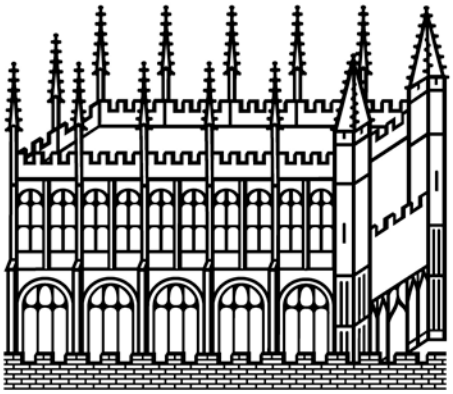

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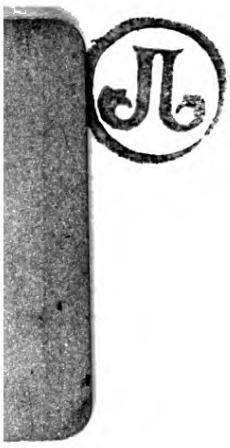

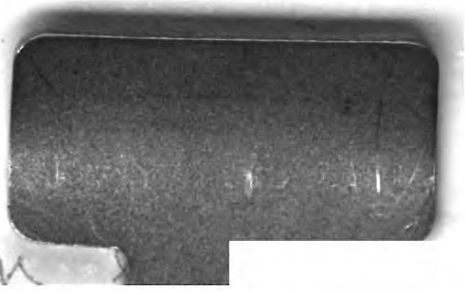

Johnson

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. III.

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CRIPPS, THE CARRIER.

CHAPTER I.

LET ME OUT.

At about the same hour of that Sunday afternoon, Miss Patch sat alone in her little cottage, stubbornly reasoning with herself. She was growing rather weary of her task, which had been a long and heavy one; a great deal longer, and a great deal heavier, than she ever could have dreamed at the outset. It was for the sake of the kingdom of heaven that she had laid her hand to this plough; and now it seemed likely to be a "plough," in the sense in which that word is lightly used by undergraduates.

For public opinion Miss Patch cared nothing. Her view of the world was purely and precisely "Scriptural," according to her own interpretation. Any line of action was especially recommended to her, by the certainty that "the world" would condemn it. She had led a life of misery with her father, the gambling captain, the man of fashion, who made slaves of his children; and being already of a narrow gauge of mind, she laid herself out for theology; not true religion, but enough to please her, and make her sure that she was always right.

Grace, being truly of a docile nature, and most unsuspicious (as her father was before her), had implicit faith in the truth and honour of her good Aunt Patch. She looked upon her as so devoutly pious and grandly upright, that any idea of fraud on her part seemed almost profanity. She believed the good lady to be acting wholly under the guidance of her own father, and as his representative; in which there

seemed nothing either strained or strange, especially as the Squire had once placed his daughter in the charge of Miss Patch, for a course of Scriptural and historical reading. And the first misgiving in the poor girl's mind arose from what Christopher Sharp had told her. Of pining and lonely weariness, weeks and weeks she had endured, under the firm belief that her father was compelled to have it so, and in the hope of the glorious time when he should come to take her home. For all that she could see good reason—according to what she had been told—but she could see no reason whatever why Miss Patch should have told her falsehoods as to the place in which they lived. Having been challenged upon this subject by her indignant niece, the elderly lady now sat thinking. She was as firmly convinced as ever, that in all she had done, she had acted strictly and purely for the glory of the Lord. Grace, a great heiress, and a silly girl, was at the point

of being snapped up by the papists, and made one of them; whereupon both an immortal soul and £150,000 would be devoted to perdition. Of this Miss Patch had been thoroughly assured before she would give her help at all. It was well known that Russel Overshute loved and would win Grace Oglander, and that Russel's dearest friend was Hardenow of Brasenose, and that Hardenow was the deepest Jesuit ever admitted to holy orders in the Church of England; therefore, at heart, Russel Overshute must be a papist of the deepest dye; and anybody with half an eye could see through that conspiracy. To defeat such a scheme, Miss Patch would have promised to spend six months in a hollow tree; but promise and performance are a "very different pair of shoes;" and the lady (though fed, like a woodpecker, on the choicest of all sylvan food) even now, in four months' time, was tiring of her martyrdom.

Her cottage in a wood had long been growing loathsome to her. The deeds of the Lord she admired greatly, when they were homicidal; but of His large and kindly works she had no congenial liking. The fluttering spread of leaves, that hang like tips of empty gloves one day, and after one kind night lift forth (like the hand of a baby with his mind made up), and the change of colour all under the trees, whether the ground be grassed or naked; also the delicate sliding of the light in and out the peeling wands of brushwood, and flat upon the lichened stones, and even in the coarsest hour of the day—which generally is from 1 to 2 p.m., when all mankind are dining — the quiet spread and receptive width of growth that has to catch its light—for none of these pretty little scenes did Miss Patch care so much as half a patch. And she was sure that they gave her the rheumatism.

She was longing to be in London now, to

sit beneath the noble eloquence of preachers and orators most divine, who spend the prime of the year in reviling their friends and extolling the negro. Whereas for weeks and weeks, in this ungodly forest, she had no chance of receiving any spiritual ministration; save once, when Tickuss, on a Sunday morning, had driven her in his pig-cart to a little Wesleyan chapel some three miles off at the end of a hamlet. Here people stared at her so, and asked such questions, that she durst not go again; and, indeed, the pleasure was not worth the risk, for the shoemaker who preached was a thoroughly quiet, ungifted man, without an evil word for anybody.

Not only these large regrets and yearnings were thronging upon this lady now, but also a small although feminine feeling of desire for support and guidance. Strong-minded as she was, and conscious of her lofty mission, from time to time she grew faint-hearted in that

dreary solitude, without the encouragement of the cool male will. This for some days she had not received, and she knew not why it had failed her.

Though the afternoon was so bright with temptation, and the wood so rich with wonders, Miss Patch preferred to nurse her knee by the little fire in her parlour. She had always hated to be out of doors, and to see too much of things which did not bear out her opinions, and to lose that clear knowledge of the will of the Lord which is lost by those who study Him. She loved to discern in everything that happened to her liking "the grand and infinite potentiality of an all-wise Providence;" and, if a little thing went amiss, she laid all the blame to the badly-principled interference of the devil.

While she was deeply pondering thus, and warming her little teapot, in ran the beautiful and lively girl, who had long been growing too

much for her. It was not only the brighter spring of young life in this Gracie, and her pretty ways, and nice surprises, and pleasure in pleasing others, and graceful turns of cookery, but also her pure fount of loving-kindness which (having no other way out) was obliged to steal around Miss Patch herself. Although she had been ill-content with the only explanation she could get about her dwelling-place—to wit, that in these roadless parts distance was very much a matter of conjecture—Grace had no suspicion yet of any plot or conspiracy. All things had been planned so deeply, and carried out so cleverly, that any such suspicion would have been contrary to her nature. She had lost, by some unaccountable carelessness, both the note from her father, which she had received at her Aunt Joan's, and also his more important letter delivered to her, when she met the chaise, by her kind and pious "Aunty Patch." In the first note (delivered by

a little boy) she had simply been called forth to meet her father in the lane, and to walk home with him, as he wished to speak with her by herself. She was not to wait to pack any o her clothes, as they would be sent for afterwards; and he hoped her Aunt Joan would excuse his deferring their little dinner for the present.

But when, instead of meeting him, she found the chaise with Miss Patch inside it, and was invited to step in, a real letter was handed to her, the whole of which in the waning light —the day being very brown and gloomy— she could not easily make out. But she learned enough to see that she was to place herself under the care of Miss Patch, and not expect to see her dear father for at least some weeks to come. Her hair, for the reason therein given, was to be cut off at once, and not even kept in the carriage; and the poor girl submitted, with a few low sobs, to the loss of

her beautiful bright tresses. But what were they? How small and selfish of her to think twice of them in the presence of the heavy trouble threatening her dear father, and the anguish of losing him for so long, without even so much as a kiss of farewell! For, after his first brief scrawl, he had found that, by starting at once, he could catch at Falmouth the packet for Demerara, and thus save a fortnight in getting to his estates, which were threatened with ruin. If these should be lost to him, Gracie knew (as he had no secrets from her) that half his income would go at one sweep—which, for his own sake, would matter little; but, for the sake of his darling, must, if possible, be prevented.

He had no time now for another word, except that he had left his house at Beckley, just as it stood, to be let by his agent, to cover the expenses of this long voyage, and to get him out of two difficulties. He could not have left his dear child there alone; and, if he could,

he would not have done so, for a most virulent fever had long been hanging about, and had now broken out hard by; and Dr. Splinters had strictly ordered, the moment he heard of it, that the dear child's hair should be cropped to her head, and burned or cast away, for nothing harboured infection as hair did. With a few words of blessing, and comfort, and love, and a promise to write from Demerara, and a fatherly hope that for his sake she would submit to Miss Patch in all things, and make the most of this opportunity for completing her course of Scriptural and historical reading, the dear old father had signed himself her "loving papa, W. O."

Grace would have been a very different girl from her own frank self, if she had even dreamed of suspecting the genuineness of this letter. It was in her father's crabbed, and upright, and queerly-jointed hand, from the first line to the last. For a moment, indeed, she

had been surprised that he called himself her "papa," because he did not like the word, and thought it a piece of the foreign stuff, which had better continue to be foreign. But there stood the word; and in his hurry how could he stop to such trifles? This letter had been lost; poor Grace could not imagine how, because she had taken such great care of it, and had slept with it under her pillow always. Nevertheless, it had disappeared, leaving tears of self-reproach in her downcast eyes, as she searched the wood for it. And this made her careful tenfold of the two letters she had received from George-town.

But now, as she came with her Sunday hat on, and her pretty Woodstock gloves, and her neat brown skirt looped up (for challenge of briers, and furze, and dog-rose), and, best of all, with the bloom on her cheeks, and the sparkle in her clear soft eyes, and the May sun making glory in her rolling clouds of new-grown hair —and, better than best, that smile of the heart

filling the whole young face with light—she really looked as if it would be impossible to say "no" to her.

"Aunty," she began, "it is quite an age since you have let me have a walk at all. One would think that I wanted to run away with that very smart young gentleman, who possesses and exhibits that extremely lustrous riding-whip. If he has only got a horse to match it—what is the name, dear Aunty, of that inestimable historical jewel that somebody stole out of somebody's eye?"

"Grace, will you never remember anything? It is now called the Orloff, or Schaffras gem, and is set in the Russian sceptre."

"Then that must be the name of this gentleman's horse, to enable it to go with such a whip. Dear Aunty now, even that whip will not tempt me or move me to run away from you. Only do please to allow me forth. This horrid little garden is so shaded and sour, that even a daisy

cannot live. But in the wood I find all things lovely. May I have a run for only half an hour?"

"Upon one condition," replied Miss Patch; "that if you see any one, you shall come back at once, and let me know."

"What, even the fat man with the flapped hat and the smock on? I never go out without seeing him, though he never seems to see me at all. He must be very short-sighted."

"Oh no, my dear; never mind that poor man; he looks after the cattle or something. What I mean is, any young gentleman, who ought to be at home on the Sabbath day. And wrestle with your natural frivolity, my dear, that no worldly thoughts may assault and hurt the soul upon this holy day."

"I will do my best, Aunty. But how can I help thinking of the things I see?"

Miss Patch having less than any faith in unregenerate human nature, feared that she

might have been wrong in allowing even this limited freedom to Grace. The truth of it was that, without fresh guidance from a mind far deeper than her own, she could not see the right thing to do in the new complication arising. The interviews between Kit Sharp and Grace were the very thing desired, and surely must have led to something good, which ought to be carefully followed up. And yet, if she met him again, she would be quite sure to go on with her questions; and Kit, being purely outside of the plot, would reply with the most inconvenient truth. Miss Patch had written, as promptly as could be, to ask what she ought to do in this crisis. But no answer had come through the trusty Tickuss, nor any well-provided visit. The Christian-minded lady could not tell at all what to make of it. Then, calling to mind the sacredness of the day, she dismissed the subject, and sternly rebuked deaf Margery Daw for not keeping the kettle boiling.

CHAPTER II.

REASON AND UNREASON.

WHEN things were in this very ticklish condition almost everywhere, and even Cripps himself could scarcely sleep because of rumours, and Dobbin in his own clean stable found the flies too many for him, an exceedingly active man set out to scour the whole of the neighbourhood. To the large and vigorous mind of the Rev. Thomas Hardenow, the worst of all sins (because the most tempting and universal) was indolence.

Hardenow never condemned a poor man for having his pint or his quart of ale (with his better half to help him), when he had earned

it by a hard day's work, and had fed his children likewise. Hardenow thought it not easy to find any hypocrisy more bald or any morality more cheap that that or those which strut about, reviling the poor man for taking, in the cheaper liquid form, the nourishment which "his betters" can afford to have in the shape of meat; and then are not content with it, unless it is curdled with some duly sour vintage. And, passing such crucial points of debate, Hardenow always could make allowance for any sins rather than those which spring from a treacherous, sneaking, and lying essence.

Now, a council was held at the Grange of Shotover on the Monday. A sad and melancholy house it was, with its fine old mistress lately buried, and its poor young master only half recovered. The young tutor had been especially invited, and having heard everything from the Squire (who was proud of having ridden so far, yet broke down ridiculously

among his boasts), and from Russel Overshute (who had thrown himself back for at least three days by excitement and exertion yesterday), and also from Mrs. Fermitage (who had lately been feeling herself overlooked), Hardenow thought for some little time before he would give his opinion. Not that he was, by any manner of means, possessed with the greatness of his own ideas; but that Mrs. Fermitage, from a low velvet chair, looked up at him with such emphatic inquiry and implicit faith, that he was quite in a difficulty how to speak, or what to say.

And so he said a very few short words of sympathy and of kindness, and gladly offered to do his best, and obey the orders given him; so far, at least, as his duty to his college and pupils permitted. He confessed that he had thought of this matter many times before he was invited to do so, and without the knowledge which he now possessed, or the special interest

in the subject which he now must feel for the sake of Russel. But Mrs. Fermitage, filled with respect for the wisdom of a fellow and tutor of a college, would not let Hardenow thus escape; and being compelled to give his opinion, he did so with his usual clearness.

"I am not at all a man of the world," he said; "and of the law I know nothing. My friend Russel is a man of the world, and knows a good deal of the law as well. A word from him is worth many of mine. But if Mrs. Fermitage insists upon having my crude ideas, they are these. First of the first, and by far the most important—I believe that Miss Oglander is alive, and that her father will receive her safe and sound, though not perhaps still Miss Oglander."

"God bless you, my dear sir!" the Squire broke in, getting up to lay hold of the young man's hand. "I don't care a straw what her name may be—Snooks, or Snobbs, or Higgin-

botham—if I only get sight of my darling child again!"

Russel Overshute looked rather queer at this, and so did Mrs. Fermitage; but the Squire continued in the same sort of way—"What odds about her name, if it only is my Grace?"

"Exactly so," replied Hardenow; "that natural feeling of yours perhaps has been foreseen and counted on; and that may be why such trouble was taken to terrify you with the idea of her death. Also, of course, that would paralyze your search, while the villains are at leisure to complete their work."

"I declare, I never thought of that," cried Russel. "How extremely thick-headed of me! That theory accounts for a number of things that cannot be otherwise explained. What a head you have got, my dear Tom, to be sure!"

"I wish I could believe it!" Mr. Oglander exclaimed, while his sister clasped her fair fat hands, and looked with amazement at every

one. "But I see no motive, no motive whatever. My Grace was a dear good girl, as everybody knows, and a fortune in herself; but of worldly goods she had very little, any more than I have; and her prospects were naturally contingent — contingent upon many things, which may not come to pass, I hope, for many years—if they ever do." Here he looked at his sister, and she said, "I hope so." "Therefore," continued Mr. Oglander, "while there are so many fine girls in the county, very much better worth carrying off—so far as mere worthless pelf is concerned—why should anybody steal my Grace unless they stole her for her own sake?"

Here the Squire sat down, and took to drumming with his stick. His feelings were hurt at the idea—though it was so entirely of his own origination — that his daughter had been carried off for the sake of her money, not of her own dear self. Hardenow looked at

him and made no answer. He felt that it did not behove a mere stranger to ask about the young lady's expectations; while Overshute was more imperatively silenced by his relations towards the family. But Mrs. Fermitage came to the rescue. Great was her faith in the value of money, and she liked to have it known that she had plenty.

"Tut, tut," she cried, shaking out her new brocaded silk—a mourning dress certainly, but softly trimmed with purple—"why should we make any mystery of things, when the truth is most important? And the truth is, Mr. Hard-enow, that my dear niece had very good expectations. My deeply lamented husband, respected, and I may say reverenced, for upwards of half a century, in every college of Oxford, and even more so by the corporation, for the pure integrity of his character, the loftiness of his principles, and—and the substance of his —what they make the wine of—he was not the

man, Mr. Hardenow, to leave a devoted wife behind him, who had stepped perhaps out of her rank a little, not being of commercial birth, you know, but never found cause to regret it, without some provision for the earthly time which she, being many years his junior——"

"Come, come, Joan, not so very many," exclaimed the truthful Squire; "about five, or say six, at the utmost. You were born on the 25th of June, A.D.——"

"Worth, I was not asking you for statistics. Mr. Hardenow, you will excuse my brother. He has always had a rude style of interruption; he learned it, I believe, in the army, and we always make allowance for it. But to go back to what I was saying—my good, and ever to be lamented husband, being, let us say, ten years my senior—Worth, will that content you?—left every farthing of his property to me; and a good husband always does the same thing, I am told, and I believe they are ordered in the Bible;

and, of course, I have no one to leave it to but Grace; and being so extraordinarily advanced in years, as my dear brother has impressed upon you, they could not have any very long time to wait; and my desire is to do my duty; and perhaps that lies at the bottom of it all."

After relieving her mind in this succinct yet copious manner, the good lady went into her chair again, carefully directing, in whatever state of mind, the gathering and the falling of her dress aright. And though it might be fancied that her colour had been high, anybody now could see that her dignity had conquered it.

"Now, the whole of this goes for next to nothing," said the Squire, while the young men looked at one another, and longed to be out of the way of it. "As we have got into the subject, let us go right down to the bottom of it. What are filthy pence and halfpence, or a cellar, like Balak's, of silver and gold, when compared with the life of one pure dear soul?

I may not express myself theologically, but you can see what I mean exactly. I mean that I would kick old Port-wine's dross to the bottom of the Red Sea, where Pharaoh lies, if it turns out that that has killed my child, or made her this long time dead to me."

Having justified his feelings thus, the old man stood up, and went to the window, to look for his horse. The very last thing he desired always was to let out what he felt too much. But to hear that old thief of a "Port-wine Fermitage" praised, and his lucre put forward, quite as if it were an equivalent for Grace, and to think that he owed to that filthy cause the loss of the liveliest, loveliest darling, without whom he had neither life nor love—such things were enough to break the balance of his patience; and the rest might think them out amongst them.

Now, this might have made a very serious to-do between Mr. Oglander and his sister

Joan, both of them being of the stiff-necked order; if he had been allowed to ride away like this. Mrs. Fermitage had her great carriage in the yard, and two black horses with wide valleys down their backs, rattling rings of the brightest brass, while they stood in the stable with a bail between them, and gently deigned to blow the chaff off from the oats of Shotover. This goodly pair made a great rush now into the mind of their mistress —the only sort of rush they ever made—and seeing her brother in that state of mind to get away from her, she became inspired with an equal desire to get away from him.

"Will you kindly ring the bell," she said, "and order my horses to be put to? I think I have quite said every word I had to say. And being the only lady present, of course I labour under some—well, some little disadvantages. Not, of course, that I mean for a moment——"

"To be sure not, Joan! You never do know

what you mean. You would be a very nasty woman if you did. Now, do let us turn our minds the pleasant way to everything. If any word has come from me to lead to strong kind of argument, I beg pardon of everybody; and then there ought to be an end of it."

Mrs. Fermitage scarcely knew what to say, but in a relenting way looked round, for some one to take it up for her. And she was not long without somebody.

"Mr. Oglander," said Russel Overshute, "you really ought to give us time to think. You are growing so hasty, sir, since you came back to your seat in the saddle, and your cross-country ways, that you want to ride over every one of us—ladies and gentlemen, all alike."

The old Squire laughed, he could not help it, at the thought of his own effrontery. He felt that there might be some truth about it, ever since it had come into his mind that he might not after all be childless. He would not have

any one know, for a thousand pounds, why he was laughing; or that half another word might turn it into weeping. He had seen it proved in learned books that no man knew the way to weep at his time of life; and if his own case went against it, he had the manners to be ashamed of it. So he waited till he felt that his face was right, and then he went up to his sister Joan, who was growing uneasy about her own words; and he took her two plump hands in his, and gave a glance, for all there present to be welcome witnesses. And then, having knowledge for the last ten years how much too fat she was to lift, he managed to kiss her in the two right places, disarranging nothing.

His sister looked up at him, as soon as he had done it, with a sense of his propriety and study of her harmonies; and she whispered to him quietly, "I beg your pardon, brother." And he spoke up for all to hear him, "Joan, my dear, I beg your pardon."

"Now, the first thing to be done," said Hardenow, "is to find Cinnaminta, and her husband Smith. But allow me to make one important request, that even your adviser, Mr. Luke Sharp, shall not be informed of what has passed to-day, or what Overshute found out yesterday."

With some little surprise they agreed to this.

CHAPTER III.

MEETING THE COACH.

THERE happened, however, to be some one else, whose opinion differed very widely from that of Mr. Hardenow, as to the necessity for any prompt appearance of either Mr. or Mrs. Joseph Smith.

The old red house in Cross Duck Lane was ready to jump out of its windows—if such a feat be possible—with eagerness and anxiety at the long absence of its master. Mr. Luke Sharp had not crossed his own threshold for ten whole days, including two Sundays, when even an attorney may give leg-bail to the

Power under whose "Ca. ad sa." he lives. The business of the noble firm of Piper, Pepper, Sharp, & Co. was falling sadly into arrears, at the very busiest time of year; for Mr. Sharp had always kept his very best clerks in leading strings; and Kit thus far, with his mother's aid, had battled against all articles. Christopher Fermitage Sharp, Esq., was resolved to be a country gentleman, and a sportsman, and no quill-driver; he felt that his arms, and legs as well, were a great deal too good for going on and under desk.

With fine resignation Kit accepted the absence of his father. With his father away, he was a very great man; with his father at home, he was quite a small boy. He liked to play master of a house, and frighten his mother and the maids; and vow to dine at the Mitre all the rest of the week—if that was their style of cookery!

But poor Mrs. Sharp could not treat the

matter thus. Truly delighted as she was to see her dear boy take his father's place, and conduct himself with dignity as the head of the household, and find fault with things of which he knew nothing, and order this, that, and the other away—still she could not help remembering that all this was not as it ought to be. Christopher ought to have been in tortures of intense anxiety; and, so far as that went, so ought she; and she really tried very hard not to sleep, and to sit up listening for the night-bell. But a man who thinks everything of his own will, and nothing of any other person's wish, may be pretty sure that none will miss his presence so much as himself does.

In spite of all that, Mrs. Sharp was anxious, and so were the rest of the household—though rather perhaps with care than love—at the long, unaccountable absence of the head and the brain of everything. Even the boys in Cross Duck Lane, who had a strong idea that

Lawyer Sharp would defend them against the magistrates, were beginning to feel that they must look out before throwing stones at any other boys.

"You are not at all the thing, my darling boy," said Mrs. Sharp to Christopher, on the evening of that same Monday on which the council had been held at Shotover; "your want of appetite makes me wretched. Now, put on your cloak, my pet, and go as far as Carfax, or Magdalen Bridge. The two evening coaches will soon be in—the 'Defiance' and the 'Regulator.' I have a strong idea that your father will come by one or other of them."

"I may just as well go there as anywhere else," the young man answered gloomily. For some days now he had striven in vain for an interview with his charmer; and, most unkindest cut of all, he had spied her once, and she had run away. "It does not matter where I go."

"When you talk like that, dear child, you have no idea what you do. You simply break the heart of your poor mother—and much you care for that! Now, if you should see any very fresh calves' sweet-breads, or even a pig's fry, or anything you fancy, order it in, dear, at once; and be sure that you are at home by nine o'clock; and bring your dear papa with you, if you can."

Kit, with a sigh and a roll of his eyes, flung his cloak around him; and with long, slow, melancholy strides clomb the arduous steep of Carfax. Here at that time—if any faith there be to bruit of veterans—eighty well-equipped quadrigæ daily passed with prance of steeds and sound of classic trump, and often youthful charioteer, more apt to handle than win ribbons. Forty chariots came from smoke, and wealth, and din of blessed Rome; and other forty sped them back, with the glory and mud of the country divine.

The moody Kit ensconced himself, away from the tramp of the vulgar crowd, in the beetling doorway of a tailor who had put his shutters up; and thrice being challenged by proctors velvet-sleeved, and velvet-selvaged Pro—"Sir, are you a member of this university?"—thrice had the pleasure of answering "No!" Once and again he wiped his hectic cheek and fevered brow with a yellow bandana, from which the winner of last year's Derby was washing out; and he saw the "Defiance" and the "Regulator" pass, newly horsed from rival inns, exalting their horns against one another, with splinter-bars swinging behind cocked tails, all eager for their race upon the Cheltenham road. But he saw not the author of his existence; yet no tear bedewed his unfilial eye, though these were the likeliest coaches.

"All right," he said, putting his pipe in its case; "governor won't come home to-night.

I'm in no hurry, if he isn't. I think I'll have sheep's trotters. It's a beastly time of the year for anything." Twitching his cloak, which had two long tassels, he strode, from his post of observation and morbid meditation, towards a tidy and clean little tripe-shop. He knew the old woman who kept it, in George Street; and she always put him into good condition, by generous admiration.

