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Title: Lucretia — Volume 04

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Release date: March 1, 2005 [EBook #7688]

Most recently updated: December 30, 2020

Language: English

*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK LUCRETIA — VOLUME 04 ***

This eBook was produced by Tapio Riikonen

and David Widger

PART THE SECOND.

PROLOGUE TO PART THE SECOND.

The century has advanced. The rush of the deluge has ebbed back; the old landmarks have reappeared; the dynasties Napoleon willed into life have crumbled to the dust; the plough has passed over Waterloo; autumn after autumn the harvests have glittered on that grave of an empire. Through the immense ocean of universal change we look back on the single track which our frail boat has cut through the waste. As a star shines impartially over the measureless expanse, though it seems to gild but one broken line into each eye, so, as our memory gazes on the past, the light spreads not over all the breadth of the waste where nations have battled and argosies gone down,—it falls narrow and confined along the single course we have taken; we lean over the small raft on which we float, and see the sparkles but reflected from the waves that it divides.

On the terrace at Laughton but one step paces slowly. The bride clings not now to the bridegroom's arm. Though pale and worn, it is still the same gentle face; but the blush of woman's love has gone from it evermore.

Charles Vernon (to call him still by the name in which he is best known to us) sleeps in the vault of the St. Johns. He had lived longer than he himself had expected, than his physician had hoped,—lived, cheerful and happy, amidst quiet pursuits and innocent excitements. Three sons had blessed his hearth, to mourn over his grave. But the two elder were delicate and sickly. They did not long survive him, and died within a few months of each other. The third seemed formed of a different mould and constitution from his brethren. To him descended the ancient heritage of Laughton, and he promised to enjoy it long.

It is Vernon's widow who walks alone in the stately terrace; sad still, for she loved well the choice of her youth, and she misses yet the children in the grave. From the date of Vernon's death, she wore mourning without and within; and the sorrows that came later broke more the bruised reed,—sad still, but resigned. One son survives, and earth yet has the troubled hopes and the holy fears of affection.

Though that son be afar, in sport or in earnest, in pleasure or in toil, working out his destiny as man, still that step is less solitary than it seems. When does the son's image not walk beside the mother? Though she lives in seclusion, though the gay world tempts no more, the gay world is yet linked to her thoughts. From the distance she hears its murmurs in music. Her fancy still mingles with the crowd, and follows on, to her eye, outshining all the rest. Never vain in herself, she is vain now of another; and the small triumphs of the young and well-born seem trophies of renown to the eyes so tenderly deceived.

In the old-fashioned market-town still the business goes on, still the doors of the bank open and close every moment on the great day of the week; but the names over the threshold are partially changed. The junior partner is busy no more at the desk; not wholly forgotten, if his name still is spoken, it is not with thankfulness and praise. A something rests on the name,—that something which dims and attains; not proven, not certain, but suspected and dubious. The head shakes, the voice whispers; and the attorney now lives in the solid red house at the verge of the town.

In the vicarage, Time, the old scythe-bearer, has not paused from his work. Still employed on Greek texts, little changed, save that his hair is gray and that some lines in his kindly face tell of sorrows as of years, the vicar sits in his parlour; but the children no longer, blithe-voiced and rose-cheeked, dart through the rustling espaliers. Those children, grave men or staid matrons (save one whom Death chose, and therefore now of all best beloved!) are at their posts in the world. The young ones are flown from the nest, and, with anxious wings, here and there, search food in their turn for their young. But the blithe voice and rose-cheek of the child make not that loss which the hearth misses the most. From childhood to manhood, and from manhood to departure, the natural changes are gradual and prepared. The absence most missed is that household life which presided, which kept things in order, and must be coaxed if a chair were displaced. That providence in trifles, that clasp of small links, that dear, bustling agency,—now pleased, now complaining,—dear alike in each change of its humour; that active life which has no self of its own; like the mind of a poet, though its prose be the humblest, transferring self into others, with its right to be cross, and its charter to scold; for the motive is clear,—it takes what it loves too anxiously to heart. The door of the parlour is open, the garden-path still passes before the threshold; but no step now has full right to halt at the door and interrupt the grave thought on Greek texts; no small talk on details and wise sayings chimes in with the wrath of "Medea." The Prudent Genius is gone from the household; and perhaps as the good scholar now wearily pauses, and looks out on the silent garden, he would have given with joy all that Athens produced, from Aeschylus to Plato, to hear again from the old familiar lips the lament on torn jackets, or the statistical economy of eggs.

But see, though the wife is no more, though the children have departed, the vicar's home is not utterly desolate. See, along the same walk on which William soothed Susan's fears and won her consent,—see, what fairy advances? Is it Susan returned to youth? How like! Yet look again, and how unlike! The same, the pure, candid regard; the same, the clear, limpid blue of the eye; the same, that fair hue of the hair,—light, but not auburn; more subdued, more harmonious than that equivocal colour which too nearly approaches to red. But how much more blooming and joyous than Susan's is that exquisite face in which all Hebe smiles forth; how much airier the tread, light with health; how much rounder, if slighter still, the wave of that undulating form! She smiles, her lips move, she is conversing with herself; she cannot be all silent, even when alone, for the sunny gladness of her nature must have vent like a bird's. But do not fancy that that gladness speaks the levity which comes from the absence of thought; it is rather from the depth of thought that it springs, as from the depth of a sea comes its music. See, while she pauses and listens, with her finger half-raised to her lip, as amidst that careless jubilee of birds she hears a note more grave and sustained,—the nightingale singing by day (as sometimes, though rarely, he is heard,—perhaps because he misses his mate; perhaps because he sees from his bower the creeping form of some foe to his race),—see, as she listens now to that plaintive, low-chanted warble, how quickly the smile is sobered, how the shade, soft and pensive, steals over the brow. It is but the mystic sympathy with Nature that bestows the smile or the shade. In that heart lightly moved beats the fine sense of the poet. It is the exquisite sensibility of the nerves that sends its blithe play to those spirits, and from the clearness of the atmosphere comes, warm and ethereal, the ray of that light.

And does the roof of the pastor give shelter to Helen Mainwaring's youth? Has Death taken from her the natural protectors? Those forms which we saw so full of youth and youth's heart in that very spot, has the grave closed on them yet? Yet! How few attain to the age of the Psalmist! Twenty-seven years have passed since that date: how often, in those years, have the dark doors opened for the young as for the old! William Mainwaring died first, careworn and shamebowed; the blot on his name had cankered into his heart. Susan's life, always precarious, had struggled on, while he lived, by the strong power of affection and will; she would not die, for who then could console him? But at his death the power gave way. She lingered, but lingered dyingly, for three years; and then, for the first time since William's death, she smiled: that smile remained on the lips of the corpse. They had had many trials, that young

couple whom we left so prosperous and happy. Not till many years after their marriage had one sweet consoler been born to them. In the season of poverty and shame and grief it came; and there was no pride on Mainwaring's brow when they placed his first-born in his arms. By her will, the widow consigned Helen to the joint guardianship of Mr. Fielden and her sister; but the latter was abroad, her address unknown, so the vicar for two years had had sole charge of the orphan. She was not unprovided for. The sum that Susan brought to her husband had been long since gone, it is true,—lost in the calamity which had wrecked William Mainwaring's name and blighted his prospects; but Helen's grandfather, the landagent, had died some time subsequent to that event, and, indeed, just before William's death. He had never forgiven his son the stain on his name,—never assisted, never even seen him since that fatal day; but he left to Helen a sum of about 8,000 pounds; for she, at least, was innocent. In Mr. Fielden's eyes, Helen was therefore an heiress. And who amongst his small range of acquaintance was good enough for her?—not only so richly portioned, but so lovely,—accomplished, too; for her parents had of late years lived chiefly in France, and languages there are easily learned, and masters cheap. Mr. Fielden knew but one, whom Providence had also consigned to his charge,—the supposed son of his old pupil Ardworth; but though a tender affection existed between the two young persons, it seemed too like that of brother and sister to afford much ground for Mr. Fielden's anxiety or hope.

From his window the vicar observed the still attitude of the young orphan for a few moments; then he pushed aside his books, rose, and approached her. At the sound of his tread she woke from her reverie and bounded lightly towards him.

"Ah, you would not see me before!" she said, in a voice in which there was the slightest possible foreign accent, which betrayed the country in which her childhood had been passed; "I peeped in twice at the window. I wanted you so much to walk to the village. But you will come now, will you not?" added the girl, coaxingly, as she looked up at him under the shade of her straw hat.

"And what do you want in the village, my pretty Helen?"

"Why, you know it is fair day, and you promised Bessie that you would buy her a fairing,—to say nothing of me."

"Very true, and I ought to look in; it will help to keep the poor people from drinking. A clergyman should mix with his parishioners in their holidays. We must not associate our office only with grief and sickness and preaching. We will go. And what fairing are you to have?"

"Oh, something very brilliant, I promise you! I have formed grand notions of a fair. I am sure it must be like the bazaars we read of last night in that charming 'Tour in the East.'"

The vicar smiled, half benignly, half anxiously. "My dear child, it is so like you to suppose a village fair must be an Eastern bazaar. If you always thus judge of things by your fancy, how this sober world will deceive you, poor Helen!"

"It is not my fault; ne me grondez pas, mechant," answered Helen, hanging her head. "But come, sir, allow, at least, that if I let my romance, as you call it, run away with me now and then, I can still content myself with the reality. What, you shake your head still? Don't you remember the sparrow?"

"Ha! ha! yes,—the sparrow that the pedlar sold you for a goldfinch; and you were so proud of your purchase, and wondered so much why you could not coax the goldfinch to sing, till at last the paint wore away, and it was only a poor little sparrow!"

"Go on! Confess: did I fret then? Was I not as pleased with my dear sparrow as I should have been with the prettiest goldfinch that ever sang? Does not the sparrow follow me about and nestle on my shoulder, dear little thing? And I was right after all; for if I had not fancied it a goldfinch, I should not have bought it, perhaps. But now I would not change it for a goldfinch,—no, not even for that nightingale I heard just now. So let me still fancy the poor fair a bazaar; it is a double pleasure, first to fancy the bazaar, and then to be surprised at the fair."

"You argue well," said the vicar, as they now entered the village; "I really think, in spite of all your turn for poetry and Goldsmith and Cowper, that you would take as kindly to mathematics as your cousin John Ardworth, poor lad!"

"Not if mathematics have made him so grave, and so churlish, I was going to say; but that word does him wrong, dear cousin, so kind and so rough!"

"It is not mathematics that are to blame if he is grave and absorbed," said the vicar, with a sigh; "it is the two cares that gnaw most,— poverty and ambition."

"Nay, do not sigh; it must be such a pleasure to feel, as he does, that one must triumph at last!"

"Umph! John must have nearly reached London by this time," said Mr. Fielden, "for he is a stout walker, and this is the third day since he left us. Well, now that he is about fairly to be called to the Bar, I hope that his fever will cool, and he will settle calmly to work. I have felt great pain for him during this last visit."

"Pain! But why?"

"My dear, do you remember what I read to you both from Sir William Temple the night before John left us?"

Helen put her hand to her brow, and with a readiness which showed a memory equally quick and retentive, replied, "Yes; was it not to this effect? I am not sure of the exact words: 'To have something we have not, and be something we are not, is the root of all evil.'"

"Well remembered, my darling!"

"Ah, but," said Helen, archly, "I remember too what my cousin replied: 'If Sir William Temple had practised his theory, he would not have been ambassador at the Hague, or—'"

"Pshaw! the boy's always ready enough with his answers," interrupted Mr. Fielden, rather petulantly. "There's the fair, my dear,—more in your way, I see, than Sir William Temple's philosophy."

And Helen was right; the fair was no Eastern bazaar, but how delighted that young, impressionable mind was, notwithstanding,—delighted with the swings and the roundabouts, the shows, the booths, even down to the gilt gingerbread kings and queens! All minds genuinely poetical are peculiarly susceptible to movement,—that is, to the excitement of numbers. If the movement is sincerely joyous, as in the mirth of a village holiday, such a nature shares insensibly in the joy; but if the movement is a false and spurious gayety, as in a state ball, where the impassive face and languid step are out of harmony with the evident object of the scene, then the nature we speak of feels chilled and dejected. Hence it really is that the more delicate and ideal order of minds soon grow inexpressibly weary of the hack routine of what are called fashionable pleasures. Hence the same person most alive to a dance on the green, would be without enjoyment at Almack's. It was not because one scene is a village green, and the other a room in King Street, nor is it because the actors in the one are of the humble, in the others of the noble class; but simply because the enjoyment in the first is visible and hearty, because in the other it is a listless and melancholy pretence. Helen fancied it was the swings and the booths that gave her that innocent exhilaration,—it was not so; it was the unconscious sympathy with the crowd around her. When the poetical nature quits its own dreams for the actual world, it enters and transfuses itself into the hearts and humours of others. The two wings of that spirit which we call Genius are revery and sympathy. But poor little Helen had no idea that she had genius. Whether chasing the butterfly or talking fond fancies to her birds, or whether with earnest, musing eyes watching the stars come forth, and the dark pine-trees gleam into silver; whether with airy daydreams and credulous wonder poring over the magic tales of Mirglip or Aladdin, or whether spellbound to awe by the solemn woes of Lear, or following the blind great bard into "the heaven of heavens, an earthly guest, to draw empyreal air,"—she obeyed but the honest and varying impulse in each change of her pliant mood, and would have ascribed with genuine humility to the vagaries of childhood that prompt gathering of pleasure, that quick-shifting sport of the fancy by which Nature binds to itself, in chains undulating as melody, the lively senses of genius.

While Helen, leaning on the vicar's arm, thus surrendered herself to the innocent excitement of the moment, the vicar himself smiled and nodded to his parishioners, or paused to exchange a friendly word or two with the youngest or the eldest loiterers (those two extremes of mortality which the Church so tenderly unites) whom the scene drew to its tempting vortex, when a rough-haired lad, with a leather bag strapped across his waist, turned from one of the gingerbread booths, and touching his hat, said, "Please you, sir, I was a coming to your house with a letter."

The vicar's correspondence was confined and rare, despite his distant children, for letters but a few years ago were costly luxuries to persons of narrow income, and therefore the juvenile letter-carrier who plied between the post-town and the village failed to excite in his breast that indignation for being an hour or more behind his time which would have animated one to whom the post brings the usual event of the day. He took the letter from the boy's hand, and paid for it with a thrifty sigh as he glanced at a handwriting unfamiliar to him,—perhaps from some clergyman poorer than himself. However, that was not the place to read letters, so he put the epistle into his pocket, until Helen, who watched his countenance to see when he grew tired of the scene, kindly proposed to return home. As they gained a stile half-way, Mr. Fielden remembered his letter, took it forth, and put on his spectacles. Helen stooped over the bank to gather violets; the vicar seated himself on the stile. As he again looked at the

address, the handwriting, before unfamiliar, seemed to grow indistinctly on his recollection. That bold, firm hand—thin and fine as woman's, but large and regular as man's—was too peculiar to be forgotten. He uttered a brief exclamation of surprise and recognition, and hastily broke the seal. The contents ran thus:—

DEAR SIR,—So many years have passed since any communication has taken place between us that the name of Lucretia Dalibard will seem more strange to you than that of Lucretia Clavering. I have recently returned to England after long residence abroad. I perceive by my deceased sister's will that she has confided her only daughter to my guardianship, conjointly with yourself. I am anxious to participate in that tender charge. I am alone in the world,—an habitual sufferer; afflicted with a partial paralysis that deprives me of the use of my limbs. In such circumstances, it is the more natural that I should turn to the only relative left me. My journey to England has so exhausted my strength, and all movement is so painful, that I must request you to excuse me for not coming in person for my niece. Your benevolence, however, will, I am sure, prompt you to afford me the comfort of her society, and as soon as you can, contrive some suitable arrangement for her journey. Begging you to express to Helen, in my name, the assurance of such a welcome as is due from me to my sister's child, and waiting with great anxiety your reply, I am, dear Sir, Your very faithful servant, LUCRETIA DALIBARD.

P. S. I can scarcely venture to ask you to bring Helen yourself to town, but I should be glad if other inducements to take the journey afforded me the pleasure of seeing you once again. I am anxious, in addition to such details of my late sister as you may be enabled to give me, to learn something of the history of her connection with Mr. Ardworth, in whom I felt much interested years ago, and who, I am recently informed, left an infant, his supposed son, under your care. So long absent from England, how much have I to learn, and how little the mere gravestones tell us of the dead!

While the vicar is absorbed in this letter, equally unwelcome and unexpected; while, unconscious as the daughter of Ceres, gathering flowers when the Hell King drew near, of the change that awaited her and the grim presence that approached on her fate, Helen bends still over the bank odorous with shrinking violets,—we turn where the new generation equally invites our gaze, and make our first acquaintance with two persons connected with the progress of our tale.

The britzska stopped. The servant, who had been gradually accumulating present dust and future rheumatisms on the "bad eminence" of a rumble-tumble, exposed to the nipping airs of an English sky, leaped to the ground and opened the carriage-door.

"This is the best place for the view, sir,—a little to the right."

Percival St. John threw aside his book (a volume of Voyages), whistled to a spaniel dozing by his side, and descended lightly. Light was the step of the young man, and merry was the bark of the dog, as it chased from the road the startled sparrow, rising high into the clear air,—favourites of Nature both, man and dog. You had but to glance at Percival St. John to know at once that he was of the race that toils not; the assured step spoke confidence in the world's fair smile. No care for the morrow dimmed the bold eye and the radiant bloom.

About the middle height,—his slight figure, yet undeveloped, seemed not to have attained to its full growth,—the darkening down only just shaded a cheek somewhat sunburned, though naturally fair, round which locks black as jet played sportively in the fresh air; about him altogether there was the inexpressible charm of happy youth. He scarcely looked sixteen, though above four years older; but for his firm though careless step, and the open fearlessness of his frank eye, you might have almost taken him for a girl in men's clothes,—not from effeminacy of feature, but from the sparkling bloom of his youth, and from his unmistakable newness to the cares and sins of man. A more delightful vision of ingenuous boyhood opening into life under happy auspices never inspired with pleased yet melancholy interest the eye of half-jealous, half-pitying age.

