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BOOK THIRD.

INITIAL CHAPTER.

SHOWING HOW MY NOVEL CAME TO BE CALLED "MY NOVEL."

"I am not displeased with your novel, so far as it has gone," said my father, graciously; "though as for the Sermon—" Here I trembled; but the ladies, Heaven bless them! had taken Parson Dale under their special protection; and observing that my father was puckering up his brows critically, they rushed forward boldly in defence of The Sermon, and Mr. Caxton was forced to beat a retreat. However, like a skilful general, he renewed the assault upon outposts less gallantly guarded. But as it is not my business to betray my weak points, I leave it to the ingenuity of cavillers to discover the places at which the Author of "Human Error" directed his great guns.

"But," said the captain, "you are a lad of too much spirit, Pisistratus, to keep us always in the obscure country quarters of Hazeldean,—you will march us out into open service before you have done with us?"

PISISTRATUS (magisterially, for he has been somewhat nettled by Mr. Caxton's remarks, and he puts on an air of dignity in order to awe away minor assailants).—"Yes, Captain Roland; not yet a while, but all in good time. I have not stinted myself in canvas, and behind my foreground of the Hall and the Parsonage I propose hereafter to open some lengthened perspective of the varieties of English life—"

MR. CAXTON.—"Hum!"

BLANCHE (putting her hand on my father's lip).—"We shall know better the design, perhaps, when we know the title. Pray, Mr. Author, what is the title?"

MY MOTHER (with more animation than usual).—"Ay, Sisty, the title!"

PISISTRATUS (startled).—"The title! By the soul of Cervantes! I have never yet thought of a title!"

CAPTAIN ROLAND (solemnly).—"There is a great deal in a good title. As a novel reader, I know that by experience."

MR. SQUILLS.—"Certainly; there is not a catchpenny in the world but what goes down, if the title be apt and seductive. Witness 'Old Parr's Life Pills.' Sell by the thousand, Sir, when my 'Pills for Weak Stomachs,' which I believe to be just the same compound, never paid for the advertising."

MR. CAXTON.—"Parr's Life Pills! a fine stroke of genius. It is not every one who has a weak stomach, or time to attend to it if he have. But who would not swallow a pill to live to a hundred and fifty-two?"

PISISTRATUS (stirring the fire in great excitement).—"My title! my title!—what shall be my title?"

MR. CAXTON (thrusting his hand into his waistcoat, and in his most didactic of tones).—"From a remote period, the choice of a title has perplexed the scribbling portion of mankind. We may guess how their invention has been racked by the strange contortions it has produced. To begin with the Hebrews. 'The Lips of the Sleeping' (Labia Dormientium)— what book did you suppose that title to designate?—A Catalogue of Rabbinical Writers! Again, imagine some young lady of old captivated by the sentimental title of 'The Pomegranate with its Flower,' and opening on a Treatise on the Jewish Ceremonials! Let us turn to the Romans. Aulus Gellius commences his pleasant gossiping 'Noctes' with a list of the titles in fashion in his day. For instance, 'The Muses' and 'The Veil,' 'The Cornucopia,' 'The Beehive,' and 'The Meadow.' Some titles, indeed, were more truculent, and promised food to those who love to sup upon horrors,—such as 'The Torch,' 'The Poniard,' 'The Stiletto'—"

PISISTRATUS (impatiently).—"Yes, sir, but to come to My Novel."

MR. CAXTON (unheeding the interruption).—"You see you have a fine choice here, and of a nature pleasing, and not unfamiliar, to a classical reader; or you may borrow a hint from the early dramatic writers."

PISISTRATUS (more hopefully).—"Ay, there is something in the Drama akin to the Novel. Now, perhaps, I may catch an idea."

MR. CAXTON.—"For instance, the author of the 'Curiosities of Literature' (from whom, by the way, I am plagiarizing much of the information I bestow upon you) tells us of a Spanish gentleman who wrote a Comedy, by which he intended to serve what he took for Moral Philosophy."

PISISTRATUS (eagerly).—"Well, sir?"

MR. CAXTON.—"And called it 'The Pain of the Sleep of the World.'"

PISISTRATUS.—"Very comic, indeed, sir."

MR. CAXTON.—"Grave things were then called Comedies, as old things are now called Novels. Then there are all the titles of early Romance itself at your disposal,—'Theagenes and Chariclea' or 'The Ass' of Longus, or 'The Golden Ass' of Apuleius, or the titles of Gothic Romance, such as 'The most elegant, delicious, mellifluous, and delightful History of Perceforest, King of Great Britain.'" And therewith my father ran over a list of names as long as the Directory, and about as amusing.

"Well, to my taste," said my mother, "the novels I used to read when a girl (for I have not read many since, I am ashamed to say)—"

MR. CAXTON.—"No, you need not be at all ashamed of it, Kitty."

MY MOTHER (proceeding).—"Were much more inviting than any you mention, Austin."

THE CAPTAIN.—"True."

MR. SQUILLS.—"Certainly. Nothing like them nowadays!"

MY MOTHER.—"Says she to her Neighbour, What?"

THE CAPTAIN.—"The Unknown, or the Northern Gallery'—"

MR. SQUILLS.—"There is a Secret; Find it out!"

PISISTRATUS (pushed to the verge of human endurance, and upsetting tongs, poker, and fire-shovel).—"What nonsense you are talking, all of you! For Heaven's sake consider what an important matter we are called upon to decide. It is not now the titles of those very respectable works which issued from the Minerva Press that I ask you to remember,—it is to invent a title for mine,—My Novel!"

MR. CAXTON (clapping his hands gently).—"Excellent! capital! Nothing can be better; simple, natural, pertinent, concise—"

PISISTRATUS.—"What is it, sir, what is it? Have you really thought of a title to My Novel?"

MR. CAXTON.—"You have hit it yourself,—'My Novel.' It is your Novel; people will know it is your Novel. Turn and twist the English language as you will, be as allegorical as Hebrew, Greek, Roman, Fabulist, or Puritan, still, after all, it is your Novel, and nothing more nor less than your Novel."

PISISTRATUS (thoughtfully, and sounding the words various ways).—"My Novel!—um-um! 'My Novel!' rather bold—and curt, eh?"

MR. CAXTON.—"Add what you say you intend it to depict,—Varieties in English Life."

MY MOTHER.—"My Novel; or, Varieties in English Life"—I don't think it sounds amiss. What say you, Roland? Would it attract you in a catalogue?"

My uncle hesitates, when Mr. Caxton exclaims imperiously.—"The thing is settled! Don't disturb Camarina."

SQUILLS.—"If it be not too great a liberty, pray who or what is Camarina?"

MR. CAXTON.—"Camarina, Mr. Squills, was a lake, apt to be low, and then liable to be muddy; and 'Don't disturb Camarina' was a Greek proverb derived from an oracle of Apollo; and from that Greek proverb, no doubt, comes the origin of the injunction, 'Quieta non movere,' which became the favourite maxim of Sir Robert Walpole and Parson Dale. The Greek line, Mr. Squills" (here my father's memory began to warm), "is preserved by Stephanus Byzantinus, 'De Urbibus,'

[Greek proverb]

Zenobius explains it in his proverbs; Suidas repeats Zenobius; Lucian alludes to it; so does Virgil in the Third Book of the *Aeneid*; and Silius Italicus imitates Virgil,—

"Et cui non licitum fatis Camarina moveri."

"Parson Dale, as a clergyman and a scholar, had, no doubt, these authorities at his fingers' end. And I wonder he did not quote them," quoth my father; "but to be sure he is represented as a mild man, and so might not wish to humble the squire over-much in the presence of his family. Meanwhile, My Novel is My Novel; and now that, that matter is settled, perhaps the tongs, poker, and shovel may be picked up, the children may go to bed, Blanche and Kitty may speculate apart upon the future dignities of the Neogilos,—taking care, nevertheless, to finish the new pinbefores he requires for the present; Roland may cast up his account book, Mr. Squills have his brandy and water, and all the world be comfortable, each in his own way. Blanche, come away from the screen, get me my slippers, and leave Pisistratus to himself. [Greek line]—don't disturb Camarina. You see, my dear," added my father kindly, as, after settling himself into his slippers, he detained Blanche's hand in his own,—"you see, my dear, every house has its Camarina. Alan, who is a lazy animal, is quite content to let it alone; but woman, being the more active, bustling, curious creature, is always for giving it a sly stir."

BLANCHE (with female dignity).—"I assure you, that if Pisistratus had not called me, I should not have—"

MR. CAXTON (interrupting her, without lifting his eyes from the book he had already taken).—"Certainly you would not. I am now in the midst of the great Oxford Controversy. [The same Greek proverb]—don't disturb Camarina."

A dead silence for half-an-hour, at the end of which—

PISISTRATUS (from behind the screen).—"Blanche, my dear, I want to consult you."

Blanche does not stir.

PISISTRATUS.—"Blanche, I say." Blanche glances in triumph towards Mr. Caxton.

MR. CAXTON (laying down his theological tract, and rubbing his spectacles mournfully).—"I hear him, child; I hear him. I retract my vindication of man. Oracles warn in vain: so long as there is a woman on the other side of the screen, it is all up with Camarina."

CHAPTER II.

It is greatly to be regretted that Mr. Stirn was not present at the parson's Discourse; but that valuable functionary was far otherwise engaged,—indeed, during the summer months he was rarely seen at the afternoon service. Not that he cared for being preached at,—not he; Mr. Stirn would have snapped his fingers at the thunders of the Vatican. But the fact was, that Mr. Stirn chose to do a great deal of gratuitous business upon the day of rest. The squire allowed all persons who chose to walk about the park on a Sunday; and many came from a distance to stroll by the lake, or recline under the elms. These visitors were objects of great suspicion, nay, of positive annoyance, to Mr. Stirn— and, indeed, not altogether without reason, for we English have a natural love of liberty, which we are even more apt to display in the grounds of other people than in those which we cultivate ourselves. Sometimes, to his inexpressible and fierce satisfaction, Mr. Stirn fell upon a knot of boys pelting the swans; sometimes he missed a young sapling, and found it in felonious hands, converted into a walking-stick; sometimes he caught a hulking fellow scrambling up the ha-ha to gather a nosegay for his sweetheart from one of poor Mrs. Hazeldean's pet parterres; not infrequently, indeed, when all the family were fairly at church, some curious impertinents forced or sneaked their way into the gardens, in order to peep in at the windows. For these, and various other offences of like magnitude, Mr. Stirn had long, but vainly, sought to induce the squire to withdraw a permission so villanously abused. But though there were times when Mr. Hazeldean grunted and growled, and swore "that he would shut up the park, and fill it [illegally] with mantraps and spring-guns," his anger always evaporated in words. The park was still open to all the world on a Sunday; and that blessed day was therefore converted into a day of travail and wrath to Mr. Stirn. But it was from the last chime of the afternoon-service bell until dusk that the spirit of this vigilant functionary was most perturbed; for, amidst the flocks that gathered from the little hamlets round to the voice of the pastor, there were always some stray sheep, or rather climbing, desultory, vagabond goats, who struck off in all perverse directions, as if for the special purpose of distracting the energetic watchfulness of Mr. Stirn. As soon as church was over, if the day were fine, the whole park became a scene animated with red cloaks or lively shawls, Sunday waistcoats and hats stuck full of wildflowers—which last Mr. Stirn often stoutly maintained to be Mrs. Hazeldean's newest geraniums. Now, on this Sunday, especially, there was an imperative call upon an extra exertion of vigilance on the part of the superintendent,—he had not only to detect ordinary depredators and trespassers; but, first, to discover the authors of the conspiracy against the stocks; and, secondly, to "make an example."

He had begun his rounds, therefore, from the early morning; and just as the afternoon bell was sounding its final peal, he emerged upon the village green from a hedgerow, behind which he had been at watch to observe who had the most suspiciously gathered round the stocks. At that moment the place was deserted. At a distance, the superintendent saw the fast disappearing forms of some belated groups hastening towards the church; in front, the stocks stood staring at him mournfully from its four great eyes, which had been cleansed from the mud, but still looked bleared and stained with the inarks of the recent outrage. Here Mr. Stirn paused, took off his hat, and wiped his brows.

"If I had sum 'un to watch here," thought he, "while I takes a turn by the water-side, p'r'aps summat might come out; p'r'aps them as did it ben't gone to church, but will come sneaking round to look on their willany! as they says murderers are always led back to the place where they ha' left the body. But in this here willage there ben't a man, woman, or child as has any consarn for squire or parish, barring myself." It was just as he arrived at that misanthropical conclusion that Mr. Stirn beheld Leonard Fairfield walking very fast from his own home. The superintendent clapped on his hat, and stuck his right arm akimbo. "Hollo, you, sir," said he, as Lenny now came in hearing, "where be you going at that rate?"

"Please, sir, I be going to church."

"Stop, sir,—stop, Master Lenny. Going to church!—why, the bell's done; and you knows the parson is very angry at them as comes in late, disturbing the congregation. You can't go to church now!"

"Please, sir—"

"I says you can't go to church now. You must learn to think a little of others, lad. You sees how I sweats to serve the squire! and you must serve him too. Why, your mother's got the house and premishes almost rent-free; you ought to have a grateful heart, Leonard Fairfield, and feel for his honour! Poor man! his heart is well-nigh bruk, I am sure, with the goings on."

Leonard opened his innocent blue eyes, while Mr. Stirn dolorously wiped his own.

"Look at that 'ere dumb cretur," said Stirn, suddenly, pointing to the stocks,— "look at it. If it could speak, what would it say, Leonard Fairfield? Answer me that! 'Damn the stocks,' indeed!"

"It was very bad in them to write such naughty words," said Lenny, gravely. "Mother was quite shocked when she heard of it this morning."

MR. STIRN.—"I dare say she was, considering what she pays for the premises;" (insinuatingly) "you does not know who did it,—eh, Lenny?"

LENNY.—"No, sir; indeed I does not!"

MR. STIRN.—"Well, you see, you can't go to church,—prayers half over by this time. You recollect that I put them stocks under your 'sponsibility,' and see the way you's done your duty by 'em! I've half a mind to—"

Mr. Stirn cast his eyes on the eyes of the stocks. "Please, sir," began Lenny again, rather frightened.

"No, I won't please; it ben't pleasing at all. But I forgives you this time, only keep a sharp lookout, lad, in future. Now you must stay here —no, there—under the hedge, and you watches if any persons comes to loiter about, or looks at the stocks, or laughs to hisself, while I go my rounds. I shall be back either afore church is over or just arter; so you stay till I comes, and give me your report. Be sharp, boy, or it will be worse for you and your mother; I can let the premises for L4 a year more to-morrow."

Concluding with that somewhat menacing and very significant remark, and not staying for an answer, Mr. Stirn waved his hand and walked off.

Poor Lenny remained by the stocks, very much dejected, and greatly disliking the neighbourhood to which the was consigned. At length he slowly crept off to the hedge, and sat himself down in the place of espionage pointed out to him. Now, philosophers tell us that what is called the point of honour is a barbarous feudal prejudice. Amongst the higher classes, wherein those feudal prejudices may be supposed to prevail, Lenny Fairfield's occupation would not have been considered peculiarly honourable; neither would it have seemed so to the more turbulent spirits among the humbler orders, who have a point of honour of their own, which consists in the adherence to each other in defiance of all lawful authority. But to Lenny Fairfield, brought up much apart from other boys, and with a profound and grateful reverence for the squire instilled into all his habits of thought, notions of honour bounded themselves to simple honesty and straightforward truth; and as he cherished an unquestioning awe of order and constitutional authority, so it did not appear to him that there was anything derogatory and debasing in being thus set to watch for an offender. On the contrary, as he began to reconcile himself to the loss of the church service, and to enjoy the cool of the summer shade and the occasional chirp of the birds, he got to look on the bright side of the commission to which he was deputed. In youth, at least, everything has its bright side,—even the appointment of Protector to the Parish Stocks. For the stocks itself Leonard had no affection, it is true; but he had no sympathy with its aggressors, and he could well conceive that the squire would be very much hurt at the revolutionary event of the night. "So," thought poor Leonard in his simple heart,—"so, if I can serve his honour, by keeping off mischievous boys, or letting him know who did the thing, I'm sure it would be a proud day for Mother." Then he began to consider that, however ungraciously Mr. Stirn had bestowed on him the appointment, still it was a compliment to him,—showed trust and confidence in him, picked him out from his contemporaries as the sober, moral, pattern boy; and Lenny had a great deal of pride in him, especially in matters of repute and character.

All these things considered, I say, Leonard Fairfield reclined on his lurking-place, if not with positive delight and intoxicating rapture, at least with tolerable content and some complacency.

Mr. Stirn might have been gone a quarter of an hour, when a boy came through a little gate in the park, just opposite to Lenny's retreat in the hedge, and, as if fatigued with walking, or oppressed by the heat of the day, paused on the green for a moment or so, and then advanced under the shade of the great tree which overhung the stocks.

Lenny pricked up his ears, and peeped out jealously.

He had never seen the boy before: it was a strange face to him.

Leonard Fairfield was not fond of strangers; moreover, he had a vague belief that strangers were at the bottom of that desecration of the stocks. The boy, then, was a stranger; but what was his rank? Was he of that grade in society in which the natural offences are or are not consonant to, or harmonious with, outrages upon stocks? On that Lenny Fairfield did not feel quite assured. According to all the experience of the villager, the boy was not dressed like a young gentleman. Leonard's notions of such aristocratic costume were naturally fashioned upon the model of Frank Hazeldean. They represented to him a dazzling vision of snow-white trousers and beautiful blue coats and incomparable cravats. Now the dress of this stranger, though not that of a peasant or of a farmer, did not in any way correspond

with Lenny's notion of the costume of a young gentleman. It looked to him highly disreputable: the coat was covered with mud, and the hat was all manner of shapes, with a gap between the side and crown.

Lenny was puzzled, till it suddenly occurred to him that the gate through which the boy had passed was in the direct path across the park from a small town, the inhabitants of which were in very bad odour at the Hall, —they had immemorably furnished the most daring poachers to the preserves, the most troublesome trespassers on the park, the most unprincipled orchard robbers, and the most disputatious asserters of various problematical rights of way, which, according to the Town, were public, and, according to the Hall, had been private since the Conquest. It was true that the same path led also directly from the squire's house, but it was not probable that the wearer of attire so equivocal had been visiting there. All things considered, Lenny had no doubt in his mind but that the stranger was a shop-boy or 'prentice from the town of Thorndyke; and the notorious repute of that town, coupled with this presumption, made it probable that Lenny now saw before him one of the midnight desecrators of the stocks. As if to confirm the suspicion, which passed through Lenny's mind with a rapidity wholly disproportionate to the number of lines it costs me to convey it, the boy, now standing right before the stocks, bent down and read that pithy anathema with which it was defaced. And having read it, he repeated it aloud, and Lenny actually saw him smile,—such a smile! so disagreeable and sinister! Lenny had never before seen the smile sardonic.

But what were Lenny's pious horror and dismay when this ominous stranger fairly seated himself on the stocks, rested his heels profanely on the lids of two of the four round eyes, and taking out a pencil and a pocket-book, began to write.

