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PART XI.

CHAPTER I.

The next day, on the outside of the "Cambridge Telegraph," there was one passenger who ought to have impressed his fellow-travellers with a very respectful idea of his lore in the dead languages; for not a single syllable, in a live one, did he vouchsafe to utter from the moment he ascended that "bad eminence" to the moment in which he regained his mother earth. "Sleep," says honest Sancho, "covers a man better than a cloak." I am ashamed of thee, honest Sancho, thou art a sad plagiarist; for Tibullus said pretty nearly the same thing before thee,—

"Te somnus fusco velavit amictu." (1)

But is not silence as good a cloak as sleep; does it not wrap a man round with as offusc and impervious a fold? Silence, what a world it covers,— what busy schemes, what bright hopes and dark fears, what ambition, or what despair! Do you ever see a man in any society sitting mute for hours, and not feel an uneasy curiosity to penetrate the wall he thus builds up between others and himself? Does he not interest you far more than the brilliant talker at your left, the airy wit at your right whose shafts fall in vain on the sullen barrier of the silent man! Silence, dark sister of Nox and Erebus, how, layer upon layer, shadow upon shadow, blackness upon blackness, thou stretchest thyself from hell to heaven, over thy two chosen haunts,—man's heart and the grave!

So, then, wrapped in my great-coat and my silence, I performed my journey; and on the evening of the second day I reached the old-fashioned brick house. How shrill on my ears sounded the bell! How

strange and ominous to my impatience seemed the light gleaming across the windows of the hall! How my heart beat as I watched the face of the servant who opened the gate to my summons!

"All well?" cried I.

"All well, sir," answered the servant, cheerfully. "Mr. Squills, indeed, is with master, but I don't think there is anything the matter."

But now my mother appeared at the threshold, and I was in her arms.

"Sisty, Sisty! my dear, dear son—beggared, perhaps—and my fault—mine."

"Yours! Come into this room, out of hearing,—your fault?"

"Yes, yes! for if I had had no brother, or if I had not been led away,— if I had, as I ought, entreated poor Austin not to—"

"My dear, dearest mother, you accuse yourself for what, it seems, was my uncle's misfortune,—I am sure not even his fault! [I made a gulp there.] No, lay the fault on the right shoulders,—the defunct shoulders of that horrible progenitor, William Caxton the printer; for though I don't yet know the particulars of what has happened, I will lay a wager it is connected with that fatal invention of printing. Come, come! my father is well, is he not?"

"Yes, thank Heaven!"

"And I too, and Roland, and little Blanche! Why, then, you are right to thank Heaven, for your true treasures are untouched. But sit down and explain, pray."

"I cannot explain. I do not understand anything more than that he, my brother—mine!—has involved Austin in—in—" (a fresh burst of tears.)

I comforted, scolded, laughed, preached, and adjured in a breath; and then, drawing my another gently on, entered my father's study.

At the table was seated Mr. Squills, pen in hand, and a glass of his favorite punch by his side. My father was standing on the hearth, a shade more pale, but with a resolute expression on his countenance which was new to its indolent, thoughtful mildness. He lifted his eyes as the door opened, and then, putting his finger to his lips, as he glanced towards my mother, he said gayly, "No great harm done. Don't believe her! Women always exaggerate, and make realities of their own bugbears: it is the vice of their lively imaginations, as Wierus has clearly shown in accounting for the marks, moles, and hare-lips which they inflict upon their innocent infants before they are even born. My dear boy," added my father, as I here kissed him and smiled in his face, "I thank you for that smile! God bless you!" He wrung my hand and turned a little aside.

"It is a great comfort," renewed my father, after a short pause, "to know, when a misfortune happens, that it could not be helped. Squills has just discovered that I have no bump of cautiousness; so that, craniologically speaking, if I had escaped one imprudence, I should certainly have run my head against another."

"A man with your development is made to be taken in," said Mr. Squills, consolingly.

"Do you hear that, my own Kitty? And have you the heart to blame Jack any longer,—a poor creature cursed with a bump that would take in the Stock Exchange? And can any one resist his bump, Squills?"

"Impossible!" said the surgeon, authoritatively.

"Sooner or later it must involve him in its airy meshes,—eh, Squills?— entrap him into its fatal cerebral cell. There his fate waits him, like the ant-lion in its pit."

"Too true," quoth Squills. "What a phrenological lecturer you would have made!"

"Go then, my love," said my father, "and lay no blame but on this melancholy cavity of mine, where cautiousness—is not! Go, and let Sisty have some supper; for Squills says that he has a fine development of the mathematical organs, and we want his help. We are hard at work on figures, Pisistratus."

My mother looked broken-hearted, and, obeying submissively, stole to the door without a word. But as she reached the threshold she turned round and beckoned to me to follow her.

I whispered my father and went out. My mother was standing in the hall, and I saw by the lamp that

she had dried her tears, and that her face, though very sad, was more composed.

"Sisty," she said, in a low voice which struggled to be firm, promise me that you will tell me all,—the worst, Sisty. They keep it from me, and that is my hardest punishment; for when I don't know all that he—that Austin suffers, it seems to me as if I had lost his heart. Oh, Sisty, my child, my child, don't fear me! I shall be happy whatever befalls us, if I once get back my privilege,—my privilege, Sisty, to comfort, to share! Do you understand me?"

"Yes indeed, my mother! And with your good sense and clear woman's wit, if you will but feel how much we want them, you will be the best counsellor we could have. So never fear; you and I will have no secrets."

My mother kissed me, and went away with a less heavy step.

As I re-entered, my father came across the room and embraced me.

"My son," he said in a faltering voice, "if your modest prospects in life are ruined—"

"Father, father, can you think of me at such a moment? Me! Is it possible to ruin the young and strong and healthy! Ruin me, with these thews and sinews; ruin me, with the education you have given me,—thews and sinews of the mind! Oh, no! there, Fortune is harmless! And you forget, sir,—the saffron bag!"

Squills leaped up, and wiping his eyes with one hand, gave me a sounding slap on the shoulder with the other.

"I am proud of the care I took of your infancy, Master Caxton. That comes of strengthening the digestive organs in early childhood. Such sentiments are a proof of magnificent ganglions in a perfect state of order. When a man's tongue is as smooth as I am sure yours is, he slips through misfortune like an eel."

I laughed outright, my father smiled faintly; and, seating myself, I drew towards me a paper filled with Squills's memoranda, and said, "Now to find the unknown quantity. What on earth is this? 'Supposed value of books, L750.' Oh, father! this is impossible. I was prepared for anything but that. Your books,—they are your life!"

"Nay," said my father; "after all, they are the offending party in this case, and so ought to be the principal victims. Besides, I believe I know most of them by heart. But, in truth, we are only entering all our effects, to be sure [added my father, proudly], that, come what may, we are not dishonored."

"Humor him," whispered Squills; "we will save the books." Then he added aloud, as he laid finger and thumb on my pulse, "One, two, three, about seventy,—capital pulse, soft and full; he can bear the whole: let us administer it."

My father nodded: "Certainly. But, Pisistratus, we must manage your dear mother. Why she should think of blaming herself because poor Jack took wrong ways to enrich us, I cannot understand. But as I have had occasion before to remark, Sphinx is a noun feminine."

