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PAUL CLIFFORD, Volume 5.

By Edward Bulwer-Lytton

CHAPTER XXII.

Outlaw. Stand, sir, and throw us that you have about you!

Val. Ruffians, forego that rude, uncivil touch!

The Two Gentlemen of Verona.

On leaving the scene in which he had been so unwelcome a guest, Clifford hastened to the little inn where he had left his horse. He mounted and returned to Bath. His thoughts were absent, and he unconsciously suffered the horse to direct its course whither it pleased. This was naturally towards the nearest halting-place which the animal remembered; and this halting-place was at that illustrious tavern, in the suburbs of the town, in which we have before commemorated Clifford's re-election to the dignity of chief. It was a house of long-established reputation; and here news of any of the absent confederates was always to be obtained. This circumstance, added to the excellence of its drink, its ease, and the electric chain of early habits, rendered it a favourite haunt, even despite their present gay and modish pursuits, with Tomlinson and Pepper; and here, when Clifford sought the pair at unseasonable hours, was he for the most part sure to find them. As his meditations were interrupted by the sudden stopping of his horse beneath the well-known sign, Clifford, muttering an angry malediction on the animal, spurred it onward in the direction of his own home. He had already reached the end of the street, when his resolution seemed to change, and muttering to himself, "Ay, I might as well arrange this very night for our departure!" he turned his horse's head backward, and was once more at the tavern door. He threw the bridle over an iron railing, and knocking with a peculiar sound at the door, was soon admitted.

"Are —— and —— here?" asked he of the old woman, as he entered, mentioning the cant words by which, among friends, Tomlinson and Pepper were usually known.

"They are both gone on the sharps to-night," replied the old lady, lifting her unsnuffed candle to the

face of the speaker with an intelligent look; Oliver (the moon) is sleepy, and the lads will take advantage of his nap."

"Do you mean," answered Clifford, replying in the same key, which we take the liberty to paraphrase, "that they are out on any actual expedition?"

"To be sure," rejoined the dame. "They who lag late on the road may want money for supper!"

"Ha! which road?"

"You are a pretty fellow for captain!" rejoined the dame, with a good-natured sarcasm in her tone. "Why, Captain Gloak, poor fellow! knew every turn of his men to a hair, and never needed to ask what they were about. Ah, he was a fellow! none of your girl-faced mudders, who make love to ladies, forsooth,—a pretty woman need not look far for a kiss when he was in the room, I warrant, however coarse her duds might be; and lauk! but the captain was a sensible man, and liked a cow as well as a calf."

"So, so! on the road, are they?" cried Clifford, musingly, and without heeding the insinuated attack on his decorum. "But answer me, what is the plan? Be quick!"

"Why," replied the dame, "there's some swell cove of a lord gives a blow-out to-day; and the lads, dear souls! think to play the queer on some straggler."

Without uttering a word, Clifford darted from the house, and was remounted before the old lady had time to recover her surprise.

"If you want to see them," cried she, as he put spurs to his horse, "they ordered me to have supper ready at———" The horse's hoofs drowned the last words of the dame; and carefully rebolting the door, and muttering an invidious comparison between Captain Clifford and Captain Gloak, the good landlady returned to those culinary operations destined to rejoice the hearts of Tomlinson and Pepper.

Return we ourselves to Lucy. It so happened that the squire's carriage was the last to arrive; for the coachman, long uninitiated among the shades of Warlock into the dissipation of fashionable life, entered on his debut at Bath, with all the vigorous heat of matured passions for the first time released, into the festivities of the ale-house, and having a milder master than most of his comrades, the fear of displeasure was less strong in his aurigal bosom than the love of companionship; so that during the time this gentleman was amusing himself, Lucy had ample leisure for enjoying all the thousand-and-one reports of the scene between Mauleverer and Clifford which regaled her ears. Nevertheless, whatever might have been her feelings at these pleasing recitals, a certain vague joy predominated over all. A man feels but slight comparative happiness in being loved, if he know that it is in vain; but to a woman that simple knowledge is sufficient to destroy the memory of a thousand distresses, and it is not till she has told her heart again and again that she is loved, that she will even begin to ask if it be in vain.

It was a partially starlight yet a dim and obscure night, for the moon had for the last hour or two been surrounded by mist and cloud, when at length the carriage arrived; and Mauleverer, for the second time that evening playing the escort, conducted Lucy to the vehicle. Anxious to learn if she had seen or been addressed by Clifford, the subtle earl, as he led her to the gate, dwelt particularly on the intrusion of that person, and by the trembling of the hand which rested on his arm, he drew no delicious omen for his own hopes. "However," thought he, "the man goes to-morrow, and then the field will be clear; the girl's a child yet, and I forgive her folly." And with an air of chivalric veneration, Mauleverer bowed the object of his pardon into her carriage.

As soon as Lucy felt herself alone with her father, the emotions so long pent within her forced themselves into vent, and leaning back against the carriage, she wept, though in silence, tears, burning tears, of sorrow, comfort, agitation, anxiety.

The good old squire was slow in perceiving his daughter's emotion; it would have escaped him altogether, if, actuated by a kindly warming of the heart towards her, originating in his new suspicion of her love for Clifford, he had not put his arm round her neck; and this unexpected caress so entirely unstrung her nerves that Lucy at once threw herself upon her father's breast, and her weeping, hitherto so quiet, became distinct and audible.

"Be comforted, my dear, dear child!" said the squire, almost affected to tears himself; and his emotion, arousing him from his usual mental confusion, rendered his words less involved and equivocal than they were wont to be. "And now I do hope that you won't vex yourself; the young man is indeed—and, I do assure you, I always thought so—a very charming gentleman, there's no denying it. But what can we do? You see what they all say of him, and it really was—we must allow that—very improper in him to come without being asked. Moreover, my dearest child, it is very wrong, very wrong indeed, to

love any one, and not know who he is; and— and—but don't cry, my dear love, don't cry so; all will be very well, I am sure,—quite sure!"

As he said this, the kind old man drew his daughter nearer him, and feeling his hand hurt by something she wore unseen which pressed against it, he inquired, with some suspicion that the love might have proceeded to love-gifts, what it was.

"It is my mother's picture," said Lucy, simply, and putting it aside.

The old squire had loved his wife tenderly; and when Lucy made this reply, all the fond and warm recollections of his youth rushed upon him. He thought, too, how earnestly on her death-bed that wife had recommended to his vigilant care their only child now weeping on his bosom: he remembered how, dwelling on that which to all women seems the grand epoch of life, she had said, "Never let her affections be trifled with,—never be persuaded by your ambitious brother to make her marry where she loves not, or to oppose her, without strong reason, where she does: though she be but a child now, I know enough of her to feel convinced that if ever she love, she will love too well for her own happiness, even with all things in her favour." These words, these recollections, joined to the remembrance of the cold-hearted scheme of William Brandon, which he had allowed himself to favour, and of his own supineness towards Lucy's growing love for Clifford, till resistance became at once necessary and too late, all smote him with a remorseful sorrow, and fairly sobbing himself, he said, "Thy mother, child! ah, would that she were living, she would never have neglected thee as I have done!"

The squire's self-reproach made Lucy's tears cease on the instant; and as she covered her father's hands with kisses, she replied only by vehement accusations against herself, and praises of his too great fatherly fondness and affection. This little burst, on both sides, of honest and simple-hearted love ended in a silence full of tender and mingled thoughts; and as Lucy still clung to the breast of the old man, uncouth as he was in temper, below even mediocrity in intellect, and altogether the last person in age or mind or habit that seemed fit for a confidant in the love of a young and enthusiastic girl, she felt the old homely truth that under all disadvantages there are, in this hollow world, few in whom trust can be so safely reposed, few who so delicately and subtly respect the confidence, as those from whom we spring.

The father and daughter had been silent for some minutes, and the former was about to speak, when the carriage suddenly stopped. The squire heard a rough voice at the horses' heads; he looked forth from the window to see, through the mist of the night, what could possibly be the matter, and he encountered in this action, just one inch from his forehead, the protruded and shining barrel of a horse-pistol. We may believe, without a reflection on his courage, that Mr. Brandon threw himself back into his carriage with all possible despatch; and at the same moment the door was opened, and a voice said, not in a threatening but a smooth accent,—

"Ladies and gentlemen, I am sorry to disturb you, but want is imperious; oblige me with your money, your watches, your rings, and any other little commodities of a similar nature!"

So delicate a request the squire had not the heart to resist, the more especially as he knew himself without any weapons of defence; accordingly he drew out a purse, not very full, it must be owned,—together with an immense silver hunting-watch, with a piece of black ribbon attached to it.

"There, sir," said he, with a groan, "don't frighten the young lady."

The gentle applicant, who indeed was no other than the specious Augustus Tomlinson, slid the purse into his waistcoat-pocket, after feeling its contents with a rapid and scientific finger.

"Your watch, sir," quoth he,—and as he spoke he thrust it carelessly into his coat-pocket, as a school-boy would thrust a peg-top,—"is heavy; but trusting to experience, since an accurate survey is denied me, I fear it is more valuable from its weight than its workmanship: however, I will not wound your vanity by affecting to be fastidious. But surely the young lady, as you call her,—for I pay you the compliment of believing your word as to her age, inasmuch as the night is too dark to allow me the happiness of a personal inspection,—the young lady has surely some little trinket she can dispense with. 'Beauty when unadorned,' you know, etc."

Lucy, who, though greatly frightened, lost neither her senses nor her presence of mind, only answered by drawing forth a little silk purse, that contained still less than the leathern convenience of the squire; to this she added a gold chain; and Tomlinson, taking them with an affectionate squeeze of the hand and a polite apology, was about to withdraw, when his sagacious eyes were suddenly stricken by the gleam of jewels. The fact was that in altering the position of her mother's picture, which had been set in the few hereditary diamonds possessed by the Lord of Warlock, Lucy had allowed it to hang on the outside of her dress, and bending forward to give the robber her other possessions, the

diamonds at once came in full sight, and gleamed the more invitingly from the darkness of the night.

"Ah, madam," said Tomlinson, stretching forth his hand, you would play me false, would you? Treachery should never go unpunished. Favour me instantly with the little ornament round your neck!"

"I cannot,—I cannot!" said Lucy, grasping her treasure with both her hands; "it is my mother's picture, and my mother is dead!"

"The wants of others, madam," returned Tomlinson, who could not for the life of him rob immorally, "are ever more worthy your attention than family prejudices. Seriously, give it, and that instantly; we are in a hurry, and your horses are plunging like devils: they will break your carriage in an instant,—despatch!"

The squire was a brave man on the whole, though no hero; and the nerves of an old fox-hunter soon recover from a little alarm. The picture of his buried wife was yet more inestimable to him than it was to Lucy, and at this new demand his spirit was roused within him.

He clenched his fists, and advancing himself as it were on his seat, he cried in a loud voice,—

"Begone, fellow! I have given you—for my own part I think so—too much already; and, by God, you shall not have the picture!"