Alas! he had stridden but a very few strides, when he met the up-coach from Woodstock, wearily with spent horses making rally for the Star. The driver (a man of fine family at Christchurch, now in his seventh term, and fighting off his "smalls"), with a turn of his strong arm, pulled the team together, while with the other hand he launched a scouring flourish of the shrill scourge over every blessed horse's ears.

"Well done, my lord!" said the gentleman on the box, as the four horses pulled up foot

for foot, and stood with their ears and their noses one for one; "you have brought them up in noble style, my lord. I never saw it done more perfectly."

My lord touched his white hat, and said nothing. He had crowned his day, as he always loved to crown it; and now, if he could get into a back room of the Star, pull off his top-boots and cape, and don cap and gown, and fetch back to college clear of £5 fine—as happy as any lord would he be, till nature sent him forth to drive again to-morrow.

But Kit, having very keen ears, had recognised, even from the other side of the street, the sound of his dear father's voice. Mr. Luke Sharp never missed a chance of commending a nobleman's exploits; but he would not have spoken in so loud a tone perhaps, if he had known that his son was near at hand. For he hated, with a consistent hatred—whether he were doing well or ill—all observation of

his movements by any member of his household. Christopher, being well aware of this, pursued his own course in the shadow, but resolved, with filial piety, to keep his good father in sight, for fear of his falling into any mischief.

First of all, Mr. Sharp—as observed at a respectful distance by his son—went into the coach office, and there left his hand-bag and his travelling coat; then, carrying something rolled under his arm, he betook himself to a little quiet tap-room, and called for something that loomed and steamed afar, very much after the manner of hot brown grog.

"Ho, ho!" muttered Kit; "then he isn't going home. My duty to the household commands me to learn why."

With a smack of his lips, Mr. Sharp the elder came out into Corn-Market Street again, and, turning his back on his home, set forth at a rapid pace for the broad desert of St. Giles. Here

he passed into an unlit alley, in the lonely parts beyond St. John's ; and Kit, full of wonder, was about to follow, but hung back as the receding figure suddenly stopped and began to shift about. In a nice dark place, the learned gentleman unrolled the travelling-rug he had been carrying, undoubled it, after that, from some selvage—and, lo, there was a city watchman's large loose overall ! Then he pressed down the crown of his black spring-hat, till it lay on his head like a pancake, pulled the pouch of his long cloak over that, and emerged from his alley with a vigilant slouch, whistling " Moll Maloney." Considerable surprise found its way into the candid mind of Christopher.

" Well now ! " thought the ungrateful youth, as he shrank behind a tree to peep ; " I always knew that the governor was a notch or two too deep for us ; but what he is up to now surpasses all experience of him. What shall I do ? It seems so nasty to go spying after him. And

yet things are taking such a very strange turn, that, for the sake of my mother, who is worth a thousand of him, I do believe I am bound to see what this strange go may lead to."

Young curiosity sprang forth, and strongly backed up his sense of duty; insomuch that Kit, after hesitating and listening for any other step, stealthily followed the "author of his existence" across the dark and dusty road. "He is going to Squeaker Smith's," thought the lad; "he will get a horse, and ride away, no end; and of course I can never go after him. I am sure it has something to do with me. Such troubles are enough to drive one mad."

But Mr. Sharp did not turn in at the lamp-lit entrance to those mews. He shunned the beaming oil, which threw barred shadows upon sawdust of a fine device, and, keeping all his merits in the dark, strode on, like a watchman newly ordered to his post. Then suddenly he turned down a narrow unmade lane, hillocked

with clay, and leading (as Christopher knew quite well) to the wildest part of "Jericho."

"I will follow him no further," said Kit Sharp, with a pang of astonishment and doubt; "he is my father; what right have I to pry into his secrets? How I wish that I had not followed him at all! It serves me right for meanness. I will go home now; what care I for anything —trotters, cow-heel, or sweet-bread?"

As he turned, to carry out this good resolve, with a heart that would have ailed him more for leaving fears unfinished, the sound of a clouting, loutish footstep came along the broken mud-banks of the narrow lane. The place was lonely, dark, and villainous: foot-pads still abounded. Kit knew that his father often carried large sums of money, and always the great gold watch; he might have been decoyed here for robbery and murder, upon pretence of secret business; clearly it was the young man's duty not to be too far away. Therefore he drew

back, and stood in the jaws of the dark entrance.

But while he was ready to leap forth if wanted, the sound of quiet voices told him that there was no danger. Kit could not hear the first few words; but his father came back towards the mouth of the lane, as if he would much rather not go into the dark too deeply. Christopher therefore was obliged either to draw back into the hedge, and there lie hid without moving, or else to come forward and declare himself. He knew that the latter was his proper course, or he might have known it, if he had taken time to think; but the dread of his father and the hurry of the moment drove him, without thought, into the lurking-place. It was quite dark now, and there was not a lamp within a furlong of them.

"You quite understand me, then;" Mr. Sharp was speaking in a low clear voice; "you are not to say a word to Cripps about it. He is

true enough to me, because he dare not be otherwise; but he is an arrant coward. I want a man who has the spirit to defy the law, when he knows that he is well backed up."

"Governor, I am your man for that. I have defied the law, since I were that high, with only my mother, in the wukuss, to back me."

"What I mean is, to defy the wrong fashions of the law; the petty rules that go against all common sense and equity."

"All the fashions of the law be wrong. I might a' got on in the world like a house afire, if it hadn't been for the devil's own law. To tell me a thing is agin the law is as good as an eyster to my teeth. Go on, governor, no fear of that, I say."

"And you know where to find, at any moment, a man as resolute as yourself—Joe Smith. Well, you know what you have to do, in case of any sudden stir arising. At present all goes well; but all, at any moment, may go

wrong. Squire Overshute is about again at last—— "

" Ah, if I could only come across of he of a dark night, such as this be—— "

" And that fool Cinnaminta has told him all she knows—which, luckily, is not very much. I took good care to keep women out of it. And the Carrier too has been smelling about—but he hasn't the sense of his own horse. Night and day, George, night and day, keep a look-out, and have the horses ready. You know what I have done for you, my man."

" Governor, if it hadn't been for you, I might a' seed the clouds through a halter loop."

" You speak the truth, and express it well. And you may still enjoy that fair opportunity, unless you attend to every word I say."

" No fear, governor; I know you too well. A good friend and a bad enemy you be. Thick and thin, sir—thick and thin. Agin all the world, sir, I sticks by you."

"Enough for to-night, my man. Get ready and be off. I shall know where to find you, as before. I shall ride over to-morrow, if I find it needful."

With these words, Mr. Luke Sharp set off at a good round pace for Oxford, while the other man shambled and whistled his way homewards up the black-mouthed lane. Perceiving these things, Christopher Sharp, with young bones, leaped from his hiding-place. Astonishment might have been read upon his ingenuous and fat countenance, if the lighting committee of the corporation had carried out their duty. But (having no house of their own out here) they had, far back, put colophon upon the nascent gas-pipe. The ambition of the city, at that time, was to fill all the houses of the citizens, and extend in no direction. But though his countenance, for want of light, only wasted its amazement, Kit—like Hector with his wind-pipe damaged, but not by any means perforated

—gave issue to his sentiments. Unlike Hector —so far as we know—Kit had been forming a habit of using language too strong for ladies.

"Blow me!" was his unheroic exclamation—"blow me, if ever yet I knew so queer a start as this! Sure as eggs is eggs, that is the very blackguard I drubbed for his insolence! His voice is enough, and his snuffle; and I believe he was rubbing his nose in the dark. I am sure he's the man; I could swear it's the man, though I could not see his filthy face at all. My father to be in a conspiracy with him! And poor Cinnaminta, and Mr. Overshute! What the dickens is the meaning of it all? The governor has a thousand times my brains, as everybody says, and I am the last to grudge it to him; and he thinks he can do what he likes with me. I am not quite sure of that, if he puts my pecker up too heavily."

To throw his favourite light on his own reflections, Kit Sharp lit his pipe, and followed

slowly in his father's wake. Wiser, and wider, and brighter men might be found betwixt every two lamp-posts, but few more simple, soft, and gentle than this honest lawyer's son.

CHAPTER IV.

THE MOTIVE.

PERFECTLY free from all suspicions, and as happy as he deserved to be, Mr. Sharp leaned back in his easy chair, after making an excellent supper, and gazed with complacency at his good wife. He was really glad to be at home again, and to find his admiring household safe, and to rest for a while with a quiet brain, as the lord and master of everything. Christopher had been sent to bed, as if he were only ten years old; for instead of exhibiting the proper joy, he had behaved in a very strange and absent manner; and his father, who delighted much in snubbing him sometimes, had requested him to seek his

pillow. Kit had accepted this proposal very gladly, longing as he did to think over, by himself, that strange adventure of the evening.

"Now, darling Luke," began Mrs. Sharp, as soon as she had made her husband quite snug, and provided him with a glass of negus, "you really must be amazed at my unparalleled patience and self-control. You ran away suddenly at the very crisis of a most interesting and momentous tale. And from that day to this I have not had one word; and how to behave to Kit has been a riddle beyond riddles. How I have seen to the dinner—I am sure—and of sleep I have scarcely had fifty winks, between my anxiety about you, and misery at not knowing how the story ended."

"Very well, Miranda, I will tell you all the rest; together with the postscript added since I went to London. Only you must stay up very late, I fear, to get to the proper end of it."

"I will stay till the cocks crow. At least, I mean, dear, if after your long journey, you are really fit for it. If not, I will wait till to-morrow, dear."

Mr. Sharp was touched by his wife's consideration for him. He loved her more than he loved any one else in the world, except himself; and though (like many other clear-headed men) he had small faith in brains feminine, he was not quite certain that he might not get some useful idea out of them when the matter at issue was feminine.

"I am ready, if you are, my dear," he said, for he hated to beat about the bush. "Only I must know where I left off. With all I have done since, I quite forget."

"You left off just when you had discovered the real man who was called 'Jolly Fellows; the man Cousin Fermitage left his will with."

"To be sure! Or at least, it was a codicil. Very well, I found him in the wine-vaults of the

company, where they have been for generations. He was going round with some large and good customer, such as old Fermitage himself had been. Senhor Gelofilos had a link in one hand, and in the other a deep dock-glass, while a man in his shadow bore a flashing gimlet and a long-armed siphon-tap. From cell to cell, and pipe to pipe, they were going in regular order, showing brands, *ex* this, and *ex* that, and making little taps and trying them.

"I was admitted, without a word, as one of this solemn procession, being taken for a member of the sacred trade; and the number of sips of wine I got, and the importance attached to my opinion, would have made you laugh, Miranda. At length I got a chance of speaking alone to Senhor Gelofilos, a tall, dark, gentlemanly man, of grave and dignified manner. He at once remembered that he had received a paper from Mr. Fermitage; of its nature however he knew nothing, not being

acquainted with our legal forms. He had kept it ever since in a box at his house, and if I could call upon him after office hours, he would show it to me with pleasure. Accordingly, I took a hackney-coach to his house near Hampstead in the evening, and found that old 'Port-wine' had not deceived me during our last interview.

"I held in my hand a most important codicil to the old man's will, duly executed and attested, so far at least as could be decided without inquiry. By this codicil he revoked his will thus far, that instead of leaving the residue, after payment of legacies, to his widow absolutely, he left her a life-interest in that residue, after bequeathing the sum of £20,000, duty free, to his niece, Grace Oglander."

"Out of my money, Luke!" cried Mrs. Sharp indignantly. "Twenty thousand pounds out of my money! And what niece of his was she, I should like to know? Was there nothing whatever for his own flesh and blood?"

"Nothing whatever," answered Mr. Sharp calmly. "But wait a bit, Miranda, wait. Well, all the residue of his estate, after the decease of his said wife Joan, was by this codicil absolutely given to his said niece Grace. He said that they both would know why he had made the change. And then the rest of his will was confirmed, as usual."

"I never heard such a thing! I never heard such robbery!" exclaimed Mrs. Sharp, with a panting breast. "I hope you will contest it all, my dear. If there is law in the land, you cannot fail to upset such a vile, vile will! You can show that the fungus got into his brain."

"My dear, it is my object to establish that will, or the codicil rather, which I thus discovered. I am obliged to proceed very carefully, of course; a rash step would ruin everything. Unluckily the executors remain as before, though he would not trust them with the codicil. Well,

one of them, as you know, bought such a lot of port, half-price, at his testator's sale, that in three months he required an executor for himself. The other took warning by his fate, and is going in for claret and the sour Rhenish wines. This has made him as surly as a bear, and he is a most difficult man to manage. But if any one can handle him, I can ; and he has a deadly quarrel with that haughty Joan. I had first ascertained, without any stir, that the attestation is quite correct—two stupid bottle-men, who gave no thought to what they were doing, but can swear to the signing ; and the codicil itself, though 'Port-wine' drew it without any lawyer, is quite clear and good. At the proper moment I produce the codicil, account for my possession of it, go to Mr. Wigginton, and make him prove it ; and then, I think, we turn the tables on the proud old widow."

"Oh, Luke, what a blessed day that would be

for me! The things I have endured from that odious woman! Of course, it will mortify her not to have disposal, and to have to give up £20,000—the miser, the screw, the Expositor hypocrite! The filthy silk stockings I should be ashamed to own! But, darling Luke, I do not see how we ourselves are a bit the better off for it. Poor Grace being dead, of course her father takes the money."

"Suppose, for a moment that, instead of being dead, Grace Oglander is the wedded wife, by that time, of a certain Christopher Fermitage Sharp, and without any settlement!"

"What!" exclaimed Mrs. Sharp, jumping with astonishment. "Is it possible? Is it possible?"

"It is more than possible, it is probable; and without some very bad luck, it is certain!"

"Oh, you darling love!" she very nearly shouted, giving him a hug with her plump white arms. "Oh, Luke, Luke, it is the noblest

thing I ever heard! And she is such a nice girl, too, so sweet, and clever, and superior! The very daughter I would have chosen out of fifty thousand! And with all that money at her back! Why, we can retire, and set up a green barouche! I shall have it lined with the new agate colour, trimmed with deep puce, like the Marchioness of Marston's — that is, if you approve, of course, my dear. And a pair of iron-greys always go the best with that. But, Luke, you will laugh at me for being in a hurry. There is plenty of time, dear, is there not?—though they do say that carriage-builders are so slow. But they think so much of their old family, my dear. I know how very wonderfully managing you are, and as clever as can be consistent with the highest principle. But do tell me, how you have contrived all this so well, and never even let me guess a single whisper of it."

"It has required some tact and skill," Mr.

Sharp replied, with a twinkle in his eyes, and taking a good pull at his port-wine negus; "and even more than that, Miranda, without a bold stroke it could never have been done. I staked almost everything upon the die; not quite everything, for I made all arrangements if we should have to fly."

"Fly, my dear!" cried Mrs. Sharp, looking up with a very different face, "what do you mean, Luke? To have to run away!"

"Quite so. There is no great stroke without great miss. And if I had missed, we must all have bolted suddenly."

"The Lord forbid! Run away in disgrace from my father's own house, and the whole world that knows us! I never could have tried to go through such a trial."

"Yes, my dear Miranda, it might have come to that. And you would have gone through the whole of it, without a single murmur."

"Luke, I positively tremble at you!" the

good woman answered, as her eyes fell under his. "How stern you can look when you want to scare me!"

"Miranda, I tell you the simple truth. We must all have been in France within twelve hours if, if—well, never mind. Nothing venture nothing win. But happily we have won, I believe; though we must not be too sure as yet. We have justice on our side; but justice does not always prevail against petty facts. And public opinion would set against us with great ferocity, if we failed. If we succeed, all men will praise us as soon as we begin to spend our money, and exert it near home at the outset. Everything depends upon success; of course, it always does in everything."

"My dear, it is not fair of you to talk like that," Mrs. Sharp answered, with tears in her eyes; for, in all her kind and ungirt nature, there was no entry for cynicism; "you must feel that I would hold by you always, whatever

all the world might have the impudence to say, dear."

"Beyond a doubt you would. You could do no otherwise. But that might be of very little use. I mean, that it would be the very greatest prop, and comfort, and blessing, and support in every way, and would keep up one's faith, to some extent, in human nature, and divine assistance—but still, if we had to live on three pound ten a week! However, we will not anticipate the worst. You would like to know how the whole thing stands now?"

Mrs. Luke Sharp, although not very clever, and wholly incapable of any plot herself (beyond such little stratagems as ladies do concoct, for fetching down the price of rep, or getting gloves at a quarter of their cost), nevertheless had her share of common sense, and that which generally goes therewith — respect for the opinion of good people. She knew that her husband was a very bold man, as well as a very

strong-willed one; he had often done things which she had thought too daring; and yet they had always turned out well. But what he had now in hand was, even according to his own account, the most risky and perilous venture yet; and though (like the partner of a gambler) she warmed up to back his hand, and cheer him, and let her heart go with him, in her wiser mind she had shivers, and shudders, and a chill shadow of the end of it.

Mr. Sharp saw that his wife was timid; which of all things would be fatal now; for her aid was indispensable. Otherwise, perhaps, he would not have been quite so ready to tell her everything. He had put things so that her dislikes and envies, as well as her likings, and loves, and ambitions would compel her to work with him. If she were lukewarm his whole scheme must fail. At the mere idea his temper stirred. "Will you hear the rest? Or is your mind upset?" he asked a little roughly. His

wife looked up brightly from some little blink of thought. "Every word of it now, I must hear every word, if you will be so kind, my dear. I will go and see that all the doors are shut."

CHAPTER V.

THE MANNER.

"You see now, Miranda," continued Mr. Sharp, as his wife came and sat quite close to him, "that it was my duty to make the most of the knowledge thus providentially obtained. We had met with a bitter disappointment through the most gross injustice, brought about, no doubt, by craft, and wheedling, and black falsehood. When old Fermitage stood godfather to our only child, and showed a sense of duty towards him by bottling and walling up a pipe of wine, everybody looked upon Kit as certain to stand in his shoes in the course of time. You know how we always looked forward to it, not

covetously or improperly, but simply as a matter of justice. And you remember what he said to me, before he went to church with Joan Oglander: 'Quibbles, my boy, this shall make no difference between you and me, mind!'

"I am sure that he meant it when he said it; but that artful woman so led him astray, and laid down the law about wives and husbands, and 'county families,' and all that, and pouring contempt upon our profession, that all his better feelings left him, and he made the will he did. And but for her low, unwomanly cowardice during his last illness, so it would have stood—as she believes it even now to stand."

"Oh, what a pure delight it will be," cried the lady, unable to help herself, "such a triumph of right over might and falsehood! Do let me be there to see it."

"There is time enough to think of that, Miranda. Well, as soon as ever I felt quite sure of my ground about the codicil (which

Senhor Gelofilos placed in my hands after making inquiry about me here, and being satisfied of my relationship and respectability), I began to cast about for the most effectual mode of working it. It was clear in a moment that the right course was to make a match between Grace, now the legal heiress, and Kit, the legitimate heir. But here I was met by difficulties which appeared at first sight insuperable. The pride of the old Squire, and his family nonsense, the suit of Russel Overshute, and the girl's own liking for that young fellow (which I had some reason to suspect), the impossibility of getting at the girl, and last not least the stupid shyness of our Christopher himself; these and other obstacles compelled me to knock them all out of the way, by some decisive action. The girl must be taken out of stupid people's power, and brought to know what was good for her.

"Of course, I might have cut the matter

short by walking the girl off, and allowing her no food until she consented to marry Kit; and probably if I could only have foreseen my sad anxieties and heavy outlay, I should have acted in that way. But I have a natural dislike to measures that wear an appearance of harshness; and I could not tell how Kit might take it, or even you, Miranda dear. In this sad puzzle, some good inspiration brought to my mind Hannah Patch, then living by herself in London. In a sort of a manner she is my sister (as I have told you long ago), although she is so many years my elder."

Mrs. Sharp nodded; she knew all about it and admired her husband none the less for being the illegitimate son of the fashionable Captain Patch.

"Very well," this admirable man resumed, "you are aware that Hannah looked very coldly upon me, and spoke of me always as 'that child of sin,' until I was enabled to marry you, my

dear, through your disinterested affection, which is my choicest treasure. Having won that, and another more lucrative (but less delightful) partnership, I became to sweet Hannah the child of love, and was immediately allowed the privilege of doing all her legal business gratis. You have often grumbled at that, but I had some knowledge of what I was about, my dear, and I soon obtained that due influence over her, which all women ought to have some man to wield. Setting aside her present use, Hannah Patch has £200 a year of her own, which might be much better invested, and shall be, as soon as it comes to us; but it would not do to have her too set up herself."

"Oh Luke, what a large-minded dear you are!" whispered Mrs. Sharp, with much enthusiasm; "I do believe nothing escapes you, and nothing that gets into your hand ever does get out again!"

"Well, I am pretty well for that," he answered,

loooking at his large, strong palm; "I began with my hands pretty empty, God knows, and only my own brain to fill them. But perseverance, integrity, and readiness to oblige, have brought me on; and above all things, Miranda, the grace that I found in your kind eyes."

The kind and still pretty eyes looked prettier, and almost young, with the gleam of tears; while the owner of all this integrity proved that it had stood him in good stead, by drawing from his pocket, and spreading on his head, a handkerchief which had cost him yesterday fourteen and sixpence, in Holborn, ready emmed.

"Yes," he continued with a very honest smile; "you see me as I am, my dear; and there are many poor people in the world worse off. Still it would never do for me to stop. One must be either backward or forward, always; and I prefer to be forward. And I hope to

make a great step now. But there must be no hesitation. Well, to go on with my story, I saw how useful Miss Patch might be to us. She has strong religious views, which always make it so easy to guide any one aright, by giving the proper turn to things. Pugnacious dread of Popery, and valiant terror of the Jesuits, are the leading-strings of her poor old mind. I got firm hold of both of these, and being trustee of her money also, I found her quite ready to do good deeds.

"I allowed her to perceive that if things went on, without our interference, Grace Oglander would be married, and her enormous fortune sacrificed, to a man whose bosom friend is a Jesuit, a fierce wolf in sheep's clothing—an uncommonly clever fellow by-the-bye—a very young tutor of Brasenose. She had heard of him; for his name is well-known among the leaders of this new sect, who call themselves Anglo-Catholics, and will end by being Roman

Catholics. Of these good men (according to their lights) Hannah Patch has even deeper terror than of downright Jesuits. Naturally such stuff matters not to me; except when I can work it.

"Hannah Patch also had a special grudge against old Squire Oglander, a man very well in his way, and very honest, who thinks a great deal of his own opinions, and is fit to be his own grandfather. He had no love at all for the Patch connection—the patch on the family, as he called it—and the marriage of his step-mother with Captain Patch, and the Captain's patronising air towards him — in a word, Miranda, he hated them all.

"However, when Hannah was in trouble once or twice, and without a roof to shelter her —before she got her present bit of cash—old Oglander had her down, and was very good, and tried to like her. He put his child under her care to learn 'theology,' as she called it, and

he paid her well for teaching her the Psalms, and the other denunciations. They went away together to some very lonely place; while the Squire was a week or two away from home. And now it occurred to me that this experience might be repeated, and prolonged if needful. Oglander had been nervous, as I knew, and as his daughter also knew, about some form of black fever or something, which had been killing some gipsy people, and was likely to come into the villages. I made use of this fact, with Hannah Patch to help me, and quietly took my young heiress off to a snug little home, in the thick of the woods, where I should be sorry to reside myself. She was under the holy wing of Miss Patch; and there she abides to this present day; and I feed them very well, I assure you. They cost me four pound ten a week; for the evangelical Hannah believes it to be the clearest 'mark of the beast' to eat meat less than twice a day; and

Leviticus Cripps, who supplies all the victuals, is making a fortune out of me. No bigger rogue ever lived than that fellow. He is under my thumb so entirely that if I told him to roll in the mud he would roll. And yet with all his awe of me, he cannot forbear from cheating me. He has found out a manner of dipping his pork so that he turns it into beef or mutton, according to the orders from the cottage; and he charges me butcher's price for it, and cartage for six miles and a half, and a penny a pound for trimming off the flanks!"

"My dear!" said Mrs. Sharp, "it is impossible! He never could deceive a woman so, however devoted her mind might be. The grain of the meat is quite different, and the formation of the bones not at all alike; and directly it began to roast——"

"Well, never mind, Miranda, there they are quite reconciled to the situation; except that Hannah Patch is always hankering after 'the

means of grace,' and the young girl mooning about her sweet old parent and beloved Beckley. Sometimes there are very fine scenes between them; but upon the whole they get on well together, and appreciate one another's virtues. And I heartily trust that the merits of our Kit have made their impression on a sensitive young heart. They took to one another quite kindly in the romance of the situation, when I brought their sweet innocence into contact by a very simple stratagem. The dear young creatures have believed themselves to be outwitting everybody; the very thing I laboured for them both to do. All's well that ends well—don't you think, Miranda?"

"I am so entirely lost—I mean I am so unable to think it all out, without more time being given me," Mrs. Sharp answered, while she passed her hand across her unwrinkled forehead, and into her generally-consulted curl, "that really, Luke, for the moment I can only

admire your audacity. But I think, dear, that in a matter of this kind—an especially feminine province, I may say—you might have done me the honour of consulting me."

"Miranda, it was not to be thought of. Your health and well-being are the dearest objects of my life. I will only ask, could you have borne the suspense, and the worry, and anxiety of the last four months; above all, the necessity for silence?"

"Yes, Luke, I could have been very silent; but I cannot abide anxiety. You call me a dear fat soul sometimes, and your judgment is always correct, my dear. At the same time, I have little views of my own, and sensible ways of regarding things. You would like to hear my opinion, Luke, and to answer me one or two questions?"