My poor father! that was a vain struggle for thy wanted innocent humor. The lips quivered.

Then the story came out. It seems that when it was resolved to undertake the publication of the "Literary Times," a certain number of shareholders had been got together by the indefatigable energies of Uncle Jack; and in the deed of association and partnership, my father's name figured conspicuously as the holder of a fourth of this joint property. If in this my father had committed some imprudence, he had at least done nothing that, according to the ordinary calculations of a secluded student, could become ruinous. But just at the time when we were in the hurry of leaving town, Jack had represented to my father that it might be necessary to alter a little the plan of the paper, and in order to allure a larger circle of readers, touch somewhat on the more vulgar news and Interests of the day. A change of plan might involve a change of title; and he suggested to my father the expediency of leaving the smooth hands of Mr. Tibbets altogether unfettered, as to the technical name and precise form of the publication. To this my father had unwittingly assented, on hearing that the other shareholders would do the same. Mr. Peck, a printer of considerable opulence and highly respectable name, had been found to advance the sum necessary for the publication of the earlier numbers, upon the guarantee of the said act of partnership and the additional security of my father's signature to a document authorizing Mr. Tibbets to make any change in the form or title of the periodical that might be judged advisable, concurrent with the consent of the other shareholders.

Now, it seems that Mr. Peck had, in his previous conferences with Mr. Tibbets, thrown much cold water on the idea of the "Literary Times," and had suggested something that should "catch the moneyed public,"—the fact being, as was afterwards discovered, that the printer, whose spirit of enterprise was congenial to Uncle Jack's, had shares in three or four speculations to which he was naturally glad of an opportunity to invite the attention of the public. In a word, no sooner was my poor father's back turned than the "Literary Times" was dropped incontinently, and Mr. Peck and Mr. Tibbets began to concentrate their luminous notions into that brilliant and comet-like apparition which ultimately blazed forth under the title of "The Capitalist."

From this change of enterprise the more prudent and responsible of the original shareholders had altogether withdrawn. A majority, indeed, were left; but the greater part of those were shareholders of that kind most amenable to the influences of Uncle Jack, and willing to be shareholders in anything, since as yet they were possessors of nothing.

Assured of my father's responsibility, the adventurous Peck put plenty of spirit into the first launch of "The Capitalist." All the walls were placarded with its announcements; circular advertisements ran from one end of the kingdom to the other. Agents were engaged, correspondents levied en masse. The invasion of Xerxes on the Greeks was not more munificently provided for than that of "The Capitalist" upon the credulity and avarice of mankind.

But as Providence bestows upon fishes the instrument of fins, whereby they balance and direct their movements, however rapid and erratic, through the pathless deeps, so to the cold-blooded creatures of our own species—that may be classed under the genus Money-Makers—the same protective power accords the fin-like properties of prudence and caution, wherewith your true money-getter buoys and guides himself majestically through the great seas of speculation. In short, the fishes the net was cast for were all scared from the surface at the first splash. They came round and smelt at the mesh with their sharp bottle-noses, and then, plying those invaluable fins, made off as fast as they could, plunging into the mud, hiding themselves under rocks and coral banks. Metaphor apart, the capitalists buttoned up their pockets, and would have nothing to say to their namesake.

Not a word of this change, so abhorrent to all the notions of poor Augustine Caxton, had been breathed to him by Peck or Tibbets. He ate and slept and worked at the Great Book, occasionally wondering why he had not heard of the advent of the "Literary Times," unconscious of all the awful responsibilities which "The Capitalist" was entailing on him, knowing no more of "The Capitalist" than he did of the last loan of the Rothschilds.

Difficult was it for all other human nature, save my father's, not to breathe an indignant anathema on the scheming head of the brother-in-law who had thus violated the most sacred obligations of trust and kindred, and so entangled an unsuspecting recluse. But, to give even Jack Tibbets his due, he had firmly convinced himself that "The Capitalist" would make my father's fortune; and if he did not announce to him the strange and anomalous development into which the original sleeping chrysalis of the "Literary Times" had taken portentous wing, it was purely and wholly in the knowledge that my father's "prejudices," as he termed them, would stand in the way of his becoming a Creesus. And, in fact, Uncle Jack had believed so heartily in his own project that he had put himself thoroughly into Mr. Peck's power, signed bills, in his own name, to some fabulous amount, and was actually now in the Fleet, whence his penitential and despairing confession was dated, arriving simultaneously with a short letter from Mr. Peck, wherein that respectable printer apprised my father that he had continued, at his own risk, the publication of "The Capitalist" as far as a prudent care for his family would permit; that he need not say that a new daily journal was a very vast experiment; that the expense of such a paper as "The Capitalist" was immeasurably greater than that of a mere literary periodical, as originally suggested; and that now, being constrained to come upon the shareholders for the sums he had advanced, amounting to several thousands, he requested my father to settle with him immediately,—delicately implying that Mr. Caxton himself might settle as he could with the other shareholders, most of whom, he grieved to add, he had been misled by Mr. Tibbets into believing to be men of substance, when in reality they were men of straw!

Nor was this all the evil. The "Great Anti-Bookseller Publishing Society," which had maintained a struggling existence, evinced by advertisements of sundry forthcoming works of solid interest and enduring nature, wherein, out of a long list, amidst a pompous array of "Poems;" "Dramas not intended for the Stage;" "Essays by Phileutheros, Philanthropos, Philopolis, Philodemus, and Philalethes," stood prominently forth "The History of Human Error, Vols. I. and II., quarto, with illustrations,"—the "Anti-Bookseller Society," I say, that had hitherto evinced nascent and budding life by these exfoliations from its slender stem, died of a sudden blight the moment its sun, in the shape of Uncle Jack, set in the Cimmerian regions of the Fleet; and a polite letter from another printer (O William Caxton, William Caxton, fatal progenitor!) informing my father of this event, stated complimentarily that it was to him, "as the most respectable member of the Association," that the said printer would be compelled to look

for expenses incurred, not only in the very costly edition of the "History of Human Error," but for those incurred in the print and paper devoted to "Poems," "Dramas not intended for the Stage," "Essays by Phileutheros, Philanthropos, Philopolis, Philodemus, and Philalethes," with sundry other works, no doubt of a very valuable nature, but in which a considerable loss, in a pecuniary point of view, must be necessarily expected.

I own that as soon as I had mastered the above agreeable facts, and ascertained from Mr. Squills that my father really did seem to have rendered himself legally liable to these demands, I leaned back in my chair stunned and bewildered.

"So you see," said my father, "that as yet we are contending with monsters in the dark,—in the dark all monsters look larger and uglier. Even Augustus Caesar, though certainly he had never scrupled to make as many ghosts as suited his convenience, did not like the chance of a visit from them, and never sat alone in tenebris. What the amount of the sums claimed from me may be, we know not; what may be gained from the other shareholders is equally obscure and undefined. But the first thing to do is to get poor Jack out of prison."

"Uncle Jack out of prison!" exclaimed I. "Surely, sir, that is carrying forgiveness too far."