Was this audacious Unknown taking an inventory of the church and the Hall for the purposes of conflagration? He looked at one and at the other, with a strange fixed stare as he wrote,—not keeping his eyes on the paper, as Lenny had been taught to do when he sat down to his copy-book. The fact is, that Randal Leslie was tired and faint, and he felt the shock of his fall the more, after the few paces he had walked, so that he was glad to rest himself a few moments; and he took that opportunity to write a line to Frank, to excuse himself for not calling again, intending to tear the leaf on which he wrote out of his pocket-book and leave it at the first cottage he passed, with instructions to take it to the Hall.

While Randal was thus innocently engaged, Lenny came up to him, with the firm and measured pace of one who has resolved, cost what it may, to do his duty. And as Lenny, though brave, was not ferocious, so the anger he felt and the suspicions he entertained only exhibited themselves in the following solemn appeal to the offender's sense of propriety,—"Ben't you ashamed of yourself? Sitting on the squire's new stocks! Do get up, and go along with you!"

Randal turned round sharply; and though, at any other moment, he would have had sense enough to extricate himself very easily from his false position, yet *Nemo mortalium, etc.* No one is always wise. And Randal was in an exceedingly bad humour. The affability towards his inferiors, for which I lately praised him, was entirely lost in the contempt for impertinent snobs natural to an insulted Etonian.

Therefore, eying Lenny with great disdain, Randal answered briefly,—

"You are an insolent young blackguard."

So curt a rejoinder made Lenny's blood fly to his face. Persuaded before that the intruder was some lawless apprentice or shop-lad, he was now more confirmed in that judgment, not only by language so uncivil, but by the truculent glance which accompanied it, and which certainly did not derive any imposing dignity from the mutilated, rakish, hang-dog, ruinous hat, under which it shot its sullen and menacing fire.

Of all the various articles of which our male attire is composed, there is perhaps not one which has so much character and expression as the top covering. A neat, well-brushed, short-napped, gentlemanlike hat, put on with a certain air, gives a distinction and respectability to the whole exterior; whereas, a broken, squashed, higgledy-piggledy sort of a hat, such as Randal Leslie had on, would go far towards transforming the stateliest gentleman who ever walked down St. James's Street into the ideal of a ruffianly scamp.

Now, it is well known that there is nothing more antipathetic to your peasant-boy than a shop-boy. Even on grand political occasions, the rural working-class can rarely be coaxed into sympathy with the trading town class. Your true English peasant is always an aristocrat. Moreover, and irrespectively of this immemorial grudge of class, there is something peculiarly hostile in the relationship between boy and boy when their backs are once up, and they are alone on a quiet bit of green,—something of the game-cock feeling; something that tends to keep alive, in the population of this island (otherwise so lamblike and peaceful), the martial propensity to double the thumb tightly over the four fingers, and make what is called "a fist of it." Dangerous symptoms of these mingled and aggressive sentiments

were visible in Lenny Fairfield at the words and the look of the unprepossessing stranger. And the stranger seemed aware of them; for his pale face grew more pale, and his sullen eye more fixed and more vigilant.

"You get off them stocks," said Lenny, disdainingly to reply to the coarse expressions bestowed on him; and, suiting the action to the word, he gave the intruder what he meant for a shove, but what Randal took for a blow. The Etonian sprang up, and the quickness of his movement, aided but by a slight touch of his hand, made Lenny lose his balance, and sent him neck- and-crop over the stocks. Burning with rage, the young villager rose alertly, and, flying at Randal, struck out right and left.

CHAPTER III.

Aid me, O ye Nine! whom the incomparable Persius satirized his contemporaries for invoking, and then, all of a sudden, invoked on his own behalf,—aid me to describe that famous battle by the stocks, and in defence of the stocks, which was waged by the two representatives of Saxon and Norman England. Here, sober support of law and duty and delegated trust,—*pro aris et focis*; there, haughty invasion and bellicose spirit of knighthood and that respect for name and person which we call "honour." Here, too, hardy physical force,—there, skilful discipline. Here—The Nine are as deaf as a post, and as cold as a stone! Plague take the jades! I can do better without them.

Randal was a year or two older than Lenny, but he was not so tall nor so strong, nor even so active; and after the first blind rush, when the two boys paused, and drew back to breathe, Lenny, eyeing the slight form and hueless cheek of his opponent, and seeing blood trickling from Randal's lip, was seized with an instantaneous and generous remorse. "It was not fair," he thought, "to fight one whom he could beat so easily." So, retreating still farther, and letting his arms fall to his side, he said mildly, "There, let's have no more of it; but go home and be good."

Randal Leslie had no remarkable degree of that constitutional quality called physical courage; but he had some of those moral qualities which supply its place. He was proud, he was vindictive, he had high self-esteem, he had the destructive organ more than the combative,—what had once provoked his wrath it became his instinct to sweep away. Therefore, though all his nerves were quivering, and hot tears were in his eyes, he approached Lenny with the sternness of a gladiator, and said between his teeth, which he set hard, choking back the sob of rage and pain,—

"You have struck me—and you shall not stir from this ground till I have made you repent it. Put up your hands,—defend yourself."

Lenny mechanically obeyed; and he had good need of the admonition; for if before he had had the advantage, now that Randal had recovered the surprise to his nerves, the battle was not to the strong.

Though Leslie had not been a fighting boy at Eton, still his temper had involved him in some conflicts when he was in the lower forms, and he had learned something of the art as well as the practice in pugilism,—an excellent thing too, I am barbarous enough to believe, and which I hope will never quite die out of our public schools. Ah, many a young duke has been a better fellow for life from a fair set-to with a trader's son; and many a trader's son has learned to look a lord more manfully in the face on the hustings, from the recollection of the sound thrashing he once gave to some little Lord Leopold Dawdle.

So Randal now brought his experience and art to bear; put aside those heavy roundabout blows, and darted in his own, quick and sharp, supplying to the natural feebleness of his arm the due momentum of pugilistic mechanics. Ay, and the arm, too, was no longer so feeble; for strange is the strength that comes from passion and pluck!

Poor Lenny, who had never fought before, was bewildered; his sensations grew so entangled that he could never recall them distinctly; he had a dim reminiscence of some breathless impotent rush, of a sudden blindness followed by quick flashes of intolerable light, of a deadly faintness, from which he was roused by sharp pangs—here—there—everywhere; and then all he could remember was, that he was lying on the ground, huddled up and panting hard, while his adversary bent over him with a countenance as dark and livid as Lara himself might have bent over the fallen Otho. For Randal Leslie was not one who, by impulse and nature, subscribed to the noble English maxim, "Never hit a foe when he is down;" and it cost him a strong, if brief, self-struggle not to set his heel on that prostrate form. It was the mind, not the heart, that subdued the savage within him, as muttering something inwardly—certainly not Christian forgiveness—the victor turned gloomily away.

CHAPTER IV.

Just at that precise moment, who should appear but Mr. Stirn! For, in fact, being extremely anxious to get Lenny into disgrace, he had hoped that he should have found the young villager had shirked the commission intrusted to him; and the right-hand man had slyly come back to see if that amiable expectation were realized. He now beheld Lenny rising with some difficulty, still panting hard, and with hysterical sounds akin to what is vulgarly called blubbering, his fine new waistcoat sprinkled with his own blood, which flowed from his nose,—nose that seemed to Lenny Fairfield's feelings to be a nose no more, but a swollen, gigantic, mountainous Slawkenbergian excrescence; in fact, he felt all nose! Turning aghast from this spectacle, Mr. Stirn surveyed, with no more respect than Lenny had manifested, the stranger boy, who had again seated himself on the stocks (whether to recover his breath, or whether to show that his victory was consummated, and that he was in his rights of possession). "Hollo," said Mr. Stirn, "what is all this? What's the matter, Lenny, you blockhead?"

"He will sit there," answered Lenny, in broken gasps, "and he has beat me because I would not let him; but I doesn't mind that," added the villager, trying hard to suppress his tears, "and I am ready again for him—that I am."

"And what do you do lolloping there on them blessed stocks?"

"Looking at the landscape; out of my light, man!"

This tone instantly inspired Mr. Stirn with misgivings: it was a tone so disrespectful to him that he was seized with involuntary respect; who but a gentleman could speak so to Mr. Stirn?

"And may I ask who you be?" said Stirn, falteringly, and half inclined to touch his hat. "What Is your name, pray? What's your bizness?"

"My name is Randal Leslie, and my business was to visit your master's family,—that is, if you are, as I guess from your manner, Mr. Hazeldean's ploughman!"

So saying, Randal rose; and moving on a few paces, turned, and throwing half-a-crown on the road, said to Lenny, "Let that pay you for your bruises, and remember another time how you speak to a gentleman. As for you, fellow,"—and he pointed his scornful hand towards Mr. Stirn, who, with his mouth open, and his hat now fairly off, stood bowing to the earth,—"as for you, give my compliments to Mr. Hazeldean, and say that when he does us the honour to visit us at Rood Hall, I trust that the manners of our villagers will make him ashamed of Hazeldean."

Oh, my poor Squire! Rood Hall ashamed of Hazeldean! If that message had been delivered to you, you would never have looked up again!

With those bitter words, Randal swung himself over the stile that led into the parson's glebe, and left Lenny Fairfield still feeling his nose, and Mr. Stirn still bowing to the earth.

CHAPTER V.

Randal Leslie had a very long walk home; he was bruised and sore from head to foot, and his mind was still more sore and more bruised than his body. But if Randal Leslie had rested himself in the squire's gardens, without walking backwards and indulging in speculations suggested by Marat, and warranted by my Lord Bacon, he would have passed a most agreeable evening, and really availed himself of the squire's wealth by going home in the squire's carriage. But because he chose to take so intellectual a view of property, he tumbled into a ditch; because he tumbled into a ditch, he spoiled his clothes; because he spoiled his clothes, he gave up his visit; because he gave up his visit, he got into the village green, and sat on the stocks with a hat that gave him the air of a fugitive from the treadmill; because he sat on the stocks—with that hat, and a cross face under it—he had been forced into the most discreditable squabble with a clodhopper, and was now limping home, at war with gods and men; ergo (this is a moral that will bear repetition), —ergo, when you walk in a rich man's grounds, be contented to enjoy what is yours, namely, the prospect,—I dare say you will enjoy it more than he does!

CHAPTER VI.

If, in the simplicity of his heart and the crudity of his experience, Lenny Fairfield had conceived it probable that Mr. Stirn would address to him some words in approbation of his gallantry and in sympathy for his bruises, he soon found himself woefully mistaken. That truly great man, worthy prime minister of Hazeldean, might perhaps pardon a dereliction from his orders, if such dereliction proved advantageous to the interests of the service, or redounded to the credit of the chief; but he was inexorable to that worst of diplomatic offences,—an ill-timed, stupid, over-zealous obedience to orders, which, if it established the devotion of the employee, got the employer into what is popularly called a scrape! And though, by those unversed in the intricacies of the human heart, and unacquainted with the especial hearts of prime ministers and right-hand men, it might have seemed natural that Mr. Stirn, as he stood still, hat in hand, in the middle of the road, stung, humbled, and exasperated by the mortification he had received from the lips of Randal Leslie, would have felt that that young gentleman was the proper object of his resentment, yet such a breach of all the etiquette of diplomatic life as resentment towards a superior power was the last idea that would have suggested itself to the profound intellect of the premier of Hazeldean. Still, as rage, like steam, must escape somewhere, Mr. Stirn, on feeling—as he afterwards expressed it to his wife—that his "buzzom was a burstin'," turned with the natural instinct of self-preservation to the safety-valve provided for the explosion; and the vapours within him rushed into vent upon Lenny Fairfield. He clapped his hat on his head fiercely, and thus relieved his "buzzom."

"You young willain! you howdaeious wiper! and so all this blessed Sabbath afternoon, when you ought to have been in church on your marrow-bones, a praying for your betters, you has been a fitting with a young gentleman, and a wisiter to your master, on the wery place of the parridge hinstitution that you was to guard and pectect; and a bloodying it all over, I declares, with your blaggard little nose!" Thus saying, and as if to mend the matter, Mr. Stirn aimed an additional stroke at the offending member; but Lenny mechanically putting up both arms to defend his face, Mr. Stirn struck his knuckles against the large brass buttons that adorned the cuff of the boy's coat-sleeve,—an incident which considerably aggravated his indignation. And Lenny, whose spirit was fairly roused at what the narrowness of his education conceived to be a signal injustice, placing the trunk of the tree between Mr. Stirn and himself, began that task of self-justification which it was equally impolitic to conceive and imprudent to execute, since, in such a case, to justify was to recriminate.

"I wonder at you, Master Stirn,—if Mother could hear you! You know it was you who would not let me go to church; it was you who told me to—"

"Fit a young gentleman, and break the Sabbath," said Mr. Stirn, interrupting him with a withering sneer. "Oh, yes! I told you to disgrace his honour the squire, and me, and the parridge, and bring us all into trouble. But the squire told me to make an example, and I will!" With those words, quick as lightning flashed upon Mr. Stirn's mind the luminous idea of setting Lenny in the very stocks which he had too faithfully guarded. Eureka! the "example" was before him! Here he could gratify his long grudge against the pattern boy; here, by such a selection of the very best lad in the parish, he could strike terror into the worst; here he could appease the offended dignity of Randal Leslie; here was a practical apology to the squire for the affront put upon his young visitor; here, too, there was prompt obedience to the squire's own wish that the stocks should be provided as soon as possible with a tenant. Suiting the action to the thought, Mr. Stirn made a rapid plunge at his victim, caught him by the skirt of his jacket; and in a few seconds more, the jaws of the stocks had opened, and Lenny Fairfield was thrust therein,—a sad spectacle of the reverses of fortune. This done, and while the boy was too astounded, too stupefied, by the suddenness of the calamity, for the resistance he might otherwise have made,—nay, for more than a few inaudible words,—Mr. Stirn hurried from the spot, but not without first picking up and pocketing the half-crown designed for Lenny, and which, so great had been his first emotions, he had hitherto even almost forgotten. He then made his way towards the church, with the intention to place himself close by the door, catch the squire as he came out, whisper to him what had passed, and lead him, with the whole congregation at his heels, to gaze upon the sacrifice offered up to the joint powers of Nemesis and Themis.

CHAPTER VII.

Unaffectedly I say it—upon the honour of a gentleman, and the reputation of an author,—unaffectedly I

say it, no words of mine can do justice to the sensations experienced by Lenny Fairfield, as he sat alone in that place of penance. He felt no more the physical pain of his bruises; the anguish of his mind stifled and overbore all corporeal suffering,—an anguish as great as the childish breast is capable of holding.

For first and deepest of all, and earliest felt, was the burning sense of injustice. He had, it might be with erring judgment, but with all honesty, earnestness, and zeal, executed the commission entrusted to him; he had stood forth manfully in discharge of his duty; he had fought for it, suffered for it, bled for it. This was his reward! Now in Lenny's mind there was pre-eminently that quality which distinguishes the Anglo Saxon race,—the sense of justice. It was perhaps the strongest principle in his moral constitution; and the principle had never lost its virgin bloom and freshness by any of the minor acts of oppression and iniquity which boys of higher birth often suffer from harsh parents, or in tyrannical schools. So that it was for the first time that that iron entered into his soul, and with it came its attendant feeling,—the wrathful, galling sense of impotence. He had been wronged, and he had no means to right himself. Then came another sensation, if not so deep, yet more smarting and envenomed for the time,—shame! He, the good boy of all good boys; he, the pattern of the school, and the pride of the parson; he, whom the squire, in sight of all his contemporaries, had often singled out to slap on the back, and the grand squire's lady to pat on the head, with a smiling gratulation on his young and fair repute; he, who had already learned so dearly to prize the sweets of an honourable name,—he to be made, as it were, in the twinkling of an eye, a mark for opprobrium, a butt of scorn, a jeer, and a byword! The streams of his life were poisoned at the fountain. And then came a tenderer thought of his mother! of the shock this would be to her,—she who had already begun to look up to him as her stay and support; he bowed his head, and the tears, long suppressed, rolled down.

Then he wrestled and struggled, and strove to wrench his limbs from that hateful bondage,—for he heard steps approaching. And he began to picture to himself the arrival of all the villagers from church, the sad gaze of the parson, the bent brow of the squire, the idle, ill-suppressed titter of all the boys, jealous of his unspotted character,—character of which the original whiteness could never, never be restored!

He would always be the boy who had sat in the stocks! And the words uttered by the squire came back on his soul, like the voice of conscience in the ears of some doomed Macbeth: "A sad disgrace, Lenny,—you'll never be in such a quandary." "Quandary"—the word was unfamiliar to him; it must mean something awfully discreditable. The poor boy could have prayed for the earth to swallow him.

CHAPTER VIII.

"Kettles and frying-pans! what has us here?" cried the tinker.

This time Mr. Sprott was without his donkey; for it being Sunday, it is presumed that the donkey was enjoying his Sabbath on the common. The tinker was in his Sunday's best, clean and smart, about to take his lounge in the park.

Lenny Fairfield made no answer to the appeal.

"You in the wood, my baby! Well, that's the last sight I should ha' thought to see. But we all lives to larn," added the tinker, sententiously. "Who gave you them leggins? Can't you speak, lad?"

"Nick Stirn."

"Nick Stirn! Ay, I'd ha' ta'en my davy on that: and cos vy?"

"Cause I did as he told me, and fought a boy as was trespassing on these very stocks; and he beat me—but I don't care for that; and that boy was a young gentleman, and going to visit the squire; and so Nick Stirn—" Lenny stopped short, choked by rage and humiliation.

"Augh," said the tinker, starting, "you fit with a young gentleman, did you? Sorry to hear you confess that, my lad! Sit there and be thankful you ha' got off so cheap. 'T is salt and battery to fit with your betters, and a Lunnon justice o' peace would have given you two months o' the treadmill.

"But vy should you fit cos he trespassed on the stocks? It ben't your natural side for fitting, I takes it."

Lenny murmured something not very distinguishable about serving the squire, and doing as he was bid.

"Oh, I sees, Lenny," interrupted the tinker, in a tone of great contempt, "you be one of those who would rayther 'unt with the 'ounds than run with the 'are! You be's the good pattern boy, and would peach agin your own border to curry favour with the grand folks. Fie, lad! you be sarved right; stick by your border, then you'll be 'spected when you gets into trouble, and not be 'varsally 'spised,—as you'll be arter church-time! Vell, I can't be seen 'sorting with you, now you are in this d'rogotary fix; it might hurt my c'r'acter, both with them as built the stocks and them as wants to pull 'em down. Old kettles to mend! Vy, you makes me forgit the Sabbath! Sarvent, my lad, and wish you well out of it; 'specks to your mother, and say we can deal for the pan and shovel all the same for your misfortin."

