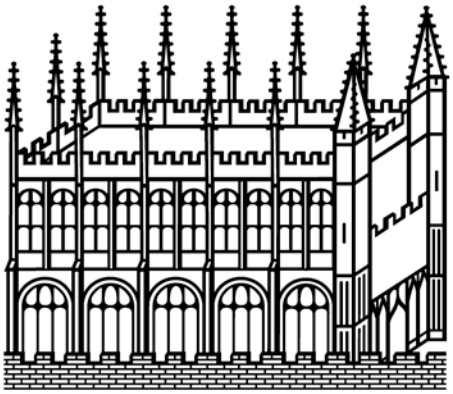

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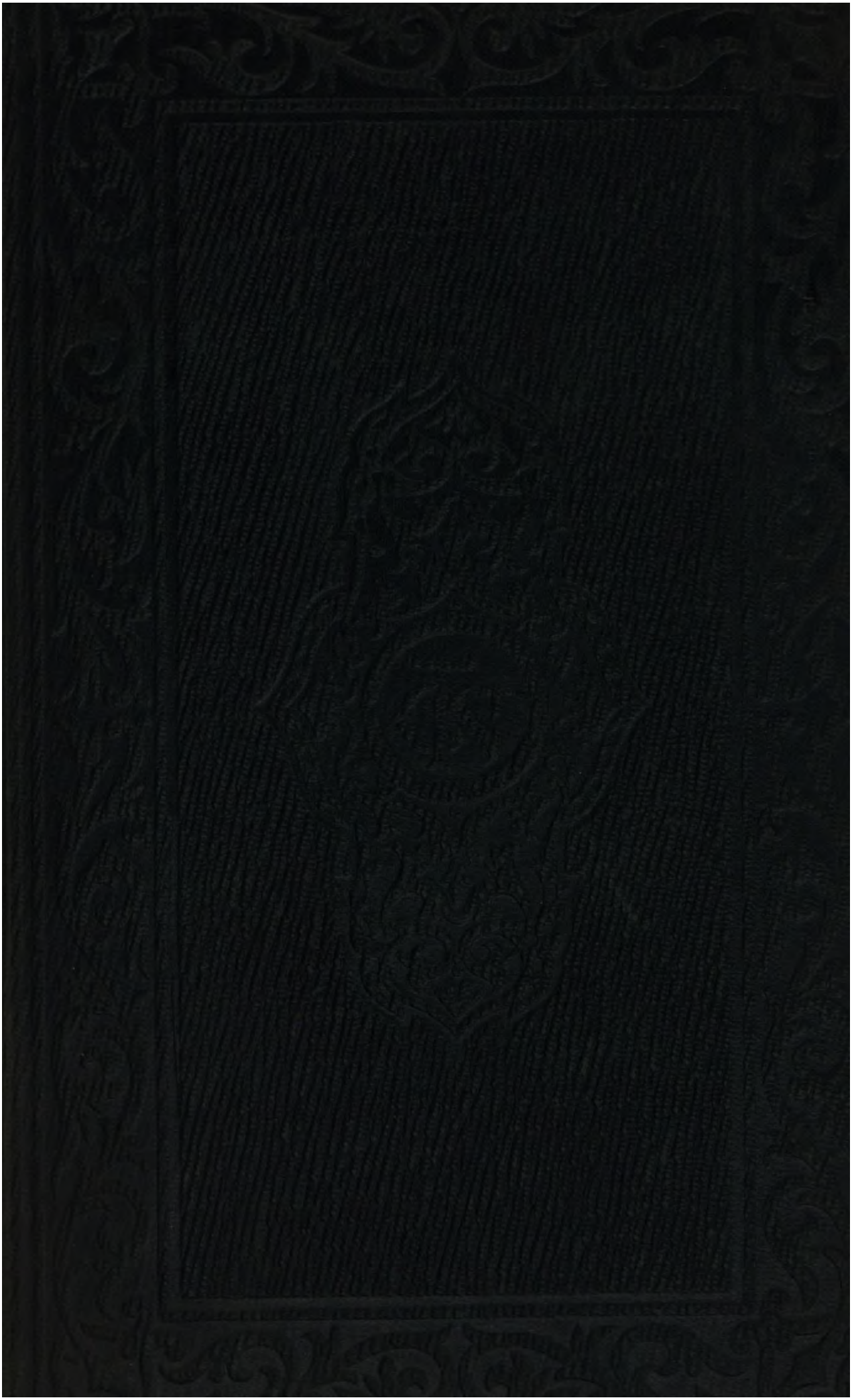

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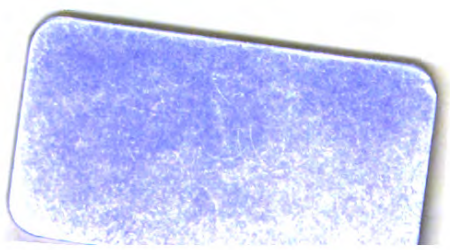

EBB AND FLOW.

A NOVEL.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

"A little more than kin and less than kind."

HAMLET.

VOL. I.

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TO

DANIEL GOOCH, ESQ.,

WHOSE EMINENT GENIUS IN HIS PROFESSION IS EQUALLED

BY THE SKILL AND IMPARTIALITY WITH WHICH

HE RULES HIS EXTENSIVE DEPARTMENT OF THE NOBLEST

RAILWAY IN THE WORLD.

EBB AND FLOW.

CHAPTER I.

ABOUT half a mile from the Chalkingdon Road Station, on the Great Western Railway, is Royal Lodge, the seat, at the date when this narrative commences, of John Elmsley, Esquire,—to quote from the County directory. From the platform of the station it was easy to see the pretty Gothic villa bearing so dignified a title, with its red-brick stonefaced gables, slender chimneys, clean white blinds, and surrounding shrubs.

Chalkingdon is on the border of quite a wild, pastoral country, so, while on the one hand of the

station you see a well-wooded, rich, farmhouse-covered tract, on the other lie naked downs, spreading as far as the eye can reach, marked but rarely by the farm or cottage, and swelling at last into a great ridge of high land, almost deserving the name, here and there, of mountainous.

Long, winding, zigzagging roads,—and did the reader ever reflect on the character of that extraordinary word zigzag?—if, indeed, there be not two words. It has, we make bold to say, no etymology, no derivation, no kindred, and nought but itself can be its parallel; yet what a blank the English tongue would be without it, and how malevolently envious must foreigners feel, whether Rooshians, or Prooshians, or Haythens, or Turks, at the reflection that they have not such a word in the whole Babel of gibberish which they call language! Tortuous, sinuous, devious, winding, twisting, turning, serpentine, and a host of other adjectives rise to the mind, as being somewhat akin to the subject of our

eulogium; but how feeble at best, is *the* best, to express the figure we are describing. The reading of the word, the pronouncing it, call up at once, in the minds of readers, speakers, and hearers, precisely the object intended to be called up, and that is, we fancy, the highest praise a word can receive.

Long, winding, zigzag roads led here and there, over these hills, and, crossing the high ground, were lost to sight from even the loftiest spot, in the wide stretch of the monotonous "down" which lay beyond the ridge.

Royal Lodge stood on the more cultivated side of the line, and was by no means of pretensions to justify its sponsors in giving it such a title. It was simply a smart Gothic villa, with a lawn, about fifty feet broad in front, always close shaven and trim, and upon which the folding windows of the parlour opened; a flower garden to the right and left, and a larger garden for the kitchen behind. In the rear of this again were a couple of small paddocks, where

were kept a stout little horse, two cows and a pet lamb. These, with more ducks, geese, and fowls, than were convenient to count, a terrier, and a house dog, formed the live stock of John Elmsley, Esq.

There was that air about the villa which betokened its owner well to do; the paint was always fresh, the blinds always white, the windows always clean, the lawn and gardens scrupulously kept, while not a twig of the tall, thick hedge was awry or straggling. These tokens seldom deceive, and assuredly they did not in this instance.

John Elmsley was a retired tradesman from London; struck by the prettiness of the house, (then known by the name of "Gubbins's Folly," in honour of the builder, who was popularly supposed to be mad, to build such a house in such a place), he had, when visiting Chalkingdon upon business, ascertained its price, and finally bought it. A name was extemporised by the agent who transacted the business, he declaring, with

the utmost gravity, that the house was called "Royal Lodge;" and accordingly "Royal" was painted on the one side, "Lodge" on the other, of the green, swing, five-barred, wooden gate, which opened upon the drive—for there was a drive, of course, albeit of no great extent.

It was when Phœbus was sinking in the west, at the close of a scorching July day, that Mr. Elmsley came out upon the dusty road, turned towards the station, and, sauntering slowly along on the shady side of the way, soon reached the Railway Arms, kept by Nathaniel Hackley, who was not only licensed to retail wines, spirituous liquors, rich compounds, beer, and tobacco; but had, moreover, neat flys, post and saddle horses to let.

This information in no way concerns the reader, but is gratuitously and generously furnished, being apropos of Mr. Elmsley, who paused opposite the Railway Arms—a pictorial representation was not given—and seemed to be attentively reading all this information concern-

ing Nathaniel Hackley; but a dubious expression on his face told that in reality he was debating whether to go in or not.

"Fine afternoon, sir!" exclaimed a voice from the tavern door; "hope you're pretty well, sir, won't you come in and rest yourself?"

The speaker was the host, a shrewd, good-humoured-looking, sunburnt man, in cloth leggings, straw hat, and smock frock; yet there was little of the rustic in his appearance, but more rather of the sportsman, which impression was strengthened by his carrying a gun in his hand, which he seemed to have been cleaning.

"I think I have a little time to spare," returned Mr. Elmsley, "so will sit down for a few minutes."

As he had fully half an hour to spare before the arrival of the train he had come out to meet, it seemed, indeed, as though he had intended some such halt; at any rate he was soon in the shady, cool parlour, with a bottle of pale ale un-

corked before him, and looking out, through a screen of geraniums and fuschias, upon the hot, dry road; the silent station with its paint blistered by the sun, which had also melted the knots of tar upon the adjacent palings; the half dozen cottages for the porters hard by; and the railway itself with its shining metals, like endless ribands, and its new raw looking paths, and its beds of flint and gravel.

Mr. Elmsley was a man of some sixty years of age, under the middle size, stout and pursy in figure, fleshy face, tinged here and there by something stronger than water, while his dark hair was getting thin and grey. He was dressed in black, but had the air of the tradesman completely, and his features, though strongly marked with acuteness and good temper, were yet of a stamp that are never so thoroughly in keeping, as when behind a counter.

"Coming to meet the train, sir?" enquired the landlord, who loitered in the room, which was indeed his private one.

"Yes," returned his guest, "I expect a friend from London; Mr. Smith, in fact; an acquaintance of yours also, I may almost say, Nat"

"Ah, to be sure!" said the landlord, with a smile, "Miss Aggy's beau; well, he's a very nice gentleman, though quiet enough. I suppose we shall be having a wedding at the Lodge soon, sir?"

"Well, it's not impossible," Elmsley said, "both the young ones are anxious, and I am willing."

"I do hope your young ladies will be happy, sir," pursued the landlord after a pause, "for better and kinder young ladies there ain't in Berks nor Wilts; that's my opinion, and stick to it I will. As for our county families, sir, there ain't one of them as can hold up their heads by the side of you, though there's no nonsense about you neither."

"I fancy I am not a humbug," laughed Elmsley, "but your county families, as you call them, are humbugs. They held up their heads pretty

stiffly when I first came down here; but I think I have taught them a lesson or two."

"Ha! ha! ha! we know all about Sir Roger and Lady Hawberry!" exclaimed Hackley, "they can't get over us Londoners, sir. I like the country in summer, because of the sporting and the profits—of course I mean summer and autumn —but I don't much like the people, sir, and, as many a time I've said, if you hadn't took the Lodge, I'd never have staid here; but there's the signal for the train. Oh, I forgot to tell you Mr. Elmsley, but young master Fielding looked in this afternoon. He was on that pretty sorrel nag of his, and said he should call at the Lodge to-night."

"What, Edgar! I am glad of that," said Elmsley, "for he is a lad after my own heart."

"He's a fine young fellow, I know, and Miss Julia has got the smartest young gent in the county," returned Hackley, "but for all that, sir, give me Mr. Smith."

"Yes, yes," smiled Mr. Elmsley, "he is a

Londoner; we know, Nat, we know. Edgar Fielding is not only the best looking, but the freest, most honourable young fellow in these parts. There's the train coming in. Good afternoon, Nat."

So the proprietor of Royal Lodge seized his walking stick, and, as the Railway Arms faced the station, or nearly so, was on the platform by the time the huge, glittering, screaming engine ran slowly alongside. Very few passengers got out at Chalkingdon; the first who did so was the individual Mr. Elmsley had come to meet; and the old gentleman hurried to him, and shook hands heartily.

"Glad to see you well, Jem, glad to see you well my boy; second classing it, eh? Quite right. I made my money by taking heed of the little leaks, they don't generally get noticed, and so sink the ship, while start a plank and you're all alive directly. Ha! how dy'e do, Thomas?"

