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THE DUKE'S SWEETHEART.

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A Romance.

BY

RICHARD DOWLING,

AUTHOR OF
"THE MYSTERY OF KILLARD," "THE SPORT OF FATE," "UNDER ST. PAUL'S," ETC.

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THE DUKE OF LONG ACRE.

CHAPTER I.

THE DUKE'S SWEETHEART.

Charles Augustus Cheyne, Duke of Long Acre, had no land. Neither in the United Kingdom nor in any other state of earth did he own a perch of ground. He did not own mines or railways, or Consols, or foreign or domestic stock of any kind. All the money he had was the result of his own industrious fingers, of his own industrious brain. Neither the Heralds' College nor the Lord Chancellor had ever heard of the Duke of Long Acre. The title was one purely of courtesy, conferred upon him by his peers, who were no peers of the realm, but untitled citizens of the Republic of Letters. If he was no duke, he would have furnished sufficient material for making two dukes of satisfactory size, as dukes go now. He was six feet tall, measured fifty inches round the chest, and forty-two round the waist. He had a large, beaming, good-humoured face. He wore no hair on his face; the hair of his head was of a dull dun colour, and always closely cut. No one could remember the colour of his eyes. He was reported to be the strongest and best-tempered man in Fleet Street. He could bend a kitchen-poker into a triangle, and bend it back again, so that one would scarcely notice it had ever been out of shape. He had never struck a man in anger, although he had been often sorely provoked, and more than once absolutely assaulted. On an occasion when a powerful rough attacked him, late at night, in one of the western squares, he had closed with his assailant, caught him round the body, first pinned one hand down, and then the other. Having given his prisoner a good squeeze, which nearly crushed the rough's ribs flat, Long Acre carried the man across the roadway, tossed him over the railings among some shrubs, and walked away. He was never known to curse or swear, or borrow money, or drink too much. His honour was above impeachment; he had never done anything mean or low or shabby. He was a gentleman in the perfect meaning of the word. He dressed in good taste; his clothes always looked fresh, although his coat was often far from new. He walked with the gait of one who would willingly stop to do a favour or lend assistance. He was sufficiently, not oppressively, attentive to women; when men were talking he would always step in gallantly to the rescue of a fair fame. He was loyal to his friends; he would have been forgiving to his enemies, if there were any, but none existed. He made friends very quickly. "I want all the friends I can make," he would say, "for I haven't a single relative alive."

He was thirty-four years of age, and lived in two rooms at the top of a house in Long Acre. With the exception of his rooms all the house was taken up with the business of carriage-making. The name of the carriage-maker was Whiteshaw.

No one of his grace's acquaintances knew anything of his history before sixteen years ago, when he first appeared in Fleet Street. At that time he was a slender, graceful, handsome lad, modest of manner and courteous of address. He was then known as Charles Augustus Cheyne; he had not displayed the wealth of imagination which, later on, caused him to be advanced to the

front rank of the peerage. He had a faculty for writing prose stories, which, if never strong, were never vulgar. He would not at any time refer to his past history; and if one put to him a point-blank question, such as "Who was your father, Cheyne?" he would always answer vaguely, "A poor gentleman, who met with a great reverse of fortune, and was ruined and died before I can remember." "And is your mother dead also?" "Yes, my mother is dead also. It is a dismal thing to be as I am without a relative in the world. Let us not speak any more on the subject."

Owing to the splendour of his imagination, which he never allowed for a moment to be dominated by facts, and to the easy and familiar way in which he spoke of the nobility, his friends had created him Duke of Long Acre. Although he preferred being called Cheyne, he answered to the name of Long Acre without any sort of resentment, or even displeasure.

One bright June morning he arose and dressed himself with peculiar care. He had business of the very first importance to transact that day. The Duke of Long Acre had at last given away his heart, and today he was to meet the lady of his choice in Hyde Park at eleven o'clock.

Mrs. Ward, an extremely slatternly woman of fifty, whom Cheyne called his housekeeper--and who came from her home in the Dials, lit his fire and got his breakfast for him of mornings, and made up his rooms, for the modest sum of five shillings a week--had toasted the bacon in a little Dutch oven, and put it on a fiery-hot plate, and made the tea for him, and set forth the milk and bread and butter.

Cheyne sat down and began his breakfast.

"This bacon is delicious, Mrs. Ward," he called out to the charwoman in the next room.

"I am glad you like it, sir."

"Delicious! I could eat a whole pig, Mrs. Ward, I think, if you cooked it."

"It is very good of you to say so, sir."

"And I am sure I don't know how it is you always get such good butter and such exceedingly good milk. I assure you, when I was staying with the Duke of Dorsetshire last summer I got much inferior butter, although he has the reputation of producing in his dairy the very finest butter of the kingdom. He told me he often sends a tub of his butter to the Prince of Wales, just in a friendly way, you know. I own his grace's butter has the full buttercup flavour; but this goes farther--this tastes of nothing but violets and cowslips."

"It ought to be good, sir; it's fivepence-halfpenny the quarter. Eating butter is eating money these times."

"You can't expect to get the essential oil of violets and cowslips permeating the most nutritious and delicate of all fixed oils at less than fivepence-halfpenny for a quarter of a pound."

"Maybe not, sir, if you put it that way."

All through his breakfast, Cheyne chatted with Mrs. Ward. When he had finished he rose, put on his hat, and having bade Mrs. Ward good-bye, went out.

It was bright and clear and fresh even in Long Acre that morning, and Cheyne had a theory that bright, clear, fresh days were made for walking, so he set off for Hyde Park at a quick pace. He would have walked all round the world rather than take an omnibus, and cabs are expensive luxuries to be used only in extreme cases. What can be finer than for a man in good health and spirits to walk down Piccadilly on a bright June day, and turn into Hyde Park to meet his sweetheart? All round you were the mansions of the richest aristocracy in the world. Here was the sense that, even if one did not belong to this privileged class, one was as free to the sunlight and the street and beautifully-kept park as the owner of the bluest blood in England. If one hired ever so sorry a nag, one was as free to a gallop in the Ride as a prince of the blood. If one borrowed any kind of a carriage, one could crawl up and down that Drive with the most yellow and wrinkled of dowager countesses. And then if one were conscious of ability and ambition, there was no reason for not imagining a coronet might not some day encircle one's own brows.

There was John Churchill, who had risen from being the son of a simple Devonshire baronet to be a duke of England. But when, in addition to all these general sources of gratitude, one has the certainty that under a particular tree and upon a particular seat one is sure to find the girl whom one holds to be the dearest in all England, joy and radiance flood the whole scene, and one can hardly believe that Hyde Park is not Paradise.

As Cheyne approached the appointed seat, he found a pair of very bright brown eyes fixed on him. The face to which those eyes belonged was that of a brunette under the medium height. She rose briskly as he drew near, and as he held out his hand to her, and she gave him hers, she said, with a saucy smile:

"I have been waiting a whole five minutes for you, sir."

"I envy those five minutes that were near you when I was away."

"A pretty speech," she said, with a dainty toss of her head; "but I am in a bad humour, and you will have to say all the civil things to-day."

"If we are not to part until I have said all the civil things I have in my heart, we shall not part till sundown."

"Oh goodness! fancy speaking to the one man from five minutes past eleven in June till sundown! It would kill any girl I know."

"Which simply means that you don't know anything at all about yourself."

"I think, Mr. Cheyne, you are the most conceited man I ever met in all my life."

"Then you must have been in a nunnery from your birth till now."

"Are you going to talk in this horrible way for the remainder of my hour and a half, or are you going to take me for a nice comfortable walk through the park and tell me things?"

Said he:

"Comfort? comfort, scorned of devils! this is truth the poet sings, That a sorrow's crown of sorrow is remembering happier things."

"But, Mr. Cheyne, have the goodness to remember I am not of the class of persons the poet sings of."

"No. You are an angel."

"I declare you've wasted another five minutes in this foolish way. I'll go home."

"A proud spirit always rebels against a threat. I assure you, if you say anything more of that kind, I'll put my hat in the middle of the path and walk away from it, so as to attract the attention of everyone in the park to us."

"Don't be absurd."

"What I am is nothing compared to what we will be when I sigh for the hat I've left behind me."

"Charlie----"

"That's better. There is a tone of humanity in your voice now, May."

"Well, let us make it up, Charlie, and be friends, not comedians."

"With all my heart, May. Before we go any farther I must say I never saw you looking so--so nice. I know 'nice' isn't the right word; but if I say anything stronger you won't give me time to say something else I want to say. Something of the greatest importance."

"Can't you say it out instead of making a speech about it?"

"Well, I never was so happy in all my life before. I never was so much in love before. You know, May, I never told you anything but the simple truth."

She took the arm he had frequently unavailingly offered since they had met.

"You are a good old fellow, and I won't abuse you any more to-day. Have you any news to tell me?"

"Not a word. Except that Effingham has sold that novel at last. Sold it for a song; but then it is a beginning."

"Well then, tell me about Lady Clarinda. What has she done!"

"Run away with the German adventurer."

"Nonsense! I wont have it."

"Can't be helped now."

"Yes, but it must. I insist upon her marrying Sir Gabriel Fairfax."

"But, my dear May, what's done can't be undone."

"Yes; but, Charlie, I insist upon Lady Clarinda marrying Sir Gabriel."

"Oh, nonsense! The public would not have it."

"You must really change it. Why should a young girl like that run away with a red-headed foreigner? She would never have done it."

"That's the new plan, dear. You can't have your hero too wild or your heroine too ugly; for men as a rule are bad, and women are not all as lovely as you, and it flatters bad men and ugly women to find bad men and ugly women heroes and heroines."

"Well, but I don't care what the new plan is, I wont have that horrid German adventurer marry Lady Clarinda."

"Oh, very well; of course, if you insist upon her marrying Sir Gabriel, she shall; although it will compel me to tear up twelve manuscript sheets worth four shillings a sheet."

"And what is going to happen in the other one when the old Duke of Fenwick dies?"

"Oh, you'd be greatly surprised."

"What?"

"You remember the long, tall, thin man who played the violoncello in the theatre orchestra, early in the story?"

"Yes. With a red nose and warts on his fingers."

"That's he. But I must read that chapter to you the next time I am at Knightsbridge."

CHAPTER II.

A DUCAL CARRIAGE.

Reginald Francis Henry Cheyne, seventh Duke of Shropshire, lived most of the year at his splendid castle Silverview, on the German Ocean. The Duke was an undersized man with a dingy dull complexion and bandy legs. He looked more like an ostler than anything else; and yet he was not only a duke, but a duke of the bluest blood, owner of Silverview Castle, three other country seats, a palatial town-house, and an income of three to four hundred thousand a year. Fate paid him every day for waking upwards of five hundred pounds, and upwards of five hundred pounds on that same day for going to bed again.

He owned one whole city, four parliamentary boroughs, and sixty-four villages. He wasn't the richest peer in England, for he had neither a seventy-foot seam of coal nor a few hundred acres in the West End of London. But against the unpleasant feeling of not being the richest peer in England he had two things to cheer him. In the first place, his city and four parliamentary boroughs were docile, and elected men whom he suggested; and in the second place, beyond his son and heir, the Marquis of Southwold, he had no family, and therefore he had no one to provide for. Consequently he could live up to his income. This he did, but he went no farther; and in all England there was no property more free from encumbrance. He was sixty-three years of age, a widower, and extremely fond of yachting. Although he had a house or castle in each of the three kingdoms and in Wales, he rarely left Silverview, except in his yacht. He was passionately fond of the sea, and had spent as much of his time afloat as ashore. Another thing that wedded him to the sea was the delicacy of his son, who, although now eight-and-thirty years of age, had been from almost his birth obliged to live much at sea, owing to general weakness, and an affection of the eyes, which the doctors said would inevitably end in blindness if he lived permanently on shore.

The reason why the Duke preferred Silverview Castle to any of his other houses or castles was because it stood on a height at the top of a narrow bay. For miles on each side of this bay the land belonged to the Duke, and in his castle above his bay he was as far out of the world as if he had been in the Zaraha, and yet so close to his yacht riding at anchor that he could see from his bedroom-window when he got up if the brasses had been polished and the decks holystoned that morning.

The Duke and his son rode as every Englishman must, but he rode as little as any Englishman may. But neither the sea nor riding had bowed the Duke's legs. From generation to generation the house of Cheyne had been noted, with two exceptions, for its bowed legs. Of course, in the family portraits you saw no sign of this, for the family had taken care never to have any more

extended counterfeit presentment than a kit-cat. Whenever, even while he was on land, the Duke encountered a gale he invariably threw out his sea-legs, and straddled, as though the road or field was, while rolling horribly, mounting a mighty swell.

There was nothing particularly interesting about the Duke of Shropshire. He was a commonplace-looking little man with very commonplace ideas. He was an excellent man of business, and every day, when he was at the Castle, gave two hours to his business folk. He was a model landlord. The tenants said it would be impossible to find better, but he was not popular among them. He was too dark and reserved and taciturn. Every sailor wants to have a garden and grow vegetables. Every farmer does not want to go a long sea-voyage. The land is no mystery to the sailor, but the sea is a mystery to the farmer. To people who have no dealings with the sea, those who frequent its plains seem aliens in race. This may, in some way, account for the fact that the Duke made no personal progress in the affections of his tenantry.

The father was not popular, the son was partly pitied and partly despised. His delicacy, and the fact that he could not live on land, separated him still more effectually from the people than his father. The people looked forward with no pleasure to the fact that this man was heir, and would be duke some day. Another thing, too, that the tenants did not like was the way father and son kept together. They knew the marquis was not strong, but still he might have a little will of his own. Why hadn't he a yacht of his own? not go about always with his father, as though he was only twelve years of age instead of thirty-eight. Surely one of the richest peers in the world could afford an allowance to his only son which would enable that son to keep a yacht! Men like men for masters. They do not care to work under invalids and recluses.

Personally the Duke spent little or nothing of his large income. On Sundays his head-gardener was much better dressed than his master. The only luxury the Duke demanded was solitude, and for this solitude he was willing to give up nine-tenths of his fortune. He kept servants at all his seats, and any of his friends of thirty-five years ago was welcome to a loan of one, servants, shooting, fishing included. But no friend was to drive up to Silverview Castle and claim hospitality.

For upwards of thirty years the Duke had not gone into society, nor had he received any guest at Silverview Castle. His wife died soon after his heir was born, and he had gone very little into society since. When not on board his yacht *Seabird*, she lay moored under the windows of the Castle, and nothing was easier than, upon receiving a notice from So-and-so saying he would call upon the Duke on a certain day, for the Duke to write, saying he was very sorry that he intended leaving on a cruise that very day.

There was no general agreement as to the cause of the Duke's avoidance of society. Some said it was owing to grief at the death of his wife; others declared he had done some dire wrong in his young days; and others that it was all the result of whim.

Although he interfered in politics he did not take an active part in them. He merely intimated to his agent which candidates had won his favour. For years he had not made an appearance in the House of Lords. On the rare occasions when he went there it was to record a silent vote on some measure of great importance.

It so happened one of those big questions arose in June, and that his grace had made up his mind to visit London for a few days, and record his vote against some Radical measure which had been sent up from the Lower Chamber. It was of course an event in the great world when the rich Duke of Shropshire came up to London even for an hour.

It was known he did not intend marrying again. But then who knows anything for certain? And then there was the Marquis. Of course he would marry some day. It wasn't probable the present owner of the dukedom would like to think there was a chance of that magnificent collection of properties being broken up amongst an unknown number of remote cousins, and the fine old title dying out; for everyone knew there was no heir to the dukedom, however, looking back beyond the seven dukes, the property might be found settled. One thing was clear, namely, that all the property which had come into the family since the first duke must go goodness knew whither, for there was absolutely no heir. It was also perfectly clear that the title would become extinct; for, with but one exception, from the first to the sixth duke, the title and entailed estates had descended through a single file of sons, and, though many children may have been born, when each duke came into possession he was the last member of the ducal house. The one exception was that of the present Duke, for when he inherited the title he had a younger brother, who, however, died unmarried.

Such was the talk of general society about the Duke of Shropshire. Of course there were people who knew everything that would happen if the line of dukes failed; but then that was, after all, a very remote contingency, and the great question was: Would the Duke marry again? and whom would the Marquis marry?

Shropshire House is in Piccadilly. Cheyne had seen in one of the morning papers that the Duke was in town, and as he and Marion Durrant walked through Piccadilly that bright June noon, they met a bandy-legged common-looking man emerging from a crowd in the roadway.

"What is the matter?" asked Marion of Cheyne.

Cheyne raised himself on his toes and answered: "There's been a smash of some kind. I can see now. The pole of a 'bus has gone through the door of a brougham. That sort of thing comes of shaving corners too fine. I'll bet any money it is the brougham that was in fault."

Marion Durrant, the orphan of Captain Durrant of the Fusiliers, was three-and-twenty years of age, and lived with an invalid maiden aunt in a very quiet street in Knightsbridge. There Miss Traynor, Marion Durrant's aunt, had a neat little house, possessing all reasonable comforts, and even modest luxuries. She and her dead sister had each settled upon her by their father two hundred a year, and as May had inherited her mother's two hundred a year, their joint income was four hundred pounds. Although Miss Traynor was an invalid she was an excellent housekeeper, and, with the aid of a bright handy little maid-of-all-work, the small house in Knightsbridge was as well managed, as well kept, and as comfortable as any other in London.

To this home Charles Cheyne was free as the acknowledged lover of Marion Durrant. Miss Traynor was one of those good, genial, generous old souls who, while keeping a dignified reserve upon her feelings, thought nothing on earth too good for those whom she loved. At the threshold of the snug little home at Knightsbridge Cheyne laid aside all his grand airs. He never carried into that home the oppressive atmosphere of dukes and earls. Here he was simply the lively and kindly gentleman who loved his love with all his loyal heart, and did all in his power to enliven and amuse the guardian angel of his sweetheart.

Towards that quiet comfortable home he was conducting Miss Durrant when they encountered the crowd and the injured brougham. As they arrived at the door she said: "Won't you come in, Charlie?"

"I really can't," he answered. "I am already very late with my copy, and I must go home and attend to my duke. Otherwise I shall get into awful trouble with the proprietor of my duke. You cannot be hasty with your duke. You must treat him as if he was fat and scant of breath. You may have noticed that in my present duke I make him say 'hem,' 'hum,' very often. This is just to spread out the ducal speech. You can't expect to get as many articulate words out of a duke as out of an ordinary mortal, and the hem-hums are wonderfully efficacious."

Having taken leave of Marion, he turned his face east, and began walking back at a rapid rate towards his lodgings in Long Acre.

In the meantime the brougham, through which the pole of the omnibus had gone, had been driven along Piccadilly through Leicester Square to Long Acre. "Take the number of that omnibus," the occupant of the injured vehicle had said to the coachman as he stepped to the ground, "and then drive to Whiteshaw's in Long Acre, and tell him to repair that door."

The coachman had done as he was told, and by the time Cheyne got back to Long Acre the brougham had arrived, the horses had been unharnessed, and the coachman had got a man to lead the horses home.

When Cheyne arrived at the place he lived in he found Mr. Whiteshaw, with whom he was friendly, examining the injured brougham.

"That was an ugly smash," said the carriage-builder. "Nearly killed the Duke."

"What Duke?" asked Cheyne, with great interest.

"The Duke of Shropshire. See the arms on the other panel. He had a very narrow escape. The pole went slap through the door, and when the 'bus-driver threw his horses on their haunches the pole made a plunge up, and just barely missed the chin of the Duke."

"By Jove, I am very sorry for poor Regi."

"Who's Regi? the 'bus-driver? Is the 'bus-driver a friend of yours?"

"No, my dear friend, but the Duke, Reginald Francis Henry Cheyne, seventh Duke of Shropshire. He is a most particular friend of mine. The other day----let me see, how long ago is it? A fortnight? Well, say eighteen days ago, I had a letter from him asking me to go down to Silverview and stay a week or ten days with him. But, Whiteshaw, although it was excessively kind of his grace, you see, I tell you in confidence, I can't afford to go to such places. I am really only a poor man, although people will say the other thing, and it runs away with an awful lot of money to go to such places."

"I daresay it does. But I thought the Duke of Shropshire was a queer kind of moody man, who never had anyone at his house?" said the carriage-builder maliciously.

"You are quite right. He lives the life of a recluse. But he now and then will see an old friend. You must know he has rather a fancy for the stories I write--no accounting for tastes, you know--and when I go to him he always insists on my reading my manuscripts to him before they go to the printer. Very flattering, you know."

"But he never lives ashore. He is nearly always in his yacht with his son the Marquis of Southwold."

"Of course. It is aboard ship I always read to Regi and Southwold. Reading is all very well in the day, but I tell you it is no little difficulty to read by the light of a swinging lamp when a ship is lying at anchor and rolling. Where did this accident happen, Whiteshaw?"

"In Piccadilly, at noon."

"By Jove, it must be this smash I saw. I was just passing along, but took little or no notice, as at the time I was explaining some matters of court etiquette to Lady Evelina de Lacy, who is to be presented this year."

"It has never struck me before, Cheyne, that your name is the same as that of the Shropshire family. Can it be that you are related to it?"

"No, no. It is merely a coincidence. The name is not uncommon. My father was a poor gentleman, with no pretensions to blood-connection with a ducal house. Good-day, Whiteshaw."

"Good-day, Cheyne," cried out the carriage-builder; adding mentally: "There goes the greatest and the most harmless liar in London."

CHAPTER III.

A VILLAGE STORY.

Anerly is one of the smallest villages in Devonshire. It, in fact, does not rise to the dignity of a village, but is called one, rather out of objection to use the more unfamiliar word hamlet than its own particular claims. Such as it is, it stands at cross-roads, and although the resident population is small, many wayfarers of all degrees pass through it by day, not a few of whom draw up at the Beagle Inn--the only one in the place--to taste the cider, for which that house is famous all through the district. In Anerly there is a theory that a good-sized lump of bread and a good-sized piece of cheese and a pint of The Beagle cider form a repast at which the Emperor of China's nose would cease to turn up.

In dwelling thus on the cider, it must not be supposed other things at The Beagle were not of good quality. As a matter of fact, The Beagle prided itself on keeping nothing which was not of the very first quality. But the cider was what capped the climax, and gave a tone to the whole. In addition to the excellence of the cider, The Beagle had another great attraction: it was very favourably situated, and there was no window or door of it from which you could not see a quiet, soothing little landscape.

Whoever built the inn, in the time of the Stuarts, knew what he was about, and set the face of the house towards the prettiest landscape of all. As the men of Anerly sat smoking their long pipes and drinking their incomparable cider in front of The Beagle on summer evenings, they had before them a long stretch of winding and descending road, bordered at irregular intervals with fine elms and beeches. To the left lay a quiet valley, the lowest line of which was marked by a broad stream. To the right a hill thinly wooded, sloped upward to where the gaunt naked trunks of the pines stood out sharply against the darkening sky. Halfway down the winding road lay the small village church. Nothing could be more peaceful or soothing than the view from the front of The Beagle on a warm June night.

Half-a-dozen of the better-off men of the village met every evening at The Beagle. When the weather was wet they had their pipes and their cider in the front parlour, where the flash of the great fire on the ruddy sand strewn on the floor made one feel warm on entering. On warm nights, the men sat outside under a roof supported by pillars and trellis, up which climbed clematis and jasmine.

This June evening happening to be warm, the men were all seated out of doors under the verandah. As a rule, the conversation on such occasions was neither animated nor sustained. The clerk and sexton of the church, a wheelwright by trade, was by courtesy supposed to be the brain-carrier of the party; but he being a man of extremely few words, it seemed as though the weight of intelligence was against conversation. It was well known there were subjects on which Stephen Goolby could be interested. Any mention of Napoleon I. made him fire up with most unpatriotic ardour in favour of the Corsican. Upon the mention of the name of the Man of Destiny, Stephen Goolby would double up his fist and, smiting the table a mighty blow, cry out:

"The greatest general of this or of any other age was Napoleon Bonaparte. I tell you what it is, sir: if Napoleon put his foot on this country, with an army at his heels, there wouldn't be a man of

us alive now, and English would be as much a dead language as Latin or Greek or double Dutch."

Upon a suggestion from someone that the Corsican met his match at Waterloo, Stephen Goolby would cry out:

"His match, sir, his match! Why, sir, answer me this, if you can: Weren't the Allies beaten when the Prussians came up? Answer me that, if you can; but I think you'll find it a stiff one. Look here, sir, if the battle was won by the Allies when the Prussians came up, what made old Wellington go about the camp all the day, thumping his chest, and saying, 'For the love of Heaven, send me night or the Prussians'? Tell me, what did he mean by that? I tell you, sir, only them Prussians came up then, every man Jack of us would be a Frenchman now, and instead of answering the service down there in good English 'Amens,' they'd be parleyvooing, so that neither you, sir, nor I would have comfort or peace."

It so happened on the June night referred to, there was exceptional reason for the exercise of the gifts which it had pleased Providence to bestow on Stephen Goolby. Edward Graham, a young landscape painter, on a walking and sketching tour through Devonshire, had arrived at Anerly that night, put up at The Beagle, and now made one of the party under the verandah.

Upon an occasion such as the present--that is, when there was company--Goolby having made the allusion to Anerly church, it became the duty of one of the regular company to suggest that Stephen Goolby had a story to tell in connection with that church and a great temptation which befell him. This having been done, Stephen Goolby refilled his pipe, put his head carefully on one side, so as to open the valves of his memory, and spoke:

"I won't do myself or anyone else hurt if I say I am close up to sixty-five years of age. I am strong and hearty still, I thank God, and can do a fair day's work, though I'm not so brisk as I was once.

"For seven-and-thirty years I have been clerk and sexton to Anerly Church; and the thing that lies in my memory now took place when I was about thirty years old, and when, as I was just then trying to set up a home for myself and my poor wife, who is dead and gone, a little ready money would have been more useful than any time before or since.

"A few months before the great temptation came in my way--I am now speaking of five-and-thirty years ago--a gentleman drove into the village one day. He had a young girl with him. I did not see him when he drove into the village; but I saw him and her often afterwards. He took the best room in The Beagle for her, and having given great instructions to the landlady, old Mrs. Timmons, dead and gone long ago, he drove away again; and we did not see him any more for a few days.

"As I said before, I have often seen both him and her since. I've been in London in my time, and seen as handsome faces as any man alive, I'll bet my life; but never did I see anywhere such a lovely creature as that young girl the gentleman left here at The Beagle five-and-thirty years ago. He was a fine tall man, with an open free manner as you'd please to meet. Soon we got word there was going to be a marriage, and that there was some secret at the bottom of all of it. What that secret was we never found out from that day to this.

"Mrs. Timmons noticed that the young girl often wept and cried when he was away; but when he came back she seemed ready to die of joy. I've never seen a prettier picture in all my life than when he took her on his arm and walked down the village with her. The people all came out of doors to look at her and him; for he was a fine man too, well made and shapely.

"Well, after a little while, we heard that the wedding was to be soon, and that it wasn't to be by banns, but by license. In time it came. There was no bridesmaid or best man. They walked down to the church together, went in, were married. I gave away the bride and signed the register. Old Billy Newton, long since dead and gone, he that led the choir then, was the other witness.

"The two left the church, and got in a chaise standing by, and drove away towards Moorfield.

"Although I did not forget the marriage, I had other things on my mind, and I gave no thought to it. I had been married a couple of years myself, and, between my trade, and my duties at the church, and shifting to my new house and the birth of a daughter, I had my hands and my head full of my own affairs.

"About six months after the marriage, who must ride up to the door of this very same Beagle but the gentleman who had married the lovely young girl in the church down there. They took his horse round. Those that saw him when he came said he looked excited and wild-like. He ordered them to keep a room for him, and to get him some supper, no matter what; and then he came straight on to me.

"'Goolby,' says he as free as if he had known me all his life, 'I want to have a few words with you in private.'

"It was to the old house he came, and we were just leaving it for good, my wife and myself, taking a last look round to see we had forgotten nothing. I beckoned to my wife to go on, and,

shutting the door, I asked him to step back into one of the empty rooms.

"'Goolby,' says he, 'I see you are house-shifting. Five hundred pounds would be very useful to you now.'

"'It would be a small fortune to me at any time, sir,' says I.

"'Goolby,' says he, putting one hand on my shoulder, and putting the other into my pocket, 'I've put five one-hundred-pound Bank of England notes in your pocket now.'

"I felt all of a tremble. I put my hand in my pocket and took out what he had put in. I felt that weak then you could have knocked me down with a little push. The sweat came out on my forehead and my throat felt twisted up. Here was more money than I could hope to lay by in a lifetime in my hand--my own, he said.

"'If you please, sir,' I says, 'I'd rather not take the money. Put it away, sir, and let me go.'

"I felt getting weaker and weaker every minute.

"'Nonsense!' says he. 'Put the money in your pocket, and don't be a fool.'

"'I can't take it, sir. You're not giving it to me for nothing; and I know I cannot do for any money what you want,' says I; for I guessed at once what he wanted.

"'What do I want?' says he, getting white and red all by turns.

"'It's something about the register, sir; and I can't think of it any longer. I must go now,' says I, 'There's your money.' And with these words I stuffed the notes into the pocket of his riding-coat, and opened the door and ran home.

"I did not tell the rector. I was too much afraid. But that night, and every night for a fortnight after, I slept in the vestry, with an axe and a crowbar handy, but no one ever came. I never saw the gentleman since; and the leaf is still in the book.

"'And what are the names on that leaf?' asked Edward Graham, the young artist.

"George Temple Cheyne and Harriet Mansfield."

CHAPTER IV.

A TOWN STORY.

"It is the fifty-second chapter," said the Duke of Long Acre. "You will remember, May," his grace continued, as he turned over the proof-slips in his hand, "you will remember, May, that in the chapter before this Antony Belmore had been out of employment for two months, and that he was at his wits' end to know how to get even bread."

"Yes, and he had a broken pane of glass to let in the cold wind; and that there was a wide gaping fireplace to let down more cold; and that he had got rid of his violoncello; and that his landlord was pressing him horribly----"

"For one pound, eighteen, and sixpence, rent."

"But, Charlie, what is the good of writing uncomfortable stories, that have no pious object? I can understand why Sunday-school tales are dismal."

"My dear May, the public won't have anything but groans and tears. If you can manage yells for them, all the better. Gladiators don't fight now in the arena. Gentle creatures like you, darling, have no chance of voting violent death to a man by holding down your thumbs in the Colosseum. The modern novel is the portable arena of to-day; and gentle darlings like you, May, must be permitted to view the death-agony of men and women, or you would not patronise the libraries."

"Charlie, if you dare to say any more such horrible untruths, I'll go down to the kitchen, put on an apron, and make the pastry for to-morrow."

"If you do that, I'll go down and eat up all the nasty indigestible dough; and then what will you say at the inquest?"

"Take your arm away, sir; I won't stay here another minute. You have, I think, made up your mind to be disagreeable."

"Well, run away now, if you like."

"But you are holding me, and I can't stir."

"And I mean to hold you if you will not sit still while I read the chapter."

"Oh dear, you are a horrible tease! There, let me go; I promise not to run away."

"Very well. Now don't stir."

The Duke of Long Acre and Marion Durrant, his sweetheart, were seated in one of the smallest conservatories in London. This conservatory was situated at the back of Miss Traynor's house in Knightsbridge. The house and all that it contained, with the exception of Marion's aunt, the owner, were small. Two people could not possibly walk abreast in the hall, nor up the stairs. It was a saying of the Duke's that one of those days he should get wedged in that hall, and would have to be extracted from it by violent means. There was a tiny front drawing-room and a tiny back drawing-room, and between them a pair of folding-doors which always stood open. At the rear of the back drawing-room was the little conservatory in which Marion and the Duke were seated. The conservatory was as wide as the room, and three feet deep. Owing to shelves at the ends and sides for flowerpots, the absolute dimensions of the place were much reduced, and it was impossible for two people to sit at the same side; so when the Duke held Marion he was standing beside her. He had risen from his chair opposite her a few minutes before. The conservatory was separated from the back drawing-room by a glass door opening into the room. At the back of the conservatory was a glass door yielding outwards on a little wooden landing, which, by means of a flight of wooden steps, communicated with the very small garden below.

Now, this being one of the fairest days of June, the door opening outwards on the landing and the door opening inwards on the back drawing-room were open. It was one of those days which make the old young, the young poetical, and love the sweetest pastime for those who have anyone to love. The day was in the fresh warm youth of the year; all the asperities of winter and spring had passed away, and the time had not yet been fatigued with summer heats; the air was moist and full of the scent of young leaves. In the dustiest street of all London there was some faint suggestion of the forest. According to the calendar it was summer; but really it was the summer end of spring, when the land is heaviest with leaves and the air is thickest with the songs of birds. There is a savour of resin in the breeze which made those who had been country-born, and were now penned in the city, raise in unguarded moments their heads, and listen for the murmur of the brittle pine-leaves.

"With your kind permission, or rather, having plainly shown you that I do not want your permission, kind or otherwise, I will now read to you the fifty-second chapter:

"'His tall thin form had shrunken almost to a skeleton. Privation and sorrow had at length broken down his health and spirits. Although he had scarcely reached his fiftieth year, he was already an old man. His eyes were dim; his cheeks had fallen in; his hands were emaciated and tremulous, his eyes were deep-sunken and unnaturally bright.

"'All the clothes he possessed were on him, with the exception of one shirt, a pair of socks, and three or four dilapidated collars. His elbows were through his coat; his trousers were frayed at the edges; the uppers and soles of his boots had, in more than one place, parted company.

"'He lived in a back attic off Cursitor Street, near Chancery Lane. There he had contracted to pay four shillings a week for an unfurnished room. One part of the contract had been fulfilled, for it might almost be said with literal truth that the room was unfurnished. It contained one chair, which had been cane-seated once, but which was now a skeleton. Across the framework of this seat had been placed a board. On this board were now set a cup and saucer and small black crockeryware teapot, a knife and fork, and a common delf plate. These, with the exception of a tin candlestick and a battered old quart tin kettle, were all the articles connected with the kitchen or table which could be seen in the place. In a corner farthest from the skylight lay a wretched stretcher, and by the side of the stretcher a common soap-box, which served as a seat, while the board across the chair answered as a table. Under the broken pane in the skylight stood a basin, and on the chimney-piece were a piece of soap, a worn-out comb and brush, a towel, and two small jugs.

"'Beyond the things mentioned above there was absolutely nothing in the room, except the most wretched of all things--Antony Belmore himself. He was sitting on the box at the head of his miserable stretcher, when a knock came to the door.

"'"Come in," said Belmore. Only two people ever called on him now--his landlord and his friend Valentine de Montmorency.

"'Mr. Jeremiah Watkins entered. He was a stout prosperous-looking man of about the same age as Belmore. "Well," said Mr. Jeremiah Watkins, the landlord, coming into the room, "got any money for me, Mr. Belmore?"

"'The musician raised his head and shook it sadly. "Nothing yet, nothing yet."

"""It is Saturday, you know, and I'm blowed if I don't think I've had plenty of patience. One eighteen six is no joke, you know."

"'Again Belmore shook his head. "I have earned nothing for months. Nothing."

"""I know that. It's bad for you; but it's bad for me also. What am I to do about my money?"

"""I can only ask you to wait--to wait until I get something to do; then I'll pay you. How am I to pay you when I am idle, and have been idle for months?"

"""I own it's hard on you; but then, you see, this is harder on me. You are out of situation, and therefore you get no money, which is natural and proper, as I say; but here is my room in situation, as I may say, and it gets no wages. Now that's not fair or reasonable, I say."

"""I cannot answer you, Mr. Watkins. I am as sorry as you can be that I am not able to pay. What can I do? tell me, what can I do?"

"'Mr. Watkins owned three houses in this alley. Each one was let in tenements, and in all he had sixteen tenants. But in Antony Belmore he knew he had a tenant far superior in mind and manners to any of his other lodgers. And yet, although he was not by nature a hard man, and although he knew he was dealing with a gentleman, and although he would not do anything harsh to poor old Belmore for a much larger sum, yet he could not be importunate with graciousness. He had one of those hard, blunt, direct natures which can never step out of the routine manner, no matter how much their minds may out of the routine course. Said he:

"""But what I look at is this, how are you ever going to pay? You are out of situation; you see no chance of getting a situation. You've sold or pawned all you could sell or pawn. Even your old fiddle is gone----"

"""It is," said Belmore, with laconic sadness.

"""Then how, in the name of all that's black and blue, are you ever going to get any money if that old fiddle is up the spout? That's what's the puzzle to me."

"'Belmore rose, and clasping his long, knotty, emaciated hands in front of him, said:

"""I cannot say more than that I am very sorry I cannot pay you Mr. Watkins. If you wish it, I am willing to go. If I go I have my choice of two things--the workhouse or the river----"

"""And you would choose the river?"

"""And I would choose the river."

"""That is the way always with you----" Mr. Watkins paused. Belmore waited for him. "With all you fools," said Mr. Watkins, using the most tender word his nature would allow, instead of the most offensive, as he had intended when he had set out with the sentence.

"""I will go if you wish it," said Belmore meekly, making a motion first to an old battered hat that lay on the floor, and then towards the door.

"""Who asked you to go?" said Watkins doggedly.

"""No one has asked me," answered Belmore; "but of course you have a perfect right to ask me to go if you wish."

"""I didn't ask you to go, and I don't ask you to go, and it's manners to wait to be asked," said Watkins ungraciously. "You may stay another week. At the end of a week I hope you will have got some employment."

"""Mr. Watkins, I should be deceiving you if I led you to suppose I shall have got anything to do in a week. This is the dull season," said the poor gentleman, dropping both his hands and looking hopelessly at his landlord.

"""Now, Mr. Belmore," said Watkins; "don't you think it a little rough on me to take me so cool? I tell you, who owe me rent, you may stay another week, and I say I hope you may get something to do in the meantime; and you then round on me, and tell me there is no use in my hoping you'll be able to get anything to do. I say it's downright rough on me. It's like telling me I'm a fool for trusting you any further."

"""Indeed I did not mean to imply anything of the kind," said the poor gentleman, in a tone of deep concern. "But if I told you I hoped to be able to get anything to do in a week, it would be a lie."

"""But I am a business man, and I like to be dealt with in a business way; and a business man would never say there was no chance of his getting employment in a week."

"'"Unfortunately, I not am a business man. I never have been one."

"'"More's the pity. You see, if you were only a business man, you would have a much better chance of getting something to do, and you would not make such unreasonable answers. But there, there; don't say any more about it. I am only wasting my time talking to you."

"'"I am very sorry it should be so," said the poor gentleman; "very sorry. If I had any property-----" He paused, and looked at the dilapidated chair, the soap-box, and the stretcher.

"'"Bah!" cried the landlord; "I'm not going to touch them. I'm a business man and no fool, but I'm not a wild beast. Do your best now this week, and try and get something to do."

"'"I am sure I am very grateful to you, Mr. Watkins."

"'"Grateful! grateful! What's the good of being grateful? Be businesslike; that's the main thing. Next week you'll owe me more than two pounds, so stir yourself and get something to do."

"'Without another word Mr. Jeremiah Watkins left the room, closing the door softly after him.

"'When the landlord had gone, Belmore took a few feeble steps across the room, and then staggered back again to his old place by the head of the bed. No fire burned in the huge yawning grate, on the bottom bars of which the cold grey light of a winter afternoon fell through the chimney-pot above. Through the skylight nothing could be seen but the leaden November sky. It was raw and damp and dismal.

"'Belmore dropped his head on his hands and rested his elbows on his knees. Thus he sat in thought for a long while without moving. At last he raised his head and shook it gravely, smiled sadly, and whispered:

"'"It is more than likely I shall have proved myself, according to his idea, a fool; for a gentleman"--at this word he drew himself together, paused for a moment, and then finished--"for a gentleman cannot afford to die of starvation in a garret."

"'Then his head fell once more. Once more he dropped his face into the hollow of his hands, and resting his elbows on his knees, sat motionless.

"'So deeply absorbed was he in his thought he did not hear a brisk step on the stairs or a faint knock at the door. The knock was repeated. Belmore heard it now. He raised his head slowly, compressed his lips for a moment, and then whispered: "If he says another word about the rent I will not look at to-morrow." He arose, and having steadied himself by holding the chimney-piece for a second, crossed the room with an air of dignity and breeding in pathetic contrast with his mean attire and squalid surroundings.

"'He opened the door and exclaimed, holding out his hand: "Ah, De Montmorency, is it you? I am delighted to see you. Come in."

"'All at once the firmness died out of his manner, and he uttered a sob. Of this the visitor took no notice, but, walking to the middle of the room where stood the chair with the board across it, he began humming a lively air as he put down on the board a few parcels. When he had given Belmore a minute to recover himself, he faced round briskly and said gaily:

"'"Any good news about yourself, Belmore?"

"'"No."

"'"I'm sorry. But, if your luck is bad mine has been good. I have come into money. What do you think of that, Belmore?"

"'"I am sincerely glad to hear it. You did not expect it, did you?"

"'"I had no more expectation of coming into money than you have. Blessed are those who expect nothing. I have run through three fortunes; and no man I ever met had a chance of running through more than three fortunes. Who ever heard of any other fellow having had four fortunes?"

"'"Is it much?"

"'"Half-a-crown."

"'"What!"

"'"Half-a-crown."

"'"It's a poor joke, de Montmorency; a poor joke."

"'"I think it's a capital joke. Now, if, as I came along the street, I lost the half-a-crown, I'd consider it a poor joke. I was looking over an old waistcoat, when, hey presto! out drops half-a-crown. I'd like to know what you'd call that, if not a good joke."

"'The speaker was a short little man, with dark eyes and hair, and a swarthy southern complexion.

"'"Ah, De Montmorency, if I had only such spirits as yours!"

"'"It isn't the best, at all, Belmore. It's only a quartern of London gin. Please observe this is no joke. No; look here, Belmore, you mustn't be offended if I have taken a liberty. I have long been wishing you would dine with me; but I've been so cruelly hard up I couldn't do the thing decently at an outside place. But, as we are both Bohemians, I've ventured to order the rag-and-bone merchant in the Lane to send over a peck of coals and a bundle of wood. I waited to see the boy start with the coal and wood before I left the place; and then I ran off and got a few little things. So I'm going--if you will not think it a liberty--to light up a fire here and cook a bit of luncheon, and ask you to have a bit with me, Belmore. You are not offended?"

"'"If, De Montmorency, it were any one but you----"

"'"Ah, that is right, my dear Belmore; that is right! That young scamp must have stopped to play with other boys. Ah, here he is! You young scamp! Put it there on the hearthstone, and, look you, here's a penny for yourself. Now vanish! Well, my dear Belmore, I don't think much of our coal merchant. When I am Comptroller of the Household I shall not give him the contract. I shall be very corrupt in those days. I shall take bribes--when I can. Now there is a piece of undesirable slate. If either of us had young children that slate might be useful in forming their young minds and making them familiar with figures."

"'"Thank Heaven we have no children."

"'"Ay, ay, ay! Have it as you will, have it as you will. No doubt you are right. Now you don't happen to have a frying-pan?"

"'"No, I have nothing of the kind."

"'"Never mind; we'll toast the rashers and fortunately a toasting-fork is within reach."

"'"There is not one in this place."

"'"I'll make a capital one out of three pieces of this wood, with the aid of string. I think this fire will light now. It is beautifully designed and excellently built. I am a connoisseur in fires. I have been accused of resorting to bludgeon tactics. But I don't care what they may call my tactics, they always succeed. First you get a few pieces of paper--if they are greasy, all so much the better--and you roll them up loosely, as I did the piece that came round the rashers. Then you put on as much wood as you judge sufficient, taking care to cross-hatch the pieces, as an artist would say. Then put on more wood loosely until you think there is too much. After that put on more wood until you are perfectly sure there is too much. When you have done this, lay on eight pieces of coal neither larger nor smaller than a bantam's egg, and upon these eight lay three pieces as big as a turkey's egg. After that set fire to your paper, as I do. I will now, while the fire is kindling and clearing, make our toasting-fork."

"'He rose from his knees before the grate, and proceeded to splice two thin pieces of firewood, one on either side of a thick piece, having first cut a slanting bit out of the ends of the thinner ones where he applied them to the thick one. These prongs he had only to sharpen.

"'While De Montmorency was engaged in making his toasting-fork, Belmore, attracted by the unfamiliar blaze and glow in that chill room, drew the soap-box to the fire, and sat down to enjoy the heat.

"'Nothing ages a man more quickly than cold and hunger, and as Belmore sat before the mounting flames he looked seventy.

"'"There is no fender," said De Montmorency; "but I'll tell you what we'll do. We'll put the tea-pot down on the ground, take the lid off, and put a saucer on the top of the teapot. That will make a capital gravy-dish to catch the rich nectar from the rashers.'

"'All this time Belmore never moved or spoke. With his thin hands hanging down over big knees, he simply gave himself to the animal enjoyment of warmth, a pleasure he had not known for a long time.

"'At last the toasting began; and now, for the first time, the attention of Belmore was withdrawn from the fire to be concentrated on the food. He had tasted food since he had felt the heat of a fire, but that food had been the simplest and most scanty. Convicts would have mutinied if they had been kept on such a scale as the poor gentleman had been obliged to adopt for a month; that is, if convicts, after a month of such diet, would have had strength enough to lift up their hands in menace.

"'At length the first piece of bacon was toasted. With a large pocket-knife De Montmorency cut off a slice of bread from a loaf, which had formed one of the parcels he had brought in; and having placed this on the chair-table, he removed everything else. Then he took up the saucer from the fire and put that on the table, and dropped the hissing crisp bacon into the rich straw-

coloured gravy. He poured some gin out of the bottle into a cup, and added water from a jug.

"'"You go on and eat now," the visitor said; "I'll cook and serve, and will naturally wait. I'll make a gravy-dish of a slice of bread this time. You don't object to a slice of bread soaked in red-hot dripping of toasted bacon? Of course you don't. I should like to see the man with a wholesome appetite who did. Pretend the bacon is fish, and that we have lent our fish-forks to the bishop who lives on the landing below this, and that you have to eat your fish with a fork and a piece of bread, and then all you've got to do is to fancy my knife is an old-fashioned fork, and there is nothing more to be desired."

"'As Belmore had cut off the first piece of bacon and was raising it to his lips, someone knocked at the door. Belmore put down the bit untasted, and said, in a tremulous voice: "De Montmorency, will you ask him to leave me in peace, or tell me I must go? Ask him to spare me or send me away."

"'De Montmorency opened the door softly and looked out.

"'"Is Mr. Belmore in?" asked a very low voice.

"'"Yes," answered De Montmorency. "May I ask what is the nature of your business?"--he kept the door partly closed so that the man outside could not see in--"because Mr. Belmore is engaged at present."

"'"I want to see him on very particular business indeed."

"'"Of what nature?"

"'"Well, I am a lawyer."

"'"If it is anything about the rent," said Belmore, "I am willing to go, but I cannot pay; nor do I think I shall be able to pay next week."

"'"As Mr. Belmore has spoken of paying rent, I may as well tell you at once that I am in a position to say he can pay it now."

"'"No, no, no!" cried the poor gentleman; "I really haven't any money."

"'"But I will pay it for him, with the greatest pleasure. I have very good news for Mr. Belmore, if I may see him."

"'"Good news?" repeated De Montmorency. "Did I understand you to say you have good news for Mr. Belmore?"

"'"Unquestionably. Very good news indeed."

"'"As Mr. Belmore is very particularly engaged at present, would it not be better if he called upon you at your office in half an hour?"

"'"Yes, that will suit admirably. You are a friend of Mr. Belmore?"

"'"Oh yes; I think I may say I am."

"'"Then will you allow me the privilege of a few moments' conversation with you, sir?"

"'"Certainly." And De Montmorency went out on the landing and closed the door.

"'He found there a tall stoutish man of middle age and very dark complexion. The stranger moved a few paces from the door, and then spoke in a very low, confidential, and friendly voice. "My name is Jackson. I am senior partner of the firm of Jackson and Connington, Lothbury. You are a friend of Mr. Belmore?"

"'"Yes; I think his only friend."

"'"I am glad to have this opportunity of having a little chat with you, for the news I have for him is not only good, but so astoundingly good that we must break it to him gently. I will not now trouble you further than to ask you if you can tell me who Mr. Antony Belmore's father was, and where and when was Mr. Belmore born? We know all about it. I ask the question merely to put all doubt of his identity out of the way finally."

"'"Mr. Belmore--whom I have known since we were boys, and whose father I also knew--is the only son of George Belmore, of Berley, in Lincolnshire. I think Mr. Belmore is about fifty years of age."

"'"All right, all right! You may break to him as gently as you can that he has fallen into an exceedingly good thing. Our firm has just found out he is heir to a fine estate. You will, I trust, excuse me for having taken the liberty of bringing this with me: but we thought it possible Mr. Belmore might want a little money before he opens his own banking account to-morrow or the day after. You will, I think, find fifty in notes and fifty in gold here."

"'"Thank you very much, I'm sure. It was very thoughtful of you to bring this. Would it put you to any inconvenience if we did not call upon you for a couple of hours instead of half an hour? Some of this"--he held up the money--"might in the meantime be usefully employed."

"'He touched his coat with his other hand.

"'"Oh, I understand," said the lawyer with a sympathetic look towards the door, behind which the poor gentleman concealed his poverty. "Let it be two hours. That will be--let me see--five o'clock. Good-day."

"'"Good-day," said De Montmorency, dropping the money into his trousers pocket. "The shock of knowing he had fallen into even a hundred pounds would be too great now."

"'He re-entered the room. "It was really good news, after all--I don't know how good yet; but, anyway, 'tis good enough for him to give me some money for you on account."

"'"Did he give you enough to pay Watkins?"

"'"How much is that?"

"'"One pound eighteen and sixpence."

"'"Oh, yes. He gave me five pounds. Here you are. Come now, and put on your hat. You see this lawyer believes in your luck, or he wouldn't put down his money without even being asked."

"'"And do you, too, believe there is some good luck in store for me?"

"'"Most emphatically."

"'"Then I'll go and pay Watkins, and never come back again."

"'"You must send for those things."

"'"Those wretched things! Why should I send for them? They would only bring up many of my cruellest memories."

"'"Ay, but you mustn't leave them here; you must take them away, if you only burn them. Suppose you are to turn out very lucky? Suppose you are the real King of Burmah; then, of course, these things will be bought up, and exhibited as curiosities. But come, put on your hat. We won't waste time with Watkins. Come out, and we will have something better in the form of luncheon than we were just about to eat. I have arranged with the lawyer that we need not call upon him for a couple of hours.