"Don't force me to use violence," said Augustus; and putting one foot on the carriage-step, he brought his pistol within a few inches of Lucy's breast, rightly judging, perhaps, that the show of danger to her would be the best method to intimidate the squire. At that instant the valorous moralist found himself suddenly seized with a powerful gripe on the shoulder; and a low voice, trembling with passion, hissed in his ear. Whatever might be the words that startled his organs, they operated as an instantaneous charm; and to their astonishment, the squire and Lucy beheld their assailant abruptly withdraw. The door of the carriage was clapped to, and scarcely two minutes had elapsed before, the robber having remounted, his comrade, hitherto stationed at the horses' heads, set spurs to his own steed, and the welcome sound of receding hoofs smote upon the bewildered ears of the father and daughter.

The door of the carriage was again opened; and a voice, which made Lucy paler than the preceding terror, said,—

"I fear, Mr. Brandon, the robbers have frightened your daughter. There is now, however, nothing to fear; the ruffians are gone."

"God bless me!" said the squire; "why, is that Captain Clifford?"

"It is; and he conceives himself too fortunate to have been of the smallest service to Mr. and Miss Brandon."

On having convinced himself that it was indeed to Mr. Clifford that he owed his safety as well as that of his daughter, whom he believed to have been in a far more imminent peril than she really was,—for to tell thee the truth, reader, the pistol of Tomlinson was rather calculated for show than use, having a peculiarly long bright barrel with nothing in it,—the squire was utterly at a loss how to express his gratitude; and when he turned to Lucy to beg she would herself thank their gallant deliverer, he found that, overpowered with various emotions, she had, for the first time in her life, fainted away.

"Good heavens!" cried the alarmed father, "she is dead,—my Lucy, my Lucy, they have killed her!"

To open the door nearest to Lucy, to bear her from the carriage in his arms, was to Clifford the work of an instant. Utterly unconscious of the presence of any one else,—unconscious even of what he said, he poured forth a thousand wild, passionate, yet half-audible expressions; and as he bore her to a bank by the roadside, and seating himself supported her against his bosom, it would be difficult perhaps to say, whether something of delight—of burning and thrilling delight—was not mingled with his anxiety and terror. He chafed her small hands in his own; his breath, all trembling and warm, glowed upon her cheek; and once, and but once, his lips drew nearer, and breathing aside the dishevelled richness of her tresses, clung in a long and silent kiss to her own.

Meanwhile, by the help of the footman, who had now somewhat recovered his astonished senses, the squire descended from his carriage, and approached with faltering steps the place where his daughter reclined. At the instant that he took her hand, Lucy began to revive; and the first action, in the bewildered unconsciousness of awaking, was to throw her arm around the neck of her supporter.

Could all the hours and realities of hope, joy, pleasure, in Clifford's previous life have been melted down and concentrated into a single emotion, that emotion would have been but tame to the rapture of

Lucy's momentary and innocent caress! And at a later yet no distant period, when in the felon's cell the grim visage of Death scowled upon him, it may be questioned whether his thoughts dwelt not far more often on the remembrance of that delightful moment than on the bitterness and ignominy of an approaching doom.

"She breathes,—she moves,—she wakes!" cried the father; and Lucy, attempting to rise, and recognizing the squire's voice, said faintly,—

"Thank God, my dear father, you are not hurt! And are they really gone? —and where—where are we?"

The squire, relieving Clifford of his charge, folded his child in his arms, while in his own elucidatory manner he informed her where she was, and with whom. The lovers stood face to face to each other; but what delicious blushes did the night, which concealed all but the outline of their forms, hide from the eyes of Clifford!

The honest and kind heart of Mr. Brandon was glad of a release to the indulgent sentiments it had always cherished towards the suspected and maligned Clifford, and turning now from Lucy, it fairly poured itself forth upon her deliverer. He grasped him warmly by the hand, and insisted upon his accompanying them to Bath in the carriage, and allowing the footman to ride his horse. This offer was still pending, when the footman, who had been to see after the health and comfort of his fellow-servant, came to inform the party, in a dolorous accent, of something which, in the confusion and darkness of the night, they had not yet learned,—namely, that the horses and coachman were gone!

"Gone!" said the squire, "gone! Why, the villains can't (for my part, I never believe, though I have heard such wonders of, those sleight of hand) have bagged them!"

Here a low groan was audible; and the footman, sympathetically guided to the spot whence it emanated, found the huge body of the coachman safely deposited, with its face downward, in the middle of the kennel. After this worthy had been lifted to his legs, and had shaken himself into intelligence, it was found that when the robber had detained the horses, the coachman, who required very little to conquer his more bellicose faculties, had—he himself said, by a violent blow from the ruffian, though, perhaps, the cause lay nearer home—quitted the coach-box for the kennel, the horses grew frightened, and after plunging and rearing till he cared no longer to occupy himself with their arrest, the highwayman had very quietly cut the traces, and by the time present, it was not impossible that the horses were almost at the door of their stables at Bath.

The footman who had apprised the squire of this misfortune was, unlike most news-tellers, the first to offer consolation. "There be an excellent public," quoth he, "about a half a mile on, where your honour could get horses; or, mayhap, if Miss Lucy, poor heart, be faint, you may like to stop for the night."

Though a walk of half a mile in a dark night and under other circumstances would not have seemed a grateful proposition, yet at present, when the squire's imagination had only pictured to him the alternatives of passing the night in the carriage or of crawling on foot to Bath, it seemed but a very insignificant hardship; and tucking his daughter's arm under his own, while in a kind voice he told Clifford "to support her on the other side," the squire ordered the footman to lead the way with Clifford's horse, and the coachman to follow or be d—d, whichever he pleased.

In silence Clifford offered his arm to Lucy, and silently she accepted the courtesy. The squire was the only talker; and the theme he chose was not ungrateful to Lucy, for it was the praise of her lover. But Clifford scarcely listened, for a thousand thoughts and feelings contested within him; and the light touch of Lucy's hand upon his arm would alone have been sufficient to distract and confuse his attention. The darkness of the night, the late excitement, the stolen kiss that still glowed upon his lips, the remembrance of Lucy's flattering agitation in the scene with her at Lord Mauleverer's, the yet warmer one of that unconscious embrace, which still tingled through every nerve of his frame, all conspired with the delicious emotion which he now experienced at her presence and her contact to intoxicate and inflame him. Oh, those burning moments in love, when romance has just mellowed into passion, and without losing anything of its luxurious vagueness mingles the enthusiasm of its dreams with the ardent desires of reality and earth! That is the exact time when love has reached its highest point,—when all feelings, all thoughts, the whole soul, and the whole mind, are seized and engrossed,—when every difficulty weighed in the opposite scale seems lighter than dust,—when to renounce the object beloved is the most deadly and lasting sacrifice,—and when in so many breasts, where honour, conscience, virtue, are far stronger than we can believe them ever to have been in a criminal like Clifford, honour, conscience, virtue, have perished at once and suddenly into ashes before that mighty and irresistible fire.

The servant, who had had previous opportunities of ascertaining the topography of the "public" of

which he spake, and who was perhaps tolerably reconciled to his late terror in the anticipation of renewing his intimacy with "the spirits of the past," now directed the attention of our travellers to a small inn just before them. Mine host had not yet retired to repose, and it was not necessary to knock twice before the door was opened.

A bright fire, an officious landlady, a commiserate landlord, a warm potation, and the promise of excellent beds, all appeared to our squire to make ample amends for the intelligence that the inn was not licensed to let post-horses; and mine host having promised forthwith to send two stout fellows, a rope, and a cart-horse to bring the carriage under shelter (for the squire valued the vehicle because it was twenty years old), and moreover to have the harness repaired, and the horses ready by an early hour the next day, the good humour of Mr. Brandon rose into positive hilarity. Lucy retired under the auspices of the landlady to bed; and the squire having drunk a bowl of bishop, and discovered a thousand new virtues in Clifford, especially that of never interrupting a good story, clapped the captain on the shoulder, and making him promise not to leave the inn till he had seen him again, withdrew also to the repose of his pillow. Clifford remained below, gazing abstractedly on the fire for some time afterwards; nor was it till the drowsy chambermaid had thrice informed him of the prepared comforts of his bed, that he adjourned to his chamber. Even then it seems that sleep did not visit his eyelids; for a wealthy grazier, who lay in the room below, complained bitterly the next morning of some person walking overhead "in all manner of strides, just for all the world like a happarition in boots."

CHAPTER XXIII.

Viola. And dost thou love me? Lysander. . . . Love thee, Viola? Do I not fly thee when my being drinks Light from thine eyes?—that flight is all my answer!

The Bride, Act ii. sc. 1.

The curtain meditations of the squire had not been without the produce of a resolve. His warm heart at once reopened to the liking he had formerly conceived for Clifford; he longed for an opportunity to atone for his past unkindness, and to testify his present gratitude; moreover, he felt at once indignant at, and ashamed of, his late conduct in joining the popular, and, as he now fully believed, the causeless prepossession against his young friend, and before a more present and a stronger sentiment his habitual deference for his brother's counsels faded easily away. Coupled with these favourable feelings towards Clifford were his sagacious suspicions, or rather certainty, of Lucy's attachment to her handsome deliverer; and he had at least sufficient penetration to perceive that she was not likely to love him the less for the night's adventure. To all this was added the tender recollection of his wife's parting words; and the tears and tell-tale agitation of Lucy in the carriage were sufficient to his simple mind, which knew not how lightly maiden's tears are shed and dried, to confirm the prediction of the dear deceased. Nor were the squire's more generous and kindly feelings utterly unmingled with selfish considerations. Proud, but not the least ambitious, he was always more ready to confer an honour than receive one, and at heart he was secretly glad at the notion of exchanging, as a son-in-law, the polished and unfamiliar Mauleverer for the agreeable and social Clifford. Such in "admired disorder," were the thoughts which rolled through the teeming brain of Joseph Brandon; and before he had turned on his left side, which he always did preparatory to surrendering himself to slumber, the squire had fully come to a determination most fatal to the schemes of the lawyer and the hopes of the earl.

The next morning, as Lucy was knitting

"The loose train of her amber-dropping hair"

before the little mirror of her chamber, which even through its dimmed and darkened glass gave back a face which might have shamed a Grecian vision of Aurora, a gentle tap at her door announced her father. There was in his rosy and comely countenance that expression generally characteristic of a man pleased with himself, and persuaded that he is about to give pleasure.

"My dear child," said the squire, fondly stroking down the luxuriance of his Lucy's hair, and kissing her damask cheek, "I am come to have some little conversation with you. Sit down now, and (for my part, I love to talk at my ease; and, by the by, shut the window, my love, it is an easterly wind) I wish that we may come to a clear and distinct understanding. Hem!—give me your hand, my child,—I think on these matters one can scarcely speak too precisely and to the purpose; although I am well aware (for, for my own part, I always wish to act to every one, to you especially, my dearest child, with the

greatest consideration) that we must go to work with as much delicacy as conciseness. You know this Captain Clifford,—'t is a brave youth, is it not? Well—nay, never blush so deeply; there is nothing (for in these matters one can't have all one's wishes, one can't have everything) to be ashamed of! Tell me now, child, dost think he is in love with thee?"

