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MY MISCELLANIES.

By WILKIE COLLINS,

AUTHOR OF 'THE WOMAN IN WHITE,' 'NO NAME,' 'THE DEAD SECRET,' &c. &c. &c.

IN TWO VOLUMES.—Vol. II.

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MY MISCELLANIES.

CASES WORTH LOOKING AT.—I.

MEMOIRS OF AN ADOPTED SON.[A]

I.—Circumstances which preceded his Birth.

Towards the beginning of the eighteenth century there stood on a rock in the sea, near a fishing village on the coast of Brittany, a ruined Tower with a very bad reputation. No mortal was known to have inhabited it within the memory of living man. The one tenant whom Tradition associated with the occupation of the place, at a remote period, had moved into it from the infernal regions, nobody knew why—had lived in it, nobody knew how long—and had quitted possession, nobody knew when. Under such circumstances, nothing was more natural than that this unearthly Individual should give a name to his residence; for which reason, the building was thereafter known to all the neighbourhood round as Satanstower.

Early in the year seventeen hundred, the inhabitants of the village were startled, one night, by seeing the red gleam of a fire in the Tower, and by smelling, in the same direction, a

preternaturally strong odour of fried fish. The next morning, the fishermen who passed by the building in their boats were amazed to find that a stranger had taken up his abode in it. Judging of him at a distance, he seemed to be a fine tall stout fellow: he was dressed in fisherman's costume, and he had a new boat of his own, moored comfortably in a cleft of the rock. If he had inhabited a place of decent reputation, his neighbours would have immediately made his acquaintance; but, as things were, all they could venture to do was to watch him in silence.

The first day passed, and, though it was fine weather, he made no use of his boat. The second day followed, with a continuance of the fine weather, and still he was as idle as before. On the third day, when a violent storm kept all the boats of the village on the beach—on the third day, in the midst of the tempest, away went the man of the Tower to make his first fishing experiment in 3
strange waters! He and his boat came back safe and sound, in a lull of the storm; and the villagers watching on the cliff above saw him carrying the fish up, by great basketsful, to his Tower. No such haul had ever fallen to the lot of any one of them—and the stranger had taken it in a whole gale of wind!

Upon this, the inhabitants of the village called a council. The lead in the debate was assumed by a smart young fellow, a fisherman named Poulailler, who stoutly declared that the stranger at the Tower was of infernal origin. "The rest of you may call him what you like," said Poulailler; "I call him The Fiend-Fisherman!"

The opinion thus expressed proved to be the opinion of the entire audience—with the one exception of the village priest. The priest said, "Gently, my sons. Don't make sure about the man of the Tower, before Sunday. Wait and see if he comes to church."

"And if he doesn't come to church?" asked all the fishermen, in a breath.

"In that case," replied the priest, "I will excommunicate him—and then, my children, you may call him what you like."

Sunday came; and no sign of the stranger darkened the church-doors. He was excommunicated, 4
accordingly. The whole village forthwith adopted Poulailler's idea; and called the man of the Tower by the name which Poulailler had given him—"The Fiend-Fisherman."

These strong proceedings produced not the slightest apparent effect on the diabolical personage who had occasioned them. He persisted in remaining idle when the weather was fine; in going out to fish when no other boat in the place dare put to sea; and in coming back again to his solitary dwelling-place, with his nets full, his boat uninjured, and himself alive and hearty. He made no attempts to buy and sell with anybody; he kept steadily away from the village; he lived on fish of his own preternaturally strong frying; and he never spoke to a living soul—with the solitary exception of Poulailler himself. One fine evening, when the young man was rowing home past the Tower, the Fiend-Fisherman darted out on to the rock—said, "Thank you, Poulailler, for giving me a name"—bowed politely—and darted in again. The young fisherman felt the words run cold down the marrow of his back; and whenever he was at sea again, he gave the Tower a wide berth from that day forth.

Time went on—and an important event occurred in Poulailler's life. He was engaged to be married. On the day when his betrothal was publicly made known, his friends clustered noisily about him on the fishing-jetty of the village to offer their congratulations. While they were all in 5
full cry, a strange voice suddenly made itself heard through the confusion, which silenced everybody in an instant. The crowd fell back, and disclosed the Fiend-Fisherman sauntering up the jetty. It was the first time he had ever set foot—cloven foot—within the precincts of the village.

"Gentlemen," said the Fiend-Fisherman, "where is my friend, Poulailler?" He put the question with perfect politeness; he looked remarkably well in his fisherman's costume; he exhaled a relishing odour of fried fish; he had a cordial nod for the men, and a sweet smile for the women—but, with all these personal advantages, everybody fell back from him, and nobody answered his question. The coldness of the popular reception, however, did not in any way abash him. He looked about for Poulailler with searching eyes, discovered the place in which he was standing, and addressed him in the friendliest manner.

"So you are going to be married?" remarked the Fiend-Fisherman.

"What's that to you?" said Poulailler. He was inwardly terrified, but outwardly gruff—not an uncommon combination of circumstances with men of his class, in his mental situation.

"My friend," pursued the Fiend-Fisherman, "I have not forgotten your polite attention in giving me a name; and I come here to requite it. You will have a family, Poulailler; and your first child 6
will be a boy. I propose to make that boy my Adopted Son."

The marrow of Poulailler's back became awfully cold—but he grew gruffer than ever, in spite of his back.

"You won't do anything of the sort," he replied. "If I have the largest family in France, no child of mine shall ever go near you."

"I shall adopt your first-born for all that," persisted the Fiend-Fisherman. "Poulailler! I wish you good morning. Ladies and gentlemen! the same to all of you."

With those words, he withdrew from the jetty; and the marrow of Poulailler's back recovered its temperature.

The next morning was stormy; and all the village expected to see the boat from the Tower put out, as usual, to sea. Not a sign of it appeared. Later in the day, the rock on which the building stood was examined from a distance. Neither boat nor nets were in their customary places. At night, the red gleam of the fire was missed for the first time. The Fiend-Fisherman had gone! He had announced his intentions on the jetty, and had disappeared. What did this mean? Nobody knew.

On Poulailler's wedding-day, a portentous circumstance recalled the memory of the diabolical stranger, and, as a matter of course, seriously discomposed the bridegroom's back. At the moment when the marriage ceremony was complete, a relishing odour of fried fish stole into the nostrils of the company, and a voice from invisible lips said: "Keep up your spirits, Poulailler; I have not forgotten my promise!" 7

A year later, Madame Poulailler was in the hands of the midwife of the district, and a repetition of the portentous circumstance took place. Poulailler was waiting in the kitchen to hear how matters ended up-stairs. The nurse came in with a baby. "Which is it?" asked the happy father; "girl or boy?" Before the nurse could answer, an odour of supernaturally fried fish filled the kitchen; and a voice from invisible lips replied: "A boy, Poulailler—*and I've got him!*"

Such were the circumstances under which the subject of this Memoir was introduced to the joys and sorrows of mortal existence.

II.—His Boyhood and Early Life.

When a boy is born under auspices which lead his parents to suppose that, while the bodily part of him is safe at home, the spiritual part is subjected to a course of infernal tuition elsewhere—what are his father and mother to do with him? They must do the best they can—which was exactly what Poulailler and his wife did with the hero of these pages. 8

In the first place, they had him christened instantly. It was observed with horror that his infant face was distorted with grimaces, and that his infant voice roared with a preternatural lustiness of tone the moment the priest touched him. The first thing he asked for, when he learnt to speak, was "fried fish;" and the first place he wanted to go to, when he learnt to walk, was the diabolical Tower on the rock. "He won't learn anything," said the master, when he was old enough to go to school. "Thrash him," said Poulailler—and the master thrashed him. "He won't come to his first communion," said the priest. "Thrash him," said Poulailler—and the priest thrashed him. The farmers' orchards were robbed; the neighbouring rabbit-warrens were depopulated; linen was stolen from the gardens, and nets were torn on the beach. "The deuce take Poulailler's boy," was the general cry. "The deuce has got him," was Poulailler's answer. "And yet he is a nice-looking boy," said Madame Poulailler. And he was—as tall, as strong, as handsome a young fellow, as could be seen in all France. "Let us pray for him," said Madame Poulailler. "Let us thrash him," said her husband. "Our son has been thrashed till all the sticks in the neighbourhood are broken," pleaded his mother. "We will try him with the rope's-end next," retorted his father; "he shall go to sea and live in an atmosphere of thrashing. Our son shall be a cabin-boy." It was all one to Poulailler Junior—he knew who had adopted him, as well as his father—he had been instinctively conscious from infancy of the Fiend-Fisherman's interest in his welfare—he cared for no earthly discipline—and a cabin-boy he became at ten years old. 9

After two years of the rope's-end (applied quite ineffectually), the subject of this Memoir robbed his captain, and ran away in an English port. London became the next scene of his adventures. At twelve years old, he persuaded society in the Metropolis that he was the forsaken natural son of a French duke. British benevolence, after blindly providing for him for four years, opened its eyes and found him out at the age of sixteen; upon which he returned to France, and entered the army in the capacity of drummer. At eighteen, he deserted, and had a turn with the gipsies. He told fortunes, he conjured, he danced on the tight-rope, he acted, he sold quack medicines, he altered his mind again, and returned to the army. Here he fell in love with the vivandière of his new regiment. The sergeant-major of the company, touched by the same amiable weakness, naturally resented his attentions to the lady. Poulailler (perhaps unjustifiably) asserted himself by boxing his officer's ears. Out flashed the swords on both sides, and in went Poulailler's blade through and through the tender heart of the sergeant-major. The frontier was close at hand. Poulailler wiped his sword, and crossed it. 10

Sentence of death was recorded against him in his absence. When society has condemned us to die, if we are men of any spirit how are we to return the compliment? By condemning society to keep us alive—or, in other words, by robbing right and left for a living. Poulailler's destiny was now accomplished. He was picked out to be the Greatest Thief of his age; and when Fate summoned him to his place in the world, he stepped forward and took it. His life hitherto had been merely the life of a young scamp—he was now to do justice to the diabolical father who had adopted him, and to expand to the proportions of a full-grown Robber.

His first exploits were performed in Germany. They showed such novelty of combination, such daring, such dexterity, and, even in his most homicidal moments, such irresistible gaiety and good humour, that a band of congenial spirits gathered about him in no time. As commander-in-chief of the Thieves' army, his popularity never wavered. His weaknesses—and what illustrious

man is without them?—were three in number. First weakness—he was extravagantly susceptible to the charms of the fair sex. Second weakness—he was perilously fond of practical jokes. Third weakness (inherited from his adopted parent)—his appetite was insatiable in the matter of fried fish. As for the merits to set against these defects, some have been noticed already, and others will appear immediately. Let it merely be premised, in this place, that he was one of the handsomest men of his time, that he dressed superbly, and that he was capable of the most exalted acts of generosity wherever a handsome woman was concerned—let this be understood, to begin with; and let us now enter on the narrative of his last exploit in Germany before he returned to France. This adventure is something more than a mere specimen of his method of workmanship—it proved, in the future, to be the fatal event of his life. 11

On a Monday in the week, he had stopped on the highway, and robbed of all his valuables and all his papers, an Italian nobleman—the Marquis Petrucci of Sienna. On Tuesday, he was ready for another stroke of business. Posted on the top of a steep hill, he watched the road which wound up to the summit on one side, while his followers were ensconced on the road which led down from it on the other. The prize expected, in this case, was the travelling carriage (with a large sum of money inside) of the Baron de Kirbergen.

Before long, Poulailler discerned the carriage afar off, at the bottom of the hill, and in advance of it, ascending the eminence, two ladies on foot. They were the Baron's daughters—Wilhelmina, a fair beauty; Frederica, a brunette—both lovely, both accomplished, both susceptible, both young. Poulailler sauntered down the hill to meet the fascinating travellers. He looked—bowed—introduced himself—and fell in love with Wilhelmina on the spot. Both the charming girls acknowledged in the most artless manner that confinement to the carriage had given them the fidgets, and that they were walking up the hill to try the remedy of gentle exercise. Poulailler's heart was touched, and Poulailler's generosity to the sex was roused in the nick of time. With a polite apology to the young ladies, he ran back, by a short cut, to the ambush on the other side of the hill in which his men were posted. 12

"Gentlemen!" cried the generous Thief, "in the charming name of Wilhelmina de Kirbergen, I charge you all, let the Baron's carriage pass free." The band was not susceptible—the band demurred. Poulailler knew them. He had appealed to their hearts in vain—he now appealed to their pockets. "Gentlemen!" he resumed, "excuse my momentary misconception of your sentiments. Here is my one half share of the Marquis Petrucci's property. If I divide it among you, will you let the carriage pass free?" The band knew the value of money—and accepted the terms. Poulailler rushed back up the hill, and arrived at the top just in time to hand the young ladies into the carriage. "Charming man!" said the white Wilhelmina to the brown Frederica, as they drove off. Innocent soul! what would she have said if she had known that her personal attractions had saved her father's property? Was she ever to see the charming man again? Yes: she was to see him the next day—and, more than that, Fate was hereafter to link her fast to the robber's life and the robbers doom. 13

Confiding the direction of the band to his first lieutenant, Poulailler followed the carriage on horseback, and ascertained the place of the Baron's residence that night.

The next morning a superbly-dressed stranger knocked at the door. "What name, sir?" said the servant. "The Marquis Petrucci of Sienna," replied Poulailler. "How are the young ladies after their journey?" The Marquis was shown in, and introduced to the Baron. The Baron was naturally delighted to receive a brother nobleman—Miss Wilhelmina was modestly happy to see the charming man again—Miss Frederica was affectionately pleased on her sister's account. Not being of a disposition to lose time where his affections were concerned, Poulailler expressed his sentiments to the beloved object that evening. The next morning he had an interview with the Baron, at which he produced the papers which proved him to be the Marquis. Nothing could be more satisfactory to the mind of the most anxious parent—the two noblemen embraced. They were still in each other's arms, when a second stranger knocked at the door. "What name, sir?" said the servant. "The Marquis Petrucci of Sienna," replied the stranger. "Impossible!" said the servant; "his lordship is now in the house." "Show me in, scoundrel," cried the visitor. The servant submitted, and the two Marquises stood face to face. Poulailler's composure was not shaken in the least; he had come first to the house, and he had got the papers. "You are the villain who robbed me!" cried the true Petrucci. "You are drunk, mad, or an impostor," retorted the false Petrucci. "Send to Florence, where I am known," exclaimed one of the Marquises, apostrophising the Baron. "Send to Florence by all means," echoed the other, addressing himself to the Baron also. "Gentlemen," replied the noble Kirbergen, "I will do myself the honour of taking your advice"—and he sent to Florence accordingly. 14

Before the messenger had advanced ten miles on his journey, Poulailler had said two words in private to the susceptible Wilhelmina—and the pair eloped from the baronial residence that night. Once more the subject of this Memoir crossed the frontier, and re-entered France. Indifferent to the attractions of rural life, he forthwith established himself with the beloved object in Paris. In that superb city he met with his strangest adventures, performed his boldest achievements, committed his most prodigious robberies, and, in a word, did himself and his infernal patron the fullest justice, in the character of the Fiend-Fisherman's Adopted Son. 15

III.—His Career in Paris.

Once established in the French metropolis, Poulailler planned and executed that vast system of

perpetual robbery and occasional homicide which made him the terror and astonishment of all Paris. In-doors, as well as out, his good fortune befriended him. No domestic anxieties harassed his mind, and diverted him from the pursuit of his distinguished public career. The attachment of the charming creature with whom he had eloped from Germany, survived the discovery that the Marquis Petrucci was Poulailler the robber. True to the man of her choice, the devoted Wilhelmina shared his fortunes, and kept his house. And why not, if she loved him?—in the all-conquering name of Cupid, why not?

Joined by picked men from his German followers, and by new recruits gathered together in Paris, Poulailler now set society and its safeguards at flat defiance. Cartouche himself was his inferior in audacity and cunning. In course of time, the whole city was panic-stricken by the new robber and his band—the very Boulevards were deserted after nightfall. Monsieur Hérault, lieutenant of police of the period, in despair of laying hands on Poulailler by any other means, at last offered a 16
reward of a hundred pistoles and a place in his office worth two thousand livres a-year to any one who would apprehend the robber alive. The bills were posted all over Paris—and, the next morning, they produced the very last result in the world which the lieutenant of police could possibly have anticipated.

Whilst Monsieur Hérault was at breakfast in his study, the Count de Villeneuve was announced as wishing to speak to him. Knowing the Count by name only, as belonging to an ancient family in Provence, or in Languedoc, Monsieur Hérault ordered him to be shown in. A perfect gentleman appeared, dressed with an admirable mixture of magnificence and good taste. "I have something for your private ear, sir," said the Count. "Will you give orders that no one must be allowed to disturb us?"

Monsieur Hérault gave the orders.

"May I enquire, Count, what your business is?" he asked, when the door was closed.

"To earn the reward you offer for taking Poulailler," answered the Count. "I am Poulailler."

Before Monsieur Hérault could open his lips, the robber produced a pretty little dagger and some rose-coloured silk cord. "The point of this dagger is poisoned," he observed; "and one scratch of it, my dear sir, would be the death of you." With these words Poulailler gagged the lieutenant of 17
police, bound him to his chair with the rose-coloured cord, and lightened his writing-desk of one thousand pistoles. "I'll take money, instead of taking the place in the office which you kindly offer," said Poulailler. "Don't trouble yourself to see me to the door. Good morning."

A few weeks later, while Monsieur Hérault was still the popular subject of ridicule throughout Paris, business took Poulailler on the road to Lille and Cambrai. The only inside passenger in the coach besides himself, was the venerable Dean Potter of Brussels. They fell into talk on the one interesting subject of the time—not the weather, but Poulailler.

"It's a disgrace, sir, to the police," said the Dean, "that such a miscreant is still at large. I shall be returning to Paris, by this road, in ten days' time, and I shall call on Monsieur Hérault, to suggest a plan of my own for catching the scoundrel."

"May I ask what it is?" said Poulailler.

"Excuse me," replied the Dean; "you are a stranger, sir,—and, moreover, I wish to keep the merit of suggesting the plan to myself."

"Do you think the lieutenant of police will see you?" asked Poulailler; "he is not accessible to strangers, since the miscreant you speak of played him that trick at his own breakfast-table."

"He will see Dean Potter of Brussels," was the reply, delivered with the slightest possible tinge of 18
offended dignity.

"Oh, unquestionably!" said Poulailler,—"pray pardon me."

"Willingly, sir," said the Dean—and the conversation flowed into other channels.

Nine days later the wounded pride of Monsieur Hérault was soothed by a very remarkable letter. It was signed by one of Poulailler's band, who offered himself as King's evidence, in the hope of obtaining a pardon. The letter stated that the venerable Dean Potter had been waylaid and murdered by Poulailler, and that the robber, with his customary audacity, was about to re-enter Paris by the Lisle coach, the next day, disguised in the Dean's own clothes, and furnished with the Dean's own papers. Monsieur Hérault took his precautions without losing a moment. Picked men were stationed, with their orders, at the barrier through which the coach must pass to enter Paris; while the lieutenant of police waited at his office, in the company of two French gentlemen who could speak to the Dean's identity, in the event of Poulailler's impudently persisting in the assumption of his victim's name.

At the appointed hour the coach appeared, and out of it got a man in the Dean's costume. He was arrested in spite of his protestations; the papers of the murdered Potter were found on him, and he was dragged off to the police office in triumph. The door opened, and the posse comitatus 19
entered with the prisoner. Instantly the two witnesses burst out with a cry of recognition, and turned indignantly on the lieutenant of police. "Gracious Heaven, sir, what have you done!" they exclaimed in horror; "this is not Poulailler—here is our venerable friend; here is the Dean himself!" At the same moment, a servant entered with a letter. "Dean Potter. To the care of

Monsieur Hérault, Lieutenant of Police." The letter was expressed in these words: "Venerable sir,—Profit by the lesson I have given you. Be a Christian for the future, and never again try to injure a man unless he tries to injure you. Entirely yours, Poulailler."

These feats of cool audacity were matched by others, in which his generosity to the sex asserted itself as magnanimously as ever.

Hearing, one day, that large sums of money were kept in the house of a great lady, one Madame de Brienne, whose door was guarded, in anticipation of a visit from the famous thief, by a porter of approved trustworthiness and courage, Poulailler undertook to rob her in spite of her precautions, and succeeded. With a stout pair of leather straps and buckles in his pocket, and with two of his band, disguised as a coachman and footman, he followed Madame de Brienne one night to the theatre. Just before the close of the performance, the lady's coachman and footman 20
were tempted away for five minutes by Poulailler's disguised subordinates to have a glass of wine. No attempt was made to detain them, or to drug their liquor. But, in their absence, Poulailler had slipped under the carriage, had hung his leather straps round the pole—one to hold by, and one to support his feet—and, with these simple preparations, was now ready to wait for events. Madame de Brienne entered the carriage—the footman got up behind—Poulailler hung himself horizontally under the pole, and was driven home with them, under those singular circumstances. He was strong enough to keep his position after the carriage had been taken into the coach-house; and he only left it when the doors were locked for the night. Provided with food beforehand, he waited patiently, hidden in the coach-house, for two days and nights, watching his opportunity of getting into Madame de Brienne's boudoir.

On the third night the lady went to a grand ball—the servants relaxed in their vigilance while her back was turned—and Poulailler slipped into the room. He found two thousand louis d'ors, which was nothing like the sum he expected, and a pocket-book, which he took away with him to open at home. It contained some stock-warrants for a comparatively trifling amount. Poulailler was far too well off to care about taking them, and far too polite, where a lady was concerned, not to 21
send them back again, under those circumstances. Accordingly, Madame de Brienne received her warrants, with a note of apology from the polite thief.

"Pray excuse my visit to your charming boudoir," wrote Poulailler, "in consideration of the false reports of your wealth, which alone induced me to enter it. If I had known what your pecuniary circumstances really were, on the honour of a gentleman, Madam, I should have been incapable of robbing you. I cannot return your two thousand louis d'ors by post, as I return your warrants. But if you are at all pressed for money in future, I shall be proud to assist so distinguished a lady by lending her, from my own ample resources, double the sum of which I regret to have deprived her on the present occasion." This letter was shown to royalty at Versailles. It excited the highest admiration of the Court—especially of the ladies. Whenever the robber's name was mentioned, they indulgently referred to him as the Chevalier de Poulailler. Ah! that was the age of politeness, when good-breeding was recognised, even in a thief. Under similar circumstances, who would recognise it now? O tempora! O mores!

On another occasion, Poulailler was out, one night, taking the air and watching his opportunities on the roofs of the houses; a member of the band being posted in the street below to assist him in 22
case of necessity. While in this position, sobs and groans proceeding from an open back-garret window caught his ear. A parapet rose before the window, which enabled him to climb down and look in. Starving children surrounding a helpless mother, and clamouring for food, was the picture that met his eye. The mother was young and beautiful; and Poulailler's hand impulsively clutched his purse, as a necessary consequence. Before the charitable thief could enter by the window, a man rushed in by the door, with a face of horror; and cast a handful of gold into the lovely mother's lap. "My honour is gone," he cried; "but our children are saved! Listen to the circumstances. I met a man in the street below; he was tall and thin; he had a green patch over one eye; he was looking up suspiciously at this house, apparently waiting for somebody. I thought of you—I thought of the children—I seized the suspicious stranger by the collar. Terror overwhelmed him on the spot. 'Take my watch, my money, and my two valuable gold snuff-boxes,' he said—'but spare my life.' I took them." "Noble-hearted man!" cried Poulailler, appearing at the window. The husband started; the wife screamed; the children hid themselves. "Let me entreat you to be composed," continued Poulailler. "Sir! I enter on the scene for the purpose of soothing your uneasy conscience. From your vivid description, I recognise the man whose property is now 23
in your wife's lap. Resume your mental tranquillity. You have robbed a robber—in other words, you have vindicated society. Accept my congratulations on your restored innocence. The miserable coward whose collar you seized, is one of Poulailler's band. He has lost his stolen property, as the fit punishment for his disgraceful want of spirit."

"Who are you?" exclaimed the husband.

"I am Poulailler," replied the illustrious man, with the simplicity of an ancient hero. "Take this purse; and set up in business with the contents. There is a prejudice, Sir, in favour of honesty. Give that prejudice a chance. There was a time when I felt it myself; I regret to feel it no longer. Under all varieties of misfortune, an honest man has his consolation still left. Where is it left? Here!" He struck his heart—and the family fell on their knees before him.

"Benefactor of your species!" cried the husband—"how can I show my gratitude?"

"You can permit me to kiss the hand of madame," answered Poulailler.

Madame started to her feet, and embraced the generous stranger. "What more can I do?" exclaimed this lovely woman eagerly—"Oh, Heavens! what more?" 24

"You can beg your husband to light me down stairs," replied Poulailler. He spoke, pressed their hands, dropped a generous tear, and departed. At that touching moment, his own adopted father would not have known him.

This last anecdote closes the record of Poulailler's career in Paris. The lighter and more agreeable aspects of that career have hitherto been designedly presented, in discreet remembrance of the contrast which the tragic side of the picture must now present. Comedy and Sentiment, twin sisters of French extraction, farewell! Horror enters next on the stage—and enters welcome, in the name of the Fiend-Fisherman's Adopted Son.

IV.—His Exit from the Scene.

The nature of Poulailler's more serious achievements in the art of robbery may be realised by reference to one terrible fact. In the police records of the period, more than one hundred and fifty men and women are reckoned up as having met their deaths at the hands of Poulailler and his band. It was not the practice of this formidable robber to take life as well as property, unless life happened to stand directly in his way—in which case he immediately swept off the obstacle without hesitation and without remorse. His deadly determination to rob, which was thus felt by the population in general, was matched by his deadly determination to be obeyed, which was felt 25 by his followers in particular. One of their number, for example, having withdrawn from his allegiance, and having afterwards attempted to betray his leader, was tracked to his hiding-place in a cellar, and was there walled up alive in Poulailler's presence; the robber composing the unfortunate wretch's epitaph, and scratching it on the wet plaster with his own hand. Years afterwards, the inscription was noticed, when the house fell into the possession of a new tenant, and was supposed to be nothing more than one of the many jests which the famous robber had practised in his time. When the plaster was removed, the skeleton fell out, and testified that Poulailler was in earnest.

To attempt the arrest of such a man as this by tampering with his followers, was practically impossible. No sum of money that could be offered would induce any one of the members of his band to risk the fatal chance of his vengeance. Other means of getting possession of him had been tried, and tried in vain. Five times over, the police had succeeded in tracking him to different hiding-places; and on all five occasions, the women—who adored him for his gallantry, his generosity, and his good looks—had helped him to escape. If he had not unconsciously paved the way to his own capture, first by eloping with Mademoiselle Wilhelmina de Kirbergen, and 26 secondly by maltreating her, it is more than doubtful whether the long arm of the law would ever have reached far enough to fasten its grasp on him. As it was, the extremes of love and hatred met at last in the bosom of the devoted Wilhelmina; and the vengeance of a neglected woman accomplished what the whole police force of Paris had been powerless to achieve.

Poulailler, never famous for the constancy of his attachments, had wearied, at an early period, of the companion of his flight from Germany—but Wilhelmina was one of those women whose affections, once aroused, will not take No for an answer. She persisted in attaching herself to a man who had ceased to love her. Poulailler's patience became exhausted; he tried twice to rid himself of his unhappy mistress—once by the knife and once by poison—and failed on both occasions. For the third and last time, by way of attempting an experiment of another kind, he established a rival to drive the German woman out of the house. From that moment his fate was sealed. Maddened by jealous rage, Wilhelmina cast the last fragments of her fondness to the winds. She secretly communicated with the police—and Poulailler met his doom.

A night was appointed with the authorities; and the robber was invited by his discarded mistress to a farewell interview. His contemptuous confidence in her fidelity rendered him careless of his 27 customary precautions. He accepted the appointment; and the two supped together, on the understanding that they were henceforth to be friends, and nothing more. Towards the close of the meal, Poulailler was startled by a ghastly change in the face of his companion.

"What is wrong with you?" he asked.

"A mere trifle," she answered, looking at her glass of wine. "I can't help loving you still, badly as you have treated me. You are a dead man, Poulailler—and I shall not survive you."

The robber started to his feet, and seized a knife on the table.

"You have poisoned me?" he exclaimed.

"No," she replied. "Poison is my vengeance on myself; not my vengeance on *you*. You will rise from this table as you sat down to it. But your evening will be finished in prison; and your life will be ended on the Wheel."

As she spoke the words, the door was burst open by the police, and Poulailler was secured. The same night the poison did its fatal work; and his mistress made atonement with her life for the first, last, act of treachery which had revenged her on the man she loved.

Once safely lodged in the hands of justice, the robber tried to gain time to escape in, by 28 promising to make important disclosures. The manœuvre availed him nothing. In those days, the

Laws of the Land had not yet made acquaintance with the Laws of Humanity. Poulailler was put to the torture—was suffered to recover—was publicly broken on the Wheel—and was taken off it alive, to be cast into a blazing fire. By those murderous means, Society rid itself of a murderous man—and the idlers on the Boulevards took their evening stroll again in recovered security.

Paris had seen the execution of Poulailler—but, if legends are to be trusted, our old friends, the people of the fishing village in Brittany saw the end of him afterwards. On the day and hour when he perished, the heavens darkened, and a terrible storm arose. Once more, and for a moment only, the gleam of the unearthly fire reddened the windows of the old Tower. Thunder pealed and struck the building into fragments. Lightning flashed incessantly over the ruins; and, in the scorching glare of it, the boat which, in former years, had put off to sea whenever the storm rose highest, was seen to shoot out into the raging ocean from the cleft in the rock—and was discovered, on this final occasion, to be doubly manned. The Fiend-Fisherman sat at the helm; his 29
Adopted Son tugged at the oars; and a clamour of diabolical voices, roaring awfully through the roaring storm, wished the pair of them a prosperous voyage. 30

SKETCHES OF CHARACTER.—IV.

THE BACHELOR BEDROOM.

The great merit of this subject is that it starts itself.

The Bachelor Bedroom is familiar to everybody who owns a country house, and to everybody who has stayed in a country house. It is the one especial sleeping apartment, in all civilised residences used for the reception of company, which preserves a character of its own. Married people and young ladies may be shifted about from bedroom to bedroom as their own caprice or the domestic convenience of the host may suggest. But the bachelor guest, when he has once had his room set apart for him, contrives to dedicate it to the perpetual occupation of single men from that moment. Who else is to have the room afterwards, when the very atmosphere of it is altered by tobacco-smoke? Who can venture to throw it open to nervous spinsters, or respectable married couples, when the footman is certain, from mere force of habit, to make his appearance at the door, with contraband bottles and glasses, after the rest of the family have retired for the 31
night? Where, even if these difficulties could be got over, is any second sleeping apartment to be found, in any house of ordinary construction, isolated enough to secure the soberly reposing portion of the guests from being disturbed by the regular midnight party which the bachelor persists in giving in his bedroom? Dining-rooms and breakfast-rooms may change places; double-bedded rooms and single-bedded rooms may shift their respective characters backwards and forwards amicably among each other—but the Bachelor Bedroom remains immovably in its own place; sticks immutably to its own bad character; stands out victoriously whether the house is full, or whether the house is empty, the one hospitable institution that no repentant after-thoughts of host or hostess can ever hope to suppress.

Such a social phenomenon as this, taken with its surrounding circumstances, deserves more notice than it has yet obtained. The bachelor has been profusely served up on all sorts of literary tables; but, the presentation of him has been hitherto remarkable for a singularly monotonous flavour of matrimonial sauce. We have heard of his loneliness, and its remedy; of his solitary position in illness, and its remedy; of the miserable neglect of his linen, and its remedy. But what have we heard of him in connexion with his remarkable bedroom, at those periods of his 32
existence when he, like the rest of the world, is a visitor at his friend's country house? Who has presented him, in his relation to married society, under those peculiar circumstances of his life, when he is away from his solitary chambers, and is thrown straight into the sacred centre of that home circle from which his ordinary habits are so universally supposed to exclude him? Here, surely, is a new aspect of the bachelor still left to be presented; and here is a new subject for worn-out readers of the nineteenth century, whose fountain of literary novelty has become exhausted at the source.

Let me sketch the history—in anticipation of a large and serious work which I intend to produce, one of these days, on the same subject—of the Bachelor Bedroom, in a certain comfortable country house, whose hospitable doors fly open to me with the beginning of summer, and close no more until the autumn is ended. I must beg permission to treat this interesting topic from the purely human point of view. In other words, I propose describing, not the Bedroom itself, but the succession of remarkable bachelors who have passed through it in my time.

The hospitable country-seat to which I refer is Coolcup House, the residence of that enterprising gentleman-farmer and respected chairman of Quarter Sessions, Sir John Giles. Sir John's 33
Bachelor Bedroom has been wisely fitted up on the ground-floor. It is the one solitary sleeping apartment in that part of the house. Fidgety bachelors can jump out on to the lawn, at night, through the bow-window, without troubling anybody to unlock the front door; and can communicate with the presiding genius of the cellar by merely crossing the hall. For the rest, the room is delightfully airy and spacious, and fitted up with all possible luxury. It started in life,

under Sir John's careful auspices, the perfection of neatness and tidiness. But the bachelors have corrupted it long since. However carefully the servants may clean, and alter, and arrange it, the room loses its respectability again, and gets slovenly and unpresentable the moment their backs are turned. Sir John himself, the tidiest man in existence, has given up all hope of reforming it. He peeps in occasionally, and sighs and shakes his head, and puts a chair in its place, and straightens a print on the wall, and looks about him at the general litter and confusion, and gives it up and goes out again. He is a rigid man and a resolute in the matter of order, and has his way all over the rest of the house—but the Bachelor Bedroom is too much for him.

The first bachelor who inhabited the room when I began to be a guest at Coolcup House, was Mr. Bigg.

Mr. Bigg is, in the strictest sense of the word, what you call a fine man. He stands over six feet, is 34
rather more than stout enough for his height, holds his head up nobly, and dresses in a style of mingled gaiety and grandeur which impresses everybody. The morning shirts of Mr. Bigg are of so large a pattern that nobody but his haberdasher knows what that pattern really is. You see a bit of it on one side of his collar which looks square, and a bit of it on the other side which looks round. It goes up his arm on one of his wristbands, and down his arm on the other. Men who have seen his shirts off (if such a statement may be permitted), and scattered loosely, to Sir John's horror, over all the chairs in the Bedroom, have been questioned, and have not been found able to state that their eyes ever followed out the patterns of any one of them fairly to the end. In the matter of beautiful and expensive clothing for the neck, Mr. Bigg is simply inexhaustible. Every morning he appears at breakfast in a fresh scarf, and taps his egg magnificently with a daily blaze of new colour glowing on his capacious chest, to charm the eyes of the young ladies who sit opposite to him. All the other component parts of Mr. Bigg's costume are of an equally grand and attractive kind, and are set off by Mr. Bigg's enviable figure to equal advantage. Outside the Bachelor Bedroom, he is altogether an irreproachable character in the article of dress. Outside the Bachelor Bedroom, he is essentially a man of the world, who can be depended on to perform 35
any part allotted to him in any society assembled at Coolcup House; who has lived among all ranks and sorts of people; who has filled a public situation with great breadth and dignity, and has sat at table with crowned heads, and played his part there with distinction; who can talk of these experiences, and of others akin to them, with curious fluency and ease, and can shift about to other subjects, and pass the bottle, and carve, and draw out modest people, and take all other social responsibilities on his own shoulders complacently, at the largest and dreariest county dinner party that Sir John, to his own great discomfiture, can be obliged to give. Such is Mr. Bigg in the society of the house, when the door of the Bachelor Bedroom has closed behind him.

But what is Mr. Bigg, when he has courteously wished the ladies good night, when he has secretly summoned the footman with the surreptitious tray, and when he has deluded the unprincipled married men of the party into having half an hour's cozy chat with him before they go up-stairs? Another being—a being unknown to the ladies, and unsuspected by the respectable guests. Inside the Bedroom, the outward aspect of Mr. Bigg changes as if by magic; and a kind of gorgeous slovenliness pervades him from top to toe. Buttons which have rigidly restrained him 36
within distinct physical boundaries, slip exhausted out of their buttonholes; and the figure of Mr. Bigg suddenly expands and asserts itself for the first time as a protuberant fact. His neckcloth flies on to the nearest chair, his rigid shirt-collar yawns open, his wiry under-whiskers ooze multitudinously into view, his coat, waistcoat, and braces drop off his shoulders. If the two young ladies who sleep in the room above, and who most unreasonably complain of the ceaseless nocturnal croaking and growling of voices in the Bachelor Bedroom, could look down through the ceiling now, they would not know Mr. Bigg again, and would suspect that a dissipated artisan had intruded himself into Sir John's house.

In the same way, the company who have sat in Mr. Bigg's neighbourhood at the dinner-table at seven o'clock, would find it impossible to recognise his conversation at midnight. Outside the Bachelor Bedroom, if his talk has shown him to be anything at all, it has shown him to be the exact reverse of an enthusiast. Inside the Bachelor Bedroom, after all due attention has been paid to the cigar-box and the footman's tray, it becomes unaccountably manifest to everybody that Mr. Bigg is, after all, a fanatical character, a man possessed of one fixed idea. Then, and then only, does he mysteriously confide to his fellow revellers that he is the one remarkable man in Great 37
Britain who has discovered the real authorship of Junius's Letters. In the general society of the house, nobody ever hears him refer to the subject; nobody ever suspects that he takes more than the most ordinary interest in literary matters. In the select society of the Bedroom, inspired by the surreptitious tray and the midnight secrecy, wrapped in clouds of tobacco smoke, and freed from the restraint of his own magnificent garments, the truth flies out of Mr. Bigg, and the authorship of Junius's Letters becomes the one dreary subject which this otherwise variously gifted man persists in dilating on for hours together. But for the Bachelor Bedroom, nobody alive would ever have discovered that the true key to unlock Mr. Bigg's character is Junius. If the subject is referred to the next day by his companions of the night, he declines to notice it; but, once in the Bedroom again, he takes it up briskly, as if the attempted reference to it had been made but the moment before. The last time I saw him was in the Bachelor Bedroom. It was three o'clock in the morning; two tumblers were broken; half a lemon was in the soap-dish, and the soap itself was on the chimney-piece; restless married rakes, who were desperately afraid of waking up their wives when they left us, were walking to and fro absently, and crunching knobs of loaf-sugar under foot at every step; Mr. Bigg was standing, with his fourth cigar in his mouth, 38
before the fire; one of his hands was in the tumbled bosom of his shirt, the other was grasping mine, while he pathetically appointed me his literary executor, and generously bequeathed to me

his great discovery of the authorship of Junius's Letters. Upon the whole, Mr. Bigg is the most incorrigible bachelor on record in the annals of the Bedroom; he has consumed more candles, ordered more footmen's trays, seen more early daylight, and produced more pale faces among the gentlemen at breakfast time, than any other single visitor at Coolcup House.