The tinker went his way. Lenny's eye followed him with the sullenness of despair. The tinker, like all the tribe of human comforters, had only watered the brambles to invigorate the prick of the horns. Yes, if Lenny had been caught breaking the stocks, some at least would have pitied him; but to be incarcerated for defending them! You might as well have expected that the widows and orphans of the Reign of Terror would have pitied Dr. Guillotin when he slid through the grooves of his own deadly machine. And even the tinker, itinerant, ragamuffin vagabond as he was, felt ashamed to be found with the pattern boy! Lenny's head sank again on his breast heavily, as if it had been of lead. Some few minutes thus passed, when the unhappy prisoner became aware of the presence of another spectator to his shame; he heard no step, but he saw a shadow thrown over the sward. He held his breath, and would not look up, with some vague idea that if he refused to see he might escape being seen.

CHAPTER IX.

"/Per Bacco!" said Dr. Riccabocca, putting his hand on Lenny's shoulder, and bending down to look into his face,—"/per Bacco! my young friend, do you sit here from choice or necessity?"

Lenny slightly shuddered, and winced under the touch of one whom he had hitherto regarded with a sort of superstitious abhorrence.

"I fear," resumed Riccabocca, after waiting in vain for an answer to his question, "that though the situation is charming, you did not select it yourself. What is this?"—and the irony of the tone vanished—"what is this, my poor boy? You have been bleeding, and I see that those tears which you try to check come from a deep well. Tell me, /povero fanciullo mio/" (the sweet Italian vowels, though Lenny did not understand them, sounded softly and soothingly),—"tell me, my child, how all this happened. Perhaps I can help you; we have all erred,—we should all help each other."

Lenny's heart, that just before had seemed bound in brass, found itself a way as the Italian spoke thus kindly, and the tears rushed down; but he again stopped them, and gulped out sturdily,—

"I have not done no wrong; it ben't my fault,—and 't is that which kills me!" concluded Lenny, with a burst of energy.

"You have not done wrong? Then," said the philosopher, drawing out his pocket-handkerchief with great composure, and spreading it on the ground,—"then I may sit beside you. I could only stoop pityingly over sin, but I can lie down on equal terms with misfortune."

Lenny Fairfield did not quite comprehend the words, but enough of their general meaning was apparent to make him cast a grateful glance on the Italian. Riccabocca resumed, as he adjusted the pocket-handkerchief, "I have a right to your confidence, my child, for I have been afflicted in my day; yet I too say with thee, 'I have not done wrong.' /Cospetto!" (and here the doctor seated himself deliberately, resting one arm on the side column of the stocks, in familiar contact with the captive's shoulder, while his eye wandered over the lovely scene around)—"/Cospetto! my prison, if they had caught me, would not have had so fair a look-out as this. But, to be sure, it is all one; there are no ugly loves, and no handsome prisons."

With that sententious maxim, which, indeed, he uttered in his native Italian, Riccabocca turned round and renewed his soothing invitations to confidence. A friend in need is a friend indeed, even if he come in the guise of a Papist and wizard. All Lenny's ancient dislike to the foreigner had gone, and he told him his little tale.

Dr. Riccabocca was much too shrewd a man not to see exactly the motives which had induced Mr. Stirn to incarcerate his agent (barring only that of personal grudge, to which Lenny's account gave him no clew). That a man high in office should make a scapegoat of his own watch-dog for an unlucky snap,

or even an indiscreet bark, was nothing strange to the wisdom of the student of Machiavelli. However, he set himself to the task of consolation with equal philosophy and tenderness. He began by reminding, or rather informing, Leonard Fairfield of all the instances of illustrious men afflicted by the injustice of others that occurred to his own excellent memory. He told him how the great Epictetus, when in slavery, had a master whose favourite amusement was pinching his leg, which, as the amusement ended in breaking that limb, was worse than the stocks. He also told him the anecdote of Lenny's own gallant countryman, Admiral Byng, whose execution gave rise to Voltaire's celebrated witticism, "En Angleterre on tue un admiral pour encourager les autres."

["In England they execute one admiral in order to encourage the others."]

Many other illustrations, still more pertinent to the case in point, his erudition supplied from the stores of history. But on seeing that Lenny did not seem in the slightest degree consoled by these memorable examples, he shifted his ground, and reducing his logic to the strict *argumentum ad rem*, began to prove, first, that there was no disgrace at all in Lenny's present position, that every equitable person would recognize the tyranny of Stirn and the innocence of its victim; secondly, that if even here he were mistaken, for public opinion was not always righteous, what was public opinion after all?—"A breath, a puff," cried Dr. Riccabocca, "a thing without matter,—without length, breadth, or substance,—a shadow, a goblin of our own creating. A man's own conscience is his sole tribunal, and he should care no more for that phantom 'opinion' than he should fear meeting a ghost if he crossed the churchyard at dark."

Now, as Lenny did very much fear meeting a ghost if he crossed the churchyard at dark, the simile spoiled the argument, and he shook his head very mournfully. Dr. Riccabocca, was about to enter into a third course of reasoning, which, had it come to an end, would doubtless have settled the matter, and reconciled Lenny to sitting in the stocks till doomsday, when the captive, with the quick ear and eye of terror and calamity, became conscious that church was over, that the congregation in a few seconds more would be flocking thitherwards. He saw visionary hats and bonnets through the trees, which Riccabocca saw not, despite all the excellence of his spectacles; heard phantasmal rustlings and murmurings which Riccabocca heard not, despite all that theoretical experience in plots, stratagems, and treasons, which should have made the Italian's ear as fine as a conspirator's or a mole's. And with another violent but vain effort at escape, the prisoner exclaimed,—

"Oh, if I could but get out before they come! Let me out, let me out!
Oh, kind sir, have pity,—let me out!"

"Diavolo!" said the philosopher, startled, "I wonder that I never thought of that before. After all, I believe he has hit the right nail on the head," and, looking close, he perceived that though the partition of wood had hitched firmly into a sort of spring-clasp, which defied Lenny's unaided struggles, still it was not locked (for, indeed, the padlock and key were snug in the justice-room of the squire, who never dreamed that his orders would be executed so literally and summarily as to dispense with all formal appeal to himself). As soon as Dr. Riccabocca made that discovery, it occurred to him that all the wisdom of all the schools that ever existed can't reconcile man or boy to a bad position—the moment there is a fair opportunity of letting him out of it. Accordingly, without more ado, he lifted up the creaking board, and Lenny Fairfield darted forth like a bird from a cage, halted a moment as if for breath, or in joy; and then, taking at once to his heels, fled, as a hare to its form, fast to his mother's home.

Dr. Riccabocca dropped the yawning wood into its place, picked up his handkerchief and restored it to his pocket; and then, with some curiosity, began to examine the nature of that place of duress which had caused so much painful emotion to its rescued victim. "Man is a very irrational animal at best," quoth the sage, soliloquizing, "and is frightened by strange buggaboos! 'T is but a piece of wood! how little it really injures! And, after all, the holes are but rests to the legs, and keep the feet out of the dirt. And this green bank to sit upon, under the shade of the elm-tree—verily the position must be more pleasant than otherwise! I've a great mind—" Here the doctor looked around, and seeing the coast still clear, the oddest notion imaginable took possession of him; yet, not indeed a notion so odd, considered philosophically,—for all philosophy is based on practical experiment,—and Dr. Riccabocca felt an irresistible desire practically to experience what manner of thing that punishment of the stocks really was. "I can but try! only for a moment," said he apologetically to his own expostulating sense of dignity. "I have time to do it, before any one comes." He lifted up the partition again: but stocks are built on the true principle of English law, and don't easily allow a man to criminate himself,—it was hard to get into them without the help of a friend. However, as we before noticed, obstacles only whetted Dr. Riccabocca's invention. He looked round, and saw a withered bit of stick under the tree; this he inserted in the division of the stocks, somewhat in the manner in which boys place a stick under a sieve for the purpose of ensnaring sparrows; the fatal wood thus propped, Dr. Riccabocca sat gravely down on the bank, and thrust his feet through the apertures.

"Nothing in it!" cried he, triumphantly, after a moment's deliberation. "The evil is only in idea. Such is the boasted reason of mortals!" With that reflection, nevertheless, he was about to withdraw his feet from their voluntary dilemma, when the crazy stick suddenly gave way and the partition fell back into its clasp. Dr. Riceabocca was fairly caught,— "Facilis descensus—sed revocare gradum!" True, his hands were at liberty, but his legs were so long that, being thus fixed, they kept the hands from the rescue; and as Dr. Riccabocca's form was by no means supple, and the twin parts of the wood stuck together with that firmness of adhesion which things newly painted possess, so, after some vain twists and contortions, in which he succeeded at length (not without a stretch of the sinews that made them crack again) in finding the clasp and breaking his nails thereon, the victim of his own rash experiment resigned himself to his fate. Dr. Riceabocca was one of those men who never do things by halves. When I say he resigned himself, I mean not only Christian but philosophical resignation. The position was not quite so pleasant as, theoretically, he had deemed it; but he resolved to make himself as comfortable as he could. At first, as is natural in all troubles to men who have grown familiar with that odoriferous comforter which Sir Walter Raleigh is said first to have bestowed upon the Caucasian races, the doctor made use of his hands to extract from his pocket his pipe, match-box, and tobacco-pouch. After a few whiffs he would have been quite reconciled to his situation, but for the discovery that the sun had shifted its place in the heavens, and was no longer shaded from his face by the elm-tree. The doctor again looked round, and perceived that his red silk umbrella, which he had laid aside when he had seated himself by Lenny, was within arm's reach. Possessing himself of this treasure, he soon expanded its friendly folds. And thus, doubly fortified within and without, under shade of the umbrella, and his pipe composedly between his lips, Dr. Riceabocca gazed on his own incarcerated legs, even with complacency.

"He who can despise all things," said he, in one of his native proverbs, "'possesses all things!"—if one despises freedom, one is free! This seat is as soft as a sofa! I am not sure," he resumed, soliloquizing, after a pause,— "I am not sure that there is not something more witty than manly and philosophical in that national proverb of mine which I quoted to the fanciullo, 'that there are no handsome prisons!' Did not the son of that celebrated Frenchman, surnamed Bras de Fer, write a book not only to prove that adversities are more necessary than prosperities, but that among all adversities a prison is the most pleasant and profitable? But is not this condition of mine, voluntarily and experimentally incurred, a type of my life? Is it the first time that I have thrust myself into a hobble? And if in a hobble of mine own choosing, why should I blame the gods?"

Upon this, Dr. Riceabocca fell into a train of musing so remote from time and place, that in a few minutes he no more remembered that he was in the parish stocks than a lover remembers that flesh is grass, a miser that mammon is perishable, a philosopher that wisdom is vanity. Dr. Riccabocca was in the clouds.

CHAPTER X.

The dullest dog that ever wrote a novel (and, *entre nous*, reader)—but let it go no further,—we have a good many dogs among the fraternity that are not Munitos might have seen with half an eye that the parson's discourse had produced a very genial and humanizing effect upon his audience.

[Munito was the name of a dog famous for his learning (a Porson of a dog) at the date of my childhood. There are no such dogs nowadays.]

When all was over, and the congregation stood up to let Mr. Hazeldean and his family walk first down the aisle (for that was the custom at Hazeldean), moistened eyes glanced at the squire's sun-burned manly face, with a kindness that bespoke revived memory of many a generous benefit and ready service. The head might be wrong now and then,—the heart was in the right place after all. And the lady leaning on his arm came in for a large share of that gracious good feeling. True, she now and then gave a little offence when the cottages were not so clean as she fancied they ought to be,—and poor folks don't like a liberty taken with their houses any more than the rich do; true that she was not quite so popular with the women as the squire was, for, if the husband went too often to the ale-house, she always laid the fault on the wife, and said, "No man would go out of doors for his comforts, if he had a smiling face and a clean hearth at his home;" whereas the squire maintained the more gallant opinion that "If Gill was a shrew, it was because Jack did not, as in duty bound, stop her mouth with a kiss!" Still, notwithstanding these more obnoxious notions on her part, and a certain awe inspired by the stiff silk gown and the handsome aquiline nose, it was impossible, especially in the softened tempers of that Sunday afternoon, not to associate the honest, comely, beaming countenance of Mrs. Hazeldean with

comfortable recollections of soups, jellies, and wine in sickness, loaves and blankets in winter, cheering words and ready visits in every little distress, and pretexts afforded by improvement in the grounds and gardens (improvements which, as the squire, who preferred productive labour, justly complained, "would never finish") for little timely jobs of work to some veteran grandsire, who still liked to earn a penny, or some ruddy urchin in a family that "came too fast." Nor was Frank, as he walked a little behind, in the whitest of trousers and the stiffest of neckcloths,—with a look of suppressed roguery in his bright hazel eye, that contrasted his assumed stateliness of mien,—without his portion of the silent blessing. Not that he had done anything yet to deserve it; but we all give youth so large a credit in the future. As for Miss Jemima, her trifling foibles only rose from too soft and feminine a susceptibility, too ivy-like a yearning for some masculine oak whereon to entwine her tendrils; and so little confined to self was the natural lovingness of her disposition, that she had helped many a village lass to find a husband, by the bribe of a marriage gift from her own privy purse; notwithstanding the assurances with which she accompanied the marriage gift,—namely, that "the bridegroom would turn out like the rest of his ungrateful sex; but that it was a comfort to think that it would be all one in the approaching crash!" So that she had her warm partisans, especially amongst the young; while the slim captain, on whose arm she rested her forefinger, was at least a civil-spoken gentleman, who had never done any harm, and who would doubtless do a deal of good if he belonged to the parish. Nay, even the fat footman who came last, with the family Prayer-book, had his due share in the general association of neighbourly kindness between hall and hamlet. Few were there present to whom he had not extended the right-hand of fellowship with a full horn of October in the clasp of it; and he was a Hazeldean man, too, born and bred, as two-thirds of the squire's household (now letting themselves out from their large pew under the gallery) were.

On his part, too, you could see that the squire "was moved withal," and a little humbled moreover. Instead of walking erect, and taking bow and courtesy as a matter of course, and of no meaning, he hung his head somewhat, and there was a slight blush on his cheek; and as he glanced upward and round him—shyly, as it were—and his eye met those friendly looks, it returned them with an earnestness that had in it something touching as well as cordial,—an eye that said, as well as eye could say, "I don't quite deserve it, I fear, neighbours; but I thank you for your good-will with my whole heart." And so readily was that glance of the eye understood, that I think, if that scene had taken place out of doors instead of in the church, there would have been a hurrah as the squire passed out of sight.

Scarcely had Mr. Hazeldean got clear of the churchyard, ere Mr. Stirn was whispering in his ear. As Stirn whispered, the squire's face grew long, and his colour rose. The congregation, now flocking out of the church, exchanged looks with each other; that ominous conjunction between squire and man chilled back all the effects of the parson's sermon. The squire struck his cane violently into the ground. "I would rather you had told me Black Bess had got the glanders. A young gentleman, coming to visit my son, struck and insulted in Hazeldean; a young gentleman,— 's death, sir, a relation—his grandmother was a Hazeldean. I do believe Jemima's right, and the world's coming to an end! But Leonard Fairfield in the stocks! What will the parson say? and after such a sermon! 'Rich man, respect the poor!' And the good widow too; and poor Mark, who almost died in my arms! Stirn, you have a heart of stone! You confounded, lawless, merciless miscreant, who the deuce gave you the right to imprison man or boy in my parish of Hazeldean without trial, sentence, or warrant? Run and let the boy out before any one sees him: run, or I shall—"

The squire elevated the cane, and his eyes shot fire. Mr. Stirn did not run, but he walked off very fast. The squire drew back a few paces, and again took his wife's arm. "Just wait a bit for the parson, while I talk to the congregation. I want to stop 'em all, if I can, from going into the village; but how?"

Frank heard, and replied readily,—"Give 'em some beer, sir."

"Beer! on a Sunday! For shame, Frank!" cried Mrs. Hazeldean.

"Hold your tongue, Harry. Thank you, Frank," said the squire, and his brow grew as clear as the blue sky above him. I doubt if Riccabocca could have got him out of his dilemma with the same ease as Frank had done.

"Halt there, my men,—lads and lasses too,—there, halt a bit. Mrs. Fairfield, do you hear?—halt. I think his reverence has given us a capital sermon. Go up to the Great House all of you, and drink a glass to his health. Frank, go with them, and tell Spruce to tap one of the casks kept for the haymakers. Harry" (this in a whisper), "catch the parson, and tell him to come to me instantly."

"My dear Hazeldean, what has happened? You are mad."

"Don't bother; do what I tell you."

"But where is the parson to find you?"

"Where? gadzooks, Mrs. H.,—at the stocks, to be sure!"

CHAPTER XI.

Dr. Riccabocca, awakened out of his reverie by the sound of footsteps, was still so little sensible of the indignity of his position, that he enjoyed exceedingly, and with all the malice of his natural humour, the astonishment and stupor manifested by Stirn, when that functionary beheld the extraordinary substitute which fate and philosophy had found for Lenny Fairfield. Instead of the weeping, crushed, broken-hearted captive whom he had reluctantly come to deliver, he stared speechless and aghast upon the grotesque but tranquil figure of the doctor enjoying his pipe, and cooling himself under his umbrella, with a sangfroid that was truly appalling and diabolical. Indeed, considering that Stirn always suspected the Papisher of having had a hand in the whole of that black and midnight business, in which the stocks had been broken, bunged up, and consigned to perdition, and that the Papisher had the evil reputation of dabbling in the Black Art, the hocus-pocus way in which the Lenny he had incarcerated was transformed into the doctor he found, conjoined with the peculiarly strange eldritch and Mephistophelean physiognomy and person of Riccabocca, could not but strike a thrill of superstitious dismay into the breast of the parochial tyrant; while to his first confused and stammered exclamations and interrogatories, Riccabocca replied with so tragic an air, such ominous shakes of the head, such mysterious equivocating, long-worded sentences, that Stirn every moment felt more and more convinced that the boy had sold himself to the Powers of Darkness, and that he himself, prematurely and in the flesh, stood face to face with the Arch-Enemy.

Mr. Stirn had not yet recovered his wonted intelligence, which, to do him justice, was usually prompt enough, when the squire, followed hard by the parson, arrived at the spot. Indeed, Mrs. Hazeldean's report of the squire's urgent message, disturbed manner, and most unparalleled invitation to the parishioners, had given wings to Parson Dale's ordinarily slow and sedate movements. And while the squire, sharing Stirn's amazement, beheld indeed a great pair of feet projecting from the stocks, and saw behind them the grave face of Dr. Riccabocca under the majestic shade of the umbrella, but not a vestige of the only being his mind could identify with the tenancy of the stocks, Mr. Dale, catching him by the arm, and panting hard, exclaimed with a petulance he had never before been known to display,—except at the whisttable,—

"Mr. Hazeldean, Mr. Hazeldean, I am scandalized,—I am shocked at you. I can bear a great deal from you, sir, as I ought to do; but to ask my whole congregation, the moment after divine service, to go up and guzzle ale at the Hall, and drink my health, as if a clergyman's sermon had been a speech at a cattle-fair! I am ashamed of you, and of the parish! What on earth has come to you all?"