"And that," mused Percival St. John,—"that is London! Oh for the Diable Boiteux to unroof me those distant houses, and show me the pleasures that lurk within! Ah, what long letters I shall have to write home! How the dear old captain will laugh over them, and how my dear good mother will put down her work and sigh! Home!—um, I miss it already. How strange and grim, after all, the huge city seems!"

His glove fell to the ground, and his spaniel mumbled it into shreds. The young man laughed, and throwing himself on the grass, played gayly with the dog.

"Fie, Beau, sir, fie! gloves are indigestible. Restrain your appetite, and we'll lunch together at the Clarendon."

At this moment there arrived at the same patch of greensward a pedestrian some years older than Percival St. John,—a tall, muscular, raw-boned, dust-covered, travel-stained pedestrian; one of your

pedestrians in good earnest,—no amateur in neat gambroon manufactured by Inkson, who leaves his carriage behind him and walks on with his fishing-rod by choice, but a sturdy wanderer, with thick shoes and strapless trousers, a threadbare coat and a knapsack at his back. Yet, withal, the young man had the air of a gentleman,—not gentleman as the word is understood in St. James's, the gentleman of the noble and idle class, but the gentleman as the title is accorded, by courtesy, to all to whom both education and the habit of mixing with educated persons gives a claim to the distinction and imparts an air of refinement. The new-comer was strongly built, at once lean and large,—far more strongly built than Percival St. John, but without his look of cheerful and comely health. His complexion had not the florid hues that should have accompanied that strength of body; it was pale, though not sickly; the expression grave, the lines deep, the face strongly marked. By his side trotted painfully a wiry, yellowish, footsore Scotch terrier. Beau sprang from his master's caress, cocked his handsome head on one side, and suspended in silent halt his right fore-paw. Percival cast over his left shoulder a careless glance at the intruder. The last heeded neither Beau nor Percival. He slipped his knapsack to the ground, and the Scotch terrier sank upon it, and curled himself up into a ball. The wayfarer folded his arms tightly upon his breast, heaved a short, unquiet sigh, and cast over the giant city, from under deep-pent, lowering brows, a look so earnest, so searching, so full of inexpressible, dogged, determined power, that Percival, roused out of his gay indifference, rose and regarded him with curious interest.

In the mean while Beau had very leisurely approached the bilious-looking terrier; and after walking three times round him, with a stare and a small sniff of superb impertinence, halted with great composure, and lifting his hind leg— O Beau, Beau, Beau! your historian blushes for your breeding, and, like Sterne's recording angel, drops a tear upon the stain which washes it from the register—but not, alas, from the back of the bilious terrier! The space around was wide, Beau; you had all the world to choose: why select so specially for insult the single spot on which reposed the wornout and unoffending? O dainty Beau! O dainty world! Own the truth, both of ye. There is something irresistibly provocative of insult in the back of a shabby-looking dog! The poor terrier, used to affronts, raised its heavy eyelids, and shot the gleam of just indignation from its dark eyes. But it neither stirred nor growled, and Beau, extremely pleased with his achievement, wagged his tail in triumph and returned to his master,—perhaps, in parliamentary phrase, to "report proceedings and ask leave to sit again."

"I wonder," soliloquized Percival St. John, "what that poor fellow is thinking of? Perhaps he is poor; indeed, no doubt of it, now I look again. And I so rich! I should like to— Hem! let's see what he's made of."

Herewith Percival approached, and with all a boy's half-bashful, half-saucy frankness, said: "A fine prospect, sir." The pedestrian started, and threw a rapid glance over the brilliant figure that accosted him. Percival St. John was not to be abashed by stern looks; but that glance might have abashed many a more experienced man. The glance of a squire upon a corn-law missionary, of a Crockford dandy upon a Regent Street tiger, could not have been more disdainful.

"Tush!" said the pedestrian, rudely, and turned upon his heel.

Percival coloured, and—shall we own it?—was boy enough to double his fist. Little would he have been deterred by the brawn of those great arms and the girth of that Herculean chest, if he had been quite sure that it was a proper thing to resent pugilistically so discourteous a monosyllable. The "tush!" stuck greatly in his throat. But the man, now removed to the farther verge of the hill, looked so tranquil and so lost in thought that the short-lived anger died.

"And after all, if I were as poor as he looks, I dare say I should be just as proud," muttered Percival. "However, it's his own fault if he goes to London on foot, when I might at least have given him a lift. Come, Beau, sir."

With his face still a little flushed, and his hat unconsciously cocked fiercely on one side, Percival sauntered back to his britzska.

As in a whirl of dust the light carriage was borne by the four posters down the hill, the pedestrian turned for an instant from the view before to the cloud behind, and muttered: "Ay, a fine prospect for the rich,—a noble field for the poor!" The tone in which those words were said told volumes; there spoke the pride, the hope, the energy, the ambition which make youth laborious, manhood prosperous, age renowned.

The stranger then threw himself on the sward, and continued his silent and intent contemplation till the clouds grew red in the west. When, then, he rose, his eye was bright, his mien erect, and a smile, playing round his firm, full lips, stole the moody sternness from his hard face. Throwing his knapsack once more on his back, John Ardworth went resolutely on to the great vortex.

CHAPTER I.

THE CORONATION.

The 8th of September, 1831, was a holiday in London. William the Fourth received the crown of his ancestors in that mighty church in which the most impressive monitors to human pomp are the monuments of the dead. The dust of conquerors and statesmen, of the wise heads and the bold hands that had guarded the thrones of departed kings, slept around; and the great men of the Modern time were assembled in homage to the monarch to whom the prowess and the liberty of generations had bequeathed an empire in which the sun never sets. In the Abbey—thinking little of the past, caring little for the future—the immense audience gazed eagerly on the pageant that occurs but once in that division of history,—the lifetime of a king. The assemblage was brilliant and imposing. The galleries sparkled with the gems of women who still upheld the celebrity for form and feature which, from the remotest times, has been awarded to the great English race. Below, in their robes and coronets, were men who neither in the senate nor the field have shamed their fathers. Conspicuous amongst all for grandeur of mien and stature towered the brothers of the king; while, commanding yet more the universal gaze, were seen, here the eagle features of the old hero of Waterloo, and there the majestic brow of the haughty statesman who was leading the people (while the last of the Bourbons, whom Waterloo had restored to the Tuileries, had left the orb and purple to the kindred house so fatal to his name) through a stormy and perilous transition to a bloodless revolution and a new charter.

Tier upon tier, in the division set apart for them, the members of the Lower House moved and murmured above the pageant; and the coronation of the new sovereign was connected in their minds with the great measure which, still undecided, made at that time a link between the People and the King, and arrayed against both, if not, indeed, the real Aristocracy, at least the Chamber recognized by the Constitution as its representative. Without the space was one dense mass. Houses, from balcony to balcony, window to window, were filled as some immense theatre. Up, through the long thoroughfare to Whitehall, the eye saw that audience,—A PEOPLE; and the gaze was bounded at the spot where Charles the First had passed from the banquet-house to the scaffold.

The ceremony was over, the procession had swept slowly by, the last huzza had died away; and after staring a while upon Orator Hunt, who had clambered up the iron palisade near Westminster Hall, to exhibit his goodly person in his court attire, the serried crowds, hurrying from the shower which then unseasonably descended, broke into large masses or lengthening columns.

In that part of London which may be said to form a boundary between its old and its new world, by which, on the one hand, you pass to Westminster, or through that gorge of the Strand which leads along endless rows of shops that have grown up on the sites of the ancient halls of the Salisburys and the Exeters, the Buckinghams and Southamptons; to the heart of the City built around the primeval palace of the "Tower;" while, on the other hand, you pass into the new city of aristocracy and letters, of art and fashion, embracing the whilom chase of Marylebone, and the once sedge-grown waters of Pimlico,—by this ignoble boundary (the crossing from the Opera House, at the bottom of the Haymarket, to the commencement of Charing Cross) stood a person whose discontented countenance was in singular contrast with the general gayety and animation of the day. This person, O gentle reader, this sour, querulous, discontented person, was a king, too, in his own walk! None might dispute it. He feared no rebel; he was harassed by no reform; he ruled without ministers. Tools he had; but when worn out, he replaced them without a pension or a sigh. He lived by taxes, but they were voluntary; and his Civil List was supplied without demand for the redress of grievances. This person, nevertheless, not deposed, was suspended from his empire for the day. He was pushed aside; he was forgotten. He was not distinct from the crowd. Like Titus, he had lost a day,—his vocation was gone. This person was the Sweeper of the Crossing!

He was a character. He was young, in the fairest prime of youth; but it was the face of an old man on young shoulders. His hair was long, thin, and prematurely streaked with gray; his face was pale and deeply furrowed; his eyes were hollow, and their stare gleamed, cold and stolid, under his bent and shaggy brows. The figure was at once fragile and ungainly, and the narrow shoulders curved in a perpetual stoop. It was a person, once noticed, that you would easily remember, and associate with some undefined, painful impression. The manner was humble, but not meek; the voice was whining, but without pathos. There was a meagre, passionless dulness about the aspect, though at times it quickened into a kind of avid acuteness. No one knew by what human parentage this personage came into the world. He had been reared by the charity of a stranger, crept through childhood and misery and rags mysteriously; and suddenly succeeded an old defunct negro in the profitable crossing whereat he is now standing. All education was unknown to him, so was all love. In those festive haunts at St. Giles's where he who would see "life in London" may often discover the boy who has held his horse in

the morning dancing merrily with his chosen damsel at night, our sweeper's character was austere as Charles the Twelfth's. And the poor creature had his good qualities. He was sensitively alive to kindness,—little enough had been shown him to make the luxury the more prized from its rarity! Though fond of money, he would part with it (we do not say cheerfully, but part with it still),—not to mere want, indeed (for he had been too pinched and starved himself, and had grown too obtuse to pinching and to starving for the sensitiveness that prompts to charity), but to any of his companions who had done him a good service, or who had even warmed his dull heart by a friendly smile. He was honest, too,— honest to the backbone. You might have trusted him with gold untold. Through the heavy clod which man's care had not moulded, nor books enlightened, nor the priest's solemn lore informed, still natural rays from the great parent source of Deity struggled, fitful and dim. He had no lawful name; none knew if sponsors had ever stood security for his sins at the sacred fount. But he had christened himself by the strange, unchristian like name of "Beck." There he was, then, seemingly without origin, parentage, or kindred tie,—a lonesome, squalid, bloodless thing, which the great monster, London, seemed to have spawned forth of its own self; one of its sickly, miserable, rickety offspring, whom it puts out at nurse to Penury, at school to Starvation, and, finally, and literally, gives them stones for bread, with the option of the gallows or the dunghill when the desperate offspring calls on the giant mother for return and home.

And this creature did love something,—loved, perhaps, some fellow-being; of that hereafter, when we dive into the secrets of his privacy. Meanwhile, openly and frankly, he loved his crossing; he was proud of his crossing; he was grateful to his crossing. God help thee, son of the street, why not? He had in it a double affection,—that of serving and being served. He kept the crossing, if the crossing kept him. He smiled at times to himself when he saw it lie fair and brilliant amidst the mire around; it bestowed on him a sense of property! What a man may feel for a fine estate in a ring fence, Beck felt for that isthmus of the kennel which was subject to his broom. The coronation had made one rebellious spirit when it swept the sweeper from his crossing.

He stood, then, half under the colonnade of the Opera House as the crowd now rapidly grew thinner and more scattered: and when the last carriage of a long string of vehicles had passed by, he muttered audibly,—

"It'll take a deal of pains to make she right agin!"

"So you be's 'ere to-day, Beck!" said a ragamuffin boy, who, pushing and scrambling through his betters, now halted, and wiped his forehead as he looked at the sweeper. "Vy, ve are all out pleasuring. Vy von't you come with ve? Lots of fun!"

The sweeper scowled at the urchin, and made no answer, but began sedulously to apply himself to the crossing.

"Vy, there isn't another sweep in the streets, Beck. His Majesty King Bill's currynation makes all on us so 'appy!"

"It has made she unkimmon dirty!" returned Beck, pointing to the dingy crossing, scarce distinguished from the rest of the road.

The ragamuffin laughed.

"But ve be's goin' to 'ave Reform now, Beck. The peopul's to have their rights and libties, hand the luds is to be put down, hand beefsteaks is to be a penny a pound, and—"

"What good will that do to she?"

"Vy, man, ve shall take turn about, and sum vun helse will sveep the crossings, and ve shall ride in sum vun helse's coach and four, p'r'aps, - -cos vy? ve shall hall be hequals!"

"Hequals! I tells you vot, if you keeps jawing there, atween me and she, I shall vop you, Joe,—cos vy? I be's the biggest!" was the answer of Beck the sweeper to Joe the ragamuffin.

The jovial Joe laughed aloud, snapped his fingers, threw up his ragged cap with a shout for King Bill, and set off scampering and whooping to join those festivities which Beck had so churlishly disdained.

Time crept on; evening began to close in, and Beck was still at his crossing, when a young gentleman on horseback, who, after seeing the procession, had stolen away for a quiet ride in the suburbs, reined in close by the crossing, and looking round, as for some one to hold his horse, could discover no loiterer worthy that honour except the solitary Beck. So young was the rider that he seemed still a boy. On his smooth countenance all that most prepossesses in early youth left its witching stamp. A smile, at once

gay and sweet, played on his lips. There was a charm, even in a certain impatient petulance, in his quick eye and the slight contraction of his delicate brows. Almaviva might well have been jealous of such a page. He was the beau-ideal of Cherubino. He held up his whip, with an arch sign, to the sweeper. "Follow, my man," he said, in a tone the very command of which sounded gentle, so blithe was the movement of the lips, and so silvery the easy accent; and without waiting, he cantered carelessly down Pall Mall.

The sweeper cast a rueful glance at his melancholy domain. But he had gained but little that day, and the offer was too tempting to be rejected. He heaved a sigh, shouldered his broom, and murmuring to himself that he would give her a last brush before he retired for the night, he put his long limbs into that swinging, shambling trot which characterizes the motion of those professional jackals who, having once caught sight of a groomless rider, fairly hunt him down, and appear when he least expects it, the instant he dismounts. The young rider lightly swung himself from his sleek, high-bred gray at the door of one of the clubs in St. James's Street, patted his horse's neck, chucked the rein to the sweeper, and sauntered into the house, whistling musically,—if not from want of thought, certainly from want of care.

As he entered the club, two or three men, young indeed, but much older, to appearance at least, than himself, who were dining together at the same table, nodded to him their friendly greeting.

"Ah, Perce," said one, "we have only just sat down; here is a seat for you."

The boy blushed shyly as he accepted the proposal, and the young men made room for him at the table, with a smiling alacrity which showed that his shyness was no hindrance to his popularity.

"Who," said an elderly dandy, dining apart with one of his contemporaries,— "who is that lad? One ought not to admit such mere boys into the club."

"He is the only surviving son of an old friend of ours," answered the other, dropping his eyeglass,—"young Percival St. John."

"St. John! What! Vernon St. John's son?"

"Yes."

"He has not his father's good air. These young fellows have a tone, a something,—a want of self-possession, eh?"

"Very true. The fact is, that Percival was meant for the navy, and even served as a mid for a year or so. He was a younger son, then,—third, I think. The two elder ones died, and Master Percival walked into the inheritance. I don't think he is quite of age yet."

"Of age! he does not look seventeen."

"Oh, he is more than that; I remember him in his jacket at Laughton. A fine property!"

"Ay, I don't wonder those fellows are so civil to him. This claret is corked! Everything is so bad at this d—d club,—no wonder, when a troop of boys are let in! Enough to spoil any club; don't know Larose from Lafitte! Waiter!"

Meanwhile, the talk round the table at which sat Percival St. John was animated, lively, and various,—the talk common with young idlers; of horses, and steeplechases, and opera-dancers, and reigning beauties, and good-humoured jests at each other. In all this babble there was a freshness about Percival St. John's conversation which showed that, as yet, for him life had the zest of novelty. He was more at home about horses and steeplechases than about opera-dancers and beauties and the small scandals of town. Talk on these latter topics did not seem to interest him, on the contrary, almost to pain. Shy and modest as a girl, he coloured or looked aside when his more hardened friends boasted of assignations and love-affairs. Spirited, gay, and manly enough in all really manly points, the virgin bloom of innocence was yet visible in his frank, charming manner; and often, out of respect for his delicacy, some hearty son of pleasure stopped short in his narrative, or lost the point of his anecdote. And yet so lovable was Percival in his good humour, his naivete, his joyous entrance into innocent joy, that his companions were scarcely conscious of the gene and restraint he imposed on them. Those merry, dark eyes and that flashing smile were conviviality of themselves. They brought with them a contagious cheerfulness which compensated for the want of corruption.

Night had set in. St. John's companions had departed to their several haunts, and Percival himself stood on the steps of the club, resolving that he would join the crowds that swept through the streets to gaze on the illuminations, when he perceived Beck (still at the rein of his dozing horse), whom he had quite forgotten till that moment. Laughing at his own want of memory, Percival put some silver into

Beck's hand,—more silver than Beck had ever before received for similar service,—and said,—

"Well, my man, I suppose I can trust you to take my horse to his stables,—No.—, the Mews, behind Curzon Street. Poor fellow, he wants his supper,—and you, too, I suppose!"

Beck smiled a pale, hungry smile, and pulled his forelock politely.

"I can take the 'oss werry safely, your 'onor."

"Take him, then, and good evening; but don't get on, for your life."

"Oh, no, sir; I never gets on,—'t aint in my ways."

And Beck slowly led the horse through the crowd, till he vanished from Percival's eyes.