If Lucy did not immediately answer by words, her pretty lips moved as if she could readily reply; and finally they settled into so sweet and so assured a smile that the squire, fond as he was of "precise" information, was in want of no fuller answer to his question.

"Ay, ay, young lady," said he, looking at her with all a father's affection, "I see how it is. And, come now, what do you turn away for? Dost think, if, as I believe, though there are envious persons in the world, as there always are when a man's handsome or clever or brave,— though, by the way, which is a very droll thing in my eyes, they don't envy, at least not ill-naturedly, a man for being a lord or rich, but, quite on the contrary, rank and money seem to make them think one has all the cardinal virtues. Humph! If, I say, this Mr. Clifford should turn out to be a gentleman of family,—for you know that is essential, since the Brandons have, as my brother has probably told you, been a great race many centuries ago,—dost think, my child, that thou couldst give up (the cat is out of the bag) this old lord, and marry a simple gentleman?"

The hand which the squire had held was now with an arch tenderness applied to his mouth, and when he again seized it Lucy hid her glowing face in his bosom; and it was only by a whisper, as if the very air was garrulous, that he could draw forth (for now he insisted on a verbal reply) her happy answer.

We are not afraid that our reader will blame us for not detailing the rest of the interview between the father and daughter: it did not last above an hour longer; for the squire declared that, for his own part, he hated more words than were necessary. Mr. Brandon was the first to descend to the breakfast, muttering as he descended the stairs, "Well now, hang me if I am not glad that's off (for I do not like to think much of so silly a matter) my mind. And as for my brother, I sha' n't tell him till it's all over and settled. And if he is angry, he and the old lord may, though I don't mean to be unbrotherly, go to the devil together!"

When the three were assembled at the breakfast-table, there could not, perhaps, have been found anywhere a stronger contrast than that which the radiant face of Lucy bore to the haggard and worn expression that disfigured the handsome features of her lover. So marked was the change that one night seemed to have wrought upon Clifford, that even the squire was startled and alarmed at it. But Lucy, whose innocent vanity pleased itself with accounting for the alteration, consoled herself with the hope of soon witnessing a very different expression on the countenance of her lover; and though she was silent, and her happiness lay quiet and deep within her, yet in her eyes and lip there was that which seemed to Clifford an insult to his own misery, and stung him to the heart. However, he exerted himself to meet the conversation of the squire, and to mask as well as he was able the evidence of the conflict which still raged within him.

The morning was wet and gloomy; it was that drizzling and misty rain which is so especially nutritious to the growth of blue devils, and the jolly squire failed not to rally his young friend upon his feminine susceptibility to the influences of the weather. Clifford replied jestingly; and the jest, if bad, was good enough to content the railer. In this facetious manner passed the time, till Lucy, at the request of her father, left the room to prepare for their return home.

Drawing his chair near to Clifford's, the squire then commenced in real and affectionate earnest his operations—these he had already planned— in the following order: they were, first, to inquire into and to learn Clifford's rank, family, and prospects; secondly, having ascertained the proprieties of the outer man, they were to examine the state of the inner one; and thirdly, should our skilful inquirer find his guesses at Clifford's affection for Lucy confirmed, they were to expel the modest fear of a repulse, which the squire allowed was natural enough, and to lead the object of the inquiry to a knowledge of the happiness that, Lucy consenting, might be in store for him. While, with his wonted ingenuity, the squire was pursuing his benevolent designs, Lucy remained in her own room, in such meditation and such dreams as were natural to a heart so sanguine and enthusiastic.

She had been more than half an hour alone, when the chambermaid of the hostelry knocked at her door, and delivered a message from the squire, begging her to come down to him in the parlour. With a heart that beat so violently it almost seemed to wear away its very life, Lucy slowly and with tremulous steps descended to the parlour. On opening the door she saw Clifford standing in the recess of the window; his face was partly turned from her, and his eyes downcast. The good old squire sat in an elbow-chair, and a sort of puzzled and half-satisfied complacency gave expression to his features.

"Come hither, child," said he, clearing his throat; "Captain Clifford— ahem!—has done you the honour to—and I dare say you will be very much surprised—not that, for my own part, I think there is much to

wonder at in it, but such may be my partial opinion (and it is certainly very natural in me)—to make you a declaration of love. He declares, moreover, that he is the most miserable of men, and that he would die sooner than have the presumption to hope. Therefore you see, my love, I have sent for you, to give him permission to destroy himself in any way he pleases; and I leave him to show cause why (it is a fate that sooner or later happens to all his fellowmen) sentence of death should not be passed against him." Having delivered this speech with more propriety of word than usually fell to his share, the squire rose hastily and hobbled out of the room.

Lucy sank into the chair her father had quitted; and Clifford, approaching towards her, said in a hoarse and low voice,—

"Your father, Miss Brandon, says rightly, that I would die rather than lift my eyes in hope to you. I thought yesterday that I had seen you for the last time; chance, not my own folly or presumption, has brought me again before you; and even the few hours I have passed under the same roof with you have made me feel as if my love, my madness, had never reached its height till now. Oh, Lucy!" continued Clifford, in a more impassioned tone, and, as if by a sudden and irresistible impulse, throwing himself at her feet, "if I could hope to merit you,—if I could hope to raise myself,—if I could—But no, no, no! I am cut off from all hope, and forever!"

There was so deep, so bitter, so heartfelt an anguish and remorse in the voice with which these last words were spoken, that Lucy, hurried off her guard, and forgetting everything in wondering sympathy and compassion, answered, extending her hand towards Clifford, who, still kneeling, seized and covered it with kisses of fire,—

"Do not speak thus, Mr. Clifford; do not accuse yourself of what I am sure, quite sure, you cannot deserve. Perhaps—forgive me—your birth, your fortune, are beneath your merits, and you have penetrated into my father's weakness on the former point; or perhaps you yourself have not avoided all the errors into which men are hurried,—perhaps you have been imprudent or thoughtless, perhaps you have (fashion is contagious) played beyond your means or incurred debts: these are faults, it is true, and to be regretted, yet surely not irreparable."

For that instant can it be wondered that all Clifford's resolution and self-denial deserted him, and lifting his eyes, radiant with joy and gratitude, to the face which bent in benevolent innocence towards him, he exclaimed,—

"No, Miss Brandon!—no, Lucy!—dear, angel Lucy! my faults are less venial than these, but perhaps they are no less the consequence of circumstances and contagion; perhaps it may not be too late to repair them. Would you—you indeed deign to be my guardian, I might not despair of being saved!"

"If," said Lucy, blushing deeply and looking down, while she spoke quick and eagerly, as if to avoid humbling him by her offer,—"if, Mr. Clifford, the want of wealth has in any way occasioned you uneasiness or—or error, do believe me—I mean *us*—so much your friends as not for an instant to scruple in relieving us of some little portion of our last night's debt to you."

"Dear, noble girl!" said Clifford, while there writhed upon his lips one of those smiles of powerful sarcasm that sometimes distorted his features, and thrillingly impressed upon Lucy a resemblance to one very different in reputation and character to her lover,—"*do not attribute my misfortunes to so petty a source; it is not money that I shall want while I live, though I shall to my last breath remember this delicacy in you, and compare it with certain base remembrances in my own mind. Yes! all past thoughts and recollections will make me hereafter worship you even more than I do now; while in your heart they will—unless Heaven grant me one prayer—make you scorn and detest me!*"

"For mercy's sake, do not speak thus!" said Lucy, gazing in indistinct alarm upon the dark and working features of her lover. "Scorn, detest you! Impossible! How could I, after the remembrance of last night?"

"Ay! of last night," said Clifford, speaking through his ground teeth,— "there is much in that remembrance to live long in both of us; but you— you—fair angel" (and all harshness and irony vanishing at once from his voice and countenance, yielded to a tender and deep sadness, mingled with a respect that bordered on reverence),—"you never could have dreamed of more than pity for one like me,—you never could have stooped from your high and dazzling purity to know for me one such thought as that which burns at my heart for you,—you—Yes, withdraw your hand, I am not worthy to touch it!" And clasping his own hands before his face, he became abruptly silent; but his emotions were but ill-concealed, and Lucy saw the muscular frame before her heaved and convulsed by passions which were more intense and rending because it was only for a few moments that they conquered his self-will and struggled into vent.

If afterwards, but long afterwards, Lucy, recalling the mystery of his words, confessed to herself that they betrayed guilt, she was then too much affected to think of anything but her love and his emotion. She bent down, and with a girlish and fond self-abandonment which none could have resisted, placed both her hands on his. Clifford started, looked up, and in the next moment he had clasped her to his heart; and while the only tears he had shed since his career of crime fell fast and hot upon her countenance, he kissed her forehead, her cheek, her lips in a passionate and wild transport. His voice died within him,—he could not trust himself to speak; only one thought, even in that seeming forgetfulness of her and of himself, stirred and spoke at his breast,— flight. The more he felt he loved, the more tender and the more confiding the object of his love, the more urgent became the necessity to leave her. All other duties had been neglected, but he loved with a real love; and love, which taught him one duty, bore him triumphantly through its bitter ordeal.

"You will hear from me to-night," he muttered; "believe that I am mad, accursed, criminal, but not utterly a monster! I ask no more merciful opinion!" He drew himself from his perilous position, and abruptly departed.

When Clifford reached his home, he found his worthy coadjutors waiting for him with alarm and terror on their countenances. An old feat, in which they had signalized themselves, had long attracted the rigid attention of the police, and certain officers had now been seen at Bath, and certain inquiries had been set on foot, which portended no good to the safety of the sagacious Tomlinson and the valorous Pepper. They came, humbly and penitentially demanding pardon for their unconscious aggression of the squire's carriage, and entreating their captain's instant advice. If Clifford had before wavered in his disinterested determination,—if visions of Lucy, of happiness, and reform had floated in his solitary ride too frequently and too glowingly before his eyes,— the sight of these men, their conversation, their danger, all sufficed to restore his resolution. "Merciful God!" thought he, "and is it to the comrade of such lawless villains, to a man, like them, exposed hourly to the most ignominious of deaths, that I have for one section of a moment dreamed of consigning the innocent and generous girl, whose trust or love is the only crime that could deprive her of the most brilliant destiny?"

Short were Clifford's instructions to his followers, and so much do we do mechanically, that they were delivered with his usual forethought and precision. "You will leave the town instantly; go not, for your lives, to London, or to rejoin any of your comrades. Ride for the Red Cave; provisions are stored there, and, since our late alteration of the interior, it will afford ample room to conceal your horses. On the night of the second day from this I will join you. But be sure that you enter the cave at night, and quit it upon no account till I come!"

"Yes!" said he, when he was alone, "I will join you again, but only to quit you. One more offence against the law, or at least one sum wrested from the swollen hands of the rich sufficient to equip me for a foreign army, and I quit the country of my birth and my crimes. If I cannot deserve Lucy Brandon, I will be somewhat less unworthy. Perhaps—why not? I am young, my nerves are not weak, my brain is not dull,—perhaps I may in some field of honourable adventure win a name that before my death-bed I may not blush to acknowledge to her!"