"Certainly, Miranda; beyond all doubt. For what other purpose do I tell you all? Now, let me have a nap for five minutes, my dear,

while you ponder this subject, and arrange your questions."

He threw his smart handkerchief over his head, stretched out his feet, and took a nice little doze.

CHAPTER VI.

THE POSITION.

"AMONG my relations," said Mrs. Sharp, reclining, for fear of asserting herself, as soon as her lord looked up again, "I have always been thought to possess a certain amount of stupid common sense. Nothing of depth, or grand stratagems, I mean; but a way of being right nearly nine times out of ten. And I think that this feeling is coming over me, just now."

"My dear, if it is, do relieve yourself. Do not consider my ideas for a moment; but let me know what your own are."

"Luke, how you love to ridicule me! Well, if my opinion is of no account, I can only ask

questions, as you tell me. In the first place, how did you get the girl away ?"

"Most easily; under her father's orders. Hannah can write the old gentleman's hand to any extent, and his style as well. For the glory of the Lord she did so."

"And how did you bring her to do such shocking things ? She must have had a strong idea that they were not honest."

"Far otherwise. She took an enthusiastic view of the matter from the very first. I made it quite clear to her how much there was at stake; and the hardest job for a long time was to prevent her from being too zealous. She scorns to take anything for herself, unless it can be put religiously. And for a long time I was quite afraid that I could not get a metal band on her. But she found out, before it was quite too late, that the mission of the "Brotherly-love-abounders," upon the west coast of Africa, had had all their missionaries eaten up, and

required a round sum to replace them. I promised her £5000 for that, when her own mission ends in glory."

"Then you are quite certain to have her tight. I might trust you for every precaution, Luke. But how have you managed to keep them so quiet, while the neighbourhood was alive with it? And in what corner of the world have you got them? And who was the poor girl that really did die?"

"One question at a time, if you please, Miranda, though they all hang pretty much upon one hook. I have kept them so quiet, because they are in a corner of a world where no one goes; in a lonely cottage at the furthest extremity of the old Stow Wood, where their nearest road is a timber-track three-quarters of a mile away. They are waited on by a deaf old woman, who believes them to be Americans, which accounts to her mind for any oddness. Their washing is done at home, and

all their food is procured through Cripps the swine-herd, whose forest farm lies well away, so that none of his children go to them. Cripps is indebted to me, and I hold a mortgage of every rod of his land, and a bill of sale of his furniture and stock. He dare not play traitor and claim the reward, or I should throw him into prison for forgery, upon a little transaction of some time back. Moreover, he has no motive; for I have promised him the same sum, and his bill of sale cancelled, when the wedding is happily celebrated. Meanwhile he is making fine pickings out of me, and he caters at a profit of cent. per cent. There is nobody else who knows anything about it, except a pair of gipsy fellows, too wide awake to come near the law for any amount of guineas. One of them is old Kershoe, the celebrated horse-stealer, whom I employed to drive and horse the needful vehicle from London. He knew where to get his horses, without any postmaster being the wiser,

and his vehicle was a very tidy carriage, bought by the gipsies for a dwelling-place, and furbished up so that the chaises of the age are not to be compared with it. The inquiries made at all livery-stables, and posting-houses, and so on, by order of Overshute and the good Squire, and some of them through my own agency, have afforded me genial pleasure and some little share of profit."

"Really, my dear," said Mrs. Sharp; "you were scarcely right in charging for them. You should have remembered that you knew all about it."

"That was exactly what I did, my dear; and I felt how expensive that knowledge was. As a little set-off against the pig-master's bills, I made heavy entries against the good Squire. The fault is his own. He should not have driven me into costly proceedings by that lowest of all things, the arrogance of birth. Well, the other gipsy man is no other than Joe

Smith, who jumped the broomstick with the lovely Princess Cinnaminta. You must have heard of her, Miranda. Half the ladies in Oxford were most bitterly jealous of her, some years back."

"I am sure then that I never was, Mr. Sharp!—a poor creature sitting under sacks, and doing juggling!"

"Nothing of the kind. You never saw her. She is a woman of superior mind and most refined appearance. Indeed, her eyes are such as never——"

"Oh, that is where you have been, Luke, is it, while we have been here for a fortnight, trembling——"

"Nonsense, Miranda; don't be so absurd. The poor thing has just lost her only child, and I believe she will go mad with it. It was her pretty sister, young Khebyra, who died of collapse, and was buried the same night. This case was most extraordinary. The fever struck

her, without any illness, just as the plague and the cholera have done, with a headlong, concentrated leap; as a thunderstorm gathers itself sometimes into one blue ball of lightning. She was laughing at ten o'clock, and her poor young jaw tied up at noon; and a great panic burst among them."

"Luke!" exclaimed Mrs. Sharp, strongly shuddering; "you never mean to say that you came home to me, from being among such people, without a change of clothes, or anything!"

"How could I come home without anything, my dear? But I was not 'among them' at all that day, nor at any other period. I never go to work in that coarse sort of way. Familiarity begets contempt. However, I was soon informed of this most sad occurrence; and for awhile it quite upset me, coming as it did at such a very busy time. However, when I had time to dwell more calmly on the subject, I

began to see a chance of turning this keen blow to my benefit.

"The gipsy camp was broken up with fatalistic terror—the most abject of all terrors; as the courage of the fatalist is the fiercest of all courage. They carried off their Royal stock, the heiress of the gipsy throne—as soon as some fine thief is hanged—quite as the bees are said to carry off their queen, when a hornet comes. Poor Cinnaminta was caught away, just when I might have made her useful; and only two men were left to attend to the burial of her sister. Of these, my friend Joseph Smith was one; as he ought to be, being Cinnaminta's spouse.

"It was a very active time for me, I assure you, Miranda dear. The complication was almost too much to be settled in so short a time. And some of my hair, which had been quite strong, was lying quite flat in the morning. Perhaps you remember telling me."

"Yes, that I do, Luke! I could not make it out. Your hair had always stood so well; and a far better colour than the young men have got! And you told me that it was gone like that, from taking Cockle's antibilious pills!"

"Miranda, I have never deceived you. I did take a couple, and they helped me on. But, without attributing too much to them, I did make a lucky turn of it. Their manner of sepulture is brief and wise; or, at any rate, that of this tribe is; though they differ, I believe, very widely. These wait till they are sure that the sun has set, and then they begin to excavate. I was able to suggest that in this great hurry and scattering of the tribes of Israel, the wisest plan would be to adopt and adapt a very quiet corner already hollowed, and indicated by name (which is so much more abiding than substance) as a legendary gipsy Aceldama. The idea was caught at, as it well deserved to be, in the panic, and lack of time,

and terror of the poor dead body. The poor thing was buried there with very hasty movements, her sister and the rest being hurried away; and it is quite remarkable how this (the merest episode) has, by the turn of events, assumed a primary importance.

"Foresight, and insight, and second-sight almost, would be attributed to me by any one who did not know the facts. Scarcely anybody would believe, as this thing worked in my favour so much, that I can scarcely claim the invention, any more than I can take any credit for the weather. Indeed, I may say, without the smallest presumption or profanity, that something higher than mere fortune has favoured my plans from the very first. I had provided for at least one whole day's start, before any alarm should be given; but the weather secured me, I may say, six weeks, before anything could be done in earnest. And then the discovery of that body,

by a girl who was frightened into fits almost, and its tardy disinterment, and the universal conclusion about it, which I perhaps helped in some measure to shape, also the illness with which it pleased Providence to visit Messrs. Oglander and Overshute—I really feel that I have the deepest cause to be grateful, and I trust that I am so."

"Certainly, my dear, your cause is just," said Mrs. Sharp, as her husband showed some symptoms of dropping off to sleep again; "but in carrying it out you have inflicted pain and sad, sad anxiety on a poor old man. Can he ever forgive you, or make it up?"

"I should hope for his own sake," replied the lawyer, "that he will cast away narrow-mindedness; otherwise we shall not permit him to rush into the embraces of his daughter. But if he proves relentless, it matters little, except for the opinion of the world. He cannot touch 'Port-wine's' property at all; and he may do what

he likes with his own little wealth. His outside value is some £40,000. However, if I understand him aright, we shall manage to secure his money too, tied up, I dare say—but what matters that? He is a most fond papa, and his joy will soon wash away all evil thoughts."

"How delightful it will be!" cried the lady, with a sigh, "to restore his long-lost child to him. Still it will be a most delicate task. You must leave all that to me, Luke."

"With pleasure, my dear Miranda; your kind heart quite adapts you for such a melting scene. And, indeed, I would rather be out of the way. But I want your help for more than that."

"You shall have it, Luke, with all my heart and soul! It is too late now to draw back; though, if you had asked my advice, I would have tried to stop you. But just one question more—how did you get rid of John Smith and his inquiries? They say that he is such a very shrewd man."

"Do you not know, will nobody ever know, the difference between small, uneducated cunning and the clear intelligence of a practised mind? To suppose that John Smith would ever give me any trouble! He has been most useful. I directed his inquiries; and exhausted the inquisitive spirit through him."

"But you did not let him know——"

"Miranda, now, I shall go to bed, if I am so very fast asleep. Can no woman ever dream of large utility? I have had no better friend, throughout this long anxiety, than John Smith. And without the expenditure of one farthing, I have guided him into the course that he should take. When he hears of anything, the first thing he asks is—'Now, what would lawyer Sharp be inclined to think of this?' Perhaps I have taken more trouble than was needful. But, at any rate, it would be disgraceful indeed if John Smith could cause me uneasiness. The only man I have ever had the smallest

fear of has been Russel Overshute. Not that the young fellow is at all acute; but that he cannot be by any means imbued with the proper respect for my character."

"How very shocking of him, my dear Luke, when your character has been so many years established!"

"Miranda, it is indeed shocking!—but what can be expected of a Radical? Ever since that villainous Reform Bill passed, the spirit of true reverence is destroyed. But he must have some respect for me, as soon as he knows all. Although, to confess the pure truth, my dear, things have worked in my favour so, that I scarcely deserve any credit at all, except for the original conception. That, however, was a brave one."

"It was, indeed; and I am scarcely brave enough to be comfortable. There is never any knowing how the world may take things. It is true that old Fermitage was not your client,

and you had been very badly treated, and had a right to make the most of any knowledge obtained by accident. But old Mr. Oglander is your client, and has trusted you even in the present matter. I do not think that my father would have considered it quite professional to behave so."

Mrs. Luke Sharp was alarmed at her own boldness in making such a speech as this. She dropped her eyes under her husband's gaze; but he took her remarks quite calmly.

"My dear, we will talk of that another time. The fact that I do a thing—after all my experience—should prove it to be not unprofessional. At the present moment, I want to go to bed; and if you are anxious to begin hair-splitting, bed is my immediate refuge. But if you wish to know about the future of your son, you must listen, and not try to reason."

"I did not mean to vex you, Luke. I might have been certain that you knew best. And

you always have so many things behind, that Solomon himself could never judge you. Tell me all about my darling Kit, and I will not even dare to cough or breathe."

"My dear, it would grieve me to hear you cough, and break my heart if you did not breathe. But I fear that your Kit is unworthy of your sighs. He has lost his young heart beyond redemption, without having the manners to tell his mother!"

"They all do it, Luke; of course they do. It is no good to find fault with them. I have been expecting that sort of thing so long. And when he went to Spiers for the melanochaitotrophe, with the yellow stopper to it, I knew as well as possible what he was about. I knew that his precious young heart must be gone; for it cost him seven and sixpence!"

"Yes, my dear; and it went the right way, in the very line I had laid for it. I will tell you another time how I managed that, with Hannah

Patch, of course, to help me. The poor boy was conquered at first sight; for the weather was cold, with snow still in the ditches, and I gave him sixpenny-worth of brandy-balls. So Kit went shooting, and got shot, according to my arrangement. Ever since that, the great job has been to temper and guide his rampant energies."

"And of course he knows nothing—oh no, he would be so very unworthy, if he did! Oh, do say that he knows nothing, Luke!"

"My dear, I can give you that pleasing assurance; although it is a puzzling one to me. Christopher Fermitage Sharp knows not Grace Oglander from the young woman in the moon. He believes her to have sailed from a new and better world. Undoubtedly he is my son, Miranda; yet where did he get his thick-headedness?"

"Mr. Sharp!"

"Miranda, make allowance for me. Such

things are truly puzzling. However, you perceive the situation. Here is a very fine young fellow—in his mother's opinion and his own—desperately smitten with a girl unknown, and romantically situated in a wood. There is reason to believe that this young lady is not insensible to his merits; he looks very nice in his sporting costume, he has no one to compete with him, he is her only bit of life for the day, he leaves her now and then a romantic rabbit, and he rescues her from a ruffian. But here the true difficulty begins. We cannot well unite them in the holy bonds, without a clear knowledge on the part of either of the true patronymic of the other. The heroine knows that the hero rejoices in the good and useful name of 'Sharp'; but he knows not that his lady-love is one Grace Oglander of Beckley Barton.

"Here, again, you perceive a fine stroke of justice. If Squire Oglander had only extended

his hospitalities to us, Christopher must have known Grace quite well, and I could not have brought them together so. At present he believes her to be a Miss Holland, from the United States of America; and as she has promised Miss Patch not to speak of her own affairs to anybody (according to her father's wish, in one of the Demerara letters), that idea of his might still continue; although she has begun to ask him questions, which are not at all convenient. But things must be brought to a point as soon as possible. Having the advantage of directing the inquiries, or at any rate being consulted about them, I see no great element of danger yet; and of course I launched all the first expeditions in every direction but the right one. That setting up of the tombstone by poor old Joan was a very heavy blow to the inquisitive."

"But, my dear, that did not make the poor girl dead a bit more than she was dead before."

"Miranda, you do not understand the world. The evidence of a tombstone is the strongest there can be, and beats that of fifty living witnesses. I won a most difficult case for our firm when I was an ardent youth, and the victory enabled me to aspire to your hand, by taking a mallet and a chisel, and a little nitric acid, and converting a 'Francis,' by moonlight, into a 'Frances.' I kept the matter to myself, of course; for your good father was a squeamish hand. But you have heard me speak of it."

"Yes, but I thought it so wrong, my dear, even though, as you said, truth required it."

"Truth did require it. The old stonemason had not known how to spell the word. I corrected his heterography; and we confounded the tricks of the evil ones. All is fair in love and law, so long as violence is done to neither. And now I wish Kit's unsophisticated mind to be led to the perception of that great truth. It is needful for him to be delicately admitted to a

knowledge of my intentions. There is nobody who can do this as you can. He takes rather clumsy and obstinate views of things he is too young to understand. The main point of all, with a mind like his, is to dwell upon the justice of our case and the depth of our affection, which has led to such a sacrifice of the common conventional view of things."

"My dear, but I have had nothing to do with it. Conception, plan, and execution are all your own, and no other person's. Why, I had not even dreamed——"

"Still, you must put it to him, Miranda, as if it was your doing more than mine. He has more faith in your—well, what shall I call it? I would not for a moment wrong him by supposing that he doubts his own father's integrity—in your practical judgment, let us say, and perception of the nicest principles. It is absolutely necessary that you should appear to have acted throughout in close unison with me. In

fact, it would be better to let the boy perceive that the whole idea from the very first was yours; as in simple fact it must have been, if circumstances had permitted me to tell you all that I desired. To any idea of yours he takes more kindly perhaps than to those which are mine. This is not quite correct, some would say; but I am above jealousy. I always desire that he should love his mother, and make a pattern of her. His poor father gets knocked about here and there, and cannot halt to keep himself rigidly upright, though it always is his ambition. But women are so different, and so much better. Even Kit perceives that truth. Let him know, my darling, that your peace of mind is entirely staked upon his following out the plan which you mean to propose to him."

"But, my dear Luke, I have not the least notion of any plan of any sort."

"Never mind, Miranda; make him promise. I will tell you all about it afterwards. It is

better not to let him know too much. Knowledge should come in small doses always, otherwise it puffs up young people. Alas! now I feel that I am not as I was! Twenty years ago I could have sat up all night talking, and not shown a sign of it next day. I have not had any sleep for the last twelve nights. Do you see any rays in my eyes, dear wife? They are sure indications of heart disease. When I am tired they always come."

"Oh, Luke, Luke, you will break my heart! You shall not say another word. Have some more negus—I insist upon it! It is no good to put your hand over the glass—and then come to bed immediately. You are working too hard for your family, my pet."

CHAPTER VII.

IN THE MESHES.

Now being newly inspired by that warm theologian—as Miss Patch really believed him to be—Luke Sharp, the lady felt capable of a bold stroke, which her conscience had seemed to cry out against, till loftier thoughts enlarged it. She delivered to her dear niece a letter, written in pale ink and upon strange paper, which she drew from a thicker one addressed to herself, and received 'through their butcher' from a post-office. Wondering who their butcher was, but delighted to get her dear father's letter, Grace ran away to devour it.

It was dated from Georgetown, English

Guayana, and though full of affection, showed touching traces of delicate health and despondency. The poor girl wiped her eyes at her father's tender longing to see her once more, and his earnest prayers for every blessing upon their invaluable friend, Miss Patch. Then he spoke of himself in a manner which made it impossible for her to keep her eyes wiped, so deep was his sadness, and yet so heroically did he attempt to conceal it from her; and then came a few lines, which surprised her greatly. He said that a little bird had told him that during her strict retirement from the world in accordance with his wishes, she had learned to esteem a most worthy young man, for whom he had always felt warm regard, and, he might even say, affection. He doubted whether, at his own time of life, and with this strange languor creeping over him, he could ever bear the voyage to England, unless his little darling would come over to fetch him, or at least to behold him once

more alive; and if she would do so, she must indeed be quick. He need not say that to dream of her travelling so far all alone was impossible; but if, for the sake of her father, she could dispense with some old formalities, and speedily carry out their mutual choice, he might with his whole heart appeal to her husband to bring her out by the next packet.

He said little more, except that he had learned by the bitter teaching of adversity who were his true friends, and who were false. No one had shown any truth and reality except Mr. Sharp of Oxford; but he never could have dreamed, till it came to the test, that even the lowest of the low would treat him as young Mr. Overshute had done. That subject was too painful, so he ended with another adjuration to his daughter.

"Aunty, I have had the most extraordinary letter," cried Grace, coming in with her eyes quite dreadful; "it astonishes me beyond every-

thing. May I see the postmark of yours which it came in? I shall think I am dreaming till I see the postmark."

"The stamp of the office, do you mean, my dear? Oh yes, you are welcome to see, Grace. Here it is, 'Georgetown, Demerara.' The date is not quite clear without my spectacles. Those foreign dies are always cut so badly."

"Never mind the date, aunt. I have the date inside, in my dear father's writing. But I am quite astonished how my father can have heard——"

"Something about you, sly little puss! You need not blush so, for I long have guessed it."

"But indeed it is not true—indeed it is not. I may have been amused, but I never, never—and oh, what he says then of somebody else—such a thing I should have thought impossible! How can one have any faith in any one?"

"My dear child, what you mean is this: How can one have any faith in worldly and ungodly

people? With their mouths they speak deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips——"

"Oh no, he never was ungodly; to see him walk would show you that; and if being good to the poor sick people, and dashing into the middle of the whooping-cough——"

"How am I to know of whom you speak? You appear to have acted in a very forward way with some one your father disapproves of."

"I assure you, I never did anything of the kind. It is not at all my manner. I thought you considered it wrong to make unfounded accusations."

"Grace, what a most un-Christian temper you still continue to display at times! Your cheeks are quite red, and your eyes excited, in a way very sad to witness. The trouble I have taken is beyond all knowledge. If you do not value it, your father does."

"Aunty Patch, may I see exactly what my

daddy says to you? I will show you mine if you will show me yours."

"My dear, you seem to forget continually. You treat me as if I were of your own age, and had never been through the very first alarm which comes for our salvation. It has not come to you, or you could not be so frivolous and worldly as you are. When first it rang, even for myself——"

"How many times does it ring, Aunt? I mean for every individual sinner, as you always call us."

"My dear, it rings three times, as has been proved by the most inspired of all modern preachers, the Rev. Wm. Romaine, while amplifying the blessed words of the pious Joseph Alleine. He begins his discourse upon it thus——"

"Aunty, you have told me that so many times that I could go up into his desk and do it. It is all so very good and superior; but there

are times when it will not come. You, or at any rate I, for certain, may go down on our knees and pray, and nothing ever comes of it. I have been at it, every night and morning, really quite letting go whatever I was thinking of—and what is there to come of it, except this letter? And it doesn't sound as if my father ever wrote a word of it?"

"Grace, what do you mean, if you please?"

"I mean what I do not please. I mean that I have been here at least five months, as long as any fifty, and have put up with the miserablest things—now, never mind about my English, if you please, it is quite good enough for such a place as this—and have done my very best to put up with you, who are enough to take fifty people's lives away, with perpetual propriety—and have hoped and hoped, and prayed and prayed, till my knees are not fit to be looked at—and now, after all, what has come of it? That I am to marry a boy with a red

cord down his legs, and a crystal in his whip, and a pretty face that seems to come from his mamma's watch-pocket, and a very nice and gentle way of looking at a lady, as if he were quite capable, if he had the opportunity, of saying 'bo' to any goose on the other side of the river!"

"My dear, do you prefer bold ruffians, then, like the vagabond you were rescued from?"

"I don't know at all what I do prefer, Aunt Patch, unless it is just to be left to myself, and have nothing to say to any one."

"Why, Grace, that is the very thing you complained of, in your sinful and ungrateful speech, just now! But do not disturb me with any more temper. I must take the opportunity, before the mail goes out, to tell your poor sick father how you have received his letter."

"Oh no, if you please not. You are quite mistaken, if you think that I thought of myself first. My dear father knows that I never would

do that; and it would be quite vain to tell him so. Oh, my darling, darling father!—where are you now, and whatever are you doing?"

"Grace, you are becoming outrageous quite. You know quite well where your father is; and as to what he is doing, you know from his own letter that he is lying ill, and longing for you to attend upon him. And this is the way that you qualify yourself!"

"Somehow or other now—I do not mean to be wicked, aunt—but I don't think my father ever wrote that letter—I mean, at any rate, of his own free will. Somebody must have stood over him—I feel as if I really saw them—and made him say this, and that, and things that he never used to think of saying. Why, he never would have dreamed, when he was well, of telling me I was to marry anybody. He was so jealous of me, he could hardly bear any gentleman to dare to smile; and he used to make me promise to begin to let him know, five

years before I thought of any one. And now for him to tell me to marry in a week—just as if he was putting down a silver-side to salt—and to marry a boy that he scarcely ever heard of, and never even introduced to me—he must have been, he cannot but have been, either wonderfully affected by the climate, or shackled down in a slave-driver's dungeon, until he had no idea what he was about."

"Have you finished, Grace, now? Is your violence over?"

"No; I have no violence; and it is not half over. But still, if you wish to say anything, I will do all I can to listen to it."

"You are most obliging. One would really think that I were seventeen, and you nearly seventy."

"Aunt Patch, you know that I am as good as nineteen; and instead of being seventy, you are scarcely fifty-five."

"Grace, your memory is better about ages

than about what you do not wish to hear of. And you do not wish to hear, with the common selfishness of the period, of the duty which is the most sacred of all, and at the same time the noblest privilege—the duty of self-sacrifice. What are your own little inclinations, petty conceits, and miserable jokes—jokes that are ever at deadly enmity with all deep religion—ah, what are they—you selfish and frivolous girl!—when set in the balance with a parent's life—and a parent whose life would have been in no danger but for his perfect devotion to you?"

"Aunt Patch, I never heard you speak of my father at all in that sort of way before. You generally talk of him as if he were careless, and worldly, and heterodox, most frivolous, and quite unregenerate. And now quite suddenly you find out all his value. What do you want me to do so much, Aunt Patch?"

"Don't look at me like that, child; you quite insult me. As if it could matter to me what

you do—except for your own eternal welfare. If you think it the right thing to let your father die in a savage land, calling vainly for you, and buried among land-crabs without a drop of water—that is a matter for you hereafter to render your own account of. You have tired me, Grace. I am not so young as you are; and I have more feeling. I must lie down a little; you have so upset me. When you have recovered your proper frame of mind, perhaps you will kindly see that Margery has washed out the little brown teapot."

"To be sure, aunty, I am up to all her tricks. And I will just toast you a water-biscuit, and put a morsel of salt butter on it, scarcely so large as a little French bean. Go to sleep, aunty, for about an hour. I am getting into a very proper frame of mind; I can never stay very long out of it. May I go into the wood, just to think a little of my darling father's letter?"

"Yes, Grace; but not for more than half an hour, on condition that you speak to no one. You have made my head ache sadly. Leave your father's letter here."

"Oh no, if you please, let me take it with me. How can I think without it?"

Miss Patch was so sleepy that she said, "Very well; let me see it again when you have made the tea." Whereupon Grace, having beaten up the cushion of the good lady's only luxury, and laid her down softly, and kissed her forehead (for fear of having made it ache), stole her own chance for a little quiet thought, in a shelter of the woods more soft than thought. For the summer was coming with a stride of light; and bashful corners, full of lateness, tried to ease it off with moss.

In a nook of this kind, far from any path, and tenderly withdrawn into its own green rest, the lonely and bewildered girl stopped suddenly, and began to think. She drew forth the letter

which had grieved her so; and she wondered that it had not grieved her more. It was not yet clear to her young frank mind that suspicion, like a mole, was at work in it. To get her thoughts better, and to feel some goodness, she sat upon a peaceful turret of new spear-grass, and spread her letter open, and began to cry. She knew that this was not at all the proper way to take things; and yet if any one had come, and preached to her, and proved it all, she could have made no other answer than to cry the more for it.

The beautiful light of the glancing day turned corners, and came round to her; the lovable joy of the many, many things which there is no time to notice, spread itself silently upon the air, or told itself only in fragrance; and the glossy young blades of grass stood up, and complacently measured their shadows.