Just then a man passing through the street paused as he saw the young gentleman on the steps of the club, and said gayly, "Ah! how do you do? Pretty faces in plenty out to-night. Which way are you going?"

"That is more than I can tell you, Mr. Varney. I was just thinking which turn to take,—the right or the left."

"Then let me be your guide;" and Varney offered his arm.

Percival accepted the courtesy, and the two walked on towards Piccadilly. Many a kind glance from the milliners—and maid-servants whom the illuminations drew abroad, roved, somewhat impartially, towards St. John and his companion; but they dwelt longer on the last, for there at least they were sure of a return. Varney, if not in his first youth, was still in the prime of life, and Time had dealt with him so leniently that he retained all the personal advantages of youth itself. His complexion still was clear; and as only his upper lip, decorated with a slight silken and well-trimmed mustache, was unshaven, the contour of the face added to the juvenility of his appearance by the rounded symmetry it betrayed. His hair escaped from his hat in fair unchanged luxuriance. And the nervous figure, agile as a panther's, though broad-shouldered and deep-chested, denoted all the slightness and elasticity of twenty-five, combined with the muscular power of forty. His dress was rather fantastic,—too showy for the good taste which is habitual to the English gentleman,—and there was a peculiarity in his gait, almost approaching to a strut, which bespoke a desire of effect, a consciousness of personal advantages, equally opposed to the mien and manner of Percival's usual companions; yet withal, even the most fastidious would have hesitated to apply to Gabriel Varney the epithet of "vulgar." Many turned to look again, but it was not to remark the dress or the slight swagger; an expression of reckless, sinister power in the countenance, something of vigour and determination even in that very walk, foppish as it would have been in most, made you sink all observation of the mere externals, in a sentiment of curiosity towards the man himself. He seemed a somebody,— not a somebody of conventional rank, but a somebody of personal individuality; an artist, perhaps a poet, or a soldier in some foreign service, but certainly a man whose name you would expect to have heard of. Amongst the common mob of passengers he stood out in marked and distinct relief.

"I feel at home in a crowd," said Varney. "Do you understand me?"

"I think so," answered Percival. "If ever I could become distinguished, I, too, should feel at home in a crowd."

"You have ambition, then; you mean to become distinguished?" asked Varney, with a sharp, searching look.

There was a deeper and steadier flash than usual from Percival's dark eyes, and a manlier glow over his cheek, at Varney's question. But he was slow in answering; and when he did so, his manner had all its wonted mixture of graceful bashfulness and gay candour.

"Our rise does not always depend on ourselves. We are not all born great, nor do we all have 'greatness thrust on us.'"

"One can be what one likes, with your fortune," said Varney; and there was a growl of envy in his voice.

"What, be a painter like you! Ha, ha!"

"Faith," said Varney, "at least, if you could paint at all, you would have what I have not,—praise and fame."

Percival pressed kindly on Varney's arm. "Courage! you will get justice some day."

Varney shook his head. "Bah! there is no such thing as justice; all are underrated or overrated. Can you name one man who you think is estimated by the public at his precise value? As for present popularity, it depends on two qualities, each singly, or both united,—cowardice and charlatanism; that is, servile compliance with the taste and opinion of the moment, or a quack's spasmodic efforts at originality. But why bore you on such matters? There are things more attractive round us. A good ankle that, eh? Why, pardon me, it is strange, but you don't seem to care much for women?"

"Oh, yes, I do," said Percival, with a sly demureness. "I am very fond of—my mother!"

"Very proper and filial," said Varney, laughing; "and does your love for the sex stop there?"

"Well, and in truth I fancy so,—pretty nearly. You know my grandmother is not alive! But that is something really worth looking at!" And Percival pointed, almost with a child's delight, at an illumination more brilliant than the rest.

"I suppose, when you come of age, you will have all the cedars at Laughton hung with coloured lamps. Ah, you must ask me there some day; I should so like to see the old place again."

"You never saw it, I think you say, in my poor father's time?"

"Never."

"Yet you knew him."

"But slightly."

"And you never saw my mother?"

"No; but she seems to have such influence over you that I am sure she must be a very superior person,—rather proud, I suppose."

"Proud, no,—that is, not exactly proud, for she is very meek and very affable. But yet—"

"'But yet—' You hesitate: she would not like you to be seen, perhaps, walking in Piccadilly with Gabriel Varney, the natural son of old Sir Miles's librarian,—Gabriel Varney the painter; Gabriel Varney the adventurer!"

"As long as Gabriel Varney is a man without stain on his character and honour, my mother would only be pleased that I should know an able and accomplished person, whatever his origin or parentage. But my mother would be sad if she knew me intimate with a Bourbon or a Raphael, the first in rank or the first in genius, if either prince or artist had lost, or even sullied, his scutcheon of gentleman. In a word, she is most sensitive as to honour and conscience; all else she disregards."

"Hem!" Varney stooped down, as if examining the polish of his boot, while he continued carelessly: "Impossible to walk the streets and keep one's boots out of the mire. Well—and you agree with your mother?"

"It would be strange if I did not. When I was scarcely four years old, my poor father used to lead me through the long picture-gallery at Laughton and say: 'Walk through life as if those brave gentlemen looked down on you.' And," added St. John, with his ingenuous smile, "my mother would put in her word,—'And those unstained women too, my Percival.'"

There was something noble and touching in the boy's low accents as he said this; it gave the key to his unusual modesty and his frank, healthful innocence of character.

The devil in Varney's lip sneered mockingly.

"My young friend, you have never loved yet. Do you think you ever shall?"

"I have dreamed that I could love one day. But I can wait."

Varney was about to reply, when he was accosted abruptly by three men of that exaggerated style of dress and manner which is implied by the vulgar appellation of "Tigrish." Each of the three men had a cigar in his mouth, each seemed flushed with wine. One wore long brass spurs and immense mustaches; another was distinguished by an enormous surface of black satin cravat, across which meandered a Pactolus of gold chain; a third had his coat laced and braided a la Polonaise, and pinched and padded a la Russe, with trousers shaped to the calf of a sinewy leg, and a glass screwed into his right eye.

"Ah, Gabriel! ah, Varney! ah, prince of good fellows, well met! You sup with us to-night at little Celeste's; we were just going in search of you."

"Who's your friend,—one of us?" whispered a second. And the third screwed his arm tight and lovingly into Varney's.

Gabriel, despite his habitual assurance, looked abashed for a moment, and would have extricated himself from cordialities not at that moment welcome; but he saw that his friends were too far gone in their cups to be easily shaken off, and he felt relieved when Percival, after a dissatisfied glance at the three, said quietly: "I must detain you no longer; I shall soon look in at your studio;" and without waiting for an answer, slid off, and was lost among the crowd.

Varney walked on with his new-found friends, unheeding for some moments their loose remarks and familiar banter. At length he shook off his abstraction, and surrendering himself to the coarse humours of his companions, soon eclipsed them all by the gusto of his slang and the mocking profligacy of his sentiments; for here he no longer played a part, or suppressed his grosser instincts. That uncurbed dominion of the senses, to which his very boyhood had abandoned itself, found a willing slave in the man. Even the talents themselves that he displayed came from the cultivation of the sensual. His eye, studying externals, made him a painter,—his ear, quick and practised, a musician. His wild, prodigal fancy rioted on every excitement, and brought him in a vast harvest of experience in knowledge of the frailties and the vices on which it indulged its vagrant experiments. Men who over-cultivate the art that connects itself with the senses, with little counterpoise from the reason and pure intellect, are apt to be dissipated and irregular in their lives. This is frequently noticeable in the biographies of musicians, singers, and painters; less so in poets, because he who deals with words, not signs and tones, must perpetually compare his senses with the pure images of which the senses only see the appearances,—in a word, he must employ his intellect, and his self-education must be large and comprehensive. But with most real genius, however fed merely by the senses,—most really great painters, singers, and musicians, however easily led astray into temptation,—the richness of the soil throws up abundant good qualities to countervail or redeem the evil; they are usually compassionate, generous, sympathizing. That Varney had not such beauties of soul and temperament it is unnecessary to add,—principally, it is true, because of his nurture, education, parental example, the utter corruption in which his childhood and youth had passed; partly because he had no real genius,—it was a false apparition of the divine spirit, reflected from the exquisite perfection of his frame (which rendered all his senses so vigorous and acute) and his riotous fancy and his fitful energy, which was capable at times of great application, but not of definite purpose or earnest study. All about him was flashy and hollow. He had not the natural subtlety and depth of mind that had characterized his terrible father. The graft of the opera-dancer was visible on the stock of the scholar; wholly without the habits of method and order, without the patience, without the mathematical calculating brain of Dalibard, he played wantonly with the horrible and loathsome wickedness of which Olivier had made dark and solemn study. Extravagant and lavish, he spent money as fast as he gained it; he threw away all chances of eminence and career. In the midst of the direst plots of his villany or the most energetic pursuit of his art, the poorest excitement, the veriest bauble would draw him aside. His heart was with Falri in the sty, his fancy with Aladdin in the palace. To make a show was his darling object; he loved to create effect by his person, his talk, his dress, as well as by his talents. Living from hand to mouth, crimes through which it is not our intention to follow him had at times made him rich to-day, for vices to make him poor again to-morrow. What he called "luck," or "his star," had favoured him,—he was not hanged!—he lived; and as the greater part of his unscrupulous career had been conducted in foreign lands and under other names, in his own name and in his own country, though something scarcely to be defined, but equivocal and provocative of suspicion, made him displeasing to the prudent, and vaguely alarmed the experience of the sober, still, no positive accusation was attached to the general integrity of his character, and the mere dissipation of his habits was naturally little known out of his familiar circle. Hence he had the most presumptuous confidence in himself,—a confidence native to his courage, and confirmed by his experience. His conscience was so utterly obtuse that he might almost be said to present the phenomenon of a man without conscience at all. Unlike Conrad, he did not "know himself a villain;" all that he knew of himself was that he was a remarkably clever fellow, without prejudice or superstition. That, with all his gifts, he had not succeeded better in life, he ascribed carelessly to the surpassing wisdom of his philosophy. He could have done better if he had enjoyed himself less; but was not enjoyment the be-all and end-all of this little life? More often, indeed, in the moods of his bitter envy, he would lay the fault upon the world. How great he could have been, if he had been rich and high-born! Oh, he was made to spend, not to save,—to command, not to fawn! He was not formed to plod through the dull mediocrities of fortune; he must toss up for the All or the Nothing! It was no control over himself that made Varney now turn his thoughts from certain grave designs on Percival St. John to the brutal debauchery of his three companions,—rather, he then yielded most to his natural self. And when the morning star rose over the night he passed with low profligates and venal nymphs; when over the fragments on the board and emptied bottles and drunken riot dawn gleamed and saw him in all the

pride of his magnificent organization and the cynicism of his measured vice, fair, fresh, and blooming amidst those maudlin eyes and flushed cheeks and reeling figures, laughing hideously over the spectacle he had provoked, and kicking aside, with a devil's scorn, the prostrate form of the favoured partner whose head had rested on his bosom, as alone with a steady step, he passed the threshold and walked into the fresh, healthful air,—Gabriel Varney enjoyed the fell triumph of his hell-born vanity, and revelled in his sentiment of superiority and power.

Meanwhile, on quitting Varney young Percival strolled on as the whim directed him. Turning down the Haymarket, he gained the colonnade of the Opera House. The crowd there was so dense that his footsteps were arrested, and he leaned against one of the columns in admiration of the various galaxies in view. In front blazed the rival stars of the United Service Club and the Athenaeum; to the left, the quaint and peculiar device which lighted up Northumberland House; to the right, the anchors, cannons, and bombs which typified ingeniously the martial attributes of the Ordnance Office.

At that moment there were three persons connected with this narrative within a few feet of each other, distinguished from the multitude by the feelings with which each regarded the scene, and felt the jostle of the crowd. Percival St. John, in whom the harmless sense of pleasure was yet vivid and unsatiated, caught from the assemblage only that physical hilarity which heightened his own spirits. If in a character as yet so undeveloped, to which the large passions and stern ends of life were as yet unknown, stirred some deeper and more musing thoughts and speculations, giving gravity to the habitual smile on his rosy lip, and steadying the play of his sparkling eyes, he would have been at a loss himself to explain the dim sentiment and the vague desire.

Screened by another column from the pressure of the mob, with his arms folded on his breast, a man some few years older in point of time,—many years older in point of character,—gazed (with thoughts how turbulent,— with ambition how profound!) upon the dense and dark masses that covered space and street far as the eye could reach. He, indeed, could not have said, with Varney, that he was "at home in a crowd." For a crowd did not fill him with the sense of his own individual being and importance, but grappled him to its mighty breast with the thousand tissues of a common destiny. Who shall explain and disentangle those high and restless and interwoven emotions with which intellectual ambition, honourable and ardent, gazes upon that solemn thing with which, in which, for which it lives and labours,—the Human Multitude? To that abstracted, solitary man, the illumination, the festivity, the curiosity, the holiday, were nothing, or but as fleeting phantoms and vain seemings. In his heart's eye he saw before him but the PEOPLE, the shadow of an everlasting audience,—audience at once and judge.

And literally touching him as he stood, the ragged sweeper, who had returned in vain to devote a last care to his beloved charge, stood arrested with the rest, gazing joylessly on the blazing lamps, dead as the stones he heeded, to the young vivacity of the one man, the solemn visions of the other. So, O London, amidst the universal holiday to monarch and to mob, in those three souls lived the three elements which, duly mingled and administered, make thy vice and thy virtue, thy glory and thy shame, thy labour and thy luxury; pervading the palace and the street, the hospital and the prison,—enjoyment, which is pleasure; energy, which is action; torpor, which is want!

CHAPTER II.

LOVE AT FIRST SIGHT.

Suddenly across the gaze of Percival St. John there flashed a face that woke him from his abstraction, as a light awakes the sleeper. It was as a recognition of something seen dimly before,—a truth coming out from a dream. It was not the mere beauty of that face (and beautiful it was) that arrested his eye and made his heart beat more quickly, it was rather that nameless and inexplicable sympathy which constitutes love at first sight,—a sort of impulse and instinct common to the dullest as the quickest, the hardest reason as the liveliest fancy. Plain Cobbett, seeing before the cottage-door, at her homeliest of house-work, the girl of whom he said, "That girl should be my wife," and Dante, first thrilled by the vision of Beatrice,—are alike true types of a common experience. Whatever of love sinks the deepest is felt at first sight; it streams on us abrupt from the cloud, a lightning flash,—a destiny revealed to us face to face.

Now, there was nothing poetical in the place or the circumstance, still less in the companionship in which this fair creature startled the virgin heart of that careless boy; she was leaning on the arm of a

stout, rosy- faced matron in a puce-coloured gown, who was flanked on the other side by a very small, very spare man, with a very wee face, the lower part of which was enveloped in an immense belcher. Besides these two incumbrances, the stout lady contrived to carry in her hands an umbrella, a basket, and a pair of pattens.

In the midst of the strange, unfamiliar emotion which his eye conveyed to his heart, Percival's ear was displeasingly jarred by the loud, bluff, hearty voice of the girl's female companion—

"Gracious me! if that is not John Ardworth. Who'd have thought it? Why, John,—I say, John!" and lifting her umbrella horizontally, she poked aside two city clerks in front of her, wheeled round the little man on her left, upon whom the clerks simultaneously bestowed the appellation of "feller," and driving him, as being the sharpest and thinnest wedge at hand, through a dense knot of some half-a-dozen gapers, while, following his involuntary progress, she looked defiance on the malcontents, she succeeded in clearing her way to the spot where stood the young man she had discovered. The ambitious dreamer, for it was he, thus detected and disturbed, looked embarrassed for a moment as the stout lady, touching him with the umbrella, said,—

"Well, I declare if this is not too bad! You sent word that you should not be able to come out with us to see the 'luminations, and here you are as large as life!"

"I did not think, at the moment you wrote to me, that—"

"Oh, stuff!" interrupted the stout woman, with a significant, good- humoured shake of her head; "I know what's what. Tell the truth, and shame the gentleman who objects to showing his feet. You are a wild fellow, John Ardworth, you are! You like looking after the pretty faces, you do, you do—ha, ha, ha! very natural! So did you once,—did not you, Mr. Mivers, did not you, eh? Men must be men,—they always are men, and it's my belief that men they always will be!"

With this sage conjecture into the future, the lady turned to Mr. Mivers, who, thus appealed to, extricated with some difficulty his chin from the folds of his belcher, and putting up his small face, said, in a small voice, "Yes, I was a wild fellow once; but you have tamed me, you have, Mrs. M.!"

And therewith the chin sank again into the belcher, and the small voice died into a small sigh.

The stout lady glanced benignly at her spouse, and then resuming her address, to which Ardworth listened with a half-frown and a half-smile, observed encouragingly,—

"Yes, there's nothing like a lawful wife to break a man in, as you will find some day. Howsomever, your time's not come for the altar, so suppose you give Helen your arm, and come with us."

"Do," said Helen, in a sweet, coaxing voice.

Ardworth bent down his rough, earnest face to Helen's, and an evident pleasure relaxed its thoughtful lines. "I cannot resist you," he began, and then he paused and frowned. "Pish!" he added, "I was talking folly; but what head would not you turn? Resist you I must, for I am on my way now to my drudgery. Ask me anything some years hence, when I have time to be happy, and then see if I am the bear you now call me."

"Well," said Mrs. Mivers, emphatically, "are you coming, or are you not? Don't stand there shilly-shally."

"Mrs. Mivers," returned Ardworth, with a kind of sly humour, "I am sure you would be very angry with your husband's excellent shopmen if that was the way they spoke to your customers. If some unhappy dropper-in,—some lady who came to buy a yard or so of Irish,—was suddenly dazzled, as I am, by a luxury wholly unforeseen and eagerly coveted,—a splendid lace veil, or a ravishing cashmere, or whatever else you ladies desiderate,— and while she was balancing between prudence and temptation, your foreman exclaimed: 'Don't stand shilly-shally'—come, I put it to you."