While this resolve beat high within Clifford's breast, Lucy sadly and in silence was continuing with the squire her short journey to Bath. The latter was very inquisitive to know why Clifford had gone, and what he had avowed; and Lucy, scarcely able to answer, threw everything on the promised letter of the night.

"I am glad," muttered the squire to her, "that he is going to write; for, somehow or other, though I questioned him very tightly, he slipped through my cross-examination, and bursting out at once as to his love for you, left me as wise about himself as I was before: no doubt (for my own part I don't see what should prevent his being a great man incog.)this letter will explain all!"

Late that night the letter came. Lucy, fortunately for her, was alone in her room; she opened it, and read as follows:—

CLIFFORD'S LETTER.

I have promised to write to you, and I sit down to perform that promise. At this moment the recollection of your goodness, your generous consideration, is warm within me: and while I must choose calm and common words to express what I ought to say, my heart is alternately melted and torn by thoughts which would ask words, oh how different! Your father has questioned me often of my parentage and birth,—I have hitherto eluded his interrogatories. Learn now who I am. In a wretched abode, surrounded by the inhabitants of poverty and vice, I recall my earliest recollections. My father is unknown to me as to every one; my mother,—to you I dare not mention who or what she was,—she died in my

infancy. Without a name, but not without an inheritance (my inheritance was large,—it was infamy!), I was thrown upon the world. I had received by accident some education, and imbibed some ideas not natural to my situation; since then I have played many parts in life. Books and men I have not so neglected but that I have gleaned at intervals some little knowledge from both. Hence, if I have seemed to you better than I am, you will perceive the cause. Circumstances made me soon my own master; they made me also one whom honest men do not love to look upon; my deeds have been, and my character is, of a par with my birth and my fortunes. I came, in the noble hope to raise and redeem myself by gilding my fate with a wealthy marriage, to this city. I saw you, whom I had once before met. I heard you were rich. Hate me, Miss Brandon, hate me!—I resolved to make your ruin the cause of my redemption. Happily for you, I scarcely knew you before I loved you; that love deepened,—it caught something pure and elevated from yourself. My resolution forsook me; even now I could throw myself on my knees and thank God that you—you, dearest and noblest of human beings—are not my wife. Now, is my conduct clear to you? If not, imagine me all that is villanous, save in one point, where you are concerned, and not a shadow of mystery will remain. Your kind father, overrating the paltry service I rendered you, would have consented to submit my fate to your decision. I blush indignantly for him—for you—that any living man should have dreamed of such profanation for Miss Brandon. Yet I myself was carried away and intoxicated by so sudden and so soft a hope,—even I dared to lift my eyes to you, to press you to this guilty heart, to forget myself, and to dream that you might be mine! Can you forgive me for this madness? And hereafter, when in your lofty and glittering sphere of wedded happiness, can you remember my presumption and check your scorn? Perhaps you think that by so late a confession I have already deceived you. Alas! you know not what it costs me now to confess! I had only one hope in life,—it was that you might still, long after you had ceased to see me, fancy me not utterly beneath the herd with whom you live. This burning yet selfish vanity I tear from me, and now I go where no hope can pursue me. No hope for myself, save one which can scarcely deserve the name, for it is rather a rude and visionary wish than an expectation,—it is that under another name and under different auspices you may hear of me at some distant time; and when I apprise you that under that name you may recognize one who loves you better than all created things, you may feel then, at least, no cause for shame at your lover. What will you be then? A happy wife, a mother, the centre of a thousand joys, beloved, admired, blest when the eye sees you and the ear hears! And this is what I ought to hope, this is the consolation that ought to cheer me; perhaps a little time hence it will. Not that I shall love you less, but that I shall love you less burningly, and therefore less selfishly. I have now written to you all that it becomes you to receive from me. My horse waits below to bear me from this city, and forever from your vicinity. For ever!—ay, you are the only blessing forever forbidden me. Wealth I may gain, a fair name, even glory I may perhaps aspire to,—to heaven itself I may find a path; but of you my very dreams cannot give me the shadow of a hope. I do not say, if you could pierce my soul while I write, that you would pity me. You may think it strange, but I would not have your pity for worlds; I think I would even rather have your hate,—pity seems so much like contempt. But if you knew what an effort has enabled me to tame down my language, to curb my thoughts, to prevent me from embodying that which now makes my brain whirl, and my hand feel as if the living fire consumed it; if you knew what has enabled me to triumph over the madness at my heart, and spare you what, if writ or spoken, would seem like the ravings of insanity, you would not and you could not despise me, though you might abhor.

And now Heaven guard and bless you! Nothing on *earth* could injure you. And even the wicked who have looked upon you learn to pray,—I have prayed for you!

Thus, abrupt and signatureless, ended the expected letter. Lucy came down the next morning at her usual hour, and, except that she was very pale, nothing in her appearance seemed to announce past grief or emotion. The squire asked her if she had received the promised letter. She answered, in a clear though faint voice, that she had,—that Mr. Clifford had confessed himself of too low an origin to hope for marriage with Mr. Brandon's family; that she trusted the squire would keep his secret; and that the subject might never again be alluded to by either. If in this speech there was something alien to Lucy's ingenuous character, and painful to her mind, she felt it as it were a duty to her former lover not to betray the whole of that confession so bitterly wrung from him. Perhaps, too, there was in that letter a charm which seemed to her too sacred to be revealed to any one; and mysteries were not excluded even from a love so ill-placed and seemingly so transitory as hers.

Lucy's answer touched the squire in his weak point. "A man of decidedly low origin," he confessed, "was utterly out of the question; nevertheless, the young man showed a great deal of candour in his

disclosure." He readily promised never to broach a subject necessarily so unpleasant; and though he sighed as he finished his speech, yet the extreme quiet of Lucy's manner reassured him; and when he perceived that she resumed, though languidly, her wonted avocations, he felt but little doubt of her soon overcoming the remembrance of what he hoped was but a girlish and fleeting fancy. He yielded, with avidity, to her proposal to return to Warlock; and in the same week as that in which Lucy had received her lover's mysterious letter, the father and daughter commenced their journey home.

CHAPTER XXIV.

Butler. What are these, sir?

Yeoman. And of what nature, to what use?

Latroc. Imagine.

The Tragedy of Rollo.

Quickly. He's in Arthur's bosom, if ever man went
to Arthur's bosom.

Henry V.

The stream of our narrative now conducts us back to William Brandon. The law-promotions previously intended were completed; and to the surprise of the public, the envied barrister, undergoing the degradation of knighthood, had, at the time we return to him, just changed his toilsome occupations for the serene dignity of the bench. Whatever regret this wily and aspiring schemer might otherwise have felt at an elevation considerably less distinguished than he might reasonably have expected, was entirely removed by the hopes afforded to him of a speedy translation to a more brilliant office: it was whispered among those not unlikely to foresee such events, that the interest of the government required his talents in the house of peers. Just at this moment, too, the fell disease, whose ravages Brandon endeavoured, as jealously as possible, to hide from the public, had appeared suddenly to yield to the skill of a new physician; and by the administration of medicines which a man less stern or resolute might have trembled to adopt (so powerful and for the most part deadly was their nature), he passed from a state of almost insufferable torture to an elysium of tranquillity and ease. Perhaps, however, the medicines which altered also decayed his constitution; and it was observable that in two cases where the physician had attained a like success by the same means, the patients had died suddenly, exactly at the time when their cure seemed to be finally completed. However, Sir William Brandon appeared very little anticipative of danger. His manner became more cheerful and even than it had ever been before; there was a certain lightness in his gait, a certain exhilaration in his voice and eye, which seemed the tokens of one from whom a heavy burden had been suddenly raised, and who was no longer prevented from the eagerness of hope by the engrossing claims of a bodily pain. He had always been bland in society, but now his courtesy breathed less of artifice,—it took a more hearty tone. Another alteration was discernible in him, and that was precisely the reverse of what might have been expected. He became more thrifty, more attentive to the expenses of life than he had been. Though a despiser of show and ostentation, and far too hard to be luxurious, he was too scientific an architect of the weaknesses of others not to have maintained during his public career an opulent appearance and a hospitable table. The profession he had adopted requires, perhaps, less of externals to aid it than any other; still Brandon had affected to preserve parliamentary as well as legal importance; and though his house was situated in a quarter entirely professional, he had been accustomed to assemble around his hospitable board all who were eminent, in his political party, for rank or for talent. Now, however, when hospitality and a certain largeness of expenses better became his station, he grew closer and more exact in his economy. Brandon never could have degenerated into a miser; money, to one so habitually wise as he was, could never have passed from means into an object; but he had evidently, for some cause or another, formed the resolution to save. Some said it was the result of returning health, and the hope of a prolonged life, to which many objects for which wealth is desirable might occur. But when it was accidentally ascertained that Brandon had been making several inquiries respecting a large estate in the neighbourhood of Warlock, formerly in the possession of his family, the gossips (for Brandon was a man to be gossiped about) were no longer in want of a motive, false or real, for the judge's thrift.

It was shortly after his elevation to the bench, and ere these signs of change had become noticeable, that the same strange ragamuffin whom we have mentioned before, as introduced by Mr. Swoppem to a

private conference with Brandon, was admitted to the judge's presence.

"Well," said Brandon, impatiently, the moment the door was closed, "your news?"

"Vy, your 'onor," said the man, bashfully, twirling a thing that stood proxy for a hat, "I thinks as 'ow I shall be hable to satisfy your vorship's 'onor.!' Then, approaching the judge and assuming an important air, he whispered, "'T is as 'ow I thought!"

"My God!" cried Brandon, with vehemence. "And he is alive,—and where?"

"I believes," answered the seemly confidant of Sir William Brandon, "that he be's alive; and if he be's alive, may I flash my ivories in a glass case, if I does not ferret him out; but as to saying vhere he be at this nick o' the moment, smash me if I can!"

"Is he in this country," said Brandon; "or do you believe that he has gone abroad?"

"Vy, much of one and not a little of the other!" said the euphonious confidant.

"How! speak plain, man; what do you mean?"

"Vy, I means, your 'oner, that I can't say vhere he is."

"And this," said Brandon, with a muttered oath,— "this is your boasted news, is it? Dog! damned, damned dog! if you trifle with me or play me false, I will hang you,—by the living God, I will!"

The man shrank back involuntarily from Brandon's vindictive forehead and kindled eyes; but with the cunning peculiar to low vice, answered, though in a humbler tone,—

"And vet good vill that do your 'oner? If so be as how you scraggs I, will that put your vorship in the vay of finding *he*?"

Never was there an obstacle in grammar through which a sturdy truth could not break; and Brandon, after a moody pause, said in a milder voice,—

"I did not mean to frighten you! Never mind what I said; but you can surely guess whereabouts he is, or what means of life he pursues. Perhaps,"—and a momentary paleness crossed Brandon's swarthy visage,— "perhaps he may have been driven into dishonesty in order to maintain himself!"

