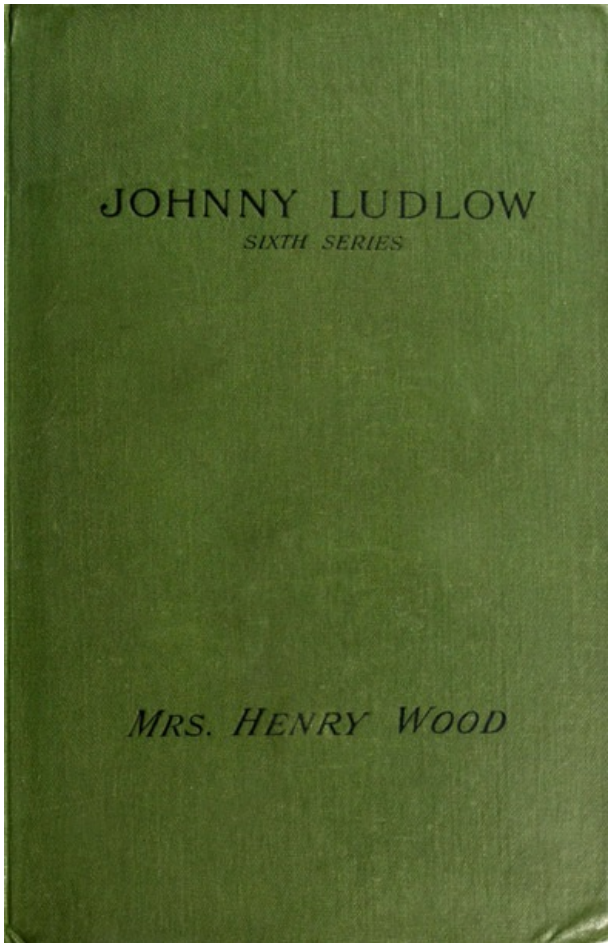
TITLE: Johnny Ludlow, Sixth Series

AUTHOR: Mrs. Henry Wood

RELEASE DATE: October 7, 2012 [EBook #40963]

LANGUAGE: English

CREDITS: Produced by David Edwards, eagkw and the Online Distributed Proofreading Team at http://www.pgdp.net (This file was produced from images generously made available by The Internet Archive)



JOHNNY LUDLOW

JOHNNY LUDLOW

BY

MRS. HENRY WOOD

AUTHOR OF "EAST LYNNE," "THE CHANNINGS," ETC.

SIXTH SERIES

London
MACMILLAN AND CO., LIMITED
NEW YORK: THE MACMILLAN COMPANY
1899

LONDON:
PRINTED BY WILLIAM CLOWES AND SONS, LIMITED,
STAMFORD STREET AND CHARING CROSS.

CONTENTS

"God sent his Singers upon earth
With songs of sadness and of mirth,
That they might touch the hearts of men,
And bring them back to heaven again."
LONGFELLOW.

[1]

JOHNNY LUDLOW

THE MYSTERY AT NUMBER SEVEN

I.—MONTPELLIER-BY-SEA

"Let us go and give her a turn," cried the Squire.

Tod laughed. "What, all of us?" said he.

"To be sure. All of us. Why not? We'll start to-morrow."

"Oh dear!" exclaimed Mrs. Todhetley, dismay in her mild tones. "Children and all?"

"Children and all; and take Hannah to see to them," said the Squire. "You don't count, Joe: you will be off elsewhere."

"We could never be ready," said the Mater, looking the image of perplexity. "To-morrow's Friday. Besides, there would be no time to write to Mary."

"*Write to her!*" cried the Squire, turning sharply on his heel as he paced the room in his nankeen morning-coat. "And who do you suppose is going to write to her? Why, it would cause her to make all sorts of preparation, put her to no end of trouble. A pretty conjurer you'd make! We will take her by surprise: that's what we will do."

"But if, when we got there, we should find her rooms are let, sir?" said I, the possibility striking me.

"Then we'll go into others, Johnny. A spell at the seaside will be a change for us all."

[2]

This conversation, and the Squire's planning-out, arose through a letter we had just received from Mary Blair—poor Blair's widow, if you have not forgotten him, who went to his end through that Gazette of Jerry's. After a few ups and downs, trying at this thing for a living, trying at that, Mrs. Blair had now settled in a house at the seaside, and opened a day-school. She hoped to get on in it in time, she wrote, especially if she could be so fortunate as to let her drawing-room to

visitors. The Squire, always impulsive and good-hearted, at once cried out that *we* would go and take it.

“It will be doing her a good turn, you see,” he ran on; “and when we leave I dare say she’ll find other people ready to go in. Let’s see”—picking up the letter to refer to the address—“No. 6, Seaboard Terrace, Montpellier-by-Sea. Whereabouts is Montpellier-by-Sea?”

“Never heard of it in my life,” cried Tod. “Don’t believe there is such a place.”

“Be quiet, Joe. I fancy it lies somewhere towards Saltwater.”

Tod flung back his head. “Saltwater! A nice common place that is!”

“Hold your tongue, sir. Johnny, fetch me the railway guide.”

Upon looking at the guide, it was found there; “Montpellier-by-Sea;” the last station before getting to Saltwater. As to Saltwater, it might be common, as Tod said; for it was crowded with all sorts of people, but it was lively and healthy.

Not on the next day, Friday, for it was impossible to get ready in such a heap of a hurry, but on the following Tuesday we started. Tod had left on the Saturday for Gloucestershire. His own mother’s relatives lived there, and they were always inviting him.

“Montpellier-by-Sea?” cried the railway clerk in a doubting tone as we were getting the tickets. “Let’s see? Where is that?”

Of course that set the Squire exploding. What right had clerks to pretend to issue tickets unless they knew their business? The clerk in question coolly ran his finger down the railway list he had turned to, and then gave us the tickets. [3]

“It is a station not much frequented, you see,” he civilly observed. “Travellers mostly go on to Saltwater.”

But for the train being due, and our having to make a rush for the platform, the Squire would have waited to give the young man a piece of his mind. “Saltwater, indeed!” said he. “I wonder the fellow does not issue his edict as to where people shall go and where they shan’t go.”

We arrived in due time at our destination. It was written up as large as life on a white board, “Montpellier-by-Sea.” A small roadside station, open to the country around; no signs of sea or of houses to be seen; a broad rural district, apparently given over entirely to agriculture. On went the whistling train, leaving the group of us standing by our luggage on the platform. The Squire was staring about him doubtfully.

“Can you tell me where Seaboard Terrace is?”

“Seaboard Terrace?” repeated the station-master. “No, sir, I don’t know it. There’s no terrace of that name hereabouts. For that matter there are no terraces at all—no houses in fact.”

The Squire’s face was a picture. He saw that (save a solitary farm homestead or two) the country was bare of dwelling-places.

“This is Montpellier-by-Sea?” he questioned at last.

“Sure enough it is, sir. Munpler, it’s called down here.”

“Then Seaboard Terrace must be *somewhere* in it—somewhere about. What a strange thing!”

“Perhaps the gentlefolks want to go to Saltwater?” spoke up one of the two porters employed at the little station. “There’s lots of terraces there. Here, Jim!”—calling to his fellow—“come here a minute. He’ll know, sir; he comes from Saltwater.” [4]

Jim approached, and settled the doubt at once. He knew Seaboard Terrace very well indeed; it was at Saltwater; just out at the eastern end of it.

Yes, it was at Saltwater. And there were we, more than two miles off it, on a broiling hot day, when walking was impracticable, with all our trunks about us, and no fly to be had, or other means of getting on. The Squire went into one of his passions, and demanded why people living at Saltwater should give their address as Montpellier-by-Sea.

He had hardly patience to listen to the station-master’s explanation—who acknowledged that we were not the first travelling party that had been deluded in like manner. Munpler (as he and the rest of the natives persisted in calling it) was an extensive, straggling rural parish, filled with farm lands; an arm of it extended as far as Saltwater, and the new buildings at that end of Saltwater had rechristened themselves Montpellier-by-Sea, deeming it more aristocratic than the common old name. Had the Squire been able to transport the new buildings, builders and all, he had surely done it on the spot.

Well, we got on to Saltwater in the evening by another train, and to No. 6, Seaboard Terrace. Mary Blair was just delighted.

“If I had but known you were coming, if you had only written to me, I would have explained that it was Saltwater Station you must get out at, not Montpellier,” she cried in deprecation.

“But, my dear, why on earth do you give in to a deception?” stormed the Squire. “Why call your

place Montpellier when it’s Saltwater?”

“I do what other people do,” she sighed; “I was told it was Montpellier when I came here. Generally speaking, I have explained, when writing to friends, that it is really Saltwater, in spite of its fine name. I suppose I forgot it when writing to you—I had so much to say. The people really to blame are those who named it so.” [5]

“And that’s true, and they ought to be shown up,” said the Squire.

Seaboard Terrace consisted of seven houses, built in front of the sea a little beyond the town. The parlours had bay windows; the drawing-rooms had balconies and verandahs. The two end houses, Nos. 1 and 7, were double houses, large and handsome, each of them being inhabited by a private family; the middle houses were smaller, most of them being let out in lodgings in the season. Mary Blair began talking that first evening as we sat together about the family who lived in the house next door to her, No. 7. Their name was Peahern, she said, and they had been so very, very kind to her since she took her house in March. Mr. Peahern had interested himself for her and got her several pupils; he was much respected at Saltwater. “Ah, he is a good man,” she added; “but——”

“I’ll call and thank him,” interrupted the Squire. “I am proud to shake hands with such a man as that.”

“You cannot,” she said; “he and his wife have gone abroad. A great misfortune has lately befallen them.”

“A great misfortune! What was it?”

I noticed a sort of cloud pass over Mary Blair’s face, a hesitation in her manner before she replied. Mrs. Todhetley was sitting by her on the sofa; the Squire was in the armchair opposite them, and I at the table, as I had sat at our tea-dinner.

“Mr. Peahern was in business once—a wholesale druggist, I believe; but he made a fortune, and retired some years ago,” began Mary. “Mrs. Peahern has bad health and is a little lame. She was very kind to me also—very good and kind indeed. They had one son—no other children; I think he was studying for the Bar; I am not sure; but he lived in London, and came down here occasionally. My young maid-servant, Susan, got acquainted with their servants, and she gathered from their gossip that he, Edmund Peahern, a very handsome young man, was in some way a trouble to his parents. He was down at Easter, and stayed three weeks; and in May he came down again. What happened I don’t know; I believe there was some scene with his father the day he arrived; anyway, Mr. Peahern was heard talking angrily to him; and that night he—he died.” [6]

She had dropped her voice to a whisper. The Squire spoke.

“Died! Was it a natural death?”

“No. A jury decided that he was insane; and he was buried here in the churchyard. Such a heap of claims and debts came to light, it was said. Mr. Peahern left his lawyer to pay them all, and went abroad with his poor wife for change of scene. It has been a great grief to me. I feel so sorry for them.”

“Then, is the house shut up?”

“No. Two servants are left in it—the two housemaids. The cook, who had lived with them five and twenty years and was dreadfully affected at the calamity, went with her mistress. Nice, good-natured young women are these two that are left, running in most days to ask if they can do anything for me.”

“It is good to have such neighbours,” said the Squire. “And I hope you’ll get on, my dear. How came you to be at this place at all?”

“It was through Mr. Lockett,” she answered—the clergyman who had been so much with her husband before he died, and who had kept up a correspondence with her. Mr. Lockett’s brother was in practice as a doctor at Saltwater, and they thought she might perhaps do well if she came to it. So Mary’s friends had screwed a point or two to put her into the house, and gave her besides a ten-pound note to start with. [7]

“I tell you what it is, young Joe: if you run and reve yourself into that scarlet heat, you shan’t come here with me again.”

“But I like to race with the donkeys,” replied young Joe. “I can run almost as fast as they, Johnny. I like to see the donkeys.”

“Wouldn’t it be better to ride a donkey, lad?”

He shook his head. “I have never had a ride but once,” he answered: “I’ve no sixpences for it. That once Matilda treated me. She brings me on the sands.”

“Who is Matilda?”

“Matilda at No. 7—Mr. Peahern’s.”

“Well, if you are a good boy, young Joe, and stay by me, you shall have a ride as soon as the donkeys come back.”

They were fine sands. I sat down on a bench with a book; little Joe strained his eyes to look after the donkeys in the distance, cantering off with some young shavers like himself on their backs, their nursemaids walking quickly after them. Poor little Joe!—he had the gentlest, meekest face in the world, with his thoughtful look and nice eyes—waited and watched in quiet patience. The sands were crowded with people this afternoon; organs were playing, dancing dolls exhibiting; and vessels with their white sails spread glided smoothly up and down on the sparkling sea.

“And will you really pay the sixpence?” asked the little fellow presently. “They won’t let me get on for less.”

“Really and truly, Joe. I’ll take you for a row in a boat some calm day, if mamma will allow you to go.”

Joe looked grave. “I don’t *much* like the water, please,” said he, timidly. “Alfred Dale went on it in a boat and fell in, and was nearly drowned. He comes to mamma’s school.”

“Then we’ll let the boats alone, Joe. There’s Punch! He is going to set himself up yonder: wouldn’t you like to run and see him?” [8]

“But I might miss the donkeys,” answered Joe.

He stood by me quietly, gazing in the direction taken by the donkeys; evidently they were his primary attraction. The other child, Mary, who was a baby when her father died (poor Baked Pie, as we boys used to call him at Frost’s), was in Wales with Mrs. Blair’s people. They had taken the child for a few months, until she saw whether she should get along at Saltwater.

But we thought she would get along. Her school was a morning school for little boys of good parentage, all of whom paid liberal terms; and she would be able to let her best rooms for at least six months in the year.

“There’s Matilda! Oh, there’s Matilda!”

It was quite a loud shout for little Joe. Looking up, I saw him rush to a rather good-looking young woman, neatly dressed in a black-and-white print gown and small shawl of the same, with black ribbons crossed on her straw bonnet. Servants did not dress fine enough to set the Thames on fire in those days. Joe dragged her triumphantly up to me. She was one of the housemaids at No. 7.

“It’s Matilda,” he said; and the young woman curtsied. “And I am going to have a donkey-ride, Matilda; Mr. Johnny Ludlow’s going to give the sixpence for me!”

“I know you by sight, sir,” observed Matilda to me. “I have seen you go in and out of No. 6.”

She had a pale olive complexion, with magnificent, melancholy dark eyes. Many persons would have called her handsome. I took a sort of liking for the girl—if only for her kindness to poor little fatherless Joe. In manner she was particularly quiet, subdued, and patient.

“You had a sad misfortune at your house not long ago,” I observed to her, at a loss for something to say.

“Oh, sir, don’t talk of it, please!” she answered, catching her breath. “I seem to have had the shivers at times ever since. It was me that found him.” [9]

Up cantered the donkeys; and presently away went Joe on the back of one, Matilda attending him. The ride was just over, and Joe beginning to enlarge on its delights to me, when another young woman, dressed precisely similar to Matilda, even to the zigzag white running pattern on the prim gown, and the black cotton gloves, was seen making her way towards us. She was nice-looking also, in a different way—fair, with blue eyes, and a laughing, arch face.

“Why, there’s Jane Cross!” exclaimed Matilda. “What in the world have you come out for, Jane? Have you left the house safe?”

“As if I should leave it unsafe!” lightly retorted the one they had called Jane Cross. “The back door’s locked, and here’s the key of the front”—showing a huge key. “Why shouldn’t I go out if you do, Matilda? The house is none so lively a one now, to stop in all alone.”

“And that’s true enough,” was Matilda’s quiet answer. “Little master Joe’s here; he has been having a donkey-ride.”

The two servants, fellow-housemaids, strolled off towards the sea, taking Joe with them. At the edge of the beach they encountered Hannah, who had just come on with our two children, Hugh and Lena. The maids sat down for a gossip, while the children took off their shoes and stockings to dabble in the gently rising tide.

And that was my introductory acquaintanceship with the servant-maids at No. 7. Unfortunately it did not end there.

Twilight was coming on. We had been out and about all day, had dined as usual at one o’clock

(not to give unnecessary trouble), and had just finished tea in Mrs. Blair's parlour. It was where we generally took tea, and supper also. The Squire liked to sit in the open bay window and watch the passers-by as long as ever a glimmer of daylight lasted; and he could not see them so well in the drawing-room above. I was at the other corner of the bay window. The Mater and Mary Blair were on their favourite seat, the sofa, at the end of the room, both knitting. In the room at the back, Mary held her morning school. [10]

I sat facing towards the end house, No. 7. And I must here say that during the last two or three weeks I had met the housemaids several times on the sands, and so had become quite at home with each of them. Both appeared to be thoroughly well-conducted, estimable young women; but, of the two, I liked Jane Cross best; she was always so lively and pleasant-mannered. One day she told me why No. 7 generally called her by her two names—which I had thought rather odd. It appeared that when she entered her place two years before, the other housemaid was named Jane, so they took to call her by her full name, Jane Cross. That housemaid had left in about a twelvemonth, and Matilda had entered in her place. The servants were regarded as equals in the house, not one above the other, as is the case in many places. These details will probably be thought unnecessary and uncalled for, but you will soon see why I mention them. This was Monday. On the morrow we should have been three weeks at Saltwater, and the Squire did not yet talk of leaving. He was enjoying the free-and-easy life, and was as fond as a child of picking up shells on the sands and looking at Punch and the dancing dolls.

Well, we sat this evening in the bay window as usual, I facing No. 7. Thus sitting, I saw Matilda cross the strip of garden with a jug in her hand, and come out at the gate to fetch the beer for supper.

"There goes Jane Cross," cried the Squire, as she passed the window. "Is it not, Johnny?"

"No, sir, it's Matilda." But the mistake was a very natural one, for the girls were about the same height and size, and were usually dressed alike, the same mourning having been supplied to both of them. [11]

Ten minutes or so had elapsed when Matilda came back: she liked a gossip with the landlady of the Swan. Her pint jug was brimful of beer, and she shut the iron gate of No. 7 after her. Putting my head as far out at the window as it would go, to watch her indoors, for no earthly reason but that I had nothing else to do, I saw her try the front door, and then knock at it. This knock she repeated three times over at intervals, each knock being louder than the last.

"Are you shut out, Matilda?" I called out.

"Yes, sir, it seems like it," she called back again, without turning her head. "Jane Cross must have gone to sleep."

Had she been a footman with a carriage full of ladies in court trains behind him, she could not have given a louder or longer knock than she gave now. There was no bell to the front door at No. 7. But the knock remained unanswered and the door unopened.

"Matilda at No. 7 is locked out," I said, laughing, bringing in my head and speaking to the parlour generally. "She has been to fetch the beer for supper, and can't get in again."

"The beer for supper?" repeated Mrs. Blair. "They generally go out at the back gate to fetch that, Johnny."

"Anyhow, she took the front way to-night. I saw her come out."

Another tremendous knock. The Squire put his good old nose round the window-post; two boys and a lady, passing by, halted a minute to look on. It was getting exciting, and I ran out. She was still at the door, which stood in the middle of the house, between the sitting-rooms on each side.

"So you have got the key of the street, Matilda!" [12]

"I can't make it out," she said; "what Jane Cross can be about, or why the door should be closed at all. I left it on the latch."

"Somebody has slipped in to make love to her. Your friend, the milkman, perhaps."

Evidently Matilda did not like the allusion to the milkman. Catching a glimpse of her face by the street lamp, I saw it had turned white. The milkman was supposed to be paying court at No. 7, but to which of the two maids gossip did not decide. Mrs. Blair's Susan, who knew them well, said it was Matilda.

"Why don't you try the back way?" I asked, after more waiting.

"Because I know the outer door is locked, sir. Jane Cross locked it just now, and that's why I came out this front way. I can try it, however."

She went round to the road that ran by the side of the house, and tried the door in the garden wall. It was fastened, as she had said. Seizing the bell-handle, she gave a loud peal—another, and another.

"I say, it seems odd, though," I cried, beginning to find it so. "Do you think she can have gone out?"

“I’m sure I don’t know, sir. But—no; it’s not likely, Master Johnny. I left her laying the cloth for our supper.”

“Was she in the house alone?”

“We are always alone, sir; we don’t have visitors. Anyway, none have been with us this evening.”

I looked at the upper windows of the house. No light was to be seen in any of them, no sign of Jane Cross. The lower windows were hidden from view by the wall, which was high.

“I think she must have dropped asleep, Matilda, as you say. Suppose you come in through Mrs. Blair’s and get over the wall?”

I ran round to tell the news to our people. Matilda followed me slowly; I thought, reluctantly. [13] Even in the dim twilight, as she stood at our gate in hesitation, I could see how white her face was.

“What are you afraid of?” I asked her, going out again to where she stood.

“I hardly know, Master Johnny. Jane Cross used to have fits. Perhaps she has been frightened into one now.”

“What should frighten her?”

The girl looked round in a scared manner before replying. Just then I found my jacket-sleeve wet. Her trembling hands had shaken a little of the ale upon it.

“If she—should have seen Mr. Edmund?” the girl brought out in a horrified whisper.

“Seen Mr. Edmund! Mr. Edmund who?—Mr. Edmund Peahern? Why, you don’t surely mean his ghost?”

Her face was growing whiter. I stared at her in surprise.

“We have always been afraid of seeing something, she and me, since last May; we haven’t liked the house at night-time. It has often been quite a scuffle which of us should fetch the beer, so as not to be the one left alone. Many a time I have stood right out at the back door while Jane Cross has gone for it.”

I began to think her an idiot. If Jane Cross was another, why, perhaps she had frightened herself into a fit. All the more reason that somebody should see after her.

“Come along, Matilda; don’t be foolish; we’ll both get over the wall.”

It was a calm, still summer evening, almost dark now. All the lot of us went out to the back garden, I whispering to them what the girl had said to me.

“Poor thing!” said Mrs. Todhetley, who had a sort of fellow-feeling for ghosts. “It has been very lonely for the young women; and if Jane Cross is subject to fits, she may be lying in one at this moment.”

The wall between the gardens was nothing like as high as the outer one. Susan brought out a [14] chair, and Matilda could have got over easily. But when she reached the top, she stuck there.

“I can’t go on by myself; I dare not,” she said, turning her frightened face towards us. “If Mr. Edmund is there——”

“Don’t be a goose, girl!” interrupted the Squire, in doubt whether to laugh or scold. “Here, I’ll go with you. Get on down. Hold the chair tight for me, Johnny.”

We hoisted him over without damage. I leaped after him, and Susan, grinning with delight, came after me. She supposed that Jane Cross had slipped out somewhere during Matilda’s absence.

The door faced the garden, and the Squire and Susan were the first to enter. There seemed to be no light anywhere, and the Squire went gingerly picking his way. I turned round to look for Matilda, who had hung back, and found her with her hand on the trellis-work of the porch, and the beer splashing over in her fear.

“I say, look here, Matilda; you must be a regular goose, as the Squire says, to put yourself into this fright before you know whether there’s any cause for it. Susan says she has only stepped out somewhere.”

She put up her hand and touched my arm, her lips the colour of chalk.

“Only last night that ever was, Mr. Johnny, as we were going up the staircase to bed, we heard a sound in the room as we passed it. It was just like a groan. Ask Jane Cross, else, sir.”

“What room?”

“Mr. Edmund’s; where he did it. She has heard him to-night, or seen him, or something, and has fallen into a fit.”

The kitchen was on the right of the passage. Susan, knowing the ways of the house, soon lighted [15] a candle. On a small round table was spread a white cloth, some bread and cheese, and two tumblers. A knife or two had seemingly been flung on it at random.

“Jane Cross! Jane Cross!” shouted the Squire, going forward towards the front hall, Susan following with the candle. It was a good-sized hall; I could see that, with a handsome well-staircase at this end of it.

“Halloa! What’s this? Johnny! Susan!—all of you come here! Here’s somebody lying here. It must be the poor girl. Goodness bless my heart! Johnny, help me to raise her!”

Still and white she was lying, underneath the opening of the staircase. Upon lifting her head, it fell back in a curious manner. We both backed a little. Susan held the candle nearer. As its light fell on the upturned face, the girl shrieked.

“She is in a fit,” cried Matilda.

“God help her!” whispered the Squire. “I fear this is something worse than a fit. We must have a doctor.”

Susan thrust the candlestick into my hand, and ran out at the back door, saying she’d fetch Mr. Lockett. Back she came in a moment: the garden gate was locked, and the key not in it.

“There’s the front door, girl,” stuttered the Squire, angry with her for returning, though it was no fault of hers. He was like one off his head, and his nose and cheeks had turned blue.

But there could be no more exit by the front door than by the back. It was locked, and the key gone. Who had done these things? what strange mystery was here? Locking the poor girl in the house to kill her!

Matilda, who had lighted another candle, found the key of the back gate lying on the kitchen dresser. Susan caught it up, and flew away. It was a most uncomfortable moment. There lay Jane [16] Cross, pale and motionless, and it seemed that we were helpless to aid her.

“Ask that stupid thing to bring a pillow or a cushion, Johnny! Ghosts, indeed! The idiots that women are!”

“What else has done it? what else was there to hurt her?” remonstrated Matilda, bringing up the second candle. “She wouldn’t fall into a fit for nothing, sir.”

And now that more light was present, we began to see other features of the scene. Nearly close to Jane Cross lay a work-basket, overturned, a flat, open basket, a foot and a half square. Reels of cotton, scissors, tapes, small bundles of work tied up, and such-like things lay scattered around.

The Squire looked at these, and then at the opening above. “Can she have fallen down the well?” he asked, in a low tone. And Matilda, catching the words, gave a cry of dismay, and burst into tears.

“A pillow, girl! A pillow, or a cushion!”

She went into one of the sitting-rooms and brought out a sofa-cushion. The Squire, going down on his knees, for he was not good at stooping, told me to slip it under while he raised the head.

A sound of feet, a sudden flash of light from a bull’s-eye, and a policeman came upon the scene. The man was quietly passing on his beat when met by Susan. In her excitement she told him what had happened, and sent him in. We knew the man, whose beat lay at this end of Saltwater; a civil man, named Knapp. He knelt down where the Squire had just been kneeling, touching Jane Cross here and there.

“She’s dead, sir,” he said. “There can be no mistake about that.”

“She must have fallen down the well of the staircase, I fear,” observed the Squire.

“Well—yes; perhaps so,” assented the man in a doubtful tone. “But what of this?”

He flung the great light in front of poor Jane Cross’s dress. A small portion of the body, where the [17] gown fastened in front, had been torn away, as well as one of the wristbands.

“It’s no fall,” said the man. “It’s foul play—as I think.”

“Goodness bless me!” gasped the Squire. “Some villains must have got in. This comes of that other one’s having left the front door on the latch.” But I am not sure that any of us, including himself, believed she could be really dead.

Susan returned with speed, and was followed by Mr. Lockett. He was a young man, thirty perhaps, pale and quiet, and much like what I remembered of his brother. Poor Jane Cross was certainly dead, he said—had been dead, he thought, an hour.

But this could scarcely have been, as we knew. It was not, at the very utmost, above twenty-five minutes since Matilda went out to fetch the beer, leaving her alive and well. Mr. Lockett looked again, but thought he was not mistaken. When a young doctor takes up a crotchet, he likes to hold to it.

A nameless sensation of awe fell upon us all. Dead! In that sudden manner! The Squire rubbed up his head like a helpless lunatic; Susan’s eyes were round with horror; Matilda had thrown her apron over her face to hide its grief and tears.

Leaving her for the present where she was, we turned to go upstairs. I stooped to pick up the

overturned basket, but the policeman sharply told me to let all things remain as they were until he had time to look into them.

The first thing the man did, on reaching the landing above, was to open the room doors one by one, and throw his bull's-eye light into them. They were all right, unoccupied, straight and tidy. On the landing of the upper floor lay one or two articles, which seemed to indicate that some kind [18] of struggle had taken place there. A thimble here, a bodkin there, also the bit that had been torn out of the girl's gown in front, and the wristband from the sleeve. The balustrades were very handsome, but very low; on this upper landing, dangerously low. These bedrooms were all in order; the one in which the two servants slept, alone showing signs of occupation.

Downstairs went Knapp again, carrying with him the torn-out pieces, to compare them with the gown. It was the print gown I had often seen Jane Cross wear, a black gown with white zigzag lines running down it. Matilda was wearing the fellow to it now. The pieces fitted in exactly.

"The struggle must have taken place upstairs: not here," observed the doctor.

Matilda, questioned and cross-questioned by the policeman, gave as succinct an account of the evening as her distressed state allowed. We stood round the kitchen while she told it.

Neither she nor Jane Cross had gone out at all that day. Monday was rather a busy day with them, for they generally did a bit of washing. After tea, which they took between four and five o'clock, they went up to their bedroom, it being livelier there than in the kitchen, the window looking down the side road. Matilda sat down to write a letter to her brother, who lived at a distance; Jane Cross sat at the window doing a job of sewing. They sat there all the evening, writing, working, and sometimes talking. At dusk, Jane remarked that it was getting blind man's holiday, and that she should go on downstairs and lay the supper. Upon that, Matilda finished her letter quickly, folded and directed it, and followed her down. Jane had not yet laid the cloth, but was then taking it out of the drawer. "You go and fetch the beer, Matilda," she said: and Matilda was glad to do so. "You can't go that way: I have locked the gate," Jane called out, seeing Matilda [19] turning towards the back; accordingly she went out at the front door, leaving it on the latch. Such was her account; and I have given it almost verbatim.

"On the latch," repeated the policeman, taking up the words. "Does that mean that you left it open?"

"I drew it quite to, so that it looked as if it were shut; it was a heavy door, and would keep so," was Matilda's answer. "I did it, not to give Jane the trouble to open it to me. When I got back I found it shut and could not get in."

The policeman mused. "You say it was Jane Cross who locked the back door in the wall?"

"Yes," said Matilda. "She had locked it before I got downstairs. We liked to lock that door early, because it could be opened from the outside—while the front door could not be."

"And she had not put these things on the table when you went out for the beer?"—pointing to the dishes.

"No: she was only then putting the cloth. As I turned round from taking the beer-jug from its hook, the fling she gave the cloth caused the air to whiffle in my face like a wind. She had not begun to reach out the dishes."

"How long were you away?"

"I don't know exactly," she answered, with a moan. "Rather longer than usual, because I took my letter to the post before going to the Swan."

"It was about ten minutes," I interposed. "I was at the window next door, and saw Matilda go out and come back."

"Ten minutes!" repeated the policeman. "Quite long enough for some ruffian to come in and fling her over the stairs."

"But who would do it?" asked Matilda, looking up at him with her poor pale face.

"Ah, that's the question; that's what we must find out," said Knapp. "Was the kitchen just as it [20] was when you left it?"

"Yes—except that she had put the bread and cheese on the table. And the glasses, and knives," added the girl, looking round at the said table, which remained as we had found it, "but not the plates."

"Well now, to go to something else: Did she bring her work-basket downstairs with her from the bedroom when she remarked to you that she would go and put the supper on?"

"No, she did not."

"You are sure of that?"

"Yes. She left the basket on the chair in front of her where it had been standing. She just got up and shook the threads from off her gown, and went on down. When I left the room the basket was there; I saw it. And I think," added the girl, with a great sob, "I think that while laying the supper she must have gone upstairs again to fetch the basket, and must have fallen against the banisters

with fright, and overbalanced herself."

"Fright at what?" asked Knapp.

Matilda shivered. Susan whispered to him that they were afraid at night of seeing the ghost of Mr. Edmund Peahern.

The man glanced keenly at Matilda for a minute. "Did you ever see it?" he asked.

"No," she shuddered. "But there are strange noises, and we think it is in the house."

"Well," said Knapp, coughing to hide a comical smile, "ghosts don't tear pieces out of gowns—that ever I heard of. I should say it was something worse than a ghost that has been here to-night. Had this poor girl any sweetheart?"

"No," said Matilda.

"Have you one?"

"No."

"Except Owen the milkman."

A red streak flashed into Matilda's cheeks. I knew Owen: he was Mrs. Blair's milkman also. [21]

"I think Owen must be your sweetheart or hers," went on Knapp. "I've seen him, often enough, talking and laughing with you both when bringing the afternoon's milk round. Ten minutes at a stretch he has stayed in this garden, when he need not have been as many moments."

"There has been no harm: and it's nothing to anybody," said Matilda.

The key of the front door was searched for, high and low; but it could not be found. Whoever locked the door, must have made off with the key. But for that, and for the evidences of the scuffle above and the pieces torn out of the gown, we should have thought Matilda's opinion was correct: that Jane Cross had gone upstairs for her basket, and through some wretched accident had pitched over the balustrades. Matilda could not relinquish the notion.

"It was only a week ago that ever was—a week ago this very day—that Jane Cross nearly fell over there. We were both running upstairs, trying in sport which should get first into our bedroom; and, in jostling one another on the landing, she all but overbalanced herself. I caught hold of her to save her. It's true—if it were the last word I had to speak."

Matilda broke down, with a dreadful fit of sobbing. Altogether she struck me as being about as excitable a young woman as one could meet in a summer day's journey.

Nothing more could be made out of it this evening. Jane Cross had met her death, and some evil or other must have led to it. The police took possession of the house for the night: and Matilda, out of compassion, was brought to ours. To describe the Mater's shock and Mary Blair's, when they heard the news, would be beyond me.

All sorts of conjectures arose in the neighbourhood. The most popular belief was that some person must have perceived the front door open, and, whether with a good or a bad intention, [22] entered the house; that he must have stolen upstairs, met Jane Cross on the top landing, and flung her down in a scuffle. That he must then have let himself out at the front door and locked it after him.

Against this theory there were obstacles. From the time of Matilda's leaving the house till her return, certainly not more than ten minutes had elapsed, perhaps not quite as much, and this was a very short space of time for what had been done in it. Moreover the chances were that I, sitting at the next window, should have seen any one going in or out; though it was not of course certain. I had got up once to ring the bell, and stayed a minute or two away from the window, talking with Mary Blair and the Mater.

Some people thought the assassin (is it too much to call him so?) had been admitted by Jane Cross herself; or he might have been in hiding in the garden before she locked the door. In short, the various opinions would fill a volume.

But suspicion fell chiefly upon one person—and that was Thomas Owen the milkman. Though, perhaps, "suspicion" is too strong a word to give to it—I ought rather to say "doubt." These Owens were originally from Wales, very respectable people. The milk business was their own; and, since the father's death, which happened only a few months before, the son had carried it on in conjunction with his mother. He was a young man of three or four and twenty, with a fresh colour and open countenance, rather superior in manners and education. The carrying out the milk himself was a temporary arrangement, the boy employed for it being ill. That he had often lingered at No. 7, laughing with the two young women, was well known; he had also been seen to accost them in the street. Only the previous day, he and Matilda had stayed talking in the churchyard after morning service when everybody else had left it; and he had walked up nearly [23] as far as Seaboard Terrace with Jane Cross in the evening. A notion existed that he had entered the house on the Monday evening, for who else was it likely to have been, cried everybody. Which was, of course, logic. At last a rumour arose—arose on the Tuesday—that Owen had been *seen* to leave the house at dusk on the fatal evening; that this could be proved. If so, it looked rather black. I was startled, for I had liked the man.

The next day, Wednesday, the key was found. A gardener who did up the gardens of the other end house, No. 1, every Wednesday, was raking the ground underneath some dwarf pines that grew close against the front railings, and raked out a big door-key. About a dozen people came rushing off with it to No. 7.

It was the missing key. It fitted into the door at once, locked and unlocked it. When the villain had made his way from the house after doing the mischief, he must have flung the key over amidst the pines, thinking no doubt it would lie hidden there.

The coroner and jury assembled; but they could not make more of the matter than we had made. Jane Cross had died of the fall down the well-staircase, which had broken her neck; and it was pretty evident she had been flung down. Beyond the one chief and fatal injury, she was not harmed in any way; not by so much as a scratch. Matilda, whose surname turned out to be Valentine, having got over the first shock, gave her testimony with subdued composure. She was affected at parts of it, and said she would have saved Jane Cross's life with her own: and no one could doubt that she spoke the truth. She persisted in asserting her opinion that there had been no scuffle, in spite of appearances; but that the girl had been terrified in some way and had accidentally fallen over.

When Matilda was done with, Thomas Owen took her place. He was all in black, having dressed himself to come to the inquest and wearing mourning for his father; and I must say, looking at him now, you'd never have supposed he carried out milk-pails. [24]

Yes, he had known the poor young woman in question, he readily said in answer to questions; had been fond of chaffing with the two girls a bit, but nothing more. Meant nothing by it, nothing serious. Respected both of them; regarded them as perfectly well-conducted young women.—Was either of them his sweetheart? Certainly not. Had not courted either of them. Never thought of either of them as his future wife: should not consider a servant eligible for that position—at least, his mother would not. Of the two, he had liked Jane Cross the best. Did not know anything whatever of the circumstances attending the death; thought it a most deplorable calamity, and was never more shocked in his life than when he heard of it.

"Is there any truth in the report that you were at the house on Monday evening?" asked the coroner.

"There is no truth in it."

"I see him come out o' No. 7: I see him come out o' the side door in the garden wall," burst forth a boy's earnest voice from the back of the room.

"You saw me *not* come out of it," quietly replied Thomas Owen, turning round to see who it was that had spoken. "Oh, it is you, is it, Bob Jackson! Yes, you came running round the corner just as I turned from the door."

"You *were* there, then?" cried the coroner.

"No, sir. At the door, yes; that's true enough; but I was not inside it. What happened was this: on Monday I had some business at a farmhouse near Munpler, and set out to walk over there early in the evening. In passing down the side road by No. 7, I saw the two maids at the top window. One of them—I think it was Jane Cross—called out to ask me in a joking kind of way whether I was about to pay them a visit; I answered, not then, but I would as I came back if they liked. [25] Accordingly, in returning, I rang the bell. It was not answered, and I rang again with a like result. Upon that, I went straight home to my milk books, and did not stir out again, as my mother can prove. That is the truth, sir, on my oath; and the whole truth."

"What time was this?"

"I am not quite sure. It was getting dusk."

"Did you see anything of the young women this second time?"

"Not anything."

"Or hear anything?—Any noise?"

"None whatever. I supposed that they would not come to the door to me because it was late: I thought nothing else. I declare, sir, that this is all I know of the matter."

There was a pause when he concluded. Knapp, the policeman, and another one standing by his side, peered at Owen from under their eyebrows, as if they did not put implicit faith in his words: and the coroner recalled Matilda Valentine.

She readily confirmed the statement of his having passed along the side road, and Jane Cross's joking question to him. But she denied having heard him ring on his return, and said the door-bell had not rung at all that night. Which would seem to prove that Owen must have rung during the time she had gone out for the beer.

So, you perceive, the inquest brought forth no more available light, and had to confess itself baffled.

"A fine termination this is to our pleasure," cried the Squire, gloomily. "I don't like mysteries, Johnny. And of all the mysteries I have come across in my life, the greatest mystery is this at

No. 7.”

THE MYSTERY AT NUMBER SEVEN

II.—OWEN, THE MILKMAN

It was a grand sea to-day: one of the grandest that we had seen at Saltwater. The waves were dancing and sparkling like silver; the blue of the sky was deeper than a painter’s ultramarine. But to us, looking on it from Mrs. Blair’s house in Seaboard Terrace, its brightness and beauty were dimmed.

“For you see, Johnny,” observed the Squire to me, his face and tone alike gloomy—outward things take their impress from the mind—“with that dreadful affair at the next door jaundicing one’s thoughts, the sea might as well be grey as blue, and the sky lowering with thunder-clouds. I repeat that I don’t like mysteries: they act on me like a fit of indigestion.”

The affair just was a mystery; to us, as to all Saltwater. More than a week had elapsed since the Monday evening when it took place, and poor Jane Cross now lay buried in the windy graveyard. On this said Monday evening, the two servant maids, Jane Cross and Matilda Valentine (left in the house, No. 7, Seaboard Terrace, during the absence of the family abroad), had been pursuing their ordinary occupations. While Jane Cross was laying the cloth for supper in the kitchen, Matilda went out to fetch the usual pint of ale. On her return she could not get in. When admittance was obtained, Jane Cross lay dead in the hall, having fallen down the well of the staircase. Evidences of a scuffle on the upper landing could be traced, making it apparent that the fall was not accidental; that she had been flung down. Some doubt attached to Owen, the milkman, partly from his previous intimacy with the girls, chiefly because he had been seen leaving the back door of the house somewhere about the time it must have occurred. What Owen said was, that he had rung twice at the door, but his ring was not answered.

Matilda was to be pitied. The two young women had cared a good deal for one another, and the shock to Matilda was serious. The girl, now staying in our house, had worn a half-dazed look ever since, and avoided No. 7 as though it had the plague. Superstition in regard to the house had already been rife in both the servants’ minds, in consequence of the unhappy death in it of their master’s son, Edmund Peahern, some weeks back: and if Matilda had been afraid of seeing one ghost before (as she had been) she would now undoubtedly expect to see two of them.

On this same morning, as I stood with the Squire looking at the sea from the drawing-room window of No. 6, Matilda came in. Her large dark eyes had lost their former sparkle, her clear olive skin its freshness. She asked leave to speak to Mrs. Todhetley: and the Mater—who sat at the table adding up some bills, for our sojourn at Saltwater was drawing towards its close—told her, in a kindly tone, to speak on.

“I am making bold to ask you, ma’am, whether you could help me to find a place in London,” began Matilda, standing between the door and the table in her black dress. “I know, ma’am, you don’t live in London, but a long way off it; Mrs. Blair has told me so, Master Johnny Ludlow also: but I thought perhaps you knew people there, and might be able to hear of something.”

The Mater looked at Matilda without answering, and then round at us. Rather strange it was, a coincidence in a small way, that we had had a letter from London from Miss Deveen that morning, which had concluded with these lines of postscript: “Do you chance to know of any nice, capable young woman in want of a situation? One of my housemaids is going to leave.”

Naturally this occurred to the Mater’s mind when Matilda spoke. “What kind of situation do you wish for?” she asked.

“As housemaid, ma’am, or parlour-maid. I can do my duty well in either.”

“But now, my girl,” spoke up the Squire, turning from the window, “why need you leave Saltwater? You’d never like London after it. This is a clear, fresh, health-giving place, with beautiful sands and music on them all day long; London is nothing but smoke and fogs.”

Matilda shook her head. “I could not stay here, sir.”

“Nonsense, girl. Of course what has happened *has* happened, and it’s very distressing; and you, of all people, must feel it so: but you will forget it in time. If you don’t care to go back to No. 7 before Mr. and Mrs. Peahern come home——”

“I can never go back to No. 7, sir,” she interrupted, a vehemence that seemed born of terror in her subdued voice. “Never in this world. I would rather die.”

“Stuff and nonsense!” said the Squire, impatiently. “There’s nothing the matter with No. 7. What has happened in it won’t happen again.”

“It is an unlucky house, sir; a haunted house,” she contended with suppressed emotion. “And it’s true that I would rather die outright than go back to live in it; for the terror of being there would slowly kill me. And so, ma’am,” she added quickly to Mrs. Todhetley, evidently wishing to escape the subject, “I should like to go away altogether from Saltwater; and if you can help me to hear of a place in London, I shall be very grateful.”

“I will consider of it, Matilda,” was the answer. And when the girl had left the room the Mater [29] asked us what we thought about recommending her to Miss Deveen. We saw no reason against it —not but that the Squire put the girl down as an idiot on the subject of haunted houses—and Miss Deveen was written to.

The upshot was, that on the next Saturday Matilda bade farewell to Saltwater and departed for Miss Deveen’s, the Squire sarcastically assuring her that *that* house had no ghosts in it. We should be leaving, ourselves, the following Tuesday.

But, before that day came, it chanced that I saw Owen, the milkman. It was on the Sunday afternoon. I had taken little Joe Blair for a walk across the fields as far as Munpler (their Montpellier-by-Sea, you know), and in returning met Thomas Owen. He wore his black Sunday clothes, and looked a downright fine fellow, as usual. There was something about the man I could not help liking, in spite of the doubt attaching to him.

“So Matilda Valentine is gone, sir,” he observed, after we had exchanged a few sentences.

“Yes, she went yesterday,” I answered, putting my back against the field fence, while young Joe went careering about in chase of a yellow butterfly. “And for my part, I don’t wonder at the girl’s not liking to stay at Saltwater. At least, in Seaboard Terrace.”

“I was told this morning that Mr. and Mrs. Peahern were on their way home,” he continued.

“Most likely they are. They’d naturally want to look into the affair for themselves.”

“And I hope with all my heart they will be able to get some light out of it,” returned Owen, warmly. “I mean to do *my* best to bring out the mystery, sir; and I sha’n’t rest till it’s done.”

His words were fair, his tone was genuine. If it was indeed himself who had been the chief actor [30] in the tragedy, he carried it off well. I hardly knew what to think. It is true I had taken a bit of a fancy to the man, according to my usual propensity to take a fancy, or the contrary; but I did not know much about him, and not anything of his antecedents. As he spoke to me now, his tone was marked, rather peculiar. It gave me a notion that he wanted to say more.

“Have you any idea that you will be able to trace it out?”

“For my own sake I should like to get the matter cleared up,” he added, not directly answering my question. “People are beginning to turn the cold shoulder my way: one woman asked me to my face yesterday whether I did it. No, I told her, I did not do it, but I’d try and find out who did.”

“You are sure you heard and saw nothing suspicious that night when you rang the bell and could not get in, Owen?”

“Not then, sir; no. I saw no light in the house and heard no noise.”

“You have not any clue to go by, then?”

“Not much, sir, yet. But I can’t help thinking somebody else has.”

“Who is that?”

“Matilda.”

“Matilda!” I repeated, in amazement. “Surely you can’t suspect that she—that she was a party to any deed so cruel and wicked!”

“No, no, sir, I don’t mean that; the young women were too good friends to harm one another: and whatever took place, took place while Matilda was out of the house. But I can’t help fancying that she knows, or suspects, more of the matter than she will say. In short, that she is screening some one.”

To me it seemed most unlikely. “Why do you judge so, Owen?”

“By her manner, sir. Not by much else. But I’ll tell you something that I saw. On the previous [31] Wednesday when I left the afternoon milk at that tall house just beyond Seaboard Terrace, the family lodging there told me to call in the evening for the account, as they were leaving the next day. Accordingly I went; and was kept waiting so long before they paid me that it was all but dark when I came out. Just as I was passing the back door at No. 7, it was suddenly drawn open from the inside, and a man stood in the opening, whispering with one of the girls. She was crying, for I heard her sobs, and he kissed her and came out, and the door was hastily shut. He was an ill-looking man; so far at least as his clothes went; very shabby. His face I did not see, for he pulled his slouching round hat well over his brows as he walked away rapidly, and the black beard he wore covered his mouth and chin.”

“Which of the maids was it?”

“I don’t know, sir. The next day I chaffed them a bit about it, but they both declared that nobody

had been there but the watchmaker, Mr. Renninson, who goes every Wednesday to wind up the clocks, and that it must have been him I saw, for he was late that evening. I said no more; it was no business of mine; but the man I saw go out was just about as much like Renninson as he was like me."

"And do you fancy——"

"Please wait a minute, sir," he interrupted, "I haven't finished. Last Sunday evening, upon getting home after service, I found I had left my prayer-book in church. Not wishing to lose it, for it was the one my father always used, I went back for it. However, the church was shut up, so I could not get in. It was a fine evening, and I took a stroll round the churchyard. In the corner of it, near to Mr. Edmund Peahern's tomb, they had buried poor Jane Cross but two days before—you know the spot, sir. Well, on the flat square of earth that covers her grave, stood Matilda Valentine, the [32] greatest picture of distress you can imagine, tears streaming down her cheeks. She dried her eyes when she saw me, and we came away together. Naturally I fell to talking of Jane Cross and the death. 'I shall do as much as lies in my power to bring it to light,' I said to Matilda; 'or people may go on doubting me to the end. And I think the first step must be to find out who the man was that called in upon you the previous Wednesday night.' Well, sir, with that, instead of making any answering remark as a Christian would, or a rational being, let us say, Matilda gives a smothered shriek and darts away out of the churchyard. I couldn't make her out; and all in a minute a conviction flashed over me, though I hardly know why, that she knew who was the author of the calamity, and was screening him; or at any rate that she had her suspicions, if she did not actually know. And I think so still, sir."

I shook my head, not seeing grounds to agree with Owen. He resumed:

"The next morning, between nine and ten, I was in the shop, putting a pint of cream which had been ordered into a can, when to my surprise Matilda walked in, cool and calm. She said she had come to tell me that the man I had seen leave the house was her brother. He had fallen into trouble through having become security for a fellow workman, had had all his things sold up, including his tools, and had walked every step of the way—thirty miles—to ask her if she could help him. She did help him as far as she could, giving him what little money she had by her, and Jane Cross had added ten shillings to it. He had got in only at dusk, she said, had taken some supper with them, and left again afterwards, and that she was letting him out at the gate when I must have been passing it. She did not see me, for her eyes were dim with crying: her heart felt fit to break in saying farewell. That was the truth, she declared, and that her brother had had no [33] more to do with Jane's death than she or I had; he was away again out of Saltwater the same night he came into it."

"Well? Did you not believe her?"

"No, sir," answered Owen, boldly. "I did not. If this was true, why should she have gone off into that smothered shriek in the churchyard when I mentioned him, and rush away in a fright?"

I could not tell. Owen's words set me thinking.

"I did not know which of the two girls it was who let the man out that Wednesday night, for I did not clearly see; but, sir, the impression on my mind at the moment was, that it was Jane Cross. Jane Cross, and not Matilda. If so, why does she tell me this tale about her brother, and say it was herself?"

"And if it was Jane Cross?"

Owen shook his head. "All sorts of notions occur to me, sir. Sometimes I fancy that the man might have been Jane's sweetheart, that he might have been there again on the Monday night, and done the mischief in a quarrel; and that Matilda is holding her tongue because it is her brother. Let the truth be what it will, Matilda's manner convinces me of one thing: that there's something she is concealing, and that it is half frightening her wits out of her.——You are going to leave Saltwater, I hear, sir," added the young man in a different tone, "and I am glad to have the opportunity of saying this, for I should not like you to carry away any doubt of me. I'll bring the matter to light if I can."

Touching his hat, he walked onwards, leaving my thoughts all in a whirligig.

Was Owen right in drawing these conclusions?—or was he purposely giving a wrong colouring to facts, and seeking craftily to throw suspicion off himself? It was a nice question, one I could make neither top nor tail of. But, looking back to the fatal evening, weighing this point, sifting that, I [34] began to see that Matilda showed more anxiety, more terror, than she need have shown *before* she knew that any ill had happened. Had she a prevision, as she stood at the door with the jug of ale in her hand, that some evil might have chanced? Did she leave some individual in the house with Jane Cross when she went to the Swan to get the ale?—and was it her brother? Did she leave Owen in the house, and was she screening him?

"Why, Matilda! Is it you?"

It was fourteen months later, and autumn weather, and I had just arrived in London at Miss Deveen's. My question to Matilda, who came into my dressing-room with some warm water to wash off the travelling dust, was not made in surprise at seeing *her*, for I supposed she was still

in service at Miss Deveen's, but at seeing the change in her. Instead of the healthy and, so to say, handsome girl known at Saltwater, I saw a worn, weary, anxious-looking shadow, with a feverish fire in her wild dark eyes.

"Have you been ill, Matilda?"

"No, sir, not at all. I am quite well."

"You have grown very thin."

"It's the London air, sir. I think everybody must get thin who lives in it."

Very civilly and respectfully, but yet with an unmistakable air of reticence, spoke she. Somehow the girl was changed, and greatly changed. Perhaps she had been grieving after Jane Cross? Perhaps the secret of what had happened (if in truth Matilda knew it) lay upon her with too heavy a weight?

"Do you find Matilda a good servant?" I asked of Miss Deveen, later, she and I being alone together.

"A very good servant, Johnny. But she is going to leave me."

"Is she? Why?"

Miss Deveen only nodded, in answer to the first query, passing over the last. I supposed she did not wish to say. [35]

"I think her so much altered."

"In what way, Johnny?"

"In looks: looks and manner. She is just a shadow. One might say she had passed through a six months' fever. And what a curious light there is in her eyes!"

"She has always impressed me with the idea of having some great care upon her. None can mistake that she is a sorrowful woman. I hear that the other servants accuse her of having been 'crossed in love,'" added Miss Deveen, with a smile.

"She is thinner even than Miss Cattledon."

"And that, I daresay you think, need not be, Johnny! Miss Cattledon, by the way, is rather hard upon Matilda just now: calls her a 'demon.'"

"A demon! Why does she?"

"Well, I'll tell you. Though it is only a little domestic matter, one that perhaps you will hardly care to hear. You must know (to begin with) that Matilda has never made herself sociable with the other servants here; in return they have become somewhat prejudiced against her, and have been ready to play her tricks, tease her, and what not. But you must understand, Johnny, that I knew nothing of the state of affairs below; such matters rarely reach me. My cook, Hall, was especially at war with Matilda: in fact, I believe there was no love lost between the two. The girl's melancholy—for at times she does seem very melancholy—was openly put down by the rest to the assumption that she must have had some love affair in which the swain had played her false. They were continually worrying her on this score, and it no doubt irritated Matilda; but she rarely retorted, preferring rather to leave them and take refuge in her room."

"Why could they not let her alone?"

"People can't let one another alone, as I believe, Johnny. If they did, the world would be pleasanter to live in than it is." [36]

"And I suppose Matilda got tired at last, and gave warning?"

"No. Some two or three weeks ago it appears that, by some means or other, Hall obtained access to a small trunk; one that Matilda keeps her treasures in, and has cautiously kept locked. If I thought Hall had opened this trunk with a key of her own, as Matilda accuses her of doing, I would not keep the woman in my house another day. But she declares to me most earnestly—for I had her before me here to question her—that Matilda, called suddenly out of her chamber, left the trunk open there, and the letter, of which I am about to tell you, lying, also open, by its side. Hall says that she went into the room—it adjoins her own—for something she wanted, and that all she did—and she admits this much—was to pick up the letter, carry it downstairs, read it to the other servants, and make fun over it."

"What letter was it?"

"Strictly speaking, it was only part of a letter: one begun but not concluded. It was in Matilda's own hand, apparently written a long time ago, for the ink was pale and faded, and it began 'Dearest Thomas Owen. The——'"

"Thomas Owen!" I exclaimed, starting in my chair. "Why, that is the milkman at Saltwater."

"I'm sure I don't know who he is, Johnny, and I don't suppose it matters. Only a few lines followed, three or four, speaking of some private conversation that she had held with him on coming out of church the day before, and of some reproach that she had then made to him

respecting Jane Cross. The words broke suddenly off there, as if the writer had been interrupted. But why Matilda did not complete the letter and send it, and why she should have kept it by her all this time, must be best known to herself."

"Jane Cross was her fellow-servant at Mr. Peahern's. She who was killed by falling down the staircase." [37]

"Yes, poor thing, I remembered the name. But, to go on. In the evening, after the finding of this letter, I and Miss Cattledon were startled by a disturbance in the kitchen. Cries and screams, and loud, passionate words. Miss Cattledon ran down; I stayed at the top of the stairs. She found Hall, Matilda, and one of the others there, Matilda in a perfect storm of fury, attacking Hall like a maniac. She tore handfuls out of her hair, she bit her thumb until her teeth met in it: Hall, though by far the bigger person of the two, and I should have thought the stronger, had no chance against her; she seemed to be as a very reed in her hands, passion enduing Matilda with a strength perfectly unnatural. George, who had been out on an errand, came in at the moment, and by his help the women were parted. Cattledon maintains that Matilda, during the scene, was nothing less than a demon; quite mad. When it was over, the girl fell on the floor utterly exhausted, and lay like a dead thing, every bit of strength, almost of life, gone out of her."

"I never could have believed it of Matilda."

"Nor I, Johnny. I grant that the girl had just cause to be angry. How should we like to have our private places rifled, and their contents exhibited to and mocked at by the world; contents which to us seem sacred? But to have put herself into that wild rage was both unseemly and unaccountable. Her state then, and her state immediately afterwards, made me think—I speak it with all reverence, Johnny—of the poor people in holy writ from whom the evil spirits were cast out."

"Ay. It seems to be just such a case, Miss Deveen."

"Hall's thumb was so much injured that a doctor had to come daily to it for nine or ten days," continued Miss Deveen. "Of course, after this climax, I could not retain Matilda in my service; [38] neither would she have remained in it. She indulged a feeling of the most bitter hatred to the women servants, to Hall especially—she had not much liked them before, as you may readily guess—and she said that nothing would induce her to remain with them, even had I been willing to keep her. So she has obtained a situation with some acquaintances of mine who live in this neighbourhood, and goes to it next week. That is why Matilda leaves me, Johnny."

In my heart I could not help being sorry for her, and said so. She looked so truly, terribly unhappy!

"I am very sorry for her," assented Miss Deveen. "And had I known the others were making her life here uncomfortable, I should have taken means to stop their pastime. Of the actual facts, with regard to the letter, I cannot be at any certainty—I mean in my own mind. Hall is a respectable servant, and I have never had cause to think her untruthful during the three years she has lived with me: and she most positively holds to it that the little trunk was standing open on the table and the letter lying open beside it. Allowing that it was so, she had, of course, no right to touch either trunk or letter, still less to take the letter downstairs and exhibit it to the others, and I don't defend her conduct: but yet it is different from having rifled the lock of the trunk and taken the letter out."

"And Matilda accuses her of doing that?"

"Yes: and, on her side, holds to it just as positively. What Matilda tells me is this: On that day it chanced that Miss Cattledon had paid the women servants their quarter's wages. Matilda carried hers to her chamber, took this said little trunk out of her large box, where she keeps it, unlocked it and put the money into it. She disturbed nothing in the trunk; she says she had wrapped the sovereigns in a bit of paper, and she just slipped them inside, touching nothing else. She was shutting down the lid when she heard herself called to by me on the landing below. She waited to [39] lock the box but not to put it up, leaving it standing on the table. I quite well remembered calling to the girl, having heard her run upstairs. I wanted her in my room."

Miss Deveen paused a minute, apparently thinking.

"Matilda has assured me again and again that she is quite sure she locked the little trunk, that there can be no mistake on that point. Moreover, she asserts that the letter in question was lying at the bottom of the trunk beneath other things, and that she had not taken it out or touched it for months and months."

"And when she went upstairs again—did she find the little trunk open or shut?"

"She says she found it shut: shut and locked just as she had left it; and she replaced it in her large box, unconscious that any one had been to it."

"Was she long in your room, Miss Deveen?"

"Yes, Johnny, the best part of an hour. I wanted a little sewing done in a hurry, and told her to sit down there and then and do it. It was during this time that the cook, going upstairs herself, saw the trunk, and took the opportunity to do what she did do."

"I think I should feel inclined to believe Matilda. Her tale sounds the more probable."

“I don’t know that, Johnny. I can hardly believe that a respectable woman, as Hall undoubtedly is, would deliberately unlock a fellow-servant’s box with a false key. Whence did she get the key to do it? Had she previously provided herself with one? The lock is of the most simple description, for I have seen the trunk since, and Hall might possess a key that would readily fit it: but if so, as the woman herself says, how could she know it? In short, Johnny, it is one woman’s word against another’s: and, until this happened, I had deemed each of them to be equally credible.”

To be sure there was reason in that. I sat thinking. [40]

“Were it proved to have been as Matilda says, still I could not keep her,” resumed Miss Deveen. “Mine is a peaceable, well-ordered household, and I should not like to know that one, subject to insane fits of temper, was a member of it. Though Hall in that case would get her discharge also.”

“Do the people where Matilda is going know why she leaves?”

“Mrs. and Miss Soames. Yes. I told them all about it. But I told them at the same time, what I had then learnt—that Matilda’s temper had doubtlessly been much tried here. It would not be tried in their house, they believed, and took her readily. She is an excellent servant, Johnny, let who will get her.”

I could not resist the temptation of speaking to Matilda about this, an opportunity offering that same day. She came into the room with some letters just left by the postman.

“I thought my mistress was here, sir,” she said, hesitating with the tray in her hand.

“Miss Deveen will be here in a minute: you can leave the letters. So you are going to take flight, Matilda! I have heard all about it. What a silly thing you must be to put yourself into that wonderful tantrum!”

“She broke into my box, and turned over its contents, and stole my letter to mock me,” retorted Matilda, her fever-lighted eyes taking a momentary fierceness. “Who, put in my place, would not have gone into a tantrum, sir?”

“But she says she did not break into it.”

“As surely as that is heaven’s sun above us, she *did it*, Mr. Johnny. She has been full of spite towards me for a long time, and she thought she would pay me out. I did but unlock the box, and slip the little paper of money in, and I locked it again instantly and brought the key away with me: I can never say anything truer than that, sir: to make a mistake about it is not possible.” [41]

No pen could convey the solemn earnestness with which she spoke. Somehow it impressed me. I hoped Hall would get served out.

“Yes, the wrong has triumphed for once. As far as I can see, sir, it often does triumph. Miss Deveen thinks great things of Hall, but she is deceived in her; and I daresay she will find her out sometime. It was Hall who ought to have been turned away instead of me. Not that I would stay here longer if I could.”

“But you like Miss Deveen?”

“Very much indeed, sir; she is a good lady and a kind mistress. She spoke very well indeed of me to the new family where I am going, and I daresay I shall do well enough there.—Have you been to Saltwater lately, sir?” she added, abruptly.

“Never since. Do you get news from the place?”

She shook her head. “I have never heard a word from any soul in it. I have written to nobody, and nobody has written to me.”

“And nothing more has come out about poor Jane Cross. It is still a mystery.”

“And likely to be one,” she replied, in a low tone.

“Perhaps so. Do you know what Owen the milkman thought?”

She had spoken the last sentence or two with her eyes bent, fiddling with the silver waiter. Now they were raised quickly.

“Owen thought that you could clear up the mystery if you liked, Matilda. At least, that you possessed some clue to it. He told me so.”

“Owen as good as said the same to me before I left,” she replied, after a pause. “He is wrong, sir: but he must think it if he will. Is he—is he at Saltwater still?”

“For all I know to the contrary. This letter, that the servants here got at, was one you were beginning to write to Owen. Did——” [42]

“I would rather not talk of that letter, Mr. Johnny: my private affairs concern myself only,” she interrupted—and went out of the room like a shot.

Had anyone told me that during this short visit of mine in London I should come across the solution of the mystery of that tragedy enacted at No. 7, I might have been slow to credit it.

Nevertheless, it was to be so.

Have you ever noticed, in going through life, that events seem to carry a sequence in themselves almost as though they bore in their own hands the guiding thread that connects them from beginning to end? For a time this thread will seem to be lost; to lie dormant, as though it had snapped, and the course of affairs it was holding to have disappeared for good. But lo! up peeps a little end when least expected, and we catch hold of it, and soon it grows into a handful; and what we had thought lost is again full of activity and gradually works itself out. Not a single syllable, good or bad, had we heard of that calamity at Saltwater during the fourteen months which had passed since. The thread of it lay dormant. At Miss Deveen's it began to steal up again: Matilda, and her passion, and the letter she had commenced to Thomas Owen were to the fore: and before that visit of mine came to an end, the thread had, strange to say, unwound itself.

I was a favourite of Miss Deveen's: you may have gathered that from past papers. One day, when she was going shopping, she asked me to accompany her and not Miss Cattledon: which made that rejected lady's face all the more like vinegar. So we set off in the carriage.

"Are we going to Regent Street, Miss Deveen?"

"Not to-day, Johnny. I like to encourage my neighbouring tradespeople, and shall buy my new silk here. We have excellent shops not far off." [43]

After a few intricate turnings and windings, the carriage stopped before a large linendraper's, which stood amidst a colony of shops nearly a mile from Miss Deveen's. George came round to open the door.

"Now what will you do, Johnny?" said Miss Deveen. "I daresay I shall be half an hour in here, looking at silks and calico; and I won't inflict that penalty on you. Shall the carriage take you for a short drive the while, or will you wait in it?—or walk about?"

"I will wait in the street here," I said, "and come in to you when I am tired. I like looking at shops." And I do like it.

The next shop to the linendraper's was a carver and gilder's: he had some good pictures displayed in his window; at any rate, they looked good to me: and there I took up my station to begin with.

"How do you do, sir? Have you forgotten me?"

The words came from a young man who stood at the next door, close to me, causing me to turn quickly to him from gazing at the pictures. No, I had not forgotten him. I knew him instantly. It was Owen, the milkman.

After a few words had passed, I went inside. It was a large shop, well fitted up with cans and things pertaining to a milkman's business. The window-board was prettily set off with moss, ferns, a bowl containing gold and silver fish, a miniature fountain, and a rush basket of fresh eggs. Over the door was his own name, Thomas Owen.

"You are living here, Owen?"

"Yes, sir."

"But why have you left Saltwater?"

"Because, Mr. Johnny, the place looked askance at me. People, in their own minds, set down that miserable affair at No. 7 to my credit. Once or twice I was hooted at by the street boys, asking what I had done with Jane Cross. My mother couldn't stand that, and I couldn't stand it, so we just sold our business at Saltwater, and bought this one here. And a good change it has been, in a pecuniary point of view: this is an excellent connection, and grows larger every day." [44]

"I'm sure I am glad to hear it."

"At first, mother couldn't bear London: she longed for the country air and the green fields: but she is reconciled to it now. Perhaps she'll have an opportunity soon of going back to see her own old Welsh mountains, and of staying there if it pleases her."

"Then I should say you are going to be married, Owen."

He laughed and nodded. "You'll wish me good luck, won't you, sir? She's the only daughter at the next door, the grocer's."

"That I will. Have you discovered anymore of that mysterious business, Owen?"

"At Saltwater? No, sir: not anything at all that could touch the matter itself. But I have heard a good bit that bears upon it."

"Do you still suspect that Matilda could tell if she chose?"

"I suspect more than that, sir."

The man's words were curiously significant. He had a bit of fern in his hand, and his fresh, open, intelligent face was bent downwards, as if he wanted to see what the leaf was made of.

"I am not sure, sir. It is but suspicion at the best: but it's an uncommonly strong one."

“Won’t you tell me what you mean? You may trust me.”

“Yes, I am sure I may,” he said, promptly. “And I think I will tell you—though I have never breathed it to mortal yet. I think Matilda did it herself.”

Backing away from the counter in my surprise, I upset an empty milk-can. [45]

“Matilda!” I exclaimed, picking up the can.

“Mr. Johnny, with all my heart I believe it to have been so. I have believed it for some time now.”

“But the girls were too friendly to harm one another. I remember you said so yourself, Owen.”

“And I thought so then, sir. No suspicion of Matilda had occurred to me, but rather of the man I had seen there on the Wednesday. I think she must have done it in a sudden passion; not of deliberate purpose.”

“But now, what are your reasons?”

“I told you, sir, as I daresay you can recall to mind, that I should do what lay in my power to unravel the mystery—for it was not at all agreeable to have it laid at my door. I began, naturally, with tracing out the doings of that night as connected with No. 7. Poor Jane Cross had not been out of doors that night, and so far as I knew had spoken to no one save to me from the window; therefore of her there seemed nothing to be traced: but of Matilda there was. Inquiring here and there, I bit by bit got a few odds and ends of facts together. I traced out the exact time, almost to a minute, that I rang twice at the door-bell at No. 7, and was not answered; and the time that Matilda entered the Swan to get the supper beer. Pretty nearly half an hour had elapsed between the first time and the second.”

“Half an hour!”

“Not far short of it. Which proved that Matilda must have been indoors when I rang, though she denied it before the coroner, and it was taken for granted that I had rung during her absence to fetch the beer. And you knew, sir, that her absence did not exceed ten minutes. Now why did not Matilda answer my ring? Why did she not candidly say that she had heard the ring, but did not choose to answer it? Well, sir, that gave rise to the first faint doubt of her: and when I recalled [46] and dwelt on her singular manner, it appeared to me that the doubt might pass into grave suspicion. Look at her superstitious horror of No. 7. She never would go into the house afterwards!”

I nodded.

“Two or three other little things struck me, all tending to strengthen my doubts, but perhaps they are hardly worth naming. Still, make the worst of it, it was only suspicion, not certainty, and I left Saltwater, holding my tongue.”

“And is this all, Owen?”

“Not quite, sir. Would you be so good as to step outside, and just look at the name over the grocer’s door?”

I did so, and read Valentine. “John Valentine.” The same name as Matilda’s.

“Yes, sir, it is,” Owen said, in answer to me. “After settling here we made acquaintance with the Valentines, and by-and-by learnt that they are cousins of Matilda’s. Fanny—my wife that is to be—has often talked to me about Matilda; they were together a good bit in early life; and by dint of mentally sifting what she said, and putting that and that together, I fancy I see daylight.”

“Yes. Well?”

“Matilda’s father married a Spanish woman. She was of a wild, ungovernable temper, subject to fits of frenzy; in one of which fits she died. Matilda has inherited this temper; she is liable to go into frenzies that can only be compared to insanity. Fanny has seen her in two only; they occur at rare intervals; and she tells me that she truly believes the girl is mad—mad, Mr. Johnny—during the few minutes that they last.”

The history I had heard of her mad rage at Miss Deveen’s flashed over me. Temporarily insane they had thought her there.

“I said to Fanny one day when we were talking of her,” resumed Owen, “that a person in that sort [47] of uncontrollable passion, might commit any crime; a murder, or what not. ‘Yes,’ Fanny replied, ‘and not unlikely to do it, either: Matilda has more than once said that she should never die in her bed.’ Meaning——”

“Meaning what?” I asked, for he came to a pause.

“Well, sir, meaning, I suppose, that she might sometime lay violent hands upon herself, or upon another. I can’t help thinking that something must have put her into one of these rages with Jane Cross, and that she pushed or flung the poor girl over the stairs.”

Looking back, rapidly recalling signs and tokens, I thought it might have been so. Owen interrupted me.

“I shall come across her sometime, Mr. Johnny. These are things that don’t hide themselves for ever: at least, not often. And I shall tax her with it to her face.”

“But—don’t you know where she is?”

“No, I don’t sir. I wish I did. It was said that she came up to take a situation in London, and perhaps she is still in it. But London’s a large place, I don’t know what part of it she was in, and one might as well look for a needle in a bundle of hay. The Valentines have never heard of her at all since she was at Saltwater.”

How strange it seemed;—that she and they were living so near one another, and yet not to be aware of it. Should I tell Owen? Only for half a moment did the question cross me. *No*: most certainly not. It might be as he suspected; and, with it all, I could only pity Matilda. Of all unhappy women, she seemed the unhappiest.

Miss Deveen’s carriage bowled past the door to take her up at the linendraper’s. Wishing Owen good-day, I was going out, but drew back to make room for two people who were entering: an elderly woman in a close bonnet, and a young one with a fair, pretty and laughing face.

“My mother and Fanny, sir,” he whispered.

“She is very pretty, very nice, Owen,” I said, impulsively. “You’ll be sure to be happy with her.” [48]

“Thank you, sir; I think I shall. I wish you had spoken a word or two to her, Mr. Johnny: you’d have seen how nice she is.”

“I can’t stay now, Owen. I’ll come again.”

Not even to Miss Deveen did I speak of what I had heard. I kept thinking of it as we drove round Hyde Park, and she told me I was unusually silent.

The thread was unwinding itself more and more. Once it had begun to lengthen, I suppose it had to go on. Accident led to an encounter between Matilda and Thomas Owen. Accident? No, it was this same thread of destiny. There’s no such thing as accident in the world.

During the visit to the linendraper’s, above spoken of, Miss Deveen bought a gown for Matilda. Feeling in her own heart sorry for the girl, thinking she had been somewhat hardly done by in her house, what with Hall and the rest of them, she wished to make her a present on leaving, as a token of her good-will. But the quantity of stuff bought proved not to be sufficient: Miss Deveen had doubted the point when it was cut off, and told Matilda to go herself and get two yards more. This it was, this simple incident, that led to the meeting with Owen. And I was present at it.

The money-order office of the district was situated amidst this colony of shops. In going down there one afternoon to cash an order, I overtook Matilda. She was on her way to buy the additional yards of stuff.

“I suppose I am going right, sir?” she said to me. “I don’t know much about this neighbourhood.”

“Not know much about it! What, after having lived in it more than a year!”

“I have hardly ever gone out; except to church on a Sunday,” she answered. “And what few articles I’ve wanted in the dress line, I have mostly bought at the little draper’s shop round the corner.” [49]

Hardly had the words left her lips, when we came face to face with Thomas Owen. Matilda gave a sort of smothered cry, and stood still, gazing at him. What they said to one another in that first moment, I did not hear. Matilda had a frightened look, and was whiter than death. Presently we were all walking together towards Thomas Owen’s, he having invited Matilda to go and see his home.

But there was another encounter first. Standing at the grocer’s door was pretty Fanny Valentine. She and Matilda recognized each other, and clasped hands. It appeared to me that Matilda did it with reluctance, as though it gave her no pleasure to meet her relatives. She must have known how near they lived to Miss Deveen’s, and yet she had never sought them out. Perhaps the very fact of not wishing to see them had kept her from the spot.

They all sat down in the parlour behind the shop—a neat room. Mrs. Owen was out; her son produced some wine. I stood up by the bookcase, telling them I must be off the next minute to the post-office. But the minutes passed, and I stayed on.

How he led up to it, I hardly know; but, before I was prepared for anything of the kind, Thomas Owen had plunged wholesale into the subject of Jane Cross, recounting the history of that night, in all its minute details, to Fanny Valentine. Matilda, sitting back on the far side of the room in an armchair, looked terror-stricken: her face seemed to be turning into stone.

“Why do you begin about that, Thomas Owen?” she demanded, when words at length came to her. “It can have nothing to do with Fanny.”

“I have been wishing to tell it her for some little time, and this seems to be a fitting opportunity,” he answered, coolly resolute. “You, being better acquainted with the matter than I, can correct me if I make any blunders. I don’t care to keep secrets from Fanny: she is going to be my wife.” [50]

Matilda's hands lifted themselves with a convulsive movement and fell again. Her eyes flashed fire.

"*Your wife?*"

"If you have no objection," he replied. "My dear old mother goes into Wales next month, and Fanny comes here in her place."

With a cry, faint and mournful as that of a wounded dove, Matilda put her hands before her face and leaned back in her chair. If she had in truth loved Thomas Owen, if she loved him still, the announcement must have caused her cruel pain.

He resumed his narrative; assuming as facts what he had in his own mind conceived to have been the case, and by implication, but not directly, charging Matilda with the crime. It had a dreadful effect upon her; her agitation increased with every word. Suddenly she rose up in the chair, her arms lifted, her face distorted. One of those fits of passion had come on.

