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Title: Ernest Maltravers — Volume 04

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Release date: March 1, 2005 [EBook #7643]

Most recently updated: December 30, 2020

Language: English

*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK ERNEST MALTRAVERS — VOLUME 04 ***

This eBook was produced by Dagny,

and David Widger,

BOOK IV.

"Strange is the land that holds thee,—and thy couch
is widow'd of the loved one."

EURIP. /Med./ 442

Translation by R. G.

CHAPTER I.

"I, alas!

Have lived but on this earth a few sad years;
And so my lot was ordered, that a father
First turned the moments of awakening life
To drops, each poisoning youth's sweet hope."
"/Cenci/."

FROM accompanying Maltravers along the noiseless progress of mental education, we are now called awhile to cast our glances back at the ruder and harsher ordeal which Alice Darvil was ordained to pass. Along her path poetry shed no flowers, nor were her lonely steps towards the distant shrine at which her pilgrimage found its rest lighted by the mystic lamp of science, or guided by the thousand stars which are never dim in the heavens for those favoured eyes from which genius and fancy have removed many of the films of clay. Not along the aerial and exalted ways that wind far above the homes and business of common men—the solitary Alps of Spiritual Philosophy—wandered the desolate steps of the child of poverty and sorrow. On the beaten and rugged highways of common life, with a weary heart, and with bleeding feet, she went her melancholy course. But the goal which is the great secret of life, the /summum arcanum/ of all philosophy, whether the Practical or the Ideal, was, perhaps, no less attainable for that humble girl than for the elastic step and aspiring heart of him who thirsted after the Great, and almost believed in the Impossible.

We return to that dismal night in which Alice was torn from the roof of her lover. It was long before she recovered her consciousness of what had passed, and gained a full perception of the fearful revolution which had taken place in her destinies. It was then a grey and dreary morning twilight; and the rude but covered vehicle which bore her was rolling along the deep ruts of an unfrequented road, winding among the uninclosed and mountainous wastes that, in England, usually betoken the neighbourhood of the sea. With a shudder Alice looked round: Walters, her father's accomplice, lay extended at her feet, and his heavy breathing showed that he was fast asleep. Darvil himself was urging on the jaded and sorry horse, and his broad back was turned towards Alice; the rain, from which, in his position, he was but ill protected by the awning, dripped dismally from his slouched hat; and now, as he turned round, and his sinister and gloomy gaze rested upon the face of Alice, his bad countenance, rendered more haggard by the cold raw light of the cheerless dawn, completed the hideous picture of unveiled and ruffianly wretchedness.

"Ho, ho! Alley, so you are come to your senses," said he, with a kind of joyless grin. "I am glad of it, for I can have no fainting fine ladies with me. You have had a long holiday, Alley; you must now learn once more to work for your poor father. Ah, you have been d—d sly; but never mind the past—I forgive it. You must not run away again without my leave; if you are fond of sweethearts, I won't balk you—but your old father must go shares, Alley."

Alice could hear no more: she covered her face with the cloak that had been thrown about her, and though she did not faint, her senses seemed to be locked and paralysed. By and by Walters woke, and the two men, heedless of her presence, conversed upon their plans. By degrees she recovered sufficient self-possession to listen, in the instinctive hope that some plan of escape might be suggested to her. But from what she could gather of the incoherent and various projects they discussed, one after another—disputing upon each with frightful oaths and scarce intelligible slang, she could only learn that it was resolved at all events to leave the district in which they were—but whither seemed yet all undecided. The cart halted at last at a miserable-looking hut, which the signpost announced to be an inn that afforded good accommodation to travellers; to which announcement was annexed the following epigrammatic distich:

"Old Tom, he is the best of gin;
Drink him once, and you'll drink him /agin/!"

The hovel stood so remote from all other habitations, and the waste around was so bare of trees, and even shrubs, that Alice saw with despair that all hope of flight in such a place would be indeed a chimera. But to make assurance doubly sure, Darvil himself, lifting her from the cart, conducted her up a broken and unlighted staircase, into a sort of loft rather than a room, and, rudely pushing her in, turned the key upon her, and descended. The weather was cold, the livid damps hung upon the distained walls, and there was neither fire nor hearth; but thinly clad as she was—her cloak and shawl her principal covering—she did not feel the cold, for her heart was more chilly than the airs of heaven. At noon an old woman brought her some food, which, consisting of fish and poached game, was better than might have been expected in such a place, and what would have been deemed a feast under her father's roof. With an inviting leer, the crone pointed to a pewter measure of raw spirits that accompanied the viands, and assured her, in a cracked and maudlin voice, that "'Old Tom' was a kinder friend than any of the young fellers!" This intrusion ended, Alice was again left alone till dusk, when Darvil entered with a bundle of clothes, such as are worn by the peasants of that primitive district of England.

"There, Alley," said he, "put on this warm toggery; finery won't do now. We must leave no scent in the track; the hounds are after us, my little blowen. Here's a nice stuff gown for you, and a red cloak that would frighten a turkey-cock. As to the other cloak and shawl, don't be afraid; they sha'n't go to the pop-shop, but we'll take care of them against we get to some large town where there are young fellows with blunt in their pockets; for you seem to have already found out that your face is your fortune, Alley. Come, make haste, we must be starting. I shall come up for you in ten minutes. Pish! don't be faint hearted; here, take 'Old Tom'—take it, I say. What, you won't? Well, here's to your health, and a better taste to you!"

And now, as the door once more closed upon Darvil, tears for the first time came to the relief of Alice. It was a woman's weakness that procured for her that woman's luxury. Those garments—they were Ernest's gift—Ernest's taste; they were like the last relic of that delicious life which now seemed to have fled for ever. All traces of that life—of him, the loving, the protecting, the adored; all trace of herself, as she had been re-created by love, was to be lost to her for ever. It was (as she had read somewhere, in the little elementary volumes that bounded her historic lore) like that last fatal ceremony in which those condemned for life to the mines of Siberia are clothed with the slave's livery, their past name and record eternally blotted out, and thrust into the vast wastes, from which even the mercy of despotism, should it ever re-awaken, cannot recall them; for all evidence of them—all

individuality—all mark to distinguish them from the universal herd, is expunged from the world's calendar. She was still sobbing in vehement and unrestrained passion, when Darvil re-entered. "What, not dressed yet?" he exclaimed, in a voice of impatient rage; "hark ye, this won't do. If in two minutes you are not ready, I'll send up John Walters to help you; and he is a rough hand, I can tell you."

This threat recalled Alice, to herself. "I will do as you wish," said she meekly.

"Well, then, be quick," said Darvil; "they are now putting the horse to. And mark me, girl, your father is running away from the gallows, and that thought does not make a man stand upon scruples. If you once attempt to give me the slip, or do or say anything that can bring the bulkies upon us—by the devil in hell!—if, indeed, there be hell or devil—my knife shall become better acquainted with that throat—so look to it!"

And this was the father—this the condition—of her whose ear had for months drunk no other sound than the whispers of flattering love—the murmurs of Passion from the lips of Poetry.

They continued their journey till midnight; they then arrived at an inn, little different from the last; but here Alice was no longer consigned to solitude. In a long room, reeking with smoke, sat from twenty to thirty ruffians before a table on which mugs and vessels of strong potations were formidably interspersed with sabres and pistols. They received Walters and Darvil with a shout of welcome, and would have crowded somewhat unceremoniously round Alice, if her father, whose well-known desperate and brutal ferocity made him a man to be respected in such an assembly, had not said, sternly, "Hands off, messmates, and make way by the fire for my little girl—she is meat for your masters."

So saying, he pushed Alice down into a huge chair in the chimney-nook, and, seating himself near her, at the end of the table, hastened to turn the conversation.

"Well, Captain," said he, addressing a small thin man at the head of the table, "I and Walters have fairly cut and run—the land has a bad air for us, and we now want the sea-breeze to cure the rope fever. So, knowing this was your night, we have crowded sail, and here we are. You must give the girl there a lift, though I know you don't like such lumber, and we'll run ashore as soon as we can."

"She seems a quiet little body," replied the captain; "and we would do more than that to oblige an old friend like you. In half an hour Oliver* puts on his nightcap, and we must then be off."

* The moon.

"The sooner the better."

The men now appeared to forget the presence of Alice, who sat faint with fatigue and exhaustion, for she had been too sick at heart to touch the food brought to her at their previous halting-place, gazing abstractedly upon the fire. Her father, before their departure, made her swallow some morsels of sea-biscuit, though each seemed to choke her; and then, wrapped in a thick boat-cloak, she was placed in a small well-built cutter; and as the sea-winds whistled round her, the present cold and the past fatigues lulled her miserable heart into the arms of the charitable Sleep.

CHAPTER II.

"You are once more a free woman;
Here I discharge your bonds."
/The Custom of the Country/.

AND many were thy trials, poor child; many that, were this book to germinate into volumes more numerous than monk ever composed upon the lives of saint or martyr (though a hundred volumes contained the record of two years only in the life of St. Anthony), it would be impossible to describe! We may talk of the fidelity of books, but no man ever wrote even his own biography without being compelled to omit at least nine-tenths of the most important materials. What are three—what six volumes? We live six volumes in a day! Thought, emotion, joy, sorrow, hope, fear, how prolix would they be if they might each tell their hourly tale! But man's life itself is a brief epitome of that which is infinite and everlasting; and his most accurate confessions are a miserable abridgment of a hurried and confused compendium!

It was about three months, or more, from the night in which Alice wept herself to sleep amongst those wild companions, when she contrived to escape from her father's vigilant eye. They were then on the coast of Ireland. Darvil had separated himself from Walters—from his seafaring companions: he had

run through the greater part of the money his crimes had got together; he began seriously to attempt putting into execution his horrible design of depending for support upon the sale of his daughter. Now Alice might have been moulded into sinful purposes before she knew Maltravers; but from that hour her very error made her virtuous—she had comprehended, the moment she loved, what was meant by female honour; and by a sudden revelation, she had purchased modesty, delicacy of thought and soul, in the sacrifice of herself. Much of our morality (prudent and right upon system) with respect to the first false step of women, leads us, as we all know, into barbarous errors as to individual exceptions. Where, from pure and confiding love, that first false step has been taken, many a woman has been saved in after life from a thousand temptations. The poor unfortunates who crowd our streets and theatres have rarely, in the first instances, been corrupted by love; but by poverty, and the contagion of circumstance and example. It is a miserable cant phrase to call them the victims of seduction; they have been the victims of hunger, of vanity, of curiosity, of evil /female/ counsels; but the seduction of love hardly ever conducts to a /life/ of vice. If a woman has once really loved, the beloved object makes an impenetrable barrier between her and other men; their advances terrify and revolt—she would rather die than be unfaithful even to a memory. Though man love the sex, woman loves only the individual; and the more she loves him, the more cold she is to the species. For the passion of woman is in the sentiment—the fancy—the heart. It rarely has much to do with the coarse images with which boys and old men—the inexperienced and the worn-out—connect it.