The informant replied with great naivete that such a thing was not impossible! And Brandon then entered into a series of seemingly careless but artful cross-questionings, which either the ignorance or the craft of the man enabled him to baffle. After some time Brandon, disappointed and dissatisfied, gave up his professional task; and bestowing on the man many sagacious and minute instructions as well as a very liberal donation, he was forced to dismiss his mysterious visitor, and to content himself with an assured assertion that if the object of his inquiries should not already be gone to the devil, the strange gentleman employed to discover him would certainly, sooner or later, bring him to the judge.

This assertion, and the interview preceding it, certainly inspired Sir William Brandon with a feeling like complacency, although it was mingled with a considerable alloy.

"I do not," thought he, concluding his meditations when he was left alone,— "I do not see what else I can do! Since it appears that the boy had not even a name when he set out alone from his wretched abode, I fear that an advertisement would have but little chance of even designating, much less of finding him, after so long an absence. Besides, it might make me the prey to impostors; and in all probability he has either left the country, or adopted some mode of living which would prevent his daring to disclose himself!" This thought plunged the soliloquist into a gloomy abstraction, which lasted several minutes, and from which he started, muttering aloud,—

"Yes, yes! I dare to believe, to hope it. Now for the minister and the peerage!" And from that time the root of Sir William Brandon's ambition spread with a firmer and more extended grasp over his mind.

We grieve very much that the course of our story should now oblige us to record an event which we would willingly have spared ourselves the pain of narrating. The good old Squire of Warlock Manor-house had scarcely reached his home on his return from Bath, before William Brandon received the following letter from his brother's gray-headed butler:—

HONNURED SUR,—I send this with all speede, thof with a hevvy bart, to axquainte you with the sudden (and it is feered by his loving friends and well-wishers, which latter, to be sur, is all as knows him) dangeros illness of the Squire. He was seezed, poor deer gentleman (for God never made a better, no offence to your Honnur),

the moment he set footing in his Own Hall, and what has hung round me like a millstone ever since, is that instead of his saying, "How do you do, Sampson?" as was his wont, whenever he returned from foreign parts, such as Bath, Lunnun, and the like, he said, "God bless you, Sampson!" which makes me think somehow that it will be his last words; for he has never spoken since, for all Miss Lucy be by his bedside continually. She, poor dear, don't take on at all, in regard of crying and such woman's work, but looks nevertheless, for all the world, just like a corpse. I sends Tom the postilion with this express, knowing he is a good hand at a gallop, having, not sixteen years ago, beat some of the best on 'un at a race. Hoping as your Honour will lose no time in coming to this "house of mourning," I remain, with all respect,

Your Honour's humble servant to command,
JOHN SAMPSON.

[The reader, who has doubtless noticed how invariably servants of long standing acquire a certain tone from that of their master, may observe that honest John Sampson had caught from the squire the habit of parenthetical composition.]

Sir William Brandon did not give himself time to re-read this letter, in order to make it more intelligible, before he wrote to one of his professional companions, requesting him to fill his place during his unavoidable absence, on the melancholy occasion of his brother's expected death; and having so done, he immediately set off for Warlock. Inexplicable even to himself was that feeling, so nearly approaching to real sorrow, which the worldly lawyer felt at the prospect of losing his guileless and unspeculating brother. Whether it be that turbulent and ambitious minds, in choosing for their wavering affections the very opposites of themselves, feel (on losing the fellowship of those calm, fair characters that have never crossed their rugged path) as if they lost, in losing them, a kind of haven for their own restless thoughts and tempest-worn designs!—be this as it may, certain it is that when William Brandon arrived at his brother's door, and was informed by the old butler, who for the first time was slow to greet him, that the squire had just breathed his last, his austere nature forsook him at once, and he felt the shock with a severity perhaps still keener than that which a more genial and affectionate heart would have experienced.

As soon as he had recovered his self-possession, Sir William made question of his niece; and finding that after an unrelaxing watch during the whole of the squire's brief illness, nature had failed her at his death, and she had been borne senseless from his chamber to her own, Brandon walked with a step far different from his usual stately gait to the room where his brother lay. It was one of the oldest apartments in the house, and much of the ancient splendour that belonged to the mansion ere its size had been reduced, with the fortunes of its successive owners, still distinguished the chamber. The huge mantelpiece ascending to the carved ceiling in grotesque pilasters, and scroll-work of the blackest oak, with the quartered arms of Brandon and Saville escutcheoned in the centre; the panelled walls of the same dark wainscot; the armorie of ebony; the high-backed chairs, with their tapestried seats; the lofty bed, with its hearse-like plumes and draperies of a crimson damask that seemed, so massy was the substance and so prominent the flowers, as if it were rather a carving than a silk,—all conspired with the size of the room to give it a feudal solemnity, not perhaps suited to the rest of the house, but well calculated to strike a gloomy awe into the breast of the worldly and proud man who now entered the death-chamber of his brother.

Silently William Brandon motioned away the attendants, and silently he seated himself by the bed, and looked long and wistfully upon the calm and placid face of the deceased. It is difficult to guess at what passed within him during the space of time in which he remained alone in that room. The apartment itself he could not at another period have tenanted without secret emotion. It was that in which, as a boy, he had himself been accustomed to sleep; and, even then a schemer and an aspirant, the very sight of the room sufficed to call back all the hopes and visions, the restless projects and the feverish desires, which had now brought him to the envied state of an acknowledged celebrity and a shattered frame. There must have been something awful in the combination of those active remembrances with the cause which had led him to that apartment; and there was a homily in the serene countenance of the dead, which preached more effectually to the heart of the living than William Brandon would ever have cared to own. He had been more than an hour in the room, and the evening had already begun to cast deep shadows through the small panes of the half-closed window, when Brandon was startled by a slight noise. He looked up, and beheld Lucy opposite to him. She did not see him; but throwing herself upon the bed, she took the cold hand of the deceased, and after a long silence burst into a passion of tears.

"My father!" she sobbed,— "my kind, good father! who will love me now?"

"I!" said Brandon, deeply affected; and passing round the bed, he took his niece in his arms: "I will be your father, Lucy, and you—the last of our race—shall be to me as a daughter!"

CHAPTER XXV.

Falsehood in him was not the useless lie
Of boasting pride or laughing vanity:
It was the gainful, the persuading art, etc.

CRABBE.

On with the horses—off to Canterbury,
Tramp, tramp o'er pebble, and splash, splash thro' puddle;
Hurrah! how swiftly speeds the post so merry!

.....
"Here laws are all inviolate: none lay
Traps for the traveller; every highway's clear;
Here—" he was interrupted by a knife,
With "D—your eyes! your money or your life!"

Don Juan.

Misfortunes are like the creations of Cadmus,—they destroy one another! Roused from the torpor of mind occasioned by the loss of her lover at the sudden illness of the squire, Lucy had no thought for herself, no thought for any one, for anything but her father, till long after the earth had closed over his remains. The very activity of the latter grief was less dangerous than the quiet of the former; and when the first keenness of sorrow passed away, and her mind gradually and mechanically returned to the remembrance of Clifford, it was with an intensity less strong, and less fatal to her health and happiness than before. She thought it unnatural and criminal to allow anything else to grieve her, while she had so sacred a grief as that of her loss; and her mind, once aroused into resistance to passion, betrayed a native strength little to have been expected from her apparent character. Sir William Brandon lost no time in returning to town after the burial of his brother. He insisted upon taking his niece with him; and, though with real reluctance, she yielded to his wishes, and accompanied him. By the squire's will, indeed, Sir William was appointed guardian to Lucy, and she yet wanted more than a year of her majority. Brandon, with a delicacy very uncommon to him where women (for he was a confirmed woman-hater) were concerned, provided everything that he thought could in any way conduce to her comfort. He ordered it to be understood in his establishment that she was its mistress. He arranged and furnished, according to what he imagined to be her taste, a suite of apartments for her sole accommodation; a separate carriage and servants were appropriated to her use; and he sought, by perpetual presents of books or flowers or music, to occupy her thoughts, and atone for the solitude to which his professional duties obliged him so constantly to consign her. These attentions, which showed this strange man in a new light, seemed to bring out many little latent amiabilities, which were usually imbedded in the callosities of his rocky nature; and, even despite her causes for grief and the deep melancholy which consumed her, Lucy was touched with gratitude at kindness doubly soothing in one who, however urbane and polished, was by no means addicted to the little attentions that are considered so gratifying by women, and yet for which they so often despise, while they like, him who affords them. There was much in Brandon that wound itself insensibly around the heart. To one more experienced than Lucy, this involuntary attraction might not have been incompatible with suspicion, and could scarcely have been associated with esteem; and yet for all who knew him intimately, even for the penetrating and selfish Mauleverer, the attraction existed. Unprincipled, crafty, hypocritical, even base when it suited his purpose; secretly sneering at the dupes he made, and knowing no code save that of interest and ambition; viewing men only as machines, and opinions only as ladders,— there was yet a tone of powerful feeling sometimes elicited from a heart that could at the same moment have sacrificed a whole people to the pettiest personal object: and sometimes with Lucy the eloquence or irony of his conversation deepened into a melancholy, a half-suppressed gentleness of sentiment, that accorded with the state of her own mind and interested her kind feelings powerfully in his. It was these peculiarities in his converse which made Lucy love to hear him; and she gradually learned to anticipate with a gloomy pleasure the hour in which, after the occupations of the day, he was accustomed to join her.

"You look unwell, uncle, to-night," she said, when one evening he entered the room with looks more fatigued than usual; and rising, she leaned tenderly over him, and kissed his forehead.

"Ay!" said Brandon, utterly unwon by, and even unheeding, the caress, "our way of life soon passes into the sear and yellow leaf; and when Macbeth grieved that he might not look to have that which should accompany old age, he had grown doting, and grieved for what was worthless."

"Nay, uncle, 'honour, love, obedience, troops of friends,' these surely were worth the sighing for?"

"Pooh! not worth a single sigh! The foolish wishes we form in youth have something noble and something bodily in them; but those of age are utter shadows, and the shadows of pygmies! Why, what is honour, after all? What is this good name among men? Only a sort of heathenish idol, set up to be adored by one set of fools and scorned by another. Do you not observe, Lucy, that the man you hear most praised by the party you meet to-day is most abused by that which you meet to-morrow? Public men are only praised by their party; and their party, sweet Lucy, are such base minions that it moves one's spleen to think one is so little as to be useful to them. Thus a good name is only the good name of a sect, and the members of that sect are only marvellous proper knaves."

"But posterity does justice to those who really deserve fame."

"Posterity! Can you believe that a man who knows what life is cares for the penny whistles of grown children after his death? Posterity, Lucy,— no! Posterity is but the same perpetuity of fools and rascals; and even were justice desirable at their hands, they could not deal it. Do men agree whether Charles Stuart was a liar or a martyr? For how many ages have we believed Nero a monster! A writer now asks, as if demonstrating a problem, what real historian could doubt that Nero was a paragon? The patriarchs of Scripture have been declared by modern philosophy to be a series of astronomical hieroglyphs; and, with greater show of truth, we are assured that the patriot Tell never existed! Posterity! the word has gulled men enough without my adding to the number. I, who loathe the living, can scarcely venerate the unborn. Lucy, believe me that no man can mix largely with men in political life, and not despise everything that in youth he adored! Age leaves us only one feeling,—contempt!"