Here lay Grace for a long sad hour, taking no heed of the things around her, however

much they heeded her. The white wind-flower with its drooping bells, and the blue-bell, and the harebell, and the pasque-flower —softest of all soft tints—likewise the delicate stitchwort, and the breath of the lingering primrose, and the white violet that outvies its sister (that sweet usurper of the coloured name) in fragrance and in purity; and hiding for its life, without any one to seek, the sensitive wood-sorrel; and, in and out, and behind them all, the cups, and the sceptres, and the balls of moss, and the shells and the combs of lichen—in the middle of the whole, this foolish maid had not one thought to throw to them. She ought to have sighed at their power of coming one after another for ever, whereas her own life was but a morning dew; but she failed to make any such reflection.

What she was thinking of she never could have told; except that she had a long letter on her lap, and could not bring her mind to it.

And here in the hollow, when the warmth came round, of the evening fringed with cloudlets, she was fairer than any of the buds or flowers, and ever so much larger. But she could not be allowed to bloom like them.

"Oh, I beg pardon," cried an unseen stranger in a very clear, keen voice; "I fear I am intruding in some private grounds. I was making a short cut, which generally is a long one. If you will just show me how to get out again, I will get out with all speed, and thank you."

Grace looked around with surprise but no fear. She knew that the voice was a gentleman's; but until she got up, and looked up the little hollow, she could not see any one. "Please not to be frightened," said the gentleman again; "I deserve to be punished, perhaps, but not to that extent. I fancied that I knew every copse in the county. I have proved, and must suffer for, my ignorance."

As he spoke he came forward on a little turfy

ledge, about thirty feet above her; and she saw that he looked at her with great surprise. She felt that she had been crying very sadly, and this might have made her eyes look strange. Quite as if by accident, she let her hair drop forward, for she could not bear to be so observed; and at that very moment there flowed a gleam of sunshine through it. She was the very painting of the picture in her father's room.

"Saints in heaven!" cried Hardenow, who never went further than this in amazement, "I have found Grace Oglander! Stop, if you please—I beseech you, stop!"

But Grace was so frightened, and so pledge-bound, that no adjuration stopped her. If Hardenow had only been less eager, there and then he might have made his bow, and introduced himself. But Gracie thought of the rabbit-man, and her promise, and her loneliness, and without looking back, she was round the

corner, and not a ribbon left to trace her by. And now again if Hardenow had only been less eager, he might have caught the fair fugitive by following in her footsteps. But for such a simple course as that he was much too clever. Instead of running down at once to the spot where she had vanished, and thence giving chase, he must needs try a cross cut to intercept her. There were trees and bushes in the way, it was true, but he would very soon get through them; and to meet her face to face would be more dignified than to run after her.

So he made a beautifully correct cast as to the line she must have taken, and aiming well ahead of her, leaped the crest of the hollow and set off down the hill apace. But here he was suddenly checked by meeting a dense row of hollies, which he had not seen by reason of the brushwood. In a dauntless manner he dashed in among them, scratching his face and hands, and losing a fine large piece of black kersey-

mere from the skirt of his coat, and suffering many other lesser damages. But what was far worse, he lost Grace also; for out of that holly grove he could not get for a long, long time; and even then he found himself on the wrong side—the one where he had entered.

If good Anglo-Catholics ever did swear, the Rev. Thomas Hardenow must now have sworn, for his plight was of that kind which engenders wrath in the patient, and pleasantry on the part of the spectator. His face suggested recent duello with a cat, his white tie was tattered and hanging down his back, his typical coat was a mere postilion's jacket, and the condition of his gaiters afforded to the sceptic the clearest proof of the sad effects of perpetual self-denial. His hat, with the instinct of self-preservation, had rolled out from the thicket when he first rushed in; and now he picked up this wiser portion of his head, and was thankful to have something left.

Chances were against him; but what is chance? He had an exceedingly strong will of his own, and having had the worst of this matter so far, he was doubly resolved to go through with it. Without a second thought about his present guise or aspect, he ran back to the spot which he had left so unadvisedly. There he did what he ought to have done ten minutes or a quarter of an hour ago, he ran down the slope to the nest in the nook which had been occupied by Grace. Then he took to the track which she had taken; but she had been much too quick for him; she had even snatched up her letter, so that he was none the wiser. He came to a spot where the narrow and thickly woven trackway broke into two; and whether of the two to choose was more than a moment's doubt to him. Then he seemed to see some glint of footsteps, and sweep of soft sprays by a dress towards the right; and making a dash through a dark hole towards it, was straightway

enveloped in a doubled rabbit-net, cast over his surviving hat.

"Hold un tight, Jarge, now thou'st got un!" cried out somebody whom he could not see, "poachin' son of a gun, us'll poach un!"

"Poaching—my good friends," cried Hardenow, trying to lift his arms and turn his head round, all vainly; "you can scarcely know the meaning of that word, or you never would think of applying it to me. Let me see you, that I may explain. I have been trespassing, I am afraid; but by the purest accident—allow me to turn round, and reason quietly; I have the greatest objection to violence; I never use, nor allow it to be used. If you are honest gamekeepers, exceeding your duty through earnest zeal, I would be the last to find fault with you; want of earnestness is the great fault of this age. But you must not allow yourselves to be misled by some little recent mischances to my clothes. Such things befall almost every-

body exploring unknown places. You are pulling me! you are exceeding your duty! Is the bucolic mind so dense? Here I am at your mercy—just show yourselves. You may choke me if you like, but the result will be—oh! —that you will also be choked yourselves!"

"A rare fine-plucked one as ever I see," said rabbiting George to Leviticus Cripps, when Hardenow lay between them, senseless from the pressure upon his throat; "ease him off a bit, my lad, he never done no harm to me. They long-coated parsons is good old women, and he be cut up into a young gal now. Lay hold on the poor devil, right end foremost, zoon as I have stopped uns praching. Did ever you see such a guy out of a barrow?"

Heavy-witted Tickuss made no answer, but laid hold of the captive by his shoulders, so that himself might be still unseen, if consciousness should return too soon. Black George tucked the feet under his arm, after winding the

tail of the net round the shanks, and expressing surprise at their slimness; and in no better way than this these two ignorant bumpkins swung the body of one of the leading spirits of the rising age to the hog-pound.

Thomas Hardenow was not the man to be long insensible. Every fibre of his frame was a wire of electric life. He was "all there"—to use a slang expression, which, by some wondrous accident, has a little pith in it—in about two minutes; not a bit of him was absent; and he showed it by hanging like a lump upon his bearers as they fetched him to an empty hog-house, dropped him anyhow, and locked him in; then one of them jumped on a little horse and galloped off to Oxford.

CHAPTER VIII.

COMBINED WISDOM.

"I REALLY cannot go on like this," said Mr. Sharp to Mrs. Sharp, quite early on the following morning. "Thank God, I am not of a nervous nature, and patience is one of my largest virtues. But acting, as I have done, for the best, I cannot be expected to put up with perpetual suspense. This very day I will settle this matter, one way or the other." The lawyer for the first time now was flurried; he had heard of the capture of a spy last night—for so poor Hardenow had been described—and though he had kept that new matter to himself, he was puzzled to see his way through with it.

"Luke, my dear," replied Mrs. Sharp, with some of her tightenings not done up, "surely there need not be such hurry. You make me quite shiver, when you speak like that. I shall come down to breakfast without any power; and the Port-meadow eel will go out for the maids. Should we ever behold it again, Luke?"

"Of course not; how could you expect it? Slippery, slippery—hard it is to lay fast hold of anything; and the worst of all to bind, is woman. I do not mean you, my dear; you need not look like that; you are as firm as this tag of your stays—corset, corset—I beg pardon; how can a man tell the fashionable words?"

"But, Luke, you surely would not think of proceeding to extremities?"

"Any extremity; if it only were the last. For the good of my family, I have worked hard; and there never should have been all this worry with it. Miranda, I may have

strayed outside the truth, and outside the law—which is so much larger—but one thing I beg you to bear in mind. Not a thing have I done, except for you and Kit. Money to me is the last thing I think of; pure affection is the very first. And no one can meddle with your settlement."

"Oh, my darling," Mrs. Sharp exclaimed, as she fell back from looking at the looking-glass, "you are almost too good for this world, Luke! You think of everybody in the world except yourself. It is not the right way to get on, dear. We must try to be a little harder."

"I have thought so, Miranda; I must try to do it. Petty little sentiments must be dropped. We must rise and face the state of things which it has pleased Providence to bring about. I am responsible for a great deal of it; and with your assistance, I will see it through. We must take Kit in hand at once. My dear wife, can I rely upon you?"

"Luke, you may rely upon me, for anything short of perjury; and if it comes to that, I must think first."

"No man ever had a better any more than he could have a truer wife, or one so perpetually young." With these words Mr. Sharp performed some little operations, which, even in the "highest circles," are sometimes allowed to be brought about by masculine hands, when clever enough; and before very long this affectionate pair went down to breakfast and enjoyed fried eel.

Kit, who had caught this fine eel, was not there; perhaps he was gone forth to catch another; so they left him the tail to be warmed up. In the present condition of his active mind, and the mournful absence of his beloved, Christopher found a dark and moody pleasure in laying night-lines. If his snare were successful, he hauled out his victim, and, with a scornful smile, despatched him; if the line held

nothing, he cast it in again, with a sigh of habitual frustration. This morning, however, he was not gone forth on his usual round of inspection, but had only walked up to the livery-stables, to make sure of his favourite hack for the day. He had made up his mind that he must see Grace that very same day, come what would of it; he would go much earlier, and watch the door; and if this bad fortune still continued, he would rush up at last and declare himself.

But this bold resolve had a different issue; for no sooner had the young man, with some reluctance and self-reproach, dealt bravely with a solid breakfast, than he was requested by his dear mother to come into his father's little study.

Now, this invitation was not in accordance with the present mood of Christopher. He had made up his mind to be off right soon for the bowers of his beloved, with a roll and some

tongue in his little fishing-creel, and a bottle of beer in each holster. In the depth of the wood he might thus get on, and enjoy to the utmost fruition of his heart all the beauty of nature around him. It was a cruel blow to march just then to a lecture from the governor, whose little private study he particularly loathed, and regarded as the den of the evil one. However, he set up his pluck and went.

Mr. Sharp, looking (if possible) more upright and bright than usual, sat in front of the large and strong-legged desk, where he kept his more private records, such as never went into the office. Mrs. Sharp also took a legal chair, and contemplated Kit with a softer gaze. He with a beating heart stood up, like a youth under orders to construe.

"My son," began the father and the master, in a manner large and affable, "prepare yourself for a little surprise on the part of those whose principal object is your truest welfare.

For some weeks now you have made your dear mother anxious and unhappy, by certain proceedings which you thought it wise and manly to conceal from her."

"Yes, you know you did, Kit!" Mrs. Sharp interposed, shaking her short curls, and trying to look fierce. The boy, with a deep blush, looked at her, as if everybody now was against him.

"Christopher, we will not blame you," resumed Mr. Sharp, rather hastily, for fear that his wife should jump up and spoil all. "Our object in calling you is not that. You have acted according to our wishes mainly, though you need not have done it so furtively. You have formed an attachment to a certain young lady, who leads for the present a retired life, in a quiet part of the old Stow Wood. And she returns your affection. Is it so, or is it not?"

"I—I—I," stammered Kit, seeking for his mother's eyes, which had buried themselves in

her handkerchief. "I can't say a word about what she thinks. She—she—she has got such a fashion of running away so. But I—I—I—well, then, it's no good telling a lie about it; I am deucedly fond of her!"

"That is exactly what I wished to know; though not expressed very tastefully. Well, and do you know who she is, my son?"

"Yes, I know all that quite well; as much as any fellow wants to know. She is a young lady, and she knows all the flowers, and the birds, and the names of the trees almost. She can put me right about the kings of England; and she knows my dogs as well as I do."

"A highly accomplished young lady, in short?"

"Yes, I should say a great deal more than that. I care very little for accomplishments. But—but if I must come to the point—I do like her, and no mistake!"

"Then you would not like some other man

to come, and run away with her, quite against her will?"

"That man must run over my body first," cried Kit, with so much spirit that his father looked proud, and his poor mother trembled.

"Well, well, my boy," continued the good lawyer, "it will be your own fault if the villain gets the chance. I am doing all I can to provide against it; and am even obliged to employ some means of a nature not at all congenial to me, for—for that very reason. You are sure that you love this young lady, Kit?"

"Father, I would not say anything strong; but I would go on my knees, all the way from here to there, for the smallest chance of getting her!"

"Very good. That is as it should be. I would have done the very same for your dear mother. Mamma, you have often reminded me of it, when anything—well, those are reminiscences; but they lie at the bottom of every-

thing. A mercenary marriage is an outrage to all good feeling."

"She has not got sixpence, father; she told me so. She makes all the bread, and she puts by all the dripping!"

"My dear boy, you know then what a good wife is. Mamma, we shall have to clear out the room where the rocking-horse is, and the old magic-lantern, and let this young couple go into it."

"My dear, it would be a long job; and there are a great many cracks in the paper; but still we could have in old Josephine."

"Those are mere details, mamma. But this is a serious question; and the boy must not be hurried. He may not have made up his mind; or he may desire to change it to-morrow. He is too young to have any settled will; and there is no reason why he should not wait——"

"Not a day will I wait—not an hour would I wait; in ten minutes I could pack everything!"

"He might wait for a twelvemonth, my dear Miranda, and sound his own feelings, and the young girl's too, if we could only be certain that the young man of rank, with the four bay horses, was not in earnest when he swore to carry her off to-morrow."

"My dear husband," Mrs. Sharp said, softly; "let us hope that he meant nothing by it. Such things are frequently said, and come to nothing."

"I tell you what it is," Kit almost shouted, with his fist upon the sacred desk; "you cannot in any way enter into my feelings upon such matters! I beg your pardon, that is not what I mean, and I ought never to have said it. But still, comparatively speaking, you can take these things easily, and go on, and think people foolish—but I cannot. I know when my mind is made up, and I do it. And to stop me with all sorts of nonsense—at least, to find fifty reasons why I should do nothing—is the surest of all ways to make me do it. I have many

people who will follow me through thick and thin; though you may not believe it, because you cannot understand me, and your views are confined to propriety. Mine are not. And you may find that out in a very short time. At any rate, if I do a thing that brings you, father and mother, into any evil words, all I can say is, you never should have stopped me."

With this very lucid expression of ideas, Christopher strode away, and left his parents petrified—as he thought. Mrs. Sharp was inclined to be a dripping well; but Mr. Sharp was dry enough. "Exactly, exactly," he said, as he always said when a thing had come up to his reckoning; "nothing could have been done much better. Put the money in his best breeches' pocket, my dear, without my knowledge; and at the back-door kiss him. Adjure him to do nothing rash; and lend him your own wedding-ring, and weep. For a runaway match the most lucky of all things is the boy's

mother's wedding-ring. And above all things, not a word about his rival, until he asks—and then all mystery; only you know a great deal more than you dare tell."

"Oh, Luke, are you sure that it will all go aright?"

"Miranda, tell me anything we can be sure of, and you will have given me a new idea. And I want ideas; I want them sadly. My power of invention is failing me, or at any rate that of combining my inventions. You did not observe that I was nervous, did you?"

"Nervous! Luke—you nervous! I should think that the end of the world was coming, if I saw any nervousness in you! And in the presence of a boy, indeed——"

"My dear wife, I will give you my word that I felt—well, I will not say 'nervous,' if you dislike it—but a little uncomfortable, and not quite clear, when I saw how Kit was taking things. Real affection is a dreadful thing. I did not

want so much of it. I meant to have told him who she is, till the turn of things made me doubt about it. But he is quite up for anything now, I believe, though he must be told before he goes. He is such a calf that he must not imagine that she has a sixpence to bless herself. He would fly off in a moment, if he guessed the truth. He must know her name; and that you must tell him; and you know how to explain it all a thousand-fold better than I do."

"Possibly I do," replied Mrs. Sharp; "I may have some very few ideas of my own; although according to you, Mr. Sharp, I am only the mother of a calf!"

"Very well said, my dear. And I have the honour of being his father." They smiled at one another, for they both knew how to give and take.

CHAPTER IX.

MASCULINE ERROR.

CHRISTOPHER FERMITAGE SHARP, Esquire, strode forth, to have room as well as time for thought. His comely young face was unusually red, and he stroked his almost visible moustache, as a stimulant to manhood. So deep and stern were his meditations, that he never even thought of his pipe until he came to a bridge on the Botley road, whereon he was accustomed to lean, and smoke, and gaze at the little fish quietly. From the force of habit he pulled out his meerschaum, flint and steel, and German tinder, and through blue rings of his own creation, watched and envied the little fish. For though it was not

yet the manner of his mind to examine itself very deeply, he had a strong conviction that the fish were happy, and that he was miserable. Upon the former point there could not be two opinions—unless the fish themselves held one—when any man observed how the little fellows jumped at the spicy-flavoured flies (that fluttered on fluid gold to them), or flashed in and out among one another, with a frolicsome spread of silver, or, best of all, in calm contemplation, softly moved pellucid fins, and gently opened fans of gills, with magnifying eyes intent upon the glory of the lustrous world. Kit considered them with an envious gaze. Were they harassed, were they tortured, were they racked with agonised despair, by the proceedings of the female fish?

Compelled to turn his grim thoughts inward, he knew not that he was jealous. He only knew that if he were to meet the young nobleman with the four bay horses, it would be an

evil day for one of them. Tush, why should he not go and forestall that bloated, unprincipled aristocrat—whose intentions might even be dishonourable—by having four horses himself, and persuading that queen of beauty to elope with him? He had given his parents due notice; and if he had done what they wished by thus falling in love, it could not be very much against their wishes, if he made a hasty match of it. But could this lovely young American be persuaded to come with him? He had far too much respect for her to dream of using violence. But surely if he could convince her of the peril she was in, and could promise her safe refuge with a grave old lady, a valued relative of his own, while she should have time to consider his suit, his devotion, his eternal constancy, his everlasting absorption into her higher and purer identity—

He pulled out his purse; it contained four and sixpence—a shilling and three halfpence

for each horse, and nothing for the postilions. "We must do it less grandly," he said to himself; "and after all it will be better so. How could four horses ever get through that wood? I must have been a fool to think of it. A very light chaise and pair will do ten times better, at a quarter of the money. I can get tick for that from old Squeaker himself; and the governor will have to pay; it need not cost me more than half a crown, and about three bob for turnpikes. Fifteen miles to old Aunt Peggy's, on the Wycombe road. Once there, I defy them to do what they like. I am always the master of that house, and I know where they keep the blunderbuss. I have the greatest mind not to go home at all, but complete my arrangements immediately. Squeaker would lend me a guinea with pleasure; he is a large-minded man, I am sure. What a fool I was to give poor Cinnaminta such a quantity of tin that day!—and yet how could I help it? I might have gone on like a lord, but for that."

Kit turned round, and shook his head in several directions, trying to bring to his mind the places where money might be hoped for. Than this there is no mental effort more difficult and absorbing. No wonder therefore that, in this contemplation, he did not hear the up-mail full-gallop, springing the arch from the Cheltenham side, to make a fine run into Oxford. "Hoi there, stoopid!" the coachman shouted, for the bridge was narrow, and the coach danced across it, with the vigour of the well-corded team. "Oh, Kit, is it? Climb for your hat, Kit."

Kit's best friend—so far as he had any friends in the University—by a stroke of fine art, sent the lash of his whip round the hat of the hero, and deposited it, ere one might cry, "Where art thou gone?" on the oil-cloth, which sat on the top of the luggage, which sat on the top of the coach which he drove, like the heir of all the race of Nimshi. The hireling Jehu sat beside

him, and having been at it since nine o'clock last night, snored with a flourish not inferior to that which the mail-guard began upon his horn.

Kit was familiar with a coach at speed, as every young Englishman at that time was. In a twinkle he dashed at the hind-boot, laid hold of the handle, and was up at once; the guard, with an eye to an honest half-crown, moving sideways, but offering no help, because it would have been an insult. Then over the hump of the luggage crawled Kit, and clapped his own hat on his head, and between the shoulders of two fat passengers, threw forth his strong arm, and "bonneted" the spanking son of Nimshi. The leaders ran askew, till they were caught up; and the smart young driver would have thrown down the reins, and committed a personal assault on Kit, who was perfectly ready to reply to it—being skilled in the art of self-defence — if the two fat pas-

sengers, having seen the whole, had not joined hands, and stopped it.

"Tit for tat; tit for tat!" they cried; "Squire you began it, and you have your due." And so, with a hearty laugh, on they galloped.

"If you should have anything to say to me," cried Kit, as he swung himself off the early mail, at the corner of his native Cross Duck Lane, "you will know where to find me. But you must wait a day or two, for I have a particular engagement."

"All rubbish, Kit! Come and wine with me at seven. I shall have tooled home the 'Nonpareil' by then."

Christopher, though stern, was placable. He kissed his hand to his reconciled friend, while he shook his head, to decline the invitation, and strode off vigorously to consult his mother. To consult his dear mother meant to get money out of her, which was a very easy thing to do; and having a good deal of conscience, Kit

seldom abused that opportunity, unless he was really driven to it. Metallic necessity was on him now; his courage had been rising for the last half-hour. "Faint heart never won fair lady," rang to the tune of many horses' feet. His dash through the air had set his spirits flying; his exploit, and the applause thereof, had taught him his own value. From this day forth he was a man of the world; and a man of the world was entitled to a wife.

It is the last infirmity of noble and too active minds, to feel that nothing is done well unless their presence guides it; to doubt the possibility of sage prevision and nice conduct, through the ins and outs of things, if ever the master-spirit trusts the master-body to be away, and the countless eyes of the brain to give twinkle, instead of the two solid lights of the head. Hence it was that Mr. Sharp, at sight of Kit, came forth to meet him, although he had arranged to send the mother. And this—as

Mrs. Sharp declared to her dying day—was the greatest mistake ever made by a man of most wonderful mind; while she was putting away the linen.

"Come in here, my boy," he said to his son, who was strictly vexed to see him, and yearning to be round the corner; "there are one or two things that have never been made quite clear to your understanding. We do not expect you to be too clear-sighted at your time of life, and so on. Come in that I may have a word with you."

Christopher, with a little thrill of fear, once more entered the sacred den, and there stood as usual; while his father sat and regarded him with a lightsome smile. One of the many causes which had long been at work to impair the young man's filial affection was, that his father behaved as if it were not worth while to be in earnest with him; as if Kit Sharp had a mind no riper than just to afford amusement

to mature and busy intellects. Christopher knew his own depth, and was trying to be strong too, whenever he could think of it. And if he did spend most of his time in sport and congenial pastime, of one thing he was certain —that he never did harm to any one. Could his father say that much for himself?

"Aha, my boy, aha," said the elder Sharp in that very same vein which always so annoyed and vexed his son; "what will you give me for a little secret, a sweet little secret about a young lady in whom you take the deepest interest?"

The ingenuous youth, in spite of all efforts, could not help blushing deeply; for he had a purely candid skin, reproduced from Piper ancestry. And the sense of hot cheeks made him glow to the vital centres of the nobler stuff. Therefore he scraped with his toes—which was a trick of his—and kept silence.

"Pocket-money gone again?" continued his

father pleasantly; "nothing to offer his kind papa for most valuable information? Courting is an expensive business — I ought to have remembered that. And the younger the parties the more it costs; hot-house flowers, and a smelling-bottle, a trifle of a ring, just to learn the size; that being accepted, the bolder brooch, charmed bracelet, and locket for the virgin heart —no wonder you are short of cash, my Kit."

"You don't know one atom about it," cried Christopher, boiling with meritorious wrath. "I never gave her nothing—and she wouldn't have it!"

"The double negative, to be sure. How forcible and how natural it is! Well, well, my boy, let us try to believe you. Scatter all doubts by exhibiting your wealth. You had five pounds and ten shillings lately; and you pay nothing for anything that can be placed to your father's credit. Let me see your cash-box, Kit."

"This is all that I have at present," said Christopher, pulling out his three-and-sixpence —for he had given the guard a shilling; "but you must not suppose that this is all to which I am entitled. I have I.O.U's from junior members of the University for really more than I can reckon up; and every one of them will get the money from his sisters, in the long vacation."

"Oh, Kit, Kit! The firm ends with me. I must sell the good-will for the very worst old song, if it once leaks out what a fool you are. By what strange cross of reckless blood can such a boy be the future head of Piper, Pepper, Sharp, & Co.?" Mr. Sharp covered up his long clear head, and hid—for this once—true emotion. Kit looked at the kerchief with a very queer glance. He was not at all affected by this lamentation, however just, because he had heard it so often before; and he never could make out exactly how much of him his father

could manage to descry through that veil Palladian.

"Well, sir," he said, "you have always told me, as long as I can remember, that I was to be a gentleman; and gentlemen trust one another."

"Very well said!" Mr. Sharp replied, with a deeply irritating smile; "and now I will trust you, young sir, in a matter of importance. Remember that I trust you as a gentleman—for I need not tell you one word, unless I choose—and if I depart from my usual practice, it is partly because you are beginning to claim a sort of maturity. Very well, let us see if it can be relied upon. You pledge your word to keep silence, and I tell you what you never could find out."

Kit was divided with his mind in twain whether he should draw the sharp falchion of his wit, or whether he should rather speak honeysome words; and, as nearly always hap-

pens when Minerva is admitted, he betook himself to the gentler process.

"Very well, sir," he said, pulling up his collar, as if he had whiskers to push it down, "whatever I am told in confidence is allowed to go no further. It is scarcely necessary for me to say that I reserve, of course, the final right of reference to my honour."

"To be sure, and to your ripe judgment and almost patriarchal experience, Kit. Then be it known to you, aged youth, that you have not shown hoar sagacity. You do not even know who the lady is whom you have honoured with your wise addresses."