We had a dreadful scene. Owen was powerful, I of not much good, but we could not hold her. Fanny ran sobbing into her own door and sent in two of the shopmen.

It was the climax in Matilda Valentine's life. One that perhaps might have been always looked for. From that hour she was an insane woman, her ravings interspersed with lucid intervals. During one of these, she disclosed the truth.

She had loved Thomas Owen with a passionate love. Mistaking the gossip and the nonsense that the young man was fond of chattering to her and Jane Cross, she believed her love was returned. On the day preceding the tragedy, when talking with him after morning service, she had taxed [51] him with paying more attention to Jane Cross than to herself. Not a bit of it, he had lightly answered; he would take her for a walk by the seashore that evening if she liked to go. But, whether he had meant it, or not, he never came, though Matilda dressed herself in readiness. On the contrary, he went to church, met Jane there, and walked the best part of the way home with her. Matilda jealously resented this; her mind was in a chaos; she began to suspect that it was Jane Cross he liked, not herself. She said a word or two upon the subject to Jane Cross the next day, Monday; but Jane made sport of it—laughed it off. So the time went on to evening, when they were upstairs together, Jane sewing, Matilda writing. Suddenly Jane Cross said that Thomas Owen was coming along, and Matilda ran to the window. They spoke to him as he passed, and he said he would look in as he returned from Munpler. After Matilda's letter to her brother was finished, she began a note to Thomas Owen, intending to reproach him with not keeping his promise to her and for joining Jane Cross instead. It was the first time she had ever attempted to write to him; and she stuck her work-box with the lid open behind the sheet of paper that Jane Cross might not see what she was doing. When it grew dusk, Jane Cross remarked that it was blind man's holiday and she would go on down and lay the supper. In crossing the room, work-basket in hand, she passed behind Matilda, glanced at her letter, and saw the first words of it, "Dearest Thomas Owen." In sport, she snatched it up, read the rest where her own name was mentioned, and laughingly began, probably out of pure fun, to teaze Matilda. "Thomas Owen your sweetheart!" she cried, running out on to the landing. "Why, he is mine. He cares more for my little finger than for——" Poor girl! She never finished her sentence. Matilda, fallen into one of those desperate fits of passion, had caught her up and was clutching her like a tiger-cat, tearing her hair, tearing pieces out of her gown. The scuffle was brief: almost in an instant Jane Cross [52] was falling headlong down the well of the staircase, pushed over the very low balustrades by Matilda, who threw the work-basket after her.

The catastrophe sobered her passion. For a while she lay on the landing in a sort of faint, all strength and power taken out of her as usual by the frenzy. Then she went down to look after Jane Cross.

Jane was dead. Matilda, not unacquainted with the aspect of death, saw that at once, and her senses pretty nearly deserted her again with remorse and horror. She had never thought or wished to kill Jane Cross, hardly to harm her, she liked her too well: but in those moments of frenzy she had not the slightest control over her actions. Her first act was to run and lock the side door in the garden wall, lest anyone should come in. How she lived through the next half-hour, she never knew. Her superstitious fear of seeing the dead Edmund Peahern in the house was strong—and now there was another! But, with all her anguish and her fear, the instinct of self-preservation was making itself heard. What must she do? How could she throw the suspicion off herself? She could not run out of the house and say, "Jane Cross has fallen accidentally over the stairs; come and look to her"—for no one would have believed it to be an accident. And there were the pieces, too, she had clutched out of the gown! Whilst thus deliberating the gate-bell rang, putting her into a state of the most intense terror. It rang again. Trembling, panting, Matilda stood cowering in the kitchen, but it did not ring a third time. This was, of course, Thomas Owen.

Necessity is the mother of invention. Something she *must* do, and her brain hastily concocted the plan she should adopt. Putting the cloth and the bread and cheese on the table, she took the jug and went out at the front door to fetch the usual pint of ale. A moment or two she stood at the [53] front door, peering up and down the road to make sure that no one was passing. Then she slipped out, locking the door softly; and, carrying the key concealed in the hollow of her hand, she threw it amidst the shrubs at No 1. *Now* she could not get into the house herself; she would not have entered it alone for the world: people must break it open. All along the way to the post-office, to

which she really did go, and then to the Swan, she was mentally rehearsing her tale. And it succeeded in deceiving us all, as the reader knows. With regard to the visit of her brother on the Wednesday, she had told Thomas Owen the strict truth; though, when he first alluded to it in the churchyard, her feelings were wrought up to such a pitch that she could only cry out and escape. But how poor Matilda contrived to live on and carry out her invented story, how she bore the inward distress and repentance that lay upon her, we shall never know. A distress, remorse, repentance that never quitted her, night or day; and which no doubt contributed to gradually unhinge her mind, and throw it finally off its balance.

Such was the true history of the affair at No. 7, which had been so great a mystery to Saltwater. The truth was never made public, save to the very few who were specially interested in it. Matilda Valentine is in an asylum, and likely to remain there for life; whilst Thomas Owen and his wife flourish in sunshine, happy as a summer day is long.

CARAMEL COTTAGE

[54]

I.—EDGAR RESTE

I

It was early in August, and we were at Dyke Manor, for the Squire had let us go home from school for the Worcester races. We had joined him at Worcester the previous day, Tuesday, driving home with him in the evening. To-morrow, Thursday, he would drive us over to the course again; to-day, Wednesday, the horses would have rest; and on Friday we must return to school.

Breakfast was over, the Squire gone out, and the few minutes' Bible-reading to us—which Mrs. Todhetley never forgot, though Tod did not always stay in for it, but he did this morning—came to an end. Hannah appeared at the door as she closed the Book.

"Miss Barbary's come, ma'am," she said.

"Run, my dear," cried Mrs. Todhetley to Lena.

"I don't want to," said Lena, running to the open window instead, and nearly pitching head-foremost through it: upon which Hannah captured her and carried her off.

"Who on earth is Miss Barbary?" questioned Tod. "Any relation to the man at Caramel Cottage?"

"His daughter," said Mrs. Todhetley. "She comes to teach Lena French."

"Hope she's less of a shady character than her father!" was Tod's free comment.

[55]

A year or two before this, a stranger had made his appearance at Church Dykely, and put up at the Silver Bear. He was a gentlemanly-looking man of perhaps forty years, tall, slender, agile, with thin, distinguished features, an olive skin, black hair, and eyes of a peculiar shade of deep steel-blue. People went into raptures over his face, and called it beautiful. And so it was; but to my thinking it had a look in it that was the opposite of beautiful; any way, the opposite of good. They said it was my fancy at home: but Duffham owned to the same fancy. His name, as he wrote it down one day at the Silver Bear, was Pointz Barbary. After a week's stay at the inn, he, finding, I suppose, that the neighbourhood suited him, looked out for a little place to settle down upon, and met with it in Caramel Cottage, a small dwelling near to us, on the property called Caramel's Farm. The cottage was then to be let, and Mr. Barbary went into it.

Some items of his past history came out by degrees; it is hard to say how, for he told none himself. Now and then some former friend or other came to pay him a short visit; and it may be that these strangers talked about him.

Pointz Barbary, a gentleman by descent, and once of fairly good substance, had been a great traveller, had roved pretty nearly all over the world. The very few relatives he possessed lived in Canada—people of condition, it was said—and his own property (what was left of it) was also there. He had been married twice. First to a young lady in France; her friends (English) having settled there for economy's sake. She died at the end of the year, leaving him a little girl, that the mother's people at once took to. Next he married a Miss Reste, daughter of Colonel Reste, in her Majesty's service. A few years later she also died—died of consumption—leaving him a widower and childless. It's true he had his first wife's daughter, but she lived in France with her mother's sister, so he did not get much benefit from her.

[56]

Mr. Barbary was poor. No mistake about that. The interest of his first wife's money brought him in fifty-two pounds yearly, and this he would enjoy till his death, when it went to his daughter. Miss Reste had brought him several thousand pounds; but he and she had lived away, and not a stiver remained of it. His own means had also been spent lavishly; and, so far as was known, he had but the two and fifty pounds a year to live upon at Caramel Cottage, with a chance

remittance from Canada now and again.

He made no acquaintance at Church Dykely, and none was made with him. Civilly courteous in a rather grand and haughty way when he met people, so far as a few remarks went, touching the weather or the crops, and similar safe topics, he yet kept the world at a distance. As the time went on it was thought there might be a reason for this. Whispers began to circulate that Mr. Barbary's doings were not orthodox. He was suspected of poaching, both in game and fish, and a strong feeling of shyness grew up against him.

Some few months prior to the present time—August—his daughter came to Caramel Cottage. Her aunt in France was dead, and she had no home henceforth but her father's. That I and Tod had not seen or heard of her until now, was owing to the midsummer holidays having been spent at Crabb Cot. The vacation over, and Mrs. Todhetley back at Dyke Manor, she found herself called upon by Miss Barbary. Hearing that Mrs. Todhetley wished her little girl to begin French, she had come to offer herself as teacher. The upshot was that she was engaged, and came for a couple of hours every morning to drill French into Lena.

"What's she like?" asked Tod of the mother, upon her explaining this. "Long and thin and dark, like Barbary, and disagreeable with a self-contained reticence?"

"She is not the least like him in any way," was Mrs. Todhetley's answer. "She is charmingly simple—good, I am sure, and one of the most open-natured girls I ever met. 'I wish to do it for the [57] sake of earning a little money,' she said to me, when asking to come. 'My dear father is not rich, and if I can help him in ever so small a way I shall be thankful.' The tears almost came into her eyes as she spoke," added Mrs. Todhetley; "she quite won my heart."

"She seems to think great things of that respectable parent of hers!" commented Tod.

"Oh, yes. Whatever may be the truth as to his failings, *she* sees none in him. And, my dears, better that it should be so. She earns a little money of me, apart from teaching Lena," added Mrs. Todhetley.

"What at?" asked Tod. "Teaching *you*?"

The mother shook her head with a smile. "I found out, Joseph, that she is particularly skilful at mending old lace. I have some that needs repairing. She takes it home and does it at her leisure—and you cannot imagine how grateful she is."

"How old is she?"

"Nineteen—close upon twenty, I think she said," replied the mother. And there the conversation ended, for Mrs. Todhetley had to go to the kitchen to give the daily orders.

The morning wore on. We went to Church Dykely and were back again by twelve o'clock. Tod had got Don on the lawn, making him jump for biscuit, when the dog rushed off, barking, and we heard a scream. A young lady in a straw hat and a half-mourning cotton dress was running away from him, she and Lena having come out of the house together.

"Come here, Don," said Tod in his voice of authority, which the good Newfoundland dog never disobeyed. "How dare you, sir? Johnny, lad, I suppose that's Miss Barbary."

I had forgotten all about her. A charming girl, as the mother had said, slight and graceful, with a face like a peach blossom, dimpled cheeks, soft light-brown hair and dark-blue eyes. Not the [58] hard, steel-blue eyes that her father had: sweet eyes, these, with a gentle, loving look in them.

"You need not be afraid of the dog," cried Tod, advancing to where she stood, behind the mulberry tree. "Miss Barbary, I believe?"—lifting his cap.

"Yes," she said in a frank tone, turning her frank face to him; "I am Katrine Barbary. It is a very large dog—and he barks at me."

Large he was, bigger than many a small donkey. A brave, faithful, good-tempered dog, he, and very handsome, his curly white coat marked out with black. Gentle to friends and respectable strangers, Don was at mortal enmity with tramps and beggars: we could not cure him of this, so he was chained up by day. At night he was unchained to roam the yard at will, but the gate was kept locked. Had he got out, he might have pinned the coat of any loose man he met, but I don't believe he would have bitten him. A good fright Don would give, but not mortal injury. At least, we had never yet known him to do that.

Lena ran up in her short pink frock, her light curls flying. "Miss Barbary is always afraid when she hears Don bark," she said to us. "She will not go near the yard; she thinks he'll bite her."

"I will teach you how to make friends with him," said Tod: "though he would never hurt you, Miss Barbary. Come here and pat his head whilst I hold him; call him by his name gently. Once he knows you, he would protect you from harm with his life."

She complied with ready obedience, though the roses left her cheeks. "There," said Tod, loosing the dog, and letting her pat him at leisure, "see how gentle he is; how affectionately he looks up at you!"

"Please not to think me very silly!" she pleaded earnestly, as though beseeching pardon for a sin. "I have never been used to dogs. We do not keep dogs in France. At least very few people do. Oh

dear!”

Something that she carried in her left hand wrapped in paper had dropped on to the lawn. Don pounced upon it. “Oh, please take it from him! please, please!” she cried in terror. Tod laughed, and extricated the little parcel. [59]

“It has some valuable old lace in it of Mrs. Todhetley’s,” she explained as she thanked him. “I am taking it home to mend.”

“You mend old lace famously, I hear,” said Tod, as we walked with her to the entrance gate.

“Yes, I think I do it nearly as well as the nuns who taught me.”

“Have you been in a convent?”

“Only for my education. I was an externe—a daily pupil. My aunt lived next door to it. I went every morning at eight o’clock and returned home at six in the evening to supper.”

“Did you get no dinner?” asked Tod.

She took the question literally. “I had dinner and collation at school; breakfast and supper at home. That was the way in our town with the externes at the convent. We were Protestants, you see, so my aunt liked me to be at home on Sundays. Thank you for teaching Don to know me: and now I will say good morning to you.”

I was holding the gate open for her to pass out, when Ben Gibbon went by, a gun carelessly held over his shoulder. He touched his hat to us, and we gave him a slight nod in reply. Miss Barbary said “Good day, Mr. Gibbon.”

Tod drew down his displeased lips. He had already taken a liking to the girl—so had I, for that matter—she was a true lady, and Mr. Ben Gibbon, a brother to the gamekeeper at Chavasse Grange, could not boast of a particularly shining character.

“Do you know *him*, Miss Barbary?” asked Tod. “Be quiet, Don!” he cried to the dog, which had begun to growl when he saw Gibbon.

“He comes to our house sometimes to see papa. Please pardon me for keeping you waiting,” she added to me, as I still held back the gate. “That gun is pointed this way and it may go off.” [60]

Tod was amused. “You seem to dread guns as much as you dread dogs, Miss Barbary. I will walk home with you,” he said, as she at last came through, the gun having got to a safe distance.

“Oh, but——” she was beginning, and then stopped in confusion, blushing hotly, and looking at both of us. “I should like it; but——would it be proper?”

“Proper!” echoed Tod, staring, and then bursting into a fit of laughter long and loud. “Oh dear! why, Miss Barbary, you must be French all over! Johnny, you can come, too. Lena, run back again; you have not any hat on.”

Crossing the road to take the near field way, we went along the path that led beside the hedge, and soon came in view of Caramel Cottage; it was only a stone’s throw, so to say, from our house. An uncommonly lonely look it had, buried there amidst many trees, with the denser trees of the Grove close beyond it. We asked her whether she did not find it dull here.

“At first I did, very; I do still a little: it is so different from the lively town I have lived in, where we knew all the people, and they knew us. But we shall soon be more lively,” she resumed, after a pause. “A cousin is coming to stay with us.”

“Indeed,” said Tod. “Is it a lady or a gentleman?”

“Oh, it is a gentleman—Edgar Reste. He is not my cousin by kin; not really related to me; but papa says he will be as my cousin, as my brother even, and that he is very nice. Papa’s last wife was Miss Reste, and he is her nephew. He is a barrister in London, and he has been much overworked, and he is coming here to-morrow for rest and country air.”

Within the low green gate of the little front garden of Caramel Cottage stood Mr. Barbary, in his brown velveteen shooting coat and breeches of the same, that became him and his straight lithe limbs so well. Every time I saw him the beauty of his face struck me afresh; but so did the shifty expression of his eyes. [61]

“There’s papa!” exclaimed the girl, her dimples lighting up. “And—why, there’s a gentleman with him—a stranger! I wonder who it is?”

I saw him as he came from the porch down the narrow garden-path. A slight, slender young man of middle height and distinguished air, with a pale, worn, nice-looking face, and laughing, luminous dark brown eyes. Yes, I saw Edgar Reste for the first time at this his entrance at Caramel Cottage, and it was a thing to be thankful for that I could not then foresee the nameless horror his departure from it (I may as well say his disappearance) was to shadow forth.

“How do you do?” said Mr. Barbary to us, courteously civil. “Katrine, here’s a surprise for you: your cousin is come. Edgar, this is my little girl.—Mr. Reste,” he added, by way of introduction generally.

Mr. Reste lifted his hat, bowed slightly, and then turned to Katrine with outstretched hand. She met it with a hot blush, as if strange young men did not shake hands with her every day.

“We did not expect you quite so soon,” she gently said, to atone for her first surprise.

“True,” he answered. “But I felt unusually out of sorts yesterday, and thought it would make no difference to Mr. Barbary whether I came to-day or to-morrow.”

His voice had a musical ring; his manner was open and honest. He might be Pointz Barbary’s nephew by marriage, but I am sure he was not by nature.

“They’ll fall in love with one another, those two; you’ll see,” said Tod to me as we went home. [62]
“Did you mark his pleased face when he spoke to her, Johnny—and how she blushed?”

“Oh, come, Tod! they tell me I am fanciful. What are you?”

“Not fanciful with your fancies, lad. As to you, Mr. Don”—turning to the dog, which had done nothing but growl while we stood before Barbary’s gate, “unless you mend your manners, you shall not come out again. What ails you, sir, to-day?”

II

If love springs out of companionship, why then, little wonder that it found its way into Caramel Cottage. They were with each other pretty nearly all day and every day, that young man and that young woman; and so—what else was to be expected?

“We must try and get you strong again,” said Mr. Barbary to his guest, who at first, amidst other adverse symptoms, could eat nothing. No matter what dainty little dish old Joan prepared, Mr. Reste turned from it.

Mr. Barbary had taken to old Joan with the house. A little, dark, active woman, she, with bright eyes and a mob-cap of muslin. She was sixty years old; quick, capable, simple and kindly. We don’t get many such servants now-a-days. One defect Joan had—deafness. When a voice was close to her, it was all right; at a distance she could not hear it at all.

“How long is it that you have been ailing, Cousin Edgar?” asked Miss Barbary, one day when they were sitting together.

“Oh, some few weeks, Cousin Katrine,” he answered in a tone to imitate hers—and then laughed. “Look here, child, don’t call me ‘Cousin Edgar!’ For pity’s sake, don’t!”

“I know you are not my true cousin,” she said, blushing furiously. [63]

“It’s not that. If we were the nearest cousins that can be, it would still be silly.” Objectionable, was the word he had all but used. “It is bad taste; has not a nice sound to cultivated ears—as I take it. I am Edgar, if you please; and you are Katrine.”

“In France we say ‘mon cousin,’ or ‘ma cousine,’ when speaking to one,” returned Katrine.

“But we are not French; we are English.”

“Well,” she resumed, as her face cooled down—“why did you not take rest before? and what is it that has made you ill?”

He shook his head thoughtfully. The parlour window, looking to the front, was thrown up before them. A light breeze tempered the summer heat, wafting in sweetness from the homely flowers and scented shrubs. The little garden was crowded with them, as all homely gardens were then. Roses, lilies, columbines, stocks, gillyflowers, sweet peas, sweet Williams, pinks white and red, tulips, pansies (or as they were then generally called, garden-gates), mignonette, bachelor’s buttons, and lots of others, sweet or not sweet, that I can’t stay to recall: and clusters of marjoram and lavender and “old-man” and sweet-briar, and jessamines white and yellow, and woodbine, and sweet syringa; and the tall hollyhock, and ever true but gaudy sunflower—each and all flourished there in their respective seasons. Amidst the grand “horticulture,” as it is phrased, of these modern days, it is a pleasure to lose one’s self in the memories of these dear old simple gardens. Sometimes I get wondering if we shall ever meet them again—say in Heaven.

They sat there at the open window enjoying the fragrance. Katrine had made a paper fan, and was gently fluttering it to and fro before her flushed young face.

“I have burnt the candle at both ends,” continued Mr. Reste. “That is what’s the matter with me.”

“Y—es,” hesitated she, not quite understanding. [64]

“At law business all day, and at literary work the best part of the night, year in and year out—it has told upon me, Katrine.”

“But why should you do both?” asked Katrine.

“Why? Oh, because—because my pocket is a shallow pocket, and has, moreover, a hole in it.”

She laughed.

“Not getting briefs showered in upon me as one might hope my merits deserve—I know not any

young barrister who does—I had to supplement my earnings in that line by something else, and I took to writing. *That* is up-hill work, too; but it brings in a few shillings now and again. One must pay one's way, you know, Katrine, if possible; and with some of us it is apt to be a rather extravagant way."

"Is it with you?" she asked, earnestly.

"It *was*. I squandered money too freely at first. My old uncle gave me a fair sum to set up with when my dinners were eaten and I was called; and I suppose I thought the sum would never come to an end. Ah! we buy our experience dearly."

"Will not the old uncle give you more?"

"Not a stiver—this long while past. He lives in India, and writing to ask him does no good. And he is the only relative left to me in the world."

"Except papa."

Edgar Reste lifted his eyebrows. "Your father is not my relative, young lady. His late wife was my aunt; my father's sister."

"Did your father leave you no money, when he died?"

"Not any. He was a clergyman with a good benefice, but he lived up to his income and did not save anything. No, I have only myself to lean on. Don't know whether it will turn out to be a broken reed."

"If I could only help you!" breathed Katrine.

"You are helping me more than I can say," he answered, impulsively. "When with you I have a [65] feeling of rest—of peace. And that's what I want."

Which avowal brought a hot blush again to Miss Katrine's cheek and a curious thrill somewhere round about her heart.

Time went on. Before much of it had elapsed, they were in love with one another for ever and for ever, with that first love that comes but once in a lifetime. That is, in secret; it was not betrayed or spoken of by either of them, or intended to be. Mr. Reste, Barrister-at-law (and briefless), could as soon have entertained thoughts of setting up a coach-and-four, as of setting up a wife. He had not a ghost of the means necessary at present, he saw not the smallest chance yet of attaining them. Years and years and years might go by before that desirable pinnacle in the social race was reached; and it might never be reached at all. It would be the height of dishonour, as he considered, to persuade Katrine Barbary into an engagement, which might never be fulfilled. How could he condemn her to wear out her heart and her life and her days in loneliness, sighing for him, never seeing him—he at one end of the world, she at the other? for that's how, lover-like, he estimated the distance between this and the metropolis. So he never let a word of his love escape him, and he guarded his looks, and treated Katrine as his little cousin.

And she? Be you sure, she was as reticent as he. An inexperienced young maiden, scrupulously and modestly brought up, she kept her secret zealously. It is true she could not help her blushes, or the tell-tale thrilling of her soft voice; but Edgar Reste was not obliged to read them correctly.

Likely enough he could penetrate, as the weeks wore on, some of the ins and outs in the private worth of Mr. Barbary. In fact, he *did* do so. He found that gentleman rather addicted to going [66] abroad at night when reasonable people were in bed and asleep. Mr. Barbary gave him his views upon the subject. Poaching, he maintained, was a perfectly legitimate and laudable occupation. "It's one to be proud of, instead of the contrary," he asserted, one September day, when they were in the gun-room together. "*Proud of*, Edgar."

"For a gentleman?" laughed Mr. Reste, who invariably made light of the subject. And he glanced at his host curiously from between his long dark eyelashes and straight, fine eyebrows; at the dark, passive, handsome face, at the long slender fingers, busy over the lock of his favourite gun.

"For a gentleman certainly. Why should common men usurp all its benefit? The game laws are obnoxious laws, and it behoves us to set them at naught."

Another amused laugh from Mr. Reste.

"Who hesitates to do a bit of smuggling?" argued the speaker. "Answer me that, Reste. Nobody. Nobody, from a prince to a peasant, from poor Jack Tar to his superfine commander, but deems it meritorious to cheat the Customs. When a man lands here or yonder with a few contraband things about him, and gets them through safely, do his friends and acquaintances turn the cold shoulder upon him? Not a bit of it; they regard it as a fine feather in his cap."

"Oh, no doubt."

"Poaching is the same thing. It is also an amusement. Oh, it is grand fun, Edgar Reste, to be out on a fine night and dodge the keepers!" continued Mr. Barbary, with enthusiasm. "The spice of daring in it, of danger, if you choose to put it that way, stimulates the nerves like wine."

"Not quite orthodox, though, mon ami."

“Orthodox be hanged. Stolen pleasures are sweetest, as we all know. You shall go out with me some night, Edgar, and judge for yourself.” [67]

“Don’t say but I will—just to look on—if you’ll ensure my getting back in safety,” said the barrister, in a tone that might be taken for jest or earnest, assent or refusal.

“Back in safety!” came the mocking echo, as if to get back in safety from midnight poaching were a thing as sure as the sun. “We’ll let a week or two go on; when shooting first comes in the keepers are safe to be on the alert; and then I’ll choose a night for you.”

“All right. I suppose Katrine knows nothing of this?”

Mr. Barbary lodged his gun in the corner against the wainscot, and turned to look at the barrister. “Katrine!” he repeated, in surprised reproach. “Why, *no*. And take care that you don’t tell her.”

Mr. Reste nodded.

“She is the most unsuspicious, innocent child in regard to the ways of the naughty world that I’ve ever met with,” resumed Barbary. “I don’t think she as much as knows what poaching means.”

“I wonder you should have her here,” remarked the younger man, reflectively.

“How can I help it? There’s nowhere else for her to be. She is too old to be put to school; and if she were not, I have not the means to pay for her. It does not signify; she will never suspect anything,” concluded Mr. Barbary.

Please do not think Caramel Cottage grand enough to possess a regular “gun-room.” Mr. Barbary called it so, because he kept his two guns in it, also his fishing-tackle and things of that sort. Entering at the outer porch and over the level door-sill, to the narrow house-passage, the parlour lay on the left, and was of pretty good size. The gun-room lay on the right; a little square room with bare boards, unfurnished save for a deal table, a chair or two, and a strong cupboard let into [68] the wall, which the master of the house kept locked. Behind this room was the kitchen, which opened into the back yard. This yard, on the kitchen side, was bounded by dwarf wooden palings, having a low gate in their midst. Standing at the gate and looking sideways, you could see the chimneys of Dyke Manor. On the opposite side, the yard was enclosed by various small outbuildings and adjuncts belonging to a cottage homestead. A rain-water barrel stood in the corner by the house; an open shed next, in which knives were cleaned and garden tools kept; then came the pump; and lastly, a little room called the brewhouse, used for washing and brewing, and for cooking also during the worst heat of summer. A furnace was built beside the grate, and its floor was paved with square red bricks. Beyond this yard, quite open to it, lay a long garden, well filled with vegetables and fruit trees, and enclosed by a high hedge. Upstairs were three bed chambers. Mr. Barbary occupied the largest and best, which was over the parlour; the smaller one over the gun-room had been assigned to Edgar Reste, both of them looking front; whilst Katrine’s room was above the kitchen, looking to the yard and the garden. Old Joan slept in a lean-to loft in the roof. There is a reason for explaining all this.

III

He had looked like a ghost when we went to school after the races; he looked like a hale, hearty man when we got home from the holidays at Michaelmas and to eat the goose. Of course he had had pretty near eight weeks’ spell of idleness and country air at Caramel Cottage. To say the truth, we felt surprised at his being there still.

“Well, it *is* longer than I meant to stay,” Mr. Reste admitted, when Tod said something of this, “The air has done wonders for me.”

“Why longer? The law courts do not open yet.” [69]

“I had thoughts of going abroad. However, that can stay over for next year.”

“Have you had any shooting?”

“No. I don’t possess a licence.”

It was on the tip of Tod’s tongue, as I could well see, to ask why he did not take out a licence, but he checked it. This little colloquy was held at the Manor gate on Saturday, the day after our return. Miss Barbary was leaving Lena at the usual time, and he had come strolling across the field to meet her. They went away together.

“What did I tell you, Johnny?” said Tod, turning to me, as soon as they were out of hearing. “It is a regular case of over-head-and-ears: cut and dried and pickled.”

“I don’t see what you judge by, Tod.”

“*Don’t you!* You’ll be a muff to the end, lad. Fancy a fine young fellow like Reste, a man of the world, staying on at that pokey little place of Barbary’s unless he had some strong motive to keep him there! I dare say he pays Barbary well for the accommodation.”

“I dare say Barbary could not afford to entertain him unless he did.”

“He stops there to make love to her. It must be a poor look-out, though, for Katrine, pretty little

dimpled girl! As much chance of a wedding, I should say, as of a blue moon."

"Why not?"

"Why not! Want of funds. I'd start for London, if I were you, Johnny, and set the Thames on fire. A man must be uncommonly hard up when he lets all the birds go beside him for want of taking out a licence."

They were walking onwards slowly, Mr. Reste bending to talk to her. And of course it will be understood that a good deal of that which I have said, and am about to say, is only related from what came to my knowledge later on.

"Is it true that you had meant to go abroad this year?" Katrine was asking him. [70]

"Yes, I once thought of it," he answered. "I have friends living at Dieppe, and they wanted me to go to them. But I have stayed on here instead. Another week of it, ten days perhaps, and then I must leave Worcestershire and you, Katrine."

"But why?"

"Why, to work, my dear little girl. That is getting in arrears shamefully. We are told that all work and no play makes Jack a dull boy; but all play and no work would have worse results for Jack than dullness. Ah, Katrine, what a world this might be if we could only do as we like in it!"

"When shall you come again?"

"Perhaps never," he answered, incautiously.

"Never!" she repeated, her face turning white before she could hide it from him. It was a great shock.

"Katrine, my dear," he said with some emotion, his tones low and earnest, "I could stay at Caramel Cottage for my whole life and never wish to quit it, unless I carried somebody else away from it with me. But there are things which a poor man, a man without money in the present or prospect of it in the future, may not as much as glance at: he must put the temptation from him and hold it at arm's length. I had a dream the other night," he added, after a pause: "I thought I was a Q.C. and stood in my silk, haranguing a full bench of judges at Westminster—who listened to me with attentive suavity. When I awoke I burst out laughing."

"At the contrast it presented to reality?" she breathed.

"Just at that. If I were only making enough to set up a snug little nest of a home, though ever so small, it would be—something: but I am not. And so, Katrine, you see that many things I would do I cannot do; cannot even think of. And there it lies, and there it ends."

"Yes, I see, Edgar," she answered, softly sighing. [71]

"Shall you miss me when I am gone?"

Some queer feeling took her throat; she could not speak. Mr. Reste stopped to pick a little pale blue-bell that grew under the hedge.

"I do not know how I shall bear with the loneliness then," she said in answer, seemingly more to herself than to him, or to the blue sky right before her, on which her eyes were fixed. "And I shall be more afraid when you are no longer in the house."

"Afraid!" he exclaimed, turning to her in blank surprise. "What are you afraid of, Katrine?"

"It—it is all so solitary for me.... Old Joan is too deaf to be talked to much; and papa is either at work in the garden or shut up in the gun-room, busy with his things. Please don't laugh at my childishness!"

She had paused, just to get over her embarrassment, the avowal having slipped from her unwittingly. The fact was, poor Katrine Barbary had been rudely awakened from her state of innocent security. Some days back, when in the cottage hut of Mary Standish, for Katrine liked to go about and make friends with the people, that ill-doing husband of Mary's, Jim, chanced to be at home. Jim had just been had up before the magistrates at Alcester on some suspicion connected with snares and gins, but there was no certain proof forthcoming, and he had to be discharged. Katrine remarked that if she were Jim she should leave off poaching, which must be a very dreadful thing, and frightfully hazardous. Mr. Jim replied that it was not a dreadful thing, nor hazardous either, for them that knew what they were about, and he referred her to her father for confirmation of this assertion. One word led to another. Jim Standish, his ideas loose and lawless, never thought to hurt the young lady by what he disclosed, for he was kind enough when he had no motive to be the contrary, but when Katrine left the hut, she carried with her the [72] terrible knowledge that her father was as fond of poaching as the worst of them. Since then she had lived in a state of chronic terror.

"Yes, it must be very solitary for you," assented Mr. Reste in a grave tone, and he had no idea that her answer was an evasive one, or its lightness put on; "but I cannot help you, Katrine. Should you ever need counsel, or—or protection in any way, apply for it to your friends at Dyke Manor. They seem kind, good people, and would be strong to aid."

Turning in at the little side gate as he spoke, they saw Mr. Barbary at work in the garden. He was

digging up a plot of ground some seven or eight feet square under the branches of the summer-apple tree, which grew at this upper end of the garden, nearly close to the yard.

“What is he going to plant there, I wonder?” listlessly spoke Mr. Reste, glancing at the freshness of the turned-up mould.

“Winter cabbages, perhaps; but I am sure I don’t know,” returned Katrine. “I do not understand the seasons for planting vegetables as papa does.”

This, as I have just said, was on Saturday. We saw Mr. Reste and Katrine at church the next day: a place Barbary did not often trouble with his presence; and walked with them, on coming out, as far as the two ways lay. Our people liked the look of Edgar Reste, but had not put themselves forward to make much acquaintance with him, on account of Barbary. One Tuesday, when the Squire was driving to Alcester, he had overtaken Mr. Reste walking thither to have a look at the market, and he invited him to a seat in the carriage. They drove in and drove back together, and had between the times a snack of bread and cheese at the Angel. The Squire took quite a fancy to the young barrister, and openly said to him he wished he was staying anywhere but at Caramel Cottage.

“You are thinking of leaving soon, I hear,” said the Squire, as we halted in a group when parting, [73] on this same walk from church.

“In about a week,” replied Mr. Reste. “I may go on Saturday next; certainly not later than the following Monday.”

“Shall you like a drive to Evesham between this and then?” went on the Squire. “I am going over there one of these days.”

“I shall like it very much indeed.”

“Then I will let you know which day I go. Good-bye.”

“Good-bye,” answered Mr. Reste, lifting his hat in salute to us all, as he walked on with Katrine.

Am I lingering over these various trifling details? I suppose it will seem so. But the truth is, a dreadful part of the story is coming on (as poor Katrine said of the poaching) and my pen holds back from it.

A day or two had gone on. It was Tuesday morning, warm and bright with sunshine. Katrine sat in the parlour at Caramel Cottage, pouring out the coffee at the breakfast-table.

“Will you take some ham, Katrine?”

“No, thank you, papa; I have no appetite.”

“No appetite! nonsense!” and Mr. Barbary put a slice of ham on her plate. “Do you feel inclined for a walk as far as Church Leet this morning, Edgar?”

“I don’t mind,” said Mr. Reste. “About three miles, is it not?”

“Three miles across the fields as straight as the crow flies. I want to see a man who lives there. He—why, that’s Pettipher coming here!—the postman,” broke off Mr. Barbary. Letters were not written every day then, and very few found their way to Caramel Cottage.

Old Joan went to the door, and then came in. She was like a picture. A dark-blue linsey gown [74] down to her ancles, neat black stockings and low, tied shoes, a check apron, and a bow of black ribbon perched in front behind the flapping border of her white muslin mob-cap.

“Pettipher says ’tis for the gentleman,” said Joan, putting the letter, a thick one, on the table by Mr. Reste.

“Why, it is from Amphlett!” he exclaimed, as he took it up, looking at the great sprawling writing. “What on earth has he got to say?”

Opening the letter, a roll of bank-notes fell out. Mr. Reste stared at them with intense curiosity.

“Is it your ship come in?” asked Katrine gaily: for he was wont to say he would do this or that when “his ship came home.”

“No, Katrine; not much chance of that. Let me see what he says.”

“‘Dear Reste,—I enclose you my debt at last. The other side have come to their senses, and given in, and paid over to me instalment the first. Thank you, old friend; you are a good fellow never to have bothered me. Let me know your movements when you write back; I ask it particularly. Ever yours, W. A.’

“Well, I never expected that,” cried Mr. Reste, as he read the words aloud.

“Money lent by you, Edgar?” asked Mr. Barbary.

“Yes; three or four years ago. I had given it up as a bad job. Never thought he would gain his cause.”

“What cause? Who is he?”

“Captain Amphlett, of the Artillery, and an old friend of mine. As to the cause, it was some injustice that his avaricious relatives involved him in, and he had no resource but to bring an action. I am glad he has gained it; he is an honest fellow, no match for them in cunning.”

Mr. Reste was counting the notes while he spoke; six of them for ten pounds each. Katrine happened to look at her father, and was startled at the expression of his face—at the grasping, covetous, *evil* regard he had fixed upon the notes. She felt frightened, half sick, with some vague apprehension. Mr. Reste smoothed the notes out one by one, and laid them open on the breakfast cloth in a little stack. While doing this, he caught Mr. Barbary’s covetous look. [75]

“You’d like such a windfall yourself,” he said laughingly to his host.

“I should. For *that* a man might be tempted to smother his grandmother.”

Katrine instinctively shuddered, though the avowal was given in a half jesting tone. A prevision of evil seized her.

CARAMEL COTTAGE [76]

II.—DISAPPEARANCE

I

October was setting in beautifully. Some people say it is the most lovely month in the year when the skies are blue and genial.

Seated at the breakfast-table at Caramel Cottage that Tuesday morning, with the window thrown open to the warm, pleasant air, the small party of three might have enjoyed that air, but for being preoccupied with their own reflections. Edgar Reste was thinking of the bank-notes which the postman had just brought him in Captain Amphlett’s letter; Katrine Barbary sat shrinking from the vague fear imparted to her by the curious avowal her father had made in language not too choice, as his covetous eyes rested on the money: “For that, a man might be tempted to smother his grandmother.” While Mr. Barbary had started instantly up and flung the window higher, as if in the silence that followed the words, they had struck back upon himself unpleasantly, and he sought to divert attention from them.

“A grand day for the outlying crops,” he remarked, his lithe, slender form, his pale, perfect features showing out well in the light of the brilliant morning. “But most of the grain is in, I think. We shall have a charming walk to Church Leet, Edgar.”

“Yes,” assented Mr. Reste, as he folded the notes together and placed them in his pocket-book. There were six of them for £10 each. [77]

Breakfast over, Katrine set off for Dyke Manor that morning as usual, to talk to Lena in French, and teach her to read it. She stayed luncheon with us. Chancing to say that her father and his guest were gone to Church Leet, Mrs. Todhetley kept her.

At four o’clock, when Katrine went home, she found they had returned, and were then shut up in the gun-room. Katrine could hear the hum of their voices, with now and again a burst of merry laughter from Edgar Reste.

“Have they had dinner?” she enquired of Joan.

“Ay, sure they have, Miss Katrine. They got back at two o’clock, and I prepared the dinner at once.”

I had lent Katrine that afternoon the “Vicar of Wakefield,”—which she said she had never read; one could hardly believe such a thing of an English girl, but I suppose it was through her having lived over in France. Taking it into the back garden, she sat down on a rustic bench, one or two of which stood about. By-and-by Edgar Reste came out and sat down beside her.

“Had you a nice walk to-day?” she asked.

“Very,” he answered. “What a quaint little village Church Leet is! Hardly to be called a village, though. Leet Hall is a fine old place.”

“Yes, I have heard so. I have not seen it.”

“Not seen it! Do you mean to say, Katrine, that you have never been to Church Leet?”

“Not yet. Nobody has ever invited me to go, and I cannot walk all that way by myself, you know.”

He was sitting sideways, his left arm leaning on the elbow of the bench, his kindly, luminous

brown eyes fixed on her fair pretty face, all blushes and dimples. Ah, if fortune had but smiled upon him!—if he might but have whispered to this young girl, who had become so dear to him, of the love that filled his whole heart! [78]

“Suppose you walk over with me one of these fine days before I leave?” he continued. “It won’t be too far for you, will it?”

“Oh no. I should like to go.”

“There is the prettiest churchyard you ever saw, to rest in. And such a quaint little church, covered with ivy. The Rectory, standing by, is quite a grand mansion in comparison with the church.”

“And the church has a history, I believe.”

“Ay, as connected with the people of the Hall and the Rectory; and with its own chimes, that never played, I hear, but disaster followed. We will go then, Katrine, some afternoon between now and Saturday.”

Her face fell; she turned it from him. “*Must* you leave on Saturday, Edgar?”

“My dear little cousin, yes. Cousins in name, you know we are, though not in reality.”

“You did say you might stay until Monday.”

“Ay, my will would be good to stay till Monday, and many a Monday after it: but you see, Katrine, I have neglected my work too long, and I cannot break into another week. So you must please make the most of me until Saturday,” he added playfully, “when I shall take the evening train.”

“You English do not care to travel on a Sunday, I notice.”

“We English! Allow me to remind Mademoiselle that she is just as much English as are the rest of us.”

Katrine smiled.

“My good mother instilled all kinds of old-world notions into me, Katrine. Amongst them was that of never doing week-day work on a Sunday unless compelled by necessity.”

“Do you never work on a Sunday—at your reviews and writings, and all that?”

“Never. I am sure it would not bring me luck if I did. Suppose we fix Thursday for walking to Church Leet?” [79]

“That will do nicely. Unless—Squire Todhetley invited you to go with him to Evesham one day, you know,” broke off Katrine. “He may just fix upon Thursday.”

“In that case we will take our walk on Friday.”

A silence ensued. Their hearts were very full, and that makes speech reticent. Katrine glanced now and again at the pages of the “Vicar of Wakefield,” which lay in her lap, but she did not read it. As to the barrister, he was looking at her; at the face that had become so dear to him. They might never meet again, nothing on earth might come of the present intimacy and the sweet burning longings, but he knew that he should remember her to the end of time. A verse of one of Moore’s melodies passed through his mind: unconsciously he began to hum it:

“O, that hallowed form is ne’er forgot
Which first love traced;
Still it, lingering, haunts the greenest spot
On memory’s waste.”

“Here comes Joan to say tea is ready,” interrupted Katrine.

They strolled indoors slowly, side by side. The tea-tray waited in the parlour. Mr. Barbary came in from the gun-room, and they all sat down to the table.

After tea he went back to the gun-room, Mr. Reste with him, leaving Katrine alone. She had the candles lighted and began to mend a piece of Mrs. Todhetley’s valuable old lace. Presently Joan came in to ask a question.

“Miss Katrine, is it the brace of partridges or the pheasants that are to be cooked for supper? Do you know?”

“No, that I don’t,” said Katrine. “But I can ask.”

Putting down her work, she went to the gun-room and gently opened the door. Upon which, she heard these remarkable words from Mr. Reste: [80]

“I wouldn’t hesitate at all if it were not for the moon.”

“The moon makes it all the safer,” contended Mr. Barbary. “Foes can’t rush upon one unawares when the moon’s shining. I tell you this will be one of the best possible nights for you.”

“Papa, papa,” hurriedly broke in Katrine, speaking through the dusk of twilight, “is Joan to cook

the pheasants or the partridges?”

“The pheasants,” he answered sharply. “Shut the door.”

So the pheasants were dressed for supper, and very nice they proved with their bread-sauce and rich gravy. Mr. Barbary especially seemed to enjoy them; his daughter did not.

Poor Katrine’s senses were painfully alert that night, as she lay listening after getting to bed. The words she had overheard in the gun-room seemed to her to bear but one meaning—that not only was her father going abroad into the wilds of danger, but Edgar Reste also. They had gone to their respective rooms early, soon after she went to hers; but that might be meant as a blind and told nothing.

By-and-by, she caught a sound as of the stairs creaking. Mr. Reste and her father were both creeping down them. Katrine flew to her window and peeped behind the blind.

They went out together by the back door. The bright moonbeams lay full upon the yard. Mr. Reste seemed to be attired like her father, in high leggings and a large old shooting-coat, no doubt borrowed plumes. Each of them carried a gun, and they stole cautiously out at the little side gate.

“Oh,” moaned the unhappy Katrine, “if papa would but take better care of himself! If he would but leave off doing this most dreadful and dangerous thing!”

Whether Katrine fell asleep after that, or not, she could never decide: it appeared as though but a [81] short time had elapsed, when she was startled by a sharp sound outside, close to the house. It might have been the report of a gun, but she was not sure. This was followed by some stir in the yard and covert talking.

“They are bringing in the game they have shot,” thought Katrine, “but oh, I am thankful they have got back safely!” And she put the pillow over her head and ears, and lay shivering.

Squire Todhetley was as good and lenient a man at heart as could be found in our two counties, Warwickshire and Worcestershire; fonder of forgiving sins and sinners than of bringing them to book, and you have not read of him all these years without learning it. But there was one offence that stirred his anger up to bubbling point, especially when committed against himself. And that was poaching.

So that, when we got downstairs to breakfast at Dyke Manor on the following morning, Wednesday, and were greeted with the news that some poachers had been out on our land in the night, and had shot at the keepers, it was no wonder the Squire went into a state of commotion, and that the rest of us partook of it.

“Johnny, tell Mack to fetch Jones; to bring him here instantly,” fumed he. “Those Standishes have been in this work!”

I went to carry the orders to Mack in the yard. In passing back, after giving them, I saw that the dog-kennel was empty and the chain lying loose.

“Where’s Don?” I asked. “Who has taken him out?”

“Guess he have strayed out of hisself, Master Johnny,” was Mack’s answer. “He was gone when I come on this morning, sir, and the gate were standing wide open.”

“Gone then?—and the gate open? Where’s Giles?”

But, even as I put the question, I caught sight of Giles at the stable pump, plunging his head and [82] face into a pail of water. So I knew what had been the matter with *him*. Giles was a first-rate groom and a good servant, and it was very seldom indeed that he took more than was good for him, but it did happen at intervals.

Old Jones arrived in obedience to the summons, and stood on his fat gouty legs in the hall while the Squire talked to him. The faith he put in that old constable was surprising, whose skill and discernment were about suited to the year One.

His tale of the night’s doings, as confirmed by other tales, was not very clear. At least, much satisfaction could not be got out of it. Some poachers congregated on a plot of land called Dyke’s Neck—why it should have been so named nobody understood—were surprised by the keepers early in the night. A few stray shots were interchanged, no damage being done on either side, and the poachers made off, escaping not only scot-free but unrecognised. This last fact bore the keenest sting of all, and the Squire paced the hall in a fury.

“You must unearth them,” he said to Jones: “don’t tell me. They can’t have buried themselves, the villains!”

“No need to look far for ’em, Squire,” protested Jones. “It’s them jail-birds, the three Standishes. If it’s not, I’ll eat my head.”

“Then why have you not taken up the three Standishes?” retorted the Squire. “Of course it is the Standishes.”

“Well, your honour, because I can’t get at ’em,” said Jones helplessly. “Jim, he is off somewhere; and Dick, he swears through thick and thin that he was never out of his bed last night; and t’other, Tom, ain’t apperiently at home at all just now. I looked in at their kitchen on my way here, and that was all I could get out of Mary.”

It was at this juncture that Katrine arrived, preparatory to her morning’s work with Lena. Old Jones and the Squire, still in the hall, were chanting a duet upon the poachers’ iniquity, and she halted by me to listen. I was sitting on the elbow of the carved-oak settle. Katrine looked pale as a sheet. [83]

Girls, thought I, do not like to hear of these things. For I knew nothing then of her fears that the offenders had been her father and Mr. Reste.

“If the poachers had been taken, sir—what then?” she said tremblingly to the Squire, in a temporary lull of the voices.

“What then, Miss Barbary? Why then they would have been lodged in gaol, and the neighbourhood well rid of them,” was the impulsive answer.

“Snug and safe, miss,” put in old Jones, shuffling on his gouty legs in his thick white stockings, “a-waiting to stand their trial next spring assizes at Worcester. Which it would be transportation for ’em, I hope—a using o’ their guns indeed!”

“Were they known at all?” gasped Katrine. “And might not the gamekeepers have shot *them*? Perhaps have killed them?”

“Killed ’em or wounded ’em, like enough,” assented Jones, “and it would be a good riddance of such varmint, as his worship says, miss. And a misfortin it is that they be *not* known. Which is an odd thing to my mind, sir, considering the lightness o’ the night: and I’d like to find out whether them there keepers did their duty, or didn’t do it.”

“I can’t see the dog anywhere, father,” interrupted Tod, dashing in at this moment in a white heat, for he had been racing about in search of Don.

“What, is the dog off?” exclaimed old Jones.

“Yes, he is,” said Tod. “And if those poachers have stolen him, I’ll try and get them hanged.”

Leaving us to our commotion, Katrine Barbary passed on to the nursery with Lena, where the lessons were taken. This straying away of Don made one of the small calamities of the day. Giles, put to the torture of confession, admitted that he remembered unchaining Don the past night as usual, but could not remember whether or not he locked the gate. Of course the probability was that he left it wide open, Mack having found it so in the morning. So that Mr. Don, finding himself at liberty, might have gone out promenading as early in the night as he pleased. Giles was ready to hang himself with vexation. The dog was a valuable animal; a prize for any tramp or poacher, for he could be sold at a high price. [84]

We turned out on our different quests; old Jones after the poachers, I and Tod after Don: and the morning wore on.

Katrine went home at midday. This news of the night encounter between the keepers and the poachers had thrown her into a state of anxious pain—though of course the reader fully understands that I am, so far, writing of what I knew nothing about until later. That her father and Edgar Reste had been the poachers of the past night she could not doubt, and a dread of the discovery which might ensue lay upon her with a sick fear. The Standishes might have been included in the party; more than likely they were; Ben Gibbon also. Mr. Jim Standish had contrived to let Katrine believe that they were all birds of a feather, tarred with the same brush. But how could Edgar Reste have allowed himself to be drawn into it even for one night? She could not understand that.

Entering Caramel Cottage by its side gate, Katrine found Joan seated in the kitchen, slicing kidney beans for dinner. Her father was in his favourite den, the gun-room, Mr. Reste was out. When she left in the morning, neither of them had quitted his respective chamber, an entirely unusual thing.

“How late you are with those beans, Joan!” listlessly observed Katrine.

“The master sent me to the Silver Bear for a bottle of the best brandy, and it hindered me,” explained Joan. “They were having a fine noise together when I got back,” she added, dropping her voice. [85]

“Who were?” quickly cried Katrine.

“The master and Mr. Reste. Talking sharply at one another, they were, like two savages. I could hear ’em through my deafness. Ben Gibbon was here when I went out, but he’d gone when I came in with the brandy.”

What with one thing and another, Katrine felt more uncomfortable than an oyster out of its shell. Mr. Reste came in at dinner-time, and she saw nothing amiss then, except that he and her father were both unusually silent.

Afterwards they went out together, and Katrine hoped that the unpleasantness between them

was at an end.

She was standing at the front gate late in the afternoon, looking up and down the solitary road, which was no better than a wide field path, when Tod and I shot out of the dark grove by Caramel's Farm, and made up to her.

"You look hot and tired," she said to us.

"So would you, Miss Barbary, if you had been scouring the fields in search of Don, as we have," answered Tod, who was in a desperate mood.

At that moment Mr. Barbary came swinging round the corner of the short lane that led to the high-road, his guest following him. They nodded to us and went in at the gate.

"You do not happen to have seen anything of our Newfoundland dog to-day, I suppose, Mr. Barbary?" questioned Tod.

"No, I have not," he answered. "My daughter mentioned to me that he had strayed away."

"Strayed away or been stolen," corrected Tod. "The dog was a favourite, and it has put my father out more than you'd believe. He thinks the Standishes may have got him: especially if it is they who were out in the night."

"Shouldn't wonder but they have," said Mr. Barbary. [86]

Standing by in silence, I had been wondering what had come to Mr. Reste. He leaned against the porch, listening to this, arms folded, brow lowering, face dark, not a bit like his own pleasant self.

"I am about the neighbourhood a good deal; I'll not fail to keep a look-out," said Mr. Barbary, as we were turning away. "He was a fine dog, and might prove a temptation to the Standishes; but I should be inclined to think it more likely that he has strayed to a distance than that they have captured him. They might find a difficulty in concealing a large, powerful dog such as he is."

"Not they; they are deep enough for any wicked action," concluded Tod, as we went onwards.

It was tea-time then at Caramel Cottage, and they sat down to take it. Mr. Barbary was sociable and talked of this and that; Edgar Reste spoke hardly a word; Katrine busied herself with the teapot and cups. At dusk Ben Gibbon came in, and Katrine was sent to bear Joan company in the kitchen. Brandy and whisky were put upon the table, Joan being called to bring in hot and cold water. They sat drinking, as Katrine supposed, and talking together in covert tones for two hours, when Gibbon left; upon which Katrine was graciously told by her father she might return to the parlour. Her head ached badly, she felt ill at ease, and when supper was over went up to bed. But she could not get to sleep.

About eleven o'clock, as she judged it to be, loud and angry sounds arose. Her father and Mr. Reste had renewed their dispute—whatever its cause might be. By-and-by, when it was at its height, she heard Mr. Reste dash out at the back door; she heard her father dash after him. In the yard there seemed to be a scuffle, more hot words, and then a sudden silence. Katrine rose and stole to the window to look.

She could not see either of them. But a noise in the kitchen beneath, as if the fire-irons were [87] thrown down, seemed to say they had come back indoors. Another minute and her father came out with a lighted lantern in his hand; she wondered why, as it was moonlight. He crossed the yard and went into the back kitchen, or brewhouse, as it was more often called, and Katrine, hoping the quarrel was over, got into bed again. Presently the back door was shut with a bang that shook the room, and footsteps were heard ascending the stairs, and afterwards all was quiet until morning.

As on the past morning, so it was on this. When Katrine got downstairs she found that neither her father nor Mr. Reste was up. She breakfasted alone, and set off for the Manor afterwards.

But, as it chanced, she was to have partial holiday that day. Lena complained of a sore throat; she was subject to sore throats; so Miss Barbary was released when the lesson was half over, and returned home.

Going to her room to take her bonnet off, she found Joan busy there. From the window she saw her father at work at the far end of the garden. This was Thursday, the day of the projected walk to Church Leet, and very lovely weather. But Mr. Reste had not said anything about it since the Tuesday afternoon.

"Is Mr. Reste gone out, Joan?"

"Mr. Reste is gone, Miss Katrine."

"Gone where?" asked she.

"Gone away; gone back to London," said Joan. Upon which Katrine, staring at the old woman, inquired what she meant.

It appeared that Mr. Barbary had left his chamber close upon Katrine's departure, and sat down to breakfast. When he had finished he called Joan to take the things away. She inquired whether they had not better be left for Mr. Reste. He answered that Mr. Reste was gone. "What, gone [88] away back to London?" Joan cried, in surprise; and her master said, "Yes." "You might just have

knocked me down with a feather, Miss Katrine, I was that took to," added Joan now, in relating this. "Never to say good-bye to me, nor anything!"

Katrine, thinking there was somebody else he had not said good-bye to, could hardly speak from amazement. "When did he go, Joan? Since breakfast? Or was he gone when I went out?"

"Well, I don't know," pondered Joan; "it seems all a moither in my head; as if I couldn't put this and that together. I never saw nor heard anything of him at all this morning, and I find his bed has not been slept in, which looks as if he went last night. It's odd, too, that he didn't say he was going, and it's odd he should start off to London at midnight. Your papa is in one of his short tempers, Miss Katrine, and I've not dared to ask him about it."

Katrine, as she listened, felt perfectly bewildered. Why had he taken his departure in this strange manner? What for? What had caused him to do it? Joan had told all she knew, and it was of no use questioning her further.

Mr. Reste's chamber door stood open; Katrine halted at it and looked in. Why! he seemed to have taken nothing with him! His coats were hanging up; trifles belonging to him lay about on chairs; on the side shelf stood his little portable desk—and she had heard him say that he never travelled without that desk, it went with him wherever he went. Opening a drawer or two, she saw his linen, his neckties, his handkerchiefs. What was the meaning of it all? Could he have been recalled to London in some desperate hurry? But no letter or summons of any kind had come to Caramel Cottage, so far as she knew, except the letter from Captain Amphlett on Tuesday morning, and that one had not recalled him.

"There be two pairs of his boots in the kitchen," said Joan. "He has took none with him but them he's got on." [89]

"I *must* ask papa about it," cried the puzzled Katrine.

Mr. Barbary was at the bottom of the garden working away at the celery bed in his shirt sleeves; his coat lay across the cucumber-frame.

"What brings you home now?" he cried out, looking up as Katrine drew near.

"The little girl is not well. Papa," she added, her voice taking a timid, shrinking tone, she hardly knew why, "Joan says Mr. Reste is gone."

"Well?"

"But why has he left so suddenly, without saying anything about it?"

"He could do so if he pleased. He was at liberty to go or stay."

Katrine could not dispute that. She hardly liked to say more, her father's answers were so curt and cross.

"He must have gone unexpectedly, papa."

"Unexpectedly! Not at all. He has been talking of going all the week."

Katrine paused. "Is he coming back, papa?"

"Not that I know of."

"But he has not taken any of his things."

"I am going to pack his things and send them after him."

"But——*when* did he go, papa?"

Mr. Barbary, who had kept on working, drew himself bolt upright. Letting his hands rest on the handle of his spade, he looked sternly into Katrine's face.

"He went last night."

"He——he never told me he was going. He never said anything about it."

"And why should he tell you?" demanded Mr. Barbary. "It was enough that he told me. He thought he had been quite long enough away from his work, and that it was high time to go back to it. I thought the same. That's all, Katrine; you need not inquire further. And now you can go indoors." [90]

She walked slowly up the narrow path, conscious that some mystery must lie behind this. Joan was standing in the yard, outside the back-kitchen door, trying to pull it open.

"This here back'us door's locked!" exclaimed Joan, in her country vernacular. "I want the spare jack out; t'other's given way at last."

"It can't be locked," dissented Katrine. "It never is."

"Well, I've never known the door locked afore; but 'tis now, Miss Katrine. I noticed it was shut to all day yesterday, but I didn't try it."

"It is only stuck," said Katrine, laying hold of the high old-fashioned bow handle which served to

lift the latch inside; and she shook it well.

“What’s that? What are you about?” called out Mr. Barbary, dashing up the path like a flash of lightning. “Let the door alone.”

“Joan says it is locked, papa,” said Katrine, frightened by his manner.

“And what if it is? I have locked up some—some wine there that came in. How dare you meddle with the places I choose to keep closed?”

“It’s the other jack I want out, sir,” said Joan, hearing imperfectly.

“You can’t have the other jack.”

“But, master, the old jack’s broke clean in two, and it’s time to put the lamb down.”

“Cut it into chops,” he cried, waving them both off, and standing, himself, before the door, as if to guard it, with a white, imperious, passionate face.

Single-minded old Joan went indoors, marvelling a little—such a bit of a trouble for him to have opened the back’us door and given her out the jack! Katrine followed, marvelling very much. She [91] did not believe in the wine: felt sure no wine had come in; they never had any; what was it that was locked up there? All in a moment a thought flashed over her that it might be game: poached game: pheasants and partridges and hares. But, upon that thought came another: why should the spoil have been brought in on Tuesday night when it had never (as she believed) been brought before? Just a little came in for their own use, nothing more.

II

That day, Thursday, we had news of Don. And we had it in this way. Tobias Jellico—who had a small draper’s shop at Evesham, and went about the country with a pack, out of which he seduced unwary ladies to buy finery, more particularly some of our ladies living in Piefinch Cut—was at Church Dykely to-day on one of his periodical visitations. We did not like the man or his trade; but that’s neither here nor there. Hearing that the Squire’s dog was lost, he at once said he had seen Dick Standish that morning in Bengeworth (a portion of Evesham) with a large Newfoundland dog. White-and-brown, he called it; which was a mistake, for Don was white and black; but Jellico might not know colours. It was Mr. Duffham who brought us this news in the afternoon: he had been sent for to Lena, whose throat was getting worse. Duffham heard it from Perkins the butcher, to whom Jellico told it.

I don’t know which item pleased the Squire most: that Don was found, or that the guilt of Tuesday night was traced home to the Standishes; for the three brothers had in general a certain gentleman’s own luck, and were rarely caught.

“Don went out roaming, through that villain Giles unloosing him and leaving the yard gate open,” [92] decided the Squire, in his excitement. “The dog must have sprung upon them; he has a mortal enmity to tramps and poachers, you know, Duffham; and the Standishes captured him. I’ll send a message to the police at Evesham at once, to look after Mr. Dick, and go over myself in the morning.”

“Anyway, I’m glad the dog’s found,” said Duffham. “But what an idiot Dick Standish must be to allow himself to be seen with the dog in the public streets.”

“Johnny,” said the Squire, turning to me as he was leaving the room to send a man galloping on horseback to the Evesham police, “you run over to Caramel Cottage. Make my compliments to young Reste; say that I am going to drive to Evesham to-morrow morning, and shall be happy to take him if he likes to accompany me. I offered to drive him over some day before he left, but this bother has caused me to delay it. Shall start at nine o’clock, tell him.”

About the time the Squire was charging me with this message, Katrine Barbary was sitting in the homely garden at Caramel Cottage, amidst the fruit trees, the vegetables, and the late flowers. The October sunlight fell on her pretty face, that somehow put you in mind of a peach with its softest bloom upon it.

Katrine was striving to see daylight out of a mass of perplexity, of which I then knew nothing, and she could not discern a single ray. Why should that fine young barrister, Edgar Reste, staying with them so peacefully for several weeks past, and fully intending to stay this week out—why should he have run away by night, leaving behind him an atmosphere of mystery? This question would never leave Katrine’s mind by night or by day.

Sitting there in the afternoon sun, she was running over mentally, for the tenth time or so, the details of the affair. One or two of them might have looked somewhat shady to a suspicious [93] observer; to Katrine they presented only a web of perplexity. She felt sure that when she went to bed on the Wednesday night he had no thought of leaving; and yet it seemed that he did leave. When Joan rose in the early morning, he had disappeared—vanished, as may be said. The puzzle that Katrine could not solve was this: why had he gone away in haste so great that he could not take his clothes with him? and why had he gone at all in an unexpected, stealthy way, saying nothing to anybody?

“It looks just as though he had run away to escape some imminent danger, with not a minute to

spare," mused Katrine.

At this moment Katrine met with an interruption to her thoughts in the shape of me. Catching a glimpse of her print frock through the hedge, I went straight in at the little side gate, without troubling the front door.

"Sit down, Johnny," she said, holding out her hand, and making room for me on the bench. And as I took the seat, I said what I had come for—to deliver the Squire's message to Mr. Reste.

"Mr. Reste has left us," said Katrine. "He went away last night."

"Went away last night!" I exclaimed, the news surprising me uncommonly. "What took him off so suddenly?"

Open-natured as the day, Katrine told me the particulars (which proved that she had no dark fears about it as yet), of course saying nothing about the poaching. And she did mention the quarrel.

"It is so strange that he should leave all his things behind him—don't you see that, Johnny?" she said. "Even that little desk, full of private papers, is left, and he never travels without it; his boots are left."

"He must have had some news to call him away. A letter perhaps."

"The only letter he has had lately came on Tuesday morning," returned Katrine. "It had a good [94] deal of money in it in bank-notes; sixty pounds; but it did not call him away. *Nothing* called him away, that I can discover. You can't think how it is worrying me; it seems just a mystery."

"Look here, Katrine," I said, after mentally twisting the matter this way and that, "I've known the most unaccountable problems turn out to be the simplest on explanation. When you hear from him, as you most likely will in a day or two, I dare say he will tell you he was called away unexpectedly, and had to go at once. Does not Mr. Barbary know why he went?"

"Well, yes; I fancy he does: he is indoors now, packing Mr. Reste's things: but he does not tell me."

After talking a little longer, we strolled up the path together, and had reached the yard when Mr. Barbary suddenly opened the kitchen door to shake the dust from a coat that seemed covered with it. His handsome face took a haughty expression, and his slender, shapely form was drawn up in pride as he looked sternly at me, as much as to say, "What do you want here?"

I turned, on my way to the side gate, to explain: that Don had been seen at Evesham in the company of Dick Standish, that the Squire would be driving thither on the morrow, and had thought Mr. Reste might like to go with him.

"Very kind of Mr. Todhetley," drawled Barbary in his stand-off manner. "Tell him, with my compliments and thanks for his courtesy, that my nephew has left for London."

"Left for good, I suppose?" I said.

"For the present, at any rate. A pressing matter of business recalled him, and he had to attend to it without delay."

I glanced at Katrine: there was the explanation.

"So the dog is at Evesham!" remarked Mr. Barbary. "The Standishes are great rogues, all three [95] of them, and Dick's the worst. But—I think—had you gone after him to-day, instead of delaying it until to-morrow, there might have been more certainty of finding him. Mr. Dick may give you leg-bail in the night."

"The police will see he does not do that; the Squire has sent a messenger to warn them," I replied. "I suppose you have not heard any more rumours about the poaching on Tuesday night, Mr. Barbary?"

"I've heard no more than was said at first—that the keepers reported some poachers were out, and they nearly came to an encounter with the rascals. Wish they had—and that I had seen the fun. Reste and I had walked to Church Leet and back that day; we were both tired and went upstairs betimes."

To hear him coolly assert this, to see his good-looking face raised unblushingly to the sun as he said it, must have been as a bitter farce to Katrine, who had believed him, until a few days back, to be next door to a saint for truth and goodness. *I* put faith in it, not being then behind the scenes.

Mr. Barbary did his packing leisurely. Tea was over, and dusk set in before the portmanteau was shut up and its direction fastened to it. Katrine read the card. "Edgar Reste, Esq., Euston Square Station, London. *To be left till called for.*"

Very lonely felt Katrine, sitting by herself that evening, working a strip of muslin for a frill. *He* was not there to talk to her in his voice of music—for that's what she had grown to think it, like other girls in love. She wondered whether they should ever meet again—ever, ever? She wondered how long it would be before a letter came from him, and whether he would write to *her*.

Mr. Barbary appeared at supper-time, ate some cold lamb in silence, seeming to be buried in thought, and went back to the gun-room when he had finished. Katrine got to her work again, did a little, then put it away for the night, and turned to the book-shelf to get a book. [96]

Standing to make a choice of one, Katrine was seized with consternation. On the lower shelf, staring her right in the face, was Mr. Reste's Bible. It had been given him by his dead father, and he set store by it. He must have left it downstairs the previous Sunday, and Joan had put it away on the shelves amongst the other books.

"I wonder if papa would mind opening the portmanteau again?" thought Katrine, as she hastened to the gun-room, and entered.

"Papa! papa! here's Mr. Reste's Bible left out," she cried, impulsively. "Can you put it into the portmanteau?"

Mr. Barbary stood by the small safe in the wall, the door of which was open. In his hand lay some bank-notes; he was holding them towards the candle on the deal table, and seemed to be counting them. Katrine, thinking of the Bible and of nothing else, went close to him, and her eye fell on the notes. He flung them into the cupboard in a covert manner, gave the door a slam, turned an angry face on Katrine, and a sharp tongue.

"Why do you come bursting in upon me in this boisterous fashion? I won't have it. What? Will I undo the portmanteau to put in a Bible? No, I won't. Keep it till he chooses to come for it."

She shrank away frightened, softly closing the door behind her. Those bank-notes belonged to Mr. Reste: they were the same she had seen him put into his pocket-book two days ago. Why had he not taken them with him?—what brought them in her father's possession? The advance shadow of the dark trouble, soon to come, crept into Katrine Barbary's heart.

In no mood for reading now, she went to bed, and lay trying to think it out. What did it all mean? Had her father conjured the pocket-book by sleight-of-hand out of Mr. Reste's keeping and *stolen* the notes? She strove to put the disgraceful thought away from her, and could not. The distress brought to her by the poaching seemed as nothing to this, bad though that was.—And would he venture abroad to-night again? [97]

Joan's light foot-fall passed her door, going up to her bed in the roof. Once there, nothing ever disturbed the old servant or her deafness until getting-up time in the morning. Katrine lay on, no sleep in her eyes; half the night it would have seemed, but that she had learned how slowly time passes with the restless. Still, it was a good while past twelve, she thought, when curious sounds, as of *digging*, seemed to arise from the garden. Sounds too faint perhaps to have been heard in the day-time, but which penetrated to her ear unless she was mistaken, in the deep, uncanny, undisturbed silence of the night. She sat up in bed to listen.

There, it came again! What could it be? People did not dig up gardens at midnight. Slipping out of bed, she drew the blind aside and peeped out.

The night was light as day, with a bright, clear, beautiful moon: the hunters' moon. Underneath the summer-apple tree, close at this end of the garden, bent Mr. Barbary, digging away with all his might, his large iron spade turning up the earth swiftly and silently. Katrine's eyes grew wide with amazement. He had dug up that same plot of ground only a few days ago, in readiness to plant winter greens: she and Edgar Reste had stood looking on for a time, talking with him as to the sort of greens he meant to put in. Why was he digging up the same ground again?—and why was he doing it at this unearthly hour?

It appeared to be a hole that was being dug now, for he threw the spadefuls of mould up on each side pretty far. The ground seemed quite soft and pliant; owing perhaps to its having been so recently turned. As the hole grew larger; wider and longer and deeper; an idea flashed over Katrine that it looked just as though it were meant for a grave. Not that she thought it. [98]

Putting a warm shawl on her shoulders and slippers on her feet, she sat down before the window, drew the blind up an inch or two, and kept looking out, her curiosity greatly excited. The moon shone steadily, the time passed, and the hole grew yet larger. Suddenly Mr. Barbary paused in his work, and held up his head as if to listen. Did he fear, or fancy, a noise in the field pathway outside, or in the dark grove to the right near Caramel's Farm? Apparently so: and that he must not be seen at his work. For he got out of the hole, left the spade in it, came with noiseless, swift, stealthy movement up the yard, and concealed himself in the dark tool-shed. Presently, he stole across to the little gate, looked well about him to the right and left, and then resumed his digging.

Quite six feet long it soon looked to Katrine, and three or more feet wide, and how deep she knew not. *Was it for a grave?* The apprehension really stole across her, and with a sick faintness. If so, if so—? A welcome ray of possibility dawned then. Had her father (warned by this stir that was going on, the search for poachers and their spoil) a lot of contraband game in his possession that must be hidden away out of sight? Perhaps so.

It seemed to be finished now. The moon had sailed ever so far across the sky by this time, but was still shining full upon it. Mr. Barbary crept again to the gate and stood listening and looking up and down in the silence of the night. Then he crossed to the brewhouse, took the key from his pocket, unlocked it, and went inside. Katrine could see the flash of the match as he struck a light.

When he emerged from the brewhouse he was dragging a weight along the ground with two strong cords. A huge, unshapely, heavy substance enveloped in what looked like matting or sacking. Dragging it straight over the yard to the grave, Mr. Barbary let it fall carefully in, cords and all, and began to shovel in the mould upon it with desperate haste. [99]

Terror seized on Katrine. What was in that matting? All in an instant, a little corner of the veil—that had obscured from her understanding so much which had seemed mysterious and unfathomable—lifted itself, bringing to her an awful conviction. Was it Edgar Reste that was being put out of the way; buried for ever from the sight of man? Her father must have killed him; must have done it in a passion! Katrine Barbary cried out with a loud and bitter cry.

Fascinated by the sight of terror, she was unable to draw her eyes away. But the next moment they had caught sight of another object, bringing equal terror, though of a different nature: some one, who had apparently crept in at the gate unheard, was standing at the corner of the garden hedge, looking on. Was it an officer of the law, come to spy upon her father and denounce his crime? But, even as she gazed, the figure drew back to make its exit by the gate again, and to Katrine it seemed to take my form.

“It is Johnny Ludlow!” she gasped. “Oh, I pray that it may be! I think *he* would not betray him.”

Katrine watched on. She saw the grave filled in; she saw her father stamp it down; she saw him carry the superfluous mould to a place under the wall, near the manure bed, and she saw him stamp that down, and then cover it loosely with some of the manure, so that it might look like a part of the heap. Then he seemed to be coming in, and Katrine thought it must be nearing the dawn.

Creeping into bed, she hid her face, that never again ought to show itself amidst honest men, under the clothes. Some covert stir yet seemed to be going on in the yard, as of pumping and scrubbing. Turning from hot to cold, from cold to hot, Katrine was seized with a shivering fit. [100]

“And who really was it watching?” she moaned. “It looked like Johnny, yet I can’t be sure; he stood in the shade.”

But it was *me*, as the schoolboys say. And the reason of my being there at the small, unearthly hours of the morning, together with the conclusion of this appalling story, will be found in the next chapter.

CARAMEL COTTAGE [101]

III.—DON THE SECOND

I

We have a saying in England, “It never rains but it pours,” as applied, not to the rain, but to the occurrences of daily life. Dyke Manor was generally quiet enough, but on Thursday evening—the Thursday already told of—we were destined to have visitors. First of all, arrived Mr. Jacobson, our neighbour at Elm Farm, with his nephew, young Harry Dene; he had his gig put up, meaning to make an evening of it. It turned out to be a night, or nearly so, as you will soon find. Close upon that, Charles Stirling of the Court (my place) came in; and Mrs. Todhetley went to the kitchen to say that we should require supper. The stirring events of the week had brought them over—namely, the encounter on our land between the poachers and the keepers, and the flight of the valuable yard dog, Don, a Newfoundland.

That afternoon, Thursday, we had heard, as may be remembered, that Don was at Evesham, under the keeping of Mr. Dick Standish; and I had been told by Katrine Barbary that Mr. Reste had suddenly and unexpectedly disappeared from Caramel Cottage. Old Jacobson predicted that Dick Standish would come to be hanged; Charles Stirling said he ought to be transported.

“Of course you will prosecute him, Squire?” said Charles Stirling. [102]

“Of course I shall,” replied the Squire, warmly. “The police have him already safe enough if they’ve done their duty, and I shall be over at Evesham in the morning.”

After a jolly supper they got to their pipes, and the time went by on wings. At least, that’s what the master of Elm Farm said when the clocks struck eleven, and he asked leave to order his gig.

It was brought round by Giles, the groom; and we were all assembled in the hall to speed the departure, when old Jones, the constable, burst in upon us at the full speed of his gouty legs, his face in a white heat.

Private information had reached Jones half an hour ago that the poachers intended to be out again that night, but he could not learn in which direction.

Then commotion arose. The Squire and his friend Jacobson were like two demented wild Indians, uncertain what was best to be done to entrap the villains. The gig was ordered away again.

Some time passed in discussion. In these moments of excitement one cannot always bring one's keenest wits to the fore. Charles Stirling offered to go out and reconnoitre; we, you may be quite sure, were eager to second him. I went with Charles Stirling one way; Tod and Harry Dene went another—leaving the Squire and Mr. Jacobson at the gate, listening for shots, and conferring in whispers with old Jones.

How long we marched about under the bright moonlight, keeping under the shade of the trees and hedges, I cannot tell you; but when we all four met at Dyke Neck, which lay between the Manor and the Court, we had seen nothing. Mr. Stirling went straight home then, but we continued our ramblings. A schoolboy's ardour is not quickly damped.