"'"Belmore had eaten the slice of bread and rasher. He had drunk a little of the gin, too, and had already begun to revive. Casting a look down at his wretched clothes, he said:

"'"De Montmorency, it was very good of you to prevent the lawyer seeing how things are here. But I am not much better off now. I am scarcely in a plight to call upon this gentleman."

"'"That will be all right. Suppose he gave me ten instead of five pounds for you? You can get all you want. Finish your gin, and I'll have some, and then we will go."

"'In a few minutes they were in Holborn. De Montmorency took Belmore into a ready-made clothing shop, and got him a suit of clothes, an ulster, and a hat. They came out, and then got boots and gloves. After this, De Montmorency surveyed his friend from top to toe, and muttered with a sigh:

"'"You'll do. Now let us go and have a good solid meal somewhere. But stay. Ask me to dine or lunch with you, Belmore; for you are the financier. I am only your agent."

"'"Where shall we go, De Montmorency?"

"'"To The Holborn."

"'"But I am afraid you have already spent more than the lawyer gave you."

"'"Let us go to The Holborn, by all means. As to money, that lawyer gave me a hundred pounds, not ten; and now here is the balance in gold, notes, silver, and copper."

"'"A hundred pounds! It must be good luck, indeed, when he gave you a hundred pounds! Why, this morning I should have thought ten pounds miraculous luck, and here now am I getting a hundred on account! De Montmorency, it must be wonderful luck!"

"'They went to The Holborn, and had a substantial luncheon, and a bottle of burgundy between them. Belmore paid the, bill, and gave the waiter half-a-crown. He said "Thank you, sir. Very much obliged, indeed;" and flew for Belmore's ulster as though Satan were at his heels.

"'When they got into the street, Belmore called a hansom, and told the man to drive to Jackson and Connington, Lothbury. As soon as the cab drew up, De Montmorency said:

"'"I'll wait for you in the cab. I'll ask the driver to let down the glass, and I shall be all right and comfortable."

"'"But won't you come up with me?"

"'"No, I think it better not, I am almost sure the lawyers do not want me, and I should not like to feel that, if I went up. I shall be quite comfortable. Run away now, Belmore, and hurry back and tell me you are the real King of Burmah."

"'Belmore did not care to force him against his wish; so he stepped out of the cab and walked into the house and upstairs.

"'He had been gone about half an hour, when a man dashed out of that door and rushed at the hansom, crying:

"'"Engaged?"

"'"Yes, sir."

"'"By whom?"

"'"Tall gentleman in ulster coat--gone upstairs half an hour ago."

"'"All right! You'll do! He's taken suddenly ill, and I want you to drive me for a doctor. The job is a sovereign, remember!"

"'"But there's a gentleman inside."

"'"De Montmorency knocked at the glass, and the driver drew it up. De Montmorency said to the man on the pathway:

"'"Mr. Belmore ill, did you say?"

"'"Yes, sir; taken suddenly ill."

"'De Montmorency leaped out, crying:

"'"Jump in, jump in! I'll run up and see him."

"'When he reached the room where Mr. Jackson and his partner stood, he found Belmore lying on a couch deadly white.

"'"Mr. de Montmorency, this is my partner, Mr. Connington. Mr. Connington, this is Mr. de Montmorency, a friend of his Grace."

"'"His Grace be----!" said De Montmorency. "I am a friend of Mr. Belmore. What's the matter with him?"

"'"His Grace the Duke of Fenwick has fainted upon hearing the honours and wealth that have suddenly come upon him.'*

"'"And who, in the name of Heaven, is His Grace the Duke of Fenwick?"

"'"The person you knew as Mr. Antony Belmore is Duke of Fenwick, with a rent-roll of ninety thousand a year!"'"

Here Cheyne finished reading, and throwing down the proofs, said:

"Well, May, what do you think of it?"

"Oh, I think it very clever indeed, only--only----"

"Yes, my ungrateful and critical sweetheart?"

"Only--only--doesn't everyone know who the heir to a dukedom is, like the heir to a kingdom?"

"No; everyone knows nothing."

"But doesn't the Duke himself know who his heir is? Or doesn't the House of Commons, or someone?"

"Dukes know absolutely nothing at all, and the House of Commons knows less."

While Charles Cheyne was reading chapter fifty-two in the little conservatory to his darling sprightly May, the Duke of Shropshire, having voted against the detested Radicals, was returning by express train to Silverview Castle, and Edward Graham was seated in front of the Beagle Inn, Anerly, painting the peaceful valley with Anerly Church in the near middle distance.

CHAPTER V.

UNDER ANERLY BRIDGE.

Although the view from the portico in front of the Beagle Inn at Anerly was very lovely, it would by no means make a good picture. It was too broad and monotonous and scattered. There was no composition in it. The pleasure derived from looking down that peaceful slope and valley was gained by glancing at it unconsciously from several points of view rather than from any particular one. If you fixed your eyes on the central or road line, no doubt you commanded Anerly Church and some fine trees and the wide plain below; but then there was no right-hand or left-hand frame to the picture, and the effect was insipid, if not distracting. If you looked through the trees you had the broad valley and the silver streak of stream; but you missed the church and the pine-clad slope which lent the romantic air to the whole scene.

Edward Graham was not a great artist. He was one of those indolent men who study art no more than the study yields pleasure. He liked painting and artists, but preferred the society of artists to that of a lonely easel, a laborious sketch-book. He was a Bohemian born, not made. He loved art for what it brought him from without more than for any divine joy it aroused within. By fortune he was poor, and by nature idle. He did not like doing anything; but of all occupations that could bring him money he disliked painting least. Therefore he painted for his bread. If he had been rich--so much did he enjoy the atmosphere of art, and the companionship of those who follow art--he would have painted all the same, that he might be entitled to smoke pipes and discuss pictures with better painters than he. He was one of those men who, although earning their bread by a profession, are amateurs to the last, one of those to whom talk of art is dearer than the use of artist's tools. He always wore a brown velveteen coat, a soft hat with a broad brim, and a Cambridge-blue tie. He was about twenty-eight years of age, of medium height, lightly built, and of dark complexion; the most remarkable thing in his face being a pair of large, round, brown eyes. In manner he was cordial, enthusiastic, almost boisterous.

The morning after Edward Graham had heard the story of Stephen Goolby's temptation was bright with dew and sunshine, and sweet with spices from the pine-trees and brisk balm of the meadows. Young Graham was on a walking tour. In his knapsack he carried two clean flannel shirts, a few collars, toilette brushes, and a comb; a couple of pair of thick knitted stockings, and a razor and strop; for Edward Graham shaved his chin and cheeks, wearing no hair on his face but a pair of moustaches. At the back of his knapsack was strapped a small rectangular japanned case, containing a large sketching-pad, three small canvases, a mahlstick, moist water-colours, oil-colours, brushes, and so on. A stout walking-stick he carried was a folded-up easel, and his knapsack served as a seat when he was painting or sketching in the open air.

On this beautiful morning in June Graham rose early, and, having filled and lighted a briar-root pipe, strolled out in front of the Beagle Inn. He took a leisurely survey of the place, drew his hat knowingly on the side of his head, as though to show the crows--the only living things in view--that Nature might be very clever in her way, but that she could not impose on him, and that he was about to probe her to the core.

He lounged indolently down the winding road that led by Anerly Church to the valley and broad stream beyond. He had his hands in the pockets of his velveteen shooting-jacket, as, with hat on one side and head on the other, and legs moving loosely and without any premeditation, he strolled down the hill.

As soon as he got near Anerly Church he paused, and, turning half round, looked up the pine-clad slope. After a careful scrutiny of a few minutes, he shook his head gloomily at it, as though he had expected and deserved much better treatment at its hands. Then, drawing his jacket tightly round his hips in a leisurely and dejected way, he continued his descent.

When he got as far as Anerly Church he paused again and looked round him. There was a slight relaxation of his critical stare, and a glance of approval in his large brown eyes. The approval was not so much of the landscape as of the fact that he, Edward Graham, approved of himself for having found out a suitable standpoint from which to make a picture of the place. For, give Nature all her due, what was the good of setting forth fair landscapes if no one with an artistic eye and artistic skill came her way to paint them?

The aspect which the young artist selected was gentle and charming as the soul who loves peaceful England could desire. Beneath the road ran a small stream.

From the right-hand side of the road, as one went down from the village, the ground sloped

rapidly towards the valley below. The little stream running under the road had worn a deep narrow ravine, which expanded lower down, and over this rose a gaunt stone bridge supporting the road. The sides of this glen were lined with mountain ash, silver beeches, splay alders, gigantic ferns, and tangles of broad-bladed grasses, and masses of mingled bush and bramble and shrub, down to the golden mosses that slept upon the dark cold rocks above the sparkling curves of falling water. And below each tiny cascade lay a level miniature swamp, with a few huge flags standing up in each green, rush-fringed, open space.

On the slope of this glen, and on the slope of the great valley, stood Anerly Church, a couple of hundred yards from the bridge. Past the church the glen opened, and the dwarf vegetation near the bridge gave way to lofty pines, whose tops made a long sombre arch over the stream. Beyond this dark arch lay a blaze of green light, and a scarf of flaming white satin, where the valley and the stream caught the full sunlight.

"This will be jolly!" said Edward Graham, as he scaled the low parapet to the approach of the bridge, and threw himself down on the slope of the glen. "That archway is partly dry; I'll walk up in it until I get the picture focussed, and then I'll paint it. The bridge is so high there is sure to be plenty of light."

But when he got under the arch, and had picked his way to the rear of it, he altered his mind slightly. "By Jove!" he cried, for a moment looking at the startling effect of light and shade. "I don't know whether Salvator Rosa or Rembrandt would have admired this the more, but I am going to paint it; and instead of using the arch merely as a means of focussing the scene, I will paint the whole blessed lot, archway and stalactites, water under the archway and all."

The picture was striking.

By the sober light of the vault it was possible to make out with dim distinctness the outline of every object in it. This dimness did not arise from want of light, but from the fact that the floor and the sides of the vault were damp, and the outlines of damp objects in such a light are always uncertain to the eye. The archway looked north and south, and now a small portion of the western inner wall had caught a beam of the early sun, and the water in a pool at the eastern side, struck by the rays refracted by the wall, threw a blue and brown patch of trembling light on the middle of the roof. This light in return fell into another pool at the eastern side, where it made a trembling veil of orange-brown and golden-green; while all round, on the grey walls, the white roof, and the ashen stalactites, were scattered wandering hints of prismatic fire, which seemed rather to come through the stone than to be reflected from the water below.

Thus the huge barrel formed by the bridge, with its wavering, dull, dappled, transparent lights, was connected by one patch of brightness on the western pier and vault with the foreground of blue-and-white water, and rich green and yellow stripes of the rushes and grasses and underwood in the flat light of the glen. Beyond the flat light was the gloomy tunnel formed by the pines, where the yellows turned to browns, and the greens to sad blues; and the water flowed furtively from dull olive pool to dull olive pool, until at last it sprang out, a white blaze, into the full sunlight beyond, and fell headlong in foam to join the silver scarf of stream lying across the golden meadows below.

For a long while Edward Graham paused in reverence. He was not in his essence an artist, and the impulse which would have come first to an artist, came second to him.

His first distinct thought was: "What a picture it will make!" His second, "How beautiful it is!" Then he looked for a long time without thinking. He was gazing at the simple whole without reflection, as one may listen to a note prolonged, and be yet content, although there is no succession of anything produced in the mind, no idea suggested by the sound.

Then his mind came back suddenly, and he thought: "By Jove! it requires no painting at all. It paints itself." He had not been able to say "By Jove!" as long as his form of thought was abstract. But the moment he thought of the concrete, of brushes and canvas, and tubes and palette, he fell to the level of his own mind in his studio, where came no intoxicating visions of delight, no visitings of poetry, no fine frenzy to cause the eye to roll. Of his own nature he was not capable of evolving a thought or idea worthy of any more powerful or enthusiastic form of expression than "By Jove!" But here something new had been set before him. He felt there was poetry in the scene. He knew at a glance it would make a good picture. A second glance showed him there was poetry in it, but where he could not tell. He had no originality. He was a reflector, not a prism.

After another period of mere gazing, he looked around. Yes, the place would do admirably for a painting room. The vault ran north and south, and the back or lower end of the archway, that from which the scene should be painted, faced the north, which settled the question of light in his favour. Then the archway was quite wide enough for an easel.

The legs of the easel might stand in the water, and he could make a little platform of flat stones on which to rest a seat for himself. At the back of the archway spread an open green space. The place was damp. But then in summer the roof would not drip, and that was all he cared about. He should have to write up to London for a much larger canvas than any he had with him. His easel, too, he should write for. Well, he'd go back to The Beagle now and have some breakfast, and write his letters afterwards.

He clambered up out of the hollow on the northern side, and walked back to the inn much more briskly than he had come.

"I shall make sketches and studies of the place while I am waiting for the easel and the canvas," he thought, as he went along the road.

When he arrived at the inn he ordered breakfast, and sat down to write a couple of letters while he was waiting. The first of these was to the man in London from whom he got his colours, asking him to send a canvas of the size he wanted. The second ran as follows:

"Beagle Inn, Anerly, Devonshire,

"June, 18--.

"MAY IT PLEASE YOUR GRACE,--I am now sojourning in Anerly, one of the most charming villages in the dominions of her who calls you Our right trusty and right entirely beloved Cousin. Everything here, including, of course, myself, is excellent, except the bread, which is beastly. The cocks and hens, the scenery, the cider, and all other things of that class, cannot be surpassed. There is a man here, six feet high, twenty-three years of age, sixteen stone ten (not an ounce of which you could pinch with a steel nippers), whom I have been telling of you, and who is awfully anxious to fight you. He is by profession a carpenter. He never saws a three-inch deal, but breaks it across his knee. He says he will fight you for nothing with great pleasure. I want you to come down at once and stop with me for a week or two. I'll treat you like a prince. You shall have three full meals and as many quarts of cider. The fact is, dear old Duke, I am going to paint a picture here. It's awfully good. I'll swear to you it's the loveliest thing you ever saw. It's the real whangdoodle, and no mistake. Come down and judge for yourself. And now I want you to do a thing for me. Go to my diggings (I mean the studio), get my big box of oils and my easel, and send them on here. You shall have one extra quart of cider for this job if you come. But if you don't come you shall not have a stiver. If you come I will tell you a story I heard here, and which will surely make your fortune if you write it. I am going to paint Anerly church, and this story is about Anerly church; so that if you come down, see the place, and do the story, it will be in a magnificent way writing up to my picture; and if you get out your book by next May, when your 'Romance of Anerly Church' is in the libraries, and my 'Under Anerly Bridge' is on the line, we shall both be helping one another to fame and fortune. Now, whatever you do or avoid doing, you must come here. I am called for breakfast. But remember and come.--I have the honour to be, my lord Duke, your Grace's most obliged and obedient servant,

"EDWARD GRAHAM.

"To His Grace the Duke of Long Acre.

"P.S.--By-the-way, the people about whom I am to tell you the romance, are namesakes of yours.

"E. G."

CHAPTER VI.

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

When the Duke of Long Acre got Edward Graham's letter, he immediately packed off the easel and colours. He liked Graham very much, and Graham loved him. Cheyne was one of those men who are always asked to do odd jobs for friends. He was good-humoured, of active habits, and liked to be busy always.

Although he was prompt about the commission he had received, he had no intention of doing the other thing Graham asked. No inducement of an ordinary kind could drag him out of London just now. He was moderately busy for the papers and magazines to which he contributed, and he was exceedingly busy with the affairs of his heart.

There was no happier lover in all London than Charles Augustus Cheyne. He loved his love, and his love loved him, and he envied no man's lot. She was as bright and dear a sweetheart as ever man had, and he loved her in a thoroughly comfortable common-sense way. He had written about romantic love, but he had never felt a pang of it in his private experience. Romance was a

good thing in a book, for it amused one, but it was a poor stock-in-trade on which to begin matrimony. So he kept his romance for the public and his friends, and his straightforward manhood for his sweetheart. "Sweetheart" is the finest love-word we have in English, and she was his sweetheart--his sweetheart--his sweet heart.

He loved her simply, frankly, wholly, without any mental reservation. He never told her he wanted to die for her, or that she was blameless or perfect. He told her she was as good a girl as any man ever might hope to marry. He knew she was as well as he knew that two and two are four. He praised her face less than was reasonable. He told her she had most lovely eyes, which was a temperate and judicial way of putting the matter. He was quite sure of his girl. He did not want anyone to tell him anything about her. He did not want her to tell him anything about herself. The only thing he wanted was to make her happy, and he thought he could do that. If she were happy he should be happy for three reasons--first, because he had an excellent constitution and was not soured by ill-health; secondly, because he had a gay and cheerful nature; thirdly, because the very sight of her happiness could not fail to be a source of abiding joy to him.

When he put his arms round her he always felt glad he was big enough and strong enough to protect her. Once, while holding her a moment in his arms, he said:

"I could crush you to death now. May, if I liked."

"You great bear, don't frighten me to death first," she said.

"Or," he added, "I think I could kill any man who annoyed you; of course I mean who injured you desperately."

"Well," she said, "as I don't mean to be injured dreadfully by anyone, as I don't want to be frightened to death or crushed to death, I don't see why you should not let me go. Oh dear, men are such plagues."

Yes, Charles Augustus Cheyne was a very strong man physically; mentally he was by no means so strong. Notwithstanding the fact that he told lies by the thousand, no one ever dreamed of saying he was a dishonourable man. He made no earthly use of his lies. If he told a new acquaintance that he had the day before dined with the Marquis of Belgravia, and his listener then asked him to dinner next day, Cheyne would most certainly decline to go. If he lied he lied for his own pleasure, not for his profit, not for the injury of anyone. He never said a bad word of any man he knew, and he never said a bad word of any member of the aristocracy, for had he not broken the bread of every member of it?

But of all the weak points in Cheyne's mental equipment the weakest was a dread of an allusion to his family. Any allusion to his people always made him uncomfortable; and, where he could possibly manage to do so, he always changed the conversation as soon as possible. When asked point-blank who his father was, he replied in almost the same form of words: "My father was a poor gentleman who met many reverses of fortune." He never said anything about his mother, and those who knew him best had long ago made up their minds that he had no right to his father's name, and that Cheyne had been his mother's name, or an assumed one. Indeed most of his friends were convinced that neither his mother nor father had borne the name of Cheyne.

He did not know much more about himself than those around him. He did not remember his father or mother. His earliest recollection was of an elderly spinster who wore corkscrew curls, kept a day-school for young ladies, and took in a few boarders. He was one of these boarders, and now he always looked back on that part of his life with the deadliest hatred. Two facts connected with that establishment clung to his imagination with terrible tenacity. First, that he never got anything to eat there but bread steeped in boiled milk; secondly, that on frosty days his schoolmistress hit him on the knuckles with a lead-pencil because he did not hold his pen properly. Even now the smell of bread steeped in boiling milk made him ill.

From this school he was sent to another, a private one kept by a clergyman in Cumberland. No one ever visited him, and he never left school for holidays. He did not know who paid for him at those houses. He had a small allowance of pocket-money. At school he had displayed some taste for literature. He always took first place in essay-writing. He assumed from this that the clergyman must have suggested he should in some way be linked to literature: for when he left school, at sixteen years of age, the clergyman told him a situation had been secured for him in a publisher's office in London. The clergyman came up to town with him, introduced him to his new master, handed him a ten-pound note, saying it came from his guardian, and then took leave of him.

From the day he left that old maid's school he had never seen or heard anything of her. From the day that clergyman handed him the that ten-pound note and bade him good-bye he had never seen or heard anything of him. At the date he first found himself in the publisher's office he was too young to set any inquiries on foot about himself; and as time went on and he began to know something of the world and its ways, he came to the conclusion he had no right to his father's name, and that the one he bore was his mother's. When he had grown to be a man he felt deeply the humiliation of his position, and made up his mind to look no further into the matter, lest what was now only matter of inference might become matter of certainty. "Let sleeping dogs lie" was the motto he adopted, and he had never departed from it. To Marion Durrant he had told all he

absolutely knew of himself. He had not told her anything he inferred or suspected. He had been told by the clergyman who had looked after his education that both his father and mother were dead. He had told Marion that he had never known either his father or mother, that they were both dead, that he had no memory of his childhood and youth apart from those two schools, and that as far as he knew he had no relative alive. But he had said nothing to her of his misgivings or doubts.

From all this it will be seen that Graham's allusion to the story connected with Anerly and his name would be anything but an inducement for Cheyne to leave London for that Devonshire village.

Every day he found his way out to Knightsbridge, and every day he had long sweet hours with his May.

It was afternoon on the day he got Graham's letter before he could leave home, and four o'clock had struck before he knocked at the hall-door of the little house in Knightsbridge.

When he came into the room where Marion Durrant sat hemming an apron, she said:

"What! come again to-day! In the name of wonder, what brought *you* here now?'

"You know, May, the pressure of race is ever from east to west,"

"The pressure of race! What on earth are you talking about? Don't! that hurts my hand."

"I was slapping your hand to prevent you from fainting at the unexpected sight of your slave and master. I meant the pressure of the human race--or more accurately, the attraction of the inhuman race--meaning yourself, sweetheart."

"Do you know, Charlie, you always begin a conversation as if you wanted me to think you clever; and if there is one thing I hate it is cleverness in a man."

"Do you know, Miss Durrant, you never by any means allow me to begin a conversation. Before I am fully in the room you always fly at me with some question or other."

"But you are so slow, Charlie. You take up half an hour getting ready to say 'Howd'y'do'; and if there is one thing more odious in a man than cleverness it is slowness."

"But you must admit. Miss Durrant, that if, when we meet, I am slow of speech, I am not slow in other matters proper to our meeting."

"Go away, sir! How dare you? I will not let you do that again. Sometimes I think you a bear, and sometimes I think you an elephant, but I think I hate you always."

"If you say any more I'll get a divorce on the grounds of cruelty and desertion. May, let us drop this sort of thing. Run and bring me a glass of beer. I've been trotting about the whole morning, and am dying for a glass of beer."

"You deserve to be starved, and you deserve to be thirsty, and you deserve to be----"

"I admit it all. I deserve it all, and every other thing that's awful, except to be married to you. Marion Durrant, spinster, what would you do if I cut my throat?"

"Charlie!"

"Or if I put my head under the wheel of an omnibus laden with exceedingly fat people?"

"Charlie! Charlie!"

"Or if I threw myself over Westminster Bridge with a couple of forty-pound shot tied round my heels?"

"I'll run for the beer, Charlie."

"Ah, I thought I'd get you to move at last. You see you can't bear to leave me even for a minute."

"Conceited fellow!" and she tripped out of the room.

She went herself with a jug into the little cellar under the front-door step, and drew the beer in a most elaborate and painstaking manner. She looked into three jugs before she was satisfied with one, although they were all as immaculate as human hands could make them. She looked at the glass as if it were a jewel she was thinking of buying, and the slightest flaw in it would render it valueless. She placed the jug and the tumbler and a plate of biscuits on an exceedingly slippery Japanese wooden tray, and declined to let the maid carry it up. She was proud of that polished jug, that polished glass, that polished tray. The jug and the glass and the tray were more to her that the condition of the beer. As a matter of fact, she never thought of the beer at all. It would be a pity if the beer was not in good condition; but it would be a disgrace if the jug, glass, and

tray were not in perfect order.

When she came back to the room she was meek and penitential. We are always softened towards those to whom we have done ever so slight a service. When he had taken a draught of the ale and broken a biscuit, she said plaintively:

"Charlie!"

"Well, my fire-eating she-dragon, what bloodthirsty thing have you to say to your down-trodden slave now?"

"Only that you were right when you said----"

"When I spoke about cutting my throat?"

"No, no, no! When you said I did not like to go away from you even for a moment. Charlie, I hate going away from you, and I hate myself when you are away; for then I remember all the foolish things I have said to you, and--and I am always afraid----"

"Of my taking four pounds, apothecaries' weight, of solid opium?"

"No. Of your being angry with me some day, or of your not forgiving me."

She was pretty and very penitent, and he had had a long walk and a glass of beer, and he felt perfectly at rest and happy; so he put out his arms and took her into them for a moment, and when he let her go they both felt that, say what you like about love, it is the finest thing in all the world, and that there is nothing else which makes people so utterly unselfish.

"I had a letter from Graham this morning," said Charlie, after a pause.

"Where is he now?"

"In Devonshire still, sketching at some place called Anerly. He wrote me to send him some painting materials. He is going to begin a picture there, so I suppose we shall not see anything of him for some time. He has asked me to run down to him for a few days?"

"And will you go?"

"Not I. I am too busy just now."

"But you could do your work down there, and I am sure you want a run away and a little fresh air."

"Yes; I could write, no doubt. But then you see, May, I should not be able to come and read my MS. to you, and I should not get on very well. While I am at work at Long Acre I am in a hurry to be done, in order that I may get back to you, and I am too anxious to please you to do slovenly work; so the result is that I work longer and yet have more leisure, which is a paradox, and a paradox is particularly unsuited to the understanding of women."

"You are always saying nice and disagreeable things in the one breath; and I don't know whether to like you or to hate you."

"To cases of this kind an infrangible rule applies. It is, when I say nice things, hate me; when I say disagreeable things, love me. This is another paradox. Paradoxes, although they are not intelligible to women, are all the more dear to them on that very account. You never yet knew a woman who thoroughly understood a man care for him. I never did."

"But, Charlie, I think I understand you very well."

"Rank presumption. The rankest presumption I ever heard in all my life. Know me, May! Why, you don't even know who my father and mother were."

"You told me they were dead."

"Yes, they are dead. But you know nothing of them. You do not know if they were felons, or shopkeepers, or gentlefolk."

"I am sure, Charlie, they were gentlefolk."

"Ah, you do not know. And now, May," said he, taking her hand very tenderly and softly patting the back of it with the palm of his own, "I must tell you a secret I ought perhaps to have told you long ago, as it might influence you in your decision of accepting or not accepting me."

"Nothing you could have told me would have made the slightest difference in my decision, Charlie," she said, in a very faint voice.

He ceased patting her hand, and pressed it softly between his two palms. He spoke in a low voice:

"Well, May, the fact of it is I do not know who my father and mother were. It could do no good, dear, if this fact were made public, and I count on you for keeping it secret."

"You may," she whispered back, returning the pressure of his hands, and laying her disengaged hand upon the upper one of his. The action was slight and made without thought, yet he felt its import. He knew by that gesture she meant to convey to him that not only was the hand his own, but that all the faculties of her nature owed allegiance to him alone.

"Thank you, darling; I know how good you are. Every day I see you I am more and more convinced of your goodness. But you see. May, that is my only great trouble, and day by day I am afraid I may find out something very, unpleasant, something disgraceful about my father and mother."

"But nothing you can find out will be disgraceful to you, Charlie."

"No, logically and morally not. But then you know the sins of the parent are visited on the children, not merely by Heaven, but by the world. You know very well that if a man's father had been a hangman, or a murderer, or a forger, his son would be looked on with suspicion and dislike by the majority of the world. A man in my position is of course more alive to the discomfort of any such discovery than a man who knows about his parents. He is continually fancying all manner of horrible surprises, until the mind becomes morbidly sensitive on the subject. I confess I am morbidly sensitive on the subject; and of one thing I am certain, that if I made any discovery of the kind I have been speaking of, I could not stand England--London. I'd emigrate. I'd go to the United States or Australia; some place where the English language is spoken, and where I might have a chance of making a living by my pen. I am telling you all this for a purpose, May. It is all only a preface to a question. And the question: In case anything of the kind arose, and I was about to leave for the United States or a colony, would you marry me and come with me?"

"Oh, how can you ask such a question? I'd go anywhere with you. What does it matter where I am so long as I am with you, Charlie?"

He thanked her and kissed her, and soon after took his leave; for he had work to do that evening.

As he walked home in the fresh bright air his step was elastic, and he carried his head thrown back. His happiness was now complete. The two great points he had reserved had been cleared up. May cared only for himself. Whatever time might unearth about his father and mother, she would not be altered by it; and if anything obliging him to leave the country did transpire, she would marry him and go with him all the same as if nothing had come to light. This was the most peaceful, contented and joyous day of his life.

When Cheyne arrived at the house in Long Acre, he found Mr. Whiteshaw, the carriage-builder, standing in his wareroom.

"Good afternoon, Cheyne," cried the builder cheerily.

"Good afternoon," said Cheyne, pausing and drawing near.

"What news?" asked the carriage-builder, rubbing his hands, as though news ever so dismal would be preferable to none.

"Not a word," said Cheyne, stepping into the wareroom.

"Heard anything of the Duke of Shropshire since?"

"No, no. Nothing particular. Except that the Duke of Dorsetshire, in a note I got from him a day or two ago, says his grace is awfully cut up by the way these rascally Radicals are behaving."

"If I were at the head of affairs now, I'd pass a law treating all Radicals as working-men out of situations, and I'd clap every man Jack of them into jail. That's what I'd do."

"You'd never get a bill like that through the Commons, although you might through the Lords."

"Ah, I suppose not; I suppose not, Cheyne. We live in a degenerate age. But you, if you were in the House, would you vote for such a measure?"

"I am afraid it is extreme," said Cheyne, with a good-humoured smile.

"But you, you ought to be dead against Radicals and demagogues. Your name alone--why, sir, your name alone shows you come of a great stock, the great house of Shropshire. (By-the-way, we weren't long putting that brougham right for his grace. There it is, you see; and a pretty job too.) But, as I was saying, you must be a member of that family. Why, look at how few there are of the name."

"No, no. I assure you, most sincerely, I am in no way connected with any great house. The name is common enough in England--common enough. Well, I must be off to work. I have a whole lot of stuff to get away by to-night's mail for the morning."

With these words Cheyne walked out of the wareroom and got to the hall-door, and mounted the stairs.

"I never can understand," thought the carriage-maker, "why this Cheyne, who lies right and left about noblemen, should have such a strong objection to thinking he was descended from a big swell."

When Cheyne reached his own room he sat down and thought a moment. Then he said to himself very gravely:

"I wish Whiteshaw would give up this connecting my name with that of the Duke of Shropshire. Supposing a person found a poor deserted child, would it be kinder to name it Fitzalan Howard or plain William Brown?"

And when he had put the question to himself, he fell to wondering very unpleasantly whether or not he had at one time been a poor deserted child, picked up by some passer-by, to whom had been given the high-sounding name of Charles Augustus Cheyne.

So the afternoon which had been the happiest of his life ended under a sombre cloud.

CHAPTER VII.

A STORY OF A CITY.

Wyechester is a small city in the Midlands. It does not contain more than thirty thousand people, so that it is possible for every man and woman of the middle class to know everyone of the same class, or, at all events, to know everything about everybody, which is almost as good, if not better.

Wyechester is not a place of any importance now, save what it draws from its cathedral and its bishop, and the other great dignitaries around the cathedral. If the city disappeared wholly one night the world of England would hardly miss it, provided the cathedral and church dignitaries were spared. It does not manufacture anything; it has no mines near it. No one ever thought of hunting or shooting in the neighbourhood but those who lived in the neighbourhood. The fishing is poor; and the land, although fairly fertile, is not held in much esteem by farmers. It is a faded, washed-out, old cathedral city, surrounded on all sides by an uninteresting country.

It had one virtue, which, as it concerned only itself, did not spread its fame--it was pious. It was the most pious city in England. It could not, of course, be said with truth that there was no hypocrisy in it; but, speaking relatively, there was very little, much less than in any other city of its size.

It was pious, and it was severe. To do any wrong there was much worse than to do the same wrong in any other city or town in England. Going to church twice on Sunday regularly for thirty years entitled one to consideration; going once freed one from adverse comment; going only twice a month was looked on as bad, very bad; but not going at all made middle-class people in Wyechester think that the sooner the offender left the diocese the better.

Five-and-thirty years before the pole of the omnibus went through the door of the Duke of Shropshire's brougham, five-and-thirty years before Edward Graham decided upon painting that landscape revealed to him under the bridge at Anerly, Mrs. Mansfield, widow of the Rev. James Mansfield, lived in Wyechester. The Rev. James Mansfield died very young. He was, at the time of his death, curate to one of the city churches, and was looked upon as a very exemplary and clever young man, who had a career before him. But his career seemed never to have begun, for he died before he was thirty. He left behind him a widow and daughter and about a hundred and fifty pounds a year, from money in the Funds, willed him by an aunt who had the warmest affection for this nephew.

On this modest income, and about seventy pounds a year coming in from other sources, the widow managed to live quietly, respectably, and to give her daughter a very good education. Five-and-thirty years before what may be taken as the present time of this story, a thing occurred which horrified all Wyechester and bowed down the head of Mrs. Mansfield for ever.

At that time Harriet Mansfield was on a visit with some friends in the country. One morning Miss Mansfield left the house of the friends she was staying with and did not return. Neither did she go home. After days of anxiety a letter, in the daughter's handwriting, came from London, in

which she simply said she had left her home for good, and that there was no chance whatever of her going back.

Mrs. Mansfield was then forty-three years of age, but, with the flight of her daughter, her life may be said to have closed, although she was living at the time this story opened, being then seventy-eight years of age. She loved her daughter with all the love she was capable of. But she was a hard, cold, stern nature. To her daughter she never showed her love except in rigours, and insisting on doing her own duty by her child, without any sympathetic conception of what effect doing her own duty would have on a gentle, soft, and confiding nature like her daughter's. The result was that the mother did her duty according to her own lights. She endeavoured to bring up her daughter according to her own rigid code, and she justified herself to herself.

But the daughter had no Spartan nature. She loved pretty things and soft subjects to wear. She was not allowed to keep pets, or to be too familiar with other children. While in the world, and now and then coming in contact for a brief period with pleasant people and grateful things, she was under a discipline as rigid as a convent without any sustaining code; for she did not believe it necessary to be uncomfortable in order to be good. So when love for the first time approached her, and she was from under the immediate eye of her mother, the oppressive goodness of that cathedral city, and the prospect of love and brightness and sunshine and freedom were all presented to her eyes by a man who owned the gift of erratic eloquence, and who was richer than any other man she had ever met, richer than even the bishop, she did not hesitate long. She fled with him. She knew that running away was wrong, but she under-estimated the risk, or indeed did not think there was any risk at all; for she was as simple as a child, and did willingly all things her lover told her, as all her life she had reluctantly obeyed her mother when uncongenial tasks were imposed.

In that letter from London, a letter dictated by the companion of her flight, she said nothing about him, nothing about marriage. It was therefore plain to the mother that the daughter was not married. So the mother cast the image of her daughter out of her heart, and shut up her heart against her child for ever. All through her widowhood this girl had been the sole source of her secret love and happiness, as far as worldly things were allowed to count in the love and happiness of one who ruled herself by the rule of duty.

Now that child had become the only source of secret and open reproach to her. Soon after she got that letter everyone in the city knew all about her misfortune, and the neighbours turned up their eyes and held aloft their hands in virtuous shame. Her daughter had disgraced her home, had disgraced the sacred order to which she might be said to belong, had disgraced the city which had given her birth. Into the mother's heart the image of the daughter should come no more. Across the mother's threshold the foot of the daughter should never pass. It was hard to keep the image out always; but no sooner did it gain an entrance than she cast it forth with bitter reproaches against herself for her sinful weakness in holding commune with the only thing which had ever brought shame to her.

The mother made no steps to follow the daughter. Several people came and offered help. She wanted no help. Her daughter had taken her fate into her own hands, and there matters should rest. She was inflexible. Nothing could move her in the least way.

Clergymen who had been friends of her husband called and expostulated, and said that it was wrong and sinful of her not to do something to win back the fugitive. But she would not listen to them with patience. She told them she had done her duty by the girl, and the girl had taken herself off, and she, the mother, could not think of receiving her daughter back. They then told her this was not a Christian spirit, and that she must remember the story of the poor Prodigal. And, upon this, she grew angry with them, for it hurt her beyond endurance to hear her daughter, her only child, referred to in such a way. She told them she knew her duty as a Christian as well as anyone, that they ought to be aware she had been under good guidance, the guidance of her husband, for many years, and that she was much obliged to them, but that her mind was made up beyond the chance of change.

Time proved she could adhere to her resolve, for she never made the least inquiry. Nor did she ever see her child again.

Harriet Mansfield had behaved very badly. There could be no excuse for her running away as she did. She was weak by nature, and her weakness betrayed her; but her weakness was no justification. Yet her folly had not betrayed her into such a desperate position as her mother imagined. She had run away, and she had run away with a lover; but there the disgrace ended.

The people with whom Harriet Mansfield was staying when she eloped were Mr. and Mrs. Gore, old friends of Mrs. Mansfield. They were childless, and lived in good style in a comfortable house close by an excellent trout-stream. Mr. Gore went to his office in town close by every day, and came home to a late dinner. During most of the day Mrs. Gore was engaged about domestic affairs, and could give little attention to her guest. This was the first time Harriet had ever been free. It was lovely weather, and she soon found out a few pleasant walks in the neighbourhood. The place was beautiful compared to the dull monotony of the scenery round Wyechester. Her favourite walk was along the banks of this trout-stream, which wound in and out through delightful shady glens and peaceful meadows.

One day by chance she met here a fine stalwart gentleman fishing. He was more impetuous than careful, and he managed to fix one of the flies of his casting-line in her dress. The hook had to be extracted at the cost of some slight injury to the dress; apologies had to be made; and by the time apologies had been offered and accepted, an acquaintance had been established. He asked if he might be permitted to know the name of the lady to whom he had caused such annoyance, and whose dress he had so shamefully injured. She told him her name, and then he in return told her his name was Cheyne.

From that day forth they met daily by the stream, and before a fortnight had gone he had asked her to marry him and she had consented. He was impulsive, chivalric, romantic; the man more than any other calculated to set on fire the heart of a girl who had been so repressed all her life.

He obtained a complete mastery over her. She submitted herself to his word as she had submitted herself to her mother's; only one submission was voluntary, joyous--the other a task, a burden. He made passionate speeches to her, explaining how, if they got married now, it must for his sake be kept an inviolate secret. She did not understand the reasons he gave, but she understood his wish--that no word of their marriage should go abroad then or it would injure him--and she made the necessary promise. She understood only one thing of the reason why their marriage should not be made known at present; and that was, that if it was known he had married a poor woman now, a property worth ten thousand a year might be taken from him. Whereas, under the will of his father, he would in a year or so come into more than would pay all his debts twice over.

He had told her the simple truth. If he had told her the simplest lie, it would have been just as satisfactory to her; for she did not think in any matter which concerned him. She was willing to do, to dare, to suffer anything for the love of him. So she took him at his word, and ran away with him on the understanding that they were to be married in some quiet out-of-the-way place, and that she was to say nothing of their marriage until he came into his fortune.

He brought her first to London, where she wrote that letter dictated by him. Then he took her to Anerly, where he married her. Between the time of his taking her away from the Gores' house until the ceremony at Anerly Church he treated her as though she were a foreign princess whom he was escorting to espouse a prince.

For a few months after the marriage the life of Harriet Cheyne went on like a dream of delight. Her husband was erratic; but he was kindly erratic. He never tired of inventing or devising some agreeable treat or pleasing wonder for her. They travelled much in England and on the Continent. Every place she went to was Fairyland, and he was the enchanter. He was never from her side. He told her he would rather hear her call his name than find the praise of all the world else within his ears. She was intoxicated with happiness, and could scarcely speak, her joy was so great. The black dreary past was more than a million times compensated for. When she lay down at night she dreaded to go to sleep, lest on waking she should find herself back in cold wretched Wyechester. Each waking of mornings was a new delivery from the past. She now knew how unwise her mother's treatment of her had been. But she forgave her; and often, when she woke at dead of night, she thought of her hard-faced stern mother at home, and a tear stole down her cheek--a tear of pity for the poor woman who had the misfortune to bring up a daughter that had acted with such perfect indifference to a mother's feelings.

But at last a sad change came. They were abroad. A letter arrived one day to her husband, saying that some of his enemies had got hold of the fact of his marriage, and were preparing to sell the information to his creditors. Something must be done at once. The bride and bridegroom were then at Brussels. It was essential he should set off at once for England, and under the circumstances it would be exceedingly dangerous for her to accompany him. So he went, giving her emphatic instructions not to leave Brussels, no matter what might happen, until she saw him or heard from him.

She never heard from him nor saw him afterwards.

He got to England safely, and reached Anerly, made an ineffectual attempt to bribe Goolby, left Anerly that day, and died within a couple of days. His death made a final settlement with his creditors, and whether he had married or not was no longer a matter of the least consequence to them.

At Brussels, Cheyne's child was born months afterwards. The mother, whose stock of money had by this time dwindled down to almost nothing, had saved a twenty-pound note, and this she gave to a woman whom she knew she could trust to bring her baby-boy to Wyechester to her mother; for she was dying, and knew it. She sent a very brief note with the boy, saying he had not been christened, that his name was Charles Augustus Cheyne, that she was dying, that she had been legally married, but that owing to circumstances the fact of her marriage could not be divulged. Then she appealed to her mother in very pathetic terms to be kind to the boy and provide for him, as she had no means, and had not heard of her husband for months. She also said she sent by bearer a sealed packet of letters and papers belonging to her husband, and begged her mother to keep it, and not to break the seals until some momentous occasion arose for doing so, as she was under important promises to her husband regarding certain matters reference to which was contained in the papers in the packet. Then there came a plea for

forgiveness.

At first Mrs. Mansfield was filled with dismay. It was horrible to think of her daughter dying, deserted by the man who had taken her away, and dying in a foreign land too. There was of course an appeal for forgiveness in the letter; but to Mrs. Mansfield's mind the appeal came far too late, and even if it had come earlier it would have appeared an appeal to an affection of the flesh, which was in itself an offence against the spirit.

Mrs. Mansfield had tried to crush down Nature, but Nature was too strong for her; and when the messenger threw back the covering from the face of the infant, the tears, tears of the flesh, stood in her eyes, and her hand trembled. For that small, white, contented, sleeping baby-face reminded her of the time when her own infant lay in her own arms, and she speculated as to what her baby's future might be. And now here was her child's child; and the little one who had lain sleeping in her lap years ago, that seemed no farther off than yesterday, was dying in disgrace among strangers. Her own baby had come into the world sanctified, to her mind, by the very atmosphere in which it was born. Its father was an exemplar of what a man and a clergyman should be. There was every reason to suppose her baby would grow up into a woman who would be spoken of as a model of all a woman should be. Now here was her child's child. It was an unholy, an unrighteous child. There was no blessing or grace about it.

Ah, it was hard to hold that babe in her arms and think of her own child, and have a proper Christian feeling towards its father!

And the grandmother, who was not yet forty-five years of age, undid the baby's hood and passed her hand over the child's beating head, and touched the little fat double chin with her bent finger, softly pinched its white cheeks, and forgot for a while all that had happened since, and was back again in the old time.

Then all at once, as though God had taken pity on her, her tears began to fall, and she became less of a rigid Christian of the poor and narrow kind, and more of a Christian in light of the Sermon on the Mount and the story of the Good Samaritan. She said: "I'll take the boy and do my duty by him." She added after a pause: "I'll take the boy and do all I can for him," At that moment she did not so much want to do her own duty as to be good to him.

But when the messenger had gone, and she found herself alone with the baby, she receded somewhat from the advanced position she had taken. She had resolved for a few moments to keep the boy and live down the talk of idle tongues. Now that idea seemed no more than a temptation to give way to vainglory, and she resolved to send the boy away as speedily as possible.

She took the boy with her to a town a hundred miles from Wyechester, and had him there baptized Charles Augustus Cheyne. Subsequently she got a nurse for him, and, having made a liberal arrangement with the nurse, she said:

"I shall come and see you and him at irregular intervals; and whenever I come and find him looking well and comfortable, I will give you a guinea in addition to what I have arranged with you for."

By this she intended to secure the continual good treatment of the child; for though she had failed in her heroic resolve of living down talk of the idle tongues of Wyechester, she had made up her mind to be as good to the orphan as she could.

When she got home she found news awaiting her of the death of her daughter. She put away the thought of her daughter as much as she could from her mind; and, in a few years, when the boy was old enough to go to school, she went to that town again, and having requested an attorney to preserve secrecy in the matter, without giving him any reason for it, she asked the lawyer to find a school for the boy. Accordingly he was sent to the school kept by the old maid, and later to a college. Subsequently he was put to business in London; but from the time he left the place where he had been brought up, he had never seen his grandmother, and the early days at his nurse's had completely faded out of his memory.

The grandmother was now a very old woman. She still lived in her house at Wyechester. She had altered greatly in face and figure, but her nature had softened in no way with years. She was still as stiff and intellectually assured as ever she had been. She had the willing power of one hundred and fifty pounds a year; the other seventy died with her; and she had made this will in favour of Charles Augustus Cheyne, of Long Acre, in London. Although he had never within his memory heard her name, she had always taken care to know what he was doing, and how he was getting on.

She had even so far given way to worldliness as to read the publications to which he contributed; and as she read them she thought of how strange it should be that his grandfather was younger than his grandson when he died, and here was she now reading what the grandson had written!

But in all that Charles Augustus Cheyne had ever written, there was nothing so surprising as would have been the result of bringing together the sealed packet held by his grandmother, the registry of Anerly Church, and Charles Augustus Cheyne.

CHAPTER VIII.

ON BOARD THE YACHT "SEABIRD."

The bodily and mental conditions of the Marquis of Southwold, which forbade him living ashore any length of time, were many and almost insurmountable. The greatest doctors had of course been consulted, but without being able to afford any relief. They had called his lordship's symptoms by a number of very learned names, seldom heard in the medical profession. They could go no further than that. They had tried every resource of their art, and had failed. Men at the top of the profession can afford to confess failure much better than their brethren of a less degree. When the greatest doctors declare a patient must die soon, the sooner that patient dies the better for conventional decency.

The doctors had not said that Lord Southwold must die soon; but they had declared him incurable, and advised him to try the sea. He tried the sea, and the remedy was most successful. On shore his eyes were tender and dim, his limbs dumb and nerveless, his appetite failed, and his spirits sank almost to melancholia. But no sooner did he go on board a ship than all these symptoms began to abate. His eyes grew stronger, his sight improved, the lassitude lessened, he could eat with relish, and his spirits gradually returned.

The Marquis of Southwold was now a man of thirty-eight years of age, tall, lank, long-cheeked, and without the hereditary bow-legs. His features were vague and expressionless. He had a remarkably large mouth, and dull faded grey eyes. There was upon his face always the look of pain past rather than pain present. His face was that of one who was fading out, rather than of one who suffered any violent assault. He was more languid and subdued than his father; but, like him too, he was very taciturn.

His health was good while on board the yacht, although she only lay at anchor in Silver Bay, beneath the ducal castle. Thus, for a large portion of the year, his grace's schooner-yacht, the *Seabird* lay at anchor in Silver Bay. The bay was excellently suited to the requirements of the ailing nobleman: for it was protected from the wind by high lands on three sides, and from the rolling sea of the German Ocean by a barrier of rocks, extending more than halfway across the bay from the northern side. The best anchorage was just under the shelter of this jagged barrier of rocks. Here, even in the most severe gales from the east, the water was always smooth. The holding ground was also excellent; and the rocks, as they rose twenty, thirty, forty feet high, protected the hull of the schooner from the force of the wind.

The entrance to this bay was safe and easy. It was about a quarter of a mile wide, and quite free from rocks. The largest vessel afloat would have water enough in any part of that opening, from a point twenty fathoms from the end of the bar to a point twenty fathoms from the opposite shore of the bay. The only great danger was if, in tacking in or out in heavy weather, anything should give way; for it was necessary to reach in or out on the one tack, there being no room for tacking in the passage itself in a strong wind and high sea.

Of course, if Lord Southwold wished for a steam-yacht, he might have the finest that could be designed. But he could not endure a steamer. It was almost worse for him than being on shore. The air is never brisk aboard a steamboat, and then the vibration jarred upon him horribly.

He was not an enterprising sailor, and did not court adventure. He did not love the sea for its perils, or for the chance it affords of enjoying the sense of struggling successfully against an enemy. He looked on dwelling afloat as a birthright, or birthwrong, against which there was no good in growling. His father allowed him twenty thousand a year pocket-money. He would have given up his twenty thousand a year and his right of succession to the title and vast estates, if he might have a thousand a year and the constitution of a navvy. It is not utterly impossible that a navvy may become a duke, but it is utterly impossible that a man with such a constitution as his could enjoy the health of a navvy.

He found it impossible to spend his pocket-money, and he hated the notion of it accumulating at his banker's. When he had a large balance, it always seemed as if it were placed there as the wages of his bodily infirmities. He hated money as honourable men hate debt. When he found a balance of ten or twelve thousand at his banker's, he could, he knew, draw it out and drop it over the side of the yacht. But that would be wilful waste. He might have given it in charity; but he had so little contact with the world that he had hardly any sense of the necessity for charity, except through reading, which is a cold and formal way of kindling one's sympathy. He might have gambled; but he had hardly ever attended a race or coursing match. They very rarely had a

guest at the Castle or on board the yacht; and he did not care for cards, even if guests were more numerous. He led an isolated and dreary life; but he had experience of hardly any other. He could not with comfort, live more than a few days ashore, or with safety more than a couple of weeks.

He was now no longer what may be called a young man, and he intended not to marry. His feeling was, that when such as he chanced to be the only representative of his race his race ought to die out. On this point his father had expostulated with him in vain. He never would marry. The vital power of his race was expiring in him--let it die.

When his father died he should be Duke of Shropshire, with three to four hundred thousand a year. What better off should he be then than he now was. No better. He should, in fact, be worse, for he would have lost the only friend and companion he had, his father. He should have to draw more cheques, to see more people, to transact more business. But he should eat nor drink nor lie no better, nor should his health be improved. His capacity for enjoyment would be in no way increased, and there would be a great addition to his labours. His father was hale and hardy, and might live twenty-five years yet; and the heir hoped with all his heart he might die before his father.

He marry! Why should he marry? What woman would care to share the stupid life he was compelled to lead? No woman would be likely to love him for himself, for he knew he was an uninteresting invalid. Thousands of women would marry him because he was the Marquis of Southwold and heir to the great dukedom of Shropshire. That went without saying. But no woman would willingly share his life; and why should he marry a woman who would unwillingly abide by him, or insist upon keeping up fitting state in London and the country while he was a frail despised rover of the sea? No! let the race go, and let the lawyers pocket the spoil--the spoil would be enough to found fifty families--and let the title die. What good would the title be to him? Could he soothe the winds with it, or stop a leak with it, or claw off a lee-shore with it?