"Why, he would not have been in prison if I had not been so blindly forgetful of his weakness, poor man! I ought to have known better. But my vanity misled me; I must needs publish a great book, as if [said Mr. Caxton, looking round the shelves] there were not great books enough in the world! I must needs, too, think of advancing and circulating knowledge in the form of a journal,—I, who had not knowledge enough of the character of my own brother-in-law to keep myself from ruin! Come what—will, I should think myself the meanest of men to let that poor creature, whom I ought to have considered as a monomaniac, rot in prison because I, Austin Caxton, wanted common-sense. And [concluded my father, resolutely] he is your mother's brother, Pistratus. I should have gone to town at once, but hearing that my wife had written to you, I waited till I could leave her to the companionship of hope and comfort,—two blessings that smile upon every mother in the face of a son like you. Tomorrow I go."

"Not a bit of it," said Mr. Squills, firmly; "as your medical adviser, I forbid you to leave the house for the next six days."

(1) Tibullus, iii. 4,55.

CHAPTER II.

"Sir," continued Mr. Squills, biting off the end of a cigar which he pulled from his pocket, "you concede to me that it is a very important business on which you propose to go to London."

"Of that there is no doubt," replied my father.

"And the doing of business well or ill entirely depends upon the habit of body!" cried Mr. Squills, triumphantly. "Do you know, Mr. Caxton, that while you are looking so calm, and talking so quietly,—just on purpose to sustain your son and delude your wife,—do you know that your pulse, which is naturally little more than sixty, is nearly a hundred? Do you know, sir, that your mucous membranes are in a state of high irritation, apparent by the papillae at the tip of your tongue? And if, with a pulse like this and a tongue like that, you think of settling money matters with a set of sharp-witted tradesmen, all I can say is, that you are a ruined man."

"But—" began my father.

"Did not Squire Rollick," pursued Mr. Squills,— "Squire Rollick, the hardest head at a bargain I know of,—did not Squire Rollick sell that pretty little farm of his, Scranny Holt, for thirty per cent below its value? And what was the cause, sir? The whole county was in amaze! What was the cause, but an incipient simmering attack of the yellow jaundice, which made him take a gloomy view of human life and the agricultural interest? On the other hand, did not Lawyer Cool, the most prudent man in the three kingdoms,—Lawyer Cool, who was so methodical that all the clocks in the county were set by his watch,—plunge one morning head over heels into a frantic speculation for cultivating the bogs in Ireland? (His watch did not go right for the next three months, which made our whole shire an hour in advance of the rest of England!) And what was the cause of that nobody knew, till I was called in, and

found the cerebral membrane in a state of acute irritation,—probably just in the region of his acquisitiveness and ideality. No, Mr. Caxton, you will stay at home and take a soothing preparation I shall send you, of lettuce-leaves and marshmallows. But I," continued Squills, lighting his cigar and taking two determined whiffs,—“but I will go up to town and settle the business for you, and take with me this young gentleman, whose digestive functions are just in a state to deal safely with those horrible elements of dyspepsia,—the L. S. D.”

As he spoke, Mr. Squills set his foot significantly upon mine.

"But," resumed my father, mildly, "though I thank you very much, Squills, for your kind offer, I do not recognize the necessity of accepting it. I am not so bad a philosopher as you seem to imagine; and the blow I have received has not so deranged my physical organization as to render me unfit to transact my affairs."

"Hum!" grunted Squills, starting up and seizing my father's pulse; "ninety-six,—ninety-six if a beat! And the tongue, sir!"

"Pshaw!" quoth my father; "you have not even seen my tongue!"

"No need of that; I know what it is by the state of the eyelids,—tip scarlet, sides rough as a nutmeg-grater!"

"Pshaw!" again said my father, this time impatiently.

"Well," said Squills, solemnly, "it is my duty to say," (here my mother entered, to tell me that supper was ready), "and I say it to you, Mrs. Caxton, and to you, Mr. Pisistratus Caxton, as the parties most nearly interested, that if you, sir, go to London upon this matter, I'll not answer for the consequences."

"Oh! Austin, Austin," cried my mother, running up and throwing her arms round my father's neck; while I, little less alarmed by Squills's serious tone and aspect, represented strongly the inutility of Mr. Caxton's personal interference at the present moment. All he could do on arriving in town would be to put the matter into the hands of a good lawyer, and that we could do for him; it would be time enough to send for him when the extent of the mischief done was more clearly ascertained. Meanwhile Squills griped my father's pulse, and my mother hung on his neck.

"Ninety-six—ninety-seven!" groaned Squills in a hollow voice.

"I don't believe it!" cried my father, almost in a passion,—“never better nor cooler in my life.”

"And the tongue—Look at his tongue, Mrs. Caxton,—a tongue, ma'am, so bright that you could see to read by it!"

"Oh! Austin, Austin!"

"My dear, it is not my tongue that is in fault, I assure you," said my father, speaking through his teeth; "and the man knows no more of my tongue than he does of the Mysteries of Eleusis."

"Put it out then," exclaimed Squills; "and if it be not as I say, you have my leave to go to London and throw your whole fortune into the two great pits you have dug for it. Put it out!"

"Mr. Squills!" said my father, coloring,—“Mr. Squills, for shame!”

"Dear, dear, Austin! your hand is so hot; you are feverish, I am sure."

"Not a bit of it."

"But, sir, only just gratify Mr. Squills," said I, coaxingly.

"There, there!" said my father, fairly baited into submission, and shyly exhibiting for a moment the extremest end of the vanquished organ of eloquence.

Squills darted forward his lynx-like eyes. "Red as a lobster, and rough as a gooseberry-bush!" cried Squills, in a tone of savage joy.

CHAPTER III.

How was it possible for one poor tongue, so reviled and persecuted, so humbled, insulted, and triumphed over, to resist three tongues in league against it?

Finally, my father yielded, and Squills; in high spirits, declared that he would go to supper with me, to see that I ate nothing that would tend to discredit his reliance on my system. Leaving my mother still with her Austin, the good surgeon then took my arm, and as soon as we were in the next room, shut the door carefully, wiped his forehead, and said: "I think we have saved him!"

"Would it really, then, have injured my father so much?"

"So much? Why, you foolish young man, don't you see that with his ignorance of business where he himself is concerned,—though for any other one's business, neither Rollick nor Cool has a better judgment,— and with his d—d Quixotic spirit of honor worked up into a state of excitement, he would have rushed to Mr. Tibbets and exclaimed, "How much do we owe you? There it is' settled in the same way with these printers, and come back without a sixpence; whereas you and I can look coolly about us and reduce the inflammation to the minimum!"

"I see, and thank you heartily, Squills."

"Besides," said the surgeon, with more feeling, "your father has really been making a noble effort over himself. He suffers more than you would think,—not for himself (for I do believe that if he were alone in the world, he would be quite contented if he could save fifty pounds a-year and his books), but for your mother and yourself; and a fresh access of emotional excitement, all the nervous anxiety of a journey to London on such a business, might have ended in a paralytic or epileptic affection. Now we have him here snug; and the worst news we can give him will be better than what he will make up his mind for. But you don't eat."

"Eat! How can I? My poor father!"

"The effect of grief upon the gastric juices, through the nervous system, is very remarkable," said Mr. Squills, philosophically, and helping himself to a broiled bone; "it increases the thirst, while it takes away hunger. No—don't touch port!—heating! Sherry and water."

CHAPTER IV.