The next bachelor in the order of succession, and the completest contrast conceivable to Mr. Bigg, is Mr. Jeremy.

Mr. Jeremy is, perhaps, the most miserable-looking little man that ever tottered under the form of humanity. Wear what clothes he may, he invariably looks shabby in them. He is the victim of perpetual accidents and perpetual ill-health; and the Bachelor Bedroom, when he inhabits it, is turned into a doctor's shop, and bristles all over with bottles and pills. Mr. Jeremy's personal tribute to the hospitalities of Coolcup House is always paid in the same singularly unsatisfactory manner to his host. On one day in the week, he gorges himself gaily with food and drink, and soars into the seventh heaven of convivial beatitude. On the other six, he is invariably ill in 39
consequence, is reduced to the utmost rigours of starvation and physic, sinks into the lowest depths of depression, and takes the bitterest imaginable views of human life. Hardly a single accident has happened at Coolcup House in which he has not been personally and chiefly concerned; hardly a single malady can occur to the human frame the ravages of which he has not practically exemplified in his own person under Sir John's roof. If any one guest, in the fruit season, terrifies the rest by writhing under the internal penalties in such cases made and provided by the laws of nature, it is Mr. Jeremy. If any one tumbles up-stairs, or down-stairs, or off a horse, or out of a dog-cart, it is Mr. Jeremy. If you want a case of sprained ankle, a case of suppressed gout, a case of complicated earache, toothache, headache, and sore-throat, all in one, a case of liver, a case of chest, a case of nerves, or a case of low fever, go to Coolcup House while Mr. Jeremy is staying there, and he will supply you, on demand, at the shortest notice and to any extent. It is conjectured by the intimate friends of this extremely wretched bachelor, that he has but two sources of consolation to draw on, as a set-off against his innumerable troubles. The first is the luxury of twisting his nose on one side, and stopping up his air-passages and Eustachian tubes with inconceivably large quantities of strong snuff. The second is the oleaginous 40
gratification of incessantly anointing his miserable little beard and mustachios with cheap bear's-grease, which always turns rancid on the premises before he has half done with it. When Mr. Jeremy gives a party in the Bachelor Bedroom, his guests have the unexpected pleasure of seeing him take his physic, and hearing him describe his maladies and recount his accidents. In other respects, the moral influence of the Bedroom over the characters of those who occupy it, which exhibits Mr. Bigg in the unexpected literary aspect of a commentator on Junius, is found to tempt Mr. Jeremy into betraying a horrible triumph and interest in the maladies of others, of which nobody would suspect him in the general society of the house.

"I noticed you, after dinner to-day," says this invalid bachelor, on such occasions, to any one of the Bedroom guests who may be rash enough to complain of the slightest uneasiness in his presence; "I saw the corners of your mouth get green, and the whites of your eyes look yellow. You have got a pain here," says Mr. Jeremy, gaily indicating the place to which he refers on his own shattered frame, with an appearance of extreme relish—"a pain *here*, and a sensation like having a cannon-ball inside you, *there*. You will be parched with thirst and racked with fidgets all to-night; and to-morrow morning you will get up with a splitting headache, and a dark-brown 41
tongue, and another cannon-ball in your inside. My dear fellow, I'm a veteran at this sort of thing; and I know exactly the state you will be in next week, and the week after, and when you will have to try the sea-side, and how many pounds' weight you will lose to a dead certainty, before you can expect to get over this attack. Suppose we look under his ribs, on the right side of him?" continues Mr. Jeremy, addressing himself confidentially to the company in general. "I'll lay anybody five to one we find an alarming lump under the skin. And that lump will be his liver!"

Thus, while Mr. Bigg always astonishes the Bedroom guests on the subject of Junius, Mr. Jeremy always alarms them on the subject of themselves. Mr. Smart, the next, and third bachelor, placed in a similar situation, displays himself under a more agreeable aspect, and makes the society that surrounds him, for the night at least, supremely happy.

On the first day of his arrival at Coolcup House, Mr. Smart deceived us all. When he was first presented to us, we were deeply impressed by the serene solemnity of this gentleman's voice, look, manner, and costume. He was as carefully dressed as Mr. Bigg himself, but on totally different principles. Mr. Smart was fearfully and wonderfully gentlemanly in his avoidance of 42
anything approaching to bright colour on any part of his body. Quakerish drabs and greys clothed him in the morning. Dismal black, unrelieved by an atom of jewellery, undisturbed even by so much as a flower in his button-hole, encased him grimly in the evening. He moved about the room and the garden with a ghostly and solemn stalk. When the ladies got brilliant in their conversation, he smiled upon them with a deferential modesty and polite Grandisonian admiration that froze the blood of "us youth" in our veins. When he spoke, it was like reading a passage from an elegant moral writer—the words were so beautifully arranged, the sentences were turned so musically, the sentiment conveyed was so delightfully well regulated, so virtuously appropriate to nothing in particular. At such times he always spoke in a slow, deep, and gentle drawl, with a thrillingly clear emphasis on every individual syllable. His speech sounded occasionally like a kind of highly-bred foreign English, spoken by a distinguished stranger who had mastered the language to such an extent that he had got beyond the natives

altogether. We watched enviously all day for any signs of human infirmity in this surprising individual. The men detected him in nothing. Even the sharper eyes of the women only discovered that he was addicted to looking at himself affectionately in every glass in the house, when he thought that nobody was noticing him. At dinner-time we all pinned our faith on Sir John's excellent wine, and waited anxiously for its legitimate effect on the superb and icy stranger. Nothing came of it; Mr. Smart was as carefully guarded with the bottle as he was with the English language. All through the evening he behaved himself so dreadfully well that we quite began to hate him. When the company parted for the night, and when Mr. Smart (who was just mortal enough to be a bachelor) invited us to a cigar in the Bedroom, his highly-bred foreign English was still in full perfection; his drawl had reached its elocutionary climax of rich and gentle slowness; and his Grandisonian smile was more exasperatingly settled and composed than ever. 43

The Bedroom door closed on us. We took off our coats, tore open our waistcoats, rushed in a body on the new bachelor's cigar-box, and summoned the evil genius of the footman's tray.

At the first round of the tumblers, the false Mr. Smart began to disappear, and the true Mr. Smart approached, as it were, from a visionary distance, and took his place among us. He chuckled—Grandison chuckled—within the hearing of every man in the room! We were surprised at that; but what were our sensations when, in less than ten minutes afterwards, the highly-bred English and the gentle drawl mysteriously disappeared, and there came bursting out upon us, from the ambush of Mr. Smart's previous elocution, the jolliest, broadest, and richest Irish brogue we had ever heard in our lives! The mystery was explained now. Mr. Smart had a coat of the smoothest English varnish laid over him, for highly-bred county society, which nothing mortal could peel off but bachelor company and whiskey-and-water. He slipped out of his close-fitting English envelope, in the loose atmosphere of the Bachelor Bedroom, as glibly as a tightly-laced young lady slips out of her stays when the admiring eyes of the world are off her waist for the night. Never was man so changed as Mr. Smart was now. His moral sentiments melted like the sugar in his grog; his grammar disappeared with his white cravat. Wild and lavish generosity suddenly became the leading characteristic of this once reticent man. We tried all sorts of subjects, and were obliged to drop every one of them, because Mr. Smart would promise to make us a present of whatever we talked about. The family mansion in Ireland contained everything that this world can supply; and Mr. Smart was resolved to dissipate that priceless store in gifts distributed to the much-esteemed company. He promised me a schooner yacht, and made a memorandum of the exact tonnage in his pocket-book. He promised my neighbour, on one side, a horse, and, on the other, a unique autograph letter of Shakespeare's. We had all three been talking respectively of sailing, hunting, and the British Drama; and we now held our tongues for fear of getting new presents if we tried new subjects. Other members of the festive assembly took up the ball of conversation, and were prostrated forthwith by showers of presents for their pains. When we all parted in the dewy morning, we left Mr. Smart with dishevelled hair, checking off his voluminous memoranda of gifts with an unsteady pencil, and piteously entreating us, in the richest Irish-English, to correct him instantly if we detected the slightest omission anywhere. 44 45

The next morning, at breakfast, we rather wondered which nation our friend would turn out to belong to. He set all doubts at rest the moment he opened the door, by entering the room with the old majestic stalk; saluting the ladies with the serene Grandison smile; trusting we had all rested well during the night, in a succession of elegantly-turned sentences; and enunciating the highly-bred English with the imperturbably-gentle drawl which we all imagined, the night before, that we had lost for ever. He stayed more than a fortnight at Coolcup House; and, in all that time, nobody ever knew the true Mr. Smart except the guests in the Bachelor Bedroom. 46

The fourth Bachelor on the list deserves especial consideration and attention. In the first place, because he presents himself to the reader, in the character of a distinguished foreigner. In the second place, because he contrived, in the most amiable manner imaginable, to upset all the established arrangements of Coolcup House—inside the Bachelor Bedroom, as well as outside it—from the moment when he entered its doors, to the moment when he left them behind him on his auspicious return to his native country. This, ladies and gentlemen, is a rare, probably a unique, species of bachelor; and Mr. Bigg, Mr. Jeremy, and Mr. Smart have no claim whatever to stand in the faintest light of comparison with him.

When I mention that the distinguished guest now introduced to notice is Herr von Müffe, it will be unnecessary for me to add that I refer to the distinguished German poet, whose far-famed Songs Without Sense have aided so immeasurably in thickening the lyric obscurities of his country's Harp. On his arrival in London, Herr von Müffe forwarded his letter of introduction to Sir John by post, and immediately received, in return, the usual hospitable invitation to Coolcup House.

The eminent poet arrived barely in time to dress for dinner; and made his first appearance in our circle while we were waiting in the drawing-room for the welcome signal of the bell. He waddled in among us softly and suddenly, in the form of a very short, puffy, florid, roundabout old gentleman, with flowing grey hair and a pair of huge circular spectacles. The extreme shabbiness and dinginess of his costume was so singularly set off by the quantity of foreign orders of merit which he wore all over the upper part of it, that a sarcastic literary gentleman among the guests defined him to me, in a whisper, as a compound of "decorations and dirt." Sir John advanced to greet his distinguished guest, with friendly right hand extended as usual. Herr von Müffe, without saying a word, took the hand carefully in both his own, and expressed affectionate recognition of English hospitality, by transferring it forthwith to that vacant space between his 47

shirt and his waistcoat which extended over the region of the heart. Sir John turned scarlet, and tried vainly to extricate his hand from the poet's too affectionate bosom. The dinner-bell rang, but Herr von Müffe still held fast. The principal lady in the company half rose, and looked perplexedly at her host—Sir John made another and a desperate effort to escape—failed again—and was marched into the dining-room, in full view of his servants and his guests, with his hand sentimentally imprisoned in his foreign visitor's waistcoat.

After this romantic beginning, Herr von Müffe rather surprised us by showing that he was 48
decidedly the reverse of a sentimentalist in the matter of eating and drinking.

Neither dish nor bottle passed the poet, without paying heavy tribute, all through the repast. He mixed his liquors, especially, with the most sovereign contempt for all sanitary considerations; drinking champagne and beer, the sweetest Constantia and the tawniest port, all together, with every appearance of the extremest relish. Conversation with Herr von Müffe, both at dinner, and all through the evening, was found to be next to impossible, in consequence of his knowing all languages (his own included) equally incorrectly. His German was pronounced to be a dialect never heard before; his French was inscrutable; his English was a philological riddle which all of us guessed at and none of us found out. He talked, in spite of these difficulties, incessantly; and, seeing that he shed tears several times in the course of the evening, the ladies assumed that his topics were mostly of a pathetic nature, while the coarser men compared notes with each other, and all agreed that the distinguished guest was drunk. When the time came for retiring, we had to invite ourselves into the Bachelor Bedroom; Herr von Müffe having no suspicion of our customary midnight orgies, and apparently feeling no desire to entertain us, until we informed
him of the institution of the footman's tray—when he became hospitable on a sudden, and 49
unreasonably fond of his gay young English friends.

While we were settling ourselves in our places round the bed, a member of the company kicked over one of the poet's capacious Wellington boots. To the astonishment of every one, there instantly ensued a tinkling of coin, and some sovereigns and shillings rolled surprisingly out on the floor from the innermost recesses of the boot. On receiving his money back, Herr von Müffe informed us, without the slightest appearance of embarrassment, that he had not had time, before dinner, to take more than his watch, rings, and decorations, out of his boots. Seeing us all stare at this incomprehensible explanation, our distinguished friend kindly endeavoured to enlighten us further by a long personal statement in his own polyglot language. From what we could understand of this narrative (which was not much), we gathered that Herr von Müffe had started at noon, that day, as a total stranger in our metropolis, to reach the London-bridge station in a cab; and that the driver had taken him, as usual, across Waterloo-bridge. On going through the Borough, the narrow streets, miserable houses, and squalid population, had struck the lively imagination of Herr von Müffe, and had started in his mind a horrible suspicion that the
cabman was driving him into a low neighbourhood, with the object of murdering a helpless 50
foreign fare, in perfect security, for the sake of the valuables he carried on his person. Chilled to the very marrow of his bones by this idea, the poet raised the ends of his trousers stealthily in the cab, slipped his watch, rings, orders, and money into the legs of his Wellington boots, arrived at the station quaking with mortal terror, and screamed "Help!" at the top of his voice, when the railway policeman opened the cab door. The immediate starting of the train had left him no time to alter the singular travelling arrangements he had made in the Borough; and he arrived at Coolcup House, the only individual who had ever yet entered that mansion with his property in his boots.

Amusing as it was in itself, this anecdote failed a little in its effect on us at the time, in consequence of the stifling atmosphere in which we were condemned to hear it.

Although it was then the sultry middle of summer, and we were all smoking, Herr von Müffe insisted on keeping the windows of the Bachelor Bedroom fast closed, because it was one of his peculiarities to distrust the cooling effect of the night air. We were more than half inclined to go, under these circumstances; and we were altogether determined to remove, when the tray came
in, and when we found our German friend madly mixing his liquors again by pouring gin and 51
sherry together into the same tumbler. We warned him, with a shuddering prevision of consequences, that he was mistaking gin for water; and he blandly assured us in return that he was doing nothing of the kind. "It is good for My ——" said Herr von Müffe, supplying his ignorance of the word stomach by laying his chubby forefinger on the organ in question, with a sentimental smile. "It is bad for Our ——" retorted the wag of the party, imitating the poet's action, and turning quickly to the door. We all followed him—and, for the first time in the annals of Coolcup House, the Bachelor Bedroom was emptied of company before midnight.

Early the next morning, one of Sir John's younger sons burst into my room in a state of violent excitement.

"I say, what's to be done with Müffe?" inquired the young gentleman, with wildly staring eyes.

"Open his windows, and fetch the doctor," I answered, inspired by the recollections of the past night.

"Doctor!" cried the boy; "the doctor won't do—it's the barber."

"Barber?" I repeated.

"He's been asking me *to shave him*!" roared my young friend, with vehement comic indignation.
"He rang his bell, and asked for 'the Son of the House'—and they made me go; and there he was, 52

grinning in the big arm-chair, with his mangy little shaving-brush in his hand, and a towel over his shoulder. 'Good morning, my dear. Can you shave My ——' says he, and taps his quivering old double chin with his infernal shaving-brush. Curse his impudence! What's to be done with him?"

I arranged to explain to Herr von Müffe, at the first convenient opportunity, that it was not the custom in England, whatever it might be in Germany, for "the Son of the House" to shave his father's guests; and undertook, at the same time, to direct the poet to the residence of the village barber. When the German guest joined us at breakfast, his unshaven chin, and the external results of his mixed potations and his seclusion from fresh air, by no means tended to improve his personal appearance. In plain words, he looked the picture of dyspeptic wretchedness.

"I am afraid, sir, you are hardly so well this morning as we could all wish?" said Sir John, kindly.

Herr von Müffe looked at his host affectionately, surveyed the company all round the table, smiled faintly, laid the chubby forefinger once more on the organ whose name he did not know, and answered with the most enchanting innocence and simplicity:

"I am *so* sick!" 53

There was no harm—upon my word, there was no harm in Herr Von Müffe. On the contrary, there was a great deal of good-nature and genuine simplicity in his composition. But he was a man naturally destitute of all power of adapting himself to new persons and new circumstances; and he became amiably insupportable, in consequence, to everybody in the house, throughout the whole term of his visit. He could not join one of us in any country diversions. He hung about the house and garden in a weak, pottering, aimless manner, always turning up at the wrong moment, and always attaching himself to the wrong person. He was dexterous in a perfectly childish way at cutting out little figures of shepherds and shepherdesses in paper; and he was perpetually presenting these frail tributes of admiration to the ladies, who always tore them up and threw them away in secret the moment his back was turned. When he was not occupied with his paper figures, he was out in the garden, gathering countless little nosegays, and sentimentally presenting them to everybody; not to the ladies only, but to lusty agricultural gentlemen as well, who accepted them with blank amazement; and to schoolboys, home for the holidays, who took them, bursting with internal laughter at the "molly-coddle" gentleman from foreign parts. As for poor Sir John, he suffered more than any of us; for Herr von Müffe was always trying to kiss him. 54
In short, with the best intentions in the world, this unhappy foreign bachelor wearied out the patience of everybody in the house; and, to our shame be it said, we celebrated his departure, when he left us at last, by a festival-meeting in the Bachelor Bedroom, in honour of the welcome absence of Herr von Müffe.

I cannot say in what spirit my fellow-revellers have reflected on our behaviour since that time; but I know, for my own part, that I now look back at my personal share in our proceedings with rather an uneasy conscience. I am afraid we were all of us a little hard on Herr von Müffe; and I hereby desire to offer him my own individual tribute of tardy atonement, by leaving him to figure as the last and crowning type of the Bachelor species presented in these pages. If he has produced anything approaching to a pleasing effect on the reader's mind, that effect shall not be weakened by the appearance of any more single men, native or foreign. Let the door of the Bachelor Bedroom close with our final glimpse of the German guest; and permit the present chronicler to lay down the pen when it has traced penitently, for the last time, the name of Herr von Müffe. 55

NOOKS AND CORNERS OF HISTORY.

III.

A REMARKABLE REVOLUTION.

A revolution which is serious enough to overthrow a reigning sovereign—which is short enough to last only nine hours—and which is peaceable enough to begin and end without the taking of a single life or the shedding of a drop of blood, is certainly a phenomenon in the history of human affairs which is worth being carefully investigated. Such a revolution actually happened, in the empire of Russia, little more than a century and a quarter ago. The narrative here attempted of its rise, its progress, and its end, may be trusted throughout as faithful to the truth. Extraordinary as they may appear, the events described in this fragment of history are matters of fact from first to last.

We start with a famous Russian character—Peter the Great. His son, who may be not unfairly distinguished as Peter the Small, died in the year seventeen hundred and thirty. With the death 56
of this last personage the political difficulties arose, which ended in the easy pulling down of one sovereign ruler at midnight, and the easy setting up of another by nine o'clock the next morning.

Besides the son whom he left to succeed him, Peter the Great had a daughter, whose title was princess, and whose name was Elizabeth. Peter's widow, the famous Empress Catherine, being a far-seeing woman, made a will which contained the expression of her wishes in regard to the

succession to the throne, and which plainly and properly designated the Princess Elizabeth (there being no Salic law in Russia) as the reigning sovereign to be chosen after the death of her brother, Peter the Small. Nothing, apparently, could be more straightforward than the course to be followed, at that time, in appointing a new ruler over the Russian people.

But there happened to be living at Court two noblemen—Prince d'Olgorowki and Count Osterman—who had an interest of their own in complicating the affairs connected with the succession.

These two distinguished personages had possessed considerable power and authority, under the feeble reign of Peter the Small, and they knew enough of his sister's resolute and self-reliant character to doubt what might become of their court position and their political privileges after the Princess Elizabeth was seated on the throne. Accordingly they lost no time in nominating a 57
rival candidate of their own choosing, whom they dexterously raised to the Imperial dignity, before there was time for the partisans of the Princess Elizabeth to dispute the authority under which they acted. The new sovereign, thus unjustly invested with power, was a woman—Anne, Dowager Duchess of Courland—and the pretence under which Prince d'Olgorowki and Count Osterman proclaimed her Empress of Russia, was that Peter the Small had confidentially communicated to them, on his death-bed, a desire that the Dowager Duchess should be chosen as the sovereign to succeed him.

The main result of the Dowager Duchess's occupation of the throne was the additional complication of the confused political affairs of Russia. The new empress had an eye to the advancement of her family; and, among the other relatives for whom she provided, was a niece, named Catherine, whom she married to the Prince of Brunswick, brother-in-law of the King of Prussia. The first child born of the marriage was a boy named Ivan. Before he had reached the age of two years, the new Empress died; and, when her will was opened, it was discovered, to the amazement of every one, that she had appointed this child to succeed her on the throne of Russia.

The private motive which led the Empress to take this extraordinary course, was her desire to place the sovereign power in the hands of one of her favourites, the Duke de Biren, by 58
nominating that nobleman as the guardian of the infant Ivan. To accomplish this purpose, she had not only slighted the legitimate claims of Peter the Great's daughter, the Princess Elizabeth, but had also entirely overlooked the interests of Ivan's mother, who naturally felt that she had a right to ascend the throne, as the nearest relation of the deceased empress, and the mother of the child who was designated to be the future emperor. To the bewilderment and dissatisfaction thus produced, a further element of confusion was added by the total incapacity of the Duke de Biren to occupy creditably the post of authority which had been assigned to him. Before he had been long in office, he gave way altogether under the double responsibility of guiding the affairs of Russia and directing the education of the future emperor. Ivan's mother saw the chance of asserting her rights which the weakness of the duke afforded to her. She was a resolute woman; and she seized her opportunity by banishing Biren to Siberia, and taking his place as Regent of the Empire and guardian of her infant son.

Such was the result, thus far, of the great scramble for the crown which began with the death of the son of Peter the Great. Such was the position of affairs in Russia at the time when the revolution broke out. 59

Through all the contentions which distracted the country, the Princess Elizabeth lived in the retirement of her own palace, waiting secretly, patiently, and vigilantly for the fit opportunity of asserting her rights. She was, in every sense of the word, a remarkable woman, and she numbered two remarkable men among the adherents of her cause. One was the French ambassador at the court of Russia, the Marquis de la Chétardie. The other was the surgeon of Elizabeth's household, a German, named Lestoc. The Frenchman had money to spend; the German had brains to plot. Both were men of tried courage and resolute will; and both were destined to take the foremost places in the coming struggle. It is certainly not the least curious circumstance in the extraordinary revolution which we are now about to describe, that it was planned and carried out by two foreigners. In the struggle for the Russian throne, the natives of the Russian soil were used only as instruments to be handled and directed at the pleasure of the French ambassador and the German surgeon.

The Marquis and Lestoc, watching the signs of the times, arrived at the conclusion that the period of the banishment of the Duke de Biren and of the assumption of the supreme power by the mother of Ivan, was also the period for effecting the revolution which was to place the Princess Elizabeth on the throne of her ancestors. The dissatisfaction in Russia had, by this time, 60
spread widely among all classes. The people chafed under a despotism inflicted on them by foreigners. The native nobility felt outraged by their exclusion from privileges which had been conceded to their order under former reigns, before the aliens from Courland had seized on power. The army was for the most part to be depended on to answer any bold appeal that might be made to it, in favour of the daughter of Peter the Great. With these chances in their favour, the Frenchman and the German set themselves to the work of organising the scattered elements of discontent. The Marquis opened his well-filled purse; and Surgeon Lestoc prowled about the city and the palace with watchful eyes, with persuasive tongue, with delicately-bribing hands. The great point to be achieved was to tamper successfully with the regiment on duty at the palace; and this was skilfully and quickly accomplished by Lestoc. In the course of a few days only, he contrived to make sure of all the considerable officers of the regiment, and of certain picked men from the ranks besides. On counting heads, the members of the military conspiracy

thus organised came to thirty-three. Exactly the same number of men had once plotted the overthrow of Julius Cæsar, and had succeeded in the attempt.

Matters had proceeded thus far when the suspicions of the Duchess Regent (that being the title which Ivan's mother had now assumed) were suddenly excited, without the slightest apparent cause to arouse them. Nothing dangerous had been openly attempted as yet, and not one of the conspirators had betrayed the secret. Nevertheless the Duchess Regent began to doubt; and, one morning, she astonished and alarmed the Marquis and Lestoc by sending, without any previous warning, for the Princess Elizabeth, and by addressing a series of searching questions to her at a private interview. Fortunately for the success of the plot, the daughter of Peter the Great was more than a match for the Duchess Regent. From first to last Elizabeth proved herself equal to the dangerous situation in which she was placed. The Duchess discovered nothing; and the heads of the thirty-three conspirators remained safe on their shoulders. 61

This piece of good fortune operated on the cunning and resolute Lestoc as a warning to make haste. Between the danger of waiting to mature the conspiracy, and the risk of letting it break out abruptly before the organisation of it was complete, he chose the latter alternative. The Marquis agreed with him that it was best to venture everything, before there was time for the suspicions of the Duchess to be renewed; and the Princess Elizabeth, on her part, was perfectly ready to be guided by the advice of her two trusty adherents. The fifteenth of January, seventeen hundred and forty-one, had been the day originally fixed for the breaking out of the revolution. Lestoc now advanced the period for making the great attempt by nine days. On the night of the sixth of January the Duchess Regent and the Princess Elizabeth were to change places, and the throne of Russia was to become once more the inheritance of the family of Peter the Great. 62

Between nine and ten o'clock, on the night of the sixth, Surgeon Lestoc strolled out, with careless serenity on his face, and devouring anxiety at his heart, to play his accustomed game of billiards at a French coffee-house. The stakes were ten ducats, and Lestoc did not play quite so well as usual that evening. When the clock of the coffee-house struck ten, he stopped in the middle of the game, and drew out his watch.

"I beg ten thousand pardons," he said to the gentleman with whom he was playing; "but I am afraid I must ask you to let me go before the game is done. I have a patient to see at ten o'clock, and the hour has just struck. Here is a friend of mine," he continued, bringing forward one of the bystanders by the arm, "who will, with your permission, play in my place. It is quite immaterial to me whether he loses or whether he wins: I am merely anxious that your game should not be interrupted. Ten thousand pardons again. Nothing but the necessity of seeing a patient could have induced me to be guilty of this apparent rudeness. I wish you much pleasure, gentlemen, and I most unwillingly bid you good night." 63

With that polite farewell, he departed. The patient whom he was going to cure was the sick Russian Empire.

He got into his sledge, and drove off to the palace of the Princess Elizabeth. She trembled a little when he told her quietly that the hour had come for possessing herself of the throne; but, soon recovering her spirits, dressed to go out, concealed a knife about her in case of emergency, and took her place by the side of Lestoc in the sledge. The two then set forth together for the French embassy to pick up the second leader of the conspiracy.

They found the Marquis alone, cool, smiling, humming a gay French tune, and quietly amusing himself by making a drawing. Elizabeth and Lestoc looked over his shoulder, and the former started a little when she saw what the subject of the drawing was. In the background appeared a large monastery, a grim prison-like building, with barred windows and jealously-closed gates; in the foreground were two high gibbets and two wheels of the sort used to break criminals on. The drawing was touched in with extraordinary neatness and steadiness of hand; and the Marquis laughed gaily when he saw how seriously the subject represented had startled and amazed the Princess Elizabeth. 64

"Courage, madam!" he said. "I was only amusing myself by making a sketch illustrative of the future which we may all three expect if we fail in our enterprise. In an hour from this time, you will be on the throne, or on your way to this ugly building." (He touched the monastery in the background of the drawing lightly with the point of his pencil.) "In an hour from this time, also, our worthy Lestoc and myself will either be the two luckiest men in Russia, or the two miserable criminals who are bound on these" (he touched the wheels) "and hung up afterwards on those" (he touched the gibbets). "You will pardon me, madam, for indulging in this ghastly fancy? I was always eccentric from childhood. My good Lestoc, as we seem to be quite ready, perhaps you will kindly precede us to the door, and allow me the honour of handing the Princess to the sledge?"

They left the house, laughing and chatting as carelessly as if they were a party going to the theatre. Lestoc took the reins. "To the palace of the Duchess Regent, coachman!" said the Marquis, pleasantly. And to the palace they went.

They made no attempt to slip in by backdoors, but boldly drove up to the grand entrance, inside of which the guard-house was situated. 65

"Who goes there?" cried the sentinel as they left the sledge and passed in.

The Marquis took a pinch of snuff.

"Don't you see, my good fellow?" he said. "A lady and two gentlemen."

The slightest irregularity was serious enough to alarm the guard at the Imperial palace in those critical times. The sentinel presented his musket at the Marquis, and a drummer-boy who was standing near, ran to his instrument and caught up his drum-sticks to beat the alarm.

Before the sentinel could fire, he was surrounded by the thirty-three conspirators, and was disarmed in an instant. Before the drummer-boy could beat the alarm, the Princess Elizabeth had drawn out her knife and had stabbed—not the boy, but—the drum! These slight preliminary obstacles being thus disposed of, Lestoc and the Marquis, having the Princess between them, and being followed by their thirty-three adherents, marched resolutely into the great hall of the palace, and there confronted the entire guard.

"Gentlemen," said the Marquis, "I have the honour of presenting you to your future empress, the daughter of Peter the Great."

Half the guard had been bribed by the cunning Lestoc. The other half, seeing their comrades advance and pay homage to the Princess, followed the example of loyalty. Elizabeth was escorted 66
into a room on the ground-floor by a military court formed in the course of five minutes. The Marquis and the faithful thirty-three went up-stairs to the sleeping apartments of the palace. Lestoc ran out, and ordered a carriage to be got ready—then joined the Marquis and the conspirators. The Duchess Regent and her child were just retiring for the night, when the German surgeon and the French ambassador politely informed them that they were prisoners. Entreaties were of no avail; resistance was out of the question. Both mother and son were led down to the carriage that Lestoc had ordered, and were driven off, under a strong guard, to the fortress of Riga.

The palace was secured, and the Duchess was imprisoned, but Lestoc and the Marquis had not done their night's work yet. It was necessary to make sure of three powerful personages connected with the government. Three more carriages were ordered out when the Duchess's carriage had been driven off; and three noblemen—among them Count Osterman, the original cause of the troubles in Russia—were woke out of their first sleep with the information that they were state prisoners, and were started before daylight on their way to Siberia. At the same time, the thirty-three conspirators were scattered about in every barrack-room in St. Petersburg, proclaiming Elizabeth Empress, in right of her illustrious parentage, and in the name of the 67
Russian people. Soon after daylight, the moment the working population was beginning to be astir, the churches were occupied by trusty men under Lestoc's orders, and the oaths of fidelity to Elizabeth were administered to the willing populace as fast as they came in to morning prayers. By nine o'clock the work was done; the people were satisfied; the army was gained over; Elizabeth sat on her father's throne, unopposed, unquestioned, unstained by the shedding of a drop of blood; and Lestoc and the Marquis could rest from their labours at last, and could say to each other with literal truth, "The government of Russia has been changed in nine hours, and we two foreigners are the men who have worked the miracle!"

This was the Russian revolution of seventeen hundred and forty-one. It was not the less effectual because it had lasted but a few hours, and had been accomplished without the sacrifice of a single life. The Imperial inheritance which it had placed in the hands of Elizabeth was not snatched from them again. The daughter of the great Czar lived and died Empress of Russia.

And what became of the two men who had won the throne for her? The story of the after-conduct of the Marquis and Lestoc must answer that question. The events of the revolution itself are hardly more strange than the events in the lives of the French Ambassador and the German 68
surgeon, when the brief struggle was over, and the change in the dynasty was accomplished.

To begin with the Marquis. He had laid the Princess Elizabeth under serious obligations to his courage and fidelity; and his services were repaid by such a reward as, in his vainest moments, he could never have dared to hope for. His fidelity had excited Elizabeth's gratitude, but his personal qualities had done more—they had touched her heart. As soon as she was settled quietly on the throne, she proved her admiration of his merits, his services, and himself by offering to marry him.

This proposal, which conferred on the Marquis the highest distinction in Russia, fairly turned his brain. The imperturbable man who had preserved his coolness in a situation of the deadliest danger, lost all control over himself the moment he rose to the climax of prosperity. Having obtained leave of absence from his Imperial mistress, he returned to France to ask leave from his own sovereign to marry the Empress. This permission was readily granted. After receiving it, any man of ordinary discretion would have kept the fact of the Empress's partiality for him as strictly secret as possible, until it could be openly avowed on the marriage-day. Far from this, the Marquis's vanity led him to proclaim the brilliant destiny in store for him all over Paris. He 69
commissioned the King's genealogist to construct a pedigree which should be made to show that he was not unworthy to contract a royal alliance. When the pedigree was completed he had the incredible folly to exhibit it publicly, along with the keepsakes which the Empress had given to him, and the rich presents which he intended to bestow as marks of his favour on the lords and ladies of the Russian court. Nor did his imprudence end even here. When he returned to St. Petersburg, he took back with him, among the other persons comprising his train, a woman of loose character, dressed in the disguise of a page. The persons about the Russian court, whose prejudices he had never attempted to conciliate—whose envy at his success waited only for the

slightest opportunity to effect his ruin—suspected the sex of the pretended page, and took good care that the report of their suspicions should penetrate gradually to the foot of the throne. It seems barely credible, but it is, nevertheless, unquestionably the fact, that the infatuated Marquis absolutely allowed the Empress an opportunity of seeing his page. Elizabeth's eye, sharpened by jealousy, penetrated instantly to the truth. Any less disgraceful insult she would probably have forgiven, but such an outrage as this, no woman—especially no woman in her position—could pardon. With one momentary glance of anger and disdain, she dismissed the Marquis from her presence, and never, from that moment, saw him again. 70

The same evening his papers were seized, all the presents that he had received from the Empress were taken from him, and he was ordered to leave the Russian dominions for ever, within eight days' time. He was not allowed to write, or take any other means of attempting to justify himself; and, on his way back to his native country, he was followed to the frontier by certain officers of the Russian army, and there stripped, with every mark of ignominy, of all the orders of nobility which he had received from the Imperial court. He returned to Paris a disgraced man, lived there in solitude, obscurity, and neglect for some years, and died in a state of positive want—the unknown inhabitant of one of the meanest dwellings in the whole city.

The end of Lestoc is hardly less remarkable than the end of the Marquis.

In their weak points, as in their strong, the characters of these two men seem to have been singularly alike. Making due allowance for the difference in station between the German surgeon and the French ambassador, it is undeniable that Elizabeth showed her sense of the services of Lestoc as gratefully and generously as she had shown her sense of the services of the Marquis. 71 The ex-surgeon was raised at once to the position of the chief favourite and the most powerful man about the Court. Besides the privileges which he shared equally with the highest nobles of the period, he was allowed access to the Empress on all private as well as on all public occasions. He had a perpetual right of entry into her domestic circle, which was conceded to no one else; and he held a place, on days of public reception, that placed him on an eminence to which no other man in Russia could hope to attain. Such was his position; and, strange to say, it had precisely the same maddening effect on his vanity which the prospect of an imperial alliance had exercised over the vanity of the Marquis. Lestoc's audacity became ungovernable; his insolence knew no bounds. He abused the privileges conferred upon him by Elizabeth's grateful regard, with such baseness and such indelicacy, that the Empress, after repeatedly cautioning him in the friendliest possible terms, found herself obliged, out of regard to her own reputation and to the remonstrances which assailed her from all the persons of her Court, to deprive him of the privilege of entry into her private apartments.

This check, instead of operating as a timely warning to Lestoc, irritated him into the commission of fresh acts of insolence, so wanton in their nature that Elizabeth at last lost all patience, and 72 angrily reproached him with the audacious ingratitude of his behaviour. The reproach was retorted by Lestoc, who fiercely accused the Empress of forgetting the great services that he had rendered her, and declared that he would turn his back on her and her dominions, after first resenting the contumely with which he had been treated by an act of revenge that she would remember to the day of her death.

The vengeance which he had threatened proved to be the vengeance of a forger and a cheat. The banker in St. Petersburg who was charged with the duty of disbursing the sums of state money which were set apart for the Empress's use, received an order, one day, to pay four hundred thousand ducats to a certain person who was not mentioned by name, but who, it was stated, would call, with the proper credentials, to receive the money. The banker was struck by this irregular method of performing the preliminaries of an important matter of business, and he considered it to be his duty to show the document which he had received to one of the Ministers. Secret inquiries were immediately set on foot, and they ended in the discovery that the order was a false one, and that the man who had forged it was no other than Lestoc. 73

For a crime of this kind the punishment was death. But the Empress had declared, on her accession, that she would sign no warrant for the taking away of life during her reign, and, moreover, she still generously remembered what she had owed in former times to Lestoc. Accordingly, she changed his punishment to a sentence of exile to Siberia, with special orders that the life of the banished man should be made as easy to him as possible. He had not passed many years in the wildernesses of Siberia, before Elizabeth's strong sense of past obligation to him, induced her still further to lighten his punishment by ordering that he should be brought back to St. Petersburg, and confined in the fortress there, where her own eyes might assure her that he was treated with mercy and consideration. It is probable that she only intended this change as a prelude to the restoration of his liberty; but the future occasion for pardoning him never came. Shortly after his return to St. Petersburg, Lestoc ended his days in the prison of the fortress.