Beating about fresh ground together for a little while, we then separated. I went across towards [103]
the village: the other two elsewhere. It was one of the loveliest of nights, the full moon bright as day, the air warm and soft. But I neither saw nor heard signs of any poachers, and I began to suspect that somebody had played a trick on the old constable.

I turned short back at the thought, and made, as the Americans say, tracks for home. My nearest way was through the dense grove of trees at the back of Caramel Farm, and I took it, though it was not the liveliest way by any means.

But no sooner was I beyond the grove than sounds struck on my ear in the stillness of the night. They seemed to come from the direction of Caramel Cottage. Darting under the side hedge, and then across the side lane, and so under the hedge again that bound the cottage, I stole on the grass as softly as a mouse. Poachers could not be at work there; but an idea flashed across me that somebody had got into Mr. Barbary's well-stocked garden, and was robbing it.

Peering through the hedge, I saw Barbary himself. He was coming out of the brewhouse, dragging behind him, with two cords, a huge sack of some kind, well-filled and heavy. Opposite the open door, on the furnace, shone a lighted horn lantern. Mr. Barbary pushed-to the door behind him, thereby shutting out the light, dragged his burden over the yard to the garden, and let it fall into what looked like—a freshly dug grave.

Astonishment kept me intensely still. What did it all mean? Hardly daring to breathe, I stole in at the gate and under the shade of the hedge. Whatever it might contain, that sacking lay perfectly quiet, and Mr. Barbary began to shovel in the spadefuls of earth upon it, as one does upon a coffin.

This was nothing for me to interfere with, and I went away silently. It looked like a mystery, and a
dark one; any way it was being done in secret in the witching hours of the night. What the time [104]
might be I knew not, the Squire having ordered our watches taken off before starting: perhaps one, or two, or three o'clock.

Tod and Harry Dene reached the gate of Dyke Manor just as I did; and we were greeted, all three, with a storm of reproaches by the Squire and Mr. Jacobson. What did we mean by it?—scampering off like that for hours?—for *hours*!—Three times had the gig been brought out and put up again! Harry was bundled headforemost into the gig, and Mr. Jacobson drove off.

And it turned out that my suspicion touching old Jones was right. Some young men had played the trick upon him. I need not have mentioned it at all, but for seeing what I did see in Barbary's garden.

How Katrine Barbary passed that night you have seen: for, like many another story-teller, I have had to carry you back a few hours. Shivering and shaking, now hot, now cold, she lay, striving to reason with herself that *it could not be*; that so dreadful a thing was not possible; that she was the most wicked girl on earth for imagining it: and she strove in vain. All the events of the past day or two kept crowding into her mind one upon another in flaring colours, like the figures in some hideous phantasmagoria. The unexpected arrival of the bank-notes for Mr. Reste; her father's covetous look at them and his dreadful joke; their going out together that night poaching; their quarrelling together the next morning; their worse quarrelling at night, and their dashing out to the yard (as if in passion) one after the other. And, so far as Katrine could trace it, that was the very last seen or heard of Edgar Reste. The next morning he was gone; gone in a mysterious manner, leaving all his possessions behind him. Her father was reticent over it; would
not explain. Then came the little episode of the locked-up brewhouse, which had never been [105]
locked before in Joan's memory. Mr. Barbary refused to unlock it, said he had put some wine there; told Joan she must do without the jack. What had really been hidden in that brewhouse? Katrine felt faint at the thought. *Not wine.* And the terrible farce of packing Mr. Reste's effects and addressing them to Euston Square Station, London! Would they lie there for ever—unclaimed? Alas, alas! The proofs were only too palpable. Edgar Reste had been put out of the world for ever. She had been the shivering witness to his secret burial.

"What's the matter, Katrine? Are you ill?"

The inquiry was made by Mr. Barbary next day at breakfast. Sick unto death she looked. The very bright night had given place to a showery morning, and the rain pattered against the window-panes.

“I have a headache,” answered Katrine, faintly.

“Better send Joan to the Manor to say you cannot attend to-day.”

“Oh, I would rather go; I must go,” she said hastily. For this good girl had been schooling herself as well as she knew how; making up her mind to persevere in fulfilling the daily duties of her life in the best way she should be able; lest, if she fell short abruptly, suspicion might turn towards her father. She had wildly prayed Heaven to grant her strength and help to bear up on her course. Not from her must come the pointing finger of discovery. It is true that he—Edgar—was her first and dearest love; she should never love another as she had loved him; but she was her father’s child, and held him sacred.

“Why must you go?” demanded Mr. Barbary, as, having finished a plate of broiled mushrooms, he began upon a couple of eggs with an appetite that the night’s work did not seem to have spoiled.

“The air—the walk—may do me good.”

“Well, you know best, child. I suppose Todhetley be off to Evesham after that dog of theirs,” Mr. Barbary went on to remark. “Master Dick Standish must be a bold sinner to steal the dog one day and parade the open streets with it the next! If—— What is it now, Joan?” [106]

For old Joan had come in with a face of surprise. “Sir,” she cried, “has Tom Noah been at work here this morning?”

“Not that I know of,” replied Mr. Barbary. Tom Noah, an industrious young fellow, son to Noah, the gardener, was occasionally employed by Mr. Barbary to clean up the yard and clear the garden of its superfluous rubbish.

“Our back’us has been scrubbed out this morning, sir,” went on Joan, still in astonishment. “And it didn’t want it. Who in the world can have come in and gone and done it?”

“Nonsense,” said Mr. Barbary.

“But it has, master; scrubbed clean; the flags are all wet still. And the rain-water barrel’s a’most empty, nearly every drop of water drawn out of it! I’d not say but the yard has had a bit of a scrubbing, too, near the garden, as well as the back’us.”

“Nonsense!” repeated Mr. Barbary, his light tone becoming irritable. “You see it has been raining! the rain has drifted into the brewhouse, that’s all; I left the door open last night. There! go back to your work.”

Joan was a simple-natured woman, but she was neither silly nor blind, and she knew that what she said was true. Rapidly turning the matter over in her mind, she came to the conclusion that Tom Noah had been in “unbeknown to the master,” and so left the subject.

“I suppose I may take out the spare jack now, sir?” she waited to say.

“Take out anything you like,” replied Mr. Barbary.

Afraid of her tell-tale face, Katrine had moved to the window, apparently to look at the weather. Too well she knew who had scrubbed out the place, and why. [107]

The rain had ceased when she set off on her short walk—for it was not much more than a stone’s throw to the Manor; the sun was struggling from behind the clouds, blue sky could be seen. Alone with herself and the open country, Katrine gave vent to her pent-up spirit, which she had not dared to do indoors; sighs of anguish and of pain escaped her; she wondered whether it would be wrong if she prayed to die. But some one was advancing to meet her, and she composed her countenance.

It was Ben Gibbon. For the past week or so, since Katrine had been enlightened as to her father’s poaching propensities, she had somehow feared this man. He was son to the late James Gibbon, the former gamekeeper at Chavasse Grange, and brother to the present keeper, Richard. Of course one might expect that Mr. Benjamin would protect game and gamekeepers; instead of which, he was known to do a little safe poaching on his own account, and to be an idle fellow altogether. Katrine did not like his intimacy with her father, and she could not forget that he had passed part of that fatal evening with him and Edgar Reste.

“Showery weather to-day, miss,” was Ben Gibbon’s salutation.

“Yes, it is,” answered Katrine, with intense civility—for how could she tell what the man might know?

“I suppose I shall find Mr. Barbary at home?”

“Oh, yes,” faintly spoke she, and passed on her way.

II

We started for Evesham under a sharp shower, the Squire driving Bob and Blister in the large phaeton. Tod sat with him, I and the groom behind. Not a shadow of doubt lay on any one of us that we should bring back Don in triumph—leaving Dick Standish to be dealt with according to his merits. But, as the Squire remarked later, we were not a match for Dick in cunning. [108]

“Keep your eyes open, lads,” the Squire said to us as we approached the town. “And if you see Dick Standish, with or without the dog, jump out and pounce upon him. You hear, Giles?”

“No need to tell me to do it, sir,” answered Giles humbly, clenching his fists; he had been eating humble pie ever since Tuesday night. “I am ready.”

But Dick Standish was not seen. Leaving the carriage and Giles at the inn, we made our way to the police station. An officer named Brett attended to us. It was curious enough, but the first person we saw inside the station was Tobias Jellico, who had called in on some matter of business that concerned his shop.

“We had your message yesterday, sir,” said Brett to the Squire, “and we lost no time in seeing after Standish. But it is not your dog that he has with him.”

“Not my dog!” repeated the Squire, up in arms at once. “Don’t tell me that, Brett. Whose dog should it be but mine? Come!”

“Well, sir, I never saw your dog; but Tomkins, one of our men, who has often been on duty at Church Dykely, knows it well,” rejoined Brett. “We had Standish and the dog up here, and Tomkins at once said it was not your dog at all, so we let the man go. Mr. Jellico also says it is not yours; I was talking to him about it now.”

“What I said was this,” put in Jellico, stepping forward, and speaking with meek deprecation. “If Squire Todhetley’s dog has been described to me correctly, the dog I saw with Standish yesterday can’t be the same. It is a great big ugly dog, with tan marks about his white coat——”

“Ugly!” retorted the Squire, resenting the aspersion, for he fully believed it to be Don.

“It is not at all an ugly dog, it’s a handsome dog,” spoke up Brett. “Perhaps Mr. Jellico does not like dogs.” [109]

“Not much,” confessed Jellico.

“How came you to say yesterday at Church Dykely that it was the same dog?” Tod asked the man.

“If you please, sir, I didn’t exactly say it was; I said I made no doubt of it,” returned Jellico, mild as new milk. “It was in this way: Perkins the butcher was standing at his shop door as I passed down the street. We began talking, and he told me about the poachers having been out on the Tuesday night, and that Squire Todhetley had lost his fine Newfoundland dog; he said it was thought the Standishes were in both games. So then I said I had met Dick Standish with just such a dog that morning as I was a-coming out of Evesham. I had never seen the Squire’s dog, you perceive, gentlemen; but neither Mr. Perkins nor me had any doubt it was his.”

“And it must be mine,” returned the Squire, hotly. “Send for the dog, Brett; I will see it. Send for Standish also.”

“I’ll send, sir,” replied Brett, rather dubiously, “and get the man here if he is to be had. The chances are that with all this bother Standish has left the town and taken the dog with him.”

Brett was a talkative man, with a mottled face and sandy hair. He despatched a messenger to see after Standish. Jellico went out at the same time, telling Brett that his business could wait till another day.

“I know it is my dog,” affirmed the Squire to Brett while he waited. Nothing on earth, except actual sight, would have convinced him that it was not his. “Those loose men play all sorts of cunning tricks. Dick Standish is full of them. I shouldn’t wonder but he has *painted* the dog; done his black marks over with brown paint—or *green*.”

“We’ve a dyer in this town, Squire,” related Brett; “he owns a little white curly dog, and he dyes him as an advertisement for his colours, and lets him run about on the pavement before the shop door. To-day the dog will be a delicate sky-blue, to-morrow a flaming scarlet; the next day he’ll be a beautiful orange, with a green tail. The neighbours’ dogs collect round and stand looking at him from a respectful distance, uncertain, I suppose, whether he is of the dog species, or not.” [110]

I laughed.

“Passing the shop the other day, I saw the dog sitting on the door-step,” ran on Brett. “He was bright purple that time. An old lady, driving by in her chariot, caught sight of the dog and called to the coachman to pull up. There she sat, that old lady, entranced with amazement, staring through her eye-glass at what she took to be a phenomenon in nature. Five minutes, full, she stared, and couldn’t tear herself away. It is true, gentlemen, I assure you.”

Mr. Dick Standish was found, and brought before us. He looked rather more disreputable than usual, his old fustian coat out at elbows, a spotted red handkerchief twisted loosely round his neck. The dog was with him, *and it was not ours*. A large, fine dog, as already described, though much less handsome than Don, and out of condition, his curly coat a yellowish white, the marks on it of real tan colour, not painted.

Dick’s account, after vehemently protesting he had nothing to do with the poaching affair on Tuesday night, was never for a minute out of his bed—was this: The dog belonged to one of the stable-helpers at Leet Hall; but the man had determined to have the dog shot, not being satisfied with him of late, for the animal had turned odd and uncertain in his behaviour. Dick Standish

heard of this. Understanding dogs thoroughly, and believing that this dog only wanted a certain course of treatment to put him right, Standish walked to Church Leet on Wednesday morning last [111] from Church Dykely, and asked the man, Brazer, to give him the dog—he would take him and run all risks. Brazer refused at first; but, after a bit, agreed to let Standish keep the dog for a time. If he cured the dog, Brazer was to have him back again, paying Standish for his keep and care; but if not satisfied with the dog, Standish might keep him for good. Standish brought the dog away, and took him straight to Evesham, walking the whole way and getting there about nine o'clock in the evening. He was doctoring the dog well, and hoped to cure him.

Whether this tale was true or whether it wasn't, none of us could contradict it. But there was an appearance of fear, of shuffling in the man's manner, which seemed to indicate that something lay behind.

"It's every word gospel, ain't it, Rove, and no lie nowhere," cried Standish, bending to pat the dog, while the corner of his eye was turned to regard the aspect of the company. "You've blown me up for many things before now, Squire Todhetley, but there's no call, sir, to accuse me this time."

"When did you hear about this dog of Brazer's, and who told you of it?" inquired Tod, in his haughty way.

"'Twas Bill Rimmer, sir; he telled me on Tuesday night," replied Dick. "And I said to him what a shame it was to talk of destroying that there fine dog, and that Brazer was a soft for thinking on't. And I said, young Mr. Todhetley, that I'd be over at Church Leet first thing the next morning, to see if he'd give the dog to me."

"It is not my dog, I see that," spoke the Squire, breaking the silence that followed Dick's speech; "and it may be the stableman's at Leet Hall; that's a thing readily ascertained. Do you know where my dog is, Dick Standish?"

"No, I don't know, sir," replied the man in a very eager tone; "and I never knowed at all, till fetched to this police station yesterday, that your dog was a-missing. I'll swear I didn't."

There was nothing more to be done, but to accept the failure, and leave the station, after [112] privately charging the police to keep an eye on clever Mr. Dick Standish, his haunts, and his movements.

In the afternoon we drove back home, not best pleased with the day's work. A sense of having been *done*, in some way or other not at present explicable, lay on most of us.

It appeared that the groom shared this feeling strongly. In passing through the yard, I came upon him in his shirt sleeves, seated outside the stable door on an inverted bucket. His elbows on his knees and his face in his hands, he looked the image of despair. The picture arrested me. Mack was rubbing down the horses; a duty Giles rarely entrusted to anybody. He was fond of Don, and had been ready to hang himself ever since Tuesday night.

"Why, Giles! what's the matter?"

"Matter enough, Master Johnny, when a false villyan like that Dick Standish can take the master, and the police their-selves, and everybody else, in!" was his answer. "I felt as cock-sure, sir, that we should bring home Don as I am that the sky above us is shining out blue after the last shower."

"But it was not Don, you see, Giles."

"*He* wasn't; the dog Standish had to show," returned Giles, with a peculiar emphasis. "Dick had got up his tale all smooth and sleek, sir."

"How do you know he had?"

"Because he told it me over again—the one he said he had been telling at the police station, Master Johnny. I was standing outside the inn yard while you were all in at lunch, and Standish came by as bold as brass, Brazer's dog, Rover, leashed to his hand."

"I suppose it is Brazer's dog?"

"Oh, it's Brazer's dog, that'un be," said Giles, with a deep amount of scorn; "I know *him* well enough."

"Then how can it be Don? And we could not bring home another man's dog." [113]

Giles paused. His eyes had a far-off look in them, as if seeking for something they could not find.

"Master Johnny," he said, "I can't rightly grasp things. All the way home I've been trying to put two and two together, I am trying at it still, and I can't do it anyhow. Don't it seem odd to you, sir, that Standish should have got Brazer's dog, Rover, into his hands just at the very time we are suspecting he has got Don into 'em?"

I did not know. I had not thought about it.

"He has that dog of Brazer's as a blind. A blind, and nothing else, sir. He has captured our dog, safe and sure, and is keeping him hid up somewhere till the first storm of the search is over, when he'll be able to dispose of him safely."

I could not see Giles's drift, or how the one dog could help to conceal the possession of the other.

"Well, sir, I can't explain it better," he answered; "I can't fit the pieces of the puzzle into one another in my mind *yet*. But I am positive it is so. Dick Standish has made up the farce about Brazer's dog and got him into his hands to throw dust in our eyes and keep us off the scent of Don."

I began to see the groom might be right; and that the Standishes, sly and crafty, were keeping Don in hiding.

Mrs. Todhetley had met us with a face of concern. Lena's throat was becoming very bad indeed, and Mr. Duffham did not like the look of it at all. He had already come twice that day.

"I think, Johnny," said the mother to me, "that we had better stop Miss Barbary's coming to-morrow; Mr. Duffham does not know but the malady may be getting infectious. Suppose you go now to the cottage and tell her."

So I went off to do so, and found her ill. On this same Friday afternoon, having occasion to ask [114]
some question of her father, who was in the garden, she found him planting greens on the plot of ground—the *grave*—under the summer-apple tree. Before she could speak, a shudder of terror seized her; she trembled from head to foot, turned back to the kitchen, and sat down on the nearest chair.

Old Joan pronounced it to be an attack of ague; Miss Katrine, she said, must have taken a chill. Perhaps she had. It was just then that I arrived and found her shivering in the kitchen. Joan ran up to her room in the garret to bring down some powder she kept there, said to be a grand remedy for ague.

It was getting dusk then; the sun had set. To me, Katrine seemed to be shaking with terror, not illness. Mr. Barbary, in full view of the window, was planting the winter greens under the summer-apple tree.

"What is it that you are frightened at?" I said, propping my back against the kitchen mantelpiece.

"I *must* ask you a question, Johnny Ludlow," she whispered, panting and shivering. "Was it you who came and stood inside the gate there in the middle of last night?"

"Yes it was. And I saw what Mr. Barbary was doing—*there*. I could not make it out."

Katrine left her chair and placed herself before me. Clasping her piteous hands, she besought me to be silent; to keep the secret for pity sake—to be *true*. All kinds of odd ideas stole across me. I would not listen to them; only promised her that I would tell nothing, would be true for ever and a day.

"It must have been an accident, you know," she pleaded; "it must have been an accident."

Joan came back, and I took my departure. What on earth could Katrine have meant? All kinds of
fancies were troubling my brain, fit only for what in these later days are called the penny [115]
dreadfuls, and I did my best to drive them out of it.

The next morning Katrine was really ill. Her throat was parched, her body ached with fever. As to Lena, she was worse; and we, who ought to have gone back to school that day, were kept at home lest we should carry with us any infection.

"All right," said Tod. "It's an ill wind that blows nobody good." He did not believe in the infection; told me in private that Duffham was an old woman.

Can any one picture, I wonder, Katrine Barbary's distress of mind, the terrible dread that had taken possession of it? Shuddering dread, amounting to a panic: dread of the deed itself, dread for her father, dread of discovery.

On the following morning, Sunday, a letter was delivered at Caramel Cottage for Mr. Reste, the postmark being London, the writing in the same hand as the last—Captain Amphlett's. Mr. Barbary took it away to his gun-room; Katrine saw it, later in the day, lying on the deal-table there, unopened.

The next Thursday afternoon, Lena being then almost well—for children are dying to-day and running about again to-morrow—I called at the Cottage to ask after Katrine. We heard she had an attack of fever. The weather was lovely again; the October sky blue as in summer, the sun hot and bright.

Well, she did look ill! She sat in the parlour at the open window, a huge shawl on, and her poor face about half the size it was before. What had it been, I asked, and she said ague; but she was much better now and intended to be at the Manor again on Monday.

"Sit down please, Johnny. I suppose Lena has been glad of the holiday?"

"She just has. That young lady believes French was invented for her especial torment. Have you
heard from Mr. Reste, Katrine?——What does he say about his impromptu flitting?" [116]

She turned white as a ghost, never answering, looking at me strangely. I thought a spasm might have seized her.

“Not yet,” she faintly said. “Papa thinks—thinks he may have gone abroad.”

While I was digesting the words, some vehicle was heard rattling up the side lane; it turned the corner and stopped at the gate. “Why, Katrine,” I said, “it is a railway fly from Evesham!”

A little fair man in a grey travelling-suit got out of the fly, came up the path, and knocked at the door. Old Joan answered it and showed him into the room. “Captain Amphlett,” she said. Katrine looked ready to die.

“I must apologize for intruding,” he began, with a pleasant voice and manner. “My friend Edgar Reste is staying here, I believe.”

Katrine was taken with a shivering fit. The stranger looked at her with curiosity. I said she had been ill with ague, and was about to add that Edgar Reste had left, when Mr. Barbary came in. Captain Amphlett turned to him and went on to explain: he was on his way to spend a little time in one of the Midland shires, and had halted at Evesham for the purpose of looking up Edgar Reste—from whom he had been expecting to hear more than a week past; could not understand why he did not. Mr. Barbary, with all the courtesy of the finished gentleman, told him, in reply to this, that Edgar Reste had left Caramel Cottage a week ago.

“Dear me!” cried the stranger, evidently surprised. “And without writing to tell me. Was his departure unexpected?”

Mr. Barbary laughed lightly. That man would have retained his calmest presence of mind when going down in a wreck at sea. “Some matter of business called him away, I fancy,” he replied. [117]

“And to what part of England was he going?” asked Captain Amphlett, after a pause. “Did he say?”

Mr. Barbary appeared to have an impulsive answer on his lips, but closed them before he could speak it. He glanced at me, and then turned his head and glanced at Katrine, as if to see whether she was there, for he was sitting with his back to her. A thought struck me that we were in the way of his plain speaking.

“He went to London,” said Mr. Barbary.

“To London!” echoed the Captain. “Why, that’s strange. He has not come to London, I assure you.”

“I can assure you it is where he told me he was going,” said Mr. Barbary, smiling. “And it was to London his luggage was addressed.”

“Well, it is altogether strange,” repeated Captain Amphlett. “I went to his chambers in the Temple yesterday, and Farnham, the barrister who shares them with him, told me Reste was still in Worcestershire; he had not heard from him for some time, and supposed he might be returning any day now. Where in the world can he be hiding himself? Had he come to London, as you suppose, Mr. Barbary, he would have sought me out the first thing.”

Whiter than any ghost ever seen or heard of, had grown Katrine as she listened. I could not take my eyes from her terrified face.

“I do not comprehend it,” resumed Captain Amphlett, looking more helpless than a rudderless ship at sea. “Are you sure, sir, that there is no mistake; that he was really going to London?”

“Not at all sure; only that he said it,” returned Mr. Barbary in a half mocking tone. “One does not inquire too closely, you know, into the private affairs of young men. We have not heard from him yet.”

“I cannot understand it at all,” persisted Captain Amphlett; “or why he has not written to me; or [118] where he can have got to. He ought to have written.”

“Ah, yes, no doubt,” suavely remarked Mr. Barbary. “He was careless about letter-writing, I fancy. Can I offer you any refreshment?”

“None at all, thank you; I have no time to spare,” said the other, rising to depart. “I suppose you do not chance to know whether Reste had a letter from me last Tuesday week?”

“Yes, he had one. It had some bank-notes in it. He opened it here at the breakfast table.”

Quite a relief passed over Captain Amphlett’s perplexed face at the answer. “I am glad to hear you say that, Mr. Barbary. By his not acknowledging receipt of the money, I feared it had miscarried.”

Bidding us good afternoon, and telling Katrine (at whose sick state he had continued to glance curiously) that he wished her better, the stranger walked rapidly out to his fly, attended by Mr. Barbary.

“Katrine,” I asked, preparing to take my own departure, “what was there in Captain Amphlett to frighten you?”

“It—it was the ague,” she answered, bringing out the words with a jerk.

“Oh—ague! Well, I’d get rid of such an ague as that. Good-bye.”

But it was not ague; it was sheer fear, as common sense told me, and I did not care to speculate upon it. An uneasy atmosphere seemed to be hanging over Caramel Cottage altogether; to have set in with Edgar Reste's departure.

A day or two later our people departed for Crabb Cot for change of air for Lena, and we returned to school, so that nothing more was seen or heard at present of the Barbarys.

[119]

III

December weather, and snow on the ground, and Caramel Cottage looking cold and cheerless. Not so cheerless, though, as poor Katrine, who had a blue, pinched face and a bad cough.

"I can't get her to rouse herself, or to swallow hardly a morsel of food," lamented Joan to Mr. Duffham. "She sits like a statty all day long, sir, with her hands before her."

"Sits like a statue, does she?" returned Duffham, who could see it for himself, and for the hundredth time wondered what it was she had upon her mind. He did his best, no doubt, in the shape of tonics and lectures, but he could make nothing of his patient. Katrine vehemently denied that she was worrying herself over any sweetheart—for that's how Duffham delicately shaped his questions—and said it was the cold weather.

"The voyage will set her up, or—*break* her up," decided Duffham, who had never treated so unsatisfactory an invalid. "As to not having anything on her mind, why she may tell that to the moon."

Katrine was just dying of the trouble. The consciousness of what the garden could disclose filled her with horror, whilst the fear of discovery haunted her steps by day and her dreams by night. She could not sleep alone, and Joan had brought her mattress down to the room and lay on the floor. When the sun shone, Mr. Barbary would compel her to sit or walk in the garden; Katrine would turn sick and faint at sight of that plot of ground under the apple tree, and the winter greens growing there. At moments she thought her father must suspect the source of her illness; but he gave no sign of it. Since Captain Amphlett's visit, no further inquiry had been made after Edgar Reste. Katrine lived in daily dread of it. Now and then the neighbours would ask after him. [120] Duffham had said one day in the course of conversation: "Where's that young Reste now?" "Oh, in London, working on for his silk gown," Mr. Barbary lightly answered. Katrine marvelled at his coolness.

Upon getting back to the Manor for Christmas we heard that Mr. Barbary was quitting Church Dykely for Canada. "And the voyage will either kill or cure the child," said Duffham, for it was he who gave us the news; "she is in a frightfully weak state."

"Is it ague still?" asked Mrs. Todhetley.

"It is more like nerves than ague," answered Duffham. "She seems to live in a chronic state of fear, starting and shrinking at every unexpected sound. I can't make her out, and that's the truth; she denies having received any shock.—So you have never found Don, Squire!" he broke off, leaving the other subject.

"No," said the Squire angrily. "Dick Standish has been too much for us this time. The fellow wants hanging. Give him rope enough, and he'll do it."

Brazer's dog was returned to him, safe and sound, but our dog had never come back to us, and the Squire was looking out for another. Dick Standish protested his innocence yet; but he had gone roving the country with that other dog, and no doubt had sold Don to somebody at a safe distance. Perhaps had dyed him a fine gold first; as the dyer dyed his dog at Evesham.

"Now, Miss Katrine, there's not a bit of sense in it!"

It was Christmas Eve. Katrine was sitting in the twilight by the parlour fire, and Joan was scolding. She had brought in a tray of tea with some bread-and-butter; Katrine was glad enough of the tea, but said she could not eat; she always said so now.

"Be whipped if I can tell what has got into the child!" stormed Joan. "Do you want to starve [121] yourself right out?—do you want to——"

"There's papa," interrupted Katrine, as the house door was heard to open. "You must bring in more tea now, Joan."

This door opened next, and some one stood looking in. Not Mr. Barbary. Katrine gazed with dilating eyes, as the firelight flickered on the intruder's face: and then she caught hold of Joan with an awful cry. For he who had come in bore the semblance of Edgar Reste.

"Why, Katrine, my dear, have you been ill?"

Katrine burst into hysterical tears as her terror passed. She had been taking it for Mr. Reste's apparition, you see, whereas it was Mr. Reste himself. Joan closed the shutters, stirred the fire, and went away to see what she could do for him in the shape of eatables after his journey. He sat down by Katrine, and took her poor wan face to his sheltering arms.

In the sobbing excitement of the moment, in the strangely wonderful relief his presence brought, Katrine breathed forth the truth; that she had seen him, as she believed, *buried* under the summer-apple tree; had believed it all this time, and that it had been slowly killing her. Mr. Reste laughed a little at the idea of his being buried, and cleared up matters in a few brief words.

“But why did you never write?” she asked.

“Being at issue with Mr. Barbary, I would not write to him: and I thought, Katrine, that the less you were reminded of me the better. I waited in London until my luggage came up, and then went straight to Dieppe, without having seen any one I knew; without having even shown myself at my Chambers——”

“But why not, Edgar?” she interrupted. Mr. Reste laughed.

“Well, I had reasons. I had left a few outstanding accounts there, and was not then prepared to pay them and I did not care to give a clue to my address to be bothered with letters.” [122]

“You did not even write to Captain Amphlett. He came here to see after you.”

“I wrote to him from Dieppe; not quite at first, though. Buried under the apple-tree! that *is* a joke, Katrine!”

It was Christmas Eve, I have said. We had gone through the snow, with Mrs. Todhetley, to help the Miss Pages decorate the church, and the Squire was alone after dinner, when Mr. Reste was shown in.

“Is it you!” cried the Squire in hearty welcome. “So you have come down for Christmas!”

“Partly for that,” answered Mr. Reste. “Partly, sir, to see you.”

“To see me! You are very good. I hope you’ll dine with us to-morrow, if Barbary will spare you.”

“Ah! I don’t know about that; I’m afraid not. Anyway, I have a tale to tell you first.”

Sitting on the other side the fire, opposite the Squire, the wine and walnuts on the table between them, he told the tale of that past Tuesday night.

He had gone out with Barbary in a fit of foolishness, not intending to do any harm to the game or to join in any harm, though Barbary had insisted on his carrying a loaded gun. The moon was remarkably bright. Not long had they been out, going cautiously, when on drawing near Dyke Neck, they became aware that some poachers were already abroad, and that the keepers were tracking them; so there was nothing for it but to steal back again. They had nearly reached Caramel Cottage, and were making for the side gate, when a huge dog flew up, barking. Barbary called out that it was the Squire’s dog, and——

“Bless me!” interjected the Squire at this.

“Yes, sir, your dog, Don,” continued Mr. Reste. “Barbary very foolishly kicked the dog: he was in a panic, you see, lest the noise of its barking should bring up the keepers. That kick must have enraged Don, and he fastened savagely on Barbary’s leg. I, fearing for Barbary’s life, or some lesser injury, grew excited, and fired at the dog. It killed him.” [123]

The Squire drew a deep breath.

“Not daring to leave the dog at the gate, for it might have betrayed us, we drew him across the yard to the brewhouse, and locked the door upon him. But while doing this, Ben Gibbon passed, and thereby learnt what had happened. The next day, Barbary and I had some bickering together. I wanted to come to you and confess the truth openly; Barbary forbade it, saying it would ruin him: we could bury the dog that night or the next, he said, and nobody would ever be the wiser. In the evening, Gibbon came in; he was all for Barbary’s opinion, and opposed mine. After he left, I and Barbary had a serious quarrel. I said I would leave there and then; he resented it, and followed me into the yard to try to keep me. But my temper was up, and I set off to walk to Evesham, telling him to send my traps after me, and to direct them to Euston Square Station. I took the first morning train that passed through Evesham for London, and made my mind up on the journey to go abroad for a week or two. Truth to confess,” added the speaker, “I felt a bit of a coward about the dog, not knowing what proceedings you might take if it came to light, and I deemed it as well to be out of the way for a time. But I don’t like being a coward, Mr. Todhetley, it is a role I have never been used to, and I came down to-day to confess all. Barbary is going away, so it will not damage him: besides, it was really I who killed the dog, not he. And now, sir, I throw myself upon your mercy. What do you say to me?”

“Well, I’m sure I don’t know,” said the Squire, who was in a rare good humour, and liked the young fellow besides. “It was a bad thing to do—poor faithful Don! But it’s Christmas-tide, so I suppose we must say no more about it. Let bygones be bygones.” [124]

Edgar Reste grasped his hand.

“Barbary’s off to Canada, we are told,” said the Squire. “A better country for him than this. He has not been thought much of in this place, as you probably know. And it’s to be hoped that poor little maiden of his will get up her health again, which seems, by all accounts, to be much shattered.”

“I think she’ll get that up now,” said Mr. Reste, with a curious smile. “She is not going out with him, sir; she stays behind with me.”

“With you!” cried the Squire, staring.

“I have just asked her to be my wife, and she says, Yes,” said Mr. Reste. “An old uncle of mine over in India has died; he has left me a few hundreds a year, so that I can afford to marry.”

“I’m sure I am glad to hear it,” said the Squire, heartily. “Poor Don, though! And what did Barbary do with him?”

“Buried him in his back garden, under the summer-apple tree.”

Coming home from our night’s work at this juncture, we found, to our surprise, a great dog fastened to the strong iron garden bench.

“What a magnificent dog!” exclaimed Tod, while the mother sprang back in alarm. “It is something like Don.”

It was very much like Don. Quite as large, and handsomer.

“I shall take it in, Johnny; the Pater would like to see it, There, mother, you go in first.”

Tod unfastened the dog and took it into the dining-room, where sat Mr. Reste. The dog seemed a gentle creature, and went about looking at us all with his intelligent eyes. Mrs. Todhetley stroked him. [125]

“Well, that is a nice dog!” cried the Squire. “Whose is it, lads?”

“It is yours, sir, if you will accept him from me,” said Mr. Reste. “I came across him in London the other day, and thought you might like him in place of Don. I have taught him to answer to the same name.”

“We’ll call him ‘Don the Second’—and I thank you heartily,” said the Squire, with a beaming face. “Good Don! Good old fellow! You shall be made much of.”

He married Katrine without much delay, taking her off to London to be nursed up; and Mr. Barbary set sail for Canada. The bank-notes, you ask about? Why, what Katrine saw in her father’s hands were but *half* the notes, for Mr. Reste divided them the day they arrived, giving thirty pounds to his host, and keeping thirty himself. And Dick Standish, for once, had not been in the fight; and the Squire, meeting him in the turnip-field on Christmas Day, gave him five shillings for a Christmas-box. Which elated Dick beyond telling; and the Squire was glad of it later, when poor Dick had gone away prematurely to the Better Land.

And all the sympathy Katrine had from her father, when he came to hear about the summer-apple tree, was a sharp wish that she could have had her ridiculous ideas shaken out of her.

A TRAGEDY [126]

I.—GERVAIS PREEN

I

Crabb Cot, Squire Todhetley’s estate in Worcestershire, lay close to North Crabb, and from two to three miles off Islip, both of which places you have heard of already. Half way on the road to Islip from Crabb, a side road, called Brook Lane, branched straight off on the left towards unknown wilds, for the parts there were not at all frequented. Passing a solitary homestead here and there, Brook Lane would bring you at the end of less than two miles to a small hamlet, styled Duck Brook.

I am not responsible for the name. I don’t know who is. It was called Duck Brook long before my time, and will be, no doubt, long after I have left time behind me. The village rustics called it Duck Bruck.

Duck Brook proper contains some twenty or thirty houses, mostly humble dwellings, built in the form of a triangle, and two or three shops. A set of old stocks for the correction of the dead-and-gone evil-doers might be seen still, and a square pound in which to imprison stray cattle. And I would remark, as it may be of use further on, that the distance from Duck Brook to either Islip or Crabb was about equal—some three miles, or so; it stood at right angles between them. Passing down Brook Lane (which was in fact a fairly wide turnpike road) into the high road, turning to the right would bring you to Crabb; turning to the left, to Islip. [127]

Just before coming to that populous part of Duck Brook, the dwelling places, there stood in a garden facing the road a low, wide, worn house, its bricks dark with age, and now partly covered with ivy, which had once been the abode of a flourishing farmer. The land on which this lay belonged to a Captain Falkner—some hundred acres of it. The Captain was in difficulties and, afraid to venture into England, resided abroad.

A Mr. Preen lived in the house now—Gervais Preen, a gentleman by descent. The Preens were Worcestershire people; and old Mr. Preen, dead now, had left a large family of sons and daughters, who had for the most part nothing to live upon. How or where Gervais Preen had lately lived, no one knew much about; some people said it was London, some thought it was Paris; but he suddenly came back to Worcestershire and took up his abode, much to the general surprise, at this old farmhouse at Duck Brook. It was soon known that he lived in it rent-free, having undertaken the post of agent to Captain Falkner.

“Agent to Captain Falkner—what a mean thing for a Preen to do!” cried Islip and Crabb all in a breath.

“Not at all mean; gentlemen must live as well as other people,” warmly disputed the Squire. “I honour Preen for it.” And he was the first to walk over to Duck Brook and shake hands with him.

Others followed the Squire’s example, but Mr. Preen did not seem inclined to be sociable. He was forty-five years old then; a little shrimp of a man with a dark face, small eyes like round black beads, and a very cross look. He met his visitors civilly, for he was a gentleman, but he let it be known that he and his wife did not intend to visit or be visited. The Squire pressed him to bring Mrs. Preen to a friendly dinner at Crabb Cot; but he refused emphatically, frankly saying that as [128] they could not afford to entertain in return, they should not themselves go out to entertainments.

Thus Gervais Preen and his wife began their career at Duck Brook, keeping themselves to themselves, locked up in lavender, so to say, as if they did not want the world outside to remember their existence. Perhaps that was the ruling motive, for he owed a few debts of long standing. One or two creditors had found him out, and were driving, it was said, a hard bargain with him, insisting upon payment by degrees if it could not be handed over in a lump.

But there was one member of the family who declined to keep herself laid up in lavender, and that was the only daughter, Jane. She came to Crabb Cot of her own accord, and made friends with us; made friends with Mrs. Jacob Chandler and her girls, and with Emma Paul at Islip. She was a fair, lively, open-natured girl, and welcomed everywhere.

Mr. and Mrs. Preen and Jane were seated at the breakfast-table one fine morning in the earliest days of spring. A space of about two years had gone by since they first came to Duck Brook. Breakfast was laid, as usual, in a small flagged room opening from the kitchen. A piece of cold boiled bacon, three eggs, a home-made loaf and a pat of butter were on the table, nothing more luxurious. Mrs. Preen, a thin woman, under the middle height, poured out the coffee. She must once have been very pretty. Her face was fair and smooth still, with a bright rose tint on the cheeks, and a peevish look in her mild blue eyes. Jane’s face was very much like her mother’s, but her blue eyes had no peevishness in them as yet. Poor Mrs. Preen’s life was one of rubs and crosses, had been for a long while, and that generally leaves its marks upon the countenance. When Mr. Preen came in he had a letter in his hand, which he laid beside his plate, address downwards. He looked remarkably cross, and did not speak. No one else spoke. Conversation [129] was seldom indulged in at meal times, unless the master chose to begin it. But in passing something to him, Jane’s eyes chanced to fall on the letter, and saw that it was of thin, foreign paper.

“Papa, is that from Oliver?”

“Don’t you see it is?” returned Mr. Preen.

“And—is anything different decided?” asked Mrs Preen, timidly, as if she were afraid of either the question or the answer.

“What is there different to decide?” he retorted.

“But, Gervais, I thought you wrote to say that he could not come home.”

“And he writes back to say that he must come. I suppose he must. The house over there is being given up; he can’t take up his abode in the street. There’s what he says,” continued Mr. Preen, tossing the letter to the middle of the table for the public benefit. “He will be here to-morrow.”

A glad light flashed into Jane’s countenance. She lifted her handkerchief to hide it.

Oliver Preen was her brother; she and he were the only children. He had been partly adopted by a great aunt, once Miss Emily Preen, the sister of his grandfather. She had married Major Magnus late in life, and was left a widow. Since Oliver left school, three years ago now, he had lived with Mrs. Magnus at Tours, where she had settled down. She was supposed to be well off; and the Preen family—Gervais Preen and all his hungry brothers and sisters—had cherished expectations from her. They thought she might provide slenderly for Oliver, and divide the rest of her riches among them. But a week or two ago she had died after a short illness, and then the amazing fact came out that she had nothing to leave. All Mrs. Magnus once possessed had been

sunk in an annuity on her own life.

This was bad enough for the brothers and the sisters, but it was nothing compared with the shock it gave to him of Duck Brook. For you see he had to take his son back now and provide for him; [130] and Oliver had been brought up to do nothing. A mild young man, he, we understood, not at all clever enough to set the Thames on fire.

Mr. Preen finished his breakfast and left the room, carrying the letter with him. Jane went at once into the garden, which in places was no better than a wilderness, and ran about the sheltered paths that were out of sight of the windows, and jumped up to catch the lower branches of trees, all in very happiness. She and Oliver were intensely attached to one another; she had not seen him for three years, and now they were going to meet again. To-morrow! oh, to-morrow! To-morrow, and he would be here! She should see him face to face!

“Jane!” called out a stern voice, “I want you.”

In half a moment Jane had appeared in the narrow front path that led between beds of sweet but common flowers from the entrance gate in the centre of the palings to the door of the house, and was walking up demurely. Mr. Preen was standing at an open window.

“Yes, papa,” she said. And Mr. Preen only answered by looking at her and shutting down the window.

The door opened into a passage, which led straight through to the back of the house. On the left, as you entered, was the parlour; on the right was the room which Mr. Preen used as an office, in which were kept the account books and papers relating to the estate. It was a square room, lighted by two tall narrow windows. A piece of matting covered the middle of the floor, and on it stood Mr. Preen’s large flat writing-table, inlaid with green leather. Shelves and pigeon-holes filled one side of the walls, and a few chairs stood about. Altogether the room had a cold, bare look.

It was called the “Buttery.” When Mr. and Mrs. Preen first came to the house, the old man who had had charge showed them over it. “This is the parlour,” he said, indicating the room they were [131] then looking at; “and this,” he added, opening the door on the opposite side of the passage, “is the Buttery.” Jane laughed: but they had adopted the name.

“I want these letters copied, Jane,” said Mr. Preen, who was now sitting at his table, his back to the fire, and the windows in front of him; and he handed to her two letters which he had just written.

Jane took her seat at the table opposite to him. Whenever Mr. Preen wanted letters copied, he called upon her to do it. Jane did not much like the task; she was not fond of writing, and was afraid of making mistakes.

When she had finished the letters this morning she escaped to her mother, asking how she could help in the preparations for Oliver. They kept one maid-servant; a capless young lady of sixteen, who wore a frock and pinafore of a morning. There was Sam as well; a well-grown civil youth, whose work lay chiefly out of doors.

The day passed. The next day was passing. From an early hour Jane Preen had watched for the guest’s arrival. In the afternoon, when she was weary of looking and looking in vain, she put on a warm shawl and her pink sun-bonnet and went out of doors with a book.

A little lower down, towards the Islip Road, Brook Lane was flanked on one side by a grove of trees, too dense to admit of penetration. But there were two straight paths in them at some distance from each other, which would carry you to the back of the grove, and to the stream running parallel with the highway in front; from which stream Duck Brook derived its name. These openings in the trees were called Inlets curiously. A few worn benches stood in front of the trees, and also behind them, and had been there for ages. If you took your seat upon one of the front benches, you could watch the passing and re-passing (if there chanced to be any) on the [132] high road; if you preferred a seat at the back, you might contemplate the pellucid stream and the meads beyond it, like any knight or fair damsel of romance.

This was a favourite resort of Jane Preen’s, a slight relief from the dullness at home. She generally sat by the stream, but to-day faced the road, for she was looking for Oliver. It was not a frequented road at all, but I think this has been said; sometimes an hour would pass away and not so much as a farmer’s horse and cart jolt by, or a beggar shambling on foot.

Jane had brought out a favourite book of the day, one of Bulwer Lytton’s, which had been lent to her by Miss Julietta Chandler. Shall we ever have such writers again? Compare a work over which a tremendous fuss is made in the present day with one of those romances or novels of the past when some of us were young—works written by Scott, and Bulwer, and others I need not mention. Why, they were as solid gold compared with silver and tinsel.

Jane tried to lose herself in the romantic love of Lucy and Paul, or in the passionate love-letters of Sir William Brandon, written when he was young; and she could not do so. Her eyes kept turning, first to that way of the road, then to this: she did not know which way Oliver would come. By rail to Crabb station she supposed, and then with a fly onwards; though being strange to the neighbourhood he might pitch upon any out-of-the-way route and so delay his arrival.

Suddenly her heart stopped beating and then coursed on to fever heat. A fly was winding along towards her in the distance, from the direction of Crabb. Jane rose and waited close to the path. It was not Oliver. Three ladies and a child sat in the fly. They all stared at her, evidently wondering who she was and what she did there. She went back to the bench, but did not open her book again.

It must be nearing four o'clock: she could tell it by the sun, for she had no watch: and she [133] thought she would go in. Slowly taking up the book, she was turning towards home, which was close by, when upon giving a lingering farewell look down the road, a solitary foot passenger came into view: a gentlemanly young man, with an umbrella in his hand and a coat on his arm.

Was it Oliver? She was not quite sure at first. He was of middle height, slight and slender: had a mild fair face and blue eyes with a great sadness in them. Jane noticed the sadness at once, and thought she remembered it; she thought the face also like her own and her mother's.

"Oliver?"

"Jane! Why—is it you? I did not expect to find you under that peasant bonnet, Jane."

They clung to each other, kissing fondly, tears in the eyes of both.

"But why are you walking, Oliver? Did you come to Crabb?"

"Yes," he said. "I thought I might as well walk; I did not think it was quite so far. The porter will send on my things."

There was just a year between them; Oliver would be twenty-one in a month, Jane was twenty-two, but did not look as much. She took his arm as they walked home.

As she halted at the little gate, Oliver paused in surprise and gazed about: at the plain wooden palings painted green, which shut in the crowded, homely garden; at the old farmhouse.

"Is *this* the place, Jane?"

"Yes. You have not been picturing it a palace, have you?"

Oliver laughed, and held back the low gate for her. But as he passed in after her, a perceptible shiver shook his frame. It was gone in a moment; but in that moment it had shaken him from head to foot. Jane saw it.

"Surely you have not caught a chill, Oliver?" [134]

"Not at all; I am warm with my walk. I don't know why I should have shivered," he added. "It was like the feeling you have when people say somebody's 'walking over your grave.'"

Mr. Preen received his son coldly, but not unkindly; Mrs. Preen did the same; she was led by her husband's example in all things. Tea, though it was so early, was prepared at once, with a substantial dish for the traveller; and they sat down to it in the parlour.

It was a long room with a beam running across the low ceiling. A homely room, with a coarse red-and-green carpet and horse-hair chairs. A few ornaments of their own (for the furniture belonged to the house), relics of better days, were disposed about; and Jane had put on the table a glass of early primroses. The two windows, tall and narrow, answered to those in the Buttery. Oliver surveyed the room in silent dismay: it wore so great a contrast to the French salons at Tours to which he was accustomed. He gave them the details of his aunt's death and of her affairs.

When tea was over, Mr. Preen shut himself into the Buttery; Mrs. Preen retired to the kitchen to look after Nancy, who had to be watched, like most young servants, as you watch a sprightly calf. Jane and Oliver went out again, Jane taking the way to the Inlets. This time she sat down facing the brook. The dark trees were behind them, the clear stream flowed past in a gentle murmur; nothing but fields beyond. It was a solitary spot.

"What do you call this place—the Inlets?" cried Oliver. "Why is it called so?"

"I'm sure I don't know: because of those two openings from the road, I suppose. I like to sit here; it is so quiet. Oliver, how came Aunt Emily to sink all her money in an annuity?"

"For her own benefit, of course; it nearly doubled her income. She did it years ago." [135]

"And you did not know that she had nothing to leave?"

"No one knew. She kept the secret well."

"It is very unfortunate for *you*."

"Yes—compared with what I had expected," sighed Oliver. "It can't be helped, Jane, and I try not to feel disappointed. Aunt Emily in life was very kind to me; apart from all selfish consideration I regret and mourn her."

"You will hardly endure this dreary place after your gay and happy life at Tours, Oliver. Duck Brook is the fag-end of the world."

"It does not appear to be very lively," remarked Oliver, with a certain dry sarcasm. "How was it that the Pater came to it?"

“Well, you know—it was a living, and we had nothing else.”

“I don’t understand.”

“When Uncle Gilbert died, there was no other of our uncles, those who were left, who could help papa; at least they said so; and I assure you we fell into great embarrassment as the weeks went on. It was impossible to remain in Jersey; we could pay no one; and what would have been the ending but for papa’s falling in with Captain Falkner, I can’t imagine. Captain Falkner owns a good deal of land about here; but he is in difficulties himself and cannot be here to look after it; so he offered papa the agency and a house to live in. I can tell you, Oliver, it was as a godsend to us.”

“Do you mean to say that my father is an agent?” cried the young man, his face dyed with a red flush.

Jane nodded. “That, and nothing less. He looks after the estate and is paid a hundred pounds a-year salary, and we live rent free. Lately he has taken something else, something different; the [136] agency of some new patent agricultural implements.”

Oliver Preen looked very blank. He had been living the life of a gentleman, was imbued with a gentleman’s notions, and this news brought him the most intense mortification.

“He will expect you to help him in the Buttery,” continued Jane.

“In the what?”

“The Buttery,” laughed Jane. “It is the room where papa keeps his accounts and writes his letters. Letters come in nearly every morning now, inquiring about the new agricultural implements; papa has to answer them, and wants some of his answers copied.”

“And he has only a hundred a year!” murmured Oliver, unable to get over that one item of information. “Aunt Emily had from eight to nine hundred, and lived up to her income.”

“The worst is that we cannot spend all the hundred. Papa has back debts upon him. Have you brought home any money, Oliver?”

“None to speak of,” he answered; “there was none to bring. Aunt Emily’s next quarter’s instalment would have been due this week; but she died first, you see. She lived in a furnished house; and as to the few things she had of her own, and her personal trinkets, Aunt Margaret Preen came down and swooped upon them. Jane, how have you managed to put up with the lively state of affairs here?”

“And this lively spot—the fag-end of the world. It was Emma Paul first called it so. I put up with it because I can’t help myself, Oliver.”

“Who is Emma Paul?”

“The daughter of Lawyer Paul, of Islip.”

“Oh,” said Oliver, slightingly.

“And the nicest girl in the world,” added Jane. “But I can tell you this much, Oliver,” she continued, after a pause: “when we came first to Duck Brook it seemed to me as a haven of [137] refuge. Our life in Jersey had become intolerable, our life here was peaceful—no angry creditors, no daily applications for debts that we could not pay. Here we were free and happy, and it gave me a liking for the place. It is dull, of course; but I go pretty often to see Emma Paul, or to take tea at Mrs. Jacob Chandler’s, and at Crabb Cot when the Todhetleys are staying there. Sam brings the gig for me in the evening, when I don’t walk home. You will have to bring it for me now.”

“Oh, there’s a gig, is there?”

“Papa has to keep that for his own use in going about the land: sometimes he rides.”

“Are the debts in Jersey paid, Jane?”

A shadow passed over her face, and her voice dropped to a whisper.

“No. It makes me feel very unhappy sometimes, half-frightened. Of course papa hopes he shall not be found out here. But he seems to have also two or three old debts in this neighbourhood, and those he is paying off.”

The sun, setting right before them in a sea of red clouds, fell upon their faces and lighted up the sadness of Oliver’s. Then the red ball sank, on its way to cheer and illumine another part of the world, leaving behind it the changes which set in after sunset. The bright stream became grey, the osiers bordering it grew dark. Oliver shook himself. The whole place to him wore a strange air of melancholy. It was early evening yet, for the month was only February; but the spring had come in with a kindly mood, and the weather was bright.

Rising from the bench, they slowly walked up the nearest Inlet, side by side, and gained the high road just as a pony-chaise was passing by, an elderly gentleman and a young lady in it; Mr. and Miss Paul.

[138]

“Oh, papa, please pull up!” cried the girl. “There’s Jane Preen.”

She leaped out, almost before the pony had stopped, and ran to the pathway with outstretched hands.

“How pleasant that we should meet you, Jane! Papa has been taking me for a drive this afternoon.”

Oliver stood apart, behind his sister, looking and listening. The speaker was one of the prettiest girls he had ever seen, with a blushing, dimpled face, a smiling mouth displaying small white teeth, shy blue eyes, and bright hair. Her straw hat had blue ribbons and her dress was one of light silk. Never in his life, thought Oliver, had he seen so sweet a face or heard so sweet a voice.

“Have you been for a walk?” she asked of Jane.

“No,” answered Jane. “We have been down the Inlet, and sitting to watch the sun set. This is my brother, Emma, of whom you have heard. He arrived this afternoon, and has left Tours. Will you allow me to introduce him to you? Oliver, this is Miss Paul.”

Mr. Oliver Preen was about to execute a deep bow at a respectful distance, after the manner of the fashionable blades of Tours, and swung off his hat to begin with; but Emma Paul, who was not fashionable at all, but sociable, inexperienced and unpretending, held out her hand. She liked his looks; a slender young fellow, in deep mourning, with a fair, mild, pleasing face.

“Papa,” she said, turning to the gig, which had drawn up close to the foot-path, “this is Mr. Oliver Preen, from France. He has come home, Jane says.”

John Paul, a portly, elderly gentleman, with iron-grey hair and a face that looked stern to those who did not know him, bent forward and shook hands with the stranger.

Emma began plunging into all sorts of gossip, for she liked nothing better than to talk. Jane liked it too.

“I have been telling Oliver we call Duck Brook the fag end of the world, and that it was you who first said it,” cried Jane. [139]

“Oh, how could you?” laughed Emma, turning her beaming face upon Oliver. And they might have gone on for ever, if left alone; but Mr. Paul reminded his daughter that it was growing late, and he wanted to get home to dinner. So she lightly stepped into the low chaise, Oliver Preen assisting her, and they drove off, Emma calling to Jane not to forget that they were engaged to drink tea at North Villa on the morrow.

“What’s Preen going to do with that young fellow?” wondered the lawyer, as he drove on.

“I’m sure I don’t know, papa,” said Emma. “Take him into the Buttery, perhaps.”

Old Paul laughed a little at the idea. “Not much more work there than Preen can do himself, I expect.”

“When I last saw Jane she said she thought her brother might be coming home. It may be only for a visit, you know.”

Old Paul nodded, and touched up the pony.

Oliver stood in the pathway gazing after the chaise until it was out of sight. “What a charming girl!” he cried to his sister. “I never saw one so unaffected in all my life.”

II

If the reader has chanced to read the two papers entitled “Chandler and Chandler,” he may be able to recall North Villa, and those who lived in it.

It stood in the Islip Road—hardly a stone’s throw from Crabb Cot. Jacob Chandler’s widow lived in it with her three daughters. She was empty-headed, vain, frivolous, always on the high ropes when in company, wanting to give people the impression that she had been as good as born a duchess: whereas everyone knew she had sprung from small tradespeople in Birmingham. The [140] three daughters, Clementina, Georgiana, Julietta, took after her, and were as fine as their names.

But you have heard of them before—and of the wrong inflicted by their father, Jacob Chandler, upon his brother’s widow and son. The solicitor’s business at Islip had been made by the elder brother, Thomas Chandler; he had taken Jacob into partnership, and given him a half share without cross or coin of recompense: and when Thomas died from an accident, leaving his only son Tom in the office to succeed him when he should be of age, Jacob refused to carry out the behest. Ignoring past obligations, all sense of right or wrong, he made his own son Valentine his partner in due course of time, condemning Tom, though a qualified solicitor, to remain his clerk.

It’s true that when Jacob Chandler lay on his death-bed, the full sense of what he had done came home to him: any glaring injustice we may have been committing in our lives does, I fancy, often take hold of the conscience at that dread time: and he enjoined his son Valentine to give Tom his due—a full partnership. Valentine having his late father’s example before him (for Jacob died), did nothing of the kind. “I’ll raise your salary, Tom,” said he, “but I cannot make you my partner.” So Tom, thinking he had put up with injustice long enough, quitted Valentine there and then.

John Paul, the other Islip lawyer, was only too glad to secure Tom for his own office; he made him his manager and paid him a good salary.

About two years had gone on since then. Tom Chandler, a very fine young fellow, honest and good-natured, was growing more and more indispensable to Mr. Paul; Valentine was growing (if the expression may be used) downwards. For Valentine, who had been an indulged son, and only made to work when he pleased, had picked up habits of idleness, and other habits that we are told in our copy-books idleness begets. Gay, handsome, pleasant-mannered, with money always in his pocket, one of those young men sure to be courted, Valentine had grown fonder of pleasure [141] than of work: he liked his game at billiards; worse than that, he liked his glass. When a client came in, ten to one but a clerk had to make a rush to the Bell Inn opposite, to fetch his master; and it sometimes happened that Valentine would not return quite steady. The result was, that his practice was gradually leaving him, to be given to Mr. Paul. All this was telling upon Valentine's mother; she had an ever-haunting dread of the poverty which might result in the future, and was only half as pretentious as she used to be.

Her daughters did not allow their minds to be disturbed by anxiety as yet; the young are less anxious than the old. When she dropped a word of apprehension in their hearing, they good-humouredly said mamma was fidgety—Valentine would be all right; if a little gay now it was only what other young men were. It was a pleasant house to visit, for the girls were gay and hospitable; though they did bedeck themselves like so many peacocks, and put on airs and graces.

Jane Preen found it pleasant; had found it so long ago; and she introduced Oliver to it, who liked it because he sometimes met Emma Paul there. It took a very short time indeed after that first meeting by the Inlets for him to be over head and ears in love with her. Thus some weeks went on.

More pure and ardent love than that young fellow's for Emma was never felt by man or woman. It filled his every thought, seemed to sanctify his dreary days at Duck Brook, and made a heaven of his own heart. He would meet her at North Villa, would encounter her sometimes in her walks, now and then saw her at her own house at Islip. Not often—old Mr. Paul did not particularly care for the Preens, and rarely gave Emma leave to invite them.

Emma did not care for *him*. She had not found out that he cared for her. A remarkably open, [142] pleasant girl in manner, to him as to all the world, she met him always with frank cordiality—and he mistook that natural cordiality for a warmer feeling. Had Emma Paul suspected his love for her she would have turned from it in dismay; she was no coquette, and all the first love of her young heart was privately given to someone else.

At this time there was a young man in Mr. Paul's office named Richard MacEveril. He was a nephew of Captain MacEveril of Oak Mansion—a pretty place near Islip. Captain MacEveril—a retired captain in the Royal Navy—had a brother settled in Australia. When this brother died, his only son, Richard, came over to his relatives, accompanied by a small income, about enough to keep him in coats and waistcoats.

The arrival very much put out Captain MacEveril. He was a good-hearted man, but afflicted with gout in the feet, and irascible when twinges took him. Naturally the question arose to his mind—how was he to put Richard in the way of getting bread and cheese. Richard seemed to have less idea of how it was to be done than his uncle and aunt had. They told him he must go back to Australia and find a living there. Richard objected; said he had only just left it, and did not like Australia. Upon the captain's death, whenever that should take place, Richard would come into a small estate of between two and three hundred a-year, of which nothing could deprive him; for Captain MacEveril had no son; only a daughter, who would be rich through her mother.

Richard was a gay-mannered young fellow and much liked, but he was not very particular. He played billiards at the Bell Inn with Valentine Chandler, with young Scott, and with other idlers; he hired horses, and dashed across country on their backs; he spent money in all ways. When his [143] own ready money was gone he went into debt, and people came to the Captain to ask him to liquidate it. This startled and angered the old post-captain as no twinge of gout had ever yet done.

"Something must be done with Dick," said Mrs. MacEveril.

"Of course it must," her husband wrathfully retorted; "but what the deuce is it to be?"

"Can't you get John Paul to take him into his office as a temporary thing? It would keep him out of mischief."

Mrs. MacEveril's suggestion bore fruit. For the present, until something eligible should "turn up," Dick was placed in the lawyer's office as a copying clerk. Mr. Paul made a favour of taking him in; but he and Captain MacEveril had been close friends for many a year. Dick wrote a bold, clear hand, good for copying deeds.

He and Oliver became intimate. It is said that a fellow-feeling makes us wondrous kind, and they could feel for one another. Both were down in life, both had poverty-stricken pockets. They were of the same age, twenty-one, and in appearance were not dissimilar—fair of face, slight in person.

So that Oliver Preen needed no plea for haunting Islip three or four times a week. "He went over to see Dick MacEveril," would have been his answer had any inquisitive body inquired what he

did there: while, in point of fact, he went hoping to see Emma Paul—if by delightful chance he might obtain that boon.

Thus matters were going on: Oliver, shut up the earlier part of the day in the Buttery with his father, answering letters, and what not; in the latter part of it he would be at Islip, or perhaps with Jane at North Villa. Sometimes they would walk home together; or, if they could have the gig, Oliver drove his sister back in it. But for the love he bore Emma, he would have found his life intolerable; nothing but depression, mortification, disappointment: but when Love takes up its [144] abode in the heart the dreariest lot becomes one of sunshine.

III

The garden attached to North Villa was large and very old-fashioned: a place crowded with trees and shrubs, intersected with narrow paths and homely flowers. The Malvern hills could be seen in the distance, as beautiful a sight in the early morning, with the lights and shadows lying upon them, as the world can show.

It was summer now, nearly midsummer. The garish day was fading, the summer moon had risen, its round shield so delicately pale as to look like silver; and Valentine Chandler was pacing the garden with Jane Preen in the moonlight. They had been singing a duet together at the piano, “I’ve wandered in dreams,” and he had taken the accompaniment. He played well; and never living man had sweeter voice than he. They were wandering in dreams of their own, those two, had been for some time now.

Silence between them as they paced the walk; a sort of discomforting, ominous silence. Valentine broke it.

“Why don’t you reproach me, Jane?”

“Do I ever reproach you?” she answered.

“No. But you ought to do so.”

“If you would only keep your promises, Valentine!”

Young Mr. Valentine Chandler, having stayed his steps while they spoke, backed against the corner of the latticed arbour, which they were just then passing. The same arbour in which his aunt, Mrs. Mary Ann Cramp, had sat in her copper-coloured silk gown to convict her brother Jacob, Valentine’s father, of his sins against Tom Chandler, one Sunday afternoon, not so very long gone by.

Val did not answer. He seemed to be staring at the moon, to investigate what it was made of. In [145] reality he saw no moon; neither moon, nor sky above, nor any earthly thing beneath; he only saw his own reckless folly in his mind’s clouded mirror.

“You know you do make promises, Valentine!”

“And when I make them I fully mean to keep them; but a lot of idle fellows get hold of me, and—and—I *can’t*,” said he, in a savage tone.

“But you might,” said Jane. “If I made promises I should keep them to you—whatever the temptation.”

“I cannot think who it is that comes tattling to you about me, Jane! Is it Oliver?”

“Oliver! Never. Oliver does not know, or suspect—anything.”

“Then it must be those confounded girls indoors!”

“Nor they, either. It is not anyone in particular, Valentine; but I hear one and another talking about you.”

“I should like to know what they say. You must tell me, Jane.”

Jane caught her breath, as if she did not like to answer. But Valentine was waiting.

“They say you are not steady, Val,” she spoke in a whisper; “that you neglect your business; that unless you pull up, you will go to the bad.”

For a few moments Valentine remained quite still; you might have thought he had gone to sleep. Then he put out his hand, drew Jane gently to him, and bent down his head to her with a long-drawn sigh.

“I *will* pull up, Jane. It is not as bad as story-tellers make out. But I will pull up; I promise you; and I’ll begin from this day.”

Jane Preen did not like to remind him that he had said the same thing many times before; rather would she trust to his renewed word. When a girl is in love, she has faith in modern miracles. [146]

Valentine held her to him very closely. “You believe me, don’t you, my darling?”

“Yes,” she whispered.

Down came a voice to them from some remote path near the house, that was anything but a

whisper. “Jane! Jane Preen! Are you in the garden? or are you upstairs with Julietta?”

Jane stole swiftly forward. “I am here, Clementina—it is cool and pleasant in the night air. Do you want me?”

“Your boy is asking how long he is to wait. The horse is fresh this evening, and won’t stand.”

“Has the gig come!” exclaimed Jane, as she met Miss Clementina. “And has Sam brought it! Why not Oliver?”

Clementina Chandler shook her head and the yellow ribbons which adorned it, intimating that she did not know anything about Oliver. It was the servant boy, Sam, who had brought the gig.

Jane hastily put on her bonnet and scarf, said good night, and was helped into the gig by Valentine—who gave her hand a tender squeeze as they drove off.

“Where is Mr. Oliver?” she inquired of Sam.

“Mr. Oliver was out, Miss Jane. As it was getting late, the missis told me to get the gig ready, and bring it.”

After that, Jane was silent, thinking about Valentine and his renewed promises. It might be that the air was favourable to love catching: anyway, both the young Preens had fallen desperately into it; Jane with Valentine Chandler and Oliver with Emma Paul.

Duck Brook was soon reached, for the horse was swift that evening. On the opposite side of the road to the Inlets, was a large field, in which the grass was down and lying in cocks, the sweet smell of the hay perfuming the air of the summer night. Leaping across this field and then over [147] its five-barred gate into the road, came Oliver Preen. Jane, seeing him, had no need to wonder where he had been.

For across this field and onwards, as straight as the crow flies, was a near way to Islip. Active legs, such as Oliver’s, might get over the ground in twenty minutes, perhaps in less. But there was no path, or right of way; he had to push through hedges and charge private grounds, with other impediments attending. Thomas Chandler, Conveyancer and Attorney-at-law, had laughingly assured Oliver that if caught using that way, he would of a surety be had up before the justices of the peace for trespass.

“Stop here, Sam,” said Jane. “I will get out now.”

Sam stopped the gig, and Jane got down. She joined her brother, and the boy drove on to the stables.

“It was too bad, Oliver, not to come for me!” she cried.

“I meant to be home in time; I did indeed, Jane,” he answered; “but somehow the evening slipped on.”

“Were you at Mr. Paul’s?”

“No; I was with MacEveril.”

“At billiards, I suppose!—and it’s very foolish of you, Oliver, for you know you can’t afford billiards.”

“I can’t afford anything, Janey, as it seems to me,” returned Oliver, kicking up the dust in the road as they walked along. “Billiards don’t cost much; it’s only the tables: anyway, MacEveril paid for all.”

“Has MacEveril talked any more about going away?”

“He talks of nothing else; is full of it,” answered Oliver. “His uncle says he is not to go; and old Paul stopped him at the first half-word, saying he could not be spared from the office. Dick says he shall start all the same, leave or no leave.”

“Dick will be very silly to go just now, when we are about to be so gay,” remarked Jane, “There’s the picnic coming off; and the dance at Mrs. Jacob Chandler’s; and no end of tea-parties.” [148]

For just now the neighbourhood was putting on a spurt of gaiety, induced to it perhaps by the lovely summer sunshine. Oliver’s face wore a look of gloom, and he made no answer to Jane’s remark. Several matters, cross and contrary, were trying Oliver Preen; not the least of them that he seemed to make no way whatever with Miss Emma.

When we left school for the midsummer holidays that year, Mr. and Mrs. Todhetley were staying at Crabb Cot. We got there on Friday, the eleventh of June.

On the following Monday morning the Squire went to his own small sitting-room after breakfast to busy himself with his accounts and papers. Presently I heard him call me.

“Have you a mind for a walk, Johnny?”

“Yes, sir; I should be glad of one.” Tod had gone to the Whitneys for a couple of days, and without him I felt like a fish out of water.

“Well, I want you to go as far as Massock’s. He is a regular cheat; that man, Johnny, needs looking after—— What is it, Thomas?”

For old Thomas had come in, a card between his fingers. “It’s Mr. Gervais Preen, sir,” he said, in answer, putting the card on the Squire’s table. “Can you see him?”

“Oh, yes, I can see him; show him in. Wait a bit, though, Thomas,” broke off the Squire. “Johnny, I expect Preen has come about that pony. I suppose we may as well keep him?”

“Tod said on Saturday, sir, that we should not do better,” I answered. “He tried him well, and thinks he is worth the price.”

“Ay; ten pounds, wasn’t it? We’ll keep him, then. Mr. Preen can come in, Thomas.”

[149] Some few days before this the Squire had happened to say in Preen’s hearing that he wanted a pony for the two children to ride, Hugh and Lena. Preen caught up the words, saying he had one for sale—a very nice pony, sound and quiet. So the pony had been sent to Crabb Cot upon trial, and we all liked him. His name was Taffy.

Mr. Preen came into the room, his small face cool and dark as usual; he had driven from Duck Brook. “A fine morning,” he remarked, as he sat down; but it would be fiery hot by-and-by, too hot for the middle of June, and we should probably pay for it later. The Squire asked if he would take anything, but he declined.

“What of the pony—Taffy—Squire?” went on Mr. Preen. “Do you like him?”

“Yes, we like him very well,” said the Squire, heartily, “and we mean to keep him, Preen.”

“All right,” said Mr. Preen. “You will not repent it.”

Then they fell to talking of horses in general, and of other topics. I stayed on, sitting by the window, not having received the message for Massock. Mr. Preen stayed also, making no move to go away; when it suddenly occurred to the Squire—he mentioned it later—that perhaps Preen might be waiting for the money.

“Ten pounds, I think, was the price agreed upon,” observed the Squire with ready carelessness. “Would you like to be paid now?”

“If it does not inconvenience you.”

The Squire unlocked his shabby old bureau, which stood against the wall, fingered his stock of money, and brought forth a ten-pound bank-note. This he handed to Preen, together with a sheet of paper, that he might give a receipt.

When the receipt was written, Mr. Preen took up the note, looked at it for a moment or two, and then passed it back again.

“Would you mind writing your name on this note, Squire?”

[150] The Squire laughed gently. “Not at all,” he answered; “but why should I? Do you think it is a bad one? No fear, Preen; I had it from the Old Bank at Worcester.”

“No, I do not fear that,” said Preen, speaking quietly. “But since a disagreeable trouble which happened to me some years ago, I have always liked, when receiving a bank-note, to get, if possible, the donor’s name upon it in his own handwriting.”

“What was the trouble?”

“I was playing cards at the house of a man of fashion, who was brother to an earl, and lived in a fashionable square at the West End of London, and I had a ten-pound note paid me, for I won, by a man who, I understood, had recently retired with honours from the army, a Major D——. I will not give you his name. The next day, or next but one, I paid this note away to a tradesman, and it was found to be forged; cleverly forged,” repeated Preen, with emphasis.

“What did you do?” asked the Squire.

“I got Major D.’s address from the house where we had played, carried the note to him, and inquired what it meant and whence he got it. Will you believe, Mr. Todhetley,” added the speaker, with slight agitation, “that the man utterly repudiated the note, saying——”

“But how could he repudiate it?” interrupted the Squire, interested in the tale.

“He said it was not the note he had paid me; he stood it out in the most impudent manner. I told him, and it was the pure truth, that it was impossible there could be any mistake. I was a poor man, down on my luck just then, and it was the only note I had had about me for some time past. All in vain. He held to it that it was not the note, and there the matter ended. I could not prove that it was the note except by my bare word. It was my word against his, you see, and naturally I went to the wall.”

[151] The Squire nodded. “Who was at the loss of the money?”

“I was. Besides that, I had the cold shoulder turned upon me. Major D. was believed; I was doubted; some people went so far as to say I must have trumped up the tale. For some time after

that I would not take a bank-note from any man unless he put his signature to it, and it has grown into a habit with me. So, if you don't mind, Squire——"

The Squire smiled goodnaturedly, drew the bank-note to him, and wrote upon the back in a corner, "J. Todhetley."

"There, Preen," said he, returning it, "I won't repudiate that. Couldn't if I would."

Mr. Preen put the note into his pocket-book, and rose to leave. We strolled with him across the front garden to the gate, where his gig was waiting.

"I have to go as far as Norton; and possibly after that on to Stoulton," he remarked, as he took the reins in his hand and got in.

"You will have a hot drive of it," said the Squire.

"Yes; but if one undertakes business it must be attended to," said Preen, as he drove off.

A TRAGEDY

[152]

II.—IN THE BUTTERY

I

The windows of the room, called the Buttery, which Mr. Preen used as an office in his house at Duck Brook, were thrown open to the warm, pure air. It was about the hottest part of the afternoon. Oliver Preen sat back in his chair before the large table covered with papers, waiting in idleness and inward rebellion—rebellion against the untoward fate which had latterly condemned him to this dreary and monotonous life. Taking out his pocket-handkerchief with a fling, he passed it over his fair, mild face, which was very hot just now.

To-day, of all days, Oliver had wanted to be at liberty, whereas he was being kept a prisoner longer than usual, and for nothing. When Mr. Preen rode out after breakfast in the morning he had left Oliver a couple of letters to copy as a beginning, remarking that there was a great deal to do that day, double work, and he should be back in half-an-hour. The double work arose from the fact that none had been done the day before, as Mr. Preen was out. For that day, Monday—this was Tuesday—was the day Mr. Preen had paid us a visit at Crabb Cott, to be paid for Taffy, the pony, and had then gone to Norton, and afterwards to Stoulton, and it had taken him the best part of the day. So the double work was waiting. But the half hours and the hours had passed on, [153] and Mr. Preen had not yet returned. It was now three o'clock in the afternoon, and they had dined without him.

Oliver, who did not dare to absent himself without permission, and perhaps was too conscientious to do so, left his chair for the window. The old garden was quite a wilderness of blossom and colour, with all kinds of homely flowers crowded into it. The young man stretched forth his hand and plucked a spray or two of jessamine, which grew against the wall. Idly smelling it, he lost himself in a vision of the days gone by; his careless, happy life at Tours, in his aunt's luxurious home, when he had no fear of a dark future, had only to dress well and ride or drive out, and idly enjoy himself.

Suddenly he was brought back to reality. The sound of hoofs clattering into the fold-yard behind the house struck upon his ear, and he knew his father had come home.

Ten minutes yet, or more, and then Mr. Preen came into the room, his little dark face looking darker and more cross than usual. He had been snatching some light refreshment, and sat down at once in his place at the table, facing the windows; Oliver sat opposite to him.

"What have you done?" asked he.

"I have only copied those two letters; there was nothing else to do," replied Oliver.

"Could you not have looked over the pile of letters which came this morning, to see whether there were any you could answer?" growled Mr. Preen.

"Why, no, father," replied Oliver in slight surprise; "I did not know I might look at them. And if I had looked I should not have known what to reply."

Mr. Preen began reading the letters over at railroad speed, dictating answers for Oliver to write, writing some himself. This took time. He had been unexpectedly detained at the other end of [154] Captain Falkner's land by some business which had vexed him. Most of these letters were from farmers and others, about the new patent agricultural implements for which Mr. Preen had taken the agency. He wished to push the sale of them, as it gave him a good percentage.

The answers, addressed and stamped for the post, at length lay ready on the table. Mr. Preen

then took out his pocket-book and extracted from it that ten-pound bank-note given him the previous morning by Mr. Todhetley for the children's pony, the note he had got the Squire to indorse, as I have already told. Letting the bank-note lie open before him, Mr. Preen penned a few lines, as follows, Oliver looking on:—

"Dear Sir,—I enclose you the ten pounds. Have not been able to send it before. Truly yours,
G. Preen."