The house-door had closed upon Mr. Squills,—that gentleman having promised to breakfast with me the next morning, so that we might take the coach from our gate,—and I remained alone, seated by the supper-table, and revolving all I had heard, when my father walked in.

"Pisistratus," said he gravely, and looking round him, "your mother!— suppose the worst—your first care, then, must be to try and secure something for her. You and I are men,—we can never want, while we have health of mind and body; but a woman—and if anything happens to me—"

My father's lip writhed as it uttered these brief sentences.

"My dear, dear father!" said I, suppressing my tears with difficulty, "all evils, as you yourself said, look worse by anticipation. It is impossible that your whole fortune can be involved. The newspaper did not run many weeks, and only the first volume of your work is printed. Besides, there must be other shareholders who will pay their quota. Believe me, I feel sanguine as to the result of my embassy. As for my poor mother, it is not the loss of fortune that will wound her,—depend on it, she thinks very little of that,—it is the loss of your confidence."

"My confidence!"

"Ah, yes! tell her all your fears, as your hopes. Do not let your affectionate pity exclude her from one corner of your heart."

"It is that, it is that, Austin,—my husband—my joy—my pride—my soul— my all!" cried a soft, broken voice.

My mother had crept in, unobserved by us.

My father looked at us both, and the tears which had before stood in his eyes forced their way. Then opening his arms, into which his Kitty threw herself joyfully, he lifted those moist eyes upward, and by

the movement of his lips I saw that he thanked God.

I stole out of the room. I felt that those two hearts should be left to beat and to blend alone. And from that hour I am convinced that Augustine Caxton acquired a stouter philosophy than that of the Stoics. The fortitude that concealed pain was no longer needed, for the pain was no longer felt.

CHAPTER V.

Mr. Squills and I performed our journey without adventure, and as we were not alone on the coach, with little conversation. We put up at a small inn in the City, and the next morning I sallied forth to see Trevanion; for we agreed that he would be the best person to advise us. But on arriving at St. James's Square I had the disappointment of hearing that the whole family had gone to Paris three days before, and were not expected to return till the meeting of Parliament.

This was a sad discouragement, for I had counted much on Trevanion's clear head and that extraordinary range of accomplishment in all matters of business—all that related to practical life—which my old patron pre-eminently possessed. The next thing would be to find Trevanion's lawyer (for Trevanion was one of those men whose solicitors are sure to be able and active). But the fact was that he left so little to lawyers that he had never had occasion to communicate with one since I had known him, and I was therefore in ignorance of the very name of his solicitor; nor could the porter, who was left in charge of the house, enlighten me. Luckily, I bethought myself of Sir Sedley Beaudesert, who could scarcely fail to give me the information required, and who, at all events, might recommend to me some other lawyer. So to him I went.

I found Sir Sedley at breakfast with a young gentleman who seemed about twenty. The good baronet was delighted to see me; but I thought it was with a little confusion, rare to his cordial ease, that he presented me to his cousin, Lord Castleton. It was a name familiar to me, though I had never before met its patrician owner.

The Marquis of Castleton was indeed a subject of envy to young idlers, and afforded a theme of interest to gray-bearded politicians. Often had I heard of "that lucky fellow Castleton," who when of age would step into one of those colossal fortunes which would realize the dreams of Aladdin,—a fortune that had been out to nurse since his minority. Often had I heard graver gossips wonder whether Castleton would take any active part in public life,—whether he would keep up the family influence. His mother (still alive) was a superior woman, and had devoted herself, from his childhood, to supply a father's loss and fit him for his great position. It was said that he was clever, had been educated by a tutor of great academic distinction, and was reading for a double-first class at Oxford. This young marquis was indeed the head of one of those few houses still left in England that retain feudal importance. He was important, not only from his rank and his vast fortune, but from an immense circle of powerful connections; from the ability of his two predecessors, who had been keen politicians and cabinet ministers; from the prestige they had bequeathed to his name; from the peculiar nature of his property, which gave him the returning interest in no less than six parliamentary seats in Great Britain and Ireland; besides the indirect ascendancy which the head of the Castletons had always exercised over many powerful and noble allies of that princely house. I was not aware that he was related to Sir Sedley, whose world of action was so remote from politics; and it was with some surprise that I now heard that announcement, and certainly with some interest that I, perhaps from the verge of poverty, gazed on this young heir of fabulous El Dorados.

It was easy to see that Lord Castleton had been brought up with a careful knowledge of his future greatness, and its serious responsibilities. He stood immeasurably aloof from all the affectations common to the youth of minor patricians. He had not been taught to value himself on the cut of a coat or the shape of a hat. His world was far above St. James's Street and the clubs. He was dressed plainly, though in a style peculiar to himself,—a white neck-cloth (which was not at that day quite so uncommon for morning use as it is now), trousers without straps, thin shoes, and gaiters. In his manner there was nothing of the supercilious apathy which characterizes the dandy introduced to some one whom he doubts if he can nod to from the bow-window at White's,—none of such vulgar coxcombs had Lord Castleton; and yet a young gentleman more emphatically coxcomb it was impossible to see. He had been told, no doubt, that as the head of a house which was almost in itself a party in the state, he should be bland and civil to all men; and this duty being grafted upon a nature singularly cold and unsocial, gave to his politeness something so stiff, yet so condescending that it brought the blood to one's cheek,—though the momentary anger was counterbalanced by a sense of the almost ludicrous

contrast between this gracious majesty of deportment and the insignificant figure, with the boyish beardless face, by which it was assumed. Lord Castleton did not content himself with a mere bow at our introduction. Much to my wonder how he came by the information he displayed, he made me a little speech after the manner of Louis XIV. to a provincial noble, studiously modelled upon that royal maxim of urbane policy which instructs a king that he should know something of the birth, parentage, and family of his meanest gentleman. It was a little speech in which my father's learning and my uncle's services and the amiable qualities of your humble servant were neatly interwoven, delivered in a falsetto tone, as if learned by heart, though it must have been necessarily impromptu; and then, reseating himself, he made a gracious motion of the head and hand, as if to authorize me to do the same.

Conversation succeeded, by galvanic jerks and spasmodic starts,—a conversation that Lord Castleton contrived to tug so completely out of poor Sir Sedley's ordinary course of small and polished small-talk that that charming personage, accustomed, as he well deserved, to be Coryphæus at his own table, was completely silenced. With his light reading, his rich stores of anecdote, his good-humored knowledge of the drawing-room world, he had scarce a word that would fit into the great, rough, serious matters which Lord Castleton threw upon the table as he nibbled his toast. Nothing but the most grave and practical subjects of human interest seemed to attract this future leader of mankind. The fact is that Lord Castleton had been taught everything that relates to property, —a knowledge which embraces a very wide circumference. It had been said to him, "You will be an immense proprietor: knowledge is essential to your self-preservation. You will be puzzled, bubbled, ridiculed, duped every day of your life if you do not make yourself acquainted with all by which property is assailed or defended, impoverished or increased. You have a vast stake in the country, you must learn all the interests of Europe,—nay, of the civilized world; for those interests react on the country, and the interests of the country are of the greatest possible consequence to the interests of the Marquis of Castleton." Thus the state of the Continent; the policy of Metternich; the condition of the Papacy; the growth of Dissent; the proper mode of dealing with the general spirit of Democracy, which was the epidemic of European monarchies; the relative proportions of the agricultural and manufacturing population; corn-laws, currency, and the laws that regulate wages; a criticism on the leading speakers of the House of Commons, with some discursive observations on the importance of fattening cattle; the introduction of flax into Ireland; emigration; the condition of the poor; the doctrines of Mr. Owen; the pathology of potatoes; the connection between potatoes, pauperism, and patriotism,—these and suchlike stupendous subjects for reflection, all branching more or less intricately from the single idea of the Castleton property, the young lord discussed and disposed of in half-a-dozen prim, poised sentences; evincing, I must say in justice, no inconsiderable information, and a mighty solemn turn of mind. The oddity was that the subjects so selected and treated should not come rather from some young barrister, or mature political economist, than from so gorgeous a lily of the field. Of a man less elevated in rank one would certainly have said, "Cleverish, but a prig;" but there really was something so respectable in a personage born to such fortunes, and having nothing to do but to bask in the sunshine, voluntarily taking such pains with himself and condescending to identify his own interests—the interests of the Castleton property—with the concerns of his lesser fellow-mortals that one felt the young marquis had in him the stuff to become a very considerable man.