This was to the engine driver, for Mr. Elmsley

finding, after the first few weeks at Royal Lodge, the ennui which so often pervades a country life, stealing quickly upon him, had made energetic efforts to repel the same, and, as one means, had cultivated the acquaintance of every soul he came across upon the railway. Thomas was a tall broad shouldered man, grimed with dust and smoke, yet with a comical, good tempered face, a small, round, merry face it was, in spite of coal dust, or oil,or smoke: he kept nodding and smiling at the speaker, rubbing his hands meanwhile upon that lump of waste cotton so inseparable from the driver or fireman, and without a preliminary shampoo from which none of the class can do anything. Thomas, doubtless, was about to hazard a remark upon the weather, but being slow of speech, the tremulous whistle of the guard, ere he could decide upon his words, was heard, and Thomas spinning quickly round discharged a louder scream from his tame monster, then jerking a handle, a short hard puff or two came, the wheels moved, and the long dark mass

answering to the tug, the engine, driver, train and all, rolled slowly from the Chalkingdon Road station, Thomas turning to give a farewell nod, a farewell smile, and a harder rub with the waste at his black hands.

"As for your luggage," resumed Elmsley, "our man Sam will come up for it, for I have walked up from the Lodge, as I hate a fuss with the chaise for so short a distance; he can come up for it, and then,—Hallo! why William!"

As Mr. Elmsley turned he confronted an individual who had left the little group of travellers that was wrangling over trunks and bandboxes, and had advanced slowly towards the two gentlemen. He was attired in black, a suit of black in style pertaining to the clerical was his, he wore a smooth white tie round his neck, his shirt front was smoother, and white were his studs; he had a full face, sandy whiskers, and wavy brown hair, showing here and there a strand of grey. Although taller and younger than Mr. Elmsley, and with a very different air,

there was something about his figure, his full lips and deep "jowl," which prepared you to hear him reply,

"Yes, brother; I have taken you a little by surprise, but I trust I am not intruding."

"Intrusion be bothered," exclaimed John Elmsley, providentially arresting himself upon the uttermost verge and brink of a precipice of swearing, down which he was about to topple. "You know you can't come too often to Royal Lodge. You know Mr. Smith, of course, Mr. James Smith, of Oxford Street; ah, I thought so."

The clerical looking gentleman, for he was not a clergyman, smiled faintly in token of knowing the person referred to, and slightly lifted his hat. In everything he did there was an absence of his brother's heartiness and bluntness; he seemed to have retained the coarser characteristics of John, without his bluff kindness, and to have kept the former down by grafting a sleek, stealthy, subdued manner upon them.

"Now come along," cried the elder Mr. Elms-

ley, "since you have so luckily popped down, we'll have a social evening; Mr. Fielding too is likely to be with us I find."

"Very well, John," returned his brother, "I shall be happy to see more of Mr. Fielding, but I must stay for a few minutes to write a letter, which the station master has kindly promised to forward."

"Well, we will wait then," said Elmsley.

"Oh dear me no," exclaimed the other, "not by any means. I would prefer your taking Mr. Smith on without delay. I will follow almost directly."

"How you please," was the rejoinder, and as Mr. William entered the station the others left it, and walked slowly in the direction of Royal Lodge.

"You have not seen much of my brother, Smith," began Mr. Elmsley, "we are very different persons you will find."

"I think I can see that already," returned the young Londoner, "and have done so ever since I knew him."

"Ah; of course," said the elder gentleman, "you see I was pushed out into the world very early, just a common apprentice, nothing more, with little education to boast of, could just read and write you know; now William was the youngest of our family, in fact he is fifteen years younger than me, and though four others came between, yet they all died. Naturally enough William was the favourite; I was a plain plodding fellow too, while he had all sorts of cleverness; then again, the old folks had mended their position by the time he became a youth, so nothing would do but that Willy must be a scholar, and a scholar accordingly he is. He is a M.A. or a B.A. or something, because he went to College; bless you, what he knows is tremendous, but it don't pay."

"Oh, indeed," said Smith, "I am sorry for that."

"No," continued Elmsley, "he's a private tutor, and has got a little connexion in London at present; but lor, Mr. Smith, the pull and the

struggle it is for him to keep up a first rate sort of appearance is surprising."

"I have no doubt of it," chimed in James, finding his companion paused.

"Perfectly surprising," Elmsley went on, "only that he is a bachelor, and that I can luckily help him a bit now and then, he could not make both ends meet. Now tell us how you left all friends in London."

So talking they reached Royal Lodge, and walking straight to the door, and letting himself in with his latch key, Elmsley led the way to the sitting-room. There were the remaining members of his household, consisting of Mrs. Elmsley, a tall, thin, careworn looking woman, of retiring, almost timid habits, Miss Elmsley—Julia her name—and Miss Agnes Elmsley. Of the latter, Mr. James Smith was the accepted suitor, and he was received by her, as he was by the whole family, with a frank everyday cordiality, without the least display or affectation; and seating himself by the side of Agnes, (who

certainly had somewhat exceeded the "every day" cordiality, by springing up and undisguisedly kissing him), he was speedily a part of the little circle, and a cheerful conversation, asking for news and retailing it, being the staple, was kept up.

It was easy to see that Julia and Agnes were sisters; Julia was taller and thinner, Agnes was below the middle size, and inclined to embonpoint, but the hair of each was dark, although Julia's was darker; the features were the same in each, but Julia had more decision in hers, more fire in her eyes, for those of Agnes had a mild soft look; both were handsome, but Julia struck the stranger at once, while the pleasant plump form of Agnes seldom drew a second glance when her sister was present. Yet she was a good, pretty girl, and far better tempered than her elder sister, who, nevertheless, was a kind-hearted young woman enough.

"Why, what do you think, Mary!" exclaimed Mr. Elmsley presently, "why brother William is down here. I've seen him at the station."

Mrs. Elmsley looked almost displeased for a moment, but clearing her countenance said, "I suppose he will be here shortly then."

"Certainly," replied her husband, "so will young Fielding, he left word to that effect with Nat Hackley."

At that instant a ring at the gatebell was heard, which announced the arrival of the person in question—the first-named person we mean—the next moment he was amongst them, and with admirable attention had saluted the ladies, all three, and had inquired at some length relative to a bilious attack, under which, as often he had since remembered with sincere sorrow, his dear Mrs. Elmsley was labouring when last he saw her. That lady was not positively rude to him, but yet replied to every remark in so cold and uninviting a manner, that few could fail to notice, and noticing, few would care to persevere in addressing her; nevertheless her brother-in-law did so persevere.

As tea was not likely to be ready for a few minutes, Mr. William Elmsley proposed a stroll

around the gardens, to observe what changes and improvements had been made since his last visit. This proposition was instantly acceded to, Julia whispering hurriedly to Agnes and Smith:

"Observe now, uncle William has some favour to ask of papa, he will first get us into a good temper and then send us away."

"But suppose, Julia, we won't go?" asked Smith, with a smile.

"We will go, Sir Jem," returned the lady, "for I hate to be in his presence. Bah! look at his soft innocent face as he finds papa's stick —there is a smile! I hope he is not a favourable specimen of a Bachelor of Arts; our old clerk at the church here is worth ten thousand of him."

"Now girls," cried her father, "come along; we're only waiting for you."

"We will follow, papa," exclaimed Miss Elmsley, then added hurriedly in a low tone, "my life upon it, he will draw out papa to tell the story about Sir Roger Hawberry."

"And what will that be a sign of?" said Smith.

"Why, that he wants to borrow money," replied Julia, "he always does after that; but come along, Agnes, come along."

They left the room and joined the elders in the garden, Mrs. Elmsley remaining alone in the parlour, with her work unheeded on her knees, the careworn expression stronger on her face, and apparently thoughtful, even to abstraction.

CHAPTER II.

No great time was required to enable the party to stroll through the pretty trim gardens of Royal Lodge, and even to visit old "King's Arms," the pony; which well fed, harmless Arabian, derived his somewhat unusual appellation from Miss Julia, who, having a pretty correct idea as to the appropriateness of the name of their dwelling, insisted upon giving their steed a title which should be in keeping. Miss Elmsley, by the bye, was the only member of the family who did not feel considerable pride in the imposing name of their mansion; and even Smith, who was as keen

a young fellow as need be sought, had a secret pleasure in directing his letters to "J. Elmsley, Esq., Royal Lodge, Chalkingdon, Berks."

To resume; it was but a short walk around the demesne, yet, ere it was completed, the young ladies, after lingering a minute at a particular flower bed, heard, on rejoining their friends, the following from the lips of their uncle:

"I have a very faint remembrance, John, of the occurrence, and above all things in the world, if not encroaching too far upon your good nature, should like to hear it again. Mr. Smith, I can promise you a most amusing narrative, if you could lend your attention for a few moments."

"I shall be only too glad," returned Smith, "for I have every reason to be confident in the character of the story."

"Yes," whispered Julia, "you are experienced."

"Well then," said John Elmsley, evidently gratified at being asked to tell his story, "suppose we sit down in this arbour for a bit, we can

see the house from here if they want us. I thought I had told this tale before, but as I haven't, mind it's well worth hearing. Ahem! You see when I first came down here, why my girls were just growing into young women, nice young women, though perhaps I ought not to say so."

An indistinct murmur from Mr. William seemed to imply that he ought to say so, and that such a sentiment was quite natural and correct.

"However that may be, of course they were fond of a little pleasure like other girls, and liked to go to parties, and balls, and fates, and all that. Egad! sir, the aristocracy about here soon found out I'd got some ready money, and they are all poor as regards *that*, they are by Jupiter. Somehow, even them that have got twenty thousand or so a year, are as poor in the way of cash; as poor as—ah! as a lawyer's clerk upon a pound a week."

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed William, "very good, very good indeed."

"So they very soon began to borrow of me," continued his brother, "and nearly all my money was out at pretty good interest among them, before I had been here a twelvemonth. Well, you know, on some occasion there was to be a grand ball given not far from here, a hunt ball, or a race ball, or something, and I determined my girls should go, and as their mother never stirs out why I went with them. I can safely say that there wasn't two prettier little slips in Berkshire than my two girls, nor nicer dressed, and proud I felt of them."

"Very natural," again murmured Mr. William, "but I beg your pardon; pray proceed."

"When we got to the ball room it was all very well for a bit, because it was really a tidy sort of affair for the country, and very much we enjoyed ourselves. I couldn't help noticing soon, however, that my girls got no partners, excepting one or two farmer's sons from about here, nor did many people, who knew us, stop and speak. Consequently, as I didn't choose them to sit like

dummies all night, I thought I had better begin the conversation with a few of the nobs myself, and for all I knew, it was my place so to do. Well, I looked round a bit, and soon spied out Sir Roger Hawberry and his wife, from Hawberry Hall, just across the fields there; now I had lent Sir Roger four thousand pounds on his bill for three months, the time was up, but there was a verbal understanding that he might have it as long as he wanted it, and of course I didn't press, for I knew it was all right."

"Then he still owed you the money?" interrogated his brother, as if desirous of following accurately every step in the narrative; Julia looked as though her eyes would scorch him, for she knew he had heard the tale a dozen times before.

"Of course he did," was Mr. John's reply, "so I went up to them—Sir Roger and his wife I mean—taking my girls, and began conversation in a pleasant sort of a way you know, by asking how her ladyship's rheumatics were, and whether she enjoyed herself. Now if you've ever

seen her, you know what a tall, bony, stately old thing she is, and how Sir Roger is always a staring right before him, just like a—like a—well, he's always a staring. On this particular occasion, brother, she drew herself up so as to look ten times bonier, statelier, and taller than ever, while he stared as if he was in a fit. Well, do all I could, I couldn't get more out of them than a half distinct grunt, and my girls began to look scared, while the people all round turned up their ugly Berkshire and Wiltshire noses at us; so I says to Julia, 'come along,' I says, 'we have had enough of this ball,' so away we went, and while I was waiting for 'em to put on their shawls, old Captain Popham, that drinks a glass here to this day, and is a good sort of fellow enough, comes up, and he says—"

"I beg your pardon, Captain Bonham, did you say?" asked the brother, who was all attention.

"Popham," repeated Mr. Elmsley, "Popham. He says, 'Why Elmsley, you're going early,' he says. 'Yes,' I says, 'I've had enough of your

grand ball.' 'Ah!' says he, 'I thought so. I see all about it; but don't you know Elmsley,' he says, 'that these country families never mix with townspeople or with new comers?' 'Captain Popham,' I says, 'damn the county families.'"

"Hush, hush!" exclaimed Mr. William.