So the two leaders of the Russian revolution lived, and so they died. It has been said, and said well, that the only sure proof of a man's strength of mind is to be discovered by observing the manner in which he bears success. History shows few such remarkable examples of the truth of this axiom as are afforded by the lives of the Marquis de la Chétardie and the German surgeon 74 Lestoc. Two stronger men in the hour of peril and two weaker men in the hour of security, have not often appeared in this world to vanquish adverse circumstances like heroes, and to be conquered like cowards afterwards by nothing but success. 75

DOUGLAS JERROLD.[B]

Some seventy years ago, there lived a poor country player, named Samuel Jerrold. His principal claim to a prominent position among the strolling company to which he was attached, consisted in the possession of a pair of shoes once belonging to the great Garrick himself. Samuel Jerrold always appeared on the stage in these invaluable "properties"—a man, surely, who deserves the regard of posterity, as the only actor of modern times who has shown himself capable of standing in Garrick's shoes.

Samuel Jerrold was twice married—the second time to a wife so much his junior that he was older than his own mother-in-law. Partly, perhaps, in virtue of this last great advantage on the 76
part of the husband, the marriage was a very happy one. The second Mrs. Samuel was a clever, good-tempered, notable woman; and helped her husband materially in his theatrical affairs, when he rose in time (and in Garrick's shoes) to be a manager of country theatres. Young Mrs. Samuel brought her husband a family—two girls to begin with; and, on the third of January, eighteen hundred and three, while she was staying in London, a boy, who was christened Douglas William, and who was destined, in after life, to make the name of the obscure country manager a household word on the lips of English readers.

In the year eighteen hundred and seven, Samuel Jerrold became the lessee of the Sheerness Theatre; and little Douglas was there turned to professional account, as a stage-child. He appeared in *The Stranger* as one of the little cherubs of the frail and interesting Mrs. Haller; and he was "carried on" by Edmund Kean, as the child in *Rolla*. These early theatrical experiences (whatever influence they might have had, at a later time, in forming his instincts as a dramatist) do not appear to have at all inclined him towards his father's profession when he grew older. The world of ships and sailors amid which he lived at Sheerness, seems to have formed his first tastes and influenced his first longings. As soon as he could speak for himself on the matter of his future 77
prospects, he chose the life of a sailor; and, at ten years old, he entered on board the guardship, Namur, as a first-class volunteer.

Up to this time the father had given the son as good an education as it lay within his means to command. Douglas had been noted as a studious boy at school; and he brought with him a taste for reading and for quiet pursuits when he entered on board the Namur. Beginning his apprenticeship to the sea as a Midshipman, in December, eighteen hundred and thirteen, he was not transferred from the guardship to active service until April, eighteen hundred and fifteen, when he was drafted off, with forty-six men, to his Majesty's gun-brig, Ernest.

Those were stirring times. The fierce struggle of Waterloo was at hand; and Douglas's first cruise was across the Channel to Ostend, at the head of a fleet of transports carrying troops and stores to the battle-field. Singularly enough, his last cruise connected him with the results of the great fight, as his first had connected him with the preparations for it. In the July of the Waterloo year, the Ernest brought her share of the wounded back to Sheerness. On the deck of that brig, Jerrold first stood face to face with the horror of war. In after life, when other pens were writing glibly enough of the glory of war, his pen traced the dark reverse of the picture, and set the terrible 78
consequences of all victories, righteous as well as wicked, in their true light.

The great peace was proclaimed, and the nations rested at last. In October, eighteen hundred and fifteen, the Ernest was "paid off." Jerrold stepped on shore, and never returned to the service. He was without interest; and the peace virtually closed his professional prospects. To the last day of his life he had a genuinely English love for the sea and sailors; and, short as his naval experience had been, neither he nor his countrymen were altogether losers by it. If the Midshipman of the Ernest had risen to be an Admiral, what would have become then of the author of Black-Eyed Susan?

Douglas's prospects were far from cheering when he returned to his home on shore. The affairs of Samuel Jerrold (through no fault of his own) had fallen into sad confusion. In his old age his vocation of manager sank from under him; his theatre was sold; and, at the end of the Waterloo year, he and his family found themselves compelled to leave Sheerness. On the first day of eighteen hundred and sixteen they sailed away in the Chatham boat, to try their fortune in London.

The first refuge of the Jerrolds was at Broad Court, Bow Street. Poor old Samuel was now past his work; and the chief dependence of the ruined family rested on Douglas and his mother. Mrs. 79
Samuel contrived to get some theatrical employment in London; and Douglas, after beginning life as an officer in the navy, was apprenticed to a printer, in Northumberland Street, Strand.

He accepted his new position with admirable cheerfulness and resolution; honestly earning his money, and affectionately devoting it to the necessities of his parents. A delightful anecdote of him, at this time of his life, is told by his son. On one of the occasions when his mother and sister were absent in the country, the little domestic responsibility of comforting the poor worn-out old father with a good dinner, rested on Douglas's shoulders. With the small proceeds of his work, he bought all the necessary materials for a good beef-steak pie—made the pie himself, succeeding brilliantly with the crust—himself took it to the bake-house—and himself brought it back, with one of Sir Walter Scott's novels, which the dinner left him just money enough to hire from a library, for the purpose of reading a story to his father in the evening, by way of dessert. For our own parts, we shall henceforth always rank that beef-steak pie as one among the many other

works of Douglas Jerrold which have established his claim to remembrance and to regard. The clue to the bright affectionate nature of the man—sometimes lost by those who knew him imperfectly, in after life—could hardly be found in any pleasanter or better place, now that he is gone from among us, than on the poor dinner-table in Broad Court. 80

Although he was occupied for twelve hours out of the twenty-four at the printing-office, he contrived to steal time enough from the few idle intervals allowed for rest and meals, to store his mind with all the reading that lay within his reach. As early as at the age of fourteen, the literary faculty that was in him seems to have struggled to develop itself in short papers and scraps of verse. Only a year later, he made his first effort at dramatic composition, producing a little farce, with a part in it for an old friend of the family, the late Mr. Wilkinson, the comedian. Although Samuel Jerrold was well remembered among many London actors as an honest country manager; and although Douglas could easily secure, from his father's friends, his admission to the theatre whenever he was able to go to it, he does not appear to have possessed interest enough to gain a reading for his piece when it was first sent in to the English Opera House. After three years had elapsed, however, Mr. Wilkinson contrived to get the lad's farce produced at Sadler's Wells, under the title of More Frightened than Hurt. It was not only successful on its first representation, but it also won the rare honour of being translated for the French stage. More than this, it was afterwards translated back again, by a dramatist who was ignorant of its original history, for the stage of the Olympic Theatre; where it figured in the bills under the new title of Fighting by Proxy, with Liston in the part of the hero. Such is the history of Douglas Jerrold's first contribution to the English drama. When it was produced on the boards of Sadler's Wells, its author's age was eighteen years. 81

He had appeared in public, however, as an author, before this time; having composed some verses which were printed in a forgotten periodical called Arliss's Magazine. The loss of his first situation, through the bankruptcy of his master, obliged him to seek employment anew in the printing-office of one Mr. Bigg, who was also the editor of a newspaper called the *Sunday Monitor*. In this journal appeared his first article—a critical paper on *Der Freischütz*. He had gone to the theatre with an order to see the opera; and had been so struck by the supernatural drama and the wonderful music to which it was set, that he noted down his impressions of the performance, and afterwards dropped what he had written, anonymously, into the editor's box. The next morning, his own article was handed to him to set up in type for the forthcoming number of the Sunday Monitor.

After this first encouragement, he began to use his pen frequently in the minor periodicals of the time; still sticking to the printer's work, however, and still living at home with his family. The success of his little farce at Sadler's Wells led to his writing three more pieces for that theatre. They all succeeded; and the managers of some of the other minor theatres began to look after the new man. Just at this time, when his career as dramatist and journalist was beginning to open before him, his father died. After that loss, the next important event in his life was his marriage. In the year eighteen hundred and twenty-four, when he was twenty-one years of age, he married his "first love," Miss Mary Swann, the daughter of a gentleman who held an appointment in the Post Office. He and his bride settled, with his mother and sister and a kind old friend of his boyish days, in Holborn; and here—devoting his days to the newspapers, and his evenings to the drama—the newly-married man started as author by profession, and met the world and its cares bravely at the point of the pen. 82

The struggle at starting was a hard one. His principal permanent source of income was a small weekly salary paid to him as dramatist to the establishment, by one Davidge, manager of the Coburg (now the Victoria) Theatre. This man appears to have treated Jerrold, whose dramas brought both money and reputation to his theatre, with an utter want of common consideration and common gratitude. He worked his poor author pitilessly; and it is, on that account, highly satisfactory to know that he overreached himself in the end, by quarrelling with his dramatist, at the very time when Jerrold had a theatrical fortune (so far as managers' interests were concerned) lying in his desk, in the shape of Black-Eyed Susan. With that renowned play (the most popular of all nautical dramas) in his hand, Douglas left the Coburg to seek employment at the Surrey Theatre—then under the management of Mr. Elliston. This last tradesman in plays—who subsequently showed himself to be a worthy contemporary of the other tradesman at the Coburg—bid rather higher for Jerrold's services, and estimated the sole monopoly of the fancy, invention, and humour of a man who had already proved himself to be a popular, money-bringing dramatist, at the magnificent rate of five pounds a week. The bargain was struck; and Jerrold's first play produced at the Surrey Theatre was Black-Eyed Susan. 83

He had achieved many enviable dramatic successes before this time. He had written domestic dramas—such as Fifteen Years of a Drunkard's Life, and Ambrose Gwinett—the popularity of which is still well remembered by play-goers of the old generation. But the reception of Black-Eyed Susan eclipsed all previous successes of his or of any other dramatist's in that line. Mr. T. P. Cooke, who, as the French say, "created" the part of William, not only found half London flocking into the Borough to see him; but was actually called upon, after acting in the play, as a first piece, at the Surrey Theatre, to drive off in his sailor's dress, and act in it again on the same night, as the last piece, at Covent Garden Theatre. Its first "run" mounted to three hundred nights: it afterwards drew money into the empty treasury of Drury Lane: it remains, to this day, a "stock-piece" on which managers and actors know that they can depend; and, strangest phenomenon of all, it is impossible to see the play now, without feeling that its great and well-deserved dramatic success has been obtained with the least possible amount of assistance from 84

the subtleties and refinements of dramatic art. The piece is indebted for its hold on the public sympathy solely to the simple force, the irresistible directness, of its appeal to some of the strongest affections in our nature. It has succeeded, and it will succeed, not because the dialogue is well, or, as to some passages of it, even naturally written; not because the story is neatly told, for it is (especially in the first act) full of faults in construction; but solely because the situations in which the characters are placed appeal to the hearts of every husband and every wife in the theatre. In this aspect of it, and in this only, the play is a study to any young writer; for it shows on what amazingly simple foundations rest the main conditions of the longest, the surest, and the widest dramatic success. 85

It is sad, it is almost humiliating, to be obliged to add, in reference to the early history of Jerrold's first dramatic triumph, that his share of the gains which Black-Eyed Susan poured into the pockets of managers on both sides of the water was just seventy pounds. Mr. Elliston, whose theatre the play had raised from a state of something like bankruptcy to a condition of prosperity which, in the Surrey annals, has not since been paralleled, not only abstained from presenting Jerrold with the smallest fragment of anything in the shape of a token of gratitude, but actually had the pitiless insolence to say to him, after Black-Eyed Susan had run its three hundred nights, "My dear boy, why don't you get your friends to present you with a bit of plate?"[C] 86

The extraordinary success of Black-Eyed Susan opened the doors of the great theatres to Jerrold, as a matter of course. He made admirable use of the chances in his favour which he had so well deserved, and for which he had waited so long. At the Adelphi, at Drury Lane, and at the Haymarket, drama after drama flowed in quick succession from his pen. The Devil's Ducat, the Bride of Ludgate, the Rent Day, Nell Gwynne, the Housekeeper—this last, the best of his plays in point of construction—date, with many other dramatic works, from the period of his life now under review. The one slight check to his career of prosperity occurred in eighteen hundred and thirty-six, when he and his brother-in-law took the Strand Theatre, and when Jerrold acted a character in one of his own plays. Neither the theatrical speculation nor the theatrical appearance proved to be successful; and he wisely abandoned, from that time, all professional connection with the stage, except in his old and ever-welcome character of dramatist. In the other branches of his art—to which he devoted himself, at this turning-point of his career, as faithfully as he devoted himself to the theatrical branch—his progress was not less remarkable. 87 As journalist and essayist, he rose steadily towards the distinguished place which was his due among the writers of his time. This middle term of his literary exertions produced, among other noticeable results, the series of social studies called Men of Character, originally begun in Blackwood's Magazine, and since republished among his collected works.

He had now advanced, in a social as well as in a literary point of view, beyond that period in the lives of self-made men which may be termed the adventurous period. Whatever difficulties and anxieties henceforth oppressed him were caused by the trials and troubles which, more or less, beset the exceptional lives of all men of letters. The struggle for a hearing, the fight for a fair field in which to show himself, had now been bravely and creditably accomplished; and all that remains to be related of the life of Douglas Jerrold is best told in the history of his works.

Taking his peculiar literary gifts into consideration, the first great opportunity of his life, as a periodical writer, was offered to him, unquestionably, by the starting of *Punch*. The brilliant impromptu faculty which gave him a place apart, as thinker, writer, and talker, among the remarkable men of his time, was exactly the faculty which such a journal as Punch was calculated to develop to the utmost. The day on which Jerrold was secured as a contributor would have been 88 a fortunate day for that periodical, if he had written nothing in it but the far-famed Caudle Lectures, and the delightful Story of a Feather. But the service that he rendered to Punch must by no means be associated only with the more elaborate contributions to its pages which are publicly connected with his name. His wit often flashed out at its brightest, his sarcasm often cut with its keenest edge, in those well-timed paragraphs and short articles which hit the passing event of the day, and which, so far as their temporary purpose with the public is concerned, are all-important ingredients in the success of such a periodical as Punch. A contributor who can strike out new ideas from the original resources of his own mind, is one man, and a contributor who can be depended on for the small work-a-day emergencies which are felt one week and forgotten the next, is generally another. Jerrold united these two characters in himself; and the value of him to Punch, on that account only, can never be too highly estimated.

At this period of his life, the fertility of his mental resources showed itself most conspicuously. While he was working for Punch, he was also editing and largely contributing to the Illuminated Magazine. In this publication appeared, among a host of shorter papers, the series called The Chronicles of Clovernook, which he himself always considered to be one of his happiest efforts, 89 and which does indeed contain, in detached passages, some of the best things that ever fell from his pen. On the cessation of The Illuminated Magazine, he started The Shilling Magazine, and contributed to it his well-known novel, Saint Giles and Saint James. These accumulated literary occupations and responsibilities would have been enough for most men; but Jerrold's inexhaustible energy and variety carried him on through more work still. Theatrical audiences now found their old favourite addressing them again, and occupying new ground as a writer of five act and three act comedies. Bubbles of the Day, Time Works Wonders, The Catspaw, Retired from Business, Saint Cupid, were all produced, with other plays, after the period when he became a regular writer in Punch.

Judged from the literary point of view these comedies were all original and striking contributions to the library of the stage. From the dramatic point of view, however, it must not be concealed

that they were less satisfactory; and that some of them were scarcely so successful with audiences as their author's earlier and humbler efforts. The one solid critical reason which it is possible to assign for this, implies in itself a compliment which could be paid to no other dramatist of modern times. The perpetual glitter of Jerrold's wit seems to have blinded him to some of the more sober requirements of the Dramatic art. When Charles Kemble said, and said truly, that there was wit enough for three comedies in Bubbles of the Day, he implied that this brilliant overflow left little or no room for the indispensable resources of story and situation to display themselves fairly on the stage. The comedies themselves, examined with reference to their success in representation, as well as to their intrinsic merits, help to support this view. Time Works Wonders was the most prosperous of all, and it is that comedy precisely which has the most story and the most situation in it. The idea and the management of the charming love-tale out of which the events of this play spring, show what Jerrold might have achieved in the construction of other plots, if his own superabundant wit had not dazzled him and led him astray. As it is, the readers of these comedies, who can appreciate the rich fancy, the delicate subtleties of thought, the masterly terseness of expression, and the exquisite play and sparkle of wit scattered over every page, may rest assured that they rather gain than lose—especially in the present condition of theatrical companies—by not seeing the last dramatic works of Douglas Jerrold represented on the stage. 90

The next, and, sad to say, the final achievement of his life, connected him most honourably and profitably with the newspaper press. Many readers will remember the starting of Douglas Jerrold's Weekly Newspaper—its great temporary success—and then its sudden decline, through defects in management, to which it is not now necessary to refer at length. The signal ability with which the editorial articles in the paper were written, the remarkable aptitude which they displayed in striking straight at the sympathies of large masses of readers, did not escape the notice of men who were well fitted to judge of the more solid qualifications which go to the production of a popular journalist. In the spring of the year eighteen hundred and fifty-two, the proprietor of Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper proposed the editorship to Jerrold, on terms of such wise liberality as to ensure the ready acceptance of his offer. From the spring of eighteen hundred and fifty-two, to the spring of eighteen hundred and fifty-seven—the last he was ever to see—Jerrold conducted the paper, with such extraordinary success as is rare in the history of journalism. Under his supervision, and with the regular assistance of his pen, Lloyd's Newspaper rose, by thousands and thousands a week, to the great circulation which it now enjoys. Of the many successful labours of Jerrold's life, none had been so substantially prosperous as the labour that was destined to close it. 91

His health had shown signs of breaking, and his heart was known to be affected, for some little time before his last brief illness; but the unconquerable energy and spirit of the man upheld him through all bodily trials, until the first day of June, eighteen hundred and fifty-seven. Even his medical attendant did not abandon all hope when his strength first gave way. But he sank rapidly —so rapidly, that in one short week the struggle was over. On the eighth day of June, surrounded by his family and his friends, preserving all his faculties to the last, passing away calmly, resignedly, affectionately, Douglas Jerrold closed his eyes on the world which it had been the long and noble purpose of his life to inform and to improve. 92

It is too early yet to attempt any estimate of the place which his writings will ultimately occupy in English literature. So long as honesty, energy, and variety are held to be the prominent qualities which should distinguish a genuine writer, there can be no doubt of the vitality of Douglas Jerrold's reputation. The one objection urged against the works, which, feeble and ignorant though it was, often went to the heart of the writer, was the objection of bitterness. Calling to mind many of the passages in his books in which this bitterness most sharply appears, and seeing plainly in those passages what the cause was that provoked it, we venture to speak out our own opinion boldly, and to acknowledge at once, that we admire this so-called bitterness as one of the great and valuable qualities of Douglas Jerrold's writings; because we can see for ourselves that it springs from the uncompromising earnestness and honesty of the author. In an age when it is becoming unfashionable to have a positive opinion about anything; when the detestable burlesque element scatters its profanation with impunity on all beautiful and all serious things; when much, far too much, of the current literature of the day vibrates contemptibly between unbelieving banter and unblushing clap-trap, that element of bitterness in Jerrold's writings—which never stands alone in them; which is never disassociated from the kind word that goes before, or the generous thought that comes after—is in our opinion an essentially wholesome element, breathing that admiration of truth, and that hatred of falsehood, which is the chiefest and brightest jewel in the crown of any writer, living or dead. 93

This same cry of bitterness, which assailed him in his literary character, assailed him in his social character also. Absurd as the bare idea of bitterness must appear in connection with such a nature as his, to those who really knew him, the reason why strangers so often and so ridiculously misunderstood him, is not difficult to discover. That marvellous brightness and quickness of perception which has distinguished him far and wide as the sayer of some of the wittiest, and often some of the wisest things also, in the English language, expressed itself almost with the suddenness of lightning. This absence of all appearance of artifice or preparation, this flash and readiness which made the great charm of his wit, rendered him, at the same time, quite incapable of suppressing a good thing from prudential considerations. It sparkled off his tongue before he was aware of it. It was always a bright surprise to himself; and it never occurred to him that it could be anything but a bright surprise to others. All his so-called bitter things, were said with a burst of hearty schoolboy laughter, which showed how far he was himself from attaching a 94

serious importance to them. Strangers apparently failed to draw this inference, plain as it was; and often mistook him accordingly. If they had seen him in the society of children; if they had surprised him in the house of any one of his literary brethren who was in difficulty and distress; if they had met him by the bedside of a sick friend, how simply and how irresistibly the gentle, generous, affectionate nature of the man would then have disclosed itself to the most careless chance acquaintance who ever misunderstood him! Very few men have won the loving regard of so many friends so rapidly, and have kept that regard so enduringly to the last day of their lives, as Douglas Jerrold. 95

SKETCHES OF CHARACTER.—V.

PRAY EMPLOY MAJOR NAMBY!

[A Privileged Communication From A Lady in Distress.]

I have such an extremely difficult subject to write about, that I really don't know how to begin. The fact is, I am a single lady—single, you will please to understand, entirely because I have refused many excellent offers. Pray don't imagine from this that I am old. Some women's offers come at long intervals, and other women's offers come close together. Mine came remarkably close together—so, of course, I cannot possibly be old. Not that I presume to describe myself as absolutely young, either; so much depends on people's points of view. I have heard female children of the ages of eighteen or nineteen called young ladies. This seems to me to be ridiculous—and I have held that opinion, without once wavering from it, for more than ten years past. It is, after all, a question of feeling; and, shall I confess it? I feel so young! 96

Dear, dear me! this is dreadfully egotistical; and, besides, it is not in the least what I want. May I be kindly permitted to begin again?

Is there any chance of our going to war with somebody, before long? This is such a dreadful question for a lady to put, that I feel called upon to apologise and explain myself. I don't rejoice in bloodshed—I don't, indeed. The smell of gunpowder is horrible to me; and the going off of the smallest imaginable gun invariably makes me scream. But if on some future occasion we—of course, I mean the government—find it quite impossible to avoid plunging into the horrors of war—then, what I want to know is, whether my next door neighbour, Major Namby, will be taken from his home by the Horse Guards, and presented with his fit post of command in the English army? It will come out sooner or later; so there is no harm in my acknowledging at once, that it would add immeasurably to my comfort and happiness if the major were ordered off on any service which would take him away from his own house.

I am really very sorry, but I must leave off beginning already, and go back again to the part before the beginning (if there is such a thing) in order to explain the nature of my objection to Major Namby, and why it would be such a great relief to me (supposing we are unfortunate enough to plunge into the horrors of war), if he happened to be one of the first officers called out for the service of his Queen and country. 97

I live in the suburbs, and I have bought my house. The major lives in the suburbs, next door to me, and *he* has bought his house. I don't object to this, of course. I merely mention it to make things straight.

Major Namby has been twice married. His first wife—dear, dear! how can I express it? Shall I say, with vulgar abruptness, that his first wife had a family? And must I descend into particulars, and add that they are four in number, and that two of them are twins? Well, the words are written; and if they will do over again for the same purpose, I beg to repeat them in reference to the second Mrs. Namby (still alive), who has also had a family, and is——no, I really cannot say, is likely to go on having one. There are certain limits, in a case of this kind, and I think I have reached them. Permit me simply to state that the second Mrs. Namby has three children, at present. These, with the first Mrs. Namby's four, make a total of seven. The seven are composed of five girls and two boys. And the first Mrs. Namby's family all have one particular kind of constitution, and the second Mrs. Namby's family all have another particular kind of constitution. Let me explain once more that I merely mention these little matters, and that I don't object to them. 98

Now pray be patient: I am coming fast to the point—I am indeed. But please let me say a little word or two about Major Namby himself.

In the first place, I have looked out his name in the Army List, and I cannot find that he was ever engaged in battle anywhere. He appears to have entered the army, most unfortunately for his own renown, just after, instead of just before, the battle of Waterloo. He has been at all sorts of foreign stations, at the very time, in each case, when there was no military work to do—except once at some West Indian Island, where he seems to have assisted in putting down a few poor unfortunate negroes who tried to get up a riot. This is the only active service that he has ever performed: so I suppose it is all owing to his being well off and to those dreadful abuses of ours

that he has been made a major for not having done a major's work. So far as looks go, however, he is military enough in appearance to take the command of the British army at five minutes' notice. He is very tall and upright, and carries a martial cane, and wears short martial whiskers, and has an awfully loud martial voice. His face is very pink, and his eyes are extremely round and staring, and he has that singularly disagreeable-looking roll of fat red flesh at the back of his neck, between the bottom of his short grey hair and the top of his stiff black stock, which seems to be peculiar to all hearty old officers who are remarkably well to do in the world. He is certainly 99
not more than sixty years of age; and, if a lady may presume to judge of such a thing, I should say decidedly that he had an immense amount of undeveloped energy still left in him, at the service of the Horse Guards.

This undeveloped energy—and here, at length, I come to the point—not having any employment in the right direction, has run wild in the wrong direction, and has driven the major to devote the whole of his otherwise idle time to his domestic affairs. He manages his children instead of his regiment, and establishes discipline in the servants'-hall instead of in the barrack-yard. Have I any right to object to this? None whatever, I readily admit. I may hear (most unwillingly) that Major Namby has upset the house by going into the kitchen and objecting to the smartness of the servants' caps; but as I am not, thank Heaven, one of those unfortunate servants, I am not called on to express my opinion of such unmanly meddling, much as I scorn it. I may be informed (entirely against my own will) that Mrs. Namby's husband has dared to regulate, not only the size and substance, but even the number, of certain lower and inner articles of Mrs. Namby's dress, which no earthly consideration will induce me particularly to describe; but as I do not (I thank Heaven again) occupy the degraded position of the major's wife, I am not justified in expressing 100
my indignation at domestic prying and pettifogging, though I feel it all over me, at this very moment, from head to foot. What Major Namby does and says, inside his own house, is his business and not mine. But what he does and says, outside his own house, on the gravel walk of his front garden—under my own eyes and close to my own ears, as I sit at work at the window—is as much my affair as the major's, and more, for it is I who suffer by it.

Pardon me a momentary pause for relief, a momentary thrill of self-congratulation. I have got to my destination at last—I have taken the right literary turning at the end of the preceding paragraph; and the fair high-road of plain narrative now spreads engagingly before me.

My complaint against Major Namby is, in plain terms, that he transacts the whole of his domestic business in his front garden. Whether it arises from natural weakness of memory, from total want of a sense of propriety, or from a condition of mind which is closely allied to madness of the eccentric sort, I cannot say—but the major certainly does sometimes partially, and sometimes entirely, forget his private family matters, and the necessary directions connected with them, while he is inside the house; and does habitually remember them, and repair all omissions, by bawling through his windows, at the top of his voice, as soon as he gets outside the house. It 101
never seems to occur to him that he might advantageously return in-doors, and there mention what he has forgotten in a private and proper way. The instant the lost idea strikes him—which it invariably does, either in his front garden, or in the roadway outside his house—he roars for his wife, either from the gravel walk, or over the low wall; and (if I may use so strong an expression) empties his mind to her in public, without appearing to care whose ears he wearies, whose delicacy he shocks, or whose ridicule he invites. If the man is not mad, his own small family fusses have taken such complete possession of all his senses, that he is quite incapable of noticing anything else, and perfectly impenetrable to the opinions of his neighbours. Let me show that the grievance of which I complain is no slight one, by giving a few examples of the general persecution that I suffer, and the occasional shocks that are administered to my delicacy, at the coarse hands of Major Namby.

We will say it is a fine warm morning. I am sitting in my front room, with the window open, absorbed over a deeply interesting book. I hear the door of the next house bang; I look up, and see the major descending the steps into his front garden.

He walks—no, he marches—half way down the front garden path, with his head high in the air, 102
and his chest stuck out, and his military cane fiercely flourished in his right hand. Suddenly, he stops, stamps with one foot, knocks up the hinder part of the brim of his extremely curly hat with his left hand, and begins to scratch at that singularly disagreeable-looking roll of fat red flesh in the back of his neck (which scratching, I may observe, in parenthesis, is always a sure sign, in the case of this horrid man, that a lost domestic idea has suddenly come back to him). He waits a moment in the ridiculous position just described, then wheels round on his heel, looks up at the first-floor window, and instead of going back into the house to mention what he has forgotten, bawls out fiercely from the middle of the walk:

"Matilda!"

I hear his wife's voice—a shockingly shrill one; but what can you expect of a woman who has been seen over and over again, in a slatternly striped wrapper, as late as two o'clock in the afternoon—I hear his wife's voice answer from inside the house:

"Yes, dear."

"I said it was a south wind."

"Yes, dear."

"It isn't a south wind."

"Lor', dear!"

"It's south-east. I won't have Georgina taken out to-day." (Georgina is one of the first Mrs. Namby's family, and they are all weak in the chest.) "Where's nurse?" 103

"Here, sir!"

"Nurse, I won't have Jack allowed to run. Whenever that boy perspires, he catches cold. Hang up his hoop. If he cries, take him into my dressing-room, and show him the birch rod. Matilda!"

"Yes, dear."

"What the devil do they mean by daubing all that grease over Mary's hair? It's beastly to see it—do you hear?—beastly! Where's Pamby?" (Pamby is the unfortunate work-woman who makes and mends the family linen.)

"Here, sir."

"Pamby, what are you about now?"

No answer. Pamby, or somebody else, giggles faintly. The major flourishes his cane in a fury.

"Why the devil don't you answer me? I give you three seconds to answer me, or leave the house. One—two—three. Pamby! what are you about now?"

"If you please, sir, I'm doing something——"

"What?"

"Something particular for baby, sir."

"Drop it directly, whatever it is. Matilda! how many pair of trousers has Katie got?"

"Only three, dear." 104

"Pamby!"

"Yes, sir."

"Shorten all Miss Katie's trousers directly, including the pair she's got on. I've said, over and over again, that I won't have those frills of hers any lower down than her knees. Don't let me see them at the middle of her shins again. Nurse!"

"Yes, sir."

"Mind the crossings. Don't let the children sit down if they're hot. Don't let them speak to other children. Don't let them get playing with strange dogs. Don't let them mess their things. And, above all, don't bring Master Jack back in a perspiration. Is there anything more, before I go out?"

"No, sir."

"Matilda! Is there anything more?"

"No, dear."

"Pamby! Is there anything more?"

"No, sir."

Here the domestic colloquy ends, for the time being. Will any sensitive person—especially a person of my own sex—please to imagine what I must suffer, as a delicate single lady, at having all these family details obtruded on my attention, whether I like it or not, in the major's rasping martial voice, and in the shrill answering screams of the women inside? It is bad enough to be submitted to this sort of persecution when one is alone; but it is far worse to be also exposed to it 105
—as I am constantly—in the presence of visitors, whose conversation is necessarily interrupted, whose ears are necessarily shocked, whose very stay in my house is necessarily shortened, by Major Namby's unendurably public way of managing his private concerns.

Only the other day, my old, dear, and most valued friend Lady Malkinshaw was sitting with me, and was entering at great length into the interesting story of her second daughter's unhappy marriage engagement, and of the dignified manner in which the family ultimately broke it off. For a quarter of an hour or so our interview continued to be delightfully uninterrupted. At the end of that time, however, just as Lady Malkinshaw, with the tears in her eyes, was beginning to describe the effect of her daughter's dreadful disappointment on the poor dear girl's mind and looks, I heard the door of the major's house bang as usual; and, looking out of the window in despair, saw the major himself strut half way down the walk, stop, scratch violently at his roll of red flesh, wheel round so as to face the house, consider a little, pull his tablets out of his waistcoat-pocket, shake his head over them, and then look up at the front windows, preparatory to bawling as usual at the degraded female members of his household. Lady Malkinshaw, quite ignorant of what was coming, happened at the same moment, to be proceeding with her pathetic 106
story in these terms:

"I do assure you, my poor dear girl behaved throughout with the heroism of a martyr. When I had told her of the vile wretch's behaviour, breaking it to her as gently as I possibly could; and when

she had a little recovered, I said to her——"

("Matilda!")

The major's rasping voice sounded louder than ever as he bawled out that dreadful name, just at the wrong moment. Lady Malkinshaw started as if she had been shot. I put down the window in despair; but the glass was no protection to our ears—Major Namby can roar through a brick wall. I apologised—I declared solemnly that my next-door neighbour was mad—I entreated Lady Malkinshaw to take no notice, and to go on. That sweet woman immediately complied. I burn with indignation when I think of what followed. Every word from the Namby's garden (which I distinguish below by parentheses) came, very slightly muffled by the window, straight into my room, and mixed itself up with her ladyship's story in this inexpressibly ridiculous and impertinent manner:

"Well," my kind and valued friend proceeded, "as I was telling you, when the first natural burst of sorrow was over, I said to her——" 107

"Yes, dear Lady Malkinshaw?" I murmured, encouragingly.

"I said to her——"

("By jingo, I've forgotten something! Matilda! when I made my memorandum of errands, how many had I to do?")

"'My dearest, darling child,' I said——"

("Pamby! how many errands did your mistress give me to do?")

"I said, 'my dearest, darling child——'"

("Nurse! how many errands did your mistress give me to do?")

"'My own love,' I said——"

("Pooh! pooh! I tell you, I had four errands to do, and I've only got three of 'em written down. Check me off, all of you—I'm going to read my errands.")

"'Your own proper pride, love,' I said, 'will suggest to you——'"

("Grey powder for baby.")

—"'the necessity of making up your mind, my angel, to——'"

("Row the plumber for infamous condition of back kitchen sink.")

—"'to return all the wretch's letters, and——'"

("Speak to the haberdasher about patching Jack's shirts.")

—"'all his letters and presents, darling. You need only make them up into a parcel, and write inside——'" 108

("Matilda! is that all?")

—"'and write inside——'"

("Pamby! is that all?")

—"'and write inside——'"

("Nurse! is that all?")

"'I have my mother's sanction for making one last request to you. It is this——'"

("What have the children got for dinner to-day?")

—"'it is this: Return me my letters, as I have returned yours. You will find inside——'"

("A shoulder of mutton and onion sauce? And a devilish good dinner, too.")

The coarse wretch roared out those last shocking words cheerfully, at the top of his voice. Hitherto, Lady Malkinshaw had preserved her temper with the patience of an angel; but she began—and who can wonder?—to lose it, at last.

"It is really impossible, my dear," she said, rising from her chair, "to continue any conversation while that very intolerable person persists in talking to his family from his front garden. No! I really cannot go on—I cannot, indeed."

Just as I was apologising to my sweet friend for the second time, I observed, to my great relief (having my eye still on the window) that the odious major had apparently come to the end of his domestic business for that morning, and had made up his mind at last to relieve us of his presence. I distinctly saw him put his tablets back in his pocket, wheel round again on his heel, and march straight to the garden gate. I waited until he had his hand on the lock to open it, and then, when I felt that we were quite safe, I informed dear Lady Malkinshaw that my detestable neighbour had at last taken himself off, and, throwing open the window again to get a little air, begged and entreated her to oblige me by resuming her charming narrative. 109

"Where was I?" inquired my distinguished friend.

"You were telling me what you recommended your poor darling to write inside her enclosure," I answered.

"Ah, yes—so I was. Well, my dear, she controlled herself by an admirable effort, and wrote exactly what I told her. You will excuse a mother's partiality, I am sure—but I think I never saw her look so lovely—so mournfully lovely, I should say—as when she was writing those last lines to the man who had so basely trifled with her. The tears came into my eyes as I looked at her sweet pale cheeks; and I thought to myself——" 110

("Nurse! which of the children was sick, last time, after eating onion sauce?")

He had come back again!—the monster had come back again, from the very threshold of the garden gate, to shout that unwarrantably atrocious question in at his nursery window!

Lady Malkinshaw bounced off her chair at the first note of his horrible voice, and changed towards me instantly—as if it had been *my* fault!—in the most alarming and unexpected manner. Her ladyship's face became awfully red; her ladyship's head trembled excessively; her ladyship's eyes looked straight into mine with an indescribable fierceness.

"Why am I thus insulted?" inquired Lady Malkinshaw, with a slow and dignified sternness which froze the blood in my veins. "What do you mean by it?" continued her ladyship, with a sudden rapidity of utterance that quite took my breath away.

Before I could remonstrate with my friend for visiting her natural irritation on poor innocent me: before I could declare that I had seen the major actually open his garden gate to go away, the provoking brute's voice burst in on us again.

"Ha! yes!" we heard him growl to himself, in a kind of shameless domestic soliloquy. "Yes, yes, yes—Sophy was sick, to be sure. Curious. All Mrs. Namby's step-children have weak chests and strong stomachs. All Mrs. Namby's own children have weak stomachs and strong chests. *I* have a strong stomach *and* a strong chest.—Pamby!" 111

"I consider this," continued Lady Malkinshaw, literally glaring at me, in the fulness of her indiscriminate exasperation—"I consider this to be unwarrantable and unladylike. I beg to know ——"

"Where's Bill?" burst in the major, from below, before her ladyship could add another word. "Matilda! Nurse! Pamby! where's Bill? I didn't bid Bill good-bye—hold him up at the window, one of you!"

"My dear Lady Malkinshaw," I remonstrated, "why blame *me*? What have I done?"

"Done!" repeated her ladyship. "Done!!!—all that is most unfriendly, most unwarrantable, most unladylike——"

"Ha! ha! ha-a-a-a!" roared the major, shouting her ladyship down, and stamping about the garden in fits of fond paternal laughter. "Bill, my boy, how are you? There's a young Turk for you! Pull up his frock—I want to see his jolly legs——"

Lady Malkinshaw screamed, and rushed to the door. I sank into a chair, and clasped my hands in despair.

"Ha! ha! ha-a-a-a! What calves the dog's got! Pamby! look at his calves. Aha! bless his heart, his legs are the model of his father's! The Namby build, Matilda: the Namby build, every inch of him. Kick again, Bill—kick out, like mad. I say, ma'am! I beg your pardon, ma'am——" 112

Ma'am? I ran to the window. Was the major actually daring to address Lady Malkinshaw, as she passed, indignantly, on her way out, down my front garden? He was! The odious monster was pointing out his—his, what shall I say?—his *undraped* offspring to the notice of my outraged visitor.

"Look at him, ma'am. If you're a judge of children, look at him. There's a two-year-older for you! Ha! ha! ha-a-a-a! Show the lady your legs, Bill—kick out for the lady, you dog, kick out!"

