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LONDON'S HEART.

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A Novel

BY

B. L. FARJEON,

AUTHOR OF "GRIF," "JOSHUA MARVEL," "BLADE-O'-GRASS," "GOLDEN GRAIN," AND "BREAD-AND-CHEESE AND KISSES."

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LONDON'S HEART.

CHAPTER I.

IN WHICH MR. PODMORE DECLARES THAT HE IS NOT ACCOUNTABLE FOR HIMSELF.

The scene opens in the locality of Soho--that labyrinth of narrow paths which always wears a depressed and melancholy air, as if it had just gone into mourning. If Soho ever had bright days in the shape of a sunny youth, it must have been very long ago. No trace of them remains; a settled sadness lies upon its queer narrow thoroughfares now and for evermore. The very voices of its residents are more subdued and resigned than other voices are in other places.

No locality in London contains so strange a variety of life's phases as may be found in Soho. And yet it is full of mystery, and its ways are dark and secret. Men and women may live there for years, and their antecedents and present modes of life shall be as little known as if they lived in the most remote corner of the earth. Soho is the molehill of the Great City. You may have a thousand pounds a year and spend it in Soho, and your neighbours not only shall not notice it, but shall be as utterly indifferent to you as if you lived on tenpence a day--as hundreds of poor fellows are doing at this present moment. Hard-working mechanics live there; weary-eyed needlewomen; libertines; ballet-girls, whose salary is twenty shillings a week, and who wear furs and false hair and diamond rings; and man-owls, who sleep by day and prey by night. On the doorstep of some of the houses in which these persons dwell, children in the afternoon play with marbles and broken pieces of crockery. Here is a group composed of half a dozen dirty-stockinged little girls, who look at you shyly as you pause before them, and put their fingers in their mouths and giggle surreptitiously. Speak to this one--a clear gray-eyed girl of some eight summers, with intelligent well-formed face and beautiful light hair. Question her, and bribe her with pence, and you may obtain from her the information that she lives in the next street, at the baker's, on the second-floor back; that mother and father live there, of course; that seven brothers and sisters live there, making a family party of ten in all; that they have only one room,

in which mother cooks the meals, and in which they all sleep; and that sometimes Uncle Bob pays them a visit, and eats and sleeps with them for a few days. Wondrous is the inner life of Soho. It is the abode of much seediness and much suffering. Many a poor gentleman eats his bread-and-dripping there, and, if he can afford it, cooks his herring there, and thinks sadly of times, gone by, when his life had its days of sunshine. He looks forward yearningly to the time to come; but rich as is the harvest that grows in the fields of Hope, the chance of its ever being gathered is a dismal one indeed. The poor gentleman, ill-fed, ill-dressed, reads faded letters in his garret, kisses pictures there, and dreams hopefully of the future, which contains for him nothing but a grave.

In one of Soho's quiet streets--belonging to that peculiar family of streets which are invariably round the corner--is a tallow-chandler's shop, ambitiously designated by its proprietor, J. Gribble senior, as an oil and colour warehouse. This designation glares at you from over the blue shopfront in yellow letters--glares at you defiantly, as if it is aware beforehand that doubt of its assertion must necessarily rise in your mind. The window of the shop, in which the stock is displayed, is dusty and dirty, and everything behind it has a faded and second-hand appearance. In a corner of the window is a sheet of note-paper, on which is written--in feeble and uncertain letters--"Down with Cooperation!" There is an exception, however, to the generally dusty aspect of the window. In a centre pane, which is kept clean, is a square of blue cardboard, on which the following announcement is neatly written, in yellow round-hand:

J. GRIBBLE JUNIOR,

PROFESSOR OF ANATOMY.

Broken Ribs or Bones
Carefully Re-set or Neatly Mended;
In fact
The Whole Frame speedily Recovered on Moderate Terms.

J. G. junior informs the neighbouring Gentry that he has had a most Extensive Practice, and that, although he has had

THOUSANDS OF PATIENTS

under his Treatment, he has never turned out one Incurable.

J. G. junior has had Numerous Patients brought to him Partly Deformed or Weakened through Improper Treatment, and has in a very few Hours invariably restored to them their Original Strength.

Consultations, Examination, and Operations performed Daily
from 8 a.m. till 10 p.m.

Patients admitted on application, and without the vexatious delay which is occasioned by references being required.

NO CURE, NO PAY. ADVICE TO ALL GRATIS.

J. G, junior's Royal Umbrella and Parasol Hospital, Second-floor Front.

The stock has not a very inviting appearance: comprising, for the most part, candles, mouse-traps, balls of twine, bars of yellow soap--so arranged as to be suggestive of prison-windows--and

limbs and wings and dead bodies of flies. These latter seem to be the peculiar attribute of shop and parlour windows in Soho. One might almost be pardoned for the supposition that every discontented fly in London makes it a practice to go to Soho and die.

The shop has its public entrance for customers, and its private entrance for the residents of the house--so private indeed, so circumscribed and squeezed up, that scarcely one out of fifty passers-by would know that it was there; and that one, seeing it by merest chance, might well be lost in wonder at the perplexing idea of a stout man struggling through the narrow passage into which the mockery of a door must necessarily open. Three bell-handles display themselves on each side of the door to snare and entrap the uninitiated; a goggle-eyed knocker (with a face so hideous that babies have gone into convulsions at the sight of it) also adds to the entanglement of ideas. For, knowing that the house contains many inhabitants who have no connection with each other, and some of whom may indeed be at variance, the uninitiated brings confusion upon himself by ringing the wrong bell or knocking the wrong knock. A woman, who lodged somewhere in the vicinity of the coal-cellar, was often the occasion of much distress to the knockers and ringers. This woman, who always made her appearance fresh from the washing-tub, and who came up-stairs invariably wiping her wet arms upon her apron, was afflicted with the perpetual conviction that a ring or a knock, whether single, or double, or treble, was certainly intended for her; and as her temper was none of the sweetest, unpleasant scenes occurred. Many a box on the ears did youthful knockers and ringers receive from the damp hands of the disappointed woman, and many an angry mother would make her appearance in the passage a few minutes afterwards and exchange shrill civilities with the bad-tempered castigator. Sometimes these angry mothers would go almost into hysterics because the woman below declined to comply with such invitations as, "Come up, and I'll show yer!" or, "Come up, and I'll scratch yer eyes out for yer!" or, "What d'yer mean by slappin' my boy Billy about on the 'ead, which was weak from a babby? What d'yer mean by it, yer minx?--What d'yer mean?" (This last *fortissimo*.) "Come up, and I'll tear the 'air out of yer 'ead!" After which challenges and defiances the angry mothers, with very white faces, would issue into the street, and form the centres of little knots of female neighbours only too willing to discuss the matter and express their opinions. A facetious person, who had called several times at the house, and who was never able to solve the mystery of the bells, once hit upon what he conceived to be a happy idea. He gave a postman's knock; but the rush of eager feet from all parts of the house, and the glare of angry faces that met his smiling one when the door was opened, were sufficient warnings to him never to try it again; and he never did.

In the front room of the first floor of this house sits an old man, working in somewhat idle fashion on a few wooden castors or wheels. It is Saturday on a summer evening in June. The window is open; on the sill are two flower-pots. The room, which is a humble one, is very clean and tidy, and there are evidences of comfort, even of refinement about it, humble as it is. Some cheap graceful ornaments are on the mantelshelf: a pair of shells; a shepherd and a shepherdess, condemned by the exigencies of art to live apart from each other, notwithstanding their languishing looks; and, in the centre of the mantelshelf, a vase with two of yesterday's roses in it. These roses, as they are placed in the vase, touch the photograph of a young girl, which hangs in a frame above them. She is pretty and fresh-looking, and there is a smile upon her face which induces gladness in the beholder: as spring flowers and bright skies do. On either side of the portrait, hung on a higher level, is a picture of the same young girl, disguised. On the right-hand side of the mantelshelf she is dressed in a Spanish costume; on her shoulders is a black-lace shawl arranged with the most charming negligence; and as she looks at you from behind a fan, you catch just a glimpse of laughing eyes. On the left-hand side of the mantelshelf she is dressed in the costume of a century ago, in brocaded silk dress, and with black beauty-spots on her cheeks; she wears a white wig, and, in the act of curtseying, looks at you saucily and demurely, coquetting the while with a white handkerchief which she holds in her fingers. The stove is hidden by an ornament of paper flowers, the colours and arrangement of which are more artistic than the majority of those sold in the streets. There is one singular peculiarity about the furniture in the room: everything movable is on wheels. The chairs, the table, a footstool, the very ornaments on the mantelshelf--all on wheels made expressly for them. There is no carpet on the floor; but the chairs make no noise as they are moved, for the wheels (made of box or deal, according to requirement) are covered with leather. Even the flower-pots on the window-sill have wheels, and the old man is at present occupied in making wheels for a work-box, which it is not difficult to guess belongs to the young girl whose portrait hangs above the roses. He works noiselessly and slowly, and with great care. It is evident that he is engaged on a labour of love. He handles the wood as if it were sensitive; he looks at his handiwork fondly, and holds it up to the light and examines it with loving interest. Once he rises and stands before the mantelshelf, and gazes with a tender light in his eyes at the picture of the young girl. Then he returns to his tools, and resumes his work. A slight sound disturbs him, and he pauses in his work to listen. As he listens he raises his hand to his ear, and directs his eyes towards a screen, which makes, as it were, a second apartment of the cosiest corner of the room. Something that the old man loves lies behind this screen, which is so arranged that the pictures on the mantelshelf and the roses and the ornaments of paper flowers can be seen by the person lying there. A pale, thin, bent old man is he: not bent by age, but by constant stooping; with long hair--a fringe of it only round his head--nearly white, and with a thoughtful expression on his face that would well become a student; which this old man is not, in the ordinary acceptation of the term. Among the decorations on the mantelshelf is the smallest of clocks, in a case of wood, carved most likely by Swiss hands. As the old man sits and works, a click from the Swiss clock warns him that another

hour is nearly gone. "Five minutes to nine," he whispers, and he steps softly towards the screen, and moves it so that, when he returns to his seat, he can see what it has before hidden from his sight. With the exception of the click, and presently of the striking of the hour in thin bell-notes, not a sound is heard in the room; for the old man has list slippers on his feet. The shifting of the screen has disclosed a single iron bedstead, on which lies a woman asleep. She is careworn and middle-aged; and when her features are composed, a likeness may be discerned in them to the picture of the girl on the mantelshelf. But at the present moment her lips wreathe distressfully, and an expression of pain rests upon her face.

So, in this quiet room, the sick woman sleeping and the old man working, the minutes pass swiftly, and the click of the little Swiss clock is heard again. Five minutes to ten. The old man, who has been growing restless, and who has several times gone to the bed to see if the woman is awake, grows more restless still as he hears the last click. "Alfred promised to be here by this time," he says, with an anxious look at the door as he lays his work aside. On a little table near the bed are two medicine bottles, one large and one small, which, with their labels tied nattily round their necks, look ridiculously like clergymen with their bands on. The old man takes one of these medicine bottles, and reads the directions: "Two tablespoonfuls to be given immediately she awakes, and after that, the same quantity every four hours."

"And she won't take it from any other hand than mine or Lily's," he muses. "If Alfred doesn't come home, and she doesn't wake, I must get somebody to go for Lily."

As he stands debating with himself what is best to be done, he hears a tap at the door. It heralds the appearance of a young woman, one of the lodgers in the upper part of the house. She has her hat and shawl on, and a basket is on her arm.

"Ah, Mrs. Podmore," he says abstractedly, "will you step inside?"

"No, thank you, Mr. Wheels," she answers; "I'm in a hurry. How's your daughter to-night?"

"Not so well, not so well," he says. "She's wandering a little, I think. The doctor was here in the afternoon, and I could tell by his face that he thought she was worse. And I have to give her her medicine directly she wakes."

"I'm sorry she's not well. We've all got our trials, Mr. Wheels! My sister's little boy's down with the fever too. I'm going to take a run round to see how he is."

"Not serious, I hope?"

"I don't know," replies Mrs. Podmore gravely; "he seems to me to be sinking--but we're all in God Almighty's hands. One thinks of one's own, Mr. Wheels, at such times. Thank God, *our* little one's upstairs, asleep, safe and well. But we feared we was going to lose her in the spring, and I never see a child struck down but I think of *her*."

"I often think of little Polly, too," says the old man sympathisingly, "and of how near she was to death. Do you remember how Lily grieved?"

"Remember it!" exclaims Mrs. Podmore, with grateful enthusiasm. "I shall remember it to my dying day. What I should have done without her I don't know. When Polly was a-laying there so quiet and solemn and white, and my heart was fit to break, Lily used to come and cheer me up. She was the only comfort I had, bless her kind heart and pretty face!"

"Yes, yes," cries the old man eagerly; "and how Polly took to her after that! and how fond she was of my girl! But who could help being that--who could help being that?"

"I had enough to do, what with looking after Jim and Polly," continues the homely woman. "What with keeping the place clean and sweet, and making the things the doctor ordered, and mending Jim's clothes, and getting his dinner and tea ready for him every morning before he went out; and what with him coming home dead-beat and worried with anxiety about Polly, I wonder how I ever got through with it. As for doctors, my blood curdles again when I see them looking so steady and cold at somebody that's a-dying before their very eyes. Our Polly had been abed nigh upon three weeks, when the doctor comes and looks at her and feels her pulse, and shakes his head. My eyes was never off his face for a second; and when I saw him shake his head, I turned so faint that I thought I should have dropped. He was going away without a word, when I stopped him in the passage. I tried to speak, but I couldn't, and I thought it was cruel of him to be so particular about buttoning his gloves, while I was in that state of agitation that I could hardly stand. 'Don't take on so, Mrs. Podmore,' he said; 'you've done your best, and that ought to be a consolation to you.' As if anything could have been a consolation to me! I asked him if he couldn't give me a bit of hope; but he shook his head again, and said, 'While there's life there's hope.' I knew what that meant, and I had to catch hold of the banisters to steady myself. Then I went and sat by Polly's bed, and began to cry. It seemed to me that she was gone from us already, and that home wasn't home any more. And I was frightened when I thought of Jim. His heart's bound up in Polly, you see, Mr. Wheels; they used to have quite a little play between them of a morning. She'd creep close to him in bed, and put her arms round his neck, and there they'd lay a-cuddling one another for half an hour before he had to get up. When he had had his breakfast and had kissed her a dozen times, and was out in the passage going to work, she'd call him back and make fun of him, and they'd laugh together that cheery like that it did my heart good to hear 'em. Sometimes

she wouldn't call him, and he'd wait in the passage. She knew he was waiting, and she'd set up in bed, with a cunning little smile on her lips, and her head bent forward, and her pretty hand raised, listening. He knew what was going on inside that little head of hers, and he'd stamp his feet and pretend to go downstairs. Then she'd call out to him, 'Father, father!' and he'd say, 'Here I am, Pollypod!' and they'd have another romp together, until he said, 'Now I *must* be off, Pollypod!' and away he'd run, waking half the people in the house with his clatter. I was always easy in my mind about Jim when he went away like that. I thought of all this after the doctor gave Polly up, and I was frightened. Jim was very late that night, and Lily was with me when he came home. 'How's my little Pollypod?' he said; but he didn't wait for an answer--he saw it in my face. I thought he'd have gone mad; but we got him quieted after a bit, and Lily sat up with me that night watching. Well, it was a little past four o'clock in the morning, and Jim was asleep, and Lily and me was watching and fearing, watching and fearing! Ah! it's an anxious time that watching of a night, when you fear you're a-going to lose something that's dearer to you than life! The tick of the clock then isn't like the tick of the clock at any other time. It seems to bring a warning to you, like; it sounds so solemn, that it brings a creeping feeling on you, and you're almost too frightened to look over your shoulder. That night we could have heard a pin drop, everything was so quiet. Polly was so still that I put my face close to hers on the pillow to catch her breathing, and I was laying like that when she opened her eyes quite wide. It gave me a dreadful turn, for I didn't know what was going to happen. But she opened her eyes for good, thank God! 'Where's father?' she asked. I couldn't have heard her, she said it so soft, if my face hadn't been close to hers, and if my heart hadn't been in my ears. 'Where's father?' she asked. I motioned to Lily, and she woke Jim; and Polly moved her thin little hand towards him and smiled. She wanted to put her hand on his neck, but she was that weak she couldn't. So Jim, with the tears running down his face, but making believe to laugh as if they was having a game together, puts his face quite close to hers, and kisses her, and from that moment Polly mended; and father and her they romp together in the morning as they used to do, and pretend more than ever, I think."

Here Mrs. Podmore wipes her eyes, and asks the old man to forgive her for being such a gossip. "I've come to ask you, as you're going to stay in, to tell Jim, if he comes home before I'm back, that I won't be gone long."

"I'll tell him; and perhaps, Mrs. Podmore, you wouldn't mind my asking your husband if he would go to the music-hall, and bring Lily home. I can't leave my daughter, you see, and Alf's not here, and I don't like the idea of Lily walking through the streets by herself."

"Ask him and welcome," says Mrs. Podmore; "but, love your heart Mr. Wheels, Jim'll be that sleepy when he comes upstairs that I don't think he's to be trusted. He can hardly see hisself home when he's done work, he's that worked off his legs; and he's worse on Saturday than on any other night. How he manages to tumble through the streets is more than I can tell; it's a mercy he ain't run over. He always waits in the passage for me to come and help him up, and when he *is* up, he tumbles down dead beat. That's why I asked you to tell him about my being out, you being nearest the street-door. To be sure Jim is a little brighter sometimes than others, and he may be so to-night."

The old man clings to this hope, and nods to Mrs. Podmore, who hurries out of the house. Then the old man falls to counting the seconds until Mr. Podmore makes his appearance. He has not long to wait. In a short time he hears the street-door opened and slammed-to. "That's Mr. Podmore," says the old man, starting from his chair and listening anxiously; "I hope he's not too tired to go."

Mr. Podmore seems to be not only too tired to go, but too tired to come. When he has slammed the street-door, he leans against it, and dozes. He has no need to close his eyes, for they were closed when he opened the door. He remains in this position for a few moments, then shuffles along the passage. Coming to the stairs, he sits upon the lowest step, and yields to the soft-sleeping murmurs which are overpowering him. Rousing himself, he sets himself in motion again, and begins to ascend the stairs, dragging his feet wearily, and falls asleep again before he arrives at the landing. In this way he reaches the old man, who is waiting to speak to him, and who is already tormented by the fear that this is not one of Mr. Podmore's bright nights.

Mr. Podmore is followed by a dog--a rough, yellow Scotch terrier--every hair in whose body bristles with watchfulness. It is a small dog, viciously faithful, and as it waits patiently and intelligently upon its master's movements, observing every motion with its watchful grey eyes, it declares clearly, "Here am I, wide awake, and armed at all points. Touch him if you dare with any but a friendly hand! Address him at your peril in any but a friendly voice! I'm on guard, faithful and true, and I can distinguish friends from foes. I can smell them." No signs of impatience are visible in the dog's demeanour at Mr. Podmore's slow progress upstairs. It follows its master's footsteps with serious attention, watches while he dozes, pricks up its ears as he sets himself in motion again, and now stands on the landing before the old man with its nose close to its master's legs.

"Good-evening, Mr. Podmore," says the old man.

"Good-evening."

He blinks at the light which the old man holds in his hands, closes his eyes, and shows so decided a disposition to lean against nothing, that the old man has to save him from falling. This

arouses him for a moment, and seeing the door open, he staggers into the room, and sinks into a chair. He is a well-made man, thirty years of age perhaps, and belongs unmistakably to the working classes--to one of the most perilously-worked of the working-classes. He carries a blue-cotton pocket-handkerchief containing an empty basin and plate which has held his dinner, and his hands and face are black with dirt. As he sits in the chair, having fallen rather heavily into it, the dog stretches itself under the seat, with its nose between its master's legs. You can see nothing of it but the tip of its nose and its two watchful grey eyes, steady and clear and humid, on the look-out for squalls.

"Where's my wife?" murmurs Mr. Podmore drowsily.

"She asked me to tell you," replies the old man, regarding Mr. Podmore doubtfully, "that she's gone to see her sister's child, who is ill. She'll be back soon."

"All right," says Mr. Podmore, upon whose ears the old man's gentle voice falls so soothingly that the soft sleep-murmurs take more complete possession of him; he sways forward in his chair, and is on the point of falling to the ground on his face, when he recovers himself by a sudden convulsive movement.

"Hush!" says the old man, casting an apprehensive look towards the bed. "Don't make a noise."

"Never fear," murmurs Mr. Podmore. "I have enough--noise--every day--to last me--my life-time."

He does not say this all at once, but breaks off two or three times to doze. Seeing him in this condition, the old man relinquishes his intention of asking him to go for Lily; his great anxiety now is to get rid of the tired-out man. But Mr. Podmore, overpowered by exhaustion, and wooed by the quiet that prevails, is so desperately bent upon falling into a deep sleep, that the old man has much difficulty in arousing him.

"Come, come," he urges, "rouse yourself, Mr. Podmore. Don't you think you would be more comfortable in bed?"

"I'm comfortable--enough," says Mr. Podmore, leaning his head on the old man's breast; "if you'll--let me be. I'm dead--beat. Where's my--precious--little Pollypod?"

"Up-stairs. Waiting for you. I want to take you to her."

Mr. Podmore rises unresistingly, and they stagger up-stairs to his apartment on the third floor. The dog follows them. A candle is alight in the wash-bowl, and Pollypod is in bed, asleep. The dog, satisfied that a safe haven is reached, leaps upon the bed, and after licking Pollypod's face, curls itself at the foot of the bed, following its master's movements now with lazily-watchful eyes. Mr. Podmore clings to the old man, who assists him on to the bed, and determines to wait until the tired-out man is asleep. Mr. Podmore, nestling close to Pollypod, thinks it necessary to enter into an explanation before his senses entirely desert him, and he mingles his apologies with expressions of endearment towards his child.

"You see, Mr. Wheels," he murmurs, at intervals, "When a man's--a pointsman--(my little darling!)--and has to be at it--fourteen and sixteen and eighteen--hours a day--he ain't accountable--for hisself. The company says--he is--and the public says--he is; but I'm--a pointsman--and I know--better. (Don't I, Pollypod!) I've been on duty--now--since five o'clock--this morning--and I'm dead--beat. (Dead--beat, Pollypod!) What'd the public--say to that--if they knew it? I'm dead--beat--and I ain't accountable--for myself. (Am I, my pretty?) I wish the public--and the company--'d try it theirselves,--for a month. (To-morrow's Sunday, Pollypod, thanks be!) Last week--there was a--a accident--on our line--you saw it--in the papers. One woman--was killed--and others was--shook. The papers had articles on it--and the pointsman--who was dead--beat--was took in custody--and the coroner--said--said—"

But what the coroner said is not repeated on the present occasion, for Mr. Podmore falls into utter unconsciousness, and being undoubtedly as dead-beat as it is in the power of mortal to be, sleeps the deepest of deep sleeps. While the faithful dog, cozily coiled up on the bed, blinks and blinks at the candle, in a state of uncertainty as to whether a lurid star which gleams in the long dull wick is friend or foe.

CHAPTER II.

IN WHICH DRIBBLE JUNIOR DISCOURSES ON CO-OPERATION.

The old man, leaving Mr. Podmore in paradise, walked slowly down-stairs, and paused before a door on the second landing, on which was inscribed--again in yellow round-hand on a blue

ground: "Umbrella and Parasol Hospital. Knock and enter." After a slight hesitation, he knocked and entered.

J. Gribble junior was hard at work mending ribs and bones, and speedily recovering frames on moderate terms. Mrs. J. Gribble junior was also hard at work on silk and gingham. The heir of the house of Gribble junior was asleep in a corner under an umbrella tent.

There could not have been fewer than a hundred umbrellas and parasols in the room, and there was not one of them which did not show signs of having seen a great deal of life--evidently much more than was good for it. Here was one reclining against the wall, surmounted by a great knob set upon one side of its head. It had a rakish and dissipated air, and seemed to declare that it had been out late at nights, in all sorts of company and all sorts of weather, and liked it; and that when the slits in its silk coat were mended, it intended to resume its dissolute life. Here was one, a sad-looking gingham, very faded and worn, telling by the plainest of signs the story of its poor life and that of its owner. In your fancy you could see the faded gingham, on its rickety frame, being borne along through wind and sleet; and if you peeped beneath the awning you would see a patient-looking woman, meanly dressed, and you would know, without being told in so many words, that the burden of life had withered all the roses that once bloomed on her cheek; for a dozen years since she could have been but a girl, and could not have been otherwise than pretty. Here was one, thin and sleek, with ivory handle, which said, "I am faded gentility." It needed no great stretch of the imagination to see the hand in its well-worn and much mended glove that had clasped that handle in the streets for many months. Here was one which proclaimed, "I have been dropsical from early youth, and there is no cure for me;" and indeed all Gribble junior's skill would not avail him if he endeavoured to get the bulge out of it. In addition to these and other types--almost as various as the types to be found in human beings--were naked umbrellas and parasols which had been stripped of their clothing. Here was one battered and bruised, with half-a-dozen ribs broken. Here was one which asserted proudly, "I am Paragon, and I glory to show myself!" Here was the dainty frame of a parasol standing like a shamefaced girl by the side of the frame of an old-man umbrella that had led a bad life.

"Ah, Mr. Wheels!" said Gribble junior. "I thought it was too late for a patient.--Mrs. J. G., a chair."

"Thank you, thank you, Mr. Gribble," replied the old man. "I'll not sit down, please. The little one well, Mrs. Gribble?"

Mrs. Gribble junior went to the umbrella tent, and softly raised it. But the face of the heir of the house of Gribble junior was hidden by a parasol, of which the child had made an inner tent, like the box-within-a-box Chinese puzzle, and which it held tightly in its hand.

"Quite well, thank you, Mr. Wheels," said the mother. "How is your daughter to-night?"

"I don't think she's improving. She wanders a good deal."

Gribble junior, who had been gazing with a satisfied air at the umbrella tent, nodded gently two or three times to express sympathy with the old man, who remarked, speaking of the child, "He takes to the business early, Mr. Gribble."

"Took to it from a baby," said Gribble junior complacently. "He sucked in the umbrella and parasol business with his mother's milk, as a body might say. For the top of his cradle was made of two umbrellas, and when he opened his little eyes and looked up, the only roof he saw, until he could crawl, was a roof of silk and whalebone. Nothing like commencing young! That there young un's going to be a useful member of society. I made up my mind to that before Mrs. J. G. made up her mind to present him to me, as a body might say. He can use his left hand as well as his right. No rights and lefts for me. They shall both be rights. It's robbing a young un of half his chance in the world to train him up to a useless hand. You might almost make up your mind to train his left leg to limp. That's not the way to keep moving. I shouldn't wonder if, when the young un's a man, he invents a new umbrella to astonish the world and make our fortunes."

The old man smiled, and remarked that Gribble junior was at work late.

"Obliged to be. My motto, you know--keep moving. I always think," and Gribble junior sent a pleasant merry look in the direction of the old man, "that it's going to rain to-morrow, and that people'll want umbrellas."

"Very good of you, very considerate," murmured the old man.

"It wouldn't be so bad," continued Gribble junior, "if other people, whether they're professors of anatomy or not, would think the same way; if *they'd* think it was going to rain to-morrow, and if *they'd* prepare their umbrellas to-day--as a body might say."

"Surely, surely," said the old man, contriving by an effort to arrest his wandering thoughts. "And how's business, Mr. Gribble?"

"Never was so bad," replied Gribble junior cheerfully. "Father's experience'll carry him a good deal farther back than mine will, as you may guess, Mr. Wheels, and he says times never was so bad as they are now."

(It is remarkable, be where you will and at any period, here or in any other part of the world, now or twenty years since or twenty years to come, that "times never were so bad" as they are certain to be at the moment of inquiry.)

"What is the cause of the bad times?" asked the old man, who had not yet found the opportunity of introducing the object of his visit, and who knew that Gribble junior must always "have his say."

"Well, Mr. Wheels," said Gribble junior, hammering softly on a dislocated rib, "some *will* have it it's because the Queen don't come out more; but that's an old cry, and I don't believe in it. Though I think it would be better if the Queen came amongst us more than she does. It's queer how people *will* stick to old cries. Old cries are like old boots. You wear tight boots long enough, and they'll become easy and comfortable, and you don't like to throw 'em off. Father says it's the co-operative stores, and he's bitter on 'em accordingly. If father's got a sore place, it's co-operation. You should start him on the subject one night; he'd open your eyes for you. There isn't an article you can mention that co-operation hasn't laid hands on--except cats'-meat, perhaps. The co-operative men don't draw the line nowhere, except at cats'-meat. There isn't a thing that father sells that they haven't gone into: not that father's business is the only business that's put upon. They go into coffins, and that's going far enough, I'm sure--as a body might say. They take a penny off everything; tallow-dips, yellow soap and mottled. As for scented and brown windsor, father hasn't sold a cake for a month. And if things don't sell, they spoil. Dust won't be denied. Then soap withers. It's like us, Mr. Wheels; the bloom goes off, and we ain't worth as much a pound as we were once on a time. We don't weigh so much neither: the sap goes out. Flies make inroads. They're like co-operation; they touch everything. The very mouse-traps get blown. As for what ought to be inside of 'em--mice--I needn't tell you what a hole *they* make in profits. I pity the small grocers now that co-operation's got hold of things."

During the brief pause that followed, the old man listened for a sound from the sick-room. Mrs. Gribble observed his anxiety, and knowing her husband's weakness when he was on a favourite theme, rose and said,

"Do take a chair, Mr. Wheels. I'll go and sit in your room for a few minutes."

The old man gave her a grateful look as she went out, and sat down patiently. He had not, long to wait before Gribble junior resumed.

"When trade began to fall off, I painted that sign outside for father, and I think it did a little good, but not much. Trade soon fell back again, and co-operation kept moving. Then he wrote, 'Down with co-operation!' on a bit of writing-paper, and put it in the window, as if that'd stop it. I told father not to do it, but he wouldn't take my advice. What's the consequence? The paper's fly-blown, and co-operation keeps moving. Father says he doesn't know where it's going to stop, and what's going to be the end of it, and says that people ought to set their faces against it. But catch 'em doing it when they think they can get a penny off everything, and catch 'em doing it as long as the women's got the buying of things. When they get the chance of making the market penny, they're sure to try and make it into the market shilling That's the way of women, bless 'em!"

The old man nodded in satisfaction, for although Gribble junior's words might have sounded very like grumbling from another man's lips, they bore the most refreshing construction as they fell from his. He had one of the pleasantest faces that eyes ever looked upon, and his voice was as pleasant as his face. Everything about this small plump man was round and agreeable. He was one of that kind of men who go out walking with their wives on the day of rest, and who carry their babies in the streets, and enjoy it. Gribble junior was often seen in this position, and, as he walked along by the side of his wife, would occasionally hold up his son and heir to the gaze of the public, as much as to say, "Here he is; he can use his left hand as well as his right, and is going to keep moving. Here is the cleverest baby in the world: what do you think of him?" There is a great deal of character to be learnt by observing the manner in which fathers carry their babies in the streets, and notwithstanding that the custom is considered by the majority of people to be namby-pamby, it is often not an unpleasant sight to witness. One father carries his treasure carefully and proudly, and proclaims, "This is Ours, and we think all the world of it!" While another holds his burden loosely, and proclaims, "This is Ours, and I wish it was Yours!" See this last specimen of the British father slouching along, and his wife walking discontentedly a few steps behind him. He carries his baby in the most uncomfortable of positions, with its head hanging down. He is a miserable dissatisfied man. He does not look this way or that, but straight before him, surlily and wearily. He seems to say, "A nice kind of thing this is, after my hard week's work! I can't go out for my Sunday walk without dragging the brat along with me. What a fool I was to get married!" And though really the burden is as a feather's weight in the strong man's arms, his discontent makes it as weighty as so much lead. There isn't a bright bit of ribbon in the child's dress, and if you could see into the man's heart, you would learn that it would not be a very great grief to him if the child were to die quietly in his arms. You may depend upon it that the home of this man and woman is not a happy one, and that life is truly a burden to them. See this other and better specimen. Working-man father and working-woman mother, in precisely the same position of life as the discontented man. He carries the baby carefully and tenderly, and the mother walks briskly by his side. There are refreshing bits of colour about the woman's dress, and the baby's dress is, pretty and bright. Sometimes the man pauses, and his wife uncovers the baby's face, and they both look at it lovingly while she makes a fuss and pretence about setting something right with the baby's hood. He gazes about him cheerfully and seems to say, "This is

one of my brightest bits of sunshine. I shouldn't enjoy my Sunday's walk without it. What a happy day for me was the day I got married!" And he thinks that soon--in twelve months, perhaps--his little treasure will be able to toddle along by his side, and throw bread to the ducks in the Park. And though the child is plump and heavy, love makes it light. Happy father! Happy home!

No such reflections as these passed through the mind of Gribble junior as he continued the enunciation of his sensible philosophy.

"My way is, to take things as they come, and to keep moving. You knock your head against things, and you're sure to rasp your skin. What's the use of fretting? You only chafe yourself, and nobody takes any notice. Make the best of things. That's what I tell father; but he doesn't agree with me. The consequence is, that he shows his weak hand, as a body might say. And that's not wise. If you have a weakness, keep it to yourself. Don't let the world see it. Father said to me one night last week when he was shutting up--(he'd only taken three and fourpence the whole day, and that's enough, I own, or isn't enough, perhaps I ought to say, to drive a shopkeeper wild)--that if he could catch hold of a co-operation manager, he'd pitch into him. I told him that if he did, he'd very likely get locked-up for it; and he said, 'Never mind, I shouldn't be the only martyr that's suffered in a good cause.' The fact is, Mr. Wheels, father belongs to the old school--he won't keep moving; and as all the world's on the move, he's left behind. I belong to the new school; and I run along with the tide as fast as I can. Mrs. J. G. belongs to the new school, and so does her brother. His name is Thompson. He's got a shop about half a mile from here. He advertises himself everywhere as Thompson the Great. He has thousands of bills circulated: 'The great Thompson! the unrivalled Thompson! Thompson the First! Come and see him to-night. No charge for admission. Where's Thompson? Who's Thompson?' That's his style. He has an illumination over his shop every night, with his portrait in the middle--although he's not a handsome man by any means. And what do you think his business is? He keeps a little paper-hanging shop. By-and-by he'll have a big paper-hanging shop. He keeps moving."

Here Gribble junior gave a finishing tap to the patient in hand, and whipped off his apron.

"I've done work for the night," he said.

At the same moment Mrs. Gribble entered, and whispered to the old man that the woman down-stairs was sleeping soundly.

"That's where it is," said the old man, with a disturbed look; "that's what I've come in for. She's got to have her medicine given to her directly she wakes, and she won't take it from any other hand than mine or Lily's; and it's now half-past ten o'clock, and I ought to be at the Hall to bring Lily home, although it'll be an hour yet before she's ready. Lily can't walk home by herself, especially on Saturday night, when there are so many roughs about and so much money spent in drink."

"Where's Alf?" asked Gribble junior.

"I don't know; he promised to be here at ten o'clock; but he hasn't come."

"Do you want Mrs. J. G. to sit with your girl down-stairs while you go and fetch Lily?"

"Didn't I tell you," said the old man fretfully, "that my daughter's got to have her medicine given her directly she wakes, and that she won't take it from anybody but me or Lily?"

"Well, then," asked Gribble junior, with great good-humour, "do you want me to go and fetch Lily?"

"Yes--yes--yes," with a jealous little sigh between each yes, as if the speaker were unwilling to give to another a task that he would fain perform himself. "I came in to ask you. I thought of Mr. Podmore at first; but he's dead-beat."

Gribble junior's coat was off before the old man was finished, and he was plunging his face in water.

"What makes Lily late to-night?" he called out in the midst of his plashing.

"They've changed the programme, and she's got a new song to sing; and her turn won't come on until past eleven o'clock. The manager's an artful man, and knows what an attraction Lily is; the people'll stop to the last to see her pretty face and hear her pretty voice. My Lily!" He uttered the last words softly to himself, in a tone of infinite tenderness. "Here are the tickets. This admits to the Hall; show it to the man at the door, and he'll let you in. Wait until Lily comes on; and when she has finished--which'll not be until they call her back two or three times--go out at once, and ask your way to the stage-door. This ticket'll admit you to the side of the stage. Tell Lily I couldn't come because mother's not awake, and that I've sent you to take care of her, and to bring her home."

"All right," said Gribble junior, twisting himself into his coat, delighted at the opportunity of getting free admission to a music-hall. "Get supper ready, Liz, by the time I come back. I'll bring Lily safe home, Mr. Wheels."

With a parting nod, the cheerful little man skipped down the stairs and into the street, and the old man went back to his room. The woman was still sleeping. He took up the work-box on which he had been working, and looked at it affectionately. "My Lily!" he murmured again, in the same tone of tenderness he had used before; and so sat musing, with that yearning of deep love which is almost painful in its intensity. Soon the Swiss clock struck eleven, and the old man laid the cloth for supper. There was the little cruet on wheels, and the breadbasket, and the salt-cellar; and each plate and dish had a wooden rim on the bottom, in which very small wheels were inserted. He took these and the remains of a small joint of roast beef from a cupboard on the landing; placed the vase with the roses in it in the centre of the table; went out for beer; and when he returned, arranged the supper-things again and again, until he was satisfied that everything was in the exact place to please his darling.

CHAPTER III.

INTRODUCES THE ROYAL WHITE ROSE MUSIC-HALL.

Gribble junior had the finest spirits of any man in London. Nothing jarred upon him. From the days of his infancy, when he used to munch his knuckles contentedly, to the present time, he was never known to be out of temper. He had never had a ten-pound note to call his own, and he was always blithe and happy. His father had been a struggling small tradesman all his life, taking just enough over his counter to keep body and soul together, as he expressed it; and therefore, although Gribble junior was his son, he could scarcely be called his heir. But the lucky junior came into a rare inheritance from his mother--the inheritance of a cheerful nature. Such a patrimony is worth more than great estates and much money.

He was in one of his happiest moods as, in accordance with his own maxim, he pushed along and kept moving towards the Royal White Rose Music-hall. It was not ten minutes' walk from his lodgings in Soho; but it might have been situated in another land, so great was the contrast between his quiet street and that in which the Royal White Rose asserted itself. The difference between the two localities was something similar to that between a poor peaceful woman treading life's path humbly and unassumingly, and a flaunting shameless madam, painted and bedizened, with everything glaring and everything false about her. The narrow pathway that led to the Royal White Rose was almost blocked up by the busy crowd of men and women and boys and girls with which it was filled. The living stream moved, it is true; but the waters were unhealthful and turbid, and ran sluggishly. In one part of the thoroughfare it was dark, and the shops were closed; in another--that portion which was in immediate contiguity to the Royal White Rose--every shop was open and driving a busy trade. Hansom cabs, with senile men and painted women in them, were rattling along; man-rakes and boy-rakes--from the twelve-year-old smoking his penny cigar with his hands in his pockets, to the fifty-year-old with his hat on one side and his black whiskers and dandy cane--sauntered idly this way and that, and often stopped to exchange light words and looks with the girl-rakes and women-rakes, who out-vied them in numbers and boldness. Unrestrained license prevailed in this saturnalia. Laughing indecency, painted misery, and flagrant violations of all that is modest and good, unblushingly proclaimed themselves in the very eye of the law. The corruption was open. There was no attempt at disguise in this legalised Mart of Shame, through which, as it forms an important lung of the City, many good men and women must necessarily walk. How innately pure must be that rose of modesty that can escape defilement, when brought into contact with it!

The Royal White Rose Music-hall was situated almost in the centre of the Mart of Shame, and Gribble junior paused for a moment at the entrance of the Hall, which was blazing with light. Dozens of pompous and fascinating announcements, in the largest letters and in the most brilliant of coloured inks, lined both sides of the passage which led to the pay-place. Upon these announcements Gribble junior gazed admiringly. The Great This will appear. The Great That was engaged. The Inimitable Noodle, who had been patronised by Royalty, would sing his choicest songs. The Flashiest Man in London to-night. The Pretty Lily at half-past eleven. The Incomparable Lackbrain (the Pet of the Drawing-room) would sing "Fie, for Shame!" and "The Only Way to enjoy Life." And so on and so on.

Gribble junior made his way into the Hall, which was crowded to excess with flash men and women, with working people of both sexes, and with boys and girls sucking in bad and foolish lessons eagerly. The Incomparable Lackbrain was on the stage, singing "Fie, for Shame!" to the intense delight of his hearers. He was a tall lank man, with a painfully vacuous countenance, and "Fie, for Shame!" was the recital of the doings of a young man and a young woman who had met on a penny steamboat, and whose vulgar words and allusions continually elicited from one or the other the exclamation, most enjoyably uttered, "Fie, for Shame!" The title of the song was the refrain of the chorus, in which the audience were invited to join by the singer. Amazing were the zest and vigour with which they complied with the invitation; the men and women laughed and winked at one another, and cried, "Fie, for Shame! Fie, for Shame!" and when the Incomparable disappeared, after many an ungainly slouch, they clapped their hands and shouted for him to return. The Chairman struck twice upon his bell, and the well-known signal provoked another

burst of applause. In the interval between the songs, Gribble junior observed and admired; for it would be useless to deny that the honest fellow enjoyed the scene immensely. His ticket admitted him to the stalls, where the Chairman, with a dyed moustache and a large nose, sat upon his throne, the cynosure of a thousand admiring eyes. Gribble junior managed to squeeze himself into a seat near this potentate, who was looked upon with awe by the youthful portion of the audience, and whose chief duty appeared to consist in smoking unlimited cigars and drinking unlimited brandies and whiskies hot at the expense of certain favoured frequenters of the Hall. In the programme, which Gribble junior had purchased for a penny, was a portrait of the Chairman, in which his large nose was considerably toned down, as a body might say (to use one of Gribble junior's favourite phrases), and his moustache presented a noble and imposing appearance. A biography of the distinguished man was also given, in which he was credited with many rare qualities, and from which you would infer that his career was one of spotless virtue; but had you been aware of the true facts of the case, you would have regarded the biography with considerable doubt. Gribble junior read also in the programme an advertisement of an eminent music-seller in the West, who had published those justly popular and refined favourite songs, "Fie, for Shame!" and "The Only Way to enjoy Life!" with a portrait of the composer on the title-page. As he was reading this, the band struck up a well-known air, and the Incomparable Lackbrain appeared in an outrageous costume to instruct the audience in "The Only Way to enjoy Life." According to his laying down of the law, the only time to enjoy life was after midnight; the only place, in the streets; and the only method, to drink champagne and brandy hot until you reeled home to your bed at three o'clock in the morning in a state of intoxication. The Incomparable illustrated the last phase. He set his hat at the back of his head, pulled his hair over his eyes, untied his cravat and let it hang loose, hitched his coat off one shoulder, buttoned his waistcoat awry, and pulled one leg of his trousers nearly up to his knees. In this condition he reeled about the stage, and drivelled and laughed like an imbecile; and, having thus distinguished himself, retired, after an egregiously stupid speech, in which he returned ungrammatical thanks to his admirers for their appreciation of his efforts. Then another singer appeared, who sang only one song; for as this was the last night of his engagement, it was the Chairman's policy to show by his indifference that the popularity of the Royal White Rose Music-hall would not be diminished by the retirement of this performer. Consequently he did not lead the applause by rapping on the table with his little hammer, and did not give the usual signal on the bell for the singer's reappearance. But he did rap very loudly before he rose to announce, with great pleasure, the fascinating Lily; and when he sat down he led the applause smartly and vigorously. Gribble junior was not the only one who joined in the applause with spirit. Nearly every person in the Hall lent a hand, and great clapping came from a private box at the corner of the stage, towards which many a curious and envious gaze had been directed during the night. There was a little table in that box, on which were a champagne-bottle and glasses, and two gentlemen were there, one sitting and the other standing. The one who was standing was the well-known manager and proprietor of the Royal White Rose Music-hall, and every now and then he leant from the box and surveyed his patrons, some of whom nudged each other, and pointed him out as the great manager who had risen from nothing. About an hour ago a bottle of champagne had been sent down from the box to the bottle-nosed Chairman, who had filled his own and one or two other glasses, and, before he drank, had looked towards the donor with a half-respectful, half familiar glance. These small circumstances had rendered the box an object of interest to the audience.

A working-man said to his wife, "There's a swell up in that box; he's drinking champagne, and treating the manager."

"What's champagne like, Bill?" the wife asked.

"Don't know; never tasted it," was the gruff rejoinder.

"It must be dreadfully nice," said the wife, with a woman's longing for things.

These paradoxical phrases are not confined to working-women; ladies in polite society are in the habit of giving utterance to such unmeaning combinations of words that we may expect presently to hear certain matters spoken of as sweetly murderous or delightfully disgusting.

The gentleman in the box, then, who sat with his back to the audience, applauded energetically when the fascinating Lily was announced, and the manager, as in duty bound, applauded also, but more graciously than the other.

"You've only seen her once," observed the manager.

"Only once," replied the gentleman. "I strolled in last night to kill half an hour, and was surprised to see such a little beauty come on the stage. How long has she been out?"

"Nearly eight months. There's nothing very striking about her, but she's pretty and simple and innocent—"

"Pretty--and simple and innocent!" interrupted the gentleman, with a light laugh.

"Yes, I'm hanged if she isn't!" exclaimed Storks energetically.

"And been in the Royal White Rose Music-hall, or any other music-hall, rose or dandelion, for

eight months?" interrupted the gentleman again, in the same light manner.

Manager Storks looked displeased. "You've got the common notion," he said; "because a girl's a ballet-girl or a singer, she can't be honest, I suppose! You don't know so much about them as I do, that's clear."

It came into the gentleman's mind to answer, "I don't suppose I do; *I* didn't marry a ballet-girl." But as Manager Storks did marry a ballet-girl, who was a good and industrious wife, and as he was at present master of the situation, the gentleman wisely held his tongue. Storks proceeded:

"I could show dozens of ballet-girls who'd reckon you up in no time, and who'd snap their fingers at your—"

"There, there!" cried the gentleman, putting his fingers in his ears. "Stop it, there's a good fellow. I don't want a lecture upon the virtues of ballet-girls. I only meant that it's against the order of things for a pretty girl to be in a music-hall for eight months, and to be as simple and innocent as you make out Lily to be. She may be as goody-goody as a missionary's daughter, for all I care."

But although he expressed himself in this indifferent manner, he was not at all indifferent when Lily came on the stage.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed, under his breath, "she *is* a little beauty!" And he clapped his hands, and threw a handsome bouquet to her.

As Lily stooped and picked up the flowers, the applause was redoubled. She stood before the motley assembly with the flowers in her hand, and her sweet innocent face beamed like a star amidst the atmosphere of smoke and heat. Truly, what had been enacted previously within the Royal White Rose Music-hall gave the lie to the title; but here was a rose, a pure white rose, which justified it. She was dressed in white silk, and had white flowers in her hair. She recognised Gribble junior, and gave him a little smile, which filled him with delight and made him look round with pride. The gentleman in the box saw the smile, and the individual at whom it was directed.

"Does she know that cad down there?" he asked of Manager Storks curiously. He would have given something for such a smile, but Lily did not raise her eyes to the box.

"Seems like it," was the reply.

"He looks like a potman. Hush! What a sweet voice she has!"

The sweetest of voices--pure and fresh, sounding strangely indeed in such a place. There was not one in the Hall to whom her simple song and almost childlike manner did not afford pleasure. "How pretty she is! How young! Is that hair all her own? She paints o' course. What a stunnin' little foot she's got! Let's 'ave 'er in agin. Ah, *she'll* soon get spoilt! Lackbrain's awfully sweet on her, I heerd. So is that gent in the box." Suchlike comments were made freely in the Hall, as were also a few others of a different nature. Said one painted young woman in pink silk to another in blue, "She's the very image of my sister Bess as she was twelve years ago. I've got a picture of her at home." And another, a faded woman--you could see she was that, notwithstanding all her finery--sighed and said to her companion, "That was mother's favourite song. Many's the time she's sung it to me." And the memory of the days when she led a better life acted upon her parched heart for a few moments like drops of dew. But the softening influence soon died away in the glare and the smoke and the bad surroundings.

The noise in the Hall was at its highest as Gribble junior pushed his way through the pleasure-and-pain seekers. Being directed by the attendant, he soon found himself on the stage. It was dark and almost quiet. The last song had been sung, and the last strains of music had died away; the curtain was drawn up, and the waiters were collecting the glasses and assisting to the door two or three "jolly dogs," who were unable to assist themselves.

Gribble junior surveyed these proceedings with considerable interest. It was the first time in his life that he had ever been behind the scenes, and he was surprised to find the place dirty and shabby and unattractive. Although the Hall was closed, and no more business was supposed to be done, there were a dozen persons at least drinking at a bar in a corner. The Incomparable Lackbrain, the Inimitable Noodle, and the Flashiest Man in London, were there, laughing and drinking with the manager and the gentleman who had occupied the private box. He was a fair man, in the prime of life, and had just ordered a fresh bottle of champagne. As he raised his glass to his lips, he glanced towards the stage, and saw the shadow of Gribble junior, who was advancing towards Lily.

"Oh, Mr. Gribble," she said, "how strange to see you here! Where's grandpapa?"

"He sent me for you, Lily," answered Gribble junior, "and told me to tell you that he couldn't come for you himself, because your mother wasn't awake, and he had to give her her medicine."

"You must wait a little while," said Lily, with something of disappointment in her voice, "as I

have to fold my dresses. I always put everything in order Saturday night. I sha'n't be long."

And she tripped away, leaving Gribble junior looking after her admiringly, and thinking what a bright little creature she was.

"Who's that fellow?" asked the gentleman at the bar of the manager.

Manager Storks did not reply; but, being jealous of strangers, and probably having the fear of detectives in his mind, walked on to the stage, followed by his friends. When Gribble junior explained that he had come to fetch Lily home at the request of her grandfather, Manager Storks grumbled, and told him to tell the old man to come himself for Lily for the future.

"I can't have all sorts of strangers knocking about my stage," he said.

Gribble junior received the rebuke humbly; he was fully sensible of the privilege he was enjoying in being allowed to linger, if only for a few minutes, behind the scenes. Some of the singers and performers had followed Manager Storks, and they stood about in little groups, talking--not in the most refined language, it must be confessed. The luxury of adjectives was by far too freely indulged in. Gribble junior did not think so; he positively glowed with delight. Was he not almost rubbing elbows with the Inimitable Noodle and the Flashiest Man in London, whose dress and walk hundreds of boys in London were imitating! As for Lackbrain the Vacuous, his dull common face was regarded with reverence by Gribble junior. In such enchanting company the minutes flew away until Lily appeared, with the bouquet and a little bundle in her hand. Gribble junior was advancing toward her when he was pushed aside by the gentleman of the private box.

"A friend of mine is anxious for an introduction, Miss Lily," said Manager Storks.

The friend of the manager, who was introduced as Mr. Sheldrake, raised his hat, and Lily bowed and cast just a look at him; he murmured his pleasure at being introduced to such a charming lily--"the fairest flower in the entire Royal White Rose bouquet," he said gallantly. Ready of speech and smooth of manner was Mr. Sheldrake as he addressed Lily. He was not satisfied with Lily's bow, but held out his hand, on the little finger of which was a plain band of gold, in which a valuable diamond was set. Every respect was paid to the young girl, who replied with smiles and simple words to the civilities of speech with which she was greeted by one and another. Lackbrain the Vacuous offered to see her home.

"Thank you," she said, advancing to Gribble junior; "I have an escort." And she placed her hand on Gribble's arm, and gave him the bundle to carry.

"Let me have the pleasure of driving you home," said Mr. Sheldrake in his most agreeable voice; "my brougham is at the door."

Lily shook her head laughingly, and thanked him, but she preferred to walk.

"Then I'll walk a few steps with you," he said pertinaciously.

Gribble junior did not like the proposal, neither did Lily approve of it; but Mr. Sheldrake was not to be shaken off. When they left the Hall it was half an hour after midnight. The Sabbath-day had commenced, and had not commenced well. The glare of a noonday sun could scarcely have been more powerful in its effect than the bright light which fell from the open shops on the people and the thoroughfare. Fish-shops and glove-shops, cigar-shops and refreshment houses, the first and last especially, were driving a brisk trade. The pushing, the struggling, the anxious faces, the drunken forms, the senseless enjoyment, the joyless mirth, the fevered life, the various aspects in which human nature was there presented, were sad to witness. Here and there in the scene were patches of shade formed by narrow thoroughfares where no light was, and at the corners of these thoroughfares, standing in the shade and forming part of it, policemen might occasionally be seen, waiting quietly to play their part in the torrent which the law allows to flow. Before one of these guardians of the peace--most paradoxical designation in such a scene--two men of the lower classes paused, and were immediately desired to move on. They were costermongers; their appearance was as rough as their speech. But that one of them at all events was logical, and that there was reason in his logic, were in some measure proved by his speech.

"This is Sunday, ain't it?" he asked.

"Yes," answered the policeman good-humouredly, "and time for you to be abed."

"Thank yer for nothin', Bobby," he said, swaying slightly before the policeman; "but my mate 'ere wants me to arks yer somethin' fust. He wants to know why these 'ere swell shops is allowed to keep open arter twelve o'clock on Saturday nights, and why he was summonsed afore the beak for sellin' wegetables last Sunday?"

"Come, move on," was the only reply from the policeman.

"But, look 'ere now," urged the costermonger; "'ere he is with 'is barrer—"

"Yes, that's it, Dropsy!" exclaimed the second man, illustrating the position with eloquent action. "That's it. 'Ere I am with my barrer—"

But the policeman, not at all disposed to parley, and not at all curious to know the history of the man's "barrer," used effectual arguments to relieve himself of the controversial costermongers, who consoled each other, as they staggered away, by agreeing that "it was a blazin' shame, that's what it was!"

Through such scenes as this, Lily and her escort walked to the humble home in Soho. Mr. Sheldrake almost entirely monopolised the conversation, talking much about himself, and about the pleasure it would give him to improve an acquaintance so agreeably commenced. Notwithstanding that it was past midnight, he threw out hints that nothing could afford him so much pleasure as being invited into the house; but as no invitation followed the expression of this desire, he was compelled to bid Lily good-night at the street-door.

When he was alone, he stood in the quiet street, looking up at the light in the room where the old man had been waiting anxiously for his darling Lily.

CHAPTER IV.

MR. DAVID SHELDRAKE COMES TO A SHREWD CONCLUSION.

Mr. David Sheldrake, smooth and bland in voice and manner, lingered about the streets for several minutes. It was a beautifully clear night, and he may have been inclined for meditation. His appearance was sufficiently respectable for such an indulgence, and a policeman who stood in the shadow of a doorway quietly observing him did not think it necessary to interfere with him. He glanced up at the first-floor window, and saw the shadow of a woman upon the blind. "I wonder if that is her room," he thought. "What a little nugget she is!" He wished that somebody would come to the street-door, that he might ask if Lily lived on the first-floor; but no one came, and the narrow street was still and quiet. "David," he said to himself, "that girl's pretty face has quite bewitched you." He seemed to take pleasure in the thought, and smiled to himself complacently. It was evidently not the first time that he had been bewitched by a pretty face. He took his cigar-case from his pocket, and, turning to a doorway to obtain a light for his cigar, saw the policeman.

"A fine night, policeman," he said.

"Yes, sir," acquiesced the policeman civilly.

"Been on this beat long, policeman?"

"A considerable time, sir."

"Pretty quiet about here, isn't it?"

"Pretty quiet, sir. But we get enough trouble out there;" with a nod of his head in the direction of the Royal White Rose Music-hall.

"Ah, I daresay. Saturday nights especially."

"As you say, sir; Saturday nights especially."

"A cigar, policeman?"

"No, thank you, sir; not allowed to smoke."

Mr. Sheldrake coughed, and the policeman coughed in sympathy.

"Can we get anything to drink about here, policeman?"

"Not to-night, sir," said the policeman somewhat stiffly. "The houses shut at twelve, Saturday nights."

His two bribes having been refused, Mr. Sheldrake bethought himself of another. But first he said, as he put his hand into his pocket,

"Who lives in that house opposite, policeman?"

"Quite a number of people, sir. Half a dozen families, I should say."

Here the jingle of money fell upon the policeman's ears. It produced a curious effect upon him. He coughed a little cough, which might have been interpreted, "Behold me, one of her Majesty's servants, always ready to do my duty." Then he looked up at the sky, and down on the pavement, and round on the houses, and anywhere but in the direction where Mr. Sheldrake stood; murmuring at the same time dreamily, in a soft musing tone,

"*Quite* half a dozen families, I should say, sir."

As he murmured this, his hand may be said to have resembled a sly rascal peeping round the corner, to find out things without wishing to draw observation upon himself. Mr. Sheldrake's hand sought that expressive hand, and found it in a lurking--not to say slinking--position, hiding itself demonstratively in the cuff of the policeman's coat. He slipped a piece of silver into it, and the jaws of darkness instantly devoured it up. The policeman was evidently in an unconscious state; for with the air of a man whose thoughts were far away, he received the coin obliviously, and, in an absent manner, conveyed it to the nearest pocket; then he coughed again, and assumed the air of one just aroused from a little sleep.

The "open, Sesame," having been thus discreetly administered, Mr. Sheldrake learned from the policeman as much as that functionary knew concerning Lily. Yes, Lily was her real name; everybody about here knew her, and everybody liked her--children especially. She *was* very pretty and very young: not more than nineteen, he should say. Yes, she lived on the first-floor of that house. She sang at the Royal White Rose Music-hall, you know; his missus had often heard her, and was quite in love with her. So was a good many others--not women, you know. But she was different from some other girls in that establishment who lived about here. How different? O, better, you know. Couldn't tell how long that would last; no more could any one else. He had seen a good many stage girls commence well and end badly. How badly? Well, fast, you know. It was enough to turn a girl's head; the lights, the music, the dresses, and the lots of swells with money hanging round 'em. Didn't think it would turn this one's, though. Any relatives? O, yes, she had a brother. Younger than her? No, a couple of years older, he should say; very much like her; come home late sometimes; a little fast, the young fellow was. And a mother, bedridden; the doctor often goes there. And a grandfather; a strange old fellow--a character. Immortality Wheels, people call him. Was that his proper name? O, no; nicknames both of 'em. Why Immortality? Well, he didn't quite know himself, but he'd been told it was because the old fellow was fond of talking about the immortality of the soul. Why Wheels? Well, he *did* know that. Because the old fellow was always saying that everything in the world ought to go upon wheels. Perhaps there was something in the notion; things certainly would go easier. He *had* heard that the old fellow had made wheels for everything in his place. Harmless old fellow; but curious notion, wasn't it? So the young fellow's a little wild, eh? Well, most young fellows are, nowadays. Very fond of each other, brother and sister are.

While the policeman was distilling these scraps of information in a leisurely manner, he and his companion were walking slowly towards the Royal White Rose Music-hall, and just at the point of his asking whether the old man's fancy was not a curious notion, they became suddenly aware of a street disturbance in a thoroughfare not many yards ahead of them.

The policeman strolled leisurely in the direction of the noise, pulling his belt tighter as he neared the spot from which the sounds proceeded. Presently they came upon an angry crowd of men and women of all ages and degrees, most of whom, judging from their excited demeanour and noisy exclamations, had a personal interest in the disturbance. "Let 'em go! What do you mean by pushing people about? Bonnet 'em! Great hulking fellows like you!" Then a woman's voice, very shrill, "Who am *I*, interfering? I'm a honest woman, that's what I am! Ain't I? I'll make you prove your words! You want the papers down on you agin, that what *you* want. We sha'n't move on! We'll stop here as long as we like!" And in the midst of all a clear and angry voice, crying, "Take your hands off me! Take your hands off me, I say!" The voice acted like a charm upon Mr. Sheldrake; he made his way into the centre of the crowd, and soon ascertained that it was nothing but an ordinary street row common to the neighbourhood, caused in the first place by two or three persons lingering on the footpath, and being desired to move on, and perhaps touched on the shoulder by a policeman. The principal offender, and the most violent, was a young man with a handsome face, the sight of which produced on Mr. Sheldrake the same effect as his voice had done. And yet it was the first time that these two had ever met. Upon such slight chances often does the future hang, that men who have fought life's battle with all their strength, and been bruised and bruised, may sometimes be pardoned for thinking that it is mockery to struggle.

At the moment of Mr. Sheldrake's appearance upon the scene, the young man, in a state of great excitement was explaining to the people about him that he was doing no harm; he was simply talking to a friend about the Northumberland Plate, the race that was soon to be run at Newcastle-on-Tyne, when the policeman pushed them into the road, and said he would take them into custody if they stood there a moment longer. The crowd cheered him as he spoke, and the police began to lose their temper. The policeman who had accompanied Mr. Sheldrake, and who fancied that that gentleman, from the interest he exhibited, knew the offender, whispered to him, that if he wanted to save the young fellow from getting into trouble, he had best get him away as quickly as possible.

"Now, then, *will* you move out of this?" exclaimed another official, about to lay hands upon the young man; Mr. Sheldrake quietly stepped between them, knowing that the touch of the policeman's hand would be adding fuel to flame. But for Mr. Sheldrake's interposition it would have fared ill with the young fellow, who had worked himself into a most unreasonable passion.

"Come, come," said the peacemaker in a persuasive tone; "you don't want to be locked up all night. The policemen have their duty to perform, and you mustn't obstruct them."

"I don't want to obstruct them, and I don't want to be locked up," said the young man; "but what right had they to interfere with me and my friends? Ask any one here if I was in the wrong."

A dozen voices supported him in various ways, all of them uncomplimentary to the police, one of whom grew so exasperated that he exclaimed, in a tone of dangerous decision, "Now, then, if you don't move off this minute, we'll march you to the station-house." He produced his stave, and the others followed his example. This action caused many among the mob to take to their heels, and they scampered away, hooting as they ran.

"They had *no* business to interfere," whispered Mr. Sheldrake hurriedly, placing his arm in that of the young man; "but don't you see, that though you might have been in the right at first—"

"Might have been!" interrupted the unreasonable young fellow hotly. "I was!"

"Well, although you *were* in the right at first, you are in the wrong now. Come, take the advice of a friend, and let us get out of this. I don't like to see a young gentleman like you mixed up in such an affair. Look at the riff-raff about. Where are your friends? Why, *they've* gone off, you see, and didn't mind leaving you in the lurch.--All right, policeman, we're going."

Thus urging and humouring, Mr. Sheldrake induced the young man to move with him through the throng of people, who were inclined to hoot him now for showing the white feather. The excitement, however, being over, they rapidly dispersed, grumbling at the peaceable issue of the affair. Soon Mr. Sheldrake and his charge were in a quieter part of the neighbourhood, when the latter, still almost at fever-heat, asked offensively, as if it were absolutely necessary he should fall foul of somebody,

"Perhaps you'll tell me who you are, interfering with my affairs. I don't know you."

"I don't suppose you do," replied Mr. Sheldrake with perfect good humour. "Are you going home?"

"What business may that be of yours?" asked the young man, not abating his offensive tone.

"I'll walk a little way with you if you are, that's all. Shall I make a shrewd guess, and say that you live in Soho? Come, come; I see that you are angry with me for interfering; but you must admit that the position you are in now is better than being hauled along by half-a-dozen policemen, with a mob hooting at their heels. Come, now, admit that."

"I sha'n't admit anything," exclaimed the young man sulkily.

An angry impatient look passed like a flash of light into Mr. Sheldrake's face at the young man's uncivil manner: but he suppressed it instantly. They were walking slowly as they conversed, and Mr. Sheldrake, allowing his companion to lead the way, observed with secret satisfaction that they were walking in the direction of Lily's house.

"And neither should I, if I were in your place," he said. "I should feel as indignant as you feel; it is only natural; but at the same time, I think I should acknowledge to myself--not to any one else--that it's better to be indignant and to cool oneself alone here in the quiet streets, than to be dragged to the station-house, and have the clothes torn off one's back. You were not born yesterday! *You* know what the police are, and how the magistrates side with them. They'll swear anything when their blood's up; and there's never any telling what kind of a scrape a man may get himself into with them. I daresay you wouldn't like your people at home to see your name on the wrong side of a police-court report."

"That's true," said the young man in a somewhat softer tone, though still with constrained manner; "it wouldn't be a nice thing for them."

"Say that you had a sister now, how would she like it?"

As Mr. Sheldrake hazarded this question, he threw a sharp look at his companion, and smiled in self-approval when he heard the reply.

"She wouldn't like it at all, and I wouldn't like it because of her." He struggled to rid himself of his ungracious bearing, and partially succeeded. "It seems to me, after all, that I have to thank you for getting me out of the mess."

He held out his hand. Mr. Sheldrake shook it cordially, saying,

"A nice state of things it would be, if one gentleman wouldn't assist another in such a case! Let us suppose that you are under an obligation to me. Wipe it off by giving me a promise."

"What kind of a promise?" asked the young man.

"Why, that when you come upon me in a similar scrape to that I found you in to-night, with my blood up, hot and naturally indignant, you'll come and help me out of it as I've helped you. You'll see how I'll take it! I shall be savage with you of course, at first, but give me time to cool down, and you'll not find me backward in acknowledging that you have acted by me and stood by me like an out-and-out friend."

The young man laughed and promised, but did not express himself confident of being able to act as judiciously as Mr. Sheldrake had done. "For you're cool, you know," he said, "and not so easily fired up as I am. Why, if you had answered me as I've answered you, I couldn't have helped quarrelling with you."

"I'm glad for one person's sake that I managed to escape that unpleasant contingency," observed Mr. Sheldrake.

"Do you mean for your own sake?" asked the young man coolly.

"Not this time," replied Mr. Sheldrake, mentally confounding the young fellow's impertinence.

"For whose, then, may I ask? Not for mine, I hope; if so, you may save yourself from farther anxiety upon the point."

"O no, not for yours; for your sister's."

"For Lily's! You know her then; and that's the reason of your coming to my assistance."

Mr. Sheldrake accepted this interpretation, and said,

"If you tell her of what has occurred to-night—"

"Of course I shall tell her," interrupted the young man. "I tell Lily everything."

"You may mention, then, that the gentleman who had the pleasure of walking home with her to-night did you a little service. She spoke of her brother to-night as we walked home. Your name must be Alfred."

"Yes; that is my name."

"Mine is Sheldrake. I shall be glad to improve our acquaintanceship--that is, if you are willing."

"O, I'm willing enough," replied Alfred half graciously; "but I'm not a swell, you know."

"Meaning that I am. None the worse for that, eh?"

"No," said Alfred, throwing sufficient expression in his hesitating manner of uttering that small word to express, "No, you're none the worse for it; but I consider myself as good as you, or any man."

"And it isn't a bad thing to be a swell nowadays, let me tell you," remarked Mr. Sheldrake genially, clapping Alfred on the shoulder. "One gets behind the scenes, and sees all sorts of things, and learns all sorts of things. And after all it's only a question of money. Once a gentleman, always a gentleman."

"That's true," assented Alfred complacently, being now on very good terms with himself.

"Only a question of money," repeated Mr. Sheldrake, slowly and thoughtfully; "and there's plenty of ways of making that."

"That's true again," exclaimed Alfred eagerly, accepting a cigar from Mr. Sheldrake's cigar-case. "Plenty of ways. I know a way. I'm going to make a heap."

"With a little luck and a little pluck, a man with brains--which you've got, I'll be bound--can be as good as the best of them. He can go up like a rocket."

Mr. Sheldrake did not carry the simile farther. The rocket being in the clouds, it suited his purpose to leave it there. "Plenty of ways of making money! I should think there were, indeed; and these are just the times."

The speaker was evidently of the opinion that some of his words were pearls of price, which should not be lost sight of. His utterances just now seemed to be thickly studded with these pearls, for he repeated thoughtfully, "Just the times."

"So they are--so they are. You know a thing or two, I see."

"Know a thing or two!" exclaimed Mr. Sheldrake, with modest boastfulness. "Well, yes, I fancy I do."

"I can put you up to something good," said Alfred, with a furtive glance at his companion, "if you like, and if you'll keep it quiet."

"Ay," returned Mr. Sheldrake, with an appearance of gratitude; "I'll keep it quiet enough."

"Do you do anything in racing?"

"A little now and then. Between you and me, I made a good thing on the Derby."

"I thought so!" cried the young fellow in an exultant tone. "I thought you knew all about racing! I say, do you keep a book? Do you belong to any of the Clubs? Let's take a turn up the street."

"But isn't it time for you to be in?" suggested Mr. Sheldrake, as if unwilling to carry the conversation farther.

"No, no; it doesn't matter for a few minutes. Lily's sure to wait up for me. Besides, I have a latch-key. I wish we could go and sit down somewhere, and have a chat and a drink. But all the places are shut, worse luck."

"Didn't I tell you that I was behind the scenes?" said Mr. Sheldrake airily. "One never need be at a loss in London if he knows the ropes. Now I'll be sworn there's a house ready to receive us within a hundred yards of where we stand, although it is past one o'clock on Sunday morning. I know others, but they are too far away." Alfred followed every word with admiring interest. This man of the world, this swell who was behind the scenes, and who seemed to know everything worth knowing, was a superior being in his eyes. "Let us walk towards the policeman. Don't be surprised; it will, be a pleasant meeting enough, although your late experience might lead you to an opposite opinion."

"But why towards a policeman?" asked Alfred.

"He'll tell us of a house of entertainment, where we can have that chat and a drink you proposed. If a thief wants to hide, let him hide in a crowded city. If you want to do an illegal act, do it in the eye of the law. As I'm going to do this, with of course a proper application of the magic key."

Alfred thought his companion one of the most genial and brightest of men, and inquired what Mr. Sheldrake meant by the magic key.

"Tip," replied that gentleman; "the greatest institution of the age. Tip, the palm-tickler. If it hadn't been for that, how do you think I could have got you out of your scrape to-night? I've travelled about here and there, and I don't think there's a city in the world where the institution of Tip is so thoroughly understood and appreciated as in this very city of London. It will carry you anywhere, effect any object, get you out of any scrape, if you know how to apply to it. But it requires to be administered delicately, its nerves being very fine."

In front of them they heard the policeman's measured step. From the rear came the sounds of a man racing towards them. His hurried tread sounded in the quiet night like the rattle of steam feet rushing along. As they turned, the man passed them. He was panting for breath, and his clothes seemed to have been hurriedly thrown on. His braces were hanging loose, and he was struggling with his coat as he ran, suggesting the idea that he was racing and dressing himself for a wager. He did not notice the faces of the men as he passed them, but Alfred recognised him, and cried, "Why, that's Mr. Gribble!" The next moment Gribble junior was round the corner and out of sight, and the calm footstep of the watchman of the night heralded Mr. Sheldrake's friendly policeman. He touched his hat to Mr. Sheldrake, and while that gentleman held brief conference with him, his slinking hand asserted itself up his coat-sleeve, where it may be said to have lurked, thirsting for Tip. The comedy, which had been so successfully performed once before during the night, having been repeated successfully, the policeman (awaking from another little sleep) leisurely led the way, Alfred being in the rear. As they walked thus in single file, Mr. Sheldrake's thoughts, put into intelligible language, would have read thus: "That was a shrewd conclusion you came to, David, when you heard this young cub's voice, and guessed that it belonged to Lily's brother! A nice young fool he is! But he'll serve your turn, David, with that little nugget--he'll serve your turn. Make the pretty Lily grateful for having befriended her brother, and get the young fool himself quietly in your hands, and the rosy-cheeked apple falls plump into your open mouth, David--plump into your open mouth!" The contemplation of the rosy-cheeked apple falling plump into his mouth was so agreeable, that David Sheldrake smiled frequently, and in a gay and airy manner blew a kiss in the direction of Lily's house.

They paused at the side door of a house of entertainment, closed according to the law, and the mystic summons of the policeman gained them admittance.

"Let us have a quiet room, and some brandy-and-water," said Mr. Sheldrake to the waiter who had opened the door, and who, with his shirt-sleeves tucked up and his thick bull-neck, looked like a prize-fighter. "Policeman, you'll come in and have a drink?"

"No objections, sir."

The liquor having been brought, the policeman treated his conscience to "something hot," and departed to pursue his duties, ready at any moment with his slinking hand to prove himself a worthy watchman of the night and a proper guardian of the public peace.

CHAPTER V.

MR. DAVID SHELDRAKE DOES A GOOD NIGHT'S WORK.

Mr. Sheldrake helped himself to brandy-and-water, lit a fresh cigar, threw his cigar-case to Alfred with the air of an old acquaintance, and seemed as if he would have been perfectly satisfied to smoke and drink without conversation. But Alfred was not so disposed.

"So you did a good thing on the Derby," he commenced familiarly; "backed the Zephyr Colt, eh? I wish I had!"

"Backed it at the right time, my boy; backed it in April, and got thirties to one three times in hundreds."

"Nine thousand to three hundred," Alfred put in rapidly and enviously.

"That's a good calculation of yours, and quickly done," observed Mr. Sheldrake, with a nod of approval.

"O yes, I'm good at mental arithmetic," was the conceited answer.

"That's what's wanted in racing matters. You go to a race, and you hear the odds bawled out, and you want to hedge, perhaps; the odds are constantly changing, and you've got to seize them at the proper moment. To do that properly, you must be smart at figures, and then you're all right. I know many a man who can't write anything but his own name, and who makes pots of money because he can calculate the odds quickly. It's a gift, and you've got it, my boy. Fill up your glass."

Alfred filled his glass, his face beaming with conceit.

"Go on with the Zephyr colt," he said. "You stuck to the bet, didn't you?"

"No, I didn't; I hedged, like a fool."

"Ah, *I* shouldn't have done that!"

"No more ought I, and no more should I, if I had had some one to advise me. You know it was at the commencement of April that the colt was at thirty to one, and a fortnight afterwards it was at twelve. I hedged at those odds to win my three hundred pounds, and make myself safe."

"So you stood to win five thousand four hundred and to lose nothing," said Alfred rapidly, having been looking out for another opportunity to exhibit his prowess in mental arithmetic.

"What wonderful calculation!" exclaimed Mr. Sheldrake in admiration, to Alfred's intense delight. "You could make a fortune in the ring."

"Do you think so? *I* think I could."

"I'd give a thousand pounds this minute to be able to reckon up figures as you can."

"You make plenty, though, without that."

"I only do what any man can do, if he keeps his head cool. Did you back anything for the Derby?"

"Yes, worse luck," replied Alfred, with a groan, emptying his glass to wash down a rising remorse. "I wish I had known you then. You might have told me to back the Zephyr colt. You would, wouldn't you?"

"That I would, for your pretty sister's sake. I wish we *had* known each other then! What did you back?"

"Three horses--Bothwell, King of the Forest, and Digby Grand. Everybody said Bothwell was sure to win, and that's why I backed it, although I didn't fancy it."

"It's a bad thing to back three horses; never back more than one, and stand to it to win a good stake."

"That's what I'm going to do on the Northumberland Plate. I ought to have backed the Baron's horse, for he always runs straight, doesn't he?" There was something painful in the speaker's eagerness as he looked for consolation in the face of his companion. "And you won over five thousand on it, and I might have done the same if I had known. If only one of my three had come in first, I should have been right. As it is—"

Alfred paused, and beat his foot fretfully on the floor.

"As it is," prompted Mr. Sheldrake, with a keen watchfulness of Alfred's manner.

Alfred stirred his empty glass with the spoon. He had drunk more than was good for him, and this may have been the cause of the sudden paleness that came over his face. He laughed nervously, and said,

"Well, it's only the same predicament that hundreds of other young fellows are in--I owe a little money, that's all. When I saw the horses coming round Tattenham-corner, and saw King of the Forest running so strong, I made sure that it was right. All the people round me cried out, 'King of the Forest wins! King of the Forest wins!' It was all over in a moment, and the Zephyr colt shot by the winning-post like a flash of lightning. I should have won a couple of hundred if it hadn't been for that. But I shall make up for it all right on the Northumberland Plate. Christopher Sly's sure to win; don't you think so? All the prophets say he can't lose. Look here;" and he pulled out a handful of letters and papers, and, trembling with eagerness and excitement, made selections, and read from them. "Hear what Pegasus says: 'Never in the Annals of racing has there been such a certainty as Christopher Sly for the Northumberland Plate. The race is as good as over, and those who were fortunate enough to back the horse when it was at twenty to one will have a rare haul. Indeed, the money is as safe as if it were in their pockets.' Here's Delphos: 'Christopher Sly has been especially reserved for this event; he is meant to win, and nothing can stop him. The race is a dead certainty for him.' Delphos ought to know, oughtn't he? They all say the same; all the prophets in the daily papers go in for him. What do you think? Don't you think he's sure to win?"

"It looks very like a certainty. If the odds were a little longer on him, I'd back him for fifty myself."

"You'd do right! I've got all sorts of odds about him--fifteen to one in one place. You can only get six to four about him now," said Alfred exultantly. "But what does it matter about the odds if you're sure to win?"

"What do you stand to lose?"

"O, I don't know. I know what I stand to win--over three hundred. I shall pay off what I owe then, and go in for something big."

"That's the sort!" cried Mr. Sheldrake gaily, clapping the young fellow on the shoulder. "Nothing venture, nothing have. You're just the stamp of man to break the ring. When it's known that you can afford to lose a few hundreds, you must join the Clubs. I'll introduce you. I'd keep quiet till then, if I were you."

Alfred nodded and laughed; all traces of anxiety had vanished from his countenance. He became pressing in his advice to Mr. Sheldrake to back Christopher Sly, admired that gentleman's cigar case and his diamond ring, and boasted of the gimcracks he intended to buy for Lily and himself when he received his winnings. By the time they had finished their brandy-and-water it was half-past two o'clock in the morning; and when they reached the streets, Mr. Sheldrake gave Alfred his card, and said he would be glad to see him at his office.

"All right, old fellow," said Alfred; "I'll come."

"And look here," said Mr. Sheldrake, hooking Alfred by the button-hole, "I wouldn't say much at home of what we've been speaking about. Wait till you make a haul. It's best always to keep these things to oneself."

Alfred nodded acquiescence.

"If you want a friend at any time," added Mr. Sheldrake, "you know where to come to; and you'll find that what David Sheldrake says, David Sheldrake means."

They shook hands and parted, Alfred going his way impressed with the conviction that Mr. Sheldrake was one of the best fellows in the world, and that gentleman going his impressed with the conviction that he had found a fine tool to assist him in working into pretty Lily's favour.

"You've done a good night's work, David," said the modern man of fashion, communing with himself, according to his favourite habit; "a very good night's work. You can win that nugget through her fool of a brother. Lily! What a pretty name! Lily! Charming Lily! Why, David, the girl's bewitched you!"

CHAPTER VI.

GRAVE NEWS.

It was with a feeling of shame that Alfred put his boasted latch-key into the street-door. He knew that Lily was waiting up for him, and that it was inconsiderate in him to keep the young girl

from her bed until so late an hour; and although his brain was disturbed by drink, he strove to administer a salve to his conscience by thinking that Lily would do anything for him; but the effort was not quite successful. Something whispered to him that it was unfair to take advantage of the girl's love and devotion for him, and to cause her anxiety. This was not the only unwelcome thought suggested by the silent monitor that keeps watch in the mind of a man whose sense of right is not entirely blinded; and Alfred received the points of these nettles discontentedly, as others are in the habit of receiving them, making excuses in response which he vainly strove to believe were not shallow. He fell back at last upon the most ordinary of all subterfuges. "What's the use of bothering?" he thought. "I'm not the only young fellow who keeps out late once now and again." It is the commonest thing in the world for us thus to throw the responsibility of our own inexcusable actions upon other people's shoulders. "O, well, I am not worse than my neighbours!" is the ointment we apply when our conscience mildly pricks us but we cannot deprive the nettles of their sting by suchlike sophistry.

As Alfred closed the street door behind him, a stream of light fell upon the stairs from the room on the first-floor. Lily had heard him come in, and now glided down to meet him.

"I am so glad you have come home," she said, with her arm round his neck. "How late you are!"

Something in the hushed tones of her voice, some new tenderness in her manner, expressive of pity for herself and for him, struck strangely upon his senses. At the same time, he was ashamed of himself for the condition he was in. His gait was unsteady, and his voice was thick. His senses were not so clouded, however, as not to be able to perceive that something of a grave nature had occurred in the house. Lily seemed to cling to him for comfort, and, hiding her face in his neck, strove to shut out creeping fears by which she was oppressed.

"How's mother, Lily?" he asked.

The sound of his voice came upon her like a shock. She was inexpressibly grieved to learn from it that he was drunk. Her first impulse led her to shrink from him, but only for a moment. The next she linked her hand in his arm, and besought him to come up-stairs quietly. He stumbled up by her side, and every slip he made caused her to quiver with keenest pain. That he should come home at such a time and in such a condition was one of the greatest sorrows the young girl had known. He was about to enter the room where his mother was lying, but Lily laid her hand upon his arm with nervous force.

"No, no!" she whispered, but so clearly and with such intensity that her whisper was almost a cry; "no, no! Not there, Alfred; not there!"

"Why not?" he questioned wonderingly, and inclined to force his way.

But she stood before him, and said,

"Not as you are, Alfred; not as you are! You will be sorry! Come into my room."

He obeyed her sullenly, and she, keeping tight hold of his arm, drew him into her little room, where he sank unsteadily upon her bed. There was no light in the room, and she made no attempt to light a candle for she felt that it would be greater shame to see him drunk than to know he was drunk and not look upon his face. But her suffering showed itself in her voice. All that she said was, "O Alfred, Alfred!" and sank upon her knees by the bedside, and hid her face in the clothes, sobbing quietly. In a blundering way he drew her to him; but even while she lay with her head upon his shoulder, she seemed to shrink from him and to be ashamed of him.

"Are you making all this fuss because I've taken a glass too much to drink?" he asked. "There! be quiet, and I'll promise not to do so again."

Promises were the easiest things in the world for him to make. Weak pliable natures such as his are continually building airy havens, in which they do painless penance for their faults.

Before Lily could answer, the door was opened, and old Wheels entered with a light. He looked at the young man half sternly and half sadly. So significant in its rebuke was his look, that Alfred, glad of an opportunity of attacking somebody in his own defence, started to his feet in unreasoning anger. But, what with his passion and his condition, the words that came from his lips were not distinct; and old Wheels raised his hand with an action almost of horror, and exclaimed,

"At such a time, at such a time! Are the sins of the father really visited upon the children?" Then, with a compassionate glance at Lily, he muttered, "I pray not, I pray not--for *her* sake!"

"What do you mean, grandfather?" cried Alfred. "Is it such an unheard-of thing for a man to come home an hour later than usual, that you should treat me as if I have committed a crime?"

"Crime!" echoed the old man, looking steadily into Alfred's eyes. "God keep you free from it!"

Whatever answer Alfred was prompted to give, it did not pass his white and trembling lips. But presently he mustered up a blustering courage, and cried in an injured tone,

"I won't stand it; I'll go away this minute! Let me go, Lily! I'll get a bed somewhere else."

He knew his power over her; and even in this moment of weakness, when he felt himself at such disadvantage, and so clearly in the wrong, he had the cunning of a weak mind, and used it. He smiled in selfish triumph as Lily's arms tightened round him.

"He does not know, grandfather!" she said, in an imploring tone. "Don't speak harshly to him; he does not know."

"O, I know very well, Lily," he said, thinking she referred to his condition; "I've taken a glass too much. I'm not ignorant of that; and if grandfather thinks he can bully me without my answering him, he is mistaken. He takes advantage of your being here, and of my being fond of you, to cast out all sorts of insinuations against me."

"I have not accused you of anything, Alfred;" said old Wheels sadly.

"You hoped I should be kept free from crime," exclaimed Alfred violently.

"Hush, Alfred," implored Lily, in awe-struck tones; "you don't know what has occurred. Don't speak so loud! Your voice sounds sinful used in such a way, and at such a time."

"I don't understand you, Lily. What's the matter with the time? It's a little late, that's all."

"Lost to all sense of shame!" muttered old Wheels. "It is like fate. So I parted from the father, and the son is before me, with the same curse upon him."

"O, I can't stand this, and won't!" exclaimed Alfred roughly. "I'll see if mother is awake, and then I'll go to bed."

He was moving towards the door, when Lily's terrified look, and the old man's solemn gesture, made him pause. For the first time a fear fell upon him.

"Why do you look so?" he asked of her; and then of his grandfather, "and why do *you* seek to prevent me going in to see mother?"

"Because you are drunk, and in your present state would not desire to appear before her, if you knew—"

"If I knew what? Is mother worse? Why don't you answer? I *will* go in and see her!"

"Stop, Alfred," said the old man, quietly and solemnly; "Your mother is dead!"

CHAPTER VII.

THE IRON BOX.

The shock of the news sobered Alfred instantly; the full disgrace of his condition came upon him, and made him ashamed to look his sister in the face.

"You--you have been very hard to me, grandfather," he said hesitatingly.

"I have been to you as you deserved, Alfred. Has your conduct to-night been such as should make me affectionate to you?"

"I have no excuse to make," replied Alfred, thoroughly humbled; "but you will do me the justice to believe that it would not have been so with me had I known."

"The remorse of a too-late repentance, Alfred, is a bitter experience."

A resentful answer rose to Alfred's lips, but he checked it.

"When--when did mother die, sir?" he asked.

The words were long in coming. It seemed to him a hard question to ask.

"An hour ago. I saw a change come over her, and Mr. Gribble ran for the doctor." Alfred remembered seeing Gribble junior tear along, struggling with his coat, and it was another sting to him that a stranger should have performed his duty. "When the doctor came she had passed away."

"What did she say? Did she ask for me?"

"She did not speak; she was unconscious."

"And she died without a word to you or Lily, grandfather? without a thought of me?"

"Who can tell her thoughts? Her mind may have been awake. She passed away in her sleep--peacefully, thank God! Her life has not been a happy one; and it is God's mercy that she was spared in her last moments the pain of seeing you as you are. It would have recalled her bitterest memories."

"I am better now, grandfather. May I see her?"

"Yes. Lily, my darling!" and the old man took her in his arms and kissed her; "you must go to bed--you are tired."

But she clung to him, and entreated to be allowed to sit up with them.

"No, dear child," he said; "we shall want you to be strong to-morrow. What is that you say? You are frightened! Nay, nay, dear child! Sleep will compose you. Alfred and I have much to talk of, and we must be alone. Good night, dear child!"

When they left the room, Lily looked round and shuddered. The silence was full of terrors for her, and it was with difficulty she restrained herself from calling out. The events of the night had unnerved her. She went into the passage, and, listening, heard the buzz of voices in her grandfather's room. She could not catch the words, but it was a comfort to her to hear the sound; it was companionship. She crouched upon the ground, and lay there, with her head against the wall. A thousand fancies crowded her brain: the music-hall, with its glare of lights, and its great concourse of people, laughing, and drinking and applauding, presented itself to her in a variety of fantastic shapes, each image being perfect in itself and utterly engrossing, and yet fading entirely away in a moment, and giving place to a successor as vivid and as engrossing as any that had gone before. Other images presented themselves. Mr. Sheldrake, with his studied polished manner, and his smooth voice; Alfred and she in the dark passage; her grandfather, with a stern bearing quite unusual to him: the doctor, with his grave face and measured tones; and her mother lying dead, with grey stony face. Everything but the image of her mother was quick with life; through all the bustle and vivid movements of the other figures in her fevered fancies, that one figure presented and intruded itself in many strange ways, but always cold, and grey, and still. Presently the entire interest of her dreams centred itself in this image. Between her and her mother no great love had ever existed; the dead woman's nature had been repressive; an overwhelming grief had clouded her life, and she had yielded to it and sunk under it. She had hugged this grief close, as it were, and so wrapped herself in it, that her natural love had become frozen. So that the feeling which Lily experienced now in her dreams, for her dead mother, had nothing in it of that agonising grief which springs from intense love. And yet she shuddered at the part she was playing towards that grey cold form. It was lying before her, and she, dressed in bright colours, was dancing and singing round it. The contrast between her own gaiety and the dreadful stillness of the form she was dancing and singing to, impressed her with horror, and she strove to be still, but could not. Her struggles made her hysterical in her sleep--for Lily was sleeping now--when suddenly peace stole upon her, and she was calm. But it was not a comforting, refreshing peace; it was oppressive and painfully intense. A man stood before her, with his eyes fixed steadily upon hers. This man was one who, a few weeks before, had performed for a benefit at the music-hall. He was an electro-biologist, and Lily had been terrified by his performances. He had stolen away the wills of some of the persons upon whom he had operated, and made them do this and that at his pleasure; to pull down the moon; to drink water and believe it wine, then soapsuds; to shiver with cold; to be oppressed with heat; to dance; to stand still; to be transfixed like stone; to form friendships, hatreds, and a hundred other things as strange and inexplicable. She watched him do all these things. When the performance was over, the man, coming off the stage, had noticed the interest with which she had followed his experiments, and had said to her, "You are a good subject; I could do with you as I please." She was terrified at his words, and tried to move away from him, but could not, and could not take her eyes from his face. Perceiving this, he said to her, "Stretch out your arm," and she obeyed him; "Take my hand," and she took it, surrendering her will entirely to him. At this point they were interrupted, and she escaped him, thankfully; but for hours afterwards she was dazed, and thought much of the incident, dreading to meet the man again. Now he stood before her in her dreams, and commanded her to rise; she had no power to resist him, and she rose at his bidding. Here a diversion occurred by the word "Father!" falling upon her ears. It was not fancy, being uttered rather loudly by one of the speakers in the room, and it raised the image of her father. The last time she saw him, she was quite a little child, and then he was drunk, and was leaving her mother with words of anger on his lips. As he turned his face, in her sleeping fancies, towards the form of her mother lying dead before her, it suddenly changed to the face of Alfred, and she was pained and grieved at the likeness between father and son. Thus far the running commentary of her dreams.

Meantime an impressive scene was being enacted between her brother and her grandfather. Alfred went behind the screen, and uncovered the face of his mother. It was hard and cold in death, as it had been hard and cold in life. The light of love had not illumined her latter days, and strength had not been given her to fight with grief. Alfred was awed into good resolution as he looked at the dumb inanimate clay. "I won't drink so much," he thought, "I'll try and be better. If Christopher Sly wins the Northumberland Plate, I shall be able to be better." And then a strange half-prayer dwelt in his mind, that Christopher Sly might win the race.

To his side came old Wheels.

"She looks like an old woman," he said; "almost too old to be my daughter."

Alfred turned his eyes to the old man's face. Youth had not departed from it; it seemed indeed younger than the face of his dead daughter.

"You were her first-born, Alfred. Think of the joy that filled her when she first pressed you in her arms, and look at her now. Time is but a breath--but a breath--but a breath!"

Old Wheels mused of the time gone by, and wondered, as we all must wonder when we think of them and now, and of the changes that have occurred in our lives. The gay spirit chilled; the cheerful heart dulled by long suffering; the hope that made life bright dead and cold long, long ago--killed in the battle we have fought! But if love be left!—

Ay, if love be left, all the bruises we have received in the fight, all the hurts and wounds, shall not make life despairing. The flowers we have gathered and held to our hearts shall never wither if love be left!

"She looks very peaceful, grandfather," said Alfred almost in a whisper.

"She *is* at peace; she is with God and nature."

Better influences were stirred into action by the old man's words, and Alfred sank upon his knees by the bedside, and perhaps loved her better at that moment than ever he had done before.

"I have heard," continued the old man, "that many faces in death assume the beauty they possessed in youth. I would give much that it had been so with your mother, and that you might have seen her face as it was when she was young."

The old man's thoughts travelled back to the time when he first looked upon the baby-face of the cold hard grey form before him. He recalled the thrills of pleasure that hurried through him as he held the pretty child in his arms, and looked at his wife smiling happily in bed. His wife had died soon after the birth of this their only child, who had been a comfort to him until trouble came. It was all over now, and a new life had commenced for her.

"I have thought sometimes," he said aloud, pursuing the commentary of his thoughts, "of the strangeness of spirits meeting under certain conditions of things."

Alfred looked up in wonder, and the old man answered the look.

"Ay, of spirits meeting. If you believe in immortality, you must believe in the meeting of spirits. What shape or form do they bear? Here, before us, is my daughter and your mother, an old woman in looks, aged by a grief that was hard enough to bear without being made harder by constant brooding. When my wife died, your mother was a babe, and my wife was almost a girl. So they parted. How do they meet now? This child of mine looks old enough to be the mother of my wife. How do they meet?--as mother and babe again? It is a strange thought, not to be answered. Yet by and by it shall be made plain to us."

Alfred listened and wondered. Although he had not been unaccustomed to hear his grandfather speak of such matters, he had never before been impressed by them. As he bowed his head to the bed, other thoughts than selfish ones came to him,--thoughts which brought with them a consciousness of something higher than the aspirations by which he had hitherto been guided. If such influences as those which softened him and made him better for the time were less fleeting and more endurable, we should be the gainers. But in most cases they are as intangible in their effect as a breeze that touches us lightly. Winds come, and rain, and heavy clouds; and the unhealthful passion and desire that are stirred by the storm sweep the chastening thought into a lost oblivion.

The old man looked hopefully upon the form of his grandson in its attitude of contrition and softened feeling, and he waited long before he desired Alfred to rise. With a distinct purpose, which he was anxious not to disguise, he at the same time moved the screen, so that, as he and Alfred sat at the table, the bed upon which the dead daughter and mother lay was not hidden from sight.

"Alfred," the old man said, after a slight pause, "have you anything to tell me?"

"What should I have to tell you, grandfather, except--except to repeat that I am ashamed of myself for coming home dr— not quite sober, and that I beg your pardon?"

The old man did not look up; he toyed with Lily's workbox, which was on the table, and said gently, pointing to the bed,

"Ask pardon there. But you have done that, I think."

"Yes, grandfather, indeed."

"That is something. At such a time as this we should be considerate of one another. These

occasions happily come but seldom in life, and sometimes they open the road to amendment. Tell me, Alfred, have I been kind to you?"

"Yes, grandfather."

"And you look upon me as a friend?"

"Yes."

"Yet you have nothing to say to me--no confidence to repose in me?"

"Nothing particular that I can think of."

A shade of disappointment passed across the old man's face like a cloud. But a rift of light chased it away as he said,

"You love Lily?"

"Indeed I do that, grandfather."

"She has but you and me, Alfred, as protectors; and she needs protection. She is surrounded by temptation. I am growing very old; my strength may fail me any day, and you may be called upon suddenly to play the part of guardian to her. You are young for it."

"But I'm strong enough, don't fear, grandfather. Lily will be all right; I'll see to that! I'll take her away from the music-hall soon. I don't like her being there—"

"You forget, Alfred, she earns our living."

"Yes, I know; but it isn't to be expected that she should always do that."

"I am glad to hear you say so. Yet you yourself are doing but little at present; you only earn—"

"Fifteen shillings a week. I know! Tickle and Flint are the stingiest old brutes in London. Of course I can't do much out of fifteen shillings a week. I must have clothes, and other things; and I can't help spending a shilling or two, and somehow or other it all goes. I must do as other young men do. I asked Tickle and Flint for a rise once; but the old screws shook their heads, referred to the agreement, and told me not to ask again."

"They were right. If you are industrious and painstaking, a prosperous future is before you."

"O, but it's too slow!" exclaimed Alfred, with an impatient shake of the head. "I am bound to them for three years more before I can make a start. It's preposterous! Never mind, I'll show them! I know a way."

"What way?" asked the old man suddenly, looking at his grandson.

"Never mind now," replied Alfred evasively. "You'll see by-and-by."

"There is but one way," observed the old man quietly--"the straight way. Alfred, go to the cupboard, and bring me a small iron box you will see there."

A sudden paleness came over Alfred's face.

"A small iron box, grandfather?" he echoed, with a curious indecision, and with a nervous trembling of the lips.

"Yes," said the old man sadly; "you know the box. You have seen it many times."

Alfred hesitated for one moment only, and then, as if much depended upon prompt action, walked swiftly to the cupboard, and taking out a small iron box, laid it before his grandfather. The old man took a key from his pocket, and put it into the lid, but did not turn the lock.

"I daresay," he said, slowly and distinctly, "you have often wondered what was in this little box. Every house, every family, has its skeleton. This box has contained ours."

"Why speak of it to-night, grandfather?" asked Alfred, nervously. "Surely it is time to go to bed. Leave this matter till to-morrow."

"Nay, it must be spoken of now, in the presence of your dead mother and my daughter. I asked you a few minutes since if you had anything to tell me. You answered not in the manner I hoped and expected. I ask you again now. Have you anything to say to me? Is there anything on your mind that it would relieve you to speak of? Think a little. Errors may be repaired; but a time comes when it is too late for reparation. Look at your mother, and say if it is not too late to make reparation for unatoned suffering. If I wrong you in speaking thus to you, I ask your pardon, my boy; but I am speaking with a strong fear upon me--a fear that a life may be wrecked by wrong-doing, as was one very near to you."

Alfred, who had listened with eyes averted from the table, caught eagerly at the last sentence.

"You *do* me wrong, grandfather," he said, in tones which he vainly strove to make firm--"a cruel wrong--in speaking in this way to me! I don't understand you. It is not the first time to-night that you have thrown out these insinuations. What did you mean by saying to me that the remorse of a too-late repentance is a bitter experience? And then, saying, God keep me free from crime?"

"I repeat it, Alfred. Once more I pray to God to keep you from crime! Once more I say that the remorse of a too-late repentance is the bitterest of experiences!"

"I deny your right to say these things to me!" cried Alfred violently. "I deny it entirely. I'll not stand it, grandfather! I shall go!"

"Stay!" exclaimed the old man in a tone of command. "I made a promise to your mother to speak to you this night of your father."