"Oh, but I did say so, and I stick to it now," retorted John. "'I'll make 'em know,' I says, 'who they've got among them.' Well sir, I went home and made no fuss about it, but in a day or two, mind you, Sir Roger Hawberry was took in execution at my suit, and as of course he couldn't raise the money all of a nonplus, my man was a going to take him off to Reading Gaol, when a servant comes post haste for me. So I went over to Hawberry Hall, and this time there was no stateliness nor fuss about them, but in I went to the bodore or study, or whatever it was, and there's Lady Hawberry a fainting, and Sir Roger walking up and down the room looking as if he had seen the very—the very sea serpent himself, and every now and then scowling like Macbeth, at old Israel Moss, who had made the

capture, and who was quietly smoking in an arm chair by the door. 'Now, Mr. Elmsley,' roars out the old gentleman, 'can you tell me what this infernal, insolent, immovable Jew wants? Do you mean to say that you are going to extremities about your paltry bill?' 'If it's a paltry bill,' I says, 'pay it. Damme, sir.'"

"Hush!" exclaimed his brother again.

"Papa," said Julia, "you will excuse us, we know; we are going to Mr. Pixton's fishpond; it's through that hedge, James, you will find a gate there, follow when father has finished."

Smith nodded, the girls ran off, and Mr. Elmsley resumed:

"'Why,' says Sir Roger, 'I am worth a hundred times the amount of your claim, but do not happen to have the money by me at this instant.' 'Then you must go to gaol,' says I. 'Impossible, my dear Mr. Elmsley,' says his wife, 'so friendly and neighbourly as we have always been.' 'And look at the disgrace,' says Sir Roger, 'of being dragged to prison if but for an hour, in the company of such a Jew as that old rascal

there. Good Heavens! what will the radical papers say?' 'Now, Sir Roger,' I says, 'if you're sensible, we can make a bargain—Izzy, go outside,' so old Moss went into the passage, and I says, 'you cut me uncommonly sharp at that ball the other night, now no words, I know all about it; here's my offer. If you'll promise to notice and patronize my girls when you meet them, and just pass the time of day when you meet *me*, and in fact help us to get a good standing here, Izzy goes away at once, and the bother's over; if not you go away with him."

"Capital! capital!" exclaimed Mr. William.

"'My dear Elmsley,' cries Sir Roger, taking my hand and squeezing it, 'you must be under some dreadful delusion; I admire, love your pretty daughters, and was only to-day expressing my wish to see them at the Hall, was I not, Lady Hawberry?' Of course Lady Hawberry said, 'yes he was,' and Sir Roger goes on, 'We shall have a quiet party next week, just a few friends, the Earl and Countess of Wiltshire, Lord and Lady Berkshire, and one or two more; now

do pray consider yourself and daughters engaged for the evening, you shall have your onveets to-morrow.' 'Sir Roger,' says I 'I see we understand each other, it's all right. Good afternoon.' So Izzy went off with me, and I insisted on standing his expenses, for when I do a thing I like to do it handsome. Sir Roger has never paid a farthing of the principal, but it is all safe enough, and I must say he has kept to his agreement like a trump, and my girls are the envy of all the young women in these parts, for they go to all the aristocrat's houses; and they ain't, they really ain't bad sort of people when you come to know them and make allowances."

"Excellent, sir," exclaimed Smith, "you played your cards beautifully—you will excuse me I hope," and stifling a gape, the young man darted through the opening previously indicated.

"Tea must surely be ready," said Mr. Elmsley, looking towards the house.

"Not quite, I think," said his brother, "but can you spare me a couple of minutes for conversation, John?"

"Certainly, my boy, what is it?"

"I will not make a long preface to the favour I am about to ask," continued the younger gentleman, clearing his voice nevertheless as though he intended a speech, "as I know you love nothing so well as straightforwardness, and a clear, honest outspeaking of one's meaning."

"Quite right, brother, quite right," assented Mr. Elmsley.

"Ahem! this being the case," resumed Mr. William, "there is no reason why I should hesitate to speak plainly. The purport of my visit here would produce a disagreeable feeling in my bosom, had I to address a brother of a different kind; but with you, John, it is impossible for me to feel anything but confidence in your affection and friendship."

He paused, but his companion merely nodded, so he went on.

"Suffice it to say, then, John, that my somewhat unpropitious sky seems clearing, that a chance at last presents itself of retrieving my lost ground; and that by purchasing the con-

nection of an excellent, very select, and highly profitable school in my own vicinity, I can place myself in a position, I have never yet held. Your assistance, for a very short time, my dear John, I venture once more to solicit. I have not by me at present the trifle necessary to secure this prize."

"How much money then does it require?" asked the elder.

"Only four hundred pounds," returned Mr. William, "and if I hesitate, if I cannot deposit that sum by to-morrow evening, the school will go into the public market, and will, assuredly be pounced upon instantly."

"I daresay it is a good thing; you ought to know best, of course," said his brother, "but unfortunately your speculations have not generally answered your expectations;—I don't wish to damp your hopes, William, I merely point out the necessity of caution."

"Ah, my dear brother, you are right!" sighed Mr. William, "ere now I have been incautiously led away by specious representations, against my

better judgment; but this is a very different case. This will enable me in a very short time, to free myself from all obligations, and furnish me, indeed, with a competence."

"I am glad to hear it it," said Mr. Elmsley, "I should not have a moment's doubt, only, you see, there is a sum of thirteen hundred pounds standing between us, all borrowed since I came to this house. Now I only mean to show you how easily—"

"Enough, no more. My dear John, you are right; I beg pardon for troubling you with this application. Thank you, thank you!" exclaimed Mr. William, seizing his brother's hand, and speaking with evident emotion, "I meant well, but you have shewn me how insane I must have been, when I asked a farther sacrifice on your part; looked on, as I unavoidably must be, with doubt, from my already existing liabilities."

He bowed his head slightly from his brother as he finished, and drawing forth a spotless cambric handkerchief, pressed it for a moment to

his eyes, then with a benignant smile upon his features, turned to Mr. Elmsley.

"My dear Will, come! come! I did not intend to hurt your feelings," said the latter in a soothing tone, "and if you had mixed more in the world, you would excuse the caution and care of one brought up to business; but you are as inexperienced as a child. My only anxiety, I am sure, is to prevent you from incurring fresh trouble and perhaps fresh disappointment, for it's just such unsuspecting, secluded men as yourself, that are duped and overreached by designing—but there, Willy, we will say no more about it. I can see, now that I have had a moment's reflection, that this school is the very thing for you, and you shall have the cash to-night."

"No, my brother, I beg you to recall your words," cried the younger gentleman, "you have a duty to perform to others nearer to you. I can cheerfully—"

"Now, Will, I shall be angry," interrupted Mr. John, "when you speak of any one being

nearer and dearer to me than my only brother, you don't do me justice, and you must know it."

"I do know it; forgive me," murmured the other.

"If I have other claims upon me," continued Elmsley, "I am surely not unmindful of them, and if anything should happen to me, if I should be suddenly snatched away, where could those helpless ones look for protection and advice but to you? You would repay me then, better than with silver and gold, William."

"May that day be far distant! but it would be a sacred trust!" exclaimed Mr. William, once more seizing his brother's hand and wringing it in silence, his overpowering feelings evidently rendering him unable to speak.

"Now not another syllable," said John, "I tell you I have got the money in the house, and that you can have it, so not another word. There's Polly coming to say that tea is ready, so compose yourself and let us go in."

They rose and entered the house, where the

three younger ones already were; and, "the cup which cheers but not inebriates" was partaken of with all due sociality.

The last rather clumsy sentence, was written on purpose to introduce the quotation from Cowper, it being utterly impossible to allude to a tea party without using this identical passage, because nobody else ever wrote anything quotable in praise of the best Hyson, at four and eight, or fine flavoured Pekoe, at four shillings.

It was barely twilight, for the day, as already hinted, was an early July one, when a horseman was heard to stop at the gate of Royal Lodge; the bell was rung, and the next instant the little party saw the visitor approach the house.

"It's Edgar Fielding!" cried Elmsley; "now, Julia, here he comes. Draw a chair close to the window, brother; that's right—aha! my boy, how are you? Only my brother, whom you know, I believe, and our old friend Smith."

This explanation was given as the room was somewhat dusky.

"Well, and how are your father and mother? By Jupiter, you are looking all the better for your holiday!"

And indeed the young man whom Mr. Elmsley was welcoming so heartily, was a fine looking fellow, truly; but while he shakes hands, and settles himself into a seat, we will tell who he is.

Edgar Fielding was the son of a "gentleman farmer" residing at about six miles from Royal Lodge at the little hamlet of Deaconstone; which from the railroad you can just see upon the hills. Edgar was a tall, well-made, handsome young man, with curling brown hair, large, dark whiskers, fine hazel eyes, good complexion, regular teeth, all just as a young lady would have them made to order. His faultless attire, his studs, chain and rings, bespoke him, perhaps, to be somewhat of the fop; but even if so, it was hardly to be cavilled at, for he could afford a little extra expense in dress, and then it became him so well. He could afford it, for not only was his father well to do, but from his aunts,

Miss Fielding, and Miss Abigail Fielding, he had great expectations.

It was no secret in the neighbourhood, that he at first, (as did the rest of the family still), used to look down upon the Elmsleys; perhaps they knew it also, and liked him none the worse; it may be remembered that when Mr. Lillyvick observes:—"Kenwigs will excuse my saying in the presence of friends, that there was a very great objection to him, on the ground that he was beneath the family, and would disgrace it," Kenwigs, in lieu of sternly asserting his own respectability, is in no way displeased, as it proved beyond doubt, of what a very high family Mrs. Kenwigs came. Human nature was the same in Royal Lodge, as in that flaxen-tailed household.

Edgar Fielding, too, had been among the first of the "county families" to get over the prejudice; and the beauty of Julia, and, possibly, the ten thousand pounds in ready money she was always said to be certain of as her portion, quite won the young gentleman's heart.

As our pen seems in the vein for explanations, and as the sooner all such are got over, the better the reader likes it, we may as well say a little, and a very little, more about James Smith. 'Tis not in mortals to command success, we know, but we really think, Sempronius, we deserve it, if only for so bold a stroke of originality as the daring to have a prominent character, almost one of our heroes, named James "Smith;" a surname which, however brilliantly distinguished in real life, (especially when linked with "Sidney," which surely must be the baptismal of half the Smiths), is, so far as we know, quite unhallowed in romance or novel.

Let us see, though, what were we saying? Oh! we remember. Mr. James Smith, then, had been an old playfellow of the girls, and the childish lover of Agnes, as soon as that young lady could speak with any distinctness; had worn her colours, figuratively speaking, ever since; and had fought in honour of her superior beauty, while at school, as zealously as ever did knight of old in behalf of *his* ladye, although

with indifferent success; for he was thin and weedy in figure, and too often got decisively thrashed; stamina, however, it was which he lacked, not courage. His affection had survived until now, and was duly returned, so he visited Royal Lodge in the character of the accepted suitor of Agnes. Mr. Elmsley was very much attached to him, although when his—Elmsley's—improving fortunes took the form of retirement, he did make a faint show, (stimulated thereto, we fear, by Julia), of discouraging the visits of the young tradesman; but Agnes suddenly blazed into a flame of anger and resolution, which astonished her sister, and completely frightened her father from his intention, if such he had, and James Smith was troubled no more. He was rather pale, plain in features, below the middle height, wore his straight hair very short, was unobtrusive in manner, and thrifty of habit.

Such was James Smith, and with him, as with each member of the little party now assembled at Royal Lodge, the evening passed gaily, for Mr. William could, when pressed, make unex-

ceptionable punch, although too coy and retiring to do so without the said pressing; most of the others could drink the punch when made. Smith could, in no despicable style, play the piano while the girls sang; Fielding rattled away almost incessantly about his horses, his dogs, his recent trip up the Rhine, and the very high company he mixed with; Mr. Elmsley was in high spirits at seeing the others comfortable, and volunteered a song, which had been considered as intensely comic when he was a youth, and consisted of twenty-two long verses, with a refrain of Too-ral-loo-ral-loo-ral-loo-ral-tum-ti-iddity-ido at the end of each stanza.

The only person who did not seem to share in the general hilarity was Mrs. Elmsley. She was not an invalid, she at least never complained of any pain or disease, yet she rarely smiled, and rarely left the house: on her too fell unavailingly the soft and attentive politeness of her brother-in-law; no urbanity, no kindness of his could remove the shade from her features; indeed when

he approached her with his blandest words, it seemed to deepen into gloom.

Nothing of moment, beyond the general gaiety, occurred during the evening, until Mr. Fielding mounted his sorrel steed and rode off, taking a friendly farewell of all, and a patronizing one of James Smith, of whom he was accustomed to speak as "our little grocer." James slept at the Railway Arms, (the arrival of Mr. William having caused the best spare room to be dedicated to his honour), he therefore speedily followed Edgar.

The girls and their mother retired, and the elder gentlemen only waited to perform one or two little ceremonies before following their example. When all save themselves had left the room, a cabinet was unlocked, an iron japanned box was taken therefrom, from which again were taken a number of pieces of paper, rustling and thin; these were handed by Mr. John to Mr. William, who received them with a profusion of thanks, alluded touchingly to his brother's never

failing kindness and his own unworthiness, took the said brother's hand, wrung it, pressed it to his heart, and then retired.