"Stuff!" said Mrs. Mivers.

"Alas! unlike your imaginary customer (I hope so, at least, for the sake of your till), prudence gets the better of me; unless," added Ardworth, irresolutely, and glancing at Helen,— "unless, indeed, you are not sufficiently protected, and—"

"Purtected!" exclaimed Mrs. Mivers, in an indignant tone of astonishment, and agitating the formidable umbrella; "as if I was not enough, with the help of this here domestic commodity, to purtect a dozen such. Purlected, indeed!"

"John is right, Mrs. M.,—business is business," said Mr. Mivers. "Let us move on; we stop the way,

and those idle lads are listening to us, and sniggering."

"Sniggering!" exclaimed the gentle helpmate. "I should like to see those who presume for to snigger;" and as she spoke, she threw a look of defiance around her. Then, having thus satisfied her resentment, she prepared to obey, as no doubt she always did, her lord and master. Suddenly, with a practised movement, she wheeled round Mr. Mivers, and taking care to protrude before him the sharp point of the umbrella, cut her way through the crowd like the scythed car of the Ancient Britons, and was soon lost amidst the throng, although her way might be guessed by a slight ripple of peculiar agitation along the general stream, accompanied by a prolonged murmur of reproach or expostulation which gradually died in the distance.

Ardworth gazed after the fair form of Helen with a look of regret; and when it vanished, with a slight start and a suppressed sigh he turned away, and with the long, steady stride of a strong man, cleared his path through the Strand towards the printing-office of a journal on which he was responsibly engaged.

But Percival, who had caught much of the conversation that took place so near him,—Percival, happy child of idleness and whim,—had no motive of labour and occupation to stay the free impulse of his heart, and his heart drew him on, with magnetic attraction, in the track of the first being that had ever touched the sweet instincts of youth.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Mivers was destined to learn—though perhaps the lesson little availed her—that to get smoothly through this world it is necessary to be supple as well as strong; and though, up to a certain point, man or woman may force the way by poking umbrellas into people's ribs and treading mercilessly upon people's toes, yet the endurance of ribs and toes has its appointed limits.

Helen, half terrified, also half amused by her companion's robust resolution of purpose, had in Mrs. Mivers's general courage and success that confidence which the weak repose in the strong; and though whenever she turned her eyes from the illuminations, she besought Mrs. Mivers to be more gentle, yet, seeing that they had gone safely from St. Paul's to St. James's, she had no distinct apprehension of any practically ill results from the energies she was unable to mitigate. But now, having just gained the end of St. James's Street, Mrs. Mivers at last found her match. The crowd here halted, thick and serried, to gaze in peace upon the brilliant vista which the shops and clubs of that street presented. Coaches and carriages had paused in their line, and immediately before Mrs. Mivers stood three very thin, small women, whose dress bespoke them to be of the humblest class.

"Make way, there; make way, my good women, make way!" cried Mrs. Mivers, equally disdainful of the size and the rank of the obstructing parties.

"Arrah, and what shall we make way for the like of you, you old busybody?" said one of the dames, turning round, and presenting a very formidable squint to the broad optics of Mrs. Mivers.

Without deigning a reply, Mrs. Mivers had recourse to her usual tactics. Umbrella and husband went right between two of the feminine obstructives; and to the inconceivable astonishment and horror of the assailant, husband and umbrella instantly vanished. The three small furies had pounced upon both. They were torn from their natural owner; they were hurried away; the stream behind, long fretted at the path so abruptly made amidst it, closed in, joyous, with a thousand waves. Mrs. Mivers and Helen were borne forward in one way, the umbrella and the husband in the other; in the distance a small voice was heard: "Don't you! don't! Be quiet! Mrs.—Mrs. M.! Oh, oh, Mrs. M.!" At that last repetition of the beloved and familiar initial, uttered in a tone of almost superhuman anguish, the conjugal heart of Mrs. Mivers was afflicted beyond control.

"Wait here a moment, my dear; I'll just give it them, that's all!" And in another moment Mrs. Mivers was heard bustling, scolding, till all trace of her whereabouts was gone from the eyes of Helen. Thus left alone, in exceeding shame and dismay, the poor girl cast a glance around. The glance was caught by two young men, whose station, in these days when dress is an equivocal designator of rank, could not be guessed by their exterior. They might be dandies from the west,—they might be clerks from the east.

"By Jove," exclaimed one, "that's a sweet pretty girl!" and, by a sudden movement of the crowd, they both found themselves close to Helen.

"Are you alone, my dear?" said a voice rudely familiar. Helen made no reply; the tone of the voice frightened her. A gap in the mob showed the space towards Cleveland Row, which, leading to no illuminations, was vacant and solitary. She instantly made towards this spot; the two men followed her, the bolder and elder one occasionally trying to catch hold of her arm. At last, as she passed the last house to the left, a house then owned by one who, at once far-sighted and impetuous, affable and haughty, characterized alike by solid virtues and brilliant faults, would, but for hollow friends, have

triumphed over countless foes, and enjoyed at last that brief day of stormy power for which statesmen resign the health of manhood and the hope of age,—as she passed that memorable mansion, she suddenly perceived that the space before her had no thoroughfare; and, while she paused in dismay, her pursuers blockaded her escape.

One of them now fairly seized her hand. "Nay, pretty one, why so cruel? But one kiss,—only one!" He endeavoured to pass his arm round her waist while he spoke. Helen eluded him, and darted forward, to find her way stopped by her persecutor's companion, when, to her astonishment, a third person gently pushed aside the form that impeded her path, approached, and looking mute defiance at the unchivalric molesters, offered her his arm. Helen gave but one timid, hurrying glance to her unexpected protector; something in his face, his air, his youth, appealed at once to her confidence. Mechanically, and scarce knowing what she did, she laid her trembling hand on the arm held out to her.

The two Lotharios looked foolish. One pulled up his shirt-collar, and the other turned, with a forced laugh, on his heel. Boy as Percival seemed, and little more than boy as he was, there was a dangerous fire in his eye, and an expression of spirit and ready courage in his whole countenance, which, if it did not awe his tall rivals, made them at least unwilling to have a scene and provoke the interference of a policeman; one of whom was now seen walking slowly up to the spot. They therefore preserved a discomfited silence; and Percival St. John, with his heart going ten knots a beat, sailed triumphantly off with his prize.

Scarcely knowing whither he went, certainly forgetful of Mr. Mivers, in his anxiety to escape at least from the crowd, Percival walked on till he found himself with his fair charge under the trees of St. James's Park.

Then Helen, recovering herself, paused, and said, alarmed: "But this is not my way; I must go back to the street!"

"How foolish I am! That is true," said Percival, looking confused. "I— I felt so happy to be with you, feel your hand on my arm, and think that we were all by ourselves, that—that—But you have dropped your flowers!"

And as a bouquet Helen wore, dislodged somehow or other, fell to the ground, both stooped to pick it up, and their hands met. At that touch, Percival felt a strange tremble, which perhaps communicated itself (for such things are contagious) to his fair companion. Percival had got the nosegay, and seemed willing to detain it; for he bent his face lingeringly over the flowers. At length he turned his bright, ingenuous eyes to Helen, and singling one rose from the rest, said beseechingly: "May I keep this? See, it is not so fresh as the others."

"I am sure, sir," said Helen, colouring, and looking down, "I owe you so much that I should be glad if a poor flower could repay it."

"A poor flower! You don't know what a prize this is to me!" Percival placed the rose reverently in his bosom, and the two moved back slowly, as if reluctant both, through the old palace-court into the street.

"Is that lady related to you?" asked Percival, looking another way, and dreading the reply,— "not your mother, surely!"

"Oh, no! I have no mother!"

"Forgive me!" said Percival; for the tone of Helen's voice told him that he had touched the spring of a household sorrow. "And," he added, with a jealousy that he could scarcely restrain from making itself evident in his accent, "that gentleman who spoke to you under the Colonnade,—I have seen him before, but where I cannot remember. In fact, you have put everything but yourself out of my head. Is he related to you?"

"He is my cousin."

"Cousin!" repeated Percival, pouting a little; and again there was silence.

"I don't know how it is," said Percival at last, and very gravely, as if much perplexed by some abstruse thought, "but I feel as if I had known you all my life. I never felt this for any one before."

There was something so irresistibly innocent in the boy's serious, wondering tone as he said these words that a smile, in spite of herself, broke out amongst the thousand dimples round Helen's charming lips. Perhaps the little witch felt a touch of coquetry for the first time.

Percival, who was looking sidelong into her face, saw the smile, and said, drawing up his head, and

shaking back his jetty curls: "I dare say you are laughing at me as a mere boy; but I am older than I look. I am sure I am much older than you are. Let me see, you are seventeen, I suppose?"

Helen, getting more and more at her ease, nodded playful assent.

"And I am not far from twenty-one. Ah, you may well look surprised, but so it is. An hour ago I felt a mere boy; now I shall never feel a boy again!"

Once more there was a long pause, and before it was broken, they had gained the very spot in which Helen had lost her friend.

"Why, bless us and save us!" exclaimed a voice "loud as a trumpet," but not "with a silver sound," "there you are, after all;" and Mrs. Mivers (husband and umbrella both regained) planted herself full before them.

"Oh, a pretty fright I have been in! And now to see you coming along as cool as if nothing had happened; as if the humbrella had not lost its hivory 'andle,—it's quite purvoking. Dear, dear, what we have gone through! And who is this young gentleman, pray?"

Helen whispered some hesitating explanation, which Mrs. Mivers did not seem to receive as graciously as Percival, poor fellow, had a right to expect. She stared him full in the face, and shook her head suspiciously when she saw him a little confused by the survey. Then, tucking Helen tightly under her arm, she walked back towards the Haymarket, merely saying to Percival,—

"Much obligated, and good-night. I have a long journey to take to set down this here young lady; and the best thing we can all do is to get home as fast as we can, and have a refreshing cup of tea—that's my mind, sir. Excuse me!"

Thus abruptly dismissed, poor Percival gazed wistfully on his Helen as she was borne along, and was somewhat comforted at seeing her look back with (as he thought) a touch of regret in her parting smile. Then suddenly it flashed across him how sadly he had wasted his time. Novice that he was, he had not even learned the name and address of his new acquaintance. At that thought he hurried on through the crowd, but only reached the object of his pursuit just in time to see her placed in a coach, and to catch a full view of the luxuriant proportions of Mrs. Mivers as she followed her into the vehicle.

As the lumbering conveyance (the only coach on the stand) heaved itself into motion, Percival's eye fell on the sweeper, who was still leaning on his broom, and who, in grateful recognition of the unwonted generosity that had repaid his service, touched his ragged hat, and smiled drowsily on his young customer. Love sharpens the wit and animates the timid; a thought worthy of the most experienced inspired Percival St. John; he hurried to the sweeper, laid his hand on his patchwork coat, and said breathlessly,—

"You see that coach turning into the square? Follow it,—find out where it sets down. There's a sovereign for you; another if you succeed. Call and tell me your success. Number —— Curzon Street! Off, like a shot!"

The sweeper nodded and grinned; it was possibly not his first commission of a similar kind. He darted down the street; and Percival, following him with equal speed, had the satisfaction to see him, as the coach traversed St. James's Square, comfortably seated on the footboard.

Beck, dull clod, knew nothing, cared nothing, felt nothing as to the motives or purpose of his employer. Honest love or selfish vice, it was the same to him. He saw only the one sovereign which, with astounded eyes, he still gazed at on his palm, and the vision of the sovereign that was yet to come.

"Scandit aeratas vitiosa naves
Cura; nee turmas equitum relinquit."

It was the Selfishness of London, calm and stolid, whether on the track of innocence or at the command of guile.

At half-past ten o'clock Percival St. John was seated in his room, and the sweeper stood at the threshold. Wealth and penury seemed brought into visible contact in the persons of the visitor and the host. The dwelling is held by some to give an index to the character of the owner; if so, Percival's apartments differed much from those generally favoured by young men of rank and fortune. On the one hand, it had none of that affectation of superior taste evinced in marqueterie and gilding, or the more picturesque discomfort of high-backed chairs and mediaeval curiosities which prevails in the daintier abodes of fastidious bachelors; nor, on the other hand, had it the sporting character which individualizes the ruder juveniles qui gaudent equis, betrayed by engravings of racers and celebrated

fox-hunts, relieved, perhaps, if the Nimrod condescend to a cross of the Lovelace, with portraits of figurantes, and ideals of French sentiment entitled, "Le Soir," or "La Reveillee," "L'Espoir," or "L'Abandon." But the rooms had a physiognomy of their own, from their exquisite neatness and cheerful simplicity. The chintz draperies were lively with gay flowers; books filled up the niches; here and there were small pictures, chiefly sea-pieces,—well chosen, well placed.

There might, indeed, have been something almost effeminate in a certain inexpressible purity of taste, and a cleanliness of detail that seemed actually brilliant, had not the folding-doors allowed a glimpse of a plainer apartment, with fencing-foils and boxing-gloves ranged on the wall, and a cricket-bat resting carelessly in the corner. These gave a redeeming air of manliness to the rooms; but it was the manliness of a boy,—half-girl, if you please, in the purity of thought that pervaded one room, all boy in the playful pursuits that were made manifest in the other. Simple, however, as this abode really was, poor Beck had never been admitted to the sight of anything half so fine. He stood at the door for a moment, and stared about him, bewildered and dazzled. But his natural torpor to things that concerned him not soon brought to him the same stoicism that philosophy gives the strong; and after the first surprise, his eye quietly settled on his employer. St. John rose eagerly from the sofa, on which he had been contemplating the starlit treetops of Chesterfield Gardens,—

"Well, well?" said Percival.

"Hold Brompton," said Beck, with a brevity of word and clearness of perception worthy a Spartan.

"Old Brompton?" repeated Percival, thinking the reply the most natural in the world.

"In a big 'ous by hisself," continued Beck, "with a 'igh vall in front."

"You would know it again?"

"In course; he's so wery peculiar."

"He,—who?"

"Vy, the 'ous. The young lady got out, and the hold folks driv back. I did not go arter them!" and Beck looked sly.

"So! I must find out the name."

"I axed at the public," said Beck, proud of his diplomacy. "They keeps a sarvant vot takes half a pint at her meals. The young lady's mabe a foriner."

"A foreigner! Then she lives there with her mother?"

"So they s'pose at the public."

"And the name?"

Beck shook his head. "'T is a French 'un, your honour; but the sarvant's is Martha."

"You must meet me at Brompton, near the turnpike, tomorrow, and show me the house."

"Vy, I's in bizness all day, please your honour."

"In business?"

"I's the place of the crossing," said Beck, with much dignity; "but arter eight I goes vere I likes."

"To-morrow evening, then, at half-past eight, by the turnpike."

Beck pulled his forelock assentingly.

"There's the sovereign I promised you, my poor fellow; much good may it do you. Perhaps you have some father or mother whose heart it will glad."

"I never had no such thing," replied Beck, turning the coin in his hand.

"Well, don't spend it in drink."

"I never drinks nothing but svipes."

"Then," said Percival, laughingly, "what, my good friend, will you ever do with your money?"

Beck put his finger to his nose, sunk his voice into a whisper, and replied solemnly: "I 'as a mattris."

"A mistress," said Percival. "Oh, a sweetheart. Well, but if she's a good girl, and loves you, she'll not let you spend your money on her."

"I haint such a ninny as that," said Beck, with majestic contempt. "I 'spises the flat that is done brown by the blowens. I 'as a mattris."

"A mattress! a mattress! Well, what has that to do with the money?"

"Vy, I lines it."

Percival looked puzzled. "Oh," said he, after a thoughtful pause, and in a tone of considerable compassion, "I understand: you sew your money in your mattress. My poor, poor lad, you can do better than that! There are the savings banks."

Beck looked frightened. "I 'opes your honour von't tell no vun. I 'opes no vun von't go for to put my tin vere I shall know nothing vatsomever about it. Now, I knows vere it is, and I lays on it."

"Do you sleep more soundly when you lie on your treasure?"

"No. It's hodd," said Beck, musingly, "but the more I lines it, the vorse I sleeps."

Percival laughed, but there was melancholy in his laughter; something in the forlorn, benighted, fatherless, squalid miser went to the core of his open, generous heart.

"Do you ever read your Bible," said he, after a pause, "or even the newspaper?"

"I does not read nothing; cos vy? I haint been made a scholard, like swell Tim, as was lagged for a forgery."

"You go to church on a Sunday?"

"Yes; I 'as a weekly hingagement at the New Road."

"What do you mean?"

"To see arter the gig of a gemman vot comes from 'Igate."

Percival lifted his brilliant eyes, and they were moistened with a heavenly dew, on the dull face of his fellow-creature. Beck made a scrape, looked round, shambled back to the door, and ran home, through the lamp-lit streets of the great mart of the Christian universe, to sew the gold in his mattress.

CHAPTER III.

EARLY TRAINING FOR AN UPRIGHT GENTLEMAN.

Percival St. John had been brought up at home under the eye of his mother and the care of an excellent man who had been tutor to himself and his brothers. The tutor was not much of a classical scholar, for in great measure he had educated himself; and he who does so, usually lacks the polish and brilliancy of one whose footsteps have been led early to the Temple of the Muses. In fact, Captain Greville was a gallant soldier, with whom Vernon St. John had been acquainted in his own brief military career, and whom circumstances had so reduced in life as to compel him to sell his commission and live as he could. He had always been known in his regiment as a reading man, and his authority looked up to in all the disputes as to history and dates, and literary anecdotes, which might occur at the mess-table. Vernon considered him the most learned man of his acquaintance; and when, accidentally meeting him in London, he learned his fallen fortunes, he congratulated himself on a very brilliant idea when he suggested that Captain Greville should assist him in the education of his boys and the management of his estate. At first, all that Greville modestly undertook, with respect to the former, and, indeed, was expected to do, was to prepare the young gentlemen for Eton, to which Vernon, with the natural predilection of an Eton man, destined his sons. But the sickly constitutions of the two elder justified Lady Mary in her opposition to a public school; and Percival conceived early so strong an affection for a sailor's life that the father's intentions were frustrated. The two elder continued their education at home, and Percival, at an earlier age than usual, went to sea. The last was fortunate enough to have for his captain one of that new race of naval officers who, well educated and accomplished, form a notable contrast to the old heroes of Smollett. Percival, however, had not been

long in the service before the deaths of his two elder brothers, preceded by that of his father, made him the head of his ancient house, and the sole prop of his mother's earthly hopes. He conquered with a generous effort the passion for his noble profession, which service had but confirmed, and returned home with his fresh, childlike nature uncorrupted, his constitution strengthened, his lively and impressionable mind braced by the experience of danger and the habits of duty, and quietly resumed his reading under Captain Greville, who moved from the Hall to a small house in the village.