Neither the Duke nor the Marquis was an intellectual man. But when one is everlastingly on ship-board he must do something. Common sailors who cannot read cultivate superstition, a knowledge of the weather, and the use of abnormal quantities of tobacco.

A sailor carries away from a book he has read a more accurate notion of what is in it than any other class of man of similar intellectual lights and acquirements. As the sailor who has studied his chart by day can see, when approaching an invisible shore through the trackless darkness of water and night, in his mind's eye the shore and the beacons of the shore that still lie hidden below the horizon, so the sailor who has read a book can see that book by aid of the chart he has made of it when the book has been closed up for ever.

As neither father nor son played the fiddle, or carved ivory, or cared much for shooting at bottles in the water, or hunting the great sea-serpent to earth, if the phrase may be allowed, or discovering the North Pole, or exploring cannibal islands, or going in search of novelty in foreign parts, a great deal of their time was spent in reading and fishing. Fishing at sea is not a very high or exciting art. Indeed, it is an art that is almost independent of the artist. And it is almost necessary to have some other occupation at the same time, so that reading goes hand-in-hand with fishing.

Thus it happened that both the Duke and his son read enormous piles of newspapers and books. The Duke read newspapers chiefly, and political books, and articles in the quarterlies. When a young man he had been active in politics, but now he took only a reflected interest in them. He hated Radicals with a complete and abiding hatred. He would root them out of the country at any cost. They disturbed his cities and boroughs. They were a low lot, and never washed their hands.

The Marquis of Southwold, on the contrary, took little or no interest in politics. As far as he had any political feeling, it was against his order and in favour of the Radicals. This feeling he kept to himself, not because he was afraid to put forward anything opposed to his father's views, but because he did not care to speak on a subject he knew so little about. Personally he had a poor opinion of dukes, but they might in reality be better than Radicals for all he knew to the contrary, for he had met two dukes besides his father, but never a Radical. He knew there was a wide gulf between dukes and Radicals. He had an idea a Radical was a kind of political poet. He didn't think much of poets; he knew little of Radicals; and he was perfectly sure dukes were useless. He had a vague general conviction that politicians who were not dukes were fools or rogues, but he was quite sure dukes were supernumeraries without parts in the play of life.

But if he did not care anything about poetry and politics, he was much interested in fiction. One of the few ways open to him, by which he could now and then reduce by a few pounds the balance at his banker's, was in ordering all the new novels which appeared, and ordering them, not at a library, but from the publisher, through his bookseller. Thus while this arrangement existed, every author who got out a novel was sure of finding at least one buyer.

It so happened that in the same month of June Edward Graham set up his easel to paint that landscape under Anerly Bridge, a novel was published called "The Duke of Fenwick: a Romance. By Charles Augustus Cheyne." According to the ordinary rule, the novel had been published in three volumes before it had fully run through the paper in which it appeared from week to week.

The same week the book was published it found its way down to Silverview Castle, and from the Castle to the yacht *Seabird*, in the hands of George Temple Cheyne, by courtesy called Marquis of Southwold.

The title naturally attracted the nobleman, who had no faith in dukes. He opened the book and found, by a curious coincidence, that the book had been written by a namesake.

"A book by a namesake," thought he; "but by no relative! There never yet was a Cheyne who could write anything more worthy of public notice than 'Trespassers will be prosecuted. Dogs found in these preserves will be shot.'"

But a book by a namesake dealing with a duke was of much more than ordinary interest; so he immediately found the easiest of couches, and lay down under the awning on deck to hear what his namesake had to say about a duke.

Certainly he had never met a duke like his Grace of Fenwick; but then he had met only his own father and two others. The two strange dukes he had met were like the farmers who came to pay his father rent. But then his father was very like a groom or jockey, and yet was not particularly fond of riding or of horses; so that it was, perhaps, not the nature of dukes to look like what they were. His namesake had no thought of drawing any member of the Shropshire family, for his duke was represented as being tall, well-made, and handsome. None of the Shropshire family had been tall, well-made, and handsome. They had all been short and bandy-legged until he had come. He was tall, it was true, and not bandy-legged; but then he was not handsome or well-made.

Stop, there had been his uncle, Lord George Temple Cheyne, who had been tall, well-made, and handsome; but he had died upwards of thirty years ago.

What a strange thing that the two last representatives of the race should have escaped the hereditary bow-legs! What a pity his uncle had not lived! He would have married, no doubt, and then his sons would have come into the title, and the property and the old name might have been carried down generations by men of wholesome make.

"What a ridiculous way that story ended! A violoncello-player turned out to be the real Duke of Fenwick. I wish to goodness he could turn me from being Marquis of Southwold into a man who had only warts on his fingers from the strings of the big fiddle. He wouldn't catch me going back again to the Marquis or Duke of Anything or Anywhere. Not I. I'd very soon pay off that landlord. But stop! How could I pay him off if I had no money? If I was the poor violoncello-player, I shouldn't have any money. But I am always wanting not to have any money; and if I had none when he came, I'd tell him I couldn't pay him then, but that I would the moment I got my next quarter's allowance from the Duke----. But I should be the Duke of Fenwick then, and there would be, as far as I was concerned, no Duke of Shropshire. Who really should I be then? It is the most puzzling thing I ever thought of. What's the good of writing a story that twists a man's head round and round like that, until he doesn't know which is front or which is back--I mean, which is his face or which is his poll? Before I had got rid of tutors they had so twisted my head round and round that, although I have been trying ever since, I have not been able to twist it back again.

"I know why this fellow wrote this book. I know it all now. Cheyne is an assumed name. He knows our name is Cheyne, and that the race dies with me. He knows I am an invalid. He knows--someone told him--I get all the novels which are published; and he has written this one to spite me, and offend my father. Low cad! But I will take good care my father does not see the filthy rubbish. Boy, bring me a marline-spike and a piece of spun-yarn."

The Marquis of Southwold bound up the three volumes of Charles Augustus Cheyne's "The Duke of Fenwick," and having looped to them the marline-spike by way of a sinker, dropped them slowly over the side of the *Seabird* into the still blue waters of Silver Bay, under the Duke of Shropshire's stately castle.

CHAPTER IX.

THE MARQUIS OF SOUTHWOLD'S LETTER.

"Oh, what a way it is up! My wind isn't now what it used to be, when first I met you warm and young, Cheyne, is it? Such confounded stairs!" said Mr. John Wilkinson, a very stout puffy-looking man for thirty-six years of age, and editor and staff of *The Coal-Vase Reporter*, one of the most prosperous of the minor trade papers in London.

"My wind is as sound as ever," said the Duke of Long Acre, rising; for Wilkinson was not alone.

"Going up and down these breakneck flights once a day would keep a man in training. Cheyne, allow me to introduce my friend Freemantle. He has a great taste for poetry, writes very beautiful poetry indeed, and is most anxious to make your acquaintance. He has just read your book, 'The Duke of Fenwick,' and is delighted with it. I haven't had time to read it yet! but I shall read it this week, and review it in next week's *Reporter*. "

Cheyne shook hands with Freemantle, set a chair for him, and pushed his new acquaintance down on it in his jovial freehanded manner.

"And how are you, Freemantle?" asked Cheyne, as though they had known one another for many years. Turning to Wilkinson, he said: "Look up a chair for yourself."

"I am quite well, thank you, Mr. Cheyne."

"For Heaven's sake don't Mister me. I am never Mistered by anyone but duns."

"I beg your grace's pardon," said Wilkinson. "May I have the honour of presenting to your grace Mr. Harry Freemantle? Mr. Harry Freemantle, his Grace the Duke of Long Acre."

The two men rose and bowed profoundly to one another. Then Cheyne, again bowing profoundly and causing his head to describe a semicircle parallel to the horizon, said:

"The interesting preliminaries of introduction having been disposed of, his grace left the room to draw the beer out of his four-and-a-half-gallon cask, kept on the landing outside his grace's bedroom."

He returned in a few minutes with a jug and three glasses. When the three men had settled themselves and lighted their pipes, Wilkinson said:

"I hope we are not disturbing you now, Cheyne? You are not busy?"

"No, not a bit. I have just written a reply to a letter I had this morning from the Earl of Sark. He is an old chum of mine, and has read my book. He wants me to go and stay with him for awhile. But I can't--not just now, anyway."

"Well, you see," said Wilkinson, "Freemantle here is very anxious to do something in the way of verse--publishing it, I mean. He has several poems ready for publication. Poetry isn't in my way, Cheyne, so I thought I'd bring him to you."

"May I ask if you expect it to pay?"

"Well, no," said Freemantle, with a candid smile.

"You are independent of it?"

"In a certain sense I am. I am an attorney, and am employed in the office of Baker and Tranter, Bedford Street."

"Oh, that is all right. Is your purpose to publish a volume?"

"No, I do not aim so high as that."

"I am glad to hear it. There aren't more than six men whose volumes pay the mere expenses of printing and publication. Poetry is the most beggarly of all arts now. Living poets of fame and exquisite merit do not make as much by their trade as the humblest Italian artisan employed in casting plaster-of-Paris in Leather Lane. Writing and publishing poetry is an expensive luxury, and the readers of poetry are now a lost tribe."

"I thought of a much more modest attempt than a book. I thought I might be able to get a few little bits of verse into a magazine or two. I have brought a few little bits with me; I should feel very much obliged to you if you will look at them, and tell me what you think of them, and if there is any chance of their getting in anywhere; and if there is, when?"

"Oh, I'll be glad to do you more than that, if they are all right. I'll give you an introduction to an editor or two, whom I think likely to take them. In fact, if they are all right, I think there can be no question of our planting them somewhere."

"I am sure I am very much obliged to you. You were speaking a moment ago of having had a letter from a nobleman who has read your novel."

"Yes, my old friend, my kind old chum, the Earl of Sark."

"Well, if both of you will promise me to keep a secret anything I may say about another nobleman who has read your book, I can tell you something which will interest you a good deal."

The promise asked was given.

"I know I may depend on you both."

"Entirely."

Wilkinson answered for the two.

"Now, you know of the Duke of Shropshire and his son, the Marquis of Southwold? And you know they happen to bear the same name as you, Cheyne?"

"Yes," said the Duke of Long Acre guardedly. If Freemantle had not thus early mentioned the identity of names between the two, no doubt Cheyne would have claimed acquaintance with both; but here was the wretched name springing up again. Should he never get rid of this odious name?

"Well, Baker and Tranter have had a letter from the Marquis of Southwold, saying he has read your novel (Baker and Tranter are the Duke of Shropshire's lawyers), and that he thinks it a most impudent and barefaced outrage upon his father and his house----"

"What!" exclaimed the Duke of Long Acre, in the profoundest astonishment.

"It is a fact. He says the book is all about a dukedom which is on the point of becoming extinct, as in the case of the dukedom of Shropshire. That you have no claim or title to the name of Cheyne----"

"He lies!" cried Cheyne, all the more vehemently because he was not certain.

"And he wants to know if criminal proceedings cannot be taken against you for slander, malicious injury, and assuming a great name, with a view to annoy or----"

"Go on."

"Or possibly extract money."

"Great heavens! What next?"

"Of course, Cheyne, you do not confound mine with any of the opinions expressed in this letter. Indeed, I now think it would have been better if I had not mentioned it at all. And, for more reasons than one, I should not have done so, only that, of course, the whole thing is utterly absurd. Baker and Tranter have written back that, having had the book and the case placed before counsel, counsel and they agree no action of a criminal or civil nature can be taken in the matter. You will, of course, make no use of anything I have told you?"

"What, sir! Do you, too, doubt my word, question my honour?"

He struck the leaf of the table a mighty blow of his right fist. The leaf of the table flew to the ground, torn from the table; the table tilted up; and all the glasses, pipes, books, and papers went flying in wild confusion around the room. Cheyne sprang to his feet with an oath, and stood, pale as death, except his eyes, which were blazing. He looked like a wild beast ready to spring.

The other two men were also standing now.

"No, no, no, old man," said Wilkinson, in a soothing voice; "nothing is farther from the thoughts of anyone here. Why, we *know* you--old man!"

Wilkinson did not like to call the furious man either your grace or Cheyne now. Mortal offence might be in either.

"For if any man asperses my mother's name or impugns my honour, I shall take him by the hips and pitch him head downward through that window."

He meant what he said; and they both felt sure he could do it.

"Do be quiet, old man!" said Wilkinson. "I am sure either Freemantle or myself would be one of the very first to defend your mother's name or your honour, if anyone here had dared to call either in question. But no one here has dreamed of any such absurdity."

"Then where is this leprous Marquis, who has dared to do both? By----, I'll choke him with the tongue that said these things, as sure as my name is----" His whole frame was convulsed, the muscles of his throat and his face flushed, deepened into purple. He could not speak. The conflict was too terrible. At last he got breath. "Oh God, is it not horrible that a wretch whom Thou has marked with the sign of Thine own displeasure should try to sully spotless names, and spit its unclean venom on wholesome men with wholesome honours? As sure as the same Great Power made you and me, you shall answer to me for this, foot to foot, eye to eye, life to life!"

Without saying another word, he took up his hat, crushed it down on his head, and dashed out of the room, leaving the two men mute, incapable of speech.

Freemantle was the first to recover.

"Don't you think we ought to follow him? He'll do mischief to himself or somebody else, I am afraid. He's a raving maniac at this moment."

"I do not think he will do any mischief."

"I never saw a man look so like as if he meant what he said."

"No doubt. But I have known Cheyne many years, and you have met him for the first time today. All the time I have known him he has been the most peaceful of men."

"Yes; but these peaceful men, when they break out, are always the worst. How infernally unlucky I was to say anything about that letter!"

"But no one could have foreseen the consequences. Ninety-nine out of a hundred would have laughed at the whole thing. But you did not know Cheyne is sensitive about his name being the same as that of the Duke of Shropshire."

"I hadn't the slightest idea of anything of the kind."

"Of course not, or you would not have spoken. Cheyne is the very soul of honour, and a very excellent fellow, although he tells lies about knowing peers and big pots of all kinds. He said to you he had just had a letter from the Earl of Sark. Now 111 lay you a level shilling that there is----"

"No such title."

"Oh no! Cheyne isn't such a fool as that. But I'll lay you a level shilling that if you look in a morning paper you'll find the Earl of Sark has been doing or saying something. He has either spoken in the House, or written a letter to the secretary of a club, or laid the foundation-stone of a church, or bought a racer of some note, or done something else that has for the moment lifted him out of the ruck of the peers."

"Then you don't attach any importance to what he said?"

"I think he is very angry now, but that before he has got half a mile he will cool down. How far is it from here to where this Marquis lives?"

"Oh, a long way! A couple of hundred miles or more: two-fifty."

"It would be sheer nonsense to suppose his anger could last half the way. And I believe this Marquis spends most of his life at sea?"

"A good deal of it. He was so knocked up by reading this book that he put out to sea almost at once, he and the Duke."

"Then we may dismiss the matter altogether from our minds. I'll lay you another level shilling he draws no blood over this affair. What a horrible mess he has made of the place! He has spilt all the beer and tobacco. There's no cure for spilt beer, but there is for spilt 'baccy. Let us pick up a fill each and have another pipe before we go."

CHAPTER X.

ROUSING THE LION.

But, notwithstanding John Wilkinson's opinion to the contrary, there was not a man in all London so sure of the endurance of his rage as Charles Augustus Cheyne. That letter of the Marquis of Southwold had hit him on two of his sore points, namely, his doubtful parentage and personal honour. It used to be his boast that he never lost his temper, never once in all his life; and even still he might say the same thing. He had not lost his temper; his reason had fled him. He was not in a legal sense insane, but morally he could scarcely be held responsible for his acts.

Ever since he had been old enough to be capable of appreciating feelings of the kind, his most anxious thoughts had been devoted to reducing as much as possible all inquiry respecting his parentage. And here now was the wretched, drivelling, imbecile Marquis not only directing attention to his early history, but putting forth in as many words the horrible suspicion that he, Charles Cheyne, had no right or title to the name he bore! The one great fear of his life had been realised. He had been called an impostor of the most shameful class, and in addition to this, his

own honour had been impugned. He had in effect been called a knave, a liar, a cheat, a low-minded bully, who wanted to levy blackmail on unoffending people. It was intolerable, monstrous, unendurable.

Nothing but a personal encounter with the man who had dared to say or insinuate such things would appease him.

He would go to this wretched Marquis of Southwold; he would give the man his name; he would confess his authorship of the book, and then----

Suppose, when he had done all this, the Marquis said nothing; what farther should he do? For had he not promised the man who told him that he would not speak of the nature of that letter? What should he do? How could he bring that wretched man to book? Yet the thing must be done somehow, anyhow.

Then he suffered a revulsion. All his life he had been boasting of his acquaintance with lords, and yet he had never, to his knowledge, spoken to one. Now he was quite resolved to meet and to speak with one, no matter what the risk, no matter what the consequences. He would never allude to the aristocracy in the old way again. He was conscious there was a kind of poetic justice in the fact that a fatal stab to the reputation of his mother and his own honour had been dealt by one of the class with which he claimed intercourse. Henceforth and for ever let that class be to him accursed. Henceforth and for ever he would be a Radical, a Socialist.

But how should he manage to keep his word with Freemantle, and yet be able to taunt Southwold with his calumnies? He could think of only one way. He would go to the Marquis, declare who he was, state he was the author of "The Duke of Fenwick," and await the course events might then take. It was more than likely that the Marquis would say something offensive to him. He would then challenge the heir; and if the latter would not fight him with pistol or sword, if the Marquis declined such a combat, Cheyne would, after warning him, attack him with such weapons as Nature had given him--his hands and his vast strength. He would take the neck of that man in his hands, and strangle him with his thumbs; then they might hang him upon the nearest tree.

He knew the Marquis was a man of delicate health, of poor physique. He, Cheyne, would first offer him an equal combat, that the matter might be settled with pistols. If the heir refused, Cheyne would then offer him swords, in which skill would compensate for strength. If swords were refused, then he should tell the Marquis to defend himself as best he could, as he, Cheyne, meant to kill him as they stood.

No doubt in a stand-up man-to-man fight for life without artificial weapons, the Marquis would have no chance. Still, was it in essence an unequal fight? Who had struck the first blow? Who had given the affront? This man had slandered his mother and himself. Suppose what had been published to the few had been published to the many; suppose, instead of writing to his lawyers, he had written to the newspapers, and he, Cheyne, had taken an action against him, and recovered, say a thousand, say ten thousand pounds damages, what injury would that be to the heir to one of the richest dukedoms in England? But the stain could never be washed out of his own or his mother's character. Give a dog a bad name, and hang him. Give the lie twenty-four hours' start of the truth, and the truth will never overtake the lie. In any conflict whatever, a rich nobleman must have enormous advantages over a poor commoner--except in one. There is no law or rule for giving the rich noble as fine a physique as the poor commoner. When, therefore, the rich noble has a physique inferior to the poor commoner, all the noble's other advantages must be put into the scale with him before the two are weighed for a physical encounter. Therefore he, Cheyne, would be perfectly justified in using every resource of his muscles, and, by Heaven, he would; and he would strangle that libellous ruffian as he would strangle a venomous snake!

Cheyne found himself in Hyde Park before he had any consciousness of surrounding objects. In every man, it is a common saying, there is a chained-down madman. We are all capable of being driven insane by something or other--we may not know what. Men have gone mad for joy, for sorrow, for success, for reverse, for love, for hate, for faith, for unfaith, for gold, for lack of gold. All Cheyne's life he had been devoted to the nobility and the concealment of his own early history. This blow therefore fell with a double weight. It was, dealt by a member of the nobility at his early history. So that his own mind, never very well rooted in firm ground, was torn up and scattered, and he could not now recognise any of the old landmarks, or see anything in the old way. All mental objects were obscured by one--the figure of the man who, he believed, had done him irreparable wrong. He did not wait to see whether the Marquis had merely made a random guess, or had spoken from ascertained facts. To Cheyne it was as bad as bad could be even to hint at the chance of his having no right to the name he bore, or the title of an honourable man. If he had known anything, no matter how small, of his parents, his birth, his early history, he should not have minded it so much. But here was his titled namesake, the head of all the Cheynes in the empire, plainly asserting that he, Charles Augustus Cheyne, had no right or title to the name.

Then, out of the depths of his own mind--depths which he did not dare to explore--came the question: Was the Marquis's shot a chance one, or did he, the Marquis, absolutely *know* that he, Cheyne, had no right to carry the name?

Horrible! Horrible question! Most horrible question because it was unanswerable--because he

had no more clue to it than he had to the mysteries that would be solved by man a thousand years hence. The Marquis and he were of the one name. Could it be the Marquis knew his history? Could it be the Marquis knew the history of Charles Cheyne; and into that book, at no particular leaf, at no single paragraph, should he ever be permitted to look, save with the sanction of the Shropshire family?

After thinking over this for awhile, he dismissed the supposition with a contemptuous gesture. The idea of the great Shropshire house knowing anything of his humble history was absurd. The Marquis had shot a random shaft, which hit an old sore and rankled. But the very fact that it had been shot at random made the offence the more grievous. Why should the titled scoundrel be privileged to blast the name of a woman whom he had never seen, never heard of--that of a man of whose existence he had not known of until the publication of that novel?

It never occurred to Cheyne for a moment to think that, when the Marquis spoke of his possibly having no title to the name, the writer might have meant that the name Cheyne had merely been assumed for literary purposes, and that the man's real name was Brown, or Jones, or Robinson, or Smith, and that the Marquis did not intend the slightest imputation on the character of any woman who ever lived. Long brooding on the subject of his birth and parentage had made Cheyne's mind morbidly sensitive to any allusion of the kind; and one might as well try to talk down a storm, or to obtain practical results by expostulation with an earthquake, as to make him see the matter in any other than its very worst and most offensive light. Hence his wild homicidal fury.

When he became conscious, he was in Hyde Park. He never noticed the warm sweet sunshine, the bright-green, well-kept grass, the wholesome looking well-dressed people, the fair, slight, blue-eyed children, the brilliant equipages and stately footmen and coachmen, the trees in the pride of their full primal leafiness. He took no heed of all these; and yet they all contributed in an obscure way, in a way he could not trace, to bring his mind suddenly back to the one object which constituted the shining brightness of his own life. He thought of his bright and sprightly May.

Under the circumstances, the vision of her was anything but quieting. It was all very well for him who had no relative in the world to talk of killing this man, and being himself hanged to the nearest tree; but if he had no relatives in the world, there was a being with whom he purposed forming the closest of human ties. To the world it would not matter a fig whether he were hanged or died quietly in his bed. He was no cynic. There was not a flaw of cynicism in his large generous nature. Yes, he knew the boys would be sorry if he died in his bed or were hanged; but then May? How would it be with his little May, his bright, gay, winsome little sweetheart, who was to be his wife?

It was easy to ask that question, and easy to answer it. May would be heart-broken. What heart he ever had to give woman he had given her. He knew that what heart she had to give man she had given him. On neither heart had there been a previous mortgage. Each heart was perfectly unencumbered. Yes; it would break May's heart, as the saying went. That is, it would take all the brightness and hope out of her life; it would crush her for ever. She would never again be the same gay, animated, cheering darling she was now.

Then for a long time he walked about the Park, with eyes cast down, brooding over the image and the memories of May.

The question arose in his mind, whether he owed more to the name of his dead mother than to the happiness of his affianced wife? To him there could not be a moment's pause in answering this question. A man, whether married or single, engaged or free, was bound, if occasion demanded, to die in defence of his country, of his home, of the honour of his name--the last part of the code was growing a little obsolete now; but the man who could sit still while they blackened the memory of a dead mother must be that worst of all reptiles--a cowardly cad.

No; he had resolved not to go near May. Seeing her might jeopardise his revenge; and revenge his mother he would at any peril. How could a man who was not ready and able to defend his mother's name be considered capable of defending a sweetheart or a wife? It would be a poor rascally world for us, if men learned to sit still while evil tongues wagged over the fame of their womankind, mothers or sisters or wives.

So he set his back towards Knightsbridge and walked in the direction of Long Acre. When he arrived at his own place, he gathered up the papers which had been scattered on the floor, kicked the broken glasses into one corner, and then, taking some notepaper, wrote three notes, two of these being to editors, and one to Marion Durrant. The last was as follows:

"My darling May,

"News which I heard quite by accident this morning obliges me to leave town very suddenly. I am unable to say good-bye. In fact, I haven't time to write even a reasonably long letter; for the train I go by to the east leaves very soon, and I have to pack a portmanteau and get to the station in a very short time. I am not sure how long I shall be away; a few days, anyway. I hope my

darling girl will take great care of herself until I get back, for her own ever fond

"Charlie."

Three days passed, and she heard no more of him than of the dead. What had happened to him--to her darling, darling Charlie? She knew him too well to think he could write and would not. She knew him too well to think he had deserted her for some other woman. What had happened to her darling Charlie? When, hour after hour, she heard the postman knock in the street, and yet no tidings came to her of him, she began to think the postman must have been bribed to suppress his letters.

Only two men suspected whither Cheyne had gone, and they waited in fear and trembling of some terrible catastrophe; and at last news was at hand, filling the whole country with his name.

From the day Charles Augustus Cheyne set out for the east coast of England his name never appeared to another story or on the title page of another book.

CHAPTER XI.

AT BANKLEIGH.

When Cheyne had packed his portmanteau he took it and a hatbox down the steep staircase, carrying at the same time his letters in his teeth. He wore a low-crowned soft hat, instead of his ordinary silk one. He jumped into the street, and having thrust his letters into a pillar-post, hailed the first empty hansom and drove away to the railway-station.

Either his watch must have been slow or he must have looked at the wrong line of figures in the time-table, for when he got to the station they told him the train was on the point of starting, instead of having, as he had calculated, a good ten minutes to spare.

He took a first-class single ticket to Bankleigh, the nearest railway-station to Silver Bay. Then, with his portmanteau in one hand and his hatbox in the other, he dashed along the way leading to the platform from which the train for Bankleigh starts. The door was shut against him. The train had not yet started, but the time was up. The next train did not go till evening, which meant getting into a small unknown town long past midnight, a thing no one cares to do, particularly when he does not know even the name of a hotel or the hotel in it.

The gate was closed against him. The man refused to open the gate. The gate was five feet high, and Cheyne about six. Cheyne raised his hatbox and portmanteau over the barrier and let them fall. The man inside thought the traveller merely wished to get rid of the trouble of carrying his luggage any longer. Instantly Cheyne stepped on the lowest cross-rail of the gate, bent his chest over the top-rail of the gate, seized the ticket-taker by the leather waist-belt, and lifted him slowly over the gate. When he had deposited the ticket-taker safely on the ground he thrust half-a-crown into the man's hand, vaulted the gate, and taking up his portmanteau and hatbox, ran for a seat, and succeeded in scrambling into a carriage just as the train was in motion, and before the astonished but grateful ticket-taker could climb over the gate and regain the platform. Two or three of the porters had seen the feat, but it was not their duty to interfere. One of the guards saw it also; but having been, when younger, something of an athlete, and admiring the way in which the thing had been done, affected not to have seen it, and absolutely held the carriage-door open for Cheyne when he was getting in.

At the first station where the train stopped, the guard who had seen Cheyne lift the man over the gate, thrust his head into Cheyne's compartment, there being no one else in it, and said:

"That was a very neat trick sir, very. It isn't often we see a thing like that nowadays, sir."

"Confound it!" thought Cheyne, "this fellow must have his tip too."

He put his hand into his waistcoat-pocket and drew out a coin.

The guard saw what the passenger was doing, drew back, and said:

"No, sir; nothing for me, sir, thank you. It's not often nowadays we see a trick like that done, and I'd give a trifle myself to see it done again. But 'tisn't everyone, or half everyone, could do it."

And he moved along the platform, shaking his head to himself with the intelligent approval of one who knows a good deal of the difficulties in the performance of the feat which he applauded.

The train took eight hours to get to Bankleigh, but at last it drew up at that station, and Cheyne alighted.

It was then dusk, and the traveller having learned there was only one place in the town or village which accommodated strangers, and that it was only a few hundred yards away, gave his portmanteau to a porter, and bade the man lead him to the Shropshire Arms.

Now on the local London lines of railway, where there was a chance of meeting a friend or acquaintance, Cheyne always travelled first class, the difference in the fares of the first and third being only a few pence. But when he went farther into the open country, where there was practically no chance of meeting anyone who would know him, and where the difference came to many shillings, he always travelled third class. This was the most important journey of his life. He, a gentleman, was about to call upon another gentleman, and demand satisfaction, and it would not do to travel in any way that did not befit the station of men of their class.

All the way down in the train the deadliness of his design had not been lessened. He would meet this man, he would tell this man who he was, and then he would challenge him. There should be no seconds and no doctor. If the Marquis declined pistols and swords, then Cheyne would try to kill him with his hands, his fists, his thumbs dug into his throat. It was not every man, it was not one in ten thousand, could have lifted that burly ticket-collector over that gate with the neat precision he had shown. He could have thrown that man headforemost twenty feet, and broken his neck against a wall.

Cheyne engaged the best room at The Shropshire Arms, and ordered supper. It was only meet that a man come upon such a mission should be housed and fed as became a man of blood.

It would have been quite impossible for Cheyne to indulge in the luxuries of first-class travelling and first-class hotel accommodation, only he was one who always lived within his means, and had by him, when starting from London, all the money he had got for the right of re-publication in three volumes of his novel "The Duke of Fenwick." The money would not last for ever, but it would keep him going comfortably for a month or six weeks.

Cheyne was not in the least superstitious; but he did look on it as an extraordinary coincidence that the money he had got for the book which had exasperated Lord Southwold, now enabled him to come down from London, and seek satisfaction for the affront which had been put upon his mother and himself.

He asked the waiter who served the supper, if his Grace the Duke of Southwold was at home.

"No, sir, I think not. His Grace the Duke and Lord Southwold--that is, you know, sir, his lordship's only son and heir----"

"Yes, yes, I know."

"Well, sir, the two of them are gone to sea in his Grace's yacht, the *Seabird*, a couple, ay, or maybe three, days ago."

"And where have they sailed for?"

"Nowhere, sir."

"Why, what do you mean?"

"They never sails for nowhere, sir, great folks like them; and they never go nowhere, just as a man might walk out into the middle of a grass field and come back whistling no tune, nor bringing no daisy nor buttercup, nor as much as cutting a switch for himself in the hedge. I have never been to sea, sir, never. Where's the good of going to sea? But I've seen my share of salt water in my time, and all I ever saw of it was as like as two pea's, ay, liker; for some of the green peas is yellow, and some of the yellow peas is green. But all the sea-water I ever saw was the same in colour and smell and beastliness of taste and disposition, only fit for sharks and alligators and sorts like them. And not a single useful fish would be in the sea but would be poisoned by the beastly sea-water, only for the sweet waters of the rivers running into the sea and cheering up the fishes, poor souls, like a pint of cold bitter after a long walk of a hot day."

"And when do you think the yacht will come back?"

"There's no telling that, not unless you was a prophet. Even the sporting prophets knows nothing about it; for his grace has no dealings with dogs or horses, no more than the miller's wife that's been dead this five year."

"Are they often long away--months?"

"No, sir, not often months. But they are often away a tidy bit. It's like hanging a leg of mutton Christmas-time; it mostly depends on the weather whether the leg will ripen by Christmas-day, or will ripen too soon, or won't be ripe enough."

"And is it the bad or the good weather that brings them home?"

"Well, sir, seeing that this house is built on the Duke's property and called after the Duke, and that the landlord, sir, holds it by lease under the Duke, it wouldn't be becoming in me or anyone else of us to call it bad weather that brings the Duke back to us; but I'm free to say it isn't the kind of weather that everybody would order if he was going on a desolate island and wanted to enjoy himself on the sly away from the old woman. We call it the Duke's wind here; for if he's afloat it brings him home, and that's the only good it ever brings, but the doctors and the coffin-makers and grave-diggers. Most people call it the nor'-east wind. You see his grace is over sixty now, and has got all his joints pretty well blocked up with rheumatism; and the minute the nor'-east sets in it screws him up, and they have to run for home. His lordship stops aboard the *Seabird* in the shelter of the bay, and his grace goes up to the Castle, and never goes out of his warm rooms at the back of the Castle, farthest away from the nor'-east, until the wind changes."

"And how far is the castle from here?"

"About four mile, or maybe a trifle less. We like to think we're a trifle nearer to it than four miles. Anyway, we're sure of one thing--we're the nearest public-house or inn by a mile."

"There is no railway, I suppose, from here to Silverview?"

"Railway! Railway! Why, it's my belief his grace would rather have a row of public-houses opposite the Castle gate, and the courtyard made into a bowling-green with green wooden boxes all round for refreshments, rather than see the snout of a railway-engine within a mile of his place."

"Then I shall walk over to the place and have a look at to-morrow morning," thought Cheyne, as he strolled out into the porch to smoke a couple of cigars before going to bed.

But he did not smoke even half one of his cigars there. The air had grown suddenly chilly, nay, downright cold. So he left the porch and went into the cosy little bar, where there was a fire for boiling water for those who liked a drop of something hot.

Here were half-a-dozen men smoking and chatting and drinking. As he entered, all were silent.

"Turned quite cold, sir," said the host, who was sitting at a table with the rest.

"Yes, indeed," said Cheyne, taking a chair. "I thought I would smoke in the porch, but it was too cold to sit there."

"Ah," said the landlord, "I think we're in for a stinging nor'-easter--the Duke's weather, as we call it hereabouts, sir."

"Do you think so?" said Cheyne.

"Ay, no doubt of it."

"Then," thought Cheyne, "I shall not have long to wait."

CHAPTER XII.

THE DUKE'S WEATHER.

That night Cheyne slept heavily. The journey and the change of air had helped to deepen his slumbers. Then there had been the exhausting excitement of the day he had just passed. It was near nine o'clock when he opened his eyes. For awhile he lay awake, unable to recall the events which had brought him to this strange place.

"The sea," he thought--"is that the rolling of the sea? Have I gone to Brighton or to Margate in my sleep?"

He jumped out of bed, and approached the window. Before he had crossed the floor he remembered all. This was Bankleigh, whither he had come for the purpose of settling affairs with the Marquis of Southwold, and this roaring sound abroad was not the beating of the sea upon the shore, but the headlong flight of the wind across the land.

How did the wind blow?

He pulled up the blind, and looked out. The wind beat at an acute angle against his window; but as he did not know how the house faced, he could not tell from what quarter the wind blew. He rang the bell.

When the waiter entered, he asked abruptly:

"How's the wind?"

"Regular Duke's weather, sir. Your boots and the hot water, sir. It has been blowing a gale all night, sir. A gale, sir, it would take soda-water bottles to hold. You couldn't bottle a gale like that in any of your flimsy fifteenpenny claret bottles. Schwepps himself might be proud of a gale like that. Some of the early customers that came in this morning says that the sea is awful, and that many's the tree there's down here and there along the road. Duke's weather all out."

"And you think there is a likelihood the Duke's yacht will be in soon."

"She will, sir, as sure as country eggs are eggs, which they mostly are, sir. But town eggs, sir, especially them at thirteen for a shilling, are very often not eggs at all, but young chickens which hadn't the heart to face life. Talking about eggs, sir, reminds me to ask what you would like for breakfast. I never could make out, sir, why we should eat eggs more in the morning than any other time of the day, unless it may be that we are vexed with the whole breed and generation of fowl by being woke up at first light by cocks crowing, and then, when we see an egg, we revenge ourselves."

Cheyne gave the necessary order for breakfast, and dismissed the talkative waiter.

The wind had not fallen. It was blowing a full gale from the north-east. The landscape, which yesterday had been flushed with the mellow green of early summer, now looked cold and bleak and dispiriting. The trees bent in the blast, and showed the dry faded green of their underleaf to the ashen sky. The grass and corn lay flat and quivering like a muddy green lake. The clouds were low and long, stretching in great jagged strips up into the wind, down into the lee. Birds were silent, and rarely left shelter. Everything was parched and gritty. All the life had gone out of the scene, all Nature looked barren, forlorn.

Cheyne dressed himself with deliberation and care. The yacht might come in to-day, and she might not. It was well to be prepared. When she did come in, he would lose no time in going aboard. He should go aboard, ask for the Marquis of Southwold, tell the Marquis he had something of importance to say which should be said to him alone. When they were alone, he should lock the door, and say what he had to say--do what he had to do. He should not be very long in coming to the point, once he found himself face to face with this cowardly nobleman. Nothing should move him from his resolution of wiping out, in blood, the deadly insult of that letter. When the good name of a man's mother was called in question, and when, at the same time, a man's own honour had been assailed, no one but a mean dastard could for a moment hesitate as to the course one ought to pursue.

No doubt Lord Southwold would refuse to fight. In all likelihood he would refuse pistols or swords. Then he should tell this arrogant liar that they should fight as they stood, armed with only manhood against manhood.

If, again, this lying miscreant refused, he should strike him, with his open hand, across the face. If this son of seven dukes did not respond to this, he would tell him, in plain words, what he was going to do. Then he should seize him and crush the vile breath out of his body, as sure as that they both owed their breath and their bodies and their manhood to the one great Maker.

They would call this murder. But was murder of the body of a living man worse than--anything nearly so bad as--murder of a dead woman's fair fame? Eternal curses attend this reprobate wretch!

He ate his breakfast, but what it consisted of he did not know. The talkative waiter kept up a running fire of words; but what they meant, or what his answers conveyed, he did not know.

He made up his mind to walk over to Silver Bay, and, as soon as breakfast was over, he asked the way and set off.

The gale had not moderated; and although Cheyne was one of the strongest men in England, he could not make rapid headway against it. In ordinary weather he would have backed himself to walk the four miles in less than three-quarters of an hour. This day, at the end of three-quarters of an hour, he had got little more than halfway.

He was in no hurry, and he liked the wind. He liked to feel it beat against his face and tug at his clothes. He exulted in the conflict, for at every pace he was conquering the enemy. He was in an excited angry humour--in a rage, the first rage he had ever known in all his life--and he exulted in having some kind of foe in front of him.

Then again, if what that loquacious waiter had told him was true, the wind against which he fought there was fighting for him out at sea, was driving that yacht with its accursed passenger towards him. When this thought crossed his mind, he reached out his arms to embrace the wind.

It was no longer a foe, but a loyal friend, doing his work with all its might.

He wondered, Would the yacht come in to-day? Almost certainly not. She had, according to the man at the Shropshire Arms, gone to sea two or three days ago. This gale had been blowing only twelve hours, and it was not likely she had been last night within twenty-four hours' sail of this bay. But then one should remember that twenty-four hours of such a gale would do more than three days of light winds. That was so if the light winds had been fair winds, and the gale was a fair wind. But if the light winds had been fair, and this was foul, how would that be? To answer this question, one should know particulars as to the course the yacht had sailed, and where she was when the gale had struck her first. He knew none of these particulars, and therefore he had no choice but to give up trying to solve the problem.

Thanks to this wind, his victim would soon be in his hands. Unless--what an intolerable disappointment that would be!--unless the waves swallowed his victim up, that victim would soon be in his hands. It would be too bad if the sea robbed him of his revenge. Vengeance for an insult to a mother was the inalienable right of a son, and it would be monstrous to take it from him.

He pressed onward through the rain and blinding dust.

What should he do if this man refused to see him? Suppose, when he tried to get aboard that yacht, they would not let him, what should he do? He had never thought of that before. In case they refused to let him go on board, he should have to go on board by force. He should have the strength of ten. Ay, but he should have more than ten against him. He could not hope to fight his way on board, across the deck, down the companion, and into the cabin, against such odds as would be opposed to him.

What should he do? What could he do?

Ah, that was a good thought! He should send in the name of Baker and Tranter, and make no other use of the name of the firm or of the information he had got through Freemantle. What an excellent thought that was! With the proceeds of the book, "The Duke of Fenwick," he had been able to undertake this journey, and face any reasonable delay. With the name of the firm to which this man had written the libel on himself and his mother, he should gain admittance to the loathsome detractor. Here was a complete circle of poetic justice!

When asked for his name, he should say:

"A gentleman on business. Kindly mention the name of Messrs. Baker and Tranter. I do not happen to have a card of the firm by me."

When he found himself in the presence of the Marquis, he should announce his own name, and say that he had written that book.

But suppose, when all this had happened, the Marquis said nothing, made no accusations, no admissions, what then?

Oh, confound it, Southwold would say something. Surely the Marquis would betray his opinions in some way or another, and then----

"Ah, is this the bay? Silver Bay? And here is the Castle--Silverview Castle."

The gale struck him with all its force; for he now stood on top of the high land by which the bay was surrounded. On his right rose the favourite home of the great Duke of Shropshire. He was in the ducal grounds, opposite the vast castellated pile of buildings, where the Duke lived when on shore; and before him lay the unquiet green waters of the bay, bounded on the seaward side by the reef of grey rocks and the narrow opening through which the heavy waters wallowed in huge uncouth billows towards the shore at his feet; while all along the reef, and high above the summit of its rock, rose and fell at regular intervals a slow-moving irregular wall of dingy white spray. Beyond the reef lay the German Ocean, heaving and tumbling beneath the impetuous blast.

On the left or northern shore of the bay the water was comparatively smooth, and here a few fishing-boats lay moored. Somewhat south-west of the fishing-boats rose and fell the buoy at which the yacht *Seabird* swung when in port. At the northern corner of the bay lay the only strip of level ground on the shores of the bay, and there stood a few fishermen's cottages; and from this rose a long private road of gradual ascent to the level of the Castle, reaching the upper land a little to the north-east of the Castle.

Except at that one strip of land at the north-east corner of the bay, at the right angle formed where the reef joined the mainland, the water of the bay was unapproachable by cart or carriage. There were three precipitous paths leading, at different points, from the top of the cliffs to three small sandy coves below. The road and the cottages had been the work of the present Duke. He had made the road, that he might have easy access to the water; and he had built the few cottages, that he might have at hand a few seafaring young men, from whom he might fill up vacancies in the yacht's crew, for neither he nor his son liked strangers. While the wild north-east wind swept over the sea and the downs, the cottages lay in secure shelter under the shadow of the high cliff and gaunt rocks, while the huge Castle stood up white against the withering gale.

The road to the little jetty was visible the whole way from the Castle to the water. That cluster of cottages was the only one within three miles of the Castle.

For awhile Cheyne stood leaning forward against the wind contemplating the scene. He looked out under the low clouds streaming up towards him, and could see no craft of any kind. He looked into the bay, and saw a few fishing-boats rolling slowly in the comparatively smooth water between him and the reef. He looked at the reef itself, and the cataracts of white foam and waving haloes of dun spray. He heard the thunder of the ocean billows on the reef, and swash of lesser waves upon the shore.

"What a storm!" he thought. "And that yacht is out there--out there where the long waves, each with the weight of thousands of tons, press onward ceaselessly to the shore. It is wonderful to think man can build anything which can withstand the onslaught of such mighty waves, the fury of such relentless wind! It is almost incredible that any structure of wood could live afloat under conditions such as these!"

He pressed his hand firmly over his eyes, drew his coat tightly round him, and, leaning still more forward into the wind, pushed resolutely down the road leading to the jetty.

CHAPTER XIII.

A NOR'-EASTER AT SEA.

When this north-east wind began to blow, the yacht *Seabird* lay well away to the southward and eastward of Silver Bay, the reckoning being that she was from the bay a hundred-and-thirty miles as a crow flies. The gale had not come on the schooner suddenly. The Duke, the Marquis, and the captain were standing together when the south-west wind on which they had been sailing, began to die, and finally shook out of the sails.

It was a beautiful moonless starlight night. When the wind fell, and the sails flapped idly against the masts, the Duke turned to Captain Drew and said:

"Well, captain, what do you think of it now?"

"I don't think much of it, your grace; I think we're going to have a stiff'ner. I don't like the look of it at all."

"Where do you expect it from now?"

"Not out of the south'ard and west'ard again. No such luck. It would not surprise me a bit if it went all the way round to north, or even the east'ard of north. The glass is falling, it's been unnaturally hot for days, and I think we'll have a change."

"So do I. I think the thermometer must have fallen also. Has it, captain?"

"Yes, your grace, it has dropped from sixty-seven to sixty, and it is going down still."

"I'm sure it isn't sixty now. I think you're right, Drew. I think it will be out of the north. I feel it in my shoulder. I feel the north-east is coming. What do you think, George?"

"I think so too. I am almost sure we shall have to put about before morning. It is growing colder and colder every moment."

For awhile there was silence on deck.

A tall raw-boned man with hollow cadaverous cheeks was at the wheel. He was a man of forty-five years of age, and one of the best seamen in the crew. It was the captain's watch, and the next man who spoke aloud was the man at the wheel. He cried out, in as low a voice as would reach the second mate:

"Mr. Mate!"

"Ay, ay!" answered the mate from the waist, as he turned and walked aft to Pritchard, the gaunt cadaverous man at the wheel.

There was a loud flapping of sails at this time. For awhile Pritchard and Starclay, the second mate, whispered. Starclay took the wheel for a moment, put it three spokes to starboard, put it three spokes to port, and then asked of Pritchard:

"When did you notice it?"

"Not until after the way went off her. I was playing with the wheel, and I felt something wrong."

"Ay, something wrong, no doubt. I don't know what. We must see to it at once. I think we're going to have a bit of a twister. Awkward to have anything wrong there if we get into heavy weather. The captain is talking to the Duke, and I don't like going to him just now. Mr. Yarmould is lying down. I'll ask him to turn up."

Yarmould was the first mate.

In a few minutes Yarmould, the first mate, came aft with the second mate, and taking the wheel in his hand, turned it three spokes to starboard, and then three spokes to port of "steady," shook his head, and then asked:

"How much was it free before from steady, Pritchard?"

"One spoke, sir, or maybe two. Did you notice, sir, that when you put it over three spokes and were putting it back six, between the second and third spoke you felt something?"

"Yes. It didn't come back smooth. I felt a check at about steady. That's queer, isn't it, Mr. Starclay?"

Mr. Yarmould was stout and low of stature.

"Yes, sir. I can't make it out. It goes over freely three spokes, and yet when it's coming back, it grates between two and three."

The chief mate spun the wheel backward and forward once more, and then looked up quickly. It was impossible to see the expression of his face; but evidently he had made up his mind as to what was wrong with the steering apparatus of the yacht *Seabird*.

He said:

"The carpenter is in your watch, Mr. Starclay?"

"Yes, sir."

"Ask him to step aft."

When the carpenter had come, the first mate said:

"Mr. Carpenter, yesterday two spokes or three spokes of the wheel picked up the slack of the rudder-chain when the wheel was hard over in smooth water, now it takes six spokes to pick up the slack. Try the wheel and tell us what you think of it."

The carpenter caught the spokes and put them over, and put them back again.

"At halfway back I feel something," said the carpenter. "That is bad. It's not the chains, it's not the wheel, it's not the tackles----"

He paused awhile, and all the men looked gravely into one another's face, but no one spoke.

The boom, with the great mainsail, lay over at the starboard side of the schooner. The Duke, the Marquis, and the captain were standing by the starboard main shrouds. The two noblemen were leaning up against the bulwark, and the captain was standing five or six planks to windward, amid-ship from the bulwark, and in a line with a line drawn from a point about halfway between the mainmast and the companion. Thus he could not see anything of what was going on at the wheel, and the flapping of the sails prevented his hearing the words spoken further aft beyond the cry of "Mr. Mate!" to which he had attached no importance.

The lower portion of the bodies of the four men now at the wheel had been all along visible to the Marquis of Southwold. Such a gathering of the crew on the quarter-deck was, under the circumstances, exceedingly unusual, and it attracted the heir's attention. At last he spoke:

"I say, Captain Drew, what can all these men want aft in a calm at this time of night?"

The captain turned quickly round, stooped so as to be able to see under the boom, recognised by the bulk and stature of the four men who they were, and guessing something was wrong from the fact that the first mate, whose watch it was below, was on deck and in consultation with Pritchard at the wheel, the second mate, and the carpenter, said: "I'll go see, my lord," and dived under the boom and disappeared, all but the lower part of his body.

"What is it, Mr. Mate?" asked the captain.

"Well, sir, it looks bad enough."

"The weather? I know it does. We're going to have it, and I think, Mr. Mate, a good deal too, of it, out of the north. But we are able for all we can get. Eh?" The final interrogative was spoken, evidently not with a view to an answer to the question it put, but with the intention of encouraging the mate to speak out and explain why a council should be held on the quarter-deck without him, at such an hour, and in a calm.

There was a perceptible pause.

"We think," said Yarmould, in a whisper, "that there's going to be a gale----"

"Well," cried the captain impatiently, "we're not feathers or chaff that we need be afraid of our being blown away, my sons." He spoke with the impatient irritation of a man who knew he was being fenced with, and knew the men who were fencing with him would not be so unstraight, only that they wished to break to him some unpleasant fact.

"What is it?" the captain asked, seeing them all hesitate.

"We think, sir, there is something wrong with the steering-gear."

"With the steering-gear! With what part of the steering-gear? The chain?"

"No."

"The tackles?"

"No."

"The wheel?"

"No."

"The helm?"

"No, sir."

"Then, in the devil's name, what is it?"

"We think the cap-irons of the rudder have worked loose."

"*What!*"

For a few seconds no one spoke.

"Are you sure?" asked the captain.

"Take the wheel, sir, and see what you think of it."

The captain spun the wheel first one way and then another. He thrust his cap back off his forehead, thrust his hands into his trousers-pockets, and remained motionless for a few moments.

Over the rudder-head was an ornamental seat.

"Carpenter," said the captain, "bring your tools and a lantern. Knock away this seat, and let us see how things are."

As the captain gave these orders the sails ceased to flap. Slowly the boom went over to what had a little while before been the weather-side; the sails filled, and the schooner began to forge slowly ahead.

"Drew!" cried the Duke.

"Yes, your grace."

"Put her about and run for the bay. Good-night."

"Ay, ay, your grace. Good-night."

"Anything wrong. Drew?" called out the Marquis.

"I hope not, your lordship. We are going to try; and when we know I will run below and tell you."

"All right. Good-night, Drew; good-night, men."

"Good-night, your lordship."

The carpenter brought the tools and a lantern. In a few minutes he had knocked away the

ornamental seat, and revealed the rudder-cap.

There, unmistakeably, was the explanation of the irregularity which Pritchard had noticed. The rudder-head was rotten; and the cap-irons of the rudder had worked loose upon the wood, so that the helm, to which the cap-irons were fixed, played a little free to starboard and port before it gripped the rudder-head.