The master of the house, as was his wont, staid to see that all fastenings were right and all lights were out, then sought his own chamber, saying as he passed his brother's room. "Poor William! poor fellow! I trust he will be lucky this time, for he deserves it"

CHAPTER III.

ROUSED sufficiently early by the shriek and cough of an enraged goods engine, Mr. Smith descended from his chamber at the Railway Arms, with the intention of taking a stroll in the deliciously fresh air of the morning; but as he passed the pretty bar parlour, he saw Hackley, waited upon by a neat little maid-servant, sitting down to some smoking coffee, a "boulder" of a loaf, and a tempting ham. Hackley, we may say, was a bachelor, and seemed in his cool fragrant little room, to be a very cosy one; he espied Smith, and exclaimed,

"Good morning, sir; not going out so early as this surely?"

"I was certainly thinking of doing so, the morning is so inviting," returned Smith.

"Lor, nonsense, sir, mornings is often like this; but do stay and taste a slice of this ham," urged the landlord; "it will do you a greal deal more good than making your feet burn over these stony, limy roads about here."

Thus solicited James complied, and quickly found himself seated at the little round table, and attacking the good things provided with at least double the power he had deemed he could command.

"It's no use going to the Lodge for nigh upon two hours yet, sir," continued Hackley, "so now do make yourself at home. The only good thing of living down in these bumpkin parts is, you do get decent bread, and butter, and bacon; but after all, sir, even for them things London is the place. You needn't talk about bread, or butter, or bacon, or nothing; all the best of everything as these chaps produces is sent there, only it's

very dear when you come to buy it. If you would try a glass of that Berkshire stingo with your ham, sir, you would like it."

"Not so early as this, thank you, Nat," returned Smith.

"Hope you found all well at the Lodge, leastways I know you did," resumed Hackley; "the young ladies look prettier every day I do think. You had quite a party, sir."

"Yes," said Smith, "and as the arrival of Mr. William Elmsley and Mr. Fielding was somewhat unexpected, our little circle was all the gayer."

"Just so, sir, any little bit of good luck or pleasure, is, as you say, all the better. I remember," continued Nathaniel, pausing with the loaf upon his knee, the knife in his hand, and looking thoughtfully through his geraniums, out upon the opposite hedge, the horse trough, and an empty waggon which stood by, "I remember as well as if it was yesterday, my cousin Ned Hackley, poor Ned! I think I see him now; he was took up for buying a horse knowing it to be

stole. Old Alderson tried him, so he thought, we all thought, as he would get at least seven years, as it was a very bad case, and by Jove, sir, he got off with three months. I never saw a fellow so delighted in my life, and so that makes good what you were saying."

"Does Mr. Fielding often come to your house?" asked Smith.

"No, he don't, sir," replied Hackley, "there's no love lost between me and Mr. Fielding, and I never say otherwise. It's no business of mine, of course, but I'm very much in doubts as to whether Miss Julia will be happy with him. He's a bad young fellow."

"I am sorry to hear you say so," said Smith, "and hope you are mistaken. Mr. Fielding is a general favourite, and an especial one at Royal Lodge."

"I hope I am—besides, many a man alters after he gets married—"

"For the better, doubtless," interrupted Smith, "I wonder, therefore, you don't take a wife yourself, Nathaniel."

"A—why—" began the landlord with a little confusion, "Perhaps I shall some day, sir. But about this young Fielding; now it's a rule of mine, sir, and being a Londoner, I fancy I know what life is, and what's right and what's wrong."

"Certainly," said Smith, with the utmost gravity, finding himself appealed to, "certainly."

"I lay it down as a regular rule, sir, that you can tell what a man is by his behaviour to women," continued Hackley. "Now," here he gave a rap upon the table with the haft of his knife, to enforce his assertion, "this Fielding is a bad one. I don't mind a man being gay, or fond of the gals, I was myself, I know; I hate a man as slinks away from 'em, or don't brighten up when one speaks to him; but Fielding is a different sort of chap. I've known two nice girls as lived about here, that he decoyed away, and not only that, but he has treated them so unfeelingly when he got tired of them. No provision or help for the poor things; no, he turns

them off any where, any how, to do the best they can, and worse than all, boasts about it, and laughs at it. Now have a egg."

"An egg! you might as well ask me, after such a breakfast to eat an elephant. No, no," continued Smith, "they must by this time be stirring at the Lodge, so I will make the best of my way there. Good morning, Nat, and whatever you do, maintain the honour of London."

So with a laugh he left the Railway Arms, and was speedily at Royal Lodge: in his brief walk, however, he was exceedingly troubled by the information received from Hackley respecting Fielding. He knew the publican to be a shrewd, quick-sighted fellow, and feared that his estimate of the young gentleman's character might be the correct one, in which case, the future of Julia—especially when her own haughty temperament was considered—would be but unenviable. His reflections on this disagreeable subject lasted until he reached the mansion sought, in one of

the gardens of which he saw the hospitable proprietor in company with the gardener (who was also groom, &c.), picking flowers to add to a tolerably large bouquet he already held. Mr. William Elmsley, too, wearing his blandest smile, stood by, and being the first to observe Smith, bowed gracefully.

"Aha! Jemmy," exclaimed Elmsley, attracted by his brother's obeisance, "here we are you see, improving the shiny hours, as the busy bee does, and gathering all the flowers. Ha! ha! ha! there's your poetry for you, and all of a moment too. Girls are in the breakfast room."

Upon this hint Smith departed, and in the room indicated soon found the young ladies: Julia was lying back in an arm chair, in a pretty but deshabille morning dress, reading a book, the last new novel, apparently; Agnes was just as neat, trim, and smiling, as she had been on the previous evening, and was at that instant unlocking a tea-caddy.

With a pretty light blush, she offered her cheek for the expected kiss, Julia contenting

herself with a glance from her book, and a brief nod.

"We are all bustle to-day, James," said Miss Agnes, "in the first place, one of our men has gone to Chalkingdon to fetch Mr. Chapman, the lawyer, on some business unknown to me."

"That must be very annoying," said Smith, seriously, "and you have doubtless made laudable efforts to ascertain why he is required."

"You are wrong, sir," retorted Agnes, "our calumniated sex has no curiosity; I am sorry to find you falling into so vulgar an error. In the next place—no, before I finish the first article, I should like to tell you that Julia always looks forward with especial pleasure to a visit from Mr. Chapman."

"What are you saying about me?" demanded the elder sister, looking up at the mention of her name.

"Merely remarking, my dear," explained her sister, "that your second admirer, Mr. Chapman, is expected here immediately; you were not aware, I think, that he had been sent for."

"Psha! you absurd creature!" exclaimed Julia, and resumed her book, but Smith smiled to observe that she almost instantly stole quietly from the room, and reappeared after a few minutes' absence, with every "point" in order, and very fit to meet the eyes of any admirer.

"Are you serious," asked Smith, "in what you say about this Mr. Chapman and Julia?"

"Indeed I hardly know whether I am or not,', laughed Agnes, "I do verily believe, however, that the little man—no offence you know, James, in calling any one a little man—is very partial to my sister."

"What sort of a person is he? is he well off?" enquired James; "I know of course from what you have said, that he is a lawyer."

"He is a lawyer, it is true," replied Agnes, "but is one of the most ignorant, yet conceited men I know. His origin was very humble, I believe; of course we don't think anything of that, although papa is one of the 'county families;' but Mr. Chapman from a desire to imitate some one, I suppose, whom he has known and

admired, assumes a manner totally unsuited to him, and while one of the dullest and most narrow-minded of men, affects a great fondness for literature, especially poetry; and would quote 'Hush a bye baby, on the tree top,' with all the gravity possible—but do not let us talk any more about him. I have not yet told you what is in the second place."

"Then why don't you tell me, Miss Agnes Elmsley?" asked Smith. "You must own I have waited patiently to hear."

"Well then," continued Agnes, "in the second place uncle William is going back to town this morning, and so papa is making a great fuss with him, and getting a bouquet more like a sheaf of wheat, or a hay cock, than a common nosegay, which he is to take. Thirdly and finally, Mr. Jem, there is the chaise to be got ready for your excursion."

"My excursion; the chaise! Why what can you mean, Agnes?" exclaimed the astonished Londoner.

"I thought I should surprise you," laughed

the young lady; "why, as a great treat, papa has decided upon taking you with him to Knollington, there to assist at a grand competition for prizes in sheep shearing, mowing, and such like fine arts."

"But, my dear Agnes," remonstrated Smith, whose features had settled into a sort of blank amazement, "I don't understand anything about mowing, nor should I care anything for either it or sheep shearing I am afraid, if I did. My holiday is but for a few days, and I can't afford to sacrifice one for such a purpose."

"Nothing will save you," replied Agnes, "I believe papa cares as little, and knows as little about the exhibition as you do yourself; but he thinks these things should be encouraged, and as one of the leading county families," here Agnes paused to laugh merrily, "a distinction on which, as you very well know, he prides himself, he makes it a rule to be present at them. Come papa," she cried, stepping to the open window, "we are waiting."

In a few minutes the household were assem-

bled at the breakfast table, and to his horror James Smith found he had been but too truly informed of the character of the treat in store for him. He made one or two faint struggles to escape from the engagement, but in vain; even Agnes seemed to take a wicked pleasure in praising the display, and hinting at the necessity of the leading families giving a regular attendance on such occasions. So there was no help for it; he cast a despairing look at the sky to see if it was likely to rain, devoutly wishing for a storm. But the sky was already like brass, and the haze which quivered above the white roads, told that a scorching day was before him.

"Ha, here's the lawyer!" exclaimed Mr. Elmsley. "We have only to settle some business, which won't take us ten minutes, and then I am at your service, Jem."

"That is a signal for us to fly to the garden, Julia," said Agnes, "mamma will be down directly, but is sure to go to the summer house."

Smith rose and left the room with the young

ladies, meeting the lawyer in the passage. As he bowed to them, the Londoner saw that he was an undersized, spare man, with deep sunk eyes, large fleshy nose, thin cheeks, and dark straight hair; a man of a cheerless and fretful aspect, clad in a dark frock coat, and wearing a white hat of unusual breadth of brim.

All this is miserably dull and uninteresting we know, but, reader, what is to be done? As the events occurred, so they must be told.

After having been closeted with his brother and the lawyer for some half-an-hour, Elmsley came forth and ordered the servant to bring out the chaise, telling Smith at the same time, with the air of a man who knows what he is saying, that he would give him a treat.

In fine, they started, the two brothers first taking an affectionate farewell, they started, we say, and no tongue can tell, no pen can write what the miserable young Londoner suffered with a smiling face that day. The scores of burly farmers to whom he was introduced, who one and all, without exception or variation, talked of hay,

oats, and mangold wurzel; the parched and parching fields he traversed to see the mowing, the bewildering appeals made to his judgment; the huge sweltering sheep he saw, and their naked, shorn, surprised, foolish looking brethren; the blisters which came upon his face; the pints of strong beer he drank, and the dust he encountered upon the road; these things cannot be told, and are indeed too harrowing for recital. Suffice it then to say, that without any particular adventure, he reached home half-dead in the evening, the only gleam of satisfaction falling to his share being derived from the palpable wretchedness of Mr. Elmsley, who suffered more perhaps than his companion, as he attempted to disguise his feelings even to himself, and laboured to feel such enjoyment in the day's proceedings as became a man who mixed with county families, and was therefore bound to show an example.

Shortly after the departure of the squire (as John Elmsley was particularly desirous of being called), Mr. William left to catch an early train; and the lawyer having of course completed his

business, sallied into the garden to pay his respects to the ladies. They were sitting in a bower at the back, or rather side of the house, quietly working, when Agnes suddenly exclaimed, looking up,

"Mama, there is Mr. Chapman. I knew, Julia, he would not leave without coming to speak to you."

"My dear Julia," said Mrs. Elmsley, "I hope this is merely one of Agnes's wild fancies, and that you are not really encouraging any attention from Mr. Chapman."

"My dear mama, don't assume so woful an aspect," remonstrated Julia, "it is only a ruse of my subtle sister to divert attention from her own manœuvres. She has, and everybody but you, mama, can see it, she has the deepest designs upon the poor little gentleman."

"I hope you will behave as well as Agnes does," returned her mother, "but here he comes."

At that moment Mr. Chapman reached the summer house, and lifting his hat with the ut-

most expression of gallantry which his rather sour features would receive, congratulated the ladies upon the beauty of the morning. Mrs. Elmsley replied, and added a hope that the unusual hour at which he had been brought from Chalkingdon, had not inconvenienced him.

"Pray do not allude to inconvenience, my dear madam," exclaimed the solicitor, "in connexion with attending at Royal Lodge at any time or season. There I may say, without a figure, pleasure as well as business commands my duty; to be exuberant I might add, poetry as well as prose is to be met with in my visits here."

"You are only too flattering, sir," said Julia, "I fear we shall be all spoilt by your compliments."

"No; not at all. To compliment *you*, Miss Julia," the large brimmed hat was again lifted here, "would be indeed to gild refined gold, and paint the lily."