Now, the education he had received, from first to last, was less adapted prematurely to quicken his intellect and excite his imagination than to warm his heart and elevate, while it chastened, his moral qualities; for in Lady Mary there was, amidst singular sweetness of temper, a high cast of character and thought. She was not what is commonly called clever, and her experience of the world was limited, compared to that of most women of similar rank who pass their lives in the vast theatre of London. But she became superior by a certain single-heartedness which made truth so habitual to her that the light in which she lived rendered all objects around her clear. One who is always true in the great duties of life is nearly always wise. And Vernon, when he had fairly buried his faults, had felt a noble shame for the excesses into which they had led him. Gradually more and more wedded to his home, he dropped his old companions. He set grave guard on his talk (his habits now required no guard), lest any of the ancient levity should taint the ears of his children. Nothing is more common in parents than their desire that their children should escape their faults. We scarcely know ourselves till we have children; and then, if we love them duly, we look narrowly into failings that become vices, when they serve as examples to the young.

The inborn gentleman, with the native courage and spirit and horror of trick and falsehood which belong to that chivalrous abstraction, survived almost alone in Vernon St. John; and his boys sprang up in the atmosphere of generous sentiments and transparent truth. The tutor was in harmony with the parents,—a soldier every inch of him; not a mere disciplinarian, yet with a profound sense of duty, and a knowledge that duty is to be found in attention to details. In inculcating the habit of subordination, so graceful to the young, he knew how to make himself beloved, and what is harder still, to be understood. The soul of this poor soldier was white and unstained, as the arms of a maiden knight; it was full of suppressed but lofty enthusiasm. He had been ill used, whether by Fate or the Horse Guards; his career had been a failure; but he was as loyal as if his hand held the field-marshal's truncheon, and the garter bound his knee. He was above all querulous discontent. From him, no less than from his parents, Percival caught, not only a spirit of honour worthy the *antiqua fides* of the poets, but that peculiar cleanliness of thought, if the expression may be used, which belongs to the ideal of youthful chivalry. In mere booklearning, Percival, as may be supposed, was not very extensively read; but his mind, if not largely stored, had a certain unity of culture, which gave it stability and individualized its operations. Travels, voyages, narratives of heroic adventure, biographies of great men, had made the favourite pasture of his enthusiasm. To this was added the more stirring, and, perhaps, the more genuine order of poets who make you feel and glow, rather than doubt and ponder. He knew at least enough of Greek to enjoy old Homer; and if he could have come but ill through a college examination into Aeschylus and Sophocles, he had dwelt with fresh delight on the rushing storm of spears in the "Seven before Thebes," and wept over the heroic calamities of Antigone. In science, he was no adept; but his clear good sense and quick appreciation of positive truths had led him easily through the elementary mathematics, and his somewhat martial spirit had made him delight in the old captain's lectures on military tactics. Had he remained in the navy, Percival St. John would doubtless have been distinguished. His talents fitted him for straightforward, manly action; and he had a generous desire of distinction, vague, perhaps, the moment he was taken from his profession, and curbed by his diffidence in himself and his sense of deficiencies in the ordinary routine of purely classical education. Still, he had in him all the elements of a true man,—a man to go through life with a firm step and a clear conscience and a gallant hope. Such a man may not win fame,—that is an accident; but he must occupy no despicable place in the movement of the world.

It was at first intended to send Percival to Oxford; but for some reason or other that design was abandoned. Perhaps Lady Mary, over cautious, as mothers left alone sometimes are, feared the contagion to which a young man of brilliant expectations and no studious turn is necessarily exposed in all places of miscellaneous resort. So Percival was sent abroad for two years, under the guardianship of Captain Greville. On his return, at the age of nineteen, the great world lay before him, and he longed ardently to enter. For a year Lady Mary's fears and fond anxieties detained him at Laughton; but though his great tenderness for his mother withheld Percival from opposing her wishes by his own, this interval of inaction affected visibly his health and spirits. Captain Greville, a man of the world, saw the cause sooner than Lady Mary, and one morning, earlier than usual, he walked up to the Hall.

The captain, with all his deference to the sex, was a plain man enough when business was to be done. Like his great commander, he came to the point in a few words.

"My dear Lady Mary, our boy must go to London,—we are killing him here."

"Mr. Greville!" cried Lady Mary, turning pale and putting aside her embroidery,—"killing him?"

"Killing the man in him. I don't mean to alarm you; I dare say his lungs are sound enough, and that his heart would bear the stethoscope to the satisfaction of the College of Surgeons. But, my dear ma'am, Percival is to be a man; it is the man you are killing by keeping him tied to your apron-string."

"Oh, Mr. Greville, I am sure you don't wish to wound me, but—"

"I beg ten thousand pardons. I am rough, but truth is rough sometimes."

"It is not for my sake," said the mother, warmly, and with tears in her eyes, "that I have wished him to be here. If he is dull, can we not fill the house for him?"

"Fill a thimble, my dear Lady Mary. Percival should have a plunge in the ocean."

"But he is so young yet,—that horrid London; such temptations,— fatherless, too!"

"I have no fear of the result if Percival goes now, while his principles are strong and his imagination is not inflamed; but if we keep him here much longer against his bent, he will learn to brood and to muse, write bad poetry perhaps, and think the world withheld from him a thousand times more delightful than it is. This very dread of temptation will provoke his curiosity, irritate his fancy, make him imagine the temptation must be a very delightful thing. For the first time in my life, ma'am, I have caught him sighing over fashionable novels, and subscribing to the Southampton Circulating Library. Take my word for it, it is time that Percival should begin life, and swim without corks."

Lady Mary had a profound confidence in Greville's judgment and affection for Percival, and, like a sensible woman, she was aware of her own weakness. She remained silent for a few moments, and then said, with an effort,—

"You know how hateful London is to me now,—how unfit I am to return to the hollow forms of its society; still, if you think it right, I will take a house for the season, and Percival can still be under our eye."

"No, ma'am,—pardon me,—that will be the surest way to make him either discontented or hypocritical. A young man of his prospects and temper can hardly be expected to chime in with all our sober, old-fashioned habits. You will impose on him—if he is to conform to our hours and notions and quiet set—a thousand irksome restraints; and what will be the consequence? In a year he will be of age, and can throw us off altogether, if he pleases. I know the boy; don't seem to distrust him,— he may be trusted. You place the true restraint on temptation when you say to him: 'We confide to you our dearest treasure,—your honour, your morals, your conscience, yourself!'"

"But at least you will go with him, if it must be so," said Lady Mary, after a few timid arguments, from which, one by one, she was driven.

"I! What for? To be a jest of the young puppies he must know; to make him ashamed of himself and me,—himself as a milksop, and me as a dry nurse?"

"But this was not so abroad."

"Abroad, ma'am, I gave him full swing I promise you; and when we went abroad he was two years younger."

"But he is a mere child still."

"Child, Lady Mary! At his age I had gone through two sieges. There are younger faces than his at a mess-room. Come, come! I know what you fear,—he may commit some follies; very likely. He may be taken in, and lose some money,—he can afford it, and he will get experience in return. Vices he has none. I have seen him,—ay, with the vicious. Send him out against the world like a saint of old, with his Bible in his hand, and no spot on his robe. Let him see fairly what is, not stay here to dream of what is not. And when he's of age, ma'am, we must get him an object, a pursuit; start him for the county, and make him serve the State. He will understand that business pretty well. Tush! tush! what is there to cry at?"

The captain prevailed. We don't say that his advice would have been equally judicious for all youths of Percival's age; but he knew well the nature to which he confided; he knew well how strong was that young heart in its healthful simplicity and instinctive rectitude; and he appreciated his manliness not too highly when he felt that all evident props and aids would be but irritating tokens of distrust.

And thus, armed only with letters of introduction, his mother's tearful admonitions, and Greville's

experienced warnings, Percival St. John was launched into London life. After the first month or so, Greville came up to visit him, do him sundry kind, invisible offices amongst his old friends, help him to equip his apartments, and mount his stud; and wholly satisfied with the result of his experiment, returned in high spirits, with flattering reports, to the anxious mother.

But, indeed, the tone of Percival's letters would have been sufficient to allay even maternal anxiety. He did not write, as sons are apt to do, short excuses for not writing more at length, unsatisfactory compressions of details (exciting worlds of conjecture) into a hurried sentence. Frank and overflowing, those delightful epistles gave accounts fresh from the first impressions of all he saw and did. There was a racy, wholesome gusto in his enjoyment of novelty and independence. His balls and his dinners and his cricket at Lord's, his partners and his companions, his general gayety, his occasional ennui, furnished ample materials to one who felt he was corresponding with another heart, and had nothing to fear or to conceal.

But about two months before this portion of our narrative opens with the coronation, Lady Mary's favourite sister, who had never married, and who, by the death of her parents, was left alone in the worse than widowhood of an old maid, had been ordered to Pisa for a complaint that betrayed pulmonary symptoms; and Lady Mary, with her usual unselfishness, conquered both her aversion to movement and her wish to be in reach of her son, to accompany abroad this beloved and solitary relative. Captain Greville was pressed into service as their joint cavalier. And thus Percival's habitual intercourse with his two principal correspondents received a temporary check.

CHAPTER IV.

JOHN ARDWORTH.

At noon the next day Beck, restored to his grandeur, was at the helm of his state; Percival was vainly trying to be amused by the talk of two or three loungers who did him the honour to smoke a cigar in his rooms; and John Ardworth sat in his dingy cell in Gray's Inn, with a pile of law books on the table, and the daily newspapers carpeting a footstool of Hansard's Debates upon the floor,—no unusual combination of studies amongst the poorer and more ardent students of the law, who often owe their earliest, nor perhaps their least noble, earnings to employment in the empire of the Press. By the power of a mind habituated to labour, and backed by a frame of remarkable strength and endurance, Ardworth grappled with his arid studies not the less manfully for a night mainly spent in a printer's office, and stinted to less than four hours' actual sleep. But that sleep was profound and refreshing as a peasant's. The nights thus devoted to the Press (he was employed in the sub-editing of a daily journal), the mornings to the law, he kept distinct the two separate callings with a stern subdivision of labour which in itself proved the vigour of his energy and the resolution of his will. Early compelled to shift for himself and carve out his own way, he had obtained a small fellowship at the small college in which he had passed his academic career. Previous to his arrival in London, by contributions to political periodicals and a high reputation at that noble debating society in Cambridge which has trained some of the most eminent of living public men [Amongst those whom the "Union" almost contemporaneously prepared for public life, and whose distinction has kept the promise of their youth, we may mention the eminent barristers, Messrs. Austin and Cockburn; and amongst statesmen, Lord Grey, Mr. C. Buller, Mr. Charles Villiers, and Mr. Macaulay. Nor ought we to forget those brilliant competitors for the prizes of the University, Dr. Kennedy (now head-master of Shrewsbury School) and the late Winthrop M. Praed.], he had established a name which was immediately useful to him in obtaining employment on the Press. Like most young men of practical ability, he was an eager politician. The popular passion of the day kindled his enthusiasm and stirred the depths of his soul with magnificent, though exaggerated, hopes in the destiny of his race. He identified himself with the people; his stout heart beat loud in their stormy cause. His compositions, if they wanted that knowledge of men, that subtle comprehension of the true state of parties, that happy temperance in which the crowning wisdom of statesmen must consist,—qualities which experience alone can give,—excited considerable attention by their bold eloquence and hardy logic. They were suited to the time. But John Ardworth had that solidity of understanding which betokens more than talent, and which is the usual substratum of genius. He would not depend alone on the precarious and often unhonoured toils of polemical literature for that distinction on which he had fixed his steadfast heart. Patiently he plodded on through the formal drudgeries of his new profession, lighting up dulness by his own acute comprehension, weaving complexities into simple system by the grasp of an intellect inured to generalize, and learning to love even what was most distasteful, by the sense of difficulty overcome, and the clearer vision which every

step through the mists and up the hill gave of the land beyond. Of what the superficial are apt to consider genius, John Ardworth had but little. He had some imagination (for a true thinker is never without that), but he had a very slight share of fancy. He did not flirt with the Muses; on the granite of his mind few flowers could spring. His style, rushing and earnest, admitted at times of a humour not without delicacy,—though less delicate than forcible and deep,—but it was little adorned with wit, and still less with poetry. Yet Ardworth had genius, and genius ample and magnificent. There was genius in that industrious energy so patient in the conquest of detail, so triumphant in the perception of results. There was genius in that kindly sympathy with mankind; genius in that stubborn determination to succeed; genius in that vivid comprehension of affairs, and the large interests of the world; genius fed in the labours of the closet, and evinced the instant he was brought into contact with men,—evinced in readiness of thought, grasp of memory, even in a rough, imperious nature, which showed him born to speak strong truths, and in their name to struggle and command.

Rough was this man often in his exterior, though really gentle and kind-hearted. John Ardworth had sacrificed to no Graces; he would have thrown Lord Chesterfield into a fever. Not that he was ever vulgar, for vulgarity implies affectation of refinement; but he talked loud and laughed loud if the whim seized him, and rubbed his great hands with a boyish heartiness of glee if he discomfited an adversary in argument. Or, sometimes, he would sit abstracted and moody, and answer briefly and boorishly those who interrupted him. Young men were mostly afraid of him, though he wanted but fame to have a set of admiring disciples. Old men censured his presumption and recoiled from the novelty of his ideas. Women alone liked and appreciated him, as, with their finer insight into character, they generally do what is honest and sterling. Some strange failings, too, had John Ardworth,—some of the usual vagaries and contradictions of clever men. As a system, he was rigidly abstemious. For days together he would drink nothing but water, eat nothing but bread, or hard biscuit, or a couple of eggs; then, having wound up some allotted portion of work, Ardworth would indulge what he called a self-saturnalia,—would stride off with old college friends to an inn in one of the suburbs, and spend, as he said triumphantly, "a day of blessed debauch!" Innocent enough, for the most part, the debauch was, consisting in cracking jests, stringing puns, a fish dinner, perhaps, and an extra bottle or two of fiery port. Sometimes this jollity, which was always loud and uproarious, found its scene in one of the cider-cellars or midnight taverns; but Ardworth's labours on the Press made that latter dissipation extremely rare. These relaxations were always succeeded by a mien more than usually grave, a manner more than usually curt and ungracious, an application more than ever rigorous and intense. John Ardworth was not a good-tempered man, but he was the best-natured man that ever breathed. He was, like all ambitious persons, very much occupied with self; and yet it would have been a ludicrous misapplication of words to call him selfish. Even the desire of fame which absorbed him was but a part of benevolence,—a desire to promote justice and to serve his kind.

John Ardworth's shaggy brows were bent over his open volumes when his clerk entered noiselessly and placed on his table a letter which the twopenny-postman had just delivered. With an impatient shrug of the shoulders, Ardworth glanced towards the superscription; but his eye became earnest and his interest aroused as he recognized the hand. "Again!" he muttered. "What mystery is this? Who can feel such interest in my fate?" He broke the seal and read as follows:—

Do you neglect my advice, or have you begun to act upon it? Are you contented only with the slow process of mechanical application, or will you make a triumphant effort to abridge your apprenticeship and emerge at once into fame and power? I repeat that you fritter away your talents and your opportunities upon this miserable task-work on a journal. I am impatient for you. Come forward yourself, put your force and your knowledge into some work of which the world may know the author. Day after day I am examining into your destiny, and day after day I believe more and more that you are not fated for the tedious drudgery to which you doom your youth. I would have you great, but in the senate, not a wretched casuist at the Bar. Appear in public as an individual authority, not one of that nameless troop of shadows contemned while dreaded as the Press. Write for renown. Go into the world, and make friends. Soften your rugged bearing. Lift yourself above that herd whom you call "the people." What if you are born of the noble class! What if your career is as gentleman, not plebeian! Want not for money. Use what I send you as the young and the well-born should use it; or let it at least gain you a respite from toils for bread, and support you in your struggle to emancipate yourself from obscurity into fame. YOUR UNKNOWN FRIEND

A bank-note for 100 pounds dropped from the envelope as Ardworth silently replaced the letter on the table.

Thrice before had he received communications in the same handwriting, and much to the same effect. Certainly, to a mind of less strength there would have been something very unsettling in those vague hints of a station higher than he owned, of a future at variance with the toilsome lot he had drawn from the urn; but after a single glance over his lone position in all its bearings and probable expectations, Ardworth's steady sense shook off the slight disturbance such misty vaticinations had effected. His

mother's family was indeed unknown to him, he was even ignorant of her maiden name. But that very obscurity seemed unfavourable to much hope from such a quarter. The connections with the rich and well-born are seldom left obscure. From his father's family he had not one expectation. More had he been moved by exhortation now generally repeated, but in a previous letter more precisely detailed; namely, to appeal to the reading public in his acknowledged person, and by some striking and original work. This idea he had often contemplated and revolved; but partly the necessity of keeping pace with the many exigencies of the hour had deterred him, and partly also the conviction of his sober judgment that a man does himself no good at the Bar even by the most brilliant distinction gained in discursive fields. He had the natural yearning of the Restless Genius; and the Patient Genius (higher power of the two) had suppressed the longing. Still, so far, the whispers of his correspondent tempted and aroused. But hitherto he had sought to persuade himself that the communications thus strangely forced on him arose perhaps from idle motives,—a jest, it might be, of one of his old college friends, or at best the vain enthusiasm of some more credulous admirer. But the enclosure now sent to him forbade either of these suppositions. Who that he knew could afford so costly a jest or so extravagant a tribute? He was perplexed, and with his perplexity was mixed a kind of fear. Plain, earnest, unromantic in the common acceptation of the word, the mystery of this intermeddling with his fate, this arrogation of the license to spy, the right to counsel, and the privilege to bestow, gave him the uneasiness the bravest men may feel at noises in the dark. That day he could apply no more, he could not settle back to his Law Reports. He took two or three unquiet turns up and down his smoke-dried cell, then locked up the letter and enclosure, seized his hat, and strode, with his usual lusty, swinging strides, into the open air.

