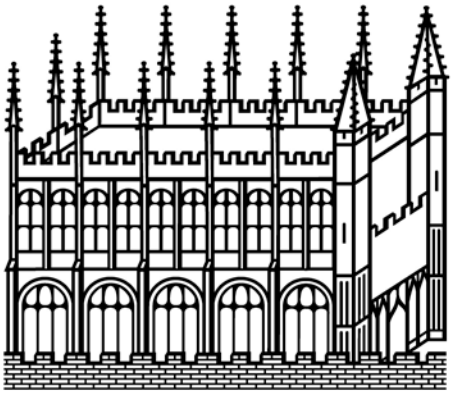


Bodleian Libraries

UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

This book is part of the collection held by the Bodleian Libraries and scanned by Google, Inc. for the Google Books Library Project.

For more information see:

http://www.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/dbooks

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 2.0 UK: England & Wales (CC BY-NC-SA 2.0) licence.

Herbert G. Norman

NEW NOVELS AT THE LIBRARIES.

THIS SON OF VULCAN. By the Authors of "Ready-Money Mortiboy." 3 vols. 31*s.* 6*d.* [*Ready this day.*

Now ready at all Libraries, the New Volume by the Author of "A Daughter of Heth," "Three Feathers," &c. 1 vol. demy 8vo. 10*s.* 6*d.*

LADY SILVERDALE'S SWEETHEART, and other Stories. By WILLIAM BLACK.

"We are not sure that we do not get a higher impression of Mr. Black's consummate mastery of the art of telling a story from this collection of short tales than from his more elaborate novels."—*Examiner.*

THE CASE OF MR. LUCRAFT, &c. By the Authors of "Ready-Money Mortiboy." 2 vols. crown 8vo. Cloth, 21*s.* [*Ready.*

"The stories in these two volumes well deserved publication. They abound in drollery and humour, both spiced with a flavour of rare and real originality, and they have also pathos and extreme delicacy of touch. The writing is done by hands both light and skilled; the style is neat and pointed, free from all affectations; the epigrams, whose name is legion, are happy and suggestive."—*World.*

SIGHTS AND INSIGHTS. By Mrs. A. D. T. WHITNEY, Author of "The Gayworthys." 3 vols. crown 8vo. Cloth extra, 31*s.* 6*d.* [*Ready.*

"Admirable descriptive passages. . . . . Its general effect is as wholesome as its method is unusual."—*Athenæum.*

THORNWELL ABBAS. 2 vols. crown 8vo. 21*s.*

"A thoroughly pleasant, well-written novel."—*Morning Post.*

London: SAMPSON LOW, MARSTON, SEARLE & RIVINGTON, Crown Buildings, 188, Fleet Street, E.C.

JL

LOW'S STANDARD SIX-SHILLING NOVELS.

☞ *The Two New Volumes in the Series are—*

THREE FEATHERS. By WILLIAM BLACK, Author o
"A Daughter of Heth," "A Princess of Thule," &c. 1 vol. sma
post 8vo. 6*s*. The Sixth Edition.

N.B.—The Sixth Edition is also ready of

ALICE LORRAINE: a Tale of the South Downs
By R. D. BLACKMORE. 1 vol. small post 8vo. 6*s*.

London: SAMPSON LOW, MARSTON, SEARLE & RIVINGTON,
Crown Buildings, 188, Fleet Street, E.C.

Hubert G. Norman.

CRIPPS, THE CARRIER.

A WOODLAND TALE.

BY

RICHARD DODDRIDGE BLACKMORE,

AUTHOR OF "LORNA DOONE," "ALICE LORRAINE," ETC.

ἆρ' ἔστιν ἡμῖν λογίδιον γνώμην ἔχον,
ὑμῶν μὲν αὐτῶν οὐχὶ δεξιώτερον,
κωμῳδίας δὲ φορτικῆς σοφώτερον;

AR. VESP. 64.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:
SAMPSON LOW, MARSTON, SEARLE & RIVINGTON,
CROWN BUILDINGS, 188, FLEET STREET.

1876.

(*All rights reserved.*)

LONDON:
PRINTED BY WILLIAM CLOWES AND SONS,
STAMFORD STREET AND CHARING CROSS.

CONTENTS OF VOL. I.

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	THE HEAD OF THE FAMILY	1
II.	THE SWING OF THE PICKAXE	14
III.	OAKLEAF POTATOES	28
IV.	CRIPPS IN A QUANDARY	42
V.	A RIDE THROUGH THE SNOW	49
VI.	THE PUBLIC OF THE "PUBLIC"	61
VII.	THE BEST FOOT FOREMOST	74
VIII.	BALDERDASH	86
IX.	CRIPPS IN AFFLICTION	100
X.	ALL DEAD AGAINST HIM	110
XI.	KNOCKER VERSUS BELL-PULL	120
XII.	MR. JOHN SMITH	136
XIII.	MR. SMITH IS ACTIVE	149
XIV.	SO IS MR. SHARP	159
XV.	A SPOTTED DOG	171

CHAPTER		PAGE
XVI.	A GRAND SMOCK-FROCK	182
XVII.	INSTALLED AT BRASENOSE	196
XVIII.	A FLASH OF LIGHT	208
XIX.	A STORMY NIGHT	221
XX.	CRIPPS DRAWS THE CORK	241
XXI.	CINNAMINTA	256
XXII.	A DELICATE SUBJECT	266

CRIPPS, THE CARRIER.

CHAPTER I.

THE HEAD OF THE FAMILY.

THE little village of Beckley lies, or rather lay many years ago, in the quiet embrace of old Stow Wood, well known to every Oxford man who loves the horn or fusil. This wood or forest (now broken up into many straggling copses) spread in the olden time across the main breadth of the highland to the north of Headington, between the valley of the Cherwell and the bogs of Otmoor. Beckley itself, though once approached by the Roman road

from Alchester, must for many a century have nursed its rural quietude, withdrawn as it was from the stage-waggon track from High Wycombe to Chipping Norton, through Wheatley, Islip, and Bletchingdon, and lying in a tangle of narrow lanes leading only to one another. So Beckley took that cheerful view of life which enabled the fox to disdain the blandishments of the vintage, and prided itself on its happy seclusion and untutored honesty.

But as all sons of Adam must have something or other to say to the rest, and especially to his daughters, this little village carried on some commerce with the outer world; and did it through a carrier.

The name of this excellent man was Cripps; and the Carrier's mantle, or woolsey coat, had descended on this particular Cripps from many generations. All the Cripps family had a habit of adding largely to their number in every generation. In this they resembled most

other families which have to fight the world, and therefore recruit their forces zealously; but in one great point they were very distinct —they agreed among one another. And ever since roads were made, or rather lanes began trying to make themselves, one great tradition had confirmed the dynasty of Crippses.

This was that the eldest son should take the carrying business; the second son (upon first avoidance) should have the baker's shop in Oxford over against old Balliol College; the third should have the queer old swine-farm in the heart of Stow Forest; the fourth should be the butcher of Beckley, and the fifth its shoemaker. If ever it pleased the Lord to proceed with the masculine fork of the family (as had happened several times), the sixth boy and the rest were expected to start on their travels, when big enough. As for the girls, the Carrier being the head of the family, and holding the house and the stable and cart, was bound to

take the maids, one by one, to and fro under his tilt twice a week, till the public fell in love with them.

Now so many things come cross and across in the countless ins and outs of life, that even the laws of the Crippses failed sometimes, in some jot or tittle. Still there they stuck, and strong cause was needed ere they could be departed from. Of course the side-shoots of the family (shoemakers' sons, and so on) were not to be bound by this great code, however ambitious to be so. To deal with such rovers is not our duty. Our privilege is to trace the strict succession of the Crippses, the deeds of the Carrier now on the throne and his second best brother, the baker, with a little side-peep at the man on the farm, and a shy desire to be very delicate to the last unmarried "female."

The present head of the family, Zacchary Cripps, the Beckley carrier, under the laws of

time (which are even stricter than the Cripps' code), was crossing the ridge of manhood towards the western side of forty, without providing the due successor to the ancestral driving-board. Public opinion was already beginning to exclaim at him; and the man who kept the chandler's shop, with a large small family to maintain, was threatening to make the most of this, and set up his own eldest son on the road; though "dot and carry one" was all he knew about the business. Zacchary was not a likely man to be at all upset by this; but rather one of a tarrying order, as his name might indicate.

Truly intelligent families living round about the city of Oxford had, and even to this day have, a habit of naming their male babies after the books of the Bible, in their just canonical sequence; while infants of the better sex are baptized into the Apocrypha, or even the Epistles. So that Zacchary should have been

"Genesis," only his father had suffered such pangs of mind at being cut down, by the ever-strengthening curtness of British diction, into "Jenny Cripps," that he laid his thumb to the New Testament when his first man-child was born to him, and finding a father in like case, quite relieved of responsibility, took it for a good sign, and applied his name triumphantly.

But though the eldest born was thus transferred into the New Testament, the second son reverted to the proper dispensation; and the one who went into the baker's shop was Exodus, as he ought to be. The children of the former Exodus were turned out testamentarily, save those who were needed to carry the bread out, till their cousin's boys should be big enough.

All of these doings were right enough, and everybody approved of them. Leviticus Cripps was the lord of the swine, and Numbers bore the cleaver, while Deuteronomy stuck to his last,

when the public-house could spare him. There was only one more brother of the dominant generation, whose name was "Pentachook," for thus they pronounced the collective eponym, and he had been compendiously kicked abroad, to seek his own fortune right early.

But as for the daughters (who took their names from the best women of the Apocrypha, and sat up successively under the tilt, until they were disposed of), for the moment it is enough to say that all except one were now forth and settled. Some married farmers, some married tradesmen, one took a miller's eldest son, one had a gentleman more or less, but all with expectations. Only the youngest was still in the tilt, a very pretty girl called Esther.

All Beckley declared that Esther's heart had been touched by a College lad, who came some five years since to lodge with Zacchary for the long vacation, and was waited on by this young girl, supposed to be then unripe for dreaming

of the tender sentiment. That a girl of only fifteen summers should allow her thoughts to stray, contrary to all common sense and her duty to her betters, for no other reason (to anybody's knowledge) than that a young man ate and drank with less noise than the Crippses, and went on about the moonlight and the stars, and the rubbishy things in the hedges—that a child like that should know no better than to mix what a gentleman said with his inner meaning—put it right or left, it showed that something was amiss with her. However, the women would say no more until it was pulled out of them. To mix or meddle with the Crippses was like putting one's fingers into a steel trap.

With female opinion in this condition, and eager to catch at anything, Mrs. Exodus Cripps, in Oxford, was confined rather suddenly. She had kneaded a batch of two sacks of flour, to put it to rise for the morning;

and her husband (who should not have let her do it) was smoking a pipe, and exciting her. Nevertheless, it would not have harmed her (as both the doctor and the midwife said) if only she had kept herself from arguing, while about it. But, somehow or other, her husband said a thing she could not agree with, and the strength of her reason went the other way, and it served him right that he had to rush off in his slippers to the night-bell.

On the next day, although things were quite brought round, and the world was the richer by the addition of another rational animal, Mr. Exodus sent up the crumpet-boy all the way from Broad Street in Oxford to Beckley, to beg and implore Miss Esther Cripps to come down and attend to the caudle. And the crumpet-boy, being short of breath, became so full of power that the Carrier scarcely knew what to do in the teeth of so urgent a message. For he had made quite a pet of his youngest

sister, and the twenty years of age betwixt them stopped the gap of rivalry. It was getting quite late in the afternoon when the crumpet-boy knocked at the Carrier's door, because he had met upon Magdalen Bridge a boy who owed him twopence; and eager as he was to fulfil his duty, a sense of justice to himself compelled him to do his best to get it. His knowledge of the world was increased by the failure of this Utopian vision, for the other boy offered to toss him "double or quits," and having no specie, borrowed poor Crumpy's last penny to do it; then being defeated in the issue, he cast the young baker's cap over the bridge, and made off at fine speed with his coin of the realm. What other thing could Crumpy do than attempt to outvie his activity? In a word, he chased him as far as Carfax, with well-winged feet and sad labour of lungs, but Mercury laughed at Astræa, and Crumpy had a very distant view of fivepence. Record-

ing a highly vindictive vow, he scratched his bare head, and set forth again, being further from Beckley than at his first start.

It certainly was an unlucky thing that the day of the week should be Tuesday—Tuesday, the 19th of December, 1837. For Zacchary always had to make his rounds on a Wednesday and a Saturday, and if he were to drive his poor old Dobbin into Oxford on a Tuesday evening, how could he get through his business to-morrow? For Dobbin insisted on a day in stable whenever he had been in Oxford. He was full of the air of the laziest place, and perhaps the most delightful, in the world. He despised all the horses of low agriculture after that inspiration, and he sighed out sweet grunts at the colour of his straw, instead of getting up the next morning.

Zacchary Cripps was a thoughtful man, as well as a very kind-hearted one. In the crown of his hat he always carried a monthly calendar

gummed on cardboard, and opposite almost every day he had dots, or round O's, or crosses. Each of these to his very steady mind meant something not to be neglected; and being (as time went) a pretty fair scholar—ere School Boards destroyed true scholarship—with the help of his horse he could make out nearly every place he had to call at. So now he looked at the crumpet-boy, to receive and absorb his excitement, and then he turned to young Esther, and let her speak first, as she always liked to do.

"Oh, please to go back quite as fast as you can," said Esther to the Crumpy, "and say that I shall be there before you; or, at any rate, as soon as you are. And, Crumpy, there ought to be something for you. Dear Zak, have you got twopence?"

"Not I," said the Carrier, "and if I had, it would do him a deal more harm than good. Run away down the hill, my lad, and you come

to me at the Golden Cross, perhaps as soon as Saturday, and I'll look in my bag for a half-penny. Run away, boy; run away, or the bogies will be after you."

CHAPTER II.

THE SWING OF THE PICKAXE.

THE baker's boy felt that his luck was askew upon this day of his existence, for Carrier Cripps was vexed so much at this sudden demand for his sister that he never even thought of asking the boy to have a glass of home-brewed ale.

"Zak, what made you send the boy away?" Esther asked, when she came downstairs, with her bonnet and short cloak on. "Of course, I am very foolish; but he would have been some little company."

"There, now, I never thought of it! I am doiled a do believe sometimes. Tramp with

you to the Bar mysell, I wull. Sarve me right for a-doin' of it."

"Indeed, then, you won't," she answered firmly. "There's a hard day's work for you, Zak, to-morrow, with all the Christmas parcels, and your touch of rheumatics so bad last week."

"Why, bless the cheeld, I be as hearty as ever!"

"Of course you are, Zak; of course you are, and think nought of a sack of potatoes. But if you declare to come with me one step, backward is the only step I take."

"Well, well," said the Carrier, glad on the whole to escape a long walk and keep conscience clear; "when you say a thing, Etty, what good is it? Round these here parts none would harm 'ee. And none of they furriners be about just now."

"Good-night, Zak, good-night, dear," cried Esther to shorten departure, for Cripps was a man of a slow turn of mind, and might go on

for an hour or two; "I shall sleep there to-night, of course, and meet you at the Golden Cross to-morrow. When had I best be there?"

"Well, you know better than I do. It might be one o'clock, or it might be two, or it might be half-past three a'most. All you have to do is this—to leave word at the bar with Sally Brown."

"I shall do nothing of the sort," she answered; "I don't like bars, and I don't like Miss Brown. I shall look in the yard for the cart, brother."

"You'll do pretty much as you like. That much a' may be cock-sure of." But before he could finish his exposition of his sister's character, she was out of sight; and he dropped his grumble, and doubted his mind about letting her go. Not that any one at all of the neighbourhood would hurt her; but that there had been much talk about a camp of dark-skinned people in Cowley Marsh, not long ago. There-

fore he laid his palm flat from his eyebrows, to follow the distance further; and seeing no more than the hedges of the lane (now growing in the cold wind naked) and the track of the lane (from wet mud slaking into light-coloured crustiness), without any figures, or sound, or shadow, or sense of life moving anywhere—he made for the best side of his cottage-door, and brightened up the firelight.

The weather had been for some few weeks in a good constitutional English state; that is to say, it had no settled tendency towards anything. Or at any rate, so it seemed to people who took little heed of it. There had been a little rain, and then a little snow, and a touch of frost, and then a sample of fog, and so on: trying all varieties, to suit the British public. True Britons, however, had grumbled duly at each successive overture; so that the winter was now resolving henceforth only to please itself. And this determined will was in the

wind, the air, and the earth itself, just when night began to fall on this dark day of December.

As Esther turned the corner from the Beckley lane into the road, the broad coach road to Oxford, she met a wind that knew its mind coming over the crest of Shotover, a stern east wind that whistled sadly over the brown and barren fields, and bitterly piped in the roadway. To the chill of this blast the sere oak-leaves shivered in the dusk and rattled; the gray ash saplings bent their naked length to get away from it; and the surly stubs of the hedge went to and fro to one another. The slimy dips of the path began to rib themselves, like the fronds of fern, and to shrink into wrinkles and sinewy knobs; while the broader puddles, though skirred by the breeze, found the network of ice veiling over them. This, as it crusted, began to be capable of a consistent quivering, with a frail infinitude of spikelets,

crossing and yet carrying into one another. And the cold work (marred every now and then by the hurry of the wind that urged it) in the main was going on so fast, that the face of the water ceased to glisten, and instead of ruffling lifted, and instead of waving wavered. So that, as the surface trembled, any level eye might see little splinters (held as are the ribs and harl of feathers) spreading, and rising like stems of lace, and then with a smooth, crisp jostle sinking, as the wind flew over them, into the quavering consistence of a coverlet of ice.

Esther Cripps took little heed of these things, or of any other in the matter of weather, except to say to herself now and then how bitter cold the wind was, and that she feared it would turn to snow, and how she longed to be sitting with a cup of "Aunt Exie's" caudle in the snug room next to the bakehouse, or how glad she would be to get only as far as the first house of St. Clement's, to see the lamps and the lights in the

shops, and be quit of this dreary loneliness. For now it must be three market days since fearful rumours began to stir in several neighbouring villages, which made even strong men discontent with solitude towards nightfall; and as for the women—just now poor Esther would rather not think of what they declared. It was all very well to pretend to doubt it while hanging the clothes out, or turning the mangle; but as for laughing out here in the dark, and a mile away from the nearest house—Good Lord! How that white owl frightened her!

Being a sensible and brave girl, she forced her mind as well as she could into another channel, and lifted the cover of the basket in which she had some nice things for "Aunt Exie," and then she set off for a bold little run, until she was out of breath, and trembling at the sound of her own light feet. For though all the Crippses were known to be of a firm

and resolute fibre, who could expect a young maid like this to tramp on like a Roman sentinel ?

And a lucky thing for her it was that she tried nothing of the sort, but glided along with her heart in her mouth, and her short skirt tucked up round her. Lucky also for her that the ground (which she so little heeded, and so wanted to get over) was in that early stage of freezing, or of drying to forestall frost, in which it deadens sound as much as the later stage enlivens it, otherwise it is doubtful whether she would have seen the Christmas-dressing of the shops in Oxford.

For, a little further on, she came, without so much as a cow in the road or a sheep in a field for company, to a dark narrow place, where the way hung over the verge of a stony hollow, an ancient pit which had once been worked as part of the quarries of Headington. This had long been of bad repute as a haunted and ill-omened

place; and even the Carrier himself, strong and resolute as he was, felt no shame in whispering when he passed by in the moonlight. And the name of the place was the "Gipsy's Grave." Therefore, as Esther Cripps approached it, she was half inclined to wait and hide herself in a bush or gap until a cart or waggon should come down the hill behind her, or an honest dairyman whistling softly to reassure his shadow, or even a woman no braver than herself.

But neither any cart came near, nor any other kind of company, only the violence of the wind, and the keen increase of the frost-bite. So that the girl made up her mind to put the best foot foremost, and run through her terrors at such a pace that none of them could lay hold of her.

Through yards of darkness she skimmed the ground, in haste only to be rid of it, without looking forward, or over her shoulders, or anywhere, when she could help it. And now she

was ready to laugh at herself and her stupid fears, as she caught through the trees a glimpse of the lights of Oxford, down in the low land, scarcely more than a mile and a half away from her. In the joy of relief she was ready to jump and pant without fear of the echoes, when suddenly something caught her ears.

This was not a thing at first to be at all afraid of; but only just enough to rouse a little curiosity. It seemed to be nothing more or less than the steady stroke of a pickaxe. The sound came from the further corner of the deserted quarry, where a crest of soft and shingly rock overhung a briary thicket. Any person working there would be quite out of sight from the road, by reason of the bend of the hollow.

The blow of the tool came dull and heavy on the dark and frosty wind; and Esther almost made up her mind to run on, and take no heed of it. And so she would have done, no doubt,

if she had not been a Cripps girl. But in this family firm and settled opinions had been handed down concerning the rights of property —the rights that overcome all wrongs, and outlive death. The brother Leviticus of Stow Wood had sown a piece of waste at the corner of the clevice, with winter carrots for his herd of swine. The land being none of his thus far, his right so to treat it was not established, and therefore likely to be attacked by any rapacious encroacher. Esther felt all such things keenly, and resolved to find out what was going on.

To this intent she gathered in the skirt of her frock and the fulling of her cloak, and fending the twigs from her eyes and bonnet, quietly slipped through a gap in the hedge. For she knew that a steep track, trodden by children in the blackberry season, led from this gap to the deep and tangled bottom of the quarry. With care and fear she went softly down, and followed the curve of the hollow.

The heavy sound of the pickaxe ceased, as she came near and nearer, and the muttering of rough voices made her shrink into a nook and listen.

"Tell 'ee, I did see zummat moving," said a man, whom she could dimly make out on the beetling ridge above her, by the light of the clearing eastern sky; "a zummat moving down yonner, I tell 'ee."

"No patience, I han't no patience with 'ee," answered a taller man coming forward, and speaking with a guttural twang, as if the roof of his mouth were imperfect. "Skeary Jem is your name and nature. Gie me the pick if thee beest aveared. Is this job to be finished to-night, or not?"

The answer was only a growl or an oath, and the swing of the tool began again, while Esther's fright grew hot, and thumped in her heart, and made her throat swell. It was all she could do to keep quiet breath, and prevent

herself from screaming; for something told her that she was watching a darker crime than theft of roots, or robbery of a sheepfold.

In a short or a long time—she knew not which—as she still lay hid and dared not show her face above the gorse-tuft, a sound of sliding and falling shale heavily shook her refuge. She drew herself closer, and prayed to the Lord, and clasped her hands before her eyes, and cowered, expecting to be killed at least. And then she peeped forth, to know what it was about. She never had harmed any mortal body; why should she be frightened so?

In the catch of the breath which comes when sudden courage makes gulp at uncertainty, she lifted herself by a stiff old root, to know the very worst of it. Better almost to be killed and be done with, than bear the heart-pang of this terrible fear. And there she saw a thing that struck her so aback with amazement, that every timid sense was mute.

Whether the sky began to shed a hovering light, or the girl's own eyes spread and bred a power of vision from their nervous dilation—at any rate, she saw in the darkness what she had not seen till now. It was the body of a young woman (such a body as herself might be), lying, only with white things round it, in the black corner, with gravel and earth and pieces of rock rolling down on it. There was nothing to frighten a sensible person now that the worst was known perhaps. Everybody must be buried at some time. Why should she be frightened so ?

However, Esther Cripps fell faint, and lay in that state long enough for tons of burying rock to fall, and secret buryers to depart.

CHAPTER III.

OAKLEAF POTATOES.

"OF all slow people in this slow place, I am quite certain that there is none so slow as Cripps the Carrier."

This "hot spache," as the patient Zacchary would perhaps have called it, passed the lips of no less a person than old Squire Oglander. He, on the 20th day of December (the day after that we began with), was hurrying up and down the long straight walk of his kitchen garden, and running every now and then to a post of vantage, from which he could look over the top of his beloved holly hedge, and make out some of the zigzags of the narrow lane from Beckley.

A bitter black frost had now set in, and the Squire knew that if he wanted anything more fetched out of his ground, or anything new put into it, it might be weeks before he got another chance of doing it. So he made a good bustle, and stamped, and ran, and did all he could to arouse his men, who knew him too well to concern themselves about any of his menaces.

"I tell you we are all caught napping, Thomas. I tell you we ought to be ashamed of ourselves. The frost is an inch in the ground already. Artichokes, carrots, parsnips, beet-root, even horse-radish for our Christmas beef —and upon my soul, a row of potatoes never even dug yet! Unless I am after you at every corner—well, I am blessed if I don't see our keeping onions!"

"Now, measter, 'ee no call to be so grum! None of they things 'll be a haporth the worse. The frost 'll ony swaten 'em."