"That's the very question I wish to Heaven I could answer," groaned the squire, quite mildly and pathetically,—*"What on earth has come to us all? Ask Stirn:"* (then bursting out) *"Stirn, you infernal rascal, don't you hear? What on earth has come to us all?"*

"The Papisher is at the bottom of it, sir," said Stirn, provoked out of all temper. "I does my duty, but I is but a mortal man, arter all."

"A mortal fiddlestick! Where's Leonard Fairfield, I say?"

"Him knows best," answered Stirn, retreating mechanically for safety's sake behind the parson, and pointing to Dr. Riccabocca. Hitherto, though both the squire and parson had indeed recognized the Italian, they had merely supposed him to be seated on the bank. It never entered into their heads that so respectable and dignified a man could by any possibility be an inmate, compelled or voluntary, of the parish stocks. No, not even though, as I before said, the squire had seen, just under his nose, a very long pair of soles inserted in the apertures, that sight had only confused and bewildered him, unaccompanied, as it ought to have been, with the trunk and face of Lenny Fairfield. Those soles seemed to him optical delusions, phantoms of the overheated brain; but now, catching hold of Stirn, while the parson in equal astonishment caught hold of him, the squire faltered out, "Well, this beats cock-fighting! The man's as mad as a March hare, and has taken Dr. Rickeybockey for Little Lenny!"

"Perhaps," said the doctor, breaking silence with a bland smile, and attempting an inclination of the head as courteous as his position would permit,—*"perhaps, if it be quite the same to you, before you proceed to explanations, you will just help me out of the stocks."*

The parson, despite his perplexity and anger, could not repress a smile, as he approached his learned

friend, and bent down for the purpose of extricating him.

"Lord love your reverence, you'd better not!" cried Mr. Stirn. "Don't be tempted,—he only wants to get you into his claws. I would not go a near him for all the—"

The speech was interrupted by Dr. Riccabocca himself, who now, thanks to the parson, had risen into his full height, and half a head taller than all present—even than the tall squire—approached Mr. Stirn, with a gracious wave of the hand. Mr. Stirn retreated rapidly towards the hedge, amidst the brambles of which he plunged himself incontinently.

"I guess whom you take me for, Mr. Stirn," said the Italian, lifting his hat with his characteristic politeness. "It is certainly a great honour; but you will know better one of these days, when the gentleman in question admits you to a personal interview in another—and a hotter world."

CHAPTER XII.

"But how on earth did you get into my new stocks?" asked the squire, scratching his head.

"My dear sir, Pliny the elder got into the crater of Mount Etna."

"Did he, and what for?"

"To try what it was like, I suppose," answered Riccabocca. The squire burst out a laughing.

"And so you got into the stocks to try what it was like. Well, I can't wonder,—it is a very handsome pair of stocks," continued the squire, with a loving look at the object of his praise. "Nobody need be ashamed of being seen in those stocks,—I should not mind it myself."

"We had better move on," said the parson, dryly, "or we shall have the whole village here presently, gazing on the lord of the manor in the same predicament as that from which we have just extricated the doctor. Now, pray, what is the matter with Lenny Fairfield? I can't understand a word of what has passed. You don't mean to say that good Lenny Fairfield (who was absent from church, by the by) can have done anything to get into disgrace?"

"Yes, he has though," cried the squire. "Stirn, I say, Stirn!" But Stirn had forced his way through the hedge and vanished. Thus left to his own powers of narrative at secondhand, Mr. Hazeldean now told all he had to communicate,—the assault upon Randal Leslie, and the prompt punishment inflicted by Stirn; his own indignation at the affront to his young kinsman, and his good-natured merciful desire to save the culprit from public humiliation.

The parson, mollified towards the rude and hasty invention of the beer-drinking, took the squire by the hand. "Ah, Mr. Hazeldean, forgive me," he said repentantly; "I ought to have known at once that it was only some ebullition of your heart that could stifle your sense of decorum. But this is a sad story about Lenny brawling and fighting on the Sabbath-day. So unlike him, too. I don't know what to make of it."

"Like or unlike," said the squire, "it has been a gross insult to young Leslie, and looks all the worse because I and Audley are not just the best friends in the world. I can't think what it is," continued Mr. Hazeldean, musingly; "but it seems that there must be always some association of fighting connected with that prim half-brother of mine. There was I, son of his own mother,—who might have been shot through the lungs, only the ball lodged in the shoulder! and now his wife's kinsman—my kinsman, too—grandmother a Hazeldean,—a hard-reading, sober lad, as I am given to understand, can't set his foot into the quietest parish in the three kingdoms, but what the mildest boy that ever was seen makes a rush at him like a mad bull. It is FATALITY!" cried the squire, solemnly.

"Ancient legend records similar instances of fatality in certain houses," observed Riccabocca. "There was the House of Pelops, and Polynices and Eteocles, the sons of OEdipus."

"Pshaw!" said the parson; "but what's to be done?"

"Done?" said the squire; "why, reparation must be made to young Leslie. And though I wished to spare Lenny, the young ruffian, a public disgrace—for your sake, Parson Dale, and Mrs. Fairfield's—yet a good caning in private—"

"Stop, sir!" said Riccabocca, mildly, "and hear me." The Italian then, with much feeling and considerable tact, pleaded the cause of his poor protege, and explained how Lenny's error arose only from mistaken zeal for the squire's service, and in the execution of the orders received from Mr. Stirn.

"That alters the matter," said the squire, softened; "and all that is necessary now will be for him to make a proper apology to my kinsman."

"Yes, that is just," rejoined the parson; "but I still don't learn how he got out of the stocks."

Riccabocca then resumed his tale; and, after confessing his own principal share in Lenny's escape, drew a moving picture of the boy's shame and honest mortification. "Let us march against Philip!" cried the Athenians when they heard Demosthenes—

"Let us go at once and comfort the child!" cried the parson, before Riccabocca could finish.

With that benevolent intention all three quickened their pace, and soon arrived at the widow's cottage. But Lenny had caught sight of their approach through the window; and not doubting that, in spite of Riccabocca's intercession, the parson was come to upbraid and the squire to re-imprison, he darted out by the back way, got amongst the woods, and lay there perdu all the evening. Nay, it was not till after dark that his mother—who sat wringing her hands in the little kitchen, and trying in vain to listen to the parson and Mrs. Dale, who (after sending in search of the fugitive) had kindly come to console the mother—heard a timid knock at the door and a nervous fumble at the latch. She started up, opened the door, and Lenny sprang to her bosom, and there buried his face, sobbing aloud.

"No harm, my boy," said the parson, tenderly; "you have nothing to fear, —all is explained and forgiven."

Lenny looked up, and the veins on his forehead were much swollen. "Sir," said he, sturdily, "I don't want to be forgiven,—I ain't done no wrong. And—I've been disgraced—and I won't go to school, never no more."

"Hush, Carry!" said the parson to his wife, who with the usual liveliness of her little temper, was about to expostulate. "Good-night, Mrs. Fairfield. I shall come and talk to you to-morrow, Lenny; by that time you will think better of it."

The parson then conducted his wife home, and went up to the Hall to report Lenny's safe return; for the squire was very uneasy about him, and had even in person shared the search. As soon as he heard Lenny was safe—"Well," said the squire, "let him go the first thing in the morning to Rood Hall, to ask Master Leslie's pardon, and all will be right and smooth again."

"A young villain!" cried Frank, with his cheeks the colour of scarlet; "to strike a gentleman and an Etonian, who had just been to call on me! But I wonder Randal let him off so well,—any other boy in the sixth form would have killed him!"

"Frank," said the parson, sternly, "if we all had our deserts, what should be done to him who not only lets the sun go down on his own wrath, but strives with uncharitable breath to fan the dying embers of another's?"

The clergyman here turned away from Frank, who bit his lip, and seemed abashed, while even his mother said not a word in his exculpation; for when the parson did reprove in that stern tone, the majesty of the Hall stood awed before the rebuke of the Church. Catching Riccabocca's inquisitive eye, Mr. Dale drew aside the philosopher, and whispered to him his fears that it would be a very hard matter to induce Lenny to beg Randal Leslie's pardon, and that the proud stomach of the pattern-boy would not digest the stocks with as much ease as a long regimen of philosophy had enabled the sage to do. This conference Miss Jemima soon interrupted by a direct appeal to the doctor respecting the number of years (even without any previous and more violent incident) that the world could possibly withstand its own wear and tear.

"Ma'am," said the doctor, reluctantly summoned away to look at a passage in some prophetic periodical upon that interesting subject,— "ma'am, it is very hard that you should make one remember the end of the world, since, in conversing with you, one's natural temptation is to forget its existence."

Miss Jemima's cheeks were suffused with a deeper scarlet than Frank's had been a few minutes before. Certainly that deceitful, heartless compliment justified all her contempt for the male sex; and yet—such is human blindness—it went far to redeem all mankind in her credulous and too confiding soul.

"He is about to propose," sighed Miss Jemima.

"Giacomo," said Riccabocca, as he drew on his nightcap, and stepped majestically into the four-posted bed, "I think we shall get that boy for the garden now!"

Thus each spurred his hobby, or drove her car, round the Hazeldean whirligig.

CHAPTER XIII.

Whatever, may be the ultimate success of Miss Jemima Hazeldean's designs upon Dr. Riccabocca, the Machiavellian sagacity with which the Italian had counted upon securing the services of Lenny Fairfield was speedily and triumphantly established by the result. No voice of the parson's, charmed he ever so wisely, could persuade the peasant-boy to go and ask pardon of the young gentleman, to whom, because he had done as he was bid, he owed an agonizing defeat and a shameful incarceration; and, to Mrs. Dale's vexation, the widow took the boy's part. She was deeply offended at the unjust disgrace Lenny had undergone in being put in the stocks; she shared his pride, and openly approved his spirit. Nor was it without great difficulty that Lenny could be induced to resume his lessons at school,—nay, even to set foot beyond the precincts of his mother's holding. The point of the school at last he yielded, though sullenly; and the parson thought it better to temporize as to the more unpalatable demand. Unluckily, Lenny's apprehensions of the mockery that awaited him in the merciless world of his village were realized. Though Stirn at first kept his own counsel the tinker blabbed the whole affair. And after the search instituted for Lenny on the fatal night, all attempt to hush up what had passed would have been impossible. So then Stirn told his story, as the tinker had told his own; both tales were very unfavourable to Leonard Fairfield. The pattern-boy had broken the Sabbath, fought with his betters, and been well mauled into the bargain; the village lad had sided with Stirn and the authorities in spying out the misdemeanours of his equals therefore Leonard Fairfield, in both capacities of degraded pattern-boy and baffled spy, could expect no mercy,—he was ridiculed in the one, and hated in the other.

It is true that, in the presence of the schoolmaster and under the eye of Mr. Dale, no one openly gave vent to malignant feelings; but the moment those checks were removed, popular persecution began.

Some pointed and mowed at him, some cursed him for a sneak, and all shunned his society; voices were heard in the hedgerows, as he passed through the village at dusk, "Who was put into the stocks?—baa!" "Who got a bloody nob for playing spy to Nick Stirn?—baa!" To resist this species of aggression would have been a vain attempt for a wiser head and a colder temper than our poor pattern-boy's. He took his resolution at once, and his mother approved it; and the second or third day after Dr. Riccabocca's return to the Casino, Lenny Fairfield presented himself on the terrace with a little bundle in his hand. "Please, sir," said he to the doctor, who was sitting cross-legged on the balustrade, with his red silk umbrella over his head,— "please, sir, if you'll be good enough to take me now, and give me any hole to sleep in, I'll work for your honour night and day; and as for wages, Mother says, 'just suit yourself, sir.'"

"My child," said the doctor, taking Lenny by the hand, and looking at him with the sagacious eye of a wizard, "I knew you would come! and Giacomo is already prepared for you! As to wages, we'll talk of them by and by."

Lenny being thus settled, his mother looked for some evenings on the vacant chair, where he had so long sat in the place of her beloved Mark; and the chair seemed so comfortless and desolate, thus left all to itself, that she could bear it no longer.

Indeed the village had grown as distasteful to her as to Lenny,—perhaps more so; and one morning she hailed the steward as he was trotting his hog-maued cob beside the door, and bade him tell the squire that "she would take it very kind if he would let her off the six months' notice for the land and premises she held; there were plenty to step into the place at a much better rent."

"You're a fool," said the good-natured steward; "and I'm very glad you did not speak to that fellow Stirn instead of to me. You've been doing extremely well here, and have the place, I may say, for nothing."

"Nothin' as to rent, sir, but a great deal as to feelin'," said the widow. "And now Lenny has gone to work with the foreign gentleman, I should like to go and live near him."

"Ah, yes, I heard Lenny had taken himself off to the Casino, more fool he; but, bless your heart, 't is no distance,—two miles or so. Can't he come home every night after work?"

"No, sir," exclaimed the widow, almost fiercely; "he sha'n't come home here, to be called bad names and jeered at!—he whom my dead good man was so fond and proud of. No, sir; we poor folks have our feelings, as I said to Mrs. Dale, and as I will say to the squire hisself. Not that I don't thank him for all favours,—he be a good gentleman if let alone; but he says he won't come near us till Lenny goes and axes pardin. Pardin for what, I should like to know? Poor lamb! I wish you could ha' seen his nose, sir,—as big as your two fists. Ax pardin! if the squire had had such a nose as that, I don't think it's pardin he'd been ha' axing. But I let the passion get the better of me,—I humbly beg you'll excuse it, sir. I'm no schollard, as poor Mark was, and Lenny would have been, if the Lord had not visited us otherways. Therefore just get the squire to let me go as soon as may be; and as for the bit o' hay and what's on the grounds and orchard, the new comer will no doubt settle that."

The steward, finding no eloquence of his could induce the widow to relinquish her resolution, took her message to the squire. Mr. Hazeldean, who was indeed really offended at the boy's obstinate refusal to make the */amende honorable/* to Randal Leslie, at first only bestowed a hearty curse or two on the pride and ingratitude both of mother and son. It may be supposed, however, that his second thoughts were more gentle, since that evening, though he did not go himself to the widow, he sent his "Harry." Now, though Harry was sometimes austere and brusque enough on her own account, and in such business as might especially be transacted between herself and the cottagers, yet she never appeared as the delegate of her lord except in the capacity of a herald of peace and mediating angel. It was with good heart, too, that she undertook this mission, since, as we have seen, both mother and son were great favourites of hers. She entered the cottage with the friendliest beam in her bright blue eye, and it was with the softest tone of her frank cordial voice that she accosted the widow. But she was no more successful than the steward had been. The truth is, that I don't believe the haughtiest duke in the three kingdoms is really so proud as your plain English rural peasant, nor half so hard to propitiate and deal with when his sense of dignity is ruffled. Nor are there many of my own literary brethren (thin-skinned creatures though we are) so sensitively alive to the Public Opinion, wisely despised by Dr. Riccabocca, as that same peasant. He can endure a good deal of contumely sometimes, it is true, from his superiors (though, thank Heaven! that he rarely meets with unjustly); but to be looked down upon and mocked and pointed at by his own equals—his own little world—cuts him to the soul. And if you can succeed in breaking this pride and destroying this sensitiveness, then he is a lost being. He can never recover his self-esteem, and you have chucked him half-way—a stolid, inert, sullen victim—to the perdition of the prison or the convict-ship.

Of this stuff was the nature both of the widow and her son. Had the honey of Plato flowed from the tongue of Mrs. Hazeldean, it could not have turned into sweetness the bitter spirit upon which it descended. But Mrs. Hazeldean, though an excellent woman, was rather a bluff, plain-spoken one; and after all she had some little feeling for the son of a gentleman, and a decayed, fallen gentleman, who, even by Lenny's account, had been assailed without any intelligible provocation; nor could she, with her strong common-sense, attach all the importance which Mrs. Fairfield did to the unmannerly impertinence of a few young cubs, which she said truly, "would soon die away if no notice was taken of it." The widow's mind was made up, and Mrs. Hazeldean departed,—with much chagrin and some displeasure.

Mrs. Fairfield, however, tacitly understood that the request she had made was granted, and early one morning her door was found locked, the key left at a neighbour's to be given to the steward; and, on further inquiry, it was ascertained that her furniture and effects had been removed by the errand cart in the dead of the night. Lenny had succeeded in finding a cottage on the road-side, not far from the Casino; and there, with a joyous face, he waited to welcome his mother to breakfast, and show how he had spent the night in arranging her furniture.

"Parson!" cried the squire, when all this news came upon him, as he was walking arm in arm with Mr. Dale to inspect some proposed improvement in the Almshouse, "this is all your fault. Why did you not go and talk to that brute of a boy and that dolt of a woman? You've got 'soft sawder enough,' as Frank calls it in his new-fashioned slang."

"As if I had not talked myself hoarse to both!" said the parson, in a tone of reproachful surprise at the accusation. "But it was in vain! O Squire, if you had taken my advice about the stocks,—'quieta non movere!'"

"Bother!" said the squire. "I suppose I am to be held up as a tyrant, a Nero, a Richard the Third, or a Grand Inquisitor, merely for having things smart and tidy! Stocks indeed! Your friend Rickeybockey said he was never more comfortable in his life,—quite enjoyed sitting there. And what did not hurt Rickeybockey's dignity (a very gentlemanlike man he is, when he pleases) ought to be no such great

matter to Master Leonard Fairfield. But 't is no use talking! What's to be done now? The woman must not starve; and I'm sure she can't live out of Rickeybockey's wages to Lenny,—by the way, I hope he don't board the boy upon his and Jackeymo's leavings: I hear they dine upon newts and sticklebacks, faugh! I'll tell you what, Parson, now I think of it, at the back of the cottage which she has taken there are some fields of capital land just vacant. Rickeybockey wants to have 'em, and sounded me as to the rent when he was at the Hall. I only half promised him the refusal. And he must give up four or five acres of the best land round the cottage to the widow—just enough for her to manage—and she can keep a dairy. If she want capital, I'll lend her some in your name,—only don't tell Stirn; and as for the rent—we'll talk of that when we see how she gets on, thankless, obstinate jade that she is! You see," added the squire, as if he felt there was some apology due for this generosity to an object whom he professed to consider so ungrateful, "her husband was a faithful servant, and so—I wish you would not stand there staring me out of countenance, but go down to the woman at once, or Stirn will have let the land to Rickeybockey, as sure as a gun. And hark ye, Dale, perhaps you can contrive, if the woman is so cursedly stiffbacked, not to say the land is mine, or that it is any favour I want to do her—or, in short, manage it as you can for the best." Still even this charitable message failed. The widow knew that the land was the squire's, and worth a good L3 an acre. "She thanked him humbly for that and all favours; but she could not afford to buy cows, and she did not wish to be beholden to any one for her living. And Lenny was well off at Mr. Rickeybockey's, and coming on wonderfully in the garden way, and she did not doubt she could get some washing; at all events, her haystack would bring in a good bit of money, and she should do nicely, thank their honours."