But still the letter haunted him. "And if," he said almost audibly,—"if I were the heir to some higher station, why then I might have a heart like idle men; and Helen, beloved Helen—" He paused, sighed, shook his rough head, shaggy with neglected curls, and added: "As if even then I could steal myself into a girl's good graces! Man's esteem I may command, though poor; woman's love could I win, though rich? Pooh! pooh! every wood does not make a Mercury; and faith, the wood I am made of will scarcely cut up into a lover."

Nevertheless, though thus soliloquizing, Ardworth mechanically bent his way towards Brompton, and halted, half-ashamed of himself, at the house where Helen lodged with her aunt. It was a building that stood apart from all the cottages and villas of that charming suburb, half-way down a narrow lane, and enclosed by high, melancholy walls, deep set in which a small door, with the paint blistered and weather-stained, gave unfrequented entrance to the demesne. A woman servant of middle age and starched, puritanical appearance answered the loud ring of the bell, and Ardworth seemed a privileged visitor, for she asked him no question as, with a slight nod and a smileless, stupid expression in a face otherwise comely, she led the way across a paved path, much weed-grown, to the house. That house itself had somewhat of a stern and sad exterior. It was not ancient, yet it looked old from shabbiness and neglect. The vine, loosened from the rusty nails, trailed rankly against the wall, and fell in crawling branches over the ground. The house had once been whitewashed; but the colour, worn off in great patches, distained with damp, struggled here and there with the dingy, chipped bricks beneath. There was no peculiar want of what is called "tenantable repair;" the windows were whole, and doubtless the roof sheltered from the rain. But the woodwork that encased the panes was decayed, and houseleek covered the tiles. Altogether, there was that forlorn and cheerless aspect about the place which chills the visitor, he defines not why. And Ardworth steadied his usual careless step, and crept, as if timidly, up the creaking stairs.

On entering the drawing-room, it seemed at first deserted; but the eye, searching round, perceived something stir in the recess of a huge chair set by the fireless hearth. And from amidst a mass of coverings a pale face emerged, and a thin hand waved its welcome to the visitor.

Ardworth approached, pressed the hand, and drew a seat near to the sufferer's.

"You are better, I hope?" he said cordially, and yet in a tone of more respect than was often perceptible in his deep, blunt voice.

"I am always the same," was the quiet answer; "come nearer still. Your visits cheer me."

And as these last words were said, Madame Dalibard raised herself from her recumbent posture and gazed long upon Ardworth's face of power and front of thought. "You overfatigue yourself, my poor kinsman," she said, with a certain tenderness; "you look already too old for your young years."

"That's no disadvantage at the Bar."

"Is the Bar your means, or your end?"

"My dear Madame Dalibard, it is my profession."

"No, your profession is to rise. John Ardworth," and the low voice swelled in its volume, "you are bold, able, and aspiring; for this, I love you,—love you almost—almost as a mother. Your fate," she continued hurriedly, "interests me; your energies inspire me with admiration. Often I sit here for hours, musing over your destiny to be, so that at times I may almost say that in your life I live."

Ardworth looked embarrassed, and with an awkward attempt at compliment he began, hesitatingly: "I should think too highly of myself if I could really believe that you—"

"Tell me," interrupted Madame Dalibard,— "we have had many conversations upon grave and subtle matters; we have disputed on the secret mysteries of the human mind; we have compared our several experiences of outward life and the mechanism of the social world,—tell me, then, and frankly, what do you think of me? Do you regard me merely as your sex is apt to regard the woman who aspires to equal men,—a thing of borrowed phrases and unsound ideas, feeble to guide, and unskilled to teach; or do you recognize in this miserable body a mind of force not unworthy yours, ruled by an experience larger than your own?"

"I think of you," answered Ardworth, frankly, "as the most remarkable woman I have ever met. Yet—do not be angry—I do not like to yield to the influence which you gain over me when we meet. It disturbs my convictions, it disquiets my reason; I do not settle back to my life so easily after your breath has passed over it."

"And yet," said Lucretia, with a solemn sadness in her voice, "that influence is but the natural power which cold maturity exercises on ardent youth. It is my mournful advantage over you that disquiets your happy calm. It is my experience that unsettles the fallacies which you name 'convictions.' Let this pass. I asked your opinion of me, because I wished to place at your service all that knowledge of life which I possess. In proportion as you esteem me you will accept or reject my counsels."

"I have benefited by them already. It is the tone that you advised me to assume that gave me an importance I had not before with that old formalist whose paper I serve, and whose prejudices I shock; it is to your criticisms that I owe the more practical turn of my writings, and the greater hold they have taken on the public."

"Trifles indeed, these," said Madame Dalibard, with a half smile. "Let them at least induce you to listen to me if I propose to make your path more pleasant, yet your ascent more rapid."

Ardworth knit his brows, and his countenance assumed an expression of doubt and curiosity. However, he only replied, with a blunt laugh,—

"You must be wise indeed if you have discovered a royal road to distinction.

'Ah, who can tell how hard it is to climb
The steep where
Fame's proud temple shines afar!'

A more sensible exclamation than poets usually preface with their whining 'Ahs' and 'Ohs!'"

"What we are is nothing," pursued Madame Dalibard; "what we seem is much."

Ardworth thrust his hands into his pockets and shook his head. The wise woman continued, unheeding his dissent from her premises,—

"Everything you are taught to value has a likeness, and it is that likeness which the world values. Take a man out of the streets, poor and ragged, what will the world do with him? Send him to the workhouse, if not to the jail. Ask a great painter to take that man's portrait,—rags, squalor, and all,—and kings will bid for the picture. You would thrust the man from your doors, you would place the portrait in your palaces. It is the same with qualities; the portrait is worth more than the truth. What is virtue without character? But a man without virtue may thrive on a character! What is genius without success? But how often you bow to success without genius! John Ardworth, possess yourself of the portraits,—win the character; seize the success."

"Madame," exclaimed Ardworth, rudely, "this is horrible!"

"Horrible it may be," said Madame Dalibard, gently, and feeling, perhaps, that she had gone too far; "but it is the world's judgment. Seem, then, as well as be. You have virtue, as I believe. Well, wrap yourself in it—in your closet. Go into the world, and earn character. If you have genius, let it comfort you. Rush into the crowd, and get success."

"Stop!" cried Ardworth; "I recognize you. How could I be so blind? It is you who have written to me,

and in the same strain; you have robbed yourself,—you, poor sufferer,—to throw extravagance into these strong hands. And why? What am I to you?" An expression of actual fondness softened Lucretia's face as she looked up at him and replied: "I will tell you hereafter what you are to me. First, I confess that it is I whose letters have perplexed, perhaps offended you. The sum that I sent I do not miss. I have more,—will ever have more at your command; never fear. Yes, I wish you to go into the world, not as a dependant, but as an equal to the world's favourites. I wish you to know more of men than mere law-books teach you. I wish you to be in men's mouths, create a circle that shall talk of young Ardworth; that talk would travel to those who can advance your career. The very possession of money in certain stages of life gives assurance to the manner, gives attraction to the address."

"But," said Ardworth, "all this is very well for some favourite of birth and fortune; but for me—Yet speak, and plainly. You throw out hints that I am what I know not, but something less dependent on his nerves and his brain than is plain John Ardworth. What is it you mean?"

Madame Dalibard bent her face over her breast, and rocking herself in her chair, seemed to muse for some moments before she answered.

"When I first came to England, some months ago, I desired naturally to learn all the particulars of my family and kindred, from which my long residence abroad had estranged me. John Walter Ardworth was related to my half-sister; to me he was but a mere connection. However, I knew something of his history, yet I did not know that he had a son. Shortly before I came to England, I learned that one who passed for his son had been brought up by Mr. Fielden, and from Mr. Fielden I have since learned all the grounds for that belief from which you take the name of Ardworth."

Lucretia paused a moment; and after a glance at the impatient, wondering, and eager countenance that bent intent upon her, she resumed:

"Your reputed father was, you are doubtless aware, of reckless and extravagant habits. He had been put into the army by my uncle, and he entered the profession with the careless buoyancy of his sanguine nature. I remember those days,—that day! Well, to return—where was I?—Walter Ardworth had the folly to entertain strong notions of politics. He dreamed of being a soldier, and yet persuaded himself to be a republican. His notions, so hateful in his profession, got wind; he disguised nothing, he neglected the portraits of things,—appearances. He excited the rancour of his commanding officer; for politics then, more even than now, were implacable ministrants to hate. Occasion presented itself. During the short Peace of Amiens he had been recalled. He had to head a detachment of soldiers against some mob,—in Ireland, I believe; he did not fire on the mob, according to orders,—so, at least, it was said. John Walter Ardworth was tried by a court-martial, and broke! But you know all this, perhaps?"

"My poor father! Only in part; I knew that he had been dismissed the army,—I believed unjustly. He was a soldier, and yet he dared to think for himself and be humane!"

"But my uncle had left him a legacy; it brought no blessing,—none of that old man's gold did. Where are they all now,—Dalibard, Susan, and her fair-faced husband,—where? Vernon is in his grave,—but one son of many left! Gabriel Varney lives, it is true, and I! But that gold,—yea, in our hands there was a curse on it! Walter Ardworth had his legacy. His nature was gay; if disgraced in his profession, he found men to pity and praise him,—Fools of Party like himself. He lived joyously, drank or gamed, or lent or borrowed,—what matters the wherefore? He was in debt; he lived at last a wretched, shifting, fugitive life, snatching bread where he could, with the bailiffs at his heels. Then, for a short time, we met again."

Lucretia's brow grew black as night as her voice dropped at that last sentence, and it was with a start that she continued,—

"In the midst of this hunted existence, Walter Ardworth appeared, late one night, at Mr. Fielden's with an infant. He seemed—so says Mr. Fielden—ill, worn, and haggard. He entered into no explanations with respect to the child that accompanied him, and retired at once to rest. What follows, Mr. Fielden, at my request, has noted down. Read, and see what claim you have to the honourable parentage so vaguely ascribed to you."

As she spoke, Madame Dalibard opened a box on her table, drew forth a paper in Fielden's writing, and placed it in Ardworth's hand. After some preliminary statement of the writer's intimacy with the elder Ardworth, and the appearance of the latter at his house, as related by Madame Dalibard, etc., the document went on thus:—

The next day, when my poor guest was still in bed, my servant Hannah came to advise me that two persons were without, waiting to see me. As is my wont, I bade them be shown in. On their entrance

(two rough, farmer- looking men they were, who I thought might be coming to hire my little pasture field), I prayed them to speak low, as a sick gentleman was just overhead. Whereupon, and without saying a word further, the two strangers made a rush from the room, leaving me dumb with amazement; in a few moments I heard voices and a scuffle above. I recovered myself, and thinking robbers had entered my peaceful house, I called out lustily, when Hannah came in, and we both, taking courage, went upstairs, and found that poor Walter was in the hands of these supposed robbers, who in truth were but bailiffs. They would not trust him out of their sight for a moment. However, he took it more pleasantly than I could have supposed possible; prayed me in a whisper to take care of the child, and I should soon hear from him again. In less than an hour he was gone. Two days afterwards I received from him a hurried letter, without address, of which this is a copy:—

DEAR FRIEND,—I slipped from the bailiffs, and here I am in a safe little tavern in sight of the sea! Mother Country is a very bad parent to me! Mother Brownrigg herself could scarcely be worse. I shall work out my passage to some foreign land, and if I can recover my health (sea-air is bracing), I don't despair of getting my bread honestly, somehow. If ever I can pay my debts, I may return. But, meanwhile, my good old tutor, what will you think of me? You to whom my sole return for so much pains, taken in vain, is another mouth to feed! And no money to pay for the board! Yet you'll not grudge the child a place at your table, will you? No, nor kind, saving Mrs. Fielden either,—God bless her tender, economical soul! You know quite enough of me to be sure that I shall very soon either free you of the boy, or send you something to prevent its being an encumbrance. I would say, love and pity the child for my sake. But I own I feel—By Jove, I must be off; I hear the first signal from the vessel that—Yours in haste, J. W. A.

Young Ardworth stopped from the lecture, and sighed heavily. There seemed to him in this letter worse than a mock gayety,—a certain levity and recklessness which jarred on his own high principles. And the want of affection for the child thus abandoned was evident,—not one fond word. He resumed the statement with a gloomy and disheartened attention.

This was all I heard from my poor, erring Walter for more than three years; but I knew, in spite of his follies, that his heart was sound at bottom (the son's eyes brightened here, and he kissed the paper), and the child was no burden to us; we loved it, not only for Ardworth's sake, but for its own, and for charity's and Christ's. Ardworth's second letter was as follows:—

En iterum Crispinus! I am still alive, and getting on in the world,—ay, and honestly too; I am no longer spending heedlessly; I am saving for my debts, and I shall live, I trust, to pay off every farthing. First, for my debt to you I send an order, not signed in my name, but equally valid, on Messrs. Drummond, for 250 pounds. Repay yourself what the boy has cost. Let him be educated to get his own living,—if clever, as a scholar or a lawyer; if dull, as a tradesman. Whatever I may gain, he will have his own way to make. I ought to tell you the story connected with his birth; but it is one of pain and shame, and, on reflection, I feel that I have no right to injure him by affixing to his early birth an opprobrium of which he himself is guiltless. If ever I return to England, you shall know all, and by your counsels I will abide. Love to all your happy family. Your grateful FRIEND AND PUPIL.

From this letter I began to suspect that the poor boy was probably not born in wedlock, and that Ardworth's silence arose from his compunction. I conceived it best never to mention this suspicion to John himself as he grew up. Why should I afflict him by a doubt from which his own father shrank, and which might only exist in my own inexperienced and uncharitable interpretation of some vague words? When John was fourteen, I received from Messrs. Drummond a further sum of 500 pounds, but without any line from Ardworth, and only to the effect that Messrs. Drummond were directed by a correspondent in Calcutta to pay me the said sum on behalf of expenses incurred for the maintenance of the child left to my charge by John Walter Ardworth. My young pupil had been two years at the University when I received the letter of which this is a copy:—

"How are you? Still well, still happy? Let me hope so! I have not written to you, dear old friend, but I have not been forgetful of you; I have inquired of you through my correspondents, and have learned, from time to time, such accounts as satisfied my grateful affection for you. I find that you have given the boy my name. Well, let him bear it,—it is nothing to boast of such as it became in my person; but, mind, I do not, therefore, acknowledge him as my son. I wish him to think himself without parents, without other aid in the career of life than his own industry and talent—if talent he has. Let him go through the healthful probation of toil; let him search for and find independence. Till he is of age, 150 pounds per annum will be paid quarterly to your account for him at Messrs. Drummond's. If then, to set him up in any business or profession, a sum of money be necessary, name the amount by a line, signed A. B., Calcutta, to the care of Messrs. Drummond, and it will reach and find me disposed to follow your instructions. But after that time all further supply from me will cease. Do not suppose, because I send this from India, that I am laden with rupees; all I can hope to attain is a competence. That boy is not the only one who has claims to share it. Even, therefore, if I had the wish to rear him to the extravagant

habits that ruined myself, I have not the power. Yes, let him lean on his own strength. In the letter you send me, write fully of your family, your sons, and write as to a man who can perhaps help them in the world, and will be too happy thus in some slight degree to repay all he owes you. You would smile approvingly if you saw me now,—a steady, money-getting man, but still yours as ever."

"P.S.—Do not let the boy write to me, nor give him this clew to my address."

On the receipt of this letter, I wrote fully to Ardworth about the excellent promise and conduct of his poor neglected son. I told him truly he was a son any father might be proud of, and rebuked, even to harshness, Walter's unseemly tone respecting him. One's child is one's child, however the father may have wronged the mother. To this letter I never received any answer. When John was of age, and had made himself independent of want by obtaining a college fellowship, I spoke to him about his prospects. I told him that his father, though residing abroad and for some reason keeping himself concealed, had munificently paid hitherto for his maintenance, and would lay down what might be necessary to start him in business, or perhaps place him in the army, but that his father might be better pleased if he could show a love of independence, and henceforth maintain himself. I knew the boy I spoke to! John thought as I did, and I never applied for another donation to the elder Ardworth. The allowance ceased; John since then has maintained himself. I have heard no more from his father, though I have written often to the address he gave me. I begin to fear that he is dead. I once went up to town and saw one of the heads of Messrs. Drummond's firm, a very polite gentleman, but he could give me no information, except that he obeyed instructions from a correspondent at Calcutta,—one Mr. Macfarren. Whereon I wrote to Mr. Macfarren, and asked him, as I thought very pressingly, to tell me all he knew of poor Ardworth the elder. He answered shortly that he knew of no such person at all, and that A. B. was a French merchant, settled in Calcutta, who had been dead for above two years. I now gave up all hopes of any further intelligence, and was more convinced than ever that I had acted rightly in withholding from poor John my correspondence with his father. The lad had been curious and inquisitive naturally; but when I told him that I thought it my duty to his father to be so reserved, he forebore to press me. I have only to add, first, that by all the inquiries I could make of the surviving members of Walter Ardworth's family, it seemed their full belief that he had never been married, and therefore I fear we must conclude that he had no legitimate children,—which may account for, though it cannot excuse, his neglect; and secondly, with respect to the sums received on dear John's account, I put them all by, capital and interest, deducting only the expense of his first year at Cambridge (the which I could not defray without injuring my own children), and it all stands in his name at Messrs. Drummond's, vested in the Three per Cents. That I have not told him of this was by my poor dear wife's advice; for she said, very sensibly,—and she was a shrewd woman on money matters,—"If he knows he has such a large sum all in the lump, who knows but he may grow idle and extravagant, and spend it at once, like his father before him? Whereas, some time or other he will want to marry, or need money for some particular purpose,—then what a blessing it will be!"