"And I don't care a d—n who she is," cried Kit, "so long as I love her, and she loves me!"

"My son, you are turbulent and hasty. Your wisdom has left you suddenly. Your manners also; or you would not swear in the presence of your father."

"Sir, I was wrong; and I beg your pardon. But I think that I learned the first way of it from you."

"Kit, Kit, recall that speech! You must have gone altogether dreaming lately. My discourse is always moderate, and to the last degree professional. However, in spite of the generous impulse, which scarcely seems natural at your threescore years and ten, it does seem a needful precaution to learn the name, style, and title of the lady whom you will vow to love, honour, and—obey."

"Her name," cried Kit, without any sense of legal phrase and jingle, "is Grace Holland. Her style is a great deal better than anybody else's. And as for title, such rubbish is unknown in the gigantic young nation to which she belongs."

"Her name," said Mr. Sharp, setting his face for the conquest of this boy, and fixing keen hard eyes upon him, "is Grace

Oglander, the daughter of the old Squire of Beckley. Her style—in your sense of the word—is that of a rustic young lady; and her title, by courtesy, is Miss—a barbarous modern abbreviation."

The youth was at first too much amazed to say a word; for he was not quick-witted, as his father was. He gave a little gasp, and his fine brown eyes, which he could not remove from his father's, changed their expression from defiance to doubt, and from doubt to fear, and from fear to sorrow, with a little dawning of contempt. "Why, my man, is this beyond your experience of life?" asked Luke Sharp, trying to look his son down, but failing, and beginning to grow uneasy. Kit's face was aflame with excitement, and his lips were trembling; but his eyes grew stern.

"Father, I hope you do not mean what you have said—that you are only joking with me—at any rate, that you have not known it—

that you have not done it—that you have not even left poor old Mr. Oglander one hour——"

"Wait, boy, wait! You know nothing about it. Who are you to judge of such matters, indeed? Remember to whom you are speaking, if you please. I have done what was right; and for your sake I have done it."

"For my sake! Why, I never had seen the young lady before I was told that she was dead and buried—murdered, as everybody said—and the tracing of the criminals was mainly left to you! I longed to help, but I knew that you despised me; and now do you mean to say that you did it?"

Luke Sharp was a quick-tempered man. He had borne a great deal more than usual. And now he spoke with vast disdain.

"To be sure, Kit, I murdered her; as is proved to such a mind as yours by the fact of her being now alive! What can I have done, to have a fool for my son?"

"And what have I done, to have a rogue for a father? You may knock me down, sir, if you please!"—for Mr. Sharp arose, as if that would be his next proceeding;—"you have always used your authority very much in that manner with me. I don't want to be knocked down; but if it will do you any good, pray proceed to it; and down I go."

"I declare, after all, you have got some little wit," cried the lawyer, with a smile withdrawing, and recovering self-command. "I cannot be angry with a boy like you, because you know no better. Oh, here comes your mother! Your excitement has aroused her. Mamma, you have not the least idea what a lion you have to answer for. I leave him to you, my dear. Soothe him, feed him, and try to find his humming-top."

CHAPTER X.

PROMETHEUS VINCTUS.

"I WILL not die like this! It is unseemly to die like this!" the Rev. Thomas Hardenow was exclaiming at this very time, but a few miles off. "I hope I am not a coward altogether; but the ignominy is unbearable. In this den of Eumæus, this sty of Sycorax, entangled in the meshes of a foul hog-net, and with hogs' grunt, grunt, for the chorus of my woes! My Prometheus class is just waiting for me at the present moment, so far as I can reckon here the climbing of the day; and I had rendered into English verses that delicious bit of chorus—'With thy woes of mighty groaning,

mortals feel a fellow-moaning, And of Colchic land indwellers, maids who never quail in fight;' and so on—how small-minded of me to forget it now!—down to, 'And springs of holy-watered rivers wail thy pitiable woe.' But instead of nymphs of ocean, here comes that old pig again! If he could only grout up that board — which he must do sooner or later — what part of me will he begin upon? Probably this little finger—it is so white and helpless! If I could only, only move! —to be eaten alive by pigs! Well, well—there is not so very much left for them. Infinitely better men have had a lower end than that. Only I would bend my knees—if bend them I could—to the Giver of all good, that I may be insensible before the pigs begin."

His plight was a very unfortunate one; but still in the blackest veil of woe there is sure to be some little threadbare place—from so many people having worn that veil—and even poor

Hardenow had one good "look-out." To wit, although he had been without food for six-and-twenty hours now (having been caught in the treacherous toils soon after he set his toes towards his dinner), he was not by any means in the same state in which a Low-Church clergyman must have been. His system was so attuned to fasting, and all his parts so disciplined, that "cupboard" was only whispered among them in a submissive manner; and even his stomach concluded sorrowfully that it must be Friday.

Beyond this considerable advantage—which could not last much longer—there was really little to console him. His cowardly captors, not content with the rabbit-net twined round him, had swathed him also in the stronger meshes of a corded gig-net. And even after that, Black George, having had the handling of his legs, and discovered the vigour of their boniness, was so impressed that he called out—

"I never did heckle such a wiry chap. Fetch a pair of they tough thongs, Tickuss, same as thou maketh use of for ringing of the pigs, my lad."

"Whish!—can't 'ee whish, with my name so pat?" Leviticus whispered sulkily; but he brought the unyielding thongs, wherewith the fellow and tutor of Brasenose very soon had his wrists and ankles strapped. And in spite of all struggles through the livelong night, as firmly as a trussed hare was he fixed.

Nevertheless, he could roll a little, though not very fast, because his elbows stopped him; for being of the sharpest they stuck into the ground, which was of a loamy nature. He fought with this difficulty, as with every other; for a braver heart never dwelled in any body, whether fat or lean; and he plucked up his angles from their bed of earth, whenever the limits of cord would yield. He knew all about the manufacture of twine—so far as one not in

the trade could know it—because he had got up the subject for the sake of a whipcord of a puzzle in Theocritus; but this only served to make his case the worse; for at that time honest string was made. The dressing, and the facing, and the thousand other rogueries, make it quite impossible to tie a good knot now; and even if a strap has any leather in it, its first operation is a compromise.

But at that stouter period, bind made bound. Mr. Hardenow could roll a little; but that was as much as he could do. And rolling did him very little good, except by way of exercise; because he was pulled up short so suddenly by feather-edged boarding, with a coat of tar. The place in which he was penned was most unworthy of such an occupant. It was not even the principal meal-house, or the best treasury of "wash." It was not the kitchen of the tasteful pigs, or even their back-kitchen, but something combining the qualities of their

scullery and dust-bin. But the floor was clean, and a man lying lowly, so far as smell was concerned, had certainly the best of the situation; inasmuch as all odours must ascend to the pure ether of the exalted. Hardenow knew that it was vain to roll, because the door was padlocked, and the lower end, to which he chiefly tended, had a loose board, lifted every now and then by the unringed snout of a very good old sow. Pure curiosity was her motive, and no evil appetite, as her eyes might tell. She had never seen a fellow and a tutor of a college rolling, as she herself loved to do; and yet in a comparatively clumsy way. She grunted deep disapproval of his movements, and was vexed that her instructions were entirely thrown away.

"Ah, Linus, Linus be the cry; and let the good be conqueror!" Mr. Hardenow quoted, as his legs began to ache; "henceforth, if I have any henceforth, how palpably shall I realise the difference between the alindethra and the

circular conistra! In this limited place I combine the two; but without the advantages of either. I take it that, whether of horse, or hen, or human being, the essential condition of revolutionary enjoyment is—that the limbs be free. In my case, they are not free. The exhilaration which would ensue, and of which, if I remember rightly, Pliny speaks—or is it Ælian? —my memory seems to be rolling too; but be the authority what it will, in my case that exhilaration is (at least for the moment) not forthcoming. But I ought to condemn myself far rather than writers who treat of a subject with the gravity of authority; that is to say, if they ever tried it. 'Experimentum in corpore vili,' is what all writers have preferred. If their own bodies were not too noble, what powerful impress they might have left!"

After such a cynical delivery as this, it served him particularly right to hit, in the course of revolution, upon a bit of bone even harder than

his own; a staunch piece of noble old ossification (whether of herbivorous, carnivorous, or omnivorous dragon), such as would have brought Professor Buckland from Christ Church headlong, or even Professor Owen, from the British Museum, the Melampus of all good dragons. Hardenow knew nothing about it; except that it ran into him, and jerked him in such a way over the ground, that he got into the highest corner, and gladly would have rubbed himself, if good hemp had yielded room for it.

But this sad blow, which seemed at first the buffet of the third and crowning billow of his woe, proved to be a blessing in disguise; inasmuch as the reaction impelled him to a spot where he descried some encouragement to work. And a little encouragement was enough for him. By virtue of inborn calmness, long classical training and memories, and pure Anglo-Catholic discipline, the young man was still "as fresh as paint," in a trouble which would have exhausted

the vigour of a far more powerful and fiery man. Russel Overshute, for instance, even in his best health, would have worn his wits out long ago, by futile wrath, and raving hunger.

Mr. Hardenow could not even guess how there came to be quite a thick cluster of pretty little holes, of about the size of a swan's quill, drilled completely through the board against which his mishap had driven him. The board was a stoutish slab of larch, cut "feather-edged;" and the saw having struck upon most of these holes obliquely, their form was elliptic instead of round, and their axes not being at right angles to the board, they attracted no attention by admitting light, since the light of course entered obliquely. In some parts as close as the holes of a colander, in other places scattered more widely, they jotted the plank for nearly a yard of its length, and afforded a fine specimen of the penetrative powers of a colony of *Sirex gigas*, so often mistaken for the hornet.

But though as to their efficient cause he could form no opinion, Hardenow hoped that their final cause might be to save his life; which he quietly believed to be in great peril. For he knew that he lay in the remote obscurity of a sad and savage wood, unvisited by justice, trade, or benefit of clergy. Here, if no good spirit came, or unseen genius, to release him, die he must at his own leisure, which would be a long one. And he could discover no moral to be read from his pre-historic skeleton; unless it were that very low one—"stick to thy own business."

A man of ordinary mind would not have troubled his head about this. "*Post me, diluvium,*" is the strengthening sentiment of this age; no fulcrum whatever for any good work; and the death of all immortality. Hardenow would have none of that; he had no idea of leaving ashes fit to nourish nothing. Collecting his energies for a noble protest against having

lived altogether in vain, he brought his fettered heels, like a double-headed hammer, as hard as his probolistic swing could whirl, against the very thickest-crowded cells of bygone domicile. The wooden shed rang, and the uprights shook, and the nose of the sow at the lower end was jarred, and her feelings hurt; for, truly speaking, her motives had been misunderstood. And if Hardenow had but kept pigs of his own, he would have gone to work down there, to help her, and so perhaps have got her to release him from his toils. Everybody, however, must be allowed to go to work in his own way: and to find fault with him, when he tries to do his best, is (as all kind critics own) alike ungraceful and ungracious. Mr. Hardenow worked right hard, as he always did at everything, and his heels had their sparables as good as new, and capable of calcitration, though he wore nothing stronger than Oxford shoes, with a bow of silk ribbon on the instep. The ribbon held fast, and he kicked

or rather swung his feet by a process of revolution, as bravely as if he had Hessian boots on. At the very first stroke he had fetched out a splinter as big as the scoop of a marrow-spoon; and delivering his coupled heels precisely where little tunnels afforded target, in a quarter of an hour he had worked a good hole, and was able to refresh himself with the largeness of the outer world.

Not that he could, however skilled now in rolling, roll himself out of his black jail yet—for the piece punched out was only four inches wide—but that he got a very decent width (in proportion at least to man's average view) for clear consideration of the world outside. And what he saw now was a pretty little sight, or peep at country scenery. For the wood, just here, was not so thick that a man could not see it by reason of the trees—as the Irishman forcibly observed—but a dotted slope of bush and timber widening and opening sunny reaches

out of the narrow forest track. There was no house to be seen, nor cottage, nor even barn or stable, nor any moving creature, except a pig or two grouting in the tufted grass, and gray-headed daws at leisure perking and prying, for the good of their home-circle.

But presently the prisoner espied a wicket-gate, nearly at the bottom of the sylvan slope, with a little space roughly stoned before it—almost a sure sign, in a neighbourhood like that, of a human dwelling-place inside. And when Hardenow's eyes, recovering tone, assured him of the existence of some moss-grown steps, for the climbing of a horse upon either side, he felt a sudden (though it may not have been a strictly logical) happiness, from the warm idea that there must be some of the human race not far from him. He placed his lips close to the hole which he had made, and shouted his very loudest, and then stopped a little while, to watch what might come of it, and then sent

forth another shout. But nothing came of it, except that the pigs pricked up their ears and looked around and grunted; and the jackdaws gave a little jerk or two, and flapped their wings, but did not fly; and a soft woody echo, of a fibrous texture, answered as weakly as a boy who does not know.

This was pretty much what Hardenow expected. He saw that the wicket-gate was a long way off, three or four hundred yards perhaps; but he did not know that his jailer, Tickuss Cripps, was the man who lived inside of it. Otherwise his sagacious mind would have yielded quiet mercy to his lungs. For Leviticus was such a cruel and cowardly blunderer, that, in mere terror, he probably would have dashed grand brains out. But luckily he was far away now, and so were all other spies and villains; and only a little child —boy or girl, at that distance nobody could say which—toddled out to the wicket-gate, and laid

fat arms against it, and laboured, with impatient grunts, to push it open. Having seen no one for a long time now, Hardenow took an extraordinary interest in the efforts of this child. The success or the failure of this little atom could not in any way matter to him; yet he threw his whole power of sight into the strain of the distant conflict. He made up his mind that if the child got out, he should be able to do the like.

Then having most accurate "introspection" (so far as humanity has such gift) he feared that his mind must be a little on the wane, ere ever such weakness entered it. To any other mind the wonder would have been that his should continue to be so tough; but he hated shortcomings, and began to feel them. Laying this nice question by, until there should be no child left to look at, he gazed with his whole might at this little peg of a body, in the distance, toppling forward, and throwing out

behind the weight of its great efforts. He wondered at his own interest—as we all ought to wonder, if we took the trouble. This little peg, now in battle with the gate, was a solid Peg in earnest; a fine little Cripps, about five years old, as firm as if just turned out of a churn. She was backward in speech, as all the Crippses are; and she rather stared forth her ideas than spoke them. But still, let her once get a settlement concerning a thing that must be done to carry out her own ideas; and in her face might be seen, once for all, that stop she never would till her own self had done it. Hardenow could not see any face, but he felt quite a surety of sturdiness, from the solid mould of attitude.

That heavy gate, standing stiffly on its heels, groaned obstreperously, and gibed at the unripe passion of this little maid. It banged her chubby knees, and it bruised her warted hand, and it even bestowed a low cowardly buffet upon her

expressive and determined cheek. And while she lamented this wrong, and allowed want of judgment to kick out at it, unjust it may have been, but true it is, that she received a still worse visitation. The forefoot of the gate, which was quite shaky and rattlesome in its joints, came down like a skittle-pin upon her little toes, which were only protected on a Sunday. "Ototoi, Ototoi!" cried Mr. Hardenow, with a thrilling gush of woe, as if his own toes were undergoing it. Bitter, yet truly just, lamentation awoke all the echoes of the woods and hills; and Hardenow thought that it was all up now—that this small atom of the wooded world would accept her sad fate, and run in to tell her mother.

But no; this child was the Carrier's niece; and a man's niece—under some law of the Lord, untraced by acephalous progeny—takes after him oftentimes a great deal closer than his own beloved daughter does. Whether or no, here was this little animal, as obstinate as

the very Carrier. Taught by adversity she did thus :—Against the gate-post she settled her most substantial availability, and exerted it, and spared it not. Therewith she raised one solid leg, and spread the naked foot thereof, while her lips were as firm as any toe of all the lot, against the vile thing that had knocked her about, and the power that was contradicting her. Nothing could withstand this fixed resolution of one of the far more resolute moiety of humanity. With a creak of surrender, the gate gave back ; and out came little Peggy Cripps, with a broad face glowing with triumph, which suddenly fell into a length of terror, as the vindictive gate closed behind her. To get out had been a great labour, but to get back was an impossibility ; and Hardenow, even so far away, could interpret the gesture of despair and horror. " Poor little thing ! How I wish that I could help her ! " he said to himself, and very soon began to think that mutual aid might with proper skill be compassed.

With this good idea, he renewed his shouts, but offered them in a more insinuating form; and being now assured that the child was female, his capacious mind framed a brief appeal to the very first instinct of all female life. Possibly therefore the fairer half of pig and daw creation appropriated with pleasure his address. At any rate, although the child began to look around, she had no idea whence came the words, "Pretty little dear! little beauty!" etc., with which the learned prisoner was endeavouring to allure her.

But at last, by a very great effort and with pain, Hardenow managed to extract from the nets his white cravat, or rather his cravat which had been white, when it first hung down his back from the taloned clasp of the hollies. By much contrivance and ingenious rollings, he brought out a pretty good wisp of white, and hoisted it bravely betwixt gyved feet, and at the little breach displayed it. And the soft

breath of May, which was wandering about, came and uncrinkled, and in little tatters waved the universal symbol of Succession Apostolical, as well as dinner-parties.

Little Peggy happened at this moment to be staring, with a loose uncertain glimpse of thought that somebody somewhere was calling her. By the flutter of the white cravat, her wandering eyes were caught at last, and fixed for a minute of deliberate growth of wonder. Not a step towards that dreadful white ghost would she budge; but a steadfast idea was implanted in her mind, and was likely to come up very slowly.

"It is waste of time; I have lost half an hour. The poor little thing — I have only scared her. Now let me think what I ought to do next."

But even while he addressed himself to that very difficult problem, Hardenow began to feel that he could not grapple with it. His mind

was as clear as ever, but his bodily strength was failing. He had often fasted for a longer time, but never with his body invested thus, and all his members straitened. The little girl sank from his weary eyes, though he longed to know what would become of her; and he scarcely had any perception at all of pigs that were going on after their manner, and rabbits quite ready for their early dinner, the moment the sun began to slope, and a fine cock partridge, who in his way was proud because his wife had now laid a baker's dozen of eggs, and but for his dissuasion would begin to sit to-morrow; and after that a round-nosed hare, with a philoprogenitive forehead, but no clear idea yet of leverets; and after that, as the shadows grew long, a cart, drawn by a horse, as carts seem always to demand that they shall be—the horse of a strong and incisive stamp (to use the two pet words of the day), the cart not so very far behind him there, as they gave

word to stop at the gate to one another—and in the cart, and above the cart, and driving both it and the horse thereof, as Abraham drove on the plain of Mamre, Zacchary Cripps; and sitting at his side, the far-travelled and accomplished Esther.

CHAPTER XI.

FEMININE ERROR.

MEANWHILE, at Cross Duck House, ever since that interview of the morning, things were becoming, from hour to hour, more critical and threatening. If Mr. Sharp could only have believed that his son was now a man, or at least should be treated as though he were; and if after that the too active lawyer could only have conceived it possible that some things might go on all the better without him; it is likely enough that his righteous and gallant devices would have sped more easily.

But Luke Sharp had governed his own little world so long that he scarcely could imagine

serious rebellion. And he cared not to hide his large contempt for the intellect of Christopher, or the grievance which he had always felt—at being the father of a donkey. And so, without further probation or pledge, he went forth to make his own arrangements, leaving young Kit to his mother's charge, like a dummy, to be stroked down and dressed.

If he had left Kit but an hour before for his mother to tell him everything, and round the corners, and smooth the levels, and wrap it all up in delicious romance, as women do so easily, with their power of believing whatever they wish, the boy might have jumped at the soft sweet bait; for he verily loved his sylvan maid. But now all his virtue and courage, and even temper, were on the outlook; and only one thing more was needed to drive him to a desperate resolve.

And that one thing was supplied, in the purest innocence, by Mrs. Sharp; though the

question would never have arisen if her son had been left to her sole handling.

"Then, mother, I suppose," said Kit as simply as if he smelled no rat whatever, thoroughly as he understood that race, "if I should be fortunate enough to marry beautiful Miss Oglander, we shall have to live on bread and cheese, until it shall please the senior people to be reconciled, and help us?"

"No, Kit! What are you talking of, child? The lady has £20,000 of her own! And £150,000 to follow, which nobody can take from her!"

With a very heavy heart he turned away. Nothing more was required to settle him. He saw the whole business of the plotting now; and the young romance was out of it. He went to the bow-window looking on the lane, and felt himself akin to a little ragamuffin, who was cheating all the other boys at marbles. Hard bitterness and keen misery were battling

in his mind which should be the first to have its way and speak.

"This comes of being a lawyer's son!" he cried, turning round for one bad glance at his mother. "She said that she disliked the law. I don't dislike, I abhor it."

"So you may, my dear boy, and welcome now. This will lift you altogether beyond it. Your dear father may consider it his duty to continue the office, and so on. But you will be a country gentleman, Kit, with horses, and dogs, and Manton guns, and a pack of hounds, and a long barouche, and hot-house grapes. And I will come and live with you, my darling; or at least make our country house of it, and show you how to manage things. For the whole world will be trying to cheat you, Kit; you are too good-natured, and grand in your ways! You must try to be a little sharper, darling, with that mint of money."

"Must I? But suppose that I won't have it?"

"Sometimes I believe that you think it manly to provoke your mother. The money ought to have been ours, Kit; mine by heritage and justice; at least a year and a half ago. A moderate provision should have been made for a woman, who may have her good points—though everybody has failed to discover them—and who married with a view to jointure. Ten thousand pounds would have been very handsome—far handsomer than she ever was, poor thing!—and then by every law, human and divine, all the rest must have come to you and me, my dear. Now, I hope that you see things in their proper light."

"Well, I dare say I do," he answered, with a little turn of sulkiness, such as he often got when people could not understand him. "Mother, you will allow me to have my own opinion; as you have yours."

"Certainly, Kit! Of course, my dear. You know that you always have been allowed extra-

ordinary liberty in that way. No boy in any school could have more; even where all the noblemen's sons are allowed to make apple-pie beds for the masters. Every night, my dear boy, when your father was away, it has rested with you, and you cannot deny it, to settle to a nicety what there must be for supper."

"Such trumpery stuff is not worth a thought. I am now like a fellow divided in two. You might guess what I am about, a little. It is high time for me to come forward. You cannot see things, perhaps, as I do. How often must I tell you? I give you my word as a gentleman —all this is exceedingly trying."

"Of course it is, Kit; of course it is. What else could be expected of it? But still, we must all of us go through trials; and then we come out purified."

"Not if we made them for ourselves, mother; and made them particularly dirty ones. But I cannot talk of it; what do I know? A lot of

things come tempting me. Everybody laughs at me for wondering what my mind is. And everybody cheats me, as you said. Let the governor carry on his own devices. I have made up my mind to consider a good deal, and behave then according to circumstances."

"You will behave, I trust, exactly as your parents wish. They have seen so much more of the world than you have, they are far better judges of right and wrong; and their only desire is your highest interest. You will break your poor mother's heart, dear Kit, if you do anything foolish now."

The latter argument had much more weight with young Sharp than the former; but pledging himself as yet to nothing, he ran away to his own room to think; while his mother, with serious misgivings, went down to see about the soup, and hurry on the dinner. She knew that in vaunting Miss Oglander's wealth she had done the very thing she was ordered not to do,

and she was frightened at the way in which her son had taken it.

Mr. Sharp did not come home to their early dinner at half-past one o'clock; indeed, his wife did not expect him much; and his son was delighted not to see him. Kit sat heavily, but took his food as usual. The condition of his mind might be very sad indeed; but his body was not to be driven thereby to neglect the duties of its own department. He helped his dear mother to some loin of mutton; and when she only played with it, and her knife and fork were trembling, he was angered, and his eyes sought hers; and she tried to look at him and smile, but made a wretched job of it. Christopher reserved his opinion about this; but it did not help in any way to impair his resolution.

For dessert they had a little dish of strawberries from pot-plants in the greenhouse; and as they were the first of the season, the young

fellow took to them rather greedily. His mother was charmed with this condescension, and urged him so well that in about three minutes the shining red globes ticked with gold were represented by a small, ignoble pile of frilled stalks blurred with pink. At this moment in walked the master of the house.

He had been as fully occupied as a certain unobtrusive, but never inactive, gentleman, proverbially must be in a gale of wind. The day was unusually warm for the May month, and the streets of Oxford dusty. Mr. Sharp had been working a roundabout course, and working it very rapidly; he had managed to snatch at a sandwich or two—for he could not go long without nourishment—but throughout all his haste he had given himself, with the brightest vision of refreshing joy, just time to catch these strawberries. At least he was sure of it. But now, where were they?

"Ah, I see you know how to snap up a good

thing!" cried the lawyer, with a glance of contempt and wrath; "show the same promptitude in what has been arranged for your benefit this afternoon, my boy; and then you will be, in earnest, what you put on your dogs' collars."

This was not the way to treat Kit Sharp; but the lawyer never could resist a sneer, even when his temper was at its best, which it certainly was not just now.

Kit looked a little ashamed for a moment, but made no excuse for his greediness; he was sure that his mother would do that best. By this time he had resolved to avoid, for the present, all further dispute with his father. Whatever was arranged for him he would do his best to accept, with one condition—that he should be allowed to see the young lady first, and test her good-will towards him, before her "removal" (as Mr. Sharp mildly called it) was attempted. His sanguine young heart had long been doing its utmost to convince him that this

sweet-tempered and simple maid could never bring herself to the terrible cruelty of rejecting him. He felt how unworthy he was; but still so was everybody else—especially the villain with the four bay horses: from that scoundrel he would save her, even if he had to dissemble more than he ever had done before.