"My father!" Alfred caught at the table, and his heart beat wildly at the thought of what was to come.

"I have never spoken of him to you before, but the wishes of the dead must be respected. Sit down and listen. In this box I have been accustomed for years to put by small savings for a special purpose, of which you shall presently hear. Lily's earnings lately and my own trifling pittance were more than sufficient for our wants, and money was saved, little by little, until a fortnight ago I had very nearly one hundred pounds in this box. When you learn to what purpose this money was to be applied, you will better understand my motives for speaking of it in this manner. One hundred pounds was the exact sum required, and I hoped in a month to have counted it out, and to have completed a tardy atonement for a life's disgrace." Alfred turned to his grandfather in amazement, but did not speak. "Shilling by shilling," continued the old man steadily, "the little heap grew and grew. No miser ever valued gold and silver more than I did the money this box contained. I hoarded it, counted it, reckoned upon my fingers how many days would elapse before the sum was reached. No one knew of it, as I thought, but your mother and I. Certainly no one but we two knew the purpose to which it was to be applied. Three weeks this night, leaving the box in the cupboard, I went to bring Lily home from the hall. I was away for more than an hour. When I returned, I found your mother strangely agitated, but could not ascertain the cause. I questioned her, but learned nothing. The following day I opened this box. It was empty. The money was gone!"

He turned the key and opened the box. It contained nothing but two pieces of faded yellow paper.

"See," said the old man, directing Alfred's attention to the box; "there is nothing in it but these sheets of paper. Every shilling was stolen."

"I see, grandfather," said Alfred, with a furtive look into the box. "Do you know who took the money?"

"No, I do not know."

"Did mother know?"

"I am not sure."

"How not sure, grandfather?" asked Alfred, with an effort to appear at his ease. "Did mother speak of it?"

"No; and I spared her the grief that telling her of the loss would have caused her."

"Then how can you say you are not sure whether mother knew? If she had known, she would have spoken. You know," added Alfred, his manner, which had hitherto been moody and embarrassed, brightening a little, "that I am going to be a lawyer, and lawyers are fond of asking questions."

The change in Alfred's manner produced a singular effect upon the old man; it rendered him more sad and troubled. Hitherto he had exhibited a strange eagerness when Alfred showed most embarrassment; and as this disappeared, and Alfred became more at his ease, an expression of absolute grief stole into the old man's face.

"The lock has not been tampered with," observed Alfred, examining the box carefully; "how could it have been opened? You kept the key in your pocket always, of course?"

"I have been foolish enough on occasions to leave it on the mantelshelf, but on those occasions I think I may say with certainty that the cupboard in which the box was placed was always locked. I was never without one key or the other. Say that once when this occurred, the thief, knowing that the box contained money, watched me out of the house. That then he entered the room, and, going to the cupboard, found it locked. That, being baffled by this circumstance, he saw upon the mantelshelf a key, which he guessed was the key of the iron box; that he took an impression of this key—"

"In what?" interrupted Alfred, almost gaily. "In wax or putty? If he had either by him he must be a professional burglar. There are plenty of lodgers in the house, but I hardly suspected there was a person of that description here."

"I don't think there is a person of that description in the house. Remember, Alfred, that what I am narrating is merely guess-work."

"Capital guess-work, I should say, grandfather; you ought to have been a lawyer. But go on."

"That he took an impression of this key," continued the old man, "in wax or putty, as you suggest. He may have come in prepared, or taking an impression in either may have been an afterthought. That from this impression he had a false key made. That on this night three weeks, when I had gone to the music-hall for Lily, the thief entered the room, found the cupboard open--it *was* open, I remember--and completed the robbery."

"A good case, grandfather, but quite circumstantial, you know."

"Yes, I know, Alfred; quite circumstantial. In my thoughts I go farther even than this. I think that when the thief was opening the box, your mother may have been awake, or perhaps in that half-wakeful condition during which fancy and reality are so strangely commingled as not to be distinguishable one from the other. I think that, being in this condition, she saw the robbery committed, and that perhaps she knew the thief—"

"Grandfather!" The exclamation was forced from Alfred's trembling lips; he could not have repressed it for his life.

"What is the matter, Alfred?"

"Nothing," stammered the young man; "it is late, and I was not well when I came home. Go on."

"That knowing the thief, and not knowing whether what she saw was reality or a trick of the imagination, she dreaded, for a reason you shall presently be made acquainted with, to assure herself of the truth. I saw the dread in her watchful face and manner whenever I went to the cupboard; I saw the subject upon her lips and the fear to speak. I saw gratefulness struggling with doubt, as day after day went by and I did not refer to the loss. She yearned to know, and dreaded to ask. For had she asked and learned the truth, the bitterness of the past would have been sweet compared to the bitterness of the present! And so she passed away and was not sure."

"I don't understand all this," said Alfred sullenly; "you are speaking in enigmas, and I'm not good at solving them. I have no doubt that one of the lodgers took the money."

"It would not be very difficult to ascertain, Alfred. There were notes in the box of which I have the numbers, and a shrewd detective would most likely soon discover where the false key was made. But I have resolved to let the matter rest; perhaps I, like your mother, dread to know the truth."

"Suppose you leave it to me, grandfather?" suggested Alfred with nervous eagerness: "it will be practice for me you know."

"Yes, Alfred, I will leave it to you; I promise not to stir in the matter myself. You may be able to recover the money, or part of it, and it may be applied to its original purpose."

Alfred gave a sigh of relief, and his manner brightened again, as he inquired what was the purpose to which his grandfather referred.

"Do you remember your father?" was the question asked in return by the old man after a pause.

"But slightly grandfather. I was very young when we lost him."

"When we lost him!" mused the old man. "What memories come to light at the thought of that time! To what end your mother made me promise to tell you the story of her life and to speak plainly of your father, it is not for me to say, but I believe she intended it to act as a warning to you."

"There again!" exclaimed Alfred fretfully. "Why as a warning?"

"That is for you to answer. Perhaps she saw in you the faults that brought shame to your father, misery to her. As you sit before me now, so sat your father when he asked me for my daughter's hand. I did not know the vices that were in him, or I would have seen her dead at my feet rather than have given her to him. She loved him and had already pleaded with me for him. We were living then near Gravesend. I had money and a house of my own. Remembrance of the happy life she lived there before she was married caused her last week to express a wish to be buried there, and I shall respect her wish. Your father, I thought, had a fair future before him. I gave him my daughter's hand, and they came to London to live--not in such poor lodgings as these, but after a better fashion. I gave my daughter such a dower as I could afford, and they

started in life with the fairest of prospects. It was not long before troubles came; it was not long before your mother learned that she had married a drunkard--worse, that she had married a gambler. These things are hard for me, your mother's father, to tell, and hard for you, your father's son to hear. But they are true, and if they serve to point a warning finger to the quicksands of life where, if you do not avoid them, all that is honourable and good for you may be engulfed, they will not be told in vain! I spare you the pain of a long recital; I simply tell you that step by step your father sank, and dragged your mother with him. He would not work, and constant appeals were made to my purse to supply the means of living. I gave and gave; spoke to your father again and again; appealed to his self respect, to his feelings of honour; and received in return--*promises* of amendment, promises of amendment, promises forgotten as soon as each temporary want was provided for. Shall I tell you more? Shall I tell you that, so low did drink and gambling bring him, he raised his hand against his wife—"

"No, no, sir!" cried Alfred, with a beating heart.

"It is true," said the old man sternly; "it is true, and it must be told. He raised his hand against the wife who had loved him and been faithful to him. And yet there was a time when he would have been as shocked as you are now, had such an accusation been made against him; but he was weak and easily misled; unstable as water, as Reuben was; selfish in his desires and pleasures; with no gratitude for love; with no thought that life has solemn duties, and that there is in it something purer, brighter, sweeter, than the false glitter that attracts weak minds; therefore he wrecked his life and broke your mother's heart--your mother, whose sufferings you can imagine when I tell you that she was once as trustful as Lily, as tender as Lily! You were born; Lily was born. The downward course went on, and he and all of you sank into deeper misery, deeper shame, until I thought the worst had been reached. But I was mistaken."

The old man paused, reluctant to proceed; but Alfred said,

"Go on, sir; I must hear all now."

"It is right that you should. You will understand how, under these miserable influences, your mother's nature changed; how gradually, from a light-hearted trustful girl, she became a hopeless despairing woman. I gave up my house, and came to live with her. Your father was away sometimes for days together, and your mother had no dependence but me. One night late, long after we had retired, your father came home without warning. He stole into my room stealthily, and roused me. He had been in hiding for weeks; the police were after him, and were hunting him down; a warrant was out for him. He told me the shameful tale. I knew that he was a drunkard and a gambler, but I did not know before that night that he was a thief!"

Alfred sank on his knees in uncontrollable agitation, and hid his face in his hands.

"Circumstances had unfortunately placed it in his power to embezzle a large sum of money; he obtained possession of it, and drank and gambled it away. What was to be done? The name that I bore had never had a stain upon it. I and mine had lived honourable lives. I loved your mother, loved you and Lily. I had no others belonging to me--you were my all. If I made no attempt to save him, we should in the eyes of the world be sharers of his crime and his disgrace. His shame would have clung to you all your lives. He gave me the name of the man whom he had robbed. By daylight I was in the wronged man's house, by his bedside. This man loved money better than justice. I represented to him that he could not have both. He chose the first. I made terms with him, and sacrificed all but a bare pittance. Between us we compounded a felony. But I had not sufficient to pay the whole of his claim. I promised, however, to pay the rest as I could, and he took my word. Alfred, little by little I have been all my life since that time wiping off the debt of disgrace. One hundred pounds only remained to be paid, and very nearly that sum has been stolen from this iron box. Whoever stole that money stole the honour of our family!"

A long pause ensued. A new day was dawning, and the faint light rested upon the solemn face of the dead woman, to whom peace had come at last. Alfred turned his eyes towards it, and shuddered. Then he turned to the old man, and said in a low voice,

"And my father, sir?"

"In this iron box are two papers," said the old man; "one from him, promising never to trouble his wife and children more, and one from the man he wronged, giving quittance of what is set down as a debt. Your father kept his word. I have never seen him since that time."

Alfred kissed his mother's face, and covered it. Then he held out his hand to his grandfather, who took it in silence, and looked at him wistfully. But Alfred only said, humbly,

"I am tired, sir. You have been very good to us, and I will try to deserve it."

They went to the door, and the old man opened it, and saw Lily lying on the ground.

"Lily!" he cried, in alarm.

The girl slowly rose and stood before him. Her eyes were closed; she was asleep.

"Lily, my darling!" he said, tenderly placing his arm round her, "Why have you been sleeping

here?"

The girl did not answer, but nestled in his arms as if she found comfort there. He led her into the room, and she accompanied him unresistingly.

"She has been overwrought, poor child," said the old man in a troubled voice.

They stood in silence for a few moments, almost fearing to speak; she still sleeping, with her sweet face turned towards the morning light, which, gradually growing brighter, illumined the strange group.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE REVEREND EMANUEL CREAMWELL STOPS THE WAY.

The parish of Stapleton, of which the Reverend Emanuel Creamwell was pastor, was situated a very few miles from London, and contained, it is to be presumed (and not to do violence to the science of divine things), an equal number of human bodies and souls. The number--reckoning the two as one--was not large, and the tithes were small, a circumstance which it is waste of time to mention, for what minister loves his emoluments better than his church? And yet in common minds a mean suspicion is sometimes engendered as to the comparative value of one and the other in the eyes of the clergy. Without indorsing this suspicion--rejecting it, indeed, as the vilest of calumnies--it is curious to observe that, when a minister has a "call," the summons from heaven generally holds out the promise of an increased earthly income. It is a proof of the base depths of which the mind is capable, and the fact of the divine summons being very generally joyfully responded to, should engender a tittle of suspicion. But unfortunately there are in the world men to whose moral perception purity of motive is a human impossibility; to such men the flesh-pots of Egypt contain the most powerful argument it is possible to conceive.

Stapleton was a tumble-down little parish, and bore unmistakable signs of being badly off. Everything in it and about it had been crumbling away for many generations. Magnates there were in it of course--most of them elderly gentlemen, with puffy faces and big stomachs, at whom the poor children of the parish, in dirty pinafores, their large eyes staring upwards, and their hands behind them, would gaze in worship. The predecessors of these great men were crumbling away in the picturesque old churchyard, making the soil rich for buttercups and daisies, with which the dirty children played and pelted one another. There were many picturesque bits of scenery about Stapleton; notwithstanding its poverty, it was not an undesirable living for a clergyman, and the patching-up and medicining of souls--which, according to doctrinal teaching, are always lame and diseased, coming into the world so, and so remaining--went on pretty much in the same way and quite as unsuccessfully as in most other parishes. Doctors for bodies and doctors for souls are so abundant, and increase and multiply so amazingly, that the human machine on two legs which walks the earth, and which Leigh Hunt's fish so very properly laughed at, may be said to be in a very bad state indeed.

Such, at all events, the preaching of the Reverend Emanuel Creamwell went to prove. According to his pulpit-doctrine, corruption was the normal state of man--and woman also, of course. This condition was bad enough in all conscience, but it was a miserable thing to be compelled to believe that it could never be bettered. The conviction was forced upon them by their pastor; his utterings were destructive of hope. He had preached to them a library of sermons, and middle-aged sinners of his congregation had grown old during his term. Inevitable time was pushing them nearer and nearer to the grave; but there was no more hope for them now than there had been long ago, when there were many years of life before them. Sinners then, sinners now. How was salvation to be obtained? They went to church, and listened to their pastor's words, but found no consolation in them. The refrain of his sermon was the same now as it had been the first day on which he ascended the pulpit, and preached to them not salvation but the other thing. As he and the members of his flock grew older, he grew more stern, and they more disconsolate. The time for them for reaching grace was getting very short, and still corruption held them fast, would not let them go indeed. When the Sabbath service was ended, they wended their way home, depressed and in the saddest of moods. For their pastor hurt and bruised the miserable sinners without mercy. He said, "This shall ye do out of fear of the Lord;" and no suggestion of love brought light to the benighted ones. He told them to cleanse their souls; he had told them to do this any time for twenty years, but he did not supply them with the divine soap and water necessary for the operation. He spoke in parables, and left them to draw the moral. He presented problems to them, hard nuts of divinity which they found it impossible to crack. He used the Bible like a catapult, and from this engine he, week after week, hurled terrible inflictions at their hands, until some impressionable souls grew to believe that God was a very dreadful creature, and that it would have been better for them if they had never been introduced into this world of sorrow, which was to be followed by another full of penalties.

Not one of his parishioners loved him. But they thought he was a good man, notwithstanding--

so good, indeed, that goodness became disagreeable in their eyes, and some of them deemed that it must be exceedingly pleasant to be naughty. The fact of this man having the charge of many precious souls (to use the stereotyped vernacular), and preaching the highest and holiest lessons for years to persons who did not, could not love him, was one of the strangest of anomalies. In his exhortations he seemed to declare, "I am sent to bruise, not to heal; here is a stone for you; here are vinegar and salt for your wounds; here are shadows and awful images to appal you, and to make your death-bed agonising; here are the waters of grace--taste them, and find them bitter!" After such exhortation, how could they love God?--how could they love His minister? Prisoners do not love their gaolers. And this man, having the charge of souls, held them in grim custody with the hard spirit of a gaoler.

They writhed and suffered in his grasp, but they had no word to say against him. He was an eminently respectable man; had never been seen to smile; and they touched their hats to him, and paid him every deference. But it was remarkable that no person had ever been known to utter a word in praise of him. Women--especially women in humble life--did not like him; and he produced a curious effect upon children. Sometimes they cried when they saw him, and sometimes they stood aside as he passed, with a kind of fear on them--petrified as it were. The effect was something similar to that which Medusa's head might have produced upon them.

His home was like his preaching. There was no light in it. It was dark and sombre. All the furniture was of dark wood; the paper on the walls of every room was dark. In the whole house, from roof to basement, there was nothing graceful in form or colour. The ornaments on the mantelshelf were ugly figures in dark wood and stone. Flowers were never seen in the house. The gas was never lighted until night had completely fallen. Nothing more oppressive can be conceived than the effect which this gloomy house and the gloomy fashion in which it was conducted would produce after a time upon a sensitive spirit. In the eyes of many, all this added to his respectability as a man of God. What wanted he with pomps and vanities? It was his mission to preach against them. Should he, then, indulge in them?

How many are there who exhibit an outward pride in living thus--who raise their eyes and hands against harmless enjoyments--whose words would rob life of its sunshine and flowers and tender feeling, and who grudge to the hungry every sweet morsel that kind impulse and kinder nature hold out to them with pitying hand! If the inner and private lives of these moralists were laid bare, what kind of lesson would they teach?

It must not be supposed that this reflection in any way touches the Reverend Emanuel Creamwell. There was not a visible stain upon him; the breath of slander had never been raised against him; he was above reproach. He may have been a little stiff and uncompromising, a little too severe in his notions of this and that, but his morality and goodness were not to be questioned. As for his judgment there were at least two persons in the parish who relied implicitly upon it.

These two men were Justices of the Peace. Their names, unlike themselves, are of no consequence. It would be hard to give any other reason for their being appointed Justices of the Peace than that one was a retired colonel and the other a retired sugar-baker; and doubtless it would be a distinct libel to declare that they knew as much of law as the man in the moon. Undoubtedly they must have been worthy; undoubtedly they must have been just. What is known as "Justices' Justice" has been a theme for satire and rebuke as long as we can remember, and it is a blessing to live in a land where it would not be tolerated that one in power having committed a gross injustice--having, perhaps, helped to make infamous what might have been made beneficial--should be permitted to retain an authority which is only used to be abused. So perfect are our institutions, that it would be next to impossible that one who had proved himself by his acts to be unworthy of the distinction should be allowed to sit in judgment on his fellows year after year, to dispense unequal and merciless justice. It would be monstrous otherwise.

The Reverend Emanuel Creamwell was to these two Justices as a staff to lean upon--a staff that would not yield or bend, however great the pressure. He frequently sat upon the Bench with one or the other, or with both, and prompted and advised them, and indeed directed their verdicts; so that it might almost be said that they spoke out of his mouth. Dressed in his little brief authority, the retired colonel or the retired sugar-baker would sit in state pompously, with his reverend counsellor by his side, and strike terror to the heart of the hardened criminal. As thus:

A boy of tender years, in the employ of a baker, was charged with stealing a pound of flour, valued at twopence, from his master. Thefacts of the case were somewhat singular. The master discovered the theft, and in hot temper sent for a policeman, who straightway locked up the ferocious thief. Then the master repented of his hasty action, made inquiries, and from what he learned, deemed that the boy was more deserving of pity than of blame. When he made his appearance in court, he stated that he was anxious not to prosecute, and he begged that the boy might be discharged with a caution.

"But he stole the flour?" asked the Justice, prompted by his reverend counsellor.

"It wasn't worth twopence," was the evasive reply; "and I have learned since—"

"We don't want to know what he learned since," remarked the Reverend Mr. Creamwell to the

Justice. "Did the boy steal the flour, or did he not?"

"Yes," echoed the parrot Justice; "we don't want to know what you have learned since. Did the boy steal the flour, or did he not?"

"He did," replied the tradesman; "but—"

"What have 'buts' to do with facts?" exclaimed the wise administrator. "The boy is a thief, and he must--eh? yes, certainly; quite proper--he must go to prison for three months, with hard labour."

So the criminal (whose first offence it was, and who had never been known to steal before) was sent to prison, where, surrounded by gentle associates and humanising influences, he learnt some salutary lessons.

Or thus:

One very cold winter evening, a poor woman--so poor that she could not afford to buy two-penny-worth of coal--was walking to her cheerless home. The sharp wind pierced to her very marrow, and the prospect before her made the cold colder. She was a charwoman, and had been unsuccessful in obtaining work during the day. Jane Plummer was her name. Her toes peeped out of her boots. Hapless Jane Plummer! She had to pass by the side of a wood which belonged to wealthy Mr. Icicle, and she saw a few rotten branches on the ground. They had dropped in the autumn, and had been soddened into the earth by many rains. Think of a sick man who for weeks had been debarred the blessings of sun and sweet air--primroses could not have gladdened his sight more than these ugly sticks gladdened the sight of Jane Plummer; fresh violets could not have been more welcome and refreshing to him than these black bits of wood were to her. They held out the hope of light and warmth. They were temptingly within reach. She stooped and picked them up, and put them into her apron, the humble badge of the Order of the Poor. Unfortunate Jane Plummer! Behind her was a policeman with a true policeman's spirit. He was off duty, but the ruling passion for taking people into custody was strong within him, and he never missed a chance. Besides, he yearned for promotion; he looked forward to being a sergeant. Animated by this blessed hope, he was as zealous a subordinate as could be found in the ranks. He knew Jane Plummer; knew that she was the poorest of the poor; knew that she had no fire, and no money to buy fuel; knew the meaning of her hesitating gait and wistful looks as the fatal branches came into view. What, now, if at this point he had turned and fled? Pooh, not to be thought of. He waited cunningly until the sticks were in her apron, and she was shuffling along with them; then he pounced upon her, and bade her come along with him. She trembled, and dropped the rotten sticks. He made her pick them up again. She sobbed and implored--unavailingly. The heart of the zealous policeman was not to be touched. Side by side they marched; he with his dreadful hand upon her arm, she holding with reluctant fingers the corners of the apron which contained the proofs of her crime. Jane Plummer passed that night in the police-station, and the next morning was brought face to face with Justice. The policeman, with modest triumph, gave his evidence.

"Taken red-handed," observed the Reverend Emanuel Creamwell to the dummy by his side, who nodded with the wisdom of an owl, and asked the prisoner what she had to say for herself.

Tremblingly and with sobs, Jane Plummer said,

"If you please, your worship, it was bitter cold, and I had no fire at home, and no money to buy coal; and as I was passing by Mr. Icicle's wood, I gathered a few sticks to boil my kettle. There is a path through the wood, and I picked up the sticks by the side of the path. I didn't think there was any harm in it; the sticks ain't worth a ha'penny!"

"Had prisoner any money upon her, policeman?"

"A penny and a farthing, your worship."

Thereupon the Reverend Emanuel Creamwell remarked that the rights of property must be respected; and the sapient Justice of the Peace, having property, read Jane Plummer a lecture upon her offence, and, looking at some writing on a paper handed to him by his reverend counsellor, passed sentence--two shillings and sixpence fine, and three shillings and sixpence costs, or seven days' imprisonment.

"And I hope," added the law's administrator, with more owl's wisdom, "that this will be a caution to you never to touch sticks in gentlemen's woods again."

Jane Plummer sobbed that she would never, never, never do so again and went to prison to brood upon her sin.

These are but two cases out of many which the Reverend Emanuel Creamwell was instrumental in deciding. No doubt that, being actuated by a love for justice presumably more merciful (in these enlightened times) than the old Mosaic law of eye for eye and tooth for tooth, he often had to wrestle with his tender feelings; but he overcame them, as Jacob did the angel. And this mention of Jacob suggests the vision of his ladder. Say that the steps of the ladder by which the Reverend Emanuel Creamwell was to ascend to heaven were to be formed by good and

just actions, surely such sentences as those he was instrumental in passing upon the baker's boy and hapless Jane Plummer would not be forgotten. If this thought ever occurred to him, it must have afforded him much consolation.

CHAPTER IX.

THE REVEREND EMANUEL CREAMWELL AND HIS SON TAKE DIFFERENT VIEWS OF THINGS.

This that we see before us might be, to a fanciful mind, the commencement of the ladder to heaven referred to in the last chapter. It is but a sunbeam, slanting from window to floor. Strangely out of place it seems in the gloomy study which it illumines, but the myriad motes within it sparkle and flash merrily, without reference to surrounding things. It is but a sunbeam, slanting from window to floor, but there are contained within it that you and I might be the better for knowing. At the simple suggestion of the thought, a darker cloud casts a shadow upon the window through which the sunbeam has stolen, and it vanishes, leaving the study utterly dreary and gloomy. The furniture in the study is heavy and ponderous, the curtains to the windows are heavy and dark, and the bookcase is oppressive and burdened with lore. Can the house, of which this funereal study forms part, be a home? The cloud passes, and the sunbeam is alive again. Truant flashes of light dart in, and shifting restlessly in the corners of the room, strive vainly to hide themselves, as if they are conscious that they have no business in a place so serious and solemn, and wonder how they could have been so unwise as to enter. In the midst of their tribulation the door opens, and the Reverend Emanuel Creamwell enters. A deeper frown than usual is on his face. He holds a letter in his hand, which he has evidently been reading more and more.

"A Wesleyan Methodist!" he mutters. "Never been baptized in the Church of England! And the man's name is Verity, too. How could it have escaped me before? The very man, perhaps, to whom this paper refers."

He takes a small packet of papers from his desk, and selects one.

"A strange story," he muses, after reading it; "no person has any legal claim to what is due upon the debt. The statute of limitations has wiped off the obligation years ago. But the moral claim remains. I will see the man if he comes. I have some slight remembrance of him, as a man of strong opinions."

He refers to other papers, the perusal of which is evidently displeasing to him, if one can judge from the expression of his face. He pushes them aside, and leans back in his chair to think. Of what? Of his wife, who has been dead for twenty years. Not with affection does he think of her. But for a living remembrance she left behind her, she might have been to him as one who had never existed. This living remembrance is a child--a son--who, having completed his studies abroad (a phrase peculiarly adapted to fiction), has come home after many years of absence, with no prospects, no profession, and no settled aims or views for the future. Not that this gives the young gentleman the slightest concern. He is as careless a soul as is to be met with here and there, and he can spend a sovereign or a sixpence with equal pleasure. An uncle, who had paid all the expenses of his training and education (upon the express understanding that his nephew was to live away from home), had lately died, and this afternoon had been appointed for the father and son to confer together upon business matters. And upon mention of the subject, here he is. A young gentleman with no trace of seriousness in his manner, with almost laughing face, and with an easy self-possession that it would evidently take a great deal to disconcert; altogether (asking pardon first for the irreverence of the comparison) no more like his father than was Hyperion to a satyr. A bright flower is in his coat.

"Good-day, father." Although it is afternoon, it is the first time they have met to-day.

"Good-day, Shad—"

But before he can get the name out, his son laughingly interrupts him.

"Felix, father; Felix, if you love me!"

The Rev. Emanuel Creamwell waives the latter proposition, and says in a displeased tone,

"I cannot understand your reason for changing your name."

"I don't like it, father. It sounds mean. Shadrach!"

"It is a Scriptural name," says the Reverend Emanuel Creamwell solemnly.

"So is the one I have chosen in its place--Felix. I never could respect a man with the name of

Shadrach. Besides," adds Felix, with twinkling eyes, "it is unfair to the firm."

"To what firm do you refer?"

"Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. They should never be parted. You know well enough, father, that you never think of the one but the other two partners pop up, as much as to say, 'Don't forget us, please! We belong to the firm.'"

Hard lines come about the thin-lipped mouth of the Reverend Emanuel Creamwell, and he says, with deepening frowns,

"The light manner in which you speak of these things is especially displeasing to me, and is entirely out of place in my presence and in this house."

"I almost seem to be out of place myself here," says Felix, with the slightest trace of vexation in his manner.

"Perhaps so; we will discuss that presently. Whoever lives here must conform to my rules. You were smoking in your bedroom last night."

"True, sir."

"I do not allow smoking."

"I will not smoke here again. I'll smoke my cigar in the open air for the future."

"I should prefer your not smoking at all; *I* don't smoke."

"Why, sir, you wouldn't keep everybody from smoking because you don't smoke? If it were not for tobacco, the revenue of nations would go to—"

"Blazes," he is about to say, but he checks himself in time. There is so little in unison between these two natures, that when they meet it seems to be almost a necessity that they should clash. One is harsh and sour; the other is tolerant and sweet. Felix was more the son of his mother than the son of his father; the sweetness of her nature had come to him with the milk he had drawn from her breast. Father and son had not been brought together for very many years until now, and the experience they have gained of each other is not agreeable to either of them.

"You scarcely need me to tell you," says the Reverend Emanuel Creamwell, as his son stopped at the dangerous word, "that your remarks do continual violence to my feelings."

"We certainly don't seem to pull nicely together, father. You have some business matters to speak to me about. Perhaps it will be as well to proceed to them."

The Reverend Emanuel Creamwell looks among the papers on the table, and says,

"Your uncle, as you know, died six weeks ago."

"So your letter informed me. Did you see him before he died?"

"I have not seen him for years. I did not approve of him; and but for its being understood that he intended to leave you as his heir, I should have declined to be upon friendly terms with him."

"He was my mother's brother, and he has been kind to me."

"So far as defraying the expenses of your education—"

"*All* my expenses, father," interrupts Felix. "Please to remember that he made me a regular allowance."

"By which you intend me to remember also," says the Reverend Emanuel Creamwell with a frown, "that you have been no expense to me."

"If you please to put it that way, you can. But I should prefer your thinking that I reminded you of the circumstance in order that you might do justice to the memory of my uncle."

"I do not need you to remind me of my duty; I need *no* reminding of that. It is always before me. The tone of your remarks, and your general bearing towards me, proceed from the stipulation made by your uncle that you should be educated away from me and from this house."

"I mean no disrespect to you, father, believe me," exclaims Felix eagerly; "but everything about me here is so--so different from what I have been accustomed to, that I feel myself almost in a strange land." He might have said more, but he restrains himself. He might have said, "Coming home as I have done, ready and wishful to be upon affectionate terms with a father who never showed any love for me--coming home with a studied resolution to try and conform to my father's wishes, and to gain for myself a place in his affections--I find myself baffled at every turn. When my father met me, after years of absence, he met me with no smile upon his face. He might have been a man of stone for all the warmth he showed to me; a stranger could not have exhibited less tenderness in his greeting. And so it has gone on from the moment I set foot in this

house, which is cold enough and gloomy enough to chill one's blood." Felix does not say this, but he thinks it, and much more to the same effect, and at the same time wonders a little whether he is in any way to blame for things being so different from what he hoped and expected.

"The stipulation made by your uncle," proceeds the Reverend Emanuel Creamwell, "has thrown you into scenes and into a way of living that would certainly not meet with my approval; and if you wish to remain here, you must positively conform to my views. It is for you to change, not for me."

"Before we speak of this," says Felix, in as calm a tone as he can command, for the uncompromising bearing of his father grates strongly upon him, "will you be kind enough to tell me something more of my uncle? I have my future to look to now, and although it does not give me any anxiety, for I am sure to be all right"--with a careless wave of his hand to show that all the world was at his feet--"I would like to know what I have to depend on. My uncle must have died very suddenly."

"Sudden death is what we should all prepare ourselves for. I hope you have reflected seriously upon this and other matters not appertaining to this life."

"I don't know that I have, father," says Felix laughingly; "it's bad enough when it comes."

"I feared it!" exclaims the Reverend Emanuel Creamwell. "Not prepared! not prepared!"

The tone in which his father utters this lamentation is so exactly similar to the other lamentations which he has heard in other places, and which he has been in the habit of looking upon as unworthy of regard, that Felix with difficulty suppresses his disdain; but he is of too frank and open a nature not to make upon the instant a confession of faith--a confession so dreadful that the Reverend Emanuel Creamwell listened in undisguised wrath.

"I don't suppose I am prepared, father, in the way you mean, and I must confess that I don't see what necessity there is for it. I am not sent into the world to mourn; there are things in it that I like to enjoy, and that I think I was sent to enjoy; otherwise, they would not be provided. I sha'n't be the worse for enjoying them, if I live till I am seventy, and I shouldn't be the better for avoiding them, or for looking upon them as sinful."

Felix is aware of the bad impression he is producing upon his father, but he deems it a point of honour not to falter, and he goes on to the end with a certain manliness that would be refreshing in any other place than the cheerless study in which he is sitting.

"May I inquire what you call yourself in the matter of religion?" asks the Reverend Emanuel Creamwell gloomily.

"Well, father," replies Felix, with a certain puzzled hesitation, "I suppose I should call myself a Church-of-England man; but I would much prefer to call myself a Christian."

"It is useless, I expect," observes the Reverend Emanuel Creamwell, after a pause, "to enter into a discussion upon these subjects with you?"

"Quite useless, I should say, father."

"Then we will continue about your uncle's affairs," said the Reverend Emanuel Creamwell, with the air of one who, encountering a difficulty, finds it insurmountable; and, curiously enough, with the air of one who feels relieved in consequence. "As I was your uncle's nearest relative, and it was understood that you were his heir, I thought it my duty, immediately I heard of his death, to hasten to his house. I then, to my astonishment, discovered that he had expended the whole of his property in the purchase of a life annuity, which, of course, dies with him. After payment of certain claims, which could not be resisted, the estate leaves you, as your uncle's heir, the exact sum of one hundred and ten pounds."

A sour smile plays about the lips of the Rev. Emanuel Creamwell; thankful as he would have been for a more fortunate issue of his brother-in-law's death as relieving him of a responsibility which he is afraid may fall upon him, and which he is wishful to be rid of, he is not displeased at this triumph over his son. But Felix is more surprised than hurt; there is no such feeling in his breast as animosity towards his uncle because a fortune is not left to him. He says in a gentle voice,

"I am not the less grateful to him for what he has done for me; and I cannot say exactly whether I am sorry that he did not leave me a fortune. I can understand now the reason of his urging me to choose a profession. He knew that he had nothing to leave me, and that I should have to depend upon myself. But he did not think that he would have died so soon; he was a healthy strong man, and the probability was that he had many years of life before him."

"I told you," interposes the Rev. Emanuel Creamwell grimly, "that we should all be prepared for sudden death; he was not prepared for it."

"We have spoken of that already," replies Felix, in a dry tone, "and it will not profit us to pursue the subject. I know that many a bad word was said about him, but after all perhaps he

was not much worse than many of his neighbours. I, at all events, have cause to be grateful to him. I have no doubt that, had he lived, he would have helped me to make a career for myself. But that is still before me; I haven't the slightest fear. The circumstance of his leaving so small an estate speaks for him. It proves that in the allowance he made me he went to the full extent of his means, and that between us we managed to swallow up his annuity pretty well to the last shilling." In his anxiety to do justice to the memory of his uncle, his generous mind seizes every point that reflects credit upon the dead man. "Be a lawyer, he wrote to me over and over again, be an architect, be an engineer, be something, whatever it is, and come home and let us set about it. That showed he was in earnest, and meant to stand by me."

"We are not likely to agree upon this or any other subject. I have but few words to say in conclusion, relating to your uncle's affairs. He left a request behind him, in a document written some years ago, that when he died all his papers and letters should be burnt. This was done; they were all burnt with the exception of one, which contains the recital of a singular story; I thought it desirable to keep it, as it may be worth money, and as I think it concerns a man who once dwelt in this locality. And that, I believe, is all I have to say respecting your uncle."

A long and embarrassing silence follows, each knowing that the most momentous part of the interview is to come. Felix is unusually grave, for he cannot but feel that the relations existing between himself and his father are to some extent unnatural. Anxious as he is to find the road to his father's good wishes--affection seems to be out of the question--the consciousness is forced upon him that the only road open to him is one the treading of which will compel him to be false to himself. And that he cannot be. Come what may, he is determined not to play the hypocrite. He is the first to break the silence.

"You have something else to speak of, father."

The Reverend Emanuel Creamwell clears his throat, in precisely the same way as he was in the habit of doing when he was about to deliver a more than usually disagreeable discourse to his congregation. This clearing of the throat did not have the effect usually produced; it did not clear his voice. On the contrary, his tones on these occasions invariably became more harsh and discordant--like rusty iron. It is in these rusty-iron tones he speaks now, and every word he utters grates upon Felix, and sets his soul on edge.

"I have something else to speak of, but the subject is the same--yourself. I am disappointed in you."

"I am sorry for it, father."

"The opinions you entertain of religious matters are sinful in my eyes. I should so regard them if they were entertained by a stranger, and it is not because you are my son that I should exercise an unwise leniency towards you in matters which I deem of the utmost importance. You have contracted habits which I do not approve of. Your views I do not approve of. Your dress, your manner, your general conduct, are not in accordance with my ideas. That gay flower in your coat is unnecessary. Outward observances show the inward spirit."

"Not always, father," said Felix, with somewhat of recklessness; "I have known men who wore masks."

"Is that meant as an imputation upon me?" asks the Reverend Emanuel Creamwell, the gulf between father and son widening at every word that is spoken.

"I was thinking at the moment," replies Felix, urged on by a feeling he cannot resist, "of what a French writer said upon the subject of outward observances and inward spirit. He said that the true man is that which exists under what is called man, and that, strictly speaking, the human visage is a mask."

"Such vague generalities are after the common manner of French romancists, whose writings lead the soul astray."

Here Felix thinks scornfully, "Why drag the soul in?" but he does not speak his thought.

"They take us," continues the Reverend Emanuel Creamwell, joining the tips of his fingers and thumbs, and making an arch of them, "from the point we are speaking upon. I must desire that you do not break in again with such unseemly interruptions."

"I wish you would remember, father, that I am a man, and not a child. I have opinions of my own, and it is no fault of mine if they do not agree with yours."

"You are my son, and, as such, owe me implicit obedience. You have not decided yet as to a profession?"

"No."

"Your uncle dying leaves me in an unpleasant position. I am not rich; I have but little money to spare. Something the world will expect me to do for you—"

"O, pray, sir," interrupted Felix, "don't study the world. I shall get along well enough without assistance, I haven't the slightest doubt."

"Something, I say, the world will expect me to do for you; but if I do it, out of my small means, I shall require from you deference, respect, obedience. I have expressed my opinion of your views. You say in reply that you are a man, and have opinions of your own. Those opinions you will perhaps find it advisable to change. Until a profession is determined upon, you can stay here; but only upon the express understanding that you conform to my rules. You are the best judge whether this arrangement will suit you."

Felix, with a wry face, is about to reject this ungracefully-offered hospitality, and to say that perhaps it will be better for him to find a lodgment elsewhere, when an interruption occurs. Voices are heard in the passage, and the Reverend Emanuel Creamwell's housekeeper makes her appearance at the study-door. Strictly speaking, she might be described as a colourless woman, her dress being black, and her face being white.

"Some persons to see you, sir," she says.

"I cannot be interrupted," replies the Reverend Mr. Creamwell.

"But they insist, sir."

"Name?"

"Verity."

"Let them come in."

The next moment old Wheels with Lily and Alfred enter the room.

CHAPTER X.

FELIX GOES OVER TO THE ENEMY.

Humbly they stood before the minister and his son, and there was silence for a moment or two in the gloomy study. From the window of the study the parish churchyard could be plainly seen, and Felix, looking through the window while the conversation between his father and the housekeeper was taking place, saw a coffin lying by the side of a newly-made grave, and a little group of persons standing about it in the sun's light. This group was composed of Gribble junior and his wife, and Mrs. Podmore and her little Polly. Gribble junior's heir was also there, under shade. The youngster was asleep on the turf at the foot of a tall and weary tombstone, on which was an inscription to the effect that the soul that had once animated the clay beneath it had assuredly gone to the place where the wicked ceased from troubling and the weary are at rest. The letters which recorded this desirable consummation of a life's labour were nearly worn away by time, and the woeful tombstone, as it leaned towards the earth, exhibited in its attitude a yearning to fall upon its face, and to go also to the place where the weary are at rest. Over the head of Gribble junior's heir a large umbrella was spread to protect him from the sun. The umbrella served two purposes--it kept the child in shade, and advertised the business. For glaring upon the Cambridge blue silk was an advertisement, in yellow paint, of Gribble junior's Royal Umbrella and Parasol Hospital; and the proprietor of that establishment, complacently surveying the announcement, did not seem to think that it was at all out of place in the old churchyard. Little Polly, to whom everything that she had never seen before possessed surpassing interest, was looking about her with that solemn wonder which is often seen on children's faces. The gravedigger, a young man who should have known better, stood with his foot resting upon his spade; and the group was completed by two very old men who took an interest in funerals, and three dirty children with the usual dirty pinafores and the usual staring eyes.

The occasion was made quite a holiday by Mrs. Podmore and Mrs. Gribble junior. When Lily's Mather died, there was much sympathy expressed for her and her grandfather in the crowded house in Soho; and the women, notwithstanding they had ordinarily not a minute to spare from their pressing duties, busied themselves unostentatiously in assisting Lily and the old man through their trouble. Thus, Mrs. Podmore took upon herself Lily's household work, and cleaned and tidied the rooms, and cooked the meals for them until after the funeral; and Mrs. Gribble junior, being a perfect marvel with her needle, set to work at once making a black dress and bonnet for Lily. This quick practical sympathy is very common and very beautiful among the poor. Then Mrs. Podmore and Mrs. Gribble junior had settled that they ought to go to the funeral, which was to take place somewhere near Gravesend, in accordance with the wish of the dying woman. They spoke of it to their respective husbands. Gribble junior said, "We'll all go; and we'll take the young 'un. He's never been to a funeral; it'll open up his ideas, as a body might say." As if such an opportunity should, for the baby's sake, on no account be allowed to slip. Mrs. Podmore told *her* husband when they were in bed. He had come home, worn and tired out as

usual, and while his wife expressed her views, he held his little treasure--his darling Pollypod--close to his breast. He had a very perfect love for his child.

"All right--old woman," he said, in his weary manner, when his wife had finished. "Go. It will be--a holiday for you."

"And Polly?" said Mrs. Podmore "What shall I do with Polly?"

"What shall you do--with Pollypod?" he repeated drowsily, hugging the child. "Take her with you. It will be a treat--for her. My Pollypod! She'll smell--the country--and see--the sun." He was falling off to sleep, when he pulled himself up suddenly, and said, "And look here--old woman! Don't bother about--my dinner. I'll make shift--somehow."

"Lord bless you, Jim!" exclaimed Mrs. Podmore: "I shall have a nice meat-pudden for you. My man ain't going without his dinner."

So it was settled, and when Mrs. Podmore, the next morning, spoke of it to old Wheels, he was grateful for the attention, and said there would be plenty of room in the coach for them all. Mrs. Podmore's great difficulty was a black dress to go in; she could not go in a coloured dress, and could not afford to buy a new one. But on the day of the funeral she made her appearance in black, having borrowed her plumes of a neighbour who was in mourning; Pollypod went in colours.

As they had nearly twenty miles to go, the coach was at the door early in the morning. All the neighbours round about came into the street to gaze at it and the mourners. They stood and talked in whispers. Their sympathy was chiefly reserved for Lily and the coffin. "Hush-sh-sh! There's the coffin. Hush-sh-sh!" as if their very whispers might disturb the dead. Then, when Lily came out, the women shook their heads, and said, "Poor dear! Poor dear! How pale she is! Ah, she didn't look like that the other night at the White Rose." Presently they expressed surprise because the children were going, but said, a moment afterwards, "Ah, well, it will be a nice ride for them."

Gribble junior's father, master of the chandler-shop, and foe to co-operation, having been assured by his son that his late lodger was not to be buried by co-operation, also patronised the starting of the funeral with his presence. He had a corrugated face, not unlike the outside of an old walnut-shell, and it would have been difficult to have persuaded him that there was hope of salvation for the deceased if the coffin had been a co-operative production.

The party being large a one, a coach of an extra size had been provided. Gribble junior rode outside the coach, with the driver; the others, each mother with her child on her lap, and the coffin, were inside. He liked his position on the box, and thoroughly enjoyed the ceremony. As he sat there, he looked round with a sad gentle smile upon his neighbours. The day was fine, and the coach moved slowly through the narrow streets, as was befitting and proper. Common as the sight is, everybody turns his head or pauses for a moment to look at a coach with a coffin in it. Women come to the windows and gaze at it with a kind of quiet fascination; dirty children suspend their games and stand in admiration at the corners of the streets; idle shopkeepers come to their doors in their aprons; and mothers bring their babies to see the coach go by--truly suggestive of the cradle and the grave. Gribble junior relished this attention on the part of the public. He took it in some measure as a tribute to himself, and even derived satisfaction from the thought that many of the persons who stopped and gazed must believe him to be a near relative of the deceased. He was as little of a hypocrite as it is in the nature of human beings to be, but he deemed it necessary to his position to assume a mournful demeanour; and he did so accordingly, and sighed occasionally. When the coach got away from the narrow streets, it moved faster. Gribble junior had brought a Cambridge blue-silk umbrella with him, which, however, he did not open on the journey. He and his wife and Mrs. Podmore enjoyed the ride amazingly. To escape for a few hours from the narrow labyrinths of Soho was good; to get into a little open country where grass and flowers were growing and blooming was better; and to see bright colour come to the children's cheeks and bright sparkles to their eyes was best of all. It was as Mr. Podmore said, a treat for them. The wives had brought sandwiches and bread-and-butter with them, and water in ginger-beer bottles. (Gribble junior, outside the coach, had two bottles filled with beer--four-penny ale--which he and the driver drank and enjoyed.) The women offered part of their refreshments to the relatives of the dead woman, but not one of the mourners could eat. In the early part of the journey, little Pollypod was inclined to show her enjoyment of the ride somewhat demonstratively, but Mrs. Podmore whispered to the child, "Hush, Polly dear! Lily's mother's in there!" pointing to the coffin. Pollypod had blue eyes, very bright, though not very large; but the brightness went out of them and they grew larger as she learned this fact and looked at the coffin. A little while afterwards, having watched and waited and debated the point with herself, without being able to come to a satisfactory conclusion, Pollypod asked why Lily's mother did not get out of the box.

"*I* would!" said Pollypod. "If I was shut up there, I'd cry, and you'd let me out; wouldn't you? Wicked box! Father couldn't play with me if I was shut up in you!" And listened and wondered why the clay in the coffin did not cry to escape.

Once during the ride, Lily nursed Polly for comfort, and the child, with her lips to Lily's ear, said,

"Lily, I want to know!"

It was one of Pollypod's peculiarities that she was always wanting to know.

"Well, Polly?"

"Was Lily's mother naughty?"

"O, no, Polly! O, no!"

"What is she shut up in the box for, then?"

"She is gone from us, Polly dear."

"Was *you* naughty, Lily?" continued the inquisitive little Pollypod; "and is *that* the reason why she's gone?"

"No, Polly, dear."

"What is the reason, then, Lily?" inquired the pertinacious little maid. "I want to know."

"God has taken her, Polly," said Lily, in a tearful voice.

"Where has God taken her to, Lily?"

"There!" pointing upwards.

What did the matter-of-fact little maid do, there and then, but go to the window, and look into the bright sky for Lily's mother? Mrs. Podmore kept her there, and whispered to her that poor Lily was not well and must not be teased. But the child, at intervals, turned her perplexed eyes to the coffin and then to the beautiful clouds, not at all satisfied in her mind, and with all her heart "wanting to know."

At length the ride, weary to some and pleasant to some, was over, and they were in the churchyard and by the grave. There a man, taking old Wheels aside, spoke a few words to him. An expression of amazement, almost of horror, came into the old man's face.

"It is impossible!" he exclaimed, in a tone of uncontrollable agitation. "Here--beneath God's sky!--Surely you are mistaken."

The man replied that there was no mistake.

"Where is the minister?" inquired the old man. "Is that his house? I will go and see him. Come, children, come with me."

And leaving his friends by the grave, the old man, followed by his grandchildren, walked swiftly to the house of the Reverend Emanuel Creamwell.

When the relatives of the dead woman entered the gloomy study, Felix, seeing a tender girl among them, offered Lily a chair. She bowed without looking into his face, and although she did not sit down, she rested her hand upon the chair, as if she needed support. If the thoughts which animated the minds of the five persons in that sombre study had been laid bare, the strangest of contrasts would have been seen. There sat the Reverend Emanuel Creamwell; behind him was his son. They were at variance with one another, and each felt himself so much in the other's way, that if it had not been for the tie of kinship that bound them, their opposing natures would have led to the plain expression of scorn and contempt on the one side, and of harsh and bitter condemnation on the other.

There stood the delicate girl, whose nerves during the last few days had been strung to the highest point of which her nature was capable. A pure and tender lily indeed, as graceful as the flower from which she derived her name, and whose white bells, as they arch among the vivid leaves of green, tremble in the lightest breath from zephyr's mouth. It was so with Lily at this time. A harsh word would have caused her to quiver with pain. The effect which the suddenness of her mother's death, and the terrifying dreams that followed, had produced upon her had not passed away. Like the lily she stood there, dependent upon surrounding things almost for very life itself; kind looks and sweet words gladdened her and helped to make her strong, as kind sunshine and sweet breezes gladden and make strong the flower. And like the flower, the light in which she stood seemed to come from inward brightness and purity.

Her brother Alfred stood by her side. What was stirring in his mind? Well, it was the day on which the Northumberland Plate was run for at the Newcastle-upon-Tyne races. The race was over by this time. Had Christopher Sly won? He trembled to think that it might have been beaten--had come in second, perhaps; had lost "by a head." If it had, there was woe in store for him. If he were in London, he would know; this uncertainty was torturing. Now he was in the depth of misery: Christopher Sly had lost, and he had to pay money, and to make money good, out of an empty purse. Now he was in the height of gladness: the horse *could* not lose--every one of the prophets had said so; Christopher Sly had won, and everything was right. It was like a reprieve from death.

Lastly, the grandfather. What his thoughts were will be shown in words. A strange and unexpected trouble had been added to his grief, and his handsome thoughtful face showed traces of perplexed anxiety.

When Felix had offered Lily a chair, the Reverend Emanuel Creamwell had killed the proffered courtesy with an irritable wave of his hand, which expressed, "You will not presume to sit in my presence." In everything that Felix did he found cause for anger, and he believed that his son was animated by a distinct wish to thwart and oppose him; this very proffered courtesy to one of these persons was another argument in his mind against Felix. Marble in the hands of a sympathetic worker was more capable of tenderness and gentleness than was the face of the Reverend Emanuel Creamwell as he sat in his arm-chair and waited for the intruders to speak.

"My name, sir, is Verity," commenced the old man, in a humble and respectful voice.

"So I understand," said the Reverend Emanuel Creamwell, in a hard and cold voice.

Lily shivered as the harshly-spoken words fell upon her ears.

"These are my grandchildren," indicating Lily and Alfred.

"A gentleman," thought Felix, as he followed the courteous action of the old man.

The Reverend Emanuel Creamwell received the intimation with a scarcely perceptible nod, and a colder chill came upon Lily's sensitive spirit as she raised her eyes to the dark face of the minister.

"They are the children of my dead daughter," continued the old man, "who before she died expressed a wish to be buried in the place which had been familiar to her in her younger and happier days."

"These details are scarcely necessary, I should say. What are you here for?"

The old man's agitation was so great that he was compelled to pause before he answered; but strength seemed to come to him as he looked at the Reverend Emanuel Creamwell's stony face.

"The mother of these children is waiting in the churchyard to be buried."

"You received my message, I have no doubt."

"Some words were spoken to me as coming from you."

"Were not they sufficient?"

"I could not believe, sir, that the words which were delivered to me came from the lips of a minister of God."

A flash of something very like anger lighted up the small eyes of the Reverend Emanuel Creamwell.

"And so you come here to revile His minister?"

"I come here in all humility, sir," replied the old man.

"Do you wish me to repeat the message?"

"I wish to know, sir, that I have been mistaken. I cannot believe that what I have been told is true."

"It is the evil of the ungodly that they cannot answer straight. Do you wish me to repeat the message?"

"Yes, sir."

"It is very simple. My intimation was to the effect that I cannot perform any service over the deceased woman."

"The prayers for the dead—" exclaimed the old man imploringly.

"Are not for her!" said the minister, finishing the sentence sternly.

At these dreadful words Felix started forward to Lily's side; the young girl was trembling, and he feared she was about to fall. Indeed she would have fallen, but for his helping hand. Inward fire possessed the soul of the Reverend Emanuel Creamwell at the action of his son and his wrath was expressed in his face. Felix saw it, but did not heed it; his lips were firmly set as he yielded Lily to her grandfather's arms, who, as he bent over her, murmured,

"I would have spared you the pain, my darling! But I thought that your helplessness and your innocent face would have pleaded for us."

Then he turned to the minister. "Why do you refuse to perform the last rites over the body of my daughter?"

"I am mistaken if you have not been informed. Her parents were members of the Wesleyan Methodist body, and the woman was not baptized in the Church of England. Therefore I cannot say prayers over her."

"Is that God's law?"

"It is mine!" replied the Reverend Emanuel Creamwell, with inconsiderate haste. If, when he heard the rejoinder, he could have caused the old man to fall into dust at his feet, he would have done so.

"You say truly, sir," said the old man, in a tone of bitter calmness. "It is not God's law; it is yours."

The Reverend Emanuel Creamwell shaded his face with his hand; he did not choose that the feeling there expressed should be seen. He knew, by his son's sympathetic movement towards Lily, that Felix had gone over to the enemy, and a consciousness possessed him that Felix was not displeased at his discomfiture. Still it was his duty to assert himself, and he did so accordingly in severe measured terms, and in tones utterly devoid of feeling.

"I have already told you that you came here to revile--to revile God through His minister. It is such as you who set men's minds afire, and drive them into the pit."

But the old man interrupted him with,

"Nay, sir, do not let us argue; I at least have no time. A dead woman is waiting for me. I must go and seek a minister who will say prayers over the poor clay. Come, my children."

"To seek a minister!" echoed the Reverend Emanuel Creamwell. "What minister?"

"A Methodist minister, as that is your will."

"Presumptuous!" exclaimed the Reverend Emanuel Creamwell, in wrath so pious that a colour came to his usually pale face. "No Methodist minister can be allowed to pray in *my* churchyard!"--with a protecting look and motion of his fingers towards the ground where the dead lay--a look which said, "Fear not! My lips have blessed you; my prayers have sanctified you. Ye shall not be defiled!"

"How, then, is my daughter to be buried?" asked the old man, with his hand to his heart.

"The woman must be buried in silence," replied the minister.

As if in sympathy with the words, a dark cloud passed across the face of the sun, and the sunbeam, with its myriad wonders, vanished on the instant, while the truant flashes of light that were playing in the corners of the room darted gladly away to places where light was.

The old man bowed his head, and the words came slowly from his trembling lips.

"Cruel! Unjust! Wicked!" he said. "Bitterly, bitterly wicked! Do we not all worship the same God? What has this innocent clay done, that holy words may not fall upon the earth that covers her? What have we done, that the last consolation of prayer shall be denied to us?" Then looking the minister steadily in the face, he said in a firm voice, "According to your deserts may you be judged! According to your deserts may you, who set your law above God's, and call yourself His priest, be dealt with when your time comes!"

Turning, he was about to go, when the voice of the Reverend Emanuel Creamwell stopped him.

"Now that you have done your reviling, attend to me for a few moments. You lived in this parish once?"

"Twenty years ago," replied the old man. "All my life up to that time--I and my poor daughter. There will be some here who will remember me."

"I remember you myself. You had a son?"

"No; I had but one child, she who lies yonder."

"Psha! it is the same--you had a son-in-law—"

The old man looked up with apprehensive eagerness, and Alfred, who had hitherto been perfectly passive--having indeed for most of the time been engrossed in torturing himself about Christopher Sly and the Northumberland Plate--made a sudden movement forward. The old man laid his hand upon his grandson's arm, cautioning him to silence.

"The father of these young persons," continued the Reverend Emanuel Creamwell. "Where is

he?"

"Alfred," exclaimed the old man, "take Lily away. It is too close for her here. I will join you presently outside."

Indeed, Lily was almost fainting. The long weary ride, the abstention from food for so many hours, and the sufferings she had experienced during the dialogue between her grandfather and the minister, had been too much for her strength. Seeing her weak state, Felix stepped forward to assist Alfred, and presently they were in the porch.

"Stay one moment, I pray," exclaimed Felix hurriedly; "only a moment."

He darted into the house, and brought out a chair.

"There!" he said. "Let her sit here for a minute or two. It will do her good. The sun is the other side of us."

It is a fact that Felix, with quick instinct, had selected this place as being likely to revive the girl. They were out of the glare of the sun.

"Now, if you will oblige me and not let her move," he said in the same hurried eager tone, "you will lay me under an obligation that I shall never be able to pay."

The words were scarcely out of his mouth before he was upstairs, in his own room, tearing open his valise; he scattered the things wildly about, and came flying down again, with a fine white handkerchief and a bottle of Cologne water in his hand. He poured the liquid upon the handkerchief, and, with a delicate consideration, handed it to Alfred.

"Bathe her forehead with it; place it on her forehead, so. Now blow gently--gently. Let me!"

He blew upon the handkerchief, and the deliciously cool breeze revived the fainting girl. She looked gratefully into his face, which turned crimson beneath her gaze. But his task was not yet completed, it seemed. He took from his pocket a flask, which he had also found in his valise. There was a little silver cup attached to the flask, and he poured a golden liquid into it.

"Taste this; it will do you good. Nay, put your lips to it; there's no harm in it. Your brother will drink first to show you how reviving it is."

His voice was like a fountain; there was something so hearty, and frank, and good in it, that it refreshed her. Alfred emptied the silver cup, and her eyes brightened.

"Take a little, Lily," he said; "it *will* do you good."

She drank a little, and felt stronger at once.

"Where's grandfather?" she asked then.

"He will be with you presently," replied Felix. "I am going into him. I will tell him to come to you. But before I go," and here his voice faltered, and became more earnest, "I want you to say that you forgive me for any pain that you may have felt in--in there," pointing in the direction of the room they had left.

"Forgive you!" said Lily, in surprise. "Why, you have been kind to us It was not you who said those dreadful words to grandfather. There is nothing to forgive in you."

"There is much to forgive," said Felix impetuously; "much, very much, if it be true that the sins of the father shall be visited on the children. I am in that state of remorse that I feel as if I had been the cause of your suffering and your pain."

"Nay, you must not think that," she said, in a very gentle voice; "I am not well, and we have come a long, long way."

"Well, but humour my whim," he persisted; "it will please me. Say, 'I forgive you.'"

"I forgive you," she said, with a sad sweet smile.

"Thank you," he said gravely, and touched her hand: and as he walked into the house again, and into the study where his father and old Wheels were, Lily's sad smile lingered with him, and made him, it may be presumed, more unreasonably remorseful.

While this scene was being enacted outside the Reverend Emanuel Creamwell's house, the conversation between the minister and old Wheels was proceeding. When Lily was out of the room, the old man said,

"Will you please detain me here as short a time as possible, sir, as we have much to do and far to go?"

"I will not detain you long," said the Reverend Emanuel Creamwell, in the tone of a man who is about to smite his enemy on the hip; "possibly you would not have remained, had you not been

curious to know what I have to say respecting your son-in-law."

"Possibly not, sir; you may guess the reason why I wished the tender girl who was here just now not to be present while you spoke."

"Because I might say something unpleasant. Well, it is not a creditable story. Searching among the papers of a deceased man, having warranty to do so, his effects being the property of my son, I came upon this paper. It recites a singular story of an embezzlement, which took place--let me see; ah, yes--which took place nearly eighteen years ago. You know the story, probably?"

"There are so many stories of embezzlement. Is my name mentioned?"

"Otherwise I should not have spoken of the matter to you. After reciting the manner of the embezzlement and the name of the criminal, it speaks of intercession by you on his behalf, and how, somewhat out of compassion and somewhat out of policy, criminal proceedings were withheld. You undertook to repay the money, and after the payment of one large sum, dates are set down on which smaller sums were paid on account from time to time."

"Anything to deny?" asked the minister.

At this point Felix entered the room.

"Nothing to deny. The story is true."

"And you," exclaimed the Reverend Emanuel Creamwell loftily, "the father of a criminal who should be expiating his crime in prison, presume to lift your voice against me! Truly, I should but be doing my duty to society if I were to make the matter public."

"Do I understand that the man from whom the money was embezzled is dead?"

"He is dead."

"There is a balance still due," said old Wheels; "one hundred pounds. Has he left the claim to any one?"

"My son is heir to the property," said the Reverend Emanuel Creamwell.

"Your son!" There were traces of disappointment in the old man's voice as he looked at Felix. "Is this he?"

"This is he."

"You shall be repaid, sir," said the old man humbly to Felix, "to the last farthing." Felix, who had stood before the old man with head inclined, turned away abruptly at these words, and looked out of window. "It is but just," continued the old man in firm and gentle tones, "that you and he should know, that no one was to blame but the unfortunate man who committed the crime--for crime it was undoubtedly, although the law judged it not. The children who were here awhile ago were babes at the time, and it was to save all of us from shame and misery that I undertook to repay the money. I have been all my life paying it, as you may see by the statement in your hand. I did not know that such a document was in existence. I have a signed quittance for the money at home, and have had from the time I paid the first instalment, which, as you see, was large enough to wipe off at once three-fourths of the debt. But the moral claim remained and remains. It is my pride to think that some part of my dear granddaughter's earnings have gone towards the clearing of her father's shame, of which, up to the present moment, she has never heard. Depend upon it, sir, the balancer that remains shall be faithfully paid. Have you anything farther to say to me?"

"Nothing farther. You can go."

The old man lingered as though he were wishful to say a word to Felix; but that young gentleman, standing with his back to him, gave him no opportunity, and he left the study in silence. Then the Reverend Emanuel Creamwell rose and, paced the room, indulging in bitter meditations. It had been an unfortunate afternoon for him; everything but this last small triumph had gone wrong with him; he had been crossed, almost defied, at every turn. First, his son; then, this presumptuous old man, whose words were still burning in his mind. And his son's silence now irritated him. Every moment added to his irritation. Felix, standing with his face to the window, looking out upon the churchyard, and upon the figures of the old man and his grandchildren walking towards the grave, showed no disposition to move or to speak. In the eyes of his father this implied disrespect. He was not destitute of a certain decision of character, and in harsh tones he called upon Felix, to speak.

"I have been considering, sir," said Felix. "I ask your pardon for keeping you waiting."

"Considering what?" demanded the Reverend Emanuel Creamwell.

"The proposition you made to me before these persons intruded upon us. You offered me a shelter here, until I determined upon a profession.

"On the express understanding that you conform to my rules."

"I do not forget, sir. Those were your very words. Will you permit me?" He took from the table the document which had been referred to in the conversation that had lately taken place. "And this old man has been all his life paying a debt for which he was not liable! There is hope yet for human nature, sir." A queer smile came upon his lips as he uttered these words in a half-gentle, half-bantering tone.

"Speak plainly," was the stern rejoinder of the Reverend Emanuel Creamwell.

"I will try to do so. My uncle left a request that all his papers should be burnt, and I am my uncle's heir. Why was this preserved?"

"You have heard: for your good. It is worth money to you. The man admits the claim."

"Money!" exclaimed Felix, with a light laugh, in which there was bitterness: "But the dead must be obeyed."

He went to the fireplace, struck a match, and applied the light to the paper. The Reverend Emanuel Creamwell, with face white with anger, watched the burning of the paper. Felix let the ashes fall into the fender, and tapped his fingers lightly together, with the air of one wiping away a soil.

"So!" he said. "I wash my hands of that."

"You know what you have done?" said the Reverend Emanuel Creamwell, placing his hand upon the table to steady himself.

"Yes, sir," answered, Felix gravely; "I shall never trouble you again."

Then he left the room quietly and sadly.

CHAPTER XI.

FELIX, DISSATISFIED WITH THE REALITY, SETS UP AN IDOL, AND WORSHIPS IT.

In the passage Felix was confronted by the colourless housekeeper. He had a kindly feeling for her. She had been his father's housekeeper ever since he could remember. She was a young woman and well-looking when he was a little child. When he came home, a man, she had addressed him in the old familiar way, and he was surprised at the change in her; but he soon recognised that living all her life within the influence of his father's house had made her what she was. Now, as, she confronted him, he gave her a kind nod, and would have passed her: but she laid her hand upon his arm to detain him.

"Where are you going?" she asked.

"Into the churchyard," he answered.

"Where, after that?"

"A subtle question, Martha. Who knows where he goes to after he gets into the churchyard?"

"Where, after that?" she repeated.

"Ask the worms," he replied; and added, somewhat bitterly, "or the preachers."

"Answer me, Felix," she said.

"I can't;" and again he attempted to pass her.

"Nay," she said, almost entreatingly; "let me speak to you for a minute or two."

"Come outside, then; I cannot speak to you here."

She followed him into the porch. The chair which he had brought for Lily was there, but Lily was gone. The fragrance of the scented water he had sprinkled upon his handkerchief lingered in the air. He placed his hand upon the chair, and in his fancy the sweet air became associated with the tender girl who had rested there awhile ago. He smiled, half gladly, half sadly, as the fancy came upon him. The housekeeper watched him earnestly, as if striving to read his thoughts.

"Now, Felix, where are you going afterwards?"

"I can't tell you, Martha," he replied--softly, for he was thinking of Lily. "My plans are unformed."

"When do you return?"

"Never; unless something dearer than life brings me back."

"You have had a quarrel with your father?"

"You are a witch," he said lightly, "and ought to be burnt."

"You have had a quarrel with your father," she repeated, showing no temper at his light manner, but even seeming to take pleasure in it.

"Something like that. We don't agree. There are not two rights, are there, Martha?"

"I am not sure; there may be."

"I *am* sure. My father's right and mine are as the north and the south pole. If I am right, I must not stay here and vex him: it would be unfilial. If he is right, I must sit in sackcloth and ashes, and pray for fresh blood and bone and brain before we can meet again. Any way I must go; that is settled."

"Who settled it?"

"He, or I, or both of us. Are you not witch enough to guess for yourself? It came, somehow. That is enough. If you entertain the idea that the difficulty is to be smoothed over—"

"I do not," she interrupted. "I know your father."

"And me--do you think you know me?"

"I think I do."

"Therefore you must see how impossible it is that he and I, having disagreed upon a vital point--it *is* vital, to my thinking--can live together. I have a fancy in my head, Martha; I'll tell it to you. To have a father and not have a father--as is the case with me--is dreadful. For father and son to disagree is dreadful also. So I shall imagine a father, and as he is sure to agree with me, we shall be the best of friends. I shall picture him tender, and good, and kind; tolerant, yet conscientious; merciful, yet just. I can see him, and I love him already!"

Light as his words were, there was a vein of seriousness in his tones that showed how deeply his feelings had been stirred.

"When I left the Continent," he continued, "I had a friend with me who also had been absent from home for years. At intervals during our journey, he spoke with enthusiasm of home delights and of the happiness in store for him when he and his family came together. He showed me letters from them which made me think. We crossed from Paris to Dover, and there he met his father, who had travelled a hundred miles to welcome his son the moment he set foot on English soil. They threw their arms round each other, like boys, and laughed to keep away the tears. When I came to the railway station here--just half a mile from where we stand--I looked about me with a dim hope that *my* father had come that distance to welcome his son home. But there are fathers and fathers, Martha. Now, if I had been wise, and had set up my imaginary father before the train stopped, I should have seen him waiting for me on the platform; I should have been able to throw my arms round his neck, to press him to my heart, and to see in his eyes a kindly welcome; I should have been able to grip his hand, and to say, 'Bravo, dear old fellow! I love you!' But I was not wise, and to be forewarned by my fears was not with me to be forearmed. It is not too late, though--it is never too late. Away, you shadows!"

He flicked his handkerchief in the air, as if the reality oppressed him with a phantom presence, and said in a mock-serious tone, in which earnestness struggled not vainly for a place:

"Here I raise a father whom I love. I kiss his hand, and vow to pay him all respect. He shall go with me, and we shall live together."

There was nothing in the housekeeper's appearance to denote that freaks of the imagination would find favour in her eyes, and yet gleams of pleasure--all the more strange because she sought to suppress them--brought light to her dull white face as Felix with fantastic grace stooped to kiss the hand of the shadow he had raised. But these signs faded away as soon as Felix had finished speaking, and her face resumed its usual dulness of expression.

"Those persons who have just gone, Felix--had they anything to do with your quarrel with your father?"

"I never saw them before," he replied.

"Had they anything to do with the quarrel with your father?" she persisted.

"There's something of the bull-dog in your nature, Martha," he said, laughing. "You never leave a subject until it is settled."

"I would not hurt you, Felix," she said, softly.

"I don't believe you would. Well, yes, they *had* something to do with the immediate cause of my leaving--though it would have come to the same thing without them. We were on the verge of the precipice as they entered. I must go and see how they are getting along, and if I can be of any use to them; but I shouldn't wonder if they shrunk from me and looked upon me as an unclean thing. Are you surprised at all this, Martha?"

"No," she replied tranquilly. "This is no house for sunshine. I knew when you came that you would not be here long."

"You can do me a service. I shall soon look my last on this place; will you pack up such things as are mine, and give them to a messenger I shall send?"

"Yes; they shall be ready this evening."

"Then that is all, and the world is before me for me to open. Where is my oyster-knife?" He felt in his pockets with a comical air. "Ah, it is here," and he touched his forehead confidently. "So now good-bye, Martha."

She did not relinquish the hand he held out to her, but clasped it firmly in hers.

"You will let me know where you live, Felix?"

"O, yes; I will let you know."

"I have but little money of my own, unfortunately—"

"Stop, stop, stop!" he cried, with his fingers on her "Enough has been said, and I must go. Good-bye."

"Good-bye; I think you do right to leave, Felix."

"I should be compelled to leave, sooner or later," he replied; "I could not live without love or sympathy. The cold austerity of this house is enough to turn heart and face to stone. I pity you, Martha. I have sometimes wondered how you could have stood it so long."

"I earn money here, Felix. Your father pays me liberally--for him--because I suit him; and I am not entirely without love. I have something to work for, thank God. Good-bye. May every good fortune be yours!"

CHAPTER XII.

POLLYPOD WANTS TO KNOW.

When Felix reached the churchyard, the grave was still empty. The coffin lay upon the earth by its side, and the women of the party were sitting on convenient tombstones. Of the men, only Alfred remained; Gribble junior and the old man were absent.

Gribble junior's baby was sleeping peacefully beneath the umbrella tent, the gay outside of which had caused the two old men to go for two other old men, and the girls in dirty pinafores to go for other girls in dirty pinafores. These new-comers were as interested in the unusual sight as their friends, and expressed their admiration by staring persistently in the dullest possible manner.

Pollypod, wandering about, was in a state of delight and wonderment. Truly the old churchyard was a world of wonders to the child. To her young mind there was nothing suggestive of corruption in it. The "Here lies" and "Here lieths" brought no melancholy thoughts to her, although she was curious about them. But, when she asked, wanting to know, her mother bade her "Hush!" as she had done in the coach, and Pollypod was fain to hold her peace. It was not difficult for her to let the matter rest for a time, as there were plenty of other things to occupy her mind. Now and then a butterfly flew by, and she watched it with delighted eyes till it was out of sight. She found ladybirds on leaves, and wished that she had a little bottle to take them home for father. But she could take him some buttercups and daisies, and she was plucking the prettiest and the most golden when her eyes lighted on Felix.

Pollypod was not by any means a bashful child. She had her likes and dislikes, as all children have, but she had more of the former than of the latter. And she was fond of society. She had tried to make friends with the dirty girls who stood staring at the umbrella and the coffin, and the

strange folk, but had not been successful. All her advances had been received with stupid stares, and not a word could the little maid extract from the juvenile bumpkins. Then she had tried the old men; but when she plucked their trousers, they moved away without a word. She had therefore given up the attempt as hopeless. Now, all at once, here was a handsome young man, handsomely dressed, and he immediately became an object of interest to Pollypod. Felix, seeing the child gaze at him, smiled at her, and Pollypod smiled in return; and to show that she was prepared to give good interest for amiability, came and stood by his side, and looked into his face with frank interest and curiosity. The healthy exercise had brought bright sparkles into Pollypod's eyes, and a bright colour to her cheeks. Felix was fond of children, and invariably found favour in their eyes. At parties where grown-up people and children were, the youngsters always claimed him as one of themselves, and played and romped with him without restraint. Children have an instinct for the discovery of amiable matures in their elders, which is very seldom wrong.

"Well, little girl," said Felix, by way of commencement. The sight of the child's artless face did him good, and tended to dispel the vapours which clouded his mind.

Pollypod nodded a reply, and arranged the buttercups and daisies in her hand, without looking at them. Her attention was fixed upon his smart clothes and bright face, and the flowers in his coat. These latter had an especial attraction for her. She thought how pleased father would be if she could take them home to him in the middle of a bunch of buttercups and daisies. But suddenly, as she looked, her face became clouded, and she retreated a step or two.

"What's the matter, little one?" he asked, seating himself upon a tombstone. "You are not frightened of me, are you?"

"I don't know," replied Pollypod; and then, with her finger to her lips, and her head inclined forward, she said solemnly, "Are you the naughty man?"

"What naughty man?" he inquired, amused at the child's attitude and manner.

"The naughty man who won't bury Lily's mother."

The cloud on the child's face was reflected on his as he replied, "No, I am not."

Pollypod came close to him immediately.

"I am glad of that; I'm very, very glad of that!"

"Why, little one?"

"Because I like you."

The artlessness of the child pleased and soothed him. It was nature speaking.

"If the naughty man was here," continued Pollypod, clenching her little fist, and stamping her little foot, "I'd beat him for making Lily cry."

"Is that Lily?" pointing to the girl.

"Yes, that's Lily, and that's Lily's brother Alfred, and that's Mrs. Gribble, and that's my mother, and that's the baby. And that's Lily's mother in the coffin. Who are you?"

"My name is Felix."

Pollypod pondered upon the name, and presently nodded her head two or three times, to express approval, In proof that she was disposed to treat him fairly in the matter of information, she said,

"My name's Pollypod."

"Polly—"

"Pod. Father's name is Jim Podmore, and I'm his little Pollypod."

Thereupon--confidential and affectionate relations being completely established--she sat down on the tombstone beside him. She put him at once upon on equality with her by asking, in the most serious manner,

"Do you like butter?"

And gravely held a buttercup beneath his chin, he laughingly submitting to the test. The golden reflection of the flower being seen on his chin, she declared that he *did* like butter, and the triumphant tone in which she announced the discovery evidently enhanced his value in her eyes. Then she asked, Did she? and held up her face for the test, which Felix applied with becoming seriousness. The answer being satisfactory, they became more confidentially familiar.

"This is a churchyard," said the little maid.

"Yes."

"Where people are buried."

"Yes."

"Lily's mother is going to be buried here."

"Yes."

"I want to know if Lily's mother is shut up in a box, how can she be up there?"

Felix, seeing that he was in danger of being entangled in a theological disputation with an opponent who thirsted for facts, answered simply,

"God lives there, and when we die we go to Him."

"Mother has told me so often and often, but I want to understand."

"Inquisitive little maid!" exclaimed Felix. "Is not that a beautiful place?" pointing upwards.

"It *is* pretty--and bright; that cloud looks like blue-and-white feathers. Mother says we'll go to heaven if we're good. And that's heaven. I'm going to be very good. But I want to know! How can we be here and there at the same time?"

Felix felt that it was a hard question to answer, and he despaired of making it clear to so young an understanding.

"See now," he said, with an attempt at simplicity; "you are a little girl. By-and-by you will become a woman; then you will grow older and older, and your hair will turn white, and you will be an old woman. When we are old, we die."

"*Must* we die--all of us?"

"All of us, little one. But God gives us a soul which is always young; it never grows old, and when our bodies are worn out, our souls go back to God and heaven."

"I give my soul to God to keep," murmured Pollypod, repeating a line which she said in her prayers every night. She did not understand, but she had faith in Felix. She murmured the words so softly that Felix did not hear them.

"So that our body is here, and our soul is there, little maid. Earth takes care of one, and heaven takes care of the other."

"I suppose it is right," said Pollypod, with her hands clasped in her lap, where the flowers had fallen loose. She looked into his face as she spoke.

"Yes, little one, it is right."

"And Lily's mother *is* there, although I can't see her."

She gazed earnestly, at the clouds for a few moments before she spoke again. "I want to know!" she then said. "Everybody who dies is not old."

"Some die young. God wants them."

"I hope God won't want me till I'm old, for I want to grow up to be a woman—"

"And then, little maid?"

"And then you shall marry me," said Pollypod, coming down to earth, and placing her hand in that of her companion. "I'll be your little wife."

"That's a bargain," said Felix merrily; "we're sweethearts from now."

"You ought to kiss me," said the forward little maid; and after being kissed, she fell to bunching her buttercups and daisies together.

"And now tell me, Pollypod," said Felix, anxious to learn something of Lily and the old man. "Where do you all come from?"

"O, along, long, long way! It was such a nice ride!"

"Then you live a long way from here?"

"O, yes, we live in London, in Soho."

"That is a long-way indeed, Pollypod. Are you Lily's cousin?"

"O, no; we're none of us relations, not even the baby! But we all live together. Lily lives on the

first floor; baby and Mr. and Mrs. Gribble live on the second floor--they're umbrella makers; father and mother and me live on the third floor."

"That's very high up, Pollypod!"

"I like it because of that; there's such a lot of light! It's nearer the sky, father says. Father's a railway man, and comes home so late! But we play in bed every morning. And we've got a dog; Snap's his name. He goes out to work every morning with father, and comes back at night. We have such fun together! We've got such a nice room."

"Only one, Pollypod?"

"Yes; we don't want more, do we?" inquired the little maid. "There's such pretty paper on the walls. Roses--*such* red ones! Father's fond of flowers, that's why. I like to look at them before I go to sleep; sometimes I see pretty faces in them, like Lily's. I dream of everything. I shall dream of you to-night, and shall look for your face among the roses. I'm making a bunch of buttercups and daisies for father, but they're all one colour"--with a wistful look at the flowers in her companion's coat.

Felix saw the wish in the look, and taking the flowers from his coat, gave them to Pollypod.

"If you put these in the bunch," he said, "there will be more than one colour."

Pollypod held up her face to be kissed again, and nestled closer to him.

"I knew you were good," she said.

When she had arranged the flowers, Felix found a piece of string in his pocket, and tied them together for her. The party near the coffin were in the same position as they had been when he came into the churchyard; the old man and Gribble junior had not returned. Having nothing better to do, and burning with a desire to know more of the fair girl whose acquaintance he had made in so strange a manner, Felix resumed his conversation with little Pollypod. He had no difficulty in doing so; Pollypod was brimful of talk.

"So you dream of everything," he said.

Pollypod nodded, repeated "E-ve-ry-thing" under her breath, and held up her bunch of flowers admiringly, turning them this way and that, and thinking how pleased father would be with them.

"What did you dream of last night?"

"I don't remember," replied Pollypod, after a little consideration. "I know what I dreamt of the night before."

"Of what?"

"Of my Doll," said the little maid, showing by her manner that the subject was of very serious importance. "And, O, it looked so beautiful! It had large blue eyes--and moved them!--and a pink face, and red lips, and it was dressed in blue silk, with such a lovely bonnet!"

"Was it as pretty as your own doll?" inquired Felix.

Pollypod shook her head a dozen times, and pursed her lips. "I haven't got one," she said wistfully, "I never saw it; I only dream of it."

Felix did not say anything in the pause that followed, knowing that he was about to be enlightened.

"It's in father's ship. Father told me, O, such a long time ago! that when his ship came home, he would give me the Doll; and the naughty ship won't come home. Father is so angry sometimes because it's so long away. There's a toy-shop not far from where we live, with such funny things in the window--and there's a Doll in the middle of them, just like mine that's in father's ship. Father says mine is handsomer, and that mine has a smaller nose and pinker lips. I go to look at it whenever I can, and wish, and wish, and wish that father's ship would come home! I often dream that it has, and when I wake up I say, 'Father, has your ship come home?' and he says, 'No, Pollypod;' and I know by his voice that he's sorry."

"Now, Pollypod," said Felix, holding up his finger to denote that she was to give him all her attention, "I'm going to tell you something. I'm a wizard."

"A wiz-ard," repeated Pollypod thoughtfully; and then said, with a sharp look at Felix, "I want to know!"

"What a wizard is! So you shall, little one. A wizard can see things, and tell things before they occur."

"Can he!" exclaimed Pollypod, her blue eyes dilating. "Can you see and tell anything now?"

"Yes."

"What?"

"I can see a little girl lying in bed, looking at the roses on the wall."

"That's me," said Pollypod, in a tone of infinite content. "Who's in the room with the little girl? Not father!"

"No; not father, because father comes home so late."

"And the little girl is asleep before he comes home."

"Fast asleep, Pollypod. But there's some one else in the room--mother is there, working."

"That's right! that's right!" cried Pollypod, twining her fingers together in her excitement. "You *are* a wizard!"

"The little girl is lying with her eyes open, looking at the roses. She fixes her eyes upon one, and it changes. Lips come--like Lily's; eyes come, bright--like Lily's. Presently Lily's face is in the rose, smiling at the little girl. But the face fades—"

"Does it?" whispered Pollypod anxiously.

"And in its place a Doll appears—"

"Yes! yes!"

"And the little girl falls asleep and dreams of it, and holds it in her arms. And while she dreams, I see a ship coming over the seas—"

"Father's ship!" cried Pollypod in ecstacy.

"No; another ship."

"O!" sighed Pollypod, drooping.

"Here it comes sailing--sailing--sailing; and the waves are curling--curling--curling; and the captain is bowing--bowing--bowing; and the stars are shining--shining--shining into the waters, lighting them up with smiles! But what is this I see on the ship? A Doll!"

"Doll!" cried Pollypod, reviving. "For the little girl?"

"Yes, for the little girl. The little girl's Doll! Pollypod's Doll! And as sure as we sit here talking, the captain, if he's alive, will bring it home before the week's out."

In a very flutter of delight Pollypod jumped to her feet, and clasped her hands.

"You mustn't be frightened of me, Pollypod," said Felix, sharing in Pollypod's delight; "I'm a good wizard."

"I know that! I know that!" said the little maid, almost in a whisper. "But I want to know! Is She beautiful?"

"Yes, she is beautiful," replied Felix, dwelling long on each syllable.

"And has she got blue eyes?"

"The bluest in the world."

"And a pink face?"

"As pink as this rose, Pollypod."

"And red lips?"

"Red as cherries."

"And what is She dressed in?"

"Blue silk, with a large sash behind, and mauve boots, and the loveliest bonnet that ever was made."

So filled with joy that she could not speak, Pollypod sat down on the tombstone, shut her eyes, and saw Her in all Her silken glory. The little maid was in a state of beatific bliss; and she saw the ship sailing, and the waves curling, and the captain bowing, and the stars shining, and the beautiful Doll eclipsing them all.

Presently she opened her eyes, and said reflectively,

"I hope Snap will like her. You're sure he'll come?"

"The captain? As sure as can be. Mother's calling you."

Away raced Pollypod, the happiest little girl in all England, towards her mother; and Felix strolled out of the churchyard with the idea of ascertaining why the old man and Gribble junior were so long absent.

He was arrested in his purpose by an incident that claimed his attention.

Near to the entrance to the churchyard was the mourning-coach which had conveyed the party from Soho, and near to the mourning-coach was the driver, in a condition bordering closely on intoxication. Whether it is that sorrow requires inward moistening, or that there is some other equally strong cause to account for it, every churchyard has in its immediate neighbourhood a handy public-house, or two, or three--according to whether the churchyard does a flourishing business or otherwise. There is nothing strange in the circumstance; for public-houses are everywhere, and churchyards should no more be deprived of the consolation their presence affords than other places. No sooner had our driver got rid of his load of flesh and clay than he sought the handy ale-house, to bait his cattle and moisten his sorrow. The former task was quickly accomplished, but the latter occupied a much longer time--a proof that his sorrow was very keen, and needed a great deal of moistening. When Felix approached him, he had paid at least half a dozen visits to the ale-house, and his sorrow had turned into anger at the time he had been kept waiting. His face, which had grown puffy in the exercise of his profession, was inflamed, and he was muttering to himself that he would see the whole party in a very warm place before he would wait for them a minute longer. The assertion was not only irreverent, with a churchyard in view, but (as he would have to be there to see) it was injudicious as regarded his own fate after he had shuffled off his mortal coil.

Felix saw the state at once, and saw also that the driver was not in a fit condition to drive the party home. A very few words with the man convinced him of this. He was quick at expedients, and eagerly took advantage of the opportunity that presented itself.

"My guv'ner," said the driver, in a thick voice, and with occasional hiccoughs, "didn't bargain that I was to stop here till I got blue in the face."

Which (supposing that the contract had been entered into between him and his "guv'ner") was so manifestly impossible of accomplishment in sight of his inflamed countenance, that Felix could not help smiling.

"And *in* consequence," continued the driver, with sarcastic emphasis, "as it wasn't in the bargain, and as the job's paid for beforehand, and as I've got my family to look arter, you can tell the party inside, as you're a friend of their'n, that I'm off."

With that he gathered up the reins, and prepared to mount. His foot was in the air when Felix invited him to "Come and have a pint."

The invitation was not to be resisted, and they adjourned to the ale-house, where, over the pint, Felix learnt the name of the street and the number of the house in which Lily lived. His purpose being served, he allowed the man to depart, and, with some satisfaction, saw the mourning-coach on its way to London.

"There would have been an accident for certain," said Felix to himself, as if in apology for allowing the man to depart, "and it will be better for them to have a sober driver than a drunken one. Besides, I myself must sleep in London to-night."

Then he went to an hotel of a better kind, where he was known, and made arrangements for the hire of a waggonette and a pair of good horses, and ascertained where he could stable them for the night in London.

"Harness the horses," he said, "at once, and let them stand at the entrance of the churchyard: I shall return in the morning. I wonder," he mused, as he walked towards the churchyard again, "Whether they will refuse to accept a courtesy from my father's son."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE WINNER OF THE NORTHUMBERLAND PLATE.

"Though the prayers of a priest are denied to you, not less sanctified is the ground in which you lie. Tender thoughts and tender remembrance accompany you, and these are the best of prayers. It is better as it is, perhaps; better that your dust should be buried thus in silence; than that the cold words of a harsh sorrowless minister should fall upon your grave. Peace be with

you!"

These words were spoken inly by Lily's grandfather, as he stood, with head uncovered, by the side of the grave into which the coffin was being lowered. He and Gribble junior had been in search of a Methodist minister, in the vague hope that something might be suggested to afford consolation to the dead woman's children; but their search had been unsuccessful, and as the day was waning and they had far to go, they had no alternative but to comply with the Reverend Mr. Creamwell's decree. As they stood about the grave, the men were silent and sad; tears were streaming down the faces of the women; and Pollypod for a few moments forgot her Doll and the ship that was bringing it home over the seas. The heir of the house of Gribble junior was awake and in his father's arms, and the enthusiastic umbrella-doctor tilted the baby over the grave, so that the child might have a good view of the coffin, in the belief probably that it would "open up his ideas, as a body might say." Notwithstanding the minister's decree, Lily's mother was not buried: in complete silence; for the twittering of birds and the soft hum of insect-life were heard, and the breeze was as peaceful, and the clouds as bright, as if a thousand human voices had been raised in her glorification. The old man picked up a handful of dust, and scattered it lightly upon the coffin, and then the earth was shovelled in and the grave was filled. Slowly they walked out of the churchyard, Pollypod in a state of restlessness about Felix, and wondering what had become of him. When she caught sight of him, standing by the waggonette he had hired, she ran eagerly to him, and plucked his coat. He inclined his head to hers.

"The Captain's sure to bring my Doll this week?" she whispered.

"Quite sure, little maid," he answered.

"Do you see the ship now?"

"Yes," he said, "and the wind is fair."

But when he raised his eyes, and saw a shadow on the old man's face, he was not so certain that the wind was fair. He had a task to perform, however, and he addressed himself to Gribble junior, and telling him that the mourning-coach was gone, delivered the driver's message, in milder terms than he had received it. The old man, listening, glanced sharply at Felix.

"I think it is as well," pursued Felix, addressing the company generally, though he looked only at Gribble junior, "that the man *has* gone, for he was drunk, and in no fit condition to drive you home."

"Then how are we to get back?" inquired Gribble junior in perplexity, more of himself than of Felix.

"I feel that I am in some measure responsible for the difficulty," rejoined Felix, "for I might have detained the man, though, as I have said, the wisest course was to let him go. Will you allow me to place this waggonette at your disposal? It will be pleasanter driving than in the close coach, and you will reach home more quickly." All but the old man looked up gratefully at the proposal. "The evening will be fine, and I will ensure a safe and speedy journey. Nay," he continued hurriedly, in answer to a motion of the old man's hand indicating refusal, "before you decide, grant me the favour of one minute's private conversation."

There was much in the voice and manner of Felix to recommend him, and the old man saw that he had found favour in the eyes of the rest of the company. He himself also, against his own judgment as it seemed, felt inclined to the young man. This feeling, no less than his perplexity, induced him to comply with the request, and they stepped aside, out of hearing of the others.

"Sir," then said Felix, "the offer is made out of pure disinterestedness, believe me."

He blushed slightly as he said this, for he thought of Lily, and of the share she unconsciously bore in the transaction.

"It is somewhat incomprehensible," said the old man, gazing attentively at the earnest face of Felix; "I cannot be mistaken. You are the young gentleman who was present during my interview with the minister."

"I am he, sir," replied Felix, "but—"

"And you are his son," interrupted the old man.

"There is no doubt of that. I am my father's son--in the flesh. For the share I took in that interview by my presence, I humbly ask your pardon. Do me the justice to believe that I am in earnest."

"It would be hard to believe otherwise."

"Thank you, sir."

"Yet it is difficult to reconcile." As he spoke he thought of the young man's kindness to Lily, and it seemed to be not so difficult. But if the kind offer sprang from sincere and unselfish impulse, father and son must be at variance. "Your father—" he said.

But Felix broke in abruptly with, "Nay, sir, pardon me. Do not let us speak of fathers and sons. The subject is a painful one. My father and I differ upon certain points. I am under suspicion, I know; I should be surprised were it otherwise. But come, sir, your own sense of justice will grant me this. Let me be judged, not by you alone, but by those who accompany you. If they decide against me, I will drive to London alone, with only my thoughts for company. If they decide for me, I will resign my whip, or drive you home, as you determine."

By this speech Felix proved himself to be a master of generous cunning. He knew that he had a true friend in little Pollypod, who necessarily carried her mother's vote, and he hoped also that Lily and her brother were on his side. But he did not know that when he said, "Do not let us speak of fathers and sons; the subject is a painful one," he had unconsciously uttered words which served him in good turn with the old man also. Thought of Alfred's father, who had brought shame on all of them, came to the old man's mind as he heard the words. He walked to where the others were standing, and found Pollypod in a state of feverish delight at the prospect of being driven home in such a beautiful carriage. Mrs. Podmore, of course, was equally pleased, because of the treat in store for her child, and because she fell in love immediately with any one who was kind to Polly. Gribble junior spoke in enthusiastic terms of the handsome offer; and Alfred, quivering with eager anxiety to know whether Christopher Sly had won the Northumberland Plate, fretted at every moment's delay that kept him from the London streets, where the evening's newspapers would tell him the news. Lily was silent, but the old Man saw in her eyes that she wished him to accept the offer. This at once decided him, and he waived all personal feeling in the matter. He returned to Felix, and said,

"They all decide for you. I am the only one against you."

The young man's face flushed with delight.

"You will not be always against me, sir. Shall I resign my whip?"

"I doubt if any one is competent to take it. And after all, it would be but a churlish way of accepting your courtesy. No; the obligation shall be complete, if it is not trespassing too much upon your time."

"I am alone in the world, sir. My time is my own."

He turned his face towards his father's house, and gazed at it for a few moments, not with regret, but with a grave consciousness that this was a serious epoch in his life. Martha the housekeeper was sitting at one of the upper windows, evidently watching him. He waved his hand to her, and walked slowly to the waggonette, where Gribble junior was busy arranging the party.

"Will you let me sit next to you?" asked Pollypod of Felix.

"I am going to drive, little one," replied Felix, "and you might fall off."

"I'll take her in my lap," said Gribble junior, and by this offer secured the place of distinction on the box.

So it was arranged, and in a few moments they were all seated, and on their way to London. As Gribble junior declared afterwards, it was the pleasantest ride that he had ever had in his life, notwithstanding the solemnity of the occasion. He and Pollypod and Felix chatted together in the pleasantest manner, but in a subdued tone, so as not to intrude upon the grief of the mourners in the waggonette. Pollypod told all about the ship that was bringing home her Doll; and Gribble junior, understanding in a literal manner the kindness of Felix, entered readily into Pollypod's enthusiasm, and looked upon that young gentleman as a model of generosity. Gribble junior himself was not disposed to be silent. He was fond of expatiating upon his establishment and business, and he seized the opportunity of airing himself and his views after his own harmless fashion.

"Why hospital?" he repeated, in reply to a query from Felix. "Well, in the first place, it's curious, and curiosity is a good advertisement. It brings business. You see, what you've got to do nowadays if you want to get along is to strike out. That's what I'm always telling father. Strike out, I say; but he hasn't got it in him. All he does is to shake his head and put his hands in his pockets. As if a man can get along that way! When that youngster's knickerbockered," with a backward notion of his head toward his baby, lying in his wife's lap, "I've made up my mind that his clothes sha'n't have any handy pockets in them where he can hide his hands. It breeds idleness. I've seen lots of fellows who think when they've got their hands in their pockets that they're following an occupation. I believe it *is* a real business with a good many. That's a good advertisement, isn't it?" he asked, opening his blue-silk umbrella, with its yellow announcement painted on it, and gazing on it in pride.

Felix nodded, amused, and remarked that it must puzzle a good many persons.

"I dare say but then they've got no brains," said Gribble junior. "If they'd only consider a little, they'd soon find out the sense of it; but more than half the people in the world are fools. An umbrella has ribs and bones and a frame and skin, like a human being; and they break their bones and get bent and out of order, like human beings. I call myself the surgeon; I set the limbs

and ribs, and put the frame in order. My wife is great in skin complaints. She patches up and mends the alpaca and silk."

In this manner he chatted on, and Felix for the most part listened in amused silence. Before they were a great way on their road home, they overtook the mourning coach which had conveyed them from Soho. The driver was in a state of perfect happiness, and his countenance was more inflamed than ever; but he evidently resented the circumstance of their driving home in such a smart carriage, for as Felix drove briskly past him, he whipped his horses and tried to overtake the party. But his cattle knew their business, and had been too well brought up to do more than amble; all the whipping in the world would not have made them gallop.

Felix had placed refreshments in the waggonette, of which they all partook, even Lily and the old man. The sincerity and honesty of their driver were so apparent, that they could not regard him with any but grateful feelings. It was past sunset when they entered the London streets.

"This is my world," Felix thought exultantly.

The brilliant lights and the thousands of people hurrying hither and thither quickened his pulses. It seemed to him as if he were born into a new life. Unfettered, free to do as he pleased, and blessed with that great blessing, a grateful nature, he gathered from everything about him hope for the future. He saw no shadows; did not dream of them. He turned to look at Lily. Her head was resting upon the old man's breast; she was asleep, and there was peace in her face. The old man smiled gratefully and thoughtfully upon Felix, and the smile made him glad. How could shadows come? Everything was fair for him. He felt a soft touch upon the hand which was not occupied with the reins; it was Pollypod's hand stealing into his. Another good omen. The little maid was very sleepy, but she was filled with joy; this had been the most eventful day in her young life. In a very little while they were winding through the labyrinth of the narrow streets of Soho.

"I am so sorry," said Pollypod.

"Why, little one?"

"We are just home. This is our street. And I should like to keep riding all night."

"Stupid little Pollypod! Why, you are so sleepy and tired now that you can't keep your eyes open."

"That would make it nice. I should like to sleep and wake up, and keep on riding and riding!"

Felix smiled; he, like the child, regretted that they had come to the end of their journey. The rattle of the smart waggonette brought all the neighbours to the doors and windows again, and Felix was scrutinised and discussed in a manner that ought to have made his ears tingle, if he had any respect for old-fashioned proverbs.

"I can but repeat my thanks," said the old man to Felix, as they stood by the street door. "You have laid us under a deep obligation."

"I hope not," replied Felix; "indeed I believe not. I have a theory of my own that every human act is dictated by a feeling of selfishness. What I have done, I have done to please myself."

The old man shook his head.

"You believe better of human nature than your theory would lead one to suppose. Of that I am certain.--Will you step upstairs?"

"No, I thank you," said Felix, after a moment's hesitation, during which he decided that the presence of a stranger was not desirable after the day's fatigue; "but if you will allow me, I will call in a day or two to pay my respects."

The old man expressed acquiescence, and looked round for Alfred; but the young man was gone. He had slipped away to obtain an evening paper, in which he would learn whether Christopher Sly had won or lost the Northumberland Plate. Instead of Alfred, the old man saw Mr. David Sheldrake, who, happening to pass through the street, paused when he saw the group at Mr. Gribble's door. Mr. Sheldrake raised his hat.

"I heard of your loss," he said to Lily, in a tone of confidential respect, "and I beg you to accept my sincere sympathy. The White Rose is quite disconsolate at your absence. I hope it will not be long before we hear your charming voice again. This is your grandfather. Allow me to present myself: Mr. David Sheldrake. I know your grandson, sir, Master Alfred; a fine young fellow, sir. We all grieve, for your granddaughter's sake, at the loss you have sustained."

The old man bowed, but did not reply, and Mr. Sheldrake, raising his hat again, passed on. Although he had not seemed to notice Felix, he had really, in a quiet manner, observed Felix closely, and had taken note of the handsome waggonette.

"Who is this interloper?" he thought, as he walked away; "but Master Alfred will tell me. Where is he, I wonder?" He pondered for a few seconds, and his countenance brightened as he

thought, "Ah, they have just come from the funeral; the woman was to be buried in the country, I heard. And Master Alfred has disappeared to look after Christopher Sly. You're a sharp one, David; never at a loss."

With which self-paid compliment he turned the corner, smiling.

"Then we will wish you good-night," said the old man to Felix.

"Good-night," said Felix, shaking hands with the old man. Lily held out her hand, and gave him a grateful look, which, supposing any payment were required, paid him a hundred times over for the little service he had rendered them. When Lily and her grandfather had passed indoors, Felix would have departed, but his left hand was in Pollypod's, and she held it tight.