I can write no more: I have done great violence to myself in writing so much. Further specimens of the daily outrages inflicted on me by my next-door neighbour (though I could add them by dozens) could do but little more to illustrate the intolerable nature of the grievance of which I complain. Although Lady Malkinshaw's naturally fine sense of justice suffered me to call and remonstrate the day after she left my house; although we are now faster friends than ever, how can I expect her ladyship to visit me again, after the reiterated insults to which she was exposed on the last occasion of her esteemed presence under my roof? How can I ask my niece—a young person who has been most carefully brought up—to come and stay with me, when I know that she will be taken into the major's closest domestic confidence on the first morning of her arrival, whether she likes it or not? Of all the dreary prospects, stretching before all the single ladies in the world, mine seems the most hopeless. My neighbours can't help me, and I can't help myself. The law of the land contains no provision against the habitual management of a wife and family in a front garden. Private remonstrance addressed to a man so densely impenetrable to a sense of propriety as the major, would only expose me to ridicule, and perhaps to insult. I can't leave my 113

house, for it exactly suits me, and I have bought it. The major can't leave his house, for it exactly suits him, and he has bought it. There is actually no remedy possible but the forcible removal of my military neighbour from his home; and there is but one power in the country which is strong enough to accomplish that removal—the Horse Guards, infuriated by the horrors of war. 114

CASES WORTH LOOKING AT.—II.

THE POISONED MEAL.

[From The Records of the French Courts.]

Chapter I. The Pockets.

This case takes us across the Channel to Normandy; and introduces us to a young French girl, named Marie-Françoise-Victoire Salmon.

Her father was a poor Norman labourer. Her mother died while she was a child. From an early age Marie had learnt to get her own living by going out to service. Three different mistresses tried her while she was a very young girl, and found every reason to be satisfied with her conduct. She entered her fourth place, in the family of one Monsieur Dumesnil, when she was twenty years of age. This was the turning-point in her career; and here the strange story of her life properly begins.

Among the persons who often visited Monsieur Dumesnil and his wife, was a certain Monsieur Revel, a relation of Madame Dumesnil's. He was a man of some note in his part of the country, 115
holding a responsible legal appointment at the town of Caen in Normandy; and he honoured Marie, when he first saw her at her master's house, with his special attention and approval. She had an innocent face, and a winning manner; and Monsieur Revel became almost oppressively anxious, in a strictly paternal way, that she should better her condition, by seeking service at Caen, where places were plentiful and wages higher than in the country; and where, it is also necessary to remember, Monsieur Revel himself happened to live.

Marie's own idea, however, of the best means of improving her condition was a little at variance with the idea of her disinterested adviser. Her ambition was to gain her living independently, if she could, by being a sempstress. She left the service of Monsieur Dumesnil of her own accord, without so much as the shadow of a stain on her character, and went to the old town of Bayeux to try what she could do by taking in needlework. As a means of subsistence, needlework soon proved itself to be insufficient; and she found herself thrown back again on the old resource of going out to service. Most unfortunately, as events afterwards turned out, she now called to mind Monsieur Revel's paternal advice, and resolved to seek employment as a maid-of-all-work at Caen.

She left Bayeux with the little bundle of clothes which represented all the property she had in the 116
world, on the first of August, seventeen hundred and eighty-one. It will be well to notice this date particularly, and to remember—in case some of the events of Marie's story should seem almost incredible—that it marks the period which immediately preceded the first outbreak of the French Revolution.

Among the few articles of the maid's apparel which the bundle contained, and to which it is necessary to direct attention at the outset, were *two pairs of pockets*, one of them being still in an unfinished condition. She had a third pair which she wore on her journey. In the last century, a country girl's pockets were an important and prominent part of her costume. They hung on each side of her, ready to her hand. They were sometimes very prettily embroidered, and they were almost always large and of a bright colour.

On the first of August, seventeen hundred and eighty-one, Marie left Bayeux, and early on the same day she reached Caen. Her good manners, her excellent character, and the modesty of her demands in the matter of wages, rendered it easy for her to find a situation. On the very evening of her arrival she was suited with a place; and her first night at Caen was passed under the roof of her new employers.

The family consisted of Marie's master and mistress, Monsieur and Madame Huet Duparc (both 117
highly respectable people); of two sons, aged respectively twenty-one and eleven years; of their sister, aged seventeen years; and of Monsieur and Madame de Beaulieu, the father and mother of Madame Duparc, one eighty-eight years old, the other eighty-six.

Madame Duparc explained to Marie the various duties which she was expected to perform, on the evening when she entered the house. She was to begin the day by fetching some milk—that being one of the ingredients used in preparing the hasty-pudding which formed the favourite morning meal of the old gentleman, Monsieur de Beaulieu. The hasty-pudding was always to be got ready by seven o'clock exactly. When this had been done, Marie was next required to take the infirm old lady, Madame de Beaulieu, every morning to mass. She was then to go to market, and get all the provisions that were wanted for the daily use of the family; and she was, finally, to look

to the cooking of the food, and to make herself additionally useful (with some occasional assistance from Madame Duparc and her daughter) in every remaining branch of household work. The yearly wages she was to receive for performing all these conflicting duties, amounted to precisely two pounds sterling of English money. 118

She had entered her new place on a Wednesday. On Thursday she took her first lesson in preparing the old gentleman's morning meal. One point which her mistress then particularly impressed on her was, that she was *not* to put any salt in the hasty-pudding.

On the Saturday following, when she went out to buy milk, she made a little purchase on her own account. Of course the purchase was an article of dress—a piece of fine bright orange-coloured stuff, for which she paid nearly the whole price on the spot, out of her small savings. The sum of two sous six deniers (about a penny English) was all that Marie took credit for. On her return to the house she showed the piece of stuff to Madame Duparc, and asked to be advised whether she should make an apron or a jacket of it.

The next day being Sunday, Marie marked the occasion by putting on all the little finery she had. Her pair of festive pockets, striped with blue and white, came out of her bundle along with other things. When she had put them on, she hung the old work-a-day pockets which she had worn on leaving Bayeux, to the back of a chair in her bed-chamber. This was a little room on the ground-floor, situated close to the dining-room, and perfectly easy of access to every one in the house. Long afterwards, Marie remembered how pleasantly and quietly that Sunday passed. It was the last day of happiness the poor creature was to enjoy in the house of Madame Duparc. 119

On the Monday morning, she went to fetch the milk as usual. But the milkwoman was not in the shop to serve her. After returning to the house, she proposed making a second attempt; but her mistress stopped her, saying that the milk would doubtless be sent before long. This turned out to be the case, and Marie, having cleaned the saucepan for Monsieur de Beaulieu's hasty-pudding, received from the hands of Madame Duparc, the earthen vessel containing the meal used in the house. She mixed this flour and put it into the saucepan in the presence of Madame Duparc and her daughter. She had just set the saucepan on the fire, when her mistress said, with a very remarkable abruptness:

"Have you put any salt in it?"

"Certainly not, ma'am," answered Marie, amazed by the question. "You told me yourself that I was never to put salt in it."

Upon this, Madame Duparc snatched up the saucepan without saying another word, turned to the dresser, stretched out her hand towards one of four salt-cellars which always stood there, and sprinkled salt into the saucepan—or (to speak with extreme correctness, the matter being important), if not salt something which she took for salt. 120

The hasty-pudding made, Marie poured it from the saucepan into a soup-plate which her mistress held. Madame Duparc herself then took it to Monsieur de Beaulieu. She and her daughter, and one of her sons remained with the old man, while he was eating his breakfast. Marie, left in the kitchen, prepared to clean the saucepan; but, before she could do so, she was suddenly called in two different directions, by Madame de Beaulieu, and Madame Duparc. The old lady wished to be taken to mass; and her mistress wanted to send her on a number of errands. Marie did not stop even to pour some clean water, as usual, into the saucepan. She went at once to get her instructions from Madame Duparc, and to attend on Madame de Beaulieu. Taking the old lady to church, and then running on her mistress's errands, kept her so long away from the house, that it was half-past eleven in the forenoon, before she got back to the kitchen.

The first news that met her on her return was that Monsieur de Beaulieu had been suffering, ever since nine o'clock, from a violent attack of vomiting and colic. Madame Duparc ordered her to help the old man to bed immediately; and inquired, when these directions had been followed, whether Marie felt capable of looking after him herself, or whether she would prefer that a nurse should be sent for. Being a kind-hearted, willing girl, always anxious to make herself useful, Marie replied that she would gladly undertake the nursing of the old man; and, thereupon, her bed was moved at once into Monsieur de Beaulieu's room. 121

Meanwhile, Madame Duparc fetched from a neighbouring apothecary's, one of the apprentices of the shop, to see her father. The lad was quite unfit to meet the emergency of the case, which was certainly serious enough to require the attention of his master, if not of a regularly qualified physician. Instead of applying any internal remedies, the apprentice stupidly tried blistering. This course of treatment proved utterly useless; but no better advice was called in. After he had suffered for hours without relief, Monsieur de Beaulieu began to sink rapidly towards the afternoon. At half-past five o'clock he had ceased to exist.

This shocking catastrophe, startling and suspicious as it was, did not appear to discompose the nerves of Madame Duparc. While her eldest son immediately left the house to inform his father (who had been absent in the country all day) of what had happened, she lost no time in sending for the nearest nurse to lay out the corpse of Monsieur de Beaulieu. On entering the chamber of death, the nurse found Marie there alone, praying by the old man's bedside.

"He died suddenly, did he not?" said the nurse. 122

"Very suddenly," answered Marie. "He was walking about only yesterday, in perfect health."

Soon afterwards the time came when it was customary to prepare supper. Marie went into the kitchen, mechanically, to get the meal ready. Madame Duparc, her daughter, and her youngest son, sat down to it as usual. Madame de Beaulieu, overwhelmed by the dreadful death of her husband, was incapable of joining them.

When supper was over, Marie assisted the old lady to bed. Then, worn out though she was with fatigue, she went back to the nurse to keep her company in watching by the dead body. Monsieur de Beaulieu had been kind to Marie, and had spoken gratefully of the little attentions she had shown him. She remembered this tenderly now that he was no more; and she could not find it in her heart to leave a hired mourner to be the only watcher by his death-bed. All that night she remained in the room, entirely ignorant of what was passing the while in every other part of the house—her own little bed-room included, as a matter of course.

About seven o'clock the next morning, after sitting up all night, she went back again wearily to the kitchen to begin her day's work. Her mistress joined her there, and saluted her instantly with a scolding.

"You are the most careless, slovenly girl I ever met with," said Madame Duparc. "Look at your dress; How can you expect to be decent on a Sunday, if you wear your best pair of pockets on week-days?" 123

Surely Madame Duparc's grief for the loss of her father must have been slight enough, if it did not prevent her from paying the strictest attention to her servant's pockets! Although Marie had only known the old man for a few days, she had been too deeply impressed by his illness and its fatal end, to be able to think of such a trifle as the condition of her dress. And now, of all the people in the world, it was Monsieur de Beaulieu's daughter who reminded her that she had never thought of changing her pockets, only the day after the old man's dreadful death.

"Put on your old pockets, directly, you untidy girl!" said Madame Duparc.

The old pockets were of course hanging where Marie had left them, at the back of the chair in her own room—the room which was open to any one who chose to go into it—the room which she herself had not entered during the past night. She left the kitchen to obey her mistress; and taking the old pair of pockets off the chair, tied them on as quickly as possible. From that fatal moment the friendless maid-of-all-work was a ruined girl. 124

Chapter II. The Arsenic.

On returning to the kitchen to go on with her work, the exhaustion against which Marie had hitherto fought successfully, overpowered her the moment she sat down; her heavy head drooped, her eyes closed in spite of her, and she fell into a broken, uneasy slumber. Madame Duparc and her daughter, seeing the condition she was in, undertook the preparation of the day's dinner themselves. Among the dishes which they got ready, and which they salted from the cellars on the dresser, were two different kinds of soup—one kind for themselves, made from fresh "stock"—the other, for Marie and the nurse, made from old "stock." They were engaged over their cookery, when Monsieur Duparc arrived from the country; and Marie was awakened to take the horse he had ridden to the stables, to unsaddle the animal, and to give him his feed of corn.

While she was thus engaged, Madame Duparc and her daughter remained alone in the kitchen. When she left the stable it was time for her to lay the cloth. She was told to put plates for seven persons. Only six, however, sat down to dinner. Those six were, Madame de Beaulieu, Monsieur and Madame Duparc, the youngest of their two sons, Madame Beauguillot (sister of Madame Duparc), and Monsieur Beauguillot (her son). Mademoiselle Duparc remained in the kitchen to help Marie in serving up the dinner, and only took her place at table after the soup had been put on. Her elder brother, after summoning his father home, had not returned to the house. 125

After the soup had been taken away, and while Marie was waiting at table during the eating of the second course, young Duparc complained that he felt something gritty between his teeth. His mother made precisely the same remark. Nobody else, however, agreed with them, and the subject was allowed to drop. When the second course was done with, the dessert followed, consisting of a plate of cherries. With the dessert there arrived a visitor, Monsieur Fergant, a relation of Madame Duparc's. This gentleman placed himself at table with the rest of the company.

Meanwhile, the nurse and Marie were making their dinner in the kitchen off the soup which had been specially provided for them—Marie having previously placed the dirty plates and the empty soup-tureen from the dining-room, in the scullery, as usual, to be washed at the proper time. While she and her companion were still engaged over their soup, young Duparc and his mother suddenly burst into the kitchen, followed by the other persons who had partaken of dinner.

"We are all poisoned!" cried Madame Duparc, in the greatest terror. "Good heavens! I smell burnt arsenic in the kitchen!" 126

Monsieur Fergant, the visitor, hearing these last words, politely stepped forward to echo them.

"Burnt arsenic, beyond a doubt," said Monsieur Fergant. When this gentleman was subsequently questioned on the subject, it may not be amiss to mention, that he was quite unable to say what

burnt arsenic smelt like. Neither is it altogether out of place to inquire how Madame Duparc happened to be so amazingly apt at discovering the smell of burnt arsenic? The answer to the question does not seem easy to discover.

Having settled that they were all poisoned, and having even found out (thanks to those two intelligent amateur chemists, Madame Duparc and Monsieur Fergant) the very nature of the deadly drug that had been used to destroy them, the next thing the company naturally thought of was the necessity of summoning medical help. Young Monsieur Beauguillot obligingly ran off (it was apparently a very mild case of poisoning, so far as he was concerned) to the apothecary's shop, and fetched, not the apprentice this time, but the master. The master, Monsieur Thierry, arrived in great haste, and found the dinner-eaters all complaining of nausea and pains in the stomach. He naturally asked what they had eaten. The reply was, that they had eaten nothing but soup. 127

This was, to say the least of it, rather an unaccountable answer. The company had had for dinner, besides soup, a second course of boiled meat and ragout of beef, and a dessert of cherries. Why was this plain fact concealed? Why was the apothecary's attention to be fixed exclusively on the soup? Was it because the tureen was empty, and because the alleged smell of burnt arsenic might be accounted for on the theory that the remains of the soup brought from the dining-room had been thrown on the kitchen fire? But no remains of soup came down—it had been all consumed by the guests. And what is still more remarkable, the only person in the kitchen (excepting Marie and the nurse) who could not discover the smell of burnt arsenic, was the person of all others who was professionally qualified to find it out first—the apothecary himself.

After examining the tureen and the plates, and stirring up the wood ashes on the fire, and making no sort of discovery, Monsieur Thierry turned to Marie, and asked if she could account for what had happened. She simply replied, that she knew nothing at all about it; and, thereupon, her mistress and the rest of the persons present all overwhelmed her together with a perfect torrent of questions. The poor girl, terrified by the hubbub, worn out by a sleepless night and by the hard 128
work and agitation of the day preceding it, burst into an hysterical fit of tears, and was ordered out of the kitchen to lie down and recover herself. The only person who showed her the least pity and offered her the slightest attention, was a servant-girl like herself, who lived next door, and who stole up to the room in which she was weeping alone, with a cup of warm milk and water to comfort her.

Meanwhile, the report had spread in the town that the old man, Monsieur de Beaulieu, and the whole Duparc family, had been poisoned by their servant. Madame Duparc did her best to give the rumour the widest possible circulation. Entirely forgetting, as it would seem, that she was on her own showing a poisoned woman, she roamed excitably all over the house with an audience of agitated female friends at her heels; telling the burnt-arsenic story over and over again to every fresh detachment of visitors that arrived to hear it; and finally leading the whole troop of women into the room where Marie was trying to recover herself. The poor girl was surrounded in a moment; angry faces and shrill voices met her on every side; the most insolent questions, the most extravagant accusations, assailed her; and not one word that she could say in her own defence was listened to for an instant. She had sprung up in the bed, on her knees, and was frantically entreating for permission to speak in her own defence, when a new personage 129
appeared on the scene, and stilled the clamour by his presence. This individual was a surgeon named Hébert, a friend of Madame Duparc's, who announced that he had arrived to give the family the benefit of his assistance, and who proposed to commence operations, by searching the servant's pockets without farther delay.

The instant Marie heard him make this proposal, she untied her pockets, and gave them to Surgeon Hébert with her own hands. He examined them on the spot. In one, he found some copper money and a thimble. In the other (to use his own words, given in evidence) he discovered "various fragments of bread, sprinkled over with some minute substance which was white and shining. He kept the fragments of bread, and left the room immediately without saying a word." By this course of proceeding, he gave Marie no chance of stating at the outset whether she knew of the fragments of bread being in her pocket, or whether she was totally ignorant how they came there. Setting aside, for the present, the question, whether there was really any arsenic on the crumbs at all, it would clearly have been showing the unfortunate maid-of-all-work no more than common justice to have allowed her the opportunity of speaking before the bread was carried away.

It was now seven o'clock in the evening. The next event was the arrival of another officious visitor. The new friend in need belonged to the legal profession—he was an advocate named 130
Friley. Monsieur Friley's legal instincts led him straightway to a conclusion which seriously advanced the progress of events. Having heard the statement of Madame Duparc and her daughter, he decided that it was his duty to lodge an information against Marie before the Procurator of the King, at Caen.

The Procurator of the King is, by this time, no stranger to the reader. He was the same Monsieur Revel who had taken such an amazingly strong interest in Marie's fortunes, and who had strongly advised her to try her luck at Caen. Here then, surely, was a friend found at last for the forlorn maid-of-all-work. We shall see how Monsieur Revel acted, after Friley's information had been duly lodged.

The French law of the period, and, it may be added, the commonest principles of justice also, required the Procurator to perform certain plain duties as soon as the accusation against Marie

had reached his ears.

He was, in the first place, bound to proceed immediately, accompanied by his official colleague, to the spot where the alleged crime of poisoning was supposed to have taken place. Arrived there, it was his business to ascertain for himself the condition of the persons attacked with illness; to hear their statements; to examine the rooms, the kitchen utensils, and the family 131
medicine-chest, if there happened to be one in the house; to receive any statement the accused person might wish to make; to take down her answers to his questions; and, lastly, to keep anything found on the servant (the breadcrumbs, for instance, of which Surgeon Hébert had coolly taken possession), or anything found about the house which it might be necessary to produce in evidence, in a position of absolute security, under the hand and seal of justice.

These were the plain duties which Monsieur Revel, the Procurator, was officially bound to fulfil. In the case of Marie, he not only neglected to perform any one of them, but actually sanctioned a scheme for entrapping her into prison, by sending a commissary of police to the house, in plain clothes, with an order to place her in solitary confinement. To what motive could this scandalous violation of his duties and of justice be attributed? The last we saw of Monsieur Revel, he was so benevolently disposed towards Marie that he condescended to advise her about her prospects in life, and even went the length of recommending her to seek for a situation in the very town in which he lived himself. And now, we find him so suddenly and bitterly hostile towards the former object of his patronage, that he actually lends the assistance of his high official position to sanction an accusation against her, into the truth or falsehood of which he had not made a single 132
inquiry! Can it be that Monsieur Revel's interest in Marie was, after all, not of the purest possible kind, and that the unfortunate girl proved too stubbornly virtuous to be taught what the real end was towards which the attentions of her over-benevolent adviser privately pointed? There is no evidence attaching to the case (as how should there be?) to prove this. But is there any other explanation of Monsieur Revel's conduct, which at all tends to account for the extraordinary inconsistency of it?

Having received his secret instructions, the commissary of police—a man named Bertot—proceeded to the house of Monsieur and Madame Duparc, disguised in plain clothes. His first proceeding was to order Marie to produce the various plates, dishes, and kitchen utensils which had been used at the dinner of Tuesday, the seventh of August (that being the day on which the poisoning of the company was alleged to have taken place). Marie produced a saucepan, an earthen vessel, a stewpan, and several plates piled on each other, in one of which there were the remains of some soup. These articles Bertot locked up in the kitchen cupboard, and took away the key with him. He ought to have taken the additional precaution of placing a seal on the cupboard, so as to prevent any tampering with the lock, or any treachery with a duplicate key. 133
But this he neglected to do.

His next proceeding was to tell Marie that the Procurator Revel wished to speak to her, and to propose that she should accompany him to the presence of that gentleman forthwith. Not having the slightest suspicion of any treachery, she willingly consented, and left the house with the commissary. A friend of the Duparcs, named Vassol, accompanied them.

Once out of the house, Bertot led his unsuspecting prisoner straight to the gaol. As soon as she was inside the gates, he informed her that she was arrested, and proceeded to search her person in the presence of Vassol, of the gaoler of the prison, and of a woman named Dujardin. The first thing found on her was a little linen bag, sewn to her petticoat, and containing a species of religious charm, in the shape of a morsel of the sacramental wafer. Her pockets came next under review (the pockets which Surgeon Hébert had previously searched). A little dust was discovered at the bottom of them, which was shaken out on paper, wrapped up along with the linen bag, sealed in one packet, and taken to the Procurator's office. Finally, the woman Dujardin found in Marie's bosom a little key, which she readily admitted to be the key of her own cupboard.

The search over, one last act of cruelty and injustice was all that remained to be committed for 134
that day. The unfortunate girl was placed at once in solitary confinement.

Chapter III. The Evidence.

Thus far, the case is one of suspicion only. Waiting until the end of the trial before we decide on whom that suspicion ought to rest, let us now hear the evidence by which the Duparcs and their adherents proceeded to justify their conspiracy against the liberty and the life of a friendless girl.

Having secured Marie in solitary confinement, and having thus left the house and all that it contained for a whole night at the free disposal of the Duparcs, the Procurator Revel bethought himself, the morning after the arrest of his prisoner, of the necessity of proceeding with something like official regularity. He accordingly issued his requisition to the Lieutenant-Criminel to accompany him to the house of Monsieur Duparc, attended by the medical officers and the clerk, to inquire into the circumstances under which the suspected death by poisoning of Monsieur de Beaulieu had taken place. Marie had been imprisoned on the evening of the seventh of August, and this requisition is dated on the morning of the eighth. The document betrays one remarkable informality. It mentions the death of Monsieur de Beaulieu; but is absolutely silent on the subject of the alleged poisoning of seven persons at dinner the next day. And yet, it was this 135
latter circumstance only which first directed suspicion against Marie, and which induced Friley to lodge the information against her on which the Procurator was now acting. Probably Monsieur Revel's legal acumen convinced him, at the outset, that the story of the poisoned dinner was too

weak to be relied on.

The officers of the law, accompanied by the doctors, proceeded to the house of the Duparcs on the eighth of August. After viewing the body of Monsieur de Beaulieu, the medical men were directed to open and examine it. They reported the discovery in the stomach of a reddish, brick-coloured liquid, somewhat resembling the lees of wine. The mucous membrane was detached in some places, and its internal surface was corroded. On examining the reddish liquid, they found it to contain a crystallised sediment, which, on analysation, proved to be arsenic. Upon this, the doctors delivered it as their opinion that Monsieur de Beaulieu had been poisoned, and that poison had been the cause of his death.

The event having taken this serious turn, the first duty of the Lieutenant-Criminel (according to the French law) was to send for the servant on whom suspicion rested, to question her, and to confront her with the Duparcs. He did nothing of the kind; he made no inquiry after the servant (being probably unwilling to expose his colleague, the Procurator, who had illegally arrested and illegally imprisoned her); he never examined the kitchen utensils which the Commissary had locked up; he never opened the servant's cupboard with the key that had been taken from her when she was searched in prison. All he did was to reduce the report of the doctors to writing, and to return to his office with his posse-comitatus at his heels. 136

It was necessary to summon the witnesses and examine them. But the Procurator Revel now conveniently remembered the story of the poisoned dinner, and he sent the Lieutenant-Criminel to examine the Duparcs and their friends at the private residence of the family, in consideration of the sickly condition of the eaters of the adulterated meal. It may be as well to observe, here as elsewhere, that these highly-indulged personages had none of them been sufficiently inconvenienced even to go to bed, or in any way to alter their ordinary habits.

On the afternoon of the eighth, the Lieutenant-Criminel betook himself to the house of Monsieur Duparc, to collect evidence touching the death by poison of Monsieur de Beaulieu. The first witness called was Monsieur Duparc.

This gentleman, it will be remembered, was away from home, on Monday, the sixth, when Monsieur de Beaulieu died, and only returned, at the summons of his eldest son, at half-past eleven on the forenoon of the seventh. He had nothing to depose connected with the death of his father-in-law, or with the events which might have taken place in the house on the night of the sixth and the morning of the seventh. On the other hand, he had a great deal to say about the state of his own stomach after the dinner of the seventh—a species of information not calculated to throw much light on the subject of inquiry, which was the poisoning of Monsieur de Beaulieu. 137

The old lady, Madame de Beaulieu, was next examined. She could give no evidence of the slightest importance touching the matter in hand; but, like Monsieur Duparc, she had something to say on the topic of the poisoned dinner.

Madame Duparc followed on the list of witnesses. The report of her examination—so thoroughly had she recovered from the effects of the dinner of the seventh—ran to a prodigious length. Five-sixths of it related entirely to her own sensations and suspicions, and the sensations and suspicions of her relatives and friends, after they had risen from table. As to the point at issue, the point which affected the liberty, and perhaps the life, of her unfortunate servant, she had so little to say that her testimony may be repeated here in her own words:

"The witness (Madame Duparc) deposed, that after Marie had helped Monsieur de Beaulieu to get up, she (Marie) hastened out for the milk, and, on her return with it, prepared the hasty-pudding, took it herself off the fire, and herself poured it out into the plate—then left the kitchen to accompany Madame de Beaulieu to mass. Four or five minutes after Monsieur de Beaulieu had eaten the hasty-pudding, he was seized with violent illness." 138

Short as it is, this statement contains several distinct suppressions of the truth.

First, Madame Duparc is wrong in stating that Marie fetched the milk, for it was the milkwoman who brought it to the house. Secondly, Madame Duparc conceals the fact that she handed the flour to the servant to make the hasty-pudding. Thirdly, Madame Duparc does not mention that she held the plate for the pudding to be poured into, and took it to her father. Fourthly, and most important of all, Madame Duparc altogether omits to state, that she sprinkled salt, with her own hands, over the hasty-pudding—although she had expressly informed her servant, a day or two before, that salt was never to be mixed with it. At a subsequent stage of the proceedings, she was charged with having salted the hasty-pudding herself, and she could not, and did not, deny it.

The examination of Madame Duparc ended the business on the day of the eighth. The next morning, the Lieutenant-Criminel, as politely attentive as before, returned to resume his inquiry at the private residence of Monsieur Duparc. 139

The first witness examined on the second day was Mademoiselle Duparc. She carefully followed her mother's lead—saying as little as possible about the preparation of the hasty-pudding on the morning of Monday, and as much as possible about the pain suffered by everybody after the dinner of Tuesday. Madame Beauguillot, the next witness, added her testimony, as to the state of her own digestive organs, after partaking of the same meal—speaking at such prodigious length that the poison would appear, in her case, to have produced its principal effect (and that of a stimulating kind) on her tongue. Her son, Monsieur de Beauguillot, was next examined, quite uselessly in relation to the death by poison which was the object of inquiry. The last witness was

Madame Duparc's younger son—the same who had complained of feeling a gritty substance between his teeth at dinner. In one important respect, his evidence flatly contradicted his mother's. Madame Duparc had adroitly connected Monsieur de Beaulieu's illness with the hasty-pudding, by describing the old man as having been taken ill four or five minutes after eating it. Young Duparc, on the contrary, declared that his grandfather first felt ill at nine o'clock—exactly two hours after he had partaken of his morning meal. 140

With the evidence of this last witness, the examinations at the private residence of Monsieur Duparc ended. Thus far, out of the seven persons, all related to each other, who had been called as witnesses, three (Monsieur Duparc himself, Madame Beauguillot, and her son) had not been in the house on the day when Monsieur de Beaulieu died. Of the other four, who had been present (Madame de Beaulieu, Madame Duparc, her son and her daughter), not one deposed to a single fact tending to fix on Marie any reasonable suspicion of having administered poison to Monsieur de Beaulieu.

The remaining witnesses, called before the Lieutenant-Criminel, were twenty-nine in number. Not one of them had been in the house on the Monday which was the day of the old man's death. Twenty-six of them had nothing to offer but hearsay evidence on the subject of the events which had taken place at, and after, the dinner of Tuesday. The testimony of the remaining three, namely, of Friley, who had lodged the information against Marie; of Surgeon Hébert, who had searched her pockets in the house; and of Commissary Bertot, who had searched her for the second time, after taking her to prison,—was the testimony on which the girl's enemies mainly relied for substantiating their charges by positively associating her with the possession of arsenic. 141

Let us see what amount of credit can be attached to the evidence of these three witnesses.

Friley was the first to be examined. After stating what share he had taken in bringing Marie to justice (it will be remembered that he lodged his information against her at the instance of Madame Duparc, without allowing her to say a word in her own defence), he proceeded to depose that he hunted about the bed on which the girl had lain down to recover herself, and that he discovered on the mattress seven or eight scattered grains of some substance, which resembled the powder reported to have been found on the crumbs in her pockets. He added further, that on the next day, about two hours before the body of Monsieur de Beaulieu was examined, he returned to the house; searched under the bed, with Monsieur Duparc and a soldier named Cauvin; and found there four or five grains more of the same substance which he had discovered on the mattress.

Here were two separate portions of poison found, then. What did Friley do with them? Did he seal them up immediately in the presence of witnesses, and take them to the legal authorities? Nothing of the sort. On being asked what he did with the first portion, he replied that he gave it to young Monsieur Beauguillot. Beauguillot's evidence was thereupon referred to; and it was found that he had never mentioned receiving the packet of powder from Friley. He had made himself extremely officious in examining the kitchen utensils; he had been as anxious as any one to promote the discovery of arsenic; and when he had the opportunity of producing it, if Friley were to be believed, he held it back, and said not one word about the matter. So much for the first portion of the mysterious powder, and for the credibility of Friley's evidence thus far! 142

On being questioned as to what he had done with the second portion, alleged to have been found under the bed, Friley replied that he had handed it to the doctors who opened the body, and that they had tried to discover what it was, by burning it between two copper pieces. A witness who had been present at this proceeding declared, on being questioned, that the experiment had been made with some remains of hasty-pudding scraped out of the saucepan. Here again was a contradiction, and here, once more, Friley's evidence was, to say the least of it, not to be depended on.

Surgeon Hébert followed. What had he done with the crumbs of bread scattered over with white powder, which he had found in Marie's pocket? He had, after showing them to the company in the drawing-room, exhibited them next to the apothecary, and handed them afterwards to another medical man. Being finally assured that there was arsenic on the bread, he had sealed up the crumbs, and given the packet to the legal authorities. When had he done that? On the day of his examination as a witness—the fourteenth of August. When did he find the crumbs? On the seventh. Here was the arsenic, in this case, then, passing about from hand to hand, and not sealed up, for seven days. Had Surgeon Hébert anything more to say? Yes, he had another little lot of arsenic to hand in, which a lady-friend of his had told him she had found on Marie's bed, and which, like the first lot, had been passed about privately for seven days, from hand to hand, before it was sealed up. To us, in these later and better days, it seems hardly credible that the judge should have admitted these two packets in evidence. It is, nevertheless, the disgraceful fact that he did so receive them. 143

Commissary Bertot came next. He and the man named Vassol, who had helped him to entrap Marie into prison, and to search her before she was placed in solitary confinement, were examined in succession, and contradicted each other on oath, in the flattest manner.

Bertot stated that he had discovered the dust at the bottom of her pockets; had shaken it out on paper; had placed with it the little linen bag, containing a morsel of the sacramental wafer, which had been sewn to her petticoat; had sealed the two up in one packet; and had taken the packet to the proper office. Vassol, on the other hand, swore that *he* had shaken out the pockets, and had 144

made up the packet; and that Bertot had done nothing in the matter but lend his seal. Contradicting each other in these details, both agreed that what they had found on the girl was inclosed and sealed up in *one* packet, which they had left at the office, neglecting to take such a receipt for it as might have established its identity in writing. At this stage of the proceedings the packet was sent for. Three packets appeared instead of one! Two were composed of paper, and contained dust and a little white powder. The third was the linen bag, presented without any covering at all. Vassol, bewildered by the change, declared that of these three separate objects, he could only identify one—the linen bag. In this case, it was as clear as daylight that somebody must have tampered with the single sealed packet which Bertot and Vassol swore to having left at the office. No attempt, however, was made to investigate this circumstance; and the case for the prosecution—so far as the accusation of poisoning was concerned—closed with the examination of Bertot and Vassol.

Such was the evidence produced in support of a charge which involved nothing less than the life or death of a human being. 145

Chapter IV. The Sentence.

While the inquiry was in course of progress, various details connected with it found their way out of doors. The natural sense of justice among the people which had survived the corruptions of the time, was aroused to assert itself on behalf of the maid-of-all-work. The public voice spoke as loudly as it dared, in those days, in Marie's favour, and in condemnation of the conspiracy against her.

People persisted, from the first, in inquiring how it was that arsenic had got into the house of Monsieur Duparc; and rumour answered, in more than one direction, that a member of the family had purchased the poison a short time since, and that there were persons in the town who could prove it. To the astonishment of every one, no steps were taken by the legal authorities to clear up this report, and to establish the truth or the falsehood of it, before the trial. Another circumstance, of which also no explanation was attempted, filled the public mind with natural suspicion. This was the disappearance of the eldest son of Monsieur and Madame Duparc. On the day of his grandfather's sudden death, he had been sent, as may be remembered, to bring his father back from the country; and, from that time forth, he had never reappeared at the house, and nobody could say what had become of him. Was it not natural to connect together the 146
rumours of purchased poison and the mysterious disappearance of this young man? Was it not utterly inconsistent with any proceedings conducted in the name of justice to let these suspicious circumstances exist, without making the slightest attempt to investigate and to explain them?

But, apart from all other considerations, the charge against Marie, was on the face of it preposterously incredible. A friendless young girl arrives at a strange town, possessing excellent testimonials to her character, and gets a situation in a family every member of which is utterly unknown to her until she enters the house. Established in her new place, she instantly conceives the project of poisoning the whole family, and carries it out in five days from the time when she first took her situation, by killing one member of the household, and producing suspicious symptoms of illness in the cases of all the rest. She commits this crime having nothing to gain by it; and she is so inconceivably reckless of detection that she scatters poison about the bed on which she lies down, leaves poison sticking to crumbs in her pockets, puts those pockets on when her mistress tells her to do so, and hands them over without a moment's hesitation to the first person who asks permission to search them. What mortal evidence could substantiate such a wild charge as this? How does the evidence actually presented substantiate it? No shadow of proof 147
that she had purchased arsenic is offered, to begin with. The evidence against her is evidence which attempts to associate her with the actual possession of poison. What is it worth? In the first place, the witnesses contradict each other. In the second place, in no one case in which powdered substances were produced in evidence against her, had those powdered substances been so preserved as to prevent their being tampered with. Two packets of the powder pass about from hand to hand for seven days; two have been given to witnesses who can't produce them, or account for what has become of them; and one, which the witnesses who made it up swear to as a single packet, suddenly expands into three when it is called for in evidence!

Careless as they were of assuming even the external decencies of justice, the legal authorities, and their friends the Duparcs, felt that there would be some risk in trying their victim for her life on such evidence as this, in a large town like Caen. It was impossible to shift their ground and charge her with poisoning accidentally; for they either could not, or would not, account on ordinary grounds for the presence of arsenic in the house. And, even if this difficulty were overcome, and if it were alleged that arsenic purchased for killing vermin, had been carelessly placed in one of the saltcellars on the dresser, Madame Duparc could not deny that her own 148
hands had salted the hasty-pudding on the Monday, and that her servant had been too ill through exhaustion to cook the dinner on the Tuesday. Even supposing there were no serious interests of the vilest kind at stake, which made the girl's destruction a matter of necessity, it was clearly impossible to modify the charge against her. One other alternative remained—the alternative of adding a second accusation which might help to strengthen the first, and to degrade Marie in the estimation of those inhabitants of the town who were now disposed to sympathise with her.

The poor girl's character was so good, her previous country life had been so harmless, that no hint or suggestion for a second charge against her could be found in her past history. If her enemies were to succeed, it was necessary to rely on pure invention. Having hesitated before no

extremes of baseness and falsehood, thus far, they were true to themselves in regard to any vile venture which remained to be tried.

A day or two after the examination of the witnesses called to prove the poisoning had been considered complete, the public of Caen were amazed to hear that certain disclosures had taken place which would render it necessary to try Marie, on a charge of theft as well as of poisoning. She was now not only accused of the murder of Monsieur de Beaulieu, but of robbing her former 149
mistress, Madame Dumesnil (a relation, be it remembered, of Monsieur Revel's), in the situation she occupied before she came to Caen; of robbing Madame Duparc; and of robbing the shopwoman from whom she had bought the piece of orange-coloured stuff, the purchase of which is mentioned in an early part of this narrative.

There is no need to hinder the progress of the story by entering into details in relation to this second atrocious charge. When the reader is informed that the so-called evidence in support of the accusation of theft was got up by Procurator Revel, by Commissary Bertot, and by Madame Duparc, he will know beforehand what importance to attach to it, and what opinion to entertain on the question of the prisoner's innocence or guilt.