Julia bowed, the lawyer replaced his hat, sighed heavily, then hooking his thumbs in the armholes of his waistcoat, turned to glance over

the wide landscape. He looked so much like a bilious monkey, as he stood there turning up the fleshy nose spoken of, (not that monkeys have much of noses generally to turn up), that Julia bit her lips until the blood almost started to repress her laughter; Agnes shook her head warningly.

"Now, Robert," resumed Chapman, speaking to his clerk who had accompanied him from Chalkingdon and followed him to the garden, "collect the papers, and get ready for starting."

"Oh! Mr. Chapman," cried Mrs. Elmsley, "you will surely not go yet. Our chaise brought you from Chalkingdon, and you will never think of walking all the way back. Pray stop until the coach from the station passes, and in the mean time you shall make a slight lunch. Mr. Parsons will stay too."

"Thank you, ma'am," returned the lawyer, "thank you. If you will not consider me too intrusive; well, well, I will. As for Parsons, he can go to the Railway Arms and drink his fill of beer; that will suit him best. Go to

Hackley's, Parsons, and when the coach leaves, engage two outside places if I have not joined you, and mind you don't get drunk."

The man bowed slightly and retired; Julia laughed again at the consequence and importance which the little man assumed as he bullied his dependent, but Agnes left her seat ere he had fairly finished speaking, and overtook the clerk as he reached the house.

"Stay a few moments, sir," said the young lady, as she followed him into the room where the papers lay, and ringing a hand bell which stood on the table as she spoke.

"Oh, Jane, bring up a tray with the lamb, and a jug of best beer."

"Pray do not take any trouble about me, miss," said Parsons, for so, as the reader has seen, the clerk was named.

"There is no trouble, sir," returned Agnes, "mama would be very angry with me if I allowed you to leave without trying our hospitality a little. Ah! that will do, Jane; ring for anything you may want, Mr. Parsons; good morning, sir."

So saying she left him and hurried to her friends, while Parsons rose, and watched her as she tripped across the lawn at the back of the house, filled a glass, and evidently, though in silence, drank her health.

Now this clerk—utterly to prevent all mistakes which might arise in the reader's mind, on finding a pretty girl take interest in him—was a man of some forty years old, thin, shabby, and dissipated looking. His threadbare coat was buttoned tightly over his chest, although the day was meltingly hot, suggesting, irresistibly, the idea of deficient or indifferent linen; more than one crack was preceptible in his blucher boots, to the tops of which his ill fitting, wrinkled trowsers scarcely reached. A rusty brown stock, some time doubtless a black one, encompassed his neck; his hands were in gloves almost fingerless from wear, while a napless hat, shining with age and grease, surmounted his scanty hair and face, which latter, by the unwholesome flush on cheeks and nose, told but too plainly one cause of his seedy attire. There was, nevertheless, a good-natured, intelligent look about his fea-

tures withal, and if the prime of his better nature had evaporated in the course of many wasted years, the lees were there, and his employer sometimes contrived to stir even them.

He had done so that morning, and though his taunt about swilling beer at the Railway Arms was such as Bob had been subjected to a thousand times before, yet, at receiving it in the presence of ladies, two of them young and beautiful, the pimpled face had flushed a deeper crimson, and the watery eyes had for once flashed fire. Agnes had noted him, and feeling hurt herself to see him wince, had followed him to the house, and soothed the poor fellow with at least one mark of kindness ere he left the Lodge.

When Agnes returned to the summer house she found her mother alone, and was informed that Julia having slightly alluded to some choice fowls, her own especial property, which were being reared at the gardener's cottage, some half mile off, Mr. Chapman had, upon this, so earnestly pressed to see them, that Julia had at last put on her hat and gone with him. They were,

indeed, at that moment visible, as they emerged from a small plantation, and crossed an open meadow; by the pump-like motion of his arm, the lawyer seemed to be speaking earnestly.

When Julia had left her mother, in his company, Mr. Chapman thanked her for such a mark of kindness, and then for a brief space said no more. Julia once or twice stole a look at his face: he seemed so deep in thought, and so forgetful of her presence, that she began to speculate on the probability of his keeping silent during the whole of the walk; at last he roused himself, "hemmed" loudly, and spoke.

"Miss Julia, my soliciting the honour of your company in this walk was not without a motive."

"No, sir," returned the young lady demurely, "you are interested in my brood of India chickens —darling little things."

"Exactly," said Chapman, "but I am only interested in them, Miss Elmsley, because they are associated in my mind with you."

"How droll!" exclaimed Julia, "and do you really, Mr. Chapman, whenever you think of

me, associate me with a lot of yellow-legged, half-fledged birds?"

"Oh! Miss Julia, how fearfully you mistake my meaning!" cried her companion; "pray allow me to assist you over this brook Ahem! Miss Julia Elmsley!"

"Sir," replied Julia.

And glancing at him once again from among her dark ringlets, her bright, wicked eye encountered the sunken but steady gaze of the lawyer, whose sour features wore a new and changed aspect.

"Miss Julia Elmsley," he repeated, "I have had the honour and pleasure of knowing you now for several years, and my admiration has increased with the lapse of time. Jocularly, I may say your fees have increased in more than arithmetical progression; but I am not desirous of giving way to mirth and levity."

Probably he was not; he certainly wore no appearance of wishing to do so. Man has, and God be thanked for it! rarely a visage ill adapted for the expression of hilarity and mirth, but

assuredly the gloomy features of Mr. Chapman were little calculated for any such emotions. So his face subsided into gravity, from the faint smile it had worn during its jocularity, and Julia said, as he repeated:

"I do not wish to give way to mirth and levity—"

"No, sir, I could not so cruelly misunderstand you."

"I have not been without some little hope," continued the lawyer, "that my attentions have been perceived, and the pleasure which a visit to Royal Lodge has always afforded me has been put down to the true cause."

"Oh, sir!" exclaimed Julia, "you overrate us; you do, indeed. Papa has often said that he considered you extremely moderate in your charges, and he feared he was really giving you too much trouble."

"Ah, my dear Miss Julia," sighed the lawyer, "our unfortunate profession is regarded as the type of all that is mercenary and base, and our charges symbolical—synonymous, I mean—sy-

nonymous with fraud and extortion. But, I assure you, there are many heavy drawbacks; my annual certificate, my clerk, my fees in acquiring my profession, the length of time I generally have to wait for my money—not, however, with your excellent father. But to return. The pleasure I derive from my visits to Royal Lodge is in no degree dependent upon business, but arises from a deeper, tenderer chord—though chord is not precisely the word I should use—"

"Now, sir, this is our gardener's," exclaimed Julia, "and there are the little, dear darlings. Chick, chick, chick—see! they all know me. Well, Mrs. Terry, and how is our little family?"

A tidy-looking woman, in blue gown and apron, now came from the cottage, and after dropping a curtsey to the lawyer, who was well enough known in those parts, spoke to Miss Elmsley of the weal and woe of the little brood.

Mr. Chapman remained leaning against the low pales of the cottage garden during the conference, his thumbs once more hooked in the arm holes of his waistcoat, and his cheerless face

either turned to the ground, or lifted high up while he seemed, with discontented air, to examine the surrounding scenery. Nevertheless, he contrived to steal frequent glances at Julia, who, with an excess of fondness which was evidently assumed, caressed her chickens, or knelt over them, and bent her head until her long, glossy ringlets almost touched the ground; then she would straighten her fine figure, and look laughingly round with an added bloom on her cheeks from bending so low. Mr. Chapman saw this, and saw her red lips and white teeth to advantage as she smiled; a facial contortion and a gulp showed how intense were his feelings.

At last, after a visit of unusual length—say ten minutes—after a visit which, to the highly-strung nerves of the lawyer, seemed as though it would be endless, Julia bade her humble friend "Good morning," and, giving her arm to her escort, left the cottage.

"Were they not darlings?" she asked; "did you ever see such beautiful little creatures?"

"Never, certainly never," said Chapman

gravely, "but in venturing to recur, Miss Elmsley, to the subject—"

"And to think they should know me too!" cried Julia; "I am going to name them all; there are five—what shall their names be, Mr. Chapman?"

"Whatever your taste suggests cannot be improved upon, I am certain," said her companion gallantly; "but however interesting your pets are, my dear Miss Elmsley, all this jars upon my mind. Allow me to repeat, Miss Julia, that my visits to Royal Lodge have a pleasure of their own, quite apart and differing from the profit and pleasure I derive by my visits to other houses. To speak jocularly—but no, no. My position in society, and general reputation, justify me, I trust, in the step I now take; to see you, Miss Julia, is to admire you, and an encouraging word from those lips—those coral lips, as some author says—"

"Your acquaintance with our poets is so profound, sir," said Julia, "that I cannot help fearing it tinges your whole conversation, and thus

may lead me to mistake the language of compliment for—"

"Compliment! how is it possible to deal in compliment or flattery with you?" cried the lawyer. "One moment, my dear Miss Julia; if we emerge from this plantation we are seen, and I pray you to wait but for one second before you leave it. On my knees, to speak figuratively; under other circumstances," he continued, glancing with an air of pride at his lustrous new black trowsers, "under other circumstances it should be literal; I solicit your hearing for my suit, and beg to tender you, unconditionally and unreservedly, Miss Julia—"

"Oh, sir, they are calling us; I am sure I hear them!" exclaimed the young lady, who began heartily to wish for the termination of the *tête-à-tête*.

The little lawyer listened for a few seconds with the utmost attention and gravity, then turning to her, said calmly:

"I think not," and proceeded with his address. "I offer you, Miss Julia, my hand and my heart.

I hope I am not in any degree objectionable either to yourself, or your highly respectable friends."

"Be assured, sir, we appreciate you at your true value," said Julia, "but you have surprised me so completely, I feel so agitated with—with emotion, that you must pardon me if I do not reply to your too flattering words."

"I of course make every possible allowance," said the solicitor, gallantly. "I have but this to add, will you consider my proposition; will you promise me to think of it?"

"Assuredly I will, sir," replied Julia; "to that extent I unhesitatingly pledge myself."

"Stay, stay!" cried Chapman, as he saw Julia, about to leave the friendly shelter of the wood, "may I mention our interview to Mr. Elmsley; would you so far allow me?"

Julia paused for a moment, and a strange expression flitted over her features, then, stifling a smile, she said:

"You may, sir, in a day or two, say in a week, if you do not consider such message as I

in the interim may send you sufficiently conclusive."

"Oh, thank you, thank you! I shall be more than satisfied," exclaimed the lawyer; "and now for one last, little, yet inestimable boon,—dare I!"

Here he took the young lady's hand in his own, and looked into her eyes with all the fire his own sunken orbs seemed capable of.

Julia divined his intention easily enough, as any woman of course would have done, but allowed him to carry it out.

"Dare I!" repeated he, and then answered himself by showing that he did dare, for by a slight exertion, and raising himself on his toes, his lips touched the glowing cheek of the young lady.

Uttering a faint scream, Julia hurried from the plantation, followed by the lawyer, who, mistaking the character of the agitation which shook her from head to foot, sheepishly offered his arm, and for the remainder of the walk apologized for his boldness.

"Gracious me!" exclaimed Agnes, as he left the house, which he did some time before the coach was due, "what a queer look the little man wears; did you ever see such a mixture of bashfulness and importance, confidence and confusion, in your life? Whatever has he been talking about, Julia?"

In default of reply to this question, Julia broke into a merry peal of laughter, which continued until she was fairly compelled to lean against the side of the summer-house, and subside into short gasps of mirth.

"I do not like that laugh, Julia," said her mother, "a thousand times have I warned you against giving way to your fondness for mischief. I trust you have not been indulging in it with Mr. Chapman; if you have, Julia, you may see reason to regret it, for with all his apparent insignificance, I do not know a more dangerous man."

CHAPTER IV.

Mr. Parsons, Mr. Robert, or plain Bob Parsons, as the taste of the reader may be inclined, for he was pretty generally known in Chalkingdon by each and every of these titles, fulfilled a portion of his employer's directions by going to the Railway Arms, waiting there for the coach, and engaging two outside places. But he did not drink his fill of beer; no, nor would he have a glass when invited to do so by Nathaniel Hackley, with whom he was a great favourite. This caused Nathaniel to marvel, as being an incident never before heard of, and which could

not have entered the dreams of the wildest nightmareian. So it was, however, and while he fondled the dogs, which ran out to meet him, as they did at every house in the neighbourhood, his countenance wore such an expression of gravity, that Nat, from the recesses of his geraniums and fuchsias, looked covertly upon him, sitting at the table al fresco, and wondered if poor Bob was ill, and if not, for he did not look ill, what the deuce had come to him.

Finding it impossible to satisfy himself in this way, he went out, and by way of stimulating the clerk, began conversation in a style not at all uncommon with him, by denouncing, seriatim, the dullness of the country, the clownish inhabitants, their uncouth language, their great stupidity, and winding up by extolling the advantages of London, and the immense superiority of Londoners, of which latter he evidently looked upon himself as a very favourable specimen. When he had concluded, finding his companion make no sign, Nat exclaimed:

"Why, Bob, what's the matter with you?