Poor Sir Sedley, to whom all these matters were as unfamiliar as the theology of the Talmud, after some vain efforts to slide the conversation into easier grooves, fairly gave in, and with a compassionate smile on his handsome countenance, took refuge in his easy-chair and the contemplation of his snuff-box.

At last, to our great relief, the servant announced Lord Castleton's carriage; and with another speech of overpowering affability to me, and a cold shake of the hand to Sir Sedley, Lord Castleton went his way.

The breakfast-parlor looked on the street, and I turned mechanically to the window as Sir Sedley followed his guest out of the room. A travelling carriage with four post-horses was at the door, and a servant, who looked like a foreigner, was in waiting with his master's cloak. As I saw Lord Castleton step into the street, and wrap himself in his costly mantle lined with sables, I observed, more than I had while he was in the room, the enervate slightness of his frail form, and the more than paleness of his thin, joyless face; and then, instead of envy, I felt compassion for the owner of all this pomp and grandeur,—felt that I would not have exchanged my hardy health and easy humor and vivid capacities of enjoyment in things the slightest and most within the reach of all men, for the wealth and greatness which that poor youth perhaps deserved the more for putting them so little to the service of pleasure.

"Well," said Sir Sedley, "and what do you think of him?"

"He is just the sort of man Trevanion would like," said I, evasively.

"That is true," answered Sir Sedley, in a serious tone of voice, and looking at me somewhat earnestly. "Have you heard? But no, you cannot have heard yet."

"Heard what?"

"My dear young friend," said the kindest and most delicate of all fine gentlemen, sauntering away, that he might not observe the emotion he caused, "Lord Castleton is going to Paris to join the Trevanions. The object Lady Ellinor has had at heart for many a long year is won, and our pretty Fanny will be Marchioness of Castleton when her betrothed is of age,—that is, in six months. The two mothers have settled it all between them."

I made no answer, but continued to look out of the window.

"This alliance," resumed Sir Sedley, "was all that was wanting to assure Trevanion's position. When Parliament meets, he will have some great office. Poor man, how I shall pity him! It is extraordinary to me," continued Sir Sedley, benevolently going on, that I might have full time to recover myself, "how contagious that disease called 'business' is in our foggy England! Not only Trevanion, you see, has the complaint in its very worst and most complicated form, but that poor dear cousin of mine who is so young [here Sir Sedley sighed], and might enjoy himself so much, is worse than you were when Trevanion was fagging you to death. But, to be sure, a great name and position, like Castleton's, must be a very heavy affliction to a conscientious mind. You see how the sense of its responsibilities has aged him already,—positively, two great wrinkles under his eyes. Well, after all, I admire him and respect his tutor: a soil naturally very thin, I suspect, has been most carefully cultivated; and Castleton, with Trevanion's help, will be the first man in the peerage,—prime minister some day, I dare say. And when I think of it, how grateful I ought to feel to his father and mother, who produced him quite in their old age; for if he had not been born, I should have been the most miserable of men,—yes, positively, that horrible marquisate would have come to me! I never think over Horace Walpole's regrets, when he got the earldom of Orford, without the deepest sympathy, and without a shudder at the thought of what my dear Lady Castleton was kind enough to save me from,—all owing to the Ems waters, after twenty years' marriage! Well, my young friend, and how are all at home?"

As when, some notable performer not having yet arrived behind the scenes, or having to change his dress, or not having yet quite recovered an unlucky extra tumbler of exciting fluids, and the green curtain has therefore unduly delayed its ascent, you perceive that the thorough-bass in the orchestra charitably devotes himself to a prelude of astonishing prolixity, calling in "Lodoiska" or "Der Freischutz" to beguile the time, and allow the procrastinating histrio leisure sufficient to draw on his flesh-colored pantaloons and give himself the proper complexion for a Coriolanus or Macbeth,—even so had Sir Sedley made that long speech requiring no rejoinder, till he saw the time had arrived when he could artfully close, with the flourish of a final interrogative, in order to give poor Pisistratus Caxton all preparation to compose himself and step forward. There is certainly something of exquisite kindness and thoughtful benevolence in that rarest of gifts,—fine breeding; and when now, re-manned and resolute, I turned round and saw Sir Sedley's soft blue eye shyly, but benignantly, turned to me, while, with a grace no other snuff-taker ever had since the days of Pope, he gently proceeded to refresh himself by a pinch of the celebrated Beaudesert mixture,—I felt my heart as gratefully moved towards him as if he had conferred on me some colossal obligation. And this crowning question, "And how are all at home?" restored me entirely to my self-possession, and for the moment distracted the bitter current of my thoughts.

I replied by a brief statement of my father's involvement, disguising our apprehensions as to its extent, speaking of it rather as an annoyance than a possible cause of ruin, and ended by asking Sir Sedley to give me the address of Trevanion's lawyer.

The good baronet listened with great attention; and that quick penetration which belongs to a man of the world enabled him to detect that I had smoothed over matters more than became a faithful narrator.

He shook his head, and, seating himself on the sofa, motioned me to come to his side; then, leaning his arm over my shoulder, he said, in his seductive, wincing way,—

"We two young fellows should understand each other when we talk of money matters. I can say to you what I could not say to my respectable senior,—by three years,—your excellent father. Frankly, then, I suspect this is a bad business. I know little about newspapers, except that I have to subscribe to one in my county, which costs me a small income; but I know that a London daily paper might ruin a man in a few weeks. And as for shareholders, my dear Caxton, I was once teased into being a shareholder in a canal that ran through my property, and ultimately ran off with L30,000 of it! The other shareholders were all drowned in the canal, like Pharaoh and his host in the Red Sea. But your father is a great scholar, and must not be plagued with such matters. I owe him a great deal. He was very kind to me at

Cambridge, and gave me the taste for reading to which I owe the pleasantest hours of my life. So, when you and the lawyers have found out what the extent of the mischief is, you and I must see how we can best settle it. What the deuce! My young friend, I have no 'incumbrances,' as the servants, with great want of politeness, call wives and children. And I am not a miserable great landed millionaire, like that poor dear Castleton, who owes so many duties to society that he can't spend a shilling except in a grand way and purely to benefit the public. So go, my boy, to Trevanion's lawyer,—he is mine, too. Clever fellow, sharp as a needle, Mr. Pike, in Great Ormond Street,—name on a brass plate; and when he has settled the amount, we young scapegraces will help each other, without a word to the old folks."