But Alice, though her blood ran cold at her terrible father's language, saw in his very design the prospect of escape. In an hour of drunkenness he thrust her from the house, and stationed himself to watch her—it was in the city of Cork. She formed her resolution instantly—turned up a narrow street, and fled at full speed. Darvil endeavoured in vain to keep pace with her—his eyes dizzy, his steps reeling with intoxication. She heard his last curse dying from a distance on the air, and her fear winged her steps: she paused at last, and found herself on the outskirts of the town. She paused, overcome, and deadly faint; and then, for the first time, she felt that a strange and new life was stirring within her own. She had long since known that she bore in her womb the unborn offspring of Maltravers, and that knowledge had made her struggle and live on. But now, the embryo had quickened into being—it moved—it appealed to her, a—thing unseen, unknown; but still it was a living creature appealing to a mother! Oh, the thrill, half of ineffable tenderness, half of mysterious terror, at that moment!—What a new chapter in the life of a woman did it not announce:—Now, then, she must be watchful over herself—must guard against fatigue—must wrestle with despair. Solemn was the trust committed to her—the life of another—the child of the Adored. It was a summer night—she sat on a rude stone, the city on one side, with its lights and lamps;—the whitened fields beyond, with the moon and the stars above; and /above/ she raised her streaming eyes, and she thought that God, the Protector, smiled upon her from the face of the sweet skies. So, after a pause and a silent prayer, she rose and resumed her way. When she was wearied she crept into a shed in a farmyard, and slept, for the first time for weeks, the calm sleep of security and hope.

CHAPTER III.

"How like a prodigal doth she return,
With over-weathered ribs and ragged sails."
/Merchant of Venice/.

"/Mer./ What are these?
/Uncle./ The tenants."
BEAUMONT AND FLETCHER.—/Wit without Money/.

IT was just two years from the night in which Alice had been torn from the cottage: and at that time Maltravers was wandering amongst the ruins of ancient Egypt, when, upon the very lawn where Alice and her lover had so often loitered hand in hand, a gay party of children and young people were assembled. The cottage had been purchased by an opulent and retired manufacturer. He had raised the low thatched roof another story high—and blue slate had replaced the thatch—and the pretty verandahs overgrown with creepers had been taken down because Mrs. Hobbs thought they gave the rooms a dull look; and the little rustic doorway had been replaced by four Ionic pillars in stucco; and a new dining-room, twenty-two feet by eighteen, had been built out at one wing, and a new drawing-room had been built over the new dining-room. And the poor little cottage looked quite grand and villa-like. The fountain had been taken away, because it made the house damp; and there was such a broad carriage-drive from the gate to the house! The gate was no longer the modest green wooden gate, ever ajar with its easy latch; but a tall, cast-iron, well-locked gate, between two pillars to match the porch. And on one of the gates was a brass plate, on which was graven, "Hobbs' Lodge—Ring the bell." The lesser Hobbses and the bigger Hobbses were all on the lawn—many of them fresh from school—for it was the half-holiday of a Saturday afternoon. There was mirth, and noise, and shouting and whooping,

and the respectable old couple looked calmly on; Hobbs the father smoking his pipe (alas, it was not the dear meerschaum); Hobbs the mother talking to her eldest daughter (a fine young woman, three months married, for love, to a poor man), upon the proper number of days that a leg of mutton (weight ten pounds) should be made to last. "Always, my dear, have large joints, they are much the most saving. Let me see—what a noise the boys do make! No, my love, the ball's not here."

"Mamma, it is under your petticoats."

"La, child, how naughty you are!"

"Holla, you sir! it's my turn to go in now. Biddy, wait,—girls have no innings—girls only fag out."

"Bob, you cheat."

"Pa, Ned says I cheat."

"Very likely, my dear, you are to be a lawyer."

"Where was I, my dear?" resumed Mrs. Hobbs, resettling herself, and readjusting the invaded petticoats. "Oh, about the leg of mutton!—yes, large joints are the best—the second day a nice hash, with dumplings; the third, broil the bone—your husband is sure to like broiled bones!—and then keep the scraps for Saturday's pie;—you know, my dear, your father and I were worse off than you when we began. But now we have everything that is handsome about us—nothing like management. Saturday pies are very nice things, and then you start clear with your joint on Sunday. A good wife like you should never neglect the Saturday's pie!"

"Yes," said the bride, mournfully; "but Mr. Tiddy does not like pies."

"Not like pies! that very odd—Mr. Hobbs likes pies—perhaps you don't have the crust made thick eno'. How somever, you can make it up to him with a pudding. A wife should always study her husband's tastes—what is a man's home without love? Still a husband ought not to be aggravating, and dislike pie on a Saturday!"

"Holla! I say, ma, do you see that 'ere gipsy? I shall go and have my fortune told."

"And I—and I!"

"Lor, if there ben't a tramper!" cried Mr. Hobbs, rising indignantly; "what can the parish be about?"

The object of these latter remarks, filial and paternal, was a young woman in a worn, threadbare cloak, with her face pressed to the openwork of the gate, and looking wistfully—oh, how wistfully!—within. The children eagerly ran up to her, but they involuntarily slackened their steps when they drew near, for she was evidently not what they had taken her for. No gipsy hues darkened the pale, thin, delicate cheek—no gipsy leer lurked in those large blue and streaming eyes—no gipsy effrontery bronzed that candid and childish brow. As she thus pressed her countenance with convulsive eagerness against the cold bars, the young people caught the contagion of inexpressible and half-fearful sadness—they approached almost respectfully—"Do you want anything here?" said the eldest and boldest of the boys.

"I—I—surely this is Dale Cottage?"

"It was Dale Cottage, it is Hobbs' Lodge now; can't you read?" said the heir of the Hobbs's honours, losing, in contempt at the girl's ignorance, his first impression of sympathy.

"And—and—Mr. Butler, is he gone too?"

Poor child! she spoke as if the cottage was gone, not improved; the Ionic portico had no charm for her!

"Butler!—no such person lives here. Pa, do you know where Mr. Butler lives?"

Pa was now moving up to the place of conference the slow artillery of his fair round belly and portly calves. "Butler, no—I know nothing of such a name—no Mr. Butler lives here. Go along with you—ain't you ashamed to beg?"

"No Mr. Butler!" said the girl, gasping for breath, and clinging to the gate for support. "Are you sure, sir?"

"Sure, yes!—what do you want with him?"

"Oh, papa, she looks faint!" said one of the /girls/ deprecatingly—"do let her have something to eat; I'm sure she's hungry."

Mr. Hobbs looked angry; he had often been taken in, and no rich man likes beggars. Generally speaking, the rich man is in the right. But then Mr. Hobbs turned to the suspected tramp's sorrowful face and then to his fair pretty child—and his good angel whispered something to Mr. Hobbs's heart—and he said, after a pause, "Heaven forbid that we should not feel for a poor fellow-creature not so well to do as ourselves. Come in, my lass, and have a morsel to eat."

The girl did not seem to hear him, and he repeated the invitation, approaching to unlock the gate.

"No, sir," said she, then; "no, I thank you. I could not come in now. I could not eat here. But tell me, sir, I implore you, can you not even guess where I may find Mr. Butler?"

"Butler!" said Mrs. Hobbs, whom curiosity had now drawn to the spot. "I remember that was the name of the gentleman who hired the place, and was robbed."

"Robbed!" said Mr. Hobbs, falling back and relocking the gate—"and the new tea-pot just come home," he muttered inly. "Come, be off, child—be off; we know nothing of your Mr. Butlers."

The young woman looked wildly in his face, cast a hurried glance over the altered spot, and then, with a kind of shiver, as if the wind had smitten her delicate form too rudely, she drew her cloak more closely round her shoulders, and without saying another word, moved away. The party looked after her as, with trembling steps, she passed down the road, and all felt that pang of shame which is common to the human heart at the sight of a distress it has not sought to soothe. But this feeling vanished at once from the breast of Mrs. and Mr. Hobbs, when they saw the girl stop where a turn of the road brought the gate before her eyes; and for the first time, they perceived, what the worn cloak had hitherto concealed, that the poor young thing bore an infant in her arms. She halted, she gazed fondly back. Even at that instant the despair of her eyes was visible; and then, as she pressed her lips to the infant's brow, they heard a convulsive sob—they saw her turn away, and she was gone!

"Well, I declare!" said Mrs. Hobbs.

"News for the parish," said Mr. Hobbs; "and she so young too!—what a shame!"

"The girls about here are very bad nowadays, Jenny," said the mother to the bride.

"I see now why she wanted Mr. Butler," quoth Hobbs, with a knowing wink—"the slut has come to swear!"

And it was for this that Alice had supported her strength—her courage—during the sharp pangs of childbirth; during a severe and crushing illness, which for months after her confinement had stretched her upon a peasant's bed (the object of the rude but kindly charity of an Irish shealing)—for this, day after day, she had whispered to herself, "I shall get well, and I will beg my way to the cottage, and find him there still, and put my little one into his arms, and all will be bright again;"—for this, as soon as she could walk without aid, had she set out on foot from the distant land; for this, almost with a dog's instinct (for she knew not what way to turn—what county the cottage was placed in; she only knew the name of the neighbouring town; and that, populous as it was, sounded strange to the ears of those she asked; and she had often and often been directed wrong),—for this, I say, almost with a dog's faithful instinct, had she, in cold and heat, in hunger and in thirst, tracked to her old master's home her desolate and lonely way! And thrice had she over-fatigued herself—and thrice again been indebted to humble pity for a bed whereon to lay a feverish and broken frame. And once, too, her baby—her darling, her life of life, had been ill—had been near unto death, and she could not stir till the infant (it was a girl) was well again, and could smile in her face and crow. And thus many, many months had elapsed, since the day she set out on her pilgrimage, to that on which she found its goal. But never, save when the child was ill, had she desponded or abated heart and hope. She should see him again, and he would kiss her child. And now—no—I cannot paint the might of that stunning blow! She knew not, she dreamed not, of the kind precautions Maltravers had taken; and he had not sufficiently calculated on her thorough ignorance of the world. How could she divine that the magistrate, not a mile distant from her, could have told her all she sought to know? Could she but have met the gardener—or the old woman-servant—all would have been well! These last, indeed, she had the forethought to ask for. But the woman was dead, and the gardener had taken a strange service in some distant county. And so died her last gleam of hope. If one person who remembered the search of Maltravers had but met and recognised her! But she had been seen by so few—and now the bright, fresh girl was so sadly altered! Her race was not yet run, and many a sharp wind upon the mournful seas had the bark to brave before its haven was found at last.