"What do you think, carpenter?" asked the captain, when the four men had recovered their upright position, after bending low to examine the rudder-head by the light of the lantern.

The carpenter shook his head gravely.

"It doesn't look wholesome, does it, captain? You're going to put the ship about, sir?"

"Yes."

"All right, sir. Put her about, and then we'll see what we can do."

The sails were now full with the north-east breeze, which was yet light. The yacht was put about. Her head was set for Silver Bay, and she lay over slightly, steered half a point to the northward of north-west, on the wind with the wind abeam.

When the yacht was tidy once more, the four men came aft to where the man stood at the wheel.

"What do you propose to do, carpenter?" asked the master.

"Well, sir, you see there's no time to be lost. It was a bad bit of timber to start with, and now it's dozed. It's the first rudder she ever had?"

"It is the first rudder she ever had."

"And it's five years since she has been on the hard or in a dry dock?"

"Five years since she got a good overhauling."

"It is my opinion, sir, that anyone would pass that rudder by sight until it began to give, which can't be longer ago than a few days."

"What do you propose doing?"

"Well, sir, I'd say the best thing would be to wedge it taut inside the cap-iron. What do you think, sir?"

"You couldn't fish it?"

"No, sir, in no way; there's no room."

"I think you're right, Mr. Carpenter. There is no other way but to wedge it. Do you think it will hold?"

"Yes, sir, I think it will. We'll lash it in with half-inch as far as we can below the iron, and then we'll wedge it inside the iron. That'll hold it," said the carpenter confidently.

"Ay," said the captain; "I don't think you can do anything better."

The carpenter set to work at once. The man at the helm kept the wheel steady, and coil after coil was slowly wound round the rotten rudder-head. The carpenter wound the rope round and round as far down as the space between the rudder-head and the rudder-case would allow. Then he improved on his original plan, and wound the line over the coil already formed, thus doubling the thickness of the serving. When this had been done, the carpenter brought some pieces of oak, and cut them into long wedges. These he drove down with a caulker's maul inside the cap-iron all round the rudder-head.

While the carpenter was lashing the rudder-head and driving in the wedges, the captain and first mate were walking up and down the quarter-deck together. As the carpenter had driven in wedge after wedge, he had noticed with satisfaction that each succeeding one required more driving. Hence it was obvious the wedges were telling. It was also plainly revealed, by the light of the lantern, that the play of the rudder-head within the irons of the rudder-cap had been reduced to almost nothing. This was exceedingly satisfactory. Now and then the captain had stopped in his walk to see how the carpenter progressed.

When the carpenter had driven in ten wedges he paused a moment, asked the captain to look, and said:

"What do you think of it now, captain?"

"What do you say, Mr. Carpenter?"

"Well, sir, I think 'twill hold now. See." He caught the rudder and shook it forcibly.

"It works a little yet."

"It does, sir. Do you think, sir, I might put in another wedge or two?"

"You see, Mr. Carpenter, it works a little free now; we're going to have a gale; if it works a little now, it will work a great deal more by-and-by, and I don't like the notion of that iron working freer and freer with a lee-shore under my bow. I don't like that notion at all. Do you think you could make it taut with a couple more wedges?"

"Yes, captain; I think I could, if----"

"If what?"

"If the iron will hold."

"Ah!" said the captain, and the three men looked down gravely at the face of the carpenter, who was kneeling on the deck, and whose tar-stained caulker's maul was partly illumined by the light of the lantern. The lantern was tilted up by a spike-nail so that most of the light was thrown on the rudder-cap and down the rudder-case.

"And what do you think of the iron, Mr. Carpenter?"

The man did not reply immediately. He took up a hammer and struck the iron sharply with it. The paint cracked and fell down the rudder-case into the black invisible water below. When most of the yellow paint had fallen off, the rusty wasted metal became visible.

"It looks all right, captain," said the carpenter, raising his head.

"Well, knock in two more wedges. I don't like the notion of that thing working loose while we are in a gale with a lee-shore under our bow. I promised the Duke I'd tell him about this as soon as it had been put straight. I suppose I may count it straight now, Mr. Carpenter?"

"Yes, sir; I think you may. With the lashing and the wedges I don't expect anything will stir, and I have no fear of the iron."

The captain walked forward and disappeared down the companion.

CHAPTER XIV.

TWO DISCOVERIES.

The captain knocked at the cabin-door, and, having received permission, entered.

"Well, Drew, what is the matter?" asked the Duke, from a couch.

"The rudder-head is dozed, your grace."

"Dozed, Drew! and you found that out only now?"

There was a tone of alarm and reproach in the old man's voice.

"You see, your grace, it is some time since she was overhauled."

"Yes; but the rudder-head. Drew, the rudder-head! That is not a thing to trifle with."

"Your grace will remember I could not get at it, owing to the seat."

"Well, talking won't undo the evil now. What do you propose doing?"

"We've cured it so far, your grace. We've served the rudder-head with the half-inch, and driven wedges inside the iron all round."

"And you think it is safe now?"

"Quite safe for the run."

"And you do not think it necessary or advisable to put in anywhere?"

"That's what I came to speak to your grace about."

"There's Izlemouth, a couple of hours nearer than Silver Bay. How is the wind for Izlemouth?"

"Fair, your grace. We'd carry it over the quarter."

"And how is it for home?"

"Abeam."

"She'd make a couple of knots more an hour with the wind on the quarter."

"Yes, your grace, and less leeway."

"I am half inclined to run in there. And yet, if you are satisfied that the rudder-head will hold until we can reach Silver Bay, I'd much rather go home."

"The rudder-head will hold, your grace. I'll answer for that. Would your grace like to come and see it?"

"No, no. Drew. I'll take your word for it. You know all about it. It's a wonder you never thought of running a knife into that rudder."

"Well, your grace, as I said, it wasn't easy to get at. You see, there was the seat."

"Ay, ay! So there was--so there was, Drew! I forgot that--I forgot that. You are not to blame. We must lay the *Seabird* up when we get in. We can hire or buy another yacht while this one is under repairs. What do you think we ought to do, Drew, sell her or repair her? What do you think?"

"You have had her a good many years now, your grace."

"Yes, yes. You think I ought to sell her. I think you are right. What course are you steering now, Drew?"

"Nor'-west, your grace; for home."

"Well, then, keep her on that tack--keep her on that tack. If you answer for the rudder, we'll go home. What do you think she'd fetch as she swims?"

"Fittings and all?"

He looked round at the superbly-fitted and furnished cabin.

"Yes. Just as she swims. We'd take our personal baggage ashore, and sell all the rest."

"She's worth thirty pounds a ton builder's measurement, although, if she was a merchant ship, she would now be off the letter. Thirty pounds a ton, if she's worth a sovereign."

"Then I tell you, Drew, we three have been shipmates many years now, and you shall have the old *Seabird* as she stands; and if you don't want to better yourself--you are too young a man to retire--you shall get us a new and a better boat, and be our captain still."

"Your grace, I shall be glad to command your new yacht. I am very proud to think you have still confidence in me, notwithstanding my oversight of the rudder----"

"The fullest confidence, Drew. As you say, there was that seat in the way."

"But, your grace, I could scarcely bring myself to take a present of the *Seabird*----"

"But you shall take a present of it. Neither I nor my son want her any more."

"Well, if your grace insists, I have no choice."

"You have no choice. She's beginning to heel over already; she's beginning to feel this nor'-easter already, and so am I. My pains grow bad; I feel it in my shoulder now. You may go now. Drew, and lie down, or take a watch on deck, as you consider best. Anyway, have just another look at that rudder-head before you turn in, and come and tell me what you think; we will then finally decide as to our course."

When the captain regained the deck, he found the wind had freshened. There was as much wind now as she could bear with all fore-and-aft canvas set. It was not yet necessary to think of taking in sail, but it would be if the breeze got any stronger. She was now quite comfortable, with flying-jib and gaff-topsails. The covering-boards on the port-side were under; but Captain Drew would rather keep her going than insure a dry deck. The dead-lights were all closed, and everything snug except the rudder-head. It was worrying to think he should not have found out about that rudder-head until he was a hundred and fifty miles from Silver Bay, and upwards of a

hundred and thirty from any port. But the wedging was sure to hold; in fact, it couldn't help holding, unless the wood was ten times worse than it looked.

Captain Drew went aft. The carpenter and first and second mates were still at the rudder-head. The broken-up seat had been carried away. Pritchard was still at the wheel.

"Well, Mr. Mate, what do you think of the cap now?"

"Taut as a drum now, sir."

"How does she behave? How does she feel, Pritchard?"

"Answers as good as new, sir. Look!"

He put up the wheel a little to port, and then a little to starboard; at each side, before he got the wheel two spokes over, there was a check, and plainly the jump of the rudder.

The captain rubbed his hands. He really thought now she would fetch forty pounds a ton, and tomorrow she would be his.

"Have you looked at the cap-iron, Mr. Carpenter?"

"Yes, sir; most careful."

"How is that?"

"Sound as a bell."

The captain rubbed his hands again. What a fortunate thing for him, after all, was this fault in the rudder-head. Only for it the Duke might not think, for goodness knew how long, of parting with the *Seabird*, and, of course, until he did think of parting with her, he could not think of making her a present to him, Captain Drew. Wonderful how things fall out!

As far as the rudder went, all now being in a satisfactory condition, and the watch sufficiently strong to deal with the duty of taking in sail, the captain told the first mate to turn in and the carpenter to go forward to his own duties, having ordered him to leave the lantern behind him. To the second mate he said:

"I'll take charge, Mr. Starclay. You can turn in, if you like."

"Thank you, sir," said the second mate; and he, too, went forward. The captain and Pritchard were now the only men on the quarter-deck. The former went below, told the Duke, and came back to the deck.

Captain Drew was too full of thought for sleep. His pay was very good, more than very good. He was perfectly content to remain as he was. The Duke and the Marquis had always treated him well. He had nothing to complain of, and he had never complained. When he was afloat he lived like a prince. When he was ashore he had a comfortable home, and a wife and children, who were dearer to him than all the rest of the world. But, notwithstanding the liberal pay of the Duke, and that he had been many years in his grace's employment, he had, owing to no extravagance on his part, but to the way in which he had kept his home and brought up his family, been able to lay nothing aside for a rainy day. Now he was between forty and fifty; all his children were still upon his hands, and his pay was no more than kept them and his wife comfortably. He had of late felt some anxiety as to what he should do with his boys and girls. He knew that if anything happened to himself, the Duke would pension his widow. But the children were now old enough to have their careers indicated at least, and he lacked the means of starting them.

Now all had been changed. This yacht would become his property the moment they reached Silver Bay, and she would fetch from five to six thousand pounds! What a blessing! She was as good as his own already. They all thought the rudder-head would hold. For anything else he cared nothing. She was a good sea-boat. She was stiff. He knew her from stem to stem. If the rudder-cap held, he feared nothing wind or wave could do. This gift had made his fortune, and from the *Seabird's* deck he would not go until she had dropped anchor safe inside the reef-protected Silver Bay.

He told the steward to bring him a cup of coffee, and having put on his pea-jacket, and lighted a pipe, he shook himself, and began pacing the quarterdeck at the windward side.

As his feet fell upon the planks, he thought, "My own! My own! The craft I've sailed these many years, the best years of my life, now is all mine, to do with as I please! And what shall I do with her? Sell her! Sell her, and put my little ones fair before the wind?"

"How does she answer now, Pritchard?" he asked the man at the wheel.

"Fast as a racer, sir," replied the man.

"That's right! That's right!" said the captain, rubbing his hands, and drawing his pipe heartily.

It was the rule of the yacht that the officer in charge, be he captain or mate, should not smoke. This was the captain's first infringement of the rule, but there were excuses for him. There was no likelihood that either the Duke or the Marquis would come on deck again that night; and in less than four-and-twenty hours the craft he commanded would be his own. He was now in the zenith of his fortune. All his worldly future was fairly provided for, and he was mapping it out with a loving hand.

He paused in his walk, and caught the bulwark, tried to shake it, that he might enjoy the consciousness of the vessel's--his vessel's--strength. He laid his hand on the mainboom, as one pats the head of a favourite child. He looked down the skylight, and saw the satin-wood panels, the silver fittings, the rich velvet curtains and upholstery.

Then he took up the lantern and directed the light from the bull's-eye on to the unshapely ragged rudder-head. The carpenter had not been able to drive all the wedges fully home, nor had he cut them off level with the rudder-cap. The clean newly-cut wedges, standing up in the rude oval formed by the line inside the cap-iron, looked like a double set of irregular teeth laid flat and open or dislocated. The upper surface of the rudder appeared lozenge-shaped, but only the outline of the iron was lozenge-shaped. The wood and the inner side formed an octagon, the sides of which were arcs of large circles, the plain being longer by one-third than broad. The irons, when they reached what may be termed the base or after-line of the octagon, increased greatly in thickness, and at the line of the base were pierced by an iron bolt which was riveted over a pair of washers, and this bolt formed the base-line of the ironwork aft. The iron sides of the octagon were continued aft, and brought together at a gentle angle, until they met the iron helm, to which they were firmly welded; the strength of this joint being enormously increased by a stout exterior ring clasping all three together, and welded to all three; following the helm-iron forward, between those two side bands over the bolt, through the rudder-head, it was finally riveted over a washer in the foremost iron side of the band.

The workmanship was excellent, and the whole looked as firm as human hands could make it.

The interior of the iron was an irregular octagon, the exterior was rounded and lozenge-shaped. The captain now, for the first time, noticed two things: namely, that the lozenge-shape, which looked so well, had been obtained at the expense of strength; and, that the helm-iron must be broken off short at the point where it entered the rudder-head. The exterior oval had been produced by thinning away the iron at points exterior to the interior angles. Unless the helm-iron had been broken, the cap-iron could not have worked so freely a while ago.

These two discoveries filled him with uneasiness. He knelt down on the deck and turned the full glare of the bull's eye on the jagged rudder-head and the symmetrical mass of ironwork.

This closer examination somewhat allayed his fears. If, as he knelt, he could have seen what was slowly, surely, creeping upwards towards him in the darkness, he would have sprung to his feet in despair.

CHAPTER XV.

AN INVISIBLE FOE.

The wind increased. It now became obvious that the captain's predictions would be verified, and that it would blow a whole gale before morning. It was midnight, and gradually Captain Drew had been taking off canvas. The sea had begun to rise. The yacht was now close-reefed, but it had not been necessary to turn up the whole crew. The wind had come on so gradually that the watch had been able to make the necessary reductions. Captain Drew was a considerate man, and never gave any unnecessary hardship to his men.

In the dim light of a moonless June night the sea looked dreary and forlorn. Although the wind was high, and round the rigging and the spars it seemed secret and furtive, it appeared to cling closely to the water, to leave the hollows between the waves stealthily, and to leave them only when goaded forward by something behind. Then it leaped the crests of the waves swiftly, and flung itself in the hollows once more.

The water looked cold and pallid. From the heavy swash at the bows, to the almost human murmur of the back-water under the counter, there ran all along the side a gamut of depressing sounds, into which every now and then ran the swirl of spray, mounting from the bow and falling with a groan on the deck, to run aft in whispered hisses, until it found its way to scupper-holes, whence it fell with a weary drone into the sea to leeward.

Captain Drew was not, for a sailor, a very superstitious man. But in the atmosphere of this night there was something which daunted him. The mere fact that a flaw should have been found in a vital part of the yacht, and that this flaw had never been discovered until it was, under existing circumstances, past effectual cure, was depressing. But then again there was the sustaining fact that this yacht, which he had sailed for years, was now practically his own property. He was now, in effect, five to six thousand pounds a richer man than when that day had broken.

How was he to regard that rudder-head? As a friend or an enemy? If it had not been for the defect in the rudder, the Duke would, in all probability, not have thought of getting rid of the *Seabird*; and if he had not thought of getting rid of her, it would never have occurred to him to give her to his captain. If the rudder-head held until they got back to Silver Bay, it would undoubtedly be the best friend, after the Duke, he had ever had in all his life. But if the rudder-head gave, what then? No one could tell. They might be driven ashore and all lost, or they might be able to live through the gale, and be picked up by some steamer or sailing-vessel, which would stand by them until a tug or some other kind of succour could reach them. Of course, if the rudder gave, they could do something with a few spars towed behind them, but not much. It was better to keep on hoping the rudder-head would hold.

It was now more than four hours since the Duke and the Marquis had gone below, and these four hours had settled one thing. There was no longer any chance of their putting in anywhere. Silver Bay was now the nearest harbour. The watch had been changed, and a second new hand was now at the wheel.

"Does she answer well, Jefferson?" asked the captain.

"As well as ever, sir," answered the man at the wheel.

By this time every man aboard knew what had happened, and the means which had been taken to meet the emergency.

The captain had slung the lantern on a belaying-pin on the weather side, abreast the companion. He unslung the lantern, and once more went aft and turned the bull's eye full on the rudder head.

He could notice no alteration. The iron looked taut, the wedges looked unchanged, the helmsman found the wheel worked as well as ever. And yet all this time there was creeping up at an infinitesimal rate, from the inner side of the rudder-iron, that which would be sufficient to dash all Captain Drew's hopes to the ground.

As he gazed at the rudder he thought:

"If the Duke does give her to me when we get into the bay, I'll let her swing there at anchor until I get a new rudder into her. She shall have the best rudder they can make for her at Izleworth. It will cost fifteen--ay, maybe twenty--pounds. It ought not to cost more than twenty pounds. But cost what it may, she shall have the best. Whatever the ship-carpenter asks he shall have. I will not cheapen him a penny. If he says five-and-twenty pounds, he shall have five-and-twenty pounds. You must not look a gift horse in the mouth, and I won't haggle over a few pounds to make the craft I sailed so long, and that now is going to bring me a fortune, shipshape and seaworthy. She doesn't want anything else. We never knew anything she wanted that she didn't get. Not likely, with such an owner as the Duke, God bless him!

"Ay, it's a fortune, and a large fortune, too, for a man like me. The most I ever had any reason to hope for was a few hundreds in the will of the Duke; and here now it has come to thousands all at once, and with the Duke alive and friendly to me yet, and promising me a new ship, and giving me the old one."

He bent forward and felt round the rudder-head carefully, tenderly, as though it were sensitive. Then he rose, hung up the lantern on the belaying-pin, and resumed his walk. His thoughts went on:

"I will run no risk with her. A plank or beam or stanchion may get dozed any time. It is likely everything else in the *Seabird* is as sound as a bell. But this matter of the rudder-head is a warning. I'll never take her to sea again at my own risk. I'll sell her in the bay, and will take good care I have the money in my pocket before she goes to sea again. How do I know but that the mainmast may be gone, or the sternpost? No, no. It won't do to throw away a chance like this. Not twice in a lifetime does a man in my position meet with a chance like this. It will not do to throw away a chance like this."

He filled and lit another pipe, and continued his walk.

It was now grey dawn, and the wind continued still to increase. Captain Drew was in no way uneasy about the wind or the sea. She was equal to it all, and much more, if the rudder-head only held. Although the wind had now double the force it had when he ordered in the flying-jib and ordered down the gaff-topsails, so skilfully had sail been reduced, and so free from anything like squall had been the gale, that she had never been more than a plank or two under to leeward. Water was now coming over the weather-side in bucketfals; and now and then the schooner

plunged her nose under a big sea, and washed her decks fore and aft.

It was a dismal daybreak. The sky was all overcast with low-flying grey clouds, the sea a tangled maze of irregular billows. As day advanced there was no encouraging element in the scene. No land, no vessel, was in sight. All looked void and purposeless. The water and the air were given up to the tempest, and the schooner seemed an impertinence the presence of which air and water resented with deadly hatred.

Still, dreary as the dawn. Captain Drew preferred it to the night. He kept the deck. He was resolved to carry out his determination of not going below until the *Seabird* was safely at anchor in Silver Bay. It was now between two and three, and, if all went well, and all had been going well, he might, in reason, hope to be in smooth water in less than a dozen hours.

Every half hour, as morning grew into day, he paused and examined that rudder-head. It held admirably to all appearances. He could discover no sign of any weakness, of any working, of any giving out. He rubbed his hands once more in satisfaction. He now felt assured the rudder would last until they had reached security. Of course there was no great strain on the steering-gear. It was not as if they had been tacking up a narrow river, where they had to come about every few minutes. A couple of spokes to port now, a couple of spokes to starboard at another moment, sufficed to keep her on her course. He should not have to put any strain on the tiller until they ported to enter the bay; that was, of course, provided they did not encounter very much worse weather or the danger of a collision. As soon as he saw anything he would be able to tell better how they were, but he calculated that they would fetch Silver Bay on this reach without changing the course a point; and he ought to know if anyone did, for it was not the first nor the fiftieth northeast wind he had run away on in this same yacht *Seabird*.

When he was getting that new rudder made, there was one thing he would be certain not to have like the old one: there should be no sacrifice of strength to appearance. If there were to be interior angles, there should be exterior angles also.

All this while the silent invisible foe was slowly, but surely, working its way upwards.

At eight o'clock the Marquis came on deck, and was informed of the way in which the night had gone over, and that Captain Drew hoped to let go anchor in Silver Bay at about two o'clock that afternoon, if the wind kept steadily as it now was, and the sea did not get very much worse. The Duke did not come on deck. He feared to face the bitter air.

As the day grew the wind and sea rose considerably, until the gale became a storm, and the *Seabird* had not a single dry inch of deck. The rudder held bravely, although it now had to contend against hardships which the captain had not foreseen for it a couple of hours ago.

At noon they made out land under the port-bow; and by what Captain Drew could see he knew he was right in his calculation, and that the yacht would, on her present course, sail almost into the bay.

For miles and miles there was no other place of refuge but that bay. In such a storm it was a serious thing to have such a lee-shore, for at this part of the coast the land tends north-west, making a lee-shore for a north-east wind. Captain Drew would have felt no anxiety if no accident had happened; but in the face of a damaged rudder on a lee-shore such as this, and in such a storm, he felt very uneasy. If anything went at the rudder there would be no hope for the yacht, and little or none for any man aboard her.

The schooner was now able to show only a storm-jib and close-reefed scandalised mainsail to the storm.

At half-past one the foe, which had been so long invisible, came into sight, the *Seabird* being then about three miles to the south-west of the entrance to Silver Bay.

At a quarter to two the carpenter, who had been ordered to watch the rudder-head, saw the foe, which had so long been working in darkness, and reported to the captain. The carpenter said to the captain:

"In the starboard side of the rudder-cap iron----"

"Yes."

"There's a crack."

"Good God! a crack? If that goes, we are all lost!"

"I think it's going fast, sir."

While the carpenter was telling this terrible news to the captain, on shore Cheyne was standing among a knot of fishermen watching the approaching yacht.

CHAPTER XVI.

ON THE ROCKS.

Gradually the group on the ledge of land hard by the cottages increased as the yacht drew nearer. A few women joined the men, and the talk about the yacht and its owner became general. Cheyne stood a little apart, within hearing, to leeward. The yacht was still half a league from the shore, heading for the bay.

"She has got as much as she wants now," said one of the men.

"Ay, and a trifle more."

"As fine a sea-boat as ever swam!"

"Ay, ay; but this is near as big a gale as ever blew."

"Oh! There's her keel from the bow to the foremast!"

"And there it is from the rudder to the main chains!"

"She'll pick up her moorings in a quarter of an hour."

"And I don't think anyone aboard will be sorry when she's in smooth water."

"Especially the Duke. For my part, I don't like even looking on, and I'd like it still less, but I know she's fit for it, and only plays with it. Fancy how an old collier would behave in a gale like that! It's very well the sea is no worse, or it might poop her."

"Poop her with that way on! You are a freshwater sailor, you are!"

"But suppose she made a stem board?"

"Or flew over the moon!"

"But if she carried away her mainsail she'd pay off, and then she might be pooped."

"If the sky fell, we'd catch larks. Get along with you, for a mud-pilot!"

"I daresay they're all on deck."

"Every soul of them. Why, who could stay below in a gale like that? Everything in her is jumping about like dice in a dice-box."

"They haven't a plate or a cup or a saucer left whole, I'll warrant."

"What odds about the cups and saucers, so long as the Duke--God bless him!--is safe."

"And the men."

"And the men too--and the men too!"

By this time the *Seabird* was within a few cables' length of the southern or cliff side of Silver Bay. She was now keeping a little more to windward than she absolutely wanted, and, according to a landsman's eye, it might seem Captain Drew meant to run his ship ashore about the middle of the reef. But when you have your vessel well in hand, and know all about her, being a little to windward of where you want to fetch is like having a fine unencumbered estate and a large balance at your banker's, after paying the last penny you can be called upon for.

"Time for him to port now," said one of the men on shore.

"Nice of a mud-pilot like you to teach Captain Drew how to bring the *Seabird* into Silver Bay! Why, if you were an admiral you'd teach the ships how to graze on the side of mountains, and the marines how to furl a t'gallant sail, you would!"

"Port!" cried Captain Drew. He was standing by the weather-bulwark, abreast of the companion. "Hard a port!" he added.

"Port!" cried Pritchard, who was again at the wheel, as being the best helmsman aboard. The wheel flew round. "Hard a port it is!" called out Pritchard mechanically. The wheel had gone round, and it ought to have ported the helm; but he knew very well it had not. It had spun round as though nothing had been attached to it. When the first few spokes had been put down, the

wheel had suddenly run away in the direction he had been forcing it. He looked instantly behind him, sprang forward to where the captain stood, and whispered in a choked hoarse voice:

"She won't answer, sir. The cap-iron's gone!"

"All hands aft! Cut away mainsail!" sang out the captain.

One man sprang into the main-rigging, and went up upon the lee side hand-over-hand; one man sprang on the peak of the gaff, and scrambled up; two men got out on the boom; and in less than three minutes the mainsail had been cut adrift, and was rolled far away down to leeward.

"Your Grace," said the captain, "the rudder-head iron is gone, and I have ordered them to cut away the mainsail."

"Good God!" exclaimed the Duke, who had heard the order, and guessed that something had gone terribly wrong with the rudder head; "then we are lost!"

"She may pay off enough to fetch in," said the captain.

"She will not," said the Duke.

"She will not," thought the captain; but he held his peace.

By this time the men on shore had become aware something was wrong. They had seen the men spring aft, and cut away the mainsail. They had seen the man at the wheel leave it, and they had not seen him or any other man return to his place. From the fact of cutting away the mainsail, and leaving the wheel untended, they came to the conclusion some accident had befallen the steering-gear. For awhile there was nothing but startled looks and violent exclamations, which to Cheyne conveyed no clear idea beyond the fact that some kind of danger assailed the schooner.

The first word of definite import which Cheyne caught was spoken by a powerful-looking man of forty. He said:

"She'll never pay off fast enough! She'll be on the rocks in five minutes!"

This announcement was received by a low moan, which told too plainly that there was no gainsaying the words of the speaker.

Upon hearing these words, Cheyne moved up more closely to the group.

"Where will she come ashore?" he asked.

"On the reef, man!" answered a fisherman hotly; for no man who knows of such things likes to talk at such times.

Cheyne moved back to his old position, and fixed his eyes upon the doomed schooner.

The men and women assembled on the ledge of ground on the northern side of Silver Bay knew too well there was no lifeboat or rocket apparatus within fifteen miles, yet still there was no good in giving way to despair. The yacht was unmistakably going ashore in a few minutes on those rocks. There was little or no hope she could hold together there for anything like the time it would take to send word from Silverview to Bankleigh by horse, and from Bankleigh to the lifeboat station by telegraph, and then have the boat or apparatus round. Yet no chance, however slight, ought to be neglected; and accordingly, before another minute had elapsed, the swiftest man of the group was on his way at the top of his speed to the Castle, to give the alarm, and order the immediate despatch of the fleetest horse in the Duke's stables to Bankleigh.

Once more Cheyne drew near the group of men and women, and listened.

"What can be done when she strikes?" asked one of the women of one of the men.

"Nothing that we know of."

"Couldn't a boat go off to her?" asked the woman.

"No boat ever built could live in those breakers except a lifeboat."

"Could not a line be got to her?"

"How are you to get a line to her? We have no rocket or cannon here. There is no chance for them but to swim."

"Swim!" cried the woman, in terror. "How could anyone swim in that sea, and where would anyone swim to?"

"Hush!" said the man impressively, and for a minute all were mute.

The schooner plunged onward through the foam, for she was already in the white outwash

from the shore and threw it madly from her bows. She was showing nothing to the wind but a storm-jib; and although she was paying off, she was paying off too slowly to give any grounds for hope. She had her anchors still, no doubt; but to let go her anchors under her nose in such a sea and with such a way on would be the wildest act of madness. They would drag her nose under or tear the bows out of her, capsize her the moment she broached to and came athwart the sea. Better the rocks than the anchors.

And those rocks looked terrible; huge spikes and feline teeth, over which mounted and broke the irregular billows, white with the sullen back-wash of former waves. When the wallowing billows flung themselves mercilessly upon the rocks, the white spray toiled slowly upward, like hopeless signals of distress.

The ill-fated yacht was now within a cable's length of destruction. There was nothing to be done but to hold on, await the end, and take advantage of everything in favour of one's life.

The men were all clinging to the fore-rigging at the weather-side. The two mates, the captain, the Marquis, and the Duke clung to the after-rigging on the same side. Absolutely nothing could be done. If there had been more time they might have tried the effect of more head-sail on her.

At length one huge wave seized her, flung her aloft, and threw her, as a giant might cast a mighty javelin, upon the rocks. There was a tremendous shock, a mighty crunching sound, an explosion like a cannon when the deck burst up in the waist, the scream of torn metal, the groan of yielding planks and timbers, the loud plunging swash of the water--all in a conflict of broken torrents hidden under a pall of blinding spray that rose over the wreck like smoke over the victim of a sacrifice.

"Her back is broken!" said one of the men on shore standing close to where Cheyne was.

When those on shore could see more clearly, they agreed that the vessel was of course a total wreck, but that the hopes of saving those on board were much better than they had any reason to hope for.

She had, it was true, broken her back; and as she had struck the rock about amidships, and her fore part was firmly wedged in between two rocks, and her after part hung over the ledge of rocks on which she lay, it was most likely the after half would very soon fall off. But it might be fairly counted that the fore part would last some time. The foremast still stood, but the jib had been blown away. No fisherman on the shore thought for a moment the fore part of the *Seabird* could possibly hold out until the arrival of the lifeboat; but five minutes ago the chances were the schooner would be in staves in ten minutes. Now half of her might be reckoned on to last an hour or two, and in an hour or two--well, there was less certainty of all of them being drowned than if she went to pieces in five minutes.

The two mates, the captain, the Marquis, and the Duke had all gone forward and secured themselves to the weather fore-rigging.

Before many minutes had elapsed, the yacht broke in two, the after part settling down in deep water.

CHAPTER XVII.

VOLUNTEER I.

In some respects the position in which lay all now above water of the *Seabird* was favourable to those on board. When she struck she had had a heavy list to port. As she had struck, so she settled down with a strong list to port. Thus her high shoulder was against the weather, and every sea did not sweep her deck. It so happened that the weather-side of the fore-rigging was in the lee of one of the rocks between which she was jambed. Thus the heavy broadside wash of the water did not reach the men, but only the thick spray of waves which broke on the sea-face of that rock, and the spray of the waves that struck her aft.

There was no chance whatever of landing on these rocks. They were almost perpendicular, tapering so as to yield no hold for the foot or hand, and at their bases was deep water surging tumultuously up and down.

Once in the unsheltered water on the outer face of that reef, nothing could save a man in such a gale and sea. His arms, his ribs, his head, would be smashed against those pitiless fangs of grey

smooth stone. These teethlike rocks rested on an irregular bed of flatter rocks; but this bed was visible only at low water, and the tide would now be at its greatest height in an hour, or, taking the wind into consideration, an hour and three-quarters.

Three of the crew were natives of the little hamlet, and their wives were spectators of their husbands' danger.

"For God's sake, men, can't you do anything?"

"Anything!" repeated a man sadly, pointing his arm to the sheer inner wall of the reef. "What could mortal man do there?"

The inner side of the reef differed from the outer one in being much more regular and straight. It was a wall of low spires, with here and there an opening down to the water, through which the foam-mantled sea shot shafts of hissing water. No human hand or foot could rest upon any part of that inner wall now in view. Nothing grew or lived on the shoreward side of that reef; not weed or barnacle or mussel. There was nothing to rest on, nothing to cling to, nothing but the cold clean side of the pitiless grey stone.

"Can nothing be done? Can nothing be done?" asked the woman, wringing her hands helplessly. "Are my babies to be orphans, while you all stand idle there? If you can't do anything to save the men, you might in all decency turn your backs, and not let them see you with your hands in your pockets in front of their own doors, while they are drowning under your very eyes!"

The men drew aside from where the women stood, and held a brief council.

Meanwhile Cheyne hardly moved. He was sheltered from the full violence of the wind, but now and then a gust burst in upon him, striking him full in front. He could see all the figures on the deck, and he had heard the people say that the undersized man, with the fur-cap tied over his ears, was the great Duke, and the tall lank man behind him was the Marquis of Southwold. His thoughts ran:

What an extraordinary thing fate was! Here was he, as it were by a mere accident, awaiting the arrival of that yacht which for years had sought and found safety in this harbour, and, by an extraordinary coincidence, that yacht would never enter this harbour again.

For the first time in all his life he had formed the design of committing fatal violence upon a fellow human being, and here was that human being withheld from the sphere of his vengeance by an appalling disaster! Was this man to be snatched from his clutches now that he was in sight? Was there no means of rescuing this crew? There was a double source of regret in seeing those men helpless on the vessel, and these men helpless here. It was a pity to see the good and useful lives of the sailors in danger; and it was a pity that, after all, this man was about to escape his natural and most just vengeance.

After a somewhat lengthened council, the knot of fishermen broke up. It was plain they had come to the decision of making some effort on behalf of the unfortunate men in peril. Two men went immediately towards the cottages; each one entered his own. The man who came out first carried a long coil of light line, and when the other man, whose name was Bence, appeared, he had nothing on but his underclothing.

"Bravo, Bence!" cried the men, with a cheer.

They made the line fast round his waist, and in another moment he had plunged into the sea.

The dangers and difficulties he faced were enormous. Although to the mind of a sailor the water inside the reef was smooth water, to a landsman it seemed tempested. No open boat could possibly swim in it, for the cross-swells and huge choppings formed by the rush of water through the long narrow slits between the rocks would swamp any ordinary small boat, such as those at the command of the fishermen. Besides, the fierce wind bursting through the clefts would almost blow a small boat out of the water. The anchorage for the yacht and the fishing-boats was not close in under the reef, but some way inland in the bay, where, in case of storms, the sea became regular once more, and any decked vessel might roll lazily to and fro in security through the strongest north-east wind that ever blew.

The swimmer had to contend with a great number of discouraging circumstances. The only thing in his favour being that the water was not very cold. It was his interest to keep as close as possible to the rocks, for ultimately he had to try and force his way through one of the openings between them. How this was to be done, no man there could tell. A man could only try and fail, and be pulled ashore, dead or alive, if he failed.

The first of these narrow openings he met he passed without any disagreeable experience. But just as he got under the second one the creamy foam-mantled water wedges dashed through it, and, striking him, turned him round and round in the water, and drove him a long way out of his course.

He recovered himself quickly, and was soon swimming obliquely for the reef again.

He had not got more than five times his own length when he encountered the spent torrent from another opening. This did not turn him over, but it drove him still farther away from the reef.

Another difficulty now was added. Every time a wave burst through one of those openings, the torrent from it caught the line and drew Bence away from his right course. He felt this tug him, pluck him from the straight course, and, although he was not discouraged, he knew the disappointment of men not full of resources when, in moments of anxious endeavour, they meet obstacles they are not prepared for.

However, he set his heart manfully to the work, and still kept on obliquely for the reef. But he gained no ground. He rather lost. Six of these openings had to be passed, and three out of the six had delivered the spent force of their torrents against him.

As he got farther and farther from the shore, he had a longer line to drag through the water, and a greater quantity of the line became exposed to the disturbing influence of the currents. So that when he came opposite the seventh opening, the one through which he should pass with the rope, he was many hundred yards to leeward and a good deal spent. The original line had been run out long ago, and other lines had been bent on. But now, when he turned about to swim straight for the goal, or rather for the rock at the northern side of the opening he desired to gain, for it was essential he should keep in the slack water, he had a great weight of line to drag through the water and against those six adverse currents.

But Bence had a big heart and a good cause, and he knew his mates on shore were watching him with pride as he tried to fight the wind and tide in the interest of humanity. Bence was a hero, not a fool; and although he had, from motives of pure humanity, volunteered to try and carry the line to what remained visible of the *Seabird*, he did not hide from himself that one of the richest men in England was on board that wreck, and that if he were the means of saving that man's life he might look on his fortune as made.

He swam with all his might, but made little or no progress. Now and then he looked over his shoulder at some mark on the shore, to find he was not making more way than a third of what he had counted upon. Into every stroke he put all his skill and all his vigour. He began to wonder whether his strength would last until he reached the reef. Even if he had strength enough to reach the reef and then found himself with no reserve he could do nothing, for the work to be done on the reef itself was almost as arduous as that to be done in the water. The perilous passage through the rock had to be forced--a thing never before attempted--before those on board could throw him a rope.

With the dogged determination to fight out to the last, he swam on. He had arranged before leaving that when he threw up his right hand those on shore were to haul in; when he did that he had been vanquished. At length, after, a desperate struggle, he reached the reef, and paused here a moment to rest, treading the water in the shelter of a rock where there was a slight backwater. But the backwater acting on his body was not enough to overcome the strain of the water on the line, and he found himself losing ground slowly. This ground had been too dearly won to be lightly lost now. The moment had arrived for the supreme effort. He must force that passage at once, or give up all hope of success.

Having pulled in some of the slack of the rope by a few vigorous strokes, and waited until the water of a wave swept past him, he fronted the opening.

The opening was little more than wide enough to admit a man. He was nearly spent, and owing to the narrowness of the passage, he was obliged to change the ordinary arm-stroke for "dog-fashion," and this caused him a loss. But then, when he could touch the rocks, although they were as smooth as polished marble, he was able to get a purchase on them, and force himself forward more successfully than if he had been swimming in the ordinary way in ordinary water.

But when he looked up to the cleft through which he had to make his way, his spirit failed him. It was at least fifty feet long and as straight as a gun barrel. At the exterior mouth it was wider than at the interior. Hence, as the water rushed through, it would gain in force and height. Who could withstand such a rush of water? Who, so spent as he, could hope to stem the fierce fury of that on-rush of the wave?

These thoughts passed almost instantaneously through his mind. He had made only four strokes after entering the cleft when he heard the next wave burst upon the beach, and saw the hoary head of the bore rushing down upon him.

He prepared to dive. But the fierce waters struck his head and shoulders before he was under water, and threw him upright in the water, turned him over on his back and shot him head foremost from the cleft into the open water beyond. Then the torrent turned him over and over until he was half stunned, and when at last he came to the surface, he had only enough strength and consciousness to hold up his arm, the signal of recall.

The men on shore pulled the line with a will; and in a short time Bence, the best swimmer of the village, was drawn ashore, defeated, insensible.

"Send for a doctor at once," said Cheyne, in a quiet tone.

The people, to whom by this time had been added many servants from the Castle, stared at the stranger in unpleasant surprise. Who was he that should give orders to them when their own lord and master, their husbands and their brothers, were in danger?

Cheyne spoke with the easy confidence of one who knew he would be obeyed.

"Groom," he continued, "take a dog-cart, and don't spare the horse. Bring back a doctor with you. Mind, not the best, but the nearest! We shall have other cases presently." And he pointed towards the yacht.

"Not a soul will come ashore alive out of her," said one of the fishermen.

"How long will it take you to go and come?" asked Cheyne of the groom.

"An hour," said the groom.

"Don't be any longer. By that time there will be work for him."

The groom hesitated a moment.

Cheyne nodded a dismissal to him, turned his back upon him, threw down his hat, and began undressing.

The men drew closer, until they made a ring round him.

He spoke in his former tone of easy confidence.

"Let the men take that anchor there up to the knoll, dig a hole for the fluke, and back it up with a grapnel--two claws buried."

"Why, sir," said one of the men doubtingly, "what are you going to do?"

"When the whip comes ashore, make it fast to the ring of that anchor, and make the hawser, when it comes ashore, fast to the same ring. I can see nothing else that will do. We'll manage the rest aboard. When all is fast, you will haul the men ashore one by one in a basket. Now there, look alive! Make that line fast round my waist."

"But it would be murder to let you go when Bence has failed."

"By ----, if any man tries to let me in this, there will be murder! Do you hear?" he roared at the top of his voice, as he drew himself up like a lion at bay, and shook himself ominously. It was a startling oath, a startling transition of tone and manner from the tone and manner of a moment before.

"Give me the line," he cried, "you palsied idiots! Give me the line and half a pound of sheet-lead!"

The man who held the line handed it to him mechanically.

One of the women whose husband was in the yacht ran to her cottage and returned, in a few seconds, with a long narrow strip of sheet-lead, such as fishermen use for making net-sinkers.

"How far below the present level of the water is there rock in those open places?" Cheyne asked, as he made the line fast round his waist.

"Two fathom," answered one of the men.

The men were by this time fairly taken aback and submissive.

Cheyne measured off three fathoms on the line from the place where the line was made fast to his waist, and rapidly rolled on the line a piece of sheet-lead weighing more than half a pound. This he tightened on the line by biting it hard, ascertained that the lead would not slip easily, walked over to the edge of the little quay, and, having told the men who tended the line to pay out freely--in fact, never check it--he dived into the turbulent sea.

CHAPTER XVIII.

VOLUNTEER II.

Cheyne had been a careful and intelligent spectator of Bence's failure, and he had learnt two of the great causes of it.

In the first place he had seen that Bence swam at such a distance from the openings as not to receive the full force of the bore, but at the same time to be very much thrown out of his course by the spent water.

In the second place he had noticed that at least half Bence's difficulty arose from the rope he towed getting into these currents, and dragging him still more out of his course.

In both these cases were precious time and enormous labour thrown away. It occurred to Cheyne that both sources of loss could be easily avoided. If the swimmer kept under the absolute shelter of the rocks, close to them as possible where there was a slight backwater, and waited to swim across the open spaces until all the force of the wave had been spent, and the water in front of the opening was still, he would avoid any loss of way owing to the former cause in Bence's case.

If, instead of towing a long slack line after him, he could manage so as to cause the line to sink almost perpendicularly from his waist to a depth below the influence of the water rushing through these openings, then the line, if allowed to run freely out at the shore end, would lie straight behind the swimmer.

Now that he was in the water he struck out for the reef, keeping as close to the northern shore as possible, in order to avoid any direct influence of the currents from the reef, and in order to get the advantage of the backwater, if there should happen to be any.

When he reached the reef he swam in under the rock, and there awaited the bore. As soon as the water had subsided he made a few vigorous strokes, and crossed the opening without losing a foot of ground. Adopting the same plan at the next opening, he passed it with equal success.

"He knows how to go about it," said one of the men on the shore.

"And he's a powerful swimmer."

"He'll be as fresh as a daisy when he gets to number seven."

"Ay, but how is he to get through number seven?" asked Bence, who had by this time been restored to consciousness, and comforted with warm dry clothes and brandy.

"Leave it to him. When a man makes a good beginning like that, it isn't for any one to doubt him until he shows that he's beat. That's what I say."

"And what I say," retorted Bence, "is, that no one who has not been in one of the guts does not know what they are."

"Well, we sha'n't be much longer in doubt; he's at number seven now."

From the time Cheyne left the shore, he had not, owing to his keeping so close to the rocks, been able to see even the topmast of the *Seabird*.

He paused under the last rock for awhile--not to rest himself, for he felt no fatigue, but to consider what he should do.

He first of all resolved to look into the opening. He waited until the water had rushed through, then swam in front of it, and looked in. He was a much bigger man than Bence, and the first thought which occurred to him was, could he squeeze himself through? At a mere glance it appeared as if he could not; but upon a closer examination and reflection, he came to the conclusion that the passage was at least four feet wide, and almost of a uniform width. He waited to see the bore coming, and then, with a few vigorous strokes, put himself once more under the shelter of the rock.

Owing to his enormous chest capacity, Cheyne swam very high, and in sea-water he could move about with almost as much ease as on land. In the deep water under the rocks the sinker on the line, even if it hung perpendicular under him, would not touch the bottom, and consequently impeded his swimming only by its weight in water, which was, of course, much less than its weight in air. But there were only two fathoms of water in the cleft; and if he entered the channel towing that leaded line after him, the chance was it would get jambed somewhere, and he should be obliged to turn back, or come back somehow, turning being out of the question on account of the narrowness of the place, in order to free the sinker.

Remembering the free way in which the line had been paid out, and the fact that the sinker was now almost perpendicular under him, he concluded that the whole of the line now run out was far below the influence of the bores. These were not, by-the-way, real bores, but the term fitted them better than any other in the language.

When the next wave had gone by, Cheyne seized the edge of the passage, and catching the line in his feet and left hand, began drawing it up. At the approach of a second wave he was obliged to desist, but before a third was upon him he had the lead in his left hand, and was

tearing it off with his teeth.

He had also another object in drawing the slack of that line. It was more than advisable that he should take with him into that cleft as much of the rope as would reach through; for if he had to overcome the friction between the line and the corner of the passage, his progress would be very much slower than if he could pay out as he went. Therefore, while treading the water in the slack, he made a small coil of about fifty feet of rope. He could swim with his right hand and legs.

Everything was now ready; and having waited his time, he filled his chest, threw back his head, and struck out for the opening.

The place looked forbidding. But its narrowness was greatly in the swimmer's favour. If it had been five feet wider, no man in his senses would have dared to enter it at such a time; but because of its narrowness there was only one point to expect motion from, namely, ahead. When the bore had swept through, the water was calm; there was no room for perturbation; and in so narrow a place, where one could touch both sides with hands and feet, there was not much chance of being dashed against the side.

Cheyne had, like Bence, resolved to dive under the bore. But he did not forget, what Bence had forgotten, that beneath the surface of the present smooth water the bore would rush with as much fury as in the body of the bore itself. This was not like a wave which moves with only the force of its undulation, and which has no more lateral power than its onward tidal force.

It is not the lateral force of the sea that beats the beams out of ships, and tears away the most enduring walls of man and the adamantine barriers of nature. It is the shoulder of the wave that gets under the ships and the walls and the cliffs, and pushes them to destruction. At sea we never find the water flying up into the air; of its own accord the water would not leave the cradle in lies in. It is only when it meets with an obstacle and is broken that it deserts its own bed. Then, being broken and weak, it is caught by the wind, and flung over the rocks and cliffs in spray.

But in the case of the passage in which Cheyne now found himself, it was quite different. Into this entered a new body of water, a perpendicular section of a wave which had been torn from the general body of water, and as a projectile blown through this opening by the wind.

Now Bence had not calculated on this; he thought that if he got under the body or lowest level of the bore visible, he would find himself in still water.

Cheyne had also resolved on diving, but for a very different object.

Suppose he remained on the surface, the force of no mortal man could resist that wild rush of water, and the upward thrust which would strike him in the place where such a blow would be most effective--the chest. It would turn him over as a wind would a leaf. It would in all likelihood lift part of his body out of the water, and hurl him backward into the open beyond. The rush of the water must be borne, there was no way of avoiding that; but the uplifting might be avoided.

It was plain that when a torrent, or when in repose, the cleft held just the same quantity of water, from the dead-level line down. Not a gallon more water was below the low-level water-line when the bore dashed through the cleft than a second before the incoming of the wave.

Therefore the bore, as it were, ran along the low-level water; and although the water beneath would be pushed violently forward, the horizontal motion would not be quite as much as above, and there would be little upheaval.

But Cheyne knew what Bence did not know--that no man could, by swimming alone, stem the force of even that under-current.

"When I dive," he said to himself, "and get down there, I shall let go a pretty powerful grapnel. I shall moor myself on all-fours with my hands and feet."

He swam up the cleft, paying out his little coil of rope as he went, until he heard the roller break upon the outer rocks. Then, without waiting another moment, he dived.

When he found the descending force of the dive spent, he thrust out both arms and legs until they reached the sides, then working his legs up and his hands down, until he could get the full measure of his enormous strength to bear laterally upon the rocks, he thrust forward his head and awaited the onset.

When it came it was not quite as bad as he had anticipated; but the strain was tremendous. He had no difficulty in resisting it; but another man, a man of ordinary strength, would have been taxed to the utmost, and in all likelihood driven from his hold.

Cheyne waited until the rush had past, and then rose to the surface. He found himself a few feet in advance of where he had dived.

He had not got many more feet when he heard the thunder of the roller on the rocks once more. Again he was under water before the bore entered the cleft. He had resolved to risk nothing, and his curiosity to know what his foe was like could not induce him to wait and see it.

This time the conditions below water were slightly altered. The passage was wider, and the hold, consequently, less secure; but, to compensate for this, the rush of water was less swift.

The fact that the passage widened thus gradually was a matter of surprise and much anxiety to Cheyne. He had a considerable distance to go before he got out of the cleft and within sight of the yacht, which lay to the southward a little off where he was.

If the passage went on widening as it approached the mouth, then there must be a point, and that too not far off, at which it would be impossible for him to reach from side to side, when, in fact, he would have nothing to rely upon but his powers as a swimmer. A baby would be as potent against that bore as he, if he depended on his powers as a swimmer merely.

It was necessary to proceed with the utmost caution. Should one wave overtake him, unprovided with secure holding-ground under water, all that he had hitherto achieved would be undone, and his own life most likely endangered. He must, so to speak, pick his steps. That is, thenceforth all his progress must be under water.

When the present bore had run its course he rose for breath. The period of his submersion was never more than ten to fifteen seconds. After a few hasty inspirations he dived again, and, feeling carefully along, crawled forward hand over hand, and foot over foot, for a few seconds, until it was time to expect the next wave. Then he set himself to resist it as before.

The moment the current slackened, he rose once more, took breath, and dived again.

At last he came to the place beyond which it would have been obviously unwise to advance, if he were to depend on the means hitherto adopted of stemming the torrent.

What was to be done now?

He was still a good distance from the mouth of the cleft. He had heard the men on shore say that if once he were at the mouth of the cleft he should be past the worst, as he should then be in sight of the yacht, from which a rope could be thrown to him.

He now was cut and bleeding in a dozen different places.

Another thing, too, troubled him greatly. He had during the few last dives, tried to pull up some of the rope he towed after him, and he began to feel that the few small coils he had left would not be sufficient to reach the end of the passage.

What could one do in such a strait?