What good it does to a man, throughout life, to meet kindness and generosity like this in his youth!

I need not say that I was too faithful a representative of my father's scholarly pride and susceptible independence of spirit to accept this proposal; and probably Sir Sedley, rich and liberal as he was, did not dream of the extent to which his proposal might involve him. But I expressed my gratitude so as to please and move this last relic of the De Coverleys, and went from his house straight to Mr. Pike's office, with a little note of introduction from Sir Sedley. I found Mr. Pike exactly the man I had anticipated from Trevanion's character,—short, quick, intelligent, in question and answer; imposing and somewhat domineering in manner; not overcrowded with business, but with enough for experience and respectability; neither young nor old; neither a pedantic machine of parchment, nor a jaunty off-hand coxcomb of West End manners.

"It is an ugly affair," said he, "but one that requires management. Leave it all in my hands for three days. Don't go near Mr. Tibbets nor Mr. Peck; and on Saturday next, at two o'clock, if you will call here, you shall know my opinion of the whole matter." With that Mr. Pike glanced at the clock, and I took up my hat and went.

There is no place more delightful than a great capital if you are comfortably settled in it, have arranged the methodical disposal of your time, and know how to take business and pleasure in due proportions. But a flying visit to a great capital in an unsettled, unsatisfactory way; at an inn—an inn in the City too—with a great, worrying load of business on your mind, of which you are to hear no more for three days, and an aching, jealous, miserable sorrow at the heart such as I had, leaving you no labor to pursue and no pleasure that you have the heart to share in,—oh, a great capital then is indeed forlorn, wearisome, and oppressive! It is the Castle of Indolence, not as Thomson built it, but as Beckford drew in his Hall of Eblis,—a wandering up and down, to and fro; a great, awful space, with your hand pressed to your heart; and—oh for a rush on some half-tamed horse through the measureless green wastes of Australia! That is the place for a man who has no home in the Babel, and whose hand is ever pressing to his heart, with its dull, burning pain.

Mr. Squills decoyed me the second evening into one of the small theatres; and very heartily did Mr. Squills enjoy all he saw and all he heard. And while, with a convulsive effort of the jaws, I was trying to laugh too, suddenly in one of the actors, who was performing the worshipful part of a parish beadle, I recognized a face that I had seen before. Five minutes afterwards I had disappeared from the side of Squills, and was amidst that strange world,—Behind The Scenes.

My beadle was much too busy and important to allow me a good opportunity to accost him till the piece was over. I then seized hold of him as he was amicably sharing a pot of porter with a gentleman in black shorts and a laced waistcoat, who was to play the part of a broken-hearted father in the Domestic Draina in Three Acts that would conclude the amusements of the evening.

"Excuse me," said I, apologetically; "but as the Swan pertinently observes, 'Should auld acquaintance be forgot?'"

"The Swan, sir!" cried the beadle, aghast,— "the Swan never demeaned himself by such d—d broad Scotch as that!"

"The Tweed has its swans as well as the Avon, Mr. Peacock."

"St—st—hush—hush- h—u—sh!" whispered the beadle in great alarm, and eying me, with savage observation, under his corked eyebrows. Then, taking me by the arm, he jerked me away. When he had got as far as the narrow limits of that little stage would allow, Mr. Peacock said,—

"Sir, you have the advantage of me; I don't remember you. Ah! you need not look—by gad, sir, I am not to be bullied—it was all fair play. If you will play with gentlemen, sir, you must run the consequences."

I hastened to appease the worthy man.

"Indeed, Mr. Peacock, if you remember, I refused to play with you; and so far from wishing to offend

you, I now come on purpose to compliment you on your excellent acting, and to inquire if you have heard anything lately of your young friend Mr. Vivian."

"Vivian? Never heard the name, sir. Vivian! Pooh, you are trying to hoax me; very good!"

"I assure you, Mr. Peac—"

"St—st—How the deuce did you know that I was once called Peac—, that is, people called me Peac—. A friendly nickname, no more. Drop it, sir, or you 'touch me with noble anger!'"

"Well, well; 'the rose by any name will smell as sweet,' as the Swan, this time at least, judiciously observes. But Mr. Vivian, too, seems to have other names at his disposal. I mean a young, dark, handsome man—or rather boy—with whom I met you in company by the roadside, one morning."

"O—h!" said Mr. Peacock, looking much relieved, "I know whom you mean, though I don't remember to have had the pleasure of seeing you before. No; I have not heard any thing of the young man lately. I wish I did know something of him. He was a 'gentleman in my own way.' Sweet Will has hit him off to a hair!—"

'The courtier's, soldier's, scholar's eye, tongue, sword.'

"Such a hand with a cue! You should have seen him seek the 'bubble reputation at the cannon's mouth.' I may say," continued Mr. Peacock, emphatically, "that he was a regular trump. Trump!" he reiterated with a start, as if the word had stung him—"trump! he was a Brick!"

Then fixing his eyes on mine, dropping his arms, interlacing his fingers in the manner recorded of Talma in the celebrated "Qu'en dis-tu!" he resumed in a hollow voice, slow and distinct—

"When—saw—you—him,—young m—m—a—n—nnn?"

Finding the tables thus turned on myself, and not willing to give Mr. Peac— any clew to poor Vivian (who thus appeared, to my great satisfaction, to have finally dropped an acquaintance more versatile than reputable), I contrived, by a few evasive sentences, to keep Mr. Peac—'s curiosity at a distance till he was summoned in haste to change his attire for the domestic drama. And so we parted.

CHAPTER. VI.

I hate law details as cordially as my readers can, and therefore I shall content myself with stating that Mr. Pike's management at the end, not of three days, but of two weeks, was so admirable that Uncle Jack was drawn out of prison and my father extracted from all his liabilities by a sum two thirds less than was first startlingly submitted to our indignant horror,—and that, too, in a manner that would have satisfied the conscience of the most punctilious formalist whose contribution to the national fund for an omitted payment to the Income Tax the Chancellor of the Exchequer ever had the honor to acknowledge. Still, the sum was very large in proportion to my poor father's income; and what with Jack's debts, the claims of the Anti-Publisher Society's printer, including the very expensive plates that had been so lavishly bespoken, and in great part completed, for the "History of Human Error," and, above all, the liabilities incurred on "The Capitalist;" what with the plant, as Mr. Peck technically phrased a great upas-tree of a total, branching out into types, cases, printing-presses, engines, etc., all now to be resold at a third of their value; what with advertisements and bills that had covered all the dead-walls by which rubbish might be shot, throughout the three kingdoms; what with the dues of reporters, and salaries of writers, who had been engaged for a year at least to "The Capitalist," and whose claims survived the wretch they had killed and buried; what, in short, with all that the combined ingenuity of Uncle Jack and Printer Peck could supply for the utter ruin of the Caxton family (even after all deductions, curtailments, and after all that one could extract in the way of just contribution from the least unsubstantial of those shadows called the shareholders),—my father's fortune was reduced to a sum of between seven and eight thousand pounds, which being placed at mortgage at four per cent, yielded just L372 10s. a year: enough for my father to live upon, but not enough to afford also his son Pisistratus the advantages of education at Trinity College, Cambridge. The blow fell rather upon me than my father, and my young shoulders bore it without much wincing.