"Are you belied, then?" said Lucy, pointing to a newspaper, the organ of the party opposed to Brandon: "are you belied when you are here called 'ambitious'? When they call you 'selfish' and 'grasping,' I know they wrong you; but I confess that I have thought you ambitious; yet can he who despises men desire their good opinion?"

"Their good opinion!" repeated Brandon, mockingly: "do we want the bray of the asses we ride? No!" he resumed, after a pause. "It is power, not honour; it is the hope of elevating oneself in every respect, in the world without as well as in the world of one's own mind: it is this hope which makes me labour where I might rest, and will continue the labour to my grave. Lucy," continued Brandon, fixing his keen eyes on his niece, "have you no ambition,—have power and pomp and place no charm for your mind?"

"None!" said Lucy, quietly and simply.

"Indeed! yet there are times when I have thought I recognized my blood in your veins. You are sprung from a once noble, but a fallen race. Are you ever susceptible to the weakness of ancestral pride?"

"You say," answered Lucy, "that we should care not for those who live after us; much less, I imagine, should we care for those who have lived ages before!"

"Prettily answered," said Brandon, smiling. "I will tell you at one time or another what effect that weakness you despise already once had, long after your age, upon me. You are early wise on some points; profit by my experience, and be so on all."

"That is to say, in despising all men and all things!" said Lucy, also smiling.

"Well, never mind my creed,—you may be wise after your own; but trust one, dearest Lucy, who loves you purely and disinterestedly, and who has weighed with scales balanced to a hair all the advantages to be gleaned from an earth in which I verily think the harvest was gathered before we were put into it,—trust me, Lucy, and never think love, that maiden's dream, so valuable as rank and power: pause well before you yield to the former; accept the latter the moment they are offered you. Love puts you at the feet of another, and that other a tyrant; rank puts others at your feet, and all those thus subjected are your slaves!"

Lucy moved her chair so that the new position concealed her face, and did not answer; and Brandon, in an altered tone, continued,—

"Would you think, Lucy, that I once was fool enough to imagine that love was a blessing, and to be

eagerly sought for? I gave up my hopes, my chances of wealth, of distinction,—all that had burned from the years of boyhood into my very heart. I chose poverty, obscurity, humiliation; but I chose also love. What was my reward? Lucy Brandon, I was deceived,—deceived!"

Brandon paused; and Lucy took his hand affectionately, but did not break the silence. Brandon resumed:—

"Yes, I was deceived! But I in my turn had a revenge, and a fitting revenge; for it was not the revenge of hatred, but" (and the speaker laughed sardonically) "of contempt. Enough of this, Lucy! What I wished to say to you is this,—grown men and women know more of the truth of things than ye young persons think for. Love is a mere bauble, and no human being ever exchanged for it one solid advantage without repentance. Believe this; and if rank ever puts itself under those pretty feet, be sure not to spurn the footstool."

So saying, with a slight laugh, Brandon lighted his chamber candle, and left the room for the night.

As soon as the lawyer reached his own apartment, he indited to Lord Mauleverer the following epistle:

"Why, dear Mauleverer, do you not come to town? I want you, your party wants you; perhaps the King wants you; and certainly, if you are serious about my niece, the care of your own love-suit should induce you yourself to want to come hither. I have paved the way for you; and I think, with a little management, you may anticipate a speedy success. But Lucy is a strange girl; and, perhaps, after all, though you ought to be on the spot, you had better leave her as much as possible in my hands. I know human nature, Mauleverer, and that knowledge is the engine by which I will work your triumph. As for the young lover, I am not quite sure whether it be not better for our sake that Lucy should have experienced a disappointment on that score; for when a woman has once loved, and the love is utterly hopeless, she puts all vague ideas of other lovers altogether out of her head; she becomes contented with a husband whom she can esteem! Sweet canter! But you, Mauleverer, want Lucy to love you! And so she will—after you have married her! She will love you partly from the advantages she derives from you, partly from familiarity (to say nothing of your good qualities). For my part, I think domesticity goes so far that I believe a woman always inclined to be affectionate to a man whom she has once seen in his nightcap. However, you should come to town; my poor brother's recent death allows us to see no one,—the coast will be clear from rivals; grief has softened my niece's heart; in a word, you could not have a better opportunity. Come!

"By the way, you say one of the reasons which made you think ill of this Captain Clifford was your impression that in the figure of one of his comrades you recognized something that appeared to you to resemble one of the fellows who robbed you a few months ago. I understand that at this moment the police are in active pursuit of three most accomplished robbers; nor should I be at all surprised if in this very Clifford were to be found the leader of the gang, namely, the notorious Lovett. I hear that the said leader is a clever and a handsome fellow, of a gentlemanlike address, and that his general associates are two men of the exact stamp of the worthies you have so amusingly described to me. I heard this yesterday from Nabbem, the police-officer with whom I once scraped acquaintance on a trial; and in my grudge against your rival, I hinted at my suspicion that he, Captain Clifford, might not impossibly prove this Rinaldo Rinaldini of the roads. Nabbem caught at my hint at once; so that, if it be founded on a true guess, I may flatter my conscience as well as my friendship by the hope that I have had some hand in hanging this Adonis of my niece's. Whether my guess be true or not, Nabbem says he is sure of this Lovett; for one of his gang has promised to betray him. Hang these aspiring dogs! I thought treachery was confined to politics; and that thought makes me turn to public matters, in which all people are turning with the most edifying celerity. . . ."

Sir William Brandon's epistle found Mauleverer in a fitting mood for Lucy and for London. Our worthy peer had been not a little chagrined by Lucy's sudden departure from Bath; and while in doubt whether or not to follow her, the papers had informed him of the squire's death. Mauleverer, being then fully aware of the impossibility of immediately urging his suit, endeavoured, like the true philosopher he was, to reconcile himself to his hope deferred. Few people were more easily susceptible of consolation than Lord Mauleverer. He found an agreeable lady, of a face more unfaded than her reputation, to whom he intrusted the care of relieving his leisure moments from ennui; and being a lively woman, the confidante discharged the trust with great satisfaction to Lord Mauleverer, for the space of a fortnight, so that he naturally began to feel his love for Lucy gradually wearing away, by absence and other ties; but just as the triumph of time over passion was growing decisive, the lady left Bath in company with a

tall guardsman, and Mauleverer received Brandon's letter. These two events recalled our excellent lover to a sense of his allegiance; and there being now at Bath no particular attraction to counterbalance the ardour of his affection, Lord Mauleverer ordered the horses to his carriage, and attended only by his valet, set out for London.

Nothing, perhaps, could convey a better portrait of the world's spoiled darling than a sight of Lord Mauleverer's thin, fastidious features, peering forth through the closed window of his luxurious travelling- chariot; the rest of the outer man being carefully enveloped in furs, half-a-dozen novels strewing the seat of the carriage, and a lean French dog, exceedingly like its master, sniffing in vain for the fresh air, which, to the imagination of Mauleverer, was peopled with all sorts of asthmas and catarrhs! Mauleverer got out of his carriage at Salisbury, to stretch his limbs, and to amuse himself with a cutlet. Our nobleman was well known on the roads; and as nobody could be more affable, he was equally popular. The officious landlord bustled into the room, to wait himself upon his lordship and to tell all the news of the place.

"Well, Mr. Cheerly," said Mauleverer, bestowing a penetrating glance on his cutlet, "the bad times, I see, have not ruined your cook."

"Indeed, my lord, your lordship is very good, and the times, indeed, are very bad,—very bad indeed. Is there enough gravy? Perhaps your lordship will try the pickled onions?"

"The what? Onions!—oh! ah! nothing can be better; but I never touch them. So, are the roads good?"

"Your lordship has, I hope, found them good to Salisbury?"

"Ah! I believe so. Oh! to be sure, excellent to Salisbury. But how are they to London? We have had wet weather lately, I think!"

"No, my lord. Here the weather has been dry as a bone."

"Or a cutlet!" muttered Mauleverer; and the host continued,—

"As for the roads themselves, my lord, so far as the roads are concerned, they are pretty good, my lord; but I can't say as how there is not something about them that might be mended."

"By no means improbable! You mean the inns and the turnpikes?" rejoined Mauleverer.

"Your lordship is pleased to be facetious; no! I meant something worse than them."

"What! the cooks?"

"No, my lord, the highwaymen!"

"The highwaymen! indeed?" said Mauleverer, anxiously; for he had with him a case of diamonds, which at that time were on grand occasions often the ornaments of a gentleman's dress, in the shape of buttons, buckles, etc. He had also a tolerably large sum of ready money about him,—a blessing he had lately begun to find very rare. "By the way, the rascals robbed me before on this very road. My pistols shall be loaded this time. Mr. Cheerly, you had better order the horses; one may as well escape the nightfall."

"Certainly, my lord, certainly.—Jem, the horses immediately!—Your lordship will have another cutlet?"

"Not a morsel!"

"A tart?"

"A dev—! not for the world!"

"Bring the cheese, John!"

"Much obliged to you, Mr. Cheerly, but I have dined; and if I have not done justice to your good cheer, thank yourself and the highwaymen. Where do these highwaymen attack one?"

"Why, my lord, the neighbourhood of Reading is, I believe, the worst part; but they are very troublesome all the way to Salthill."

"Damnation! the very neighbourhood in which the knaves robbed me before! You may well call them troublesome! Why the deuce don't the police clear the country of such a movable species of trouble?"

"Indeed, my lord, I don't know; but they say as how Captain Lovett, the famous robber, be one of the set; and nobody can catch him, I fear!"

"Because, I suppose, the dog has the sense to bribe as well as bully. What is the general number of these ruffians?"

"Why, my lord, sometimes one, sometimes two, but seldom more than three."

Mauleverer drew himself up. "My dear diamonds and my pretty purse!" thought he; "I may save you yet!"

"Have you been long plagued with the fellows?" he asked, after a pause, as he was paying his bill.

"Why, my lord, we have and we have not. I fancy as how they have a sort of a haunt near Reading, for sometimes they are intolerable just about there, and sometimes they are quiet for months together! For instance, my lord, we thought them all gone some time ago; but lately they have regularly stopped every one, though I hear as how they have cleared no great booty as yet."

Here the waiter announced the horses, and Mauleverer slowly re-entered his carriage, among the bows and smiles of the charmed spirits of the hostelry.