"Good-night, Pollypod. I must go now."

"No; you mustn't go yet," said the forward little maid; "I want you to carry me upstairs."

"Don't tease the gentleman, Polly!" exclaimed Mrs. Podmore; "you mustn't be tiresome."

"She isn't tiresome," said Felix good-naturedly, taking Pollypod in his arms; "I'll carry her up-stairs if you'll allow me."

Certainly if ever man had the knack of winning a mother's heart, Felix had it; and if he could have read Mrs. Podmore's thoughts as he stepped into the passage with her child in his arms, he would have found himself there enshrined as the very pink and perfection and pattern of goodness.

"Go up slow," whispered Pollypod to him, as she lay with her head on his shoulder; the cunning little maid was in a delicious trance, and was wishful not to wake up too soon; "isn't it nice and dark? Can you see the Ship?"

"Yes."

"And the Captain?"

"Yes."

"And the Doll *is* there?"

"I can see it, Pollypod."

"And the stars are shining?"

"Beautifully, Pollypod."

"Yes," she murmured, "it is night, and the stars are shining."

The roses on the wall of Mrs. Podmore's room were red enough to assert themselves even in the dim light, and Felix thought that Pollypod's idealisation of them was one of the prettiest of pretty fancies.

"I'm sure we're all very much obliged to you, sir," said Mrs. Podmore to him as he placed the child on the bed.

"You could not be more welcome to anything," replied Felix. "Good night, little maid."

He stooped to kiss her, and she encircled his neck with her arms.

"There's a kiss for the Ship," she whispered, "and a kiss for the Captain, and two for You! I shall tell Snap about you when father comes home."

Gribble junior was waiting on the landing of the second floor to wish him good night.

"Did you see that gent that stopped and spoke to Miss Lily?" asked Gribble junior.

"Yes."

"What do you think of him?"

Felix smilingly replied that it was impossible for him to form an opinion.

"I don't think much of him myself," said Gribble junior dryly; "he ain't one of my sort."

"Tell me," said Felix, "if it is not rude to ask, what did he mean by saying that the White Rose was quite disconsolate at Miss Lily's absence? What is the White Rose?"

"Don't you know the Royal White Rose Music-hall?" interrogated Gribble junior, wondering at the young man's ignorance. "That's where Miss Lily sings. You should see her and hear her! She looks like an angel, and sings like one. She's not like any of the others. You see, a girl must do

something, and between you and me, I don't think the old gentleman would be able to get along if it wasn't for the money that Miss Lily earns. Master Alfred, he doesn't do much."

About an hour afterwards, Felix found himself in the Royal White Rose Music-hall, wondering that so pure and simple a girl as Lily should be associated with some of the things he heard and witnessed there. "But," he thought, "to the pure all things are pure. And there are stranger contrasts in life than this."

He had engaged a bed at an hotel where a night porter was kept, so that he could get to his room at any time. He stopped out until late, thinking over the events of the day, and musing upon the future. He strolled over Westminster Bridge, and lingered in admiration; thinking, and thinking truly, that he had never seen a more wonderful and beautiful sight than the dark solemn water and the waving lines of lights presented. And as he lingered and admired and mused, his thoughts wandered to the little crowded house in Soho—

Where Lily was sleeping peacefully;

Where Pollypod, pressed to her father's breast, and with her face towards the roses, was dreaming of her Doll and of the Ship that was sailing over the shining seas;

Where, in the solitude of his room, a young man, with wild, haggard, despairing face, was reading for the twentieth time the account of the race for the Northumberland Plate, which had been won by an old horse called Taraban; and muttering, with white and trembling lips, imprecations on the false prophets by whose advice he had backed Christopher Sly with money that did not belong to him.

CHAPTER XIV.

TRAPS FOR GULLS--HOW SPIDERS CATCH THE FLIES.

At the corner of a desponding thoroughfare in the neighbourhood of Vauxhall is a chemist's shop, where every cure for every ailment is dispensed. The thoroughfare is one of a numerous family of streets so exactly alike in their melancholy aspect, that you can scarcely tell one from another; they are all very sad-looking, and they are all composed of rows of private houses, two stories high, exactly of a height, and of a dismal flatness, which look dejectedly at one another across the road. The name of Dr. Cadbury is over the door of the chemist's shop, and a neat inscription on a brass plate informs the public that the doctor may be consulted (gratis) at from 11 till 1 o'clock in the morning, and from 6 till 8 in the evening. It is a queer-looking shop and wonderfully comprehensive, notwithstanding that it is much cramped. The consultation-room is a small apartment at the back of the shop, and, viewed from the outside, has quite a pretentious appearance. The word "Surgery" over the door is suggestive of dreadful instruments of bright steel, which shine with a savage desire to cut into you; but there is really nothing to be alarmed at in the apartment, the most noticeable article in it being a turn-up bedstead; for at night it is converted into a sleeping apartment for the doctor's assistant. This assistant, who has a passion for too much bitter beer, and who tells the customers under the pledge of secrecy that he is a partner in the concern, is a moon-faced, bald-headed man, who has walked the hospitals, as the women whisper to one another. He is mysteriously spoken of as being very highly connected, and he continually talks of going down somewhere for a week's shooting; but he never goes. His present lowly position is popularly supposed to be due to his having been a little wild, and it is rumoured that he is in hiding, which immensely enhances his reputation. The queer little shop has quite a bustling appearance during the hours of consultation; but very different pictures are presented in the morning and evening. In the morning it is the males, who, chiefly in their dinner-hour, throng to the doctor for his advice; but the evening is sacred to the wives. As the consultation hour draws nigh, all the poor women in the neighbourhood who are in an interesting condition gather together until the little shop is crowded with them. They wait to consult the "dear doctor"--he is such a dear man! they say to one another; and while they wait they relate their experiences, and exchange pleasantries with the moon-faced assistant. The doctor's fee for confinements is only a guinea, attendance and medicine included, and this guinea he sometimes takes in instalments, and sometimes does not take at all--which is not his fault, but his misfortune. It is quite a relaxation to the poor women to assemble together on these occasions; and when they come away from their consultation, they have none but words of praise for Dr. Cadbury, who is such a pleasant man, and has told them such funny stories, that they declare they would send for him--ah, that they would!--in the dead of night, if they lived ever so far away. For which marks of favour Dr. Cadbury could not be, and certainly was not, sufficiently grateful.

The doctor occupies only the ground-floor. Who occupies the upper portion of the house? Let us step up and see. The first-floor will be sufficient for our purpose.

It is the day after the running for the Northumberland Plate, and a man about thirty-five years of age has just laid down a paper where he has read, not for the first time, how that the morning

opened unfavourably at Newcastle, the rain pouring steadily down, and how the sporting fraternity grew despondent in consequence; how deserted the Newcastle streets were, when upon every previous Plate-day they had been crowded with betting men; how the weather took a better turn about noon, and hope revived in the ardent breasts of the men who laid the odds and the dupes who took them; how the special trains from Northumberland and Durham began to arrive with eager excursionists, and matters began to look brighter; how all considerations of the weather, and every other consideration whatsoever, paled to insignificance before the news that a noble sportsman had insisted that Christopher Sly, the sensational animal of the day, who had been backed for pounds, shillings, and pence, should carry a ten pound penalty for winning another race a short time since; how the question was discussed and what excitement it caused, those who had backed the horse trembling in their shoes lest they should be "done" out of their soon-to-be winnings at the last moment; how the stewards were unable to decide the point before the race, and how the horse declined in the betting from 6 to 4 to 2 to 1, still being first favourite however; how eight runners came to the starting-post, Christopher Sly being one and looking as fresh as paint; how, after two or three false starts, the horses were fairly slipped; how, soon afterwards, Christopher Sly threw his jockey clean over his head, and then tumbled down and rolled over the lad, who was carried off the field in an insensible state; and how, after some other slight mishaps, an old horse, Taraban by name, came in the winner, to the discomfiture of more persons than one, and to the utter confusion, and if they have any shame in them (which may be reasonably doubted), of every prophet and tipster in the United Kingdom. All this and more the occupant of the room reads with exceeding relish, slapping his thigh and rubbing his knees in delight, as if it is the finest joke he had ever heard of.

"Not one of 'm thought of Taraban," he exclaims; "not one. What a sell for the talent!"

He says this in a tone which implies that the "talent," whatever that may be, is his natural enemy, and he rejoices in its discomfiture. The furnishings of the room in which he sits are very simple--a deal table, three or four chairs, and a safe. But that it is a room in which serious work is performed is evident from the appearance of the table, upon which are pens and ink, piles of letters, half a dozen different descriptions of circulars, some account-books, and cuttings from newspapers. From the addresses on the letters, the firm which he represents must be an extensive one, comprising many partners. Here is one pile addressed to Adolphus Fortescue, Post-office, Rugby; here is another addressed to Horace St. John, 43, Diddledom-place, W.C.; here is another addressed to James Middleman, Box 67, Post-office, Leicester; here is another addressed to W. and B. Tracey, 87 1/2, Essex-road, E.C.; and others to other names and other addresses, all of which he has opened with his own hand, as if he were one and all of these persons combined. Perhaps he is; he looks confident enough and shrewd enough to be a score of men in one. Perhaps his own proper name, which any detective would be able to tell you without going to the bottom of a well to seek for it, is too common a one for his profession; and if the success of that profession depended on the catching of gudgeons, the presumption is that many an unwary one which would have turned up its nose at plain Smith or Robinson would for a certainty fall into the spicy trap labelled Adolphus Fortescue or Horace St. John. But, unexplained, it is a very riddle to the simple and uninitiated. Riddle me riddle me ree, tell me who this man can be? Perhaps some of the documents on the table will supply a clue to the seeming mystery. Here is an advertisement cut out of a sporting newspaper. What does it say?

"An Absolute Moral for the Doncaster St. Leger. Horace St. John is in possession of certain important information concerning this race, which he is willing to impart to Gentlemen and to no others. The Horse that will Win is a dark horse, and has been reserved especially for the Leger. No one else is in the secret, except the Stable, and they have kept it dark, and intend to back it for every shilling they can raise. Not one of the favourites has a chance. Horace St. John is no vulgar tipster, but a Gentleman moving in the very Highest Circles, and his honour is unimpeachable. A TERRIFIC Sum will be won upon this Moral Certainty, which will absolutely WALK IN. But remember--only to Gentlemen will this secret be imparted, and only upon the understanding that it will not be imparted to outsiders. At present, 100 to 1 can be obtained. This is the greatest certainty in the annals of racing. Send immediately 5*s.* worth of postage-stamps and your Word of Honour that, after the race, you will remit five per cent of your winnings to Horace St. John, 43, Diddledom-place, W.C., and the name of the horse with all particulars will be forwarded by return post. Subscribers, remember the enormous sums you won over H. St. J.'s tip for the Derby--remember his earnest words, 'The Zephyr Colt and no other'--and send at once, before the bookmakers take the alarm. To those who wish H. St. J. to undertake their commissions for them, 100 to 1 will be obtained."

Here is another advertisement, in which James Middleman, Box 67, Post-office, Leicester, vindictively advises you (impressing it upon you after the manner of Macbeth's Witches) to--

"Break the Ring! Break the Ring! Break the Ring! If you want to know the Winner of the Chester Cup, send six stamps and a stamped directed envelope for the greatest certainty on the face of the earth. Break the Ring! Now or never! Now's the day, and Now's the hour! Faint hearts never won great fortunes yet. Trust not to stable-boys and specious impostors, but send six stamps and a stamped directed envelope immediately to James Middleman, and reach the height of your cupidity! (*sic.*) The horse could win with three stones more on his back. The greatest *coup* on record. Now or never! James Middleman, Box 67, Post-office, Leicester."

Here is an advertisement from W. and B. Tracey, who "implore you not to throw away your money upon ignorant tipsters, whose worthless selections will bring you to ruin. Send a stamped

envelope for our system--our infallible system--by which loss is rendered an impossibility. £10,000 is waiting for you this season. With a capital of £5, a fortune is certain. Be wise in time."

Here is another, addressed,

"To gentlemen of honour.--A Turfite of high position (recent owner of race-horses and member of Tattersall's) desires to communicate the Winner of the Goodwood Stakes to Gentlemen who will Pledge their Honour to respect his confidence, and send him ten guineas from winnings. This advertisement emanates from no common tipster, and well merits the confidence of the public. To prevent merely inquisitive and unprincipled persons from benefiting by it, a post-office order (or stamps) for 7s. 6d. must accompany each application."

But, indeed, you may spend hours in reading the traps for the unwary set by the person who occupies the room, and who is known to his private friends as Con Stavely. He is a sharp cunning rogue indeed, and has as many aliases as Argus had eyes; and the mine in which he digs is rich enough, in all conscience, to make the fortunes of a thousand such rogues as he. Gulls and dupes abound, and it has become part of our social system that, turn which way you will, spiders may be seen lying in wait for flies.

Some of Con Staveley's systems are simplicity itself. It was only last week that, in the innocence of his heart, he was explaining to an intimate friend the machinery of one which seldom failed to bring grist to his mill.

"It is very easy," said Con. "Here, now; the Northumberland Plate is going to be run for. You advertise, a fortnight or three weeks beforehand, that you will send the winner for twelve stamps, and a promise of five per cent. on their winnings. Throw in something strong when you write the advertisement. Say you will forfeit a thousand pounds if the horse you send doesn't win, or that you will eat the horse, or something of that sort. Plenty of fools'll believe you. You'll get lots of answers, and any number of stamps--more than enough to pay for your advertisements six times over. Well, then, you make a list of the horses that are likely to start for the Plate. You've only got to know the ropes to do this easily. There won't be many starters; about ten or a dozen, probably. Here is your list:--The Boy. The Dwarf. Christopher Sly. Mineral. Taraban. Lord Hawthorne. Falkland. Cap-à-pie. Myosotis. Miss Hervine. You get some circulars printed, leaving a space to write in the name of the horse."

"But why," asked Con's friend, "send answers at all? Why not stick to the stamps and have done with it?"

Con Stavely winked, thrust his tongue into his cheek, put a wing to his nose, and in other delicate ways asserted the superiority of his judgment to that of his friend.

"My very worthy and particular," he replied oracularly, "you've got a thing or two to learn before you're quite awake. Why? Because it pays better the other way. To each one of your subscribers you send a circular, with the name of one of the horses from your list, so that if you get three hundred subscribers, and divide the list fairly, there will be thirty subs to every horse. Of course the circular says that it is impossible for the horse to lose; that the stable are backing it heavily, and all that sort of thing. Well, one of the horses wins--Taraban, Christopher Sly, or any other--it doesn't matter which. Then you look out the names of the subs to whom you sent the winning horse, and you send them congratulatory letters--you hope they have won a pot, and that they will send you a percentage on their winnings; you've got a rare good tip for the next big race, which you will be glad to send to them. You'll get something from them, depend upon it, if it's only half-a-crown's worth of stamps. A fellow sent me a fiver only last week, and I've got plenty of post-office orders for sovs. That's the reason why, my worthy particular. Because it pays better, and because" (tapping his nose with his finger knowingly) "honesty's the best policy."

If all Con Stavely's systems are as simple as this one, gulls must abound, indeed, to make them profitable.

As Con Stavely sits and smokes and works on this summer afternoon, he hears an uncertain foot upon the stairs.

"It's the old un," he says.

The reference to the "old un," which to uninstructed ears might have borne a diabolical signification, applies to an old man--older than his years, which may be about fifty--who presently enters the room. An old man, with restless eyes that seek the ground, as if fearful of looking any one in the face; a very shabby, sad, and worn old man. All his clothes are too large for him, and are kept together by a very few buttons and a great many pins.

"Well, Muzzy," says Con, "got plenty of letters?"

Muzzy, with trembling hands, produces letters from every pocket, and deposits them on the table. All these letters are addressed to Captain Leonard Maginn, who, as represented by Muzzy, is certainly not a credit to the army; and they all contains stamps from persons eager to be let into the precious secret which Captain Maginn, otherwise Muzzy, is willing to impart to them for a trifling consideration.

"Is this the lot, Muzzy?" inquires Con Staveley, when the old man has completed the slow process of emptying his pockets.

"Yes, Mr. Con, that's the lot," is the answer, in a shaky, hesitating voice.

"Haven't kept a few stamps back to get drunk with, eh, Muzzy?"

"No, sir; no, Mr. Con," in querulously indignant tones, and with a vain endeavour to express injured innocence with his eyes; but he can't get them to the level of Con's face, strive as he may. "I haven't kept a few stamps back, Mr. Con. You ought to know better, Mr. Con, than to ask me such a question. I don't want them, sir, I don't want them. I backed the winner yesterday; I backed the old horse. I put a dollar on him, and the governor said he'd get me starting-prices--twelve to one, that's what the old horse started at."

"Why, who put Taraban into your head?" asks Con, good-humouredly, as he opens the letters Muzzy has brought. "Not one of the prophets went for him. You ought to set up in business for yourself, if you're as clever as that."

"No, sir; no, Mr. Con; I'm too old, sir--too old. My time's gone by. If I were younger, as young as you, Mr. Con, I'd make a fortune. I'll tell you how I spotted the winner, Mr. Con. I wrote the names of the horses on pieces of paper, sir, and shook 'em up in a hat, and the first one I drew out was Taraban so I backed him for a dollar. Back your luck, always, Mr. Con, if you want to win; back your luck always."

Muzzy's voice and his hands and his whole body tremble and shake in sympathy, as he relates the luck that has befallen him.

"I hear the governor's step," he says. "Yes, that's him, on the stairs. I'll ask him for my twelve dollars."

"You're precious sharp on him, Muzzy; it isn't settling-day yet."

"I know it isn't, Mr. Con, I know it isn't; but the governor's always good to me. I'll give him a dollar if he let's me have the money now. I'll take eleven dollars--eleven fives are fifty-five. That's good interest, Mr. Con, and that's what the governor likes."

"Hullo, Muzzy," exclaims Mr. David Sheldrake, as he enters the room, "what are you shaking and quavering about for, eh? How much did you back Taraban for altogether?"

With an easy nod to Con Stavely, Mr. Sheldrake seats himself and lights a cigar.

"Only a dollar, sir, only a dollar with you," replies Muzzy. "I'd have backed it for more--for all I could raise--but a dollar was all I had, and I couldn't raise another shilling."

"Just like your luck, eh, Muzzy?"

"Yes, sir, just like my luck. I've spotted many a winner, sir, and never had the money to back them. But luck's been against me all my life, sir--all my life!"

He passes the back of his hand slowly across his mouth half a dozen times, and stands looking timidly at Mr. Sheldrake, with an uncertain look in his eyes.

"Well, Muzzy, what do you want now?" asks Mr. Sheldrake, with an inward chuckle, knowing the old man's thoughts.

"I thought, sir, you might be so good as to pay me the odds on Taraban. I'm in want of money, sir, badly, very badly."

"To get drunk with, eh?"

"No, sir; I don't drink, sir; I've given it up," cries Muzzy, with no consciousness that everything about him gives the lie to his words. "I've taken the pledge a dozen times--a dozen times, sir, and I'll take it again if you want me to."

Mr. Sheldrake laughs; but something in the old man's earnest imploring manner makes him suddenly serious, and he gazes attentively at the shaking form before him.

"Listen to me, old man," he says impressively.

Muzzy leans forward to denote obedience.

"Look at me."

But Muzzy finds it impossible to comply with this demand. He raises his eyes a dozen times, but he cannot control them. Invariably they seek the ground.

"I see you, sir," he murmurs apologetically.

"Do you think it possible that you could look respectable if you had a respectable task to

perform?"

"Yes, sir, I think so; I am sure so, sir; but I should want better clothes than these," in apology for his rags.

"And possible to keep sober, if it was worth your while?"

"I'll take a solemn oath, sir, not to touch another drop of drink as long as I live--not another drop! Shall I take my oath now? I'll take it this minute, sir, upon the book!"

In his eagerness he takes up a betting-book, and stands waiting for the word of command.

"Put down the book, you old fool! When I want you to take your oath, I'll let you know."

"Ready at any time, sir--at any minute." Which is literally true.

"And when I want you to turn over a new leaf—"

"As many as you please, sir; I'm ready."

"You'd better do, if you don't want to go to the dogs. What would you do if I were to say, 'Muzzy, old man, I've got no farther use for you?' How would you live? Tell me that."

Mr. Sheldrake knows that he is striking terror to the old man, for he is the only friend Muzzy has in the world. Muzzy, standing in abject humility before his patron and master, has no proper idea what a valuable servant he is to that gentleman, not that the dirty work which he performs for his employer would be poorly paid if he received his wages threefold. All that he is conscious of is that he is an old man, very feeble, very shaky, fit for nothing but the work--if it can be called so--he is engaged in, and that it is in Mr. Sheldrake's power to deprive him of the only pleasure the world affords--the pleasure of getting drunk in private.

"I'll do my best, sir," he says humbly. "You may depend on the old man, sir. He's a little bit shaky sometimes, but Muzzy's to be depended on."

"All right, then; you can go now."

But still Muzzy lingers, passing the back of his hand over his mouth with a parched air. When he has mustered sufficient courage to speak, he says,

"Taraban started at twelve to one, didn't he, sir?"

"That's the price, Muzzy, and I wish I'd known what you knew, you old dog."

"I only had a dollar on, sir--it was the last I had in the world. I'll take eleven dollars if you'll settle with me now, sir. The landlady'll be down on me for my rent to-night, and I haven't a copper to buy a loaf with."

Mr. Sheldrake pays Muzzy two pounds fifteen shillings, retaining the odd crown for interest, and the old man slouches out of the room and into the streets, and when he is near a favourite public-house, gives the lie direct to his earnest words.

No one who knew him had ever seen him take a glass of liquor at a public-house bar. His enjoyment was indulged in secretly. He would linger about the public-house where he bought his liquor until a small bar marked "private" was empty; and then he would slink in, and, without a word, take a bottle and place it upon the counter, casting apprehensive looks at the door lest any one should come in and detect him. The barman, knowing his wants, would fill the bottle. If Muzzy was rich, he would produce a second bottle from another pocket, this the barman would also fill. Quickly placing the bottles in his pocket, Muzzy would lay upon the counter the exact price of the liquor (having provided himself beforehand with the necessary change), and glide swiftly away. Hugging the bottles to his breast, hiding them so that no one should see, or even, as he believed, suspect, Muzzy would make his way to his garret, and lock the door. Then he would experience thrills of pleasure at the prospect before him, and he would sit and drink and drink and mumble until every drop was gone; then he would sigh and wish for more.

Such was the bad sweetness which life contained for this ill-starred man.

CHAPTER XV.

SUGGESTS THE DOUBT WHETHER EVERY FRIEND IN NEED IS A FRIEND INDEED.

"Con," said Mr. Sheldrake, "I want you to assist me in a private little matter of my own, and to

ask no questions."

"Fire away, governor," was Con's rejoinder.

"A young man will call upon you in half an hour, with one of my cards, on which I have written, 'Do what you can for the bearer, a friend of mine.' He wants to borrow some money."

"And I am to lend it to him. How much?"

"Stop a bit. He wants to borrow money; he is in difficulties. Backed Christopher Sly, and lost; he's in a mess, and I want to do him a good turn. He *must* have the money, so you can put the screw upon him."

"What interest shall I charge him?"

"Whatever you like. It will be as well to make it something handsome; he will agree to anything so long as he can get the money."

"They generally do agree to anything," observed Con, sagely; "it makes me laugh to see their long faces sometimes. What security can he give?"

"None, I expect. You'll have to take his bill."

"Is it to be a long dated bill?"

"No, short; not longer than three months. I don't expect he'll be able to pay it when its due, but that's my affair."

This was so contrary to Mr. Sheldrake's general mode of procedure, that Con gave a low whistle--a whistle of curious inquiry, which expressed, "What's his little game, I wonder?" Mr. Sheldrake did not enlighten him, but proceeded with his instructions:

"He'll tell you, of course, that he can't give you any security, and you'll tell him, of course, that it will be impossible for you to lend him money under the circumstances. But don't let him go away. Angle with him until I come. I shall stroll in upon you quite accidentally, and you can take your cue from me. Do you understand?"

"Perfectly."

"You can speak about me as if I was a soft-hearted, good-natured fellow, always too ready to do a good turn. I've been taken in by a great many persons, and you don't feel inclined to let me be taken in again, or to follow my example. My great fault is that I think too well of people: I believe that everybody is as honest and straightforward as I am myself. I think that I am as sharp and cunning as any man, but you know better. Directly my susceptibilities are appealed to, I am as soft as a pat of butter."

Con laughed heartily, and Mr. Sheldrake continued:

"You and I are not in anyway connected in business, you know, and if you feel inclined to do anything for him, it is only upon my recommendation."

"O, of course," said Con, still laughing.

"I persuaded you to do a good turn to a fellow last year, who turned out to be a scamp. You didn't lose any money by the transaction--I took the liability upon myself, and paid you out of my own pocket, although you hadn't the slightest claim upon me. It was only the week before last that I took a poor man out of prison, and paid his debts for him, and set him upon his legs again, because he had a wife and family. But I don't like these things mentioned to my face. I'm the sort of man who goes about doing all sorts of kind actions on the quiet."

Con opened his eyes wider, and still wondered what on earth Mr. Sheldrake's little game was.

"Then, of course, you're very short of money yourself," said Mr. Sheldrake, in self-satisfied tones; for if there was one thing in the world he had confidence in more than another, it was in his own cunning and cleverness; he was always shaking hands with himself. "You've had losses lately; all your money's locked up, and you've been disappointed in people not keeping their promises; besides, it's a very risky affair, lending upon personal security, especially to a man you don't know anything of--and you're generally disinclined to accommodate him until I make my appearance."

Con gave a nod of acquiescence to each of these instructions, and Mr. Sheldrake presently took his departure, and left the spider waiting for the fly.

He had not long to wait. The fly soon made his appearance.

A very anxious-looking fly indeed. His countenance betokened nothing but care and overwhelming trouble; looking very much like a fly who had not had a wink of sleep last night--which, indeed, was the fact.

Con Staveley received the card which the fly handed to him, and waved his hand to a seat. Alfred sat down, holding his hat between his legs, and looked nervously at Con Staveley; but finding no comfort in that gentleman's face, looked into his hat with a like result. He was terribly distressed. It seemed to him that life and death hung upon the words of the judge in whose presence he was sitting.

Con Staveley read the words on the card aloud:

"'Do what you can for the bearer, a friend of mine.' Happy to see you. Any friend of Mr. Sheldrake is a friend of mine. What can I do for you?"

Although his tone infused hope into Alfred's breast, the young man did not know how to commence. Observing his hesitation, Con rattled on, without waiting for him to speak:

"Sheldrake's a fine fellow. A little too easy, a little too confiding, but a fine fellow for all that. Doesn't look sharp enough after Number One, though; and that doesn't do nowadays. You can take care of yourself, I'll be bound; you look after Number One."

With dry lips, Alfred muttered assent to the proposition.

"Do you want to back a horse for the Cambridgeshire or the Cesarewitch? Now's the time; the early bird catches the worm. I'll give you sixty-six to one against any horse you can name. Spot the winner and put a few tenners on. There's an old fellow I know spotted Taraban yesterday for the Northumberland Plate. What do you think he did, the old fool? Backed it for a crown. No pluck. He might have won a heap of money, and now the chance has gone. About this time last year a fellow came in--just as you have done now--asked about a horse for the Cambridgeshire--wanted to know the odds. A hundred to one I offered. 'I'll take it to fifty sovs.,' he said. I gave it to him, five thousand to fifty. Hanged if the horse didn't win, with a stone in hand, and I was nicked. He had pluck, that fellow, and took my cheque for five thou. with a grin on his face. He's one of the leviathans now--had a fifty thousand book on the Derby. Is that *your* little game? Have you come to take the odds? Well, I'll give them to you, to any amount."

"No," Alfred managed to say, "that isn't the business I've come upon."

"Well, what is it, then?" inquired free-and-easy Con. "Fire away. Do anything I can for a friend of Sheldrake's."

"He told me to make a clean breast of it," said Alfred, playing nervously with his hat; and Con Staveley thought, "What a soft young fool he is!" "The fact is, I've been out of luck lately. I backed the wrong horse yesterday."

"Christopher Sly?"

"Yes; it looked like a moral certainty for him."

"It *was* a sell," observed Con gravely. "Every one of the prophets went for him. I was bit myself--heavily, too; so you're not alone in the boat."

Alfred derived no consolation from this statement. The reverse, indeed. For the fact that the man he was about to ask to assist him had lost heavily on the same race, rendered his chance of obtaining money a less hopeful one than it had seemed. But he spurred on desperately.

"There wasn't one of the prophets or tipsters that went in for Taraban. They all gave Christopher Sly. And if you can't believe them, whom are you to believe? All the morning papers gave Christopher Sly as the absolute winner--all the sporting papers too. Nothing else had a chance. I sent five shillings to Horace St. John—"

"Who is he?" asked Con innocently.

"A gentleman. He advertises in the sporting papers. I sent him five shillings for the tip, and got it--Christopher Sly. He sent me a voucher with the tip--£20 to £2 against Christopher Sly. The horse was then at only three to one, and he gave me ten to one. I sent him the £2, and was afraid he would return it to me, because he had given me too long odds. But he didn't; it was all right, I thought. I should have won a little hatful of money if Christopher Sly had come in first--but you know how it was."

Alfred spoke fretfully, and without the slightest control over his tongue. He felt that he was damaging the probable success of his errand by whining about his misfortunes, but he could not help himself. It was a necessity especially belonging to his nature to endeavour to justify himself in his own eyes by attempting to prove what an exceptionally unfortunate person he was. This is one of the idiosyncrasies of weak and selfish natures, which seek to find comfort in the fiction that all the world is in a conspiracy against them, and that their misfortunes are caused, not by their own weakness and selfishness, but by a predetermined effort on the part of everybody and everything to persecute and crush them.

"Well, I told all this to my friend Mr. Sheldrake," continued Alfred, looking moodily at the floor, for Con Staveley's silence boded no good result, "and told him I was in a hole, and wanted

to borrow some money. He would have lent it to me in a minute if he had had it--he told me so--but he is short himself."

"And always will be short," retorted Con grumblingly, "if he doesn't give up being so soft-hearted. What with lending here and lending there, taking this man out of prison and paying his debts, and setting that man on his legs, he'll find himself in a mess one of these fine days. The joke of it is, that he thinks himself the smartest man in London."

"He says to me," continued Alfred with a fainting heart, "'Go to my friend Mr. Staveley, and take my card; he'll do what you want upon my recommendation.' So I've come. You *do* lend money, don't you?"

"Yes, I lend money to responsible people," replied Con; "I've got a good deal of money put into my hand for investment, and to lend out at fair interest—"

"I'll pay any interest," said Alfred eagerly.

"But then of course my hands are tied so far as regards money that doesn't belong to me. How much do you want?"

"Fifty pounds I can manage with."

"What security can you give?"

"Security!" stammered Alfred.

"Yes, this is a matter of business. You don't expect any man to lend you money without security, do you? Have you got prospects--expectations? I've lent money to a good many swells upon their own and their friends' names, but then they have expectations, and are sure to come into property; so that the money is certain to be paid one day."

"I haven't any expectations that I know of," said Alfred gloomily: "but I'll be sure to pay you. Do you think I'd borrow money without being sure that I can pay it back?"

"I don't know," responded Con dryly; "some people do. What do you want the money for? To pay betting debts? They're not recoverable in law; and even if they were, isn't it as well for you to owe money to one man as to another?"

"But they're debts of honour," said Alfred, with a not uncommon but very miserable assumption of high-mindedness; "no gentleman can afford not to pay his debts of honour."

"It seems you can't afford to pay them," observed Con mercilessly, somewhat relishing the sport, "or you wouldn't come to me."

If he had not been in a very miserable plight indeed, Alfred would have replied hotly. But he was frightened and completely cowed. In truth, if Con Staveley failed him, he did not know which way to turn. And he dared not confess the truth; he dared not confess that, taking advantage of his position in the office of his employers, he had committed the common indiscretion of "borrowing" money for a few days. If he did not replace it at once—well, he was terrified to think what might occur. The minutes were very precious to him. Discovery hung above him on a hair; any moment it might fall and overwhelm him. These reflections kept him silent, and he suffered a very agony of terror and remorse in the slight pause that followed Con Staveley's taunt.

"The only way in which you can get the money is by giving a bill for it--to be paid in three months, say. Have you got a responsible friend--somebody who is worth something--who will endorse the bill for you!"

"No," faltered Alfred, "I don't know anybody, except Mr. Sheldrake."

"I don't want his name--he's good enough for any amount--but he would most likely have to pay the bill when it's due (excuse my saying so), and it wouldn't be friendly on my part to take it from him. The same thing occurred last year. I accommodated a friend of his with three hundred pounds; I did it only because Sheldrake persuaded me. Well, the fellow didn't pay, and Sheldrake insisted on cashing up, though I hadn't the slightest claim upon him. There's not one man in ten thousand would have done it; but it was like Sheldrake all over. I took the money, of course; it was business, you know, but it wasn't friendly. I don't want the same thing to occur again. Sheldrake thinks too well of people. He has a right to do as he pleases with his money, but hang me if I like to be a party to his throwing it away. Then, what do I know of you? It isn't reasonable of Sheldrake to expect me to do this; upon my soul it isn't! Are you in business? Is your father worth anything? Would he cash up if you put the screw on?"

"I have no father," said Alfred, his heart growing fainter and fainter, "and I'm not in business. I'm a clerk."

"O, you're in a situation, I suppose."

"Yes, I'm a clerk at Tickle and Flint's."

"Salary?"

"Fifteen shillings a week."

At mention of which amount Con shifted some books from one part of the table to another with very decided action, as if that settled the matter.

"I can put some of it by," exclaimed Alfred imploringly. "I can put it all by, if you'll let me have fifty pounds for three months!"

"Fifteen shillings a week wouldn't pay the interest, my boy," was Con's rejoinder. "Wouldn't cover risk."

"Then Alfred suddenly thought of Lily. If he mentioned her, it might improve his standing in Con Staveley's estimation.

"My sister earns money," he said in a shamefaced manner.

"Indeed," very carelessly from Con. "What does she do?"

"She sings at the Royal White Rose Music-hall. Her name's Lily. Perhaps you've heard her?"

Thought Con, of Sheldrake, "That is your little game, eh?" "O, yes, I've heard her. So she's your sister. A pretty girl--I'd like to know her. But about this fifty pounds you want--I really don't think I can do it for you. Very sorry--very sorry, indeed, because you're a friend of Sheldrake's; but to speak candidly" (which he did, with a display of white teeth) "it isn't good enough. Best to be candid, you know."

Alfred's weak hand was played out. The game was lost. He sat, looking despairingly at the floor. What should he do? Run away? Try to hide himself? That would draw attention to him, and bring exposure at once. Besides, where would he be safe from the detectives? He almost groaned aloud as he thought. The words of his grandfather came to him "Once more I pray God to keep you from crime! Once more I say that the remorse of a too late repentance is the bitterest of experiences!" He was suffering this bitterest of experiences now, and felt the truth of his grandfather's words. And yet he took credit to himself for the good resolution he had come to, of being a better man if Christopher Sly had won the Northumberland Plate. Whose fault was it that the horse had not won, and that this monstrous undeserved misfortune had come upon him? Not his. He had done his best: but he had been deceived, swindled, robbed; those false prophets had ruined him, and all the world was in a conspiracy against him. In this way he threw the blame off his own shoulders, and felt no shadow of self-reproach because he had been weak enough to allow himself to be duped by tricksters. In the midst of his self-tormenting the door opened, and he heard, in a pleasant voice,

"Good-day, Staveley. How are things? Ah, Alf, you here! I thought it likely I might catch you."

Alfred looked up, and Mr. Sheldrake smiled familiarly upon him. "Like Paul Pry, I hope I don't intrude," said Mr. Sheldrake. "Perhaps I'm interrupting business."

"O, no," replied Con; "our business is over."

"Well, *that's* all right!" and Mr. Sheldrake clapped Alfred on the shoulder gaily.

Alfred winced. He was labouring under a sense of injury, not so much at the present moment on account of Con Staveley's refusal to accommodate him, as on account of Sheldrake's recommending him to a man who had failed him in this desperate crisis. But he could not afford to quarrel with any man now; all his courage and insolence were gone. He said, almost humbly,

"Mr. Staveley won't lend me the money."

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Mr. Sheldrake. "Not on my recommendation. Come, come, Staveley, this isn't friendly, you know."

"I think it is," replied Con; "there isn't a money-lender in London would let him have what he wants. Why, he can't even give security! Can't even give a good name at the back of a bill!"

"Isn't my name good enough?"

"For any amount; but we're friends, and I'm not to see you let in with my eyes open—"

"That's my affair," said Mr. Sheldrake warmly.

"It happens to be mine as well. I don't want to take money of my friends. Remember the three hundred you had to pay me last year, and the hundred and twenty for that poor woman—"

"Shut up!" interrupted Mr. Sheldrake. "Let my affairs alone. You've no business to mention those things. You know I don't like it. How much did you ask Mr. Staveley for, Alfred?"

"Fifty pounds; that's all. For three months only."

"A paltry fifty pounds!" exclaimed Mr. Sheldrake scornfully. "Why, you might win it on a horse fifty times over in five minutes! There's the Goodwood Cup and the Stakes going to be run for presently—"

"I've got the tip for the Cup," cried Alfred eagerly; "I can get thirty to one about it to-day. I'll pay Mr. Staveley directly the race is over, and any interest he likes to charge, and I'll give him the tip, too, if he likes." (Whereat something very like a grin appeared on Con's face.) "The horse only carries five stone seven. He can't lose!"

"There, Staveley, do you hear that?" asked Mr. Sheldrake in a reproachful tone. "Isn't that good enough for you?"

Con Staveley shrugged his shoulders, indicating that it was not good enough for him.

"Curse me if I don't feel inclined to turn nasty!" then exclaimed Mr. Sheldrake. "If I had the money to spare, I'd lend it to him on the spot. But I shall be short for the next month."

"Can't your friend wait till then?"

With quivering lips, Alfred said, No; "he *must* have the money at once."

"And you'll let him have it," said Mr. Sheldrake.

"I don't feel at all inclined to," replied Con.

Here Mr. Sheldrake took up his hat in pretended indignation, and declared if this was friendship, curse him, he didn't want any more of it! and otherwise expressed himself to the same effect in terms so exceedingly warm, that Con Staveley began to lose patience.

"Look here, Sheldrake," he retorted; "be reasonable. I'm doing this for your protection, and you're infernally ungrateful. Your friend wants the money to pay racing debts with; well, I told him before you came in, that racing debts are not recoverable by law, so that whoever he owes the money to *must* wait until he can pay. Let your friend pay his debts after the Goodwood Cup is run for; he'll be all right then. As for friendship, you're a little too hard on me. You know fifty pounds is no object to me, and if after what I've said you insist upon becoming responsible for the sum, I'll let him have it. I can't say fairer than that. But mind; I warned you."

Mr. Sheldrake seemed impressed by what Con Staveley had said. He considered a little, and asked if Con could let him have five minutes' private conversation with Alfred.

"You can have this room," said Con, rising. "I've got some writing to do in the next. Call me when you have done."

When they were alone, Mr. Sheldrake said,

"After all, Alf, there's something in what Staveley says. Racing debts are not recoverable. I can understand his feelings very well; he doesn't know you, or anything about you. He is only anxious to protect me. I *have* been let in a good many times by one and another, and I've paid him money which he has been obliged to take in the way of business, and which he has lent, on my recommendation, to people I've wanted to do a good turn for."

"*I* won't let you in," said Alfred.

"I don't think you will, Alf. If I were in funds, you shouldn't have had to come to Staveley for the money. But I can't shut my eyes to what he has said. You must deal a little openly with me; you know I'm your friend. You've lost this money on Christopher Sly?"

"Yes."

"Why not let the people you've lost it to wait?"

"Because I've paid them already. I had to stake the money in advance."

"You dealt with commission agents, then?"

"Yes."

Mr. Sheldrake hesitated before he asked the next question.

"It wasn't your own money that you staked?"

Alfred did not reply.

"I don't want to press you unfairly, Alf," said Mr. Sheldrake, after a few moments' study of Alfred's downcast face, "and I don't want you to say anything you would rather not say. Young fellows often get into scrapes. I suppose you're in one now?"

"Yes, I'm regularly cornered," replied Alfred. "I wouldn't care so much for my own sake--but there's Lily. She's fond of me, and it would break her heart to see me in a mess."

"Lily's heart sha'n't be broken, and you shall get out of your mess, Alf. I'll stand your friend, as I said I would, and Con Staveley shall let you have the money before you go."

Alfred looked up, and grasped Mr. Sheldrake's hand. The revulsion of feeling almost blinded him.

"Mind," continued Mr. Sheldrake, "I do this for Lily's sake, so you may thank your stars you've got such a sister."

"She is the dearest girl in the world," cried Alfred, his good spirits returning.

"So she is, and I should like her to think well of me."

"She'll do that, depend upon it. I'll let her know what a friend you've been to me. You *are* a trump! I'll pay Mr. Staveley after the Goodwood Meeting."

That astute person being called in, and Mr. Sheldrake's decision being communicated to him, the next quarter of an hour was spent in the drawing-up and signing of documents. Alfred signed everything unhesitatingly, without reading the papers; he was too overjoyed to attend to such small formalities. He signed a bill at three months for seventy-five pounds, and would have signed it for a hundred and seventy-five, without murmuring at the interest charged. The two hundred per cent. per annum seemed to him fair enough, and when Con Staveley gave him the cheque, and the business was concluded, he gaily asked his friends to come and have a "bottle of fiz," an invitation which they willingly and gladly accepted. Over the bottle of "fiz" they indulged in a great deal of merry conversation, and Alfred forgot his despair and remorse, and once more indulged in visions of shadowy fortunes, and boasted of the grand things he was going to do.

"I'll show them a trick or two," he said confidently.

Poor fool! Not by such credulous selfish natures as his can tricksters be tricked and dupers duped. They laugh in his face, and in the face of stronger than he. Have they not reason? They are stronger than the law, which is powerless to touch them. Yet it is a strange reflection that a cunning rogue is allowed to swindle, and a starving woman is not allowed to beg. But such is the law.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE CAPTAIN ARRIVES.

If you were asked to come into Fairyland, you would expect to see wonders, and you would consider it the height of presumption to be conducted to a small room, nearly at the top of a house, in which a child lies sleeping and a woman sits working. The roses on the wall are sham ones; but there are two real roses in the centre of a bunch of buttercups and daisies, which stands in a jug with a broken handle near to the bed on which the child lies sleeping. It is eleven o'clock at night, and the woman is working by the light of one candle. If ever woman was happy, this woman is as she plies her needle and looks at her child, and hums a few bars of a song softly to herself. The roses on the child's face rival the real and artificial ones in the room. It is a beautiful face to gaze at, and the brown eyelashes, and the curly brown hair, and the lips deliciously parted, make a delightful picture, which, were I a painter, I should love to paint. As it is, I stoop in fancy and kiss the pure fresh lips of this innocent happy child. What work is the woman doing? If this be Fairyland, is she busy with the wings of grasshoppers making a cover for Queen Mab's chariot, or collars of the moonshine's watery beams for the teams of little atomies that gallop "athwart men's noses as they lie asleep?" No; she is busy on some things very different indeed from these. And she is doing good work--woman's work: darning stockings.

And this is Fairyland! you say. And darning stockings is good work and woman's work! you say. Can I detect a scornful ring in your protest? But what are we to do, I humbly submit, if women will not darn the stockings? Of course I mean poor women. Rich women, thanks to those metaphorical silver spoons which are in their mouths when they are born, do not need to darn. But poor women cannot afford to buy new stockings every week; and they have to sit down to turn old lamps into new ones, which they almost always do with infinite content, and with a cheerful readiness which is not worthy of a better cause, for the cause is a good one enough as it is. I declare it always gives me a pleasurable sensation to see a good housewife--the true household fairy--sit down of an evening at her fireside, and make preparations to attack the contents of a basket where woolen stockings and cotton stockings shake hands--no, I mean feet--together, and lie down side by side in amicable confusion. What a homily might be preached upon the contents of some of these baskets, which tell of many mouths to fill, and of many little legs and feet to keep warm! What diversity is there to be seen! and how suggestive is the contemplation of the thick woollen stocking of the father and the dainty tiny Sunday sock of the three-year-old darling! Yet have I not seen somewhere in print articles and letters which give me

the impression that women are at length awaking from a hideous dream of centuries of slavery, and that they consider it derogatory to their intelligence to darn stockings? But if women will not darn stockings, who will? Or is darning as an institution to be abolished?

Say that in this woman and the work she is singing over there are no graceful suggestions which, in their worth and purity and tenderness, deserves to be ranked with imaginings and mental creations of exceeding beauty--say, as some hard critics, aver, that she and her occupation are the prosiest of prosy themes, and that the sentiment which animates her and makes her contented and happy belongs of necessity to the dullest of dull clay; tear from her and her surroundings every vestige of ideality: divest her of everything but what is coarse and common, and make the room in which she sits a place to moan over the hard realities of life--still in this very room Fairyland dwells. The little head that lies so peacefully upon the pillow teems with wonders; imagination is bringing to the child fantastic creations and scenes of exquisite loveliness and grace. Though the strangest of contrasts are presented to her, there is harmony in everything. The light, the fresh air, the brighter clouds than those she sees in the narrow streets, play their parts in her dreams in a thousand happy shapes and forms. She walks with Felix in a field, gathering flowers more beautiful than she has ever yet seen; there are silver leaves and golden leaves, and all the colours of the rainbow hide themselves in flower-bells, and then peep out to gladden her. There are lilies, and roses, and wallflowers, and daisies, with the fresh dew glistening on their leaves and stems. She and Felix wander and wander until they are tired, and sit down to rest amidst the flowers, which grow and arch until they are buried in them, and the light of day is shut out. Then they sink and sink through the flowers, which dissolve and melt away, as it seems, and she and Felix are walking among the stars. It is night, and the stars are all around them. Suddenly, in the clouds which float in solemn splendour beneath them, a valley of light appears, and she looks through wondrous depths into a shining sea, with the only ship her world contains sailing on it. When she and Felix are walking at the bottom of the sea--as they do presently--the stars are still with them, and the Captain and the Doll play their parts in her beautiful dreams. Happiest of the happy is Pollypod.

Up the stairs stumbles a tired-out man, with a dog close at his heels. Mrs. Podmore jumps from her chair at the sound of his steps, and almost in the twinkling of an eye the table is made ready for supper.

"Well, old woman," says Jim, with a great sigh of relief at being home at last.

He speaks in gasps as usual, as if, after his day's hard labour, he finds talking an effort. Mrs. Podmore takes a blue-cotton handkerchief containing an empty basin from him--Jim's favourite dinner is a meat-pudding, in the making of which his wife would not yield the palm to the Queen's cook. Snap, the faithful dog, greets Mrs. Podmore with sniffs at the hem of her gown, and when this duty is performed, leaps upon the bed and licks Pollypod's face.

"Did you enjoy yourself--old woman?" asks Jim Podmore.

"That we did. We've had such a beautiful day, Jim!"

Jim nods, and his hand wanders to Pollypod's neck, and caresses it.

"What a colour--she's got--mother!"

"Bless her little heart!" is the reply. "It's done her a power o' good."

He sees the flowers, and takes them in his hand.

"They're for you, Jim," said Mrs. Podmore; "Polly's present for father. She tried to keep awake to give them to you; but she could not keep her little eyes open."

He turns the flowers about tenderly, and a troubled look that was in his eyes when he came home vanishes as he lays his great dirty face and bushy head on the pillow. But when he sits down to his supper, with the flowers before him to give an additional zest to his food, the troubled look returns. Mrs. Podmore says quietly,

"You're bothering your head about something, Jim;" and draws her chair a little nearer to him.

He does not answer her immediately, but makes a pretence of eating, and presently lays his knife and fork on his plate, and pushes them away.

"Did you hear--the newspaper boys--a-calling out anything?" he asks.

"No, Jim."

"Nothing about--a accident?"

"No, Jim. Has there been one?"

"There's been--another smash-up--on our line. A lot o' people--hurt--badly. I saw some of 'em. It made me sick."

He takes the fork, and plays with it nervously. A look of apprehension flashes into Mrs.

Podmore's eyes as she notices his agitation, and she asks, with white lips,

"It wasn't your doing, Jim, was it? Don't say it was your doing!"

"No, it wasn't my doing," he answers; but he evidently takes it to heart almost as much as if he had been to blame.

"It's bad enough, Jim," said Mrs. Podmore, relieved of her fear; "but it would ha' been worse if you was to blame. It ain't your fault?"

"It ain't my fault--no; but it might ha' been--it might ha' been. It warn't his fault, either."

"Whose, then, Jim?"

"Whose?" he exclaims. "When a lot o' directors--works a feller--till he's--dead beat--till blue lights--and green lights--and red lights--dances afore his eyes--and he don't know what is real--and what is fancy--is he to be made--accountable? Dick Hart--him as had the accident--wouldn't lift his finger--agin man or child--and now he's killed--two or three--and 'll be made--accountable. I never saw--such a face--as his'n--to-night--when the people that was hurt--was brought in. It was as white--as a bit o' chalk. He was hurt as much as them. There was a child among 'em--a little girl"--(his voice breaks here, and his eyes wander to Pollypod)--"they didn't know what--was the matter with her. She breathed--and that was all. Dick Hart--(he's got a little girl hisself, mother--and he wouldn't lift his finger--agin any man)--Dick Hart--he trembles--and cries--when he sees the little thing--a-laying so still--and he whispers to a mate--as how he wishes--some one--'d come and strike him dead--where he stands. As he says this--the little thing's mother--runs in wild-like--and cries, 'Where's the man--as killed my child?' And Dick Hart runs away--on the platform--and jumps on to the rails--scared and mad--and if he hadn't been stopped--would ha' made away--with hisself--somehow. But they stopped him--in time--and brought him back. Another minute--and he'd ha' been cut to pieces--by a train--that was coming in. They had to keep--tight hold on him; for when he was in the room agin--and saw the little girl's--mother--on her knees by the child--he fell a-trembling--and looked more like a animal--than a man."

"What will they do to him, Jim?"

"The Lord knows! The law's pretty sharp--on us--for don't you see, old woman, the public's got to be protected. Lord save us! As if it was our fault! As if it was us!--the public's got to be--protected from! It's a pretty how-do-you-do--altogether, that's what it is."

"I pity his wife as much as him," says Mrs. Podmore, with all a woman's sympathy.

"She *is* to be pitied. She's near her confinement, too--poor creature!--and Dick, he's out of a billet now--and hasn't got anything--put by. I tell you what it is, old woman--it's hard lines--that's what it is--hard lines!"

"But the Company'll see to her, Jim, surely!"

"Will they!" exclaims Jim bitterly. "The Company'll pay you--pretty regular--while you work--and 'll work you--pretty hard--while they pay you;--that's what the Company'll do. You'd think--knowing, as they know--that Dick Hart's got a wife as is near her confinement--and knowing, as they know--that Dick Hart's wages is just enough to keep him and her--and his little girl--and that it's next to impossible--he could lay anything by--for a rainy day--you'd think, old woman--that now Dick's in trouble--the Company'd pay him his wages--till he got out of it! Catch 'em at it! That's not the Company's game. Their game is--when an accident occurs--to make out--that they're not accountable--and responsible--and that they're the victims--not us, or the public. The Company'll see to--Dick's wife--will they, old woman! Where's my pipe?"

He has it in his hand, but is so engrossed in his theme that he does not know it, and Mrs. Podmore quietly takes it from him, and fills it. In truth there is another cause for Jim's agitation--a cause which he dare not speak of, which he scarcely dare think of, as he puffs away at his pipe. But it comes upon him, despite his reluctance to entertain it, and fills him with terrible fear. This very night he himself had a narrow escape from an accident. He was very tired, and even as he stood waiting to shift the points for an expected train, he fell into a dose. For how long he did not know--a second, a minute, or many--but he was suddenly aroused by a furious whirl of sound. It was the train approaching. In a very agony of fear, he rushed and adjusted the points. Just in time, thank God! Half a dozen seconds more, and it would have been too late. No one but he knew of the narrow escape of the passengers, yet the anguish of that one almost fatal moment will remain with him for many a year.

It is with him now, as he smokes, and it remains with him during the night, as he holds his darling Pollypod in his arms, and thinks what would become of her if one night, when he was dead-beat, he should fall asleep again on his watch, and not wake up until it was too late. Then the fancy comes upon him that the little girl who was hurt in the accident, and who lay like dead, was something like Pollypod; and he shivers at the thought, and holds his darling closer to his breast.

Pollypod is awake very early in the morning, and while her mother is lighting the fire, and preparing breakfast for Jim, who has to be at his post at half-past five, she tells her father all

about the adventures of the previous day. He listens in delight, and when she comes to the part where Felix gave her the flowers, he says, "Felix is a gentleman;" but Pollypod whispers, "No, he is a wizard;" and tells of the ship and the Doll and the Captain, and speaks in such good faith, that Jim is troubled in his mind, and thinks, "That all comes along of my stupidity about my ship coming home! Polly'll break her heart if she doesn't get the Doll." Jim cannot afford to buy one; he is in the same boat as Dick Hart, and has not been able to put anything by for a rainy day. He thinks that the very happiest thing that could occur to him would be to pick up a sovereign as he goes to his work. "If some swell'd only drop one now," he thinks absurdly, "and I was to drop across it as I walk along!"

When he is dressed and has had his breakfast, and stands by the bedside kissing Pollypod before he goes, she makes him put some flowers in the button-hole of his greasy old fustian jacket.

"Now you look like Felix," she says,

As Jim walks to his work, with the bright sun shining on him, he looks anxiously along the pavements of the quiet streets in the ridiculous hope that some swell had dropped a sovereign, and that it might be his luck to come across it. But no such good fortune is his, and he wishes with all his heart that he had not put the notion of the ship in Pollypod's head.

This ship that is coming home is always a poor man's ship, and many a pretty conceit is woven out of it to gratify the poor man's child. It is always sailing over the seas, freighted with precious treasure, but it rarely reaches port. When it does, earth contains no greater happiness and delight.

The faithful dog, Snap, does not accompany his master on this morning. Pollypod had said to her father, "Leave Snap at home, father. I want to tell him something."

So Snap is left behind, unconscious of the precious secret that is about to be intrusted to him. Pollypod waits until mother is out of the room, and then, kneeling upon her bed in her night-dress, she sets Snap before her, and bids him listen. Snap, sitting gravely on his haunches, but with some difficulty, for the bed is all tumbled about, looks Pollypod straight in the face, with a serious demeanour worthy of the occasion. He receives the intelligence that Pollypod imparts to him with no other expressions of feeling than are contained in short barks, and blinks, and rollings backward when he loses his balance; but Pollypod finds this perfectly satisfactory, and tells him that he is to be sure to be fond of the Doll, and not to growl at her or be jealous of her. "For I'll love you all the same, Snap." Whereat Snap licks her face, and by that act vows fealty to the Doll.

The week that passes after her mother's funeral is by no means an unhappy one for Lily. A familiar voice and a familiar presence are gone, and she grieves naturally. But she derives much comfort from the restfulness and peacefulness of everything about her. The lodgers in the house make as little noise as possible, and Jim Podmore, as he goes down-stairs to his work in the early morning, treads as softly as his heavy boots will allow him, so that he shall not disturb her. She derives comfort also from Alfred's happier mood. The night after the funeral he comes home with a bright look in his face, and greets her with a kiss. With his arm round her waist, he draws her into her bedroom, and tells her that she mustn't mind if he has not been so affectionate to her lately as he ought to have been.

"I have had some troubles," he says, "and have been very unhappy, Lily. But now things look brighter. I'm going to love you more than ever. I'm going to do something grand by-and-by. You'll see! I'm not going to let you work much longer."

"O, but I don't mind it, Alf," she replies, with her arm round his neck.

"Ah, but it isn't right. I'm going to work for you. I know a way! You let me alone for knowing a thing or two. We'll have a better place than, this soon, and we'll go about a bit."

She listens to him with pleasure, in her innocence and trustfulness, and kisses him softly. Alfred is proud of her--proud of her beauty, proud of her gentleness and modesty--proud because she loves him and thinks all the world of him.

"I have made," he continues, "the best friend that any man ever had--the noblest-hearted fellow I had ever seen or heard of."

"O, I am glad of that, Alfred--I am glad of that! Who is it? He must be my friend too. Do I know him?"

Her thoughts turn to Felix as she asks the question, and an innocent joy warms her young heart.

"Do you know him!" he repeats gaily. "Do you know him, Puss! Why, of course you do! You don't need me to tell you who it is. You can guess--you do guess. There's only one--although he's only a new friend after all, now I come to think of it. But he's a man every inch of him. He gave a hundred and twenty pounds to a poor widow-woman who was left penniless! The week before last

he paid a poor man's debts--the poor fellow had got into trouble somehow--and set him up in business again, and made him comfortable--all because he had a wife and children. What do you think of that, Lily?"

"A noble nature, indeed!" says Lily softly, sharing Alfred's enthusiasm, and wondering whether she shall ever see Felix again.

"And he thinks himself so wise" (Alfred says this with a light laugh) "that he's always being taken in."

"That's a pity, Alfred."

"O, but he don't mind; he can afford it, and likes it. If you knew what a friend he is to me! And I shouldn't wonder if it was for Somebody's sake—why, how you are trembling, Lily!"

"You speak so warmly of this good friend, Alfred, that I am filled with joy--for your sake, my dear, that you have found such a friend. And yet I wonder, and cannot understand it."

She almost whispers these last words. She has been carried away by Alfred's enthusiasm. Certainly, Felix's kindness and gentle bearing had made a great impression upon her, and her thoughts dwelt much upon him. But it was only yesterday that she first saw him. It is all so strange. Only yesterday! But it seems longer; it seems to her as if she has known him for a long, long time.

"So now you can guess who it is, Lily, can't you?"

"I think I can, dear, and I am very, very glad! Glad to find he is as good and noble as I believed him to be when I first saw him."

"And it isn't so long ago that we first knew him!"

"No, indeed, Alf dear--but yesterday!"

"It might be yesterday. Why, it was only last Saturday night--just five days ago--that he saw you home from the Royal White Rose."

The little hand that was caressing his neck slowly withdraws itself, and the flush of colour, that the excitement of the conversation had brought to the cheeks, dies rapidly away. Her hands now lie idly in her lap, her face is colourless, her eyes are drooping to the ground. "You are speaking of"--she manages to say.

"Mr. Sheldrake, Puss! The noblest-hearted man in the world. You guessed at once--I saw it. Ah, Lily, that's a wise little head of yours!"

He takes the wise little head between his hands, and kisses her lips. She kisses him thoughtfully, and gazes at him with a steady sad light in her eyes.

"And he is such a good friend to you, Alf?"

"Haven't I told you!--and all, perhaps, for Somebody's—"

With a rapid motion, she places her fingers on his lips.

"And is really noble-hearted! And has done all these kind things!"

"All, and more, Lily. It is quite by accident I heard of these; for he is a queer character, and nothing displeases him so much as for people to speak to him about his kindness, or that they know it. He tries to show himself in quite a different light."

Lily is silent and very thoughtful for a little time after this, but she soon recovers, and her manner becomes brighter because Alfred's is so. A great weight seems to have been lifted from his mind, and he is more considerate of her than is usual with him. But she, in the unselfishness of her affection, does not notice this; it is because he is more cheerful that she is happier.

The next evening is Friday, and Pollypod and her mother have tea with Lily and her grandfather. Pollypod, of course, is engrossed by one subject. She has the fullest faith in Felix, but as the end of the week is very near, she is very curious about the Captain. She wants to know so much--what a Captain is like; how the Captain will find the house; whether the Captain will know her, and know that the Doll is for her. Every knock and ring at the street-door makes her heart beat loud and fast, and during the last two days she has tired out her little legs by running up and down-stairs to see if the Captain is at the door. Mrs. Podmore is not so sanguine. She tries to prepare Pollypod for disappointment, but nothing can shake the child's faith. He was the nicest-spoken gentleman (said Mrs. Podmore to Lily, in confidence) that she has ever set eyes on. But Lord love you! he only told Pollypod the story out of the goodness of his heart. He was as good as gold, that he was; the way he carried Pollypod upstairs was a sight to see; but all he wanted to do was to amuse the child, bless him! What did he know of dolls, a gentleman like him? But Mrs. Podmore does not win Lily over to her view of the question, for Pollypod has also made a confidante of Lily, and she in her heart of hearts believes that Felix will make the child a

present of a doll.

"Not such a handsome one as you say, Polly." says Lily to her; "but a nice one, I daresay."

"You'll see--you'll see," is all that Pollypod says in reply. "I wish it was to-morrow! I wish it was to-morrow!"

But although she wishes it were to-morrow, she looks out for the Captain to-night, and listens to every footfall on the stairs. But the night passes, and to-morrow comes, and still no Captain. As twilight comes on, Pollypod's excitement is so great that Mrs. Podmore declares she is afraid the child will work herself into a fever. So Lily proposes that Pollypod shall come and sit with her and her grandfather, and Mrs. Podmore consents, all the more willingly because she wants to clean up for Sunday. Pollypod is glad to go down to the first-floor, for she will be nearer to the street door. They sit at the window, the three of them, Polly in Lily's lap, with all her heart in her ear. Knocks come, and rings, but not one of them heralds the Captain or the Doll. Lily believes in the Doll, but not in the Captain; Pollypod believes in both.

"If he doesn't come, Polly," says old Wheels, "I'll make you a doll, on wheels."

"He's sure to come! he's sure to come!" exclaims Pollypod.

But twilight deepens, and the hope grows fainter. Pollypod's face is on Lily's neck, and Lily feels the tears welling from the child's eyes. Lily begins to feel sorry, also; sorry for more reasons than one. Mrs. Podmore is busy upstairs, scrubbing the room; Sunday is a day of rare, enjoyment to her and her small family. Old Wheels is on the point of suggesting that they shall light the lamp, when a knock comes at the street-door--a strange knock. Not a single knock for the first-floor, not two deliberate knocks for the second-floor, nor three for the third; but a rat-tat-tat, with a flourish which might be intended for some person in this humble house who has distinguished friends in the upper circles of society. Some one--never mind whom--opens the door and a step that none of them recognises is on the stairs. Pollypod jumps from Lily's lap, but Lily retains her hand. The man lingers on the first landing. It is dark, and he is evidently a stranger.

"Does Mrs. Podmore live here?" he asks of Nobody, in a loud voice.

"Yes," answers Old Wheels, going to the door. "On the third-floor, but she's busy cleaning. What do you want of her?"

"I have brought something for her little girl."

"O, O!" cries Pollypod, and in her excitement Lily rises, and accompanies the child to the door. "Are you a Captain?"

"Yes."

"What ship?" inquires Old Wheels, merrily for the child's sake, and nautically in honour of the visitor.

"The Fancy" replies the man in the dark.

"Come in," says Old Wheels; "the little girl you want is here."

And the Captain of the Fancy enters the room.

CHAPTER XVII.

A HAPPY NIGHT.

The Captain of the Fancy, coming out of the streets where there was little light, into a small room where there was less, could see nothing of the occupants but shadowy outlines, and had to take it for granted that he had brought himself to anchor in a friendly port. He appeared to have no doubt upon the point; but then it belonged to his profession to be as confident in danger as in safety, and to be able to steer amidst rocks with a bold heart. So, like a true seaman, he kept his own counsel. If he had any evidence to guide him to a satisfactory assurance other than his sense of sight might have afforded him, he did not show the acknowledgment of it. But there being no sun, he could not take an observation; the darkness in the room was like a fog at sea. He may have had other evidence; voices that were familiar to him may have been one. As on the ocean, when night usurps the place of day, and not an hour of the twenty-four brings a glimpse of sunlight, peculiar murmurings of the solemn waters whisper to the skilful ear warning of danger or assurance of safety. But what familiar voices could he have heard in this humble room of crowded Soho, seeing that he was Captain of the Fancy, and just come ashore? And yet he seemed to consider himself quite at home, although he and those in whose presence he found

himself could not distinguish each other's faces.

He had a gruff and kindly voice had the Captain of the Fancy, and he wore rough blue trousers, and a rough pea-jacket, and a rough cap. But notwithstanding that everything about him outwardly was as rough as rough could be, it is not unreasonable to assume that he had a kind heart and a gentle spirit. Otherwise, he would scarcely have been here on his present errand, where there was no freight charges to receive--nothing but the overflowing gratitude of a poor little child, who had never had a doll, and who lived contentedly upon the thought of one, for a long, long time past. Insubstantial payment this, but evidently sufficient in the Captain's eyes, as his conduct proved. He could not have been more in his element on the ocean than he showed himself in this dark room, in which he had set foot for the first time on this summer evening.

It was a peaceful evening, and everything in the narrow street was in harmony with it. The window of the room in which he stood was open, and there were flowers on the sill. There were flowers also on other window-sills in the street, in pots and boxes; and he saw on the opposite side, in a room which was lighted up, a woman covering a bird-cage, in which doubtless a pet canary sang during the day. Harmonious influences these: a weird contrast which was to be found in a labyrinth of curiously-shaped thoroughfares a few hundred yards away, in a very tangle of dwarf streets and alleys, where the glare of light dazzled the eye and bewildered the senses. A strange scene indeed, but so frequent and common in the great City as to possess no novelty to the accustomed gaze; affording no food for reflection to any but those whose hearts are in their eyes. Poor people were there in shoals, bargaining and eking out their poor means to the best advantage: trucks and barrows, filled with the commonest and meanest necessaries of life, so choked the spaces as to render straight walking an impossibility. Hoarse voiced men were bawling out inducements to intending purchasers, who stood debating and reckoning up before making the bold plunge. Some of the barrows were presided over by pale-faced women, as nervous anxious-looking as many of the timid ones who bargained for their wares. Here, a foreigner, having made his purchase, hurried away with hanging head, as if what was hidden beneath his coat was something to be ashamed of, or was so precious that it needed swift lodgment in his garret before he could consider it safe. Here lingered a hungry man, looking and longing, or a cunning beggar who, by the counterfeit misery on his face, drew pence and halfpence from others needier than himself. But what was given was given ungrudgingly and with earnest sympathy. Here stood an old man and a little girl with a basket on her arm. The old man was sliding some coppers and two or three small pieces of silver in the palm of his hand, calculating what it would buy for the Sunday dinner, and the girl was looking up into his face with a pleasant light in her eyes; a light which it was not hard to see often warmed the old man's heart. He was a long time before he decided; and when he had made up his mind, the foolish fellow jeopardised Monday's necessities by purchasing a picture-book and a bunch of flowers for his little granddaughter, Commerce, as represented in the market, did not show to advantage. It was a shabby and second-hand institution; from the damaged fruit and vegetables (which wore a frayed appearance) to the old clothes, patched and mended, and the second-hand boots and shoes (should it not be second-foot), with an excruciating polish on them, like paint on the cheeks of age, to hide the ravages of time. Art was not neglected; for here was a second-hand bookstall, and here an inverted open umbrella, the interior of which was lined with prints and engravings torn from old books, marked up at "a penny apiece, and take your choice." The roar of voices from this busy mart came to the Captain's ears, subdued and, sounding like the soft lapping of the sea, added to the peacefulness of the quiet street.

How it was that Lily's grandfather asked "What ship?" when the stranger announced himself as a Captain, he could not have explained. But it may be rightly surmised that it was prompted by his sympathy with Pollypod, and by his gladness that she was not to be disappointed. When Lily heard the Captain's voice--which most surely have been unfamiliar to her, it was so gruff--she relinquished Pollypod's hand, and softly went to her seat. There are some moments which are very precious to us; now and again in our lives visions of pure happiness come, and, indistinct and undefinable as they are, we forget all else for the time; and with awe and gladness resign ourselves to influences which fill the present with peace and joy. Such times are the stars in our life's record, and the memory of them never dies.

Pollypod, standing by the Captain's side, exclaimed with tearful joy,

"I'm the little girl."

"And I'm the Captain."

"I knew you would come!" (Her voice was so full and rich, that it was a pleasure to hear it.) "Felix said you would, and he saw you such a long way off. You *have* brought her!"

"Yes, here she is in my arms, little one. Dressed."

"In what?"

"Mauve silk, I think she told me."

"O!"

A volume of words could not have expressed more.

"Hold hard!" cried the Captain, as he heard the scraping of a match against a box, and guessed that it was intended to light up. "Let us talk in the dark a bit."

He knew that there were two persons, an old man and a little girl, present besides himself, and the momentary flash of the match, as it was drawn across the sand-paper, did not reveal to him a third, for Lily was sitting in the darkest shadow of the room, and he was not looking that way. The old man readily assented to the proposition to talk in the dark a bit, and the shadows of the peaceful summer night lay about the room undisturbed. But the Captain appearing to consider that his proposition was too abruptly made, and scarcely justifiable, he being a stranger and almost an intruder, added immediately,

"That is, if you have no objection, and if you will pardon me for suggesting it."

"No apology is necessary," replied the old man, "from one accredited as you are, and coming on such an errand."

"It's a Captain's fancy," said the stranger.

"And it's yours by right, as Captain of the Fancy," observed the old man, in a gentle and courteous tone.

"You are kind enough to say so. Of all the hours of the twenty-four, I love that the most during which the day steals away to the other side of the world. There's no time at sea so pleasant as night, when it is fine and balmy, as this summer's night is, and when you can look over the bulwarks into the water, and see it wake into living light as the ship sails on. Then, when the moon rises, the heavens, as well as the water, are filled with glory; though, for the matter of that, they are always filled with natural beauty, whether it is dark or light."

He spoke like a sailor, heartily though gruffly, and it almost seemed as if the salt of the sea had got into his voice, and had given it a flavour. So the old man thought evidently, and thought the flavour was of the pleasantest (but there could be no mistaking that), for he encouraged the Captain to proceed by asking,

"How's the moon to-night, Skipper?"

Thus showing that he had read of the sea, or at some time of his life had travelled on it.

"'Tis a few days old, and soon we shall see it, pure and clear and bright--like truth, like modesty, like virtue, like the heart of an innocent maid, like anything that is good."

Almost a poet as well as a Captain. But what else could be expected from one who commanded the good ship Fancy? The old man rubbed his hands in satisfaction, and being drawn still closer to the newcomer by the sympathy that dwells in kindly natures, farther encouraged him by remarking,

"You know all about the moon, Skipper?"

"Not all, but something--sufficient for my purpose; and about the stars also. I ought to, for they're the sailor's friends."

"Yes," responded the old man; "they are nearer to sailors than to us. They are more than visible signs at sea; they are testimony. On land, we glance at them carelessly, regardless of their beauty and of the lessons they teach. I never travelled much myself, but a generation ago I knew one—"

Here, however, the old man paused, as if he were being drawn on by the attractiveness of the theme to speak at greater length than he deemed proper, or as if this were not the right time to relate personal experiences. But the Captain of the Fancy said, in a tone of the deepest interest,

"Proceed, sir, I pray. You knew one—"

--"Who passed an adventurous life, and who, being wrecked, floated on a spar on the wild seas for three days and three nights, being happily picked up then by a passing vessel. What you said just now about the stars brought him to my mind. He was alone, and but for the stars, which were like companions to him, he would have relinquished his hold of the spar, and bade good-bye to life. 'Hope on,' the stars said to him; 'Do not despair. You are not forsaken.' The sight of them gave him courage to persevere and to suffer; and they taught him the lesson that, however lonely, however forsaken, however utterly wretched a man may be in the world, the future contains for him a revelation in which there is much goodness and sweetness. Which is surely true. For this beautiful world, with all its wonders, was not made in vain; and we, the highest form of intelligence it contains, have not played out the parts allotted to us when the curtain drops upon our lives. The poet says truly that the grave is not the goal of life, and only the utterly selfish man can believe that it is the be-all and the end-all. This friend of mine was almost a sceptic before he had the good fortune to be wrecked; but the stars taught him differently. They instilled a kind of faith into him. If a dark night had come, when he could not have seen his consolers, he might have despaired. But he was saved, happily. You say right. The stars are the sailor's friends."

Pollypod found this dialogue so entrancing, that, eager as she was to ask questions, she did not interrupt it. Taking advantage now of the pause that followed, she asked of the Captain,

"How did you find us out?"

"Very easily, my lass; my friend Felix directed me."

"Where is Felix?"

"You will see him soon. Did you think I was not coming?"

"I knew you would come. I told Snap so, and everybody. Are you Felix's brother?"

"No, my lass. What makes you think so?"

"You speak like Felix, and yet your voice is different. Where have you been to with your ship?"

"The Fancy sails all over the world, and under it, and in the middle of it, for that matter."

"I want to know! How can a ship do all that?"

"My ship can, and does, little one."

"Are you a wizard, then, as well as Felix?" asked the pertinacious little maid, who was in her glory, asking questions, and nursing the doll, which was enveloped in silver tissue paper.

"Being Captain of the Fancy, I may say, Yes. Else how could I see into the heart of a little girl when I was so many miles away, and how could I know that she was waiting and hoping and hoping that father's ship would come home?"

Then, to please the child, the Captain told of some wondrous voyages he had made in the Fancy; spoke of mermaids and coral reefs, and wonderful lands across the seas, where it was always summer. According to his reckoning, life contained no sorrow; and "O, how I should like to be there! O, how I should like to see!" murmured Pollypod, as the bright pictures were presented to her young mind. Even the old man, who had tasted the bitterest of experiences, listened approval to the utterings of the Captain of the Fancy, divining, perchance, the motive which prompted them. Lily said not a word; but when the Captain came to the end of one of the prettiest flights of the Fancy, Pollypod exclaimed, with enthusiasm,

"O Lily! isn't it beautiful!"

Whereupon, singular to say, the Captain's eloquence suddenly deserted him. Somewhat of an awkward silence followed; broken by the old man asking, in an amused voice, whether Pollypod did not want to see her doll. The child answering, "Yes, yes!" eagerly, the old man lit the lamp. They all looked with curiosity at the Captain, who, however, had found something exceedingly interesting in the street, and as he was looking out of window, they could see only his back. When he turned to them, as he could not help doing presently, he had a very red face; yet there was a sly gleam of humour in his eyes as he advanced to the old man and said,

"It was only for Pollypod's amusement, and for my own selfish pleasure, that I sailed under false colours, sir. I did not expect to find myself here."

Unwinding a large handkerchief which was round his neck, and which partially hid his face, he presented himself to them in his proper colours. When Pollypod discovered that Felix and the Captain were one, her delight may be imagined. She ran out of the room, and called her mother excitedly, and then ran back and jumped into Felix's arms, forgetting even her doll for the moment. Mrs. Podmore coming down-stairs, and being informed of the part that Felix had played, said aside to Lily, in a tone of complete admiration, "Well, I never! But it's just like him. *I* never saw such a gentleman in all my born days!"

The old man shook hands with Felix, and bade him heartily welcome, and Lily also in her gentle manner, and in two or three minutes they were as much at home together as if they had known each other all their lives. Then came the important ceremony of unwrapping the doll, and revealing its glories. Its reputation as the most beautiful doll that ever was seen was firmly established in a moment. Pollypod gazed at it in mute ecstacy, and worshipped the giver with all her heart and soul. The great longing of her life was satisfied, and she was supremely happy. She was allowed by her mother to sit up later than usual in honour of Felix; but the excitement of the day proved too much for her, and after a little while she fell asleep with the doll in her arms.

The others sat by the window, and the old man and Felix, finding in each other much that was congenial, talked unreservedly of many matters. It seemed to be tacitly understood that the painful incidents which had occurred on the day of the funeral should not be spoken of, and no reference was therefore made to them. Lily took but little part in the conversation; she sat and listened with a soul in harmony with everything about her. It was very seldom that her grandfather had the opportunity of enjoying a quiet hour with a nature which so nearly resembled his own. Both he and Felix evidently loved to look at common things from almost an ideal point of view, and the most ordinary matters, as they conversed upon them, were occasionally invested with bright bits of colour which matter-of-fact and prosaic minds would

have utterly failed to see. Only once was Lily's mother referred to; the reference arose from a remark made by Felix concerning the singular peculiarity in the room that nearly everything was on castors. The old man explained that it originated from his daughter's sickness.

"Every little noise fretted her," he said, "and as I had learnt turning in my young days, I amused myself by making small wheels to whatever I laid hands on, so that it could be moved about without noise. It was not quite an idle whim, therefore; it has occupied my time, which otherwise would have hung heavily, and I have really grown to believe that it could be made to serve many useful purposes. The man who first conceived the idea of a wheel was a great benefactor. Civilization," he added, with a pleasant laugh, "would be at a standstill without its wheel."

One thing leading to another, in the course of conversation they found themselves conversing upon deeper than mundane matters. They had been talking of the comparative value of creeds, and the old man said,

"Faith is everything. So long as a man believes--if his belief be associated with anything that is pure and good in itself--it matters little what it is. To me it is the worst kind of arrogance, the worst kind of intolerance, for a man to say, 'Believe as I believe, or you are lost.'"

"And those who don't believe?" suggested Felix.

"Degrade themselves. We are but part of a system, they say, and we live and wither and die like birds and beasts and plants. Our parts being played out, we perish utterly, and make room for others. Do they ever consider that man is the only form of life which seems to be capable of improvement--that only man advances, improves, discovers, acquires, and that all other things in Nature are the same now as they were in the beginning? That the sun rises as in the olden time; that the seasons are the same; that all forms of vegetable life show no change in all these centuries; that beasts make their lairs as of yore, and birds their nests,--that all these, according to the laws of nature, are sufficient for and in themselves, and that of all the wonders that fill the earth, man is the only one that thinks, aspires, thirsts to know, and conquers?"

In this strain they talked until nearly midnight. Long before their talk was over, Pollypod had been taken to bed so fast asleep, that she could not even wake to kiss Felix. She smiled as he kissed her, and Mrs. Podmore thrilled with joy as she gazed, in thankful, full-hearted admiration, on the beautiful face of her child as she lay in her arms. Unclouded happiness rested in Polly's face, and rested also in the hearts of all present, old and young.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE BEATING OF THE PULSE.

Being thrown upon his own resources, Felix employed his time in looking about him--not in the most industrious fashion, it must be confessed, but after the manner of one who was entirely independent of the world, and who had merely to make up his mind which of the many good things by which he was surrounded would be most suitable to a young gentleman in his position. The weapons with which he was armed to fight the battle into which he had thrown himself were trustfulness, simplicity, and faith in human nature. These weapons are good enough, in all conscience, in themselves; but we are not content, nowadays, as we were of old, to fight a fair fight, man to man. Torpedoes and other infernal weapons have come into fashion; and a man, unless he be crafty, has but a small chance of victory when he throws down his glove.

One of the first things Felix did when he came into London to conquer it was to make himself comfortable. He established himself in a capital hotel not half a mile from Soho, so as to be near his friends; for it may be truly said that the only friends he had in London lived in the little house in Soho inhabited by the Podmores, and the Gribbles, and Lily and her grandfather. He found plenty of excuses for going there often: Gribble junior was an umbrella maker, and Felix's umbrella was so continually out of repair, that it became quite a source of revenue to the bustling frame mender.

"What! another rib gone!" Gribble junior would say, with a look of astonishment, not suspecting that Felix had broken it purposely, so that he might have an excuse for calling at the house in the middle of the day; "it'd be cheaper to buy a new one, sir."

But Felix protested that he would on no account part with so old a friend; and the repairs continued to be made, until not a particle of the original structure was left. There was no necessity for these small subterfuges on Felix's part, for after a time he was always welcome in that house, and his happiest hours were spent there. They all liked him; and as for Pollypod, her mother declared, in the pleasantest of voices, that she was as jealous as jealous could be, her little girl was that fond of him! All this was very agreeable, and Felix decided that his new career

had commenced in the most satisfactory manner. His training had not been of such a nature as to cause him to value money, or to be careful of it; and while he had it in his purse, he spent it freely. He did not do so from recklessness, but from a largeness of nature (although he himself would have disputed it warmly and with a quaint logic), in the light of which small matters of feeling were ridiculously magnified, and the world's goods dwindled down to insignificant proportions. Therefore, while he had he spent; and it was fortunate for him that his tastes and desires were simple and easily satisfied, for he grudged himself nothing. The present being amply provided for, he had no fears and no anxiety for to-morrow. His nature was one which it was easy to impose upon, and he did not escape the snares set in the public thoroughfares for liberal hearts. The piteous eyes and faces of beggars that were raised to his appealingly were never raised in vain. When he was told that these were part of a trade, he refused to believe. Arrows tipped with doubts of human goodness glanced from off his generous nature, and left no wound behind. And yet, as will be seen, he was keen enough in some matters concerning which men who knew infinitely more of the world than he (priding themselves upon it) were blind. Speaking upon the subject to Lily's grandfather, the old man said,

"If you thought a man who begged of you was an impostor, you would not give."

"I don't know that," replied Felix. "I am selfish enough to think I should."

The old man smiled at this reference to one of Felix's pet theories.

"It does not so much concern them as me," continued Felix, with sly gleams. "I give to please myself. Is not that a selfish motive? Not to give would be to deprive myself of a gratification. I say to myself sometimes, almost unconsciously (but the sentiment which prompts it belongs to my nature, or I should not have the thought), 'Bravo, Felix! that was a good thing to do. You are not a bad fellow.'"

The old man was amused at this.

"The thought comes afterwards," he said.

"But it comes," insisted Felix, as if determined to deprive the kind promptings of his nature of grace--"it comes, and that is enough. It is an investment. I give away a penny, and receive the best of interest. Pure selfishness, upon my word, as is every other action of our lives. But apart from this, I don't believe that these men and women are not in want."

"Ah, well," said the old man, looking in admiration at the animated face of Felix; "it is better to trust than doubt. Suspicion ages the heart, and robs life of bright colour."

Satisfied that he was spending his time profitably, Felix found life very enjoyable. He did not trouble himself about the past; the world was before him, and he was observing, and studying, and preparing himself to open his oyster. His hotel was in the Strand, and he soon became well acquainted with the phases of life presented in that locality. The streets were so full of life, and there was so much to see. The shops; the theatres; the conveyances the streams of people flowing this way and that, a few smiling as they walked, some idling, some talking eagerly to themselves, unconscious of the surging life through which they make their way--each man perfectly engrossed in his own personality, each a world, the secret ways of which were known only to himself. He was soon quite familiar also with the singular variety of street-shows which can there be seen daily. With the broad-shouldered, frizzly-haired Italian with his monkeys, residents of Short's-gardens, where probably the dumb brutes are not so tenderly treated as strangers, who see them hugged to their master's breast as he walks along, might suppose them to be. With another monkey also, a poor little creature, who, being pulled this way and that by a chain attached to its master's wrist, capers on the pavement (generally at night) to the dismal moaning of an organ, upon whose grinder's face a ghastly smile for ever sits, suggesting the idea that it must have been carved upon his features in infancy. With the melancholy-looking, straight-haired young man who plays operatic selections upon the spout of a coffee-pot and through the nozzle of a bellows, and who selects the widest of the side thoroughfares for his entertainment, seldom commencing until a perfect ring of admirers and curiosity-mongers is formed, and who, while his island is being made, stands with an air of proud humility, as who should say, "I am the only and original player upon the spout and nozzle in the kingdom; all others are counterfeit." With the inconceivably-maniacal Swiss quartette, who shout and caper, and produce hideous sounds from throat and windbag. With the Mongolian impostor who sits upon a doorstep, uttering never a word, with a look upon his face as of one suddenly stricken with fatal disease. With the poor miserable woman, whose thought may soar upwards, but whose eyes never see the sun, for her body is literally bent in two, who creeps almost daily along the Strand; and with many other forms of beggary, even less attractive than these.

What Felix saw in the streets were not his only studies; he read the newspapers carefully, and not seldom was he amazed at the inequality of things. He found it difficult to understand how, in one shape, a certain thing was held up for public censure and condemnation, while in another shape precisely the same thing (in a worse form perhaps) was quietly tolerated, and even admired. As thus: He read in the papers from time to time accounts of proceedings taken against the publishers and venders of a weekly illustrated sheet, against which it was charged that it contained objectionable pictures. When he saw the illustrations he at once acquiesced in the justice of the proceedings, and decided in his own mind that they pandered to the worst taste,

and were calculated to do much harm. But looking in many of the shop windows in the locality of the Strand, he saw pictures infinitely worse in the effect they would be likely to produce than those which were published in the objectionable paper. The portraits and full-length pictures of nearly naked women, taken in every attitude that the lascivious imagination could suggest, and paraded conspicuously in these windows for public admiration, were worse, in their insidious badness, than anything that Holywell Street ever produced. There was no disguise of what are called "female charms" in the pictures; they were displayed to their fullest extent to feed the sensual taste, and neither art nor any useful purpose was served by these degrading exhibitions. On the contrary; they tended to mislead, in their incongruous mixture of worth and shamelessness. For here was an actor deservedly popular; here was a courtesan, deservedly notorious; here was a statesman and a poet, whose names add lustre to the history of the times in which they live; between them a shameless woman, bold and lewd, and almost naked; above *her*, a princess, worthily loved, with her baby on her back, clasping the mother round her neck--a picture which the poorest wife in England feels the happier for looking at, so much of homely love and wifely virtue and sisterly kinship does it suggest; while below was paraded the painted face of a wanton, whose name is shame. In one window of a semi-religious kind, in which the frequenters of the May meetings at Exeter Hall might be supposed to gaze without fear of contamination, the very worst of these lewd pictures were displayed in the company of Bibles, and Prayer Books, and Church Services; an association which, by any sophistry, could not have been proved to be a good one.

In the study of these and other matters Felix found the time pass rapidly away. Something else passed rapidly away also--his money. Calling for his hotel-bill one day, he found that, after paying it, he would have scarcely twenty pounds left. This set him thinking. If he continued to live in the hotel, he might not be able to pay his next bill, and the dishonour attaching to such a contingency caused him to resolve to adopt a more modest mode of living. The gravity of the position made him serious, but not for long. His idle days were gone--well, he was glad of it; he was tired of idleness, and longed to be up and doing. "If I were a rich man," he thought, "and could not get work without paying for it, I'd pay for it willingly, rather than be idle." Yes, it was time for him to set to work. He would first take lodgings in some cheap neighbourhood, and there he would look things straight in the face. It is amazing what comfort is found in metaphor, until the time for action arrives. In making this resolution Felix worked himself into such a state of excitement that he really believed he had already commenced life in earnest. At first he thought of Soho, but very slight reflection induced him to forego the temptation of living in the neighbourhood of Lily. "Whatever struggles I have," he thought, "I will keep to myself." Chance directing his steps to Vauxhall, he saw there numbers of bills in the windows announcing rooms to let. Seeing a decent-looking woman with a baby in her arms standing at the door of a house in which there was a first-floor to let, he spoke to her, and asked for particulars. The rent for sitting-room and bedroom was very moderate, he found. Upon inquiry he learned that there were other lodgers in the house, that indeed it was filled with lodgers. The landlady and her husband lived in the basement; a married couple occupied the parlours; and four or five persons, perfectly independent of each other, lived on the second and third floors. "You'll find us very quiet, sir," the landlady said, looking with an eye of favour upon Felix, and wondering why so smart a young gentleman as he should desire to live in that poor neighbourhood, "and you'll have no call to complain of the attendance." Felix, perfectly satisfied, pinched the baby's cheek, paid the first week's rent in advance, and received his latch-key. It was characteristic of him that when he left the hotel he was as liberal to the attendants as if he had been a gentleman of independent property.

When he was settled in his new lodgings, he bethought himself of his promise to Martha Day, his father's housekeeper, to let her know his address in London. He had written to her from his hotel, and had heard from her there. As he wrote now, he thought, "If Martha knew how poor this neighbourhood is, she would guess the reason of my moving; but she cannot know much of London, and will not be able to learn anything from the address." He wrote his letter, and went out in the afternoon with the intention of posting it. But wandering about in idle humour he forgot it, and at about nine o'clock in the evening he found himself at his street-door with the letter still in his pocket. He was about to put his latch-key into the lock when he remembered the letter, and he was turning away, thinking how stupid he was to be so forgetful, when the door opened from within, and the very woman in his thoughts passed swiftly into the street. Martha Day! To see her in London, away from his father's house, with whose gloom her own joyless gloomy manner was so thoroughly in unison that they might have been deemed inseparable, would have been surprise enough in itself; but to see her there, in that house, so suddenly and strangely, was so great a surprise that for a moment he thought he had seen an apparition. When the first shock of the surprise was over, he looked after the woman, and saw her turn the corner of the street. Then he knew that he was not mistaken--it was Martha Day he had seen. He hurried after her, intending to speak to her; but when he turned the corner, he could not see her, and although he ran hither and thither, he could find no trace of her. Strangely perplexed, he walked slowly back to the house. Perhaps she had come there to see him--but how could she know he lived in that house, having been in it only a few hours? He questioned the landlady, but she could not enlighten him. She had seen no particular woman pass in or out of the house. There were so many lodgers, you see, sir, that all sorts of strange people come in and out. Had any inquiry been made for him? he asked. No; how could there be, was the reply, when the landlady didn't know his name? That was true enough; he had not given his name when he paid the week's rent in advance. Then he described Martha Day--her face with no trace of colour in it, her eyes nearly always cast down, her hands nearly always hidden, her black dress and bonnet--and asked if the landlady knew her. No, the landlady never remembered to have seen her; and when Felix went

up-stairs to his room, the landlady thought it was singular that he should be so anxious about the woman--and not a young woman either, according to his description, she added mentally.

Felix in his room re-opened the letter he had written to Martha, read it carefully, and put on his considering-cap. But the more he thought the more he was perplexed. "She cannot have come here for me," he thought; "and she cannot have come here without a purpose. If I write to her from this address, it may disturb her, or cause her annoyance in some way." He tore up the letter, and wrote another, giving his address at a post-office in the locality. As he went down-stairs in the dark to post the letter, he brushed somewhat roughly against a lodger who had just entered the house, and something which the man carried in his hand dropped to the ground. It sounded like a bottle. "I beg your pardon, I'm sure," said Felix, groping in the dark for what had fallen; "I hope it is not broken. No; here it is." He handed a flat bottle to his fellow-lodger, who received it eagerly, and feeling with trembling fingers for the cork to assure himself that the liquor had not escaped, muttered humbly, "No offence, sir; no offence," and passed to his room.

Felix was in the humour to be irritated by trifles, and this small incident vexed him unreasonably. He was annoyed with himself for being vexed, but he could not shake himself into good-humour, and as, in his present mood, sleep was impossible, he walked along the Embankment and over Westminster Bridge towards Soho, and thence to the Royal White Rose Music-hall. It was in the full swing of prosperity, and the usual audience was present. Composed of pale-faced young men without whiskers, of fuller-fleshed and older men with much whisker, of boys sharply featured and men richly lipped, of young men naturally old, and old men artificially young; of work-girls and servant-girls, and other girls and other women. There were many hats of the kind called Alpine, with peacocks' feathers in them, of course; there were many overcoats with sham fur collars and cuffs; there was much cigar-smoking and whisky-drinking; and there was generally a large amount of low swelldom in a state of assertive rampancy. In a certain respect the audience resembled the audience which was assembled in Noah's Ark--there was a great deal of pairing. As Felix entered the music-hall, there came upon the stage a very stout and very short female vocalist, between thirty-five and fifty years of age, dressed in a gown which appeared to have been made out of faded bed-hangings. She was by no means attractive, having bad teeth and a peculiar habit of squeezing the corners of her eyelids, as if she had some nice things there which she wanted to keep all to herself. She sang a song, and there was no applause. Whereupon, the Chairman struck on his bell, and said she would oblige again. She obliged again. The audience did not seem to mind her, one way or another. She obliged a third time, and the refrain to her third song catching the sympathy of her hearers, she finally retired in triumph, and then the audience wanted to see her again, and she didn't come. Felix did not like to think of Lily in association with these things, and he walked away from the place in nowise soothed by his visit. Naturally light-hearted as he was, a strange sadness was upon him to-night, and whether it was by chance, or because his gloomier mood induced him to observe them more closely and take them to heart, the darker shadows of life forced themselves upon his attention; turn which way he would, he could not escape from them. He had just passed a throng of night-birds, dressed in gay plumage, when sounds of mirth arrested his attention, and he saw before him a child-girl, perhaps fifteen years of age, with blue ribbons in her hair, with mocking flowers in her brown hat, with a white cloud round her throat, with a green dress, and with a petticoat marvellously fashioned and coloured, staggering along drunk, swaying her body, waving her arms, and protesting with feeble imploring, even in the midst of her helpless degradation, against the gibes and laughter of a grinning mob. The men and women composing the mob laughed, and nudged each other in the ribs with a fine sense of humour, and made witty remarks, and winked and flashed their fingers at the girl, and pointed her out to chance acquaintances, and indulged in other expressions of delight at the piteous spectacle. An omnibus conductor jumped down to have a look, and jumped up again, refreshed; a man with waxed moustaches followed the girl with undisguised delight and admiration; a cab-driver stopped his horse, and laughingly pointed at the girl with his whip; a beggar stamped his curiously-clothed toes in approval as the mob scrambled past him; and a fair-haired girl smiled pleasantly to herself, and hugged her furs as she walked through the crowd. Not one stopped to pity; not one among them stepped forward to save the miserable drunken child-girl from the taunts and word-stings which were flung at her from all sides, until a policeman came, and, with a merciful harshness, seized the girl's arm, and pushed her before him to the police-station.

O! London's Heart! Laden with the sorrow of such lifeblood as this! What purifying influences can be brought to bear to lessen the pain that beats in every sob? In this great land, filled as it is with preachers social and political--in which every hour children are born to suffer, to grow up to shame and sorrow--can no medicine be found to cool your fevered blood, and no physicians, unselfish, wise, and merciful enough, and sufficiently regardless of the pomp of power, capable of administering it? Some few healers there are, who toil not in the light, and whose earnest lives are devoted to their work. Blessings on them, and on every heart that dictates benevolent remedy, even although it can only reach a few out of the many suffering! Blessings on the head that devises it, on the hand that administers it! You who walk through life wrapped in the cruel mantle of selfishness, heedless of the wails of your helpless brothers and sisters, stand aside; you who only heed your own comfort, your own ease, your own well-doing, who have no ointment for your neighbour's wounds, stand aside; let the gloom of night encompass you and hide your faces! But you whose hearts bleed at the sight of suffering, whose nerves quiver at the sound of it, whose hands are eager to relieve it, come into heaven's light, and let it shine upon you and the aureola which crowns you, in which every kind impulse that finds life in action gleams like a blessed star!

It was past midnight when Felix made his way to his lodgings. The humble streets through which he walked as he neared his home were not quite deserted. Night-birds were there also, but of a low degree; night-birds with soiled plumage and ragged feathers; night-birds whose voices grated upon the ear, like the harsh cawing of crows. High up, from dingy garret windows, glimmered pale gleams of light. What mysteries were being wrought within those chambers? How beat the pulse of London's Heart? What links in the greatness of the mighty city were there being woven? Perchance within sat some poor seamstress stitching for bread sleepily through the night, wearing--O, dreadful paradox!--wearing her life away so that she might live. Not fables, not legends of the past, are such life struggles--they are of to-day. Perchance within was hatching some crime, the execution of which would quicken for a day the pulse of the great City's Heart. Who knew or who could tell? Crime and patient endurance, purity and vice, are but divided by a narrow strip of wall, and none can see the mysteries that lie beneath a single roof but the sleepless Eye which shines above them all!

CHAPTER XIX.

MR. SHELDRAKE SUGGESTS THAT IT IS TIME FOR MUZZY TO TURN OVER A NEW LEAF.

Congratulating himself upon the escape he had had of losing his precious liquor in his encounter with Felix on the stairs, Muzzy, hugging the bottle to his breast, mounted to the one room in the garret which formed his home. The room was not so dark that he could not see shadows on the walls, which as he opened the door seemed to be imbued with weird animation. His own shadow, as he stood in the centre of the room, assumed monstrous proportions, and covered one side of the wall and ceiling; there was something so threatening in it, and so dreadfully suggestive to the old man, that he hastened, with trembling fingers, to light a candle, still keeping the bottle hugged to his breast the while as tenderly as if it were human. The candle being lighted, he felt as if he had escaped some great danger, and his manner became more assured. Before laying the bottle on the mantelshelf, he looked at it wishfully, and uncorking it, was about to drink, when he closed his lips with a snap, and resisted the temptation. Taking off his hat, he produced from the interior a flower which was stuck in the lining for safety. This flower was evidently intended for a special purpose, which, had he needed any reminding, recurred to him as he looked round the room. It was very poorly furnished, containing merely a bed, two or three chairs, and a table. But everything was tidy and in its place. The bed was made, and the little piece of faded carpet in front of the fender had been newly swept and put straight. He opened a little cupboard, and saw the few pieces of crockery it contained set in their proper places. Indeed there was about the whole place an order and cleanliness one would scarcely have expected from the appearance of the owner.

"Good girl, good girl!" muttered Muzzy, as he noted these evidences of comfort; "there are few like her, I should say."