CHAPTER IV.

"Patience and sorrow strove
Which should express her goodliest."—SHAKESPEARE.

"Je /la/ plains, je /la/ blame, et je suis son appui."*-VOLTAIRE.

* I pity her, I blame her, and am her support.

AND now Alice felt that she was on the wide world alone, with her child—no longer to be protected, but to protect; and after the first few days of agony, a new spirit, not indeed of hope, but of endurance, passed within her. Her solitary wanderings, with God her only guide, had tended greatly to elevate and confirm her character. She felt a strong reliance on His mysterious mercy—she felt, too, the responsibility of a mother. Thrown for so many months upon her own resources, even for the bread of life, her intellect was unconsciously sharpened, and a habit of patient fortitude had strengthened a nature originally clinging and femininely soft. She resolved to pass into some other county, for she could neither bear the thoughts that haunted the neighbourhood around her, nor think, without a loathing horror, of the possibility of her father's return. Accordingly, one day, she renewed her wanderings—and after a week's travel, arrived at a small village. Charity is so common in England, it so spontaneously springs up everywhere, like the good seed by the roadside, that she had rarely wanted the bare necessities of existence. And her humble manner, and sweet, well-tuned voice, so free from the professional whine of mendicancy, had usually its charm for the sternest. So she generally obtained enough to buy bread and a night's lodging, and, if sometimes she failed, she could bear hunger, and was not afraid of creeping into some shed, or, when by the sea-shore, even into some sheltering cavern. Her child throve too—for God tempers the wind to the shorn lamb! But now, so far as physical privation went, the worst was over.

It so happened that as Alice was drawing herself wearily along to the entrance of the village which was to bound her day's journey, she was met by a lady, past middle age, in whose countenance compassion was so visible, that Alice would not beg, for she had a strange delicacy or pride, or whatever it may be called, and rather begged of the stern than of those who looked kindly at her—she did not like to lower herself in the eyes of the last.

The lady stopped.

"My poor girl, where are you going?"

"Where God pleases, madam," said Alice.

"Humph! and is that your own child?—you are almost a child yourself."

"It is mine, madam," said Alice, gazing fondly at the infant; "it is my all!"

The lady's voice faltered. "Are you married?" she asked.

"Married!—Oh, no, madam!" replied Alice, innocently, yet without blushing, for she never knew that she had done wrong in loving Maltravers.

The lady drew gently back, but not in horror—no, in still deeper compassion; for that lady had virtue, and she knew that the faults of her sex are sufficiently punished to permit Virtue to pity them without a sin.

"I am sorry for it," she said, however, with greater gravity. "Are you travelling to seek the father?"

"Ah, madam! I shall never see him again!" And Alice wept.

"What!—he has abandoned you—so young, so beautiful!" added the lady to herself.

"Abandoned me!—no, madam; but it is a long tale. Good evening—I thank you kindly for your pity."

The lady's eyes ran over.

"Stay," said she; "tell me frankly where you are going, and what is your object."

"Alas! madam, I am going anywhere, for I have no home; but I wish to live, and work for my living, in order that my child may not want for anything. I wish I could maintain myself—he used to say I could."

"He!—your language and manner are not those of a peasant. What can you do? What do you know?"

"Music, and work, and—and—"

"Music!—this is strange! What were your parents?"

Alice shuddered, and hid her face with her hands.

The lady's interest was now fairly warmed in her behalf.

"She has sinned," said she to herself; "but at that age, how can one be harsh? She must not be thrown upon the world to make sin a habit. Follow me," she said, after a little pause; "and think you have found a friend."

The lady then turned from the high-road down a green lane which led to a park lodge. This lodge she entered; and after a short conversation with the inmate, beckoned to Alice to join her.

"Janet," said Alice's new protector to a comely and pleasant-eyed woman, "this is the young person—you will show her and the infant every attention. I shall send down proper clothing for her to-morrow, and I shall then have thought what will be best for her future welfare."

With that the lady smiled benignly upon Alice, whose heart was too full to speak; and the door of the cottage closed upon her, and Alice thought the day had grown darker.

CHAPTER V.

"Believe me, she has won me much to pity her.
Alas! her gentle nature was not made
To buffet with adversity."—ROWE.

"Sober he was, and grave from early youth,
Mindful of forms, but more intent on truth;
In a light drab he uniformly dress'd,
And look serene th' unruffled mind express'd.

* * * * *

"Yet might observers in his sparkling eye
Some observation, some acuteness spy
The friendly thought it keen, the treacherous deem'd it sly;
Yet not a crime could foe or friend detect,
His actions all were like his speech correct—
Chaste, sober, solemn, and devout they named
Him who was this, and not of this ashamed."—CRABBE.

"I'll on and sound this secret."—BEAUMONT AND FLETCHER.

MRS. LESLIE, the lady introduced to the reader in the last chapter, was a woman of the firmest intellect combined (no unusual combination) with the softest heart. She learned Alice's history with admiration and pity. The natural innocence and honesty of the young mother spoke so eloquently in her words and looks, that Mrs. Leslie, on hearing her tale, found much less to forgive than she had anticipated. Still she deemed it necessary to enlighten Alice as to the criminality of the connection she had formed. But here Alice was singularly dull—she listened in meek patience to Mrs. Leslie's lecture; but it evidently made but slight impression on her. She had not yet seen enough of the social state to correct the first impressions of the natural: and all she could say in answer to Mrs. Leslie was: "It may be all very true, madam, but I have been so much better since I knew him!"

But though Alice took humbly any censure upon herself, she would not hear a syllable insinuated against Maltravers. When, in a very natural indignation, Mrs. Leslie denounced him as a destroyer of innocence—for Mrs. Leslie could not learn all that extenuated his offence—Alice started up with flashing eyes and heaving heart, and would have hurried from the only shelter she had in the wide world—she would sooner have died—she would sooner even have seen her child die, than done that idol of her soul, who, in her eyes, stood alone on some pinnacle between earth and heaven, the wrong of hearing him reviled. With difficulty Mrs. Leslie could restrain, with still more difficulty could she pacify and soothe her; and for the girl's petulance, which others might have deemed insolent or ungrateful, the woman-heart of Mrs. Leslie loved her all the better. The more she saw of Alice, and the more she comprehended her story and her character, the more was she lost in wonder at the romance of which this beautiful child had been the heroine, and the more perplexed she was as to Alice's future prospects.

At length, however, when she became acquainted with Alice's musical acquirements, which were, indeed, of no common order, a light broke in upon her. Here was the source of her future independence. Maltravers, it will be remembered, was a musician of consummate skill as well as taste, and Alice's natural talent for the art had advanced her, in the space of months, to a degree of perfection which it cost others—which it had cost even the quick Maltravers—years to obtain. But we learn so rapidly when our teachers are those we love: and it may be observed that the less our knowledge, the less perhaps our genius in other things, the more facile are our attainments in music, which is a very jealous mistress of the mind. Mrs. Leslie resolved to have her perfected in this art, and so enable her to become a teacher to others. In the town of C——, about thirty miles from Mrs. Leslie's house, though in the same county, there was no inconsiderable circle of wealthy and intelligent persons; for it was a cathedral town, and the resident clergy drew around them a kind of provincial aristocracy. Here, as in most rural towns in England, music was much cultivated, both among the higher and middle classes. There were amateur concerts, and glee-clubs, and subscriptions for sacred music; and once every five years there was the great C—— Festival. In this town Mrs. Leslie established Alice: she placed her under the roof of a /ci-devant/ music-master, who, having retired from his profession, was no longer jealous of rivals, but who, by handsome terms, was induced to complete the education of Alice. It was an eligible and comfortable abode, and the music-master and his wife were a good-natured easy old couple.

Three months of resolute and unceasing perseverance, combined with the singular ductility and native gifts of Alice, sufficed to render her the most promising pupil the good musician had ever accomplished; and in three months more, introduced by Mrs. Leslie to many of the families in the place, Alice was established in a home of her own; and, what with regular lessons, and occasional assistance at musical parties, she was fairly earning what her tutor reasonably pronounced to be "a very genteel independence."