Desperate cases require desperate remedies. There were two coils of that rope round his body. If he unwound these he would be able to add considerably to his few remaining coils. He could tie the end of the line to his left wrist, and then he should be no more incapacitated than he had been with the coils.

To effect this, under existing circumstances, was an enormous labour. Wave after wave he dived under; time after time he rose again to his work.

At length the line was ready, and he had only now to face his desperate swim.

He had by this time begun to feel faint. His head was somewhat dizzy and confused from long and frequently holding his breath. He was bleeding from twenty small wounds, of not one of which he felt the pain. He was too desperate, too battered, too exhausted, to feel paltry pain. He knew he had to swim between one wave and another to the end of that passage, and for the time he thought of nothing else.

At last the moment came, and he thrust himself forward through that narrow channel with the supreme mental and physical concentration of a man whose whole being is absorbed in the determination to succeed.

He reached the end of the opening, and found himself in shallow water. With a dim hazy sense of triumph he staggered to his feet. He was conscious of smiling. Then he saw standing up before him a grey-green barrier of water, and then, for awhile, he was conscious of no more.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE RESCUE.

When the wave, which Cheyne had seen approaching, struck him, he was dashed violently against the rock behind. Fortunately he had got round the corner of the opening. Had he happened to be in the gap, he would to a certainty have been hurled through it into the sheltered water inside the reef, and the chances are that, if he had been thus taken unawares, he would have been killed in that gap. Another thing too, had been in his favour: the rock against which he had been thrown had a small cleft in it, and into this cleft he had been jambed by the force of the water. This fact prevented him from being knocked down and carried away.

Before another wave could strike him, he had extricated himself, and was ready to meet it. Crouching down in the recess, he bent his head, and received the full force of the weight on his crown. The moment the water fell he rose to his feet, and looked around. He was standing on a smooth piece of rock about level with the still water. On each side of him were irregular rocks, a man's height, resting on a bed of flat rock, not more than a few inches submerged in the intervals between the billows.

He looked up, and could now see the yacht forty or fifty yards off to the south-east of where he stood. He had not heard the cheer which went up from the crew when they caught sight of him, and guessed his mission. The crew did not see him until the wave which stunned him for a moment was upon him.

But while his strength was failing him, his object seemed as far from accomplishment as ever. He had now come to the end of the line, and he was still unable to reach the yacht. To venture among those low rocks out there, and face the waves, would be to court almost certain death; for it would be impossible for any one who, like him, knew absolutely nothing of the place, to move more than a couple of feet a minute, as it would be necessary for him to explore with his feet or hands every inch of the way he took, lest he should step into a hole. In case he attempted to run and missed his footing, and got into a hole, a wave would surely be upon him before he could recover himself, and then all would be lost.

Ail these thoughts passed through his mind with the rapidity of lightning. When he had done with them he looked up at the yacht.

They had not been idle there. Already a man was out on the foremast-head with a coil of rope. The man waited for the next wave to pass; then, when he saw Cheyne stand up once more, he threw the coil. Fortunately the wind was almost fair for the rope, and it fell within two feet of Cheyne. In an instant it was in his hand. In a few minutes more it was bent to the line Cheyne had tied round his wrist. Then Cheyne loosened the line from his wrist; he had not done so before lest by some mistake or failure of his strength--which he found momentarily giving way--the shore-line might be carried away before the communication had been established.

Then he drew in the slack of the line from the yacht until he had fifty or sixty yards to spare. He wound the line twice round him, and seizing the yacht end of the line, plunged forward through the shallow water. The men on board the yacht drew in the slack of the line, so as to keep it taut without putting any strain upon him.

He heard a roller burst upon the weather-side of the reef, and plunged forward with all his remaining force to reach the yacht before it was upon him.

At that moment he swayed suddenly forward and disappeared from view. He had fallen into one of holes he had feared to meet. As he did so, the tawny-headed monsters of the water dashed hissing in and swept over the pool in which he lay.

The conditions of this pool were very different from the low-level waters in the gap. Here the lower water was almost wholly undisturbed laterally, for the water, the plain of rock in which the hole was, lay almost on a level with the still water, and the water in the pool was consequently almost undisturbed by the waves.

Cheyne rose in a few seconds close to the spot where he sank. The men in the yacht had hauled in the line softly when they saw him come to the surface, and thus they drew him across the hole. In a few seconds he was once more upright, and before another wave had time to reach him he had gained the yacht. Just as they hauled him up the side, the water rose and touched him once more.

But this time it was powerless to hurt him, and with a cheer from those on board, he was drawn over the bulwark of the lee-side.

He was almost insensible. His shirt and drawers were torn into shreds, and beat in rags about him in the wind. He was bleeding from twenty wounds, not one of which, however, was dangerous. The line had chafed through his shirt at the waist, and a livid circle marked where it had tightened upon him. His left wrist was torn and discoloured by the coil, and his hands, feet, and knees were covered with bruises and small cuts from his conflict in the narrow passage.

They had to support him as he stood, while they forced some brandy down his throat. Up from

the forecastle they brought blankets and wrapped them round him. It was some minutes before he had sufficiently recovered to speak.

In the meantime the sailors had not been idle.

Captain Drew was competent and energetic. He knew the yacht would not hold together very much longer, and that every second was of vital importance. Already the block had been lashed for the whip, the whip was rove, and the men on shore were now pulling in the whip by means of the line Cheyne had carried out.

When Cheyne was first carried up windward, both the Duke and the Marquis went up to him and thanked him cordially, and commended his valour. Then they saw he was not in a position to understand them, so they contented themselves with superintending the application of blankets and the administration of brandy, now and then lending a hand to support his drooping figure. All on the yacht saw he was a stranger. They had seen the attempt and failure of Bence. They had seen this other man, this strange man, strip and jump in with the rope; and then they had seen nothing of him until he emerged from that narrow opening in the rock and encountered the first wave. While he was swimming towards them unseen, they were not ignorant of his progress, for repeated signals from the men on shore kept them informed of the way he made.

At the moment Cheyne dived, the Duke turned to the captain and asked him what he thought was the chance of success.

"Bence has tried, and Bence has failed," answered Drew, with a shake of the head. There was no need to say more. The captain's opinion was plainly expressed by his words and manner. Bence had tried to swim out to the yacht with a rope, had failed, and there was no likelihood any other man would succeed.

But as time went on, and the men on shore signalled by an outward gesture of the arms, as in swimming, and by then holding up an arm for each opening passed, the excitement on board the yacht became intense. The captain ordered a man to the masthead with a rope; he also ordered another man aloft to cut away the topmast, so as to lighten her above. For now he had begun to hope.

The reason why it was utterly impossible for a man to swim from the yacht to the shore was simple enough. In order to do so it would be necessary to cross that comparatively open space between the yacht and the narrow passage, and to enter the passage with one's back to the source of danger. This alone was an enormous difficulty, added to the others already existing. But what prevented any member of the crew trying to swim ashore was the conviction that no human being could ever get through that passage with life. Bence had more than a local reputation as a swimmer, and anyone could understand his trying to do what no other man would attempt.

When at last the signal came that Cheyne had reached the seventh passage, the excitement on board became intense. Only a few seconds had before elapsed between the signal that Bence had entered and the signal that he had failed. Now minutes went by, and the men on board saw that the men ashore had not begun to draw in the line or made any signal of recall. The eyes of every man were now fixed on the mouth of the passage.

"If he does it," said the captain, "he deserves a monument."

"And he shall have it," said the Duke. No one had the least clue as to what station in life Cheyne belonged. The sailors assumed he was a seafaring man of some kind, because he would have been a credit to their class. While bathing it is difficult to recognise in the water an acquaintance until you hear his voice. But although Cheyne was battered and ragged and marred, there was something about him which told the Duke of Shropshire that the man who had come to the rescue was not an ordinary sailor. You can always tell a sailor by his hands; and the Duke saw by this man's hands that he had not had any long dealing with ropes. The hand was small and powerful, but the knuckles were not abnormally developed, and the nails were smooth and fine.

The men both ashore and on board worked with a will. The whip had been hauled ashore, and the block of it made fast; and now they were hauling the hawser to the beach. Once the hawser was made fast to the anchor on the knoll, they could begin sending the men ashore.

Meanwhile men had been busy in the ship preparing the jackets for the warp. The hawser was new and strong. The whip was of unusual thickness, and, as time was the only thing which could now beat them. Captain Drew decided that two men should go at a time.

Two deep baskets were lashed to a short spar, and then firmly to one another top and bottom. The spar was then secured to two patent blocks, and these patent blocks were slipped in on the hawser and secured. All now was ready for the first two men to go ashore.

Meanwhile Cheyne had recovered to a great extent. He was now able to stand alone. They had brought him clothes, which he had put on, and although he began to feel cold and sick the stiffness of reaction had not yet set in.

Cheyne was standing with his right arm round a pump, his blood-stained face dropped into his

bloodstained hand, and his eyes fixed on the man he had sworn to destroy. The Duke and the Marquis stood by the weather rigging, anxiously watching the men at work on the baskets and hawser.

The captain stood at the lee-rigging, looking up at the men aloft. When all was ready, he crossed the deck and said to the Duke:

"Now, your grace, all is ready for you and his lordship."

The Duke pointed his long lean finger at Cheyne and said:

"That man must go first."

The captain drew back to the mast in surprise.

"But, your grace, I am afraid there is danger in delay."

The water was at every wave bursting over the rocks to the windward and rushing from aft along the deck, so that it was impossible to stand without holding on to something.

"There was danger for him when he swam with the rope. He and my son must go first. I will remain. My life is nearly done. If one is to die, let it be me."

As the Duke said this the captain noticed a change come over the Marquis. His eyes closed, his knees bent under him, and he fell to the deck. He had fainted. The relief of knowing there was now a chance of all of them being saved had been too much, and his exhausted strength had broken down under the reaction.

The men carried the insensible man to the basket, and lashed him in it.

"You are to go with the Marquis," said the captain to Cheyne.

"Go where?"

"Ashore in the sling. And here's a flask of brandy. His lordship has fainted. Give him some brandy as you are hauled ashore."

Cheyne took the flask.

"Who says I am to go ashore the first trip?"

"His grace the Duke."

"But does he know why I have come here, and who I am?"

"No, I don't think so. But do not waste any more time. If we are to escape, there must be no loss of time."

"Of course not," thought Cheyne. "The Duke may not know who I am, or anything about me. How could he know me? I have not told my name to anyone here. I thought it would be fine vengeance to come down here and kill this weakling. But would it not be a finer revenge to save him, and then, when he has recovered, declare who I am, and ask if it were likely I, who had risked my life to save him and his father from death, had written that book with an unworthy motive or could be the son of an unworthy mother? Yes, by all means, let me give what help I can."

Without a moment's hesitation he allowed himself to be hoisted up to the basket and secured.

The Marquis had not yet recovered. His head was drooping on his chest; his arms were hanging down lifelessly at his side. When Cheyne had got into the basket, and the men were lashing him, he supported the drooping head, and pressed the mouth of the flask against the white lips of the insensible man. They were above the reach of large bodies of water, but they were still deluged with heavy sheets of spray.

The gale not only continued to blow, but increased in fury. Every wave flung tons of water over the deck, and the difficulty of maintaining a position on it increased each minute.

The Duke was still standing by the weather-rigging. With his right hand he hung on by a ratlin. Already the seams of the planks on which the men stood began to gape, and when the water rushed up from the after end of the yacht and struck against the forecastle bulkhead below, it squirted up through the opening seams.

Twice had the Duke been forced from his hold and cast against the mast. He declined to be lashed. But he was no longer young, and his hold on the ratlin was not nearly as firm as it might be. The very smallness of the line, while it enabled him to grasp it round completely, tended to numb the hand. He felt cold and wretched. The wind and wetting had begun to produce pains in his shoulder more intense than any he had felt before.

The signal had been given by the man at the mast-head to the men on shore to haul in, and

already the baskets had begun to glide away from the yacht, when a shout of warning and terror came from the man at the mast-head.

"On deck there, hold on for your lives!" shouted the man aloft.

The words were hardly out of his mouth when a huge wave, larger by far than any other which had struck the ill-fated yacht, burst upon her, and covered her with boiling torrents of tawny water, hissing foam, and swishing spray.

When the water cleared away two men were missing, a sailor and Reginald Francis Henry Cheyne, seventh Duke of Shropshire.

The men uttered a cry of dismay. Ropes were thrown, and two lifebuoys, which were secured to the pump-case. But neither the sailor nor the Duke was ever again seen alive by anyone on board that wreck. Before the nobleman, who left the *Seabird* as Marquis Southwold, and Charles Augustus Cheyne reached the shore, the Duke of Shropshire had died, and George Temple Cheyne, late Marquis of Southwold, was eighth Duke of Shropshire and virtual owner of four hundred thousand a year, five princely residences, and of all the power and influence of the great house.

Next day the bodies of the Duke and the sailor were found in a little cove at the top of the bay, and hard by the two a book in three volumes, bound with a string which was chafed and broken at the loose end. On opening these volumes they were found to be "The Duke of Fenwick: a Novel. By Charles Augustus Cheyne." The facts that the book had been found near the body of the dead nobleman, and that it had something to do with a duke, led the simple people who found it to believe that it had only come ashore from the wreck, and that it was in some way or other connected with the person of the late Duke, so they sent it up to the Castle in the same carriage with the body.

In that same carriage, on the day before, the present Duke and the bruised and battered Cheyne had been driven from the place where they had landed to Silverview Castle, above Silver Bay, the residence of the Duke of Shropshire.

CHAPTER XX.

FAME.

The little household in Knightsbridge, where Marion Durrant lived with her invalid aunt, Miss Traynor, did not breakfast early. It was very rarely the teapot found its way to the table until ten o'clock. Miss Traynor was one of those invalids who suffer from sleeplessness, together with other maladies; and it was often three, four, or five o'clock in the morning before she closed her eyes.

Miss Traynor was old-fashioned and kindly, with none of the irritability or exactingness of the invalid about her. She was often in great pain; but at such times she wished to be alone. She was never irritable or capricious. She always behaved in her own house as though she were a guest, as far as herself was concerned. She hated ringing bells for the servant, and tried to prevent Marion doing a number of little services which many women in health exact of those around them.

But she was most decidedly old-fashioned. She had a great number of settled notions, notions acquired long ago, and which nothing in the world could shake. All the eloquence or argument in the world would not move her on any subject she had made up her mind about twenty or thirty years ago. She had an antipathy to new theories, new places, new people. She was an enthusiastic admirer of Church and State. She considered all Liberals murderers and regicides at heart, not that she had even a dim idea of what a Liberal was. Personally she would not have hurt the meanest of God's creatures, but she could have read with lively satisfaction that all the Liberals and Radicals had been drowned, provided all detail were omitted, and a bishop had something to do with the matter.

She looked on clergymen of the Church of England with the greatest respect, and she considered bishops infallible and impeccable. She did not put the least faith in missions to savages. She had a mean opinion of savages, and did not think them worth the trouble taken with them by pious folk of a certain way of thinking.

Her father before her had taken in *The Times*, and she took it in too; not that she read much of

it, but that she thought every staid respectable house ought to have *The Times*; and that, after the Church and State, *The Times* was the most important institution in the country. She had no comprehensive notion of what the Church was, and her idea of the State was *The Court Circular*. But in what way *The Times* contributed to the welfare of the country, she had no conception whatever. She was always quite sure that whatever *The Times* said must infallibly be right. Any suggestion that, possibly, a conflict or difference of any kind could arise between these three, she would have treated with merciless scorn. There were the Church, State, and *Times*; and as long as they went on, England must continue to be the greatest, most pious, and most successful country under the sun.

After the Church, State, and *Times* the institution which claimed her greatest respect was the Peerage of England. She would cheerfully have allowed art and commerce to die if we might only retain our old nobility. She had no social ambition for herself. She knew she was not of the metal peers are made of. If a lord had spoken to her, she would have felt he was doing something derogatory to his order. She was a firm believer in caste, and did not wish those above her to come down any more than she wished herself to go up.

"We ought all to keep in our own places, my dear," she would say. "It pleases Heaven that we shall be born in a certain state of life. If Heaven intended we should fill any other, there is no doubt we should have been born in that state. We ought not to try and change these things. We are not in our own hands, but in the hands of those above. If a king is wanted, one is sent; if a lord is wanted, one is sent; and so on. And we ought not to try and alter these laws of Nature any more than any other laws of Nature."

Upon being reminded that great generals and lawyers and statesmen are often made lords of, she would say:

"These, my dear, were intended by Nature to be lords, but there was no vacancy for them at the time. But you see, in the end, Nature found a vacancy, and they became lords. If a man is intended by Nature to be a lord, nothing in the world will keep him from being one."

The morning after the wreck of the yacht *Seabird*, Miss Traynor was later than usual for breakfast. She came down looking white and worn. She had been more sleepless than usual that night. But on mornings after such nights she was more gentle and considerate than at other times.

"How are you this morning, Marion?" she asked as she kissed the girl and sank into her elbow-chair.

"Pretty well, aunt, only I slept badly. How are you? You look as if you had had one of your bad nights," said Marion, as she began pouring out the tea.

"So I had, my child, so I had. I heard every hour till four; and I did not go to sleep even soon after that. What kept you awake?"

"Oh, I don't know, aunt," said the girl wearily.

"Well, if you don't know, I do, Marion; and you are a little goose to fret about the matter. I know him, dear, better than you do."

Marion smiled. As though anyone, or all the world together, could know her Charlie as she knew him.

"And he's a noble-hearted splendid fellow any girl might rely on and be proud of!"

Marion pouted. As though any human being could be more proud of any other than she was of him!

"And, Marion, you ought not to be a goose and go fidget your life out because you have not heard from him for two or three days. Now, if it were weeks or months, you might have cause to be uneasy."

Marion looked at her aunt in horror. As though it would be possible for her to live if she were months without hearing from him!

"You know very well, child, there is not a more loyal or gentle-minded man in all London."

Marion looked and smiled. As though anyone knew anything of Charlie's gentle-mindedness compared with what she knew of it!

"I'll take another cup of tea, and I'll engage you hear from him before the week is out."

"Before the week is out, aunt!" said Marion, speaking aloud for the first time on the subject. "Before the week is out! If I don't hear before then, I shall *know* something dreadful has happened."

"But I tell you you shall. I have a presentiment, a very strong presentiment, you will have a letter from him the morning after to-morrow, saying he is in town, and will be out to see you that

afternoon."

"But why could he not come out, aunt, if he was in London the night before, instead of writing?" Even talking of the chance of his being in London was so much better than thinking of him as far away.

"I did not say he would be in London the night before. Might he not post his letter in Wales, or Cornwall, or Scotland, or Ireland?"

"Yes; but then, aunt, he ought to be here as soon as his letter."

"Now you are an impatient girl. Business might prevent his coming on by the mail. He might come by a late train. My presentiments are always right, or nearly always; and this is one of the very strongest I ever had in all my life."

Marion shook her head in despair rather than incredulity. Whatever was the matter, Charlie might have written. What business had he anywhere? In the ordinary sense of the word, he had no business. What he had to do with editors and proprietors of papers and publishers, was all done in London, not in that hateful place to which he had gone, wherever it was.

She did not care for her breakfast that morning. She drank a cup of tea, ate a mouthful of dry bread, but left the eggs and bacon untouched.

Miss Traynor having done all she could to cheer her niece, and being one of those gentle natures which cannot endure the sight of unhappiness in others when she was powerless to lessen it, took up *The Times*, partly to try and distract herself, and partly to shut out from her eyes the painful sight of the young girl's saddened face.

The gale of the night and day before had been general in England, and London had got its share of it. But a whole gale on the coast never seems more than a stiff breeze in London. Nevertheless, the gale of yesterday had not passed over London without inflicting injury; and among the other things which it had done within the ten-mile radius was to fling a chimney-pot into the street, just opposite Miss Traynor's front-door.

This had been a terrible event in the mind of Miss Traynor.

She had been fascinated at the time, and anticipated nothing short of the destruction of her own house and of everyone in it. She had eventually congratulated herself a dozen times on the fact that her will was made, and that Marion should have all she had the power to bequeath, in complete forgetfulness that according to her own theory, Marion would be included among the slain.

However, as afternoon passed into evening, the gale subsided, and Miss Traynor's apprehensions declined. But as she ceased to fear, she began to feel an interest in the perils she had passed. Therefore when, this morning, she saw a column of *The Times* headed "Yesterday's Gale," it instantly attracted her interest, and settling her spectacles on her nose, she began to read.

"Oh dear!" she cried suddenly.

"What is it, aunt?" said Marion, with little interest.

"There has been a dreadful wreck of a yacht; and the owner of it, the great Duke of Shropshire, is drowned."

"Good gracious!" said Marion, somewhat roused from the contemplation of her own unhappiness.

The old woman read on, but did not say anything further.

Marion had raised her eyes in expectation of more news, and was now looking with awakened interest at her aunt.

Gradually Miss Traynor's face lengthened with astonishment. The mouth opened, the eyebrows went up, the eyes grew round, and the plump cheeks became almost hollow.

"What *is* it?" said Marion, now thoroughly alert.

At last Miss Traynor put down the paper, and looked speechlessly at her niece for awhile.

"Aunt, *do* tell me what it is!"

"What did I say about your being proud?"

"I'm sure I don't think I'm very proud," said the girl, in uneasy perplexity.

"Of him?"

"Of whom, aunt? Do tell me!"

"Of Charles?"

"Well, I'm sure I'm very proud of him. But what has he to do with the storm, and the wreck, and a duke, and the paper?" asked the girl almost piteously.

From her aunt's manner one might assume anything, so long as the thing was very violent and unusual.

"There, read for yourself!" cried the aunt, handing the paper across the table to her niece.

With sparkling eyes and trembling hands, Marion caught the paper and began to read.

The comment on the rescue wound up with these words:

"For endurance and gallantry we may search in vain for a case parallel to this of Mr. Charles Augustus Cheyne. He will receive the medal of the Royal Humane Society, as a matter of course. But in a case of this kind it is to be regretted that some even higher distinction cannot be awarded for endurance and courage inferior to nothing which has gained for a handful of our boldest soldiers the Victoria Cross."

When Marion had finished reading she put the paper down on the table before her, looked feebly at her aunt for a moment, and then fell fainting back in her chair.

CHAPTER XXI.

COINCIDENCES.

For a few days Edward Graham worked at his big canvas under Anerly Bridge. The weather was superb, the "studio" as quiet as the top of Horeb, and the artist in the very best of spirits. He had already dead-coloured his work, and got in some of the most important shadows.

This cavernous chamber had many advantages for a painter. The light was of the coolest and softest. But few people and fewer vehicles passed over the bridge to disturb the quiet of the place. Owing to the moisture of the air, the rattling of waggons or carts did not cause any dirt or dust to fall from the roof.

Graham had not told any of the people at The Beagle or in the village that he was going to paint the scene under Anerly Bridge. The morning after the easel, canvas, and colours arrived he had arisen at four and carried them to the bridge, and got them over the parapet and under the arch without anyone seeing them or him. He did not want to be haunted by village boys or idle men. He wanted to paint his picture, and to paint it in peace and quietness.

So every morning he arose before the village was stirring, walked to the bridge, and painted until breakfast-time. He waited until all the people were at breakfast, then went down the little glen as far as the church, got into the churchyard, and returned to The Beagle by the church-path and the main road. He had a simple dinner then at the inn, a pint of cider and a pipe under the portico, where he sat until all the village folk were once more at work. Then he went back to the church again, ascended the glen, and recommenced painting.

A more happy or peaceful time Graham never spent than those hours beneath Anerly Bridge. He was young, in full health, had enough money to keep himself comfortably, was by nature light of heart, and had made a good beginning of a picture which he firmly believed would establish his fame. Nothing could be more delightful than working away at his big canvas down there. No one in Town but Cheyne knew where he was or what he was doing; and even Cheyne had only a general notion that he was painting a landscape, nothing more. He should get back to Town in a month or so with his great picture finished. He should not sell it for awhile, not until he had it on the walls of the Academy anyway. He could live very well until next spring or summer without selling this; and he would put a big price on it, and send it to Burlington House. Suppose it was well hung, he would get his money for it, and a lot of press-notices besides. Cheyne could arrange one or two press-notices, anyway.

The afternoon before the gale he had been at work on the sky. The sky was to be full of pure blue morning light, and across it were to float shining white clouds. All was to be calm and radiant; and somehow or another he did not like the look of the sky that afternoon. The colour aloft was thin and dragged out. There was also a disheartening chill in the air. He felt no disposition for work after dinner. This disinclination he attributed to having drank stout instead

of cider with his chop.

"It will never do," he said to himself, "to get any bile or stout into that sky. Champagne above and maraschino below are what this picture ought to be painted in. Stout is fit only for still-life and decorative work."

Therefore, a couple of hours after dinner he left his studio, and, descending by the glen, reached the churchyard, whence he returned to the village. It was too early for the elders to assemble, and Graham did not know exactly what to do with his time. It was not inviting out of doors, so he went up to his room and cast about him to see if he could find any not too laborious occupation to fill up the time until he might go down and smoke a big pipe with the elders in the porch.

It was not easy to find any occupation in that room. It was perfectly satisfactory as a sleeping-chamber for a bachelor, but it afforded no means of amusement. Of course Graham could smoke; but merely smoking was not enough to keep a young man employed for hours. Besides, Graham was such an inveterate smoker that a pipe was no more to him than a coat or a pair of boots. It went without saying.

At last he thought he would sit down, and, as he was going to paint the scene under Anerly Bridge, write out the story of Anerly Church told him by Stephen Goolby. Cheyne had not made any allusion to the coincidence between the name of the chief actors in that story and his own.

He wrote on for a long time, telling the story as plainly and as tersely as he could. It was close on six before he had finished, and then he was obliged to leave a blank for the names of the man and woman who had been married. He knew the man's surname was Cheyne, but could not recall the christian-name of the man, or either the christian-name or surname of the woman.

As soon as he heard voices in the porch he went down, and, having called for cider and a long pipe, joined in the conversation. Gradually he worked it round to Stephen Goolby's favourite story, and got the old man to tell him the names once more.

"If you like," said Stephen, "you are welcome to come down and see the entry yourself."

"Oh no; thank you. I only asked out of curiosity," said Graham.

Soon after that the evening turned suddenly cool, and from cool to cold. The men took their measures and pipes and tobacco into the comfortable front parlour, whence, at an early hour, Graham retired to his room.

Here he took up the story, and having found out the blanks for the names, wrote them in. It was not until he had filled in the names, and was reading them over, that another coincidence struck him. Not only were the surnames of the man married thirty-five years ago and his literary friend the same, but the christian-names were also identical. Both men were Charles Augustus Cheyne.

This seemed to Graham a most remarkable circumstance; and when he remembered that Cheyne never spoke of his father and mother except when he could not help it, and that he was now about thirty-four years of age, and that this marriage took place thirty-five years ago, he was more than surprised--he was interested. He made up his mind to keep the story by him until he got back to London, and then work gradually round Cheyne until he got him to tell all he knew of his own history. Then, if there seemed to be any likelihood of this story fitting to the real history of Cheyne, he would give him the manuscript; and if not, he would destroy it.

He went to bed, and slept soundly, so soundly he never heard the gale that tore across the land from the north-east, and smote the fore front of the forest, and beat back the unavailing trees, and thrust the corn flat upon the earth, and winnowed the weakly leaves out of the roaring woods, and hauled great curtains of cloud swiftly across the distracted heavens, and held back the current of the persistent river, and defied the wings of the strongest birds, and beat a level pathway where the young saplings stood.

He slept unusually long that morning. It was six when he awoke. As soon as he knew of the storm, he dressed himself hastily, and walked as quickly as the wind would let him to the bridge.

Here his worst fears were realised. The archway had acted as a funnel, and focussed the wind coming down the glen. The canvas was not to be seen; the easel had been flung halfway through the bridge and smashed. The colour-box, with all the colours out, had been blown out of the vault, and lay in the foreground below.

He swore at the wind and at himself for his folly in leaving the canvas there. Then he started in pursuit of the fugitive picture.

He found it, face down, in a shallow pool, just under the church. He pulled it out of the water, and placed it flat upon the ground. He then stood back from it a few feet, saw it was all cut and torn; jumped on it half-a-dozen times; rolled it up carefully; carried it back to the bridge; and, having emptied the bottle of turpentine over it, succeeded, after many efforts, in lighting a match and setting it on fire.

Then he sat down on his camp-stool--the storm had spared that--and watched the unlucky canvas blaze in the sheltered place he had thrown it.

"If I had only a fiddle now, and could play it, I'd be a kind of Modern Nero. But I haven't a fiddle, and if I had I couldn't play it; so, upon the whole, I think I had better get out of this place."

He rose and went back to the inn. All that day nothing was thought of or talked of but the storm. By night the wind died away. Next morning arose bright and serene. He had made up his mind to stay at Anerly no longer. He would not paint that landscape. He would not try to recover the wreck of that easel. He would not gather up the scattered contents of his colour-box. The place had served him a scurvy trick, and he would leave it without any other recognition of its existence than that of paying what he owed at The Beagle. He would get back to Town at once. Be it ever so humble, there was no place like Town.

At breakfast he called for his bill and paid it.

The London morning papers did not reach Anerly until ten o'clock. Breakfast had softened Graham's mind towards the village. He no longer called down fire and brimstone from heaven on the unlucky place. After all, the wind, which had only been, like himself, a visitor, was more to blame than the place. It was a horrid thing to get to London in the early afternoon--the odious, practical, dinner-eating, business-rushing afternoon. No. He would wait until the shades of eve were falling fast, and then he'd through a Devon village pass, bearing a banner, with the sensible device, "Nearest railway-station where I can book for London?" In the meantime he would sit under the porch, have some cider and a pipe, and look at the London paper, which had just come.

Having been a severe sufferer from the storm, Graham naturally turned to the account of it. The first thing that caught his eye was: "Gallant Rescue of a Yacht's Crew." The Report did not consist of more than two dozen lines, but it contained all the important elements of the story, and wound up by saying that Mr. Charles Augustus Cheyne was now the guest of his Grace the new Duke of Shropshire. In the early part of the paragraph it spoke of Mr. Cheyne as being the author of the late and very successful novel, "The Duke of Fenwick," so that no doubt could exist in Graham's mind as to the individuality of the hero.

"In the fact that Cheyne's name is the same as that of the man mysteriously married here thirty-five years ago, and that the name is the same as that of the Duke of Shropshire, and that Cheyne is at Silverview now, there is more than mere coincidence, and I cannot do better than send off my manuscript to Cheyne to-night."

So he put the sheets into an envelope, with a note, and posted them at the railway-station on his way up to town.

CHAPTER XXII.

THIRTY-FIVE YEARS AFTER.

Mrs. Mansfield still lived at Wyechester, and in the same house as she had spent the early days of her widowhood. With the disappearance and disgrace of her daughter, she had closed her heart against the world. She had provided, in a mechanical way, for her grandson, and she kept herself informed of his whereabouts and his doings. Otherwise she lived a blind narrow life of rigid devotion and unscrupulous severity.

From the day the baby-boy and the packet arrived from Brussels, she had never broken the seal of that packet. For thirty-five years it had lain where she had that day placed it in her desk. The brown paper in which it had been wrapped was now rotten, and might be shaken asunder.

Why should she open it? Her daughter had run away with a man, and had not, in her first letter, said she was married. What was the good of looking through those papers? If it contained any statements in favour of that wretched girl, these statements were, beyond all doubt, lies. Nothing in the world would clear her daughter's name or mitigate the disgrace of her conduct.

Mrs. Mansfield took in *The Wyechester Independent*. She did not read the general news as a rule. But the *Independent* as became the only daily paper in a town whose sole claim upon distinction was that it had a cathedral and a bishop, devoted much of its space to local and general religious topics. The religious news and comments she always read.

That morning after the storm, *The Wyechester Independent* had a long account of the storm

and of the wreck of the *Seabird*, the death of the Duke of Shropshire, and of the heroic conduct of "Mr. Charles Augustus Cheyne, a gentleman who had recently won his spurs in the field of literature, and whose latest achievement fills all England this day with wonder and admiration, and of whom the people of Wyechester are naturally proud, as he owes his parentage on one side to this city."

What, Wyechester proud of her grandson, of the child of her unhappy daughter! Wyechester, the pious cathedral-town of Wyechester, proud of him she had looked upon as a disgrace! It was unkind, ungenerous, unmanly of the author of that article to hint thus even distantly at the disgraceful past. It was not necessary or decent for the writer of that article to unearth a long-buried scandal. It was an outrage on the living and the dead. The man who wrote it was a low creature, and ought to be scouted from all decent society; that is, indeed, if ever he had been in decent society. How had this man found out? It must have been the attorney who gave the information.

While the old woman was giving full scope to her anger, there was a knock at the door. A gentleman desired to see Mrs. Mansfield; he gave the name of Fritson. The servant might show him in.

A stout little man entered the room, and bowed to Mrs. Mansfield, and said briskly:

"Mrs. Mansfield, I believe?"

"Yes, sir, I am Mrs. Mansfield," she said, with great coldness and repelling precision.

He took no notice of her manner.

"My name is Fritson, madam."

"And to what, Mr.--er--eh--Fritson, do I owe the honour of this visit? I have no recollection of having seen you before, sir," she said frigidly.

"You are right, my dear madam."

The old woman drew herself back at the unwarrantable freedom of this man calling her "my dear madam."

The visitor took no notice--in fact, did not observe her manner. He went on:

"We have never met before; and you owe my visit to the flattering fact that you have a grandson, whose name is now a household word in all England."

"Sir!" she said, rising angrily.

He did not see her anger.

"I have come, my dear madam, to know if you will be good enough to furnish me with additional particulars about your grandson, about his youth, and so on--in short a brief biography. I represent The Wyechester Independent and one of the most influential metropolitan dailies. Any facts you will be good enough to give me will not, you may be certain, suffer in my hands. I will do the best I can to make them light and readable. Any anecdote of your grandson's prowess as, say, a boxer or a cricketer, while a boy, would be peculiarly acceptable, particularly if there was a touch of magnanimity about it. One of the fruits of my long experience is that nothing appeals so universally to the British public as magnanimous muscle."

The old woman stood pale and without the power of speech while he made this long harangue. When he paused she raised her arm, and, pointing with a long thin yellow finger at the door, said huskily:

"Go, sir; go at once!" She could say no more.

He bounded to his feet in amazement. He had no intention to hurt or offend. Nothing was farther from his thoughts. He had been simply heedless, full of his own mind, unobservant.

"I am sure I beg your pardon," he said, in a tone of sincere apology. "I had no intention of causing you any annoyance. I thought you might like to make the *Independent* and the *Metropolitan Vindicator* the medium----"

"Go, sir, go! You are committing an outrage. Go!"

"Believe me, madam," he began, backing towards the door.

"I do not want to hear any more. Go, sir!"

"But, my dear madam, you must allow me to explain----"

"If you do not leave at once I shall send my servant for the police!"

The reporter had reached the door by this time, and as Mrs. Mansfield ceased speaking, he

bowed and retired, comforting himself with the assurance that she was mad.

When she was alone she sank down and covered her face with her hands, too much exhausted to think.

For upwards of an hour she did not move; then she took away her hands from before her face, arose, and, with resolute step, crossed the room to where her desk stood on a small table in the pier. With resolute hands she opened the desk, and took out that old bundle which had been sent to her by her dying child by the same messenger that had brought the boy four-and-thirty years ago.

Yes, she would destroy this hateful relic of disgrace and dishonour. She would burn it down to the last atom. Nothing of it, nothing of that perfidious daughter, should survive.

She sat down and broke the seals, and cut the moulding cord, and released what was inside. This proved to be a large leather pocket-book.

The first thing that met her eye was the copy of a certificate of marriage between Charles Augustus Cheyne and Harriet Mansfield at Anerly Church. She searched in the pocket-book and found a small sealed packet, bearing, in a man's writing, these words: "Not to be opened for three years." The date was the same as that on the copy of the marriage-certificate.

With trembling hands the old woman cut the silk and broke the seal. She found nothing but a letter on an old-fashioned sheet of letter-paper, which, on its right-hand corner, bore a coronet surrounded by strawberry leaves.

END OF PART I.

PART II.

THE DUKE OF SHROPSHIRE.

CHAPTER I.

THE TWO CHEYNES.

Dr. RowlandThought, chief physician of Barnardstown, the nearest place of any importance to Silverview, reached the Castle almost as soon as the new Duke of Shropshire and Cheyne. The groom had brought him to the place in a dog-cart.

Dr. Rowland had the reputation of being one of the most intelligent and skilful doctors in the provinces. He had early made his reputation and position, in spite of mean personal appearance, untidiness in dress, and indifference to some nice points in the profession. He had unquestionably genius, and cared nothing for routine or for canons that were not salutary. His first remarkable case had been that of a man whom two of the great formal doctors of Barnardstown had left at night, saying he could not last till morning. This man happened to be a wealthy eccentric bachelor, who lived in a lonely house a little way out of the town. The sick man's servant, Johnson, had been at one time a patient of Rowland's, and entertained the highest

respect for Rowland's skill; and it so happened that on the night the sick man was despaired of Dr. Rowland met Johnson. The latter told the former that the great medical men had come and gone, and said his master could by no possibility get through the night. Johnson implored Rowland to see his master. The latter agreed; and next morning the patient was better. In three weeks the man was up and about, and one of his first acts was to give Johnson and Rowland a hundred pounds each, observing that if Johnson had not called in Rowland, Rowland would not have been able to do him any good. After this the two old formal doctors refused to meet Rowland in consultation, which determination in no way discomposed the young man, who replied, caustically, that if he might only come in by himself when they had failed, and be paid by results, he should have a very large and lucrative practice. When asked by what means he had cured the dying man, he had answered: "Gumption, a jug of hot water, and a tin of mustard."

His next cure was that of an old woman whom two other grave and reverend members of the profession had declared beyond help. When he was asked what drugs he had employed in this case, he answered: "Brandy and beef-tea. I wonder the venerables did not do some good there, for you didn't want any gumption in that case."

After this the elder and more regular members of the profession gave up declaring their despair; and although they adhered to their resolution of not meeting Dr. Rowland in consultation, the younger practitioners of the town had no objection to avail themselves of his aid in extreme cases. He was, however, peculiar in more ways than this. He would not take any regular practice. He would not tie himself down to routine work. He had no patience with hypochondriacs, and positively refused to attend trifling cases. "I like to let these old dunderheads ripen a case for me. When they have goaded a patient into a really bad state, then I don't mind tucking up my sleeves and giving them a lesson."

These and many more things he did and said were not professional, but they got him a name in the neighbourhood for being the best man in an emergency. Accordingly, when the Duke's groom asked the steward whom he should fetch, the steward answered, "Rowland."

Dr. Rowland was not only low in stature and untidy in dress, but many other physical details were against him. He had round shoulders and thin legs. He had a yellow shining skin. His nose was too long and too prominent for his face, and his eyes had an uncandid and suspicious look in them. But he diagnosed almost instinctively, knew medicine well, and acted with the promptness of a good general.

The doctor examined first the Duke. He knew the constitution of his grace, and although he had never before attended him, he felt at once that the case was one of extreme gravity. He acted with decision, but he refused to bear the whole responsibility.

"The case is serious, very serious. I don't think anyone can be of use; no one certainly but Granby. Of that I am quite sure. Telegraph for Granby. I'll stop here until he comes."

Accordingly a telegram was sent to the celebrated West-End doctor, Sir Francis Granby, asking the great baronet to come and see the great duke who lay ill.

"And now," said Dr. Rowland, "for the other man. What's the matter with him?"

He was shown into the room where Cheyne lay. He had learned that Cheyne was unknown at the Castle, and not a guest in the ordinary meaning of the word. When Rowland had examined the second patient, he said:

"Nothing wrong with you beyond a few cuts and bruises. You will be all right in a few days. In the meantime you must keep quiet; that's all you want, and some tepid water, a sponge and lint."

Although Sir Francis Granby was one of the most gifted and distinguished of the West-End doctors, it was not every day he was called to go special to a duke with four hundred thousand a-year. It was not every day he enjoyed the advantage of pocketing a thousand-pound fee. It was not every day he had the opportunity of meeting that erratic genius Oliver Rowland; for though the baronet was many years older than the country doctor, he had a great respect for his junior.

"It is all up with him, Granby," said Rowland, when the two were alone after examining the new Duke.

"A very bad case. You found out what was the matter at once?"

"God bless my soul, yes! It is as plain as the nose on your face. I knew you'd find it out, too. That's the reason I sent for you."

"And yet it is obscure, very obscure. I have met only three cases of the kind before. Have you met one?"

"No, not one. Nothing can be done."

"Nothing. He cannot last long."

The burly London baronet shook his head.

"Not a week?"

"Not half that, I think. Is there not another man hurt here? Do you wish me to see him?"

"Oh, he's all right. Only knocked about a bit by wind and water. Cuts and bruises, and nothing more, except exhaustion. He's a kind of hero, you know. Swam out with a rope. Wonderfully fine physique. He must be an uncommonly powerful man. He was the means of saving all the lives that were saved. What a funny thing that only the Duke and the Marquis should have been lost!"

"Funny, Rowland! What a ghastly notion of fun you must have to call the loss of the two most valuable lives in the yacht funny!"

"Valuable! In what way were these lives valuable? They were not valuable even to the men themselves. One was a hopeless invalid and the other was as morose as Boreas. One of them did, it is true, occasionally vote in the House of Lords, but only to oppose all useful measures of reform. The other had not become even one of that most useless body of men in England, members of the House of Commons."

"Rowland! Rowland! this will never do!"

"Who wants it to do? Not I, any way. I don't want myself to do. Wanting to do is one of the common and mean aspirations. It is the father of hypocrisy, and servility, and lies, and all the degrading vices of the time-server; it is the foul pollution upon which the parasites of success fatten and fester."

"Well, well, Rowland. Long ago, before you had grown quite so violent, I used to recommend you to come up to London; but now I would not think of doing so."

"Of course not; nor would I think of going, nor did I ever think of going. London is the grave of independence and self-respect. You cannot be yourself there. You must be the creature of somebody else or the tool of a clique. Give me the hillside and freedom----"

"And five hundred a-year if you are lucky, instead of London and fifteen thousand a-year----"

"And bowing and scraping, and heeling and toeing, and my-lording and my-ladying----"

"Well, well, well," said the great city physician; "I shall never be able to convert you. You are the only man I know in the country who I am sure ought to be in town."

"And you are the only man in town who I know ought to be in the country."

"In very few places in the country will you get such madeira as this," said Sir Francis, in order to change the conversation.

"And nowhere in the town," said Rowland warmly. "No one thinks of keeping good wines in town to be guttled down by foreigners, adventurers, fraudulent speculators, and beggared noblemen. No, no. If your country gentleman has a brand of which he is particularly proud or fond, he keeps it down in the country, where he and his real friends, who come to him on cordial invitations, can discuss it gravely, un-distracted by the bore of comparative strangers, and the noise and smoke of the city. Good wine, Granby, should never be drunk when there is another house within a mile, or with men you have not known twenty years."

"Well, well, well;" which was the great man's formula for dismissing a subject. "Let it be--let it be. Suppose you drop the Duke and his wines. What do you think of your other patient? Don't you think he'd make a very good soldier?"

"Good heavens, Granby, the town has turned your brain! Make a soldier of him! A soldier of a man with such a torso, and limbs, and muscles! Won't the puny and the deformed do you for soldiers? Isn't anything good enough to pull a rifle-trigger or be shot at? Your parade soldiers, all puffed and padded, are good enough to please the vanity of the eye; but their puffs and pads are all in their own way. They don't help them to chase a man or kill a man. They are stuck on them for no more reason than women wore crinolines. Why should we try to get the finest men of all the nation into an institution or force which boasts of being ready to expose these men to sudden death at any moment--a duty which, by-the-way, they are very seldom called upon to fulfil?"

"Rowland, I now go farther than ever I went with you about London: I must strongly recommend you *not* to go there."

"Of course not; I told you I should never suit it or it me. But I'll tell you what our friend the burly patient would make, Granby--he'd make a magnificent coal-porter, or corn-porter, or backwoodsman."

"Well, well, well, you are hard on the young man. But we cannot agree on several points that have arisen; but on two we are agreed: that the Duke cannot live more than a few days, and that nothing can be done?"

"Yes."

"And that the other man will be all right with care in a very short time?"

"Yes, Granby, that's how I read it."

As the great London physician was leaving later, he said to the country doctor: "When shall I see you again, Rowland? We ought to meet now and then."

"Ay, we ought," said Rowland, with the shadow of sadness on his inexpressive face. This was followed by a gleam of pleasure. "Granby, come down here for a week's fishing. I mean come to my place at Barnardstown. There is capital fishing there. I'll give you new-laid eggs and porridge for your breakfast; beef or fowl and ham, with sound claret for your dinner; and a good supper, with excellent beer, and afterwards a rare good glass of Scotch whisky and a cigar."

The great man shook his head ruefully. "I wish I could, Rowland, my friend. It would remind me of younger and more light-hearted days. But it can't be done now. Is there any chance of inducing you to come up to London to stay with us awhile? Do, Rowland!"

"Pooh, pooh, man."

"And when shall we meet again?"

"When some accident befalls the next duke."

"But," said the London baronet, pausing, as he was about to step into the carriage, "I understood that there was no heir to the title?"

"True, true. I forgot that, Granby. Well, good-bye."

"Good-bye, Rowland."

And the two shook hands.

"I wonder what they would think of him?" By *they* he meant the faculty in London.

"Every day I hate London more and more. Granby and I were made for pals. D---- London!" thought Rowland, as he turned back into the house of mourning and pain.

CHAPTER II.

THE DREAD OF STRAWBERRY LEAVES.

"What's the matter with you, Marion? You are not going to faint again today?"

"I hope not, aunt."

"Then what is the matter with you, my dear? You are shaking as if you had the ague. You are not able to hold those papers in your hand. Who was that large letter from this morning?"

"Charlie, aunt."

"I thought Charlie was too ill to write?"

"A Doctor Rowland wrote it for him."

"And has Doctor Rowland written for Charles such a dreadful letter, so dreadfully unkind a letter, that it takes your breath and your senses away? Come over here to me, my little girl, and tell me all about it."

"It is not unkind, aunt; it's worse. It is dreadful."

"Now, now, Marion, you must not allow yourself to be carried away by every little thing connected with Charlie. Is he worse?"

"No. He's going on well, the doctor says."

"Well, then, child, come over to me and bring all those papers with you; and first of all read out what the doctor says."

With the look of one overwhelmed with sorrow, May crossed the room, carrying the papers in one hand down by her side, and in the other, holding against her brown-red cheek, a tress of her dark hair, which had escaped the fastening behind her head.

She sat down in her low easy-chair behind her aunt, and, having placed the more voluminous documents on the ground beside her, rested one elbow on an elbow of the chair, and began reading out in a doleful voice:

"DEAR MADAM,

"I am still in medical attendance on both the Duke of Shropshire and Mr. Cheyne, and I have to report with sorrow that the condition of his grace causes the gravest anxiety. Additional medical assistance has been summoned since the hasty note I wrote you a few days ago; but the universal opinion of the medical men is that his grace is not likely to last many days. An old acquaintance and I take the watching in turns.

"With regard to Mr. Cheyne, I am happy to be able to report that he is going on better than we had anticipated. All signs of fever have left him, and he has now only to pull up strength to be no worse than when he first came to this neighbourhood. You may rest quite assured he shall want nothing that can be got or done for him here. He has communicated to me the understanding which exists between you and him, and has desired me to write as much as I please of my own will, and then asked me to take the rest from his dictation. So far I have written from myself. Before I begin taking down his words I may tell you that I am one of the crustiest of old bachelor doctors; but the story which Mr. Cheyne has to tell you is of so romantic a character that I cannot avoid feeling an interest in it, and that if there is anything I can do in the matter for you I shall be most happy to act.

"Your faithful Servant,

"OLIVER ROWLAND."

Then came Cheyne's letter to May, written out for him by Dr. Rowland.

"MY DEAREST MAY,

"Doctor Rowland will tell you that I am rapidly getting better, and that in a few days I may hope to be able to get up and about. For the first time, this morning they allowed me to look through the letters lying here for me, among which were two from your own good hand, dear, and two more from other sources. These four are all that I need mention now; and of your own you will, for an obvious reason, see why I must confine myself to thanks and good wishes, and telling you how glad I was to hear that you and your kind aunt are so well. I pray you may both continue so.

"And now for the other two.

"One of them is from an old friend of mine of whom you have often heard me speak, and whom you met more than once--Edward Graham, the artist, who, as I told you, has been painting a picture under Anerly Bridge, in Devonshire. This letter is accompanied by a story which goes back to the year before I was born, and tells of a certain marriage in that village between George Temple Cheyne and Harriet Mansfield.

"The second letter is from Mrs. Mansfield of Wyechester, in which she tells me that she is the mother of the Harriet Mansfield married at Anerly, and that I am the only child of that Anerly marriage.

"And now, May dearest, prepare yourself for a most astounding discovery.

"The letter from my grandmother contained several other papers, among them one in my father's and one in my mother's writing. I will not plague you with details, but the facts are simply these:

"My mother met my father by accident, and ran away with him. She thought him a plain gentleman, and for two reasons he wished to keep their marriage private for a while. The first of these was that a rich relative had promised to hand him over a large fortune if he did not marry up to a certain age--an age he had not then reached, though he should reach it in a short time. The second was that a number of men to whom he owed money knew of this, and would have been down on him at once if they suspected him of having married.

"Accordingly the secret was kept, and the married pair went away on the Continent. Here my father caught sound of a rumour that his creditors were on the look-out for him; and, leaving instructions with his wife to remain in Brussels, he went away. She never saw her husband again;

and when dying she told the nurse to bring me to my grandmother Mansfield, at Wyechester, at the same time giving in charge to the good woman, for my grandmother, some papers my father had left behind him, with instructions that they were not to be opened until a certain future time. My grandmother provided for me secretly, and had me ultimately put into the publishing house in London.

"It appears my father, on reaching England, being a man always variable and fickle in love, went straight to the village of Anerly, and tried to bribe the clerk to tear out of the register the leaf containing the entry of my father and mother's marriage; but he failed. This part I learn from Graham's story.

"May, I have been a long time preparing you for what is to come. Let it come all at once.

"Now this George Temple Cheyne, my father, was the only brother of the late Duke of Shropshire, and I am first cousin of the present Duke, and heir-presumptive to the titles and estates."

For a moment the woman looked into the girl's eyes. Then Miss Traynor said:

"Marion, dear, read the last bit over again."