The preliminary proceedings were now considered to be complete. During their progress, Marie had been formally interrogated, in her prison, by the legal authorities. Fearful as her situation was, the poor girl seems to have maintained self-possession enough to declare her innocence of poisoning, and her innocence of theft, firmly. Her answers, it is needless to say, availed her nothing. No legal help was assigned to her; no such institution as a jury was in existence in France. Procurator Revel collected the evidence, Procurator Revel tried the case, Procurator Revel delivered the sentence. Need the reader be told that Marie's irresponsible judge and 150
unscrupulous enemy had no difficulty whatever in finding her guilty? She had been arrested on the seventh of August, seventeen hundred and eighty-one. Her doom was pronounced on the seventeenth of April, seventeen hundred and eighty-two. Throughout the whole of that interval she remained in prison.

The sentence was delivered in the following terms. It was written, printed, and placarded in Caen; and it is here translated from the original French:

"The Procurator Royal of the Bailiwick and civil and criminal Bench and Presidency of Caen, having taken cognizance of the documents concerning the trial specially instituted against Marie-Françoise-Victoire-Salmon, accused of poisoning; the said documents consisting of an official report of the capture of the said Marie-Françoise-Victoire-Salmon on the seventh of August last, together with other official reports, &c.,

"Requires that the prisoner shall be declared duly convicted,

"I. Of having, on the Monday morning of the sixth of August last, cooked some hasty-pudding for Monsieur Paisant de Beaulieu, father-in-law of Monsieur Huet-Duparc, in whose house the prisoner had lived in the capacity of servant from the first day of the said month of August; and of having put arsenic in the said hasty-pudding while cooking it, by which arsenic the said Monsieur 151
de Beaulieu died poisoned, about six o'clock on the same evening.

"II. Of having on the next day, Tuesday, the seventh of August last, put arsenic into the soup which was served, at noon, at the table of Monsieur and Madame Duparc, her employers, in consequence of which all those persons who sat at table and eat of the said soup were poisoned and made dangerously ill, to the number of seven.

"III. Of having been discovered with arsenic in her possession, which arsenic was found on the said Tuesday, in the afternoon, not only in the pockets of the prisoner, but upon the mattress of the bed on which she was resting; the said arsenic having been recognised as being of the same nature and precisely similar to that which the guests discovered to have been put into their soup, as also to that which was found the next day, in the body of the aforesaid Monsieur de Beaulieu, and in the saucepan in which the hasty-pudding had been cooked, of which the aforesaid Monsieur de Beaulieu had eaten.

"IV. Of being *strongly suspected* of having put some of the same arsenic into a plate of cherries which she served to Madame de Beaulieu, on the same Tuesday morning, and again on the afternoon of the same day at the table of Monsieur and Madame Duparc. 152

"V. Of having, at the period of Michaelmas, seventeen hundred and eighty, committed different robberies at the house of Monsieur Dumesnil, where she lived in the capacity of servant, and notably of stealing a sheet, of which she made herself a petticoat and an apron.

"VI. Of having, at the beginning of the month of August last, stolen, in the house of Monsieur Huet-Duparc, the different articles enumerated at the trial, and which were found locked up in her cupboard.

"VII. Of being *strongly suspected* of stealing, at the beginning of the said month of August, from the woman Lefévre, a piece of orange-coloured stuff.

"For punishment and reparation of which offences, she, the said Marie-Françoise-Victoire-Salmon, shall be condemned to make atonement, in her shift, with a halter round her neck, holding in her hands a burning wax candle of the weight of two pounds, before the principal gate and entrance of the church of St. Peter, to which she shall be taken and led by the executioner of criminal sentences, who will tie in front of her and behind her back, a placard, on which shall be

written in large characters, these words:—*Poisoner and Domestic Thief*. And there, being on her knees, she shall declare that she has wickedly committed the said robberies and poisonings, for which she repents and asks pardon of God and Justice. This done, she shall be led by the said executioner to the square of the market of Saint Saviour's, to be there fastened to a stake with a chain of iron, and to be burnt alive; her body to be reduced to ashes, and the ashes to be cast to the winds; her goods to be acquired and confiscated to the king, or to whomsoever else they may belong. Said goods to be charged with a fine of ten livres to the king, in the event of the confiscation not turning to the profit of his Majesty. 153

"Required, additionally, that the said prisoner shall be previously submitted to the Ordinary and Extraordinary Torture, to obtain information of her accomplices, and notably of those who either sold to her or gave to her the arsenic found in her possession. Order hereby given for the printing and placarding of this sentence, in such places as shall be judged fit. Deliberated at the bar, this seventeenth April, seventeen hundred and eighty-two.

"(Signed) Revel."

On the next day, the eighteenth, this frightful sentence was formally confirmed.

The matter had now become public, and no one could prevent the unfortunate prisoner from claiming whatever rights the law still allowed her. She had the privilege of appealing against her sentence before the parliament of Rouen. And she appealed accordingly; being transferred, as directed by the law in such cases, from the prison at Caen to the prison at Rouen, to await the decision of the higher tribunal. 154

On the seventeenth of May the Rouen parliament delivered its judgment, and confirmed the original sentence.

There was some difficulty, at first, in making the unhappy girl understand that her last chance for life had failed her. When the fact that her sentence was ordered to be carried out was at length impressed on her mind, she sank down with her face on the prison floor—then started up on her knees, passionately shrieking to Heaven to have pity on her, and to grant her the justice and the protection which men denied. Her agitation at the frightful prospect before her was so violent, her screams of terror were so shrill and piercing, that all the persons connected with the management of the prison hurried together to her cell. Among the number were three priests, who were accustomed to visit the prisoners and to administer spiritual consolation to them. These three men mercifully set themselves to soothe the mental agony from which the poor creature was suffering. When they had partially quieted her, they soon found her willing and anxious to answer their questions. They inquired carefully into the main particulars of her sad story; and all three came to the same conclusion, that she was innocent. Seeing the impression she had produced on them, she caught, in her despair, at the idea that they might be able to preserve her life; and the dreadful duty devolved on them of depriving her of this last hope. After the confirmation of the sentence, all that they could do was to prove their compassion by preparing her for eternity. 155

On the 26th of May, the priests spoke their last words of comfort to her soul. She was taken back again, to await the execution of her sentence in the prison of Caen. The day was at last fixed for her death by burning, and the morning came when the Torture-Chamber was opened to receive her.

Chapter V. Hushed-up.

The saddest part of Marie's sad story now remains to be told.

One resource was left her, by employing which it was possible, at the last moment, to avert for a few months the frightful prospect of the torture and the stake. The unfortunate girl might stoop, on her side, to use the weapons of deception against her enemies, and might defame her own character by pleading pregnancy. That one miserable alternative was all that now remained; and, in the extremity of mortal terror, with the shadow of the executioner on her prison, and with the agony of approaching torment and death at her heart, the forlorn creature accepted it. If the law of strict morality must judge her in this matter without consideration, and condemn her without appeal, the spirit of Christian mercy—remembering how sorely she was tried, remembering the frailty of our common humanity, remembering the warning word which forbade us to judge one another—may open its sanctuary of tenderness to a sister in affliction, and may offer her the tribute of its pity, without limit and without blame. 156

The plea of pregnancy was admitted, and, at the eleventh hour, the period of the execution was deferred. On the day when her ashes were to have been cast to the winds, she was still in her prison, a living, breathing woman. Her limbs were spared from the torture, her body was released from the stake, until the twenty-ninth of July, seventeen hundred and eighty-two. On that day her reprieve was to end, and the execution of her sentence was absolutely to take place.

During the short period of grace which was now to elapse, the situation of the friendless girl, accused of such incredible crimes and condemned to so awful a doom, was discussed far and wide in French society. The case became notorious beyond the limits of Caen. The report of it spread by way of Rouen, from mouth to mouth, till it reached Paris; and from Paris it penetrated into the palace of the King at Versailles. That unhappy man, whose dreadful destiny it was to pay the penalty which the long and noble endurance of the French people had too mercifully 157

abstained from inflicting on his guilty predecessors, had then lately mounted the fatal steps of the throne. Louis the Sixteenth was sovereign of France when the story of the poor servant-girl obtained its first court-circulation at Versailles.

The conduct of the King, when the main facts of Marie's case came to his ears, did all honour to his sense of duty and his sense of justice. He instantly despatched his Royal order to suspend the execution of the sentence. The report of Marie's fearful situation had reached him so short a time before the period appointed for her death, that the Royal mandate was only delivered to the parliament of Rouen on the twenty-sixth of July.

The girl's life now hung literally on a thread. An accident happening to the courier, any delay in fulfilling the wearisome official formalities proper to the occasion—and the execution might have taken its course. The authorities at Rouen, feeling that the King's interference implied a rebuke of their inconsiderate confirmation of the Caen sentence, did their best to set themselves right for the future by registering the Royal order on the day when they received it. The next morning, the twenty-seventh, it was sent to Caen; and it reached the authorities there on the twenty-eighth. 158

That twenty-eighth of July, seventeen hundred and eighty-two, fell on a Sunday. Throughout the day and night the order lay in the office unopened. Sunday was a holiday, and Procurator Revel was not disposed to occupy it by so much as five minutes, performance of week-day work.

On Monday, the twenty-ninth, the crowd assembled to see the execution. The stake was set up, the soldiers were called out, the executioner was ready. All the preliminary horror of the torturing and burning was suffered to darken round the miserable prisoner, before the wretches in authority saw fit to open the message of mercy and to deliver it at the prison-gate.

She was now saved, as if by a miracle, for the second time! But the cell-door was still closed on her. The only chance of ever opening it—the only hope of publicly asserting her innocence, lay in appealing to the King's justice by means of a written statement of her case, presenting it exactly as it stood in all its details, from the beginning at Madame Duparc's to the end in the prison of Caen. The production of such a document as this was beset with obstacles; the chief of them being the difficulty of gaining access to the voluminous reports of the evidence given at the trial, which were only accessible in those days to persons professionally connected with the courts of law. If Marie's case was to be placed before the King, no man in France but a lawyer could 159 undertake the duty with the slightest chance of serving the interests of the prisoner and the interests of truth.

In this disgraceful emergency a man was found to plead the girl's cause, whose profession secured to him the privilege of examining the evidence against her. This man—a barrister, named Lecauchois—not only undertook to prepare a statement of the case from the records of the court—but further devoted himself to collecting money for Marie, from all the charitably-disposed inhabitants of the town. It is to be said to his credit that he honestly faced the difficulties of his task, and industriously completed the document which he had engaged to furnish. On the other hand, it must be recorded to his shame, that his motives were interested throughout, and that with almost incredible meanness he paid himself for the employment of his time by putting the greater part of the sum which he had collected for his client in his own pocket. With her one friend, no less than with all her enemies, it seems to have been Marie's hard fate to see the worst side of human nature, on every occasion when she was brought into contact with her fellow-creatures.

The statement pleading for the revision of Marie's trial was sent to Paris. An eminent barrister at the Court of Requests framed a petition from it, the prayer of which was granted by the King. Acting under the Royal order, the judges of the Court of Requests furnished themselves with the 160 reports of the evidence as drawn up at Caen; and after examining the whole case, unanimously decided that there was good and sufficient reason for the revision of the trial. The order to that effect was not issued to the parliament of Rouen before the twenty-fourth of May, seventeen hundred and eighty-four—nearly two years after the King's mercy had saved Marie from the executioner. Who can say how slowly that long, long time must have passed to the poor girl who was still languishing in her prison?

The Rouen parliament, feeling that it was held accountable for its proceedings to a high court of judicature, acting under the direct authority of the King himself, recognised at last, readily enough, that the interests of its own reputation and the interests of rigid justice were now intimately bound up together; and applied itself impartially, on this occasion at least, to the consideration of Marie's case.

As a necessary consequence of this change of course, the authorities of Caen began, for the first time, to feel seriously alarmed for themselves. If the parliament of Rouen dealt fairly by the prisoner, a fatal exposure of the whole party would be the certain result. Under these circumstances, Procurator Revel and his friends sent a private requisition to the authorities at Rouen, conjuring them to remember that the respectability of their professional brethren was at 161 stake, and suggesting that the legal establishment of Marie's innocence was the error of all others which it was now most urgently necessary to avoid. The parliament of Rouen was, however, far too cautious, if not too honest, to commit itself to such an atrocious proceeding as was here plainly indicated. After gaining as much time as possible by prolonging their deliberations to the utmost, the authorities resolved on adopting a middle course, which on the one hand should not actually establish the prisoner's innocence, and, on the other, should not

publicly expose the disgraceful conduct of the prosecution at Caen. Their decree, not issued until the twelfth of March, seventeen hundred and eighty-five, annulled the sentence of Procurator Revel on technical grounds; suppressed the further publication of the statement of Marie's case, which had been drawn out by the advocate Lecauchois, as libellous towards Monsieur Revel and Madame Duparc; and announced that the prisoner was ordered to remain in confinement until more ample information could be collected relating to the doubtful question of her innocence or her guilt. No such information was at all likely to present itself (more especially after the only existing narrative of the case had been suppressed); and the practical effect of the decree, therefore, was to keep Marie in prison for an indefinite period, after she had been illegally deprived of her liberty already from August, seventeen hundred and eighty-one, to March, seventeen hundred and eighty-five. Who shall say that the respectable classes did not take good care of their respectability on the eve of the French Revolution! 162

Marie's only hope of recovering her freedom, and exposing her unscrupulous enemies to the obloquy and the punishment which they richly deserved, lay in calling the attention of the higher tribunals of the capital to the cruelly cunning decree of the parliament of Rouen. Accordingly, she once more petitioned the throne. The King referred the document to his council; and the council issued an order submitting the Rouen decree to the final investigation of the parliament of Paris.

At last, then, after more than three miserable years of imprisonment, the victim of Madame Duparc and Procurator Revel had burst her way through all intervening obstacles of law and intricacies of office, to the judgment-seat of that highest law-court in the country, which had the final power of ending her long sufferings and of doing her signal justice on her adversaries of all degrees. The parliament of Paris was now to estimate the unutterable wrong that had been inflicted on her; and the eloquent tongue of one of the first advocates of that famous bar was to plead her cause openly before God, the king, and the country. 163

The pleading of Monsieur Fournel (Marie's counsel) before the parliament of Paris, remains on record. At the outset, he assumes the highest ground for the prisoner. He disclaims all intention of gaining her liberty by taking the obvious technical objections to the illegal and irregular sentences of Caen and Rouen. He insists on the necessity of vindicating her innocence legally and morally before the world, and of obtaining the fullest compensation that the law allows for the merciless injuries which the original prosecution had inflicted on his client. In pursuance of this design, he then proceeds to examine the evidence of the alleged poisoning and the alleged robbery, step by step, pointing out in the fullest detail the monstrous contradictions and improbabilities which have been already briefly indicated in this narrative. The course thus pursued, with signal clearness and ability, leads, as every one who has followed the particulars of the case from the beginning will readily understand, to a very serious result. The arguments for the defence cannot assert Marie's innocence without shifting the whole weight of suspicion, in the matter of Monsieur de Beaulieu's death by poisoning, on to the shoulders of her mistress, Madame Duparc.

It is necessary, in order to prepare the reader for the extraordinary termination of the proceedings, to examine this question of suspicion in some of its most striking details. 164

The poisoning of Monsieur de Beaulieu may be accepted, in consideration of the medical evidence, as a proved fact, to begin with. The question that remains is, whether that poisoning was accidental or premeditated. In either case, the evidence points directly at Madame Duparc, and leads to the conclusion that she tried to shift the blame of the poisoning (if accidental) and the guilt of it (if premeditated) from herself to her servant.

Suppose the poisoning to have been accidental. Suppose arsenic to have been purchased for some legitimate domestic purpose, and to have been carelessly left in one of the salt-cellars, on the dresser—who salts the hasty-pudding? Madame Duparc. Who—assuming that the dinner next day really contained some small portion of poison, just enough to swear by—prepared that dinner? Madame Duparc and her daughter, while the servant was asleep. Having caused the death of her father, and having produced symptoms of illness in herself and her guests, by a dreadful accident, how does the circumstantial evidence further show that Madame Duparc tried to fix the responsibility of that accident on her servant, before she openly charged the girl with poisoning?

In the first place, Madame Duparc is the only one of the dinner-party who attributes the general uneasiness to poison. She not only does this, but she indicates the kind of poison used, and declares in the kitchen that it is burnt,—so as to lead to the inference that the servant, who has removed the dishes, has thrown some of the poisoned food on the fire. Here is a foregone conclusion on the subject of arsenic in Madame Duparc's mind, and an inference in connection with it, directed at the servant by Madame Duparc's lips. In the second place, if any trust at all is to be put in the evidence touching the finding of arsenic on or about Marie's person, that trust must be reposed in the testimony of Surgeon Hébert, who first searched the girl. Where does he find the arsenic and the bread crumbs? In Marie's pockets. Who takes the most inexplicably officious notice of such a trifle as Marie's dress, at the most shockingly inappropriate time, when the father of Madame Duparc lies dead in the house? Madame Duparc herself. Who tells Marie to take off her Sunday pockets, and sends her into her own room (which she herself has not entered during the night, and which has been open to the intrusion of any one else in the house) to tie on the very pockets in which the arsenic is found? Madame Duparc. Who put the arsenic into the pockets? Is it jumping to a conclusion to answer once more—Madame Duparc? 165

Thus far we have assumed that the mistress attempted to shift the blame of a fatal accident on to

the shoulders of the servant. Do the facts bear out that theory, or do they lead to the suspicion that the woman was a parricide, and that she tried to fix on the friendless country girl the guilt of her dreadful crime? 166

If the poisoning of the hasty-pudding (to begin with) was accidental, the salting of it, through which the poisoning was, to all appearance, effected, must have been a part of the habitual cookery of the dish. So far, however, from this being the case, Madame Duparc had expressly warned her servant not to use salt; and only used the salt (or the arsenic) herself, after asking a question which implied a direct contradiction of her own directions, and the inconsistency of which she made no attempt whatever to explain. Again, when her father was taken ill, if Madame Duparc had been only the victim of an accident, would she have remained content with no better help than that of an apothecary's boy? would she not have sent, as her father grew worse, for the best medical assistance which the town afforded? The facts show that she summoned just help enough, barely to save appearances, and no more. The facts show that she betrayed a singular anxiety to have the body laid out as soon as possible after life was extinct. The facts show that she maintained an unnatural composure on the day of the death. These are significant circumstances. They speak for themselves independently of the evidence given afterwards, in which she and her child contradicted each other as to the time that elapsed when the old man had eaten his fatal meal, before he was taken ill. Add to these serious facts the mysterious disappearance from the house of the eldest son, which was never accounted for; and the rumour of purchased poison, which was never investigated. Consider, besides, whether the attempt to sacrifice the servant's life be not more consistent with the ruthless determination of a criminal, than with the terror of an innocent woman who shrinks from accepting the responsibility of a frightful accident—and determine, at the same time, whether the infinitesimal amount of injury done by the poisoned dinner can be most probably attributed to lucky accident, or to premeditated doctoring of the dishes with just arsenic enough to preserve appearances, and to implicate the servant without too seriously injuring the company on whom she waited. Give all these serious considerations their due weight; then look back to the day of Monsieur de Beaulieu's death: and say if Madame Duparc was the victim of a dreadful accident, or the perpetrator of an atrocious crime! 167

That she was one or the other, and that, in either case, she was the originator of the vile conspiracy against her servant which these pages disclose, was the conclusion to which Monsieur Fournel's pleading on his client's behalf inevitably led. That pleading satisfactorily demonstrated Marie's innocence of poisoning and theft, and her fair claim to the fullest legal compensation for the wrong inflicted on her. On the twenty-third of May, seventeen hundred and eighty-six, the parliament of Paris issued its decree, discharging her from the remotest suspicion of guilt, releasing her from her long imprisonment, and authorizing her to bring an action for damages against the person or persons who had falsely accused her of murder and theft. The truth had triumphed, and the poor servant-girl had found laws to protect her at last. 168

Under these altered circumstances, what happened to Madame Duparc? What happened to Procurator Revel and his fellow-conspirators? What happened to the authorities of the parliament of Rouen?

Nothing.

The premonitory rumblings of that great earthquake of nations which History calls the French Revolution, were, at this time, already beginning to make themselves heard; and any public scandal which affected the wealthier and higher classes involved a serious social risk, the importance of which no man in France could then venture to estimate. If Marie claimed the privilege which a sense of justice, or rather a sense of decency, had forced the parliament of Paris to concede to her,—and, through her counsel, she did claim it,—the consequences of the legal inquiry into her case which her demand for damages necessarily involved, would probably be the trying of Madame Duparc, either for parricide, or for homicide by misadventure; the dismissal of Procurator Revel from the functions which he had disgracefully abused; and the suspension from office of the authorities at Caen and Rouen, who had in various ways forfeited public confidence by aiding and abetting him. 169

Here, then, was no less a prospect in view than the disgrace of a respectable family, and the dishonouring of the highest legal functionaries of two important provincial towns! And for what end was the dangerous exposure to be made? Merely to do justice to the daughter of a common day-labourer, who had been illegally sentenced to torture and burning, and illegally confined in prison for nearly five years. To make a wholesale sacrifice of her superiors, no matter how wicked they might be, for the sake of giving a mere servant-girl compensation for the undeserved obloquy and misery of many years, was too preposterous and too suicidal an act of justice to be thought of for a moment. Accordingly, when Marie was prepared to bring her action for damages, the lawyers laid their heads together, in the interests of society. It was found possible to put her out of court at once and for ever, by taking a technical objection to the proceedings in which she was plaintiff, at the very outset. This disgraceful means of escape once discovered, the girl's guilty persecutors instantly took advantage of it. She was formally put out of court, without the possibility of any further appeal. Procurator Revel and the other authorities retained their distinguished legal positions; and the question of the guilt or innocence of Madame Duparc, in the matter of her father's death, remains a mystery which no man can solve to this day. 170

After recording this scandalous termination of the legal proceedings, it is gratifying to be able to conclude the story of Marie's unmerited sufferings with a picture of her after-life which leaves an

agreeable impression on the mind.

If popular sympathy, after the servant-girl's release from prison, could console her for the hard measure of injustice under which she had suffered so long and so unavailingly, that sympathy was now offered to her heartily and without limit. She became quite a public character in Paris. The people followed her in crowds wherever she went. A subscription was set on foot, which, for the time at least, secured her a comfortable independence. Friends rose up in all directions to show her such attention as might be in their power; and the simple country girl, when she was taken to see the sights of Paris, actually beheld her own name placarded in the showmen's bills, and her presence advertised as the greatest attraction that could be offered to the public. When, in due course of time, all this excitement had evaporated, Marie married prosperously, and the government granted her its licence to open a shop for the sale of stamped papers. The last we hear of her is, that she was a happy wife and mother, and that she performed every duty of life in such a manner as to justify the deep interest which had been universally felt for her by the people of France. 171

Her story is related here, not only because it seemed to contain some elements of interest in itself, but also because the facts of which it is composed may claim to be of some little historical importance, as helping to expose the unendurable corruptions of society in France before the Revolution. It may not be amiss for those persons whose historical point of view obstinately contracts its range to the Reign of Terror, to look a little farther back—to remember that the hard case of oppression here related had been, for something like one hundred years, the case (with minor changes of circumstance) of the forlorn many against the powerful few, all over France—and then to consider whether there was not a reason and a necessity, a dreadful last necessity, for the French Revolution. That Revolution has expiated, and is still expiating, its excesses, by political failures, which all the world can see. But the social good which it indisputably effected remains to this day. Take, as an example, the administration of justice in France at the present time. Whatever its shortcomings may still be, no innocent French woman could be treated, now, as an innocent French woman was once treated at a period so little remote from our own time as the end of the last century. 172 173

SKETCHES OF CHARACTER.-VI.

MY SPINSTERS.

[Introduced by an Innocent Old Man.]

My young bachelor friends, suspend your ordinary avocations for a few minutes and listen to me. I am a benevolent old gentleman, residing in a small country town, possessing a comfortable property, a devoted housekeeper, and some charming domestic animals. I have no wife, no children, no poor relations, no cares, and nothing to do. I am a nice, harmless, idle old man; and I want to have a word with you in confidence, my worthy young bachelor friends.

I have a mania. Is it saving money? No. Good living? No. Music? Smoking? Angling? Pottery? Pictures? No, no, no,—nothing of the selfish sort. My mania is as amiable as myself: it contemplates nothing less than the future happiness of all the single ladies of my acquaintance. I call them My Spinsters; and the one industrious object of my idle existence is to help them to a matrimonial settlement in life. In my own youth I missed the chance of getting a wife, as I have always firmly believed, for want of meeting with a tender-hearted old gentleman like myself to help me to the necessary spinster. It is possibly this reflection which originally led to the formation of the benevolent mania that now possesses me. Perhaps sheer idleness, a gallant turn of mind, and living in a small country town, have had something to do with it also. You see I shirk nothing. I do not attempt any deception as to the motive which induces me to call you together. I appear before you in the character of an amateur matrimonial agent having a few choice spinsters to dispose of; and I can wait patiently, my brisk young bachelor friends, until I find that you are ready to make me a bid. 174

Shall we proceed at once to business? Shall we try some soft and sentimental Spinsters to begin with? I am anxious to avoid mistakes at the outset, and I think softness and sentiment are perhaps the safest attractions to start upon. Let us begin with the six unmarried sisters of my friend Mr. Bettifer.

I became acquainted, gentlemen, with Mr. Bettifer in our local reading-rooms, immediately after he came to settle in my neighbourhood. He was then a very young man, in delicate health, with a tendency to melancholy and a turn for metaphysics. I profited by his invitation as soon as he was kind enough to ask me to call on him; and I found that he lived with his six sisters, under the following agreeable circumstances. 175

On the morning of my visit, I was shown into a very long room, with a piano at one end of it and an easel at another. Mr. Bettifer was alone at his writing-desk when I came in. I apologised for interrupting him, but he very politely assured me that my presence acted as an inestimable relief to his mind, which had been stretched—to use his own strong language—on the metaphysical

rack all the morning. He gave his forehead a violent rub as he mentioned this circumstance, and we sat down and looked seriously at one another, in silence. Though not at all a bashful old man, I began nevertheless to feel a little confused at this period of the interview.

"I know no question so embarrassing," began Mr. Bettifer, by way of starting the talk pleasantly, "as the question on which I have been engaged this morning—I refer to the subject of our own Personality. Here am I, and there are you—let us say two Personalities. Are we a permanent, or are we a transient thing? There is the problem, my dear sir, which I have been vainly trying to solve since breakfast-time. Can you (metaphysically speaking) be one and the same person, for example, for two moments together, any more than two successive moments can be one and the same moment?—My sister Kitty." 176

The door opened as my host propounded this alarming dilemma, and a tall young lady glided serenely into the room. I rose and bowed. The tall young lady sank softly into a chair opposite me. Mr. Bettifer went on:

"You may tell me that our substance is constantly changing. I grant you that; but do you get me out of the difficulty? Not the least in the world. For it is not substance, but——My sister Maria."

The door opened again. A second tall young lady glided in, and sank into a chair by her sister's side. Mr. Bettifer went on:

"As I was about to remark, it is not substance, but consciousness, which constitutes Personality. Now what is the nature of consciousness?—My sisters Emily and Jane."

The door opened for the third time, and two tall young ladies glided in, and sank into two chairs by the sides of their two sisters. Mr. Bettifer went on:

"The nature of consciousness I take to be that it cannot be the same in any two moments, nor consequently the personality constituted by it. Do you grant me that?"

Lost in metaphysical bewilderment, I granted it directly. Just as I said yes, the door opened again, a fifth tall young lady glided in, and assisted in lengthening the charming row formed by her sisters. Mr. Bettifer murmured indicatively, "My sister Elizabeth," and made a note of what I had granted him, on the manuscript by his side. 177

"What lovely weather," I remarked, to change the conversation.

"Beautiful!" answered five melodious voices.

The door opened again.

"Beautiful, indeed!" said a sixth melodious voice.

"My sister Harriet," said Mr. Bettifer, finishing his note of my metaphysical admission.

They all sat in one fascinating row. It was like being at a party. I felt uncomfortable in my coloured trowsers—more uncomfortable still, when Mr. Bettifer's sixth sister begged that she might not interrupt our previous conversation.

"We are so fond of metaphysical subjects," said Miss Elizabeth.

"Except that we think them rather exhausting for dear Alfred," said Miss Jane.

"Dear Alfred!" repeated the Misses Emily, Maria, and Kitty, in mellifluous chorus.

Not having a heart of stone, I was so profoundly touched, that I would have tried to resume the subject. But, Mr. Bettifer waved his hand impatiently, and declared that my admission had increased the difficulties of the original question until they had become quite insuperable. I had, it appeared, innocently driven him to the conclusion, that our present self was not our yesterday's self, but another self mistaken for it, which, in its turn, had no connection with the self of to-morrow. As this certainly sounded rather unsatisfactory, I agreed with Mr. Bettifer that we had exhausted that particular view of the subject, and that we had better defer starting another until a future opportunity. An embarrassing pause followed our renunciation of metaphysics for the day. Miss Elizabeth broke the silence by asking me if I was fond of pictures; and before I could say Yes, Miss Harriet followed her by asking me if I was fond of music. 178

"Will you show your picture, dear?" said Miss Elizabeth to Miss Harriet.

"Will you sing, dear?" said Miss Harriet to Miss Elizabeth.

"Do, dear!" said the Misses Jane and Emily to Miss Elizabeth.

"Do, dear!" said the Misses Maria and Kitty to Miss Harriet.

There was an artless symmetry and balance of affection in all that these six sensitive creatures said and did. The fair Elizabeth was followed to the end of the room where the piano was, by Jane and Emily. The lovely Harriet was attended in the direction of the easel by Maria and Kitty. I went to see the picture first.

The scene was the bottom of the sea; and the subject, A Forsaken Mermaid. The unsentimental, or fishy lower half of the sea nymph was dexterously hidden in a coral grove before which she was sitting, in an atmosphere of limpid blue water. She had beautiful long green hair, and was 179

shedding those solid tears which we always see in pictures and never in real life. Groups of pet fishes circled around her with their eyes fixed mournfully on their forlorn mistress. A line at the top of the picture, and a strip of blue above it, represented the surface of the ocean, and the sky; the monotony of this part of the composition being artfully broken by a receding golden galley with a purple sail, containing the fickle fisher youth who had forsaken the mermaid. I had hardly had time to say what a beautiful picture it was, before Miss Maria put her handkerchief to her eyes, and, overcome by the pathetic nature of the scene portrayed, hurriedly left the room. Miss Kitty followed, to attend on and console her; and Miss Harriet, after covering up her picture with a sigh, followed to assist Miss Kitty. I began to doubt whether I ought not to have gone out next, to support all three; but Mr. Bettifer, who had hitherto remained in the background, lost in metaphysical speculation, came forward to remind me that the music was waiting to claim my admiration next.

"Excuse their excessive sensibility," he said. "I have done my best to harden them and make them worldly; but it is not of the slightest use. Will you come to the piano?" 180

Miss Elizabeth began to sing immediately, with the attendant sylphs, Jane and Emily, on either side of her, to turn over the music.

The song was a ballad composition—music and words by the lovely singer herself. A lady was dreaming in an ancient castle; a dog was howling in a ruined courtyard; an owl was hooting in a neighbouring forest; a tyrant was striding in an echoing hall; and a page was singing among moonlit flowers. First five verses. Pause—and mournful symphony on the piano, in the minor key. Ballad resumed:—The lady wakes with a scream. The tyrant loads his arquebus. The faithful page, hearing the scream among the moonlit flowers, advances to the castle. The dog gives a warning bark. The tyrant fires a chance shot in the darkness. The page welters in his blood. The lady dies of a broken heart. Miss Jane is so affected by the catastrophe that Miss Emily is obliged to lead her from the room; and Miss Elizabeth is so anxious about them both as to be forced to shut up the piano, and hasten after them with a smelling-bottle in her hand. Conclusion of the performance; and final exit of the six Miss Bettifers.

Tell yourselves off, my fortunate young bachelor friends, to the corresponding number of half-a-dozen, with your offers ready on your tongues, and your hearts thrown open to tender 181
investigation, while favourable circumstances yet give you a chance. My boys, my eager boys, do you want pale cheeks, limpid eyes, swan-like necks, low waists, tall forms, and no money? You do —I know you do. Go then, enviable youths!—go tenderly—go immediately—go by sixes at a time, and try your luck with the Miss Bettifers!

Let me now appeal to other, and possibly to fewer tastes, by trying a sample of a new kind. It shall be something neither soft, yielding, nor hysterical this time. You who agree with the poet that

> Discourse may want an animated No,
> To brush the surface and to make it flow—

you who like girls to have opinions of their own, and to play their parts spiritedly in the give and take of conversation, do me the favour to approach, and permit me to introduce you to the three Miss Cruttwells. At the same time, gentlemen, I must inform you, with my usual candour, that these Spinsters are short, sharp, and, on occasion, shrill. You must have a talent for arguing, and a knack at instantaneous definition, or you will find the Miss Cruttwells too much for you, and had better wait for my next sample. And yet for a certain peculiar class of customer, these are really very choice spinsters. For instance, any unmarried legal gentleman, who would like to have 182
his wits kept sharp for his profession, by constant disputation, could not do better than address himself (as logically as possible) to one of the Miss Cruttwells. Perhaps my legal bachelor will be so obliging as to accompany me on a morning call?

It is a fine spring day, with a light air and plenty of round white clouds flying over the blue sky, when we pay our visit. We find the three young ladies in the morning room. Miss Martha Cruttwell is fond of statistical subjects, and is annotating a pamphlet. Miss Barbara Cruttwell likes geology, and is filling a cabinet with ticketed bits of stone. Miss Charlotte Cruttwell has a manly taste for dogs, and is nursing two fat puppies on her lap. All three have florid complexions; all three have a habit of winking both eyes incessantly, and a way of wearing their hair very tight, and very far off their faces. All three acknowledge my young legal friend's bow in—what may seem to him—a very short, sharp manner; and modestly refrain from helping him by saying a word to begin the conversation. He is, perhaps, unreasonably disconcerted by this, and therefore starts the talk weakly by saying that it is a fine day.

"Fine!" exclaims Miss Martha, with a look of amazement at her sister. "Fine!" with a stare of perplexity at my young legal friend. "Dear me! what do you mean, now, by a fine day?" 183

"We were just saying how cold it was," says Miss Barbara.

"And how very like rain," says Miss Charlotte, with a look at the white clouds outside, which happen to be obscuring the sun for a few minutes.

"But what do you mean, now, by a fine day?" persists Miss Martha.

My young legal friend is put on his mettle by this time, and answers with professional readiness:

"At this uncertain spring season, my definition of a fine day, is a day on which you do not feel the want of your great-coat, your goloshes, or your umbrella."

"Oh, no," says Miss Martha, "surely not! At least, that does not appear to me to be at all a definition of a fine day. Barbara? Charlotte?"

"We think it quite impossible to call a day—when the sun is not shining—a fine day," says Miss Barbara.

"We think that when clouds are in the sky there is always a chance of rain; and, when there is a chance of rain, we think it is very extraordinary to say that it is a fine day," adds Miss Charlotte.

My legal bachelor starts another topic, and finds his faculty for impromptu definition exercised by the three Miss Cruttwells, always in the same briskly-disputatious manner. He goes away—as I hope and trust—thinking what an excellent lawyer's wife any one of the three young ladies would 184
make. If he could only be present in the spirit, after leaving the abode of the Miss Cruttwells in the body, his admiration of my three disputatious spinsters would, I think, be greatly increased. He would find that, though they could all agree to a miracle in differing with him while he was present, they would begin to vary in opinion, the moment their visitor's subjects of conversation were referred to in his absence. He would, probably, for example, hear them take up the topic of the weather again, the instant the house-door had closed after him, in these terms:

"Do you know," he might hear Miss Martha say, "I am not so sure after all, Charlotte, that you were right in saying that it could not be a fine day, because there were clouds in the sky?"

"You only say that," Miss Charlotte would be sure to reply, "because the sun happens to be peeping out, just now, for a minute or two. If it rains in half-an-hour, which is more than likely, who would be right then?"

"On reflection," Miss Barbara might remark next, "I don't agree with either of you, and I also dispute the opinion of the gentleman who has just left us. It is neither a fine day, nor a bad day."

"But it must be one or the other."

"No, it needn't. It may be an indifferent day."

"What do you mean by an indifferent day?" 185

So they go on, these clever girls of mine, these mistresses in the art of fencing applied to the tongue. I have not presented this sample from my collection, as one which is likely to suit any great number. But, there are peculiarly constituted bachelors in this world; and I like to be able to show that my assortment of spinsters is various enough to warrant me in addressing even the most alarming eccentricities of taste. Will nobody offer for this disputatious sample—not even for the dog-fancying Miss Charlotte, with the two fat puppies thrown in? No? Take away the Miss Cruttwells, and let us try what we can do, thirdly and lastly, with the Miss Duckseys produced in their place.

I confidently anticipate a brisk competition and a ready market for the spinsters now about to be submitted to inspection. You have already had a sentimental sample, gentlemen, and a disputatious sample. In now offering a domestic sample, I have but one regret, which is, that my spinsters on the present occasion are unhappily limited to two in number. I wish I had a dozen to produce of the same interesting texture and the same unimpeachable quality.

The whole world, gentlemen, at the present writing, means, in the estimation of the two Miss Duckseys, papa, mamma, and brother George. This loving sample can be warranted never yet to have looked beyond the sacred precincts of the family circle. All their innocent powers of 186
admiration and appreciation have been hitherto limited within the boundaries of home. If Miss Violet Ducksey wants to see a lovely girl, she looks at Miss Rose Ducksey, and vice versâ; if both want to behold manly dignity, matronly sweetness, and youthful beauty, both look immediately at papa, mamma, and brother George. I have been admitted into the unparalleled family circle, of which I now speak. I have seen—to say nothing, for the present, of papa and mamma—I have seen brother George come in from business, and sit down by the fireside, and be welcomed by Miss Violet and Miss Rose, as if he had just returned, after having been reported dead, from the other end of the world. I have seen those two devoted sisters race across the room, in fond contention which should sit first on brother George's knee. I have even seen both sit upon him together, each taking a knee, when he has been half-an-hour later than usual at the office. I have never beheld their lovely arms tired of clasping brother George's neck, never heard their rosy lips cease kissing brother George's cheeks, except when they were otherwise occupied for the moment in calling him "Dear!" On the word of honour of a harmless spinster-fancying old man, I declare that I have seen brother George fondled to such an extent by his sisters that, although a lusty and long-suffering youth, he has fallen asleep under it from sheer exhaustion. Even then, I 187
have observed Miss Rose and Miss Violet contending (in each other's arms) which should have the privilege of casting her handkerchief over his face. And that touching contest concluded, I have quitted the house at a late hour, leaving Violet on papa's bosom, and Rose entwined round mamma's waist. Beautiful! beautiful!