Now, in these arrangements (for we must here go back a little), there had been one gigantic difficulty of conscience in one party, of feeling in another, to surmount. Mrs. Leslie saw at once that unless Alice's misfortune was concealed, all the virtues and all the talents in the world could not enable her to retrace the one false step. Mrs. Leslie was a woman of habitual truth and strict rectitude, and she was sorely perplexed between the propriety of candour and its cruelty. She felt unequal to take the responsibility of action on herself; and, after much meditation, she resolved to confide her scruples to one who, of all whom she knew, possessed the highest character for moral worth and religious sanctity. This gentleman, lately a widower, lived at the outskirts of the town selected for Alice's future residence, and at that time happened to be on a visit in Mrs. Leslie's neighbourhood. He was an opulent man, a banker; he had once represented the town in parliament, and retiring, from disinclination to the late hours and onerous fatigues even of an unreformed House of Commons, he still possessed an influence to return one, if not both, of the members for the city of C——. And that influence was always exerted so as best to secure his own interest with the powers that be, and advance certain objects of ambition (for he was both an ostentatious and ambitious man in his own way), which he felt he might more easily obtain by proxy than by his own votes and voice in parliament—an atmosphere in which his light did not shine. And it was with a wonderful address that the banker contrived at once to support the government, and yet, by the frequent expression of liberal opinions, to conciliate the Whigs and the Dissenters of his neighbourhood. Parties, political and sectarian, were not then so irreconcilable as they are now. In the whole county there was no one so respected as this eminent person, and yet he possessed no shining talents, though a laborious and energetic man of business. It was solely and wholly the force of moral character which gave him his position in society. He felt this; he was sensitively proud of it; he was painfully anxious not to lose an atom of a distinction that required to be vigilantly secured. He was a very /remarkable/, yet not (perhaps could we penetrate all hearts), a very /uncommon/ character—this banker! He had risen from, comparatively speaking, a low origin and humble fortunes, and entirely by the scrupulous and sedate propriety of his outward conduct. With such a propriety he, therefore, inseparably connected every notion of worldly prosperity and honour. Thus, though far from a bad man, he was forced into being something of a hypocrite. Every year he had grown more starch and more saintly. He was conscience-keeper to the whole town; and it is astonishing how many persons hardly dared to make a will or subscribe to a charity without his advice. As he was a shrewd man of this world, as well as an accredited guide to the next, his advice was precisely of a nature to reconcile the Conscience and the Interest; and he was a kind of negotiator in the reciprocal diplomacy of earth and heaven. But our banker was really a charitable man, and a benevolent man, and a sincere believer. How, then, was he a hypocrite? Simply because he professed to be far /more/ charitable, /more/ benevolent, and /more/ pious than he really was. His reputation had now arrived to that degree of immaculate polish that the smallest breath, which would not have tarnished the character of another man, would have fixed an indelible stain upon his. As he affected to be more strict than the churchman, and was a great oracle with all who regarded churchmen as lukewarm, so his conduct was narrowly watched by all the clergy of the orthodox cathedral, good men, doubtless, but not affecting to be saints, who were jealous at being so luminously outshone by a layman and an authority

of the sectarians. On the other hand, the intense homage and almost worship he received from his followers kept his goodness upon a stretch, if not beyond all human power, certainly beyond his own. For "admiration" (as it is well said somewhere) "is a kind of superstition which expects miracles." From nature this gentleman had received an inordinate share of animal propensities: he had strong passions, he was by temperament a sensualist. He loved good eating and good wine—he loved women. The two former blessings of the carnal life are not incompatible with canonisation; but St. Anthony has shown that women, however angelic, are not precisely that order of angels that saints may safely commune with. If, therefore, he ever yielded to temptations of a sexual nature, it was with profound secrecy and caution; nor did his right hand know what his left hand did.

This gentleman had married a woman much older than himself, but her fortune had been one of the necessary stepping-stones in his career. His exemplary conduct towards this lady, ugly as well as old, had done much towards increasing the odour of his sanctity. She died of an ague, and the widower did not shock probabilities by affecting too severe a grief.

"The Lord's will be done!" said he; "she was a good woman, but we should not set our affections too much upon His perishable creatures!"

This was all he was ever heard to say on the matter. He took an elderly gentlewoman, distantly related to him, to manage his house, and sit at the head of the table; and it was thought not impossible, though the widower was past fifty, that he might marry again.

Such was the gentleman called in by Mrs. Leslie, who, of the same religious opinions, had long known and revered him, to decide the affairs of Alice and of Conscience.

As this man exercised no slight or fugitive influence over Alice Darvil's destinies, his counsels on the point in discussion ought to be fairly related.

"And now," said Mrs. Leslie, concluding the history, "you will perceive, my dear sir, that this poor young creature has been less culpable than she appears. From the extraordinary proficiency she has made in music, in a time that, by her own account, seems incredibly short; I should suspect her unprincipled betrayer must have been an artist—a professional man. It is just possible that they may meet again, and (as the ranks between them cannot be so very disproportionate) that he may marry her. I am sure that he could not do a better or a wiser thing, for she loves him too fondly, despite her wrongs. Under these circumstances, would it be a—a—a culpable disguise of truth to represent her as a married woman—separated from her husband—and give her the name of her seducer? Without such a precaution you will see, sir, that all hope of settling her reputably in life—all chance of procuring her any creditable independence, is out of the question. Such is my dilemma. What is your advice?—palatable or not, I shall abide by it."

The banker's grave and saturnine countenance exhibited a slight degree of embarrassment at the case submitted to him. He began brushing away, with the cuff of his black coat, some atoms of dust that had settled on his drab small-clothes; and, after a slight pause, he replied, "Why, really, dear madam, the question is one of much delicacy—I doubt if men could be good judges upon it; your sex's tact and instinct on these matters are better—much better than our sagacity. There is much in the dictates of your own heart; for to those who are in the grace of the Lord He vouchsafes to communicate His pleasure by spiritual hints and inward suggestions!"

"If so, my dear sir, the matter is decided; for my heart whispers me that this slight deviation from truth would be a less culpable offence than turning so young and, I had almost said, so innocent a creature adrift upon the world. I may take your opinion as my sanction."

"Why, really, I can scarcely say so much as that," said the banker, with a slight smile. "A deviation from truth cannot be incurred without some forfeiture of strict duty."

"Not in any case? Alas, I was afraid so!" said Mrs. Leslie, despondingly.

"In any case! Oh, there /may/ be cases! But had I not better see the young woman, and ascertain that your benevolent heart has not deceived you?"

"I wish you would," said Mrs. Leslie; "she is now in the house. I will ring for her."

"Should we not be alone?"

"Certainly; I will leave you together."

Alice was sent for, and appeared.

"This pious gentleman," said Mrs. Leslie, "will confer with you for a few moments, my child. Do not be

afraid; he is the best of men." With these words of encouragement the good lady vanished, and Alice saw before her a tall dark man, with a head bald in front, yet larger behind than before, with spectacles upon a pair of shrewd, penetrating eyes, and an outline of countenance that showed he must have been handsome in earlier manhood.

"My young friend," said the banker, seating himself, after a deliberate survey of the fair countenance that blushed beneath his gaze, "Mrs. Leslie and myself have been conferring upon your temporal welfare. You have been unfortunate, my child."

"Ah—yes."

"Well, well, you are very young; we must not be too severe upon youth. You will never do so again?"

"Do what, please you, sir?"

"What! Humph! I mean that you will be more rigid, more circumspect. Men are deceitful; you must be on your guard against them. You are handsome, child, very handsome—more's the pity." And the banker took Alice's hand and pressed it with great unction. Alice looked at him gravely and drew the hand away instinctively.

The banker lowered his spectacles, and gazed at her without their aid; his eyes were still fine and expressive. "What is your name?" he asked.

"Alice—Alice Darvil, sir."

"Well, Alice, we have been considering what is best for you. You wish to earn your own livelihood, and perhaps marry some honest man hereafter."

"Marry, sir—never!" said Alice, with great earnestness, her eyes filling with tears.

"And why?"

"Because I shall never see /him/ on earth, and they do not marry in heaven, sir."

The banker was moved, for he was not worse than his neighbours, though trying to make them believe he was so much better.

"Well, time enough to talk of that; but in the meanwhile you would support yourself?"

"Yes, sir. His child ought to be a burden to none—nor I either. I once wished to die, but then who would love my little one? Now I wish to live."

"But what mode of livelihood would you prefer? Would you go into a family, in some capacity?—not that of a servant—you are too delicate for that."

"Oh, no—no!"

"But, again, why?" asked the banker, soothingly, yet surprised.

"Because," said Alice, almost solemnly, "there are some hours when I feel I must be alone. I sometimes think I am not all right /here/," and she touched her forehead. "They called me an idiot before I knew /him/!—No, I could not live with others, for I can only cry when nobody but my child is with me."

This was said with such unconscious, and therefore with such pathetic, simplicity, that the banker was sensibly affected. He rose, stirred the fire, resettled himself, and, after a pause, said emphatically: "Alice, I will be your friend. Let me believe you will deserve it."

Alice bent her graceful head, and seeing that he had sunk into an abstracted silence, she thought it time for her to withdraw.

"She is, indeed, beautiful," said the banker, almost aloud, when he was alone; "and the old lady is right—she is as innocent as if she had not fallen. I wonder—" Here he stopped short, and walked to the glass over the mantelpiece, where he was still gazing on his own features, when Mrs. Leslie returned.

"Well, sir," said she, a little surprised at this seeming vanity in so pious a man.

The banker started. "Madam, I honour your penetration as much as your charity; I think that there is so much to be feared in letting all the world know this young female's past error, that, though I dare not advise, I cannot blame, your concealment of it."

"But, sir, your words have sunk deep into my thoughts; you said every deviation from truth was a forfeiture of duty."

"Certainly; but there are some exceptions. The world is a bad world, we are born in sin; and the children of wrath. We do not tell infants all the truth, when they ask us questions, the proper answers of which would mislead, not enlighten them. In some things the whole world are infants. The very science of government is the science of concealing truth—so is the system of trade. We could not blame the tradesman for not telling the public that if all his debts were called in he would be a bankrupt."

"And he may marry her after all—this Mr. Butler."

"Heaven forbid—the villain!—Well, madam, I will see to this poor young thing—she shall not want a guide."

"Heaven reward you! How wicked some people are to call you severe!"

"I can bear /that/ blame with a meek temper, madam. Good day."

"Good day. You will remember how strictly confidential has been our conversation."

"Not a breath shall transpire. I will send you some tracts to-morrow—so comforting. Heaven bless you!"

This difficulty smoothed, Mrs. Leslie, to her astonishment, found that she had another to contend with in Alice herself. For, first, Alice conceived that to change her name and keep her secret was to confess that she ought to be ashamed, rather than proud, of her love to Ernest, and she thought that so ungrateful to him!—and, secondly, to take his name, to pass for his wife—what presumption—he would certainly have a right to be offended! At these scruples Mrs. Leslie well-nigh lost all patience; and the banker, to his own surprise, was again called in. We have said that he was an experienced and skilful adviser, which implies the faculty of persuasion. He soon saw the handle by which Alice's obstinacy might always be moved—her little girl's welfare. He put this so forcibly before her eyes; he represented the child's future fate as resting so much, not only on her own good conduct, but on her outward respectability, that he prevailed upon her at last; and, perhaps, one argument that he incidentally used, had as much effect on her as the rest. "This Mr. Butler, if yet in England, may pass through our town—may visit amongst us—may hear you spoken of by a name similar to his own, and curiosity would thus induce him to seek you. Take his name, and you will always bear an honourable index to your mutual discovery and recognition. Besides, when you are respectable, honoured, and earning an independence, he may not be too proud to marry you. But take your own name, avow your own history, and not only will your child be an outcast, yourself a beggar, or, at best, a menial dependant, but you lose every hope of recovering the object of your too-devoted attachment."

