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Story of American Life, by Jr. Horatio Alger**

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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK TIMOTHY CRUMP'S WARD: A STORY OF AMERICAN
LIFE ***

**TIMOTHY CRUMP'S WARD:
A STORY OF AMERICAN LIFE.**

By Horatio Alger

1866.

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TIMOTHY CRUMP'S WARD.

CHAPTER I. INTRODUCES THE CRUMPS.

IT was drawing towards the close of the last day of the year. A few hours more, and 1836 would be no more.

It was a cold day. There was no snow on the ground, but it was frozen into stiff ridges, making it uncomfortable to walk upon. The sun had been out all day, but there was little heat or comfort in its bright, but frosty beams.

The winter is a hard season for the poor. It multiplies their necessities, while, in general, it limits their means and opportunities of earning. The winter of 1836-37 was far from being an exception to this rule. It was worse than usual, on account of the general stagnation of business.

In an humble tenement, located on what was then the outskirts of New York, though to-day a granite warehouse stands on the spot, lived Timothy Crump, an industrious cooper. His family consisted of a wife and one child, a boy of twelve, whose baptismal name was John, though invariably addressed, by his companions, as Jack.

There was another member of the household who would be highly offended if she were not introduced, in due form, to the reader. This was Miss Rachel Crump, maiden sister of Uncle Tim, as he was usually designated.

Miss Rachel was not much like her brother, for while the latter was a good-hearted, cheerful easy man, who

was inclined to view the world in its sunniest aspect. Rachel was cynical, and given to misanthropy. Poor Rachel, let us not be too hard upon thy infirmities. Could we lift the veil that hides the secrets of that virgin heart, it might be, perchance, that we should find a hidden cause, far back in the days when thy cheeks were rounder and thine eyes brighter, and thine aspect not quite so frosty. Ah, faithless Harry Fletcher! thou hadst some hand in that peevishness and repining which make Rachel Crump, and all about her, uncomfortable. Lured away by a prettier face, you left her to pass through life, unblessed by that love which every female heart craves, and for which no kindred love will compensate. It was your faithlessness that left her to walk, with repining spirit, the flinty path of the old maid.

Yes; it must be said—Rachel Crump was an old maid; not from choice, but hard necessity. And so, one by one, she closed up the avenues of her heart, and clothed herself with complaining, as with a garment. Being unblessed with earthly means, she had accepted the hearty invitation of her brother, and become an inmate of his family, where she paid her board by little services about the house, and obtained sufficient needle-work to replenish her wardrobe as often as there was occasion. Forty-five years had now rolled over her head, leaving clearer traces of their presence, doubtless, than if her spirit had been more cheerful; so that Rachel, whose strongly marked features never could have been handsome, was now undeniably homely.

Mrs. Crump, fortunately for her husband's peace, did not in the least resemble her sister-in-law. Her disposition was cheerful, and she had frequent occasion to remonstrate with her upon the dark view she took of life. Had her temper been different, it is very easy to see that she would have been continually quarrelling with Rachel; but, happily, she was one of those women with whom it is impossible to quarrel. With her broad mantle of charity, she was always seeking to cover up and extenuate the defects of her sister-in-law, though she could not help acknowledging their existence.

It had been a hard winter for the cooper. For a month he had been unable to obtain work of any kind, and for the two months previous he had worked scarcely more than half the time. Unfortunately for him, his expenses for a few years back had kept such even pace with his income, that he had no reserved fund to fall back upon in such a time as this. That was no fault of his. Both he and his wife had been economical enough, but there are a great many things included in family expenses—rent, fuel, provisions, food, clothing, and a long list of sundries, besides; and all these had cost money, of which desirable article Uncle Tim's trade furnished not a very large supply.

So it happened that, as tradesmen were slow to trust, they had been obliged to part with a sofa to defray the expenses of the month of December. This article was selected because it was best convertible into cash,—being wanted by a neighbor,—besides being about the only article of luxury, if it could be called such, in possession of the family. As such it had been hardly used, being reserved for state occasions; yet hardly had it left (sic) the the house, when Aunt Rachel began to show signs of extreme lowness of spirits, and bewailed its loss as a privation of a personal comfort.

"Life's full of disappointments," she groaned. "Our paths is continually beset by 'em. There's that sofa! It's so pleasant to have one in the house when a body's sick. But there, it's gone, and if I happen to get down, as most likely I shall, for I've got a bad feeling in my stummick this very minute, I shall have to go up-stairs, and most likely catch my death of cold, and that will be the end of me."

"Not so bad as that, I hope," said Mrs. Crump, cheerfully. "You know, when you was sick last, you didn't want to use the sofa—you said it didn't lay comfortable. Besides, I hope, before you are sick again we may be able to buy it back again."

Aunt Rachel shook her head despondingly.

"There ain't any use in hoping that," said she. "Timothy's got so much behindhand that he won't be able to get up again; I know he won't."

"But if he manages to get steady work soon, he will."

"No, he won't. I'm sure he won't. There won't be any work before spring, and most likely not then."

"You are too desponding, Aunt Rachel."

"Enough to make me so. If you had only taken my advice, we shouldn't have come to this."

"I don't know what advice you refer to, Rachel."

"No, I don't expect you do. You didn't pay no attention to it. That's the reason."

"But if you'll repeat it, perhaps we can profit by it yet," said Mrs. Crump, with imperturbable good humor.

"I told you you ought to be layin' up something ag'in a rainy day. But that's always the way. Folks think when times is good it's always a goin' to be so, but I knew better."

"I don't see how we could have been more economical," said Mrs. Crump, mildly.

"There's a hundred ways. Poor folks like us ought not to expect to have meat so often. It's frightful to think what the butcher's bill must have been the last six months."

Inconsistent Rachel! Only the day before she had made herself very uncomfortable because there was no meat for dinner, and said she couldn't live without it. Mrs. Crump might have reminded her of this, but the good woman was too kind to make the retort. She contented herself with saying that they must try to do better in future.

"That's always the way," muttered Rachel. "Shut the stable door, when the horse is stolen. Folks never learn from experience till it's too late to be of any use. I don't see what the world was made for, for my part. Everything goes topsy-turvy, and all sorts of ways except the right way. I sometimes think 'taint much use livin'."

"Oh, you'll feel better by and by, Rachel. Hark, there's Jack, isn't it?"

"Anybody might know by the noise who it is," pursued Rachel, in the same general tone that had marked her conversation hitherto. "He always comes *stomping* along as if he was paid for makin' a noise. Anybody ought to have a cast-iron head that lives anywhere in his hearing."

Her cheerful remarks were here broken in upon by the sudden entrance of Jack, who, in his eagerness, slammed the door behind him, unheeding his mother's quiet admonition not to make a noise.

"Look there!" said he, displaying a quarter of a dollar.

"How did you get it?" asked his mother.

"Holding horses," answered Jack.

"Here, take it, mother. I warrant you'll find a use for it."

"It comes in good time," said Mrs. Crump. "We're out of flour, and I had no money to buy any. Before you take off your boots, Jack, why can't you run over to the store, and get half a dozen pounds?"

"You see the Lord hasn't quite forgotten us," remarked his mother, as Jack started on his errand.

"What's a quarter of a dollar?" said Rachel, gloomily. "Will it carry us through the winter?"

"It will carry us through to-night, and perhaps Timothy will have work to-morrow. Hark, that's his step."

CHAPTER II. THE EVENTS OF AN EVENING.

AT this moment the outer door opened, and Timothy Crump entered, not with the quick elastic step of one who brings good tidings, but slowly and deliberately, with a quiet gravity of demeanor, in which his wife could read only too well that he had failed in his efforts to procure work.

His wife, reading all these things in his manner, had the delicacy to forbear intruding upon him questions to which she saw that he could give no satisfactory answers.

Not so Aunt Rachel.

"I needn't ask," she began, "whether you got work, Timothy. I knew beforehand you wouldn't. There ain't no use in tryin'. The times is awful dull, and, mark my words, they'll be wuss before they're better. We mayn't live to see 'em. I don't expect we shall. Folks can't live without money, and when that's gone we shall have to starve."

"Not so bad as that, Rachel," said the cooper, trying to look cheerful; "don't talk about starving till the time comes. Anyhow," glancing at the table on which was spread a good plain meal, "we needn't talk about starving till to-morrow, with that before us. Where's Jack?"

"Gone after some flour," replied his wife.

"On credit?" asked the cooper.

"No, he's got the money to pay for a few pounds," said Mrs. Crump, smiling, with an air of mystery.

"Where did it come from?" asked Timothy, who was puzzled, as his wife anticipated. "I didn't know you had any money in the house."

"No more we had, but he earned it himself, holding horses, this afternoon."

"Come, that's good," said the cooper, cheerfully, "We ain't so bad off as we might be, you see, Rachel."

The latter shook her head with the air of a martyr.

At this moment Jack returned, and the family sat down to supper.

"You haven't told us," said Mrs. Crump, seeing her husband's cheerfulness in a measure restored, "what Mr. Blodgett said about the chances for employment."

"Not much that was encouraging," answered Timothy. "He isn't at all sure how soon it will be best to commence work; perhaps not before spring."

"Didn't I tell you so?" commented Rachel, with sepulchral sadness.

Even Mr. Crump could not help looking sober.

"I suppose, Timothy, you haven't formed any plans," she said.

"No, I haven't had time. I must try to get something else to do."

"What, for instance?"

"Anything by which I can earn a little, I don't care if it's only sawing wood. We shall have to get along as economically as we can; cut our coat according to our cloth."

"Oh, you'll be able to earn something, and we can live *very* plain," said Mrs. Crump, affecting a cheerfulness greater than she felt.

"Pity you hadn't done it sooner," was the comforting suggestion of Rachel.

"Mustn't cry over spilt milk," said the cooper, good-humoredly. "Perhaps we might have lived a *leetle* more economically, but I don't think we've been extravagant."

"Besides, I can earn something, father," said Jack, hopefully. "You know I did this afternoon."

"So you can," said Mrs. Crump, brightly.

"There ain't horses to hold every day," said Rachel, apparently fearing that the family might become too cheerful, when, like herself, it was their duty to become profoundly gloomy.

"You're always trying' to discourage people," said Jack, discontentedly.

Rachel took instant umbrage at these words.

"I'm sure," said she; mournfully, "I don't want to make you unhappy. If you can find anything to be cheerful about when you're on the verge of starvation, I hope you'll enjoy yourselves, and not mind me. I'm a poor dependent creetur, and I feel to know I'm a burden."

"Now, Rachel, that's all foolishness," said Uncle Tim. "You don't feel anything of the kind."

"Perhaps others can tell how I feel, better than I can myself," answered his sister, knitting rapidly. "If it hadn't been for me, I know you'd have been able to lay up money, and have something to carry you through

the winter. It's hard to be a burden upon your relations, and bring a brother's family to poverty."

"Don't talk of being a burden, Rachel," said Mrs. Crump. "You've been a great help to me in many ways. That pair of stockings now you're knitting for Jack—that's a help, for I couldn't have got time for them myself."

"I don't expect," said Aunt Rachel, in the same sunny manner, "that I shall be able to do it long. From the pains I have in my hands sometimes, I expect I'm going to lose the use of 'em soon, and be as useless as old Mrs. Sprague, who for the last ten years of her life had to sit with her hands folded in her lap. But I wouldn't stay to be a burden. I'd go to the poor-house first, but perhaps," with the look of a martyr, "they wouldn't want me there, because I should be discouragin' 'em too much."

Poor Jack, who had so unwittingly raised this storm, winced under the words, which he knew were directed at him.

"Then why," said he, half in extenuation, "why don't you try to look pleasant and cheerful? Why won't you be jolly, as Tom Piper's aunt is?"

"I dare say I ain't pleasant," said Aunt Rachel, "as my own nephew tells me so. There is some folks that can be cheerful when their house is a burnin' down before their eyes, and I've heard of one young man that laughed at his aunt's funeral," directing a severe glance at Jack; "but I'm not one of that kind. I think, with the Scriptures, that there's a time to weep."

"Doesn't it say there's a time to laugh, also?" asked Mrs. Crump.

"When I see anything to laugh about, I'm ready to laugh," said Aunt Rachel; "but human nature ain't to be forced. I can't see anything to laugh at now, and perhaps you won't by and by."

It was evidently of no use to attempt a confutation of this, and the subject dropped.

The tea-things were cleared away by Mrs. Crump, who afterwards sat down to her sewing. Aunt Rachel continued to knit in grim silence, while Jack seated himself on a three-legged stool near his aunt, and began to whittle out a boat after a model lent him by Tom Piper, a young gentleman whose aunt has already been referred to.

The cooper took out his spectacles, wiped them carefully with his handkerchief, and as carefully adjusted them to his nose. He then took down from the mantel-piece one of the few books belonging to his library,—"Captain Cook's Travels,"—and began to read, for the tenth time it might be, the record of the gallant sailor's circumnavigations.

The plain little room presented a picture of peaceful tranquillity, but it proved to be only the calm which precedes a storm.

The storm in question, I regret to say, was brought about by the luckless Jack. As has been said, he was engaged in constructing a boat, the particular operation he was now intent upon being the excavation or hollowing out. Now three-legged stools are not the most secure seats in the world. That, I think, no one can doubt who has any practical acquaintance with them. Jack was working quite vigorously, the block from which the boat was to be fashioned being held firmly between his knees. His knife having got wedged in the wood, he made an unusual effort to draw it out, in which he lost his balance, and disturbed the equilibrium of his stool, which, with his load, tumbled over backwards. Now it very unfortunately happened that Aunt Rachel sat close behind, and the treacherous stool came down with considerable force upon her foot.

A piercing shriek was heard, and Aunt Rachel, lifting her foot, clung to it convulsively, while an expression of pain distorted her features.

At the sound, the cooper hastily removed his spectacles, and letting "Captain Cook" fall to the floor, started up in great dismay—Mrs. Crump likewise dropped her sewing, and jumped to her feet in alarm.

It did not take long to see how matters stood.

"Hurt ye much, Rachel?" inquired Timothy.

"It's about killed me," groaned the afflicted maiden. "Oh, I shall have to have my foot cut off, or be a cripple anyway." Then turning upon Jack, fiercely, "you careless, wicked, ungrateful boy, that I've been wearin' myself out knittin' for. I'm almost sure you did it a purpose. You won't be satisfied till you've got me out of the world, and then—then, perhaps—" here Rachel began to whimper, "perhaps you'll get Tom Piper's aunt to knit your stockings."

"I didn't mean to, Aunt Rachel," said Jack, penitently, eyeing his aunt, who was rocking to and fro in her chair. "Besides, I hurt myself like thunder," rubbing vigorously the lower part of the dorsal-region.

"Served you right," said his aunt, still clasping her foot.

"Sha'n't I get something for you to put on it?" asked Mrs. Crump of (sic) her-sister-in-law.

This Rachel steadily refused, and after a few more postures, (sic) indicating a great amount of anguish, limped out of the room, and ascended the stairs to her own apartment.

CHAPTER III. THE LANDLORD'S VISIT.

SOON after Rachel's departure Jack, also, was seized with a sleepy fit, and postponing the construction of his boat to a more favorable opportunity, took a candle and followed his aunt's example.

The cooper and his wife were now left alone.

"Now that Rachel and Jack have gone to bed, Mary," he commenced, hesitatingly, "I don't mind saying that I am a little troubled in mind about one thing."

"What's that?" asked Mrs. Crump, anxiously.

"It's just this, I don't anticipate being stinted for food. I know we shall get along some way; but there's another expense which I am afraid of."

"Is it the rent?" inquired his wife, apprehensively.

"That's it. The quarter's rent, twenty dollars, comes due to-morrow, and I've got less than a dollar to meet it."

"Won't Mr. Colman wait?"

"I'm afraid not. You know what sort of a man he is, Mary. There ain't much feeling about him. He cares more for money than anything else."

"Perhaps you are doing him injustice."

"I am afraid not. Did you never hear how he treated the Underhills?"

"How was it?"

"Underhill was laid up with a rheumatic fever for three months. The consequence was, that, when quarter-day came round, he was in about the same situation with ourselves,—a little worse even, for his wife was sick, also. But though Colman was aware of the circumstances, he had no pity; but turned them out without ceremony."

"Is it possible?" asked Mrs. Crump, uneasily.

"And there's no reason for his being more lenient with us. I can't but feel anxious about to-morrow, Mary."

At this moment, verifying an old adage which will perhaps occur to the reader, who should knock but Mr. Colman himself?

Both the cooper and his wife had an instinctive foreboding as to the meaning of his visit.

He came in, rubbing his hands in a social way, as was his custom. No one, to look at him, would have suspected the hardness of heart that lay veiled under his velvety softness of manner.

"Good evening, Mr. Crump," said he, affably, "I trust you and your worthy wife are in good health."

"That blessing, at least, is continued to us," said the cooper, gravely.

"And how comfortable you're looking too, eh! It makes an old bachelor, like me, feel lonesome when he contrasts his own solitary room with such a scene of comfort as this. You've got a comfortable home, and dog-cheap, too. All my other tenants are grumbling to think you don't have to pay any more for such superior accommodations. I've about made up my mind that I must ask you twenty-five dollars a quarter, hereafter."

All this was said very pleasantly, but the pill was none the less bitter.

"It seems to me, Mr. Colman," remarked the cooper soberly, "you have chosen rather a singular time for raising the rent."

"Why singular, my good sir?" inquired the landlord, urbanely.

"You know of course, that this is a time of general business depression; my own trade in particular has suffered greatly. For a month past, I have not been able to find any work."

Colman's face lost something of its graciousness.

"And I fear I sha'n't be able to pay my quarter's rent to-morrow."

"Indeed!" said the landlord coldly. "Perhaps you can make it up within two or three dollars?"

"I can't pay a dollar towards it," said the cooper. "It's the first time, in five years that I've lived here, that this thing has happened to me. I've always been prompt before."

"You should have economized as you found times growing harder," said Colman, harshly. "It is hardly honest to live in a house when you know you can't pay the rent."

"You sha'n't lose it Mr. Colman," said the cooper, earnestly. "No one ever yet lost anything by me. Only give me time, and I will pay you all."

The landlord shook his head.

"You ought to cut your coat according to your cloth," he responded. "Much as it will go against my feelings, under the circumstances I am compelled by a prudent regard to my own interests to warn you that, in case your rent is not ready to-morrow, I shall be obliged to trouble you to find another tenement; and furthermore, the rent of this will be raised five dollars a quarter."

"I can't pay it, Mr. Colman," said the cooper; "I may as well say that now; and it's no use my agreeing to pay more rent. I pay all I can afford now."

"Very well, you know the alternative. But it is a disagreeable subject. We won't talk of it now; I shall be round to-morrow morning. How's your excellent sister; as cheerful as ever?"

"Quite as much so as usual," answered the cooper, dryly.

"But there's one favor I should like to ask, if you will allow us to remain here a few days till I can look about me a little."

"I would with the greatest pleasure in the world," was the reply, "but there's another family very anxious to take the house, and they wish to come in immediately. Therefore I shall be obliged to ask you to move out to-morrow. In fact that is the very thing I came here this evening to speak about, as I thought you might not wish to pay the increased rent."

"We are much obliged to you," said the cooper, with a tinge of bitterness unusual to him. "If we are to be turned out of doors, it is pleasant to have a few hours' notice of it."

"Turned out of doors, my good friend! What disagreeable expressions you employ! It is merely a matter of business. I have an article to dispose of. There are two bidders; yourself and another person. The latter is willing to pay a larger sum. Of course I give him the preference. Don't you see how it is?"

"I believe I do," replied the cooper. "Of course, it's a regular proceeding; but you must excuse me if I think of it in another light, when I reflect that to-morrow at this time my family and myself may be without a shelter."

"My dear sir, positively you are looking on the dark side of things. It is actually sinful to distrust Providence as you seem to do. You're a little disappointed, that's all. Just take to-night to sleep on it, and I've no doubt you'll think better of it and of me. But positively I have stayed longer than I intended. Good night, my friends. I'll look in upon you in the morning. And by the by, as it is so near the time, allow me to wish you a Happy New Year."

The door closed upon the landlord, leaving behind two anxious hearts.

"It looks well in him to wish that," said the cooper, gloomily. "A great deal he is doing to make it so. I don't know how it seems to others, but for my part I never say them words to any one unless I really wish 'em well, and am willing to do something to make 'em so. I should feel as if I was a hypocrite if I acted anyways different."

Mary did not respond to this. In her own gentle heart she could not help feeling a silent repugnance, mingled, it may be, with a shade of contempt, for the man who had just left them. It was an uncomfortable feeling, and she strove to get rid of it.

"Is there any tenement vacant in this neighborhood?" she asked.

"Yes, there's the one at the corner, belonging to Mr. Harrison."

"It is a better one than this."

"Yes, but Harrison only asks the same that we have been paying. He is not so exorbitant as Colman."

"Couldn't we get that?"

"I am afraid, if he knew that we had failed to pay our rent here, he would object."

"But he knows you are honest, and that nothing but the hard times would have brought you to such a pass."

"It may be, Mary. At any rate you have lightened my heart a little. I feel as if there was some hope left."

"We ought always to feel so, Timothy. There was one thing that Mr. Colman said that didn't sound so well, coming from his lips; but it's true, for all that."

"What do you mean, Mary?"

"I mean that about not distrusting Providence. Many a time have I been comforted by reading the verse, 'Never have I seen the righteous forsaken, or his seed begging bread.' As long as we try to do what is right, Timothy, God will not suffer us to want."

"You are right, Mary. He is our ever-present help in time of need. Let us put away all anxious cares, fully confiding in his gracious promises."

They retired to rest thoughtfully, but not sadly.

The fire upon the hearth flickered, and died out at length. The last sands of the old year were running out, and the new morning ushered in its successor.

CHAPTER IV. THE NEW YEAR'S PRESENT.

"HAPPY New Year!" was Jack's salutation to Aunt Rachel, as, with an unhappy expression of countenance, she entered the sitting-room.

"Happy, indeed!" she repeated, dismally. "There's great chance of its being so, I should think. We don't any of us know what the year may bring forth. We may all be dead before the next New Year."

"If that's the case," said Jack, "we'll be jolly as long as it lasts."

"I don't know what you mean by such a vulgar word," said Aunt Rachel, disdainfully. "I've heard of drunkards and such kind of people being jolly; but, thank Providence, I haven't got to that yet."

"If that was the only way to be jolly," said Jack, stoutly, "then I'd be a drunkard; I wouldn't carry round such a long face as you do, Aunt Rachel, for any money."

"It's enough to make all of us have long faces, when you are brazen enough to own that you mean to be a drunkard."

"I didn't say any such thing," said Jack, indignantly.

"Perhaps I have ears," remarked Aunt Rachel, sententiously, "and perhaps I have not. It's a new thing for a nephew to tell his aunt that she lies. They didn't use to allow such things when I was young.—But the world's going to rack and ruin, and I shouldn't much wonder if the people are right that says it's comin' to an end."

Here Mrs. Crump happily interposed, by asking Jack to go round to the grocery, in the next street, and buy a pint of milk.

Jack took his cap and started, with alacrity, glad to leave the dismal presence of Aunt Rachel.

He had scarcely opened the door when he started back in surprise, exclaiming, "By hokey, if there isn't a basket on the steps!"

"A basket!" repeated Mrs. Crump, in surprise. "Can it be a New Year's present? Bring it in, Jack."

It was brought in immediately, and the cover being lifted there appeared a female child, of apparently a year old. All uttered exclamations of surprise, each in itself characteristic.

"What a dear, innocent little thing!" said Mrs. Crump, with true maternal instinct.

"Ain't it a pretty 'un?" said Jack, admiringly.

"Poor thing!" said the cooper, compassionately.