He went into the passage, and called, "Lizzie, Lizzie!" receiving no reply, however. He tapped at the door of the room next to the one he occupied, and after a moment or two turned the handle; put the door was locked. Disappointed, he returned to his own room, and wandered about it in a restless, uncertain manner, as if, being alone, he did not know what to do. Every now and then he came near to the bottle, and sometimes turned his head resolutely from it, and sometimes could not resist the temptation of gazing at it. "No," he said aloud once, as if answering some inward questioning or argument; "no; I promised Lizzie I wouldn't, and I won't. What is this?" He had laid the bottle on a piece of folded paper, containing a key. "The key of her room. Good girl, good girl!" He took his candle, and went into Lizzie's room. It was in every respect more comfortable than his own, although the furniture, with the exception of a smart little sewing-machine, was of the same humble kind. There were two or three cheap ornaments on the mantelshelf, the table could boast of a cover, and a carpet was laid down which nearly covered the floor. "She can't have gone out long," said Muzzy, who, having no one else to talk to, talked to himself, in defiance of an old-fashioned proverb not very complimentary to such self-communings. "She knew I would be home soon, and thought I should like to sit here." On the table were some needlework and a workbox, and behind the door hung a dress, which Muzzy touched with his hand, as the most civilising influence within his reach. A picture an the wall evidently possessed a fascination for him, and presently he sat gazing at it, dreamily. It was the picture of a woman's face, fair and comely, and the eyes seemed to follow his as he gazed; but the reflections raised by the contemplation were not pleasant ones, and he rose and walked about in the same restless, uncertain manner. Soon he was in his own room again, and the bottle was in his hand uncorked. "I could have kept from it if she had been here," he muttered; "but how can I when I am alone--alone?" He repeated the word two or three times with desolate distinctness. "Alone--alone--always alone until she came! What should I do if she went away? And she may--she may. That young fellow who comes to see her so often--who is he, who is he? I wish he was dead, I mustn't go into the room when he's there--Lizzie hasn't told me so, but I know I mustn't. And there they sit, laughing and talking—Laughing and talking! No, not always. He made her cry

once; I heard her. I'll ask Lizzie who he is. If he wants to take her away, I'd like to kill him--secretly, secretly!" The feeble old man scowled as he said this, and mechanically took a glass from the cupboard, and poured some gin in it. But a restraining influence was upon him even then, and he did not immediately raise it to his lips. "I promised her I wouldn't," he said; "I swore I'd give it up. But how can I when I have no one to talk to? So old a friend too; so old a friend! I should have gone mad without it many a time. I'll take one drop--just one little drop. But she mustn't know--she mustn't know." Looking round warily, he, swiftly and with a secret air, drained the glass, and immediately afterwards endeavoured to assume an unconsciousness that he had broken his promise and his oath. But although presently he took a second draught in the same secret manner, it was evident that he could not quite satisfy his conscience, for he pushed the empty glass from him, retaining the bottle in his hand. "What made me buy it? I didn't intend to, and didn't intend to pass the public house; but I got there somehow, and I couldn't resist going in. It seemed to draw me to it. But it'll be my ruin, my ruin, my ruin! The governor said it would, and it will." As he sat there, battling with himself, his deeply-lined face and his thin hair straggling over his forehead, did he have no ambition, no aspiration, no hope, outside the walls of brick which formed his home? This Lizzie of whom he spoke was, according to his own showing, not an old friend. Had he any other link of love, or had other human affection quite died out of his life? It was hard to tell. It seemed that, but for this girl, to whom he was not linked by ties of blood, his life was colourless, purposeless. But every living breast contains a smouldering fire, and even to this old man, wreck as he was, a spark might come to kindle once more into a flame the fire that must have burned when he was young. Supposing him to have been bright and handsome in his youth--as he must have been, despite his worn and almost hopeless face--how, could he have seen it, would he have received a vision of the future which showed him truthfully what he was to be in years to come? A vision of some sort was upon him now, as, sitting with no purpose in his mind, he fell into a doze. From which, after the lapse of a few moments, which seemed to him hours, he awoke with a bewildered air, and looked about him, and listened wonderingly for voices which he might have heard in his dream, or as if the dead past had cast up its ghosts, and he had seen them. He saw something more tangible as he raised his eyes to the door, and recognised his governor, Mr. David Sheldrake. The bottle was still in Muzzy's hand, and he tried to put it out of sight as he rose to welcome his most unexpected visitor.

"Surprised to see me, eh, Muzzy!" exclaimed Mr. Sheldrake, in an easy tone.

"You're welcome, sir, you're welcome," said Muzzy, his looks contradicting his words. "Anything wrong, sir?"

"No, old man, don't be alarmed; there's nothing wrong."

Mr. Sheldrake was smartly dressed, and presented quite a gay appearance in his cut-away velvet coat and his cane and fashionable hat, and with his moustaches carefully curled. He did not remove his hat, but looked round upon the room and its poor furnishings superciliously, with the air of a suzerain; and looked also at Muzzy with more than usual interest.

"Will you take a seat, sir?" asked Muzzy humbly, and with inward trepidation; for any occurrence out of the usual run of things filled him with fear.

Mr. Sheldrake seated himself by the table and took up the empty glass. "Been drinking, Muzzy?"

"No, sir, no," replied Muzzy, striving to look Mr. Sheldrake in the face as he told the untruth, but failing most signally. "I've given it up, sir, I've given it up."

Mr. Sheldrake smiled and nodded, as much as to say, "I know you are lying, but it's of no consequence;" and said aloud, with another disparaging look round the apartment, "Not a very handsome lodging, old man."

"As good as I can afford, sir," said Muzzy.

"You sly old dog," said Mr. Sheldrake merrily; "it's my opinion you have a pot of money put by somewhere."

"No, sir, indeed, sir, no; if I had, I should live in a better place than this."

"A flower, eh?" taking up the flower which Muzzy had bought for Lizzie. "You amorous old dog! What lady fair is this for?"

"For a friend who lives in the next room."

"I thought you told me you had no friends," said Mr. Sheldrake, with a swift but searching glance at Muzzy's drooping form.

"More I have, sir; only this one, a good girl who tidies up my place, and cooks a bit for me now and then. I told you the truth, sir. I have not known her long."

"Can she hear us talk, this charmer of yours?"

"She's not at home, sir."

"But if she came in quietly--women are sly ones, some of them; like cats--could she hear us?"

"No, sir, not when the door is shut."

Mr. Sheldrake rose and closed the door.

"Now, Muzzy, let's to business."

"Yes, sir."

"I haven't come here for nothing to-night, old man. You're getting too old for the work at the office—"

"Don't say that, sir," implored Muzzy; "don't say that!"

"Don't put yourself in a flurry old man. We want younger heads than yours now; they're looking sharper after us than they used to do, and in the case of a blow-up they'd frighten all sorts of things out of you. The fact is, we're going to break up the office here, and start a new one in Scotland. But I've something better in view for you, if I thought I could depend upon you."

"Don't think, sir; be sure. I'll do anything you tell me. You'll find the old man faithful to the last. I didn't think you'd throw me off, sir; you're not that sort."

"I suppose you would be faithful, as it would be for your interest to be so. You'd go to the dogs fast enough if I threw you off. And if I thought you were not to be trusted—"

Mr. Sheldrake did not finish his speech, but he had said enough to strike terror to Muzzy, who sat before him shaking and trembling with fear.

"I asked you," continued Mr. Sheldrake, after a sufficient pause, "a little while ago if it was possible you could keep sober were it worth your while."

"I remember, sir."

"And you told me, as you told me just now, that you had given up drink."

Muzzy's only answer was a frightened, nervous look.

"Look here, old man," exclaimed Mr. Sheldrake sternly, "once and for all--no more of your lies to me. You've been drinking to-night. I saw you hide the bottle as I came into the room."

"There's no concealing anything from you, sir," said Muzzy, in an imploring tone. "I felt lonely, and I *did* buy a little--not much, upon my soul, sir!--and I tried to keep from it, but wasn't quite able. If Lizzie had been here—"

"Lizzie?"

"The girl in the next room, sir. If she had been at home I shouldn't have tasted a drop. But what can an old man do, in such a place as this, with not a soul to speak to? It is a terrible lonely life, sir, and grows worse and worse as one grows older. If I wasn't afraid, I'd kill myself, but I'm frightened of death--I'm frightened of death."

Muzzy shook and shuddered and raised his feeble hand; had he been alone, with this fear upon him, he would undoubtedly have emptied his bottle of gin in a very short time. Mr. Sheldrake, with an air of thoughtfulness, lit a cigar, and slowly paced the room for a few moments. Pausing before the trembling old man, he said,

"This girl Lizzie, how old is she?"

"About eighteen I should say, sir; but I don't exactly know."

"Where are her parents?"

"She has none, sir."

"Does she live alone?"

"Yes, sir."

"How does she get her living?"

"By the sewing-machine, sir; and sometimes goes out to work."

The sound of laughing voices on the stairs stopped this cross-examination. A look of astonishment flashed into the eyes of Mr. Sheldrake.

"Who's that?" he asked abruptly.

"It must be Lizzie," answered Muzzy; "no one else but her and me lives on this floor."

"Come and listen--quick! Come and listen!"

In his impatience he almost dragged Muzzy to the door. The persons outside were laughing and talking on the landing.

"Yes, it is Lizzie," said the old man.

"And the other?" questioned Mr. Sheldrake, with strange eagerness. "The other, who is he?"

An expression of displeasure, almost of envy, passed across Muzzy's face. "It's a young man who comes to see her sometimes."

"Her lover?" Muzzy did not reply, and Mr. Sheldrake demanded again impatiently, "Her lover?"

"I suppose so," answered Muzzy reluctantly; "it looks like it."

"Do you know him--what is he like?"

"I haven't seen him, but I know his voice; I hear it often enough."

Mr. Sheldrake laughed--a triumphant, self-satisfied laugh, as if he had made a gratifying discovery. By this time the persons outside had entered Lizzie's room; the listeners heard the door close.

"Muzzy, old man," cried Mr. Sheldrake heartily; but he checked himself suddenly, and opening the door, stepped quietly into the passage, and listened to the voices in Lizzie's room. Returning with a beaming face, he repeated, "Muzzy, old man! the time has come for you to turn over a new leaf."

"I am quite ready, sir," acquiesced Muzzy, without the slightest consciousness of his patron's meaning.

CHAPTER XX

AN UNEXPECTED PROPOSITION.

But although the tone of Muzzy's acquiescence in the turning over of a new leaf was almost abject, his manner denoted inward disturbance. His restless eyes became more restless in the endeavour to look steadily into Mr. Sheldrake's face, and his lips twitched nervously as he passed the back of his hand across them with the air of one who is thirsty. The sudden interest which Mr. Sheldrake exhibited in Lizzie and her lover was evidently distressing to him, and he waited anxiously for an explanation. Mr. Sheldrake did not notice these symptoms; he was too much engrossed in his own musing, the satisfactory nature of which was evidenced by the bright look he turned upon Muzzy.

"This girl, this Lizzie," he said, following the current of his thoughts, "who has no parents—she has none?"

"None, sir."

"Must find it dull work living up in a garret by herself."

"Lizzie is happy enough," said Muzzy; "I have never heard her complain; she is a good girl, sir."

"Doubtless; but nevertheless would jump at the opportunity of living in a pretty detached house in the suburbs, say in St. John's-wood or Kensington, or better still near to the river--a pretty house, cosily furnished, with a garden round it. How would that suit you, old man?"

Muzzy stared in amazement at his employer, who continued gaily,

"Respectably dressed, living a quiet respectable life, as a widower, say with an only child, a daughter—"

"Sir!" exclaimed Muzzy, rising in his agitation.

"Steady, old man! A daughter ready-made, Lizzie the charmer--what can be better? If you object to father and daughter say uncle and niece; it will serve the purpose equally well. Fifty neat stories can be made up to suit the case, if there is need of explanation. Of course it will not be kept secret that the man who enables you to do this is Mr. David Sheldrake--that he is your best friend--and that in your declining days (excuse me for referring to the unpleasant fact) you

owe it to him that you are enabled to live in ease and comfort."

"I don't understand, sir."

"It isn't so very difficult, either. I want a place where I can come for an hour's quiet now and again, and where my friends would be welcome. You have served me well up to this point—"

"I have tried to do so, sir," murmured Muzzy.

"And in serving me well, have served yourself at the same time. Continue to do so, but ask no questions, and don't look a gift horse in the mouth." (This was somewhat sternly spoken; for notwithstanding Muzzy's humble acquiescence in his employer's plans, there was something in his manner that did not please Mr. Sheldrake.) "I may have a purpose to serve in what I propose, and I may not. That is my business. The prospect I open out to you is not an unpleasant one. It is better than the workhouse." (Muzzy shivered.) "I will put you in such a house as I have described, where you may enjoy the comforts of a home, instead of living the pig's life you are living now. But only on the understanding, mind you, that Lizzie lives with you." (The same increased restlessness in Muzzy's eyes, the same nervous twitching of his lips, the same action of his hand across his parched mouth, were observable in Muzzy's manner, at this fresh reference to Lizzie.) "Tell her that a stroke of good fortune has fallen to you suddenly, and that you owe it to me to give or to withhold. Ask her to share your home as your daughter or your niece. You want nothing from her. If she wishes to continue her needlework, let her do so; it will be a pleasanter place to do it than here, and it will keep her in pocket-money. As for you, I promise that you shall not be quite idle; for I intend to pay you your salary, besides keeping the house, and you must do something to earn it. I daresay we shall start a new firm, at the new address, one, say, that undertakes discretionary investments--a good game, old man" (this with a laugh)--"and so shall manage to pay expenses. Then if you like to do a little private betting on your own account, you can do so. You may make a hit with that system of yours which you say you have discovered."

"I could make a fortune, sir," cried Muzzy eagerly, "a fortune, if I had a little money to speculate with."

"So that's settled," said Mr. Sheldrake easily, "and you can speak to Lizzy to-night."

But Muzzy's diversion from the cause of his uneasiness was only momentary.

"I thank you, sir," he said, hesitating over his words, "for all this. Whatever position you place me in, I shall endeavour to serve you faithfully."

"It will be your interest to do so," was the masterful rejoinder, "or something unpleasant might happen."

"But I want to ask you—"

"I told you not to ask questions, old man," interrupted Mr. Sheldrake, with a frown.

"I must ask you this one," said Muzzy, with a courage which surprised even himself.

"If you must, you must. What is it?"

"Lizzie's a good girl, sir."

"Who said she wasn't?"

"She has been almost a daughter to me, sir. I have lived a lonely life for many, many years, until she took the room next to me, and then after a little while everything seemed changed. If you were to ask me who in the whole world I would sooner serve than any other, I would mention her--excepting you, sir, of course."

"What are you driving at, old man?"

"Rather than any harm should come to her through me, I would never see her again. I would go away. And you don't know, sir, what it is to live alone; to feel that you are growing older and older, and to be tormented with bad dreams and bad fancies; and not to have one person in the world to give you a smile or a cheerful word."

"Drives you to drink, eh?"

"What else can a lonely man do, sir?"

"That's just the reason I'm offering you this chance with Lizzie, and just the reason why you should jump at it. But you haven't asked me your question yet."

Muzzy could not for a few moments muster sufficient courage to put it; but at last he said in an imploring tone,

"You don't mean any harm to Lizzie, sir?"

Mr. Sheldrake laughed loud and laughed long; he seemed to be relieved from an embarrassment by Muzzy's question.

"Why, man," he said boisterously, "I've never set eyes on this charmer of yours, so how can I mean any harm to her? Nay, more; I should not have the slightest objection to this lover of hers who's chatting with her now visiting her at the house—"

"I don't want him there," cried Muzzy jealously.

"He'll come, depend upon it, old man. Why, Muzzy, if you were not too old to play the lover, I should say you were jealous. Let the youngsters alone; let them enjoy themselves. You were young yourself once, and I've no doubt played the gay Lothario often enough. Let me see--Muzzy means Musgrave, doesn't it?"

"That's my name, sir."

"Well, Mr. Musgrave, I'll wish you good-night. You can report progress to me at the office to-morrow. Show me a light."

Muzzy waited on his patron with the candle until Mr. Sheldrake was out of the house; then listened for a moment in the passage to ascertain if Lizzie's companion was still with her, and hearing the sound of conversation, returned to his room, leaving the door ajar. The prospect opened to him by Mr. Sheldrake was very pleasant. A house in the suburbs, with a garden, and with Lizzie for a companion--it was paradise. "I should like to live by the riverside," he thought; then looked at his shabby clothes, and at his worn face in a cracked looking-glass, and wondered whether Mr. Sheldrake was really in earnest. "I never saw him so serious as he was to-night," he muttered. "He has some new money-making scheme in his head, and he wants the old man's assistance. Yes, that is it. I thought at first that he meant harm to Lizzie; and rather than that, rather than that—" he thought out the alternative, still looking in the glass. "As father and daughter," he said. "Father and daughter!" What memories of the past did those words conjure up? If any, not pleasant ones. For he sighed and grew more thoughtful, and, letting the glass slide upon the table, covered his eyes with his hand, and looked through the darkness into the time gone by. Into life's seasons. Spring, when the buds were coming. Yes. Summer, when the buds had blossomed. No. The leaves withered as they grew. Autumn. Cold, despairing, cheerless. Winter. It was winter now, and no sweet winds came from the time gone by to temper the bleak present. His musings were disturbed by the opening of Lizzie's door. "Good night," he heard the man say. "Good night," Lizzie replied, in a pleasant voice. Silence then, for a few moments; and then Lizzie's voice asking in the passage,

"Daddy, are you awake?"

"Yes, Lizzie; come in."

CHAPTER XXI.

LIZZIE TELLS A VERY SIMPLE STORY.

Smiling youth and wasted age stood gazing at each other for a moment. The girl's cheeks were flushed; bright happiness danced in her eyes. She came like a sunbeam into the room; joyous light and life irradiated from her.

She was a picture of neatness and prettiness; she was dressed in a pretty-coloured stuff dress, and a piece of blue ribbon round her neck, to which a locket was attached, gave the slightest suspicion of coquettishness to her appearance. She held a candlestick in her hand, but the candle in it was not lighted. Although she stood still for a brief space, gazing at the old man, her thoughts were not upon him There was a listening look in her face, and as she raised her hand she murmured, "I wonder! I wonder!" and said aloud in soft tones,

"May I look out of your window, daddy?"

Muzzy's window looked upon the street. Lizzie, not waiting for permission, went to the window, and looked out, and stood there in silence so long, that Muzzy shuffled to her side. He saw nothing, however, for the form which Lizzie had been watching was out of sight. If she had spoken her thoughts, the words would have been: "The dear fellow! It does my heart good to see him linger about the house. I used to see that with Mary, and Mary used to watch through the blind." (Here, to be faithful to her musings, would have come a laugh that was almost a whisper--like a ripple on a lake--like a gurgling stream dancing down a hill.) "He turned back three times to look at the house. Now, if he had known that I was here, he wouldn't have gone away for a long time. How handsome he is!"

A deeper flush was in her cheek, and her eyes sparkled still more brightly, as with a happy

sigh she turned from the window to Muzzy, who was standing by her side.

"You got my key, daddy?" she said.

"Yes, my dear, thank you."

"Did you come home early?"

"At about ten o'clock, my dear."

"Did you see any one? Did anybody ask for me?"

"Nobody asked of me, Liz. You expected somebody, then?"

"O, no; but I wish I had been at home."

She dismissed the subject with a light shake of the head, and said, smiling,

"You've had company, daddy."

"Yes, my dear," he replied, with a wistful look at her pretty face--a strangely jealous look, too, which seemed to imply that he would have been better pleased if she were a little less bright.

"Nice company?" she asked.

"A gentleman--one who has been kind to me."

She nodded with conscious grace, and stood before the old man with an assertion of prettiness upon her which heightened the contrast between her graceful person and his unattractive form. Not that the contrast was in her mind; she did not think of it, but it would have been forced upon an observer.

"We heard you talking," she said.

"You have had company also, Lizzie."

"O, yes." With a blush and a smile.

"We heard *you* talking, my dear."

"I suppose we made a great noise; Some One talks very loud sometimes."

"You did not make a noise, my dear, but we heard you. Lizzie," he said, as if the thought had just occurred to him, "your candle was out when you came in."

"It went out in the passage, daddy."

"Or some one blew it out, Lizzie."

"Yes; perhaps--Some One--did." With the pleasantest little laugh in the world.

"Preferring to talk in the dark," he suggested, in a singular tone of discontent.

"Yes; perhaps--Some One--does."

Again the pleasant little laugh. That, which was like music, and her joyous happy manner, and her clear voice and pretty ways, made a home of the otherwise lonely room.

"We have been to the theatre to-night," she said; "Some One and me. I should like to be an actress. I think I should have made a good one."

She let her hair fall loose as she spoke, and put on an arch look to provoke a favourable verdict. Muzzy's hitherto dull mood brightened under her influence.

"What theatre did you go to, my dear?"

"To the Olympic. We saw Daisy Farm. Isn't it a pretty name? Now, one would fancy that everybody was happy at Daisy Farm, because of the name; but it wasn't so. They were all in trouble until the end of the play, and then something very unexpected happened, and everything came right. Is it so in real life?"

"I don't think so."

"But it's nice in a play. I wonder how ever they can cram such a lot of things in a couple of hours; and it all seems so natural! There was one part that Some One did not like; it was where a young man who had been doing wrong--stealing money from his master--robbed his own father (as we all thought he was), so that he could put the money back. Some One got regularly excited over it; but it turned out that the man he robbed wasn't his father, so *that* was all right. When that was shown and the young man got off, Some One clapped so, that everybody looked at him.

He lost his sweetheart, though."

"Who?"

"The young man in the play. As we were walking home, I said to Some One, 'Supposing that was you, would you have liked to lose your sweetheart in that way?' He turned quite white at the idea, and he looked at me so strangely, and said, 'But you wouldn't throw me off as that heartless girl did in the play, would you, Lizzie?' I said, 'No; that I wouldn't.' 'Not even if I was as bad as that young fellow?' asked Some One, to try me. And then I said—But you can guess what I said, daddy. I don't think I'm a changeable girl, like some."

"Come and sit down, Lizzie," said Muzzy; "I want to talk to you."

The girl obeyed, and as Muzzy did not immediately speak, she fell a-musing. Sweet thoughts were hers evidently, for presently the laugh that was like music came from her, evoked by something pleasant that she had seen or heard in her fancies. The sound aroused her, and looking up she saw Muzzy holding out the flower he had brought home for her.

"For you, Liz."

"O, thank you, dad."

She held it up by the side of her hair to admire it, and asked how it looked there. Out of his full-hearted admiration of her pretty ways he had but one answer, of course. Then she placed it in the bosom of her dress, which was slightly open at the throat, and as the leaves touched her fair akin, she looked down and smiled both on the flower and herself.

"Some One would be jealous," she said, "if he saw it there; especially after what he brought me to-night. Wait a minute; I'll show you."

She ran out of the room, and returned with a large bunch of flowers, fresh and fragrant like herself.

"Are they not beautiful? Am I not a lucky girl? Just think! Two presents of flowers in one night!"

"Mine is a poor one, Lizzie."

"It is very pretty, and I shall put it in water all by itself."

She selected a flower from the bunch, and placed it in her bosom by the side of the other; then bent down until her lips touched it.

"You are fond of flowers, my dear."

"I love everything that is bright. I like to bury my face in them, like this, and shut my eyes, and think. Such beautiful thoughts come!"

Suiting the action to the word, she buried her face in the flowers, and saw pictures of the future as she wished it to be. It was filled with sweet promise, as it nearly always is to youth. And if fulfilment never comes, the dreams bring happiness for the time.

"Try!" she said, raising her face and holding out the flowers to him.

To please her, he closed his eyes among the leaves. But the visions that came to his inner sense of sight were different from those she had seen. For her the future. For him the past. The clouds through which he looked were dark and sombre; and as glimpses of long-forgotten times flashed through them, he sighed as one might have sighed who, wandering for a generation through a strange country filled with discordant and feverish circumstance, finds himself suddenly in a place where all is hushed, and where the soft breeze brings to him the restful sound of sweet familiar bells. But darker clouds soon rolled over these memories, blotting them out.

"Lizzie," he said "suppose you had the chance of living away from the dusty streets in a pretty little house, surrounded by the flowers you love so well!"

"How delightful!" she exclaimed, with her face among the flowers again.

"Open your eyes, Lizzie, while I speak."

"Wait a minute, daddy. Don't speak for sixty seconds. I'm looking at the house."

Muzzy remained silent until she spoke again.

"I see it," she said, "peeping out among the flowers. It is built of old red brick, the windows are very small, and vines are creeping all over the walls."

Thus did her fancy reproduce for her the picture of a country house, which doubtless she had seen at one time or another. Even when she opened her eyes, she saw the vision hanging, as it

were in the clouds of a bright memory.

"How would you like to live in such a house, Liz?"

"How would I like to live in a rainbow?" was her merry rejoinder.

"But what I say I mean, my dear."

"And what I say I don't--that is, sometimes. Do you really, really mean it though, dad?"

"Yes, my dear. The gentleman who was with me to-night--a good friend--has opened out such a prospect to me."

"O, I am so glad; for this isn't very nice for you!" she said, glancing round the room.

"Nor for you, my dear," he replied, looking wistfully at her. "Don't you wish for something better?"

"I wish for a great many things--holidays, new dresses, and new hats--and I should like a good deal of money. If fifty pounds were to tumble down the chimney now, shouldn't we be surprised? Ah, but what's the use of wishing, daddy!"

"You may have some of these things, Liz, if you like." His serious manner made her more serious and attentive. "Such a house as you saw just now you may have, perhaps. It depends upon you whether I accept the offer that has been made to me to-night."

"Upon me!" she exclaimed.

"Do you remember what I was when you first came here?"

"Why, the same as you are now," she replied, with a laughing evasion of what he was referring to.

"No, my dear," he said humbly, taking her hand in his; "I was a lonely miserable man. There was no light in my life. I used to come home night after night, and drink."

She placed her fingers on his lips, to stop the farther confession; but he gently removed them.

"I had nothing else to do. Bad fancies used to come, and I drank to drive them away; and the more I drank, the worse they became. I don't know what might have been the end of me. This room used to be full of terrible shadows creeping over the walls. I saw them in the dark, stealing upon me. One night, when these fancies were upon me, driving me almost mad--how long ago was it, Lizzie?--I heard a little voice singing in the next room. I didn't know any one had moved in until I heard your voice, and I crept into the passage and listened to you, my dear, and blessed you--ay, I did Lizzie! and I fell asleep with your singing in my ears."

"And I came out," she said, humouring him, "and saw you."

"And saw me, and pitied me," he continued. "I wonder you were not afraid. You came into my room, and saw the bottle on the table; there was liquor in it, and you asked me if you might take it away, and I said Yes. Then you tidied up the room, and made the bed, and I sat wondering at your goodness, and wondering why the shadows didn't come while you were with me. That was the commencement of it, Lizzie; and so we became friends, and my life was not so desolate as it used to. You brightened it for me, by dear."

"No, it wasn't me, daddy; it was yourself--it was leaving off that—that—"

"Drink," he added, as he hesitated. "It was driving me mad!"

"And you have left it off, daddy, and that's the reason why you are better and happier."

"Yes, Lizzie," he said, with a guilty look at her, for the flat bottle, half filled with gin, was in his pocket as he spoke. "I have kept my promise."

"So it's not me, after all," she exclaimed merrily, "that you have to thank."

"It is you, Lizzie. If it were not for you, I should go back to my old ways again; it is only you who keep me from them. I know now what it is to have some one to care for me; if I had known it before--O, if I had known it before! If when we were young, we could see what was before us!"

"Have you never had any one care for you, daddy?" she asked pityingly.

"Don't ask me, child. I mustn't look back--I daren't look back. But it seems to me, Lizzie, that I never knew how dreadful a lonely life was until you came and showed me the misery of it. I cannot leave you now, Lizzie; I should become I am frightened to think what."

His voice, his hands, his whole body trembled as he pleaded for companionship, for protection from his torturing fancies. She was his shelter, and he clung to her. His manhood had been like a ship tossed amidst storms, overhung by dark clouds, battered and bruised by sunken reefs.

Suddenly a rift of light appeared, and the old worn ship floated into peaceful waters, and lay there with an almost painful sense of rest upon it--painful because of the fear that the light might vanish as suddenly as it had appeared, and the storm break again.

"What is it you want me to do, daddy?"

"To come and live with me, my dear, if I am fortunate enough to get this house, where there will be rest; to share my home, as my daughter."

"As your daughter!" (Very, very softly spoken, musingly, wonderingly. The turning over of a new leaf, indeed, for her who had never known a father's love.) "Does *he* know of this--your friend?"

"It was he who suggested it when I spoke of you. He proposed it for my sake."

"It is kind of him; he must have a noble nature. But I don't know, daddy, I don't know!"

"Don't know what, my dear?"

"Whether you would be pleased with me--whether you would be as fond of me as you are now. Ah, you smile, but you might be mistaken in me. I like to have my own way, and I am ill-tempered when I don't. Then, you know, Some One must come and see me."

"If you say so, my dear," he humbly assented, "I can't object."

"I think he would like it," she mused; "he is fond of nice things and nice places."

"Tell me, Lizzie--I have never asked, but I may, because I am an old man--is Some One your sweetheart?"

"Couldn't you guess that, daddy?"

"Yes, my dear, but I wanted to be certain. Do you love him?"

Shyly, tenderly, archly she looked at the old man, and answered him with her eyes. They fell into silence for a little while after that, the mind of each being occupied.

"You don't remember your father, Lizzy?"

"No."

"Your mother?"

"No, I never saw her."

"Have you any other friends besides Some One?"

"Yes, there's Mary, and my best friend, my aunt. She has been very kind to me, and must come and see me too. Indeed, I must ask her permission, for she has been like a mother to me. Mother! ah, to have a good kind mother to love, and who loves you--what happiness! I have dreamt of it often--have wished that such a happiness was mine. But it never was, daddy--never, never was, and never, never can be!"

"Lizzie," he said timidly, "tell me something of your life before I knew you."

In their new relations towards each other she had seated herself at his feet. Her hands were clasped in her lap, and her eyes were towards the flowers in her breast. Graceful as the leaves of the flowers was this young girl; not more delicate was their colour than the colour in her face. The tender contact of this fresh young life was a new revelation to him, and he held his breath for fear he should awake and find that he was dreaming.

"Of my life!" she mused, speaking more to herself than to him. "What can I remember? How young was I as I see myself, in my first remembrance, playing with two other children in a field near the house in which I lived? Two years, or a little more. The house belonged to Mrs. Dimmock, and I did not know then that she was not my mother; but as I grew I learned--I don't know how; it wasn't told me, but the knowledge came--that the little girls I played with were not my sisters, although they were her children. Mrs. Dimmock was not a very kind woman, at least not to me. She would pet and fondle her own children, and I used to cry in secret because of it, and because she did not love me as she did them. My aunt came to see me often, and often brought me toys and sweets. If she had been my mother she could not have been kinder to me, but then of course I should have lived with her. She saw that I fretted because it wasn't the same with me as it was with the other children, and she tried in every way to make up for it; but she couldn't. What I wanted was a mother that I could love with all my heart, and who could love me with all hers--as Mrs. Dimmock loved her children, although she was harsh and unkind to me. My aunt did not know that she did not treat me well; I didn't tell her. When I grew up, I went to a day-school, and learnt other things besides reading and writing; I think it was in that way, trying to make me superior to other girls, that my aunt endeavoured to lessen any sorrow I may have felt. I can play the piano, daddy--you wouldn't have thought that, would you! Mrs. Dimmock was

jealous, I could see, because I was learning more than her girls; and the girls, too, didn't like it. I think it was partly maliciousness on my part that made me proud to know more than they did; if they had been kind to me, I shouldn't have cared to triumph over them in that way. Well, everything went on so until I was fourteen years of age, when one day something occurred. I hadn't been expected home so soon; the street-door was open, and as I went into the passage I heard my aunt and Mrs. Dimmock speaking together, and from my aunt's voice I guessed that she was crying. 'I can't help your misfortunes,' Mrs. Dimmock said; 'I've got children of my own, and I must look after them first. I'm keeping the girl now for less than her food costs; she eats more than my two girls put together.' I knew that she meant me by 'the girl,' and I turned hot and cold, for I felt like a charity girl. Mrs. Dimmock spoke very spitefully, and I knew that she did so because I gave myself superior airs over her daughters. I daresay it was wrong of me to do so, but I couldn't help it, they were such mean things! One of them let a girl in school be beaten for something that she did, and I knew it. But we used to quarrel about all sorts of things, and of course Mrs. Dimmock always took their parts, so that you may guess, daddy, I was not very happy. I heard sufficient of the conversation between my aunt and Mrs. Dimmock to make me tingle all over. It served me right, for listeners never *do* hear any good of themselves; but it was as well I did hear, notwithstanding, as you will see presently. My aunt was in arrears for my board and lodging, and she was compelled to hear patiently--for my sake, I felt it!--all the hard things that Mrs. Dimmock said to her. 'I shall be able to pay you by and by,' my aunt said, O, so humbly! 'I can't afford to wait till by and by, ma'am,' Mrs. Dimmock answered, 'and I can't live on promises--they're like pie-crusts, made to be broken. It is a shame that such a big girl as her should be eating charity bread.' Just think, daddy, how I felt when I heard that! 'If she can't pay for her bread-and-butter, let her work for it, if she ain't too fine and proud. If she wants to live on charity, she must go somewhere else and get it; I can't afford to give it to her.' I think, daddy, that if I had been on fire, I. couldn't have run out of the house faster than I did. I had an idea at first of running clean away, but the thought of how kind my aunt had been to me prevented me. Instead of that, I watched for her, and saw her come out of the house and look anxiously about for me. She was always very pale, but her face was whiter than I had ever seen it before. She brightened up when she saw me, and I drew her a long way from the house before I would let her talk. When she began, how I pitied her! She couldn't get along at all, and would have gone away without telling me anything, if I hadn't said that I was in the passage and heard her and Mrs. Dimmock speaking together about me. She looked so frightened when I told her, that I was frightened myself; she was dreadfully anxious to know all that I had heard, and seemed to be relieved that I hadn't heard any more. I supposed that Mrs. Dimmock had been saying worse things of me than I had already heard, and I wasn't sorry that I went out of the house when I did. 'And so you are poor, aunty,' I said to her, 'and I have made you so!' 'No, my dear, no, Lizzie, no, my darling!' she said eagerly. 'You haven't made me so; I had enough, more than enough, and to spare, and I was putting by money for you, my dearest, and saving up for you. But like a foolish woman I put it into a bank, and they have robbed me and a thousand other poor creatures. The bankers were thieves, my darling, thieves! and there's no law to touch them, and I can't get my poor little bit of money out of their pockets! I thought I should have gone mad when I went yesterday, and found the place shut up; and it was no consolation to me to find others that had been robbed hanging about the great stone walls--for I thought: of you, darling, and I was too wretched to feel for others.' I tried to console her. 'Never mind, aunt,' I said; 'you have been very, very kind to me, and I shall never be able to pay you.' 'Yes, you can, my dearest,' she said, crying over me as I kissed her; 'you are paying me now, over and over again.' Then I said I wouldn't be a burden to her any longer, and that Mrs. Dimmock was right when she said that I ought to work for my living. My aunt cried more and more at this, and begged me not to think of it; but my mind was made up. What was to become of me by and by, I thought, unless I learnt to depend upon myself; and when Mrs. Dimmock the next day said that I ought to go into service, I determined to try and be something better than a servant. Well, I was very lucky, daddy. I set my wits to work, and I heard that a woman who kept a little milliner's shop wanted an apprentice. I went to her, and she was so pleased with me that she agreed to take me into the house, and keep me, and teach me the business. I was to be with her for four years, and I wasn't to have any wages during the whole time. I served my time faithfully, and my aunt gave me more than enough money to keep me in clothes. It pleased her to see me look nice, and I liked it myself, daddy; I like nice clothes and things! At the end of the four years, a friend in the same business, Mary--you've heard me speak of her often, daddy--proposed that we should live together; said that we could take one room, which would be enough for us, and that we could get enough work to keep us. There was something so delightful in the idea of being my own mistress, that I jumped for joy at the proposal, and without consulting my aunt I consented. We took a room very near here, daddy, and paid six shillings a week for it. All this was done very quickly, and then I wrote to my aunt to come and see me. She came, but took it so much to heart that I should make so serious a change in my life without consulting her, that I promised never to do anything of the sort again without asking her advice. We were very comfortable together that night, I remember, and she gave us our first order for two black dresses. So Mary and me jogged along. Although our living did not cost us much, we had to be very careful, as we could not earn a great deal of money. Sometimes trade was slack, and we were without work; but my aunt took care that I should always have a little money in my purse. She came to see me more often than she used to do when I was at Mrs. Dimmock's. I knew why. She was uneasy at the idea of two girls living together; thought we couldn't take care of ourselves. That's why, daddy, I think she would be glad to consent to my living in the pretty little house you spoke of. It is almost too good to be true, though. Is it really true?"

"It is, my dear," replied Muzzy.

"Then," continued Lizzie, "Mary got a sweetheart, which was nice for me as well as for her, for he used to take us both out. Sometimes, you know, daddy, I wouldn't go; I pretended that I was very busy, and had a great deal to do--and they had to go out by themselves. Nearly always when they came home I had a bit of supper ready for them; and when Mary's sweetheart went away after supper, Mary used to peep through the blind, and watch him standing in the street looking at the house and up at the window as if he was so much in love with them that he couldn't go away."

"As you did to-night, Lizzie, when you came in."

She gave him a sly happy look.

"Yes, as I did to-night, daddy. I haven't much more to tell. Mary got married, and then I came here to live, and that's the end of my story."

"That picture in your room," he said, "is the portrait of your aunt, I suppose."

"Yes, but you will scarcely recognise her by it when you see her. She is not like the same woman. She has had some great trouble, I am sure, although she never speaks of it. I have tried often to imagine what it must have been, but I have never been able to find out."

"And Mary--is she happy?"

"O, yes, very, very happy. She will have a baby soon."

A soft light stole into her face, and her fingers closed tenderly on the locket hanging at her bosom. Muzzy noticed the action. "That's a new locket, Lizzie."

"Yes; Some One gave it to me. If I am to live with you as your daughter, you ought to know his name."

"What is it?" he asked, seeing that Lizzie expected him to take an interest in her lover.

"Alfred. Isn't it a nice name?"

"Yes," he muttered, in a slightly troubled voice.

She took the locket from her neck, and handed it to him. He opened it, and gazed at it long and earnestly, and in deep silence. Perhaps it was the prospect of the new life that was before him that caused him to start when Lizzie addressed him presently, and to look around him with the bewildered air of one suddenly aroused from sleep.

"You are tired, daddy," she said, taking the locket from his hand; "it is time to go to bed."

He bade her good-night, almost mechanically, and when he was alone, sank into his chair, with an oppression of vague thought upon him. Long before he retired to rest, Lizzie was asleep, dreaming of her Lover.

CHAPTER XXII.

LOVE LINKS.

If integrity and upright conduct be commendable qualities, no man should covet the distinction of being considered a man of the world. And yet to be known as such is to command admiration. But then the world--meaning ourselves--often finds it convenient not to examine too curiously. The man of the world whose reputation rests upon a sound foundation is sure to get the best of his neighbours. He is shrewd and sharp and cunning, and, like the fretful porcupine, so armed at all points as to be almost certain of wounding whatever comes in contact with him. Frankness beams in his eye, but calculation sits in his soul; he gets information out of you by side strokes, and profits by it; he brings you round by the artfullest of roads to the point he is working for; he pumps you dry so skilfully that you do not feel thirsty in the process; and he leaves you under the impression that he is the most amiable of companions. Fortunate it is for you if farther experience of his amiability do not compel you, with groans, to reverse this verdict. Attached to the popular interpretation of "man of the world" are profound and puzzling depths. A man fails in business, lifts up his eyes, looks mournfully around him, buys sackcloth and ashes, sighs frequently, is soul-despondent, grows a little shabby, meets his creditors, obtains his release, and, hey, presto! smilingly re-enters, the circle from which he has been temporarily banished--re-enters it calm and confident, with no sign of defeat upon him. He is received with open arms, for it is whispered that he has "means;" and if one says to another, "Is it not strange that Mr. Plausible, who was in such difficulties last month, and was supposed to be ruined, should be living now in such good style?" it is ten to one that another answers, "He is a man of the world,

sir, a thorough man of the world;" and lifts his hat to Mr. Plausible, who just at that moment happens to pass by. See the other side of the picture. A man fails in business, is soul-crushed, looks mournfully about him, shrinks from his former friends, grows old quickly, sits in sackcloth and ashes, sinks down, down in the world, obtains his release after bitter struggling, and never raises his head again; one says to another, "Poor Mr. Straight! Regularly crushed, isn't he?" And another answers, "What else could be expected? Straight never *was* a man of the world;" and turns his back upon the unfortunate, who, just at that moment, happens to be coming towards them. To be a completely successful man of the world, one must be thoroughly selfish, often dishonest, often false, seldom conscientious, and the porcupine quills which guard his precious interests must be well sharpened. If now and then there is blood upon them, what matters? Blood is easily washed off--but they say the smell remains.

Mr. David Sheldrake was such a man. With his quills always sharpened and often drawing blood, he walked through life enjoying its good things, believing that when they did not come to him easily he had a right to appropriate them. The lives of some men present singular contradictions. Dishonest persons are often charitable and kindly-hearted. Thoroughpaced rogues are often good husbands and good fathers. Very few men see straight. Nearly every one of us has a moral squint. Not that the career of Mr. Sheldrake presented any such contradiction. If he had been married, he could not have been a good husband; if he had had children, he could not have been a good father: he was too selfish. He was one of those who never have stings of conscience, simply because he believed that he had a right to have and to enjoy whatever he desired. In his own class he was a triton among the minnows. It was not a very desirable class, nor were its manners and customs to be commended; the first grand aim of its members was not to do unto others as you would others should do unto you, but to do all others, and take care others should not do you. No form of cheating and rascality was too bad for them, if an honest penny could be turned by it; and it is a sad thing to be compelled to say that even the honour that can be found among thieves was very seldom to be found among them--thus showing their tribe to be special and distinctive. It was but a poor game, after all, for the majority of them; as can be seen by going to any race-course, and observing the ragged crew who, while the horses are being saddled and taking their preliminary canters, rush this way and that, and hustle each other, and push and elbow their way fiercely, almost madly, through the crowds of their excited brethren. Mr. Sheldrake was above this ragged crew; he floated while others sank. As a proof of his respectability, what better could be desired than the fact that he had been known to shake hands with lords, and had betted ponies and monkeys with them?

But, sharp and cunning as he was, armed at all points as he was, he had his vulnerable point. What man has not? Do you know of one? I do not. And you have but to find it out to shake the decorous owner from his propriety. Archimedes would have shaken the world itself, had you given him a convenient place for his lever and standing room for himself.

The weak spot in Mr. David Sheldrake's character was that he did not like to be beaten. If he set his heart ever so lightly upon a thing and found it difficult of accomplishment, he instantly grew earnest in the pursuit of it, however trivial it might be. When he first saw Lily in the Royal White Rose Music-hall he was attracted by her pretty face, and he thought it could be no difficult matter to gain her favour. He had been successful before--why not now? His free manners and free purse had been an open sesame to sham affection before to-day; they would not fail him with Lily. But although he paid her pretty compliments in his softest tone, they did not produce the impression he intended. Other girls had received such gratefully, and had been merry with him; but Lily had no word of response for his honeyed speech. She received his compliments in silence and with eyes cast down. Little by little he discovered the difficulty of the task he had almost unconsciously set himself, and the value of the prize increased. He worked himself into a state of enthusiasm concerning her, and tried to believe that his feeling was genuine. It was not possible that a nature so purely selfish as his could love sincerely; but it pleased him to set up sham sentiment in its place, and he said to himself more than once, in tones of self-applauding satisfaction, "I do believe, David, you love that little beauty."

Lily knew nothing of this, for Mr. Sheldrake, after the futile result of his first tender advances, became cautious in his behaviour to her; he saw that there was danger of starting the game, and he went roundabout to secure it. A shrewd worldly girl, in Lily's place, would have seen at once that here were too lovers for her to choose from--Felix and Mr. Sheldrake--and she might, had she been very worldly, have worked one against the other; but Lily was neither shrewd nor worldly. To elevate her to the position of a heroine is a difficult task, for she had no marked qualities to fit her for the distinction. She was not strong minded, nor wilful, nor hoydenish, nor very far-seeing, nor very clever. She required to be led; she was not strong enough to lead. She was capable of devotion, of much love, of personal sacrifice, and was rich in the possession of the tenderest womanly qualities--of those qualities which make the idea of woman cherished in the innermost heart of every man whose good fortune it is to have been associated at some time of his life with a loving tender nature. Many a man has been kept pure by the memory of such an association; and although the present and future generations may have the advantage of those that have gone before in a more early comprehension of practical matters, and in the possession of a keener sense of the value of worldly things, it is much to be feared that the good and tender influence of woman is on the wane, and that the idea of womanly gentleness and purity, which has given birth to so much that is beautiful in the best sense of the word, is dying in the light of something infinitely coarser and less beneficial. We admire the sunflower, but we love the daisy.

Yes; Lily was dreaming. She had discovered her Prince in the person of Felix. In her musings she made him the embodiment of all that was good and noble and gentle. He was her hero, and she moulded him to her fancy, and beautified him, and idealised him. She enshrined her idealism in her heart of hearts, and found her greatest pleasure in worshipping it. So do we all at some time of our lives set up images for ourselves, and worship them, and discover too often, alas! that the feet of our idols are made of clay. It must not be supposed that Lily was fated to make this desolating discovery respecting Felix; he was in every way worthy of the love of a pure-minded girl, of such a love as Lily crowned him with, and as she was in every way capable of, notwithstanding the vitiated atmosphere of the Royal White Rose Music-hall. That she was enabled to retain, untarnished, the simplicity of character which made her beautiful, was due no less to her own innate purity than to the influence of her grandfather, who from her infancy had watched and guarded her with jealous care. Lily did not pause to ask herself if it was love she felt for Felix; she was too contented with the present to analyse her feelings; happiness took possession of her when he was with her, and it was sufficient for her to sit and listen and silently worship. She delighted to hear the unstinted praise which her grandfather bestowed upon Felix in his absence, and she fed upon the words, secretly repeating them to herself again and again, and finding new meanings for them. When she read in book or paper of a generous-souled man, "Like Felix!" she whispered; or of a generous deed performed, "As Felix would do!" she whispered. Felix had no idea of the good things which were credited to him--had no idea, indeed, that he was the idol of the girl whom he had grown to love; for Lily kept her secret close, and only whispered it to herself, and mused over it in those moments of solitude which she made sacred by her thoughts. So time went on.

Happy as she was in her dream, her wakeful life contained disturbing elements. It distressed her to see a slow but steady estrangement growing between her brother and her grandfather; it did not find expression in open speech, but it was no less sure, notwithstanding. In thinking of the matter, as she often did, Lily could not resolve from which side the coldness first sprang. But it was certain that Alfred steadily avoided his grandfather, and was uneasy in the old man's society. Many times, when Lily and Alfred were conversing together, and when Alfred perhaps was building castles in the air with enthusiastic speech, the entrance of his grandfather drove him into silence, or into monosyllabic answers to the old man's inquiries. He resented the quietly-watchful manner with which the old man regarded him on those occasions, and sometimes would leave the room suddenly and fretfully. Up to this time the old man had avoided speaking to Lily upon the subject. He knew how Lily loved her brother, and that the growing estrangement would be made more painful to her by an explanation of his fears. But although Old Wheels seemed to be not satisfied with the progress Alfred was making, everything, to all outward appearance, was prospering with the young man. Despite a worn expression of anxiety which often stole into his features unaware, and which he threw off resolutely immediately he became conscious of it, his general manner was more cheerful and confident. He was more extravagant in his habits, and dressed better. Lily was delighted at this, but her grandfather did not share her delight. He found cause for disturbing thought in these signs of prosperity. Alfred coming home in a new suit of clothes caused him to remark,

"Another new suit of clothes, Alfred!"

"Yes, grandfather," was Alfred's reply, in a half-defiant, half-careless tone. "Can't do without clothes, you know."

"You had a new suit a very little while ago, Alfred."

"Well, sir! I didn't come to you for the money to pay for them."

The old man was always gentle in his manner, but Alfred took offence even at this. It would have better pleased the young man if his grandfather had openly quarrelled with him.

"I hope you are not getting into debt, my boy."

"Never fear, sir; I've paid for this suit, and the last one too."

And Alfred avoided farther conversation by leaving the old man abruptly. But to Lily he was more affectionate than ever, and spoke glowingly of the future and of the great things he was about to accomplish.

"More than half the people in the world are fools," he said arrogantly; "they walk about with their eyes shut."

It was useless for Lily to ask him for the application of such trite observations; he evaded her with light laughs, and, being much given to slang, declared that he would "show some of them the road. You'll see, Lily, one of these days; you'll see."

She liked to hear him speak like this, for his manner at these times was always bright and confident. She attempted on occasions to draw him into conversation about the growing estrangement between him and his grandfather; but he steadily refused to speak upon the subject, farther than to say that "grandfather is not treating me well; he suspects me of I don't know what, and it isn't likely that I'm going to stand it."

"Of what can he suspect you, Alfred?" asked Lily.

"That's where it is. That's what I ask myself, for he never tells me. The fact of it is, Lily, grandfather is an old man, and I'm a young one. You can't put an old head on young shoulders, you know. I'm fond of pleasure and of seeing a little bit of life. All young fellows are. He'll confess himself wrong about me one of these days, and then it will be all right. Until then I sha'n't bother myself about it, and don't you. Perhaps I've a secret, and he wants to know it."

"Have you a secret, Alfred? I thought you told me everything."

"I only said 'perhaps,' Lily. I'll tell you by-and-by, when the proper time comes."

"Then you really have one. Come"--coaxingly, and with her arm round his neck--"tell me, Alf, or shall I guess it?"

He looked at her hesitatingly, as if half tempted to tell her, but he resisted the inclination.

"Not now, Lily, not now.--Everybody's got a secret, and perhaps--mind, I only say perhaps--I've got mine. Girls have their secrets as well as men. All except you, Lily. You haven't got one, I know; you wouldn't keep a secret from me, I'll be bound."

Lily blushed, and felt like a traitor, but she did not answer. She almost guessed his secret, and was glad of it, for it was a new bond of union between them. But as hers was sacred, so she felt his to be; she kissed him tenderly, and, looking into his eyes, with all her heart in hers, read something there it thrilled her to see. Then Alfred showed her a new chain he had bought, and while she was admiring it, Old Wheels entered the room.

"Show it to grandfather, Alf," she said.

But Alfred buttoned his coat, and said that grandfather didn't take an interest in such things. He fretted, however, because the old man glanced at him somewhat sadly and significantly, and very soon found an excuse to leave.

"Alfred goes out a great deal now, Lily," said Old Wheels. "Do you know where he goes to?"

"No," replied Lily, "but I suspect--I suspect!" with an arch glance at her grandfather.

"What do you suspect, my dear?"

"You must guess for yourself, dear grandfather, for I know nothing--nothing yet. But supposing--just supposing, grandfather--that a young man has a portrait in his pocket which he looks at very often, and won't let anybody else see for the world--that is a sign, isn't it?"

She asked this with a sly look into her grandfather's face; he was silent for a while, and said presently,

"Alfred has such a portrait, Lily?"

"Perhaps," she said, in unconscious imitation of her brother; "mind, I only say perhaps."

A footfall on the stairs; a brighter flush on Lily's cheek; knock at the door, and Felix entered. Happy moments followed. There was no lack of conversation when these three were together. But Lily had her duties to perform, and within an hour they were walking towards the Royal White Rose, and Felix bade Lily good-night at the stage-door.

"She sings early to-night," said Old Wheels, as they lingered near the entrance to the hall, and watched the strangely-suggestive throng that found their business or pleasure there. The words of a poet came to Felix, and he murmured the lines,

"In the street the tide of being, how it surges, how it rolls!
God what base ignoble faces God! what bodies wanting souls!"

But Old Wheels interrupted him with,

"Not so, Felix; that is a poet's rhapsody, and not applicable here. Look around you; you will see but few base ignoble faces. Some of them might be taken as models for innocence, simplicity, guilelessness. See here, and here."

He indicated this girl and that, whose pretty features and the expression on them served to illustrate his meaning.

"No," he continued, "not bodies wanting souls. They are misguided, ill-taught, misdirected, the unhappy ones of a system which seems to create them and make them multiply. The light attracts them; they see only the glitter, and do not feel the flame until they fly to it gaily; when, bewildered and dazzled, they are burnt and die, or live maimed lives for the rest of their days."

"I did not quote those lines," said Felix, "with any distinct idea of their applicability to this scene. What follows will please you better:--

'Mid this stream of human being, banked by houses tall and grim,

Pale I stand this shining morrow, with a pant for woodlands dim;
To hear the soft and whispering rain, feel the dewy cool of leaves;
Watch the lightning dart like swallows round the brooding thunder-eaves;
To lose the sense of whirling streets 'mong breezy crests of hills,
Skies of larks, and hazy landscapes, with fine threads of silver rills;
Stand with forehead bathed in sunset on a mountain's summer crown,
And look up and watch the shadow of the great night coming down;
One great life in my myriad veins, in leaves, in flowers, in cloudy cars,
Blowing, underfoot, in clover; beating, overhead, in stars!'"

"How many men have such vague dreams," said Old Wheels, "dreams that they can scarcely understand and can but feebly express! We live in a world of shadows. Come home with me; I have something to give you."

They walked in silence to Soho, and when they were in the little house, the old man said, "I have avoided speaking to you upon a certain subject for more than one reason, but I was aware that the time must come when silence could no longer be maintained. Our acquaintance was commenced in a strange manner, and you have been to me almost a new experience. I have taken such pleasure in your society—"

"It gives me inexpressible pleasure," interrupted Felix, "to hear you say so."

"--That I have, with somewhat of a cowardly feeling, often restrained myself from speaking to you on the subject which was referred to by your father on the day I buried my daughter."

"Pray, sir—"

"Nay," interposed Old Wheels gently and firmly, "this conversation cannot be avoided, and we must speak plainly. Consider the position in which we stand to one another, and ask yourself whether, if you were in my place, you would not feel it due to yourself to act as I am doing. If you remember, you came into your father's room while we were speaking of a matter in which you were pecuniarily interested. Doubtless you were well acquainted with all the particulars of the affair."

"No, sir," exclaimed Felix, eagerly, "I knew comparatively nothing. But a few minutes before your arrival upon your sad mission, my father and I were speaking upon business matters--for the first and only time. I had been away from home nearly all my life, and all the expense of my education and living were borne by an uncle from whom I supposed I had expectations. He died suddenly, and I returned home, possessing certain ideas and certain habits not pleasing to my father. The day on which you came to the rectory was appointed by my father for our business interview, and then I learned that my uncle had not left any property, and that I was not to come into the magnificent fortune my father had anticipated for me. This did not affect me, and all that I knew of the matter you have referred to was that my uncle had left behind him, among his papers, a document which contained, as my father said, the recital of a singular story, and which, in my father's opinion, might be worth money to me. That is all that passed between us until your arrival."

"Until my arrival," said Old Wheels, taking up the thread of the narrative, "When you heard from my lips that it was Lily's father who had brought this shame upon us. But doubtless, after my departure, you learned all the particulars from the document left by your uncle."

"No, sir, I know nothing more."

Old Wheels looked gratefully at Felix.

"It belongs to your character," he said, "to have practised such restraint; I might have expected as much. If you have the paper about you—"

"I have not got it, sir."

"You have it at home, then. I should like to see it, for I did not know of its existence before that day, and it might contain mis-statements which, for the children's sakes, should not be allowed to remain uncontradicted or unexplained. If I might ask you to let me read it—"

"It is impossible, sir; I cannot show it to you. Nay, do not misunderstand me," added Felix quickly, as he saw an expression of disappointment in the old man's face; "no one has any claim upon you, neither I nor any one connected with me. It is wiped off."

"Shame can never be obliterated," said Old Wheels, in a tone of mingled pride and sternness. "Have you the paper?"

"No, sir."

"Who has?"

"No one. It is burnt, and there is no record of the circumstance you have referred to."

"Burnt!" exclaimed Old Wheels, with a dim glimmering of the truth. "Who burnt it?"

"My uncle left a request that all his papers and documents should be burnt, unreservedly. My father, acting for me before I returned home, complied with the request, and burnt everything with the exception of this single document. It is with shame I repeat that he retained this because he thought it was worth money to me."

"So it was."

"My uncle's wish was sacred to me, and when you left my father's room, I burnt this paper, as all the others had been; it was my simple duty."

"Burnt it without reading it?"

"Yes, sir. What else would you have me do with it? Put yourself in my place, sir," he said, turning the old man's words against himself, "and say whether you would not have felt it due to yourself to act as I did."

Old Wheels held out his hand, and Felix grasped it cordially. These two men understood one another.

"You would give me faith if I needed it," said the elder; "you make me young again. It would have been my greatest pride to have had such a son."

Felix's heart beat fast at the words, and an eager light came into his eyes, for he thought of Lily; but he restrained his speech. The time had not yet come; he was very nearly penniless, and had no home for the girl who had won his heart; he had no right to speak.

"And notwithstanding this," said the old man, almost gaily, "a plain duty remains." He went to the cupboard, and took out the iron box in which he deposited his savings. "Here is the first instalment of the balance due," he said, handing a small packet of money to Felix, whose face grew scarlet as, with reluctant hand, he took the packet, for he divined truly that no other course was open to him; "soon it will all be repaid, and then a great weight will be lifted from us. I know your thought, Felix; but the money is yours by right, and such a debt as this is must not remain unpaid. Come, come--don't look downcast, or you will cause me to feel sorry that we have grown to be friends."

Felix felt the force of the old man's words, but could no help saying,

"If I could afford it, I would give much if this had not been."

"And what would I give, think you, could it be so? But the past is irrevocable. Were it not for this debt of shame hanging upon us, do you think I would have allowed Lily to occupy her present position?"

"She does not know—" interrupted Felix.

"She knows nothing of all this. She may one day; it may be my duty to tell her; and then, if any one reproaches her, she has her answer."

"Need she know, ever?" asked Felix eagerly, thinking of the pain the knowledge would cause her.

"I say she may, if only as a warning; for I think I see trouble coming. I pray that I may be mistaken, but I think I see it."

"I do not understand your meaning," said Felix earnestly; "but if I might venture to ask one thing, and you would grant it, it would be a great happiness to me."

"Let me hear what it is, Felix," replied Old Wheels gently.

"That if at any time I can be of use to you--if at any time you want a friend upon whom you can depend, and who would sacrifice much to serve you and your granddaughter—"

"That then I will call upon you? I promise."

"Thank you, sir."

"You must have wondered, seeing, as you have seen, how pure and simple my dear girl is--you must have wondered that I should have brought her into contact with such associations as those by which she is surrounded at the Royal White Rose. But it was what I conceived to be a sacred duty; and if I had had a shadow of a doubt that she was other than she is, I would have given my life rather than have done it, as you know."

"Truly, sir, as I know," assented Felix.

"I have watched her from infancy, and I know her purity. I pray that she may be spared from life's hard trials; but they may come to her, as they come to most of us. They may come to her undeservedly, and through no fault of hers; and if they do, and if, like Imogen, she has to pass through the fire, she will, like Imogen, come out unscathed."

Some hidden fear, some doubt which he was loth to express more plainly, prompted the old man's words. With an effort, he returned to his first theme.

"What else could I do? There was no other way of paying the debt. I have a small pittance of my own, from which not a shilling can be spared; our necessities demand it all. And when I think, as I do often, that this dear child, tender as she is, has been and is working to wipe out, as far as is humanly possible, the disgrace entailed upon us by her father's crime, I love her the more dearly for it."

He went to the mantelshelf, where the portraits of Lily hung, and gazed at them long and lovingly.

"To her as to others," he said softly, "life's troubles may come. To her may come, one day, the sweet and bitter experience of love. When it does, I pray to God that she may give her heart to a man who will be worthy of her--to one who holds not lightly, as is unhappily too much the fashion now, the sacred duties of life." The prescience of a coming trouble weighed heavily upon the old man, and his voice grew mournful under its influence. "In a few years I shall have lived my span, Felix; I may be called any day. Should the call come soon, and suddenly, who will protect my darling when I am gone?"

Felix drew nearer to the old man in sympathy, but dared not trust himself to speak.

"I speak to you," continued the old man, "out of my full heart, Felix, for I have faith in you, and believe that I can trust you. It relieves me to confide in you; strange as it may sound to you, you are the only person I know to whom I would say what I am saying now--you are the only person in whom I can repose this confidence, lame and incomplete as you will find it to be."

"Your granddaughter, sir—" suggested Felix.

"The fears that oppress me are on her account," interrupted the old man, "and I dare not at present speak to her of them; they would necessarily suggest doubts which would bring great grief to her."

"Her brother, sir, Alfred--could you not confide in him?"

The old man turned abruptly from Felix, as if by that sudden movement he could stifle the gasp of pain which involuntarily escaped him at this reference.

"Least of all in him, Felix--least of all in him! Do not ask me why; do not question me, lest I should do an injustice which it would be difficult to repair. Tell me. Have you ever noticed in Lily's manner an abstraction so perfect as to make her unconscious of surrounding things?"

"Not so perfect as you describe, sir," replied Felix, after a little reflection; "but I have noticed sometimes that she looks up suddenly, as if she had been asleep, and had just awoke. Now that you mention it, it strikes me more forcibly. This has always occurred when you and I have been engaged in conversation for some little time, and during a pause. But she is awake in an instant, and appears to be quite conscious of what we have been saying."

"These moods have come upon her only lately," said the old man, "and only when she is deeply stirred. There are depths in my darling's soul which even I cannot see. I am about to repose a confidence in you, Felix, and to tell you a secret concerning my darling of which she herself is ignorant. With the exception of one other, I believe that I am the only one that knows it, and it has given rise to fears of possible danger to her, in the event of anything occurring to me by which she would be deprived of my watchful care. She is but the child of my child, Felix, but she is so near to me, so dear, so precious, that if heart-photographs could be taken, you would see my darling in mine, lighting it up with her bright eyes and innocent face. She has grown into my heart, that I rejoice instinctively when she is happy, and am sad when she is sad. Our nature is capable of such instinctive emotions of joy and suffering, which spring sympathetically from the joy and suffering of those whom we love heartily and faithfully."

The old man paused, and Felix waited for his next words in intense anxiety.

"A few months since there was a benefit at the Royal White Rose, and a variety of new entertainments were introduced for the occasion. Among them was a short performance by a man who called himself an electro-biologist, and who professed to be able to so control the mental powers of other persons, as to make them completely subservient to his will. This is common enough and feasible enough; and whether this man was a charlatan or not, it is certain that what he professes is not all delusion, and may in time lead to important discoveries. The fact that mere earnestness on the part of one person produces certain effects upon the minds of others, is a sufficient proof that this so-called new science is founded upon a tangible basis. When Lily came home from the music-hall, on the night of this benefit, I noticed that she was much agitated, and although she tried to laugh away my inquiries into the cause of her agitation, by saying that she was a foolish girl, I could see that her gaiety was assumed. After a little while she told me that she had been frightened by this man, and that while she was watching his performances from the side of the stage, she seemed to be in some degree under his influence. The man, it appears, noticed the interest she took in his performance, and, when the curtain was down, addressed her, saying she was a good subject, and that he could make her do whatever he

pleased. Lily was terrified, and tried to escape from him, but could not take her eyes from his face until his attention was diverted from her; then she ran to her room. Knowing how highly sensitive and nervous Lily's nature is, I was not surprised at the effect this man produced on her, but I need scarcely tell you that the incident gave me new cause for fear, and that I watched Lily more carefully. I purposely refrained from speaking with her upon the subject again, and since that time it has never been referred to between us. But soon afterwards another circumstance occurred to cause me alarm. It was the night on which her mother died. We none of us knew on the day of her death that it was so near, and Lily went as usual to the music-hall to fulfil her duties. She came home late--at midnight. Shortly after she came home, her mother died. Alfred was away--had been away all the night; and it was not until two o'clock in the morning that we heard his step upon the stairs. Lily went out to meet him. I being angry with him for his thoughtlessness, and for another reason, which I cannot explain, remained for a little while with the dead body of his mother--thinking also that, at such a solemn time, the undisturbed communion of brother and sister would be consoling to Lily. When I went into Lily's room, I saw that Lily's grief had been deepened by her brother's coming home flushed with drink. I had a solemn duty to fulfil that night; Alfred is but a young man, with many temptations thrown in his way, and I hoped that something which I had to say to him might, under the influence of such an event as had occurred, have a good effect upon him in the future--might teach him a lesson which would make him less selfishly wrapt in his own pleasures, and more thoughtful of us--no, not of us, of Lily, whom he loves, I believe, very truly, and whom he would not consciously harm for any consideration. But the old lines are bitterly true, 'that evil is wrought by want of thought as well as want of heart.' In justice to Alfred, I must not relate to you the nature of our conversation. I brought him into this room, where his dead mother lay. Lily begged that she might come and sit with us, but I could not permit her--the pain she would have suffered would have been greater than that she had already experienced, and I bade her good-night, and begged her to go to bed. She submitted unresistingly--her nature is singularly gentle--and Alfred and I left her. It was daylight when our interview was ended; Alfred and I went to the door, and opening it, saw Lily lying on the ground, asleep. Poor child! she had been much agitated by the events of the night, and was frightened of solitude, so she had come to the door of the room where we were sitting, finding companionship in being near us, and hearing perhaps the murmur of our voices. Thus she must have fallen asleep. I called to her, 'Lily!' To my surprise, she rose slowly, and stood before us; but she was not awake. She nestled to me, and came into the room, still asleep; and even when I led her into her own room, she followed me, still sleeping. We laid her upon her bed, and I sat by her for hours, watching her. When she awoke, she had no consciousness of what had passed, and I would not distress her by telling her. Three times since that night I have discovered her in the same condition. Her rooms open into mine, as well as into the passage, and it is usual for her to call out a good-night to me as she puts out her candle. I always wait for these last words from her before I retire to rest. My bed, you see, is behind this screen, where her poor mother lay sick for so long a time. On the first of the three occasions I have mentioned she kissed me, thoughtfully as I observed, and went into her room. I waited for a long time for her 'Good-night, grandfather,' but it did not come. I whispered her name at the door, and asked in a low voice if she were asleep. I spoke low on purpose, for if she were sleeping I did not wish to disturb her. She did not answer me; but I saw the light still burning in her room, and I opened the door gently, and saw her sitting by the table. She had not undressed herself. I went to her side, and took her hand. She rose, and I saw that she was asleep. Fearful of the consequences of suddenly arousing her, I thought it best to leave her; I led her to the bed, and left the room, taking the candle with me. I did not sleep, however; I waited and listened, and within an hour I heard her moving about the room. When she was quiet again, I went in, and found that she had undressed and gone to bed. The following morning I thought she would have spoken to me about it and about the candle being removed, but she made no reference to the circumstance. After that I was more carefully observant of her, and in less than a fortnight I discovered her in the same condition for the second time. Anxious to test whether her mind was in a wakeful state, I returned to my room, and called to her. She turned her head at the sound of my voice, and I called again. She came from her room slowly, and sat down when I bade her; seemed to listen to what I said to her, and smiled, as if following my words, but did not speak. More and more distressed at this new experience of Lily, and fearful lest some evil to her might arise from this strange habit, I consulted in confidence a doctor who lives near here, who is somewhat of a friend of mine, and whose knowledge and ability deserve a larger practice than he enjoys. He was much interested in my recital; he knows Lily, and has attended her on occasions. More than once he has spoken to me about her delicate mental organisation. 'The girl is all nerves,' he has said; 'an unkind word will cut her as surely as a knife; she is like a sensitive plant, and should be cared for tenderly.' And then he has said that as she grew older she might grow stronger. But, you see, it has not been so. I asked him whether he could account for the condition in which I found her, and at his request I related to him every particular and every detail which might be supposed to be associated with it. He said he could come to but one conclusion--that these abstractions, as he called them, came upon her when she was brooding upon some pet idea, or when her feelings were unusually stirred by surrounding circumstances. If her mind were perfectly at rest, he said, she would not be subject to these abstractions. His theory sufficiently accounted for her condition on the night of her mother's death, but did not account for what occurred afterwards. I knew of nothing that was agitating her, and so I told him; but he only smiled, and said, 'You will probably know some day; still waters run deep. Quiet as your granddaughter is, she is, from my knowledge of her, capable of much deeper and stronger feeling than most women.' And then he made me promise, the next time I found her in this condition, to run round for him. 'It should not be allowed to grow upon her,' he said, 'and I may be able to advise you better after personal observation of her.' Last night the opportunity occurred. I found Lily kneeling by her bed, dressed

and asleep. I closed the door softly upon her, and went for the doctor. 'Now,' he said, as we hurried here, 'I do not think it well that she should hear a strange voice, so I will not speak while I am in the room with her. But I may wish you to say certain things to her, perhaps to ask a question or two; I will write them in pencil, so that I shall have no occasion to speak.' We found Lily in the same position--still kneeling by her bedside. I did what I had done on the previous occasion, I called her by name; but I had to place my hand upon her shoulder, and call her again, before she rose. She followed me into this room, as she had done before, and at my bidding sat down, resting her head upon her hand. The doctor wrote upon paper, 'Speak to her in a gentle voice upon indifferent subjects--about the weather, or anything that suggests itself to you.' I obeyed, and she seemed to listen to what I said. But the doctor wrote, She hears your voice, which harmonises with her condition, as would the voice of any one that she loved; it falls upon her senses like a fountain, but it is the sound only that she hears--she does not understand your words. Appeal to her through her affections, by speaking to her of some one whom she loves.' I said then, 'Lily, I am going to speak to you about Alfred.' Her face lighted up as I mentioned her brother's name, and she leant forward eagerly. 'She hears and understands,' wrote the doctor, and then desired me to say other things to her. But I must not tell you more of the details of that interview, Felix; for the dear girl's sake, I must not. The doctor told me, before he went away, that he was satisfied that his theory was correct. 'She retires to her room,' he said, and sits or kneels, as we found her to-night, in a state of wakefulness. While in this position she muses upon something dear to her, and so completely lost does she become in the contemplation, that she sinks into slumber, and continues musing upon her thought even in her sleep. This to a certain extent accounts for her being susceptible to outward sound, and especially to the sound of voices that she loves. Her musings are happy ones, and please her--so that when she hears a familiar voice, one that is inwoven with her affections, as it were, it harmonises with her mental condition; it pleases her, and she seems to listen. This is all that I can say up to this point, with my imperfect knowledge of her inner life, and with the brief observation that I have made. But I have no doubt that I am right.' It seems to me, Felix, that his theory is very near the truth, and if you knew the fears by which I am tortured, but which I dare not commit to words, you would better understand my grief. But it has relieved me to open my heart to you thus far, for I know that you will respect my confidence."

"Indeed I will, sir," said Felix, in a tone of deep earnestness, "for your sake and Lily's; and if ever I can be of service to you or to her, depend upon my truth and honour, and trust me to do it. If I dared to ask you one question—"

"Ask it, Felix," said the old man, as Felix hesitated.

"Do not answer it, sir, if it is a wrong one. What you said to Lily at the doctor's request, and which you must not repeat—" but here he hesitated again.

"Well," said the old man, kindly and encouragingly, and yet with a certain sadness.

"Did it refer to matters in which you suppose she took an affectionate interest?"

"Yes, Felix."

"And did she answer you, sir?"

"By signs, Felix, not by words. You must be content with this."

Felix asked no more questions, but after he bade the old man good-night, thought much of the events of the past few hours.

"How much hidden good there is in the world!" he mused. "What a sweet lesson is contained in the life of this dear girl! She has a secret. Ah, if that secret concerns me, and I can win her heart! But how dare I think of it--I, without a nest to take my bird to? Ah, if I could build a nest!"

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE COMMENCEMENT OF A HAPPY DAY.

A mother could not have watched her only child with more jealous devotion than that with which Old Wheels watched his darling Lily. He could not bear her out of his sight; he even begrudged the time she gave to Alfred; for Lily clung to her brother, and seemed to have discovered a new bond of affection to bind them closer to each other. Beset as he was with doubts and fears, Old Wheels found a fresh cause for disturbance in this circumstance; and he was not successful in hiding his disturbance from Alfred, who showed his consciousness of it in a certain defiant fashion, which gave his grandfather inexpressible pain. But the old man bore with this without open repining; he gave all his love to Lily, and he blamed himself for the jealous feeling he bore to Alfred. He strove against it, but he could not weaken it, and he could only watch and wait. In the mean time Lily, to his eyes, was growing thinner and paler. He spoke to

Gribble junior about it.

"Don't you think Lily is not looking so well as she did?"

"Mrs. J. G. was saying the very same thing to me," replied Gribble junior, "only the night before last. 'I don't think Lily is strong,' said Mrs. J. G. to me; 'she looks pale.' And I said, 'It's that music-hall; the heat and the gas and the smoke's too much for her.'"

"You are right--you are right," said Old Wheels, the lines in his face deepening. "Such a place is not fit for a young girl--so tender as my Lily is, too. I will take her from it soon." (Thinking: "I shall be able to, for the debt will soon be paid.")

"Although," added Gribble junior, scarcely heeding the old man's words, "to my thinking a music-hall's the jolliest place in the world. I could set all night and listen to the comic songs." And Gribble junior, to whom a music-hall was really a joy and a delight, hummed the chorus of a comic song as a proof of the correctness of his opinion; breaking off in the middle, however, with the remark, "Yes, Lily *does* look pale."

"And thin?" asked Old Wheels anxiously.

"*And* thin," assented Gribble junior. "But then we all of us have our pale days and our red days, and our thin days and our fat days, as a body might say. Look at me, now; I'm three stone heavier than I was four years ago. But I wasn't married then, and perhaps Mrs. J. G. has something to do with it--though she hasn't lost either, mind you! I was going to say something--what was it?" Here Gribble junior scratched his head. "O, I know. Well, when I said to Mrs. J. G., 'It's that music-hall,' she said, with a curl of the nose, though I didn't see it, for we were abed, 'You men's got no eyes,' which was news to me, and sounded queer too, for Mrs. J. G. don't generally speak to me in that way. 'You men's got no eyes,' she said; 'it's my belief that Lily is in love, and that makes her pale.' I don't often give in to Mrs. J. G., but I give in to her in this, and it's my opinion she's right. It's natural that girls, and boys too, should fall in love. Keep moving."

Thus Gribble junior rattled on for half an hour, being, as you know, fond of the sound of his own voice, while Old Wheels pondered over Mrs. Gribble junior's summing up of the cause of Lily's paleness, and wondered if she were right. "There is but one man whom I know," he thought, "Who is worthy of my pearl. I should be happy if this were so, and if he returned her love." Then he thought of Mr. Sheldrake, and of that gentleman's intimacy with Alfred, and the glimmer of light faded in that contemplation.

The following morning, as he and his grandchildren were sitting at breakfast, Alfred said,

"Lily, I've got a holiday to-day, and I'm going to take you to Hampton Court."

Lily's eyes sparkled; she looked up with a flush of delight. Old Wheels also looked at Alfred with an expression of gratification.

"Lily doesn't go out very often," continued Alfred; "it is a fine day, and the outing will do her good."

Lily, who was sitting close to Alfred, kissed his hand; the pleasure was all the greater because it was unexpected.

"It is kind of you, Alf," said Old Wheels, with a nod of approval, and with more cordiality in his manner towards his grandson than he had expressed for many a day; "Lily seldom gets an opportunity to breathe the fresh air. A run in the park will bring the roses in my darling's face again."

"Do I want them, grandfather?" asked Lily gaily.

Her face was bright with anticipation. Old Wheels looked at her fondly.

"Not now, my dear," he replied, "but you have been looking pale lately."

"You are too anxious about me, grandfather," said Lily affectionately; "I am very well. I think--I think--that you love me just a little bit too much." And she took his face between her hands, and kissed him, once, twice, thrice--making a rosebud of her mouth, as a little child might have done. He was delighted at her merry humour.

"I can't be that, darling," he said; "you are worthy of all the love that we can give you."

Alfred assented with, "That she is, grandfather."

"You are in a conspiracy to spoil me," said Lily, greatly elated. She was standing between them, holding a hand of each, and out of her affectionate nature and her gladness at their more cordial manner towards each other, she brought their hands together, and held them clasped within her own.

As the old man's fingers tightened upon those of his grandson, he thought that perhaps after all he was torturing himself unnecessarily, and, out of his hopes, he smiled and nodded

affectionately at Alfred. Alfred smiled in return, but the next moment a shadow passed into his face. It did not rest there long; his lighter mood soon asserted itself.

"How soon shall we start, Alfred?" asked Lily.

"As soon as you can get dressed, Lil. It will be best to go early. Then we can have a ramble and a bit of dinner, and a row on the river, perhaps."

"That will be nice, and grandfather shall go with us."

Alfred's face became overclouded at the suggestion, and Old Wheels saw the cloud. Involuntarily his grasp of Alfred's hand relaxed.

"No, my dear," he said quickly; "I can't go with you. I have something to do at home. Run away now, and get dressed." Lily being gone, the old man continued, "I spared you the awkwardness of a refusal, Alfred; I saw that you would rather I should not accompany you."

"O, sir," was the reply, spoken with exceeding ill grace, "if you wish—"

"I don't wish, my boy. Why should I do anything to spoil Lily's enjoyment? and it *would* spoil her enjoyment if she noticed that you considered me an encumbrance."

"Of course it's me," exclaimed Alfred pettishly; "I thought I had had enough lecturing. I won't stand it much longer, and so I tell you."

"Don't quarrel, Alfred; Lily will be back presently, and we must do everything in our power to avoid giving her pain. I am glad that you are going to take her out. Can you afford it?"

"Afford it! I should think I could!" And Alfred rattled the money in his pocket.

Old Wheels sighed.

"Your wages at the office are still the same, Alfred--fifteen shillings a week?"

"Yes--the old skinflints! I don't believe I should be better off if I stopped there all my life."

"You seem to be well off, notwithstanding," observed the old man, with a grave look.

"You're going to preach again, I suppose!" exclaimed Alfred in a fretful tone. "A young fellow can't have a shilling in his pocket without being preached at. I tell you what it is, grandfather—"

But Alfred was prevented from telling his grandfather what it was by the entrance of Lily, who came in, dressed in her best, and looking as pretty and modest as any girl in England; and in a few moments brother and sister were in the streets, arm in arm.

The old man watched them from the window until they were out of sight. "I am glad my darling has gone to enjoy herself," he thought, but he could not keep back an uneasy feeling because she was away from him. He accounted for it by saying that old age was selfish; but that reflection brought no consolation to him. He went to the street door and stood there, and felt more than ordinarily pleased as he saw Felix turn the corner of the street.

"I have come on purpose to tell you something," said Felix, as they shook hands; "you know that I am looking out for something to do."

"Yes, Felix."

"The matter is difficult enough. I can't go to work as a shoemaker, or a carpenter, or a bricklayer, because I am Jack-of-no-trade, and don't know anything. I am neither this nor that, nor anything else. But last night there was a great fire not very far from here—"

"I read of it in the papers this morning."

"It occurred, as you know then, after midnight. I was there at the commencement of it, and saw it--saw the children and the mother standing in their night-dresses at the third-floor window--saw the flames surrounding them and creeping to them like fiery serpents--saw that fireman, God bless him! scale the ladder and rescue the poor things, nearly losing his life in the effort, spoke to him, shook hands with him, hurriedly got some particulars from him and the poor woman, and then—"

"Yes, and then," said Old Wheels, sharing Felix's excitement.

"Then went to the newspaper office with an account of the fire, which they inserted. What you read this morning was mine, and I feel quite proud of it. It is the first bit of real work I have ever done."

"It is beautifully done!" exclaimed Old Wheels. "Bravo, Felix!"

"That's what I said to myself, 'Bravo, Felix!' Why should not this lead to other things? And I am so elated that I came to ask you if you would come with me into the country for a few hours,

somewhere close enough to this city of wonders to enable us to get back in the evening. It is a lovely day, and perhaps Lily will accompany you."

"Lily is not at home," said the old man thoughtfully, noticing the colour in Felix's face; "she has gone out with Alfred on just such a trip as you so kindly propose. She wanted me to come, but I have business at home and could not, so I cannot accompany you. If you are not fixed upon any place, why not go yourself to Hampton Court, where they have gone? You may meet them; I am sure Lily will be pleased to see you."

"I should like it above all things in the world," said Felix eagerly; "have they gone by themselves?"

"Yes."

Felix looked earnestly at the old man.

"Thank you, sir, a thousand times. I will go."

Old Wheels smiled to himself as he turned into the house, and sat down contentedly to his work--a cart which he was making for Pollypod. "I feel easier now," he said, as he worked.

But although Felix went down at once to Hampton Court, and strolled into the palace and the picture-gallery and over the gardens, and stood above the maze to see who were in it, he saw no signs of Lily or Alfred. This occupied him a couple of hours, and then he resolved to go into Bushy Park. "I ought to have gone there at first," he thought. He strolled into the beautiful grounds, and down the grand avenue with its lines of noble chestnut-trees. In the distance he saw a lady on a seat, and a gentleman standing by her. His sight, quickened by love, recognised Lily's form; but the man was not Alfred. He approached slowly, until he was near enough to distinguish more clearly, and a keen pang shot through him as he saw Lily sitting on the garden-seat, and Mr. David Sheldrake bending over her. Alfred was not in sight.

CHAPTER XXIV.

SELFISH YEARNINGS AND UNSELFISH LOVE.

What but pure accident could have brought David Sheldrake and Lily together on this day? There was nothing singular in the meeting, and setting aside the presumption (as hitherto borne out by his actions) that Mr. Sheldrake was Alfred's friend, Hampton Court is open to all the world and his wife, and the chestnut-trees in Bushy Park have a wide renown. They are beautiful through all the year, in and out of blossom; their leaves have shaded many thousands of lovers, and will shade many thousands more; and the story that is as old as the hills has been whispered and acted over and over again to the noble branches that break the sunlight and the moonlight fantastically. And what was there to prevent Mr. Sheldrake having an eye for the beautiful?

It was to all appearance the most natural occurrence in the world, and Lily certainly had no suspicion that the meeting was pre-arranged. If it had been, where was the harm? Alfred saw none, and if he had—Well, if he had, it is difficult to determine how he would have acted. Men are to be found who are at once so selfish and so weak that they bring a moral blindness upon themselves. In the pursuit of their own selfish ends they are incapable of seeing in their actions a possible evil result to those whom they love. Their minds are mirrors reflecting from within, in which they see nothing but themselves and their own troubles and desires.

The holiday commenced most happily, and Lily's heart's hopes were as bright as the clouds above her. The day was an event in her life of even routine. She was as blithe as a bird. As she walked, she felt as if she would like to dance, and as she could not do that, she hummed her favourite songs, and pressed Alfred's arm to her side, and showed her grateful spirit in a hundred little affectionate ways. Every little incident afforded her pleasure, and strangers looked admiringly at her bright face. When she and Alfred arrived at Hampton Court, she was in the gayest of spirits. She chatted merrily on all sorts of subjects, and drank in the goodness and the beauty of nature with a spirit of exceeding thankfulness. She was girl and woman in one. It would have done any person good to see her roaming about the grounds and gardens, admiring this and that as a child might have done. So childlike was she in her womanliness that every now and then she would set Alfred's remarks to favourite airs, and sing them again and again in a dozen different ways.

"I am as happy as a bird," she said; "and I have you to thank for it, dear, and that makes me happier still."

In this way did her affectionate nature pay exorbitant interest for Alfred's small outlay of kindness. As she pressed his arm to her breast, and held it there, Alfred thrilled with amazement at her goodness; he looked into her sparkling eyes, which were dewy with joy.

"Do you know what, Lil?"

"What, dear?"

"I am glad you are my sister."

Her heart laughed as he said the words.

"And glad that you love me, Lil," he added.

"What would life be without love, dear Alf?"

She did not know (although she might have guessed, as she was aware that he had a heart-secret) what a tender chord her words touched. What would life be without love? Ah! think of it, all, and believe that it is the richest dower woman can bring to man, the richest gift man can give to woman! Love, faith, and charity: all the rest is dross. Out from the branches flew a bird, and after it another. Lily's eyes followed them. Up, up into the clouds, which seemed fit dwelling-place for the graceful things, until they were lost to sight. But Lily did not miss them; for in the clouds she saw her hopes reflected. She was in harmony with the peacefulness and beauty of everything around and about her. Every blade that sprang from the earth, every leaf that thrilled to the whisper of the wind, every glint of light imprismed in the brown and green lattice-work of the trees, every bright bit of colour that dwelt in cloud and flower, contributed to her happiness. Such times as these are Forget-me-nots.

So they strolled through the gardens, and into courtyards so still and quiet that they appeared scarcely to belong to the busy world. They went into the picture-gallery, because Alfred said it was the proper thing to do, but a gloom fell upon Lily when she was in the rooms. They were sad and sombre, and there was something dispiriting in the manner in which the few persons who were at the palace walked about and looked at the pictures. They walked with soft footfalls, and spoke with bated breath, and wore a solemn expression on their countenances, which seemed to say, "we are walking among the dead!" One might not inaptly have imagined, indeed, that at night, when no profane footstep disturbed the silence, the palace was a palace of ghosts and shades that rose from the floor, and started from frame and wainscot, to play their parts in the shadowy world to which they belonged. The excitement and pleasure of the day rendered Lily more than usually susceptible to outward influences. Every nerve in her was quivering with susceptibility, and the contrast between the ghostly rooms and the bright landscape without sensibly affected her. She hurried Alfred through the rooms nervously, but the eyes of a Puritan, that glared at her sternly from the wall, arrested her attention and frightened her.

The face was sunless; even about the lips and eyes there was no trace of gentleness or sweetness. The cruelly hard lines in the face of this man spoke of severity, austerity, absolutism, and declared, "Life is bitter; it is a battle of brute forces, and he who wins by strength of character, by dogmatism, by harshness, achieves a moral victory, and proves himself worthy. There is but one course--bend all the forces of your will, all the power of your strength, to crush those whose ways are not your ways, whose belief is not your belief. There is not room for all; some have no business here. To be human is not to be humane." Lily's heart grew faint as she gazed at this stern face, and it was only by a strong effort that she wrested her attention from it. She was glad when she was out in the sunshine and among the flowers again, and her lightheartedness soon returned. Alfred's mood was more subdued. Lily did not notice when they started from home that his gaiety was forced, and that he seemed to be playing a part; but it was so. His cheerfulness was only assumed. Notwithstanding the outward evidences of prosperity he displayed, he was in trouble again. In immediate trouble, that is. For, like a very numerous class, so long as his circumstances were easy for to-day, he was easy in his mind. He rarely looked beyond; sufficient for the day was the good thereof. But to-morrow comes inevitably, and it came to Alfred, and brought trouble to his door.

Nearly all his racing speculations had gone against him. The race for the Goodwood Cup, the winner of which he was so confident of having "spotted," as the phrase is, had proved disastrous to him. The acceptance for seventy-five pounds which he had given to Con Staveley would soon be due, and he had not the means to meet it. He had borrowed the money of Mr. Sheldrake, and he had given that gentleman he did not know what documents as security, security of the frailest, as his friend took care to tell him.

"It is a mere matter of form," Mr. Sheldrake had said; "for as you have no property, and are worth nothing, these bills and I O Us are worth almost as much as waste paper. But I trust to your honour, Alf; I know you'll not let me in. But although I am partial to you, my boy, and like you, and all that, I should be bound to declare, if you pushed me to it, that it is for Lily's sake only I assist you. You don't mind my saying this, do you? It is because I like her, and want her to think well of me--not without deserving it, Alf; I think I deserve it--that I'm disposed to stick to you. You'll have a slice of luck one day, my boy. That tip of yours for the Cup was a bad one; but better luck next time, that's my motto. How much did you lose? O, that wasn't a great deal" (making light of what was a serious sum to Alfred); "you'll soon pull that up. Of course you'll be able to meet that little bill of Staveley's? If I didn't think it was all right, I wouldn't tell you what he said yesterday. He swore that if the bill wasn't paid (what put it in his head that it wouldn't be, puzzles me) he wouldn't hold me accountable, but would come down upon you, and press the money out of you. He's as hard as nails upon some points, is Con Staveley, and he's sore because

I've been let in by so many of my friends. He can't make out what makes me cotton to you so; but then he hasn't seen Lily, has he, Alf? or he might alter his tone."

Of course Alfred said he would be able to meet Con Staveley's bill, hoping that meanwhile the slice of luck (which, unfortunately for the hopeful ones, is nearly always figurative) would be cut off Fortune's pudding for him. But it wasn't; and pay-day was drawing near; and he had been borrowing more money of Mr. Sheldrake, some of which he had lost in racing as usual, and some of which he had spent upon himself, and in other ways. So that altogether he was in a bad way, and supposing that Mr. Sheldrake failed him, he did not know where to turn for assistance to float him through his money scrapes. Of one thing he was certain--it depended upon Lily whether Mr. Sheldrake continued to be his friend. He extracted comfort from this thought; for as the word of promise is often kept to the ear to break it to the hope, so he cajoled himself into believing that Lily entertained a warm feeling for Mr. Sheldrake; he believed it because it was vitally necessary to him that it should be so. Still he would make sure. He had a favour to ask of Mr. Sheldrake this very day, and Lily would be able to assist him in obtaining it. Perhaps she would be able to put in a word for him with that gentleman. He absolutely saw nothing wrong in the thought. It was, however, with an uneasy feeling that he commenced the conversation, and he was rather ashamed of himself for going roundabout instead of coming straight to the point.

"I am so glad you are enjoying yourself, Lily."

He could find nothing better to say than this.

"I can't help it, Alfred; it would be ungrateful not to on such a day. And I enjoy it all the more because you have brought me and because you are with me. What beautiful places there are to come to, if one has the time and the money!"

"Yes, and the money," repeated Alfred, with a groan. "Isn't it a shame, Lily, that a fellow can't get as much as he wants?"

"That depends, Alf," answered Lily, with a touch of philosophy which sounded all the prettier from her lips, because she was the last person in the world who would be supposed to be given to philosophising, "upon how much a fellow wants."

"Not much; not a great deal. There are hundreds of people who have more than they know what to do with."

"I think," said Lily, in a musing tone, "one can do with a very little and be very happy."

"You say so because you're a girl; if you were a man you would think different."

"Perhaps," she said, with a readier mental acquiescence than the word expressed.

"A man wants so many things," continued Alfred, with only one interpretation of "man" in his mind, and that was himself, "that a girl has no idea of. He has to move in the world, and do as others do, if he doesn't want to look mean and shabby; it's hard lines on a fellow when it comes to that. Now a girl's different; so long as she's comfortable at home she's all right. There is no occasion for her to knock about."

"Alfred," said Lily, looking into his face suddenly, "you speak as if you were in trouble."

"And if I were, and if you could help me, Lily, would you?"

"Would I?" She took his hand and kissed it, as she had done once before this morning. A wise man, or, rather, one who had learnt wisdom (for the two definitions are not synonymous), who was strolling in the gardens, saw the action, and thought, "How fond that girl is of that young fellow!" naturally setting them down as sweethearts; and in his superior wisdom smiled somewhat sneeringly at the hollowness of love's young dream. "Would I! What would I not do for those I love!" It was her heart that spoke. "Tell me your trouble, Alfred."

"Money," he replied curtly; "that's my trouble."

"Can I help you, dear? I earn some."

"And give it all to grandfather," he said bitterly; for he thought of what better use he could make of Lily's earnings than his grandfather, and how many fine chances of backing the right horses he was throwing away for want of means.

"Yes," she said, in a surprised tone at his bitterness; "surely that's right, Alf?"

"O, I suppose it is," he answered, in a rough, ungracious manner; "whatever grandfather is mixed up with, and whatever he does, must be right, of course."

"What is the matter with you and grandfather?" she asked in deep anxiety; the brightness was beginning to die out of the day. "I can't tell you how grieved I have been to see the way you behave to each other. You do not love each other as you used to do. I was in hopes this morning that it was all right between you again."

"How can I tell you what it is that makes him treat me as he does. Lily, when I don't know myself? Directly you went out of the room this morning, he began to nag me, and I couldn't stand it. He's always at me with his eyes or his tongue."

Lily was exquisitely distressed. Alfred spoke as if his grandfather were his enemy, and they were both necessary to her. She loved them both--not equally; her love for Alfred was the stronger. If it were placed distinctly before her that she would be compelled to choose between them, she would have chosen Alfred. This contingency did not present itself to her now, but she was sufficiently grieved at the consciousness of the breach between the two persons upon whom until lately she had bestowed all her love. Could she heal it? could she do anything? she asked timidly.

"Whose fault is it, Alfred--yours or grandfather's?"

"Is it mine?" he demanded impetuously, in return. "Now I ask you, Lily, do you think it is mine?"

"No, no," she replied, with generous and loving readiness; "I am sure it is not."

And thus committed herself, almost instinctively, out of her love for him.

"Well then," he said, feeling like a coward, "there it is. If I have a new suit of clothes, grandfather preaches me a sermon. That's why I didn't show him the chain the other day. I don't want to say anything against him, but young men are not the same as they used to be. Now, I put it to you, Lily: if you had anybody that you liked--I mean that you cared for a bit--that--that--you were--very fond of—"

"Alfred!" cried Lily, looking at him with eager eyes.

"You know what I mean, Lily. If you were a man and had anybody that you loved--there! now it's out!--wouldn't you like to look well in her eyes?"

"O, yes, yes, Alfred! And have you some one like that? I thought so--I thought so!"

"Yes, I have, Lily, and she is the dearest, prettiest, best girl in the world, Lily. And it's because she's poor—"

"That's nothing, Alfred."

"That's nothing, of course, in her. But because she's poor I try to make a little money so as to be nice, and make her a present now and then, perhaps; and because of that, grandfather's always at me, preaching--preaching--preaching. O Lily, you should see her! She is as good as you are, and as pretty, upon my word, Lil."

"Prettier and better, I am sure, Alfred," said Lily, taking his hand and caressing it. She would have liked to throw her arms round his neck, but they were sitting in the gardens, and people's eyes were upon them; so she was compelled to restrain the impulse, and to content herself with caressing his hand and saying, "I am so glad! I am so glad and that was your secret? You have got some one that you love--my dear, my dearest! O, how happy you have made me! And you love her very, very much?"

"With all my heart and soul, Lily." He spoke the truth.

"And she loves you? But what a question! As if she could help it!"

She looked into his handsome face with genuine admiration. How bright the day was again! Earth, sky, air, grew lovelier in the light of her happiness; for in the love her brother bore to this girl she saw her own reflected.

"She loves me as well as I love her, Lily."

"I am sure of it--I am sure of it; she couldn't do otherwise. What is her name?"

"Lizzie," answered Alfred, with gratified vanity.

"Lizzie! Lizzie! I shall have a sister; I love her already, my dear. Of course," she said slyly, "you have her portrait?"

"How do you know, you puss?" he asked, with a laugh and a blush.

She echoed his laugh, and said, with an affectation of superior wisdom,

"I could shut my eyes, and find it--there!" and she touched his breast-pocket lightly.

"Here it is, Lil," he said, bashfully and proudly, taking Lizzie's portrait from his pocket. "What do you think of her? But it doesn't do her justice."

The accumulative sins that photographers are guilty of in "not doing justice" must surely bring a heavy retribution upon them one of these days. But in this instance they found a zealous

champion in Lily, who gazed at the portrait with admiring eyes, and kissed it again and again.

"What a beautiful face! what lovely hair!" ("All her own, Lil," interpolated Alfred.) "I can tell that. And she has brown eyes, like mine. And your portrait is in this locket round her neck. When shall I see her really?"

"Soon; I have told her about you. But O, Lily, I am so unhappy with it all! I am the most miserable wretch in the world, I do believe!"

"Unhappy!" exclaimed Lily, bewildered by these alternations of feeling. "Miserable! I don't understand you, Alfred."

Indeed, she could not understand it. She judged from her own feelings; to love and to be loved was, to her imagination, the highest condition of happiness. Earth contained no brighter lot; and if in the Heaven and future life we believe in and look forward to--all of us, I hope--some such bliss as the bliss of pure love is to be ours, there can be no better reward for living a good life.

"You asked me to tell you my troubles," said Alfred, a little sulkily, "and I told you: money. But you seem to have forgotten it already."

"I did, for a moment, my dear," she replied remorsefully; "I forgot it in my delight at the news you have told me for and in the contemplation of your happiness."

"How can I be happy," he grumbled, "with such a trouble upon me? You do not know what it is, and how it weighs me down. How can I show my face to Lizzie when I am so pressed, and when I am in debt, and can't pay?"

"And yet," she said, out of her own goodness and unselfishness, "you have brought me here for a holiday to-day, and I have been thoughtless enough to come, and put you to expense, when I ought to have guessed you could not afford it!"

The very construction she placed upon it displayed him in a generous light which he so little deserved, that he felt inwardly ashamed of himself.

"How could you have guessed? I have kept my troubles to myself. Why should I bother you with them? And it would be hard, indeed, if I could not give you a little pleasure now and then. It isn't much I give you, Lil--not as much as I should like to. Until I saw Lizzie, I had no one to love but you, and now, when everything might be so splendid with me, here am I stumped because I am hard-up. It's too bad--that's what it is--it's too bad altogether; and just at the time that I have got the tip for the Cesarewitch, and could make a thousand pounds as safe as nails."

All this was Greek to Lily. She did not know what the "tip" or the Cesarewitch was, but she was too anxiously interested in Alfred's main trouble to go into details.

"Is it much money you want, Alfred?"

"No, not much, Lily."

"Why not ask grandfather—"

But he interrupted her with sudden vehemence.

"Lily!" he cried. "Grandfather must not know anything of this. Promise me."

"I promise," she answered readily; "but why, Alfred?"

He dared not tell her the truth; he dared not say that his grandfather suspected him, and suspected him with just cause; he himself did not know whether it was suspicion or actual knowledge that caused his grandfather to be doubtful of him. Then how could he tell her to what purpose her earnings were devoted? If she knew that, not only would she become acquainted with the shameful story of their father's crime, but she might get to learn the story of the little iron box. For he was guilty of the theft; it was he who had stolen the money, intending, of course, to replace it, and not knowing why it was hoarded up so carefully.