Thus Alice was convinced. From that time she became close and reserved in her communications. Mrs. Leslie had wisely selected a town sufficiently remote from her own abode to preclude any revelations of her domestics; and, as Mrs. Butler, Alice attracted universal sympathy and respect from the exercise of her talents, the modest sweetness of her manners, the unblemished propriety of her conduct. Somehow or other, no sooner did she learn the philosophy of concealment than she made a great leap in knowledge of the world. And, though flattered and courted by the young loungers of C——, she steered her course with so much address that she was never persecuted. For there are few men in the world who make advances where there is no encouragement.

The banker observed her conduct with silent vigilance. He met her often, he visited her often. He was intimate at houses where she attended to teach or perform. He lent her good books—he advised her—he preached to her. Alice began to look up to him—to like him—to consider him as a village girl in Catholic countries may consider a benevolent and kindly priest. And he—what was his object?—at that time it is impossible to guess:—he became thoughtful and abstracted.

One day an old maid and an old clergyman met in the High Street of C——.

"And how do you do, ma'am?" said the clergyman; "how is the rheumatism?"

"Better, thank you, sir. Any news?"

The clergyman smiled, and something hovered on his lips, which he suppressed.

"Were you," the old maid resumed, "at Mrs. Macnab's last night? Charming music?"

"Charming! How pretty that Mrs. Butler is! and how humble! Knows her station—so unlike

professional people."

"Yes, indeed!—What attention a certain banker paid her!"

"He! he! he! yes; he is very fatherly—very!"

"Perhaps he will marry again; he is always talking of the holy state of matrimony—a holy state it may be—but Heaven knows, his wife, poor woman, did not make it a pleasant one."

"There may be more causes for that than we guess of," said the clergyman, mysteriously. "I would not be uncharitable, but—"

"But what?"

"Oh, when he was young, our great man was not so correct, I fancy, as he is now."

"So I have heard it whispered; but nothing against him was ever known."

"Hem—it is very odd!"

"What's very odd?"

"Why, but it's a secret—I dare say it's all very right."

"Oh, I sha'n't say a word. Are you going to the cathedral?—don't let me keep you standing. Now, pray proceed!"

"Well, then, yesterday I was doing duty in a village more than twenty miles hence, and I loitered in the village to take an early dinner; and, afterwards, while my horse was feeding, I strolled down the green."

"Well—well?"

"And I saw a gentleman muffled carefully up, with his hat slouched over his face, at the door of a cottage, with a little child in his arms, and he kissed it more fondly than, be we ever so good, we generally kiss other people's children; and then he gave it to a peasant woman standing near him, and mounted his horse, which was tied to the gate, and trotted past me; and who do you think this was?"

"Patience me—I can't guess!"

"Why, our saintly banker. I bowed to him, and I assure you he turned as red, ma'am, as your waistband."

"My!"

"I just turned into the cottage when he was out of sight, for I was thirsty, and asked for a glass of water, and I saw the child. I declare I would not be uncharitable, but I thought it monstrous like—you know whom!"

"Gracious! you don't say—"

"I asked the woman 'if it was hers?' and she said 'No,' but was very short."

"Dear me, I must find this out! What is the name of the village?"

"Covedale."

"Oh, I know—I know."

"Not a word of this; I dare say there is nothing in it. But I am not much in favour of your new lights."

"Nor I neither. What better than the good old Church of England?"

"Madam, your sentiments do you honour; you'll be sure not to say anything of our little mystery."

"Not a syllable."

Two days after this three old maids made an excursion to the village of Covedale, and lo! the cottage in question was shut up—the woman and the child were gone. The people in the village knew nothing about them—had seen nothing particular in the woman or child—had always supposed them mother and daughter; and the gentleman identified by the clerical inquisitor with the banker had never but once been observed in the place.

"The vile old parson," said the eldest of the old maids, "to take away so good a man's character!—and the fly will cost one pound two, with the baiting!"

CHAPTER VI.

"In this disposition was I, when looking out of my window one day to take the air, I perceived a kind of peasant who looked at me very attentively."—GIL BLAS.

A SUMMER'S evening in a retired country town has something melancholy in it. You have the streets of a metropolis without their animated bustle—you have the stillness of the country without its birds and flowers. The reader will please to bring before him a quiet street in the quiet country town of C——, in a quiet evening in quiet June; the picture is not mirthful—two young dogs are playing in the street, one old dog is watching by a newly-painted door. A few ladies of middle age move noiselessly along the pavement, returning home to tea: they wear white muslin dresses, green spencers a little faded, straw poke bonnets with green or coffee-coloured gauze veils. By twos and threes they have disappeared within the thresholds of small neat houses, with little railings, inclosing little green plots. Threshold, house, railing, and plot, each as like to the other as are those small commodities called "nest-tables," which, "even as a broken mirror multiplies," summon to the bewildered eye countless iterations of one four-legged individual. Paradise Place was a set of nest houses.

A cow had passed through the streets with a milkwoman behind; two young and gay shopmen "looking after the gals," had reconnoitred the street, and vanished in despair. The twilight advanced—but gently; and though a star or two were up, the air was still clear. At the open window of one of the tenements in this street sat Alice Darvil. She had been working (that pretty excuse to women for thinking), and as the thoughts grew upon her, and the evening waned, the work had fallen upon her knee, and her hands dropped mechanically on her lap. Her profile was turned towards the street; but without moving her head or changing her attitude, her eyes glanced from time to time to her little girl, who nestled on the ground beside her, tired with play; and wondering, perhaps, why she was not already in bed, seemed as tranquil as the young mother herself. And sometimes Alice's eyes filled with tears—and then she sighed, as if to sigh the tears away. But poor Alice, if she grieved, hers was now a silent and a patient grief.

The street was deserted of all other passengers, when a man passed along the pavement on the side opposite to Alice's house. His garb was rude and homely, between that of a labourer and a farmer; but still there was an affectation of tawdry show about the bright scarlet handkerchief, tied, in a sailor or smuggler fashion, round the sinewy throat; the hat was set jauntily on one side, and, dangling many an inch from the gaily-striped waistcoat, glittered a watch-chain and seals, which appeared suspiciously out of character with the rest of his attire. The passenger was covered with dust; and as the street was in a suburb communicating with the high-road, and formed one of the entrances into the town, he had probably, after long day's journey, reached his evening's destination. The looks of this stranger wore anxious, restless, and perturbed. In his gait and swagger there was the recklessness of the professional blackguard; but in his vigilant, prying, suspicious eyes there was a hang-dog expression of apprehension and fear. He seemed a man upon whom Crime had set its significant mark—and who saw a purse with one eye and a gibbet with the other. Alice did not note the stranger, until she herself had attracted and centred all his attention. He halted abruptly as he caught a view of her face—shaded his eyes with his hands as if to gaze more intently—and at length burst into an exclamation of surprise and pleasure. At that instant Alice turned, and her gaze met that of the stranger. The fascination of the basilisk can scarcely more stun and paralyse its victim than the look of this stranger charmed, with the appalling glamour of horror, the eye and soul of Alice Darvil. Her face became suddenly locked and rigid, her lips as white as marble, her eyes almost started from their sockets—she pressed her hands convulsively together, and shuddered—but still she did not move. The man nodded, and grinned, and then, deliberately crossing the street, gained the door, and knocked loudly. Still Alice did not stir—her senses seemed to have forsaken her. Presently the stranger's loud, rough voice was heard below, in answer to the accents of the solitary woman-servant whom Alice kept in her employ; and his strong, heavy tread made the slight staircase creak and tremble. Then Alice rose as by an instinct, caught her child in her arms, and stood erect and motionless facing the door. It opened—and the FATHER and DAUGHTER were once more face to face within the same walls.

"Well, Alley, how are you, my blown?—glad to see your old dad again, I'll be sworn. No ceremony, sit down. Ha, ha! snug here—very snug—we shall live together charmingly. Trade on your own account—eh? sly!—well, can't desert your poor old father. Let's have something to eat and drink."

So saying, Darvil threw himself at length upon the neat, prim little chintz sofa, with the air of a man resolved to make himself perfectly at home.

Alice gazed, and trembled violently, but still said nothing—the power of voice had indeed left her.

"Come, why don't you stir your stumps? I suppose I must wait on myself—fine manners!—But, ho, ho—a bell, by gosh—mighty grand—never mind—I am used to call for my own wants."

A hearty tug at the frail bell-rope sent a shrill alarm half-way through the long lath-and-plaster row of Paradise Place, and left the instrument of the sound in the hand of its creator.

Up came the maid-servant, a formal old woman, most respectable.

"Hark ye, old girl!" said Darvil; "bring up the best you have to eat—not particular—let there be plenty. And I say—a bottle of brandy. Come, don't stand there staring like a stuck pig. Budge! Hell and furies! don't you hear me?"

The servant retreated, as if a pistol had been put to her head, and Darvil, laughing loud, threw himself again upon the sofa. Alice looked at him, and, still without saying a word, glided from the room—her child in her arms. She hurried down-stairs, and in the hall met her servant. The latter, who was much attached to her mistress, was alarmed to see her about to leave the house.

"Why, marm, where be you going? Dear heart, you have no bonnet on! What is the matter? Who is this?"

"Oh!" cried Alice, in agony; "what shall I do?—where shall I fly?" The door above opened. Alice heard, started, and the next moment was in the street. She ran on breathlessly, and like one insane. Her mind was, indeed, for the time, gone; and had a river flowed before her way, she would have plunged into an escape from a world that seemed too narrow to hold a father and his child.

But just as she turned the corner of a street that led into the more public thoroughfares, she felt her arm grasped, and a voice called out her name in surprised and startled accents.

"Heavens, Mrs. Butler! Alice! What do I see? What is the matter?"

"Oh, sir, save me!—you are a good man—a great man—save me—he is returned!"

"He! who? Mr. Butler?" said the banker (for that gentleman it was) in a changed and trembling voice.

"No, no—ah, not he!—I did not say /he/—I said my father—my, my—ah—look behind—look behind—is he coming?"