Am I exaggerating? Go, and judge for yourselves, my bachelor friends. Go, if you like, and meet my domestic sample at a ball.

My bachelor is introduced to Miss Violet, and takes his place with her in a quadrille. He begins a

lively conversation, and finds her attention wandering. She has not heard a word that he has been saying, and she interrupts him in the middle of a sentence with a question which has not the slightest relation to anything that he has hitherto offered by way of a remark.

"Have you ever met my sister Rose before?"

"No, I have not had the honour—"

"She is standing there, at the other end, in a blue dress. Now, do tell me, does she not look charming?"

My bachelor makes the necessary answer, and goes on to another subject. Miss Violet's attention wanders again, and she asks another abrupt question. 188

"What did you think of mamma, when you were introduced to her?"

My bachelor friend makes another necessary answer. Miss Violet, without appearing to be at all impressed by it, looks into the distance in search of her maternal parent, and then addresses her partner again:

"It is not a pleasant thing for young people to confess," she says, with the most artless candour, "but I really do think that mamma is the handsomest woman in the room. There she is, taking an ice, next to the old lady with the diamonds. Is she not beautiful? Do you know, when we were dressing to-night, Rose and I begged and prayed her not to wear a cap. We said, 'Don't, mamma; please don't. Put it off for another year.' And mamma said, in her sweet way, 'Nonsense, my loves! I am an old woman. You must accustom yourselves to that idea, and you must let me wear a cap; you must, darlings, indeed.' And we said—what do you think we said?"

(Another necessary answer.)

"We said, 'You are studying papa's feelings, dear—you are afraid of being taken for our youngest sister if you go in your hair,—and it is on papa's account that you wear a cap. Sly mamma!'—Have you been introduced to papa?"

Later in the evening my bachelor friend is presented to Miss Rose. He asks for the honour of dancing with her. She inquires if it is for the waltz, and hearing that it is, draws back and curtsies apologetically. 189

"Thank you, I must keep the waltz for my brother George. My sister and I always keep waltzes for our brother George."

My bachelor draws back. The dance proceeds. He hears a soft voice behind him. It is Miss Violet who is speaking.

"You are a judge of waltzing?" she says, in tones of the gentlest insinuation. "Do pray look at George and Rose. No, thank you: I never dance when George and Rose are waltzing. It is a much greater treat to me to look on. I always look on. I do, indeed."

Perhaps my bachelor does not frequent balls. It is of no consequence. Let him be a diner-out; let him meet my domestic sample at the social board; and he will only witness fresh instances of that all-absorbing interest in each other, which is the remarkable peculiarity of the whole Ducksey family, and of the young ladies in particular. He will find them admiring one another with the same touching and demonstrative affection over the dishes on the dinner-table, as amid the mazes of the dance. He will hear from the venerable Mr. Ducksey that George never gave him a 190
moment's uneasiness from the hour of his birth. He will hear from Mrs. Ducksey that her one regret in this life is, that she can never be thankful enough for her daughters. And (to return to the young ladies, who are the main objects of these remarks), he will find, by some such fragments of dialogue as the following, that no general subjects of conversation whatever have the power of alluring the minds of the two Miss Duckseys from the contemplation of their own domestic interests, and the faithful remembrance of their own particular friends.

It is the interval, let us say, between the removal of the fish and the appearance of the meat. The most brilliant man in the company has been talking with great sprightliness and effect; has paused for a moment to collect his ideas before telling one of the good stories for which he is famous; and is just ready to begin—when Miss Rose stops him and silences all her neighbours by anxiously addressing her sister, who sits opposite to her at the table.

"Violet, dear."

"Yes, dear."

(Profound silence follows. The next course fails to make its appearance. Nobody wanting to take any wine. The brilliant guest sits back in his chair, dogged and speechless. The host and hostess look at each other nervously. Miss Rose goes on with the happy artlessness of a child, as if 191
nobody but her sister was present.)

"Do you know I have made up my mind what I shall give mamma's Susan when she is married?"

"Not a silk dress? That's my present."

"What do you think, dear, of a locket with our hair in it?"

"Sweet."

(The silence of the tomb falls on the dinner-table. The host and hostess begin to get angry. The guests look at each other. The second course persists in not coming in. The brilliant guest suffers from a dry cough. Miss Violet, in her turn, addresses Miss Rose across the table.)

"Rose, I met Ellen Davis to-day."

"Has she heard from Clara?"

"Yes; Clara's uncle and aunt won't let her come."

"Tiresome people! Did you go on to Brompton? Did you see Jane? Is Jane to be depended on?"

"If Jane's cold gets better, she and that odious cousin of hers are sure to come. Uncle Frank, of course, makes his usual excuse."

So the simple-hearted sisters prattle on in public; so do they carry their own innocent affections and interests about with them into the society they adorn; so do they cast the extinguishing sunshine of their young hearts over the temporary flashes of worldly merriment, and the short- 192
lived blaze of dinner eloquence. Without another word of preliminary recommendation, I confidently submit the Miss Duckseys to brisk public competition. I can promise the two fortunate youths who may woo and win them, plenty of difficulties in weaning their affections from the family hearth, with showers of tears and poignant bursts of anguish on the wedding day. All properly-constituted bridegrooms feel, as I have been given to understand, inexpressibly comforted and encouraged by a display of violent grief on the part of the bride when she is starting on her wedding tour. And, besides, in the particular case of the Miss Duckseys, there would always be the special resource of taking brother George into the carriage, as a sure palliative, during the first few stages of the honeymoon trip. 193

DRAMATIC GRUB STREET.[D]

EXPLORED IN TWO LETTERS.

Letter the First. From Mr. Reader to Mr. Author.

My dear Sir,—I am sufficiently well-educated, and sufficiently refined in my tastes and habits, to be a member of the large class of persons usually honoured by literary courtesy with the title of the Intelligent Public. In the interests of the order to which I belong, I have a little complaint to 194
make against the managers of our theatres, and a question to put afterwards, which you, as a literary man, will, I have no doubt, be both able and willing to answer.

Like many thousands of other people, I am fond of reading and fond of going to the theatre. In regard to my reading, I have no complaint to make—for the press supplies me abundantly with English poems, histories, biographies, novels, essays, travels, criticisms, all of modern production. But, in regard to going to the theatre, I write with something like a sense of injury—for nobody supplies me with a good play. There is living literature of a genuine sort in the English libraries of the present time. Why (I beg to inquire) is there no living literature of a genuine sort in the English theatre of the present time, also?

Say, I am a Frenchman, fond of the imaginative literature of my country, well-read in all the best specimens of it,—I mean, best in a literary point of view, for I am not touching moral questions now. When I shut up Balzac, Victor Hugo, Dumas, and Soulié, and go to the theatre—what do I find? Balzac, Victor Hugo, Dumas, and Soulié again. The men who have been interesting me in my arm-chair, interesting me once more in my stall. The men who can really invent and observe for the reader, inventing and observing for the spectator also. What is the necessary 195
consequence? The literary standard of the stage is raised; and the dramatist by profession must be as clever a man, in his way, as good an inventor, as correct a writer, as the novelist. And what, in my case, follows that consequence? Clearly this: the managers of theatres get my money at night, as the publishers of books get it in the day.

Do the managers get my money from me in England? By no manner of means. For they hardly ever condescend to address me.

I get up from reading the best works of our best living writers, and go to the theatre, here. What do I see? The play that I have seen before in Paris. This may do very well for my servant, who does not understand French, or for my tradesman, who has never had time to go to Paris,—but it is only showing *me* an old figure in a foreign dress, which does not become it like its native costume. But, perhaps, our dramatic entertainment is not a play adapted from the French Drama. Perhaps, it is something English—a Burlesque. Delightful, I have no doubt, to a fast young farmer from the country, or to a convivial lawyer's clerk, who has never read anything but a newspaper in his life. But is it satisfactory to *me*? It is, if I want to go and see the Drama satirised. But I go to enjoy a new play—and I am rewarded by seeing all my favourite ideas and characters in some old play, ridiculed. This, like the adapted drama, is the sort of entertainment I do *not* want. 196

I read at home many original stories, by many original authors, that delight me. I go to the

theatre, and naturally want original stories by original authors, which will also delight me there. Do I get what I ask for? Yes, if I want to see an old play over again. But, if I want a new play? Why, *then* I must have the French adaptation, or the Burlesque. The publisher can understand that there are people among his customers who possess cultivated tastes, and can cater for them accordingly, when they ask for something new. The manager, in the same case, recognises no difference between me and my servant. My footman goes to see the play-actors, and cares very little what they perform in. If my taste is not his taste, we may part at the theatre door,—he goes in, and I go home. It may be said, Why is my footman's taste not to be provided for? By way of answering that question, I will ask another:—Why is my footman not to have the chance of improving his taste, and making it as good as mine?

The case between the two countries seems to stand thus, then:—In France, the most eminent imaginative writers work, as a matter of course, for the stage, as well as for the library table. In England, the most eminent imaginative writers work for the library table alone. What is the reason of this? To what do you attribute the present shameful dearth of stage literature? To the 197
dearth of good actors?—or, if not to that, to what other cause?

Of one thing I am certain, that there is no want of a large and a ready audience for original English plays, possessing genuine dramatic merit, and appealing, as forcibly as our best novels do, to the tastes, the interests, and the sympathies of our own time. You, who have had some experience of society, know as well as I do, that there is in this country a very large class of persons whose minds are stiffened by no Puritanical scruples, whose circumstances in the world are easy, whose time is at their own disposal, who are the very people to make a good audience and a paying audience at a theatre, and who yet, hardly ever darken theatrical doors more than two or three times in a year. You know this; and you know also that the systematic neglect of the theatre in these people, has been forced on them, in the first instance, by the shock inflicted on their good sense by nine-tenths of the so-called new entertainments which are offered to them. I am not speaking now of gorgeous scenic revivals of old plays—for which I have a great respect, because they offer to sensible people the only decent substitute for genuine dramatic novelty to be met with at the present time. I am referring to the "new entertainments" which are, in the vast majority of cases, second-hand entertainments to every man in the theatre who is familiar with 198
the French writers—or insufferably coarse entertainments to every man who has elevated his taste by making himself acquainted with the best modern literature of his own land. Let my servant, let my small tradesman, let the fast young farmers and lawyers' clerks, be all catered for! But surely, if they have their theatre, I, and my large class, ought to have our theatre too? The fast young farmer has his dramatists, just as he has his novelists in the penny journals. We, on our side, have got our great novelists (whose works the fast young farmer does not read)—why, I ask again, are we not to have our great dramatists as well?

With high esteem, yours, my dear Sir,

A. Reader.

Letter the Second. From Mr. Author to Mr. Reader.

My dear Sir,—I thoroughly understand your complaint, and I think I can answer your question. My reply will probably a little astonish you—for I mean to speak the plain truth boldly. The public ought to know the real state of the case, as regards the present position of the English stage towards English Literature, for the public alone can work the needful reform.

You ask, if I attribute the present dearth of stage literature to the dearth of good actors? I reply to that in the negative. When the good literature comes, the good actors will come also, where 199
they are wanted. In many branches of the theatrical art they are not wanted. We have as good living actors among us now as ever trod the stage. And we should have more if dramatic literature called for more. It is literature that makes the actor—not the actor who makes literature. I could name men to you, now on the stage, whose advance in their profession they owe entirely to the rare opportunities, which the occasional appearance of a genuinely good play has afforded to them, of stepping out—men whose sense of the picturesque and the natural in their art, lay dormant, until the pen of the writer woke it into action. Show me a school of dramatists, and I will show you a school of actors soon afterwards—as surely as the effect follows the cause.

You have spoken of France. I will now speak of France also; for the literary comparison with our neighbours is as applicable to the main point of my letter as it was to the main point of yours.

Suppose me to be a French novelist. If I am a successful man, my work has a certain market value at the publisher's. So far my case is the same if I am an English novelist—but there the analogy stops. In France, the manager of the theatre can compete with the publisher for the purchase of any new idea that I have to sell. In France, the market value of my new play is as 200
high, or higher, than the market value of my new novel. Remember, I am not now writing of French theatres which have assistance from the Government, but of French theatres which depend, as our theatres do, entirely on the public. Any one of those theatres will give me as much, I repeat, for the toil of my brains, on their behalf, as the publisher will give for the toil of my brains on his. Now, so far is this from being the case in England, that it is a fact perfectly well known to every literary man in the country, that, while the remuneration for every other species of literature has enormously increased in the last hundred years, the remuneration for dramatic writing has steadily decreased, to such a minimum of pecuniary recognition as to make it

impossible for a man who lives by the successful use of his pen, as a writer of books, to alter the nature of his literary practice, and live, or nearly live, in comfortable circumstances, by the use of his pen, as a writer of plays. It is time that this fact was generally known, to justify successful living authors for their apparent neglect of one of the highest branches of their Art. I tell you, in plain terms, that I could only write a play for the English stage—a successful play, mind—by consenting to what would be, in my case, and in the cases of all my successful brethren, a serious pecuniary sacrifice.

Let me make the meanness of the remuneration for stage-writing in our day, as compared with what that remuneration was in past times, clear to your mind by one or two examples. Rather more than a hundred years ago, Doctor Johnson wrote a very bad play called Irene, which proved a total failure on representation, and which tottered, rather than "ran," for just nine nights, to wretched houses. Excluding his literary copyright of a hundred pounds, the Doctor's dramatic profit on a play that was a failure—remember that!—amounted to one hundred and ninety-five pounds, being just forty-five pounds *more* than the remuneration now paid, to my certain knowledge, for many a play within the last five years, which has had a successful run of sixty, and, in some cases, even of a hundred nights! 201

I can imagine your amazement at reading this—but I can also assure you that any higher rate of remuneration is exceptional. Let me, however, give the managers the benefit of the exception. Sometimes two hundred pounds have been paid, within the last five years, for a play; and, on one or two rare occasions, three hundred. If Shakspere came to life again, and took Macbeth to an English theatre, in this year, eighteen hundred and sixty-three, that is the highest market remuneration he could get for it. You are to understand that this miserable decline in the money-reward held out to dramatic literature is peculiar to our own day. Without going back again so long as a century—without going back farther than the time of George Colman, the younger—I may remind you that the Comedy of John Bull brought the author twelve hundred pounds. Since then, six or seven hundred pounds have been paid for a new play; and, later yet, five hundred pounds. We have now dropped to three hundred pounds, as the exception, and to one hundred and fifty, as the rule. I am speaking, remember, of plays in not less than three acts, which are, or are supposed to be, original—of plays which run from sixty to a hundred nights, and which put their bread (buttered thickly on both sides) into the mouths of actors and managers. As to the remuneration for ordinary translations from the French, I would rather not mention what that is. And, indeed, there is no need I should do so. We are talking of the stage in its present relation to English literature. Suppose I wrote for it, as some of my friends suggest I should; and suppose I could produce one thoroughly original play, with a story of my own sole invention, with characters of my own sole creation, every year. The utmost annual income the English stage would, at present prices, pay me, after exhausting my brains in its service, would be three hundred pounds! 202

I use the expression "exhausting my brains," advisedly. For a man who produces a new work, every year, which has any real value and completeness as a work of literary art, does, let him be who he may, for a time, exhaust his brain by the process, and leave it sorely in need of an after-period of absolute repose. Three hundred a-year, therefore, is the utmost that a fertile original author can expect to get by the English stage, at present market-rates of remuneration. 203

Such is now the position of the dramatic writer—a special man, with a special faculty. What is now the position of the dramatic performer, when he happens to be a special man, with a special faculty also? Is his income three hundred a-year? Is his manager's income three hundred a-year? The popular actors of the time when Colman got his twelve hundred pounds would be struck dumb with amazement, if they saw what salaries their successors are getting now. If stage remuneration has decreased sordidly in our time for authorship, it has increased splendidly for actorship. When a manager tells me now that his theatre cannot afford to pay me as much for my idea in the form of a play, as the publisher can afford to pay me for it in the form of a novel—he really means that he and his actors take a great deal more now from the nightly receipts of the theatres than they ever thought of taking in the time of John Bull. When the actors' profits from the theatre are largely increased, somebody else's profits from the same theatre must be decreased. That somebody else is the dramatic author. There you have the real secret of the mean rate at which the English stage now estimates the assistance of English Literature. 204

There are persons whose interest it may be to deny this; and who will deny it. It is not a question of assertion or denial, but a question of figures. How much per week did a popular actor get in Colman's time? How much per week does a popular actor get now? The biographies of dead players will answer the first question. And the managers' books, for the past ten or fifteen years, will answer the second. I must not give offence by comparisons between living and dead men—I must not enter into details, because they would lead me too near to the private affairs of other people. But I tell you again, that the remuneration for acting has immensely increased, and the remuneration for dramatic writing has immensely decreased, in our time; and I am not afraid of having that assertion contradicted by proofs.

It is useless to attempt a defence of the present system by telling me that a different plan of remunerating the dramatic author was adopted in former times, and that a different plan is also practised on the French stage. I am not discussing which plan is best, or which plan is worst. I am only dealing with the plain fact, that the present stage-estimate of the author is barbarously low—an estimate which men who had any value for literature, any idea of its importance, any artist-like sympathy with its great difficulties, and its great achievements, would be ashamed to make. I prove that fact by reference to the proceedings of a better past time, and by a plain 205

appeal to the market-value of all kinds of literature, off the stage, at the present time; and I leave the means of effecting a reform to those who are bound in common honour and common justice to make the reform. It is not my business to re-adjust the commercial machinery of theatres; I don't sit in the treasury, and handle the strings of the moneybags. I say that the present system is a base one towards literature, and that the history of the past, and the experience of the present, prove it to be so. All the reasoning in the world which tries to convince us that a wrong is necessary, will not succeed in proving that wrong to be right.

Having now established the existence of the abuse, it is easy enough to get on to the consequences that have arisen from it. At the present low rate of remuneration, a man of ability wastes his powers if he writes for the stage—unless he is prepared to put himself out of the category of authors, by turning manager and actor, and taking a theatre for himself. There are men still in existence, who occasionally write for the stage, for the love and honour of their Art. 206
Once, perhaps, in two or three years, one of these devoted men will try single-handed to dissipate the dense dramatic fog that hangs over the theatre and the audience. For the brief allotted space of time, the one toiling hand lets in a little light, unthanked by the actors, unaided by the critics, unnoticed by the audience. The time expires—the fog gathers back—the toiling hand disappears. Sometimes it returns once more bravely to the hard, hopeless work: and out of all the hundreds whom it has tried to enlighten, there shall not be one who is grateful enough to know it again.

These exceptional men—too few, too scattered, too personally unimportant in the republic of letters, to have any strong or lasting influence—are not the professed dramatists of our times. These are not the writers who make so much as a clerk's income out of the stage. The few men of practical ability who now write for the English Theatre, are men of the world, who know that they are throwing away their talents if they take the trouble to invent, for an average remuneration of one hundred and fifty pounds. The well-paid Frenchman supplies them with a story and characters ready made. The Original Adaptation is rattled off in a week: and the dramatic author beats the clerk after all, by getting so much more money for so much less manual exercise in the 207
shape of writing. Below this clever tactician, who foils the theatre with its own weapons, come the rank-and-file of hack-writers, who work still more cheaply, and give still less (I am rejoiced to say) for the money. The stage results of this sort of authorship, as you have already implied, virtually drive the intelligent classes out of the theatre. Half a century since, the prosperity of the manager's treasury would have suffered in consequence. But the increase of wealth and population, and the railway connection between London and the country, more than supply in quantity what audiences have lost in quality. Not only does the manager lose nothing in the way of profit—he absolutely gains by getting a vast nightly majority into his theatre, whose ignorant insensibility nothing can shock. Let him cast what garbage he pleases before them, the unquestioning mouths of his audience open, and snap at it. I am sorry and ashamed to write in this way of any assemblage of my own countrymen; but a large experience of theatres forces me to confess that I am writing the truth. If you want to find out who the people are who know nothing whatever, even by hearsay, of the progress of the literature of their own time—who have caught no chance vestige of any one of the ideas which are floating about before their very eyes—who are, to all social intents and purposes, as far behind the age they live in, as any people out of a lunatic asylum can be—go to a theatre, and be very careful, in doing so, to pick out the most 208
popular performance of the day. The actors themselves, when they are men of any intelligence, are thoroughly aware of the utter incapacity of the tribunal which is supposed to judge them. Not very long ago, an actor, standing deservedly in the front rank of his profession, happened to play even more admirably than usual in a certain new part. Meeting him soon afterwards, I offered him my mite of praise in all sincerity. "Yes," was his reply. "I know that I act my very best in that part, for I hardly get a hand of applause in it through the whole evening." Such is the condition to which the dearth of good literature has now reduced the audiences of English theatres—even in the estimation of the men who act before them.

And what is to remedy this? Nothing can remedy it but a change for the better in the audiences.

I have good hope that this change is slowly, very slowly, beginning. "When things are at the worst they are sure to mend." I really think that, in dramatic matters, they have been at the worst; and I have therefore some belief that the next turn of Fortune's wheel may be in our favour. In certain theatres, I fancy I notice already symptoms of a slight additional sprinkling of intelligence among the audiences. If I am right; if this sprinkling increases; if the few people who have brains in their 209
heads will express themselves boldly; if those who are fit to lead the opinion of their neighbours will resolutely make the attempt to lead it, instead of indolently wrapping themselves up in their own contempt—then there may be a creditable dramatic future yet in store for the countrymen of Shakspere. Perhaps we may yet live to see the day when managers will be forced to seek out the writers who are really setting their mark on the literature of the age—when "starvation prices" shall have given place to a fair remuneration—and when the prompter shall have his share with the publisher in the best work that can be done for him by the best writers of the time.

Meanwhile, there is a large audience of intelligent people, with plenty of money in their pockets, waiting for a theatre to go to. Supposing that such an amazing moral portent should ever appear in the English firmament, as a theatrical speculator who can actually claim some slight acquaintance with contemporary literature; and supposing that unparalleled man to be smitten with a sudden desire to ascertain what the circulation actually is of serial publications and successful novels which address the educated classes; I think I may safely predict the consequences that would follow, as soon as our ideal manager had received his information and 210
recovered from his astonishment. London would be startled, one fine morning, by finding a new

theatre opened. Names that are now well known on title-pages only, would then appear on play-bills also; and tens of thousands of readers, who now pass the theatre-door with indifference, would be turned into tens of thousands of play-goers also. What a cry of astonishment would be heard thereupon in the remotest fastnesses of old theatrical London! "Merciful Heaven! There is a large public, after all, for well-paid original plays, as well as for well-paid original books. And a man has turned up, at last, of our own managerial order, who has absolutely found it out!"

With true regard, yours, my dear Sir,

A. N. Author.

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TO THINK, OR BE THOUGHT FOR?

If anything I can say here, on the subject of the painter's Art, will encourage intelligent people of any rank to turn a deaf ear to all that critics, connoisseurs, lecturers, and compilers of guide-books can tell them; to trust entirely to their own common sense when they are looking at pictures; and to express their opinions boldly, without the slightest reference to any precedents whatever—I shall have exactly achieved the object with which I now apply myself to the writing of this paper.

Let me first ask, in regard to pictures in general, what it is that prevents the public from judging for themselves, and why the influence of Art in England is still limited to select circles,—still unfelt, as the phrase is, by all but the cultivated classes? Why do people want to look at their guide-books, before they can make up their minds about an old picture? Why do they ask connoisseurs and professional friends for a marked catalogue, before they venture inside the walls of the exhibition-rooms in Trafalgar Square? Why, when they are, for the most part, always 212
ready to tell each other unreservedly what books they like, or what musical compositions are favourites with them, do they hesitate the moment pictures turn up as a topic of conversation, and intrench themselves doubtfully behind such cautious phrases, as, "I don't pretend to understand the subject,"—"I believe such and such a picture is much admired,"—"I am no judge," and so on?

No judge! Does a really good picture want you to be a judge? Does it want you to have anything but eyes in your head, and the undisturbed possession of your senses? Is there any other branch of intellectual art which has such a direct appeal, by the very nature of it, to every sane human being as the art of painting? There it is, able to represent through a medium which offers itself to you palpably, in the shape of so many visible feet of canvass, actual human facts, and distinct aspects of Nature, which poetry can only describe, and which music can but obscurely hint at. The Art which can do this—and which has done it over and over again both in past and present times—is surely of all arts that one which least requires a course of critical training, before it can be approached on familiar terms. Whenever I see an intelligent man, which I often do, standing before a really eloquent and true picture, and asking his marked catalogue, or his newspaper, or 213
his guide-book, whether he may safely admire it or not—I think of a man standing winking both eyes in the full glare of a cloudless August noon, and inquiring deferentially of an astronomical friend whether he is really justified in saying that the sun shines!

But, we have not yet fairly got at the main obstacle which hinders the public from judging of pictures for themselves, and which, by a natural consequence, limits the influence of Art on the nation generally. For my own part, I have long thought, and shall always continue to believe, that this same obstacle is nothing more or less than the Conceit of Criticism, which has got obstructively between Art and the people,—which has kept them asunder, and will keep them asunder, until it is fairly pulled out of the way, and set aside at once and for ever in its proper background place.

This is a bold thing to say; but I think I can advance some proofs that my assertion is not altogether so wild as it may appear at first sight. By the Conceit of Criticism, I desire to express, in one word, the conventional laws and formulas, the authoritative rules and regulations which individual men set up to guide the tastes and influence the opinions of their fellow-creatures. When Criticism does not speak in too arbitrary a language, and when the laws it makes are ratified by the consent and approbation of intelligent people in general, I have as much respect 214
for it as any one. But, when Criticism sits altogether apart, speaks opinions that find no answering echo in the general heart, and measures the greatness of intellectual work by anything rather than by its power of appealing to all capacities for admiration and enjoyment, from the very highest to the very humblest,—then, as it seems to me, Criticism becomes the expression of individual conceit, and forfeits all claim to consideration and respect. From that moment, it is Obstructive—for it has set itself up fatally between the Art of Painting and the honest and general appreciation of that Art by the People.

Let me try to make this still clearer by an example. A great deal of obstructive criticism undoubtedly continues to hang as closely as it can about Poetry and Music. But there are, nevertheless, stateable instances, in relation to these two Arts, of the voice of the critic and the voice of the people being on the same side. The tragedy of Hamlet, for example, is critically considered to be the masterpiece of dramatic poetry; and the tragedy of Hamlet is also,

according to the testimony of every sort of manager, the play, of all others, which can be invariably depended on to fill a theatre with the greatest certainty, act it when and how you will. 215
Again, in music, the Don Giovanni of Mozart, which is the admiration even of the direst pedant producible from the ranks of musical connoisseurs, is also the irresistible popular attraction which is always sure to fill the pit and gallery at the opera. Here, at any rate, are two instances in which two great achievements of the past in poetry and music are alike viewed with admiration by the man who appreciates by instinct, and the man who appreciates by rule.

If we apply the same test to the achievements of the past in Painting, where shall we find a similar instance of genuine concurrence between the few who are appointed to teach, and the many who are expected to learn?

I put myself in the position of a man of fair capacity and average education, who labours under the fatal delusion that he will be helped to a sincere appreciation of the works of the Old Masters by asking critics and connoisseurs to form his opinions for him. I am sent to Italy as a matter of course. A general chorus of learned authorities tells me that Michael Angelo and Raphael are the two greatest painters that ever lived; and that the two recognised masterpieces of the highest High Art are the Last Judgment, in the Sistine Chapel, and the Transfiguration, in the Vatican picture gallery. It is not only Lanzi and Vasari, and hosts of later sages running smoothly along the same critical grooves, who give me this information. Even the greatest of English portrait-painters, Sir Joshua Reynolds, sings steadily with the critical chorus, note for note. When 216
experience has made me wiser, I am able to detect clearly enough in the main principles which Reynolds has adopted in his Lectures on Art, the reason of his notorious want of success whenever he tried to rise above portraits to the regions of historical painting. But at the period of my innocence, I am simply puzzled and amazed, when I come to such a passage as the following in Sir Joshua's famous Fifth Lecture, where he sums up the comparative merits of Michael Angelo and Raphael:—

> "If we put these great artists in a line of comparison with each other (lectures Sir Joshua), Raphael had more taste and fancy, Michael Angelo more genius and imagination. The one excelled in beauty, the other in energy. Michael Angelo had more of the poetical inspiration; his ideas are vast and sublime; his people are a superior order of beings; there is nothing about them, nothing in the air of their actions or their attitudes, or the style and cast of their limbs or features, that reminds us of their belonging to our own species."

Here I get plainly enough at what Sir Joshua considers to be the crowning excellence of high art. It is one great proof of the poetry and sublimity of Michael Angelo's pictures that the people 217
represented in them never remind us of our own species: which seems equivalent to saying that the representation of a man made in the image of Michael Angelo is a grander sight than the representation of a man made in the image of God. I am a little staggered by these principles of criticism; but as all the learned authorities that I can get at seem to have adopted them, I do my best to follow the example of my teachers, and set off reverently for Rome to see the two works of art which my critical masters tell me are the sublimest pictures that the world has yet beheld.

I go first to the Sistine Chapel; and, on a great blue-coloured wall at one end of it, I see painted a confusion of naked, knotty-bodied figures, sprawling up or tumbling down below a single figure, posted aloft in the middle, and apparently threatening the rest with his hand. If I ask Lanzi, or Vasari, or Sir Joshua Reynolds, or the gentleman who has compiled Murray's Handbook for Central Italy, or any other competent authorities, what this grotesquely startling piece of painter's work can possibly be, I am answered that it is actually intended to represent the unimaginably awful spectacle of the Last Judgment! And I am further informed that, estimated by the critical tests applied to it by these competent authorities, the picture is pronounced to be a 218
masterpiece of grandeur and sublimity. I resolve to look a little closer at this celebrated work, and to try if I can get at any fair estimate of it by employing such plain, uncritical tests, as will do for me and for everybody.

Here is a fresco, which aspires to represent the most impressive of all Christian subjects; it is painted on the wall of a Christian church, by a man belonging to a Christian community—what evidences of religious feeling has it to show me? I look at the lower part of the composition first, and see—a combination of the orthodox nursery notion of the devil, with the Heathen idea of the conveyance to the infernal regions, in the shape of a horned and tailed ferryman giving condemned souls a cast across a river! Pretty well, I think, to begin with.

Let me try and discover next what evidences of extraordinary intellectual ability the picture presents. I look up towards the top now, by way of a change, and I find Michael Angelo's conception of the entrance of a martyr into the kingdom of Heaven, displayed before me in the shape of a flayed man, presenting his own skin, as a sort of credential, to the hideous figure with the threatening hand—which I will not, even in writing, identify with the name of Our Saviour. Elsewhere, I see nothing but unnatural distortion and hopeless confusion; fighting figures, tearing figures, tumbling figures, kicking figures; and, to crown all, a caricatured portrait, with a 219
pair of ass's ears, of a certain Messer Biagio of Sienna, who had the sense and courage, when the Last Judgment was first shown on completion, to protest against every figure in it being painted stark-naked!

I see such things as these, and many more equally preposterous, which it is not worth while to mention. All other people with eyes in their heads see them, too. They are actual matters of fact, not debateable matters of taste. But I am not—on that account—justified, nor is any other

uncritical person justified, in saying a word against the picture. It may palpably outrage all the religious proprieties of the subject; but, then, it is full of "fine foreshortening," and therefore we uncritical people must hold our tongues. It may violate just as plainly all the intellectual proprieties, counting from the flayed man with his skin in his hand, at the top, to Messer Biagio of Sienna with his ass's ears, at the bottom; but, then, it exhibits "masterly anatomical detail," and therefore we uncritical spectators must hold our tongues. It may strike us forcibly that, if people are to be painted at all, as in this picture, rising out of their graves in their own bodies as they lived, it is surely important (to say nothing of giving them the benefit of the shrouds in which they were buried) to represent them as having the usual general proportions of human beings. 220
But Sir Joshua Reynolds interposes critically, and tells us the figures on the wall and ceiling of the Sistine Chapel are sublime, because they don't remind us of our own species. Why should they not remind us of our own species? Because they are prophets, sibyls, and such like, cries the chorus of critics indignantly. And what then? If I had been on intimate terms with Jeremiah, or if I had been the ancient king to whom the sibyl brought the mysterious books, would not my friend in the one case, and the messenger in the other, have appeared before me bearing the ordinary proportions and exhibiting the usual appearance of my own species? Does not Sacred History inform me that the prophet was a Man, and does not Profane History describe the sibyl as an Old Woman? Is old age never venerable and striking in real life?—But I am uttering heresies. I am mutinously summoning reason and common sense to help me in estimating an Old Master. This will never do: I had better follow the example of all the travellers I see about me, by turning away in despair, and leaving the Last Judgment to the critics and connoisseurs.

Having thus discovered that one masterpiece of High Art does not address itself to me, and to the large majority whom I represent, let me go next to the picture gallery, and see how the second masterpiece (the Transfiguration, by Raphael) can vindicate its magnificent reputation among 221
critics and connoisseurs. This picture I approach under the advantage of knowing, beforehand, that I must make allowances for minor defects in it, which are recognised by the learned authorities themselves. I am indeed prepared to be disappointed, at the outset, because I have been prepared to make allowances:

First, for defects of colour, which spoil the general effect of the picture on the spectator; all the lights being lividly tinged with green, and all the shadows being grimly hardened with black. This mischief is said to have been worked by the tricks of French cleaners and restorers, who have so fatally tampered with the whole surface, that Raphael's original colouring must be given up as lost. Rather a considerable loss, this, to begin with; but not Raphael's fault. Therefore, let it by no means depreciate the picture in my estimation.

Secondly, I have to make allowances for the introduction of two Roman Catholic Saints (St. Julian and St. Lawrence), represented by the painter as being actually present at the Transfiguration, in order to please Cardinal de' Medici, for whom the picture was painted. This *is* Raphael's fault. This sets him forth in the rather anomalous character of a great painter with no respect for his art. I have some doubts about him, after that,—doubts which my critical friends might possibly 222
share if Raphael were only a modern painter.

Thirdly, I have to make allowances for the scene of the Transfiguration on the high mountain, and the scene of the inability of the disciples to cure the boy possessed with a devil, being represented, without the slightest division, one at the top and the other at the bottom of the same canvass,—both events thus appearing to be connected by happening in the same place, within view of each other, when we know very well that they were only connected by happening at the same time. Also, when I see some of the disciples painted in the act of pointing up to the Transfiguration, the mountain itself being the background against which they stand, I am to remember (though the whole of the rest of the picture is most absolutely and unflinchingly literal in treatment) that here Raphael has suddenly broken out into allegory, and desires to indicate by the pointing hands of the disciples that it is the duty of the afflicted to look to Heaven for relief in their calamities. Having made all these rather important allowances, I may now look impartially at the upper half of this famous composition.

I find myself soon looking away again. It may be that three figures clothed in gracefully fluttering drapery, and dancing at symmetrically exact distances from each other in the air, represent such an unearthly spectacle as the Transfiguration to the satisfaction of great judges of art. I can also 223
imagine that some few select persons may be able to look at the top of the high mountain, as represented in the picture, without feeling their gravity in the smallest degree endangered by seeing that the ugly knob of ground on which the disciples are lying prostrate, is barely big enough to hold them, and most certainly would not hold them if they all moved briskly on it together. These things are matters of taste, on which I have the misfortune to differ with the connoisseurs. Not feeling bold enough to venture on defending myself against the masters who are teaching me to appreciate High Art, I can only look away from the upper part of the picture, and try if I can derive any useful or pleasant impressions from the lower half of the composition, in which no supernatural event is depicted, and which it is therefore perfectly justifiable to judge by referring it to the standard of dramatic truth, or, in one word, of Nature.

As for this portion of the picture, I can hardly believe my eyes when I first look at it. Excepting the convulsed face of the boy, and a certain hard eagerness in the look of the man who is holding him, all the other faces display a stony inexpressiveness, which, when I think of the great name of Raphael in connection with what I see, fairly amazes me. I look down incredulously at my guide- 224
book. Yes! there is indeed the critical authority of Lanzi quoted for my benefit. Lanzi tells me in plain terms that I behold represented in the picture before me "the most pathetic story Raphael

ever conceived," and refers, in proof of it, to the "compassion evinced by the apostles." I look attentively at them all, and behold an assembly of hard-featured, bearded men, standing, sitting, and gesticulating, in conventional academic attitudes; their faces not expressing naturally, not even affecting to express artificially, compassion for the suffering boy, humility at their own incapability to relieve him, or any other human emotion likely to be suggested by the situation in which they are placed. I find it still more dismaying to look next at the figure of a brawny woman, with her back to the spectator, entreating the help of the apostles theatrically on one knee, with her insensible classical profile turned in one direction, and both her muscular arms stretched out in the other; it is still more dismaying to look at such a figure as this, and then to be gravely told by Lanzi that I am contemplating "the affliction of a beautiful and interesting female." I observe, on entering the room in which the Transfiguration is placed, as I have previously observed on entering the Sistine Chapel, groups of spectators before the picture consulting their guide-books —looking attentively at the work of High Art which they are ordered to admire—trying hard to admire it—then, with dismay in their faces, looking round at each other, shutting up their books, and retreating from High Art in despair. I observe these groups for a little while, and I end in following their example. We members of the general public may admire Hamlet and Don Giovanni, honestly, along with the critics, but the two sublimest pictures (according to the learned authorities) which the world has yet beheld, appeal to none of us; and we leave them, altogether discouraged on the subject of Art for the future. From that time forth we look at pictures with a fatal self-distrust. Some of us recklessly take our opinions from others; some of us cautiously keep our opinions to ourselves; and some of us indolently abstain from having anything to do with an opinion at all.