As he sat silent now in the light of the beautiful day, with his trouble heavy upon him, and suffering from the remorse that is not born of repentance, all the circumstances of the theft spread themselves swiftly before him. The money had been stolen in just the way his grandfather had surmised in the interview that took place between them on the night of his mother's death. He had seen his grandfather go often to the iron box, and he suspected that it contained money. One day, when his grandfather was not at home, he tried the cupboard in which the iron box was placed for safety, and found it locked. Seeing a key upon the mantelshelf, and believing it to be the key of the iron box, he ran out of the room with it, and took an impression of it, and from the impression had a false key made. Then, on the very night his grandfather had mentioned, he watched the old man out of the house, and took the iron box from the unlocked cupboard. He opened the box, and was taking the money from it when he heard a sound from the bed behind him. Turning, he saw his mother with her eyes open, as he thought, watching him. For a few moments he could not stir, he was so dismayed; but a sigh from his mother which was half a groan completely aroused him, and going to the bed he found his mother asleep. Relieved, he

completed the theft. This scene was always before his eyes when he was in trouble; when his money affairs were easy, and he had sufficient for the day, he rarely thought of it. He had quite made up his mind that, supposing his mother had been awake, he would have told her all--how that he had used money belonging to his employers, not for the first time; that it was imperative he should replace it; and that it was better to take for a time these savings, hoarded up by his grandfather for a then unknown purpose, rather than allow exposure to come. "Mother would have given me right," he often thought, but he did not have the opportunity of testing whether his thought was correct. All his life he was never to know whether his mother had gone down to the grave with the consciousness that her son, as well as her husband, was a thief.

CHAPTER XXV.

ALFRED NEGLECTS THE WARNING OF DON'T TOUCH ME, AND RUES IT.

But, in a lame sort of way, he found justification for the act. He would not accept the brand; fate and bad luck were to blame, not he. He took the money with the firm intention of replacing it, and with the conviction (by what sophistry gained, heaven only knows) that he would be able to do so; and he gave himself credit for his intention, as if it were an act performed. With part of the money he had backed horses to win a heavy stake, but his usual bad luck pursued him; in his vernacular, one horse was "pulled," another was "scratched" an hour before the race, and others went wrong in all sorts of ways. But his heaviest stroke of bad luck, and one which almost maddened him at the time of its occurrence, was the disqualifying of a horse he had backed after it had actually won the race. This took place on a suburban race-course, where probably the finest collection in the world of blacklegs, thieves, and swindlers may be seen by any one interested in the species. It may be accepted as a fact, that nearly every person who goes there, goes with the intention of "getting the best" of his neighbour, if he can possibly manage it; and Alfred was not one of the exceptions that proved the rule. His moral consciousness was as spotted as the morality of those he elbowed. There were men who backed the favourites, who backed the jockeys' mounts, who backed the stable (whichever one it might be), who backed their fancy, who backed the owners, who backed the issue of famous sires, who backed the prophets' selections, and who laid out their money in accordance with a system. Many of them had private information of such-and-such horses, and knew for a certainty that they must win--some from superior excellence of their own, some because their opponents were not going to try. Men of straw most of them; miserable crawlers through the crooked ways of life, striving to reach the heaven of their hopes by means of any species of roguery; who will look their friends in the face, and lie deliberately; who take the name of God in vain a dozen times an hour; whose hands and tongues are ready at any moment to filch and profane; and in whose minds the noblest qualities of human nature are but themes for ribald jest. I who write these words am no purist; I am no more moral than my neighbours, I daresay; and I love pleasure as well as I love work. Temptations beset us all, at times, and not one of us is strong enough always to resist. I, as well as you, have occasion to be sorry, and would, if I could, live over again some of the time that is past, and would strive to avoid slipping. I have deceived myself often, and have given myself credit for things which have resulted from no merit that I possess. But I do not deceive myself when I say that I have a hearty contempt for roguery and meanness, and that I have a horror of blasphemy and the profaning of human and divine things. And, as at no open gatherings in the wide world can so much roguery and knavery be seen as at some of these small race-meetings (and in some large ones, too), I think it a pity that they are encouraged by high authorities, whose position among the people is almost that of a teacher.

Being at this suburban race-meeting (having obtained the holiday by shamming illness), Alfred at once set to work backing horses. He had in his pocket more than twenty pounds, the surplus of the money he had taken from the iron box, and he had fully made up his mind that a great stroke of good luck was to come to him on this day, and that he would go home with a purse filled with others persons' losings. His plan of operations upon this occasion was a very simple one. He pursued the "doubling" system--a system which undoubtedly would result in gain, if it could be carried out without stopping. In the first race he selected a horse, and backed it for two pounds; the horse did not win. All the better for the next race, thought Alfred, as he walked about, and studied on his race-card the string of horses that were next to compete. In this race he made his selection, and backed his horse for four pounds. Again the horse came in among the rear division, and again Alfred lost. He began to look anxious, and nervously fingered the money in his pocket. Should he leave off, and be content with his losses? He fortified his faint heart with some brandy, and walked among the crowd to pick up information. No, he would go on; the odds were surely in his favour now. He had lost twice; he *must* win in the third venture. Up went the black board with the names of the horses for the third race. Among them was Never Despair. Acting upon an inspiration, Alfred backed Never Despair for eight pounds, and obtained the odds of five to one--that is, if Never Despair won, Alfred's gain would be forty pounds. The horse *did* win. It was an exciting race between the favourite and Never Despair; and as the sporting writers said the next morning, Never Despair caught the favourite in the last stride, and won by a short head. "By—!" muttered a man by Alfred's side, "Never Despair's won, and I'm done for!" And, with muttered

oaths hanging about his white lips, the loser looked around, ready to pick a pocket. "Hurrah!" cried Alfred, taking off his hat and waving it. "Hurrah! Never Despair's won!" But stopped suddenly, for fear that a mistake might occur, or that there might be something wrong with the horse, or that the jockey might be found a pound short in his weight. His first fear was dispelled by the appearance of the number of Never Despair on the black board. Then Alfred, trembling with excitement, waited for the magic words which would proclaim that the jockey had passed his ordeal in safety, and that the race was really and truly won by the horse he had backed. The three or four minutes that intervened seemed to be three or four hours, and Alfred fretted and fumed, and dug his nails into his hands. At length came the magic cry from the saddling paddock, "All right!" "All right! All right!" screamed Alfred, and the recognised scouts took up the cry, passing it from list to list. Off scampered Alfred to get his forty pounds, and came away radiant, with eight five-pound notes and his own deposited stake of eight pounds clenched in his fist. "How much have I won?" he thought. On the first and second races he had lost six pounds. Six from forty, thirty-four. That was good thirty-four pounds were not a bad day's work. "I knew luck would turn," said Alfred exultantly. "I knew luck would turn! Let me see. Thirty-four pounds a day--how much is that a year?" And began to reckon up his thousands, and look a long way ahead. He had now in his pocket nearly sixty pounds. He gave a shilling to an old gipsy woman, who detained him a few moments by telling him that a beautiful young lady with brown eyes was thinking of him at that moment, "Of course she is," exclaimed Alfred merrily, breaking away from the fortune-teller with a laugh. "I could have told you that, mother!" He was in the highest of spirits. "What shall I buy for Lizzie?" he thought. "I'll buy her a watch. And Lil, too, I mustn't forget her. I want some new clothes myself. I'll buy that diamond ring young Shrewboy at the office wants to sell. He only asks twelve pounds for it, and it just fits my little finger. It sparkles like anything! There's that money, too, I borrowed from the box: I must put it back." If he had been wise, he would not have indulged in these extravagant anticipations; he would have been content with his winnings. But who ever knew a wise gamester? He went to the best drinking-bar on the race-course, and treated himself to a bottle of champagne; and said to himself, as he drank it, that now his luck was in, and he would be a fool not to back it. He might go home that afternoon with two or three hundred pounds in his pocket, if he had a spark of courage in him. Nothing venture, nothing have. How had the leviathans of the ring made their money? First by luck, then by pluck. Why shouldn't he be one of them? Why should he not buy his own trap, have private boxes at the music-halls, wear diamond rings and diamond pins, and an Ulster coat down to his heels? Some of them had country houses and race-horses of their own, and ate and drink of the best; as for champagne, they might swim in it. The iron was hot; now was the time to strike it. Flushed and elated, he walked into the ring. The names of the horses for the fourth race were being chalked on the black board. By a strange chance one was named Don't Touch Me. There was nothing very singular in this appellation; as a matter of fact you will find in the sporting papers of to-day a list of outlawed horses, among which you will see such names as Bird of Prey, Phryne, Roll Call, I Must Not Touch It, and others as significant. Now this horse, that Alfred was disposed to back directly he saw that, it was among the runners, carried its own recommendation with it. Don't Touch Me was a sufficiently fair warning for any horse to carry, never mind how lightly it was weighted; but Alfred fancied it as it took its preliminary canter. "It will walk in," he heard some one say, "and it belongs to So-and-so," mentioning the name of one of the "knowing ones" of the turf. How these persons earn the distinctive title of the "knowing ones" there is no necessity here to inquire; it can scarcely be by the exercise of the cardinal virtues, which pagans declared to be justice, prudence, temperance, and fortitude, although the second-named, prudence, bears a wide and various meaning, and they might lay claim to it in the interests of self. However it was, there stood Don't Touch Me on the black board, and there before his eyes cantered Don't Touch Me on the turf, with a celebrated jockey on its back. "I'll back it for every shilling in my pocket," thought Alfred, "and make a good haul." But he would make sure that he was right. How? By one of those foolish superstitions which gamblers believe in. He wrote the names of the eleven runners on eleven pieces of paper, folded them separately, and shook them together in his pocket. "Now," he said, "if I draw Don't Touch Me, that will settle it." He put in his hand, and drew one of the folded pieces of paper. Opening it he read Don't Touch Me, and that settled it. "It's the favourite," he said, almost aloud, in his excitement, as he consulted the lists, and saw that Don't Touch Me was quoted at three to one; "it's the favourite, and it's sure to win!" Down went his money. Not all with one man. One man might not be able to pay him so large a sum when the race was over. So he invested twenty pounds with one, ten with another, five with another, until he had put all he had upon Don't Touch Me. He stood altogether to win about a hundred and seventy pounds. He selected "safe men" to bet with. In some lists, kept by men who looked remarkably like costermongers with a polish on, the odds against Don't Touch Me were quoted at four, five, and even six to one; but Alfred knew that these worthies were welchers, and not all their seductive offers, not all their flattering "Now then, captain, what d'ye want to back?--any odds on outsiders!--give it a name, captain--what'll you put a fiver on?" could tempt him. He knew the ropes better than that; he knew that these capitalists, whose stock-in-trade consisted of a bit of chalk, a stool, a printed placard, and a lead pencil, were swindlers, who were allowed to rob with the policeman looking on. Truly, if Justice is blind, the law that is supposed to lead to it has a cast in its eye. Having made his great venture, Alfred went to look at the horse that carried it. It was a noble-looking animal, in splendid condition, fit to run for a man's life. Just behind it, making its way leisurely to the starting-post, was a horse named the Cunning One. Alfred laughed as he noted the difference between the two horses. He was in the enclosure where the swells were, having, after his winnings on Never Despair, paid for that privilege; and as he laughed now, he heard, "I'll take a thousand to thirty." "I'll give it to you," was the answer of a bookmaker; "a thousand to thirty against the Cunning One!" Turning, Alfred saw the man who had taken the bet, a tall, thin, languid swell, who drawled his words out as if speaking were a labour. A thick

moustache covered his lips, or something might have been seen in the expression on them that would have given the lie to his apparently unconcerned and drawling manner. "There's thirty pounds clean thrown away," thought Alfred, with a look of contempt at the languid swell; "a nice fly chap he is to back such a horse as the Cunning One. It's only fit for a scavenger's cart." Away went the horses to the starting-post; there was a difficulty in getting a fair start, each jockey trying to "jockey" the others. Full twenty minutes elapsed, the while a very Babel of sound, created by the hoarse strong voices of the betting men, kept the fever of excitement to boiling-point. Again and again the cry "They're off!" was raised, and again and again came the mild addendum, "No; another false start." During this time Alfred heard nothing, saw nothing but the horses; he had staked his all upon Don't Touch Me, and it was upon that horse of all of them that he fixed his attention. The jockey's colours were pink; those of the jockey of the Cunning One were saffron. Alfred noticed that both these horses were kept comparatively cool and quiet by their riders while the false starts were being made. This was all in Alfred's favour, and he remarked it with satisfaction, and said, "It's all right, it's all right! Don't Touch Me is sure of the race." But his face was pale with suffering, notwithstanding. How he wished it was all over! "I won't put another shilling on," he said. "When the race is over, I'll go straight home." At length the horses were coming together, and a straight line of variegated colour was seen. "It will be a start this time," said some one, and the next moment the flag dropped again, and, "They're off! They're off!" burst from a thousand throats. Before the horses had gone a hundred yards Alfred saw the pink jacket of Don't Touch Me and the saffron jacket of the Cunning One in the rear. "All the better," he thought; for it was a two-mile race, and it was good policy to save the wind of the horses that were intended to win until the final struggle. On they came, rushing like the wind past the grand stand, and although no great distance separated them, saffron and pink were the absolute last. The race was being run at a great pace. Alfred was ablaze with excitement. The horses were lost for a few moments behind a great clump of bush on the other side of the course, and when they reappeared the aspect of affairs was changed. The horse that had made the running had dropped behind, and one or two others also were at the tails of Don't Touch Me and the Cunning One. A mile and a quarter of the race was run, and these two horses were held in with wrists of steel, while the riders sat as if they grew out of their saddles. Now they are coming into the straight run home. "A monkey to a pony on pink and saffron!" shouts a bookmaker; "a monkey to a pony, first past the post!" He is right in his judgment. The final struggle is not yet come, but slight efforts on the part of the jockeys enable Don't Touch Me and the Cunning One to thread through their horses and come to the front. Alfred clenches his teeth, and his fingers work into his palms, and his lips twitch convulsively. Nearer and nearer they come, increasing in every stride the distance between themselves and their competitors. Within five hundred yards from the winning post, they are neck and neck. "Pink wins! Saffron wins! Saffron's beat! Pink's done!" These words are yelled out frantically, and Alfred suffers a martyrdom. Suddenly the jockey of Don't Touch Me touches his horse slightly with his spur, and the noble creature bounds to the front, gaining a full half-length on the Cunning One. But the Cunning One's jockey raises his whip, and recovers his lost ground. Then ensues a grand struggle, every foot of ground being contested. They might be struggling for dear life, or for something dearer. Alfred follows them with his wild eyes. They pass like a flash of lightning, so close together that he does not know whether he has won or lost. His agony is increased by the conflicting cries, "The Cunning One wins! Don't Touch Me wins!" Which is right? A calm voice says, "I'll bet fifty to one that pink came in first;" and the speaker receives a swift grateful look from Alfred. What an age it seems before the black board is hoisted that proclaims the winner! Here it is at last. Hurrah! hurrah! The numbers proclaim Don't Touch Me first; the Cunning One second. Alfred gives a great sigh of relief; his heart was almost bursting; he wipes his forehead, and looks round with a triumphant air. The horse he backed has won the race, and he wins a hundred and seventy pounds. He sees the man from whom he has to receive the largest stake, and he walks towards him in an apparently unconcerned manner. The man is studying his book with a serious air; he has a bulbous face, and every knob on it is aflame, so that it looks like a mountain dotted with signal fires. Many of the people are eagerly canvassing the race; some are radiant, some are despairing. Here is one man tearing betting-tickets with his teeth, and flinging the pieces away savagely. Here is another, shouting exultantly to an acquaintance, "Nipped him this time, Jo! I put a tenner on!" Here is another, scowling at every face that meets his gaze. Here is one who staggers like a drunken man, but who nevertheless has not tasted liquor this day. Alfred has no eye for any of these; despair, joy, exultation, remorse, surge around him, and he does not heed them. He thinks of himself only, and burns with impatience to hear the magic cry "All right!" so that he may claim his winnings. Five minutes pass, and no signal comes from the saddling paddock that it is all right. What can be the meaning of the delay? Another minute, and another and another pass—and then comes a cry from the paddock, "Don't pay! An objection!" The scouts take up the cry, and it is all over the field in an instant. "Don't pay!" "Don't pay!" rings from one end to another; the bookmakers shut their books, and look impenetrable; the excited backers of Don't Touch Me present their tickets for payment to the keepers of the list outside the ring, and all the satisfaction they get is "Don't you hear? There's an objection." The curses, the oaths, are dreadful to hear. Alfred is dazed for a moment. It is not possible that the cup can be dashed from his lips! He also staggers like a drunken man, and a sickening feeling comes upon him. "What's the objection?" he asks of a bookmaker, in a tone that sounds strange in his own ears. His lips are white, his limbs are trembling, his heart sinks within him. "Don't Touch Me won the such-and-such Cup a month ago," is the answer; "incurred a penalty of five pounds, and did not carry it. The stewards are settling the dispute now. We shall know in a few minutes, but Don't Touch Me is sure to be disqualified, and the Cunning One will get the race." The feeling that is upon Alfred is like the fear that comes to some men whose lives have been ill spent, and who have not many minutes to live. He walks about, and hears vaguely the indignant comments of the backers of

Don't Touch Me, and the hopeful anticipations of the backers of the Cunning One. What is one man's meat is another man's poison. A partisan of Don't Touch Me is especially noisy. "Strike me blind," he cries, "if it isn't a plant! The owner didn't back the horse for a shilling. He stands in with the owner of the Cunning One; and if the Cunning One gets the race, as he's sure to, they'll divide four thousand between them." How the objection is settled is not known until after the next race is run, and then a notice is stuck up that Don't Touch Me is disqualified, and that the race is awarded to the Cunning one. Thus Don't Touch Me justifies the warning that lies in his name, and thus Alfred's castle once more crumbles into dust, and he is robbed of his money. "What a fool I was," he groans, "not to have been content with my winnings on Never Despair! What an idiot to back a horse with such a name!" He sees the warning now, and, almost blind with despair, stumbles against people, and is pushed aside roughly. But he himself is not to blame, not he. Fate is against him; ill-luck follows him. Who could have foreseen such a calamity as this? If it had not been for this piece of deliberate villany--for so he settled in his mind that it was--he would have been able to make reparation for his fault, and to be kind to those he loved. "I did it all for them," he groans. The pieces of paper with the names of the horses written upon them are still in his pocket. He puts in his hand, and draws--the Cunning One! "If I hadn't been so hasty!" he thinks. "I oughtn't to have settled it the first draw. If I had only tried a second time! I could have got a thousand pounds to thirty, as that swell did. I should have had two thousand pounds in my pocket this minute! And I could have done so much good with the money--for Lil, and Lizzie, and all of us! Fool that I was! Fool that I was!" And so staggers away, and in these miserable repinings passes the day and the night that follow.

CHAPTER XXVI.

SURPRISES.

Alfred remained silent for so long a time, that Lily had to repeat her question; and again, in a timid tone, she asked him why their grandfather must not be told of his troubles and joys. Alfred asked her, in reply, whether she did not have confidence in him, whether she mistrusted him, whether she thought he had not good reason for what he said? To all these questions she answered, O, yes, yes; she had full confidence in him; she trusted him thoroughly; she knew that he must have the best of reasons for his desire that their grandfather should not be made acquainted with his secrets.

"There isn't another person in the world," said Alfred, "that I would confide in but you; but I could not keep anything secret for long from the dearest sister that man ever had, and whom I love--well, you know how I love you, Lily."

She answered sweetly, "Yes, she knew; had he not given proof of it this day? She would be worthy of his confidence; he need be sure of that." Alfred received these heartfelt protestations graciously.

"I feel better for having spoken to you, and now I shall smoke a cigar. What do you think Lizzie did the other night, Lil? I asked her in fun to light my cigar for me, and she actually did, and took a puff. She didn't like it, though; but she'll do anything for me. There's one thing I've been thinking of, Lil. When you and Lizzie are friends--as you're sure to be directly you see each other--it will be nice for you; for now I think of it, you never had a girl friend, did you?"

"There's Mrs. Gribble," answered Lily, "and Mrs. Podmore, and little Polly—"

"O yes, they're all very well in their way, but they're married women, and little Polly's only a child. What I mean is, a girl of your own age--one that you can say all sorts of things to that you can't say to any one else."

"No, I have never had a girl friend; it *would* be nice."

"Lizzie's just the girl for you. How I should like to be hidden somewhere, and hear you talking about ME! Mind you always search under the table when you're talking secrets, Lil, for I shall look out for an opportunity to hear what you two girls have to say about me."

They made merry over this, and extracted from it all kinds of gay possibilities to suit their humour.

"You said a little while ago, Alf, that you could make a thousand pounds as safe as--as safe as —"

"As safe as nails, Lil. And so I could, and more perhaps, over the Cesarewitch."

"The Cesarewitch!" she repeated, curious to know the meaning of so strange a word.

"It is a big race that will be run soon--a race worth thousands of pounds--and I know the horse

that's going to win."

"That's very clever of you, Alfred."

Alfred nodded, taking full credit to himself.

"But how can you make a thousand pounds by that, Alf? A thousand pounds! I never heard of so much money."

"Little simpleton I'll show you as much one day, and more thousands at the back of it. How can I make it? Why, I'll tell you. Here I am with 'the tip.' The tip," he continued, noticing her puzzled look, "is the secret that some of us get hold of as to which horse is going to win a race."

"O," was Lily's simple reply.

"That's what the tip is," said Alfred, with a confident air; he was in his glory, airing himself on racing matters. "And I've got it for the Cesarewitch."

"Do they know, then, beforehand what horse is going to win a race?"

"Sometimes pretty nearly, you know. Some horses that run haven't a chance; some are not intended to win—"

"Is that right, Alf?"

"Of course it is. If a man has a horse and can't back it, perhaps he backs another; then of course he doesn't want his own horse to win, for if it does, he loses his money."

Lily shook her head.

"I can't understand it; it doesn't seem right to me; but of course you know best."

"Of course I do, Lil. Women are not expected to understand these things. As to its being not quite right, that's neither here nor there. What you've got to do is to find out the secret, get into the swim, and make money. And that's what I've got the chance of doing. But I haven't explained it all. Here am I with the tip; I know the horse that's going to win. Well, what do I do, naturally? I bet on that horse. I put as much money on that horse as ever I can scrape together, and when the race is over, there I am with my pockets full. I can get fifty to one on my tip. Think of that, Lil. Fifty to one against the horse that's sure to win! If I had twenty pounds to-day, I could get a thousand to twenty, and win it. Only think what I could do with a thousand. I've got my eye on two lovely gold watches and chains for Lizzie and you, and I know where there's a stunning diamond ring to be almost given away."

"But tell me, Alf! Isn't that gambling? and isn't gambling wrong? I've heard grandfather say it is."

"Grandfather!" exclaimed Alfred, contemptuously. "What does grandfather know of such things? When he was a young man, things were different. A young fellow didn't have the chance he's got now of making a fortune in a day, if he's wide awake. That's why I don't want grandfather to know anything of this, nor anything that I've been speaking of. And of course you'll not tell him, Lil, for you've promised."

"You may depend upon me, dear Alf. It is for your good."

But she said these last words in a doubting tone.

"That it is, and for yours, and for Lizzie's, and for grandfather's, too. As to its being gambling and wrong--now, look here, Lil. You know what grandfather thinks of the newspapers. You know that he's always speaking in praise of them, and saying what capital things they are, and what a blessing it is that a poor man can get all the news of the world for a penny. You know that, Lil."

"Yes, dear."

"Why, it was only last week that grandfather said that the cheap newspapers were the poor man's best friend and best educator, because they taught him things and showed him truthfully what was going on round about him, and that they were doing more in their quiet way for the improvement of the people than anything he ever remembered in his time."

"Yes, dear, I heard him say so."

"To be sure you did. Well, then, you look in the newspapers, and see what they say of racing. Why, they give columns upon columns about it! They employ regular prophets and tipsters, and pay 'em handsomely--regular fly men, who think they know every move on the board; and they tell you what horses to back, and what horses are going to win. They *are* educators and improvers, I can tell you, Lil! And they tell a fellow lots of things worth knowing--though I don't follow them always; not I! I know as much as they do sometimes, and a little more, perhaps. But I read them; I read every word the prophets write. Why, I spend sixpence a day often in papers; if it wasn't for what the prophets write in them, I don't suppose I'd spend a penny."

If Alfred had said that the columns devoted in the newspapers to the vaticinations of the prophets were his Bible, he would have been as near to the truth as he ever was in his life. The lessons they taught were bearing bitter fruit. Not for him alone; for thousands of others.

"There's the Cambridgeshire and the Cesarewitch," continued Alfred, "going to be run for soon. All the best horses in England are engaged. There won't be less than three columns about each race in some of the newspapers, and people get to know which horses have the best chances, and which horses are sure to run straight. Though, to be sure, you never can depend upon that. You must keep your eyes open. But come now, Lily, ain't you satisfied that there's nothing wrong in a young fellow doing a little betting now and then?"

"I don't see how there can be any wrong in it after what you've told me, Alf."

"And after what grandfather said," he added.

"Yes, and after what grandfather said, my dear."

"So then," he summed up, "that's where it is."

Which was Alfred's almost invariable way of disposing of a question.

"And here I have a chance," he presently resumed, "of getting out of all my money troubles, and of making everything straight for you and Lizzie, and all of us."

"But," insisted Lily, "I am very happy, Alf."

"Well, I'm going to make you happier, Lil. But you can't be quite happy, Lil, when I am in trouble."

"O, no, my dear," she said quickly: "I forgot. Forgive me for my selfishness. But you'll be out of it soon."

"It depends a good deal upon you, Lil."

"How upon me, dear?"

"Well, I don't quite know if it depends upon you, but it may, and of course I'm anxious! for to tell you the truth, I owe some money which I *must* pay very soon, or it will be all up with me."

"O, Alfred!"

"It's true, Lil, every word I'm telling you. My contemptible screw at the office melts away without my knowing how it goes. Besides, what's fifteen shillings a week? Fifteen shillings! When I have the opportunity of making thousands of pounds! Grandfather says, 'Think of the future;' but I say, 'Think of the present.' Grandfather preaches to me about the career that such an office as Tickle and Flint's opens out to me, if I am steady and study hard. As if he knew anything about it! A nice career indeed! Why Tickle and Flint, the pair of 'em, are like two musty old Brazil nuts. Old Flint looks as if he hasn't got a drop of blood in his body; I don't believe, if you pricked him, that you'd get a drop out of him. Well, he came to that, I suppose, because he was steady and worked hard, and never saw a bit of life, and never enjoyed himself; never wasted a minute, I daresay; a precious steady young card he must have been when he was my age, poking his nose over his law books, which give me a splitting headache only to look at 'em. You should see what he's grown into, Lil, by being steady and studying hard. He can't see an inch before his nose; his clothes are as musty as himself. Now, I put it to you, Lil," he said, with an effort at merriment, "would you like to see me like that? Would you like to see me, as he is, bent double, old, snuffy, musty, with a voice like a penny tin-whistle that's got a crack in it? Would you like to see me like an old Brazil nut? You know the kind I mean: they're very brown and very wrinkly; when you crack 'em, you find that they're filled with dust which almost chokes you."

"No, no," replied Lily amused with the description and with the vivacity with which Alfred gave it; "that I shouldn't indeed, Alf."

"Well then," said Alfred, pleased with his brilliant effort, and concluding as usual, "that's where it is."

"You haven't told me all yet," said Lily quietly, after a pause.

"I've got nothing new to tell you, Lil dear," he said, biting his nails nervously; "you know that, with the exception of you and Lizzie, I have only one friend in the world."

"Mr. Sheldrake, you mean."

"Who else? I should have been floored long ago if it hadn't been for him. If he was to throw me over I should have to run from the country, or hide myself, or do something worse perhaps."

She caught his hand in deep alarm, and begged him not to speak in that dreadful manner. "You make me so unhappy, Alfred," she said, with difficulty checking her tears.

"I don't want to, I'm sure," he replied gloomily; "I want to make you happy. I've got no one else to sympathise with me but you. I can't tell Lizzie all these things. It would make me look small, and no man likes to look so in the eyes of the girl he's fond of. Supposing you were me, Lil, how would you feel?"

Terribly perplexed at these alternations of feeling, Lily said whatever she could to comfort him.

"Tell me what I can do, Alfred?" she implored. "A good deal depends upon me, you say. If it does, dear, although I cannot see the meaning of your words, you may be sure that you will get comfortably through all your difficulties. We have been everything to each other all our lives. Do you think there is anything you would ask me to do for you that I would refuse?"

"No," replied Alfred triumphantly, "I am sure there is not. It is ungrateful of me to doubt you even for a moment. Everything will come right--you'll see! Why Lily--look yonder! Is not that Mr. Sheldrake coming along? Yes, it is, by Jove! Almost the best friend I have in the world. How strange, now, that he should appear just as we have been talking of him!"

With perfect trustfulness, Lily said, "Yes, it was strange;" and if her eyes sought the ground, and a troubled feeling took possession of her breast, it was not because she doubted the brother whom she loved with all her heart. Doubt him! No. She was too guileless, too unsuspicious, too simple in her nature, to doubt where she gave her love. But she could not banish the feeling of uneasiness that stole upon her when Mr. Sheldrake came in view, and she could not help hoping he might turn away before he noticed them. But her hope was not to be fulfilled. Mr. Sheldrake, walking in the centre of a broad patch of sunlight, strolled leisurely towards them; apparently he was in an idle mood, for he stopped every two minutes, and gazed about him with a bright look and with the air of one who was gratefully enjoying the beauty of the scene. It was singular that he never once looked before him, and he must therefore have been unconscious of the presence of Lily and Alfred. His grateful mood took a benevolent turn presently, for observing an old woman humbly dressed walking in the shadow of the trees, he called to her, and gave her a small piece of silver. Truly we are a nation of beggars. Strictly speaking this old woman was not a beggar, but she accepted the money with a thankful curtsey. Then Mr. Sheldrake paused before a couple of birds which were hopping about on the ground, contemplating them as though he derived pleasure in all such pretty things, and when they left the ground, he followed their flight with a pleasant smile. In this manner, giving full play to his benevolent instincts, only because he was conscious that he was not being observed, Mr. Sheldrake approached Lily and Alfred. He was quite close to them before he looked up and recognised them.

"What--Alfred! Miss Lily!" he exclaimed. "This is indeed a surprise! and a pleasure," he added, as he raised his hat and bowed to Lily, and shook hands with her and Alfred; then asked of Alfred gaily, "What brings *you* into the woods? You ought to be reckoning up six-and-eightpence! This is not a fit place for lawyers, is it, Miss Lily? They're not in keeping with birds, and trees, and blue clouds. They ought to be locked up in offices filled with cobwebs. But I never thought Alfred was cut out for a lawyer--did you?"

He addressed Lily, and she, having in her mind Alfred's description of his employer, Mr. Flint, replied, "No, indeed!" and looked at her brother affectionately. Alfred, however, was not quite at his ease; he appeared to be a little disturbed by Mr. Sheldrake's expressions of surprise at seeing them.

"If anything could have given me an additional pleasure," continued Mr. Sheldrake, with a warning look at Alfred, "the height of pleasure, I may say, it is the surprise of coming upon: you both so unexpectedly--in such a totally unexpected manner. I am an idle dog, Miss Lily, and I often take it in my head to run into the country for a day's quiet ramble. There is so much to enjoy in the country; it is so much better than the smoke and whirl of London. Don't you think so?"

Lily could not help agreeing with him, and she said as much.

"Here we are agreeing upon almost everything," he said, with another of his pleasant smiles; "agreeing that Alfred is not cut out for a lawyer; agreeing that the country is so much better than London. That we have something in unison is, believe me, an honour I appreciate."

His manner was perfectly respectful, and Lily's first feeling of discomfort at his appearance was wearing away. Everything was in his favour. He was Alfred's friend, and must be really attached to her brother, as was proved by his acts; he had given money to a poor woman, and the manner in which he regarded the birds was unmistakable evidence that he possessed a kindly nature. Then the stories which Alfred had told her of Mr. Sheldrake's benevolence recurred to her, and she was disposed to be angry with herself for being uncharitably disposed towards him. Certainly she had done him an injustice; certainly she owed him reparation. And so she spoke to him in such tones as thrilled him to hear. She told him of Alfred's kindness, of how she had enjoyed herself; how much she loved the country, and how she would like to live in it always.

"But then we have everything we wish for," she said sweetly.

"You ought to have," said Mr. Sheldrake gallantly, "your wishes are so simple. It is only a

question of money."

"But what a teasing question that is!" she remarked, thinking of Alfred's troubles.

Mr. Sheldrake replied warmly that it was a burning shame (Lily was accustomed to hear such phrases from Alfred's lips, and therefore they did not sound strange to her coming from Mr. Sheldrake); if he had his way, he would take from those who had too much to give to those who had too little; things were unequal, that's what they were. Why should people be condemned to wish, when their wishes were reasonable and good, as Lily's wishes were? If there was one thing that would delight him more than another, it would be to be allowed the privilege of helping her to what she most desired. But that, of course, could not be; the conventionalities of society stepped in and said, "You must not." Was that not so? Lily said, "Yes, it was so," without at all understanding what he meant by his rodomontade.

"O, by-the-way, Alfred," said Mr. Sheldrake, after a few minutes' conversation of this description, "I have a note for you."

Alfred started like a guilty thing, for in his excited state every little unexpected event brought alarm with it. He crushed the note in his hand without looking at it, without daring to look at it. What could it contain? Was it from Con Staveley, reminding him of the acceptance so nearly due, and which he had not the means of paying? Or was it from Mr. Sheldrake himself, reminding him of his obligation to that gentleman? He was in such distress and trouble that he could not conceive it could contain any good news.

"Why don't you read it?" asked Mr. Sheldrake, with a smile. "We'll excuse you."

Alfred stepped behind a tree, so that he might hide his agitation. His heart beat wildly as he looked at the writing on the envelope--beat wildly, not with distress, but with surprise and pleasure. Opening the note hastily, he read, "Dear Alfred,--I am waiting for you. Mr. Sheldrake will tell you where I am.--Your own Lizzie." And then of course came a postscript: "What a kind good friend Mr. Sheldrake is!" Alfred read the note twice, and with a beaming face came towards Mr. Sheldrake.

"Well!" said that kind good friend. "Alfred seems pleased at something, doesn't he, Miss Lily? Good news in the note, Alf?"

His voice was full of hearty good-nature, and Lily was more remorseful than ever for the injustice she had done him in not thinking thoroughly well of him.

"What does this mean?" asked Alfred, drawing Mr. Sheldrake aside.

"How do I know?" was the reply. "I haven't read the note."

"But you know who it's from?"

"O yes; I saw her write it."

"Where is she?"

"Very near us, my boy--within a few hundred yards of this very spot."

"Here!" exclaimed Alfred. "How did she come here?"

"I brought her," replied Mr. Sheldrake with a pleasant chuckle.

"You!"

"You sly dog! Did you think I didn't know your secret? I scented it long ago, but I didn't let on. And as two's company and three's none, I thought you would like to have Lizzie to spend the afternoon with you. There'll be four of us now--two and two--just as it should be. You are a sly one, Alf. Well, never mind; you've got one of the prettiest little girls I ever set eyes on. I made the arrangement with her yesterday, and made her promise not to tell you, and not to spoil the pleasant surprise. Then I thought what a capital opportunity it would be for you to make her and your sister acquainted with one another. What do you think of me now? Am I a good friend?"

"A good friend!" exclaimed Alfred. "The best of friends!" and became almost outrageously effusive in his expressions of gratitude.

"And look here," said Mr. Sheldrake, "about that little acceptance of Con Staveley's, if you want time—"

"I do! I do!" interrupted Alfred eagerly. "I'm rather hard pressed just now, but I shall be all right presently. I've got the tip for the Cesarewitch, and I shall make a pot of money. Can you manage it for me with Con Staveley? I didn't like to ask you, but to tell you the truth, I didn't know which way to turn."

"Very well; I'll manage it for you, for Lily's sake. Don't worry yourself about it."

And then he told Alfred that Lizzie, looking as fresh as a peach--"You mustn't be jealous of me, Alf," he said--was waiting for him outside an inn opposite the entrance to Bushey Park. "Run off to her," he said; "Lily and I will wait for you here. You needn't hurry; I'll take care of Lily. We'll have a bit of dinner together, the four of us, and a row on the river, perhaps."

With radiant face Alfred hastened to Lily.

"I sha'n't be gone long, Lil," he said, kissing her. "Wait here with Mr. Sheldrake. I've got such a surprise for you. I don't believe any man ever had a more out-and-out friend than Mr. Sheldrake is to me. I want you to be very, very happy--as I am, my dear sis, my dear little Lil!"

He kissed her again, and left her with springing step. Lily was in a flutter of joy at his bright manner, and could not but feel grateful to Mr. Sheldrake for bringing such happiness to her brother. But, being left alone with him for the first time during their acquaintance, she did not feel quite at her ease, and it was while she was listening--with eyes cast modestly to the ground--to Mr. Sheldrake's soft tones, that Felix caught sight of her. She did not see him; all her attention was fixed upon Mr. Sheldrake's words.

"Yes, my dear Miss Lily," he was saying, "I am glad of the opportunity of doing Alfred a good turn; if he had no other claim upon me, he is your brother. I should like to see the man who would want a stronger argument than that. I dare say you know that he is a little bit harassed in money matters; but we'll pull him through, and when he's all right, I hope he'll know whom he has to thank for it."

"You," said Lily.

"No, my dear Miss Lily," Mr. Sheldrake, with the slightest shade of tenderness in his tone; "it is you he will have to thank. Or stay," he added gaily, "suppose we say that he has to thank the pair of us. Suppose we say that we are working together--you and I--for Alfred's good. Shall we say so?"

"If you wish," said Lily faintly.

"That's a bargain," exclaimed Mr. Sheldrake heartily. "We enter into a compact to work together for Alfred's good. I'm sure he deserves it, for he's a good fellow, and such a partner as I've got can't ask anything that I would refuse. Let us shake hands on it."

Lily held out her hand, and Mr. Sheldrake pressed it tenderly.

"And now, my dear Miss Lily, where do you think Alfred has gone to now?"

"I don't know. He seemed very excited, all of a sudden, and very happy."

"He ought to be. Do you know he has a sweetheart, the happy fellow? Has he told you about Lizzie?"

"Yes, he told me only this morning."

"He will be here directly with her. She is waiting outside the park gates for him. Are you not pleased?"

She gave him for answer a bright, happy look.

It was then that Felix turned away. He did not know, of course, what had passed between Lily and Mr. Sheldrake. But he had seen that, when they shook hands, Lily had held out hers first; and he saw, as he turned his head, the bright look which flashed into Lily's eyes as Mr. Sheldrake told her that Lizzie was near.

Something else of interest to him was taking place almost simultaneously, at a short distance from where he stood. Outside the park gates a company of street acrobats had halted, and having beaten the drum and spread their little bit of carpet, were going through their performances before an admiring audience. Among their audience was Lizzie, who took great delight in street exhibitions. She was dressed in her best clothes, and looked, as Mr. Sheldrake had said, as fresh as a peach. Her whole attention was not given to the performers, for she looked about her every now and then, expectant of some one. But she did not see that she was being watched. From the opposite side of the crowd an elderly woman, with a pale troubled face, dressed in black, was observing Lizzie's every movement, and following the girl's every motion with anxious eyes. This woman was Martha Day, housekeeper to the Reverend Emanuel Creamwell.

CHAPTER XXVII.

FELIX COMFORTS MARTHA DAY.

In a very flutter of delight, Alfred hurried to the spot where Lizzie was waiting for him. He did not pause to reflect upon the strange manner in which she had been brought to the place; it was sufficient for him that she was here, that the day was bright, and that Mr. Sheldrake had promised him to see that his acceptance to Con Staveley would be made all right. "It is only for a little while," he said to himself, as he came to the gates of Bushey Park; "when the Cesarewitch is run, I shall be all right. I daresay Sheldrake will put something on for me." Attracted by the crowd assembled round the street acrobats, he paused, and saw Lizzie. He saw also a pale-looking woman on the opposite side observing her; but this did not strike him as being worthy of notice. He looked round at the men and women who were admiringly following the movements of the acrobats, and noticed, with a feeling of as much pride as pleasure, that Lizzie was the most attractive and prettiest of them all.

"Lizzie!" he whispered in her ear.

"O, Alfred!"

The girl turned at the sound of his voice with such unrestrained joy in her face, that Martha Day bit her colourless lip until a blood-stain came upon it.

"Who ever expected to see you here, Lizzie?"

"Are you disappointed?" asked Lizzie archly. "If you are, I'll go back again."

In earnest of her sincerity, she took his arm, and clung to it. Alfred laughed.

"It looks as if you wanted to go back," he said, with admiring glances at her.

"O, Alfred, isn't this a delightful surprise?"

He nodded, and heedless of the people about them, took her hand in his. But she, more immediately conscious of the proprieties, gave his hand a little squeeze, and withdrew her own. She had on a new hat and a new dress, and she wanted him to admire them.

"Do you like my new hat, Alf?"

"Upon my word, I didn't notice it, Lizzie."

"O!" was her comment, in a tone of disappointment.

"I couldn't see anything but your face, Lizzie."

"Ah!" was her comment, in a tone of gratification, with love-sparkles in her eyes.

"It's very pretty," he said.

"My face or my bonnet, Alf?"

"I should like to hug you, Lizzie," was his crooked answer.

"But you mustn't," she said, with ripples in her voice. "So many people looking! Give me twopence, Alf."

"What for?" he asked, giving her the coppers.

"For the conjurers--because I feel so happy."

A juvenile member of the company had just tied himself into a knot, and having untied himself, Lizzie beckoned to him and gave him the money, the good example being immediately followed by others of the on-lookers.

"You've brought them luck, Lizzie."

"I'm glad of it."

But the hat question was not yet settled. She directed his attention to it.

"I made it myself last night, Alf. I want to know if it becomes me."

"It's just the kind of hat that I should have bought for you," he said.

"I made this dress, too. Do you like it? Feel what nice soft stuff it is."

He squeezed her arm.

"I like what is in it best," he said.

"What's that?" she asked coquettishly.

"You."

"O, I daresay," with a saucy toss of her head. "But it's the dress I want to know about."

"It's the very prettiest dress I ever saw."

"I thought you would like it;" and then she inquired anxiously, "It isn't too short, is it?"

With a lover's jealousy, he said he thought it might be a trifle longer.

"Goose!" she exclaimed, with an air of superior wisdom. "As if you knew anything about it! If I had ugly feet, of course I should have made it a little longer. Perhaps I *have* got ugly feet."

"O!" he said. "You've got the prettiest feet in the world."

Accepting this statement (with feminine logic) as a decision in her favour respecting the length of the dress, she said,

"I'm glad you're pleased with it; I never made anything for myself without considering whether you will like it. Just see if my panier is right, Alf."

He said, with a critical eye that her panier was just the thing.

Martha Day noted this comedy with wistful gaze. To them it was the pleasantest of plays--to her the dreariest.

"So that, take me altogether, Alf," said Lizzie, "you think I'll do?"

"If you speak like that, Lizzie, I *shall* hug you. I won't be able not to." (Most ungrammatical, but very expressive.)

"If you're not quiet, Alf, I shall run away."

"And now tell me; I want to know all about it. When Mr. Sheldrake gave me your note I was regularly knocked over. I had to read it twice before I could make sure. How long have you known Mr. Sheldrake? And how did you come to know him? And how did he find out about you and me?"

Lovers are never tired of asking questions. In this respect they resembled the character of the American people, which, if I were asked to define tersely, I should define thus: ?

"It's like a delightful fairy story," said Lizzy.

"Nonsense, Lizzie. *Do* be sensible."

"It isn't nonsense, Alf. It really and truly is like a delightful fairy story, and if you don't think so, I'll not tell you anything about it."

"I'll say it's like anything, if you'll only tell me all about it."

"Well, then, I must commence properly. Once upon a time—" Here she paused, in the most tantalising manner, and asked, "Where do I live?"

"Why, where you lived the last time I was at your place."

"How long ago is that?" with an air of not having the most remote idea as to whether it was a day, or a week, or a year.

"This day last week, you little tease."

"Was it?" as though she really had no idea. "Perhaps you're right. Well, everything's altered since then. I don't live there any longer. But, Alfred, isn't your sister here?"

"Yes," he answered, not knowing what to make of her humour.

"Oughtn't we to go to her? I hope she'll like me."

"She loves you already, for my sake, Lizzie. She told me so, and is longing to see you. But we've no occasion to hurry. We'll walk slowly, and then you can tell me your fairy story."

"Well," she said, with a smile at once bewitching and tender, "you're a dear patient boy, and now I'll be good and tell you all about it. Once upon a time—"

They turned, and walked towards the entrance of Bushey Park. So interested were they in Lizzie's fairy story, that they did not notice Felix, who brushed quite close by them. He saw them, however, and saw at the same moment what was a greater astonishment to him--Martha Day, with a face like death, watching the lovers with misery in her eyes.

"Martha!" he cried, "how strange to meet you here, and at such a time!"

She made no reply to his expression of surprise, and did not seem to think it strange that he

should make his appearance at that moment. Taking, almost mechanically, the hand he held out to her, she clasped it firmly, and made a movement in the direction of the park gates. But Felix, not knowing what was her intention, held back. He had no desire to play the part of spy upon Lily's brother.

"Why do you restrain me?" asked Martha, in a low voice.

"I don't wish to restrain you, Martha," replied Felix; "but I cannot go in that direction for a minute or two. You appear to me not to quite know what you are about. What is it you want, and what is the matter with you?"

"You passed close by them?" pointing after Lizzie and Alfred.

"Yes."

"And saw them?"

"Yes."

"What do they look like?"

"Like sweethearts, I should say, Martha."

An expression of pain escaped from Martha's lips.

"Do *you* know them, Martha?"

"I know one."

"Which one?"

"The girl. I must not lose sight of her."

Again she made a movement in the direction of the retreating forms of the lovers, and again Felix held her back. She had clasped his hand so firmly during the time that he could not release it without being rough.

"If you follow them," he said, "you must go alone. What is this girl to you?"

"She is my life--my soul!" cried Martha passionately, wringing her hands.

Seeing that her passion was attracting the attention of the bystanders, Felix drew her away gently towards the park, in the direction which Lizzie and Alfred had taken. Felix had not had much experience of Martha; but what little he had seen of her in his father's house had so decidedly exhibited her in the character of a cold passionless woman, whom scarcely anything could move to strong emotion, that this present experience of her filled him with surprise. It was a new revelation to him. Martha had exhibited much affection for him, and he was disposed to assist her to the utmost extent of his power. There had always been something odd and strange in her behaviour to him; but he had ascribed this to her eccentric manner. He had, however, never seen any signs in her of the stormy currents of feeling which she now exhibited, and which were brought into play by the girl whom he had just passed, and he had seen for the first time. What connection could exist between that bright girl and the pale sad woman by his side, whose whole life appeared to have been one of self-restraint? He asked himself the question, but he was unable to answer it. They walked slowly along, she being contented to allow him to take the lead, because she could see Lizzie's dress fluttering in the distance. Felix took care to keep well out of sight, and when Lizzie and Alfred reached the spot where Mr. Sheldrake and Lily were sitting, paused also, and looked about for a seat for Martha.

"I will sit here, Felix," she said, seating herself where she could see the movements of the party in the distance; she had somewhat recovered herself, but was pale and trembling still.

Felix waited for her to speak. He had lost sight of his own troubles and his own misgivings in the contemplation of Martha's grief and agitation; but as he stood leaning against a tree, with his face towards the woman he loved with all his strength, they came back upon him. The subject they involved was so near to him, so dear, so inwoven in his heart, that it was impossible for it to be absent from his mind now for any but a brief space of time. He had not yet been able to think it over and to place a construction upon what he had seen. But although clouds were gathering about him, he had already committed himself to one determination--not to allow himself to be blinded by unworthy doubts. He had extracted a promise from Lily's grandfather, had pledged himself, as it were, and the old man had put a trust in him. It was not in his nature to betray a trust, nor to give way to mean suspicions. Suspicions! Of Lily, and her truth and innocence! No, indeed. "I have watched her from infancy," the old man had said, "and I know her purity. I pray that she may be spared from life's hard trials: but they may come to her, as they come to most of us. They may come to her undeservedly, and through no fault of hers; and if they do, and if, like Imogen, she has to pass through the fire, she will, like Imogen, come out unscathed." The full sense of these words came upon Felix now, and were of themselves sufficient to hold in arrest his judgment upon what he had witnessed. But this influence was not needed, and it was a proof of the chivalry of his nature that, even as these words recurred to him, he should turn his face from

the woman he loved.

There are a class of men who have no belief in generous feeling. It is an article of faith with these clever ones of the world to believe that there is something unworthily selfish or base at the bottom of every action; but this is not the only false creed extant. The quixotism which they sneer at often contains a kernel of much nobility and sweetness. Felix was to a certain extent quixotic; he was even, according to a certain mistaken interpretation of the term, a sentimentalist. But he was no rhapsodist; he indulged in dreams, but he did not allow his imagination to steal a march upon his reason and distort it. His mind was a logical one; and the course he had taken with his father proved that he could be firm and faithful to an idea. In the few brief moments of silence that elapsed he was busy piecing together many things in connection with Lily, deduced chiefly from what had been said by her grandfather regarding her. "To her, as to others," the old man had said, "life's troubles may come. To her may come one day the sweet and bitter experience of love. When it does, I pray to God that she may give her heart to one who will be worthy of her--to one who holds not lightly, as is unhappily too much the fashion now, the sacred duties of life." In the very interview in which these words were spoken, the old man had said to Felix, "You would give me faith if I needed it. It would have been my greatest pride to have had such a son." Swiftly upon this came the old man's advice to Felix to follow Lily and Alfred to Hampton Court. These things and the unexpressed meanings they conveyed--(here intruded the question asked by Felix, whether the brother and sister had gone to Hampton Court by themselves, and the old man's answer, Yes)--were so opposed to what might not unreasonably have been inferred from the attitude of Lily and Mr. Sheldrake to each other, that Felix, with characteristic quixotism, refused to accept the interpretation that most other men would have put upon the discovery. His thoughts having arrived at this climax, he was prevented from going farther by Martha speaking to him. She had watched with earnest eyes the meeting between Lizzie and Lily, and seemed to derive consolation from the way the girls took to each other. She was calmer now, and directed Felix's attention to the two girls, with their arms round each other's waists, drawing a little apart from the men.

"I see," said Felix, also appearing to derive satisfaction from the companionship of the girls; "but I am in the dark as yet. If you can trust me—"

"Trust you, Felix! I would trust you with my life!"

"You might, and with anything else as dear to you. Who is that young lady?"

"My niece." With a steady look at Felix, and with the slightest bit of colour in her face.

"Your niece! I had an idea that you had no relations. I never heard you speak of any."

"No, Felix." (She was fast recovering her composure.) "But that does not prevent my having a niece."

"I can tell by your manner that you love her very dearly, Martha."

"If she were my daughter, Felix, I could not love her more." The composure of her face and manner was wonderful to witness, after her late exhibition of passion and anxiety. "I love the girl you see before you with as intense a love as if I had suckled her at my breast, and as if all other ties upon me (if I ever had any), all other demands upon my love, had passed out of my life. Rather than see her come to harm"— (she stretched out her hands, which now were slightly trembling, and strove hard to preserve her quiet calm demeanour; but she could not quite succeed, as the tremor in her voice testified.) "Rather than see her come to harm, I would choose to have these fingers torn from my hands, joint by joint; I would submit to any suffering, to any indignity; I would live my unhappy life over a hundred times, and be a hundred times more unhappy than I have been. I don't know what could be dictated to me that I would not do for her sake."

The passion of her words and the forced calm of her voice presented a strange contrast. Felix listened in wonder.

"Does she know you are here, Martha?"

"No."

"How did you come upon her, then?"

"I followed her from London. Chance alone befriended me. Yesterday I went to where she lived, and I was told she had moved."

"Where did she live?"

It was no surprise to hear her mention the street and the very house in which he had his lodgings, for as he asked the question he remembered how, on the first night of his taking up his quarters there, he had seen Martha pass swiftly out of the street-door as he was about to open it. He had not been very curious about the other lodgers in the house, being wishful that they should not be curious about him; but on two or three occasions he had seen a girl go up the stairs past his landing--a young graceful girl, who might have been Lizzie--who indeed, he settled in his own

mind now, was Lizzie, although he had never seen her face. He said nothing of this to Martha, except that he knew the street.

"You went to where Lizzie lived, and were told that she had moved—"

"Lizzie had already told me so in a letter she wrote to me, and she said in it that in a day or two she would tell me more. But I could not rest after I received the letter. Here it is, Felix; read it."

She took a letter from the bosom of her dress, and gave it to him. In the distance, the two girls, having drawn still further apart from Alfred and Mr. Sheldrake, were standing within the shadow of a great chestnut tree, the branches of which bent over them protectingly; their attitude bespoke the exercise of much affectionate feeling. Lizzie was speaking with animation, and Lily was listening, with a smile on her face. Alfred and Mr. Sheldrake were also engaged in conversation; their faces were towards the girls, and every now and then Alfred gave them a pleasant nod, and received smiles and bright glances in return.

"She writes a good hand," observed Felix, opening the letter.

"She has had a good education."

"That speaks well for her mother."

"She has no remembrance of her mother."

"Then she owes it all to you, Martha."

"All to me, Felix," replied Martha quietly; "but read."

Felix read:

"My dear Aunty,--It is nearly twelve o'clock at night, and I am very tired and sleepy. But before I go to bed I want to talk to you, and as you are not here for me to tease you, I must write a letter. Now I daresay you wonder what about--*I* should, if I were you!--although I know you are always glad to get a letter from me, whether there is anything in it or not. But I really have something to say to you now; something very, *very* particular, although it will puzzle you, for I can only tell you a bit of it. You shall know the rest when you come to London, which I hope will be soon, but not until I write you another letter to tell you where to come to. I am going to move, aunty dear, into a nice house, where I'm going to be very happy and comfortable; and although I said at first that I must tell you about it before I did it, I have been persuaded to wait until it was done, so that I might give you a real pleasant surprise. Now, this is to tell you just so much, and no more,--and to tell you, too, that you mustn't be the least bit uneasy about me. We shall be nicely settled in a very few days, and then I shall write to you to come and see me. I fancy I see you walking in and looking about in astonishment, you dear aunty! I wish we could always live together, and that I could show you how much I love you, and how grateful I am for all your care of me. Perhaps that time will come, eh, dear aunty?--Now I must wish you good-night, for I feel so sleepy. Good-night; God bless you.--From your happy and affectionate LIZZIE."

"When I received that letter yesterday," said Martha when Felix returned it to her, "I cannot describe to you the misery it brought to me. Lizzie had made a change in her life once before without my knowing, and she promised me then, seeing the unhappiness it caused me, always to consult me in any matter of importance. She has not done so; I have seen her to-day with two men who are utter strangers to me; she has never mentioned their names to me; and one is evidently more to her than an ordinary friend or acquaintance."

"Calm yourself, Martha," said Felix, in sincere compassion for her distress of mind; "you are wasting your strength."

"What can my poor Lizzie know of the heartlessness and cruelty of the world? What can she know of the falseness of fair words, and of the base thoughts that a smiling face can cover? O Felix, I have felt it! I know what it is; I have suffered from it cruelly. She was going to move into a nice house, she says in her letter. What do these words mean? I tortured myself with putting meanings to them. It was impossible for me to get to London yesterday, and I had to wait until this morning. O, what a weary night I passed, Felix--what a weary, weary night! I lay in the dark, and the tick of the old clock in the passage almost maddened me, it was so slow. I did not have a moment's sleep--you can see that in my face. I must have dressed myself at least half a dozen times. How I prayed for the morning to come! Of all the nights of agony I have passed--and I have had many, Felix; my life has been hard and cold and bitter--that was the worst, and the most unhappy!"

She paused for a moment after this lament.

"Bitter as my life has been, I have borne it patiently, uncomplainingly, as long as I was sure that Lizzie was well and happy. There was my comfort; there is now my suffering. O, Felix, what pain there is in love--what pain, what pain!"

Felix recalled her to herself by a gentle touch of his hand.

"I know, Felix, I know; I cannot help it. I have such a weary pain here."

"Rest a little," he said, "before you proceed."

But she continued.

"The morning came at last, thank God--it came at last! And then again I had to wait until the train left Stapleton. I arrived in London before ten o'clock, and went straight to the house where Lizzie lodged. I saw the landlady. She told me that Lizzie had left, and that another lodger of hers had also left at the same time. This other lodger was an old man, she said, and she did think it a little strange that they should both have given warning at the same time. Did she know where Lizzie had gone to? I asked. No, she did not know. I was turning away, when I thought of the old man. Did she know where he was gone to? No, she didn't know the number of the house, nor the street; but a few days ago the old man had let drop a word or two, which led her to suppose he was going to live near a certain place about four miles from London. I thought, if I could find this old man, he might be able to tell me where Lizzie was. I arrived in the locality; I rode there in a cab. But it seemed to me that I might as well have been in a wilderness for all the clue I could obtain as to where the old man lived. As I was searching and inquiring, with such little success that I became sick and faint, I suddenly saw a figure a long way before me. I knew it immediately--I should have known it among a thousand. It was Lizzie. But she was not alone. A gentleman was with her, and I did not wish to make my girl angry by speaking to her in the presence of a stranger. I followed them. They seemed to be very happy, and talked and laughed with light hearts; while I with my heavy load hung behind, so that they should not see me. They stopped at a railway-station, and the gentleman left Lizzie standing on the platform, and came along to the ticket-window to get tickets. My veil was down, and as I did not know him, it was not likely that he would know me, even if he saw my face; so I mustered sufficient courage to approach close to him, and heard him ask for tickets for Hampton Court. I took a ticket also for this place, and came in the same train, but not in the same carriage. I was alone in the carriage, and I had plenty of time to think what it was best for me to do. I was a long time before I made up my mind; and then I decided that it would be best for me not to discover myself to Lizzie unless I was compelled. My girl was keeping some part of her life from me, I thought, and I should know better how to act if I found out what it was. I had never seen this gentleman before, had never heard of him from Lizzie. He looked like a gentleman, but still like that kind of gentleman that it would not be wise for a girl in Lizzie's position to know too well. I thought of the temptations which surrounded a young girl like Lizzie--she is very, very pretty, dear girl!--in a great city like London. Imagine my agony. After all, girls are girls; they like pleasure and excitement; and Lizzie was living by herself. But I dared not think long upon this; it weighed upon me too much. We alighted at Hampton Court, and I followed my dear girl and the gentleman cautiously. They stopped at an inn--the inn before which the street conjurers were playing. The gentleman said a few words to Lizzie, and left her. Just then the conjurers came and began to make preparations for performing. Lizzie came out to see them--she is very fond of street sights, dear child!--and I stood apart from her in the crowd watching her. I don't know how long a time passed before the young man came up to her; but it was like a knife in my heart to see the joy in Lizzie's face when he spoke to her. I never thought it possible I could have felt pain to see my girl look bright and happy. And you may wonder, Felix, why I suffered so; you may wonder why I should not rejoice in my girl's pleasures. But think for a moment--think of the misery it caused me to learn that Lizzie had been hiding things from me. If she kept this from my knowledge, as she has done, may she not have kept other things? If you knew how wretched it makes me to hear myself speaking like this of her--if you knew Felix, you would pity me. But I wouldn't say it to any one else but you; and I know that I am mistaken, and that my girl is good and true. They talked together for a little while, and I saw her ask him for some money to give to the performers. It was like her, dear child she has the tenderest heart! Soon afterwards they walked away, and I was about to follow them when you came up. That is all."

While she was speaking, Felix called to mind that on the day he first saw Lily in his father's house in Stapleton, Martha admitted her and her grandfather and brother to his father's study. "Did she remember Alfred's face?" he asked of himself mentally.

"You saw the young man who came to Lizzie?" he asked aloud.

"Yes, Felix."

"Can you see his face now?"

"No, I am shortsighted. If it were not for my love, I should not be able to distinguish Lizzie."

"Tell me," said Felix, "do you ever remember seeing his face before?"

"Never, Felix; and yet—" she paused, and passed her hand over her eyes--"now you mention it, there seemed to be something familiar in his face as I looked at him. But no, I must be mistaken; I have no recollection of ever having seen him. Why do you ask?"

"I wondered if you had, that is all, Martha. And now" (dismissing the subject), "what is it you intend to do?"

"I don't know--I am bewildered. At one time I think of going away, and bearing my misery until she writes to me again, which she is sure to do soon; then I can speak to her. At another time I think of going up to her, and showing myself. She would be glad to see me, I think; she would not turn her back upon me."

"I am sure she would be glad to see you—"

"Bless you, Felix," cried Martha, in a grateful tone, "for that assurance!"

"But have you thought how you could account for your presence here, Martha? Would not the gentleman who brought her from London be likely to remember that he saw you at the ticket-office? Would not Lizzie be hurt if she thought you had been watching her?"

"Yes, yes," exclaimed Martha, looking up to him for support. "You are right in everything you say; you can see things in a clearer light than I can. I am confused and tired out. It *would* hurt Lizzie's feelings; and rather than that—"

"Rather than that, if I judge you rightly, you would suffer much without murmuring."

"You judge me rightly, Felix. I would suffer much to save her from the smallest pain."

He gave her a bright look in approval, and pressed her hand.

"You are sure of one thing, Martha--sure that Lizzie will write to you soon?"

"O, yes."

"Well, she has come out to enjoy the day--I don't suppose she has too many holidays. Look at her--you can see that she is happy. It would be a pity to spoil her enjoyment. You agree with me--I see it in your eyes. So presently, if it is necessary, you will go home and leave them to themselves."

"If you advise me to do so, I will," she said humbly, and then with more animation, "although it will make me very unhappy to be sent away. For one reason, Felix. You must not think that in what I am going to say I am prejudiced or prompted by fears. I don't like that man's face."

"Which of the two do you refer to, Martha?"

"The one who brought Lizzie from London."

"Neither do I."

"You know him then--you have seen him?"

"Let me think a little, Martha."

He moved away from her, and walked slowly up and down in deep thought. Should he tell Martha his secret, or so much of it as he deemed necessary? Her instinctive aversion to David Sheldrake's face found sympathy with him. Felix was a shrewd observer, and during his brief sojourn in London had formed a pretty fair estimate of the life of the great city. His judgment was not biassed by prejudices of any kind, and it did not detract from the correctness of his conclusions that he judged by a high standard. He knew the class of men of which Mr. Sheldrake was a member; knew that they lived only for the pleasures of the day, and that such moral obligations as conscientiousness and right-doing were not to be found in their vocabulary of ethics. That Lily entertained an affection for Mr. Sheldrake, he could not believe; no, not even the bright look she gave to Mr. Sheldrake, and of which he had been an involuntary witness--not even the confidential relations which seemed to subsist between them--could make him believe that. "Although love comes--how?" thought Felix. "Who can analyse the subtle influences which compose it? who can set down rules for it?" But the strongest argument he found to strengthen his belief that Lily did not love Mr. Sheldrake was that her grandfather knew nothing of it. And, on the other hand, from what had passed between himself and Old Wheels, the hope had been born within him that the old man suspected and approved of his feelings for Lily. "He would not encourage me by the shadow of a word," thought Felix, "if he thought that Lily loved another. She may not love me, although I have sometimes thought that I might win her love; but I may have been misled by my hopes." He would know some day, perhaps; in the mean time a clear duty was before him, prompted no less by his love for her than by his sense of right, and by his promise to the old man. Felix was convinced that the old man knew nothing of the present meeting of Lily and Mr. Sheldrake, and was convinced that Lily herself did not know of it beforehand; for she had asked her grandfather to accompany them, and he had refused. Why did he refuse? Lily wished him to come, and that wish was sufficiently strong for compliance. Immediately Felix arrived at this point of his reflections, he decided that Alfred must be the cause of the old man's absence, and also that Alfred knew that Mr. Sheldrake would be at Hampton Court, and had kept the knowledge from Lily. The meeting was planned, then, beforehand--planned by Alfred and Mr. Sheldrake.

Thus logically following out his train of thought, things became clearer to him; but the chain was not complete. What was the link that connected Alfred and Mr. Sheldrake? Felix knew

nothing of Alfred's racing speculations; neither did he suspect Alfred of deliberate treachery against his sister. All that was ill in the matter he set down to the credit of Mr. Sheldrake. And this was the more strange because he would admit of no compromise, and because, as a general rule, he was singularly lenient and tender in his estimate of acts and persons, finding and making excuses often which could only be conceived by one possessing a kindly nature.

Lily was in danger; of that he was satisfied. Her love for Alfred magnified the danger. He drew a deep breath, and looked steadily at the persons of whom he had been thinking; they were together now, and were making preparations for quitting the spot.

"You said just now, Martha," he said, "that you could trust me with your life."

"I meant it," she replied.

"Trust me, then," he exclaimed, in an incisive tone; his words seemed to cut the air, they were so clear and sharp. "Do exactly as I tell you. Your cause is mine. Lizzie is as dear to you as your life is; I know that. Let me relieve your mind upon one point. I am acquainted with the young man who looks like Lizzie's sweetheart--it is strange how things are linked together, is it not? The young lady you see with them is his sister--as pure and good a girl as breathes in this villanous world. No, no; why should I say villanous? There are spots even upon the sun. But the girl whose arm is round Lizzie's waist, the girl whose cheek is so close to Lizzie's now, has a soul as clear as an undefiled mountain stream."

"Felix!" cried Martha in wonder; for a tremulous tenderness had stolen into his voice as he spoke these last words.

"You and I are something alike in one thing, Martha; we don't waste words when there is a purpose before us. What we say has meaning in it. What I say to you now, I know; for I have come in contact with that pure soul and simple nature, and it has done me good. It should do you good, too, to know that your girl is in such companionship."

"It does, Felix; my mind is inexpressibly relieved."

"Stay here, Martha; they are moving off. I intend to see where they are going to."

Martha resumed her seat without a word of protest, having confidence in him; and he, waiting until the party were ahead of him, followed them slowly. He was not gone more than ten minutes.

"It is as I thought," he said to Martha, when he returned; "they are at the inn now, and dinner is being prepared for them."

He sat down beside her, and she took his hand, and looked at him affectionately.

"I have been thinking, Felix, of what you said just now concerning that young lady."

"And thinking of me, I suppose, in connection with her."

"Yes, Felix."

"Well, Martha, you have the key to my secret. Let it be sacred between us, and do not let any reference to it pass your lips unless with my consent."

He asked her to recall the time when he and she last met.

"I do," she answered. "It was in the porch of your father's house, on the day you left."

"But I have seen you since then, Martha."

"Not there!" she exclaimed, in surprise. "Not at Stapleton!"

"No; in London. I am about to give you a surprise, Martha; the day seems full of surprises, indeed. I am going to tell you where I live."

He told her the street, and the number of the house. In amazement, she cried,

"Why, that's where Lizzie lived! I was at the house this morning!"

"I never saw Lizzie's face; all I knew was that a young girl and an old man lived at the top of the house. I keep myself very quiet, Martha, and have not been desirous of making acquaintances. So now you know where to come and see me in London, should you wish; for of course I cannot come to Stapleton. Things go on as usual there, I suppose?"

"Yes; there is no change."

He made no farther reference to his former home, and came back to his theme.

"I shall stay here, Martha. You had best go home; I will write to you to-morrow. When you hear from Lizzie, with her new address, come to me and let me know it."

"Have you decided, then, what to do, Felix?"

"I can't see my way clearly, but things will shape themselves for me. Have you seen the play of *Richelieu?*"

"I haven't been to a theatre since I was a girl," she replied.

"Well, in one part of that play the principal mover finds it necessary for his plans to put on a fox's skin. It may be that I shall take a leaf out of his book. Come, we must be moving."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

LIZZIE IN HER NEW HOME.

There is no telling nowadays where London ends and the country commences. It is difficult to realize that quite recently in our history, within the last three hundred years indeed, the Strand was bush and garden, and that Westminster and Islington were made pleasant by green woods and fields. Then, houses were few and far between; now, they are so thickly clustered that (animated, perhaps, by the spirit of their inhabitants) they seem to be poking their elbows into each other's ribs, and to be jealous of one another. So, for rest and quiet, we must away from these busy thoroughfares.

The course of our story, however, does not carry us very far from London's centre; and although the house at which we stop is in a pretty and quiet neighbourhood, and is old-fashioned and delightfully irregular in its outlines, the shriek of the iron horse is heard within its walls a dozen times an hour. It is a small house in one of the suburbs, with garden all round it, just such a house (or at least she says it is) as Lizzie saw among the flowers when Muzzy proposed that they should live together. Lizzie is bustling about the house now, singing as she runs up and down-stairs, and old Muzzy--henceforth to be dignified by the name of Musgrave--looks up from the table, upon which are a number of letters and circulars, and listens to her blithe voice. He has discovered already that Lizzie is a capital little housewife; that she can cook and market without the slightest fuss, and without taking any particular merit to herself for those accomplishments. Lizzie, indeed, is fond of work; she is busy all day long, and it is evident that her sewing-machine is not allowed to rust.

It is the day after the excursion to Hampton Court. It was quite eleven o'clock of the previous night when Mr. Musgrave, sitting in the parlour waiting anxiously for Lizzie's return, heard voices at the garden gate in front of the house. He went to the street-door, and stood quietly with the handle in his hand. "Good-night," he heard Lizzie cry; "and don't forget--on Thursday!" A low voice replied in words that Mr. Musgrave did not hear, and then there was pleasant laughter, and "Good-night!" "Good-night!" a dozen times repeated. After that Mr. Musgrave, opening the street-door, saw Lizzie standing by the gate waving her handkerchief. When they were in the house, Lizzie declared that she was too tired to tell him the day's adventures; that she had spent a very happy day, and that she was sleepy, and wanted to go to bed and think.

"I will tell you all about it to-morrow, daddy," she said, and kissed him and wished him good-night.

Now, sitting in what may be termed the back parlour, he is waiting to hear Lizzie's account of her adventures the previous day. The window in this room looks out on the garden at the rear of the house. At the end of the garden is a cozy little summer-house, with just sufficient room for four persons to sit embowered "in mossy shade."

Lizzie, coming into the room, tells him what there is for dinner and that it will soon be ready, and asks him for the twentieth time if all this isn't delightful.

"But," she adds, "do you think it will last, daddy?"

"Why shouldn't it, Lizzie?" he asks in return.

"I don't know," she replies, with somewhat of a serious look in her face. "It seems strange when you come to think of it. I couldn't help wondering about it last night in bed."

"Wondering in what way, Lizzie?"

"Just tell me if I am wrong in something you once said to me. You said you hadn't known Mr. Sheldrake very long."

"I might have told you so, Lizzie."

"But it is true, isn't it, daddy?"

"Yes, it is true."

"Then I remember you once said that nobody in the world does anything without a motive."

"Go on."

"So I put this and that together. Mr. Sheldrake hasn't known you very long. What motive can he have in being so kind to you?"

"He is my master, Lizzie."

"That's no motive. So I think to myself, I wonder if it will last! You see, daddy, I am inquisitive, as all girls are, and I want to find out. And I mean to--for reasons."

He laughs at this, and says that she is an inquisitive girl indeed. What makes her so inquisitive about Mr. Sheldrake when she has never seen him?

"O, then you don't know!" she exclaims.

"Don't know what, Lizzie? You talk in riddles."

"Don't know that Mr. Sheldrake met me at a little distance from here yesterday, and went down with me to Hampton Court?"

"Lizzie!" he exclaims in a tone of alarm, which sets Lizzie's sharp eyes at work studying his face, while the serious look on hers deepens in intensity.

The thought which prompts his alarm is this: Is Mr. Sheldrake playing him false? He remembers, when Mr. Sheldrake proposed that he should turn over a new leaf, asking his master if he meant any harm to Lizzie. To that question Mr. Sheldrake had returned a scornful reply. But Lizzie's statement revives his suspicion. Her honour is as dear to him as a daughter's would have been. But how to warn her? Her high spirit would not permit of plain speaking; and besides, the subject is a delicate one, and the mere mention of it by him might be construed into a suspicion of Lizzie. She sees his trouble and perplexity, and divines the cause of it.

"Don't be frightened, daddy," she says; "Mr. Sheldrake did not make love to me. *I* am not his motive. A girl can soon tell, you know."

"Tell me all about your meeting with him, Lizzie--how it came about."

"He wrote me a note, telling me he wanted to give Some One--Alfred, you know--a pleasant surprise, and proposing that I should meet him and go down to Hampton Court with him. We were to keep the matter to ourselves, and I wasn't even to tell you. Well, I hesitated a little at first, thinking it wasn't quite right; but then I thought of the noble character you gave him, and I was curious to see him. And you mustn't think, daddy, that I can't take care of myself. So I told you what was the truth when I said I was going to Hampton Court to meet Some One, but I didn't tell you how it was to come about. You mustn't think ill, or have any suspicions, of Mr. Sheldrake because of what I say, for everything turned out exactly as he proposed. We went down to Hampton Court, and he left me and went for Alfred: and altogether it was one of the very happiest days I have ever spent."

"I am glad of that, Lizzie. But this doesn't bring us any nearer to Mr. Sheldrake's motive."

"Alfred's sister was there. Such a dear girl, daddy! If she wasn't Alfred's sister, I should be jealous of her, because I am sure that everybody must prefer her to me. You will fall in love with her directly you see her. Lily and I are going to be great friends; she is coming to spend the day here on Thursday. Mr. Sheldrake was very attentive to her." This with a shrewd look at Mr. Musgrave's face. But it seems as if he has not heard the last words.

"What name did you say?" he asks.

"Lily. Pretty names are they not, daddy, for brother and sister? Lily and Alfred."

"What is she like?" He does not ask the question immediately. He pauses for a little while before he speaks.

"She is about my height, but a little slighter, with such beautiful brown eyes! I can't describe her face, there is such a dreamy look upon it sometimes. You must wait until Thursday and see for yourself. But I tell you what she is; she is good."

"Does Mr. Sheldrake know she is coming?"

"Yes; he proposed it, I think."

Then he asks her to let him see Alfred's portrait which she has in her locket, and he gazes at it long and earnestly. The subject drops, and is not renewed again that day.

Ivy Cottage is the name of the house, and it has been taken furnished, at a low rent, in

consequence of its having been tenantless for some time. It is understood in the neighbourhood that an old gentleman and his daughter have come to live there, and Lizzie's bright face has already attracted attention and admiration. That Mr. Sheldrake, through his friend Con Staveley, intends to make Ivy Cottage a profitable speculation is evident. Operations have been already commenced in the sporting papers, and intending speculators are implored, before investing in the two great races which are soon to take place, the Cambridgeshire and the Cesarewitch, to send twelve stamps to a certain gentleman who, according to the advertisement, might be reasonably supposed to live in a letter-box at a post-office not a mile distant from Ivy Cottage. Mr. Musgrave, going to that post-office twice a day, never comes away empty-handed. The letter-box is his Tom Tiddler's ground, where he picks up gold and silver as represented by postage-stamps. And it is not the only Tom Tiddler's ground which has been discovered by the persevering explorers. A mile from Ivy Cottage, in another direction, is another post-office, whereto sportsmen are invited to send more postage stamps to the cousin of the most successful jockey of the day, and receive in return the "straight tip" for the above mentioned races, "the greatest moral ever known." The cousin of the most successful jockey of the day is, of course, in all the stable secrets, knows the intentions of the owners of all the most celebrated horses, and offers to forfeit one thousand pounds if the horse he sends fails to win; and as his honour is unimpeachable (he says to himself), there can be no doubt that the money would be forthcoming in case of a failure. And all for a paltry eighteen penny stamps! A third Tom Tiddler's ground lies in another direction, and a fourth in another; so that Con Staveley may be said to levy contributions north, south, east, and west: it is certain that the winds that blew from every quarter blew postage stamps into Ivy Cottage.

But a more ambitious scheme than any of these is afoot--a scheme which deals in pounds instead of shillings, in post-office orders and cheques instead of penny postage stamps. This scheme comes under the head of "Discretionary Investments," which, notwithstanding that they are as distinct frauds as can be found in the criminal record, are allowed to take root and to flourish without check or hindrance. The large sums of money that are paid for long advertisements in the front pages of certain sporting newspapers by the rogues who undertake these "discretionary investments," testify to the profitable nature of their undertaking. It is amazing that such swindling systems should be allowed to flourish in the very eye of the law, which virtually protects the swindler, and laughs at the dupe.

Lizzie is in a great state of excitement until Thursday morning arrives.

"I don't exactly know what I feel like," she says on that morning; "having a house to look after is so strange and new. This is just such a house as I should like if I was settled. You know what I mean," she adds, with a sharp nod of her head at "daddy," who has looked up at the word.

"Married," he says.

"Yes; I can't imagine anything better. Home is very beautiful."

"Is Some One--Alfred--in a good position, Lizzie?"

"I don't think so; he's in a lawyer's office. But he will be very rich one day."

"Rich relations? Rich parents?"

"He has no parents. He and Lily are orphans. Father and mother both dead. And I've never heard him speak of rich relations. No; not rich that way. But he's sure to have plenty of money some day. He is very clever. Lily says so too; she is very fond of him, and would do anything for him. She told me so. Come up-stairs, daddy; I want to show you something."

He goes up-stairs with her, and she takes him into her bedroom. Everything in it is clean and fresh; there are flowers on the table, and, the window being open, a grateful perfume steals in from the garden.

"Now, look here," she says, and she opens the door of a room which leads into hers. But that is smaller, it is the very counterpart of hers.

"Now, you see what I have been so busy about, daddy. I shall call this Lily's room; although, when she comes to stop with us for a few days now and then, I shall give her my room, because it is larger."

"Is she coming to stop with us, Lizzie?"

"I hope so; some time or other. Mr. Sheldrake said what a pleasant thing it would be for me, and Alfred said so too. You don't mind, daddy?"

"Anything pleases me that is for your pleasure and happiness, my dear."

"Mind!" she exclaims, kissing him, "you must like Lily very, very much; and you must like Alfred too."

"I will try to, my dear."

"She will be here in a couple of hours, and Alfred is coming in the afternoon."

"It is unfortunate that I am not able to stop at home to see her, Lizzie; but I will try to get back in time."

"Why, daddy!" cries Lizzie, in a tone of disappointment, "you are not going away!"

"I must, my dear. Read this letter. I only received it this morning."

It is a letter from Con Staveley, desiring him to be at the office in London by a certain time, to talk over the new scheme of discretionary investments.

"How provoking!" exclaims Lizzie. "But it can't be helped, I suppose. You don't think it strange, do you?"

"I see nothing strange in it, my dear; it is a matter of business."

Lizzie gives him a queer look, and says again she supposes it can't be helped.

"Be home as soon as you can, daddy," she calls after him, as he goes out of the house.

Whatever reflections Lizzie indulges in after his departure are lost for the time in the pleasure she feels in Lily's arrival. Lily is not alone; Pollypod accompanies her.

"Grandfather did not like me to come by myself," she says to Lizzie, "so I thought I would bring little Polly with me, Polly and I are great friends."

Pollypod nods solemnly, and, after her usual fashion with new acquaintances, gazes in silence at Lizzie for a few seconds, and then, having made up her mind, raises her face to be kissed, and says, with the air of an oracle,

"I like you!"

This simple statement being received in good faith by Lizzie, they become friends instantly, and Pollypod being made free of the house wanders about it and the garden in a state of great delight, coming to the girls every now and then, "wanting to know" something or other. As for Lizzie and Lily they desire nothing better than to be left by themselves; girls, when they get together have so many important items of information to impart to each other, and so many confidences to exchange. The first thing to be done is, of course, to show Lily all over the house; and then there is a long chat in the bedroom.

"I am so sorry daddy is not at home," says Lizzie, "but he was obliged to go to London on particular business."

The mention of daddy necessitates an explanation, for Lily has understood from Alfred that Lizzie is an orphan.

So Lizzie tells the simple story of her life to her new friend, and Lily listens, and sympathises, and admires. When Lizzie comes to the part which introduces Mr. Sheldrake's name into the narrative, Lily listens more attentively, and yet with something of a forced and embarrassed air, which does not escape Lizzie's observation.

"Must not Mr. Sheldrake be a kind-hearted gentleman?" asks Lizzie, keeping close watch on Lily's face. "He does it out of pure kindness, daddy says. You don't often hear of such things."

"I have heard much good of him," replies Lily; "he is a great friend of Alfred's. Alfred is never tired of speaking of him."

"Wasn't it kind of him," pursues Lizzie, "to take me down to Hampton Court, to meet Alfred and you? He wouldn't let Alfred know beforehand, he said, because he wanted to give him a pleasant surprise."

"Did Mr. Sheldrake know, then, that we were at Hampton Court?"

"Yes, dear; he wouldn't have taken me down else."

"How did he find out?" muses Lily, a little disquieted. "Alfred may have mentioned it to him the day before, and yet he seemed surprised to see us there."

"Riddle-me-riddle-me-ree," interrupts Lizzie gaily, to dispel the cloud; adding, with a wise air, "you don't know men so well as I do, my love."

She draws Lily into the garden, and touches a key-note to which she knows Lily's nature will respond, to the exclusion of distressful thought. She talks of Alfred and of her love for him; they sit in the summer-house until Pollypod comes to them, and diverts them from their theme.

"Lily," says Pollypod, "don't you wish Felix was here?" The colour mounts to Lily's face, and to hide it Lily bends to Pollypod, and caresses her.

"And who is Felix, Polly?" asks Lizzie.

"Felix is a gentleman; mother says there never *was* any body as good as him. He bought me my doll. I wish I had it with me. And we all love him so--don't we, Lily? I love him, and mother loves him, and Lily loves him, and Snap loves him."

"O!" says Lizzie; and that is all she says. But there is a great deal of meaning in the little word, if any value can be attached to the significant tone in which she utters it.

CHAPTER XXIX.

FELIX FINDS HIS OYSTER DIFFICULT TO OPEN.

The little word uttered by Lizzie in the concluding paragraph of the previous chapter is like the dropping of the curtain for a time upon the histories of the personages, good and bad, who are playing their parts in this drama of every-day life. For if it in any way resembles what it professes to be, the drama here presented should represent the doings of the time in which it is written; in so far, of course, as they enter into the ordinary life of the ordinary characters who are introduced into it.

The autumn and winter have passed, and the beautiful buds herald the yearly miracle of spring. Certain changes have taken place in the circumstances and lives of the movers in our story, and of these changes it is necessary here to make record.

Lily has left the music-hall, and her simple songs are no longer heard in the Royal White Rose, as an antidote to the coarseness and vulgarity which find prominent place on that stage. She is missed and regretted by many of the frequenters of the Royal White Rose. Her presence there was like a fountain of pure clear water in the midst of an unhealthy tract of land; it made men and women forget for a time the impurities by which they were surrounded. I am glad to be able to say that her absence was regretted there, for it is a proof that indecency in word and action, and immoral suggestiveness in the nature of the songs sung in the Royal White Rose, are not vital elements in the success of suchlike establishments. People laugh at these atrocious songs, and at the atrocious meanings conveyed in many of the catch-lines; they suit the trade of some who are regular frequenters of these halls. But that better sentiments can be awakened in their hearts is proved by the earnest and honest enthusiasm which is evoked by the simple singing of a simple ditty, belonging to a school whose days unfortunately are not of the present. It is but a very few weeks ago that I strolled into one of the very lowest music-halls in the metropolis, in which, upon the occasion of my visit, there were not too many honest men and women, notwithstanding that the hall was quite filled. Among other indecently suggestive songs was one, the title of which I refrain from mentioning, but which has grown into a catch-phrase, and may be heard to-day uttered openly by boys and girls all over London, with laughing meaning. The title of this song is supposed to have brought much money and reputation to the Eminent Comic who invented it; if he were whipped for his ingenuity it would be a fitter reward. Whoever trades in indecency deserves some such punishment, and should receive it. After the singing of a number of similar songs, all of which were received with expressions of delight and approval, two young girls came upon the stage and sang, "What are the wild waves saying?" and an old-fashioned duet, called, I think, "The Cousins." I was amazed at the favour with which these songs were received. The applause was honest, earnest, genuine. There was nothing in music-hall ethics to account for the enthusiasm. The girls were not immodestly dressed, and did not smile or wink at the audience, and yet they were recalled again and again to sing, and their songs, which could not raise a blush or an impure thought, were undoubtedly the greatest success of the entertainment.

There were two reasons to account for Lily leaving the Royal White Rose. One reason was that her grandfather was alarmed for her health: a secret sorrow seemed to weigh upon her spirits and to depress them. She was not as happy in the society of her grandfather as she used to be, although, as if to counterbalance this and to remove any uneasiness from him, she strove to be even more affectionate to him when they were alone. The other was, that the purpose for which Old Wheels consented to her appearing upon a stage was served. The debt of shame was paid, and Felix, feeling very sorrowful the while, was compelled to accept the balance of the hundred pounds which had been saved out of Lily's earnings. The old man made no remark concerning Felix's evident reluctance to receive the money. He merely said, "Now we are free, Felix, and Lily can leave the music-hall. The little income I have will be sufficient to keep us, and I shall be able to watch more closely over my darling."

As the winter approached, Felix, going often to the little house in Soho, more often found the old man alone. Lily had a girl companion, the old man said, and Alfred and she made frequent visits to their new acquaintance.

"My dear girl seems to take pleasure in her new friend," he said, "and it is but natural, for they are nearly the same age. It is but natural also that brother and sister should cling together as

Alfred and Lily do. I have seen the young lady, and there is much in her that I like."

"She has been here, then?" asked Felix.

"Yes; on two occasions. I have not been to her house; I have never been asked. Even if I were, I think I should not go."

"Why, sir?"

"Because Alfred does not wish it, and there is antagonism between my grandson and me. It has sprung up gradually, and acquires strength daily. When I first discovered it, I strove to remove it; I strove to win Alfred's confidence, but I was unsuccessful, perhaps because I did not make sufficient excuse for youth and inexperience. And he has so strong an influence over Lily that I am afraid to do anything with reference to her of which he does not approve; for he would be sure to use it as an argument against me in his confidence with my darling. God knows I do not want anything to occur to weaken her love for me! Poor girl! she must be distressed enough as it is. She is between two fires, as it were--her brother on one side, and, unhappily, her grandfather on the other. It is I who must forbear. Do you know, Felix, that I have for some time seen this conflict of feeling approaching; and a little while ago I did hope—"

"You hoped what, sir?" asked Felix, for Old Wheels had paused, as though he were approaching forbidden ground.

"That I should have had such an ally in a friend whom I esteem," said Old Wheels, looking earnestly at Felix, "as would have rendered me easy in my mind respecting my darling's future."

"This friend, sir," observed Felix, turning his head from the old man--"had you reason to suppose that he had any influence over Lily, and that his counsel would have had weight with her?"

"I believe he had influence with my dear girl; I believe he has. I believe that she would have heeded, and would heed now, any words of counsel he might speak to her."

"But suppose," continued Felix, still standing so that his companion could not see his face, "that this friend held precisely your own view of the case. Suppose he feared that any counsel he might be bold enough to offer would hurt Lily's tenderest feelings--inasmuch as it would almost of a certainty clash with her deep affection for her brother. Suppose that, seeing this, knowing this, and believing that he had some slight influence over her, he refrained from saying what was and is in his mind, because of the painful conflict of feeling which it would stir in your dear granddaughter's breast—"

He turned and held out his hand, which Old Wheels took and warmly pressed.

"What, then, remains for this friend to do," continued Felix, with animation, as they stood hand in hand, face to face, "out of regard for this dear girl's tender sensitive nature, out of regard for her helplessness? To put aside, as well as it is in his power to do, his own feelings; to be content to do as you do--to wait and hope. To do more--not only to wait and hope, but to watch over her for her good, without trusting himself before her in such a way as to cause her pain. The friend of whom you speak is doing this."

"Felix, my dear lad, how can I repay you?"

"With your friendship--but I have that, I know. Something else is on my lips, but I must not say it; something else is in my heart--you have guessed before this time what it is--but I must not give it expression. If the time should ever come--and I pray that it may--when I feel that I can speak freely, it may be in your power to repay me a thousandfold. In any case, believe that I am repaid over and over again. Now let us talk of something else."

They spoke of Felix's prospects. He had found by this time that the world he had come into London to conquer was not so easy to open as the time-honoured oyster. He had smiled often to himself since his boast to Martha, and had said, "What arrogance!" But he was mistaken. It was not arrogance. When he said to Martha Day that the world was before him for him to open, and, asking where his oyster-knife was, had tapped his forehead and said it was there, he had spoken, not out of arrogance, but out of the over-confidence of youth. He had not long been in London before he discovered his mistake. He became humbled in the contemplation of the greatness of his oyster and the littleness of himself, and he set modestly, humbly to work upon the very lowest rung of the ladder, not daring to hope to rise very high. There came to him this feeling, of which he never lost sight: "I shall be content," he said to himself, "if I can become one of the common workers in the world, and if I can find some channel in which, by the exercise of all my energy, of all the talent which I may possess, I am able to earn my living." He did not desire much; it was no boast when he said to himself that he would be content with very little; his wants were small, and he had within him the capacity to enjoy. He took his enjoyments modestly; went now and again to the pit of the theatre, and (out of his gratefulness for small blessings) obtained more than his money's worth. When he could not afford the pit he went to the gallery, and would not have been ashamed to be seen there by any of his former friends. At one time his funds were very low, so low, indeed, that he could not afford a dinner; so, apples being in, he lived upon bread-and-apples and cold water, and made merry over his fare. He told no one, and he was not in the least to be

pitied; he was learning life's lessons, and was bearing reverses bravely, without repining and without self-exaltation. He tried the usual resources of helplessness; he could draw and paint indifferently well, and one day (just before his bread-and-apple fare commenced) he almost ruined himself by laying-in a stock of cardboard and crayons. In a few days he had two sketches ready, of which he thought so highly that he said, as he surveyed them, "Upon my word, I don't think I'll part with them." But he laughed at his vanity the next moment, and out he went to sell them, and came back with them under his arm. No one would buy them. He tried again the next day, and the next, and the best result that he could obtain was that a shopkeeper offered to put them in his window, and to divide the proceeds with him, supposing they were sold. Felix agreed readily enough, put a low price upon them, and went round every day to look at them in the window. He did not dare to enter the shop. "The shopkeeper might ask me for storage expenses," he said with a laugh. Then came the bread-and-apple time; and one day, longing for a change of food, he thought he would treat himself to better fare; so he painted a chop on cardboard, and with comical earnestness set out his meal--a pennyworth of apples, half a quartern loaf, a jug of water, and his painted chop. As he ate his bread he rubbed out the chop, until he had eaten every bit of it, and nothing but smudges remained. He laughed heartily over his meal, I can tell you, and so enjoyed the whimsical fancy, that it did him more good than a dozen chops would have done. He was comically concerned at the thought that he had eaten bone and all. "I wonder it didn't stick in my throat and choke me," he said; "must be more careful next time." The occasions were not few on which he made light of his reverses thus: he seasoned his bread-and-apples with many such painted dishes, and amused himself sometimes by saying that his chop or steak was underdone or burnt up. He lived rarely during these days: had pine-apples when they were out of season, pears of a guinea apiece, grapes from the hot-house, and every luxury he could think of. Then, going to the shop-window in which his sketches had been exhibited, he saw that they were gone. It gave him a shock. He had put what he considered to be a ridiculously low price upon them--ten shillings apiece. "Perhaps he sold them for more," thought Felix, and entered the shop with a jaunty air. The shopkeeper gave him good-day.

"It was best to get rid of 'em," he said; "they were blocking up the window, so I took an offer for them."

"How much?" asked Felix.

"Sketches are a drug," said the shopkeeper, fencing.

"I ought to have taken them to a chemist, then," observed Felix.

The shopkeeper stared; he had no sense of humour.

"I took seven-and-six for the pair," said the shopkeeper, and then defended himself, without being accused, by adding, "and a good price too, I consider it."

Felix looked at the shopkeeper with twinkling eyes.

"Thank you, good sir," he said; "I owe you one."

"Don't mention it," replied the shopkeeper, thinking he had got hold of a queer customer; "here's your share--three-and-ninepence."

Felix received it, and looked at the shopkeeper with an odd smile on his lips. And when he was in his room, paid the man the one he owed him by drawing caricatures of him, and suddenly developed a talent which, but for this small circumstance, might have been hidden under a bushel. With a fine sense of humour (which he was not afraid of displaying under the shopkeeper's very nose, seeing that the man did not possess the discriminative affection), Felix, the following day, took to the shop a caricature of the shopkeeper himself, in crayons, with which his patron was so tickled, not seeing the joke, that he bought it out of hand, and Felix was the richer by a crown. The joke, however, told against Felix in a certain way, for the shopkeeper would have readily given more for it; but then Felix was conscientious, and did not set too high a price upon the man. He dashed off a couple of other caricatures, and sold them likewise. The scene of one was laid at a narrow luncheon-counter which he had visited. There were three barmaids serving, but only the backs of their heads could be seen. There is no need to say that this back view was imposing. The comicality of the sketch was in the faces of the eaters, with which the narrow counter was lined. They were depicted eating their luncheons after the fashions of their various temperaments. Some were solemn, some were farcical; the face of one was buried in a pint-pot: all were grotesque. The scene of the other was a street on a rainy day. A languid swell, six feet high, was languidly holding an umbrella over his head, and a street Arab, two feet and a half high, was running by his side, crying, "Shall I 'old yer umberellar up, sir?" If Felix had been fertile in subjects, he might have done well in this line; but it was not every day that he could get a new idea, and he was above copying old ones. Then came the incident of the fire, and the acceptance of his account of it by the newspaper. He was fortunate in picking up other incidents, and made capital out of them. He grew hopeful, and began to make acquaintances. No money had ever been so sweet to him as the little money he was earning.

About this time came a rare stroke of good fortune. Mention has been made of a friend with whom he had travelled abroad, and who came home with him. Felix was in the gallery of a theatre one night, when he saw this friend in the stalls. Their eyes met, and they recognised each

other. Felix made no sign, the chasm between stalls and gallery was so deep and wide. But when the piece was over Felix hurried to the door of the theatre, wondering if his friend would try to find him out. By good chance they met in the crowd; his friend *had* been hunting for him.

"Felix, old fellow!"

"Charley, old boy!"

"I thought I wasn't mistaken, Felix; but I *was* surprised to see you up there."

Felix smiled. "Funds low, old boy. Been long in London?"

"A month; can't tear myself away. Isn't it glorious? Come and have some supper."

Nothing loth, for they really had been friends, Felix took Charley's arm, and they made a capital supper, laughing and joking and quizzing as they had done in the olden times.

"But I say, old fellow," said Charley, "tell us about it. What's up?"

"I was," cried Felix merrily--he was in the gayest of humours, for the circumstance of Charley looking for him after the play to shake hands with him had gladdened his heart--"high up, eh? And only sixpence! You and I have been in queerer places, haven't we, old boy?"

And they fell-to again fishing up pleasant memories from the past. They were supping together in Charley's room at the very hotel which Felix had patronised when he first came to London.

"The waiter seems to know you, Felix," said Charley.

"I was a lodger here once, and played the part of Grand Bashaw with twopence-ha'penny in my pocket. When my twopence-ha'penny was spent, I fled."

"An honourable retreat, I'll swear," remarked Charley. Felix twirled his cigar, and puffed out royally.

"And now, old fellow, I must know all about you."

Felix told his friend all; of his quarrel with his father, softening that part of the story, and taking much blame to himself; of his quitting his home for ever and ever, never more to return, with his twopence-ha'penny in his purse; of his coming to London to conquer the world; of his failure; of his funds running out; and of his taking to the arts for a living. Only casually did he mention Lily, but his heart was so full of tenderness for her, that the few words he uttered respecting her were rightly interpreted by his friend.

"Felix, you are in love."

Felix puffed away in silence, and looked into the fire.

"Come, old fellow," continued Charley, "we used to have no secrets; we shared and shared, you remember."

"Well, Charley," replied Felix, "I have kept no secret from you. You know this one, at all events, and you know it from me. But don't let us talk about it; the odds are that it will come to nothing."

"One word only--rich?"

"Poor as I am."

"And a lady?"

"A tender-hearted, pure-souled girl. 'Right about face!'" Which, in the old days, was a favourite cry with them when a subject was to be dismissed from their conversation.

"I borrowed some money of you once, Felix."

"You did, Charley, old boy--and paid it."

"Are you sure?"

Felix laughed, rather boisterously.

"That won't do, old boy," he said; "no beating about the bush between us two. The grog's confoundedly strong." (It must have been, for it made his eyes water.)

"Look here, Charley, I want money--badly; but I must earn it. Now, if you could help me to anything in the newspaper way—"

Charley broke in here with "I can by Jove! You can do newspaper correspondence?"

Felix nodded excitedly.

"Well," continued Charley enthusiastically, "down our way we've a newspaper, of course. What's an Englishman without a newspaper? Why, they start them in the bush! Now, between you and me--it mustn't go farther, mind--my dad is part proprietor, under the rose. What a glorious thing it would be if we could get a London correspondent, who moves in the best society"--Charley winked, and Felix responded--"who is hand-and-glove with all the political nobs and the literary swells; who is behind the scenes everywhere; who knows all the news, and can serve it up piping hot and spicy! Now, then, what do you say? The *Penny Whistle* is only a weekly, and we could only spare two columns to our London Special."