Mr. Preen folded the sheet on which he had written this, put the bank-note within it, and enclosed all in a good-sized business envelope, which he fastened securely down. He then addressed it to John Paul, Esquire, Islip, and put on a postage stamp.

"I shall seal this, Oliver," he remarked; "it's safer. Get the candle and the wax. Here, you can seal it," he added, taking the signet ring from his finger, on which was engraved the crest of the Preen family.

Oliver lighted a candle kept on a stand at the back for such purposes, brought it to the table, and sealed the letter with a large, imposing red seal. As he passed the ring and letter back to his father, he spoke.

"If you are particularly anxious that the letter should reach Mr. Paul safely, father, and of course you are so, as it contains money, why did you not send it by hand? I would have taken it to him."

"There's nothing safer than the post," returned Mr. Preen, "and I want him to have it to-morrow morning."

Oliver laughed. "I could have taken it this evening, father. I can do so still, if you like." [155]

"No, it shall go by post. You want to be off to MacEveril, I suppose."

"No, I do not," replied Oliver. "Had I been able to finish here this morning I might have gone over this afternoon; it is too late now."

"You had nothing to do all day yesterday," growled his father.

"Oh, yes, I know. I am not grumbling."

Mr. Preen put the letter into his pocket, gathered up the pile of other letters, handed half of them to his son, for it was a pretty good heap, and they started for the post, about three minutes' walk.

The small shop containing the post-office at Duck Brook was kept by Mrs. Sym, who sold sweetstuff, also tapes and cottons. Young Sym, her son, a growing youth, delivered the letters, which were brought in by a mail-cart. She was a clean, tidy woman of middle age, never seen out of a muslin cap with a wide border and a black bow, a handkerchief crossed over her shoulders, and a checked apron.

Oliver, of lighter step than his father, reached the post-office first and tumbled his portion of the letters into the box placed in the window to receive them. The next moment Mr. Preen put his in also, together with the letter addressed to Mr. Paul.

"We are too late," observed Oliver. "I thought we should be."

"Eh?" exclaimed Mr. Preen, in surprise, as he turned round. "Too late! Why how can the afternoon have gone on?" he continued, his eyes falling on the clock of the little grey church which stood beyond the triangle of houses, the hands of which were pointing to a quarter past five.

"If you knew it was so late why did you not say so?" he asked sharply of his son.

"I was not sure until I saw the clock; I only thought it must be late by the time we had been at work," replied Oliver. [156]

"I might have sent you over with that letter as you suggested, had I known it would not go to-night. I wonder whether Dame Sym would give it back to me."

He dived down the two steps into the shop as he spoke, Oliver following. Dame Sym—so Duck Brook called her—stood knitting behind the little counter, an employment she took up at spare moments.

"Mrs. Sym, I've just put some letters into the box, not perceiving that it was past five o'clock," began Mr. Preen, civilly. "I suppose they'll not go to-night?"

"Can't, sir," replied the humble post-mistress. "The bag's made up."

"There's one letter that will hardly bear delay. It is for Mr. Paul of Islip. If you can return it me out of the box I will send it over by hand at once; my son will take it."

"But it is not possible, sir. Once a letter is put into the box I dare not give it back again," remonstrated Mrs. Sym, gazing amiably at Mr. Preen through her spectacles, whose round glasses had a trick of glistening when at right angles with the light.

"You might stretch a point for once, to oblige me," returned Mr. Preen, fretfully.

"And I'm sure I'd not need to be pressed to do it, sir, if I could," she cried in her hearty way. "But

I dare not break the rules, sir; I might lose my place. Our orders are not to open the receiving box until the time for making-up, or give a letter back on any pretence whatever."

Mr. Preen saw that further argument would be useless. She was a kindly, obliging old body, but upright to the last degree in all that related to her place. Anything that she believed (right or wrong) might not be done she stuck to.

"Obstinate as the grave," muttered he.

Dame Sym did not hear; she had turned away to serve a child who came in for some toffee. Mr. Preen waited. [157]

"When will the letter go?" he asked, as the child went out.

"By to-morrow's day mail, sir. It will be delivered at Islip—I think you said Islip, Mr. Preen—about half-past four, or so, in the afternoon."

"Is the delay of much consequence, sir?" inquired Oliver, as he and his father turned out of the shop.

"No," said Mr. Preen. "Only I hate letters to be delayed uselessly in the post."

Tea was waiting when they got in. A mutton chop was served with it for Mr. Preen, as he had lost his dinner. Jane ran downstairs, drank a cup of tea in haste, and ran back again. She had been busy in her bedroom all day, smartening-up a dress. A picnic was to be held on Thursday, the next day but one; Jane and Oliver were invited to it, and Jane wanted to look as well as other girls.

After tea Oliver sat for ever so long at the open window, reading the *Worcester Journal*. He then strolled out to the Inlets, sauntered beside the brook, and presently threw himself listlessly upon one of the benches facing it. The sun shone right upon his face there, so he tilted his straw hat over his eyes. That did not do, and he moved to another bench which the trees shaded. He often felt lonely and weary now; this evening especially so; even Jane was not with him.

His thoughts turned to Emma Paul; and a glow, bright as the declining sun rays, shot up in his heart. As long as *she* filled it, he could not be all gloom.

"If I had means to justify it I should speak to her," mused he—as he had told himself forty times over, and forty more. "But when a fellow has no fortune, and no prospect of fortune; when it may be seen by no end of odd signs and tokens that he has not so much as a silver coin in his pocket, [158] how can he ask a girl the one great question of life? Old Paul would send me to the right-about."

He leaned his head sideways for a few minutes against the trunk of a tree, gazing at the reddening sky through the green tracery of the waving boughs; and fell to musing again.

"If she loved me as I love her, she would be glad to wait on as things are, hoping for better times. Lovers, who are truly attached to each other, do wait for years and years, and are all the happier for it. Sometimes I feel inclined to enlist in a crack regiment. The worst of it is that a fellow rarely rises from the ranks in England to position and honour, as he does in France; they manage things better over there. If old Uncle Edward would only open his purse-strings and buy me a commission, I might—— Halloa!"

A burst of girlish laughter, and a pair of girlish arms, flung round his neck from behind, disturbed Oliver's castles-in-the-air. Jane came round and sat down beside him. "I thought I should find you here, Oliver," she said.

"Frock finished, Janey?"

"Finished! why no," she exclaimed. "It will hardly be finished by this time to-morrow."

"Why, how idle you must have been!"

"Idle? You don't understand things, or the time it takes to make an old frock into a new one. A dressmaker might have done it in a day, but I'm not a dressmaker, you know, Oliver."

"Is it a silk gown?"

"It is a mousseline-de-laine, if you chance to be acquainted with that material," answered Janey. "It was very pretty when it was new: pale pink and lilac blossoms upon a cream ground. But it has been washed, and that has made it shrink, and it has to be let out everywhere and [159] lengthened, and the faded silk trimming has to be turned, and—oh, ever so much work. And now, I daresay you are as wise as you were before, Oliver."

"I've heard of washed-out dresses," remarked Oliver. "They look like rags, don't they?"

"Some may. Mine won't. It has washed like a pocket-handkerchief, and it looks as good as new."

"Wish my coats would wash," said Oliver. "They are getting shabby, and I want some new ones."

Not having any consolation to administer in regard to the coats, Jane did not take up the subject. "What have you been doing all day, Oliver?" she asked.

“Airing my patience in that blessed Buttery,” replied he. “Never stirred out of it at all, except for dinner.”

“I thought you wanted to get over to Islip this afternoon.”

“I might want to get over to the North Pole, and be none the nearer to it. MacEveril was bound for some place a mile or two across fields this afternoon, on business for the office, and I promised to go over to walk with him. Promises, though, are like pie-crust, Janey: made to be broken.”

Jane nodded assent. “And a promise which you are obliged to break is sure to be one you particularly want to keep. I wish I had a pair of new gloves, Oliver. Pale grey.”

“I wish I had half-a-dozen new pairs, for the matter of that. Just look at those little minnows, leaping in the water. How pretty they are!”

He went to the edge of the brook and stood looking down at the small fry. Jane followed. Then they walked about in the Inlets, then sat down again and watched the sunset; and so the evening wore away until they went home.

Jane was shut up again the following day, busy with her dress; Oliver, as usual, was in the Buttery with his father. At twelve o’clock Mr. Preen prepared to go out to keep an appointment at [160] Evesham, leaving Oliver a lot of work to do, very much to his aggravation.

“It’s a shame. It will take me all the afternoon to get through it,” ran his thoughts—and he would have liked to say so aloud.

“You don’t look pleased, young man,” remarked his father. “Recollect you will be off duty to-morrow.”

Oliver’s countenance cleared; his disposition was a pleasant one, never retaining anger long, and he set to his task with a good will. The morrow being the day of the picnic, he would have whole holiday.

At five o’clock the young servant carried the tea-tray into the parlour. Presently Mrs. Preen came in, made the tea, and sat down to wait for her son and daughter. Tired and hot, she was glad of the rest.

Jane ran downstairs, all happiness. “Mamma, it is finished,” she cried; “quite finished. It looks so well.”

“It had need look well,” fretfully retorted Mrs. Preen, who had been unable to get at Jane for any useful purpose these two days, and resented it accordingly.

“When all trades fail I can turn dressmaker,” said the girl, gaily. “Where’s Oliver?”

“In the Buttery, I expect; he said he had a great deal to do there this afternoon, and I have not seen him about,” replied Mrs. Preen, as she poured out the tea. “Not that I should have been likely to see him—shut into that hot kitchen with the ironing.”

Jane knew this was a shaft meant for herself. At ordinary times she did her share of the ironing. “I will tell Oliver that tea is ready, mamma,” she said, rising to go to the other room. “Why, there he is, sitting in the shade under the walnut tree,” she exclaimed, happening to look from the window.

“Sitting out in the cool,” remarked Mrs. Preen. “I don’t blame him, poring all day long over those [161] accounts and things. Call him in, Jane.”

“Coming,” said Oliver, in response to Jane’s call from the open window.

He crossed the grass slowly, fanning himself with his straw hat. His fair face—an unusual thing with him—was scarlet.

“You look red-hot, Oliver,” laughed his sister.

“If it is as hot to-morrow as it is to-day we shall get a baking,” returned Oliver.

“In this intense weather nothing makes one feel the heat like work, and I suppose you’ve been hard at it this afternoon,” said his mother in a tone of compassion, for she disliked work naturally very much herself.

“Of course; I had to be,” answered Oliver.

He and Jane sat together under the shade of the walnut tree after tea. When it grew a little cooler they went to the Inlets, that favourite resort of theirs; a spot destined to bear a strange significance for one of them in the days to come; a haunting remembrance.

II

The white mist, giving promise of a hot and glorious day, had hardly cleared itself from the earth, when, at ten o’clock on the Thursday morning, Jane and Oliver Preen set off in the gig for North Villa, both of them as spruce as you please; Jane in that pretty summer dress she had spent so much work over, a straw hat with its wreath of pink may shading her fair face, Oliver with a

white rose in his button-hole. The party was first to assemble at Mrs. Jacob Chandler's, and to go from thence in waggonettes. There had been some trouble about the gig, Mr. Preen wanting it himself that day, or telling Jane and Oliver that he did, and that they could walk. Jane almost [162] cried, declaring she did not care to arrive at North Villa looking like a milkmaid, hot and red with walking; and Mr. Preen gave way. Oliver was to drive himself and Jane, Sam being sent on to Crabb to bring back the gig.

Mr. Preen did not regard the picnic with favour. Mr. Preen could not imagine what anybody could want at one, he said, when ungraciously giving consent to Oliver's absenting himself from that delightful Buttery for a whole day.

Picnics in truth are nearly all alike, and are no doubt more agreeable to the young than to the old. This one was given conjointly by the Jacob Chandlers, the Letsoms, the Coneys, and the Ashtons of Timberdale. A few honorary guests were invited. I call them honorary because they had nothing to do with finding provisions. Tod got an invitation, myself also; and uncommonly vexed we were not to be able to arrive till late in the afternoon. The Beeles from Pigeon Green were coming to spend the day at Crabb Cot, and the Squire would not let us off earlier.

The picnic was held upon Mrs. Cramp's farm, not far from Crabb, and a charming spot for it. Gentle hills and dales, shady groves and mossy glens surrounded the house, which was a very good one. So that it may be said we all were chiefly Mrs. Cramp's guests. Mrs. Cramp made a beaming hostess, and was commander-in-chief at her own tea-table. Tea was taken in her large parlour, to save the bother of carrying things out. Dinner had been taken in the dell, under shade of the high and wide-spreading trees.

They were seated at tea when we got there. Such a large company at the long table; and such tempting things to eat! I found a seat by Emma Paul, the prettiest girl there; Oliver Preen was next her on the other side. Mary MacEveril made room for Tod beside her. The MacEverils were proud, exclusive people, and Miss MacEveril privately looked down on some of her fellow guests; but Tod was welcome; he was of her own order.

Two or three minutes later Tom Chandler came in; he also had not been able to get away earlier. [163] He shook hands with his aunt, Mrs. Cramp, nodded to the rest of us, and deftly managed to wedge himself in between Emma Paul and young Preen. Preen did not seem pleased, Emma did; and made all the room she could, by crushing me.

"I wouldn't be in your shoes to-morrow morning, young man," began Mr. Chandler, in a serio-comic tone, as he looked at Dick MacEveril across the table. "To leave the office to its own devices the first thing this morning, in defiance of orders——"

"Hang the musty old office!" interrupted MacEveril, with a genial laugh.

Valentine Chandler had done the same by his office; pleasure first and business later always with both of them; but Valentine was his own master and MacEveril was not. In point of fact, Mr. Paul, not a man to be set at defiance by his clerks, was in a great rage with Dick MacEveril.

I supposed the attractions of the picnic had been too powerful for Dick, and that he thought the sooner he got to it the better. But this proved to be a fallacy. Mrs. Cramp was setting her nephew right.

"My dear Tom, you are mistaken. Mr. MacEveril did not come this morning; he only got here an hour ago—like two or three more of the young men."

"Oh, did he not, Aunt Mary Ann?" replied Tom, turning his handsome, pleasant face upon her.

"Yes, and if you were not at the office I should like to know what you did with yourself all day, Dick," severely cried Miss MacEveril, bending forward to regard her cousin.

"I went to see the pigeon-match," said Dick, coolly.

"To see the pigeon-match!" she echoed. "How cruel of you! You had better not let papa know."

"If anyone lets him know it will be yourself, Miss Mary. And suppose you hold your tongue now," [164] cried Dick, not very politely.

This little passage-at-arms over, we went on with tea. Afterwards we strolled out of doors and disposed of ourselves at will. Some of the Chandler girls took possession of me, and I went about with them.

When it was getting late, and they had talked me deaf, I began looking about for Tod, and found him on a bench within the Grove. A sheltered spot. Sitting there, you could look out, but people could not look in. Mary MacEveril and Georgiana Chandler were with him; Oliver Preen stood close by, leaning against the stump of a tree. I thought how sad his look was, and wondered what made it so.

Within view of us, but not within hearing, in a dark, narrow walk Tom Chandler and Emma Paul were pacing side by side, absorbed evidently in one another. The sun had set, the lovely colours in the sky were giving place to twilight. It was the hour when matter-of-fact prosaic influences change into romance; when, if there's any sentiment within us it is safe to come out.

The nightingale’s high note is heard;
It is the hour when lovers’ vows
Seem sweet in every whispered word,”

as Lord Byron says. And who could discourse on love—the true ring of it, mind you—as he did?

“Do sing,” said Tod to Miss MacEveril; and I found they had been teasing her to do so for the last five minutes. She had a pleasant voice and sang well.

“I’m sure you don’t care to hear me, Mr. Todhetley.”

“But I’m sure I do,” answered Tod, who would flirt with pretty girls when the fit took him. Flirt and flatter too.

“We should have everyone coming round us.”

“Not a soul of them. They are all away somewhere, out of hearing. Do sing me one song.” [165]

She began at once, without more ado, choosing an old song that Mrs. Todhetley often chose; one that was a favourite of hers, as it was of mine: “Faithless Emma.” Those songs of the old days bore, all of them, a history.

“I wandered once at break of day,
While yet upon the sunless sea
In wanton sighs the breeze delayed,
And o’er the wavy surface played.
Then first the fairest face I knew,
First loved the eye of softest blue,
And ventured, fearful, first to sip
The sweets that hung upon the lip
Of faithless Emma.

So mixed the rose and lily white
That nature seemed uncertain, quite,
To deck her cheek which flower she chose,
The lily or the blushing rose.
I wish I ne’er had seen her eye,
Ne’er seen her cheeks of doubtful dye,
Nor ever, ever dared to sip
The sweets that hung upon the lip
Of faithless Emma.

Now though from early dawn of day,
I rove alone and, anxious, stray
Till night with curtain dark descends,
And day no more its glimmering lends;
Yet still, like hers no cheek I find,
No eye like hers, save in my mind,
Where still I fancy that I sip
The sweets that hung upon the lip
Of faithless Emma.”

“I think all Emmas are faithless,” exclaimed Georgiana, speaking at random, as the last sounds of the sweet song died away.

“A sweeping assertion, Miss Georgie,” laughed Tod.

“Any way, I knew two girls named Emma who were faithless to their engaged lovers, and one of them’s not married yet to any one else,” returned Georgie. [166]

“I think I know one Emma who will be true for ever and a day,” cried Tod, as he pointed significantly to Emma Paul, still walking side by side with Tom Chandler in the distance.

“I could have told you that before now,” said Mary MacEveril. “I have seen it for a long time, though Miss Emma will never confess to it.”

“And now, I fancy it will soon be a case,” continued Tod.

“A case!” cried Georgie. “What do you mean?”

“A regular case; dead, and gone, and done for,” nodded Tod. “Church bells and wedding gloves, and all the rest of the paraphernalia. Looks like it, anyhow, to-night.”

“Oh!” exclaimed Georgie, “then how sly Tom has been over it, never to tell us! Is it really true? I shall ask Valentine.”

“The last person likely to know,” said Tod. “You’ll find it’s true enough, Georgie.”

“Then——” Georgie began, and broke off. “Listen!” she cried. “They are beginning to dance on the lawn. Come, Mary.” And the two girls moved away, attracted by the scraping of the fiddle.

Oliver Preen moved a step forward from the tree, speaking in a low, calm tone; but his face was white as death.

“Were you alluding to *them*?” he asked, looking across to those two pacing about. “Why do you say it is a ‘case’?”

“Because I am sure it is one,” answered Tod. “They have been in love with one another this many a day past, those two, months and months and years. As everyone might see who had eyes, except old Paul. That’s why, Preen.”

Oliver did not answer. He had his arm round the trunk of a tree looking across as before. [167]

“And I wouldn’t stake a fortune that Paul has not seen it also,” went on Tod. “All the same, I had a rumour whispered to me to-day that he sees it now, and has said, ‘Bless you, my children.’ Tom Chandler is to be made his partner and to marry Emma.”

“We are too many girls there, and want you for partners,” cried Eliza Letsom, dashing up. “Do come and dance with us, Johnny!”

What else could I do? Or Tod, either.

It was nearly eleven o’clock when the party separated. The waggonettes held us all, and nice scrambling and crowding we had for seats. One of the vehicles, after setting down some of its freight—ourselves and the Miss Chandlers—continued its way to Duck Brook with Jane and Oliver Preen.

It was a lovely night. The moon had risen, and was flooding the earth with its soft light. Jane sat looking at it in romantic reverie. Suddenly it struck her that her brother was unusually still; he had not spoken a single word.

“How silent you are, Oliver. You are not asleep, are you?”

Oliver slowly raised his bent head. “Silent?” he repeated. “One can’t talk much after a tiring day such as this.”

“I think it must be getting on for twelve o’clock,” said Jane. “What a delightfully happy day it has been!”

“The one bad day of all my life,” groaned Oliver, in spirit. But he broke into the two lines, in pretended gaiety, that some one had sung on the box-seat of the waggonette when leaving Mrs. Cramp’s:

> “For the best of all ways to lengthen our days
> Is to steal a few hours from the night, my dear.”

[168]

III

“My Dear Sir,—Robert Derrick is getting troublesome. He has been here three times in as many days, pressing for ten pounds, the instalment of your debt now due to him. Will you be good enough to transmit it to me, that I may pay and get rid of him.

“Truly yours, John Paul.”

This letter, written by Lawyer Paul of Islip, came to Mr. Preen by the Thursday morning post, just a week after the picnic. It put him into a temper.

“What do Paul’s people mean by their carelessness?” he exclaimed angrily, as he snatched a sheet of paper to pen the answer.

“Dear Mr. Paul,—I don’t know what you mean. I sent the money to you ten days ago—a bank-note, enclosed in a letter to yourself.

“Truly yours, G. Preen.”

Calling Oliver from his breakfast, Mr. Preen despatched this answer by him at once to the post-office. There was no hurry whatever, since the day mail had gone out, and it would lie in Mrs. Sym’s drawer until towards evening, but an angry man knows nothing of patience.

The week since the picnic had not been productive of any particular event, except a little doubt and trouble regarding Dick MacEveril. Mr. Paul was so much annoyed, at Dick’s taking French leave to absent himself from the office that day, that he attacked him with hot words when he entered it on the Friday morning. Dick took it very coolly—old Paul said “insolently,” and retorted that he wanted a longer holiday than that, a whole fortnight, and that he must have it. Shortly and sharply Mr. Paul told him he could not have it, unless he chose to have it for good. [169]

Dick took him at his word. Catching up his hat and stick, he went out of the office there and then, and had not since appeared at it. Not only that: during the Friday he disappeared also from Islip. Nobody knew for certain whither he had gone, or where he was: unless it might be London. He had made no secret of what he wanted a holiday for. Some young fellow whom he had known in Australia had recently landed at the docks and was in London, and Dick wanted to go up to see

him.

Deprived of his friend, and deprived of his heart's love, Oliver Preen was in a bad case. The news of Emma Paul's engagement to Thomas Chandler, and the news that Chandler was to have a share in her father's business, had been made public; the speedy marriage was already talked of. No living person saw what havoc it was making of Oliver Preen. Jane found him unnaturally quiet. He would sit by the hour together and never say a word to her or to anyone else, apparently plunged in what might be either profound scientific calculations or grim despondency. It was as if he had the care of the world upon his mind, and at times there would break from him a sudden long-drawn sigh. Poor Oliver! Earth's sunshine had gone out for him with sweet Emma Paul.

She had not been faithless, like the Faithless Emma of the song, for she had never cared for anyone but Tom Chandler, had never given the smallest encouragement to another. Oliver had only deluded himself. To his heart, filled and blinded with its impassioned love, her open, pleasing manners had seemed to be a response, and so he had mistaken her. That was all.

But this is sentiment, which the world, having grown enlightened of late years, practically despises; and we must go on to something more sensible and serious.

[170] The answer sent by Mr. Preen to John Paul of Islip brought forth an answer in its turn. It was to the effect that Mr. Paul had not seen anything of the letter spoken of by Mr. Preen, or of the money it was said to contain.

This reached Duck Brook on the Saturday morning. Mr. Preen, more puzzled this time than angry, could not make it out.

"Oliver," said he, "which day was it last week that I wrote that letter to Paul of Islip, enclosing a ten-pound note?"

"I don't remember," carelessly replied Oliver. They had not yet settled to work, and Oliver was stretched out at the open window, talking to a little dog that was leaping up outside.

"Not remember!" indignantly echoed Mr. Preen. "My memory is distracted with a host of cares, but yours has nothing to trouble it. Bring your head in, sir, and attend to me properly."

Oliver dutifully brought his head in, his face red with stooping. "What was it you asked me, father? I did not quite catch it," he said.

"I asked you if you could remember which day I sent that money to Paul. But I think I remember now for myself. It was the day after I received the bank-note from Mr. Todhetley. That was Monday. Then I sent the letter to Paul with the bank-note in it on the Tuesday. You sealed it for me."

"I remember quite well that it was Tuesday—two days before the picnic," said Oliver.

"Oh, of course; a picnic is a matter to remember anything by," returned Mr. Preen, sarcastically. "Well, Paul says he has never received either money or letter."

"The letter was posted——" began Oliver, but his father impatiently interrupted him.

"Certainly it was posted. You saw me post it."

[171] "It was too late for the evening's post; Dame Sym said it would go out the next morning," went on Oliver. "Are Paul's people sure they did not receive it?"

"Paul tells me so. Paul is an exact man, and would not tolerate any but exact clerks about him. He writes positively."

"I suppose Mrs. Sym did not forget to forward it?" suggested Oliver.

"What an idiot you are!" retorted his father, by way of being complimentary. "The letter must have gone out safely enough."

Nevertheless, after Mr. Preen had attended to his other letters and to two or three matters they involved, he put on his hat and went to Mrs. Sym's.

The debt for which the money was owing appeared to be a somewhat mysterious one. Robert Derrick, a man who dealt in horses, or in anything else by which he could make money, and attended all fairs near and far, lived about two miles from Islip. One day, about a year back, Derrick presented himself at the office of Mr. Paul, and asked that gentleman if he would sue Gervais Preen for a sum of money, forty pounds, which had been long owing to him. What was it owing for, Mr. Paul inquired; but Derrick declined to say. Instead of suing him, the lawyer wrote to request Mr. Preen to call upon him, which Mr. Preen did. He acknowledged that he did owe the debt—forty pounds—but, like Derrick, he evaded the question when asked what he owed it for. Perhaps it was for a horse, or horses, suggested Mr. Paul. No, it was for nothing of that kind, Mr. Preen replied; it was a strictly private debt.

An arrangement was come to. To pay the whole at once was not, Mr. Preen said, in his power; but he would pay it by instalments. Ten pounds every six months he would place in Mr. Paul's hands, [172] to be handed to Derrick, whom Mr. Preen refused to see. This arrangement Derrick agreed to. Two instalments had already been paid, and one which seemed to have now miscarried in the post was the third.

“Mrs. Sym,” began Mr. Preen, when he had dived into the sweet-stuff shop, and confronted the post-mistress behind her counter, “do you recollect, one day last week, my asking you to give me back a letter which I had just posted, addressed to Mr. Paul of Islip, and you refused?”

“Yes, sir, I do,” answered Mrs. Sym. “I was sorry, but——”

“Never mind that. What I want to ask you is this: did you notice that letter when you made up the bag?”

“I did, sir. I noticed it particularly in consequence of what had passed. It was sealed with a large red seal.”

“Just so. Well, Mr. Paul declares that letter has not reached him.”

“But it must have reached him,” rejoined Mrs. Sym, fastening her glittering spectacles upon the speaker’s face. “It had Mr. Paul’s address upon it in plain writing, and it went away from here in the bag with the rest of the letters.”

“The letter had a ten-pound note in it.”

Mrs. Sym paused. “Well, sir, if so, that would not endanger the letter’s safety. Who was to know it had? But letters that contain money ought to be registered, Mr. Preen.”

“You are sure it went away as usual from here—all safe?”

“Sure and certain, sir. And I think it must have reached Mr. Paul, if I may say so. He may have overlooked it; perhaps let it fall into some part of his desk, unopened. Why, some years ago, there was a great fuss made about a letter which was sent to Captain Falkner, when he was living at the Hall. He came here one day, complaining to me that a letter sent to him by post, which had money in it, had never been delivered. The trouble there was over that lost letter, sir, I couldn’t [173] tell you. The Captain accused the post-office in London, for it was London it came from, of never having forwarded it; then he accused me of not sending it out with the delivery. After all, it was himself who had mislaid the letter. He had somehow let it fall unnoticed into a deep drawer of his writing-table when it was handed to him with other letters at the morning’s delivery; and there it lay all snug till found, hid away amid a mass of papers. What do you think of that, sir?”

Mr. Preen did not say.

“In all the years I have kept this post-office I can’t call to memory one single letter being lost in the transit,” she ran on, warming in her own cause. “Why, how could it, sir? Once a letter’s sent away safe in the bag, there it must be; it can’t fall out of it. Your letter was so sent away by me, Mr. Preen, and where should it be if Mr. Paul hasn’t got it? Please tell him, sir, from me, that I’d respectfully suggest he should look well about his desk and places.”

Evidently it was not at this side the letter had been lost—if lost it was. Mr. Preen wished the post-mistress good morning, and walked away. Her suggestion had impressed him; he began to think it very likely indeed that Paul had overlooked the letter on its arrival, and would find it about his desk, or table, or some other receptacle for papers.

He drove over to Islip in the gig in the afternoon, taking Oliver with him. Islip reached, he left Oliver in the gig, to wait at the door or drive slowly about as he pleased, while he went into the office to, as he expressed it, “have it out with Paul.”

Not at once, however, could he do that, for Mr. Paul was out; but he saw Tom Chandler.

The offices, situated in the heart of Islip, and not a stone’s throw from the offices of Valentine [174] Chandler, consisted of three rooms, all on the ground floor. The clerks’ room was in front, its windows (painted white, so that no one could see in or out) faced the street; Mr. Paul’s room lay behind it and looked on to a garden. There was also a small slip of a room, not much better than a passage, into which Mr. Paul could take clients whose business was very private indeed. Tom Chandler, about to be made a partner, had a desk in Mr. Paul’s room as well as one in the clerks’ room. It was at the latter that he usually sat.

On this afternoon he was seated at his desk in Mr. Paul’s room when Gervais Preen entered. Tom received him with a smile and a hand-shake, and gave him a chair.

“I’ve come about that letter, Mr. Chandler,” began the visitor; “my letter with the ten-pound bank-note in it, which Mr. Paul denies having received.”

“I assure you no such letter was received by us——”

“It was addressed in a plain handwriting to Mr. Paul himself, and protected by a seal of red wax with my crest upon it,” irritably interrupted the applicant, who hated to be contradicted.

“Mr. Preen, you may believe me when I tell you the letter never reached us,” said Tom, a smile crossing his candid, handsome face, at the other’s irritability.

“Then where is the letter? What became of it?”

“I should say perhaps it was never posted,” mildly suggested Tom.

“Not posted!” tartly echoed Mr. Preen. “Why, I posted it myself; as Dame Sym, over at Duck Brook, can testify. And my son also, for that matter; he stood by and saw me put it into the box.

Dame Sym sent it away in the bag with the rest; she remembers the letter perfectly."

"It never was delivered to us," said Tom, shaking his head. "If—— oh, here is Mr. Paul."

[175] The portly lawyer came into the room, pushing back his iron-grey hair. He sat down at his own desk-table; Mr. Preen drew his chair so as to face him, and the affair was thoroughly gone into. It cannot be denied that the experienced man of law, knowing how difficult it was to Mr. Preen to find money for his debts and his needs, had allowed some faint doubt to float within him in regard to this reported loss. Was it a true loss?—or an invented one? But old Paul read people's characters, as betrayed in their tones and faces, tolerably well; he saw that Preen was in desperate earnest, and he began to believe his story.

"Let me see," said he. "You posted it on Tuesday, the fifteenth. You found it was too late for that night's post, and would not go off until the morrow morning, when, as Dame Sym says, she despatched it. Then we ought to have received it that afternoon—Wednesday, the sixteenth."

"Yes," assented Mr. Preen. "Mrs. Sym wished to respectfully suggest to you, Paul, that you might have overlooked it amidst the other letters at the time it was delivered, and let it drop unseen into some drawer or desk."

"Oh, she did, did she?" cried old Paul, while Tom Chandler laughed. "Give my respects to her, Preen, and tell her I'm not an old woman. We don't get many letters in an afternoon, sometimes not any," he went on. "Can you carry your memory back to that Wednesday afternoon, Chandler?"

"I daresay I shall be able to do so," replied Tom. "Wednesday, the sixteenth.—Was not that the day before the picnic at Aunt Cramp's?"

"What on earth has the picnic to do with it?" sharply demanded Mr. Preen. "All you young men are alike. Oliver could only remember the date of my posting the letter by recalling that of the picnic. You should be above such frivolity."

[176] Tom Chandler laughed. "I remember the day before the picnic for a special reason, sir. MacEveril asked for holiday that he might go to it. I told him he could not have the whole day, we were too busy, but perhaps he might get half of it; upon which he said half a day was no good to him, and gave me some sauce. Yes, that was Wednesday, the sixteenth; and now, having that landmark to go by, I may be able to trace back other events and the number of letters which came in that afternoon."

"Is MacEveril back yet?" asked Preen.

"No," replied Paul. "The captain does not know where he is; no one does know, that I'm aware of. Look here, Preen; as this letter appears to be really lost, and very unaccountably, since Mrs. Sym is sure she sent it off, and I am sure it was never delivered to me, I shall go to our office here now, and inquire about it. Will you come with me?"

Mr. Preen was only too glad to go to any earthly place that was likely to afford news of his ten-pound note, for the loss would be his, and he knew not where he should find another ten pounds to satisfy the insatiable Derrick.

They proceeded along the pavement together, passing Oliver, who was slowly parading the gig up and down the street. His sad face—unusually sad it looked—had a sort of expectancy on it as he turned his gaze from side to side, lest by some happy chance it might catch the form of Emma Paul. Emma might be going to marry another; but, all the same, Oliver could not drop her out of his heart.

They disclaimed all recollection of the letter at the post-office. Had it been for a private individual it might have been remembered, but Mr. Paul had too many letters to allow of that, unless something special called attention to any one of them. Whether the letter in question had reached them by the Islip bag, or whether it had not, they could not say; but they could positively affirm that, if it had, it had been sent out to Mr. Paul.

[177] In returning they overtook the postman on his round, with the afternoon delivery: a young, active man, who seemed to skim over the ground, and was honest as the day.

"Dale," said Lawyer Paul, "there has been a letter lost, addressed to me. I wonder whether you chanced to notice such a letter?" And he mentioned the details of the case.

"One day is like another to me in its round of duties, you see, sir," observed the man. "Sealed with a big red seal, you say, sir? Well, it might be, but that's nothing for me to go by; so many of your letters are sealed, sir."

The lawyer returned to his office with Mr. Preen, and entered his own room. Tom Chandler heard them and came swiftly through the door which opened from the clerks' department, a smile of satisfaction on his face.

"I remember all about the letters that were brought in on Wednesday week," said he. "I can recall the whole of the circumstances; they were rather unusual."

III.—MYSTERY

I

Thomas Chandler possessed a clear, retentive memory by nature, and he had done nothing to cloud it. After his master, Lawyer Paul—soon to be no longer his master, but his partner—had gone out with Mr. Preen to make inquiries at the post-office for the missing letter, he sat down to bring his memory into exercise.

Carrying his thoughts back to the Wednesday afternoon, some ten days ago, when the letter ought to have been delivered at Mr. Paul's office, and was not—at least, so far as could be traced at present—he had little difficulty in recalling its chief events, one remembered incident leading up to another.

Then he passed into the front room, and spoke for some minutes with Michael Hanborough, a steady little man of middle age, who had been with Mr. Paul over twenty years. There was one clerk under him, Tite Batley (full name Titus), and there had been young Richard MacEveril. The disappearance of the latter had caused the office to be busy just now, Michael Hanborough especially so. He was in the room alone when Mr. Chandler entered.

"You have not gone to tea yet, Mr. Hanborough!"

"No, sir. I wanted to finish this deed, first. Batley's gone to his." [179]

"Look here, Hanborough, I want to ask you a question or two. That deed's in no particular hurry, for I am sure Mr. Paul will not be ready to send it off to-day," continued Mr. Chandler. "There's going to be a fuss over that letter of Preen's, which appears to have been unaccountably lost. I have been carrying my thoughts back to the Wednesday afternoon when it ought to have been delivered here, and I want you to do the same. Try and recollect anything and everything you can, connected with that afternoon."

"But, Mr. Chandler, the letter could not have been delivered here; Mr. Paul says so," reasoned Michael Hanborough, turning from his desk while he spoke and leaning his elbow upon it.

His desk stood between the window and the door which opened from the passage; the window being at his right hand as he sat. Opposite, beside the other window, was Mr. Chandler's desk. A larger desk, used by MacEveril and young Batley, crossed the lower end of the room, facing the window; and near it was the narrow door that opened to Mr. Paul's room.

Thomas Chandler remained talking with Hanborough until he saw the lawyer and Mr. Preen return, when he joined them in the other room. They mentioned their failure at the post-office, and he then related to them what he had been able to recall.

Wednesday afternoon, the sixteenth of June, had been distinguished in Mr. Paul's office by a little breeze raised by Richard MacEveril. Suddenly looking up from his writing, he disturbed Mr. Chandler, who was busy at his desk, by saying he expected to have holiday on the morrow for the whole day. Hanborough was just then in Mr. Paul's room; Batley was out. Batley had been sent to execute a commission at a distance, and would not be back till evening.

"Oh, indeed!" responded Tom Chandler, laughing at MacEveril's modest request, so modestly put. "What else would you like, Dick?" [180]

Dick laughed too. "That will serve me for the present moment, Mr. Chandler," said he.

"Well, Dick, I'm sorry to deny you, but you can't have it. You have a conscience to ask it, young man, when you know the Worcester Sessions are close at hand, and we are so busy here we don't know which way to turn!"

"I mean to take it," said Dick.

"But I don't mean you to; understand that. See here, Dick: I won't be harder than I'm obliged; I should like to go to the pic-nic myself, though there's no chance of that for me. Come here in good time in the morning, get through as much work as you can, and I daresay we can let you off at one o'clock. There!"

This concession did not satisfy MacEveril. When Mr. Hanborough came in from the other room he found the young man exercising his saucy tongue upon Tom Chandler, calling him a "Martinet," a "Red Indian Freebooter," and other agreeable names, which he may have brought with him from Australia. Tom, ever sweet-tempered, took it all pleasantly, and bade him go on with his work.

That interlude passed. At half-past four o'clock MacEveril went out, as usual, to get his tea, leaving Chandler and Hanborough in the office, each writing at his own desk. Presently the former paused; looked fixedly at the mortgage-deed he was engaged upon, and then got up to carry it to the old clerk. As he was crossing the room the postman came in, put a small pile of letters into Mr. Chandler's hand, and went out again. Tom looked down at the letters but did not disturb them; he laid them down upon Mr. Hanborough's desk whilst he showed him the parchment.

“I don’t much like this one clause, Hanborough,” he said. “Just read it; it’s very short. Would it be binding on the other party?” [181]

They were both reading the clause, heads together, when Mr. Paul was heard speaking in haste. “Chandler! Tom Chandler! Come here directly”—and Tom turned and went at once.

“Is Hanborough there?” cried Mr. Paul.

“Yes, sir.”

“Tell him to come in also; no time to lose.”

Mr. Paul wanted them to witness his signature to a deed which had to go off by the evening post. That done, he detained them for a minute upon some other matter; after which, Hanborough left the room. Chandler turned to follow him.

“Bring the letters in as soon as they come,” said Mr. Paul. “There may be one from Burnaby.”

“Oh, they have come,” replied Tom; and he went into the other room and brought the letters to the lawyer.

It was this which Tom Chandler now related to his master and to Mr. Preen. By dint of exercising his own memory and referring to his day-book, Mr. Paul was enabled to say that the letters that past afternoon were four in number, and to state from whom they came. There was no letter amongst them from Mr. Preen; none at all from Duck Brook. So there it was: the letter seemed to have mysteriously vanished; either out of the post bag despatched by Mrs. Sym, or else after its arrival at Islip. The latter was of course the more probable; since, as Dame Sym had herself remarked, once a letter was shut up in the bag, there it must remain; it could not vanish from it.

But, assuming this to be the case, how and where had it vanished? From the Islip post-office? Or from the postman’s hands when carrying it out for delivery? Or from Mr. Paul’s front room?

They were yet speaking when Dale the postman walked in. He came to say that he had been exercising his mind upon the afternoons of the past week and could now distinguish Wednesday from the others. He recalled it by remembering that it was the afternoon of the accident in the street, when a tax-cart was overturned and the driver had broken his arm; and he could positively say that he had that afternoon delivered the letters to Mr. Chandler himself. [182]

“Yes, yes, we remember all that ourselves, Dale,” returned Mr. Paul, somewhat testily. “The thing we want you to remember is, whether you observed amidst the letters one with a large red seal.”

Dale shook his head. “No, sir, I did not. The letters lay one upon another, address upwards, and I took no particular notice of them. There were four or five of them, I should think.”

“Four,” corrected the lawyer. “Well, that’s all, Dale, for the present. The letter is lost, and we must consider what to do in the matter.”

Yes, it was all very well to say that to Dale, but what *could* they do? How set about it? To begin with, Preen did not know the number of the note, but supposed he might get it from Mr. Todhetley. He stayed so long in discussion with the lawyer, that his son, waiting in the gig outside, grew tired and the horse impatient.

Oliver was almost ready to die of weariness, when an acquaintance of his came out of the Bell. Fred Scott; a dashing young fellow, who had more money than brains.

“Get up,” said Oliver. And Scott got into the gig.

They were driving slowly about and talking fast, when two young ladies came into view at the end of the street. Oliver threw the reins to his friend, got out in a trice and met them. No need to say that one of them was Emma Paul.

“I beg your pardon,” said Oliver to her, lifting his hat from his suddenly flushed face, as he shook hands with both of them. “I left two books at your house yesterday: did you get them? The servant said you were out.” [183]

“Oh, yes, I had them; and I thank you very much,” answered Emma, with a charming smile: whilst Mary MacEveril went away to feast her eyes at the milliner’s window. “I have begun one of them already.”

“Jane said you would like to read them; and so—I—I left them,” returned Oliver, with the hesitating shyness of true love.

“It is very kind of you, Sir. Oliver, to bring them over, and I am sorry I was not at home,” said Emma. “When are you and Jane coming to see me?”

With her dimpled face all smiles, her blue eyes beaming upon him, her ready handshake still tingling in his pulses, her cordial tones telling of pleasure, how could that fascinated young man do otherwise than believe in her? The world might talk of her love for Tom Chandler: he did not and would not believe it held a grain of truth. Oh, if he could but know that she loved *him*! Mary MacEveril turned.

“Emma, are you not coming? We have that silk to match, you know.”

With another handshake, another sweet smile, she went away with Mary. Oliver said adieu, his heart on his lips. All his weariness was gone, lost in a flood of sunshine.

Mr. Preen was seen, coming along. Scott got out of the gig, and Oliver got into it. Preen took his seat and the reins, and drove off.

Mr. Paul went home to dinner at the usual hour that evening, but the clerks remained beyond the time for closing. Work had been hindered, and had to be done. Batley was the first to leave; the other two lingered behind, talking of the loss.

"It is the most surprising thing that has happened for a long while," remarked Hanborough. He had locked his desk and had his hat and gloves at his elbow. "That letter has been stolen, Mr. Chandler; it has not been accidentally lost." [184]

"Ay," assented Tom. "Stolen—I fear—from here. From this very room that you and I are standing in, Hanborough."

"My suspicions, sir, were directed to the Islip post-office."

"I wish mine were," said Tom. "I don't think—think, mind, for we cannot be sure—that the post-office is the right quarter to look to. You see the letters were left here on your desk, while we were occupied with Mr. Paul in his room. About two minutes, I suppose, we stayed with him; perhaps three. Did anyone come in during that time, Hanborough, and take the letter?"

Mr. Hanborough drew off his spectacles, which he wore out of doors as well as in; he was sure to take them off when anything disturbed him.

"But who would do such a thing?" he asked.

Tom laughed a little. "You wouldn't, old friend, and I wouldn't; but there may be people in the neighbourhood who would."

Doubts were presenting themselves to Michael Hanborough's mind: he did not "see" this, as the saying runs. "Why should anyone single out that one particular letter to take, and leave the rest?" he resumed.

"That point puzzles me," remarked Tom. "If the letter was singled out, as you put it, from the rest, I should say the thief must have known it contained money: and who could, or did, know that? I wish I had carried the letters in with me when Mr. Paul called to me!"

"If the letters had been left alone for a whole day in our office, I should never have supposed they were not safe," said the clerk, impulsively. "But, now that my attention has been drawn to this, I must mention something, Mr. Chandler."

"Yes. Go on." [185]

"When the master called me in after you, I followed you in through that door," he began, pointing to the door of communication between the two rooms. "But I left it by the other, the passage door, chancing to be nearest to it at the moment. As I went out, I saw the green baize door swinging, and supposed that someone had come in; MacEveril, perhaps, from his tea. But he had not done so. I found neither him nor anyone else; the room here was vacant as when I left it."

The green baize door stood in the passage, between the street door, always open in the daytime, and the door that led into the front office.

"Seeing no one here, I concluded I was mistaken; and I have never thought of it from that hour to this," continued the clerk. "No, not even when it came out that a letter had been lost with a bank-note in it."

Tom nodded his head several times, as much as to say that was when the thief must have come in. "And now, Hanborough, I'll tell you something in turn," he went on. "Dale put the letters into my hand that afternoon, as you know; and I laid them on your desk here while showing you that clause in the mortgage deed. Later, when I took up the letters to carry them to Mr. Paul, an idea struck me that the packet felt thinner. It did indeed. I of course supposed it to be only fancy, and let it slip from my mind. I have never thought of it since—as you say by the green door—until this afternoon."

Michael Hanborough, who had put his spectacles on again, turned them upon his young master, and dropped his voice to a whisper.

"Who is it that—that we may suspect, sir?"

"Say yourself, Hanborough."

"I'm afraid to say. Is it—MacEveril?"

"It looks like it," replied Tom, in the same low tone. "But while there are reasons for suspecting him, there are also reasons against it," he added, after a pause. "MacEveril was in debt, petty little odds and ends of things which he owes about the place and elsewhere; that's one reason why money would be useful to him. Then his running away looks suspicious; and another reason is that there's positively no one else to suspect. All that seems to tell against him; but on the other hand, MacEveril, though random and heedless, is a gentleman and has a gentleman's instincts, and I do *not* think he would be guilty of such a thing." [186]

“Well, and I can’t think it, either,” said Michael Hanborough; “despite his faults and his saucy tongue, I liked him. He did not come in again that afternoon till half-past five, I remember. I told him he was late; he answered, laughing, that he had dropped asleep over his tea—though I didn’t believe a word of it.”

“If MacEveril really took the letter, how had he ascertained that it contained money?” mused Tom Chandler. “Hanborough, at present I think this suspicion had better lie entirely between ourselves.”

“Yes, Mr. Chandler, and so do I. Perhaps a few days may bring forth something to confirm or dispel it.”

II

Preen was a great deal too anxious and restless to let the following day pass over quietly; and on that Sunday afternoon when we were all sitting in the garden at Crabb Cot, under the scent and shade of the large syringa trees, he walked in. His little dark face looked darker than ever, the scowl of pain on his brow deeper.

“No, I can’t take anything,” he said, in answer to the Squire’s hospitable offers of having wine, or ale, or lemonade brought out. “Thirsty? Yes, I am thirsty, Squire, but it is with worry, not with the walk. Wine and lemonade won’t relieve that.” [187]

And, sitting down to face us, in a swinging American chair, which Tod had brought out for his own benefit, Gervais Preen surprised us with the history of his mysterious loss, and inquired whether the Squire could give him the number of the note.

“Yes, I can,” replied the Squire; “my name is on the note also; you made me write it, you know. How on earth has it got lost?”

“It is just one of those things there’s no accounting for,” said Preen, bending forward in his earnestness. “The letter left Duck Brook in safety; I posted it myself, and Mrs. Sym took notice of it when she shut it up in the bag. That is as far as it can be traced. The Islip post-office, though not remembering it in particular, have no doubt it reached them, as it could not have been lost from the bag, or that they sent it out for delivery to Mr. Paul by Dale, who is cautious and trustworthy. Paul declares it never reached him; and of course *he* is trustworthy. Dale says, and it is a fact, that he delivered the letters that afternoon into Mr. Chandler’s own hands. One cannot see where to look for a weak point, you perceive, Todhetley.”

The Squire was rubbing his face, the account having put it into a white heat. “Bless my heart!” cried he. “It reminds me of that five-pound note of mine which was changed in the post for a stolen one! You remember *that*, Johnny.”

“Yes, sir, that I do.”

“Wednesday, the sixteenth, was the day it ought to have reached old Paul!” exclaimed Tod, who was balancing himself on the branch of a tree. “Why, that was the day before the pic-nic!”

“And what if it was?” retorted Preen, enraged that everybody should bring up that pic-nic in conjunction with his loss. “The pic-nic had nothing to do with my bank-note and letter.” [188]

“Clearly not,” agreed Tod, laughing at his ire.

“I should advertise, Preen,” said the Squire, “and I should call in the detectives. They——”

“I don’t like detectives,” growled Preen, interrupting him, “and I think advertising might do more harm than good. I must get my money back somehow; I can’t afford to lose it. But as to those detectives—— Mercy upon us!”

In the ardour of declamation, Mr. Preen had bent a little too forward. The chair backed from under him, and he came down upon the grass, hands and knees. Tod choked with laughter, and dashed off to get rid of it. The man gathered himself up.

“Nasty tilting things, those chairs are!” he exclaimed. “Please don’t trouble, ma’am,” for Mrs. Todhetley had sprung forward; “there’s no harm done. And if you don’t mind giving me the number of the note to-day, Squire, I shall be much obliged.”

He declined to stay for tea, saying he wanted to get back home. When he and the Squire went indoors, we talked of the loss; Mrs. Todhetley thought it strangely unaccountable.

As the days went on, and the bank-note did not turn up, Mr. Preen fell into the depths of gloom. He had lost no time in proceeding to the Old Bank, at Worcester—from whence Mr. Todhetley had drawn the note, in conjunction with other notes—recounting to its principals the history of its loss, and giving in its number, together with the information that Mr. Todhetley’s name was written on it. The bank promised to make inquiries of other banks, and to detain the note should it be paid in.

“As if *that* were likely!” groaned Preen. “A rogue filching a note would not go and pay it into the place it came from.”

Thomas Chandler was gazetted the partner of Mr. Paul, the firm to be known henceforth as Paul [189]

and Chandler. In the first private conference that the young man held with his partner, he imparted to him the suspicions which he and Hanborough held of Dick MacEveril. For as that erratic gentleman continued to absent himself, and the time was going on without bringing a shadow of doubt upon anyone else, the new partner felt that in duty he must speak to his chief and elder. Old Paul was overwhelmed.

“What a dreadful thing!” he exclaimed testily. “And why couldn’t you or Hanborough mention this before?”

“Well,” said Tom, “for one thing I was always expecting something might crop up to decide it one way or another; and, to tell the truth, sir, I cannot bring myself to believe that MacEveril did it.”

“He is a villainous young dog for impudence, but—to do such a thing as that? No, I can hardly think it, either,” concluded the lawyer.

That same evening, after his dinner, Mr. Paul betook himself to Oak Mansion, to an interview with his old friend, Captain MacEveril. Not to accuse that scapegrace nephew of the Captain’s to his face, but to gather a hint or two about him, if any might be gathered.

The very first mention of Dick’s name set the old sailor off. His right foot was showing symptoms of gout just then; between that and Dick he had no temper at all. Calming down presently, he called his man to produce tobacco and grog. They sat at the open window, smoking a pipe apiece, the glasses on a stand between them, and the lame foot upon a stool. For the expost-captain made a boast that he did not give in to that enemy of his any more than he had ever given in to an enemy at a sea-fight. The welcome evening breeze blew in upon them through the open bow window, with the sweet-scent of the July roses; and the sky was gorgeous with the red sunset.

“Where is Dick, you ask,” exploded the Captain. “How should I know where he is? Hang him! [190] When he has taken his fill of London shows with that Australian companion of his, he’ll make his way back again here, I reckon. Write? Not he. He knows he’d get a letter back from me, Paul, if he did.”

Leading up to it by degrees, talking of this and that, and especially of the mysterious loss of Preen’s note, the lawyer spoke doubtingly of whether it could have been lost out of his own office, and, if so, who had taken it. “That young rascal would not do such a thing, you know, MacEveril,” he carelessly remarked.

“What, Dick? No, no, he’d not do that,” said the Captain, promptly. “Though I’ve known young fellows venture upon queer things when they were hard up for money. Dick’s honest to the backbone. Had he wanted money to travel with, he’d have wormed it out of my wife by teasing, but he wouldn’t steal it.”

“About that time, a day or so before it, he drew out the linings of his pockets as he sat at his desk, and laughingly assured Hanborough, that he had not a coin of ready money in the world,” remarked Mr. Paul.

“Like enough,” assented the Captain. “Coin never stays in *his* pockets.”

“I wonder where he found the money to travel with?”

“Pledged his watch and chain maybe,” returned the Captain with composure. “He would be quite equal to *that*. Stockleigh, the fellow he is with in London, had brought home heaps of gold, ’twas said; he no doubt stands treat for Dick.”

John Paul did not, could not, say anything more definite. He thought of nothing else as he walked home; now saying to himself that Dick had stolen the money, now veering over to the Captain’s opinion that Dick was incapable of doing so. The uncertainty bothered him, and he hated to be [191] bothered.

The man to whom the money was owing, Robert Derrick, was becoming very troublesome. Hardly a day passed but he marched into Mr. Paul’s office, to press for payment, threatening to take steps if he did not get it shortly. The morning following the lawyer’s visit to Captain MacEveril, he went in again, vowing it was for the last time, for that he should cite Mr. Preen before the County Court.

“And mark you this,” he added to Hanborough, with whom the colloquy was taking place, “some past matters will come out that Preen wants kept in. He’ll wish he had paid me, then.”

Now, old Paul overheard this, for the door was partly open. Rugged in look, and in manner too when he chose to be, he was not rugged at heart. He was saying to himself that if this money had really been lost out of his office, stolen possibly by one of his clerks, he might replace it from his own pocket, to ward off further damage to Preen. Preen had not at present a second ten-pound note to give, could not find one anyway; Preen wished he could. Ten pounds would not affect the lawyer’s pocket at all: and his resolution was taken. Ringing his bell, which was answered by Batley, he bade him show Derrick to his room.

The man came in with a subdued face. He supposed he had been overheard, and he did not care to offend Mr. Paul.

“I cannot have you coming here to disturb my clerks, Derrick,” said the lawyer, with authority. “If you write out a receipt, I will pay you.”

“And sure enough that’s all I want, sir,” returned Derrick, who was Irish. “But I can’t let the thing go on longer—and it’s Preen I’d like to disturb, Lawyer Paul, not you.”

“Sit down yonder and write the receipt,” said the lawyer, shortly. “You know how to word it.”

So Derrick wrote the receipt and went off with the ten pounds. And Gervais Preen said a few words of real thanks to Mr. Paul in a low tone, when he heard of it. [192]

On Tuesday morning, the thirteenth of July, exactly four weeks to the day since the bank-note left Mr. Preen’s hands, he had news of it. The Old Bank at Worcester wrote to him to say that the missing note had been paid in the previous day, Monday, by a well-known firm of linen-drapers in High Street. Upon which the bank made inquiry of this firm as to whence they received the note, and the answer, readily given, was that they had had it from a neighbour opposite—the silversmith. The silversmith, questioned in his turn, replied with equal readiness that it had been given him in payment of a purchase by young Mr. Todhetley.

Preen, hardly believing his eyes, went off with all speed to Islip, and laid the letter before Lawyer Paul.

“What does it all mean?” he asked. “How can young Todhetley have had the note in his possession? I am going on to Crabb Cot to show the Squire the letter.”

“Stop, stop,” said the far-seeing lawyer, “it won’t do to take this letter to Todhetley. Let us consider, first of all, how we stand. There must be some mistake. The bank and the silversmith have muddled matters between them; they may have put young Todhetley’s name into it through seeing his father’s on the bank-note. I will write at once to Worcester and get it privately inquired into. You had better leave it altogether in my hands, Preen, for the present.” A proposal Preen was glad to agree to.

Lawyer Paul wrote to another lawyer in Worcester with whom he was on friendly terms, Mr. Corles; stating the particulars of the case. That gentleman lost no time in the matter; he made the inquiries himself, and speedily wrote back to Islip.

There had been no mistake, as Mr. Paul had surmised. The linen-drapers, a long-established and respectable firm, as Paul knew, had paid the note into the Old Bank, with other monies, in the ordinary course of business; and the firm repeated to Mr. Corles that they had received it from their neighbour, the silversmith. [193]

The silversmith himself was from home at this time; he was staying at Malvern for his health, going to Worcester on the market days only, Saturdays and Wednesdays, when the shop expected to be busy. He had one shopman only, a Mr. Stephenson, who took charge in his master’s absence. Stephenson assured Mr. Corles that he had most positively taken the note from Squire Todhetley’s son. Young Mr. Todhetley had gone into the shop, purchased some trifling article, giving the note in payment, and received the change in gold. Upon referring to his day-book, Stephenson found that the purchase was made and the note paid to him during the morning of Thursday, the seventeenth of June.

When this communication from Mr. Corles reached Islip, it very much astonished old Paul. “Absurd!” he exclaimed, flinging it upon his table when he had read it; then he took it up and read it again.

“Here, Chandler,” said he, calling his new partner to him, “what do you make of this?”

Tom Chandler read it twice over in his turn. “If Joseph Todhetley did change the note,” he observed, “he must have done it as a practical joke, and be keeping up the joke.”

“It is hardly likely,” returned Mr. Paul. “If he has, he will have a bad quarter of an hour when the Squire hears of it.”

On this same morning, Thursday, we were preparing for Worcester; the Squire was going to drive us in—that is, myself and Tod. The phaeton was actually being brought round to the gate and we were getting our hats, when Tom Chandler walked in, saying he had come upon a little matter of business.

“No time to attend to it now, Tom,” said the Squire, all in a bustle; “just starting for Worcester. You look hot.” [194]

“I am hot, for I came along at a trotting pace,” said Tom; “the matter I have come upon makes me hot also. Mr. Todhetley, I must explain it, short as your time may be; it is very important, and—and peculiar. Mr. Paul charged me to say that he would have come himself, but he is obliged to stay at home to keep an appointment.”

“Sit down, then,” said the Squire, “and make it as brief as you can. Johnny, lad, tell Giles to drive the horses slowly about.”

When I got back, after telling Giles, Tom Chandler had two letters in his hand; and was apologising to the Squire and to Tod for what he was obliged to enter upon. Then he added, in a few words, that the lost bank-note had come to light; it had been changed at Worcester, at the silversmith’s in High Street, by, it was asserted, young Mr. Todhetley.

“Why, what d’ye mean?” cried the Squire sharply.

To explain what he meant, Tom Chandler read aloud the two letters he held; the short one, which had been first addressed to Mr. Preen by the Old Bank, and then the longer one written by Mr. Corles.

“Edward Corles must be a fool to write that!” exclaimed the Squire in his hot fashion.

“Well, he is not that, you know,” said Tom Chandler. “The question is, Squire, what the grounds can be upon which they so positively state it. According to their assertion, young Mr. Todhetley changed the note at the silversmith’s on the morning of Thursday, the seventeenth of June.”

“Young Mr. Todhetley” in a general way was just as hot as his father, apt to fly out for nothing. I expected to see him do so now. Instead of which, he had a broad smile on his face, evidently regarding the accusation as a jest. He had perched himself on the arm of the sofa, and sat there [195] grinning.

This struck Tom Chandler. “Did you do it for a joke?” he asked promptly.

“Do what?” rejoined Tod.

“Change the note.”

“Not I.”

“The only conclusion Mr. Paul and I could come to was, that—if you had done it—you did it to play a practical joke upon Preen, and were keeping it up still.”

The Squire struck his hand in anger upon the table by which he sat.

“What is the meaning of this, Joe? A practical joke? Did you do the thing, or didn’t you? Speak out seriously. Don’t sit there, grinning like a Chinese image.”

“Why of course I did not do it, father. How should Preen’s bank-note get into my hands? Perhaps Johnny there got it and did it. He is sometimes honoured by being put down as your son, you know.”

He was jesting still. The Squire was not in a mood for jesting; Tom Chandler either. A thought struck me.

“Did you say the note was changed on Thursday, the seventeenth of June?” I asked him.

“They say so,” answered Tom Chandler.

“Then that was the day of the picnic at Mrs. Cramp’s. Neither I nor Tod left the house at all until we went there.”

“Why bless me, so it was! the seventeenth,” cried the Squire. “I can prove that they were at home till four o’clock: the Beeles were spending the day here from Pigeon Green. Now, Chandler, how has this false report arisen?”

“I am as much at sea as you can be, sir,” said Tom Chandler. “Neither I nor Paul can, or do, believe it—or understand why the other people stick to it so positively. You are going into [196] Worcester, Squire; make your own inquiries.”

“That I will,” said the Squire. “You had better drive in with us, Chandler, if you can. Giles can stay at home.”

It was thus decided, and we started for Worcester, Chandler sitting beside the Squire. And the way the Squire touched up Bob and Blister, and the pace we flew along at, was a sight for the road to see.

III

Thursday morning, the seventeenth of June—for we have to go back to that day. High Street was basking in the rays of the hot sun; foot passengers, meeting each other on the scorching pavement, lifted their hats for a moment’s air, and said what a day it was going to be. The clean, bright shops faced each other from opposite sides. None of their wares looked more attractive than those displayed in the two windows of the silversmith.

Mr. Stephenson—a trustworthy, civil little man of thirty, with a plain face and sandy hair that stood upright on his head—was keeping guard over his master’s goods, some of them being very valuable. The shop was a long one and he was far down in it, behind the left-hand counter. Before him lay a tray of small articles of jewellery, some of which he was touching up with a piece of wash-leather. He did not expect to be busy that day; the previous day, Wednesday, had been a busy one, so many country people came into town for the market.

While thus engaged a gentleman, young, good looking, and well dressed, entered the shop. Mr. Stephenson went forward.

“I have called for Mrs. Todhetley’s brooch,” said the stranger. “Is it ready?”

“What brooch, sir?” returned Stephenson. [197]

“The one she left with you to be mended.”

The shopman felt a little puzzled. He said he did not remember that any brooch had been left by that lady to be mended.

“Mrs. Todhetley of Crabb Cot,” explained the applicant, perhaps thinking the man was at fault that way.

“Oh, yes, sir, I know who you mean; I know Mrs. Todhetley. But she has not left any brooch here.”

“Yes, she has; she left it to be mended. I was to call to-day and ask for it.”

Stephenson turned to reach the book in which articles left to be mended were entered, with their owners’ names. Perhaps his master might have taken in the brooch and omitted to tell him. But no such entry was recorded in it.

“I am afraid it is a mistake, sir,” he said. “Had Mrs. Todhetley left a brooch, or anything else, for repair, it would be entered here. She may have taken it to some other shop.”

“No, no; it is yours I was to call at. She bought it here a few months ago,” added the young man. “She came in to ask you about the polishing-up of an old silver cake-basket, and you showed her the brooches, some you had just had down from London, and she bought one of them and gave four guineas for it.”

Stephenson remembered the transaction perfectly. He had stood by while his principal showed and sold the brooch to Mrs. Todhetley. Four only of these brooches had been sent to them on approval by their London agent, they were something quite new. Mrs. Todhetley admired them greatly; said she wanted to make a wedding present to a young lady about to be married, but had not meant to give as much as four guineas. However, the beauty of the brooch tempted her; she bought it, and took it home.

Stephenson’s silence, while he was recalling this to his memory, caused the gentleman to think [198] his word was doubted, and he entered into further particulars.

“It was last March, I think,” he said. “The brooch is a rather large one; a white cornelian stone, or something of that sort, with a raised spray of flowers upon it, pink and gold; the whole surrounded by a border of gold filagree work. I never saw a nicer brooch.”

“Yes, yes, sir, it was just as you say; I recollect it all quite well. Mrs. Todhetley bought it to give away as a wedding present.”

“And the wedding never came off,” said the young man, with ease. “Before she had time to despatch the brooch, news came to her of the rupture.—So she had to keep it herself: and the best thing too, the Squire said. Well, it is that brooch I have come for.”

“But I assure you it has not been left with us, Mr. Todhetley,” said Stephenson, presuming he was speaking to the Squire’s son.

“The little pink flower got broken off last week as Mrs. Todhetley was undoing her shawl; she brought it in at once to be mended,” persisted the young man.

“But not here indeed, sir,” reiterated Stephenson. “I’m sorry to hear it is broken.”

“She wouldn’t take it anywhere but to the place it was bought at, would she? I’m sure it was here I had to come for it.”

Stephenson felt all abroad. He did not think it likely the brooch would be taken elsewhere, and began to wonder whether his master had taken it in, and forgotten all about it. Opening a shallow drawer or two in the counter, in one of which articles for repair were put, in the other the repaired articles when finished, he searched both, but could not see the brooch. This took him some little time, as most of the things were in paper and he had to undo it.

Meanwhile the applicant amused himself by looking at the articles displayed under the glass [199] frame on the counter. He seemed to be rather struck with some very pretty pencils.

“Are those pencils gold?” he inquired of Stephenson, when the latter came forward with the news that the brooch was certainly not in the shop.

“No, sir; they are silver gilt.”

Lifting the glass lid, Stephenson took out the tray on which the pencils and other things lay, and put it right under the young man’s nose, in the persuasive manner peculiar to shopmen. The pencils were chased richly enough for gold, and had each a handsome stone at the end, which might or might not be real.

“What is the price?”

“Twelve shillings each, sir. We bought them a bargain; from a bankrupt’s stock in fact; and can afford to sell them as such.”

“I should like to take this one, I think,” said the young man, choosing out one with a pink topaz. “Wait a bit, though: I must see if I’ve enough change to pay for it.”

“Oh, sir, don’t trouble about that; we will put it down to you.”

“No, no, that won’t do. One, two, four, six. Six shillings; all I have in the world,” he added laughing, as he counted the coin in his porte-monnaie, “and that I want. You can change me a ten-pound note, perhaps?”

“Yes, sir, if you wish it.”

The purchaser extracted the note from a secret pocket of his porte-monnaie, and handed it to the shopman.

“The Squire’s name is on it,” he remarked.

Which caused Stephenson to look at the back. Sure enough, there it was—“J. Todhetley,” in the Squire’s own handwriting.

“Give me gold, if you can.”

Stephenson handed over nine pounds in gold and eight shillings in silver. He then wrapped the [200]
pencil in soft white paper, and handed over that.

Wishing the civil shopman good morning, the young man left. He stood outside the door for a minute, looking about him, and then walked briskly up the street. While Stephenson locked up the ten-pound note in the cash-box.

There it lay, snug and safe, for two or three weeks. One day Stephenson, finding he had not enough change for a customer who came in to pay a bill, ran over to the draper’s opposite and got change for it there. These were the particulars which Stephenson had furnished, and furnished readily, upon inquiries being made of him.

Squire Todhetley drove like the wind, and we soon reached Worcester, alighting as usual at the Star-and-Garter. The Squire’s commotion had been growing all the way; that goes without telling. He wanted to take the bank first; Tom Chandler recommended that it should be the silversmith’s.

“The bank comes first in the way,” snapped the Squire.

“I know that, sir; but we can soon come back to it when we have heard what the others say.”

Yet I think he would have gone into the bank head-foremost, as we passed it, but chance had it that we met Corles, the lawyer, at the top of Broad Street. Turning quickly into High Street, on his way from his office, he came right upon us. The Squire pinned him by the button-hole.

“The very man I wanted to see,” cried he. “And now you’ll be good enough to tell me, Edward Corles, what you meant by that rigmarole you wrote to Paul yesterday about my son.”

“I cannot tell what was meant, Squire, any more than you can; I only wrote in accordance with my information,” said Mr. Corles, shaking hands with the rest of us. “You have done well to come over; and I will accompany you now, if you like, to see Stephenson.”

The Squire put his arm within the younger man’s, and marched on down High Street to the [201]
silversmith’s, never so much as looking at the bank door. Stephenson was in the shop alone: such a lot of us, it seemed, turning in!

The Squire, hot and impulsive, attacked him as he had attacked Edward Corles. What did Stephenson mean by making that infamous accusation about his son?

It took Stephenson aback, as might be seen; his eyes opened and his hair stood on end straighter than ever. Looking from one to the other of us, he last looked at Mr. Corles, as if seeking an explanation.

“The best thing you can do, to begin with, Stephenson, is to relate to Squire Todhetley and these gentlemen the particulars you gave me yesterday morning,” said Mr. Corles. “I mean when you took the bank-note, a month ago.”

Without more ado, Stephenson quietly followed the advice; he seemed of as calm a temperament as the Squire was the contrary, and recited the particulars just given. The Squire’s will was good to interrupt at every second word, but Mr. Corles begged him to listen to the end.

“Oh, that’s all very well,” cried he at last, “all true, I dare say; what I want to know is, how you came to pitch upon that customer as being my son.”

“But he was your son, sir. He was young Mr. Todhetley.”

“Nonsense!” retorted the Squire. “Was this he?” drawing Tod forward.

“No, sir; certainly not.”

“Well, this is my only son; except a little who is not yet much more than out of his petticoats. Come! what do you say now?”

Stephenson looked again at one and the other of us. His pale face took a sort of thoughtful haze as if he had passed into a fog.

“It must have been young Mr. Todhetley,” spoke he; “everything seemed to uphold the fact.”

“Now don’t you turn obstinate and uphold what is *not* the fact,” reproved the Squire. “When I tell you this is my only son, except the child, how dare you dispute my word?” [202]

It should be stated that Stephenson had been with the silversmith since the beginning of the year only, and had come from Birmingham. He knew Mr. and Mrs. Todhetley by sight, from their coming sometimes to the shop, but he had never yet seen Tod or me.

“I don’t suppose you want Squire Todhetley’s word confirmed, Stephenson, but I can do so if necessary,” said Mr. Corles. “This is his only grown-up son.”

“No, no, sir, of course I don’t,” said Stephenson. “This gentleman,” looking at Tod, “does not bear any resemblance to the one who changed the note.”

“What was he like?” said Tom Chandler, speaking for the first time; and he asked it because his thoughts were full.

“He was fair, sir,” replied Stephenson.

“What height?”

“About middle height. A young, slender man.”

“Well dressed? Spoke like a gentleman?”

“Oh, quite like a gentleman, and very well dressed indeed.”

“Just as MacEveril was that morning, on the strength of getting to the picnic,” ran through Tom Chandler’s thoughts. “Did he come off here first, I wonder?”

“He seemed to know all about you, sir, just as though he lived at your house,” said Stephenson to the Squire; “and Mrs. Todhetley sent him for her brooch that day. Perhaps you may know, sir, who it was she sent?”

“Sent! why, nobody,” spluttered the Squire. “It must have been a planned thing. The brooch is not broken.”

“He said the little pink flower had got broken off, and that Mrs. Todhetley did it with her shawl,” persisted Stephenson, unable to stare away his perplexity. And I think we were all feeling perplexed too. [203]

“He knew what the brooch cost, and that it was bought for a wedding present, and that Mrs. Todhetley kept the brooch for herself because the wedding did not come off,” went on Stephenson. “How could I suppose, sir, it was anybody but your own son? Why once I called him ‘Mr. Todhetley;’ I remember it quite well; and he did not tell me I was mistaken. Rely upon it, if you’ll excuse me for saying so, Squire Todhetley, that it is some young gentleman who is intimate at your house and familiar with all its ways.”

“Hang him for a young rogue!” retorted the Squire.

“And your own name was on the note, sir, which he bade me notice, and all! And—and I don’t see how it was possible to *help* falling into the mistake that he came from you,” concluded Stephenson, with a slightly injured accent.

Upon which the Squire, having had time to take in the bearings of the matter, veered round altogether to the same opinion, and said so, and shook hands with Stephenson when we departed.

Tom Chandler let us go on, remaining behind for a minute or two. He wanted to put quietly a few questions about the appearance of the young man who had changed the note. He also examined the silver-gilt pencils, finally buying one which was precisely similar, stone and all, to the one which had been sold that other morning.

Stephenson answered the questions to the best of his ability and recollection. And Tom Chandler found that while on some points the description would have served very well for that of Richard MacEveril, on other points it did not seem to fit in with it at all.

A TRAGEDY [204]

IV.—OLIVER

I

Dinner was over. Emma Paul had gone out to stroll in the shady garden and wait for the evening

breeze that would soon come on, and was so delightful after the heat of the day. Her father remained at the table. He was slowly sipping at his one glass of port wine, which he took in a large claret glass, when the door opened and Thomas Chandler entered.

“Oh,” said Mr. Paul. “So you *are* back, are you, young man!”

“I went on to Worcester, sir,” explained Tom; who though he was now made Mr. Paul’s partner, could not get rid all at once of the old mode of addressing him. Managing clerks in these days, who are qualified solicitors, do not condescend to say “Sir” to their chief, no matter though he be their elder by half a life-time; but they did in the days gone by.

“When I got to Crabb Cot this morning, sir, Mr. Todhetley was on the point of starting for Worcester in the phaeton with his son and Johnny Ludlow,” went on Tom. “After listening to the news I took him, he naturally wished me to go also, and I did so. He was in a fine way about it.”

“But you need not have stayed at Worcester all day.” [205]

“Well, being there, I thought—after I had conferred with Corles at his office upon this other matter—I should do well to go on to Oddingley and see William Smith about that troublesome business of his; so I hired a gig and went there; and I’ve just got back by train, walking from Crabb,” answered Tom Chandler.

“Had any dinner?”

“Oh, yes, thank you; and some tea also at Shrub Hill station, while waiting for the train: this weather makes one thirsty. No, thank you, sir,” as Mr. Paul pushed the decanter towards him; “wine would only make me still more thirsty than I am.”

“I never saw you looking so hot,” remarked the old lawyer.

Tom laughed, and rubbed his face. The walk from Crabb was no light one: and, of course, with Miss Emma at the end of it, he had come at a steaming pace.

“Well, and what did you and Todhetley make of the matter?”

It was the day, as may readily be understood, when we had gone to Worcester to have it out at the silversmith’s. Tom Chandler recounted all that passed, and repeated the description given to himself by Stephenson of the fellow who had changed the bank-note. Mr. Paul received it with an impatient and not at all orthodox word, meant for Richard MacEveril.

“But I cannot feel sure, no, nor half sure, that it was MacEveril,” said Tom Chandler.

“What have your feelings got to do with it?” asked old Paul, in his crusty way. “It seems to me, the description you give would be his very picture.”

“Stephenson says he had blue eyes. Now Dick’s are brown.”

“Eyes be sugared,” retorted the lawyer. “As if any man could swear to a chance customer’s eyes after seeing them for just a minute or two! It was Dick MacEveril; he caught up the letter as it lay on Hanborough’s desk in the office and decamped with it; and went off the next day to Worcester to get the note changed, as bold as though he had been Dick Turpin!” [206]

Still Tom was not convinced. He took out the pencil he had bought and showed it to Mr. Paul.