"You zany, I know all your talk. Hold your tongue. Not a glass of beer will I send out, if this is all I get for it. Sweeten them indeed! And when we want them, are we to dig them with mattocks, pray? Or do you thick-heads expect it to thaw to order, when the pot is bubbling? Stir your lazy legs, or I'll throw every one of you on the workhouse the moment the first snow falls."

The three men grinned at one another, and proceeded leisurely. They knew much better than the Squire himself what his gentle nature was, and that he always expiated a scolding with a jug of beer.

"Man and boy," said the eldest of them, speaking below his breath, as if this tyranny had extinguished him; "in this here gearden have I worked, man and boy, for threescore year, and always gi'en satisfaction. Workuss! What would his father a' said, to hear tell in this gearden of workuss? Workuss! Well, let

un coom, if a' will! Can't be harder work, God knoweth."

"Tummuss, Tummuss, you may say that," said another lazy rascal, shaking his head, with his heel on his spade, and then wiping his forehead laboriously. "'Tis the sweat of our brow, Tummuss, none of 'em thinks on—but there, they was born to be driving of us!"

Squire Oglander made as if he heard them not; and then he hurried to the hedge again, and stood on the wall of the leaf-mould pit, and peered over the beard of hollies. And this time he spied in the distance Cripps, or at any rate the tilt of the Crippsian cart, jogging sedately to the rhythm of the feet of Dobbin.

"Hurrah!" cried the Squire, who was still as young in mind as if he had no body. "By George, we shall be just in time. Never mind what I said, my lads. I was a little bit cross, I know. Take out the crumbs from the bottom

of your trenches, and go two inches deeper. Our new potatoes are come at last! Mary, come out with a gallon of ale."

Squire Oglander, having retired now from the army and all warfare, was warmly devoted to the arts of peace. Farming, planting, gardening, breeding, training of dogs, and so on—all of these quiet delights fell softly on a very active mind, when the vigour of the body began to fail. He loved his farm, and he loved his garden, and all his attempts at improvement, and nothing better than to point out his own mistakes to rash admirers. But where is the pleasure of showing things to strangers who know nothing? The old man's grand delight of all was to astonish his own daughter, his only child, Grace Oglander.

This it was that made him work so hard at the present moment. He was determined to have his kitchen garden in first-rate winter order by the time his daughter should come

home from a visit to her aunt at Cowley. Now this sister, Mrs. Fermitage, had promised to bring home their joint pet Gracie in time for the dinner at five o'clock that very day, and to dine there with them; so that it was needful to look alive, and to make quick step of everything. Moreover, this good Squire had some little insight (as behoves a farmer and a sportsman) into the ways and meaning of the weather of the neighbourhood. He knew as well as a short-tailed field-mouse that a long frost was coming. The sharp dry rustle of the upturned leaves of holly and of ivy, the heavy stoop of the sullen sky, the patches of spaded mould already browning with powdery crispness, the upward shivering look of the grass, and the loss of all gloss upon everything, and the shuddering rattle in the teeth of a man who opened his mouth to the wind at all—many other things than these, as well as all of them, were here; that any man (not blind, or deaf, or choked in

citied ignorance) might fall to at once, and dig every root of his potatoes.

But the strange thing, in this present matter, was that Squire Oglander was bent not only on digging potatoes, but also on planting them, this very day. Forsooth it was one of his fixed dates in the chronicles of the garden, that happen what might, or be the season whatsoever it chose to be, new potatoes and peas he would have by the last day of May, at the latest. And this without any ignoble resort to forcing-pit, hot-bed, or even cold frame; under the pure gaze of the sky, by that time they must be ready. Now this may be easy at Ventnor, or Penzance, or even Bournemouth; but in the highlands of Oxfordshire it requires some skill and management. In the first place, both pea and potato must be of a kind that is ready to awake right early; and then they must be humoured with a very choice place; and after that they must be

shielded from the winter's rages. If all these "musts" can be complied with, and several "ifs" are solved aright, the gardener (eager as well as patient) may hope to get pleasure from his early work.

Of all men there was none perhaps more capable of hoping than this good Squire Oglander. In his garden and his household, or among his friends and neighbours, or the world at large, he not only tried to see, but saw, the very best side of everything. When things fell out amiss, he always looked very wise, and shook his head, and declared that he had predicted them; and before very long he began to find out that they were not so bad as they might have been. His ruddy face, and blue eyes, and sometimes decidedly waggish nose, as well as his crisp white hair, and way of standing to be looked at, let everybody know that here was a man of no great pretension, yet true, and of kind and happy heart, and fit

to be relied upon. Ten thousand such may be found in England; and they cannot be too many.

"Inside and outside, all look alive!" cried this gentleman, running to and fro: "Gracie will be home; Miss Grace, I mean; and not a bit of fire in the drawing-room grate! No Christmas-boxes for any of you sluts! Now, I did not mean that, Mary, as you might know. Inside the women, and outside the men—now, what is this paper for, my dear?"

"That there Cripps, sir, have a sent 'un in. He be gettin' so pertikular!"

"Quite right. Quite right. Business is business. No man can be too particular. Let him sit down and have a pint of ale. He wants me to sign this paper, does he? Very well; tell him to come next week. My fingers are cramped with the wind. Tell Cripps—now, don't you be in such a hurry, Mary; Cripps is not a marrying man."

"As if I would touch him with a pair of tongs, sir! A Hookham to have a Cripps, sir! —a man who always smells as if he had been a-combing of a horse!"

"Ah, poor Mary, the grapes are sour. Tell bachelor Cripps to send in the bag. And bring me the little truck-basket, Mary; I dare say that will hold them. Just in time, they are only just in time. To-morrow would have been a day too late."

The Squire was to pay a guinea for this bushel of early oakleaf potatoes, a sort that was warranted to beat the ashleaf by a fortnight, and to crop tenfold as much. The bag had been sent by the Henley coach from a nursery near Maidenhead, and left at the Black Horse in St. Clement's, to be called for by the Beckley carrier.

"Stay now," cried the Squire; "now I think of it we will unpack the bag in the brewery, Mary. They have had a fire there all the

morning. And it will save making any mess in here. Miss Grace is coming, bless her heart! And she'll give it to me, if she finds any dirt."

"But, sir, if you please, Master Cripps now just is beginning of his pint of ale. And he never hurryeth over that——"

"Well, we don't want Cripps. We only want the bag. Jem will bring it into the brewery, if you want to sit with Cripps. Cripps is tired, I dare say. These young men's legs are not fit for much. Stop—call old Thomas; he's the best, after all. If I want a thing done, I come back to the old folk, after all."

"Well, sir, I don't think you have any reason to say that. Howsomever, here cometh Mr. Kale. Mr. Kale, if you please, you be wanted."

Presently Thomas Kale, the man who had worked so long in the garden there, followed

his master across the court, with the bag of potatoes on his back. The weight was a trifle, of course, being scarcely over half a hundredweight; but Thomas was too old a hand to make too light of anything.

"I've knowed the time," he said, setting down the sack on the head of an empty barrel, "when that there weight would have failed, you might say, to crook my little finger. Now, make so bold—do you know the raison?"

"Why, Thomas, we cannot expect to be always so young as we were once, you know."

"Nout to do wi' it—less nor nout. The raison lie all in the vittels, maister; the vittels is fallen from what they was."

"Thomas, you give me no peace with your victuals. You must groan to the cook, not to me, about them. Now, cut the cord. Why, what has Cripps been about?"

The bag was made of a stout grey canvas, not so thick as sacking, and as the creases of

the neck began to open, under the slackening cord, three or four red stripes were shown, such as are sometimes to be found in the neck of a leather mail-bag, when the postmaster has been in a hurry, and dropped his wax too plenteously. But the stripes in these creases were not dry and brittle, as of run sealing-wax, but clammy and damp, as if some thick fluid had oozed from dripping fingers.

"I don't like the look of it," cried the old Squire. "Cripps should be more careful. He has left the bag down at his brother the butcher's. I am sure they never sent it out like this. Not that I am of a squeamish order, but still—good God! What is this that I see?"

With scarcely time for his cheeks to blanch, or his firm old hands to tremble, Squire Oglander took from the mouth of the sack a coil of long bright golden hair. The brown shade of the potatoes beneath it set off its glistening

beauty. He knew it at a glance; there was no such hair in all Oxfordshire but his Gracie's. A piece of paper was roughly twisted in and out the shining wreath. This he spread in the hollow of his palm, and then put on his spectacles, and read by the waning light these words, "All you will ever see of her."

CHAPTER IV.

CRIPPS IN A QUANDARY.

WORTH OGLANDER, now in his seventieth year, although he might be a trifle fat, was a truly hale and active man. His limbs were as sound as his conscience; and he was well content with his life and age. He had seen a good deal of the world and of enemies, in the stirring times of war. But no wrong lay in the bottom of his heart, no harm ever done to any one, except that he had killed a few Frenchmen, perhaps, as all Englishmen used to be forced to do.

Moreover he had what most folk now, of the very best kind, have almost outlived, a staunch

and steadfast faith in the management of the world by its Maker. We are too clever now for all this, of course. But it must be allowed that this fine old faith bred courage, truth, and comfort.

"Whoever has played this trick with me," said the Squire, as soon as he recovered himself, "is, to say the least of it, a blackguard. Even for a Christmas joke, it is carrying things a great deal too far. I have played, and been played, many practical jokes, when there was nothing else to do; in winter-quarters, and such like. But this is beyond—— Thomas, run and fetch Cripps. I will get to the bottom of this, I am resolved."

In a minute or two Master Cripps came in. His face was a little flushed, from the power of the compliments paid to Mary, but his eyes were quite firm, and his breeches and gaiters strictly under discipline of the legs inside them.

"Servant, sir," he said, touching his forelock, nearly of the colour of clover hay; "all correct, I hope, Squire, safe and sound and in good condition. That's how I deliver all goods, barring the will of the A'mighty."

"Tell me the meaning of this." As he spoke Mr. Oglander held up the bright wreath of hair, and pointed to the red stains on the sack. Cripps, as behoved a slow-minded man, stared at the hair, and the bag, and the Squire, the roof of the brewery, and all the tubs; and then began feeling in his hat for orders.

"Cripps, are you dumb; are you tipsy; or what? Or are you too much ashamed of yourself?"

"I ain't done nort for to be ashamed of—me, nor my father avoore me."

"Then will you tell me what this means? Are you going to keep me all night, for God's sake?"

"Squire, I never, I never see'd 'un. I know

no more than a sto-un. I know no more than the dead, I do."

"Where did you get the bag? Was it like this? Who gave it to you? Have you let it out of sight? Did you see anybody come near it?"

"Squire, I can't tell 'ee such a many things. They heft up the barg to me at the Black Horse, where the bargs is alwas left for you. I took no heed of 'un, out of common. And no one have a titched him since, but me."

There was nothing more to be learned from Cripps, except that he passed the Black Horse that day a little earlier than usual, and had not brought his sister Esther, who was to have met him at the Golden Cross. He had come home by way of Elsfield, having something to deliver there, and had given a lift to old Shepherd Wakeling; but that could have naught to do with it.

It was now getting dark, and the Squire

every moment grew more and more uneasy. "Keep all this nonsense to yourself now, Cripps," he said, as he stowed the bag under a tub, and carefully covered his daughter's hair, and the piece of paper, with a straining sieve; "it might annoy me very much if this joke went any further, you know. I can trust Thomas to hold his tongue, and I hope I can trust you, neighbour Cripps."

"Your honour knoweth what I be," answered the loyal Carrier. "Ever since I were a boy—but there, they all knows what I be."

Master Cripps, with his brain "a good piece doiled," as he afterwards said of it, made his way back to the cart, and mounted in his special manner. Although he was only two-score years of age, he had so much rheumatism in his right knee—whether it sprang from the mud, or the ruts, or (as he believed) from the turnpike gates—that he was bound to get up in this way. First he looked well up and down

the lane, to be sure there was no other cart in sight, then he said "whoa-hoa" to Dobbin (who was always quite ready to receive that advice), and then he put his left foot on the little step, and made sure that it was quite steady. Throwing his weight on that foot, he laid hold of the crupper with his right hand, and placed his stiff knee on the flat of the shaft, never without a groan or two. At this stage he rested, to collect his powers; and then with decisive action flung his left foot upon the foot-board, and casting the weight of his body thither, came down on the seat, with a thump and rattle. He was now all right, and Dobbin felt it, and acknowledged the fact with a grateful grunt. Then Carrier Cripps took up the reins, and made a little flourish with his brass-bound whip, and Dobbin put up his head, and started with his most convenient foot.

"I dunno what to make of this here start," said Cripps to himself, and his horse and cart,

as soon as he had smitten his broad chest long enough to arouse circulation. "Seemeth to me a queer thing truly. But I never were a hand at a riddle. Wugg then, Dobbin! Wun'not go home to-night?"

CHAPTER V.

A RIDE THROUGH THE SNOW.

MEANWHILE the old Squire, with a troubled mind, kept talking and walking about, and listening for the rumble of his sister's carriage, the clank of horses' hoofs, and the ring of wheels upon the frozen road. He could not believe that any one in the world would hurt his darling Gracie. Everybody loved her so, and the whole parish was so fond of her, and she had such a way of easing every one's perplexities, that if any villain durst even think of touching a hair of her blessed head——yet whose hair was it?—whose hair was it? And

such a quantity as never could have been cut with her consent!

"This is too much! I cannot bear it!" he said to himself, after many a turn, and anxious search of the distance; "Joan's carriage should have been here long ago. My darling would have made them keep their time. I cannot stop here: I must go to meet them. But I need not startle any one."

To provide for this, he just looked in at the kitchen door, and told the old cook to keep the dinner back awhile; for the roads were so bad that the ladies were almost sure to be behind their time; and then he went quietly to the stable, where the horses were bedded down, and by the light of an old horn lantern saddled and bridled his favourite hack.

Heavy snow-clouds had been gathering all the afternoon; and now as he passed through a side-gate into the lane, and turned his mare's head eastward, the forward flakes were borne by

the sharp wind into his white whiskers. "We shall have a coarse night of it, I doubt," he said to himself, as he buttoned his coat. At every turn of the lane he hoped to meet his sister's chariot labouring up the slippery track with the coal-black horses gray with snow, and somebody well wrapped up inside, to make him laugh at his childish fears. But corner after corner he turned, and met no carriage, no cart, no horse, nor even so much as a man afoot; only the snow getting thicker and sharper, and the wind beginning to wail to it. The ruts of the lane grew more distinct, as their combs of frozen mud attracted and held the driving whiteness; and the frogs of heavy cart-horses might be traced by the hoary increment. Then in three or four minutes, a silvery greyness (cast by the brown face of the roadway underlying the skin of snow) glistened between steep hedgerows wherein the depth of darkness rested. Soon even these showed traitor members, and began

to hang the white feather forth, where drooping spray or jutting thicket stopped the course of the laden air. Every hoof of the horse fell softer than it had fallen the step before, and the old man stooped to heed his reins, as his hoary eyebrows crusted.

Fear struck colder to his heart than frost, as he turned the last corner of his way, without meeting presence or token of his sister or darling daughter. In the deepening snow he drew his horse up under the two great yew-trees that overhung his sister's gate, and fumbled in the dark for the handle. The close heavy gates were locked and barred; and nothing had lately passed through them. Then he hoped that the weather might have stopped the carriage, and he tugged out the heavy bronze lion's-head in the pillar, which was the bell-pull. The bell in the porch of the house clanged deeply, and the mastiff heavily bayed at him; but he had to make the bell clang thrice before any servant answered it.

"Who be you there?" at last a gruff voice asked, without stretch of courtesy. "This sort of weather, come ringing like that! If 'ee say much more, I'll let the big dog loose."

"Open the gate, you young oaf," cried the Squire. "I suppose you are one of the new lot, eh? Not to know me, Worth Oglander!"

"Why couldn't you have said so then?" the surly fellow answered, as he slowly opened one leaf of the gate, sweeping a fringe of snow back.

"Such a fellow wouldn't be with me half a day. Are you too big for your work, sir? Run on before me, you piecrust in pumps, or you shall taste my whip, sir."

The footman, for once in his life, took his feet up, and ran in a bluster of rage and terror to the front door, which he had left wide open to secure a retreat from violence. Mr. Oglander struck his mare, and she started so that he scarcely pulled her head up under the coigne of his sister's porch.

"What is all this, I would beg to know? If you think to frighten me, you are mistaken. Oh, Worth is it? Worth, whatever do you mean by making such a commotion?"

Three or four frightened maids were peeping, safe in the gloom of the entrance-hall; while the lady of the house came forward bravely in the lamp-light.

"I will speak to you presently, Joan," said the Squire, as he vainly searched, with a falling heart, for some dear face behind her. "Here, Bob, I know you at any rate; take the old mare to the stable."

Then, with a sign to his sister, he followed her softly into the dining-room. At a glance he saw that she had dined alone, and he fell into a chair, and could not speak.

"Have you brought back the stockings? Why, how ill you look? The cold has been too much for you, brother. You should not have come out. What was Grace doing to let——"

"Where is my daughter Grace?"

"Your daughter Grace! My niece Grace! Why, at home in her father's house, to be sure! Worth, are your wits wandering?"

"When did Grace leave you?"

"At three o'clock, yesterday. How can you ask, when you sent in such hot haste for her? You might be quite sure that she would not linger. I thought it rather — let me tell you——"

"I never sent for Grace. I have not seen her!"

Mrs. Fermitage looked at her brother steadily, with one hand fencing her forehead. She knew that he was of no drunken kind—yet once in a way a man might take too much—especially in such weather. But he answered her gaze with such eyes that she came up to him, and began to tremble.

"I tell you, Joan, I never sent for Grace. If you don't know where she is—none but God knows!"

"I have told you all," his sister answered, catching her breath at every word almost—"a letter came from you, overruling the whole of our arrangement—you were not ill; but you wanted her for some particular purpose. She was to walk, and you would meet her; and walk she did, poor darling! And I was so hurt that I would not send——"

"You let her go, Joan! You let her go! It was a piece of your proud temper. Her death lies at your door. And so will mine!"

Mr. Oglander was very sorry, as soon as he had spoken thus unjustly; but the deep pang of the heart devoured any qualms of conscience.

"Are you sure that you let her go? Are you sure that she is not in this house now?" he cried, coming up to his sister, and taking both hands to be sure of her. "She must be here; and you are joking with me."

"Worth, she left this house at two o'clock

by that timepiece yesterday, instead of to-day, as we meant to do. She would not let any one go with her, because you were coming down the hill to meet her. Not expecting to go home that day, she had a pair of my silk stockings on, because—well, I need not go into that—and knowing what a darling little fidget she is, I thought she had sent you back with them, and to make your peace for so flurrying me."

"Have you nothing more to tell me, Joan? I shall go mad while you dwell on your stockings. Who brought that letter? What is become of it? Did you see it? Can you think of anything? Oh, Joan, you women are so quick-witted! Surely you can think of something!"

Mrs. Fermitage knew what her brother meant; but no sign would she show of it. The Squire was thinking of a little touch of something that might have grown up into love, if Grace had not been so shy about it, and so

full of doubts as to what she ought to do. Her aunt had been anxious to help this forward; but not for the world to speak of it.

"Concerning the letter, I only just saw it. I was up—well, well, I mean I happened to have something to do in my own room then. The dear creature knocked at my door, and I could not let her in at the moment——"

"You were doing your wig—well, well, go on."

"I was doing nothing of the kind—your anxiety need not make you rude, Worth. However, she put the letter under the door, and I saw that it was your handwriting, and so urgent that I was quite flurried, and she was off in two minutes, without my even kissing her. Oh, poor dear! My little dear! She said good-bye through the key-hole, and could not wait for me even to kiss her!"

At this thought the elderly lady broke down, and could for the moment do nothing but sob.

"Dear heart, dear heart!" cried the Squire, who was deeply attached to his sister; "don't take on so, my dear good Joan! We know of no harm as yet—that is"—for he thought of the coil of hair, but with strong effort forbore to speak of it—"nothing I mean in any way positive, or disastrous. She may have, you know—she may have taken it into her head to—to leave us for awhile, Joan."

"To run away! To elope! Not she! She is the last girl in the world to do it. Whatever may have happened, she has not done that. You ought to know better than that, Worth."

"Perhaps I do; I have no more time to talk of that, or any other thing. I shall hurry into Oxford, and see John Smith, and let everybody know of it. What do I care what people think? Send a man on horseback to Beckley at once. Have you any man worth a pinch of salt? You are always changing so."

"I cannot keep cripples, or sots, dear brother. Take any one you please of them."

"Any one who will deign to come, you should say. Deep snow tries the mettle of new-comers."

CHAPTER VI.

THE PUBLIC OF THE "PUBLIC."

MEANWHILE, Esther Cripps, who perhaps could have thrown some light on this strange affair, was very uneasy in her mind. She had not heard, of course, as yet that Grace Oglander was missing. But she could not get rid of the fright she had felt, and the dread of some dark secret. Her sister-in-law was in such a condition that she must not be told of it; and as for her brother Exodus, it would be worse than useless to speak to him. He had taken it into his head, ever since that business with the "College gent," that his sister was not "right-minded"—

that she dreamed things, and imagined things; and that anything she liked to say should be listened to, and thought no more of. And Baker Cripps was one of those men from whose minds no hydraulic power can lift an idea—laid once, laid for ever.

Esther had no one to tell her tale to. She longed to be home at Beckley; but there had been such symptoms with the baker's wife, that a woman, of the largest experience to be found in Oxford, declared that there was another coming. This was not so. But still (as all the women said) it might have been; and where was the man to lay down the law to them that had been through it?

The whole of this was made quite right in the end and everybody satisfied; but it prevented poor Esther from going to the Golden Cross, as she should have done; and the Carrier (having a little tiff with his brother about a sack of meal, as long ago as Michaelmas) left him

to bake his own bread, and would rather drive over his dinner than dine with him.

The days of the week are hard to follow, as everybody must have long found out; but still, from Tuesday to Saturday is a considerable time to think of. Master Cripps had two carrying days, two great days of long voyaging. Not that he refrained from coasting here and there about the parish, or up and down a lane or two, on days of briefer enterprise; or refused to take some washings round; for he was not the man to be ashamed of earning sixpence honourably.

But now such weather had set in, that even Cripps, with his active turn and pride in his honest calling, was forced to stay at home and boil the bones the butcher sent him, and nurse his stiff knee, and smoke his pipe, and go no further than his bed of hardy kail, or Dobbin's stable. Except that when the sun went down —if it ever got up, for aught he knew—his

social instincts so awoke, that he managed to go to the corner of the lane, where the blacksmith kept the public-house. This was a most respectable house, frequented very quietly. Master Cripps, from his intercourse with the world, and leading position in Beckley, as well as his pleasant way of letting other people talk, and nodding when their words were wisdom—Cripps had long been accepted as the oracle; and he liked it.

Even there—in his brightest moments, when he smoked his pipe and thought, leaving emptier folk to waste the income of their brain in words, and even when he had been roused up to settle some vast question by a brief emphatic utterance—his satisfaction was now alloyed. Not from any threat of rival wisdom—that was hopeless—but from the universal call for a guiding judgment from him. The whole of Beckley village now was more upset than had been known for thirty years and

upward. Ever since Napoleon had been expected to encamp at Carfax, and all the University went into white gaiters against him, there had been no such stir of parochial mind as now was heaving. Cripps could remember the former movement, and how his father had lost wisdom by saying that nothing would come of it—whereas the greatest things came of it; the tailor was bankrupt by making breeches which the Government would not pay for, the publican bought a horse and defied his brewer on the strength of it, and the parish-clerk limped for the rest of his life through the loss of two toes when tipsy—therefore Zacchary Cripps was now determined to hide his opinion.

When the mind is in this uncertain state, it fails of receiving that consideration which it is slowly exerting. If Cripps had stood up, and rashly spoken, he must have carried all before him: whereas now he felt, and was grieved to feel, that shallow fellows were taking his place,

by dint of decisive ignorance. This Friday evening, everybody, who had teeth to face the arrowy wind, came into the Dusty Anvil, well laden with enormous rumours.

Phil Hiss, the blacksmith, had a daughter, who served him as a barmaid, Amelia, or Mealy Hiss; a year or two older than Miss Oglander, and in the simple country fashion (setting birth and rank aside) a true ally and favourite. Now, some old woman in Beckley had said, as long ago as yesterday, that she could not believe but what Mealy Hiss, who dressed herself so outrageous, knew a deal more than she dared speak out concerning that wonderful unkid thing about the Squire's daughter. For her part, this old woman was sure that a young man lay at the bottom of it. Them good young ladies that went to the school, and made up soup and such-like, was not a bit better than the rest of us; and if butter wouldn't melt in their mouths, pitchforks wouldn't choke them. She would

say no more, it was no concern of hers; and everybody knew what she was. But as sure as her copper burst that morning, something would come out ere long; and Mealy would be at the bottom of it!