Luke Sharp, with his eyes fixed on his son in lofty contemplation, beheld (as through a grand microscope) these despicable little reasonings. To argue with Kit was more foolish than filing a declaration against a man of straw. To suppose that Kit would ever really rebel was more absurd than to imagine that a case would be decided upon its merits. "So be it," he said; "but of course, even you would never be quite such a fool as to tell her what your father and mother have done for her good."

There still was a little to be done, and some nicety of combination to see to; and after a short consultation with his wife, and particular

instructions as to management of Kit, Mr. Sharp rode off on his own stout horse, with a heavily loaded whip and a brace of pistols, because there were some rogues about.

CHAPTER XII.

UNFILIAL.

"At seven o'clock all must be ready," said Mr. Sharp, towards the close of a hurried conversation with Miss Patch, Grace Oglander being sent out of the way, according to established signal; "there is no time to lose, and no ladies' tricks of unpunctuality, if you please. We must have daylight for these horrid forest-roads, and time it so as to get into the London road about half-past eight. We must be in London by two in the morning; the horses, and all that will be forthcoming. Kit rides outside, and I follow on horseback. Hannah, why do you hesitate?"

"Because I cannot—I cannot go away, with-

out having seen that Jesuit priest in the pig-net wallowing. It is such a grand providential work—the arm of the Lord has descended from heaven, and bound him in his own meshes. Luke, I beg you, I implore you—I can pack up everything in an hour—do not rob me of a sight like that."

"Hannah, are you mad? You have never been allowed to go near that place, and you never shall!"

"Well, you know best; but it does seem very cruel, after all the lack of grace I have borne with here, to miss the great Protestant work thus accomplished. But suppose that the child should refuse to come with us—we have no letters now, nor any other ministration."

"We have no time now for such trumpery; we must carry things now with a much higher hand. Everything hangs upon the next few hours; and by this time to-morrow night all shall be safe: Kit and the girl gone for their

honeymoon, and you sitting under the most furious dustman that ever thumped a cushion."

"Oh, Luke, how can you speak as if you really had no reverence?"

"Because there is no time for such stuff now. We have the strength, and we must use it. Just go and get ready. I must ride to meet my people. The girl, I suppose, is with Kit by this time. What a pair of nincompoops they will be!"

"I am sure they will be a very pretty pair—so far as poor sinful exterior goes—and, what is of a thousand-fold more importance, their worldly means will be the means of grace to hundreds of our poor fellow-creatures, who, because their skin is of a different tint, and in their own opinion a finer one, are debarred——"

"Now, Hannah, no time for that. Get ready. And mind that there must be no feminine weakness if circumstances should com us to employ a little compulsion. Call to your

mind that the Lord is with us ; the sword of the Lord and of Gideon."

Pleased with his knowledge of Holy Writ, he went to the place where his horse was tied, and there he found a man with a message for him, which he just stopped to hearken.

" As loovin' as a pair o' toortle doves; he hath a-got her by the middle ; as sweet as my missus were to me, afore us went to church togither!" Black George had been set to watch Kit and Gracie, during their private interview, lest any precaution should be overlooked.

" Right! Here's a guinea for you, my man. Now, you know what to do till I come back—to stay where you are, and keep a sharp look-out. Can the fool in the net do without any water ? Very well, after dark, give him some food, bandage his eyes, and walk him to and fro, and let him go in Banbury."

" All right, governor. A rare bait he shall have of it, with a little swim in the canal, to clane un."

"No hardship, no cruelty!" cried Mr. Sharp, with his finger to his forehead, as he rode away; "only a little wise discipline to lead him into closer attention to his own affairs."

Black George looked after his master with a grin of admiration. "He sticketh at nort," said George to himself, as he began to fill a grimy pipe; "he sticketh at nort no more than I would. And with all that house and lands to back un! Most folk with money got no pluck left, for thinking of others as owneth the same. I'll be danged if he dothn't carry on as bold as if he slep' in a rabbit-hole." With these words he sat down to watch the house, according to his orders.

But this man's description of what he had seen in the wood was not a correct one—much as he meant to speak the truth—for many reasons, and most of all this: that he ran away before the end of it. It was a pretty and a moving scene; but the rabbit-man cared a great

deal more for the pipe, which he could not smoke in this duty, and the guinea which he hoped to get out of it. And it happened, as near as one can tell, on this wise:

Grace Oglander came down the winding wooded path, with her heart pit-a-patting at every step, because she was ordered to meet somebody. An idea of that kind did not please her. A prude, or a prim, she would never wish to be; and a little bit of flirting had been a great relief, and a pleasant change in her loneliness. But to bring matters to so stern a point, and have to say what she meant to say, in as few words as possible, and then walk off—these strong measures were not to her liking, because she was a most kind-hearted girl, and had much good-will towards Christopher.

Kit, on the other hand, came along fast, with a resolute brow and firm heavy stride. He had made up his mind to be wretched for life, if the heart upon which he had set his own should

refuse to throb responsively. But whatever his fate might be, he would tread the highest path of generosity, chivalry, and honour; and this resolution was well set forth in the following nervous and pathetic lines, found in his blotting-paper after his untimely—but stay, let us not anticipate. These words had been watered with a flood of tears.

C. F. S. TO MISS O. G.

"Say that happier mortal woos thee,
Say that nobler knight pursues thee,
While this blighted being teareth
All the festive robes it weareth,
While this dead heart splits to lose thee—
Ah, could I so misuse thee?
Though this bosom, rent by thunder,
Crash its last hope anchor'd in thee;
Liefer would I groan thereunder,
Than by falsehood win thee!"

And now they met in a gentle place, roofed with leaves, and floored with moss, and decorated with bluebells. The chill of the earth was gone by and forgotten, and the power

of the sky come back again; stately tree, and graceful bush, and brown depths of tangled prickliness—everything having green life in it—was spreading its green, and proud of it. Under this roof, and in these halls of bright young verdure, the youth and the maid came face to face befittingly. Grace, as bright as a rose, and flushing with true tint of wild rose, drew back and bowed, and then, perceiving serious hurt of Christopher, kindly offered a warm, white hand —a delicious touch for any one. Kit laid hold of this and kept it, though with constant fear of doing more than was established, and, trying to look firm and overpowering, led the fair young woman to a trunk of fallen oak.

Here they both sat down; and Grace was not so far as she could wish from yielding to a little kind of trembling which arose in her. She glanced at Kit sideways whenever she felt that he could not be looking at her; and she kept her wise eyes mainly downward whenever

they seemed to be wanted—not that she could not look up and speak, only that she would rather wait until there was no other help for it; and as for that, she felt no fear, being sure that he was afraid of her. Kit, on the other hand, was full of fear, and did all he could in the craftiest manner to make his love look up at him. He could not tell how she might take his tale; but he knew by instinct that his eyes would help him where his tongue might fail. At last he said—

"Now, will you promise faithfully not to be angry with me?"

"Oh yes, oh yes—to be sure," said Grace; "why should I be angry?"

"Because I can't help it—I give you my honour. I have tried very hard, but I cannot help it."

"Then who could be angry with you, unless it was something very wicked?"

"It is not very wicked, it is very good—too good for me, a great deal, I am afraid."

"There cannot be many things too good for you; you are simple, and brave, and gentle."

"But this is too good for me, ever so much, because it is your own dear self."

Grace was afraid that this was coming; and now she lifted her soft blue eyes and looked at him quite tenderly, and yet so directly and clearly that he knew in a moment what she had for him—pity, and trust, and liking; but of heart's love not one atom.

"I know what you mean," he whispered sadly, with his bright young face cast down. "I cannot think what can have made me such a fool. Only please to tell me one thing. Has there been any chap in front of me?"

"How can I tell what you mean?" asked Grace; but her colour showed that she could guess.

"I must not ask who it is, of course. Only, say it's not the swell that drives the four bay horses."

"I do not know any one that drives four bay horses. And now I think that I had better go. Only, as I cannot ever meet you any more, I must try to tell you that I like you very much, and never shall forget what I owe to you; and I hope you will very soon recover from this—this little disappointment; and my dear father, as soon as we return to England—for I must go to fetch him——"

"Grace—oh, let me call you 'Grace' once or twice, it can't matter here in the middle of the wood—Grace, I was so taken up with myself, and full of my miserable folly, which of course I ought to have known better——"

"I must not stop to hear any more. There is my hand—yes, of course you may kiss it, after all that you have done for me."

"I am going to do a great deal more for you," cried Kit, quite carried away with the yielding kindness of lovely fingers. "For your sake I am going to injure and disgrace my own

father—though the Lord knows the shame is of his own making. It is my father who has kept you here; and to-night he is going to carry you off. Miss Patch is only a tool of his. Your own father knows not a word about it. He believes you to be dead and buried. Your tombstone is set up at Beckley, and your father goes and cries over it."

"But his letters—his letters from Demerara? Oh! my head swims round! Let me hold by this tree for a moment!"

Kit threw his arm round her delicate waist to save her from falling; and away crept George, who had lurked behind a young birch-tree too far off to hear their words.

"You must rouse up your courage," said Kit, with a yearning gaze at his sweet burden, yet taking no advantage of her. "Rouse up your courage, and I will do my best to save you from myself. It is very hard—it is cruelly cruel, and nobody will thank me!"

"His letters from Demerara!" cried Grace, having scarcely heard a word he said. "How could he have written them? You must be wrong."

"Of such letters I have never heard. I suppose they must have been forgeries. I give you my word that your father has been the whole of the time at Beckley, and a great deal too ill to go from home."

"Too ill!—my father? Yes, of course—of course! How could he help being ill without me? And he thinks I am dead? Oh! he thinks that I am dead! I wonder that he could dare to be alive. But let me try to think a little."

She tottered back to the old stump of the tree, and sat down there, and burst forth into an extraordinary gush of weeping: more sad and pitiful tears had never watered an innocent face before. "Let me cry!—let me cry!" was her only answer, when the young man clumsily tried to comfort.

Kit got up and strode about; his indignation at her deep low sobs, and her brilliant cheeks like a river's bed, and her rich hair dabbled like drifted corn, and above all the violent pain which made her lay both hands to her heart and squeeze—his wrath made him long to knock down people entitled to his love and reverence. He knew that her heart was quite full of her father in all his long desolation, and was making a row of pictures of him in deepening tribulation; but a girl might go on like that for ever; a man must take the lead of her.

"If you please, Miss Oglander," he said, going up and lifting both her hands, and making her look up at him, "you have scarcely five minutes to make up your mind whether you wish to save your father, or to be carried away from him."

Grace in confusion and fear looked up. All about herself she had forgotten; she had even forgotten that Kit was near; she was only

pondering slowly now—as the mind at most critical moments does—some straw of a trifle that blew across.

"Do you care to save your father's life?" asked Kit, rather sternly, not seeing in the least the condition of her mind, but wondering at it. "If you do, you must come with me, this moment, down the hill, down the hill, as fast as ever you can. I know a place where they can never find us. We must hide there till dark, and then I will take you to Beckley."

But the young lady's nerves would not act at command. The shock and surprise had been too severe. All she could do was to gaze at Kit, with soft imploring eyes, that tried to beg pardon for her helplessness.

"If we stay here another minute, you are lost!" cried Kit, as he heard the sound of carriage-wheels near the cottage, on the rise above them. "One question only—will you trust me?"

She moved her pale lips to say "yes," and faintly lifted one hand to him. Kit waited for no other sign, but caught her in his sturdy arms, and bore her down the hill as fast he could go, without scratching her snow-white face, or tearing the arm which hung on his shoulder.

CHAPTER XIII.

UNPATERNAL.

MEANWHILE, Mr. Sharp had his forces ready, and was waiting for Grace and Christopher. Cinnaminta's good Uncle Kershoe (who spent half of his useful time in stealing horses, and the other half in disguising and disposing of them), although he might not have desired to show himself so long before the moonlight, yet, true to honour, here he was, blinking beneath a three-cornered hat, like a grandly respectable coachman. The carriage was drawn up in a shady place, quite out of sight from the windows; and the horses, having very rare experience of oats, were embracing a fine oppor-

tunity. In picturesque attitudes of tobacco-nizing—if the depth of the wood covers barbarism—three fine fellows might now be seen; to wit, Black George, Joe Smith, and that substantial householder, Tickuss Cripps. In the chaise sat a lady of comfortable aspect, though fidgeting now with fat, well-gloved hands. Mrs. Sharp had begged not to have to stop at home and wonder what might be doing with her own Kit: and the case being now one of "neck or nothing," her husband had let her come, foreseeing that she might be of use with Grace Oglander. For the moment, however, she looked more likely to need attendance for herself; for she kept glancing round towards the cottage-door, while her plump and still comely cheeks were twitching, and tears of deep thought about the merits of her son held her heart in quick readiness to be up and help them. Once Mr. Sharp, whose main good point, among several others, was affection for

his wife, rode up, and in a playful manner tickled her nose with the buckskin loop of his loaded whip, and laughed at her. She felt how kind it was of him, but her smile was only feeble.

"Now mind, dear," said Mr. Sharp, reining his horse (as strong as an oak and as bright as a daisy), "feel no anxiety about me. You have plenty of nourishment in your three bags; keep them all alive with it. Everything is mapped out perfectly. Near Wycombe, without rousing any landlord, you have a fresh pair of horses. In a desert place called the 'New Road,' in London, I meet you and take charge of you."

"May Kit have his pipe on the box? I am sure it will make him go so much sweeter."

"Fifty, if he likes. You put his sealskin pouch in. You think of every one before yourself."

"But can I get on with that dreadful woman?

Don't you think she will preach me to death, Luke ?"

"Miranda, my dear, you are talking loosely. You forget the great gift that you possess—the noblest endowment of the nobler sex. You can sleep whenever you like, and do it without even a suspicion of a snore. It is the very finest form of listening. Good-bye! You will be a most happy party. When once I see you packed, I shall spur on in front."

Mr. Sharp kissed his hand, and rode back to the cottage. Right well he knew what a time ladies take to put their clothes upon them ; and the more grow the years of their practice in the art, the longer grow the hours needful. Still he thought Miss Patch had been quite long enough. But what could he say, when he saw her at her window, with the looking-glass sternly set back upon the drawers, lifting her hands in short prayer to the Lord : as genuine a prayer as was ever tried. She was praying for

a blessing on this new adventure, and that all might lead up to the glory of the Kingdom; she besought to be relieved at last from her wearying instrumentality. Mr. Sharp still had some little faith left—for he was a man of much good feeling—and he did not scoff at his sister's prayer, as a man of low nature might have done.

Nevertheless he struck up with his whip at the ivy round her bedroom window, to impress the need of brevity; and the lady, though shocked at the suggestion of curtailment, did curtail immediately. In less than five minutes, she was busy at the doorway, seeing to the exit of everything; and presently, with very pious precision, she gave Mrs. Margery Daw half a crown, and a tract which some friend should read to her, after rubbing her glands with a rind of bacon, and a worn-out pocket-handkerchief, which had belonged to the mighty Rowland Hill, whose voice went three miles and a half.

Then Miss Patch (with her dress tucked up, and her spectacles at their brightest) marched, with her copy of the Scriptures borne prominently forward, and the tags of her cloak doubled up on her arm, towards the carriage, where Grace must be waiting for her. The sloping of the sunset threw her shadow, and the ring-doves in the wood were cooing. The peace and the beauty touched even her heart; and the hushing of the winds of evening in the nestling of the wood appeased the ruffled mind to that simplicity of childhood, where God and good are one.

But just as she was shaking hands benevolently with Mrs. Sharp, before getting into the carriage, back rode Mr. Sharp at full gallop, and without any ceremony shouted, "Where's the girl?"

"Miss Oglander! Why, I thought she was here!" Hannah Patch answered, with a little gasp.

"And I thought she was coming with you," cried Mrs. Sharp; "as well as my dear boy, Christopher."

"I let her go to meet him as you arranged," Miss Patch exclaimed decisively; "I had nothing to do with her after that."

"Is it possible that the boy has rogued me?" As Mr. Sharp said these few words, his face took a colour never seen before, even by his loving wife. The colour was a livid purple, and it made his sparkling eyes look pale.

"They must be at the cottage," Mrs. Sharp suggested; "let me go to look for the naughty young couple."

The lawyer had his reasons for preventing this, as well as for keeping himself where he was; and therefore at a sign from him, Miss Patch turned back, and set off with all haste for the cottage. No sooner had she turned the corner, than Joe Smith, the tall gipsy, emerged from the wood with long strides into the road,

and beckoned to Mr. Sharp urgently. The lawyer was with him in a moment, and almost struck him in his fury at what he heard.

"How could you allow it? You great tinkering fool! Run to the corner where the two lanes meet. Take George with you. I will ride straight down the road. No, stop, cut the traces of those two horses! You jump on one, and Black George on the other, and off for the Corner full gallop! You ought to be there before the cart. I will ride straight for that rotten old jolter! Zounds, is one man to beat five of us?" Waiting for no answer, he struck spurs into his horse, and, stooping over the withers, dashed into a tangled alley, which seemed to lead towards the timber-track.

No wonder Mr. Sharp was in such a rage, for what had happened was exactly this—only much of it happened with more speed than words:—

Cripps, the Carrier, had been put up by several

friends and relations (especially Numbers, the butcher, who missed the pork trade of Leviticus) to bring things directly to a point, instead of letting them go on, in a way which was neither one thing nor the other. Confessing all the claims of duty, poor Zacchary only asked how he could discharge them. He had done his very best, and he had found out nothing. If any one could tell him what more to do, he would wear out his Sunday shoes to thank them.

"Brother Zak," said Mrs. Numbers, with a feeling which in a less loyal family would have been contempt, "have you set a woman to work; now, have you?"

Every Cripps present was struck with this, and most of all the Carrier. Mrs. Numbers herself was quite ready to go, but a feud had arisen betwixt her and Susannah, as to whether three-holed or four-holed buttons cut the cotton faster; and therefore the Carrier resolved to take his own sister Etty, who never quarrelled.

It was found out that she required change of air, and, indeed, she had been rather delicate ever since her long sad task at Shotover. Now, Leviticus durst not refuse to receive her, much as he disliked the plan. The girl went without any idea of playing spy; all she knew was that her brother was suspected of falling into low company, and she was to put him on his mettle, if she could.

Hence it was that Hardenow, gazing betwixt the two feather-edged boards, beheld—just before he lost his wits—the honoured vehicle of Cripps, with empty washing baskets standing, on its welcome homeward road, to discharge the fair Etty at her brother's gate. Tickuss was away upon Mr. Sharp's business, and Zacchary, through a grand sense of honour, would not take advantage of the chance by going in. Craft and wickedness might be in full play with them, but a wife should on no account be taken unawares, and tempted to speak outside her duty.

Therefore the Carrier kissed his sister in the soft gleam of the sunset-clouds, and refusing so much as a glass of ale, touched up Dobbin with a tickle of the whip; and that excellent nag (after looking round for oats in a dream, which his common sense premised to be too sanguine) brushed all his latter elegances with his tail, and fetching round his blinkers a most sad adieu to Esther, gave a little grunt at fortune and resignedly set off. Alas, when he grunted at a light day's work, how little did he guess what unparalleled exertions parted him yet from his stable for the night!

For while Master Cripps, with an equable mind, was jogging it gently on the silent way, and (thinking how lonely his cottage would be without Esther) was balancing in his mind the respective charms of his three admirers, Mary Hookham, Mealy Hiss, and Sally Brown of the Golden Cross, and sadly concluding that he must make up his mind to one of the three

ere long—suddenly he beheld a thing which frightened him more than a dozen wives.

Cripps was come to a turn of the track—for it scarcely could be called a road—and was sadly singing to Dobbin and himself that exquisite elegiac—

> "Needles and pins, needles and pins,
> When a man marries, his trouble begins!"

Dobbin also, though he never had been married, was trying to keep time to this tune, as he always did to sound sentiments; when the two of them saw a sight that came, like a stroke for profanity, over them.

Directly in front of them, from a thick bush, sprang a beautiful girl into the middle of the lane, and spread out her hand to stop them. If the evening light had been a little paler, or even the moon had been behind her, a ghost she must have been then, and for ever. Cripps stared as if he would have no eyes any more; but Dobbin had received a great many comforts

from the little hands spread out to him ; and he stopped and sniffed, and lifted up his nose (now growing more decidedly aquiline) that it might be stroked, and even possibly regaled with a bunch of white-blossomed clover.

"Oh, Cripps, good Cripps, you dear old Cripps!" Grace Oglander cried with great tears in her eyes, "you never have forgotten me, Zacchary Cripps? They say that I am dead and buried. It isn't true, not a word of it! Dear Cripps, I am as sound alive as you are. Only I have been shamefully treated! Do let me get up in your cart, good Cripps, and my father will thank you for ever!"

"But, Missy, poor Missy," Cripps stammered out, drawing on his heart for every word, "you was buried on the seventh day of January, in the year of our Lord, 1838 ; three pickaxes was broken over digging of your grave, by reason of the frosty weather; and all of us come to your funeral! Do 'ee go back, miss, that's a

dear! The churchyard to Beckley is a comfortable place, and this here wood no place for a Christian."

"But, Cripps, dear Cripps, do try to let me speak! They might have broken thirty pick-axes, but I had nothing at all to do with it. May I get up? Oh, may I get up? It is the only chance of saving me. I hear a horse tearing through the wood! Oh, dear, clever Cripps, you will repent it for the rest of all your life. Even Dobbin is sharper than you are."

"You blessed old ass!" cried a stern young voice, as Kit Sharp (who had meant not to show) rushed forward, "there is no time for your heavy brain to work. You shall have the young lady, dead or alive! Pardon me, Grace—no help for it. Now, thick-headed bumpkin, put one arm round her, and off at full gallop with your old screw! If you give her up I will hang you by the neck to the tail of your broken rattletrap!"

"Oh, Cripps, dear Cripps, I assure you on my honour," said Grace, as tossed up by her lover, she sat in the seat of Esther, "I have never been dead any more than you have. I can't tell you now; oh, drive on, drive, if you have a spark of manhood in you!"

A horse and horseman came out of the wood, about fifty yards behind them, and Grace would have fallen headlong, but for the half-reluctant arm of Cripps, as Dobbin with a jump (quite unknown in his very first assay of harness) set off full gallop over rut and rock, with a blow on his back, from the fist of Kit, like the tumble of a chimney-pot.

Then Christopher Sharp, after one sad look at Grace Oglander's flying figure, turned round to confront his father.

"What means all this?" cried the lawyer fiercely, being obliged to rein up his horse, unless he would trample Kit underfoot.

"It means this," answered his son, with firm

gaze, and strong grasp of his bridle; "that you have made a great mistake, sir—that you must give up your plan altogether—that the poor young lady who has been so deceived——"

"Let go my bridle, will you? Am I to stop here—to be baffled by you? Idiot, let go my bridle!"

"Father, you shall not—for your own sake, you shall not! I may be an idiot, but I will not be a blackguard——"

"If by the time I have counted three, your hand is on my bridle, I will knock you down, and ride over you!"

Their eyes met in furious conflict of will, the elder man's glaring with the blaze of an opal, the younger one's steady with a deep brown glow.

"Strike me dead, if you choose!" said Kit, as his father raised his arm, with the loaded whip swinging, and counted, "One, two, three!" —then the crashing blow fell on the naked temple; and it was not needed twice.

Dashing the rowels into his horse (whose knees struck the boy in the chest as he fell, and hurled him among the bushes), the lawyer, without even looking round, rode madly after Zacchary. Dobbin had won a good start by this time, and was round the corner, doing great wonders for his time of life—tossing the tubs, and the baskets, and Grace, and even the sturdy Carrier, like fritters in a pan, while the cart leaped and plunged, and the spokes of the wheels went round too fast to be counted. Cripps tugged at Dobbin with all his might; but for the first time in his life the old horse rebelled, and flung on at full speed.

"He knoweth best, miss; he knoweth best," cried Zacchary, while Grace clung to him; "he hath a divination of his own, if he dothn't kick the cart to tatters. But never would I turn tail on a single man—who is yon chap riding after us?"

"Oh, Cripps, it is that dreadful man,"

whispered Grace, with her teeth jerking into her tongue; "who has kept me in prison, and perhaps killed my father! Oh, Dobbin, sweet Dobbin, try one more gallop, and you shall have clover for ever!"

Poor Dobbin responded with his best endeavour; but, alas! his old feet, and his legs, and his breath were not as in the palmy days; and a long shambling trot, with a canter for a change, were the utmost he could compass. He wagged his grey tail, in brief expostulation, conveying that he could go no faster.

"Now for it," said Cripps, as the foe overhauled them. "I never was afeard of one man yet; and I don't mane to begin at this time of life. Missy, go down into the body of the cart. Her rideth aisily enough by now; and cover thee up with the bucking-baskets. Cripps will take thee to thy father, little un. Never fear, my deary!"

She obeyed him by jumping back into the

cart—but as for hiding in a basket, Grace had a little too much of her father's spirit. The weather was so fine that no tilt was on; she sat on the rail there, and faced her bitter foe.

"That child is my ward!" shouted Mr. Sharp, riding up to the side of Cripps; while his eyes passed on from Grace's; "give her up to me this moment, fellow! I can take her by law of the land; and I will!"

"Liar Sharp," answered Master Cripps, desiring to address him professionally, "this here young lady belongeth to her father; and no man else shall have her. Any reasoning thou hast to come down with, us will hearken, as we goes along; if so be that thou keepest to a civil tongue. But high words never bate me down one penny; and never shall do so, while the Lord is with me."

"Hark you, Cripps," replied Mr. Sharp, putting his lips to the Carrier's ear; and whispering so that Grace could only guess at

enormous sums of money (which sums began doubling at every breath)—"down on the nail, and no man the wiser!"

"But the devil a great deal the wiser," said the Carrier, grinning gently, as if he saw the power of evil fleeing away in discomfiture. "Now Liar Sharp hath outwitted hisself. What Liar would offer such a sight of money for what were his own by the lai of the land?"