The girl did so in a dull, monotonous voice.

"Marion, could it be that his head has been hurt, and he is wandering in his mind?" asked the old lady hopefully.

"But, aunt, the doctor might humour him by writing it down, yet he would hardly send it off to humour him."

"That is very true, Marion; very true," admitted the aunt, ruefully. Then, after a pause, she brightened up wonderfully, and cried in a triumphant voice: "I have it, Marion--I have it! It is a chapter of one of his novels he has sent you by mistake."

"But," said May despairingly, pointing to the documents at her feet, "what are these? I did not read out all the letter, aunt. He tells me, after where I stopped, to go with these things to Macklin and Dowell, his solicitors, ask them to read the papers over, and await further instructions until he comes up to town."

The aunt was not going to be baffled. She pondered a long time, and at last cried out cheerfully:

"But, Marion, my dear, his solicitors and the other solicitors may find out some flaw--some flaw that may spoil all."

The girl shot a bright glance up.

"Oh, aunt, thank you for that hope. It was good of you to think of it. I hope with all my heart it may be so."

Marion stooped down and gathered up all the papers at her feet.

For a long time neither spoke. May sat with her lap full of papers, and her eyes fixed dully upon them. Miss Traynor had fallen into a deep reverie, her elbow on the white cloth of the breakfast-table, her white round chin dropped into her white round hand. The elder was the first to speak, and when she did it was in a very timid and apologetic way, as though she was more than half ashamed of referring to such a subject.

"Isn't a duke the greatest after the Queen and the Princes and the Princesses, May?"

"I believe so."

"And he has a right to be presented to the Court, and know the Queen; and maybe now and then she asks a duke or two to dine with her, and advise her what to do about Parliament and Radicals and foreign possessions, and so on?"

"I believe so, aunt dear."

"It is wonderful to think of it! Wonderful to think of it! To think that the young man we knew in this humble little house as Charlie will be sitting down to gold services with the Queen, and that we shall see his name in *The Court Circular*--'The Duke of Shropshire visited the Queen yesterday, and afterwards enjoyed the honour of dining with Her Majesty.' Wonderful!"

From the lids of the girl's eyes the tears now began to fall. The old Duke had been drowned, the present Duke was dying, and her Charlie, her own, her only darling Charlie, was to be the new Duke. And they should read all those dreadful things in *The Court Circular* and elsewhere; and she should scarcely be able to take up any kind of a paper in which she should not find his

name; but it was plain to her she had lost himself. She, the sweetheart, the wife of a great duke!--she blushed crimson with shame at the bare thought, and she wept for sorrow that a dukedom should rob her of her dear lover.

The elder woman's thoughts went on in quite a different way.

She had, of course, often seen lords and ladies in the Park and the theatres and other places of public assembly, but she had never spoken to one. Her father had, of course, spoken to many, and had been presented at Court; but then her father was to her a god apart, quite as much apart as the members of the peerage. She had, as far as she could now recollect, never seen a duke, except the Duke of Wellington. But then he wasn't a great duke to her mind. He was a great captain, a great soldier, but the ducal quality in him was too new to be interesting. It was overborne by the splendour of his achievements and the glory of his renown. The dukedom was no more in him than the scarf he had put on that morning. But a duke proper, from her point of view, she had never seen; one of whose house there had been dukes three hundred years ago had never come within her ken, and of such dukes she stood in awe, not knowing what manner of men they might be. She had heard of the Dukeries as of some mysterious region, upon which nothing earthly could compel her to enter. She had, of course, seen royal dukes; but these she looked upon as only princes of the blood masquerading.

She had never in all her life spoken to a lord or a lady; and beyond what she read of them in books, which she believed to be mostly lies, she had no means of forming any notion of how they spoke. She knew that judges on the bench were not as other men, and did not speak as other men; but judges were only common men, had been only common barristers at one time. Had a lord spoken to her she should not have known what to say. She should in all likelihood have said Yes or No without any discrimination, and retired. She would not say Yes or No, my lord, for all the world; for to say so would have been to admit she knew the honour which had been thrust upon her; and the burden of such an admission she could not bear. She had a notion that members of the peerage were as much removed from sympathy with common mortals as birds or fishes; and when, once a year or so, in looking idly down the columns of *The Times*, she could not help seeing that a noble lord had said something about turnips or calves, she hastened on, shocked and affrighted as much as though a clergyman, in whom she had always trusted, had one Sunday, in the pulpit, advised his congregation to come no more to church, but to spend the day in playing whist and billiards, and dancing and singing, and eating and drinking.

But now what had arisen? A man whom she had known for years, who had crossed her threshold hundreds of times, who had sat on every chair in that little drawing-dining-room, who had eaten her beef and broken her eggs at his tea, who had rolled her chair from one room into the other, who had made the salad for tea and praised the condition of her beer, who had kissed her niece in her presence over and over again, and had promised to be a good husband to that young girl, whom she now loved more than all else on earth--this man was now about to be lifted into the front rank of the peerage! He was to be a duke--the ducal son of she knew not how many fathers! It was prodigious! unbelievable!

And what would come of it all? Would he remember them? Plainly: for had he not sent the important papers to Marion? And there was the girl, wretched and dispirited. Why? Ah well, she might guess. Charles Augustus Cheyne with a few hundreds a year from his pen, and Charles Augustus Cheyne, Duke of Shropshire and master of how much wealth she knew not, were widely different persons. But, after all, who could tell? She had met Mr. Cheyne, and liked him. She had never met a duke--how could she tell what would be her feelings towards a duke if she met one? And then the fact of Cheyne and a duke being one! She should let matters take their course, and see how they would turn out.

"Marion dear," she said at the end of these cogitations, "what is it you are to do with those papers Charles sent you?"

"Take them to Macklin and Dowell."

"And had you not better do so at once? They are of the highest consequence."

"Yes, aunt."

She rose and went to her room, and dressed herself listlessly: and when she was dressed, a cab was called and she drove away. She was not more than an hour at Macklin and Dowell's. When she was leaving, the two members of the firm conducted her to the cab. The last words they said to her, as they handed her into the vehicle, were:

"If the documents and the history are good, the case is clear; and we have every reason to believe both are good."

When she found herself alone in the cab rolling to Knightsbridge, she covered her eyes with her hands and sobbed hysterically:

"I wish the history and the documents had left Charlie alone, and left him to me."

CHAPTER III.

THE RETURN OF THE PRODIGAL.

About a fortnight after the arrival of the letter and the documents which caused such a profound sensation at Miss Traynor's, and while the elder and younger women were idling over the end of a very late breakfast, a hansom cab drew up sharply at the hall-door, and a man ran quickly up the steps and knocked briskly.

Marion knew who it was in a moment, and hastened out of the room. Her aunt thought she had, as in the careless old times, gone to open the door for him; but she had fled up to her own room and locked the door, and thrown herself on her knees beside her bed and burst into tears.

In the meantime Anne had opened the door, and when she saw who it was, quiet Anne, who rarely spoke beyond her business, exclaimed:

"Oh Mr. Cheyne, they will be glad to see you!"

"Have the goodness," said he soberly, "to tell Miss Traynor that the Duke of Shropshire would be glad of the honour of a few words with her."

"Yes, my lord," said Anne, curtsying profoundly, blushing deeply, and then running off with a great want of dignity into the sitting room. She left his grace standing in the sunken porch with as little ceremony as if he had been the man for the gas account.

"If you please, my lord, will you walk into the room?" said Anne from the back of the hall, not daring to go near a man who had been so awfully changed in a few days from a plain Mr. to one of the greatest lords, as her mistress had informed her.

As the visitor came up to where she stood, he said:

"Anne, your grace."

"I beg your pardon," faltered timid Anne, "I do not know what you mean."

"That in future you are to call me 'your grace,' and not 'Mr. Charlie,' or 'Mr. Cheyne,' or 'my lord.'"

"But--but, my lord, I--couldn't think of calling you anything so familiar."

"Very well, Anne, I will excuse you. And how are you, Anne?"

"Quite well, thank you, my lord."

"And not married yet, Anne,--my little Anne?"

"No, my lord."

"Ah well, the man is making an awful fool of himself, that it is all I have to say."

Anne ran upstairs and knocked at Marion's door. She was too full of her own surprise and awe to take into consideration the position of her young mistress. Marion rose from her knees and opened the door. Anne exclaimed:

"Oh, Miss May, Mr. Cheyne is below, and he's so changed I hardly knew him."

"Changed, Anne!" cried May eagerly; "is he looking ill?"

"Oh no, miss, he's looking better than ever; but he's so changed and dark and distant-like."

"Is that all?" said May, relapsing into her old sad forlorn manner. "No wonder; you know, Anne, he has had a wonderful change of fortune since we saw him last."

"Yes, miss, I know he has; but, miss, when I called him my lord, as in duty bound, he now being a great lord, he told me I must not call him 'lord,' but 'grace.' The last place I was in I had a fellow-servant called Grace, and I used to call her Grace; and wouldn't it seem very presuming on my part to call him Grace, as it might be after her? So I begged to be excused, and he excused me."

"But, Anne, he is a duke now, and a duke has a right to be called 'your grace.'"

In the meanwhile the Duke had entered the tiny sitting-room, and, having bowed profoundly to Miss Traynor, went over to her, and took her hand and pressed it respectfully, and then drew a chair opposite to the one in which she sat.

She noticed he was dressed in the same clothes as he wore when he was last in that house. "What could a duke mean by wearing old clothes?"

He began speaking immediately.

"My dear Miss Traynor, since I had the pleasure of seeing you last, most extraordinary events have occurred in my career, as, to some extent, you are aware. I left London less than three weeks ago with a most unmanly and barbarous intent. A combination of circumstances, old and new, had almost goaded me into madness, and I went on an expedition of revenge. I am glad to say that I was saved the penalty of my anger; for I was able to give help instead of doing injury when the opportunity for striking the blow came. As you know, the seventh Duke of Shropshire was drowned in that awful storm, and his only son, the Marquis of Southwold, was saved. The Marquis of Southwold, as a matter of course, became, while in a dying condition, eighth Duke of Shropshire. On the death of the eighth duke, a few days ago, I became a claimant to the peerage and all the estates, and so on; and the best lawyers say there is no chance of my claim being even disputed. So that virtually I am now a very rich man, an enormously rich man. Well, when I was poor I offered all I had then to Marion--my heart and hand. I am now rich, and immediately upon my arrival in London this morning I have come to offer what has been added to my store since--riches. As to the title, I daresay if the Queen said I was to be called Tim it would not make much difference in my nature or my feelings towards May; though, as a matter of fact, I'd rather not be called Tim. This little speech of mine. Miss Traynor, may sound like a passage from a book; but talking like a book saves time often."

Poor Miss Traynor broke down and wept like a child.

"I always told her she ought to be proud of you--always; but I never felt it so much as now."

"There now. Miss Traynor, don't distress yourself. We shall all be good friends."

It was some time before he could quiet her. When he had done so he begged that he might be allowed a few moments alone with Marion.

The aunt rang the bell, and, when Anne appeared, told the servant to ask Miss Durrant to come down to the front room, if she pleased.

Aunt and niece met in the doorway, but neither spoke. The aunt looked at the girl, but the eyes of the latter were on the ground.

When the door was closed the girl stood inside it motionless, with her head slightly drooped on one side and her eyes still lowered.

He went over and took her silently into his arms, and held her lightly there awhile and then kissed her lightly. Then he drew her a little closer to him and kissed her again, and put his lips near her ear, whispered into it words which, though old and familiar, are always new as the odours of old springs and old flowers in the new spring and new flowers.

At last she looked up into his face, and, reaching high, put her small hands on his shoulders, and sobbing out, "Oh Charlie!" hid her head upon him.

He carried her across the room and placed her in a chair, and soothed her until he had won her back to her old bright self. When he had accomplished this, he stood up, and bending seriously over her, said:

"And now. May, I have made a long speech to your aunt, and said a lot to you, and I want you to do me a great favour. Will you?"

"Anything, anything, Charlie."

"Well, I want you to bring me up a jug of that delicious cool beer and a couple of biscuits; and if you love me, don't be long. I am ready to fall down from exhaustion. When I have drunk and eaten, I will tell you everything."

She went from the room, and as she walked about the kitchen and the cellar, half forgetting what she came for, she could see nothing clearly for her happy tears.

CHAPTER IV.

THE IMPENDING CORONET.

The visitor drank a glass of the beer at a draught, broke and eat a biscuit with great deliberateness, and then bending forward solemnly over May, who sat on a low chair at his side, said:

"I have just been paying a visit to my grandmother at Wyechester, and a very stately and formal reception it was. How do you feel, Duchess?"

"Oh no, no, no! Don't say that, Charlie! For mercy's sake don't say that!" she cried piteously, covering her face with her hands, and dropping her head forward.

"What on earth is the matter, May?" he asked tenderly. He placed his hand on the rich brown hair of the bent head.

"I am terrified! Oh, I am terrified at that--at the thought that you are now--that you have become so rich; and still more, that other awful, awful thing!" she cried.

"What! The title? Why many women would give their right hands for it," he said, in a tone half soothing, half jocose.

"I hate it! I hate it!" she sobbed passionately. "I'd rather I was dead! I would indeed. Oh, oh, oh!" She sobbed and swayed herself to and fro.

"In the name of wonder, what am I to do? I can't get rid of it," he said, in a whimsical tone of voice, as he stroked her hair. "You know, May, the thing was not of my seeking. It was thrust upon me. I had no more notion it was coming than you had. I had no more notion I was related to those great Cheynes than you had. What am I to do? I don't know how to get rid of it. There is only one way, and that is, to commit high treason and get attainted; but in that case they take away one's head when they take away one's title. Of course, I shall no longer need what is inside my head, now that I am rich; still I am not sure that the treason would be a success. Can you suggest nothing that I could do, May?"

"No; nothing. But it is dreadful! Oh, so dreadful!"

He now saw that she was much more seriously distressed than he had at first imagined, and that her uneasiness could not be dispelled by badinage. He drew his chair as near as he could to hers, and taking one of her hands down from her face, held it in both his, and said, in a deep grave voice:

"May darling, I will not have you fret about this thing. It cannot be helped now, and we must only try and accommodate ourselves to circumstances in the best way we can. I'll tell you what I propose; that first all this legal business shall be disposed of, and that when I am getting near the end of that business you go over to Paris with your aunt, and that when I have taken the oath in the House I slip over quietly to Paris, and we get married at the Embassy there. We can then knock about the Continent for a year or two, until the town and country are done talking about us, and then come home, stay quietly for awhile at one of our country places before coming up to our house in Piccadilly, What do you think of that, darling?" He pressed her hand and raised it to his lips.

What did she think of that? It was worse and worse. Every word he said made it seem more dismal and hopeless. He was to go into the House of Lords, and she was to be married at the ambassador's in Paris. She was to stay at one of their country houses--stay there for awhile before coming up to their house in Piccadilly. Oh, it would never, never, do! She could not bear it! She was not suited to any such position. How cruel--how piteously cruel Fate was with her!

All she said was: "I cannot think of it now. I cannot think of it now. Do not ask me."

He saw that for the present it was useless to urge her further, and therefore changed the subject.

"You must know. May, that while I was in the doctor's books in the country--by-the-way, I had a most extraordinary doctor; I'll tell you more of him another time--I made up my mind to celebrate my return to town by spending part of my first day in London with you, and giving a supper to a lot of old pals in my old diggings in Long Acre."

She took down her hand from her face, and sat back in her chair.

"May, you are very pale? Are you unwell?"

"No; I am quite well. Shall you have many at the supper?"

"No; not very many. A dozen or so. Just the old fellows who knew me, and whom I liked when--

I mean whom I have always liked." He had been near alluding to the great change, but had stopped in time. Then he gave her the names of those he expected. She knew of them all, and brightened up a little as he went on with his descriptive catalogue of his guests. At length he came to little Porson, the novelist and journalist.

"Little Porson, too, will be there. You know little Porson? Well, no, but I have told you of him. He's a dapper, mild, conceited fellow, with the best heart and the most infernally restless tongue in the world. He has just got out a new novel. It's called 'A Maid of Chelsea,' and is doing very well, I believe. By-the-way, I have had a most polite letter from Blantyre and Ferguson, the firm that published my book. They say that of late the demand for the novel has been so great as to warrant them in getting out, in three volumes, a new edition four times as large as the first. Think of that!"

She looked up brightly, and cried: "Oh, Charlie, that is good news!"

"I should have thought it great news a month ago, but it does not make much difference now."

"Ah, I forgot," she said sadly. All the light left her face suddenly, and during the rest of the time they were together that day she never called him Charlie again.

When he left she went, up to her own room, feeling wretched, and cold, and broken-hearted. She locked herself in once more, and drew down the blind.

Ah, what a change! What an awful change! Not in him; there was no change in his kind nature. And yet there was a change. Of old he thought and spoke of two only things; he seemed to have had only two things to think of--his work and herself.

Now he had to think of the House of Lords, for he was a great lord; and of foreign cities, for he was rich and must travel; and of business of vast importance, for he owned wide tracts of land, with castles, and villages, and towns. By the side of all these things how wretchedly insignificant she seemed! In their presence she was dwarfed into nothing. She could not recognise herself, and surely he could not recognise her. She would be invisible to him, unless, indeed, she happened to be in his way.

Yes, in so far as she might be anything to him, she should be in his way. He was a strong man, who knew the world and was very clever. He would take his place among all these great things naturally. He would be invited to assist in the government of the country, and in course of time add the dignities and honours his intellect would bring him to those he had just inherited. By the side of a man in such a career was not the place for such as she.

Her aunt had always said one should keep in the sphere of life into which one was born, and now the justice of this saying was plain; nothing could be plainer. If he had not come into this thing, if his book had been a success while he was still simple Mr. Cheyne, and if he had got on as a writer, and became famous and rich, she would willingly share his triumph and prosperity with him. In that case all would come gently, softly. Even if he had leaped into fame and fortune it would be no more than they had been dreaming about, hoping for. But in the present case an intolerable burden had been thrust upon her shoulders. She could not, she would not, bear it.

No. She would never marry. Never. She could never marry anyone but him, and now he had been taken from her as much as though the grave had opened and swallowed him. She should only be in his way. He had always been heir to the honours which had now come upon him, and no doubt her aunt had always been right in saying that people were born to high state, although at their birth, and for some time after, it might seem they had been intended for humbler places. Was not the present a case in point? Here was he perfectly at his ease about the new position into which he had come, to which he had been born, but of which he knew nothing until a few days ago. Here was she overwhelmed, appalled by the mere thought of the honours and responsibilities. Why? Why was she so frightened by the phantoms of things which he took as easily as the ordinary events of everyday life? Because he had been born to them, and she had not. Nothing could be plainer. Ah, nothing!

No, she would never marry anyone now. He should marry; marry a lady born; marry one whose whole life had been spent among such things as were to surround him all the days of his life. He should marry someone who was not only accustomed to such things, but who expected their presence always, and would feel uncomfortable if they were withdrawn from her. He should marry such a wife and be happy, and she herself would be happy, knowing she had done her duty by him in refusing to marry him.

Her duty, ay; but what of her love?

Then she threw herself on her bed and sobbed passionately.

Her love! Was all her love for him to count as nothing in this bitter case? Were all her hopes and dreams to vanish? She had been faithful to him with her whole nature; she would be faithful to him until her death. But had the end of all come so soon? So soon, that the end had come while she was only picturing to herself the beginning? Had the love-chambers of her heart to be locked for ever upon merely an image? Were all the sweet thoughts of the future which used to haunt her to fade away for ever? Should she never minister to him, or cheer him, or help him? Of old he

had said she should read his proofs to him, for the ear is quicker to catch an error or an unhappy phrase than the writer's eyes. Should she not share his troubles and hear his plans? She had a little money, and he was able to make a little. In the old days their united incomes seemed enough for a quiet pair to start on. Now he would hardly miss their joint incomes multiplied a hundred times. All was over with her. Come, night and darkness! Come, oh grave, for life was over!

Then for a long time she lay and sobbed as though her heart would break. No thoughts were clearly defined to her. She simply felt the great woe around her like a choking mist. There was hope nowhere. Her life was over. There was nothing for her to do.

Nothing!

Ah, yes, there was one thing. One last thing.

The consciousness that something remained for her to do roused her, and she got up and bathed her flushed, miserable face, and took down her little writing-case from its place on the shelf, and opened it on the dressing-table.

With deliberate hands she selected a sheet of paper, took up a pen, dipped it slowly into the ink, and wrote the address and date. Then she paused, bowed her head on her arm, and remained motionless. She was about to address her last letter to him. How should she begin it? Last month when she wrote she called him "My darling Charlie." That would not do now. And yet he was her darling more than ever. She never loved him so much as now. But she must not tell him so. She must let him think she had changed her mind, changed her heart towards him.

How should she begin?

She would set out without any formal beginning, and finish with no formal ending. She would say what she had to say without addressing him by name, and then just put her own name.

She waited a little while to think what she should say, and then wrote a few lines, and was surprised to find it so easy to dismiss finally all she held dear. She did not sigh or weep as she wrote, and nothing could be simpler or more direct than her words. They were:

"Ever since I heard of the great changes which have taken place with you of late, I have felt that all between us must be at an end. Even if I could bear the weight of your new position, I would not, and in any case I should be unworthy of the place. It is not you who have changed, but I. You must not write to me or come to me again. I will not see you if you call. I will not answer you if you write. I shall always have a most friendly feeling towards you, but we must not meet. If you do not want the ring you gave me, I should like to keep it in memory of you.

"MARION DURRANT."

She finished the letter in a firm hand, and without any unusual effort. She wrote more as if she was putting down the words of someone else. When she spoke of keeping the ring, she never thought of looking at it. Indeed, she had forgotten it was on one of the fingers that held steady the sheet of paper on which she wrote. It seemed to her she was writing about another person's ring, and that in making the unusual request she was thinking of the person on whose behalf she wrote, and not of the foolish proprieties of the case.

When the letter was signed, she put it in an envelope. How should she address it? She had not directed an envelope to him since the wreck. All her notes and letters to him had gone under cover to Dr. Rowland. Still, she felt as if she was acting for another, and not for herself. And yet she could not write down his new title. No. For the last time, and out of regard to--to old times, she would address him as--as she had done before that day he went away on that journey which had changed her inward life and the outward look of all the world.

She always posted letters to him with her own hand. As soon as she had finished writing, she put on her hat and went downstairs. Her aunt was in the little breakfast-room as usual.

"I'm going to the post, aunt," said May, looking in from the doorway. "And I think I'll go for a short walk then."

"Is--is----" The woman paused. She did not like to say Charlie or Mr. Cheyne, and she could not yet bring herself to call him by his new name. "Is--is he going with you, or waiting for you? I hope all is pleasant between you. You are not looking very bright, Marion."

"I feel a little tired, that is all. The stir will do me good. Have you any letter for post, aunt?"

"You have not quarrelled? There is something wrong with you. I hope no difference has come between you?"

Miss Traynor's old views with regard to caste had not been changed in the least, but they had

been placed in abeyance. It was not now a question of preordination. She knew Marion loved him better than all else on earth, and she loved Marion, and only Marion. It was therefore no longer an abstract question. The matter now concerned her darling girl, her only care, her only hope, her only joy, the one lamp that illumined the downward way of her life.

She need not think of him as a duke; she need think of him as Charles Cheyne only. He should be nothing more than that to her, if he might be everything else he had been to her darling Marion. She could not originate or adopt a new theory on the subject of caste, but she could hold her old one at arm's length when it threatened the happiness of the young girl round whose welfare all her hopes centered.

When Marion spoke, her voice was low, clear, and free from tremulousness.

"No, aunt, we have not quarrelled. A difference, without a quarrel, has come between us, but I have written a letter to him," holding it up; "and this will make it all right"--she added mentally--"for him."

"I am glad, my darling, there is no quarrel. Of course we must all have our differences, but need not have any quarrels. I wonder, if I asked him, would he come and dine with us to-morrow?"

"I am afraid he would not. I think you had better not write."

As she said these words, she went out of the room.

"I fear there is something more than a difference between them," thought Miss Traynor, as the door closed upon the girl.

Holding the letter in her hand, Marion went out into the bright warm weather. The post-pillar, in which she had posted every line she had ever written to him, was at the end of the street. She walked down listlessly to the end of the street, mechanically raised her hand to the hole, and dropped the letter in.

It had no sooner escaped her fingers, and fallen with a hollow rattle down the pillar, than she shuddered; made a convulsive clutch at the mouth of the pillar, as though to snatch it back, then drew her figure together and hurried away.

She walked on until she found herself in Hyde Park. She went west, thinking of nothing, feeling nothing but a dead numbed sensation at her heart. She passed into Kensington Gardens, and there, selecting a quiet retired seat under the trees, sat down.

It was better here in the bright clear air, than in the small house, where she could not get away from her aunt's questioning face. Yet that questioning face would have to be answered some time. And what would the answer be?

All at once, as she put this question to herself, the full effect of that letter rushed in upon her mind.

What! was it all over? Had the simple act of dropping that letter into the pillar put an end for ever to all that had been between her and Charlie?

Was it all over now? All over, as though it never had been, except that there was the tormenting memory of the pleasant hours and dreams that had been, all the delicious sense of protection and companionship now withdrawn. Oh, blank indeed had life become! That small act of dropping those few lines into the pillar had cut her off for ever from him. She could not get her letter back--she could not now withdraw her words. If she had only waited until now! If she had only kept that letter by her until now, for an hour! There had been no need to post it so soon. If she had kept it till night, and then posted it, he would have received it next morning. That would have been time enough. She had loved him so long she might have waited a few hours longer. Oh, it was hard, hard, hard to give up all she had set her heart upon!

The tears ran down her face, and she sobbed quietly for awhile before she turned homeward.

That day she avoided her aunt as much as possible, and would not speak any more about the position of affairs between her and him. She had a headache, and went to her room and lay down for awhile.

She could not sleep. She wept, and lay thinking of all that had been, and of that letter. It was broad daylight still when she got up. She thought the whole thing over again, and having come to the conclusion once more that she had done right, that she would not recall that letter if she could, and that her only chance of keeping her resolution was not to see him any more, she made up her mind to go away from home, and leave no trace of whither she had gone behind her. Then she opened her writing-case once more, wrote a few lines to her aunt, and went out.

CHAPTER V.

THE GLORIOUS PRIVILEGE.

When the Duke of Shropshire left Miss Traynor's house in Tenby Terrace, Knightsbridge, he had the remainder of the afternoon at his disposal. None of the men he had invited would be at his place until nine o'clock. He had no plan for getting rid of the intervening time. When he set out for Tenby Terrace, he had intended staying longer with Marion, but in the mood he then found her, he considered it better not to remain long. He thought the great suddenness of the change had overcome her, and that a few hours to herself would be the best thing for her.

With regard to himself, he could not fully realise the difference recent events had made in his fate. He was now almost as well as he had been when he set out from London to Silverview. He had been detained in the country a few days beyond those necessary for the safety of his health; and his fine constitution, aided by the good air and the marvellous alteration in his fortune, had done wonders towards restoring him to his old fine physical condition.

Macklin and Dowell had promised that he should have little or no trouble in establishing his claim, and they backed their promise by placing their banking account, specially increased for the purpose, at his service. Each member of the firm had been down with him at Silverview, and the only trouble from which each seemed to suffer was the mere fear that he might in some way be inconvenienced.

The lawyers and all the servants at the Castle had been calling him "your grace" for many days; and although the title bestowed upon him by his old companions had protected him from shock in finding himself so addressed, he felt very uncomfortable and ill at ease. He had, while at Silverview, left strict word that he could see no one except those with whom he had made an appointment by letter. But although no unauthorised person was allowed past the lodges, the greatness of his position was continually thrust upon him as soon as he was able to move about, by the bowing servants in the house and the uncovered workmen out of doors.

Although the gates of the demesne were carefully guarded, the castle-fortress was not impregnable. Through the post the new Duke was assailed day and night. After the newspapers had announced his succession to the property and title, he was inundated with letters from people and societies he had hitherto not heard of. The first intimation he received that the outer world knew anything of his altered circumstances, was from a circular about a voice lozenge, without which, it would appear, no public speakers could, with any chance of success, address an audience. Every member of the Houses of Lords and Commons was ready to bear enthusiastic testimony to the efficacy of these lozenges. The word "Lords" was underlined, and the circular was accompanied by two of the wonderful lozenges, and a manuscript request that his grace would give them an early trial.

"If I were a prima donna, getting a hundred a night for singing, they could not show a greater anxiety about my voice," said the Duke to Rowland.

"But you get ten times more for your silence than any prima donna ever got for her singing," said Rowland.

This set the Duke thinking.

Then came a hundred formal well and ill spelled letters from all kinds of people who had been in the employment of the old Duke, and wished to serve under the new one, and from those who had not served before, but were anxious to be of assistance to the family now. All the servants wanted instructions, and the new peer did not know how to give any instructions. Part of this business he handed over to the Silverview steward, and part to his lawyers, Macklin and Dowell.

He was obliged to give long interviews to the agents of the various estates; for although his claim to the title and property had not yet been legally confirmed, everyone connected with the property treated him as though he were in full possession.

From all kinds of charitable and pious bodies and institutions, and from all kinds of private people, begging letters came in showers upon him. On one day no fewer than four hundred letters were delivered at the Castle; upwards of three hundred of which were from unknown people, asking assistance of one kind or another.

Some of these people who asked aid for what seemed to them meritorious purposes, had sought to force their way through the lodge-gates, and one lady of more perseverance than good taste had bribed a child of one of the lodge-keepers to open a wicket and let her into the grounds. This occurred when the new owner of Silverview was able to take exercise in the grounds. He saw her before any of the servants about the place. She came up to him, and, not knowing who he

was, asked him how she was to obtain an interview with the Duke.

"May I ask," said he, with a smile, "what you want to see him about? You know, I suppose, that he sees nobody?"

"Oh yes, I know that," answered the lady, looking up into his face. She was small and had dark hair and eyes. He thought she was about the same size as Marion. "But I got in by fraud, and I hope you will help me if you can, to see his grace. You have some authority here?" she asked.

She was not nearly so bright or so pretty as Marion, but she reminded him strongly of her. He was now thinking of the little house in Tenby Terrace, and wishing to be there. He answered gravely:

"Yes, I have some influence here."

"Then, like a good Christian, get me just a few minutes with the Duke. You will be doing an act of charity, you will indeed. I have come here to beg in the interest of a most worthy charity. It is for the purpose of keeping up the Barnardstown Home for Decayed Spinsters."

He smiled again, thinking how far Marion would be removed from the condition of a decayed spinster.

"If you go to the Castle now you will most certainly not see the Duke there. The orders are very strict that no one is to be admitted, and I am sure you would have no chance of seeing him there. But if you give me any message, I promise it shall reach him as though you had seen him yourself."

"Perhaps," she said vivaciously, "you are the Duke yourself."

"I am," he said simply; "I am the Duke." He felt glad that the first person of the outside world who knew him as the Duke, should have reminded him of Marion. "If you give me your name and address, you may count on a subscription from me, on one condition."

"And what is the condition, your grace?"

"That you say nothing about this meeting; for if you did, the place would so swarm with good people like yourself, that we should have to fly. Stay, I'll enlist you in my defence. I will give you a subscription every year. I have promised you the subscription with a condition, and I will impose no fresh condition now. But if between this and the time I leave the Castle for town, no one else gets into the grounds, I'll give you a donation as well as a subscription."

He had spoken playfully, and she laughed.

"If that is so, I will paint your grace in the most atrocious colours."

"But that will be telling of our meeting."

"Oh no! I will paint as though from hearsay."

It pleased him greatly that the first promise he made of help to a benevolent object was made through one who reminded him of Marion.

All these little things had gradually accustomed him to the dignities which had lately fallen upon him, so that by the time he got to London, he neither blushed nor laughed on being called by his title or spoken to as his title demanded. Still there was much that was new and disturbing; and, before setting out for London, he resolved not to carry up his title with him, except among those from whom he could not hide it. One of the titles that went with the dukedom was Baron Ashington; and when he got to his hotel in London, he gave his name as Ashington, and was entered on the books as "---- Ashington, Esq."

This day he had arrived in London was the first one of freedom he had enjoyed since the wreck. He was now staying at an hotel where they could have no suspicion of who he was. He had not given this address to anyone, and all letters were to be forwarded to him at his lawyers'. He was free to go where he liked--do what he chose.

In the old days he should have thought himself fortunate if he could afford five shillings a day for pocket-money; now he had in his pocket two hundred pounds, and at his hotel three hundred more. He had not yet opened a bank account, but he drew on Macklin and Dowell for any money he wanted.

He had known what the want of money was. He had often been obliged to walk to offices with his MSS., for want of pence to buy postage-stamps for them. He had been without tobacco, without a dinner, without the means of getting his shoes mended. Now here he was in this rich fine weather, with the sense of strength in his limbs, and the feeling of youth in his heart, and the consciousness of money in his pocket. In his poor days, one of the things he most yearned for was travel. Now the four ends of the world lay open to him, with every comfort and luxury of each.

He found himself in Regent Street. He lit a cigar. The day was very warm. The cigar was

excellent. He was in the finest humour. He looked at the carriages whirling by. He counted a score of coronets, but not one had the eight strawberry leaves. He saw one with four leaves and four pearls round the band, and six with four leaves round the band and four pearls supported on pyramids. These were the carriages of a marquis and six earls; the other coronets belonged to barons. And he who had lately wanted a smoke, a dinner, a pair of shoes, had now, in all likelihood, an income as great as the whole twenty peers put together. It was incredible! incredible!

He looked away from the carriages to the shop-windows. Any of these things exposed for sale were his if he willed it so. There was not one single article from end to end of the street which he could not have for raising his finger.

Not a soul in Regent Street knew him. None of his friends ever came that way. Journalists seldom get west of Charing Cross, unless they happen to live at the aristocratic side of St. Martin's Lane. He was to see all his old friends that night at Long Acre, and he had seen May, and now he was enjoying for the first time the pleasure of an *incognito*. He had not ever been well enough off to keep an account in Regent Street, and consequently there was no chance of the shop-people recognising him.

As he passed the various windows dear to ladies, he thought how he and May would stroll up this street some day soon--to-morrow or the day after--and she should select any things she liked, and he would have them sent home. Even now, as he walked, he fancied she was on his arm, and that he was drawing her attention to all the pretty and rich things.

For one moment he never felt his altered circumstances made any difference between her and him. He was no better now than ever he had been, and she was no worse. He had never loved anyone but her, and he had no intention of giving up any of his love for her, because he was now a rich man with a fine title. Of old he had, in his talk, been familiar with dukes, and thought them very wonderful beings. Since then he had seen and spoken to two dukes, and had become one himself. The latter fact ruined dukes for ever in his mind. If they could make a duke out of a newspaper and publisher's hack, the standard for dukes must not be very high.

He did not know what to do with himself. It was now four o'clock, and he had eaten nothing since breakfast, except the biscuits at Tenby Terrace. He did not care to do anything particular. It was sufficiently delightful to stroll about old familiar London, and look at the old things through the glass of his new fortune. He felt "the glorious privilege of being independent." He might hail a cab and be driven to Shropshire House, one of the most splendid dwelling-places in London. He might drive to any of the stations of the great railways, and be carried at the rate of forty miles an hour towards one of his country-seats. He might drive to London Bridge or the Docks, and there take passage for almost any land under the sun. Ay, that would not be a bad notion. Why not get into a cab, drive to London Bridge, take a steamboat to Greenwich, and come back by land? He had often done this before, and the excursion would be well within his present means!

He called a passing hansom and got in. In the old days he always thought a good many times before he took a cab. In fact he thought so often that he rarely took one. He got out at London Bridge and took the boat to Greenwich.

He took a seat and looked at the motley crowd around him. He sat between a private soldier and a young girl who looked like a poor milliner. Opposite him was a working-man, with a short clay pipe in his mouth, fast asleep. Forward of the sleeping man was a comely matron, with a rosy child at her side; and aft of the sleeping man was a nondescript long-shore man, half clerk, half tout, whole rogue.

What should he do when he reached Greenwich? Get something to eat at The Ship? Ay, that would be very good. The fresh air of the river cooled him, and he felt the gratifying assurance that when he got to The Ship he should be in a condition to dispose of a nice little dinner in a thoroughly workmanlike manner.

Was this the first time a duke had gone from London Bridge to Greenwich on the fore-deck of a steamboat? (He was smoking still; and no smoking is "allowed abaft the funnel.") He thought it most likely. Would this poor young milliner rather sit beside him or beside that fine young soldier? And what would that poor young milliner think if she knew she was sitting by the side of a real duke, who had a great desire to put his arm round the owner of that pallid face and limp figure, and support her in a fatherly way until they came to their journey's end?

"Will you allow me to offer you a cigar?" said the Duke to the soldier.

"Very much obliged to you, I'm sure, sir," said the soldier, taking one.

"Are you stationed down the river? A light? Here, strike it on the box."

"Thank you. No, sir. I am not stationed down the river. I am going down to see some friends at Greenwich."

"Lady friends, I have no doubt?" said the Duke, with a good-natured smile. The soldier was a fine honest-looking young fellow, and it pleased the Duke to think he had a sweetheart down at

Greenwich, who would be glad to see him when he got there, as May was glad to see another person when that person got to Tenby Terrace.

"It's my mother and sister, sir. My mother is sixty-five years of age."

"Ah!" said the Duke, thinking of the poor, young, helpless, deserted mother who bore himself, and who died in an alien land years and years ago.

"Yes, sir. She's an old woman, and I'm going down to see her, and I don't count on seeing her. My sister writes to say the doctor says she can't hold out another few days."

"I am sorry to hear that, I am indeed. And do you think there is no hope?"

"There is no hope, sir. She has been bad a long time, and the doctor said all along she'd never be up and about again."

"Poor old soul!" said the Duke sympathetically. "Now," thought he, "the thing is, would this young soldier resent my offering him a present of a fiver? I am afraid he would. He looks as if he were a lad of the right sort, and I must not even run the chance of offending him. No, no; I mustn't offer him money." He paused awhile in thought, and then spoke:

"By-the-way, did you ever hear of a society called the Soldiers' Kith and Kin Society?"

"No, sir."

"Well, it is a very good society. I would strongly recommend you to join it. You're a young man, and you ought to be a member of it. I am connected with it, and if you will be so kind as to give me your name and the name of where you are quartered, I'll send you some information about the society, and then you can make up your mind about joining it or not."

The young soldier pulled his sister's letter out of the bosom of his jacket, and handed the envelope to the Duke.

"That's where I am quartered; and if you please to send the thing there, I'll get it."

The Duke thrust the envelope into his waistcoat-pocket, and soon afterwards he shook hands with the young soldier on Greenwich pier. He walked into The Ship and ordered dinner. While he was waiting he asked for the means of writing a letter. Having copied the name and address on the envelope the young soldier had given him, he wrote on a sheet of paper: "From the Soldiers' Kith and Kin Society," folded two five-pound notes into the sheet of paper, closed up and stamped the envelope, and on his way back stopped his cab at a post-office and dropped the letter in.

CHAPTER VI.

A SUPPER WITHOUT A HOST.

The Duke had been quite right about his appetite. He could have contented himself with a steak, but now he might as well have a nice little dinner, and play with it for an hour or so. He had fricasseed sole, roast lamb, duck and green peas, and cheese *fondu*. He had a pint bottle of sound claret, and maraschino to finish with; and all the time there was the freshness from the river streaming through the window, and the soft beat of paddle-wheels and the swirl of cool waters at the prows of steamers and of barges.

Yes, this was much better than working seven, eight, or ten hours a day in the top of that dull house in Long Acre, where the smell of varnish, turpentine, and shavings of the factory blended not pleasantly with the dull damp odour native to the street outside. And of those ten hours a day what had come? On an average not more than a dozen shillings a day. A dozen shillings a day! Fancy a dozen shillings a day for all that work--all that plotting and planning, and weighing and considering; and then the hateful slavery of having to bend over a desk until he grew sick of pens, ink, and paper, as a prisoner grows sick of his cell! And then, after the weary writing, the reading over, and scoring out and writing in. After this came the proofs, and after the proofs came the printed and published sheet, and the two blunders or infelicities on each page, or the five in each column, which had after all escaped him! Oh, it was a cruel life now to look back upon; but he had not felt it to be so at the time.

Now here he was, at the pleasant open window. He had had an excellent simple little dinner, and he was smoking a cigar which cost as much as all the bird's-eye he had used in a week of the

old time! Every day he could do what he liked, go where he liked, buy what he liked. In a few days, as soon as the novelty had worn off May, he should make her go with him everywhere in the neighbourhood of London. He should map out the little trips they should take. She should travel in the softest of carriages, and taste the daintiest fare, and see the fairest sights. It would be so good to lean back and watch the delight in her bright face, as she came upon some beauty of wood or glen or river! It would be such a happiness to him to see her resting on the most luxurious cushions art could devise! It would be so good to see the servants at every place they stopped eager to anticipate her lightest wish! It would be delightful!

And now he should not abandon writing altogether. Of course he should never run a story in any of the papers again. But he would write a novel in time. He need be in no hurry about it. He would have excellent opportunities of going about and picking up local colour and character. As far as he knew, no English duke had ever written a novel. It would be a novelty to find three volumes at Mudie's and Smith's by the Duke of Shropshire. There would be an enormous demand for it.

Fortunately he had not sold the copyright of anything he had written, so that no one could now advertise a book of his without his consent. He had sold the three-volume right of "The Duke of Fenwick" to Blantyre and Ferguson; but they had no power to put "by the Duke of Shropshire" on the title-page; and even though all the world and his wife knew "Charles Augustus Cheyne," author of "The Duke of Fenwick," was now Duke of Shropshire, the effect was not nearly so striking as if the page showed the title he now bore.

Ah, it was pleasant to be rich at last! He had often dreamed and written of great riches, but never of such a colossal fortune as he now owned. He was not crushed by it, and yet he felt he should have great difficulty in disposing of his revenue. There were, of course, four or five houses to keep in order and readiness; and there were subscriptions and donations to be paid, as a matter of routine. But after this had all been done scarcely any impression had been created on the enormous income. He had no taste for horses or gambling, but he supposed it would be necessary for him to rely on some such means for spending his money.

The seventh Duke had managed to get through his income, but it was by means which the ninth would not follow. He did not believe in keeping up five or six huge establishments, as though a great noble lived in each, and for no other reason than that they might be lent to friends. He was safe from the temptation of lending his houses to any of his old friends, for not one of all the people he knew could afford the mere tips to the servants.

Anyway, it was a very pleasant thing to sit there at ease, smoking the very best cigar, looking at the broad river, and knowing that one's pockets were full of money, and that the moment these pockets were empty they might be filled again and again and again as often as one liked.

A cab was called for him, and he drove the whole way to Long Acre. It was dusk as he came, and that was a mercy, for he passed through repulsive ways and repulsive people. But still the surroundings had no power to depress him; and although he did feel a sense of relief when he found himself crossing Waterloo Bridge, he was not sorry for his drive. When a man of good constitution and equable mind is happy and on excellent terms with himself and the world, there is something cheering and invigorating in the contemplation of large masses' of people, no matter of what social standing those people may be.

When he got to Long Acre it was dark. He ran up the long-familiar stairs, and found himself in the old rooms. They had, by his order, been altered greatly since he had last seen them. All the old furniture had been removed, and what had been his sitting room had been converted into a dining-room, and what had been his bedroom into a smoking-room. Two more rooms at the opposite side of the landing had been taken by him. The smaller of these was lined with hat and coat pegs, and the larger discharged the joint offices of larder, wine-cellar, and butler's pantry. In the last room sat two waiters. A third servant took charge of the hat-pegs, and a fourth attended to the door downstairs. None of the men wore livery.

No one had come yet, and the host went into the smoking-room and sat down. He did not expect any man to be punctually there at nine o'clock, and some he did not expect until after the theatres. He had asked about twenty artists--actors, authors, musicians; and although he had got replies from only five, he fully expected all would come. He knew Bohemia seldom troubles itself to answer letters of that kind; it usually hates writing letters, but it comes. All those whom he had invited were old friends; and as he felt quite sure they were men enough to visit him in sickness or in strait, he was equally sure they were not cads enough to stay away in his prosperity.

He now sat thinking of all the dear old faces he should see, and all the kindly hands he should touch, before daylight. He was thinking of the words he should use in the little speech he intended making at some time of that evening.

He should tell them that, when he lived in these very rooms, a few weeks ago, the brougham of the seventh duke had been injured in Piccadilly while he (the speaker) was walking in Piccadilly; that the brougham was brought for repairs to Mr. Whiteshaw, the coach builder, who occupied the lower portion of that house in which they now found themselves; and that Mr. Whiteshaw had remarked to him the identity between the family name of the duke and his own. How he had thought nothing at all of that matter then; and how, if any carriage of the seventh or

eighth duke now lay below, it was his (the speaker's), as the seventh duke left all his personal property, except a few money legacies to servants, to his son, the eighth duke, who died intestate, and whose heir-at-law he (the speaker) was.

He would tell them that he never should be able to forget that strange coincidence about the brougham; and that, in order to mark it so that it might always be suggested to their memories, if their memory of this night grew dim, he would arrange that the Cheyne brougham, that day injured, should for ever be kept downstairs; and that the old friends of Charles Augustus Cheyne should always be able to meet one another, and often meet himself, up there where they now sat; and that his object in asking them to come and drink a glass of wine with him and smoke a pipe with him this evening was that they, might found the Anerly Club, in honour of the discovery made by Graham at that village. He would propose their first president should be Edward Graham. He would give them the rooms and pay four servants. All other details they might arrange among themselves, except two: first, that all the men who were now there, or had been asked, to come and could not, should be members of that club, without power to add to their number.

When he came to consider the second condition, he arranged not only the substance of what he had to say, but the words as well.

"And, second, I intend making the bond between this club and me the closest of any but one. I desire that the one bond, which shall be closer than that with this club, may be associated with it, and that you will once give me the privilege of breaking my first condition, that is, when I am married, and propose that my wife may be made an honorary member."

At that moment someone entered the room. He looked up with a smile, thinking it was the first guest. It was the hall-porter, who held out a salver, saying:

"A letter for your grace,"

He took the letter, saw it was Marion's handwriting, and told the man to go.

He broke the envelope and read over the letter slowly twice. When he had considered awhile he went to a table where there were writing materials, and addressed a cover:

"To the First Man who comes to-night."

Then on a sheet of paper he wrote:

"I was the first in, and had been here some time, when I got a note by the last post. Must run away at once, but hope to be back in an hour. Don't wait for me. I am awfully sorry. Show all the fellows this, and tell them, as they will guess, that nothing but matter of the gravest moment could take me away under the circumstances.

"C. A. C."

He drove straight to Tenby Terrace. He ran up the steps, and, when Anne opened the door, asked impetuously:

"Is May in?" He forgot to say "Miss Durrant."

"Oh, a letter has just come saying she will not be back, and we don't know where she is gone to, sir."

Anne had forgotten to call him even "my lord."

That night the members of the new Anerly Club saw nothing of its founder.

CHAPTER VII.

ADRIFT.

When Marion found herself out of the house for the second time on that day, with the letter in her hand addressed to her aunt, she had no idea of what direction she took. It was only a little after five o'clock, and the air was fall of pleasant sunshine. All around her were happy-looking people moving blithely along, each to some known point or other. She was going nowhere; she was simply going away. All places were alike to her, so long as there was no chance of meeting him there. She, whose whole nature yearned to be at his side, was flying from him who, she knew, wished her to remain for him, with him. What was all the world to one without love? How could it be that anything in the world could come between hearts that loved?

She turned east and walked on. She was conscious she knew well the streets through which she passed, but the names of them did not occur to her. After a while she found herself on the Thames Embankment. It was full tide, and the river looked its best. It was the fresh young summer of the year, when all London looks brightest; and no part of London, not even the parks, feels the summer so much as the Embankment; for there is not only the fresh green of the time on the trees of the Embankment and the gardens, but the bright silver of the river of all time sparkling back to the wide expanse of sky. Every wholesome man and woman and child, and beast and bird and insect, that could, came out to pay homage to the sun; all noisome things, human or beneath man in the scheme of Nature, now sought concealment. It made old people young and young people gay, to be abroad.

She had not often been on the Embankment, and the river was a variety to her. Without intruding on her thoughts, it attracted her eye. A full tide between prosperous banks always gives a sense of quietude and peace; but to May's mind the sense of peace did not seem of this world, but of the world beyond. There was a bounteous calm in that river which seemed to invite the weary. When the tide is out, and the sordid lower abutments of bridges and the bedraggled foreshore are visible, the river looks fit to be the friend of only outcasts and felons. But when it is full it seems to have risen up to one as a kind friend capable of assuaging present woes, and of wafting one securely to Elysian Fields.

As May walked along by the parapet, she thought she should like to lay herself down gently on the bosom of the water, and be carried calmly beyond the noises of the world. She had no thought of suicide; what she felt was merely a craving of her physical nature. It was parallel to the desire one experiences, when looking down from a high mountain, to launch oneself into air, and float above the valley below. She did not murmur against Heaven or revile Fate. She would have liked to be at rest; she longed to change utterly the ordinary experiences of life, even if death was the only alternative; but she had no intention or wish to compass her own death.

Big Ben struck seven. The sound startled her.

"That is the Parliament clock," she thought; "and he will often hear that sound when he has ceased to hear my voice for ever."

And then she forgot him for awhile and fell to pitying herself, until the tears rolled down her face under her veil, and she found herself at Blackfriars Bridge. This part of the town she knew nothing of. Whither should she go? All ways were alike to her. She kept on to the right, and crossed the bridge.

She had never been across any London bridge on foot before; she could not remember ever having been across the river at all, except in a train. She had never heard either her aunt or him speak about the Surrey side. It was best for her to go across the water, and to stay there.

To stay there! She had not thought of staying anywhere before; she had come away from home because she had made up her mind not to see Charlie again; but up to that moment she had not thought of staying away from home, or staying anywhere else. Before, leaving Tenby Terrace she had mechanically taken all the money out of her writing-case and put it in her purse. She always had much more money by her than young girls living in houses such as those in the Terrace; for she had an income which was absolutely her own, and her aunt had always insisted on her keeping a small bundle of bank-notes by her. Miss Traynor said: "You should always keep a little money by you; I do. You never know what is going to happen. A bank may break, or your lawyer may die, and you may not be able to get your money for a month, or maybe three months; and then, you see, what a fix you would be in! I do not think it safe to keep large sums of money in the house; but twenty or thirty or forty pounds can do no harm, and make you feel secure, for a time at least, against accident." Miss Traynor little thought, when she gave her niece this advice, that the money would in the end be used for putting space between her and the girl for whose welfare and happiness she would have laid down her life.