Miss Amelia Hiss, before she lit her two tallow-candles—which never was allowed to be done till a quart of beer had been called for—knew right well that all her wits must be brought into use that evening. A young man, who had a liking for her, which she was beginning to think about, came in before his time to tell her all that Gammer Gurdon said. Wherefore she put on her new neck-ribbon (believed to have come express from London) and her agate broach, and other most imposing properties. With the confidence of all these, she drew the ale, and kept her distance.

For an hour or so these tactics answered. Young men, old men, and good women (who came of course for their husbands' sakes), soberly

took their little drop of beer, nodded to one another, and said little. Pressure lay on heart and mind; and nature's safety-valve, the tongue, was sat upon by prudence. But this, of course, could not last long. Little jerkings of short questions broke the crust of silence; lips from blowing froth of beer began to relax their grimness; eyelids that had drooped went up, and winks grew into friendly gaze; and everybody began to beg everybody's pardon less. The genial power of good ale, and the presence of old friends, were working on the solid English hearts; and every man was ready for his neighbour to say something.

Hiss, the blacksmith and the landlord, felt that on his heavy shoulders lay the duty of promoting warmth and cordiality. He sat without a coat, as usual, and his woolsey sleeves rolled back displayed the proper might of arm. In one grimy hand he held a pipe, at which he had given the final puff, and in the other a

broad-rimmed penny, ready to drop it into the balance of the brass tobacco-box, and open it for a fresh supply. First he glanced at the door, to be sure that his daughter Mealy could not hear; for ever since her mother's death he had stood in some awe of Mealy; and then receiving from Zacchary Cripps a nod of grave encouragement, he fixed his eyes on him through the smoke, and uttered what all were inditing of.

"I call this a very rum start, I do, about poor Squire's daughter."

The public of the public gazed with admiring approval at him. The sentiment was their own, and he had put it well and briefly. In different ways, according to the state and manner of each of them, they let him know that he was right, and might hold on by what he said. Then Master Hiss grew proud of this, and left it for some other body to bear the weight of thinking out. But even before his broad fore-

finger had quite finished with his pipe, and pressed the crown of fuel flat, a man of no particular wisdom, and without much money, could not check a weak desire to say something striking. His name was Batts, and he kept a shop, and many things in it which he could not sell. Before he spoke, he took precautions to secure an audience, by standing up, and rapping the table with the heel of his half-pint mug. "Hear, hear!" cried some young fellow; and Batts was afraid that he had gone too far.

"Gentlemen," said Grocer Batts, the very same man who had threatened to put his son into the carrying line, "I bows, in course, to superior wisdom, and them as is always to and fro. But every man must think his thoughts, right or wrong, and speak them out, and not be afeared of no one. And my mind is that in this here business, we be all of us going to work the wrong way altogether."

As no one had any sense as yet of having

gone to work at all, in this or any other matter, and several men had made up their minds to be thrown out of work on the Saturday night if the bitter weather lasted, this great speech of Grocer Batts created some confusion.

"Let 'un go to work, hisself!" "What do he know about work?" "Altogether wrong! Give me the saw-dust for to clear my throat!" These and stronger exclamations showed poor Batts that it would have been better for trade if he had held his tongue. He hid his discomfiture in his mug, and made believe to drink, although it had ever so long been empty.

But Carrier Cripps had a generous soul. He did not owe so much as a halfpenny piece to Master Batts, neither did he expect to make a single halfpenny out of him—quite the contrary in fact; and yet he came to his rescue.

"Touching what neighbour Batts have said," he began in his slow and steadfast voice, "it may be neither here nor there; and all of us

be liable, in our best of times, to error. But I do believe as he means well, and hath a good deal inside him, and a large family to put up with. He may be right, and all us in the wrong. Time will show, with patience. I have knowed so many things as looked at first unlikely, come true as Gospel in the end, and so many things I were sure of turn out quite contrairy, that whenever a man hath aught to say, I likes to hearken to him. There now, I han't no more to say; and I leave you to make the best of it."

Zacchary rose, for his time was up; he saw that hot words might ensue, and he detested brawling. Moreover, although he did not always keep strict time with his horse and cart, no man among the living could be more punctual to his pillow. With kind "good-nights" from all, he passed, and left the smoky scene behind. As he stopped at the bar to say good-bye, and to pay his score to

Amelia, for whom he had a liking, a short, quick, rosy man came in, shaking snow from his boots, and seeming to have lost his way that night. By the light from the bar, the Carrier knew him, and was about to speak to him, but received a sign to hold his tongue, and pass on without notice. Clumsily enough he did as he was bidden, and went forth, puzzled in his homely pate by this new piece of mystery.

For the man who passed him was John Smith, not as yet well-known, but held by all who had experience of him to be the shrewdest man in Oxford. This man quietly went into the sanded parlour, and took his glass, and showed good manners to the company. They set him down as a wayfarer, but a pleasant one, and well to do; and as words began to kindle with the friction of opinions, he listened to all that was said, but did not presume to side with any one.

CHAPTER VII.

THE BEST FOOT FOREMOST.

THE arrows of the snowy wind came shooting over Shotover. It was Saturday now of that same week with which we began on Tuesday. The mercury during those four days had not risen once above 28° of Fahrenheit, and now it stood about 22°, and lower than that in the river meadows. Trusty and resolute Dobbin never had a harder job than now. Some parts of Headington Hill give pretty smart collar-work in the best of times; and now with deep snow scarred by hoofs, and ridged by wheels, but not worn down, hard it seemed for a horse, however sagacious, to judge what to do.

Dobbin had seen snow ere now, and gone through a good deal of it. But that was before the snow had fallen so thickly on his own mane and tail, and even his wise eyebrows. That was in the golden days, when youth and quick impatience moved him, and the biggest flint before his wheel was crushed, with a snort at the road-surveyor.

But now he was come to a different state of body, and therefore of spirit too. At his time of life it would not do to be extravagant of strength; it was not comely to kick up the heels; neither was it wise to cherish indignation at the whip. So now on the homeward road, with a heavy Christmas-laden cart to drag, this fine old horse took good care of himself, and having only a choice of evils, chose the least that he could find.

Alas, the smallest that he could find were great and very heavy ills. Scarcely any man stops to think of the many weary cares that

weigh upon the back of an honest horse. Men are eloquent on the trouble that sits behind the horseman; but the silent horse may bear all that, and the troublesome man in the saddle to boot, without any poet to pity him. Dobbin knew all this, but was too much of a horse to dwell on it. He kept his tongue well under bit, and his eyes in sagacious blinkers, and sturdily up the hill he stepped, while Cripps, his master, trudged beside him.

Every "talented" man must think, whenever he walks beside a horse, of the superior talents of the horse—the bounty of nature in four curved legs, the pleasure there must be in timing them, the pride of the hard and goutless feet, the glory of the mane (to which the human beard is no more than seaweed in a billow), the power of blowing (which no man has in a comely and decorous form); and last, not least, the final blessing of terminating usefully in a tail. Zacchary Cripps was a man of five

talents, and traded with them wisely; but often as he walked beside his horse, and smelled his superiority, he became quite humble, and wiped his head, and put his whip back in the cart again. The horse, on the other hand, looked up to Zacchary with soft faith and love. He knew that his master could not be expected quite to understand the ways a horse is bound to have of getting on in harness—the hundreds of things that must needs be done—and done in proper order, too—the duty of going always like a piece of the finest music, with chains, and shafts, and buckles, and hard leather to be harmonized, and the load which men are not born to drag, until they make it for themselves. Dobbin felt the difference, but he never grumbled as men do.

He made the best of the situation; and it was a hard one. The hill was strong against the collar; and, by reason of the snow, zigzag and the corkscrew tactics could not be resorted

to. At all of these he was a dab, by dint of steep experience; but now the long hill must be breasted, and both shoulders set to it. The ruts were as slippery as glass, and did not altogether fit the wheels he had behind him; and in spite of the spikes which the blacksmith gave him, the snow balled on his hairy feet. So he stopped, and shook himself, and panted with large resolutions; and Cripps from his capacious pockets fetched the two oak wedges, and pushed one under either wheel; while Esther, who was coming home at last, jumped from her seat, to help the load, and patted Dobbin's kind nose, and said a word or two to cheer him.

"The best harse as ever looked through a bridle," Zacchary declared across his mane; "but he must be hoomered with his own way now, same as the rest on us, when us grows old. Etty, my dear, no call for you to come down and catch chilblains."

"Zak, I am going to push behind. I am not big enough to do much good. But I would rather be alongside of you, through this here bend of the road, I would."

For now the dusk was gathering in, as they toiled up the lonesome and snowy road where it overhung the "Gipsy's Grave."

"This here bend be as good as any other," said Cripps, though himself afraid of it. "What ails you, girl? What hath ailed you, ever since out of Oxford town you come? Is it a jail thou be coming home to? Oxford turns the head of thee!"

"Now, Zak, you know better than that. I would liefer be at Beckley any day. But I have been that frightened since I passed this road on Tuesday night that scarce a morsel could I eat or drink, and never sleep for dreaming."

"Frightened, child? Lord bless my heart! you make me creep by talking so. There, wait

till we be in our own lane—can't spare the time now to speak of it."

"Oh, but, Zak, if you please, you must. I have had it on my mind so long. And I kept it for you, till we got to the place, that you might go and see to it."

"Etty, now, this is childish stuff; no time to hearken to any such tell-up. Enough to do, the Lord knows there be, without no foolish stories."

"It is not a foolish story, Zak. It is what I saw with my own eyes. We are close to the place; it was in a dark hollow, just below the road on here. I will show you; and then I will stand by the cart, while you go and seek into it."

"I wun't leave the haigh road for any one, I tell 'ee. All these goods is committed to my charge, and my dooty is to stick to them. A likely thing as I'd leave the cart to be robbed in that there sort of way. Ah, ha! they'd soon

find out, I reckon, what Zacchary Cripps is made of."

"Ah, we all know how brave you are, dear Zak. And perhaps you wouldn't like to leave me, brother?"

"No, no; of course not. How could I do it? All by yourself, and the weather getting dark. Hup! Hup! Dobbin, there. Best foot foremost kills the hill."

But Esther was even more strongly set to tell the story and relieve her mind, than Zacchary was to relieve his mind by turning a deaf ear to all of it. Nevertheless, she might have failed, if it had not been for a lucky chance. Dobbin, after a very fine rush, and spirited bodily tug at the shafts, was suddenly forced to pull up and pant, and spread his legs, to keep where he was, until his wind should come back again. And he stopped with the off-wheel of the cart within a few yards of the gap in the hedge, where Esther began her

search that night. She knew the place at a glance, although in the snow it looked so different; and she ran to the gap, and peeped as if she expected to see it all again.

In all the beauty of fair earth, few things are more beautiful than snow on clustering ivy-leaves. Wednesday's fall had been shaken off; for even in the coldest weather, jealous winds and evaporation soon clear foliage of snow. But a little powdery shed of flakes had come at noon that very day, like the flitting of a fairy; and every delicate star shone crisply in its cupped or pillowed rest. The girl was afraid to shake a leaf, because she had her best bonnet on; therefore she drew back, and called the reluctant Zacchary to gaze.

"Nort but a sight of snow," said he; "it hath almost filled old quarry up. Harse have rested, and so have we. Shan't be home by candlelight. Wugg then! Dobbin—wugg then! wilt 'a?"

"Stop, brother, stop! Don't be in such a hurry. Something I must tell you now, that I have been feared to tell anybody else. It was so dreadfully terrible! Do you see anything in the snow down there?"

"As I am a sinner, there be something moving. Jump up into the cart, girl. I shall never get round with my things to-night."

"There is something there, Zak, that will never move again. There is the dead body of a woman there!"

"No romantics! No romantics!" the Carrier answered as he turned away; but his cheeks beneath a week's growth of beard turned as white as the snow in the buckthorn. No living man might scare him—but a woman, and a dead one——

"Come, Zak," cried Esther, having seen much worse than she was likely now to see; "you cannot be afraid of 'romantics,' Zak. Come here, and I will show thee."

Driven by shame and curiosity, the valiant Cripps came back to her, and even allowed himself to be led a little way through the gap into the deep untrodden and drifted snow. She took him as far as a corner, whence the nook of the quarry was visible; and there with trembling fingers pointed to a vast billow of pure white, piled by the driving east wind over the grave, as she thought, of the murdered one.

"Enough," he said, having heard her tale, and becoming at once a man again in the face of something real; "my dear, what a fright thou must have had! How couldst thou have kept it all this time? I would not tell thee our news at home, for fear of tarrifying thee in the cold. Hath no one to Oxford told thee?"

"Told me what? Oh, Zak, dear Zak, I am so frightened, I can hardly stand."

"Then run, girl, run! We must go home, fast as ever we can, for constable."

He took her to the cart, and reckless of Dobbin's indignation, lashed him up the hill, and made him trot the whole length of Beckley lane, then threw a sack over his loins, and left his Christmas parcels in the frost and snow, while he hurried to Squire Oglander.

CHAPTER VIII.

BALDERDASH.

WORTH OGLANDER sat in his old oak chair, weary, and very low of heart, but not altogether broken down. He had not been in bed since last Monday night, and had slept, if at all, in the saddle, or on the roof of the Henley and Maidenhead coach. For miles he had scoured the country round, until his three horses quite broke down, with the weather so much against them ; and all the bran to be got in the villages was made away with in mashes. One of these horses "got the pipes ;" and had to be tickled before he could eat.

The Squire cared not a button for this. The

most particular of mankind concerning what is grossly and contemptuously (if not carnivorously) spoken of as "horseflesh," forgets his tender feelings towards the noblest of all animals when his own flesh and blood come into competition with them. But ride, and lash, and spur as he might, the old Squire made no discovery.

His daughter, his only child, in whom all the rest of his old life lived and loved, was gone and lost; not even leaving knowledge of where she lay, or surety of a better meeting. His faith in God was true and firm; for on the whole he was a pious man, although no great professor; and if it had pleased the Lord to take his only joy from his old age, he could have tried to bear it.

But thus to lose her, without good-bye, without even knowing how the loss befell, and with the deep misery of doubting what she might herself have done—only a chilly stoic, or a

remarkably warm Christian, could have borne it with resignation. The Squire was neither of these; but only a simple, kind, and loving-hearted gentleman; with many faults, and among them, a habit of expecting the Lord to favour him perpetually. And of this he could not quit himself, in the deepest tribulation; but still expected all things to be tempered to his happiness, according to his own ideas of what happiness should be. The clergyman of the parish, a good and zealous man, had called upon him, and with many words had proved how thankful he was bound to be for this kindly-ordered chastisement. The Squire, however, could not see it. He listened with his old politeness, but a sad and weary face, and quietly said that the words were good, but he could not yet enter into them. Hereat the parson withdrew, to wait for a softer and wiser season.

And now, in the dusk of this cold dark day, Squire Oglander sat gazing from the window of

his dining-room; with his head fallen back, and his white chin up, and hard-worn hands clasped languidly. His heavy eyes dwelled on the dreary snow that buried his daughter's handi-work—the dwarf plants not to be traced, and the tall ones only as soft hillocks, like the tufts in a great white counterpane. And more and more, as the twilight deepened, and the curves of white grew dim, he kept repeating below his voice, "Her winding-sheet, her winding-sheet; and her pretty eyes wide open perhaps!"

"Now, sir, if you please, you must—you must," cried Mary Hookham, his best maid, trotting in with her thumbs turned back from a right hot dish, and her lips up as if she were longing to kiss him, to let out her feelings. "Here be a duster, by way of a cloth, not to scorch the table against Miss Grace comes home again. Sir, if you please, you must ate a bit. Not a bit have you aten sin' Toosday, and it is enough to kill a carrier's horse. 'Take

on,' as my mother have often said, 'take on, as you must, if your heart is right, when the hand of the Lord is upon you; but never take off with your victuals.' And a hearty good woman my mother is, and have seen much tribulation. You never would repent, sir, of hearkening to me, and of trying of her, till such time as poor Miss Grace comes back. And not a penny would she charge you."

"Let her come, if she will," he answered, without thinking twice about it; for he paid no heed to household matters in his present trouble. "Let her come, if you wish it, Mary. At any rate, she can do no harm."

"She will do a mort of good, sir. But now do try to ate a bit. My mother will make you, if you have her, sir."

The old man did his best to eat; for he knew that he must keep his strength up, to abide the end of it. And Mary, without asking leave, lit four good candles, and drew the

curtains, and made the fire cheerful. "All of us has our troubles," said Mary; "but these here pickles is wonderful."

"You are a good girl," answered the Squire; "and you deserve a good husband. Now, if either the man from Oxford or young Mr. Overshute should come, show them in directly; but I can see no other person. No more, thank you. Take all away, Mary."

"Oh my! what a precious little bit you've had! But as sure as my name is Mary Hookham, you shall have three glasses of port, sir. You don't keep no butler, because you knows better; and no housekeeper, because you don't know mother. Likewise, Miss Grace is so clever—but there, now, if she stay long for her honeymoon, a housekeeper you must have, sir."

The master was tempted to ask what she meant, but he scarcely thought it worth while perhaps. By pressure of advice from all the womankind within his doors (whenever they

could get hold of him) he had been sped on many bootless errands, as was natural. For without any ground, except that of their hearts, all the gentler bosoms of the place were filled with large belief that this was only a lovely love affair.

Russel Overshute, the heir of the Overshutes of Shotover, was a young man who could speak for himself, and did it sometimes too strongly. He had long been taken prisoner by the sweet spell of Grace Oglander; and being of a bold and fearless order, he had so avowed himself. But her father had always been against him; not from personal dislike, but simply because he could not bear his "wild political sentiments." Worth Oglander was as staunch an old Tory as ever stood in buckram, although in social and domestic matters perhaps almost too gentle. Radical and rascal were upon his tongue the self-same word; and he passed the salt with the back of his hand to even a mild Reformer.

And now, as he drank his glass of port, by dint of Mary's management, and did his best to think about it, as he always used to do, the door of the room was thrown open strongly, and in strode Russel Overshute.

"Will you kindly leave the room," he said to the sedulous Mary. "I wish to say a few words to the Squire of a private nature."

This young gentleman was a favourite with maid-servants everywhere, because he always spoke to them "just the same as if they was ladies." Every housemaid now demands this, in our advanced intelligence; and doubtless she is right; but forty years ago it was otherwise, and "Polly, my dear," and a chuck of the chin, were not as yet vile antiquity. Mary made a bob of the order still taught at the village-school, and set a glass for the gentleman, and simpered, and departed.

"Shake hands with me, Squire," said Overshute, as Mr. Oglander arose, with cold dignity,

and bowed to him. "You have sent for me; I rode over at once, the moment that I heard of it. I returned from London this afternoon, having been there for a fortnight. When I heard the news, I was thunderstruck. What can I do to help you?"

"I will not shake hands with you," answered the Squire, "until you have solemnly pledged your honour, that you know nothing of this—of this—there, I have no word for it!" Mr. Oglander trembled, though his eyes were stern. His last hope of his daughter's life lay in the young man before him; and bitterly as he would have felt the treachery of his only child, and deeply as he despised himself for harbouring such a suspicion—yet even that disgrace and blow would be better than the alternative, the only alternative—her death!

"I should have thought it quite needless," young Overshute answered, with some disdain, until he observed the father's face, so broken

down with misery; "from any one but you, sir, it would have been an insult. If you do not know the Overshutes, you ought to know your own daughter."

"But against her will—against her will. Say that you took her against her will. You have been from home. For what else was it? Tell me the truth, Russel Overshute—only the truth, and I will forgive you."

"You have nothing to forgive, sir. Upon the word of an Englishman, I hadn't even heard of it."

The old man watched his clear keen eyes, with deep tears gathering in his own. Then Russel took his hand, and led him tenderly to his hard oak chair.

For a minute or two not a word was said: the young man doubting what to say, and the old one really not caring whether he ever spoke again. At last he looked up and spread both hands, as if he groped forth from a heavy

dream; and the rheumatism from so much night-work caught him in both shoulder-blades.

"What is it?—what is it?" he cried. "I have lived a long time in this wicked world, and I have not found it painful."

"My dear sir," his visitor answered, pitying him sincerely, and hiding (like a man) his own deep heart-burn of anxiety, "may I say, without your being in the least degree offended, what I fancy—or at least, I mean, a thing that has occurred to me? You will take it for its worth. Most likely you will laugh at it; but taking my chance of that, may I say it? Will you promise not to be angry?"

"I wish I could be angry, Russel. What have I to be angry for?"

"A terrible wrong, if I am right, but not a purely hopeless one. I have not had time to think it out, because I have been hurried so. But, right or wrong, what I think is this—the whole is a foul scheme of Luke Sharp's."

"Luke Sharp! My own solicitor! The most respectable man in Oxford! Overshute, you have made me hope, and then you dash me with balderdash!"

"Well, sir, I have no evidence at all; but I go by something I heard in London, which supplies the strongest motive; and I know, from my own family affairs, what Luke Sharp will do when he has strong motive. I beg you to keep my guess quite secret. Not that I fear a score of such fellows, but that he would be ten times craftier if he thought we suspected him; and he is crafty enough without that, as his principal client, the Devil, knows!"

"I will not speak of it," the Squire answered; "such a crotchet is not worth speaking of, and it might get you into great trouble. With one thing and another now, I am so knocked about, that I cannot put two and two together. But one thing really comforts me."

"My dear sir, I am so glad! What is it?"

"That a man of your old family, Russel, and at the same time of such new ways, is still enabled by the grace of God to retain his faith in the Devil."

"While Luke Sharp lives I cannot lose it," he answered, with a bitter smile. "That man is too deep and consummate a villain to be uninspired. But now, sir, we have no time to lose. You tell me what you have done, and then I will tell you what I have been thinking of, unless you are too exhausted."

For the old man, in spite of fierce anxiety, long suspense, and keen excitement, began to be so overpowered with downright bodily weariness that now he could scarcely keep his head from nodding, and his eyes from closing. The hope which had roused him, when Overshute entered, was gone, and despair took the place of it; tired body and sad mind had but a very low heart to work them. Russel, with a strong man's pity, and the love which must arise

between one man and another whenever small vanity vanishes, watched the creeping shades of slumber soften the lines of the harrowed face. As evening steals along a hill-side where the sun has tyrannised, and spreads the withering and the wearying of the day with gentleness, and brings relief to rugged points, and breadth of calm to everything; so the Squire's fine old face relaxed in slumber's halo, and tranquil ease began to settle on each yielding lineament; when open flew the door of the room, and Mary, at the top of her voice, exclaimed—

"Plaize, sir, Maister Cripps be here."

CHAPTER IX.

CRIPPS IN AFFLICTION.

"CONFOUND that Cripps!" young Overshute cried, with irritation getting the better of his larger elements; while the Squire slowly awoke and stared, and rubbed his gray eyelashes, and said that he really was almost falling off, and he ought to be quite ashamed of himself. Then he begged his visitor's pardon for bad manners, and asked what the matter was. "Sir, it is only that fool Cripps," said the young man, still in vexation, and signing to Mary to go, and to shut the door. "Some trumpery parcel, of course. They might have let you rest for a minute or two."

"No, sir, no; if you plaize, sir, no!" cried Mary, advancing with her hands up. "Maister Cripps have seen something terrible, and he hath come straight to his Worship. He be that out of breath that he was aforced to lay hold of me, before he could stand a'most! He must have met them sheep-stealers!"

"Sheep-stealing again!" said Mr. Oglander, who was an active magistrate. "Well, let him come in. I have troubles of my own; but I must attend to my duty."

"Let me attend to it," interposed the other, being also one of the "great unpaid." "You must not be pestered with such things now. Try to get some little rest while I attend to this Cripps affair."

"I am much obliged to you," answered the Squire, rising, and looking wide-awake; "but I will hear what he has to say myself. Of course, I shall be too glad of your aid if you are not in a hurry."

Mr. Overshute knew that this fine old Justice, although so good in the main, was not entirely free from foibles, of which there was none more conspicuous than a keen and resolute jealousy if any brother magistrate dared to meddle with Beckley matters. Therefore Russel for the time withdrew, but promised to return in half an hour, not only for the sake of consulting with the Squire, but also because he suspected that Cripps might be come on an errand different from what Mary had imagined.