“Ay,” said the old gentleman, “it’s a pretty thing, and perhaps he may get traced by it. Do you forget, Mr. Thomas, that the young rascal absented himself all that day from the office on pretext of going to the picnic at Mrs. Cramp’s, and that, as you told me, he never made his appearance at the picnic until late in the afternoon?”

“I know,” assented Tom. “He said he had been to the pigeon match.”

“If he said he had been to the moon, I suppose you’d believe it. Don’t tell me! It was Dick MacEveril who stole the note; every attendant circumstance helps to prove it. There: we’ll say no more about the matter, and you can be off to the garden if you want to; I know you are on thorns for it.”

From that day the matter dropped into oblivion, and nothing was allowed to transpire connecting MacEveril with the theft. Mr. Paul enjoined silence, out of regard for his old friend the captain, on Tom Chandler and Mr. Hanborough, the only two, besides himself, who suspected Dick. Some letters arrived at Islip about this time from Paris, written by Dick: one to Captain MacEveril, another to Mr. Paul, a third to his cousin Mary. He coolly said he was gone to Paris for a few weeks with Jim Stockleigh, and they were both enjoying themselves amazingly.

So, the ball of gossip not being kept up, the mysterious loss of the letter containing the bank-note was soon forgotten. Mr. Paul was too vexed to speak of it; it seemed a slur on his office; and he shielded Dick’s good name for his uncle’s sake; whilst Preen was silent because he did not wish the *debt* talked about. [207]

We left Crabb Cot for Dyke Manor, carrying our wonder with us. The next singular point to us was, how the changer of the note could have been so well acquainted with the circumstances attending the buying of the brooch. Mrs. Todhetley would talk of it by the hour together, suggesting now this person and now that; but never seeming to hit upon a likely one.

July passed away, August also, and September came in. On the Thursday in the first week of the latter month, Emma Paul was to become Emma Chandler.

All that while, through all those months and weeks, poor Oliver Preen had been having a bad time of it. No longer able to buoy himself up with the delusive belief that Emma's engagement to Chandler was nothing but a myth, he had to accept it, and all the torment it brought him. He had grown pale and thin; nervous also; his lips would turn white if anyone spoke to him abruptly, his hot hand trembled when in another's grasp. Jane thought he must be suffering from some inward fever; she did not know much about her brother's love for Emma, or dream that it could be so serious.

"I'm sure I wish their wedding was over and done with; Oliver might come to his proper senses then," Jane told herself. "He is very silly. *I* don't see much in Emma Paul."

September, I say, came in. It was somewhat singular that we should again be for just that one first week of it at Crabb Cot. Sir Robert Tenby had invited the Squire to take a few days' shooting with him, and included Tod in the invitation—to his wild delight. So Mr. and Mrs. Todhetley went from Dyke Manor to Crabb Cot for the week, and we accompanied them.

[208] On the Monday morning of this eventful week—and terribly eventful it was destined to be—Mr. Paul's office had a surprise. Richard MacEveril walked into it. He was looking fresh and blooming, as if he had never heard of such a thing as running away. Mr. Hanborough gazed up at him from his desk as if he saw an apparition; Tite Batley's red face seemed illumined by sudden sunshine.

"Well, and is nobody going to welcome me back?" cried Dick, as he put out his hand, in the silence, to Mr. Hanborough.

"The truth is, we never expected to see you back; we thought you had gone for good," answered Hanborough.

Dick laughed. "The two masters in there?" he asked, nodding his head at the inner door.

Hearing that they were, he went in. Old Paul, in his astonishment, dropped a penful of ink upon a letter he was writing.

"Why, where do you spring from?" he cried.

"From my uncle's now, sir; got home last night. Been having a rare time of it in Paris. I suppose I may take my place at the desk again?" added Dick.

The impudence of this supposition drove all Mr. Paul's wisdom out of him. Motioning to Tom Chandler to close the doors, he avowed to Dick what he was suspected of, and accused him of taking the letter and the bank-note.

"Well, I never!" exclaimed Dick, meeting the news with equanimity. "Go off with a letter of yours, sir, and a bank-note! *Steal* it, do you mean? Why, you cannot think I'd be capable of such a dirty trick, Mr. Paul. Indeed, sir, it wasn't me."

And there was something in the genuine astonishment of the young fellow, a certain honesty in his look and tone, that told Mr. Paul his suspicion might be a mistaken one. He recounted a brief outline of the facts, Tom Chandler helping him.

[209] "I never saw the letter or the note, sir," persisted Dick. "I remember the Wednesday afternoon quite well. When I went out to get my tea I met Fred Scott, and he persuaded me into the Bull for a game at billiards. It was half-past five before I got back here, and Mr. Hanborough blew me up. He had not been able to get out to his own tea. Batley was away that afternoon. No, no, sir, I wouldn't do such a thing as that."

"Where did you get the money to go away to London with, young man?" questioned old Paul, severely.

Dick laughed. "I won it," he said; "upon my word of honour, sir, I did. It was the day of the picnic, and I persisted in going straight to it the first thing—which put the office here in a rage, as it was busy. Well, in turning out of here I again met Scott. He was hastening off to the pigeon-shooting match. I went with him, intending to stay only half an hour. But, once there, I couldn't tear myself away. They were betting; I betted too, though I had only half a crown in my pocket, and I won thirty shillings; and I never got to Mrs. Cramp's till the afternoon, when it was close upon tea-time. Tom Chandler knows I didn't."

Tom Chandler nodded.

"But for winning that thirty shillings I could not have got up to London, unless somebody had lent me some," ran on Dick, who, once set going, was a rare talker. "You can ask anyone at that pigeon match, sir, whether I was not there the whole time: so it is impossible I could have been at Worcester, changing a bank-note."

The words brought to Mr. Paul a regret that he had *not* thought to ask that question of some one of the sportsmen: it would have set the matter at rest, so far as MacEveril was concerned. And the suspicion had been so apparently well grounded, as to prevent suspicion in other quarters.

Tom Chandler, standing beside Dick at Mr. Paul's table, quietly laid a pencil upon it, as if

intending to write something down. Dick took it up and looked at it. [210]

“What a pretty pencil!” he exclaimed. “Is it gold?”

It should be understood that in those past days, these ornamental pencils were rare. They may be bought by the bushel now. And Tom Chandler would have been convinced by the tone, had he still needed conviction, that Dick had not seen any pencil like it before.

“Well,” struck in old Paul, a little repentant for having so surely assumed Dick’s guilt, and thankful on the captain’s account that it was a mistake: “if you promise to be steady at your work, young man, I suppose you may take your place at the desk again. This gentleman here is going a-roving this week,” pointing the feather-end of his pen at Tom Chandler, “for no one knows how long; so you’ll have to stick to it.”

“I know; I’ve heard,” laughed Dick. “I mean to get a few minutes to dash into the church and see the wedding. Hope you’ll not dismiss me for it, sir!”

“There, there; you go to your desk now, young man, and ask Mr. Hanborough what you must do first,” concluded the lawyer.

It was not the only time on that same day that Thomas Chandler displayed his pencil. Finding his theory, that Dick MacEveril possessed the fellow one, to be mistaken, he at once began to take every opportunity of showing it to the world—which he had not done hitherto. Something might possibly come of it, he thought. And something did.

Calling in at Colonel Letsom’s in the evening, I found Jane Preen there, and one or two more girls. The Squire and Tod had not appeared at home yet, neither had Colonel Letsom, who made one at the shooting-party; we decided that Sir Robert must be keeping them to an unceremonious dinner. Presently Tom Chandler came in, to bring a note to the Colonel from Mr. Paul.

Bob Letsom proposed a round game at cards—Speculation. His sister, Fanny, objected; [211] speculation was nothing but screaming, she said, and we couldn’t sit down to cards by daylight. She proposed music; she thought great things of her singing: Bob retorted that music might be shot, and they talked at one another a bit. Finally we settled to play at “Consequences.” This involves, as everyone knows, sitting round a table with pencils and pieces of writing-paper.

I sat next to Tom Chandler, Jane Preen next to me. Fanny was on the other side of Tom—but it is not necessary to relate how we all sat. Before we had well begun, Chandler put his pencil on the table, carelessly, and it rolled past me.

“Why, that is Oliver’s pencil!” exclaimed Jane, picking it up.

“Which is?” quietly said Tom. “That? No; it is mine.”

Jane looked at it on all sides. “It is exactly like one that Oliver has,” she said. “It fell out of a drawer in his room the other day, when I was counting up his collars and handkerchiefs. He told me he brought it from Tours.”

“No doubt,” said Tom. “I bought mine at Worcester.”

In taking the pencil from Jane, Tom’s eye caught mine. I did feel queer; he saw I did; but I think he was feeling the same. Little doubt now who had changed the note!

“You will not talk of it, will you?” I whispered to Tom, as we were dispersing about the room when the game was over.

“No,” said he, “it shall not come out through me. I’m afraid, though, there’s no mistake this time, Johnny. A half doubt of it has crossed my mind at odd moments.”

Neither would I talk of it, even to Tod. After all, it was not proof positive. I had never, never thought of Oliver.

The Letsoms had a fine old garden, as all the gardens at Crabb were, and we strolled out in the twilight. The sun had set, but the sky was bright in the west. Valentine Chandler, for he had come [212] in, kept of course by Jane Preen’s side. Anyone might see that it was, as Tod called it, a gone case with them. It was no end of a pity, Val being just as unsteady and uncertain as the wind.

People do bolder things in the gloaming than in the garish daylight; and we fell to singing in the grotto—a semi-circular, half-open space with seats in it, surrounded at the back by the artificial rocks. Fanny began: she brought out an old guitar and twanged at it and sang for us, “The Baron of Mowbray;” where the false knight rides away laughing from the Baron’s door and the Baron’s daughter: that far-famed song of sixty years ago, which was said to have made a fortune for its composer.

The next to take up the singing was Valentine Chandler: and in listening to him you forgot all his short-comings. Never man had sweeter voice than he; and in his singing there was a singular charm impossible to be described. In his voice also—I mean when he spoke—there was always melody, and in his speech, when he chose to put it forth, a persuasive eloquence. This might have been instrumental in winning Jane Preen’s heart; we are told that a man’s heart is lost through his eye, a woman’s through her ear. Poor Valentine! he might have been so nice a fellow—and he was going to the bad as fast as he could go.

The song he chose was a ridiculous old ditty all about love; it went to the tune of “Di tanti palpiti.” Val chose it for Miss Jane and sung it to her; to her alone, mind you; the rest of us went for nothing.

“Here we meet, too soon to part,
Here to part will raise a smart,
Here I’d press thee to my heart,
Where none are set above thee.

Here I’d vow to love thee well;
Could but words unseal the spell,
Had but language power to tell,
I’d tell thee how I’ve loved thee. [213]

Here’s the rose that decks the door,
Here’s the thorn that spreads the moor,
Here’s the willow of the bower,
And the birds that rest above thee.

Had they power of life to see,
Sense of souls, like thee—and me,
Then would each a witness be
How dotingly I love thee.

Here we meet, too soon to part,
Here to part will raise a smart,
Here I’d press thee to my heart,
None e’er were there but thee.”

Now, as you perceive, it is a most ridiculous song, foolish as love-songs in general are. But had you been sitting there with us in all the subtle romance imparted by the witching hour of twilight, the soft air floating around, the clear sky above, one large silver star trembling in its blue depths, you would have felt entranced. The wonderful melody of the singer’s voice, his distinct enunciation, the tender passion breathing through his soft utterance, and the slight yet unmistakable emphasis given to the avowal of his love, thrilled us all. It was as decided a declaration of what he felt for Jane Preen as he could well make in this world. Once he glanced at her, and only once throughout; it was where I have placed the pause, as he placed it himself, “like thee—and me.” As if his glance drew hers by some irresistible fascination, Jane, who had been sitting beneath the rock just opposite to him, her eyes cast down—as he made that pause and glanced at her, I say, she lifted them for a moment, and caught the glance. I may live to be an old man, but I shall never forget Val’s song that night, or the charm it held for us. What, then, must it have held for Jane? And it is because that song and its charm lie still fresh on my memory, though many a year has since worn itself out, that I inscribe it here.

As the singing came to an end, dying softly away, no one for a moment or two broke the hushed [214] silence that ensued. Valentine was the first to do it. He got up from his seat; went round to a ledge of rock and stood upon it, looking out in the distance. Had the sea been near, one might have thought he saw a ship, homeward bound.

II

Had the clerk of the weather been bribed with a purse of gold, he could not have sent a finer day than Thursday turned out to be. The sun shone, the air sparkled, and the bells of Islip church rang out from the old steeple. Islip was much behind other churches in many respects; so primitive, indeed, in some of its ways, that had an edifice of advanced views come sailing through the air to pay it a visit, it would have turned tail again and sailed away; but Islip could boast of one thing few churches can boast of—a delightful peal of bells.

The wedding took place at eleven o’clock, and was a quiet one. Its attendants were chiefly confined to the parties themselves and their immediate relatives, but that did not prevent other people from flocking in to see it.

I and Dick MacEveril went in together, and got a good place close up; which was lucky, for the old church is full of pillars and angles that obstruct the view. Emma was in white silk; her bridesmaid, Mary MacEveril, the same; it was the custom in those days. Tom looked uncommonly well; but he and she were both nervous. Old Paul gave her away; and a thin aunt, with a twisted nose, who had come on a visit to superintend the wedding, in place of Emma’s dead mother, did nothing but weep. She wore an odd gown, pink one way, blue another; you might have thought she had borrowed its colours from their copper teakettle. Mrs. Chandler, Tom’s mother, in grey silk, was smarter than she had ever been in her life; and his aunt, Mrs. Cramp, was resplendent [215] in a dress bordering upon orange.

The ceremony came to an end very quickly, I thought—you do think so at most simple weddings; and Tom and his wife went away together in the first carriage. Next came the breakfast at Mr. Paul’s; the aunt presiding in a gentle stream of tears. Early in the afternoon the bride and bridegroom left for London, on their way to the Continent.

Everyone does not care to dash to a church to see a marriage: some would as soon think of running to look on at a funeral. Mr. Preen was one of these insensible people, and he, of course, did not care to go near it. He made game of Jane for doing so; but Jane wanted to see the dresses and the ceremony. Oliver had not the opportunity of going; and would not have gone though he had had it. Just about eleven o'clock, when the gay doings were in full swing, Mr. Preen took Oliver off to Worcester in the gig.

About a fortnight before, Mr. Preen had appointed a saddler in Worcester to be his agent for the new patent agricultural implements, for which he was himself agent-in-chief. Until this under agency should be well in hand, Mr. Preen considered it necessary to see the saddler often: for which purpose he drove into Worcester at least three times a week. Once, instead of going himself, he had sent Oliver, but this day was the first time the two had gone together. It might have been—one cannot tell—but it might have been that Mr. Preen discerned what this wedding of Emma Paul's must be to his son, and so took him out to divert his mind a bit.

Now, upon entering Worcester, to get to the saddler's it was necessary to drive through High Street and turn into Broad Street. At least, that was the straightforward route. But Oliver had not taken it the day he drove in alone; he had preferred the more roundabout way of the back streets. [216] After driving through Sidbury, he—instead of going forward up College Street and so into High Street—went careering along Friar Street, along the whole length of New Street, turned up St. Swithin Street, or Goose Lane, or one of those dingy thoroughfares, made a dash across the top of High Street, and so into his destination, Broad Street. In returning he took the same way. What his objection to the better streets could be, he alone knew. To-day, however, Mr. Preen held the reins.

Mr. Preen was driving quietly up College Street, when Oliver spoke.

"I wish you'd put me down here, father."

"Put you down here!" repeated Mr. Preen, turning to look at him. "What for?"

"I want to get a little book for Jane," answered Oliver, glancing towards Mr. Eaton's house. "I shall be up in Broad Street nearly as soon as you are, if you want me there."

"I don't particularly want you," said Mr. Preen, crustily, "but you needn't be long before you come." And, drawing up to the side, he let Oliver get out.

Driving on to the saddler's, Mr. Preen transacted his business with him. When it was over, he went to the door, where his gig waited, and looked up and down the street, but saw nothing of Oliver.

"Hasn't given himself the trouble to come up! Would rather put his lazy legs astride one of those posts opposite the college, and watch for my passing back again!"

Which was of course rather a far-fetched idea of Mr. Preen's; but he spoke in a temper. Though, indeed, of late Oliver had appeared singularly inert; as if all spirit to move had gone out of him.

Mr. Preen got into his gig at the saddler's door and set off again. Turning into High Street, he drove gently down it, looking out on all sides, if truth must be told, for Oliver. This caused him to [217] see Stephenson standing at the silversmith's door, the silversmith himself, back now for good at his business, being behind the counter. Now and then, since the bank-note was traced, Mr. Preen had made inquiries of Stephenson as to whether any news had been heard of its changer, but he had not done so lately. Not being in a hurry, he pulled up against the curb-stone. Stephenson crossed the flags to speak.

"Nothing turned up yet, I suppose?" said Mr. Preen.

"Well, I can hardly say it has," replied Stephenson; "but I've seen the gentleman who paid it in to us."

"And who is it? and where was he?" cried Preen, eagerly.

Stephenson had stepped back a pace, and appeared to be looking critically at the horse and gig.

"It was last Saturday," he said, coming close again. "I had to take a parcel into Friar Street for one of our country customers, a farmer's wife who was spending the day with some people living down there, and I saw a gig bowling along. The young fellow in it was the one who changed the note."

"Are you sure of it?" returned Mr. Preen.

"Quite sure, sir. I had no opportunity of speaking to him or stopping him. He was driving at a good pace, and the moment he caught sight of me, for I saw him do that, he touched the horse and went on like a whirlwind."

Mr. Preen's little dark face took a darker frown. "*I* should have stopped him," he said, sternly. "You ought to have rushed after him, Stephenson, and called upon the street to help in the pursuit. You might, at least, have traced where he went to. A gig, you say he was in?"

"Yes," said Stephenson. "And, unless I am greatly mistaken, it was this very gig you are in now."

"What do you mean by that?" retorted Preen, haughtily.

"I took particular notice of the horse and gig, so as to recognise them again if ever I got the chance; and I say that it was this gig and this horse, sir. There's no mistake about it." [218]

They stared into one another's eyes, one face looking up, and the other looking down. All in a moment, Stephenson saw the other face turn ghastly white. It had come into Mr. Preen's recollection amidst his bewilderment, that Oliver had gone into Worcester last Saturday afternoon, driving the horse and gig.

"I can't understand this! Who should be in my gig?" he cried, calling some presence of mind to his aid. "Last Saturday, you say? In the afternoon?"

"Last Saturday afternoon, close upon four o'clock. As I turned down Lich Street, I saw the lay-clerks coming out of College. Afternoon service is generally over a little before four," added Stephenson. "He was driving straight into Friar Street from Sidbury."

Another recollection flashed across Mr. Preen: Oliver's asking just now to be put down in College Street. Was it to prevent his passing through High Street? Was he afraid to pass through it?

"He is a nice-looking young fellow," said Stephenson; "has a fair, mild face; but he was the one who changed the note."

"That may be; but as to his being in my gig, it is not—— Why, I was not in town at all on Saturday," broke off Mr. Preen, with a show of indignant remonstrance.

"No, Mr. Preen; the young man was in it alone," said Stephenson, who probably had his own thoughts upon the problem.

"Well, I can't stay longer now; I'm late already," said Mr. Preen. "Good morning, Stephenson." And away he drove with a dash.

Oliver was waiting in College Street, standing near the Hare and Hounds Inn. Mr. Preen pulled up. [219]

"So you did not chose to come on!" he said.

"Well, I—I thought there'd be hardly time, and I might miss you; I went to get my hair cut," replied Oliver, as he settled himself in his place beside his father.

Mr. Preen drove on in silence until they were opposite the Commandery gates in the lower part of Sidbury. Then he spoke again.

"What made you drive through Friar Street on Saturday last, instead of going the direct way?"

"Through—Friar Street?" stammered Oliver.

"Through Friar Street, instead of High Street," repeated Mr. Preen, in a sharp, passionate accent.

"Oh, I remember. High Street is so crowded on a market day; the back streets are quiet," said Oliver, as if he had a lump in his throat, and could not make his voice heard.

"And in taking the back streets you avoid the silversmith's, and the risk you run of being recognised; is that it?" savagely retorted Mr. Preen.

Not another word did he speak, only drove on home at a furious pace. Oliver knew all then: the disgrace for which he had been so long waiting had come upon him.

But when they got indoors, Mr. Preen let loose the vials of his wrath upon Oliver. Before his mother, before Jane, he published his iniquity. It was he, Oliver, who had stolen the ten-pound note; it was he who had so craftily got it changed at Worcester. Oliver spoke not a word of denial, made no attempt at excuse or defence; he stood with bent head and pale, meek face, his blue eyes filled with utter misery. The same look of misery lay in Mrs. Preen's eyes as she faintly reproached him amid tears and sobs. Jane was simply stunned.

"You must go away now and hide yourself; I can't keep you here to be found and pounced upon," roared Mr. Preen. "By the end of the week you must be gone somewhere. Perhaps you can pick up a living in London." [220]

"Yes, I will go," said Oliver, meekly. And at the first lull in the storm he crept up to his room.

He did not come down to dinner; did not come to tea. Jane carried up a cup of tea upon a waiter and some bread-and-butter, and put it down outside the chamber door, which he had bolted.

Later, in passing his room, she saw the door open and went in. Cup and plate were both empty, so he had taken the refreshment. He was not in the house, was not in the garden. Putting on her sun-bonnet and a light shawl, she ran to the Inlets.

Oliver was there. He sat, gazing moodily at the brook and the melancholy osier-twigs that grew beside it. Jane sat down and bent his poor distressed face upon her shoulder.

"Dear Oliver! Don't take it so to heart. I know you must have been sorely tempted."

Bending there upon her, her arms clasping him, yielding to the loving sympathy, so grateful after those harsh reproaches, he told her all, under cover of the gathering shades of evening. Yes, he

had been tempted—and had yielded to the temptation.

He wanted money badly for necessary things, and things that he had learned to deem necessaries, and he had it not. A pair of new gloves now and again, a necktie to replace his shabby ones, a trifle of loose silver in his pocket. He owed a small sum to MacEveril, and wanted to repay him. Once or twice he had asked a little money of his father, and was refused. His mother would give him a few shillings, when pressed, but grumbled over it. So Oliver wrote to a friend at Tours, whom he had known well, asking if he would lend him some. That was the first week in June. His friend wrote back in answer that he could lend him some after quarter day, the 24th, but not before; he would send him over ten pounds then, if that would do. [221]

Never a thought had presented itself to Oliver of touching the ten pounds in his father's letter to Mr. Paul, which he had sealed and saw posted. But on the following afternoon, Wednesday, he saw the letter lying on Mr. Hanborough's desk; the temptation assailed him, and he took it.

It may be remembered that Mr. Preen had gone out that hot day, leaving Oliver a lot of work to do. He got through it soon after four o'clock, and went dashing over the cross route to Islip and into Mr. Paul's office, for he wanted to see Dick MacEveril. The office was empty; not a soul was in it; and as Oliver stood, rather wondering at that unusual fact, he saw a small pile of letters, evidently just left by the postman, lying on the desk close to him. The uppermost of the letters he recognised at once; it was the one sent by his father. "If I might borrow the ten pounds inside that now, I should be at ease; I would replace it with the ten pounds coming to me from Tours, and it might never get known," whispered Satan in his ear, with plausible cunning.

Never a moment did he allow himself for thought, never an instant's hesitation served to stop him. Catching up the letter, he thrust it into his breast pocket, and set off across country again at a tearing pace, not waiting to see MacEveril.

He seemed to have flown over hedges and ditches and to be home in no time. Little wonder that when he was seen sitting under the walnut tree in the garden and was called in to tea, his mother and sister exclaimed at his heated face. They never suspected he had been out.

All that night Oliver lay awake: partly wondering how he should dispose of his prize to make it available; partly telling himself, in shame-faced reproach, that he would not use it, but send it back to old Paul. It came into his mind that if he did use it he might change it at the silversmith's as if for the Todhetleys, the Squire's name on the back suggesting the idea to him. It would not do, he thought, to go into a shop, any shop, purchase some trifling article and tender a ten-pound note in payment. That might give rise to suspicion. Some months before, when at Crabb Cot, he had heard Mrs. Todhetley relate the history of her brooch, where she bought it, what she paid for it, and all about it, to Colonel Letsom's wife and other people, for it happened that several callers had come in together. The brooch had been passed round the company and admired. Oliver remembered this, and resolved to make use of it to disarm suspicion at the silversmith's. He knew the principal shops in Worcester very well indeed, and Worcester itself. He had stayed for some time, when sixteen, with an uncle who was living there; but he had not visited the city since coming to Duck Brook. [222]

Thursday, the day following that on which he took the money, was the day of the picnic. Oliver started with Jane for it in the morning, as may be remembered, the ten-pound note hidden safely about him. Much to Oliver's surprise his mother put seven shillings into his hand. "You'll not want to use it, and must give it me back to-morrow," she said, "but it does not look well to go to a thing of this sort with quite empty pockets." Oliver thanked her, kissed her, and they drove off. Before reaching Mrs. Jacob Chandler's, after passing Islip Grange—the property of Lady Fontaine, as may be remembered, who was first cousin to John Paul—they overtook Sam, walking on to take back the gig. "We may as well get out here," said Oliver, and he pulled up. Getting out, and helping out Jane, he sent Sam and the gig back at once. He bade his sister walk on alone to Mrs. Chandler's, saying he wanted to do a little errand first. But he charged her not to mention that; only to say, if questioned, that he would join them by-and-by. He ran all the way to the station, regardless of the heat, and caught a train for Worcester. [223]

The rest is known. Oliver changed the note at the silversmith's, bought himself a pair of dandy gloves, with one or two other small matters, and made the best of his way back again. But it was past the middle of the afternoon when he got to the picnic: trains do not choose our time for running, but their own. Jane wondered where he had been. Hearing of the pigeon-match, she thought it was there. She asked him, in a whisper, where he had found those delicate gloves; Oliver laughed and said something about a last relic from Tours.

And there it was. He had taken the note; he, Oliver Preen; and got the gold for it. That day of the picnic was in truth the worst he had ever experienced, the one hard day of all his life, as he had remarked to Jane. Not only had he committed a deed in it which might never be redeemed, but he also learnt that Emma Paul's love was given not to him, but to another. It was for her sake he had coveted new gloves and money in his pockets, that he might not look despicable in her sight.

The dearest and surest of expectations are those that fail. While Oliver, as the days went on, was feverishly looking out, morning after morning, for the remittance from Tours, he received a letter to say it was not coming. His friend, with many expressions of regret, wrote to the effect that he was unable to send it at present; later, he hoped to do so. Of course, it never came. And Oliver had not been able to replace the money, and—this was the end of it.

In a whispering, sobbing tone, he told these particulars by degrees to Jane as they sat there. She

tried to comfort him; said it might never be known beyond themselves at home; rather advocated his going away for a short time, as proposed, while things righted themselves, and their father's anger cooled down. But Oliver could not be comforted. Then, leaving the unsatisfactory theme, she tried another, and began telling him of the wedding at Islip that morning, and of how Tom and Emma looked——

[224]

"Don't, Jane," he interrupted; and his wailing, shrinking tone seemed to betray the keenest pain of all.

They walked home together in silence, Jane clinging to his arm. The night shades lay upon the earth, the stars were shining in the sky. Oliver laid his hand upon the garden gate and paused.

"Do you remember, Jane, when I was coming in here for the first time, how a strange shiver took me, and you thought I must have caught a chill. It was a warning, my dear; a warning of the evil that lay in store for me."

He would not go into the parlour to supper, but went softly up to his room and shut himself in for the night. Poor Oliver! Poor, poor Oliver!

The following day, Friday, Mr. Preen, allowing himself the unwonted luxury of a holiday for a day's shooting, was away betimes. For the afternoon and evening, Mrs. Jacob Chandler's daughters, Clementina, Georgiana, and Julietta, had organised a party to celebrate their cousin Tom's wedding; Miss Julietta called it a "flare-up."

Jane Preen had promised, for herself and for Oliver, to be there by three o'clock. For Oliver! She made herself ready after dinner; and then, looking everywhere for her brother, found him standing in the road just outside the garden gate. He said he was not going. Jane reproached him, and he quite laughed at her. *He* go into company now! she might know better. But Jane had great influence over him, and as he walked with her along the road—for she was going to walk in and walk back again at night—she nearly persuaded him to fetch her. Only nearly; not quite. Oliver finally refused, and they had almost a quarrel.

Then the tears ran down Jane's cheeks. Her heart was aching to pain for him; and her object in pressing him to come was to take him out of his loneliness.

[225]

"Just this one evening, Oliver!" she whispered, clinging to him and kissing him. "I don't ask you a favour often."

And Oliver yielded. "I'll come for you, Janey," he said, kissing her in return. "That is, I will come on and meet you; I cannot go to the house."

With that, they parted. But in another minute, Jane was running back again.

"You will be *sure* to come, Oliver? You won't disappoint me? You won't go from your word?"

Oliver felt a little annoyed; the sore heart grows fretful. "I swear I'll come, then," he said; "I'll meet you, alive or dead."

I was at the party. Not Tod; he had gone shooting. We spent the afternoon in the garden. It was not a large party, after all; only the Letsoms, Jane Preen, and the Chandler girls; but others were expected later. Jane had a disconsolate look. Knowing nothing of the trouble at Duck Brook, I thought she was sad because Valentine had not come early, according to promise. We knew later that he had been kept by what he called a long-winded client.

At five o'clock we went indoors to tea. Those were the days of real, old-fashioned teas, not sham ones, as now. Hardly had we seated ourselves round the table, and Mrs. Jacob Chandler was inquiring who took sugar and who didn't, when one of the maids came in.

"If you please, Miss Preen, the gig is come for you," she said.

"The gig!" exclaimed Jane. "Come for me! You must be mistaken, Susan."

"It is at the gate, Miss Jane, and Sam's in it. He says that his master and missus have sent him to take you home immediate."

Jane, all astonishment, followed by some of us, went out to see what Sam could mean. Sam only repeated in a stolid kind of way the message he had given to Susan. His master and mistress had despatched him for Miss Jane and she must go home at once.

[226]

"Is anything the matter?—anyone ill?" asked Jane, turning pale.

Sam, looking more stolid than before, professed not to know anything; he either did not or would not. Miss Jane had to go, and as quick as she could, was all he would say.

Jane put on her things, said good-bye in haste, and went out again to the gig. Sam drove off at a tangent before she had well seated herself.

"Now, Sam, what's the matter?" she began.

Sam, in about three stolid words, protested, as before, he couldn't say *what* was the matter; except that he had been sent off for Miss Jane.

Jane noticed, and thought it odd, that he did not look at her as he spoke, though he was frank and

open by habit; he had never looked in any of their faces since coming to the door.

“Where’s Mr. Oliver?” she asked. But Sam only muttered that he “couldn’t say,” and drove swiftly.

They went on in silence after that, Jane seeing it would be useless to inquire further, and were soon at Duck Brook. She felt very uneasy. What she feared was, that her father and Oliver might have quarrelled, and that the latter was about to be turned summarily out of doors.

“Why, there’s Mr. Oliver!” she exclaimed. “Pull up, Sam.”

They were passing the first Inlet. Oliver stood at the top of it, facing the road, evidently looking out for her, as Jane thought. His gaze was fixed, his face white as death.

“I told you to pull up, Sam; how dare you disobey me and drive on in that way?” cried Jane; for Sam had whipped up the horse instead of stopping. Jane, looking at his face saw it had gone white too.

“There he is! there he is again! There’s Mr. Oliver!” [227]

They had approached the other Inlet as Jane spoke. Oliver stood at the top of it, exactly as he had stood at the other, his gaze fixed on her, his face ghastly. Not a muscle of his face moved; a dead man could not be more still. Sam, full of terror, was driving on like lightning, as if some evil thing were pursuing him.

And now Jane turned pale. What did it mean? these two appearances? It was totally impossible for Oliver to be at the last Inlet, if it was he who stood at the other. A bird of the air might have picked him up, carried him swiftly over the trees and dropped him at the second Inlet; nothing else could have done it in the time. What did it mean?

Mr. Preen was waiting at the door to receive Jane. He came a little way with slow steps down the path to meet her as the gig stopped. She ran in at the gate.

“What has happened, papa?” she cried. “Where’s Oliver?”

Oliver was upstairs, lying upon his bed—dead. Mr. Preen disclosed it to her as gently as he knew how.

It was all too true. Oliver had died about two hours before. He had shot himself at the Inlets, close by the melancholy osiers that grew over the brook.

Oliver had accompanied Jane to the end of Brook Lane. There, at the Islip Road, they parted; she going on to Crabb, Oliver walking back again. Upon reaching the Inlets, that favourite spot of his, he sat down on the bench that faced the highway; the self-same bench Jane had sat on when she was watching for his arrival from Tours, in the early days of spring. He had not sat there above a minute when he saw his father, with one or two more gentlemen, get over the gate from the field opposite. They were returning from shooting, and had their guns in their hands. Mr. Preen walked quickly over the road to Oliver.

“Take my gun indoors,” he said; “I am not going in just yet. It is loaded.” [228]

He walked away down the road with his friends, after speaking. Oliver took the gun, walked slowly down one of the Inlets, and placed himself on the nearest bench there, lodging the gun against the end. In a few minutes there arose a loud report.

Sam was in the upper part of the field on the other side the brook with the waggon and waggoner. He turned to look where the noise came from, and thought he saw some one lying on the ground by the bench. They both came round in haste, he and the waggoner, and found Oliver Preen lying dead with the gun beside him. Running for assistance, Sam helped to carry him home, and then went for the nearest doctor; but it was all of no avail. Oliver was dead.

Was it an accident, or was it intentional? People asked the question. At the coroner’s inquest, Mr. Preen, who was so affected he could hardly give evidence, said that, so far as he believed, Oliver was one of the last people likely to lay violent hands on himself; he was of too calm and gentle a temperament for that. The rustic jury, pitying the father and believing him, gave Oliver the benefit of the doubt. Loaded guns were dangerous, they observed, apt to go off of themselves almost; and they brought it in Accidental Death.

But Jane knew better. I thought I knew better. I’m afraid Mr. Preen knew better.

And what of that appearance of Oliver which Jane saw? It could not have been Oliver in the flesh, but I think it must have been Oliver in the spirit. Many a time and oft in the days that followed did Jane recount it over to me; it seemed a relief to her distress to talk of it. “He said he would come, alive or dead, to meet me; and he came.”

And I, Johnny Ludlow, break off here to state that the account of this apparition is strictly true. [229] Every minute particular attending it, even to the gig coming with Sam in it to fetch Jane from the tea-table, is a faithful record of that which occurred.

I took an opportunity of questioning Sam, asking whether he had seen the appearance. It was as we were coming away from the grave after the funeral. Oliver was buried in Duck Brook

churchyard, close under the clock which had told him the time when he stood with his father posting the letters that past afternoon at Dame Sym's window. "We are too late, father," he had said. But for being too late the tragedy might never have happened, for the letter, which caused all the trouble and commotion, would have reached Mr. Paul's hands safely the next morning.

"No, sir," Sam answered me, "I can't say that I saw anything. But just as Miss Jane spoke, calling out that Mr. Oliver was there, a kind of shivering wind seemed to take me, and I turned icy cold. It was not her words that could have done it, sir, for I was getting so before she spoke. And at the last Inlet, when she called it out again, I went almost out of my mind with cold and terror. The horse was affrighted too; his coat turned wet."

That was the tragedy: no one can say I did wrong to call it one. For years and years it has been in my mind to write it. But I had hoped to end the paper less sadly; only the story has lengthened itself out, and there's no space left. I meant to have told of Jane's brighter fate in the after days with Valentine, the one lover of her life. For Val pulled himself up from his reckless ways, though not at Islip; and in a distant land they are now sailing down the stream of life together, passing through, as we all have to do, its storms and its sunshine. All this must be left for another paper.

IN LATER YEARS

[230]

I

I think it must have been the illness he had in the summer that tended to finally break down Valentine Chandler. He had been whirling along all kinds of doubtful ways before, but when a sort of low fever attacked him, and he had to lie by for weeks, he was about done for.

That's how we found it when we got to Crabb Cot in October. Valentine, what with illness, his wild ways and his ill-luck, had come to grief and was about to emigrate to Canada. His once flourishing practice had run away from him; no prospect seemed left to him in the old country.

"It is an awful pity!" I remarked to Mrs. Cramp, having overtaken her in the Islip Road, as she was walking towards home.

"Ay, it is that, Johnny Ludlow," she said, turning her comely face to me, the strings of her black bonnet tied in a big bow under her chin. "Not much else was to be expected, taking all things into consideration. George Chandler, Tom's brother, makes a right good thing of it in Canada, farming, and Val is going to him."

"We hear that Val's mother is leaving North Villa."

"She can't afford to stay in it now," returned Mrs. Cramp, "so has let it to the Miss Dennets, and taken a pretty little place for herself in Crabb. Georgiana has gone out as a governess."

"Will she like that?"

[231]

"Ah, Master Johnny! There are odd moments throughout all our lives when we have to do things we don't like any more than we like poison—I hate to look at the place," cried Mrs. Cramp, energetically. "When I think of Mrs. Jacob's having to turn out of it, and all through Val's folly, it gives me the creeps."

This applied to North Villa, of which we then were abreast. Mrs. Cramp turned her face from it, and went on sideways, like a crab.

"Why, here's Jane Preen!"

She was coming along quietly in the afternoon sunshine. I thought her altered. The once pretty blush-rose of her dimpled cheeks had faded; in her soft blue eyes, so like Oliver's, lay a look of sadness. He had been dead about a year now. But the blush came back again, and the eyes lighted up with smiles as I took her hand. Mrs. Cramp went on; she was in a hurry to reach her home, which lay between Islip and Crabb. Jane rang the bell at North Villa.

"Shall I take a run over to Duck Brook to-morrow, Jane, and sit with you in the Inlets, and we'll have a spell of gossip together?"

"I never sit in the Inlets now," she said, in a half whisper, turning her face away.

"Forgive me, Jane," I cried, repenting my thoughtlessness; and she disappeared up the garden path.

Susan opened the door. Her mistress was out, she said, but Miss Clementina was at home. It was Clementina that Jane wanted to see.

Valentine, still weak, was lying on the sofa in the parlour when Jane entered. He got up, all

excitement at seeing her, and they sat down together.

“I brought this for Clementina,” she said, placing a paper parcel on the table. “It is a pattern which she asked me for. Are you growing stronger?”

“Clementina is about somewhere,” he observed; “the others are out. Yes, I am growing stronger; [232] but it seems to me that I am a long while about it.”

They sat on in silence, side by side, neither speaking. Valentine took Jane’s hand and held it within his own, which rested on his knee. It seemed that they had lost their tongues—as we say to the children.

“Is it all decided?” asked Jane presently. “Quite decided?”

“Quite, Jane. Nothing else is left for me.”

She caught her breath with one of those long sighs that tell of inward tribulation.

“I should have been over to see you before this, Jane, but that my legs would not carry me to Duck Brook and back again without sitting down by the wayside. And you—you hardly ever come here now.”

A deep flush passed swiftly over Jane’s face. She had not liked to call at the troubled house. And she very rarely came so far as Crabb now: there seemed to be no plea for it.

“What will be the end, Val?” she whispered.

Valentine groaned. “I try not to think of it, my dear. When I cannot put all thought of the future from me, it gives me more torment than I know how to bear. If only——”

The door opened, and in came Clementina, arresting what he had been about to say.

“This is the pattern you asked me for, Clementina,” Jane said, rising to depart on her return home. For she would not risk passing the Inlets after sunset.

A week or two went by, and the time of Valentine Chandler’s departure arrived. He had grown well and strong apparently, and went about to say Good-bye to people in a subdued fashion. The Squire took him apart when Val came for that purpose to us, and talked to him in private. Tod [233] called it a “Curtain Lecture.” Valentine was to leave Crabb at daybreak on the Saturday morning for London, and go at once on board the ship lying in the docks about to steam away for Quebec.

It perhaps surprised none of us who knew the Chandler girls that they should be seen tearing over the parish on the Friday afternoon to invite people to tea. “It will be miserably dull this last evening, you know, Johnny,” they said to me in their flying visit; “we couldn’t stand it alone. Be sure to come in early: and leave word that Joseph Todhetley is to join us as soon as he gets back again.” For Tod had gone out.

According to orders, I was at North Villa betimes: and, just as on that other afternoon, I met Jane Preen at the gate. She had walked in from Duck Brook.

“You are going to spend the evening here, Jane?”

“Yes, it is the last evening,” she sighed. “Valentine wished it.”

“The girls have been to invite me; wouldn’t let me say No. There’s to be quite a party.”

“A party!” exclaimed Jane, in surprise.

“If they could manage to get one up.”

“I am sure Valentine did not know that this morning.”

“I daresay not. I asked the girls if Valentine wanted a crowd there on his last evening, and they exclaimed that Valentine never knew what was good for him.”

“As you are here, Johnny,” she went on, after a silence, “I wonder if you would mind my asking you to do me a favour? It is to walk home with me after tea. I shall not be late this evening.”

“Of course I will, Jane.”

“I *cannot* go past the Inlets alone after dark,” she whispered. “I never do so by daylight but a dreadful shiver seizes me. I—I’m afraid of seeing something.”

“Have you ever seen it since that first evening, Jane?” [234]

“Never since. Never once. I do not suppose that I shall ever see it again; but the fear lies upon me.”

She went on to explain that the gig could not be sent for her that evening, as Mr. Preen had gone to Alcester in it and taken Sam. Her mode and voice seemed strangely subdued, as if all spirit had left her for ever.

In spite of their efforts, the Miss Chandlers met with little luck. One of the Letsom girls and Tom Coney were all the recruits they were able to pick up. They came dashing in close upon our heels.

In the hall stood Valentine's luggage locked and corded, ready for conveyance to the station.

There's not much to relate of that evening: I hardly know why I allude to it at all—only that these painful records sometimes bring a sad sort of soothing to the weary heart, causing it to look forward to that other life where will be no sorrow and no parting.

Tod came in after tea. He and Coney kept the girls alive, if one might judge by the laughter that echoed from the other room. Tea remained on the table for anyone else who might arrive, but Mrs. Jacob Chandler had turned from it to put her feet on the fender. She kept me by her, asking about a slight accident which had happened to one of our servants. Valentine and Jane were standing at the doors of the open window in silence, as if they wanted to take in a view of the garden. And that state of things continued, as it seemed to me, for a good half-hour.

It was a wild night, but very warm for November. White clouds scudded across the face of the sky; moonlight streamed into the room. The fire was low, and the green shade had been placed over the lamp, so that there seemed to be no light but that of the moon.

"Won't you sing a song for the last time, Valentine?" I heard Jane ask him with half a sob.

"Not to-night; I'm not equal to it. But, yes, I will; one song," he added, turning round. "Night and [235]
day that one song has been ever haunting me, Jane."

He was sitting down to the piano when Mrs. Cramp came in. She said she would go up to take her bonnet off, and Mrs. Chandler went with her. This left me alone at the fire. I should have made a start for the next room where the laughing was, but that I did not like to disturb the song then begun. Jane stood listening just outside the open window, her hands covering her bent face.

Whether the circumstances and surroundings made an undue impression on me, I know not, but the song struck me as being the most plaintive one I had ever heard and singularly appropriate to that present hour. The singer was departing beyond seas, leaving one he loved hopelessly behind him.

> "Remember me, though rolling ocean place its bounds 'twixt thee and me,
> Remember me with fond emotion, and believe I'll think of thee."

So it began; and I wish I could recollect how it went on, but I can't; only a line here and there. I think it was set to the tune of Weber's Last Waltz, but I'm not sure. There came a line, "My lingering look from thine will sever only with an aching heart;" there came another bit towards the end: "But fail not to remember me."

Nothing in themselves, you will say, these lines; their charm lay in the singing. To listen to their mournful pathos brought with it a strange intensity of pain. Valentine sang them as very few can sing. That his heart was aching, aching with a bitterness which can never be pictured except by those who have felt it; that Jane's heart was aching as she listened, was all too evident. You could feel the anguish of their souls. It was in truth a ballad singularly applicable to the time and place.

The song ceased; the music died away. Jane moved from the piano with a sob that could no [236]
longer be suppressed. Valentine sat still and motionless. As to me, I made a quiet glide of it into the other room, just as Mrs. Cramp and Mrs. Jacob Chandler were coming in for some tea. Julietta seized me on one side and Fanny Letsom on the other; they were going in for forfeits.

Valentine Chandler left the piano and went out, looking for Jane. Not seeing her, he followed on down the garden path, treading on its dry, dead leaves. The wind, sighing and moaning, played amidst the branches of the trees, nearly bare now; every other minute the moon was obscured by the flying clouds. Warm though the night was, and grand in its aspect, signs might be detected of the approaching winter.

Jane Preen was standing near the old garden arbour, from which could be seen by daylight the long chain of the Malvern Hills. Valentine drew Jane within, and seated her by his side.

"Our last meeting; our last parting, Jane!" he whispered from the depth of his full heart.

"Will it be for ever?" she wailed.

He took time to answer. "I would willingly say No; I would *promise* it to you, Jane, but that I doubt myself. I know that it lies with me; and I know that if God will help me, I may be able to ——"

He broke down. He could not go on. Jane bent her head towards him. Drawing it to his shoulder, he continued:

"I have not been able to pull up here, despite the resolutions I have made from time to time. I was one of a fast set of men at Islip, and—somehow—they were stronger than I was. In Canada it may be different. I promise you, my darling, that I will strive to make it so. Do you think this is no lesson to me?"

"If not——" [237]

"If not, we may never see each other again in this world."

“Oh, Valentine!”

“Only in Heaven. The mistakes we make here may be righted there.”

“And will it be *nothing* to you, never to see me again here?—no sorrow or pain?”

“*No sorrow or pain!*” Valentine echoed the words out of the very depths of woe. Even then the pain within him was almost greater than he could bear.

They sat on in silence, with their aching hearts. Words fail in an hour of anguish such as this. An hour that comes perhaps but once in a lifetime; to some of us, never. Jane’s face lay nestled against his shoulder; her hand was in his clasp. Val’s tears were falling; he was weak yet from his recent illness; Jane’s despair was beyond tears.

We were in the height and swing of forfeits when Valentine and Jane came in. They could not remain in the arbour all night, you see, romantic and lovely though it might be to sit in the moonlight. Jane said she must be going home; her mother had charged her not to be late.

When she came down with her things on, I, remembering what she had asked me, took my hat and waited for her in the hall. But Valentine came out with her.

“Thank you all the same, Johnny,” she said to me. And I went back to the forfeits.

They went off together, Jane’s arm within his—their last walk, perhaps, in this world. But it seemed that they could not talk any more than they did in the garden, and went along for the most part in silence. Just before turning into Brook Lane they met Tom Chandler—he who was doing so much for Valentine in this emigration matter. He had come from Islip to spend a last hour with his cousin.

“Go on, Tom; you’ll find them all at home,” said Valentine. “I shall not be very long after you.” [238]

Upon coming to the Inlets, Jane clung closer to Valentine’s arm. It was here that she had seen her unfortunate brother Oliver standing, after his death. Valentine hastily passed his arm round her to impart a sense of protection.

At the gate they parted, taking their farewell hand-shake, their last kiss. “God help you, my dear!” breathed Valentine. “And if—if we never meet again, believe that no other will ever love you as I have loved.”

He turned back on the road he had come, and Jane went in to her desolate home.

II

“Aunt Mary Ann, I’ve come back, and brought a visitor with me!”

Mrs. Mary Ann Cramp, superintending the preserving of a pan of morella cherries over the fire in her spacious kitchen, turned round in surprise. I was perched on the arm of the old oak chair, watching the process. I had gone to the farm with a message from Crabb Cot, and Mrs. Cramp, ignoring ceremony, called me into the kitchen.

Standing at the door, with the above announcement, was Julietta Chandler. She had been away on a fortnight’s visit.

“Now where on earth did you spring from, Juliet?” asked Mrs. Cramp. “I did not expect you to-day. A visitor? Who is it?”

“Cherry Dawson, Aunt Mary Ann; and I didn’t think it mattered about letting you know,” returned Juliet. They had given up the longer name, Julietta. “You can see her if you look through the window; she is getting out of the fly at the gate. Cherry Dawson is the nicest and jolliest girl in [239] the world, and you’ll all be in love with her—including you, Johnny Ludlow.”

Sure enough, there she was, springing from the fly which had brought them from Crabb station. A light, airy figure in a fresh brown-holland dress and flapping Leghorn hat. The kitchen window was open, and we could hear her voice all that way off, laughing loudly at something and chattering to the driver. She was very fair, with pretty white teeth, and a pink colour on her saucy face.

Mrs. Cramp left Sally to the cherries, went to the hall door and opened it herself, calling the other maid, Joan, to come down. The visitor flew in with a run and a sparkling laugh, and at once kissed Mrs. Cramp on both cheeks, without saying with your leave or by your leave. I think she would not have minded kissing me, for she came dancing up and shook my hand.

“It’s Johnny Ludlow, Cherry,” said Juliet.

“Oh, how delightful!” cried Miss Cherry.

She was really very unsophisticated; or—very much the other way. One cannot quite tell at a first moment. But, let her be which she might, there was one thing about her that took the eyes by storm. It was her hair.

Whether her rapid movements had unfastened it, or whether she wore it so, I knew not, but it fell

on her shoulders like a shower of gold. Her small face seemed to be set in an amber aureole. I had never before seen hair so absolutely resembling the colour of pure gold. As she ran back to Mrs. Cramp from me, it glittered in the sunlight. The shower of gold in which Jupiter went courting Danaë could hardly have been more seductive than this.

“I know you don’t mind my coming uninvited, you dear Mrs. Cramp!” she exclaimed joyously. “I did so want to make your acquaintance. And Clementina was growing such a cross-patch. It’s not Tim’s fault if he can’t come back yet. Is it now?”

“I do not know anything about it,” answered Mrs. Cramp, apparently not quite sure what to make of her. [240]

With this additional company I thought it well to come away, and wished them good morning. At the gate stood the fly still, the horse resting.

“Like to take a lift, Mr. Johnny, as far as your place?” asked the man civilly. “I am just starting back.”

“No, thank you, Lease,” I answered. “I am going across to Duck Brook.”

“Curious young party that, ain’t it, sir?” said Lease, pointing the whip over his shoulder towards the house. “She went and asked me if Mrs. Cramp warn’t an old Image, born in the year One, and didn’t she get her gowns out of Noah’s Ark? And while I was staring at her saying that, she went off into shouts of laughter enough to frighten the horse. Did you see her hair, sir?”

I nodded.

“For my part, I don’t favour that bright yaller for hair, Mr. Johnny. I never knew but one woman have such, and she was more deceitful than a she-fox.”

Lease touched his hat and drove off. He was cousin in a remote degree to poor Maria Lease, and to Lease the pointsman who had caused the accident to the train at Crabb junction and died of the trouble. At that moment, Fred Scott came up; a short, dark young fellow, with fierce black whiskers, good-natured and rather soft. He was fond of playing billiards at the Bell at Islip; had been doing it for some years now.

“I say, Ludlow, has that fly come with Juliet Chandler? Is she back again?”

“Just come. She has brought some one with her: a girl with golden hair.”

“Oh, bother *her*!” returned Fred. “But it has been as dull as ditchwater without Juliet.”

He dashed in at Mrs. Cramp’s gate and up the winding path. I turned into the Islip Road, and crossed it to take Brook Lane. The leaves were beginning to put on the tints of autumn; the grain was nearly all gathered. [241]

Time the healer! As Mrs. Todhetley says, it may well be called so. Heaven in mercy sends it to the sick and heavy-laden with healing on its wings. Nearly three years had slipped by since the departure for Canada of Valentine Chandler; four years since the tragic death of Oliver Preen.

There are few changes to record. Things and people were for the most part going on as they had done. It was reported that Valentine had turned over a new leaf from the hour he landed over yonder, becoming thoroughly staid and steady. Early in the summer of this year his mother had shut up her cottage at North Crabb to go to Guernsey, on the invitation of a sister from whom she had expectations. Upon this, Julietta, who lived with her mother, went on a long visit to Mrs. Cramp.

Clementina had married. Her husband was a Mr. Timothy Dawson, junior partner in a wholesale firm of general merchants in Birmingham; they had also a house in New York. Mr. and Mrs. Timothy Dawson lived in a white villa at Edgbaston, and went in for style and fashion. At least she did, which might go without telling. The family in which her sister Georgiana was governess occupied another white villa hard by.

Close upon Juliet’s thus taking up her residence with her aunt, finding perhaps the farm rather dull, she struck up a flirtation with Fred Scott, or he with her. They were everlastingly together, mooning about Mrs. Cramp’s grounds, or sauntering up and down the Islip Road. Juliet gave out that they were engaged. No one believed it. At present Fred had nothing to marry upon: his mother, just about as soft as himself, supplied him with as much pocket-money as he asked for, and there his funds ended.

Juliet had now returned from a week or two’s visit she had been paying Clementina, bringing with her, uninvited, the young lady with the golden hair. That hair seemed to be before my eyes as a picture as I walked along. She was Timothy Dawson’s young half-sister. Both the girls had grown tired of staying with Clementina, who worried herself and everyone about her just now because her husband was detained longer than he had anticipated in New York, whither he had gone on business. [242]

Mr. Frederick Scott had said “Bother” in contempt when he first heard of the visitor with the golden hair. He did not say it long. Miss Cherry Dawson cast a spell upon him. He had never met such a rattling, laughing girl in all his born days, which was how he phrased it; had never seen

such bewildering hair. Cherry fascinated him. Forgetting his allegiance to Juliet, faithless swain that he was, he went right over to the enemy. Miss Cherry, nothing loth, accepted his homage openly, and enjoyed the raging jealousy of Juliet.

In the midst of this, Juliet received a telegram from Edgbaston. Her sister Clementina was taken suddenly ill and wanted her. She must take the first train.

“Of course you are coming with me, Cherry!” said Juliet.

“Of course I am not,” laughed Cherry. “I’m very happy here—if dear Mrs. Cramp will let me stay with her. You’ll be back again in a day or two.”

Not seeing any polite way of sending her away in the face of this, Mrs. Cramp let her stay on. Juliet was away a week—and a nice time the other one and Fred had of it, improving the shining hours with soft speeches and love-making. When Juliet got back again, she felt ready to turn herself into a female Bluebeard, and cut off Cherry’s golden head.

Close upon that Mrs. Cramp held her harvest-home. “You may as well come early, and we’ll have [243] tea on the lawn,” she said, when inviting us.

It was a fine afternoon, warm as summer, though September was drawing to its close. Many of the old friends you have heard of were there. Mary MacEveril and her cousin Dick, who seemed to be carrying on a little with one another, as Tod called it; the Letsoms, boys and girls; Emma Chandler, who looked younger than ever, though she could boast of two babies: and others. Jane Preen was there, the weary look which her mild and pretty face had gained latterly very plainly to be seen. We roamed at will about the grounds, and had tea under the large weeping elm tree. Altogether the gathering brought forcibly to mind that other gathering; that of the picnic, four summers ago, when we had sung songs in light-hearted glee, and poor Oliver Preen must have been ready to die of mortal pain.

The element of interest to-day lay in Miss Cherry Dawson. In her undisguised assumption of ownership in Fred Scott, and in Juliet Chandler’s rampant jealousy of the pair. You should have seen the girl flitting about like a fairy, in her white muslin frock, the golden shower of curls falling around her like nothing but threads of transparent amber. Fred was evidently very far gone. Juliet wore white also.

Whether things would have come that evening to the startling pass they did but for an unfortunate remark made in thoughtless fun, not in malice, I cannot tell. It gave a sting to Juliet that she could not bear. A ridiculous pastime was going on. Some of them were holding hands in a circle and dancing round to the “House that Jack Built,” each one reciting a sentence in turn. If you forgot your sentence, you paid a forfeit. The one falling to Juliet Chandler was “This the maiden all forlorn.” “Why, that’s exactly what you are, Juliet!” cried Tom Coney, impulsively, and [244] a laugh went round. Juliet said nothing, but I saw her face change to the hue of death. The golden hair of the other damsel was gleaming just then within view amidst the trees, accompanied by the black head and black whiskers of Mr. Fred Scott.

“That young man must have a rare time of it between the two,” whispered Tod to me. “As good as the ass between the bundles of hay.”

At dusk began the fun of the harvest-home. Mrs. Cramp’s labourers and their wives sat in the large kitchen at an abundant board. Hot beef, mutton and hams crowded it, with vegetables; and of fruit pies and tarts there was a goodly show. Some of us helped to wait on them, and that was the best fun of all.

They had all taken as much as they could possibly eat, and were in the full flow of cider and beer and delight; a young man in a clean white smock-frock was sheepishly indulging the table with a song: “Young Roger of the Valley,” and I was laughing till I had to hold my sides; when Mrs. Cramp touched me on the back. She sat with the Miss Dennets in the little parlour off the kitchen, in full view of the company. I sat on the door-sill between them.

“Johnny,” she whispered, “I don’t see Juliet and Cherry Dawson. Have they been in at all?”

I did not remember to have seen them; or Fred Scott either.

“Just go out and look for the two girls, will you, Johnny. It’s too late for them to be out, though it is a warm night. Tell them I say they are to come in at once,” said Mrs. Cramp.

Not half a stone’s throw from the house I found them—quarrelling. Their noisy voices guided me. A brilliant moon lighted up the scene. The young ladies were taunting one another; Juliet in [245] frantic passion; Cherry in sarcastic mockery. Fred Scott, after trying in vain to throw oil upon the troubled waters, had given it up as hopeless, and stood leaning against a tree in silent patience.

“It’s quite true,” Cherry was saying tauntingly when I got up. “We *are* engaged. We shall be married shortly. Come!”

“You are not,” raved Juliet, her voice trembling with the intense rage she was in. “He was engaged to me before you came here; he is engaged to me still.”

Cherry laughed out in mockery. “Dear me! old maids do deceive themselves so!”

Very hard, that, and Juliet winced. She was five or six years older than the fairy. How Fred relished the bringing home to him of his sins, I leave you to judge.

“I say, can’t you have done with this, you silly girls?” he cried out meekly.

“In a short time you’ll have our wedding-cards,” went on Cherry. “It’s all arranged. He’s only waiting for me to decide whether it shall take place here or at Gretna Green.”

Juliet dashed round to face Fred Scott. “If this be true; if you do behave in this false way to me, I’ll not survive it,” she said, hardly able to bring the words out in her storm of passion. “Do you hear me? I’ll not live to see it, I say; and my ghost shall haunt her for her whole life after.”

“Come now, easy, Juliet,” pleaded Fred uncomfortably. “It’s all nonsense, you know.”

“I think it is; I think she is saying this to aggravate me,” assented Juliet, subsiding to a sort of calmness. “If not, take you warning, Cherry Dawson, for I’ll keep my word. My apparition shall haunt you for ever and ever.”

“It had better begin to-night, then, for you’ll soon find out that it’s as true as gospel,” retorted Cherry.

Managing at last to get in a word, I delivered Mrs. Cramp’s message: they were to come in [246]
instantly. Fred obeyed it with immense relief and ran in before me. The two girls would follow, I concluded, when their jarring had spent itself. The last glimpse I had of them, they were stretching out their faces at each other like a couple of storks. Juliet’s straw hat had fallen from her head and was hanging by its strings round her neck.

“Oh, they’re coming,” spoke up Fred, in answer to Mrs. Cramp. “It’s very nice out there; the moon’s bright as day.”

And presently I heard the laugh of Cherry Dawson amidst us. Her golden hair, her scarlet cheeks and her blue eyes were all sparkling together.

III

It was the next morning. We were at breakfast, answering Mr. and Mrs. Todhetley’s questions about the harvest home, when old Thomas came in, all sad and scared, to tell some news. Juliet Chandler was dead: she had destroyed herself.

Of course the Squire at once attacked Thomas for saying it. But a sick feeling of conviction arose within me that it was true. One of the servants, out of doors on an errand, had heard it from a man in the road. The Squire sat rubbing his face, which had turned hot.

Leaving the breakfast table, I started for Mrs. Cramp’s. Miss Susan Dennet was standing at her gate, her white handkerchief thrown over her head, her pale face limp with fright.

“Johnny,” she called to me, “have you heard? Do you think it can be true?”

“Well, I hope not, Miss Susan. I am now going there to see. What I’m thinking of is this—if it is not true, how can such a report have arisen?”

Tod caught me up, and we found the farm in distress and commotion. It was all true; and poor [247]
Mrs. Cramp was almost dumb with dismay. These were the particulars: The previous evening, Juliet did not appear at the late supper, laid in the dining-room for the guests; at least, no one remembered to have seen her. Later, when the guests had left, and Mrs. Cramp was in the kitchen busy with her maids, Cherry Dawson looked in, bed-candle in hand, to say good-night. “I suppose Juliet is going up with you,” remarked Mrs. Cramp. “Oh, Juliet went up ages ago,” said Cherry, in answer.

The night passed quietly. Early in the morning one of the farm men went to the eel-pond to put in a net, and saw some clothes lying on the brink. Rushing indoors, he brought out Sally. She knew the things at once. There lay the white dress and the pink ribbons which Juliet had worn the night before; the straw hat, and a small fleecy handkerchief which she had tied round her neck at sundown. Pinned to the sash and the dress was a piece of paper on which was written in ink, in a large hand—Juliet’s hand:

“I SAID I WOULD DO IT; AND I WILL HAUNT HER FOR EVERMORE.”

Of course she had taken these things off and left them on the bank, with the memorandum pinned to them, to make known that she had flung herself into the pond.

“I can scarcely believe it; it seems so incredible,” sighed poor Mrs. Cramp, to the Squire, who had come bustling in. “Juliet, as I should have thought, was one of the very last girls to do such a thing.”

The next to appear upon the scene, puffing and panting with agitation, was Fred Scott. He asked which of the two girls it was, having heard only a garbled account; and now learned that it was Juliet. As to Cherry Dawson, she was shut up in her bedroom in shrieking hysterics. Men were preparing to drag the pond in search of——well, what was lying there.

The pond was at the end of the garden, near the fence that divided it from the three-acre field. [248]
Nothing had been disturbed. The white frock and pink ribbons were lying with the paper pinned to them; the hat was close by. A yard off was the white woollen handkerchief; and near it I saw the faded bunch of mignonette which Juliet had worn in her waistband. It looked as if she had

flung the things off in desperation.

Standing later in the large parlour, listening to comments and opinions, one question troubled me —Ought I to tell what I knew of the quarrel? It might look like treachery towards Scott and the girl upstairs; but, should that poor dead Juliet——

The doubt was suddenly solved for me.

“What I want to get at is this,” urged the Squire: “did anything happen to drive her to this? One doesn’t throw oneself into an eel-pond for nothing in one’s sober senses.”

“Miss Juliet and Miss Dawson had a quarrel out o’ doors last night,” struck in Joan, for the two servants were assisting at the conference. “Sally heard ’em.”

“What’s that?” cried Mrs. Cramp. “Speak up.”

“Well, it’s true, ma’am,” said Sally, coming forward. “I went out to shake a tray-cloth, and heard voices at a distance, all in a rage like; so I just stepped on a bit to see what it meant. The two young lasses was snarling at one another like anything. Miss Juliet was——”

“What were they quarrelling about?” interrupted the Squire.

“Well, sir, it seemed to be about Mr. Scott—which of ’em had him for a sweetheart, and which of ’em hadn’t. Mr. Johnny Ludlow ran up as I came in: perhaps he heard more than I did.”

After that, there was nothing for it but to let the past scene come out; and Mrs. Cramp had the pleasure of being enlightened as to the rivalry which had been going on under her roof and the [249] ill-feeling which had arisen out of it. Fred Scott, to do him justice, spoke up like a man, not denying the flirtation he had carried on, first with Juliet, next with Cherry, but he declared most positively that it had never been serious on any side.

The Squire wheeled round. “Just say what you mean by that, Mr. Frederick. What do you call serious?”

“I never said a word to either of them which could suggest serious intentions, sir. I never hinted at such a thing as getting married.”

“Now look here, young man,” cried Mrs. Cramp, taking her handkerchief from her troubled face, “what right had you to do that? By what right did you play upon those young girls with your silly speeches and your flirting ways, if you meant nothing?—nothing to either of them?”

“I am sorry for it now, ma’am,” said Scott, eating humble pie; “I wouldn’t have done it for the world had I foreseen this. It was just a bit of flirting and nothing else. And neither of them ever thought it was anything else; they knew better; only they became snappish with one another.”

“Did not think you meant marrying?” cried the Squire sarcastically, fixing Scott with his spectacles.

“Just so, sir. Why, how could I mean it?” went on Scott in his simple way. “I’ve no money, while my mother lives, to set up a wife or a house; she wouldn’t let me. I joked and laughed with the two girls, and they joked and laughed back again. I don’t care what they may have said between themselves—they *knew* there was nothing in it.”

Scott was right, so far. All the world, including the Chandlers and poor Juliet, knew that Scott was no more likely to marry than the man in the moon.

“And you could stand by quietly last night when they were having, it seems, this bitter quarrel, and not stop it?” exclaimed Mrs. Cramp.

“They would not listen to me,” returned Scott. “I went between them; spoke to one, spoke to the [250] other; told them what they were quarrelling about was utter nonsense—and the more I said, the more they wrangled. Johnny Ludlow saw how it was; he came up at the end of it.”

Cherry Dawson was sent for downstairs, and came in between Sally and Joan, limp and tearful and shaking with fright. Mrs. Cramp questioned her.

“It was all done in fun,” she said with a sob. “Juliet and I teased one another. It was as much her fault as mine. Fred Scott needn’t talk. I’m sure *I* don’t want him. I’ve somebody waiting for me at Edgbaston, if I choose. Scott may go to York!”

“Suppose you mind your manners, young woman: you’ve done enough mischief in my house without forgetting *them*,” reproved Mrs. Cramp. “I want to know when you last saw Juliet.”

“We came in together after the quarrel. She ran up to her room; I joined the rest of you. As she did not come down to supper, I thought she had gone to bed. O-o-o-o-o!” shivered Cherry; “and she says she’ll haunt me! I shall never dare to be alone in the dark again.”

Mr. Fred Scott took his departure, glad no doubt to do so, carrying with him a hint from Mrs. Cramp that for the present his visits must cease, unless he should be required to give evidence at the inquest. As he went out, Mr. Paul and Tom Chandler came in together. Tom, strong in plain common-sense, could not at all understand it.

“Passion must have overbalanced her reason and driven her mad,” he said aside to me. “The

taunts of that Dawson girl did it, I reckon."

"Blighted love," said I.

"Moonshine," answered Tom Chandler. "Juliet, poor girl, had gone in for too many flirtations to care much for Scott. As to that golden-haired one, *her* life is passed in nothing else: getting out of one love affair into another, month in, month out. Her brother Tim once told her so in my [251] presence. No, Johnny, it is a terrible calamity, but I shall never understand how she came to do it as long as I live."

I was not sure that I should. Juliet was very practical: not one of your moaning, sighing, die-away sort of girls who lose their brains for love, like crazy Jane. It was a dreadful thing, whatever might have been the cause, and we were all sorry for Mrs. Cramp. Nothing had stirred us like this since the death of Oliver Preen.

Georgiana Chandler came flying over from Birmingham in a state of excitement. Cherry Dawson had gone then, or Georgie might have shaken her to pieces. When put up, Georgie had a temper of her own. Cherry had disappeared into the wilds of Devonshire, where her home was, and where she most devoutly hoped Juliet's ghost would not find its way.

"It is an awful thing to have taken place in your house, Aunt Mary Ann. And why unhappy, ill-fated Juliet should have—but I can't talk of it," broke off Georgie.

"I know that I am ashamed of its having happened here, Georgiana," assented Mrs. Cramp. "I am not alluding to the sad termination, but to that parcel of nonsense, the sweethearting."

"Clementina is more heartless than an owl over it," continued Georgie, making her remarks. "She says it serves Juliet right for her flirting folly, and she hopes Cherry will be haunted till her yellow curls turn grey."

The more they dragged, the less chance there seemed of finding Juliet. Nothing came up but eels. It was known that the eel-pond had a hole or two in it which no drags could penetrate. Gloom settled down upon us all. Mrs. Cramp's healthy cheeks lost some of their redness. One day, calling at Crabb Cot, she privately told us that the trouble would lie upon her for ever. The best word Tod gave to it was—that he would go a day's march with peas in his shoes to see a certain [252] lady hanging by her golden hair on a sour apple tree.

It was a bleak October evening. Jane Preen, in her old shawl and garden hat, was hurrying to Dame Sym's on an errand for her mother. The cold wind sighed and moaned in the trees, clouds flitted across the face of the crescent moon. It scarcely lighted up the little old church beyond the Triangle, and the graves in the churchyard beneath, Oliver's amidst them. Jane shivered, and ran into Mrs. Sym's.

Carrying back her parcel, she turned in at the garden gate and stood leaning over it for a few moments. Tears were coursing down her cheeks. Life for a long time had seemed very hard to Jane; no hope anywhere.

The sound of quick footsteps broke upon her ear, and a gentleman came into view. She rather wondered who it was; whether anyone was coming to call on her father.

"Jane! Jane!"

With a faint cry, she fell into the arms opened to receive her—those of Valentine Chandler. He went away, a ne'er-do-well, three years ago, shattered in health, shaken in spirit; he had returned a healthy, hearty man, all his parts about him.

Yes, Valentine had turned over a new leaf from the moment he touched the Canadian shores. He had put his shoulder to the wheel in earnest, had persevered and prospered. And now he had a profitable farm of his own, and a pretty house upon it, all in readiness for Jane.

"We have heard from time to time that you were doing well," she said, with a sob of joy. "Oh, Valentine, how good it is! To have done it all yourself!"

"Not altogether myself, Jane," he answered. "I did my best, and God sent His blessing upon it."

Jane no longer felt the night cold, the wind bleak, or remembered that her mother was waiting [253] for the parcel. They paced the old wilderness of a garden, arm locked within arm. There was something in the windy night to put them in mind of that other night: the night of their parting, when Valentine had sung his song of farewell, and bade her remember him though rolling ocean placed its bounds between them. They had been faithful to one another.

Seated on the bench, under the walnut tree, the very spot on which poor Oliver had sat after that rush home from his fatal visit to Mr. Paul's office at Islip, Jane ventured to say a word about Juliet, and, to her surprise, found that Valentine knew nothing.

"I have not heard any news yet, Jane," he said. "I came straight to you from the station. Presently I shall go back to astonish Aunt Mary Ann. Why? What about Juliet?"

Jane enlightened him by degrees, giving him one particular after another. Valentine listening in silence to the end.

“I don’t believe it.”

“Don’t believe it!” exclaimed Jane.

“Not a syllable of it.”

“But what do you mean? What don’t you believe?”

“That Juliet threw herself into the pond. My dear, she is not the kind of girl to do it; she’d no more do such a thing than I should.”

“Oh, Val! It is true the drags brought up nothing but eels; but——”

“Of course they didn’t. There’s nothing but eels there to bring up.”

“Then where can Juliet be?—what is the mystery?” dissented Jane. “What became of her?”

“That I don’t know. Rely upon it, Janey, she is not there. She’d never jump into that cold pond. How long ago is this?”

“Nearly a month. Three weeks last Thursday.” [254]

“Ah,” said Valentine. “Well, I’ll see if I can get to the bottom of it.”

Showing himself indoors to Mr. and Mrs. Preen for a few minutes, Valentine then made his way to Mrs. Cramp’s, where he would stay. He knew his mother was away, and her house shut up. Mrs. Cramp, recovering from her surprise, told him he was welcome as the sun in harvest. She had been more grieved when Valentine went wrong than the world suspected.

Seated over the fire, in her comfortable parlour, after supper, Valentine told her his plans. He had come over for one month; could not leave his farm longer; just to shake hands with them all, and to take Jane Preen back with him. That discussed, Mrs. Cramp entered gingerly upon the sad news about Juliet—not having thought well to deluge him with it the moment he came in. Valentine refused to believe it—as he had refused with Jane.

“Bless the boy!” exclaimed Mrs. Cramp, staring. “What on earth makes him say such a thing?”

“Because I am sure of it, Aunt Mary Ann. Fancy strong-minded Juliet throwing herself into an eel pond! She is gadding about somewhere, deep already, I daresay, in another flirtation.”

Mrs. Cramp, waiting to collect her scattered senses, shook her head plaintively. “My dear,” she said, “I don’t pretend to know the fashion of things in the outlandish world in which you live, but over here it couldn’t be. Once a girl has been drowned in a pond—whether eel, duck, or carp pond, what matters it?—she can’t come to life again and go about flirting.”

To us all Valentine was, as Mrs. Cramp had phrased it, more welcome than the sun in harvest, and was made much of. When a young fellow has been going to the bad, and has the resolution to [255] pull up and to persevere, he should be honoured, cried the Squire—and we did our best to honour Val. For a week or two there was nothing but visiting everywhere. He was then going to Guernsey to see his mother, when she wrote to stop him, saying she was coming back to Crabb for his wedding.

And while Valentine was reading his mother’s letter at the tea-table—for the Channel Islands letters always came in by the second post—Mrs. Cramp was opening one directed to her. Suddenly Valentine heard a gurgle—and next a moan. Looking up, he saw his aunt gasping for breath, her face an indescribable mixture of emotions.

“Why, Aunt Mary Ann,” he cried; “are you ill?”

“If I’m not ill, I might be,” retorted Mrs. Cramp. “Here’s a letter from that wretched girl—that Juliet! She’s not dead after all. She has been in Guernsey all this time.”

Valentine paused a moment to take in the truth of the announcement, and then burst into laughter deep and long. Mrs. Cramp handed him the letter.

“Dear Aunt Mary Ann,—I hope you will forgive me! Georgie writes word that you have been in a way about me. I thought you’d be *sure* to guess it was only a trick. I did it to give a thorough fright to that wicked cat; you can’t think how full of malice she is. I put on my old navy-blue serge and close winter bonnet, which no one would be likely to miss or remember, and carried the other things to the edge of the pond and left them there. While you were at supper I stole away, caught the last train at Crabb Junction, and surprised Clementina at Edgbaston. She promised to be secret—she hates that she-cat—and the next morning I started for Guernsey. Clementina did not tell Georgie till a week ago, after she heard that Valentine would not believe it, and then Georgie wrote to me and blew me up. I am enchanted to hear that the toad passes her nights in horrid fear of seeing my ghost, and that her yellow hair is turning blue; Georgie says it is.—Your [256] ever affectionate and repentant niece,

“Julietta.