Confound it, if you are ill, say so; if you're in any other sort of trouble, why, say so. I don't believe you've got a real friend in these parts excepting me, so why don't you out with it?"

"I don't believe I have, indeed," returned the clerk, "but I am well enough in health to-day, Nat, while as for the trouble, I have no more than I have had a thousand times before. I can't touch your beer, it would strangle me I think just now, but I would drink it if I could. Confusion, and ruin, and every evil, to my mean, cowardly, scoundrelly employer!"

"What! has he been up to some of his old games?" cried Nat; "I wonder he ain't ashamed of himself. I wish you could get another berth, Bob; I couldn't stand what I've heard him say to you."

"You would not, I dare say," replied Bob, and a deeper shade crossed his visage, "but with me, the case is different. He keeps me, not only because I am useful as a drudge; but because, having lost caste everywhere, and being a shabby,

sottish, avoided wretch, he knows well enough that I dare not rise against his meanness and conduct. But, blast him with a curse!" continued the clerk, clenching his hand, while his lips trembled with rage, "I bear it all in mind, and will some day be revenged. God! I could burn him in his bed, Hackley! yes, and would sleep sounder upon my own pillow for doing it."

This burst of passion was so unlooked for, and so discomposed Hackley, who had not imagined Parsons capable of such an explosion—although as he often said afterwards, he was a Londoner, and knew something of life, too—it so discomposed Hackley, we say, that, after staring blankly at his companion for a space, he retired into his bar parlour, and from behind his secure screen of fuschias watched the clerk; whistling in a subdued key as he did so.

But no fresh outbreak followed; Parsons sat there for some time motionless, until presently he looked up, and then gathered his blue bags together. The next moment Hackley saw Mr. Chapman approaching the house, and advan-

cing to the door, he bade the lawyer "good morning."

"Good morning, Mr. Hackley," returned Chapman, "what a charming day, quite balmy —tum tum tum, ti tum ti-iddity! Well, Robert, have you had your beer? No! why then, 'life let us cherish,' as the poet says. Nathaniel, a quart of best beer. Tum tum tum ti tum ti-idity!"

"Sir!" said Nat, scarcely believing he could have heard aright, and bewildered, moreover by a certain gaiety apparent in the lawyer, which led him to pace jauntily up and down in front of the house, with thumbs in waistcoat holes as was his wont; and caused him to hum certain musical notes, not traceable it is true, to any air known by Hackley, nor remarkably pleasant in themselves, yet showing, nevertheless, that something of more than ordinary moment was animating Mr. Chapman's bosom lord, and causing it to sit lightly on its throne.

"A pot of best beer, sir?" cried the landlord.

"Ah, umph!" ejaculated the solicitor, "I said —but never mind, it is a very warm day, and strong beer will no doubt be heating; a quart of your nice fresh fourpenny then, Mr. Hackley. Tum tum tum, ti tum ti-iddity—tum tum tum that's it, thank you. Three glasses if you please for you shall join us—no refusal, Nathaniel; three glasses, I say. Now, Robert, we will drink a bumper, 'life's a bumper filled by fate,' as Byron says, or Dr. Watts—'The Ladies!' come drink deep, 'The ladies!' that is very refreshing beer, Mr. Hackley."

"The coach is coming out of the station, sir," interposed Parsons, "shall I stop it?"

"Certainly, certainly," returned his employer, "good day, Hackley, you must not be surprised if I look in pretty often in future, to try your tap. The ladies! ha! ha! ha! all right coachman! Tum tum tum ti tum ti-iddity."

Like even as the swan, which expires in song, so did Mr. Chapman vanish from the Railway Arms, with the notes of the unknown melody on his lips.

Nathaniel watched the coach as its wheels flung the dust abroad like so much smoke, scratching his poll meantime with a most puzzled and comical look in his face. At last he seemed to have found a clue, for his features suddenly lightened, and turning with a broad grin into his bar, he muttered:

"He's drunk!"

During the remainder of the day, until the somewhat vague period of "teatime," Hackley kept watch and ward over the Railway Arms Tavern, with the premises, fixtures, and various appurtenances pertaining thereto; cleaning his gun, sorting his flies and hooks, when no train was expected, and drawing much ale and "cold gin," when one was due. The time was further beguiled, and his pursuits varied, by occasional gossips with the straw-hatted driver of the "Deaconstone Express," a ricketty apology for an omnibus, which ran daily to that important village; or by discussing with a porter, in a shiny moleskin jacket, the forward character of his potato bed, of some twelve feet by eight, as

compared with that of Ned Jones, the night policeman.

About tea time, however, Nat was able to indulge in half an hour's stroll, for the junior clerk at the station lodged with him, and, as Nat had no wife, he used to get this youngster, a pale, delicate youth of sixteen or seventeen, to mind house, while he took a little exercise. The possession of this lodger was a great comfort to Nat, for he was not only a Londoner, and one very much out of his element, in this little-frequented spot; but he had a great admiration for Hackley, and thought him much the best marksman, angler, cricketer, and boxer out of the metropolis; and had, moreover, a full conviction that no house in those parts, really kept Allsop's pale ale, excepting the Railway Arms, at Chalkingdon Road.

So Fred—for the young gentleman's name was Mr. Frederick Harley—partook of a quiet tea with his landlord, during which the conversation was exclusively of a sporting cast; and related chiefly to trout of unusual size, captured by Nat;

winners of the Derby foretold by Nat in his time, when at a hundred to one, with a few mysterious hints about the coming St. Leger; extraordinary shooting he had seen while in service; with graphic accounts of prizefights he had attended, and of spirited sets to in which he had himself been an actor.

On all such details Harley would hang with breathless interest, and when the meal was concluded, Hackley would give him his fly book to examine, or allot him some such task, and then, after exchanging his frock for a coat, stroll out to some neighbouring farmhouse.

On this particular evening Nat thought he would saunter to Squire Pixton's fishpond, and make interest with that gentleman, or his son, for a day's sport, in behalf of young Harley. He reached the pond, but after lingering for some time in its vicinity, and noting, with longing eyes, some choicer and larger fish than ordinary, he left without seeing any of the family. Determining to return by a favourite route across the fields, he passed through one of the paddocks

at the rear of Royal Lodge, and thus became an unintentional witness of a very hearty embrace, and affectionate parting, between Miss Julia Elmsley and Mr. Edgar Fielding. He saw the gentleman depart, and then heard him ride from the house, but he saw also, with some surprise, Miss Elmsley, after a short pause of reflection, sit down upon a bank and laugh aloud. Hackley left the spot, and plainly meditated deeply for the remainder of his walk, upon what he had seen; his reflections appearing to be by no means satisfactory, as he more than once shook his head, and frowned. Of whatever cast, however, his thoughts were, he must be left to the undisturbed enjoyment of them, while we follow, or rather precede, Mr. Edgar Fielding in his ride.

Chalkingdon was lying hot, silent, and dusty, in the glow of that afternoon's sun, and, save for one or two idlers collected around the gateway of the shadiest inn yard in the market-place, there were few signs of life in the quiet town. Lawyer Chapman's house looked upon

the market-place, which same was a wide naked area sloping from the high ground where stood the church, down to the main street, which crossed the lower portion. The only ornament of this area was a pump, or spring, for the Town Hall was too much on one side to be considered of it, though nearly adjacent; not indeed that the mean, crazy, yellow building could have been classed amongst the ornaments of any locality. The solemn old church, lying far back, its square, weather-beaten tower, visible above the avenue of lime trees which led through the church yard to the porch, certainly filled the upper end splendidly, and gave repose and beauty to the naked spot. Ranged around the area, then, were the houses of the town magnates; the banker was there, the brewer was there; the two chief inns, in a sad state of decline now, when compared to the prosperity of the good old coaching times, were there; and as the reader already knows, Lawyer Chapman's was there also.

A large, flat, red brick house, with "Mr.

Zaccheus Chapman, Solicitor," on the door plate, was the residence of our worthy friend, and he, at the moment to which we refer, was in what had once been a back parlour, but which was now fitted up as an office. Here, too, seated at a large table covered with papers, was Robert Parsons, scribbling away patiently, never pausing in his monotonous employment save to dip his pen in the ink, or, as he drew a fresh sheet of paper towards him, to glance for an instant upon the pleasant garden, and to listen to such faint and subdued sounds as at intervals reached them from the streets of Chalkingdon. To him, as the old playbooks say, Zaccheus Chapman, who still bore a portion of the extreme lightness and hilarity which had so amazed the host of the Railway Arms:

"Now, Robert," began the superior, "is that lease almost finished? Very nearly, eh? That's right, I have promised to let the parties sign to-morrow, and to be done, or not to be done, they are the questions, as the poet observes."

"Mr. Meyrick's servant has been here to-day,

sir," said Parsons, "and says his master wishes to see you to-morrow at ten."

"Indeed, that's unfortunate," returned Chapman, "as I had intended to call at Royal Lodge; what does your friend Hackley, now, think of the family there, eh! Parsons?"

"He admires them very much," answered his clerk, "as every one who sees them must do."

"Just so; as every one who sees must do. They are monarchs of all they survey, as has been well remarked, or we might amend it, I think, by saying, 'monarchs of all who survey them'; what do you think of that for an adaptation, Parsons?"

"I think it very novel," was the reply.

"Ah! I need not have asked you," retorted the solicitor; "that alone interests you which appeals to the grosser senses. However, events may occur soon, Robert, which will at once supply the means and the excuse for your unrestrained indulgence in your most congenial pleasures."

His fag made no answer, but in silence plied his pen unflaggingly, adding line after line to the dull mass of verbiage before him, while Chapman, who seemed quite unable on this day to settle to any regular work, looked from the open window, and hummed in a low tone the cheerful strain he had hit upon in the morning.

He had got to perhaps the twenty-second or twenty-third repetition of tum tum tum ti-tum ti-iddity, and his clerk was reaching for his sixth dip of ink since they had spoken, when suddenly came a sharp ring at the office bell, the sound of hoofs having been heard just before. The street door was opened by the servant; a man was heard to stride through the passage; the office door was thrown back, and Edgar Fielding entered. The little lawyer instantly shook him by the hand warmly, and expressed the great delight he felt at seeing his young friend in his, Z. C.'s house; but wound up with an eye to business, by enquiring if he could be of any service to him.

"Why, yes, Mr. Chapman," replied Edgar, "I certainly wish to have a few words with you in private."

"By all means, my dear sir, I am perfectly at your disposal," cried the lawyer, with the greatest alacrity. "This way, sir, this way, if you please; I shall be delighted, I am sure, to attend to you."

"Shall you?" asked Fielding, and he laughed openly as he spoke.

The solicitor laughed too; he always liked laughter; it was a good sign in a wealthy client, and he made a rule of encouraging it. They were now in Mr. Chapman's front parlour, a comfortable, well-furnished sitting-room, shadier and cooler than the rear of the house, on which the rays of the declining sun still fell brightly.

"Pray be seated," continued the lawyer, placing a chair near the window; "we have had an extremely warm day, Mr. Fielding."

"Very," returned the young man.

"You found some inconvenience from the dust, no doubt," said Chapman; "these roads are

very bad on that account, especially when riding."

"They are indeed," was the rejoinder.

"I am not much of a horseman myself," Chapman went on, "and am, in fact, rather timid of riding."

The lawyer paused, expecting his companion would at once enter upon the business which had brought him to Chalkingdon. But Edgar remained coolly lolling in the arm chair, and gazing listlessly from the window, apparently without any immediate intention of speaking. Finding one or two significant coughs of no avail, the solicitor said:

"I think I understood you, Mr. Fielding, to say that you wished for a few words with me in private; did you intend—"

"Oh, certainly! ha! ha! ha! to be sure!" exclaimed Fielding, rousing himself, and turning to confront his host; "but I ought first to apologise for disturbing you, as my business would very well have kept for a day or two."

"Of no consequence; only too happy," interposed the lawyer blandly, satisfied at finding there *was* something to be done.

"I believe," continued Fielding carelessly, "that you know the family at Royal Lodge pretty well."

"Extremely well! Oh, dear me, yes!" cried Chapman, much surprised at the turn which the conversation had taken.

"Ah, well then, Mr. Chapman," continued Fielding, seeming to stifle a yawn, though such an effort consorted but ill with the penetrating glance he shot at the solicitor as he spoke, "you being, as I supposed, an intimate of the family, accounts for my having heard you often spoken of, especially by the young ladies—eh, Mr. Chapman?"

"Ha! ha! ha!—he! he! he!" laughed the lawyer.

But it was evident, from the nervous manner in which he rubbed his hands together, and from the wistful, enquiring look he directed at his

companion, that there was little "body" in his laugh, and that he was at a loss to conjecture the drift of these remarks.

"Very good, sir, very good," he continued, "I only wish I could attend more frequently at Royal Lodge; my visits are, jocularly speaking, like angel's, with a considerable interval between them. You see, Mr. Fielding, even lawyers indulge occasionally in the jocular."