Meanwhile, the Carrier could hardly be kept from bursting in head-foremost. Betty, the cook, laid hold of him in the passage, while he was short of breath; but he pushed at even her, although he ought to have known better manners. Betty was also in a state of mind at having cooked no dinner worth speaking of since Tuesday; and Cripps, if his wits had been about him, must have yielded space and bowed. Betty, however, was nearly as wide,

and a great deal thicker than he was; and she spread forth two great arms that might have stopped even Dobbin with a load down-hill.

At last the signal was passed that Cripps might now come on, and tell his tale; and he felt as if he should have served them right by refusing to say anything. But when he saw the Squire's jovial face drawn thin with misery, and his sturdy form unlike itself, and the soft puzzled manner in lieu of the old distinct demand to know everything, Zacchary Cripps came forward gently, and thought of what he had to tell, with fear.

"What is it, my good fellow?" asked the Squire, perceiving his hesitation. "Nothing amiss with your household, I sincerely hope, my friend? You are a fortunate man in one thing—you have had no children yet."

"Ay, ay; your Worship is right enough there. The Lord lends they, and He takes

them away. And the taking be worse than the giving was good."

"Now, Master Cripps, we must not talk so. All is meant for the best, I doubt."

"Her may be. Her may be," Cripps replied. "The Lord is the one to pronounce upon that, knowing His own maning best. But He do give very hard measure some time to them as have never desarved it. Now, there be your poor Miss Grace, for instance. As nice a young lady as ever lived; the purtiest ever come out of a bed; that humble, too, and gracious always, that 'Cripps,' she would say—nay 'Master Cripps'—she always give me my proper title, even on a dirty linen day—'Master Cripps,' her always said, 'let me mark it off, in your hat, for you'—no matter whether it was my best hat, or the one with the grease come through—'Master Cripps,' she always say, 'let me mark it out for you.'"

"Very well, Cripps. I know all that. It is

nothing to what my Grace was. And I hope, with God's blessing, she will do it again. But what is it you are so full of, Cripps?"

The carrier felt in the crown of his hat, and then inside the lining; as if he had something entered there, to help him in this predicament. And then he turned away, to wipe—as if the weather was very wet—the drops of the hedge from the daze of his eyes; and after that he could not help himself, but out with everything.

"I knows where Miss Gracie be," he began with a little defiance, as if, after all, it was nothing to him, but a thing that he might have a bet about. "I knows where our Miss Gracie lies—dead and cold—dead and cold—without no coffin, nor a winding-sheet—the purty crature, the purty crature—there, what a fool I be, good Lord!"

Master Cripps, at the picture himself had drawn, was taken with a short fit of sobs, and turned away, partly to hunt for his "kercher,"

and partly to shun the poor Squire's eyes. Mr. Oglander slowly laid down the pen, which he had taken for notes of a case, and standing as firm as his own great oak-tree (famous in that neighbourhood), gave no sign of the shock, except in the colour of his face, and the brightness of his gaze.

"Go on, Cripps, as soon as you can," he said in a calm and gentle voice. "Try not to keep me waiting, Cripps."

"I be trying; I be trying all I knows. The blessed angel be dead and buried, close to Tickuss's tatie crop, in the corner of bramble quarry. At least, I mean Tickuss's taties was there; but he dug them a fortnight, come Monday, he did."

"The corner of the 'Gipsy's Grave,' as they call it. Who found it? How do you know it?"

"Esther was there. She seed the whole of it. Before the snow come—last Tuesday night."

"Tuesday night! Ah, Tuesday night!"—for the moment, the old man had lost his clearness. "It can't have been Tuesday night—it was Wednesday when I rode down to my sister's. Cripps, your sister must have dreamed it. My darling was then at her aunt's, quite safe. You have frightened me for nothing, Cripps."

"I am glad with all my heart," cried Zacchary; "I am quite sure it were Tuesday night, because of Mrs. Exie. And your Worship knows best of the days, no doubt. Thank the Lord for all His mercies! Well, seeing now it were somebody else, in no ways particular, and perhaps one of them gipsy girls as took the fever to Cowley, if your Worship will take your pen again, I will tell you all as Esther seed:—Two men with a pickaxe working, where the stone overhangeth so, and the corpse of a nice young woman laid for the stone to bury it natural. No harm at all in the world, when

you come to think, being nought of a Christian body. And they let go the rock, and it come down over, to save all infection. Lord, what a turn that Etty gived me, all about a trifle!" The Carrier wiped his forehead, and smiled. "And won't I give it well to her?"

"Poor girl! It is no trifle, Cripps, whoever it may have been. But stop—I am all abroad. It was Tuesday afternoon when my poor darling left Mrs. Fermitage. And to the quarry, across the fields, from the way she would come, is not half a mile—half a mile of fields and hedge-rows——Oh, Cripps, it was my daughter!"

"Her maight a' been, sure enough," said Cripps, in whom the reflective vein, for the moment, had crossed the sentimental—"sure enough, her maight a' been. A pasture meadow, and a field of rape, and Gibbs's turnips, and then a fallow, and then into Tickuss's taties—half an hour maight a' done the carrying —and consarning of the rest—your Worship,

now when did she leave the lady? Can you count the time of it?"

"Zacchary now, the will of the Lord be done, without calculation! My grave is all I care to count on, if my Grace lies buried so. But before I go to it, please God, I will find out who has done it!"

CHAPTER X.

ALL DEAD AGAINST HIM.

"Now, do 'ee put on a muffler, sir," cried Mary, running out with her arms full, as Mr. Oglander set forth in the bitter air, without overcoat, but ready to meet everything. At the door was his old Whitechapel cart, with a fresh young colt between the shafts, pawing the snow, and snorting; the only one of his little stud not lamed by rugged travelling. The floor of the cart was jingling with iron tools, as the young horse shook himself; and the Squire's groom, and two gardeners, were ready to jump in, when called for. They stamped a little, and flapped their bodies, as if they would like a

cordial; but their master was too busy with his own heart to remember it.

"If we be goin' to dig some hours in such weather as this be," Mr. Kale managed to whisper—"best way put in a good brandy flask, Mary, my dear, with Master's leave. Poor soul, a' can't heed everything."

"Go along," answered Mary; "you have had enough. Shamed I be of you, to think of such things, and to look at that poor Hangel!"

"So plaize your Worship, let me drive," said Cripps, who was going to sit in front. "A young horse, and you at your time of life, and all this trouble over you!"

"Give me the reins, my friend," cried his Worship; and Cripps in some dread for his neck obeyed. The men jumped in, and the young horse started at a rather dangerous pace. Many a time had Miss Grace fed him, and he used to follow her, like a lamb.

"He will take us safe enough," said the

Squire; "he seems to know what he is going for."

Not another word was spoken, until they came to the gap at the verge of the quarry, where the frosty moon shone through it. "Tie him here," said the master shortly, as the groom produced his ring-rope; "and throw the big cloth over him. Now, all of you come; and Cripps go first."

Scared as they were, they could not in shame decline the old man's orders; and the sturdy Cripps, with a spade on his shoulders, led through the drifted thicket. Behind him plodded the Squire, with an unlit lantern in one hand, and a stout oak staff in the other; the moonlight glistening in his long white hair, and sparkling frost in his hoary beard. The snow before them showed no print larger than the pad of an old dog-fox pursuing the spluttering track of a pheasant's spurs; and it crunched beneath their boots with the crusty impact of

crisp severance. All around was white and waste with depth of unknown loneliness; and Master Cripps said for the rest of his life, that he could not tell what he was about, to do it!

After many flounderings in and out of hollow places, they came to the corner of the quarry-dingle, and found it entirely choked with snow. The driving of the north-east wind had gathered as into a funnel there, and had stacked the snow of many acres in a hollow of less than half a rood. The men stopped short, where the gaunt brown fern, and then the furze, and then the hazels, in rising tier waded out of sight; and behind them even some ash-saplings scarcely had a knuckled joint to lift from out their burial. Over the whole, the cold moon shone, and made the depth look deeper. The men stopped short, and looked at their shovels, and looked at one another. They may not have been very bright of mind, or accustomed to hurried conclusions; and doubtless they were,

as true Englishmen are, of a tough unelastic fibre. All powers of evil were banded against them, and they saw no turn to take; still it was not their own wish to go back, without having struck a blow for it.

"You can do nothing," said the Squire, with perhaps the first bitter feeling he had yet displayed. "All things are dead against me; I must grin, as you say, and bear it. It would take a whole corps of sappers and miners a week to clear this place out. We cannot even be sure of the spot; we cannot tell where the corner is; all is smothered up so. Ill luck always rides ill luck. This proves beyond doubt that my child lies here!"

The men were good men, as men go, and they all felt love and pity for the lost young lady and the poor old master. Still their fingers were so blue, and their frozen feet so hard to feel, and the deep white gulf before them surged so palpably invincible, that they

could not repine at a dispensation which sent them home to their suppers.

"Nort to be done till change of weather," said Cripps, as they sat in the cart again; "I reckon they villains knew what was coming, better nor I, who have kept the road, man and boy, for thirty year. The Lord knoweth best, as He always do! But to my mind He maneth to kape on snowing and freezing for a month at laste. Moon have changed last night, I b'lieve; and a bitter moon we shall have of it."

And so they did; the bitterest moon, save one, of the present century. And old men said that there had not been such a winter, and such a sight of snow, since the one which the Lord had sent on purpose to discomfit Bony.

Mr. Oglander, in his lonely home, strove bravely to make the best of it. He had none of that grand religious consolation which some people have (especially for others), and he grounded his happiness perhaps too much upon

his own old hearthstone. His mind was not an extraordinary one, and his soul was too old-fashioned to demand periods of purging.

Moreover, his sister Joan came up—a truly pious and devoted woman, the widow of an Oxford wine-merchant. Mrs. Fermitage loved her niece so deeply that she had no patience with any selfish pinings after her. "She is gone to the better land," she said; "the shores of bliss unspeakable!—unless Russel Overshute knows about her a great deal more than he will tell. I have far less confidence in that young man since he took to wear india-rubber. But to wish her back is a very sinful and unchristian act, I fear."

"Now, Joan, you know that you wish her back every time that you sit down, or get up, or go to tea without her."

"Yes, I know, I know, I do. And most of all when I pour it out—she used to do it for me. But, Worth, you can wrestle more than

I can. The Lord expects so much more of a man!"

Being exhorted thus, the Squire did his best to wrestle. Not that any words of hers could carry now their former weight; for if he had no daughter left, what good was money left to her? The Squire did not want his sister's money for himself at all. Indeed, he would rather be without it. Dirty money, won by trade!—but still it had been his duty always to try to get it for his daughter. And this is worth a word or two.

At the Oxford bank, and among the lawyers and the leading tradesmen, it had been a well-known thing that old Fermitage had not died with less than £150,000 behind him. Even in Oxford there never had been a man so illustrious for port wine. "Fortiter occupa portum" was the motto over the door to his vaults, and he fortified port impregnably. Therefore he supplied all the common-room cellars, which

cannot have too much geropiga; and among the undergraduates his name was surety for another glass. And there really was a port wine basis; so that nobody died of him.

All these things are beside the mark. Mr. Fermitage, however, went on, and hit his mark continually; and his mark was that bull's eye of this golden age, a yellow imprint of a dragon. So many of these came pouring in that he kept them in bottles without any "kicks," sealed, and left to mature, and acquire "the genuine bottle flavour." When he had bottled half a pipe of these, and was thinking of beginning now to store them in the wood, a man coming down with a tap found him dead; and was too much scared to steal anything.

This man reproached himself, ever afterwards, for his irresolute conscience; and the two executors gave him nothing but blame for his behaviour. People in Holiwell said that these two took a dozen bottles of guineas

between them, to toast their testator's memory; but Holiwell never has been famous for the holy thing lying at the bottom of the well. Enough that he was dead; and every man, seeing his funeral, praised him.

CHAPTER XI.

KNOCKER *VERSUS* BELL-PULL.

THERE is, or was, a street in Oxford, near the ruins of the ancient castle, and behind the new county jail, where one of the many offsets of the Isis filters its artificial way beneath low arches and betwixt dead walls; and this street (partly destroyed since then) was known to the elder generation by the name of "Cross Duck Lane." Of course what remains of it now exults in an infinitely grander title, though smelling thereby no sweeter. With that we have nothing to do; the street was "Cross Duck Lane" in our time.

Here, in a highly respectable house, a truly respectable man was living, with his business and his family. "Luke Sharp, gentleman," was his name, description, style, and title; and he was not by any means a bad man, so as to be an Attorney.

This man possessed a great deal of influence, having much house-property; and he never in the least disguised his sentiments, or played fast and loose with them. Being of a commanding figure, and fine straightforward aspect, he left an impression, wherever he went, of honesty, vigour, and manliness. And he went into very good society, as often as he cared to do so; for although not a native of Oxford, but of unknown (though clearly large) origin, he now was the head, and indeed the entirety, of a long-established legal firm. He had married the daughter of the senior partner, and bought or ousted away the rest; and although the legend on his plate was still "Piper, Pepper, Sharp,

and Co.," every one knew that the learning, wealth, and honour of the whole concern were now embodied in Mr. Luke Sharp. Such a man was under no necessity ever to blow his own trumpet.

His wife, a fat and goodly person, Miranda Piper of former days, happened to be the first cousin and nearest relative of a famous man —"Port-wine Fermitage" himself; and his death had affected her very sadly. For she found that he had provided for himself a most precarious future, by unjust disposal of his worldly goods, which he could not come back to rectify. To his godson, her only child and her idol, Christopher Fermitage Sharp, he had left a copy of Dr. Doddridge's "Expositor," and nothing else! A golden work, no doubt—but still golden precepts fill no purse, but rather tend to empty it. Mrs. Luke Sharp, though a very good Christian, repacked and sent back the "Expositor."

If Mr. Sharp had been at home, he would not have let her do so. He was full at all times of large generous impulse, but never yet guilty of impulsive acts. It had always been said that his son was to have the bottled half-pipe of gold, or the chief body of it, after the widow's life-interest. Whereas now, Mrs. Fermitage, if she liked, might roll all the bottles down the High Street. She, however, was a careful woman; and it was manifest where the whole of this Côte d'Or vintage would be binned away—to wit, in the cellars of Beckley Barton, with the key at Grace Oglander's very pretty waist. Mr. Sharp at the moment could descry no cure; but still to show temper was a vulgar thing.

Now, upon the New Year's Day of 1838, the bitter weather continuing still, and doing its best to grow more bitter, Mr. Sharp, being of a festive turn, had closed his office early. The demand for universal closing and perpetual

holiday had not yet risen to its present height, and the clerks, though familiar with the kindness of their principal, scarcely expected such a premature relief. But this only added to the satisfaction with which they went home to their New Year dinners.

But Mr. Sharp, though of early habits, and hungry at proper seasons, was not preparing for his dinner now. He had ordered his turkey to be kept back, and begged his wife to see to it until he could make out and settle the import of a letter which reached him about one o'clock. It had been delivered by a groom on horseback, who had suffered some inward struggle before he had stooped to ring the Attorney's bell. For "Cross Duck House," though a comfortable place, was not of an aristocratic cast. The letter was short, and expounded little.

"SIR—"I shall do myself the honour of calling upon you at four o'clock this afternoon, upon some important business.

"Obediently yours,

"RUSSEL OVERSHUTE."

It is not altogether an agreeable thing, even for a man with the finest conscience, such as Mr. Sharp was blest with, to receive a challenge upon an unknown point, curtly worded in this wise. And the pleasure does not increase, when the strong correspondent is partly suspected of holding unfavourable views towards one, and the gaze of self-inspection needs a little more time to compose itself. Luke Sharp had led an unblemished life, since the follies of his youth subsided; he subscribed to inevitable charities; and he waited for his rents, when sure of them. Still he did not like that letter.

Now he took off the coat which he wore at

his desk, and his waistcoat of the morning, and washed his nice white hands, and clothed himself in expensive dignity. Then he opened his book of daily entries, and folded blotting-paper, and prepared to receive instructions, or give advice, or be wise abstractedly. But he thought it a sound precaution to have his son Christopher within earshot; for young Overshute was reputed to be of a rather excitable nature; therefore Kit Sharp was commanded to finish the cleaning of his gun—which was his chief delight—in his father's closet adjoining the office, and to keep the door shut, unless called for.

The lawyer was not kept waiting long. As the clock of St. Thomas struck four, the shoes of a horse rang sharply on the icy road, and the office-bell kicked up its tongue, with a jerk showing great extra-mural energy. "Let him ring again," said Mr. Sharp; "I defy him to ring much harder."

The defiance was soon proved to be unsound; for in less than ten seconds, the bell, which had stood many years of strong emotion, was visited with such a violent spasm that nothing short of the melting-pot restored its constitution. A piece clinked on the passage floor, and the lawyer was filled with unfeigned wrath. That bell had been ringing for three generations, and was the Palladium of the firm.

"What clumsy clod-hopper," cried Mr. Sharp, rushing out, as if he saw nobody—"what beggarly bumpkin has broken my bell? Mr. Overshute!—oh! I beg pardon, I am sure!"

"We must make allowance," said Russel calmly, "for fidgety animals, Mr. Sharp; and for thick gloves in this frosty weather. John, take my horse on the Seven-bridges road, and be back in exactly fifteen minutes. How kind of you to be at home, Mr. Sharp!"

With the words, the young man bestowed on

the lawyer a short sharp glance, which entirely failed to penetrate the latter.

"Shut out this cold wind, for Heaven's sake!" he exclaimed, as he shut in his visitor. "You young folk never seem to feel the cold. But you carry it a little too far sometimes. Ah, I must have been about your age when we had such another hard winter as this, four and twenty years ago. Scarcely so bitter, but a deal more snow; snow, snow, six feet everywhere. I was six and twenty then—about your age, I take it, sir?"

"My age to a tittle," said Overshute; "but I am generally taken for thirty-two. How can you have guessed it so?"

"Early thought, sir, juvenile thought, and advanced intelligence make young people look far in front of their age. When you come to my time of life, young sir, your thoughts and your looks will be younger. Now take this chair. Never mind your boots; let them hiss

as they will on the fender. I like to hear it—a genial sound—a touch of emery paper in the morning, and there we are, ready for other boots. I have had men here come fifty miles across country, as the crow flies, to see me, when the floods were out; and go away with minds comforted."

"I have heard of your skill in all legal points. But I am not come on that account. Quibbles and shuffles I detest."

"Well, Mr. Overshute, I have met with a good deal of rudeness in my early days; before I was known, as I am now. It was worth my while to disarm it then. It is not so now, in your case. You belong to a very good county family; and although you are committed to inferior hands, if you had come in a friendly spirit, I would have been glad to serve you. As it is, I can only request you to say what your purpose is, and to settle it."

Russel Overshute, with his large and power-

ful eyes, gazed straight at Sharp; and Mr. Sharp (who had steely eyes—the best of all for getting on with—not very large, but as keen as need be) therewith answered complacently, and as if he saw hope of amusement.

"You puzzle me, Sharp," said Overshute—about the worst thing he could have said; and he knew it before the words had passed.

"I am called, for the most part, 'Mister Sharp,' except by gentlemen of my own age, or friends who entirely trust me. Mr. Russel Overshute, explain how I have puzzled you."

"Never mind that. You would never understand. Have you any idea what has brought me here?"

"Yes, to be plain with you, I have. One of your least, but very oldest tenants, has been caught out in poaching. You hate the game-laws; you are a Radical, ranter, and reformer. You know that your lawyer is good and active, but too well-known as a Liberal. It requires a

man of settled principles to contest with the game-laws."

"You could not be more wide astray!" cried young Overshute triumphantly, taking in every word the other had said, as a piece of his victory. "No, no, thank goodness, we are not come so low that we cannot get off our tenants, in spite of any evidence; you must indeed think that our family is quite reduced to the dirt, if we can no longer do even that much."

"Not at all, sir. You are much too hot. I only supposed for the moment that your principles might have stopped you."

"Oh dear, no! My mother could not take it at all, in that way. Now, where have you put Grace Oglander?"

Impetuous Russel, with his nostrils quivering, and his eyes fixed on the lawyer's, and his right hand clenching his heavy whip, purposely fired his question thus, like a thunder-bolt out of pure heaven. He felt sure of producing a

grand effect; and so he did, but not the right one.

"You threaten me, do you?" said Mr. Sharp. "I think that you make a mistake, young man. Violence is objectionable in every way, though natural with fools, who believe they are the stronger. I am sorry to have spoiled your whip; but you will acknowledge that the fault was yours. Now, I am ready for reason—if you are."

With a grave bow, Luke Sharp offered Russel the fragments of his pet hunting-crop, which he had caught from his hand, and snapped like a stick of peppermint, as he spoke. Overshute thought himself a fine, strong fellow, and with very good reason; but the quickness of his antagonist left him gasping.

"I want no apologies," Mr. Sharp continued, going to his desk; while the young man looked sadly at his brazen-knockered butt, for he had been at that admirable college, and cherished

his chief reminiscence of it thus. "Apologies are always waste of time. You have threatened me, and you have found your mistake. Such a formidable antagonist makes one's hand shake. Still, I think that I can hit my key-hole."

"You can always make your keys fit, I dare say. But you never could do that to me again."

"Very likely not. I shall never care to try it. Physical force is always low. But, as a gentleman, you must own that you first offered violence."

"Mr. Sharp, I confess that I did. Not in word, or deed; but still my manner fairly imported it. And the first respect I ever felt for you, I feel now, for your quickness and pluck."

"I am pleased with any respect from you; because you have little for anything. Now, repeat your question, moderately."

"Where have you put Grace Oglander?"

"Let me offer you a chair again. Striding about with frozen feet is almost the worst thing a man can do. However, you seem to be a little excited. Have you brought me a letter from my client, to authorize this inquiry?"

"From Mr. Oglander? Oh no! He has no idea of my being here."

"We will get over that. You are a friend of his, and a neighbour. He has asked you, in a general way, to help him, in this sad great trouble."

"Not at all. He would rather not have my interference. He does not like its motive."

"And the motive is, that like many other people, you were attached to this young lady?"

"Certainly, I am. I would give my life at any moment for her."

"Well, well; I will not speak quite so strongly as you do. Life grows dearer as it gets more short. But still, I would give my best year remaining, to get to the bottom of this problem."

"You would?" cried young Overshute, looking at him, with admiration of his strength and truth. "Give me your hand, sir? I have wronged you! I see that I am but a hasty fool!"

"You should never own that," said the lawyer.

CHAPTER XII.

MR. JOHN SMITH.

MEANWHILE, all Beckley and villages around were seething with a ferment of excitement and contradiction. Esther Cripps had been strictly ordered by the authorities to hold her tongue; and so far as in her lay she did so. But there were others—the Squire's three men, and even the Carrier himself, who had so many things to think, that they were pretty sure to say some of them. One or two of them had wives; and though these women could not be called by their very worst friends "inquisitive," it was not right and lawful that they should be debarred of everything. They did all they

could not to know any more than they were really bound to know; and whatever was forced upon them had no chance of going any further.

This made several women look at one another slyly, each knowing more than the other, and nodding while sounding the other's ignorance. Until, with one accord they grew provoked at being treated so; and truth being multiplied to its cube became, of course, infinite error.

Now, Mrs. Fermitage having been obliged to return to Cowley, Mary Hookham's mother had established her power by this time; and being, as her daughter had pronounced, a conspicuous member of the females, she exerted herself about all that was said, and saw the other side of everything. She never went to no public-house—nobody could say that of her; but perhaps she could put two and two together every bit as well as them that did. It had

been her fortune to acquire exceptional experience—or, as she put it more plainly, "she had a seed a many things;" and the impressions left thereby upon her idiosyncracy (or, in her own words, "what she come to think") was and were that nothing could be true that she had not known the like of. This was the secret of her success in life—which, however, as yet bore no proportion to her merits. She frankly scouted as "a pack of stuff" everything to which her history afforded no vivid parallel. In a word, she believed only what she had seen.

Now, incredulity is a grand power. To be able to say, "Oh, don't tell me," or "None of your stuff!" when the rest of the audience, stricken with awe, is gaping, confers at once the esteem of superior intellect and vigour. And when there are good high people, who derive comfort from the denial, the chances are that the active sceptic does not get the worst of it.

Mrs. Hookham plainly declared that Esther's tale was neither more nor less than a trumpery cock-and-bull story. She would not call it a parcel of lies, because the poor girl might have dreamed it. Walking in the snow was no more than walking in one's sleep; she knew that, from her own experience; and if there had been no snow as yet, that made her all the more sure to be right; the air was full of it, and of course it would have more power overhead. Depend upon it, she had see a bush, if indeed she did see anything, and being so dazed by the weather, she had gone and dreamed the rest of it.

Beckley, on the other hand, having known Esther ever since she toddled out of her cradle, and knowing her brothers, the carrier, the baker, and the butcher, and having no experience yet of Mother Hookham's wisdom, as good as told the latter lady not to be "so bounceable." She must not come into this parish, and pretend

to know more about things that belonged to it than those who were bred and born there.