"Calm yourself, my dear young friend—no one is near. I will go and reason with your father. No one shall harm you—I will protect you. Go back—go back, I will follow—we must not be seen together." And the tall banker seemed trying to shrink into a nutshell.

"No, no," said Alice, growing yet paler, "I cannot go back."

"Well, then, just follow me to the door—your servant shall get you your bonnet, and accompany you to my house, where you can wait till I return. Meanwhile I will see your father, and rid you, I trust, of his presence."

The banker, who spoke in a very hurried and even impatient voice, waited for no reply, but took his way to Alice's house. Alice herself did not follow, but remained in the very place where she was left, till joined by her servant, who then conducted her to the rich man's residence. . . . But Alice's mind had not recovered its shock, and her thoughts wandered alarmingly.

CHAPTER VII.

"/Miramont./—Do they chafe roundly?
/Andrew./—As they were rubbed with soap, sir,
And now they swear aloud, now calm again
Like a ring of bells, whose sound the wind still utters,
And then they sit in council what to do,
And then they jar again what shall be done?"

BEAUMONT AND FLETCHER.

OH! what a picture of human nature it was when the banker and the vagabond sat together in that little drawing-room, facing each other,—one in the armchair, one on the sofa! Darvil was still employed on some cold meat, and was making wry faces at the very indifferent brandy which he had frightened the formal old servant into buying at the nearest public-house; and opposite sat the respectable—highly

respectable man of forms and ceremonies, of decencies and quackeries, gazing gravely upon this low, daredevil ruffian:—the well-to-do hypocrite—the penniless villain;—the man who had everything to lose—the man who had nothing in the wide world but his own mischievous, rascally life, a gold watch, chain and seals, which he had stolen the day before, and thirteen shillings and threepence halfpenny in his left breeches pocket!

The man of wealth was by no means well acquainted with the nature of the beast before him. He had heard from Mrs. Leslie (as we remember) the outline of Alice's history, and ascertained that their joint /protegee's/ father was a great blackguard; but he expected to find Mr. Darvil a mere dull, brutish villain—a peasant-ruffian—a blunt serf, without brains, or their substitute, effrontery. But Luke Darvil was a clever, half-educated fellow: he did not sin from ignorance, but had wit enough to have bad principles, and he was as impudent as if he had lived all his life in the best society. He was not frightened at the banker's drab breeches and imposing air—not he! The Duke of Wellington would not have frightened Luke Darvil, unless his grace had had the constables for his /aides-de-camp/.

The banker, to use a homely phrase, was "taken aback."

"Look you here, Mr. What's-your-name!" said Darvil, swallowing a glass of the raw alcohol as if it had been water—"look you now—you can't humbug me. What the devil do you care about my daughter's respectability or comfort, or anything else, grave old dog as you are! It is my daughter herself you are licking your brown old chaps at!—and, 'faith, my Alley is a very pretty girl—very—but queer as moonshine. You'll drive a much better bargain with me than with her."

The banker coloured scarlet—he bit his lips and measured his companion from head to foot (while the latter lolled on the sofa), as if he were meditating the possibility of kicking him down-stairs. But Luke Darvil would have thrashed the banker and all his clerks into the bargain. His frame was like a trunk of thews and muscles, packed up by that careful dame, Nature, as tightly as possible; and a prizefighter would have thought twice before he had entered the ring against so awkward a customer. The banker was a man prudent to a fault, and he pushed his chair six inches back, as he concluded his survey.

"Sir," then said he, very quietly, "do not let us misunderstand each other. Your daughter is safe from your control—if you molest her, the law will protect—"

"She is not of age," said Darvil. "Your health, old boy."

"Whether she is of age or not," returned the banker, unheeding the courtesy conveyed in the last sentence, "I do not care three straws—I know enough of the law to know that if she have rich friends in this town, and you have none, she will be protected and you will go to the treadmill."

"That is spoken like a sensible man," said Darvil, for the first time with a show of respect in his manner; "you now take a practical view of matters, as we used to say at the spouting-club."

"If I were in your situation, Mr. Darvil, I tell you what I would do. I would leave my daughter and this town to-morrow morning, and I would promise never to return, and never to molest her, on condition she allowed me a certain sum from her earnings, paid quarterly."

"And if I preferred living with her?"

"In that case, I, as a magistrate of this town, would have you sent away as a vagrant, or apprehended —"

"Ha!"

"Apprehended on suspicion of stealing that gold chain and seals which you wear so ostentatiously."

"By goles, but you're a clever fellow," said Darvil, involuntarily; "you know human natur."

The banker smiled: strange to say, he was pleased with the compliment.

"But," resumed Darvil, helping himself to another slice of beef, "you are in the wrong box—planted in Queer Street, as /we/ say in London; for if you care a d—n about my daughter's respectability, you will never muzzle her father on suspicion of theft—and so there's tit for tat, my old gentleman!"

"I shall deny that you are her father, Mr. Darvil; and I think you will find it hard to prove the fact in any town where I am a magistrate."

"By goles, what a good prig you would have made! You are as sharp as a gimlet. Surely you were brought up at the Old Bailey!"

"Mr. Darvil, be ruled. You seem a man not deaf to reason, and I ask you whether, in any town in this

country, a poor man in suspicious circumstances can do anything against a rich man whose character is established? Perhaps you are right in the main: I have nothing to do with that. But I tell you that you shall quit this house in half an hour—that you shall never enter it again but at your peril; and if you do—within ten minutes from that time you shall be in the town gaol. It is no longer a contest between you and your defenceless daughter; it is a contest between—"

"A tramper in fustian, and a gemman as drives a coach," interrupted Darvil, laughing bitterly, yet heartily. "Good—good!"

The banker rose. "I think you have made a very clever definition," said he. "Half an hour—you recollect—good evening."

"Stay," said Darvil; "you are the first man I have seen for many a year that I can take a fancy to. Sit down—sit down, I say, and talk a bit, and we shall come to terms soon, I dare say;—that's right. Lord! how I should like to have you on the roadside instead of within these four gimcrack walls. Ha! ha! the argufying would be all in my favour then."

The banker was not a brave man, and his colour changed slightly at the intimation of this obliging wish. Darvil eyed him grimly and chucklingly.

The rich man resumed: "That may or may not be, Mr. Darvil, according as I might happen or not to have pistols about me. But to the point. Quit this house without further debate, without noise, without mentioning to any one else your claim upon its owner—"

"Well, and the return?"

"Ten guineas now, and the same sum quarterly, as long as the young lady lives in this town, and you never persecute her by word or letter."

"That is forty guineas a year. I can't live upon it."

"You will cost less in the House of Correction, Mr. Darvil."

"Come, make it a hundred: Alley is cheap at that."

"Not a farthing more," said the banker, buttoning up his breeches pockets with a determined air.

"Well, out with the shiners."

"Do you promise or not?"

"I promise."

"There are your ten guineas. If in half an hour you are not gone—why, then—"

"Then?"

"Why, then you have robbed me of ten guineas, and must take the usual consequences of robbery."

Darvil started to his feet—his eyes glared—he grasped the carving-knife before him.

"You are a bold fellow," said the banker, quietly; "but it won't do. It is not worth your while to murder me; and I am a man sure to be missed."

Darvil sank down, sullen and foiled. The respectable man was more than a match for the villain.

"Had you been as poor as I,—Gad! what a rogue you would have been!"

"I think not," said the banker; "I believe roguery to be a very bad policy. Perhaps once I /was/ almost as poor as you are, but I never turned rogue."

"You never were in my circumstances," returned Darvil, gloomily. "I was a gentleman's son. Come, you shall hear my story. My father was well-born, but married a maid-servant when he was at college; his family disowned him, and left him to starve. He died in the struggle against a poverty he was not brought up to, and my dam went into service again; became housekeeper to an old bachelor—sent me to school—but mother had a family by the old bachelor, and I was taken from school and put to trade. All hated me—for I was ugly; damn them! Mother cut me—I wanted money—robbed the old bachelor—was sent to gaol, and learned there a lesson or two how to rob better in future. Mother died,—I was adrift on the world. The world was my foe—could not make it up with the world, so we went to war;—you understand, old boy? Married a poor woman and pretty;—wife made me jealous—had learned to suspect every one. Alice born—did not believe her mine: not like me—perhaps a gentleman's child. I

hate—I loathe gentlemen. Got drunk one night—kicked my wife in the stomach three weeks after her confinement. Wife died—tried for my life—got off. Went to another county—having had a sort of education, and being sharp eno', got work as a mechanic. Hated work just as I hated gentlemen—for was I not by blood a gentleman? There was the curse. Alice grew up; never looked on her as my flesh and blood. Her mother was a w——! Why should not /she/ be one? There, that's enough. Plenty of excuse, I think, for all I have ever done. Curse the world—curse the rich—curse the handsome—curse—curse all!"

"You have been a very foolish man," said the banker; "and seem to me to have had very good cards, if you had known how to play them. However, that is your lookout. It is not yet too late to repent; age is creeping on you.—Man, there is another world."

The banker said the last words with a tone of solemn and even dignified adjuration.

"You think so—do you?" said Darvil, staring at him.

"From my soul I do."

"Then you are not the sensible man I took you for," replied Darvil, drily; "and I should like to talk to you on that subject."

But our Dives, however sincere a believer, was by no means one

"At whose control
Despair and anguish fled the struggling soul."

He had words of comfort for the pious, but he had none for the sceptic—he could soothe, but he could not convert. It was not in his way; besides, he saw no credit in making a convert of Luke Darvil. Accordingly, he again rose with some quickness, and said:

"No, sir; that is useless, I fear, and I have no time to spare; and so once more good night to you."

"But you have not arranged where my allowance is to be sent."

"Ah! true; I will guarantee it. You will find my name sufficient security."

"At least, it is the best I can get," returned Darvil, carelessly; "and after all, it is not a bad chance day's work. But I'm sure I can't say where the money shall be sent. I don't know a man who would not grab it."

"Very well, then—the best thing (I speak as a man of business) will be to draw on me for ten guineas quarterly. Wherever you are staying, any banker can effect this for you. But mind, if ever you overdraw the account stops."

"I understand," said Darvil; "and when I have finished the bottle I shall be off."

"You had better," replied the banker, as he opened the door.