During the daylight Mauleverer, who was naturally of a gallant and fearless temper, thought no more of the highwaymen,—a species of danger so common at that time that men almost considered it disgraceful to suffer the dread of it to be a cause of delay on the road. Travellers seldom deemed it best to lose time in order to save money; and they carried with them a stout heart and a brace of pistols, instead of sleeping all night on the road. Mauleverer, rather a *preux chevalier*, was precisely of this order of wayfarers; and a night at an inn, when it was possible to avoid it, was to him, as to most rich Englishmen, a tedious torture zealously to be shunned. It never, therefore, entered into the head of our excellent nobleman, despite his experience, that his diamonds and his purse might be saved from all danger if he would consent to deposit them, with his own person, at some place of hospitable reception; nor, indeed, was it till he was within a stage of Reading, and the twilight had entirely closed in, that he troubled his head much on the matter. But while the horses were putting to, he summoned the postboys to him; and after regarding their countenances with the eye of a man accustomed to read physiognomies, he thus eloquently addressed them,—

"Gentlemen, I am informed that there is some danger of being robbed between this town and Salthill. Now, I beg to inform you that I think it next to impossible for four horses, properly directed, to be stopped by less than four men. To that number I shall probably yield; to a less number I shall most assuredly give nothing but bullets. You understand me?"

The post-boys grinned, touched their hats; and Mauleverer slowly continued,—

"If, therefore,—mark me!—one, two, or three men stop your horses, and I find that the use of your whips and spurs are ineffectual in releasing the animals from the hold of the robbers, I intend with these pistols— you observe them!—to shoot at the gentlemen who detain you; but as, though I am generally a dead shot, my eyesight wavers a little in the dark, I think it very possible that I may have the misfortune to shoot you, gentlemen, instead of the robbers! You see the rascals will be close by you, sufficiently so to put you in jeopardy, unless indeed you knock them down with the but-end of your whips. I merely mention this, that you may be prepared. Should such a mistake occur, you need not be uneasy beforehand, for I will take every possible care of your widows; should it not, and should we reach Salthill in safety, I intend to testify my sense of the excellence of your driving by a present of ten guineas apiece! Gentlemen, I have done with you. I give you my honour that I am serious in what I have said to you. Do me the favour to mount."

Mauleverer then called his favourite servant, who sat in the dickey in front (rumble-tumbles not being then in use). "Smoothson," said he, "the last time we were attacked on this very road, you behaved damnably. See that you do better this time, or it may be the worse for you. You have pistols to-night about you, eh? Well, that's right! And you are sure they're loaded? Very well! Now, then, if we are stopped, don't lose a moment. Jump down, and fire one of your pistols at the first robber. Keep the other for a sure aim. One shot is to intimidate, the second to slay. You comprehend? My pistols are in excellent order, I suppose. Lend me the ramrod. So, so! No trick this time!"

"They would kill a fly, my lord, provided your lordship fired straight upon it."

"I do not doubt you," said Mauleverer; "light the lanterns, and tell the postboys to drive on."

It was a frosty and tolerably clear night. The dusk of the twilight had melted away beneath the moon which had just risen, and the hoary rime glittered from the bushes and the sward, breaking into a

thousand diamonds as it caught the rays of the stars. On went the horses briskly, their breath steaming against the fresh air, and their hoofs sounding cheerily on the hard ground. The rapid motion of the carriage, the bracing coolness of the night, and the excitement occasioned by anxiety and the forethought of danger, all conspired to stir the languid blood of Lord Mauleverer into a vigorous and exhilarated sensation, natural in youth to his character, but utterly contrary to the nature he had imbibed from the customs of his manhood.

He felt his pistols, and his hands trembled a little as he did so,—not the least from fear, but from that restlessness and eagerness peculiar to nervous persons placed in a new situation.

"In this country," said he to himself, "I have been only once robbed in the course of my life. It was then a little my fault; for before I took to my pistols, I should have been certain they were loaded. To-night I shall be sure to avoid a similar blunder; and my pistols have an eloquence in their barrels which is exceedingly moving. Humph, another milestone! These fellows drive well; but we are entering a pretty-looking spot for Messieurs the disciples of Robin Hood!"

It was, indeed, a picturesque spot by which the carriage was now rapidly whirling. A few miles from Maidenhead, on the Henley Road, our readers will probably remember a small tract of forest-like land, lying on either side of the road. To the left the green waste bears away among the trees and bushes; and one skilled in the country may pass from that spot, through a landscape as little tenanted as green Sherwood was formerly, into the chains of wild common and deep beech-woods which border a certain portion of Oxfordshire, and contrast so beautifully the general characteristics of that county.

At the time we speak of, the country was even far wilder than it is now; and just on that point where the Henley and the Reading roads unite was a spot (communicating then with the waste land we have described), than which, perhaps, few places could be more adapted to the purposes of such true men as have recourse to the primary law of nature. Certain it was that at this part of the road Mauleverer looked more anxiously from his window than he had hitherto done, and apparently the increased earnestness of his survey was not altogether without meeting its reward.

About a hundred yards to the left, three dark objects were just discernible in the shade; a moment more, and the objects emerging grew into the forms of three men, well mounted, and riding at a brisk trot.

"Only three!" thought Mauleverer, "that is well;" and leaning from the front window with a pistol in either hand, Mauleverer cried out to the postboys in a stern tone, "Drive on, and recollect what I told you!—Remember!" he added to his servant. The postboys scarcely looked round; but their spurs were buried in their horses, and the animals flew on like lightning.

The three strangers made a halt, as if in conference; their decision was prompt. Two wheeled round from their comrade, and darted at full gallop by the carriage. Mauleverer's pistol was already protruded from the front window, when to his astonishment, and to the utter baffling of his ingenious admonition to his drivers, he beheld the two postboys knocked from their horses one after the other with a celerity that scarcely allowed him an exclamation; and before he had recovered his self-possession, the horses taking fright (and their fright being skilfully taken advantage of by the highwaymen), the carriage was fairly whirled into a ditch on the right side of the road, and upset. Meanwhile Smoothson had leaped from his station in the front; and having fired, though without effect, at the third robber, who approached menacingly towards him, he gained the time to open the carriage door and extricate his master.

The moment Mauleverer found himself on terra firma, he prepared his courage for offensive measures; and he and Smoothson, standing side by side in front of the unfortunate vehicle, presented no unformidable aspect to the enemy. The two robbers who had so decisively rid themselves of the postboys acted with no less determination towards the horses. One of them dismounted, cut the traces, and suffered the plunging quadrupeds to go whither they listed. This measure was not, however, allowed to be taken with impunity; a ball from Mauleverer's pistol passed through the hat of the highwayman with an aim so slightly erring that it whizzed among the locks of the astounded hero with a sound that sent a terror to his heart, no less from a love of his head than from anxiety for his hair. The shock staggered him for a moment; and a second shot from the hands of Mauleverer would have probably finished his earthly career, had not the third robber, who had hitherto remained almost inactive, thrown himself from his horse, which, tutored to such docility, remained perfectly still, and advancing with a bold step and a levelled pistol towards Mauleverer and his servant, said in a resolute voice, "Gentlemen, it is useless to struggle; we are well armed, and resolved on effecting our purpose. Your persons shall be safe if you lay down your arms, and also such part of your property as you may particularly wish to retain; but if you resist, I cannot answer for your lives!"

Mauleverer had listened patiently to this speech in order that he might have more time for adjusting

his aim. His reply was a bullet, which grazed the side of the speaker and tore away the skin, without inflicting any more dangerous wound. Muttering a curse upon the error of his aim, and resolute to the last when his blood was once up, Mauleverer backed one pace, drew his sword, and threw himself into the attitude of a champion well skilled in the use of the instrument he wore.

But that incomparable personage was in a fair way of ascertaining what happiness in the world to come is reserved for a man who has spared no pains to make himself comfortable in this. For the two first and most active robbers having finished the achievement of the horses, now approached Mauleverer; and the taller of them, still indignant at the late peril to his hair, cried out in a stentorian voice,—

"By Jove! you old fool, if you don't throw down your toasting-fork, I'll be the death of you!"

The speaker suited the action to the word by cocking an immense pistol. Mauleverer stood his ground; but Smoothson retreated, and stumbling against the wheel of the carriage, fell backward; the next instant, the second highwayman had possessed himself of the valet's pistols, and, quietly seated on the fallen man's stomach, amused himself by inspecting the contents of the domestic's pockets. Mauleverer was now alone; and his stubbornness so enraged the tall bully that his hand was already on his trigger, when the third robber, whose side Mauleverer's bullet had grazed, thrust himself between the two.

"Hold, Ned!" said he, pushing back his comrade's pistol. "And you, my lord, whose rashness ought to cost you your life, learn that men can rob generously." So saying, with one dexterous stroke from the robber's riding-whip, Mauleverer's sword flew upwards, and alighted at the distance of ten yards from its owner.

"Approach now," said the victor to his comrades. "Rifle the carriage, and with all despatch!"

The tall highwayman hastened to execute this order; and the lesser one having satisfactorily finished the inquisition into Mr. Smoothson's pockets, drew forth from his own pouch a tolerably thick rope; with this he tied the hands of the prostrate valet, moralizing as he wound the rope round and round the wrists of the fallen man, in the following edifying strain:—

"Lie still, sir,—lie still, I beseech you! All wise men are fatalists; and no proverb is more pithy than that which says, 'What can't be cured must be endured.' Lie still, I tell you! Little, perhaps, do you think that you are performing one of the noblest functions of humanity; yes, sir, you are filling the pockets of the destitute; and by my present action I am securing you from any weakness of the flesh likely to impede so praiseworthy an end, and so hazard the excellence of your action. There, sir, your hands are tight,—lie still and reflect."

As he said this, with three gentle applications of his feet, the moralist rolled Mr. Smoothson into the ditch, and hastened to join his lengthy comrade in his pleasing occupation.

In the interim Mauleverer and the third robber (who, in the true spirit of government, remained dignified and inactive while his followers plundered what he certainly designed to share, if not to monopolize) stood within a few feet of each other, face to face.

Mauleverer had now convinced himself that all endeavour to save his property was hopeless, and he had also the consolation of thinking he had done his best to defend it. He therefore bade all his thoughts return to the care of his person. He adjusted his fur collar around his neck with great sang froid, drew on his gloves, and, patting his terrified poodle, who sat shivering on its haunches with one paw raised and nervously trembling, he said,—

"You, sir, seem to be a civil person, and I really should have felt quite sorry if I had had the misfortune to wound you. You are not hurt, I trust. Pray, if I may inquire, how am I to proceed? My carriage is in the ditch, and my horses by this time are probably at the end of the world."

"As for that matter," said the robber, whose face, like those of his comrades, was closely masked in the approved fashion of highwaymen of that day, "I believe you will have to walk to Maidenhead,—it is not far, and the night is fine!"

"A very trifling hardship, indeed!" said Mauleverer, ironically; but his new acquaintance made no reply, nor did he appear at all desirous of entering into any further conversation with Mauleverer.

The earl, therefore, after watching the operations of the other robbers for some moments, turned on his heel, and remained humming an opera tune with dignified indifference until the pair had finished rifling the carriage, and seizing Mauleverer, proceeded to rifle him.

With a curled lip and a raised brow, that supreme personage suffered himself to be, as the taller robber expressed it, "cleaned out." His watch, his rings, his purse, and his snuff-box, all went. It was long since the rascals had captured such a booty.