But Mrs. Hookham's opinion was, in one way, very important; however little weight it carried at the Dusty Anvil. Mr. Oglander himself had to depend for his food entirely on Mrs. Hookham's efforts; for Betty, the cook, went purely off her head, after all she had gone through; and they put her in bed with a little barley-water, and much malt liquor in a nobler form. And though Mrs. Hookham at her time of life was reluctant so to demean herself, she found all the rest such a "Noah's compass," that she roused up the fires of departed youth, and flourished with the basting-ladle. A clever well-conditioned dame, with a will of her own, is somebody.

"Now, sir," she cried, rushing in to the Squire, with a basin of first-rate ox-tail soup, upon that melancholy New Year's Day, "you have been out in the snow again! No use

denying of it, sir ; I can see it by the chattering of your teeth. I call it a bad, wicked thing to go on so. Flying in the face of the Lord like that !"

"You are a most kind and good soul, Mrs. Hookham. But surely you would not have me sit with my hands crossed, doing nothing."

"No, no ; surely not. Take the spoon in one hand, and the basin in the other. You owe it to yourself to keep up your strength, and to some one else as well, good sir."

"I have no one else now to owe it to," the old man answered, sadly tucking his napkin into his waistcoat pockets.

"Yes, you have. You have your Miss Gracie, alive and kicking, as sure as I be ; and with a deal more of life in front of her ; though scarce a week passes but what I takes my regular dose of calumny. Ah, if it had not been for that, I never could have been twenty year a widow."

"Don't cry, Mrs. Hookham. I beg you not

to cry. You have many good children to look after; and there still is abundance of calomel. But why do you talk so about my darling?"

"Because, sir, please God, I means to see you spend many a happy year together. Lord have mercy, if I had took for granted every trouble as come upon me, who could a' tried for to cheat me this day? My goodness, don't go for to swallow the bones, sir!"

"To be sure not. No, I was not thinking. Of course there are bones in every tail."

"And a heap of bones in them Crippses' tale, sir, as won't go down with me nohow. Have faith in the mercy of the Lord, sir; and in your own experience."

"That is exactly what I try to do. There cannot be any one in the world so bad as to hurt my Gracie. Mrs. Hookham, you never can have seen anybody like her. She was so full of life and kindness that everybody who

knew her seemed to have her in their own family. She never made pretence to be above herself, or any one; and she entered into everybody's trouble quite as if she had brought it on. She never asked them any questions, whether it might have been their own fault; and she gave away all her own money first, before she came to me for more. She was so simple, and so pleasant, and so full of playful ways—but there, when I think of that, it makes me almost as bad as you women are. Take out the dish. I am very much obliged to you."

"Not a bit, sir, not a bit as yet," the brisk dame answered, with tears on her cheeks. "But before very long, you will own that you was; when you find every word I say come true. Oh my! How that startled me! Somebody coming the short way from the fields! That wonderful man, as is always prowling about, unbeknown to any one. They don't like me in the village much, civil as I am to all

of them. But as sure as six is half a dozen, that Smith is the one they ought to hate."

"If he is there, show him in at once," said the Squire, without further argument; "and let no one come interrupting us."

This was very hard upon Mrs. Hookham; and she could not help showing it in her answer.

"Oh, to be sure, sir! Oh, to be sure not! What is my poor opinion, compared to his? Ah well, it is a fine thing to be a man!"

The man, for whose sake she was thus cast out, seemed to be of the same opinion. He walked, and looked, and spoke as if it was indeed a fine thing to be a man; but the finest of all things to be the man inside his own cloth and leather. Short and thick of form he was, and likely to be at close quarters a dangerous antagonist. And the set of his jaws, and the glance of his eyes, showed that no want of manhood would at the critical moment disable

him. His face was of a strong red colour, equally spread all over it, as if he lived much in the open air, and fed well, and enjoyed his food.

"John Smith, your Worship—John Smith," he said, without troubling Mrs. Hookham. "I hope I see your Worship better. Don't rise, I beg of you. May I shut the door? Oh, Mary, your tea is waiting."

"Mary, indeed!" cried widow Hookham, ungraciously departing; "young man, address my darter thus!"

"Now, what have you done, Smith, what have you done?" the old gentleman asked, stooping over him. "Or have you done nothing at all as usual? You tell me to have patience every day, and every day I have less and less."

"The elements are against us, sir. If the weather had been anything but what it is, I must have known everything long ago. Stop,

sir, stop ; it is no idle excuse, as you seem to fancy. It is not the snow that I speak of ; it is the intense and deadly cold, that keeps all but the very strong people indoors. How can any man talk when his beard is frozen ? Look, sir ! "

From his short brown beard he took lumps of ice, beginning to thaw in the warmth of the room, and cast them into the fire to hiss. Mr. Oglander gazed as if he thought that his visitor took a liberty, but one that could not matter much. "Go on, sir, with your report," he said.

"Well, sir, in this chain of crime," Mr. Smith replied in a sprightly manner, "we have found one very important link."

"What is it, Smith? Don't keep me waiting. Don't fear me. I am now prepared to stand anything whatever."

"Well, sir, we have discovered, at last, the body of your Worship's daughter."

The Squire bowed, and hid his face. By the aid of faith, he had been hoping against hope, till it came to this. Then he looked up, with his bright old eyes for the moment very steady, and said with a firm though hollow voice—

"The will of the Lord be done! The will of the Lord be done, Smith."

"The will of the Lord shall not be done," cried Mr. Smith emphatically, and striking his thick knees with his fist, "until the man who has done it shall be swung, Squire, swung! Make up your mind to that, your Worship. You may safely make up your mind to that."

"What good will it do me?" the father asked, talking with himself alone. "Will it ever bring back my girl—my child? Bereaved I am, but it cannot be long! I shall meet her in a better world, Smith."

"To be sure your Worship will, with the angels and archangels. But to my mind that

will be no satisfaction, till the man has swung for it."

"Excuse me for a moment, will you, Mr. Smith, excuse me? I have no right to be overcome, and I thought I had got beyond all that. Ring the bell, and they will bring you cold sirloin and a jug of ale. Help yourself, and don't mind me. I will come back directly. No, thank you; I can walk alone. How many have had much worse to bear! You will find the under-cut the best."

CHAPTER XIII.

MR. SMITH IS ACTIVE.

MR. JOHN SMITH was a little upset at seeing the Squire so put out. But he said to himself: "It is natural—after all, it is natural. Poor old chap! he has taken it as well as could be expected. However, we must all live; and I feel uncommonly peckish just now. I declare I would rather have had something hot, this weather. But in such a case, one must put up with things. I wonder if they have got any horse-radish. All frozen hard in the ground, I fear—no harm, at any rate, in asking."

With this self-commune he rang the bell; and Mary, by her mother's order, answered.

"I'll not go nigh the baste!" cried widow Hookham, still indignant. Mary, like a good maid, laid the cloth without a syllable, and like a good young woman, took the keenest heed of Mr. Smith, without letting him dream that she peeped at him.

"Thank you, Mary," said Mr. Smith, to open conversation.

"My mother's name is Mary," she answered, "and perhaps you would like some pickles."

"By all means, as there is no horse-radish. Bring onions, gherkins, and walnuts, Mary. But above all things, walnuts."

"You must have what you can get," said Mary. "I will go and tell master what you require."

"On no account, Mary; on no account! He is gone away to pray, I believe. On no account disturb him."

"Poor dear, I should hope not. Perhaps you can manage with what I have set before you."

"I will do my best," he answered.

"The scum of the earth!" said Mary to herself; good servants being the most intensely aristocratic of all the world. "He never dined at a gentleman's table before, and his head is turned with it. Our kitchen is too good for him. But poor master never heeds nothing now."

As soon, however, as Mr. Smith had appeased the rage of hunger, and having called for a glass of hot brandy and water, was clinking the spoon in it, the Squire showed that he did heed something, by coming back calmly to talk with him. Mr. Oglander had passed the bitterest hour of his long life yet; filled at every turn of thought with yearning to break down and weep. Sometimes his mind was so confused that he did not know how old he was, but seemed to be in the long past days, with his loving wife upon his arm, and their Gracie toddling in front of them. He spoke to them both as he used to do, and

speaking cleared his thoughts again; and he shook away the dreamy joy in the blank forlorn of facts. At last he washed his face, and brushed his silver hair and untended beard, and half in the looking-glass expected to see his daughter scolding him; because he knew that he had neglected many things she insisted on; and his conscience caught him, when he seemed to be taking a low advantage.

"I hope you have been treated well," he said, with his fine old-fashioned bow, to Smith, as he came back again. "I do not often leave my guests to attend to themselves in this way."

"Don't apologize, Squire, I beg you. I have done, first chop, I assure you, sir. I have not tasted real mustard, ground at home as yours is, since I was up in Durham county, where they never grow it."

"Well, Mr. Smith," said the Squire, trying to smile at his facetiousness, "I am very glad that you have done well. In weather like this, a

young man like you must want a good deal of nourishment. But now, will you—will you tell me——"

"Yes, your Worship, everything! Of course you are anxious; and I thoroughly enter into your feelings. There are none of the women at the door, I hope?"

"Such things do not happen in my house. I will not interrupt you."

"Very well, sir; then sit down here. You must be aware in the first place then, that I was not likely to be content with your way of regarding things. The Lord is the Lord of the weather, of course, and does it without consulting us. Nevertheless, He allows us also to do our best against it. So I took the bull by the horns, as John Bull, by his name, has a right to do. I just resolved to beat the weather, and have it out with everything. So I communicated with the authorities in London. You know we are in a transition state—a transition

state at present, sir—between the old system and the new."

"Yes, yes, of course I know all that."

"Very well, your Worship, we are obliged, of course, to be doubly careful. In London, we are quite established; but down here, we must feel our way. The magistrates, saving your Worship's presence, look upon us with dislike, as if we were superseding them. That will wear off, your Worship, and the new system will work wonders."

"Yes, so you all say. But now, be quick. What wonders have you wrought, John Smith?"

"Well, I was going to tell your Worship when you interrupted me. You know that story of Cripps, the Carrier, and his sister—what's her name? Well, some folk believed it, and some bereaved it. I did neither of the two, but resolved to get to the bottom of it. Your Worship was afraid, you remember—well, then, let us say daunted, sir—or, if you will not have

that, we may say, that you trusted in Providence."

"It was not quite that; but still, Mr. Smith——"

"Your Worship will excuse me. Things of that sort happen always, and the people are always wrong that do it. I trusted in Providence once myself, but now I trust twice in my own self first and leave Providence to come after me. Ha, ha! I speak my mind. No offence, your Worship. Well then, this was what I did. A brave regiment of soldiers having newly returned from India, was ordered to march from London to the Land's End for change of temperature. They had not been supplied, of course, with any change of clothes for climate, and they felt it a little, but were exhorted not to be too particular. Two companies were to be billeted at Abingdon last evening; and having, of course, received notice of that, I procured authority to use them. They

shivered so that they wanted work; and there is nothing, your Worship, like discipline."

"Of course, I know that from my early days. Will you tell your story speedily?"

"Sir, that is just what I am doing. I brought them without many words to the quarry, where ten times the number of our clod-hoppers would only have shovelled at one another. Bless my heart! they did work, and with order and arrangement. Being clothed all in cotton they had no time to lose, unless they meant to get frozen; and it was a fine sight, I assure your Worship, to see how they showed their shoulder-blades, being skinny from that hot climate, and their brown freckled arms in the white of the drift, and the Indian steam coming out of them! In about two hours all the ground was clear, and the trees put away, like basket-work; and then we could see what had happened exactly, and even the mark of the pickaxes. Every word of that girl was proved true to a

tittle! I never heard finer evidence. We can even see that two men had been at work, and the stroke of their tools was different. You may trust me for getting up a case; but I see that you have no patience, Squire. We shovelled away all the fallen rock, and mould, and stumps, and furze-roots; and, at last, we came to the poor, poor innocent body, as fresh as the day-light!"

"I can hear no more! You have lost no child—if you have, perhaps you could spare it. Tell me nothing—nothing more! But prove that it was my child!"

"Lord a' mercy, your Worship! Why, you are only fit to go to bed! Here, Mary! Mary! Mother Hookham! Curse the bell—I have broken it! Your master is taken very queer! Look alive, woman! Stir your stumps! A pot of hot water and a foot-tub! Don't get scared—he will be all right. I always carry a fleam with me. I can bleed him as well as any doctor.

Hold his head up. Let me feel. Oh, he is not going to die just yet! Stop your caterwauling! There, I have relieved his veins. He will know us all in a minute again. He ought to have had a deal more spirit. I never could have expected this. I smoothed off everything so nicely—just as if it was a lady——"

"Did you, indeed! I have heard every word," said widow Hookham sternly. "You locked the door, or I would have had my ten nails in you long ago! Poor dear! What is a scum like you? And after all, what have you done, John Smith?"

CHAPTER XIV.

SO IS MR. SHARP.

On the very next day it was known throughout the parish and the neighbourhood that the ancient Squire had broken down at last, under the weight of anxieties. Nobody blamed him much for this, except his own sister and Mr. Smith. Mrs. Fermitage said that he ought to have shown more faith and resignation; and John Smith declared that all his plans were thrown out by this stupidity. What proper inquiry could be held, when the universal desire was to spare the feelings and respect the affliction of a poor old man?

Mr. Smith was right. An inquest truly must

be held upon the body which had been found by the soldiers. But the Coroner, being a good old friend and admirer of the Oglanders, contrived that the matter should be a mere form, and the verdict an open nullity. Mr. Luke Sharp appeared, and in a dignified reserve was ready to represent the family. He said a few words, in the very best taste, and scarcely dared to hint at things which must be painful to everybody left alive to think of them. How the crush of tons of rock upon an unprotected female form had made it impossible to say—and how all the hair (which more than any other human gift survived the sad, sad change), having been cut off, was there no longer—and how there was really nothing except a pair of not over new silk stockings, belonging to a lady of lofty position in the county, and the widow of an eminent gentleman, but not required, he might hope, to present herself so painfully. Mr. Sharp could say no more; and the jury felt

that he now must come, or, failing him, his son, Kit Sharp, into the £150,000 of "Port-wine Fermitage."

Therefore they returned the verdict carried in his pocket for them, "Death by misadventure of a young lady, name unknown." Their object was to satisfy the Squire and their consciences; and they found it wise, as it generally is, not to be too particular. And the Coroner was the last man to make any fuss about anything.

"Are you satisfied now, Mr. Overshute?" asked Lawyer Sharp, as Russel met him in the passage of the Quarry Arms, where the inquest had been taken. "The jury have done their best, at once to meet the facts of the case, and respect the feelings of the family."

"Satisfied! How can I be? Such a hocus-pocus I never knew. It is not for me to interfere, while things are in this wretched state. Everybody knows what an inquest is. No doubt you have done your duty, and acted

according to your instructions. Come in here, where we can speak privately."

Mr. Sharp did not look quite as if he desired a private interview. However, he followed the young man, with the best grace he could muster.

"I am going to speak quite calmly, and have no whip now for you to snap," said Russel, sitting down, as soon as he had set a chair for Mr. Sharp; "but may I ask you why you have done your utmost to prevent what seemed, to an ordinary mind, the first and most essential thing?"

"The identification? Yes, of course. Will you come, and satisfy yourself? The key of the room is in my pocket."

"I cannot do it. I cannot do it," answered the young man shuddering. "My last recollection must not be——"

"Young sir, I respect your feelings. And need I ask you, after that, whether I have done

amiss in sparing the feelings of the family? And there is something more important than even that at stake just now. You know the poor Squire's sad condition. The poor old gentleman is pretty well broken down at last, I fear. What else could we expect of him? And the doctor his sister had brought from London says that his life hangs positively upon a thread of hope. Therefore we are telling him sad stories, or rather, I ought to say, happy stories; and though he is too sharp to swallow them all, they do him good, sir—they do him good."

"I can quite understand it. But how does that bear—I mean you could have misled him surely about the result of this inquest?"

"By no means. He would have insisted on seeing a copy of *The Herald.* In fact, if the jury could not have been managed, I had arranged with the editor to print a special copy giving the verdict as we wanted it. A pious

fraud, of course; and so it is better to dispense with it. This verdict will set him up again upon his poor old legs, I hope. He seemed to dread the final blow so, and the bandying to and fro of his unfortunate daughter's name. I scarcely see why it should be so; but so it is, Mr. Overshute."

"Of course it is. How can you doubt it? How can it be otherwise? You can have no good blood in you—I beg your pardon, I speak rashly; but I did not mean to speak rudely. All I mean to say is that you need no more explain yourself. I seem to be always doubting you; and it always shows what a fool I am."

"Now, don't say that," Mr. Luke Sharp answered, with a fine and genial smile. "You are acknowledged to be the most rising member of the County Bench. But still, sir, still there is such a thing as going too far with acuteness, sir. You may not perceive it yet; but when you come to my age, you will own it."

"Truly. But who can be too suspicious, when such things are done as these? I tell you, Sharp, that I would give my head off my shoulders, this very instant, to know who has done this damned villainy!—this infernal —unnatural wrong, to my darling — to my darling!"

"Mr. Overshute, how can we tell that any wrong has been done to her?"

"No wrong to take her life! No wrong to cut off all her lovely hair, and to send it to her father! No wrong to leave us as we are, with nothing now to care for! You spoke like a sensible man just now—oh, don't think that I am excitable."

"Well, how can I think otherwise? But do me the justice to remember that I do not for one moment assert what everybody takes for granted. It seems too probable, and it cannot for the present at least be disproved, that here we have the sad finale of the poor young lady.

But it must be borne in mind that, on the other hand, the body——"

"The thing could be settled in two minutes—Sharp, I have no patience with you!"

"So it appears; and, making due allowance, I am not vexed with you. You mean, of course, the interior garments, the nether clothing, and so on. There is not a clue afforded there. We have found no name on anything. The features and form, as I need not tell you——"

"I cannot bear to hear of that. Has any old servant of the family; has the family doctor——"

"All those measures were taken, of course. We had the two oldest servants. But the one was flurried out of her wits, and the other three-quarters frozen. And you know what a fellow old Splinters is, the crustiest of the crusty. He took it in bitter dudgeon that Sir Anthony had been sent for to see the poor old Squire. And all he would say was, 'Yes,

yes, yes ; you had better send for Sir Anthony. Perhaps he could bring—oh, of course he could bring—my poor little pet to life again!' Then we tried her aunt, Mrs. Fermitage, one of the last who had seen her living. But bless you, my dear sir, a team of horses would not have lugged her into the room! She cried, and shrieked, and fainted away."

"'Barbarous creatures!' she said, 'you will have to hold another inquest, if you are so unmanly. I could not even see my dear husband,' and then she fell into hysterics, and we had to send two miles for brandy. Now, sir, have we anything more to do? Shall we send a litter or a coffin for the Squire himself?"

"You are inclined to be sarcastic. But you have taken a great deal upon yourself. You seem to have ordered everything. Mr. Luke Sharp everywhere!"

"Will you tell me who else there was to

do it? It has not been a very pleasant task, and certainly not a profitable one. I shall reap the usual reward—to be called a busybody by every one. But that is a trifle. Now, if there is anything you can suggest, Mr. Overshute, it shall be done at once. Take time to think. I feel a little tired and in need of rest. There has been so much to think of. You should have come to help us sooner. But, no doubt, you felt a sort of delicacy about it. The worthy jurymen's feet at last have ceased to rattle in the passage. My horse will not be here just yet. You will not think me rude, if I snatch a little rest, while you consider. For three nights I have had no sleep. Have I your good permission, sir? Here is the key of that room, meanwhile."

Russel Overshute was surprised to see Mr. Sharp draw forth a large silk handkerchief, with spots of white upon a yellow ground, and spread it carefully over the crown of his

long, deep head, and around his temples down to the fine grey eyebrows. Then lifting gaitered heels upon the flat wide bar of the iron fender—the weather being as cold as ever —in less than a minute Mr. Luke Sharp was asleep beyond all contradiction. He slept the sleep of the just, with that gentle whisper of a snore which Aristotle hints at to prove that virtue being, as she must be, in the mean, doth in the neutral third of life maintain a middle course between loud snore and silent slumber.

If Mr. Sharp had striven hard to produce a powerful effect, young Overshute might have suspected him; but this calm, good sleep and pure sense of rest laid him open for all the world to take a larger view of him. No bad man could sleep like that. No narrow-minded man could be so wide to nature's noblest power. Only a fine and genial soul could sweetly thus resign itself. The soft content of well-

earned repose spoke volumes in calm silence. Here was a good man (if ever there was one), at peace with his conscience, the world, and heaven!

Overshute was enabled thus to look at things more loftily;—to judge a man as he should be judged, when he challenges no verdict;—to see that there are large points of view, which we lose by worldly wisdom, and by little peeps through selfish holes, too one-eyed and ungenerous. Overshute could not bear the idea of any illiberality. He hated suspicion in anybody, unless it were just; as his own should be. In this condition of mind he pondered, while the honest lawyer slept. And he could not think of anything neglected, or mismanaged much, in the present helpless state of things.

CHAPTER XIV.

A SPOTTED DOG.

WHEN at last the frost broke up, and streams began to run again, and everywhere the earth was glad that men should see her face once more; and forest-trees, and roadside pollards, and bushes of the common hedgerow, straightened their unburdened backs, and stood for spring to look at them; a beautiful young maiden came as far as she could come, and sighed; as if the beauty of the land awaking was a grief to her.

This pretty lady, in the young moss-bud, and slender-necked chalice of innocence, was laden with dews of sorrow, such as nature, in her

outer dealings with the more material world, defers until autumnal night and russet hours are waiting. Scarcely in full bloom of youth, but ripe for blush or dreaminess, she felt the power of early spring, and the budding hope around her.

"Am I to be a prisoner always, ever more a prisoner?" she said, as she touched a willow catkin, the earliest of all, the silver one. She stroked the delicate silken tassel, doubtful of its prudence yet; and she looked for leaves, but none there were, and nothing to hold commune.

The feeble sun seemed well content to have a mere glimpse of the earth again, and spread his glances diffidently, as if he expected shadow. Nevertheless, there he was at last; and the world received him tenderly.

"It has been such a long, long time. It seems to grow longer, as the days draw out, and nobody comes to talk to me. My place

it is to obey, of course—but still, but still—there he is again!"

The girl drew back; for a fine young man, in a grand new velvet shooting-coat, wearing also a long shawl waistcoat and good buck-skin breeches, which (combined with calf-skin gaiters) set off his legs to the uttermost,—in all this picturesque apparel, and swinging a gun right gallantly, there he was, and no mistake! He was quietly trying through the covert, without any beaters, but with a brace of clever spaniels, for woodcock, snipe, or rabbit perhaps; the season for game being over. A tall, well-made, and rather nice young man (so far as a bashful girl might guess) he seemed at this third view of him; and of course it would be an exceedingly rude and pointed thing to run away. Needless, also, and indeed absurd; because she was sure that when last they met, he was frightened much more than she was. It was nothing less than a duty now, to find out whether he had

recovered himself. If he had done so, it would be as well to frighten him even more this time. And if he had not, it would only be fair to see what could be done for him.

One of his dogs—a "cocking spannel," as the great Mr. Looker warranted—a good young bitch, with liver-coloured spots, and drop ears torn by brambles, and eyes full of brownish yellow light, ran up to the girl confidentially, and wagged a brief tail, and sniffed a little, and with sound discretion gazed. Each black nostril was like a mark of panting interrogation, and one ear was tucked up like a small tunnel, and the eye that belonged to it blinked with acumen.

"You pretty dear, come and let me pat you," the young lady cried, looking down at the dog, as if there were nobody else in the world. "Oh, I am so fond of dogs—what is your name? Come and tell me, darling."

"Her name is 'Grace,'" said the master,

advancing in a bashful but not clumsy way. "The most beautiful name in the world, I think."

"Oh, do you think so, Mr. —— but I beg your pardon, you have not told me what your own name is, I think."

"I hope you are quite well," he answered, turning his gun away carefully; "quite well this fine afternoon. How beautiful it is to see the sun, and all the things coming back again so!"

"Oh yes! and the lovely willow-trees! I never noticed them so before. I had no idea that they did all this." She was stroking the flossiness as she spoke.

"Neither had I," said the young man, trying to be most agreeable, and glancing shyly at the haze of silver in lily fingers glistening; "but do not you think that they do it because —because they can scarcely help themselves?"

"No! how can you be so stupid? Excuse

me—I did not mean that, I am sure. But they do it because it is their nature; and they like to do it."

"You know them, no doubt; and you understand them, because you are like them."