"If you are really serious," said Felix slowly, his colour rising, for he saw a great chance in the proposal, "and the *Penny Whistle* can afford a special London correspondent, I could send a capital two columns every week, and I would take care to be on the look-out for anything special. Could it afford a pound a week, Charley?"

"A pound a week, old fellow!" cried Charley. "It's too little."

"It is enough," said Felix firmly; "I could not accept more under the circumstances. If the proprietors write to me to that effect, I shall only be too happy to accept."

In a fortnight from that time Felix was engaged as London correspondent at the sum fixed by himself. He ran to Old Wheels, and told the good news. He was really beginning to open his oyster.

CHAPTER XXX.

JIM PODMORE HAS A "DAZE."

In the mean time, some of the humble personages in our drama, being fixed in certain grooves, remain there uneventfully, the only changes that occur to them being marked by the hand of time. Mr. Podmore continues in his situation on the railway, works as hard and as long hours as ever, comes home as tired as ever, but more often now with a "daze" upon him, as he expresses it. This "daze"--he has no idea how he got hold of the word--gives him terrible frights at times, and causes him to be oblivious of what passes around him. It never comes upon him but when he is dead-beat, when what is known as a fair day's work is turned into a foul day's work by the abominable system which coins large dividends out of its servants' health, and which taxes their strength so unfairly as to bring old age upon men long before it is naturally due. Jim Podmore is fearful to speak of this "daze" to any one, for if it were known to the officers of the company, short shrift would be his portion. Such a sympathetic affection as humanity holds no place in the schemes and calculations of railway directors. Given so much bone and blood and muscle: how much strain can they bear? This ascertained, apply the strain to its utmost, until blood, bone, and muscle can no longer bear it, and fail, naturally, to perform their task. Then throw aside, and obtain fresh. Jim Podmore would not thus have expressed it, but the conclusion at which he had arrived is the same as the conclusion here set down. The only person who knows of his fast-growing infirmity is his wife. He confides to her the various stages of this "daze;" how he goes to work of a morning pretty fresh, and how, when his fair day's work is being turned into a foul day's work by the directors' strain, he begins to tire. "I seem to--fall asleep--gradually," he says, "although I hear--everything about me. All the wear and tear--of the day--all the noise--all the slamming and shouting--all the whistling and puffing--seem to get into the middle--of my head--and buzz there--as if they were bees. And so I go off--with this buzzing. Then I jump up--in a fright--just in time, old woman!--to shift the points--but I'm all of a tremble--and feel fit to die. Then I fall off--into a daze again--and the buzzing goes on--in my head. Then Snap--good old dog!"--(Snap licks the hand that pats its head) "pulls at my trousers--sometimes--and wakes me. Suppose I shouldn't--rouse myself in time--some time or other--and something was to occur! What then, old woman? I wake up--in the middle of a night--often--thinking of it--with the perspiration--a-running down me." Mrs. Podmore does her best to comfort him, but she cannot suggest a cure for Jim's "daze." "You see, old woman," he says, "it wouldn't do--for me--to fall ill even--and be laid up--for a week or two. That might do me good--but it wouldn't do. Where's the money--to come from? We couldn't lay our hands--on a spare half a crown--to save our lives." Which was a fact. Capital, in the majority of instances, pays labour just such a sum for its blood, bone, and muscle as is barely sufficient to live upon; every farthing flies away for urgent necessities, without which labour would starve, with which it barely manages to preserve its health. The result is that labour grows inevitably into a state of pauperism; hence workhouses--which are not known in the world's new lands. May they never be known! They are plague-spots, poisonous to the healthful blood of cities.

However, until a change for the worse comes, this small family of three, Mr. and Mrs. Podmore and their little Pollypod, live in their one room, and are more often happy there than otherwise. Felix frequently pays them visits, and learns from Jim and Mrs. Podmore many

particulars concerning the railway system of overworking its servants, which he works up with good effect in his newspaper letters and other ways. Felix likes to get hold of a good public grievance, and has already learnt how to make capital of it. But, indeed, he could not write earnestly on any matter in which his sympathies were not in some way engaged. Pollypod enjoys herself greatly; she and Lizzie are firm friends, and the consequence is that she often accompanies Lily to Lizzie's house in the "country," and spends the day there. Old Wheels likes Lily to take the child with her; and, apart from her fondness for Pollypod, Lily is glad to please her grandfather in this way.

The Gribbles, senior and junior, go on as usual. Gribble junior maintains his ground, and is even prospering a little in his umbrella hospital, which is generally pretty full of patients. He "keeps moving" with his tongue, and is continually rattling away complacently on this subject and that. He likes Felix, who indeed is a favourite with them all, but he has contracted an inveterate dislike to Mr. Sheldrake, and never loses an opportunity of saying an ill word concerning that gentleman. Gribble senior keeps his chandler's shop open, but the trade continues to fall off woefully, and the old shopkeeper is more rampant than ever on the subject of co-operative stores, which he declares will be the ruin of the country.

Alfred grows more and more infatuated with racing; he meets with reverse after reverse, adopts system after system, discovers continually new methods of winning infallibly, is buoyed up and elated one day with the prospect of winning a great sum, and groans with despair the next day when the result is made known. Of course he does not always lose; he wins small sums occasionally, but they are like raindrops in the sea. Week after week passes, month after month flies by, and he is sinking lower and lower. David Sheldrake stands his friend still; still supplies him with money, and takes his signature for the amount, and what with letters and documents and information of how matters stand with Alfred at the office of his employers, Messrs. Tickle and Flint, holds such a dangerous power over the infatuated young man as can crush him at any moment. Here a defence must be set up for David Sheldrake, otherwise he might be taken for a fool for parting with his money so freely to a young fellow for whom he cared no more than for the snuff of a candle. David Sheldrake knew every trick of the game he was playing. Madly infatuated as he was with Lily, he was too completely a man of the world to throw away the sums of money he advanced to Alfred from time to time. But the fact of it was, he got it all back; what he gave with one hand he received with the other. He made an express stipulation with Alfred that Con Staveley should be the medium of all the young fellow's racing speculations; so that no sooner did David Sheldrake lend, than Con Staveley swallowed. Therefore, although in the aggregate, Alfred owed David Sheldrake a large sum of money, the astute David was really very little out of pocket. He was aware that, in other ways, Alfred was more extravagant than his earnings at Messrs. Tickle and Flint's warranted; but where he got the money from to supply these extravagances was no business of David Sheldrake's. Alfred did not get it from *him*. But in Alfred's moments of remorse, when he was pouring into David Sheldrake's ears accounts of his misfortunes, of how he was trapped by this tipster or deceived by that prophet, or swindled in some other way, many a chance expression of terror escaped from him, of which David Sheldrake made good use in his reflections--putting this and that together until he had arrived at the truth, and knew for a certainty that Alfred was robbing his employers. The power which this knowledge gave him over Lily was so complete that he would not have parted with it upon easy terms. He never failed of impressing upon Alfred that what he did for him he did for Lily's sake, and for Lily's sake only.

"If it were not for her, my boy," he said, "I think I should close on you; for after all, business is business."

Alfred listened, white and trembling.

"For God's sake," he said to Lily one day, when David Sheldrake had retired offended at her coldness; the man of the world had been more than usually pressing in his attentions, and Lily had shrunk from them--"for God's sake, Lily, don't offend him! You don't know how good he is; you don't know what a friend he is to me. If it was not for him, I should—"

Lily's eyes, fixed in alarm upon his face, stopped him, and he broke off with,

"I am the most miserable wretch in the world! There never was anybody half so miserable or half so unfortunate as I am! There's only one girl in the world who loves me--and that's Lizzie. My own sister, that I would lay down my life for, turns against me."

Lily's grief may be imagined. Turn against him! Against the dearest brother that sister ever had! How could she prove the sincerity of her love for him, she asked.

"By being kind to Mr. Sheldrake," Alfred answered sullenly; his fears blinded him to the unselfishness of her affection, blinded him to results.

Thus it came about that, on the next occasion Lily and Mr. Sheldrake met, Lily acted a part, and Mr. Sheldrake's wound was healed. Lily received her reward; Alfred kissed her and embraced her, and called her the dearest sister! She found consolation in his brighter manner; and although she shed many tears she was careful that Alfred should not witness her pain.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE SWINDLE WHICH THE LAW PROTECTS KNOWN BY THE TITLE OF DISCRETIONARY INVESTMENTS.

All Mr. David Sheldrake's calculations were conducted in such a manner as to cause Number One to eclipse all other figures, single or in combination. Number One was the only figure in which he took a real interest; the other figures could take care of themselves. He made it his special business to look after the humblest of them all, and it is but a fair tribute to his genius to state that he made Number One a brilliant success. It has been shown how cheaply he bought the reputation of being Alfred's sincerest and most generous friend, and how he received back through his agent Con Staveley all the money he lent to Alfred; and in common justice it must be shown how he made Ivy Cottage--the cottage which, out of ostensibly benevolent motives, he had taken for Mr. Musgrave and Lizzie--one of the most profitable speculations in which he had ever invested.

With his eye ever on the main chance (which may be pithily described as Number One, surrounded by a glory), Ivy Cottage became, under his instructions, the secret centre of a system known among sporting men as Discretionary Investments, one of the shallowest swindles of the day, and yet one which has been successful in emptying the purses of greedy gulls and filling the purses of needy sharks. No money was received at Ivy Cottage, as in the event of discovery the law could punish the receivers. But it being a peculiarity of the British law that, in so far as it affects racing matters, a man may pick his neighbour's pocket in Scotland, but must not do so in England, a garret was taken in Glasgow, and thither Con Staveley bent his steps to perform his part in the Discretionary Investment scheme--which consisted in receiving and pocketing the money of the gulls. Innocent readers who are not acquainted with these matters may doubt the statement that a man may rob in Scotland with impunity; but it really is the plain sober truth, and it is a proof that what is known as the British Constitution is after all but a patched and ragged garment, and that, notwithstanding its patches, it has many a rent in it which the law (having, as I have said before, a squint in its eye) cannot or will not see. A day before the Millennium it may make up its mind to catch a glimpse of these rents, through which rogues laugh and snap their fingers in the faces of their dupes.

As it was necessary that the operations should be conducted in secrecy, Ivy Cottage, very soon after its new tenancy, had in it a Blue Beard's room, to which neither Lizzie nor any of her friends had the right of entry. The only persons who ever entered it were Mr. Musgrave and Mr. Sheldrake. There the announcements of the new scheme of Discretionary Investments were prepared and launched upon the world in the names of Messrs. Montague and D'Arcy, Mr. Sheldrake knowing, from profitable experience, that high-sounding names were the best bait for gudgeons. Their first public announcement led the uninitiated to believe that the firm was an old one, and that it had been established for many years; but we know differently. However, as there is absolutely no such thing as fair dealing among betting men, this was but of a piece with the rest of the machinery. The circular (of which a copy lies before the present writer) issued and advertised by the myths, Montague and D'Arcy, commenced by declaring in large letters that a certain fortune without the slightest risk was within the reach of the humblest, and that Messrs. Montague and D'Arcy had conferred an incalculable boon upon the public at large by reducing speculation on horse-racing to a means by which immense sums of money might be realized weekly by a small stake. Fortunes, said these public benefactors, were being daily realized by investing in accordance with their Marvellously Lucrative and Ever Triumphantly Successful Method of Turf Speculation. Many gentlemen who never backed a horse for a shilling held large stakes in the system, as the safety of capital, and the immense profits that were weekly realized, and promptly paid, rendered it a perfect El Dorado to the fortunate investors. Many of the largest speculators now entirely confined their operations to Messrs. Montague and D'Arcy's Systematic Investments, and this fact alone should prove a sufficient inducement to those who hitherto have not speculated to join in realizing the golden harvest. As, however, sceptics would always be found, these public benefactors offered to forward to those who doubted the most unexceptionable references--to noblemen, officers, gentlemen, and tradesmen--as to the marvellously successful nature of their system, which by its heavy and never-failing success had fairly eclipsed and distanced all other modes of speculation. It had the advantage of combining the two great desiderata of immense and ever-increasing profits, combined with absolute and perfect security of capital.

Facts, however, spoke stronger than words; hence, in appending the following list of amounts won last season at a few of the principal meetings, the projectors were well satisfied to leave gentlemen to judge for themselves as to the correctness of the assertion, that the winnings realized week by week by the investor, in accordance with this method, were far in excess of the amounts that could by any possibility be realized by any other mode of investment:

LAST SEASON'S OPERATIONS.

At Lincoln	.	.	£100	stake	won	£4840
Liverpool	.	.	25	"	"	1230
Chester	.	.	10	"	"	240
Newmarket	.	.	50	"	"	1004

Bath	.	.	.	5	"	"	134
Epsom	.	.	.	50	"	"	1450
Ascot	.	.	.	25	"	"	740
Windsor.	.	.	.	25	"	"	1020
Goodwood	.	.	.	20	"	"	648
Doncaster	.	.	.	50	"	"	2104
Newmarket	.	.	.	5	"	"	325
Liverpool	.	.	.	10	"	"	521
Shrewsbury	.	.	.	25	"	"	1203

During the whole of the season a loss never occurred. In indubitable proof of which Messrs. Montague and D'Arcy publicly expressed their willingness to forfeit the sum of £1000 to any investing client at the above-named meetings who did not receive the amounts in full, as stated above, or in due proportion to the amount invested.

But, pleasant and profitable as were the results of last season's operations, by which men of the most moderate means had obtained affluence and wealth, the present campaign promised to throw those magnificent results in the shade. At Newmarket, for instance, the most extraordinary and almost marvellous success had attended their operations in the first three days, Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday. They had not had time to make out a careful statement, and could not do so till Saturday, as the meeting extended to Friday, but they roughly estimated that up to Thursday night, each investor of

£500	**had realized**	**£7850!**
100	**"**	**1300**
50	**"**	**650**
25	**"**	**325**
10	**"**	**127**
5	**"**	**63**

To suit small speculators investments would be taken by Messrs. Montague and D'Arcy as low as five shillings, but the nobility could forward as high a stake as One Thousand pounds. At this point they stopped, for the line must be drawn somewhere. They would not take less than five shillings from each man of moderate means, nor more than One Thousand pounds from each nobleman.

In conclusion, Messrs. Montague and D'Arcy announced themselves as members of all the West-end clubs (without mentioning names), and gave as their bankers the Royal Bank of Scotland, and as their address, the garret in Glasgow rented by Con Staveley, where clients could send cheques, post-office orders, bank-notes, or postage stamps.

The advertisements and circulars contained a great deal more than is given above, and the most infamous artifices were used to fire the imagination of clerks and apprentices; for it was really from such unfortunates as these that Mr. Sheldrake and his confederate netted the greater portion of their large gains. They pointed out how those who desired to speculate might commence in a small way, and creep up gradually, until they became wealthy; and many weak men and boys studied the figures, and borrowed or stole to make the venture--which indeed was no venture, but a certainty; for it is needless to say that no penny of the money sent to the garret in Glasgow ever found its way back. To some extent, a semblance of fair dealing was kept up, and where Messrs. Montague and D'Arcy thought they saw a chance of the dupe being farther duped, they forwarded him a tabulated statement showing how his money had been invested upon the wrong horses, and how he was in their debt a trifling sum. This statement was accompanied by a lithographed letter, detailing how all the race-meetings upon which the speculator had not invested had turned out marvellously profitable, and how the particular race-meeting upon which he had desired his money to be invested had, "for the first time during the past five consecutive seasons, turned out a failure." However, they consoled their unfortunate client with the assurance that at the race-meeting which would take place next week "winning was reduced to an absolute certainty," and that, as there was not the slightest chance of losing, they trusted that their client "would take their advice, and invest £25, £50, or £100, and realize a few thousands forthwith." Remaining his faithfully, Montague and D'Arcy. Of course, if more money were sent, it shared the fate of the first; and notwithstanding the groans and curses of those who were thus robbed in open daylight, the ball rolled on right merrily. No one knew that Messrs. Montague and D'Arcy were identical with David Sheldrake and Con Staveley. Their faces were never seen in the transactions, everything being conducted under seal, and no personal interviews on any consideration ever being allowed. And in the event of some irate clients making the name of the firm and their address notorious, it was the easiest thing in the world to change their names and take another garret, perhaps in Edinburgh this time instead of Glasgow. It is but fair to some of the sporting papers in which these lying advertisements were inserted for the trapping of apprentices and others, to state that in their "Answer to Correspondents" such answers as these appeared week after week: "An Anxious Inquirer. They are swindlers." "A. Z. You should not have trusted your money to them." "R. H. C. We do not recommend Discretionary Investments." "Fair Play. You have been swindled." And many others to the same effect. But they continued to open their columns to the advertising knaves, who, without this means of publicity, would find their schemes fall comparatively fruitless to the ground.

Said Alfred to David Sheldrake, in the course of conversation, being artfully led to the subject:

"Those discretionary investments seem to be an easy way of making money. Did you see the advertisements of Montague and D'Arcy in the papers this morning?"

"No," replied Mr. Sheldrake. "Montague and D'Arcy! I fancy I have met a Mr. Montague at some of the meetings. If it is the same man, he bets and wins largely."

"It must be the same," cried Alfred. "Look here," pulling the paper out of his pocket, "a £100 stake realized £1800 at Newmarket last week in three days."

"That seems good enough, Alf," was Mr. Sheldrake's comment. "If I had £20 or £80," said Alfred, with an anxious look at Sheldrake—

"You'd try your luck with them? Well, I see what you're driving at, Alf. I'll give you a cheque for £20, made payable to them, and you can have a dive."

"Ah, you *are* a friend! If I win, I shall be able to give you a good sum off what I owe you."

"All right, my boy," said Mr. Sheldrake heartily, and then wrote the cheque and gave it to Alfred, and two days afterwards received it back from Con Staveley in Glasgow.

In this and other ways he drew the mesh round Lily's brother, until he had the infatuated gambler completely at his mercy.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE POLISH JEW.

A remarkable change had taken place in Mr. Musgrave, dating almost from the day on which he took possession of Ivy Cottage. Those who had known him when he lived in his garret and bought gin on the sly, and who knew him now, were amazed at the transformation; for it was nothing less. The vice that appeared to have been so bred in his bone as to be ineradicable had disappeared. He drank no more. Whether he considered it was due to his altered position, whether it was from gratitude or fear, or from whatever other unknown cause, it is certain that the respectable old man known now as Mr. Musgrave, and the disreputable tippler known some months since as old Muzzy, were distinctly different types. The change really commenced within the first fortnight of his residence in Ivy Cottage. Within this time, Lily and Alfred had come by invitation to take tea with Lizzie and spend the evening with her. The young people were in good spirits, and Mr. Musgrave sat in his corner listening to their light-hearted chatting. In the course of the evening Lily sang two or three old-fashioned simple songs, and altogether the time was a happy one. Then Mr. Sheldrake dropped in, and whatever little part Mr. Musgrave had played in the proceedings was over from that moment. But when Lily and Alfred were going home, Mr. Musgrave, with hands that trembled from eagerness, held Lily's mantle for her, and pressed her hands, and said that she had made him young again, and that he had spent the happiest evening he had spent for years. He entreated her to come again, and to come often, and she said gaily she intended to, for Lizzie and she were sisters already. When they were gone--Mr. Sheldrake accompanied Lily and Alfred home--Mr. Musgrave and Lizzie sat up for a little while talking, and he told her how pleased he was she had made such a friend. That night when he went to his bedroom, he took from a place of concealment two time-honoured friends--to wit, two flat bottles, in which he had been in the habit of carrying away his gin from the public-house. With these under his arm he stole down to the garden, and hurled them over the wall as far as his strength would allow him, thus bidding good-bye to them. On that night before he retired to rest, he knelt by his bedside for the first time for many, many years, and thought, if he did not say, a prayer.

Mr. Sheldrake noticed a change in him, and commented on it.

"Why, Muzzy," he said, "you have grown quite respectable."

"I hope it does not displease you, sir," was Mr. Musgrave's reply.

"No, indeed," said Mr. Sheldrake; "it is a compliment to me, for I think I have had something to do with it."

"Yes, sir, you have."

Mr. Sheldrake clapped him on the shoulder.

"Never too late to mend, eh, old man?"

"I hope not, sir."

And yet it is to be doubted whether Mr. Sheldrake was quite pleased at this remarkable change in his servant. He liked to hold a power over a man, and if that power sprung from a man's weakness, or even vice, he was all the more gratified, so long as it did not affect him. There was no doubt, however, that Mr. Musgrave was endeavouring to become a respectable member of society, and that he had, in real sober earnest, turned over the new leaf which Mr. Sheldrake had proposed to him.

On a cold evening in March, Lily and Old Wheels were sitting in their room in the little house in Soho. There was no change in its appearance. The portraits of Lily were on the mantelshelf, and a bouquet of flowers was on the table. The old man was making castors for a little cigar cabinet which he had bought second-hand at a shop a day or two before. He had cut holes in the bottom of the cabinet, so that the castors were almost hidden from sight, and he had devised a false bottom so as not to interfere with the usefulness of the box. His work being done, he put his tools aside, and rolled the cabinet towards Lily, asking her what she thought of it, and whether Felix would not be pleased with it.

"O, then," said Lily, with a faint smile, "it is for Felix. You did not tell me that. I was wondering whom it was for."

"Are you glad or sorry, Lily, that I am going to make Felix a present?"

"Glad."

"I don't know what I should do now without him," said Old Wheels, with assumed carelessness, but really watching Lily's face with more of keenness than his words warranted; "I am so used to his coming in here often, and have so grown to like him, that if he were to go away I should feel quite lost."

"You are more often alone now, grandfather, than you used to be," said Lily sadly and quietly.

"Yes, my darling, when you were at the music-hall I saw more of you than I do now. But it can't be helped, I suppose, Lily, can it?"

Lily put the needle in her work, and laid it on the table; then rose from the chair, and sat upon a stool at the old man's feet. He looked down upon her fondly, and raised her to his knee, where she sat with her arm round his neck, and her face close to his.

"That's my own Lily," murmured Old Wheels. "That's my own dear darling! And you have not learned to love your old grandfather less?"

"Grandfather!"

"Forgive me, Lily--old men grow foolish, and do not know what they say sometimes. I, of all the world, should not say anything to hurt my Lily's feelings; my Lily, that I love more than all the world besides! Forgive me, darling."

"You must not ask me to do that, grandfather," said Lily. "What have I to forgive? What feeling can I have for you but one of gratitude and love for all your care of me? Don't think, dear, that I have no consciousness of it. If you were to look into my heart, you would see yourself there. Kiss me, my more than father, and say that you forgive *me* for my petulance, for my sadness, which I know pains you, but which I cannot help feeling."

"There, there, my pet! We kiss each other, and forgive each other. But you must not be sad. I want you to be bright, as you used to be not so very long ago, Lily. I want you to smile and to be glad, as youth should be. I want you to confide in me, if you have any trouble. Lily, my child, my daughter! I am an old man, worn out and useless, but if I had within me the life and the strength of twenty men, I would yield them gladly to make you happy."

"I know it, dear," and Lily, with her lips to his cheek, nestled to him as a child might have done; "I know it, and there is part of my sadness, part of my pain. Don't ask me too many questions, grandfather. Let us hope everything will come right, and that we shall be happy by and by. By and by!" she repeated, almost in a whisper. "When we are at rest!"

Old Wheels held her face from him to see it more clearly. "Lily!" he exclaimed, "what makes you say that?"

"I cannot tell you. Let me lie on your shoulder, dear, and believe that I love you with all the love a daughter can give to a father. If my heart aches it is not your fault. And by and by we *shall* be at rest, thank God!"

"Yes, thank God, as you say, my darling!" replied Old Wheels. "To the old the thought comes naturally--and often thankfully. But to the young! no, no! It is not natural to hope for the time to come. You have a bright life before you, my dear, and you must not despond. Why, I, nearly two generations older than the little flower lying on my bosom, do not wish yet for the rest you sigh for! I want to live and see my flower bright and blooming, not drooping as it is now. Come, cheer up, little flower!" Old Wheels forced himself to speak cheerfully. "Cheer up, and gladden me with

smiles. Here's an old man who wants them, and whose heart warms at the sight of them. Here am I, old winter! Come, young spring-flower, give me a glimpse of sunshine."

Lily looked into the old man's eyes, and smiled, and although there was sadness in the smile, he professed himself satisfied with the effort.

"That's right, and now let us talk about something else. Let me see. What was I saying? O, about Felix. He is getting along well. Do you know, Lily, that though he has never spoken of it, I believe he endured hardships when he first came to London? But he bore them bravely, and battled through them, never losing heart. Does this interest you, Lily?"

"Yes; go on."

"Felix is a good man, high-minded, honourable, just. He knows how to suffer in silence, as do all brave natures, my dear. Men are often changed by circumstances, my dear; but I am sure Felix would not be. But natures are so different, my dear. Some are like the sea-sand, running in and out with the waves, never constant. Others are like the rocks against which the waves beat and dash, as they do at Land's End. It would do you, my darling, good to go for change of air and scene to the west, and breathe the purer air that comes across the sea. Perhaps we will manage it by-and-by--you and I alone. I was a young man when I was there, but it is the same now as it was then; it is only we who change. Felix laughed at us the other day--laughed at you, and me, and himself, and everybody else in the world. 'Go where you will,' he said, 'you find us crawling over the face of the earth, wrapt up in ourselves, each man thinking only of himself and his desires, and making so little of the majesty of nature as to believe himself of more importance than all the marvels of the heaven and earth.' But he was not quite right, and I told him so. I told him--no, I should rather say, I reminded him--that every man did not live only for himself. That in the lives of many men and women might be found such noble examples of right-doing and self-sacrifice as were worthy to be placed side by side with the goodness and the majesty of things. 'Right,' he answered at once, 'nature does not suffer--we do.' Then he asked me to account for the suffering that often lies in right-doing. I could not do this, of course. I tried to maintain the side I took in the argument by saying that the suffering springs out of our selfishness, out of our being unable, as it were, to wrest ourselves from ourselves, and to live more in others. And then, after all, it was but for a short time. Think of the life of a man. How short it is in comparison with time! 'We are in the world,' he said, 'and should be of the world.' 'Not against our sense of right,' I answered. 'The noblest phase of human nature is to do what we believe to be right, though all the world is against us, though we suffer through it, and lose the pleasures of the world.' And what do you think this ingenious young fellow did, Lily, when I said that? Laughed at me, and asked in return whether there is not a dreadful arrogance in a man placing his back against a rock, and saying to the world, 'You are all wrong; I only am right.' Do I tire you, my child, with an old man's babble?"

"No, my dear," answered Lily; "I love to hear you talk so, although I cannot understand the exact meaning of all you say."

Indeed, this "old man's babble" was soothing to Lily; his gentle voice brought peace to her troubled heart.

"I have found out, my darling," continued Old Wheels, with a secret delight at her calmer manner, "that this foolish young man, whom I love like a son--ay, Lily, like my own son!--is fond of arguing against himself, of placing himself in a disadvantageous light, of saying things often that he does not mean. But I know him; I see his heart and the rare nobility of his nature. Our argument ended thus, 'Come,' I said, 'answer me fairly. Can you believe in a man giving judgment against himself?' 'If,' he said, 'by "yourself" you mean your hopes, your desires, your heart's yearnings--and these, being in the life of a man, comprise himself--I answer, yes. I can imagine a man loving a thing, thirsting for it, believing that his life's happiness is comprised in the possession of it, and yet standing by quietly, and letting it slip from him, with his heart aching all the while! There is a higher attribute than love,' he said. I asked him what it was, and he answered, 'Duty!'"

Lily raised her head from the old man's breast; her eyes were bright, her face was flushed.

"Do *you* believe this, grandfather?"

The old man returned her earnest gaze, and was silent for many moments. Some deeper meaning than usual was in their gaze, and although neither of them could have explained how it had come about, both by some mysterious instinct were aware of the solemn significance which would attach to the answer of the girl's question. He placed his arms tenderly about her, but not so as to hide his face from her.

"Yes, child," he said gently, "I believe it. But"--and his voice trembled here, and his gaze grew more wistful--"not mistaken duty. If I had a friend whom I loved, whom I trusted faithfully and implicitly, whom I believed to be honest and true and single-hearted, I should--if such a crisis in the conflict of love and duty should unhappily arise in my life--take counsel from him."

Her eyes drooped before his, and the next moment her face was hidden on his breast again.

"Tell me," she whispered, so softly that he had to bend his head to hear, "do you think that

such a crisis has arisen—"

"Go on, my child," he said, in a tone almost as soft as hers, for she had paused suddenly. "Speak what is in your heart."

"Do you think, grandfather, that such a crisis has arisen in the life of any one whom you love very dearly?"

"I do, dear child."

He would have continued the subject, but she begged him, with a tender caress, not to speak for a little while; to let her rest. He called her again his sweet flower, his spring flower, and obeyed her. They remained silent for a long while, and Old Wheels thought she had fallen asleep. But Alfred's light step upon the stairs undeceived him. Immediately Alfred entered the room she went eagerly to his side, and placed her arms round his neck.

"I am so glad you have come, Alfred!"

Alfred returned the kiss she gave him, and asked her why she looked so pale.

"You want excitement, Lil--that's what you want. Wait till the summer comes; I'll take you into the country, and we'll have a regular time of it. Well, now, I've come to give you a bit of change, Lil. I want you to have tea quick and dress yourself out. I've got an order for the theatre."

"O Alfred!" exclaimed Lily, "you are kind. I shall dearly like to go."

"It's a box, Lil, for the Lyceum. Mr. Sheldrake gave it to me, and he's coming with Lizzie to fetch us. We'll have to be quick; so bustle, Lil, and get tea ready. See, grandfather; she has a colour already. Excitement--that's what she wants."

Old Wheels said nothing, but cast a furtive glance at Lily, who, however, did not observe it; and soon tea was ready and over, and Lily went to her room to dress. When she came back in her pretty warm dress, the old man said,

"I am glad you have put on that dress, Lily; I was afraid you were going to dress yourself out, as Alfred said. Shall I come to the theatre and fetch you."

"O no," replied Alfred, who, having just come into the room, had heard the question; "we'll bring her home all right. There's the cab!"

He ran down stairs, and Mr. Sheldrake came in with a flower in his coat, and another in his hand, which, with a bow and a few pleasant words, he handed to Lily, who placed it in her hair, thanking him. Between Old Wheels and Mr. Sheldrake nothing but the commonest commonplaces of conversation ever passed; they did not get along very well together, and although neither could have complained of the other for want of politeness, each knew that the other was not his friend. With Lizzie and Old Wheels it was different; Lily always expressed herself so enthusiastically about her friend, that the old man, first out of love for his granddaughter, and afterwards for Lizzie's own sake, had grown to like her.

"We're going to have a pleasant evening," said Lizzie, who had dressed herself in her brightest; "I wish you were coming with us, Mr. Wheels."

"I wish so, too," said Alfred, "and it's a pity that they only allow four in the box. Isn't it so, Mr. Sheldrake?"

"The order says for four," replied Mr. Sheldrake politely; "but if Mr. Wheels wishes—"

"No, no, thank you," said Old Wheels, with a hurried motion of his hand; "Lily is quite safe in the company of her brother."

"And in mine," added Lizzie, with somewhat of earnestness in her rejoinder.

"I think she is, my dear," said Old Wheels.

When they were gone, Old Wheels paced the room thoughtfully, listening anxiously to every footfall on the stairs. Felix seldom missed an evening, and at about seven o'clock his welcome knock was at the door.

"All alone, sir?" he asked, looking round.

Old Wheels nodded: "I thought Lily would have spent the evening here with us quietly, Felix; but she has gone out with her brother. Felix, I want you to accept a little token from me. I know you smoke, and passing a shop where I saw this cabinet for sale, I thought you would like it, as a small remembrance from a friend. See--I have made castors to it, so that you can wheel it noiselessly across the table to a friend, and so be unostentatious in your hospitality."

Felix entertained very enthusiastic notions respecting presents; it pleased him mightily to receive them, and he would not part with the smallest token ever given to him for its weight in

gold. "They are testimonies of character," he would say laughingly, when he showed his few trophies of friendship. He thanked the old man warmly, and said he was afraid it would lead him into extravagance, as it necessitated an immediate investment in the best cigars. Felix did not stop long. Upon Old Wheels telling him that Lily had gone to the Lyceum Theatre, and that Mr. Sheldrake was of the party, Felix started up, and said that he must be going.

"They have a box, you say?"

"Yes, Felix; Mr. Sheldrake gave it to Alfred."

"I think I shall run round to the theatre myself."

Felix uttered these words half questioningly. The old man gave him a grateful look in reply, and bade Felix good-night as if he were anxious to get rid of him.

The only place Felix could obtain in the theatre was at the back of the pit, but as he could see the box in which Lily was seated, he was satisfied. Lily and Lizzie were sitting in the front of the box, and bending over them occasionally were Mr. Sheldrake and Alfred. A great many opera-glasses were levelled admiringly at the box, at which marks of attention Mr. Sheldrake was mightily pleased, taking himself, and with justice, the credit of having brought to the theatre the two prettiest girls in it. Soon after Felix's entrance, the curtain rose upon the dramatised version of The Polish Jew.

The gloom of this play was perfect; there was no light in it. No interest was taken in the love-story comprised in the courtship of Christian and Annette; no spark of tender sympathy was touched in the breast of one of the spectators. The attention of all was centred in the figure of Mathias the burgomaster and in his terrible life. When, at the end of the first act, the curtain fell on the agony of the undiscovered murderer, every trace of colour which the animation of the theatre and the excitement of the lights and bustle had brought into Lily's face, had departed from it. Mr. Sheldrake was loud in his applause. "It was a wonderful piece! A grand conception! And how well the principal actor plays the part of the burgomaster!" Alfred was also pleased with it, but neither of the girls liked it. Towards the end of the act Lizzie wanted Lily to shift her seat to the back of the box, but Lily whispered "No, no!" and was not conscious that she spoke. She was fascinated, and could not move. The two men, of course, went out for refreshment, and sent in some for the girls, which neither of them touched. The second act commenced and progressed, and the horror of the piece increased in intensity; when the curtain again fell upon the wild delirium of the murderer, Lily shuddered as if she were suffering his agonies. Alfred and Mr. Sheldrake addressed her, but she did not answer, did not seem indeed to heed or hear them. Seeing that Lily would not move from her conspicuous position in the box, Lizzie shifted her seat to the back of her friend's and put her arm round Lily's waist, and clasped her hand; it was nearly cold, notwithstanding the heat of the crowded theatre.

Lizzie whispered to Alfred not to speak to Lily, but to wait until the ghastly piece was over, and she whispered also that she wished he had taken them to see something lighter and more lively. Alfred, feeling remorseful at first, said he did not know what kind of a piece it was, and then turned petulant, and called Lizzie ungrateful. On another occasion, this would have led to a lovers' quarrel, but Lizzie's attention was otherwise occupied just now. During the progress of the horrors contained in the last act, the hand which Lizzie clasped grew icy cold, and Lizzie herself was compelled to turn her face from the ghastly picture upon which the curtain finally fell.

"Come, Lily," said Lizzie, in a cheerful voice, delighted that the horrible curiosity was at an end.

But Lily's feelings were overwrought, and for answer she sank fainting to the ground.

"Get away from her!" cried Lizzie to Mr. Sheldrake, who was stooping to raise her.

Mr. Sheldrake, amazed at the fierceness in the girl's voice, bit his lip and obeyed her. If he had put his thoughts into words, he would have said, "You little tiger-cat, I will pay you for this!" Lily drew Lizzie to the back of the box, out of sight of the audience, whose attention had been aroused by the bustle. "That pretty girl has fainted," said some; "did you see how white she turned before the piece was over?"

The rising of the people in the pit prevented Felix from seeing what had occurred; but he had noticed Lily's pallor and the horrible fascination which the drama had for her. He had resolved upon his line of action, and now he hurried out of the theatre, and engaged a cab.

"I want you," he said to the cabman, "to follow a party that I shall point out to you, who will either walk or ride, and to follow them in such a manner as not to be observed. If you succeed in this, double fare."

The cabman knew a gentleman, that is, a man whose money was sure, when he saw him, and he raised his whip to his hat, and said, "All right, sir, I'm awake;" and drew his cab to a convenient spot.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

LIZZIE DEEMS IT NECESSARY TO CALL CUNNING TO HER AID.

The first thing Lily saw when she recovered consciousness was Lizzie's face bending down to hers. In that instant Lizzie began to act: as all women do upon every possible occasion. If those who enlist in the ranks of the drama would but act on the stage as they act off it, there would be no talk of the decadence of dramatic art. Every trace of anxiety vanished from Lizzie's face as Lily's eyes looked into hers, and she smiled so brightly and nodded so encouragingly as to infuse strength into the heart of her friend.

"Where am I, Lizzie?"

"With friends, my dear. The theatre was so hot that I almost fainted myself."

"Did I faint, then? How foolish of me!" A look of joy filled her eyes as they lighted on her brother. "O Alfred!"

He knelt by her side, and she took his hand and retained it. By this time the theatre was fast being emptied.

"I remember now what it was that overcame me. The horrible sight of that man dying!"

She shuddered, and Lizzie said briskly,

"Never mind; we're not going to think of that any more. It was only a piece of acting, after all. We'll go to see something more lively next time."

And Lizzie nodded emphatically at Alfred, who answered,

"Yes, we will. I didn't know what sort of a piece this was, or I shouldn't have brought you to see it."

"But Mr. Sheldrake knew," remarked Lizzie, with a sharp glance in the direction of that gentleman.

"I assure you I did not," was Mr. Sheldrake's reply. "You do me great injustice, and not for the first time to-night. I have too high a regard for Miss Lily to cause her pain. She knows that, I am sure; and so does Alfred."

"I know it well," interposed Alfred eagerly; "and Lily knows it too. How can you be so unjust, Liz?"

Lily turned to her friend. "I am so sorry for all this. I am the only one to blame for being so weak and foolish."

This brought Mr. Sheldrake out in full force; he was almost tender in his expressions of sympathy for Lily, and he even relented so far towards Lizzie as to hold up a warning finger as a caution not to be unjust to her friends for the future.

"And now," he said, when Lily was ready to depart, "I propose we go and have a little supper."

"No, thank you," said Lizzie, in a decided tone, not at all softened by the evidence of Mr. Sheldrake's magnanimity.

Mr. Sheldrake bit his lip.

"You speak for all," he said.

"I think so. Lily will not go without me, and of course Alfred must see me home."

"Why won't you accept Mr. Sheldrake's invitation, Liz?" asked Alfred uneasily.

"Daddy is waiting up for me, and we have a long way to go. And besides, Lily is unwell."

For one instant, Mr. Sheldrake hesitated; but only for an instant.

"Well, it's of no use trying to persuade you. A wilful woman will have her way. How do you propose we shall go home?" he asked of Lizzie in a tone of sarcastic politeness. "Your way is different from ours."

Lizzie decided this without hesitation. They would all go in one cab, and drop Lily at the door of her grandfather's house in Soho, and then Alfred should see Lizzie home. Mr. Sheldrake made no demur to her suggestion, and the party drove from the theatre. But he stopped the cab at the corner of the little street in Soho, and said that the driver need not turn, as he could see Lily the few yards she had to go. He jumped out of the cab, and said to Alfred,

"By-the-bye, Alf, I want to say a word or two to you. The girls will excuse us for a moment."

Alfred and he walked half-a-dozen steps from the cab, and then he turned upon Alfred, and asked what was the meaning of Lizzie's behaviour.

"I don't know," replied Alfred; "I never saw her in such a humour before. I hope you don't think I am to blame for what has occurred."

"I haven't stopped to think. When a man's made mad as I've been to-night, he doesn't think of much else but the cause. Look here, Alfred, I don't want to pry into your secrets, my boy, and I don't want to spoil your love-making. You know best whether I've been a friend to you or not—"

"You have been," interrupted Alfred eagerly; "a true friend!"

"Well, then, I'm not going to be made to look small by any sweetheart of yours. I've nothing to say against Lizzie; but she mustn't come any of her tricks with me. Take my advice. Tell her to be more civil to me for the future. If she isn't--" here he paused, and gave Alfred a significant look--"well, if she isn't, I might turn rusty. And that might be awkward for you, Alf."

There was no mistaking his meaning, and Alfred's heart sickened at the threat conveyed in the words. It suited Mr. Sheldrake not to notice Alfred's discomposure, and they returned to the cab in silence.

"I'll walk with you, Lily," said Lizzie, as Mr. Sheldrake held out his hand to assist Lily from the cab; "it's only a few steps, and the cab can wait."

But Mr. Sheldrake put a restraining hand upon her arm.

"I can see Miss Lily safely to her door," he said politely. "You have a long way to go, and Mr. Musgrave is waiting up for you, you said. It's very late, and you'd best be moving. Eh, Alfred?"

"Yes, yes," returned Alfred hurriedly; "we must rattle on. Good-night, Mr. Sheldrake. I'll see you to-morrow some time."

The cab drove away, and for a few moments neither Lizzie nor Alfred spoke. Their thoughts were not in unison. But Lizzie, the more gentle nature of the two, presently crept close to Alfred and placed her hand in his. He threw it from him angrily. She resented this at first, and shrank from him; but a better feeling came upon her soon, and she asked:

"What have I done, Alfred, that you behave in this manner to me?"

"Done!" he repeated, with bitter emphasis. "Been the ruin of me, I shouldn't wonder!"

"Alfred!"

"O, yes," he said sullenly. "It's all very well for you to cry Alfred in that tone; but it won't mend matters. I thought you loved me—"

"Have I not proved it, Alfred?" she interrupted, in a tone of sadness.

"But I have found out my mistake," he continued, not heeding her words; "it's always the way. Mr. Sheldrake is right in what he says about women; no man ought to trust them."

"Do you think you ought not to trust me?

"Do you think there is anything in the world that I would not do for your sake? O Alfred, you speak blindly!"

"I am the best judge of that," he returned quickly; "you don't know all. If there is nothing in the world that you would not do for my sake, why should you act in such a manner to-night as to set Mr. Sheldrake dead against me?"

Lizzie did not reply for a few moments; her face was turned towards her lover, as if striving to read his thoughts. She could not see his features distinctly in the gloom of the cab, but his voice was a sufficient index to the trouble that possessed him.

"You speak as if you were afraid of Mr. Sheldrake, Alfred?"

"I should have reason to be if he turned rusty. He gave me a warning to-night."

"Because I displeased him?"

"Yes, because of you. It makes me sick to think of it, to speak of it. I wish I was dead! I am the most miserable wretch in the world! If it were not for you and Lily, I think I should make away with myself."

"Don't speak like that, Alf," said Lizzie, placing her arm tenderly around him; "it breaks my heart to see you so unhappy. I know you love me and Lily. And you ought to be sure that we are better friends to you than Mr. Sheldrake can be, and that we would do more for you if it was in

our power."

"That's it. If it was in your power. But it isn't, and it *is* in Mr. Sheldrake's; and he has behaved like a true friend to me."

"Sometimes I ask myself, Alfred, what can be his motive?"

"I know that you are prejudiced against him; and that's the reason you suspect him, and can't be civil to him. You think he wouldn't do me a kindness without a motive?"

"I am sure he wouldn't," said Lizzie firmly; "and I am sure of another thing--that you, in your heart, do not like him. I wish you had never seen him."

"I wish I hadn't," groaned Alfred.

"And yet you have told me he was your best friend, Alfred."

"Don't badger me, Liz, for God's sake I am almost torn to pieces as it is. You ought to comfort me, and try and make things better for me."

"Ah, if I could! If I knew how to, how gladly would I! Why not confide entirely in me, Alf? Who can have a better right to your confidence that the girl that loves you with all her heart and soul?--as I do, Alf, my dear! Come now, tell me all. Who knows? Something good may come of it. What's your trouble?"

"Money."

"Yes, I know that; and that you owe Mr. Sheldrake more than you can pay. Tell me how it all came about, dear."

So by many little endearing ways she coaxed him to tell her the whole of his miserable story. How, excited by the glowing accounts in the papers of the easy manner in which fortunes could be made on the turf, he had commenced to bet, a few shillings at the time at first; how he attended races, and how one unfortunate day he won a few pounds, and came home flushed with the idea that he had found the philosopher's stone; how little by little he had been led on, with the inevitable result of losing more than he could afford; how on one important race, when the prophets and tipsters in every one of the papers declared--in such glowing and confident terms that it was impossible to resist the temptation of making a bold plunge for fortune--that a certain horse could not possibly lose, he had used money which did not belong to him; and how the horse came in last instead of first.

"I had to make up that money, of course," he continued; "I had to get it somehow; and I did get it--never mind in what manner. You can imagine what I suffered, Liz! I thought I had fortune in my hands; and I had, but I was tricked out of it--for the whole affair was a swindle. The horse was never intended to win; and they swore it couldn't lose."

He derived comfort from the confession he was making; he took no blame to himself; and he did not, when he reached this point, tell her the story of the theft from the iron box. Then he went on to narrate how he had made Mr. Sheldrake's acquaintance, and how that gentleman had lent him money from time to time, and how misfortune continued to pursue him. He would have had his pockets filled with money over and over again if it had not been that things invariably went wrong with him just at the critical moment.

"It was from no want of judgment on my part, Liz. I had got to learn as much as any of the prophets and tipsters, and yet I could never manage to turn up trumps. I saw other fellows, who didn't know in their whole bodies as much as I knew in my little finger, make hundreds and hundreds of pounds. It only wants sticking to, Liz. I'll make all our fortunes yet; you see if I don't! There's the City and Suburban coming on; and I know something that'll open their eyes. And when I pay Mr. Sheldrake the money I owe him, I'll cut with him, if it's only to please you."

By the time he had reached the end of his recital he had recovered some of his good spirits. Lizzie listened in silence, and interrupted him only once, to ask whether he ever made any bets with Mr. Sheldrake.

"O, no," was the reply; "Sheldrake will never bet with me, Liz. Why, sometimes he tries to persuade me not to back a horse that I'm sweet on, and even tries to persuade me not to bet on races at all. 'It's a bad game, Alf,' he has said to me more than once, 'it's a bad game, unless you've got a strong bank at your back, and unless you can hold out for a long time.' Well, then, I ask him how it was he had managed to make his money; and he can't help telling me the truth. He was dead broke, Liz, in a worse fix than I'm in now--ay, a thousand times worse--he has told me so lots of times; but he stuck to it until on one race he had taken a bet of a thousand pounds to ten, and his horse won. There he was, all right in a minute. He was a made man directly the horse passed the winning-post. He told me how he threw his hat in the air, and how he almost danced for joy. Then the money began to roll in. That's how it is, Liz. You've only got to stick to it long enough, and keep your heart up."

"Do you bet with any of Mr. Sheldrake's friends, Alf?"

"With one--Con Staveley."

Lizzie repeated, under her breath, "Con Staveley!" as if desiring to fix the name in her memory.

"Con gives me long odds--longer than I should be able to get from any other of the commission agents or from any of the clubs. One of these days I shall give him a nip, as sure as fate. He has told me so, often, laughingly. 'You'll nip me one of these fine days, Alf,' he said; and 'I shall have to hand you over a big cheque. Well, you may as well have it as anybody else.' And I mean to have it, Liz. If I don't make it out of the City and Suburban, I'll make it out of the Derby. Would you like to go to the Derby, Liz?

"And so," concluded Alfred, when he came to the end of his story, which he had told and coloured in such a way as to make it appear that it was only by an extraordinary combination of ill-chances that he was not "rolling in money" at the present time, "you see where my chance lies. I shall be sure to come up all right, if I go on. And I *must* go on, Liz; that's a fact. It's my only chance. And as Mr. Sheldrake can shut me up at any minute, I must be careful not to offend him. I want you to be civil to him, for my sake, if you won't for his own."

"I'll try to, Alf."

"That's a dear! I can't understand why you are so bitter against him. At one time you were always praising him; and you've some reason to be thankful to him. I'm sure he's been, very kind to you and Mr. Musgrave."

"It looks so," said Lizzie thoughtfully, "outwardly."

She said no more; for she was keen enough to see that many conflicting influences were at work. That Alfred was blind to Mr. Sheldrake's character was plain; and, indeed, the feeling she entertained against him was really nothing more than a matter of prejudice. But her instincts were dead against him; and she thoroughly distrusted him. There is often in woman's character a sort of unreasoning reason, to the whisperings of which she tenaciously clings, even though outward evidence almost surely prove it to be based upon false grounds. And in the majority of instances, the instinct which prompts this refusal of direct evidence is correct. Mr. Sheldrake had become Lizzie's Doctor Fell; and she judged him accordingly.

The conversation she had had with Alfred this night set her thinking more seriously. She yearned to set matters right; but turn which way she did, one obstacle started up constantly before her--Mr. Sheldrake. He seemed to hold them all in his power by the relations which existed between him and Alfred. As she thought of the terrible blow he could inflict upon them all, she began to hate him. Alfred was powerless; Lily was powerless; Mr. Musgrave was powerless. Lizzie had a large share of woman's wit and cunning, and much confidence in herself. In her musings now, Mr. Sheldrake presented himself to her in the light of a foe to her dearest hopes, as one who was weaving treacherous webs around her friends; and she found herself watching him, and looking about her for some means to break the threads, and so defeat him. "If I had some one to help me," she thought, "some man to depend upon who is not in Mr. Sheldrake's power. Felix!" She started; for the name had come so suddenly upon her, and with such vivid force, as to make her almost fancy that she had really heard it spoken. Felix! The man of all others whom she would have chosen; the man of all others upon whom she could best depend. The thought of him gave her such hope and comfort, that she kissed Alfred tenderly. He returned her caress, and called her a dear good girl, and told her how he loved her.

Mr. Musgrave, who was waiting up for Lizzie, heard the sound of the cab wheels, and ran to the gate.

"Will you come inside, Alfred?" he asked.

"No, thank you, I will bid Lizzie good-night here."

"I'll be in presently, daddy," said Lizzie, with a kiss, which sent the old man into the house with a light heart.

As the lovers stood together in the quiet night, some better influences, born of the peace which surrounded him and of the consciousness of the love which Lizzie bore towards him, entered Alfred's heart, and he experienced a genuine feeling of regret for the folly of the past. It had floated him on to rocks so perilous that his liberty was endangered and his honour was lost. How much better had it been for him and all of them had he avoided the fatal snares! "Let me but once get free," he thought, "and I will take care not to be caught again." In this way do all weak natures repent the consequences of their folly. What was bad in Alfred's nature sprang out of his weakness; his very selfishness only asserted itself when he was in trouble--but then, indeed, it asserted itself with such strength as to sweep aside every other consideration, and as to make it impossible for him to recognise the danger he might inflict on those he loved in his efforts to free himself from the net he had woven for himself.

The lovers did not part for nearly an hour. The little that Lizzie said to Alfred soothed and comforted him, and when he bade her the last good-night, and gave her the last kiss, he was in a quieter and better mood than he was when they quitted the theatre.

"Will Lily be asleep when you get home, Alf?" asked Lizzie.

"I should think so, Liz."

"And I should think not so, Alf," said Lizzie, half gaily, half sadly. "See. When you are at home, knock at her door, and if she is awake, give her this kiss from me."

She watched Alfred till he was out of sight, then went indoors, where Mr. Musgrave was patiently waiting for her.

"Did you enjoy yourself, Lizzie?"

"Yes--no," replied Lizzie, taking off her hat and mantle. "It isn't a very lively piece, and Lily was ill. Why, how pale you've turned, daddy! She was better before we left her. It was the piece made her ill, I think."

"Tell me more about it, Lizzie; she was well when she went to the theatre?"

"O yes, and we thought we were going to enjoy ourselves very much. And so we should have done if the play had been a lively one. But it was horrible. I wouldn't go to see it again for ever so much. Well, and the theatre was very hot and the last scene was so dreadful that Lily fainted. She soon recovered, and we all went to Soho in one cab."

"That was right, Lizzie."

"Yes," said Lizzie, with assumed carelessness, but watching the old man keenly, "it was my doing, that was. Mr. Sheldrake wanted to walk home with Lily, and wanted me and Alfred to start off at once in a cab from the theatre--but I wouldn't have it so. I insisted that we should all go together, and that we should drop Lily at her door. Mr. Sheldrake wasn't very pleased. To tell you the truth, daddy, I think I rather set him against me to-night. Do you mind?"

Such a concentrated look of watchfulness did she flash into his face that it would have startled him to see. But as he did not see, he could only answer her spoken words.

"No, my dear, I don't mind; but it will be as well not to quarrel with him, if you can help it."

"He would be a dangerous enemy, wouldn't he, daddy?"

"Yes, my dear; very dangerous."

"So if we know he *is* our enemy we shall have to behave cunningly towards him; we shall have to be on our guard. To be civil to him to his face, and ready to tear him to pieces directly we get a chance."

There was so much excitement in her words and manner that Mr. Musgrave looked at her in uneasy amazement. She walked about the room restlessly, with a bright flame in her cheeks. Presently she grew calmer, and sat down by the table, on which supper was laid. There was trouble in her face, and it brought trouble into his.

"Take some supper, Lizzie; we will talk afterwards."

"No, we will talk now. I can't eat any supper. Mr. Sheldrake wanted us to go with him to some supper-rooms, but I wouldn't hear of it. Was I right?"

"Quite right."

"So that I've been twice right to-night, and this enemy of ours with the curled moustaches has been twice wrong.

"You seem to be very much set against Mr. Sheldrake, my dear."

"*Seem* to be! I am. I mean every word I say, and a good deal more. Tell me--do *you* like him?"

"He is my employer, Lizzie, and could turn us out of this house any day he chose."

"And could do many other hard things--and would, and will, if he's thwarted; so we must be cunning, and must enter into a league against him. Shake hands upon it." And she held out her hand earnestly to him. "Shake hands upon it!" she repeated, almost vehemently.

"Child, child!" he said sorrowfully. "I take your hand, and kiss it because I love you, and because I feel that your words convey a deeper meaning than they express. But I am an old man, and I have seen trouble, and have felt its bitter experiences. I would not willingly encourage you in what may bring bad consequences to both of us."

"Not if we are wary, daddy--not if we are cunning. You don't know what prompts me to speak so! Ah, daddy! Do you remember my telling you, when you first opened out the prospect of this pretty little cottage to me, that I was wilful, and might tease you a good deal, and that for that reason you had better consider very seriously whether it would do for you and me to live together as you proposed? I don't know whether to be thankful or sorry that I consented. I was very happy

then--very, very happy."

"You did it for my sake, Lizzie," he said humbly.

"Not altogether; I did it a good deal for my own. I thought how nice it would be for Alfred."

She covered her face with her hands to hide her tears.

"You took pity on my lonely life, Lizzie, and I bless you for it, my child! You have brought much happiness to me, and things have occurred to me since then--such wonderful things."

She looked up, with the tears in her eyes.

"What wonderful things, daddy?"

"That is my secret, my dear," he said sadly. "You do not know the history of my past life. The time may come--and soon--when you will learn it. I have become a better man, I hope, since we came to live here. Sit by me, my child, and tell me your trouble."

She seated herself on a stool at his feet, and took his hand and caressed it.

"And you have a secret, too," she murmured, "and a new one. We all of us have secrets, I think, that we are keeping from one another."

"All of us! Have you a secret that you keep from me?"

"Yes, daddy; and one that I must not tell anybody, not even you. I have promised. You must not ask me any questions about it, for I cannot answer them."

"Very well, my dear. But tell me the reason of your feeling against Mr. Sheldrake."

"Suppose you knew that he could destroy the happiness of the one you loved best in the world--suppose you knew that he was ready to use that power if you crossed him in any of his bad ways."

"That is all supposing, Lizzie."

"It is reality to me. Mr. Sheldrake has Alfred in his power, and can ruin him any minute he pleases. Alfred told me so to-night. O, daddy, daddy! I am unhappy and miserable, and I don't know which way to turn if you will not help me."

"I will help you, child, in any way that I can. Does Alfred owe Mr. Sheldrake money?"

"Yes, more than he can pay."

"How has that come about?"

"You must not tell anybody. Alfred would be angry. Alfred has lost the money in betting on horses."

Mr. Musgrave started. The business that was conducted in Ivy Cottage was conducted in so secret a manner that Lizzie did not know its nature. She had been curious about it, and once or twice had asked the old man; but he had laughingly evaded her, and it was she who had dubbed the room in which he and Mr. Sheldrake were often closeted together for so long a time the Bluebeard's room.

"Does he bet with Mr. Sheldrake, Lizzie?"

"No--with a man named Con Staveley."

The guilty look that stole into Mr. Musgrave's face bore no meaning to Lizzie's sense. Some part of the scheme was now revealed to him. Mr. Sheldrake lent Alfred money, which he received back through Con Staveley; and he himself perhaps had been an unconscious instrument in Mr. Sheldrake's hands, and had assisted in Alfred's entanglement. But what could be Mr. Sheldrake's motive? There was nothing to be gained from Alfred, who had no money and no expectations. Knowing Mr. Sheldrake thoroughly, Mr. Musgrave knew well that there must be some deep motive at the bottom of all this. The old man had parts of the chain in his hand, but the important link was wanting. Could Lizzie supply it?

"Have Alfred and Mr. Sheldrake been friends for a very long time, Lizzie?"

"No, daddy; not twelve months, I think."

"How did they become acquainted?"

"I don't quite know, but I suspect it was through Lily."

"Through Lily!" echoed the old man, almost in a whisper.

"I think that Mr. Sheldrake lends Alfred money because of her. I think--no, I don't think; I am sure--that Mr. Sheldrake wants Lily to be fond of him."

Lizzie was frightened at the white face which met her gaze. A terrible fear smote the old man dumb for a time. The missing link was found! This Mr. Sheldrake--this man without principle, without honour, without heart--had designs upon the tender girl who had brought light into the old man's life. Lizzie had indeed found a friend in her design--how eager and willing a friend she little knew--but one whose motive for aiding her was so strong as to overleap every other consideration in life.

"You are ill, daddy!" she cried.

He rose and paced the room, and Lizzie's anxious eyes watched him. What were his thoughts during the silence that followed he did not reveal. But a new strength seemed to have entered into him, and he paused before his adopted child with a determination in his face which robbed him of many years.

"Answer my questions, Lizzie," he said, "without asking for reasons. First let me tell you that when you brought Lily here as your friend, I was glad. I have grown to love her, as well as I love you, child. Has she any affection for Mr. Sheldrake?"

"No!" Very decided and emphatic was Lizzie's reply.

"Thank God for it! He is unworthy of her. You speak as if you knew."

"How do girls learn each other's secrets, daddy? Lily has never told me, although I have tried to coax her a hundred times. She loves another man. I know this as well as I know that I love Alfred with all my heart and soul."

"A good man, Lizzie?"

"One of the best of men, daddy."

"Do not answer carelessly, child. I have a stake in this, perhaps as deep and as strong as yours."

"I do not answer carelessly, daddy. Your manner gives me such hope! I am so glad I have spoken to-night. The man she loves and who loves her, I am sure, is one to be honoured--a man worthy of any girl, worthy even of Lily."

"You asked me to give you my hand a little while ago, my dear. I give it to you now in the way that you wished."

There was something solemn in the manner in which he held out his hand to her; and something altogether so new and earnest in him, that it stirred her to deeper feeling, as his hand closed over hers.

"Now for Alfred," he said; "do you know if he bets in his own name?"

"He has never told me."

"You have some letters of his?"

"Yes, daddy."

"It is time for you to go to bed, my dear. I want to see Alfred's writing. I will come up with you, and you will give me one or two of his letters. Trust me, child, I have a good reason for what I am doing. So now, kiss me, and let us go upstairs."

He kissed her at her bedroom door again, when she gave him the letters.

"We'll try and be a match for this enemy of ours, Lizzie."

"O daddy," she answered, with a bright look, "you have made my heart light!"

CHAPTER XXXIV.

GOOD COUNSEL.

The cab was turning the corner of the little street in Soho in which Lily lived, and Lily was about to ring the door-bell, when Mr. Sheldrake laid his hand on her wrist, and said:

"Let me have a few minutes' conversation with you to-night. I beg it as a favour."

Not daring for Alfred's sake to refuse, Lily tremblingly suggested that they should go indoors and talk; but Mr. Sheldrake said, in a tone that was half decided and half imploring:

"I cannot speak to you in the house."

She raised her eyes to his face for an explanation, and he answered the look.

"Your grandfather is not my friend."

"But that is not grandfather's fault," she said loyally.

"I do not say it is; it is my misfortune, perhaps. He is not so much a friend of Alfred's as he should be."

"How can you say that?" asked Lily, with a beating heart. "You are wrong--very wrong; grandfather loves Alfred."

"I only judge from what Alfred has told me. So far as regards myself, of course, I can see that your grandfather is not over cordial to me. He has no right to be otherwise; I have been a good friend to his grandson, and I deserve some better return."

"I know, I know, Mr. Sheldrake," said Lily earnestly. "Alfred has told me of your kindness to him. I am very grateful to you for it, believe me."

"Well, then," rejoined Mr. Sheldrake briskly, "you can scarcely refuse me the small favour of a few minutes' quiet conversation with you--although I accept it as a great favour. It is a fine night, and after the heat of the theatre, the air will do you no harm."

She had no power to refuse, and they turned slowly from the door. Near to the house was an arched avenue which led to one of the larger thoroughfares. Not many persons were stirring in this quiet courtway, and thither Mr. Sheldrake led Lily.

"If we walk up and down slowly," he said, "our talking together at this time of night will not attract attention. Pray take my arm."

She laid her hand lightly on his sleeve, and waited anxiously for his next words.

"I hope," he said, looking into her face with an expression of tender solicitude, "that the effects of your faintness have quite passed away."

"Yes, thank you. It was very stupid of me to give way so."

"You must not say that. You could not help it. And you are the last person, I am sure, to give pain to your friends."

She raised her eyes to his.

"It pained me exceedingly to see you overcome, and I could not help reproaching myself for being the innocent cause of your suffering."

"You were not to know that I was so weak; you did not know what kind of a play it was we were going to see."

"Thank you, Miss Lily," he said eagerly, "thank you. You do me greater justice than your friend Lizzie did. I think she must be ungrateful."

"No, indeed," said Lily warmly. "She is the very reverse of that. You must not speak ill of Lizzie, Mr. Sheldrake."

"Your wish is law," he replied gallantly; "but if she is not ungrateful, I am the most unfortunate of men, for I have by some unaccountable means incurred the displeasure of two persons whom you love--your grandfather and Lizzie."

He paused here, anticipating, and wishing, that Lily would have replied to this, but she was silent.

"And the mystery is, that both have good reason to behave differently towards me, to think better of me, for they must know that I have stood a good friend to Alfred. You know that."

"Yes."

"We entered into a compact, if you remember--you and I--to work together for Alfred's good. You *do* remember it, do you not?"

"Yes."

"That was at Bushey Park. It is one of the pleasantest days in my remembrance. Well, now, I've tried to perform my part in the contract. I've stood Alfred's friend through thick and thin--very few men would have stuck to him as I have done. However, I can take no credit to myself for

doing so; he has you to thank for it--only you. Why, here am I repeating the very few words I said to you on the day we entered into partnership!"

His treacherous hand closed upon hers with a tender pressure which made her shiver. Not so much in the words he had spoken, but in the manner of their utterance, he made her understand that he held Alfred's safety--perhaps his life--in his hand, and she felt that if she repulsed him Alfred would be made to suffer. He released her presently, and encouraged by her submission his treacherous arms would have stolen round her waist. But instinctively she evaded the embrace, and stood apart from him. Had her life depended upon it, she could not have acted otherwise. At this moment a man passed through the archway. Mr. Sheldrake's back was towards the man, who, with a keen observance of Lily's attitude, walked slowly onwards in the direction of Lily's home. Mr. Sheldrake waited until the man was out of hearing before he spoke again.

"I hope I have not frightened you by telling you that very few men would have stood by Alfred as I have done, Miss Lily?" How strong the armour of modesty is, was never better shown than in the fact that the man of the world had not yet found courage to address her simply by her Christian name. "But it is a fact, I assure you. I daresay Alfred has confided in you, and has told you some of his troubles?"

"I don't know the exact nature of them; I only know that he is very much harassed."

"Perhaps it is better," said Mr. Sheldrake significantly, "that your knowledge should go no farther. I am afraid that he has been very injudicious--it is a mild phrase, but I would not distress you by using a harsher term. Let us say that he has been injudicious, indiscreet. Well, what then? So long as you and I remain true to our compact, he is safe."

"Mr. Sheldrake," said Lily, in an agony of alarm, "is Alfred in danger?"

"Not while we stand by him. Do not needlessly distress yourself. We'll see him through it, you and I. Many a young fellow has been wrecked through want of a friend--but Alfred has two. Shall I tell you what makes me so earnest in his cause?"

"No," she replied hurriedly, and looking round as if for help; "not to-night. It is late, and grandfather will be anxious about me. Some other time."

"What if some other time should be too late?" he questioned pitilessly. "You ask me whether he is in danger, and almost in the same breath you show unkindness to the only friend who has it in his power to pull him through his difficulties. I make no boast of being his friend--it is the simple truth. And what should there be to displease you in the knowledge that I am your brother's friend because of the feeling I entertain for you? A girl should be thankful--I will not speak of gratitude--to be in this way the guardian and protector of her brother."

"I am grateful, Mr. Sheldrake, indeed, indeed I am!"

"You have a strange way of showing it, Miss Lily. Pardon me, if I seem to speak harshly, but I am deeply wounded by your conduct, and by the conduct of others who should show a better regard for Alfred's position. Your grandfather is cold to me--Alfred's sweetheart misjudges me; but I could forgive these, if you were kind. It is due to my self-respect--which I cannot forfeit, even to win your good opinion--to ask you again whether I may tell you what makes me so earnest in your brother's cause?"

Thus miserably constrained, Lily whispered, "Yes," in a faint tone, knowing what was coming, and dreading it. Mr. Sheldrake dropped his voice to the requisite pitch of tenderness, and prepared to make his avowal.

"I saw you first by accident, Miss Lily. I was passing the Royal White Rose Music-hall one evening--it was in June of last year, a night I shall never forget--and having a spare half hour I dropped in. Almost as I entered, you came upon the stage, and from that moment it seemed to me that my fate was fixed. Such an impression did your sweet face make upon me that I drove to the hall on the following evening, and being acquainted with Storks the manager, we spoke together about you. You remember on that night I threw you a bouquet--I bought it especially for the pretty girl who had made such an impression upon me--and after the performance I came to the back of the stage, and had the pleasure of being introduced to you. I saw that you were too good for such a place--that you were in every way different from the usual run of music-hall performers--and you must take the blame on yourself for having attracted me in such a manner. It is not many girls who have done so--nay, no other has ever produced a similar impression upon me. From that moment I began to love you."

He did not appear to be aware that the very words he employed in declaring his love showed of what base material it was composed. His speech flowed smoothly, and he mentally congratulated himself upon his skill in delivering it. There was no tremor in his voice, for the situation was not new to him. He had delivered himself of artificial love-phrases to a score of girls in his time, and he had become practised in the art; but he was compelled to acknowledge to himself that never had he found conquest so difficult as this--which gave it without doubt a keener zest, and made him as artificially earnest as it was in his false nature to be.

Lily listened tremblingly. It was the first avowal of love that had ever been spoken to her, and

it met with no response in her heart. But thought of Alfred's peril compelled her attention. Encouraged by her silence, Mr. Sheldrake proceeded.

"I saw you home that night, and after lingering about the street long after you entered the house--see what an impression you made upon me!--it was my good fortune to make the acquaintance of your brother. He has told you of the circumstance probably?"

He paused for her reply, and she gave it.

"Yes." Faintly whispered, as if it were wrung from her.

"He was in some difficulty, and I was enabled to get him out of it. I was attracted to him by his voice and by his resemblance to you. An acquaintanceship sprang up between us, and it has been in my power to assist him on many occasions. I have done so, as you know, for your sake, and because I love you. There is no need for me to say more. There is one reward I have looked forward to for befriending your brother, and whom I shall continue to befriend if I can hope to find some place in your affection—"

He placed his arm around her, and so overpowered was she by her inward conflict of feeling, that she had no power to resist. But at this critical moment a quick step was heard coming into the archway. Lily turned with a gasp of relief, and seeing who it was that was approaching them, involuntarily cried in a joyful tone,

"Felix!"

And made a movement towards him.

Felix raised his hat, and said:

"Your grandfather is anxious about you, Miss Lily."

"Have you seen him to-night?" asked Lily.

"Yes; I have been to see *The Bells*, and he told me that you had gone to the same theatre. He expected you would have been home before this time."

"Miss Lily was in perfectly safe keeping, sir," said Mr. Sheldrake, biting his lip with vexation at the interruption, and with jealousy at Lily's more cordial manner towards Felix.

"I make no question of it," replied Felix politely. "Her grandfather must be satisfied of that, but I think he expected Alfred would bring his sister home."

"I will come at once," said Lily. "Alfred has gone to see Lizzie home."

Felix offered his arm, and Lily was about to accept it, when Mr. Sheldrake interposed.

"I would like you to assure this person, Miss Lily, that there was no cause for alarm."

In a very lofty manner indeed did Mr. Sheldrake make this request.

"Indeed, no assurance is necessary," said Felix, with the intention of sparing Lily.

But Mr. Sheldrake would not be denied.

"I asked the lady, sir."

"There was no cause for alarm, Felix."

"One word before you go," said Mr. Sheldrake.

Obedient to her look, Felix fell back a pace or two.

"I will not intrude farther upon you to-night, for I see that you are fatigued and anxious. Of course you will keep what has passed between us an entire secret. For Alfred's sake. Out of consideration for you, I have not told you how serious his position is; I do not wish to alarm you unnecessarily. But you and I, working together, will be able to set him straight."

He pressed her hand tenderly as he wished her good-night; and as she took Felix's arm, he shaped with his lips the warning words, "For Alfred's sake," and turned away without a word to Felix. Before Lily and her protector arrived at the house, Lily said:

"I have not done anything wrong in stopping to speak to Mr. Sheldrake."

"I know that, Lily; but don't say anything more about it."

"I must. I cannot bear that you should think ill of me; and it has so strange an appearance that any one less generous than you would require an explanation, and that I cannot give."

"If I say I am satisfied, and that I hold you in too perfect esteem to think ill of you in any way--

that I know you have troubles which you are compelled to keep to your own breast, because they affect others more than yourself--will that content you?"

She answered yes, and he gave her the assurance in other words.

"I have a confession to make before we go in, Lily."

"You, Felix!"

"Yes; I have told an untruth, but one which, I think, may be pardoned. I have not been to your house since eight o'clock. I saw your grandfather then, and he told me you had gone to see *The Bells*, and appeared anxious about you. I was anxious, also, for I did not care that you should see such a piece."

Lily shuddered. "It was dreadful, Felix! Did you know that I fainted?"

"No; I noticed that you were very pale."

"You were watching me, Felix?"

"Yes, Lily; I was at the back of the pit, and could just see your box."

Lily experienced an exquisite delight at this confession. He had come to the theatre expressly to watch over her. Involuntarily she held out her hand to him, and allowed it to remain in his grasp.

"I knew when you came out of the theatre, Lily," he continued, "and when I came towards you just now, and you asked me if I had been at home with your grandfather, I saw no other way of avoiding an unpleasant explanation with Mr. Sheldrake than to say what was not exactly true. If you can say sincerely that you forgive me for the subterfuge, you will relieve my mind and make me feel less culpable."

"No forgiveness can be necessary, Felix, when the only feeling I have is one of gratitude that you came when you did."

"Thank you; I am more than sufficiently rewarded. Now I am going to say something to you, which may need forgiveness; but I depend upon your generous nature not to misjudge me. My words are prompted by sincerity and pure esteem, Lily. Shall I go on?"

"Yes," she answered, looking him earnestly in the face. There was so much truthfulness in her gaze that he could have taken her to his arms there and then, believing that she would have found comfort in that shelter, knowing that it would be to him the greatest happiness earth could afford. But he mastered the impulse with manly resolve, and with a tender and chivalrous regard for her weakness. There was no fear, no doubt, in her face; she knew she could trust him; all the bright dreams of her youth were embodied in him, and would ever be, though the dear realisation of them might never, never come. He was her knight, in the truest sense of the word.

"You are but a child, Lily," he said, "inexperienced in the world's hard ways, and bringing only to your aid, in any difficulty you may be labouring under, a simple heart, unused to the artifice and cunning which surround us. I have learnt something of the world in my struggle; and although I have not learned to condemn it--for there is much that is beautiful in it, Lily--I have learned that it is often necessary to arm yourself with weapons that you despise, if you would save yourself from hurt. In battling with the world, a man must not wear his heart upon his sleeve--there are too many vultures about--he must not oppose a bare breast to foes whose breasts are mailed. I am expressing myself in this way, so as to make you understand that I--who, I would have you believe, despise meanness and unworthiness as heartily as it is in the power of man to do--feel the necessity of using weapons in life's battle which I would fain throw aside. There is nothing more noble than simplicity of heart--I worship it wherever I see it--but it is a weak weapon, as the world goes, and in most cases, where it is relied on solely, it becomes woefully bruised. Say that you are in any trouble, that any cloud hangs over your life, that you are threatened by storms which you see approaching to you nearer and nearer--how can *you* meet them, Lily? What weapons have you at your command to save yourself from the peril? Simplicity, innocence, self-sacrifice! Relying only on these and on yourself, the storm breaks, and then—"

He paused, and Lily did not speak. How precious his words were to her! How skilfully and delicately he had contrived to tell her that her happiness was dear to him! His voice was like music to her heart.

"Then, Lily," he resumed, "think what occurs. It may be that I am wrong in my fears. How happy it would make me to know that it is so! But if I am right, think what may occur. You may bring misery not only to yourself but to others. You are moved by this thought, I see. Has it never occurred to you before? You have at home two whom you love--your brother and your grandfather. There is no need for me to say how dearly your grandfather loves you, and what anguish you may bring upon him if you allow suffering to come on yourself unprepared. In both your brother and your grandfather you should confide, and from your grandfather's larger experience of the world, and from his whole-hearted love for his dear child, good counsel would surely come, if counsel be needed. I should say, if I were asked, that were I in your place and

needed counsel, I should deem it a matter of duty, as it is equally a matter of affection, to seek for it in one whose riper years qualify him for giving it, and whose life of love for his child is a sufficient warrant for his sincerity. I should say more than this, Lily, if you would allow me, and if you are not displeased with me—"

"Go on, Felix. I honour you for what you are saying."

"I should say, were I in your place and in such a position as I have hinted at, that I should fail in my duty and my love if I neglected to take him into my confidence, and that, in that case, doubts might well arise in his mind—"

"Of my love for him, Felix?" interrupted Lily, with all the earnestness of her nature. "No, no; do not say that!"

"I might have been harsh enough to use these very words, if I did not know that good old man's heart. Cling to him and to his love, dear Lily; do not throw him aside in your trouble. It is the dearest privilege of affection to share the troubles of those we love. If I were married"--his voice trembled slightly here--"the first consoling thought that would arise to my mind should misfortune overtake me would be, 'Thank God, I have one at home who will sympathise with me and, by her sympathy, console me!'"

Had Felix been the most cunning of men, and had he carefully studied every word he wished to say, he could not have made a more successful appeal. Such strength is there in sincerity and honesty of purpose! If anything had been wanting to make him inexpressibly dear to the girl he loved so loyally, to make her cherish him (as she did) in her heart of hearts, he had supplied it. But he had no thought of that; he had spoken out of perfect singleness of motive.

"So, now," he said, in a lighter tone, "my lecture being over, and knowing, as I know, that you are not hurt or offended with me for speaking as I have done, we will go in to your grandfather. I look upon myself as a very conspirator--pretending to be anxious that you should be at home, and keeping you in the night air for my own selfish purpose!"

He raised his hand to the bell, and Lily caught it and kissed it. She felt no shame in the action, no more than a little child might have done; but the soft touch of her lips thrilled through Felix, and so powerful a happiness filled his heart, as he thought of what might be in the future for him and for her, that a mist floated before his eyes, The next moment he raised her hand to his lips, and returned the homage with the respect and devotion of a true and faithful knight.

CHAPTER XXXV.

MR. PODMORE WISHES TO BE INSTRUCTED UPON THE DOCTRINE OF RESPONSIBILITY, AND DECLARES THAT HE HAS A PRESENTIMENT.

Eventful as this night had been to Lily, and destined as it was to live for ever in her memory, it was pregnant with yet deeper meaning for her future, and an event was to occur which was to draw closer together the links of the chain of pure and unworthy love which bound her. On this night she saw clearly what before had been but dimly presentable to her. She saw that Felix loved her; and also that Mr. Sheldrake had a passion for her. She was instinctively conscious that there was nothing in common in the sentiments of these two men. Their feelings for her were as wide apart as were their characters; and she had already estimated these correctly, although she did not realize the depth of baseness from which Mr. Sheldrake's passion sprung. She was too pure and innocent for that.

When the party left for the theatre, Old Wheels found the time pass slowly enough, and for the purpose of whiling away a few minutes, he went up to Gribble junior's room, and found that worthy man and his wife working cheerfully as usual. Gribble junior's father, the victim of co-operative stores, was sitting in a corner nursing the baby, and had as usual been descanting upon the evils of co-operation, when Old Wheels entered. Mr. and Mrs. Gribble junior were laughing heartily at something their father had just uttered.

"What do you think we're laughing at, Mr. Wheels?" asked Gribble junior, as the old man sat down.

Old Wheels expressed a desire to be enlightened.

"Father just said, that he supposed they would be trying next to bring babies into the world by co-operation."

At which, of course, the laughter recommenced.

"Why not?" grumbled Gribble senior. "You can buy pap at the stores, and you can buy coffins.

Mind, John, when I'm dead, get my coffin made by an honest tradesman. If you was to buy one at a co-operative stores, I shouldn't rest in my grave."

"Time enough for that, father," replied Gribble junior, in a business-like tone, and yet with affection; "you're good for twenty years yet, I hope and trust."

"I should be, John, if trade was allowed to go on in a proper way. But co-operation'll be the death of me long before my proper time."

"My girl's gone to the theatre," observed Old Wheels, to change the subject.

"It'll do her good," paid Mrs. Gribble; "she's been looking pale of late."

"I'm going to take father to the Music Hall to-night," said Gribble junior. "He's never been to one. You see, Mr. Wheels, what I complain of in father is, that he won't keep moving."

"It's too late, John; it's too late. My joints are stiff."

"Perhaps so, but there's no occasion to make 'em stiffer. All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy. Go in for everything, I say--go in for work, and go in for play; and keep moving. How do you think baby's looking, Mr. Wheels?"

Old Wheels pinched the baby's cheek, and said gaily that the co-operative store couldn't turn out a baby like that.

"Do you hear that, father?" cried Mrs. Gribble junior, with a merry laugh. "Do you hear that?"

"Mr. Wheels is quite right," replied Gribble senior, faithful to his theories; "it ain't likely that anything good and wholesome can come out of co-operation."

"How's trade, Mr. Gribble?"

"Well, it's no use grumbling, but it ain't as good as it should be. I had an idea yesterday, though. It was raining, you know, and I had no jobs on hand. The hospital ain't as full as it ought to be. I went out in the rain yesterday with three new umbrellas under my arms, and one over my head. What for, now? you'll ask. To sell 'em? no; people never buy umbrellas in rainy weather of their own accord; they always wait for a fine day. No; I had an idea, and I carried it out in this way. I saw a respectable man, with an umbrella over his head that wanted mending. I followed him home, and just as he knocked at his door, I went up to him, and said I was an umbrella-maker, and would like the job of mending his umbrella. 'But I've only got this one,' he said, 'and I want to go out again.' 'I'm prepared for that, sir,' I said; 'here's my card; and here's a new umbrella as good as yours. I'll leave this with you to use till I bring back your own, properly mended.' He was tickled at the idea, and was more tickled when I told him that, trade being slack, I had come out on purpose to look for umbrellas that wanted mending. 'You're an industrious fellow,' he said, with a laugh. 'Yes, sir,' I answered, 'if work won't come to you, you must go to work. Keep moving, that's my motto. If you can't get work, make it.' Well, he gave me his second-hand umbrella, and took my new one. In this way, in less than three hours, I got rid of my four new umbrellas, and got four jobs. I took them back this afternoon, and--would you believe it, Mr. Wheels?--not only did I get paid well for the jobs, but two of the gentlemen bought two of my new umbrellas, and said I deserved to be encouraged. And I think I do," added Gribble junior complacently. "I made a good job of that idea, and I daresay it'll bring me in some money. You see, an umbrella is such an awkward thing to get mended, when it's out of order. Not one person out of twenty knows where to take it to. Well, go to them. I hope it'll rain to-morrow."

When Old Wheels was in his room again, it was natural that his thoughts should dwell much on the conversation that had taken place between himself and Lily. It brought the past before him, and he was painfully startled by the resemblance which the present crisis in the life of his darling bore to that other event in the life of her mother which had wrecked the happiness of that unhappy woman, He opened the cupboard, and saw the little iron box. Very sad were the thoughts it suggested as he brought it to the table and opened it. There was a little money in it, sufficient for a few weeks' expenses of their humble home; two or three mementoes of Lily, such as a piece of ribbon and a flower she had worn in her hair; and some old letters and papers worn and faded. He took them from the box, and sadly read one and another. Among them were letters from Lily's father to her mother during their days of courtship; and certain terms of expression in them brought to him the remembrance of sentiments almost similarly expressed by Alfred. The same vague declarations of being able to make large sums of money by unexplained means; the same selfishness, the same boastfulness, were there embodied. But not the same remorse which Alfred had already experienced; that was to come afterwards, and the despair which ever accompanies it. "We were happy then, my daughter and I," the old man murmured; "happy before he came. My daughter's life might not have ended as it did, in misery; might not have been passed, as it was, in miserable repinings. He brought a blight upon us." And then came the thought, "Like father, like son." He paced the room with disturbed steps. "Alfred's father," he thought, "wrecked the happiness of the woman who loved him, who trusted implicitly in him--wrecked the happiness of my daughter, who was once as bright as my darling Lily. And how she changed under the consequence of his vice and his folly! How she drooped, and drooped, until life became torture! As she trusted him and believed in him, and sacrificed herself for him, so Lily trusts and believes and is ready to sacrifice herself for Alfred. Shall I allow her to do this blindly?

The end would not be the same, for Lily could not live through it. How can I save my darling? Would it not be better to inflict a sharp pain upon her now, than to see her walk blindly, confidingly, lovingly, to a desolate future?" At this point of his musings he heard the street-door open and shut, and heard a stumbling step in the passage below. Looking over the papers in the iron box, he came upon two which he opened and read. They were the last two documents connected with the career of Lily's father. One was a full quittance for a sum of money which the unhappy man had embezzled; the wording of the other was as follows:

"In consideration of my father-in-law paying the money due to Mr. James Creamwell, which I have wrongfully used, I solemnly promise not to trouble my wife with my presence as long as I live, and not to make myself known to my children in the future, should we meet by any chance. For the wrong that I have done, I humbly ask their forgiveness.

"RICHARD MANNING."

"He has kept his word," mused Old Wheels; "from that time I have never seen him, never heard of him. No one but I has ever read this paper, unless Alfred, when he took the money from this box— But no; he could have had no thought for anything but his unhappy purpose."

Old Wheels was interrupted in his musings by the whining of a dog at the door. "That's Snap's voice," he said, and going to the door, he saw the faithful dog waiting for him. Snap, directly he saw the old man, looked in his face appealingly, and walked towards the stairs. Old Wheels, taking the candle, followed the dog down-stairs, and found Jim Podmore asleep at the bottom. Snap, having fulfilled his mission, waited patiently for the old man to act.

"Come, Mr. Podmore," said Old Wheels, gently shaking the sleeping man; "you mustn't sleep here. Come up-stairs, and get to bed."

The tired man murmured "All right," and settled himself comfortably to continue his nap. But Old Wheels shook him more roughly, and he rose to his feet wearily, and leaning against the wall, seemed disposed to fall asleep again in that position.

"Come, pull yourself together," urged Old Wheels, taking Jim Podmore's arm; "you'll be more comfortable in your own room than here."

Thus advised, and being well shaken, Jim "pulled himself together," and with many incoherent apologies, accompanied Old Wheels up-stairs. When he arrived at the first landing, he appeared to think he had gone far enough, and quite naturally he stumbled into the old man's room, and fell into a chair.

"I'm not going to allow you to fall asleep again," persisted Old Wheels. "Bed's the proper place for you."

"I should like," murmured Jim, "to go to bed--and sleep--for a month."

Old Wheels laughed slightly at this.

"You wouldn't expect to wake up at the end of the time," he said, continuing to shake Jim Podmore.

"I don't know--I don't care--I'd like to go to bed--and sleep--for a year. All right, Mr. Wheels--don't shake me--any more!--I'm awake--that is, as awake--as I shall be--till to-morrow morning. I beg you--a thousand pardons--for troubling you. I suppose--you found me asleep--somewhere. Where?"

"On the stairs."

"Ah--yes. I thought--I should ha' fell down in the streets--as I walked along. I was so--dead-beat. I'm glad--*you* woke me up--for I wanted--to ask you something."

Old Wheels thought it best not to interrupt the current of Jim's thoughts, and therefore did not speak. Jim shook himself much as a dog does when he comes out of the water, and having, it is to be presumed, by that action, aroused his mental faculties, proceeded.

"We've had a talk--to-day--me and some mates--and I made up my mind--that I'd speak--to some one--as might know--better than us. I meant you."

"Yes--what were you speaking about?"

"Well, you see--it come in this way. I never told you--about Dick Hart--did I?"

"No--not that I remember," replied Old Wheels.

"He was a man o' our'n--Dick Hart was. As good a fellow--as ever drawed--God's breath. He was working--on our line--a many months ago. He ain't working there now--not him--ain't working anywhere--can't get it. Willing enough--Dick Hart is--and a-breaking his heart--because he can't

get it. He's a doomed man--Mr. Wheels--a doomed man!--and might as well--be dead--as alive. Better--a dooced sight better--if it warn't for his wife--and kids."

Jim Podmore was evidently warming up. His theme was powerful enough to master his fatigue. Old Wheels listened attentively.

"It might have happened--to me--it *might* happen--to me--any night--when I'm dead-beat. What then?" he asked excitedly, to the no small surprise of Snap, to whom this episode was so strange that he stood aside, gazing gravely at his master. "What then?" Jim repeated. "Why, I should be--what Dick Hart is--a-wandering about--in rags--a-starving almost. I should be worse than him--for when I think--of the old woman up-stairs--asleep--and my little Polly--that is my star--my star, Polly is!--and think of them--with nothing to eat--like Dick Hart's old woman and kids--I shouldn't be able--to keep my hands--to myself. And I shouldn't try to--I'm damned if I should!"

Old Wheels laid his hand with a soothing motion on the excited man's shoulder.

"Be cool, Mr. Podmore," he said. "Tell me calmly what you want. You are wandering from the subject."

"No, I ain't," responded Jim Podmore doggedly. "I'm sticking to it. And it ain't likely--begging your pardon--for being so rough--that I *can* be calm--when I've got what I have got--in my mind."

"What's that?"

Jim Podmore looked with apprehension at Old Wheels, and then turned away his eyes uneasily.

"Never mind that--it's *my* trouble--and mustn't be spoken of. Let's talk of Dick Hart."

"You were about," said Old Wheels gently, "to tell me some story connected with him."

"He was as good a fellow--as ever drawed breath--and had been in the Company's service--ever so many years. There was nothing agin him. He did his work--and drawed his screw. Little enough! He got overworked--often--as a good many of us gets--a-many times too often--once too often for poor Dick--as I'm going to tell you, short. It must ha' been--eight months ago--full--when Dick Hart--worked off his legs--with long hours--and little rest--had a accident. He took a oath afterwards--that he was that dead-beat--before the accident--that he felt fit to drop down dead with fatigue. He couldn't keep--his eyes open--as I can't sometimes--and when the accident--takes place--he goes almost mad. But that doesn't alter it. The accident's done--and Dick Hart's made accountable. He's took up--and tried--and gets six months. If what he did--had ha' been his fault--he ought to have been--hung--but they didn't seem--quite to know--whether he was to blame--or whether--he wasn't--so they give him six months--to make things even, I suppose. While Dick's in prison--his wife's confined--with her second--and how they lived--while he's away from 'em--God knows! Some of us gives a little--now and then. I give twice--but what Dick's wife got--in that way was--next to nothing--as much as we--could afford. Dick Hart--comes out of prison--a little while ago--and tries to get work--and can't. He gets a odd job--now and then--by telling lies about himself--and his old woman--gets a little charing--but they've not been able--to keep the wolf--from the door. It's got right in--and they are--pretty-nigh starving--him and the old woman--and the kids."

Jim Podmore's drowsiness coming upon him powerfully here, he had as much as he could do to keep himself awake. He indulged himself with a few drowsy nods, and then proceeded as though there had been no interval of silence.

"Well, we had a talk about him--to-day, me and my mates. We made up--a little money--about six shillings--and sent it to his old woman. But we can't go on--doing this--and one of the men said--that if it comes to the officers' ears--or the directors'--that we'd been making up money--for a man as has been discharged--and's been in prison--and's cost the Company a lot o' money in damages--(for they had to pay two men--who was able--to afford a lawyer; there was others--as was poor--who couldn't afford a lawyer, consequently--they got nothing)--that if it come--to the directors' ears--we should likely--get into trouble ourselves."

Having come to the end of Dick Hart's story, Jim Podmore dozed off again, and would have fallen into deep sleep but for Old Wheels nudging him briskly.

"Well?" asked the old man.

"Ah, yes," said Jim; "I was almost forgetting. What I want to know is--is Dick Hart responsible--for what he's done? Is it right--that a respectable man--a hardworking man--a honest man--should be compelled--to work until he's lost--all control over himself--till he's ready to drop--as I've told you before--and as I've been ready to myself--and that then--when a accident happens--which wouldn't have happened--if he'd been fresh--or if a fresh man had been--in his place is it right, I want to know," and Jim Podmore raised his arm slowly and lowered it, and raised it again and lowered it again, as if it were a piston, "that that man--should be put--in prison--should be disgraced--should lose his honest name--shouldn't be able to get work--for his old woman--and the young uns--and that they should be almost starving--as Dick Hart's people's doing now?"

Fortunately for Old Wheels, who would have found these questions very difficult to answer,

Jim Podmore was too tired and too sleepy to wait for a reply.

"If I don't go upstairs--immediate," he said, rising slowly to his feet, "you'll have--to carry me. So I'll wish you--good-night, Mr. Wheels, and thank you."

He paused at the door for the purpose of asking one other question.

"Did you ever feel--that something was going to happen--without exactly knowing what it was?"

"Yes," replied Old Wheels good-humouredly, "but it never did happen."

"Ah," pondered the puzzled man, "but this will, though."

"What will?"

"Didn't I tell you--I didn't know what? But it'll happen--as sure as my name's--Jim Podmore. It's buzzing about my head now,--and I can't make it out."

"Nervousness," suggested Old Wheels, "brought on by overwork."

"Mayhap, but there it is. What would you call it, now? Give it a name."

"It is a presentiment, I should say."

"That's it. I've got--a presentiment. Thank you. Good-night, Mr. Wheels. I've got--a presentiment--and it'll come true--as sure as my name's--Jim."

With that Jim Podmore staggered upstairs, with faithful Snap at his heels, and within an hour Old Wheels heard the street-door bell ring, and hurried downstairs.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

HOW FELIX GAINED A CLUB.

Felix intended to leave Lily after he had seen her safely within doors, but the old man begged him to come in. A look from Lily decided him, and the three faithful souls ascended the stairs to the old man's room. Old Wheels entering first, gave Lily an opportunity to say hurriedly to Felix,

"Don't tell grandfather of my fainting, Felix. It might distress him."

He promised her.

"Nor about Mr. Sheldrake."

"Very well, Lily."

She spoke in a whisper; she was so thrilling with exquisite sensitiveness that any harsher sound would have been a disturbance to her happy state.

"I will think of what you have said to-night, Felix; you are right, I know--you *must* be right." (The unspoken words came to her: "My heart tells me so.") "Thank you for it, Felix, with all my heart."

Their hands met in a tender clasp. They entered the room the next moment, and Old Wheels looked towards them with a pleased expression in his face, brought there by the circumstance of Lily and Felix lingering for a few moments in the passage. It betokened a confidence between them.

It was one o'clock before Felix took his departure. The conversation between him and Old Wheels had turned principally upon the mental disturbance of Mr. Podmore, and upon his presentiment. This made a great impression upon Felix, and, although he was almost ashamed to confess it to himself, took fast hold of his mind. He was predisposed for some such influence, from the thought of the crisis that seemed to be imminent in the life of the woman he loved. That it must come, and soon, he was convinced, and he thought to himself it would be almost a wise act to hasten it, if possible. He had quietly made it his business to acquaint himself with the nature of Mr. Sheldrake's transactions; and, notwithstanding that that gentleman was close and crafty, Felix had learned much concerning him. The knowledge sprang naturally, as it were, out of Felix's profession. He was correspondent for two country newspapers, and had managed to insert the thin end of his wedge into the wall of London journalism. He was working his way, steadily and unobtrusively, and he was sanguine and confident of the future. Very many people suppose that cunning is one of the principal specialties of wisdom, but it is not always so. A rare

strength, which shows itself almost invariably with great and good results, lies in the man who is wise and not cunning--who is wise from honesty of purpose. Felix was this. He was sincere in all he did--honest in all he did. It is a pleasure to be able to indicate, even by such mere outlines as these, a character which too many persons do not believe in.

Beginning to earn his living by his pen, and being enabled to act in a certain measure independently, and to take his own view of things, it was natural that he should exercise his small power in the cause of right. It was not his ambition to be the Don Quixote of literature, but he could no more resist the inclination to strike hard blows at public shams and injustice than, being naturally truthful, he could resist the inclination to tell the truth. Of course he could effect but little good, The great shield behind which imposture and knavery found shelter, and which protected dishonesty and hypocrisy, suffered but little from his attacks; but here and there he made a dent, and that was a great satisfaction to him. He was a faithful soldier, and fought with courage.

He knew that in some way Lily's brother was in Mr. Sheldrake's power, and accident revealed to him the nature of the bond between them. In his crusade against knavery, he became acquainted with the unmitigated roguery that was practised under the protection of the institution which, with a grim and ghastly humour, has been denominated the great national sport. His friend Charley, who introduced him to the columns of the *Penny Whistle*, was the first who opened his eyes to the knavery. It seems to be a recognised necessity that all young men who have the means and the leisure should go through the formula known as "seeing life"--a process which to some is a sad tragedy, and which to nearly all is a bitter experience. Very few come out of that fire unscathed. Charley had gone through this formula--fortunately for him, in a superficial way. Charley's parents were good people enough, and had tacitly agreed that their son must "see life" before he settled; everybody's sons saw life before settling, and Charley must not be an exception. So the young fellow went into the world, and in the natural course of things became mixed up in matters, the mere mention of which would have brought a blush to his mother's cheek. But Charley was doing the proper thing: there was no doubt of that. However, the young fellow's inclinations were not inherently vicious, and he escaped the pitfalls in which so many weak and unfortunate ones are ingulfed. He and Felix had met some few times since Felix's installation as London correspondent to the *Penny Whistle*, and they had opened their hearts to each other. Thus it came out that Charley told Felix of his introduction to the racing world, and of his adventures therein.

"You see, Felix," he said, "I had outrun my allowance, and I thought I might be able to set things straight, and pay my few small debts, without coming on my father's purse. So, led away by the flaming accounts in the newspapers, I went into betting; was introduced by a friend to club where I could bet, and for three months went regularly to races. It didn't turn out well, and after dropping nearly two hundred pounds, I went to my father, and made a clean breast of it. He paid my debts, and made me promise to give up the infatuation, as he called it. I promised willingly enough, for I had made up my mind before, and I am sure I shall never be drawn into the net again. The fact is, Felix, it didn't suit me: the men I met on the race-courses were such cads and blackguards that I soon became disgusted with myself for mixing with them. I tell you what it is, old fellow. I think being with you a great deal has done me good, and I have learnt from you to hate things that are mean. You've been to races, of course?"

"I've been to Goodwood, and Ascot, and to the Derby. The Derby is a wonderful sight. I should like to go with you to one or two of the small meetings."

They went in company, and Felix, having a deeper purpose in his mind than idle amusement, saw much to astonish him. As they were making their way through a crowd of sharks and gulls, Charley pulled his sleeve, and said,

"There! There's a man who had over a hundred pounds of my money."

Turning, Felix saw Mr. David Sheldrake, evidently very much at home. Felix, not wishing to be seen by Mr. Sheldrake, walked away, and watched him from a distance.

"Is he a betting-man?" asked Felix.

"O, yes; and as sharp as a needle."

"Does he attend these meetings regularly?"

"You seem to be interested in him, Felix."

"Yes, I know him."

"And don't like him, evidently," observed Charley, judging from his friend's tone.

"That is true; I don't like him. But you haven't answered my question."

"I have met him on nearly every race-course I have been to; he is always to be seen in the 'ring,' I should say."

Felix did not pursue the subject, but later in the day said,

"Have you any documents, Charley, connected with your betting experiences, or have you destroyed them?"

"I have them all. By-the-bye, they might be useful to you; there are some strange things among them--well, perhaps not strange in themselves, but strange that such things should be allowed. It would be a good subject for you to take up."

"Any letters from that man?"

"O, yes; suppose I send you the packet?"

"I should like to see them."