“P.S.—I hope you will believe I am very sorry for paining you, dear Aunt Mary Ann. And I want to

tell you that I think it likely I shall soon be married. An old gentleman out here who has a beautiful house and lots of money admires me very much. Please let Fred Scott know this.”

And so, there it was—Julietta was in the land of the living and had never been out of it. And we had gone through our fright and pain unnecessarily, and the poor eels had been disturbed for nothing.

They were married at the little church at Duck Brook; no ceremony, hardly anyone invited to it. Mr. Preen gave Jane away. Tom Chandler and Emma were there, and Mrs. Jacob Chandler and Mrs. Cramp. Jane asked me to go—to see the last of her, she said. She wore a plain silk dress of a greyish colour, and a white straw bonnet with a bit of orange blossom—which she took off before they started on their journey. For they went off at once to Liverpool—and would sail the next day for their new home.

And Valentine is always steady and prospering, and Jane says Canada is better than England and she wouldn’t come back for the world.

And Juliet is married and lives in Guernsey, and drives about with her old husband in his handsome carriage and pair. But Mrs. Cramp has not forgiven her yet.

THE SILENT CHIMES

[257]

I.—PUTTING THEM UP

I

The events of this history did not occur within my own recollection, and I can only relate them at second-hand—from the Squire and others. They are curious enough; especially as regard the three parsons—one following upon another—in their connection with the Monk family, causing no end of talk in Church Leet parish, as well as in other parishes within earshot.

About three miles’ distance from Church Dykely, going northwards across country, was the rural parish of Church Leet. It contained a few farmhouses and some labourers’ cottages. The church, built of grey stone, stood in its large graveyard; the parsonage, a commodious house, was close by; both of them were covered with time-worn ivy. Nearly half a mile off, on a gentle eminence, rose the handsome mansion called Leet Hall, the abode of the Monk family. Nearly the whole of the parish—land, houses, church and all—belonged to them. At the time I am about to tell of they were the property of one man—Godfrey Monk.

The late owner of the place (except for one short twelvemonth) was old James Monk, Godfrey’s father. Old James had three sons and one daughter—Emma—his wife dying early. The eldest son (mostly styled “young James”) was about as wild a blade as ever figured in story; the second son, [258] Raymond, was an invalid; the third, Godfrey, a reckless lad, ran away to sea when he was fourteen.

If the Monks were celebrated for one estimable quality more than another, it was temper: a cross-grained, imperious, obstinate temper. “Run away to sea, has he?” cried old James when he heard the news; “very well, at sea he shall stop.” And at sea Godfrey did stop, not disliking the life, and perhaps not finding any other open to him. He worked his way up in the merchant service by degrees, until he became commander and was called Captain Monk.

The years went on. Young James died, and the other two sons grew to be middle-aged men. Old James, the father, found by signs and tokens that his own time was approaching; and he was the next to go. Save for a slender income bequeathed to Godfrey and to his daughter, the whole of the property was left to Raymond, and to Godfrey after him if Raymond had no son. The entail had been cut off in the past generation; for which act the reasons do not concern us.

So Raymond, ailing greatly always, entered into possession of his inheritance. He lived about a twelvemonth afterwards, and then died: died unmarried. Therefore Godfrey came into all.

People were curious, the Squire says, as to what sort of man Godfrey would turn out to be; for he had not troubled home much since he ran away. He was a widower; that much was known; his wife having been a native of Trinidad, in the West Indies.

A handsome man, with fair, curling hair (what was left of it); proud blue eyes; well-formed features with a chronic flush upon them, for he liked his glass, and took it; a commanding, imperious manner, and a temper uncompromising as the grave. Such was Captain Godfrey Monk; now in his forty-fifth year. Upon his arrival at Leet Hall after landing, with his children and one or two dusky attendants in their train, he was received by his sister Emma, Mrs. Carradyne. Major [259]

Carradyne had died fighting in India, and his wife, at the request of her brother Raymond, came then to live at Leet Hall. Not of necessity, for Mrs. Carradyne was well off and could have made her home where she pleased, but Raymond had liked to have her. Godfrey also expressed his pleasure that she should remain; she could act as mother to his children.

Godfrey's children were three: Katherine, aged seventeen; Hubert, aged ten; and Eliza, aged eight. The girls had their father's handsome features, but in their skin there ran a dusky tinge, hinting of other than pure Saxon blood; and they were every whit as haughtily self-willed as he was. The boy, Hubert, was extremely pretty, his face fair, his complexion delicately beautiful, his auburn hair bright, his manner winning; but he liked to exercise his own will, and appeared to have generally done it.

A day or two, and Mrs. Carradyne sat down aghast. "I never saw children so troublesome and self-willed in all my life, Godfrey," she said to her brother. "Have they ever been controlled at all?"

"Had their own way pretty much, I expect," answered the Captain. "I was not often at home, you know, and there's nobody else they'd obey."

"Well, Godfrey, if I am to remain here, you will have to help me manage them."

"That's as may be, Emma. When I deem it necessary to speak, I speak; otherwise I don't interfere. And you must not get into the habit of appealing to me, recollect."

Captain Monk's conversation was sometimes interspersed with sundry light words, not at all orthodox, and not necessarily delivered in anger. In those past days swearing was regarded as a gentleman's accomplishment; a sailor, it was believed, could not at all get along without it. Manners change. The present age prides itself upon its politeness: but what of its sincerity? [260]

Mrs. Carradyne, mild and gentle, commenced her task of striving to tame her brother's rebellious children. She might as well have let it alone. The girls laughed at her one minute and set her at defiance the next. Hubert, who had good feeling, was more obedient; he did not openly defy her. At times, when her task pressed heavily upon her spirits, Mrs. Carradyne felt tempted to run away from Leet Hall, as Godfrey had run from it in the days gone by. Her own two children were frightened at their cousins, and she speedily sent both to school, lest they should catch their bad manners. Henry was ten, the age of Hubert; Lucy was between five and six.

Just before the death of Raymond Monk, the living of Church Leet became vacant, and the last act of his life was to present it to a worthy young clergyman named George West. This caused intense dissatisfaction to Godfrey. He had heard of the late incumbent's death, and when he arrived home and found the living filled up he proclaimed his anger loudly, lavishing abuse upon poor dead Raymond for his precipitancy. He had wanted to bestow it upon a friend of his, a Colonial chaplain, and had promised it to him. It was a checkmate there was no help for now, for Mr. West could not be turned out again; but Captain Monk was not accustomed to be checkmated, and resented it accordingly. He took up, for no other reason, a most inveterate dislike to George West, and showed it practically.

In every step the Vicar took, at every turn and thought, he found himself opposed by Captain Monk. Had he a suggestion to make for the welfare of the parish, his patron ridiculed it; did he venture to propose some wise measure at a vestry meeting, the Captain put him and his measure down. Not civilly either, but with a stinging contempt, semi-covert though it was, that made its impression on the farmers around. The Reverend George West was a man of humility, given to much self-disparagement, so he bore all in silence and hoped for better times. [261]

The time went on; three years of it; Captain Monk had fully settled down in his ancestral home, and the neighbours had learnt what a domineering, self-willed man he was. But he had his virtues. He was kind in a general way, generous where it pleased him to be, inordinately attached to his children, and hospitable to a fault.

On the last day of every year, as the years came round, Captain Monk, following his late father's custom, gave a grand dinner to his tenants; and a very good custom it would have been, but that he and they got rather too jolly. The parson was always invited—and went; and sometimes a few of Captain Monk's personal friends were added.

Christmas came round this year as usual, and the invitations to the dinner went out. One came to Squire Todhetley, a youngish man then, and one to my father, William Ludlow, who was younger than the Squire. It was a green Christmas; the weather so warm and genial that the hearty farmers, flocking to Leet Hall, declared they saw signs of buds sprouting in the hedges, whilst the large fire in the Captain's dining-room was quite oppressive.

Looking from the window of the parsonage sitting-room in the twilight, while drawing on his gloves, preparatory to setting forth, stood Mr. West. His wife was bending over an easy-chair, in which their only child, little Alice, lay back, covered up. Her breathing was quick, her skin parched with fever. The wife looked sickly herself.

"Well, I suppose it is time to go," observed Mr. West, slowly. "I shall be late if I don't."

"I rather wonder you go at all, George," returned his wife. "Year after year, when you come back

from this dinner, you invariably say you will not go to another."

"I know it, Mary. I dislike the drinking that goes on—and the free conversation—and the objectionable songs; I feel out of place in it all." [262]

"And the Captain's contemptuous treatment of yourself, you might add."

"Yes, that is another unwelcome item in the evening's programme."

"Then, George, why *do* you go?"

"Well, I think you know why. I do not like to refuse the invitation; it would only increase Captain Monk's animosity and widen still further the breach between us. As patron he holds so much in his power. Besides that, my presence at the table does act, I believe, as a mild restraint on some of them, keeping the drinking and the language somewhat within bounds. Yes, I suppose my duty lies in going. But I shall not stay late, Mary," added the parson, bending to look at the suffering child; "and if you see any real necessity for the doctor to be called in to-night, I will go for him."

"Dood-bye, pa-pa," lisped the little four-year-old maiden.

He kissed the little hot face, said adieu to his wife and went out, hoping that the child would recover without the doctor; for the living of Church Leet was but a poor one, though the parsonage house was so handsome. It was a hundred-and-sixty pounds a year, for which sum the tithes had been compounded, and Mr. West had not much money to spare for superfluities—especially as he had to substantially help his mother.

The twilight had deepened almost to night, and the lights in the mansion seemed to smile a cheerful welcome as he approached it. The pillared entrance, ascended to by broad steps, stood in the middle, and a raised terrace of stone ran along before the windows on either side. It was quite true that every year, at the conclusion of these feasts, the Vicar resolved never to attend another; but he was essentially a man of peace, striving ever to lay oil upon troubled waters, after the example left by his Master. [263]

Dinner. The board was full. Captain Monk presided, genial to-day; genial even to the parson. Squire Todhetley faced the Captain at the foot; Mr. West sat at the Squire's right hand, between him and Farmer Threpp, a quiet man and supposed to be a very substantial one. All went on pleasantly; but when the elaborate dinner gave place to dessert and wine-drinking, the company became rather noisy.

"I think it's about time you left us," cried the Squire by-and-by to young Hubert, who sat next him on the other side: and over and over again Mr. Todhetley has repeated to us in later years the very words that passed.

"By George, yes!" put in a bluff and hearty fox-hunter, the master of the hounds, bending forward to look at the lad, for he was in a line with him, and breaking short off an anecdote he was regaling the company with. "I forgot you were there, Master Hubert. Quite time you went to bed."

"I daresay!" laughed the boy. "Please let me alone, all of you. I don't want attention drawn to me."

But the slight commotion had attracted Captain Monk's notice. He saw his son.

"What's that?—Hubert! What brings you there now, you young pirate? I ordered you to go out with the cloth."

"I am not doing any harm, papa," said the boy, turning his fair and beautiful face towards his father.

Captain Monk pointed his stern finger at the door; a mandate which Hubert dared not disobey, and he went out.

The company sat on, an interminable period of time it seemed to the Vicar. He glanced stealthily at his watch. Eleven o'clock.

"Thinking of going, Parson?" said Mr. Threpp. "I'll go with you. My head's not one of the strongest, and I've had about as much as I ought to carry." [264]

They rose quietly, not to disturb the table; intending to steal away, if possible, without being observed. Unluckily, Captain Monk chanced to be looking that way.

"Halloa! who's turning sneak?—Not you, surely, Parson!—" in a meaningly contemptuous tone. "And *you*, Threpp, of all men! Sit down again, both of you, if you don't want to quarrel with me. Odds fish! has my dining-room got sharks in it, that you'd run away? Winter, just lock the door, will you; you are close to it, and pass up the key to me."

Mr. Winter, a jovial old man and the largest tenant on the estate, rose to do the Captain's behest, and sent up the key.

"Nobody quits my room," said the host, as he took it, "until we have seen the old year out and the new one in. What else do you come for—eh, gentlemen?"

The revelry went on. The decanters circulated more quickly, the glasses clinked, the songs

became louder, the Captain's sea stories broader. Mr. West perforce made the best of the situation, certain words of Holy Writ running through his memory:

"*Look not thou upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth its colour in the cup, when it moveth itself aright!*"

Well, more than well, for Captain Monk, that he had not looked upon the red wine that night!

In the midst of all this, the hall clock began to strike twelve. The Captain rose, after filling his glass to the brim.

"Bumpers round, gentlemen. On your legs. Ready? Hooray! Here's to the shade of the year that's gone, and may it have buried all our cares with it! And here's good luck to the one setting in. A happy New Year to you all; and may we never know a moment in it worse than the present? Three-times-three—and drain your glasses."

"But we have had the toast too soon!" called out one of the farmers, making the discovery close after the cheers had subsided. "It wants some minutes yet to midnight, Captain." [265]

Captain Monk snatched out his watch—worn in those days in what was called the fob-pocket—its chain and bunch of seals at the end hanging down.

"By Jupiter!" he exclaimed. "Hang that butler of mine! He knew the hall clock was too fast, and I told him to put it back. If his memory serves him no better than this, he may ship himself off to a fresh berth.—Hark! Listen!"

It was the church clock striking twelve. The sound reached the dining-room room very clearly, the wind setting that way. "Another bumper," cried the Captain, and his guests drank it.

"This day twelvemonth I was at a feast in Derbyshire; the bells of a neighbouring church rang in the year with pleasant melody; chimes they were," remarked a guest, who was a partial stranger. "Your church has no bells, I suppose?"

"It has one; an old ting-tang that calls us to service on a Sunday," said Mr. Winter.

"I like to hear those midnight chimes, for my part. I like to hear them chime in the new year," went on the stranger.

"Chimes!" cried out Captain Monk, who was getting very considerably elated, "why should we not have chimes? Mr. West, why don't we have chimes?"

"Our church does not possess any, sir—as this gentleman has just remarked," was Mr. West's answer.

"Egad, but that parson of ours is going to set us all ablaze with his wit!" jerked out the Captain ironically. "I asked, sir, why we should not get a set of chimes; I did not say we had got them. Is there any just cause or impediment why we should not, Mr. Vicar?"

"Only the expense," replied the Vicar, in a conciliatory tone. [266]

"Oh, bother expense! That's what you are always wanting to groan over. Mr. Churchwarden Threpp, we will call a vestry meeting and make a rate."

"The parish could not bear it, Captain Monk," remonstrated the clergyman. "You know what dissatisfaction was caused by the last extra rate put on, and how low an ebb things are at just now."

"When I will a thing, I do it," retorted the Captain, with a meaning word or two. "We'll send out the rate and we'll get the chimes."

"It will, I fear, lie in my duty to protest against it," spoke the uneasy parson.

"It may lie in your duty to be a wet blanket, but you won't protest me out of my will. Gentlemen, we will all meet here again this time twelvemonth, when the chimes shall ring-in the new year for you.—— Here, Dutton, you can unlock the door now," concluded the Captain, handing the key to the other churchwarden. "Our parson is upon thorns to be away from us."

Not the parson only, but several others availed themselves of the opportunity to escape.

II

It perhaps did not surprise the parish to find that its owner and master, Captain Monk, intended to persist in his resolution of embellishing the church-tower with a set of chiming-bells. They knew him too well to hope anything less. Why! two years ago, at the same annual feast, some remarks or other at table put it into his head to declare he would stop up the public path by the Rill; and his obstinate will carried it out, regardless of the inconvenience it caused.

A vestry meeting was called, and the rate (to obtain funds for the bells) was at length passed. Two or three voices were feebly lifted in opposition; Mr. West alone had courage to speak out; but the Captain put him down with his strong hand. It may be asked why Captain Monk did not provide the funds himself for this whim. But he would never touch his own pocket for the benefit of the parish if he could help it: and it was thought that his antagonism to the parson was the deterring motive. [267]

To impose the rate was one thing, to collect it quite another. Some of the poorer ratepayers protested with tears in their eyes that they could not pay. Superfluous rates (really not necessary ones) were perpetually being inflicted upon them, they urged, and were bringing them, together with a succession of recent bad seasons, to the verge of ruin. They carried their remonstrances to their Vicar, and he in turn carried them to Captain Monk.

It only widened the breach. The more persistently, though gently, Mr. West pleaded the cause of his parishioners, asking the Captain to be considerate to them for humanity's sake, the greater grew the other's obstinacy in holding to his own will. To be thus opposed roused all the devil within him—it was his own expression; and he grew to hate Mr. West with an exceeding bitter hatred.

The chimes were ordered—to play one tune only. Mr. West asked, when the thing was absolutely inevitable, that at least some sweet and sacred melody, acceptable to church-going ears, might be chosen; but Captain Monk fixed on a sea-song that was a favourite of his own—"The Bay of Biscay." At the end of every hour, when the clock had struck, the Bay of Biscay was to burst forth to charm the parish.

The work was put in hand at once, Captain Monk finding the necessary funds, to be repaid by the proceeds of the rate. Other expenses were involved, such as the strengthening of the belfry. The rate was not collected quickly. It was, I say, one of those times of scarcity that people used to talk [268] so much of years ago; and when the parish beadle, who was the parish collector, went round with the tax-paper in his hand, the poorer of the cottagers could not respond to it. Some of them had not paid the last levy, and Captain Monk threatened harsh measures. Altogether, what with one thing or another, Church Leet that year was kept in a state of ferment. But the work went on.

One windy day in September, Mr. West sat in his study writing a sermon, when a jarring crash rang out from the church close by. He leaped from his chair. The unusual noise had startled him; and it struck on every chord of vexation he possessed. He knew that workmen were busy in the tower, but this was the first essay of the chimes. The bells had clashed in some way one upon the other; not giving out The Bay of Biscay or any other melody, but a very discordant jangle indeed. It was the first and the last time that poor George West heard their sound.

He put the blotting-paper upon his sermon; he was in no mind to continue it then; took up his hat and went out. His wife spoke to him from the open window.

"Are you going out now, George? Tea is all but ready."

Turning back on the path, he passed into the sitting-room. A cup of tea might soothe his nerves. The tea-tray stood on the table, and Mrs. West, caddy in hand, was putting the tea into the tea-pot. Little Alice sat gravely by.

"Did you hear dat noise up in the church, papa?" she asked.

"Yes, I heard it, dear," sighed the Vicar.

"A fine clashing!" cried Mrs. West. "I have heard something else this afternoon, George, worse than that: Bean's furniture is being taken away."

"What?" cried the Vicar.

"It's true. Sarah went out on an errand and passed the cottage. The chairs and tables were being [269] put outside the door by two men, she says: brokers, I conclude."

Mr. West made short work of his tea and started for the scene. Thomas Bean was a very small farmer indeed, renting about thirty acres. What with the heavy rates, as he said, and other outgoings and bad seasons, and ill-luck altogether, he had been behind in his payments this long while; and now the ill-luck seemed to have come to a climax. Bean and his wife were old; their children were scattered abroad.

"Oh, sir," cried the old lady when she saw the Vicar, the tears raining from her eyes, "it cannot be right that this oppression should fall upon us! We had just managed—Heaven knows how, for I'm sure I don't—to pay the Midsummer rent; and now they've come upon us for the rates, and have took away things worth ten times the sum."

"For the rates!" mechanically spoke the Vicar.

She supposed it was a question. "Yes, sir; two of 'em we had in the house. One was for putting up the chimes; and the other—well, I can't just remember what the other was. The beadle, old Crow, comes in, sir, this afternoon. 'Where be the master?' says he. 'Gone over to t'other side of Church Dykely,' says I. 'Well,' says he, upon that, 'you be going to have some visitors presently, and it's a pity he's out.' 'Visitors, for what, Crow?' says I. 'Oh, you'll see,' says he; 'and then perhaps you'll wish you'd bestirred yourselves to pay your just dues. Captain Monk's patience have been running on for a goodish while, and at last it have run clean out.' Well, sir——"

She had to make a pause; unable to control her grief.

"Well, sir," she went on presently, "Crow's back was hardly turned, when up came two men, wheeling a truck. I saw 'em afar off, by the ricks yonder. One came in; t'other stayed outside with [270] the truck. He asked me whether I was ready with the money for the taxes; and I told him I was

not ready, and had but a couple of shillings in the house. ‘Then I must take the value of it in kind,’ says he. And without another word, he beckons in the outside man to help him. Our middle table, a mahogany, they seized; and the handsome oak chest, which had been our pride; and the master’s arm-chair—— But, there! I can’t go on.”

Mr. West felt nearly as sorrowful as she, and far more angry. In his heart he believed that Captain Monk had done this oppressive thing in revenge. A great deal of ill-feeling had existed in the parish touching the rate made for the chimes; and the Captain assumed that the few who had not yet paid it *would* not pay—not that they could not.

Quitting the cottage in an impulse of anger, he walked swiftly to Leet Hall. It lay in his duty, as he fully deemed, to avow fearlessly to Captain Monk what he thought of this act of oppression, and to protest against it. The beams of the setting sun, sinking below the horizon in the still autumn evening, fell across the stubbled fields from which the corn had not long been reaped; all around seemed to speak of peace.

To accommodate two gentlemen who had come from Worcester that day to Leet Hall on business, and wished to quit it again before dark, the dinner had been served earlier than usual. The guests had left, but Captain Monk was seated still over his wine in the dining-room when Mr. West was shown in. In crossing the hall to it, he met Mrs. Carradyne, who shook hands with him cordially.

Captain Monk looked surprised. “Why, this is an unexpected pleasure—a visit from you, Mr. Vicar,” he cried, in mocking jest. “Hope you have come to your senses! Sit down. Will you take port or sherry?”

“Captain Monk,” returned the Vicar, gravely, as he took the chair the servant had placed, “I am [271] obliged for your courtesy, but I did not intrude upon you this evening to drink wine. I have seen a very sad sight, and I am come hoping to induce you to repair it.”

“Seen what?” cried the Captain, who, it is well to mention, had been taking his wine very freely, even for him. “A flaming sword in the sky?”

“Your tenants, poor Thomas Bean and his wife, are being turned out of house and home, or almost equivalent to it. Some of their furniture has been seized this afternoon to satisfy the demand for these disputed taxes.”

“Who disputes the taxes?”

“The tax imposed for the chimes was always a disputed tax; and——”

“Tush!” interrupted the Captain; “Bean owes other things as well as taxes.”

“It was the last feather, sir, which broke the camel’s back.”

“The last feather will not be taken off, whether it breaks backs or leaves them whole,” retorted the Captain, draining his glass of port and filling it again. “Take you note of that, Mr. Parson.”

“Others are in the same condition as the Beans—quite unable to pay these rates. I pray you, Captain Monk—I am here to *pray* you—not to proceed in the same manner against them. I would also pray you, sir, to redeem this act of oppression by causing their goods to be returned to these two poor, honest, hard-working people.”

“Hold your tongue!” retorted the Captain, aroused to anger. “A pretty example *you’d* set, let you have your way. Every one of the lot shall be made to pay to the last farthing. Who the devil is to pay, do you suppose, if they don’t?”

“Rates are imposed upon the parish needlessly, Captain Monk; it has been so ever since my time [272] here. Pardon me for saying that if you put up chimes to gratify yourself, you should bear the expense, and not throw it upon those who have a struggle to get bread to eat.”

Captain Monk drank off another glass. “Any more treason, Parson?”

“Yes,” said Mr. West, “if you like to call it so. My conscience tells me that the whole procedure in regard to setting up these chimes is so wrong, so manifestly unjust, that I have determined not to allow them to be heard until the rates levied for them are refunded to the poor and oppressed. I believe I have the power to close the belfry-tower, and I shall act upon it.”

“By Jove! do you think *you* are going to stand between me and my will?” cried the Captain passionately. “Every individual who has not yet paid the rate shall be made to pay it to-morrow.”

“There is another world, Captain Monk,” interposed the mild voice of the minister, “to which, I hope, we are all——”

“If you attempt to preach to me——”

At this moment a spoon fell to the ground by the sideboard. The Vicar turned to look; his back was towards it; the Captain peered also at the end of the rapidly-darkening room: when both became aware that one of the servants—Michael, who had shown in Mr. West—stood there; had stood there all the time.

“What are you waiting for, sirrah?” roared his master. “We don’t want *you*. Here! put this window open an inch or two before you go; the room’s close.”

“Shall I bring lights, sir?” asked Michael, after doing as he was directed.

“No: who wants lights? Stir the fire into a blaze.”

Michael left them. It was from him that thus much of the conversation was subsequently known.

Not five minutes had elapsed when a commotion was heard in the dining-room. Then the bell [273]
rang violently, and the Captain opened the door—overturning a chair in his passage to it—and shouted out for a light. More than one servant flew to obey the order: in his hasty moods their master brooked not delay: and three separate candles were carried in.

“Good lack, master!” exclaimed the butler, John Rimmer, who was a native of Church Dykely, “what’s amiss with the Parson?”

“Lift him up, and loosen his neck-cloth,” said Captain Monk, his tone less imperious than usual.

Mr. West lay on the hearthrug near his chair, his head resting close to the fender. Rimmer raised his head, another servant took off his black neck-tie; for it was only on high days that the poor Vicar indulged in a white one. He gasped twice, struggled slightly, and then lay quietly in the butler’s arms.

“Oh, sir!” burst forth the man in a horror-stricken voice to his master, “this is surely death!”

It surely was. George West, who had gone there but just before in the height of health and strength, had breathed his last.

How did it happen? How could it have happened? Ay, how indeed? It was a question which has never been entirely solved in Church Leet to this day.

Captain Monk’s account, both privately and at the inquest, was this: As they talked further together, after Michael left the room, the Vicar went on to browbeat him shamefully about the new chimes, vowing they should never play, never be heard; at last, rising in an access of passion, the Parson struck him (the Captain) in the face. He returned the blow—who wouldn’t return it?—and the Vicar fell. He believed his head must have struck against the iron fender in falling: if not, if the blow had been an unlucky one (it took effect just behind the left ear), it was [274]
only given in self-defence. The jury, composed of Captain Monk’s tenants, expressed themselves satisfied, and returned a verdict of Accidental Death.

“A false account,” pronounced poor Mrs. West, in her dire tribulation. “My husband never struck him—never; he was not one to be goaded into unbecoming anger, even by Captain Monk. *George struck no blow whatever*; I can answer for it. If ever a man was murdered, he has been.”

Curious rumours arose. It was said that Mrs. Carradyne, taking the air on the terrace outside in the calmness of the autumn evening, heard the fatal quarrel through the open window; that she heard Mr. West, after he had received the death blow, wail forth a prophecy (or whatever it might be called) that those chimes would surely be accursed; that whenever their sound should be heard, so long as they were suffered to remain in the tower, it should be the signal of woe to the Monk family.

Mrs. Carradyne utterly denied this; she had not been on the terrace at all, she said. Upon which the onus was shifted to Michael: who, it was suspected, had stolen out to listen to the end of the quarrel, and had heard the ominous words. Michael, in his turn, also denied it; but he was not believed. Anyway, the covert whisper had gone abroad and would not be laid.

III

Captain Monk speedily filled up the vacant living, appointing to it the Reverend Thomas Dancox, an occasional visitor at Leet Hall, who was looking out for one.

The new Vicar turned out to be a man after the Captain’s heart, a rollicking, jovial, fox-hunting [275]
young parson, as many a parson was in those days—and took small blame to himself for it. He was only a year or two past thirty, good-looking, of taking manners and hail-fellow-well-met with the parish in general, who liked him and called him to his face Tom Dancox.

All this pleased Captain Monk. But very soon something was to arrive that did not please him—a suspicion that the young parson and his daughter Katherine were on rather too good terms with one another.

One day in November he stalked into the drawing-room, where Katherine was sitting with her aunt. Hubert and Eliza were away at school, also Mrs. Carradyne’s two children.

“Was Dancox here last night?” began Captain Monk.

“Yes,” replied Mrs. Carradyne.

“And the evening before—Monday?”

Mrs. Carradyne felt half afraid to answer, the Captain’s tone was becoming so threatening. “I—I think so,” she rather hesitatingly said. “Was he not, Katherine?”

Katherine Monk, a dark, haughty young woman, twenty-one now, turned round with a flush on her handsome face. “Why do you ask, papa?”

“I ask to be answered,” replied he, standing with his hands in the pockets of his velveteen shooting-coat, a purple tinge of incipient anger rising in his cheeks.

“Then Mr. Dancox did spend Monday evening here.”

“And I saw him walking with you in the meadow by the rill this morning,” continued the Captain. “Look here, Katherine, *no sweethearting with Tom Dancox*. He may do very well for a parson; I like him as such, as such only, you understand; but he can be no match for you.”

“You are disturbing yourself unnecessarily, sir,” said Katherine, her own tone an angry one.

“Well, I hope that is so; I should not like to think otherwise. Anyway, a word in season does no harm; and, take you notice that I have spoken it. You also, Emma.” [276]

As he left the room, Mrs. Carradyne spoke, dropping her voice: “Katherine, you know that I had already warned you. I told you it would not do to fall into any particular friendship with Mr. Dancox; that your father would never countenance it.”

“And if I were to?—and if he did not?” scornfully returned Katherine. “What then, Aunt Emma?”

“Be silent, child; you must not talk in that strain. Your papa is perfectly right in this matter. Tom Dancox is not suitable in any way—for *you*.”

This took place in November. Katherine paid little heed to the advice; she was not one to put up with advice of any sort, and she and Mr. Dancox met occasionally under the rose. Early in December she went with Mr. Dancox into the Parsonage, while he searched for a book he was about to lend her. That was the plea; the truth, no doubt, being that the two wanted a bit of a chat in quiet. As ill-luck had it, when she was coming out again, the Parson in attendance on her as far as the gate, Captain Monk came by.

A scene ensued. Captain Monk, in a terrible access of passion, vowed by all the laws of the Medes and Persians, which alter not, that never, in life or after death, should those two rebellious ones be man and wife, and he invoked unheard-of penalties on their heads should they dare to contemplate disobedience to his decree.

Thenceforth there was no more open rebellion; upon the surface all looked smooth. Captain Monk understood the folly to be at an end: that the two had come to their senses; and he took Tom Dancox back into favour. Mrs. Carradyne assumed the same. But Katherine had her father’s unyielding will, and the Parson was bold and careless, and in love. [277]

The last day of the year came round, and the usual banquet would come with it. The weather this Christmas was not like that of last; the white snow lay on the ground, the cold biting frost hardened the glistening icicles on the trees.

And the chimes? Ready these three months past, they had not yet been heard. They would be to-night. Whether Captain Monk wished the remembrance of Mr. West’s death to die away a bit first, or that he preferred to open the treat on the banqueting night, certain it was that he had kept them silent. When the church clock should toll the midnight knell of the old year, the chimes would ring out to welcome the new one, and gladden the ears of Church Leet.

But not without a remonstrance. That morning, as the Captain sat in his study writing a letter, Mrs. Carradyne came to him.

“Godfrey,” she said in a low and pleading tone, “you will not suffer the chimes to play to-night, will you? Pray do not.”

“Not suffer the chimes to play?” cried the Captain. “But indeed I shall. Why, this is the special night they were put up for.”

“I know it, Godfrey. But—you cannot think what a strangely strong feeling I have against it: an instinct, it seems to me. The chimes have brought nothing but discomfort and disaster yet; they may bring more in the future.”

Captain Monk stared at her. “What d’ye mean, Emma?”

“*I would never let them be heard*,” she said impressively. “I would have them taken down again. The story went about, you know, that poor George West in dying prophesied that whenever they should be heard woe would fall upon this house. I am not superstitious, Godfrey, but——” [278]

Sheer passion had tied, so far, Godfrey Monk’s lips. “Not superstitious!” he raved out. “You are worse than that, Emma—a fool. How dare you bring your nonsense here? There’s the door.”

The banquet hour approached. Nearly all the guests of last year were again present in the warm and holly-decorated dining-room, the one notable exception being the ill-fated Parson West. Parson Dancox came in his stead, and said grace from the post of honour at the Captain’s right hand. Captain Monk did not appear to feel any remorse or regret: he was jovial, free, and grandly hospitable; one might suppose he had promoted the dead clergyman to a canonry instead of to a place in the churchyard.

“What became of the poor man’s widow, Squire?” whispered a gentleman from the neighbourhood of Evesham to Mr. Todhetley, who sat on the left hand of his host; Sir Thomas

Rivers taking the foot of the table this year.

“Mrs. West? Well, we heard she opened a girls’ school up in London,” breathed the Squire.

“And what tale was that about his leaving a curse on the chimes?—I never heard the rights of it.”

“Hush!” said the Squire cautiously. “Nobody talks of that here. Or believes it, either. Poor West was a man to leave a blessing behind him; never a curse.”

Hubert, at home for the holidays, was again at table. He was fourteen now, tall of his age and slender, his blue eyes bright, his complexion delicately beautiful. The pleated cambric frill of his shirt, which hung over the collar of his Eton jacket after the fashion of the day, was carried low in front, displaying the small white throat; his golden hair curled naturally. A boy to admire and be proud of. The manners were more decorous this year than they ever had been, and Hubert was [279] allowed to sit on. Possibly the shadow of George West’s unhappy death lay insensibly upon the party.

It was about half-past nine o’clock when the butler came into the room, bringing a small note, twisted up, to his master from Mrs. Carradyne. Captain Monk opened it and held it towards one of the lighted branches to read the few words it contained.

“*A gentleman is asking to speak a word to Mr. Dancox. He says it is important.*”

Captain Monk tore the paper to bits. “*Not to-night*, tell your mistress, is my answer,” said he to Rimmer. “Hubert, you can go to your aunt now; it’s past your bed-time.”

There could be no appeal, as the boy knew; but he went off unwillingly and in bitter resentment against Mrs. Carradyne. He supposed she had sent for him.

“What a cross old thing you are, Aunt Emma!” he exclaimed as he entered the drawing-room on the other side the hall. “You won’t let Harry go in at all to the banquets, and you won’t let me stay at them! Papa meant—I think he meant—to let me remain there to hear the chimes. Why need you have interfered to send for me?”

“I neither interfered with you, Hubert, nor sent for you. A gentleman, who did not give his name and preferred to wait outside, wants to see Mr. Dancox; that’s all,” said Mrs. Carradyne. “You gave my note to your master, Rimmer?”

“Yes, ma’am,” replied the butler. “My master bade me say to you that his answer was *not to-night*.”

Katherine Monk, her face betraying some agitation, rose from the piano. “Was the message not given to Mr. Dancox?” she asked of Rimmer.

“Not while I was there, Miss Katherine. The master tore the note into bits, after reading it; and [280] dropped them under the table.”

Now it chanced that Mr. Dancox, glancing covertly at the note while the Captain held it to the light, had read what was written there. For a few minutes he said nothing. The Captain was busy sending round the wine.

“Captain Monk—pardon me—I saw my name on that bit of paper; it caught my eye as you held it out,” he said in a low tone. “Am I called out? Is anyone in the parish dying?”

Thus questioned, Captain Monk told the truth. No one was dying, and he was not called out to the parish. Some gentleman was asking to speak to him; only that.

“Well, I’ll just see who it is, and what he wants,” said Mr. Dancox, rising. “Won’t be away two minutes, sir.”

“Bring him back with you; tell him he’ll find good wine here and jolly cheer,” said the Captain. And Mr. Dancox went out, swinging his napkin in his hand.

In crossing the hall he met Katherine, exchanged a hasty word with her, let fall the serviette on a chair as he caught up his hat and overcoat, and went out. Katherine ran upstairs.

Hubert lay down on one of the drawing-room sofas. In point of fact, that young gentleman could not walk straight. A little wine takes effect on youngsters, especially when they are not accustomed to it. Mrs. Carradyne told Hubert the best place for him was bed. Not a bit of it, the boy answered: he should go out on the terrace at twelve o’clock; the chimes would be fine, heard out there. He fell asleep almost as he spoke; presently he woke up, feeling headachy, cross and stupid, and of his own accord went up to bed.

Meanwhile, the dining-room was getting jollier and louder as the time passed on towards midnight. Great wonder was expressed at the non-return of the parson; somebody must be [281] undoubtedly grievously sick or dying. Mr. Speck, the quiet little Hurst Leet doctor, dissented from this. Nobody was dying in the parish, he affirmed, or sick enough to need a priest; as a proof of it, *he* had not been sent for.

Ring, ring, ring! broke forth the chimes on the quiet midnight air, as the church clock finished striking twelve. It was a sweet sound; even those prejudiced against the chimes could hear that:

the windows had been opened in readiness.

The glasses were charged; the company stood on their legs, some of them not at all steady legs just then, bending their ears to listen. Captain Monk stood in his place, majestically waving his head and his left hand to keep time in harmony with The Bay of Biscay. His right hand held his goblet in readiness for the toast when the sounds should cease.

Ring, ring, ring! chimed the last strokes of the bells, dying away to faintness on the still evening air. Suddenly, amidst the hushed silence, and whilst the sweet melody fell yet unbroken on the room, there arose a noise as of something falling outside on the terrace, mingled with a wild scream and the crash of breaking glass.

One of the guests rushed to the window, and put his head out of it. So far as he could see, he said (perhaps his sight was somewhat obscured), it was a looking-glass lying further up on the terrace.

Thrown out from one of the upper windows! scornfully pronounced the Captain, full of wrath that it should have happened at that critical moment to mar the dignity of his coming toast. And he gave the toast heartily; and the new year came in for them all with good wishes and good wine.

Some little time yet ere the company finally rose. The mahogany frame of the broken looking-glass, standing on end, was conspicuous on the white ground in the clear frosty night, as they [282] streamed out from the house. Mr. Speck, whose sight was rather remarkably good, peered at it curiously from the hall steps, and then walked quickly along the snowy terrace towards it.

Sure enough, it was a looking-glass, broken in its fall from an open window above. But, lying by it in the deep snow, in his white night-shirt, was Hubert Monk.

When the chimes began to play, Hubert was not asleep. Sitting up in bed, he disposed himself to listen. After a bit they began to grow fainter; Hubert impatiently dashed to the window and threw it up to its full height as he jumped on the dressing-table, when in some unfortunate way he overbalanced himself, and pitched out on the terrace beneath, carrying the looking-glass with him. The fall was not much, for his room was in one of the wings, the windows of which were low; but the boy had struck his head in falling, and there he had lain, insensible, on the terrace, one hand still clasping the looking-glass.

All the rosy wine-tint fading away to a sickly paleness on the Captain’s face, he looked down on his well-beloved son. The boy was carried indoors to his room, reviving with the movement.

“Young bones are elastic,” pronounced Mr. Speck, when he had examined him; “and none of these are broken. He will probably have a cold from the exposure; that’s about the worst.”

He seemed to have it already: he was shivering from head to foot now, as he related the above particulars. All the family had assembled round him, except Katherine.

“Where is Katherine?” suddenly inquired her father, noticing her absence.

“I cannot think where she is,” said Mrs. Carradyne. “I have not seen her for an hour or two. Eliza says she is not in her room; I sent her to see. She is somewhere about, of course.”

“Go and look for your sister, Eliza. Tell her to come here,” said Captain Monk. But though Eliza [283] went at once, her quest was useless.

Miss Katherine was not in the house: Miss Katherine had made a moonlight flitting from it that evening with the Reverend Thomas Dancox.

THE SILENT CHIMES [284]

II.—PLAYING AGAIN

I

It could not be said the Church Leet chimes brought good when they rang out that night at midnight, as the old year was giving place to the new. Mrs. Carradyne, in her superstition, thought they brought evil. Certainly evil set in at the same time, and Captain Monk, with all his scoffing obstinacy, could not fail to see it. That fine young lad, his son, fell through the window listening to them; and in the self-same hour the knowledge reached him that Katherine, his eldest and dearest child, had flown from his roof in defiant disobedience, to set up a home of her own.

Hubert was soon well of his bruises; but not of the cold induced by lying in the snow, clad only in his white night-shirt. In spite of all Mr. Speck’s efforts, rheumatic fever set in, and for some time Hubert hovered between life and death. He recovered; but would never again be the strong, hearty lad he had been—though indeed he had never been very physically strong. The doctor

privately hoped that the heart would be found all right in future, but he would not have answered for it.

The blow that told most on Captain Monk was that inflicted by Katherine. And surely never was disobedient marriage carried out with the impudent boldness of hers. Church Leet called it [285] "cheek." Church Leet (disbelieving the facts when they first oozed out) could talk of nothing else for weeks. For Katherine had been married in the church hard by, that same night.

Special licenses were very uncommon things in those days; they cost too much; but the Reverend Thomas Dancox had procured one. With Katherine's money: everybody guessed that. She had four hundred a-year of her own, inherited from her dead mother, and full control over it. So the special license was secured, and their crafty plans were laid. The stranger who had presented himself at the Hall that night (by arrangement), asking for Mr. Dancox, thus affording an excuse for his quitting the banquet-room, was a young clergyman of Worcester, come over especially to marry them. When tackled with his deed afterwards, he protested that he had not been told the marriage was to be clandestine. Tom Dancox went out to him from the banquet; Katherine, slipping on a bonnet and shawl, joined them outside; they hastened to the rectory and thence into the church. And while the unconscious master of Leet Hall was entertaining his guests with his good cheer and his stories and his hip, hip, hurrah, his Vicar and Katherine Monk were made one until death should them part. And death, as it proved, intended to do that speedily.

At first Captain Monk, in his unbounded rage, was for saying that a marriage celebrated at ten o'clock at night by the light of a solitary tallow candle, borrowed from the vestry, could not hold good. Reassured upon this point, he strove to devise other means to part them. Foiled again, he laid the case before the Bishop of Worcester, and begged his lordship to unfrock Thomas Dancox. The Bishop did not do as much as that; though he sent for Tom Dancox and severely reprimanded him. But that, as Church Leet remarked, did not break bones. Tom had striven to make the best [286] of his own cause to the Bishop, and the worst of Captain Monk's obdurate will; moreover, stolen marriages were not thought much of in those days.

An uncomfortable state of things was maintained all the year, Hall Leet and the Parsonage standing at daggers drawn. Never once did Captain Monk appear at church. If he by cross-luck met his daughter or her husband abroad, he struck into a good fit of swearing aloud; which perhaps relieved his mind. The chimes had never played again; they pertained to the church, and the church was in ill-favour with the Captain. As the end of the year approached, Church Leet wondered whether he would hold the annual banquet; but Captain Monk was not likely to forego that. Why should he? The invitations went out for it; and they contained an intimation that the chimes would again play.

The banquet took place, a neighbouring parson saying grace at it in the place of Tom Dancox. While the enjoyment was progressing and Captain Monk was expressing his marvel for the tenth time as to what could have become of Speck, who had not made his appearance, a note was brought in by Rimmer—just as he had brought in one last year. This also was from Mrs. Carradyne.

"*Please come out to me for one moment, dear Godfrey. I must say a word to you.*"

Captain Monk's first impulse on reading this was to send Rimmer back to say she might go and be hanged. But to call him from the table was so very extreme a measure, that on second thoughts he decided to go to her. Mrs. Carradyne was standing just outside the door, looking as white as a sheet.

"Well, this is pretty bold of you, Madam Emma," he began angrily. "Are you out of your senses?"

"Hush, Godfrey! Katherine is dying."

"What?" cried the Captain, the words confusing him.

"Katherine is dying," repeated his sister, her teeth chattering with emotion. [287]

In spite of Katherine's rebellion, Godfrey Monk loved her still as the apple of his eye; and it was only his obstinate temper which had kept him from reconciliation. His face took a hue of terror, and his voice a softer tone.

"What have you heard?"

"Her baby's born; something has gone wrong, I suppose, and she is dying. Sally ran up with the news, sent by Mr. Speck. Katherine is crying aloud for you, saying she cannot die without your forgiveness. Oh, Godfrey, you will go, you will surely go!" pleaded Mrs. Carradyne, breaking down with a burst of tears. "Poor Katherine!"

Never another word spoke he. He went out at the hall-door there and then, putting on his hat as he leaped down the steps. It was a wretched night; not white, clear, and cold as the last New Year's Eve had been, or mild and genial as the one before it; but damp, raw, misty.

"You think I have remained hard and defiant, father," Katherine whispered to him, "but I have many a time asked God's forgiveness on my bended knees; and I longed—oh, how I longed!—to ask yours. What should we all do with the weight of sin that lies on us when it comes to such an

hour as this, but for Jesus Christ—for God's wonderful mercy!"

And, with one hand in her father's and the other in her husband's, both their hearts aching to pain, and their eyes wet with bitter tears, poor Katherine's soul passed away.

After quitting the parsonage, Captain Monk was softly closing the garden gate behind him—for when in sorrow we don't do things with a rush and a bang—when a whirring sound overhead caused him to start. Strong, hardened man though he was, his nerves were unstrung to-night in company with his heartstrings. It was the church clock preparing to strike twelve. The little doctor, Speck, who had left the house but a minute before, was standing at the churchyard fence [288] close by, his arms leaning on the rails, probably ruminating sadly on what had just occurred. Captain Monk halted beside him in silence, while the clock struck.

As the last stroke vibrated on the air, telling the knell of the old year, the dawn of the new, another sound began.

Ring, ring, ring! Ring, ring, ring!

The chimes! The sweet, soothing, melodious chimes, carolling forth The Bay of Biscay. Very pleasant were they in themselves to the ear. But—did they fall pleasantly on Captain Monk's? It may be, not. It may be, a wish came over him that he had never thought of instituting them. But for doing that, the ills of his recent life had never had place. George West's death would not have lain at his door, or room been made by it for Tom Dancox, and Katherine would not be lying as he had now left her—cold and lifeless.

"Could *nothing* have been done to save her, Speck?" he whispered to the doctor, whose arms were still on the churchyard railings, listening to the chimes in silence—though indeed he had asked the same question indoors before.

"Nothing; or you may be sure, sir, it would have been," answered Mr. Speck. "Had all the medical men in Worcestershire been about her, they could not have saved her any more than I could. These unfortunate cases happen now and then," sighed he, "showing us how powerless we really are."

Well, it was grievous news wherewith to startle the parish. And Mrs. Carradyne, a martyr to belief in ghosts and omens, grew to dread the chimes with a nervous and nameless dread.

[289]

II

It was but the first of February, yet the weather might have served for May-day: one of those superb days that come once in a while out of their season, serving to remind the world that the dark, depressing, dreary winter will not last for ever; though we may have half feared it means to, forgetting the reassuring promise of the Divine Ruler of all things, given after the Flood:

"*While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night, shall not cease.*"

The warm and glorious sunbeams lay on Church Leet, as if to woo the bare hedges into verdant life, the cold fields to smiling plains. Even the mounds of the graveyard, interspersed amidst the old tombstones, looked green and cheerful to-day in the golden light.

Turning slowly out of the Vicarage gate came a good-looking clergyman of seven-or-eight-and-twenty. A slender man of middle height, with a sweet expression on his pale, thoughtful face, and dark earnest eyes. It was the new Vicar of Church Leet, the Reverend Robert Grame.

For a goodish many years have gone on since that tragedy of poor Katherine's death, and this is the second appointed Vicar since that inauspicious time.

Mr. Grame walked across the churchyard, glancing at the inscriptions on the tombs. Inside the church porch stood the clerk, old John Cale, keys in hand. Mr. Grame saw him and quickened his pace.

"Have I kept you waiting, Cale?" he cried in his pleasant, considerate tones. "I am sorry for that."

"Not at all, your reverence; I came afore the time. This here church is but a step or two off my home, yonder, and I'm as often out here as I be indoors," continued John Cale, a fresh-coloured [290] little man with pale grey eyes and white hair. "I've been clerk here, sir, for seven-and-thirty years."

"You've seen more than one parson out then, I reckon."

"More than one! Ay, sir, more than—more than six times one, I was going to say; but that's too much, maybe. Let's see: there was Mr. Cartright, he had held the living I hardly know how many years when I came, and he held it for many after that. Mr. West succeeded him—the Reverend George West; then came Thomas Dancox; then Mr. Atterley: four in all. And now you've come, sir, to make the fifth."

"Did they all die? or take other livings?"

"Some the one thing, sir, and some the other. Mr. Cartright died, he was old; and Mr. West, he—he——" John Cale hesitated before he went on—"he died; Mr. Dancox got appointed to a

chaplaincy somewhere over the seas; he was here but about eighteen months, hardly that; and Mr. Atterley, who has just left, has had a big church with a big income, they say, given to him over in Oxfordshire."

"Which makes room for me," smiled Robert Grame.

They were inside the church now; a small and very old-fashioned church, with high pews, dark and sombre. Over the large pew of the Monks, standing sideways to the pulpit, sundry slabs were on the wall, their inscriptions testifying to the virtues and ages of the Monk family dead and gone. Mr. Grame stood to read them. One slab of white marble, its black letters fresh and clear, caught especially his eye.

"Katherine, eldest child of Godfrey Monk, gentleman, and wife of the Reverend Thomas Dancox," he read out aloud. "Was that he who was Vicar here?"

"Ay, 'twas. She married him again her father's wish, and died, poor thing, just a year after it," replied the clerk. "And only twenty-three, as you see, sir! The Captain came down and forgave [291] her on her dying bed, and 'twas he that had the stone put up there. Her baby-girl was taken to the Hall, and is there still: ten years old she must be now; 'twas but an hour or two old when the mother died."

"It seems a sad history," observed Mr. Grame as he turned away to enter the vestry.

John Cale did the honours of its mysteries: showing him the chest for the surplices; the cupboard let into the wall for the register; the place where candles and such-like stores were kept. Mr. Grame opened a door at one end of the room and saw a square flagged place, containing grave-digging tools and the hanging ropes of the bell which called people to church. Shutting the door again, he crossed to a door on the opposite side. But that he could not open.

"What does this lead to?" he asked. "It is locked."

"It's always kept locked, that door is, sir; and it's a'most as much as my post is worth to open it," said the clerk, his voice sinking to a mysterious whisper. "It leads up to the chimes."

"The chimes!" echoed the new parson in surprise. "Do you mean to say this little country church can boast of chimes?"

John Cale nodded. "Lovely, pleasant things they be to listen to, sir, but we've not heard 'em since the midnight when Miss Katherine died. They play a tune called 'The Bay o' Biscay.'"

Selecting a key from the bunch that he carried in his hand, he opened the door, displaying a narrow staircase, unprotected as a ladder and nearly perpendicular. At the top was another small door, evidently locked.

"Captain Monk had all this done when he put the chimes up," remarked he. "I sweep the dust off these stairs once in three months or so, but otherwise the door's not opened. And that one," nodding to the door above, "never."

"But why?" asked the clergyman. "If the chimes are there, and are, as you say, melodious, why do [292] they not play?"

"Well, sir, I b'lieve there's a bit of superstition at the bottom of it," returned the clerk, not caring to explain too fully lest he should have to tell about Mr. West's death, which might not be the thing to frighten a new Vicar with. "A feeling has somehow got abroad in the parish (leastways with a many of its folk) that the putting-up of its bells brought ill-luck, and that whenever the chimes ring out some dreadful evil falls on the Monk family."

"I never heard of such a thing," exclaimed the Vicar, hardly knowing whether to laugh or lecture. "The parish cannot be so ignorant as that! How can the putting-up of chimes bring ill-luck?"

"Well, your reverence, I don't know; the thing's beyond me. They were heard but three times, ringing in the new year at midnight, three years, one on top of t'other—and each time some ill fell."

"My good man—and I am sure you are good—you should know better," remonstrated Mr. Grame. "Captain Monk cannot surely give credence to this?"

"No, sir; but his sister up at the Hall does—Mrs. Carradyne. It's said the Captain used to ridicule her finely for it; he'd fly into a passion whenever 'twas alluded to. Captain Monk, as a brave seaman, is too bold to tolerate anything of the sort. But he has never let the chimes play since his daughter died. He was coming out from the death-scene at midnight, when the chimes broke forth the third year, and it's said he can't abear the sound of 'em since."

"That may well be," assented Mr. Grame.

"And finding, sir, year after year, year after year, as one year gives place to another, that they are never heard, we have got to call 'em amid ourselves, the Silent Chimes," spoke the clerk, as [293] they turned to leave the church. "The Silent Chimes, sir."

Clinking his keys, the clerk walked away to his home, an ivy-covered cottage not a stone's-throw off; the clergyman lingered in the churchyard, reading the memorials on the tombstones. He was smiling at the quaintness of some of them, when the sound of hasty footsteps caused him to turn.

A little girl was climbing over the churchyard-railings (as being nearer to her than the entrance-gate), and came dashing towards him across the gravestones.

“Are you grandpapa’s new parson?” asked the young lady; a pretty child of ten, with a dark skin, and dusky-violet eyes staring at him freely out of a saucy face.

“Yes, I am,” said he. “What is your name?”

“What is yours?” boldly questioned she. “They’ve talked about you at home, but I forgot it.”

“Mine is Robert Grame. Won’t you tell me yours?”

“Oh, it’s Kate.—Here’s that wicked Lucy coming! She’s going to groan at me for jumping here. She says it’s not reverent.”

A charming young lady of some twenty years was coming up the path, wearing a scarlet cloak, its hood lined with white silk; a straw hat shaded her fair face, blushing very much just now; in her dark-grey eyes might be read vexation, as she addressed Mr. Grame.

“I hope Kate has not been rude? I hope you will excuse her heedlessness in this place. She is only a little girl.”

“It’s only the new parson, Lucy,” broke in Kate without ceremony. “He says his name’s Robert Grame.”

“Oh, Kate, don’t! How shall we ever teach you manners?” reprimanded the young lady, in distress. “She has been very much indulged, sir,” turning to the clergyman.

“I can well understand that,” he said, with a bright smile. “I presume that I have the honour of [294]
speaking to the daughter of my patron—Captain Monk?”

“No; Captain Monk is my uncle: I am Lucy Carradyne.”

As the young clergyman stood, hat in hand, a feeling came over him that he had never seen so sweet a face as the one he was looking at. Miss Lucy Carradyne was saying to herself, “What a nice countenance he has! What kindly, earnest eyes!”

“This little lady tells me her name is Kate.”

“Kate Dancox,” said Lucy, as the child danced away. “Her mother was Captain Monk’s eldest daughter; she died when Kate was born. My uncle is very fond of Kate; he will hardly have her controlled at all.”

“I have been in to see my church! John Cale has been doing its honours for me,” smiled Mr. Grame. “It is a pretty little edifice.”

“Yes, and I hope you will like it; I hope you will like the parish,” frankly returned Lucy.

“I shall be sure to do that, I think. As soon, at least, as I can feel convinced that it is to be really mine,” he added, with a quaint expression. “When I heard, a week ago, that Captain Monk had presented me—an entire stranger to him—with the living of Church Leet, I could not believe it. It is not often that a nameless curate, without influence, is spontaneously remembered.”

“It is not much of a living,” said Lucy, meeting the words half jestingly. “Worth, I believe, about a hundred and sixty pounds a-year.”

“But that is a great rise for me—and I have a house to myself large and beautiful—and am a Vicar and no longer a curate,” he returned, laughingly. “I cannot *imagine*, though, how Captain Monk came to give it me. Have you any idea how it was, Miss Carradyne?”

Lucy’s face flushed. She could not tell this gentleman the truth: that another clergyman had been [295]
fixed upon, one who would have been especially welcome to the parishioners; that Captain Monk had all but nominated him to the living. But it chanced to reach the Captain’s ears that this clergyman had expressed his intention of holding the Communion service monthly, instead of quarterly as heretofore, so he put the question to him. Finding it to be true, he withdrew his promise; he would not have old customs broken in upon by modern innovation, he said; and forthwith he appointed the Reverend Robert Grame.

“I do not even know how Captain Monk heard of me,” continued Mr. Grame, marking Lucy’s hesitation.

“I believe you were recommended to him by one of the clergy attached to Worcester Cathedral,” said Lucy.—“And I think I must wish you good-morning now.”

But there came an interruption. A tall, stately, haughty young woman, with an angry look upon her dark and handsome face, had entered the churchyard, and was calling out as she advanced:

“That monkey broken loose again, I suppose, and at her pranks here! What are you good for, Lucy, if you cannot keep her in better order? You know I told you to go straight on to Mrs. Speck, and——”

The words died away. Mr. Grame, who had been hidden by a large upright tombstone, emerged into view. Lucy, with another blush, spoke to cover the awkwardness.

“This is Miss Monk,” she said to him. “Eliza, it is the new clergyman, Mr. Grame.”

Miss Monk recovered her equanimity. A winning smile supplanted the anger on her face; she held out her hand, grandly gracious. For she liked the stranger’s look: he was beyond doubt a gentleman—and an attractive man.

“Allow me to welcome you to Church Leet, Mr. Grame. My father chances to be absent to-day; he is gone to Evesham.” [296]

“So the clerk told me, or I should have called this morning to pay my respects to him, and to thank him for his generous and most unexpected patronage of me. I got here last night,” concluded Mr. Grame, standing uncovered as when he had saluted Lucy. Eliza Monk liked his pleasant voice and taking manners: her fancy went out to him there and then.

“But though papa is absent, you will walk up with me now to the Hall to make acquaintance with my aunt, Mrs. Carradyne,” said Eliza, in tones that, gracious though they were, sounded in the light of a command—just as poor Katherine’s had always sounded. And Mr. Grame went with her.

But now—handsome though she was, gracious though she meant to be—there was something about Eliza Monk that seemed to repulse Robert Grame, rather than attract him. Lucy had fascinated him; she repelled. Other people had experienced the same kind of repulsion, but knew not where it lay.

Hubert, the heir, about twenty-five now, came forward to greet the stranger as they entered the Hall. No repulsion about *him*. Robert Grame’s hand met his with a warm clasp. A young man of gentle manners and a face of rare beauty—but oh, so suspiciously delicate! Perhaps it was the extreme slenderness of the frame, the wan look in the refined features and their bright hectic that drew forth the clergyman’s sympathy. An impression came over him that this young man was not long for earth.

“Is Mr. Monk strong?” he presently asked of Mrs. Carradyne, when Hubert had temporarily quitted the room.

“Indeed, no. He had rheumatic fever some years ago,” she added, “and has never been strong since.”

“Has he heart disease?” questioned the clergyman. He thought the young man had just that look. [297]

“We fear his heart is weak,” replied Mrs. Carradyne.

“But that may be only your fancy, you know, Aunt Emma,” spoke Miss Monk reproachfully. She and her father were both passionately attached to Hubert; they resented any doubt cast upon his health.

“Oh, of course,” assented Mrs. Carradyne, who never resented anything.

“We shall be good friends, I trust,” said Eliza, with a beaming smile, as her hand lay in Mr. Grame’s when he was leaving.

“Indeed I hope so,” he answered. “Why not?”

III

Summer lay upon the land. The landscape stretched out before Leet Hall was fair to look upon. A fine expanse of wood and dale, of trees in their luxuriant beauty; of emerald-green plains, of meandering streams, of patches of growing corn already putting on its golden hue, and of the golden sunlight, soon to set and gladden other worlds, that shone from the deep-blue sky. Birds sang in their leafy shelters, bees were drowsily humming as they gathered the last of the day’s honey, and butterflies flitted from flower to flower with a good-night kiss.

At one of the windows stood, in her haughty beauty, Eliza Monk. Not, surely, of the lovely scene before her was she thinking, or her face might have worn a more pleasing expression. Rather did she seem to gaze, and with displeasure, at two or three people who were walking in the distance: Lucy Carradyne side by side with the clergyman, and Miss Kate Dancox pulling at his coat-tails.

“Shameful flirt!”

The acidity of the tone was so pronounced that Mrs. Carradyne, seated near and busy at her netting, lifted her head in surprise. “Why, Eliza, what’s the matter? Who is a flirt?” [298]

“Lucy,” curtly replied Eliza, pointing with her finger.

“Nonsense,” said Mrs. Carradyne, after glancing outwards.

“Why does she persistently lay herself out to attract that man?” was the passionate rejoinder.

“Be silent, Eliza. How can you conjure up so unjust a charge? Lucy is not capable of *laying herself out* to attract anyone. It lies but in your imagination.”

“Day after day, when she is out with Kate, you may see him join her—allured to her side.”

“The ‘allurer’ is Kate, then. I am surprised at you, Eliza: you might be talking of a servant-maid. Kate has taken a liking for Mr. Grame, and she runs after him at all times and seasons.”

“She ought to be stopped, then.”

“Stopped! Will you undertake to do it? Could her mother be stopped in anything she pleased to do? And the child has the same rebellious will.”

“I say that Robert Grame’s attraction is Lucy.”

“It may be so,” acknowledged Mrs. Carradyne. “But the attraction must lie in Lucy herself; not in anything she does. Some suspicion of the sort has, at times, crossed me.”

She looked at them again as she spoke. They were sauntering onwards slowly; Mr. Grame bending towards Lucy, and talking earnestly. Kate, dancing about, pulling at his arm or his coat, appeared to get but little attention. Mrs. Carradyne quietly went on with her work.

And that composed manner, combined with her last sentence, brought gall and wormwood to Eliza Monk.

Throwing a summer scarf upon her shoulders, Eliza passed out at the French window, crossed the terrace, and set out to confront the conspirators. But she was not in time. Seeing her coming, [299] or not seeing her—who knew?—Mr. Grame turned off with a fleet foot towards his home. So nobody remained for Miss Monk to waste her angry breath upon but Lucy. The breath was keenly sharp, and Lucy fell to weeping.

“I am here, Grame. Don’t go in.”

The words fell on the clergyman’s ears as he closed the Vicarage gate behind him, and was passing up the path to his door. Turning his head, he saw Hubert Monk seated on the bench under the may tree, pink and lovely yet. “How long have you been here?” he asked, sitting down beside him.

“Ever so long; waiting for you,” replied Hubert.

“I was only strolling about.”

“I saw you: with Lucy and the child.”

They had become fast and firm friends, these two young men; and the minister was insensibly exercising a wonderful influence over Hubert for good. Believing—as he did believe—that Hubert’s days were numbered, that any sharp extra exertion might entail fatal consequences, he gently strove, as opportunity offered, to lead his thoughts to the Better Land.

“What an evening it is!” rapturously exclaimed Hubert.

“Ay: so calm and peaceful.”

The rays of the setting sun touched Hubert’s face, lighting up its extreme delicacy; the scent of the closing flowers filled the still air with sweetness; the birds were chanting their evening song of praise. Hubert, his elbow on the arm of the bench, his hand supporting his chin, looked out with dreamy eyes.

“What book have you there?” asked Mr. Grame, noticing one in his other hand.

“Herbert,” answered the young man, showing it. “I filched it from your table through the open [300] window, Grame.”

The clergyman took it. It chanced to open at a passage he was very fond of. Or perhaps he knew the place, and opened it purposely.

“Do you know these verses, Hubert? They are appropriate enough just now, while those birds are carolling.”

“I can’t tell. What verses? Read them.”

“Hark, how the birds do sing,
And woods do ring!
All creatures have their joy, and man hath his,
Yet, if we rightly measure,
Man’s joy and pleasure
Rather hereafter than in present is.

Not that we may not here
Taste of the cheer;
But as birds drink and straight lift up the head,
So must he sip and think
Of better drink
He may attain to after he is dead.”

“Ay,” said Hubert, breaking the silence after a time, “it’s very true, I suppose. But this world—oh, it’s worth living for. Will anything in the next, Grame, be more beautiful than *that*?”

He was pointing to the sunset, marvellously and unusually beautiful. Lovely pink and crimson

clouds flecked the west; in their midst shone a dazzling golden light too glorious to look upon.

“One might fancy it the portals of heaven,” said the clergyman; “the golden gate of entrance, leading to the pearly gates within, and to the glittering walls of precious stones.”

“Ay! And it seems to take the form of an entrance-gate!” exclaimed Hubert; for it really did so. “Look at it! Oh, Grame, surely the very gate of Heaven cannot be more wonderful than that!”

“And if the gate of entrance is so unspeakably beautiful, what will the City itself be?” murmured [301] Mr. Grame. “The Heavenly City! the New Jerusalem!”

“It is beginning to fade,” said Hubert presently, as they sat watching; “the brightness is going. What a pity!”

“All that’s bright must fade in this world, you know; and fade very quickly. Hubert! it will not in the next.”

Church Leet, watching its neighbours’ doings sharply, began to whisper that the new clergyman, Mr. Grame, was likely to cause unpleasantness to the Monk family, just as some of his predecessors had caused it. For no man having eyes in his head (still less any woman) could fail to see that the Captain’s imperious daughter had fallen desperately in love with him. Would there be a second elopement, as in the days of Tom Dancox? Would Eliza Monk set her father at defiance as Katherine did?

One of the last to see signs and tokens, though they took place under her open eyes, was Mrs. Carradyne. But she saw at last. The clergyman could not walk across a new-mown field, or down a shady lane, or be hastening along the dusty turnpike road, but by some inexplicable coincidence he would be met by Miss Monk; and when he came to the Hall to pass an hour with Hubert, she generally made a third at the interview. It had pleased her latterly to take to practising on the old church organ; and if Mr. Grame was not wiled into the church with her and her attendant, the ancient clerk, who blew the bellows, she was sure to alight upon him in going or returning.

One fine evening, dinner over, when the last beams of the sun were slanting into the drawing-room, Eliza Monk was sitting back on a sofa, reading; Kate romped about the room, and Mrs. Carradyne had just rung the bell for tea. Lucy had been spending the afternoon with Mrs. Speck, and Hubert had now gone to fetch her home.

“Good gracious, Kate, can’t you be quiet!” exclaimed Miss Monk, as the child in her gambols [302] sprang upon the sofa, upsetting the book and its reader’s temper. “Go away: you are treading on my flounces. Aunt Emma, why do you persist in having this tiresome little reptile with us after dinner?”

“Because your father will not let her be sent to the nursery,” said Mrs. Carradyne.

“Did you ever know a child like her?”

“She is only as her mother was; as you were, Eliza—always rebellious. Kate, sit down to the piano and play one of your pretty tunes.”

“I won’t,” responded Kate. “Play yourself, Aunt Emma.”

Dashing through the open glass doors, Kate began tossing a ball on the broad gravel walk below the terrace. Mrs. Carradyne cautioned her not to break the windows, and turned to the tea-table.

“Don’t make the tea yet, Aunt Emma,” interrupted Miss Monk, in tones that were quite like a command. “Mr. Grame is coming, and he won’t care for cold tea.”

Mrs. Carradyne returned to her seat. She thought the opportunity had come to say something to her niece which she had been wanting to say.

“You invited Mr. Grame, Eliza?”

“I did,” said Eliza, looking defiance.

“My dear,” resumed Mrs. Carradyne with some hesitation, “forgive me if I offer you a word of advice. You have no mother; I pray you to listen to me in her stead. You must change your line of behaviour to Mr. Grame.”

Eliza’s dark face turned red and haughty. “I do not understand you, Aunt Emma.”

“Nay, I think you do understand me, my dear. You have incautiously allowed yourself to fall into—into an undesirable liking for Mr. Grame. An *unseemly* liking, Eliza.”

“Unseemly!” [303]

“Yes; because it has not been sought. Cannot you see, Eliza, how he instinctively recedes from it? how he would repel it were he less the gentleman than he is? Child, I shrink from saying these things to you, but it is needful. You have good sense, Eliza, keen discernment, and you might see for yourself that it is not to you Mr. Grame’s love is given—or ever will be.”

For once in her life Eliza Monk allowed herself to betray agitation. She opened her trembling lips

to speak, but closed them again.

“A moment yet, Eliza. Let us suppose, for argument’s sake, that Mr. Grame loved you; that he wished to marry you; you know, my dear, how utterly useless it would be. Your father would not suffer it.”

“Mr. Grame is of gentle descent; my father is attached to him,” disputed Eliza.

“But Mr. Grame has nothing but his living—a hundred and sixty pounds a year; *you* must make a match in accordance with your own position. It would be Katherine’s trouble, Katherine’s rebellion over again. But this was mentioned for argument’s sake only; Mr. Grame will never sue for anything of the kind; and I must beg of you, my dear, to put all idea of it away, and to change your manner towards him.”

“Perhaps you fancy he may wish to sue for Lucy!” cried Eliza, in fierce resentment.

“That is a great deal more likely than the other. And the difficulties in her case would not be so great.”

“And pray why, Aunt Emma?”

“Because, my dear, I should not resent it as your father would. I am not so ambitious for her as he is for you.”

“A fine settlement for her—Robert Grame and his hundred——”

“Who is taking my name in vain?” cried a pleasant voice from the open window; and Robert Grame entered. [304]

“I was,” said Eliza readily; her tone changing like magic to sweet suavity, her face putting on its best charm. “About to remark that the Reverend Robert Grame has a hundred faults. Aunt Emma agrees with me.”

He laughed lightly, regarding it as pleasantry, and inquired for Hubert.

Eliza stepped out on the terrace when tea was over, talking to Mr. Grame; they began to pace it slowly together. Kate and her ball sported on the gravel walk beneath. It was a warm, serene evening, the silver moon shining, the evening star just appearing in the clear blue sky.

“Lucy being away, you cannot enjoy your usual flirtation with her,” remarked Miss Monk, in a light tone.

But he did not take it lightly. Rarely had his voice been more serious than when he answered: “I beg your pardon. I do not flirt—I have never flirted with Miss Carradyne.”

“No! It has looked like it.”

Mr. Grame remained silent. “I hope not,” he said at last. “I did not intend—I did not think. However, I must mend my manners,” he added more gaily. “To flirt at all would ill become my sacred calling. And Lucy Carradyne is superior to any such trifling.”

Her pulses were coursing on to fever heat. With her whole heart she loved Robert Grame: and the secret preference he had unconsciously betrayed for Lucy had served to turn her later days to bitterness.

“Possibly you mean something more serious,” said Eliza, compressing her lips.

“If I mean anything, I should certainly mean it seriously,” replied the young clergyman, his face blushing as he made the avowal. “But I may not. I have been reflecting much latterly, and I see I may not. If my income were good it might be a different matter. But it is not; and marriage for me must be out of the question.” [305]

“With a portionless girl, yes. Robert Grame,” she went on rapidly with impassioned earnestness, “when you marry, it must be with someone who can help you; whose income will compensate for the deficiency of yours. Look around you well: there may be some young ladies rich in the world’s wealth, even in Church Leet, who will forget your want of fortune for your own sake.”

Did he misunderstand her? It was hardly possible. She had a large fortune; Lucy none. But he answered as though he comprehended not. It may be that he deemed it best to set her ill-regulated hopes at rest for ever.

“One can hardly suppose a temptation of that kind would fall in the way of an obscure individual like myself. If it did, I could only reject it. I should not marry for money. I shall never marry where I do not love.”

They had halted near one of the terrace seats. On it lay a toy of Kate’s, a little wooden “box of bells.” Mechanically, her mind far away, Eliza took it up and began, still mechanically, turning the wire which set the bells playing with a soft but not unpleasant jingle.

“You love Lucy Carradyne!” she whispered.

“I fear I do,” he answered. “Though I have struggled against the conviction.”

A sudden crash startled them; shivers of glass fell before their feet; fit accompaniment to the

shattered hopes of one who stood there. Kate Dancox, aiming at Mr. Grame's hat, had sent her ball through the window. He leaped away to catch the culprit, and Eliza Monk sat down on the bench, all gladness gone out of her. Her love-dream had turned out to be a snare and a delusion.

"Who did that?"

Captain Monk, frightened from his after-dinner nap by the crash, came forth in anger. Kate got a box on the ear, and was sent to bed howling. [306]

"You should send her to school, papa."

"And I will," declared the Captain. "She startled me out of a sleep. Out of a dream, too. And it is not often I dream. I thought I was hearing the chimes again."

"Chimes which I have not yet been fortunate enough to hear at all," said Mr. Grame with a smile. Eliza recalled the sound of the bells she had set in motion, and thought it must have reached her father in his sleep.

"By George, no! You shall, though, Grame. They shall ring the new year in when it comes."

"Aunt Emma won't like that," laughingly commented Eliza. She was trying to be gay and careless before Robert Grame.

"Aunt Emma may *dis*like it!" retorted the Captain. "She has picked up some ridiculously absurd notion, Grame, that the bells bring ill-luck when they are heard. Women are so foolishly superstitious."

"That must be a very far-fetched superstition," said the parson.

"One might as well believe in witches," mocked the Captain. "I have given in to her fancies for some years, not to cross her, and allowed the bells to be silent: she's a good woman on the whole; but be hanged if I will any longer. On the last day of this year, Grame, you shall hear the chimes."

How it came about nobody exactly knew, unless it was through Hubert, but matters were smoothed for the parson and Lucy.

Mrs. Carradyne knew his worth, and she saw that they were as much in love with one another as ever could be Hodge and Joan. She liked the idea of Lucy being settled near her—and the vicarage, large and handsome, could have its unused rooms opened and furnished. Mr. Grame honestly avowed that he should have asked for Lucy before, but for his poverty; he supposed that Lucy was poor also. [307]

"That is so; Lucy has nothing of her own," said Mrs. Carradyne to this. "But I am not in that condition."

"Of course not. But—pardon me—I thought your property went to your son."

Mrs. Carradyne laughed. "A small estate of his father's, close by here, became my son's at his father's death," she said. "My own money is at my disposal; the half of it will eventually be Lucy's. When she marries, I shall allow her two hundred a year: and upon that, and your stipend, you will have to get along together."

"It will be like riches to me," said the young parson all in a glow.

"Ah! Wait until you realise the outlets for money that a wife entails," nodded Mrs. Carradyne in her superior wisdom. "Not but that I'm sure it's good for young people, setting up together, to be straitened at the beginning. It teaches them economy and the value of money."

Altogether it seemed a wonderful prospect to Robert Grame. Miss Lucy thought it would be Paradise. But a stern wave of opposition set in from Captain Monk.

Hubert broke the news to him as they were sitting together after dinner. To begin with, the Captain, as a matter of course, flew into a passion.

"Another of those beggarly parsons! What possessed them, that they should fix upon *his* family to play off their machinations upon! Lucy Carradyne was his niece: she should never be grabbed up by one of them while he was alive to stop it."

"Wait a minute, father," whispered Hubert. "You like Robert Grame; I know that: you would rather see him carry off Lucy than Eliza."

"What the dickens do you mean by that?"

Hubert said a few cautious words—hinting that, but for Lucy's being in the way, poor Katherine's escapade might have been enacted over again. Captain Monk relieved his mind by some strong language, sailor fashion; and for once in his life saw he must give in to necessity. [308]

So the wedding was fixed for the month of February, just one year after they had met: that sweet time of early spring, when spring comes in genially, when the birds would be singing, and the green buds peeping and the sunlight dancing.

But the present year was not over yet. Lucy was sewing at her wedding things. Eliza Monk,

smarting as from an adder's sting, ran away to visit a family who lived near Oddingly, an insignificant little place, lying, as everybody knows, on the other side of Worcester, famous only for its dullness and for the strange murders committed there in 1806—which have since passed into history. But she returned home for Christmas.