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Is this exaggerated? Have I misrepresented facts in the example I have quoted of obstructive criticism on Art, and of its discouraging effects on the public mind? Let the doubting reader, by all means, judge for himself. Let him refer to any recognised authority he pleases, and he will find that the two pictures of which I have been writing are critically and officially considered, to this day, as the two masterworks of the highest school of painting. Having ascertained that, let him next, if possible, procure a sight of some print or small copy from any part of either picture (there is a copy of the whole of the Transfiguration in the Gallery at the Crystal Palace), and practically test the truth of what I have said. Or, in the event of his not choosing to take that trouble, let him ask any unprofessional and uncritical friend who has seen the pictures themselves—and the more intelligent and unprejudiced that friend, the better for my purpose—what the effect on him was of The Last Judgment, or The Transfiguration. If I can only be assured of the sincerity of the witness, I shall not be afraid of the result of the examination.

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Other readers who have visited the Sistine Chapel and the Vatican Gallery can testify for themselves (but, few of them will—I know them!) whether I have misrepresented their impressions or not. To that part of my audience I have nothing to say, except that I beg them not to believe that I am a heretic in relation to all works by all old masters, because I have spoken out about the Last Judgment and the Transfiguration. I am not blind, I hope, to the merits of any picture, provided it will bear honest investigation on uncritical principles. I have seen such exceptional works by ones and twos, amid many hundreds of utterly worthless canvasses with undeservedly famous names attached to them, in Italy and elsewhere. My valet-de-place has not pointed them out to me; my guide-book, which criticises according to authority, has not recommended me to look at them, except in very rare cases indeed. I discovered them for myself, and others may discover them as readily as I did, if they will only take their minds out of leading-strings when they enter a gallery, and challenge a picture boldly to do its duty by explaining its own merits to them without the assistance of an interpreter. Having given that simple receipt for the finding out and enjoying of good pictures, I need give no more. It is no part of my object to attempt to impose my own tastes and preferences on others. I want—if I may be allowed to repeat my motives once more in the plainest terms—to do all I can to shake the influence of authority in matters of Art, because I see that authority standing drearily and persistently aloof from all popular sympathy; because I see it keeping pictures and the people apart; because I find it setting up as masterpieces, two of the worst of many palpably bad and barbarous works of past times; and lastly, because I find it purchasing pictures for the National Gallery of England, for which, in nine cases out of ten, the nation has no concern or care, which have no merits but technical merits, and which have not the last and lowest recommendation of winning general approval even among the critics and connoisseurs themselves.

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And what remedy against this? I say at the end, as I said at the beginning, the remedy is to judge for ourselves, and to express our opinions, privately and publicly, on every possible occasion, without hesitation, without compromise, without reference to any precedents whatever. Public opinion has had its victories in other matters, and may yet have its victory in matters of Art. We, the people, have a gallery that is called ours; let us do our best to have it filled for the future with pictures (no matter when or by whom painted), that we can get some honest enjoyment and benefit from. Let us, in Parliament and out of it, before dinner and after dinner, in the presence of authorities just as coolly as out of the presence of authorities, say plainly once for all, that the sort of High Art which is professedly bought *for us*, and which does actually address itself to nobody but painters, critics, and connoisseurs, is not High Art at all, but the lowest of the Low: because it is the narrowest as to its sphere of action, and the most scantily furnished as to its means of doing good. We shall shock the connoisseurs (especially the elderly ones) by taking this course; we shall get indignantly reprimanded by the critics, and flatly contradicted by the lecturers; but we shall also, sooner or later, get a collection of pictures bought for us that we, mere mankind, can appreciate and understand. It may be a revolutionary sentiment, but I think that the carrying out of this reform (as well as of a few others) is a part of the national business

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which the people of England have got to do for themselves, and in which no existing authorities will assist them. There is a great deal of social litter accumulating about us. Suppose, when we start the business of setting things to rights, that we try the new broom gently at first, by sweeping away a little High Art, and having the temerity to form our own opinions? 229 230

SOCIAL GRIEVANCES.—IV.

SAVE ME FROM MY FRIENDS.

A few days ago, I was walking in a street at the western part of London, and I encountered a mendicant individual of an almost extinct species. Some years since, the oratorical beggar, who addressed himself to the public on each side of the way, in a neat speech spoken from the middle of the road, was almost as constant and regular in his appearances as the postman himself. Of late, however, this well-known figure—this cadger Cicero of modern days—has all but disappeared; the easy public ear having probably grown rather deaf, in course of time, to the persuasive power of orators with only two subjects to illustrate—their moral virtues and their physical destitution.

With these thoughts in my mind, I stopped to look at the rare and wretched object for charity whom I had met by chance, and to listen to the address which he was delivering for the benefit of the street population and the street passengers on both sides of the pavement. He was a tall, 231 sturdy, self-satisfied, healthy-looking vagabond, with a face which would have been almost handsome if it had not been disfigured by the expression which Nature sets, like a brand, on the countenance of a common impostor. As for his style of oratory, I will not do him the injustice of merely describing it. Here is a specimen, faithfully reported for the public, from the original speech:—

"Good Christian people, will you be so obliging as to leave off your various occupations for a few minutes only, and listen to the harrowing statement of a father of a family, who is reduced to acknowledge his misfortunes in the public streets? Work, honest work, is all I ask for; and I cannot get it. Why?—I ask, most respectfully, why? Good Christian people, I think it is because I have no friends. Alas! indeed I have no friends. My wife and seven babes are, I am shocked to tell you, without food. Yes, without food. Oh, yes, without food. Because we have no friends: I assure you I am right in saying because we have no friends. Why am I and my wife and my seven babes starving in a land of plenty? Why have I no share in the wholesome necessaries of life, which I see, with my hungry eyes, in butchers' and bakers' shops on each side of me? Can anybody give me a reason for this? I think, good Christian people, nobody can. Must I perish in a land of plenty 232 because I have no work and because I have no friends? I cannot perish in a land of plenty. No, I cannot perish in a land of plenty. Oh, no, I cannot perish in a land of plenty. Bear with my importunity, if you please, and listen to my harrowing statement. I am the father of a starving family, and I have got no friends."

With this neat return to the introductory passage of his speech, the mendicant individual paused; collected the pecuniary tokens of public approval; and walked forward, with a funereal slowness of step, to deliver a second edition of his address in another part of the street.

While I had been looking at this man, I had also been insensibly led to compare myself, as I stood on the pavement, with my oratorical vagrant, as he stood in the roadway. In some important respects, I found, to my own astonishment, that the result of the comparison was not by any means flattering on my side. I might certainly assume, without paying myself any extraordinary compliment, that I was the honester man of the two; also that I was better educated and a little better clad. But here my superiority ceased. The beggar was far in advance of me in all the outward and visible signs of inward mental comfort which combine to form the appearance of a healthily-constituted man. After perplexing myself, for some time, in the attempt to discover the reason for the enviably prosperous and contented aspect of this vagabond—which appeared 233 palpably to any sharp observer, through his assumed expression of suffering and despair—I came to the singular conclusion that the secret of his personal advantages over me, lay in the very circumstance on which he chiefly relied for awakening the sympathies of the charitable public—the circumstance of his having no friends.

"No friends!" I repeated to myself, as I walked away. "Happily-situated vagrant! there is the true cause of your superiority over me—you have no friends! But can the marvellous assertion be true? Can this enviable man really go home and touch up his speech for to-morrow, with the certainty of not being interrupted? I am going home to finish an article, without knowing whether I shall have a clear five minutes to myself, all the time I am at work. Can he take his money back to his drawer, in broad daylight, and meet nobody by the way who will say to him, 'Remember our old friendship, and lend me a trifle'? I have money waiting for me at my publisher's, and I dare not go and fetch it, except under cover of the night. Is that spoilt child of fortune, from whom I have just separated myself, really and truly never asked to parties and obliged to go to them? He has a button on his coat—I am positively certain I saw it—and is there no human finger and thumb to lay hold of it, and no human tongue to worry him, the while? He does not live in the 234 times of the pillory, and he has his ears—the lucky wretch. Have those organs actually enjoyed

the indescribable blessedness of freedom from the intrusion of 'well-meant advice'? Can he write—and has he got no letters to answer? Can he read—and has he no dear friend's book to get through, whether he likes it or not? No wonder that he looks prosperous and healthy, though he lives in a dingy slum, and that I look peevish and pale, though I reside on gravel, in an airy neighbourhood. Good Heavens! does he dare to speak of his misfortunes, when he has no calls to make? Irrational Sybarite! what does he want next, I wonder?"

These are crabbed sentiments. But, perhaps, as it is the fashion, now-a-days, to take an inveterately genial view of society in general, my present outbreak of misanthropy may be pardoned, in consideration of its involving a certain accidental originality of expression in relation to social subjects. It is a dreadful thing to say; but it is the sad truth that I have never yet been able to appreciate the advantage of having a large circle of acquaintances, and that I could positively dispense with a great many of my dearest friends.

There is my Boisterous Friend, for instance—an excellent creature, who has been intimate with 235
me from childhood, and who loves me as his brother. I always know when he calls, though my study is at the top of the house. I hear him in the passage, the moment the door is opened—he is so hearty; and, like other hearty people, he has such a loud voice. I have told my servant to say that I am engaged, which means simply, that I am hard at work. "Dear old boy!" I hear my Boisterous Friend exclaim, with a genial roar, "writing away, just as usual—eh, Susan? Lord bless you! he knows me—he knows I don't want to interrupt him. Up-stairs, of course? I know my way. Just for a minute, Susan—just for a minute." The voice stops, and heavily-shod feet (all boisterous men wear thick boots) ascend the stairs, two at a time. My door is burst open, as if with a battering-ram (no boisterous man ever knocks), and my friend rushes in like a mad bull. "Ha, ha, ha! I've caught you," says the associate of my childhood. "Don't stop for me, dear old boy; I'm not going to interrupt you (bless my soul, what a lot of writing!)—and you're all right, eh? That's all I wanted to know. By George, it's quite refreshing to see you here forming the public mind! No! I won't sit down; I won't stop another instant. So glad to have seen you, dear fellow—good-bye." By
this time, his affectionate voice has made the room ring again; he has squeezed my hand, in his 236
brotherly way, till my fingers are too sore to hold the pen; and he has put to flight, for the rest of the day, every idea that I had when I sat down to work. And yet (as he would tell me himself) he has not been in the room more than a minute—though he might well have stopped for hours, without doing any additional harm. Could I really dispense with him? I don't deny that he has known me from the time when I was in short frocks, and that he loves me like a brother. Nevertheless, I could dispense—yes, I could dispense—oh, yes, I could dispense—with my Boisterous Friend.

Again, there is my Domestic Friend, whose time for calling on me is late in the afternoon, when I have wrought through my day's task; and when a quiet restorative half-hour by myself, over the fire, is precious to me beyond all power of expression. There is my Domestic Friend, who comes to me at such times, and who has no subject of conversation but the maladies of his wife and children. No efforts that I can make to change the subject, can get me out of the range of the family sick-room. If I start the weather, I lead to a harrowing narrative of its effect on Mrs. Ricketts, or the Master and Miss Rickettses. If I try politics or literature, my friend apologises for
knowing nothing about any recent events in which ministers or writers are concerned, by telling 237
me how his time has been taken up by illness at home. If I attempt to protect myself by asking him to meet a large party, where the conversation must surely be on general topics, he brings his wife with him (though he told me, when I invited her, that she was unable to stir from her bed), and publicly asks her how she feels, at certain intervals; wafting that affectionate question across the table, as easily as if he was handing the salt-cellar, or passing the bottle. I have given up defending myself against him of late, in sheer despair. I am resigned to my fate. Though not a family man, I know (through the vast array of facts in connection with the subject, with which my friend has favoured me) as much about the maladies of young mothers and their children, as the doctor himself. Does any other unmedical man know when half a pint of raw brandy may be poured down the throat of a delicate and sensitive woman, without producing the slightest effect on her, except of the restorative kind? I know when it may be done—when it must be done—when, I give you my sacred word of honour, the exhibition of alcohol in large quantities, may be the saving of one precious life—ay, sir, and perhaps of two! Possibly it may yet prove a useful addition to my stores of information, to know what I know now on such interesting subjects as
these. It may be so—but, good Christian people, it is not the less true, that I could also dispense 238
with my Domestic Friend.

My Country Friends—I must not forget them—and least of all, my hospitable hostess, Lady Jinkinson, who is in certain respects the type and symbol of my whole circle of rural acquaintance.

Lady Jinkinson is the widow of a gallant general officer. She has a charming place in the country. She has also sons who are splendid fellows, and daughters who are charming girls. She has a cultivated taste for literature—so have the charming girls—so have not the splendid fellows. She thinks a little attention to literary men is very becoming in persons of distinction; and she is good enough to ask me to come and stay at her country-house, where a room shall be specially reserved for me, and where I can write my "fine things" in perfect quiet, away from London noises and London interruptions. I go to the country-house with my work in my portmanteau—work which must be done by a certain time. I find a charming little room made ready for me,

opening into my bed-room, and looking out on the lovely garden-terrace, and the noble trees in the park beyond. I come down to breakfast in the morning; and after the second cup of tea. I get up to return to my writing-room. A chorus of family remonstrances rises instantly. Oh, surely I am 239
not going to begin writing on the very first day. Look at the sun, listen to the birds, feel the sweet air. A drive in the country, after the London smoke, is absolutely necessary—a drive to Shockley Bottom, and a picnic luncheon (so nice!), and back by Grimshawe's Folly (such a view from the top!), and a call, on the way home, at the Abbey, that lovely old house, where the dear Squire has had my last book read aloud to him (only think of that! the very last thing in the world that I could possibly have expected!) by darling Emily and Matilda, who are both dying to know me. Possessed by a (printer's) devil, I gruffly break through this string of temptations to be idle, and resolutely make my escape.

"Lunch at half-past one," says Lady Jinkinson, as I retire.

"Pray, don't wait for me," I answer.

"Lunch at half-past one," persists Lady Jinkinson, as if she thought I had not heard her.

"And cigars in the billiard-room," adds one of the splendid fellows.

"And in the green-house, too," continues one of the charming girls, "where your horrid smoking is really of some use."

I shut the door desperately. The last words I hear are from Lady Jinkinson. "Lunch at half-past one."

I get into my writing-room, and take the following inventory of the contents:— 240

Table of rare inlaid woods, on which a drop of ink would be downright ruin. Silver inkstand of enormous size, holding about a thimbleful of ink. Clarified pens in scented papier-mâché box. Blotting-book lined with crimson watered silk, full of violet and rose-coloured note-paper with the Jinkinson crest stamped in silver at the top of each leaf. Pen-wiper, of glossy new cloth, all ablaze with beads; tortoise-shell paper-knife; also paper-weight, exhibiting a view of the Colosseum in rare Mosaic; also, light green taper, in ebony candlestick; wax in scented box; matches in scented box; pencil-tray made of fine gold, with a turquoise eruption breaking out all over it. Upon the whole, about two hundred pounds' worth of valuable property, as working materials for me to write with.

I remove every portable article carefully from the inlaid table—look about me for the most worthless thing I can discover to throw over it, in case of ink-splashes,—find nothing worthless in the room, except my own summer paletôt,—take that, accordingly, and make a cloth of it,—pull out my battered old writing-case, with my provision of cheap paper, and my inky steel pen in my two-penny holder. With these materials before me on my paletôt (price one guinea), I endeavour to persuade myself, by carefully abstaining from looking about the room, that I am immersed in my customary squalor, and upheld by my natural untidiness. After a little while, I succeed in the 241
effort, and begin to work.

Birds. The poets are all fond of birds. Can they write, I wonder, when their favourites are singing in chorus close outside their window? I, who only produce prose, find birds a nuisance. Cows also. Has that one particular cow who bellows so very regularly, a bereavement to mourn? I think we shall have veal for dinner to-day; I do think we shall have nice veal and stuffing. But this is not the train of thought I ought to be engaged in. Let me be deaf to these pastoral noises (including the sharpening of the gardener's scythe on the lawn), and get on with my work.

Tum-dum-tiddy-hidy-dum—tom-tom-tiddy-hiddy-tom—ti-too-tidy-hidy-ti—ti-ti-ti-tum. Yes, yes, that famous tenor bit in the Trovatore, played with prodigious fire on the piano in the room below, by one of the charming girls. I like the Trovatore (not being, fortunately for myself, a musical critic). Let me lean back in my chair on this balmy morning—writing being now clearly out of the question—and float away placidly on the stream of melody. Brava! Brava! Bravissima! She is going through the whole opera, now in one part of it, and now in another. No, she stops, after only an hour's practice. A voice calls to her; I hear her ringing laugh, in answer: no more piano—silence. Work, work, you must be done! Oh, my ideas, my only stock in trade, mercifully come 242
back to me—or, like the famous Roman, I have lost a day.

Let me see; where was I when the Trovatore began? At the following passage apparently, for the sentence is left unfinished.

"*The farther we enter into this interesting subject, the more light*"—— What had I got to say about light, when the Trovatore began? Was it, "flows in upon us"? No; nothing so commonplace as that. I had surely a good long metaphor, and a fine round close to the sentence. "The more light"——shines? beams? bursts? dawns? floods? bathes? quivers? Oh, me! what was the precious next word I had in my head, when the Trovatore took possession of my poor crazy brains? It is useless to search for it. Strike out "the more light," and try something else.

"*The farther we enter into this interesting subject, the more prodigally we find scattered before us the gems of truth which—so seldom ride over to see us now.*"

"So seldom ride over to see us now?" Mercy on me, what am I about? Ending my unfortunate sentence by mechanically taking down a few polite words, spoken by the melodious voice of one of the charming girls on the garden-terrace under my window. What do I hear, in a man's voice?

"Regret being so long an absentee, but my schools and my poor"—Oh, a young clerical visitor; I know him by his way of talking. All young clergymen speak alike—who teaches them, I wonder? Let me peep out of window. 243

I am right. It is a young clergyman—no whiskers, apostolic hair, sickly smile, long frock coat, a wisp of muslin round his neck, and a canonical black waistcoat with no gap in it for the display of profane linen. The charming girl is respectfully devouring him with her eyes. Are they going to have their morning chat under my window? Evidently they are. This is pleasant. Every word of their small, fluent, ceaseless, sentimental gabble comes into my room. If I ask them to get out of hearing I am rude. If I go to the window, and announce my presence by a cough, I confuse the charming girl. No help for it, but to lay the pen down again, and wait. This is a change for the worse, with a vengeance. The Trovatore was something pleasant to listen to; but the reverend gentleman's opinions on the terrace flowers which he has come to admire; on the last volume of modern poetry which he has borrowed from the charming girl; on the merits of the church system in the Ages of Faith, and on the difficulties he has had to contend with in his Infant School, are, upon the whole, rather wearisome to listen to. And this is the house that I entered in the full belief that it would offer me the luxury of perfect quiet to work in! And down stairs sits Lady Jinkinson, firmly believing that she has given me such an opportunity of distinguishing myself with my pen, as I have never before enjoyed in all my life! Patience, patience. 244

Half an hour; three quarters of an hour. Do I hear him taking his leave? Yes, at last. Pen again; paper again. Where was I?

"*The farther we enter into this interesting subject, the more prodigally do we find scattered before us the gems of truth, which*"——

What was I going to say the gems of truth did, when the young clergyman and the charming girl began their sentimental interview on the terrace? Gone—utterly gone. Strike out the gems of truth, and try another way.

"*The farther we enter into this interesting subject, the more its vast capabilities*"——

A knock at the door.

"Yes."

"Her Ladyship wishes me to say, sir, that luncheon is ready."

"Very well."

"*The farther we enter into this interesting subject, the more clearly its vast capabilities display themselves to our view. The mind, indeed, can hardly be pronounced competent*"——

A knock at the door. 245

"Yes."

"Her Ladyship wishes me to remind you, sir, that luncheon is ready."

"Pray beg Lady Jinkinson not to wait for me."

"*The mind, indeed, can hardly be pronounced competent to survey the extended field of observation*"——

A knock at the door.

"Yes."

"I beg your pardon, sir, but her Ladyship desires me to say that a friar's omelette has just come up, which she very much wishes you to taste. And she is afraid it will get cold, unless you will be so good as to come down-stairs at once."

"Say, I will come directly."

"*The mind, indeed, can hardly be pronounced competent to survey the extended field of observation, which*"—which?—which?—Gone again! What else could I expect? A nice chance literature has in this house against luncheon.

I descend to the dining-room, and am politely told that I look as if I had just achieved a wonderful morning's work. "I dare say you have not written in such perfect quiet as this for months past?" says Lady Jinkinson, helping me to the friar's omelette. I begin with that dainty: where I end is more than my recollection enables me to say. Everybody feeds me, under the impression that I am exhausted with writing. All the splendid fellows will drink wine with me, "to set me going again." Nobody believes my rueful assertion that I have done nothing, which they ascribe to excessive modesty. When we rise from table (a process which is performed with extreme difficulty, speaking for myself), I am told that the carriage will be ready in an hour. Lady Jinkinson will not hear of any objections. "No! no!" she says. "I have not asked you here to overwork yourself. I really can't allow that." 246

I get back to my room, with an extraordinary tightness in my waistcoat, and with slight symptoms

of a determination of Sherry to the head. Under these circumstances, returning to work immediately is not to be thought of. Returning to bed is by far the wiser proceeding. I lie down to arrange my ideas. Having none to arrange, I yield to Nature, and go to sleep.

When I wake, my head is clear again. I see my way now to the end of that bit about "the extended field of observation;" and make for my table in high spirits. Just as I sit down, comes another knock at the door. The carriage is ready. The carriage! I had forgotten all about it. There is no way of escape, however. Hours must give way to me, when I am at home; I must give way to hours, when I am at Lady Jinkinson's. My papers are soon shuffled together in my case; and I am 247
once more united with the hospitable party down-stairs. "More bright ideas?" cry the ladies interrogatively, as I take my place in the carriage. "Not the dimmest vestige of one," I answer. Lady Jinkinson shakes her parasol reproachfully at me. "My dear friend, you were always absurdly modest when speaking of yourself; and, do you know, I think it grows on you."

We get back in time to dress for dinner. After dinner, there is the social evening, and more Trovatore. After that, cigars with the splendid fellows in the billiard-room. I look over my day's work, with the calmness of despair, when I get to bed at last. It amounts to four sentences and a half; every line of which is perfectly worthless as a literary composition.

The next morning, I rise before the rest of the family are up, leave a note of apology on my table, and take the early train for London. This is very ungrateful behaviour to people who have treated me with extreme kindness. But here, again, I must confess the hard truth. The demands of my business in life are imperative; and, sad to say, they absolutely oblige me to dispense with Lady Jinkinson.

I have now been confessing my misanthropical sentiments at some length; but I have not by any 248
means done yet with the number of my dear friends whom I could dispense with. To say nothing of my friend who borrows money of me (an obvious nuisance), there is my self-satisfied friend, who can talk of nothing but himself, and his successes in life; there is my inattentive friend, who is perpetually asking me irrelevant questions, and who has no power of listening to my answers; there is my accidental friend, whom I always meet when I go out; there is my hospitable friend, who is continually telling me that he wants so much to ask me to dinner, and who never does really ask me by any chance. All these intimate associates of mine are persons of fundamentally irreproachable characters, and of well-defined positions in the world; and yet so unhappily is my nature constituted, that I am not exaggerating when I acknowledge that I could positively dispense with every one of them.

To proceed a little farther, now that I have begun to unburden my mind—

A double knock at the street door stops my pen suddenly. I make no complaint, for I have been, to my own amazement, filling these pages for the last three hours, in my parlour after dinner, without interruption. A well-known voice in the passage smites my ear, inquiring for me, on very particular business, and asking the servant to take in the name. The servant appears at my door, 249
and I make up my mind to send these leaves to the printer, unfinished as they are. No necessity, Susan, to mention the name; I have recognised the voice. This is my friend who does not at all like the state of my health. He comes, I know beforehand, with the address of a new doctor, or the recipe of a new remedy; and he will stay for hours, persuading me that I am in a bad way. No escaping from him, as I know by experience. Well, well, I have made my confession, and eased my mind. Let my friend who doesn't like the state of my health, end the list, for the present, of the dear friends whom I could dispense with. Show him in, Susan—show him in. 250

CASES WORTH LOOKING AT.—III.

THE CAULDRON OF OIL.

About one French league distant from the city of Toulouse, there is a village called Croix-Daurade. In the military history of England, this place is associated with a famous charge of the eighteenth hussars, which united two separated columns of the British army, on the day before the Duke of Wellington fought the battle of Toulouse. In the criminal history of France, the village is memorable as the scene of a daring crime, which was discovered and punished under circumstances sufficiently remarkable to merit preservation in the form of a plain narrative.

I. The Persons of the Drama.

In the year seventeen hundred, the resident priest of the village of Croix-Daurade was Monsieur Pierre-Célestin Chaubard. He was a man of no extraordinary energy or capacity, simple in his habits, and sociable in his disposition. His character was irreproachable; he was strictly conscientious in the performance of his duties; and he was universally respected and beloved by 251
all his parishioners.

Among the members of his flock, there was a family named Siadoux. The head of the household, Saturnin Siadoux, had been long established in business at Croix-Daurade as an oil-manufacturer. At the period of the events now to be narrated, he had attained the age of sixty, and was a widower. His family consisted of five children—three young men, who helped him in the business, and two daughters. His nearest living relative was his sister, the widow Mirailhe.

The widow resided principally at Toulouse. Her time in that city was mainly occupied in winding up the business affairs of her deceased husband, which had remained unsettled for a considerable period after his death, through delays in realising certain sums of money owing to his representative. The widow had been left very well provided for—she was still a comely attractive woman—and more than one substantial citizen of Toulouse had shown himself anxious to persuade her into marrying for the second time. But the widow Mirailhe lived on terms of great intimacy and affection with her brother Siadoux and his family; she was sincerely attached to them, and sincerely unwilling, at her age, to deprive her nephews and nieces, by a second marriage, of the inheritance, or even of a portion of the inheritance, which would otherwise fall to them on her death. Animated by these motives, she closed her doors resolutely on all suitors 252
who attempted to pay their court to her, with the one exception of a master-butcher of Toulouse, whose name was Cantegrel.

This man was a neighbour of the widow's, and had made himself useful by assisting her in the business complications which still hung about the realisation of her late husband's estate. The preference which she showed for the master-butcher was, thus far, of the purely negative kind. She gave him no absolute encouragement; she would not for a moment admit that there was the slightest prospect of her ever marrying him—but, at the same time, she continued to receive his visits, and she showed no disposition to restrict the neighbourly intercourse between them, for the future, within purely formal bounds. Under these circumstances, Saturnin Siadoux began to be alarmed, and to think it time to bestir himself. He had no personal acquaintance with Cantegrel, who never visited the village; and Monsieur Chaubard (to whom he might otherwise have applied for advice) was not in a position to give an opinion: the priest and the master-butcher did not even know each other by sight. In this difficulty, Siadoux bethought himself of inquiring privately at Toulouse, in the hope of discovering some scandalous passages in Cantegrel's early life, which might fatally degrade him in the estimation of the widow Mirailhe. 253
The investigation, as usual in such cases, produced rumours and reports in plenty, the greater part of which dated back to a period of the butcher's life when he had resided in the ancient town of Narbonne. One of these rumours, especially, was of so serious a nature, that Siadoux determined to test the truth or falsehood of it, personally, by travelling to Narbonne. He kept his intention a secret not only from his sister and his daughters, but also from his sons; they were young men, not over-patient in their tempers—and he doubted their discretion. Thus, nobody knew his real purpose but himself, when he left home.

His safe arrival at Narbonne was notified in a letter to his family. The letter entered into no particulars relating to his secret errand: it merely informed his children of the day when they might expect him back, and of certain social arrangements which he wished to be made to welcome him on his return. He proposed, on his way home, to stay two days at Castelnaudry, for the purpose of paying a visit to an old friend who was settled there. According to this plan, his return to Croix-Daurade would be deferred until Tuesday, the twenty-sixth of April, when his family might expect to see him about sunset, in good time for supper. He further desired that a little party of friends might be invited to the meal, to celebrate the twenty-sixth of April (which 254
was a feast-day in the village), as well as to celebrate his return. The guests whom he wished to be invited were, first, his sister; secondly, Monsieur Chaubard, whose pleasant disposition made him a welcome guest at all the village festivals; thirdly and fourthly, two neighbours, business-men like himself, with whom he lived on terms of the friendliest intimacy. That was the party; and the family of Siadoux took especial pains, as the time approached, to provide a supper worthy of the guests, who had all shown the heartiest readiness in accepting their invitations.

This was the domestic position, these were the family prospects, on the morning of the twenty-sixth of April—a memorable day, for years afterwards, in the village of Croix-Daurade.

II. The Events of the Day.

Besides the curacy of the village church, good Monsieur Chaubard held some small ecclesiastical preferment in the cathedral church of St. Stephen at Toulouse. Early in the forenoon of the twenty-sixth, certain matters connected with this preferment took him from his village curacy to the city—a distance which has been already described as not greater than one French league, or between two and three English miles.

After transacting his business, Monsieur Chaubard parted with his clerical brethren, who left him by himself in the sacristy (or vestry) of the church. Before he had quitted the room, in his turn, 255
the beadle entered it, and inquired for the Abbé de Mariotte, one of the officiating priests attached to the cathedral.

"The Abbé has just gone out," replied Monsieur Chaubard. "Who wants him?"

"A respectable-looking man," said the beadle. "I thought he seemed to be in some distress of mind, when he spoke to me."

"Did he mention his business with the Abbé?"

"Yes, sir; he expressed himself as anxious to make his confession immediately."

"In that case," said Monsieur Chaubard, "I may be of use to him in the Abbé's absence—for I have authority to act here as confessor. Let us go into the church, and see if this person feels disposed to accept my services."

When they went into the church, they found the man walking backwards and forwards in a restless, disordered manner. His looks were so strikingly suggestive of some serious mental perturbation, that Monsieur Chaubard found it no easy matter to preserve his composure, when he first addressed himself to the stranger.

"I am sorry," he began, "that the Abbé de Mariotte is not here to offer you his services——"

"I want to make my confession," said the man, looking about him vacantly, as if the priest's words had not attracted his attention. 256

"You can do so at once, if you please," said Monsieur Chaubard. "I am attached to this church, and I possess the necessary authority to receive confessions in it. Perhaps, however, you are personally acquainted with the Abbé de Mariotte? Perhaps you would prefer waiting——"

"No!" said the man, roughly. "I would as soon, or sooner, confess to a stranger."

"In that case," replied Monsieur Chaubard, "be so good as to follow me."

He led the way to the confessional. The beadle, whose curiosity was excited, waited a little, and looked after them. In a few minutes, he saw the curtains, which were sometimes used to conceal the face of the officiating priest, suddenly drawn. The penitent knelt with his back turned to the church. There was literally nothing to see—but the beadle waited nevertheless, in expectation of the end.

After a long lapse of time, the curtain was withdrawn, and priest and penitent left the confessional.

The change which the interval had worked in Monsieur Chaubard was so extraordinary, that the beadle's attention was altogether withdrawn, in the interest of observing it, from the man who had made the confession. He did not remark by which door the stranger left the church—his eyes were fixed on Monsieur Chaubard. The priest's naturally ruddy face was as white as if he had just risen from a long sickness—he looked straight before him, with a stare of terror—and he left the church as hurriedly as if he had been a man escaping from prison; left it without a parting word, or a farewell look, although he was noted for his courtesy to his inferiors on all ordinary occasions. 257

"Good Monsieur Chaubard has heard more than he bargained for," said the beadle, wandering back to the empty confessional, with an interest which he had never felt in it till that moment.

The day wore on as quietly as usual in the village of Croix-Daurade. At the appointed time, the supper-table was laid for the guests in the house of Saturnin Siadoux. The widow Mirailhe, and the two neighbours, arrived a little before sunset. Monsieur Chaubard, who was usually punctual, did not make his appearance with them; and when the daughters of Saturnin Siadoux looked out from the upper windows, they saw no signs on the high road of their father's return.

Sunset came—and still neither Siadoux nor the priest appeared. The little party sat waiting round the table, and waited in vain. Before long, a message was sent up from the kitchen, representing that the supper must be eaten forthwith, or be spoilt; and the company began to debate the two alternatives, of waiting, or not waiting, any longer. 258

"It is my belief," said the widow Mirailhe, "that my brother is not coming home to-night. When Monsieur Chaubard joins us, we had better sit down to supper."

"Can any accident have happened to my father?" asked one of the two daughters, anxiously.

"God forbid!" said the widow.

"God forbid!" repeated the two neighbours, looking expectantly at the empty supper-table.

"It has been a wretched day for travelling," said Louis, the eldest son.

"It rained in torrents, all yesterday," added Thomas, the second son.

"And your father's rheumatism makes him averse to travelling in wet weather," suggested the widow, thoughtfully.

"Very true!" said the first of the two neighbours, shaking his head piteously at his passive knife and fork.

Another message came up from the kitchen, and peremptorily forbade the company to wait any longer.

"But where is Monsieur Chaubard?" said the widow. "Has he been taking a journey too? Why is *he* absent? Has anybody seen him to-day?" 259

"I have seen him to-day," said the youngest son, who had not spoken yet. This young man's name

was Jean; he was little given to talking, but he had proved himself, on various domestic occasions, to be the quickest and most observant member of the family.

"Where did you see him?" asked the widow.

"I met him, this morning, on his way into Toulouse."

"He has not fallen ill, I hope? Did he look out of sorts when you met him?"

"He was in excellent health and spirits," said Jean. "I never saw him look better——"

"And *I* never saw him look worse," said the second of the neighbours, striking into the conversation with the aggressive fretfulness of a hungry man.

"What! this morning?" cried Jean, in astonishment.

"No; this afternoon," said the neighbour. "I saw him going into our church here. He was as white as our plates will be—when they come up. And what is almost as extraordinary, he passed without taking the slightest notice of me."

Jean relapsed into his customary silence. It was getting dark; the clouds had gathered while the company had been talking; and, at the first pause in the conversation, the rain, falling again in 260
torrents, made itself drearily audible.

"Dear, dear me!" said the widow. "If it was not raining so hard, we might send somebody to inquire after good Monsieur Chaubard."

"I'll go and inquire," said Thomas Siadoux. "It's not five minutes' walk. Have up the supper; I'll take a cloak with me; and if our excellent Monsieur Chaubard is out of his bed, I'll bring him back, to answer for himself."

With those words he left the room. The supper was put on the table forthwith. The hungry neighbour disputed with nobody from that moment, and the melancholy neighbour recovered his spirits.

On reaching the priest's house, Thomas Siadoux found him sitting alone in his study. He started to his feet, with every appearance of the most violent alarm, when the young man entered the room.

"I beg your pardon, sir," said Thomas; "I am afraid I have startled you."

"What do you want?" asked Monsieur Chaubard, in a singularly abrupt, bewildered manner.

"Have you forgotten, sir, that this is the night of our supper?" remonstrated Thomas. "My father has not come back; and we can only suppose——"

At those words the priest dropped into his chair again, and trembled from head to foot. Amazed to the last degree by this extraordinary reception of his remonstrance, Thomas Siadoux 261
remembered, at the same time, that he had engaged to bring Monsieur Chaubard back with him; and, he determined to finish his civil speech, as if nothing had happened.

"We are all of opinion," he resumed, "that the weather has kept my father on the road. But that is no reason, sir, why the supper should be wasted, or why you should not make one of us, as you promised. Here is a good warm cloak——"

"I can't come," said the priest. "I'm ill; I'm in bad spirits; I'm not fit to go out." He sighed bitterly, and hid his face in his hands.

"Don't say that, sir," persisted Thomas. "If you are out of spirits, let us try to cheer you. And you, in your turn, will enliven us. They are all waiting for you at home. Don't refuse, sir," pleaded the young man, "or we shall think we have offended you, in some way. You have always been a good friend to our family——"

Monsieur Chaubard again rose from his chair, with a second change of manner, as extraordinary and as perplexing as the first. His eyes moistened as if the tears were rising in them; he took the hand of Thomas Siadoux, and pressed it long and warmly in his own. There was a curious mixed expression of pity and fear in the look which he now fixed on the young man. 262

"Of all the days in the year," he said, very earnestly, "don't doubt my friendship to-day. Ill as I am, I will make one of the supper-party, for your sake——"

"And for my father's sake?" added Thomas, persuasively.

"Let us go to the supper," said the priest.

Thomas Siadoux wrapped the cloak round him, and they left the house.

Every one at the table noticed the change in Monsieur Chaubard. He accounted for it by declaring, confusedly, that he was suffering from nervous illness; and then added that he would do his best, notwithstanding, to promote the social enjoyment of the evening. His talk was fragmentary, and his cheerfulness was sadly forced; but he contrived, with these drawbacks, to take his part in the conversation—except in the case when it happened to turn on the absent master of the house. Whenever the name of Saturnin Siadoux was mentioned—either by the neighbours, who politely regretted that he was not present; or by the family, who naturally talked

about the resting-place which he might have chosen for the night—Monsieur Chaubard either relapsed into blank silence, or abruptly changed the topic. Under these circumstances, the company, by whom he was respected and beloved, made the necessary allowances for his state of health; the only person among them, who showed no desire to cheer the priest's spirits, and to humour him in his temporary fretfulness, being the silent younger son of Saturnin Siadoux. 263

Both Louis and Thomas noticed that, from the moment when Monsieur Chaubard's manner first betrayed his singular unwillingness to touch on the subject of their father's absence, Jean fixed his eyes on the priest, with an expression of suspicious attention; and never looked away from him for the rest of the evening. The young man's absolute silence at table did not surprise his brothers, for they were accustomed to his taciturn habits. But the sullen distrust betrayed in his close observation of the honoured guest and friend of the family, surprised and angered them. The priest himself seemed once or twice to be aware of the scrutiny to which he was subjected, and to feel uneasy and offended, as he naturally might. He abstained, however, from openly noticing Jean's strange behaviour; and Louis and Thomas were bound, therefore, in common politeness, to abstain from noticing it also.

The inhabitants of Croix-Daurade kept early hours. Towards eleven o'clock, the company rose and separated for the night. Except the two neighbours, nobody had enjoyed the supper, and even the two neighbours, having eaten their fill, were as glad to get home as the rest. In the little confusion of parting, Monsieur Chaubard completed the astonishment of the guests at the extraordinary change in him, by slipping away alone, without waiting to bid anybody good night. 264

The widow Mirailhe and her nieces withdrew to their bed-rooms, and left the three brothers by themselves in the parlour.