Now, for the first time. May realised the fact that it would be necessary for her to find some place in which she might live. She had been in her time very little from home, and felt miserably uncomfortable at the notion of having to take lodgings for herself in London. She had no plan, no scheme. She did not think of the future; she did not try to see a week in advance--she wished only to hide herself. She made no calculation as to how long she should be from home, how long her money would last. She had, like a pursued hare, the simple instinct of flight, with the desire for concealment; all else was absolutely indifferent to her. If she had her choice between life and death, she would have chosen the latter.

The idea of leaving London never crossed her mind. She had often heard that, for the purpose of concealment, there was no place so good as London. She had now been walking two hours, and all that time she had been putting space between her and Knightsbridge; and yet all around her were thousands of people, hundreds of vehicles hurrying up and down. There was no fear of anyone being able to track her through all those winding ways, all this streaming multitude.

It was necessary for her to get somewhere to sleep that night. She was now in the Kennington Road. The noise of the tramcars and omnibuses and cabs, and carts and vans and drays, almost overwhelmed her. She was beginning to feel tired. She turned into a quiet-looking side-street; up and down this street she walked more than once before she could make up her mind to knock at any door of a house in which she saw that lodgings were to be let. At last she selected a neat-looking house, with flower-pots on the window-sill and immaculate steps. She knocked. Yes, there were lodgings to be let in that house; would the lady walk in? She was shown into a clean, cheaply-furnished back parlour, which looked into a dark yard twenty feet square. It was the landlady herself who let in May. She was a stout, undersized, pleasant-looking woman of middle age. She had two bedrooms and a sitting-room to let. This was the sitting-room; the bedrooms were up-stairs. Would the lady like to see the bedrooms?--they were comfortable and well furnished. Would not the lady walk up? This was the better bedroom of the two, in the front; this was the smaller one in the back. What accommodation did the lady require? The gentleman could have breakfast and tea or supper in, and dinner of a Sunday. Oh, it wasn't for gentlemen, wasn't it? It was the lady herself? So sorry; but she never took lady lodgers--only gentlemen. Her servant would not stay if lady lodgers were admitted. It was very wrong in a servant to have such notions; but her servant was a very good one, and it was next to impossible to get a good servant, and she could not afford to lose this one. Good-afternoon.

May went down the whitened steps with a heavy heart. She had never tried to find lodgings before; she had not known there was any difficulty in the way of getting them. It was necessary, however, that she should try again. She looked at her watch, half in fear. Half-past seven. Not any time to be lost; it was getting late.

She selected another house in the same street. A tall thin woman, who suggested a remote connection with better days, and a present connection with a temper, opened the door. May's first question was: Did they accommodate lady lodgers in that house? They did. Would the lady like to see the room?

With a sigh of relief May went in. She explained that she wanted only one room--a bedroom. Very well. This way; this was the bedroom. The lady would dine out? Oh yes. May would have undertaken to do anything now, that she might be at liberty to lock the door, sit down by herself and cry. The rent was ten shillings a week, inclusive. May did not know that the room would have been dear at seven-and-six; and of what "inclusive" meant she had no idea. Was ten shillings a week satisfactory? Yes, perfectly. And the lady would pay a week's rent in advance to secure the room? May took out her purse and proffered a sovereign. And when did the lady wish to occupy the room? To-night--now. To-night! How could that be? Of course references should be exchanged. Did the lady know anyone in the immediate vicinity to whom a reference might be made? No, May knew no one in the vicinity. Was it--was it necessary there should be a reference? Oh, absolutely; all respectable houses require references. Ah, in that case May must try elsewhere.

"Well, I'm sure; just to think you fancied they'd take anyone into a respectable house without a reference!" cried the tall slim woman, in a tone of exasperation, as she allowed May to find the front door and let herself out.

She hurried out of that street; she had not the courage to try at any other house there. She thought she should not have the courage to try anywhere else. She had already thought of going to an hotel, but had dismissed the idea. She had a great fear of being discovered; and an hotel was too open. Besides, she could not bring herself to face an hotel alone; there was something repugnant to her feelings in being without a friend or protector in a house the front door of which was always kept open. Besides, who could tell but, by one of those coincidences there is no foreseeing, some acquaintance of hers might light on that very hotel, and meet her in one of the passages? But if people objected to ladies as lodgers, and if those who did not object to ladies would take no one in who could not give a reference, how could she hope to find a resting-place for her weary limbs, a covering for her aching head that night? She could give no reference; for to do so would be, of course, instantly to betray herself.

What was she to do now? Whither should she turn? In a little while it would be dark. It was dreadful to be alone in London, cut off from all friends, having no home, no roof to cover her, and find the shades of night coming on. How peaceful and secure now seemed that small house over there in Knightsbridge, where but a few hours ago she had seen him, had heard his great kind voice, had felt his strong protecting arm round her! She had but to hold up her hand, get into the nearest cab, and in an hour she would be safe under that protecting roof.

Should she go back? Those houses in which she had sought shelter were hideous in her eyes, and the women repulsively vulgar. Should she go back and throw herself at her aunt's feet, and cry herself into her aunt's forgiveness? No, no, that would never do. She had resolved to sacrifice herself for him she loved, and she would do so, no matter how great the pain, no matter how great the humiliation she should endure. In the sum of her great sacrifice, what did these mean

houses, these vulgar women, count for? Nothing. Why should she make great difficulties out of small? She had had the courage to write that letter to him, to renounce her love, to give up the one dream of her young life: was she now going to blench when confronted by trivial details such as would not daunt one out of ten of the women moving round her, passing up and down this road? No. She had been brave in the great thing, she would be indifferent in the small. She would be brave. She would hold on. She would lie down in the road and die rather than go back, rather than imperil his future happiness by once more placing herself under the influence of his presence, which she felt certain would be too strong for any resolution she might make.

She once more found herself walking down a side street, looking up at the windows for a card. This was a much better street than the last one. The roadway was wider, and the houses more respectable and better kept. She was now glad she had not succeeded in getting a place in the former street.

This one looked much better, and as though the people who lived in the houses could not be so vulgar.

She went down all one side, and saw no card in any window. She thought she had discovered one at the opposite side, but she could not be quite sure. She crossed. Yes, there was a card in one window, in only one. She knocked. A servant opened the door. Did they take lady lodgers? Oh yes; would the lady be kind enough to step into the front room and see the mistress?

In the front room May found a little old widow sitting at work. She greeted the entrance of the young girl with a benevolent smile, and bade her be seated. May was delighted she had come so far. This woman was much superior to either of the others. She had not the look of common prosperity of the first, nor of broken-down respectability of the second. Fate may make a lady poor, but it never can make her shabby-genteel. Though she may sink to pauperism, she can never fall so low as gentility. A lady once is a lady for ever; and the little old widow before May was evidently not only a lady, but a kindly and considerate old soul as well. May resolved, if possible, to cast her lot here.

After a few preliminary words, the landlady said:

"Yes, my dear, I not only take in ladies, but I do not take in gentlemen. I know how hard ladies, who wish to be quiet, find it to get lodgings in London, and so I have made up my mind to take in no gentlemen."

"Oh, then," said May piteously, "I may stay with you, may I not?"

"Well, my dear," said the old woman smiling encouragingly, "that will be as you please, I daresay. I have no doubt we should get on together. Of course you would like to see the room; we have only one to be let."

She half rose from her chair.

"No, no," cried May. "Pray sit down. Do not disturb yourself. I am sure I shall like it."

"Then, my dear," said the old lady, smiling again, but looking curiously at the worn face and bright eyes and weary figure of this young girl, who was willing to take a room without seeing it, "there are, you know, a few business arrangements to be considered. We shall have to charge you seven shillings and sixpence a week for your room. You will dine in or out, as you please."

"I am sure I am very much obliged to you. I had no idea----" here she paused. She thought it just as well not to say any more.

The old lady looked at May again. She smiled, but there seemed to be something over-eager in this young girl.

"May I ask, do you belong to London?"

"Yes."

"Ah, I am glad of that. Then you will perhaps know the name of this gentleman. He is not the rector of our parish, but one of the Canons of St. Paul's."

She handed the girl a card.

"I do not know him," answered May, wondering what a Canon of St. Paul's could have to do with the matter. "I know his name very well. Is he a relative of yours?"

"No, my dear, no relative, but a good kind friend of my late husband. The Canon has done a great deal for me, and among other things he allows me to refer anyone to him who may want to know anything about me."

"It is very kind of him," said May, not knowing what to say, what was meant.

"So, my dear," said the old lady, "you may call upon him or write to him, as you please."

The widow was plainly perplexed by May's rejoinder.

"I!" cried May; "I call on him!"

"Yes, my dear. I suppose there will be plenty of time before you give me the pleasure of your company permanently. When do you wish the room to be ready for you?"

The girl did not yet understand what the old lady meant by reference to the Canon of St. Paul's; but she had a sickening sense that something was going wrong.

"If--if," she faltered, "you would let me, I should like to stay this evening. I--I am anxious to get some place this evening, now."

She felt her throat quite dry, and her voice husky,

"This evening, my dear; this evening! That is rather sudden. I am not sure we could manage that. And where are your things?"

"What things?" asked May, in a whisper.

"Your luggage, my dear."

"I have none."

"Well, then, give me the name and address of some of your friends in London."

"I cannot."

"Oh dear, dear, dear! I am very sorry, truly sorry for you, my child. But you have friends in London?" said the old lady, in a kindly tone.

May placed her hand on the back of the chair, and rose with unsteady limbs.

"I beg your pardon," she said, in a low broken voice, "I now understand what you mean. I have no luggage, and can give no reference. Thank you for your kindness. Good-evening!" and before the old lady had time to rise or speak, May had reached the outer door and gained the street.

"There must be something wrong," said the old lady to herself, "or she would not have been in such a hurry to run away. If she had only waited and told me all, I might have done something for her. She is young and very pretty. It's a thousand pities, whatever it is. I'm sorry she did not wait another minute. She took my breath away when she stood up. I thought she was going to make a scene. I did not intend her to go. I only wanted the address to write to her friends. There's something wrong, and it's a thousand pities, a thousand pities."

CHAPTER VIII.

ON THE TRACK.

The Duke passed quickly by Anne in the little hall, and went into the room where Miss Traynor sat in the dim light of a single lamp. As he entered, she had been sitting with her head bowed upon her chest. She had not uttered an exclamation on reading Marion's brief note. She had not wept a tear since. It was now ten o'clock. Half an hour ago that note had come. It lay on the table beside her. She had put on her spectacles to read it, and had forgotten to take them off. As the young man entered the room, she looked up.

"Miss Traynor! Miss Traynor, what is this Anne tells me? Is it true Marion has left the house?"

"What?" said she.

"Anne tells me that Marion has left the house, and that you do not know where she is, and that she said she is not coming back."

"Anne told me she was not in the house, and I got that note a while ago."

She pointed to the table.

He took up the note and read it. Then he sat down without a word, and for a long time there was unbroken silence.

When Miss Traynor saw her niece's writing, addressed to herself on a stamped envelope which had come by the post, all her faculties had been suddenly stimulated into extraordinary activity. She had had, ever since his visit earlier in the day, a dull misgiving that something had gone wrong, or was going wrong. The sight of her niece's handwriting instantly confirmed her suspicions. She tore the letter open, and in a minute had mastered its contents. The letter was very brief, and ran as follows:

"My own dearest Aunt,

"I have all along been terrified by the changes which have taken place in his fortunes. I am, as you know, only a poor plain girl, with no pretensions to blood or family. It is therefore impossible for anything more to be between him and me. I have made my mind up never to see him again. I am sure he would not stay away for my telling him. I have no choice but to go and hide myself until he has grown wise enough to forget.

"Your always most loving niece,

"Marion."

When Miss Traynor had finished reading, the extraordinary mental activity which had sprung up in her died out, and she sank into a dull stupid state, in which there was nothing clear before her mind. For years she had been an invalid incapable of active bodily exercise. She now found herself alone in a house with her servant, and the knowledge that, as far as she might be able to do anything, she might as well be dead. Marion had fled. She could not move, and even if she were suddenly restored to health and strength, she had so long been unaccustomed to cross the threshold of her own door, that she would have been quite helpless. All this rushed into her mind in a moment, while the mind continued still active. Then the activity was exhausted, her chin dropped upon her chest and until Cheyne entered the room she had had no clear image of anything in her mind.

He broke the silence at last.

"Miss Traynor, this is dreadful. This is awful. I too got a letter from her this evening. It contains something of the substance of yours, but it did not hint at her leaving home. When did she go out?"

He was looking vacantly as he spoke at the feeble old woman before him.

"I do not know. Anne can tell you I daresay."

Anne was called. She thought Miss Durrant had gone out a little after five. She could not say exactly.

"There is not a moment to be lost. She must be found to-night," said he, as the servant withdrew.

"It would be well she was found to-night," said Miss Traynor mechanically. She did not seem to know what his words meant--of whom he was speaking. After a moment's pause, she added: "I think she will come back to-night, for she did not even take a shawl with her; and you know, Charlie, it will be very cold soon, won't it?"

He was greatly shocked at this speech. She had never called him Charlie before, and what she said about the shawl plainly showed her mind was unhinged. It was obvious to him that he could do no good by staying. Without saying another word, beyond a formal "Good-bye for the present; I may see you later on," he rose, and went to the door.

"Any time you come I will see you," said the poor invalid quietly, "for I intend waiting up until my child comes home. I think we ought to have a fire for her when she comes in; you know, Charlie, she did not take even a shawl with her, and a place always looks twice more like home when there's a fire in the room we love best."

As he was going out he called Anne, and told her to remain in the room with her mistress until he returned.

"If Miss Traynor refuses to go to bed, as I fear she will, you must sleep in a chair. I'll be back as soon as ever I can. I have a cab at the door. I'll leave it there; and if you want a doctor, or anything else, you can send the cab."

Then he hurried out, told the cabman to wait at the disposal of the servant, and walked off in search of another. He sprang into a hansom, and gave the order--"Scotland Yard."

He did not remain long in the Yard. Once more jumping into the hansom, he drove to Charing Cross, and entered a court, where he remained a short time. Then he went to Finsbury Square. He drove to a few other places that night, and at twelve o'clock he dismissed the hansom in

Piccadilly.

"I do not know what more I can do to-night. The police and every inquiry-office in London are on the alert now. It is too late for the morning papers. What else can I do? Nothing, as far as I can see, but go back and see how the poor old lady is. There will be no news for a few hours, at the earliest."

He set off to walk to Tenby Terrace. He had nothing to do but to kill' time, and walking killed more time than driving. To the police and at the private inquiry-offices he had given the name of Ashington, and his address at the hotel. They had all promised to send the first intelligence there at the earliest moment. His orders had been, that if any news came, and the messenger at the hotel found him out, the messenger was to wait.

It was one o'clock when he got back to the Knightsbridge house. The cab was still standing at the door. He knocked, and was let in by Anne. There was no news. No one had come near the house since. Miss Traynor had not stirred. She had refused to go to bed up to this. She had, Anne believed, dozed in her chair. Anne had slept a few minutes.

He said he would go in and see Miss Traynor.

"Miss Traynor," said he, as he entered the room, "I have run back to say that I have been round to all the offices"--he did not mention what kind of offices--"and have given full description and instructions; and you may rely on it that, if Marion does not return here to-night, we shall know where she is, and fetch her home in the morning."

Miss Traynor had not been asleep; she was just in the same state as he had left her--half-stunned. She said:

"It is very good of you, Charlie. I am sure she will come home some time to-night. I'll sit up for her--I'll sit up; I am not sleepy. You know I often lie awake half the night. I shouldn't mind it if she had only taken a shawl--ever so light a shawl."

He told Anne, if Miss Durrant came back during the night, to send the cab instantly to his hotel.

Although he had walked a good deal that day, and had not yet fully recovered from the effects of that swim, he resolved to walk back to his hotel. All that could be done had been done, and until morning, at all events, there was nothing for him to do but wait, and the best place for waiting was at his hotel, whither the first news would be carried.

His mind was highly strung, and he went at a quick rate. He had not yet given himself time to think; he did not mean to give himself time to think. He had only one thing to do now, and that was to find May. Until she was found, all his thoughts should be centred in one idea; there would be plenty of time for thought afterwards.

He had no sensation of tenderness or love toward May in his thoughts while thinking of her flight or recovery; he felt as though he had no personal interest in the pursuit. That girl must be brought back to her home at any expense, at any risk; and he meant to bring her back, though he carried her by main force, and broke the law in so doing. To her aunt's house he would bring her, as sure as he had carried that line to that yacht. He had risked his life to save life at Silver Bay; he would risk his life, and all he was worth, to place this girl once more under her aunt's roof. When she was safe there, then he might think of other things, such as his love for her, himself, and so on.

No messenger awaited him at the hotel; of course he could hardly hope for news yet. He left word with the hall-porter that if anyone called for Mr. Ashington, Mr. Ashington might be found in his own room.

He had engaged a suite of rooms on the first floor, and to the sitting-room of this he went. He never felt less inclined to sleep in all his life; all his mind and body tingled for something to do, and yet he could do nothing but wait.

Miss Traynor never lay down that night, but sat in her chair with her chin sunken on her breast, and her dull lifeless eyes fixed on the dimly-illumined carpet of the little sitting-room which had for so many years been brightened by the young girl's presence and cheered by her voice.

By six o'clock in the morning no fewer than four clues had been reported to the Duke; but as each one came from a different office, and each pointed to a different point of the compass as the line of flight, and as none was declared to be thoroughly satisfactory, there was nothing to be done but to wait still further.

At seven o'clock breakfast was brought to Cheyne in his private room. He ate with appetite, and when he had finished, lit a cigar. He was engaged in business of importance, which required all his faculties.

At half-past eight Mr. Bracken was announced. Cheyne told the waiter to show the gentleman

up instantly.

Bracken was the detective into whose hands he had confided the Scotland Yard branch of the inquiry. Bracken was a tall, lank, solemn-looking man, dressed in black. Only that there was no appearance of relaxation or festivity about him, he would have looked like a clergyman on his holiday tour.

"Well, Mr. Bracken," said Cheyne, after he had motioned the detective to a chair, "any news?"

"Yes, sir. We have news of the first importance."

"No *clue*, I hope, Mr. Bracken."

"No, sir; not a clue this time. Clues are very good things when you have nothing to go on. We're bound to have a clue in a few hours, it's the privilege of our profession."

"I know," said Cheyne, "a kind of perquisite."

"In a way, sir, a kind of perquisite; or, if you like it better, the flash note by which *we* work our confidence-trick."

"Well, Mr. Bracken, you are very candid, and from your candour I assume you have a genuine note for me in this case."

The detective took out a large pocket-book, and having drawn a letter from it, handed the letter to Cheyne, saying:

"That's a genuine note, sir."

Cheyne took the letter out of the envelope and read:

"8, Garthorne Street,

"Kennington Road.

"SIR,

"I am uneasy, and cannot rest without writing you a line. I let lodgings in this house to ladies only. This evening a young lady, a little under the middle height, and of very good figure, dark eyes, brown hair, and pretty expression, called and wanted me to accommodate her. She had no luggage, and when I asked her for the address of some friend in London, she seemed much disturbed, told me she could not give it to me, and before I could say or do anything, she hastened out of the room and house. She was in deep distress; and ever since she went I feel as though she must have left her friends, and that in all likelihood they will make inquiries after her. In case you should wish for anything I can tell you of her, I shall be only too glad to give you all information I have.

"Yours faithfully,

"Harriet Dumaresq.

"The Chief Inspector of Police,

"Scotland Yard."

"You have a cab at the door?"

"Yes, sir."

"And the photograph I gave you?"

"Yes, sir."

"Very well, then; come along at once. We will drive direct there without loss of a moment."

When they arrived, Mrs. Dumaresq was up, and would see them immediately. In a few minutes she came into the room. Bracken explained the object of their visit, and showed a photograph of May, which the old lady at once recognised as that of the young lady who wished to engage lodgings there the evening before. Then Bracken and Cheyne took their leave, having found that the thoughtful and kindhearted old widow could give them no more information beyond the fact that the young lady, when she left that house, took the way leading into Kennington Road.

When the two men got outside, Cheyne said:

"Well, Bracken, what do you think of this?"

"I think, sir, we have done a good morning's work. The lady was here surely last evening, and late too, so that it is almost certain she slept in London last night. Now that's a most useful thing to know'; for we had all the trains watched this morning, and if she tried to get away by any of them, we shall have news of her. As it was late when she was here, we may take it she slept somewhere in this neighbourhood; so that we have limited the district we shall have to examine. These are two great things; in fact, they are nearly as good as if we had got sight of her."

"And what do you think we should do next?"

"The best thing for you to do is to go back to the hotel. They may have more knowledge of her there now. I'll go round here to the stations, and see if they know anything. I suppose, sir, you would not mind spending a little money locally on this district, now that we have a--I won't say clue, but trace?"

"No, no; spend any money you like. You will come back as soon as you have made arrangements here?"

"I will."

CHAPTER IX.

WAITING FOR NEWS.

When Cheyne returned to the hotel, he found clues had accumulated during his absence, but that nothing more important than clues had turned up. He wrote a brief note to Miss Traynor, saying they had certain intelligence of Marion; that he had been to a house in which she had sought lodgings last night; and that there could now be no doubt Marion would be restored to her friends in a very short time. He did not name any exact hour, or even day, for her return; for, warned by his hasty prophecy of the night before, he did not care to risk another disappointment. In avoiding prophecy, he did not wholly, or even to any large extent, consider Miss Traynor's ease of mind, for, from what he had seen of her since Marion's flight, he did not think theory or hope likely to be of any great good. "Nothing," he said to himself, "but the sight of Marion, and the touch of her hand, will rouse the poor old lady from her lethargy." But he forbore to prophesy, because he did not wish to be again mistaken to himself. He would admit no sentimental thoughts into his mind until the mere business of the case had been discharged--until Marion was once more under the protection of her aunt; and in the meantime he must not exhaust his hope or energy by placing limits to her absence, only to find these limits overpassed.

It was past ten o'clock when Cheyne got back to his hotel. He had two great desires in this unhappy affair. One was that his own rank should not ooze out, and the other that the utmost possible secrecy should be observed. These two wishes were indeed only two parts of the one, for, if it were known that the Duke of Shropshire had a case in the hands of the detectives, it would be sure to get into the papers; and, if anyone knew that Miss Durrant had left her home alone without consulting her friends or guardians, it would very soon be known the relation in which she stood to him. Accordingly, he telegraphed to Miss Traynor's servant that she was not to open the door that day to any one whatsoever until he saw her; for he very well knew that if Anne allowed an acquaintance of either of the ladies in, or even if she stood talking for a few seconds at the open door, the secret would be over the whole district in an hour. Having despatched the telegram, he adopted another precaution. He sent down one of the private-inquiry men to Tenby Terrace with instructions that he was to stay in the house, to open the side-door as far as was absolutely necessary, and to see that no one went into or came out of the house. Of course Anne was in the secret, and might tell at some later day, even though a curb was now placed on her natural loquacity; still, sufficient for the day is the evil thereof, and later on he could devise means of insuring her permanent silence. In order most effectually to guard against the danger of his rank being discovered, he thought the best thing for him to do would be to retire from the active conduct of the search. He therefore resolved to place it in the hands of Macklin and Dowell, and at about eleven o'clock he found himself detailing the facts of the evening and night to Mr. Macklin, who promised to do all he could, and undertook to say that there was no doubt whatever that the young lady would be discovered that day before set of sun.

Mr. Macklin was very unlike the typical family London lawyer. He was low of stature, well-proportioned, fresh-complexioned, and abrupt and forcible in speech. He had a decidedly horsey appearance, although, as a matter of fact, he took as little interest in horses as any man within the sound of Big Ben. Although he was a solicitor, he hated law, and left all the legal elements of

the firm to his partner. But he had a taste for business which did not wear a strictly legal aspect, and he entered into the ordinary and extraordinary affairs of the clients with a zest which made him cheering to his own side and irresistible against those on the other. Cheyne had known him, and liked him, before the great change had taken place in his fortunes; and one of the chief pleasures he had in contemplating his good luck was that by means of it he could do a service to Macklin by appointing his firm law-agents to the Shropshire property. Macklin was the quickest and most ready of men. When a thing was proposed to him he never made a difficulty. He either instantly declared the thing to be impossible, or he went about doing it with all his heart and soul, and with such a manner of conviction he was right that it seemed an outrage on common sense to oppose him.

Cheyne asked the lawyer if there was anything more he would recommend to be done.

"No," said Macklin, "leave it all in the hands of Bracken now. You could not possibly have done better. There is not a more intelligent, conscientious, and painstaking man in the Yard. You may do what you like, go where you please. Take my word for it, things will turn out as I say, and before dark you will be at rest."

"And now," said Cheyne, "I want you to do something for me. I told you of the way in which we heard of her?"

"Yes, yes, of course, through the old widow lady; of course. Somewhere in Kennington. I wonder you found a lady keeping lodgings there. My impression was, and is still, that with the one exception you met, every lodging-house is kept by a retired upper servant. But you were about to say----?"

"The house is No. 8, Garthorne Road, Kennington, and I want you, if you can, to buy it for me. I know this is rather a strange thing to ask you, for of course the house may not be for sale."

"Any limit as to price, your grace."

"No; no limit."

"Then if the house is not in the market, we must put it in the market."

"How can you manage that?"

"We will put golden rollers under it, and roll it into the market. If the house is one the market valued at five hundred pounds, we will pay down the five hundred. If, being worth five hundred pounds, it is not in the market, we give a thousand, that's the only difference. You cannot get everything you want in this world, your grace, unless you have plenty of money, and are willing to give your money for what you want."

"Then I may look on that thing as settled?"

"Oh, yes, practically settled. Of course, if a miracle should occur against us, there would be a hitch."

"And suppose a miracle did occur against us, what then?" asked Cheyne.

"Why, then the purchase-money would be two thousand pounds, instead of only one."

Then Cheyne explained to the lawyer his wishes with regard to secrecy, and her name and his being kept out of people's mouths, and most particularly out of the newspapers.

"Last night," said he, "when the first fresh anxiety was upon me, I thought of going to the newspapers and inserting advertisements for this morning; but it was too late, and now I am glad it was too late; for while there would be hardly a likelihood of her seeing any of the advertisements, and less of her acting on them, there would be reason to fear someone else might see and understand to whom they referred. I wish you to take the whole thing up for me, and act for me now until the end. Of course, last night I had to do what I could myself. I did not know where to find you. You will, I am sure, do all you can for me."

"You may rely on my thinking of nothing else until the young lady is restored to her friends."

When he asked himself the question, had his love for May altered with his altered fortune? he smiled, but would not deign any other reply. He was not insensible to the enormous advantages attending his new position. To be a duke of England was to be one of the first subjects of the first country in the world; and then to have that great honour; coupled with an income which exceeded that of many European sovereigns, were circumstances which impressed him profoundly. Although he moved and acted as though he believed all that had happened, when he was alone he always tried to shake off what he could not help regarding as a delusion. At times it seemed to him as though he was but playing a part, into which he had entered so thoroughly that he could not at ordinary moments divest his mind of the character he had temporarily assumed. This was a very unpleasant feeling; he would have given a great deal to be rid of it, but nothing he could do would drive it away. When people came up to him and called him "your grace" he always felt inclined to laugh, but refrained from doing so, lest it might spoil the play.

He had talked to May about taking the oath and his seat; but although his manner may have been serious, he spoke more as one continuing the play than as one uttering serious words of measured import.

He had called her Duchess, but he had done it in jest, or at least half jest, or as another portion of the play, but not as a part of their own real life. Women are much more literal than men. She had taken all his words literally, and been affrighted by them. Besides, it was much more easy for her than for him to realise the fact that he was a duke. She was a woman; he was her lover, her hero, and, to her mind, worthy of being anything and everything good on earth. But he knew the stuff he was made of, the thoughts that had been in his mind; and to himself the notion of his wearing a coronet was mostly comic. Still, carrying out the conceit of the play, he had indulged his imagination with comic scenes in the House of Lords, between him and others of the hereditary members until he had to shout out laughing. He had had even the irreverence to picture a full sitting of the House of Lords as a transformation scene, in which all the noble lords wore their robes and coronets until the red fire was turned on, and he, playing harlequin, jumped in, and with one blow of his lath sword turned all the noble lords into his old intimate friends of Fleet Street.

In the other days, when he lived in Long Acre and earned a few pounds a week, he had indulged his imagination with lordly company. He had written about lords and ladies, dukes and fine associates; he had described palaces beside which the Escurial was but a simple manor-house; he had lavished riches, and bestowed whole countries, on his heroes. Moreover, he had taken these lords and ladies out of the frame of fiction, and set their portraits round his simple table, making believe that he was the wisest, the richest, and the most puissant of all. He had acted as one of the commissioners in opening Parliament, and crowned monarchs in Westminster Abbey; he had been received with regal honours at foreign courts; had danced with Princesses of the Blood, and been minister in attendance at Osborne. In all these romances and dreams he had been awake. Then into his sleep his splendid surroundings had followed him; the mere dross of authorship he left behind when he slept, but he could not, if he would, shake off the phantoms aristocracy; they followed him into sleep with the easy familiarity of friends whom he could not deny. The shadowy duke who by day graced his garret breakfast by night sent him presents of game or wine or jewels. In his waking and his sleeping dreams he was always rich beyond measurement by number. All the wealth of the world was at his feet, and he scattered it with a liberal hand. The affluence of his imagination was never checked by the emptiness of his purse. He had led a double life--the one of iron poverty, the other of golden visions. So much had his dreams become a portion of his inner life that they often overflowed into his talk. When he dreamed he had been on a visit to the Marquis of Thanet, and came to tell of his dream, he forgot to put in the words "I dreamt." What difference did those two words make? No one was the richer or the poorer for leaving the words out, and the anecdote was all the shorter.

Now reality had exceeded in his own person any dignity or wealth he had ever enjoyed in the realm of shadows. It was one of his great difficulties to persuade himself all was not the pure creation of the brain. He had never, after waking, believed in the reality of those dreams. He had never been at a loss to know whether the Long Acre rooms or the marquis's castles were the reality when he was awake in the Long Acre rooms; but in his sleep he was confident the castles were substantial. When he slept now, he lived in the Long Acre rooms; when he woke, then he dwelt in the marquis's castles. The real and the imaginary had been interchanged, and although he felt, in talking to men who knew of the great change, that he should act as the Duke of Shropshire, he was always prepared to awake and find himself in bed at the top of Mr. Whiteshaw's carriage-manufactory, and, hear the noise of Mrs. Ward in the outer room, busy getting his breakfast ready.

But in the old time and the new there was one thing that never changed--he was always May's lover. In the old time, when he was at the marquis's castles, he thought how he should bring May there when they were married. In the old time, in the Long Acre rooms, he thought how he should go away from them for ever when May was his. In the new time May would enjoy the Long Acre rooms, and how she would enjoy the marquis's castles! Thus she was more with him at this time than ever. Her image was never from his side; her voice was always in his ear. And now she had gone away from him.

Where was she now? Good God, if anything had happened to her!

CHAPTER X.

"FIRE!"

Hour after hour went by that day, and although Bracken came back three times from Kennington, he brought nothing new. The local men had not been able to find a single trace of Marion after the moment she left, the house in Garthorne Street. They had made inquiries at all the lodging-houses and hotels in the district, and had discovered absolutely nothing. They, of course, were hopeful; policemen and private detectives always are. But despite all this hope, and the knowledge that unlimited money was at their disposal, they could not get the slightest additional trace of the fugitive.

In order to beguile the time, rather than from any hope Marion had returned, Cheyne went more than once to Tenby Terrace. There he found poor Miss Traynor had at last succumbed, and gone to bed; but no trace or tidings of the missing girl. If "to be wroth with those we love works like madness in the brain," there is some self-sustaining power in the anger itself; but to love tenderly, and seek the loved object in vain, is more wearing and depressing than mere anger.

He went to Mr. Macklin; but the energetic lawyer was able to do nothing beyond find out that No. 8, Garthorne Street might be bought for eight hundred pounds, upon which Cheyne told him to buy; and when the purchase had been effected, to make a deed of gift in favour of Mrs. Harriet Dumaresq, and hand the documents to the widow without comment or explanation. The purchase and the gift were to be made in the name of Ashington. Cheyne wished to benefit in a substantial way the woman who had been gentle to his love, and careful of her when she was away from him.

The long summer day began to wane, and yet there were no definite tidings--nothing beyond the news Bracken had gathered of the widow in the morning. The detective was quite sure she was in the neighbourhood of Kennington; but beyond this he was sure of nothing.

Cheyne could hardly believe it possible she had not been found. It was, indeed, only by an effort he could believe she had been lost. When his mind was not busy with the subject of her disappearance, he always felt as though she were in Knightsbridge, and he was going over presently to see her, and chat with and chide her humorously for some fault of his own inventing. Then a great sadness fell upon, him, and he thought of all her sweet secret ways and gentle sprightliness. All her sweet ways were secret, and only to be found out by accident. Often and often she had been saucy to him, but never, as far as he knew, to her aunt. But her sauciness fascinated him more than anything else, and now a thousand instances of it crowded in upon him, and filled him with anguish at his loss. He had always been a man of few wants and desires; but, as often happens with such men, those wants were paramount with him, and the loss of anything he loved or had set his heart upon seemed to make his life bankrupt. He could have lived without wine or fine clothes, and never felt the want of either; but clean linen and tobacco were necessaries to him, as bread and beef are to other men. Although in the old days he had spoken of dukes and marquises, he had never longed to be one; he had never thought of being one; and now that things had taken such a different aspect, he set his titles and his riches down at a very low rate, and would rather have given up the marquisate of Southwold, or even the dukedom itself, than abandon the use of tobacco.

Now what had he lost? The only being on earth he loved. What were all his lands and castles and titles if he might not share them with her, if he might not live in the glory of her happiness? To feel that she was happy because he was with her, and that her happiness was diverted from his own individuality only by the contemplation or possession of something procured for her by him, was the end and aim of all his own expectations of happiness as far as the relations between man and woman are concerned. He had his independent masculine ambitions and hopes. He did not believe he should die if Marion were never found. He did not think he should throw his money and his coronet into the Thames, and lead the life of a recluse ever afterwards. But he knew that never again could he wrap anyone in such a beautiful mystical chivalry. Never again in all his life should he be able to taste the sweet perfume of romantic passion. He had the feelings of a poet, and she was his best-beloved poem. He had the ardour of a lover, and she was his most dear mistress. He worshipped beauty, and she was the most beautiful spirit in his earthly paradise.

And now she was gone, gone away from him? No one whom he knew could tell him where she was, and he could not find her. Good Heavens! what an unhappy ending to all the happy hours he had spent with her, all the happy hours he had spent thinking of her when away from her! He had in the still times of his leisure thought of nothing else. "She was his festival to see;" and he had brightened some of his darkest hours with thoughts of her. He had never to her betrayed his love emotionally. He looked on emotion with suspicion. But his passions, like his frame, were strong. His rage, his pity, his love, would have carried him any distance. But for mere emotion, that quality of human nature which appraises everything by the accident of the present moment, he had a supreme contempt.

He became restless. He could not remain in one place. The same faculty of his nature which drove him down in a fury to Silverview now drove him between the two extremes of rage and despair. His passions, when roused, were grotesque. In his ordinary moods few men had a more level or equable temper; but once excited, he knew no self-control, attempted no moderation. At one time he thought of going to Bracken, seizing him by the shoulders, and knocking his brains out against a wall; at another time he thought of putting an advertisement in the papers, setting forth the whole facts of the case and offering a stupendous reward for any information about her.

At last daylight failed, and the long summer day was over. Macklin, who remained at his office, declared that he had been belied by events; and Bracken confessed that, since morning, no

progress had been made, and that practically no progress could be made during the night. Cheyne asked Bracken what was to be done; and Bracken said little or nothing could be done till morning. What was there for him to do? Nothing. He might go to bed, but there was no chance of his sleeping. This night was worse than last, for nothing had been done towards the recovery of the girl last night, and he had felt the fullest confidence in the men he had put on her track. Now a whole day had been passed in active search, and nothing had been discovered.

What if she had met with an accident, and was now lying in a hospital? But no; Bracken surely had inquired at all the hospitals in London. Then there was the worst chance, the most awful chance. Perhaps she had met with an accident, and was now beyond the united skill of all the hospitals in London! The Thames, the treacherous, lithe, sleek, murderous Thames, could it have anything to do with the fact that she had not written, the fact that no trace of her had been found of later date than yesterday evening? That woman over there in Kennington had told them the missing girl had seemed in great distress. Could it be that, driven desperate by her desolate condition, she had----

The thought was unendurable. It drove him mad. He would not, he could not, sit any longer inactive under it. What was the good of rank and civilisation, and wealth and police, if a young girl might disappear, and the cleverest men in London could find no trace of her? Why, in the American forests a hunter could follow up his poor, helpless, simple child.

When he came upon the idea of her being a helpless simple child, he groaned and stamped and struck his thigh with his clenched fist; then got up, and swore an oath he would go and find her himself. He was in the hotel at the time, and it was then ten o'clock. Having asked Macklin to act for him in his absence, he left the hotel and crossed the river on foot.

Going over Westminster Bridge he paused, and looked down at the dark swift waters beneath. Could it be that black heedless tyrant below there had strangled his love? Could it be the swirling tide below was now waving to and fro that beautiful brown hair?--that brown hair on which he had loved to lay his hand, that he might feel sanctified. Had loved--had loved! Gracious heavens, had it come to that? Was his love already a thing of the past? Had the love, which was yesterday a living passion with worshipper and idol, in one brief moment left finally for want of an object? Was his life widowed of the one passion which had ennobled it? And here was he, strong, rich, titled, possessed of almost unlimited power to prosecute such an inquiry, as helpless against this mystery as he was against the accursed water rushing beneath his feet!

He left the bridge, and moved on. It was now quite dark--that is, as dark as night is in mid-summer. It was fresh, and not too warm for walking with comfort. The streets were crowded with people, and nearly all the shops were still open.

Cheyne strode on at a rapid pace, his great form cleaving its way through the crowd as a descending stone divides water. He went on without looking to either side until he passed Newington Butts. Here he slackened; here he ceased to be indifferent to the people, and looked sharply every moment from side to side, examining every face with anxious care. If he had been in his ordinary mental condition, he would have known quite well that nothing was more unlikely than that Marion would be walking out at such an hour. But he was not in his ordinary mental condition; and when, after awhile, that thought occurred to him, he put it away impatiently, and said to himself:

"Better fail myself to find her here than listen to the history of others' failures over there." And he turned round and looked indignantly back upon the way he had come. Then he resumed his walk and his eager questioning glance at the unfamiliar passers-by.

On and on he kept until he got to the top of Kennington Road; then he turned, and, having crossed the road, walked back again to Newington Butts. Then, facing round again, he went hither and thither, down by-streets, he knew not, he cared not where.

Gradually the streets became deserted and more deserted. Lights shone a short time in upper windows, and were then put out. The cabs, which had set down people coming home from the theatres, had long since rattled away; The great silent dome of night, fretted with millions of stars, seemed to have absorbed from earth all the unruly noises of day, and only now and then the sound of a solitary footfall broke upon the ear, like a penitential ghost from the dead day. The stormy heart of day was eased of its trouble by that "sweet oblivious antidote"--night. There lingered in remote distances marvellous tones of music. The harsh inconsistencies of day had lain down to sleep, like weary wayward children. The peace of the desert had descended on the great city. Upon all the land had fallen night, that great Sabbath of Nature, when men cease from doing evil to their neighbours and blaspheming God, when the earth rises up out of the great ocean of sunlight, which is for the uses of the earth only, towards the great light of illimitable heaven, which is for the peace of the soul.

All round people were asleep. So great was the silence that the ticking of the clocks could be distinguished through the front doors. It was almost possible to fancy the breathing of the people above could be heard.

As the night wore on, and the chill dawn paled and pushed back the flaming stars, Cheyne's mood changed from one of indignant determination to melancholy. He seemed no longer

possessed of vitality enough to be angry. The long walk and the depressing influence of the hour overcame him, and he felt inclined to weep.

Slowly the day broadened. A solitary crow broke the overwhelming silence of the morning with a single cry, that reverberated through the streets and went rolling away among the distant echoes. That one sound seemed more like the last note of an expiring world than the reveille for the world's work.

Cheyne looked up, stopped, and kept his eyes fixed on the one thing visible in the zenith, that solitary bird.

Then, while he was still watching the crow, down through the streets rang a very different sound:

"Fire!"

CHAPTER XI.

DAWN.

Cheyne looked up and down. He had taken little or no notice of the street. Now for the first time he observed that it was a quiet by-street of inferior order. There was but one other person visible, and that a man of the working class, who yelled at the top of his voice:

"Fire!"

Cheyne saw this man a few hundred yards in advance of him, standing in front of a three-storey house. Again the man yelled "Fire!" and then ran up and knocked loudly at the door of one of the houses. Cheyne walked on rapidly in the direction of the house, and saw no symptom of fire. When Cheyne came up the man was still knocking at the door. There was an area, and into this Cheyne now looked. He could see nothing unusual, but he heard a crackling angry noise.

"Fire!" shouted the man again, as he thundered at the door. Then he turned round and saw Cheyne. "Do you know where the station is?" he asked.

"No," answered Cheyne; "I am a stranger here."

"Very good, then," he said; "you rouse them, and I'll fetch the engine."

At that moment a crash was heard, and on looking into the area Cheyne perceived the glass of the kitchen window had been broken, and that through the hole issued a long lazy-moving cloud of smoke.

Cheyne now seized the knocker and knocked, and shouted "Fire!" with all his might. The working-man ran up the street at the top of his speed. Above, the crow sailed serenely on. Around, the people lay sleeping quietly. In this house, the existence of which was now threatened, the inmates had not yet awakened.

From the first cry of "Fire!" to this time not more than five minutes had passed. Now the flames began to beat against the kitchen window, and glass fell out again. Cheyne knocked and shouted. At last the window of a room on the second-floor was opened; a man appeared at it, and asked what was the matter.

"Fire!" answered Cheyne. "Your house is on fire; get all the people out at once. A messenger is gone for the engine. Look sharp!" The man withdrew in terror to rouse the household. Cheyne could do nothing more. So he stood at the area railings watching the progress of the disaster.

It had got firm hold. Owing to the smoke he could not see plainly, but he now and then caught sight of a tenacle of flame as it shot forth and seized some new object. The crackling sound had increased to a muffled roar, through which occasionally came a sharp hiss. Some of the neighbours had been roused by this time and were at the windows talking excitedly.

Cheyne heard a crash, and for a moment there was more smoke and less flame and noise. Then a dulness seemed to come on the glass of the first-floor room. It was smoke. The plastering of the kitchen ceiling had fallen, and the smoke was making its way up through the laths and boards.

There was no time to be lost, for the flames must soon reach the hall and staircase.

Again Cheyne went to the door and knocked. At last the door opened, and a man and his wife and two servants came out half-clad into the street. They were terrified and only partly awake. Each carried something or other.

"Anyone else in the house?" asked Cheyne.

"No," answered the man, "we are all here. My wife, two servants and myself. But shall we not be able to save any of our things? They are not insured."

"You, I am greatly afraid, will not, and ought to think yourself lucky in getting off with your lives." As Cheyne spoke, the fire burst through the door at the head of the kitchen stairs, and rushed up the hall towards the entrance. Cheyne caught hold of the handle and banged the door.

"What did you do that for?" asked the man angrily.

"To give you the only chance you have of saving your furniture."

"What do you mean?" said the man, in bewilderment. "How are we to get at it now?"

"The air, my dear sir, the air. You cannot go into that hall now to get at anything. Nothing can be done until the firemen come; and if you left the front door open, you would only be blowing the flame upstairs."

"The mistress of the house had by this time been taken in by a neighbour opposite, but the servants declined a sanctuary, preferring the excitement and the spectacle in the street. Cheyne approached one of the servants and said:

"Are you quite sure no one else is in that house, for I greatly fear there is little hope of saving a stick of it."

"Oh yes, sir," said the girl. "Quite sure. We have a lodger.

"And where is he?"

"Gone out of town for a few days. She's been with us a good while, and went away on her holidays this very day. It's a lady, sir; Mrs. Carpenter."

"And you're quite sure she has left the house?"

"Yes, sir, quite sure; I helped to bring her things downstairs for her this night, and saw her get into a cab and drive off to the railway-station. She went away from here about ten o'clock, and drove straight to the station. I heard her tell the cabman to take her to Waterloo."

"Oh, then, it's all right?" said Cheyne.

"All right!" exclaimed the servant indignantly; "and it was only the day before yesterday that missis got in a new wardrobe that cost every penny, and the odd shillings too, of twelve guineas! I can smell the varnish of it burning now. It's a shame the fireman aren't here. Oh, yes," went on the loquacious maid, "Mrs. Carpenter is safe enough, and I'm glad of it; for there isin't, sir, in all London, a nicer or a kinder lady. She's been with us now ever so long; she's been with us before I came into this place. I was in a situation in Dulwich before I came here. I ought to know she is safe, for I was the only person in the house, sir, when she left. The master and missis went to the theatre in London, and cook was out--it was her evening out. But I stayed in until Mrs. Carpenter was gone, and then I went over, sir, to see my mother, who does washing in Canterbury Lane, off the Brixton Road. Missis said I might go when Mrs. Carpenter was gone; for I am general servant, and there was not a thing to do, and missis gave cook the latchkey, and I had leave till eleven o'clock; and at eleven to the minute I was back, and cook let me in, and the master and missis were not home until nigh to twelve o'clock, as they had to come from London in a cab. Mrs. Carpenter locked her door before she went away, as she said there were things about, and she'd rather tidy them herself than put me to the trouble. She is a real lady, and lives on her own money, which her own husband left to her out of the coal business. And now all the poor lady's things are going to be burned up. That is her room there, at the top. She had the drawing-room too--that, see, beginning to light up now. Mercy on us, there's the beautiful plate-glass gone all to bits, and the furniture only two years old, and master's got no insurance on it! Oh, it's a cruel pity! But, as I was saying, I saw Mrs. Carpenter into the cab, and she gave me half-a-sovereign--I may as well do her justice and own to it, now that her things are going to be burnt up. And she locked the door of her bed-room, and took away the key, and when I came back from my mother's in Canterbury Lane, I put my hand on the handle of the door, and it was locked sure enough, so she's safe, and I'm glad of it; for she's a good kind lady, and I sha'n't meet her like again, I know."

The servant had by this time a large group for audience. Cheyne was standing among that group, and he had heard, in an unconscious kind of way, all she had said.

It was full daylight. All round that now awakened street the same profound quiet reigned as before, but scarcely a house from one side to the other was without a representative in the crowd. Almost every front door was open, and people half-clad were at the windows of the

opposite houses, looking on in affrighted amazement.

Meanwhile the flames had gained ground rapidly. They were now pouring out of the basement and ground-floor windows, and already the smoke wreathed and curled against the windows of the drawing-room on the first-floor. The top or third-floor was yet uninvaded. On the front door the paint cracked and blistered, and as it became hotter and hotter, chinks opened in it, and through those chinks the fumes streamed in an idle and leisurely manner. The flames and heat issuing from the basement window had scorched the paint of the area-railings, and the wreaths of flame and smoke had already marked the walls with bars of soot.

The people next door on either side were already busy moving the furniture, for there was no saying what dimensions the fire might ultimately assume. Plenty of neighbours were able and willing to help, and already, not more than twenty minutes after the first alarm, two growing piles of furniture stood on the opposite footpath. All was done silently and with a business-like absence of bustle, as if the people had been brought up to the work. The men were in their shirts, trousers and slippers, and spoke little. They took their orders from the owners of the houses, and carried out the things as carefully as if they had been their own. Sashes had been removed from windows, and ropes had been procured somewhere, and by means of these ropes the heavier articles of furniture were being lowered into the street.

Cheyne stood merely looking on. At another time, under ordinary circumstances, he would have been in the thick of the fight. But there were men enough and to spare for the work, and he felt too depressed and wretched to take much interest in saving a few pounds' worth of tables and chairs. He stood by, idly looking on.

The police and the turncock had by this time arrived, and a column of water five feet high was boiling up in the street a little distance from the burning house. It was evident that the house on fire was doomed. Nothing could save it. Even if the engines came now they would not avail. Already the flames were visible in the drawing-room.

Another clatter of glass sounded through the whirring and flapping of the flames, and the glass of the drawing-room windows fell, clashing and shrieking from window-sill to window-sill until it shot down the area, shattered into a thousand echoing pieces.

At this moment the fire-escape arrived, and almost at the same instant a steam fire-engine came clattering up the street. As the fire escape was not needed, it was placed at the end of the street. The engine drew up in position, and in a few minutes was ready for work.

The fire-escape was ordered up and reared against the burning house. A man mounted the escape with a hose, and began playing through one of the drawing-room windows. Through the ground-floor window the flames were rushing out in great volumes, and frequently the position of the man on the ladder became extremely critical.

Now the fire darted out, and bending upwards and sideways, seemed to try to reach him. Now it contented itself with darting a fang at the ladder, as though exasperated at not being able to meet him, it had resolved not to be baulked of some prey outside the scope of its present activity.

The gradual growth of day progressed meanwhile, and the broad dawn was white and full. In the fierce glare of day the flames grew paler and paler, until they almost disappeared. Now the position of the fire was marked by a column of dense black smoke, for there was not a breath of wind to blow it away. The sun had risen above the horizon, and its white light stood up against the black shaft of smoke. No bird was now in the air over the doomed house. The great city still slept; all but those of it who had sorrows.

The flames were at their fiercest. The man still stood on the ladder and directed the water through the windows. The flames darted out still more angrily, and came nearer to him, but he did not flinch.

The crowd was small, and the police did not insist on the people keeping at any great distance. Cheyne leaned against a railing, and looked on quietly at the scene. It was better to look at such a scene, which prevented one thinking, than to wander through the streets brooding over his loss.

The burning house faced the east; and now that the flames were on a level with the window-sill of the third-floor the sunlight struck the windows full, and they blazed with light. The people murmured, thinking the upper floor was burning.

For a moment all eyes were directed upwards; and while dispute ran high as to whether the glare came from within or without there was a crash below, and a shout of dismay, and all eyes were lowered.

The ladder on which the fireman had been standing had snapped in two, and he and a portion of the ladder had fallen into the area.