However, my dear madam, as you know the world better than I do, you can now do as you please, both as to communicating to John all the information herein contained as to his parentage, and as to apprising him of the large sum of which he is lawfully possessed. MATTHEW FIELDEN.

P.S.—In justice to poor John Ardworth, and to show that whatever whim he may have conceived about his own child, he had still a heart kind enough to remember mine, though Heaven knows I said nothing about them in my letters, my eldest boy received an offer of an excellent place in a West India merchant's house, and has got on to be chief clerk; and my second son was presented to a living of 117 pounds a year by a gentleman he never heard of. Though I never traced these good acts to Ardworth, from whom else could they come?

Ardworth put down the paper without a word; and Lucretia, who had watched him while he read, was struck with the self-control he evinced when he came to the end of the disclosure. She laid her hand on his and said,—

"Courage! you have lost nothing!"

"Nothing!" said Ardworth, with a bitter smile. "A father's love and a father's name,—nothing!"

"But," exclaimed Lucretia, "is this man your father? Does a father's heart beat in one line of those hard sentences? No, no; it seems to me probable,—it seems to me almost certain, that you are—" She stopped, and continued, with a calmer accent, "near to my own blood. I am now in England, in London, to prosecute the inquiry built upon that hope. If so, if so, you shall—" Madame Dalibard again stopped abruptly, and there was something terrible in the very exultation of her countenance. She drew a long breath, and resumed, with an evident effort at self-command, "If so, I have a right to the interest I feel for you. Suffer me yet to be silent as to the grounds of my belief, and—and—love me a little in the mean while!"

Her voice trembled, as if with rushing tears, at these last words, and there was almost an agony in the tone in which they were said, and in the gesture of the clasped hands she held out to him.

Much moved (amidst all his mingled emotions at the tale thus made known to him) by the manner and voice of the narrator, Ardworth bent down and kissed the extended hands. Then he rose abruptly, walked to and fro the room, muttering to himself, paused opposite the window, threw it open, as for air, and, indeed, fairly gasped for breath. When he turned round, however, his face was composed, and folding his arms on his large breast with a sudden action, he said aloud, and yet rather to himself than to his listener,—

"What matter, after all, by what name men call our fathers? We ourselves make our own fate! Bastard or noble, not a jot care I. Give me ancestors, I will not disgrace them; raze from my lot even the very name of father, and my sons shall have an ancestor in me!"

As he thus spoke, there was a rough grandeur in his hard face and the strong ease of his powerful form. And while thus standing and thus looking, the door opened, and Varney walked in abruptly.

These two men had met occasionally at Madame Dalibard's, but no intimacy had been established between them. Varney was formal and distant to Ardworth, and Ardworth felt a repugnance to Varney. With the instinct of sound, sterling, weighty natures, he detected at once, and disliked heartily, that something of gaudy, false, exaggerated, and hollow which pervaded Gabriel Varney's talk and manner,—even the trick of his walk and the cut of his dress. And Ardworth wanted that boyish and beautiful luxuriance of character which belonged to Percival St. John, easy to please and to be pleased, and expanding into the warmth of admiration for all talent and all distinction. For art, if not the highest, Ardworth cared not a straw; it was nothing to him that Varney painted and composed, and ran showily through the jargon of literary babble, or toyed with the puzzles of unsatisfying metaphysics. He saw but a charlatan, and he had not yet learned from experience what strength and what danger lie hid in the boa parading its colours in the sun, and shifting, in the sensual sportiveness of its being, from bough to bough.

Varney halted in the middle of the room as his eye rested first on Ardworth, and then glanced towards Madame Dalibard. But Ardworth, jarred from his reverie or resolves by the sound of a voice discordant to his ear at all times, especially in the mood which then possessed him, scarcely returned Varney's salutation, buttoned his coat over his chest, seized his hat, and upsetting two chairs, and very considerably disturbing the gravity of a round table, forced his way to Madame Dalibard, pressed her hand, and said in a whisper, "I shall see you again soon," and vanished.

Varney, smoothing his hair with fingers that shone with rings, slid into the seat next Madame Dalibard, which Ardworth had lately occupied, and said: "If I were a Clytemnestra, I should dread an Orestes in such a son!"

Madame Dalibard shot towards the speaker one of the sidelong, suspicious glances which of old had characterized Lucretia, and said,—

"Clytemnestra was happy! The Furies slept to her crime, and haunted but the avenger."

"Hist!" said Varney.

The door opened, and Ardworth reappeared.

"I quite forgot what I half came to know. How is Helen? Did she return home safe?"

"Safe—yes!"

"Dear girl, I am glad to hear it! Where is she? Not gone to those Miverses again? I am no aristocrat, but why should one couple together refinement and vulgarity?"

"Mr. Ardworth," said Madame Dalibard, with haughty coldness, "my niece is under my care, and you will permit me to judge for myself how to discharge the trust. Mr. Mivers is her own relation,—a nearer one than you are."

Not at all abashed by the rebuke, Ardworth said carelessly: "Well, I shall talk to you again on that subject. Meanwhile, pray give my love to her,—Helen, I mean."

Madame Dalibard half rose in her chair, then sank back again, motioning with her hand to Ardworth to approach. Varney rose and walked to the window, as if sensible that something was about to be said not meant for his ear.

When Ardworth was close to her chair, Madame Dalibard grasped his hand with a vigour that

surprised him, and drawing him nearer still, whispered as he bent down,—

"I will give Helen your love, if it is a cousin's, or, if you will, a brother's love. Do you intend—do you feel—an other, a warmer love? Speak, sir!" and drawing suddenly back, she gazed on his face with a stern and menacing expression, her teeth set, and the lips firmly pressed together.

Ardworth, though a little startled, and half angry, answered with the low, ironical laugh not uncommon to him, "Pish! you ladies are apt to think us men much greater fools than we are. A briefless lawyer is not very inflammable tinder. Yes, a cousin's love,—quite enough. Poor little Helen! time enough to put other notions into her head; and then— she will have a sweetheart, gay and handsome like herself!"

"Ay," said Madame Dalibard, with a slight smile, "ay, I am satisfied. Come soon."

Ardworth nodded, and hurried down the stairs. As he gained the door, he caught sight of Helen at a distance, bending over a flower-bed in the neglected garden. He paused, irresolute, a moment. "No," he muttered to himself, "no; I am fit company only for myself! A long walk into the fields, and then away with these mists round the Past and Future; the Present at least is mine!"

CHAPTER V.

THE WEAVERS AND THE WOOF.

"And what," said Varney,— "what, while we are pursuing a fancied clew, and seeking to provide first a name, and then a fortune for this young lawyer,—what steps have you really taken to meet the danger that menaces me,—to secure, if our inquiries fail, an independence for yourself? Months have elapsed, and you have still shrunk from advancing the great scheme upon which we built, when the daughter of Susan Mainwaring was admitted to your hearth."

"Why recall me, in these rare moments when I feel myself human still,— why recall me back to the nethermost abyss of revenge and crime? Oh, let me be sure that I have still a son! Even if John Ardworth, with his gifts and energies, be denied to me, a son, though in rags, I will give him wealth!—a son, though ignorant as the merest boor, I will pour into his brain my dark wisdom! A son! a son! my heart swells at the word. Ah, you sneer! Yes, my heart swells, but not with the mawkish fondness of a feeble mother. In a son, I shall live again,—transmigrate from this tortured and horrible life of mine; drink back my youth. In him I shall rise from my fall,—strong in his power, great in his grandeur. It is because I was born a woman,—had woman's poor passions and infirm weakness,—that I am what I am. I would transfer myself into the soul of man,—man, who has the strength to act, and the privilege to rise. Into the bronze of man's nature I would pour the experience which has broken, with its fierce elements, the puny vessel of clay. Yes, Gabriel, in return for all I have done and sacrificed for you, I ask but co-operation in that one hope of my shattered and storm-beat being. Bear, forbear, await; risk not that hope by some wretched, peddling crime which will bring on us both detection,—some wanton revelry in guilt, which is not worth the terror that treads upon its heels."

"You forget," answered Varney, with a kind of submissive sullenness,—for whatever had passed between these two persons in their secret and fearful intimacy, there was still a power in Lucretia, surviving her fall amidst the fiends, that impressed Varney with the only respect he felt for man or woman,— "you forget strangely the nature of our elaborate and master project when you speak of 'peddling crime,' or 'wanton revelry' in guilt! You forget, too, how every hour that we waste deepens the peril that surrounds me, and may sweep from your side the sole companion that can aid you in your objects,—nay, without whom they must wholly fail. Let me speak first of that most urgent danger, for your memory seems short and troubled, since you have learned only to hope the recovery of your son. If this man Stubmore, in whom the trust created by my uncle's will is now vested, once comes to town, once begins to bustle about his accursed projects of transferring the money from the Bank of England, I tell you again and again that my forgery on the bank will be detected, and that transportation will be the smallest penalty inflicted. Part of the forgery, as you know, was committed on your behalf, to find the moneys necessary for the research for your son,—committed on the clear understanding that our project on Helen should repay me, should enable me, perhaps undetected, to restore the sums illegally abstracted, or, at the worst, to confess to Stubmore—whose character I well know—that, oppressed by difficulties, I had yielded to temptation, that I had forged his name (as I had forged his father's) as an

authority to sell the capital from the bank, and that now, in replacing the money, I repaid my error and threw myself on his indulgence, on his silence. I say that I know enough of the man to know that I should be thus cheaply saved, or at the worst, I should have but to strengthen his compassion by a bribe to his avarice; but if I cannot replace the money, I am lost."

"Well, well," said Lucretia; "the money you shall have, let me but find my son, and—"

"Grant me patience!" cried Varney, impetuously. "But what can your son do, if found, unless you endow him with the heritage of Laughton? To do that, Helen, who comes next to Percival St. John in the course of the entail, must cease to live! Have I not aided, am I not aiding you hourly, in your grand objects? This evening I shall see a man whom I have long lost sight of, but who has acquired in a lawyer's life the true scent after evidence: if that evidence exist, it shall be found. I have just learned his address. By tomorrow he shall be on the track. I have stinted myself to save from the results of the last forgery the gold to whet his zeal. For the rest, as I have said, your design involves the removal of two lives. Already over the one more difficult to slay the shadow creeps and the pall hangs. I have won, as you wished, and as was necessary, young St. John's familiar acquaintance; when the hour comes, he is in my hands."

Lucretia smiled sternly. "So!" she said, between her ground teeth, "the father forbade me the house that was my heritage! I have but to lift a finger and breathe a word, and, desolate as I am, I thrust from that home the son! The spoiler left me the world,—I leave his son the grave!"

"But," said Varney, doggedly pursuing his dreadful object, "why force me to repeat that his is not the only life between you and your son's inheritance? St. John gone, Helen still remains. And what, if your researches fail, are we to lose the rich harvest which Helen will yield us,—a harvest you reap with the same sickle which gathers in your revenge? Do you no longer see in Helen's face the features of her mother? Is the perfidy of William Mainwaring forgotten or forgiven?"

"Gabriel Varney," said Lucretia, in a hollow and tremulous voice, "when in that hour in which my whole being was revulsed, and I heard the cord snap from the anchor, and saw the demons of the storm gather round my bark; when in that hour I stooped calmly down and kissed my rival's brow,—I murmured an oath which seemed not inspired by my own soul, but by an influence henceforth given to my fate: I vowed that the perfidy dealt to me should be repaid; I vowed that the ruin of my own existence should fall on the brow which I kissed. I vowed that if shame and disgrace were to supply the inheritance I had forfeited, I would not stand alone amidst the scorn of the pitiless world. In the vision of my agony, I saw, afar, the altar dressed and the bride-chamber prepared; and I breathed my curse, strong as prophecy, on the marriage-hearth and the marriage-bed. Why dream, then, that I would rescue the loathed child of that loathed union from your grasp? But is the time come? Yours may be come: is mine?"

Something so awful there was in the look of his accomplice, so intense in the hate of her low voice, that Varney, wretch as he was, and contemplating at that very hour the foulest and most hideous guilt, drew back, appalled.

Madame Dalibard resumed, and in a somewhat softer tone, but softened only by the anguish of despair.

"Oh, had it been otherwise, what might I have been! Given over from that hour to the very incarnation of plotting crime, none to resist the evil impulse of my own maddening heart, the partner, forced on me by fate, leading me deeper and deeper into the inextricable hell,—from that hour fraud upon fraud, guilt upon guilt, infamy heaped on infamy, till I stand a marvel to myself that the thunderbolt falls not, that Nature thrusts not from her breast a living outrage on all her laws! Was I not justified in the desire of retribution? Every step that I fell, every glance that I gave to the gulf below, increased but in me the desire for revenge. All my acts had flowed from one fount: should the stream roll pollution, and the fount spring pure?"

"You have had your revenge on your rival and her husband."

"I had it, and I passed on!" said Lucretia, with nostrils dilated as with haughty triumph; "they were crushed, and I suffered them to live! Nay, when, by chance, I heard of William Mainwaring's death, I bowed down my head, and I almost think I wept. The old days came back upon me. Yes, I wept! But I had not destroyed their love. No, no; there I had miserably failed. A pledge of that love lived. I had left their hearth barren; Fate sent them a comfort which I had not foreseen. And suddenly my hate returned, my wrongs rose again, my vengeance was not sated. The love that had destroyed more than my life,—my soul,—rose again and cursed me in the face of Helen. The oath which I took when I kissed my rival's brow, demanded another prey when I kissed the child of those nuptials."

"You are prepared at last, then, to act?" cried Varney, in a tone of savage joy.

At that moment, close under the window, rose, sudden and sweet, the voice of one singing,—the young voice of Helen. The words were so distinct that they came to the ears of the dark-plotting and guilty pair. In the song itself there was little to remark or peculiarly apposite to the consciences of those who heard; yet in the extreme and touching purity of the voice, and in the innocence of the general spirit of the words, trite as might be the image they conveyed, there was something that contrasted so fearfully their own thoughts and minds that they sat silent, looking vacantly into each other's faces, and shrinking perhaps to turn their eyes within themselves.

HELEN'S HYMN.

Ye fade, yet still how sweet, ye Flowers! Your scent outlives the bloom! So, Father, may my mortal hours Grow sweeter towards the tomb!

In withered leaves a healing cure The simple gleaners find;
So may our withered hopes endure In virtues left behind!

Oh, not to me be vainly given The lesson ye bestow, Of thoughts that rise in sweets to Heaven, And turn to use below.

The song died, but still the listeners remained silent, till at length, shaking off the effect, with his laugh of discordant irony, Varney said,- -

"Sweet innocence, fresh from the nursery! Would it not be sin to suffer the world to mar it? You hear the prayer: why not grant it, and let the flower 'turn to use below'?"

"Ah, but could it wither first!" muttered Lucretia, with an accent of suppressed rage. "Do you think that her—that his—daughter is to me but a vulgar life to be sacrificed merely for gold? Imagine away your sex, man! Women only know what I—such as I, woman still—feel in the presence of the pure! Do you fancy that I should not have held death a blessing if death could have found me in youth such as Helen is? Ah, could she but live to suffer! Die! Well, since it must be, since my son requires the sacrifice, do as you will with the victim that death mercifully snatches from my grasp. I could have wished to prolong her life, to load it with some fragment of the curse her parents heaped upon me,—baffled love, and ruin, and despair! I could have hoped, in this division of the spoil, that mine had been the vengeance, if yours the gold. You want the life, I the heart,—the heart to torture first; and then—why then more willingly than I do now, could I have thrown the carcass to the jackal!"

"Listen!" began Varney; when the door opened and Helen herself stood unconsciously smiling at the threshold.

CHAPTER VI.

THE LAWYER AND THE BODY-SNATCHER.

That same evening Beck, according to appointment, met Percival and showed him the dreary-looking house which held the fair stranger who had so attracted his youthful fancy. And Percival looked at the high walls with the sailor's bold desire for adventure, while confused visions reflected from plays, operas, and novels, in which scaling walls with rope-ladders and dark-lanterns was represented as the natural vocation of a lover, flitted across his brain; and certainly he gave a deep sigh as his common-sense plucked him back from such romance. However, having now ascertained the house, it would be easy to learn the name of its inmates, and to watch or make his opportunity. As slowly and reluctantly he walked back to the spot where he had left his cabriolet, he entered into some desultory conversation with his strange guide; and the pity he had before conceived for Beck increased upon him as he talked and listened. This benighted mind, only illumined by a kind of miserable astuteness and that "cunning of the belly" which is born of want to engender avarice; this joyless temperament; this age in youth; this living reproach, rising up from the stones of London against our social indifference to the souls which wither and rot under the hard eyes of science and the deaf ears of wealth,—had a pathos for his lively sympathies and his fresh heart.

"If ever you want a friend, come to me," said St. John, abruptly.

The sweeper stared, and a gleam of diviner nature, a ray of gratitude and unselfish devotion, darted through the fog and darkness of his mind. He stood, with his hat off, watching the wheels of the cabriolet as it bore away the happy child of fortune, and then, shaking his head, as at some puzzle that perplexed and defied his comprehension, strode back to the town and bent his way homeward.