He was frightened as soon as he had said this; which he thought (while he uttered it) rather good.

"I am really astonished," the fair maid said, with the gleam of a smile in her lively eyes, but her bright lips very steadfast, "to be compared to a willow-tree. I thought that a willow meant—but never mind, I am glad to be like a willow."

"Oh no! oh no! You are not one bit—I am sure you will never be like a willow. What could I have been thinking of?"

"No harm whatever, I am sure of that," she answered, with so sweet a look, that he stopped from scraping the toe of his boot on a clump of moss; and in his heart was wholly taken up

with her—"I am sure that you meant to be very polite."

"More than that—a great deal more than that—oh, ever so much more than that!"

She let him look at her for a moment, because he had something that he wanted to express. And she, from pure natural curiosity, would have been glad to know what it was. And so their eyes dwelt upon one another just long enough for each to be almost ashamed of leaving off; and in that short time they seemed to be pleased with one another's nature. The youth was the first to look away; because he feared that he might be rude; whereas a maiden cannot be rude. With the speed of a glance she knew all that, and she blushed at the colour these things were taking. "I am sure that I ought to go," she said.

"And so ought I, long and long ago. I am sure I cannot tell why I stop. If you were to get into any trouble—— "

"You are very kind. You need not be anxious. If you do not know why you stop—the sooner you run away at full speed the better."

"Oh, I hope you won't say that," he replied, being gifted by nature with powers of courting, which only wanted practice. "I really think that you scarcely ought to say so unkind a thing as that."

"Very well, then. May I say this, that you have important things to attend to, and that it looks—indeed it does—as if it was coming on to rain?"

"I assure you there is no fear of that—although if it did, there is plenty of shelter. But look at the sun—how it shines in your hair! Oh, why do you keep your hair so short? It looks as if it ought to be ten feet long."

"Well, suppose that it was—not quite ten feet, for that would be rather hard to manage—but say only half that length, and then for a

very good reason was all cut off—but that is altogether another thing, and in no way can concern you. I give you a very good day, sir."

"No, no! you will give me a very bad day, if you hurry away so suddenly. I am anxious to know a great deal more about you. Why do you live in this lonely place, quite as if you were imprisoned here? And what makes you look so unhappy sometimes, although your nature is so bright? There! what a brute I am! I have made you cry. I ought to shoot myself."

"You must not talk of such wicked things. I am not crying; I am very happy—at least, I mean quite happy enough. Good-bye! or I never shall bear you again."

As she turned away, without looking at him, he saw that her pure young breast was filled with a grief he must not intrude upon. And at the same moment he caught a glimpse through the trees of some one coming. So he

lifted his smart Glengarry cap, and in sad perplexity strode away. But over his shoulder he softly said—"I shall come again—you must let me do that—I am sure that I can help you."

The young lady made no answer; but turned, as soon as she thought he was out of sight, and wistfully looked after him.

"Here comes that Miss Patch, of course," she said. "I wonder whether she has spied him out. Her eyes are always everywhere."

"Oh, my darling child," cried Miss Patch, an elderly lady of great dignity; "I had no idea you were gone so far. Come in, I beg of you, come this moment; what has excited you like this?"

"Nothing at all. At least, I mean, I am not in the least excited. Oh! look at the beautiful sunset!"

Miss Patch, with deep gravity, took out her spectacles, placed them on her fine Roman nose, and gazed eastward to watch the sunset.

"Oh dear no! not there," cried her charge in a hurry; "here, it is all in this direction."

"I thought that I saw a spotted dog," the lady answered, still gazing steadily down the side of the forest by which the youth had made his exit; "a spotted dog, Grace, I am almost sure."

"Yes, I dare say. I believe that there is a dog with some spots in the neighbourhood."

CHAPTER XVI.

A GRAND SMOCK-FROCK.

UPON the Saturday after this, being market-day at Oxford, Zacchary Cripps was in and out with the places and the people, as busy as the best of them. The number of things that he had to do used to set his poor brain buzzing; until he went into the Bar—not the grand one, but the Hostler's Bar, at the Golden Cross—and left dry froth at the bottom of a pewter quart measure of fine old ale. At this flitting trace of exhaustion he always gazed for a moment as if he longed to behold just such another, and then, with a sigh of self-dedication to all the great duties before him, out he pulled his leather

bag, and counted fourpence four times over (without any multiplication thereof, but a desire to have less subtraction), and then he generally shook his head, in penitence at his own love of good ale, and the fugitive fate of the passion. The last step was to deposit his fourpence firmly upon the metal counter, challenging all the bad pence and half-pence pilloried there as a warning; and then with a glance at the bar-maid, Sally, to encourage her still to hope for him, away went Cripps to the duties of the day.

These always took him to the market first, a crowded and very narrow quarter then, where he always had a great host of commissions, at very small figures, to execute. His honesty was so broadly known that it was become quite an onerous gift, as happens in much higher grades of life. Folk, all along both his roads of travel, naturally took great advantage of it; being certain that he would spend their money quite as gingerly as his own, and charge them

no more than he was compelled by honesty towards himself to charge.

Farmers, butchers, poulterers, hucksters, chandlers, and grocers—black, yellow, and green—all knew Zacchary Cripps, and paid him the compliment of asking fifty per cent. above what they meant, or even hoped to take. Of this the Carrier was well aware, and upon the whole it pleased him. The triumph each time of rubbing down, by friction of tongue and chafe of spirit, eighteen-pence into a shilling, although it might be but a matter of course, never lost any of its charms for him. His brisk eyes sparkled as he pulled off his hat, and made the most learned annotations there—if learning is (as generally happens) the knowledge of what nobody else can read.

But now, before he had filled the great leathern apron of his capacities—which being full, his hat had no room for any further entries

—a thing came to pass which startled him; so far at least as the road and the world had left him the power of starting. He saw his own brother, Leviticus, standing in friendly talk with a rabbit-man; a man whose reputation was not at a hopeless distance beyond reproach; a man who had been three times in prison—whether he ought or ought not to have been, this is a difficult point to debate. His friends contended that he ought not—if so, he of course was wrong to go there. His enemies vowed that he ought to be there—if so, he could rightly be nowhere else. The man got the benefit of both opinions, in a powerfully negative condition of confidence on the part of the human brotherhood. But for all that, there were bigger rogues to be found in Oxford.

Cripps, however, as the head of the family, having seigneurial rights by birth — as well as, in his own opinion, force of superior in-

tellect—saw, and at once discharged, his duty. No taint of poached rabbits must lie, for a moment, on the straightforward path of the Crippses. Zacchary, therefore, held up one hand, as a warning to Tickuss to say no more, until he could get at him—for just at this moment a dead lock arose, through a fight of four women about a rotten egg—but when that had lapsed into hysterics, the Carrier struggled to his brother's elbow.

Leviticus Cripps was a large, ruddy man, half a head taller than the heir of the house, but not so well built for carrying boxes. His frame was at the broadest and thickest of itself at that very important part of the human system which has to do with aliment. But inasmuch as all parts do that, more or less directly, accuracy would specify (if allowable) his stomach. Here he was well developed; but narrowed or sloped towards less essential points; whereas the Carrier was at his greatest across and around

the shoulders. A keen physiologist would refer this palpable distinction to their respective occupations. The one fed pigs and fed upon them, and therefore required this local enlargement for sympathy, and for assimilation. The other bore the burden of good things for the benefit of others ; which is anything but fattening.

Be that as it will, they differed thus ; and they differed still more in countenance. Zacchary had a bright open face, with a short nose of brave and comely cock, a mouth large, pleasant, and mild as a cow's, a strong square forehead, and blue eyes of great vivacity, and some humour. He had true Cripps' hair, like a hornbeam hedge in the month of January ; and a thick curly beard of good hay colour, shaven into three scollops like a clover leaf. His manner of standing, and speaking, and looking was sturdy, and plain, and resolute ; and he stuck out his elbows, and set his knuckles on his hips, whenever both hands were empty.

On the contrary, Tickuss, his brother, looked at every one, and at all times, rather as if he were being suspected. Wrongly suspected, of course, and puzzled to tell at all why it should be so; and as a general rule, a little surly at such injustice. The expression of his face was heavy, slow-witted, and shyly inquisitive; his hair was black, and his eyes of a muddy brown with small slippery pupils; and he kept his legs in a fidgety state, as if prone to be wanted for running away. In stature, however, and weight this man was certainly above the average; and he would rather do a good than a bad thing, whenever the motives were equivalent.

But if his soul could not always walk in spotless raiment, his body at least was clad in the garb of innocence. No man in Oxford market wore a smock that could be compared with his. For on such great occasions Leviticus came in a noble shepherd's smock, long and flowing around him well, a triumph of mind in design

and construction, and a marvel of hand in fine stitching and plaiting, goffering, crimping, and ironing. The broad turned-over collar was like a snowdrift tattoed by fairies, the sleeves were gathered in as religiously as a bishop's gossamer; and the front was foursquare with cunning work; a span was the length, and a span the breadth, like the breastplate over the ephod. As for Tickuss himself, he cared no more than the wool of a pig for such trifles; beyond this, that he liked to have his neighbours looking up to, and the women looking after, him. Even in the new unsullied sanctity of this chasuble, he would grasp by the tail an Irish pig, if sore occasion befell them both. It was Mrs. Leviticus who adorned him (after a sea of soap-suds and many irons tested ejectively) with this magnificent vesture, suggested to feminine capacity, perhaps, in the days of the Tabernacle.

"Leviticus," said Zacchary sternly, leading

him down a wet red alley, peopled only with cooped chicks, and paved with unsaleable giblets; "Leviticus, what be thou doing, this day? Many queer things have I seed of thee—but to beat this here—never nothing!"

"I dunno what dost mean," Tickuss answered unsteadily.

"Now, I call that a lie," said the Carrier firmly but mildly, as if well used thereto; as a dog is to fleas in the summer time.

"A might be; and yet again a might not," Tickuss replied, with keen sense of logic, but none of impeached ethics.

"Do 'ee know, or do 'ee not?"—the ruthless Carrier pressed him—"that there hosebird have a been in jail?"

"Now, I do believe; let me call to mind"—said Tickuss, with his duller eyes at bay—"that I did hear summat as come nigh that. But, Lord bless you, the best of men goes to jail sometimes! Do you call to mind old Squire Dempster——"

"Naught to do wi' it! naught to do wi' it!" Zacchary cried, with a crack of his thumb. "That were an old gentleman's misfortune; the same as Saint Paul and Saint Peter did once. But that hosebird I see you talking along of, have been in jail three times—three times I tell 'ee—and no miracle. And if ever I sees you dealing with him——" he closed his sentence emphatically, by shaking his fist in the immediate neighbourhood of his brother's retiring nose.

"Well, well! no need to take on so, Zak," cried the bigger man at safe distance; "you might bear in mind that I has my troubles, and no covered cart at the tail of me. And a family, Zak, as wears out more boots than a tanyard a week could make good to 'em. But there, I never finds anybody gifted with no consideration. Why, if I was to talk till to-morrow night——"

"If you was to talk to next Leap-year's day,

you could not fetch right out of wrong, Tickuss. And you know pretty well what I be. Now, what was you doing of with that black George? Mind, no lies won't go down with me."

"Best way go and get him to tell 'ee," the younger brother answered sulkily. "It will do 'ee good like, to get it out of he."

"No harm to try," answered Cripps with alacrity; "no fear for me to be seen along of un; only for the likes of you, Tickuss."

The Carrier set off, to stake his higher repute against lowest communications; but his brother, with no "heed of smock or of crock," took three long strides and stopped him.

"Hearken me, hearken me, Zak!" he cried, with a start at a cock that crowed at him, and his face like the wattles of chanticleer—"Zak, for the sake of the Lord in heaven, and of my seven little ones,—stop a bit!"

"I bain't in no hurry that I know on," replied the Cripps of pure conscience; "you told

me to ask of him, and I were a-gooin' on the wag to do so."

"Come out into the Turl, Zak; come out into Turl a minute; there is nobody there now. They young College-boys be all at their lessons, or hunting. There is no place to come near the Turl for a talk; when they noisy College chaps are gone."

By a narrow back lane they got into the Turl, at that time of day little harassed by any, unless it were the children of the porter of Lincoln or Exeter. "Now, what is it thou hast got to say?" asked Zacchary. But this was the very thing the younger brother was vainly seeking for.

"Nort, nort, Zak; nort of any 'count," he stammered, after casting in his slow imagination for a good, fat, well-seasoned lie.

"Now spake out the truth, man, whatever it be," said the Carrier, trying to encourage him; "Tickuss, thou art always getting into scrapes by manes of crooked dealing. But I'll not turn

my back on thee, if for once canst spake the truth like a man, brother."

Leviticus struggled with his nature, while his little eyes rolled slowly, and his plaited breast-plate rose and fell. He stole some irresolute glances at his brother's clear, straightforward face; and he might have saved himself by doing what he was half-inclined to do. But circumstances aided nature to defeat his better star. The wife of the porter of Lincoln College had sent forth one of her little girls to buy a bunch of turnips. She knew that turnips would be very scarce after so much hard weather; but her stew would be no good without them; and among many other fine emotions, anxiety was now foremost. So she thrust forth her head from the venerable porch, and at the top of her voice exclaimed—"Turmots, turmots, turmots!"

At that loud cry, Leviticus Cripps turned pale—for his conscience smote him. "She meaneth me, she meaneth me, she meaneth my

turmot-field;" he whispered, with his long legs bent for departure; "'tis a thousand pound they have offered, Zak. Come away, come away, down Ship Street; there is a pump, and I want some water."

"But tell me what thou wast agoing to say," cried his brother, laying hold of him.

"Dash it! I will tell thee the truth, then, Zak. I just went and cut up a maisly sow—as fine a bit of pork as you ever clapped eyes on, but for they little beauty spots. And the clerk of the market bought some for his dinner; and he have got a bad cook, a cantankerous woman, and now I be in a pretty mess!"

"Not a word of all that do I believe," said Cripps.

CHAPTER XVII.

INSTALLED AT BRASENOSE.

MASTER CRIPPS was accustomed mainly to daylight roads and open ways. It was true that he had a good many corners to turn between Beckley and Oxford, whether his course were through Elsfield and Marston, or the broader track from Headington. But for all sharp turns he had two great maxims—keep on the proper side, and go slowly. By virtue of these, he had never been damaged himself, or forced to pay damages; and when he was in a pleasant vein, at the Dusty Anvil, or anywhere else, it was useless to tell him that any mischance need happen to a man who heeded this—that is

to say, if he drove a good horse, and saw to the shoeing of the nag himself. Of course there was also the will of the Lord. But that was quite sure to go right, if you watched it.

If he has any good substance in him, a man who spends most of his daylight time in the company of an honest horse, is sure to improve so much, that none of his bad companions know him—supposing that he ever had any. The simplicity and the good will of the horse, his faith in mankind, and his earnest desire to earn his oats, and have plenty of them; also the knowledge that his time is short, and his longest worn shoes will outlast him; and that when he is dead, quite another must be bought, who will cost twice as much as he did—these things (if any sense can be made of them) operate on the human mind, in a measure, for the most part, favourable.

Allowance, therefore, must be made for Master Leviticus Cripps and his character, as

often as it is borne in mind that he, from society of good horses, was (by mere mischance of birth) fetched down to communion with low hogs. Not that hogs are in any way low, from a properly elevated gazing-point; and taking, perhaps, the loftiest of human considerations, they are, as yet, fondly believed to be much better on a dish than horses.

But that—as Cripps would plainly put it—is neither here nor there just now; and it is ever so much better to let a man make his own excuses, which he can generally do pretty well.

"Cripps, well met!" cried Russel Overshute, seizing him by the apron, as Zacchary stood at the corner of Ship Street, to shake his head after his brother, who had made off down the Corn Market; "you are the very man I want to see!"

"Lor' a mercy now, be I, your worship? Well, there are not many gentlemen as it does me more good to look at."

Without any flattery he might say that. It was good, after dealing with a crooked man, to set eyes upon young Overshute. In his face there was no possibility of lie, hidden thought, or subterfuge. Whatever he meant was there expressed, in quick bold features, and frank bright eyes. His tall straight figure, firm neck, and broad shoulders helped to make people respect what he meant; moreover, he walked as if he had always something in view before him. He never turned round to look after a pretty girl, as weak young fellows do. He admired a pretty girl very much; but had too much respect for her to show it. He had made his choice, once for all in life; and his choice was sweet Grace Oglander.

"I made sure of meeting you, Master Cripps; if not in the market, at any rate where you put up your fine old horse. I like a man who likes his horse. I want to speak to you quietly, Cripps."

BIBLIOTHECA·BODLEIANA·

"I am your man, sir. Goo where you plaiseth. Without no beckoning, I be after you."

"There is nothing to make any fuss about, Cripps. And the whole world is welcome to what I say, whenever there is no one else concerned. At present, there are other people concerned;—and get out of the way, you jackanapes!"

In symmetry with his advanced ideas, he should not have spoken thus—but he spake it; and the eavesdropper touched his hat, and made off very hastily.

Russel was not at all certain of having quite acted up to his better lights, and longed to square up all the wrong with a shilling; but, with higher philosophy, suppressed that foolish yearning. "Now, Cripps, just follow me," he said.

The Carrier grumbled to himself a little, because of all his parcels, and the change he was

to call for somewhere, and a woman who could not make up her mind about a bullock's liver—not to think of more important things in every other direction. No one thought nothing of the value of his time; every bit the same as if he was a lean old horse turned out to grass! In spite of all that, Master Cripps did his best to keep time with the long legs before him. Thus was he led through well-known ways to the modest gate of Brasenose, which being passed, he went up a staircase near the unpretentious hall of that very good society. "Why am I here?" thought Cripps, but, with his usual resignation, added, "I have aseed finer places nor this." This, in the range of his great experience, doubtless was an established truth. But even his view of the breadth of the world received a little twist of wonder, when over a narrow dark doorway, which Mr. Overshute passed in silence, he read—for read he could—these words, "Rev. Thomas Hardenow." "May I be danged," said

Cripps, "if I ever come across such a queer thing as this here be!"

However, he quelled his emotions and followed the lengthy-striding Overshute into a long low room containing uncommonly little furniture. There was no one there, except Overshute, and a scout, who flitted away in ripe haste, with an order upon the buttery.

"Now, Cripps, didst thou ever taste college ale?" Mr. Overshute asked, as he took a chair like the dead bones of Ezekiel. "Master Carrier, here thou hast the tokens of a new and important movement. In my time, chairs were comfortable. But they make them now, only to mortify the flesh."

"Did your Worship mean me to sit down?" asked Cripps, touching the forelock which he kept combed for that purpose.

"Certainly, Cripps. Be not critical; but sit."

"I thank your Worship kindly," he answered, with little cause for gratitude. "I have a-druv

many thousand mile on a seat no worse nor this, perhaps."

"Your reservation is wise, my friend. Your driving-board must have been velvet to this. But the new lights are not in our Brewery yet. If they get there, they will have the worst of it. Here comes the tankard! Well done, old Hooper! Score a gallon to me for my family."

"With pleasure, sir," answered Hooper, truly, while he set on the table a tray filled with solid luncheon. "Ah, I see you remember the good old times, when there was those in this college, sir, that never thought twice about keeping down the flesh; and better flesh, sir, they had ever so much than these as are always a-doctoring of it. Ah, when I comes to recall to my mind what my father said to me, when fust he led me in under King Solomon's nose—'Bob, my boy,' he says to me——"

"Now, Hooper, I know that his advice was good. The fruit thereof is in yourself. You

shall tell me all about it the very next time I come to see you."

"Ah, they never cares now to hearken," said Hooper to himself, as, with the resignation of an ancient scout, he coughed, and bowed, and stroked the cloth, and contemplated Cripps with mild surprise, and then made a quiet exit. As for listening at the door, a good scout scorns such benefit. He likes to help himself to something more solid than the words behind him.

"If I may make so bold," said the Carrier, after waiting as long as he could, with Overshute clearly forgetting him; "what was it your Worship was going to tell me? Time is going by, sir, and our horse will miss his feeding."

"Attend to your own, Cripps, attend to your own. I beg your pardon for not helping you. But that you can do for yourself, I dare say. I am trying to think out something. I used to be quick; I am very slow now."

Cripps made a little face at this, to show that

the ways of his betters had good right to be beyond him; and then he stood upon his sturdy bowed legs, and turned a quick corner of eye at the door, in fear of any fasting influence, and seeing nothing of the kind, with pleasure laid hold of a large knife and fork.

"Lay about you, Cripps, my friend; lay about you to your utmost." So said Mr. Overshute, himself refusing everything.

"Railly now, I dunno, your Worship, how to get on, all a-ating by myself. Some folk can, and some breaks down at it. I must have somebody to ate with me—so be it was only now a babby, or a dog."

"I thank you for the frank comparison, Cripps. Well, help me, if you must—ah, I see you can carve."

"I am better at the raw mate, sir; but I can make shift when roasted. Butcher Numbers my brother, your Worship—but perhaps you never heered on him?"

"Oh yes, I know, Cripps. A highly respectable thriving man he is too. All your family thrive, and everybody speaks so well of them. Why, look at Leviticus! They tell me he has three hundred pigs!"

Like most men who have the great gift of gaining good will and popularity, Russel Overshute loved a bit of gossip about his neighbours.

"Your Worship," said Cripps, disappointing him of any new information, "pigs is out of my way altogether. When I was a young man of tender years, counteracted I was for to carry a pig. Three pounds twelve shillings and four pence he cost me, in less than three-quarters of a mile of road; and squeak, squeak, all the way, as if I was a-killing of him, and not he me. Seemeth he smelled some apples somewhere, and he went through a chaney clock, and a violin, and a set of first-born babby-linen for Squire Corser's daughter; grown up now she is, your

Worship must a met her riding. And that was not the worst of it nother—— "

"Well, Cripps, you must tell me another time. It was terribly hard upon you. But, my friend, the gentleman who lives here will be back for his hat, when the clock strikes two. Cap and gown off, when the clock strikes two. From two until five, he walks fifteen miles, whatever the state of the weather is."

"Lord bless me, your Worship, I could not travel that, with an empty cart, and all down-hill!"

"Never mind, Cripps. Will you try to listen, and offer no observation?"

"To say nort,—does your worship mean? Well, all our family be estamed for that."

"Then prove the justice of that esteem; for I have a long story to tell you, Cripps, and no long time to do it in."

CHAPTER XVIII.

A FLASH OF LIGHT.

THE Carrier, with a decisive gesture, ceased from both solid and liquid food, and settled his face, and whole body, and members into a grim and yet flexible aspect, as if he were driving a half-broken horse, and must be prepared for any sort of start. And yet with all this he reconciled a duly receptive deference, and a pleasant readiness, as if he were his own Dobbin, just fresh from stable.

"I need not tell you, Master Cripps," said Russel, "how I have picked up the many little things, which have been coming to my knowledge lately. And I will not be too positive

about any of them; because I made such a mistake in the beginning of this inquiry. All my suspicions at first were set on a man who was purely innocent—a legal gentleman of fair repute, to whom I have now made all honourable amends. In the most candid manner he has forgiven me, and desires no better than to act in the best faith with us."

"Asking your pardon for interrupting—did the gentleman happen to have a sharp name?"

"Yes, Cripps, he did. But no more of that. I was over sharp myself, no doubt; he is thoroughly blameless, and more than that, his behaviour has been most generous, most unwearying, most—— I never can do justice to him."

"Well, your Worship, no—perhaps not. A would take a rare sharp un to do so."

"You hold by the vulgar prejudice—well, I should be the last to blame you. That, however, has nothing to do with what I want to ask you.

But first, I must tell you my reason, Cripps. You know I have no faith whatever in that man John Smith. At first I thought him a tool of Mr.—never mind who—since I was so wrong. I am now convinced that John Smith is 'art and part' in the whole affair himself. He has thrown dust in our eyes throughout. He has stopped us from taking the proper track. Do you remember what discredit he threw on your sister's story?"

"He didn't believe a word of un. Had a good mind, I had, to a' knocked un down."

"To be sure, Cripps, I wonder that you forbore. Though violent measures must not be encouraged. And I myself thought that your sister might have made some mistakes through her scare in the dark. Poor thing! Her hair can have wanted no bandoline ever since, I should fancy. What a brave girl too not to shriek or faint!"

"Well, her did goo zummut queer, sir, and

lie down in the quarry-pit. Perhaps 'twas the wisest thing the poor young wench could do."

"No doubt it was—the very wisest. However, before she lost her wits she noticed, as I understand her to say—or rather she was particularly struck with the harsh cackling voice of the taller man, who also had a pointed hat, she thinks. It was not exactly a cackling voice, nor a clacking voice, nor a guttural voice, but something compounded of all three. Your sister, of course, could not quite so describe it; but she imitated it; which was better."