"It's a world of iniquity!" remarked Rachel, lifting up her eyes, dismally. "There isn't any one you can trust. I didn't think a brother of mine would have such a sin brought to his door."

"Good heavens, Rachel!" said the honest cooper, in amazement, "what can you mean?"

"It isn't for me to explain," said Rachel, shaking her head; "only it's strange that it should have been brought to *this* house, that's all I say."

"Perhaps it was meant for you, Aunt Rachel," said Jack, with thoughtless fun.

"Me!" exclaimed Rachel, rising to her feet, while her face betrayed the utmost horror at the suggestion. She fell back in her seat, and made a violent effort to faint.

"What have I said?" asked Jack, a little frightened at the effect of his words. "Aunt Rachel takes one up so."

"He didn't mean anything," said Mrs. Crump. "How could you suspect such a thing? But here's a letter. It looks as if there was something in it. Here, Timothy, it is directed to you."

Mr. Cooper opened the letter, and read as follows:—

"For reasons which it is unnecessary to state, the guardians of this child find it expedient to (sic) intrust it to others to be brought up. The good opinion which they have formed of you, has led them to select you for that charge. No further explanation is necessary, except that it is by no means their object to make this a service of charity. They therefore (sic) inclose a certificate of deposits on the Broadway Bank, of three hundred dollars, the same having been made in your name. Each year, while the child remains in your charge, the same sum will in like manner be placed to your credit at the same bank. It may be as well to state, farther, that all attempts to fathom whatever of mystery may attach to this affair, will prove useless."

This letter was read in silent amazement.

The certificate of deposits, which had fallen to the floor, was handed to Timothy by his wife.

Amazement was followed by a feeling of gratitude and relief.

"What could be more fortunate?" exclaimed Mrs. Crump. "Surely, Timothy, our faith has been rewarded."

"God has listened to our cry," said the cooper, devoutly; "and, in the hour of our need, He has remembered us."

"Isn't it prime?" said Jack, gleefully; "three hundred dollars! Ain't we rich, Aunt Rachel?"

"Like as not," observed Rachel, "the certificate isn't genuine. It doesn't look natural it should be. I've heard of counterfeits before. I shouldn't be surprised at all if Timothy got taken up for presenting it."

"I'll risk that," said Mr. Crump, who did not look very much depressed by this suggestion.

"Now you'll be able to pay the rent, Timothy," said Mrs. Crump, cheerfully.

"Yes; and it's the last quarter I shall pay to Mr. Colman, if I can help it."

"Why, where are you going?" inquired Jack.

"To the corner house belonging to Mr. Harrison, that is, if it is not already engaged. I think I will go and see about it at once. If Mr. Colman should come in while I am gone, tell him I will be back directly; I don't wish you to tell him of the change in our circumstances."

The cooper found Mr. Harrison at home.

"I called to inquire," commenced the cooper, "whether you had let that house of yours on the corner of the street."

"Not as yet," was the reply.

"What rent do you ask?"

"Twenty dollars a quarter," said Mr. Harrison; "that I consider reasonable."

"It is satisfactory to me," was the cooper's reply, "and, if you have no objections to me as a tenant, I will engage it at once."

"Far from having any objections, Mr. Crump," was the courteous reply, "I shall be glad to secure so good a tenant. Will you go over and look at the house?"

"Not now, sir; I am somewhat in haste. When can we move in?"

"To-day, if you like."

His errand satisfactorily accomplished, the cooper returned home. Meanwhile the landlord had called.

He was a little surprised to find that Mrs. Crump, instead of looking depressed, looked cheerful, rather than otherwise.

"I was not aware you had a child so young," he remarked, looking at the baby.

"It isn't mine," said Mrs. Crump, briefly.

"The child of a neighbor, I suppose," thought Colman.

Meanwhile he scrutinized closely, without appearing to do so, the furniture in the room.

At this point Mr. Crump opened the outer door.

"Good-morning," said Colman, affably. "A fine morning."

"Quite so," answered his tenant, shortly.

"I have called, Mr. Crump, to know if you are ready with your quarter's rent."

"I think I told you, last night, how I was situated. Of course I am sorry——"

"So am I," said the landlord, "for I may be obliged to have recourse to unpleasant measures."

"You mean that we must leave the house!"

"Of course, you cannot expect to remain in it if you are unable to pay the rent. Of course," added Colman, making an inventory with his eyes, of the furniture, "you will leave behind a sufficient amount of furniture to cover your bill——"

"Surely, you would not deprive us of our furniture!"

"Is there any hardship in requiring payment of honest debts?"

"There are cases of that description. However, I will not put you to that trouble. I am ready to pay you your

dues."

"You have the money?" said Colman, hastily.

"I have, and something over; as you will see by this document. Can you give me the two hundred and eighty dollars over?"

It would be difficult to picture the amazement of Colman. "Surely, you told me a different story last night," he said.

"Last night and this morning are different times. Then I could not pay you; now, luckily, I am able. If you cannot change this amount, and will accompany me to the bank, I will place the money in your hands."

"My dear sir, I am not at all in haste," said the landlord, with a return of his former affability. "Any time within a week will do. I hope, by the way, you will continue to occupy this house."

"As I have already engaged Mr. Harrison's house, at the corner of the street, I shall be unable to remain. Besides, I do not want to interfere with the family who are so desirous of moving in."

Mr. Colman was silenced. He regretted, too late, the hasty course which had lost him a good tenant. The family referred to had no existence; and, it may be remarked, the house remained vacant for several months, when he was glad to rent it at the old price.

CHAPTER V. A LUCKY RESCUE.

THE opportune arrival of the child inaugurated a season of comparative prosperity in the home of Timothy Crump. To persons accustomed to live in their frugal way, three hundred dollars seemed a fortune. Nor, as might have happened in some cases, did this unexpected windfall tempt the cooper or his wife to extravagances.

"Let us save something against a rainy day," said Mrs. Crump.

"We can, if I get work soon," answered her husband. "This little one will add but little to our expenses, and there is no reason why we should not save up at least half of it."

"There's no knowing when you will get work, Timothy," said Rachel, in her usual cheerful way; "it isn't well to crow before you're out of the woods."

"Very true, Rachel. It isn't your failing to look too much at the sunny side of the picture."

"I'm ready to look at it when I can see it anywhere," said his sister, in the same enlivening way.

"Don't you see it in the unexpected good fortune which came with this child?" asked Timothy.

"I've no doubt it seems bright enough, now," said Rachel, gloomily, "but a young child's a great deal of trouble."

"Do you speak from experience, Aunt Rachel?" inquired Jack, demurely.

"Yes;" said his aunt, slowly; "if all babies were as cross as you were when you were an infant, three hundred dollars wouldn't begin to pay for the trouble of having one round."

Mr. Crump and his wife laughed at this sally at Jack's expense, but the latter had his wits about him sufficiently to answer, "I've always heard, Aunt Rachel, that the crosser a child is the pleasanter he will grow up. What a very pleasant baby you must have been!"

"Jack!" said his mother, reprovngly; but his father, who looked upon it as a good joke, remarked, good-humoredly, "He's got you there, Rachel."

The latter, however, took it as a serious matter, and observed that, when she was young, children were not allowed to speak so to their elders. "But, I don't know as I can blame 'em much," she continued, wiping her eyes with the corner of her apron, "when their own parents encourage 'em in it."

Timothy was warned, by experience, that silence was his best (sic) defence. Since anything he might say would only be likely to make matters worse.

Aunt Rachel sank into a fit of deep despondency, and did not say another word till dinner time. She sat down to the table with a profound sigh, as if there was little in life worth living for. Notwithstanding this, it was observed that she had a good appetite. Indeed, Rachel seemed to thrive on her gloomy views of life and human nature. She was, it must be acknowledged, perfectly consistent in all her conduct, as far as this peculiarity was concerned. Whenever she took up a newspaper, she always looked first to the space appropriated to deaths, and next in order to the column of accidents, casualties, etc., and her spirits were visibly exhilarated when she encountered a familiar name in either list.

Mr. Crump continued to look out for work, but it was with a more cheerful spirit. He did not now feel as if the comfort of his family depended absolutely upon his immediate success. Used economically, the money he had by him would last nine months, and during that time it was impossible that he should not find something to do. It was this sense of security—of possessing something upon which he could fall back—that enabled him to keep up good heart. It is too generally the case that people are content to live as if they were sure of constantly retaining their health and never losing their employment. When a reverse does come they are at once plunged into discouragement, and feel that something must be done immediately. There is only one way to fend off such an embarrassment, and that is to resolve, whatever may be the amount of the income, to lay aside some part to serve as a reliance in time of trouble. A little economy—though it involves privation—will be well repaid by the feeling of security thus engendered.

Mr. Crump was not compelled to remain inactive as long as he feared. Not that his line of business revived,—that still remained depressed,—but another path was opened to him for a time.

Returning home late one evening, the cooper saw a man steal out from a doorway, and assault a gentleman

whose dress and general appearance indicated probable wealth. Seizing him by the throat, the villain effectually prevented him from calling the police, and was engaged in rifling his pockets when the cooper arrived at the scene. A sudden blow on the side of the head admonished the robber that he had more than one to deal with.

"Leave this man instantly," said the cooper, sternly, "or I will deliver you into the hands of the police."

The villain hesitated, but fear prevailed, and springing to his feet, he hastily made off under cover of the darkness.

"I hope you have received no injury," said Timothy, respectfully, turning towards the stranger he had rescued.

"No, my worthy friend, thanks to your timely assistance. The rascal nearly succeeded, however."

"I hope you have lost nothing, sir."

"Nothing, fortunately. You can form an idea of the value of your interference, when I say that I have fifteen hundred dollars with me, all of which I should undoubtedly have lost."

"I am glad," said the cooper, "that I was able to do you such essential service. It was by the merest chance that I came this way."

"Will you add to my indebtedness by accompanying me with that trusty club of yours? I have some little distance yet to go, and the amount of money I have with me makes me feel desirous of taking every possible precaution."

"Willingly," said the cooper.

"But I am forgetting," said the gentleman, "that you yourself will be obliged to return alone."

"I do not carry enough money to make me fear an attack," said Mr. Crump, laughing. "Money brings care I have always heard, and now I realize it."

"Yet most people are willing to take their chance of that," said the merchant.

"You are right, sir, nor can I call myself an exception. Still I should be satisfied with the certainty of constant employment."

"I hope you have that, at least."

"I have had until recently."

"Then, at present, you are unemployed?"

"Yes, sir."

"What is your business?"

"That of a cooper."

"I must see what I can do for you. Can you call at my office to-morrow, say at twelve o'clock?"

"I shall be glad to do so, sir."

"I believe I have a card with me. Yes, here is one. And this is my house. Thank you for your company, my good friend. I shall see you to-morrow."

They stood before a handsome dwelling-house, from whose windows, draped by heavy crimson curtains, a soft light proceeded. The cooper could hear the ringing of childish voices welcoming home their father, whose life, unknown to them, had been in such peril, and he could not but be grateful to Providence that he had been the means of frustrating the designs of the villain who would have robbed him, and perhaps done him farther injury.

He determined to say nothing to his wife of the night's adventure until after his meeting appointed for the next day. Then if any advantage accrued to him from it, he would tell the whole at once.

When he reached home, Mrs. Crump was sewing beside the fire. Aunt Rachel sat with her hands folded in her lap, with an air of martyr-like resignation to the woes of life.

"I've brought you home a paper, Aunt Rachel," said the cooper, cheerfully. "You may find something interesting in it."

"I sha'n't be able to read it this evening," said Rachel, mournfully. "My eyes have troubled me lately. I feel that it is more than probable that I am growing blind. But I trust I shall not live to be a burden to you. Your prospects are dark enough without that."

"Don't trouble yourself with any fears of that sort, Rachel," said the cooper, cheerily. "I think I know what will enable you to use your eyes as well as ever."

"What?" asked Rachel, with melancholy curiosity.

"A pair of spectacles," said her brother, incautiously.

"Spectacles!" retorted Rachel, indignantly. "It will be a good many years before I am old enough to wear spectacles. I didn't expect to be insulted by my own brother. But it's one of my trials."

"I didn't mean to hurt your feelings, Rachel," said the cooper, perplexed.

"Good night," said Rachel, rising and taking a small lamp from the table.

"Come, Rachel, don't go yet. It is early."

"After what you have said to me, Timothy, my self-respect will not permit me to stay."

Rachel swept out of the room with something more than her customary melancholy.

"I wish Rachel war'n't quite so contrary," said the cooper. "She turns upon a body so sudden, it's hard to know how to take her. How's the little girl, Mary?"

"She's been asleep ever since six o'clock."

"I hope you don't find her very much trouble. That all comes upon you, while we have the benefit of the money."

"I don't think of that, Timothy. She is a sweet child, and I love her almost as much as if she were my own."

As for Jack, he perfectly idolizes her."

"And how does Aunt Rachel look upon her?"

"I am afraid she will never be a favorite with Rachel."

"Rachel never took to children much. It isn't her way. Now, Mary, while you are sewing, I will read you the news."

CHAPTER VI. WHAT THE ENVELOPE CONTAINED.

THE card which had been handed to Timothy Crump contained the name of Thomas Merriam,—Wall Street. Punctually at twelve, the cooper reported himself at the counting-room, and received a cordial welcome from the merchant.

"I am glad to see you," he said. "I will come to business at once, as I am particularly engaged this morning. Is there any way in which I can serve you?"

"Not unless you can procure me a situation, sir."

"I think you told me you were a cooper."

"Yes sir."

"Does this yield you a good support?"

"In good times it pays me two dollars a day. Lately it has been depressed, and for a time paid me but a dollar and a half."

"When do you anticipate its revival?"

"That is uncertain. It may be some months first."

"And, in the mean time, you are willing to undertake some other employment?"

"Yes, sir. I have no objection to any honest employment."

Mr. Merriam reflected a moment.

"Just at present," he said, "I have nothing to offer except the post of porter. If that will suit you, you can enter upon the duties to-morrow."

"I shall be very glad to take it, sir. Anything is better than idleness."

"Your compensation shall be the same that you have been accustomed to earn by your trade,—two dollars a day."

"I only received that in the best times," said Timothy, conscientiously.

"Your services will be worth it. I will expect you, then, to-morrow morning at eight. You are married, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir. I am blessed with a good wife."

"I am glad of that. Stay a moment."

The merchant went to his desk, and presently returned with a scaled envelope.

"Give that to your wife," he said.

The interview terminated, and the cooper went home, quite elated by his success. His present engagement would enable him to bridge over the dull time, and save him from incurring debt, of which he had a just horror.

"Just in time," said Mrs. Crump. "We've got an apple-pudding to-day."

"You haven't forgotten what I like, Mary."

"There's no knowing how long you will be able to afford puddings," said Aunt Rachel. "To my mind it's extravagant to have meat and pudding both, when a month hence you may be in the poor-house."

"Then," said Jack, "I wouldn't eat any."

"Oh, if you grudge me the little I eat," said his aunt, in severe sorrow, "I will go without."

"Tut, Rachel, nobody grudges you anything here," said her brother, "and as to the poor-house, I've got some good news to tell you that will put that thought out of your heads."

"What is it?" asked Mrs. Crump, looking up brightly.

"I have found employment."

"Not at your trade?"

"No, but at something else, which will pay equally well, till trade revives."

Here he told the story of the chance by which he was enabled to serve Mr. Merriam, and of the engagement to which it had led.

"You are, indeed, fortunate," said Mrs. Crump. "Two dollars a day, and we've got nearly the whole of the money that came with this dear child. How rich we shall be!"

"Well, Rachel, where are your congratulations?" asked the cooper of his sister, who, in subdued sorrow, was eating her second slice of pudding.

"I don't see anything so very fortunate in being engaged as a porter," said Rachel, lugubriously. "I heard of a porter, once, who had a great box fall upon him and crush him; and another, who committed suicide."

The cooper laughed.

"So, Rachel, you conclude that one or the other is the inevitable lot of all who are engaged in this business."

"It is always well to be prepared for the worst," said Rachel, oracularly.

"But not to be always looking for it," said her brother.

"It'll come, whether you look for it or not," returned his sister, sententiously.

"Then, suppose we spend no thoughts upon it, since, according to your admission, it's sure to come either way."

Rachel pursued her knitting, in severe melancholy.

"Won't you have another piece of pudding, Timothy?" asked Mrs. Crump.

"I don't care if I do, Mary, it's so good," said the cooper, passing his plate. "Seems to me it's the best pudding you ever made."

"You've got a good appetite, that is all," said Mrs. Crump, modestly.

"By the way, Mary," said the cooper, with a sudden thought, "I quite forgot that I have something for you."

"For me?"

"Yes, from Mr. Merriam."

"But he don't know me," said Mrs. Crump, in surprise.

"At any rate, he asked me if I were married, and then handed me this envelope for you. I am not quite sure whether I ought to allow gentlemen to write letters to my wife."

Mrs. Crump opened the envelope with considerable curiosity, and uttered an exclamation of surprise, as a bank-note fluttered to the carpet.

"By gracious, mother," said Jack, springing to get it, "you're in luck. It's a hundred dollar bill."

"So it is, I declare," said Mrs. Crump, joyfully. "But, Timothy, it isn't mine. It belongs to you."

"No, Mary, it shall be yours. I'll put it in the Savings Bank for you."

"Merriam's a trump, and no mistake," said Jack. "By the way, father, when you see him again, won't you just insinuate that you have a son? Ain't we in luck, Aunt Rachel?"

"Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall," said Rachel.

"I never knew Aunt Rachel to be jolly but once," said Jack, under his breath; "and that was at a funeral."

CHAPTER VII. EIGHT YEARS. IDA'S PROGRESS.

EIGHT years slipped by, unmarked by any important event. The Crumps were still prosperous in an humble way. The cooper had been able to obtain work most of the time, and this, with the annual remittance for little Ida, had enabled the family not only to live in comfort, but even to save up one hundred and fifty dollars a year. They might even have saved more, living as frugally as they were accustomed to do, but there was one point upon which none of them would consent to be economical. The little Ida must have everything she wanted. Timothy brought home daily some little delicacy for her, which none of the rest thought of sharing. While Mrs. Crump, far enough from vanity, always dressed with exceeding plainness, Ida's attire was always rich and tasteful. She would sometimes ask, "Mother, why don't you buy yourself some of the pretty things you get for me?"

Mrs. Crump would answer, smiling, "Oh, I'm an old woman, Ida. Plain things are best for me."

"No, I'm sure you're not old, mother. You don't wear a cap."

But Mrs. Crump would always playfully evade the child's questions.

Had Ida been an ordinary child, all this petting would have had an injurious effect upon her mind. But, fortunately she had that rare simplicity, young as she was, which lifted her above the dangers to which many might have been subjected. Instead of being made vain, she only felt grateful for the many kindnesses bestowed upon her by her father and mother and brother Jack, as she was wont to call them. Indeed, it had not been thought best to let her know that such was not the relation in which they really stood to her.

There was one point, more important than dress, in which Ida profited by the indulgence of her friends.

"Wife," the cooper was wont to say, "Ida is a sacred charge in our hands. If we allow her to grow up ignorant, or afford her only ordinary advantages, we shall not fulfil our duty. We have the means, through Providence, to give her some of those advantages which she would enjoy if she remained in that sphere to which her parents, doubtless, belong. Let no unwise parsimony, on our part, withhold them from her."

"You are right, Timothy," said Mrs. Crump; "right, as you always are. Follow the dictates of your own heart, and fear not that I shall disapprove."

Accordingly Ida was, from the first, sent to a carefully-selected private school, where she had the advantage of good associates, and where her progress was astonishingly rapid.

She early displayed a remarkable taste for drawing. As soon as this was discovered, her foster parents took care that she should have abundant opportunity for cultivating it. A private master was secured, who gave her daily lessons, and boasted everywhere of his charming little pupil, whose progress, as he assured her friends, exceeded anything he had ever before known.

Nothing could exceed the cooper's gratification when, on his birthday, Ida presented him with a beautifully-drawn sketch of his wife's placid and benevolent face.

"When did you do it, Ida?" he asked, after earnest expressions of admiration.

"I did it in odd minutes," she said; "in the evening."

"But how could you do it without any one of us knowing what you were about?"

"I had a picture before me, and you thought I was copying it, but whenever I could do it without being noticed, I looked up at mother as she sat at her sewing, and so, after awhile, I made this picture."

"And a fine one it is," said Timothy, admiringly.

Mrs. Crump insisted that Ida had flattered her, but this the child would not admit. "I couldn't make it look as good as you, mother," she said. "I tried to, but somehow I couldn't succeed as well as I wanted to."

"You wouldn't have that difficulty with Aunt Rachel," said Jack, roguishly.

Ida, with difficulty, suppressed a laugh.

"I see," said Aunt Rachel, with severe resignation, "that you've taken to ridiculing your poor aunt again. But it's what I expect. I don't never expect any consideration in this house. I was born to be a martyr, and I expect I shall fulfil my destiny. If my own relations laugh at me, of course I can't expect anything better from other folks. But I sha'n't be long in the way. I've had a cough for some time past, and I expect I'm in a consumption."

"You make too much of a little thing, Rachel," said the cooper. "I don't think Jack meant anything."

"I'm sure, what I said was complimentary," said Jack.

Rachel shook her head incredulously.

"Yes it was. Ask Ida. Why won't you draw Aunt Rachel, Ida? I think she'd make a capital picture."

"So I will," said Ida, hesitatingly, "if she will let me."

"Now, Aunt Rachel, there's a chance for you," said Jack. "I advise you to improve it. When it's finished, it can be hung up at the Art Rooms, and who knows but you may secure a husband by it?"

"I wouldn't marry," said his aunt, firmly compressing her lips, "not if anybody'd go down on their knees to me."

"Now I am sure, Aunt Rachel, that's cruel in you."

"There ain't any man that I'd trust my happiness to."

"She hasn't any to trust," observed Jack, *sotto voce*.

"They're all deceivers," pursued Rachel, "the best of 'em. You can't believe what one of 'em says. It would be a great deal better if people never married at all."

"Then where would the world be a hundred years hence?" suggested her nephew.

"Come to an end, most likely," said Aunt Rachel; "and I don't know but that would be the best thing. It's growing more and more wicked every day."

It will be seen that no great change has come over Miss Rachel Crump during the years that have intervened. She takes the same disheartening view of human nature and the world's prospects, as ever. Nevertheless, her own hold upon the world seems as strong as ever. Her appetite continues remarkably good, and although she frequently expresses herself to the effect that there is little use in living, probably she would be as unwilling to leave the world as any one. I am not sure that she does not derive as much enjoyment from her melancholy as other people from their cheerfulness. Unfortunately, her peculiar way of enjoying herself is calculated to have rather a depressing influence upon the spirits of those with whom she comes in contact—always excepting Jack, who has a lively sense of the ludicrous, and never enjoys himself better than in bantering his aunt.

Ida is no less a favorite with Jack than with the other members of the household. Rough as he is sometimes, Jack is always gentle with Ida. When she was just learning to walk, and in her helplessness needed the constant care of others, he used, from choice, to relieve his mother of much of the task of amusing the child. He had never had a little sister, and the care of a child as young as Ida was a novelty to him. It was, perhaps, this very office of guardian to the child, assumed when she was so young, that made him feel ever after as if she was placed under his special protection.

And Ida was equally attached to Jack. She learned to look up to him for assistance in anything which she had at heart, and he never disappointed her. Whenever he could, he would accompany her to school, holding her by the hand; and fond as he was of rough play, nothing would induce him to leave her.

"How long have you been a nurse-maid?" asked a boy, older than himself, one day.

Jack's fingers itched to get hold of his derisive questioner, but he had a duty to perform, and contented himself with saying, "Just wait a few minutes, and I'll let you know."