This settled to our universal satisfaction, I went to pay my farewell visit to Sir Sedley Beaudesert. He had made much of me during my stay in London. I had breakfasted and dined with him pretty often; I

had presented Squills to him, who no sooner set eyes upon that splendid conformation than he described his character with the nicest accuracy, as the necessary consequence of such a development for the rosy pleasures of life. We had never once retouched on the subject of Fanny's marriage, and both of us tacitly avoided even mentioning the Trevanions. But in this last visit, though he maintained the same reserve as to Fanny, he referred without scruple to her father.

"Well, my young Athenian," said he, after congratulating me on the result of the negotiations, and endeavoring again in vain to bear at least some share in my father's losses, "well, I see I cannot press this further; but at least I can press on you any little interest I may have in obtaining some appointment for yourself in one of the public offices. Trevanion could of course be more useful; but I can understand that he is not the kind of man you would like to apply to."

"Shall I own to you, my dear Sir Sedley, that I have no taste for official employment? I am too fond of my liberty. Since I have been at my uncle's old Tower, I account for half my character by the Borderer's blood that is in me. I doubt if I am meant for the life of cities; and I have odd floating notions in my head that will serve to amuse me when I get home, and may settle into schemes. And now to change the subject: may I ask what kind of person has succeeded me as Mr. Trevanion's secretary?"

"Why, he has got a broad-shouldered, stooping fellow, in spectacles and cotton stockings, who has written upon 'Rent,' I believe,—an imaginative treatise in his case, I fear, for rent is a thing he could never have received, and not often been trusted to pay. However, he is one of your political economists, and wants Trevanion to sell his pictures, as 'unproductive capital.' Less mild than Pope's Narcissa, 'to make a wash,' he would certainly 'stew a child.' Besides this official secretary, Trevanion trusts, however, a good deal to a clever, good-looking young gentleman who is a great favorite with him."

"What is his name?"

"His name? Oh! Gower,—a natural son, I believe, of one of the Gower family."

Here two of Sir Sedley's fellow fine gentlemen lounged in, and my visit ended.

CHAPTER VII.

"I Swear," cried my uncle, "that it shall be so." And with a big frown and a truculent air he seized the fatal instrument.

"Indeed, brother, it must not," said my father, laying one pale, scholar-like hand mildly on Captain Roland's brown, bellicose, and bony fist, and with the other, outstretched, protecting the menaced, palpitating victim.

Not a word had my uncle heard of our losses until they had been adjusted and the sum paid; for we all knew that the old Tower would have been gone—sold to some neighboring squire or jobbing attorney—at the first impetuous impulse of Uncle Roland's affectionate generosity. Austin endangered! Austin ruined!—he would never have rested till he came, cash in hand, to his deliverance. Therefore, I say, not till all was settled did I write to the Captain and tell him gayly what had chanced. And however light I made of our misfortunes, the letter brought the Captain to the red brick house the same evening on which I myself reached it, and about an hour later. My uncle had not sold the Tower, but he came prepared to carry us off to it *vi et armis*. We must live with him and on him, let or sell the brick house, and put out the remnant of my father's income to nurse and accumulate. And it was on finding my father's resistance stubborn, and that hitherto he had made no way, that my uncle, stepping back into the hall, in which he had left his carpet bag, etc., returned with an old oak case, and, touching a spring roller, out flew the Canton pedigree.

Out it flew, covering all the table, and undulating, Nile-like, till it had spread over books, papers, my mother's work-box, and the tea-service (for the table was large and compendious, emblematic of its owner's mind); and then, flowing on the carpet, dragged its slow length along till it was stopped by the fender.

"Now," said my uncle, solemnly, "there never have been but two causes of difference between you and me, Austin. One is over: why should the other last? Aha! I know why you hang back: you think that we may quarrel about it!"

"About what, Roland?"

"About it, I say; and I'll be d—d if we do!" cried my uncle, reddening. "And I have been thinking a great deal upon the matter, and I have no doubt you are right. So I brought the old parchment with me, and you shall see me fill up the blank just as you would have it. Now, then, you will come and live with me, and we can never quarrel any more." Thus saying, Uncle Roland looked round for pen and ink; and having found them,—not without difficulty, for they had been submerged under the overflow of the pedigree,—he was about to fill up the lacuna, or hiatus, which had given rise to such memorable controversy, with the name of "William Caxton, printer in the Sanctuary," when my father, slowly recovering his breath, and aware of his brother's purpose, intervened. It would have done your heart good to hear them, so completely, in the inconsistency of human nature, had they changed sides upon the question, —my father now all for Sir William de Caxton, the hero of Bosworth; my uncle all for the immortal printer. And in this discussion they grew animated their eyes sparkled, their voices rose,—Roland's voice deep and thunderous, Austin's sharp and piercing. Mr. Squills stopped his ears. Thus it arrived at that point, when my uncle doggedly came to the end of all argumentation,—"I swear that it shall be so;" and my father, trying the last resource of pathos, looked pleadingly into Roland's eyes, and said, with a tone soft as mercy, "Indeed, brother, it must not." Meanwhile the dry parchment crisped, creaked, and trembled in every pore of its yellow skin.

"But," said I, coming in opportunely, like the Horatian deity, "I don't see that either of you gentlemen has a right so to dispose of my ancestry. It is quite clear that a man has no possession in posterity. Posterity may possess him; but deuce a bit will he ever be the better for his great great-grandchildren!"

Squills.—"Hear, hear!"

Pisistratus (warming).—"But a man's ancestry is a positive property to him. How much, not only of acres, but of his constitution, his temper, his conduct, character, and nature, he may inherit from some progenitor ten times removed! Nay, without that progenitor would he ever have been born,—would a Squills ever have introduced him into the world, or a nurse ever have carried him upo kolpo!"

Squills.—"Hear, hear!"

Pisistratus (with dignified emotion).—"No man, therefore, has a right to rob another of a forefather, with a stroke of his pen, from any motive, howsoever amiable. In the present instance you will say, perhaps, that the ancestor in question is apocryphal,—it may be the printer, it may be the knight. Granted; but here, where history is in fault, shall a mere sentiment decide? While both are doubtful, my imagination appropriates both. At one time I can reverence industry and learning in the printer; at another, valor and devotion in the knight. This kindly doubt gives me two great forefathers; and, through them, two trains of idea that influence my conduct under different circumstances. I will not permit you, Captain Roland, to rob me of either forefather, either train of idea. Leave, then, this sacred void unfilled, unprofaned, and accept this compromise of chivalrous courtesy while my father lives with the Captain, we will believe in the printer; when away from the Captain, we will stand firm to the knight."

"Good!" cried Uncle Roland, as I paused, a little out of breath.

"And," said my mother, softly, "I do think, Austin, there is a way of settling the matter which will please all parties. It is quite sad to think that poor Roland and dear little Blanche should be all alone in the Tower; and I am sure that we should be much happier all together."

"There!" cried Roland, triumphantly. "If you are not the most obstinate, hard-hearted, unfeeling brute in the world,—which I don't take you to be,—brother Austin, after that really beautiful speech of your wife's, there is not a word to be said further."