"Her hath had great advantages. Her can imitate a'most anything. Her waited for months on a College-chap, the very same in whose house we be sitting now."

"Cripps, that is strange. But to come back again. Your sister, who is a very nice girl indeed, and a good member of a good family——"

"Ay, your Worship, that her be. Wish a could

come across the man as would dare to say the contrairy!"

"Now, Cripps, we never shall get on, while you are so horribly warlike. Are you ready to listen to me, or not?"

"Every blessed word, your Worship, every blessed word goeth down; unto such time as you begins to spake of things at home to me."

"Such dangerous topics I will avoid. And now for the man with this villainous voice. You knew, or at any rate now you know, that I never was satisfied with that wretched affair that was called an 'Inquest.' Inquest a non inquirendo—but I beg your pardon, my good Cripps. Enough that the whole was pompous child's-play, guided by crafty hands beneath; as happens with most inquests. I only doubted the more, friend Cripps; I only doubted the more, from having a wrong way taken to extinguish doubts."

"To be sure, your Worship; a lie on the back of another lie makes un go heavier."

"Well, never mind; only this I did. For a few days perhaps I was overcome; and the illness of my dear old friend, the Squire, and the trouble of managing so that he should not hear anything to kill him; and my own slowness at the back of it all; for I never, as you know, am hasty—these things, one and another, kept me from going on horseback anywhere."

"To be sure, your Worship, to be sure. You ought to be always a-horseback. I've a-seed you many times on the Bench; but you looks a very poor stick there compared to what 'ee be a-horseback."

"Now, Cripps, where is your reverence? You call me 'your Worship,' and in the same breath contemn my judicial functions. I must commit you for a week's hard labour at getting in and out of your own cart, if you will not allow me to speak, Cripps. At last I have frightened

you, have I? Then let me secure the result in silence. Well, after the weather began to change from that tremendous frost and snow, and the poor Squire fell into the quiet state that he has been in ever since, I found that nothing would do for me, my health not being quite as usual——"

"Oh, your Worship was wonderfully kind; they told me you was as good as any old woman in the room almost!"

"Except to take long rides, Cripps, nothing at all would do for me. And, not to speak of myself too much, I believe that saved me from falling into a weak, and spooney, and godless state. I assure you there were times—however, never mind that, I am all right now, and——"

"Thank the Lord! you ought to say, sir; but you great Squires upon the bench——"

"Thank the Lord! I do say, Cripps; I thank Him every day for it. But, if I may edge in

a word, in your unusually eloquent state, I will tell you just what happened to me. I never believed, and never will, that poor Miss Oglander is dead. The coroner and the jury believed that they had her remains before them, although for the Squire's sake they forbore to identify her in the verdict. Your sister, no doubt, believed the same; and so did almost every one. I could not go, I could not go—no doubt I was a fool; but I could not face the chance of what I might see, after what I had heard of it. Well, I began to ride about, saying nothing of course to any one. And the more I rode, the more my spirit and faith in good things came back to me. And I think I have been rewarded, Cripps; at last I have been rewarded. It is not very much; but still it is like a flash of light to me. I have found out the man with the horrible voice."

"Lord have mercy upon me! your Worship—the man as laid hold of the pick-axe!"

"I have found him, Cripps, I do believe. But rather by pure luck than skill."

"There be no such thing as luck, your Worship; if you will excoose me. The Lord in heaven is the master of us!"

"Upon my word, it looks almost like it, though I never took that view of things. However, this was the way of it. To-day is Saturday. Well, it was last Wednesday night, I was coming home from a long, and wet, and muddy ride to Maidenhead. That little town always pleases me; and I like the landlord and the hostler, and I am sure that my horse is fed——"

"Your Worship must never think such a thing, without you see it mixed, and feel it, and watch him a-munching, until he hath done."

"More than that, I have always fancied, ever since that story was about the bag of potatoes you brought, without knowing any

more of it—ever since I heard of that, it has seemed to me that more inquiries ought to be made at Maidenhead. I need not say why; but I know that the Squire's opinion had been the same, as long as—I mean while—his health permitted. On Wednesday I went to the foreman of the nursery whence the potatoes came. It was raining hard, and he was in a shed, with a green baize apron on, seeing to some potting work. I got him away from the other men, and I found him a very sharp fellow indeed. He remembered all about those potatoes, especially as Squire Oglander had ridden from Oxford, in the snowy weather, to ask many questions about them. But the Squire could not put the questions I did. The poor old gentleman could not bear, of course, to expose his trouble. But I threw away all little scruples (as truly I should have done long ago), and I told the good foreman every word, so far as we know it yet, at least. He was

shocked beyond expression—people take things in such different ways—not at the poor Squire's loss and anguish, but that anybody should have dared to meddle with his own pet 'oak-leafs,' and, above all, his new pet seal.

"'I sealed them myself,' he said, 'sealed them myself, sir, with the new coat of arms that we paid for that month, because of the tricks of the trade, sir! Has anybody dared to imitate——' 'No, Mr. Foreman,' I said, 'they simply cut away your seal altogether, and tied it again, without any seal.' 'Oh, then,' he replied, 'that quite alters the case. If they had only meddled with our new arms, while the money was hot that we paid for them, what a case we might have had! But to knock them off—no action lies.'

"Cripps, it took me a very long time to warm him up to the matter again, after that great disappointment. He was burning for some great suit at law against some rival

nursery, which always pays the upstart one; but I led him round, and by patient words and simple truth brought him back to reason. The packing of the bag he remembered well, and the pouring of a lot of buck-wheat husks around and among the potato sets, to keep them from bruising, and to keep out frost, which seemed even then to be in the air. And he sent his best man to the Oxford coach, the first down coach from London, which passed by their gate about ten o'clock, and would be in Oxford about two, with the weather and the roads as usual. In that case, the bag could scarcely have been at the Black Horse more than half an hour before you came and laid hold of it; and being put into the bar, as the Squire's parcels always are, it was very unlikely to be tampered with."

"Lord a' mercy! your Worship, it was witch-craft then! The same as I said all along; it were witches' craft, and nothing else."

"Stop, Cripps, don't you be in such a hurry. But wait till you hear what I have next to tell. But oh, here comes my friend Hardenow, as punctual as the clock strikes two! Well, old fellow, how are you getting on?"

CHAPTER XIX.

A STORMY NIGHT.

THE Rev. Thomas Hardenow, fellow and tutor of Brasenose, strode into his own room at full speed, and stopped abruptly at sight of the Carrier. "Of all men, most I have avoided thee," was in his mind; but he spoke it not, though being a strongly outspoken man. Not that he ever had done any wrong to make him be shy of the Cripps race; but that he felt in his heart a desire for commune, which must be dangerous. He knew that in him lurked a foolish tendency towards Esther; and (which was worse) he knew that she had done

her best to overcome a still more foolish turn towards him.

Cripps, however (who would have fed the doves of Venus on black peas), looked upon any little bygone "coorting" as a social and congenial topic, enabling a quiet man to get on (if he only had a good memory) with almost any woman. Like a sensible man, he had always acquitted Hardenow of any blame in the matter, knowing that young girls' fancies may be caught without any angling. "If her chose to be a fool, how were he to blame for it?" And the Carrier never forgot the stages of social distinction. "Servant, sir," he therefore said, with his usual salaam; "hope I see you well, sir."

"Thank you, Zacchary," said Mr. Hardenow, taking the Carrier's horny palm (which always smelled of straps and buckles), and trying to squeeze it, with a passive result, "I am pretty well, Zacchary, thank you."

"Then you don't look it, sir, that you doesn't. We heerd you was getting on wonderful well. But the proof of the puddin' ain't in you, sir."

"That's right, Cripps," cried Overshute; "give it to him, Cripps! Why, he starves himself! Ever since he took his first and second, and got his fellowship and took orders, he hasn't known what a good dinner is. He keeps all the fasts in the calendar, and the vigils of the festivals, and he ought to have an appetite for the feasts; but he overstays his time, and can't keep anything on his stomach!"

"Now, Russel, as usual!" Hardenow answered, with a true and pleasant smile; "what a fine fellow you would be, if you only had moderation! But I see that you want to talk to Cripps; and I have several men waiting in the quad. Where is my beaver? Oh! here, to be sure! Will you come with us? No, of course you can't. Will you dine in hall with me?"

"Of course, I won't. But come you and

dine with me on Sunday—the only day you dare eat a bit—and my mother will do her best to strengthen you, build you up, establish you, for a fortnight of macaroni. Will you come?"

"Yes, yes, to-morrow—to be sure—I have many things I want to say to you. Good-bye for the present; good-bye, Master Cripps."

"There goes one of the finest fellows, of all the fine fellows yet ruined by rubbish!" With these words Russel Overshute ran to the window and looked out. A dozen or more of young men were waiting, the best undergraduates of the college, for Mr. Hardenow to lead them for fifteen miles, without a word.

"Well, every man to his liking," said Russel; "but that would be about the last of mine. Now, Cripps, most patient of carriers, are you ready for me to go on or not?"

"I hath a been thinking about my horse. How greedy o' me to be ating like this"—for the thought of so much fasting had made him

set to again, while he got the chance—"drinking likewise of college ale—better I have tasted, but not often—and all this time, as you might say, old Dobbin easing of his dainty foot, with no more nor a wisp of hay to drag through his water—if he hath any."

"An excruciating picture, Cripps, drawn by too vivid a conscience. Dobbin is as happy as he can be, with twenty-five horses to talk to him. At this very moment I behold him munching choicest of white oats and chaff."

"Your worship can see through a stone-wall, they say; but they only keeps black oats at the Cross just now, along of a contract the landlord have made—and a blind sort of bargain, to my thinking——"

"Never mind that—let him have black oats then, or Irish oats, or no oats at all. But do you wish to hear my story out, or will you leave it till next Saturday?"

"Sir, you might a' seen as I was waiting,

until such time as you plaze to go on wi' un."

"Very well, Cripps, that satisfies the most exacting historian. I will go on where I left off, if that point can be established. Well, I left the foreman of the nursery telling me about the man he sent with the bag of potatoes to the Oxford coach. He told me he was one of his sharpest hands, who had been off work for a week or two then, and had only returned that morning. 'Joe Smith' was his name; and when they could get him to work, he would do as much work as any two other men on the place. He might be trusted with anything, if he only undertook it; but the worst of him was that he never could be got to stick long to anything. Here to-day and gone to-morrow had always been his character; and they thought that he must be of gipsy race, and perhaps had a wandering family.

"This made me a little curious about the

man; and I asked to see him. But the foreman said that for some days now he had not been near the nursery, and they thought that he was on the Oxford road, in the neighbourhood of Nettlebed; and another thing—if I did see him, I could not make out more than half he said, for the man had such a defect in his voice, that only those who were used to him could be certain of his meaning. Suddenly I thought of your sister's tale, and I said to the foreman, 'Does he speak like this?' imitating as well as I could your sister's imitation of him. 'You know the man, sir,' the foreman answered; 'you have got him so exactly, that you must have heard him many times.' I told him no more, but asked him to describe Joe Smith's appearance. He answered that he was a tall, dark man, loosely built, but powerful, with a stoop in his neck, and a long sharp nose; and he generally wore a brown pointed hat.

"Cripps, you may well suppose that my sus-

picions were strong by this time. Here was your sister's description—so far as the poor girl could see in the dusk and the fright—confirmed to the very letter; and here was the clear opportunity offered for slipping the wreath of hair into the bag."

"Your Worship, now, your Worship! you be a bit too sharp! If that there man were at Headington quarry at nightfall of the Tuesday, how could he possible a' been to Maidenhead next morning? No, no, your Worship are too sharp."

"Too thick, you mean, Cripps; and not sharp enough. But listen to me for a moment. Those long-legged gipsies think very little of going thirty miles in a night; though they never travel by day so. And then there is the up mail-coach. Of course he would not pay his fare, but he might hang on beneath the guard's bugle, with or without his knowledge, and slip away at the changing-houses. Of that objection

I think nothing. It serves to my mind as a confirmation."

"Very well, sir," said Cripps discreetly; "who be I for to argify ?"

" No, Cripps, of course not. But still I wish to allow you to think of everything. You may not be right ; but still I like you to speak when you think of anything. That is what I have always said, and contended for continually—let every man speak—when sensible."

" Your Worship hath hit the mark again. The old Squire saith, 'let no man speak,' as St. Paul sayeth of the women. But your Worship saith 'let all men speak, all women likewise, as hath a tongue'—and then you stoppeth us both the more, by restirrecting all on us, women or men, whichever a may happen, till such time as all turns up sensible. Now, there never could ever be such a time!"

"Carrier, you are satirical. Keep from the Dusty Anvil, Cripps. Marry a wife, and you

will have a surfeit of argument at home. But still you have been very good on the whole, and you never will get home to-night. At any rate, I was so convinced, in spite of all smaller difficulties, that I bound the foreman to let me know, by a man on horseback, at any expense, the moment he saw Joe Smith again. And his parting words to me were these—'Well, sir, don't you think harm of Joe without sure proof against him. He is a random chap, I know; but I never saw a better man to earn his wages.'

"Well, I went back to the inn at once, and rode leisurely to Henley. It was raining hard, and the river in flood with all the melted snow and so on, when I crossed that pretty bridge. I had been trying in vain to think what was the best thing I could do; not liking to go home, and leave my new discovery so vague. But being soaked and chilly now, I resolved to have a glass of something hot, for fear of taking a

violent cold, and losing perhaps a week by it. So I went into the entrance of that good inn by the waterside, and called for some brandy and water hot. The landlord was good enough to come out; and knowing me from old boating days, he got into a talk with me. I had helped him at the sessions about a house of his at Dorchester; and nothing could exceed his good will. Remembering how the gipsies hang about the boats and the waterside, I asked him (quite as a random shot) whether any of them happened to be in the neighbourhood just now. He thought perhaps that I was timid about my dark ride homeward, and he told me all he knew of them. There was one lot, as usual, in the open ground about Nuneham, and another large camp near Chalgrove, and another, quite a small pitch that, on the edge of the firs above Nettlebed.

"This last was the lot for me; and I pressed him so about them, that he looked at me with a peculiar grin. 'What do you mean by that?'

I asked. 'Now, Squire Overshute, as if you did not know!' he answered. 'Doth your Worship happen to remember Cinnaminta's name?'

"Cripps, I assure you I was astonished. Of course you knew Cinnaminta—well, I don't want to be interrupted. No one could say any harm of her; and a lovelier girl was never seen. The landlord had heard some bygone gossip about Cinnaminta and myself. I did admire her. I am not ashamed to say that I greatly admired her. And so did every young fellow here, who had got a bit of pluck in him. I will not go into that question; but you know what Cinnaminta was."

Cripps nodded, with a thick mixture of feelings. His poetical self had been smitten more with Cinnaminta then he cared to tell; and his practical self was getting into a terrible hubbub about his horse. "To be sure, your Worship,' was all he said.

"Very well, now you understand me. To hear of Cinnaminta being in that camp at Nettlebed made me so determined that I laid hold of the landlord by the collar without thinking. He begged me not to ride off with him, or his business would be ruined; and feeling that he weighed about eighteen stone, I left him on his threshold.

"I could not bear to ask him now another word of anything. Knowing looks, and winks, and reeking jokes so irritate me, when I know that a woman is pure and good. You remember how we all lost Cinnaminta. Three or four score of undergraduates, reckless of parental will, had offered her matrimony; and three or four newly-elected fellows were asking whether they would vacate, if they happened to jump the broomstick."

"All that were too fine to last," muttered Cripps, most sensibly. "But her ought to a' had a sound man on the road—a man with a

horse well seasoned, and a substantial cart—her ought."

"Oh then, Cripps, you were smitten too! A nice connection for light parcels! Well, never mind. The whole thing is over. We all are sadder and wiser men; but we like to know who the chief sufferer is—what man has won the beauty. And with this in my mind, I rode up the hill, and resolved to go through with my seeking.

"When I got to the end of 'the fair-mile,' the night came down in earnest. You know my young horse 'Cantelupe,' freckled like a melon. He knows me as well as my old dog; and a child can ride him. But in the dark he gets often nervous, and jumps across the road, if he sees what he does not consider sociable. So that one must watch his ears, whatever the weather may be. And now the weather was as bad as man or horse could be out in.

"All day, there had been spits of rain, with

sudden puffs of wind, and streaks of green upon the sky, and racing clouds with ragged edges. You remember the weather of course; Wednesday is one of your Oxford days. Well, I hope you were home before it began to pelt as it did that evening. For myself I did not care one fig. I would rather be drenched than slowly sodden. But I did care for my horse; because he had whistled a little in the afternoon, and his throat is slightly delicate. And the whirr of the wind in the hedge, and the way it struck the naked branches back, like the clashing of clubs against the sky, were enough to make even a steady old horse uneasy at the things before him. Moreover, the road began to flash with that peculiar light which comes upward or downward—who can tell?—in reckless tumults of the air and earth. The road was running like a river; come here and go there, like glass it shone with the furious blows of the wind striking a pale gleam out of it. I stooped upon

Cantelupe's neck, or the wind would have dashed me back over his crupper.

"Suddenly in this swirl and roar, my horse stood steadfast. He spread his fore legs and stooped his head to throw his balance forward; and his mane (which had been lashing my beard) swished down in a waterfall of hair. I was startled as much as he was, and in the strange light stared about. 'You have better eyes than I have,' I said, 'or else you are a fool, Canty.'

"I thought that he was a fool, until I followed the turn of his head, and there I saw a white thing in the ditch. Something white or rather of a whity-brown colour was in the trough, with something dark leaning over it. 'Who are you there?' I shouted, and the wind blew my voice back between my teeth.

"'Nort to you, master. Nort to you. Go on, and look to your own consarns.'

"This rough reply was in a harsh high cackle,

rather than a human voice; but it came through the roar of the tempest clearly, as no common voice could come. For a moment, I had a great mind to do exactly as I was ordered. But curiosity, and perhaps some pity for the fellow, stopped me. 'I will not leave you, my friend,' I said, 'until I am sure that I can do no good.' The man was in such trouble, that he made no answer which I could hear, so I jumped from my horse, who would come no nearer; and holding the bridle, I went up to see.

"In as sheltered a spot as could be found, but still in a dripping and weltering place, lay, or rather rolled and kicked, a poor child in a most violent fit. 'Don't 'ee now, my little Tom; don't 'ee, that's a deary, don't!' The man kept coaxing, and moaning, and trying to smooth down little legs and arms. 'Let it have its way,' I said; 'only keep the head well up; and try to put something between the teeth.' Without any

answer, he did as I bade; and what he put betwixt the teeth must have been his own great thumb. Of course he mistook me for a doctor. None but a doctor was likely to be out riding on so rough a night."

"Ah, how I do pity they poor chaps!" cried Carrier Cripps, who really could not wait one minute longer. "Many a naight I mates 'em a starting for ten or twenty maile of it, just when I be in the smell o' my supper, and nort but nightcap arterward. Leastways, I mean, arter pipe and hot summat. Your worship 'll 'scoose me a-breakin' in. But there's half my arrands to do yet, and the sun gone flat on the Radcliffe! The Lord knows if I shall get home to-night. But if I doos—might I make so bold—your Worship be coming to see poor Squire? Your Worship is not like some worships be—and I has got a rare drop of fine old stuff! Your Worship is not the man to take me crooked. I means no liberty, mind you."

"Of that I am certain," Mr. Overshute answered. "Cripps, your suggestion just hits the mark. I particularly want to see your sister. That was my object in seeking you. And I did not like to see her, until you should have had time to prepare her. I have several things to see to here, and then I will ride to Beckley. Mrs. Hookham will give me a bit of dinner, when I have seen my dear friend the Squire. At night, I will come down, and smoke a pipe, and finish my story with you, as soon as I am sure you have had your supper."

"Never you pay no heed at all," said Master Cripps, with solemnity, "to no thought of my zupper, sir. That be entire what you worships call a zecondary consideration. However, I will have un, if so be I can. And you mustn't goo for to think, sir, that goo I would now, if stay I could. I goes with that there story, the same as the jog of a cart to the trot of the nag.

My wits kapes on agoin' up and down. But business is a piece of the body, sir. But no slape for me; nor no church to-morrow; wi'out I hears the last of that there tale!"

CHAPTER XX.

CRIPPS DRAWS THE CORK.

Any kind good-natured person, loving bright simplicity, would have thought it a little treat to look round the Carrier's dwelling-room, upon that Saturday evening, when he expected Mr. Overshute. Not that Cripps himself was over-tidy, or too particular. He was so kindly familiar now with hay, and straw, and bits of string, and chaff, and chips, and promiscuous parcels, that on the whole he preferred a litter to any exertions of broom or brush. But Esther, who ruled the house at home, was the essence of quick neatness, and scorned all comfort, unless

it looked—as well as was—right comfortable. And now, expecting so grand a guest, she had tucked up her sleeves, and stirred her pretty arms to no small purpose.

The room was still a kitchen, and she had made no attempt to disguise that much. But what can look better than a kitchen, clean, and bright, and well supplied with the cheery tools of appetite. It was a good-sized room, and very picturesque with snugness. Little corners, in and out, gave play for light and shadow; the fireplace retired far enough to well express itself; and the dresser had brass-handled drawers, that seemed quietly nursing table-cloths. Well, above these, upon lofty hooks, the chronicles of the present generation might be read on cups. Zacchary headed the line, of course; and then—as Genesis is ignored by grander generations—Exodus, and Leviticus (the fount of much fine movement), and Numbers, and a great many more, showed that the

Carrier's father and mother had gladly baptized every one.

In front of the fire sat the Carrier, with nearly all of his best clothes on, and gazing at a warming-pan. He had been forbidden to eat his supper, for fear of making a smell of it; and he had a great mind to go to bed, and have some hot coals under him. For nearly five miles of uphill work and laying his shoulder against the spokes, he had been promising himself a rare good supper, and a pipe to follow; and now where were they? In the far background. He had no idea of rebellion; still that saucepan on the simmer made the most provoking movements. Therefore he put up his feet upon a stump of oak (which had for generations cooled down pots), and he turned with a shake of his head toward the fire, and sniffed the sniff of Tantalus, and muttered—"Ah, well! the Lord knoweth best!" and thought to himself that if ever again he invited the quality to

his house, he would wait till he had his own quantity first.

Esther was quite in a flutter; although she was ready to deny it stoutly, and to blush a bright red in doing so. To her, of course, Justice Overshute was simply a great man, who must have the chair of state, and the talk of restraint, and a clean dry hearth, and the curtsy, and the best white apron of deference. To her it could make not one jot of difference, that Mr. Overshute happened to be the most intimate friend of some other gentleman, who never came near her, except in dreams. Tush, she had the very greatest mind, when the house was clean and tidy, to go and spend the evening with her dear friend Mealy at the Anvil. But Zacchary would not hear of this; and how could she go against Zacchary?

So she brought the grand chair, the arm-chair of yew-tree—the tree that used to shade the graves of unrecorded Crippses—a chair of

deepest red complexion, countenanced with a cushion. The cushion was but a little pad in the dark capacious hollow; suggesting to an innocent mind, that a lean man had left his hat there, and a fat man had sat down on it. But the mind of every Cripps yet known was strictly reverential; and this was the curule chair, and even the Olympian throne of Crippses.

Russel Overshute knocked at the door, in his usual quick and impetuous way. In the main he was a gentleman; and he would have knocked at a nobleman's door exactly as he did at the Carrier's. But all radical theories, fine as they are, detract from gentle practice; and the too-large-minded man, while young, takes a flying leap over small niceties. He does not remember that poor men need more deference than rich men, because they are not used to it. To put it more plainly—Overshute knocked hard, and meant no harm by it.

"Come in, sir, and kindly welcome!" Cripps

began, as he showed him in; "plaize to take this chair, your Worship. Never mind your boots; Lor' bless us! the mud of three counties cometh here."

"Then it goes away again very quickly! Miss Cripps, how are you? May I shake hands?"

Esther, who had been shrinking into the shade of the clock and the dresser, came forward with a brave bright blush, and offered her hand, as a lady might. Russel Overshute took it kindly, and bowed to her curtsy, and smiled at her. In an honest manly way, he admired pretty Esther.

"Master Cripps, you are too bad; and your sister in the conspiracy too! I do believe that your mind is set to make me as tipsy as a king to-night!"

"They little things," said the Carrier, pointing to the old oak table, where a bottle of grand old whisky shone with the reflected

gleam of lemons, and glasses danced in the firelight—"they little things, sir, was never set for so good a gentleman afore, nor a one to do such honour to un. But they might be worse, sir, they might be worse, to spake their simple due of un. And how is poor Squire to-night, your Worship?"