They had scarcely finished when the postboys, who had now begun to look about them, uttered a simultaneous cry, and at some distance a wagon was seen heavily approaching. Mauleverer really wanted his money, to say nothing of his diamonds; and so soon as he perceived assistance at hand, a new hope darted within him. His sword still lay on the ground; he sprang towards it, seized it, uttered a shout for help, and threw himself fiercely on the highwayman who had disarmed him; but the robber, warding off the blade with his whip, retreated to his saddle, which he managed, despite of Mauleverer's lunges, to regain with impunity.

The other two had already mounted, and within a minute afterwards not a vestige of the trio was visible. "This is what may fairly be called single blessedness!" said Mauleverer, as, dropping his useless sword, he thrust his hands into his pockets.

Leaving our peerless peer to find his way to Maidenhead on foot, accompanied (to say nothing of the poodle) by one wagoner, two postboys, and the released Mr. Smoothson, all four charming him with their condolences, we follow with our story the steps of the three *alieni appetentes*.

CHAPTER XXVI.

The rogues were very merry on their booty. They said a thousand things that showed the wickedness of their morals.—Gil Bias.

They fixed on a spot where they made a cave, which was large enough to receive them and their horses. This cave was inclosed within a sort of thicket of bushes and brambles. From this station they used to issue, etc.—Memoirs of Richard Turpin.

It was not for several minutes after their flight had commenced that any conversation passed between the robbers. Their horses flew on like wind; and the country through which they rode presented to their speed no other obstacle than an occasional hedge, or a short cut through the thicknesses of some leafless beechwood. The stars lent them a merry light, and the spirits of two of them at least were fully in sympathy with the exhilaration of the pace and the air. Perhaps, in the third, a certain presentiment that the present adventure would end less merrily than it had begun, conspired, with other causes of gloom, to check that exaltation of the blood which generally follows a successful exploit.

The path which the robbers took wound by the sides of long woods or across large tracts of uncultivated land; nor did they encounter anything living by the road, save now and then a solitary owl, wheeling its gray body around the skirts of the bare woods, or occasionally troops of conies, pursuing their sports and enjoying their midnight food in the fields.

"Heavens!" cried the tall robber, whose incognito we need no longer preserve, and who, as our readers are doubtless aware, answered to the name of Pepper,—"heavens!" cried he, looking upward at the starry skies in a sort of ecstasy, "what a jolly life this is! Some fellows like hunting; d—it! what hunting is like the road? If there be sport in hunting down a nasty fox, how much more is there in hunting down a nice, clean nobleman's carriage! If there be joy in getting a brush, how much more is there in getting a purse! If it be pleasant to fly over a hedge in the broad daylight, hang me if it be not ten times finer sport to skim it by night,—here goes! Look how the hedges run away from us! and the silly old moon dances about, as if the sight of us put the good lady in spirits! Those old maids are always glad to have an eye upon such fine, dashing young fellows."

"Ay," cried the more erudite and sententious Augustus Tomlinson, roused by success from his usual philosophical sobriety; "no work is so pleasant as night-work, and the witches our ancestors burned were in the right to ride out on their broomsticks with the awls and the stars. We are their successors now, Ned. We are your true fly-by-nights!"

"Only," quoth Ned, "we are a cursed deal more clever than they were; for they played their game without being a bit the richer for it, and we—I say, Tomlinson, where the devil did you put that red morocco case?"

"Experience never enlightens the foolish," said Tomlinson, "or you would have known, without asking, that I had put it in the very safest pocket in my coat. 'Gad, how heavy it is!"

"Well," cried Pepper, "I can't say I wish it were lighter! Only think of our robbing my lord twice, and on the same road too!"

"I say, Lovett," exclaimed Tomlinson, "was it not odd that we should have stumbled upon our Bath friend so unceremoniously? Lucky for us that we are so strict in robbing in masks! He would not have thought the better of Bath company if he had seen our faces."

Lovett, or rather Clifford, had hitherto been silent. He now turned slowly in his saddle, and said: "As it was, the poor devil was very nearly despatched. Long Ned was making short work with him, if I had not interposed!"

"And why did you?" said Ned.

"Because I will have no killing; it is the curse of the noble art of our profession to have passionate professors like thee."

"Passionate!" repeated Ned. "Well, I am a little choleric, I own it; but that is not so great a fault on the road as it would be in housebreaking. I don't know a thing that requires so much coolness and self-possession as cleaning out a house from top to bottom,—quietly and civilly, mind you!"

"That is the reason, I suppose, then," said Augustus, "that you altogether renounced that career. Your first adventure was house breaking, I think I have heard you say. I confess it was a vulgar debut,—not worthy of you!"

"No! Harry Cook seduced me; but the specimen I saw that night disgusted me of picking locks; it brings one in contact with such low companions. Only think, there was a merchant, a rag-merchant, one of the party!"

"Faugh!" said Tomlinson, in solemn disgust.

"Ay, you may well turn up your lip; I never broke into a house again."

"Who were your other companions?" asked Augustus. "Only Harry Cook, —[A noted highwayman.]—and a very singular woman—"

Here Ned's narrative was interrupted by a dark defile through a wood, allowing room for only one horseman at a time. They continued this gloomy path for several minutes, until at length it brought them to the brink of a large dell, overgrown with bushes, and spreading around somewhat in the form of a rude semicircle. Here the robbers dismounted, and led their reeking horses down the descent. Long Ned, who went first, paused at a cluster of bushes, which seemed so thick as to defy intrusion, but which, yielding on either side to the experienced hand of the robber, presented what appeared the mouth of a cavern. A few steps along the passage of this gulf brought them to a door, which, even seen by torchlight, would have appeared so exactly similar in colour and material to the rude walls on either side as to have deceived any unsuspecting eye, and which, in the customary darkness brooding over it, might have remained for centuries undiscovered. Touching a secret latch, the door opened, and the robbers were in the secure precincts of the "Red Cave." It may be remembered that among the early studies of our exemplary hero the memoirs of Richard Turpin had formed a conspicuous portion; and it may also be remembered that in the miscellaneous adventures of that gentleman nothing had more delighted the juvenile imagination of the student than the description of the forest cave in which the gallant Turpin had been accustomed to conceal himself, his friend, his horse,

"And that sweet saint who lay by Turpin's side;"

or, to speak more domestically, the respectable Mrs. Turpin. So strong a hold, indeed, had that early reminiscence fixed upon our hero's mind, that no sooner had he risen to eminence among his friends than he had put the project of his childhood into execution. He had selected for the scene of his ingenuity an admirable spot. In a thinly peopled country, surrounded by commons and woods, and yet, as Mr. Robins would say if he had to dispose of it by auction, "within an easy ride" of populous and well-frequented roads, it possessed all the advantages of secrecy for itself and convenience for depredation. Very few of the gang, and those only who had been employed in its construction, were made acquainted with the secret of this cavern; and as our adventurers rarely visited it, and only on occasions of urgent want or secure concealment, it had continued for more than two years undiscovered and unsuspected.

The cavern, originally hollowed by nature, owed but little to the decorations of art; nevertheless, the roughness of the walls was concealed by a rude but comfortable arras of matting; four or five of such

seats as the robbers themselves could construct were drawn around a small but bright wood-fire, which, as there was no chimney, spread a thin volume of smoke over the apartment. The height of the cave, added to the universal reconciler (custom), prevented, however, this evil from being seriously unpleasant; and, indeed, like the tenants of an Irish cabin, perhaps the inmates attached a degree of comfort to a circumstance which was coupled with their dearest household associations. A table, formed of a board coarsely planed, and supported by four legs of irregular size, made equal by the introduction of blocks or wedges between the legs and the floor, stood warming its uncouth self by the fire. At one corner a covered cart made a conspicuous article of furniture, no doubt useful either in conveying plunder or provisions; beside the wheels were carelessly thrown two or three coarse carpenter's tools, and the more warlike utilities of a blunderbuss, a rifle, and two broadswords. In the other corner was an open cupboard, containing rows of pewter platters, mugs, etc. Opposite the fireplace, which was to the left of the entrance, an excavation had been turned into a dormitory; and fronting the entrance was a pair of broad, strong wooden steps, ascending to a large hollow about eight feet from the ground. This was the entrance to the stables; and as soon as their owners released the reins of the horses, the docile animals proceeded one by one leisurely up the steps, in the manner of quadrupeds educated at the public seminary of Astley's, and disappeared within the aperture.

These steps, when drawn up,—which, however, from their extreme clumsiness, required the united strength of two ordinary men, and was not that instantaneous work which it should have been,—made the place above a tolerably strong hold; for the wall was perfectly perpendicular and level, and it was only by placing his hands upon the ledge, and so lifting himself gymnastically upward, that an active assailant could have reached the eminence,—a work which defenders equally active, it may easily be supposed, would not be likely to allow.

This upper cave—for our robbers paid more attention to their horses than themselves, as the nobler animals of the two species—was evidently fitted up with some labour. The stalls were rudely divided, the litter of dry fern was clean, troughs were filled with oats, and a large tub had been supplied from a pond at a little distance. A cart-harness and some old wagoners' frocks were fixed on pegs to the wall; while at the far end of these singular stables was a door strongly barred, and only just large enough to admit the body of a man. The confederates had made it an express law never to enter their domain by this door, or to use it, except for the purpose of escape, should the cave ever be attacked; in which case, while one or two defended the entrance from the inner cave, another might unbar the door, and as it opened upon the thickest part of the wood, through which with great ingenuity a labyrinthine path had been cut, not easily tracked by ignorant pursuers, these precautions of the highwaymen had provided a fair hope of at least a temporary escape from any invading enemies.

Such were the domestic arrangements of the Red Cave; and it will be conceded that at least some skill had been shown in the choice of the spot, if there were a lack of taste in its adornments.

While the horses were performing their nightly ascent, our three heroes, after securing the door, made at once to the fire. And there, O reader! they were greeted in welcome by one—an old and revered acquaintance of thine—whom in such a scene it will equally astound and wound thee to behold.

Know, then—But first we will describe to thee the occupation and the garb of the August personage to whom we allude. Bending over a large gridiron, daintily bespread with steaks of the fatted rump, the INDIVIDUAL stood, with his right arm bared above the elbow, and his right hand grasping that mimic trident known unto gastronomers by the monosyllable "fork." His wigless head was adorned with a cotton nightcap. His upper vestment was discarded, and a whitish apron flowed gracefully down his middle man. His stockings were ungartered, and permitted between the knee and the calf interesting glances of the rude carnal. One list shoe and one of leathern manufacture cased his ample feet. Enterprise, or the noble glow of his present culinary profession, spread a yet rosier blush over a countenance early tinged by generous libations, and from beneath the curtain of his pallid eyelashes his large and rotund orbs gleamed dazzlingly on the new comers. Such, O reader! was the aspect and the occupation of the venerable man whom we have long since taught thee to admire; such, alas for the mutabilities of earth! was—A new chapter only can contain the name.

CHAPTER XXVII.

Caliban. Hast thou not dropped from heaven?

Tempest.

PETER MacGRAWLER!!
!!
!!

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK PAUL CLIFFORD — VOLUME 05 ***

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