"Yes, I know they do," returned Edgar, "for you have several times informed me that you were merry; I took your word for it, of course. However, to business. Trifling as the matter is, any little mark of attention is valuable from friends, and I make no secret of the fact that Miss Julia suggested my visit here."

A flush, and then a nervous trembling were visible in the face of the little man, who looked pleased, nevertheless, and replied simperingly:

"I am much indebted to Miss Julia, I am sure. No one can fail to admire her, Mr. Fielding, and I shall make a point, on her account, of

reading the play of Romeo and Julia, whenever I can come across it cheap. But—"

"Your poetic reading will be very extensive," returned Fielding, "but I must not detain you. We agreed that you had better wait upon Mr. Elmsley to-morrow or next day, and speak to him upon the subject."

"Good God, Mr. Fielding, you amaze me!" exclaimed the lawyer, rising and pacing nervously to and fro. "Excuse this agitation, but I was not prepared for this. Tell Miss Julia, if you please, that I have to wait upon Mr. Meyrick to-morrow at ten, but will certainly be at the Lodge by one. Excuse, I say, this agitation, sir."

"Dear me!" ejaculated his visitor, regarding him with what was meant as an expression of the deepest sympathy, but in which there was something so unpleasant, that when his eye caught the lawyer's, the latter involuntarily stopped, and remained gazing anxiously at him, awaiting further explanations. "Dear me!" said Fielding again, "do business communications always

so disturb you, sir? To be brief, Mr. Chapman, I wait upon you with the earliest notice. My father will probably choose his own lawyer; of course I do not know who that may be, but the day has been fixed, with Mrs. Elmsley's sanction; Mr. Elmsley's, of course, will follow, and you will be kind enough to call speedily at the Lodge for instructions."

"For—for what, sir?" asked Chapman faintly, the nervous twitching of his face increasing, and his flush of excitement sinking into an ashy paleness.

"For—tut, how slow you are!" cried Fielding. "Ha! ha! ha! you lawyers won't see anything when you don't choose. You must understand me; I and Miss Julia are to be married in about three weeks' time, and as an old acquaintance I should wish you to draw out the settlements."

"He! he!" laughed the solicitor feebly; and if his face had been pale before, it was now ghastly, and the twitching had given way to an expression which was perfectly hideous.

He seemed to try for the utterance of a few words, but merely gasped out again a faint "He! he! he!"

"Oh, yes," pursued Fielding, rapping his boot with his riding whip, and speaking in a tone of the utmost indifference; "we have been engaged for this six months, you know, though very little fuss has been made about it. A great many people thought I should have looked higher, but I don't agree with them. It will be rather a good match for me, I fancy, as there is not only a beautiful, high spirited girl, but plenty of money."

"I know it," groaned the lawyer, involuntarily, as it seemed.

"I have no further occasion for detaining you," said Fielding; "you won't forget, Mr. Chapman."

Mr. Chapman made a sign implying that he should not forget.

"You must contrive to be at leisure on the day of the wedding," resumed Edgar, "for we shall have a little merriment, I will be bound.

'All went merry as a marriage bell,' you know; that is one of the *recherché* and unhackneyed quotations in which you delight. Well, good afternoon, Mr. Chapman, be sure call on Mr. Elmsley soon—good afternoon."

The lawyer forced out a farewell, and threw himself at full length upon a sofa; Fielding riding briskly away, almost choking with suppressed laughter, to which, when he had fairly cleared the town, he gave full vent, and said aloud:

"This has paid him in full for the kiss, I should think."

Parsons, in his room, worked on until the hour for tea had come and passed; Milly, the maid, had come up twice to ascertain if "master didn't want his tea," and still the lawyer remained in the parlour. At last, Parsons, getting too hungry to hold out any longer, decided upon an excuse for disturbing his employer's reverie, and accordingly knocked at the parlour door. It was immediately opened, and Chapman came out.

Parsons had prepared himself with some trivial business enquiry, the first words of which were on his lips as the door moved, but so changed and deathly an aspect did his superior wear, that Bob recoiled a pace, and was speechless. Chapman glared at him, but passed on in silence, and Bob, extinguished, as it were, by the sight of his wild visage, hazarded no questions. His tea—Bob's tea, we mean—was brought up, as usual, into the office upon the usual tray, with the usual bread and butter, but, instead of hurrying down-stairs, as was her wont, Milly lingered in the room, until Parsons had made himself comfortable by changing his seat from the stool to one of the office chairs, and laying his legs in another. Then, with the tray close to his elbow, the garden made fragrant by the evening breeze, just below him, and a copy of last Saturday's "Mid Western Chronicle" upon his knees, he began his meal.

"Hallo! Milly, what do you want, my girl?" he exclaimed, as he caught sight of the handmaiden.

"Lor! Robert," said the girl, for no one used any ceremony with poor Parsons, "how our master be a going on, surely."

"Why, what is he doing, Nelly?" asked Parsons, whose curiosity was excited by the girl's manner, and by what he had seen himself.

"Oh, nothing; he bean't doing nothin' zackly," said the girl, "but he have a leant his head upon his arm, and he be as white as your shirt vront; ah, and a good deal whiter."

Bob frowned, and hurriedly pulled his coat over his breast, as though he did not relish the amended comparison. The girl saw he was annoyed, and sought to remove the impression by saying:

"Not as there be nought the matter wi' your shirt vront, Measter Robert; no, I've seen 'un a girt deal dirtier nor it be now. But measter does look so awful bad, and his eyes do rowl about so, and a' zhuts a's vists, and a' says—no, a' doan't zay anythink, but a' looks it—do'ee think he be mad, Robert?"

"Mad, you absurd girl, no; he's only suffering, I dare say, from a touch of this disease which is going about so much now. Come, be off to your work, Milly, or you will get into the wrong box."

So Parsons resumed his tea, while the girl went down stairs, and for the next hour or so was horrified to hear, in her kitchen, the bitter groans, now and then, of her master, and was still more shocked to see, when she had occasion to enter his room, his ghastly face and starting eyes.

CHAPTER V.

No great sensation was created at Royal Lodge by the fixing of the day for the wedding, although more of interest was thereto belonging than has yet been revealed to the reader. Agnes had agreed to marry on the same day; indeed, the chief purport of James Smith's, Esq., brief holiday, was to appoint the time. But no great sensation, we say, was at first created within the walls of Royal Lodge, even by this doubly important arrangement; the wooing of both young ladies, especially Agnes, had been carried on so undisguisedly, so much at home, and this

termination had been looked for so much as a matter-of-course, that neither of the elders, nay, not either of the suitors or the sued, felt it necessary to express any particular emotion.

It cannot be denied, however, that some important conferences took place during the next few days between the young ladies and their mamma as to the best means of bringing off the double event with sufficient éclât. To these conferences, Mr. Elmsley was sometimes admitted, and it was not a little amusing to one of the party at least, the quick-sighted Julia, to find him gravely objecting to this and that person being invited, on the score that he or she was "not quite up to the mark" of the county families. In this he was perfectly earnest, yet would, most undoubtedly, in the same hour have told, with all the relish imaginable, his tale of the discomfiture of Sir Roger and Lady Hawberry. John Elmsley, however, was no more inconsistent than yourself, reader, because you know how angry you are with the family in the large house to the left, for keeping you out of their set, in

spite of all your advances; and how justly indignant you feel with the low people on the right, who persist in snatching at every pretext for thrusting themselves upon you.

This chronicle entereth nothing more about the domestic preparations for the wedding; the editor thereof having been married himself, naturally avoids a subject so full of painful reminiscences. Let the light talk, too often expended on such occasions, be confined to ignorant, giddy bachelors; you rarely find an old Benedict titter at matrimony:

"He jests at scars who never felt a wound."

James Smith, as before said, had but a few days to spare, too soon were they expended, and in due time he left for London. He was to come back in three weeks time to claim the pretty girl who stood with swimming eyes by the carriage side; yet, brief though the interval, James was down-hearted at leaving, and but for the presence of a very stout gentleman, with a

bulbous nose, who looked up angrily from his paper, at the "smack" of a farewell kiss, he could have shed a tear himself. However, he did not, for as the young lady withdrew, the old gentleman, who was stout, and had a bulbous nose, made a most disparaging noise. It was not a cough, although he would doubtless wish it to be so considered; it was not a clearing of the throat, although he might so have excused it; it was a long, contemptuous "Bah-h-ha! terminating in a complete growl, as he jerked himself half round, away from Smith. James watched him steadily for a couple of minutes, as the train moved on, intending to freeze him into wretchedness by a single glance, but the stout old gentleman with a bulbous nose, did not look from his paper. So Smith jerked *him*self round, and stared out of his window; thus those travellers remained, and thus they beguiled a journey of some sixty odd miles, and made it pleasant to each other by their sociability—after the manner of the English.

On this day, the day whereon James Smith

left for London, of course we mean, Mr. Elmsley drove over to Knollington, a village some ten miles distant, and lying on the farther side of the hills. He had promised to attend a meeting there, which was preliminary to giving a sort of fête in the ensuing week; merely a little rustic affair, prizes for cottagers' gardens, to old servants, skilful dairymaids, and so on; but he had been elected upon the committee (a distinction frequently conferred on the man who was known to be always good for a five pound note), and felt it necessary to attend the meeting.

At starting, he told his wife that he might or might not be home that evening; if he got away early, or if any one was riding his road, he should be back, if not, they need not feel alarmed if he did not come home. Thus having, like a prudent husband, provided for contingencies, he ordered "King's Arms" to the front, entered the chaise, and drove off.

Now, although King's Arms was a stout, chubby, willing pony, yet the day was intensely

hot; the way long, when it is remembered that the roads were almost perpendicular; Mr. Elmsley, therefore, made but slow progress; he got out to walk up the worst part of the hills, till he was almost as tired and hot as the pony, and it was not until considerably more than two hours had passed, that the two travellers bipedal and quadrupedal, found themselves in the quiet inn yard of the "Lamb" the cosey, cheerful, single hostel of Knollington. This was the head-quarters of the committee, and the committee were just sitting down in the principal room, with windows and doors open, blinds drawn, everything cool, quiet, and shady, to a quarter of lamb, cold, with salad. This part of the duty, after draining a couple of glasses of deliciously cool, nectar-like pale ale, Elmsley found himself especially fitted for, and with his four coadjutors, commenced an attack upon the aforesaid lamb.

After dinner, the five committee-men sat near the shaded windows, and disturbed by no sound more irritating than the buzz of a stray bee,

the chime of the mellow church clock, or the occasional gurgle of liquids from bottles, they talked their business over. Mr. Elmsley was gratified, for reasons about to be given, by having a neat hand-bill shown him, a very well got up one indeed, with a floral border, and setting forth the attractions of the coming fête. It was under the immediate patronage of the most noble the Marquis Norroy, and, of course, the Marchioness; Earl Clarencieux, Viscount Jarretier, with his young and beautiful Viscountess, patronized it too. The celebrated band of the South-West Berkshire Yeomanry, by the kind permission of their Colonel, Sir Roger Hawberry, Bart., would play selections of the most popular music. Prizes would be distributed in the great marquee (to be erected by Edgington, of London), by the most noble the Marquis of Norroy, who, together with Sir Giles Vetch, Bart., and Canute Froissart, Esq., two of the county members, would address the successful candidates.

Last of all—no, not last of all, for the last

thing on the bill, above the printer's name, was, of course, the announcement that tickets, price one shilling each, or family packets of six, for five shillings, could be obtained at the Lamb, Knollington; the Wheatsheaf, Deaconstone; the Waggon and Horses, Hillingdale; and of the various members of the Committee. Best of all, we say, was the following:

COMMITTEE OF MANAGEMENT.

John Elmsley, Esq., Royal Lodge, Chalkingdon Road, CHAIRMAN.
Ezekiel Bodgings, Esq., Rawbone Lodge, Knollington.
Alfred Fielding, Esq., Fielding House, Deaconstone.
Gilbert Tunks, Esq., Wheatstraw Farm, Knollington.
Revd. Sleekie Topper, A.M., HON. SECRETARY.

Now, these were all sound, substantial men, and men of good repute among the county families. Fielding was Edgar's father, and allied, at not more than five removes, with nobility; while Ezekiel Bodgings, of Rawbone, was the wealthiest man in those parts.

Great then was the natural and justifiable pride of Elmsley, at finding his name in print

among such men, and not only among them, but absolutely at their head, elected by their own graceful act to superintend them. Thereupon Elmsley ordered up half a dozen of Mr. Bumple's best sherry. Mr. Bumple, the landlord, brought it, and very good his guests found it.

A little bye play took place between Elmsley and Mr. Fielding, which ended in a long shaking of hands, with much smiling, which being over, they rejoined their companions, and one or two glasses were emptied in silence. At last Mr. Elmsley, who had been fingering or reading the handbill almost continually since dinner, rose, and addressing the Rev. S. Topper, said:

"I should like to take the liberty of saying a few words, sir, if no objection on your part, or the rest of the company."