"But we have not yet heard Kitty to the end, Roland."

"I beg your pardon a thousand times, ma'am—sister," said the Captain, bowing.

"Well, I was going to add," said my mother, "that we will go and live with you, Roland, and club our little fortunes together. Blanche and I will take care of the house, and we shall be just twice as rich together as we are separately."

"Pretty sort of hospitality that!" grunted the Captain. "I did not expect you to throw me over in that way. No, no; you must lay by for the boy there. What's to become of him?"

"But we shall all lay by for him," said my mother, simply,—"you as well as Austin. We shall have more to save, if we have more to spend."

"Ah, save!—that is easily said; there would be a pleasure in saving, then," said the Captain, mournfully.

"And what's to become of me?" cried Squills, very petulantly. "Am I to be left here in my old age, not a rational soul to speak to, and no other place in the village where there's a drop of decent punch to be had? 'A plague on both your houses!' as the chap said at the theatre the other night."

"There's room for a doctor in our neighborhood, Mr. Squills," said the Captain. "The gentleman in your profession who does for us, wants, I know, to sell the business."

"Humph," said Squills,—"a horribly healthy neighborhood, I suspect!"

"Why, it has that misfortune, Mr. Squills; but with your help," said my uncle, slyly, "a great alteration for the better may be effected in that respect."

Mr. Squills was about to reply when ring—a—ting—ring—ting! there came such a brisk, impatient, make-one's-self-at-home kind of tintinnabular alarum at the great gate that we all started up and looked at each other in surprise. Who could it possibly be? We were not kept long in suspense; for in another moment Uncle Jack's voice, which was always very clear and distinct, pealed through the hall, and we were still staring at each other when Mr. Tibbets, with a bran-new muffler round his neck, and a peculiarly comfortable greatcoat,—best double Saxony, equally new,—dashed into the room, bringing with him a very considerable quantity of cold air, which he hastened to thaw, first in my father's arms, next in my mother's. He then made a rush at the Captain, who ensconced himself behind the dumb-waiter with a "Hem! Mr.—sir— Jack—sir—hem, hem!" Failing there, Mr. Tibbets rubbed off the remaining frost upon his double Saxony against your humble servant, patted Squills affectionately on the back, and then proceeded to occupy his favorite position before the fire.

"Took you by surprise, eh?" said Uncle Jack, unpeeling himself by the hearth-rug. "But no,—not by surprise; you must have known Jack's heart: you at least, Austin Caxton, who know everything,—you must have seen that it overflowed with the tenderest and most brotherly emotions; that once delivered from that cursed Fleet (you have no idea what a place it is, sir!), I could not rest, night or day, till I had flown here,—here, to the dear family nest,—poor wounded dove that I am," added Uncle Jack, pathetically, and taking out his pocket-handkerchief from the double Saxony, which he had now flung over my father's arm-chair.

Not a word replied to this eloquent address, with its touching peroration. My mother hung down her pretty head and looked ashamed. My uncle retreated quite into the corner and drew the dumb-waiter after him, so as to establish a complete fortification. Mr. Squills seized the pen that Roland had thrown down, and began mending it furiously,—that is, cutting it into slivers,—thereby denoting, symbolically, how he would like to do with Uncle Jack, could he once get him safe and snug under his manipular operations. I bent over the pedigree, and my father rubbed his spectacles.

The silence would have been appalling to another man nothing appalled Uncle Jack.

Uncle Jack turned to the fire, and warmed first one foot, then the other. This comfortable ceremony performed, he again faced the company, and resumed, musingly, and as if answering some imaginary observations,—

"Yes, yes, you are right there; and a deuced unlucky speculation it proved too. But I was overruled by that fellow Peck. Says I to him, says I, "Capitalist"!—pshaw! no popular interest there; it don't address the great public! Very confined class the capitalists, better throw ourselves boldly on the people. Yes,' said I, 'call it the "Anti-Capitalist."' By Jove! sir, we should have carried all before us! but I was overruled. The 'Anti-Capitalist'!—what an idea! Address the whole reading world, there, sir: everybody hates the capitalist—everybody would have his neighbor's money. The 'Anti-Capitalist'!—sir, we should have gone off, in the manufacturing towns, like wildfire. But what could I do?—"

"John Tibbets," said my father, solemnly, "Capitalist 'or' Anti-Capitalist,' thou hadst a right to follow thine own bent in either,—but always provided it had been with thine own money. Thou seest not the thing, John Tibbets, in the right point of view; and a little repentance in the face of those thou hast wronged, would not have misbecome thy father's son and thy sister's brother!"

Never had so severe a rebuke issued from the mild lips of Austin Caxton; and I raised my eyes with a compassionate thrill, expecting to see John Tibbets gradually sink and disappear through the carpet.

"Repentance!" cried Uncle Jack, bounding up as if he had been shot. "And do you think I have a heart of stone, of pumice-stone? Do you think I don't repent? I have done nothing but repent; I shall repent to my dying day."

"Then there is no more to be said, Jack," cried my father, softening, and holding out his hand.

"Yes!" cried Mr. Tibbets, seizing the hand and pressing it to the heart he had thus defended from the suspicion of being pumice, "yes,—that I should have trusted that dunderheaded, rascally curmudgeon Peck; that I should have let him call it 'The Capitalist,' despite all my convictions, when the Anti—"

"Pshaw!" interrupted my father, drawing away his hand.

"John," said my mother, gravely, and with tears in her voice, "you forget who delivered you from prison; you forget whom you have nearly consigned to prison yourself; you forg—"

"Hush, hush!" said my father, "this will never do; and it is you who forget, my dear, the obligations I owe to Jack. He has reduced my fortune one half, it is true; but I verily think he has made the three hearts, in which he my real treasures, twice as large as they were before. Pisistratus, my boy, ring the bell."

"My dear Kitty," cried Jack, whimperingly, and stealing up to my mother, "don't be so hard on me; I thought to make all your fortunes,—I did indeed."

Here the servant entered.

"See that Mr. Tibbets's things are taken up to his room, and that there is a good fire," said my father.

"And," continued Jack, loftily, "I will, make all your fortunes yet. I have it here!" and he struck his head.

"Stay a moment!" said my father to the servant, who had got back to the door. "Stay a moment," said my father, looking extremely frightened,— "perhaps Mr. Tibbets may prefer the inn!"

"Austin," said Uncle Jack, with emotion, "if I were a dog, with no home but a dog-kennel, and you came to me for shelter, I would turn out—to give you the best of the straw!"

My father was thoroughly melted this time.

"Primmins will be sure to see everything is made comfortable for Mr. Tibbets," said he, waving his hand to the servant. "Something nice for supper, Kitty, my dear,—and the largest punch-bowl. You like punch, Jack?"

"Punch, Austin!" said Uncle Jack, putting his handkerchief to his eyes.

The Captain pushed aside the dumb-waiter, strode across the room, and shook hands with Uncle Jack; my mother buried her face in her apron, and fairly ran off; and Squills said in my ear, "It all comes of the biliary secretions. Nobody could account for this who did not know the peculiarly fine organization of your father's—liver!"

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE CAXTONS: A FAMILY PICTURE — VOLUME 11

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