The rich man returned home hurriedly. "So Alice, after all, has some gentle blood in her veins," thought he. "But that father—no, it will never do. I wish he were hanged and nobody the wiser. I should very much like to arrange the matter without marrying; but then—scandal—scandal—scandal. After all, I had better give up all thoughts of her. She is monstrous handsome, and so—humph:—I shall never grow an old man."

CHAPTER VIII.

"Began to bend down his admiring eyes
On all her touching looks and qualities,
Turning their shapely sweetness every way
Till 'twas his food and habit day by day."
LEIGH HUNT.

THERE must have been a secret something about Alice Darvil singularly captivating, that (associated as she was with images of the most sordid and the vilest crimes) left her still pure and lovely alike in the eyes of a man as fastidious as Ernest Maltravers, and of a man as influenced by all the thoughts and theories of the world as the shrewd banker of C——. Amidst things foul and hateful had sprung up this beautiful flower, as if to preserve the inherent heavenliness and grace of human nature, and proclaim the handiwork of God in scenes where human nature had been most debased by the abuses of

social art; and where the light of God Himself was most darkened and obscured. That such contrasts, though rarely and as by chance, are found, every one who has carefully examined the wastes and deserts of life must own. I have drawn Alice Darvil scrupulously from life, and I can declare that I have not exaggerated hue or lineament in the portrait. I do not suppose, with our good banker, that she owed anything, unless it might be a greater delicacy of form and feature, to whatever mixture of gentle blood was in her veins. But, somehow or other, in her original conformation there was the happy bias of the plantes towards the Pure and the Bright. For, despite Helvetius, a common experience teaches us that though education and circumstances may mould the mass, Nature herself sometimes forms the individual, and throws into the clay, or its spirit, so much of beauty or deformity, that nothing can utterly subdue the original elements of character. From sweets one draws poison—from poisons another extracts but sweets. But I, often deeply pondering over the psychological history of Alice Darvil, think that one principal cause why she escaped the early contaminations around her was in the slow and protracted development of her intellectual faculties. Whether or not the brutal violence of her father had in childhood acted through the nerves upon the brain, certain it is that until she knew Maltravers—until she loved—till she was cherished—her mind had seemed torpid and locked up. True, Darvil had taught her nothing, nor permitted her to be taught anything; but that mere ignorance would have been no preservation to a quick, observant mind. It was the bluntness of the senses themselves that operated like an armour between her mind and the vile things around her. It was the rough, dull covering of the chrysalis, framed to bear rude contact and biting weather, that the butterfly might break forth, winged and glorious, in due season. Had Alice been a quick child, Alice would have probably grown up a depraved and dissolute woman; but she comprehended, she understood little or nothing, till she found an inspirer in that affection which inspires both beast and man; which makes the dog (in his natural state one of the meanest of the savage race) a companion, a guardian, a protector, and raises Instinct half-way to the height of Reason.

The banker had a strong regard for Alice; and when he reached home, he heard with great pain that she was in a high state of fever. She remained beneath his roof that night, and the elderly gentlewoman, his relation and /gouvernante/, attended her. The banker slept but little; and the next morning his countenance was unusually pale. Towards daybreak Alice had fallen into a sound and refreshing sleep; and when, on waking, she found, by a note from her host, that her father had left her house, and she might return in safety and without fear, a violent flood of tears, followed by long and grateful prayer, contributed to the restoration of her mind and nerves. Imperfect as this young woman's notions of abstract right and wrong still were, she was yet sensible to the claims of a father (no matter how criminal) upon his child: for feelings with her were so good and true, that they supplied in a great measure the place of principles. She knew that she could not have lived under the same roof with her dreadful parent; but she still felt an uneasy remorse at thinking he had been driven from that roof in destitution and want. She hastened to dress herself and seek an audience with her protector; and the latter found with admiration and pleasure that he had anticipated her own instantaneous and involuntary design in the settlement made upon Darvil. He then communicated to Alice the compact he had already formed with her father, and she wept and kissed his hand when she heard, and secretly resolved that she would work hard to be enabled to increase the sum allowed. Oh, if her labours could serve to retrieve a parent from the necessity of darker resources for support! Alas! when crime has become a custom, it is like gaming or drinking—the excitement is wanting; and had Luke Darvil been suddenly made inheritor of the wealth of a Rothschild, he would either still have been a villain in one way or the other; or /ennui/ would have awakened conscience, and he would have died of the change of habit.

Our banker always seemed more struck by Alice's moral feelings than even by her physical beauty. Her love for her child, for instance, impressed him powerfully, and he always gazed upon her with softer eyes when he saw her caressing or nursing the little fatherless creature, whose health was now delicate and precarious. It is difficult to say whether he was absolutely in love with Alice; the phrase is too strong, perhaps, to be applied to a man past fifty, who had gone through emotions and trials enough to wear away freshness from his heart. His feelings altogether for Alice, the designs he entertained towards her, were of a very complicated nature; and it will be long, perhaps, before the reader can thoroughly comprehend them. He conducted Alice home that day; but he said little by the way, perhaps because his female relation, for appearance's sake, accompanied them also. He, however, briefly cautioned Alice on no account to communicate to any one that it was her father who had been her visitor; and she still shuddered too much at the reminiscence to appear likely to converse on it. The banker also judged it advisable to be so far confidential with Alice's servant as to take her aside, and tell her that the inauspicious stranger of the previous evening had been a very distant relation of Mrs. Butler, who, from a habit of drunkenness, had fallen into evil and disorderly courses. The banker added with a sanctified air that he trusted, by a little serious conversation, he had led the poor man to better notions, and that he had gone home with an altered mind to his family. "But, my good Hannah," he concluded, "you know you are a superior person, and above the vulgar sin of indiscriminate gossip; therefore, mention what has occurred to no one; it can do no good to Mrs. Butler—it may hurt the man

himself, who is well-to-do—better off than he seems; and who, I hope, with grace, may be a sincere penitent; and it will also—but that is nothing—very seriously displease me. By the by, Hannah, I shall be able to get your grandson into the Free School."

The banker was shrewd enough to perceive that he had carried his point; and he was walking home, satisfied, on the whole, with the way matters had been arranged, when he was met by a brother magistrate.

"Ha!" said the latter, "and how are you, my good sir? Do you know that we have had the Bow Street officers here, in search of a notorious villain who has broken from prison? He is one of the most determined and dexterous burglars in all England, and the runners have hunted him into our town. His very robberies have tracked him by the way. He robbed a gentleman the day before yesterday of his watch, and left him for dead on the road—this was not thirty miles hence."

"Bless me!" said the banker, with emotion; "and what is the wretch's name?"

"Why, he has as many aliases as a Spanish grandee; but I believe the last name he has assumed is Peter Watts."

"Oh!" said our friend, relieved,— "well, have the runners found him?"

"No, but they are on his scent. A fellow answering to his description was seen by the man at the toll-bar, at daybreak this morning, on the way to F——; the officers are after him."

"I hope he may meet with his deserts—and crime is never unpunished even in this world. My best compliments to your lady:—and how is little Jack?—Well! glad to hear it—fine boy, little Jack! good day."

"Good day, my dear sir. Worthy man, that!"

CHAPTER IX.

"But who is this? thought he, a demon vile.
With wicked meaning and a vulgar style;
Hammond they call him—they can give the name
Of man to devils. Why am I so tame?
Why crush I not the viper? Fear replied,
Watch him a while, and let his strength be tried."
CRABBE.

THE next morning, after breakfast, the banker took his horse—a crop-eared, fast-trotting hackney—and merely leaving word that he was going upon business into the country, and should not return to dinner, turned his back on the spires of C——.

He rode slowly, for the day was hot. The face of the country, which was fair and smiling, might have tempted others to linger by the way; but our hard and practical man of the world was more influenced by the weather than the loveliness of the scenery. He did not look upon Nature with the eye of imagination; perhaps a railroad, had it then and there existed, would have pleased him better than the hanging woods, the shadowy valleys, and the changeful river that from time to time beautified the landscape on either side the road. But, after all, there is a vast deal of hypocrisy in the affected admiration for Nature;—and I don't think one person in a hundred cares for what lies by the side of a road, so long as the road itself is good, hills levelled, and turnpikes cheap.

It was midnight, and many miles had been passed, when the banker turned down a green lane and quickened his pace. At the end of about three-quarters of an hour, he arrived at a little solitary inn, called "The Angler,"—put up his horse, ordered his dinner at six o'clock—beggd to borrow a basket to hold his fish—and it was then apparent that a longish cane he had carried with him was capable of being extended into a fishing-rod. He fitted in the various joints with care, as if to be sure no accident had happened to the implement by the journey—pried anxiously into the contents of a black case of lines and flies—slung the basket behind his back, and while his horse was putting down his nose and whisking about his tail, in the course of those nameless coquetries that horses carry on with hostlers—our worthy brother of the rod strode rapidly through some green fields, gained the riverside, and began fishing with much semblance of earnest interest in the sport. He had caught one trout, seemingly by accident—for the astonished fish was hooked up on the outside of its jaw—probably while in the act, not of biting, but of gazing at, the bait, when he grew discontented with the spot he had selected; and, after looking round as if to convince himself that he was not liable to be disturbed or observed (a thought

hateful to the fishing fraternity), he stole quickly along the margin, and finally quitting the riverside altogether, struck into a path that, after a sharp walk of nearly all hour, brought him to the door of a cottage. He knocked twice, and then entered of his own accord—nor was it till the summer sun was near its decline that the banker regained his inn. His simple dinner, which they had delayed in wonder at the protracted absence of the angler, and in expectation of the fishes he was to bring back to be fried, was soon despatched; his horse was ordered to the door, and the red clouds in the west already betokened the lapse of another day, as he spurred from the spot on the fast-trotting hackney, fourteen miles an hour.

"That 'ere gemman has a nice bit of blood," said the hostler, scratching his ear.

"Oiy,—who be he?" said a hanger-on of the stables.

"I dooan't know. He has been here twice afoar, and he never catches anything to sinnify—he be mighty fond of fishing, surely."