They were received in due course by Felix, and they so interested him that he began from that time to subscribe to the sporting papers, and to make a regular study of the usually unprofitable theme. Any person who did not know Felix's character might reasonably have supposed that he had been bitten by the mania, and that he was beginning to entertain the idea that he might make a fortune by betting with sharps. They would have had ample grounds for so supposing, if they had known that Felix actually sent small sums in stamps to the prophets and tipsters and the layers of odds who advertised in the sporting papers, for the purpose of obtaining the information necessary for the rapid and certain realisation of "fabulous sums"--a phrase which many of the advertisers used in the traps they set, unconscious of the ironical truth it contained. But what Felix was doing was a means to another end, and he lost his money cheerfully. He began to frequent race-courses also, and on one occasion, early in his experience, he saw Lily's brother, as he expected to see him, running hither and thither in a state of blind excitement. With a set determination, Felix watched the young man during the whole of the day, saw the fatal infatuation which urged him onwards, and saw him pass through the various stages of hope, suspense, and agony. Felix saw more with the eyes of his mind; he saw ruin waiting at Alfred's heels. Felix had met with an old legend which stated how every human being was attended by two angels, one bad, one good, and how they strove for mastery over the soul they attended. As the recollection of this legend came to him, Felix looked up and saw Alfred's bad angel, Mr. David Sheldrake, talking to Alfred, and Alfred eagerly listening. It saddened Felix to see this, although he fully expected it, and was prepared for it. "Alfred's good angel," he thought, "is love. But love has no sword to strike this false friend dead." But Felix went home that evening with a clue in his hand.

On this night, as Felix walked away from Lily's house, he thought of these things, and was too disturbed to go home. He walked about the quiet streets, and at the end of an hour found himself on the Thames Embankment. As he stood there, musing, gazing into the solemn river, he became conscious of a sudden tremor in the air. He looked around with a feeling of vague alarm upon him, but he saw nothing, heard nothing. "Pshaw!" he muttered. "Mr. Podmore's presentiment is frightening me with shadows. I'll stroll past Lily's house, and then go home to bed."

CHAPTER XXXVII.

JIM PODMORE HAS A DREAM, AND WAKES UP IN TIME.

Jim Podmore, staggering into the one room which formed his Englishman's castle, found his wife and Pollypod fast asleep in bed. Before he went out to his work in the morning, he had told his wife not to sit up for him that night. "You've had precious hard work of it, old woman," he had said, "this last week; so go to bed early and have a long night's rest. I'll find my way up-stairs all right." The precious hard work which Jim Podmore referred to was one of those tasks which poor people--especially women--take upon themselves when occasion requires, with a readiness and cheerfulness which it is beautiful to see. A neighbour's child had been ill, and required constant watching. The mother, worn out with her labour of love, had fallen ill herself. And Mrs. Podmore flew to her aid, and attended to her household duties, and nursed her and the child through their sickness. The cheerfulness with which Mrs. Podmore undertook this task and performed it, as if it were a duty incumbent upon her, cannot be described. The best reward she could receive was hers: the mother and child recovered their health, and were strong enough to attend to themselves. Late in the previous night the doctor had released Mrs. Podmore, and told her--with smiles and good words and with a hand-shake which gratified the simple woman mightily--that now she had best go home and take care of herself; "for we can get about ourselves now," he said, "and sha'n't want you any more." This accounted for Jim Podmore having to find his way up-stairs by himself, for Mrs. Podmore seldom went to bed before he returned home. He knew, on this night, that his wife was asleep, and in the midst of his drowsiness he took off his boots in the passage, so that he should not disturb her.

Entering the room in his stockinged feet, he stepped softly to the bedside, and rested his hand lightly and tenderly on Pollypod's neck. The bed being against the wall, and Pollypod sleeping inside, he could not kiss her without disturbing his wife. The child slept peacefully, and Jim

Podmore gazed lovingly at the pretty picture, and leaned forward to feel the sweet breath, pure as an angel's whisper, that came from her parted lips. His supper was laid for him on the table, and he sat down to it, Snap standing at his feet in patient eagerness waiting for such scraps and morsels as he thought fit to give. Jim did not forget his dog; Snap fared well, and when supper was finished the dog stretched himself on the ground, and with half-closed eyes watched his master's face. Snap blinked and blinked, but although occasionally his eyes were so nearly closed that only the thinnest line of light could be seen, the dog never relaxed his watchful gaze. Jim sat in his chair, pipe in mouth, and smoked and dozed, and thought of Dick Hart and his wife and children, and of his own wife and Pollypod, till they all became mixed up together in the strangest way, and in the phantasmagoria of his fancy changed places and merged one into the other in utter defiance of all probability. Thus, as he leaned forward to catch the sweet breath that came from Pollypod's lips, the child's face became blurred and indistinct, and in her place Dick Hart appeared, crouching upon the rail way platform in an agony of despair. The platform itself appeared, with its throng of anxious faces, with its sound of hurried feet and cries of pain, with a light in the air that belonged to neither night nor day, sensitive with a tremor which was felt, but could not be seen or described, and which spoke of hopes for ever crushed out, and of lives of fair promise blighted by the act that lay in one fatal moment's neglect or helplessness. "If I don't go to bed," murmured Jim with a start, whereat all these things vanished into nothingness, "I shall fall asleep." And still he sat, and murmured, "Poor Dick!"

It was really but the work of a moment. Jim Podmore being on duty, suddenly felt a shock--then heard a crash, followed by screams and shouts, and what seemed to be the muffled sound of a myriad of voices. He knew that an accident had occurred, and he ran forward, and saw carriages overturned on the line, and huge splinters of wood lying about. "Who did it?" he cried. "Dick Hart!" a voice replied; and then he heard Dick's voice crying, "O, my God!" The busy hands were at work clearing the wreck, and the few passengers--happily there were but few--were assisted out. Most of them had escaped with a bruise or a scratch, but one man, they said, looked in a bad state, and at his own entreaty they allowed him to lie still upon the platform until doctors, who had been promptly sent for, had arrived; and one little child was taken into a room, and lay like dead. Jim Podmore was in the room, and he saw Dick Hart brought in between two men. Dick, when his eyes lighted on the piteous sight of the little girl lying like that, trembled as if ague had seized him, and began to sob and cry. "*I* did it! *I* did it!" he gasped. "Why don't some one strike me down dead?" As he uttered these words, and as he stood there, with a face whiter than the face of the child who lay before him, a woman rushed in and cried in a wild tone, "Where's the man that killed my child?" Upon this, with a cry wilder than that to which the poor woman had given vent, Dick Hart wrested himself free from the men, whose hands (in their grief at what had occurred) were only lightly laid upon him, and rushed out of the room like a madman. The men followed him, but he was too quick for them, and before they could lay hands on him again, he had jumped from the platform on to the line, dashing aside the persons who tried to stop him. His mad idea was to run forward on the line until he saw a train coming, and then to throw himself before it and be crushed to pieces. But he was saved from the execution of this piteous design; the men reached him and seized him, and carried him back by main force. When he was in the room again, his passion being spent, he fell upon his knees, and looked round with a scared white face, waiting for what was to come. "Poor Dick!" murmured Jim Podmore. And then the men whispered to each other how Dick Hart had been worked off his legs lately; how the accident was nothing more than was to be expected; and how Dick's wife was near her confinement with her second. "Poor Dick!" murmured Jim Podmore again, for the thought of Dick Hart's one little girl at home, and the other child that was soon expected, brought Pollypod to his mind.

It was too true; Dick Hart's wife was very near her confinement, and on this very night, unconscious of the dreadful event that had taken place, she was busy getting together the little things she had made for her first-born, and recalling the feelings she had experienced before she became a mother--feelings in which joy and pride were so commingled as to be inseparable. The time was night, in the wane of summer, and many a smile came upon the woman's lips, and many a tender thought dwelt in her mind, as she laid out the little garments and examined them to see where they wanted a stitch. Mrs. Hart had been married five years; and while she was employed in the manner just described, her first child, four years of age, was sitting in a low chair, playing with a doll, which not only had softening of the brain, but softening of every portion of its anatomy--for it was a rag doll.

But the doll, treasure as it was, notwithstanding its flat face (for rags do not admit of the formation of features of particular shape and beauty), was not the only object of the child's attention. She had that day been invested with a pair of new red socks, and Little Vanity was now holding out her little legs as straight as she could, and calling her mother's attention for the hundredth time to her flaming red treasures. Mrs. Hart knelt before the child, and admired the socks with the most outrageously-exaggerated turns of speech, and pulled them up tight, to her child's infinite delight and contentment. Then the mother began to prattle upon the subject nearest to her heart, and began to speak also, for the hundredth time, about the little brother--for Mrs. Hart had settled that "her second," as Jim Podmore had expressed it, was to be a boy--whom Rosy presently would have to play with.

"And you'll love him very much, Rosy, won't you?" asked the mother.

"Yes, very, very much."

Indeed, Rosy used a great many more "verys" than two, and quite ingenuously, be it stated. But Rosy had a strong desire to be enlightened upon a certain point, and she seized the present favourable opportunity. She had heard a great deal about this little brother whom she was to love and play with, but she was puzzled to know where the little stranger was to come from. Now was the time to obtain the information.

"Mother," asked the inquisitive little girl, "when will Bunny come?"

"Bunny," it must be explained, was the fanciful title by which Rosy had already christened the expected stranger.

"Next week, Rosy," answered the happy mother; "almost sure next week. Ain't you glad?"

"Yes, I'm very, very glad." (Again a redundancy of "verys" which must be left to the imagination.) "But, mother, who'll bring Bunny here?"

"Who'll bring him, Rosy? Why the doctor, to be sure."

Rosy nodded her head wisely, and employed a full minute in the silent enjoyment of her new red socks. Mrs. Hart was silent also, worshipping her little girl. If children only knew how their mothers worship them! Down went Rosy's legs again.

"Where will the doctor bring Bunny from, mother?"

"From the parsley-bed," replied the mother, laughing.

"Is Bunny there now, mother?"

"Yes, dear."

"Did *I* come out of a parsley-bed mother?"

"Yes, my dear," and Mrs. Hart smothered Rosy's face and neck with kisses. She was so occupied with her happiness that she did not hear the door, and did not know that any one was in the room until she heard a voice calling her name. The voice belonged to a neighbour, Mrs. Thomson, and Mrs. Hart rose to her feet, and was beginning to tell merrily of the conversation which she had just had with Rosy, when something in Mrs. Thomson's face stopped her tongue.

"What's the matter, Mrs. Thomson? What is it? Tell me, quick!"

"Now, bear up, Mrs. Hart," said the neighbour; "remember how near your time is, and bear up, there's a good soul!"

"What's the matter?" cried Mrs. Hart, thoroughly frightened.

"Tell me, quick, for God's sake! Is it anything about Dick? Has he had an accident? Is he hurt! O, why don't you speak!"

"Dick's not hurt."

"Thank God! But on and off, all this week, I've been frightened about him. It's a shame and a sin to work a man as he's been worked. Who's outside?"

She flew to the door, and pulled into the room a man employed by the same Company as her husband.

"There's something the matter," she gasped, and caught Rosy up, and pressed the child close to her breast. The man judged wisely that it would be the best to come to the point at once.

"Dick sent me to you, Mrs. Hart," he said; "he's had an accident, and one or two people have been hurt; he's all right himself, and he sent me to tell you so."

"Why didn't he come himself?" asked the wife, trembling and crying.

"Well, you see—" began the man; but Mrs. Hart did not allow him to proceed.

"They've put him in prison," she said, with a quick short breath; "my Dick, the best husband and the best father in the world! And they're going to punish him for what's not his fault Do you know how many hours' sleep he's had this week?"

"Don't excite yourself, there's a good soul!" remonstrated Mrs. Thomson. "He'll come out of it all right. Think of your baby."

"He's not in prison, Mrs. Hart," said the man; "but he's going to remain at the station until after the inquiry."

"Mrs. Thomson, will you take care of Rosy till I come back?"

"Why, surely, my dear, you're not going out in your condition!"

"I'm going to my husband," said Mrs. Hart, "and I'm going to see them managers and directors, and ask them what they're going to do to Dick."

With that the distracted woman, putting on her hat and shawl, left Rosy in her neighbour's charge, and hurried downstairs, followed by the man, who said it was best to let her have her own way, and that it was what he would like his wife to do if anything happened to him.

Jim Podmore was with her during all this time, and witnessed the interview between husband and wife.

"I can't tell how it occurred," said Dick Hart, who, although dreadfully distressed, was now more calm, and inexpressibly comforted by the presence of his wife. "Everything seemed to take place in a flash of light, like. I suppose it was because I was tired out with too much work. I don't care for myself. I'm thinking of the future, and what's going to become of you and Rosy--and--and the baby."

Dick broke down a dozen times during the interview, and sobbed and cried like a child.

"It'll always be on my mind. I'm glad I didn't kill myself, for your sake. Perhaps it'd ha' been better for you if I'd been killed, though. I don't know; I don't know what to think. You'd better take what money I've got about me. It ain't much; but I daresay they'll pay you for my work up to to-night."

Dick was fairly bewildered in this serious crisis, and completely helpless. If he had had money, he might have sent for a lawyer; but between eleven and twelve shillings was all his wealth.

An inquiry and inquest were held, at both of which Jim Podmore was present. Indeed, he was never absent from Dick Hart and his wife during all this time, although he took no active part in the history of their lives. And this is what he saw.

Dick Hart on his trial for manslaughter, with an array of lawyers against him sufficient to frighten a poor man out of his senses. The lawyers for the prosecution were against him, and strove, by all the ingenuity of long study and sharp experience, to prove him the guiltiest man that ever stood in a felon's dock. The lawyers of the Company were against him, and their aim was to prove the perfect innocence of the powerful directors they represented, and therefore the utter and inexcusable guilt of Dick Hart. Strong odds these against a poor man with an empty purse. A strange road to justice was this on which Dick Hart found himself, unarmed and with bare breast--and with something of a guilty conscience also, for he really did not know how far he was to blame--opposed to the keen intellects of those who were grandly paid to find him guilty. He quivered with helpless rage, he was racked with despair, as he listened to the manner in which the case was stated by his enemies: they were nothing less; they were there to destroy him. But there was a grain of salt for him in the midst of all this great trouble. A young lawyer, not overburdened with briefs, undertook his defence for the love of the thing, and pleaded so ably that he very nearly succeeded in proving Dick Hart innocent--as undoubtedly he was. Unfortunately, he could not prove that Dick Hart was not immediately responsible for the accident; but he did prove that the man, by excessive overwork, was so prostrate from fatigue, that it would have been almost next to a miracle had an accident not occurred. "Perhaps," said this daring champion, to the admiration of Jim Podmore, who nodded his head in confirmation and approbation at every thrust the lawyer made--"perhaps you will say that the prisoner was wrong in allowing himself to be so overtasked; but he has a wife and child dependent on him for support, and his wife is now at home, expecting every hour to saddle him with another responsibility. The prisoner is a hardworking man, and a poor man, and had he refused to perform the duties required of him, never mind at what sacrifice to himself, never mind at what peril to the public--as has been too often unhappily proved in other cases--he would have stood a fair chance of being dismissed from the service of the Company. If this case serves in any way to direct public attention to the manner in which too many servants of the railway companies are overworked, it will be fortunate that it is tried; but the prisoner must not be made the victim of a bad and abominable system. Not many days ago the coroner of Middlesex, at an inquest held upon the body of an engine-fitter, who was crushed to death between two engines, stated that no fewer than thirty railway servants are killed in his district every year; and he very pertinently wished to know whether such wholesale slaughter was altogether necessary. This is not the question for you to answer now, but it may lead you to a merciful view of the prisoner's case; for the perils of the service are sufficiently great in themselves, and should not be made greater by unfairly tasking the powers of the men. There are in the full week of seven days one hundred and sixty-eight hours; and there are hundreds of railway servants who can show a time-bill of one hundred and twelve hours. Add to these hours the time employed in going and coming from work, and you will have some idea of the manner in which these men are overworked. I read lately in a leading article upon this subject in a paper whose facts may be relied upon, that some men have worked thirty, some forty hours right off, without any sleep but that which nature has exacted at the post of duty, at the peril of those intrusted to their charge. It is the public who suffer; and when an accident occurs in consequence of a man being unfairly worked, he--being a man, and not a machine--cannot in justice be held responsible. At a meeting lately held in Brighton, one railway servant stated that he sometimes worked thirty-seven hours at a stretch." The lawyer cited many such facts as these, and even had the hardihood to assert that a director or a

manager should be standing in the dock in Dick Hart's place. However, it seemed to be understood that it was impossible to let Dick Hart off scot-free, and being found guilty and strongly recommended to mercy, he was sentenced to six months' imprisonment, a sentence which was virtually a parody upon justice; for if Dick Hart were guilty he should have been hanged, and if he were innocent he should have been compensated for the torture he had been made to suffer. An hour after the trial Jim Podmore was telling Dick Hart that his wife was confined.

It was a mystery to Jim how Dick's wife and children managed to live during that time, but manage they did, somehow. Neighbours were as kind to them as their own narrow means would allow: Rosy had many a good meal in one house and another; when Mrs. Hart grew strong, she went out charing; sometimes when she could not get work she begged--and dodged the policeman. It is amazing to what shifts some honest unfortunate folk are compelled to resort in the necessity that nature lays upon them to eat or die: which last is not an easy thing to do. Dick came out of prison and tried to get work, and failed. He was compelled also to resort to such dishonest shifts as adopting a name that did not belong to him, as denying this and that unworthy thing, as putting a cheerful face upon an empty stomach. He obtained work on another line of railway, and was turned away at the end of the fourth day, having been *found out*, a crime which is invariably severely punished, and which the world never forgives. Dick Hart really found existence a very difficult thing; and yet he had muscles, and was willing to exercise them.

The struggle was too hard for him, and he fell sick, and could not go out of his room for weeks. His wife nursed him and worked for him, after a fashion. When she could not get charing to do, she went a-begging. Rosy was sent to a school where the children occasionally enjoyed the blessing of penny dinners. On those occasions Rosy was always duly armed with a penny by her mother. One day a policeman arrested Mrs. Hart for begging, and she was brought before the magistrate. Money was found upon her--one shilling and sevenpence--and eight boxes of fusees. The policeman, in his evidence, fairly stated that he had made inquiry at the address Mrs. Hart gave, and found that she lived in a respectable house, that Dick Hart was sick and unable to move out of his room, that he had never been known to be drunk, and that neighbours sincerely pitied him and spoke well of him; also that the mistress of the school to which Rosy went gave the child and her mother an excellent character. Asked what she had to say for herself, Mrs. Hart told the truth: she went out to get bread for her husband and children; she asserted that she was compelled to beg. The magistrate said she should have gone to the parish. Then she told a piteous story. She *had* gone to the parish, and the relieving-officer (a mock title, surely!) refused to give her any out-door relief, but said she and her family might go into the workhouse, if she chose. She declined to do this, as in that case her husband would not be able to get work, and she did not wish to be a burden to the parish. She begged for a loaf of dry bread for her children; and "dressed in his little brief authority," the relieving-officer refused. "We have not broken our fast," she pleaded; and asked what they were to do. "The best you can," was the merciful reply. She did the best she could: she went into the streets hungry, and begged; and hurried home with the first penny she received, and sent Rosy to school, armed for dinner. Then she continued her begging--with her next proceeds bought a dozen boxes of fusees--and when she was in a flourishing condition, with one shilling and sevenpence in her pocket, was arrested for her monstrous crime.

It is pleasant to be able to record that the poor woman was acquitted, and that the magistrate spoke in proper terms of the conduct of the relieving-officer. It gave Jim Podmore pleasure, but this feeling soon gave place to pain as he witnessed the downward course of Dick Hart and his family, and the misery they endured. He was with them in their poorly-furnished home, and was gazing sadly at their white pinched faces, when suddenly Rosy's face changed to that of Pollypod his own darling; in the place of Mrs. Hart he saw his own wife; and he himself stood where Dick Hart had stood a moment before. These figures, himself and his wife and child, vanished as suddenly and as strangely as they had appeared, and he found himself on the platform on which his duties were performed. A bewildering sound was in his ears. A thousand engines were screaming furiously, a thousand voices were shouting despairingly, a thousand terrible fears were making themselves heard. The air was filled with clamour and confusion, and starting forward with a wildly beating heart, he awoke.

He had been dreaming. But there was cause for these his later fancies. The faithful dog Snap was tearing at the door, through the crevices of which Jim saw smoke stealing. He looked towards the bed: Polly and her mother were fast asleep. He ran to the door, and opened it, and a blaze of flame rushed on to him, and almost blinded him. The house was on fire!

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

FELIX BECOMES A LANDLORD.

Jim Podmore's first feeling after the shock of the discovery was one of deep-felt gratitude, and a muttered "Thank the Lord!" escaped his lips as he saw his wife and child lying asleep in bed. When he started to his feet in a half-conscious state, with the clamour and the roar in his ears,

his fear was that there had been an accident on the line, and that Polly and her mother had been hurt; and he was inexpressibly relieved to find that he had been dreaming. So deep and strong was his feeling of relief that he did not immediately realize the real danger which threatened him and those dear to him. It came upon him presently in its full force, and he recognised that a moment's delay might prove fatal. The first thing to find out was the extent of the danger. He had shut the door directly the fire met his gaze. Now he opened it, and ran down a few steps, on which the fire had not yet seized. He was beaten back by the flames. He fancied he heard cries from the lower part of the house, but he could see nothing for the smoke. There was no escape that way. Snap ran hither and thither in the wildest agitation, barking at the flames to keep them down. As Jim Podmore threw open the window in despair, to see what means of escape that outlet afforded, he saw the forms of persons hurrying to the street, and heard the cries they uttered. Those below could not distinguish his face, for he had closed the door again, and impelled by some strange process of reasoning, had locked it to keep out the flames. They saw, however, that some one was standing at the window, and they called out to him, but he was too agitated to understand what they said. The front of the house presented a flat surface of brick, and there seemed to be nothing between him and death--not a foothold, nor anything to cling to. The whole of this action had taken place in scarcely more than two or three moments, and within that time Snap had leaped upon the bed, and had aroused Pollypod and her mother. Had they been alone, it is probable that they would have slept on unconscious of their danger, for the smoke, stealing through the crevices of the door, had already somewhat stupefied them, and whatever subtle influence that and the dull roar of voices without might have had upon their dreams, they would not have aroused them to consciousness. Mrs. Podmore, with a scream, jumped out of bed, and looked wildly around; at the same moment she snatched Polly from the bed, and held the child close to shield her from danger.

"Keep cool, old woman," said Jim Podmore; "the house is on fire;" and muttered inly, "I knew that presentiment would come true--didn't I tell Old Wheels so?"

Mrs. Podmore was now standing at the window by Jim's side, with Polly in her arms. Their white night-dresses shone in the midst of the dark surface of brick, and voices reached them, rashly advising them to jump down. But they were on the third floor, and although Jim saw friendly arms held out below, he held his wife tight, lest in her fear she should obey the entreaties of their neighbours.

"There's time enough for that, old woman," he muttered, with thick breath; "perhaps the fire escape'll come. It'd be almost certain death to take the leap."

Time was too precious to waste in mere words, and he released her from his embrace. She turned to the door, but he cried out to her not to open it, and that their only chance lay in doing their best to keep out the flames.

"There's only one way out for us, old woman; and that's by the window. Put Polly down, and give me a hand here. Quick! Don't be frightened, my darling!"

He was tying the bedclothes together, to form a rope by which they might escape through the window, and Mrs. Podmore flew to help him. The door began to crack, and the room to fill with smoke; little jets of flame appeared.

"God help us!" cried Mrs. Podmore. "We shall be burnt to death!"

Jim said nothing to this, but all the bedclothes being used, he hurriedly fixed the mattress against the door, to gain another moment; then tied one end of the rope firmly to the foot of the bedstead, and threw the other end out of the window. It reached a little below the second-floor window. As he leaned forward to see how long it was, a ladder was fixed against the wall of the house, and a man, cheered on by the crowd, ran up to the room where Old Wheels slept.

"There's the old man getting out," said Jim, in a suppressed tone; the father, mother, and child were now together at the window; "and the man's jumped into the room. Don't look behind you, mother! Thank God, there's the fire-engine!"

It came tearing up the narrow street, and brave men were at work almost in an instant.

"The man's out on the ladder, mother, with Lily in his arms. Hurrah!" Jim lost sight of his own danger for a moment. "It'll be our turn presently. The Gribbles are getting down now. They've found a rope!"

Indeed, in less time than it takes to describe, all these, happily, were safely rescued, and only Jim Podmore and his wife and child remained in the burning house. The flames were in the room, and the fire-escape had not arrived. A moment's delay now would be fatal.

"Do you think you could hold fast to the rope," asked Jim of his wife, with a tightening grasp on the knots, "and slide down? There's no other chance left."

"I don't know, Jim," replied the trembling woman.

"See--there are two men climbing the ladder to catch us, and there are others below them, holding them up. You'll have to drop into their arms when you get to the end. Quick, mother!

Now?"

"I can't, Jim," gasped the fainting woman; "I can't. Never mind me. Save Polly!"

Without another word, Jim Podmore, with Polly in his arms, swung out upon the rope. Happily it held and bore strain. Those below watched him with agonised looks, and the roar suddenly became hushed.

"Drop the child!" cried a voice. It came from one of the men on the ladder, and sounded clear and distinct, as from a silver trumpet. "Don't be frightened, Pollypod! It's me--Felix!"

"Felix! Felix!" screamed Pollypod, and as she cried, fell through the air into his arms. The cheers and the roar of delight that came from the crowd were frozen as it were in the throats of the excited throng as Jim, assuring himself by a hasty glance that his child was safe, began to ascend the rope for his wife. He was not a moment too soon. She was so overpowered with fright that he had to drag her through the window.

"Keep your senses about you," he cried, "for God's sake, old woman! Polly's safe! Hold me tight--don't loose your hold! For Polly's sake, now--for Polly's sake, mother!"

She clung to him so tightly as almost to press the breath out of his body; it was fortunate for them that another ladder was raised, and that other friendly arms were held out to break their fall. The moment they were safe, the attention of the crowd was diverted to the form of a dog, who was standing and barking on the window-sill above. It was Snap, who had been left behind. The dog was in great distress, for the flames were darting towards him, and he could scarcely keep his foothold. But Jim Podmore saw the peril of his faithful servant, and having hurriedly ascertained that his wife and Pollypod were unhurt, he ran up the ladder and called out to Snap to jump. The dog had but one alternative--to be burnt; so he risked his limbs, and jumped clean on the shoulders of his master, whence he rolled safely into the crowd, who cheered merrily at the episode. Soon all the rescued ones were assembled in a house at the bottom of the street. Their neighbours had lent them clothes, and they stood looking strangely at one another, grateful for their escape, but dismayed at the prospect before them. Presently their tongues were loosened, and every little incident connected with the fire was narrated with eagerness. No one knew or suspected how it had occurred. Alfred had come home, and, in accordance with the promise he had given to Lizzie to kiss Lily before he went to bed, had knocked at his sister's door and found that she was awake. He sat talking to her for about a quarter of an hour, and then went to bed.

"I was asleep in a minute," said Alfred, "and I don't remember anything until I was pulled out of bed and told the house was on fire."

He held out his hand to Felix, for it was Felix who, after helping to rescue Lily and Old Wheels, had aroused Alfred to a sense of his danger. Felix responded cordially, and was sufficient of a casuist to be quietly pleased because a lucky chance had given him a claim upon Alfred's gratitude.

Voices asked where the fire had commenced.

"It must have broken out in the lower part of the house," said Old Wheels; "but it does not matter to us now. Thank God we're all saved, eh, Pollypod?"

Pollypod nodded her head a dozen times, and looked solemnly at Felix.

"*You* saved *me*," she said.

"Father saved you, Polly," replied Felix. "Didn't he make a rope and creep out of the window down it with Polly in his arms?"

"But you caught me!"

"Yes, I caught you, little one. It's like the story of Cock Robin, with a happier ending. Some one saw the fire--some one cried out--some one climbed up--some one crept down--some one caught Polly."

Which made Polly laugh. But her father looked grave, His strait was a hard one indeed. Every stick of furniture burnt, every scrap of spare clothing burnt, no money in his purse, and not insured for a shilling. Here was a fine example for theorists whose favourite theme is the improvidence of the poor!

The Gribbles were better off than the others, and had taken shelter elsewhere. Gribble junior had saved his little store of money, and had thrown his clothes and those of his wife out of the window, not having had time to put them on. Gribble senior drivelled a great deal; and weakly declared his belief that co-operation was the cause of this, his crowning misfortune.

Jim Podmore did not say anything of his dream. His wife made a remark.

"It's an ill-wind that blows nobody good, Jim. If you hadn't fell asleep in the chair, you wouldn't have saved your clothes, perhaps."

"A nice figure I should ha' looked going to work without 'em," he replied, with grim humour.

If there was any comfort in the fact that they were all in the same boat as regards the complete destruction of their worldly goods, that comfort was theirs. The only one who seemed to make light of the misfortune was Felix; he extracted some secret satisfaction from it. He had a plan in his head.

He certainly lost no time in putting it into execution. In the afternoon of the following day he burst in upon them. He was flushed and triumphant.

"Now, then," he said, with heartless gaiety, "if you had anything to pack up, I should tell you to pack up at once and get ready. As it is, you can come along with we at once. I intend to take you all into custody."

They looked at him for his meaning.

"Polly," he said, "will you come and live in my house?"

"O, yes, yes!"

"I've settled it all with your husband, Mrs. Podmore, and he comes straight from his work to my house to-night; so you are powerless, you see, and dare not make an objection."

Old Wheels drew Felix aside.

"Explain this to me, Felix."

"Well, I knew of a house--a small one--ready furnished, which I could obtain on reasonable terms for a short time. I have taken it as a speculation, and I am going to instal you at once in your new home."

"How as a speculation, Felix?"

"Why, you shall pay me rent, of course, when you have turned yourself round, and so shall Mr. Podmore. The loss would be a very trifling one to me--I am doing fairly well now, you know--if you all cheated me out of the rent. Seriously, sir, I know you would as soon be under an obligation to me as to any other man, and a home you must have. I am delighted to have you all in my power."

He beckoned to Lily.

"Where do you think your new home is, Lily?"

"I can't guess."

Strange enough, she also seemed to extract happiness from their trouble.

"Where would you like it to be? Near to Lizzie's?"

She uttered an exclamation of pleasure.

"Well, it is; within twenty yards of Lizzie's house. Lizzie is making everything ready for you now. Mrs. Podmore has a room upstairs. A cab is waiting at the door, and we are all going together in a bunch."

Old Wheels rang Felix's hand; Lily smiled one of her brightest smiles; Pollypod jumped for joy; Mrs. Podmore burst out crying, and throwing her arms round Felix's neck, kissed him first and begged his pardon afterwards.

That evening they were all comfortably installed in their new residence. Even Alfred was delighted, although he knew that a sword was hanging over his head.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

ALFRED'S LAST CHANCE.

It happened that on the day succeeding the fire Mr. David Sheldrake purposely kept away from Soho. He was nettled at the treatment he had received the previous evening, both from Lily and Lizzie, and he was determined to show them that he was not to be trifled with. He knew that Alfred would be uneasy at not seeing him, for a great race--the City and Suburban--was to be run at Epsom the following week, and Alfred's hopes hung upon the result. Alfred had begged for another advance of money, and Mr. Sheldrake had promised to give it to him, knowing that it would be returned to him through Con Staveley. "He will be mad at not seeing me," thought Mr.

Sheldrake, "and he will set it down to the manner in which the girls behaved to me last night. They will be sure to hear of it from him, and it will do them good. At any rate, it will show them that it is a dangerous game to play fast-and-loose with me." Mr. Sheldrake's vanity was wounded; he had never taken so much pains with a girl as he had taken with Lily, and here he was, after many months' attention and wooing, in the same position as when he started. Time had been wasted, and money had been thrown away; not much of the latter certainly--but the result altogether was unsatisfactory. He would bring the matter to a climax; he would close on Alfred, and send old Musgrave and Lizzie to the right-about. He had them all in his power, and fear might accomplish what fair words failed to do.

He did not hear of the fire until late in the following night. He hastened to the spot, and found the house in ruins. It was quite midnight before he ascertained where Lily had found refuge, and when he learnt that they had gone to live in a house very near to that occupied by Mr. Musgrave, he smiled complacently. "I could not have hoped for anything better," he thought. Before noon the next day he was at the house, overwhelming them with expressions of sympathy and with offers of assistance, all of which were gently declined by Old Wheels.

"We want for nothing, thank you," he said smilingly.

"But," urged Mr. Sheldrake somewhat coarsely, "I am told you were burnt right out, and hadn't time to save a stick."

"You were told right; we did not save a stick."

"Then you want a friend," persisted Mr. Sheldrake.

"We did," said Old Wheels, "and one came--the best of friends."

Burning to know who this best of friends was, Mr. Sheldrake put the question direct, which Old Wheels parried by saying,

"I don't think he would like us to speak of it, and I shall please him, I believe, by not mentioning his name."

There were in the room only the old man and Lily and Pollypod, and not one of these enlightened Mr. Sheldrake. When the old man spoke of this best of friends, Pollypod chimed in with enthusiastic declarations, and said, in her childlike way, that he was so good, so good!

"He seems to be a favourite with all of you," observed Mr. Sheldrake.

"He is a wizard," said Pollypod from her corner; "a good wizard. Father says he's a trump, and mother loves him. So do I, dearly, dearly. So does Mr. Wheels. So does Lily--don't you, Lily?"

Mr. Sheldrake turned suddenly and sharply upon Lily. A deep rose-tint had stolen into her face, and, for contrast, a dark cloud overshadowed Mr. Sheldrake's. Not a motion, not a look, escaped Old Wheels, who said,

"Yes, we cannot help having an affection for one who has been so kind to us."

"Of course not, of course not," assented Mr. Sheldrake, concealing his displeasure, "and I consider myself particularly unfortunate in having been deprived of the opportunity of standing in his place. Then I might have had the same claim upon your affection. It is the more unfortunate because I am so often in the habit of strolling about Soho during the small hours. Many a time have I walked up and down your street for an hour at least after midnight. Now what hard fortune was it that prevented me doing so on this occasion?" He intended these words to convey a significant declaration of his tender regard for Lily, and he added, in a low tone, addressed especially to her: "I went home not very happy because I thought you were angry with me for what occurred at the theatre. I hope you are not displeased with me now. Indeed, I was not to blame."

And again Mr. Sheldrake pressed offers of assistance upon Old Wheels, which again were firmly declined. The man of the world departed in no pleasant humour. His jealousy was aroused. Who was this friend, of whom the child had said that she loved him dearly, dearly, and that Lily loved him also? He had half a suspicion, and he was determined to know. Then his thoughts reverted to Lily's behaviour to himself. "Does she suspect," he mused, in his own elegant vernacular, "that I'm not acting on the square, and is she holding off on purpose to draw me on? In one word, David Sheldrake, is the girl a model of simplicity--or artfulness? Any way, she is a witch, and has set me on fire, I *will* have her! I could almost make up my mind to marry her." A serious consideration for such a man as he, who look upon girls merely as the playthings of an hour, and in whose mind womanly virtue and goodness are like dead wood in a forest. That, in case he made up his mind to such a contingency, there would be a doubt of success, was too manifestly ridiculous to be entertained for a moment. As he mused, he saw Alfred coming towards him. The young man did not see Mr. Sheldrake at first, and that gentleman stepped aside to observe Alfred's manner, in which he seemed to detect something more marked than usual. Alfred was walking quickly and nervously, looking over his shoulder hurriedly this way and that, as if some one were dogging him. Once a dog ran, barking, out of a house, and Alfred turned round swiftly with a white face and an exclamation of fright. Mr. Sheldrake watched these

symptoms of agitation with remarkable keenness, and as Alfred passed clapped him on the shoulder. A cry of alarm escaped from Alfred's trembling lips, for Mr. Sheldrake's salutation was sudden and violent; seeing who it was, however, Alfred smiled and drew a long breath of relief.

"Who did you think it was, Alf?" asked Mr. Sheldrake, to whom Alfred's manner seemed to be in some way a satisfaction.

"I didn't know, you clapped me on the shoulder so suddenly."

"You gave a cry," observed Mr. Sheldrake, with assumed carelessness, "for all the world as if I were a detective officer. Don't start; I'm not. That's one comfort, isn't it?"

"I don't see how it is a comfort," said Alfred half sullenly, and yet with an air which showed that he wished not to offend his companion; "I'm nervous, that's the fact. Been smoking and drinking a little too much; I shall be all right next Tuesday, after the City and Suburban's run."

"Going to Epsom to see the race?"

"Yes; I hope you'll do what you promised."

"We'll talk of that presently. You've got the tip, of course?"

"Yes, and a good one; but there's something else I'm going to do if you'll stand my friend once more."

"A new system?"

"Well, not exactly that: but a plan which *must* prevent the chance of loss."

"That's good enough, Alf," said Mr. Sheldrake in a light tone. "But come, I want to have a talk with you." They were at the gate of Mr. Musgrave's house. "Let us turn in here."

Lizzie opened the door, and greeted them with a smile. Mr. Sheldrake had not seen her since the night they were at the theatre together, and, remembering how she had spoken to him then, he was somewhat surprised at her amiability. He was still more surprised when Lizzie said she hoped he had not taken offence because she spoke so sharply to him.

"I was so anxious about Lily you see," she said; "and even Alfred had to put up with my bad temper. Didn't you, Alf?"

"Yes, dear," replied Alfred, pleased with her changed manner towards his friend.

"Well, well," said Mr. Sheldrake, gaily shaking hands again with Lizzie, "let byegones be byegones. Is the old man at home?"

"No," replied Lizzie readily; "I don't think he will be back for an hour."

"We'll go into his room," said Mr. Sheldrake, and he and Alfred went upstairs to the room where Mr. Musgrave transacted his business, and which Lizzie had called Bluebeard's room, because she was never allowed to enter it. Mr. Sheldrake had a private key, and before he opened the door, he turned to Lizzie, who had accompanied them to the landing, and tapping her familiarly on the cheek, told her to go down stairs, that he and Alfred would not keep her long, and that he was glad she thought better of him.

"Upon my word," he said with blithe significance, "I'm as glad for Alfred's sake as I am for my own."

And with a light laugh he led the way into the room. If he had seen the change that came over the girl's face when he shut the door upon her, and if he had seen her clench her little fists, and shake them at an airy picture of himself which she conjured up, he might have altered his agreeable tone. His manner also changed directly the door was closed and locked. An his cordiality vanished as he sat down at the table and took a pocket-book from his pocket. Alfred watched him apprehensively.

Everything in this Bluebeard's room betokened order and system. Two sides of the room were completely covered with pigeon-holes, and the compartments were nearly filled with documents neatly folded and ticketed. Although, from the appearance of the room and the shelves, a large amount of work was evidently gone through, not a loose document nor a scrap of writing was lying about. This circumstance appeared to give Mr. Sheldrake much satisfaction, and he nodded his head approvingly as he looked around. He did not waste time, however, but proceeded at once to the business before him. Opening his pocket-book, he selected some papers from it, and laid them on the table.

"Sit down, Alf," he said.

Alfred obeyed. Mr. Sheldrake unfolded the papers, and jotted down some figures from them; and laying his hand upon them, as if he did not immediately intend to refer to them said,

"I have been to your new house to-day, Alf."

"I called at your place yesterday," said Alfred, "to tell you about the fire, and where we had moved to, but you were not at home."

"No; and I kept from Soho purposely. I was angry with Lizzie, and I was not pleased with your sister. They will have to learn, if they have not learned already, that I am not to be trifled with."

Alfred had no reply to make to this; he felt that his best plan would be to listen quietly, and to say as few words as possible.

"By heavens;" exclaimed Mr. Sheldrake, with more passion that he usually displayed, "I think I have been patient long enough--too long! No other man but me would have stood it. Every advance that I make--except," he added with a sneer, "those advances I make to you--is met as if I were an enemy instead of a friend. It is time for this to be settled. I'll know very soon whether I'm to be a friend or foe. I can be as good an enemy as a friend, and that I'll prove. With you, now, which is it, friend or foe?"

"Which *can* it be," answered Alfred moodily, "but friend?"

"Out-and-out friend, eh? No half-measures--thorough!"

"Thorough, out-and-out!" responded Alfred a little less despondently.

"No beating about the bush? No concealments, no double-dealing?"

"None."

"And you say this," pursued Mr. Sheldrake with remorseless tenacity--he had been so goaded that it was necessary he should revenge himself upon some one--"you say this not because it is for your interest to say it--not because you are in my debt, and I could shut you up at any moment I please--but because you believe it, because you know that I am straightforward, honest-minded, open-hearted?"

"What other motive can I have for saying it?"

"But say it plainly. You wish me to continue your friend, and to be my friend, for the reasons that I have given?"

"Yes, for those reasons, and no other." And as Alfred spoke the lie which was forced from him by fear, Mr. Sheldrake laughed lightly, and with an open scorn of the avowal, which brought the blood to the younger man's cheek.

It brought the blood also to the cheek of another person, not in the room. Crouching outside the door, at the top of the landing, was Lizzie, listening with beating heart, and hearing every word that passed. She could see clearly everything in the room, and being in the dark herself, could not be detected. A small lumber-room, the door of which she had partly opened, and which swung noiselessly on its hinges, was ready to afford her the means of concealment should the suspicions of Mr. Sheldrake be aroused. She saw the insolent triumphant manner of Mr. Sheldrake, and she thought for a moment that if she were a man, she would kill him; but she saw also the abject manner of her lover, and her passion was subdued by fear.

"If I thought you were deceiving me, Alf," said Mr. Sheldrake, "I should know what to do."

"What makes you speak in this way to me?" Alfred mustered up sufficient courage to ask. "If you doubt me, try me."

"I will. I was at your house to-day, as I have told you. I offered your grandfather assistance; he declined it. Both he and Lily were anything but cordial to me. For the old man I don't care one jot; but he influences Lily, and has power over her. She follows the cue he gives her. The old man said they wanted for nothing; that they had a friend, who had come forward at the nick of time--a friend, said that railway man's little girl, that they all loved--old man, little girl, Lily, and all."

Mr. Sheldrake bit his lips at the remembrance of the blush which had come to Lily's cheek when Pollypod asked her if she didn't love this friend.

"Children talk all sorts of nonsense," said Alfred, "and Polly more than most children."

"Perhaps; but that isn't the question just now. Who is this friend, this paragon, this model of goodness, that everybody loves?"

Alfred hesitated for one moment only. Felix asked them, as a particular favour, not to mention his name as having befriended them, and they had given him the promise. But Alfred felt that to hesitate now, and to beat about the bush with Mr. Sheldrake in that gentleman's present humour, would be fatal to him. So he answered,

"His name is Felix Creamwell. He in an old acquaintance."

"I thought so; the same young cub who interrupted my conversation with Lily after we came from the theatre. What is the special tie that binds him to your people?"

This direct questioning of Felix s motive for befriending them staggered Alfred. It had never occurred to him before; and with the sudden introduction of the subject came a glimpse of light--a new revelation--which enabled him but dimly at present to place a possible correct construction on Lily's unhappiness. Policy impelled him to reply,

"Friendship for my grandfather, I suppose."

But he stammered over the words, and Mr. Sheldrake said sharply,

"You don't seem quite certain as to his motive, Alf."

"I know that there's a great friendship between him and my grandfather," said Alfred, and with a fuller consciousness of what was at stake; "and although I have never asked myself the question, I should say that what he has done has been prompted by friendship."

"Not by love?"

"Love for whom?" inquired Alfred in his turn, with ready cunning.

"Well, let that pass," replied Mr. Sheldrake, only too willing not to have his doubts confirmed. "I daresay I can square the account between us, if we ever come across each other. I *know* I can make it even with you. He has a motive, doubtless, and I don't believe in disinterested friendship. Now we will come to our own business." He took the papers which he had laid aside, and looked over them. "You know what these are?"

"I see some of my bills among them."

"Accounts of money you owe me--dishonoured acceptances, and other documents equally valuable. Here is your bill for sixty pounds, due three weeks since, dishonoured, and for which you were served with a writ."

"As a mere matter of form, I understood you to say," put in Alfred, trembling.

"I have obtained judgment upon it, nevertheless."

"What for?"

"So as to be ready," said Mr. Sheldrake coolly, "in case I find you are playing the double with me. It will be best for you to understand at once that I am in serious earnest. Miss Lizzie would not say many more uncivil things to me if she knew this. I suppose you couldn't say how much you owe me?"

"I haven't kept an account."

"It being no business of yours. Well, I have, feeling interested in it, naturally; and what between me and Con Stavely, the debt is as near three hundred pounds as possible. Is it convenient to you to settle this small account?"

"You know it isn't," answered Alfred, with a groan; and added entreatingly, "If you will advance me what you promised for the City and Suburban, I shall be able to pay you a good lump after the race."

"How if you lose?"

"I can't lose I must win; I must! Even if I didn't do what I am going to do--even if I trusted entirely to chance--luck must turn. You have told me so yourself a dozen times. But I don't depend upon that."

"How much do you want?"

"Forty pounds;" and Alfred twined his fingers nervously. Indeed, it seemed to him, as it had seemed a dozen times in the course of the year gone by, that the result was a certainty, if he had only the money to back his opinion. "If I can but once get clear," he thought, not for the first time, "I'll never back another horse as long as I live--never, never!"

It was not his debt to Mr. Sheldrake that pressed so heavily upon him; there was a sharper and more terrible sword hanging over him.

"What horses would you back for this money, Alf?"

Alfred, encouraged by a tinge of the old cordiality in Mr. Sheldrake's tone, answered confidently:

"I would put ten pounds on Xanthus, and twenty pounds on Kingcraft."

"And the other ten pounds?"

"I want that to speculate with on the race-course on the day of the race."

"No," said Mr. Sheldrake in a decided tone, "I can't consent to that. I shall give you no money in hand to play ducks and drakes with."

"Well, then, I'll put it *all* on Kingcraft and Xanthus--fifteen pounds on Xanthus, and twenty-five on Kingcraft."

"What makes you fancy Kingcraft? Xanthus I know is good--all the papers speak up for him."

"Didn't Kingcraft win the Derby?" cried Alfred excitedly. "I'm told that the horse has come back to his old form, and that he's certain to win. A man told me who knows all about it. The stable have been keeping it dark, and they're all going to put their money on. I shall be able to pay you every penny back, and I shall never know how to thank you enough. I've told Liz and Lily that no man ever had such a friend as you are to me, and I'll tell them again. Will you do it for me?"

"Let me see. The odds about Kingcraft are—"

"Fifteen to one," interposed Alfred eagerly; "and six to one about Xanthus. I only back Xanthus to save myself. One or other is certain to pull off the race."

"Very well; Ill give you the odds myself."

"You will! You are a trump, and no mistake. How can I thank you! Are you making a book on the race?"

"Yes, and it will be better for you that I should take the bet rather than anybody else; for then," he added with a quiet chuckle, "the money will be safe."

"Yes, that it will," said Alfred in all sincerity. "Fifteen to one to twenty-five pounds--that will be three hundred and seventy-five pounds if I win on Kingcraft, and ninety pounds, if Xanthus wins."

He felt as if he had the larger sum already in his pocket, and the despair which filled him but a few minutes since was swallowed up in the false hope.

"I will send you the vouchers to-morrow, and now I want *your* voucher for this money that I am going to lend you."

Always willing enough to give his signature, Alfred waited, pen in hand, while Mr. Sheldrake drew up the paper. It was to the effect that Alfred had borrowed of him forty pounds, with which he had backed two horses named for the City and Suburban Race, to be run at Epsom on Tuesday 23rd of April, and that he promised to pay back the money the Saturday after the race.

Alfred read it carelessly, and remarked, as he signed it,

"This is differently worded to any of the other things I have signed."

"I have a purpose in drawing it up in this way," said Mr. Sheldrake, as he folded the paper and placed it in his pocket-book. "This document and the protested bills would be awkward things to take to your employers, Messrs. Tickle and Flint, in case you didn't pay, or in case I found that you were playing me false--or in case of other contingencies I need not mention just now. It might induce them to make an mediate examination of the vouchers and books in your care. You are cashier there, I believe, Alf. A tempting thing is the handling of other people's money, Alf--a devilish tempting thing--when one is in debt and wants to get rich too quick."

"What do you mean?" cried Alfred, with such terror in his face and in his voice that Lizzie on the outside of the door was compelled to cling to the baluster for support. "For God's sake!— "

"Don't agitate yourself, Alf. I am only putting an extreme case. I hope I may not be driven to such a course. It depends more on others than on yourself. And now I think our little conference is ended. Anything more to say? No? Well, you shall have your vouchers to-morrow."

Lizzie glided down-stairs noiselessly, and when, a few moments afterwards, Mr. Sheldrake came down and shook hands with her, she accompanied him to the gate and wished him good-bye with a smile on her lips, although her hand was like ice in his grasp.

"You've tamed that little devil, David," he mused as he walked along; "she'll be twice as civil and polite the next time you meet her. Now if Kingcraft pull off the City and Suburban— Well, Con Staveley can give the odds. I'll tell Alfred that my book is full, and that, as I can't lay any more, I got Con to take his bets. And Con Staveley needn't pay if the horse wins."

Lizzie went back to Alfred, and found him racked by despair one moment, buoyed up by hope another. She went up to him and kissed him, saying cheerfully,

"Am I not a good girl, Alf, for behaving so well to Mr. Sheldrake?"

"Yes, dear Liz, you are; I wish I were as good."

"Nonsense, dear; you're not strong-minded, that's all. And I don't think you love me enough."

"You mustn't say that, Liz. I love no other."

"I don't think you do, Alf; but if you loved me as well as I love you, you would not keep secrets from me."

He looked at her with sudden alarm.

"Secrets, Liz! Who told you I had secrets?"

"My heart," she replied, with a yearning look, and then, at sight of his troubled face, altered her tone as if she were schooling herself, and said archly, "Girls are artful guessers. And I'm jealous."

"Of whom?"

"Of Mr. Sheldrake. You have been talking secrets with him up-stairs; and I have a better right than he to share them with you. I hate that man!" she exclaimed, with flashing eyes. "There's nothing mean that he wouldn't do; he has a false heart, and his smooth words can't hide his bad thoughts. I saw in his face to-day what seems to be hidden from you. O, how I wish you had never known him!"

"It's of no use wishing, Liz. Perhaps it will all turn out for the best. Don't worry me, there's a dear! I want cheering up badly."

He laid his head upon the table wearily; his folly had made life very bitter to him. One of its sweetest blessings was his, and he had set it far below worthless things. As Lizzie's arms stole tenderly round his neck, and as her sweet words fell upon his ears, he was conscious that he had never rightly appreciated her love. He thought now how happy his life might be if he had been contented and honest, and if he had not yielded to temptation.

"Lizzie," he said with his face hidden, "I have not acted rightly to you. If I could commence over again—"

"Nonsense, Alf," she interposed, in as cheerful a tone as she could command, for his remark, with the meaning it conveyed, brought the tears to her eyes; "I'll not allow you to speak like that. I should be satisfied if I could see you happier in your mind. You have some grief that you will not let me share, and that pains me. You seem to be frightened of something that you cannot see. I have noticed that you have often been unconscious of what is passing, and that you seem to be listening— There! as you are now!"

He had risen to his feet with wild eyes, and was listening, with a terrible expression of fear in his face, to the sound of loud voices in the street. The speakers had stopped outside the house, and Alfred crept softly to the window. They passed away presently, and Alfred, with a sigh of relief, returned to Lizzie's side.

"What's the meaning of this, Alf?" she asked, with a fainting heart. "I have a right to know. Tell me."

"Not now," he replied, taking her cold hand and placing it on his forehead. "I dare not. If you love me, don't ask me questions. I have been foolish, and have not taken care of myself. It will be all right after next Tuesday, and we'll be happy again as we used to be. Come," he cried, with an attempt at gaiety, facing her with his hands on her shoulders, "if you want to do me good, wish me luck next Tuesday."

"I wish you luck, dear, with all my heart."

"That's right, Liz; and when you go to bed, pray that I may be lucky, my dear. For if I am, all this trouble will be over, and we'll commence a happy life--you, and I, and Lily. And we'll tell our secret then--our own secret, dearest, that no one knows but you and me."

He drew her towards him, and she laid her head upon his shoulder. Something in his words made him the consoler now.

"It will have to be told soon, Alf dear, or it will tell itself," she said, in a tone in which joy and pain were subtly mingled.

"I know it, darling; and I've been working, and trying to get money for you and me and Lil, and bad fortune has pursued me so steadily that I have been driven almost mad. Ah, Liz, I love you! You'll see how I love you when all this trouble comes to an end. And it *will* come to an end now that you've wished me luck, and will pray for it."

She pressed him in her arms, grateful for his calmer and tenderer mood.

"May I say something to you, dear?" she asked.

"Anything, darling; kiss me first."

She kissed him, and he said softly.

"What a pity it is that time will not stand still, isn't it, Liz? Now, if we could be like this for a long, long time, what happiness it would be! I almost feel as if I should like to die now, with you in my arms. What is it you want to say, darling?"

"Something about Lily."

"Dear Lily! Go on."

"Have you noticed that Mr. Sheldrake has been paying her a great deal of attention?"

"I think he likes her, Liz."

"You think! You know, you mean. But, Alf, if I had a sister that I loved as you love Lily, and who loved me as Lily loves you, I would rather see her in her grave than see her placed as Lily is now."

"Lizzie!"

"I mean what I say, Alf, and you ought to have seen it more clearly before. Do you believe that Mr. Sheldrake has any honourable intentions in his open admiration for Lily?"

"If I thought otherwise—" cried Alfred hotly.

"What would you do?" interrupted Lizzie; "what *could* you do, placed as you are with that man? He has been working for this, Alf dear, and you haven't seen it. So deep and true is Lily's love for you, that if he were to say to her, 'I have your brother in my power, and I can bring misery and shame upon him, and will, if you are cold to me!'--if he were to say this to Lily in his own bad way, and work upon her loving heart in his own bad way—O, Alfred, I could almost pray that somebody would kill him!--if he were to do all this, as he may, I tremble to think what Lily would do."

"What would she do?" The words came faintly from a throat parched by remorse.

"Can you ask, Alf? What would *I* do for you? To secure your happiness, is there any sacrifice that I would not make? Lily's love for you, although it is the love of a sister, is not less strong than mine. But I have learnt harder lessons than Lily has had to learn, and I should not be so easily led as she would be. A bad, calculating man, as Mr. Sheldrake is, could work upon such a simple nature as hers more easily than upon mine. I should be strong where she, through innocence and simplicity, would be weak. And when she felt, as she would feel, that any sacrifice of happiness which she would be called upon to make would be made to secure the happiness of a beloved brother—"

"Stop, Lizzie!" cried Alfred, rising in his agitation, and turning from her. "Stop, for God's sake! I have been blind."

Yes, he had been blind; and blindly had walked, step by step, to the terrible abyss which lay before him now, deliberately taking with him a pure devoted girl, whom, despite all his selfishness, he loved next in the world to Lizzie. All the sweet memories of his life, until he met Lizzie, were of his sister, and he had conspired against her happiness. He was powerless now to undo the past; but he might atone for it. He silently swore that if he were fortunate on Tuesday he would become a better man.

"I have something else to tell you, Alfred," said Lizzie, after a long pause. "Lily is in love."

"In love! Ah, I see more clearly now, dear Lizzie. With Felix?"

"Yes, a happy life is before her, with that true man, if happily they come together."

"And he?"

"Loves her."

"Has he told you?"

"No; but there are things that need no telling. We women know. He has not spoken to her, because, because—"

"Go on, Lizzie."

"Because he sees what you have been blind to, and out of the nobleness of his heart will not add to her distress."

"It would have been better for her," groaned Alfred, "and for you, if I had never been born."

"Nay," remonstrated Lizzie, in a gentle loving tone, "we must not repine: we must try to do better. Promise--and I will help you, with all my strength, and so will Lily and Felix--ah, you don't know what a heart he has! And your grandfather, Alfred, that good old man—"

"I know what you would say about him, Lizzie. I am punished enough already."

Indeed, he was very humble and repentant; and, when he went home, he knocked at his grandfather's door. It was dusk, and they could but dimly see each other's faces.

"I have come to ask your forgiveness, sir," said Alfred.

Old Wheels started to his feet, in joyful agitation. He understood it all immediately.

"My dear boy," he said, with a sob, taking Alfred's hand, "Not another word; not another word."

He pressed the young man to his heart and kissed him. Lily, hearing the voices, came into the passage.

"Come here, Lily," cried Old Wheels. "Come hear, dear child."

Lily flew into the room, and after the joy that this glad meeting brought to them, they settled down quietly, and talked, and thought, and hoped, while the evening shadows deepened. The tender movements she made towards Alfred and her grandfather, the expressions of exquisite happiness she uttered, almost unconsciously, every now and then, the loving caresses, the musical little laughs, the words, "O, I am so happy now! so happy!" that escaped again and again, like music from her lips, delighted the old man.

"We want Lizzie here," said Old Wheels tenderly.

"And Felix," thought Lily. This reunion seemed to bring Felix nearer to her.

CHAPTER XL.

ON EPSOM DOWNS.

"Pray that I may be lucky, my dear."

Alfred had spoken these words to Lizzie with fullest meaning. He did not ask for a wish; he asked for a prayer. He was not himself given to praying, but on this night, before he went to bed, he knelt at his bedside for the first time for many, many months, with a distinct devotional purpose, in his mind, and prayed with all his mental power that Kingcraft, the horse he had backed, might win the City and Suburban race on the following day.

He remained at his devotions for fully a quarter of an hour, and had his grandfather seen him in his attitude of contrition, the old man would indeed have been comforted. But during this quarter of an hour no entreaty for forgiveness of folly and crime passed Alfred's lips. Remorse he felt, but it was the remorse born of fear. Every form of prayer with which he had been familiar in childhood was unconsciously made subservient to his present purpose. His one prayerful thought shaped in silence by his lips was, "I pray with all my soul that Kingcraft may win the City and Suburban. Let Kingcraft win, O Lord! I pray that Kingcraft may win. Kingcraft! Kingcraft! Win the race! Win the race!" He transposed these words in a hundred different ways, and thought them with as much agonising intensity as the most righteous saint could have done. When he rose to his feet, he felt strengthened by the charm he had laid upon himself. He felt that nothing could prevent Kingcraft from winning; and he already began to look ahead beyond the day, when, with the money he would receive, he could set himself free, and begin again; already his better resolutions were beginning to be weakened by the prospect of large gains easily obtained. He argued with himself, as he had done scores of times before. There was no harm in betting; there was only harm in losing. If there were any harm in it, would the newspapers encourage it? It was reading the newspapers that first put the idea into his head; what followed had followed naturally. He had been unlucky, that was all. Well, luck would turn now. Why, here he would prove that luck would turn. He did, as he had often done before; once again he wrote on separate pieces of paper the names of the horses that were likely to run in the race; he folded them up separately, and shook them in his hat; he shut his eyes, and putting his hand among the papers, fumbled with them until he selected one. He drew it forth and opened it. Kingcraft! There was a plain proof. How *could* the horse lose after that? He laughed gleefully, and *would* not entertain the thought that he had purposely written the name of this horse on a larger piece of paper than the others, so that he might be sure of drawing out the one he wanted. He went to bed, and dreamt of the race. The whole of the familiar scene passed before him in his dream; he had staked a lot of money on Kingcraft, and he saw the horse sailing past the winner's post, an easy winner, and found himself the winner of a thousand pounds. "Why not?" he asked of himself, as he awoke exultant; "why shouldn't I win a thousand pounds? If I could borrow money somehow, I could pay it back at once. No one would know, and we should all be happy." He read the daily newspapers eagerly, and sucked fresh hope and renewed incentives from them. The papers said

that Kingcraft was in blooming health; that the stable believed in him; that a fine jockey was to ride him to probable victory; and that the public were backing him. Even, thought Alfred, in his endeavours to come to a fair conclusion, even if Kingcraft should, by some strange and unaccountable chance, not come in first, what horse was to beat him? For, notwithstanding the honest and upright manner in which the national sport is carried on, strange and unaccountable occurrences do sometimes happen; roguery does occasionally triumph. Well, what horse would win, if Kingcraft came in second instead of first? Xanthus, of course. Xanthus, the horse that was rising daily in popular favour. Were not all the honest and disinterested tribe of prophets and tipsters warning their miserable public to look after him? Said one, "Xanthus must not be lost sight of;" said another, "Keep Xanthus on the right side;" said another, "Put a bit on Xanthus;" said another (a cautious prophet, who never allowed himself to be caught tripping), "But--if--notwithstanding--nevertheless--such or such a thing occurred to Bertram--or, *if* Pax is not what is represented--or, *if* a mistake has been made in Marmora's trial--or, *if* Phosphorus gets off badly--or, *if* Kingcraft has entirely lost his old form--or if, notwithstanding, and nevertheless, with half-a-dozen other horses--why, *then*, keep your eye on Xanthus; he may be dangerous." With what zest and animation did Alfred read the words of these inspiring writers! How attentively he studied their elegant English, and read their prophecies again and again! They all spoke well of Kingcraft, but none gave the horse as the absolute winner. Well, but was not Alfred as good a judge as any of them? Had not the secret been revealed to him, as it was to Daniel, in a night-vision? But the course of reading such worshippers as he goes through is of an intensely distracting nature, and Alfred could not be blind to the fact that there were other horses that might have a chance. If he only had some money to back these horses, and to back Kingcraft and Xanthus to be first, second, or third, in the race, winning would be an absolute certainty, beyond the possibility of doubt. On Saturday morning he rushed to the sporting papers, and read dozens of columns concerning the race. Some of the most respectable and reputable of these papers gave Xanthus as the winner, coupling him, however, in most instances, with other horses. Alfred was tortured by doubt--now thinking this, now that, until his mind was in a whirl of bewilderment over the miserable affair. Other papers gave other horses as the certain winners. One said, Pax or Bertram would win; another, Pax or Bridgwater; another, Bertram or Hector; and so on and so on; and Alfred had not backed one of these horses. If either of them won, he was ruined past redemption. But his favourite prophet had to speak yet; a prophet whose name was in every backer's mouth. On Monday morning this prophet would unbosom himself, and Alfred determined to wait till then before he decided his course of action.

He went by train to his office, and on Monday he read the deliverances of his favourite prophet as he sat in the railway carriage. The prophecy recorded, with an appearance of satisfaction, that backers of certain horses who had made their bets weeks ago had burnt their fingers, as the horses they had backed would not run in the race. The horse named Pax, who held the position of first favourite, had been backed heavily in every part of the country by those connected with the stable the owner, it was said, having played a waiting game with his horse, now intended to win a fortune with him. Alfred's prophet declared he did not believe in Pax, although, after the usual fashion of prophets, he put in a saving clause in a few words which he could quote by-and-by, in proof of his own sagacity, in case the horse should win. He pinned his faith, after much wavering, on Xanthus and Bertram, chiefly on the former, and in an elaborate and confusing summing up, declared, in capital letters, that one of these must win, and that either Kingcraft or Marmora would be certain to be among the first three. Alfred was much excited by the hopes held out in this prophecy; and, with some difficulty, obtained from his employers leave of absence for the following day. He had not been too attentive to his duties lately, and his employers demurred at first; but he pleaded the fire that had taken place in Soho, and said that his sister and grandfather required his assistance to set their new home in order. "You shall have no cause to complain of me after this," he said humbly, and received a reluctant assent to absent himself from his duties. He stopped at the office later than usual that evening, and was very careful and painstaking in what he did. Early in the morning he was up and away. He had told Lizzie that he was going to the races, but had made her promise not to let any one know. Lily and Old Wheels supposed he was going to his office as usual, and they stood at the window watching him with smiling faces. Lily kissed her hand to him as he looked back, and he waved his gaily towards the window, and smiled brightly.

"A great change has come over him," said Old Wheels thoughtfully, "for the better, thank God! It makes you happier, Lily."

"Yes, dear; and you, too. Things seem brighter and happier than they did a little while ago. He is coming back to us!"

She ran down-stairs, and Old Wheels followed her. Alfred was at the door.

"I've come back to give you another kiss," he said; "you looked so pretty standing at the window, that I could not help it."

"Prettier than Lizzie?" she asked saucily and affectionately.

"As pretty, I do believe," he replied gaily, and shook hands with Old Wheels, whose face, notwithstanding its kind expression, had a trace of seriousness in it.

"Isn't he good?" asked Lily, as she and Old Wheels stood at the gate. "Dear Alf! See! He's running into Lizzie's house, and Lizzie's opening the door for him!"

"I have had such nice dreams about you," said Lizzie, as she stood in the passage with Alfred's arm around her.

He laughed blithely, and took her face between his hand, and kissed her lips seven times.

"Because seven's a lucky number, Liz."

"O that's the reason!" she cried, with a little toss of her head.

"Yes," he replied merrily, "and not because I love you the least bit in the world. Here's seven more--and seven more--three times seven."

And, the charm being complete, he pressed her in his arms again, and darted away.

There was something more than idle meaning in his words; in the excited state of his mind he was impelled to place an important construction upon every little incident that occurred. It was not merely an affectionate impulse that caused him to turn back and kiss Lily again. Something seemed to whisper to him, "If you don't go back, you will be unlucky to-day;" and if he had resisted the impulse, he would have fretfully made that the cause of any ill-luck that might befall him. In the same manner, he kissed Lizzie the number of times which seemed to him to bear the most fortunate significance. In this way he strove to make assurance doubly sure, and drew the most favourable auguries from his attention to these details, connecting them, with strange sophistry, with the great stake he was about to play. Once as he walked under a ladder; and the thought occurring to him that it was an unlucky omen, he retraced his steps, so as to undo the evil consequences that might result from his act, and walked outside the ladder the second time, and congratulated himself upon his wisdom. When he was in the train that was to convey him to Epsom, he bought the newspapers containing the last outpourings of his favourite prophet upon the City and Suburban race. He read a glowing account of the appearance of the course, of "straggling gipsy women wandering about," of "knots of men in the middle of the road, or leaning against the public-house corners, talking in quiet and almost solemn tones, which indicated that they were absorbed in considerations much more important to them than racing--the means of living from hand to mouth, of which one sees so much on the turf." He read how one individual "in the centre of these groups, footsore, wretched, ragged, and deplorable, had formerly been a tout in highly prosperous circumstances, and absolutely won close upon £1500 when Blair Athol won the Derby;" and how this unfortunate man was "exciting the compassion of his almost equally forlorn companions by narrating how he had walked, or rather crawled, for weeks by road from Liverpool, as nigh starving as makes no matter." He read how the mysterious horse, known as Pax, was conveyed to the scene of action in high state, in a "private van drawn by four grey horses:" and how his owner and backers, confident of victory, declared, in racing phraseology, that the horse would "walk in." This and much more Alfred read, and then came to the kernel--the prophecy--which stated that either Pax, Xanthus, Bertram, Kingcraft, or Phosphorus would be certain to win, and that of the five, Xanthus, Bertram, and Kingcraft were the three upon which this wise prophet pinned his faith. Alfred looked round triumphantly. The carriage in which he was seated was crowded, and the occupants were reading the prophets' predictions in the newspapers with avidity. Alfred, fingering some crisp bank-notes in his pocket, soon made up his mind as to his course of action. He had twenty new £5 bank-notes, and these he would judiciously invest upon all five of the horses named by his favourite prophet, backing them all to win and to be in the first three, in such proportions as to be certain to win. He took pencil and paper from his pocket, and made his calculations; so much upon one horse, so much upon another, and so much upon the others, at the current odds. Against one of the horses named--Phosphorus--he could get as much as forty to one. He would put £20 upon this horse, so as to gain £800 if the horse won. He gloried at the thought of it. By the time the train reached Epsom he had made his calculations, and had determined so to invest that he could win from a hundred to nearly a thousand pounds. "How happy I shall be to-night," he thought, "with the money in my pocket! I'll be at the office early in the morning to make everything straight, and then—" The perspective that stretched itself out in his imagination was too delightfully vague for words or distinct thought. It contained a hazy vista of delight, and in this he basked, and saw Lizzie and himself, and Lily and Felix perhaps, the happiest of the happy.

It was a bright clear morning, and a fresh breeze was blowing over the Surrey Downs. Gipsies, beggars, thieves, sharpers, and others of that ilk were about and on the alert, and Alfred moved briskly through them to the scene of action. Every species of rascaldom was there represented, and the noble sport afforded a lawful outlet for roguery in every shape--for roguery in broadcloth as well as roguery in fustian. There was something hideous in the Babel of sound round the betting-men, and everything that was degrading in the features which most prominently presented themselves. The first race was a race between two horses, and was in no respects interesting. Alfred paid no attention to it, nor to the two races which followed. He was too busy "getting his money on" for the great event of the day, which was the fourth on the card. He staked his money with men whom he considered to be good--that is, "sufficient," as Shylock has it--and when the bell rang to announce the appearance of the horses on the course, he had but five shillings left. But his pockets would soon be filled. His mind was thronged with intricate calculations, as to how much he would win if this horse that he had backed came in first and that second, or that first and this second; as to how much he would win under the most favourable circumstances, supposing three of his horses came in first, second, and third. Indeed, he worked himself into a state of belief that it was certain two of his horses would be first and second; and if fortune favoured him out and out, he would go home with twelve hundred pounds in his pocket.

Losing was an impossibility. If a shadow of doubt intruded itself, he banished it instantly by a reference to his prophet. Twelve hundred pounds! He parcelled it out. So much to pay Mr. Sheldrake--so much to replace what he had "borrowed" from the office--so much left. There they were! All the horses were out, and the course was clear. Such bright colourings of jockeys' caps and jackets--such grand action from the beautiful creatures they bestrode--such confident smiles on some of the jockeys' lips--such eager scrutinising on the part of anxious investors. There was Kingcraft--there Xanthus--there Bertram--there Phosphorus--there Pax, that was to bring anything but peace to those who believed in him. Alfred had no eyes for any others. On these his hopes and salvation were staked. Away they went--thirty of them in all--in a gay line to the starting-post; and they pranced, and hung back, or were held back by astute jockeys, or falsely started, for at least an hour. Alfred was ablaze with excitement, and was eating his heart away with impatience. Another false start--another--another. This torture of suspense was agonising. At last they were off, and Alfred, craning forward, muttered the names of Lizzie and Lily for luck. Away they sailed over the hill to Tattenham Corner. In little more than two minutes the mile and a quarter was compassed, and there came in, first, Digby Grand; second, Lord Glasgow; third, Hector. Not one of the prophet's five horses was in the first three, and Alfred had not backed one of the winning horses for a penny. He put his hand to his forehead, to clear away the mist; but it gathered upon him thicker and thicker. He could not distinguish a face in all the throng of persons around him. A man behind him placed his hand somewhat firmly on Alfred's shoulder, with the intention of passing him.

"No, no!" cried Alfred hoarsely, cowering down. But the man passed on, not heeding him; and Alfred, hiding his face as well as he could, slunk through the crowd to the rear of the race-course, bearing in his face and manner the air of a hunted animal, with death on his track.

CHAPTER XLI.

ON THE WATCH.

When Alfred was clear of the crowd, he paused for a moment, and looked around with a vacant stare. In that moment his eyes fell upon Mr. David Sheldrake, who accosted him gaily. Alfred's parched lips moved in response, but no sound came from them. He thought he had spoken aloud, however, and his eyes, after the first swift recognition of Mr. Sheldrake, sought the ground miserably. Mr. Sheldrake made a pretence of not observing Alfred's uneasiness, and he went on to say airily, that he had had a slice of good luck in the City and Suburban, and that he had strolled away from the betting-ring to cool his excitement.

"I was looking for you before the race," he said: "I wanted to give you the tip. I was told by the best jockey of the day that Digby Grand could not be beaten, and I backed the horse, and I wanted you to back it also. But perhaps you did."

He paused for a reply, but Alfred said no word. He was in a stupor of despair. Mr. Sheldrake continued,

"You'll be able to square up now, I suppose. I don't care so much for myself, although, of course, the money will come acceptable, but Con Staveley swears he'll be down on you to-morrow. He says he'll go to your place of business, and if you don't pay, he'll split on you to your employers. That would be serious, wouldn't it? I should advise you not to have anything more to do with Con; he's a hard nail. How much have you won? A couple of monkeys at least, I hope. You must let me into the secret of that new system of yours."

Still no reply from Alfred. Mr. Sheldrake's tone grew grave. He laid his hand upon Alfred's arm, and Alfred shivered at the touch, and feebly endeavoured to shake off the grasp.

"I must insist upon an answer, Alf. Have you won or lost?"

"Lost!" muttered Alfred hoarsely.

"How much?" demanded Mr. Sheldrake.

"Every shilling I had in the world. Let go my arm."

"Be still, or I'll set the police on you! Be still, and tell me," said Mr. Sheldrake with distinct emphasis, "How you are going to replace the money you have taken from your office?"

Alfred trembled violently, but did not raise his eyes.

"You wonder how I know, I daresay," pursued Mr. Sheldrake; "but I know more than you are aware of. What are you going to do?"

"I don't know," replied Alfred, and moved away slowly, Mr. Sheldrake following him

thoughtfully.

They were not the only actors in this the last act of the sad drama. An old man, whose eyes never left them, was following them watchfully and warily. A pause of several moments ensued. Then Mr. Sheldrake said, weighing every word,

"I don't like to desert an old friend, even when he has behaved shabbily to me, as you have done. It seems to me that, unless something is done for you at once, it is all up with you. You daren't go back to the office until your accounts are squared, and you daren't go home. The detectives will be on the look out for you. I daresay if Tickle and Flint could get back a portion of the money you have--we may as well speak plainly--stolen, they would be inclined to let you off. I'll see if I can serve you."

Alfred's white face was raised imploringly at this glimpse of hope.

"But I must have authority," continued Mr. Sheldrake, "I must have something to show your people, and to prove to them, if necessary, that they may trust me. Here--write as I dictate."

He tore a leaf from his pocket-book, and handed it to Alfred, with a pencil.

"Put the date first--that's right; and the place--Epsom. Now write: 'I am in great trouble and danger, and cannot come home; my friend, Mr. Sheldrake, is the only man I can trust, and the only man who can save me. Put full faith and trust in him.--ALFRED.'"

Alfred, dazed and helpless, wrote the words, and Mr. Sheldrake took the paper, and placed it in his pocket.

"I must get back to the ring now," he said, with a friendly nod; "you know where to find me when you want me."

With these words he turned away: the old man who had been watching him and Alfred tried to avoid him, but Mr. Sheldrake had left Alfred very suddenly, and the old man's movements were not quick enough. Mr. Sheldrake's sharp eyes lighted upon him instantly.

"Hallo, Muzzy!" he exclaimed. "What brings you here?"

"I came to see the race run," said Mr. Musgrave, standing before his employer in a submissive attitude. "It's my favourite race, and I've not missed a year. I was at the first City and Suburban in 1851, when Elthiron won; and the next year, when Butterfly won; and the next, when Ethelbert ran a dead heat with Pancake. I lost a hatful of money over Pancake, at the very moment I thought I had made a fortune."

"It's always the way, Muzzy. You're a regular walking racing calendar! Did you back the winning horse this time, old man?"

"No, sir; I had nothing on."

"Found out the error of your ways, eh? Well, now the race is over, you can do a little business for me. You see that young fellow," pointing to Alfred, who was walking away with hanging head.

Mr. Musgrave shaded his eyes with his hand.

"My eyes are not so good as they used to be, but I fancy I know him."

"O, you know him well enough. It's Alfred, Lizzie's young man."

"Ah, yes; to be sure, to be sure. I recognise him now."

"Keep your eye on him; watch him; don't let him go out of your sight. I want to know what he's up to, and where he is going to."

"I suppose he'll go home to-night," said Mr. Musgrave.

"I am not so sure of that; and if he doesn't, you must see where he puts up, and keep near him. I may want him."

"For what?"

"What's that to you?" retorted Mr. Sheldrake. "Perhaps he owes me money, and I don't intend that he shall give me the slip. Perhaps he's lost on the race and can't pay, and I want to do him a service."

"For the sake of his pretty sister," suggested Mr. Musgrave humbly.

"You dog, you!" retorted Mr. Sheldrake, half angrily, half approvingly. "Whatever it is, it's my business, and not yours. Mind that, old man. If you don't want to be turned off at a moment's notice, do as you're told, and ask no questions. And look here, old man, you know the Myrtle Inn? Well, inquire there the first thing in the morning for a note. I may have to write to you, to give you instructions. And if the place is handy, you can put up there to-night."

Mr. Musgrave nodded submissively, and crept away in the direction that Alfred had taken.

"Mind," said Mr. Sheldrake, overtaking him, "he's not to see you, and not to know that you are watching him. You can drop me a line to-night, telling me where he puts up. Here's a sov. to pay ex's."

Although the old man took the sovereign in silence, his manner did not seem to please Mr. Sheldrake, who muttered, as he looked at the slouching figure creeping away,

"I'd give him the sack if I could; but I must get things straight first. He knows too much. I'll square up the concern, and get rid of him this year. I'll have all the books and vouchers moved from Ivy Cottage this very week."

While this scene was being enacted, Alfred pursued his sad way. His great desire was to escape from the crowd, among which probably there were persons who were acquainted with him. He must get to some place and among people where he could hide himself and would not be known. Mr. Sheldrake had rightly said that he dared not show his face at the office. To-morrow all would be discovered. It had been his unhappy fortune yesterday to receive an uncrossed cheque, payable to bearer, in settlement of a large account due to his employers. This cheque he had cashed, and had used the proceeds in backing the horses of the false prophet upon whom he had placed all his hopes. This was not the only money he had used; for some time he had pursued a system of falsifying the books of the firm, and of appropriating such payments as would be the least likely to be missed. Discovery was imminent every day, every hour. All this money had been lost in betting, and in vainly striving to recover what had gone before. Even in the midst of his despair he groaned to himself that he had done his best, that he had tried system after system, prophet after prophet, with the same result; and that ill-fortune, and not he, was to blame. There was some special reason for each fresh loss--some special reason applicable to that case alone, and which could not by any exercise of forethought have been anticipated or avoided. It brought that smallest of consolation to him which consists in the reflection that the same thing would have happened to anybody else placed in his position; but it brought sharp stings also in the reflection that he might have known, or ought to have known, that such and such a thing might have been anticipated, or suspected, or guessed, and the unfortunate result avoided. No consideration of this description, however, intruded itself in what had occurred to-day in his speculations on the City and Suburban race. Here was a prophet, whose name was known to every betting boy and man in the kingdom, who had actually named five horses as the winner of the race, and not one of these five horses came in among the first three. In the eyes of a reasonable being such a circumstance would be sufficient to stamp this prophet as the veriest impostor and incapable that ever put pen to paper; and he might feel a natural indignation that such mischievous utterances should be openly allowed to lead weak men to acts of folly and crime. Even Alfred, never given to moralising, caring only for himself, and not one jot for the public, cursed this false prophet as he staggered over the Downs, and gave vent to weak imprecations against the man whose cruel prophecies had brought him to this stage of infamy and disgrace.

What would they think at home? Would they guess the truth? What would Lizzie do? He thought mostly of her. If he could get to some new country with her, where they could commence a new life, what happiness it would be! If he could undo the past! In the midst of all these repinings and vain repentances, the terrible thought intruded itself that there was no escape for him. He had but five shillings in his pocket; every article of jewellery he possessed had been mortgaged to raise money to swell the fatal stake he had played this day. The detectives would soon be after him. Could he disguise himself in any way, so as to escape detection? His nerves were strung up to such a high pitch that the slightest unexpected sound was sufficient to terrify him, and the roar from the distant race-course which proclaimed that another race had been decided was converted by his fears into the shouts of pursuers on his track. He quickened his steps instinctively, preparing for flight, but the next his reason returned, and he ascribed the shouts to their correct cause. With a faint smile on his lips, he turned his head in the direction of the cries, and as he turned he suddenly saw Mr. Musgrave. The sight of the old man gave Alfred a shock, and the first thought which flashed through his mind was that the old man had been set to watch him. That this presumption was the correct one was due, not to Alfred's perspicacity, but to his fears. In his condition, every face that was familiar was a face to be suspected. Alfred cast furtive glances at the old man, who, having seen Alfred's recognition of him, looked about listlessly in every direction but that in which Alfred was. He seemed to have come to the spot entirely by accident, and Alfred was partly thrown off his guard by the old man's manner. "But I will make sure," thought Alfred, and he set traps, into which the old man unconsciously fell. Alfred slunk behind a hedge, which was not thick enough to hide him completely from sight, and remaining there for fully a quarter of an hour, watched and waited, and when he emerged into the open plain, the old man was still there, looking about him with ill-concealed listlessness. "He *is* watching me!" thought Alfred, trembling in every limb. "Who set him on? How can I escape?" He had no thought of addressing the old man to ascertain his purpose. No cordiality had grown between them during their acquaintanceship; Alfred knew that in some way Mr. Musgrave was connected in business with Mr. Sheldrake, and this circumstance was sufficient to convert the old man into a spy, if not into an enemy. Faint, despairing, and weary, Alfred stumbled on across the Downs, and stopped at a quiet inn. The old man was still on his track. Alfred called for brandy, and tried to eat, but the food almost choked him, and he put it aside, sick at heart, and drank more brandy. "Can you give me a sheet of paper and an envelope?" he asked of the girl who

served him. She gave him what he required, and pen and ink as well, and he sat down in the parlour, looking at the blank paper, and trying to think. A voice at the bar roused him. It was Mr. Musgrave's voice asking for refreshments. For a moment Alfred thought of going boldly to the old man, and appealing to him, for Lizzie's sake; but he dismissed the thought immediately. "It will be betraying myself," he muttered; "but I must let Lizzie know. How can I get a letter to her?" He went to the rear of the inn, and asked an ostler if he knew any one who was going to London that afternoon. Yes, the ostler said, a man from the yard was going to London by the next train, which would start in a quarter of an hour. The ostler pointed out the man to Alfred. Returning to the parlour, Alfred wrote:

"I have been miserably unfortunate to-day, and I dare not come home. I am at Epsom, and I don't know where to turn for safety. At this very moment I am being watched by an enemy; you know him well, but I will not pain you by naming him. I have done you injury enough already, and I can never, never atone for it. All hope has left me, and I wish my miserable life were ended. I can only ask you to think kindly of me and to forgive me. If I did not love you, I should not be as unhappy as I am. I am afraid to think of the future.--I send this by a stranger. I want you to get it to-night, and the post would not arrive in time. No one must know that you have heard from me. God knows what will happen to me. I have brought shame and disgrace upon all.--A."

Alfred enclosed and addressed the letter, and seeing the man going to the railway station, ran after him, and bargained with him to deliver the letter for four shillings, which was all the money he possessed.

"Don't deceive me," said Alfred imploringly.

"Do you take me for a thief?" was the surly answer. "The young woman shall have the letter all right. You look as if you've been backing the wrong horse, young fellow."

Alfred did not reply, and when the man was out of sight, walked to a quiet spot, and threw himself on the ground, waiting for night to hide himself and his despair from the sight of man.

CHAPTER XLII.

THE CLOUDS BRIGHTEN FOR LILY.

All unconscious of the terrible crisis that was occurring, Lily went about the house that day as blithe as a bird. Her life seemed to be brightening, and the shadows that had hung over it appeared to be clearing away. She ran up and down the stairs, and in and out of the rooms, singing her old songs. She was in the happiest of moods, and her grandfather listened with a grateful heart to her fresh voice. He expressed his delight to Mrs. Podmore, who came downstairs with Pollypod, dressed for walking. Mrs. Podmore had a basket on her arm.

"Lily is like her old self again, Mrs. Podmore," he said.

"Bless her heart!" exclaimed Mrs. Podmore. "It does one good to hear her. It's an ill wind that blows nobody good, and the fire has done Lily the good turn of sending her here, where the air is fresher for her. Polly likes it, too, don't you?"

"O, yes, mother," answered the child.

"So we've got to be thankful even for misfortune," said Mrs. Podmore, with a half sigh. "It was a hard blow for Jim, though, was that fire. It'll take us a long time to get over it."

"How much worse it would have been," said Old Wheels, "if some of us had been hurt and burnt, instead of our clothes and sticks of furniture!"

"Ah, yes, indeed, Mr. Wheels. It's downright wicked to grumble, after all. But I never shall forget it, never! I shall remember Jim carrying Polly and me down the rope, to my dying day. Jim's never been himself since then, Mr. Wheels. I wish he was anything but what he is, and that he could get a living in a reasonable way, where he wouldn't be worked to death as he's being worked now. It ain't fair to flesh and blood, and flesh and blood can't stand it. Dear, dear! here I am grumbling again! I don't know what's come over me. We're going to London, Polly and me, to get one or two little things. We sha'n't be home till night. Can I do anything in town for you, Mr. Wheels?"

"No, thank you."

A silence ensued, caused by Lily commencing a verse of a favourite song, which they paused to hear.

"She sings like a bird," said Mrs. Podmore; and added, with a meaning smile, "but there's something else besides fresh air to account for her lightheartedness. Here's Mr. Felix himself to bear me out in what I say."

"And what is that, Mrs. Podmore?" asked Felix, who entered as she spoke, and heard her last words.

"Ah, that's a little secret between me and Mr. Wheels," replied Mrs. Podmore with another smile of much meaning, intended especially for the old man; "but I've got Jim's dinner in the basket, and I must go and give it to him."

"There's another thing to be thankful for, Mrs. Podmore," said Old Wheels. "Your husband hasn't so far to go home when his work's done as he had when we lived in Soho. You see how lucky the fire was, after all, to bring you here to live, so near the station where your husband works."

"Well, we know who we've got to thank for it," replied Mrs. Podmore, with an affectionate look at Felix: "don't we, Polly?"

And with other grateful words, the mother and child left the house.

"You have come early to-day, Felix," said Old Wheels; "has any particular business brought you?"

Felix, looking both anxious and happy, answered,

"Yes, sir, one or two very particular things. First, a stroke of good fortune. Through the influence of my friend Charles, of whom I have spoken to you, I am appointed London correspondent to a leading colonial newspaper. By his advice, I sent an initial letter--in my best style, of course; a regular trap for them," added Felix, with a light laugh--"and the result is, that I have obtained the appointment. It adds a hundred pounds a year to my income, and the labour really is very light."

"That is good news indeed," said Old Wheels, rubbing his hands; "I congratulate you heartily on it."

"I am becoming quite an important person," said Felix, with comic seriousness, "from a worldly point of view. But there are other matters I wish to tell you of. I have spoken to you of my father's housekeeper—"

"Martha Day?" interposed Old Wheels. "Yes."

"She has left my father's service suddenly. I do not think I have told you that Lizzie, Alfred's sweetheart, is related to Martha Day."

"No; this is the first time I have heard it."

"It was a matter of no great importance for you to know; but as Martha has left my father's house, and may be more nearly connected with me, it is right that you should be acquainted with everything that concerns me. Martha is with Lizzie at the present moment at Mr. Musgrave's house. And interrupting myself here, it seems strange to me that you and Mr. Musgrave should never have met."

"It is strange," said Old Wheels, after a little pondering; "and now that you speak of it, it comes to my mind that, on every occasion when we were expected, in the natural course of things to meet, sudden business has called Mr. Musgrave away. You are not acquainted with any reasons why he should avoid me?"

"No; I know of none."

"He is eccentric, perhaps; disinclined to make new acquaintances. Some men are so."

"He is exceedingly fond of Lily," observed Felix.

"That makes it all the more strange," said Old Wheels, with a thoughtful air; "and yet I should not say so. The child would win her way to any heart. It speaks well for him I am very glad to hear it. Exceedingly fond of Lily, you say!" He repeated these words, as if he wished to make some obscure thing clear to his understanding.

"I think he shows more tenderness towards her than towards his adopted daughter. It seems to me as if he feels that he cannot be considerate enough of her. That is Lily singing, is it not?"

"Yes, the dear child! She is more cheerful than she has been for a long time past."

Felix listened, with a pleased expression on his face, and the old man watched his attitude and manner with a curious mingling of hope and anxiety. Presently Felix resumed,

"I am doing nothing but flying off at tangents, and I have so much to say. About Mr. Musgrave:

he and I have had confidential business together lately. Business, I hope, which will turn out well."

"Profitable?"

"Well, not in the common sense of the word; that is, it will not put money in my pocket; but it will do something better perhaps. You will hear of it, I daresay, very soon. Now, about Martha Day. Hers is a strange story. She has lived all her womanly life with my father, as his housekeeper, and has out of her savings brought Lizzie up, given her a tolerable education, and supplied her with money. My father, it appears, knew nothing of this; he supposed that Martha had no family ties. Lately, however, he has discovered her connection with Lizzie, and has discovered something else also. Lizzie, it appears, is not Martha's niece, as I understood: she is her daughter. The story that Martha tells of an early marriage and of being deserted by her husband, who enlisted and died in India, my father refuses to believe. He insisted that Martha should promise not to see Lizzie any more, and Martha indignantly left his service. She has been with him for a great many years, and she says that it suited her; that she was fit for nothing else, and that it supplied her with means to pay for Lizzie's early training. What memories, what fears, or what fanciful idea that Lizzie's future would be happier if she were brought up in the belief that Martha was her aunt, instead of her mother, neither you nor I can guess. The web of the simplest life seems to me to be made up of tangled skeins, and one of the highest duties of life consists in kindly judgment of each other. Martha's life has been one of sacrifice, and what joy and comfort she has experienced in it have come from this girl, for whom I have a great esteem."

"I too, Felix; Lizzie is a good girl."

"It sounds strange that so simple a circumstance should induce my father to part with a woman who must have been wonderfully useful to him; but I think I am to blame for the severance of that connection."

"In what way?"

"My father knows of my movements, so Martha tells me; knows of my friendship for you and your grandchildren, and knows of the tie which binds Alfred to Lizzie. It is in some way to punish me that he has provoked this breach; but, indeed, it is no punishment to me, for I believe and hope that it will turn out for the good of all of us."

"Is there no hope of a reconciliation with your father, Felix?"

"None, sir," replied Felix firmly; "our natures are too wide apart. In all probability, we shall never meet again: both he and I are too steadfast to our beliefs, which are as the north and the south poles. It is wonderful by what roads men arrive at totally different estimates of things! My father will judge me harshly, perhaps, all the days of his life; but he is my father, and it will best become me to be silent as to his judgments and motives. I am but a young man, but it seems to me that my life is clear before me. I do not aspire to riches. I have one great hope, and if that is fulfilled, I shall be content to work with others of the world's workers, satisfied with moderate competence, proud if the track in which I work will enable me to leave a mark for good behind me. I have flown off at a tangent again, and must come back to Martha. Looking upon myself as the cause of her misfortunes, I purpose to set up some sort of a home, in which she can live in the same capacity as she has done in my father's house."

"What does she say to your plan, Felix?"

"She is delighted with it; but she will say nothing decisive until after she has talked to Lizzie about it, and until after the result of my visit here to-day is ascertained. Acting upon my advice, Martha is telling Lizzie the secret which she has kept all her life, and Lizzie probably knows by this time that she has a mother. Now, sir, I come to my one great hope. I have waited until now, when not only my position is assured, but when another matter which has caused you and Lily much anxiety--I refer to Alfred's connection with Mr. Sheldrake looks less hopeless than it has done for some time past. If you guess what it is I am about to say, will you give me permission to speak more plainly?"

"Speak, my dear lad," said Old Wheels, trembling with eagerness.

"It is about Lily—"

But the old man rose suddenly, and in a tone of deep agitation said,

"One moment, Felix."

It was joy at the prospect of his darling's happiness that compelled him to rise. He stood with averted head, silent for many moments; then turned, and said, with the tears running down his face,

"Go on, Felix; go on, my dear boy."

"I love Lily, sir, and I ask your permission to tell her, and to ask her to be my wife."

Old Wheels grasped Felix's hand.

"God bless you, my dear lad!" he almost sobbed. "These are tears of joy that you see. How I have prayed for this! But I feared that some scruple of just feeling--some motive of honour and tenderness, for which I should not have esteemed you less, Felix; no, not one whit--I feared that something of this sort might have prevented you from speaking. The sad day that we met is the happiest of my life. God bless you, Felix! Go to my darling; go to her, and then come down to me together, that I may see my dearest desire accomplished."

Lily, very busy setting things to rights in the house, and very happy in her work, did not know that Felix had come, until he stood close to her. She gave a little cry of surprise and pleasure, and then, seeing something in his face that she had never seen before, stood for an instant pale and trembling. But her heart was animated by the dawn of a tender hope. His nature was too earnest to dally at such a time. He held out his hand, and retaining hers, said,

"I have come straight from grandfather, Lily."

And paused, as earnest lovers do who are about to play their great stake. She stood silent, her hand in his, waiting for him to speak.

"I have been telling him of some good fortune that has befallen me. I have obtained another London correspondenceship for a colonial paper, and I am growing rich. My income is quite three hundred pounds, and there is a fair prospect before me. I have schemes in my head. One of these fine days I may put the finishing lines to a book, and by good luck I may find a publisher who will publish it; or to a play, and by good luck I may find a manager who will produce it. Whichever it is may be successful, and another hundred pounds may come in my purse. If I do not do either, or if I am unsuccessful in the doing, my position is good enough, and I shall be happy and satisfied, even if it does not improve very much. But I want a home--a helpmate. And there is but one woman in the world who can be to me what my heart yearns for. Lily!" He had released her hand, and she stood before him with drooping head; the sun was shining behind the bright clouds. "Will you be my wife?"

Whether he took her into his arms, or whether she crept into them, neither knew; but she was there, with her head on his breast, and with such joy in her heart as seemed to make life too happy. A long silence followed, a silence that was like a prayer; their feelings were too deep for words, and when, after a long, long dream, they spoke, their voices were tremulous.

"Are you glad, Lily?"

She nestled closer to him.

"Lily, my dear, I devote my life to your happiness."

"And I to yours, Felix." She spoke the words softly and solemnly.

"So I have two objects in life, and these will be sufficient--my wife and my work."

He repeated the words "My wife!" tenderly. She raised her bright face to his.

"And I have but one."

"That is—"

"Felix."

His pulses were charged with grateful music as he stooped and kissed her.

"Love and Labour would not be a bad motto, Lily, or a bad title for my book or play. Let us go down to grandfather."

"You perceive, sir," said Felix to Old Wheels a quarter of an hour afterwards, "what my scheming has come to. The first time I saw Lily, I thought to myself, There is my wife; and I schemed for the result. I have acted my part very well, I think. Now, will you still dispute my proposition that every action in our lives is dictated by selfishness."

Felix and Lily were sitting hand in hand.

"I am too happy, Felix," replied Old Wheels, "to dispute anything with you; you must have everything your own way. I have no doubt that Lily has made up her mind--as I have made up mine--that you are as heartless and selfish as it is possible for man to be."

But a little while after that Lily and Felix were speaking together more seriously. In the suddenness of her happiness, Lily had lost sight for a time of Alfred's troubles. Now they recurred to her, and brought with them the image of Mr. Sheldrake and the memory of his threats. Felix saw the change that came over her, and guessed the cause.

"You are thinking of Alfred," he said. "To-night, when he comes home, we will take him into

our confidence, and coax him to confide freely in us. I know your love for him, Lily, and you know, my dear, that nothing that is in my power shall be left undone to release him from his anxieties."

Then, without being asked, Lily told Felix all that had passed between her and Mr. Sheldrake; she told him first of Mr. Sheldrake's confession of love for her, and how it terrified her; and then, going back, she told him of their meeting in Bushey Park, and of her seeing Lizzie for the first time on that day; of the story of Mr. Sheldrake's goodness that Alfred had related to her (Felix smiled gravely at this); of the persistent manner in which Mr. Sheldrake had impressed upon her that it was for her sake, and for her sake only, he was her brother's friend; of Mr. Sheldrake forcing a partnership upon her on that day, suggesting that they should enter into a compact to work together for Alfred's good; and of his saying that when Alfred was safely through his troubles, he would have no one but Lily to thank for his release.

"But since that day," continued Lily, "Alfred has been getting into deeper and deeper trouble, until a time came--only a little while ago, Felix--when I was afraid to think of what might occur to him--and to me," she added in a dreamy tone. A moment after she had uttered the words a shudder came over her. Felix took her in his arms, and she clung to him for protection.

"I feel happy and safe with you, Felix."

"I understand your feelings towards Alfred, my dear," said Felix encouragingly; "but I must have my treasure grow strong, and I must strive to wean her from her dreamy fancies. I shall watch my sensitive flower very jealously, and she must trust to my judgment wholly. You have doubts! Why, I have had them! and for a long time have been afraid to speak. So you see, little weakling, that I, strong as I am, have shared some of your anxieties with you. I saw you on the day you went to Hampton Court with Alfred."

"You, Felix!"

"Yes, my dear; I was there, watching over you even then, although I had not the right to do so that I have now."

"And you would not come to me and speak to me, Felix!"

"Dearest! I saw that you were happy, and I felt that I might have been the cause of disturbance, of which Mr. Sheldrake probably would have been glad to avail himself. So I kept myself in the background."

"And suffered," she said, wistfully and tenderly; "for you loved me then, Felix; I know it."

"Yes, darling. I loved you then. But love often shows itself in self-sacrifice."

She paused for a little while before she spoke again. "You said once, Felix, that there is a higher attribute than love--duty!"

"How do you know I said that, Lily?"

"Grandfather told me. Do you believe that duty is a higher quality than love? That supposing these two stand before us, duty on one side, love on the other, duty should be followed and love put aside?"

"Can you not take your answer, Lily, from what I hinted to you on the night you came from the theatre? Duty *should* be followed first; much that is bitter in life it makes sweet. But when love and duty clash, we should examine ourselves strictly, sternly perhaps, out of justice for others—"

"As you did, Felix," she interrupted in loving tones, "when you restrained yourself from telling me your feelings until to-day. Ah, I know! Love has made me wise. Now we will not talk of this any more now; we shall have plenty of time by and by. How I have thought over every word you said to me that night, Felix!"

"Every word, Lily!"

"Yes, every word; you made me very happy!"

"Darling! But you could not repeat to me what I said."