For a moment there was silence.

Cheyne stood up and shook himself. He might be of help to this poor fellow, who had been so cruelly treated by Fate in the discharge of his perilous duty.

All at once a yell of horror burst from the crowd, and someone shrieked:

"Look up!"

A hundred arms pointed frantically aloft.

Cheyne raised his eyes, and saw, at the window of the third-floor of the burning house, lighted up by the sweet cool light of early summer morning, Marion Durrant!

CHAPTER XII.

NIGHT.

When Marion Durrant went down the steps of No. 8, Garthorne Street, that evening, she was in despair. She did not know where to turn or what to do. She had tried three times to get lodgings, and had failed. She would not go to an hotel; and even if she did, she now felt certain they would not take her in. She had money in her pocket; but she had no luggage, no reference; and both reference and luggage seemed almost more necessary than money. If she had had no money, but had been able to give a reference, she had no doubt the lady whom she had just left would have let her stay the night anyway. Now what should she do? It was cruel to think that she, who had done no wrong, and had money in her pocket, and was willing to pay for it, could not get a lodging that night in great London. She had often heard it said that, with money, one could do anything; and yet here was she with money, and she could not get the commonest of all human necessaries, a roof to cover her.

There was only one thing impossible, and that was that she should go back to Knightsbridge. But she did not know what to do. The notion of walking about the streets all night was appalling; still it was preferable to going back. Anything was better than going back. She would rather sit down by the side of the way and die than anything else. But she was she felt, young and strong and full of life; and as to interfering with her existence, the thought was as little to be entertained as that of returning to Knightsbridge; going back was her ideal of absolute impossibility.

She wandered on now she did not know, she did not care, where. She was tired by this time, and would have liked to sit down. She could not sit down by the side of the street. She did not know of any place to which she could go. She had only one idea, and that was to keep moving; for she had heard that the police insisted on suspicious people moving on, and she supposed she must be a suspicious-looking person, for no one would take her in. So she kept on.

She had no notion of what would become of her. She had not thought, she did not think, of what would happen when she could go on no further. All she knew was, that back to Knightsbridge she would not go. She was thirsty, and would have given half-a-crown for a glass of water, but she did not know where or how to get it. She felt hunted and dismayed.

So much was she shocked and discouraged by the last interview that she failed to observe she had taken the wrong turning, and was going towards the Thames. She adopted no regular course, followed no regular track. Now she crossed a street aimlessly. Then she as aimlessly crossed back again. The wheels became less, and the feet more, frequent. The streets were thronged, and in a misty, half-unconscious way she realised for the first time the enormous magnitude of London. We are told one half the world does not know how the other half lives. One half of London has never seen the district in which the other half dwells.

It was a matter of perfect indifference to her which way she went, so long as it was not to Knightsbridge. Of course going towards Knightsbridge meant nothing; for when one takes a step due north, one is going towards the North Pole. The moment she came anywhere near Knightsbridge she should know it--then it would be time to change her direction; but until then she had only to keep moving on according to police regulations.

But how much longer could she continue to walk about? She had been brought up in London, and was not accustomed to more walking than falls to the lot of an average London-reared girl. She had now been four hours wandering about, and had endured three serious disappointments about getting somewhere to rest for the night. She was indifferent to her fate. She assumed that at one time or another something would happen to decide it; but what that something might be, or what was likely to happen, she could not guess. She did not try to imagine.

It was now growing dusk; but by this time she was too worn out and too miserable to be any longer horrified at the notion of being alone in the dusk or dark of London streets. She had only two desires, and these were to get a drink of water and find some place where she might sit down and rest ten minutes.

It seemed to her that if she might have just ten minutes' rest, and a drink of water, she should be able to face any danger, encounter any fatigue. But where should she turn? Whither should she go?

Despair had given way to indifference, and she now did not care what became of her. By instinct she avoided the crowded thoroughfares and wandered through a network of quiet by-streets.

Minute succeeded minute, and silence gradually fell upon the streets through which she passed, until the only footfall which kept company with her own was that of the policeman. She was footsore and hungry and weak, but still she kept on. Part of the time, it seemed to her, she must have been asleep as she walked, for she was always conscious of passing into a condition of increased wakefulness when anyone passed her.

At length the darkness faded, and it was daylight once again. Still she stumbled on until at last she came to the gates of Kennington Park and found them open. The park was almost deserted. Without intention she took one of the quiet side-walks apart from the main one, along which a few workmen were hastening with their tool-baskets over their shoulders.

Here she found a sheltered seat, and, sitting into the corner of it, fell fast asleep.

It was three hours before she awoke. She was aroused by the voices of children journeying on their way to school. She heard some of them talk of a fountain, and then all ran away. She followed them, and having waited until they had scampered off and no one else was near, she reached up and filled the little cup and drank, and felt greatly refreshed by her sleep and the delicious cool water she had been so long thirsting for.

Then she sat down again and rested till noon. She was too feeble and worn out to think of any plan for the future. She forgot she had money in her pocket and that she could buy food. After the horrors of the evening and night she could think of nothing but that it was cheerful day again with the security of light and people around her.

At noon she rose and tried to walk a little, but felt so tired and footsore that she went no farther than the next chair, and then sat down. But day waned and evening came on, and the time for shutting the park arrived. What was to become of her now? She had not the courage to go to that fountain since, as the people began to appear soon after the children passed by. And now she was thirsty and tired and hungry, and did not know whither to turn. Her mind was enfeebled like her body, and beyond the firm resolution not to go back to Knightsbridge and a consciousness of an obligation to keep moving, she had no clear perception of anything.

She had for some time been walking down a large and populous road, and now she suddenly came upon a railway viaduct. In an idle effortless way she looked up, and found she was near Waterloo Station. Often, when she had gone little journeys with her aunt, before Miss Traynor had been altogether laid up, she had been to Waterloo Station, and had often rested in the waiting-room, It occurred to her she might do so now. She turned into the station, found a waiting-room, and sat down.

She selected a corner, and had not sat many minutes when all the objects in view grew softer and less angular to her eyes, and when her sense of desolation diminished, until the faculties of her nature were centred on the one supreme physical sensation of the deliciousness of rest. She settled her shoulders more comfortably into the corner, and before she was conscious of drowsiness was asleep.

Mrs. Carpenter, a widow in comfortable circumstances, living in lodgings at Wilkinson Street, Kennington, had that day made up her mind to go south to some relatives for awhile. Although she had got the letter of invitation days ago, she had not answered it until that day, and then she telegraphed that she would be with them late that night, by the last train, or the train before the last.

Mrs. Carpenter was, in a few ways, a little eccentric. In all London there was not a woman with a warmer or more humane heart, but in some things she was not as other people. She had a habit of making up her mind suddenly, and unmaking it quite as quickly. She conceived violent likes and dislikes, without being able to account for them. She trusted altogether to instinct, and pooh-poohed reason. She had her troubles and trials in the world, but she was now, as far as money went, above any chance of evil fortune, and what she loved most was to help others who were deserving and were not so fortunate.

She was not what is popularly called a charitable woman. She did not give half-crowns to tramps or large sums to hospitals and other charitable institutions. But she found out men who could get no work because of the want of tools, or women whose children were hungry because of their mother's illness, or some other case of blameless distress, and then she stretched forth no niggard hand, but one open and free, and full of aid and kindly counsel. She did not sermonise

away the value of her gifts or loans, or make them an opportunity for dwelling upon any particular form of faith. If she found people hungry and deserving, she gave them bread, without making it the price of a pious mortgage.

On this particular night, when she left her lodgings in Wilkinson Street, she drove to Waterloo Station. She had some minutes to spare, and went into the waiting-room. Here the only object that met her eye was the unusual one of a well and quietly dressed girl of good appearance fast asleep in one of the corners of the public waiting-room. She drew near and looked at the sleeper. Even in sleep there was an expression of pain and weariness upon the girl's face. But, being worn out, she slept soundly.

"She'll lose her train as sure as fate is fate," said the sympathetic widow, drawing still nearer, and putting her hand softly on Marion's arm. "I beg your pardon, my dear," she said, shaking her softly.

Marion did not wake at once.

"My dear, my dear, you will lose your train. Where are you going? Wake up!"

"Ah," said Marion, opening her eyes and looking into the kindly face above her, "I--I am not going by train anywhere."

"Then you must have been a long time asleep. Do you know it's ten o'clock?"

"Yes, I know it is ten o'clock. I have been only a few minutes here. I was very tired, and when I sat down I fell asleep."

"But, child, this is no place for a young girl to fall asleep. Are you waiting here for anyone?"

"No."

"Then allow me to advise you to go home. This is not at all a proper place for a young girl to fall asleep in. What would people, uncharitable people, say if they saw you?"

"I do not know what people would say. But I cannot go home, and I have not been able to get a lodging," said Marion piteously. She liked the kindly voice and face of the widow, and she resolved to confide in her.

"And where are you to sleep to-night, my dear?" asked the widow, in mingled horror and amazement.

"I do not know. I wish you could help me; and I am very thirsty, I can hardly speak."

Mrs. Carpenter stretched out her hand and took Marion's, and said:

"Come with me. I will get you something to drink, and put you right for the night. I shall miss the train I intended taking; but never mind that, there is another later."

She took the girl into the refreshment-room and got her a cup of tea. Marion could eat nothing, but she drank the tea with a great sense of relief. While she was drinking the tea, she told the widow as much of her story as she would tell anyone--how, for reasons unconnected with the fault of anyone, she had been compelled to leave home unexpectedly and suddenly, and how she had wandered about, looking in vain for lodgings.

"And," said Mrs. Carpenter, "what is your name?"

Marion felt it hard to refuse to tell one who had been so kind to her, and yet she had made up her mind to tell no one.

"If you would not think it very ungrateful of me, I would rather not tell you," she said in a voice of pain.

"Oh, my dear, I am not in the least curious, not in the least. I had no object in asking you what it was. I only wanted to know what I am to call you."

"My christian name is Marion, and they call me May," said the girl, with a spasm at her throat when she said the word "they." What were they thinking of now? What were they thinking of? Long ago both her notes had been delivered. When they knew she had gone away, what would they say? And in all this, "they" meant only two people, Charlie and her aunt.

"Well, May, come along now, and I'll do better for you than any of those very particular people. Cab--four-wheeler!"

They got in, and she gave the direction to drive to Wilkinson Street. Here she opened the door with a latch-key and went in, making Marion follow her. She told the cabman to wait.

"Now, are you sure, my dear child, that you would not like something to eat?"

"Oh, quite, thank you. I want only to sleep. You are too kind to me, and I am too tired and too

miserable to thank you in any way. Indeed, I shall never be able to thank you, for I was in despair."

"Poor child! poor child! It must have been cruelly hard. Mind yourself now in the dark. I'll get a candle in my own room; I don't know where to put my hand on one here. This is my door. I've got the key in my pocket; ay, here it is. Now, my dear, come in. Oh, yes, here is the candle. That is better; now you can see around you. There is no one in the house but ourselves. The master and mistress are gone to the theatre, and the servants are out. You will find the whole of the people very nice. I have been lodging here some time, and I must say I never met nicer people--not a bit like the ordinary lodging-house folk."

"But when they come in and find me here, what will they say? What am I to say?" asked Marion faintly.

"They will say nothing to you, and you will be fast asleep when they come. I have a very simple plan of getting over that difficulty: I'll write a note. They know my door is locked. You shall take the key and lock the door on the inside. Tomorrow morning you push my note out under the door. They will not be much surprised to see it there, and they will be only astonished, not alarmed, when they hear that you are in this room; whereas, if you showed yourself to-night, or if you opened the door to-morrow morning, without their knowing about you, they might be terrified, or treat you as a thief."

She sat down at the dressing-table and wrote the note, and then, after giving a few more words of instruction, said "Good-night," and added:

"I shall not be back for a couple of weeks anyway, and during that time you are quite welcome to stay here. By that time you will have succeeded in getting a place for yourself, as you can use the landlady here as a reference, or me, for that matter, if you prefer it."

She closed the door after her, and was gone.

Marion turned the key and sat down to think.

The events of the past hour had added a fresh and surprising subject for thought to the situation. What deliverance could have been more thorough, more opportune, or more unexpected? Now that she was safe within walls, securely housed and sheltered, she recognised the gravity of her position an hour ago. What would have become of her but for this kind and thoughtful woman? She did not know. She could not answer the question; but the fact she was unable to answer was more terrible than any answer she could conceive. To wander another night through those weary streets! She could not have done it. She should have fallen down and died; or if she did not die, no doubt the police would take her to the station or somewhere else.

This was the first time she had been from under the protection of her father or mother or aunt, and she felt as if the ground beneath her was no longer solid and trustworthy, but full of holes and other dangers.

And then the thought of her poor old invalid kind aunt rushed in upon her, and she sobbed. What would the poor old woman do now that she was gone? Marion knew very well her aunt had no thought of anything in this world but herself, Marion. She knew that never fell greater desolation on a mother than would fall on her heart when the fact of her flight broke upon her for the first time. She could not conceive what the poor old woman would do. Perhaps she might die. That would be a merciful end of this wearying tragedy. If she, too, might only die here in secret, where no one knew, where even her name had never been heard, would never be known! What a delivery death would be! Sudden and painless death she would prefer, but she would not shirk pain, if it proved the gateway to release. She was not conscious of any great wickedness; and she believed she should find nothing in the hereafter so bad as what she now endured.

Then she knelt down and said a short prayer, begging of God to take her that night as she lay in sleep.

She was as loyal-hearted a maiden as man need hope to win. And as she lay down to sleep that night she wished and prayed that she might die, for her sweetheart's ease. After God, she held him first, above all considerations of self or others. She was profoundly sorry for her poor helpless aunt. If the question had arisen as to whether she or her aunt should die, she would have freely offered herself as the victim; if her offer was rejected, she would have felt resigned. But on the question of whether he or she should be sacrificed, she would not have allowed the right of any human interference. She was, by the nature of her womanhood and the quality of her love, the natural victim in any such sacrifice. She would have gone gladly to the stake for him, as she had despairingly gone into exile away from him.

Then she fell asleep.

It was a broad open plain, bounded on all its four straight sides by swift impassable rivers. In that wonderful atmosphere it was possible to see objects distinctly at enormous distances. All this vast plain, hundreds and hundreds of miles every way you looked, was dotted, at regular

intervals, with groups of mounted men, a vast horde, more numerous than all the armies of the world combined. These bodies of men kept moving from spot to spot, always movements of equal length, like draughts on a board. Yet no one body of men came in contact with any other. They always kept at regular distances; and the most curious thing was, that although there seemed to be a body of cavalry for each space, so that every space was occupied, they moved about from square to square without touching or filling up the blank places, which were only half the size of the occupied spaces.

There was another curious thing too about those squares of men. No matter how far remote from the eye--and some of them are evidently thousands, if not hundreds of thousands of miles away--the movements of those that were remotest were only equal to those immediate to the eye, and yet looked as great.

Another most remarkable thing about this plain was, that while the rivers bounding it were at such distances that the mind of man could not appreciate them, the sound of the swift rivers--cataracts in fact, they were--came as clearly upon the ear as the sound of the tramp of the horses close by.

Now the formation of this incalculable body of men and horses underwent a change. Instead of being ranged in squares equidistant, they, with incredible speed, formed into two long lines, and stood facing one another. It was obvious the great battle was about to begin at last. The slaughter would be terrific.

Not only had the formation changed, but the very nature of the troops themselves. They were no longer cavalry, but artillery with long lean guns, that looked hungry like starved wolves.

The men had all dismounted from their horses now, and were busy about the guns. It was not possible to see exactly what the men were doing, but anyone must know they were preparing for battle. If, when these men had been merely cavalry, the carnage was sure to be great, what would it be now that each man, as well as could be seen, had a long, lean, hungry-looking cannon?

And now the battle began. The long, lean, hungry-looking cannon belched forth huge columns of smoke, which lay down on the earth and drifted towards the spectator. There was no sound of firing from the cannon; all that could be heard was the roaring of the waters and the hissing and screaming of the cannon-shot.

For hours this battle went on, and although the shriek of the shot through the air could be distinctly heard, no one fell on either side, nor was there any means of ascertaining whither the shot went, for no spirit of dust rose to show. Upon the whole it was a most extraordinary battle, such as one seldom or never sees nowadays.

The only progress which the battle seemed to make was in the accumulation of smoke; for this had not only continued to gather, but, by an inexplicable freak of Nature, the two lines of smoke were blown together, and both forced downward on the spectator.

This smoke was suffocating, maddening. It was not to be borne any longer. It had already blotted out the battle, and nothing could be seen, although everything could be heard, including the shouts of the dying; for now the shot must have begun to tell, as cries and yells and screams burst in upon the ear, and almost maddened the listener.

The spectator tried to retire, but could not. A high wall had insensibly arisen on the plain, and now barred retreat, To advance against that fog was as impossible as to walk through that wall. What was to be done? Suffocation! Oh, help!

With a shriek she awoke.

The room was dim with smoke. She sprang up. She had not undressed. She rushed to the window and looked out. She saw at once that the house was on fire, and that no one knew she was in it.

Right opposite to her stood Charlie, leaning against the railings. Was her prayer for death about to be answered?

CHAPTER XIII.

ON THE ROOF.

For a moment he and she stared at one another in mute stupefaction. She had prayed she might die that night, and now death had sought her. And yet--and yet----

To die alone was easy, would have been less than easy when she offered up the prayer; would have been easy now if he had not been present. But how was she to die within the view of him? How was she to go out of life while he stood by? No, no. Now was not the time to die. She could not, she would not, die now.

"Charlie! Charlie! can't you save me?" she cried, throwing out her arms towards him.

He could not hear her voice, but he saw the appealing arms. For a moment he felt as though he had received a heavy blow on the head. Then he uttered a loud shout that drew all eyes upon him, and lowering his head, darted through the crowd and across the road towards the house next the one on fire. Two policemen tried to stop him, but he pushed them aside with an oath.

He sprang into the hall of the house next door and dashed up the stairs. They were still removing the furniture from this house, and when he reached the second landing he found it blocked with a wardrobe four men were carrying down. He caught two balusters of the higher flight, and drawing himself up flung himself over the balustrade. Then he dashed on again. At last he reached the top of the house. He looked into one of the rooms. Some of the neighbours were taking down an iron bedstead. He seized one of the side-rails, and with a blow of it knocked out the sash of the front window.

He got out on the window-sill, carrying the iron bar with him. He rested the bar against the side of the window, and then for a moment seized the gutter-pipe and swung out of it. The gutter bore his weight without giving way in the least.

When he had ascertained that the gutter would bear him he took up the iron bar, and, laying it down in the gutter, pushed it towards the burning house.

Thus he was now standing on the window-sill next to the one at which he had seen Marion, and the iron bar, to which the cross laths of the bed had been attached, lay in the gutter overhead between him and the burning house.

Was she still standing at that window? or had the accursed flames---- No, no; he must not even think of such a thing for a moment. It would unnerve him, and he had need of all his nerve and strength now if she was to be saved. So far all had gone well. It was not more than a minute and a half since he had seen her figure at the window. How long that minute and a half seemed to him! Keep cool! That was the great thing; keep cool!

All this rushed through his mind as he once more lifted himself up by the power of his hands and hung out of the gutter.

At that moment a fireman thrust his head through the bottom sash, and said:

"We've sent for another escape. What are you going to do? You can, if you are strong, go along the gutter to the window, but you can't bring her back that way."

"I am not going to try," said Cheyne.

"Then what are you going to do? You can't go along the roof, it's too steep."

"I can," said Cheyne.

"You cannot," said the fireman. "We've been looking at it, and we all agree it's too steep."

"I have no time to talk, but I'm going."

"It's as much as your life is worth, and I won't let you."

"By ---- if you touch me I'll impale you on the railings below!"

The fireman drew back, and, as he did, Cheyne let go the gutter and slipped off his boots. Then seizing the gutter once more, and standing at one side of the window-sill--the side farthest from the burning house--he pressed his stocking-feet against the brickwork of the embrasure of the window, and walked up until his left foot was at the top of the window. Thus his body was now higher at the feet than at the head.

He raised his left leg cautiously and caught the edge of the gutter with the foot. He raised the right leg and passed it over the left. Then he lifted his body up as high as he could by the hands until he got the elbow of his right arm into the gutter. He was able to keep himself in this position by pressing his right knee firmly against the wall.

The great danger of his present position was that the holdfasts securing the gutter might give way. If they did, he would have had no chance of life.

A moment he hung in this way, on the edge of the roof. Then, by a prodigious effort of his enormous strength he rolled himself in on the roof. There was a cheer from the crowd below. Not one of the firemen had believed he could do this.

His position was still one of extreme danger. The roof was too steep to allow of his walking upright on it, although in his stocking-feet. To prevent himself slipping down he kept one hand and one foot in the gutter. Now he thrust his right hand upward on the slates as far as he could, lifted up a slate, tore it off, and flung it over the roof. He did this to avoid any chance of its striking anyone in the street or the area, where three firemen were now busy rescuing their injured comrade. He tore off another slate, and threw it over in like way. Then he had something to lay hold of. Clutching the laths, he drew himself up by his right hand until his breast was on a level with the hole in the slates. Holding on with his left hand, he thrust his right down the gutter and took up the side rail of the bed, and, resting himself on the slates, keeping his toes in the gutter, he stretched himself upward to his full height, holding the iron rail in his right hand.

Again there came a cry of applause from the crowd below. All this Cheyne had done with amazing swiftness. From the moment he had burst through the crowd below, only two-and-an-half minutes had gone by. Yet to him it had seemed an age.

Now his progress was much slower than it had hitherto been, for in order not to start the holdfasts of the gutter, he was obliged to rest as much of his weight as possible on the slates. Thus he had to lie at full length on the slates, and in moving to the burning house had to shift his feet with great deliberation and caution along the gutter.

The people below watched in breathless excitement. At length he passed the boundary between the two houses. The houses were old, and the party-wall did not come through the roof. The smoke was dense, almost suffocating. He had to dodge his head this way and that to try and get a breath of air. At last the crowd shouted, "Far enough."

He paused, and, resting on his knees and toes, raised the iron bar high and brought it down with a mighty crash on the slates. They rose in a shower of fragments; and, when he could see, the laths were exposed in two or three places. Seizing hold of the laths he drew himself up, and, standing upon the laths, which gave him a firm foothold, he thrust the bar down--as one uses a pavior--until he had made a hole big enough to allow his body through.

Into this hole he dropped, and found himself in an unboarded cockloft over the room in which he had seen Marion. Between two of the joists he now thrust his bar. Already the smoke was thick in the cockloft, but when the hole was made in the ceiling the smoke rushed up in a dense column.

Not a moment was to be lost. Perhaps it was already too late.

He smashed down the ceiling, and in a few seconds had cleared a space large enough to allow his body to pass between the joists. He threw away the bar and dropped his legs through the hole and lowered himself until he hung at full length from the joists by his hands. Then he let go.

The room was so full of smoke he could not see anything distinctly. One thing was clear, Marion was no longer standing at the window. Six minutes had passed since he left the street--only six minutes! She was then standing at the window, but in those six minutes what might not have happened?

Meantime, the firemen had not been idle. They had got their comrade up out of the area, and were busy with a long rope. One of the men got upon the stump of the escape, and having secured the end of the rope to a hammer and coiled twenty or thirty yards of the rope in his left hand, he swung the hammer round his head three or four times, and then let go.

The hammer flew upward towards the roof next that of the burning house; the coil ran out of the man's left hand--the hammer disappeared over the roof. Another fireman now rushed into the house over which the line lay, and in a few seconds the rope was hauled a little from the back of the house. Then the fireman who had gone into the adjoining house came to a window on the top-floor, and cried out:

"Pull in!"

Just as this man cried "Pull in!" Cheyne saw, through the smoke, something lying on the ground near the window. He could feel, by his unshod feet, that the floor of the room was already hot; the smoke was stifling. Everything depended on the haste he made.

Under the hole in the ceiling he dashed a table, then on this he flung a chair. The roof of the room was low and he was a tall man, so that by standing on the chair he could reach the ceiling.

Then he seized the insensible form of the girl and mounted on the table, and from that to the chair. He was almost choked with smoke, and for a moment he felt as though he was about to faint. His shoulders were on a level with the ceiling.

Making a supreme effort, he pushed his burden upward through the opening and rested it on the joists above. Then he drew himself up until his feet came through, and he crouched in the

cockloft.

It did not take him a moment to get from the cockloft to the roof. But how was he to get back. He had never thought of getting back until now. He looked down at the insensible girl. He had just been in time. He saw a flutter at her throat. The air had already begun to revive her.

Now the people below saw him, and shouted with relief and joy.

How was he to get back? It was utterly impossible for him to go as he had come. Awhile he rested on the edge of the hole. The smoke was increasing every moment. He looked in the face of the girl he loved more than all the world besides, he looked at the burning house, he looked down at the opposite side of the street, and then he turned his eyes straight in front of him and saw the white level light of dawn broadening in the east.

She was reviving, but for what fate? What a horrible thing to think of! What a maddening thing to fancy of even for a minute!

At that moment the people below shouted:

"The rope! the rope!"

He looked along the roof and saw the rope. It was now secured at the back of the next house, and held by one of the firemen in front. This man drew the rope as much as he dared in the direction of the burning house; but, owing to the flames issuing from the windows, he could not bring it across the house, hence it was twenty feet off from Cheyne. Those twenty feet made all the difference in the world. The whole distance to the point from which he had set out was not more than thirty feet. It would have been as difficult for him to have got ten as thirty feet.

There was no foothold, no handhold, and the gutter would not do--would not bear the whole weight of himself, not to allow for her weight at all. For now, if he were to try and regain the roof of the next house, he would have to employ his arms with her, and could not take any of his weight off the gutter by leaning on his hands or chest.

The smoke coming up the hole grew more and more dense. Fortunately there was no wind, and the smoke rose in a solid column through the roof, and the two were little annoyed by it.

That rope seemed the only chance of delivery, for in less than another ten minutes the flames would be bursting through that hole, and all would be over with them. How could he reach that rope?

Marion had not yet fully revived, but he could see she was breathing more freely.

At last a thought struck him. He lay down, thrust his arm and shoulder into the cockloft, and brought up the iron bar. Then, having carefully placed the unconscious girl at his feet, he raised the bar and brought it down with tremendous violence on the slates in the direction of the rope. A shower of splinters rose into the air and fell with a rattle on the roof. A huge gash appeared on the roof. Again Cheyne brought down the bar with great force, and a space a foot wide was cleared of slates and showed the naked laths. Then he battered down the laths close at hand as far as the bar would reach. Having thrust the bar through the laths, as far as he had broken, he looked once more at Marion.

Her eyes were open. She was perfectly conscious, but very weak.

"May," he said, "have courage. Have courage, my girl, and try and do what I tell you."

"Oh, God forgive me, Charlie; God forgive me for all this!"

"Hush, child, hush! There is not a moment to lose. Now do what I tell you. On no account look down into the street. Sit here. Lean upwards on the slates, and hold on by this rafter with both your hands. Or stay, better lean forward and clasp the rafter with both arms. Do not stir now, and I will not be a moment."

Then he crept on to the next rafter and clove in the lath and plaster there, and then to the next, and the next, and so on, until at last, in an incredibly short space of time, he had worked his way to where the rope stretched across the roof.

When he reached it another cheer burst from the crowd below. Balancing himself with the heavy iron bar he crawled back along the rafter to where Marion lay.

But up through that hole the smoke had been rushing with increasing volume, and when Cheyne touched the young girl he found she had fainted again.

He raised her up and drew her out of the immediate up-draught of the smoke. She did not revive at once, but he saw the weakness which had again overtaken her was of a trifling nature. He placed her above him on the slates, and then drew up some of the slack of the rope. He wound the rope round his body, so that it stretched taut from the coping of the roof to his waist.

Then placing her on his shoulder and pressing her securely to him with his left arm, he caught

the rope in both his hands, and leaning slightly backwards, resting the weight of his body partly on the rope and partly on his feet, took a few steps slowly and carefully up the slates towards the coping.

The pure white light of dawn was on his back, and when for a moment he stood still, he looked, against the sun, like a bronze statue of Hercules triumphant.

He took four or five steps to the left, and was then off the roof of the burning house, from which slender shafts of flame, almost invisible in the strong light, were now darting through the dense column of smoke.

Another cheer burst from the crowd when they saw he was at last clear of the burning house. But still he was in a position of no small difficulty. He had left his bar behind.

He was on a roof upon which he could not stand without support, and he had the fainting girl in his arms. He could stop there as long as he liked by making the rope fast, but the fire might spread.

At that moment another shout rose from the people. "The escape! the escape!" they cried, and looking up the street he saw a second escape approaching.

In a few minutes it was rolled into position, ladders were shot up, and backing gradually by aid of the rope, he reached the ladder and was soon on firm ground.

Marion had again opened her eyes.

"A cab!" he cried.

One was on the spot in a short time.

"I'll take charge of this lady--she is a friend of mine," said Cheyne, as he helped her in. To the driver he said: "Knightsbridge Road, and then I'll show you." He got in, and the cab drove away.

CHAPTER XIV.

A SILENT DRIVE.

Neither said anything. Both were exhausted. Both were experiencing collapse after the danger and anxieties of the past two days--of the past hour. He put his arm round her to support her, and she leaned on him unconscious, or almost unconscious, that it was really he.

Cheyne now felt for the first time that he was covered with bruises and cuts from slates and nails. Of course, when he came to think of it, nothing but a miracle could have saved him injury in the ordeal through which he had just come. He knew that his clothes were all in tatters. His left leg and right arm felt particularly cold and uncomfortable, with here and there a very slight sense of pain. The pain was not worth talking about, but the cold uncomfortable sensation was new and very sickening.

He did not think of May or of the rescue he had just made. He was feeling, more than thinking. He allowed his mind to drift, and took no heed of the course it followed; and by a circumstance for which he feebly endeavoured to account as the cab rattled along, he found his mind more occupied with a curious observation of his own physical condition, that with any thought of May or recent events. This was very strange, and perplexed him in a hazy sort of way, as one is perplexed on waking in a dark strange room, and being unable to recollect in what relation the bed stands to the door or the door to the window.

Why could not he take his mind off his left leg and his right arm, when he had just not only recovered his lost darling, whom he had been two days seeking, but whom he had only just delivered from imminent risk of death? It was strange, very strange.

He had no desire to talk, no desire to utter a word. May was sitting there beside him, and he was taking her home to her aunt's house, and yet he felt no inclination to talk. What he should like most of all would be to go to bed and get covered up well, and fall fast asleep. By Jove, he was falling fast asleep as it was! What an extraordinary thing he should feel drowsy now he had recovered May, and all was so satisfactorily settled!

Asleep! Yes, he was falling asleep! What a wonderful thing! No doubt it was owing to the two

sleepless nights he had spent. But his leg and arm did feel very dreary.

What! could he not keep his eyes open? This was incredible! Swimming?--he thought he had done with swimming. And yet here he was once more swimming out to that wreck with the line! What was the good of his going out again to that wreck when all the men but the one he had saved were drowned? What earthly good could come of carrying a line out to a ship on which there was not a living soul? Absurd as it was, he should not so much mind it only for his arm and leg. They had got entangled in the rope, and he could hardly support himself in the water. They were dragging him down.

May was also silent, although she never felt less sleepy in all her life. She was scared, and could not gather her thoughts. The past two days were like a dream to her, and she felt she should not be fully awake until she had got back to Tenby Terrace, and seen the old place and kissed her kind old aunt. She had run away and hidden herself, and Charlie had come in search of her and had found her, and she was going back with him. That was quite right and natural, and she was glad that horrible time was over--a time of dreaming or waking. Yes, she was going back once more to her old home with Charlie. She had no longer any doubt that it was wrong of her to have left home. She ought to have remained there and resisted Charlie. It was weak and cowardly of her to run away; and instead of that helping to make Charlie forget her, it would of course make him only more determined not to give her up. If she had stayed at home and seen him every day, and treated him merely as a friend when he called, he would have been much more swiftly cured of his love for her than by her flying and hiding herself from him.

What a wonder Charlie did not speak! He had not uttered a word since they had got into the cab, and now they were crossing the river.

Yes, this was Charlie's arm round her, and it would never be round her again. Never. Even now it was not round her in the old way. It was that of a supporter, a protector, not a lover. How could he continue to love her after her last act? If he had run away from her, would she care for him again?.... Ah, that would be a different thing. Of course she would forgive him. Who could, help forgiving Charlie anything? But then it was quite a different thing. He had everything in his favour, she nothing; and she had thrown him up, run away from him, and told him she would never marry him or meet him again as a lover. No. It was impossible to make any comparison between the two cases, and no doubt Charlie had thought over the whole thing, and came to the same conclusion as she.

That was lucky. It was lucky for her that Charlie had finally abandoned all thought of looking at her in the old way. She had tried to break away from her old home, and she had met cruel difficulties and rebuffs. She would never have left her aunt but that she thought doing so would be of advantage to him. And it had been of advantage to him. Had it not changed him from the warm but unwise lover into merely the protector and friend? Nothing could have been more efficacious than the plan she had adopted. If he had not found her that night, the chances are his love of her would have gone on as of old, and if she had been a whole fortnight from home his love of her might have increased, to fade away as the time of her absence grew longer. But here was she now, who had run away only two days ago, who only two days ago had told him she would never know him as a suitor again, brought back from her hiding and placed face to face with him. All his love must have left him. What could be plainer? What could be more simple? They were now driving through Piccadilly, and he had not said a word.

His face was pale and drooped forward, so that she could only see his forehead. His clothes were, like hers, torn and ragged, and--yes, there was something the matter with his clothes she had not noticed before--something that was not the matter with hers--they were wet! Wet! Wet with what?

Here by this shoulder, close to which she rested her head, his coat was wet and clammy. Clammy!

"Charlie! Charlie! I am very sorry for all I have done--all the trouble I have caused you and poor dear aunt. Will you not speak to me? Scold me if you like, but speak!" she said pleadingly. She stretched out both her hands and touched his left hand. She lifted that hand; there was no resistance. She let that hand go; it fell inertly back. Then she shook herself free from the arm that held her; it dropped down nervelessly behind her back.

"My God!" she cried, "what is the matter?" She turned towards him. She put one of her hands on his forehead. She touched his cheek. Both were cold. She raised his head. It wagged to either side, and then fell forward again until the chin rested on the chest.

Then she shrieked. The cabman heard her and drew up. He clambered down out of his seat and looked into the cab.

"What's the matter?" asked the man. "Oh, I don't know! I don't know! Look!"

"Wake up, sir, wake up. The young lady is frightened. Wake up, sir!" The man shook Cheyne, and raised his hand, and struck his thigh, but there was no response.

"Why, he's wet!" cried the man; "he's wet all over! What wet him?"

"I don't know. Oh Heaven, be merciful to me, and do not drive me mad! I was in a house that caught fire--the one you saw burning--and he saved me!"

The man opened the cab and looked carefully up and down Cheyne. Then he looked at the floor of the cab close to where Cheyne sat, and glancing up with a face full of fear, he cried: "Why, it's blood. He's all wet with blood! Look!"

May turned her eyes down, and saw upon the floor of the cab a large pool of blood close to the left leg. She did not shriek. She turned deadly pale, and said to the man: "Quick, quick; quick as you can go! Eight, Tenby Terrace!"

The man clambered up into his seat, and, whipping the horse, drove off at the top of the beast's speed.

In less than ten minutes he drew up at the door of Miss Traynor's house, jumped down and knocked loudly. The man whom Cheyne had set to watch the side door opened it and came out. In a minute Anne appeared at the front-door. Both were dressed, and ran forward hastily towards the cab. By this time May had alighted, and was standing at one side of the cab, while the driver stood at the other.

Anne uttered a cry of delight at seeing May, but the girl pointed into the cab, saying: "Make haste, get him up to the spare room at once."

The two men lifted him out of the cab and carried him slowly and with difficulty upstairs, and laid him on the bed in the small spare room. The cab was immediately sent for a surgeon, and May sat down by Cheyne's side to watch.

Miss Traynor had gone to bed that night and was now asleep. May did not know what to do, except to try and force a few teaspoonfuls of brandy into Cheyne's mouth. Fortunately the surgeon was at home, and in a few minutes his tread was heard on the stairs. May told the surgeon all she knew, and then she and Anne went out of the room, leaving the surgeon and the man Cheyne had sent together.

For upwards of an hour May had to wait before the surgeon opened the door; then he came downstairs with a very grave face.

The surgeon said Mr. Cheyne was now conscious, but very low.

May had given the injured man's old name in order, if possible, to avoid attracting particular attention to the circumstances out of which the case arose, or the case itself. The patient had lost a very large, an exceedingly large, quantity of blood. Only he happened to have a splendid constitution and youth, he must have succumbed in the cab. His right arm and left leg had been severely torn by splinters and nails. Some of the splinters had remained in the flesh, and had had to be extracted. The sufferer had been overtaxed at the time he received the injuries. He had, the surgeon gathered from him, been two days in great mental excitement, eating little, and moving about continually. Then at the fire he had made prodigious efforts. The speaker had questioned him in detail on this part of the case, and felt sure that few men, few of even the strongest men in their freshest vigour, could have accomplished the feats performed by him in that emergency. Even if he had come out of that fierce ordeal of physical strength unscathed, there would in all likelihood be a great reaction and depression of vital power. But the great loss of blood coming at such a moment made the case one of great anxiety--of the gravest anxiety.

Was his life in danger?

Well, the life of anyone who got a cut or a scrape was to a certain extent in danger, for many things might assail that cut or proceed from it. There was another thing which complicated this case, namely, the fact that where these fresh cuts and scrapes appeared were others not quite healed, This gave the case an ugly appearance.

Would Dr. Fernbeck wish for assistance? He could have any one he liked.

Well, up to this there was no immediate cause of alarm. But let him see.

Yes, he should like to meet the man who attended for those older cuts and bruises. It would be useful to meet that man. Where was he to be found?

It was Dr. Oliver Rowland, of Barnardstown.

And where were those injuries received?

At Silver Bay.

What! Was the Mr. Cheyne upstairs the Mr. Cheyne of the celebrated, of the immortal swim to the yacht *Seabird?*

Yes.

And consequently he was the Duke of Shropshire?

Yes.

And possibly a brother to the lady the speaker had then the honour of addressing?

No. And would Dr. Fernbeck have the goodness not to say anything about the patient's rank, or even the name she had given him? as, for some sufficient reason, the Duke was in London, and had been for some days under an *incognito*.

Dr. Fernbeck promised to respect the *incognito*, and say nothing about the case. He would at once telegraph to Dr. Oliver Rowland, at Barnardstown, asking him to come up and consult with him. Let him see; it was now five o'clock. There was no use in telegraphing before eight, as the office at Barnardstown was sure not to be open until then. By nine or half-past nine he should have a reply from Dr. Oliver Rowland, and by ten he would be at Tenby Terrace again.

Might she go up and sit with the patient?

Was the lady whom he had the honour of addressing the Miss Marion Durrant of whom his grace had spoken, and whom his grace so much desired to see?

Her name was Marion Durrant.

Then she might go up, but no one else was to go into the room save the man whom he had left with the patient, and who would be relieved in a few hours by a professional nurse. In the meantime, the patient was not to be excited or allowed to excite himself. Excitement of any kind might produce the gravest, the very gravest, results.

When Dr. Fernbeck had gone. May went into the little sitting-room for a moment, to think. She had told Anne not to rouse her aunt, for, knowing what a poor sleeper she always was, and having heard how she had sat up the night before, and feeling that the poor old helpless woman would be unable to render any assistance, and that the sense of her uselessness would only pain her. May had resolved to let Miss Traynor sleep on. But, now she was about to go up and see him, what would he say? what should she say?

The thoughts which had passed through her mind in the cab, having been nearly all based on the belief that he was at the time deliberately keeping silence, were now worthless, and she had no clue to what had really been, in his mind, for she did not know at what precise moment he had fainted. He may have been semi-unconscious at the instant he helped her in. Owing to her own terror and excitement she had not noticed the blood on his clothes; and as he wore black, and the blood came from within, it had no other effect on the clothes but to make them damp and clammy.

But what would he say? what should she say? It was impossible to answer these questions. Let her go to him at once. That was the only way to solve the riddle.

CHAPTER XV.

THE MARRIAGE OF CHARLIE AND MAY.

She stole up noiselessly and knocked at the door. The man who was minding Cheyne opened the door and let her in. She went to the foot of the bed and looked at the poor pale face, now trying to force the pallid flesh into a smile.

"May," said a voice she hardly knew, it was so weak and thin, "come and sit by me, dearest. I want to speak to you." He looked at the man and said: "I am much obliged to you. You will leave us a little while, if you please."

The man withdrew.

"Dearest," he said again, and paused and smiled that pale sad smile. "Dearest." Again he stopped; the repetition of the word, and the sight of her face, seemed to be the only thing he then cared for.

"Oh Charlie! oh Charlie!" she cried and covered her face with her hands.

"May," he whispered, "take my hand. I cannot lift it now. I should not mind my weakness, only that I cannot take your hand, dearest."

She took his hand in hers, and cherished it against her bosom for awhile, and then put it down on the counterpane, and laid her warm young cheek upon it, and bathed it with her tears.

"Oh Charlie, Charlie! This is awful. Oh God, give me strength!"

Again he tried to smile, and said: "May, you must not fret yourself in this way. You must not, dearest. You ask for strength. Why you are a Goliath compared to me now. It is not so long ago, only a few days since, I was counted a strong man, could do things with my arms no man of the company could do. But now I cannot get a kiss of my sweetheart unless she comes and kisses me. I cannot raise my stupid old head so as to touch my sweetheart's lips."

She bent over him and kissed his forehead, his lips, her tears falling so fast the while that she could scarcely see.

"When I was on the roof that time, and you were in that room, I could have torn up those rafters with my hands, I could have pushed a wall down with my back, I could have taken a chimney-stack in my arms and dragged it up by the roots. Now, May, I could not lift one of the braids of your beautiful hair, dearest. If it was our bridal-day I could not put the ring on your finger."

Her heart was breaking. She leaned over him and whispered with passionate entreaty into his ear: "But, Charlie, Charlie, you will put it on another day. Some day soon, won't you, my heart's darling?"

"Not very soon," he said; "I am not sure I shall ever put that ring on your finger now, dearest." Still he smiled.

"But oh, my Charlie! I did not mean what I said when I wrote that dreadful note. I am only a weak girl, not a strong man like you."

"Strong man!" he repeated in a tone of amusement. "I cannot be a very strong man, can I, when I have swum to the life-buoy, see the ship bearing down to take me up, and yet feel my hand relaxing on the buoy so that I shall not be able to float until she is near enough to take me on board."

May did not understand that he was speaking metaphorically, and thought his mind was wandering back to that great swim which had made his name famous. But she did not want his mind to go so far afield now. She wanted to keep his mind as close as she possibly could to herself. So she said: "But you will give me that plain gold band soon?"

"No; not soon. It can't be soon."

"I mean as soon as you are quite well."

"That may not be very soon, dearest."

"Oh yes it will."

He smiled. "May, do they not say marriages are made in Heaven?"

"Yes, Charlie."

"I am greatly afraid I am not good enough to have my marriage made there; but if I am, you may be sure we shall be married, not soon, but--by-and-by."

Again she missed his meaning. "Soon or by-and-by are all the same to me, so long as you forgive me and take me back to your heart."

"You have never been out of my heart, child, never for a minute."

"But I have behaved very badly, Charlie."

"You did what you thought was best; and no one can do more than that."

"And you forgive me?"

"Dearest, I have nothing to forgive."

"But, my darling, my poor heart's darling, only for me you would now be strong and well."

"Do you think I could ever be strong and well again if any harm had come to you in that blazing house?"

She was conscious that this was special pleading on her behalf; that it was not sound; but she could not find out the flaw, and for awhile she sat tranquil, holding his hand.

He was silent for a long time, and at last May knew by his breathing that he slept. She sat as the morning wore on, and still he slept. At last she released his hand and went downstairs. It was now nine o'clock, and her aunt was in the little breakfast-parlour.

Miss Traynor had not recovered from the shock of her niece's flight, and, although Anne had told her of Marion's return, she was still too feeble to understand the full import of that event. Indeed she was never very clear as to Marion's flight, and had dim doubts as to whether the whole thing was not a dream. Anne had also told the invalid that Mr. Cheyne had been put to bed in the spare room, and that the doctor had come and said he was very bad.

When May saw her aunt she ran to her, and throwing her arms round the old woman's shoulders, burst into a passionate flood of tears, but said no word; her heart was too full for speech.

"There now, my child! there now, my child! Don't cry. I am very glad you came back. We are all very glad you came back. It was very wrong of you to go out this bitterly cold weather without anything to put round you when you were coming home. I did not mind your going in the least, but you must never again do such a thing without taking a cloak or a shawl with you. Charlie, your Charlie, was very uneasy too at your not having even a silk handkerchief to put about your neck when you came out of the theatre."

May did not say anything, but, sliding down on her knees, buried her head in the old woman's lap, thinking:

"Oh, my aunt, my poor good aunt, has my folly struck you down too!"

At ten o'clock Dr. Fernbeck came. He had had a telegram from Dr. Oliver Rowland, who was already on the way up, as he felt most deeply interested in the case. Then Dr. Fernbeck went up to the sickroom, and upon coming down reported the patient in pretty much the same condition as in the early morning. Yes, Miss Durrant might go up and stop with the patient, but she must not let him talk. No, not even for a minute. It was imperative that he should be kept quiet. Miss Durrant's presence would be more conducive, no doubt, to his quiet than her absence, but there must be no talking. He would come again in the afternoon with Dr. Rowland.

So Marion went up again to the bedroom, and took his hand and held it for his comfort--he was now awake--and wept quietly for her own heart's ease. He wished to speak, but she would not allow him, and told him if he made any new attempt in that direction she would be compelled to leave the room, as her orders allowed of no exception; upon which he smiled and remained silent, with his pale face turned towards her and his weary eyes fixed upon her face.

Shortly after this the professional nurse arrived, but she was told she would not be wanted in the sick-room as a watcher--not for the present at least, and that she might rest below until need arose for her upstairs.

It was four o'clock when Dr. Fernbeck came again. This time he was accompanied by Dr. Oliver Rowland. The two medical men spent half-an hour in the sick-room, and then came down, saying that, as Sir Francis Granby had seen the patient in his former illness, it could do no harm if he saw him now in this. Dr. Rowland would remain in attendance while Dr. Fernbeck went to fetch Sir Frederick, and a cabman was sent for Mr. Macklin, of the firm of Macklin and Dowell, solicitors to the patient, as the latter had some business matters of importance to communicate to Mr. Macklin.

It was judged best that, until Sir Francis had seen the sufferer, Miss Durrant should not visit him. It was more than likely Sir Francis would not be there for an hour, and Dr. Rowland suggested that Miss Durrant should take some refreshment, a glass of wine and a biscuit, and lie down and try and sleep. Dr. Rowland promised to call her when the great doctor had seen the injured man.

And May, being half distracted and quite weak, ate a biscuit and drank a glass of wine, and lay down as she had been bid. In a few minutes she was asleep. She was exhausted, and she slept profoundly, dreamlessly, for hours. When she woke up the west was all aglow. With a pang of grief that she had allowed herself to sleep so long, and a feeling of indignation against Dr. Rowland, who had promised to wake her when Sir Francis Granby was gone, she rose and went out on the narrow landing, at the farther end of which was the room in which he lay.

Just at that moment the door of the sick-room opened, and three men descended the stairs and went into the little drawing-room, which had in the morning been used a consulting-room by the two doctors. She remained standing on the landing until she heard the drawing-room door open, and then the front door, and finally a carriage drive away. Then she ran down.

She met Dr. Rowland in the hall, and said eagerly:

"Well?"

"Sir Francis Granby has just left," said Rowland gravely. "Doctor Fernbeck could not get him until now. He was out of town. This will explain why I did not call you."

"Yes, yes. But what does he--what do you all think?"

"That the case is serious, very serious."

"But Doctor Fernbeck thought the case very serious this morning. Is he worse?"

"That is a thing hard to say. The symptoms are but very slightly changed."

"But you think he will be quite well again in a few days?"

"Ah, well--a few days? Not quite so soon as that."

"But soon?"

"He is very ill."

"But he is enormously strong, and he is young."

"These are two points in any man's favour."

"Are they not in his favour *now?*"

"We are most anxious,"

"Ah, I see you mean that he will die."

"No, we do not say he must die."

"Doctor Rowland, may I go to him? He was very dear to me."

"I know, child. I know--you may go to him," said the Radical doctor, turning into the drawing-room and putting his hand before his face.

She went upstairs with a slow step. When she entered the room, Cheyne said to her: "Come here, little May, and sit down beside me, and take my hand as you did awhile ago. I want to say something to you."

She did as he told her without saying a word. He went on:

"When you were last here you asked me if we should not be married soon, and I said I feared not. I have changed my opinion. I now think we shall be married very soon. At once."

She turned and looked at him. His face was turned towards the window, through which the red disc of the setting sun was clearly visible above the distant housetops. The ruddy light fell on his face and made him look more like his old self. She said nothing, but kept her piteous eyes on his face. He smiled.

"We are alone now, and I suppose we are not likely to be interrupted for a little time. In that little time, dearest, let us get married."

Still she said nothing. She thought his mind was wandering.

"Little Marion, I have forgotten to get a wedding-ring, and even if I had one I could not put it on your finger. I have not the strength left. But then, out there is the great red ring of the sun, and if you hold my hand in yours until it goes down below those housetops, I shall feel that we are married. It is the poor conceit, dearest, of a Fleet Street hack who is weak and spent, and--and--and--well, never mind 'and' what. Will you do it, dearest, to humour a whim? and then I shall sleep sounder this night than ever, for I shall know that nothing can ever part us, for I shall believe this is a real marriage--as real as though it were performed in the dear old Abbey. Now, dearest, the ring begins to dip. Hold my hand and let us be silent until we can see it no more."

In silence they both watched the sun as it sank. She held his hand in both hers. When she could no longer see the sun she turned to him, and said:

"Charlie, it is set."

With a prodigious effort he raised himself in the bed, and, throwing out both his arms towards her, cried in a voice of agony and love: "Marion! Marion, my wife--my dearest! My wife, Marion!" and then fell back, to see the sun no more.

Dr. Rowland heard that cry, and hurried upstairs. He knew what had happened. He took her by the hand.

"Come with me, child, come with me;" and saying these words he led Marion away out of the chamber of death.

THE END.

[April 1885.

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