"Jean," said Thomas Siadoux, "I have a word to say to you. You stared at our good Monsieur Chaubard in a very offensive manner all through the evening. What did you mean by it?"

"Wait till to-morrow," said Jean; "and perhaps I may tell you."

He lit his candle, and left them. Both the brothers observed that his hand trembled, and that his manner—never very winning—was, on that night, more serious and more unsociable than usual.

III. The Younger Brother.

When post-time came on the morning of the twenty-seventh, no letter arrived from Saturnin Siadoux. On consideration, the family interpreted this circumstance in a favourable light. If the master of the house had not written to them, it followed, surely, that he meant to make writing unnecessary by returning on that day.

As the hours passed, the widow and her nieces looked out, from time to time, for the absent man. Towards noon, they observed a little assembly of people approaching the village. Ere long, on a nearer view, they recognised at the head of the assembly, the chief magistrate of Toulouse, in his official dress. He was accompanied by his Assessor (also in official dress), by an escort of archers, and by certain subordinates attached to the town-hall. These last appeared to be carrying some burden, which was hidden from view by the escort of archers. The procession stopped at the house of Saturnin Siadoux; and the two daughters, hastening to the door, to discover what had happened, met the burden which the men were carrying, and saw, stretched on a litter, the dead body of their father. 265

The corpse had been found that morning on the banks of the river Lers. It was stabbed in eleven places with knife or dagger wounds. None of the valuables about the dead man's person had been touched; his watch and his money were still in his pockets. Whoever had murdered him, had murdered him for vengeance, not for gain.

Some time elapsed before even the male members of the family were sufficiently composed to hear what the officers of justice had to say to them. When this result had been at length achieved, and when the necessary inquiries had been made, no information of any kind was obtained which pointed to the murderer, in the eye of the law. After expressing his sympathy, and promising that every available means should be tried to effect the discovery of the criminal, the chief magistrate gave his orders to his escort, and withdrew. 266

When night came, the sister and the daughters of the murdered man retired to the upper part of the house, exhausted by the violence of their grief. The three brothers were left once more alone in the parlour, to speak together of the awful calamity which had befallen them. They were of hot Southern blood, and they looked on one another with a Southern thirst for vengeance in their tearless eyes.

The silent younger son was now the first to open his lips.

"You charged me yesterday," he said to his brother Thomas, "with looking strangely at Monsieur Chaubard all the evening; and I answered that I might tell you *why* I looked at him when to-morrow came. To-morrow has come, and I am ready to tell you."

He waited a little, and lowered his voice to a whisper when he spoke again.

"When Monsieur Chaubard was at our supper-table last night," he said, "I had it in my mind that something had happened to our father, and that the priest knew it."

The two elder brothers looked at him in speechless astonishment.

"Our father has been brought back to us a murdered man!" Jean went on, still in a whisper. "I tell you, Louis—and you, Thomas—that the priest knows who murdered him." 267

Louis and Thomas shrank from their younger brother, as if he had spoken blasphemy.

"Listen," said Jean. "No clue has been found to the secret of the murder. The magistrate has promised us to do his best—but I saw in his face that he had little hope. We must make the discovery ourselves—or our father's blood will have cried to us for vengeance, and cried in vain. Remember that—and mark my next words. You heard me say yesterday evening, that I had met Monsieur Chaubard on his way to Toulouse in excellent health and spirits. You heard our old friend and neighbour contradict me at the supper-table, and declare that he had seen the priest, some hours later, go into our church here with the face of a panic-stricken man. You saw, Thomas, how he behaved when you went to fetch him to our house. You saw, Louis, what his looks were like when he came in. The change was noticed by everybody—what was the cause of it? *I* saw the cause in the priest's own face, when our father's name turned up in the talk round the supper-table. Did Monsieur Chaubard join in that talk? He was the only person present who never joined in it once. Did he change it, on a sudden, whenever it came his way? It came his way four times; and four times he changed it—trembling, stammering, turning whiter and whiter, but still, as true as the Heaven above us, shifting the talk off himself, every time! Are you men? Have you brains in your heads? Don't you see, as I see, what this leads to? On my salvation I swear it—the priest knows the hand that killed our father!" 268

The faces of the two elder brothers darkened vindictively, as the conviction of the truth fastened itself on their minds.

"*How* could he know it?" they inquired, eagerly.

"He must tell us himself," said Jean.

"And if he hesitates—if he refuses to open his lips?"

"We must open them by main force."

They drew their chairs together after that last answer, and consulted, for some time, in whispers.

When the consultation was over, the brothers rose and went into the room where the dead body of their father was laid out. The three kissed him, in turn, on the forehead—then took hands together, and looked, meaningly, in each other's faces—then separated. Louis and Thomas put on their hats, and went at once to the priest's residence; while Jean withdrew by himself to the great room at the back of the house, which was used for the purposes of the oil-factory. 269

Only one of the workmen was left in the place. He was watching an immense cauldron of boiling linseed-oil.

"You can go home," said Jean, patting the man kindly on the shoulder. "There is no hope of a night's rest for me, after the affliction that has befallen us—I will take your place at the cauldron. Go home, my good fellow—go home."

The man thanked him, and withdrew. Jean followed, and satisfied himself that the workman had really left the house. He then returned, and sat down by the boiling cauldron.

Meanwhile, Louis and Thomas presented themselves at the priest's house. He had not yet retired to bed, and he received them kindly—but with the same extraordinary agitation in his face and manner which had surprised all who saw him on the previous day. The brothers were prepared beforehand with an answer, when he inquired what they wanted of him. They replied immediately that the shock of their father's horrible death had so seriously affected their aunt and their eldest sister, that it was feared the minds of both might give way, unless spiritual consolation and assistance were afforded to them that night. The unhappy priest—always faithful and self-sacrificing where the duties of his ministry were in question—at once rose to accompany the young men back to the house. He even put on his surplice, and took the crucifix with him, to impress his words of comfort all the more solemnly on the afflicted women whom he was called on to succour. 270

Thus innocent of all suspicion of the conspiracy to which he had fallen a victim, he was taken into the room where Jean sat waiting by the cauldron of oil; and the door was locked behind him.

Before he could speak, Thomas Siadoux openly avowed the truth.

"It is we three who want you," he said—"not our aunt, and not our sister. If you answer our questions truly, you have nothing to fear. If you refuse——" He stopped, and looked toward Jean and the boiling cauldron.

Never, at the best of times, a resolute man; deprived, since the day before, of such resources of energy as he possessed, by the mental suffering which he had undergone in secret—the unfortunate priest trembled from head to foot, as the three brothers closed round him. Louis took the crucifix from him, and held it; Thomas forced him to place his right hand on it; Jean stood in front of him and put the questions.

"Our father has been brought home a murdered man," he said. "Do you know who killed him?"

The priest hesitated; and the two elder brothers moved him nearer to the cauldron. 271

"Answer us, on peril of your life," said Jean. "Say, with your hand on the blessed crucifix, do you know the man who killed our father?"

"I do know him."

"When did you make the discovery?"

"Yesterday."

"Where?"

"At Toulouse."

"Name the murderer."

At those words, the priest closed his hand fast on the crucifix, and rallied his sinking courage.

"Never!" he said firmly. "The knowledge I possess was obtained in the confessional. The secrets of the confessional are sacred. If I betray them, I commit sacrilege. I will die first!"

"Think!" said Jean. "If you keep silence, you screen the murderer. If you keep silence, you are the murderer's accomplice. We have sworn over our father's dead body to avenge him—if you refuse to speak, we will avenge him on *you*. I charge you again, name the man who killed him."

"I will die first," the priest reiterated, as firmly as before.

"Die then!" said Jean. "Die in that cauldron of boiling oil."

"Give him time," cried Louis and Thomas, earnestly pleading together.

"We will give him time," said the younger brother. "There is the clock yonder, against the wall. 272
We will count five minutes by it. In those five minutes, let him make his peace with God—or make up his mind to speak."

They waited, watching the clock. In that dreadful interval, the priest dropped on his knees and hid his face. The time passed in dead silence.

"Speak! for your own sake, for our sakes, speak!" said Thomas Siadoux, as the minute hand reached the point at which the five minutes expired.

The priest looked up—his voice died away on his lips—the mortal agony broke out on his face in great drops of sweat—his head sank forward on his breast.

"Lift him!" cried Jean, seizing the priest on one side. "Lift him, and throw him in!"

The two elder brothers advanced a step—and hesitated.

"Lift him, on your oath over our father's body!"

The two brothers seized him on the other side. As they lifted him to a level with the cauldron, the horror of the death that threatened him, burst from the lips of the miserable man in a scream of terror. The brothers held him firm at the cauldron's edge. "Name the man!" they said for the last time.

The priest's teeth chattered—he was speechless. But he made a sign with his head—a sign in the affirmative. They placed him in a chair, and waited patiently until he was able to speak. 273

His first words were words of entreaty. He begged Thomas Siadoux to give him back the crucifix. When it was placed in his possession, he kissed it, and said faintly, "I ask pardon of God for the sin that I am about to commit." He paused; and then looked up at the younger brother, who still stood in front of him. "I am ready," he said. "Question me, and I will answer."

Jean repeated the questions which he had put, when the priest was first brought into the room.

"You know the murderer of our father?"

"I know him."

"Since when?"

"Since he made his confession to me yesterday, in the cathedral of Toulouse."

"Name him."

"His name is Cantegrel."

"The man who wanted to marry our aunt?"

"The same."

"What brought him to the confessional?"

"His own remorse."

"What were the motives for his crime?"

"There were reports against his character; and he discovered that your father had gone privately to Narbonne to make sure that they were true."

"Did our father make sure of their truth?"

"He did."

"Would those discoveries have separated our aunt from Cantegrel if our father had lived to tell her of them?" 274

"They would. If your father had lived, he would have told your aunt that Cantegrel was married already; that he had deserted his wife at Narbonne; that she was living there with another man, under another name; and that she had herself confessed it in your father's presence."

"Where was the murder committed?"

"Between Villefranche and this village. Cantegrel had followed your father to Narbonne; and had followed him back again to Villefranche. As far as that place, he travelled in company with others, both going and returning. Beyond Villefranche, he was left alone at the ford over the river. There Cantegrel drew the knife to kill him, before he reached home and told his news to your aunt."

"How was the murder committed?"

"It was committed while your father was watering his pony by the bank of the stream. Cantegrel stole on him from behind, and struck him as he was stooping over the saddle-bow."

"This is the truth, on your oath?"

"On my oath, it is the truth."

"You may leave us."

The priest rose from his chair without assistance. From the time when the terror of death had forced him to reveal the murderer's name, a great change had passed over him. He had given his answers with the immoveable calmness of a man on whose mind all human interests had lost their hold. He now left the room, strangely absorbed in himself; moving with the mechanical regularity of a sleep-walker; lost to all perception of things and persons about him. At the door he stopped—woke, as it seemed, from the trance that possessed him—and looked at the three brothers with a steady changeless sorrow, which they had never seen in him before, which they never afterwards forgot. 275

"I forgive you," he said, quietly and solemnly. "Pray for me, when my time comes."

With those last words, he left them.

IV. The End.

The night was far advanced; but the three brothers determined to set forth instantly for Toulouse, and to place their information in the magistrate's hands, before the morning dawned.

Thus far, no suspicion had occurred to them of the terrible consequences which were to follow their night-interview with the priest. They were absolutely ignorant of the punishment to which a man in holy orders exposed himself, if he revealed the secrets of the confessional. No infliction of that punishment had been known in their neighbourhood—for, at that time, as at this, the rarest of all priestly offences was a violation of the sacred trust confided to the confessor by the Roman Church. Conscious that they had forced the priest into the commission of a clerical offence, the brothers sincerely believed that the loss of his curacy would be the heaviest penalty which the law could exact from him. They entered Toulouse that night, discussing the atonement which they might offer to Monsieur Chaubard, and the means which they might best employ to make his future life easy to him. 276

The first disclosure of the consequences which would certainly follow the outrage they had committed, was revealed to them when they made their deposition before the officer of justice. The magistrate listened to their narrative with horror vividly expressed in his face and manner.

"Better you had never been born," he said, "than have avenged your father's death, as you three have avenged it. Your own act has doomed the guilty and the innocent to suffer alike."

Those words proved prophetic of the truth. The end came quickly, as the priest had foreseen it, when he spoke his parting words.

The arrest of Cantegrel was accomplished without difficulty, the next morning. In the absence of any other evidence on which to justify this proceeding, the private disclosure to the authorities of the secret which the priest had violated, became inevitable. The Parliament of Languedoc was, under these circumstances, the tribunal appealed to; and the decision of that assembly immediately ordered the priest and the three brothers to be placed in confinement, as well as the murderer Cantegrel. Evidence was then immediately sought for, which might convict this last criminal, without any reference to the revelation that had been forced from the priest—and evidence enough was found to satisfy judges whose minds already possessed the foregone 277

certainty of the prisoner's guilt. He was put on his trial, was convicted of the murder, and was condemned to be broken on the wheel. The sentence was rigidly executed, with as little delay as the law would permit.

The cases of Monsieur Chaubard, and of the three sons of Siadoux, next occupied the judges. The three brothers were found guilty of having forced the secret of a confession from a man in holy orders, and were sentenced to death by hanging. A far more terrible expiation of his offence awaited the unfortunate priest. He was condemned to have his limbs broken on the wheel, and to be afterwards, while still living, bound to the stake, and destroyed by fire.

Barbarous as the punishments of that period were, accustomed as the population was to hear of 278
their infliction, and even to witness it, the sentences pronounced in these two cases dismayed the public mind; and the authorities were surprised by receiving petitions for mercy from Toulouse, and from all the surrounding neighbourhood. But the priest's doom had been sealed. All that could be obtained, by the intercession of persons of the highest distinction, was, that the executioner should grant him the mercy of death, before his body was committed to the flames. With this one modification, the sentence was executed, as the sentence had been pronounced, on the curate of Croix-Daurade.

The punishment of the three sons of Siadoux remained to be inflicted. But the people, roused by the death of the ill-fated priest, rose against this third execution, with a resolution before which the local government gave way. The cause of the young men was taken up by the hot-blooded populace, as the cause of all fathers and all sons; their filial piety was exalted to the skies; their youth was pleaded in their behalf; their ignorance of the terrible responsibility which they had confronted in forcing the secret from the priest, was loudly alleged in their favour. More than this, the authorities were actually warned that the appearance of the prisoners on the scaffold would be the signal for an organised revolt and rescue. Under this serious pressure, the 279
execution was deferred, and the prisoners were kept in confinement until the popular ferment had subsided.

The delay not only saved their lives, it gave them back their liberty as well. The infection of the popular sympathy had penetrated through the prison doors. All three brothers were handsome, well-grown young men. The gentlest of the three in disposition—Thomas Siadoux—aroused the interest and won the affection of the head-gaoler's daughter. Her father was prevailed on at her intercession to relax a little in his customary vigilance; and the rest was accomplished by the girl herself. One morning, the population of Toulouse heard, with every testimony of the most extravagant rejoicing, that the three brothers had escaped, accompanied by the gaoler's daughter. As a necessary legal formality, they were pursued, but no extraordinary efforts were used to overtake them: and they succeeded, accordingly, in crossing the nearest frontier.

Twenty days later, orders were received from the capital, to execute their sentence in effigy. They were then permitted to return to France, on condition that they never again appeared in their native place, or in any other part of the province of Languedoc. With this reservation they were left free to live where they pleased, and to repent the fatal act which had avenged them on 280
the murderer of their father at the cost of the priest's life.

Beyond this point the official documents do not enable us to follow their career. All that is now known has been now told of the village-tragedy at Croix-Daurade. 281

BOLD WORDS BY A BACHELOR.

The postman's knocks at my door have been latterly more frequent than usual; and out of the increased number of letters left for me, it has happened that an unusually large proportion have contained wedding cards. Just as there seem to be certain days when all the beautiful women in London take to going out together, certain days when all the people we know appear to be conspiring to meet us at every turn in one afternoon's walk—so there seem to be times and seasons when all our friends are inexplicably bent on getting married together. Capricious in everything, the law of chances is especially whimsical, according to my experience, in its influence over the solemnisation of matrimony. Six months ago, there was no need for me to leave a single complimentary card anywhere, for weeks and weeks together. Just at the present time, I find myself in danger of wearing out my card-case by incessant use. My friends are marrying recklessly in all sorts of opposite directions, and are making the bells a greater 282
nuisance than usual in every parish of London.

These curious circumstances have set me thinking on the subject of marriage, and have recalled to my mind certain reflections in connection with that important change in life, which I first made when I was not quite such an incurably-settled old bachelor as I am at the present moment.

It occurred to me, at that past time, and it occurs to me still, that while great stress is laid in ordinary books and ordinary talk on the personal interest which a man has himself, and on the family interest which his near relations have also, in his marrying an affectionate and sensible woman, sufficient importance has not been attached to the interest of another sort, which the tried and worthy friends of his bachelor days ought to feel, and, for the most part, do feel, in his

getting a good wife. It really and truly depends upon her, in more cases than I should like to enumerate, whether her husband's friendships are to be continued, after his marriage, in all their integrity, or are only to be maintained as a mere social form. It is hardly necessary for me to repeat—but I will do so, in order to avoid the slightest chance of misconstruction—that I am here speaking only of the worthiest, the truest, the longest-tried friends of a man's bachelor days. 283
Towards these every sensible married woman feels, as I believe, that she owes a duty for her husband's sake. But, unfortunately, there are such female phenomena in the world as fond wives and devoted mothers, who are anything rather than sensible women the moment they are required to step out of the sphere of their conjugal and maternal instincts. Women of this sort have an unreasonable jealousy of their husbands in small things; and on the misuse of their influence to serve the interests of that jealousy, lies but too often the responsibility of severing such friendships as no man can hope to form for the second time in the course of his life. By the severing of friendships, I do not mean the breaking off of all intercourse, but the fatal changing of the terms on which a man lives with his friend—the casting of the first slight shadow which alters the look of the whole prospect. It is astonishing by what a multitude of slight threads the firm continuity of brotherly regard is maintained. Many a woman has snapped asunder all the finer ligaments which once connected her husband and his friend; and has thought it enough if she left the two still attached by the coarser ties which are at the common disposal of all the world. Many a woman—delicate, affectionate, and kind within her own narrow limits—has committed that heavy social offence, and has never felt afterwards a single pang of pity or remorse. 284

These bold words will be unpopular enough, I am afraid, with certain readers; but I am an old bachelor, and I must have licence to speak the unwelcome truth. I respect and admire a good husband and father, but I cannot shake off the equally sincere reverence that I feel for a good friend; and I must be allowed to tell some married ladies—what Society ought to tell them a little oftener—that there are other affections, in this world, which are noble and honourable, besides those of conjugal and parental origin. It may be an assertion of a very shocking and unexpected kind, but I must nevertheless be excused for saying, that some of the best wives and mothers in the land have given the heart-ache to some of the best friends. While they have been behaving like patterns of conjugal propriety, they have been estranging men who would once have gone to the world's end to serve each other. I, as a single man, can say nothing of the dreadful wrench—not the less dreadful because it is inevitable—when a father and mother lose a daughter, in order that a lover may gain a wife. But I can speak feelingly of the shock of losing a dear friend, in order that a bride may gain a devoted husband. Nothing shall ever persuade me (possibly because I am not married) that there is not a flaw of some sort in the love for a wife which is made complete, in some people's eyes, by forced contributions from the love which belongs to a 285
friend. I know that a man and woman who make a happy marriage have gained the summit of earthly felicity; but do they never reach that enviable eminence without having trampled underfoot something venerable, or something tender, by the way?

Bear with me, indignant wives, if I recall the long-past time when one of the handsomest women I ever saw, took my dearest friend away from me, and destroyed, in one short day, the whole pleasant edifice that we two had been building up together since we were boys at school.

I shall never be as fond of any human being again, as I was of that one friend, and, until the beautiful woman came between us, I believe there was nothing in this world that he would not have sacrificed and have done for me. Even while he was courting, I kept my hold on him. Against opposition on the part of his bride and her family, he stipulated that I should be his best man on the wedding-day. The beautiful woman grudged me my one small corner in his heart, even at that time; but he was true to me—he persisted—and I was the first to shake hands with him when he was a married man. I had no suspicion then that I was to lose him from that moment. I only discovered the truth when I went to pay my first visit to the bride and bridegroom at their abode in the country. I found a beautiful house, exquisitely kept from top to bottom; I found a hearty 286
welcome; I found a good dinner and an airy bed-room; I found a pattern husband and a pattern wife: the one thing I did not find was my old friend. Something stood up in his clothes, shook hands with me, pressed wine on me, called me by my Christian name, and inquired what I was doing in my profession. It was certainly something that had a trick of looking like my former comrade and brother; something that nobody in my situation could have complained of with the smallest reason; something with all the brightness of the old metal about it, but without the sterling old ring; something, in short, which made me instinctively take my chamber-candlestick early on the first night of my arrival, and say good night while the beautiful woman and pattern wife was present to keep her eye on me.

Can I ever forget the language of that eye on that occasion!—the volumes it spoke in one glance of cruel triumph! "No more sacred secrets between you two," it said, brightly. "When you trust him now, you must trust me. You may sacrifice yourself for your love of him over and over again still, but he shall make no sacrifices now for you, until he has first found out how they affect my convenience and my pleasure. Your place in his heart now, is where I choose it to be. I have stormed the citadel, and I will bring children by-and-by to keep the ramparts; and you, the 287
faithful old soldier of former years—you have got your discharge, and may sit and sun yourself as well as you can at the outer gates. You have been his truest friend, but he has another now, and need trouble you no longer, except in the capacity of witness of his happiness. This, you will observe, is in the order of nature, and in the recognised fitness of things; and he hopes you will see it—and so do I. And he trusts you will sleep well under his (and my) new roof—and so do I. And he wishes you good night—and so do I!"

Many, many years have passed since I first learned these hard truths; but I can never forget the pang that it cost me to get them by heart at a moment's notice. My old friend lives still—that is to say, I have an intimate acquaintance, who asks me to all his dinners, and who made me godfather to one of his children; but the brother of my love, who died to me on the day when I paid him the marriage visit, has never come back to life since that time. On the altar at which we two once sacrificed, the ashes lie cold. A model husband and father has risen from them, and that result is, I suppose, the only one that any third person has a right to expect. It may be so; but, to this day, I cannot help thinking that the beautiful woman would have done better if she could have made a fond husband, without at the same time marring a good friend.

Readers will, I am afraid, not be wanting, who will be inclined to tell me that the lady to whom I have been referring, only asserted the fair privilege that was hers by right of marriage; and that my sense of injury springs from the touchy selfishness of an old bachelor. Without attempting to defend myself, I may at least be allowed to inquire into the lady's motive for using her privilege—or, in plainer terms, for altering the relations in which my friend and I had stood towards one another since boyhood.

Her idea, I presume to have been, that, if I preserved my old footing with her husband, I should be taking away some part of his affection that belonged to her. According to my idea of it, she was taking away something which had belonged to me, and which no effort on her part could afterwards convert to her own use. It is hard to make some women understand that a husband's heart—let him be ever so devoted and affectionate—has vacant places in it which they can never hope to fill. It is a house in which they and their children, naturally and properly, occupy all the largest apartments and supply all the prettiest furniture; but there are spare rooms which they cannot enter, which are reserved all through the lease of life for inevitable guests of some sort from the world outside. It is better to let in the old friend than some of the substituted visitors, who are sure, sooner or later, to enter where there are rooms ready for them, by means of pass-keys obtained without the permission of the permanent tenants. Am I wrong in making such assertions as these? I should be willing enough to think it probable—being only a bachelor—if my views were based on mere theory. But my opinions, such as they are, have been formed with the help of proofs and facts. I have met with bright examples of wives who have strengthened their husbands' friendships as they never could have been strengthened except under the influence of a woman's care, employed in the truest, the tenderest, the most delicate way. I have seen men rescued from the bad habits of half a lifetime by the luck of keeping faithful friends who were the husbands of sensible wives. It is a very trite and true remark that the deadliest enmities between men have been occasioned by women. It is not less certain—though it is a far less widely-accepted truth—that some (I wish I could say many) of the strongest friendships have been knit most closely by women's helping hands.

The real fact seems to be, that the general idea of the scope and purpose of the Institution of Marriage is a miserably narrow one. The same senseless prejudice which leads some people, when driven to extremes, to the practical confession (though it may not be made in plain words) that they would rather see murder committed under their own eyes, than approve of any project for obtaining a law of divorce which shall be equal in its operation on husbands and wives of all ranks who cannot live together, is answerable also for the mischievous error in principle of narrowing the practice of the social virtues, in married people, to themselves and their children. A man loves his wife—which is, in other words, loving himself—and loves his offspring, which is equivalent to saying that he has the natural instincts of humanity; and, when he has gone thus far, he has asserted himself as a model of all the virtues of life, in the estimation of some people. In my estimation, he has only begun with the best virtues, and has others yet to practise before he can approach to the standard of a socially complete man. Can there be a lower idea of Marriage than the idea which makes it, in fact, an institution for the development of selfishness on a large and respectable scale? If I am not justified in using the word selfishness, tell me what character a good husband presents (viewed plainly as a man) when he goes out into the world, leaving all his sympathies in his wife's boudoir, and all his affections up-stairs in the nursery, and giving to his friends such shreds and patches of formal recognition, in place of true love and regard, as consist in asking them to an occasional dinner-party, and granting them the privilege of presenting his children with silver mugs? He is a model of a husband, the ladies will say. I dare not contradict them; but I should like to know whether he is also a model of a friend?

No. Bachelor as I am, I have a higher idea of Marriage than this. The social advantages which it is fitted to produce ought to extend beyond one man and one woman, to the circle of society amid which they move. The light of its beauty must not be shut up within the four walls which enclose the parents and the family, but must flow out into the world, and shine upon the childless and the solitary, because it has warmth enough and to spare, and because it may make them, even in their way, happy too. I began these few lines by asking sympathy and attention for the interest which a man's true friends have, when he marries, in his choosing a wife who will let them be friends still, who will even help them to mingling in closer brotherhood, if help they need. I lay down the pen, suggesting to some ladies—affectionately suggesting, if they will let me use the word, after some of the bold things I have said—that it is in their power to deprive the bachelor of the sole claim he has left to social recognition and preeminence, by making married men what many of them are, and what more might be—the best and truest friends that are to be found in the world.

SOCIAL GRIEVANCES.—V.

MRS. BULLWINKLE.

Ladies and gentlemen. Give me five minutes' sympathy and attention. I have something serious to say to you.

I am a married man, with an income which is too miserably limited to be worth mentioning. About a month since, my wife advanced me one step nearer to the Court for the Relief of Insolvent Debtors, by presenting me with another child. On five previous occasions, her name had appeared in the List of British Mothers which adorns the daily Supplement of the Times newspaper. At each of these trying periods (I speak entirely of myself when I use the word "trying") she was attended by the same Monthly Nurse. On this last, and sixth, occasion, we were not so fortunate as to secure the services of our regular functionary. She was already engaged; and a new Nurse, with excellent recommendations, was, therefore, employed in her stead. When I first heard of her, and was told that her name was Mrs. Bullwinkle, I laughed. It was then the beginning of the month. It is now the end of it, and I write down that once comical name with a settled gravity which nothing can disturb. 293

We all know Mrs. Gamp. My late Monthly Nurse is the exact antipodes of her. Mrs. Bullwinkle is tall and dignified; her complexion is fair; her Grecian nose is innocent of all convivial colouring; her figure is not more than agreeably plump; her manners are icily composed; her dress is quiet and neat; her age cannot be more than five-and-thirty; her style of conversation, when she talks, is flowing and grammatical—upon the whole, she appears to be a woman who is much too ladylike for her station in life. When I first met Mrs. Bullwinkle on the stairs, I felt inclined to apologise for my wife's presumption in engaging her services. Though I checked this absurd impulse, I could not resist answering the new nurse's magnificent curtsy by expressing a polite hope that she would find her situation everything that she could wish, under my roof.

"I am not accustomed to exact much, sir," said Mrs. Bullwinkle. "The cook seems, I am rejoiced to say, to be an intelligent and attentive person. I have been giving her some little hints on the subject of my meals. I have ventured to tell her, that I eat little and often; and I think she thoroughly understands me."

I am ashamed to say I was not so sharp as the cook. I did not thoroughly understand Mrs. Bullwinkle, until it became my duty, through my wife's inability to manage our domestic business, to settle the weekly bills. I then became sensible of an alarming increase in our household expenditure. If I had given two dinner-parties in the course of the week, the bills could not have been more exorbitant: the butcher, the baker, and the grocer could not have taken me at a heavier pecuniary disadvantage. My heart sank as I thought of my miserable income. I looked up piteously from the bills to the cook for an explanation. 294

The cook looked back at me compassionately, shook her head, and said:

"Mrs. Bullwinkle."

I reckoned up additional joints, additional chops, additional steaks, fillets, kidneys, gravy beef. I told off a terrible supplement to the usual family consumption of bread, flour, tea, sugar, and alcoholic liquids. I appealed to the cook again; and again the cook shook her head, and said, "Mrs. Bullwinkle."

My miserable income obliges me to look after sixpences, as other men look after five-pound notes. Ruin sat immovable on the pile of weekly bills, and stared me sternly in the face. I went up into my wife's room. The new nurse was not there. The unhappy partner of my pecuniary embarrassments was reading a novel. My innocent infant was smiling in his sleep. I had taken the bills with me. Ruin followed them up-stairs, and sat spectral on one side of the bed, while I sat on the other. 295

"Don't be alarmed, love," I said, "if you hear the police in the house. Mrs. Bullwinkle has a large family, and feeds them all out of our provisions. A search shall be instituted, and slumbering Justice shall be aroused. Look at these joints, these chops, these steaks, these fillets, these kidneys, these gravy beefs!"

My wife shook her head, exactly as the cook had shaken hers; and answered, precisely as the cook had answered, "Mrs. Bullwinkle."

"But where does she hide it all?" I exclaimed.

My wife shut her eyes, and shuddered.

"John!" she said, "I have privately consulted the doctor; and the doctor says Mrs. Bullwinkle is a Cow."

"If the doctor had to pay these bills," I retorted savagely, "he would not be quite so free with his jokes."

"He is in earnest, dear. He explained to me, what I never knew before, that a Cow is an animal with many stomachs——"

"What!" I cried out, in amazement; "do you mean to tell me that all these joints, these chops, these steaks, these fillets, these kidneys, these gravy beefs—these loaves, these muffins, these mixed biscuits—these teas, these sugars, these brandies, gins, sherries, and beers, have disappeared in one week, down Mrs. Bullwinkle's throat?" 296

"All, John," said my wife, sinking back on the pillow with a groan.

It was impossible to look at the bills and believe it. I questioned and cross-questioned my wife, and still elicited nothing but the one bewildering answer, "All, John." Determined—for I am a man of a logical and judicial mind—to have this extraordinary and alarming case properly investigated, I took out my pocket-book and pencil, and asked my wife if she felt strong enough to make a few private entries for my satisfaction. Finding that she willingly accepted the responsibility, I directed her to take down, from her own personal investigation, a statement of Mrs. Bullwinkle's meals, and of the time at which she partook of each of them, for twenty-four hours, beginning with one morning and ending with another. After making this arrangement, I descended to the parlour, and took the necessary business measures for using the cook as a check upon her mistress. Having carefully instructed her to enter, on the kitchen slate, everything that was sent up to Mrs. Bullwinkle, for twenty-four hours, I felt that my machinery for investigating the truth was now complete. If the statement of the mistress, in bed on the second floor, agreed with the statement of the cook, in the distant sphere of the kitchen, there could be no doubt that I had obtained reliable information on the mysterious subject of Mrs. Bullwinkle's meals. 297

In due time, the two reports were sent in, and I had an opportunity of understanding at last, what "eating little and often" really meant, in the case of my wife's monthly nurse. Except in one particular, to be hereafter adverted to, both statements agreed exactly. Here is the List, accompanied by a correct time-table, of Mrs. Bullwinkle's meals, beginning with the morning of Monday and ending with the morning of Tuesday. I certify, on my honour as a British husband and housekeeper, that the copy is correctly taken from my wife's entries in my pocket-book, checked impartially by the cook's slate:[E]

A.M.

7. Breakfast.—Tea, Toast, Half-quartern Loaf, Butter, Eggs, Bacon.

9.30. First Morning Snack.—A glass of pale Sherry, and a plate of Mixed Biscuits.

11. Second Morning Snack.—A Basin of Beef Tea, and a tumbler of Brandy and Water.

P.M.

12.45. Dinner.—A Roast Loin of Mutton and Mashed Potatoes. With Dinner, Ale, spiced and warmed. After Dinner, a tumbler of Hot Gin and Water. 298

P.M.

3. Afternoon Snack.—A glass of pale Sherry, and a plate of Mixed Biscuits.

4.30. Tea and Muffins.

7. Evening Snack.—Stewed Cheese, Toast, and a tumbler of Brandy and Water.

9. Supper.—Nice juicy Steak, and two glasses of Beer. Second Course.—Stewed Cheese, and a tumbler of Gin and Water.

ADDITIONAL PARTICULARS. (Not vouched for by the cook's slate.)—During the night of Monday Mrs. Bullwinkle partook, at intervals, of Caudle. At 4.30 A.M., on the morning of Tuesday, my wife was awakened by hearing the nurse walking up and down the room, and sighing bitterly. The following conversation then took place between them:

My Wife.—Are you ill?

Mrs. Bullwinkle.—No. Hungry.

I can certify that the above List correctly, and even moderately, represents Mrs. Bullwinkle's daily bill of fare, for one month. I can assert, from my own observation, that every dish, at every hour of the day, which went up to her full, invariably came down from her empty. Mrs. Bullwinkle 299 was not a wasteful eater. She could fully appreciate, in roast meat, for example, the great value of "lean;" but she was not, on that account, insensible to the humbler merits of fat, skin, and "outside." All—emphatically, all—was fish that came to her net; and the net itself, as I can personally testify, was never once over-weighted and never out of order. I have watched, in the case of this perfectly unparalleled human cormorant, for symptoms of apoplexy, or at least of visible repletion, with a dreadful and absorbing interest; and have, on no occasion, been rewarded by making the smallest discovery. Mrs. Bullwinkle was never, while in my service, even so much as partially intoxicated. Her face was never flushed; her articulation was never thickened; her brain was never confused; her movements were never uncertain. After the breakfast, the two morning snacks, and the dinner,—all occurring within the space of six hours,—she could move about the room with unimpeded freedom of action; could keep my wife and the baby in a state of the strictest discipline; could curtsy magnificently, when the unoffending master, whom she was eating out of house and home, entered the room, preserving her colour, her equilibrium, and her staylaces, when she sank down and when she swelled up again, without the vestige of an apparent effort. During the month of her devastating residence under my roof, 300 she had two hundred and forty-eight meals, including the snacks; and she went out of the house no larger and no redder than she came in. After the statement of one such fact as that, further comment is superfluous.

I leave this case in the hands of the medical and the married public. I present it, as a problem, to physiological science. I offer it, as a warning, to British husbands with limited incomes. While I write these lines, while I give my married countrymen this friendly caution, my wife is weeping over the tradesmen's bills; my children are on half-allowance of food; my cook is worked off her legs; my purse is empty. Young husbands, and persons about to marry, commit to memory the description here given of my late monthly nurse! Avoid a tall and dignified woman, with a flowing style of conversation and impressively ladylike manners! Beware, my struggling friends, my fellow-toilers along the heavily-taxed highways of domestic happiness—beware of Mrs. Bullwinkle!

THE END.

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FOOTNOTES

[A] The curious legend connected with the birth of this "Adopted Son," and the facts relating to his extraordinary career in after life, are derived from the "Records" of the French Police of the period. In this instance, and in the instances of those other papers in the present collection which deal with foreign incidents and characters, while the facts of each narrative exist in print, the form in which the narrative is cast is of my own devising. If these facts had been readily accessible to readers in general, the papers in question would not have been reprinted. But the scarce and curious books from which my materials are derived, have been long since out of print, and are, in all human probability, never likely to be published again.

[B] The biographical facts mentioned in this little sketch, are derived from Mr. Blanchard Jerrold's interesting narrative of his father's Life and Labours. For the rest—that is to say, for the opinions here expressed on Jerrold's works, and for the estimate attempted of his personal character—I am responsible. This is the only instance of a reprinted article in the present collection, any part of which is founded on a modern and an accessible book. The reader will perhaps excuse and understand my making an exception here to my own rules, when I add that Douglas Jerrold was one of the first and the dearest friends of my literary life.

[C] When this article was first published in Household Words, a son of Mr. Elliston wrote to the conductor to protest against the epithets which I had attached to his father's name. In the present reprint I have removed the epithets; not because I think them undeserved, but because they merely represented my own angry sense of Mr. Elliston's treatment of Jerrold—a sense which I have no wish needlessly to gratify at the expense of a son's regard for his father's memory. But the facts of the case as they were originally related, and as I heard them from Jerrold himself, remain untouched—exactly as my own opinion of Mr. Elliston's conduct remains to this day unaltered. If the "impartial" reader wishes to have more facts to decide on than those given in the text, he is referred to Raymond's Life of Elliston—in which work he will find the clear profits put into the manager's pocket by Black-Eyed Susan, estimated at one hundred and fifty pounds a week.

[D] This paper, and the paper on Art entitled 'To Think, or Be Thought For,' which immediately follows it, provoked, at the time of their first appearance, some remonstrance both of the public and the private sort. I was blamed—so far as I could understand the objections—for letting out the truth about the Drama, and for speaking my mind (instead of keeping it to myself, as other people did) on the subject of the Old Masters. Finding, however, that my positions remained practically unrefuted, and that my views were largely shared by readers with no professional interest in theatres, and no vested critical rights in old pictures—and knowing, besides, that I had not written without some previous inquiry and consideration—I held steadily to my own convictions; and I hold to them still. These articles are now reprinted (as they were originally produced) to serve two objects which I persist in thinking of some importance:—Freedom of inquiry into the debased condition of the English Theatre; and freedom of thought on the subject of the Fine Arts.

[E] This time-table is no invention of mine. It is accurately copied from an "original document" sent to me by the victim of a monthly nurse.

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