"We shall be only too happy to hear you, sir," smiled Mr. Topper. "I am sure I speak your sentiments, gentlemen?" Appealing with a look to his friends as he finished.

"Hear, hear!" cried the other three, and the chairman, still folding and unfolding the hand-

bill, and looking nervously from side to side of the room, began:

"Gentlemen, allow me to return my very best thanks for this honour, this unexpected honour, which you have done me. Only a plain man of business, as makes no pretensions to anything, I could hardly expect, you know, for gentlemen of your repute in the county to go and elect me as chairman. I am very proud of it, indeed, and this bill shall be cherished as a memorandum of the event. I can't help feeling proud, gentlemen, at finding my name associated, in large letters with the Marquis and Marchioness of Norroy, Earl Clarenceoo, and the Viscount and Viscountess Jarrytier; on such occasions, gentlemen, we feel how important it is to teach the labourer to cultivate floriculture and the fine arts, and produce spinnage and brokeloe, and all those vegetables."

"Bravo, Elmsley!" roared old Tunks, while Mr. Topper gently rapped the table with an approving "hear, hear."

Stimulated by this applause, Elmsley bowed,

wetted his lips with his tongue, and went on:

"Of course, if we don't give them prizes, they can't expect to get any, for where, I should like to know, are they to look for 'em, if the old county families, and them that mixes with them don't come down with the money? Gentlemen, I know I am not much of a speaker, and consequently don't do it very well, but what I have to to say, is this:—I am so anxious to promote the —the prosperity of the villager, and to elevate him in the social scale," (this was a quotation from the prospectus, at which Mr. Elmsley was furtively glancing), "I am so anxious to do these sort of things, and take such an interest in roses and fewshers, and sunflowers, and—and dandelions, and all that; that, gentlemen, I beg, in consideration with those things, and of the honour you have done me, to make an extra donation of five pounds to the funds."

Hearty applause followed this announcement, and while the Rev. Sleekie Topper took out his

pocketbook for the purpose of entering the subscription, Elmsley was overwhelmed with praise for his liberality: it was not wholly unexpected, for the Rev. S. T. had said, with modest diffidence, while they were casting about for a fifth committee man and chairman, that Mr. Elmsley, of Royal Lodge, would like the post, and would, he was convinced, feel a proper sense of his responsibility.

Then Mr. Fielding arose, and informed the company, that, like them he had been delighted with the speech of their upright, downstraight friend, whose generosity did him honour, and set an example well worthy of imitation to old county families, and he was sure—Alfred Fielding was sure—they would drink with great pleasure a toast he was about to propose. It was a double toast, or a treble toast, but for the life of him he could not make up his mind to divide it, or to diminish it a bit. No, he must give it entire, and here it was: "Prosperity to Mr. Elmsley, their respected chairman, and happiness to

his wife and family, especially to Miss Elmsley, Miss Julia Elmsley, soon to become Mrs. Edgar Fielding."

What a burst there was then! how Elmsley returned thanks, and what a general shaking of hands ensued.

The Rev. S. Topper came out brilliantly upon the subject, and while at one moment he moved them to laughter, with his rich, but gentlemanly humour, at another he sank into the nethermost depths of pathos, and Elmsley fairly shed tears.

On the whole, they had a joyous afternoon, and Mr. Elmsley mounted his vehicle, (a little later, it must be owned, than he should have done), a proud and happy man. He could not make up his mind to stay at Knollington, he was too full of his honours; he felt that he must hurry home to communicate them to Mrs. Elmsley; besides, he had solemnly pledged himself to take her to the fête next week, and was anxious to tell her so. He knew that she loved feasting and revelry but little; still he had been so pressed

to bring her, by all his fellow officials, that he had at last promised. After a single cup of tea, therefore, he sat once more behind King's Arms, and emerging at a gentle trot from the Lamb archway, awoke the seldom-startled echoes of Knollington.

It was a beautiful, though somewhat too warm an evening, the sun was still pretty high in the heavens, but his bed was hazy and cloudy. Before him, stretching far away over the immense down, ran the road, narrowing and narrowing till it diminished in the distance to a thread, with but few turns and inequalities to baffle even the benighted traveller; behind lay Knollington, fringed with tall trees, and its cluster of slated, tiled or thatched roofs, crowned by the slender little spire of its pretty church.

Elmsley, pensive and ruminating, as men not unfrequently are, after so convivial a meeting, turned in his chaise to gaze upon the quiet little village, and mark the change from gold to grey upon its gables and roofs, until objects grew indistinct, and at last nothing but the lofty trees

could be seen. Then he devoted his attention to King's Arms, for the sun had quite sunk, and as it seemed to him, with unusual rapidity; he had hitherto left his pony to its own guidance, knowing how few were the chances, on these lonely roads, of meeting any vehicle after sun down.

The haze, too, was spreading wider, and the clouds looked suddenly darker and more angry, so King's Arms was stimulated into a trot; not a fast one, for the poor beast seemed tired, and, moreover, they now began to climb the ascent which led to the crest of the ridge; and a long and toilsome ascent it was. So long and so toilsome was it, that Elmsley once again roused himself from a profound reverie, to find night closing in, and the wind blowing fresher and cooler, and driving before it now and then, a spray of rain.

Anxious to cross the hill before it was pitch dark, Elmsley jerked his reins, smacked his whip, and tried to urge his steed to a swifter pace. But poor King's Arms was nearly knocked up,

and could go no faster. Elmsley was therefore obliged to brave the increasing wind and thickening rain, and he jogged on, meditating seriously upon the advisability of returning to Knollington; for he remembered how steep was the descent on his own side of the hills, and how soon an accident might happen in the dark, especially to so unskilful a charioteer.

He was yet revolving these things in his mind and thinking the road endless, when he suddenly came abreast of a light, and looking to the roadside, saw the outline of a small hut, from whence the light proceeded, and could just observe faintly, that a large house lay at some little distance behind.

Uttering an exclamation of surprise, he pulled up to consider where he was, and what houses these could possibly be. More puzzled the longer he looked, he at last alighted, and picking his way cautiously through the darkness, rapped at the door of the hut, a miserable little thatched tenement of some eight feet high.

A voice cried, "Who be there?"

"A traveller," returned Elmsley, "who wants to know his best road to Chalkingdon."

The door was opened by a tall man in a coarse smock frock, and, with his first glance into the interior of the cottage, Elmsley saw it to be a poor and wretched house, meanly furnished, evidently of two rooms only, and that at the table, on which burnt the feeble light which had attracted his attention, sat a woman and two girls.

"Thee won't go to Chalkingdon to-night, surely!" exclaimed the man, "Why it be vivteen or zixteen mile away, and the worst road on all the hills."

"Then how far am I from Knollington?" demanded Elmsley.

"Pretty nigh as much—leastways a dozen," returned the man.

Here was a catastrophe! A dark night, a dangerous and unknown road, a lame horse, and an unskilful driver! It was too clear, then, that he had mistaken his way; how he could have done it, or when, he tried in vain to remember, but the fact was indisputable.

"Where am I now, then?" he asked, "and where shall I find a public house at which I can get a bed!"

"This be Owlet Thicket," said the cottager, "and there ben't a public house vor vive or zix mile, and a main bad road to get to un beside. And, zur, thee would'nt like to bide among trampers, and gypsies, and the like. Bean't you Measter Elmsley?"

"Unfortunately it is Mr. Elmsley," replied our friend, in some amazement, "but who then are you?"

"Lord! do'entee remember I, zur?" exclaimed the man. "Do'entee remember Steeve Johnson! I've a worked many a day vor you, zur."

"Ah! to be sure, I recollect you now," cried Elmsley, pleased to recognize an honest, hard-working fellow, who used to live near him.

"Well, Steeve, I want you to tell me what I had best do—my horse is lame, I have lost my way, and it is coming on a wet night."

"I doan't know, zur," said Johnson, "I can't think what th'hadst better do. There bean't

another house nigh—zartainly I could go to Deaconstone, and that's seven mile off, and vetch a vresh horse, or could zhow thee the way. Let's look at the powney."

King's Arms accordingly underwent an inspection, the result of which was a decided opinion from Johnson, that he would not go another mile that night.

"You say it's seven miles to Deaconstone," resumed Elmsley, "then I can't go there. Could you let me sleep in one of your rooms, Johnson? What family have you got?"

"Well, zur," said Johnson, hesitatingly, "I will, if nout better can be done, but there's vive children and me and Mary—you must ha' some on us in the same room, zur."

"Well, put the horse and chaise into your shed there, at any rate, and we'll talk the matter over," said Elmsley.

The horse was led into the rude stable, and made as comfortable as Johnson's limited resources would allow. Elmsley, meanwhile, asking a few questions which enabled him to decide

upon sleeping in the chaise, rather than intrude upon the crowded family. He asked who lived in the large house close by, but found it was a deserted ruin; even a ruin, however, was better than the open down, so he determined, with the aid of his thick rug, chaise mat, and coat, to make himself a bed in one of the rooms, as he found that several were weather-tight, and so told Steeve to fetch a candle. Steeve complied, but not until after considerable delay, and, when at last he reappeared with a tin lantern, he formed a series of trivial excuses for loitering in the shed, and a decided reluctance to proceed was visible in his face and movements.

"Come! come!" exclaimed Elmsley, "let us see my lodgings; what makes you so slow, Steeve? If you have not permission to let any one into the ruin, I will bear the blame; I will answer for your not losing anything by your service."

"Oh, it bean't that, zur," said Johnson, looking down, and swinging his lantern gently to and fro.

"Then what is it? what are you afraid of?" demanded Elmsley.

"Whoy, to tell'ee the truth, zur," at last explained Johnson, with an effort, "to tell'ee the truth, Measter, it bean't a many as would like to go into Judgment House after dark."

"What house did you call it?" asked Elmsley.

"Judgment House, zur," replied the man, "its name used to be zummat else, but now it be called so; it be harnted."

"Haunted! pooh, nonsense: come along, you timid fellow, there's nothing worse than darkness or dust, I'll be bound," laughed Elmsley.

With an ominous shake of the head, Johnson complied, and led the way towards the deserted house; after walking a few score yards, they entered an enclosure, through an opening where once, doubtless, a gate had swung; in this garden, or whatever the area had been, it was but bad walking, so net-like was the ground with rank weeds, while here and there, in spite of the lantern, the intruders stumbled over a fallen limb of a tree.

At last they reached the house; by the faint light of the night, to which the feeble rays of the lantern lent but little aid, Elmsley could just discern that it had been a building of considerable size, now partly roofless, and that its evil reputation had not been of sufficient power to prevent the doors from being torn from their hinges; a glance within showed the broad staircase decayed and imperfect. All, of course, was profoundly silent about the ruin, but as they entered, a swift rushing sound was heard for an instant, as of some light bodies flying rapidly past them. Indistinctly, too, something shadowy and vague was seen to tremble for an instant on the ground.

"Oh, zur! oh, Measter Elmsley," began Johnson, but his companion, who wanted not for nerve, cut him short.

"Tut! tut!" he exclaimed, "did you never see or hear rabbits before?"

"Be um really rabbuts, though, do'ee think?" enquired Johnson; yet he was evidently reassured by this simple explanation of the noise.

The place was, indeed, a ruin, and though they ventured no farther than the ground floor, yet they found, from its roofless condition, that most of the rooms were very damp: one small chamber, however, which had probably been a bedroom, seemed less decayed than the others, and Elmsley decided upon bivouacking there. The dust flew in little clouds at each step they took, and at each step, moreover, a hollow, mournful noise reverberated through the house, and Johnson had evidently great difficulty in believing these sounds to be of ordinary character, and mortal origin.

But in the little room selected, the window was nearly whole, and but one door opened into it; so, throwing the chaise mat into a corner, and his rug and coat upon it, Elmsley declared himself well satisfied with his lodging.

"I shall come back to your cottage, Steeve," said the gentleman, "for a whole candle and a bit of supper. What have you got? any meat, cheese, any good beer?"

"Lor' bless'ee, Measter Elmsley!" exclaimed

Johnson, as he turned to precede his companion, "how be such as we to get they things? Mind they there steps, zur; we never tastes meat, 'cept when Varmer Lawrence do kill a ship, then I do ha' the head, or, like as not, a breast. Times be hard to live now, I do assure'ee, zur, specially when there's three or fower as yearns nothing, though I be better off than most o' they about here."

"Then what do you earn, Johnson?" asked Elmsley.

"Why, zur," returned his companion, "I do ha' this cottage rent vree, and eight shillin' a week, and haven't lost a day's work vor more nor vive years."

"Eight shillings a week with a lot of children! but go on," said the gentleman.

"We ha' gotten some main tidy bearcon," resumed Steeve, whose chief trouble was the providing supper for his unexpected guest, "vor I zaved a bit out of our last pig; we keeps a pig, thee knows, and that helps us a great deal."

"Then you have no beer?" was the next inquiry.

"No, no, zur," was Steeve's answer, "we be only too glad to get bread, zur; here we be. Get a cheer, