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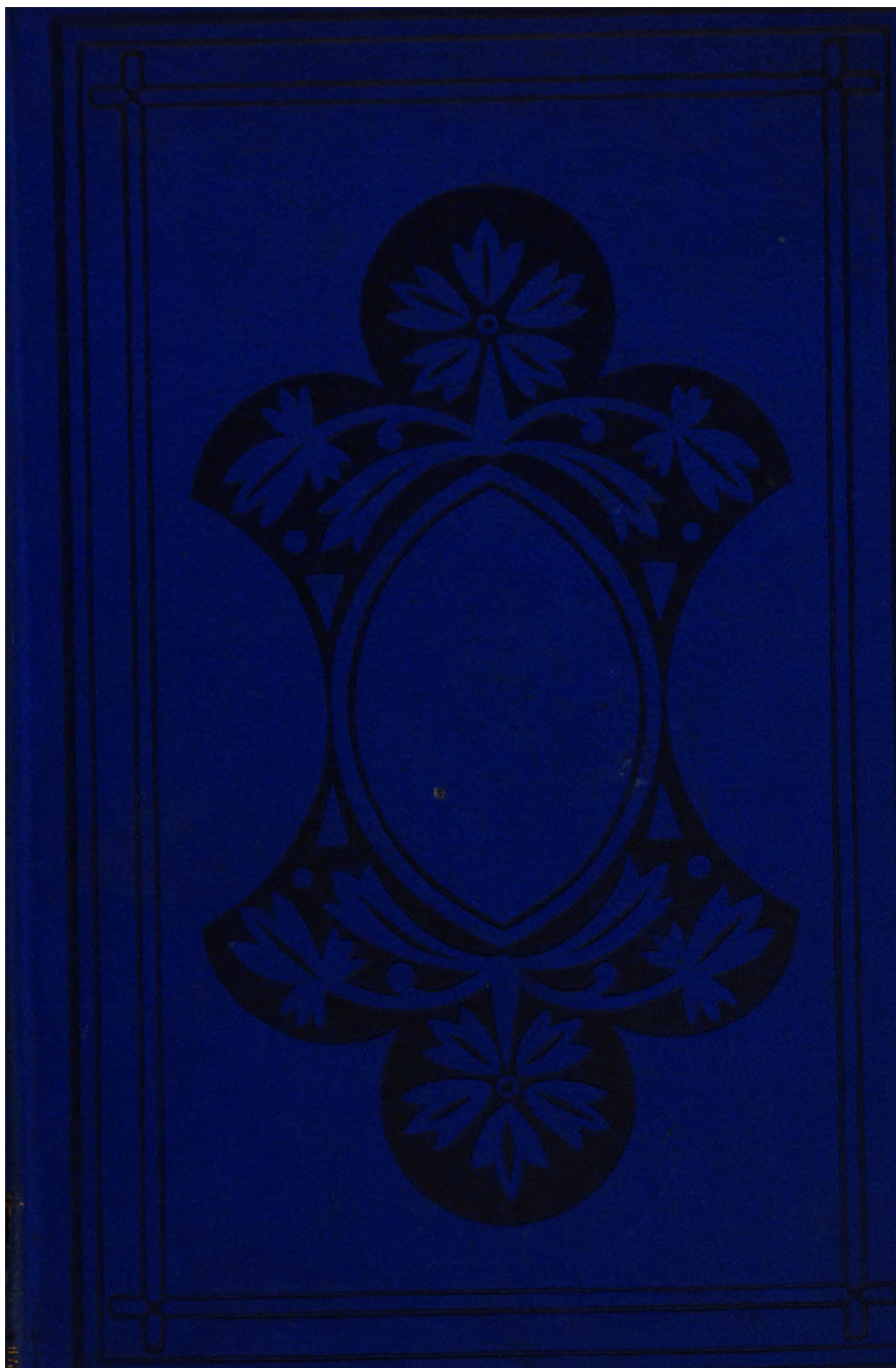
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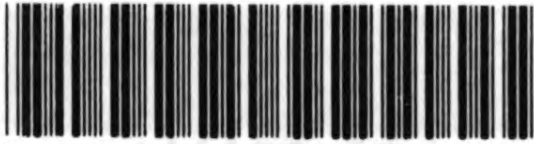
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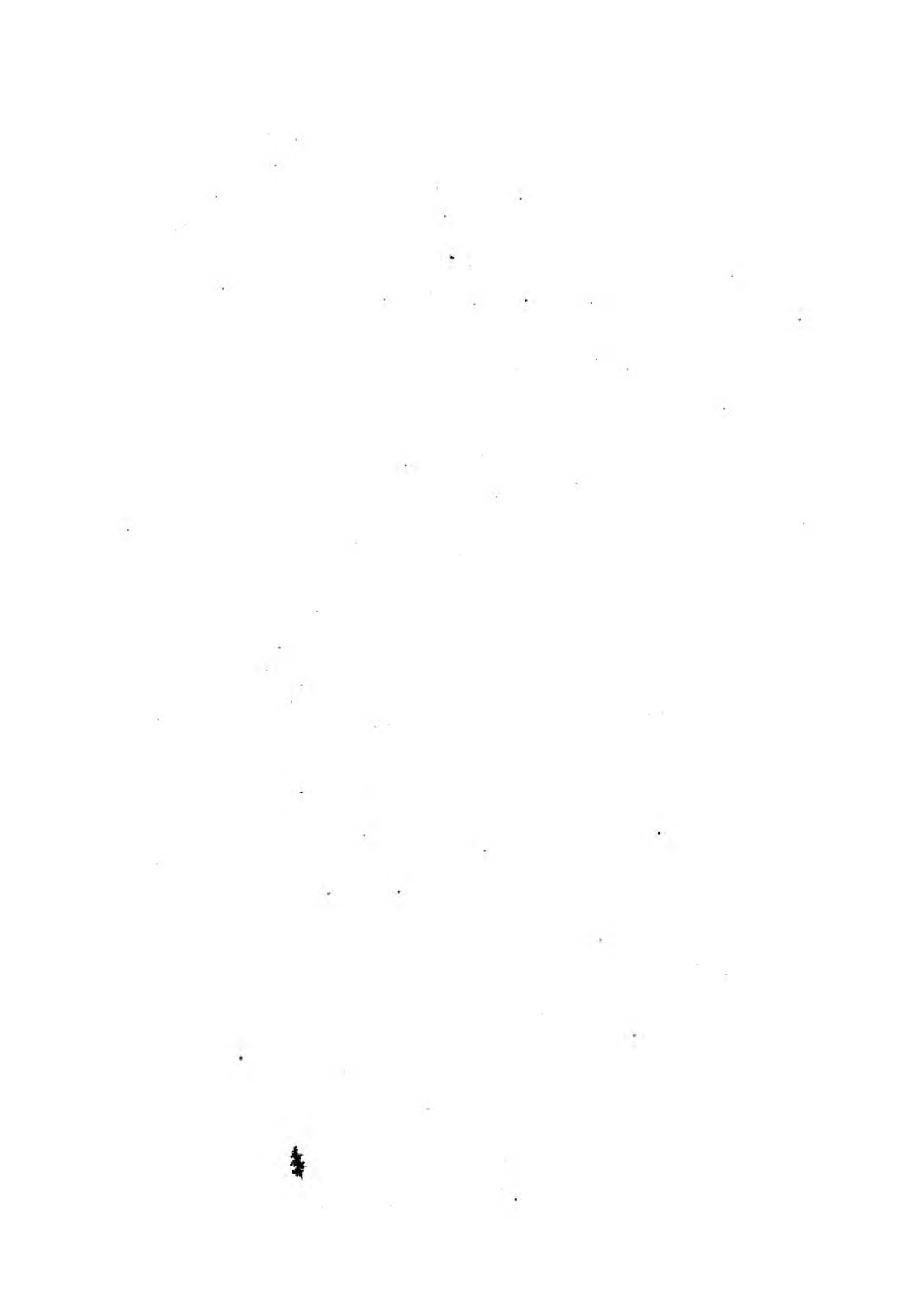


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A MARRIAGE OF CONSCIENCE.



A MARRIAGE OF CONSCIENCE.

A Novel.

BY

ARTHUR SKETCHLEY,

(GEORGE ROSE),

AUTHOR OF "A MATCH IN THE DARK," "MRS. BROWN AT THE PLAY," ETC.

In Three Volumes.

VOL. I.



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A MARRIAGE OF CONSCIENCE.

CHAPTER I.

IN a gloomy no-thoroughfare street—one of those described by house agents as situated in an aristocratic neighbourhood and near the parks—there stood Blomberg House, the town residence of the most noble the Marquis of Cankerfield: a gloomy mansion, which, built in the reign of the second George, in a then remote suburb, had enjoyed almost complete isolation for more than a century till the ruthless hand of progress, and consequent rush of cabs, omnibuses, and promiscuous vehicles, laid it open to the vulgar gaze, whilst traffic in general so invaded its precincts as to render it in the estimation of its noble owner simply uninhabit-

able. For some years previous to the irruption of the vandals above referred to, the house had been used only at intervals as a residence by the family, the members of which preferring to pass the greater part of their time in more agreeable localities possessed by the Marquis, who was the fortunate proprietor of several country seats, the finest of which—a palatial residence, surrounded by a magnificent park, in the midland counties—being what is termed a “show-place.” He had also a stronghold of the date of the last century in the Highlands, and a charming retreat amid the Surrey hills, where the second wife of the present noble owner and her family chiefly resided.

At the time our story opens, some forty years ago, two remarkable events occurred, almost simultaneously, in the Cankerfield family—the one being the death of Viscount Mildown, the eldest son of the Marquis, sole offspring of his first marriage; and the other the wedding of his second son, Lord Augustus Blomberg, who had gained the affections and handsome fortune of the daughter of

a millionaire. Lord Mildown died abroad, and so suddenly that his family had no intimation of his illness. The news of the melancholy event, which reached the family on the day after the wedding of his half-brother, did not, however, cast much gloom over its members. The Marquis, not having been on terms with his son, expressed no regret at his loss; and the Marchioness, although displaying the amount of regret which the decorum of life demanded, did not affect any deep sorrow at the death of a stepson. The departed nobleman had been estranged from his father from early childhood, for on the occasion of the second marriage of the Marquis, his widowed sister, Lady Caroline Dashwater, being childless, had volunteered to undertake the bringing up of the child, an arrangement which gave its stepmother much satisfaction, whilst Lady Caroline was most anxious to have the charge of her nephew. So it was that father and son, estranged from the first, became more so as years rolled on; a state of things which ended in an open rupture between them when the

young man, on attaining his majority, openly opposed the Marquis's proceedings as regarded the settlement of property, and went so far as to appeal, and successfully, to the law to restrain his father's action in the matter, a step which so deeply offended the defeated parent that he refused to see his son, though the young man had expressed a desire to be reconciled, as he was about to leave England for some years, chiefly in order to avoid the consequences of the quarrel with his father. The Marquis was, however, inexorable, and Lord Mildown went abroad unforgiven, never to return to his paternal abode.

A short time previous to his sudden death he was in town for something less than a week, but saw none of his relatives, his aunt being away from home; and as the object of his visit was to confirm the proceedings he had already taken, in opposition to his father's designs on the family property, he deemed it not to be a favourable opportunity to renew his overtures for a reconciliation. His sudden death gave the Marquis a

griefless shock ; he said nothing on the subject to anyone but those with whom he had matters of business to transact. His son had died single and intestate, consequently he was now in uncontrolled possession of everything, and felt a species of triumph at so unexpected a result to their differences. The Marchioness did not offer any condolence to her noble spouse on his bereavement ; she saw little of him at any time, and was, when she heard of her stepson's death, wholly engrossed with the thought of the advancement of her own darling boy.

It is true she had not been altogether pleased with his marriage, for she objected to the social position of her daughter-in-law, and would have been doubly opposed to the match had she been aware that her son, on the very day of his marriage, was actually next in succession to the marquise, and was almost laying a coronet at the feet of an alderman's grand-daughter. 'Tis true the bride had one hundred thousand pounds for her dowry, but it was notorious that the alderman

aforesaid had commenced life as a Fellowship Porter.

Descent was not, however, the strong point of the House of Cankerfield, which had neither sprung from the Plantagenets nor descended from Crusaders, its founders having been of Hebrew origin, and had come to England at the time of the conquest of this country by the Dutch, under the leadership of the pious and immortal William of Orange, to whose patronage they owed their subsequent honours and position.

To return to Blomberg House. A year has nearly elapsed since the occurrence of the two important family events we have recorded, and the wife of the present Lord Mildown is immured in one of the gloomy chambers of the ancestral mansion, about to present her loving spouse with, as it is hoped, a son and heir. Under such circumstances, even the house of the Blombergs might have been expected to be the scene of some slight degree of excitement; but no, it was not within those gloomy walls that any pleasurable feeling

would have appeared to be natural. The portraits on the walls bore an expression of weary depression, as though the individuals therein represented had felt life to have been a heavy burden, almost as much so as some of the costumes in which they had been painted, and which they seemed to long to take off and go to rest. The very atmosphere of the house was surcharged with a mist, there were many rooms into which a ray of sunshine had never made its way. The place in fact would have dispirited Momus himself, and have awed the late Mr. Grimaldi, so calculated was it to repress any feeling of a mirthful kind. A solemn, griefless funeral would have been in strict keeping with the gloomy character of the abode, but joy or merriment of any kind would have been totally out of place within those sombre walls. Its sooty exterior, a marvel of architectural ugliness, had long disfigured a once remote suburb, but now fashionable centre of the great metropolis, whilst its dingy interior had a saddening effect on all who entered its doors. Not even

when lighted up for a ball or grand reception could anything like gaiety be infused into its solemn saloons ; a miasma seemed to hang throughout the mansion, as though it had been founded on some morally unwholesome soil.

On the present occasion the aspect of the place was rendered, if possible, more dull than usual from the flicker of life that hovered about its precincts ; for although Lord Mildown was there in anxious attendance on his wife, all the state-rooms were shut up, and in one small sitting-room on the ground-floor only was there light and fire. The large kitchens were deserted and the steward's room empty, as was usual, the Marquis and Marchioness being in the country. Some of the smaller domestic offices were tenanted as well as a few of the bedrooms, the noble owners having given the use of their town residence for the accommodation of their daughter-in-law, Lady Mildown, under the present interesting circumstances. The Marquis was a man of peculiar character, being an odd mixture of good-humour

and ill-nature, mean when driving a bargain, to the verge of dishonesty, though lavish in expenditure on anything which could enhance his selfish gratification or flatter his personal vanity, which was extreme, even for a man. He was sharp in money matters, but easily taken in by flattery, suspicious of the many, and frequently duped by those few in whom he confided. Though wealthy, even for an English nobleman, he quarrelled with his eldest son merely on the question of money. The appointments of the household were of the highest order, yet the servants were clothed at a Hebrew emporium, and kept on by no means a liberal scale of board-wages. Report said that, though his lordship's table was handsomely served, he was not above giving his guests questionable wine; and on one occasion, when a grand ball was given in honour of his son's coming of age, that youth solemnly warned his intimates against indulging in the champagne; he having, as he said, seen his noble parent emerging from the establishment of

a wine merchant, known to fame through the advertising columns of the newspapers, wherein alone was there found any laudatory expression respecting the quality of his wines. The Marquis had married for the first time a very handsome woman ; not exactly for love, for he was forty, and not susceptible ; but he was gratified at having a wife whom everyone admired, and his satisfaction was enhanced when his son and heir, a fine boy, was born, inheriting his mother's looks. Poor lady, she was overjoyed, and bade fair to ruin the child by extreme indulgence ; was allowed to do so for a very short time, as she died somewhat suddenly, when he was two years old, to the great regret of everyone, including even the Marquis, who, however, within a year consoled himself with the daughter of a Scotch peer. The lady formed a strong contrast to her predecessor ; she was very plain, had a handsome fortune, and was generally disliked, as was her son, now by succession Viscount Mildown ; whilst his half-brother and predecessor had been universally popular, and

would have been spoiled had not a public school and the university successfully effaced the effects of over-indulgence experienced in his early life.

He had been supported, in his opposition to his father, by his aunt Lady Caroline, that lady having spoken very plainly to her brother on the subject of his behaviour to his son. She was overwhelmed with grief when the news of the young man's death was conveyed to her, and had nearly an open and serious breach with her brother and his family in consequence of a suspicion she entertained that they had been aware of Mildown's death some days before announcing it, having kept it a secret in order that the melancholy event might not interfere with the wedding of Lord Augustus. Lady Caroline was pacified by the good offices and utter mendacity of Mr. Elvey, the Marquis's man of business, that worthy having solemnly declared that he had, on his own authority, kept back the mournful news till the wedding was over. The bridegroom was nearly as much annoyed at Mr. Elvey's reticence as his aunt had been, for

had he been aware of his promotion to the position of son and heir he would have reconsidered even at the eleventh hour his matrimonial project, as he agreed with his mother in thinking that though Miss Wittles, with a hundred thousand pounds, was an excellent match for a younger brother, yet, with immediate succession to the marquise in prospect, he might have done better, at any rate with regard to settlements, over which he had already wrangled with the family of his intended.

Augustus was decidedly not a noble nature; he had been kicked at school for lying, expelled for stealing, and only admitted to the university through his father's influence and a plea of kleptomania. He did not gain either popularity or honours at Cambridge, which he quitted without a degree. Very early on his entrance into society he was nearly strangled at a public dinner for slandering a lady. Being both weak and small, he ought to have been protected, but his utter mendacity had so disgusted those around that it was not till the wretched little man was about to be kicked down-

stairs that the bystanders, dreading a coroner's inquest, or perhaps thinking that he had been sufficiently punished, interfered to save him from a violent death. Some wags of his acquaintance, knowing his warlike disposition, tried to point out to him that he was bound in honour to avenge this insult by calling his assailant out, duelling in those days being not quite exploded; but the aristocratic Augustus replied that he despised his adversary too much to think of such a thing. Enough has been said to show that for the sake of the highest interests of our country the birth of an heir to such a man, must have been an event of national as well as family interest; so at least thought the expectant father, as he sat over a small fire in the morning-room of his paternal mansion, a couple of candles throwing a dim light around the dingy apartment. Augustus felt sleepy and chilly; he had been rash enough to try some sherry bought expressly and left out for this occasion by his noble parent, it having been long since arranged that Lady Mildown should be

in town for the interesting event, in order that she might have the benefit of the personal superintendence of that eminent practitioner, Dr. Fussel; and, as her mother-in-law observed, being at Blomberg House would preclude the possibility of any vulgar relatives venturing to intrude on her.

In this arrangement the expectant father readily acquiesced, both for economy's sake and also as sharing his mother's contempt for the plebeian connections of her with whom he had allied himself, money having been the chief if not sole attraction the wife possessed in her noble husband's eyes, who, young as he was, regarded marriage as merely a means of increasing income, and was half inclined to have broken off the match at the eleventh hour, so much disgusted was he at hearing that the lady's fortune, with the exception of a life annuity for himself, was to revert to her family in the event of her dying childless. It was indeed chiefly from a pecuniary point of view that the fond husband was so painfully anxious at the present time, which he regarded as a sort of

monetary crisis. Lady Cankerfield had been at first much opposed to her son's marriage, but was silenced by her noble spouse, who, in reply to her mild remonstrance, exclaimed: "You consider it a bad match? You must be mad. Bad match! With fifty thousand down and twice as much when the old tallow-chandler drops; that is far better luck than I could have expected from such a fool as Gus." So the Marchioness remonstrated no longer, and in due time Miss Wittles became her daughter-in-law, and was now shut up in the family mansion with Mrs. Asher as a nurse, who had once been the Marchioness's own maid, and had orders to keep guard over her patient and allow her to see no one; a proceeding rendered necessary as the poor solitary young woman had expressed a wish to have with her in her hour of trial an aunt who had brought her up. The very slight hint she had ventured to give on this subject was so instantly disposed of by a peremptory "totally out of the question" from her lord and master that, dissolving into tears, her only refuge, she quietly acquiesced in whatever arrange-

ments were made for her by the members of the aristocratic family she had been permitted to enter, and wherein she found herself the victim of the most depressing patronage at the hands of all, including her husband and the family nurse. The father expectant, who in his heart of hearts voted his share in the interesting event a frightful bore, was nervous and restless, waked up from a doze suddenly, and in a fit of excitement, rang the bell violently, without having any reason for the act.

"Has Dr. Fussel been here lately?" he asked of the hall-porter who answered his summons.

"No, my lord, Simmons has gone for him."

"Oh yes. I remember I sent. I forgot. Very well; so never mind."

These remarks were the result of his lordship having wakened from his nap, and thinking himself called upon to act in some way relative to his wife's condition, entirely forgetful of having sent a short time before to summon the eminent accoucheur.

"What a slave-driver he is," muttered the porter as he returned to the hall. "Why can't he make

up his mind what it is he do wants before he fidgets me in and out there."

With these words he drew his portly form more deeply into his leathern-hooded chair beside the hall-fire. "I never see such a starving misery as he is," he continued. "Why couldn't he take a house of his own, like a man, for his wife, and not come here a sponging? I suppose he thinks he'll get the old 'un to stand the expense—a likely game. I should like to serve the lot of them out." This he said as he proceeded to soothe his irritation by smashing a large lump of coal on the top of the fire with a ponderous poker and decidedly felonious air.

At this moment a ring was heard, and the irate janitor opened the door to Mr. Simmons, own servant to Lord Mildown.

"Thank you, Walkins, for letting me in so quick."

"You've been out in a nice night," replied Walkins. "Didn't you have a coach?"

"No," replied Mr. Simmons—a serious-looking cadaverous man, "I wasn't thinking about

myself, but only anxious to be back. Has my lord asked for me?"

"No, not exactly; but he rang just now for nothing."

"I'll go in," said Simmons, "and ask him what he wants, and tell him Dr. Fussel will be here at eleven o'clock."

"Why, he knew that this afternoon," said Walkins. "Dr. Fussel left word with everybody; he only sent you out because he must fidget somebody or other. You'd better change your clothes; you're wet through."

"Never mind me," said the amiable Simmons, as he entered the room to his master.

"Catch him changing," thought Walkins; "he wants to show that he got wet through. Take a coach, indeed! he'd have to steal the fare, for he'd never get paid. I suppose he does make his money out of him somehow, but I'm blest if I can see how it's to be done."

With such reflections Mr. Walkins continued to doze before the hall-fire till the arrival of the eminent Dr. Fussel thoroughly aroused him.

"It certainly was very unexpected," replied Mrs. Asher, a pale woman with thin lips, gray hair, and a scrupulously neat toilette. "But I am never taken by surprise; and had Mr. Maltby here all the evening." This speech was not calculated to soothe the irritation of Dr. Fussel, who had arrived at Blomberg House punctually at eleven o'clock, to find that the expected heir had, with great want of delicacy and taste, allowed himself to be ushered into the world about a quarter of an hour before by Mr. Maltby, the neighbouring apothecary, *protégé* of Mrs. Asher.

"I never was more annoyed in my life, I assure you, Mr. Maltby," said Fussel. "It was my intention to have been here at ten, but Lady Dollymote was in such a fearful state of depression that I could hardly venture to leave her."

"I always think that so much more depends upon the treatment a patient receives after the event," remarked Mr. Maltby, in a deprecatory tone to Dr. Fussel, as though apologising for his own interference.

"Quite so, quite so; now let's see," he con-

tinued, as Mr. Maltby proceeded to give him details as to his patient. "Very good, very good. Yes, I think I may say very satisfactory."

These last speeches were *tête-à-tête*, for neither medical attendant would have said as much to the other in the hearing of a third party.

"I am happy to congratulate your lordship on being father to as fine a boy as I've seen in my somewhat extensive practice," said Dr. Fussel to the noble father, who now entered the room, which was adjoining his wife's.

"He seems a nice strong little fellow," sniggered his lordship.

There might have been some excuse for a parental blindness making such an assertion; but in Dr. Fussel it was an instance of scandalous mendacity, for he had only a few minutes before agreed with Maltby that the little creature might with much care struggle into life, but he was doubtful.

"How is Lady Mildown going on," inquired her husband, who remembered that perhaps she was entitled to be honourably mentioned on the occasion.

"Very nicely," said the doctor, "very nicely."

"Oh, I'm glad of that," said his lordship; "then I suppose we needn't trespass on your valuable time any longer to-night, Dr. Fussel. I really feel so much obliged to you."

"Don't mention it," observed the doctor. "I shall remain here for half an hour; by that time I shall feel quite at ease about her ladyship, for to-night at any rate."

In saying which he seated himself by the fire, and observed that "the wet made it chilly."

Mildown was posed, he didn't know what to say, he was in an agony of mind about the fee, for he saw that the doctor was bent on getting it, and knew that he must pay Maltby as well.

This was maddening, so the newly-made father sat looking at the doctor in perplexity till the latter returned to visit his patient, and then his lordship left the room. His mind had been tortured, but on repairing to the morning-room his natural ingenuity and meanness pointed out a course he could adopt. He resolved to write a note to the doctor, by which he could show that he had

no intention of giving such a fee as might be expected; but at the same time to be careful not to altogether refuse to pay, as he felt that such a statement in writing might be used against him. It cost him some time, and the backs of several old letters, to concoct the epistle, which he was in the act of sealing with the family arms when Dr. Fussel presented himself with a beaming countenance.

"I find her ladyship so mercifully well," he said blandly and devoutly, for the doctor was seriously disposed, "that I shall now take my leave, as I have one or two other patients to see to-night."

"Indeed!" replied the Viscount. "So late. Ah! but I forgot. Yes, of course, they always do, at least generally, I believe. Ah! so much obliged," he added, as he took the doctor's hand, into which he crushed his note. "A thousand thanks for all your intended kindness. I'm sure you have been most attentive and thoughtful." As he spoke he conducted his visitor to the door of the room, and bowed him out in a polite though hurried manner.

“What the deuce did he mean by ‘intended kindness’?” said the doctor, as he opened the note on his drive home. “He has surely given me fifty; there is no cheque enclosed. Ah! perhaps he has written it on the back of the note.” Having no light in the carriage, the doctor had no means of assuring himself on this point till he had gained his library, where he threw himself into an easychair, and proceeded to peruse Lord Mildown’s communication. It was to the following effect:

“DEAR DR. FUSSEL,—The extraordinary kindness and great interest you have evinced for Lady Mildown induces me to feel a very great debt of gratitude to you, as well as regret, which will be shared by my mother, that the services of one so valued as yourself should not have been available at the interesting and critical moment when your marvellous skill, though happily not required, might have been of the greatest service, and allayed any natural anxiety. Be assured, however, that we are all convinced that you share our regret and I feel that I have discharged but a small part

of the debt of gratitude I owe you when I assure you that I am, yours faithfully,

“MILDOWN.”

“Confound him ! What the deuce does he mean ?” exclaimed the astonished practitioner. “No cheque ? Then he don’t intend to pay me. But we’ll see about that. A scurvy hound. I’ll write and threaten——”

But at these words the doctor paused, locked up the note, and did what every gentleman should do when he receives an annoying communication—resolved to sleep before replying to it. He consequently went to bed, his statement regarding the other patients to whom visits were due that night being merely a form in which he was wont to take his leave gracefully from sufferers of the class to which the occupants of Blomberg House belonged. He fell asleep, resolving in some way to be more than even with Lord Mildown the next time he had him in his power.

CHAPTER II.

IN the first year of the reign of Queen Victoria there lived in a small street, situated at the East End of London, one Mrs. Welbyn, who, as a means of livelihood, let out the chief part of her small house in lodgings, or rather, as a notice in her parlour window set forth, "Furnished Apartments." At first starting in what was termed in that neighbourhood "the letting line," Mrs. Welbyn had offered accommodation to single gentlemen only; but when the bill inviting celibates had remained disregarded by that class of lodger for a long time, she had been known to relax her rule and let to ladies, sometimes even to married couples. But this was with her rather a matter of necessity than of choice, for she found single ladies exacting

and unprofitable, whilst married people were frequently both troublesome and unpunctual as to payment, always alleging as a reason the state of things in business. Mrs. Welbyn was clean to a fault, and had a general notion of comfort, so that her lodgings were seldom long vacant when she had become well known in the neighbourhood. Moreover her charges were moderate—eight shillings a week for the parlours, and ten for the first-floor, the only extras being washing and firing, with your boots thrown in; for which expenses she had a tariff drawn up after due consultation with her distant relative and near neighbour, one Mrs. Tozer, who resided in a street close by, and had advised her, while considering of others, to do herself justice, “As is a duty as you owes yourself, as the saying is.” This advice was given over a cup of tea on the evening that the new house had been set in order, and in years after Mrs. Tozer had occasion to remark to her relative: “And proud you might well be of them rooms, as I remembers you comin’ in to like yesterday, as

'ave supported yourself on 'em, left as you was a strugglin' widder with seven on your 'ands, tho' most on 'em doomed to a early churchyard, and your lawful purtector a good riddance, tho' not one myself to speak ill of the dead in a general way, and a many would 'ave sunk under their blow, as come that thick on your 'ead, but showed your sperrit in a turnin' to, as I always knowed you would, as I've said scores of times, and will always say to my dyin' day, as I would scorn to be one thing afore your face and another behind your back, as the sayin' is, as is double dealin' as I don't hold with; and tho' only one out of seven left, and them dear precious ones never bein' spared to know what a mother they'd got, as is wot 'Melia Ann did, ought to be proud on the privilege 'avin' lived to see, as is a good girl and steady, will work at her needle neater no doubt in time, and as to them others I'm sure they're better off, as not one on 'em could be called fine children thro' a tenderness to water in the 'ead with all, as in the eldest settled in the limbs, as were rickety from the month, and never

thought as 'Melia Ann would run alone thro' not bein' put down till eighteen months, as is backard in a gal as in a general way is more forard partikler in the tung." These observations relating to the physical deficiencies of her children were not addressed to the bereaved mother, but only remarks in which Mrs. Tozer would indulge in speaking to what she termed "indifferent parties," to whom she would say: "In my opinion it's a mussy as they was took tho', I will say as she's a true-'arted woman for all that and a good one in trouble tho' always a cup too low, as the sayin' is, as is owin' no doubt to that villin's treatment on 'er, as 'ave reg'lar settled on 'er nerves, for if ever there was a tyrant that Welbyn were one, as black-'arted a man as ever Julia Cæsar could 'ave been, as put 'er own father to death, and then took and drove over 'is dead body." It was true that Mrs. Welbyn was subject to chronic low spirits, owing, no doubt, in some measure to the cause to which Mrs. Tozer attributed them, but this did not render her a cheerful companion,

though, as her friend maintained, "She might be a ornymment to 'er sect; tho' she is my own second cousin thro' the mother's side, and will always speak as I find to my dyin' day; and what I've said a thousand times to scores upon scores." This statement, though inaccurate numerically speaking, was perfectly true as to the fact of Mrs. Welbyn being the subject of Mrs. Tozer's eulogium when spoken of to Mrs. Clisby, the butcher's lady, or Mrs. Judgrove at The Catherine Wheel. "And as I say all the more thro' 'er not bein' never brought up to it like thro' 'er father bein' a carriage-linin' fitter with sons that work in Long Acre; and worked 'erself at the gimp, as is the fine part of the work as were pocket-money for 'er, and would dress that genteel when we was both gals, as were proved in walkin' out of a Sunday arternoon together scores of times, when you'd 'ave looked round for the carriage to be a follerin', as a many did as met us sudden tho' not one myself to encourage no starin' ways, but she certainly were the lady all over." In spite of her aristocratic deport-

ment and correct toilette, Mrs. Welbyn, or rather, " 'Melia Cussens,' " had not been fortunate in her selection of a partner for life; having in " an evil moment placed her affections, and eventually bestowed her hand, on Welbyn, "as were in the sea-farin' line," and had, in the course of his wedded life, been erroneously supposed to have met with several watery graves. He, however, had indulged in an awkward habit of turning up suddenly after such lengthened terms of absence as had induced the fullest belief in his decease. Once on his return home he actually found his widow in weeds and his orphans in black, a sight which only excited his mirth, and caused him to express his belief that the old woman was chuckling at the thought as she had got rid of him for good. He certainly had good grounds for suspecting that he would be classed by his family among the happy releases rather than in the category of the deeply regretted; for whatever claims he might have had on the affections of his wife and children, he certainly had none on their respect, his conduct being generally un-

pleasant, and not unfrequently brutal. It was his normal state to return home fearfully intoxicated; and when in partial possession of his senses would display such a wayward disposition that, as his unhappy wife expressed it, "nothing wouldn't pacify him." He would at first indulge in boisterous hilarity and be most demonstratively affectionate; then, in a sudden access of fury, would beat his offspring, and throw sundry articles, varying from a flat-iron to a baby's chair, at his wife's head; and finally, bursting into an agony of tears, take to his bed for many hours, and emerge thence merely to seek distraction in his only earthly solace—rum. At length there came a period to his excesses as far as his family was concerned, for he one day departed on a voyage from which he never returned, in fact the vessel which bore him from his native land was never heard of again; a circumstance which excited no surprise in the case of those who, being intimately acquainted with his habits, were aware that he was in command of the craft which he had stated was bound

for "Cheyney," as he termed the land of tea; and it is certain that the *Sarah Bell* sailed for Hong Kong, but never reached the Flowery Land, or any other port of the known world.

Whether Mrs. Welbyn mourned him really too deeply for much outward display of grief it is, of course, impossible to say, but she showed respect for his memory to an extraordinary degree, for she never laid aside her weeds, in fact wore them, in every sense of the term, too long; for as Mrs. Tozer would say: "If you will stick to them weeds, Susan, you might as well 'ave 'em clean a little oftener, 'cos they really do look as if you'd been up the chimbley in 'em."

In consequence of these remarks a compromise was effected, and Mrs. Welbyn adopted a black cap of the widow's form and style, which Mrs. Tozer said as she considered, "she must wear as a sign of thankfulness at gettin' rid of a man as were the terror of her life and a dreadful bad example to his family." So it was that Welbyn passed away unregretted by any but the underwriters,

and perhaps the crew of the vessel which had been entrusted to him, and which, to say the truth, he had managed admirably for many voyages—a fact which can only be accounted for on the supposition of the superhuman care said to be bestowed by the power of evil on its own.

For a long time did Mrs. Welbyn continue to hope, or rather to fear, that he would return, and it was only after a lapse of years that she was able to persuade herself that she was really released from her domestic thralldom. 'Melia Ann, at the time of his departure, was about her eye-teeth, and at the opening of our story she was busily engaged in hearth-stoning a narrow slip of flagstones which led from the garden-gate to the front door of her maternal abode, which was being tidied up for the reception of new lodgers.

“Not as I think much on 'em when they do come,” she observed to Miss Biles, the young lady next door, who was leaning over the railings which separated the respective gardens; “but,” she con-

tinued, "summer is coming on, and we don't let so well in summer as in winter."

Miss Biles made some remark as commiserating "'Melia Ann," respecting the hard work to which she was condemned; and adding "that her ma wouldn't let her sile 'er 'ands with 'ard work." Though, judging from appearances, Miss Biles's hands attained that condition in spite of her maternal care.

"'Melia Ann!" shrieked Mrs. Welbyn from the front-parlour window, "whyever arn't you whitened this winder-sell? and don't be idlin' your time."

"'Cos I ain't idlin', and am a going to do the winder now."

Amelia Ann spoke in an injured tone, feeling that the imputation of idleness was unjust, as did Miss Biles, who at once withdrew, observing "that she pitied 'Melia Ann for havin' such a fidget for a mother."

'Melia Ann proceeded to wash the window-sill, and Mrs. Welbyn was devoting all her energies to

polishing a sideboard in the front-parlour. It was an old-fashioned piece of furniture, and rather too large for the room; but Mrs. Welbyn would not part with it, and often spoke of it with a sigh as having seen better days. It certainly never could have seen brighter ones, for the amount of beeswax and oil, combined with what Mrs. Tozer called "elber-grease," bestowed on that sideboard was simply incalculable, and had produced a polish which, as that lady observed, "nothin' but hard labour won't bring up, leastways in my opinion, and I ought to be a judge," she continued, "through well rememberin' Lady Whittles's own dinin' table, as the dessert were put on without no cloth, and never took a finger-mark, nor didn't signify wine bein' spilt; and I will say, Susan Welbyn, as your sideboard is equal to it any day, as can't be done by no French polish in this world to look for all the world like bein' dipped in ile."

"'Melia Ann!" again shrieked Mrs. Welbyn, "whyever don't you red lead them flowerpots afore whitenin' the winder-sell?"

“’Cos I ’ave,” was the prompt reply.

’Melia did not as a rule speak so abruptly, but she was busy, “and mother will fidget so,” she said to herself; “and I’m sure he’s no great shake, and will be a deal of trouble bein’ two of ’em; as I wouldn’t ’ave took ’em myself at twelve shillings a week, for wotever is it when you comes to look at it, with them a wantin’ meals at all ’ours?”

Such reflections filled the mind of ’Melia Ann respecting the expected inmates when the click of the lock of the gate induced her to turn her head, and she beheld one of them approaching her. He was a short thick-set man, had a sea-faring appearance, and spoke with a strong foreign accent.

“Is the lady come?” he asked, as ’Melia Ann advanced to meet him.

“Not as I know on, sir; but I’ll ask mother,” she replied. This answer was only given to afford the girl time to rush into the house to announce the arrival.

“No sir, she have not,” said Mrs. Welbyn, confronting her new lodger on the doorstep; “and

did not expect you till this evening, from what you said yesterday; not but what everything is ready, leastways as far as the rooms goes, and the kettle almost on the boil."

"All right," said the lodger. "She'll be here in a minute or two."

"Did I understand you as the lady was an invalid?" observed Mrs. Welbyn.

"Not exactly," he replied. "Only wants care for a little while."

"Ah! I see; and that she shall have, for I takes a pride in lookin' arter them as wants it, for I've known sorrows as would 'ave broke many a heart, living or dead, with bitter tears as I've shed."

"All right," said the new lodger, displaying brutal indifference as to Mrs. Welbyn's sorrows.

"I suppose," added the stranger, "you don't mind nursing a lady through her trouble if well paid for it, as you shall be now?"

"Well, it's not a case as I should care for in a general way, nor yet take in voluntary, you see," replied the landlady, "tho' I'm used to nursing,

thro' 'aving 'ad my own 'usband's aunt bedridden over seven years in my top back."

To this the stranger made no reply, but walked somewhat anxiously up and down the strip of garden, rapidly marring the effect of 'Melia Ann's labours. In a few minutes a hackney coach drew up at the gate, to which the Captain, as he styled himself, almost lifted out a female, whom he led somewhat gently into the house, and placed on the sofa in the front-parlour. Having removed one box and some wraps, he dismissed the vehicle, and returned to the parlour, where he found Mrs. Welbyn standing over her new lodger.

"I came in, sir," she said, apologetically, "thro' hearing the good lady sob; and hadn't I better take off her veil and cloak, she seems faint?"

Without waiting for the required permission, Mrs. Welbyn proceeded to relieve the evidently suffering lady from her outer clothing, and was almost on the point of exclaiming aloud at the sight of a lovely-looking young girl, so fragile and fair as to form about the same contrast to her com-

panion as our old friend, the fabled Beauty, must have been to the Beast.

"She's fainted," said the man. "Do what you can for her; she wants care."

"So she do, indeed, pretty dear," replied Mrs. Welbyn. "'Melia Ann," she continued, addressing her daughter, who was standing at the door of the room, awe-stricken at the sight of so much beauty, "fetch the vinegar and a glass of cold water, and ask Mrs. Tozer to step up here, as is wonderful in sickness, and it's a providence as she 'appens to be a settin' in the kitchen thro' 'aving looked in just now, and a mother of five."

These restoratives having been administered, the sufferer's lips moved, and she rolled her head about in an uneasy manner.

"I thinks she wants to speak to you, sir," said Mrs. Welbyn.

"No, she don't," he replied gruffly. "You get her to bed, and you'd better send for a doctor; here's money," he added, "and you must see her through her trouble; it's rather unexpected."

"I wish as you 'ad let me 'ave known wot the case were at first," said Mrs. Welbyn, "and then I should 'ave 'ad a fire in the bedroom, and sent for a party as would 'ave 'elped me with pleasure; not but Mr. Dixon is a man as might attend a princess."

"Well, well," said the stranger impatiently, "you know all about it now;" and then added sulkily, "it's a common case enough."

"That's true, and one I understands, tho' no nurse myself; and perhaps you'd jest lift 'er into the next room."

As he approached the sofa, the invalid sat up and waved him off, and speaking with a strong foreign accent, said: "No, no, leave me to the woman, I want you no more;" then extending her hand to Mrs. Welbyn, was led into the adjoining room, where a bed was in the course of rapid preparation by the joint efforts of 'Melia Ann and Mrs. Tozer, a motherly, good-looking woman, who was evidently both experienced and practical in sickness. She said very little, but as soon as she had assisted the

sufferer to bed, took her leave under the express understanding that she was to be sent for if the lady got worse or wanted help.

Meanwhile, the strange man walked to the window and waited for some time, as though irresolute as to how he should proceed, then going to the bedroom-door, he tapped at it gently.

"She's a-dozing," said Mrs. Welbyn, re-entering the sitting-room in reply to this summons.

"Get all she wants," he said; "here's money;" and placing five sovereigns in the landlady's hand, he added, "I'm obliged to go out now; I'll be back in the evening."

"Pray, don't be gone long, sir," replied Mrs. Welbyn. "And what name did you say?"

"Morgan," he replied.

"Oh indeed; and the lady the same, of course?" she said.

"Of course," he answered, as he left the room and the house.

"You're no husband of hers," said Mrs. Welbyn to herself, as, after watching his departure from

her gate, she returned to her interesting charge, who had fallen into a heavy though by no means undisturbed sleep, during which her sympathising landlady watched her for upwards of two hours. At the expiration of that time the sleeper awoke with a start, and uttered something in a tongue not understood by Mrs. Welbyn.

"What would you please to want?" said that worthy woman in a soothing tone.

"Oh, if you please, where am I?" inquired the stranger. And she added, "Now I remember;" and she looked round the room in evident anxiety.

"He's not here, mum; he's stepped out for a little bit. Don't go to worry yourself about him, he'll soon be back. Will you have a cup of tea?"

"No, no, thank you, I do not like the tea. I will have a little water."

"Oh dear me! Water is a poor substitute for the stomach, and won't never do for anyone as is in want of all their strength," said Mrs. Welbyn, as she gave her the required drink. "Now,

keep up your spirits," she continued; "I've sent for the doctor, and you'll soon be better; only you must be kept up."

No reply being elicited by these remarks, Mrs. Welbyn, presuming that the patient had dropped off again, left the room and went to the front-door, in order to see if 'Melia Ann, whom she had sent for the doctor, was in sight. She was not kept long in suspense, for she soon beheld her daughter turn the corner of the street, accompanied by Mr. Dixon, a general practitioner, held in high esteem by the matrons of the neighbourhood. "One," as Mrs. Welbyn observed, "as you might trust your life with any day; but as to that fellow Moody, I'd as lief call in a bull-dog." Mr. Dixon had, as he said, only just come in from his rounds, and hadn't even stopped to wash his hands, a statement the truth of which was substantiated by a glance at them. He was a mild, flabby-looking man, spoke slowly in a low tone; had a tendency to corpulency, and a sallow complexion, both characteristics of indulgence in hot suppers and

a general tendency to indulge in the pleasures of the table, in the shape of several good meals and sundry snacks during the day and night. Regularity with respect to taking food being incompatible with his professional duties, he guarded against contingencies by eating and drinking whenever an occasion for so doing presented itself. He was careful in the exercise of his profession, and being of a serious turn, had great influence in his own immediate circle. In spite of his many excellences, Mr. Dixon had enemies, among the foremost of whom was one Moody, a rival practitioner, who did not hesitate to speak of the estimable Dixon as a lying, canting humbug, who, though he wouldn't swear, didn't stick at any lie, however barefaced, if it suited his convenience. But then Moody was a reprobate, never attended a place of worship, whereas Dixon was called out of his Bethesda sometimes twice on a Sunday, and generally just before the sermon. Moody, moreover, indulged in strong language, and recommended drinks of a corresponding nature,

whilst Dixon, though not a teetotaller, was, especially in advising patients, rigidly abstemious.

After a visit to the patient, Mr. Dixon sat chatting in Mrs. Welbyn's kitchen, and partaking of a slight refection in the shape of tea, with a German sausage, French roll, and butter.

"I wouldn't on any account disturb her," he said; "but must wait till she wakes. Perhaps your daughter will let us know?"

"Oh yes," replied Mrs. Welbyn. "That she will, for I told her to come and fetch me when the lady seemed like waking, for I must say I ain't easy about her, poor thing, through being that dreadful faint, as is never a good sign, in my opinion; and she's quite a lady, as anyone can see, though a foreigner to the backbone; and as to him, he's as common as dirt, though, I will say, free with the money; but can't be her husband, or never would have walked out of the house like that, as is against nature in one as is likely to be a father, though some are that stony-hearted."

"It is an odd case," said Mr. Dixon reflectively,

“and as you say there is money, Mrs. Welbyn, of course it’s all right ; but,” he continued, “really such cases are so very dangerous—I mean risky as far as payment is concerned—that I should have recommended——”

“I’ve got your money in hand, and more too,” she replied, “or else I should have sent for Mr. Moody, as being the parish doctor.”

“Ah ! I should have been grieved if Moody had this case,” said the amiable doctor. “He is far too rough ; and I think that here a word in season may be of service from the glance I had of her, and she is very young—I should say barely eighteen.”

“Ah,” observed Mrs. Welbyn, with a sigh, “I must say as it’s a case as I don’t like. I don’t fancy him, though I pities her, so let’s hope it will turn out all right in the end.”

CHAPTER III.

WHILST this conversation was being held, 'Melia Ann, nothing loath, had gone to watch the beautiful stranger, in whom she felt a strange interest. Never had she seen anyone so lovely, and it was a sort of fascination that seemed to rivet the girl to the spot as she stood gazing at that sleeping form, admiring the profusion of dark hair that lay scattered over the pillow, and formed a rich contrast to the deep pallor on the sufferer's face, over which from time to time a flush of pain spread itself.

As she stood lost in admiration the sleeper awoke, and 'Melia Ann was about to announce the fact in the kitchen when her course was arrested by the lady exclaiming:

“ Do not leave me.”

"I'm only going to tell mother and the doctor as you've woke," replied the girl.

"Who is mother?" inquired the lady.

"Mrs. Welbyn, as keeps the house as you're come to," said 'Melia Ann, half alarmed at the manner of the stranger, whose eyes, as she afterwards stated, seemed like red-hot coals.

"Have I been here long?" asked the lady.

"Oh dear no: you come between two and three o'clock. It's past five now by the milkman's second round, 'cos our clock's wrong through the kitten a-playing with the cords, as is a Dutch one."

"Am I near London?" inquired the strange lady.

"Oh yes, close. You can go by the 'bus as passes the end of the street, as some thinks quicker than the train, as is the same fare third class."

"Tell me," said the lady, "is there a Catholic church here?"

"Yes," said 'Melia Ann, "though it's a very little one."

"Go there and ask the priest to come and see a sick—a dying person."

“Oh law!” exclaimed the girl, “you ain’t never a-dying. Oh, I must call mother;” and without more ado the alarmed ’Melia Ann hurried into the kitchen, interrupting Mr. Dixon’s third cup of tea and Mrs. Welbyn’s account of how the lodgings had been taken. The girl’s announcement that the lady was awake and had been talking “that wild and gibberishy like,” caused both landlady and doctor to adjourn at once to the bedroom.

“No, Mr. Dixon,” said Mrs. Welbyn, a short time before she was interrupted by the entrance of her daughter, “I am not superstitious, but do not like Friday, nor yet to set down thirteen, and that’s why I said to him: ‘Come in to-morrow afternoon;’ but he said he must find a lodging for his good lady at once, and would pay twelve shillings with pleasure, and a month in advance. Not that I liked his looks when I see him a reading the bill, and turn back and look again, and that’s why I asked twelve shillings, thinking to choke him off, as seemed quite respectable a layin’ three sovereigns on the table before ten o’clock in the morning, and quite sober tho’ a smell of spirits

but the moment I see her I says to myself : ' This is not all open and above-board, for mark my words she's no wife of his any more than me ; ' and had been in my opinion from aboard ship, and been a travelling too far, though not much luggage, as I ain't had time to look at ; but she's got on nice underclothing, and all the luggage was hers, for he hadn't nothing but what he stood up in ; and now he's walked off and left her, goodness knows what I shall do. "

Whatever remark or reply that Mr. Dixon might have made to this communication was interrupted by the sudden entrance of ' Melia Ann, after exclaiming : " She's wide awake and been a talking awful, and says she's a-dying, and all manner like that. "

" You didn't ought to have let her talk, " said Mrs. Welbyn, as she rose from her seat, and, following Mr. Dixon, was soon at the bedside of the patient.

They found her again dosing, though their entrance roused her. ' Melia Ann having been

told by her mother to go and get her tea and be ready in case she was wanted, at once followed orders, had her tea, and sat waiting with some anxiety for news of the patient; but though her mother reappeared in the kitchen once or twice during the hours that ensued, she said very little beyond a charge as to keeping up the fire and having boiling water ready.

Once Mr. Dixon went out for a short time and on his return sat in the front-parlour; but though 'Melia Ann took him in candles she did not venture to ask him any questions.

Hour after hour passed away, and 'Melia Ann heard it strike nine as she sat by the fire, half dozing, when she was roused by the entrance of her mother, who said in a hurried tone :

“Just run round and ask Mrs. Tozer to step in if she ain't in bed, and say I want to speak to her particular; look sharp, that's a good girl.”

'Melia Ann needed no incentive to looking sharp, for she was both interested and excited,

so in a very few minutes was on her way to the next street, where Mrs. Tozer lived, thinking on her way that "the poor lady must be very bad, or mother wouldn't send for Mrs. Tozer at this time of night."

"Set down, 'Melia Ann, for a minute," said Mrs. Tozer, not surprised at being summoned, "and I'll be with you. It's a mercy that it ain't your mother took ill so sudden, though in course I feels if it's only for a lodger."

With these words Mrs. Tozer returned to her apartment to inform her half-sleeping spouse of the summons she had received, and prepared to accompany 'Melia Ann.

"It give me sich a turn when I see them first arrive, till I got a sight of 'im thro' the kitchen winder," Mrs. Tozer subsequently observed, "for I thought as perhaps it were Welbyn 'ad turned up after all."

In a very few minutes she was in the street, and had reached the corner of that in which Mrs. Welbyn resided, when 'Melia Ann exclaimed:

“Oh my! I quite forgot.”

“Forgot what?” inquired Mrs. Tozer.

“Why, all about the Catholic chapel as I’m to go to for the priest. Wherever is it?”

“Not far off,” replied Mrs. Tozer, “though I can’t say exactly; but I tell you who does know, and that’s Mrs. Flinn, as is nearly oppersite, and you can go as far and I’ll ’urry on to your mother. It’s the fust door down the court there, and she’s sure not to be in bed, for she’s a ’ard-workin’ cretur’, tho’ she did break two panes of glass last time she came in to me for arf a day, and cleaned my plated teapot with scourin paper.”

’Melia at once proceeded to the abode of Mrs. Flinn, and with that lady’s help soon reached the Catholic chapel.

Mrs. Tozer meanwhile had hurried on to Peter Street, and was soon closeted with Mrs. Welbyn, who said:

“Ah, my dear Martha, it’s a world of trouble, and he says he don’t think as she’ll get through it,

and has gone to fetch another party, so I thought I'd send for you."

"Well, it ain't no use you a-sheddin' tears over it," said Mrs. Tozer; "let me see the poor thing, 'cos there's no tellin', for I'm sure arter Tozer's own sister as I nussed back from death's door, as the sayin' is, as took nothing for days but wot I forced down 'er throat with 'er jaw wrenched open through a plated skewer and a butter-boat."

As she spoke Mrs. Tozer followed Mrs. Welbyn into the sick-room, and saw at once that the case was most serious, if not hopeless.

"Get me some brandy!" she exclaimed. "Why she's sinking!"

"Don't you think as sperrits might do 'arm?" said Mrs. Welbyn.

Mrs. Tozer made no reply, but seizing the brandy, prepared to administer the restorative, which in some degree revived the fainting young creature. In a few minutes Mrs. Tozer repeated the dose, which so far restored the patient that she opened her eyes, and at last asked in a low tone :

"Is he come?"

"No, my dear," replied Mrs. Welbyn. "She means the doctor," she observed to Mrs. Tozer.

"No, no," murmured the sufferer.

"Who is it as you wants?" inquired Mrs. Tozer, bending down to catch what the feeble words of the sufferer were.

"It's the priest she wants," she exclaimed; and then replied, "yes, he'll soon be here, he's gone for. 'Melia Ann's gone for him," she continued, addressing Mrs. Welbyn; "it ain't far to the chapel, and the girl is sure to make haste, for she was so dreadful put out with herself for forgettin' as this poor dear young lady 'ad asked for him; and do 'ope as the good gentleman won't be gone to bed. Ah! there's 'Melia Ann, as ain't been gone long!" exclaimed Mrs. Welbyn as she left the room.

"Did you want anything else, mum?" said Mrs. Tozer, on observing that the patient was still anxiously looking about.

"Yes," said the lady; "I want you to be my friend; you look so kind, I feel I can ask you."

"Be your friend? Of course I will," replied Mrs. Tozer; "but what can I do?"

"Is he here?" inquired the lady.

"Who's he? Oh, you mean your husband?"

"Oh no, no; not that man; he is not; save me from him; do not let him see me; protect me from him."

As she uttered these words almost incoherently, with an increased foreign accent, the poor girl shuddered, as though in fear.

"Hush, hush!" said Mrs. Tozer in a sympathetic tone. "Don't take on so, that's a dear; he shan't come near you nor the baby neither, whether it's a girl or a boy, if you don't like."

"No, no, he must not have my child."

"Oh then, he ain't the father?"

"Never!" said the young creature, her face flushing. "No, he is nothing; but here, you are good, you shall protect my child; take this, it is all for you;" and as she uttered these words she thrust a small packet into Mrs. Tozer's hand, and sank back in a semi-fainting state, from which Mrs. Tozer,

assisted by Mrs. Welbyn, who entered at the moment, had much difficulty in rousing her.

“She’s a-dozing now,” remarked Mrs. Tozer, when after a short time the attack of faintness had passed off; “and I think we may as well go into the next room, as can speak without disturbing, and watch her through the foldin’-doors.”

Assenting to this proposal, Mrs. Welbyn followed her companion to the adjoining room, where they sat by the fire and talked matters over in a subdued tone.

“Of course,” said Mrs. Welbyn, “and is very low, and I feels a misgivin’ over ’er, and being a foreigner it’s nat’ral that she should want to see the priest; but I do ’ope as she ain’t no Jesyist in disguise, nor nothink as comes into families, or might be run away from a dungeon, as that priest is sure to force her back into; not as ever he should in my ’ouse, as don’t like sich characters myself, like Maria Monk, not as she were much good; but then, as Mr. Dixon were a sayin’, there’s the Inquisition as would burn you like a faggit.”

“Oh, bother Mr. Dixon,” said Mrs. Tozer; “why, he wants to make out as we shall all be burnt in the next world, through not a-’oldin’ with ’im as ’is Bethesday is the only way to ’evan; but I ’olds with Tozer, as often says: ‘Let everyone go there ’is own way,’ though goodness knows there’s lots as it’s the last place as ever they thinks about goin’ to; but I ain’t one to interfere with no one’s religion myself, though in course there’s a great difference, and someone must be wrong, but as to goin’ about ‘No Popery,’ like Lord George Gordin, as my dear mother often spoke about, through bein’ the same year as ’er father and mother got married, and well remembered London in flames, as if that were true religion, with milingtary called out, and the Riot Act read over the people’s ’eads afore firing; not as ever I can make out what a many’s a drivin’ at; not as I’d be one to interfere with others, only you don’t catch me at no such games.”

Further exposition of Mrs. Tozer’s theological views was cut short by the return of ’Melia Ann

with the priest, who was at once introduced and remained for some time with the sufferer.

"I can't think what he can want to come again for," observed Mrs. Welbyn to Mr. Dixon, who arrived just as the priest was about to leave, saying he would return very shortly."

"Ah," said Mr. Dixon, "it is well not to oppose a patient. I am sorry she has seen a priest, for they are dangerous people."

"I think, Mr. Dixon," observed Mrs. Tozer, emerging from the sick-room, "as you'd better give a look at her, she looks so fainty-like agin."

"Oh yes, decidedly," was the reply. "I'll go at once to her. I'm sorry to say my old friend, Mr. Mossman, is laid up with gout, or I'd have brought him."

"I don't see as she wants more doctors," remarked Mrs. Tozer, "for they ain't as much use as good nussin' in sich cases."

"Ah, there's a knock," said Mrs. Tozer; "it must be that priest come back. Well, he ain't let the grass grow under his feet, as the sayin' is."

I'll let 'im in if you'll go back to 'er, Mrs. Welbyn, for as to 'Melia Ann a 'earin' 'im, that's not in natur', as 'ave been dead asleep with 'er 'ead on the kitchen table as I found 'er myself, as any one would think that candle a-burnin' down in the socket would 'ave choked her with its flare, if it 'adn't with that orful smell as it were a makin', for it's been stiflin' the house for ever so long."

"Yes, sir, if you'll jest step in and take a seat in the parlour," she continued, as she let in the priest; "I'll just mention that you're here agin', thro' the medical gentleman, 'avin' jest come 'isself as you went out, and is with 'er now; likewise Mrs. Welbyn, as honest a woman as ever kept a 'ouse over 'er 'ead to my certain knowledge, thro' bein' brought up together, as is 'ard work to keep a 'ome nowadays, with things a gettin' dearer every day, and most on 'em catch-penny rubbish; as I said to Mrs. Pollin the day before yesterday: 'Change a sov'rin' and where is it but like chaff before the wind, as the sayin' is?'"

“Will you be so kind as to ask if I can see the lady at once, and quite alone?” asked the priest, a sallow-looking foreigner, taking advantage of Mrs. Tozer having stopped for breath.

“I don’t call that polite,” said Mrs. Tozer to herself, as she left the room; “and I’m sure he ain’t been a listenin’ to one-half I’ve been a-sayin’, as is jest like foreigners. You must wait a little bit longer, if you please, sir,” she said, returning hastily to the room; “and you’ll excuse me, for things ’ave took a sudden turn, and I’ll let you know in a minute or two.” With these words Mrs. Tozer retreated, and for more than an hour did the priest wait till Mrs. Tozer, re-entering the room, ushered him to the bedside of his charge, where we will leave him.

“I never did see a finer boy, Susan,” observed Mrs. Tozer to Mrs. Welbyn, as she sat by that lady’s kitchen-fire completing the first toilette of a very young gentleman, whom she was investing in some very yellow though perfectly clean garments of babyhood.

"It's lucky as I had 'em by me," said Mrs. Welbyn, "as is quite a chance."

"Ah!" exclaimed Mrs. Tozer, "it only shows as 'store is no sore,' as the sayin' is; why, your Tom would be seven, if a day."

"Ah, that he would, poor dear, as is no doubt all for the best," said the bereaved mother.

"Yes," observed Mrs. Tozer, "our Joe is nearly five, and you was married a good nine years afore me; but I've kep' every rag of 'is, excep' wot I've give away, for baby-linen is like black—you never knows when you may want either."

"The lady wishes to see you," said the priest, entering the kitchen somewhat suddenly, "and please bring the baby."

"Ah, bless her heart, no doubt she wants to see it," said Mrs. Welbyn, as she hurried upstairs with her very young charge, followed by Mrs. Tozer.

"Give it to the priest," said the young mother, as Mrs. Welbyn was about to place the infant by her side. She spoke in a tone scarcely audible.

"She's dreadful low," whispered Mrs. Tozer, "Mr. Dixon did ought to be fetched back, if it's only for a satisfaction. I'll go for him this very instant," she added.

"No," said Mrs. Welbyn, as she gave the infant to the priest; "you stay with her. I'll go; you're a better hand in sickness and not so easy frightened as me, so I'll go for 'im."

Having assented to this arrangement, Mrs. Tozer returned to the patient's side, just in time to see the priest "take and christen the infant right off," as she said subsequently, in relating the incident; "not as I had much time for to notice him, thro' that dear young creetur a-growin' that deadly faint as I raised her in the bed, tho' she 'ad 'er senses to the werry last, and smiled on the baby, and kissed the cross as that priest 'eld to 'er lips; as he were a-kneelin' by the bedside, and stopped there a-prayin' even when it was all over and she'd gone off like a bird without a sign, just as Mrs. Welbyn came back with Mr. Dixon; as the priest let 'em in a-sayin' 'too late,' as put

Mr. Dixon out thro' 'avin jest got into bed. I shan't never forget that good priest, for tho' only a foreigner, he must 'ave a tender 'art, and a good christthun too, tho' he is a priest."

"Ah, poor dear, she does look lovely," exclaimed Mrs. Welbyn, "and shan't be berried by the parish, not if I 'as to put away the teapot to do it; tho' I believe I've money enough, even if that unfeelin' brute don't turn up."

"But if he don't how about the infant?" inquired Mr. Dixon.

"Oh, we'll see after him," exclaimed Mrs. Tozer; "such a fine boy as that never come into the world for nothink, I'm sure."

"Ah, very well," said the doctor; "and now good-night, and no doubt you know how to manage him very well."

"I didn't speak afore now," said Mrs. Tozer; "but I believe as there must be money in this," and she held up the little packet the departed one had given her.

"We'll look at it in the morning," said Mrs.

Welbyn, "so do you keep it; and 'adn't you better go home, Martha?"

"Oh dear no, poor dear, I won't leave you alone; tho' I'm sure nobody couldn't feel no terrors in looking on death like this. Ah, it's a sad case. I only hope she ain't got a mother to fret arter her." As she spoke, a tear of sympathy escaped from the good woman's eye; and as to Mrs. Welbyn, she sat down and had a good cry over it, tho', as she observed, "if ever anyone was gone to be happy, judging by their looks, it's that young creetur as have a lovely smile on her face, even now, and you can't hardly believe as she's really dead and gone."

CHAPTER IV.

WHILST these interesting events were passing in London, the Marquis and Marchioness of Cankerfield were at their seat in Downburyshire, where their married daughters, Lady Bolderstone and Lady Augusta Folkingham were on a visit to them, unaccompanied by their husbands—Captain Lord Charles Folkingham, younger son of the Earl of Wallsend, being with his regiment in Ireland; and Lord Bolderstone at Harrogate, just recovering from a severe attack of gout, where, as his devoted wife stated, she had insisted on his remaining for another fortnight, in order, as she said, “to give the waters a chance;” the truth being that the nobleman in question had registered a vow that he would see his father-in-law consigned to eternal perdition before he would go on a visit to him at that time. Neither

of the ladies had made good matches in any sense. Lady Bolderstone, who was married first, although she had acquired wealth, was doomed to domestic misery; and Lady Augusta, who had, after her elder sister's marriage, taken her penniless cousin in fear of being left out in the cold when, at the end of her third season, she had failed to attract a single suitor, suffered from impecuniosity of a severe kind. Lord Bolderstone was middle-aged, wealthy, gouty, and had what his friends called "a devil of a temper." He married late; neglected his wife, who repaid his conduct by displaying supreme contempt for both himself and his authority. She had a son almost an idiot, whilst her sister was blessed with two girls. Such was the family party at the Hall, where Lady Augusta with her children passed most of her time as a matter of convenience. Lady Bolderstone only came from time to time, with an eye to probable lace and jewels in future, and to prevent her sister gaining too much ascendancy over her mother with respect to the disposal of the same. The Marquis had been fond of his daughters when

young, but hated both their husbands—a state of feeling which cooled much of his parental affections towards the ladies. The Marchioness was afraid of her eldest daughter, and liked to keep her youngest near her, as a sort of body-guard. The ladies were too well bred to quarrel, but maintained a sort of armed neutrality among themselves, which did not render the character of their intercourse particularly cordial. The party thus assembled had to celebrate at the family seat the auspicious event of the recent birth of an heir to the marquise, the particulars of which formed an important part of the opening of our story.

“It had better be got over at once,” observed the Marquis to his steward, Mr. Woolley, “whilst my daughters are here, and before Lady Mildown is about again, because we don’t want them down here. I can’t stand being condemned to listen to one of my son’s after-dinner speeches; so you’d better arrange the dinner for the farmers. We needn’t have a servants’ ball, but we must have the county people at the hall in two detachments; I’ll settle that with the Marchioness.”

In pursuance of these directions, the tenants had their dinner forthwith, which consisted chiefly of cold viands, with a haunch of venison from the park. The farmers talked and laughed loudly as they swallowed masses of food and torrents of drink, especially beer; for, though there was wine on the table, the bucolic taste was too cultivated to indulge in it to any extent, well knowing the cellarage. After the toast of the day had been duly honoured, and pipes introduced, spirits-and-water became the universal beverage. At one or two of the healths proposed by Mr. Woolley several of the guests made grimaces which were not lost on the steward, and were treasured in his tenacious memory against coming rent-days, when his turn would come to make some of those present make faces. The two entertainments at the Hall were conducted in the usual style of aristocratic hospitality. All the magnates of the county were first entertained, with all the gloomy form and state in which all are involved who take part in such affairs. Next came the second-class dinner, which was a failure; the noble host and hostess intended,

no doubt, to be affable; but became, as did their daughters, patronising. The Marchioness was given to mistaking one person for another, and consequently was wont to say the wrong thing to those whom she was addressing. She was very agreeable when she received Mrs. Walby, the wife of one of the small gentry of the neighbourhood, whose husband, though he could not speak English, was on the commission of the peace, and whose eldest daughter had just gone through the Divorce Court; but Mrs. Walby felt that there was a restraint in the manner of her hostess, all doubt as to whose sentiments about her were removed when the Marchioness, a few minutes after her arrival, under the impression that she was addressing Mrs. Wrighton, the apothecary's lady, said in a confidential tone:

"I'm so glad to have you near me to-day, for I really want you to help me to entertain these people, because, of course, neither of my daughters can possibly speak to those Walbys after that disgraceful affair," respecting which her ladyship would have said more, but at

that moment dinner being announced, and the Marquis approaching to offer his arm to Mrs. Walby, revealed to his wife the mistake she had made.

The weary two hours devoted to dinner at length expired, and the ladies adjourned to the drawing-room. The Marquis devoted himself to the entertainment of the men, displaying as little as possible the intense amount of boredom he was enduring in listening to Mr. Walby's dissertations on poachers, to the doctor's account of the poor, Mr. Woolley's defence of the guardians, and other matters of local interest. He had been annoyed during dinner by the Misses Walby, who were so genteel that they had refused every dish offered them, conduct which so incensed their noble host, as to cause him to desire Woolley, ere they left the dining-room, "never to invite those people again."

In the drawing-room matters had not been going on quite as well as with the gentlemen. It is true the Marchioness, in order to expiate her late offence, talked perseveringly to Mrs.

Walby and her daughters, from whose society, however, Lady Augusta and her sister held themselves aloof, devoting themselves to the wife of Mr. Wordell, the brewer, a man of importance in the county town, being the local banker. They also paid a slight attention to Mrs. Wrighton, whom they kept urging to sing, and with whom Lady Augusta sang "I know a bank." Poor Mrs. Wrighton sang very badly, though well enough to answer the purpose, on the present occasion, of "stop-gap." Her husband used to say that she was *prima donna* at the Hall, and excited much ill-will among his neighbours against his unfortunate wife, by his constant allusions to her vocal displays, so much applauded by the aristocratic circle ; statements which were decidedly exaggerated, for she was only asked to sing in order to relieve the ladies of the family from having the trouble of talking to guests in whom they were not the least interested, or such as they wished to ignore.

Everything, it is well known, must come to an end, and therefore it was not to be expected

that the dinner we have been chronicling could be an exception to this universal rule, and the relief which its termination afforded was fully experienced and acknowledged by both hosts and visitors, who breathed more freely when released from the restraints of each other's society. Lady Augusta declared, with a yawn, that high position was dearly purchased at the price of being subjected to such an ordeal as that which they had just undergone; whilst Lady Bolderstone observed that persons out of society had no idea of dress, referring to the Misses Walby, who had worn dresses of alarming dimensions and costly materials, more fitted for a ball-room than a dinner-party. These remarks were concurred in by the Marchioness, who was giving Mr. Woolley some directions respecting what she required done in town before her return there, and the Marquis was conferring with his agent as to a property he was anxious to let. It was a relief to all when they parted for the night, the Marquis and the ladies being unanimous, however, on one point—that

there was an end of the Walbys. Shortly after this slumber sealed the aristocratic eyes of the inmates of the hall, as was also the case with their humbler neighbours. It was quite midnight before Mrs. Walby would allow her drowsy husband to find repose, for she declared that nothing would ever induce her to enter the doors of the Hall again.

"I shall send cards to-morrow, Charles," she said; "but will never again endure the rudeness of that stupid old woman nor the insolence of her ugly daughters;" a statement Walby was wide awake enough to receive with caution.

"Quite right, my love," he replied, in a sleepy tone, "a beastly dinner and filthy wine. But, I say, this little chap is in luck; the estates are improving every day, Woolley tells me. Ah! he's been born with a silver spoon in his mouth, at any rate;" and with this quotation of proverbial philosophy Mr. Walby fell asleep, amused, as he was dropping off, at thinking with what anxiety his wife would, in spite of her recent assertion,

look out for the next invitation from their noble neighbours, not imagining that the doors of the aristocratic mansion were closed upon his family for ever, since the Marchioness and her daughters had agreed that to allow a divorced woman to marry was nothing short of licensing infamy—a proposition with which the Marquis expressed his perfect concurrence, not from any moral view of the question, but because he considered divorce to be a luxury intended solely for the use and convenience of the highest class of society; whilst his wife, swayed by the prejudice of education and influenced by an old-fashioned sense of propriety, considered a divorced woman an outcast.

CHAPTER V.

OF all the spots in Europe endowed by nature to convey the idea of a terrestrial paradise, none is more calculated to do so than that part of the coast of Sicily where the ruins of the once famous city of Tauromenium, now known by its more modern name, Taormina, still exist. Nothing can exceed the loveliness of the position of its vast amphitheatre and temple, and the adjacent ruins—sole remnants of the past. In gazing on them, one marvels how so fair a spot could ever have ceased to hold a pre-eminence among the haunts of men; since, apart from all other advantages, the beauty of its position alone must, one would have thought, have endeared Tauromenium to its inhabitants, and have made them, in spite of foreign conquests or intestine struggles, ever

cling to that most lovely and fruitful shore. The view commanded from the rocky eminence, once crowned by the ancient city, is unrivalled; combining on one side the grandly picturesque coast of Calabria washed by the cerulean waters of the bright and sparkling Mediterranean, and on the other the vast outline of gigantic Etna with its snowy summit, filling up, as it were, the expanse of the sublime picture. Neither writer nor painter could possibly do justice to the loveliness of the landscape, of which no poet has as yet given an adequate idea of the glories, nor would it be possible for any pen to describe or classify the rich and varying offspring of the soil, producing as it does flowers and fruit in very wantonness of abundance, the rare blossoms of which in early spring, bathed in a flood of richest sunshine, enamel the mountain-side and give relief to the glorious canopy of deepest blue which overhangs the scene; whilst the atmosphere, surcharged with the rich odour of the orange and other blossoms, gives an effect to the whole, as though nature, bursting forth with super-

fluous beauty, rejoicing in its own loveliness, were doing homage to the Creator for the superabundant blessings of His choicest gifts. No wonder that the poets of old should have selected such a spot as the scene from which to draw material for their mythologic lore, or that men in the sole pursuit of pleasure should have yielded to the temptation of regarding this favoured spot of creation as an object of adoration, and having forgotten all but the indulgence of that sensual gratification which mere animal capacity for the sublime could obtain in the rites and pageants of which Tauromenium was once the favoured scene. It is to the vicinity of this romantic spot we must now transport our readers, and introduce them to characters of a very different stamp to that with which these pages have already familiarised them. In the immediate neighbourhood of a modern Sicilian village, situated near Taormina, there stood on the rising ground a one-storied and by no means neatly-appointed residence, the abode of the proprietress, the Baroness D'Alfieri, where she passed annually the months of

May and October, the season of spring and autumn *villeggiatura*.

The village itself was not remarkable for either beauty or neatness, the houses being mean in appearance, badly built; whilst the unpaved streets, unswept or cared for either in summer or winter, gave an air of squalor to the place, which the aspect of the inhabitants was by no means calculated to remove. Nothing strikes a traveller in Sicily more forcibly than the departed glories of the land; the luxurious past contrasting sadly with the present neglected aspect of both place and people. For centuries increasing apathy would seem to have crushed all attempt on the part of man in this favoured isle to utilise the marvellous gifts of nature.

But to return to our village, with its hovel-like houses, and meagre, insignificant church, which a stranger passing through at mid-day would imagine to be depopulated; but at the moment we are about to describe, full of life and bustle. It is "Ave Maria," or half an hour after sunset, all work is over, and the whole population

absorbed in that one important business of Sicilian life—providing supper.

Food, oil, and wine are being purchased at the various shops. Women, standing at the open doors of the houses, are fanning the small fires of charcoal, over which the frying-pan is frizzling, ready for fish or broccoli. Some are engaged in parching peas and beans, an important feature in a Sicilian menu; others are boiling macaroni, lupines, or lettuce; all talking in shrieking tones about their own affairs or those of their neighbours, as is the wonted pastime of the great human family all over the world.

At the café, in the barbers' and druggists' shops, are assembled groups of male gossips, some discussing the prospects of the vine and olive crops, whilst others are venturing on a mild dose of politics, and the probable spread of the cholera, which terrible disease at the period of our story had appeared for the first time in the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies.

Little anxiety regarding the epidemic was as

yet being felt among the general public of the place; but the few, and as they fancied themselves the better-informed members of the community, looked very grave as they discussed the probability of its advances. It was whispered by those disaffected to the Government that the cholera had no existence as a disease, but was the work of the police, whose agents were employed in disseminating a subtle poison, through the medium of the air, in order to destroy the population supposed to be inclined to revolt against the King of Naples—a decidedly clumsy device, had it ever been planned, and one which could only have been promulgated by the vilest of men, who well knew how easily an ignorant and excitable people can be imposed on by any falsehood, however monstrous. Leaving the villagers to their discussion and suppers we will adjourn to the residence of the Baroness, which, though by no means up to the mark (according to our notions) in the way of style or even neatness, was, nevertheless, superior to the dwellings by which it was at a distance and

sparsely surrounded, and from which it was separated by an extensive olive-yard and a slovenly though luxuriant garden. The house, approached from a terrace commanding a portion of the fine adjacent prospect, was of but one storey; the rooms well sized, paved with red tiles and meanly furnished. In the largest of them an elderly lady was seated, employed in the humble occupation of knitting, whilst by her side was seated a young girl, reading aloud by the feeble light of a small lamp. The dress of both ladies partook decidedly of the character of *déshabille*, in spite of which the demeanour of the elder was dignified, while her young companion possessed personal attractions to an extraordinary degree.

"How late Nina is," she exclaimed, as she closed her book; "it must be nearly one hour of the night."

"Poor Nina has met friends, no doubt, and is having a long gossip," replied the elder lady.

"Ah, there she is; I hope she will bring us plenty of news," exclaimed the young girl, who,

having risen from her seat, went towards the door of the apartment, in the anxiety to welcome Nina on her return from the village, where she had been engaged in the commissariat department.

"My dear child, be not too anxious to know what is going on in the outer world," exclaimed the Baroness. "Believe me, you will always find there far more pain than pleasure; but," she added, "at your age it is natural that the world should attract you."

"Well, Nina, what is it?" she asked, as a middle-aged woman entered the room with an expression of face that betokened anything but peace of mind.

"Oh, your excellency!" she exclaimed, "horrible; dreadful! They are poisoning the people by thousands every day in Palermo and Naples, and are coming to do the same here. Most Holy Mary protect us!"

"What folly is this, Nina?" said the elder lady in a severe tone.

"It is no folly, it is true, my lady. Tonio and Puddo have just come from Catania, and they told

me, and everybody says that if the cholera comes there, there is going to be a revolution."

"We live in evil times, no doubt," said the lady; "but there, Nina, never mind, say no more about it to-night."

Nina, thus dismissed, left the room, exclaiming against the wickedness of poisoning people, saying, "It was no disease, but poison, of which so many were dying."

"I wonder whether there is any truth in these reports, grandmamma?" observed the younger lady, whose name was Cattarina.

"No doubt there is gross exaggeration," replied the Baroness; "but Don Francisco will bring us some intelligence on which we may rely, as he hears all the news from Naples through his friend the stranger."

Cattarina made no reply, for at that moment Don Francisco entered the apartment. He was a person of great importance in the household, combining as he did the functions of chaplain and man of business to the Baroness.

He was full of the intelligence to which Nina had referred, though by no means inclined to believe in it fully.

"I shall pay the stranger a visit," he added, "in the morning. He will have the papers from Naples and Malta, and if you would like to hear the news, signora, no doubt he would come and call on you."

"I do not care for his visits," replied the Baroness; "I do not like the English."

"So much for taste," thought Cattarina, who, barely fifteen, and blessed with the health and spirits peculiar to that period of life, had her own private opinion of the individual referred to as "the stranger."

"Oh grandmamma!" she exclaimed, "think how kind he was in giving you medicine that cured you of the fever last autumn."

"I do not forget his kindness, my child, but I do not care for his visits," was the reply.

At that moment the entrance of Nina with the announcement of supper put a stop to any discussion that might have ensued as to the merits

of the stranger ; and during the meal Don Francisco was too full of all the gossip he had collected in the village to allow any other subjects to be discussed during the meal than those by which he was so much absorbed. The stranger to whom reference has been made had been known in the vicinity of Taormina for the two years preceding the period of our story, during which time he had at intervals resided in a small cottage on the mountain, which he had fitted up in a somewhat Robinson Crusoe sort of style. He was a tenant of the Baroness ; was very fitful and uncertain in his movements ; came and went as he pleased, devoting his time by turns to shooting and the studies of botany and entomology. Little was known of him except that he was said to be English, decidedly young, very handsome, had apparently abundant means, which he bestowed liberally, and was consequently held in the highest esteem by the natives in general ; and especially by his only attendant, one Stefano, a young Sicilian, who, though considered a bit of a scapegrace in

his native village, was a favourite with his master. Attended by this young fellow, and guarded by two large dogs, did this somewhat eccentric individual occupy his rough shooting-box, little regarded and quite undisturbed by his neighbours.

Don Francisco, who knew him first as a matter of business when he first rented the cottage of the Baroness, thought highly of his principles as to honour and honesty, and, as he remarked, "How sad that so good a man should be outside the pale of Christianity," a view in which the parish priest concurred, having heard of the stranger's manifest disregard of all the rules of the Church, which, however, both priests partially excused on the ground of ignorance, the Englishman having never displayed any outward contempt for religion, but, on the contrary, uncovered his head and bent the knee as the Holy Vaticanum passed ; moreover, he was held in great esteem by the poor of the place, not only for his liberality with respect to money, but also on account of his possessing knowledge of the healing art, which he had displayed in giving doses

of quinine, which had been most efficacious in certain cases of fever. Though at first his medicine was taken with reluctance by those who could expect no good from a man who never heard mass, and had been known to eat quails on a Friday, yet the efficacy of his remedies inspired confidence; besides, he was a fine-looking young fellow, of about two-and-twenty, when he first took up his abode in Sicily, and good looks are a passport everywhere; added to which, our stranger had the manners of a gentleman, as even the Baroness admitted, when he had made her acquaintance about twelve months previous to the period of which we are now speaking. It was at that time that he and Cattarina, a girl of thirteen, first met; so plain and awkward was she as scarcely to attract the attention of the stranger, whom she sedulously avoided. During the ensuing year, the stranger scarcely ever saw the girl, even when she was residing at Taormina, which was only at intervals, her usual residence being in Catania, in which city her grandmother inhabited a portion of an

old palace, inherited from her father, as being the direct representative of an ancient and noble Sicilian family. She had married young the Barone D'Alfieri, and had been left a widow early in life with one son. Her marriage had not been a happy one, nor was she more fortunate as a mother than she had been as a wife, for her son was a source of constant anxiety to her, and at last ended his days in a duel, leaving a young creature, whom he had married, and an infant daughter to his mother's care.

The Baroness received the widowed mother and her child kindly, but the former did not long survive her husband, and from that time the Baroness devoted her whole existence to the care of her orphan grand-daughter. Having been educated in Paris, the Baroness was able to give Cattarina instruction which placed her far beyond the average of girls of her age and country. She grew up somewhat awkward from having no society beyond that of the nuns in a neighbouring convent, where her grandmother allowed her to

pass much of her time, and it was with these good ladies that the young girl enjoyed all the very little social intercourse that ever fell to her lot. Twice a year did she gladly accompany her grandmother to her country house, near Taormina, which, though at a considerable distance from Catania, the Baroness preferred as being accessible by a good carriage-road—a novelty in Sicily at that time—and also from its being the most agreeably situated of her residences. With a light heart did Cattarina set forth for the village about the spring of 1837, little dreaming how terribly eventful that year would prove to herself and to her ill-fated country. One great charm that the season of *villeggiatura* had for a young and lively girl was the perfect freedom of action that she enjoyed whilst in the country, a license which could not be permitted in a populous city and among a people who still maintained an observance of etiquette, which the principles of the French revolution had done much to dissipate in other countries of Europe. In Catania all was gloomy and decorous, but in Taormina little or no

restraint was imposed on Cattarina's movements, save and except such as the constant but indulgent surveillance which Nina, her nurse, exercised over a charge on whom she doted, to whom she could refuse nothing, and to whose engaging manners even grandmamma's gentle remonstrances usually gave way. So good and docile, however, was the girl that she had needed no restraint, even when a child, beyond a slight check at times when her high spirits would bear her away. As she sat singing in the bright sunshine, waking the solitary echoes of the garden with her bright laugh, the Baroness would sometimes say to Don Francisco, "Dear one, how happy she is! Ah, I am indeed consoled in possessing such a treasure. May Heaven long guard her from the evils of this terrible world. Ah me, who shall protect her when I am gone?"

"Heaven will direct, no doubt, and bless her future course," observed the priest, who fully shared the devotion felt for the young girl by all around her.

“She will be very wealthy,” continued the Baroness. “I sometimes dread her falling into the hands of some worthless designing man ; but as you say, my worthy friend, we must leave such matters in the hands of higher powers. We can do so little. Man proposes, God disposes. At any rate I am happy to see her now so unsophisticated and light-hearted. She seems quite in infancy still.”

Don Francisco made no reply, to tell the truth Cattarina’s future was a source of greater anxiety to him than even to the Baroness. He knew that some of her distant relatives, from whom his patroness was almost entirely estranged, were making advances towards a reconciliation, with a view to secure Cattarina’s hand and fortune for a distant cousin, a young man whom Don Francisco knew to be both unprincipled and worthless. On this account he had been endeavouring to induce the Baroness to keep her grandchild as much in seclusion as possible; he felt, however, that Cattarina was now rapidly attaining an age when she must either be married or adopt the life of the cloister, to which she was by no

means disinclined, but to which the priest felt she could not properly be admitted unless she had seen more of life in the outward world, so as to be able to decide as to which she would prefer devoting her life.

CHAPTER VI.

It was at an early hour one bright morning in April in the year referred to, that among the ruins of Taormina an artist might have been observed, had there been anyone at hand to have enjoyed the scene with him, busily engaged in sketching the varied glories of the spot.

So completely absorbed was he in his work as to pay but little attention to the tinkling bells of the goats browsing near him, nor yet to a voice heard singing at some distance, but which, as the singer drew nearer, struck him as being unusually clear and sweet, as it trolled out a then popular Neapolitan air, "Io te voglio bene assa."

At the moment that he recognised the air,

his attention was more particularly arrested by the appearance of the singer, a young girl, who, unconscious of his presence, proceeded to seat herself on the very spot which our artist had selected for the foreground of his sketch.

It so happened that something was just wanting to fill up the picture, and that something her light figure most aptly supplied, so well, indeed, that a sketch of her was quickly embodied into the artist's work.

So long and quietly did his model sit, that he was enabled to make considerable progress with his work till the position of the sun compelled him to lay it aside. He was about to thank his unconscious model and compensate her for the services she had rendered, when what was his surprise, on approaching what he expected would be a peasant-girl, to find a remarkably handsome young creature, evidently of the better class, who was engaged in reading, whilst a middle-aged woman, till now unobserved by him, sat close to her, occupied with her knitting.

His approach startled the young lady, but she immediately recovered her self-possession and politely saluted the artist, saying to him, "Ah, Signor Inglese, you do not remember me."

"Indeed, I do not," he replied ; adding quickly, "oh, I beg pardon. You are the grand-daughter of the Baroness. I was not aware that you were in this neighbourhood."

"We only arrived last night. We left Catania earlier than usual on account of the great heat."

"And I came out," said the artist, "this morning to get an early view of this glorious panorama."

"Oh, you have been drawing ! Pray permit me to see your work."

"It is but a rough sketch," replied the artist, somewhat confused as he handed her his book.

"Oh !" shrieked her attendant, who had come eagerly forward to inspect the drawing. "*Ah, la signorina !*" and she laughed heartily as she pointed to the figure of her young lady, as though she considered the introduction of it an amusing feature.

“I shall do myself the honour of paying my respects to the Baroness,” said the artist, as, receiving back his sketch, he was about to withdraw.

“You are very good,” replied Cattarina, by no means sure that the proposed visit would be agreeable to the intended object of it. She was evidently unwilling to prolong the colloquy, but with a slight bow, and wishing the Englishman (for it was he) good-morning, hurried from the spot.

“I don’t think I ever saw a more lovely face,” he exclaimed, gazing after her. “What a smile, and so fair! Who would have thought that so plain a looking child could become such a lovely girl? And she sings like a nightingale.”

With such reflections absorbing him did the artist turn his steps in an opposite direction to that taken by the young lady; his whole mind occupied by the thought of how it would be possible to know her better, and discover if she possessed higher qualities than mere physical attractions.

In the course of the following day he received a visit from Don Francisco, and after some friendly

conversation announced his intention of paying the Baroness a visit.

He could see by the chaplain's manner that he would not be over-welcome; but this circumstance he resolved should not deter him from persevering in his project of seeing Cattarina again. He had during the previous autumn improved his originally very slight acquaintance with the elder lady, and had barely noticed her grand-daughter. He had at that time been so fortunate, as he now considered it, to have rendered service to the Baroness, when suffering from ague, by sending her some quinine; and being, moreover, her tenant, he did not think she could decline to receive a visit from him, especially now that he had been officially informed of her arrival by her chaplain, to whom he deemed it prudent not to say anything about his meeting with Cattarina, aware as he was of the notions entertained by Sicilians as to the gross impropriety of anything approaching intimacy being allowed between a man and an unmarried woman.

Resolved, however, to know something more of

a girl whose personal appearance and manner had so forcibly and favourably impressed him, he proceeded the evening following their interview to pay his projected visit, not without some nervous apprehension as to what might be its effects on his future prospects.

Nothing could exceed the beauty of the scene on which he entered as he approached the presence of the Baroness, whom he found on the terrace fronting her house, which commanded the same view as that which renders the position of Taormina so unrivalled.

For though no longer arrayed in gorgeous mid-day splendour, the scene was, if possible, rendered more sublime by the heavenly quiet of evening, which gave an additional charm to the landscape, and imparted a sense of repose, after the heat of the day, as it were a foretaste of that heavenly rest that awaits the blessed in another state of existence.

The evening star was shedding its mild ray on the sea, whilst the thread-like crescent of the new moon

shone out amidst the rapidly-declining twilight, fast hurrying away the last traces of the setting sun.

The bell of a neighbouring convent blended with that of the village church in ringing out the Angelus, reminding man of the great mystery of the Incarnation, in adoration of which Donna Teresa and her little household were kneeling, engaged in repeating the angelic salutation, "Ave Maria."

Such was the scene on the threshold of which the Englishman paused, and amid that picture one figure stood out in such bright relief as to positively startle him: it was that of Cattarina, looking more beautiful in his eyes than when he had seen her enveloped in the bright morning light.

He was positively struck dumb for a moment, as she rose from her knees and advanced to meet him, with a manner so entirely at variance with that in which she had avoided him a year previous. He could hardly believe that it could be the same creature.

Recovering from his surprise, he advanced after a short salutation to address the Baroness, and was received by the lady with the courteous reserve that was considered etiquette among Sicilians of her rank.

The visit was a short one, and by no means over lively; but as the visitor quitted that simple abode he felt something very like a consciousness that he was leaving his heart behind him. From that evening it was quite remarkable how frequently Cattarina encountered the stranger, whom she had learnt to address as Don Ernesto, a name by which he was known among his neighbours. Don Francisco, too, found that he was becoming deeply interested in the young man, to whose abode on the mountain-side he often repaired for a talk, the more readily as he found the young man by no means indisposed to discuss religious subjects, and, moreover, inclined to agree on many points with the theology of the Catholic Church. Many were the occasions on which Cattarina encountered the stranger during the next few

weeks, and it was with a heavy heart that within six weeks of their more intimate acquaintance she announced to him her almost immediate return to Catania. This statement seemed to bring matters to a climax as far as the young man was concerned, for many and earnest were the conversations he contrived to have with her to whom he did not scruple to declare his love. She did not by any means repel his addresses, though she always replied that she feared her grandmother's objection to their union would be insuperable. On the evening previous to the departure of the ladies the Baroness received a visit of ceremony from her tenant, who, after the first salutations, said: "I have come to bid you good-bye, for I am about to leave Sicily for a short time. I hope to be allowed to pay my respects to you in Catania on my return." The old lady heard him with an unconcerned air, though the effect produced by this announcement on her grand-daughter was very different, and induced the young lady to apply herself with great assiduity to her knitting.

"I shall hope to return to Sicily within a month or so," said the visitor, "when I know I shall not find you here."

"We shall most likely pass our next *villeggiatura* at another of my estates," said the lady, without any reference to his proposed visit.

"Indeed," said the Englishman in a somewhat offended tone of assumed indifference. The manner of the Baroness nettled him, and did not encourage conversation. Catterina hardly spoke, and the visit could not be said to be gratifying to any of the party—so little so to the visitor that he rose to take leave.

"Good-night," said Donna Teresa; "a prosperous journey to you;" but she did not add the usual wish of "a happy return." Cattarina rose from her seat, and bade the visitor farewell in a somewhat distant manner, to which he replied hurriedly, as, with a slight bow, he left the room.

Within an hour after this formal adieu, the two figures of Cattarina and her lover were seen seated in an angle of the rock, engaged in the

pleasurable pain of leave-taking. Nina was at hand, but kept at a prudent distance from the pair.

“Why,” exclaimed the ardent, love-sick youth, “why will you not let me declare myself to your grandmother as your accepted lover?”

“I have told you, Ernesto dearest,” replied the girl, “the only terms on which she would hear of our marriage.”

“I will comply with those terms, I solemnly declare, immediately on my return. It is necessary that I should leave you for a short time, in order to make some arrangements in my own country before I claim you as my wife. You do not doubt me, Cattarina?”

“I would trust you with my life, my soul, now that you promise to become a Christian.”

“Signorina,” cried Nina in a low tone, “we must go home, it is nearly midnight.”

“Is it possible!” exclaimed the young man, starting up; “I ordered my horse to be ready at ten. Once more farewell, my own loved one,”

he said, as he folded the object of his affections to his heart, as she murmured, "Oh! return to me soon; I shall die without you."

Reassuring her with one last embrace, he consigned her half-fainting form to Nina, into whose hand he slipped several pieces of gold as she led her charge away.

The lover stood gazing after the retiring forms till the darkness concealed them from his view, and then remained watching the house till the lamp in one window was extinguished; and then whistling two dogs, his constant companions, made his way to the spot where his servant and horse were awaiting him, and forthwith took the road to Messina, where he proposed taking the steamer for Marseilles at daybreak.

* * * *

Two months have nearly elapsed since the occurrences of our last scene, and long-desired evening has succeeded to the scorching heat of an August day in the city of Catania.

Some few carriages are drawn up round the

great square. Men are chatting with the ladies seated in them, but there is a gloom over all, caused by the reports that are rife respecting the ravages of the cholera in Naples and Palermo, the horrors of which are being exaggerated by the natural tendency of human nature to revel in the terrible. At the cafés, the apothecary's shop, and other favourite rendezvous of gossipers, nothing was to be heard but accounts of the terrible havoc which the dreaded epidemic was making elsewhere in the island ; for, as yet, Catania had been free from the scourge. It was reported that a thousand victims in one day had succumbed to its violence at Naples, and nearly as many at Palermo. The whole of the piazza is full, occupants of carriages and their friends discuss the awful topic, whilst knots of men of the lower class are talking in undertones. Suddenly there is a loud cry, and a rush is made to one spot, where a man has been arrested for making a seditious speech ; a feeble attempt at rescue is made by some of the bystanders, but a file of soldiers appear on the scene, and all retire to their homes with heavy

hearts, the streets being soon cleared of all but bodies of troops that patrol them—all is terror and distrust.

It was on that same night that Donna Teresa, long since returned to her town residence, sat in her own apartment, after having heard of the events of the evening, anxiety preventing her from retiring to rest, when, with a hurried knock at the door, Nina entered the room in a wild, excited manner.

“Calm yourself, Nina! What has happened?” exclaimed the lady.

Without replying, the woman seized the lamp from the table, and, pushing open the shutters, passed into the balcony.

At that moment the tinkling of a small bell, blending with the death-knell tolling from an adjacent church, announced that the Holy Viaticum was being borne to the dying.

Devoutly crossing herself, Donna Teresa followed her attendant, and saw, by the kneeling group in the streets below, that a soul was passing away in the house opposite to her own.

The room occupied by Donna Teresa being on the *entresol* of the palace, commanded a full view of the abode of the dying person, and he could see the bed on which the sufferer was lying through the open door, around which a small crowd of kneeling figures assembled, whilst from the windows of the adjoining houses lamps were displayed in honour of the presence of the Saviour, whilst the voices of all were united in supplication for the departing soul. Donna Teresa and Nina joined in the appeal for mercy till the priest's departure; then, the crowd dispersing, the windows were closed, and silence once more took possession of the deserted street. As Nina closed the window and replaced the lamp, Donna Teresa resumed her seat just as Don Francisco entered the room. From his statement it would seem that the cholera, brought by troops on board a man-of-war sent from Naples to quell an expected popular outbreak in the city, had broken out there with intense virulence during the last twelve hours.

"What is to be done?" inquired Donna Teresa,

“Oh fly, my lady, fly !” exclaimed Nina, “for the dear young lady’s sake.”

“Alas ! it is too late for flight ; a cordon is ordered round the city,” exclaimed the priest, “and numbers who tried to leave this evening have been obliged to return. Everyone must remain ; all intercourse with other places will be stopped by order of the military authorities.”

“It is the will of Heaven, and we must not only submit but adore its decrees,” exclaimed the Baroness.

“But the Signorina !” exclaimed Nina.

“Is she aware of what has happened ?” inquired the priest.

“Ah no, she is luckily sleeping ; she is suffering with headache. I will go to her presently,” said the Baroness, “so do not disturb her, Nina. You go to bed, and you, Don Francisco, try and get some rest. We shall require all our strength of body and mind.” With these words having dismissed her attendants, the Baroness for some time devoted herself to prayer ; and then proceeded to the apart-

ment of her grand-daughter. The beauty of the night caused her to linger near a window in the corridor that commanded a view of the city; and as she gazed on the quiet aspect it presented, she could hardly realise the possibility that the angel of death had received the command to go forth and smite the helpless inhabitants now buried in sleep. The moonlight shed its bright silvery hue over the roofs of the houses, and on the towers of churches and convents; now and again a bell would ring forth the hour of prayer, by which the watches of the night are marked in religious communities; and the Baroness felt that there were at least some faithful few left in the city, for whose sakes it would be spared from utter destruction. Fervently she prayed for all, especially for that dear one she was about to seek and prepare for the probable doom that awaited them. She found Cattarina awake; and so far recovered from headache as to receive the terrible announcement of the outbreak of the pestilence with self-possession and calmness.

“Dearest of parents,” she exclaimed, “can you

forgive me if I tell you a secret, the only one I ever had from you?"

"In this solemn hour, my child, when we must all be prepared for death, there can be nothing you would wish to withhold from me."

"My own, more than mother, let me lay my head upon your bosom while I tell you all." Encircling the slender form beside her with her arm, the Baroness listened with deepest interest and anguish as she heard the girl's story of her love for the Englishman. "He loves me, dearest grandmamma, and will come to save us; he is in Malta by this time."

"I will send to him, my own child," replied the Baroness. "This is no time for reproaches, even if I felt inclined to indulge in them. It is my fault; I ought never to have exposed you to the temptation of meeting that young man. He is handsome, and no doubt agreeable; but tell me, my dear one, what do you know of him?"

"Oh grandmamma, forgive me that I have not told you all."

“Ah!” cried the Baroness, deeply moved, “and what more have you to disclose?”

“I have had a letter from him to-day; it is here—read it.”

The Baroness’s face wore an expression of pain as she took the letter; but as she perused it a gleam of satisfaction passed over her features.

“It is well written,” she exclaimed at the first glance; “let me see what he says.” The letter was in Italian, and contained many expressions of fervent love and unalterable devotion for Cattarina; but the portion of it which most deeply interested the reader was that in which the enamoured writer announced his conversion to the Catholic faith. “I know,” wrote he, “that religion was the sole obstacle to our happiness, and that barrier is now removed. I shall hope to be with you in less than a fortnight, when I will explain my position to your grandmother, feeling confident that she will not now oppose our union.” The letter was dated Paris, and stated that the writer had been detained in England longer than he had anticipated,

but that he was *en route* for Sicily. "Should the quarantine prevent my landing in Messina," he added, "I shall go on to Malta, where you must write to me." The only signature the letter bore was Ernesto, by which name Cattarina had been wont to address her lover. Having read the letter carefully, the Baroness returned it to its owner, and kissing the girl's palid cheek, remarked, "This seems providential, although I hardly know what to think of it, but at any rate I will see him ; his love for you must be strong indeed to bring him here at such a time, so I will write to him, and tell him to come to us at once ; and now, my own one, commend yourself to God, and try to sleep. Farewell !"

With these words the loving ones parted ; but it was long before either could sleep ; each being filled with dread apprehensions as to whom the message of death might be sent, amid the hundreds around them who would soon be victims to that scourge of God, the terrible and mysterious cholera.

CHAPTER VII.

IN a corner of Stepney churchyard the unknown lady, followed by her humble though sincerely sympathising friends Mrs. Tozer and Mrs. Welbyn, was buried a week after her death, the man who had taken her lodgings for her not having returned, or sent to make any inquiries respecting her, or the helpless infant, indeed an orphan.

“But whatever you are to do, supposin’ as he shouldn’t never come back, I can’t think, as will be like ’avin of a fondlin’ left at your doorstep, without no natural protector, as the sayin’ is; and then, on the other ’and, why I’m sure nobody with a Christian’s ’art in their bussims, wouldn’t like such a unfeelin’ brute as ’im to ’ave the care of a innercent hinfant, as would bring it up to nice

ways, and most probable turn out a thief. Oh dear no, I couldn't do it, with that there dead gal's sweet face a-lookin' at me, and a-sayin' to me, 'be my friend.'" Such were the remarks of Mrs. Tozer to Mrs. Welbyn, on the evening of the day that they had followed the unknown lady to the grave. "In course," observed that good woman, "there's money enough to pay everythink, includin' layin' 'er decent in 'er grave, poor soul; and no doubt the money as she gave you, Martha, will go a long way for the child, while he is a child; but wot to do with 'im when growed up, is wot puzzles me."

"Ah, that's where it is," replied Mrs. Tozer; "with time a-flyin' like dust afore the wind, as the sayin' is, as you'll 'ave 'im shavin' afore you can turn round, with 'is whiskers a-comin'; but we'll talk to Tozer, when he comes 'ome, for I'm sure you ain't never the woman as would give up neither child nor woman to that feller, without a-knowin' somethink more about 'im, as may be a burglar, and must be a cold-'arted willin to go off

like that, and leave that poor thing to die with nothink but strangers round 'er."

"I don't believe he'll ever come back," she continued, "for he looked more like a Wanderin' Jew than a reg'lar sailor. I don't know as I can keep the child," said Mrs. Welbyn; "why, p'r'aps the feller would go to a magistrate and claim 'im on the grounds of a parent; as I'm sure he's quite capable of puttin' 'im down a drain or anywheres out of the way; and then there's the parish as would take 'im, and then advertise the waggerbone."

"I promised that poor, dear, dead gal," interrupted Mrs. Tozer, "as I'd purtect 'er and that infant too, though unborn, from the feller as she didn't want to have nothink to do with, and my promise I'll keep, as Tozer agrees to; and if we're put to it, why I'd rather the child went to the parish than to a willin like that, as in my opinion 'ave kidnapped and robbed 'er too."

"Ah," said Mrs. Welbyn, "she certingly 'adn't much luggage, poor dear, and weren't nothink to him nor he to her, nor the baby neither, with no

weddin'-ring; and in my opinion it's been a runaway match with someone else."

"Well, in course, 'avin' only seen 'im at a glance thro' a winder, cannot judge," observed Mrs. Tozer, by no means inclined to endorse too readily any opinion advanced by Mrs. Welbyn, of whom she always spoke, "as well meanin', but no more 'ead than a pin on 'er shoulders. Wotever he may be or may not be, and I'm not a-goin' to say wot he is, nor wot he is not," continued Mrs. Tozer, "thro' not a knowing; but he don't 'ave that child, till he can prove before a magistrut, and not then, as he've a lawful right to 'im; and the money is two notes, a 'underd each, as don't prove nothink; and as to 'er things, poor dear, as we've looked thro', there's nothink like a clue about them, 'cos you can't call that little picter' as were round 'er neck anythink, nor the few clothes, tho' there is that one 'broidered 'ankercher, as the mark might turn out somethink, but we must keep a sharp look-out and read the papers reg'lar; and as to that child, he's all right on milk and water, with tops and bottoms in time,

and a fine-limbed boy, as Providence will, no doubt, purtect; so I tell you wot it is, I'll take charge on 'im for a week or so, as I know Tozer will be agreeable to, as will distract me from them twins as I berried, till this 'ere feller's blowed over, 'cos if he should turn up, it would be as well to 'ave the child off the premises, and 'Melia Ann ain't a gal to talk, if told not."

"Bless you, no," said Mrs. Welbyn, "for even next door they ain't no consumption there's a infant in the 'ouse, as is a thing I wishes kep' quiet, for parties will talk about you in the general way."

"Let 'em talk," said Mrs. Tozer, "and I can carry 'im under my shawl, as the night air won't 'urt 'im thro' bein' only the next street, and 'Melia Ann can come with me to carry 'is bottle and things."

"Yes," said Mrs. Welbyn, "and with pleasure to think as he should be in sich 'ands as 'ave washed and dressed 'im yourself every day with your own 'ands, and never did see anyone 'andle a infant like you."

"Well, then," observed Mrs. Tozer, "we'll be off as soon as it's dark, and 'Melia Ann had better go first with the things, as 'll make 'im a cradle in my large clothes-basket."

According to these arrangements, off was the little stranger conveyed to a new house, to the no small relief of Mrs. Welbyn, who, being a timid soul, had already visions of the return of the seafaring party, to drag off the hapless infant to an untimely end. "If he should come, I shan't give 'im no satisfaction on this point," she said to her friend at parting.

"That's right," replied Mrs. Tozer. "Don't allude to the infant, nor yet to the priest, nor nothink as can give 'im a 'andle, and if he likes to fancy as the child is a-layin' along with its mother, that ain't no business of ours, unless as he can prove he's the lawful father."

For some time after the departure of Mrs. Tozer and her young charge, and even after the return of 'Melia Ann, who announced as he 'adn't moved nor stirred all the way, did Mrs. Welbyn

sit in a meditative mood, her mind occupied with the future of the charge so strangely thrown upon her. So passed a week; the infant remaining with Mrs. Tozer for convenience of Mrs. Welbyn's lodgers, when one night, just as the good woman was thinking of retiring, 'Melia Ann having already taken her departure bedwards, a low knock at the door gave her what she termed "a turn," for though she had rather expected the mysterious stranger would turn up at night, or what she called "some unearthly hour," yet when she heard that low tap at the door, it gave her what she called "the flutters;" when a second and louder knock at the door made her nearly "jump out of her skin," as she subsequently stated.

Though somewhat startled, she didn't hurry, but proceeded slowly to answer the summons, and was consequently quite herself when she confronted Captain Morgan, who, as a glance showed her, was in a state of decided inebriety.

"Oh, pray step in," she said, "just into the ront-parlour, and I'll light the gas; and wherever

have you been, as we all thought you must be dead, or a fatal accident at the very least?"

Without reply or remark the visitor entered the parlour, and, seating himself on the sofa, stared at the lady of the house with so vacant an expression as to render any attempt on her part at a lengthy explanation unnecessary.

Some minutes elapsed before the stranger spoke at all, and then, after gazing round with a blank expression of countenance, he contrived to hiccup out, "How is she going on?" indicating by a jerk of his head the back-parlour. Ere an answer could be given him, his head sinking on to his breast showed he was in a doze, in fact so sound asleep that Mrs. Welbyn felt it would be useless to make him a reply. Some little time having elapsed, he partially roused himself and repeated his question, gazing sternly at Mrs. Welbyn, who, as she said, "wished the floor would open and swallow him." Being at length obliged to speak, in spite of her reluctance to talk to him, she took refuge in her pocket-handkerchief, as she exclaimed: "Oh

dear, and to think as you should know nothink about it, and you to call yourself a husband, and leave anyone like that !”

“What is the matter?” asked the strange visitor, suddenly waking up, and speaking with the sort of effort that drunken people are wont to make, in order, as they express it, to “pull themselves together.”

Mrs. Welbyn, thus admonished, proceeded with much volubility to give an account of what had occurred during the last week, studiously avoiding any reference to the fact of the infant being alive, though she did not attempt to conceal the fact of its birth, as she had a vague idea that by such concealment she would incur the penalties of the law. When she had concluded her narration, during the course of which her visitor was repeatedly dozing, he merely said :

“Well, it’s no use fretting ;” and rose somewhat abruptly from his seat and made for the door ; but pausing when he had got so far, he turned and said, “I knew she’d die ; but here, you must have some money. How much ?”

Mrs. Welbyn was making up her mind as to the amount she should ask, when the man threw on the table a crumpled-up bank-note, and staggered from the room, as Mrs. Welbyn, following him to the door, stammered out something about his leaving his address, and when she might expect the pleasure of seeing him again. "Not," as she subsequently remarked, "as I wanted to know anythink about him, goodness knows, but was afraid to seem to be a-wanting to get rid of him; but lor' bless you, he didn't make no reply, but rolled down the garden like a porpus let loose, and was off like a shot; and I never stopped at the door to look after him, but shut it pretty quick, and in a minnit arter went up to bed, thankful he was gone, as will never darken my door again I hope in this world."

Mrs. Welbyn went to bed, but, as she said the next morning, "Sleep was the last of my thoughts, I couldn't get a wink, thro' that man's face being in my eyes all night, a drunken beast; and to think of 'im a darin' to lay claim to that sweet

young thing." These reflections had no doubt kept Mrs. Welbyn from her slumbers for a short time, and she consequently became a victim to the delusion that she had not slept at all, by no means an uncommon view of the case indulged in by those who, habitually are no sooner in bed than asleep, are occasionally kept awake half an hour. This was Mrs. Tozer's view of her friend's insomnolency, though, as she said, "I'm glad she kep' 'erself to 'erself on the pint."

"Then he ain't a bit like this 'ere little picter, she wore next 'er 'art?" inquired Mrs. Tozer, as she sat with her friend discussing the visit of the inebriated Morgan.

"Lor' bless you, no more than chalk's to cheese."

The picture alluded to was a badly-executed miniature of a very handsome young man, with a lock of fair hair enclosed in the back of it.

"It can't be never no clue to 'im, can it?" said Mrs. Welbyn.

"I should say not, thro' there a-bein' no way

of advertisin' of it, 'cos we couldn't put it in the papers; so all that we can do is, as Tozer says, to put the money in the savin's bank, for you to 'ave wot you wants over bringin' that boy up; and as to 'er things, poor dear, they can be kep' in 'er box, as ain't nothink as moths can get at, and I'm sure 'ad been treated bad, for she were that terrified; and this 'ere picter, why it will be a comfort to the boy when he grows up for to look back and think as he 'ad a father, though only a picter. And as to that feller, though not one for to 'old with them low drunken characters myself, I must say as it were a mercy, as he were that far gone in licker as not to ask no more questions about 'er nor yet about the child."

Such were the remarks that Mrs. Tozer made to Mrs. Welbyn, who had hurried round to see her the first thing in the morning to convey the intelligence of the Captain's visit.

"In course I might 'ave 'ad a perliceman, and 'ave stopped in," observed Mrs. Welbyn; "but that's jest what I didn't want to; bless him, what a back he's got of his own," she exclaimed. But this

remark was by the way of parenthesis, and not intended to apply to any physical excellence of the Captain, but to that of the baby, whom Mrs. Tozer was about to invest in his day-clothes, after having duly subjected him to copious ablutions—a process she accompanied with many remarks addressed to him and to her visitors alternately, in the following strain: “Then there, did she take him out of his nice bed, and put him into the nasty water, like a cruel old thing as she is? and did he cry because he didn’t like it? as shall be over in a minute and nice warm clothes on ’im, and no pins nor nothink to hurt ’im, thro’ bein’ all tacked together and over ’is ’ead at once, as I did it over night; and there now, it’s all over, with his bottle ready for ’im, as won’t cry no more, with ’is back patted gentle, and a few caraways boiled with the milk, as I always does with tops and bottoms as is beat to a jelly with a fork, and a change from baked flour, when a little older; poor dear, and did you ever see a finer chest, and can kick out his legs like a lamb, and will go off like a church with ’is bottle

at 'is mouth, and gives me that pain in the back a-stoopin' over 'im to put 'im in his tub, that I do believe as I shall 'ave to give 'im up to 'Melia Ann to wash 'im, with either you or me a-settin' by ready to dry 'im well all over, with a soft towel, for as to the powder-puff, though werry well in its way, didn't ought to be used in my opinion, till well dried fust; but as you was a-sayin', Mrs. Welbyn, it's jest like a-takin' a story-book, ain't it, which he might be a changeling, as they do say is always that 'ansome; and didn't the feller ask about 'er berryin' nor nothink—no questions?"

"Not a word; it seemed to me as he were jolly glad as she were dead and gone, a 'ard-'arted waggerbone, as is the only reason for me a-thinkin' as she were p'r'aps 'is wife."

"Not a bit on it," said Mrs. Tozer, "for if she 'ad been he'd 'ave wanted to make sure as she were dead to marry agin upon, and wouldn't 'ave gone off like that."

"No more he wouldn't," said Mrs. Welbyn. "Wot a head you 'ave got, to be sure; without

never so much as asking for her clothes, nor if I'd saved a bit of her hair."

"I tell you," urged Mrs. Tozer, "she wasn't nothink in this world to 'im, as am sure he'd kidnapped her from forren parts, like old Porklington the ship-chandler, as were in the slave trade in the background, and made millions by it over in the Brazeels where the nuts grow, though he did come to a bad end, when retired to Chigwell, thro' 'is own cellar-flap bein' left open, and 'im a-pitchin' down the stairs 'ead downwards, a-goin' to draw 'is own supper-beer; and, like this feller, never turned up again. Why, I might as well expect to see that chap again as promised he'd call and see 'ow I liked them wild-ducks as I bought of 'im at the door, full of sand, as there wasn't no bearin' the 'ous with 'em thro' 'im a warrantin' of 'um to keep sweet over Sunday. No, no, he'll never come back; and now that he's off I'll lay 'im down as will sleep for 'ours, bless 'is 'art."

It is hardly necessary to state that these concluding remarks did not apply to the Captain, respecting

whom Mrs. Tozer was right, for he did not return, and the orphan child was left to the care of his earliest friends, returning after a brief sojourn with Mrs. Tozer to the fostering care of Mrs. Welbyn, where the only danger he had to encounter in the earlier stage of existence was suffocation from the quantity of food with which 'Melia Ann was wont to cram him, and which would have proved baneful to his constitution but for the judicious and timely interference of Mrs. Tozer; who paid him daily visits, varying in duration, during the first six months of his career, and after that period had elapsed, seldom allowing more than a couple of days to pass without dropping on him, for though she had firm faith in Mrs. Welbyn's good intentions towards her charge, she had a secret contempt for that good soul's judgment in all matters, and more especially those pertaining to the nursery. Not only was the boy's physical welfare anxiously watched over by Mrs. Tozer, but the development of his moral growth absorbed much of her thoughts as he advanced in life; on both points she assumed

complete superintendence of all that pertained to him, by administering from time to time such medicines as she deemed necessary for the preservation of his health, and also by presenting him with the first picture-book he ever possessed.

“I’m sure that boy’s always a-thinking,” she observed to Mrs. Welbyn, “for the way as he’ll sit and stare at me in that little chair of ’is’n, which I really do not think the stick on across ’is chest presses too ’ard agin’ thro’ bein’ that full-bosomed ; and I’m sure the other evenin’ as I sat here a-waitin’ for you between the lights, his eyes were a glarin’ like live coals, as the sayin’ is, and never made no remark to all my talking to ’im, as p’r’aps ain’t ’ardly to be expected at barely ten months if you counts it by the weeks, tho’ I did once ’ear of a child as said Pa’ at nine, tho’ in my opinion only in a mother’s ear, as is apt to be took in. But as I were sayin’ to Tozer, that boy’ll turn out somethink some day, as ’ave quite took to ’im, and didn’t mind ’im cryin’ at night that time as he stopped along with us, as is more than he’d stand from ’is

own flesh and blood ; as he couldn't 'ardly keep 'is hands off if disturbed in 'is sleep, and our Mary Ann were a dreadful child to fret, as 'ave undressed 'er myself over and over agin a-thinkin' it were a pin, tho' not sich a thing about no child of mine, as was always dressed with a needle and thread, as I considers is the safest plan. But certainly Tozer do take to that boy, and it's my opinion as he sees things in the dark, as they do say them as is born at midnight always does ; and well I remember 'earin' of the clocks a-strikin' twelve at 'is birth, thro' 'er a-bein' dead faint, and Mr. Morgan a-sayin' it were a boy jest as I throwed up the winder to give her a little air for breath, poor dear. But as to a child a-bein' a trouble, if not a burden, why in course that must be expected in the way of things ; but we must do the best as we can for 'im, 'cos in my opinion them as purtects the orfin—and if ever there was a orfin this boy is one—won't never 'ave that to repent on their death-bed as may bring a blessin', as I 'ave knowed 'appen afore now by a chance child as 'ad its dooty done by 'im."

CHAPTER VIII.

It was on an intensely hot morning towards the end of August that a group of Englishmen, assembled on the balcony of an hotel in Malta, were endeavouring to mitigate the overpowering effects of the prevailing heat by smoking, and beguile the tedium of even a short sojourn in such quarters by chatting.

The party was chiefly composed of men either bound for India or homeward.

“By Jove, this is something like heat!” exclaimed young Snooks, *en route* for Bombay, *viâ* Alexandria and Suez.

“Ah, my boy, wait till you’re in the Red Sea!” exclaimed Major Magrath, who, being on his way home, thought to comfort a junior bound for our

Indian empire by preparing him for the coming struggle.

"No wonder the cholera is so bad all about the Mediterranean with this heat," remarked another youngster.

"Pooh! heat has nothing to do with cholera!" burst forth the Major, adding, "and as to cholera, here it's mere child's play. You should see it in India. Why, I've known half a regiment swept off in a couple of hours."

"It seems tolerably bad in Sicily," remarked a third speaker. "The deaths in Palermo are a thousand a day, and it is rapidly spreading through the island."

"I beg your pardon," said a stranger, who had been hitherto seated apart from the group, "when did you hear from Sicily?"

"I got a letter from Messina this morning," replied the person addressed, "giving an awful account of the ravages of the disease in Catania."

"Did your letter come by post?"

"No; there is little communication between this

and Sicily. My letter came by a *speronara*, and my news is recent."

With a few words of thanks, having inquired the name of the boat, the stranger hastily left the hotel and made his way to the post, followed by a Sicilian servant.

"You are sure, Stefano, that there were no letters for me?"

"No, your excellency," replied the man, in Sicilian. "Since you have been away I have asked every day."

Ernesto, for it was he, paused to reflect.

He had only reached Malta the night before, having come by the French steamer from Marseilles, and finding that a quarantine of forty days would be his fate on arriving in Messina, had come on to Malta, awaiting a chance of getting thence to some port of Sicily where the existence of the cholera would remove the veto to landing imposed by the health-office in all places free from the disease, as was the case with Messina.

Without the least hesitation with regard to his

personal safety, our traveller had designed to proceed to Catania even before he heard of the existence of the epidemic in that city, having not the slightest dread of the disease as far as he was personally concerned, and now being tortured with apprehension as to the fate of his beloved Cattarina, he resolved to hasten there at once.

He exclaimed to Stefano; "We must find a *speronara* for Catania, so do you go down to the port, and I will be ready to follow in a few minutes."

With these words the speaker returned to the hotel, which in a very short time he quitted with his luggage, and made his way to the quay.

As he was passing down a flight of steps leading to the waterside he met Stefano, accompanied by a sailor, who had a letter for him.

To tear it open and peruse its contents occupied but a few moments; they were a few lines in Don Francisco's writing, to the following effect:

"BELOVED FRIEND,—Farewell; we are all doomed to a sad and dreadful death. She still

lives, and sends her undying love; rescue her if you can. Our trust is in heavenly mercy, which alone can save us.—*Addio*.”

For a few moments the reader stood as though paralysed.

“She is alive, at any rate, and I will save her!” he exclaimed. “To Catania,” he added, addressing his servant.

“But, signor, it is impossible!” exclaimed Stefano. “No one would go.”

“Ah! you are afraid, I see. Well then, stay here and wait my return. And now,” he added, addressing the boatmen who stood around, “which of you will take me to Sicily? To Catania and back, how much? I’ll pay readily, so name your own terms.”

One sunburnt mariner was not long in complying with this request, and did not, considering the circumstances, make an exorbitant demand. He said he had no fear, nor had his men.

“All right,” said the traveller, as he stepped on

board the boat, already prepared to sail ; and thus it was that within a couple of hours from receiving Don Francisco's missive, the *speronara* was on her way to the coast of Sicily, bearing on board one loving heart intent only on doing his utmost to save from death the object most dear to him on earth.

He was angry with himself for having been so long absent from Sicily. He had made his journey to London on business, but to little purpose, for, on arriving there, he had found all the members of his family absent from the metropolis, and so little encouraging was the account that he received from his solicitors of the regard they bore him that he resolved not to intrude himself on their notice, but take his own course regardless of their views or wishes.

Accordingly he at once returned to Paris with the intention of remaining there a few weeks, which design was frustrated by the alarming news that reached him of the outbreak of cholera in the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, which malady

had for the first time invaded that country during the previous autumn, but, checked by winter, had lain dormant for some months, only to break out with renewed vigour as summer advanced.

The terror inspired by the very name of the epidemic aggravated its violence, especially in the case of an excitable and not over-courageous people; and so it was that on its first appearance in Southern Italy a universal panic seized the entire population, and many who escaped the disease fell victims to their own terror, or died neglected by those whom fear deprived of the power of rendering assistance to the sufferers, however dear.

It was Sunday morning; the sun had risen in all its glory and strength on the city of Catania. The bells of the churches from time to time summoned the people to mass, but the priests were for the most part left to offer the sacrifice alone, the worshippers being few, and mostly of the poorest class.

In the streets all was blank. The great square,

generally so thronged at early morn, was deserted.
All the business of life seemed suspended.

A few beggars were gathered in knots before the cathedral; they cared so little for life as to feel indifferent as to the time or the manner of its termination, whilst they hoped to work on the sympathy and excite the compassion of those few who were seeking help from Heaven.

Within the sacred precincts some devout souls knelt to implore the mercy of God through the mediation of St. Agatha, patroness of the city, that by her prayers she, like faithful Abraham of old, might obtain pity from a justly offended though merciful Creator.

Her name, as that of one who had been faithful unto death, was invoked by hundreds in their agony, asking for help, as did Dives in torment of the Father of the faithful.

The godless, the thoughtless, all but the open blasphemer and reprobate, sought the mercy of Heaven in that awful hour; and many turned from their evil ways and joined with the faithful few

who persevered in their petition to the throne of grace.

From time to time female forms might be seen hurrying through the streets in search of help for soul or body. Again and again did the priest issue from the church, bearing the Holy Viaticum to the dying.

The doors of many houses were thrown open, from some of which were borne the dead amid the shrieks and cries of the living. Here and there would be seen the officers of the law sealing up the entrances to habitations in which there was not a survivor left, whole families having been swept away by the destroying angel. Shrieks of despair, uttered by the dying, mingled with violent outbursts of grief from survivors, were heard from house to house. The dead were borne out from all sides by bands of ruffians, some of whom mocked at the misery by which they were surrounded, and devoted themselves with ribald mirth to plundering both dead and living. Helpless babes lay expiring by the side of their dead mothers. Strong men sat paralysed with grief and horror.

“Water, water!” was the cry of many in their agony, whilst the misery of the dying was intensified as they witnessed the tortures of their nearest and dearest, to whom they were unable to render assistance, struck down as they were themselves by the hand of death.

Many died within sight and reach of those loved ones who, by reason of their own utter prostration, were powerless to give them help, or utter a word of sympathy to their fellow-sufferers.

Day and night the Angel of Death had hovered thus over the devoted city for nearly a week.

It must have been that ten righteous were to be found therein, or all would have perished.

A few good Christians persevered in prayer and also in their feeble attempts to succour the sufferers, whilst on the other hand ruffians of the vilest sort betook themselves to wildest outrages, laughed and mocked at death, and some, maddened by despair, sang and danced and sported with the dead they were hired to carry to burial.

Amid these accumulated horrors a *speronara* arrived in port, and from it sprang on to the quay

Ernesto, as yet unaware of the horrors that awaited him in the devoted city.

"You come to certain death," said the health-officer, as he took the papers from the boatman.

"Is the disease so very bad?" asked Ernesto.

"Cholera fulminante rages," was the reply. "All who could fled the city before the cordon was instituted. Those who remain are paralysed with fear; were it not for the justifiable severity of the military, they would be all plundered, if not murdered, by the rascally assassins who are trying to sack the town."

By this time, the necessary formula having been gone through, Ernesto passed the bar and hurried on towards the street in which the Baroness resided.

Nothing was known as to her fate by those of whom he inquired at the port; and as she resided at some distance from the landing-place, a large portion of the city had to be traversed before reaching her house.

Ernesto passed through the scenes we have

been attempting to describe, scarcely heeding them.

The ghastly aspect of the place chilled his soul; the solitude seemed increased by the hideous mockery of a brilliant sunshine, which shed its splendour over the scene as though in contemptuous disdain of the misery it illuminated.

The incessant howling of famishing dogs, left to perish in the tenantless abodes, gave an unearthly horror to the situation.

Sick at heart, though impelled onward by excitement, Ernesto pressed on according to the directions he had received for the residence of his beloved.

Stifled with heat, and partially blinded by the glare of the scorching sun, he pursued his way, so absorbed by thoughts of one being as to be almost insensible to what others were enduring around him.

At length, nearly exhausted, he reached the palazzo he so earnestly sought, only to find its doors closed and the building apparently deserted.

The main entrance was barred so effectually as to defy all attempts to obtain an entrance by it, and the visitor sought in vain some other means by which he might do so.

He looked anxiously at the windows of the palace, but it seemed as though all were dead within its walls. The houses and shops in the basement of the building were closed.

"Can they all have perished?" exclaimed the now almost despairing lover, as he sought in vain someone to give him information respecting the residents of the palazzo.

At length he saw two Capuchins emerge from a house at no great distance from the spot where he was standing. Hurrying to them he asked if they knew anything as to the fate of the family of the Baroness.

"Ah, Signor," replied one, an aged man, "death has been busy there. One of our brethren was there this morning, summoned to attend a dying priest."

"How can I obtain an entrance?" exclaimed

the young man; "will anyone help me to force the gate?"

"There must be someone surviving within," replied the monk, "for I saw the men enter to remove the dead, and they have not come out again."

Stimulated by this information, Ernesto renewed his efforts at attempting to get the door open, and offered a reward to one or two passers-by if they would procure a ladder for him.

Dread of their motives being mistaken by the patrol deterred any from assisting in such an enterprise, since summary justice had been dealt to all found attempting to pillage houses.

The monks, unable to assist, hurried away, being so much engaged in urgent works of mercy as to be unable to help in doubtful cases.

Ernesto, half frenzied, knew not how to act, as, in spite of all efforts, the whole building seemed impregvably fortified.

In vain did he make the circuit of the house in the hope of finding some means of ingress, but

no opportunity of doing so presented itself to his observation.

In reply to his loud shouts, uttered when he saw that some windows were open in the upper story of the house, no answer was elicited.

At length, in the frenzy of despair, the young man made for some time vigorous attempts on the principal entrance, but without attracting any notice from those within.

Ernesto persisted till at length an old woman appeared at one of the windows of the *entresol*, and demanded his business.

"Let me in!" he exclaimed; "I have to do with life and death."

By means of a cord attached to the lock, a small wicket in the large door was opened, and the almost frantic visitor rushed into the courtyard.

A glance round showed it to be quite deserted.

Hurrying across it, he ascended a large stone staircase, at the head of which he encountered the old woman who had admitted him.

She shook her head in answer to his questions, merely pointing to an open door on the first-floor, through which a sight met his eyes filling him with horror.

There, in the middle of a spacious hall, on a kind of bier, lay two or three dead bodies, huddled together, nearly naked, whilst a group of men were sitting on the bier, drinking and smoking.

Feeling that it would be inexpedient to offer any remarks on their behaviour, he merely inquired for the Baroness's apartment, having at a glance convinced himself that none whom he knew were among the dead.

In reply to his questions, the men informed him that the apartments he sought were on the other side of the house.

With hardly a word he crossed the staircase and passed into a vast saloon, the decorations and appointments of which bore traces of the ravages of time as well as signs of recent confusion.

To rap at an inner door and call loudly were the next steps Ernesto adopted, and after the lapse of

a minute or so the welcome form of Nina appeared at the extreme end of the apartment.

A cry of mournful surprise escaped her as he seized her hand, and in accents broken by agitation demanded news of his beloved Cattarina.

The woman was far too much agitated to answer, but led him to an inner apartment.

"Tell me," he asked in a tone of agony, "is she alive?"

"Yes, yes," was the reply, "and you have come to save her."

With a mental expression of thanksgiving he added, "And the Baroness?"

"Ah, ah! She died three days ago!" screamed the woman; "all in the house are dead except the young lady and myself."

"What, Don Francisco too?"

"He is in his last agony. Come, come and see him; but you fear," she added, observing the extreme pallor which overspread her companion's features.

"Not I," he exclaimed; "where is he?"

Opening a door in the wall of the saloon, she

led him into a small apartment where, on a low pallet, lay the priest, evidently dying.

By his side, holding a cup to his parched and purple lips, knelt a form the sight of which sent a thrill of delight through Ernesto's frame, for it was that of Cattarina.

She turned her head, and, with a faint cry, held out her hand to her lover, without attempting to leave her post.

"Oh Ernesto dearest," she cried, "help him! Alas, you cannot, he is passing away. Oh Don Francisco, here is our preserver, Ernesto; look up at him."

Kneeling by the sufferer's side, Ernesto spoke to him gently, calling him by his name. A gleam of consciousness flitted across the features of the dying man as, with a tremendous effort, he endeavoured to raise himself.

The young man at once took up the prostrate form of the priest in his arms, and as Cattarina moistened his lips the dying man spoke in a voice scarcely audible.

"Swear to me," he said, "as you will answer at

the last great day, that you will protect her; that you will make her your wife."

"I swear it," was the Englishman's reply, as he clasped Cattarina's hand.

Something like a smile played over the agonised features of the sufferer; a few more words of prayer, almost inaudible, trembled on his lips, and all was over.

To raise the now fainting girl and carry her to an adjoining room was the next course of action which Ernesto adopted.

He there encountered a monk who had come to see whether Don Francisco still lived.

He was an elderly man, and had all that calm self-possession which his holy calling required, and which was now intensified by his having become so familiarised with horrors.

He directed Nina to convey the exhausted Cattarina to her apartment, and then turned to the Englishman, who at once requested his advice as to how he had best proceed.

"I do not think she will be attacked, nor does

the doctor who saw her this morning," said the monk, "and if you can at once remove her she may be saved."

"I can take her to Malta this very hour, and there all will be well," replied Ernesto.

The monk seemed taken by surprise, and paused, as in a few words Ernesto explained to him his relation to Cattarina, and his wish to fulfil at once the solemn promise he had just made to the departed priest.

"I must go and find the English Consul," he added.

"Alas, he is dead!" exclaimed the monk. "He and all his family were among the first victims of the pestilence; all died but one lady, and she escaped to Malta, but only to die there."

"What can I do," exclaimed Ernesto, "to make her my wife?"

"Your only course," replied the monk, "will be to take the girl to the church, and at the moment that the priest gives the benediction, kneeling at his feet, you must declare yourselves man and wife.

That will be a marriage in the sight of God, and also according to the law of the land."

"There is no time to be lost," he added, "for the high mass has begun in the cathedral."

In a few minutes the anxious lover was kneeling by Cattarina's side, urging immediate flight.

She was perfectly calm, but seemed unable to comprehend clearly what he was proposing.

"Come, my own dear one," he said, "come with me."

"Where?" she asked.

"To church, to become my wife. Time presses, and we must fly."

"Where are we going?"

"To Malta, as soon as you are my wife," he said.

For a moment she drew herself from his embrace and hesitated.

"Speak to her, my good father," said Ernesto to the monk. "Nina, do you persuade her, and we will all go together far from these horrors. Father, will you come too?"

“Yes,” replied the monk, “to the church, but not to Malta. My duty is here.”

He then addressed himself to Cattarina in a few earnest words, which had the effect of rousing her sufficiently to accompany her now sole protector to the church, Nina having enveloped her in a large black silk mantle, the ordinary walking costume of the Catanese females of all ranks.

A few moments sufficed for these preparations, and soon, almost carried in her lover's arms, Cattarina, hardly conscious, was hurried from the house, Nina and the monk following.

It was but a short distance to the church, which they entered by a side door, and found the sacred edifice almost empty. The high mass was nearly concluded.

“Approach the altar at once,” whispered the monk to Ernesto, who drew Cattarina, almost fainting, towards it.

Sinking on her knees beside him, in front of the altar, she remained there but half conscious, till she

felt the firm grasp of her lover's hand enclasping her own.

"Speak, dearest," he whispered; "say 'This is my husband.'"

She uttered the words but faintly, and heard him, in a loud-toned voice, proclaim her his wife.

Raising her eyes, she saw the hand of the priest lifted in the act of benediction; the whole scene swam before her, sight failed her eyes, and she fell senseless in the arms of her husband, who, within an hour, after some formulæ with the priest were completed, proceeded to convey her on board the *speronara*, which, however, could not sail till the close of the day.

Happily for herself, Cattarina was so thoroughly exhausted as to be almost unconscious of all the discomfort that awaited her on board the boat. She fell into a deep stupor of sleep, which lasted for many hours, during which time her husband did all in his power to provide, by means of a hastily-constructed tent, some rough accommodation for her on the deck of the vessel.

Nina was simply useless, so completely had fatigue and grief overwhelmed her.

Her groans and lamentations almost maddened Ernesto, but after a time they grew less audible, and at length were silenced in a heavy sleep, which overtook the worn-out, half-distracted woman.

Tedious indeed were the movements of the crew of the *speronara* in getting her clear of the port, and it was not till late in the evening that, to the great satisfaction of all on board, they were out at sea with a favourable breeze, which continued during the earlier part of the night, wafting them along so quickly as to induce the hope that Malta might be reached within four-and-twenty hours.

Before sunrise, which succeeded a lovely night, during which Cattarina slept for the greater part tranquilly, this hope was dissipated, for again a dead calm ensued, which lasted perseveringly during the next two days.

It was on the Monday night that two of the crew were attacked by cholera, and quickly suc-

cumbed to its effects. A third man died the following day. The captain and Nina were the next sufferers. The former rallied, but, to the despairing anguish of Cattarina, the faithful Nina perished.

During the night, the dead calm continuing, a fifth victim was claimed by the inexorable conqueror, and the survivors, almost paralysed with horror, awaited, with the silence of despair, their apparently inevitable doom.

The *speronara* made but little way the next day, one man alone besides the captain having survived.

The heat grew more intense every hour, the supply of water fell short, when, on the Wednesday, Ernesto, who had borne up wonderfully during the dreadful ordeal he had undergone, fell fainting by the side of his terrified, distracted bride.

For some time he remained unconscious, but was at length partially roused by her voice as she cried: "A ship, a ship! We are saved!"

CHAPTER IX.

WE must now return and give a glance at the proceedings of our orphan at Stepney, for time, as is its wont, rolled on, and the boy rolled on with it, and developed into a fine healthy lad.

He was called Frank Welbyn, as there existed total ignorance as to his surname, and some doubt as to that he had received in baptism.

But Frank was the nearest that Mrs. Tozer could make out, for that "forrin priest," as she said, "'ad a mumbly sort of a way of speakin', as give 'im back into my arms, so can't say for certin."

So Frank he was called, and "a remarkable forrerd child he wor, for at seven he could read that well as it were a pleasure to 'ear 'im," as Mrs. Tozer said.

It was when about twelve years old that Frank received two terrible blows, coming nearly together.

One was the marriage of 'Melia Ann with a soldier, who took her to India, and the other the death of Mrs. Welbyn, which last event occurred within six months of her daughter's departure.

It had been a cause of great sorrow to the boy to part with 'Melia Ann, but the death of her mother for a time seemed to crush him with an overwhelming grief.

With reason did he mourn for his kind friend who had bestowed on him care and love only second to that which a fond mother could have lavished; in fact she would have over-indulged the boy had it not been for the judicious suggestions of Mrs. Tozer and her husband, who, both feeling the greatest interest in the child, interfered in his behalf.

He had the happy charm of ingratiating himself with those whom he encountered, owing no doubt in a great measure to his possessing that inestim-

able gift of a good personal appearance, being, as he grew up, remarkably handsome, and a fine well-grown lad.

Mrs. Welbyn doted on him, and said "as he had brought a blessing with him to her door, for she hadn't had her bill in her winder not more than three or four days at a time ever since he came into her house," which, as we know, was a somewhat figurative way of describing his arrival.

When about nine years old, Tozer induced Mrs. Welbyn to send the boy to a day-school, the expense of which that worthy woman agreed to meet out of the money in the savings bank, a very small portion of which had been expended.

This step not only removed Frank from too great home influence, but in the hour of affliction served to distract his thoughts from his sorrow.

Poor Mrs. Welbyn had done her best to impart something like religious instruction to the child, but her own ideas were somewhat vague on the subject, for though she generally attended a place of worship

on a Sunday evening, she was totally indifferent as to sect or doctrine, provided she heard what she called "the Gospel;" respecting which she had received the uncertain sounds emanating at various times from pulpits occupied by the disciples of Boatswain Smith, the late Mr. Wesley, members of various other denominations, and the wavering sentiments of the established clergy, some of whom at that time were warmly advocating High Church views as opposed to the doctrines of their Calvinistic brethren.

It had often been a subject of remark between Mrs. Tozer and Mrs. Welbyn, that it was singular Frank should never have asked any questions about his parents.

"Not but," as Mrs. Tozer observed, "we none on us never frets arter wot we don't never know the want, and 'wot the eye don't see the 'art don't grieve for,' as the sayin' is; and I'm sure that boy ain't never missed a mother's care not from tops and bottoms to bein' short-coated, nor yet with 'is teeth, as come through almost unbeknown; and

the way as he throwed off both 'oopin-corf and the measles, not all the mothers in the world could 'ave got 'im through 'em better."

Though right in most particulars respecting Frank, both the worthy matrons were wrong as to his being indifferent respecting his parents, for he had asked and learnt a great deal about his mother from 'Melia Ann, who had often told him the story of her death, when, as she said, "you were too young to remember;" and on one occasion when they were walking out together on a Sunday evening, had consented, though not without misgiving, to enter the Catholic chapel, from which, as she told him, she had fetched the priest to his dying parent.

"I wonder whether he remembers her, and could tell me all about her?" inquired the boy.

"Oh no," said 'Melia Ann, "it's not the same one as is there now; he was a foreigner, as most Catholics are."

Nothing more was then said on the subject, and shortly after this 'Melia Ann married, and

was, as Mrs. Tozer observed, “sperrited away like to India, as is at least twenty years older than ’er, though he seems a steady man, by the name of Gordin; but I don’t like them differences between man and wife, though she is a good gal and will do ’er dooty.”

The death of Mrs. Welbyn took all her friends by surprise, for she was, as Mrs. Tozer observed, “out on the Sunday, though not a-lookin’ wot I should call ’erself; and when the boy come to fetch me on Tuesday, a-saying as she were a layin’ down, I didn’t think as it were anythink more than bile, as is ’er constitution, as was the matter with ’er; but soon changed my tune when I see ’er, as was jaunders up to ’er eye-balls, poor soul; yet didn’t think as there was no danger, nor yet I don’t believe there was if she ’adn’t took that wiolent medsin, as were calimel in lemon-juice, as the second dose killed ’er jest on three o’clock Sunday mornin’, and quite a chance as I were with ’er; for she’d seemed better and took a cup of tea before I left ’er Saturday evenin’, a-feelin’ easy

about 'er, but yet couldn't get 'er off my mind, so says to Tozer, 'I'll go back now as I've give you your supper, and will sit up with 'er till two, and then Mrs. Warble, as lodges with 'er, 'ave promised to come to 'er.' It were jest on arf-past ten when I got back to 'er place, and though she were asleep I didn't like her breathin'; and so I told the nuss as 'ad set up the night before to go and lie down, for she 'adn't 'ad her clothes off for two nights. She slept on till past twelve, and then woke up with a shiver, as I knowed were a bad sign, and by three she were in a 'appy release, poor dear; but, as I says to 'im, 'Don't go on a-bustin' out like that, my dear boy, 'cos it's a dooty for to submit.' "

These last words were addressed to poor Frank, who, overwhelmed with sorrow, had taken up his abode with Mrs. Tozer, but not till his benefactress was laid in her grave; for so earnestly had he begged not to be taken away from her house while she was what Mrs. Tozer called "above ground," that his wish had been granted, and Mrs. Tozer had remained with him.



Unintentionally did that good woman add to his misery by trying, what she intended to be the means, to distract his thoughts, and to this end she would send him out on half-holidays for a walk; but the poor boy's steps were always directed to the cemetery, where he would sit and cry by his friend's grave.

On this being discovered, Mrs. Tozer found out some employment for him at home, and luckily his taste led him to studying the fine arts, which he pursued by devoting his time to colouring prints of celebrated theatrical characters.

It was while thus employed one afternoon that he overheard Mrs. Tozer's account, given to a friend, of the circumstances attendant on Mrs. Welbyn's death.

"I never give the boy a thought," she said, "through 'im a settin' by the winder as quiet as a mouse with 'is paintin', and never thought as he were a listenin' all the while with the tears a-runnin' down his cheeks till he bust out with a reg'lar torrinent as the sayin' is; so in course I

were obligated to talk to 'im serious, and say as it weren't right to take on like that; but wot'll do 'im most good is Tozer a-takin' 'im with 'im down to see all them things at the Docks for a day or two; and then our Joe he'll come 'ome from the school of the Umbrellers' Company as we'd got 'im into, as will be a companion for one another, 'cos I'd been alone through 'Melia Ann a-goin' to service, 'cos she was always that contrairy as I never could manage 'er without constant words, as is wot I don't 'old with; and as to 'Liza, she were always brought up with 'er aunt on Tozer's side."

Frank did not have a companion for long, for Joe soon returned to school, and again was the orphan alone with his kind friends, attending daily at the small school in the neighbourhood, where we must leave him for the present.

A question once arose respecting his religion, which was decided by Tozer, to whom Mrs. Tozer appealed as to the propriety of the boy going to the Catholic chapel on a Sunday, "which," as

she said, "is only intended for the Hirish, as will go there in downright rags ; and no one respectable ever goes."

"Don't talk that rubbish, mother, don't," said Tozer, somewhat brusquely. "Why some of the first in the land is Catholics, and so is nearly all them foreign kings and queens."

"In course, I knows as forriners is," replied his wife, "but then they don't know no better through not being free-born Britons, and I certainly 'ave 'eard say as they'd cut Queen Wictoria's 'ead off in a jiffey if she become a Catholic; and that's 'ow the Protestants come in, through their a cuttin' off the 'eads of all the Catholics, and a-drivin' all the rest away as wouldn't turn, as is 'ow we come to 'ave liberty of consence."

"Go it, old lady," said Tozer, "you've got the right end of the stick now."

"Ah! it's all very fine to jeer, Mr. Tozer," replied his better-half, "but you don't ketch me a-givin' into none of them bullyin' ways; and as to Guy Fox, I'd have 'im put down, tho' he was

a good Protestant, and didn't never ought to be forgot, as the boys says, tho' he was as near as a toucher, as the sayin' is, a-bein' the end of all my sheets and tablecloths as I'd jest got hung on fifth of November, as you was away, and turned out fine dryin' weather, as is not to be expected that time of the year; so a-takin' time by the firelock, as the sayin' is, I got every rag on it hung out arter dinner, and left it till dusk, when them dratted young Wardens begun a larkin' with their squibs and crackers all over the place, as was the most audacious boys as ever I see, and both took to the sea, and their mother no more power over them than a bleating lamb, though I'm sure she never spared the copper-stick, and sometimes drove to the tongs when defied. Well, them boys sent two crackers a-flyin' over our palins', as the shock knocked me clean off the steps as I were a-standin' on, a-taking in my large counterpin, as nearly smothered me and Mrs. Collins; and it's lucky as we both fell agin the line, as gave way with us, as put out the sheet as was in flames thro' 'avin'

cort at the corner, and would 'ave been all a-blazin' the next minnit, and so I says, though I don't like a-interferin' with my naybours' religion; but they didn't ought to play their pranks over it on me, or else the perlice must interfere, 'cos that's a-carryin' liberty of consence too far, as might end in a gen'ral conflagration, as the sayin' is; but, in course, it's no use a-goin' on a-tellin' anythink to a man as is off to sleep like you. But jest say afore you're off wot am I to do about the boy a-goin' to the Catholic chapel?"

"Let him do as he likes; his mother was that way of thinking, wasn't she?"

"In course she were, poor thing, leastways wouldn't die in peace till she'd 'ad the priest to 'er; but then she might 'ave been a wanderin' in 'er 'ead, 'cos that's 'ow they say them priests gets over parties when they're a-dyin'; not as I can see wot 'arm they can do 'em; and don't tell 'em a parcel of lies like them Methody lot did old Capstin, as they perswaded him he were a saint, and set there round 'is deathbed, a-sayin' he were a-goin' to glory, till it made my werry blood bile

to 'ear 'em, and I couldn't bear it no longer, thro' a-knowin' wot a wile old wretch he'd been, with his lawful wife turned out of doors for that 'ussey as were a-settin' there a-whimperin' by 'is bedside, and wouldn't 'ave let me in to see 'im, if he 'adn't said as he knowed I could do 'im good. So I says to them parties as were a-talkin' that free about grace and glory, I says, 'Well,' I says, 'for my part if I 'ad to talk to you, Mr. Capstin, I should say you'd better send for your lawful wife and children, and ask them to forgive you, and then say your prayers, so as you might 'ope to be forgiven; and as to you, you good-for-nothink, impident, brazen wretch, if these parties was real religious, they'd jest take and turn you out of the room, as is downright mockery a-settin' there along with your sarm-singin' 'umbug;' and out of the place I walked, 'cos in my opinion that old reprobate deserved tarrin' and featherin' more than anythink else in this world, wotever he may get in the next. But, in course, if you thinks as it's right as the boy should go to the chapel, why he shall do

it, as I wouldn't for my part shet the door agin a Jew as wanted for to say 'is prayers, though in my opinion it's werry ridiculus in them for to keep New Year's Day in the fall of the year, when it's been passed so many months as to be werry near out; but better than a-keepin' of it like the Scotch do, as is drunk all over the place from mornin' till night, as ain't wot I considers beginnin' of the New Year well; though I likes a cheerful glass with one or two friends, or jest a drain agin the fog, as is apt to settle on the chest the same as wet paint, as will kill all the birds through a settlin' on their water, as did ought to be took away out of the cage when painters is about, the same as children as didn't ought to be let meddle with it, though there's some as you can't keep in check, jest like little Tommy Waters, as weren't only jest three-and-a-arf, as got at the paint-pots and took and painted 'is little stomick lead-colour, with 'is mother's back turned, while the men were gone to their dinner, as ruined all 'is clothes; and I do think as that paint worked into 'is constitution,

for he always looked lead-colour under the eyes and never was a 'ealthy child, and so couldn't struggle through the measles, as come on the top of the 'oopin'-corf—as they will sometimes—as is wot children must go through, the same as distemper in dogs, as will often prove fatal, jest as the paint did with poor Tommy, tho' his mother always called 'im a fine child, as is only nat'ral in a mother; but I certingly do consider as Frank is a boy as'll do credit to any Sunday-school, tho' he ain't never been in one, as is places I don't 'old with myself, and thinks as there's a-many goes to teach there as did ought to be a learnin' theirselves, and a deal too much dressin' and gossipin' for me. But as to Frank, he's not a boy to tell no falsities, and might be trusted with untold treacle, without ever dippin' of 'is fingers in to suck 'em, the same as I caught that Alfred Barnes a-doin', and should have liked to have giv' 'im a good slap, only didn't want no words with 'is mother, as is a woman I can't abear, tho' my own 'usban's sister, but no more like 'im

than a flea to a elephant. But as to Frank, wherever he goes he'll turn out well, I knows."

Frank had at an early age evinced a strong aversion to the chapel Mrs. Welbyn attended, having disturbed the congregation on his first appearance there by bursting into a violent fit of crying, so great was the terror with which the singing inspired the child; and it was not for many years after that his indulgent protectress even proposed that he should accompany her.

When old enough to understand that it was her notion of his duty to go with her, he acquiesced without a murmur.

So it was that the boy had been left to form his own character, not from its being a matter of indifference to those about him, but partly because all felt their inability to guide him; and in a great measure because Tozer had formed so high an estimate of the boy's natural ability that he was convinced he would, if left to himself, sooner or later develop points of character calculated to form a man of integrity, as well

as one whom nature had endowed with no ordinary amount of talent. When, in speaking of the lad, he often made the remark: "He'll turn up trumps some day, you see if he don't."

Mrs. Tozer never opposed her husband on any important point of conduct, for she held him to be what she termed "a right-thinkin' man, with his 'ead put on the right way; and as to the boy a-goin' to chapel," she remarked, "I knows if I were dead and gone, and a-layin' in the cymetry, I shouldn't consider as parties was a-be'avin' 'andsome in bringin' up my child different to wot I liked; and I'm sure I never give the boy's religion a thought, tho', in course, it stands to reason as his mother wouldn't never 'ave sent for that priest if she didn't 'old with them ways. So to chapel he shall go next Sunday, if I takes 'im to the door myself, as is goin' as far as I considers my dooty by the dead."

CHAPTER X.

HAVING given our readers a further glimpse at humble life, we must now reconduct them to Blomberg House, where, with the lapse of time, grave changes have taken place since we last visited that aristocratic abode.

The Marchioness is dead, and has been duly mourned in the deepest black, her family and household displaying all becoming insignia of woe; the profusion of which in some way made up for the absence of any deep sorrow at her loss.

She was respected by many, though loved by few, and little regretted by those nearest to her.

Declining health of late years had not improved a temper at no time remarkable for its sweetness.

Her children, in speaking of their loss, observed to their friends that it was a happy release, a view in which her husband fully acquiesced.

Some there were who regretted her; few, if any, loved her; though the Rev. Dr. McCrawley, whose ministry she attended, at times spoke of her in the pulpit as one eminently fitted for the place to which she was gone.

He left his hearers to fix the locality according to their private views on the subject.

To the world among which she had lived she was a matter of indifference. To her family she had never been devoted; she cared nothing for her husband, being rather afraid of him; to her son she was devoted; but never on cordial terms with her daughters, with whom she had been severe in their youth, and was politely ignored by them as they grew up.

Her chief excellence consisted in her money and her descent, which was aristocratic from her point of view.

The founder of the family had been a Whig lord, the son of a political adventurer at the time of the Revolution, enriched by the spoils of the Jacobites. His son became a Tory under Queen

Anne, in expectation of a Stuart restoration, and then a Whig at the accession of the House of Hanover. His descendants varying in their political views, according to interest, were not remarkable for ability of any kind, beyond a talent for money-making, which secured for the sole heiress of the house the hand, if not the heart, of the Marquis of Cankerfield, who bore the shock of her loss with marvellous resignation, and devoted himself with energy to the disposal of her property, no doubt as a distraction to his deeply-seated affliction.

His daughters were disgusted at his behaviour in the non-distribution of their departed mother's jewellery, the whole of which the Marquis retained.

She having left everything to her husband unconditionally; though at one time there were some considerable legacies to her children; but these had been materially reduced in amount by a codicil, drawn up and added a few days before her death, as some did not hesitate to assert, under the immediate supervision of the Marquis.

Mildown was sadly cut up at not getting a share of his mother's jointure, but he made the best of

it; was more obsequiously affectionate to his father than ever, venting his ill-humour on his wife, of whom he stood somewhat in awe, as she could fight him at long-range through her son, of whom his father was afraid.

The boy had been extremely delicate from infancy, and consequently much indulged by both parents, which, as he grew up, he requited by a display of a patronising sort of affection for his mother, whilst he treated his father with an indifference that savoured strongly of contempt.

From a child he had indirectly ruled the house, by being the instrument, in his mother's hands, for completely subjugating her husband.

Poor Mildown was not, therefore, happy at home, nor was he satisfied with the state of affairs between himself and his father.

In all money matters the Marquis referred him to Mr. Elvey, and Mr. Elvey was the one person whom Mildown detested and at the same time feared.

The late Marchioness had at one time shared her son's antipathy for that individual, till she saw Mr. Elvey moved to tears by one of Dr. McCrawley's

sermons, a fact to which her ladyship could testify from her own personal observation, for by mere accident of course Mr. Elvey happened to be seated in a front row of the gallery exactly opposite the pew occupied by herself ; and from hearing that sermon Mr. Elvey, who had previously been, as he said, worldly and self-seeking, became a converted character.

He read with diligence and quoted copiously all the Doctor's work ; no easy task, for the Doctor was a man of many volumes, not strictly speaking of his own composition, but drawn largely from the works of more obscure authors, whose writings would have been lost to the world had not the Doctor made free with them.

It is true that this worthy man never in any way acknowledged the writer from whom he quoted whole pages at a time ; but reconciled the piracy to himself, on the ground that thereby he made these obscure works useful, and rendered both the author and the public a service, whilst he only got the mere worldly advantages of money and fame, which he utterly despised, worthy man !

His great work, "Rome weighed in the Balance," reached its hundredth edition, in spite of the ill-nature of a portion of the worldly-minded press, in whose columns it was cut up, and denounced as a wholesale robbery from writings full of inaccuracy both as to veracity and scholarship.

The religious papers praised the Doctor's books in articles, written, as some said, by the author himself, which excused the apparent dishonesty on the ground that by such means a hidden treasure had been brought to light.

It was not attempted to be shown that the widow and orphans of the real author derived any of the substantial advantages of the work, all of which the worthy Doctor pocketed; but what cared he or his admirers for ill-natured comments on one who preached agreeable doctrine? and as to truth, logic, or justice, what had so *sound* a divine to do with such empty formalities?

Mr. Elvey was not popular in the household of the Marquis, over which he presided as comptroller, and many were the ill-natured things whispered

about him, both in the steward's-room and servants'-hall, though with great caution, as it was generally believed that he paid one or two of the servants to act as spies.

He had been employed to look after the affairs of the late heir of the house, and had followed him to Naples to arrange some family matters, but had been kicked downstairs by him for having been caught incautiously reading the young nobleman's letters.

He returned to England, and though he more than once went abroad to have an eye on the wandering heir, he never ventured to come within the reach of that aristocratic youth's boot.

On the decease of the Marchioness all her family except her daughter-in-law assembled at Cankerfield Hall to attend her obsequies.

The Marquis appeared in the shiniest of black boots and most faultless mourning, and though he displayed much feeling and a deeply black-bordered handkerchief at the funeral, he did not allow himself to become a prey to immoderate grief.

He derived much solace from the society of his sons-in-law, especially that of Bolderstone, with whom he played *écarté* a great part of the day, though, out of respect to the memory of the departed, in his own room and with locked doors.

Lady Mildown was unable to join the family circle, in consequence of her son's state of health, and so, as she stated to an intimate friend, "got out of a bore."

Lady Bolderstone and Lady Augusta were pleased at her absence, for, as the former observed to her sister, "those underbred people always delight in making scenes."

Mr. Elvey was for a time apparently inconsolable, in spite of the constant perusal of a work by Dr. McCrawley, entitled "Balm for Mourners."

The Doctor had been admitted to see the Marchioness once during her illness, but under the express understanding that he was in no way to allude to her ladyship being more than a little out of health.

In fact the poor woman had been most studiously

kept in ignorance of her real condition; and on being required to alter her will was assured it was merely to facilitate some arrangements about to be made in favour of her son which did not admit of delay.

Dr. McCrawley was not asked to the funeral, as the Honourable and Rev. Theophilus Bland, a relation of the Marquis, objected to meeting a Dissenter.

We will dwell no further on the mournful scene; suffice it to say that the Marchioness was buried, and her surviving relatives were consoled if not reconciled under their loss.

They made no vulgar display of grief that would have been incompatible with their position.

The Marquis, with a force of character worthy his high position, soon resumed his wonted gaiety, and reappeared in society in a lovely brown curly head of hair, over which sorrow seemed to have cast an additional gloss.

He had a desperate row with some distant relatives of his late wife about a small portion of her jointure which reverted to her family. With the

assistance of Mr. Elvey, he looked over all her papers, distributed with some reluctance a trifling sum she had requested might be given to the servants, and felt thoroughly consoled when he found that he had gained a good round sum in ready money by her decease.

In fact, by her death and that of his eldest son, the Marquis had been considerably enriched during the last few years; and yet he grumbled frightfully at increasing his second son's allowance, and would not have done so had he not been obliged by the family settlements.

It was thought, and devoutly hoped, that on the decease of the Marchioness, Mr. Elvey's influence in the family would diminish; but all were doomed to disappointment, for within a few weeks after her ladyship's funeral, he actually dined *tête-à-tête* with the Marquis at Blomberg House.

Mildown saw with much uneasiness the growing power of Mr. Elvey, to whom he was obsequiously polite, though he "hated him like poison," as Mr. Graves, the house-steward, told Mrs. Ellis, the housekeeper.

Mr. Elvey in turn treated the heir-apparent with much deference, though his manner to him and every one of the family was such as to make all fully sensible of his position with the head of the house.

Such was the state of affairs at Blomberg House within six months of the death of the Marchioness.

Mr. Elvey reigned supreme as grand vizier.

Lady Bolderstone took refuge in a sulky fit, and never came near her father after having received the small legacy from her mother through *that man*.

Lady Augusta, who had a small house near the parks, came dutifully once or twice a week to see the Marquis, though she met with small encouragement to pursue her course of filial duty, as frequently she was received by Mr. Elvey, with some lame apology for his patron's non-appearance.

Mr. Elvey did not reside at Blomberg House, but was in attendance there almost every day, and frequently paid Lord Mildown a morning visit on matters of business.

There was a degree of mystery about Mr. Elvey

in general, and more especially as regarded his domestic affairs, to which he never alluded.

It was reported that he had married a wealthy widow, and he was known to reside somewhere near Euston Square, his official address being in the neighbourhood of Bedford Row.

As he was at Blomberg House every day, there was little or no occasion for his being sought elsewhere.

"Who the deuce can Cankerfield visit in the neighbourhood of Euston Square?" inquired Fred Fobbington of his brother-in-law Bolderstone, as they were gossiping together one afternoon at the Tourists' Club.

"Can't think," was the reply. "I don't know what sort of people live there."

"Oh!" said Bolderstone, "I know a stock-broker who has a house there—at least so he told me. I've heard that it is a sort of Ghetto, from so many Israelites living in that quarter."

"Well," said Fred, "I saw our respected father-in-law coming out of a house there the day

before yesterday ; a very quiet, well-appointed establishment. I was passing through the street on my way from the railway."

"Did the old man see you?" inquired Bolderstone.

"Oh no ; I was too sharp for that, and screwed myself into a corner of the cab."

"That was just as well," observed Bolderstone. "No doubt it's the old story—some attraction of a tender kind."

"Hang it, he can't be carrying on a flirtation with a Jewess !" exclaimed Fobbington, "or making up to a stockbroker's daughter !"

"Doesn't that canting thief, old Elvey, live somewhere in that direction ?" asked Bolderstone.

"Can't say," replied Fobbington ; "though now you mention it, I think I heard Mildown once asking him where he lived, and he mumbled something about the neighbourhood of Russell Square."

"Well, then, there is some great attraction there for our respected papa," observed Bolder-

stone. "One used to meet him prowling about Brompton, or driving up in the direction of Primrose Hill; but none of his intimates can have gone to live near Russell Square."

"Perhaps he goes to see Elvey," suggested Fobbington; "I believe he has a pretty wife."

Bolderstone laughed as he remarked: "Ah! that may be the secret of the fellow's influence."

"Not entirely," replied Fobbington, "he has been for many years a useful man to the family, and knows a great deal more about all the members of it than most of us do. He used to go abroad to look after the first-born, and had the first news of his death. You never knew him?"

"No," said Bolderstone, "I only saw him once, but I liked him."

"He was beastly selfish, they say," remarked Fobbington, "very obstinate, but worth ten thousand of that sneaking cur his successor. By-the-way, we meet there at dinner to-day, do we not?"

"Yes, I believe so," replied Bolderstone, as with

a nod he rose to depart, leaving his brother-in-law absorbed in the evening paper.

Lord Bolderstone was right in his conjecture as to the house at which the Marquis visited ; for it was the residence of Mr. Elvey.

But the attraction was not Mr. Elvey, nor his wife, for she had been dead some time, having left a daughter, whom on her death-bed she had confided to her husband's care.

Mr. Elvey had married a widow of whose property he had the management.

It is not worth our while to inquire into that lady's antecedents ; suffice it to say that she had been well connected in some way, having a good income settled on her by a deceased nobleman, a part of which at her death passed to her only daughter.

When Mr. Elvey first married, he lived in Brompton, but subsequently removed to the vicinity of the New Road, just about the time of the Marchioness's death.

Shortly after that melancholy event, he launched

out considerably, at his wife's desire, in order to introduce his step-daughter into society.

Poor Mrs. Elvey was not destined to enjoy her new house, a brougham, or a front pew in the gallery of St. Pancras Church, very long.

Hot suppers and generous living in general, for which she had of late years contracted a weakness, induced a tendency to corpulence and bronchial attacks, to one of which she succumbed within three months of entering her new abode.

Her afflicted husband derived no small amount of consolation under his bereavement from the thought that he had insured her life very well, and that her daughter was provided for comfortably.

It is true the bulk of the late Mrs. Elvey's income reverted to the noble house of Candleham, from which it was derived, though the family did not feel itself called on in any way to notice her decease.

Her husband, however, though he hardly alluded to his loss at Blomberg House, erected a monument, describing her as the object of his profoundest love and respect, and also as an ornament of her sex.

CHAPTER XI.

It was at the close of a cold November afternoon that Mr. Elvey, on his return from business, which had taken him to the City, was sitting by his drawing-room fire, ruminating over the past and the future.

He had done well in life, and was satisfied as to the past; but he was thinking how his future had best be shaped.

He had that day been engaged on his late wife's affairs, and he was thinking what course he had best adopt with his stepdaughter.

Should he marry again in order to advance her interests? And he passed in mental review one or two eligible parties who might be induced, as he thought, to share his home.

Then the consideration of his orphan charge,

whom he knew to be self-willed and strong-minded, made him doubtful as to the expediency of such a proceeding till he had disposed of her.

Full of such thoughts, he was getting a little drowsy, when he was suddenly roused by the entrance of the page, who came to announce that a gentleman wished to see him.

"Who is it?" he inquired.

"Don't know, sir," was the reply. "At least not for certain, but I think it's my lord, though he wouldn't give no name."

"What do you mean?" exclaimed Elvey; and he hurried downstairs, and found in the passage no less a personage than the Marquis of Cankerfield, standing on his door-mat.

"Ah, Elvey," said his lordship, in his most affable manner, "I'm disturbing you, I'm afraid."

"Not in the least, my lord," replied the man of business, highly bewildered as to the purport of this visit.

"Pray, my lord, do me the honour to walk up;" and with these words he ushered his aristo-

cratic visitor into a handsome though somewhat over-furnished drawing-room.

To light the lustres, and to beg his visitor to be seated by the fire, were the work of a few seconds to the still flurried Elvey.

"I took you by surprise, Elvey," said his lordship, as he seated himself.

"You did indeed, my lord; I was not aware that your lordship knew my precise address; for the truth is I have been here such a very short time that I did not intend to mention it till I was settled."

"Oh, I knew where to find you," said his lordship; "and having business with Hunter this afternoon, at his office in Lincoln's Inn Fields, he told me you had married Mrs. Harcourt, a charming creature, and an old acquaintance, I may say friend, of mine."

"Indeed, my lord!" replied Elvey, in a tone of astonishment.

"Oh no, no, she was not an intimate friend of mine; but I knew Candleham; we were at

Eton together, though he was much my senior; and so you understand I knew all his family, and all his friends; that is to say—I mean——”

And feeling that he was making a mess of his subject, the Marquis lapsed into silence.

After a short pause, he went on to say: “My business with Hunter was about my eldest son’s affairs. You know some of his mother’s jointure would have come to him; but now I am entitled to it as his heir. Well, those confounded Scotch cousins of hers want to be sure that every reasonable search was made for his will.”

“As I have often told your lordship, there was no such document found among his papers. I made it my business to possess myself of such of his effects as had not been carried off. His papers were all untouched in a valise.”

“But,” said the Marquis, “you did not discover any clue to his companion?”

“No, my lord; for did we not agree that it was better to ignore any possible connections that he might have formed?”

“Oh, decidedly, decidedly. We did not want any claim on us established.”

“Be assured, my lord, there is no chance of such a thing. No, no, it was an unhappy business, and best hushed up, and I have taken every precaution to prevent any unpleasant result. As to his house, it was literally bare walls. How he could have lived in such a hovel, and among such people, I can't think. His native servant, with whom I fell in, did not deny the existence of some love affair, but either could not or would not throw any light upon the subject. Everything has been done to put you at ease on the point, both by myself and the agents whom you on reflection thought fit to employ, and you may rest assured that all reason for uneasiness as regards a will is removed, and that every possible search for it has been made.”

“Yes, yes, I know that, and am perfectly satisfied, but Hunter would like to see you on the subject, so you had better call on him. I promised to see you, and ask you to do so.”

His lordship said all this in a very natural tone and manner, but not so much so as to deceive Elvey as to his seeing Hunter being the real motive of his visit.

"Well," said his lordship, looking round him, "you are snugly lodged here for a bachelor. I hope I've not disturbed you. Good-day."

As he said this, his lordship rose and moved towards the door, which he had nearly reached when it was opened, and a remarkably showy-looking girl entered the room.

She was attired in deep mourning, which set off charms, of which a taper she carried enabled a beholder to get a fuller view than the dim light of the room would have disclosed.

"My dear, I am particularly engaged!" exclaimed Elvey.

"No, no," said the Marquis, as the young lady was about to make a hurried retreat, "I am going, and if I were not, I could not allow a lady to be turned out of her own drawing-room."

His lordship made a profound bow, and there

was nothing left for Elvey to do but introduce his stepdaughter.

The young lady made a deep curtsy as the Marquis addressed her in a strain that soon put her at her ease with him.

"I had no idea you had a grown-up daughter, Elvey?"

"My late wife's daughter," he murmured.

"I am so sorry I intruded on you, papa, but I thought you were in your own room," said the young lady.

"My daughter has only lately returned from school in Paris," said Elvey, feeling somewhat awkward in spite of the self-possession of the young lady and the perfect ease of his visitor.

"Ah! is not Paris delightful?" said the Marquis, who, having resumed his seat, seemed inclined to gossip.

"I can't say I found it so," replied the lady; "I was hardly ever outside the walls of my school."

"Oh, how cruel," exclaimed the Marquis, "to keep anyone caged up in Paris! Ah, you have a

pleasure to come in seeing all its beauties. You must coax papa into taking you there again some day. I hope I may have the pleasure of meeting you there, for I adore Paris. You know Paris well, Elvey, of course?"

"Yes, my lord, very well—at least I used to know it."

"Ah well, you must renew your acquaintance with it," continued the Marquis; "we will show your daughter all the lions of that queen of cities."

Seated by the side of the charming Miss Laura, who, evidently highly gratified, entered readily into conversation with the visitor, the Marquis chatted away, smiling with pleasure, for a considerable time.

The young lady received, with a certain degree of reserve, the Marquis's complimentary remarks, who continued to indulge in the small-talk of the day, the charming Laura contriving to express it to be the wish of her life to see Paris again, of which city she had had but such tantalising glimpses.

So agreeable and amusing did his lordship find the society of this girl, that he remained enjoying it a full half-hour beyond Mr. Elvey's dinner-time, and consequently caused that meal to be an utter failure; for the fish was spoilt and the meat over-roasted before the footboy was sent for a cab to convey the noble visitor to his home, where he arrived to join full late a family party to which he was engaged at his son's hospitable board.

Mr. Elvey endured his spoilt dinner with as much complacency as he could muster, not so much from any sense that it would have been unjust under the circumstances to complain, but because he was so absorbed in trying to understand what the late visit could mean, and how far his step-daughter had been a party to it.

He felt the excuse the Marquis had offered for his call to be a mere fiction, and he knew human nature too well not to suspect his step-daughter of having had some hand in bringing the Marquis to his door.

He was too shrewd to question her at once,

but determined to know everything when he went up to tea.

Miss Laura Harcourt, on the late occasion, had not strictly adhered to truth in words or action, for when she entered the drawing-room she was fully aware of the presence of the Marquis of Cankerfield in that apartment, and had duly prepared herself for the encounter.

Moreover, we must disclose the fact that they were already acquainted, and though she had not made any positive appointment with him, she had taken care that his visit should take place not only at a time when her papa was at home, but also at an hour when, without appearing to intrude, she might throw herself in the way of the visitor, of whose arrival she was duly informed by her maid, beforehand instructed to give immediate intelligence on the subject.

The way in which Miss Harcourt had originally made Lord Cankerfield's acquaintance was the most simple in the world; they had met in the streets, for the young lady was of a constitution

that required regular exercise, and she being by no means of the opinion that she was born to blush unseen, always selected some of the less sequestered parts of the town for her walks.

On the north side of Oxford Street and in Bond Street she was frequently to be seen walking briskly on a fine morning in a quiet but becoming toilette.

She was far too discreet a person to be out alone; a humble friend or a young girl, daughter of that humble friend, always bearing her company.

Sometimes, when the weather was dull, Laura and her companion would enter the Burlington, or one of the bazaars, to loiter about, it would appear, rather than for the purpose of making purchases.

All this had been done very assiduously by Miss Harcourt during her sojourn in town, excepting for a short interval when her mother's illness and death had kept her at home.

On one occasion, having been overtaken by a sharp shower in Gower Street, Laura and her companion took a cab to Bond Street, and on alighting at the door of a shop to which they were bound,

tendered a shilling as the fare, whereupon cabby indulged in very uncomplimentary remarks, and in reply to a demand for his ticket, loaded her with such loud and violent abuse as to attract the attention of passers-by, and especially that of a rather dressy, elderly gentleman, who had just stepped from a well-appointed brougham. He at once interfered, and so effectually as to put a stop to the man's insolence and relieve the ladies of his presence. Laura having with a gracious bow acknowledged the stranger's courtesy, passed into the shop, plainly showing that she did not intend to allow what had occurred to pass for an introduction, as it was evidently the elderly gentleman's wish that it should do. The young lady's manner was so decidedly "stand off," that the stranger could only raise his hat and pass by; though so anxious was he not to convey the idea of having intended any offence, that he took occasion subsequently to waylay her companion, a middle-aged female, and offer an apology if he had unintentionally given any offence.

Laura was quite unaware that the stranger had spoken to her friend, Mrs. Melcombe, nor did she ever know that it was from that same quarter that his lordship discovered the name of the fair object of his admiration.

Her charms had smitten him at once, and so far attracted his attention, that in pursuit of her he bestowed much time and energy, so that from the time of the cab episode, Laura was constantly encountering her unknown champion. She never, on any occasion of their meeting, compromised herself by the slightest acknowledgment of her unknown admirer, but in passing looked him steadily in the face, with an expression which decidedly said, "Don't know you."

Poor Mrs. Melcombe, however, had been induced to tell the stranger all about her fair charge when she met him alone one day, accidentally, near Regent Street.

On this occasion he addressed her as though acquainted, and suggested some refreshment at a neighbouring restaurant, to which Mrs. Melcombe

did not object; and went home that afternoon in the Islington 'bus with a very large parcel from one of the best West-End drapers' shops, and surprised her landlady very much by paying her five sovereigns on account of rent overdue; whilst her daughter Julia was utterly petrified at the sight of dresses for both herself and her mother, and also at seeing her mother's portemonnaie well filled.

We wish it to be distinctly understood that Laura was in total ignorance of all this, and that Lord Cankerfield, though parsimonious, was a man of generous impulses at times, and had felt a deep interest in the account poor Mrs. Melcombe had given him of her changed fortunes and present distress; and what were two ten-pound notes to him? "a mere fleabite," as Mrs. Melcombe thought as she pocketed them, though she little guessed how deep must have been the infatuation of the donor which could have extracted such a sum from him for answers to inquiries of the most inoffensive kind; acting, however, on which, his

lordship had paid Mr. Elvey the visit which we have just recorded, thinking that he had succeeded perfectly in throwing a cloud of dust into that worthy man's eyes, but having utterly failed to insert a single grain of that article therein.

Mr. Elvey soon saw not only the cards the Marquis held, but those in his stepdaughter's hand, for under a sharp cross-questioning that same evening, after the Marquis's unexpected visit, she admitted that she knew him by sight.

Mr. Elvey read character well—he had been used to the study, especially female character, and therefore did not beat about the bush ; but before retiring for the night he had a long conversation with his stepdaughter, and told her plainly to take care of herself and not be made a fool of, a principle on which the young lady had already resolved to act, though she received the advice with dutiful attention.

From that time the Marquis was a constant visitor at his agent's house.

He never saw Miss Harcourt alone, her constant

companion being a little girl, whom nothing ever separated from "dear Laura" at a greater distance than the back drawing-room, where a magnificent doll's house, a present from the Marquis, had been set up.

He often came laden with flowers and fruit for Laura, sometimes with game for Mr. Elvey.

He once attempted to place a bracelet on the young lady's wrist, but was so instantly repulsed as to be obliged to pocket both his feelings and his intended present.

He spoke more than once of his daughters intending to call on Miss Harcourt, but was given to understand plainly that the young lady desired no such honour.

She had got their papa all to herself, and she intended to keep him so without interference till he was safely landed.

She declined dinners at Richmond even, though she had a *carte blanche* as to guests.

She did not, however, refuse a box at the opera, for having in a careless manner, and with

childlike simplicity, declared, in the presence of the Marquis, that she would die if she did not hear Alboni, the following morning a box for the next opera-night was placed at her disposal.

"I don't see how you can go, my dear," said Elvey, "without a lady as companion."

"There is no necessity for one," replied Laura; "I'm not going to be condemned to sit all the evening with Mrs. Melcombe, in all poor dear mamma's finery, and that India scarf smelling of musk, and bird-of-paradise plume redolent of camphor in her turban, and cleaned gloves, too. Oh no. Surely," she added, with a bright smile, "a young lady can go to the opera with her papa?"

"I don't mean to go, my dear," said Mr. Elvey.

"Then the Marquis was under some mistake," replied Laura.

"Did he say that he wished me to go?"

"He took it for granted that you would go, or I'm sure he would not have ventured to offer me the box; and if you do not go, I most certainly shall not."

With these words she left the room, with the air of one who felt herself mistress of the situation, which she certainly was; and acting on her knowledge of that fact, she made all her preparations for the opera, and received at dinner her step-papa's intimation that he was willing to accompany her, as though she had never imagined that he was serious in having made any objection to so doing.

Having made a somewhat hurried meal, Laura withdrew, in order to arm herself more fully for conquest; and when Mr. Elvey saw her reappear in full-dress, it was for the first time that he fully realised how extremely handsome she was.

A white dress of light but rich-looking material set off her graceful figure to the greatest advantage; whilst a band of velvet, in which three diamond stars were fixed, encircled her throat, enhancing both its beauty of form and purity of colour, and giving an additional charm to her finely-formed neck and shoulders.

Her beautiful hair she judiciously left un-

adorned; in fact an elegant simplicity was the characteristic of her toilette.

The easy style in which she took possession of her box, and bowed gracefully to the Marquis, already in his stall, would have conveyed the idea that she had been long accustomed to move in the highest circles.

Elvey was astonished, and almost alarmed at her behaviour, and when the Marquis came at the end of the first act to pay his respects, "papa," as Laura perseveringly called him, beat a retreat, and actually felt so chilled, that he went to an adjoining tavern to get himself a glass of brandy-and-water.

"Dear papa, where have you been?" exclaimed Laura, as he re-entered the box, in a corner of which sat the Marquis. "You have missed such a lovely duet."

"I found it so very warm," replied Elvey, with a total disregard for truth.

"I daresay," observed the Marquis; "you're not used to it."

"She certainly has a magnificent voice," he continued, addressing Laura, as though resolved that Elvey's entrance should not check the flow of his conversation, which he then carried on in so low a tone that the purport of it did not reach the anxious parent's ear, with the exception of one or two endearing terms, and a reference made to the oft-talked-about visit to Paris.

Elvey tried to devote his attention to the opera, but felt nervous and anxious about his fair charge, and was therefore not a little relieved when she expressed a wish to go home.

To his surprise the Marquis proceeded to escort Laura to the brougham.

His lordship's manner was evidently nervous, and he lingered at the carriage-door before saying "Good-night." Elvey could not hear his parting words, for they were uttered in a whisper.

The journey home afforded no opportunity for conversation, and Elvey, though resolved to have an explanation with Laura, reserved it till they were seated *tête-à-tête* at supper.

For some time he watched his daughter closely, but could see no trace of excitement in her face or manner.

From time to time she spoke kindly, and, as Elvey fancied, in a slightly patronising style to her stepfather, who, holding the evening paper before his eyes, was watching her closely from behind it, his mind totally absorbed in thinking over the events of the evening.

“I heard him call her ‘dearest,’” thought he; “and as I entered the box he was fondly holding her hand, and I distinctly heard him saying something about her having possession of his heart.”

It was not till he had got his second glass of brandy-and-water that Mr. Elvey had courage to open the conversation he had premeditated.

He then said, “Well, Laura, my dear, how did you like the opera?”

“It was very charming,” she replied.

“Oh, but I mean the company, the display—everyone was there.”

"They all looked very like other people whom one sees daily," she observed.

"My dear girl, you don't often see such company. It is quite a privilege to be allowed to sit down in the same place with them."

"I really don't perceive that, when you pay for the privilege," she answered.

"How very agreeable the Marquis made himself," he continued; "so condescending of him to come into the box to see us; but, my dear girl, you must not let your head be turned by his attentions, which are no doubt gratifying. You must know that he is rather given to flirtations; I have, therefore, been very anxious to put you on your guard against——"

"Against what?" she inquired, interrupting and looking at him steadily.

"Why, my dear, had your excellent mother, who was a woman of the world, been spared to you, or had you any near female relation, I should not talk to you at all on the subject; but you know, my dear, that this is a very bad world, and

we never can trust anybody—not that I would say a word against my excellent patron, who is a most honourable man; but then, you see, the world will talk, and people are ill-natured, and one gets compromised in a minute. So I was going to say that, as the Marquis talks about going to Wiesbaden very soon, and we shall go away very shortly afterwards into Yorkshire, you had better not think anything about any nonsense he may have been talking to you, because you know noblemen will talk nonsense to pretty girls, and of course they've a right to do so, only I don't want your brain to be turned by it."

How much longer Mr. Elvey would have continued talking in this rambling style it is impossible to say, had his speech not been brought to a close by the young lady (who had till now listened to him in silence) leaving her seat to place herself by his side, where she addressed him as follows :

"Dear papa, many thanks for all your kind care of me, and anxious thoughts about me. I know quite enough of the world to be convinced of

its baseness, hollowness, and treachery. I am quite aware of the designs of that poor old man. I know he would pet me, dress me up, and caress me as I used to do a new doll, and, more than that, I know he would fling me aside at last without a thought beyond giving me such a pension as would reflect credit on his noble name. But, papa—thanks to you—I have been soundly advised, and—thanks to my dear mother—educated sufficiently well, to know what men of rank are when they overwhelm a girl in my position with compliments ; and moreover—thanks to myself—I have enough pride not to allow anyone to make a fool of me. I will either go through life in a quiet, humble way, or be a real somebody. No gilded trumpery for me. Don't be anxious on my account, dear papa, for as I told the Marquis to-night, when he urged me to go to Paris—with you, papa, of course——” she added hastily, seeing Elvey about to give way to a burst of angry surprise.

“ Well, my dear, what did you tell him ? ” he asked.

"I told him that I would never consent to go to Paris, or elsewhere, with him but as his wife."

"My dear girl!" exclaimed Mr. Elvey, quite aghast at her coolness, "what was his reply?"

"I saw that it gave him an ugly twinge," she continued, "for he only sank back in his chair and said nothing."

"Did he say no more?"

"Not till the next act was over, when he asked you to go and inquire for the brougham."

"Well, what then?" almost gasped Mr. Elvey.

"Why, he began a wild rhapsody about his family and position, talked about villas at Cowes—Naples—anywhere I pleased; went so far as to name settlements to a vast amount if I would only love him as a daughter; and then the silly old goose babbled about his love for me, and I don't know what more he might have said, but I desired him never to address me more in such a tone unless as his intended wife. At that moment you returned."

"Confound it," said Elvey, "how unlucky!"

“Not at all. I had my fish well hooked, papa; I did not wish him to say another word then.”

“But what did he say to you when he put you into the carriage?”

“A few but important words, papa: ‘Good-night, my angel; sweet Lady Cankerfield.’”

A cry of surprise escaped from Elvey, and in his paroxysm of delight he embraced his step-daughter.

“Admirable, wonderful girl!” he exclaimed; “where could you have got such a knowledge of life from?”

He did not know how excellent a study of it can be pursued at a finishing-school, and how fully pupils may become adepts when that study is supplemented by a subsequent perusal of the literature of the day, and the society of so judicious a chaperone as Mrs. Melcombe.

“My dear,” he said, “you are wise beyond your years.”

“I am nearly twenty, papa,” replied Laura, as, with a smile and a kiss on his forehead, she extri-

cated herself from his fond embrace, and bidding him "Good-night," left the room.

"She is a miracle!" he exclaimed. "There'll be a tremendous row, but I don't care. Then," he continued, "Mildown is done out of the savings; but the girl, what a father she must have had, for her poor mother was a fool! I must say she has quite astonished me."

And with these reflections Mr. Elvey went to bed.

CHAPTER XII.

“Now, Frank, mind as you’re in good time, and don’t be a-dawdlin’ along the streets, and never stop of errands, as nothink ain’t more aggrawatin’ for a boy to do when you’re a-waitin’ for anythink in a hurry; not as I think you will; and as to a-answerin’ pert, or anythink like that, I’m sure it’s the last of your thoughts, as the sayin’ is; so now be off, for there’s nine a-strikin’, and he don’t want you before ten, as ain’t arf an ’our from door to door, Tozer says, as ’ave got your lunch, and shall expect you by five anxious; so you’ll be in good time, and hopes you’ll find a friend, as ’ave always got me and Tozer at your back, as won’t never stand by and see you put upon.”

It was a memorable morning that on which

Mrs. Tozer delivered the foregoing address to Frank, as she was equipping him in a cape and comforter, preparatory to his starting in a London fog, to enter upon a new career in life as office-boy to one Mr. Crocket, who carried on some business at offices in the neighbourhood of Holborn.

It is three years since we parted with the lad at the death of Mrs. Welbyn, after which event he had made his home with Mrs. Tozer, and had been, as that good woman stated, as contented as a lamb at play, till within the last six months, as a change had seemed to come over the boy; not as ever he give trouble, not even when we was moving, nor yet showed no temper; and as to a short anser, or a bangin' of a door arter 'im, why he wouldn't 'ave thought no more of doin' it than of flyin', as was our Joe's ways of showin' temper when put out about anythink; but as to Frank, he 'ad his feelin's, no doubt, but never showed 'em, except it might be the colour a-risin' in his face, as I likes to see, 'cos I can't abear a cold-blooded, sulky disposition, as is Tom Barnes all over. But, as I were

a-sayin', somethink did ought to be done for to rouse that boy, as frets inward over somethink, Tozer, as ain't to be got to the bottom on, and will tell on his 'ealth."

"I wish we could get him into a good school," replied Tozer, "but I don't see how it's to be managed; not that I'm afraid of that boy goin' wrong, mother, though I think you're right, he do want rousing."

Not only Mrs. Tozer, but all Frank's friends had observed the change in the lad, for the last three years of his life, during which time he had appeared to become more unsettled, and, as Mrs. Tozer observed, "with his 'ead full of all manner."

This remark was elicited by the way in which Frank had of late cross-questioned his benefactress as to the expense of his schooling and maintenance, which he had some vague notion was defrayed by money which his mother had left behind; for, having been partly informed on the subject of her death by 'Melia Ann, in days gone by, he by degrees got further particulars from Mrs. Tozer, and from the

time of obtaining them he was what she called "a changed boy, a-readin' and a-ritin' more than ever, and a doin' of 'is paintin's that beautiful, as in my opinion did ought to be put to a grainer, or some of them fancy lines."

In this view of the boy's future she was stoutly opposed by her husband, who was better calculated to judge of Frank's intellectual powers than his wife.

Indeed so struck was he by the boy's intelligence, that he was seriously debating whether he couldn't get him a chance at some public school, where he knew educational advantages could be obtained, though he was ignorant of the steps necessary to be taken in order to procure them.

It was when Frank had attained the age of fourteen that he took his friend Tozer somewhat aback, in the course of a stroll they were taking one Sunday evening at the close of summer, by asking whether he could not get him some employment.

"What would you like to be?" inquired Tozer.

"It is no use my saying what I'd like to be,"

replied the boy, "because I can't choose ; but," he added quietly, as though afraid of giving pain by his answer, "I shouldn't like to go into a shop—I'd rather be an office-boy, like young Jarvis over the way."

"Well, my boy, I'll look out for you," said Tozer, "though I'd rather you went to school ; but don't see how it is to be managed."

Some weeks after this conversation, an opening presented itself for the boy, through Mrs. Tozer's relative, young Padwick, a law stationer, who recommended Frank to the situation, upon the duties of which he was now about to enter.

"And glad I am as he's got it," observed Mrs. Tozer, "though it is only six shillings a week, as I'm sure neither me nor Tozer will touch a penny on, only so far as 'll put that boy's mind at ease, as is always a-dwellin' on being a burden to us, as I'm sure he's welcome to, as is a fine nature and wouldn't stoop to tell a lie, as is the character as 'is school-master gave 'im ; but is always a-thinkin' about somethin', even when he's a-sittin', a-paintin' of a

evenin' as quiet as any dormouse, and then takes and reads out loud about Lady Jane Grey and Mary Queen of Scots, as makes me seem to know both of 'em, as if they was a-walkin' about with their 'eads cut off; and should be sorry to be with that old 'Arry, nor yet be Queen Lizzbeth as done it, though in course Lady Jane Grey 'ad'nt no busyness to go a-takin' off the crown as didn't belong to 'er, 'cos we all knows as the receiver is wuss than the thief; and as to 'er bustin' into tears and a-faintin' away over it, she should 'ave put 'er foot down firm and said 'No,' once for all; the same as Jane Eadley did when young Smethers went down on 'is knees and made 'er a offer, though ingaged to the plumber's dorter oppersite, as Jane were up to his baseness, and gave 'im 'is congo as the French says; and it certingly would be a pity to see that boy a errand-boy, with all his readin' as he sends me off to sleep with, whenever he gets a chance of ketching me on the quiet of a arternoon; not as I will let 'im read by firelight thro' it bein' that bad for the eyes, and shall take somethink to eat with him, and not

wait till he comes 'ome of a evenin', with nothink but a biscuit, as is I considers wot brought on that white swellin' with young Jarvis, not as ever he were strong arter the scarlet fever, as will often settle in the glands."

It was on receiving his appointment that Frank, at the opening of our chapter, was started off by his kind friend, with a comfortable outfit, and, as she observed, "as stout a pair of bluchers as ever any prince might wear, with wusted comforter, and a pair of gloves, and sixpence in 'is pocket, as nobody didn't ought to be without for fear of a accident, as will 'appen in the best-regilated fam'lies. Not as he's a-going into the fam'ly, thro' 'is being a single man I understands and lives at Islington."

Frank had at first objected to the expense of his new clothes, but on having the state of his finances explained to him, consented to the expenditure.

Good Mrs. Welbyn had, by Tozer's direction, taken another fifty pounds of the money entrusted by Frank's mother to Mrs. Tozer; and about twenty pounds a year had been taken for his schooling and

maintenance during the two years that he had resided with Tozer; and this was only done to satisfy the lad, for though far from wealthy, Tozer had been in good paying employment on the railway, with an increasing salary, and, as his worthy wife observed, "'avin all their own took care on, could well afford for to 'elp a orfin."

The office to which Frank bent his steps was on the ground-floor of a dingy house, in a dull street off Holborn, where he arrived about half-past nine.

Having been told to be punctual to ten o'clock, he resolved not to ring for admission till the appointed hour, and so filled up the interval with a stroll through the neighbourhood, and expanded his ideas by a survey of the things exposed for sale in Tottenham Court Road, which gave him a faint notion of the requirements in the way of furniture of those who are about to marry.

Frank did not altogether relish the employment he was about to enter upon, and in fact had at one time seriously thought he would like to go to sea, but was deterred therefrom mainly by what he

heard of the companions he would encounter on board a ship.

Not that he shrank from hardships, or was a milksop, but, as Mrs. Tozer observed of him, "he wasn't a boy to stoop to no insults, nor yet put up with the dirt and filth of a wessel, down to a-cleanin' the pigs," particulars of which he had heard, together with many other interesting details and accounts of what pertains to the entrance on a seafaring life, from Mrs. Tozer, who was averse to his adopting such a career, and especially strong in giving her experiences of boys who had given trouble at home, and found the tables turned when they went abroad—the heroes of her anecdotes being always rather in the character of warnings than examples.

As the clock was striking ten, Frank was at the office-door again, and in less than a minute after that a little pale-faced man, dressed in black, with an odd-shaped hat, came up, and, in answer to Frank's inquiries, announced himself to be Mr. Crocket.

"What do you want?" he inquired.

"I'm the lad you said you'd give a trial, sir."

"Oh! ah! yes!" replied the pale-faced man, as he opened the door with a latch-key and led the way into a front room, the shutters of which were closed, but which, at the desire of his employer, Frank proceeded to open, whilst that individual unlocked the door of an adjoining room, the shutters of which he opened, and seating himself at a table, began to read some letters he had taken from the letter-box.

Having called Frank in, he desired him to light the fire.

"I'm not here very much," he said; "and when I am out you can sit in this room, and won't require a fire in the outer office, except on Saturday, when I'm here nearly all day. You know you're to come at ten o'clock and leave at four. The old woman will let you in, and before you leave in the evening pull the bell twice, to let Mrs. Grump know you're going, and give her the key, and shut the street-door after you quietly. You won't have

much work. Have you got anything to do for yourself?"

"No, sir," answered Frank.

"Copy this then," replied Mr. Crocket, handing him what looked like a marvellous piece of penmanship to Frank.

"I can't write as well as this, sir," he observed, in a deprecatory tone.

"I daresay not," was the reply; "do your best."

So saying, Mr. Crocket gave him a bottle of ink, pens, and paper, and pointed to a desk in the front room, where Frank soon seated himself, and prepared to commence his task.

"You'd better light your fire before you begin," said Mr. Crocket, adding, as he shut his door, "as I'm not going out yet."

Frank adopted the suggestion, and was soon deeply absorbed in his literary labours, which nothing occurred to interrupt except an occasional summons to attend to the next room fire.

Frank was so fully employed that he even

neglected the calls of hunger, and his bread and cheese remained unconsumed till about two o'clock, when Mr. Crocket called him to bring his work.

With no slight degree of nervousness he handed in his copy and waited for some remark, but he got none.

The old gentleman put the papers in a drawer, which he locked, proceeding thereafter to envelope himself in his coat and take himself off, saying: "You won't have much to do, so you had better bring something to employ yourself with. I don't know when I shall be here to-morrow, but expect me any time from ten till four."

Frank, when left to himself, sat down near the fire and began thinking, for it was now too dark to do anything else; and waiting till the clock struck four, raked out the remains of the fire and rang the bell for Mrs. Grump, as he had been directed.

"You needn't ring so hard," said a squeaky tremulous voice, "I can hear."

Frank turned and beheld a little shrivelled old woman coming downstairs, who held out a claw-like

hand for the key, and then, holding the door open, said, "I'll shut it."

"Are you Mrs. Grump, please?" asked Frank.

"Yes, I am Mrs. Grump; and don't you bang this door never, for she's very sensible."

"Very well," said Frank, wondering *who* was sensible.

"Ring gentle in the morning," continued the old woman, closing the door, as Frank turned away with a light heart to return to his home, now in the neighbourhood of Edgware Road.

CHAPTER XIII.

A good fire and a kindly welcome awaited him there, and as he sat at his tea he gave his friends so vivid an account of the office and all that had occurred during the day, that no one who had witnessed those remarkably commonplace events could have imagined that so interesting a communication could have been made respecting them.

Yet the boy did not exaggerate, but only exercised his descriptive powers as to all that he had seen and heard.

"Didn't he say nothing to your writing, as is downright copper-plate?" asked Mrs. Tozer.

"No, he only said 'That'll do.' I'm not afraid of him," continued the boy; "but he's got a dreadful frown when he's thinking."

“Ah! I daresay,” observed Mrs. Tozer. “Some has; for I well remember a party as I know’d intimate, as used to be that took up in his thoughts, as he’d look you thro’ and thro’; and as I always said, he’s somethink on his mind, as proved to be the fact, for he married a very nice young girl, and just after his first was born, the Bow Street officers burst in the door of a room as used to be before the new police come in, as wore red westcotes, as he wouldn’t never allow no one to look into, and there found all the tools as was brought home to him, bein’ one of a gang of coiners, and my own mother see him tried at the Old Bailey, and the shrieks as went thro’ her very head when that poor young woman see the black cap, and the infant had convulsions to her dying day, as did not ought to have been allowed to be there, as the judge said in ordering her to be carried out; which the sentence never were, for he was only transported to Botany Bay, all thro’ Queen Charlotte, and lived to be a magistracy himself over there; and she a living to ride in her own carriage, as is a thing not

to be looked for Newgate to lead to, as I should consider a dreadful eyesore, even if it was to be made queen upon the throne."

"How you are a-clacking on, mother, surely," observed Tozer, who sat puffing away at his pipe. "Haven't you got nothing more than bread and butter for that boy?" he said, when Frank had gone to get his drawing.

"Well, that I've not till supper, as will be ready by the time as the beer is round, and a nice supper, too, as I know you'll relish; a bit of loin of pork, as will be cold for you and 'im to take with you to-morrow, as I didn't have nothing for him but a bit of bread and cheese to-day, and did ought to have got himself half a pint of porter through growing so fast, as he seems to shoot up afore your eyes, and was wexed with myself for not 'avin' cold meat in the house, through so many a-coming in to supper last night, and reg'lar eat me out of 'ouse and 'ome as the sayin' is, though glad to see my own flesh and blood in course, though I must say that boy of Jane's eats more than I'd let any

child of mine eat at a meal, for it quite gives me a turn to see his eyes a glistening as he gloats over the wittles, and so different to Frank, as always will say as he've 'ad enuf if there's short commons, and that partickler never to take the largest bit, nor yet the last, as is 'ow I like to see young boys and girls go on at meals, and not grab at everythink like a alligator, as don't know no better, but looks out for 'isself, as is natur's fust law, 'we all know, but looks werry 'oggish in Christshuns ; and that's why everyone do take to that boy, as I always did from the fust ; not as he must set too much over that drorin' of a evenin', partickler as he can take it to the office ; and wot do you think of evenin' school for 'im ? ”

“ Why he shall go three times a week,” said Tozer, “ and then he can dror and read the other evenin's, as will fill up 'is time ; and I must say I do like to hear him.”

“ And that you do,” replied his helpmate, “ for I never even see you nod when he's a-reading, as is more than I can say.”

For many weeks did Frank attend Mr. Crocket's

office, without being called on to discharge any duties more important than opening the doors and shutters and attending to the fire.

His employer came punctually at ten, left in the middle of the day, and usually looked in again just before four, on his way home.

Several people came, as though by appointment, to see Mr. Crocket, and were closeted with him; the most frequent visitors being shabby-genteel and somewhat cadaverous-looking men, who never gave their names; and if Mr. Crocket happened to be out would say, "Tell him the gentleman from the other end of town called."

So went on Frank, receiving daily from Mrs. Grump a caution about shutting the door quietly, and by degrees won the good opinion of his employer by his punctuality and diligence, and above all by his marvellous reticence; for on several occasions visitors to Mr. Crocket, whilst waiting for that gentleman's arrival, would enter into conversation with the lad, but endeavoured in vain to elicit from him anything respecting his employer.

Frank strongly suspected, from what he heard

and saw, that Mr. Crocket was a money-lender, but he never said a word on the subject to a creature, for he was sure that Mr. Crocket desired his affairs to be kept in the dark, and he more than once expressed his satisfaction at the discretion with which Frank had answered questions put to him by clients.

Little occurred of any interest in the lad's career during the next two years, except that he grew to a tall, elegant-looking youth, preserving his good looks during that period of boyhood when the lords of creation do not usually present a very attractive appearance.

He had continued to attend Mr. Crocket's office, and had worked hard, not so much in that gentleman's service, the duties of which were light, as in his own ; for he had devoted his time not only to drawing, but to studying Latin and French, for both of which languages he had displayed great aptitude, and for his progress in which he had been mainly indebted to a casual acquaintance made at a book-stall, about the precincts of which he was wont to hover.

One book that lay there, when first he pored over its treasures, was the object of his earnest desire to possess.

It was a Latin grammar, but the price was eighteenpence, a sum beyond his power to disburse; for, aware of his dependence on his kind friends, Frank regularly handed to Mrs. Tozer his weekly stipend, for though it had been increased within the last six months to eight shillings, yet was he most scrupulous as to ever asking for any of it, sensible of its inadequacy to repay the expense, Tozer absolutely refusing for his maintenance to disturb the money in the savings bank.

"I'm sure we never shan't touch a farthing on it," said Mrs. Tozer; "tho' his boots, as he won't rest if I don't promise as he shall pay for, eats into it pretty deep, and I must say I takes a pride in seein' him dressed that neat for his chapel on Sunday."

Under these circumstances Frank never hinted at wishing to purchase the Latin grammar, though he often took it up and examined it.

"You seem to hanker arter that book a deal, for I've 'ad my eye on you; and to tell you the truth

thought at first as you was a light-fingered party," said the old bookstall-keeper to him one evening, when for about the twentieth time during one week Frank had taken up the coveted volume.

The old man spoke with a good-natured expression which reassured the lad, who felt not a little confused at being thus accosted, conscious that for many weeks, morning and evening, he had lingered about the bookstall in a way calculated to excite suspicion.

"I should like to have it," said the boy, "but it is too dear."

"Too dear? Why it's scarcely soiled, and never been dog-eared by any idle young dogs. Ah, it's a bad sign when a boy uses his books badly. How much can you give?"

"I've only threepence," answered Frank, blushing very deeply.

"I can't take threepence for it," said the old man; "but I tell you what I will do. Give me threepence, and if you can show the book to me without a dog's-ear this day month, you shall have

it for ninepence more, and pay me a penny a week."

Gladly did Frank accept the offer, feeling he could pay a penny a week and possess himself of his treasure.

"Now, mind, if you don't show it me quite clean, I shall have the whole price for it," said the old man, as the boy, thanking him, took the book and turned away.

A Latin grammar without a master is not altogether an easy step on the ladder of learning for a lad of fourteen to mount, and Frank decidedly felt no small difficulty in making way with it.

At last a bright thought struck him; he would ask the priest at the chapel he attended to read it over to him.

He hesitated not a little, as he knew the kind man so very slightly, and imagined his time to be occupied fully; but he made a bold attempt, which was, as is the case with most bold attempts, crowned with success, for M. l'Abbé Pitrou at once consented to help him.

He was a lively, charming-mannered ecclesiastic,

one of the old school of French divines, beloved and respected by all who knew him, whether of his own creed or not.

M. l'Abbé had not very heavy duty at the chapel, and having been struck by Frank's appearance and manner, had often felt inclined to make inquiries respecting him.

He was therefore not a little pleased to have the opportunity of assisting one in whom he felt no small interest.

Both master and pupil worked away with a right good will; Frank most assiduously devoted himself to his studies, and was not a little pleased to get, on such easy terms, instruction, not only in Latin, but in French and Italian, from the kind priest, who was delighted at the ability the lad displayed in acquiring foreign languages.

It is almost needless to say that Frank got his Latin grammar for one shilling, and so pleased was his old friend at the bookstall at the neatness with which he had kept the volume, that he lent him several others of an educational character.

"Now, Frank, do go to bed, that's a good boy,"

exclaimed Mrs. Tozer one night, on seeing the lad resume his book after supper, "I'm sure you've read enough for one night; why you'll addle your brains, that you will, and grow out, or somethink, as often comes from reading I've 'eard say, as will be up betimes in the morning reading agin. I can't think where the boy puts it all to, for my part," she continued, when Frank had retired, "whatever can he want with them forrin books?"

"Why to learn from, to be sure," said Tozer, shaking the ashes from his pipe; "and a good thing too."

"Well, I daresay it is," said his wife, "but I don't half fancy it; and then he gets so thin, and his eyes get bigger and bigger every day, and looks you thro' and thro' with that glare if you speaks to him sudden, as quite gives me a turn. I hope that priest ain't a-teaching him none of their dark ways."

"What rubbish are you running your skull agin now?" asked Tozer.

"Ah! that's always your ways, that is, to shut anyone up in a corner; and I'm sure I don't know

nothink about priests, only a very nice lady as called in friendly last week, and offered to read to me while I was at work, said she was once a worldling 'erself, but was now a renewed character. She told me things about them Catherlics as made my blood ran cold, thro' a-thinking about Frank, as she said was proved in scripture by Pilgrim's Progress, to be the great beast, and other wild characters, as they did ought to be ashamed of themselves for to encourage."

"I tell you what it is, Mrs. Tozer," said her spouse, "if I comes in and catches any of your tract-readers here, I'll pretty soon start 'em. Let them as like the Catholics follow them, and them as don't go their ways, is what I says, and I won't have none of your canting humbugs here, as is often known to neglect their own families and homes, a idling away their time looking after other folks' affairs on pints as they knows nothink about, and ain't no business of theirs. Frank's a good boy," he continued, "and goes to his chapel, where I'm sure he's taught his duty, and that's all we've got to do with him, as is what I considers keeping faith

with the dead. So don't you let me find none of them tracts about, a-insulting of his feelings, or I'll pretty soon light the fire with 'em."

So saying Mr. Tozer went up to bed.

"I daresay he's right," thought Mrs. Tozer, as she raked out the fire, and put a bundle of wood on the hob to be dry for lighting it the more easily in the morning; "but I must say as them Catherlics do give me a turn; but I'm sure a better boy than Frank never stood in shoe-leather;" and this reflection brought to her mind that he needed some addition to his stock of that article, and sent her to bed musing on the instability of all things, high lows included.

Although of too sensitive and refined a nature to be capable of any indelicate curiosity on the subject, the worthy Abbé had learnt from Frank some of the particulars of his birth, and had at his request made some inquiries at the Catholic chapel in Stepney respecting the attendant circumstances of it.

He had found a memorandum of the child's baptism and the mother's death, but the description

of both was vague and the names quite unintelligible.

The priest then in charge of the mission had left, but it was evident from the writing that a foreigner had attended the dying lady, and there was a vague tradition of the sacristan that he had heard of a priest-visitor, who only stopped one night, attending the sick call on account of its great urgency, in the absence of the regular priest.

This visitor was a foreign ecclesiastic who was merely passing through town, and left London the day after he had attended the last moments of Frank's mother.

It would seem, from the vague record of the call, that he must have been unable to elicit from the dying person either her name or that of her husband; she probably being in much too exhausted a condition to enter into any conversation, and barely able to answer what was essential to be known for her soul's welfare.

Under these circumstances Frank's birth had not been a subject of investigation to the then resident priest long since departed.

The kind Abbé now felt rather inclined to drop the subject, the investigation of it being likely to cause the boy pain, and to be unattended by any possible good to him, being derived as it would be from such very uncertain and meagre sources.

More than once the Abbé had made it his business to pay a visit to Mrs. Tozer, whom he regarded with respect as the benefactress of the orphan, but was utterly mystified by her language and volubility.

He did not understand one-third of her utterances, in spite of her speaking in the loudest key and with a broken English accent, in which she assured him she had been used to converse with foreigners all her life; adding that "she 'ad knowed 'em good Christshuns for all that, as far as the eye could reach, and did all ought to do our best, and no call to be afear'd.

"But as to that boy, sir," she continued, "all as I can say is that it's my opinion as he's a angel, and only wish as my boy were not 'prenticed so far off, as I should like 'im to come 'ome once a week, if only for the example; and 'owever he can

manage to wear a shirt a week, and keep it that clean, as is all owin' to 'im not bein' able for to bear me to 'ave no trouble, and were quite put out in comin' home that day when quite a child with the sick 'eadache, and findin' me with his shirt at the wash-tub."

Thus it was that what with one help and another Frank got through his two years, and found a really good friend in old Mr. Crocket, who was especially pleased at the boy's improvement in writing as well as in his general appearance and behaviour.

His approbation took a practical turn, for on discovering Frank's talent as an artist, he made him attend an evening drawing school twice a week, for which he undertook to pay the fees; a very unusual proceeding for a man of Mr. Crocket's disposition, for he was fond of his money and had a contempt for art.

"That boy'll make friends through life," observed Mrs. Tozer to her husband. "Everyone 'ave took to him from the month uppermost, I may say; and he certingly have got a way with 'im as checks anyone as is a-going to be rude, the same as he give

it them young Labins, as is only Jews arter all, as checked me for tellin' 'em not to worrit our cat. So Frank up and says to 'em, 'If ever you dares to touch the cat, or insult this good lady again, I'll give you a good lickin';' and he'd 'ave done it, too, for he smacked the baker boy's 'ead as shoved in between me and the wall, and would 'ave thrusted me nearly into the mud, only Frank give 'im that spin round as sent him flyin' back'ards, basket and all, and when he come up to show fight got more than he bargained for, though I did part 'em with my umbrella, and told Frank it were beneath him to knock a baker's boy like that down, and shouldn't 'ave thought as he'd 'ave 'ad the strength, through growing so fast; but 'ave got a muscle in 'is arm as is as 'ard as the pump-'andle, and no more afraid than old Stretcher's bulldog, as would tackle a steam-ingin, I do believe, and sometimes thinks I should like to know who 'is real father were, as must 'ave been somethink out of the common I'm sure, for that boy's made like a prince from top to toe, with a hartch to 'is instep as you can see daylight under it, when a-standin' in 'is socks,

as is always considered a sign of 'igh breed, even in a 'orse, as they can tell by their ankles, as they bandages up, and always looks in their mouths for to tell their ages; and as to growin', he does it that fast, jest for all the world like Mrs. Malchin's puppy, as were the Newfoundling breed, and seemed to shoot up like a arrer, as the sayin' is, under your nose, as he stood a-gnawin' of 'is paunch, as broke 'is chain through bein' that strong, and bolted over the wall and attacked old Grimley's pigs, as lived three doors off from us in the Bow Road, as he could smell all that way, through 'avin' that fine scent in 'is nose, the same as I 'ad myself when a-settin' with the back-parlour winder open, for the sake of a breath of air of a summer evenin' as is always refreshin' when the weather's that sultry, as is why parties likes livin' in the country, as is always full of them fresh smells, as must do you good arter bein' that stived up in town, though for my part I likes London best, with all its faults, as you can get a 'bus to all parts easy, as in a general way ain't nothink wus than gaspipes a-leakin', or the shores a-wantin' flushin', as can't

be so werry bad for the 'ealth arter all, or we must 'ave been all dead and buried long ago. But as I was a-sayin', that boy'll be sure to get on somehow or other; not as he'll ever be one as'll get on by 'ook or by crook, as the sayin' is, through bein' a deal too straightfor'ard for that; and as to a-curryin' favour, he never won't, but act the gentleman all over, like our cat, as you can trust the milk-jug close agin his werry nose, and won't never even smell anythink as is put in the fender to keep warm, though it might be tripe, as he dotes on in gen'ral; and might be trusted with untold bones if they was put on a clean dish on the dresser, as a many Christshuns might take a lesson from, though he is only a cat, poor thing, as didn't make 'isself any more than the rest on us; but if that boy don't do 'isself credit, and other people too, well then my name ain't Matilda Tozer, that's all as I've got to say, if it was my last words."

END OF VOL. I.