Once more it was old-fashioned Christmas weather; Jack Frost freezing the snow and sporting his icicles. The hearty tenants, wending their way to the annual feast in the winter twilight, said how unusually sharp the air was, enough to bite off their ears and noses.

The Reverend Robert Grame made one at the table for the first time, and said grace at the Captain's elbow. He had heard about the freedom obtaining at these dinners; but he knew he was utterly powerless to suppress it, and he hoped his presence might prove some little restraint, just as poor George West had hoped in the days gone by: not that it was as bad now as it used to be. A rumour had gone abroad that the chimes were to play again, but it died away unconfirmed, for Captain Monk kept his own counsel.

The first to quit the table was Hubert. Captain Monk looked up angrily. He was proud of his son, of his tall and graceful form, of his handsome features, proud even of his bright complexion; ay, [309] and of his estimable qualities. While inwardly fearing Hubert's signs of fading strength, he defiantly refused to recognise it or to admit it openly.

"What now?" he said in a loud whisper. "Are *you* turning renegade?"

The young man bent over his father's shoulder. "I don't feel well; better let me go quietly, father; I have felt pain here all day"—touching his left side. And he escaped.

There was present at table an elderly gentleman named Peveril. He had recently come with his wife into the neighbourhood and taken on lease a small estate, called by the odd name of Peacock's Range, which belonged to Hubert and lay between Church Dykely and Church Leet. Mr. Peveril put an inopportune question.

"What is the story, Captain, about some chimes which were put up in the church here and are never allowed to ring because they caused the death of the Vicar? I was told of it to-day."

Captain Monk looked at Mr. Peveril, but did not speak.

"One George West, I think. Was he parson here?"

"Yes, he was parson here," said Farmer Winter, finding nobody else answered Mr. Peveril, next to whom he sat. He was a very old man now, but hale and hearty still, and a steadfast ally of his landlord. "Given that parson his way and we should never have had the chimes put up at all. Sweet sounding bells they are, too."

"But how could the chimes kill him?" went on Mr. Peveril. "Did they kill him?"

"George West was a quarrelsome, mischief-making meddler, good for nothing but to set the parish together by the ears; and I must beg of you to drop his name when at my table, Peveril. As to the chimes, you will hear them to-night."

Captain Monk spoke in his sternest tones, and Mr. Peveril bowed. Robert Grame had listened in [310] surprise. He wondered what it all meant—for nobody had ever told him of this phase of the past. The table clapped its unsteady hands and gave a cheer for the chimes, now to be heard again.

"Yes, gentlemen," said the Captain, not a whit more steady than his guests. "They shall ring for us to-night, though it brought the parson out of his grave."

A few minutes before twelve the butler, who had his orders, came into the dining-room and set the windows open. His master gave him another order and the man withdrew. Entering the drawing-room, he proceeded to open those windows also. Mr. Peveril, and one or two more guests, sat with the family; Hubert lay back in an easy-chair.

"What are you about, Rimmer?" hastily cried out Mrs. Carradyne in surprise. "Opening the windows!"

"It is by the master's orders, ma'am," replied the butler; "he bade me open them, that you and the ladies might get a better hearing of the chimes."

Mrs. Carradyne, superstitious ever, grew white as death. "*The chimes!*" she breathed in a dread whisper. "Surely, surely, Rimmer, you must be mistaken. The chimes cannot be going to ring again!"

"They are to ring the New Year in," said the man. "I have known it this day or two, but was not allowed to tell, as Madam may guess"—glancing at his mistress. "John Cale has got his orders, and he'll set 'em going when the clock has struck twelve."

"Oh, is there no one who will run to stop it?" bewailed Mrs. Carradyne, wringing her hands in all the terror of a nameless fear. "There may yet be time. Rimmer! can you go?"

Hubert came out of his chair laughing. Rimmer was round and fat now, and could not run if he tried. "I'll go, aunt," he said. "Why, walking slowly, I should get there before Rimmer." [311]

The words, "walking slowly," may have misled Mrs. Carradyne; or, in the moment's tribulation, perhaps she forgot that Hubert ought not to be the one to use much exertion; but she made no

objection. No one else made way, and Hubert hastened out, putting on his overcoat as he went towards the church.

It was the loveliest night; the air was still and clear, the landscape white and glistening, the moon bright as gold. Hubert, striding along at a quick walk, had traversed half the short distance, when the church clock struck out the first note of midnight. And he knew he should not be in time—unless——

He set off to run: it was such a very little way! Flying along without heed to self, he reached the churchyard gate. And there he was forced—forced—to stop to gather up his laboured breath.

Ring, ring, ring! broke forth the chimes melodiously upon Hubert's ear. "Stop!" he shouted, panting; "stop! stop!"—just as if John Cale could hear the warning: and he began leaping over the gravestones in his path, after the irreverent fashion of Miss Kate Dancox.

"Stop!" he faintly cried in his exhaustion, dashing through the vestry, as the strains of "The Bay of Biscay" pursued their harmonious course overhead, sounding louder here than in the open air. "Sto——"

He could not end the word. Pulling the little door open, he put his foot on the first step of the narrow ladder of a staircase: and then fell prone upon it. John Cale and young Mr. Threpp, the churchwarden's son, who had been the clerk's companion, were descending the stairs, after the chimes had chimed themselves out, and they had locked them up again to (perhaps) another year, when they found some impediment below.

"What is it?" exclaimed young Mr. Threpp. The clerk turned on his lantern. [312]

It was Hubert, Captain Monk's son and heir. He lay there with a face of deadly whiteness, a blue shade encircling his lips.

THE SILENT CHIMES [313]

III.—RINGING AT MIDDAY

I

It was an animated scene; and one you only find in England. The stubble of the cornfields looked pale and bleak in the departing autumn, the wind was shaking down the withered leaves from the trees, whose thinning branches told unmistakably of the rapidly-advancing winter. But the day was bright after the night's frost, and the sun shone on the glowing scarlet coats of the hunting-men, and the hounds barked in every variety of note and leaped with delight in the morning air. It was the first run of the season, and the sportsmen were fast gathering at the appointed spot—a field flanked by a grove of trees called Poachers' Copse.

Ten o'clock, the hour fixed for the throw-off, came and went, and still Poachers' Copse was not relieved of its busy intruders. Many a gentleman fox-hunter glanced at his hunting-watch as the minutes passed, many a burly farmer jerked his horse impatiently; while the grey-headed huntsman cracked his long whip amongst his canine favourites and promised them they should soon be on the scent. The delay was caused by the non-arrival of the Master of the Hounds.

But now all eyes were directed to a certain quarter, and by the brightened looks and renewed stir, it might be thought that he was appearing. A stranger, sitting his horse well and quietly at [314] the edge of Poachers' Copse, watched the newcomers as they came into view. Foremost of them rode an elderly gentleman in scarlet, and by his side a young lady who might be a few years past twenty.

"Father and daughter, I'll vow," commented the stranger, noting that both had the same well-carved features, the same defiant, haughty expression, the same proud bearing. "What a grandly-handsome girl! And he, I suppose, is the man we are waiting for. Is that the Master of the Hounds?" he asked aloud of the horseman next him, who chanced to be young Mr. Threpp.

"No, sir, that is Captain Monk," was the answer. "They are saying yonder that he has brought word the Master is taken ill and cannot hunt to-day"—which proved to be correct. The Master had been taken with giddiness when about to mount his horse.

The stranger rode up to Captain Monk; judging him to be regarded—by the way he was welcomed and the respect paid him—as the chief personage at the meet, representing in a manner the Master. Lifting his hat, he begged grace for having, being a stranger, come out, uninvited, to join the field; adding that his name was Hamlyn and he was staying with Mr. Peveril at Peacock's Range.

Captain Monk wheeled round at the address; his head had been turned away. He saw a tall, dark

man of about five-and-thirty years, so dark and sunburnt as to suggest ideas of his having recently come from a warmer climate. His hair was black, his eyes were dark brown, his features and manner prepossessing, and he spoke as a man accustomed to good society.

Captain Monk, lifting his hat in return, met him with cordiality. The field was open to all, he said, but any friend of Peveril's would be doubly welcome. Peveril himself was a muff, in so far as that he never hunted.

"Hearing there was to be a meet to-day, I could not resist the temptation of joining it; it is many [315] years since I had the opportunity of doing so," remarked the stranger.

There was not time for more, the hounds were throwing off. Away dashed the Captain's steed, away dashed the stranger's, away dashed Miss Monk's, the three keeping side by side.

Presently came a fence. Captain Monk leaped it and galloped onwards after the other red-coats. Miss Eliza Monk would have leaped it next, but her horse refused it; yet he was an old hunter and she a fearless rider. The stranger was waiting to follow her. A touch of the angry Monk temper assailed her and she forced her horse to the leap. He had a temper also; he did not clear it, and horse and rider came down together.

In a trice Mr. Hamlyn was off his own steed and raising her. She was not hurt, she said, when she could speak; a little shaken, a little giddy—and she leaned against the fence. The refractory horse, unnoticed for the moment, got upon his legs, took the fence of his own accord and tore away after the field. Young Mr. Threpp, who had been in some difficulty with his own steed, rode up now.

"Shall I ride back to the Hall and get the pony-carriage for you, Miss Eliza?" asked the young man.

"Oh, dear, no," she replied, "thank you all the same. I should prefer to walk home."

"Are you equal to walking?" interposed the stranger.

"Quite. The walk will do away with this faintness. It is not the first fall I have had."

The stranger whispered to young Mr. Threpp—who was as good-natured a young fellow as ever lived. Would he consent to forego the sport that day and lead his horse to Mr. Peveril's? If so, he would accompany the young lady and give her the support of his arm.

So William Threpp rode off, leading Mr. Hamlyn's horse, and Miss Monk accepted the stranger's [316] arm. He told her a little about himself as they walked along. It might not have been an ominous commencement, but intimacies have grown sometimes out of a slighter introduction. Their nearest way led past the Vicarage. Mr. Grame saw them from its windows and came running out.

"Has any accident taken place?" he asked hurriedly. "I hope not."

Eliza Monk's face flushed. He had been Lucy's husband several months now, but she could not yet suddenly meet him without a thrill of emotion. Lucy ran out next; the pretty young wife for whom she had been despised. Eliza answered Mr. Grame curtly, nodded to Lucy, and passed on.

"And, as I was telling you," continued Mr. Hamlyn, "when this property was left to me in England, I made it a plea for throwing up my post in India, and came home. I landed about six weeks ago, and have been since busy in London with lawyers. Peveril, whom I knew in the days gone by, wrote to invite me to come to him here on a week's visit, before he and his wife leave for the South of France."

"They are going to winter there for Mrs. Peveril's health," observed Eliza. "Peacock's Range, the place they live at, belongs to my cousin, Harry Carradyne. Did I understand you to say that you were not an Englishman?"

"I was born in the West Indies. My family were English and had settled there."

"What a coincidence!" exclaimed Eliza Monk with a smile. "My mother was a West Indian, and I was born there.—There's my home, Leet Hall!"

"A fine old place," cried Mr. Hamlyn, regarding the mansion before him.

"You may well say 'old,'" remarked the young lady. "It has been the abode of the Monk family from generation to generation. For my part, I sometimes half wish it would tumble down that we [317] might move to a more lively locality. Church Leet is a dead-alive place at best."

"We always want what we have not," laughed Mr. Hamlyn. "I would give all I am worth to possess an ancestral home, no matter if it were grim and gloomy. We who can boast of only modern wealth look upon these family castles with an envy you have little idea of."

"If you possess modern wealth, you possess a very good and substantial thing," she answered, echoing his laugh.—"Here comes my aunt, full of wonder."

Full of alarm also. Mrs. Carradyne stood on the terrace steps, asking if there had been an accident.

"Nothing serious, Aunt Emma. Saladin refused the fence at Ring Gap, and we both came down together. This gentleman was so obliging as to forego his day's sport and escort me home. Mr.—

Mr. Hamlyn, I believe?" she added. "My aunt, Mrs. Carradyne."

The stranger confirmed it. "Philip Hamlyn," he said to Mrs. Carradyne, lifting his hat.

Gaining the hall-door with slow and gentle steps came a young man, whose beautiful features were wasting more perceptibly day by day, and their hectic growing of a deeper crimson. "What is wrong, Eliza?" he cried. "Have you come to grief? Where's Saladin?"

"My brother," she said to Mr. Hamlyn.

Yes, it was indeed Hubert Monk. For he did not die of that run to the church the past New Year's Eve. The death-like faint proved to be a faint, nothing more. Nothing more *then*. But something else was advancing with gradual steps: steps that seemed to be growing almost perceptible now.

Now and again Hubert fainted in the same manner; his face taking a death-like hue, the blue tinge surrounding his mouth. Captain Monk, unable longer to shut his eyes to what might be [318] impending, called in the best medical advice that Worcestershire could afford; and the doctors told him the truth—that Hubert's days were numbered.

To say that Captain Monk began at once to "set his house in order" would not be quite the right expression, since it was not he himself who was going to die. But he set his affairs straight as to the future, and appointed another heir in his son's place—his nephew, Harry Carradyne.

Harry Carradyne, a brave young lieutenant, was then with his regiment in some almost inaccessible fastness of the Indian Empire. Captain Monk (not concealing his lamentation and the cruel grief it was to himself personally) wrote word to him of the fiat concerning poor Hubert, together with a peremptory order to sell out and return home as the future heir. This was being accomplished, and Harry might now be expected almost any day.

But it may as well be mentioned that Captain Monk, never given to be confidential about himself or his affairs, told no one what he had done, with one exception. Even Mrs. Carradyne was ignorant of the change in her son's prospects and of his expected return. The one exception was Hubert. Soon to lose him, Captain Monk made more of his son than he had ever done, and seemed to like to talk with him.

"Harry will make a better master to succeed you than I should have made, father," said Hubert, as they were slowly pacing home from the parsonage, arm-in-arm, one dull November day, some little time after the meet of the hounds, as recorded. It was surprising how often Captain Monk would now encounter his son abroad, as if by accident, and give him his arm home.

"What d'ye mean?" wrathfully responded the Captain, who never liked to hear his own children disparaged, by themselves or by anyone else.

Hubert laughed a little. "Harry will look after things better than I ever should. I was always given [319] to laziness. Don't you remember, father, when a little boy in the West Indies, you used to tell me I was good for nothing but to bask in the heat?"

"I remember one thing, Hubert; and, strange to say, have remembered it only lately. Things lie dormant in the memory for years, and then crop up again. Upon getting home from one of my long voyages, your mother greeted me with the news that your heart was weak; the doctor had told her so. I gave the fellow a trimming for putting so ridiculous a notion into her head—and it passed clean out of mine. I suppose he was right, though."

"Little doubt of that, father. I wonder I have lived so long."

"Nonsense!" exploded the Captain; "you may live on yet for years. I don't know that I did not act foolishly in sending post-haste for Harry Carradyne."

Hubert smiled a sad smile. "You have done quite right, father; right in all ways; be sure of that. Harry is one of the truest and best fellows that ever lived: he will be a comfort to you when I am gone, and the best of all successors later. Just—a—moment—father!"

"Why, what's the matter?" cried Captain Monk—for his son had suddenly halted and stood with a rapidly-paling face and shortened breath, pressing his hands to his side. "Here, lean on me, lad; lean on me."

It was a sudden faintness. Nothing very much, and it passed off in a minute or two. Hubert made a brave attempt at smiling, and resumed his way. But Captain Monk did not like it at all; he knew all these things were but the beginning of the end. And that end, though not with actual irreverence, he was resenting bitterly in his heart.

"Who's that coming out?" he asked, crossly, alluding to some figure descending the steps of his [320] house—for his sight was not what it used to be.

"It is Mr. Hamlyn," said Hubert.

"Oh—Hamlyn! He seems to be always coming in. I don't like that man somehow, Hubert. Wonder what he's lagging in the neighbourhood for?"

Hubert Monk had an idea that he could have told. But he did not want to draw down an explosion on his own head. Mr. Hamlyn came to meet them with friendly smiles and hand-shakes. Hubert liked him; liked him very much.

Not only had Mr. Hamlyn prolonged his stay beyond the “day or two” he had originally come for, but he evinced no intention of leaving. When Mr. Peveril and his wife departed for the south, he made a proposal to remain at Peacock’s Range for a time as their tenant. And when the astonished couple asked his reasons, he answered that he should like to get a few runs with the hounds.

II

The November days glided by. The end of the month was approaching, and still Philip Hamlyn stayed on, and was a very frequent visitor at Leet Hall. Little doubt that Miss Monk was his attraction, and the parish began to say so without reticence.

The parish was right. One fine, frosty morning Mr. Hamlyn sought an interview with Captain Monk and laid before him his proposals for Eliza.

One might have thought by the tempestuous words showered down upon him in answer that he had proposed to smother her. Reproaches, hot and fast, were poured forth upon the suitor’s unlucky head.

“Why, you are a stranger!” stormed the Captain; “you have not known her a month! How dare you? It’s not commonly decent.” [321]

Mr. Hamlyn quietly answered that he had known her long enough to love her, and went on to say that he came of a good family, had plenty of money, and could make a liberal settlement upon her.

“That you never will,” said Captain Monk. “I should not like you for my son-in-law,” he continued candidly, calming down from his burst of passion to the bounds of reason. “But there can be no question of it in any way. Eliza is to become Lady Rivers.”

Mr. Hamlyn opened his eyes in astonishment. “Lady Rivers!” he echoed. “Do you speak of Sir Thomas Rivers?—that old man!”

“No, I do not, sir. Sir Thomas Rivers has one foot in the grave. I speak of his eldest son. He wants her, and he shall have her.”

“Pardon me, Captain, I—I do not think Miss Monk can know anything of this. I am sure she did not last night. I come to you with her full consent and approbation.”

“I care nothing about that. My daughter is aware that any attempt to oppose her will to mine would be utterly futile. Young Tom Rivers has written to me to ask for her; I have accepted him, and I choose that she shall accept him. She’ll like it herself, too; it will be a good match.”

“Young Tom Rivers is next door to a simpleton: he is not half-baked,” retorted Mr. Hamlyn, his own temper getting up: “if I may judge by what I’ve seen of him in the field.”

“Tom Rivers is a favourite everywhere, let me tell you, sir. Eliza would not refuse him for you.”

“Perhaps, Captain Monk, you will converse with her upon this point?”

“I intend to give her my orders—if that’s what you mean,” returned the Captain. “And now, sir, I think our discussion may terminate.” [322]

Mr. Hamlyn saw no use in prolonging it for the present. Captain Monk bowed him out of the house and called his daughter into the room.

“Eliza,” he began, scorning to beat about the bush, “I have received an offer of marriage for you.”

Miss Eliza blushed a little, not much: few things could make her do that now. Once our blushes have been wasted, as hers were on Robert Grame, their vivid freshness has faded for ever and aye. “The song has left the bird.”

“And I have accepted it,” continued Captain Monk. “He would like the wedding to be early in the year, so you may get your rattle-traps in order for it. Tell your aunt I will give her a blank cheque for the cost, and she may fill it in.”

“Thank you, papa.”

“There’s the letter; you can read it”—pushing one across the table to her. “It came by special messenger last night, and I have sent my answer this morning.”

Eliza Monk glanced at the contents, which were written on rose-coloured paper. For a moment she looked puzzled.

“Why, papa, this is from Tom Rivers! You cannot suppose I would marry *him*! A silly boy, younger than I am! Tom Rivers is the greatest goose I know.”

“How dare you say so, Eliza?”

“Well, he is. Look at his note! Pink paper and a fancy edge!”

“Stuff! Rivers is young and inexperienced, but he’ll grow older—he is a very nice young fellow, and a capital fox-hunter. You’d be master and mistress too—and that would suit your book, I take

it. I want to have you settled near me, Eliza—you are all I have left, or soon will be."

"But, papa——"

Captain Monk raised his hand for silence. [323]

"You sent that man Hamlyn to me with a proposal for you. Eliza; you *know* that would not do. Hamlyn's property lies in the West Indies, his home too, for all I know. He attempted to tell me that he would not take you out there against my consent; but I know better, and what such ante-nuptial promises are worth. It might end in your living there."

"No, no."

"What do you say 'no, no' for, like a parrot? Circumstances might compel you. I do not like the man, besides."

"But why, papa?"

"I don't know; I have never liked him from the first. There! that's enough. You must be my Lady Rivers. Poor old Tom is on his last legs."

"Papa, I never will be."

"Listen, Eliza. I had one trouble with Katherine; I will not have another with you. She defied me; she left my home rebelliously to enter upon one of her own setting-up: what came of it? Did luck attend her? Do you be more wise."

"Father," she said, moving a step forward with head uplifted; and the resolute, haughty look which rendered their faces so much alike was very conspicuous on hers, "do not let us oppose each other. Perhaps we can each give way a little? I have promised to be the wife of Philip Hamlyn, and that promise I will fulfil. You wish me to live near you: well, he can take a place in this neighbourhood and settle down in it; and on my part, I will promise you not to leave this country. He may have to go from time to time to the West Indies; I will remain at home."

Captain Monk looked steadily at her before he answered. He marked the stern, uncompromising expression, the strong will in the dark eyes and in every feature, which no power, not even his, [324] might unbend. He thought of his elder daughter, now lying in her grave; he thought of his son, so soon to be lying beside her; he did not care to be bereft of *all* his children, and for once in his hard life he attempted to conciliate.

"Hark to me, Eliza. Give up Hamlyn—I have said I don't like the man; give up Tom Rivers also, as you will. Remain at home with me until a better suitor shall present himself, and Leet Hall and its broad lands shall be yours."

She looked up in surprise. Leet Hall had always hitherto gone in the male line; and, failing Hubert, it would be, or ought to be, Harry Carradyne's. Though she knew not that any steps had already been taken in that direction.

"Leet Hall?" she exclaimed.

"Leet Hall and its broad lands," repeated the Captain impatiently. "Give up Mr. Hamlyn and it shall all be yours."

She remained for some moments in deep thought, her head bent, revolving the offer. She was fond of pomp and power, as her father had ever been, and the temptation to rule as sole domineering mistress in her girlhood's home was great. But at that very instant the tall fine form of Philip Hamlyn passed across a pathway in the distance, and she turned from the temptation for ever. What little capability of loving had been left to her after the advent of Robert Grame was given to Mr. Hamlyn.

"I cannot give him up," she said in low tones.

"What moonshine, Eliza! You are not a love-sick girl now."

The colour dyed her face painfully. Did her father suspect aught of the past; of where her love *had* been given—and rejected? The suspicion only added fuel to the fire.

"I cannot give up Mr. Hamlyn," she reiterated. [325]

"Then you will never inherit Leet Hall. No, nor aught else of mine."

"As you please, sir, about that."

"You set me at defiance, then!"

"I don't wish to do so, father; but I shall marry Mr. Hamlyn."

"At defiance," repeated the Captain, as she moved to escape from his presence; "Katherine secretly, you openly. Better that I had never had children. Look here, Eliza: let this matter remain in abeyance for six or twelve months, things resting as they are. By that time you may have come to your senses; or I (yes, I see you are ready to retort it) to mine. If not—well, we shall only then be where we are."

"And that we should be," returned Eliza, doggedly. "Time will never change either of us."

“But events may. Let it be so, child. Stay where you are for the present, in your maiden home.”

She shook her head in denial; not a line of her proud face giving way, nor a curve of her decisive lips: and Captain Monk knew that he had pleaded in vain. She would neither give up her marriage nor prolong the period for its celebration.

What could be the secret of her obstinacy? Chiefly the impossibility of tolerating opposition to her own indomitable will. It was her father’s will over again; his might be a very little softening with years and trouble; not much. Had she been in desperate love with Hamlyn one could have understood it, but she was not; at most it was but a passing fancy. What says the poet? I daresay you all know the lines, and I know I have quoted them times and again, they are so true:

[326]

“Few hearts have never loved, but fewer still
Have felt a second passion. *None* a third.
The first was living fire; the next a thrill;
The weary heart can never more be stirred:
Rely on it the song has left the bird.”

Very, very true. Her passion for Robert Grame had been as living fire in its wild intensity; it was but the shadow of a thrill that warmed her heart for Philip Hamlyn. Possibly she mistook it in a degree; thought more of it than it was. The feeling of gratification which arises from flattered vanity deceives a woman’s heart sometimes: and Mr. Hamlyn did not conceal his rapturous admiration of her.

She held to her defiant course, and her father held to his. He did not continue to say she should not marry; he had no power for that—and perhaps he did not want her to make a moonlight escapade of it, as Katherine had made. So the preparation for the wedding went on, Eliza herself paying for the rattletraps, as they had been called; Captain Monk avowed that he “washed his hands of it,” and then held his peace.

Whether Mr. Hamlyn and his intended bride considered it best to get the wedding over and done with, lest adverse fate, set afoot by the Captain, should after all circumvent them, it is impossible to say, but the day fixed was a speedy one. And if Captain Monk had deemed it “not decent” in Mr. Hamlyn to propose for a young lady after only a month’s knowledge, what did he think of this? They were to be married on the last day of the year.

Was it fixed upon in defiant mockery?—for, as the reader knows, it had proved an ominous day more than once in the Monk family. But no, defiance had no hand in that, simply adverse fate. The day originally fixed by the happy couple was Christmas Eve: but Mr. Hamlyn, who had to go [327] to London about that time on business connected with his property, found it impossible to get back for the day, or for some days after it. He wrote to Eliza, asking that the day should be put off for a week, if it made no essential difference, and fixed the last day in the year. Eliza wrote word back that she would prefer that day; it gave more time for preparation.

They were to be married in her own church, and by its Vicar. Great marvel existed at the Captain’s permitting this, but he said nothing. Having washed his hands of the affair, he washed them for good: had the bride been one of the laundry-maids in his household he could not have taken less notice. A Miss Wilson was coming from a little distance to be bridesmaid; and the bride and bridegroom would go off from the church door. The question of a breakfast was never mooted: Captain Monk’s equable indifference might not have stood that.

“I shall wish them good luck with all my heart—but I don’t feel altogether sure they’ll have it!” bewailed poor Mrs. Carradyne in private. “Eliza should have agreed to the delay proposed by her father.”

III

Ring, ring, ring, broke forth the chimes on the frosty midday air. Not midnight, you perceive, but midday, for the church clock had just given forth its twelve strokes. Another round of the dial, and the old year would have departed into the womb of the past.

Bowling along the smooth turnpike road which skirted the churchyard on one side came a gig containing a gentleman, a tall, slender, frank-looking young man, with a fair face and the pleasantest blue eyes ever seen. He wore a white top-coat, the fashion then, and was driving [328] rapidly in the direction of Leet Hall; but when the chimes burst forth he pulled up abruptly.

“Why, what in the world——” he began—and then sat still listening to the sweet strains of “The Bay of Biscay.” The day, though in mid-winter, was bright and beautiful, and the golden sunlight, shining from the dark-blue sky, played on the young man’s golden hair.

“Have they mistaken midday for midnight?” he continued, as the chimes played out their tune and died away on the air. “What’s the meaning of it?”

He, Harry Carradyne, was not the only one to ask this. No human being in and about Church Leet, save Captain Monk and they who executed his orders, knew that he had decreed that the chimes should play that day at midday. Why did he do it? What could his motive be? Surely not that they should, by playing (according to Mrs. Carradyne’s theory), inaugurate ill-luck for Eliza! At the moment they began to play she was coming out of church on Mr. Hamlyn’s arm, having

left her maiden name behind her.

A few paces more, for he was driving gently on now, and Harry pulled up again, in surprise, as before, for the front of the church was now in view. Lots of spectators, gentle and simple, stood about, and a handsome chariot, with four post-horses and a great coat-of-arms emblazoned on its panels, waited at the church gate.

“It must be a wedding!” decided Harry.

The next moment the chariot was in motion; was soon about to pass him, the bride and bridegroom within it. A very dark but good-looking man, with an air of command in his face, he, but a stranger to Harry; she, Eliza. She wore a grey silk dress, a white bonnet, with orange blossoms and a veil, which was quite the fashionable wedding attire of the day. Her head was [329] turned, nodding its farewells yet to the crowd, and she did not see her cousin as the chariot swept by.

“Dear me!” he exclaimed, mentally. “I wonder who she has married?”

Staying quietly where he was until the spectators should have dispersed, whose way led them mostly in opposite directions, Harry next saw the clerk come out of the church by the small vestry door, lock it and cross over to the stile: which brought him out close to the gig.

“Why, my heart alive!” he exclaimed. “Is it Captain Carradyne?”

“That’s near enough,” said Harry, who knew the title was accorded him by the rustic natives of Church Leet, as he bent down with his sunny smile to shake the old clerk’s hand. “You are hearty as ever, I see, John. And so you have had a wedding here?”

“Ay, sir, there have been one in the church. I was not in my place, though. The Captain, he ordered me to let the church go for once, and to be ready up aloft in the belfry to set the chimes going at midday. As chance had it, the party came out just at the same time; Miss Eliza was a bit late in coming, ye see; so it may be said the chimes rang ’em out. I guess the sound astonished the people above a bit, for nobody knew they were going to play.”

“But how was it all, Cale? Why should the Captain order them to chime at midday?”

John Cale shook his head. “I can’t tell ye that rightly, Mr. Harry; the Captain, as ye know, sir, never says why he does this or why he does t’other. Young William Threpp, who had to be up there with me, thought he must have ordered ’em to play in mockery—for he hates the marriage like poison.”

“Who is the bridegroom?” [330]

“It’s a Mr. Hamlyn, sir. A gentleman who is pretty nigh as haughty as the Captain himself; but a pleasant-spoken, kindly man, as far as I’ve seen: and a rich one, too.”

“Why did Captain Monk object to him?”

“It’s thought ’twas because he was a stranger to the place and has lived over in the Indies; and he wanted Miss Eliza, so it’s said, to have young Tom Rivers. That’s about it, I b’lieve, Mr. Harry.”

Harry Carradyne drove away thoughtfully. At the foot of the slight ascent leading to Leet Hall, one of the grooms happened to be standing. Harry handed over to him the horse and gig, and went forward on foot.

“Bertie!” he called out. For he had seen Hubert before him, walking at a snail’s pace: the very slightest hill tried him now. The only one left of the wedding-party, for the bridesmaid drove off from the church door. Hubert turned at the call.

“Harry! Why, Harry!”

Hand locked in hand, they sat down on a bench beside the path; face gazing into face. There had always been a likeness between them: in the bright-coloured, waving hair, the blue eyes and the well-favoured features. But Harry’s face was redolent of youth and health; in the other’s might be read approaching death.

“You are very thin, Bertie; thinner even than I expected to see you,” broke from the traveller involuntarily.

“*You* are looking well, at any rate,” was Hubert’s answer. “And I am so glad you are come: I thought you might have been here a month ago.”

“The voyage was unreasonably long; we had contrary winds almost from port to port. I got on to Worcester yesterday, slept there, and hired a horse and gig to bring me over this morning. What [331] about Eliza’s wedding, Hubert? I was just in time to see her drive away. Cale, with whom I had a word down yonder, says the master does not like it.”

“He does not like it and would not countenance it: washed his hands of it (as he told us) altogether.”

“Any good reason for that?”

“Not particularly good, that I see. Somehow he disliked Hamlyn; and Tom Rivers wanted Eliza, which would have pleased him greatly. But Eliza was not without blame. My father gave way so far as to ask her to delay things for a few months, not to marry in haste, and she would not. She might have conceded as much as that.”

“Did you ever know Eliza concede anything, Bertie?”

“Well, not often.”

“Who gave her away?”

“I did: look at my gala toggery”—opening his overcoat. “He wanted to forbid it. ‘Don’t hinder me, father,’ I pleaded; ‘it is the last brotherly service I can ever render her.’ And so,” his tone changing to lightness, “I have been and gone and done it.”

Harry Carradyne understood. “Not the last, Hubert; don’t say that. I hope you will live to render her many another yet.”

Hubert smiled faintly. “Look at me,” he said in answer.

“Yes, I know; I see how you look. But you may take a turn yet.”

“Ah, miracles are no longer wrought for us. Shall I surprise you very much, cousin mine, if I say that were the offer made me of prolonged life, I am not sure that I should accept it?”

“Not unless health were renewed with it; I can understand that. You have had to endure suffering, Bertie.”

“Ay. Pain, discomfort, fears, weariness. After working out their torment upon me, they—why then [332]
they took a turn and opened out the vista of a refuge.”

“A refuge?”

“The one sure Refuge offered by God to the sick and sorrowful, the weary and heavy-laden—Himself. I found it. I found *Him* and all His wonderful mercy. It will not be long now, Harry, before I see Him face to face. And here comes His true minister, but for whom I might have missed the way.”

Harry turned his head, and saw, advancing up the drive, a good-looking young clergyman. “Who is it?” he involuntarily cried.

“Your brother-in-law, Robert Grame. Lucy’s husband.”

It was not the fashion in those days for a bride’s mother (or one acting as her mother) to attend the bride to church; therefore Mrs. Carradyne, following it, was spared risk of conflict with Captain Monk on that score. She was in Eliza’s room, assisting at the putting on of the bridal robes (for we have to go back an hour or so) when a servant came up to say that Mr. Hamlyn waited below. Rather wondering—for he was to have driven straight to the church—Mrs. Carradyne went downstairs.

“Pardon me, dear Mrs. Carradyne,” he said, as he shook hands, and she had never seen him look so handsome, “I could not pass the house without making one more effort to disarm Captain Monk’s prejudices, and asking for his blessing on us. Do you think he will consent to see me?”

Mrs. Carradyne felt sure he would not, and said so. But she sent Rimmer to the library to ask the question. Mr. Hamlyn pencilled down a few anxious words on paper, folded it, and put it into the man’s hand.

No; it proved useless. Captain Monk was harder than adamant; he sent Rimmer back with a flea in his ear, and the petition torn in two.

“I feared so,” sighed Mrs. Carradyne. “He will not this morning see even Eliza.” [333]

Mr. Hamlyn did not sigh in return; he spoke a cross, impatient word: he had never been able to see reason in the Captain’s dislike to him, and, with a brief good-morning, went out to his carriage. But, remembering something when crossing the hall, he came back.

“Forgive me, Mrs. Carradyne; I quite forgot that I have a note for you. It is from Mrs. Peveril, I believe; it came to me this morning, enclosed in a letter of her husband’s.”

“You have heard at last, then!”

“At last—as you observe. Though Peveril had nothing particular to write about; I daresay he does not care for letter writing.”

Slipping the note into her pocket, to be opened at leisure, Mrs. Carradyne returned to the adorning of Eliza. Somehow, it was rather a prolonged business—which made it late when the bride with her bridesmaid and Hubert drove from the door.

Mrs. Carradyne remained in the room—to which Eliza was not to return—putting up this, and that. The time slipped on, and it was close upon twelve o’clock when she got back to the drawing-room. Captain Monk was in it then, standing at the window, which he had thrown wide open. To see more clearly the bridal party come out of church, was the thought that crossed Mrs. Carradyne’s mind in her simplicity.

“I very much feared they would be late,” she observed, sitting down near her brother: and at that moment the church clock began to strike twelve.

“A good thing if they were *too* late!” he answered. “Listen.”

She supposed he wanted to count the strokes—what else could he be listening to? And now, by the stir at the distant gates, she saw that the bridal party had come out. [334]

“Good heavens, what’s that?” shrieked Mrs. Carradyne, starting from her chair.

“The chimes,” stoically replied the Captain. And he proceeded to hum through the tune of “The Bay of Biscay,” and beat a noiseless accompaniment with his foot.

“*The Chimes*, Emma,” he repeated, when the melody had finished itself out. “I ordered them to be played. It’s the last day of the old year, you know.”

Laughing slightly at her consternation, Captain Monk closed the window and quitted the room. As Mrs. Carradyne took her handkerchief from her pocket to pass it over her face, grown white with startled terror, the note she had put there came out also, and fell on the carpet.

Picking it up, she stood at the window, gazing forth. Her sight was not what it used to be; but she discerned the bride and bridegroom enter their carriage and drive away; next she saw the bridesmaid get into the carriage from the Hall, assisted by Hubert, and that drive off in its turn. She saw the crowd disperse, this way and that; she even saw the gig there, its occupant talking with John Cale. But she did not look at him particularly; and she had not the slightest idea but that Harry was in India.

And all that time an undercurrent of depression was running riot in her heart. None knew with what a strange terror she had grown to dread the chimes.

She sat down now and opened Mrs. Peveril’s note. It treated chiefly of the utterly astounding ways that untravelled old lady was meeting with in foreign parts. “If you will believe me,” wrote she, “the girl that waits on us wears carpet slippers down at heel, and a short cotton jacket for best, and she puts the tea-tray before me with the handle of the tea-pot turned to me and the spout standing outwards, and she comes right into the bed-room of a morning with Charles’s [335] shaving-water without knocking.” But the one sentence that arrested Mrs. Carradyne’s attention above any other was the following: “I reckon that by this time you have grown well acquainted with our esteemed young friend. He is a good, kindly gentleman, and I’m sure never could have done anything to deserve his wife’s treatment of him.”

“Can she mean Mr. Hamlyn?” debated Mrs. Carradyne, all sorts of ideas leaping into her mind with a rush. “If not—what other ‘esteemed friend’ can she allude to?—*she*, old herself, would call *him* young. But Mr. Hamlyn has not any wife. At least, had not until to-day.”

She read the note over again. She sat with it open, buried in a reverie, thinking no end of things, good and bad: and the conclusion she at last came to was, that, with the unwonted exercise of letter-writing, poor old Mrs. Peveril’s head had grown confused.

“Well, Hubert, did it all go off well?” she questioned, as her nephew entered the room, some sort of excitement on his wasted face. “I saw them drive away.”

“Yes, it went off well; there was no hitch anywhere,” replied Hubert. “But, Aunt Emma, I have brought a friend home with me. Guess who it is.”

“Some lady or other who came to see the wedding,” she returned. “I can’t guess.”

“You never would, though I were to give you ten guesses; no, though je vous donne en mille, as the French have it. What should you say to a young man come all the way over seas from India? There, that’s as good as telling you, Aunt Emma. Guess now.”

“Oh, Hubert!” clasping her trembling hands. “It cannot be Harry! What is wrong?”

Harry brought his bright face into the room and was clasped in his mother’s arms. She could not understand it one bit, and fears assailed her. Come home in *this* unexpected manner! Had he left [336] the army? What had he done? *What* had he done? Hubert laughed and told her then.

“He has done nothing wrong; everything that’s good. He has sold out at my father’s request and left with honours—and is come home the heir of Leet Hall. I said all along it was a shame to keep you out of the plot, Aunt Emma.”

Well, it was glorious news for her. But, as if to tarnish its delight, like an envious sprite of evil, deep down in her mind lay that other news, just read—the ambiguous remark of old Mrs. Peveril’s.

IV

The walk on the old pier was pleasant enough in the morning sun. Though yet but the first month in the year, the days were bright, the blue skies without a cloud. Mr. and Mrs. Hamlyn had enjoyed the fine weather at Cheltenham for a week or two; from that pretty place they had now come to Brighton, reaching it the previous night.

“Oh, it is delightful!” exclaimed Eliza, gazing at the waves. She had not seen the sea since she

crossed it, a little girl, from the West Indies. Those were not yet the days when all people, gentle and simple, told one another that an autumn tour was essential to existence. “Look at the sunbeams sparkling on the ripples and on the white sails of the little boats! Philip, I should like to spend a month here.”

“All right,” replied Mr. Hamlyn.

They were staying at the Old Ship, a fashionable hotel then for ladies as well as gentlemen, and had come out after breakfast; and they had the pier nearly to themselves at that early hour. A [337] yellow, gouty gentleman, who looked as if he had quarrelled with his liver in some clime all fire and cayenne, stood at the end leaning on his stick, alternately looking at the sea and listlessly watching any advancing stragglers.

There came a sailor, swaying along, a rope in his hand; following him, walked demurely three little girls in frocks and trousers, with their French governess; then came two eye-glassed young men, dandified and supercilious, who appeared to have more money than brains—and the jaundiced man went into a gaping fit of lassitude.

Anyone else coming? Yes; a lady and gentleman arm-in-arm: quiet, well-dressed, good-looking. As the invalid watched their approach, a puzzled look of doubt and surprise rose to his countenance. Moving forward a step or two on his gouty legs, he spoke.

“Can it be possible, Hamlyn, that we meet here?”

Even through his dark skin a red flush coursed into Mr. Hamlyn’s face. He was evidently very much surprised in his turn, if not startled.

“Captain Pratt!” he exclaimed.

“Major Pratt now,” was the answer, as they shook hands. “That wretched climate played the deuce with me, and they graciously gave me a step and allowed me to retire upon it. The very deuce, I assure you, Philip. Beg pardon, ma’am,” he added, seeing the lady look at him.

“My wife, Mrs. Hamlyn,” spoke her husband.

Major Pratt contrived to lift his hat, and bow: which feat, what with his gouty hands and his helpless legs and his great invalid stick, was a work of time. “I saw your marriage in the *Times*, Hamlyn, and wondered whether it could be you, or not: I didn’t know, you see, that you were over here. Wish you luck; and you also, ma’am. Hope it will turn out more fortunate for you, Philip, than——”

“Where are you staying?” broke in Mr. Hamlyn, as if something were frightening him. [338]

“At some lodgings over yonder, where they fleece me,” replied the Major. “You should see the bill they’ve brought me in for last week. They’ve made me eat four pounds of butter and five joints of meat, besides poultry and pickles and a fruit pie! Why, I live mostly upon dry toast; hardly dare touch an ounce of meat in a day. When I had ’em up before me, the harpies, they laid it upon my servant’s appetite—old Saul, you know. *He* answered them.”

Mrs. Hamlyn laughed. “There are two articles that are very convenient, as I have heard, to some of the lodging-house keepers: their lodgers’ servant, and their own cat.”

“By Jove, ma’am, yes!” said the Major. “But I’ve given warning to this lot where I am.”

Saying au revoir to Major Pratt, Mr. Hamlyn walked down the pier again with his wife. “Who is he, Philip?” she asked. “You seem to know him well.”

“Very well. He is a sort of connection of mine, I believe,” laughed Mr. Hamlyn, “and I saw a good deal of him in India a few years back. He is greatly changed. I hardly think I should have known him had he not spoken. It’s his liver, I suppose.”

Leaving his wife at the hotel, Mr. Hamlyn went back again to Major Pratt, much to the lonely Major’s satisfaction, who was still leaning on his substantial stick as he gazed at the water.

“The sight of you has brought back to my mind all that unhappy business, Hamlyn,” was his salutation. “I shall have a fit of the jaundice now, I suppose! Here—let’s sit down a bit.”

“And the sight of you has brought it to mine,” said Mr. Hamlyn, as he complied. “I have been striving to drive it out of my remembrance.”

“I know little about it,” observed the Major. “She never wrote to me at all afterwards, and you [339] wrote me but two letters: the one announcing the fact of her disgrace; the other, the calamity and the deaths.”

“That is quite enough to know; don’t ask me to go over the details to you personally,” said Mr. Hamlyn in a tone of passionate discomfort. “So utterly repugnant to me is the remembrance altogether, that I have never spoken of it—even to my present wife.”

“Do you mean you’ve not told her you were once a married man?” cried Major Pratt.

“No, I have not.”

“Then you’ve shown a lack of judgment which I wouldn’t have given you credit for, my friend,”

declared the Major. “A man may whisper to his girl any untoward news he pleases of his past life, and she’ll forgive and forget; aye, and worship him all the more for it, though it were the having set fire to a church: but if he keeps it as a bonne bouchée to drop out after marriage, when she has him fast and tight, she’ll curry-comb his hair for him in style. Believe that.”

Mr. Hamlyn laughed.

“There never was a hidden skeleton between man and wife yet but it came to light sooner or later,” went on the Major. “If you are wise, you will tell her at once, before somebody else does.”

“What ‘somebody?’ Who is there here that knows it?”

“Why, as to ‘here,’ I know it, and nearly spoke of it before her, as you must have heard; and my servant knows it. That’s nothing, you’ll say; we can be quiet, now I have the cue: but you are always liable to meet with people who knew you in those days, and who knew *her*. Take my advice, Philip Hamlyn, and tell your wife. Go and do it now.”

“I daresay you are right,” said the younger man, awaking out of a reverie. “Of the two evils it may be the lesser.” And with lagging steps, and eyes that seemed to have weights to them, he set out to walk back to the Old Ship Hotel. [340]

THE SILENT CHIMES [341]

IV.—NOT HEARD

I

That oft-quoted French saying, a mauvais-quart-d’heure, is a pregnant one, and may apply to small as well as to great worries of life: most of us know it to our cost. But, rely upon it, one of the very worst is that when a bride or bridegroom has to make a disagreeable confession to the other, which ought to have been made before going to church.

Philip Hamlyn was finding it so. Standing over the fire, in their sitting-room at the Old Ship Hotel at Brighton, his elbow on the mantelpiece, his hand shading his eyes, he looked down at his wife sitting opposite him, and disclosed his tale: that when he married her fifteen days ago he had not been a bachelor, but a widower. There was no especial reason for his not having told her, save that he hated and abhorred that earlier period of his life and instinctively shunned its remembrance.

Sent to India by his friends in the West Indies to make his way in the world, he entered one of the most important mercantile houses in Calcutta, purchasing a lucrative post in it. Mixing in the best society, for his introductions were undeniable, he in course of time met with a young lady named Pratt, who had come out from England to stay with her elderly cousins, Captain Pratt and his sister. Philip Hamlyn was caught by her pretty doll’s face, and married her. They called her Dolly: and a doll she was, by nature as well as by name. [342]

“Marry in haste and repent at leisure,” is as true a saying as the French one. Philip Hamlyn found it so. Of all vain, frivolous, heartless women, Mrs. Dolly Hamlyn turned out to be about the worst. Just a year or two of uncomfortable bickering, of vain endeavours on his part, now coaxing, now reproaching, to make her what she was not and never would be—a reasonable woman, a sensible wife—and Dolly Hamlyn fled. She decamped with a hair-brained lieutenant, the two taking sailing-ship for England, and she carrying with her her little one-year-old boy.

I’ll leave you to guess what Philip Hamlyn’s sensations were. A calamity such as that does not often fall upon man. While he was taking steps to put his wife legally away for ever and to get back his child, and Captain Pratt was aiding and abetting (and swearing frightfully at the delinquent over the process), news reached them that Heaven’s vengeance had been more speedy than theirs. The ship, driven out of her way by contrary winds and other disasters, went down off the coast of Spain, and all the passengers on board perished. This was what Philip Hamlyn had to confess now: and it was more than silly of him not to have done it before.

He touched but lightly upon it now. His tones were low, his words when he began somewhat confused: nevertheless his wife, gazing up at him with her large dark eyes, gathered an inkling of his meaning.

“Don’t tell it me!” she passionately interrupted. “Do not tell me that I am only your second wife.”

He went over to her, praying her to be calm, speaking of the bitter feeling of shame which had ever since clung to him. [343]

“Did you divorce her?”

“No, no; you do not understand me, Eliza. She died before anything could be done; the ship was

wrecked.”

“Were there any children?” she asked in a hard whisper.

“One; a baby of a year old. He was drowned with his mother.”

Mrs. Hamlyn folded her hands one over the other, and leaned back in her chair. “Why did you deceive me?”

“My will was good to deceive you for ever,” he confessed with emotion. “I hate that past episode in my life; hate to think of it: I wish I could blot it out of remembrance. But for Pratt I should not have told you now.”

“Oh, he said you ought to tell me?”

“He did: and blamed me for not having told you already.”

“Have you any more secrets of the past that you are keeping from me?”

“None. Not one. You may take my honour upon it, Eliza. And now let us——”

She had started forward in her chair; a red flush darkening her pale cheeks. “Philip! Philip! am I legally married? Did you describe yourself as a *bachelor* in the license?”

“No, as a widower. I got the license in London, you know.”

“And no one read it?”

“No one save he who married us: Robert Grame, and I don’t suppose he noticed it.”

Robert Grame! The flush on Eliza’s cheeks grew deeper.

“Did you *love* her?” [344]

“I suppose I thought so when I married her. It did not take long to disenchant me,” he added with a harsh laugh.

“What was her Christian name?”

“Dolly. Dora, I believe, by register. My dear wife, I have told you all. In compassion to me let us drop the subject, now and for ever.”

Was Eliza Hamlyn—sitting there with pale, compressed lips, sullen eyes, and hands interlocked in pain—already beginning to reap the fruit she had sown as Eliza Monk by her rebellious marriage? Perhaps so. But not as she would have to reap it later on.

Mr. and Mrs. Hamlyn spent nearly all that year in travelling. In September they came to Peacock’s Range, taking it furnished for a term of old Mr. and Mrs. Peveril, who had not yet come back to it. It stood midway, as may be remembered, between Church Leet and Church Dykely, so that Eliza was close to her old home. Late in October a little boy was born: it would be hard to say which was the prouder of him, Philip Hamlyn or his wife.

“What would you like his name to be?” Philip asked her one day.

“I should like it to be Walter,” said Mrs. Hamlyn.

“*Walter!*”

“Yes. I like the name to begin with, but I once had a dear little brother named Walter, just a year younger than I. He died before we came home to England. Have you any objection to the name?”

“Oh, no, no objection,” he slowly said. “I was only thinking whether you would have any. It was the name given to my first child.”

“That can make no possible difference—it was not my child,” was her haughty answer. So the baby was named Walter James; the latter name also chosen by Eliza, because it had been old Mr. [345] Monk’s.

In the following spring Mr. Hamlyn had to go to the West Indies. Eliza remained at home; and during this time she became reconciled to her father.

Hubert brought it about. For Hubert lived yet. But he was a mere shadow and had to take entirely to the house, and soon to his room. Eliza came to see him, again and again; and finally over Hubert’s sofa peace was made—for Captain Monk loved her still, just as he had loved Katherine, for all her rebellion.

Hubert lingered on to the summer. And then, on a calm evening, when one of the glorious sunsets that he had so loved to look upon was illumining the western sky, opening up to his dying view, as he had once said, the very portals of Heaven, he passed peacefully away to his rest.

II

The next change that set in at Leet Hall concerned Miss Kate Dancox. That wilful young pickle, somewhat sobered by the death of Hubert in the summer, soon grew unbearable again. She had completely got the upper hand of her morning governess, Miss Hume—who walked all the way

from Church Dykely and back again—and of nearly everyone else; and Captain Monk gave forth his decision one day when all was turbulence—a resident governess. Mrs. Carradyne could have danced a reel for joy, and wrote to a governess agency in London.

One morning about this time (which was already glowing with the tints of autumn) a young lady got out of an omnibus in Oxford Street, which had brought her from a western suburb of London, paid the conductor, and then looked about her.

"There!" she exclaimed in a quaint tone of vexation, "I have to cross the street! and how am I to do it?" [346]

Evidently she was not used to the bustle of London streets or to crossing them alone. She did it, however, after a few false starts, and so turned down a quiet side street and rang the bell of a house in it. A slatternly girl answered the ring.

"Governess-agent—Mrs. Moffit? Oh, yes; first-floor front," said she crustily, and disappeared.

The young lady found her way upstairs alone. Mrs. Moffit sat in state in a big arm-chair, before a large table and desk, whence she daily dispensed joy or despair to her applicants. Several opened letters and copies of the daily journals lay on the table.

"Well?" cried she, laying down her pen, "what for you?"

"I am here by your appointment, made with me a week ago," said the young lady. "This is Thursday."

"What name?" cried Mrs. Moffit sharply, turning over rapidly the leaves of a ledger.

"Miss West. If you remember, I——"

"Oh, yes, child, my memory's good enough," was the tart interruption. "But with so many applicants it's impossible to be certain as to faces. Registered names we can't mistake."

Mrs. Moffit read her notes—taken down a week ago. "Miss West. Educated in first-class school at Richmond; remained in it as teacher. Very good references from the ladies keeping it. Father, Colonel in India."

"But——"

"You do not wish to go into a school again?" spoke Mrs. Moffit, closing the ledger with a snap, and peremptorily drowning what the applicant was about to say.

"Oh, dear, no, I am only leaving to better myself, as the maids say," replied the young lady, smiling.

"And you wish for a good salary?" [347]

"If I can get it. One does not care to work hard for next to nothing."

"Or else I have—let me see—two—three situations on my books. Very comfortable, I am instructed, but two of them offer ten pounds a-year, the other twelve."

The young lady drew herself slightly up with an involuntary movement. "Quite impossible, madam, that I could take any one of them."

Mrs. Moffit picked up a letter and consulted it, looking at the young lady from time to time, as if taking stock of her appearance. "I received a letter this morning from the country—a family require a well-qualified governess for their one little girl. Your testimonials as to qualifications might suit—and you are, I believe, a gentlewoman——"

"Oh, yes; my father was——"

"Yes, yes, I remember—I've got it down; don't worry me," impatiently spoke the oracle, cutting short the interruption. "So far you might suit: but in other respects—I hardly know what to think."

"But why?" asked the other timidly, blushing a little under the intent gaze.

"Well, you are very young, for one thing; and they might think you too good-looking."

The girl's blush grew red as a rose; she had delicate features and it made her look uncommonly pretty. A half-smile sat in her soft, dark hazel eyes.

"Surely that could not be an impediment. I am not so good-looking as all that!"

"That's as people may think," was the significant answer. "Some families will not take a pretty governess—afraid of their sons, you see. This family says nothing about looks; for aught I know there may be no sons in it. 'Thoroughly competent'—reading from the letter—'a gentlewoman by birth, of agreeable manners and lady-like. Salary, first year, to be forty pounds.'" [348]

"And will you not recommend me?" pleaded the young governess, her voice full of entreaty. "Oh, please do! I know I should be found fully competent, and promise you that I would do my best."

"Well, there may be no harm in my writing to the lady about you," decided Mrs. Moffit, won over by the girl's gentle respect—with which she did not get treated by all her clients. "Suppose you

come here again on Monday next?”

The end of the matter was that Miss West was engaged by the lady mentioned—no other than Mrs. Carradyne. And she journeyed down into Worcestershire to enter upon the situation.

But clever (and generally correct) Mrs. Moffit made one mistake, arising, no doubt, from the chronic state of hurry she was always in. “Miss West is the daughter of the late Colonel William West,” she wrote, “who went to India with his regiment a few years ago, and died there.” What Miss West had said to her was this: “My father, a clergyman, died when I was a little child, and my uncle William, Colonel West, the only relation I had left, died three years ago in India.” Mrs. Moffit somehow confounded the two.

This might not have mattered on the whole. But, as you perceive, it conveyed a wrong impression at Leet Hall.

“The governess I have engaged is a Miss West; her father was a military man and a gentleman,” spake Mrs. Carradyne one morning at breakfast to Captain Monk. “She is rather young—about twenty, I fancy; but an older person might never get on at all with Kate.”

“Had good references with her, I suppose?” said the Captain.

“Oh, yes. From the agent, and especially from the ladies who have brought her up.” [349]

“Who was her father, do you say?—a military man?”

“Colonel William West,” assented Mrs. Carradyne, referring to the letter she held. “He went to India with his regiment and died there.”

“I’ll refer to the army-list,” said the Captain; “daresay it’s all right. And she shall keep Kate in order, or I’ll know the reason why.”

The evening sunlight lay on the green plain, on the white fields from which the grain had been reaped, and on the beautiful woods glowing with the varied tints of autumn. A fly was making its way to Leet Hall, and its occupant, looking out of it on this side and that, in a fever of ecstasy, for the country scene charmed her, thought how favoured was the lot of those who could live out their lives amidst its surroundings.

In the drawing-room at the Hall, watching the approach of this same fly, stood Mrs. Hamlyn, a frown upon her haughty face. Philip Hamlyn was still detained in the West Indies, and since her reconciliation to her father, she would go over with her baby-boy to the Hall and remain there for days together. Captain Monk liked to have her, and he took more notice of the baby than he had ever taken of a baby yet. For when Kate was an infant he had at first shunned her, because she had cost Katherine her life. This baby, little Walter, was a particularly forward child, strong and upright, walked at ten months old, and much resembled his mother in feature. In temper also. The young one would stand sturdily in his little blue shoes and defy his grandpapa already, and assert his own will, to the amused admiration of Captain Monk.

Eliza, utterly wrapt up in her child, saw her father’s growing love for him with secret delight; and [350] one day when he had the boy on his knee, she ventured to speak out a thought that was often in her heart.

“Papa,” she said, with impassioned fervour, “*he* ought to be the heir, your own grandson; not Harry Carradyne.”

Captain Monk simply stared in answer.

“He lies in the *direct* succession; he has your own blood in his veins. Papa, you ought to see it.”

Certainly the gallant sailor’s manners were improving. For perhaps the first time in his life he suppressed the hot and abusive words rising to his tongue—that no son of that man, Hamlyn, should come into Leet Hall—and stood in silence.

“*Don’t* you see it, papa?”

“Look here, Eliza: we’ll drop the subject. When my brother, your uncle, was dying, he wrote me a letter, enjoining me to make Emma’s son the heir, failing a son of my own. It was right it should be so, he said. Right it is; and Harry Carradyne will succeed me. Say no more.”

Thus forbidden to say more, Eliza Hamlyn thought the more, and her thoughts were not pleasant. At one time she had feared her father might promote Kate Dancox to the heirship, and grew to dislike the child accordingly. Latterly, for the same reason, she had disliked Harry Carradyne; hated him, in fact. She herself was the only remaining child of the house, and her son ought to inherit.

She stood this evening at the drawing-room window, this and other matters running in her mind. Miss Kate, at the other end of the room, had prevailed on Uncle Harry (as she called him) to play a game at toy ninepins. Or perhaps he had prevailed on her: anything to keep her tolerably quiet. She was in her teens now, but the older she grew the more troublesome she became; and she was remarkably small and childish-looking, so that strangers took her to be several years [351] younger than she really was.

“This must be your model governess arriving, Aunt Emma,” exclaimed Mrs. Hamlyn, as the fly came up the drive.

“I hope it is,” said Mrs. Carradyne; and they all looked out. “Oh, yes, that’s an Evesham fly—and a ramshackle thing it appears.”

“I wonder you did not send the carriage to Evesham for her, mother,” remarked Harry, picking up some of the nine-pins which Miss Kate had swept off the table with her hand.

Mrs. Hamlyn turned round in a blaze of anger. “Send the carriage to Evesham for the governess. What absurd thing will you say next, Harry?”

The young man laughed in good humour. “Does it offend one of your prejudices, Eliza?—a thousand pardons, then. But really, nonsense apart, I can’t see why the carriage should not have gone for her. We are told she is a gentlewoman. Indeed, I suppose anyone else would not be eligible, as she is to be made one of ourselves.”

“And think of the nuisance it will be! Do be quiet, Harry! Kate ought to have been sent to school.”

“But your father would not have her sent, you know, Eliza,” spoke Mrs. Carradyne.

“Then——”

“Miss West, ma’am,” interrupted Rimmer, the butler, showing in the traveller.

“Dear me, how very young!” was Mrs. Carradyne’s first thought. “And what a lovely face!”

She came in shyly. In her whole appearance there was a shrinking, timid gentleness, betokening refinement of feeling. A slender, lady-like girl, in a plain, dark travelling-suit and a black bonnet lined and tied with pink, a little lace border shading her nut-brown hair. The bonnets in those days set off a pretty face better than do these modern ones. That’s what the Squire tells us. [352]

Mrs. Carradyne advanced and shook hands cordially; Eliza bent her head slightly from where she stood; Harry Carradyne stood up, a pleasant welcome in his blue eyes and in his voice, as he laughingly congratulated her upon the ancient Evesham fly not having come to grief en route. Kate Dancox pressed forward.

“Are you my new governess?”

The young lady smiled and said she believed so.

“Aunt Eliza hates governesses; so do I. Do you expect to make me obey you?”

The governess blushed painfully; but took courage to say she hoped she should. Harry Carradyne thought it the very loveliest blush he had ever seen in all his travels, and she the sweetest-looking girl.

And when Captain Monk came in he quite took to her appearance, for he hated to have ugly people about him. But every now and then there was a look in her face, or in her eyes, that struck him as being familiar—as if he had once known someone who resembled her. Pleasing, soft, dark hazel eyes they were as one could wish to see, with goodness in their depths.

III

Months passed away, and Miss West was domesticated in her new home. It was not all sunshine. Mrs. Carradyne, ever considerate, strove to render things agreeable; but there were sources of annoyance over which she had no control. Kate, when she chose, could be verily a little elf, a demon; as Mrs. Hamlyn often put it, “a diablesse.” And she, that lady herself, invariably treated the governess with a sort of cool, indifferent contempt; and she was more often at Leet Hall than [353] away from it. The Captain, too, gave way to fits of temper that simply terrified Miss West. Reared in the quiet atmosphere of a well-trained school, she had never met with temper such as this.

On the other hand—yes, on the other hand, she had an easy place of it, generous living, was regarded as a lady, and—she had learnt to love Harry Carradyne for weal or for woe.

But not—please take notice—not unsolicited. Tacitly, at any rate. If Mr. Harry’s speaking blue eyes were to be trusted and Mr. Harry’s tell-tale tones when with her, his love, at the very least, equalled hers. Eliza Hamlyn, despite the penetration that ill-nature generally can exercise, had not yet scented any such treason in the wind: or there would have blown up a storm.

Spring was to bring its events; but first of all it must be said that during the winter little Walter Hamlyn was taken ill at Leet Hall when staying there with his mother. The malady turned out to be gastric fever, and Mr. Speck was in constant attendance. For the few days that the child lay in danger, Eliza was almost wild. The progress to convalescence was very slow, lasting many weeks; and during that time Captain Monk, being much with the little fellow, grew to be fond of him with an unreasonable affection.

“I’m not sure but I shall leave Leet Hall to him after all,” he suddenly observed to Eliza one day, not noticing that Harry Carradyne was standing in the recess of the window. “Halloa! are you there, Harry? Well, it can’t be helped. You heard what I said?”

“I heard, Uncle Godfrey: but I did not understand.”

“Eliza thinks Leet Hall ought to go in the direct line—through her—to this child. What should you say to that?”

“What could he say to it?” imperiously demanded Eliza. “He is only your nephew.” [354]

Harry looked from one to the other in a sort of bewildered surprise: and there came a silence.

“Uncle Godfrey,” he said at last, starting out of a reverie, “you have been good enough to make me your heir. It was unexpected on my part, unsolicited; but you did do it, and you caused me to leave the army in consequence, to give up my fair prospects in life. I am aware that this deed is not irrevocable, and certainly you have the right to do what you will with your own property. But you must forgive me for saying that you should have made quite sure of your intentions beforehand: before taking me up, if it be only to throw me aside again.”

“There, there, we’ll leave it,” retorted Captain Monk testily. “No harm’s done to you yet, Mr. Harry; I don’t know that it will be.”

But Harry Carradyne felt sure that it would be; that he should be despoiled of the inheritance. The resolute look of power on Eliza’s face, bent on him as he quitted the chamber, was an earnest of that. Captain Monk was not the determined man he had once been; that was over.

“A pretty kettle of fish, this is,” ruefully soliloquised Harry, as he marched along the corridor. “Eliza’s safe to get her will; no doubt of that. And I? what am I to do? I can’t repurchase and go back amongst them again like a returned shilling; at least, I won’t; and I can’t turn Parson, or Queen’s Counsel, or Cabinet Minister. I’m fitted for nothing now, that I see, but to be a gentleman-at-large; and what would the gentleman’s income be?”

Standing at the corridor window, softly whistling, he ran over ways and means in his mind. He had a pretty house of his own, Peacock’s Range, formerly his father’s, and about four hundred a- [355]
year. After his mother’s death it would not be less than a thousand a-year.

“That means bread and cheese at present. Later—— Heyday, young lady, what’s the matter?”

The school room door, close by, had opened with a burst, and Miss Kate Dancox was flying down the stairs—her usual progress the minute lessons were over. Harry strolled into the room. The governess was putting the littered table straight.

“Any admission, ma’am?” cried he quaintly, making for a chair. “I should like to ask leave to sit down for a bit.”

Alice West laughed, and stirred the fire by way of welcome; he was a very rare visitor to the school-room. The blaze, mingling with the rays of the setting sun that streamed in at the window, played upon her sweet face and silky brown hair, lighted up the bright winter dress she wore, and the bow of pink ribbon that fastened the white lace round her slender, pretty throat.

“Are you so much in need of a seat?” she laughingly asked.

“Indeed I am,” was the semi-grave response. “I have had a shock.”

“A very sharp one, sir?”

“Sharp as steel. Really and truly,” he went on in a different tone, as he left the chair and stood up by the table, facing her; “I have just heard news that may affect my whole future life; may change me from a rich man to a poor one.”

“Oh, Mr. Carradyne!” Her manner had changed now.

“I was the destined inheritor, as you know—for I’m sure nobody has been reticent upon the subject—of these broad lands,” with a sweep of the hand towards the plains outside. “Captain Monk is now pleased to inform me that he thinks of substituting for me Mrs. Hamlyn’s child.”

“But would not that be very unjust?” [356]

“Hardly fair—as it seems to me. Considering that my good uncle obliged me to give up my own prospects for it.”

She stood, her hands clasped in sympathy, her face full of earnest sadness. “How unkind! Why, it would be cruel!”

“Well, I confess I felt it to be so at the first blow. But, standing at the outside window yonder, pulling myself together, a ray or two of light crept in, showing me that it may be for the best after all. ‘Whatever *is*, is right,’ you know.”

“Yes,” she slowly said—“if you can think so. But, Mr. Carradyne, should you not have anything at all?—anything to live upon after Captain Monk’s death?”

“Just a trifle, I calculate, as the Americans say—and it is calculating I have been—so that I need not altogether starve. Would you like to know how much it will be?”

“Oh, please don’t laugh at me!”—for it suddenly struck the girl that he was laughing, perhaps in reproof, and that she had spoken too freely. “I ought not to have asked that; I was not thinking—I was too sorry to think.”

“But I may as well tell you, if you don’t mind. I have a very pretty little place, which you have

seen and heard of, called by that delectable title Peacock's Range——"

"Is Peacock's Range yours?" she interrupted, in surprise. "I thought it belonged to Mr. Peveril."

"Peacock's Range is mine and was my father's before me, Miss Alice. It was leased to Peveril for a term of years, but I fancy he would be glad to give it up to-morrow. Well, I have Peacock's Range and about four hundred pounds a-year."

Her face brightened. "Then you need not talk about starving," she said, gaily.

"And, later, I shall have altogether about a thousand a-year. Though I hope it will be very long [357] before it falls to me. Do you think two people might venture to set up at Peacock's Range, and keep, say, a couple of servants upon four hundred a-year? Could they exist upon it?"

"Oh, dear, yes," she answered eagerly, quite unconscious of his drift. "Did you mean yourself and some friend?"

He nodded.

"Why, I don't see how they could spend it all. There'd be no rent to pay. And just think of all the fruit and vegetables in the garden there!"

"Then I take you at your word, Alice," he cried, impulsively, passing his arm round her waist. "You are the 'friend.' My dear, I have long wanted to ask you to be my wife, and I did not dare. This place, Leet Hall, encumbered me: for I feared the opposition that I, as its heir, should inevitably meet."

She drew away from him, with doubting, frightened eyes. Mr. Harry Carradyne brought all the persuasion of his own dancing blue ones to bear upon her. "Surely, Alice, you will not say me nay!"

"I dare not say yes," she whispered.

"What are you afraid of?"

"Of it altogether; of your friends. Captain Monk would—would—perhaps—turn me out. And there's Mrs. Carradyne!"

Harry laughed. "Captain Monk can have no right to any voice in my affairs, once he throws me off; he cannot expect to have a finger in everyone's pie. As to my mother—ah, Alice, unless I am much mistaken, she will welcome you with love."

Alice burst into tears: emotion was stirring her to its depths. "*Please* to let it all be for a time," she pleaded.

"If you speak it would be sure to lead to my being turned away." [358]

"I *will* let it be for a time, my darling, so far as speaking about it goes: for more reasons than one it may be better. But you are my promised wife, Alice; always recollect that."

And Mr. Harry Carradyne, bold as a soldier should be, took a few kisses from her unresisting lips to enforce his mandate.

IV

Some time rolled on, calling for no particular record. Mr. Hamlyn's West Indian property, which was large and lucrative, had been giving him trouble of late; at least, those who had the care of it gave it, and he was obliged to go over occasionally to see after it in person. Between times he stayed with his wife at Peacock's Range; or else she joined him in London. Their town residence was in Bryanston Square; a pretty house, but not large.

It had been an unfavourable autumn; cold and wet. Snow had fallen in November, and the weather continued persistently dull and dreary. One gloomy afternoon towards the close of the year, Mrs. Hamlyn, shivering over her drawing-room fire, rang impatiently for more coal to be piled upon it.

"Has Master Walter come in yet?" she asked of the footman.

"No, ma'am. I saw him just now playing in front there."

She went to the window. Yes, running about the paths of the Square garden was the child, attended by his nurse. He was a sturdy little fellow. His mother, wishing to make him hardy, sent him out in all weathers, and the boy throve upon it. He was three years old now, but looked older; [359] and he was as clever and precocious as some children are at five or six. Her heart thrilled with a strange joy only at the sight of him: he was her chief happiness in life, her idol. Whether he would succeed to Leet Hall she knew not; since that one occasion, Captain Monk had said no more upon the subject, for or against it.

Why need she have longed for it so fervently? to the setting at naught the express wishes of her deceased uncle and to the detriment of Harry Carradyne? It was simply covetousness. As his father's eldest son (there were no younger ones yet) the boy would inherit a fine property, a large income; but his doting mother must give him Leet Hall as well.

Her whole heart went out to the child as she watched him playing there. A few snowflakes were beginning to fall, and twilight would soon be drawing on, but she would not call him in. Standing thus at the window, it gradually grew upon her to notice that something was standing back against the opposite rails, looking fixedly at the houses. A young, fair woman apparently, with a profusion of light hair; she was draped in a close dark cloak which served to conceal her figure, just as the thick veil she wore concealed her face.

“I believe it is *this* house she is gazing at so attentively—and at *me*,” thought Mrs. Hamlyn. “What can she possibly want?”

The woman did not move away and Mrs. Hamlyn did not move; they remained staring at one another. Presently Walter burst into the room, laughing in glee at having distanced his nurse. His mother turned, caught him in her arms and kissed him passionately. Wilful though he was by disposition, and showing it at times, he was a lovable, generous child, and very pretty: great brown eyes and auburn curls. His life was all sunshine, like a butterfly’s on a summer’s day; his [360] path as yet one of roses without their thorns.

“Mamma, I’ve got a picture-book; come and look at it,” cried the eager little voice, as he dragged his mother to the hearthrug and opened the picture-book in the light of the blaze. “Penelope bought it for me.”

She sat down on a footstool, the book on her lap and one arm round him, her treasure. Penelope waited to take off his hat and pelisse, and was told to come for him in five minutes.

“It’s not my tea-time yet,” cried he defiantly.

“Indeed, then, Master Walter, it is long past it,” said the nurse. “I couldn’t get him in before, ma’am,” she added to her mistress. “Every minute I kept expecting you’d be sending one of the servants after us.”

“In five minutes,” repeated Mrs. Hamlyn. “And what’s *this* picture about, Walter? Is it a little girl with a doll?”

“Oh, dat bootiful,” said the eager little lad, who was not yet as advanced in speech as he was in ideas. “It says she——dere’s papa!”

In came Philip Hamlyn, tall, handsome, genial. Walter ran to him and was caught in his arms. He and his wife were just a pair for adoring the child.

But nurse, inexorable, appeared again at the five minutes’ end, and Master Walter was carried off.

“You came home in a cab, Philip, did you not? I thought I heard one stop.”

“Yes; it is a miserable evening. Raining fast now.”

“Raining!” she repeated, rather wondering to hear it was not snowing. She went to the window to look out, and the first object her eyes caught sight of was the woman; leaning in the old place against the railings, in the growing twilight.

“I’m not sorry to see the rain; we shall have it warmer now,” remarked Mr. Hamlyn, who had [361] drawn a chair to the fire. “In fact, it’s much warmer already than it was this morning.”

“Philip, step here a minute.”

His wife’s tone had dropped to a half-whisper, sounding rather mysterious, and he went at once.

“Just look, Philip—opposite. Do you see a woman standing there?”

“A woman—where?” cried he, looking of course in every direction but the right one.

“Just facing us. She has her back against the railings.”

“Oh, ay, I see now; a lady in a cloak. She must be waiting for some one.”

“Why do you call her a lady?”

“She looks like one—as far as I can see in the gloom. Does she not? Her hair does, any way.”

“She has been there I cannot tell you how long, Philip; half-an-hour, I’m sure; and it seems to me that she is *watching* this house. A lady would hardly do that.”

“This house? Oh, then, Eliza, perhaps she’s watching for one of the servants. She might come in, poor thing, instead of standing there in the rain.”

“Poor thing, indeed!—what business has any woman to watch a house in this marked manner?” retorted Eliza. “The neighbourhood will be taking her for a female detective.”

“Nonsense!”

“She has given me a creepy feeling; I can tell you that, Philip.”

“But why?” he exclaimed.

“I can’t tell you why; I don’t know why; it is so. Do not laugh at me for confessing it.”

Philip Hamlyn did laugh; heartily. “Creepy feelings” and his imperiously strong-minded wife could have but little affinity with one another. [362]

“We’ll have the curtains drawn, and the lights, and shut her out,” said he cheerily. “Come and sit down, Eliza; I want to show you a letter I’ve had to-day.”

But the woman waiting outside there seemed to possess for Eliza Hamlyn somewhat of the fascination of the basilisk; for she never stirred from the window until the curtains were drawn.

“It is from Peveril,” said Mr. Hamlyn, producing the letter he had spoken of from his pocket. “The lease he took of Peacock’s Range is not yet out, but he can resign it now if he pleases, and he would be glad to do so. He and his wife would rather remain abroad, it seems, than return home.”

“Yes. Well?”

“Well, he writes to me to ask whether he can resign it; or whether I must hold him to the promise he made me—that I should rent the house to the end of the term. I mean the end of the lease; the term he holds it for.”

“Why does he want to resign it? Why can’t things go on as at present?”

“I gather from an allusion he makes, though he does not explicitly state it, that Mr. Carradyne wishes to have the place in his own hands. What am I to say to Peveril, Eliza?”

“Say! Why, that you must hold him to his promise; that we cannot give up the house yet. A pretty thing if I had no place to go down to at will in my own county!”

“So far as I am concerned, Eliza, I would prefer to stay away from the county—if your father is to continue to treat me in the way he does. Remember what it was in the summer. I think we are very well here.”