"You cursed fool, will you die?" cried Sharp, drawing and cocking a great horse-pistol; "your blood be on your own head—then yield!"

Cripps, with great presence of mind, made believe for a moment to surrender, till Mr. Sharp lowered his weapon, and came up to stop the cart, and to take out Grace. In a moment, the Carrier, with a wonderful stroke, learned from long whip-wielding, fetched down his new lash on the eyeball of the young and ticklish horse of the lawyer. Mad with pain and rage, the horse stood up as straight as a soldier drill-

ing, and balanced on the turn to fall back, break his spine, and crush his rider. Luke Sharp in his peril slipped off, and the cart-wheel comfortably crunched over his left foot. His pistol-bullet whizzed through a tall old tree. He stood on one foot, and swore horribly.

"Gee wugg, Dobbin," said Cripps, in a cheerful, but not by any means excited, vein; "us needn't gallop any more now, I reckon. The Liar hath put his foot in it. Plaize now, Miss Grace, come and sit to front again."

"We shall have you yet, you d——d old clod!" Mr. Sharp in his rage yelled after him; "oh, I'll pay you out for this devil's own trick! You aren't come to the Corner yet."

"Ho, ho!" shouted Cripps; "Liar Sharp, my duty to you! You don't catch me goin' to the Corner, sir, if some of the firm be awaitin' for me there."

With these words he gaily struck off to the right, through a by-lane, unknown, but just

passable, where the sound of his wheels was no longer heard, and the mossy boughs closed over him. Grace clung to his arm; and glory and gladness filled the simple heart of Cripps.

Meanwhile Mr. Sharp, who had stuck to his bridle, limped to his horse, but could not mount. Then he drew forth the other pistol from the near holster, and cocked it and levelled it at Cripps; but thanks to brave Dobbin, now the distance was too great; and he kept the charge for nobler use.

CHAPTER XIV.

"THIS WILL DO."

MR. SHARP'S young horse, being highly fed and victualled for the long ride to London, and having been struck in the eye unjustly, and jarred in the brain by the roar of a pistol and whizz of a bullet between his pricked ears, was now in a state of mind which offered no fair field for pure reasoning process. A better-disposed horse was never foaled; and possibly none—setting Dobbin aside, as the premier and quite unapproachable type—who took a clearer view of his duties to the provider of corn, hay, and straw, and was more ready to face and undergo all proper responsibilities.

Therefore he cannot be fairly blamed, and not a pound should be deducted from his warrantable value, simply because he now did what any other young horse in the world would have felt to be right. He stared all around to ask what was coming next, and he tugged on the bridle, with his fore-feet out, as a leverage against injustice, and his hind-legs spread wide apart, like a merry-thought, ready to hop anywhere. At the same time he stared with great terrified eyes, now at the man who had involved him in these perils, and now at the darkening forest which might hold even worse in the background.

Mr. Sharp was not in the mood for coaxing, or any conciliation. His left foot was crushed so that he could only hop, and to put it to the ground was agony; his own son had turned against him; and a contemptible clod had outwitted him; disgrace, and ruin, and death stared at him; and here was his favourite

horse a rebel! He fixed his fierce eyes on the eyes of the horse, and fairly quelled him with fury. The eyes of the horse shrank back, and turned, and trembled, and blinked, and pleaded softly, and then absolutely fawned. Being a very intelligent nag, he was as sure as any sound Christian of the personality of the devil—and, far worse than that, of his presence now before him.

He came round whinnying to his master's side, as gentle as a lamb, and as abject as a hang-dog; he allowed the lame lawyer to pick up his whip, and to lash him on his poor back, without a wince, and to lead him (when weary of that) to a stump, from which he was able to mount again.

"Thank you, you devil," cried Mr. Sharp, giving his good horse another swinging lash; "it is hopeless altogether to ride after the cart. That part of the play is played out and done with. The pious papa and the milk-and-water

missy rush into each other's arms. And as for me—well, well, I have learned to make a horse obey me. Now, sir, if you please, we will join the ladies—gently, because of your master's foot."

He rode back quietly along the track over which he had chased the Carrier's cart; and his foot was now in such anguish that the whole of his wonderful self-command was needed to keep him silent. He set his hard lips, and his rigid nose was drawn as pale as parchment, and the fire of his eyes died into the dullness of universal rancour. No hard-hearted man can find his joy in the sweet soft works of nature, any more than the naked flint nurses flowers. The beauty of the young May twilight flowing through the woven wood, and harbouring, like a blue bloom, here and there, in bays of verdure; while upward all the great trees reared their domes once more in summer roofage, and stopped out the heavens; while in

among them, finding refuge, birds (before the dark fell on them) filled the world with melody; and all the hushing rustle of the well-earned night was settling down—through all of these rode Mr. Sharp, and hated every one of them.

Presently his horse gave a little turn of head, but was too cowed down to shy again; and a tall woman, darkly clad, was standing by the timber-track, with one hand up to catch his eyes.

"You here, Cinnaminta!" cried the lawyer with surprise. "I have no time now. What do you want with me?"

"I want you to see the work of your hand—your only child, dead by your own blow!"

Struck with cold horror, he could not speak. But he reeled in the saddle, with his hand on his heart, and stared at Cinnaminta.

"It is true," she said softly; "come here and see it. Even for you, Luke Sharp, I never

could have wished a sight like this. You have ruined my life; you have made my people thieves; the loss of my children lies on you. But to see your only son murdered by yourself is too bad even for such as you."

"I never meant it—I never dreamed it—God is my witness that I never did. I thought his head was a great deal thicker."

Sneerer as he was, he meant no jest now. He simply spoke the earnest truth. In his passion he had struck men before, and knocked them down, with no great harm; he forgot his own fury in this one blow, and the weight of his heavily-loaded whip.

"If you cannot believe," she answered sternly, supposing him to be jeering still, "you had better come here. He was a kind, good lad, good to me, and to my last child. I have made him look very nice. Will you come? Or will you go and tell his mother?"

Luke Sharp looked at her in the same sort

of way in which many of his victims had looked at him. Then he touched his horse gently, having had too much of rage, and allowed him to take his own choice of way.

The poor horse, having had a very bad time of it, made the most of this privilege. Setting an example to mankind (whose first thought is not sure to be of home) the poor fellow pointed the white star on his forehead towards his distant stable. Oxford was many a bad mile away, but his heart was set upon being there. Sleepily therefore he jogged along, having never known such a day of it.

While he thought of his oat-sieve sweetly, and nice little nibbles at his clover hay, and the comfortable soothing of his creased places by a man who would sing a tune to him, his rider was in a very different case, without one hope to turn to.

The rising of the moon, to assuage the earth of all the long sun fever, the spread of dewy

light, and quivering of the nerves of shadow, and then the soft, unfeatured beauty of the dim tranquillity, coming over Luke Sharp's road, or flitting on his face, what difference could they make to its white despair? He hated light, he loathed the shade, he scorned the meekness of the dapple, and he cursed the darkness.

Out of sight of the road, and yet within a level course of it, there lay, to his knowledge, a deep, and quiet, and seldom-troubled forest-pool. This had long been in his mind, and coming to the footpath now, he drew his bridle towards it.

The moon was here fenced out by trees, and thickets of blackthorn, and ivy hanging like a funeral pall. Except that here at the lip of darkness, one broad beam of light stole in, and shivered on gray boles of willow, and quivered on black lustrous smoothness of contemptuous water.

To the verge of this water Luke Sharp rode,

with his horse prepared for anything. He swept with his keen eyes all the length of liquid darkness, ebbing into blackness in the distance. And he spoke his last words—"This will do."

Then he drove his horse into the margin of the pool, till the water was up to the girths, and the broad beams of the moon shone over them. Here he drew both feet from the stirrup-irons, and sat on his saddle sideways, sluicing his crushed and burning foot, and watching the water drip from it. And then he carefully pulled from the holster the pistol that still was loaded, took care that the flint and the priming were right, and turning his horse that he might escape, while the man fell into deep water, steadfastly gazed at the moon, and laid the muzzle to his temple, justly careful that it should be the temple, and the vein which tallied with that upon which he had struck his son.

A blaze lit up the forest-pool, and a roar shook the pall of ivy; a heavy plash added to

the treasures of the deep, and a little flotilla of white stuff began to sail about on the black water, in the commotion made by man and horse. When Mr. Sharp was an office-boy, his name had been " Little Big-brains."

CHAPTER XV.

CRIPPS BRINGS HOME THE CROWN.

ALTHOUGH the solid Cripps might now be supposed by other people to have baffled all his enemies, in his own mind there was no sense of triumph, but much of wonder. The first thing he did when all danger was past, and Dobbin was pedalling his old tune—"three-happence and tuppence; three-happence and tuppence; a good horse knows what his shoes are worth"—was to tie up Gracie in a pair of sacks. He thumped them well on the foot-board first, to shake all the mealiness out of them; and then, with permission, he spread one over the delicate shoulders, and the other in front, across the

trembling heart and throat. Then, by some hereditary art, he fastened them together, so that the night air could not creep between.

"Cripps, you are too good," said Grace; "if I could only tell you half the times that I have thought of you; and once when I saw a sack of yours——"

"Lor', miss, the very one as I have missed! Had un got a red cross, thick to one side—the Lord only knows what a fool I be, to carry on with such rum-tums now; however I'll have hold of he—and zummat more, ere I be done with it." Here the Carrier rubbed his mouth on his sleeve, as he always did to stop himself. He was not going to publish the family disgrace, till he had avenged it. "But now, miss, not another word you say. Inside of them sacks you go to sleep; the Lord knows you want it dearly; and fall away you can't nohow. Scratched you be to that extreme in getting out of Satan's den, that tallow candles dropped

in water is what I must see to. None on 'em knows it, no, not one on 'em. Man or horse, it cometh all the same. It taketh a man to do it, though."

"I should like to see a horse do it," said Grace; and her sleepy smile passed into sleep. Eager as she was to be in her father's arms, the excitement, and the exertion, and the unwonted shaking, and passage through the air, began to tell their usual tale.

This was the very thing the crafty Carrier longed to bring about. It left him time to consider how to meet two difficulties. The first was to get her through Beckley without any uproar of the natives; the second, to place her in her father's arms without dangerous emotion. The former point he compassed well, by taking advantage of the many ins and outs of the leisurely lanes of Beckley, so that he drew up at the back door of the Barton, without a single sapient villager being one bit the wiser.

Now, if he only had his sister with him, the second point might have been better managed; because he would have sent her on in front, to treat with Mrs. Hookham, and employ all the feminine skill supplied by quickness, sympathy, and invention. As it was, he must do the best he could; and his greatest difficulty was with Grace herself.

The young lady by this time was wide awake, and stirred with such violent throbbings of heart, at the view of divine and desirable Beckley sleeping in the moonlight, and at the breath of her own home-door, and haunt of her darling father's steps, that Cripps had to hold her down by her sacks, and wished that he could strap her so. "Do 'ee zit still, miss; do 'ee zit still," he kept on saying, till he was afraid of being rude.

"You are a tyrant, Cripps; a perfect tyrant! Because you have picked me up, and been so good, have you any right to keep me from my father?"

"Them rasonings," said Cripps in a decided tone, "is good; but comes to nothing. Either you do as I begs of you, missy, or I turns Dobbin's head, and back you go. It is for the Squire's sake I spake so harsh to 'ee. Supposin' you was to kill him, missy, what would you say arterwards?"

"Oh, is he so dreadfully ill as that? I will do everything exactly as you tell me."

"Then get down very softly, miss, and run and hide in that old doorway, quite out of the moonshine, and stay there, till I come to fetch 'ee."

Still covered with the sacks, the maiden did as she was told; while the Carrier, with ungainly skill, and needless cautions to his horse (who stood like a rock), descended. Then he walked into the Squire's kitchen, with whip in hand, as usual, as if he were come to deliver goods.

The fat cook now was sitting calmly by the fire meditating. To her the time of year made

no difference, except for the time that meat must hang, and the recollection of what was in its prime, and the consideration of the draught required, and the shutting of the sun out when he spoiled the fire. In the fire of young days, when herself quite raw, this admirable cook had been "done brown" by a handsome young Methodist preacher. Before she understood what a basting-ladle is, her head was set spinning by his tongue and eyes; he had three wives already, but he put her on the list, took all her money out of her, and went another circuit. The poor girl spent about a year in crying, and then she returned to the Church of England, buried her baby, and became a cook. Without being soured by any evil, she now had long experience, and a ripe style of twirling her thumbs upon her apron.

"Plaize, Mrs. Cook," began Zacchary, entering under official privilege, and trying to look full of business, "do 'ee know where to lay hand

on Mother Hookham? A vallyble piece of goods I has to deliver, and must have good recate for un."

"But lor', Master Cripps, now, whatever be about? It ain't one of your Hoxford days; and us never sends out no washing!"

"You've a-knowed me a long time now, ain't you, Mrs. Cook? Did you ever know me for to play trickum-trully?"

"Never have you done that to my knowledge," the good woman answered steadfastly, though pained in her heart by the thought of one who had; "Master Cripps is known to be the breadth of his own word."

"Then, my good soul, will 'ee fetch down Mother Hookham? It bain't for the flourishes, the Lord A'mighty knows. I haven't got the governing of them little scrawls myself, nor the seasoning amongst them as appertains to you. Bootifully you could a' done it, Mrs. Cook; but the directions here is so particular! For

a job of this sort, you are twenty years too young."

"Oh, Master Cripps," cried the cook, who made a star, like that upon a pie, for her manual sign; "well you know that the ruin of my days has been trust in eddication. Standing outside of it, I was a-took in, and afore there come any pen or pencil, £320 was gone. Not for a moment do I blame the Word of God, only them as blasphemeth it. But the whole of my innard parts is turned against a papper, even on a pie-crust."

"Don't 'ee give way now, dear heart alive! Many a time have you told me, and every time I feels the more for 'ee. Quite a young 'ooman you be still in a way, and a treasure for a young man with a whame in his throat, and half-a-guinea every week you might airn for roasting dinner-parties. But do 'ee now go, and fetch Mother Hookham down."

"The old 'ooman isn't in the house, Master

Cripps. She hath so many things to mind that the wonder is how she can ever go through of them. A heavy weight she hath taken off my shoulders, ever since here she come, in virtue of her tongue. But her darter can be had to put a flour to a'most anything, if my signs isn't grand enough to go into your hat, Master Cripps."

"Now, my dear good soul," replied the Carrier, standing back and looking at her, "you be taking of everything in a crooked way, you be. I have a little thing to see to—nort to say of kitchen in it, and some sort of style pecooliar. Requaireth pecooliar management, I do assure you, and no harm. Will 'ee plaize to hearken to me now? Such as I have to say—not much."

The brave cook answered this appeal by running to fetch Mary Hookham; in everything that now she did, even with such a man as Cripps, the remembrance of vile deceit made

her look out for a witness. Mary came down with a bounce, as if she had never been near her looking-glass, but was born with her ribbons and colour to match. And her eyes shone fresh at the sight of Master Cripps.

"How well you be looking, my dear, for sure!" said the Carrier, having (as a soldier has) his admiration of a pretty girl quickened by the sound of firearms. "And I be come to make 'ee look still better."

Mary cast a glance at the cook, as if she thought her one too many. Cripps must be going to declare his mind at last; and Mary had such faith in him, that she required no witness.

"Who do 'ee think I have brought 'ee back?" asked Zacchary, meaning to be very quiet, but speaking so loud in his pride, that Mary, with a pale face, ran and shut the door upon the steps leading to her master's quarters. Then she came back more at leisure, and put her elbows to her sides, and looked at Master Cripps, as

if she had never meant to think of him for herself. And this made Cripps, who had been exulting at her first proceedings, put down his whip and wonder.

"Not Miss Grace!" cried Mary; "surely never our Miss Grace!"

"What a intellect that young woman hath!" said Cripps aloud, reflecting; "a'most too much, I be verily afeared."

"Oh no, Master Cripps, not at all too much for any one as entereth into it, with a household feeling. But were I right? Oh, Master Cripps, were I right?"

"Mary Hookham," said Cripps, coming over, and laying his hand on her shoulder (as he used to do when she was a little wench, and made him a curtsy with a glass of ale, even then admiring him), "Mary, you were right, as I never could believe any would have the quickness. Cripps hath a-brought home to this old ancient mansion the very most vallyble case

of goods as ever were inside it. Better than the crown as the young Queen hath, for ten months now, preparing."

"Alive?" asked Mary, shrinking back towards the fire, for his metaphor might mean coffins.

"Now, there you go down again—there you go down," answered Cripps, who enjoyed the situation, and desired to make the most of it. "I thought you was all intellect—but better perhaps without too much. Put it to yourself now, Mary, whether I should look like this, if I had only brought remainses."

"Oh, where is her? Where is her? Whereever can her be?" cried Mary, forgetting all her fine education, in strong vernacular excitement.

"Her be where I knows to find her again," answered Zacchary, with a steadfast face. It was not for any one to run in and strike a light betwixt him and his own work. "Her might

be to Abingdon, or to Banbury. Proper time come, I can vetch her forrard."

"Oh, I thought you had got her in the house, Master Cripps. How disappointing you do grow, to be sure! I suppose it is the way of all men."

Mary shed a tear, and Master Cripps (having been tried by sundry women) went closer, to be sure of it. He was pleased at the sign, but he went on with his business.

"You desarve to know everything. Now, can 'ee shut the doors, without a chance of anybody breaking in?"

Mary, and the cook, with a glance at one another, fastened all the doors of the large low kitchen, except the one leading to the lane itself.

"You bide just as you be," said Cripps, "and I'll show 'ee something worth looking at."

He ran to the place where Grace was hiding, in the chill and the heat of impatience, and he

took the coarse sacks from her shoulders, as if her sackcloth time was done at last. Then he led her to the warmth and light, and she hung behind afraid of them. That strange, but not uncommon shyness of one's own familiar home —when long unseen—came over her; and she felt, for the moment, almost afraid of her own beloved father. But Cripps made her come, and both Mary Hookham, and the fat cook, cried "Oh my! My good!" and ran up and kissed her, and held her hands; while she stood pale and mute, with large blue eyes brimful of tears, and lips that wavered between smile and sob.

"Does he—does he know about me?" she managed to say to Cripps, while she glanced at the door leading up to her father's room.

"Not he! Lord bless you, my dear," said Cripps, "it taketh 'em all half an hour apiece, to believe as you ever be alive, miss."

"It would never take my father two minutes,"

answered Grace; "he will be a great deal too glad of it to doubt."

"You promised to bide by my diraxions," the Carrier cried reproachfully; "if 'ee don't, I on't answer for nort of it. Now sit you down, miss, by back-kitchen door, to come or go either way, according as is ordered. Now, Mary, plaize to go, and say, that Cripps hath come to see his Worship, about a little mistake he hath made."

Mr. Oglander never refused to see any who came to visit him. His simple straightforward mind compelled him to go through with everything as it turned up; whether it were of his own business, or any other person's. Therefore he said, "Show Cripps in here."

Cripps was in no hurry to be shown in. He felt that he had a ticklish job to carry through, and he might drop the handles, if himself were touched amiss. And he thought that he could get on much better, with a clever woman there to help him.

"Plaize, your Worship"—he began, coming in, with his finger to his forelock, and his stiff knee sticking out. "Don't 'ee run away now, Mary, that's a dear; you knows all the way-bills; and his Worship will allow of you."

"Why, Cripps," Mr. Oglander exclaimed, "you are making a very great fuss to-night; and you look as if you had been run over. Even if it is half-a-crown, Cripps, you are come to prove against me—put it down. I will not dispute it. I know that you would rather wrong yourself than me." The old gentleman was tired, and he did not want to talk.

"In coorse, in coorse," said Zacchary (as if every man preferred to wrong himself), "but the point is a different thing; and, Mary, speak up, and say you know it is."

"Yes, sir, I do assure you now," said Mary; "the point is altogether quite a different sort of thing."

"Then why can't you come to it?" cried the

Squire; "is it that you want to marry one another?"

Mary's face blushed to a fine young colour; and Cripps made a nod at her, as if he meant to think of it, but must leave that for another evening.

"I never could abide such stuff," muttered Mary, "as if all the world was a-made of wives and husbands!"

The Squire sat calmly with his head upon his hand, and his white hair glistening in the lamplight, as he gazed from one to the other, with a smile of melancholy amusement. It would be a great discomfort to him to lose Mary Hookham's services; and he thought it a little unkind of her to leave him in this sad loneliness; but he had not lived threescore years and ten without knowing what the way of the world is. Therefore, if Cripps had made up his mind—as the women had long been declaring that he as a man was bound to do—

Mr. Oglander would be the last to complain, or say a word to damp them. The Carrier himself had some idea that such was the working of the Squire's mind.

"Now, your Worship," he said, putting Mary away to a place where she could use her handkerchief, "will 'ee plaize to hearken, without your own opinion before hast heard what there be to say? Nayther of us drameth of doing you the wrong to take away Mary, while you be wanting of her. You ought to have knowed us better, Squire. And as for poor Mary, I ain't said a word to back up her hopes of a-having me yet. Now, Miss Mary, have I?"

"No, that you never haven't, Master Cripps! And it may come too late; if it ever do come."

"Well, well," continued Mr. Cripps, without much terror at the way she turned her back; "railly, your Worship, it was you who throwed us out. Reckoning of my times is a hard thing for me; and a hundred and four times a year

is too much for the discretion of a horse a'most."

"Very well, Cripps," said the Squire in despair; "every one knows that you must have your time. Not a word will I speak again, until I have your leave."

"I calls it onhandsome of your Worship to say that; being so contrary of my best karaksteristicks. Your Worship maneth all things for the best, I am persuaded; but speaking thus you drives me into such a prespiration, the same as used to be a sweat when I was young and forced to it. Now, doth your Worship know that all things cometh in a round, like a sound cart-wheel, to all such folks as trusts the Lord?"

"I know that you have such a theory, Cripps. You beat the whole village in theology."

"And the learned scholar in Oxford, your Worship; he were quite doubled up about the tribe of Levi. But for all of their stuff, the

Lord still goeth on, making His rounds to His own right time; and now His time hath come for you, Squire."

"Do try to speak out, Cripps; and tell me what excites you so."

"Mary, his Worship is beginning to look white. Fetch in the pepper-castor, and the gallon of vinegar as I delivered last Wednesday."

"No, Mary, no. I want nothing of the kind. Tell him—beg him—just to speak out what he means."

"Cripps—Master Cripps, now," cried Mary in a tremble; "you be going too far, and then stopping of a heap like. His Worship ought to be let into the whole of it, gradooal—gradooal—gradooal."

"Can 'ee trust in the word of the Lord, your Worship?" asked Cripps, advancing bravely. "Can 'ee do that now, without no disrespect to 'ee?"

"In two minutes more you'll drive me mad,

between you!" the old Squire shouted, as he rose and spread his arms. "In the name of God, what is it? Is it of my daughter?"

"Yes, yes, father, dearest! who else could it be in the whole of the world?" a clear voice cried, as a timid form grew clear. "They would go on all the night; but I could not wait a moment. Daddy, I am sure that you won't be frightened. You can't have too much of your own Grace, can you? Don't let it go to your heart, my darling. Grace will rub it for you. There, let me put my head just as I used; and then you will be certain, won't you?"

She laid her head upon her father's breast, while Mary caught hold of the Carrier's sleeve, and led him away to the passage. Then the old man's weak and trembling fingers strayed among his daughter's hair, and he could not speak, or smile, or weep.

"There, you will be better directly, darling,"

she whispered, looking up with streaming eyes, as she felt him tremble exceedingly, and her quick hands eased him of the little brooch (containing her mother's hair and her own), which fastened his quivering shirt-frill; "you wanted me to come back, didn't you? But not in such a hurry, darling—not in such a hurry. Father dear, why ever don't you kiss me?"

"If you did not run away, dear—say you did not run away."

"Daddy, you cannot be so ill-minded; so very wicked to your only child."

The old man took his child's hand in his own, and soothed her down, and drew her down, until they were kneeling at the table side by side; then they put up their hands to thank God for one another, and did it not with lips, but with heart and soul.

CHAPTER XVI.

SMITH TO THE RESCUE.

Now, in the whole of Beckley village, scarcely a soul under eighty years of age (unless it were of some child under eight, tucked up in rosy slumber) failed to discuss within half an hour the "miracle" about Grace Oglander. That word was first set afoot in the parish by a man of settled habits, and therefore of sure authority. For Thomas Kale had been put upon a horse, when the Carrier's leg would not go up, and ordered to ride for his life to tell Squire Overshute all that was come to pass.

This Kale was a man of large wondering power, gifted moreover with a faith in ghosts,

which often detracted from his comfort. He had seen his young mistress in a half-light only, when the household was called to look at her; and now he was ordered to a house where a lady had died not more than a few weeks back. Between Beckley Barton and Shotover Grange, there are two places known to be haunted. The necessity for priming Thomas, before he started, had occurred unluckily to himself alone. Already, as he rode out of the yard, a gatepost and a tree shone spectrally. He felt the necessity for priming himself; and, prudent man as he was, he saw no mischief in affording it. Squire Overshute could not give him less than a guinea for his tidings. Therefore (though pledged to the utmost not to speak) he took the very turn which the prudent Cripps had shunned; and pulling up at the window of the Dusty Anvil, gave a shout for hot gin-and-water.

The Anvil was ringing with hilarity that night,

and its dust, if heavy sprinkling could allay it, was subsiding. For Beckley having played a cricket-match with Islip, and beaten the dalesmen by ten wickets—as needs must be with five Crippses holding willow—an equally invincible resolve arose to out-eat the losers at the supper. Islip, defeated but not disgraced, was well represented both in flesh and cash; and as Mr. Kale called for his modest glass, a generous feeling awoke in the breasts of several young men to pay for it. For the wickets had been pitched in a meadow of the Squire's, where Kale had plied scythe and roller.