"One part I could."

"I am listening!"

"You said, it is the dearest privilege of affection to share the troubles of those we love. If I were married (you said), the first consoling thought that would arise to my mind, should misfortune overtake me, would be, 'Thank God, I have one at home who will sympathise with me, and by her sympathy console me!'" She paused awhile, and said, "This privilege is mine now, and love and duty can go together."

In this way she poured out her full heart to him. His duties called him away in the afternoon, and he left her, saying he would run down in the night, at about ten o'clock, for an hour.

"We will wait supper for you, Felix," said Old Wheels.

Felix went his way to town, the happiest of the happy.

CHAPTER XLIII.

MR. SHELDRAKE MAKES A BOLD MOVE.

Tea was over, and Lily and her grandfather were sitting by the fire. The night without was chilly, although it was now the middle of spring, and a raw cold wind was blowing. But the room was warm and cozy, and the occupants were thoroughly happy. Lizzie and Martha Day had been to see them in the afternoon, and had spent an hour or two with them. When Lizzie came in, she said simply, "Lily, this is my mother;" and both received a warm welcome from Old Wheels and his darling child. Martha's pale face had a flush of happiness in it, and the sombre effect of her black dress had been lightened by Lizzie, who had insisted on her mother's wearing one or two pieces of bright ribbon. Yet, notwithstanding the joy which the disclosure of their nearer and dearer relationship must have brought to both Lizzie and Martha Day, uneasy shades of expression rested occasionally on their features. The cause of this uneasiness in Lizzie seemed to be entirely within herself, and to be in no way connected with any person present in the room; but with Martha it was different. It was evident that her uneasiness was caused in a direct way by something that she saw in her daughter; and every now and then her eyes would rest on Lizzie's face with a look of wistful pain. They were not long in the society of their friends before the news of the engagement between Felix and Lily was told them; and Lizzie, forgetting for a few moments the great anxiety which pressed upon her, danced about the room in delight.

"Next to Alfred," she said, "I love Felix. There is only one other thing wanting now to complete our happiness."

She was pressed to tell what that "other thing" was; but she refused in as light a manner as she could command. That "other thing" was that Alfred might be lucky that day, and that he might get out of Mr. Sheldrake's toils. It was hard for her to show a bright face when, as it seemed to her, Alfred's fate and hers was being decided. Strangely enough, she also dwelt superstitiously in her thoughts upon the three times seven kisses Alfred had given her when he parted from her in the morning. "They will be sure to bring him luck," she had said to herself a dozen times during the day. She thought of them hopefully now, and murmured, "To-night all our troubles will be over." A happy future indeed was spread before them if fortune smiled upon Alfred. How she longed for night to come, and Alfred with the glad tidings!

"We'll all live together," she said aloud.

And Lily nodded and laughed. It was like a bright dream, where everything that was good in nature was around and about her. The woods were beautiful with various greens; sweet breezes was stirring the leaves, and stealing their secrets from them; there was not a dark cloud in the sky. The two girls crept into a corner, and with their arms around each other's necks, whispered confidence to each other. One thing--her most precious secret--Lizzie was burning to tell her friend; but she restrained herself. She had solemnly promised not to speak of it until Alfred gave her permission. In the evening, when she and her mother were at home again, she said she was tired, and she went to her room to lie down for half an hour. Thither, after a time, Martha crept, and sat by her daughter's side. Lizzie was murmuring in her sleep, and although her tones and every word she murmured were charged with love and tenderness, the sorrowful tears ran down Martha's face as she heard.

"Is this a judgment upon me for my neglect and deceit?" she asked of herself, between her sobs. "I should have looked after her better! I should have looked after her better!" But when Lizzie awoke, Martha was careful that her daughter should not see any traces of agitation. "I will wait until Alfred comes home," she thought, "and then I will tax him and discover the truth." Everything seemed to depend upon Alfred's return.

And now it was night, and Old Wheels and Lily were together in their room. Old Wheels was reading aloud, and Lily was working. There was no one else in the house. Mrs. Podmore and little Polly had gone to London for some bits of clothing which friends had gathered together for them; they were expected to return by train at about ten o'clock. Every now and then, Old Wheels paused in his reading, and made a remark. Lily understood very little of the story the old man was reading; she was thinking. Scarcely anything but Felix was in her mind.

"Mrs. Podmore will be delighted to hear the news," said Old Wheels in one of the intervals; "although she has been hinting at it mysteriously from the very first day we saw Felix--when he drove us home in the waggonette. That's eight o'clock striking. Alfred ought to be home before now."

"It's nine o'clock sometimes before he comes home," said Lily; "but I wish he was here. I want to tell him."

Old Wheels read, and Lily worked, for another half an hour, and at the end of that time the old man laid his book aside.

"I shall have to read all this over again," he said, with pretended petulance; "I am sure you have not been attending to me."

"I haven't," she replied, with a happy light in her eyes; "I have been thinking all the while of Felix."

"So I've been reading nothing but Felix, Felix, Felix; and you've heard nothing but Felix, Felix, Felix. Well, well, my darling; I am more than satisfied. Now, then," he said merrily, "come to the window, and look out. It is blowing quite cold, dear child. Let me keep you warm in my arms. Ah, Lily, Lily, now I can die happy when my time comes. But what am I thinking of? To speak of such a subject at such a time! Talk of dying, indeed! I intend to live, and to see my darling's happiness. Ah, God is good!" Then, after a pause, he said, slyly, "But really this is serious--if it's to be nothing but Felix, Felix, Felix! Look along the road--what do you see?"

"Felix," she replied, entering into his humour, and to dispel his sadness; "he's a long way off though, for he'll not be here for an hour and a half. But I see him coming."

"Of course you do. Now look up at the ceiling--what do you see?"

"Felix."

"And into the lamp. What do you see?"

"Felix."

"And into the fire. What do you see?"

"Felix."

"Ah, child!" he said, touching her eyelids gently; "Felix is not on the road, nor in the room; he is here."

"No," she replied in the tenderest of tones, taking his hand, and placing it on her heart; "he is here."

She was on her knees before the fire, looking into it, and remained so for many minutes, the old man standing quietly by her side, with his hand on her shoulder, looking down upon her. "A happier fate awaits her, thank God!" he thought, "than fell to her mother's lot."

He sat down in his chair at the thought, and mused on the time gone by, and thought of Lily's father too, and wondered as to his fate.

"Strange," he mused, "that one so unstable as he should have been so faithful to his written promise. Strange that I have never heard of him since that dreadful time! If he is living now, would it not be a good thing that he should witness his daughter's happiness? But if the old vice is in him still!—No, it would be impossible to find him, and it is better as it is. This is a happy turning-tide for all of us."

Nine o'clock struck. Lily started up.

"I wish Alfred was home," she said impatiently. "I do so want him to know!"

"Perhaps he's at Lizzie's," said the old man. "Shall I run round and see?"

"Yes, yes," cried Lily, "and tell him to come at once. Let Lizzie come too, and Mr. Musgrave. Mr. Musgrave is very fond of me, grandfather, and I like him very much. But want Alfred most."

She was tying a muffler round the old man's throat, when she suddenly exclaimed, "It's a shame to let you go; *I'll* run round, grandfather."

"No, child. You will catch cold. And think," he added gaily; "Felix may come in any moment. I shall not be gone long."

She listened to his footsteps and to the slamming of the street-door, and then knelt before the fire again. What a day has this been--never to be forgotten! the white day of her life! In an hour her hero would be with her. She rehearsed the scene that had taken place between them again and again. "I want a home--a helpmate. And there is but one woman in the world who can be to me what my heart yearns for. Lily--will you be my wife?" His wife! Why, if all the world were before her to choose from--if she could fix her own lot, her own destiny--that is what she would choose to be. Ah, how happy she would try to make him! A thought of Alfred crept in. Felix would be a good friend to him--a true friend. How much happier Alfred had been these last few days! his troubles seemed to be over. His smiling face, as she had seen it this very morning, when he ran

back and kissed her, appeared in the fire among her other fancies that she conjured up there. Alfred and Lizzie married--herself and Felix in their little home—. She saw every room in it, and saw them all smiling at one another in the fire before which she was kneeling. But why was not Alfred here now? Swiftly she thought, "He cannot be with Lizzie; for the first thing Lizzie would tell him about would be about Felix and me, and Alfred would have run home to me at once." She started to her feet, and ran nervously to the window; and as she looked out into the dark roadway, a knock came at the street-door. "That is Alfred!" she cried, and ran down-stairs; but when she was in the dark passage, she remembered that the knock was not Alfred's. Alfred always knocked at the door with a flourish; this that she had heard was a single knock. It could not be her grandfather, either; for he had a latch-key. Perhaps it was Mrs. Podmore. The knock came again, and she mustered up sufficient courage to go to the street-door, and ask who was there. A strange voice answered her. "Did Mr. Wheels live there?" it asked. "Yes," she answered.

"Is his granddaughter at home?"

"Yes."

"I want to see her."

"What for?"

These questions were asked by Lily through the closed door: she was alone in the house, and was frightened to draw the lock.

"What for?" she inquired again, faintly.

"I can't say, unless I see her."

"She is speaking to you now; I am she."

"Is anybody with you?"

Almost overcome with fear, Lily answered, "No; what do you want me for?"

"To give you a letter."

Lily hesitated still: the voice was that of a stranger, the locality was somewhat of a lonely one, and her grandfather had warned her not to open the door at night to any person she did not know, if there was no man in the house.

"Wait," she said, "until my grandfather returns. He will be here presently, and then I will take the letter."

"Then I can't give it to you, miss," the voice said. "My instructions are to give it into your hand, and into your hand only, when there is no one near."

"Why? What is the letter about?" she asked, in an agony of terror, and murmuring inly, "O, why doesn't grandfather return?"

"I don't know what's in the letter. But the gentleman who gave it to me told me to say, if anything like this occurred, that it was a matter of life or death to some one that you loved."

Life or death to some one whom she loved! She hesitated no longer, but tore open the door, panting. A man, who looked like a common labouring man, stood in the dusk.

"I am only carrying out my instructions, miss," he said, touching his cap. "Here is the letter, and I am to wait for an answer. You can shut the door while you read it, if you're afraid. I'll wait outside."

She closed the door, and running like a deer up-stairs into the light, opened the letter. It was as follows:

"My dear Miss Lily,--You must read this letter by yourself, and no other person must see it or know of it. I would come instead of writing, but my appearance, and the circumstance of our conversing privately in your grandfather's house, might excite suspicions. Your brother cannot come home, and it is probable that his life hangs upon your prompt action; his safety certainly depends on your secrecy. He is in the greatest danger. If you love him and wish to save him, come and see me immediately. I am waiting at the end of the road, at the corner of the True Blue public-house. The messenger who brings this will take your message, or will accompany you to where I am waiting for you. You must decide without one moment's delay. If you resolve not to come--a contingency I cannot contemplate, knowing you--you may never see your brother again. In any case, believe me to be your faithful friend,

"David Sheldrake."

There was so much in the note of hidden and terrible danger to the brother she loved so

dearly that, without considering, she ran to her room for her hat and mantle, and hurried into the street. The messenger was waiting.

"Do you know where the gentleman is who gave you this letter?" she asked breathlessly, as she tied the ribbons of her hat.

"Yes, miss; he's waiting at the True Blue, and told me to bring you to him if you asked me."

"I will come with you. Walk as quick as you can; I'll keep up with you."

The messenger, without answering, walked at once at a rapid pace in the direction of the True Blue, and Lily followed him. The road was long, and was but dimly lighted. When they arrived at the meeting-place, Lily was completely out of breath, and her heart beat so violently that she reeled and would have fallen, but for a friendly arm held out for her support. She clung to it instinctively, and looking up the next moment, saw that it was Mr. Sheldrake who had come to her assistance. He waited in a considerate and respectful attitude until she had recovered herself, and when she withdrew herself from his support, did not press his attentions upon her.

"I am glad you have come," he then said: she was about to speak, but he anticipated her; "it is a great relief to me. Alfred was not mistaken in you, nor am I."

"Where is he?" she asked, in an agitated tone. "What is the matter? Has any accident happened to him?"

"No accident has happened to him," replied Mr. Sheldrake gravely. "But we can scarcely talk here; it is dangerous; the very walls have ears. There is a private room in this public-house in which we can talk for a few minutes undisturbed. Nay," he said, in a sad tone, "do not hesitate at such a time. When we can talk without being observed, I will instantly convince you that I am not worthy of being suspected."

"Why cannot we talk here?"

He looked round cautiously, and lowered his voice. "Because, if any person overheard us, your brother would be lost. It would be out of your power then to save him."

Lily thought of Felix, and hastily glanced through the partially-open door of the public-house. There was a clock hanging up, and she saw that it was half-past nine. A comfortable-looking woman was standing within the bar, and her husband, with his shirt-sleeves tucked up, was busy serving the customers.

"There is a private room behind the bar," said Mr. Sheldrake; "that little parlour with the door open. You can ask for the use of it yourself, if you like. But I warn you not to delay. Time is precious."

He spoke in a cold tone, and as if his feelings were deeply wounded by her suspicions of him. Lily walked into the public-house, followed by Mr. Sheldrake, and beckoned the landlady aside.

"Can I have the use of your parlour," she asked, "for a very few moments, undisturbed, to speak with this gentleman?"

"Yes, miss," answered the landlady. She knew Lily, and was surprised at her appearance there. "You can come round this way; no one shall disturb you."

Lily and Mr. Sheldrake walked into the little room, and the landlady closed the door of communication between it and the bar. Lily, standing near this door, waited in painful suspense for Mr. Sheldrake to speak. He had noticed that when she entered the room she had moved timorously towards the door as if for protection, and he experienced a feeling of mingled anger and mortification, any outward exhibition of which, however, he successfully repressed. When he spoke he spoke slowly, as if studying his words.

"Your behaviour towards me is ungenerous to a degree. At any other time, and under any other circumstances, I might be disposed to wash my hands of this affair at once. Notwithstanding the feelings I entertain for you--do not be alarmed; I am not going to speak of them--I owe to myself a certain amount of self-respect, and I stand in danger of forfeiting this, and of placing myself in a false light, by silent submission to your distrust of me. But"--and here his voice grew less restrained, and his words were expressed with more warmth--"I can afford even this renunciation of self-defence, simple as it is, and unsupported, except by my consistent behaviour towards yourself and your brother, in the consciousness that what I am doing is done out of pure disinterested friendship and esteem."

"For mercy's sake," she implored, "speak more plainly, and tell me for what purpose you have brought me here."

"For no purpose of my own; for your brother's sake. It is a matter of life or death to him."

She clasped her hands, and could not find words to speak for her agony. She had never appeared more fascinating in his eyes than she appeared to him now, as she stood before him in pleading attitude. But although he was under the spell of this fascination, and although he knew

that she was at his mercy, he was instinctively conscious, bold and unscrupulous as he was, that he held no power for ill over her. Her innocence and trustfulness were a stronger armour than any which cunning and artifice could supply. As he gazed at her in admiration, he thought how proud he should be of her if she was his, and thought, too, taking credit for the generosity of the sentiment, that if the worst came to the worst, he would marry her.

"Where is the note that I wrote to you?" he asked.

"Here it is."

"Had you not better be seated?" he said, as he took the note from her hand. "You will want all your strength."

She sank into the chair he handed her, and he, glancing at the note carelessly, put it into the fire.

"There must be no chance," he said, when it was destroyed, "of such evidence falling into strange hands. For your brother's sake."

"You said in it," she said, in exquisite distress, "that his life--his life! hangs upon my action."

"And upon mine; we two can save him. The compact we entered into for his good can now be carried out. I am ready to perform my part; are you ready to perform yours?"

"I will do anything for my brother--anything. But I do not understand your meaning."

"Your brother must see you immediately; he will tell you in what way you are able to save him."

"I am ready to see him!" she cried; "I want to see him! Where is he! O, Mr. Sheldrake, if you respect me, let me see him at once."

"That is my wish, and the reason why I am here. You know that I respect you--you know that I —" The shudder that seized her warned him of the indiscretion he was about to commit. "But this is no time to speak of anything but Alfred. Every moment's delay now may be fatal to him. What is done must be done at once."

"Bring him to me, then; I will wait. Bring him to me, but do not torture me with suspense! Have pity on me!"

She held out her hands imploringly to him, and he took them in his, and looked steadily into the pale agitated face.

"I *do* sincerely pity you, Lily; my heart bleeds for you. But it is in your power to avert all this misery. Listen to me calmly. I cannot bring Alfred to you; he is in hiding, and dare not show himself. I can take you to him. I have a cab at the door. Come."

She withdrew her hands from his grasp, and retreated a step or two, nearer to the door of communication with the bar. He smiled bitterly.

"Still distrustful!" he exclaimed, with a frown. "Well, be it as you will. To-morrow, when shame and disgrace are at your door--shame and disgrace which, by the simplest of acts, you could have averted--to-morrow, when you learn the miserable fate that has befallen the brother who loved you so fondly--you may repent what you have done. But, unjust, and cruel as you are in this, do me then at least the justice of acknowledging that I did my best--more, I believe, by heaven! than any other man in my position would have done--to save both him and you. Good-night."

He had acted well, and as he turned from her, his heat beat exultantly at her next words.

"Stay, for pity's sake! There is no sacrifice that I would not make for Alfred's sake. He knows it--he knows it!"

"He believed it, firmly; and he in his turn would be ready to make any sacrifice for you. I have heard him say so dozens of times."

"I know, I know. He has been so good to me! But all this is so sudden and terrible, and I am so much in the dark--with no one to advise me—" She could not proceed for her tears.

"I did not think," said Mr. Sheldrake gently and with a touch of pride, "when I sent for you that any persuasion would be necessary to induce you to act as your heart must surely prompt. I wished my disinterested conduct to speak for itself. Knowing my own motives and the more than good-will to yourself which prompted them, I wished you to depend upon me, and to trust in me, as you may do implicitly, believe me. I have in my pocket proof of my sincerity and faithfulness, but I did not intend to use it. I almost despise myself now for doing so, but I do it out of pity for you--out of a warmer feeling which you know I entertain for you."

He took from his pocket-book the paper which Alfred had written at his dictation on Epsom Downs.

"Read this, and decide; for I cannot stop one minute longer."

Lily read the paper with difficulty; the words blurred in her sight:

"I am in great trouble and danger. My friend, Mr. Sheldrake, is the only man I can trust, and the only man who can save me. Put full faith and trust in him.--ALFRED."

"Will that satisfy you?" asked Mr. Sheldrake, almost tenderly. "You know Alfred's handwriting. Will you come and see him now?"

"Forgive me for my suspicions," said Lily, almost distracted by conflicting doubts; "I will come with you. But I must send a line to my grandfather first, explaining my absence."

"Not explaining," said Mr. Sheldrake, placing writing-materials before her; "no mention must be made of Alfred or me."

Lily wrote hurriedly:

"Dear, dear Grandfather,--I am compelled to go away suddenly for a little while. Do not be anxious about me. I will return soon, and you will know that I have done right. Tell Felix this; I dare not explain now.--Your loving child,--LILY."

"The messenger who brought my note to you will take it," said Mr. Sheldrake. "If you can contrive to look less sad--if you could even smile--as we go out, it might avert suspicion, should any one have been on the watch."

They went out of the public-house together, and Lily called a sad smile to her lips, although her heart was fainting within her at the prospect of Alfred's danger. The messenger who had brought Mr. Sheldrake's note was outside, talking to his companions. She hurried to him, and giving him the paper she had written to her grandfather, asked him to deliver it, putting sixpence into his hand at the same time. The next moment she was in the cab.

"One moment," Mr. Sheldrake said to her hurriedly, "I want to settle with the landlady."

He had seen the messenger who was to deliver Lily's note to her grandfather go into the public-house; Mr. Sheldrake followed him.

"The young lady has changed her mind," he said to the man; "give me the letter back. Here is a shilling from her."

The man delivered up the letter, glad to dispose of it on such good terms; and Mr. Sheldrake, throwing half-a-crown on the bar, said, "Give your customers some beer, landlady;" and departed amidst a chorus of "Thank'ee, sir," from the men standing about inside.

"Perhaps you'll prefer sitting by yourself," said Mr. Sheldrake to Lily; "I'll get up outside, and sit by the driver. Keep up your courage."

This act of delicacy on his part seemed to assure her.

"Thank you," she said hurriedly and nervously; "shall we be long?"

"No; I'll tell the driver to drive quick?"

He was on the box, and the driver had started when he saw a number of men running along the road, with alarm on their faces.

"What's the matter?" he called out to them.

"An accident on the line," they called out, in answer, as they ran past towards the railway station. Mr. Sheldrake did not stop to ascertain its nature, and the cab drove quickly off.

Meantime Old Wheels made his way to Mr. Musgrave's house. He was surprised to find, when he arrived there, that all within was dark. He knocked at the door more than once, and obtaining no reply, walked round the house, endeavouring to find an explanation for the cause of the strange desertion. He saw no person, however, and he returned to the front door. As he stood there irresolute, the same thought came to his mind that had occurred to Lily; that Lizzie would have been certain to tell Alfred of the engagement between Felix and Lily, and that Alfred would have come home immediately to hear all the news concerning it. "Alfred could not have passed me on the way," he mused; "I should have been certain to see him. Nor did Lizzie." He could arrive at no clear understanding of the circumstances, and he was about to retrace his steps uneasily, when a voice said,

"Have you knocked, Mr. Wheels?"

It was Martha Day who spoke.

"Yes," the old man replied; "but I have received no reply. I have been here for nearly ten minutes, but I have been unable to make any one hear."

"Perhaps Lizzie is asleep. I have been away nearly three hours, looking after my boxes. I did not intend to come back to-night, but I could not rest away from my darling. Come round the back way, Mr. Wheels. Lizzie has shown me where she leaves the key of the back door sometimes."

They went to the rear of the house, and Martha found the key.

"Yes, here it is; I suppose my girl has gone out for a walk. With Alfred perhaps."

"I can scarcely think that," the old man said, "the night is so cheerless."

"It *is* cold and dreary, out of doors," assented Martha.

"I came round to see if Alfred was here. Lily is uneasy because he has not come home, and she wants him to hear the news about her and Felix."

Martha, groping about in the dark for matches, seemed to find something strange in this, for she said, in an uneasy tone,

"Alfred not come home, and Lizzie not here!"

"But perhaps she is asleep, as you said," suggested Old Wheels.

"I'll see," said Martha, feeling her way to Lizzie's room. "You won't mind stopping here in the dark a bit."

As Martha felt her way along the passage and up the stairs, she called softly, "Lizzie! Lizzie!" But no voice answered her. She went into Lizzie's bedroom, and felt the bed. Lizzie was not there. She began to be alarmed. She glided quickly down the stairs again, and going to the parlour, found the matches, and lit the lamp. Then she called to the old man.

"I cannot understand it," she said, as if communing with herself. "Can Lizzie have been frightened because of what I said to her this afternoon? O Lizzie! Lizzie! O my darling child!"

She sat on a chair, and rocked herself to and fro in her distress.

"Because of what you said to her this afternoon?" questioned Old Wheels, sharing Martha's distress. "We are all closely connected by affectionate ties, Mrs. Day. May I ask what you said to her that causes you to be alarmed now?"

"No, no!" cried Martha, covering her face with her hands. "You are his grandfather, and I dare not tell you. But a mother's eyes can see! a mother's eyes can see!"

A sudden paleness stole into the old man's face, and his lips trembled.

"Is it something connected with Alfred? Nay, answer me; I am an old man, and I love Lizzie."

"It would have been better for her," sobbed the unhappy woman, "if she had never seen him. He has brought shame upon her, and I only am to blame! I should have watched over her; I should not have left her alone! O, Lizzie, my darling! come back to me!"

"If I understand you aright," said the old man, with an aching heart, "and I am afraid that I do, a new grief is brought upon us by the unhappy boy--a grief which I never dreamed of, never suspected. I thought our troubles were coming to an end, and that this day, until now so bright and so full of hope, was the beginning of a happier life for all of us. Alas for the errors of youth! God knows I have striven to do my best, and my duty!"

He was overwhelmed with sorrow, but the thought of Lily waiting at home for him aroused him to action.

"I must get home to my darling," he said, gazing sadly at the bowed figure of the unhappy mother; "she is alone in the house. Will you come with me?"

He took her unresisting hand, and she accompanied him to the street-door, but she paused there, and said, with a despairing look around,

"No, I must go and seek Lizzie--I cannot come."

"Do you know where she is likely to be?" he asked pityingly.

"No," she replied helplessly; "I don't know which way to turn. I'll wait here; perhaps she'll return soon. It will be best for me to wait."

He did not urge her farther, but saying he would see her again before the night was over, he hurried away, leaving her alone with her grief. His own heart was pierced with keenest sorrow, and he scarcely dared trust himself to think.

CHAPTER XLIV.

A CRISIS.

When Old Wheels entered the house, he expected Lily to run down-stairs to meet him, and he was surprised that he did not hear her voice welcoming him. Indeed, knowing her nature, he was quite prepared to find her waiting and watching for him at the street-door, or in the passage, and he was somewhat disappointed, when he put the key in the lock and listened, to hear no sound. Notwithstanding that a deep feeling of sadness was upon him, created by Martha Day's words and Lizzie's strange absence, the happiness that lay in the assurance that Lizzie's future was safe was more than sufficient to counterbalance all depression. When Felix had the right to protect his darling from the snares by which she had been surrounded--snares which her own loving nature had strengthened--trouble would weigh lightly upon him. But he could not shake off the uneasiness caused by the scene through which he had just passed. It was so strange and inexplicable: Lizzie's disappearance--for which her mother, who had parted from her but a few hours before, could not account--Alfred's absence and, added to these, the circumstance of Mr. Musgrave not being at home, he resolved that he would not tell Lily. "Let the child enjoy her happiness," he thought, "Alfred is sure to be home some time to-night." Ascending the stairs, he entered the sitting-room, and looked around for Lily. She was not there. "The puss!" he thought, with a smile. "She thinks Alfred is with me, and she is hiding herself. Lily; Lily!" No sound broke the silence that followed, as the old man stood, with head inclined, listening for the response. But the silence seemed to speak, and his heart turned cold. He looked around again with a vacant eye, and murmured, more than cried, in a helpless tone, "Lily! Lily!" with the same result. He wandered into her bedroom, and into every room in the house, but found no trace of his darling. Then a feeling came upon him, like the feeling of death, and almost deprived him of consciousness. But after a little while, by a strong effort of will, he recovered himself somewhat. "I must think! I must think!" he murmured; and wrenching his mind from the lethargy of despair which was stealing over it, he thought over all that had occurred. Presently a comforting thought came to him: the coincidence of Lizzie being absent from her house was a sufficient reason for his darling not being at home. "I have been away longer than Lily expected," he thought as he descended the stairs towards the street. "Lily grew anxious, and coming after me met Lizzie, and perhaps Alfred as well. I must have missed them on the way." In the hope and expectation of finding both the girls and his grandson there, he retraced his steps to Lizzie's house; but the place was dark and deserted, and he obtained no response to his knocks and cries. Even Martha Day was gone. In greater distress of mind, and with a terrible fear stealing upon him, which he found it impossible to shake off, he returned to his own house, and leaving the street-door open, wandered in an uncertain manner again through every room, searching in the most unlikely places. He looked about for a note, a line from Lily, to account for her absence, but not a trace of her writing was to be seen. Not knowing what to think or do, he stood, helpless, in the middle of the room, with clasped hands, as if waiting for some sign. For the space of little more than a minute he stood thus, when a church bell began to chime the hour of ten, and as the sound fell upon his ears he heard the street-door pushed softly open, and afterwards a light step upon the stairs. A sudden rush of tears came to his eyes, and the feeling of grateful relief he experienced almost overpowered him. "Thank God! She has come back, and I have been tormenting myself with foolish fears." But there entered the room, not Lily, but Felix. He approached the old man with outstretched hand, and looked eagerly around.

"Ten o'clock exactly," he said in a cheery tone; "I said I'd be here at ten. I came by the road, too. Where's Lily?"

The old man could not find voice to answer the question, and the agitation expressed in his troubled eyes was reflected instantly in the eyes of Felix, as in a mirror. For a moment a shadow reflected upon Felix's hitherto joyful face, like a mist upon a mirror, dimming its brightness.

"Where's Lily?" he asked again, hurriedly.

"You have not met her, then?" asked the old man faintly, in reply.

The shadow instantly passed away, and Felix's face became bright again.

"Seen her! No. Has she gone to meet me? The dear girl! She thought, perhaps, I was coming by train."

He was about to leave the room with the intention of running to the railway-station, when Old Wheels, who had received the suggestion with a feeling of intense gratitude, convinced that Felix had placed the right construction upon Lily's absence, called out to him to stop for a moment.

"I will go with you, Felix," he said.

Felix waited at the street-door for him, but before the old man left the house, he went into Lily's bedroom. He had not thought before of ascertaining whether Lily's hat and mantle were in their usual place. They were not there.

"Of course she has gone to the railway-station," he said to himself, smiling. "It's so long since I was young that I see everything through sixty-year-old spectacles. Ah, young hearts, young

hearts!"

His own uneasiness had caused him for the time to lose sight of Lizzie's strange absence and of Martha Day's agitation; but as Felix and he walked to the railway-station, they recurred to him, and he narrated to Felix the history of the events that had occurred within the last hour.

"Lizzie gone, and Alfred not come home!" Felix exclaimed in amazement. "And Martha had no knowledge of Lizzie's movements?"

"None; she was terribly distressed at Lizzie's disappearance."

"Tell me. Have you seen Mr. Sheldrake to-day?"

"No."

"He would scarcely be in London," mused Felix. "He would be certain to go to Epsom and see the City and Suburban run." Then to the old man, "And Alfred went to the office this morning at his usual hour, you say?"

"Surely; and was brighter than I have seen him for many a day."

Notwithstanding these apparently satisfactory answers concerning Alfred, Felix found food for grave reflection in the information but the occurrence of other events prevented him from dwelling too deeply upon what he had been told. As they approached the railway-station they saw a number of persons hurrying thither, and some coming from it, with looks of haste and alarm. Felix was about to inquire the cause of this--for there was something unusual in the commotion, and it was evident that an incident out of the common had occurred--when the very man of whom he was about to inquire seized his arm and asked if he was a doctor.

"No," replied Felix; "why do you ask?"

"There's been an accident on the line," said the man as he hastened away.

"Jim Podmore is employed at this station," said Felix to Old Wheels, quickening his steps as he spoke. "Let's get there quickly."

He was thinking of Lily, and of her alarm, if she happened to be at the station at the time of the accident. And upon the shock of this news, and of its probably evil consequences to his humble friends, came a dim presage of ill which increased his excitement. Suddenly he paused, and said to the old man,

"One moment--only a moment--for reflection."

And in scarcely more than that space of time he became composed. He had resolutely shaken off all signs of agitation, and he was now cool and collected.

"It has occurred twice in my life," he said, rapidly and distinctly, "to be placed in a position of great peril, where a moment's haste, or a single false step, might have been attended with a fatal result. At the exact instant it was required, I have recovered the self-possession I had lost, and thereby have been enabled to escape the danger. This same feeling has come upon me within this last minute or two. Do not interrupt me, but hear me out, and act as I desire." He paused to recover his breath. "So many strange things have taken place to-night that I cannot overcome the impression that something of serious moment to persons whom we love has occurred, or may occur. If it be so--and I am convinced that my feeling springs from something more than mere nervousness--only calm reflection and steady action will help us. Lily may not be here; she may have arrived home in our absence, and will be alarmed that there is no one there to receive her Nay, she will not be able to get into the house. If she goes round to Lizzie's house, she will find no one there. Do you see what I mean? We are wasting our forces. Two men are doing the work of one. Hurry home as quickly as you can. If Lily is there, wait with her until I come; or she may return while you are waiting. If she is at the station, I will return with her as soon as possible. Under any circumstances, we are wrong in leaving the house alone. And mind," he concluded, with a detaining grasp on the old man's arm, "whether Lily is at home or not, or whether she come or not, do not stir from the house until I arrive."

The old man comprehended the wisdom of the arrangement, and saying hurriedly, "I will act exactly as you desire, Felix," walked back towards his house.

Felix then ran to the station, and with some little trouble obtained permission to the platform. There he found everything in confusion. A train had run off the line, and the rails were torn up.

"Is anybody hurt?" he asked, in a tone of authority.

"Only a child, fortunately; but she seems to be hurt rather badly. There were not many persons in the train."

"Whose fault was it?"

"The pointsman's, they say. He was half asleep when the accident occurred--the lazy scamp!"

"The pointsman!" exclaimed Felix. "That's Mr. Podmore!"

"I don't know his name, I'm sure," the man replied--it was a passenger who had answered Felix's questions--"but whatever it is, he ought to be made an example of, and I hope he will be."

A man employed at the station, who had heard the last question, said, as he passed, "Yes, it's Podmore's doing, this time."

Felix's first anxiety was for Lily, but he could not see her. He made his way into the waiting-room, and saw, in the centre of a little group, a child lying as if dead in the lap of a weeping woman. He darted forward.

"Good God!" he cried, as he leant over the sad couple. "It's little Polly!"

The weeping woman looked up into his face, and recognised him through her fast-flowing tears.

"She won't want any more dolls," she sobbed, with a gasp between each word. "My Polly! my darling! she's dead! she's dead! O Polly, my blessed, why was not I killed too!"

The piteous words cut Felix's heart and made it bleed. He laid his hand commiseratingly upon Mrs. Podmore's shoulder.

"Thank you, sir," she sobbed; "thank you. You never thought to see Polly like this, did you? O, why don't the doctor come! Will no one bring a doctor? Look after Jim, sir, for the love of God, and comfort him if you can."

Felix turned, and saw Jim Podmore, standing, with clenched hands and writhing form, apart from the group, and with so strong an agony in his face that Felix stepped swiftly to the side of the suffering man.

"Don't touch me!" cried Jim Podmore hoarsely, shrinking from the contact. "Don't lay a finger on me! I ain't safe to be touched or talked to. I've killed my child! I've killed what's dearer to me than life, and I want judgment to fall upon me!"

His looks were so wild that Felix feared for his reason; and knowing that it would do the man good to give vent to his grief, said in a gentle tone,

"You know me, Mr. Podmore? I'm your friend--Felix."

Jim Podmore softened at the sound of the friendly voice. He turned his face from Felix, and said:

"Ah, sir, she loved you, my Polly did! Your name was always on her tongue; and it was only this morning she told me of the new doll you promised her. She said you had another ship come home. She didn't know, when she cuddled me in bed afore I went to work, that I meant to kill her before the day was out. 'And when's your ship coming home, father?' she asked me; 'and when's your ship coming home, father?' Good Lord, help me! My ship's come home to-night, and my pet's laying dead afore my eyes! What right have I to stand here a living man, with that sight afore me?"

A man--a fellow-workman--was coming towards Jim with somewhat of a rough manner, when Felix gently put him aside.

"Let him be," Felix said; "let him have his talk out. It will do him good. He knows that I'm his friend, and he doesn't mind pouring out his grief to me. There's no one else hurt, I hope?"

"No, one else, sir," said the man respectfully.

"Thank God for that! Keep the people away from us; if you can."

Felix had drawn Jim out of the waiting-room; but although Jim could see neither his wife nor child, he spoke of Polly as if she were lying before him.

"Says my pet, a-laying there afore my eyes, as we was a-cuddling one another, 'Felix has got another ship come home, father, and there's a doll in it for Polly. There's a doll in it for Polly,' she says. She went all through with it, as she's done dozens o' times afore; and she says, with her eyes shut, 'Here's the ship a-sailing, a-sailing, and here's the waves a-curling, a-curling'--she knew it by heart, sir, every word of it--'and here's the captain a-bowing, a-bowing.' And then she shuts her eyes tighter, and says, for all the world as if she was in a dream, 'And here's the stars a-shining, a-shining.' Is my pet that's a-laying before my eyes in a dream now, and can she see the stars a-shining, a-shining?"

A voice only a few yards away said,

"Here's the doctor. Move away, and let the child have some air."

The words reached Felix's ears; but Jim Podmore was deaf to everything but his grief and

despair.

"Whose fault was it? I heard some ask. Whose fault? *Was* it mine, when I was that dead-beat with long hours and overwork that I couldn't keep my eyelids open? And I didn't know my pet was in the train. I thought mother and her was home long ago. But I know'd it'd come to this--I've feared it for months and months. If it wasn't to-night, it'd come some other time. But I shouldn't ha' minded then, for I shouldn't ha' killed my pet. Ah, Snap, if I'd only ha' known! There was him a-pulling at my trousers with his teeth, and I never understood him a bit--not a bit."

Felix looked down, and saw the faithful dog standing at some little distance, watching its master with sympathetic eyes. It seemed to Felix as if it knew that something serious had occurred. Jim Podmore was somewhat calmer now, and seated himself on a bench, and rocked himself to and fro, with his head in his hands.

"Don't move for a minute," said Felix. "I want to go into the room to hear what the doctor says. You'll promise not to move till I come back?"

Jim, by a motion of his shoulders, gave the promise, and Felix went into the waiting-room. The people made way for him, and, to Felix's inexpressible relief, he heard the doctor's voice saying cheerily,

"There, there; it's not so bad after all! No bones broke. Shook a little--that's all. Killed! not at all, thank God!" And "Thank God! thank God!" came from a dozen lips, and a ray of hope shot into Mrs. Podmore's white face.

"The little thing will live to be an old woman, please God," the doctor continued. "Now don't be a foolish mother." Mrs. Podmore had taken his hand and kissed it.--"You must be a wise and steady mother; and if you don't at once stop crying like that, I declare you'll do your little girl a deal of harm." Mrs. Podmore instantly suppressed her sobs.--"Pretty little thing! See, she is recovering already!"

Pollypod opened her eyes, and raised her arms to her mother's neck. Mrs. Podmore was about to clasp the child to her breast in the overflow of her joy; but the doctor restrained her.

"No, not like that. Take her in your arms gently. Do you live far from here? No--that's right, that's right. I'll go home with you, and will see the little girl comfortably in bed.--You feel all right, don't you, little one?"

Pollypod answered "Yes, sir," in a weak voice; and seeing Felix, her eyes brightened, and she held out her hand to him. Mrs. Podmore whispered,

"Tell my husband, sir, and bring him to me."

Felix hastened to comply. Jim Podmore could not easily be made to understand that his precious Pollypod was comparatively unhurt; but when he did so, his grateful emotion impressed Felix deeply.

"I've lost my situation, sir; but I sha'n't mind that now. I'll try and get a living in a fairer way than this."

"And I'll help you," said Felix; "but tell me, before you join your wife, have you seen anything of Lily on the platform to-night?"

Jim Podmore considered for a moment, and passed his hands across his eyes to clear away the clouds.

"My memory's almost gone, sir, for everything but this. Yet I think I should ha' remembered seeing Lily if she'd been here. No, sir; I haven't seen her; but that ain't saying she ain't been here. The nearest thing to it is the up-train from Epsom."

"The up-train from Epsom!" echoed Felix, not seeing the connection.

"It stopped here; and one of our porters got a shilling from a passenger for taking a letter to Miss Lizzie--Master Alfred's sweetheart, sir."

Felix gave a start, but knew that it would be cruel to detain Jim any longer from his wife and child. The last thing he saw before he left the station on his way to Old Wheels was Jim Podmore lifting Polly tenderly in his arms.

Old Wheels was waiting at the street door for Felix's return in a state of intense anxiety; and when he saw Felix coming along by himself, his anxiety was redoubled. Felix knew immediately, by the expression in the old man's face, that Lily had not come home.

"No news of Lily, sir?" he asked, as he drew the old man into the house.

"None, Felix. And you?"

"She has not been seen at the railway station."

It was necessary that he should tell Old Wheels of the accident caused by Jim Podmore; and he did so in as few words as possible.

"I am glad that little Polly is not seriously hurt," said Old Wheels--"very, very glad. But I am in dreadful anxiety about Lily."

"I too, sir. She is our first and only care. You have no theory to account for her absence?"

"None, Felix."

"Her hat and cloak are gone," said Felix, following out a train of thought as he spoke. "That is a proof that she went from the house with deliberate intentions. We must not rest until we find her--that's understood."

"Yes, yes, Felix; go on."

"The first thing to ascertain is if anybody is at home at Mr. Musgrave's house. I will run round and see."

Felix returned in a very short time.

"No one is there; the house is quite deserted. There is some connection between Lily's absence and theirs. The only thing I cannot understand is that Lily did not leave a line of writing behind, in explanation. She knows what deep anxiety her absence would cause."

"Felix," said the old man, in a low tone, "can there have been some foul play?"

Felix did not reply for a few moments; he was mentally busy deciding on the best course of action.

"If there is, we will find it out, depend upon it, sir. I have a clue. I learnt at the station that a passenger from Epsom gave a porter a shilling to take a letter to Lizzie. That letter either came from Alfred or Mr. Musgrave, and upon the receipt of that letter Lizzie has disappeared."

"It could not have come from Alfred," interposed Old Wheels; "he was at his office."

"We must be sure of that. I have my suspicions that he did not go to work to-day. Now, sir, you must still be content to remain quiet, while I ride to London. I shall have no difficulty in obtaining the fastest horse from the stables near here."

"What is your object in going to London, Felix?" asked the old man, gaining confidence from Felix's firm tone.

"I am acquainted with a person employed in Alfred's office. I can obtain from him the information whether Alfred has been at his work to-day. Without that information, we might take a false step; with it (if it be as I suspect) I think I see part of my way. I shall be back sooner than you expect. I am a good rider, and I shall not spare my horse on such an errand."

Felix made good use of his time. It was barely half-past twelve o'clock as he ran upstairs to Old Wheels, flushed with the exercise. He cast a sharp glance around, and Old Wheels, shook his head, saying,

"No, Felix, she has not returned."

"I was right in my suspicions, sir. Alfred has not been at his office to-day. He asked for leave of absence on the plea that you required his assistance at home."

"Where can he have spent his time, then?"

"At Epsom. A great race called the City and Suburban was run to-day, and Alfred has been betting on that race, and has lost. Now, sir, can you bear a shock?"

Old Wheels waited in trembling suspense. "A greater one than has already fallen?" he murmured.

"As great, almost," replied Felix gravely; "but it is necessary that you should know. From what I have heard to-night, I suspect Alfred has been using money that does not belong to him."

Old Wheels covered his face with his hands, and sobbed quietly. Felix continued steadily,

"My acquaintance, who is employed in Messrs. Tickle an Flint's office, was desired this afternoon by one of his employers to tell Alfred to step into the private office immediately he arrived to-morrow morning, and my acquaintance told me that, from the tone in which the message was delivered, he believed, something serious had transpired. Can you see the connection between these things, and Lily's connection with them Alfred, having lost in the race money that did not belong to him, is afraid to show his face at the office, is afraid to come home.. A letter arrived for Lizzie from Epsom; that letter is written by him, and tells her probably of the danger he is in. Lizzie disappears without warning, without leaving word or message behind her.

Why? She is afraid of compromising Alfred. Where has Lizzie gone to? The letter she received from Alfred guided her steps without doubt. Do you agree with me that we have now accounted for Alfred's and Lizzie's absence?"

"Yes, but how do you connect Lily with these movements? Remember, that when I left Lily in the house, at half-past nine o'clock, neither she nor I had any suspicion of these occurrences. We thought Lizzie was at her house; we expected Alfred's arrival home every moment. Before that time Lizzie must have received the letter from Alfred, and must have gone to join him. Where?"

"There is the difficult point, sir. If we could ascertain where Lizzie has gone, and how, it would be a most important point. The only livery-stable near is the one from which I hired the horse to go to London." And here Felix stamped his foot, and exclaimed excitedly, "Fool that I was, not to have made inquiries there! We must go there at once, you and I. You may be of use. There will be no sleep for either of us to-night."

Before they left the house, they went up-stairs to the Podmores, to see how Polly was, and to leave a message with Mrs. Podmore, in the unlikely contingency of Lily returning in their absence. Polly was asleep, and mother and father were watching by her bedside. Snap licked Felix's hand as he stooped to pat the dog's head.

"Snap knows what a friend you are to us," said Mrs. Podmore in a whisper; "but you seem in trouble. Has Lily gone to bed?"

She was soon made acquainted with their trouble, and promised obedience to Felix's instructions.

"I don't suppose either Jim or me will close our eyes this night," she said; "but one of us will be sure to be on the watch. If Lily comes back while you are away, we'll keep her here until you return."

Felix hastily wrote a few lines to Lily, and intrusting them to Mrs. Podmore, kissed Pollypod tenderly.

"You have much to be grateful for," he said to Mrs. Podmore.

"Ah, sir, we have indeed!" she answered. "God bless you, and send you success and happiness!"

Felix and Old Wheels shook hands with Jim Podmore, and were soon at the livery-stables. There was only one man there, and they had some difficulty in arousing him. He referred to the books, and said that no lady had engaged anything from the yard that night.

"Two saddle-horses have been taken out since seven o'clock," said the man, with his eye on the page on which the record was made; "a brougham and pair for a customer" (mentioning his name, which satisfied Felix that it could not be for Lizzie), "and a cab."

"Who hired the cab?"

"Can't say. One of our men, Thompson by name, has gone with it. Hired by a gentleman; ten pounds left as deposit."

"How long was it hired for?"

"Can't say, sir; all night, most likely. Thompson is generally selected for the long jobs. You know Thompson, sir?"

"No, I do not."

"He is a tallish man, with his nose on one side, and a hare-lip: wears an old white overcoat. Now I think of it, I saw him and the cab waiting at the door of the True Blue public-house."

"Ah!" exclaimed Felix briskly. "At what time?"

"About half-past nine, I should say. I happened to be passing just then, and now I think of it, Thompson and me had a drink."

"Thank you," said Felix, with sudden animation. "Here's something to get another drink with. Is the True Blue a late house?"

"Got a one-o'clock license, sir. Thank you, sir."

"It's ten minutes to one," said Felix, looking at his watch. "Come along, Mr. Wheels; we shall get there before the house closes."

And he ran out of the livery-yard, followed by Old Wheels. Lounging about the bar of the True Blue they found the usual class of customers, who were being urged by the landlord to leave, as the time was come to close the house. The potman was busy with shutters and bolts; behind the bar was the landlady. She knew Old Wheels, and she nodded to him. Felix was a stranger to her,

but she cast a favourable eye upon him nevertheless.

"Can we have one minute's private conversation with you?" asked Felix. "And there is time, isn't there, for us to drink a glass or two of your best dry sherry?"

The landlady glanced at the clock, as a matter of form--it was five minutes to one--and said:

"Would you like to step into our little room, gentlemen; you'll find it more comfortable?--Now, turn out, my men, if you don't want to be put out!"

That it would certainly come to this with some of the customers of the True Blue was evident: one man was especially loth to go.

"Just another pint, missis," he urged, "just another pint, and then we'll toddle." In a tone of such entreaty that to one unacquainted with the usual proceedings of such topers, it might reasonably have been inferred that his very life depended upon that other pint, and that the most serious consequences to his health would ensue if it were refused. The landlady paid no attention to the entreaty, but devoted herself to Felix and Old Wheels, who had stepped into the parlour at her invitation. Seeing that she only set two glasses before them, Felix called for two more, and hoped that the landlady and her husband would join them. He completed the conquest by drinking prosperity to the True Blue, and then proceeded to business.

"We have come to consult you upon a matter of much importance, my dear madam," he said; "and we hope you will give us what assistance you can."

"Anything that is in my power, sir," replied the landlady, flattered by the courtesy of so well-looking a young man as Felix; "I am sure I shall be most happy."

"We do not wish it talked about," continued Felix; "so suppose we agree that it shall be a secret between us, taking your husband into our confidence, of course."

The landlady expressed her acquiescence, her curiosity growing.

"It will take the form of questions, I am afraid," observed Felix.

"You've only to ask, sir," said the amiable woman; "and I'll answer, if I can."

"There was a cab waiting at your door at about half-past nine o'clock to-night, was there not?"

"There have been three or four waiting, on and off."

"But there was one in particular, from the livery-stables near here, with the driver Thompson, a man with a crooked nose and a hare-lip. He came in here to drink with a mate from the yard."

"Yes, he did," was the ready reply. "There's no mistaking Thompson, once you set eyes upon him."

"Can you tell us who hired that cab?"

"I should say it was the gentleman who was about the house for an hour or more, and who was in this parlour for more than ten minutes talking with--with—" But her eyes lighted upon Old Wheels, who was listening with strained attention to every word that passed, and she hesitated.

"Talking with whom?" inquired Felix quickly. "With a gentleman?"

"No," with another hesitating look towards Old Wheels; "with a lady."

"A young lady?"

"Yes."

"Do not hesitate to answer, there's a good creature. You know who the lady is, evidently."

"Yes; but I would rather not say. If you like to mention who you think it is, I'll tell you, if you're right."

"Was it this gentleman's granddaughter?" asked Felix, hazarding the guess.

Old Wheels held his breath.

"Yes, it was," answered the landlady, reluctantly. "There! you shouldn't have forced it out of me! Look at the old gentleman!"

A deadly pallor had come over his face, and he could scarcely stand.

"You must not give way, sir," said Felix, with grave tenderness; "everything depends upon your keeping your strength. Bear in mind that this is what we have come to hear, and that we are approaching nearer and nearer to the unravelling of the plot. And remember, too, dear sir, that I have almost as great a stake in the discovery as you have yourself. There has been foul play, as

you suggested; but something assures me that all will come right, and that our dear girl will be restored to us is a few hours. But not if we're not strong. Remember--we are working together for Lily's safety."

His tone was so tender that tears came into the landlady's eyes.

"I will tell you all I know," she said, addressing herself to Felix. "The young lady came in here, and asked me if she could have the use of the parlour for a few minutes, undisturbed. She wanted to speak to the gentleman who came in the cab. They were in the parlour for ten minutes, then they went away together in the cab."

"Thank you, thank you, a thousand times. See, sir, how near we are coming; Now, this gentleman--who was he?"

"I am sure I don't know, sir; I never set eyes on him before to-night."

Felix thought of Alfred, and described his personal appearance. No, it wasn't him, said the landlady. Then Felix described Mr. Sheldrake, and she answered that it was the very man.

Felix drew a long breath; he was almost at the end of the inquiry. One other question remained to be asked. Did she know what direction the cab had taken? No, she didn't know; but she would call the potman in; he was outside all the time. The potman was called in, and being refreshed with a drink and a shilling, remembered, after much circumlocution, that he heard the gentleman tell Thompson to drive towards Epsom.

"Nearer and nearer," said Felix, grasping the old man's hand. "Now, potman, is there anything else you know. Another shilling, if you can remember anything else."

The potman scratched his head.

"There's the shilling," said Felix, in a hearty tone, giving the man the coin, "whether you can remember or not."

"You're a gentleman, sir," said the potman; "*I* don't remember anything else; but there's Dick Maclean, perhaps he can tell something."

The public-house was empty at this time, and the bar was cleared.

"Run out, Tom," said the landlady, excitedly, "and if you see him bring him in." The potman ran out at the back door. The landlady explained. "Dick has been drinking here all night, sir. You bring to my mind that I saw the gentleman who was here with the young lady give him some money."

They had not to wait a very long time for Dick Maclean. He was the man who had begged for more beer, and the potman found him outside entreating through the keyhole for "just another pint." He was fairly drunk, but upon the landlady promising him that other pint, and telling him that the gentleman wanted him to earn half-a-crown simply by answering a question or two, he pulled himself together, and endeavoured to earn it. The skilful manner in which Felix put these questions caused the landlady to ask admiringly if he was a lawyer. Felix stopped his questioning to answer, "No;" and the landlady said, To be sure! How could he be? He wasn't dried-up enough. When the cross-examination was over, they had learnt all. Of Mr. Sheldrake giving Dick Maclean a letter to take to Lily, and of the instruction that he was to give it to the young lady in secret, and to tell her, if he found any difficulty in delivering it, that it was a matter of life or death to some one whom she loved; of the young lady accompanying him to the True Blue to see Mr. Sheldrake; of their going into the public-house together; of their coming out together; of the young lady giving him a letter to deliver to Mr. Wheels, and giving him a sixpence to deliver it; of her getting into the cab, and of his going into the True Blue for just another pint before he went with the letter; of Mr. Sheldrake coming after him, and telling him that the young lady had altered her mind, and didn't want the letter delivered; of his getting a shilling for *that*; and that was all.

It was enough. It was as clear as day to Felix. The potman and Dick being sent out of the room, Felix said that what they wanted now was a light trap and a smart horse. Now thoroughly enthusiastic in the cause, the landlady said they had in their stables the lightest trap and the smartest trotting mare out of London.

"You're a kind creature," said Felix, shaking hands with her. "Will you trust us with it?"

That she would, and with a dozen of them, if she had them. The landlord assented.

"Now what shall I leave with you as security?" asked Felix. "Here are four five-pound notes, here is my watch and chain—"

The landlady rejected them enthusiastically. She only wanted two things as security--his name and his word. He gave them, and thanked her heartily again and again. While the smartest trotting mare out of London was being harnessed, Old Wheels looked at Felix, wistfully, earnestly, humbly. Felix understood him. He put his arm round the old man's shoulder, and said,

in a tone of infinite tenderness,

"Dear sir, I never loved Lily as I love her now. I never trusted her as I trust her now. Dear girl! Pure heart! When I lose my faith in her, may I lose my hope of a better life than this!"

His face lighted up as he uttered these words. The old man pressed him in his arms, and sobbed upon his shoulder. The landlady turned aside to have a quiet cry in the corner.

"You're a good young fellow," she said, in the midst of her indulgence, "and I'm glad you came to me."

Before five minutes had passed, they were in the lightest trap and behind the smartest trotting mare out of London, ready to start.

"Here!" cried the landlady. And running to the wheels, she handed up a great parcel of sandwiches and a bottle of brandy. "It's the right stuff," she said, between laughing and crying. "Our own particular!"

The next minute they were on the road to Epsom.

CHAPTER XLV.

HOW MR. SHELDRAKE PLAYS HIS GAME.

Mr. David Sheldrake was a cool calculating rogue, and was by no means of a sufficiently romantic or daring turn to plan and to carry out an abduction. If Lily had decided not to accompany him, he would, with an ill grace, have abided by her decision. The qualities of his mind were pretty evenly balanced, and he had no intention of placing himself in danger. What Lily did she did deliberately, and with her own free-will, and every move in the little game that he had played was testimony in his favour. Lily had come to him, had made it appear, by asking the landlady of the True Blue for the use of her parlour, that it was she who desired to confer privately with him, had smiled when she left the public house, and had voluntarily entered the cab which was conveying them along the Epsom road. He could prove that he had been a friend to her brother, and, according to the logic of figures, a heavy loser by him; he could prove that he had been on intimate terms with Lily, and that she had accepted favours from him. So far all was well. But, going a point farther, Mr. Sheldrake, carefully considering the position as the cab drove along, was puzzled. He had not definitely settled upon the next step. He had, in a vague manner, decided that to bring the brother and sister together--to make Lily clearly understand the desperate position in which Alfred was placed--and then to say to her, "And I am the only man that can save your brother"--would be a fine thing for him. Setting aside the dramatic effect of the situation (Mr. Sheldrake, having an eye for dramatic effect, had thought of that), it would undoubtedly place him in a good light. But then, on what terms would he consent to save her brother? It was at this point he paused, and said to himself that he must consider seriously what was the best thing he could do; and while he was considering he heard Lily's voice calling to him. He bade the driver stop, and he alighted and went to the cab-door.

"Have we much farther to go, Mr. Sheldrake?" she asked, in a weak imploring tone.

"No, not a great way."

"I thought we should have been in London before now; but the road is strange to me; I do not recognise it."

"It is the road to Epsom," he explained. "I told you, if you remember, that your brother could not come home."

"Yes; but I thought you meant he could not come from London; he went straight to his office from us this morning."

"No, he did not, Lily; he went to the Epsom races."

She uttered a sharp cry of pain.

"O, why could he not have confided in me? Why did he deceive us?"

"I supposed you knew," said Mr. Sheldrake gently; "I had no reason for supposing otherwise."

"I don't blame you, Mr. Sheldrake—"

"Thank you, Lily," he said. Kind words from her were really pleasant to him.

"But I am frightened of being on this road alone."

"Not alone; I am here to protect you."

Her tears fell fast.

"If I had known--if I had known!" she murmured, in great distress of mind. She had been thinking of Felix and her grandfather, and of their unhappiness at her absence. But there was some small comfort for her in the thought that she had written to them, and had explained as far as she dared.

"If you had known!" repeated Mr. Sheldrake gravely. "Do you mean that if you had known, you would not have come? Surely you cannot mean that, Lily! When I parted from your brother this afternoon, he was flying to hide himself from the danger which threatens him, and from which only we can save him. And of course I thought you knew where he was. If there has been deceit, it has not been on my part. And even at this stage, I cannot submit to be placed in a false light, or to be misjudged. I have endeavoured to make you acquainted with the unhappy position of affairs; in the state of mind in which I left your brother, I would not answer for it that he would not commit any rash act. But if you cannot trust me, you have but to say the word, and we will go back, and I will leave you within a dozen yards of your grandfather's door."

"No, no!" she cried. She was, indeed, almost helpless in this man's hands. "We will go on; I must see him and save him, if I can."

"You trust me, then," he said eagerly.

She was constrained to reply "Yes;" but when he took her hand, which was resting on the sash, and kissed it, she shivered as though she had been drawn into an act of disloyalty to Felix. Mr. Sheldrake had made up his mind by the time he had resumed his seat on the box: he would marry Lily--there was nothing else for it. "I'll sow my wild oats and settle down," he thought, as he lit a cigar; "a man must marry at some time or other, and it's almost time for me to be thinking of it. I couldn't do better; she's innocent and pretty, and--everything that's good; and she's not a girl that will impose on a man, like some of those who know too much." Then he fell a-thinking of the wives of his friends, and how superior Lily was in every way to any of them. "She'll do me credit," he thought. He was dimly conscious that Lily entertained a tender feeling for Felix; but that this would fade utterly away in the light of his own magnanimous offer he did not entertain a doubt. He mused upon the future in quite a different mood from that he was accustomed to; for the purifying influence of Lily's nature made itself felt even in his heart, deadened as it had been all his life to the higher virtues. And now they were nearing the end of their journey. In the distance could be seen the fires of the gipsy camps; the cold wind came sweeping over the downs. The best thing he could do, he thought, would be to stop at an inn; he knew of a quiet one, out of the town, where it was likely they would not be noticed; and he would leave Lily alone for a few minutes, and, on the pretence of going out to seek for Alfred, he would go to the Myrtle--the inn at which he had desired Mr. Musgrave to put up--and see if the old man was there. Then he would come back to Lily, and tell her they would not be able to see Alfred until the morning. There would be a little scene, perhaps, but he would be able to smooth matters over.

By the time he had matured this plan, the cab drove up to the door of the inn. It was not yet midnight, and Mr. Sheldrake had no difficulty in obtaining admission. As they entered, and walked upstairs into a private room which Mr. Sheldrake ordered, Lily looked about, expecting to see Alfred. Mr. Sheldrake, attentively observing her, knew the meaning of those searching glances, and, against his reason, was mortified by the reflection that *he* occupied no place in her thoughts.

"You had best take off your things, Lily," he said awkwardly, and, seeming not to notice the look of sudden distrust and surprise which came into her face at his words, proceeded, "It is chilly, but we will soon have a fire, and be comfortable."

Either his words, or the tone of familiarity in which they were spoken, came like a cold wind upon Lily's fevered senses. Felix seemed to stand before her, and to warn her against this man. But although, in the light of these new impressions, a veil seemed to be falling from before her sight, and although love for Felix, and the responsibilities it conveyed to her heart, gave her strength, the shock was too great and unexpected for her to find words to answer Mr. Sheldrake immediately.

"I will order some supper, Lily. Is there anything particular that you would like?"

She steadied herself, resting her hand upon the table.

"Where is Alfred?" she asked, in a voice that was firm, despite its tremulousness. "Where is Alfred?"

Mr. Sheldrake was discomposed by her unusual manner.

"Alfred is not here, Lily."

"Not here!" she echoed. "For what reason, then, have we stopped here?"

Mr. Sheldrake felt the difficulty of the situation, and, with an embarrassment which he strove

in vain not to express, proceeded to explain. But disconcerted by the steady gaze with which she regarded him, he stumbled over his words, and for once in his life his assurance failed him. Had he been at his ease, and had he spoken with his usual plausibility, he might still have been successful in deceiving her; but he had betrayed himself, and it came upon her like a flash of light that he had set a trap for her. She waited until he had finished speaking, and then said, with an utter disregard of his explanation,

"You asked me to come with you to see my brother. Bring him to me."

"That is what I intend, Lily," he said, biting his lips; "I will go and search for him. But you want rest and refreshment first."

She stopped his farther speech.

"I want neither. I am here to see my brother. Bring him to me."

Amazed and confounded by the resolution of her manner, he hesitated. He could not leave her in the strange mood that had come upon her; he must strive to leave more favourable impression behind him. But the words he wished to utter for the purpose of quieting and assuring her would not come to his lips. As he hesitated, Lily stepped quickly to the window, and throwing it open, looked out.

"What are you looking for?" he asked, stepping towards her.

A sudden cry, almost hysterical, escaped from her, and she turned swiftly and confronted him.

"I am looking for the cab," she said, her cheeks flushing, showing such distrust of him by the action of her hands that he shrugged his shoulders, and sat down at a little distance from her. He had quietly ordered the driver to take the cab to the Myrtle Inn, and put up there; but he knew that, even if the cab were still at the door, she could not see it, for the window of the room looked out upon the back of the inn. As Lily leaned out of the window, Mr. Sheldrake fancied he heard a voice without, but he set it down to the account of some toper going from the inn; in another moment, however, he did hear Lily's voice, but could not distinguish what she said. He started up with a jealous exclamation, and as he did so, Lily closed the window, and sank into a chair in a fit of hysterical weeping.

"Why can you not trust me?" he asked, bending over her tenderly. "You are over-wrought and over-excited. To whom were you speaking?"

She calmed herself by a great effort:

"The man said he could not see anything of the cab," she answered; "nor could I. It is gone."

"The driver has put up his horse, I suppose. It is a long drive, remember, and the horse must be tired."

A knock came at the door, and the landlady entered.

"Do you stop here to-night, sir?" she inquired.

"Yes," he said.

"No," said Lily firmly. "This gentleman does not stop here to-night."

A threatening look came into his eyes.

"Wait outside a minute," he said to the landlady. The landlady obeyed, and Mr. Sheldrake closed the door. "What is the meaning of this?" he demanded of Lily, in a husky voice, almost throwing off his disguise.

"Can you ask me? You have brought me here to see my brother on a matter of life or death. I cannot rest until I see him. Have you no pity for my anxiety? Do you know where Alfred is?"

"Yes," he was compelled to reply. "I will go and bring him to you. Will that satisfy you?"

"You know it will. But promise me one thing."

"You can't ask me anything, Lily, that I will not promise," he said, hailing this small token of confidence with gladness.

"Give me your sacred word of honour that you will not return here to-night unless my brother is with you."

He felt that he had no alternative; but the fear that she wished to escape from him was upon him. In the light of this fear she became more than ever precious in his eyes. Urged to the desperate declaration, he said,

"Lily, listen to me. You know that I love you--that I love you honourably."

"If you do," she interrupted bravely, but with her hand on her heart, "you cannot hesitate to give me the promise I ask."

"But you! What will you do?"

"I shall stop here in the hope of seeing my brother."

"I can depend on that? You *will* stop here to-night?"

"I will--by all that I hold dear!"

"And if I am unsuccessful in finding Alfred to-night, you will see me in the morning?"

"Yes."

"Well, then, I promise you," he said gaily: "I will show you that you can trust me thoroughly. Good-night, Lily."

He held her hand tenderly in his for a moment, and deemed it prudent to say no more.

"Little witch!" he murmured, as he walked away from the inn. "I was afraid she was going to turn upon me. But I have her safely now, I think!"

CHAPTER XLVI.

FATHER AND DAUGHTER.

Lily listened to the sound of Mr. Sheldrake's departing footsteps as he went down-stairs; heard him speak to some one in the bar, and heard the front door open and close upon him as he walked out into the night. Then, with a grateful "Thank God!" she called the landlady into the room, and whispered to her, and put money into her hand. The landlady said,

"Very well, miss; I'll watch for him."

Whoever it was she was set to watch, it was evidently no enemy to Lily; for in less than five minutes she was talking to the person at the back door, and telling him that the young lady was up-stairs alone. Lily was waiting for him at the top of the stairs. She drew him into the room with eager haste, and clasping him round the neck, cried again, "Thank God! I am safe now! You will not leave me, will you? Stop with me--for my grandfather's sake, for Lizzie's sake!" and, overcome by emotion, could say no more, and swooned in his arms. When consciousness returned to her, the landlady was standing by her side, and Mr. Musgrave was kneeling before her.

"There, there!" said the landlady soothingly; "I told you she had only fainted. Do you feel better, my dear?"

"Much better, thank you," replied Lily, vaguely. But looking down upon the kneeling form of Mr. Musgrave, remembrance of what had passed came to her; and she clung to him in a passion of tears, and besought him again and again not to desert her. At a sign from him the landlady quitted the room, saying,

"You will find me down-stairs if you want me."

"You are crying, Mr. Musgrave," said Lily, when they were alone. "I feel your tears on my hand."

"They are tears of joy and pain, my dear," he answered, rising from his knees. "Tell me now how you came here. When I saw you looking out of the window, I placed my finger on my lips, warning you to silence. It is as I suspected, is it not? Mr. Sheldrake brought you here?"

Briefly she told him of the means employed by Mr. Sheldrake to induce her to accompany him, and of what had passed between them on the road and at the inn. He listened attentively, and with varying shades of emotion; and when she ceased speaking, he told her to be comforted, that he would protect her, and that it was not Mr. Sheldrake she or Alfred had to fear.

"There *is* cause for fear, my dear," he said, "but not from him. When I return, I will tell you more—"

"You are not going?" she interrupted entreatingly, clinging to him more closely.

"I must; you shall know my errand when I come back, and you will be satisfied. Then I will not leave you again. I shall be absent for half an hour, my dear; and while I am away the landlady will sit with you."

"But if Mr. Sheldrake returns—"

"You say he has gone for Alfred. Lily, trust one who would give his life for you. I would, my dear! I would lay it down willingly at your feet, if it were necessary for your safety or your honour!" What inexplicable passion, inwardly borne but not expressed, was it that caused his limbs to tremble as he held her to him for a few brief moments? What impulse caused him to loose her from his embrace suddenly, and to stand aloof from her as if he were not worthy of the association?

"Mr. Sheldrake will not come back to-night. Be patient for half an hour, my dear, and trust me thoroughly. Let me hear you say you have confidence in my words."

His earnestness carried conviction with it; but his humble manner pained her.

"You would not deceive me, sir," she said. "I trust you thoroughly, and will wait patiently."

She raised her face to his, and with a grateful sob he was about to kiss her; but the same impulse restrained him.

"No," he murmured; "not until she knows all." And left the room without embracing her.

At the appointed time he returned. During the interval the landlady had lit the fire, and had drawn a couch to the hearth, upon which she persuaded Lily to rest herself.

"Ah, that's good," Mr. Musgrave said; "are you warm enough?" He arranged the rugs about her with a tenderness which surprised her, and then sat apart from her, with his head upon his hand.

"You have something on your mind, sir. Come and sit near me. Are you troubled about me?"

He did not answer her immediately; but with a clumsy movement of his hand he overturned the candlestick, putting out the light, almost purposely as it seemed.

"We do not need to light it, child," he said; "we can talk in the dark."

"Yes, sir, if you please," she answered, yet wondering somewhat; "but the room is not dark. I like the soft light of the fire; it brings rest to me. I shall be glad when day comes." She paused between each sentence, expecting him to speak; but he sat silent, watching the fitful shadows as they grew large and dwindled on the walls and ceiling "What are you thinking of, sir?"

"I am looking into the past," he replied presently, in sad and solemn tones.

"And you see—"

"A wasted life. A life that might have been useful and happy, and good in making others happy."

"Not yours, sir," she said pityingly--"not yours. Ah, sir, you speak as if your heart was troubled! Come closer to me, and let me comfort you, as you have comforted me."

"Not yet, child; I dare not. If, when you have heard what I have to say, you ask me to do that, I will fall at your feet and bless you! This wasted life that I see in the shadows that play about the room--may I tell you some passages in it?"

"It pains you to speak; it pains me to hear your sad voice—"

"Nay," he interrupted; "it relieves me. My heart will burst else; and I have waited for this so long, so long! You *will* listen in patience?"

"Yes, sir."

"So gradual are the changes that we do not notice them during the time--we scarcely know how they come about; until, after the lapse of many years, we look back and wonder at the contrast between them and now. This wasted life that I speak of, how does it look now in the eyes of the man who has misused it? He sees his youth as one, standing at the foot of a great hill where the shadows lie thick, might look up to the mount upon which the sun shines. That was before he was married, and when he was a young man. Reckless, uncontrolled, thirsting for the possession of things out of his reach, he did not stop to think or reason. He could not then have spoken of himself and of his desires as he speaks now, for he was arrogant, insolent, selfish, and inconsiderate to his heart's core. Bitter has been the fruit of these passions; but had he died a hundred deaths he could not have expiated the wrong he inflicted. And yet he did not awake to the consciousness of this until a few months since--until all the wrong was accomplished, and until he had sunk to a shameful depth--until a terrible retribution had ripened, to fall upon him for his deeds. No one was to blame but he. Life presented fair opportunities to him. He had youth, he had strength, he had a wife who loved him; but the curse that lies heavy upon thousands, that wrecks the happiness of life, poisons its sweetness, turns smiles into tears, joy into despair--the curse of drink was upon him. It brought a blight upon his wife's fond hopes, and broke her heart. He sees now in the shadows the picture of that time. He sees himself covered

with shame, flying from justice, saved from just punishment by one whom he has only lately learned to revere; he sees that man, the father of his wife, looking with aching heart at the prospect that lies before his child; he sees his wife, pale, dumb, heart-crushed, mourning the death of love and hope; he sees his two children, a boy and a girl, the girl almost a babe—"

He paused here, fighting with his grief. A long silence followed. Lily had raised herself upon the couch, and had followed his words with agonised interest. She could say nothing to comfort him; her emotion was too powerful for speech. In trembling suspense she waited for his next words. She felt that she was in some way connected with the story he was telling, but the light that shone upon her mind burned dimly as yet.

"So he left those who should have been dear to him, and never looked again upon the face of his wife. The time that followed--the long, long years during which he strove to forget the past--seem to him like a dream. With the curse of drink still upon him, he grew old before his time. He had taken another name, and nothing of his former life was known. Mention of it never passed his lips. How he lived, matters not now. It shames him to think of it. But after many years had passed, he awoke one day to a better consciousness of things. There came to lodge in the house in which he lived a bright and good girl, who obtained her living by dressmaking. When he first saw her, and heard her pretty voice singing in the room next to his, it seemed as if a vision of the past had fallen upon him. This girl and he became friends, and he grew to love her, and loves her now. Often, as he looked upon her, he thought that his daughter, if she was living--his daughter whom he had not seen since she was a babe--would be something like this bright girl. One night the man's employer came to him and made a strange offer. On the condition that he could persuade this girl to live with him as his daughter or his niece, a small house near London was to be taken, of which he was to be the tenant and ostensible master. While they were talking over this proposition, the girl came home; she had been to the theatre with her sweetheart; he accompanied her home, and the voices were heard in the adjoining room. The employer heard the young man's voice, and recognised it, and it seemed as if the recognition made him more desirous that the plan should be put into operation quickly. The old man that very night acquainted the girl with the proposition that had been made to him, and she consented to live with him. She told him the story of her life, and they sat up talking until late. Before she went to bed he asked her the name of her sweetheart. She told him. It was the name of his own son!"

He covered his face with his hands, unable to proceed. Lily rose from the sofa, and approached him tremblingly. She knelt at his feet, and said, in a voice that rose no higher than a whisper,

"Tell me his name, sir."

The name came through his sobs.

"Alfred."

"And his sweetheart's name is Lizzie, is it not?"

"Yes."

"And the story you have related to me is your own?"

"It is my own, miserable man that I am!"

The silence that followed was very brief, but to him it was like a long and terrible oblivion. Then upon the darkness in which his soul was wrapped broke a silver line of light, so inexpressively sweet, so exquisitely painful, that his heart almost ceased to beat.

"Father!"

Her arms were round his neck, but he fell on the ground at her feet, and cried humbly for forgiveness.

"Father, you have something more to tell me!"

"Yes, my dear child. You must be made acquainted with what has passed, so that you may be prepared. You will hear what I have to tell bravely, will you not, my child?"

"It is about Alfred!" she cried, in great agitation.

"It is; I know where he is. I have seen him. I went to him when I left you awhile ago."

She started to her feet, and looked about tremblingly for her mantle.

"I must go to him at once. Come! Why do we stop here?"

"Dear child," he said, taking her hand in his, and striving to calm her, "you must be guided by me. For his sake, we must keep away from him."

"But he is alone, and unhappy. What will he think if he knows that I am here? O, let us go to him, dear father! We should not be absent from him in his trouble."

"Lily, my child, you would not bring greater trouble upon him?"

"No, no!"

"You might, if you do not act as I tell you. A watch might be set upon your steps, and his safety depends upon his hiding-place being kept secret. For he *is* in hiding, my dear. Sit down, child, and be satisfied that for the present you are serving him best by remaining here. And do not be uneasy, my darling, that he is not being taken care of. He is not alone. Lizzie is with him."

"Lizzie with him!"

What strange wonders was this night bringing forth!

"He wrote to her, and although he did not tell her where she could find him, she lost not a moment, but came here at once, the dear brave girl! Alfred was at the races to-day, as you already know, and lost not only his own money, but money that did not belong to him. What this false man who brought you here to-night told you about him is true. Alfred is in great peril, and the despair that seized him when he realized the full sense of his danger made him desperate, and drove him almost mad. I came to Epsom to-day especially to keep an eye upon him, for I feared that something bad would occur. Last week Lizzie overheard a conversation between him and Mr. Sheldrake--it took place in our cottage, and she listened at the door. She had not the courage until last night to tell me what she had heard, and I dreaded the consequences, and saw them in a clearer light than she. I have gone through such an experience myself, and have tasted the bitter fruit. I determined to come to Epsom, knowing, alas! that it was too late to undo the evil he was bringing upon himself, but hoping against hope that by a lucky chance (the gambler's forlorn hope, my dear!) things would turn out well. They did not; and when the race was over, I saw Alfred steal away from the course, ruined and almost lost--I saw it in his face--and I followed him to prevent worse occurring. His false friend saw me, and for a purpose of his own set me to watch my own son, little dreaming of the stake I held in his unhappy fortunes. But Alfred discovered that I was watching him, and he escaped me. I was frightened to think to what his agony and remorse might drive him, and I wandered everywhere in search of him. For six hours, my dear, I hunted for him in vain. I was distracted. It was a dark cold night, and I was worn-out and wearied. At nearly eleven o'clock I was on the plains, near to some gipsy tents, about half a mile from here. I thought of Lizzie's misery at Alfred's absence, and I thought of you also, dear child. I did not know what it was best for me to do. Shall I return home? I asked of myself. And as I stood, uncertain and helpless, I heard a voice that was familiar to me. It was Lizzie's voice, my dear. She had been searching also, and with a woman's wit knew that it was useless to inquire at the inns or wander about the town in search of him. She guessed rightly where it was most likely he would try to find refuge. She went to every tent and every camping party on the plains, and made her way where I could not, and received answers and civil words where they were denied to me. At the gipsy tents, near which I had halted, she was told that a man with the horrors on him--don't tremble, child!--had come and wanted to camp with them; but they had turned him away, and would have naught to do with him. Lizzie described Alfred to them. Yes, they answered, it was some such sort of a man. She searched for him near those tents, and found him lying under a hedge in a state of delirium. Dear child, be calm! let us pray that he will get well, and that this great trouble may be tided over. It is not Mr. Sheldrake that he has to fear. But I haven't finished my story yet. Lizzie found him, and prevailed upon the gipsy women to give them shelter. She bribed them with money; she would have given them her blood if they had bargained for it, for his sake. Ah, my child! I begin to see the beauty of a woman's love, and how unworthy we are! One of the gipsy women made some cooling drink for him, and it was while these two were talking outside the tent that I heard Lizzie's voice. You may imagine our sad pleasure at thus discovering each other. I remained with them some little time, and came to this inn for food and drink for them, and as I approached the place I saw your face at the window. You know now the errand which took me from you for half an hour. It is arranged that Alfred shall remain with these people, if necessary; they will conceal him if they are paid for it, and one of the women has taken a great liking for Lizzie. The dear girl would win her way anywhere. I told Lizzie you were here. She sends her dearest love to you, and says that she will contrive to see you to-morrow. She told me to tell you also, that when Felix and your grandfather--God bless him for the care and love he has bestowed on my child!--And all of us absent, Felix will be sure, after the first shock of surprise, to guess where we all are, and that he will follow you to Epsom early in the morning, perhaps to-night. Felix, she says, knows more about Alfred than you are aware of. So, dear child, all that we can do is to wait until the morning, and to hope for the best. And now, before you lie down to rest, tell me if it is as I suspect and hope with you and Felix."

She hid her face on his shoulder, and told him all.

"God bless you both!" he said solemnly.

He insisted on her lying down, and he sat by her side and watched her. When, presently, she pretended to fall asleep, he knelt by the couch, and, with his face resting on her soft warm hand, prayed with humble heart.

CHAPTER XLVII.

FELIX CHECKMATES MR. DAVID SHELDRAKE.

Mr. David Sheldrake, calling at ten o'clock the next morning to see Lily, receives from the landlady a message that the young lady has passed a bad night, and cannot receive him until noon. Somewhat surprised, but compelled to acquiesce in the arrangement, he walks away from the inn, consoling himself with the thoughts that all girls are capricious, and that Lily, having seen how deep was the passion he entertained for her, and having made up her mind to accept him as her lover, was disposed to coquet with him a little. "The bewitching little jade!" he muses. "They like to hold on and off. But I'll soon bring her to the point." He has not been idle during the morning; he has been hunting after Mr. Musgrave, to give him information of Alfred's movements. But Mr. Musgrave has not made his appearance at the Myrtle Inn, and Mr. Sheldrake, although he has been about the neighbourhood making inquiries, has been unsuccessful in finding any trace of him or Alfred. Mr. Sheldrake has settled with himself that this dereliction of duty must not be overlooked. "The old man must go," he thinks: "Ivy Cottage has served its turn. It is getting rather warm there, and Old Muzzy is beginning to know too much." The reflection that Ivy Cottage is getting too warm is not entirely new; certain victims who had been fleeced by Mr. Sheldrake and his agents had been writing threatening letters to him and Con Staveley addressed to Ivy Cottage, and the secret of their connection had in some way leaked out. Now, Mr. Sheldrake does not desire a public exposure; such a thing would be annoying and expensive, perhaps dangerous. He knows well enough that many of his transactions will not bear the light, and that in some instances a boundary line within which roguery can safely trade had been overstepped. He thinks of this during the interval between ten and twelve o'clock, and resolves to go to the cottage that very evening, and destroy all the letters and papers it contains; they are the only evidence against him. At noon he presents himself again at the inn. The landlady informs him that the young lady is up, and will see him. She leads him to the parlour. "We shall be private here?" he says, before he enters. "O yes, sir," the landlady replies, and retires. He sees at a glance that Lily has passed a disturbed night, but she receives him with a singular mixture of composure and nervousness. When he tells her that he has not brought Alfred with him, she does not cry and make a scene, as he anticipated. She is very pale, and she listens, without interrupting him, to the reasons he gives for Alfred's absence.

"It looks as if I had broken faith with you, my dear Lily," he says confidently; "but the fact is, Alfred *must* keep out of the way until his accounts are squared. The detectives are on the look-out for him, but you and I will be able to pull him through. You see he has made a mess of it all round. He owes me money; he owes a person of the name of Con Staveley money. Of course what he owes me does not matter, but this Con Staveley is a hard nail, and insists on having his money down, or he'll prosecute. Even that wouldn't be so bad; but Alfred has done worse. He has taken money from his office--in plain terms, he has been embezzling the money of his employers--and they are determined not to let him escape. I heard it an hour ago, from the best authority--from one of the detectives, indeed, that I managed to square. So you see how the matter stands."

As yet Lily has not spoken a word, and he pauses here, expecting her to say something. She does not disappoint him.

"Will you tell me exactly, Mr. Sheldrake, how much money Alfred owes?"

"He owes me and Con Staveley about three hundred pounds. In a sort of way, I am friendly with Con Staveley. He is stopping in the town for the races, and hearing I was here, he came to see me. I thought I'd best set to work at once, and I got him to give me an account of the debt. Well, he puts confidence in me, and he not only gave me the figures, but the bills as well, with Alfred's name on them. Here they are." He takes some papers from his pocket, and shows them to her. "I told Con I would pay them."

"And you will?"

"You have but to say the word, and I'll make things straight for Alfred at his office, as well. Lily, do you remember the conversation we had when we came home from the theatre, when that young puppy" (her colour rose here) "interrupted us? I have a right to call him so, for I know what he is made of. Would he do for you what I would do, what I am ready to do this very day? I think not. Think! I am sure not." He strives to read her face, but she has turned from him, and her eyes are towards the ground. "Ah," he thinks, "she knows what is coming;" and says aloud, "The very first night I saw Alfred, I told him I would be his friend for his pretty sister's sake, and I have kept my word. He would have had to cave-in long ago if it hadn't been for me; but again and again, when he was going to the bad, you stepped in and saved him. He knew this all along. He knew that it was for your sake I helped him through his troubles. You sigh! You think he is in a worse trouble to-day than he has ever been before. Well, you are right. I warned him repeatedly; I told him twenty times to pull-up, but he wouldn't listen to me; and still I stuck to him like a man, for his pretty Lily's sake. I can save him now, and will, if you but say the word. To-morrow, this afternoon, in another hour, it may be too late. His fate hangs upon you, and you only. Say but the word, and I'll bring him to your arms again."

"What word?"

Although she is almost falling to the ground, and although she speaks in a whisper, as if the words were forced from her, he hears her.

"Say that you love me."

Bending forward it his eagerness, with his eyes fixed upon her drooping form, with his arms outstretched to receive her, he does not see that a door which communicates with an inner room is swiftly and softly opened. Emboldened by her silence, which he interprets favourably, he is approaching nearer to her exultantly, when he is put aside with a firm hand, and Old Wheels steps between him and her. His face turns white as he sees the old man, who regards him steadily.

"You were saying—" says Old Wheels gently.

Mr. Sheldrake bites his lips, and accepts the situation.

"That I love your granddaughter. I was about to ask her to be my wife."

Old Wheels, with his arms around Lily, kisses her, and strokes her hair fondly.

"My darling!" he murmurs. She hides her face on his breast. He directs his clear bright eyes to Mr. Sheldrake, whose own eyes shift and waver, and shrink, as falsehood shrinks in the light of truth. "I will answer for her, Mr. Sheldrake. She declines."

"What!" exclaims Mr. Sheldrake, a white fury gathering about his lips.

"It is true, nevertheless," says the old man.

"She shall answer with her own lips," cries Mr. Sheldrake, with a menacing gesture.

"She will never again open her lips to you. I speak for her."

"Old dotard! But she *shall* answer!"

The arm he raises to put the old man aside is seized by a stronger hand than his, and he is thrust back violently.

"O!" he sneers, as he recognises Felix. "Are there any more of you?"

"One other," replies Felix, with a smile. "You shall see him presently."

For a moment Mr. Sheldrake measures himself with Felix; the conclusion he arrives at in this hasty glance is not assuring. Felix stands before him as firm as a rock, and with a kindling light in his eyes, which warns him to be careful of himself. He heeds the warning, and says in as calm a voice as he can command,

"This is a plot, then!"

"If you please to call it so," is the answer. "Plot against plot, we will say. Yours has failed."

"We shall see."

"We shall."

Felix is supremely calm; Mr. Sheldrake's passion breaks against him as the sea breaks against a rook and recoils upon itself.

"And you came here, I suppose, to play the hero, and to trick that young lady with fine speeches. But if she knows what is good for her, she'll be wise in time."

"I hope she will. Lily!"

She does not answer in words, but creeps into his arms. Then Mr. Sheldrake shows his full meanness. "Take her!" he says, with a toss of the hand, as discarding a worthless thing. "She came with me from the old man's house last night. How many hours ago? Ah, thirteen! Take her. *I* have done with her!"

Felix laughs cheerily, and holds Lily closer to his breast.

"It was a lucky chance," he says, not addressing Mr. Sheldrake, "that caused us to put up at the Myrtle Inn; for going into the stable to look after my horse, I saw another horse which had been put up but a very short time before we arrived. I have driven that horse more than once, and I know the livery-stables to which it belonged. It was by another lucky chance that I inquired of the ostler at the Myrtle whether a man of the name of Thompson, a man with a crooked nose and a hare-lip, had driven that horse down. But it was by the luckiest chance of all that we found Thompson in bed at that very inn, and that we induced him, without much trouble, to tell all about the pleasant drive he had had, and where he had set his passengers down."

"You *have* been very lucky," sneers Mr. Sheldrake, "but all your luck will not avail you to save

Master Alfred from the hulks. It is my mission now to assist him to that desirable retreat for fools and thieves. I have you there, my lucky hero."

"I think not. You have not heard all our luck yet. A friend of mine, a detective--O yes, I have detective friends, as well as you!--has in his possession certain letters and documents concerning transactions in which the names of Sheldrake, Staveley, and half a dozen aliases assumed by each to serve his turn, suspiciously occur. I think the law is not inclined to treat with leniency the miserable tricksters whose knavery leads many poor creatures to ruin. Some public attention has been drawn to the class to which Mr. Sheldrake and Mr. Staveley belong, as you may have observed. The law hitherto has been comparatively powerless, because of the want of sufficiently direct evidence; the rascals are a cunning set. But I and my detective friend have in our possession documents by which we shall be able to prove distinct fraud; and as those who administer the law wait but for the opportunity to convict, you may depend that the punishment will not be light. Nay, we have not only documents; we have witnesses. Knowing what kind of man we had to deal with, knowing what kind of knavery we had to expose, we set traps, not yesterday, nor last week, but months ago, and the evidence we can bring forward will be sufficient. Temptation has proved too strong for you in one or two instances, and you have overstepped the mark, as we shall prove to you to your cost."

Inwardly disturbed as he is--for he does not know what proofs may be in Felix's hands, and whether Felix is speaking truth or gasconading--Mr. Sheldrake snaps his fingers scornfully.

"That for your evidence and witnesses!" he says. "You can do your best and your worst!"

But he begins to lose courage when Felix plays his next move.

"You asked me when I came in whether there were any more of us. I told you there was one more, and that you should see him presently."

Felix goes to the door which leads to the inner room, and opens it, and Mr. Musgrave comes forward. Then, for the first time, the consideration whether it will not be advisable to make terms, occurs to Mr. Sheldrake.

"You drunken old thief!" he exclaims, with an oath. "Are you in this plot?"

"And has been for some time," answers Felix, in a pleasant voice. "We will excuse any hard words you may use. We are in confidence, and what passes between us is, as the lawyers say, without prejudice. But you have not seen all the cards in our hands yet. I speak, you see, in a language you can understand. Shall I show you another trump-card that we hold?"

"Go on."

"I heard you say before I entered that you had seen Mr. Con Staveley this morning. That is not true. But it *is* true that my detective friend has seen him, and we have made terms (this is without prejudice, mind) with him. If we are compelled to make this case public, he appears against you. We hold him harmless, and he is satisfied to get out of a serious scrape without a scratch. In no one instance was he your partner in any of the transactions you have had with the young gentleman whom you tried to lead to ruin. We have this down in black and white. Do you think we have trumps enough to win the game?"

"I don't know. What stakes are we playing for?"

"Those bills and acceptances you hold with Alfred's name to them, and a full quittance from you to him for all money directly or indirectly advanced to him by you and Con Staveley. We know almost to a sovereign what they amount to. You have a list in your pocket. I also have a list from Con Staveley."

"What if I refuse?"

Felix smiles.

"Why, then, I suppose, we must be quixotic enough to pay to Mr. Sheldrake such of those bills as bear his name. Those bearing Mr. Staveley's name we should be able to settle with that gentleman direct. We should pay your bills under protest."

"*We* pay!" interrupted Mr. Sheldrake incredulously.

"Well, say instead that I pay. I am able, I assure you; and I assure you also that I am able to prove how many of the cheques bearing Mr. Sheldrake's name for which bills were given came back to Mr. Sheldrake through Mr. Staveley, and never passed through the bank. Here is a suspicion of fraud, which it might be worth while to prosecute. But we should not want it, I believe. We shall be able to keep Alfred's name out of the proceedings. The other cases we have against you are, in my detective friend's opinion, amply sufficient. And be sure of this"--and here Felix's voice grew stern--"that unless the terms I have stated are accepted by you, I will make the name of Sheldrake famous in criminal records, and will so gibbet you in public opinion that your very friends and acquaintances shall think it prudent to know you no more. Excuse me for using strong language; all that passes is without prejudice, and we are here in private conference."

His earnestness and determined manner carry conviction with them. Mr. Sheldrake does not hesitate.

"And if I give you those bills, and the quittance, as you desire—"

"We wash our hands of you."

"You will give me back those documents and letters--you dog, you!" with a dark look at Mr. Musgrave--"which you say you have?"

"We might be prevailed upon to do as much."

"On those terms I accept; I can have my revenge another way."

"Any other way you please. This is all I stipulate for."

"Can we arrange the business now?"

"At once. I will call my detective friend in."

The next half-hour is passed in the settlement of the affair, and Felix conducts himself in so calm and business-like a manner, as to intensify the bitterness with which Mr. Sheldrake regards him. Lily and her father and grandfather do not speak, but they worship Felix with their eyes; and now and then he turns and gives them an encouraging smile, which does not escape Mr. Sheldrake's notice. But he seems more eager than Felix to conclude the affair, having something in his mind of which he is burning to deliver himself.

"On your word and honour as a gentleman," he says, as he receives certain letters and papers from Felix, "these are all that you have?"

Felix, who has been carefully examining the bills, and who has been very particular in the wording of the paper which releases Alfred from liability, places the documents in his pocket carefully, and says,

"On my word and honour as a gentleman, these are all that we have. I cannot honestly put the same form of words to you; but I am satisfied that the bills tally with the list, and that the amount is correct. Here, then, our acquaintanceship ends. I wish you good-day."

"I am going," says Mr. Sheldrake, energetically buttoning his coat--"where to, do you think?"

"I haven't the slightest interest in knowing," Felix replies.

"You will alter your note when you hear I am going to Messrs. Tickle and Flint, Alfred's employers, to tell them where it is likely they will find the runaway clerk who has embezzled their money. You thought the game was over, did you? Here is an unexpected check for you."

Mr. Sheldrake, with a wicked smile, is hurrying from the room, when Felix, in his brightest manner, says with a pleasant laugh,

"I checkmate you. I have myself been to Messrs. Tickle and Flint, and have arranged with them. This is in strict confidence between you and me, as men of--well, we will say of honour. If you go, you will find that they have nothing to say against Alfred. But I should advise you to beware of Tickle and Flint; they are my lawyers in the little matter in which you were very nearly putting in an appearance in the dock. Shall I call 'checkmate' again, for the game is over?"

He turns his back upon Mr. Sheldrake, who takes his leave with no good feelings in his heart, you may be sure. Felix takes Lily's hand, and looks fondly into her eyes.

"This last piece of news is true, my darling. I have made myself responsible to the firm for Alfred's debt; and Messrs. Tickle and Flint have accepted fifty pounds on account. It was not an easy matter to persuade them; but I pleaded with them effectually, and it is a satisfaction to them to know that they will not be losers. Alfred, of course, will not be employed in the office again; but he is free, and let us thank God."

Her heart is too full for words; she can only press his hand to her trembling lips, and bid God bless him. He looks round with a happy smile.

"All selfishness, sir, believe me!" he says to Old Wheels. "I would not change my lot with that of the best man in England!"

* * * * * *

A scene of another description took place at the same time between two women, mother and daughter. Felix brought Martha Day from London, after his visit to Alfred's employers. Before he returned to the inn, to play the principal part in the scene just described, he took Martha to the tent in which Lizzie was nursing Alfred, and said,

"You will find your daughter in there. Keep with her until I come for you."

As Martha timidly entered the tent, Lizzie turned with a low cry, and threw her arms round her mother's neck.

"I sent a letter to you this morning, mother; but you could not have received it."

"I came home last night, my dear," Martha replied.

"Last night! How anxious you must have been! If I had thought you were coming back, I would have left word."

"I was almost distracted, Lizzie. Felix found me at the house this morning in a sad state, and told me all."

Lizzie moved to where Alfred was lying. A bed had been made up for him on the ground, and he was murmuring feverishly in his sleep. She knelt by his side, but could not make sense of the words that came from his lips. Names of horses and jockeys and prophets, with expressions of fondness for Lizzie and Lily, were strangely mingled together.

"He would have died, mother, if I had not come last night! I found him lying under a hedge in a strong fever. He has not recognised me yet. If he dies, my heart will break! You will help me to nurse him, mother?"

"Yes, dear child."

They gazed at each other wistfully. Lizzie's eyes were heavy and weary with watching. Filled as was Martha's heart with yearning love for her child, there was an expression of misery in her face. Lizzie saw it, and a sad smile played upon her lips.

"I want all your love, mother!"

"You have it, dear child!"

"And yet you are unhappy."

Martha did not reply; and after a pause Lizzie continued, in a low sweet voice:

"Mother, I am going to make you happy."

"Lizzie!"

"Lying there as Alfred is lying now--dying, perhaps--I may consider myself absolved from my promise. Ah, mother, you are not tender to him; you have not kissed him; you have no kind thoughts in your heart for him! Is it not so? You do not answer, and I love him so! Mother, kiss Alfred."

Martha leant towards the sleeping man; but fast-flowing tears came from her eyes, and she wrenched herself away from him, and said, in a choking voice,

"I cannot, child; I cannot!"

"Ah, mother, you wrong him," said Lizzie tenderly. "And me. You spoke some words to me last evening. They are in my mind now. Look at me, mother. Place your hand in mine."

Martha placed her hand in Lizzie's, and Lizzie's other hand stole forward, and imprisoned it. An eager light flashed into Martha's eyes as she looked down on the hand that lay uppermost.

"Lizzie! A wedding-ring!"

"We were married six months ago, mother. But Alfred made me promise solemnly to keep it secret until he gave me permission. He wanted to make his fortune first, poor dear! I have broken my promise; but I don't think he would blame me. Mother, will you kiss Alfred now? Will you kiss my husband?"

* * * * * *

It is so short a time since this last scene was acted, that there is but little more to tell. All those persons who have taken part in the story are living now. Alfred went through a very severe illness, but has almost recovered his strength. He is very humble; let us hope that the bitter experience he has undergone will make him a better man. His mind is filled with good resolves as he looks at Lizzie, who sits at his side with a baby at her breast.

Mr. David Sheldrake prospers. Will the law ever give him his proper position in society, and deprive him of the means of lawful wrong doing? Let us hope that it will--and soon.

The Reverend Emanuel Creamwell still reigns at Stapleton. The justices of the peace who are ruled by him, and who speak their sentences out of his mouth, pursue the crooked tenor of their way. Last week, a woman nearly eighty years of age, whose antecedents are good, was charged

before them with damaging a fence to the amount of one penny. The owner of the fence, a farmer, would not appear against her, and a policeman was the only witness. The woman is nearly stone-deaf, and could not hear a word of the evidence. She and her aged husband depended upon parish relief for support, and between them would have found it difficult, after their long battle of life, to muster sufficient money to pay for one day's food. The policeman said he charged the woman with the terrible offence, and that she denied it, and said she had merely broken a bit of dead wood with her foot. The woman being deaf, could not examine the witness. The magistrates pronounced the sentence, as dictated by the clergyman. She was found guilty, and was condemned to pay one penny for the damage done to the property of a man who was too merciful to prosecute; was fined fivepence in addition to the penny; and was required to pay the cost of the trial, amounting to thirteen shillings and sixpence. In default of these payments, she was condemned to prison for seven days. The old deaf woman was sent to prison. *And the clergyman, on the following Sabbath, preached God's love and mercy to his flock!* Will the Government ever recognise that it belongs imperatively to its duty to be careful that only capable[1] men--men with hearts as well as heads--shall sit on the magisterial benches to dispense justice? Let us hope this, also.

Footnote 1: In a disreputable gambling action which was tried at the Court of Queen's Bench in February, 1873, the Lord Chief-Justice of England, speaking of "the pernicious and fatal habit of gambling," declared "that the habit was one so demoralising and degrading that it would, like some foul leprosy, eat away the conscience, until a man comes to think that it is your duty to yourself to 'do your neighbour as your neighbour would do you!'" The defendant in this disreputable action was twenty-four years of age, and a magistrate! The case of the poor woman who was charged with committing a penny's worth of damage to a fence was tried before three magistrates, all of them clergymen. Are such men as these fit administrators of justice?

Pollypod's accident was not a very serious one; but it was discovered that she had hurt her knee, and she will never be able to walk without a limp. Sometimes when Jim Podmore looks at her as she limps along, it seems to him as if she is treading on his heart. Jim has obtained a situation in which he is enabled to earn a living by working ten hours a day. Quite hours enough to work for a decent living.

Felix and Lily are married. He is working bravely, modestly, cheerfully, and they are very happy. Old Wheels and he have many quaint conversations together, and Lily and Pollypod listen with delight to their discussions about this and that. They have but little of the world's wealth; but they are very rich notwithstanding.

THE END.

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