Meanwhile, away sped the banker—milestone on milestone glided by—and still, scarce turning a hair, trotted gallantly out the good hackney. But the evening grew darker, and it began to rain; a drizzling, persevering rain, that wets a man through ere he is aware of it. After his fiftieth year, a gentleman who has a tender regard for himself does not like to get wet; and the rain inspired the banker, who was subject to rheumatism, with the resolution to take a short cut along the fields. There were one or two low hedges by this short way, but the banker had been there in the spring, and knew every inch of the ground. The hackney leaped easily—and the rider had a tolerably practised seat—and two miles saved might just prevent the menaced rheumatism: accordingly, our friend opened a white gate, and scoured along the fields without any misgivings as to the prudence of his choice. He arrived at his first leap—there was the hedge, its summit just discernible in the dim light. On the other side, to the right was a haystack, and close by this haystack seemed the most eligible place for clearing the obstacle. Now since the banker had visited this place, a deep ditch, that served as a drain, had been dug at the opposite base of the hedge, of which neither horse nor man was aware, so that the leap was far more perilous than was anticipated. Unconscious of this additional obstacle, the rider set off in a canter. The banker was high in air, his loins bent back, his rein slackened, his right hand raised knowingly—when the horse took fright at an object crouched by the haystack—swerved, plunged midway into the ditch, and pitched its rider two or three yards over its head. The banker recovered himself sooner than might have been expected; and, finding himself, though bruised and shaken, still whole and sound, hastened to his horse. But the poor animal had not fared so well as its master, and its off-shoulder was either put out or dreadfully sprained. It had scrambled its way out of the ditch, and there it stood disconsolate by the hedge, as lame as one of the trees that, at irregular intervals, broke the symmetry of the barrier. On ascertaining the extent of his misfortune, the banker became seriously uneasy; the rain increased—he was several miles yet from home—he was in the midst of houseless fields, with another leap before him—the leap he had just passed behind—and no other egress that he knew of into the main road. While these thoughts passed through his brain, he became suddenly aware that he was not alone. The dark object that had frightened his horse rose slowly from the snug corner it had occupied by the haystack, and a gruff voice that made the banker thrill to the marrow of his bones, cried, "Holla, who the devil are you?"

Lame as his horse was, the banker instantly put his foot into the stirrup; but before he could mount, a heavy gripe was laid on his shoulder—and turning round with as much fierceness as he could assume, he saw—what the tone of the voice had already led him to forebode—the ill-omened and cut-throat features of Luke Darvil.

"Ha! ha! my old annuitant, my clever feelosofer—jolly old boy—how are you?—give us a fist. Who would have thought to meet you on a rainy night, by a lone haystack, with a deep ditch on one side, and no chimney-pot within sight? Why, old fellow, I, Luke Darvil,—I, the vagabond—I whom you would have sent to the treadmill for being poor, and calling on my own daughter—I am as rich as you are here—and as great, and as strong, and as powerful."

And while he spoke, Darvil, who was really an undersized man, seemed to swell and dilate, till he appeared half a head taller than the shrinking banker, who was five feet eleven inches without his shoes.

"E-hem!" said the rich man, clearing his throat, which seemed to him uncommonly husky; "I do not know whether I insulted your poverty, my dear Mr. Darvil—I hope not; but this is hardly a time for talking—pray let me mount, and—"

"Not a time for talking!" interrupted Darvil angrily; "it's just the time to my mind: let me consider,—ay, I told you that whenever we met by the roadside it would be my turn to have the best of the argufying."

"I dare say—I dare say, my good fellow."

"Fellow not me!—I won't be fellowed now. I say I have the best of it here—man to man—I am your match."

But why quarrel with me?" said the banker, coaxingly; "I never meant you harm, and I am sure you cannot mean me harm."

"No!—and why?" asked Darvil, coolly;—"why do you think I can mean you no harm?"

"Because your annuity depends on me."

"Shrewdly put—we'll argufy that point. My life is a bad one, not worth more than a year's purchase; now, suppose you have more than forty pounds about you—it may be better worth my while to draw my knife across your gullet than to wait for the quarter-day's ten pounds a time. You see it's all a matter of calculation, my dear, Mr. What's-your-name!"

"But," replied the banker, and his teeth began to chatter, "I have not forty pounds about me."

"How do I know that?—you say so. Well, in the town yonder your word goes for more than mine; I never gainsaid you when you put that to me, did I? But here, by the haystack, my word is better than yours; and if I say you must and shall have forty pounds about you, let's see whether you dare contradict me."

"Look you, Darvil," said the banker, summoning up all his energy and intellect, for his moral power began now to back his physical cowardice, and he spoke calmly, and even bravely, though his heart throbbed aloud against his breast, and you might have knocked him down with a feather—"the London runners are even now hot after you."

"Ha!—you lie!"

"Upon my honour I speak the truth; I heard the news last evening. They tracked you to C——; they tracked you out of the town; a word from me would have given you into their hands. I said nothing—you are safe—you may yet escape. I will even help you to fly the country, and live out your natural date of years, secure and in peace."

"You did not say that the other day in the snug drawing-room; you see I have the best of it now—own that."

"I do," said the banker.

Darvil chuckled, and rubbed his hands.

The man of wealth once more felt his importance, and went on. "This is one side of the question. On the other, suppose you rob and murder me, do you think my death will lessen the heat of the pursuit against you? The whole country will be in arms, and before forty-eight hours are over you will be hunted down like a mad dog."

Darvil was silent, as if in thought; and after a pause, replied: "Well, you are a 'cute one after all. What have you got about you? you know you drove a hard bargain the other day—now it's my market—fustian has riz—kersey has fell."

"All I have about me shall be yours," said the banker, eagerly.

"Give it me, then."

"There!" said the banker, placing his purse and pocketbook into Darvil's bands.

"And the watch?"

"The watch?—well there!"

"What's that?"

The banker's senses were sharpened by fear, but they were not so sharp as those of Darvil; he heard nothing but the rain pattering on the leaves, and the rush of water in the ditch at hand. Darvil stooped and listened—till, raising himself again, with a deep-drawn breath, he said, "I think there are rats in the haystack; they will be running over me in my sleep; but they are playful creturs, and I like 'em. And now, my /dear/ sir, I am afraid I must put an end to you!"

"Good Heavens, what do you mean? How?"

"Man, there is another world!" quoth the ruffian, mimicking the banker's solemn tone in their former interview. "So much the better for you! In that world they don't tell tales."

"I swear I will never betray you."

"You do?—swear it, then."

"By all my hopes of earth and heaven!"

"What a d—d coward you be!" said Darvil, laughing scornfully. "Go—you are safe. I am in good humour with myself again. I crow over you, for no man can make me tremble. And villain as you think me, while you fear me you cannot despise—you respect me. Go, I say—go."

The banker was about to obey, when suddenly, from the haystack, a broad, red light streamed upon the pair, and the next moment Darvil was seized from behind, and struggling in the gripe of a man nearly as powerful as himself. The light, which came from a dark-lantern, placed on the ground, revealed the forms of a peasant in a smock-frock, and two stout-built, stalwart men, armed with pistols—besides the one engaged with Darvil.

The whole of this scene was brought as by the trick of the stage—as by a flash of lightning—as by the change of a showman's phantasmagoria—before the astonished eyes of the banker. He stood arrested and spell-bound, his hand on his bridle, his foot on his stirrup. A moment more and Darvil had clashed his antagonist on the ground; he stood at a little distance, his face reddened by the glare of the lantern and fronting his assailants—that fiercest of all beasts, a desperate man at bay! He had already succeeded in drawing forth his pistols, and he held one in each hand—his eyes flashing from beneath his bent brows and turning quickly from foe to foe! At last those terrible eyes rested on the late reluctant companion of his solitude.

"So /you/ then betrayed me," he said, very slowly, and directed his pistol to the head of the dismounted horseman.

"No, no!" cried one of the officers, for such were Darvil's assailants; "fire away in this direction, my hearty—we're paid for it. The gentleman knew nothing at all about it."

"Nothing, by G—!" cried the banker, startled out of his sanctity.

"Then I shall keep my shot," said Darvil; "and mind, the first who approaches me is a dead man."

It so happened that the robber and the officers were beyond the distance which allows sure mark for a pistol-shot, and each party felt the necessity of caution.

"Your time is up, my swell cove!" cried the head of the detachment; "you have had your swing, and a long one it seems to have been—you must now give in. Throw down your barkers, or we must make mutton of you, and rob the gallows."

Darvil did not reply, and the officers, accustomed to hold life cheap, moved on towards him—their pistols cocked and levelled.

Darvil fired—one of the men staggered and fell. With a kind of instinct Darvil had singled out the one with whom he had before wrestled for life. The ruffian waited not for the others—he turned and fled along the fields.

"Zounds, he is off!" cried the other two, and they rushed after him in pursuit. A pause—a shot—another—an oath—a groan—and all was still.

"It's all up with him now," said one of the runners, in the distance; "he dies game."

At these words, the peasant, who had before skulked behind the haystack, seized the lantern from the ground, and ran to the spot. The banker involuntarily followed.

There lay Luke Darvil on the grass—still living, but a horrible and ghastly spectacle. One ball had pierced his breast, another had shot away his jaw. His eyes rolled fearfully, and he tore up the grass with his hands.

The officers looked coldly on. "He was a clever fellow!" said one.

"And has given us much trouble," said the other; "let us see to Will."

"But he's not dead yet," said the banker, shuddering.

"Sir, he cannot live a minute."

Darvil raised himself bolt upright—shook his clenched fist at his conquerors, and a fearful gurgling howl, which the nature of his wounds did not allow him to syllable into a curse, came from his breast—with that he fell flat on his back—a corpse.

"I am afraid, sir," said the elder officer, turning away, you had a narrow escape—but how came you here?"

"Rather, how came /you/ here?"

"Honest Hodge there, with the lanthorn, had marked the fellow skulk behind the haystack, when he himself was going out to snare rabbits. He had seen our advertisement of Watts' person, and knew that we were then at a public house some miles off. He came to us—conducted us to the spot—we heard voices—showed up the glim—and saw our man. Hodge, you are a good subject, and love justice."

"Yees, but I shall have the rewourd," said Hodge, showing his teeth.

"Talk o' that by and by," said the officer. "Will, how are you, man?"

"Bad," groaned the poor runner, and a rush of blood from the lips followed the groan.

It was many days before the ex-member for C—— sufficiently recovered the tone of his mind to think further of Alice; when he did, it was with great satisfaction that he reflected that Darvil was no more, and that the deceased ruffian was only known to the neighbourhood by the name of Peter Watts.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK ERNEST MALTRAVERS — VOLUME 04 ***

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