“Now, Philip, I have *said*. I do not intend to release our hold on Peacock’s Range. My father will be reconciled to you in time as he is to me.” [363]

“I wonder what Harry Carradyne can want it for?” mused Philip Hamlyn, bowing to the imperative decision of his better half.

“To live in it, I should say. He would like to show his resentment to papa by turning his back on Leet Hall. It can’t be for anything else.”

“What cause for resentment has he? He sent for him home and made him his heir.”

“*That* is the cause. Papa has come to his senses and changed his mind. It is our darling little Walter who is to be the heir of Leet Hall, Philip—and papa has so informed Harry Carradyne.”

Philip Hamlyn gazed at his wife in doubt. He had never heard a word of this; instinct had kept her silent.

“I hope not,” he emphatically said, breaking the silence.

“*You hope not?*”

“Walter shall never inherit Leet Hall with my consent, Eliza. Harry Carradyne is the right and proper heir, and no child of mine, as I hope, must or shall displace him.”

Mrs. Hamlyn treated her husband to one of her worst looks, telling of contempt as well as of power; but she did not speak.

“Listen, Eliza. I cannot bear injustice, and I do not believe it ever prospers in the long run. Were your father to bequeath—my dear, I beg of you to listen to me!—to bequeath his estates to little Walter, to the exclusion of the true heir, rely upon it the bequest would *never bring him good*. In some way or other it would not serve him. Money diverted by injustice from its natural and just channel does not carry a blessing with it. I have noted this over and over again in going through life.”

“Anything more?” she contemptuously asked.

“And Walter will not need it,” he continued persuasively, passing her question as unheard. “As my son, he will be amply provided for.” [364]

A very commonplace interruption occurred, and the subject was dropped. Nothing more than a servant bringing in a letter for his master, just come by hand.

“Why, it is from old Richard Pratt!” exclaimed Mr. Hamlyn, as he turned to the light.

“I thought Major Pratt never wrote letters,” she remarked. “I once heard you say he must have forgotten how to write.”

He did not answer. He was reading the note, which appeared to be a short one. She watched him. After reading it through he began it again, a puzzled look upon his face. Then she saw it flush all over, and he crushed the note into his pocket.

“What is it about, Philip?”

“Pratt wants a prescription for gout that I told him of. I’m sure I don’t know whether I can find

it.”

He had answered in a dreamy tone with thoughts preoccupied, and quitted the room hastily, as if in search of it.

Eliza wondered why he should flush up at being asked for a prescription, and why he should have suddenly lost himself in a reverie. But she had not much curiosity as to anything that concerned old Major Pratt—who was at present staying in lodgings in London.

Downstairs went Mr. Hamlyn to the little room he called his library, seated himself at the table under the lamp, and opened the note again. It ran as follows:—

“Dear Philip Hamlyn,—The other day, when calling here, you spoke of some infallible prescription to cure gout that had been given you. I’ve symptoms of it flying about me—and be hanged to it! Bring it to me yourself to-morrow; I want to see you. *I suppose there was no mistake in the report that that ship did go down?*—and that none of the passengers were saved from it? [365]

“Truly yours,
“Richard Pratt.”

“What can he possibly mean?” muttered Philip Hamlyn.

But there was no one to answer the question, and he sat buried in thought, trying to answer it himself. Starting up from the useless task, he looked in his desk, found the infallible prescription, and then snatched his watch from his pocket.

“Too late,” he decided impatiently; “Pratt would be gone to bed. He goes at all kinds of unearthly hours when out of sorts.” So he went upstairs to his wife again, the prescription displayed in his hand.

Morning came, bringing the daily routine of duties in its train. Mrs. Hamlyn had made an engagement to go with some friends to Blackheath, to take luncheon with a lady living there. It was damp and raw in the early portion of the day, but promised to be clear later on.

“And then my little darling can go out to play again,” she said, hugging the child to her. “In the afternoon, nurse; it will be drier then; it is really too damp this morning.”

Parting from him with fifty kisses, she went down to her comfortable and handsome carriage, her husband placing her in.

“I wish you were coming with me, Philip! But, you see, it is only ladies to-day. Six of us.”

Philip Hamlyn laughed. “I don’t wish it at all,” he answered; “they would be fighting for me. Besides, I must take old Pratt his prescription. Only picture his storm of anger if I did not.”

Mrs. Hamlyn was not back until just before dinner: her husband, she heard, had been out all day, and was not yet in. Waiting for him in the drawing-room listlessly enough, she walked to the window to look out. And there she saw with a sort of shock the same woman standing in the same place as the previous evening. Not once all day long had she thought of her. [366]

“This is a strange thing!” she exclaimed. “I am *sure* it is this house that she is watching.”

On the impulse of the moment she rang the bell and called the man who answered it to the window. He was a faithful, attached servant, had lived with them ever since they were married, and previously to that in Mr. Hamlyn’s family in the West Indies.

“Japhet,” said his mistress, “do you see that woman opposite? Do you know why she stands there?”

Japhet’s answer told nothing. They had all seen her downstairs, yesterday evening as well as this, and wondered what she could be watching the house for.

“She is not waiting for any of the servants, then; not an acquaintance of theirs?”

“No, ma’am, that I’m sure she’s not. She is a stranger to us all.”

“Then, Japhet, I think you shall go over and question her,” spoke his mistress impulsively. “Ask her who she is and what she wants. And tell her that a gentleman’s house cannot be watched with impunity in this country—and she will do well to move away before the police are called to her.”

Japhet looked at his mistress and hesitated; he was an elderly man and cautious. “I beg your pardon, madam,” he began, “for venturing to say as much, but I think it might be best to let her alone. She’ll grow tired of stopping there. And if her motive is to attract pity, and get alms sent out, why the fact of speaking to her might make her bold enough to ask for them. If she comes there to-morrow again, it might be best for the master to take it up himself.” [367]

For once in her life Mrs. Hamlyn condescended to listen to the opinion of an inferior, and Japhet was dismissed without orders. Close upon that, a cab came rattling down the square, and stopped at the door. Her husband leaped out of it, tossed the driver his fare—he always paid liberally—and let himself in with his latch-key. To Mrs. Hamlyn’s astonishment she had seen the woman

dart from her standing-place to the middle of the road, evidently to look at or to accost Mr. Hamlyn. But his movements were too quick: he was within in a moment and had closed the outer door. She then walked rapidly away, and disappeared.

Eliza Hamlyn stood there lost in thought. The nurse came in to take the child; Mr. Hamlyn had gone to his room to dress for dinner.

“Have you seen the woman who has been standing out there yesterday evening and this, Penelope?” she asked of the nurse, speaking upon impulse.

“Oh, yes, ma’am. She has been there all the blessed afternoon. She came into the garden to talk to us.”

“Came into the garden to talk to you?” repeated Mrs. Hamlyn. “What did she talk about?”

“Chiefly about Master Walter, ma’am. She seemed to be much taken with him; clasped him in her arms and kissed him, and said how old was he, and was he difficult to manage, and that he had his father’s beautiful brown eyes——”

Penelope stopped abruptly. Mistaking the hard stare her mistress was unconsciously giving her for one of displeasure, she hastened to excuse herself. The fact was, Mrs. Hamlyn’s imagination was beginning to run riot.

“I couldn’t help her speaking to me, ma’am, or her kissing the child; she took me by surprise. [368]
That was all she said—except that she asked whether you were likely to be going into the country soon, away from the house here. She didn’t stay five minutes with us, but went back to stand by the railings again.”

“Did she speak as a lady or as a common person?” quite fiercely demanded Mrs. Hamlyn. “Is she young?—good-looking?”

“Oh, I think she is a lady,” replied the girl, her accent decisive. “And she’s young, as far as I could see, but she had a thick veil over her face. Her hair is lovely, just like threads of pale gold,” concluded Penelope, as Mr. Hamlyn’s step was heard.

He took his wife into the dining-room, apologising for being late. She, giving full range to the fancies she had called up, heard him in silence with a hardening haughty face.

“Philip, you know who that woman is,” she suddenly exclaimed during a temporary absence of Japhet from the dining-room. “What is it that she wants with you?”

“I!” he returned, in a surprise very well feigned if not real. “What woman? Do you mean the one who was standing out there yesterday?”

“You know I do. She has been there again—all the blessed afternoon, as Penelope expresses it. Asking questions of the girl about you—and me—and Walter; and saying the child has your beautiful brown eyes. *I ask you who is she?*”

Mr. Hamlyn laid down his knife and fork to gaze at his wife. He looked quite at sea.

“Eliza, I assure you I know nothing about it. Or about her.”

“Indeed! Don’t you think it may be some acquaintance, old or new? Possibly someone you knew in the days gone by—come over seas to see whether you are yet in the land of the living? She has [369]
wonderful hair, which looks like spun gold.”

All in a moment, as the half-mocking words left her lips, some idea seemed to flash across Philip Hamlyn, bringing with it distress and fear. His face turned to a burning red and then grew white as the hue of the grave.

THE SILENT CHIMES [370]

V.—SILENT FOR EVER

I

Breakfast was on the table in Mr. Hamlyn’s house in Bryanston Square, and Mrs. Hamlyn waited, all impatience, for her lord and master. Not in any particular impatience for the meal itself, but that she might “have it out with him”—the phrase was hers, not mine, as you will see presently—in regard to the perplexity existing in her mind connected with the strange appearance of the damsel watching the house, in her beauty and her pale golden hair.

Why had Philip Hamlyn turned sick and faint—to judge by his changing countenance—when she had charged him at dinner, the previous evening, with knowing something of this mysterious

woman? Mysterious in her actions, at all events; probably in herself. Mrs. Hamlyn wanted to know that. No further opportunity had then been given for pursuing the subject. Japhet had returned to the room, and before the dinner was at an end, some acquaintance of Mr. Hamlyn had fetched him out for the evening. And he came home with so fearful a headache that he had lain groaning and turning all through the night. Mrs. Hamlyn was not a model of patience, but in all her life she had never felt so impatient as now.

[371] He came into the room looking pale and shivery; a sure sign that he was suffering; that it was not an invented excuse. Yes, the pain was better, he said, in answer to his wife's question; and might be much better after a strong cup of tea; he could not imagine what had brought it on. *She* could have told him, though, had she been gifted with the magical power of reading minds, and have seen the nervous apprehension that was making havoc with his.

Mrs. Hamlyn gave him his tea in silence, and buttered a dainty bit of toast to tempt him to eat. But he shook his head.

"I cannot, Eliza. Nothing but tea this morning."

"I am sorry you are ill," she said, by-and-by. "I fear it hurts you to talk; but I want to have it out with you."

"Have it out with me!" cried he, in real or feigned surprise. "Have what out with me?"

"Oh, you know, Philip. About that woman who has been watching the house these two days; evidently watching for you."

"But I told you I knew nothing about her: who she is, or what she is, or what she wants. I really do not know."

Well, so far that was true. But all the while a sick fear lay on his heart that he did know; or, rather, that he was destined to know very shortly.

"When I told you her hair was like threads of fine, pale gold, you seemed to start, Philip, as if you knew some girl or woman with such hair, or had known her."

"I daresay I have known a score of women with such hair. My dear little sister who died, for instance."

"Do not attempt to evade the subject," was the haughty reprimand. "If——"

Mrs. Hamlyn's sharp speech was interrupted by the entrance of Japhet, bringing in the morning letters. Only one letter, however, for they were not as numerous in those days as they are in [372] these.

"It seems to be important, ma'am," Japhet remarked, with the privilege of an old servant, as he handed it to his mistress. She saw it was from Leet Hall, in Mrs. Carradyne's handwriting, and bore the words: "In haste," above the address.

Tearing it open Eliza Hamlyn read the short, sad news it contained. Captain Monk had been taken suddenly ill with inward inflammation. Mr. Speck feared the worst, and the Captain had asked for Eliza. Would she come down at once?

"Oh, Philip, I must not lose a minute," she exclaimed, passing the letter to him, and forgetting the pale gold hair and its owner. "Do you know anything about the Worcestershire trains?"

"No," he answered. "The better plan will be to get to the station as soon as possible, and then you will be ready for the first train that starts."

"Will you go down with me, Philip?"

"I cannot. I will take you to the station."

"Why can't you?"

"Because I cannot just now leave London. My dear, you may believe me, for it is the truth. *I cannot do so.* I wish I could."

And she saw it was true: for his tone was so earnest as to tell of pain.

Making what haste she could, kissing her boy a hundred times, and recommending him to the special care of his nurse and of his father during her absence, she drove with her husband to the station, and was just in time for a train. Mr. Hamlyn watched it steam out of the station, and then looked up at the clock.

[373] "I suppose it's not too early to see him," he muttered. "I'll chance it, at any rate. Hope he will be less suffering than he was yesterday, and less crusty, too."

Dismissing his carriage, for he felt more inclined to walk than to drive, he went through the park to Pimlico, and gained the house of Major Pratt.

This was Friday. On the previous Wednesday evening a note had been brought to Mr. Hamlyn by Major Pratt's servant, a sentence in which, as the reader may remember, ran as follows:—

"*I suppose there was no mistake in the report that that ship did go down?—and that none of the passengers were saved from it?*"

This puzzled Philip Hamlyn: perhaps somewhat troubled him in a hazy kind of way. For he could only suppose that the ship alluded to must be the sailing-vessel in which his first wife, false and faithless, and his little son of a twelvemonth old had been lost some five or six years ago—the *Clipper of the Seas*. And the next day (Thursday) he had gone to Major Pratt's, as requested, to carry the prescription for gout he had asked for, and also to inquire of the Major what he meant.

But the visit was a fruitless one. Major Pratt was in bed with an attack of gout, so ill and so "crusty" that nothing could be got out of him excepting a few bad words and as many groans. Mr. Hamlyn then questioned Saul—of whom he used to see a good deal in India, for he had been the Major's servant for years and years.

"Do you happen to know, Saul, whether the Major wanted me for anything in particular? He asked me to call here this morning."

Saul began to consider. He was a tall, thin, cautious, slow-speaking man, honest as the day, and very much attached to his master.

"Well, sir, he got a letter yesterday morning that seemed to put him out, for I found him swearing over it. And he said he'd like you to see it." [374]

"Who was the letter from? What was it about?"

"It looked like Miss Caroline's writing, sir, and the postmark was Essex. As to what it was about—well, the Major didn't directly tell me, but I gathered that it might be about——"

"About what?" questioned Mr. Hamlyn, for the man had come to a dead standstill. "Speak out, Saul."

"Then, sir," said Saul, slowly rubbing the top of his head, and the few grey hairs left on it, "I thought—as you tell me to speak—it must be something concerning that ship you know of; she that went down on her voyage home, Mr. Philip."

"The *Clipper of the Seas*?"

"Just so, sir; the *Clipper of the Seas*. I thought it by this," added Saul: "that pretty nigh all day afterwards he talked of nothing but that ship, asking me if I should suppose it possible that the ship had not gone down and every soul on board, leastways of her passengers, with her. 'Master,' said I, in answer, 'had that ship not gone down and all her passengers with her, rely upon it, they'd have turned up long before this.' 'Ay, ay,' stormed he, 'and Caroline's a fool.'—Which of course meant his sister, you know, sir."

Philip Hamlyn could not make much of this. So many years had elapsed now since news came out to the world that the unfortunate ship, *Clipper of the Seas*, went down off the coast of Spain on her homeward voyage, and all her passengers with her, as to be a fact of the past. Never a doubt had been cast upon any part of the tidings, so far as he knew.

With an uneasy feeling at his heart, he went off to the city, to call upon the brokers, or agents, of the ship: remembering quite well who they were, and that they lived in Fenchurch Street. An elderly man, clerk in the house for many years, and now a partner, received him. [375]

"The *Clipper of the Seas*?" repeated the old gentleman, after listening to what Mr. Hamlyn had to say. "No, sir, we don't know that any of her passengers were saved; always supposed they were not. But lately we have had some little cause to doubt whether one or two might not have been."

Philip Hamlyn's heart beat faster.

"Will you tell me why you think this?"

"It isn't that we think it; at best 'tis but a doubt," was the reply. "One of our own ships, getting in last month from Madras, had a sailor on board who chanced to remark to me, when he was up here getting his pay, that it was not the first time he had served in our employ: he had been in that ship that was lost, the *Clipper of the Seas*. And he went on to say, in answer to a remark of mine about all the passengers having been lost, that that was not quite correct, for that one of them had certainly been saved—a lady or a nurse, he didn't know which, and also a little child that she was in charge of. He was positive about it, he added, upon my expressing my doubts, for they got to shore in the same small boat that he did."

"Is it true, think you?" gasped Mr. Hamlyn.

"Sir, we are inclined to think it is not true," emphatically spoke the old gentleman. "Upon inquiring about this man's character, we found that he is given to drinking, so that what he says cannot always be relied upon. Again, it seems next to an impossibility that if any passenger were saved we should not have heard of it. Altogether we feel inclined to judge that the man, though evidently believing he spoke truth, was but labouring under an hallucination."

"Can you tell me where I can find the man?" asked Mr. Hamlyn, after a pause. [376]

"Not anywhere at present, sir. He has sailed again."

So that ended it for the day. Philip Hamlyn went home and sat down to dinner with his wife, as already spoken of. And when she told him that the mysterious lady waiting outside must be waiting for him—probably some acquaintance of his of the years gone by—it set his brain working and his pulses throbbing, for he suddenly connected her with what he had that day heard. No wonder his head ached!

To-day, after seeing his wife off by train, he went to find Major Pratt. The Major was better, and could talk, swearing a great deal over the gout, and the letter.

“It was from Caroline,” he said, alluding to his sister, Miss Pratt, who had been with him in India. “She lives in Essex, you know, Philip.”

“Oh, yes, I know,” answered Philip Hamlyn. “But what is it that Caroline says in her letter?”

“You shall hear,” said the Major, producing his sister’s letter and opening it. “Listen. Here it is. ‘The strangest thing has happened, brother! Susan went to London yesterday to get my fronts recurled at the hairdresser’s, and she was waiting in the shop, when a lady came out of the back room, having been in there to get a little boy’s hair cut. Susan was quite struck dumb when she saw her: *she thinks it was poor erring Dolly*; never saw such a likeness before, she says; could almost swear to her by the lovely pale gold hair. The lady pulled her veil over her face when she saw Susan staring at her, and went away with great speed. Susan asked the hairdresser’s people if they knew the lady’s name, or who she was, but they told her she was a stranger to them; had never been in the shop before. Dear Richard, this is troubling me; I could not sleep all last night [377] for thinking of it. Do you suppose it is possible that Dolly and the boy were not drowned? Your affectionate sister, Caroline.’ Now, did you ever read such a letter?” stormed the Major. “If that Susan went home and said she’d seen St. Paul’s blown up, Caroline would believe it. Who’s Susan, d’ye say? Why, you’ve lost your memory, Philip. Susan was the English maid we had with us in Calcutta.”

“It cannot possibly be true,” cried Mr. Hamlyn with quivering lips.

“True, no! of course it can’t be, hang it! Or else what would you do?”

That might be logical though not satisfactory reasoning. And Mr. Hamlyn thought of the woman said to be watching for him, and her pale gold hair.

“She was a cunning jade, if ever there was one, mark you, Philip Hamlyn; that false wife of yours and kin of mine; came of a cunning family on the mother’s side. Put it that she *was* saved: if it suited her to let us suppose she was drowned, why, she’d do it. *I* know Dolly.”

And poor Philip Hamlyn, assenting to the truth of this with all his heart, went out to face the battle that might be coming upon him, lacking the courage for it.

II

The cold, clear afternoon air touching their healthy faces, and Jack Frost nipping their noses, raced Miss West and Kate Dancox up and down the hawthorn walk. It had pleased that arbitrary young damsel, who was still very childish, to enter a protest against going beyond the grounds that fine winter’s day; she would be in the hawthorn walk, or nowhere; and she would run races there. As Miss West gave in to her whims for peace’ sake in things not important, and as she was [378] young enough herself not to dislike running, to the hawthorn walk they went.

Captain Monk was recovering rapidly. His sudden illness had been caused by drinking some cold cider when some out-door exercise had made him dangerously hot. The alarm and apprehension had now subsided; and Mrs. Hamlyn, arriving three days ago in answer to the hasty summons, was thinking of returning to London.

“You are cheating!” called out Kate, flying off at a tangent to cross her governess’s path. “You’ve no right to get before me!”

“Gently,” corrected Miss West. “My dear, we have run enough for to-day.”

“We haven’t, you ugly, cross old thing! Aunt Eliza says you *are* ugly. And—”

The young lady’s amenities were cut short by finding herself suddenly lifted off her feet by Mr. Harry Carradyne, who had come behind them.

“Let me alone, Harry! You are always coming where you are not wanted. Aunt Eliza says so.”

A sudden light, as of mirth, illumined Harry Carradyne’s fresh, frank countenance. “Aunt Eliza says all those things, does she? Well, Miss Kate, she also says something else—that you are now to go indoors.”

“What for? I shan’t go in.”

“Oh, very well. Then that dandified silk frock for the new year that the dressmaker is waiting to try on can be put aside until midsummer.”

Kate dearly loved new silk frocks, and she raced away. The governess followed more slowly, Mr. Carradyne talking by her side.

For some months now their love-dream had been going on; aye, and the love-making too. Not

altogether surreptitiously; neither of them would have liked that. Though not expedient to proclaim it yet to Captain Monk and the world, Mrs. Carradyne knew of it and tacitly sanctioned it. [379]

Alice West turned her face, blushing uncomfortably, to him as they walked. “I am glad to have this opportunity of saying something to you,” she spoke with hesitation. “Are you not upon rather bad terms with Mrs. Hamlyn?”

“She is with me,” replied Harry.

“And—am *I* the cause?” continued Alice, feeling as if her fears were confirmed.

“Not at all. She has not fathomed the truth yet, with all her penetration, though she may have some suspicion of it. Eliza wants to bend me to her will in the matter of the house, and I won’t be bent. Old Peveril wishes to resign the lease of Peacock Range to me; I wish to take it from him, and Eliza objects. She says Peveril promised her the house until the seven years’ lease was out, and that she means to keep him to his bargain.”

“Do you quarrel?”

“Quarrel! no,” laughed Harry Carradyne. “I joke with her, rather than quarrel. But I don’t give in. She pays me some left-handed compliments, telling me that I am no gentleman, that I’m a bear, and so on; to which I make my bow.”

Alice West was gazing straight before her, a troubled look in her eyes. “Then you see that I *am* the remote cause of the quarrel, Harry. But for thinking of me, you would not care to take the house on your own hands.”

“I don’t know that. Be very sure of one thing, Alice: that I shall not stay an hour longer under the roof here if my uncle disinherits me. That he, a man of indomitable will, should be so long making up his mind is a proof that he shrinks from committing the injustice. The suspense it keeps me in is the worst of all. I told him so the other evening when we were sitting together and he was in an amiable mood. I said that any decision he might come to would be more tolerable than this prolonged suspense.” [380]

Alice drew a long breath at his temerity.

Harry laughed. “Indeed, I quite expected to be ordered out of the room in a storm. Instead of that, he took it quietly, civilly telling me to have a little more patience; and then began to speak of the annual new year’s dinner, which is not far off now.”

“Mrs. Carradyne is thinking that he may not hold the dinner this year, as he has been so ill,” remarked the young lady.

“He will never give that up, Alice, as long as he can hold anything; and he is almost well again, you know. Oh, yes; we shall have the dinner and the chimes also.”

“I have never heard the chimes,” she said. “They have not played since I came to Church Leet.”

“They are to play this year,” said Harry Carradyne. “But I don’t think my mother knows it.”

“Is it true that Mrs. Carradyne does not like to hear the chimes? I seem to have gathered the idea, somehow,” added Alice. But she received no answer.

Kate Dancox was changeable as the ever-shifting sea. Delighted with the frock that was in process, she extended her approbation to its maker; and when Mrs. Ram, a homely workwoman, departed with her small bundle in her arms, it pleased the young lady to say she would attend her to her home. This involved the attendance of Miss West, who now found herself summoned to the charge.

Having escorted Mrs. Ram to her lowly door, and had innumerable intricate questions answered touching trimmings and fringes, Miss Kate Dancox, disregarding her governess altogether, flew back along the road with all the speed of her active limbs, and disappeared within the churchyard. At first Alice, who was growing tired and followed slowly, could not see her; presently, a desperate shriek guided her to an unfrequented corner where the graves were crowded. Miss Kate had come to grief in jumping over a tombstone, and bruised both her knees. [381]

“There!” exclaimed Alice, sitting down on the stump of an old tree, close to the low wall. “You’ve hurt yourself now.”

“Oh, it’s nothing,” returned Kate, who did not make much of smarts. And she went limping away to Mr. Grame, then doing some light work in his garden.

Alice sat on where she was, reading the inscriptions on the tombstones; some of them so faint with time as to be hardly discernible. While standing up to make out one that seemed of a rather better class than the rest, she observed Nancy Cale, the clerk’s wife, sitting in the church-porch and watching her attentively. The poor old woman had been ill for a long time, and Alice was surprised to see her out. Leaving the inscriptions, she went across the churchyard.

“Ay, my dear young lady, I be up again, and thankful enough to say it; and I thought as the day’s so fine, I’d step out a bit,” she said, in answer to the salutation. An intelligent woman, and quite sufficiently cultivated for her work—cleaning the church and washing the parson’s surplices. “I

thought John was in the church here, and came to speak to him; but he's not, I find; the door's locked."

"I saw John down by Mrs. Ram's just now; he was talking to Nott, the carpenter," observed Alice. "Nancy, I was trying to make out some of those old names; but it is difficult to do so," she added, pointing to the crowded corner.

"Ay, I see, my dear," nodded Nancy. "*His* be worn a'most right off. I think I'd have it done again, an I was you."

"Have what done again?"

"The name upon your poor papa's gravestone." [382]

"The *what*?" exclaimed Alice. And Nancy repeated her words.

Alice stared at her. Had Mrs. Cale's wits vanished in her illness? "Do you know what you are saying, Nancy?" she cried; "I don't. What had papa to do with this place? I think you must be wandering."

Nancy stared in her turn. "Sure, it's not possible," she said slowly, beginning to put two and two together, "that you don't know who you are, Miss West? That your papa died here? and lies buried here?"

Alice West turned white, and sat down on the opposite bench to Nancy. She did know that her father had died at some small country living he held; but she never suspected that it was at Church Leet. Her mother had gone to London after his death, and set up a school—which succeeded well. But soon she died, and the ladies who took to the school before her death took to Alice with it. The child was still too young to be told by her mother of the serious past—or Mrs. West deemed her to be so. And she had grown up in ignorance of her father's fate and of where he died.

"When we heard, me and John, that it was a Miss West who had come to the Hall to be governess to Parson Dancox's child, the name struck us both," went on Nancy. "Next we looked at your face, my dear, to trace any likeness there might be, and we thought we saw it—for you've got your papa's eyes for certain. Then, one day when I was dusting in here, I let fall a hymn-book from the Hall pew; in picking it up it came open, and the name writ in it stared me in the face, '*Alice* West.' After that, we had no manner of doubt, him and me, and I've often wished to talk with you and tell you so. My dear, I've had you on my knee many a time when you were a little one."

Alice burst into tears of agitation. "I never knew it! I never knew it. Dear Nancy, what did papa [383] die of?"

"Ah, that was a sad piece of business—he was killed," said Nancy. And forthwith, rightly or wrongly, she, garrulous with old age, told all the history.

It was an exciting interview, lasting until the shades of evening surprised them. Miss Kate Dancox might have gone roving to the other end of the globe, for all the attention given her just then. Poor Alice cried and sighed, and trembled inwardly and outwardly. "To think that it should just be to this place that I should come as governess, and to the house of Captain Monk!" she wailed. "Surely he did not *kill* papa!—intentionally!"

"No, no; nobody has ever thought that," disclaimed Nancy. "The Captain is a passionate man, as is well-known, and they quarrelled, and a hot blow, not intentional, must have been struck between 'em. And all through them blessed chimes, Miss Alice! Not but that they be sweet to listen to—and they be going to ring again this New Year's Eve."

Drawing her warm cloak about her, Nancy Cale set off towards her cottage. Alice West sat on in the sheltered porch, utterly bewildered. Never in her life had she felt so agitated, so incapable of sound and sober thought. *Now* it was explained why the bow-windowed sitting-room at the Vicarage would always strike her as being familiar to her memory; as though she had at some time known one that resembled it, or perhaps seen one like it in a dream.

"Well, I'm sure!"

The jesting salutation came from Harry Carradyne. Despatched in search of the truants, he had found Kate at the Vicarage, making much of the last new baby there, and devouring a sumptuous tea of cakes and jam. Miss West? Oh, Miss West was sitting in the church porch, talking to old [384] Nancy Cale, she said to Harry.

"Why! What is it?" he exclaimed in dismay, finding that the burst of emotion which he had taken to be laughter, meant tears. "What has happened, Alice?"

She could no more have kept the tears in than she could help—presently—telling him the news. He sat down by her and held her close to him, and pressed for it. She was the daughter of George West, who had died in the dispute with Captain Monk in the dining-room at the hall so many years before, and who was lying here in the corner of the churchyard; and she had never, never known it!

Mr. Carradyne was somewhat taken to; there was no denying it; chiefly by surprise.

“I thought your father was a soldier, Alice—Colonel West; and died when serving in India. I’m sure it was said so when you came.”

“Oh, no, that could not have been said,” she cried; “unless Mrs. Moffit, the agent, made a mistake. It was my uncle who died in India. No one here ever questioned me about my parents, knowing they were dead. Oh, dear,” she went on in agitation, after a silent pause, “what am I to do now? I cannot stay at the Hall. Captain Monk would not allow it either.”

“No need to tell him,” quoth Mr. Harry.

“And—of course—we must part. You and I.”

“Indeed! Who says so?”

“I am not sure that it would be right to—to—you know.”

“To what? Go on, my dear.”

Alice sighed; her eyes were fixed thoughtfully on the fast-falling twilight. “Mrs. Carradyne will not care for me when she knows who I am,” she said in low tones.

“My dear, shall I tell you how it strikes me?” returned Harry: “that my mother will be only the more anxious to have you connected with us by closer and dearer ties, so as to atone to you, in [385] even a small degree, for the cruel wrong which fell upon your father. As to me—it shall be made my life’s best and dearest privilege.”

But when a climax such as this takes place, the right or the wrong thing to be done cannot be settled in a moment. Alice West did not see her way quite clearly, and for the present she neither said nor did anything.

This little matter occurred on the Friday in Christmas week; on the following day, Saturday, Mrs. Hamlyn was returning to London. Christmas Day this year had fallen on a Monday. Some old wives hold a superstition that when that happens, it inaugurates but small luck for the following year, either for communities or for individuals. Not that that fancy has anything to do with the present history. Captain Monk’s banquet would not be held until the Monday night: as was customary when New Year’s Eve fell on a Sunday. He had urged his daughter to remain over New Year’s Day; but she declined, on the plea that as she had been away from her husband on Christmas Day, she would like to pass New Year’s Day with him. The truth being that she wanted to get to London to see after that yellow-haired lady who was supposed to be peeping after Philip Hamlyn.

On the Saturday morning Mrs. Hamlyn was driven to Evesham in the close carriage, and took the train to London. Her husband, ever kind and attentive, met her at the Paddington terminus. He was looking haggard, and seemed to be thinner than when she left him nine days ago.

“Are you well, Philip?” she asked anxiously.

“Oh, quite well,” quickly answered poor Philip Hamlyn, smiling a warm smile, that he meant to look like a gay one. “Nothing ever ails me.”

No, nothing might ail him bodily; but mentally—ah, how much! That awful terror lay upon him [386] thick and threefold; it had not yet come to any solution, one way or the other. Major Pratt had taken up the very worst view of it; and spent his days pitching hard names at misbehaving syrens, gifted with “the deuce’s own cunning” and with mermaids’ shining hair.

“And how have things been going, Penelope?” asked Mrs. Hamlyn of the nurse, as she sat in the nursery with her boy upon her knee. “All right?”

“Quite so, ma’am. Master Walter has been just as good as gold.”

“Mamma’s darling!” murmured the doting mother, burying her face in his. “I have been thinking, Penelope, that your master does not look well,” she added after a minute.

“No, ma’am? I’ve not noticed it. We have not seen much of him up here; he has been at his club a good deal—and dined three or four times with old Major Pratt.”

“As if she would notice it!—servants never notice anything!” thought Eliza Hamlyn in her imperious way of judging the world. “By the way, Penelope,” she said aloud in light and careless tones, “has that woman with the yellow hair been seen about much?—has she presumed again to accost my little son?”

“The woman with the yellow hair?” repeated Penelope, looking at her mistress, for the girl had quite forgotten the episode. “Oh, I remember—she that stood outside there and came to us in the square-garden. No, ma’am, I’ve seen nothing at all of her since that day.”

“For there are wicked people who prowl about to kidnap children,” continued Mrs. Hamlyn, as if she would condescend to explain her inquiry, “and that woman looked like one. Never suffer her to approach my darling again. Mind that, Penelope.”

The jealous heart is not easily reassured. And Mrs. Hamlyn, restless and suspicious, put the same [387] question to her husband. It was whilst they were waiting in the drawing-room for dinner to be announced, and she had come down from changing her apparel after her journey. How handsome she looked! a right regal woman! as she stood there arrayed in dark blue velvet, the firelight

playing upon her proud face, and upon the diamond earrings and brooch she wore.

“Philip, has that woman been prowling about here again?”

Just for an imperceptible second, for thought is quick, it occurred to Philip Hamlyn to temporize, to affect ignorance, and say, What woman? just as if his mind was not full of the woman, and of nothing else. But he abandoned it as useless.

“I have not seen her since; not at all,” he answered: and though his words were purposely indifferent, his wife, knowing all his tones and ways by heart, was not deceived. “He is afraid of that woman,” she whispered to herself; “or else afraid of *me*.” But she said no more.

“Have you come to any definite understanding with Mr. Carradyne in regard to Peacock’s Range, Eliza?”

“He will not come to any; he is civilly obstinate over it. Laughs in my face with the most perfect impudence, and tells me: ‘A man must be allowed to put in his own claim to his own house, when he wants to do so.’”

“Well, Eliza, that seems to be only right and fair. Peveril made no positive agreement with us, remember.”

“*Is* it right and fair? That may be your opinion, Philip, but it is not mine. We shall see, Mr. Harry Carradyne!”

“Dinner is served, ma’am,” announced the old butler.

That evening passed. Sunday passed, the last day of the dying year; and Monday morning, New Year’s Day, dawned.

New Year’s Day. Mr. and Mrs. Hamlyn were seated at the breakfast-table. It was a bright, cold, sunny morning, showing plenty of blue sky. Young Master Walter, in consideration of the day, was breakfasting at their table, seated in his high chair. [388]

“Me to have dinner wid mamma to-day! Me have pudding!”

“That you shall, my sweetest; and everything that’s good,” assented his mother.

In came Japhet at this juncture. “There’s a little boy in the hall, sir, asking to see you,” said he to his master. “He——”

“Oh, we shall have plenty of boys here to-day, asking for a new year’s gift,” interposed Mrs. Hamlyn, rather impatiently. “Send him a shilling, Philip.”

“It’s not a poor boy, ma’am,” answered Japhet, “but a little gentleman: six or seven years old, he looks. He says he particularly wants to see master.”

Philip Hamlyn smiled. “Particularly wants a shilling, I expect. Send him in, Japhet.”

The lad came in. A well-dressed beautiful boy, refined in looks and demeanour, bearing in his face a strange likeness to Mr. Hamlyn. He looked about timidly.

Eliza, struck with the resemblance, gazed at him. Her husband spoke. “What do you want with me, my lad?”

“If you please, sir, are you Mr. Hamlyn?” asked the child, going forward with hesitating steps. “Are you my papa?”

Every drop of blood seemed to leave Philip Hamlyn’s face and fly to his heart. He could not speak, and looked white as a ghost.

“Who are you? What is your name?” imperiously demanded Philip’s wife.

“It is Walter Hamlyn,” replied the lad, in clear, pretty tones. [389]

And now it was Mrs. Hamlyn’s turn to look white. Walter Hamlyn?—the name of her own dear son! when she had expected him to say Sam Smith, or John Jones! What insolence some people had!

“Where do you come from, boy? Who sent you here?” she reiterated.

“I come from mamma. She would have sent me before, but I caught cold, and was in bed all last week.”

Mr. Hamlyn rose. It was a momentous predicament, but he must do the best he could in it. He was a man of nice honour, and he wished with all his heart that the earth would open and engulf him. “Eliza, my love, allow me to deal with this matter,” he said, his voice taking a low, tender, considerate tone. “I will question the boy in another room. Some mistake, I reckon.”

“No, Philip, you must put your questions before me,” she said, resolute in her anger. “What is it you are fearing? Better tell me all, however disreputable it may be.”

“I dare not tell you,” he gasped; “it is not—I fear—the disreputable thing you may be fancying.”

“Not dare! By what right do you call this gentleman ‘papa’?” she passionately demanded of the

child.

“Mamma told me to. She would never let me come home to him before because of not wishing to part from me.”

Mrs. Hamlyn gazed at him. “Where were you born?”

“At Calcutta; that’s in India. Mamma brought me home in the *Clipper of the Seas*, and the ship went down, but quite everybody was not lost in it, though papa thought so.”

The boy had evidently been well instructed. Eliza Hamlyn, grasping the whole truth now, staggered in terror. [390]

“Philip! Philip! is it true? Was it *this* you feared?”

He made a motion of assent and covered his face. “Heaven knows I would rather have died.”

He stood back against the window-curtains, that they might shade his pain. She fell into a chair and wished he *had* died, years before.

But what was to be the end of it all? Though Eliza Hamlyn went straight out and despatched that syren of the golden hair with a poison-tipped bodkin (and possibly her will might be good to do it), it could not make things any the better for herself.

III

New Year’s Night at Leet Hall, and the banquet in full swing—but not, as usual, New Year’s Eve.

Captain Monk headed his table, the parson, Robert Grame, at his right hand, Harry Carradyne on his left. Whether it might be that the world, even that out-of-the-way part of it, Church Leet, was improving in manners and morals; or whether the Captain himself was changing: certain it was that the board was not the free board it used to be. Mrs. Carradyne herself might have sat at it now, and never once blushed by as much as the pink of a seashell.

It was known that the chimes were to play this year; and, when midnight was close at hand, Captain Monk volunteered a statement which astonished his hearers. Rimmer, the butler, had come into the room to open the windows.

“I am getting tired of the chimes, and all people have not liked them,” spoke the Captain in slow, distinct tones. “I have made up my mind to do away with them, and you will hear them to-night, gentlemen, for the last time.” [391]

“*Really*, Uncle Godfrey!” cried Harry Carradyne, in most intense surprise.

“I hope they’ll bring us no ill-luck to-night!” continued Captain Monk as a grim joke, disregarding Harry’s remark. “Perhaps they will, though, out of sheer spite, knowing they’ll never have another chance of it. Well, well, they’re welcome. Fill your glasses, gentlemen.”

Rimmer was throwing up the windows. In another minute the church clock boomed out the first stroke of twelve, and the room fell into a dead silence. With the last stroke the Captain rose, glass in hand.

“A happy New Year to you, gentlemen! A happy New Year to us all. May it bring to us health and prosperity!”

“And God’s blessing,” reverently added Robert Grame aloud, as if to remedy an omission.

Ring, ring, ring! Ah, there it came, the soft harmony of the chimes, stealing up through the midnight air. Not quite as loudly heard perhaps, as usual, for there was no wind to waft it, but in tones wondrously clear and sweet. Never had the strains of “The Bay of Biscay” brought to the ear more charming melody. How soothing it was to those enrapt listeners; seeming to tell of peace.

But soon another sound arose to mingle with it. A harsh, grating sound, like the noise of wheels passing over gravel. Heads were lifted; glances expressed surprise. With the last strains of the chimes dying away in the distance, a carriage of some kind galloped up to the hall door.

Eliza Hamlyn alighted from it—with her child and its nurse. As quickly as she could make opportunity after that scene enacted in her breakfast-room in London in the morning, that is, as soon as her husband’s back was turned, she had quitted the house with the maid and child, to take the train for home, bringing with her—it was what she phrased it—her shameful tale. [392]

A tale that distressed Mrs. Carradyne to sickness. A tale that so abjectly terrified Captain Monk, when it was imparted to him on Tuesday morning, as to take every atom of fierceness out of his composition.

“Not Hamlyn’s wife!” he gasped. “Eliza!”

“No, not his wife,” she retorted, a great deal too angry herself to be anything but fierce and fiery. “That other woman, that false first wife of his, was not drowned, as was set forth, and she has come to claim him with their son.”

“His wife; their son,” muttered the Captain as if he were bewildered. “Then what are you?—what

is your son? Oh, my poor Eliza."

"Yes, what are we? Papa, I will bring him to answer for it before his country's tribunal—if there be law in the land."

No one spoke to this. It may have occurred to them to remember that Mr. Hamlyn could not legally be punished for what he did in innocence. Captain Monk opened the glass doors and walked on to the terrace, as if the air of the room were oppressive. Eliza went out after him.

"Papa," she said, "there now exists all the more reason for your making my darling *your* heir. Let it be settled without delay. He must succeed to Leet Hall."

Captain Monk looked at his daughter as if not understanding her. "No, no, no," he said. "My child, you forget; trouble must be obscuring your faculties. None but a *legal* descendant of the [393] Monks could be allowed to have Leet Hall. Besides, apart from this, it is already settled. I have seen for some little time now how unjust it would be to supplant Harry Carradyne."

"Is *he* to be your heir? Is it so ordered?"

"Irrevocably. I have told him so this morning."

"What am I to do?" she wailed in bitter despair. "Papa, what is to become of me—and of my unoffending child?"

"I don't know: I wish I did know. It will be a cruel blight upon us all. You will have to live it down, Eliza. Ah, child, if you and Katherine had only listened to me, and not made those rebellious marriages!"

He turned away as he spoke in the direction of the church, to see that his orders were being executed there. Harry Carradyne ran after him. The clock was striking midday as they entered the churchyard.

Yes, the workmen were at their work—taking down the bells.

"If the time were to come over again, Harry," began Captain Monk as they were walking homeward, he leaning upon his nephew's arm, "I wouldn't have them put up. They don't seem to have brought luck somehow, as the parish has been free to say. Not but that it must be utter nonsense."

"Well, no, they don't, uncle," assented Harry.

"As one grows in years, one gets to look at things differently, lad. Actions that seemed laudable enough when one's blood was young and hot, crop up again then, wearing another aspect. But for those chimes, poor West would not have died as he did. I have had him upon my mind a good bit lately."

Surely Captain Monk was wonderfully changing! And he was leaning heavily upon Harry's arm.

"Are you tired, uncle? Would you like to sit down on this bench and rest?" [394]

"No, I'm not tired. It's West I'm thinking about. He lies on my mind sadly. And I never did anything for the wife or child to atone to them! It's too late now—and has been this many a year."

Harry Carradyne's heart began to beat a little. Should he say what he had been hoping to say sometime? He might never have a better opportunity than this.

"Uncle Godfrey," he spoke in low tones, "would you—would you like to see Mr. West's daughter? His wife has been dead a long while; but—would you like to see her—Alice?"

"Ay," fervently spoke the old man. "If she be in the land of the living, bring her to me. I'll tell her how sorry I am, and how I would undo the past if I could. And I'll ask her if she'll be to me as a daughter."

So then Harry Carradyne told him all. It was Alice West who was already under his roof, and who, fate and fortune permitting, *Heaven* permitting, would sometime be Alice Carradyne.

Down sat Captain Monk on a bench of his own accord. Tears rose to his eyes. The sudden revulsion of feeling was great: and truly he was a changed man.

"You spoke of Heaven, Harry. I shall begin to think it has forgiven me. Let us be thankful."

But Captain Monk found he had more to thank Heaven for ere many minutes had elapsed. As Harry Carradyne sat by him in silence, marvelling at the change, yet knowing that the grievous blow which was making havoc of Eliza had effected the completeness of the subduing, he caught sight of an approaching fly. Another fly from the railway station at Evesham.

"How dare you come here, you villain!" shouted Captain Monk, rising in threatening anger, as [395] the fly's inmate called to the driver to stop and began to get out of it. "Are you not ashamed to show your face to me, after the evil you have inflicted upon my daughter?"

Philip Hamlyn, smiling kindly and calmly, caught Captain Monk's lifted hands. "No evil, sir," he said, soothingly. "It was all a mistake. Eliza is my true and lawful wife."

"Eh? What's that?" said the Captain quite in a whisper, his lips trembling.

Quietly Philip Hamlyn explained. He had taken the previous day to investigate the matter, and had followed his wife down by a night train. His first wife *was* dead. She had been drowned in the *Clipper of the Seas*, as was supposed. The child was saved, with his nurse: the only two passengers who were saved. The nurse made her way to a place in the south of France, where, as she knew, her late mistress's sister lived, Mrs. O'Connett, formerly Miss Sophia Pratt. Mrs. O'Connett, a young widow, had just lost her only child, a boy about the age of the little one rescued from the cruel seas. She seized on him with feverish avidity, adopted him as her own, quitted the place for another Anglo-French town where she was not previously known, taught the child to call her "Mamma," and had never let it transpire that the boy was not hers. But now, after the lapse of a few years, Mrs. O'Connett was on the eve of marriage with an Irish Major. To him she told the truth; and, as he did not want to marry the child as well as herself, he persuaded her to return him to his father. Mrs. O'Connett brought the child to London, ascertained Mr. Hamlyn's address, and all about him, and watched about to speak to him, alone if possible, unknown to his wife. Remembering what had been the behaviour of the child's mother, she was by no means sure of a good reception from Philip himself, or what adverse influence might be [396] brought to bear by the new ties he had formed. Mrs. O'Connett had the same remarkable and lovely hair that her sister had had, whom she very much resembled; she had also a talent for underhand ways.

That was the truth—and I have had to tell it in a nutshell, space growing limited. Philip Hamlyn had ascertained it all beyond possibility of dispute, had seen Mrs. O'Connett, and had brought down the good tidings.

Of all the curious sights this record has afforded, perhaps the most surprising was to see Captain Monk pass his arm lovingly within that of Philip Hamlyn and march off with him to Leet Hall as if he were a prize to be coveted. "Here he is, Eliza," said he; "he has come to cheer both you and me."

For once in her life Eliza Hamlyn was subdued to meekness. She kissed her husband and shed happy tears. She was his lawful wife, and the little one was his lawful child. True, there was an elder son; but, compared with what had been feared, that was a slight evil.

"We must make them true brothers, Eliza," whispered Philip Hamlyn. "They shall share alike all I have and all I leave behind me. And our own little one must be called James in future."

"And you and I will be good friends from henceforth," cried Captain Monk warmly, clasping Philip Hamlyn's ready hand. "I have been to blame in more ways than one, giving the reins unduly to my arbitrary temper. It seems to me, however, that life holds enough of real angles for us without creating any for ourselves."

And surely it did seem, as Mrs. Carradyne would have liked to point out aloud, that those chimes had been fraught with messages of evil. For had not all these blessings set in with their removal? [397] —even in the very hour that their fate was sealed!

Harry Carradyne had drawn his uncle from the room; he now came in again, bringing Alice West. Her face was a picture of agitation, for she had been made known to Captain Monk. Harry led her up to Mrs. Hamlyn, with a beaming smile and a whisper.

"Eliza, as we seem to be going in generally for amenities, won't you give just a little corner of your heart to *her*? We owe her some reparation for the past. It is her father who lies in that grave at the north end of the churchyard."

Eliza started. "Her father! Poor George West her father?"

"Even so."

Just a moment's struggle with her rebellious spirit and Mrs. Hamlyn stooped to kiss the trembling girl. "Yes, Alice, we do owe you reparation amongst us, and we must try to make it," she said heartily. "I see how it is: you will reign here with Harry; and I think he will be able, after all, to let us keep Peacock's Range."

There came a grand wedding, Captain Monk himself giving Alice away. But Mr. and Mrs. Hamlyn did not retain Peacock's Range; they and their boys, the two Walters, had to look out for another local residence; for Mrs. Carradyne retired to Peacock's Range herself. Now that Leet Hall had a young mistress, she deemed it policy to quit it; though it should have as much of her as it pleased as a visitor. And Captain Godfrey Monk made himself happier in these peaceful days than he had ever been in his stormy ones.

And that's the history. If I had to begin it again, I don't think I should write it; for I have had to take its details from other people—chiefly from the Squire and old Mr. Sterling, of the Court. [398] There's nothing of mine in it, so to say, and it has been only a bother.

And those unfortunate chimes have nearly passed out of memory with the lapse of years. The "Silent Chimes" they are always called when, by chance, allusion is made to them, and will be so called for ever.

THE END

LONDON: PRINTED BY WILLIAM CLOWES AND SONS LIMITED,
STAMFORD STREET AND CHARING CROSS.

MRS. HENRY WOOD'S NOVELS

[399]

SALE TWO AND A HALF MILLIONS.

EXTRACTS FROM THE PRESS.

1.

EAST LYNNE.

FOUR HUNDRED AND EIGHTIETH THOUSAND.

"'East Lynne' is so full of incident, so exciting in every page, and so admirably written, that one hardly knows how to go to bed without reading to the very last page."—THE OBSERVER.

"A work of remarkable power which displays a force of description and a dramatic completeness we have seldom seen surpassed. The interest of the narrative intensifies itself to the deepest pathos. The closing scene is in the highest degree tragic, and the whole management of the story exhibits unquestionable genius and originality."—THE DAILY NEWS.

"'East Lynne' has been translated into the Hindustani and Parsee languages, and the success of it has been very great."—DANIEL BANDMANN'S JOURNAL.

"I was having a delightful conversation with a clever Indian officer, and listening to his reminiscences of being sent out to serve in China with Gordon. He gave me an account of how he tried to keep the regimental library together under difficulties, and how 'East Lynne' was sent to them from England. Gordon got hold of it, and was fascinated. He used to come riding from a distance, at some risk, to get hold of the volumes as they were to be had."—EXTRACT FROM A LETTER.

[400]

2.

THE CHANNINGS.

TWO HUNDREDTH THOUSAND.

"'The Channings' will probably be read over and over again, and it can never be read too often."—THE ATHENÆUM.

3.

MRS. HALLIBURTON'S TROUBLES.

ONE HUNDRED AND FIFTIETH THOUSAND.

"The boldness, originality, and social scrutiny displayed in this work remind the reader of Adam Bede. It would be difficult to place beside the death of Edgar Halliburton anything in fiction comparable with its profound pathos and simplicity. It is long since the novel-reading world has had reason so thoroughly to congratulate itself upon the appearance of a new work as in the instance of 'Mrs. Halliburton's Troubles.' It is a fine work; a great and artistic picture."—THE MORNING POST.

4.

THE SHADOW OF ASHLYDYAT.

ONE HUNDRED AND TENTH THOUSAND.

"'The Shadow of Ashlydyat' is very clever, and keeps up the constant interest of the reader. It has a slight supernatural tinge, which gives the romantic touch to the story which Sir Walter Scott so often used with even greater effect; but it is not explained away at the end as Sir Walter Scott's supernatural touches generally, and inartistically, were."—THE SPECTATOR.

"The genius of Mrs. Henry Wood shines as brightly as ever. There is a scene or two between Maria Godolphin and her little girl just before she dies, which absolutely melt the heart. The death-bed scene likewise is exquisitely pathetic."—THE COURT JOURNAL.

[401]

5.

LORD OAKBURN'S DAUGHTERS.

ONE HUNDRED AND FIFTH THOUSAND.

"The story is admirably told."—THE SPECTATOR.

6.

VERNER’S PRIDE.

EIGHTY-FIFTH THOUSAND.

“‘Verner’s Pride’ is a first-rate novel in its breadth of outline and brilliancy of description. Its exciting events, its spirited scenes, and its vivid details, all contribute to its triumph. The interest this work awakens, and the admiration it excites in the minds of its readers, must infallibly tend to the renown of the writer, while they herald the welcome reception of the work wherever skill in construction of no ordinary kind, or a ready appreciation of character, which few possess, can arouse attention or win regard.”—The Sun.

7.

ROLAND YORKE.

ONE HUNDRED AND THIRTIETH THOUSAND.

“In all respects worthy of the hand that wrote ‘The Channings’ and ‘East Lynne.’ There is no lack of excitement to wile the reader on, and from the first to the last a well-planned story is sustained with admirable spirit and in a masterly style.”—The Daily News.

8.

JOHNNY LUDLOW.

The First Series.

FIFTY-FIFTH THOUSAND.

“We regard these stories as almost perfect of their kind.”—The Spectator.

“Fresh, lively, vigorous, and full of clever dialogue, they will meet with a ready welcome. The Author is masterly in the skill with which she manages her successive dramas.”—Standard.

“It is an agreeable change to come upon a book like Johnny Ludlow.”—Saturday Review.

“Vigour of description and a strong grasp of character.”—Athenæum.

“The Author has given proof of a rarer dramatic instinct than we had suspected among our living writers of fiction.”—Nonconformist.

“Tales full of interest.”—Vanity Fair. [402]

“Fresh, clear, simple, strong in purpose and in execution, these stories have won admiration as true works of inventive art. Without a single exception they maintain a powerful hold upon the mind of the reader, and keep his sympathies in a continued state of healthy excitement.”—Daily Telegraph.

9.

MILDRED ARKELL.

EIGHTIETH THOUSAND.

“Mrs. Henry Wood certainly possesses in a wholly exceptional degree the power of uniting the most startling incident of supernatural influence with a certain probability and naturalness which compels the most critical and sceptical reader, having once begun, to go on reading.... He finds himself conciliated by some bit of quiet picture, some accent of poetic tenderness, some sweet domestic touch telling of a heart exercised in the rarer experiences; and as he proceeds he wonders more and more at the manner in which the mystery, the criminality, the plotting, and the murdering reconciles itself with a quiet sense of the justice of things; and a great moral lesson is, after all, found to lie in the heart of all the turmoil and exciting scene-shifting. It is this which has earned for Mrs. Wood so high a place among popular novelists, and secured her admittance to homes from which the sensational novelists so-called are excluded.”—The Nonconformist.

10.

SAINT MARTIN’S EVE.

SEVENTY-SIXTH THOUSAND.

“A good novel.”—The Spectator.

“Mrs. Wood has spared no pains to accumulate the materials for a curiously thrilling story.”—The Saturday Review. [403]

11.

TREVLYN HOLD.

Sixty-fifth Thousand.

“We cannot read a page of this work without discovering a graphic force of delineation which it would not be easy to surpass.”—The Daily News.

12.

GEORGE CANTERBURY'S WILL.

SIXTY-FIFTH THOUSAND.

"The name of Mrs. Henry Wood has been familiar to novel-readers for many years, and her fame widens and strengthens with the increase in the number of her books."—The Morning Post.

13.

THE RED COURT FARM.

EIGHTIETH THOUSAND.

"When we say that a plot displays Mrs. Wood's well-known skill in construction, our readers will quite understand that their attention will be enchained by it from the first page to the last."—The Weekly Dispatch. [404]

14.

WITHIN THE MAZE.

ONE HUNDRED AND TWELFTH THOUSAND.

"The decided novelty and ingenuity of the plot of 'Within the Maze' renders it, in our eyes, one of Mrs. Henry Wood's best novels. It is excellently developed, and the interest hardly flags for a moment."—The Graphic.

15.

ELSTER'S FOLLY.

SIXTIETH THOUSAND.

"Mrs. Wood fulfils all the requisites of a good novelist: she interests people in her books, makes them anxious about the characters, and furnishes an intricate and carefully woven plot."—The Morning Post.

16.

LADY ADELAIDE.

SIXTIETH THOUSAND.

"One of Mrs. Henry Wood's best novels."—The Star.

"Mme. Henry Wood est fort célèbre en Angleterre, et ses romans—très moraux et très bien écrits—sont dans toutes les mains et revivent dans toutes les mémoires. *Le serment de lady Adelaïde* donneront à nos lecteurs une idée très suffisante du talent si élevé de mistress Henry Wood."—L'Instruction Publique. [405]

17.

OSWALD CRAY.

SIXTIETH THOUSAND.

"Mrs. Wood has certainly an art of novel-writing which no rival possesses in the same degree and kind. It is not, we fancy, a common experience for anyone to leave one of these novels unfinished."—The Spectator.

18.

JOHNNY LUDLOW.

The Second Series.

THIRTY-FIFTH THOUSAND.

"The author has given proof of a rarer dramatic instinct than we had suspected among our living writers of fiction. It is not possible by means of extracts to convey any adequate sense of the humour, the pathos, the dramatic power and graphic description of this book."—The Nonconformist.

"Mrs. Henry Wood has made a welcome addition to the list of the works of contemporary fiction."—Athenæum (*second notice*).

"These most exquisite studies."—Nonconformist (*second notice*).

"The tales are delightful from their unaffected and sometimes pathetic simplicity."—Standard (*second notice*).

"To write a short story really well is the most difficult part of the art of fiction; and 'Johnny Ludlow' has succeeded in it in such a manner that his—or rather her—art looks like nature, and is hardly less surprising for its excellence than for the fertility of invention on which it is founded."—Globe.

"Freshness of tone, briskness of movement, vigour, reality, humour, pathos. It is safe to affirm that there is not a single story which will not be read with pleasure by both sexes, of all ages."—Illustrated London News.

19.

ANNE HEREFORD.

FORTY-FIFTH THOUSAND.

“Mrs. Wood’s story, ‘Anne Hereford,’ is a favourable specimen of her manner, the incidents are well planned, and the narrative is easy and vigorous.”—Illustrated London News. [406]

20.

DENE HOLLOW.

SIXTIETH THOUSAND.

“Novel-readers wishing to be entertained, and deeply interested in character and incident, will find their curiosity wholesomely gratified by the graphic pages of ‘Dene Hollow,’ an excellent novel, without the drawbacks of wearisome digressions and monotonous platitudes so common in the chapters of modern fiction.”—The Morning Post.

21.

EDINA.

FORTY-FIFTH THOUSAND.

“The whole situation of the book is clever, and the plot is well managed.”—Academy.

“Edina’s character is beautifully drawn.”—The Literary World.

22.

A LIFE’S SECRET.

SIXTY-FIFTH THOUSAND.

“Now that the rights of capital and labour are being fully inquired into, Mrs. Wood’s story of ‘A Life’s Secret’ is particularly opportune and interesting. It is based upon a plot that awakens curiosity and keeps it alive throughout. The hero and heroine are marked with individuality, the love-passages are finely drawn, and the story developed with judgment.”—The Civil Service Gazette.

“If Mrs. Wood’s book does not tend to eradicate the cowardice, folly, and slavish submission to lazy agitators among the working men, all we can say is that it ought to do so, for it is at once well written, effective, and truthful.”—The Illustrated Times.

23.

COURT NETHERLEIGH.

FORTY-SIXTH THOUSAND.

“We always open one of Mrs. Wood’s novels with pleasure, because we are sure of being amused and interested.”—The Times.

“Lisez-le; l’émotion que vous sentirez peu à peu monter à votre cœur est saine et fortifiante. Lisez-le; c’est un livre honnête sorti d’une plume honnête et vous pourrez le laisser traîner sur la table.”—Le Signal (*Paris*). [407]

24.

LADY GRACE.

TWENTY-FIRST THOUSAND.

“‘Lady Grace’ worthily continues a series of novels thoroughly English in feeling and sentiment, and which fairly illustrate many phases of our national life.”—Morning Post.

25.

BESSY RANE.

FORTY-SECOND THOUSAND.

“The power to draw minutely and carefully each character with characteristic individuality in word and action is Mrs. Wood’s especial gift. This endows her pages with a vitality which carries the reader to the end, and leaves him with the feeling that the veil which in real life separates man from man has been raised, and that he has for once seen and known certain people as intimately as if he had been their guardian angel. This is a great fascination.”—The Athenæum.

26.

THE UNHOLY WISH.

FIFTEENTH THOUSAND.

“The characters and situations of which the author made her books are, indeed, beyond criticism; their interest has been proved by the experience of generations.”—Pall-Mall Gazette.

27.

JOHNNY LUDLOW.

Third Series.

TWENTY-THIRD THOUSAND.

“The peculiar and unfailing charm of Mrs. Wood’s style has rarely been more apparent than in this succession of chronicles, partly of rustic life, some relating to the fortunes of persons in a higher class, but all remarkable for an easy simplicity of tone, true to nature.”—Morning Post.

28.

THE MASTER OF GREYLANDS.

FIFTIETH THOUSAND.

“A book by Mrs. Wood is sure to be a good one, and no one who opens ‘The Master of Greylands’ in anticipation of an intellectual treat will be disappointed. The keen analysis of character, and the admirable management of the plot, alike attest the clever novelist.”—John Bull. [408]

29.

ORVILLE COLLEGE.

THIRTY-EIGHTH THOUSAND.

“Mrs. Wood’s stories bear the impress of her versatile talent and well-known skill in turning to account the commonplaces of daily life as well as the popular superstitions of the multitude.”—The Literary World.

30.

POMEROY ABBEY.

FORTY-EIGHTH THOUSAND.

“All the Pomeroys are very cleverly individualised, and the way in which the mystery is worked up, including its one horribly tragic incident, is really beyond all praise.”—The Morning Post.

31.

JOHNNY LUDLOW.

Fourth Series.

FIFTEENTH THOUSAND.

“Fresh, clear, simple, strong in purpose and in execution, these stories have won admiration as true works of inventive art. Without a single exception they maintain a powerful hold upon the mind of the reader, and keep his sympathies in a continual state of healthy excitement.”—Daily Telegraph.

32.

ADAM GRAINGER.

FIFTEENTH THOUSAND.

“Mrs. Wood fulfils all the requisites of a good novelist; she interests people in her books, makes them anxious about the characters, and furnishes an intricate and carefully woven plot.”—Morning Post.

33.

JOHNNY LUDLOW.

Fifth Series.

FIFTEENTH THOUSAND.

“Freshness of tone, briskness of movement, vigour, reality, humour, pathos. It is safe to affirm that there is not a single story which will not be read with pleasure by both sexes, of all ages.”—Illustrated London News.

JOHNNY LUDLOW.

Sixth Series. New Edition.

LONDON: MACMILLAN AND CO., LIMITED.

Transcriber's Note

A few errors in punctuation were corrected silently. Also the following corrections were made, on page
152 "TRAGDEY" changed to "TRAGEDY" (In chapter header.)
170 "Todhetly" changed to "Todhetley" (from Mr. Todhetley. That was)
188 "bank-notes" changed to "bank-note" (the bank-note did not turn up)
223 "by-and-bye" changed to "by-and-by" (would join them by-and-by.)
239 "Danäe" changed to "Danaë" (Jupiter went courting Danaë)
284 "I" added (Section header)
324 "an" changed to "as" (give up Tom Rivers also, as you will)
349 "a" added (than he had ever taken of a baby yet).

Otherwise the original was preserved, including inconsistent spelling and hyphenation.

below. There are a lot of things you can do with Project Gutenberg™ electronic works if you follow the terms of this agreement and help preserve free future access to Project Gutenberg™ electronic works. See paragraph 1.E below.

1.C. The Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation (“the Foundation” or PGLAF), owns a compilation copyright in the collection of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works. Nearly all the individual works in the collection are in the public domain in the United States. If an individual work is unprotected by copyright law in the United States and you are located in the United States, we do not claim a right to prevent you from copying, distributing, performing, displaying or creating derivative works based on the work as long as all references to Project Gutenberg are removed. Of course, we hope that you will support the Project Gutenberg™ mission of promoting free access to electronic works by freely sharing Project Gutenberg™ works in compliance with the terms of this agreement for keeping the Project Gutenberg™ name associated with the work. You can easily comply with the terms of this agreement by keeping this work in the same format with its attached full Project Gutenberg™ License when you share it without charge with others.

1.D. The copyright laws of the place where you are located also govern what you can do with this work. Copyright laws in most countries are in a constant state of change. If you are outside the United States, check the laws of your country in addition to the terms of this agreement before downloading, copying, displaying, performing, distributing or creating derivative works based on this work or any other Project Gutenberg™ work. The Foundation makes no representations concerning the copyright status of any work in any country other than the United States.

1.E. Unless you have removed all references to Project Gutenberg:

1.E.1. The following sentence, with active links to, or other immediate access to, the full Project Gutenberg™ License must appear prominently whenever any copy of a Project Gutenberg™ work (any work on which the phrase “Project Gutenberg” appears, or with which the phrase “Project Gutenberg” is associated) is accessed, displayed, performed, viewed, copied or distributed:

> This eBook is for the use of anyone anywhere in the United States and most other parts of the world at no cost and with almost no restrictions whatsoever. You may copy it, give it away or re-use it under the terms of the Project Gutenberg License included with this eBook or online at www.gutenberg.org. If you are not located in the United States, you will have to check the laws of the country where you are located before using this eBook.

1.E.2. If an individual Project Gutenberg™ electronic work is derived from texts not protected by U.S. copyright law (does not contain a notice indicating that it is posted with permission of the copyright holder), the work can be copied and distributed to anyone in the United States without paying any fees or charges. If you are redistributing or providing access to a work with the phrase “Project Gutenberg” associated with or appearing on the work, you must comply either with the requirements of paragraphs 1.E.1 through 1.E.7 or obtain permission for the use of the work and the Project Gutenberg™ trademark as set forth in paragraphs 1.E.8 or 1.E.9.

1.E.3. If an individual Project Gutenberg™ electronic work is posted with the permission of the copyright holder, your use and distribution must comply with both paragraphs 1.E.1 through 1.E.7 and any additional terms imposed by the copyright holder. Additional terms will be linked to the Project Gutenberg™ License for all works posted with the permission of the copyright holder found at the beginning of this work.

1.E.4. Do not unlink or detach or remove the full Project Gutenberg™ License terms from this work, or any files containing a part of this work or any other work associated with Project Gutenberg™.

1.E.5. Do not copy, display, perform, distribute or redistribute this electronic work, or any part of this electronic work, without prominently displaying the sentence set forth in paragraph 1.E.1 with active links or immediate access to the full terms of the Project Gutenberg™ License.

1.E.6. You may convert to and distribute this work in any binary, compressed, marked up, nonproprietary or proprietary form, including any word processing or hypertext form. However, if you provide access to or distribute copies of a Project Gutenberg™ work in a format other than “Plain Vanilla ASCII” or other format used in the official version posted on the official Project Gutenberg™ website (www.gutenberg.org), you must, at no additional cost, fee or expense to the user, provide a copy, a means of exporting a copy, or a means of obtaining a copy upon request, of the work in its original “Plain Vanilla ASCII” or other form. Any alternate format must include the full Project Gutenberg™ License as specified in paragraph 1.E.1.

1.E.7. Do not charge a fee for access to, viewing, displaying, performing, copying or distributing any Project Gutenberg™ works unless you comply with paragraph 1.E.8 or 1.E.9.

1.E.8. You may charge a reasonable fee for copies of or providing access to or distributing Project Gutenberg™ electronic works provided that:

- You pay a royalty fee of 20% of the gross profits you derive from the use of Project Gutenberg™ works calculated using the method you already use to calculate your applicable taxes. The fee is owed to the owner of the Project Gutenberg™ trademark, but he has agreed to donate royalties under this paragraph to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation. Royalty payments must be paid within 60 days following each date on which you prepare (or are legally required to prepare) your periodic tax returns. Royalty payments should be clearly marked as such and sent to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation at the address specified in Section 4, “Information about donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation.”

- You provide a full refund of any money paid by a user who notifies you in writing (or by e-mail) within 30 days of receipt that s/he does not agree to the terms of the full Project Gutenberg™ License. You must require such a user to return or destroy all copies of the works possessed in a physical medium and discontinue all use of and all access to other copies of Project Gutenberg™ works.

- You provide, in accordance with paragraph 1.F.3, a full refund of any money paid for a work or a replacement copy, if a defect in the electronic work is discovered and reported to you within 90 days of receipt of the work.

- You comply with all other terms of this agreement for free distribution of Project Gutenberg™ works.

1.E.9. If you wish to charge a fee or distribute a Project Gutenberg™ electronic work or group of works on different terms than are set forth in this agreement, you must obtain permission in writing from the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, the manager of the Project Gutenberg™ trademark. Contact the Foundation as set forth in Section 3 below.

1.F.

1.F.1. Project Gutenberg volunteers and employees expend considerable effort to identify, do copyright research on, transcribe and proofread works not protected by U.S. copyright law in creating the Project Gutenberg™ collection. Despite these efforts, Project Gutenberg™ electronic works, and the medium on which they may be stored, may contain “Defects,” such as, but not limited to, incomplete, inaccurate or corrupt data, transcription errors, a copyright or other intellectual property infringement, a defective or damaged disk or other medium, a computer virus, or computer codes that damage or cannot be read by your equipment.

1.F.2. LIMITED WARRANTY, DISCLAIMER OF DAMAGES - Except for the “Right of Replacement or Refund” described in paragraph 1.F.3, the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, the owner of the Project Gutenberg™ trademark, and any other party distributing a Project Gutenberg™ electronic work under this agreement, disclaim all liability to you for damages, costs and expenses, including legal fees. YOU AGREE THAT YOU HAVE NO REMEDIES FOR NEGLIGENCE, STRICT LIABILITY, BREACH OF WARRANTY OR BREACH OF CONTRACT EXCEPT THOSE PROVIDED IN PARAGRAPH 1.F.3. YOU AGREE THAT THE FOUNDATION, THE TRADEMARK OWNER, AND ANY DISTRIBUTOR UNDER THIS AGREEMENT WILL NOT BE LIABLE TO YOU FOR ACTUAL, DIRECT, INDIRECT, CONSEQUENTIAL, PUNITIVE OR INCIDENTAL DAMAGES EVEN IF YOU GIVE NOTICE OF THE POSSIBILITY OF SUCH DAMAGE.

1.F.3. LIMITED RIGHT OF REPLACEMENT OR REFUND - If you discover a defect in this electronic work within 90 days of receiving it, you can receive a refund of the money (if any) you paid for it by sending a written explanation to the person you received the work from. If you received the work on a physical medium, you must return the medium with your written explanation. The person or entity that provided you with the defective work may elect to provide a replacement copy in lieu of a refund. If you received the work electronically, the person or entity providing it to you may choose to give you a second opportunity to receive the work electronically in lieu of a refund. If the second copy is also defective, you may demand a refund in writing without further opportunities to fix the problem.

1.F.4. Except for the limited right of replacement or refund set forth in paragraph 1.F.3, this work is provided to you ‘AS-IS’, WITH NO OTHER WARRANTIES OF ANY KIND, EXPRESS OR IMPLIED, INCLUDING BUT NOT LIMITED TO WARRANTIES OF MERCHANTABILITY OR FITNESS FOR ANY PURPOSE.

1.F.5. Some states do not allow disclaimers of certain implied warranties or the exclusion or limitation of certain types of damages. If any disclaimer or limitation set forth in this agreement violates the law of the state applicable to this agreement, the agreement shall be interpreted to make the maximum disclaimer or limitation permitted by the applicable state law. The invalidity or unenforceability of any provision of this agreement shall not void the remaining provisions.

1.F.6. INDEMNITY - You agree to indemnify and hold the Foundation, the trademark owner, any agent or employee of the Foundation, anyone providing copies of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works in accordance with this agreement, and any volunteers associated with the production, promotion and distribution of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works, harmless from all liability, costs and expenses, including legal fees, that arise directly or indirectly from any of the following which you do or cause to occur: (a) distribution of this or any Project Gutenberg™ work, (b) alteration, modification, or additions or deletions to any Project Gutenberg™ work, and (c) any Defect you cause.

Section 2. Information about the Mission of Project Gutenberg™

Project Gutenberg™ is synonymous with the free distribution of electronic works in formats readable by the widest variety of computers including obsolete, old, middle-aged and new computers. It exists because of the efforts of hundreds of volunteers and donations from people in all walks of life.

Volunteers and financial support to provide volunteers with the assistance they need are critical to reaching Project Gutenberg™'s goals and ensuring that the Project Gutenberg™ collection will remain freely available for generations to come. In 2001, the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation was created to provide a secure and permanent future for Project Gutenberg™ and future generations. To learn more about the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation and how your efforts and donations can help, see Sections 3 and 4 and the Foundation information page at www.gutenberg.org.

Section 3. Information about the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation

The Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation is a non-profit 501(c)(3) educational corporation organized under the laws of the state of Mississippi and granted tax exempt status by the Internal Revenue Service. The Foundation's EIN or federal tax identification number is 64-6221541. Contributions to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation are tax deductible to the full extent permitted by U.S. federal laws and your state's laws.

The Foundation's business office is located at 809 North 1500 West, Salt Lake City, UT 84116, (801) 596-1887. Email contact links and up to date contact information can be found at the Foundation's website and official page at www.gutenberg.org/contact

Section 4. Information about Donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation

Project Gutenberg™ depends upon and cannot survive without widespread public support and donations to carry out its mission of increasing the number of public domain and licensed works that can be freely distributed in machine-readable form accessible by the widest array of equipment including outdated equipment. Many small donations ($1 to $5,000) are particularly important to maintaining tax exempt status with the IRS.

The Foundation is committed to complying with the laws regulating charities and charitable donations in all 50 states of the United States. Compliance requirements are not uniform and it takes a considerable effort, much paperwork and many fees to meet and keep up with these requirements. We do not solicit donations in locations where we have not received written confirmation of compliance. To SEND DONATIONS or determine the status of compliance for any particular state visit www.gutenberg.org/donate.

While we cannot and do not solicit contributions from states where we have not met the solicitation requirements, we know of no prohibition against accepting unsolicited donations from donors in such states who approach us with offers to donate.

International donations are gratefully accepted, but we cannot make any statements concerning tax treatment of donations received from outside the United States. U.S. laws alone swamp our small staff.

Please check the Project Gutenberg web pages for current donation methods and addresses. Donations are accepted in a number of other ways including checks, online payments and credit card donations. To donate, please visit: www.gutenberg.org/donate

Section 5. General Information About Project Gutenberg™ electronic works

Professor Michael S. Hart was the originator of the Project Gutenberg™ concept of a library of electronic works that could be freely shared with anyone. For forty years, he produced and distributed Project Gutenberg™ eBooks with only a loose network of volunteer support.

Project Gutenberg™ eBooks are often created from several printed editions, all of which are confirmed as not protected by copyright in the U.S. unless a copyright notice is included. Thus, we do not necessarily keep eBooks in compliance with any particular paper edition.

Most people start at our website which has the main PG search facility: www.gutenberg.org.

This website includes information about Project Gutenberg™, including how to make donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, how to help produce our new eBooks, and how to subscribe to our email newsletter to hear about new eBooks.