Nothing further could be done in the direct way, but the remark about the washing suggested some mode of indirectly benefiting the widow; and a little time afterwards, the sole laundress in that immediate neighbourhood happening to die, a hint from the squire obtained from the landlady of the inn opposite the Casino such custom as she had to bestow, which at times was not inconsiderable. And what with Lenny's wages (whatever that mysterious item might be), the mother and son contrived to live without exhibiting any of those physical signs of fast and abstinence which Riccabocca and his valet gratuitously afforded to the student in animal anatomy.

CHAPTER XIV.

Of all the wares and commodities in exchange and barter, wherein so mainly consists the civilization of our modern world, there is not one which is so carefully weighed, so accurately measured, so plumbed and gauged, so doled and scraped, so poured out in minima and balanced with scruples,—as that necessary of social commerce called "an apology"! If the chemists were half so careful in vending their poisons, there would be a notable diminution in the yearly average of victims to arsenic and oxalic acid. But, alas! in the matter of apology, it is not from the excess of the dose, but the timid, niggardly, miserly manner in which it is dispensed, that poor Humanity is hurried off to the Styx! How many times does a life depend on the exact proportions of an apology! Is it a hairbreadth too short to cover the scratch for which you want it? Make your will,—you are a dead man! A life do I say?—a hecatomb of lives! How many wars would have been prevented, how many thrones would be standing, dynasties flourishing, commonwealths brawling round a /bema/, or fitting out galleys for corn and cotton, if an inch or two more of apology had been added to the proffered ell! But then that plaguy, jealous, suspicious, old vinegar-faced Honour, and her partner Pride—as penny-wise and pound-foolish a she-skinflint as herself—have the monopoly of the article. And what with the time they lose in adjusting their spectacles, hunting in the precise shelf for the precise quality demanded, then (quality found) the haggling as to quantum,—considering whether it should be Apothecary's weight or Avoirdupois, or English measure or Flemish,—and, finally, the hullabuloo they make if the customer is not perfectly satisfied with the monstrous little he gets for his money, I don't wonder, for my part, how one loses temper and patience, and sends Pride, Honour, and Apology all to the devil. Aristophanes, in his comedy of "Peace," insinuates a beautiful allegory by only suffering that goddess, though in fact she is his heroine, to appear as a mute. She takes care never to open her lips. The shrewd Greek knew very well that she would cease to be Peace, if she once began to chatter. Wherefore, O reader, if ever you find your pump under the iron heel of another man's boot, Heaven grant that you may hold your tongue, and not make things past all endurance and forgiveness by bawling out for an apology!

CHAPTER XV.

But the squire and his son, Frank, were large-hearted generous creatures in the article of apology, as in all things less skimpingly dealt out. And seeing that Leonard Fairfield would offer no plaster to Randal Leslie, they made amends for his stinginess by their own prodigality. The squire accompanied his son to Rood Hall, and none of the family choosing to be at home, the squire in his own hand, and from his own head, indited and composed an epistle which might have satisfied all the wounds which the dignity of the Leslies had ever received.

This letter of apology ended with a hearty request that Randal would come and spend a few days with his son. Frank's epistle was to the same purport, only more Etonian and less legible.

It was some days before Randal's replies to these epistles were received. The replies bore the address of a village near London; and stated that the writer was now reading with a tutor preparatory to entrance to Oxford, and could not, therefore, accept the invitation extended to him.

For the rest, Randal expressed himself with good sense, though not with much generosity. He excused his participation in the vulgarity of such a conflict by a bitter, but short allusion to the obstinacy and ignorance of the village boor; and did not do what you, my kind reader, certainly would have done under similar circumstances,—namely, intercede in behalf of a brave and unfortunate antagonist. Most of us like a foe better after we have fought him,—that is, if we are the conquering party; this was not the case with Randal Leslie. There, so far as the Etonian was concerned, the matter rested. And the squire, irritated that he could not repair whatever wrong that young gentleman had sustained, no longer felt a pang of regret as he passed by Mrs. Fairfield's deserted cottage.

CHAPTER XVI.

Lenny Fairfield continued to give great satisfaction to his new employers, and to profit in many respects by the familiar kindness with which he was treated. Riccabocca, who valued himself on penetrating into character, had from the first seen that much stuff of no common quality and texture was to be found in the disposition and mind of the English village boy. On further acquaintance, he perceived that, under a child's innocent simplicity, there were the workings of an acuteness that required but development and direction. He ascertained that the pattern-boy's progress at the village school proceeded from something more than mechanical docility and readiness of comprehension. Lenny had a keen thirst for knowledge, and through all the disadvantages of birth and circumstance, there were the indications of that natural genius which converts disadvantages themselves into stimulants. Still, with the germs of good qualities lay the embryos of those which, difficult to separate, and hard to destroy, often mar the produce of the soil. With a remarkable and generous pride in self-repute, there was some stubbornness; with great sensibility to kindness, there was also strong reluctance to forgive affront.

This mixed nature in an uncultivated peasant's breast interested Riccabocca, who, though long secluded from the commerce of mankind, still looked upon man as the most various and entertaining volume which philosophical research can explore. He soon accustomed the boy to the tone of a conversation generally subtle and suggestive; and Lenny's language and ideas became insensibly less rustic and more refined. Then Riccabocca selected from his library, small as it was, books that, though elementary, were of a higher cast than Lenny could have found within his reach at Hazeldean. Riccabocca knew the English language well,—better in grammar, construction, and genius than many a not ill-educated Englishman; for he had studied it with the minuteness with which a scholar studies a dead language, and amidst his collection he had many of the books which had formerly served him for that purpose. These were the first works he lent to Lenny. Meanwhile Jackeymo imparted to the boy many secrets in practical gardening and minute husbandry, for at that day farming in England (some favoured counties and estates excepted) was far below the nicety to which the art has been immemorially carried in the north of Italy,—where, indeed, you may travel for miles and miles as through a series of market-gardens; so that, all these things considered, Leonard Fairfield might be said to have made a change for the better. Yet, in truth, and looking below the surface, that might be fair matter of doubt. For the same reason which had induced the boy to fly his native village, he no longer repaired to the church of Hazeldean. The old intimate intercourse between him and the parson

became necessarily suspended, or bounded to an occasional kindly visit from the latter,— visits which grew more rare and less familiar, as he found his former pupil in no want of his services, and wholly deaf to his mild entreaties to forget and forgive the past, and come at least to his old seat in the parish church. Lenny still went to church,—a church a long way off in another parish,—but the sermons did not do him the same good as Parson Dale's had done; and the clergyman, who had his own flock to attend to, did not condescend, as Parson Dale would have done, to explain what seemed obscure, and enforce what was profitable, in private talk, with that stray lamb from another's fold.

Now I question much if all Dr. Riccabocca's maxims, though they were often very moral and generally very wise, served to expand the peasant boy's native good qualities, and correct his bad, half so well as the few simple words, not at all indebted to Machiavelli, which Leonard had once reverently listened to when he stood by Mark's elbow-chair, yielded up for the moment to the good parson, worthy to sit in it; for Mr. Dale had a heart in which all the fatherless of the parish found their place. Nor was this loss of tender, intimate, spiritual lore so counterbalanced by the greater facilities for purely intellectual instruction as modern enlightenment might presume. For, without disputing the advantage of knowledge in a general way, knowledge, in itself, is not friendly to content. Its tendency, of course, is to increase the desires, to dissatisfy us with what is, in order to urge progress to what may be; and in that progress, what unnoticed martyrs among the many must fall baffled and crushed by the way! To how large a number will be given desires they will never realize, dissatisfaction of the lot from which they will never rise! Allons! one is viewing the dark side of the question. It is all the fault of that confounded Riccabocca, who has already caused Lenny Fairfield to lean gloomily on his spade, and, after looking round and seeing no one near him, groan out querulously,—“And am I born to dig a potato ground?”

Pardieu, my friend Lenny, if you live to be seventy, and ride in your carriage, and by the help of a dinner-pill digest a spoonful of curry, you may sigh to think what a relish there was in potatoes, roasted in ashes after you had digged them out of that ground with your own stout young hands. Dig on, Lenny Fairfield, dig on! Dr. Riccabocca will tell you that there was once an illustrious personage—[The Emperor Diocletian]—who made experience of two very different occupations,—one was ruling men, the other was planting cabbages; he thought planting cabbages much the pleasanter of the two!

CHAPTER XVII

Dr. Riccabocca had secured Lenny Fairfield, and might therefore be considered to have ridden his hobby in the great whirligig with adroitness and success. But Miss Jemima was still driving round in her car, handling the reins, and flourishing the whip, without apparently having got an inch nearer to the flying form of Dr. Riccabocca.

Indeed, that excellent and only too susceptible spinster, with all her experience of the villany of man, had never conceived the wretch to be so thoroughly beyond the reach of redemption as when Dr. Riccabocca took his leave, and once more interred himself amidst the solitudes of the Casino, and without having made any formal renunciation of his criminal celibacy. For some days she shut herself up in her own chamber, and brooded with more than her usual gloomy satisfaction on the certainty of the approaching crash. Indeed, many signs of that universal calamity, which, while the visit of Riccabocca lasted, she had permitted herself to consider ambiguous, now became luminously apparent. Even the newspaper, which during that credulous and happy period had given half a column to Births and Marriages, now bore an ominously long catalogue of Deaths; so that it seemed as if the whole population had lost heart, and had no chance of repairing its daily losses. The leading article spoke, with the obscurity of a Pythian, of an impending CRISIS. Monstrous turnips sprouted out from the paragraphs devoted to General News. Cows bore calves with two heads, whales were stranded in the Humber, showers of frogs descended in the High Street of Cheltenham.

All these symptoms of the world's decrepitude and consummation, which by the side of the fascinating Riccabocca might admit of some doubt as to their origin and cause, now, conjoined with the worst of all, namely, the frightfully progressive wickedness of man,—left to Miss Jemima no ray of hope save that afforded by the reflection that she could contemplate the wreck of matter without a single sentiment of regret.

Mrs. Dale, however, by no means shared the despondency of her fair friend, and having gained access to Miss Jemima's chamber, succeeded, though not without difficulty, in her kindly attempts to cheer the drooping spirits of that female misanthropist. Nor, in her benevolent desire to speed the car of Miss Jemima to its hymeneal goal, was Mrs. Dale so cruel towards her male friend, Dr. Riccabocca,

as she seemed to her husband. For Mrs. Dale was a woman of shrewdness and penetration, as most quick-tempered women are; and she knew that Miss Jemima was one of those excellent young ladies who are likely to value a husband in proportion to the difficulty of obtaining him. In fact, my readers of both sexes must often have met, in the course of their experience, with that peculiar sort of feminine disposition, which requires the warmth of the conjugal hearth to develop all its native good qualities; nor is it to be blamed overmuch if, innocently aware of this tendency in its nature, it turns towards what is best fitted for its growth and improvement, by laws akin to those which make the sunflower turn to the sun, or the willow to the stream. Ladies of this disposition, permanently thwarted in their affectionate bias, gradually languish away into intellectual inanition, or sprout out into those abnormal eccentricities which are classed under the general name of "oddity" or "character." But once admitted to their proper soil, it is astonishing what healthful improvement takes place,—how the poor heart, before starved and stinted of nourishment, throws out its suckers, and bursts into bloom and fruit. And thus many a belle from whom the beaux have stood aloof, only because the puppies think she could be had for the asking, they see afterwards settled down into true wife and fond mother, with amaze at their former disparagement, and a sigh at their blind hardness of heart.

In all probability Mrs. Dale took this view of the subject; and certainly, in addition to all the hitherto dormant virtues which would be awakened in Miss Jemima when fairly Mrs. Riccabocca, she counted somewhat upon the mere worldly advantage which such a match would bestow upon the exile. So respectable a connection with one of the oldest, wealthiest, and most popular families in the shire would in itself give him a position not to be despised by a poor stranger in the land; and though the interest of Miss Jemima's dowry might not be much, regarded in the light of English pounds (not Milanese lire), still it would suffice to prevent that gradual process of dematerialization which the lengthened diet upon minnows and sticklebacks had already made apparent in the fine and slow-evanishing form of the philosopher.

Like all persons convinced of the expediency of a thing, Mrs. Dale saw nothing wanting but opportunities to insure its success. And that these might be forthcoming she not only renewed with greater frequency, and more urgent instance than ever, her friendly invitations to Riccabocca to drink tea and spend the evening, but she so artfully chafed the squire on his sore point of hospitality, that the doctor received weekly a pressing solicitation to dine and sleep at the Hall.

At first the Italian pished and grunted, and said */Cospetto/*, and */Per Bacco/*, and */Diavolo/*, and tried to creep out of so much proffered courtesy. But like all single gentlemen, he was a little under the tyrannical influence of his faithful servant; and Jackeymo, though he could bear starving as well as his master when necessary, still, when he had the option, preferred roast beef and plum-pudding. Moreover, that vain and incautious confidence of Riccabocca touching the vast sum at his command, and with no heavier drawback than that of so amiable a lady as Miss Jemima—who had already shown him (Jackeymo) many little delicate attentions—had greatly whetted the cupidity which was in the servant's Italian nature,—a cupidity the more keen because, long debarred its legitimate exercise on his own mercenary interests, he carried it all to the account of his master's!

Thus tempted by his enemy and betrayed by his servant, the unfortunate Riccabocca fell, though with eyes not unblinded, into the hospitable snares extended for the destruction of his—celibacy! He went often to the Parsonage, often to the Hall, and by degrees the sweets of the social domestic life, long denied him, began to exercise their enervating charm upon the stoicism of our poor exile. Frank had now returned to Eton. An unexpected invitation had carried off Captain Higginbotham to pass a few weeks at Bath with a distant relation, who had lately returned from India, and who, as rich as Creesus, felt so estranged and solitary in his native isle that, when the captain "claimed kindred there," to his own amaze "he had his claims allowed;" while a very protracted sitting of parliament still delayed in London the squire's habitual visitors during the later summer; so that—a chasm thus made in his society— Mr. Hazeldean welcomed with no hollow cordiality the diversion or distraction he found in the foreigner's companionship. Thus, with pleasure to all parties, and strong hopes to the two female conspirators, the intimacy between the Casino and Hall rapidly thickened; but still not a word resembling a distinct proposal did Dr. Riccabocca breathe. And still, if such an idea obtruded itself on his mind, it was chased therefrom with so determined a *Diavolo* that perhaps, if not the end of the world, at least the end of Miss Jemima's tenure in it, might have approached and seen her still Miss Jemima, but for a certain letter with a foreign postmark that reached the doctor one Tuesday morning.

CHAPTER XVIII.

The servant saw that something had gone wrong, and, under pretence of syringing the orange-trees, he lingered near his master, and peered through the sunny leaves upon Riccabocca's melancholy brows.

The doctor sighed heavily. Nor did he, as was his wont after some such sigh, mechanically take up that dear comforter the pipe. But though the tobacco-pouch lay by his side on the balustrade, and the pipe stood against the wall between his knees, childlike lifting up its lips to the customary caress, he heeded neither the one nor the other, but laid the letter silently on his lap, and fixed his eyes upon the ground.

"It must be bad news indeed!" thought Jackeymo, and desisted from his work. Approaching his master, he took up the pipe and the tobacco-pouch, and filled the bowl slowly, glancing all the while towards that dark musing face on which, when abandoned by the expression of intellectual vivacity or the exquisite smile of Italian courtesy, the deep downward lines revealed the characters of sorrow. Jackeymo did not venture to speak; but the continued silence of his master disturbed him much. He laid that peculiar tinder which your smokers use upon the steel, and struck the spark,—still not a word, nor did Riccabocca stretch forth his hand.

"I never knew him in this taking before," thought Jackeymo; and delicately he insinuated the neck of the pipe into the nerveless fingers of the band that lay supine on those quiet knees. The pipe fell to the ground.

Jackeymo crossed himself, and began praying to his sainted namesake with great fervour.

The doctor rose slowly, and as if with effort; he walked once or twice to and fro the terrace; and then he halted abruptly and said,—

"Friend!"

"Blessed Monsignore San Giacomo, I knew thou wouldst hear me!" cried the servant; and he raised his master's hand to his lips, then abruptly turned away and wiped his eyes.

"Friend," repeated Riccabocca, and this time with a tremulous emphasis, and in the softest tone of a voice never wholly without the music of the sweet South, "I would talk to thee of my child."

CHAPTER XIX.

"The letter, then, relates to the signorina. She is well?"

"Yes, she is well now. She is in our native Italy." Jackeymo raised his eyes involuntarily towards the orange-trees, and the morning breeze swept by and bore to him the odour of their blossoms.

"Those are sweet even here, with care," said he, pointing to the trees.

"I think I have said that before to the padrone."

But Riccabocca was now looking again at the letter, and did not notice either the gesture or the remark of his servant. "My aunt is no more!" said he, after a pause.

"We will pray for her soul!" answered Jackeymo, solemnly. "But she was very old, and had been a long time ailing. Let it not grieve the padrone too keenly: at that age, and with those infirmities, death comes as a friend."

"Peace be to her dust!" returned the Italian. "If she had her faults, be they now forgotten forever; and in the hour of my danger and distress she sheltered my infant! That shelter is destroyed. This letter is from the priest, her confessor. And the home of which my child is bereaved falls to the inheritance of my enemy."

"Traitor!" muttered Jackeymo; and his right hand seemed to feel for the weapon which the Italians of lower rank often openly wear in their girdles.

"The priest," resumed Riccabocca, calmly, "has rightly judged in removing my child as a guest from the house in which that traitor enters as lord."

"And where is the signorina?"

"With the poor priest. See, Giacomo, here, here—this is her handwriting at the end of the letter,—the first lines she ever yet traced to me."

Jackeymo took off his hat, and looked reverently on the large characters of a child's writing. But large as they were, they seemed indistinct, for the paper was blistered with the child's tears; and on the place where they had not fallen, there was a round fresh moist stain of the tear that had dropped from the lids of the father. Riccabocca renewed, "The priest recommends a convent."

"To the devil with the priest!" cried the servant; then crossing himself rapidly, he added, "I did not mean that, Monsignore San Giacomo,—forgive me! But your Excellency does not think of making a nun of his only child!"

[The title of Excellency does not, in Italian, necessarily express any exalted rank, but is often given by servants to their masters.]

"And yet why not?" said Riccabocca, mournfully; "what can I give her in the world? Is the land of the stranger a better refuge than the home of peace in her native clime?"

"In the land of the stranger beats her father's heart!"

"And if that beat were stilled, what then? Ill fares the life that a single death can bereave of all. In a convent at least (and the priest's influence can obtain her that asylum amongst her equals and amidst her sex) she is safe from trial and from penury—to her grave!"

"Penury! Just see how rich we shall be when we take those fields at Michaelmas."

"Pazzie/!"—[Follies]—said Riccabocca, listlessly. "Are these suns more serene than ours, or the soil more fertile? Yet in our own Italy, saith the proverb, 'He who sows land reaps more care than corn.' It were different," continued the father, after a pause, and in a more resolute tone, "if I had some independence, however small, to count on,—nay, if among all my tribe of dainty relatives there were but one female who would accompany Violante to the exile's hearth,—Ishmael had his Hagar. But how can we two rough-bearded men provide for all the nameless wants and cares of a frail female child? And she has been so delicately reared,—the woman-child needs the fostering hand and tender eye of a woman."