"I dare say," was the reply. "I rather think I shall have to wait till both of us are gray before that time."

"You won't have to wait long before you are black and blue," retorted Jack.

"Don't mind what he says, Jack," whispered Ida, fearful lest he should leave her.

"Don't be afraid, Ida; I won't leave you; I guess he won't trouble us another day."

Meanwhile the boy, emboldened by Jack's passiveness, followed, with more abuse of the same sort. If he had been wiser, he would have seen a storm gathering in the flash of Jack's eye; but he mistook the cause of his forbearance.

The next day, as they were again going to school, Ida saw the same boy dodging round the corner, with his head bound up.

"What's the matter with him, Jack?" she asked.

"I licked him like blazes, that's all," said Jack, quietly.

"I guess he'll let us alone after this."

CHAPTER VIII. A STRANGE VISITOR.

IT was about eleven o'clock in the forenoon, Mrs. Crump was in the kitchen, busy in preparations for dinner, when a loud knock was heard at the door.

"Who can it be?" ejaculated Mrs. Crump. "Aunt Rachel, there's somebody at the door; won't you be kind enough to see who it is?"

"People have no business to call at such an hour in the morning," grumbled Aunt Rachel, as she laid down her knitting reluctantly, and rose from her seat. "Nobody seems to have any consideration for anybody else. But that's the way of the world."

Opening the outer door, she saw before her a tall woman, dressed in a gown of some dark stuff, with marked, and not altogether pleasant features.

"Are you the lady of the house?" inquired the visitor.

"There ain't any ladies in this house," said Rachel. "You've come to the wrong place. We have to work for a living here."

"The woman of the house, then. It doesn't make any difference about names. Are you the one I want to see?"

"No, I ain't," said Rachel, shortly.

"Will you lead me to your mistress, then?"

"I have none."

The visitor's eyes flashed, as if her temper was easily roused.

"I want to see Mrs. Crump," she said, impatiently. "Will you call her, or shall I go and announce myself?"

"Some folks are mighty impatient," muttered Rachel. "Stay here, and I'll call her to the door."

In a short time Mrs. Crump presented herself.

"Won't you come in?" she asked, pleasantly.

"I don't care if I do," was the reply. "I wish to speak to you on important business."

Mrs. Crump, whose interest was excited, led the way into the sitting-room.

"You have in your family," said the stranger, after seating herself, "a girl named Ida."

Mrs. Crump looked up suddenly and anxiously. Could it be that the secret of Ida's birth was to be revealed at last!

"Yes," she said.

"Who is not your child?"

"But *whom* I love as such; whom I have always taught to look upon me as a mother."

"I presume so. It is of her that I wish to speak to you."

"Do you know anything of her parentage?" inquired Mrs. Crump, eagerly.

"I was her nurse," said the other, quietly.

Mrs. Crump examined, anxiously, the hard features of the woman. It was a relief at least to know, though she could hardly have believed, that there was no tie of blood between her and Ida.

"Who were her parents?"

"I am not permitted to tell," was the reply.

Mrs. Crump looked disappointed.

"Surely," she said, with a sudden sinking of heart, "you have not come to take her away?"

"This letter will explain my object in visiting you," said the woman, drawing a sealed envelope from a bag which she carried on her arm.

The cooper's wife nervously broke open the letter, and read as follows:—

"MRS. CRUMP;

"Eight years ago last New Year's night, a child was left on your door-steps, with a note containing a request that you would care for it kindly as your own. Money was sent, at the same time, to defray the expenses of such care. The writer of this note is the mother of the child Ida. There is no need to say, here, why I sent the child away from me. You will easily understand that only the most imperative circumstances would have led me to such a step. Those circumstances still prevent me from reclaiming the child, and I am content, still, to leave Ida in your charge. Yet, there is one thing of which I am desirous. You will understand a mother's desire to see, face to face, the child who belongs, of right, to her. With this view, I have come to this neighborhood. I will not say where, for concealment is necessary to me. I send this note by a trustworthy attendant,—Mrs. Hardwick, my little Ida's nurse in her infancy,—who will conduct Ida to me, and return her again to you. Ida is not to know whom she is visiting. No doubt she believes you her mother, and it is well. Tell her only, that it is a lady who takes an interest in her, and that will satisfy her childish curiosity. I make this request as

"IDA'S MOTHER."

Mrs. Crump read this letter with mingled feelings. Pity for the writer; a vague curiosity in regard to the mysterious circumstances which had compelled her to resort to such a step; a half feeling of jealousy, that there should be one who had a claim to her dear adopted daughter superior to her own; and a strong feeling of relief at the assurance that Ida was not to be permanently removed,—all these feelings affected the cooper's wife.

"So you were Ida's nurse," she said, gently.

"Yes, ma'am," said the stranger. "I hope the dear child is well."

"Perfectly well. How much her mother must have suffered from the separation!"

"Indeed, you may say so, ma'am. It came near to break her heart."

"So it must," said sympathizing Mrs. Crump. "There is one thing I would like to ask," she continued, hesitating and reddening. "Don't answer it unless you please. Was—is Ida the child of shame?"

"She is not," answered the nurse.

Mrs. Crump looked relieved. It removed a thought from her mind which would now and then intrude, though it had never, for an instant, lessened her affection for the child.

At this point in the conversation, the cooper entered the house. He had just come home on an errand.

"It is my husband," said Mrs. Crump, turning to her visitor, by way of explanation. "Timothy, will you come in a moment?"

Mr. Crump regarded his wife's visitor with some surprise. His wife hastened to introduce her as Mrs. Hardwick, Ida's nurse, and handed to the astonished cooper the letter which the latter had brought with her.

He was not a rapid reader, and it took him some time to get through the letter. He laid it down on his knee, and looked thoughtful. The nurse regarded him with a slight uneasiness.

"This is, indeed, unexpected," he said, at last. "It is a new development in Ida's history. May I ask, Mrs. Hardwick, if you have any further proof. I want to be prudent with a child that I love as my own,—if you have any further proof that you are what you claim to be?"

"I judged that this letter would be sufficient," said the nurse; moving a little in her chair.

"True; but how can we be sure that the writer is Ida's mother?"

"The tone of the letter, sir. Would anybody else write like that?"

"Then you have read the letter?" said the cooper, quickly.

"It was read to me, before I set out."

"By——"

"By Ida's mother. I do not blame you for your caution," she continued. "You must be so interested in the happiness of the dear child of whom you have taken such (sic) excellent care, I don't mind telling you that I was the one who left her at your door eight years ago, and that I never left the neighborhood until I found that you had taken her in."

"And it was this, that enabled you to find the house, to-day."

"You forget," said the nurse, "that you were not then living in this house, but in another, some rods off, on the left-hand side of the street."

"You are right," said the cooper. "I am disposed to believe in the genuineness of your claim. You must pardon my testing you in such a manner, but I was not willing to yield up Ida, even for a little time, without feeling confident of the hands she was falling into."

"You are right," said the nurse. "I don't blame you in the least. I shall report it to Ida's mother, as a proof of your attachment to your child."

"When do you wish Ida to go with you?" asked Mrs. Crump.

"Can you let her go this afternoon?"

"Why," said Mrs. Crump, hesitating, "I should like to have a chance to wash out some clothes for her. I want her to appear as neat a possible, when she meets her mother."

The nurse hesitated.

"I do not wish to hurry you. If you will let me know when she will be ready, I will call for her."

"I think I can get her ready early to-morrow morning."

"That will answer excellently. I will call for her then."

The nurse rose, and gathered her shawl about her.

"Where are you going, Mrs. Hardwick?" asked the cooper's wife.

"To a hotel," was the reply.

"We cannot allow that," said Mrs. Crump, kindly. "It is a pity if we cannot accommodate Ida's old nurse for one night, or ten times as long, for that matter."

"My wife is quite right," said the cooper; "we must insist upon your stopping with us."

The nurse hesitated, and looked irresolute. It was plain she would have preferred to be elsewhere, but a remark which Mrs. Crump made, decided her to accept the invitation.

It was this. "You know, Mrs. Hardwick, if Ida is to go with you, she ought to have a little chance to get acquainted with you before you go."

"I will accept your kind invitation," she said; "but I am afraid I shall be in your way."

"Not in the least. It will be a pleasure to us to have you here. If you will excuse me now, I will go out and attend to my dinner, which I am afraid is getting behindhand."

Left to herself, the nurse behaved in a manner which might be regarded as singular. She rose from her seat, and approached the mirror. She took a full survey of herself as she stood there, and laughed a short, hard laugh.

Then she made a formal courtesy to her own reflection, saying, "How do you do, Mrs. Hardwick?"

"Did you speak?" asked the cooper, who was passing through the entry on his way out.

"No," said the nurse, a little awkwardly. "I believe I said something to myself. It's of no consequence."

"Somehow," thought the cooper, "I don't fancy the woman's looks, but I dare say I am prejudiced. We're all of us as God made us."

While Mrs. Crump was making preparations for the noon-day meal, she imparted to Rachel the astonishing information, which has already been detailed to the reader.

"I don't believe a word of it," said Rachel, resolutely.

"She's an imposter. I knew she was the very first moment I set eyes on her."

This remark was so characteristic of Rachel, that Mrs. Crump did not attach any special importance to it. Rachel, of course, had no grounds for the opinion she so confidently expressed. It was consistent, however, with her general estimate of human nature.

"What object could she have in inventing such a story?"

"What object? Hundreds of 'em," said Rachel, rather indefinitely. "Mark my words, if you let her carry off Ida, it'll be the last you'll ever see of her."

"Try to look on the bright side, Rachel. Nothing is more natural than that her mother should want to see her."

"Why couldn't she come herself?" muttered Rachel.

"The letter explains."

"I don't see that it does."

"It says that the same reasons exist for concealment as ever."

"And what are they, I should like to know? I don't like mysteries, for my part."

"We won't quarrel with them, at any rate, since they enable us to keep Ida with us."

Aunt Rachel shook her head, as if she were far from satisfied.

"I don't know," said Mrs. Crump, "but I ought to invite Mrs. Hardwick in here. I have left her alone in the front room."

"I don't want to see her," said Aunt Rachel. Then changing her mind, suddenly, "Yes, you may bring her in. I'll find out whether she is an imposter or not."

Mrs. Crump returned with the nurse. "Mrs. Hardwick," said she, "this is my sister, Miss Rachel Crump."

"I am glad to make your acquaintance, ma'am," said the nurse.

"Aunt Rachel, I will leave you to entertain Mrs. Hardwick," said Mrs. Crump. "I am obliged to be in the kitchen."

Rachel and the nurse eyed each other with mutual dislike.

"I hope you don't expect me to entertain you," said Rachel. "I never expect to entertain anybody again. This is a world of trial and tribulation, and I've had my share. So you've come after Ida, I hear?" with a sudden change of subject.

"At her mother's request," said the nurse.

"She wants to see her, then?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"I wonder she didn't think of it before," said Aunt Rachel, sharply. "She's good at waiting. She's waited eight years."

"There are circumstances that cannot be explained," commenced the nurse.

"No, I dare say not," said Rachel, dryly. "So you were her nurse?"

"Yes, ma'am," said Mrs. Hardwick, who evidently did not relish this cross-examination.

"Have you lived with the mother ever since?"

"No,—yes," stammered the nurse. "Some of the time," she added, recovering herself.

"Umph!" grunted Rachel, darting a sharp glance at her.

"Have you a husband living?" inquired Rachel, after a pause.

"Yes," said Mrs. Hardwick. "Have you?"

"I!" repeated Aunt Rachel, scornfully. "No, neither living nor dead. I'm thankful to say I never married. I've had trials enough without that. Does Ida's mother live in the city?"

"I can't tell you," said the nurse.

"Humph, I don't like mystery."

"It isn't my mystery," said the nurse. "If you have any objection to make against it, you must make it to Ida's mother."

The two were not likely to get along very amicably. Neither was gifted with the best of tempers, and perhaps it was as well that there should have been an interruption as there was.

CHAPTER IX. A JOURNEY.

"OH, mother," exclaimed Ida, bounding into the room, fresh from school.

She stopped short, in some confusion, on seeing a stranger.

"Is this my own dear child, over whose infancy I watched so tenderly?" exclaimed the nurse, rising, her harsh features wreathed into a smile.

"It is Ida," said Mrs. Crump.

Ida looked from one to the other in silent bewilderment.

"Ida," said Mrs. Crump, in a little embarrassment, "this is Mrs. Hardwick, who took care of you when you were an infant."

"But I thought you took care of me, mother," said Ida, in surprise.

"Very true," said Mrs. Crump, evasively, "but I was not able to have the care of you all the time. Didn't I ever mention Mrs. Hardwick to you?"

"No, mother."

"Although it is so long since I have seen her, I should have known her anywhere," said the nurse, applying a handkerchief to her eyes. "So pretty as she's grown up, too!"

Mrs. Crump, who, as has been said, was devotedly attached to Ida, glanced with pride at the beautiful child, who blushed at the compliment.

"Ida," said Mrs. Hardwick, "won't you come and kiss your old nurse?"

Ida looked at the hard face, which now wore a smile intended to express affection. Without knowing why, she felt an instinctive repugnance to her, notwithstanding her words of endearment.

She advanced timidly, with a reluctance which she was not wholly able to conceal, and passively submitted to a caress from the nurse.

There was a look in the eyes of the nurse, carefully guarded, yet not wholly concealed, which showed that she was quite aware of Ida's feeling towards her, and resented it. But whether or not she was playing a part, she did not betray this feeling openly, but pressed the unwilling child more closely to her bosom.

Ida breathed a sigh of relief when she was released, and walked quietly away, wondering what it was that made her dislike the woman so much.

"Is my nurse a good woman?" she asked, thoughtfully, when alone with Mrs. Crump, who was setting the table for dinner.

"A good woman! What makes you ask that?" queried her adopted mother, in surprise.

"I don't know," said Ida.

"I don't know anything to indicate that she is otherwise," said Mrs. Crump. "And, by the way, Ida, she is going to take you on a little excursion, to-morrow."

"She going to take me?" exclaimed Ida. "Why, where are we going?"

"On a little pleasure trip, and perhaps she may introduce you to a pleasant lady, who has already become interested in you, from what she has told her."

"What could she say of me?" inquired Ida, "she has not seen me since I was a baby."

"Why," said the cooper's wife a little puzzled, "she appears to have thought of you ever since, with a good deal of affection."

"Is it wicked," asked Ida, after a pause, "not to like those that like us?"

"What makes you ask?"

"Because, somehow or other, I don't like this Mrs. Hardwick at all, for all she was my old nurse, and I don't believe ever shall."

"Oh yes, you will," said Mrs. Crump, "when you find she is exerting herself to give you pleasure."

"Am I going to-morrow morning with Mrs. Hardwick?"

"Yes. She wanted you to go to-day, but your clothes were not in order."

"We shall come back at night, sha'n't we?"

"I presume so."

"I hope we shall," said Ida, decidedly, "and that she won't want me to go with her again."

"Perhaps you will think differently when it is over, and you find you have enjoyed yourself better than you anticipated."

Mrs. Crump exerted herself to fit Ida up as neatly as possible, and when at length she was got ready, she thought to herself, with sudden fear, "Perhaps her mother won't be willing to part with her again."

When Ida was ready to start, there came over all a little shadow of depression, as if the child were to be separated from them for a year, and not for a day only. Perhaps this was only natural, since even this latter term, however brief, was longer than they had been parted from her since, an infant, she was left at their door.

The nurse expressly desired that none of the family should accompany her, as she declared it highly important that the whereabouts of Ida's mother should not be known at once. "Of course," she said, "after Ida returns, she can tell you what she pleases. Then it will be of no consequence, for her mother will be gone. She does not live in this neighborhood; she has only come here to have an interview with Ida."

"Shall you bring her back to-night?" asked Mrs. Crump.

"I may keep her till to-morrow," said the nurse. "After eight years' absence, that will seem short enough."

To this, Mrs. Crump agreed, but thought that it would seem long to her, she had been so accustomed to have Ida present at meals.

The nurse walked as far as Broadway, holding Ida by the hand.

"Where are we going?" asked the child, timidly. "Are we going to walk all the way?"

"No," said the nurse, "we shall ride. There is an omnibus coming now. We will get into it."

She beckoned to the driver who stopped his horse. Ida and her companion got in.

They got out at the Jersey City ferry.

"Did you ever ride in a steamboat?" asked Mrs. Hardwick, in a tone intended to be gracious.

"Once or twice," said Ida. "I went with brother Jack once, over to Hoboken. Are we going there, now?"

"No, we are going over to the city, you can see over the water."

"What is it? Is it Brooklyn?"

"No, it is Jersey City."

"Oh, that will be pleasant," said Ida, forgetting, in her childish love of novelty, the repugnance with which the nurse had inspired her.

"Yes, and that is not all; we are going still further," said the nurse.

"Are we going further?" asked Ida, her eyes sparkling. "Where are we going?"

"To a town on the line of the railroad."

"And shall we ride in the cars?" asked the child, with animation.

"Yes, didn't you ever ride in the cars before?"

"No, never."

"I think you will like it."

"Oh, I know I shall. How fast do the cars go?"

"Oh, a good many miles an hour,—maybe thirty."

"And how long will it take us to go to the place you are going to carry me to!"

"I don't know exactly,—perhaps two hours."

"Two whole hours in the cars!" exclaimed Ida. "How much I shall have to tell father and Jack when I get back."

"So you will," said Mrs. Hardwick, with an unaccountable smile, "when you get back."

There was something peculiar in her tone as she pronounced these last words, but Ida did not notice it.

So Ida, despite her company, actually enjoyed, in her bright anticipation, a keen sense of pleasure.

"Are we most there?" she asked, after riding about two hours.

"It won't be long," said the nurse.

"We must have come ever so many miles," said Ida.

An hour passed. She amused herself by gazing out of the car windows at the towns which seemed to flit by. At length, both Ida and her nurse became hungry.

The nurse beckoned to her side a boy who was going through the cars selling apples and seed-cakes, and inquired their price.

"The apples are two cents apiece, ma'am, and the cakes a cent apiece."

Ida, who had been looking out of the window, turned suddenly round, and exclaimed, in great astonishment; "Why, William Fitts, is that you?"

"Why, Ida, where did you come from?" asked the boy, his surprise equalling her own.

The nurse bit her lips in vexation at this unexpected recognition.

"I'm making a little journey with her," indicating Mrs. Hardwick.

"So you're going to Philadelphia," said the boy.

"To Philadelphia!" said Ida, in surprise. "Not that I know of."

"Why, you're most there now."

"Are we, Mrs. Hardwick?" asked Ida, looking in her companion's face.

"It isn't far from there where we're going," said the nurse, shortly. "Boy, I'll take two of your apples and four seed-cakes. And now you'd better go along, for there's somebody by the stove that looks as if he wanted to buy of you."

William looked back as if he would like to question Ida farther, but her companion looked forbidding, and he passed on reluctantly.

"Who is that boy?" asked the nurse, abruptly.

"His name is William Fitts."

"Where did you get acquainted with him?"

"He went to school with Jack, so I used to see him sometimes."

"With Jack! Who's Jack?"

"What! Don't you know Jack, brother Jack?" asked Ida, in childish surprise.

"O yes," replied the nurse, recollecting herself; "I didn't think of him."

"He's a first-rate boy, William is," said Ida, who was disposed to be communicative. "He's good to his mother. You see his mother is sick most of the time, and can't do much; and he's got a little sister, she ain't more than four or five years old—and William supports them by selling things. He's only sixteen; isn't he a smart boy?"

"Yes;" said the nurse, mechanically.

"Some time," continued Ida, "I hope I shall be able to earn something for father and mother, so they won't be obliged to work so hard."

"What could you do?" asked the nurse, curiously.

"I don't know as I could do much," said Ida, modestly; "but when I have practised more, perhaps I could draw pictures that people would buy."

"So you know how to draw?"

"Yes, I've been taking lessons for over a year."

"And how do you like it?"

"Oh, ever so much! I like it a good deal better than music."

"Do you know anything of that?"

"Yes, I can play a few easy pieces."

Mrs. Hardwick looked surprised, and regarded her young charge with curiosity.

"Have you got any of your drawings with you?" she asked.

"No, I didn't bring any."

"I wish you had; the lady we are going to see would have liked to see some of them."

"Are we going to see a lady?"

"Yes, didn't your mother tell you?"

"Yes, I believe she said something about a lady that was interested in me."

"That's the one."

"Where does she live? When shall we get there?"

"We shall get there before very long."

"And shall we come back to New York to-night?"

"No, it wouldn't leave us any time to stay. Besides, I feel tired and want to rest; don't you?"

"I do feel a little tired," acknowledged Ida.

"Philadelphia!" announced the conductor, opening the car-door.

"We get out, here," said the nurse. "Keep close to me, or you may get lost. Perhaps you had better take hold of my hand."

"When are you coming back, Ida?" asked William Fitts, coming up to her with his basket on his arm.

"Mrs. Hardwick says we sha'n't go back till to-morrow."

"Come, Ida," said the nurse, sharply. "We must hurry along."

"Good-by, William," said Ida. "If you see Jack, just tell him you saw me."

"Yes, I will," was the reply.

"I wonder who that woman is with Ida," thought the boy. "I don't like her looks much. I wonder if she's any relation of Mr. Crump. She looks about as pleasant as Aunt Rachel."

The last-mentioned lady would hardly have felt complimented at the comparison, or the manner in which it was made.

Ida looked about her with curiosity. There was a novelty in being in a new place, since, as far back as she could remember, she had never left New York, except for a brief excursion to Hoboken; and one Fourth of July was made memorable in her recollection, by a trip to Staten Island, which she had taken with Jack, and enjoyed exceedingly.

"Is this Philadelphia?" she inquired.

"Yes," said her companion, shortly.

"How far is it from New York?"

"I don't know; a hundred miles, more or less."

"A hundred miles!" repeated Ida, to whom this seemed an immense distance. "Am I a hundred miles from father and mother, and Jack, and—and Aunt Rachel?"

The last name was mentioned last, and rather as an after-thought, if Ida felt it her duty to include the not very amiable spinster, who had never erred in the way of indulgence.

"Why, yes, of course you are," said Mrs. Hardwick, in a practical, matter-of-fact tone. "Here, cross the street here. Take care or you'll get run over. Now turn down here."

They had now entered a narrow and dirty street, with unsightly houses on either side.

"This ain't a very nice looking street," said Ida, looking about her.

"Why isn't it?" demanded the nurse, looking displeased.

"Why, it's narrow, and the houses don't look nice."

"What do you think of that house, there?" asked Mrs. Hardwick, pointing out a tall, brick tenement house.

"I shouldn't like to live there," said Ida, after a brief survey.

"You shouldn't! You don't like it so well as the house you live in in New York?"

"No, not half so well."

The nurse smiled.

"Wouldn't you like to go up and look at the house?" she asked.

"Go up and look at it!" repeated Ida, in surprise.

"Yes, I mean to go in."

"Why, what should we do that for?"

"You see there are some poor families living there that I go to see sometimes," said Mrs. Hardwick, who appeared to be amused at something. "You know it is our duty to visit the poor."

"Yes, that's what mother says."

"There's a poor man living in the third story that I've made a good many clothes for, first and last," said the nurse, in the same peculiar tone.

"He must be very much obliged to you," said Ida, thinking that Mrs. Hardwick was a better woman than she had supposed.

"We're going up to see him, now," said the nurse. "Just take care of that hole in the stairs. Here we are."

Somewhat to Ida's surprise, her companion opened the door without the ceremony of knocking, and revealed a poor untidy room, in which a coarse, unshaven man, was sitting in his shirt-sleeves, smoking a pipe.

"Hallo!" exclaimed this individual, jumping up suddenly. "So you've got along, old woman! Is that the gal?"

Ida stared from one to the other, in unaffected amazement.

CHAPTER X. UNEXPECTED QUARTERS.

THE appearance of the man whom Mrs. Hardwick addressed so familiarly was more picturesque than pleasing. He had a large, broad face, which, not having been shaved for a week, looked like a wilderness of stubble. His nose indicated habitual indulgence in alcoholic beverages. His eyes, likewise, were bloodshot, and his skin looked coarse and blotched; his coat was thrown aside, displaying a shirt which bore evidence of having been useful in its day and generation. The same remark may apply to his nether integuments, which were ventilated at each knee, indicating a most praiseworthy regard to the laws of health. He was sitting in a chair pitched back against the wall, with his feet resting on another, and a short Dutch pipe in his mouth, from which volumes of smoke were pouring.

Ida thought she had never seen before so disgusting a man. She continued to gaze at him, half in astonishment, half in terror, till the object of her attention exclaimed,—

“Well, little girl, what you're looking at? Hain't you never seen a gentleman before?”

Ida clung the closer to her companion, who, she was surprised to find, did not resent the man's impertinence.

“Well, Dick, how've you got along since I've been gone?” asked Mrs. Hardwick, to Ida's unbounded astonishment.

“Oh, so so.”

“Have you felt lonely any?”

“I've had good company.”

“Who's been here?”

Dick pointed significantly to a jug, which stood beside his chair.

“So you've brought the gal. How did you get hold of her?”

There was something in these questions which terrified Ida. It seemed to indicate a degree of complicity between these two, which boded no good to her.

“I'll tell you the particulars by and by,” said the nurse, looking significantly at the child's expressive face.

At the same time she began to take off her bonnet.

“You ain't going to stop, are you?” whispered Ida.

“Ain't going to stop!” repeated the man called Dick. “Why shouldn't she? Ain't she at home?”

“At home!” echoed Ida, apprehensively, opening wide her eyes in astonishment.

“Yes, ask her.”

Ida looked, inquiringly, at Mrs. Hardwick.

“You might as well take off your things,” said the latter, grimly. “We ain't going any farther to-day.”

“And where's the lady you said you were going to see?” asked the child, bewildered.

“The one that was interested in you?”

“Yes.”

“Well, I'm the one.”

“You!”

“Yes.”

“I don't want to stay here,” said Ida, becoming frightened.

“Well, what are you going to do about it?” asked the woman, mockingly.

“Will you take me back early to-morrow?”

“No, I don't intend to take you back at all,” said the nurse, coolly.

Ida seemed stupefied with astonishment and terror at first. Then, actuated by a sudden impulse, she ran to the door, and had got it open when the nurse sprang forward, and seizing her by the arm, dragged her rudely back.

“Where are you going in such a hurry?” she demanded, roughly.

“Back to father and mother,” said Ida, bursting into tears. “Oh, why did you carry me away?”

“I'll tell you why,” answered Dick, jocularly. “You see, Ida, we ain't got any little girl to love us, and so we got you.”

“But I don't love you, and I never shall,” said Ida, indignantly.

“Now don't you go to saying that,” said Dick. “You'll break my heart, you will, and then Peg will be a widow.”

To give effect to this pathetic speech, Dick drew out a tattered red handkerchief, and made a great demonstration of wiping his eyes.

The whole scene was so ludicrous that Ida, despite her fears and disgust, could not help laughing hysterically. She recovered herself instantly, and said, imploringly, “Oh, do let me go, and father will pay you; I'm sure he will.”

“You really think he would?” said Dick.

“Oh, yes; and you'll tell her to carry me back, won't you?”

“No, he won't tell me any such thing,” said Peg, gruffly; “and if he did, I wouldn't do it; so you might as well give up all thoughts of that first as last. You're going to stay here; so take off that bonnet of yours, and say no more about it.”

Ida made no motion towards obeying this mandate.

“Then I'll do it for you,” said Peg.

She roughly untied the bonnet, Ida struggling vainly in opposition, and taking this with the shawl, carried them to a closet, in which she placed them, and then, locking the door, deliberately put the key in her pocket.

"There," said she, "I guess you're safe for the present."

"Ain't you ever going to carry me back?" asked Ida, wishing to know the worst.

"Some years hence," said the woman, coolly. "We want you here for the present. Besides, you're not sure that they want to see you back again."

"Not glad to see me?"

"No; how do you know but your father and mother sent you off on purpose? They've been troubled with you long enough, and now they've bound you apprentice to me till you're eighteen."

"It's a lie," said Ida, firmly. "They didn't send me off, and you're a wicked woman to keep me here."

"Hoity-toity!" said the woman, pausing and looking menacingly at the child. "Have you anything more to say before I whip you?"

"Yes," said Ida, goaded to desperation; "I shall complain of you to the police, and they will put you in jail, and send me home. That is what I will do."

The nurse seized Ida by the arm, and striding with her to the closet already spoken of, unlocked it, and rudely pushing her in, locked the door after her.

"She's a punky 'un," remarked Dick, taking the pipe from his mouth.

"Yes," said the woman, "she makes more fuss than I thought she would."

"How did you manage to come it over her family?" asked Dick.

His wife, gave substantially, the same account with which the reader is already familiar.

"Pretty well done, old woman!" exclaimed Dick, approvingly. "I always said you was a deep 'un. I always say if Peg can't find out a way to do a thing it can't be done, no how."

"How about the counterfeit coin?" asked his wife, abruptly.

"They're to supply us with all we can get off, and we are to have one half of all we succeed in passing."

"That is good," said the woman, thoughtfully. "When this girl Ida gets a little tamed down, we'll give her some business to do."

"Won't she betray us if she gets caught?"

"We'll manage that, or at least I will. I'll work on her fears so that she won't any more dare to say a word about us than to cut her own head off."

Ida sank down on the floor of the closet into which she had been thrust. Utter darkness was around her, and a darkness as black seemed to hang over all her prospects of future happiness. She had been snatched in a moment from parents, or those whom she regarded as such, and from a comfortable and happy though humble home, to this dismal place. In place of the kindness and indulgence to which she had been accustomed, she was now treated with harshness and cruelty. What wonder that her heart desponded, and her tears of childish sorrow flowed freely?

CHAPTER XI. SUSPENSE.

"It doesn't somehow seem natural," said Mr. Crump, as he took his seat at the tea-table, "to sit down without Ida. It seems as if half of the family were gone."

"Just what I've said twenty times to-day," remarked his wife. "Nobody knows how much a child is to them till they lose it."

"Not lose it, mother," said Jack, who had been sitting in a silence unusual for him.

"I didn't mean to say that," said Mrs. Crump. "I meant till they were gone away for a time."

"When you spoke of losing," said Jack, "it made me feel just as Ida wasn't coming back."

"I don't know how it is," said his mother, thoughtfully, "but that's just the feeling I've had several times to-day. I've felt just as if something or other would happen so that Ida wouldn't come back."

"That is only because she has never been away before," said the cooper, cheerfully. "It isn't best to borrow trouble; we shall have enough of it without."

"You never said a truer word, brother," said Rachel, lugubriously. "'Man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upward.' This world is a vale of tears. Folks may try and try to be happy, but that isn't what they're sent here for."

"Now that's where I differ from you," said the cooper, good-humoredly, "just as there are many more pleasant than stormy days, so I believe that there is much more of brightness than shadow in this life of ours, if we would only see it."

"I can't see it," said Rachel, shaking her head very decidedly.

"Perhaps you could if you tried."

"So I do."

"It seems to me, Rachel, you take more pains to look at the clouds than the sun."

"Yes," chimed in Jack; "I've noticed whenever Aunt Rachel takes up the newspaper, she always looks first at the (sic) death's, and next at the fatal accidents and steamboat explosions."

"It's said," said Aunt Rachel, with severe emphasis, "if you should ever be on board a steamboat when it exploded you wouldn't find much to laugh at."

"Yes, I should," said Jack. "I should laugh——"

"What!" said Aunt Rachel, horrified.

"On the other side of my mouth," concluded Jack. "You didn't wait till I had got through the sentence."

"I don't think it proper to make light of such matters."

"Nor I, Aunt Rachel," said Jack, drawing down the corners of his mouth. "I am willing to confess that this is a serious matter. I should feel as they said the cow did, that was thrown three hundred feet into the air."

"How was that?" inquired his mother.

"A little discouraged," replied Jack.

All laughed except Aunt Rachel, who preserved the same severe composure, and continued to eat the pie upon her plate with the air of one gulping down medicine.

So the evening passed. All seemed to miss Ida. Mrs. Crump found herself stealing glances at the smaller chair beside her own in which Ida usually sat. The cooper appeared abstracted, and did not take as much interest as usual in the evening paper. Jack was restless, and found it difficult to fix his attention upon anything. Even Aunt Rachel looked more dismal than usual, if such a thing be possible.

In the morning all felt brighter.

"Ida will be home to-night," said Mrs. Crump, cheerfully. "What an age it seems since she left us!"

"We shall know better how to appreciate her presence," said the cooper, cheerfully.

"What time do you expect her home? Did Mrs. Hardwick say?"

"Why no," said Mrs. Crump, "she didn't say, but I guess she will be along in the course of the afternoon."

"If we only knew where she had gone," said Jack, "we could tell better."

"But as we don't know," said his father, "we must wait patiently till she comes."

"I guess," said Mrs. Crump, in the spirit of a notable housewife, "I'll make up some apple-turnovers for supper to-night. There's nothing Ida likes so well."

"That's where Ida is right," said Jack, "apple-turnovers are splendid."

"They're very unwholesome," remarked Aunt Rachel.

"I shouldn't think so from the way you eat them, Aunt Rachel," retorted Jack. "You ate four the last time we had them for supper."

"I didn't think you'd begrudge me the little I eat," said Rachel, dolefully. "I didn't think you took the trouble to keep account of what I ate."

"Come, Rachel, this is unreasonable," said her brother. "Nobody begrudges you what you eat, even if you choose to eat twice as much as you do. I dare say, Jack ate more of them than you did."

"I ate six," said Jack.

Rachel, construing this into an apology, said no more; but, feeling it unnecessary to explain why she ate what she admitted to be unhealthy, added, "And if I do eat what's unwholesome, it's because life ain't of any value to me. The sooner one gets out of this vale of affliction the better."

"And the way you take to get out of it," said Jack, gravely, "is by eating apple-turnovers. Whenever you die, Aunt Rachel, we shall have to put a paragraph in the papers, headed, 'Suicide by eating apple-turnovers.'"

Rachel intimated, in reply, that she presumed it would afford Jack a great deal of satisfaction to write such a paragraph.

The evening came. Still no tidings of Ida.

The family began to feel alarmed. An indefinable sense of apprehension oppressed the minds of all. Mrs. Crump feared that Ida's mother, seeing her grown up so attractive, could not resist the temptation of keeping her.

"I suppose," she said, "that she has the best claim to her; but it will be a terrible thing for us to part with her."

"Don't let us trouble ourselves in that way," said the cooper. "It seems to me very natural that they should keep her a little longer than they intended. Besides, it is not too late for her to return to-night."

This cheered Mrs. Crump a little.

The evening passed slowly.

At length there came a knock at the door.

"I guess that is Ida," said Mrs. Crump, joyfully.

Jack seized a candle, and hastening to the door, threw it open. But there was no Ida there. In her place stood William Fitts, the boy who had met Ida in the cars.

"How do you do, Bill?" said Jack, endeavoring not to look disappointed. "Come in, and take a seat, and tell us all the news."

"Well," said William, "I don't know of any. I suppose Ida has got home."

"No," said Jack, "we expected her to-night, but she hasn't come yet."

"She told me that she expected to come back to-day," said William.

"What! have you seen her?" exclaimed all in chorus.

"Yes, I saw her yesterday noon."

"Where?"

"Why, in the cars," said William, a little surprised at the question.

"What cars?" asked the cooper.

"Why, the Philadelphia cars. Of course, you knew that was where she was going?"

"Philadelphia!" all exclaimed, in surprise.

"Yes, the cars were almost there when I saw her. Who was that with her?"

"Mrs. Hardwick, who was her old nurse."

"Anyway, I didn't like her looks," said the boy.

"That's where I agree with you," said Jack, decidedly.

"She didn't seem to want me to speak to Ida," continued William, "but hurried her off, just as quick as possible."

"There were reasons for that," said Mrs. Crump, "she wanted to keep secret her destination."

"I don't know what it was," said William; "but any how, I don't like her looks."

The family felt a little relieved by this information; and, since Ida had gone so far, it did not seem strange that she should have outstayed her time.

CHAPTER XII. HOW IDA FARED.

WE left Ida confined in a dark closet, with Peg standing guard over her.

After an hour she was released.

"Well," said Peg, grimly, "how do you feel now?"

"I want to go home," sobbed the child.

"You are at home," said the woman. "This is going to be your home now."

"Shall I never see father and mother and Jack, again?"

"Why," answered Peg, "that depends on how you behave yourself."

"Oh, if you will only let me go," said Ida, gathering hope from this remark, "I'll do anything you say."

"Do you mean this, or do you only say it for the sake of getting away?"

"Oh, I mean just what I say. Dear, good Mrs. Hardwick, just tell me what I am to do, and I will obey you cheerfully."

"Very well," said Peg, "only you needn't try to get anything out of me by calling me dear, good Mrs. Hardwick. In the first place, you don't care a cent about me. In the second place, I am not good; and finally, my name isn't Mrs. Hardwick, except in New York."

"What is it, then?" asked Ida.

"It's just Peg, no more and no less. You may call me Aunt Peg."

"I would rather call you Mrs. Hardwick."

"Then you'll have a good many years to call me so. You'd better do as I tell you if you want any favors. Now what do you say?"

"Yes, Aunt Peg," said Ida, with a strong effort to conceal her repugnance.

"That's well. Now the first thing to do, is to stay here for the present."

"Yes—aunt."

"The second is, you're not to tell anybody that you came from New York. That is very important. You understand that, do you?"

The child replied in the affirmative.

"The next is, that you're to pay for your board, by doing whatever I tell you."

"If it isn't wicked."

"Do you suppose I would ask you to do anything wicked?"

"You said you wasn't good," mildly suggested Ida.

"I'm good enough to take care of you. Well, what do you say to that? Answer me."

"Yes."

"There's another thing. You ain't to try to run away."

Ida hung down her head.

"Ha!" said Peg. "So you've been thinking of it, have you?"

"Yes," said Ida, boldly, after a moment's hesitation; "I did think I should if I got a good chance."

"Humph!" said the woman; "I see we must understand one another. Unless you promise this, back you go into the dark closet, and I shall keep you there all the time."

Ida shuddered at this fearful threat, terrible to a child of nine.

"Do you promise?"

"Yes," said the child, faintly.

"For fear you might be tempted to break your promise, I have something to show you."

She went to the cupboard, and took down a large pistol.

"There," she said, "do you see that?"

"Yes, Aunt Peg."

"What is it?"

"It is a pistol, I believe."

"Do you know what it is for?"

"To shoot people with," said Ida, fixing her eyes on the weapon, as if impelled by a species of fascination.

"Yes," said the woman; "I see you understand. Well, now, do you know what I would do if you should tell anybody where you came from, or attempt to run away? Can you guess now?"

"Would you shoot me?" asked the child, struck with terror.

"Yes, I would," said Peg, with fierce emphasis. "That's just what I'd do. And what's more," she added, "even if you got away, and got back to your family in New York. I would follow you and shoot you dead in the street."

"You wouldn't be so wicked!" exclaimed Ida, appalled.

"Wouldn't I, though?" repeated Peg, significantly. "If you don't believe I would, just try it. Do you think you would like to try it?"

"No," said the child, with a shudder.

"Well, that's the most sensible thing you've said yet. Now, that you have got to be a little more reasonable, I'll tell you what I am going to do with you."

Ida looked up eagerly into her face.

"I am going to keep you with me a year. I want the services of a little girl for that time. If you serve me faithfully, I will then send you back to your friends in New York."

"Will you?" said Ida, hopefully.

"Yes. But you must mind and do what I tell you."

"O yes," said the child, joyfully.

This was so much better than she had been led to fear, that the prospect of returning home, even after a year, gave her fresh courage.

"What shall I do?" she asked, anxious to conciliate Peg.

"You may take the broom,—you will find it just behind the door,—and sweep the room."

"Yes, Aunt Peg."

"And after that you may wash the dishes. Or, rather, you may wash the dishes first."

"Yes, Aunt Peg."

"And after that I will find something for you to do."

The next morning Ida was asked if she would like to go out into the street.

This was a welcome proposition, as the sun was shining brightly, and there was little to please a child's fancy in Peg's shabby apartment.

"I am going to let you do a little shopping," said Peg. "There are various things that we want. Go and get your bonnet."

"It's in the closet," said Ida.

"O yes, where I put it. That was before I could trust you."

She went to the closet, and came back bringing the bonnet and shawl. As soon as they were ready, they emerged into the street. Ida was glad to be in the open air once more.

"This is a little better than being shut up in the closet, isn't it?" said Peg.

Ida owned that it was.

"You see you'll have a very good time of it, if you do as I bid you. I don't want to do you any harm. I want you to be happy."

So they walked along together, until Peg, suddenly pausing, laid her hand on Ida's arm, and pointing to a shop near by, said to her, "Do you see that shop?"

"Yes," said Ida.

"Well, that is a baker's shop. And now I'll tell you what to do. I want you to go in, and ask for a couple of rolls. They come at three cents apiece. Here's some money to pay for them. It is a silver dollar, as you see. You will give this to them, and they will give you back ninety-four cents in change. Do you understand?"

"Yes," said Ida; "I think I do."

"And if they ask if you haven't anything smaller, you will say no."

"Yes, Aunt Peg."

"I will stay just outside. I want you to go in alone, so that you will get used to doing without me."

Ida entered the shop. The baker, a pleasant-looking man, stood behind the counter.

"Well, my dear, what is it?" he asked.

"I should like a couple of rolls."

"For your mother, I suppose," said the baker, sociably.

"No," said Ida; "for the woman I board with."

"Ha! a silver dollar, and a new one, too," said the baker, receiving the coin tendered in payment. "I shall have to save that for my little girl."

Ida left the shop with the two rolls and the silver change.

"Did he say anything about the money?" asked Peg, a little anxiously.

"He said he should save it for his little girl."

"Good," said the woman, approvingly; "you've done well."

Ida could not help wondering what the baker's disposal of the dollar had to do with her doing well, but she was soon thinking of other things.

CHAPTER XIII. BAD COIN.

THE baker introduced to the reader's notice in the last chapter was named Crump. Singularly enough Abel Crump, for this was his name, was a brother of Timothy Crump, the cooper. In many respects he resembled his brother. He was an excellent man, exemplary in all the relations of life, and had a good heart. He was in very comfortable circumstances, having accumulated a little property by diligent attention to his business. Like his brother, Abel Crump had married, and had one child, now about the size of Ida, that is, nine years old. She had received the name of Ellen.

When the baker closed his shop for the night he did not forget the silver dollar which he had received, or the disposal which he told Ida he should make of it.

He selected it carefully from the other coins, and slipped it into his vest pocket.

Ellen ran to meet him as he entered the house.

"What do you think I have brought you, Ellen?" said her father, smiling.

"Do tell me quick," said the child, eagerly.

"What if I should tell you it was a silver dollar?"

"Oh, father, thank you," and Ellen ran to show it to her mother.

"You got it at the shop?" asked his wife.

"Yes," said the baker; "I received it from a little girl about the size of Ellen, and I suppose it was that gave me the idea of bringing it home to her."

"Was she a pretty little girl?" asked Ellen, interested.

"Yes, she was very attractive. I could not help feeling interested in her. I hope she will come again."

This was all that passed concerning Ida at that time. The thought of her would have passed from the baker's mind, if it had not been recalled by circumstances.

Ellen, like most girls of her age, when in possession of money, could not be easy until she had spent it. Her mother advised her to lay it away, or perhaps deposit it in some Savings Bank; but Ellen preferred present gratification.

Accordingly one afternoon, when walking out with her mother, she persuaded her to go into a toy shop, and price a doll which she saw in the window. The price was sixty-two cents. Ellen concluded to take it, and tendered the silver dollar in payment.

The shopman took it into his hand, glancing at it carelessly at first, then scrutinizing it with considerable attention.

"What is the matter?" inquired Mrs. Crump. "It is good, isn't it?"

"That is what I am doubtful of," was the reply.

"It is new."

"And that is against it. If it were old, it would be more likely to be genuine."

"But you wouldn't (sic) condemn a piece because it was new?"

"Certainly not; but the fact is, there have been lately many cases where spurious dollars have been circulated, and I suspect this is one of them. However, I can soon test it."

"I wish you, would," said Mrs. Crump. "My husband took it at his shop, and will be likely to take more unless he is placed on his guard."

The shopman retired a moment, and then reappeared.

"It is as I thought," he said. "The coin is not good."

"And can't I pass it, then?" said Ellen, disappointed.

"I am afraid not."

"Then I don't see, Ellen," said her mother, "but you will have to give up your purchase for to-day. We must tell your father of this."

Mr. Crump was exceedingly surprised at his wife's account.

"Really," he said, "I had no suspicion of this. Can it be possible that such a beautiful child could be guilty of such a crime?"

"Perhaps not," said his wife. "She may be as innocent in the matter as Ellen or myself."

"I hope so," said the baker; "it would be a pity that such a child should be given to wickedness. However, I shall find out before long."

"How?"

"She will undoubtedly come again some time, and if she offers me one of the same coins I shall know what to think."

Mr. Crump watched daily for the coming of Ida. He waited some days in vain. It was not the policy of Peg to send the child too often to the same place, as that would increase the chances of detection.

One day, however, Ida entered the shop as before.

"Good morning," said the baker. "What will you have to-day?"

"You may give me a sheet of gingerbread, sir."

The baker placed it in her hands.

"How much will it be?"

"Twelve cents."

Ida offered him another silver dollar.

As if to make change, he stepped from behind the counter, and managed to place himself between Ida and the door.

"What is your name, my child?" he asked.

"Ida, sir."

"Ida? A very pretty name; but what is your other name?"

Ida hesitated a moment, because Peg had forbidden her to use the name of Crump, and told her if the inquiry was ever made, she must answer Hardwick.

She answered, reluctantly, "My name is Ida Hardwick."

The baker observed the hesitation, and this increased his suspicions.

"Hardwick!" he repeated, musingly, endeavoring to draw from the child as much information as he could before allowing her to perceive that he suspected her. "And where do you live?"

Ida was a child of spirit, and did not understand why she should be questioned so closely. She said, with some impatience, "I am in a hurry, sir, and would like to have you hand me the change as soon as you can."

"I have no doubt of it," said the baker, his manner changing; "but you cannot go just yet."

"And why not?" asked Ida, her eyes flashing.

"Because you have been trying to deceive me."

"I trying to deceive you!" exclaimed the child, in astonishment.

"Really," thought Mr. Crump, "she does it well, but no doubt they train her to it. It is perfectly shocking, such depravity in a child."

"Don't you remember buying something here a week ago?" he said, in as stern a tone as his good nature would allow him to employ.

"Yes," said Ida, promptly; "I bought two rolls at three cents a piece."

"And what did you offer me in payment?"

"I handed you a silver dollar."

"Like this?" asked Mr. Crump, holding up the coin.

"Yes, sir."

"And do you mean to say," said the baker, sternly, "that you didn't know it was bad when you handed it to me?"

"Bad!" exclaimed Ida, in great surprise.

"Yes, spurious. It wasn't worth one tenth of a dollar."

"And is this like it?"

"Precisely."

"Indeed, sir, I didn't know anything about it," said Ida, earnestly, "I hope you will believe me when I say that I thought it was good."