"Well, he is about as usual. Nothing seems to move him much. He sits in his old chair, and listens for a step that never comes. But his patience is wonderful. It ought to be a lesson to us; and I hope it has been one to me. He trusts in the Lord, Cripps, as strongly as ever. I fear I should have given up that long ago, if I were laid on my back as he is."

"Young folk," answered Cripps, as he drew the cork—"meaning no disrespect to you, sir—when they encounters trouble, is like a young horse a-coming to the foot of a hill for the fust time wi' a heavy load. He feeleth the collar beginning to press, and he tosseth his head, and

that maketh un worse. He beginneth to get into fret and fume, and he shaketh his legs with anger, and he turneth his head and foameth a bit, and champeth, to ax the maning o' it. And then you can judge what the stuff of him is. If he be bad stuff, he throweth him back, and tilteth up his loins, and spraddleth. But if he hath good stuff, he throweth out his chest, and putteth the fire into his eyes, and closeth his nostrils, and gathereth his legs, and straineth his muscles like a bowstring. But be he as good as a wool, he longeth to see over the top of that there hill, afore he be half-way up it."

"Well, Cripps, I have done that, I confess. I have longed to see over the top of the hill; and Heaven only knows where that top is! But as sure as we sit here and drink this glass of punch to your sister's health, and to yours, good Carrier, so surely shall our dear old friend receive the reward of his faith and courage; whether in this world or the next!"

"Thank 'ee kindly, sir. Etty, is that the best sort of curtsy they teaches now? Now, don't blush, child, but make a betterer. But as to what your Worship was a-saying of, I virtually hopes a may come to pass in this world we be living in. Otherwise, maybe, us never may know on it, the kingdom of Heaven being such a size."

"Cripps, I believe it will be in this world. And I hope that I am on the straight road now towards making out some part of it. You have told your sister all I told you at Brasenose this morning according to my directions? Very well, then; I may begin again at the point where I left off with you. Where did I break it? I almost forget."

"With the man's big thumb in the mouth of the cheeld, while you was a-looking at him, sir; and the wind and the rain blowing furious."

"Ah, yes, I remember; and so they were. I thought that the crest of the hedge would fall

over, and bury the whole of us out of the way. And when the poor boy had kicked out his convulsions, and fallen into a senseless sleep, the rough man turned on me savagely, as if I could have prevented it. 'A pretty doctor you be!' he exclaimed. But I took the upper hand of him. 'Stand back there!' I said; and I lifted the child (expecting him to strike me all the while), and placed the poor little fellow on my horse, and managed to get up into my saddle before the wind blew him off again. 'Now lead the way to your home,' I said. And muttering something, he set off.

"He strode along at such a pace that, having to manage both child and horse, it was all I could do to keep up with him. But I kept him in sight till he came to a common; and there he struck sharply away to the right. By the light of the wind and the rain, and a star that twinkled where the storm was lifting, I followed him, perhaps for half a mile, through a narrow

track, in and out furze and bramble. At last he turned suddenly round a corner, and a shadow fell behind him—his own shadow thrown by a gusty gleam of fire. Cantelupe —that is my horse, Miss Esther—has not learned to stand fire yet, and he shied at the light, and set off through the furze, as if with the hounds in full cry before him. We were very lucky not to break our necks, going headlong in the dark among rabbit-holes. I thought that I must have dropped the child, as the best thing to be done for him; but the shaking revived him, and he clung to me.

"I got my horse under command at last; but we must have gone half a mile anywhere, and to find the way back seemed a hopeless task. But the quick-witted people (who knew what had happened, and what was likely to come of it) saved me miles of roundabout by a very simple expedient. They hoisted from time to time a torch of dry furze blazing upon a pole;

and though the light flared and went out on the wind, by the quick repetition they guided me. In the cold and the wet, it rejoiced my heart to think of a good fire somewhere."

"Etty, stir the fire up," the hospitable Cripps interrupted. "His Worship hath shivers, to think of it. When a man, or, beg pardon, a gentleman, feeleth the small of his back go creeping, he needeth good fire to come up his legs, and a hot summat to go down him. Etty, be quick with the water now."

"Cripps, Cripps, Carrier Cripps! do you want to have me spilled on the road to-night? I am trying to tell things in proper order. But how can I do it, if you go on so? However, as I was beginning to say, Cantelupe, and the child, and I, fetched back to the place at last, where the flash of light had started us. And we saw, not a flash, but a glow this time, a steadfast body of cheerful fire, with pots and cauldrons over it. So well had the spot been chosen, in

the lee of ground and growth, that the ash of the fire lay round the embers, as still as the beard of an oyster; while thicket and tree but a few yards off were threshing in the wind and wailing. Behind this fire, and under a rick-cloth sloping from a sandstone crest, women and children, and one or two men, sat as happy and snug as could be: dry, and warm, and ready for supper, and pleased with the wind and the rain outside, which improved their comfort and appetite. And now and then the children seemed to be pulling at an important woman, to hurry her, perhaps, in her cookery.

"But while I was watching them, keeping my horse on the verge of light and shadow, a woman, quite different from the rest, came out of the darkness after me. Heedless of weather, and reckless of self, she had been seeking for me, or rather for my little burden. Her hair was steeped with the drenching rain, for she wore no hat or bonnet; and her dark clothes

hung on the lines of her figure, as women hate to let them do. Her eyes and face I could not see because of the way the light fell; but I seemed to know her none the less.

"While I gazed in doubt, my little fellow slipped like an eel from my clasp and the saddle; and almost before I could tell where he was—there he was in the arms of his mother! Wonders of love now began to go on; and it struck me that I was one too many in a scene of that sort; and I turned my good horse, to be off and away. But the woman called out, and a man laid hold of my bridle, and took his hat off, when, with the usual impulse of a stopped Briton, I was going to strike at him. I saw that it was my good friend of the ditch, and I came to parley with him.

"What with his scarcity of manners, and of polished language, and worst of all his want of palate, I found it hard, with so much wind blowing out here all around us, to understand

his meaning. This was rude of me to the last degree, for the queerly-voiced man was doing no less than inviting me, with all his heart, to an uncommonly good dinner!"

CHAPTER XXI.

CINNAMINTA.

"Now that," said Cripps, "is what I call the proper way of doing things. Arter all, they hathens knows a dale more than we credit 'em."

"Well, Miss Esther," asked Russel, turning to his other listener, "what do you think about it now?"

"Sir," she replied, with her round cheeks coloured by the excitement of his tale, and shining in the firelight, "I do not know what the manners may be among the gentry in such things. But if it had been one of us, we never could have supped with him."

"You are right," answered Overshute; "so I

felt. Starving as I was, I could not break bread with a man like that, until he should have cleared himself. He did not seem to be conscious of any dark mistrust on my part ; and that was natural enough, as he did not even know me. But when I said that I must ride home as fast as I could, he asked me first to come and have a look at the poor little child. This I could not well refuse ; so I gave my horse to a boy to hold, and followed him into the warm dry place, and into his own corner. As I passed, and the people made way for me, I saw that they were genuine gipsies, not mere English vagabonds. There was no mistaking the clearly-cut features, and the olive complexions, and the dark eyes, lashed both above and below. My gruff companion raised a screen, and showed me into his snuggery.

" It was dimly lit by a queer old lamp of red earthenware, and of Roman shape. Couches of heather, and a few low stools, and some vessels

were the only furniture; but the place was beautifully clean, and fragrant with dry fern and herbs. In the furthest corner lay little Tom, with a woman bending over him. At the sound of our entry she turned to meet us, and I saw Cinnaminta. Her hair, and eyes, and graceful carriage were as grand as ever, and her forehead as clear and noble; but her face had lost the bright puzzle of youth, and the flush of damask beauty. In a word, that rich mysterious look, which used to thrill so many hearts, was changed into the glance of fear, and the restless gaze of anxiety.

"She knew me at once, and asked, with a very poor attempt at gaiety—'Are you come to have your fortune told, sir?'

"Before I could answer, her husband spoke some words in her own language, and the 'Princess,' as we used to call her, took my hand in both of hers, and kissed it, and poured forth her thanks. She had been so engrossed with

her poor sick child that she had not known me on horseback. Having done so little to deserve her thanks, I was quite surprised at such gratitude; and it made me fear that she must be now unaccustomed to kind treatment. I asked how her grandmother was, who used to sit up so proudly at Cowley, as well as her sister, the little thing that used to run in and out so. As I spoke of them, she shook her head and gazed at some long distance, to tell me that they were no more. I could not remember the rest of her people, except her Uncle Kershoe, as fine a fellow as ever stole a horse. When I spoke of him, she laughed as if he were going on as well as ever; and I hoped that it might be no son of his to whom I had trusted Cantelupe. But of course I knew that gipsy honour would hold him sacred for the time, even if he were Bay Middleton. Then I asked her about her own children, and again she shook her head and said—'Three, all three in one are now; and

that is the one you saved.' With that, while her husband left the tent, Cinnaminta led me to look at the poor little fellow in his deep warm sleep. A beautiful little boy it was; a real Princess might yearn in vain for such a lovely offspring, if only the stamp of health had been on him. But the glow of airy health and breezy vigour was not on him; neither will it ever be, so far as one may judge by skin. Clear, transparent, pearly skin, all whose colour seems to come from under, instead of over it; the more the wind or the sun strikes on it, the more its colour evaporates. I fear that poor Cinnaminta's child will go the way of the younger ones."

"Poor dear! poor dear!" exclaimed the Carrier, rubbing his nose in a sad slow way. "I can guess what her would be to them. If her loseth that little un, mind—well then, you will see if her dothn't go arter un."

"I believe that she will," replied Overshute;

"I never saw any one so wrapped up in another being as she is. As for Joe Smith, her husband, and the way she treats him, I couldn't—no, I never could put up with it, even if it were—— But, Miss Esther, why do you look with such a curious smile at me? Of such matters what can you know? However, there goes your clock again! Cripps, I shall never get home to-night; and my mother will think I was poaching. Because I will not send the poachers to prison, she believes that I must be a poacher myself!"

"Now, verily, your Worship, that bates all I have ever heerd of! How could a Justice go a-poaching, howsomever he tried his best?"

"Cripps, he might. I believe he might, if he really did his best for it. However, let that question pass; although it is highly interesting. I will try, at my leisure, to solve it. But how can I think of such little things in the middle of great sad ones? It really

made me feel as if I never should laugh again almost, when I saw this fine unselfish woman controlling herself, and commanding herself, in the depth of her misery about her child. And when I thought how she might have got on, if she only had liked education, and that; and to marry a fellow of Oriel; I assure you, Miss Esther, I began to feel how women throw away their chances. Of course, I could not hint at things disloyal—or what shall I call them? Unconjugal, perhaps, is what I mean; unuxorial, or what it may be. But although I am slow at seeing things; because I used to think myself too quick, and have made false charges through it; I really could not help feeling sure that poor Cinnaminta had made an awkward tally with her husband. However, that was no concern of mine. She had made her own choice, and must stick to it. But to think of it made me uncomfortable, and I could not speak then of what I wished

to speak of, but took short leave and rode away. First, however, I got permission to come over again on the Friday—yesterday, I mean; and now I will tell you exactly what happened then."

"Your Worship do tell a tale," said Cripps; "that wonderful, that us be almost there! They women takes a man, whether or no he wool; and when they gets tired of un, they puts all the fault on he, they do! There was a woman as did the washing, over to Squire Pemberton's; nothing to look at—unless you hadn't seen done-up hair for a twelvemonth, the same as happens to the sailors; and in her go-roundings of no account, for to catch the notice of a man much. But that very woman, I'm danged if her didn't——"

"Zacchary, hush!" said Esther; and the Carrier muttered, "Of course, of course! No chance of fair play wi' un! Well, go on, your Worship."

"I have very little more to tell you, as yet," Overshute answered, with a smile at both. "You have listened with wonderful patience to me; and I am surprised at remembering half of what happened to me in a hurry so. I shall make more allowance for witnesses now, when they get confused and hesitate. But, as I was going to say, I rode over to Nettlebed Common, or whatever it is called, in good time yesterday, so as to have a long quiet talk with Cinnaminta; knowing that if she would not tell me the truth, she would tell no falsehood. As I rode along in that fine spring sun, my mind was unusually clear and bright. I saw to a nicety what questions I ought to put, and how to put them; and nothing of all the ins and outs of this matter could escape me. When the sun threw my shadow, as sharp as a die, I could not help laughing to the open road and the clear long breadth of prospect, at the narrow stupid thoughts we

had been thinking throughout the winter. In a word, I was sure, as I am of my life, of finding sweet Grace Oglander, and restoring her father to his fine old health, and spreading great happiness everywhere; and thus I rode up to the gipsy-camp—and there was not a shadow or a trace of it!"

CHAPTER XXII.

A DELICATE SUBJECT.

THE log had burned down, and the fire was low, when Russel thus ended his story. Cripps was indignant, because he had made up his mind for "summat of a zettlement;" and Esther was full of young womanly thoughts about Cinnaminta and her poor child. But even before they could consult one another, or cross-examine, a loud, sharp knock at the door was heard, and in ran Mary Hookham.

"Oh, if you please, sir—oh, if you please, sir!" she exclaimed with both hands up, and making the most of her shawl fringe, "such a thing have turned up!—I never! Them

stockings! Oh, them silk stockings, sir! Your Worship—oh, them silk stockings, sir!"

"My dear," said Cripps in a fatherly tone, and with less contemporary feeling than Mary might wish to inspire him with—"my dear good maid, you be that upset, that to spake, without sloping the spout of the kettle, might lade to a'most anything. Etty, you ain't had a drap of nort—and all the better for 'ee. Give over your glass, girl. Now, Miss Mary, the laste little drap, and then you spakes; and then you has another drap. 'Scoose me, your Worship, to make so bold; but a young man can't see them things in the right light."

"Oh, Master Cripps, now!" cried Mary Hookham, "what but a young man be you yourself? And none of they young men can point their tongues, to compare with you, to my mind. But I beg your pardon, sir, Mr. Russel—your name come so familiar to me, through our dear young lady. I forgot what

I was a-doing, your worship, to be sitting down in your presence so!"

"Mary, if you get up I shall get up also, and go away. We are both enjoying the hospitality of our good friend, Master Cripps. Now, Mary, by no means hurry yourself; but tell me at your leisure why you came, and what your news is."

"Silk stockings, forsooth!" cried Master Cripps, being vexed at this break of the evening. "Why, my grandmother had a whole pair of they! I belave I could find 'em now, I do! Silk stockings, to break up one's comfort for! Not but what I be glad to see you. Mary, my dear, I drink your good health, touching spoons in lack of lips."

"Oh, Mr. Cripps, you are so funny! And you do make me feel things in such a way! Bless me, if I haven't dropped my comb! Oh, I am so shocked to trouble you! Natteral hair are so provoking, compared to what most

people wears now-a-days. But about what I come for—oh, your Worship, stockings is not what I ought to speak of, except in the ear of females."

"Stockings are a very good subject, Mary; particularly if they are silk ones."

"Lor, sir! Now, I never thought of that! To be sure, that makes all the difference! Well then, your Worship must know all, and Master Cripps, and Miss Esther, too. It seemeth that Mrs. Fermitage, master's own sister, you know, sir, have never been comfortable in her mind about her behaviour when the 'quest was held. Things lay on her nerves at that time so, that off and on she hardly seemed to know where she was, or how dooty lay to her. Not that she is at all selfish, if you please to understand me—no more selfish than I myself be, or any one of us here present. But ladies requires allowance; and it makes me have a pain to think of it. You could not expect her—could

you now?—to go through it, as if she was a man; or rather, I should say, a gentleman."

"Of course we could not," answered Overshute; and the Carrier began to think, why not.

"However, she did go through it," said Mary, "as well as the very best man could have done. She covered her feelings, as you might say, with a pint pot, or with less than that."

"With a wine-glass of brandy, I did heer tell," said Master Cripps inquiringly.

"No, no; that was a shocking story. It makes me ashamed of the place as we live in whenever I heer such scandalies!"

"Miss Mary, my dear, I beg your pardon. Lord knows I only say what I heers! Take a little drop, Miss, and go on."

"It makes one afeared to touch a drop of most hinnocent mixture as ever was," continued poor Mary, after one good gulp; "and at the same time most respectable waters—when people as never had opportunity of forming no judgment

about them—people as only can spit out their tongues at them as have some good taste in theirn, when such folk—for people they are not—dareth to go forth to say—— But I see you are laughing at me, your Worship; and perhaps I well deserve it, sir. It is no place of mine to convarse of such subjects—me who never deals with 'em! But, one way or other, that good lady (as, barring her way with her servants, she is, which our good master have many a time, up and given it to her about), well, this very day, sir, in she come when I was a-doing of my morning doos—every bit as partiklar, sir, as if I had a mistress over me; and she say to me, 'Mary Hookham!' and I says 'Yes, ma'am; at your service.' And she ask me without any more to do—the just words I cannot now call to mind—for to send at once, without troubling poor master, to fetch they stockings as was put by, to the period of the coroner's 'quest. Poor master have never been allowed to see them, no

more has none of us, sir; for fear of setting on foot some allowance of vulgar curiosity. And all of us is not above it, I know; but that is a natteral error in places where few has had much eddication."

"I don't hold much with that there eddication," cried the Carrier rather gloomily. "A may suit some people, but not many. They puts it on 'em all alike wi'out trial of constitootion. Some goes better for it; but most volk worse."

"Well, you know best, Mr. Cripps, of course. Up and down the road as you be, every door give you a hinstance. His Worship is all for eddication; and no one need swaller it, unless they likes. But pretty well schooled as I have been, sir, I looks down on no one. And now, when master's sister made that sudden call upon me, I assure you, sir, and Master Cripps, and Miss Esther in the corner there, the very first thing as I longed for was more knowledge of the ways of the kingdom. More sense, I mean,

of where the powers puts the things that have been called up and laid at the feet of the law-courts. They stockings was more lost to me, than gone to be washed by the gipsies.

"It never would have done for me to say that much to Mrs. Fermitage. She would have been out in a wrath at once, for she is not sweet like master; so I gave her all 'yes' instead of 'why' or 'how,' as we do to quick-tempered gentlefolk. And then I ran away to ask my mother, and she no more than laughed at me. 'You silly child,' says mother, quite as if there had never been a fool till now; 'when the law getteth hold of a thing, there be only two places for to find it in.' 'Two places, mother! What two places?' said I, without construction. 'Why, the right-hand or the left-hand pocket of a lawyer's breeches,' mother answered, just as if she had served all her time with a tailor. Now, don't laugh, Mr. Overshute; it is true, every word as I tell you."

"Ay, that her be," cried Cripps, with a smack of one hand on the other. "Your mother is a wonderful woman for truth and sense, my deary."

"Well, well," replied Mary, with a broad knowing smile, as much as to say, "You had better try her;" "at her time of life her ought to be, if ever they seek to attain it. So I acted according to mother's directions, letting her always speak foremost. And between us we got Master Kale to go, on his legs, all the way to Oxford with the hope of a lift back with you, Master Cripps; but, late as you was, he were later. He carried a letter from Mrs. Fermitage, couched in the thirtieth person, to Mrs. Luke Sharp of Cross-Duck House, the very one as sent that good book back. Master's sister have felt below contempt towards her since that time, and in dignity could do no otherwise. And now she put it short and sharp, as no less could be expected—and word for word can I say of it—

"'Mrs. Fermitage has the honour of pre-

senting her compliments to Mrs. Sharp, and begs to express her surprise at the strange retention by Mrs. S. of a pair of valuable silk stockings, which are the property of Mrs. F. If they are not in use, it is begged that they may be returned by the bearer.—Postscript: Mrs. F. takes this opportunity of acknowledging the return of a book, which, being filled only with the word of God, was perhaps of less practical value to Mrs. S. than silk stockings appear to be.'

"'That will fetch them,' said my mother; 'if they be in the house, that will fetch them, ma'am. No lady could stand against them inawindows.' And, sure enough, back they come by Mr. Kale, about an hour after you left our house, sir. It seems that Mr. Luke Sharp was gone to dine with the Corporation, or likely they never would have come at all. And they never would have come at all, because Mrs. Sharp could not have found them, if it hadn't

been that Master Sharp, the boy they think such wonders of, just happened to come in from shooting, where the whole of his time he spends. He found his mother in the hystrikes of a heart too full for tears, as she expressed it bootifully to both cook and housemaid; and they pointed to the letter, and he read it; and he were that put out, that Master Kale, seeing the two big barrels of his gun, were touched in his conscience, and ran away and got under the mangle. What happened then, he were afeard to be sure of; but the cook and the housemaid brought him out, and they locked him in, to eat a bit, which he did with trembles of thankfulness. And, almost afore he had licked his knife as clean as he like to leave it, that wicked young man he kicked open the door, and flung a parcel at him.

"'Tell your d—d missus,' he says—your Worship, I hopes no offence to the statues—'tell her,' he says, 'that her rubbish is there! And

add, without no compliments, that a lady of her birth should a' known better than to insult another lady so!'"

"Well done, Kit Sharp!" exclaimed Overshute. "I rather admire him for that. Not that he ought to have sworn so, of course. But I like a young fellow to get in a rage when he thinks that his mother is trampled on."

"Then you might a' been satisfied with him, sir. In a rage he were, and no mistake! So much so that our Mr. Kale made off by the quickest door out of the premises. But the cook, she ran after him out to the steps, when there was the corners between them, and she begged him not to give a bad account, but to put a Christian turn to it. And she told poor Tummuss that she had a manner of doing veal fit to suprise him; and if he could drop in on Sunday week, he might go home the wiser. The Lord knows how she hit so quick upon his bad propensities; for he do pay attention to

his victuals, whatever his other feelings be. However, away he come at last; and I doubt if he goeth in a hurry again.

"Of course he knowed better than give the broken handles of his message. It is only the boys and the girls does that, for the pleasure of vexing their betters. Master Kale sent his parcel in by me, together with Mrs. Sharp's compliments; leaving the truth in the kitchen to strengthen, and follow to the parlour, as the cat comes in. And so master's sister, she put out her hand all covered with rings, and no shaking; and I makes my best entry just like this, excusing your presence, Mr. Russel, sir; and she nod to me pleasantly, and take it. 'Mary, you may go,' she said; and for sure, I am not one of those who linger.

"There happened, however, to be a new candle full of thieves and guttering; and being opposite a looking-glass made it more reproachful. So back I turned by the corner of a

screen, for to right it without disturbance. I had no more idea, bless you, Master Cripps, of cooriosity, than might have happened to yourself, sir! But I pulled a pair of scissors out of my pocket, no snuffers being handy; and then I heer'd a most sad groan.

"To my heart it went, like a clap of thunder, having almost expected it, which made it worse; and back I ran to do my dooty, if afforded rightly. And sure enough there was poor Mrs. Fermitage afell back well into the long-backed chair, with her legs out straight, and her hands to her forehead, and a pair of gray stockings laid naked on her lap! 'Is it they things, ma'am? Is it they?' I asked, and she put up her chin to acknowledge it. By the way they were lying upon her lap, I was sure that she was vexed with them. 'Oh, Mary,' she cried out; 'oh, Mary Hookham, I am both as foolish and a wicked woman, if ever in the world there was one!'

"So deeply was I shocked by this, master's own sister, and a mint of money, going the wrong way to kingdom come — that I give her both ends of the smelling-bottle, open, and running on her velvet gown, as innocent as possible. 'Oh, you wicked, wicked girl!' she says, coming round, before I could stop; 'do you know what it cost a yard, you minx?'

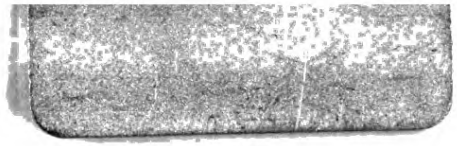
"This gave me good hopes of her, being so natteral. Twice the price comes always into ladies' minds, when damage is; if anybody can be made to pay. But it did not become me to speak one word, as you see, Mr. Russel, and Master Cripps. And there was my reward at once.

"'I must have a magistrate,' she cries; 'a independent justice of the peace. Not my poor brother—too much of him already. Where is that boy Overshute?' she says, saving, of course, your Worship's presence. 'I heered

he were gone to that low carrier's. Mary, run and fetch him!'"

"My brother to be called a low carrier!" young Esther exclaimed, with her hand on her heart. "What carrier is to compare with him?"

"Never you mind, cheel," answered Cripps, with a smile that shone like a warming-pan; "the womens may say what they pleases on me, so long as I does my dooty by 'em. Squaze the lemon for his Worship, afore un goeth."

END OF VOL. I.

LONDON: PRINTED BY WILLIAM CLOWES AND SONS, STAMFORD STREET AND CHARING CROSS.