"And with a word," said Jackeymo, resolutely, "the padrone might secure to his child all that he needs to save her from the sepulchre of a convent; and ere the autumn leaves fall, she might be sitting on his knee. Padrone, do not think that you can conceal from me the truth, that you love your child better than all things in the world,—now the Patria is as dead to you as the dust of your fathers,—and your heart-strings would crack with the effort to tear her from them, and consign her to a convent. Padrone, never again to hear her voice, never again to see her face! Those little arms that twined round your neck that dark night, when we fled fast for life and freedom, and you said, as you felt their clasp, 'Friend, all is not yet lost.'"

"Giacomo!" exclaimed the father, reproachfully, and his voice seemed to choke him. Riccabocca turned away, and walked restlessly to and fro the terrace; then, lifting his arms with a wild gesture, as he still continued his long irregular strides, he muttered, "Yes, Heaven is my witness that I could have borne reverse and banishment without a murmur, had I permitted myself that young partner in exile and privation. Heaven is my witness that, if I hesitate now, it is because I would not listen to my own selfish heart. Yet never, never to see her again,—my child! And it was but as the infant that I beheld her! O friend, friend!" (and, stopping short with a burst of uncontrollable emotion, he bowed his head upon his servant's shoulder), "thou knowest what I have endured and suffered at my hearth, as in my country; the wrong, the perfidy, the— the—" His voice again failed him; he clung to his servant's breast, and his whole frame shook.

"But your child, the innocent one—think now only of her!" faltered Giacomo, struggling with his own sobs. "True, only of her," replied the exile, raising his face, "only of her. Put aside thy thoughts for thyself, friend,—counsel me. If I were to send for Violante, and if, transplanted to these keen airs, she drooped and died—Look, look, the priest says that she needs such tender care; or if I myself were summoned from the world, to leave her in it alone, friendless, homeless, breadless perhaps, at the age of woman's sharpest trial against temptation, would she not live to mourn the cruel egotism that closed on her infant innocence the gates of the House of God?"

Jackeymo was appalled by this appeal; and indeed Riccabocca had never before thus reverently spoken of the cloister. In his hours of philosophy, he was wont to sneer at monks and nuns, priesthood and superstition. But now, in that hour of emotion, the Old Religion reclaimed her empire; and the sceptical world-wise man, thinking only of his child, spoke and felt with a child's simple faith.

CHAPTER XX.

"But again I say," murmured Jackeymo, scarce audibly, and after a long silence, "if the padrone would make up his mind—to marry!"

He expected that his master would start up in his customary indignation at such a suggestion,—nay, he might not have been sorry so to have changed the current of feeling; but the poor Italian only winced slightly, and mildly withdrawing himself from his servant's supporting arm, again paced the terrace, but this time quietly and in silence. A quarter of an hour thus passed. "Give me the pipe," said Dr. Riccabocca, passing into the belvidere.

Jackeymo again struck the spark, and, wonderfully relieved at the padrone's return to the habitual adviser, mentally besought his sainted namesake to bestow a double portion of soothing wisdom on the benignant influences of the weed.

CHAPTER XXI.

Dr. Riccabocca had been some little time in the solitude of the belvidere, when Lenny Fairfield, not knowing that his employer was therein, entered to lay down a book which the doctor had lent him, with injunctions to leave it on a certain table when done with. Riccabocca looked up at the sound of the young peasant's step.

"I beg your honour's pardon, I did not know—"

"Never mind: lay the book there. I wish to speak with you. You look well, my child: this air agrees with you as well as that of Hazeldean?"

"Oh, yes, Sir!"

"Yet it is higher ground,—more exposed?"

"That can hardly be, sir," said Lenny; "there are many plants grow here which don't flourish at the squire's. The hill yonder keeps off the east wind, and the place lays to the south."

"Lies, not lays, Lenny. What are the principal complaints in these parts?"

"Eh, sir?"

"I mean what maladies, what diseases?"

"I never heard tell of any, sir, except the rheumatism."

"No low fevers, no consumption?"

"Never heard of them, sir."

Riccabocca drew a long breath, as if relieved. "That seems a very kind family at the Hall."

"I have nothing to say against it," answered Lenny, bluntly. "I have not been treated justly. But as that book says, sir, 'It is not every one who comes into the world with a silver spoon in his mouth.'"

Little thought the doctor that those wise maxims may leave sore thoughts behind them! He was too occupied with the subject most at his own heart to think then of what was in Lenny Fairfield's.

"Yes; a kind, English domestic family. Did you see much of Miss Hazeldean?"

"Not so much as of the Lady."

"Is she liked in the village, think you?"

"Miss Jemima? Yes. She never did harm. Her little dog bit me once,— she did not ask me to beg its pardon, she asked mine! She's a very nice young lady; the girls say she is very affable; and," added

Lenny, with a smile, "there are always more weddings going on when she is down at the Hall."

"Oh!" said Riccabocca. Then, after a long whiff, "Did you ever see her play with the little children? Is she fond of children, do you think?"

"Lord, sir, you guess everything! She's never so pleased as when she's playing with the babies."

"Humph!" grunted Riccabocca. "Babies! well, that's woman-like. I don't mean exactly babies, but when they're older,—little girls?"

"Indeed, Sir, I dare say; but," said Lenny, primly, "I never as yet kept company with the little girls."

"Quite right, Lenny; be equally discreet all your life. Mrs. Dale is very intimate with Miss Hazeldean,—more than with the squire's lady. Why is that, think you?"

"Well, sir," said Leonard, shrewdly, "Mrs. Dale has her little tempers, though she's a very good lady; and Madame Hazeldean is rather high, and has a spirit. But Miss Jemima is so soft: any one could live with Miss Jemima, as Joe and the servants say at the Hall."

"Indeed! get my hat out of the parlour, and—just bring a clothes-brush, Lenny. A fine sunny day for a walk."

After this most mean and dishonourable inquisition into the character and popular repute of Miss Hazeldean, Signor Riccabocca seemed as much cheered up and elated as if he had committed some very noble action; and he walked forth in the direction of the Hall with a far lighter and livelier step than that with which he had paced the terrace.

"Monsignore San Giacomo, by thy help and the pipe's, the padrone shall have his child!" muttered the servant, looking up from the garden.

CHAPTER XXII.

Yet Dr. Riccabocca was not rash. The man who wants his wedding-garment to fit him must allow plenty of time for the measure. But from that day, the Italian notably changed his manner towards Miss Hazeldean. He ceased that profusion of compliment in which he had hitherto carried off in safety all serious meaning. For indeed the doctor considered that compliments to a single gentleman were what the inky liquid it dispenses is to the cuttle-fish, that by obscuring the water sails away from its enemy. Neither did he, as before, avoid prolonged conversations with the young lady, and contrive to escape from all solitary rambles by her side. On the contrary, he now sought every occasion to be in her society; and entirely dropping the language of gallantry, he assumed something of the earnest tone of friendship. He bent down his intellect to examine and plumb her own. To use a very homely simile, he blew away that froth which there is on the surface of mere acquaintanceships, especially with the opposite sex; and which, while it lasts, scarce allows you to distinguish between small beer and double X. Apparently Dr. Riccabocca was satisfied with his scrutiny,—at all events under that froth there was no taste of bitter. The Italian might not find any great strength of intellect in Miss Jemima, but he found that, disentangled from many little whims and foibles,—which he had himself the sense to perceive were harmless enough if they lasted, and not so absolutely constitutional but what they might be removed by a tender hand,—Miss Hazeldean had quite enough sense to comprehend the plain duties of married life; and if the sense could fail, it found a substitute in good old homely English principles, and the instincts of amiable, kindly feelings.

I know not how it is, but your very clever man never seems to care so much as your less gifted mortals for cleverness in his helpmate. Your scholars and poets and ministers of state are more often than not found assorted with exceedingly humdrum, good sort of women, and apparently like them all the better for their deficiencies. Just see how happily Racine lived with his wife, and what an angel he thought her, and yet she had never read his plays. Certainly Goethe never troubled the lady who called him "Mr. Privy Councillor" with whims about "monads," and speculations on colour, nor those stiff metaphysical problems on which one breaks one's shins in the Second Past of the "Faust." Probably it may be that such great geniuses—knowing that, as compared with themselves, there is little difference between your clever woman and your humdrum woman—merge at once all minor distinctions, relinquish all attempts at sympathy in hard intellectual pursuits, and are quite satisfied to establish that tie which, after all, best resists wear and tear,—namely, the tough household bond between one human

heart and another.

At all events, this, I suspect, was the reasoning of Dr. Riccabocca, when one morning, after a long walk with Miss Hazeldean, he muttered to himself,—

"Duro con duro
Non fete mai buon muro,"—

which may bear the paraphrase, "Bricks without mortar would make a very bad wall." There was quite enough in Miss Jemima's disposition to make excellent mortar: the doctor took the bricks to himself.

When his examination was concluded, our philosopher symbolically evinced the result he had arrived at by a very simple proceeding on his part, which would have puzzled you greatly if you had not paused, and meditated thereon, till you saw all that it implied. /Dr. Riccabocca, took of his spectacles!/ He wiped them carefully, put them into their shagreen case, and locked them in his bureau,—that is to say, he left off wearing his spectacles.

You will observe that there was a wonderful depth of meaning in that critical symptom, whether it be regarded as a sign outward, positive, and explicit, or a sign metaphysical, mystical, and esoteric. For, as to the last, it denoted that the task of the spectacles was over; that, when a philosopher has made up his mind to marry, it is better henceforth to be shortsighted—nay, even somewhat purblind—than to be always scrutinizing the domestic felicity, to which he is about to resign himself, through a pair of cold, unillusory barnacles. As for the things beyond the hearth, if he cannot see without spectacles, is he not about to ally to his own defective vision a good sharp pair of eyes, never at fault where his interests are concerned? On the other hand, regarded positively, categorically, and explicitly, Dr. Rocabocca, by laying aside those spectacles, signified that he was about to commence that happy initiation of courtship when every man, be he ever so much a philosopher, wishes to look as young and as handsome as time and nature will allow. Vain task to speed the soft language of the eyes through the medium of those glassy interpreters! I remember, for my own part, that once, on a visit to the town of Adelaide, I—Pisistratus Caxton—was in great danger of falling in love,—with a young lady, too, who would have brought me a very good fortune,—when she suddenly produced from her reticule a very neat pair of No. 4, set in tortoiseshell, and fixing upon me their Gorgon gaze, froze the astonished Cupid into stone! And I hold it a great proof of the wisdom of Riccabocca, and of his vast experience in mankind, that he was not above the consideration of what your pseudo-sages would have regarded as foppish and ridiculous trifles. It argued all the better for that happiness which is our being's end and aim that in condescending to play the lover, he put those unbecoming petrifiers under lock and key.

And certainly, now the spectacles were abandoned, it was impossible to deny that the Italian had remarkably handsome eyes. Even through the spectacles, or lifted a little above them, they were always bright and expressive; but without those adjuncts, the blaze was softer and more tempered: they had that look which the French call *veloute*, or *velvety*; and he appeared altogether ten years younger. If our Ulysses, thus rejuvenated by his Minerva, has not fully made up his mind to make a Penelope of Miss Jemima, all I can say is, that he is worse than Polyphemus, who was only an *Anthropophagos*,—

He preys upon the weaker sex, and is a *Gynopophagite*!

CHAPTER XXIII.

"And you commission me, then, to speak to our dear Jemima?" said Mrs. Dale, joyfully, and without any bitterness whatever in that "dear."

DR. RICCABOCCA.—"Nay, before speaking to Miss Hazeldean, it would surely be proper to know how far my addresses would be acceptable to the family."

MRS. DALE.—"Ah!"

DR. RICCAROCCA.—"The squire is of course the head of the family."

MRS. DALE (absent and distraite).—"The squire—yes, very true—quite proper." (Then, looking up, and with naivete) "Can you believe me? I never thought of the squire. And he is such an odd man, and has so many English prejudices, that really—dear me, how vexatious that it should never once have

occurred to me that Mr. Hazeldean had a voice in the matter! Indeed, the relationship is so distant, it is not like being her father; and Jemima is of age, and can do as she pleases; and—but, as you say, it is quite proper that he should be consulted as the head of the family."

DR. RICCASOCCA.—"And you think that the Squire of Hazeldean might reject my alliance! Pshaw! that's a grand word indeed,—I mean, that he might object very reasonably to his cousin's marriage with a foreigner, of whom he can know nothing, except that which in all countries is disreputable, and is said in this to be criminal,—poverty."

MRS. DALE (kindly)—"You misjudge us poor English people, and you wrong the squire, Heaven bless him! for we were poor enough when he singled out my husband from a hundred for the minister of his parish, for his neighbour and his friend. I will speak to him fearlessly—"

DR. RICCABOCCA.—"And frankly. And now I have used that word, let me go on with the confession which your kindly readiness, my fair friend, somewhat interrupted. I said that if I might presume to think my addresses would be acceptable to Miss Hazeldean and her family, I was too sensible of her amiable qualities not to—not to—"

MRS. DALE (with demure archness).—"Not to be the happiest of men,— that's the customary English phrase, Doctor."

RICCABOCCA (gallantly).—"There cannot be a better. But," continued he, seriously, "I wish it first to be understood that I have—been married before!"

MRS. DALE (astonished).—"Married before!"

RICCABOCCA.—"And that I have an only child, dear to me,—inexpressibly dear. That child, a daughter, has hitherto lived abroad; circumstances now render it desirable that she should make her home with me; and I own fairly that nothing has so attached me to Miss Hazeldean, nor so induced my desire for our matrimonial connection, as my belief that she has the heart and the temper to become a kind mother to my little one."

MRS. DALE (with feeling and warmth).—"You judge her rightly there."

RICCABOCCA.—"Now, in pecuniary matters, as you may conjecture from my mode of life, I have nothing to offer to Miss Hazeldean correspondent with her own fortune, whatever that may be!"

MRS. DALE.—"That difficulty is obviated by settling Miss Hazeldean's fortune on herself, which is customary in such cases."

Dr. Riccabocca's face lengthened. "And my child, then?" said he, feelingly. There was something in that appeal so alien from all sordid and merely personal mercenary motives, that Mrs. Dale could not have had the heart to make the very rational suggestion, "But that child is not Jemima's, and you may have children by her."

She was touched, and replied hesitatingly, "But from what you and Jemima may jointly possess you can save something annually,—you can insure your life for your child. We did so when our poor child whom we lost was born" (the tears rushed into Mrs. Dale's eyes); "and I fear that Charles still insures his life for my sake, though Heaven knows that—that—"

The tears burst out. That little heart, quick and petulant though it was, had not a fibre of the elastic muscular tissues which are mercifully bestowed on the hearts of predestined widows. Dr. Riccabocca could not pursue the subject of life insurances further. But the idea—which had never occurred to the foreigner before, though so familiar with us English people when only possessed of a life income—pleased him greatly. I will do him the justice to say that he preferred it to the thought of actually appropriating to himself and to his child a portion of Miss Hazeldean's dower.

Shortly afterwards he took his leave, and Mrs. Dale hastened to seek her husband in his study, inform him of the success of her matrimonial scheme, and consult him as to the chance of the squire's acquiescence therein. "You see," said she, hesitatingly, "though the squire might be glad to see Jemima married to some Englishman, yet if he asks who and what is this Dr. Riccabocca, how am I to answer him?"

"You should have thought of that before," said Mr. Dale, with unwonted asperity; "and, indeed, if I had ever believed anything serious could come out of what seemed to me so absurd, I should long since have requested you not to interfere in such matters. Good heavens!" continued the parson, changing colour, "if we should have assisted, underhand as it were, to introduce into the family of a man to whom we owe so much a connection that he would dislike, how base we should be, how ungrateful!"

Poor Mrs. Dale was frightened by this speech, and still more by her husband's consternation and displeasure. To do Mrs. Dale justice, whenever her mild partner was really either grieved or offended, her little temper vanished,—she became as meek as a lamb. As soon as she recovered the first shock she experienced, she hastened to dissipate the parson's apprehensions. She assured him that she was convinced that, if the squire disapproved of Riccabocca's pretensions, the Italian would withdraw them at once, and Miss Hazeldean would never know of his proposals. Therefore, in that case, no harm would be done.

This assurance, coinciding with Mr. Dale's convictions as to Riccabocca's scruples on the point of honour, tended much to compose the good man; and if he did not, as my reader of the gentler sex would expect from him, feel alarm lest Miss Jemima's affections should have been irretrievably engaged, and her happiness thus put in jeopardy by the squire's refusal, it was not that the parson wanted tenderness of heart, but experience in womankind; and he believed, very erroneously, that Miss Jemima Hazeldean was not one upon whom a disappointment of that kind would produce a lasting impression. Therefore Mr. Dale, after a pause of consideration, said kindly,—

"Well, don't vex yourself,—and I was to blame quite as much as you. But, indeed, I should have thought it easier for the squire to have transplanted one of his tall cedars into his kitchen-garden than for you to inveigle Dr. Riccabocca into matrimonial intentions. But a man who could voluntarily put himself into the parish stocks for the sake of experiment must be capable of anything! However, I think it better that I, rather than yourself, should speak to the squire, and I will go at once."

CHAPTER XXIV.

The parson put on the shovel-hat, which—conjoined with other details in his dress peculiarly clerical, and already, even then, beginning to be out of fashion with Churchmen—had served to fix upon him emphatically the dignified but antiquated style and cognomen of "Parson;" and took his way towards the Home Farm, at which he expected to find the squire. But he had scarcely entered upon the village green when he beheld Mr. Hazeldean, leaning both hands on his stick, and gazing intently upon the parish stocks. Now, sorry am I to say that, ever since the Hegira of Lenny and his mother, the Anti-Stockian and Revolutionary spirit in Hazeldean, which the memorable homily of our parson had a while averted or suspended, had broken forth afresh. For though while Lenny was present to be mowed and jeered at, there had been no pity for him, yet no sooner was he removed from the scene of trial than a universal compassion for the barbarous usage he had received produced what is called "the reaction of public opinion." Not that those who had mowed and jeered repented them of their mockery, or considered themselves in the slightest degree the cause of his expatriation. No; they, with the rest of the villagers, laid all the blame upon the stocks. It was not to be expected that a lad of such exemplary character could be thrust into that place of ignominy, and not be sensible to the affront. And who, in the whole village, was safe, if such goings-on and puttings-in were to be tolerated in silence, and at the expense of the very best and quietest lad the village had ever known? Thus, a few days after the widow's departure, the stocks was again the object of midnight desecration: it was bedaubed and bescratched, it was hacked and hewed, it was scrawled over with pithy lamentations for Lenny, and laconic execrations on tyrants. Night after night new inscriptions appeared, testifying the sarcastic wit and the vindictive sentiment of the parish. And perhaps the stocks was only spared from axe and bonfire by the convenience it afforded to the malice of the disaffected: it became the Pasquin of Hazeldean.

As disaffection naturally produces a correspondent vigour in authority, so affairs had been lately administered with greater severity than had been hitherto wont in the easy rule of the squire and his predecessors. Suspected persons were naturally marked out by Mr. Stirn, and reported to his employer, who, too proud or too pained to charge them openly with ingratitude, at first only passed them by in his walks with a silent and stiff inclination of his head; and afterwards, gradually yielding to the baleful influence of Stirn, the squire grumbled forth "that he did not see why he should be always putting himself out of his way to show kindness to those who made such a return. There ought to be a difference between the good and the bad." Encouraged by this admission, Stirn had conducted himself towards the suspected parties, and their whole kith and kin, with the iron-handed justice that belonged to his character. For some, habitual donations of milk from the dairy and vegetables from the gardens were surlily suspended; others were informed that their pigs were always trespassing on the woods in search of acorns, or that they were violating the Game Laws in keeping lurchers. A beer-house, popular in the neighbourhood, but of late resorted to over-much by the grievance-mongers (and no wonder,

since they had become the popular party), was threatened with an application to the magistrates for the withdrawal of its license. Sundry old women, whose grandsons were notoriously ill-disposed towards the stocks, were interdicted from gathering dead sticks under the avenues, on pretence that they broke down the live boughs; and, what was more obnoxious to the younger members of the parish than most other retaliatory measures, three chestnut-trees, one walnut, and two cherry-trees, standing at the bottom of the Park, and which had, from time immemorial, been given up to the youth of Hazeldean, were now solemnly placed under the general defence of "private property." And the crier had announced that, henceforth, all depredators on the fruit trees in Copse Hollow would be punished with the utmost rigour of the law. Stirn, indeed, recommended much more stringent proceedings than all these indications of a change of policy, which, he averred, would soon bring the parish to its senses,—such as discontinuing many little jobs of unprofitable work that employed the surplus labour of the village. But there the squire, falling into the department and under the benignant influence of his Harry, was as yet not properly hardened. When it came to a question that affected the absolute quantity of loaves to be consumed by the graceless mouths that fed upon him, the milk of human kindness—with which Providence has so bountifully supplied that class of the mammalia called the "Bucolic," and of which our squire had an extra "yield"—burst forth, and washed away all the indignation of the harsher Adam.

Still your policy of half-measures, which irritates without crushing its victims, which flaps an exasperated wasp-nest with a silk pocket-handkerchief, instead of blowing it up with a match and train, is rarely successful; and after three or four other and much guiltier victims than Lenny had been incarcerated in the stocks, the parish of Hazeldean was ripe for any enormity. Pestilent Jacobinical tracts, conceived and composed in the sinks of manufacturing towns, found their way into the popular beer-house,—Heaven knows how, though the tinker was suspected of being the disseminator by all but Stirn, who still, in a whisper, accused the Papishers. And, finally, there appeared amongst the other graphic embellishments which the poor stocks had received, the rude gravure of a gentleman in a broad-brimmed hat and top-boots, suspended from a gibbet, with the inscription beneath, "A warnin to hall tirans—mind your hi!— sighnde Captin sTraw."

It was upon this significant and emblematic portraiture that the squire was gazing when the parson joined him. "Well, Parson," said Mr. Hazeldean, with a smile which he meant to be pleasant and easy, but which was exceedingly bitter and grim, "I wish you joy of your flock,—you see they have just hanged me in effigy!"

The parson stared, and though greatly shocked, smothered his emotion; and attempted, with the wisdom of the serpent and the mildness of the dove, to find another original for the effigy.

"It is very bad," quoth he, "but not so bad as all that, Squire; that's not the shape of your bat. It is evidently meant for Mr. Stirn."

"Do you think so?" said the squire, softened. "Yet the top-boots—Stirn never wears top-boots."

"No more do you, except in the hunting-field. If you look again, those are not tops, they are leggings,—Stirn wears leggings. Besides, that flourish, which is meant for a nose, is a kind of hook, like Stirn's; whereas your nose—though by no means a snub—rather turns up than not, as the Apollo's does, according to the plaster cast in Riccabocca's parlour."

"Poor Stirn!" said the squire, in a tone that evinced complacency, not unmingled with compassion, "that's what a man gets in this world by being a faithful servant, and doing his duty with zeal for his employer. But you see things have come to a strange pass, and the question now is, what course to pursue. The miscreants hitherto have defied all vigilance, and Stirn recommends the employment of a regular nightwatch, with a lanthorn and bludgeon."

"That may protect the stocks certainly; but will it keep those detestable tracts out of the beer-house?"

"We shall shut the beer-house up the next sessions."

"The tracts will break out elsewhere,—the humour's in the blood!"

"I've half a mind to run off to Brighton or Leamingtongood hunting at Leamington—for a year, just to let the rogues see how they can get on without me!"

The squire's lip trembled.

"My dear Mr. Hazeldean," said the parson, taking his friend's hand, "I don't want to parade my superior wisdom; but, if you had taken my advice, 'quieta non movere!' Was there ever a parish so peaceable as this, or a country gentleman so beloved as you were, before you undertook the task which has dethroned kings and ruined States,—that of wantonly meddling with antiquity, whether for the

purpose of uncalled-for repairs, or the revival of obsolete uses."

At this rebuke, the squire did not manifest his constitutional tendencies to choler; but he replied almost meekly, "If it were to do again, faith, I would leave the parish to the enjoyment of the shabbiest pair of stocks that ever disgraced a village. Certainly I meant it for the best,—an ornament to the green; however, now the stocks is rebuilt, the stocks must be supported. Will Hazeldean is not the man to give way to a set of thankless rascalions."

"I think," said the parson, "that you will allow that the House of Tudor, whatever its faults, was a determined, resolute dynasty enough,—high-hearted and strong-headed. A Tudor would never have fallen into the same calamities as the poor Stuart did!"

"What the plague has the House of Tudor got to do with my stocks?"

"A great deal. Henry VIII. found a subsidy so unpopular that he gave it up; and the people, in return, allowed him to cut off as many heads as he pleased, besides those in his own family. Good Queen Bess, who, I know, is your idol in history—"

"To be sure!—she knighted my ancestor at Tilbury Fort."

"Good Queen Bess struggled hard to maintain a certain monopoly; she saw it would not do, and she surrendered it with that frank heartiness which becomes a sovereign, and makes surrender a grace."

"Ha! and you would have me give up the stocks?"

"I would much rather the stocks had remained as it was before you touched it; but, as it is, if you could find a good plausible pretext—and there is an excellent one at hand,—the sternest kings open prisons, and grant favours, upon joyful occasions. Now a marriage in the royal family is of course a joyful occasion! and so it should be in that of the King of Hazeldean." Admire that artful turn in the parson's eloquence!—it was worthy of Riccabocca himself. Indeed, Mr. Dale had profited much by his companionship with that Machiavellian intellect.

"A marriage,—yes; but Frank has only just got into coattails!"

"I did not allude to Frank, but to your cousin Jemima!"

CHAPTER XXV.

The squire staggered as if the breath had been knocked out of him, and, for want of a better seat, sat down on the stocks. All the female heads in the neighbouring cottages peered, themselves unseen, through the casements. What could the squire be about? What new mischief did he meditate? Did he mean to fortify the stocks? Old Gaffer Solomons, who had an indefinite idea of the lawful power of squires, and who had been for the last ten minutes at watch on his threshold, shook his head and said, "Them as a cut out the mon a hanging, as a put it in the squire's head!"

"Put what?" asked his grand-daughter.

"The gallus!" answered Solomons,—"he be a going to have it hung from the great elfin-tree. And the parson, good mon, is a quoting Scriptor agin it; you see he's a taking off his gloves, and a putting his two han's together, as he do when he pray for the sick, Jeany."

That description of the parson's mien and manner, which with his usual niceness of observation, Gaffer Solomons thus sketched off, will convey to you some idea of the earnestness with which the parson pleaded the cause he had undertaken to advocate. He dwelt much upon the sense of propriety which the foreigner had evinced in requesting that the squire might be consulted before any formal communication to his cousin; and he repeated Mrs. Dale's assurance, that such were Riccabocca's high standard of honour and belief in the sacred rights of hospitality, that, if the squire withheld his consent to his proposals, the parson was convinced that the Italian would instantly retract them. Now, considering that Miss Hazeldean was, to say the least, come to years of discretion, and the squire had long since placed her property entirely at her own disposal, Mr. Hazeldean was forced to acquiesce in the parson's corollary remark, "That this was a delicacy which could not be expected from every English pretender to the lady's hand." Seeing that he had so far cleared the ground, the parson went on to intimate, though with great tact, that since Miss Jemima would probably marry sooner or later (and,

indeed, that the squire could not wish to prevent her), it might be better for all parties concerned that it should be with some one who, though a foreigner, was settled in the neighbourhood, and of whose character what was known was certainly favourable, rather than run the hazard of her being married for her money by some adventurer, or Irish fortune-hunter, at the watering-places she yearly visited. Then he touched lightly on Riccabocca's agreeable and companionable qualities; and concluded with a skilful peroration upon the excellent occasion the wedding would afford to reconcile Hall and parish, by making a voluntary holocaust of the stocks.

As he concluded, the squire's brow, before thoughtful, though not sullen, cleared up benignly. To say truth, the squire was dying to get rid of the stocks, if he could but do so handsomely and with dignity; and had all the stars in the astrological horoscope conjoined together to give Miss Jemima "assurance of a husband," they could not so have served her with the squire as that conjunction between the altar and the stocks which the parson had effected!

Accordingly, when Mr. Dale had come to an end, the squire replied, with great placidity and good sense, "That Mr. Rickeybockey had behaved very much like a gentleman, and that he was very much obliged to him; that he [the squire] had no right to interfere in the matter, further than with his advice; that Jemima was old enough to choose for herself, and that, as the parson had implied, after all she might go farther and fare worse,—indeed, the farther she went (that is, the longer she waited) the worse she was likely to fare. I own, for my part," continued the squire, "that though I like Rickeybockey very much, I never suspected that Jemima was caught with his long face; but there's no accounting for tastes. My Harry, indeed, was more shrewd, and gave me many a hint, for which I only laughed at her. Still I ought to have thought it looked queer when Mounseer took to disguising himself by leaving off his glasses, ha, ha! I wonder what Harry will say; let's go and talk to her."

The parson, rejoiced at this easy way of taking the matter, hooked his arm into the squire's, and they walked amicably towards the Hall. But on coming first into the gardens they found Mrs. Hazeldean herself, clipping dead leaves or fading flowers from her rose-trees. The squire stole slyly behind her, and startled her in her turn by putting his arm round her waist, and saluting her smooth cheek with one of his hearty kisses; which, by the way, from some association of ideas, was a conjugal freedom that he usually indulged whenever a wedding was going on in the village.

"Fie, William!" said Mrs. Hazeldean, coyly, and blushing as she saw the parson. "Well, who's going to be married now?"

"Lord! was there ever such a woman?—she's guessed it!" cried the squire, in great admiration. "Tell her all about it, Parson."

The parson obeyed.

Mrs. Hazeldean, as the reader may suppose, showed much less surprise than her husband had done; but she took the news graciously, and made much the same answer as that which had occurred to the squire, only with somewhat more qualification and reserve. "Signor Riccabocca had behaved very handsomely; and though a daughter of the Hazeldeans of Hazeldean might expect a much better marriage in a worldly point of view, yet as the lady in question had deferred finding one so long, it would be equally idle and impertinent now to quarrel with her choice,—if indeed she should decide on accepting Signor Riccabocca. As for fortune, that was a consideration for the two contracting parties. Still, it ought, to be pointed out to Miss Jemima that the interest of her fortune would afford but a very small income. That Dr. Riccabocca was a widower was another matter for deliberation; and it seemed rather suspicious that he should have been hitherto so close upon all matters connected with his former life. Certainly his manners were in his favour, and as long as he was merely an acquaintance, and at most a tenant, no one had a right to institute inquiries of a strictly private nature; but that, when he was about to marry a Hazeldean of Hazeldean, it became the squire at least to know a little more about him,—who and what he was. Why did he leave his own country? English people went abroad to save: no foreigner would choose England as a country in which to save money! She supposed that a foreign doctor was no very great things; probably he had been a professor in some Italian university. At all events, if the squire interfered at all, it was on such points that he should request information."

"My clear madam," said the parson, "what you say is extremely just. As to the causes which have induced our friend to expatriate himself, I think we need not look far for them. He is evidently one of the many Italian refugees whom political disturbances have driven to a land of which it is the boast to receive all exiles of whatever party. For his respectability of birth and family he certainly ought to obtain some vouchers. And if that be the only objection, I trust we may soon congratulate Miss Hazeldean on a marriage with a man who, though certainly very poor, has borne privations without a murmur; has preferred all hardship to debt; has scorned to attempt betraying the young lady into any clandestine connection; who, in short, has shown himself so upright and honest, that I hope my dear Mr. Hazeldean will forgive him if he is only a doctor—probably of Laws—and not, as most foreigners

pretend to be, a marquis or a baron at least."

"As to that," cried the squire, "It is the best thing I know about Rickeybockey that he don't attempt to humbug us by any such foreign trumpery. Thank Heaven, the Hazeldeans of Hazeldean were never tuft-hunters and title-mongers; and if I never ran after an English lord, I should certainly be devilishly ashamed of a brother-in-law whom I was forced to call markee or count! I should feel sure he was a courier, or runaway valley-de-sham. Turn up your nose at a doctor, indeed, Harry!—pshaw, good English style that! Doctor! my aunt married a Doctor of Divinity—excellent man—wore a wig and was made a dean! So long as Rickeybockey is not a doctor of physic, I don't care a button. If he's that, indeed, it would be suspicious; because, you see, those foreign doctors of physic are quacks, and tell fortunes, and go about on a stage with a Merry-Andrew."

"Lord! Hazeldean, where on earth did you pick up that idea?" said Harry, laughing.

"Pick it up!—why, I saw a fellow myself at the cattle fair last year— when I was buying short-horns— with a red waistcoat and a cocked hat, a little like the parson's shovel. He called himself Dr. Phoscophornio, and sold pills. The Merry-Andrew was the funniest creature, in salmon- coloured tights, turned head over heels, and said he came from Timbuctoo. No, no: if Rickeybockey's a physic Doctor, we shall have Jemima in a pink tinsel dress tramping about the country in a caravan!"

At this notion both the squire and his wife laughed so heartily that the parson felt the thing was settled, and slipped away, with the intention of making his report to Riccabocca.

CHAPTER XXVI.

It was with a slight disturbance of his ordinary suave and well-bred equanimity that the Italian received the information that he need apprehend no obstacle to his suit from the insular prejudices or the worldly views of the lady's family. Not that he was mean and cowardly enough to recoil from the near and unclouded prospect of that felicity which he had left off his glasses to behold with unblinking, naked eyes, —no, there his mind was made up; but he had met in life with much that inclines a man towards misanthropy, and he was touched not only by the interest in his welfare testified by a heretical priest, but by the generosity with which he was admitted into a well-born and wealthy family, despite his notorious poverty and his foreign descent. He conceded the propriety of the only stipulation, which was conveyed to him by the parson with all the delicacy that became one long professionally habituated to deal with the subtler susceptibilities of mankind,—namely, that, amongst Riccabocca's friends or kindred, some person should be found whose report would confirm the persuasion of his respectability entertained by his neighbours,—he assented, I say, to the propriety of this condition; but it was not with alacrity and eagerness. His brow became clouded. The parson hastened to assure him that the squire was not a man /qui stupet in titulis/,—["Who was besotted with titles."]— that he neither expected nor desired to find an origin and rank for his brother-in-law above that decent mediocrity of condition to which it was evident from Riccabocca's breeding and accomplishments he could easily establish his claim. "And though," said he, smiling, "the squire is a warm politician in his own country, and would never see his sister again, I fear, if she married some convicted enemy of our happy constitution, yet for foreign politics he does not care a straw; so that if, as I suspect, your exile arises from some quarrel with your government,— which, being foreign, he takes for granted must be insupportable,—he would but consider you as he would a Saxon who fled from the iron hand of William the Conqueror, or a Lancastrian expelled by the Yorkists in our Wars of the Roses."

The Italian smiled. "Mr. Hazeldean shall be satisfied," said he, simply. "I see, by the squire's newspaper, that an English gentleman who knew me in my own country has just arrived in London. I will write to him for a testimonial, at least to my probity and character. Probably he may be known to you by name,—nay, he must be, for he was a distinguished officer in the late war. I allude to Lord L'Estrange."

The parson started.

"You know Lord L'Estrange?—profligate, bad man, I fear."

"Profligate! bad!" exclaimed Riccabocca. "Well, calumnious as the world is, I should never have thought that such expressions would be applied to one who, though I knew him but little,—knew him chiefly by the service he once rendered to me,—first taught me to love and revere the English name!"

"He may be changed since—" the parson paused.

"Since when?" asked Riccabocca, with evident curiosity. Mr. Dale seemed embarrassed. "Excuse me," said he, "it is many years ago; and in short the opinion I then formed of the nobleman you named was based upon circumstances which I cannot communicate."

The punctilious Italian bowed in silence, but he still looked as if he should have liked to prosecute inquiry.

After a pause he said, "Whatever your impression respecting Lord L'Estrange, there is nothing, I suppose, which would lead you to doubt his honour, or reject his testimonial in my favour?"

"According to fashionable morality," said Mr. Dale, rather precisely, "I know of nothing that could induce me to suppose that Lord L'Estrange would not, in this instance, speak the truth. And he has unquestionably a high reputation as a soldier, and a considerable position in the world." Therewith the parson took his leave. A few days afterwards, Dr. Riccabocca inclosed to the squire, in a blank envelope, a letter he had received from Harley L'Estrange. It was evidently intended for the squire's eye, and to serve as a voucher for the Italian's respectability; but this object was fulfilled, not in the coarse form of a direct testimonial, but with a tact and delicacy which seemed to show more than the fine breeding to be expected from one in Lord L'Estrange's station. It evinced that most exquisite of all politeness which comes from the heart; a certain tone of affectionate respect (which even the homely sense of the squire felt, intuitively, proved far more in favour of Riccabocca than the most elaborate certificate of his qualities and antecedents) pervaded the whole, and would have sufficed in itself to remove all scruples from a mind much more suspicious and exacting than that of the Squire of Hazeldean. But, to and behold! an obstacle now occurred to the parson, of which he ought to have thought long before,—namely, the Papistical religion of the Italian. Dr. Riccabocca was professedly a Roman Catholic. He so little obtruded that fact—and, indeed, had assented so readily to any animadversions upon the superstition and priestcraft which, according to Protestants, are the essential characteristics of Papistical communities—that it was not till the hymeneal torch, which brings all faults to light, was fairly illumined for the altar, that the remembrance of a faith so cast into the shade burst upon the conscience of the parson. The first idea that then occurred to him was the proper and professional one,—namely, the conversion of Dr. Riccabocca. He hastened to his study, took down from his shelves long neglected volumes of controversial divinity, armed himself with an arsenal of authorities, arguments, and texts; then, seizing the shovel-hat, posted off to the Casino.

CHAPTER XXVII.

The parson burst upon the philosopher like an avalanche! He was so full of his subject that he could not let it out in prudent driblets. No, he went souse upon the astounded Riccabocca—

"Tremendo
Jupiter ipse rueus tumultu."

The sage—shrinking deeper into his armchair, and drawing his dressing-robe more closely round him—suffered the parson to talk for three quarters of an hour, till indeed he had thoroughly proved his case; and, like Brutus, "paused for a reply."

Then said Riccabocca mildly: "In much of what you have urged so ably, and so suddenly, I am inclined to agree. But base is the man who formally forswears the creed he has inherited from his fathers, and professed since the cradle up to years of maturity, when the change presents itself in the guise of a bribe; when, for such is human nature, he can hardly distinguish or disentangle the appeal to his reason from the lure to his interests,—here a text, and there a dowry!—here Protestantism, there Jemima! Own, my friend, that the soberest casuist would see double under the inebriating effects produced by so mixing his polemical liquors. Appeal, my good Mr. Dale, from Philip drunken to Philip sober! —from Riccabocca intoxicated with the assurance of your excellent lady, that he is about to be 'the happiest of men,' to Riccabocca accustomed to his happiness, and carrying it off with the seasoned equability of one grown familiar with stimulants,—in a word, appeal from Riccabocca the wooer to Riccabocca the spouse. I may be convertible, but conversion is a slow progress; courtship should be a quick one,—ask Miss Jemima. /Finalmente/, marry me first, and convert me afterwards!"

"You take this too jestingly," began the parson; "and I don't see why, with your excellent understanding, truths so plain and obvious should not strike you at once."

"Truths," interrupted Riccabocca, profoundly, "are the slowest growing things in the world! It took fifteen hundred years from the date of the Christian era to produce your own Luther, and then he flung his Bible at Satan (I have seen the mark made by the book on the wall of his prison in Germany), besides running off with a nun, which no Protestant clergyman would think it proper and right to do nowadays." Then he added, with seriousness, "Look you, my dear sir, I should lose my own esteem if I were even to listen to you now with becoming attention,—now, I say, when you hint that the creed I have professed may be in the way of my advantage. If so, I must keep the creed and resign the advantage. But if, as I trust not only as a Christian but a man of honour, you will defer this discussion, I will promise to listen to you hereafter; and though, to say truth, I believe that you will not convert me, I will promise you faithfully never to interfere with my wife's religion."

"And any children you may have?"

"Children!" said Dr. Riccabocca, recoiling; "you are not contented with firing your pocket-pistol right in my face! you must also pepper me all over with small shot. Children! well, if they are girls, let them follow the faith of their mother; and if boys, while in childhood, let them be contented with learning to be Christians; and when they grow into men, let them choose for themselves which is the best form for the practice of the great principles which all sects have in common."

"But," began Mr. Dale again, pulling a large book from his pocket.

Dr. Riccabocca flung open the window, and jumped out of it.

It was the rapidest and most dastardly flight you could possibly conceive; but it was a great compliment to the argumentative powers of the parson, and he felt it as such. Nevertheless, Mr. Dale thought it right to have a long conversation, both with the squire and Miss Jemima herself, upon the subject which his intended convert had so ignominiously escaped.

The squire, though a great foe to Popery, politically considered, had also quite as great a hatred to renegades and apostates. And in his heart he would have despised Riccabocca if he could have thrown off his religion as easily as he had done his spectacles. Therefore he said simply, "Well, it is certainly a great pity that Rickeybockey is not of the Church of England; though, I take it, that would be unreasonable to expect in a man born and bred under the nose of the Inquisition" (the squire firmly believed that the Inquisition was in full force in all the Italian States, with whips, racks, and thumbscrews; and, indeed, his chief information of Italy was gathered from a perusal he had given in early youth to "The One-Handed Monk"); "but I think he speaks very fairly, on the whole, as to his wife and children. And the thing's gone too far now to retract. It's all your fault for not thinking of it before; and I've now just made up my mind as to the course to pursue respecting the d—d stocks!"

As for Miss Jemima, the parson left her with a pious thanksgiving that Riccabocca at least was a Christian, and not a Pagan, Mahometan, or Jew!

CHAPTER XXVIII.

There is that in a wedding which appeals to a universal sympathy. No other event in the lives of their superiors in rank creates an equal sensation amongst the humbler classes.

From the moment the news that Miss Jemima was to be married had spread throughout the village, all the old affection for the squire and his House burst forth the stronger for its temporary suspension. Who could think of the stocks in such a season? The stocks were swept out of fashion,—hunted from remembrance as completely as the question of Repeal or the thought of Rebellion from the warm Irish heart, when the fair young face of the Royal Wife beamed on the sister isle.

Again cordial courtesies were dropped at the thresholds by which the squire passed to his own farm; again the sunburned brows uncovered—no more with sullen ceremony—were smoothed into cheerful gladness at his nod. Nay, the little ones began again to assemble at their ancient rendezvous by the stocks, as if either familiarized with the phenomenon, or convinced that, in the general sentiment of good-will, its powers of evil were annulled.

The squire tasted once more the sweets of the only popularity which is much worth having, and the loss of which a wise man would reasonably deplore,—namely, the popularity which arises from a persuasion of our goodness, and a reluctance to recall our faults. Like all blessings, the more sensibly felt from previous interruption, the squire enjoyed this restored popularity with an exhilarated sense of existence; his stout heart beat more vigorously; his stalwart step trod more lightly; his comely English face looked comelier and more English than ever,—you would have been a merrier man for a week to have come within hearing of his jovial laugh.

He felt grateful to Jemima and to Riccabocca as the special agents of Providence in this general */integratio amoris/*. To have looked at him, you would suppose that it was the squire who was going to be married a second time to his Harry!

One may well conceive that such would have been an inauspicious moment for Parson Dale's theological scruples to have stopped that marriage, chilled all the sunshine it diffused over the village, seen himself surrounded again by long sulky visages,—I verily believe, though a better friend of Church and State never stood on a hustings, that, rather than court such a revulsion, the squire would have found jesuitical excuses for the marriage if Riccabocca had been discovered to be the Pope in disguise! As for the stocks, its fate was now irrevocably sealed. In short, the marriage was concluded,—first privately, according to the bridegrooms creed, by a Roman Catholic clergyman, who lived in a town some miles off, and next publicly in the village church of Hazeldean.

It was the heartiest rural wedding! Village girls strewed flowers on the way; a booth was placed amidst the prettiest scenery of the Park on the margin of the lake—for there was to be a dance later in the day. Even Mr. Stirn—no, Mr. Stirn was not present; so much happiness would have been the death of him! And the Papisher too, who had conjured Lenny out of the stocks nay, who had himself sat in the stocks for the very purpose of bringing them into contempt,—the Papisher! he had a lief Miss Jemima had married the devil! Indeed he was persuaded that, in point of fact, it was all one and the same. Therefore Mr. Stirn had asked leave to go and attend his uncle the pawnbroker, about to undergo a torturing operation for the stone! Frank was there, summoned from Eton for the occasion—having grown two inches taller since he left—for the one inch of which nature was to be thanked, for the other a new pair of resplendent Wellingtons. But the boy's joy was less apparent than that of others. For Jemima, was a special favourite with him, as she would have been with all boys,—for she was always kind and gentle, and made him many pretty presents whenever she came from the watering-places; and Frank knew that he should miss her sadly, and thought she had made a very queer choice.

Captain Higginbotham had been invited; but to the astonishment of Jemima, he had replied to the invitation by a letter to herself, marked "private and confidential."

"She must have long known," said the letter, "of his devoted attachment to her! motives of delicacy, arising from the narrowness of his income and the magnanimity of his sentiments, had alone prevented his formal proposals; but now that he was informed (he could scarcely believe his senses or command his passions) that her relations wished to force her into a BARBAROUS marriage with a foreigner of MOST FORBIDDING APPEARANCE, and most abject circumstances, he lost not a moment in laying at her feet his own hand and fortune. And he did this the more confidently, inasmuch as he could not but be aware of Miss Jemima's SECRET feelings towards him, while he was proud and happy to say, that his dear and distinguished cousin, Mr. Sharpe Currie, had honoured him with a warmth of regard which justified the most brilliant EXPECTATIONS,—likely to be soon realized, as his eminent relative had contracted a very bad liver complaint in the service of his country, and could not last long!"

In all the years they had known each other, Miss Jemima, strange as it may appear, had never once suspected the captain of any other feelings to her than those of a brother. To say that she was not gratified by learning her mistake would be to say that she was more than woman. Indeed, it must have been a source of no ignoble triumph to think that she could prove her disinterested affection to her dear Riccabocca by a prompt rejection of this more brilliant offer. She couched the rejection, it is true, in the most soothing terms. But the captain evidently considered himself ill used; he did not reply to the letter, and did not come to the wedding.

To let the reader into a secret, never known to Miss Jemima, Captain Higginbotham was much less influenced by Cupid than by Plutus in the offer he had made. The captain was one of that class of gentlemen who read their accounts by those corpse-lights, or will-o'-the-wisps, called expectations. Ever since the squire's grandfather had left him—then in short clothes—a legacy of L500, the captain had peopled the future with expectations! He talked of his expectations as a man talks of shares in a Tontine; they might fluctuate a little,—be now up and now down,—but it was morally impossible, if he lived on, but that he should be a millionaire one of these days. Now, though Miss Jemima was a good fifteen years younger than himself, yet she always stood for a good round sum in the ghostly books of the captain. She was an expectation to the full amount of her L4000, seeing that Frank was an only

child, and it would be carrying coals to Newcastle to leave him anything.

Rather than see so considerable a cipher suddenly sponged out of his visionary ledger, rather than so much money should vanish clean out of the family, Captain Higginbotham had taken what he conceived, if a desperate, at least a certain, step for the preservation of his property. If the golden horn could not be had without the heifer, why, he must take the heifer into the bargain. He had never formed to himself an idea that a heifer so gentle would toss and fling him over. The blow was stunning. But no one compassionates the misfortunes of the covetous, though few perhaps are in greater need of compassion. And leaving poor Captain Higginbotham to retrieve his illusory fortunes as he best may among "the expectations" which gathered round the form of Mr. Sharpe Currie, who was the crossdest old tyrant imaginable, and never allowed at his table any dishes not compounded with rice, which played Old Nick with the captain's constitutional functions, I return to the wedding at Hazeldean, just in time to see the bridegroom—who looked singularly well on the occasion—hand the bride (who, between sunshiny tears and affectionate smiles, was really a very interesting and even a pretty bride, as brides go) into a carriage which the squire had presented to them, and depart on the orthodox nuptial excursion amidst the blessings of the assembled crowd.

It may be thought strange by the unreflective that these rural spectators should so have approved and blessed the marriage of a Hazeldean of Hazeldean with a poor, outlandish, long-haired foreigner; but besides that Riccabocca, after all, had become one of the neighbourhood, and was proverbially "a civil-spoken gentleman," it is generally noticeable that on wedding occasions the bride so monopolizes interest, curiosity, and admiration that the bridegroom himself goes for little or nothing. He is merely the passive agent in the affair,—the unregarded cause of the general satisfaction. It was not Riccabocca himself that they approved and blessed,—it was the gentleman in the white waistcoat who had made Miss Jemima Madam Rickeybockey!

Leaning on his wife's arm (for it was a habit of the squire to lean on his wife's arm rather than she on his, when he was specially pleased; and there was something touching in the sight of that strong sturdy frame thus insensibly, in hours of happiness, seeking dependence on the frail arm of woman),—leaning, I say, on his wife's arm, the squire, about the hour of sunset, walked down to the booth by the lake.

All the parish-young and old, man, woman, and child were assembled there, and their faces seemed to bear one family likeness, in the common emotion which animated all, as they turned to his frank, fatherly smile. Squire Hazeldean stood at the head of the long table: he filled a horn with ale from the brimming tankard beside him. Then he looked round, and lifted his hand to request silence; and ascending the chair, rose in full view of all. Every one felt that the squire was about to make a speech, and the earnestness of the attention was proportioned to the rarity of the event; for (though he was not unpractised in the oratory of the hustings) only thrice before had the squire made what could fairly be called "a speech" to the villagers of Hazeldean,—once on a kindred festive occasion, when he had presented to them his bride; once in a contested election for the shire, in which he took more than ordinary interest, and was not quite so sober as he ought to have been; once in a time of great agricultural distress, when in spite of reduction of rents, the farmers had been compelled to discard a large number of their customary labourers, and when the squire had said, "I have given up keeping the hounds because I want to make a fine piece of water (that was the origin of the lake), and to drain all the low lands round the Park. Let every man who wants work come to me!" And that sad year the parish rates of Hazeldean were not a penny the heavier.

Now, for the fourth time, the squire rose, and thus he spoke,—at his right hand, Harry; at his left, Frank; at the bottom of the table, as vice-president, Parson Dale, his little wife behind him, only obscurely seen. She cried readily, and her handkerchief was already before her eyes.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE SQUIRE'S SPEECH.

"Friends and neighbours, I thank you kindly for coming round me this day, and for showing so much interest in me and mine. My cousin was not born amongst you as I was, but you have known her from a child. It is a familiar face, and one that never frowned, which you will miss at your cottage doors, as I and mine will miss it long in the old Hall—"

Here there was a sob from some of the women, and nothing was seen of Mrs. Dale but the white

handkerchief. The squire himself paused, and brushed away a tear with the back of his hand. Then he resumed, with a sudden change of voice that was electrical,—

"For we none of us prize a blessing till we have lost it! Now, friends and neighbours, a little time ago, it seemed as if some ill-will had crept into the village,—ill-will between you and me, neighbours!—why, that is not like Hazeldean!"

The audience hung their heads! You never saw people look so thoroughly ashamed of themselves. The squire proceeded,—

"I don't say it was all your fault; perhaps it was mine."

"Noa, noa, noa," burst forth in a general chorus.

"Nay, friends," continued the squire, humbly, and in one of those illustrative aphorisms which, if less subtle than Riccabocca's, were more within reach of the popular comprehension,—"nay, we are all human, and every man has his hobby; sometimes he breaks in the hobby, and sometimes the hobby, if it is very hard in the mouth, breaks in him. One man's hobby has an ill habit of always stopping at the public house! [Laughter.] Another man's hobby refuses to stir a peg beyond the door where some buxom lass patted its neck the week before,—a hobby I rode pretty often when I went courting my good wife here! [Much laughter and applause.] Others have a lazy hobby that there's no getting on; others, a runaway hobby that there's no stopping: but to cut the matter short, my favourite hobby, as you well know, is always trotted out to any place on my property which seems to want the eye and hand of the master. I hate," cried the squire, warming, "to see things neglected and decayed, and going to the dogs! This land we live in is a good mother to us, and we can't do too much for her. It is very true, neighbours, that I owe her a good many acres, and ought to speak well of her; but what then? I live amongst you, and what I take from the rent with one hand, I divide amongst you with the other. [Low but assenting murmurs.] Now the more I improve my property, the more mouths it feeds. My great-grandfather kept a Field-book in which were entered not only the names of all the farmers and the quantity of land they held, but the average number of the labourers each employed. My grandfather and father followed his example: I have done the same. I find, neighbours, that our rents have doubled since my great-grandfather began to make the book. Ay,—but there are more than four times the number of labourers employed on the estate, and at much better wages too! Well, my men, that says a great deal in favour of improving property, and not letting it go to the dogs. [Applause.] And therefore, neighbours, you will kindly excuse my bobby: it carries grist to your mill. [Reiterated applause.] Well, but you will say, 'What's the squire driving at?' Why this, my friends: There was only one worn-out, dilapidated, tumble-down thing in the parish of Hazeldean, and it became an eyesore to me; so I saddled my hobby, and rode at it. Oh, ho! you know what I mean now! Yes, but, neighbours, you need not have taken it so to heart. That was a scurvy trick of some of you to hang me in effigy, as they call it."

"It warn't you," cried a voice in the crowd, "it war Nick Stirn."

The squire recognized the voice of the tinker; but though he now guessed at the ringleader, on that day of general amnesty he had the prudence and magnanimity not to say, "Stand forth, Sprott: thou art the man." Yet his gallant English spirit would not suffer him to come off at the expense of his servant.

"If it was Nick Stirn you meant," said he, gravely, "more shame for you. It showed some pluck to hang the master; but to hang the poor servant, who only thought to do his duty, careless of what ill-will it brought upon him, was a shabby trick,—so little like the lads of Hazeldean, that I suspect the man who taught it to them was never born in the parish. But let bygones be bygones. One thing is clear,—you don't take kindly to my new pair of stocks! The stocks has been a stumbling-block and a grievance, and there's no denying that we went on very pleasantly without it. I may also say that, in spite of it, we have been coming together again lately. And I can't tell you what good it did me to see your children playing again on the green, and your honest faces, in spite of the stocks, and those diabolical tracts you've been reading lately, lighted up at the thought that something pleasant was going on at the Hall. Do you know, neighbours, you put me in mind of an old story which, besides applying to the parish, all who are married, and all who intend to marry, will do well to recollect. A worthy couple, named John and Joan, had lived happily together many a long year, till one unlucky day they bought a new bolster. Joan said the bolster was too hard, and John that it was too soft. So, of course, they quarrelled. After sulking all day, they agreed to put the bolster between them at night." (Roars of laughter amongst the men; the women did not know which way to look, except, indeed, Mrs. Hazeldean, who, though she was more than usually rosy, maintained her innocent genial smile, as much as to say, "There is no harm in the squire's jests.") The orator resumed, "After they had thus lain apart for a little time, very silent and sullen, John sneezed. 'God bless you!' says Joan, over the bolster. 'Did you say God bless me?' cries John, 'then here goes the bolster!'"

Prolonged laughter and tumultuous applause.

"Friends and neighbours," said the squire, when silence was restored, and lifting the horn of ale, "I have the pleasure to inform you that I have ordered the stocks to be taken down, and made into a bench for the chimney-nook of our old friend Gaffer Solomons yonder. But mind me, lads, if ever you make the parish regret the loss of the stocks, and the overseers come to me with long faces, and say, 'The stocks must be rebuilt,' why—" Here from all the youth of the village rose so deprecating a clamour, that the squire would have been the most burgling orator in the world, if he said a word further on the subject. He elevated the horn over his head—"Why, that's my old Hazeldean again! Health and long life to you all!"

The tinker had sneaked out of the assembly, and did not show his face in the village for the next six months. And as to those poisonous tracts, in spite of their salubrious labels, "The Poor Man's Friend," or "The Rights of Labour," you could no more have found one of them lurking in the drawers of the kitchen dressers in Hazeldean than you would have found the deadly nightshade on the flower-stands in the drawing-room of the Hall. As for the revolutionary beerhouse, there was no need to apply to the magistrates to shut it up,—it shut itself up before the week was out.

O young head of the great House of Hapsburg, what a Hazeldean you might have made of Hungary! What a "Moriatur pro rege nostro!" would have rung in your infant reign,—if you had made such a speech as the squire's!

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