"I don't know what to think," said the baker, perplexed.

"I don't know whether to believe you or not," said he. "Have you any other money?"

"That is all I have got."

"Of course, I can't let you have the gingerbread. Some would deliver you up into the hands of the police. However, I will let you go if you will make me one promise."

"Oh, anything, sir."

"You have given me a bad dollar. Will you promise to bring me a good one to-morrow?"

Ida made the required promise, and was allowed to go.

CHAPTER XIV. DOUBTS AND FEARS.

"WELL, what kept you so long?" asked Peg, impatiently, as Ida rejoined her at the corner of the street, where she had been waiting for her. "And where's your gingerbread?"

"He wouldn't let me have it," said Ida.

"And why not?"

"Because he said the money wasn't good."

"Stuff! it's good enough," said Peg, hastily. "Then we must go somewhere else."

"But he said the dollar I gave him last week wasn't good, and I promised to bring him another to-morrow, or he wouldn't have let me go."

"Well, where are you going to get your dollar to carry him?"

"Why, won't you give it to me?" said Ida, hesitatingly.

"Catch me at such nonsense! But here we are at another shop. Go in and see whether you can do any better there. Here's the money."

"Why, it's the same piece."

"What if it is?"

"I don't want to pass bad money."

"Tut, what hurt will it do?"

"It is the same as stealing."

"The man won't lose anything. He'll pass it off again."

"Somebody'll have to lose it by and by," said Ida, whose truthful perceptions saw through the woman's sophistry.

"So you've taken up preaching, have you?" said Peg, sneeringly. "Maybe you know better than I what is proper to do. It won't do to be so mighty particular, and so you'll find out if you live with me long."

"Where did you take the dollar?" asked Ida, with a sudden thought; "and how is it that you have so many of them?"

"None of your business," said her companion, roughly. "You shouldn't pry into the affairs of other people."

"Are you going to do as I told you?" she demanded, after a moment's pause.

"I can't," said Ida, pale but resolute.

"You can't," repeated Peg, furiously. "Didn't you promise to do whatever I told you?"

"Except what was wicked," interrupted Ida.

"And what business have you to decide what is wicked? Come home with me."

Peg, walked in sullen silence, occasionally turning round to scowl upon the unfortunate child, who had been strong enough, in her determination to do right, to resist successfully the will of the woman whom she had every reason to dread.

Arrived at home, Peg walked Ida into the room by the shoulder.

Dick was lounging in a chair, with the inevitable pipe in his mouth.

"Hilloa!" said he, lazily, observing his wife's movements, "what's the gal been doing, hey?"

"What's she been doing?" repeated Peg; "I should like to know what she hasn't been doing. She's refused to go in and buy some gingerbread of the baker, as I told her."

"Look here, little gal," said Dick, in a moralizing vein, "isn't this rayther undootiful conduct on your part? Ain't it a piece of ingratitude, when we go to the trouble of earning the money to pay for gingerbread for you to eat, that you ain't willing to go in and buy it?"

"I would just as lieves go in," said Ida, "if Peg would give me good money to pay for it."

"That don't make any difference," said the admirable moralist; "jest do as she tells you, and you'll do right. She'll take the risk."

"I can't!" said the child.

"You hear her?" said Peg.

"Very improper conduct!" said Dick, shaking his head. "Put her in the closet."

So Ida was incarcerated once more in the dark closet. Yet, in the midst of her desolation, there was a feeling of pleasure in thinking that she was suffering for doing right.

When Ida failed to return on the expected day, the Crumps, though disappointed, did not think it strange.

"If I were her mother," said Mrs. Crump, "and had been parted from her so long, I should want to keep her as long as I could. Dear heart! how pretty she is, and how proud her mother must be of her!"

"It's all a delusion," said Aunt Rachel, shaking her head. "It's all a delusion. I don't believe she's got a mother at all. That Mrs. Hardwick is an imposter. I knew it, and told you so at the time, but you wouldn't believe me. I never expect to set eyes on Ida again in this world."

"I do," said Jack, confidently.

"There's many a hope that's doomed to disappointment," said Aunt Rachel.

"So there is," said Jack. "I was hoping mother would have apple-pudding for dinner to-day, but she didn't."

The next day passed, and still no tidings of Ida. There was a cloud of anxiety, even upon Mr. Crump's usually placid face, and he was more silent than usual at the evening meal.

At night, after Rachel and Jack had both retired, he said, anxiously, "What do you think is the cause of Ida's prolonged absence, Mary?"

"I don't know," said Mrs. Crump, seriously. "It seems to me, if her mother wanted to keep her longer than the time she at first proposed, it would be no more than right that she should write us a line. She must know that we would feel anxious."

"Perhaps she is so taken up with Ida that she can think of nothing else."

"It may be so; but if we neither see Ida to-morrow, nor hear from her, I shall be seriously troubled."

"Suppose she should never come back," said the cooper, sadly.

"Oh, husband, don't think of such a thing," said his wife, distressed.

"We must contemplate it as a possibility," returned Timothy, gravely, "though not, I hope, as a probability. Ida's mother has an undoubted right to her; a better right than any we can urge."

"Then it would be better," said his wife, tearfully, "if she had never been placed in our charge. Then we should not have had the pain of parting with her."

"Not so, Mary," said the cooper, seriously. "We ought to be grateful for God's blessings, even if he suffers us to possess them but a short time. And Ida has been a blessing to us, I am sure. How many hours have been made happy by her childish prattle! how our hearts have been filled with cheerful happiness and affection when we have gazed upon her! That can't be taken from us, even if she is, Mary. There's some lines I met with in the paper, to-night, that express just what I feel. Let me find them."

The cooper put on his spectacles, and hunted slowly down the columns of the paper, till he came to these beautiful lines of Tennyson, which he read aloud,—

"I hold it true, whate'er befall;

*I feel it when I sorrow most;
'Tis better to have loved and lost,
Than never to have loved at all."*

"There, wife," said he, as he laid down the paper; "I don't know who writ them lines, but I'm sure it's some one that's met with a great sorrow, and conquered it."

"They are beautiful," said his wife, after a pause; "and I dare say you're right, Timothy; but I hope we mayn't have reason to learn the truth of them by experience. After all, it isn't certain but that Ida will come back. We are troubling ourselves too soon."

"At any rate," said the cooper, "there is no doubt that it is our duty to take every means to secure Ida if we can. Of course, if her mother insists upon keeping her, we can't say anything; but we ought to be sure, before we yield her up, that such is the case."

"What do you mean, Timothy?" asked Mrs. Crump, with anxious interest.

"I don't know as I ought to mention it," said her husband. "Very likely there isn't anything in it, and it would only make you feel more anxious."

"You have already aroused my anxiety," said his wife. "I should feel better if you would tell me."

"Then I will," said the cooper. "I have sometimes doubted," he continued, lowering his voice, "whether Ida's mother really sent for her."

"And the letter?" queried Mrs. Crump, looking less surprised than he supposed she would.

"I thought—mind it is only a guess on my part—that Mrs. Hardwick might have got somebody to write it for her."

"It is very singular," murmured Mrs. Crump, in a tone of abstraction.

"What is singular?"

"Why, the very same thought occurred to me. Somehow, I couldn't help feeling a little suspicious of Mrs. Hardwick, though perhaps unjustly. But what object could she have in obtaining possession of Ida?"

"That I cannot conjecture; but I have come to one determination."

"And what is that?"

"Unless we learn something of Ida within a week from the time she left here, I shall go on to Philadelphia, or send Jack, and endeavor to get track of her."

CHAPTER XV. AUNT RACHEL'S MISHAPS.

THE week which had been assigned by Mr. Crump slipped away, and still no tidings of Ida. The house seemed lonely without her. Not until then, did they understand how largely she had entered into their life and thoughts. But worse even, than the sense of loss, was the uncertainty as to her fate.

When seven days had passed the cooper said, "It is time that we took some steps about finding Ida. I had intended to go to Philadelphia myself, to make inquiries about her, but I am just now engaged upon a job which I cannot very well leave, and so I have concluded to send Jack."

"When shall I start?" exclaimed Jack, eagerly.

"To-morrow morning," answered his father, "and you must take clothes enough with you to last several days, in case it should be necessary."

"What good do you suppose it will do, Timothy," broke in Rachel, "to send such a mere boy as Jack?"

"A mere boy!" repeated her nephew, indignantly.

"A boy hardly sixteen years old," continued Rachel. "Why, he'll need somebody to take care of him. Most likely you'll have to go after him."

"What's the use of provoking a fellow so, Aunt Rachel?" said Jack. "You know I'm most eighteen. Hardly sixteen! Why, I might as well say you're hardly forty, when everybody knows you're most fifty."

"Most fifty!" ejaculated the scandalized spinster. "It's a base slander. I'm only forty-three."

"Maybe I'm mistaken," said Jack, carelessly. "I didn't know exactly. I only judged from your looks."

"Judge not that ye be not judged!" said Rachel, whom this explanation was not likely to appease. "The world is full of calumny and misrepresentation. I've no doubt you would like to shorten my days upon the earth, but I sha'n't live long to trouble any of you. I feel that, ere the summer of life is over, I shall be gathered into the garden of the Great Destroyer."

At this point, Rachel applied a segment of a pocket-handkerchief to her eyes; but unfortunately, owing to circumstances, the effect, instead of being pathetic, as she had intended, was simply ludicrous.

It so happened that a short time previous the inkstand had been partially spilled on the table, and this handkerchief had been used to sop it up. It had been placed inadvertently on the window-seat, where it had remained till Rachel, who sat beside the window, called it into requisition. The ink upon it was by no means dry. The consequence was that, when Rachel removed it from her eyes, her face was found to be covered with ink in streaks,—mingling with the tears that were falling, for Rachel always had tears at her command.

The first intimation the luckless spinster had of her misfortune, was conveyed in a stentorian laugh from Jack, whose organ of mirthfulness, marked *very large* by the phrenologist, could not withstand such a provocation to laughter.

He looked intently at the dark traces of sorrow upon his aunt's face, of which she was yet unconscious—and doubling up, went into a perfect paroxysm of laughter.

Aunt Rachel looked equally amazed and indignant.

"Jack!" said his mother, reprovingly, for she had not observed the cause of his amusement. "It's improper for you to laugh at your aunt in such a rude manner."

"Oh, I can't help it, mother. It's too rich! Just look at her," and Jack went off into another paroxysm.

Thus invited, Mrs. Crump did look, and the rueful expression of Rachel, set off by the inky stains, was so irresistibly comical, that, after a little struggle, she too gave way, and followed Jack's example.

Astounded and indignant at this unexpected behavior of her sister-in-law, Rachel burst into a fresh fit of weeping, and again had recourse to the handkerchief.

"I've stayed here long enough, if even my sister-in-law, as well as my own nephew, from whom I expect nothing better, makes me her laughing-stock. Brother Timothy, I can no longer remain in your dwelling to be laughed at; I will go to the poor-house, and end my life as a pauper. If I only receive Christian burial, when I leave the world, it will be all I hope or expect from my relatives, who will be glad enough to get rid of me."

The second application of the handkerchief had so increased the effect, that Jack found it impossible to check his laughter, while the cooper, whose attention was now for the first time drawn to his sister's face, burst out in a similar manner.

This more amazed Rachel than even Mrs. Crump's merriment.

"Even you, Timothy, join in ridiculing your sister!" she exclaimed, in an 'Et tu Brute,' tone.

"We don't mean to ridicule you, Rachel," gasped Mrs. Crump, with difficulty, "but we can't help laughing ____"

"At the prospect of my death," uttered Rachel. "Well, I'm a poor forlorn creetur, I know; I haven't got a friend in the world. Even my nearest relations make sport of me, and when I speak of dying they shout their joy to my face."

"Yes," gasped Jack, "that's it exactly. It isn't your death we're laughing at, but your face."

"My face!" exclaimed the insulted spinster. "One would think I was a fright, by the way you laugh at it."

"So you are," said Jack, in a state of semi-strangulation.

"To be called a fright to my face!" shrieked Rachel, "by my own nephew! This is too much. Timothy, I leave your house forever."

The excited maiden seized her hood, which was hanging from a nail, and hardly knowing what she did, was about to leave the house with no other protection, when she was arrested in her progress towards the door by the cooper, who stifled his laughter sufficiently to say: "Before you go, Rachel, just look in the glass."

Mechanically his sister did look, and her horrified eyes rested upon a face which streaked with inky spots and lines seaming it in every direction.

In her first confusion, Rachel did not understand the nature of her mishaps, but hastily jumped to the conclusion that she had been suddenly stricken by some terrible disease like the plague, whose ravages in London she had read of with the interest which one of her melancholy temperament might be expected to find in it.

Accordingly she began to wring her hands in an excess of terror, and exclaimed in tones of piercing anguish,—

"It is the fatal plague spot! I feel it; I know it! I am marked for the tomb. The sands of my life are fast running out!"

Jack broke into a fresh burst of merriment, so that an observer might, not without reason, have imagined him to be in imminent danger of suffocation.

"You'll kill me, Aunt Rachel; I know you will," he gasped out.

"You may order my coffin, Timothy," said Rachel, in a sepulchral tone. "I sha'n't live twenty-four hours. I've felt it coming on for a week past. I forgive you for all your ill-treatment. I should like to have some one go for the doctor, though I know I'm past help. I will go up to my chamber."

"I think," said the cooper, trying to look sober, "that you will find the cold-water treatment efficacious in removing the plague-spots, as you call them."

Rachel turned towards him with a puzzled look. Then, as her eyes rested, for the first time, upon the handkerchief which she had used, its appearance at once suggested a clue by which she was enabled to account for her own.

Somewhat ashamed of the emotion which she had betrayed, as well as the ridiculous figure which she had cut, she left the room abruptly, and did not make her appearance again till the next morning.

After this little episode, the conversation turned upon Jack's approaching journey.

"I don't know," said his mother, "but Rachel is right. Perhaps Jack isn't old enough, and hasn't had sufficient experience to undertake such a mission."

"Now, mother," expostulated Jack, "you ain't going to side against me, are you?"

"There is no better plan," said Mr. Crump, quietly, "and I have sufficient confidence in Jack's shrewdness and intelligence to believe he may be trusted in this business."

Jack looked gratified by this tribute to his powers and capacity, and determined to show that he was deserving of his father's favorable opinion.

The preliminaries were settled, and it was agreed that he should set out early the next morning. He went to bed with the brightest anticipations, and with the resolute determination to find Ida if she was anywhere in Philadelphia.

CHAPTER XVI. THE FLOWER-GIRL.

HENRY BOWEN was a young artist of moderate talent, who had abandoned the farm, on which he had labored as a boy, for the sake of pursuing his favorite profession. He was not competent to achieve the highest success. The foremost rank in his profession was not for him. But he had good taste, a correct eye, and a skilful hand, and his productions were pleasing and popular. A few months before his introduction to the reader's notice, he had formed a connection with a publisher of prints and engravings, who had thrown considerable work in his way.

"Have you any new commission this morning?" inquired the young artist, on the day before Ida's discovery that she had been employed to pass off spurious coins.

"Yes," said the publisher, "I have thought of something which I think may prove attractive. Just at present, the public seem fond of pictures of children in different characters. I should like to have you supply me with a sketch of a flower-girl, with, say, a basket of flowers in her hand. The attitude and incidentals I will leave to your taste. The face must, of course, be as beautiful and expressive as you can make it, where regularity of features is not sufficient. Do you comprehend my idea?"

"I believe I do," said the young man, "and hope to be able to satisfy you."

The young artist went home, and at once set to work upon the task he had undertaken. He had conceived that it would be an easy one, but found himself mistaken. Whether because his fancy was not sufficiently lively, or his mind was not in tune, he was unable to produce the effect he desired. The faces which he successively outlined were all stiff, and though perhaps sufficiently regular in feature, lacked the great charm of being expressive and life-like.

"What is the matter with me?" he exclaimed, impatiently, throwing down his pencil. "Is it impossible for me to succeed? Well, I will be patient, and make one trial more."

He made another trial, that proved as unsatisfactory as those preceding.

"It is clear," he decided, "that I am not in the vein. I will go out and take a walk, and perhaps while I am in the street something will strike me."

He accordingly donned his coat and hat, and, descending, emerged into the great thoroughfare, where he was soon lost in the throng. It was only natural that, as he walked, with his task still in his thoughts, he should scrutinize carefully the faces of such young girls as he met.

"Perhaps," it occurred to him, "I may get a hint from some face I may see. That will be better than to depend upon my fancy. Nothing, after all, is equal to the masterpieces of Nature."

But the young artist was fastidious. "It is strange," he thought, "how few there are, even in the freshness of childhood, that can be called models of beauty. That child, for example, has beautiful eyes but a badly-cut mouth, Here is one that would be pretty, if the face was rounded out; and here is a child, Heaven help it! that was designed to be beautiful, but want and unfavorable circumstances have pinched and cramped it."

It was at this point in the artist's soliloquy that, in turning the corner of a street, he came upon Peg and Ida.

Henry Bowen looked earnestly at the child's face, and his own lighted up with pleasure, as one who stumbles upon success just as he has despaired of it.

"The very face I have been looking for!" he exclaimed to himself. "My flower-girl is found at last!"

He turned round, and followed Ida and her companion. Both stopped at a shop-window to examine some articles which were exhibited there. This afforded a fresh opportunity to examine Ida's face.

"It is precisely what I want," he murmured. "Now the question comes up, whether this woman, who, I suppose, is the girl's attendant, will permit me to copy her face."

The artist's inference that Peg was merely Ida's attendant, was natural, since the child was dressed in a style quite superior to her companion. Peg thought that in this way she should be more likely to escape suspicion when occupied in passing spurious coin.

The young man followed the strangely-assorted pair to the apartments which Peg occupied. From the conversation which he overheard he learned that he had been mistaken in his supposition as to the relation between the two, and that, singular as it seemed, Peg had the guardianship of the child. This made his course clearer. He mounted the stairs, and knocked at the door.

"What do you want?" said a sharp voice from within.

"I should like to see you a moment," was the reply.

Peg opened the door partially, and regarded the young man suspiciously.

"I don't know you," she said, shortly. "I never saw you before."

"I presume not," said the young man. "We have never met, I think. I am an artist."

"That is a business I don't know anything about," said Peg, abruptly. "You've come to the wrong place. I don't want to buy any pictures. I've got plenty of other ways to spend my money."

Certainly, Mrs. Hardwick, to give her the name she once claimed, did not look like a patron of the arts.

"You have a young girl, about eight or nine years old, living with you," said the artist.

"Who told you that?" queried Peg, her suspicions at once roused.

"No one told me. I saw her with you in the street."

Peg at once conceived the idea that her visitor was aware of the fact that that the child was stolen—possibly he might be acquainted with the Crumps, or might be their emissary. She therefore answered, shortly,—

"People that are seen walking together don't always live together."

"But I saw the child entering this house with you."

"What if you did?" demanded Peg, defiantly.

"I was about," said the artist, perceiving that he was misapprehended, and desiring to set matters right, "I was about to make a proposition which might prove advantageous to both of us."

"Eh!" said Peg, catching at the hint. "Tell me what it is, and perhaps we may come to terms."

"It is simply this," said Bowen, "I am, as I told you, an artist. Just now I am employed to sketch a flower-girl, and in seeking for a face such as I wished to sketch from, I was struck by that of your child."

"Of Ida?"

"Yes, if that is her name. I will pay you five dollars for the privilege of copying it."

Peg was fond of money, and the prospect of earning five dollars through Ida's instrumentality, so easily, blinded her to the possibility that this picture might prove a means of discovery to her friends.

"Well," said she, more graciously, "if that's all you want, I don't know as I have any objections. I suppose you can copy her face here as well as anywhere."

"I should prefer to have her come to my studio."

"I sha'n't let her come," said Peg, decidedly.

"Then I will consent to your terms, and come here."

"Do you want to begin now?"

"I should like to do so."

"Come in, then. Here, Ida, I want you."

"Yes, Peg."

"This young man wants to copy your face."

Ida looked surprised.

"I am an artist," said the young man, with a reassuring smile. "I will endeavor not to try your patience too much. Do you think you can stand still for half an hour, without much fatigue?"

Ida was easily won by kindness, while she had a spirit which was roused by harshness. She was prepossessed at once in favor of the young man, and readily assented.

He kept her in pleasant conversation while with a free, bold hand, he sketched the outlines of her face and figure.

"I shall want one more sitting," he said. "I will come to-morrow at this time."

"Stop a minute," said Peg. "I should like the money in advance. How do I know that you will come again?"

"Certainly, if you prefer it," said the young man, opening his pocket-book.

"What strange fortune," he thought, "can have brought these two together? Surely there can be no relationship."

The next day he returned and completed his sketch, which was at once placed in the hands of the publisher, eliciting his warm approval.

CHAPTER XVII. JACK OBTAINS INFORMATION.

JACK set out with that lightness of heart and keen sense of enjoyment that seem natural to a young man of eighteen on his first journey. Partly by cars, partly by boat, he traveled, till in a few hours he was discharged, with hundreds of others, at the depot in Philadelphia.

Among the admonitions given to Jack on leaving home, one was prominently in his mind, to beware of imposition, and to be as economical as possible.

Accordingly he rejected all invitations to ride, and strode along, with his carpet-bag in hand, though, sooth to say, he had very little idea whether he was steering in the right direction for his uncle's shop. By dint of diligent and persevering inquiry he found it at length, and, walking in, announced himself to the worthy baker as his nephew Jack.

"What, are you Jack?" exclaimed Mr. Abel Crump, pausing in his labor; "well, I never should have known you, that's a fact. Bless me, how you've grown! Why, you're most as big as your father, ain't you?"

"Only half an inch shorter," returned Jack, complacently.

"And you're—let me see, how old are you?"

"Eighteen, that is, almost; I shall be in two months."

"Well, I'm glad to see you, Jack, though I hadn't the least idea of your raining down so unexpectedly. How's your father and mother and Rachel, and your adopted sister?"

"Father and mother are pretty well," answered Jack, "and so is Aunt Rachel," he added, smiling; "though she ain't so cheerful as she might be."

"Poor Rachel!" said Abel, smiling also, "all things look upside down to her. I don't suppose she's wholly to blame for it. Folks differ constitutionally. Some are always looking on the bright side of things, and others can never see but one side, and that's the dark one."

"You've hit it, uncle," said Jack, laughing. "Aunt Rachel always looks as if she was attending a funeral."

"So she is, my boy," said Abel Crump, gravely, "and a sad funeral it is."

"I don't understand you, uncle."

"The funeral of her affections,—that's what I mean. Perhaps you mayn't know that Rachel was, in early life,

engaged to be married to a young man whom she ardently loved. She was a different woman then from what she is now. But her lover deserted her just before the wedding was to have come off, and she's never got over the disappointment. But that isn't what I was going to talk about. You haven't told me about your adopted sister."

"That's what I've come to Philadelphia about," said Jack, soberly. "Ida has been carried off, and I've been sent in search of her."

"Been carried off!" exclaimed his uncle, in amazement. "I didn't know such things ever happened in this country. What do you mean?"

In answer to this question Jack told the story of Mrs. Hardwick's arrival with a letter from Ida's mother, conveying the request that the child might, under the guidance of the messenger, be allowed to pay her a visit. To this, and the subsequent details, Abel Crump listened with earnest attention.

"So you have reason to think the child is in (sic) Phildelphia?" he said, musingly.

"Yes," said Jack, "Ida was seen in the cars, coming here, by a boy who knew her in New York."

"Ida!" repeated his Uncle Abel, looking up, suddenly.

"Yes. You know that's my sister's name, don't you?"

"Yes, I dare say I have known it; but I have heard so little of your family lately, that I had forgotten it. It is rather a singular circumstance."

"What is singular!"

"I will tell you," said his uncle. "It may not amount to anything, however. A few days since, a little girl came into my shop to buy a small amount of bread. I was at once favorably impressed with her appearance. She was neatly dressed, and had a very sweet face."

"What was her name?" inquired Jack.

"That I will tell you by and by. Having made the purchase, she handed me in payment a silver dollar. 'I'll keep that for my little girl,' thought I at once. Accordingly, when I went home at night, I just took the dollar out the till, and gave it to her. Of course she was delighted with it, and, like a child, wanted to spend it at once. So her mother agreed to go out with her the next day. Well, they selected some nicknack or other, but when they came to pay for it the dollar proved to be spurious."

"Spurious!"

"Yes, bad. Got up, no doubt, by a gang of coiners. When they told me of this I thought to myself, 'Can it be that this little girl knew what she was about when she offered me that money?' I couldn't think it possible, but decided to wait till she came again."

"Did she come again?"

"Yes, only day before yesterday. This time she wanted some gingerbread, so she said. As I thought likely, she offered me another dollar just like the other. Before letting her know that I had discovered the imposition I asked her one or two questions, with the idea of finding out as much as possible about her. When I told her the coin was a bad one, she seemed very much surprised. It might have been all acting, but I didn't think so then. I even felt pity for her and let her go on condition that she would bring me back a good dollar in place of the bad one the next day. I suppose I was a fool for doing so, but she looked so pretty and innocent that I couldn't make up my mind to speak or harshly to her. But I'm afraid that I was deceived, and that she is an artful character, after all."

"Then she didn't come back with the good money?" said Jack.

"No, I haven't seen her since; and, what's more, I don't think it very likely she will venture into my shop at present."

"What name did she give you?" asked Jack.

"Haven't I told you? It was the name that made me think of telling you. It was Ida Hardwick."

"Ida Hardwick!" exclaimed Jack, bounding from his chair, somewhat to his uncle's alarm.

"Yes, Ida Hardwick. But that hasn't anything to do with your Ida, has it?"

"Hasn't it, though?" said Jack. "Why, Mrs. Hardwick was the woman that carried her away."

"Mrs. Hardwick—her mother!"

"No, not her mother. She was, or at least she said she was, the woman that took care of Ida before she was brought to us."

"Then you think that Ida Hardwick may be your missing sister?"

"That's what I don't know," said Jack. "If you would only describe her, Uncle Abel, I could tell better."

"Well," said Mr. Abel Crump, thoughtfully, "I should say this little girl might be eight or nine years old."

"Yes," said Jack, nodding; "what color were her eyes?"

"Blue."

"So are Ida's."

"A small mouth, with a very sweet expression."

"Yes."

"And I believe her dress was a light one, with a blue ribbon about her waist. She also had a brown scarf about her neck, if I remember rightly."

"That is exactly the way Ida was dressed when she went away. I am sure it must be she."

"Perhaps," suggested his uncle, "this woman, though calling herself Ida's nurse, was really her mother."

"No, it can't be," said Jack, vehemently. "What, that ugly, disagreeable woman, Ida's mother! I won't believe it. I should just as soon expect to see strawberries growing on a thorn-bush. There isn't the least resemblance between them."

"You know I have not seen Mrs. Hardwick, so I cannot judge on that point."

"No great loss," said Jack. "You wouldn't care much about seeing her again. She is a tall, gaunt, disagreeable looking woman; while Ida is fair, and sweet looking. I didn't fancy this Mrs. Hardwick when I first set eyes on her. Aunt Rachel was right, for once."

"What did she think?"

"She took a dislike to her, and declared that it was only a plot to get possession of Ida; but then, that was what we expected of Aunt Rachel."

"Still, it seems difficult to imagine any satisfactory motive on the part of this woman, supposing she is not Ida's mother."

"Mother, or not," returned Jack, "she's got possession of Ida; and, from all that you say, she is not the best person to bring her up. I am determined to rescue Ida from this she-dragon. Will you help me, uncle?"

"You may count upon me, Jack, for all I can do."

"Then," said Jack, with energy, "we shall succeed. I feel sure of it. 'Where there's a will there's a way,' you know."

CHAPTER XVIII. FINESSE.

THE next thing to be done by Jack was, of course, in some way to obtain a clew to the whereabouts of Peg, or Mrs. Hardwick, to use the name by which he knew her. No mode of proceeding likely to secure this result occurred to him, beyond the very obvious one of keeping in the street as much as possible, in the hope that chance might bring him face to face with the object of his pursuit.

Fortunately her face was accurately daguerretyped in his memory, so that he felt certain of recognizing her, under whatever circumstances they might meet.

In pursuance of this, the only plan which suggested itself, Jack became a daily promenader in Chestnut and other streets. Many wondered what could be the object of the young man who so persistently frequented the thoroughfares. It was observed that, while he paid no attention to young ladies, he scrutinized the faces of all middle-aged or elderly women whom he met, a circumstance likely to attract remark, in the case of a well-made youth like Jack.

Several days passed, and, although he only returned to his uncle's house at the hour of meals, he had the same report to bring on each occasion.

"I am afraid," said the baker, "it will be as hard as finding a needle in a hay-stack, to hope to meet the one you seek, among so many faces."

"There's nothing like trying," answered Jack, courageously. "I'm not going to give up yet awhile."

He sat down and wrote the following note, home:—

"DEAR PARENTS:

"I arrived in Philadelphia safe, and am stopping at Uncle Abel's. He received me very kindly. I have got track of Ida, though I have not found her yet. I have learned as much as this, that this Mrs. Hardwick—who is a double distilled she-rascal—probably has Ida in her clutches, and has sent her on two occasions to my uncle's. I am spending most of my time in the streets, keeping a good lookout for her. If I do meet her, see if I don't get Ida away from her. But it may take some time. Don't get discouraged, therefore, but wait patiently. Whenever anything new turns up you will receive a line from your dutiful son

"JACK."

In reply to this letter, or rather note, Jack received an intimation that he was not to cease his efforts as long as a chance remained to find Ida.

The very day after the reception of this letter, as Jack was sauntering along the street, he suddenly perceived in front of him a form which at once reminded him of Mrs. Hardwick. Full of hope that this might be so, he bounded forward, and rapidly passed the suspected person, turned suddenly round, and confronted Ida's nurse.

The recognition was mutual. Peg was taken aback by this unexpected encounter.

"Her first impulse was to make off, but the young man's resolute expression warned her that this would prove in vain.

"Mrs. Hardwick!" said Jack.

"You are right," said she, nodding, "and you, if I am not mistaken, are John Crump, the son of my worthy friends in New York."

"Well," ejaculated Jack, internally, "if that doesn't beat all for coolness."

"My name is Jack," he said, aloud.

"Indeed! I thought it might be a nickname."

"You can't guess what I came here for," said Jack, with an attempt at sarcasm, which utterly failed of its effect.

"To see your sister Ida, I presume," said Peg, coolly.

"Yes," said Jack, amazed at the woman's composure.

"I thought some of you would be coming on," said Peg, whose prolific genius had already mapped out her course.

"You did?"

"Yes, it was only natural. But what did your father and mother say to the letter I wrote them?"

"The letter you wrote them!"

"The letter in which I wrote that Ida's mother had been so pleased with the appearance and manners of her child, that she could not resolve to part with her, and had determined to keep her for the present."

"You don't mean to say," said Jack, "that any such letter as that has been written?"

"What, has it not been received?" inquired Peg, in the greatest apparent astonishment.

"Nothing like it," answered Jack. "When was it written?"

"The second day after Ida's arrival," replied Peg, unhesitatingly.

"If that is the case," returned Jack, not knowing what to think, "it must have miscarried."

"That is a pity. How anxious you all must have felt!" remarked Peg, sympathizingly.

"It seemed as if half the family were gone. But how long does Ida's mother mean to keep her?"

"A month or six weeks," was the reply.

"But," said Jack, his suspicions returning, "I have been told that Ida has twice called at a baker's shop in this city, and, when asked what her name was, answered Ida Hardwick.' You don't mean to say that you pretend to be her mother?"

"Yes, I do," returned Peg, calmly.

"It's a lie," said Jack, vehemently. "She isn't your daughter."

"Young man," said Peg, with wonderful self-command, "you are exciting yourself to no purpose. You asked me if I *pretended* to be her mother. I do pretend; but I admit, frankly, that it is all pretence."

"I don't understand what you mean," said Jack, mystified.

"Then I will take the trouble to explain it to you. As I informed your father and mother, when in New York, there are circumstances which stand in the way of Ida's real mother recognizing her as her own child. Still, as she desires her company, in order to avert all suspicion, and prevent embarrassing questions being asked, while she remains in Philadelphia she is to pass as my daughter."

This explanation was tolerably plausible, and Jack was unable to gainsay it, though it was disagreeable to him to think of even a nominal connection between Ida and the woman before him.

"Can I see Ida?" asked Jack, at length.

To his great joy, Peg replied, "I don't think there can be any objection. I am going to the house now. Will you come now, or appoint some other time?"

"I will go now by all means," said Jack, eagerly. "Nothing should stand in the way of seeing Ida."

A grim smile passed over the nurse's face.

"Follow me, then," she said. "I have no doubt Ida will be delighted to see you."

"Dear Ida!" said Jack. "Is she well, Mrs. Hardwick?"

"Perfectly well," answered Peg. "She has never been in better health than since she has been in Philadelphia."

"I suppose," said Jack, with a pang, "that she is so taken up with her new friends that she has nearly forgotten her old friends in New York."

"If she did," said Peg, sustaining her part with admirable self-possession, "she would not deserve to have friends at all. She is quite happy here, but she will be very glad to return to New York to those who have been so kind to her."

"Really," thought Jack; "I don't know what to make of this Mrs. Hardwick. She talks fair enough, if her looks are against her. Perhaps I have misjudged her, after all."

CHAPTER XIX. CAUGHT IN A TRAP.

JACK and his guide paused in front of a three-story brick building of respectable appearance.

"Does Ida's mother live here?" interrogated Jack.

"Yes," said Peg, coolly. "Follow me up the steps."

The woman led the way, and Jack followed.

The former rang the bell. An untidy servant girl made her appearance.

"We will go up-stairs, Bridget," said Peg.

Without betraying any astonishment, the servant conducted them to an upper room, and opened the door.

"If you will go in and take a seat," said Peg, "I will send Ida to you immediately."

She closed the door after him, and very softly slipped the bolt which had been placed on the outside. She then hastened downstairs, and finding the proprietor of the house, who was a little old man with a shrewd, twinkling eye, and a long aquiline nose, she said to this man, who was a leading spirit among the coiners into whose employ she and her husband had entered, "I want you to keep this lad in confinement, until I give you notice that it will be safe to let him go."

"What has he done?" asked the old man.

"He is acquainted with a secret dangerous to both of us," answered Peg, with intentional prevarication; for she knew that, if it were supposed that she only had an interest in Jack's detention, they would not take the trouble to keep him.

"Ha!" exclaimed the old man; "is that so? Then, I warrant me, he can't get out unless he has sharp claws."

"Fairly trapped, my young bird," thought Peg, as she hastened away; "I rather think that will put a stop to your troublesome interference for the present. You haven't lived quite long enough to be a match for old Peg. You'll find that out by and by. Ha, ha! won't your worthy uncle, the baker, be puzzled to know why you don't come home to-night?"

Meanwhile Jack, wholly unsuspecting that any trick had been played upon him, seated himself in a rocking-chair, waiting impatiently for the coming of Ida, whom he was resolved to carry back with him to New York if his persuasions could effect it.

Impelled by a natural curiosity he examined, attentively, the room in which he was seated. It was furnished moderately well; that is, as well as the sitting-room of a family in moderate circumstances. The floor was covered with a plain carpet. There was a sofa, a mirror, and several chairs covered with hair-cloth were standing stiffly at the windows. There were one or two engravings, of no great artistic excellence, hanging against the walls. On the centre-table were two or three books. Such was the room into which Jack had been introduced.

Jack waited patiently for twenty minutes. Then he began to grow impatient.

"Perhaps Ida is out," thought our hero; "but, if she is, Mrs. Hardwick ought to come and let me know."

Another fifteen minutes passed, and still Ida came not.

"This is rather singular," thought Jack. "She can't have told Ida that I am here, or I am sure she would rush up at once to see her brother Jack."

At length, tired of waiting, and under the impression that he had been forgotten, Jack walked to the door, and placing his hand upon the latch, attempted to open it.

There was a greater resistance than he had anticipated.

Supposing that it must stick, he used increased exertion, but the door perversely refused to open.

"Good heavens!" thought Jack, the real state of the case flashing upon him, "is it possible that I am locked in?"

To determine this he employed all his strength, but the door still resisted. He could no longer doubt.

He rushed to the windows. There were two in number, and looked out upon a court in the rear of the house. No part of the street was visible from them; therefore there was no hope of drawing the attention of passers-by to his situation.

Confounded by this discovery, Jack sank into his chair in no very enviable state of mind.

"Well," thought he, "this is a pretty situation for me to be in! I wonder what father would say if he knew that I was locked up like a prisoner. And then to think I let that treacherous woman, Mrs. Hardwick, lead me so quietly into a snare. Aunt Rachel was about right when she said I wasn't fit to come alone. I hope she'll never find out this adventure of mine; I never should hear the last of it."

Jack's mortification was extreme. His self-love was severely wounded by the thought that a woman had got the better of him, and he resolved, if he ever got out, that he would make Mrs. Hardwick suffer, he didn't quite know how, for the manner in which she had treated him.

Time passed. Every hour seemed to poor Jack to contain at least double the number of minutes which are usually reckoned to that division of time. Moreover, not having eaten for several hours, he was getting hungry.

A horrible suspicion flashed across his mind. "The wretches can't mean to starve me, can they?" he asked himself, while, despite his constitutional courage, he could not help shuddering at the idea.

He was unexpectedly answered by the sliding of a little door in the wall, and the appearance of the old man whose interview with Peg has been referred to.

"Are you getting hungry, my dear sir?" he inquired, with a disagreeable smile upon his features.

"Why am I confined here?" demanded Jack, in a tone of irritation.

"Why are you confined?" repeated his interlocutor. "Really, one would think you did not find your quarters comfortable."

"I am so far from finding them comfortable that I insist upon leaving them immediately," returned Jack.

"Then all you have got to do is to walk through that door.

"It is locked; I can't open it."

"Can't open it!" repeated the old man, with another disagreeable leer; "perhaps, then, it will be well for you to wait till you are strong enough."

Irritated by this reply, Jack threw himself spitefully against the door, but to no purpose.

The old man laughed in a cracked, wheezing way.

"Good fellow!" said he, encouragingly, "try it again! Won't you try it again? Better luck next time."

Jack throw himself sullenly into a chair.

"Where is the woman that brought me here?" he asked.

"Peg? Oh, she couldn't stay. She had important business to transact, my young friend, and so she has gone; but don't feel anxious. She commended you to our particular attention, and you will be just as well treated as if she were here."

This assurance was not very well calculated to comfort Jack.

"How long are you going to keep me cooped up here?" he asked, desperately, wishing to learn the worst at once.

"Really, my young friend, I couldn't say. We are very hospitable, very. We always like to have our friends with us as long as possible."

Jack groaned internally at the prospect before him.

"One question more," he said, "will you tell me if my sister Ida is in this house?"

"Your sister Ida!" repeated the old man, surprised in his turn.

"Yes," said Jack; believing, his astonishment feigned. "You needn't pretend that you don't know anything about her. I know that she is in your hands."

"Then if you know so much," said the other, shrugging his shoulders, "there is no need of asking."

Jack was about to press the question, but the old man, anticipating him, pointed to a plate of food which he pushed in upon a shelf, just in front of the sliding door, and said: "Here's some supper for you. When you get ready to go to bed you can lie down on the sofa. Sorry we didn't know of your coming, or we would have got our best bed-chamber ready for you. Good-night, and pleasant dreams!"

Smiling disagreeably he slid to the door, bolted it, and disappeared, leaving Jack more depressed, if possible, than before.

CHAPTER XX. JACK IN CONFINEMENT.

THE anxiety of Mr. Abel Crump's family, when Jack failed to return at night, can be imagined. They feared that he had fallen among unscrupulous persons, of whom there is no lack in every large city, and that some ill had come to him. The baker instituted immediate inquiries, but was unsuccessful in obtaining any trace of his nephew. He resolved to delay as long as possible communicating the sad intelligence to his brother Timothy, who he knew would be quite (sic) overwhelmed by this double blow.

In the mean time, let us see how Jack enjoyed himself. We will look in upon him after he has been confined four days. To a youth as active as himself, nothing could be more wearisome. It did not add to his cheerfulness to reflect that Ida was in the power of the one who had brought upon him his imprisonment, while he was absolutely unable to help her. He did not lack for food. This was brought him three times a day. His meals, in fact, were all he had to look forward to, to break the monotony of his confinement. The books upon the table were not of a kind likely to interest him, though he had tried to find entertainment in them.

Four days he had lived, or rather vegetated in this way. His spirit chafed against the confinement.

"I believe," thought he, "I would sooner die than be imprisoned for a long term. Yet," and here he sighed, "who knows what may be the length of my present confinement? They will be sure to find some excuse for retaining me."

While he was indulging in these uncomfortable reflections, suddenly the little door in the wall, previously referred to, slid open, and revealed the old man who had first supplied him with food. To explain the motive of his present visit, it will be remembered that he was under a misapprehension in regard to the cause of Jack's confinement. He naturally supposed that our hero was acquainted with the unlawful practises of the gang of coiners with which he was connected.

The old man, whose name was Foley, had been favorably impressed by the bold bearing of Jack, and the idea had occurred to him that he might be able to win him as an accomplice. He judged, that if once induced to join them, he would prove eminently useful. Another motive which led him to favor this project was, that it would be very embarrassing to be compelled to keep Jack in perpetual custody, as well as involve a considerable expense.

Jack was somewhat surprised at the old man's visit.

"How long are you going to keep me cooped up here?" he inquired, impatiently.

"Don't you find your quarters comfortable?" asked Foley.

"As comfortable as any prison, I suppose."

"My young friend, don't talk of imprisonment. You make me shudder. You must banish all thoughts of such a disagreeable subject."

"I wish I could," groaned poor Jack.

"Consider yourself as my guest, whom I delight to entertain."

"But, I don't like the entertainment."

"The more the pity."

"How long is this going to last? Even a prisoner knows the term of his imprisonment."

"My young friend," said Foley, "I do not desire to control your inclinations. I am ready to let you go whenever you say the word."

"You are?" returned Jack, incredulously. "Then suppose I ask you to let me go immediately."

"Certainly, I will; but upon one condition."

"What is it?"

"It so happens, my young friend, that you are acquainted with a secret which might prove troublesome to me."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Jack, mystified.

"Yes; you see I have found it out. Such things do not escape me."

"I don't know what you mean," returned Jack, perplexed.

"No doubt, no doubt," said Foley, cunningly. "Of course, if I should tell you that I was in the coining business, it would be altogether new to you."

"On my honor," said Jack, "this is the first I knew of it. I never saw or heard of you before I came into this house."

"Could Peg be mistaken?" thought Foley. "But no, no; he is only trying to deceive me. I am too old a bird to

be caught with such chaff."

"Of course, I won't dispute your word, my young friend," he said, softly; "but there is one thing certain; if you didn't know it before you know it now."

"And you are afraid that I shall denounce you to the police."

"Well, there is a possibility of that. That class of people have a little prejudice against us, though we are only doing what everybody wants to do, *making money*."

The old man chuckled and rubbed his hands at this joke, which he evidently considered a remarkably good one.

Jack reflected a moment.

"Will you let me go if I will promise to keep your secret?" he asked.

"How could I be sure you would do it?"

"I would pledge my word."

"Your word!" Foley snapped his fingers in derision. "That is not sufficient."

"What will be?"

"You must become one of us."

"One of you!"

Jack started in surprise at a proposition so unexpected.

"Yes. You must make yourself liable to the same penalties, so that it will be for your own interest to keep silent. Otherwise we cannot trust you."

"And suppose I decline these terms," said Jack.

"Then I shall be under the painful necessity of retaining you as my guest."

Foley smiled disagreeably.

Jack walked the room in perturbation. He felt that imprisonment would be better than liberty, on such terms. At the same time he did not refuse unequivocally, as possibly stricter watch than ever might be kept over him.

He thought it best to temporize.

"Well, what do you say?" asked the old man.

"I should like to take time to reflect upon your proposal," said Jack. "It is of so important a character that I do not like to decide at once."

"How long do you require?"

"Two days," returned Jack. "If I should come to a decision sooner, I will let you know."

"Agreed. Meanwhile can I do anything to promote your comfort? I want you to enjoy yourself as well as you can under the circumstances."

"If you have any interesting books, I wish you would send them up. It is rather dull staying here with nothing to do."

"You shall have something to do as soon as you please, my young friend. As to books, we are not very bountifully supplied with that article. We ain't any of us college graduates, but I will see what I can do for you in that way. I'll be back directly."

Foley disappeared, but soon after returned, laden with one or two old magazines, and a worn copy of the "Adventures of Baron Trenck."

It may be that the reader has never encountered a copy of this singular book. Baron Trenck was several times imprisoned for political offences, and this book contains an account of the manner in which he succeeded, in some cases after years of labor, in breaking from his dungeon. His feats in this way are truly wonderful, and, if not true, at least they have so very much similitude that they find no difficulty in winning the reader's credence.

Such was the book which Foley placed in Jack's hands. He must have been in ignorance of the character of the book, since it was evident to what thoughts it would lead the mind of the prisoner.

Jack read the book with intense interest. It was just such a one as he would have read with avidity under any circumstances. It gratified his taste for adventure, and he entered heart and soul into the Baron's plans, and felt a corresponding gratification when he succeeded. When he completed the perusal of the fascinating volume, he thought, "Why cannot I imitate Baron Trenck? He was far worse off than I am. If he could succeed in overcoming so many obstacles, it is a pity if I cannot find some means of escape."

He looked about the room in the hope that some plan might be suggested.

CHAPTER XXI. THE PRISONER ESCAPES.

TO give an idea of the difficulties of Jack's situation, let it be repeated that there was but one door to the room, and this was bolted on the outside. The room was in the second story. The only two windows looked out upon a court. These windows were securely fastened. Still a way might have been devised to break through them, if this would at all have improved his condition. Of this, however, there seemed but little chance. Even if he had succeeded in getting safely into the court, there would have been difficulty and danger in getting into the street.

All these considerations passed through Jack's mind, and occasioned him no little perplexity. He began to think that the redoubtable Baron Trenck himself might have been puzzled, if placed under similar

circumstances.

At length this suggestion occurred to him: Why might he not cut a hole through the door, just above or below the bolt, sufficiently large for him to thrust his hand through, and slip it back? Should he succeed in this, he would steal down stairs, and as, in all probability, the key would be in the outside door, he could open it, and then he would be free.

With hope springing up anew in his heart, he hastened to the door and examined it. It was of common strength. He might, perhaps, have been able to kick it open, but of course this was not to be thought of, as the noise would at once attract the attention of those interested in frustrating his plans.

Fortunately, Jack was provided with a large, sharp jack-knife. He did not propose, however, to commence operations at present. In the daytime he would be too subject to a surprise. With evening, he resolved to commence his work. He might be unsuccessful, and subjected, in consequence, to a more rigorous confinement; but of this he must run the risk. "Nothing venture, nothing have."

Jack awaited the coming of evening with impatience. The afternoon had never seemed so long.

It came at last—a fine moonlight night. This was fortunate, for his accommodating host, from motives of economy possibly, was not in the habit of providing him with a candle.

Jack thought it prudent to wait till he heard the city clocks pealing the hour of twelve. By this time, as far as he could see from his windows, there were no lights burning, and all who occupied the building were probably asleep.

He selected that part of the door which he judged to be directly under the bolt, and began to cut away with his knife. The wood was soft, and easy of excavation. In the course of half an hour Jack had cut a hole sufficiently large to pass his hand through, but found that, in order to reach the bolt, he must enlarge it a little. This took him fifteen minutes longer.

His efforts were crowned with success. As the city clock struck one Jack softly drew back the bolt, and, with a wild throb of joy, felt that freedom was half regained. But his (sic) embarrassments were not quite at an end. Opening the door, he found himself in the entry, but in the darkness. On entering the house he had not noticed the location of the stairs, and was afraid that some noise or stumbling might reveal to Foley the attempted escape of his prisoner. He took off his boots, and crept down-stairs in his stocking feet. Unfortunately he had not kept the proper bearing in his mind, and the result was, that he opened the door of a room on one side of the front door. It was used as a bedroom. At the sound of the door opening, the occupant of the bed, Mr. Foley himself, called out, drowsily, "Who's there?"

Jack, aware of his mistake, precipitately retired, and concealed himself under the front stairs, a refuge which his good fortune led him to, for he could see absolutely nothing.

The sleeper, just awakened, was naturally a little confused in his ideas. He had not seen Jack. He had merely heard the noise, and thought he saw the door moving. But of this he was not certain. To make sure, however, he got out of bed, and opening wide the door of his room, called out, "Is anybody there?"

Jack had excellent reasons for not wishing to volunteer an answer to this question. One advantage of the opened door (for there was a small oil lamp burning in the room) was to reveal to him the nature of the mistake he had made, and to show him the front door in which, by rare good fortune, he could discover the key in the lock.

Meanwhile the old man, to make sure that all was right, went up-stairs, far enough to see that the door of the apartment in which Jack had been confined was closed. Had he gone up to the landing he would have seen the aperture in the door, and discovered the hole, but he was sleepy, and anxious to get back to bed, which rendered him less watchful.

"All seems right," he muttered to himself, and re-entered the bed-chamber, from which Jack could soon hear the deep, regular breathing which indicated sound slumber. Not till then did he creep cautiously from his place of concealment, and advancing stealthily to the front door, turn the key, and step out into the faintly-lighted street. A delightful sensation thrilled our hero, as he felt the pure air fanning his cheek.

"Nobody can tell," thought he, "what a blessed thing freedom is till he has been cooped up, as I have been, for the last week. Won't the old man be a little surprised to find, in the morning, that the bird has flown? I've a great mind to serve him a little trick."

So saying, Jack drew the key from its place inside, and locking the door after him, went off with the key in his pocket. First, however, he took care to scratch a little mark on the outside of the door, as he could not see the number, to serve as a means of identification.

This done Jack made his way as well as he could guess to the house of his uncle, the baker. Not having noticed the way by which Peg had led him to the house, he wandered at first from the straight course. At length, however, he came to Chestnut Street. He now knew where he was, and, fifteen minutes later, he was standing before his uncle's door.

Meanwhile, Abel Crump had been suffering great anxiety on account of Jack's protracted absence. Several days had now elapsed, and still he was missing. He had been unable to find the slightest trace of him.

"I am afraid of the worst," he said to his wife, on the afternoon of the day on which Jack made his escape. "I think Jack was probably rash and imprudent, and I fear, poor boy, they may have proved the death of him."

"Don't you think there is any hope? He may be confined."

"It is possible; but, at all events, I don't think it right to keep it from Timothy any longer. I've put off writing as long as I could, hoping Jack would come back, but I don't feel as if I ought to hold it back any longer. I shall write in the morning, and tell Timothy to come right on. It'll be a dreadful blow to him."

"Yes, better wait till morning, Abel. Who knows but we may hear from Jack before that time?"

The baker shook his head.

"If we'd been going to hear, we'd have heard before this time," he said.

He did not sleep very soundly that night. Anxiety for Jack, and the thought of his brother's affliction, kept him awake.

About half-past two, he heard a noise at the front door, followed by a knocking. Throwing open the window, he exclaimed, "Who's there?"

"A friend," was the answer.

"What friend?" asked the baker, suspiciously. "Friends are not very apt to come at this time of night."

"Don't you know me, Uncle Abel?" asked a cheery voice.

"Why, it's Jack, I verily believe," said Abel Crump, joyfully, as he hurried down stairs to admit his late visitor.

"Where in the name of wonder have you been, Jack?" he asked, surveying his nephew by the light of the candle.

"I've been shut up, uncle,—boarded and lodged for nothing,—by some people who liked my company better than I liked theirs. But to-night I made out to escape, and here I am. I'll tell you all about it in the morning. Just now I'm confoundedly hungry, and if there's anything in the pantry, I'll ask permission to go in there a few minutes."

"I guess you'll find something, Jack. Take the candle with you. Thank God, you're back alive. We've been very anxious about you."

CHAPTER XXII. MR. JOHN SOMERVILLE.

PEG had been thinking.

This was the substance of her reflections. Ida, whom she had kidnapped for certain purposes of her own, was likely to prove an (sic) incumbrance rather than a source of profit. The child, her suspicions awakened in regard to the character of the money she had been employed to pass off, was no longer available for that purpose. So firmly resolved was she not to do what was wrong, that threats and persuasions were alike unavailing. Added to this was the danger of her encountering some one sent in search of her by the Crumps.

Under these circumstances, Peg bethought herself of the ultimate object which she had proposed to herself in kidnapping Ida—that of extorting money from a man who is now to be introduced to the reader.

John Somerville occupied a suite of apartments in a handsome lodging-house on Walnut Street. A man wanting yet several years of forty, he looked a greater age. Late hours and dissipation, though kept within respectable limits, had left their traces on his face. At twenty-one he inherited a considerable fortune, which, combined with some professional practice (for he was a lawyer, and not without ability), was quite sufficient to support him handsomely, and leave a considerable surplus every year. But, latterly, he had contracted a passion for gaming, and however shrewd he might be naturally, he could hardly be expected to prove a match for the wily habitues of the gaming-table, who had marked him as their prey.

The evening before he is introduced to the reader's notice he had, passed till a late hour at a fashionable gambling-house, where he had lost heavily. His reflections, on awakening, were not of the pleasantest. For the first time, within fifteen years, he realized the folly and imprudence of the course he had pursued. The evening previous he had lost a thousand dollars, for which he had given his I O U. Where to raise this money, he did not know. He bathed his aching head, and cursed his ill luck, in no measured terms. After making his toilet, he rang the bell, and ordered breakfast.

For this he had but scanty appetite. Scarcely had he finished, and directed the removal of the dishes, than the servant entered to announce a visitor.

"Is it a gentleman?" he inquired, hastily, fearing it might be a creditor. He occasionally had such visitors.

"No, sir."

"A lady?"

"No, sir."

"A child? But what could a child want of me?"

"If it's neither a gentleman, lady, nor child," said Somerville, somewhat surprised, "will you have the goodness to inform me who it is?"

"It's a woman, sir," said the servant, grinning.

"Why didn't you say so when I asked you?" said his employer, irritably.

"Because you asked if it was a lady, and this isn't—at least she don't look like one."

"You can send her up, whoever she is," said Mr. Somerville.

A moment afterwards Peg entered the apartment.

John Somerville looked at her without much interest, supposing that she might be a seamstress, or laundress, or some applicant for charity. So many years had passed since he had met with this woman, that she had passed out of his remembrance.

"Do you wish to see me about anything?" he asked, indifferently. "If so, you must be quick, for I am just going out."

"You don't seem to recognize me, Mr. Somerville," said Peg, fixing her keen black eyes upon his face.

"I can't say I do," he replied, carelessly. "Perhaps you used to wash for me once."

"I am not in the habit of acting as laundress," said the woman, proudly. It is worth noticing that she was not above passing spurious coin, and doing other things which are stamped as disreputable by the laws of the land, but her pride revolted at the imputation that she was a washer-woman.

"In that case," said Somerville, carelessly, "you will have to tell me who you are, for it is out of my power to

conjecture.”

“Perhaps the name of Ida will assist your recollection,” said Peg, composedly.

“Ida!” repeated John Somerville, changing color, and gazing now with attention at the woman's features.

“Yes.”

“I have known several persons of that name,” he said, evasively. “Of course, I can't tell which of them you refer to.”

“The Ida I mean was and is a child,” said Peg. “But, Mr. Somerville, there's no use in beating about the bush, when I can come straight to the point. It is now about eight years since my husband and myself were employed in carrying off a child—a female child of about a year old—named Ida. We placed it, according to your directions, on the door-step of a poor family in New York, and they have since cared for it as their own. I suppose you have not forgotten that.”

John Somerville deliberated. Should he deny it or not? He decided to put a bold face on the matter.

“I remember it,” said he, “and now recall your features. How have you fared since the time I employed you? Have you found your business profitable?”

“Far from it,” answered Peg. “We are not yet able to retire on a competence.”

“One of your youthful appearance,” said Solmerville, banteringly, “ought not to think of retiring under ten years.”

Peg smiled. She knew how to appreciate this speech.

“I don't care for compliments,” said she, “even when they are sincere. As for my youthful appearance, I am old enough to have reached the age of discretion, and not so old as to have fallen into my second childhood.”

“Compliments aside, then, will you proceed to whatever business has brought you here?”

“I want a thousand dollars.”

“A thousand dollars!” repeated John Somerville. “Very likely, I should like that amount myself. You have not come here to tell me that?”

“I have come here to ask that amount of you.”

“Suppose I should say that your husband is the proper person for you to apply to in such a case.”

“I think I am more likely to get it out of you,” answered Peg, coolly. “My husband couldn't supply me with a thousand cents, even if he were willing, which is not likely.”

“Much as I am flattered by your application,” said Somerville, “since it would seem to place me next in your estimation to your husband, I cannot help suggesting that it is not usual to bestow such a sum on a stranger, or even a friend, without an equivalent rendered.”

“I am ready to give you an equivalent.”

“Of what value?”

“I am willing to be silent.”

“And how can your silence benefit me?”

John Somerville asked this question with an assumption of indifference, but his fingers twitched nervously.

“That *you* will be best able to estimate,” said Peg.

“Explain yourself.”

“I can do that in a few words. You employed me to kidnap a child. I believe the law has something to say about that. At any rate, the child's mother may have.”

“What do you know about the child's mother?” demanded Somerville, hastily.

“All about her!” returned Peg, emphatically.

“How am I to know that? It is easy to claim the knowledge.”

“Shall I tell you all? In the first place she married your cousin, *after rejecting you*. You never forgave her for this. When a year after marriage her husband died, you renewed your proposals. They were rejected, and you were forbidden to renew the subject on pain of forfeiting her friendship forever. You left her presence, determined to be revenged. With this object you sought Dick and myself, and employed us to kidnap the child. There is the whole story, briefly told.”

John Somerville listened, with compressed lips and pale face.

“Woman, how came this within your knowledge?” he demanded, coarsely.

“That is of no consequence,” said Peg. “It was for my interest to find out, and I did so.”

“Well?”

“I know one thing more—the residence of the child's mother. I hesitated this morning whether to come here, or carry Ida to her mother, trusting to her to repay from gratitude what I demand from you, because it is your interest to comply with my request.”

“You speak of carrying the child to her mother. She is in New York.”

“You are mistaken,” said Peg, coolly. “She is in Philadelphia.”

“With you?”

“With me.”

“How long has this been?”

“Nearly a fortnight.”

John Somerville paced the room with hurried steps. Peg watched him carelessly. She felt that she had succeeded. He paused after awhile, and stood before her.

“You demand a thousand dollars,” he said.

“I do.”

"I have not that amount with me. I have recently lost a heavy sum, no matter how. But I can probably get it to-day. Call to-morrow at this time,—no, in the afternoon, and I will see what I can do for you."

"Very well," said Peg.

Left to himself, John Somerville spent some time in reflection. Difficulties encompassed him—difficulties from which he found it hard to find a way of escape. He knew how impossible it would be to meet this woman's demand. Something must be done. Gradually his countenance lightened. He had decided what that something should be.

CHAPTER XXIII. THE LAW STEPS IN.

WHEN Peg left Mr. John Somerville's apartment, it was with a high degree of satisfaction at the result of her interview. She looked upon the thousand dollars as sure to be hers. The considerations which she had urged would, she was sure, induce him to make every effort to secure her silence. With a thousand dollars, what might not be done? She would withdraw from the coining-business, for one thing. It was too hazardous. Why might not Dick and she retire to the country, lease a country-inn, and live an honest life hereafter. There were times when she grew tired of the life she lived at present. It would be pleasant to go to some place where she was not known, and enrol herself among the respectable members of the community. She was growing old; she wanted rest and a quiet home. Her early years had been passed in the country. She remembered still the green fields in which she played as a child, and to this woman, old and sin-stained, there came a yearning to have that life return.

It occurred to her to look in upon Jack, whom she had left in captivity four days before. She had a curiosity to see how he bore his confinement.

She knocked at the door, and was admitted by the old man who kept the house. Mr. Foley was looking older and more wrinkled than ever. He had been disturbed of his rest the night previous, he said.

"Well," said Peg, "and how is our prisoner?"

"Bless my soul," said Mr. Foley, "I haven't been to give him his breakfast this morning. He must be hungry. But my head is in such a state. However, I think I've secured him."

"What do you mean?"

"I have asked him to become one of us,—he's a bold lad,—and he has promised to think of it."

"He is not to be trusted," said Peg, hastily.

"You think not?"

"I know it."

"Well," said the old man, "I suppose you know him better than I do. But he's a bold lad."

"I should like to go up and see him," said Peg.

"Wait a minute, and I will carry up his breakfast."

The old man soon reappeared from the basement with some cold meat and bread and butter.

"You may go up first," he said; "you are younger than I am."

They reached the landing.

"What's all this?" demanded Peg, her quick eyes detecting the aperture in the door.

"What's what?" asked Foley.

"Is this the care you take of your prisoners?" demanded Peg, sharply. "It looks as if he had escaped."

"Escaped! Impossible!"

"I hope so. Open the door quick."

The door was opened, and the two hastily entered.

"The bird is flown," said Peg.

"I—I don't understand it," said the old man, turning pale.

"I do. He has cut a hole in the door, slipped back the bolt, and escaped. When could this have happened?"

"I don't know. Yes, I do remember, now, being disturbed last night by a noise in the entry. I got out of bed, and looked out, but could see no one."

"Did you come up-stairs?"

"Part way."

"When was this?"

"Past midnight."

"No doubt that was the time he escaped."

"That accounts for the door being locked," said the old man, thoughtfully.

"What door?"

"The outer door. When I got up this morning, I found the key had disappeared, and the door was locked. Luckily we had an extra key, and so opened it."

"Probably he carried off the other in his pocket."

"Ah, he is a bold lad,—a bold lad," said Foley.

"You may find that out to your cost. He'll be likely to bring the police about your ears."

"Do you think so?" said the old man, in alarm.

"I think it more than probable."

"But he don't know the house," said Foley, in a tone of reassurance. "It was dark when he left here, and he will not be apt to find it again."

"Perhaps not, but he will be likely to know you when he sees you again. I advise you to keep pretty close."

"I certainly shall," said the old man, evidently alarmed by this suggestion. "What a pity that such a bold lad shouldn't be in our business!"

"Perhaps you'll wish yourself out of it before long," muttered Peg.

As if in corroboration of her words, there was a sharp ring at the door-bell.

The old man, who was constitutionally timid, turned pale, and looked helplessly at his companion.

"What is it?" he asked, apprehensively.

"Go and see."

"I don't dare to."

"You're a coward," said Peg, contemptuously. "Then I'll go."

She went down stairs, followed by the old man. She threw open the street door, but even her courage was somewhat daunted by the sight of two police officers, accompanied by Jack.

"That's the man," said Jack, pointing out Foley, who tried to conceal himself behind Mrs. Hardwick's more ample proportions.

"I have a warrant for your arrest," said one of the officers, advancing to Foley.

"Gentlemen, spare me," he said, clasping his hands. "What have I done?"

"You are charged with uttering counterfeit coin.

"I am innocent."

"If you are, that will come out on your trial."

"Shall I have to be tried?" he asked, piteously.

"Of course. If you are innocent, no harm will come to you."

Peg had been standing still, irresolute what to do. Determined upon a bold step, she made a movement to pass the officers.

"Stop!" said Jack. "I call upon you to arrest that woman. She is the Mrs. Hardwick against whom you have a warrant."

"What is all this for?" demanded Peg, haughtily. "What right have you to interfere with me?"

"That will be made known to you in due time. You are suspected of being implicated with this man."

"I suppose I must yield," said Peg, sulkily. "But perhaps you, young sir," turning to Jack, "may not be the gainer by it."

"Where is Ida?" asked Jack, anxiously.

"She is safe," said Peg, sententiously.

"You won't tell me where she is?"

"No. Why should I? I am indebted to you, I suppose, for this arrest. She shall be kept out of your way as long as it is in my power to do so."

Jack's countenance fell.

"At least you will tell me whether she is well?"

"I shall answer no questions whatever," said Mrs. Hardwick.

"Then I will find her," he said, gaining courage. "She is somewhere in the city, and sooner or later I shall find her."

Peg was not one to betray her feelings, but this arrest was a great disappointment to her. Apart from the consequences which might result from it, it would prevent her meeting with John Somerville, and obtaining from him the thousand dollars of which she had regarded herself certain. Yet even from her prison-cell she might hold over him *in terrorem* the threat of making known to Ida's mother the secret of her child's existence. All was not lost. She walked quietly to the carriage in waiting, while her companions, in an ecstasy of terror, seemed to have lost the power of locomotion, and had to be supported on either side.

CHAPTER XXIV. "THE FLOWER-GIRL."

"BY gracious, if that isn't Ida!" exclaimed Jack, in profound surprise.

He had been sauntering along Chestnut Street, listlessly, troubled by the thought that though he had given Mrs. Hardwick into custody, he was apparently no nearer the discovery of his foster-sister than before. What steps should he take to find her? He could not decide. In his perplexity he came suddenly upon the print of the "Flower-Girl."

"Yes," said he, "that is Ida, plain enough. Perhaps they will know in the store where she is to be found."

He at once entered the store.

"Can you tell me anything about the girl that picture was taken for?" he asked, abruptly of the nearest clerk.

The clerk smiled.

"It is a fancy picture," he said. "I think it would take you a long time to find the original."

"It has taken a long time," said Jack. "But you are mistaken. It is the picture of my sister."

"Of your sister!" repeated the clerk, with surprise, half incredulous.

There was some reason for his incredulity. Jack was a stout, good-looking boy, with a pleasant face; but Ida's beauty was of a delicate, refined type, which argued gentle birth,—her skin of a brilliant whiteness, dashed by a tinge of rose,—exhibiting a physical perfection, which it requires several generations of refined habits and exemptions from the coarser burdens of life to produce. The perfection of human development is not wholly a matter of chance, but is dependent, in no small degree, upon outward conditions. We frequently see families who have sprung from poverty to wealth exhibiting, in the younger branches, marked improvement in this respect.

"Yes;" said Jack, "my sister."

"If it is your sister," said the clerk, "you ought to know where she is."

Jack was about to reply, when the attention of both was called by a surprised exclamation from a lady who had paused beside them. Her eyes, also, were fixed upon "The Flower-Girl."

"Who is this?" she asked, hurriedly. "Is it taken from life?"

"This young man says it is his sister," said the clerk.

"Your sister!" said the lady, her eyes bent, inquiringly, upon Jack. In her tone, too, there was a slight mingling of surprise, and, as it seemed, disappointment.

"Yes, madam," said Jack, respectfully.

"Pardon me," she said, "there is so little family resemblance, I should hardly have supposed it."

"She is not my own sister," said Jack, "but I love her just the same."

"Do you live in (sic) Philadelphia? Could I see her?" asked the lady, eagerly.

"I live in New York, madam," said Jack; "but Ida was stolen from us nearly a fortnight since, and I have come here in pursuit of her. I have not been able to find her yet."

"Did you say her name was Ida?" demanded the lady, in strange agitation.

"Yes, madam."

"My young friend," said the lady, rapidly, "I have been much interested in the story of your sister. I should like to hear more, but not here. Would you have any objection to coming home with me, and telling me the rest? Then we will, together, concert measures for discovering her."

"You are very kind, madam," said Jack, somewhat bashfully; for the lady was elegantly dressed, and it had never been his fortune to converse with many ladies of her rank; "I shall be very much obliged to you for your advice and assistance."

"Then we will drive home at once."

Jack followed her to the street, where he saw an elegant carriage, and a coachman in livery.

With natural gallantry, Jack assisted the lady into the carriage, and, at her bidding, got in himself.

"Home, Thomas!" she directed the driver; "and drive as fast as possible."

"Yes, madam."

"How old was your sister when your parents adopted her?" asked Mrs. Clifton. Jack afterwards ascertained that this was her name.

"About a year old, madam."

"And how long since was it?" asked the lady, bending forward with breathless interest.

"Eight years since. She is now nine."

"It must be," said the lady, in a low voice. "If it is indeed so, how will my life be blessed!"

"Did you speak, madam?"

"Tell me under what circumstances your family adopted Ida."

Jack related, briefly, the circumstances, which are already familiar to the reader.

"And do you recollect the month in which this happened?"

"It was at the close of December, the night before New Years."

"It is—it must be she!" ejaculated the lady, clasping her hands while tears of happy joy welled from her eyes.

"I—I do not understand," said Jack.

"My young friend, our meeting this morning seems providential. I have every reason to believe that this child—your adopted sister—is my daughter, stolen from me by an unknown enemy at the time of which you speak. From that day to this I have never been able to obtain the slightest clew that might lead to her discovery. I have long taught myself to look upon her as dead."

"It was Jack's turn to be surprised. He looked at the lady beside him. She was barely thirty. The beauty of her girlhood had ripened into the maturer beauty of womanhood. There was the same dazzling complexion—the same soft flush upon the cheeks. The eyes, too, were wonderfully like Ida's. Jack looked, and what he saw convinced him.

"You must be right," he said. "Ida is very much like you."

"You think so?" said Mrs. Clifton, eagerly.

"Yes, madam."

"I had a picture—a daguerreotype—taken of Ida just before I lost her. I have treasured it carefully. I must show it to you."

The carriage stopped before a stately mansion in a wide and quiet street. The driver dismounted, and opened the door. Jack assisted Mrs. Clifton to alight.

Bashfully, he followed the lady up the steps, and, at her bidding, seated himself in an elegant apartment,

furnished with a splendor which excited his wonder. He had little time to look about him, for Mrs. Clifton, without pausing to take off her street-attire, hastened down stairs with an open daguerreotype in her hand.

"Can you remember Ida when she was brought to your house?" she asked. "Did she look like this?"

"It is her image," said Jack, decidedly. "I should know it anywhere."

"Then there can be no further doubt," said Mrs. Clifton. "It is my child whom you have cared for so long. Oh, why could I not have known it? How many sleepless nights and lonely days would it have spared me! But God be thanked for this late blessing! Pardon me, I have not yet asked your name."

"My name is Crump—Jack Crump."

"Jack?" said the lady, smiling.

"Yes, madam; that is what they call me. It would not seem natural to be called by another."

"Very well," said Mrs. Clifton, with a smile which went to Jack's heart at once, and made him think her, if anything, more beautiful than Ida; "as Ida is your adopted sister, that makes us connected in some way, doesn't it? I won't call you Mr. Crump, for that would seem too formal. I will call you Jack."

To be called Jack by such a beautiful lady, who every day of her life was accustomed to live in a state which he thought could not be exceeded, even by royal state, almost upset our hero. Had Mrs. Clifton been Queen Victoria herself, he could not have felt a profounder respect and veneration for her than he did already.

"Now Jack," said Mrs. Clifton, "we must take measures immediately to discover Ida. I want you to tell me about her disappearance from your house, and what steps you have taken thus far towards finding her out."

Jack began at the beginning, and described the appearance of Mrs. Hardwick; how she had been permitted to carry Ida away under false representations, and the manner in which he had tracked her to Philadelphia. He spoke finally of her arrest, and her obstinate refusal to impart any information as to Ida's whereabouts.

Mrs. Clifton listened attentively and anxiously. There were more difficulties in the way than she had supposed.

"Do you think of any plan, Jack?" she asked, at length.

"Yes, madam," said our hero. "The man who painted the picture of Ida may know where she is to be found."

"You are right," said the lady. "I should have thought of it before. I will order the carriage again instantly, and we will at once go back to the print-store."

An hour later, Henry Bowen was surprised by the visit of an elegant lady to his studio, accompanied by a young man of eighteen.

"I think you are the artist who designed 'The Flower-Girl,'" said Mrs. Clifton.

"I am, madam."

"It was taken from life?"

"You are right."

"I am anxious to find out the little girl whose face you copied. Can you give me any directions that will enable me to find her out?"

"I will accompany you to the place, if you desire it, madam," said the young man. "It is a strange neighborhood to look for so much beauty."

"I shall be deeply indebted to you if you will oblige me so far," said the lady. "My carriage is below, and my coachman will obey your orders."

Once more they were on the move. A few minutes later, and the carriage paused. The driver opened the door. He was evidently quite scandalized at the idea of bringing his lady to such a place.

"This can't be the place, madam," he said.

"Yes," said the artist. "Do not get out, madam. I will go in, and find out all that is needful."

Two minutes later he returned, looking disappointed.

"We are too late," he said. "An hour since a gentleman called, and took away the child."

Mrs. Clifton sank back, in keen disappointment.

"My child, my child!" she murmured. "Shall I ever see thee again?"

Jack, too, felt more disappointed than he was willing to acknowledge. He could not conjecture who this gentleman could be who had carried away Ida. The affair seemed darker and more complicated than ever.

CHAPTER XXV. IDA IS FOUND.

IDA was sitting alone in the dreary apartment which she was now obliged to call home. Peg had gone out, and not feeling quite certain of her prey, had bolted the door on the outside. She had left some work for the child,—some handkerchiefs to hem for Dick,—with strict orders to keep steadily at work.

While seated at work, she was aroused from thoughts of home by a knock at the door.

"Who's there?" asked Ida.

"A friend," was the reply.

"Mrs. Hardwick—Peg isn't at home," returned Ida. "I don't know when she will be back."

"Then I will come in and wait till she comes back," said the voice outside.

"I can't open the door," said Ida. "It's fastened on the outside."

"Yes, I see. Then I will take the liberty to draw the bolt."

Mr. John Somerville entered the room, and for the first time in eight years his glance fell upon the child whom, for so long a time, he had defrauded of a mother's care and tenderness.

Ida returned to the window.

"How beautiful she is!" thought Somerville, with surprise. "She inherits all her mother's rare beauty."

On the table beside Ida was a drawing.

"Whose is this?" he inquired.

"Mine," answered Ida.

"So you have learned to draw?"

"A little," answered the child, modestly.

"Who taught you? Not the woman you live with?"

"No;" said Ida.

"You have not always lived with her, I am sure."

Ida admitted that she had not.

"You lived in New York with a family named Crump, did you not?"

"Do you know father and mother?" asked Ida, with sudden hope. "Did they send you for me?"

"I will tell you that by and by, my child; but I want to ask you a few questions first. Why does this woman Peg lock you in whenever she goes away?"

"I suppose," said Ida, "she is afraid I will run away."

"Then she knows you don't want to live with her?"

"Oh, yes, she knows that," said the child, frankly. "I have asked her to send me home, but she says she won't for a year."

"And how long have you been with her?"

"About a fortnight."

"What does she make you do?"

"I can't tell what she made me do first."

"Why not?"

"Because she would be very angry."

"Suppose I should tell you that I would deliver you from her. Would you be willing to go with me?"

"And you would carry me back to my mother and father?"

"Certainly, I would restore you to your mother," said he, evasively.

"Then I will go with you."

Ida ran quickly to get her bonnet and shawl.

"We had better go at once," said Somerville. "Peg might return, and give us trouble."

"O yes, let us go quickly," said Ida, turning pale at the remembered threats of Peg.

Neither knew yet that Peg could not return if she would; that, at this very moment, she was in legal custody on a charge of a serious nature. Still less did Ida know that, in going, she was losing the chance of seeing Jack and her mother, of whose existence, even, she was not yet aware; and that he, to whose care she consigned herself so gladly, had been her worst enemy.

"I will carry you to my room, in the first place," said her companion. "You must remain in concealment for a day or two, as Peg will, undoubtedly, be on the lookout for you, and we want to avoid all trouble."

Ida was delighted with her escape, and, with the hope of soon seeing her friends in New York, she put implicit faith in her guide, and was willing to submit to any conditions which he might impose.

On emerging into the street, her companion summoned a cab. He had reasons for not wishing to encounter any one whom he knew.

At length they reached his lodgings.

They were furnished more richly than any room Ida had yet seen; and formed, indeed, a luxurious contrast to the dark and scantily-furnished apartment which she had occupied for the last fortnight.

"Well, are you glad to get away from Peg?" asked John Somerville, giving Ida a seat at the fire.

"Oh, *so* glad!" said Ida.

"And you wouldn't care about going back?"

The child shuddered.

"I suppose," said she, "that Peg will be very angry. She would beat me, if she should get me back again."

"But she sha'n't. I will take good care of that."

Ida looked her gratitude. Her heart went out to those who appeared to deal kindly with her, and she felt very grateful to her companion for his instrumentality in effecting her deliverance from Peg.

"Now," said Somerville, "perhaps you will be willing to tell me what it was you were required to do."

"Yes," said Ida; "but she must never know that I told. It was to pass bad money."

"Ha!" exclaimed her companion. "Do you mean bad bills, or spurious coin?"

"It was silver dollars."

"Does she do much in that way?"

"A good deal. She goes out every day to buy things with the money."

"I am glad to learn this," said John Somerville, thoughtfully.

"Ida," said he, after a pause, "I am going out for a time. You will find books on the table, and can amuse yourself by reading; I won't make you sew, as Peg did," he said, smiling.

Ida laughed.

"Oh, yes," said she, "I like reading. I shall amuse myself very well."

Mr. Somerville went out, and Ida, as he recommended, read awhile. Then, growing tired, she went to the window and looked out. A carriage was passing slowly, on account of a press of carriages. Ida saw a face that she knew. Forgetting her bonnet in her sudden joy, she ran down the stairs, into the street, and up to the carriage window.

"O Jack!" she exclaimed; "have you come for me?"

It was Mrs. Clifton's carriage, returning from Peg's lodgings.

"Why, it's Ida!" exclaimed Jack, almost springing through the window of the carriage. "Where did you come from, and where have you been all the time?"

He opened the door of the carriage, and drew Ida in.

Till then she had not seen the lady who sat at Jack's side.

"My child, my child! Thank God, you are restored to me," exclaimed Mrs. Clifton.

She drew the astonished child to her bosom. Ida looked up into her face. Was it Nature that prompted her to return the lady's embrace?

"My God, I thank thee!" murmured Mrs. Clifton; "for this, my child, was lost and is found."

"Ida," said Jack, "this lady is your mother."

"My mother!" said the child, bewildered. "Have I two mothers?"

"Yes, but this is your real mother. You were brought to our house when you were an infant, and we have always taken care of you; but this lady is your real mother."

Ida hardly knew whether to feel glad or sorry.

"And you are not my brother?"

"You shall still consider him your brother, Ida," said Mrs. Clifton. "Heaven forbid that I should wean your heart from the friends who have cared so kindly for you! You shall keep all your old friends, and love them as dearly as ever. You will only have one friend the more."

"Where are we going?" asked Ida, suddenly.

"We are going home."

"What will the gentleman say?"

"What gentleman?"

"The one that took me away from Peg's. Why, there he is now!"

Mrs. Clifton followed the direction of Ida's finger, as she pointed to a gentleman passing.

"Is he the one?"

"Yes, mamma," said Ida, shyly.

Mrs. Clifton pressed Ida to her breast. It was the first time she had ever been called mamma. It made her realize, more fully, her present happiness.

Arrived at the house, Jack's bashfulness returned. He hung back, and hesitated about going in.

Mrs. Clifton observed this.

"Jack," said she, "this house is to be your home while you remain in Philadelphia. Come in, and Thomas shall go for your baggage."

"Perhaps I had better go with him," said Jack. "Uncle Abel will be glad to know that Ida is found."

"Very well; only return soon."

"Well!" thought Jack, as he re-entered the carriage, and gave the direction to the coachman; "won't Uncle Abel be a little surprised when he sees me coming home in such style!"

CHAPTER XXVI. "NEVER TOO LATE TO MEND."

MEANWHILE, Peg was passing her time wearily enough in prison. It was certainly provoking to be deprived of her freedom just when she was likely to make it most profitable. After some reflection, she determined to send for Mrs. Clifton, and reveal to her all she knew, trusting to her generosity for a recompense.

To one of the officers of the prison she communicated the intelligence that she had an important revelation to make to Mrs. Clifton, and absolutely refused to make it unless the lady would visit her in prison.

Scarcely had Mrs. Clifton returned home, after recovering her child, than the bell rang, and a stranger was introduced.

"Is this Mrs. Clifton?" he inquired.

"It is."

"Then I have a message for you."

The lady inclined her head.

"You must know, madam, that I am one of the officers connected with the City Prison. A woman was placed in confinement this morning, who says she has a most important communication to make to you, but declines to make it except to you in person."

"Can you bring her here, sir?"

"That is impossible. We will give you every facility, however, for visiting her in prison."

"It must be Peg," whispered Ida; "the woman that carried me off."

Such a request Mrs. Clifton could not refuse. She at once made ready to accompany the officer. She resolved to carry Ida with her, fearful that, unless she kept her in her immediate presence, she might disappear again as before.

As Jack had not yet returned, a hack was summoned, and they proceeded at once to the prison. Ida shuddered as she passed beneath the gloomy portal which shut out hope and the world from so many.

"This way, madam!"

They followed the officer through a gloomy corridor, until they came to the cell in which Peg was confined.

The tenant of the cell looked surprised to find Mrs. Clifton accompanied by Ida.

"How do you do, Ida?" she said, smiling grimly; "you see I've moved. Just tell your mother she can sit down on the bed. I'm sorry I haven't any rocking-chair or sofa to offer you."

"O Peg," said Ida, her tender heart melted by the woman's misfortunes; "how sorry I am to find you here!"

"Are you sorry?" asked Peg, looking at her in surprise.

"You haven't much cause to be. I've been your worst enemy, or one of the worst."

"I can't help it," said the child, her face beaming with a divine compassion; "it must be so sad to be shut up here, and not be able to go out into the bright sunshine. I do pity you."

Peg's heart was not wholly hardened. Few are. But it was long since it had been touched as it was now by this great pity on the part of one she had injured.

"You're a good girl, Ida," she said; "and I'm sorry I've injured you. I didn't think I should ever ask forgiveness of anybody; but I do ask your forgiveness."

The child rose, and advancing towards Peg, took her large hand in (sic) her's and said, "I forgive you, Peg."

"From your heart?"

"With all my heart."

"Thank you, child. I feel better now. There have been times when I thought I should like to lead a better life."

"It is not too late now, Peg."

Peg shook her head.

"Who will trust me after I have come from here?"

"I will," said Mrs. Clifton, speaking for the first time.

"You will?"

"Yes."

"And yet you have much to forgive. But it was not my plan to steal your daughter from you. I was poor, and money tempted me."

"Who could have had an interest in doing me this cruel wrong?"

"One whom you know well,—Mr. John Somerville."

"Surely, you are wrong!" exclaimed Mrs. Clifton, in unbounded astonishment. "It cannot be. What object could he have had?"

"Can you think of none?" queried Peg, looking at her shrewdly.

Mrs. Clifton changed color. "Perhaps so," she said. "Go on."

Peg told the whole story, so circumstantially, that there was no room left for doubt.

"I did not believe him capable of such wickedness," she ejaculated. "It was a base, unmanly revenge. How could you lend yourself to it?"

"How could I?" repeated Peg. "Madam, you are rich. You have always had whatever wealth could procure. How can you understand the temptations of the poor? When want and hunger stare us in the face, we have not the strength to resist that you have in your luxurious homes."

"Pardon me," said Mrs. Clifton, touched by these words, half bitter, half pathetic; "let me, at any rate, thank you for the service you have done me now. When you are released from your confinement, come to me. If you wish to change your mode of life and live honestly henceforth, I will give you the chance."

"You will!" said Peg, eagerly.

"I will."

"After all the injury I have done you, you will trust me still?"

"Who am I that I should condemn you? Yes, I will trust you, and forgive you."

"I never expected to hear such words," said Peg, her heart softened, and her arid eyes moistened by unwonted emotion, "least of all from you. I should like to ask one thing."

"What is it?"

"Will you let her come and see me sometimes?" she pointed to Ida as she spoke; "it will remind me that this is not all a dream—these words which you have spoken."

"She shall come," said Mrs. Clifton, "and I will come too, sometimes."

"Thank you," said Peg.

They left the prison behind them, and returned home.

"Mr. Somerville is in the drawing-room," said the servant. "He wishes to see you."

Mrs. Clifton's face flushed.

"I will go down," she said. "Ida, you will remain here."

She descended to the drawing-room, and met the man who had injured her. He had come with the resolve to stake his all upon a single cast. His fortunes were desperate. Through the mother's love for the daughter whom she had mourned so long, whom, as he believed he had it in his power to restore to her, he hoped to obtain her consent to a marriage, which would retrieve his fortunes, and gratify his ambition.

Mrs. Clifton seated herself quietly. She did not, as usual, offer him her hand. Full of his own plans, he did not notice this omission.

"How long is it since Ida was lost?" inquired Somerville.

Mrs. Clifton started in some surprise. She had not expected him to introduce this subject.

"Eight years," she said.

"And you believe she yet lives?"

"Yes, I am certain of it."

John Somerville did not understand her aright. He felt only that a mother never gives up hope.

"Yet it is a long time," he said.

"It is—a long time to suffer," she said. "How could any one have the heart to work me this great injury? For eight years I have led a sad and solitary life,—years that might have been made glad by Ida's presence."

There was something in her tone which puzzled John Somerville, but he was far enough from suspecting the truth.

"Rose," he said, after a pause. "Do you love your child well enough to make a sacrifice for the sake of recovering her?"

"What sacrifice?" she asked, fixing her eyes upon him.

"A sacrifice of your feelings."

"Explain. You talk in enigmas."

"Listen, then. I, too, believe Ida to be living. Withdraw the opposition you have twice made to my suit, promise me that you will reward my affection by your land if I succeed, and I will devote myself to the search for Ida, resting day nor night till I am able to place her in your arms. Then, if I succeed, may I claim my reward?"

"What reason have you for thinking you should find her?" asked Mrs. Clifton, with the same inexplicable manner.

"I think I have got a clew."

"And are you not generous enough to exert yourself without demanding of me this sacrifice?"

"No, Rose," he said, "I am not unselfish enough."

"But, consider a moment. Will not even that be poor atonement enough for the wrong you have done me,"—she spoke rapidly now,—“for the grief and loneliness and sorrow which your wickedness and cruelty have wrought?"

"I do not understand you," he said, turning pale.

"It is enough to say that I have seen the woman who is now in prison,—your paid agent,—and that I need no assistance to recover Ida. She is in my house."

What more could be said?

John Somerville rose, and left the room. His grand scheme had failed.

CHAPTER XXVII. CONCLUSION.

"I AM beginning to feel anxious about Jack," said Mrs. Crump. "It's almost a week since we heard from him. I'm afraid he's got into some trouble."

"Probably he's too busy to write," said the cooper.

"I told you so," said Rachel, in one of her usual fits of depression. "I told you Jack wasn't fit to be sent on such an errand. If you'd only taken my advice, you wouldn't have had so much worry and trouble about him now. Most likely he's got into the House of Reformation, or somewhere. I knew a young man once who went away from home, and never came back again. Nobody ever knew what became of him till his body was found in the river, half-eaten by fishes."

"How can you talk so, Rachel?" said Mrs. Crump, indignantly; "and of your own nephew, too!"

"This is a world of trial and disappointment," said Rachel; "and we might as well expect the worst, because it's sure to come."

"At that rate there wouldn't be much joy in life," said the cooper. "No, Rachel, you are wrong. God didn't send us into the world to be melancholy. He wants us to enjoy ourselves. Now I have no idea that Jack has jumped into the river. Then again, if he has, he can swim."

"I suppose," said Rachel, "you expect him to come home in a coach and four, bringing Ida with him."

"Well," said the cooper, good-humoredly, "I don't know but that is as probable as your anticipations."

Rachel shook her head dismally.

"Bless me!" said Mrs. Crump, in a tone of excitement; "there's a carriage just stopped at our door, and—yes, it is Jack, and Ida too!"

The strange (sic) fulfilment of the cooper's suggestion struck even Aunt Rachel. She, too, hastened to the window, and saw a handsome carriage drawn, not by four horses, but by two elegant bays, standing before

the door. Jack had already jumped out, and was now assisting Ida to alight. No sooner was Ida on firm ground than she ran into the house, and was at once clasped in the arms of her adopted mother.

"O mother!" she exclaimed; "how glad I am to see you once more."

"Haven't you a kiss for me too, Ida?" said the cooper, his face radiant with joy. "You don't know how much we've missed you."

"And I'm so glad to see you all, and Aunt Rachel, too."

To her astonishment, Aunt Rachel, for the first time in the child's remembrance, kissed her. There was nothing wanting to her welcome home.

Scarcely had the spinster done so than her observant eyes detected what had escaped the cooper and his wife, in their joy.

"Where did you get this dress, Ida?" she asked.

Then, for the first time, all observed that Ida was more elegantly dressed than when she went away. She looked like a young princess.

"That Mrs. Hardwick didn't give you this gown, I'll be bound," said she.

"Oh, I've so much to tell you," said Ida, breathlessly. "I've found my mother,—my other mother!"

A pang struck to the honest hearts of Timothy Crump and his wife. Ida must leave them. After all the happy years during which they had watched over and cared for her, she must leave them at length.

Just then, an elegantly-dressed lady appeared at the threshold. Smiling, radiant with happiness, Mrs. Clifton seemed, to the cooper's family, almost a being from another sphere.

"Mother," said Ida, taking her hand, and leading her to Mrs. Crump, "this is my other mother, who has always taken such good care of me and loved me so well."

"Mrs. Crump," said Mrs. Clifton, "how can I ever thank you for your care of my child?"

My child!

It was hard for Mrs. Crump to hear another speak of Ida in this way.

"I have tried to do my duty by her," she said, simply; "I love her so much."

"Yes," said the cooper, clearing his throat, and speaking a little huskily, "we all love her as if she was our own. She has been so long with us that we have come to think of her as our own, and—and it won't be easy at first to give her up."

"My friend," said Mrs. Clifton, "think not that I shall ever ask you to make that sacrifice. I shall always think of Ida as only a little less yours than mine."

"But you live in Philadelphia. We shall lose sight of her."

"Not unless you refuse to come to Philadelphia, too."

"I am not sure whether I could find work there."

"That shall be my care. I have another inducement. God has bestowed upon me a large share of this world's goods. I am thankful for it, since it will enable me in some slight way to express my sense of your great services to Ida. I own a neat brick house in a quiet street, which you will find more comfortable than this. Just before I left Philadelphia my lawyer drew up a deed of gift, conveying the house to you. It is Ida's gift, not mine. Ida, give this to Mr. Crump."

The child took the parchment, and handed it to the cooper, who was bewildered by his sudden good fortune.

"This for me?" he said.

"It is the first installment of my debt of gratitude; it shall not be the last," said Mrs. Clifton.

"How shall I thank you, madam?" said the cooper. "To a poor man this is, indeed, an acceptable gift."

"By accepting it," said Mrs. Clifton. "Let me add, for I know it will enhance the value of the gift in your eyes, that it is only five minutes' walk from my own house, and Ida will come and see you every day."

"Yes, mamma," said Ida; "I couldn't be happy away from father and mother and Jack, and Aunt Rachel."

"You must introduce me to your Aunt Rachel," said Mrs. Clifton, with a grace all her own.

Ida did so.

"I am glad to make your acquaintance, Miss Rachel," said Mrs. Clifton. "I need not say that I shall be glad to see you, as well as Mr. and Mrs. Crump, at my house very frequently."

"I'm much obliged to you," said Aunt Rachel; "but I don't think I shall live long to go anywhere. The feelin's I have, sometimes warn me that I'm not long for this world."

"You see, Mrs. Clifton," said Jack, his eyes dancing with mischief, "we come of a short-lived family. Grandmother died at eighty-two, and that wouldn't give Aunt Rachel long to live."

"You impudent boy!" exclaimed Miss Rachel, in great indignation. Then relapsing into melancholy, "I'm a poor afflicted creetur, and the sooner I leave this scene of trial the better."

"Let us hope," said Mrs. Clifton, politely, "that you will find the air of Philadelphia beneficial to your health. Change of air sometimes works wonders."

In the course of a few weeks the whole family removed to Philadelphia. The house which Mrs. Clifton had given them, exceeded their anticipations. It was so much better and larger than their present dwelling, that their furniture would have shown to great disadvantage in it. But Mrs. Clifton had foreseen this, and they found the house already furnished for their reception. Through Mrs. Clifton's influence the cooper was enabled to establish himself in business on a larger scale, and employ others, instead of working himself, for hire. Ida was such a frequent visitor, that it was hard to tell which she considered her home—her mother's elegant dwelling, or Mrs. Cooper's comfortable home.

For Jack, a situation was found in a merchant's counting-room, and he became a thriving young merchant, being eventually taken into partnership. Ida grew lovelier as she grew older, and her rare beauty caused her

to be sought after. If she does not marry well and happily, it will not be for want of an opportunity.

Dear reader, you who deem that all stories should end with a marriage, shall not be disappointed.

One day Aunt Rachel was missing from her room. It was remembered that she had appeared singularly for some days previous, and the knowledge of her constitutional low spirits, led to the apprehension that she had made way with herself. The cooper was about to notify the police, when the front door opened and Rachel walked in. She was accompanied by a short man, stout and freckled.

"Why, Aunt Rachel," exclaimed Mrs. Crump, "where *have* you been? We have been so anxious about you."

A faint flush came to Aunt Rachel's sallow cheek.

"Sister Mary," said she, "you will be surprised, perhaps, but—but this is my consort. Mr. Smith, let me introduce you to my sister."

"Then you are married, Rachel," said Mrs. Crump, quite confounded.

"Yes," said Rachel; "I—I don't expect to live long, and it won't make much difference."

"I congratulate you, *Mrs. Smith*," said Mary Crump, heartily; "and I wish you a long and happy life, I am sure."

It is observed that, since her marriage, Aunt Rachel's fits of depression are less numerous than before. She has even been seen to smile repeatedly, and has come to bear, with philosophical equanimity, her nephew Jack's sly allusions to her elopement.

One word more. At the close of her term of confinement, Peg came to Mrs. Clifton, and reminded her of her promise. Dick was dead, and she was left alone in the world. Imprisonment had not hardened her as it so often does. She had been redeemed by the kindness of those she had injured. Mrs. Clifton secured her a position in which her energy and administrative ability found fitting exercise, and she leads a laborious and useful life, in a community where her antecedents are not known.

END.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK TIMOTHY CRUMP'S WARD: A STORY OF AMERICAN LIFE

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