Thomas Kale saw that it would be a most uncandid and illiberal act to open his mouth for a negative only. He firmly restricted good feeling, however, to three good bumpers, and a bottomer; pledging himself, on compulsion, to call on his way back and manage the duplicate. But his heart was so good, that before he rode off, with a flout at all ghosts and

goblins, he took an old crony by the name upon his smock, and told him where to go for a "miracle."

Now, who should this be but old Daddy Wakeling, that ancient and valued friend of Cripps, and one of the best men in Elsfield parish? Daddy was forced to spend much of his time outside his own parish, for the best of reasons—and a melancholy one—there was no public-house inside of it. Here he was now, with his fine white locks and patriarchal countenance, propounding a test to our finest qualities, a touchstone of one's lofty confidence or low cynicism—whether the subject should now be pronounced more venerable, or more tipsy.

But old Daddy Wakeling would be the very last (when getting near the middle of his third gallon) to conceal from his friends any gratifying news; and ere ever Kale's horse's heels turned the corner, Daddy's wise old lips were wagging into the ear of a crony. In less than two

minutes, Phil Hiss had got the news; a council was held in the long-room of the inn; and a march upon the Squire's house, and a serenade by every one who could scrape, blow, twang, or halloa, was the resolution of a moment.

In the thick of the rout, as with good intent they approached the old-fashioned coach-doors (which led to the front where they meant to be musical), a short square fellow slipped out of the crowd, and without observation went his way. His way was to a little hut of a stable, fastened only with a prong outside, but holding a nice young horse, who had finished his supper, but was not sleepy. He neighed as John Smith came in, for he felt quite inclined for a little exercise, and he knew the value of the saying he had heard—"After supper, trot a mile." Numbers Cripps was his owner, in that shameful age of ownership—which soon will be abolished, now that its prime key is gone, the key of holy wedlock—and the butcher had

offered Mr. Smith a ride, whenever he should happen to want one.

The night was well up in the sky, and the track of summer daylight star-swept; the dim remembrance of a brighter hour (that hangs round a tree, like a halo) was gone; and only little twinkles shone through bays of leafage against the tidal power of the moon; and the long immeasurable stretch of silence spread faint avenues of fear.

Mr. John Smith was a very brave man. Imagination never stirred the corpulence of his comfort. What he either saw or sifted out by his own process, that he believed; and very little else. And so he rode, through light and shade, and the grain of the air which is neither; while the forest grew deeper with phantasm, and the depth of night made way for him.

Suddenly even he was startled. In a dark narrow place, where he kept the track, and stuck his heels under his horse's belly (for fear

of being taken sideways), something dashed by him, with a pant and roar, and fire flying out of it. Mr. Smith blessed his stars that he was not rolled over, as he very well might have been; for that which flew by him, like a streak of meteor, was a strong horse frantic.

Smith turned round in his saddle, and stared; but the runaway sped the faster, as if he were rushing away from the forest, with a pack of wolves behind him. The stirrups of his empty saddle struck fire, clashing under him, and his swift flight scarcely left a sound of breath or hoof to follow him.

"The devil is after him!" said John Smith; "I never saw a horse in such a state of mind. I may as well mark the spot where he came out. He has left, as sure as I sit here, a tale to be told, in the background."

Without dismounting, he broke off a branch of young white poplar, and cast it so that by daylight he could find it; and then, with a very

uneasy mind, he rode on, to trace the rest of it. He was not by any means in Luke Sharp's pay (as one or two persons had suspected), neither was he even of his privy council; and yet he was bound hand and foot to him; partly by fealty of a conquered mind, and partly by sense of his brother Joe's complicity and subservience. John Smith, in his own way, was an honourable man; and money was no bribe to him.

With quickened alarm, he rode on at all speed towards the cottage of the swineherd. Never in any way had he dealt with the sylvan schemes of Mr. Sharp, or even from a distance watched them. It was long ere he had any clear suspicions—for his tall brother kept miles away from him—and in seeking the remains of Grace under the snowdrift, he wrought out his duty with blind honesty.

John Smith's nerves were of iron, and even the riderless horse had not scattered them;

but though he rode on bravely still, a cloud of gloom fell over him. It would make a sad difference to his life if anything had happened to Mr. Sharp (for Smith had invested a little money under the lawyer's guidance), and knowing Luke Sharp as he did, he feared that evil had befallen him.

Hence, with dark misgiving, and the set resolve to face it, he lashed his horse on at a perilous rate, through the wattled ways of moonlight. The glance and the glimpse of light and shade flew past him, like a cataract, till suddenly even he was scared by the sound of his name in a sad clear voice. He pulled up his horse, and laid his hand on the butt of a pistol beneath his cape, till a woman came forth into the light, and said—

"I was sure you would come; but too late—it is too late!"

"Cinnaminta, show me," he answered very softly, knowing by her gesture that the mischief

was at hand. As soon as he was off his horse, and had made him fast by the bridle, she led him round some shadowy corners into a little dingle. This had no great trees to crowd it; and though it lay below the level of the wood around, the moon was high enough now to throw a broad gangway of light along it. The sides were fringed or jagged with darkness, cumbrous tree or mantled ivy jutting forth black elbows; but in the middle lay and spread fair sward of dewy emblements, swept with brightness, and garnished for a Whitsun dance of fairies.

But now, instead of skip and music, sigh and sob and wailing noises of the human heart were heard. A fine young form, of the Oxford build, lay heavily girt with molehills, enfolded vainly in a velvet cloak, and vainly on every side adjured to open its eyes and come back again. Kit was not at all the fellow thus to be addressed in vain—if he only could have heard

the living voices challenge him. His love of sport had been love of pluck, as it generally is with Englishmen; and all his dogs, of different sizes, must have taught him something. His mother now was pulling at him, in a storm of fear and hope. She felt that he could not be dead, because it would be so outrageous; and yet her feeble heart was fearful that such things had been before. Happily for herself, she knew not what had happened to him; but took it for an accident of the woods; for the gipsy-woman, who alone had seen it, had been too kind to tell the truth.

"Oh, Kit, Kit! now only look!" the poor fond mother was going on; "only lift one eyelid, darling; only move one little hand"—his hands were of very considerable size—"or do anything, anything you like, dear, just to show that you are coming back, back to your own mother! Kit—oh, my Kit, my own and ever only Kit—or Christopher, if you like it better, darling—here

have I been for whole hours and hours, and not one word will you say to me! If ever I laughed at you, Kit, in my life, you must have felt how proud I was. There is not anything in all the world, or anybody to come near you, Kit. Only come—only be near me, instead of breaking all my heart like this!"

Worn out with misery, she fell back; and Cinnaminta, with a short quick sigh, knelt down on the turf, and supported her.

"Four times have I had to bear it, and every time worse than the time before," she said in her soft clear tone to herself; but only to remind herself of the tenderness she was sure to show. "And this was her only one, and grown up!"

Her face (still beautiful and lovely with the sad love in her eyes, the memory of the time when still there was somebody to live for) shone in the gentle light, now poured abundantly on all of them. Of all who had lived, and loved,

and suffered, and now made shadows in the moonshine, not one had been down to the holy depths of sorrow as this woman had.

"Catch un up now," cried John Smith, who never knew how his ideas were timed; "catch un up by the heels, one of 'ee, while I take un by the head. This here baistly hole be enow to fetch the ghost of his life out. He hath got life in him. Don't tell me! His ears be like a shell; and no dead man's is. Rap on the nob! Lor' bless my heart, I'd sooner have fifty, than one on the basket. What, all on you afeard to heckle him?"

"Oh no, sir, oh no, sir," cried poor Mrs. Sharp, as Tickuss, and another man, fell away; "I am not very strong, but I can help my child."

"Ma'am, you are a lady!" said John Smith, that being his very highest crown of praise; "but as for you—a d—d set of cowards—go to the devil, all of you! Now, ma'am, I will not

trouble you, except to follow after us. Cinny will clear the way in front; it cometh more natural to her. And you, ma'am, shall follow me as you please; and sorry I am not to help you. A little shaking will do him a world of good."

He was taking up Kit, with a well-adjusted balance, while he spoke to her; and he wasted his breath in nothing, except in telling her to follow him. As the hind comes after the poor slain fawn, or the cow runs after the netted cart, where the white face of her calf weeps out, even so Mrs. Sharp of her dress thought nothing—though cut up, like a carrot, in the latest London style, and trimmed with almost every flower nature never saw—anyhow, after Kit she went, and knew not light from darkness.

Mr. Smith sturdily managed to get on; he was thickly built, and had well-set reins; and though poor Kit was no feather-weight, his bearer did not flag with him. Then setting the

body of the lad on a mound, where the moon shone clearly upon his face, and the night air fanned him quietly, John Smith very calmly pulled out a bright weapon, and flourished it, and felt the edge.

"Oh no, sir! Oh pray, sir!" cried Mrs. Sharp, falling on her knees, and enclasping her poor boy.

"Cinny, just lead her behind that bush. 'Tis either death, or blood, with him."

"Oh no, I never could bear to be out of sight. If it really must be done, I will not shriek. I will not even sigh. Only let me stay by his side!"

John Smith signed to his sister-in-law, who took the mother's trembling hands, and turned her away for a moment.

"Now fetch cold water. That vein must not be allowed to bleed too long, ma'am. 'Tis a ticklish one to manage for a surgeon even; and at present it is sulky. But it only wants a little

air, and just the least little touch again. If you could just manage to go and say your prayers, ma'am, we could get on a long sight better."

"Oh, I never thought of that. How sinful of me! Oh, kind good man, I implore of you——.'

"Not of me, ma'am. Pray to God in heaven, unless you wish to see me run away. And if I do, he slips right off the hooks."

She turned away, with her weak hands clasped; but whether she prayed or not, never could she tell. But one thing she bore in mind, as long as soul abode with it, and that was the leap of her heart when Smith shouted in a good loud voice, "All right!"

CHAPTER XVII.

FATAL ACCIDENT TO THE CARRIER.

Now, that little maid who with such strength, alike of mind and body, had opened the paternal gate, and then bewailed her prowess, happened to be the especial favourite of her good Aunt Esther. Therefore no sooner had the Carrier begun his eventful homeward course, as heretofore related, than Etty, who loved a forest walk and felt rather dull without Zacchary, took Peggy's fat red hand, and, after a good tea with Susannah, set forth for an evening stroll, to gather flowers and hear the birds sing.

Almost before they had got well into the

wooded places, Peggy shrank away from a black timber shed, partly overhung by trees.

"Peggy not go there, Aunt Etty," she said; "goose in there, a great white goose!"

"A ghost, you little goose?" answered Esther laughing, for still there was good sunset. "Come and show me; I want to see a ghost."

"No, no, no!" cried the child, pulling backward, and struggling as hard as she had struggled with the gate; "Peggy see a white goose in a black hole there, all day."

"Then, Peggy, stop here while I go and look. You won't be afraid to do that, will you?"

Running bravely up to the hole in the boards, Esther saw, to her great amazement, the form, perhaps the corpse, of a man, stretched at length on the ground inside. It lay too much in the dark for the face to be seen, and the dress was so swaddled with netting, and earthy, that little could be made of it. A torn strip of cambric,

that once had been white, lay partly on the body and partly on the board. Esther caught it up; she remembered having ironed something of this shape for somebody once, who was going to be examined. She knew where to look for the mark, and there she saw in small letters—"T. Hardenow."

Surprised as she was, she did not lose her wits or courage, as she used to do. She ran to the door of the shed, tried the padlock, and finding it fastened (as she had feared), made haste to the grain-house, and seized a bunch of keys. Not one of them truly was born with the lock, but one was soon found to serve the turn; then Esther pushed back the creaking door, and timidly gazed round the shadowy shed. She was quite alone now, for her little niece, with short sobs of terror, had set off for home.

In the light admitted by the open door, young Esther descried a poor miserable thing,

helpless, still as a log, and senseless, yet to her faithful heart the idol of all adoration. Gently, step by step, she stole to the prostrate form, and knelt down softly, and reverently touched it. She feared to seem to take advantage of a helpless moment; and yet a keen joy, mixed with terror, shone in the eagerness of her eyes. "He is alive, I am sure of that," she said to herself, as she pulled forth a pair of strong scissors which she always carried; "he is alive, but very, very nearly dead. What wretches can have treated him like this?"

In two minutes, Hardenow was free from every cord and thong of bondage; his lax arms fell at his sides; his legs (that had saved his life by kicking) slowly sank back to their native angles, like a lobster's claw untied, and his small and dismally empty stomach quivered almost invisibly.

"Oh, he is starving, or downright starved!" cried Esther, watching his white lips, which

trembled with some glad memory of suction, and then stiffened again to some Anglican dream. "After all, I have blamed other folk quite amiss. He hath corded himself away from his victuals to give way to his noble principles. But how could he lock himself in? The Lord must have sent a bad angel to tempt him, and then to turn the key on him."

Before she had finished this reasoning process, the girl was half-way towards the cot of Tickuss, her heart outweighing her mind, according to all true feminine proportions. She ran in swiftly upon Susannah, sitting in the dusky kitchen and pondering over a very slow fire the cookery of the children's supper. These good young children never failed to go to see the pigs fed, and down at the styes they all were at this moment, with no victuals come, and the pigs all squeaking, because the pig-master was not at home.

This was most sad, and the children felt it;

nevertheless they bore it, knowing that their own pot was warming. But they too might have squeaked, if they had known that out of their own pot Aunt Etty was stealing half the meat and all the little cobs of jelly. It was as fine a pot of stuff as ever Susannah Cripps had made, for she did not hold at all with fattening the pigs, and starving her own children; and she argued most justly, while Esther all the while was ladling all the virtue out.

Etty had never been known to do anything violent or high-handed; yet now, without entering into even the very shortest train of reasoning, away she went swifter than any train, bearing in her right hand the best dresser-jug (filled with the children's titbits of nurture), and in her left hand flourishing Susannah's own darling silver wedding-spoon. Mrs. Leviticus longed to rush in chase of her; but ere her slowly startled nerves could send the necessary tingle to her ruminating knees, the girl was out

of sight, and for her vestige lingered naught but a very provoking smell of soup.

Now, in so advanced a stage of the world's existence (and of this narrative) is it needful, judicious, or even becoming to describe, spoonful by spoonful, however grateful, delicious, and absorbing, the process of administering and receiving soup? To "give and take" is said, by people of large experience in life, to be about the latest and most consummate lesson of humanity; coming even after that extreme of wisdom which teaches us to "grin and bear it." But in the present trifling instance, two young people very soon began to be comparatively at home with the subject. The opening of the eyes, in all countries and creatures, is done a good deal later than the opening of the mouth; the latter being the essential, the former quite a fortuitous proceeding.

After six spoonfuls, as counted by Esther, Hardenow opened both his eyes; after two or

three more, he knew where he was; and when he had swallowed a dozen and a bonus, scarcely any of his wits were wanting. Still Esther, for fear of a relapse, went on; though her hand trembled dreadfully when he sat up, with his poor bones creaking sadly, and tried to be steady upon her arm, but was overbalanced by his weight of brain. Instead of shrieking, or screaming, she took advantage of this opportunity, and his bony chin dropping afforded the finest opening towards his interior.

To put it briefly, he quite came round, and after twenty spoonfuls vowed—with the conscience rushing for the moment into the arms of common sense—that never would he fast again. And after thirty were absorbed and beginning to assimilate, he gazed at Esther's smiling eyes, and saw the clearest and truest solution of his "postulates on celibacy." Esther dropped her eyes in terror, and made him drink the dregs and bottom, with a convert's zealous gulp. And as it happened, this was wise.

If any malignant persons charge him with having sold, for a mess of pottage, man's noblest birthright, celibacy, let every such person be corded up, at the longest possible date after breakfast, and the shortest before dinner—or rather, alas! before dinner-time—let him stay corded, and rolling about in a hog-house (as long as roll he can, which never would approach Mr. Hardenow's cycle); let him throughout this whole period, instead of eating, expect to be eaten; then with a wolf in his stomach (if he has one) let him lose his wits (if he has any), and then let a lovely girl come and free him, and feed him, and cry over him, and regard him —with his clothes at their very worst, and cakes of dirt in his eyes and mouth—as the imperial Jove in some Dictæan cavern dormant; and then, as the light and the life flow back, and the power of his heart awakes, let there manifestly accrue thereto a better, gentler, and sweeter heart, timid even of its own pulse, and ashamed

of its own veracity—and then if he takes all this unmoved, why, let him be corded up again, and nobody come to deliver him.

Esther only smiled and wept at her patient's ardent words and impassioned gratitude. She knew that between them was a great gulf fixed, and that the leap across it seldom has a happy landing; and when poor Hardenow fell back, in the weak reaction of a heart more fit for pain than passion, she knelt at his side, and nursed and cheered him, less with the air of a courted maiden than of a careful handmaid. In the end, however, this feeling (like most of those which are adverse to our wishes) was prevailed upon to subside, and Esther, although of the least revolutionary and longest-established stock in England — that of the genuine Crippses, whose name, originally no doubt "Chrysippus," indicates the possession of a golden horse — Etty Cripps, finding that the heart of her adored one had, in Splinters' opinion, a perilous

fissure, requiring change of climate, consented at last (having no house of her own) to come down from the tilt, and go to Africa.

For Hardenow, as he grew older and able to regard mankind more largely, came out from many of the narrow ways, which (like the lanes of Beckley) satisfy their final cause by leading into one another. With the growth of his learning, his candour grew; and he strove to bind others by his own strap and buckle, as little as he offered to be bound by theirs. Therefore when two of his very best friends made a *bonâ fide* job of it, and being unable to think their thoughts out got it done by deputy, and sank to infallible happiness, Thomas Hardenow pulled up, and set his heels into the ground of common sense, like a horse at the brink of a quarry-pit; and the field of reason, rich and gracious, opened its gates again to him.

Herein he cut no capers, as so many of the wilder spirits did, but made himself ready for

some true work and solid advantage to his race. And so, before any University Mission, or plough-and-Bible enterprise, Hardenow set forth to open a track for commerce and civilization, and to fight the devil and slavery in the rich rude heart of Africa. Besides his extraordinary gift of tongues, he had many other qualifications — the wiriness of his legs and stomach, his quiet style of listening (so that even a "nigger" need not be snubbed), his magnificent freedom from humour (an element fatal to stern convictions), and last not least, as he said to Etty, for a clinching argument, his wife's acquaintance with the carrying trade.

Happy exile, how much better than home misery it is! But the House of Cripps sent forth another member into banishment, with little choice or chance of much felicity on his part. As there are woes more strong than tears, so are there crimes beyond the lash. When the doings of Leviticus were brought to

light, and shown to be unsuccessful, a council of Crippses was held in his hog-house, and a stern decree passed to expatriate him. Tickuss was offered his fair say, and did his very best to defend himself; but the case from the first was hopeless. If he had wronged any other parish than Beckley, or even any other as well, there might have been some escape for him. Cruelty, cowardice, treason high and low, perjury to his own elder brother, and eternal disgrace to his birthplace—there was not a word in the mouth of any one half bad enough to use to him. The Carrier rose, and said all he could say, for the sake of the many children; but, weighty with piety as he was, he could not stem the many-fountained torrent of the Crippsic wrath. The pigs of Leviticus were divided among all the nephews, and nieces, and cousins (ere ever a creditor got a hock-rope or a flick-whip ready), and Tickuss himself, unhoused, unstyed, unlarded, and unsmocked,

wandered forth with his business gone, like a Gadarene swine-herd void of swine.

For years and years that fine old hog-farm was the haunt of rats and rabbits; never a grunt or squeak of porker (ringing or rung eloquently) shook the fringe of ivied shade, or jarred the acorn in its cup, until a third son arose and grew up to Zacchary Cripps hereafter. All the neighbourhood lay under a cloud of fear and sadness, because of what Luke Sharp had done, not to others, but himself. Luke Sharp, the greatest of all lawyers—so the affrighted woodman says—may and must, alas, be seen (at certain moments of the forest moon) rising on horseback from the black pool where his black life ended, gaining the shore with a silent bound, and galloping, with his arm held forth as straight as any sign-post, to the nook of dark lane where he smote his son; and then to the ruined hut, wherein he imprisoned the fair lady; and then to the

rotting shed, in which he corded and starved the great Oxford scholar.

Whether, for the assertion of the law, Luke Sharp is allowed by some evil power thus to revisit the glimpses of the moon, or whether he lies in silent blackness, ignorant of evil—sure it is that no one cares to stay beyond the fall of dusk in that part of the forest.

But as soon as the lawyer's wife and son, by virtue of the poplar mark, had found and quietly buried his disappointed corpse, they made the very best of a broken business, as cheerfully as could be hoped for. Each of them sighed very heavily at times, especially when they were almost certain of hearing again, round the corner or downstairs, a masterful and very memorable tread. Therefore, with what speed they might, they let their fine old Cross Duck House, and fleeing all low curiosity, unpleasant remark, and significant glance, took refuge under the quiet roof of

Kit's aunt Peggy, near High Wycombe, where he had hoped to lodge, and woo his timid forest angel. Here Kit found tardy comfort, and recovered health quite rapidly, by writing his own dirge in many admirable metres, till, being at length made laureate of a strictly local paper—at a salary of nil per annum, and some quarts of ale to stand—he swung his cloak and lit his pipe in the style of better days.

From those whom his father had wronged so deeply he would accept no help whatever, much as they desired to show their sense of his good behaviour. And when the second-best ambition of his life arrived by coach—that notable dog, "Pablo"—if Christopher could have sniffed lightest scent of Beckley, or Shotover, in the black dog-winkles of his nostrils, the odds are ten to one that Oxford never would have sighed (as all through the October term she did) at the loss of her finest badgerer.

In spite of all this obstinacy, three people

were resolved to make him come round and be comfortable, settled, and respectable. To this they brought him in the end, and made him give up fugitive pieces, sonnets, stanzas to a left-hand glove, and epitaphs on a cenotaph. The Squire, and Russel, and Grace could not compose their own snug happiness without providing that Kit should be less miserable than his poetry. So they married him to a banker's daughter, and —better still—put him in the bank itself.

The loyalty of Mrs. Fermitage to her distinguished husband's memory was never disturbed by any knowledge of that fatal codicil. Poor Mrs. Sharp, as she slowly recovered from the sad grief wrought by greed, more and more reverently cherished her great husband's high repute. She rejoined him in a better world—or at least she set forth to do so—without any knowledge of the blow he had given to her son's head, and her own heart. Kit, like a man, concealed that outrage, and, like a good son,

listened to his departed father's praises. But in her heart the widow felt that some of these might be imperilled, if that codicil turned up. Long time she kept it in reserve, as a thunder-bolt for Joan Fermitage; but Pablo's arrival improved her feelings, and so did the banker's daughter; and finally, on Kit's wedding-day, with a sigh and a prayer, she took advantage of a clear fire and a rapid draught—and the codicil flew through the chimney-pot.

As a lawyer's daughter, she revered such things. In the same capacity, she knew that now it could make no great practical difference; for Grace was quite sure of her good aunt's money. And again, as a widow and mother, she felt what a stain must be cast on the name she loved best, if this little document ever came to light—other than good firelight.

But why should Esther have had no house of her own, as darkly hinted above, so as to almost compel her to descend from tilt to tent? The

reason is not far to seek, and he who runs may read it, without running out of Beckley.

Cripps the Carrier, now being past the middle milestone of man's life, and seeing every day, more and more, the grey hairs in his horse's tail, lowered his whip in a shady place, and let his reins go slackly, and pulled his crooked sixpence out, and could not see to read it. And yet the summer sun was bright in the top of the bushes over him!

"I vear a must; I zee no way out of un," Zacchary said to his lonely self. "Etty is as good as gone a'ready; her cannot stan' out agin that there celibacy; and none else understandeth the frying-pan. The Lord knows how I have fought agin the womminses, seeing all as I has seen. And better I might a' done, if I must come to it, many a time in the last ten year. Better at laste for the brown, white, and yellow; though the woman as brought might a' shattered 'em again. After all, Mary might be a deal worse;

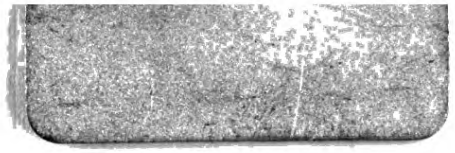
though I have a-felt some doubt consarning of of her tongue; but her hath a proper respect for me, and forty puns to Oxford bank—if her moother spaiketh raight of her; and the Squaire hath given me a new horse, to come on whenso Dobbin beginneth to wear out. Therefore his domestics hath first claim; though I'd soonder draive Dobbin than ten of un. What shall us do now? Whatever shall us do?"

Zacchary Cripps pulled off his hat in a slow perspiration of suspense; for if he once made up his mind, there would be no way out of it. He looked at his horse with a sad misgiving, both on his own account and Dobbin's. The marriage of the master might wrong the horse, and the horse might no more be the master's. Suddenly a bright idea struck him—a bar of sunshine through the shade.

"Thou shalt zettle it, Dobbin," he cried, leaning over and stroking his gingery loins. "It consarneth thee most, or, leastways, quite as

much. Never hath any man had a better horse. The will of the Lord takes the strength out of all of us; but He leaveth, and addeth to the wisdom therein. Dobbin, thou seest things as never men can tell of. Now, if thou waggest thy tail to the right—I will; and so be to the left—I wun't. Mind what thou doest now. Call upon thy wisdom, nag, and give thy master honestly the sense of thy discretion."

With a settled mind, and no disturbance, he awaited the delivery of Dobbin's tail. A fly settled on the white foam of the harness on the off side of this ancient horse. Away went his tail with a sprightly flick at it; and Cripps accepted the result. The result was the satisfaction of Mary's long and faithful love for him, and the happy continuance, in woodland roads, of the loyal race and unpretentious course of Cripps, the Carrier.

THE END.

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