Between two and three hours after Percival thus parted from the sweeper, a man whose dress was little in accordance with the scene in which we present him, threaded his way through a foul labyrinth of alleys in the worst part of St. Giles's,—a neighbourhood, indeed, carefully shunned at dusk by wealthy passengers; for here dwelt not only Penury in its grimmest shape, but the desperate and dangerous guilt which is not to be lightly encountered in its haunts and domiciles. Here children imbibe vice with their mother's milk. Here Prostitution, commencing with childhood, grows fierce and sanguinary in the teens, and leagues with theft and murder. Here slinks the pickpocket, here emerges the burglar, here skulks the felon. Yet all about and all around, here, too, may be found virtue in its rarest and noblest form,—virtue outshining circumstance and defying temptation; the virtue of utter poverty, which groans, and yet sins not. So interwoven are these webs of penury and fraud that in one court your life is not safe; but turn to the right hand, and in the other, you might sleep safely in that worse than Irish shealing, though your pockets were full of gold. Through these haunts the ragged and penniless may walk unfearing, for they have nothing to dread from the lawless,—more, perhaps, from the law; but the wealthy, the respectable, the spruce, the dainty, let them beware the spot, unless the policeman is in sight or day is in the skies!

As this passenger, whose appearance, as we have implied, was certainly not that of a denizen, turned into one of the alleys, a rough hand seized him by the arm, and suddenly a group of girls and tatterdemalions issued from a house, in which the lower shutters unclosed showed a light burning, and surrounded him with a hoarse whoop.

The passenger whispered a word in the ear of the grim blackguard who had seized him, and his arm was instantly released.

"Hist! a pal,—he has the catch," said the blackguard, surlily. The group gave way, and by the light of the clear starlit skies, and a single lamp hung at the entrance of the alley, gazed upon the stranger. But they made no effort to detain him; and as he disappeared in the distant shadows, hastened back into the wretched hostlery where they had been merry-making. Meanwhile, the stranger gained a narrow court, and stopped before a house in one of its angles,—a house taller than the rest, so much taller than the rest that it had the effect of a tower; you would have supposed it (perhaps rightly) to be the last remains of some ancient building of importance, around which, as population thickened and fashion changed, the huts below it had insolently sprung up. Quaint and massive pilasters, black with the mire and soot of centuries, flanked the deep-set door; the windows were heavy with mullions and transoms, and strongly barred in the lower floor; but few of the panes were whole, and only here and there had any attempt been made to keep out the wind and rain by rags, paper, old shoes, old hats, and other ingenious contrivances. Beside the door was conveniently placed a row of some ten or twelve bell-pulls, appertaining no doubt to the various lodgments into which the building was subdivided. The stranger did not seem very familiar with the appurtenances of the place. He stood in some suspense as to the proper bell to select; but at last, guided by a brass plate annexed to one of the pulls, which, though it was too dark to decipher the inscription, denoted a claim to superior gentility to the rest of that nameless class, he hazarded a tug, which brought forth a 'larum loud enough to startle the whole court from its stillness.

In a minute or less, the casement in one of the upper stories opened, a head peered forth, and one of those voices peculiar to low debauch—raw, cracked, and hoarse—called out: "Who waits?"

"Is it you, Grabman?" asked the stranger, dubiously.

"Yes,—Nicholas Grabman, attorney-at-law, sir, at your service; and your name?"

"Jason," answered the stranger.

"Ho, there! ho, Beck!" cried the cracked voice to some one within; "go down and open the door."

In a few moments the heavy portal swung and creaked and yawned sullenly, and a gaunt form, half-undressed, with an inch of a farthing rushlight glimmering through a battered lantern in its hand, presented itself to Jason. The last eyed the ragged porter sharply.

"Do you live here?"

"Yes," answered Beck, with the cringe habitual to him. "H-up the ladder, with the rats, drat 'em."

"Well, lead on; hold up the lantern. A devil of a dark place this!" grumbled Jason, as he nearly

stumbled over sundry broken chattels, and gained a flight of rude, black, broken stairs, that creaked under his tread.

"St! 'st!" said Beck between his teeth, as the stranger, halting at the second floor, demanded, in no gentle tones, whether Mr. Grabman lived in the chimney-pots.

"St! 'st! Don't make such a rumpus, or No. 7 will be at you."

"What do I care for No. 7? And who the devil is No. 7?"

"A body-snatcher!" whispered Beck, with a shudder. "He's a dillicut sleeper,—can't abide having his night's rest sp'ilt. And he's the houtrageoustest great cretur when he's h-up in his tantrums; it makes your 'air stand on ind to 'ear him!"

"I should like very much to hear him, then," said the stranger, curiously. And while he spoke, the door of No. 7 opened abruptly. A huge head, covered with matted hair, was thrust for a moment through the aperture, and two dull eyes, that seemed covered with a film like that of the birds which feed on the dead, met the stranger's bold, sparkling orbs.

"Hell and fury!" bawled out the voice of this ogre, like a clap of near thunder, "if you two keep tramp, tramp, there close at my door, I'll make you meat for the surgeons, b—— you!"

"Stop a moment, my civil friend," said the stranger, advancing; "just stand where you are: I should like to make a sketch of your head."

That head protruded farther from the door, and with it an enormous bulk of chest and shoulder. But the adventurous visitor was not to be daunted. He took out, very coolly, a pencil and the back of a letter, and began his sketch.

The body-snatcher stared at him an instant in mute astonishment; but that operation and the composure of the artist were so new to him that they actually inspired him with terror. He slunk back, banged to the door; and the stranger, putting up his implements, said, with a disdainful laugh, to Beck, who had slunk away into a corner,—

"No. 7 knows well how to take care of No. 1. Lead on, and be quick, then!"

As they continued to mount, they heard the body-snatcher growling and blaspheming in his den, and the sound made Beck clamber the quicker, till at the next landing-place he took breath, threw open a door, and Jason, pushing him aside, entered first.

The interior of the room bespoke better circumstances than might have been supposed from the approach; the floor was covered with sundry scraps of carpet, formerly of different hues and patterns, but mellowed by time into one threadbare mass of grease and canvas. There was a good fire on the hearth, though the night was warm; there were sundry volumes piled round the walls, in the binding peculiar to law books; in a corner stood a tall desk, of the fashion used by clerks, perched on tall, slim legs, and companioned by a tall, slim stool. On a table before the fire were scattered the remains of the nightly meal,—broiled bones, the skeleton of a herring; and the steam rose from a tumbler containing a liquid colourless as water, but poisonous as gin.

The room was squalid and dirty, and bespoke mean and slovenly habits; but it did not bespeak penury and want, it had even an air of filthy comfort of its own,—the comfort of the swine in its warm sty. The occupant of the chamber was in keeping with the localities. Figure to yourself a man of middle height, not thin, but void of all muscular flesh,—bloated, puffed, unwholesome. He was dressed in a gray-flannel gown and short breeches, the stockings wrinkled and distained, the feet in slippers. The stomach was that of a portly man, the legs were those of a skeleton; the cheeks full and swollen, like a ploughboy's, but livid, bespeckled, of a dull lead-colour, like a patient in the dropsy. The head, covered in patches with thin, yellowish hair, gave some promise of intellect, for the forehead was high, and appeared still more so from partial baldness; the eyes, embedded in fat and wrinkled skin, were small and lustreless, but they still had that acute look which education and ability communicate to the human orb; the mouth most showed the animal,—full-lipped, coarse, and sensual; while behind one of two great ears stuck a pen.

You see before you, then, this slatternly figure,—slipshod, half-clothed, with a sort of shabby demigentility about it, half ragamuffin, half clerk; while in strong contrast appeared the new-comer, scrupulously neat, new, with bright black-satin stock, coat cut jauntily to the waist, varnished boots, kid gloves, and trim mustache.

Behind this sleek and comely personage, on knock-knees, in torn shirt open at the throat, with

apathetic, listless, unlighted face, stood the lean and gawky Beck.

"Set a chair for the gentleman," said the inmate of the chamber to Beck, with a dignified wave of the hand.

"How do you do, Mr.—Mr.—humph—Jason? How do you do? Always smart and blooming; the world thrives with you."

"The world is a farm that thrives with all who till it properly, Grabman," answered Jason, dryly; and with his handkerchief he carefully dusted the chair, on which he then daintily deposited his person.

"But who is your Ganymede, your valet, your gentleman-usher?"

"Oh, a lad about town who lodges above and does odd jobs for me,—brushes my coat, cleans my shoes, and after his day's work goes an errand now and then. Make yourself scarce, Beck! Anatomy, vanish!"

Beck grinned, nodded, pulled hard at a flake of his hair, and closed the door.

"One of your brotherhood, that?" asked Jason, carelessly.

"He, oaf? No," said Grabman, with profound contempt in his sickly visage. "He works for his bread,—instinct! Turnspits and truffle-dogs and some silly men have it! What an age since we met! Shall I mix you a tumbler?"

"You know I never drink your vile spirits; though in Champagne and Bordeaux I am any man's match."

"And how the devil do you keep old black thoughts out of your mind by those washy potations?"

"Old black thoughts—of what?"

"Of black actions, Jason. We have not met since you paid me for recommending the nurse who attended your uncle in his last illness."

"Well, poor coward?"

Grabman knit his thin eyebrows and gnawed his blubber lips.

"I am no coward, as you know."

"Not when a thing is to be done, but after it is done. You brave the substance, and tremble at the shadow. I dare say you see ugly goblins in the dark, Grabman?"

"Ay, ay; but it is no use talking to you. You call yourself Jason because of your yellow hair, or your love for the golden fleece; but your old comrades call you 'Rattlesnake,' and you have its blood, as its venom."

"And its charm, man," added Jason, with a strange smile, that, though hypocritical and constrained, had yet a certain softness, and added greatly to the comeliness of features which many might call beautiful, and all would allow to be regular and symmetrical. "I shall find at least ten love-letters on my table when I go home. But enough of these fopperies, I am here on business."

"Law, of course; I am your man. Who's the victim?" and a hideous grin on Grabman's face contrasted the sleek smile that yet lingered upon his visitor's.

"No; something less hazardous, but not less lucrative than our old practices. This is a business that may bring you hundreds, thousands; that may take you from this hovel to speculate at the West End; that may change your gin into Lafitte, and your herring into venison; that may lift the broken attorney again upon the wheel,—again to roll down, it may be; but that is your affair."

"Fore Gad, open the case," cried Grabman, eagerly, and shoving aside the ignoble relics of his supper, he leaned his elbows on the table and his chin on his damp palms, while eyes that positively brightened into an expression of greedy and relentless intelligence were fixed upon his visitor.

"The case runs thus," said Jason. "Once upon a time there lived, at an old house in Hampshire called Laughton, a wealthy baronet named St. John. He was a bachelor, his estates at his own disposal. He had two nieces and a more distant kinsman. His eldest niece lived with him,—she was supposed to be destined for his heiress; circumstances needless to relate brought upon this girl her uncle's displeasure,—she was dismissed his house. Shortly afterwards he died, leaving to his kinsman—a Mr.

Vernon- his estates, with remainder to Vernon's issue, and in default thereof, first to the issue of the younger niece, next to that of the elder and disinherited one. The elder married, and was left a widow without children. She married again, and had a son. Her second husband, for some reason or other, conceived ill opinions of his wife. In his last illness (he did not live long) he resolved to punish the wife by robbing the mother. He sent away the son, nor have we been able to discover him since. It is that son whom you are to find."

"I see, I see; go on," said Grabman. "This son is now the remainderman. How lost? When? What year? What trace?"

"Patience. You will find in this paper the date of the loss and the age of the child, then a mere infant. Now for the trace. This husband—did I tell you his name? No? Alfred Braddell—had one friend more intimate than the rest,—John Walter Ardworth, a cashiered officer, a ruined man, pursued by bill-brokers, Jews, and bailiffs. To this man we have lately had reason to believe that the child was given. Ardworth, however, was shortly afterwards obliged to fly his creditors. We know that he went to India; but if residing there, it must have been under some new name, and we fear he is now dead. All our inquiries, at least after this man, have been fruitless. Before he went abroad, he left with his old tutor a child corresponding in age to that of Mrs. Braddell's. In this child she thinks she recognizes her son. All that you have to do is to trace his identity by good legal evidence. Don't smile in that foolish way,—I mean sound, bona fide evidence that will stand the fire of cross-examination; you know what that is! You will therefore find out,—first, whether Braddell did consign his child to Ardworth, and, if so, you must then follow Ardworth, with that child in his keeping, to Matthew Fielden's house, whose address you find noted in the paper I gave you, together with many other memoranda as to Ardworth's creditors and those whom he is likely to have come across."

"John Ardworth, I see!"

"John Walter Ardworth,—commonly called Walter; he, like me, preferred to be known only by his second baptismal name. He, because of a favourite Radical godfather; I, because Honore is an inconvenient Gallicism. And perhaps when Honore Mirabeau (my godfather) went out of fashion with the sans-culottes, my father thought Gabriel a safer designation. Now I have told you all."

"What is the mother's maiden name?"

"Her maiden name was Clavering; she was married under that of Dalibard, her first husband."

"And," said Grabman, looking over the notes in the paper given to him, "it is at Liverpool that the husband died, and whence the child was sent away?"

"It is so; to Liverpool you will go first. I tell you fairly, the task is difficult, for hitherto it has foiled me. I knew but one man who, without flattery, could succeed, and therefore I spared no pains to find out Nicholas Grabman. You have the true ferret's faculty; you, too, are a lawyer, and snuff evidence in every breath. Find us a son,—a legal son,—a son to be shown in a court of law, and the moment he steps into the lands and the Hall of Laughton, you have five thousand pounds."

"Can I have a bond to that effect?"

"My bond, I fear, is worth no more than my word. Trust to the last; if I break it, you know enough of my secrets to hang me!"

"Don't talk of hanging; I hate that subject. But stop. If found, does this son succeed? Did this Mr. Vernon leave no heir; this other sister continue single, or prove barren?"

"Oh, true! He, Mr. Vernon, who by will took the name of St. John, he left issue; but only one son still survives, a minor and unmarried. The sister, too, left a daughter; both are poor, sickly creatures,—their lives not worth a straw. Never mind them. You find Vincent Braddell, and he will not be long out of his property, nor you out of your 5,000 pounds! You see, under these circumstances a bond might become dangerous evidence!"

Grabman emitted a fearful and tremulous chuckle,—a laugh like the laugh of a superstitious man when you talk to him of ghosts and churchyards. He chuckled, and his hair bristled. But after a pause, in which he seemed to wrestle with his own conscience, he said: "Well, well, you are a strange man, Jason; you love your joke. I have nothing to do except to find out this ultimate remainderman; mind that!"

"Perfectly; nothing like subdivision of labour."

"The search will be expensive."

"There is oil for your wheels," answered Jason, putting a note-book into his confidant's hands. "But mind you waste it not. No tricks, no false play, with me; you know Jason, or, if you like the name better, you know the Rattlesnake!"

"I will account for every penny," said Grabman, eagerly, and clasping his hands, while his pale face grew livid.

"I do not doubt it, my quill-driver. Look sharp, start to-morrow. Get thyself decent clothes, be sober, cleanly, and respectable. Act as a man who sees before him 5,000 pounds. And now, light me downstairs."

With the candle in his hand, Grabman stole down the rugged steps even more timorously than Beck had ascended them, and put his finger to his mouth as they came in the dread vicinity of No. 7. But Jason, or rather Gabriel Varney, with that fearless, reckless bravado of temper which, while causing half his guilt, threw at times a false glitter over its baseness, piqued by the cowardice of his comrade, gave a lusty kick at the closed door, and shouted out: "Old grave-stealer, come out, and let me finish your picture. Out, out! I say, out!" Grabman left the candle on the steps, and made but three bounds to his own room.

At the third shout of his disturber the resurrection-man threw open his door violently and appeared at the gap, the upward flare of the candle showing the deep lines ploughed in his hideous face, and the immense strength of his gigantic trunk and limbs. Slight, fair, and delicate as he was, Varney eyed him deliberately, and trembled not.

"What do you want with me?" said the terrible voice, tremulous with rage.

"Only to finish your portrait as Pluto. He was the god of Hell, you know."

The next moment the vast hand of the ogre hung like a great cloud over Gabriel Varney. This last, ever on his guard, sprang aside, and the light gleamed on the steel of a pistol. "Hands off! Or—"

The click of the pistol-cock finished the sentence. The ruffian halted. A glare of disappointed fury gave a momentary lustre to his dull eyes. "P'r'aps I shall meet you again one o' these days, or nights, and I shall know ye in ten thousand."

"Nothing like a bird in the hand, Master Grave-stealer. Where can we ever meet again?"

"P'r'aps in the fields, p'r'aps on the road, p'r'aps at the Old Bailey, p'r'aps at the gallows, p'r'aps in the convict-ship. I knows what that is! I was chained night and day once to a chap jist like you. Didn't I break his spurit; didn't I spile his sleep! Ho, ho! you looks a bit less varmently howdacious now, my flash cove!"

Varney hitherto had not known one pang of fear, one quicker beat of the heart before. But the image presented to his irritable fancy (always prone to brood over terrors),—the image of that companion chained to him night and day,—suddenly quelled his courage; the image stood before him palpably like the Oulos Oneiros,—the Evil Dream of the Greeks.

He breathed loud. The body-stealer's stupid sense saw that he had produced the usual effect of terror, which gratified his brutal self-esteem; he retreated slowly, inch by inch, to the door, followed by Varney's appalled and staring eye, and closed it with such violence that the candle was extinguished.

Varney, not daring,—yes, literally not daring,—to call aloud to Grabman for another light, crept down the dark stairs with hurried, ghostlike steps; and after groping at the door-handle with one hand, while the other grasped his pistol with a strain of horror, he succeeded at last in winning access to the street, and stood a moment to collect himself in the open air,—the damps upon his forehead, and his limbs trembling like one who has escaped by a hairbreadth the crash of a falling house.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK LUCRETIA — VOLUME 04 ***

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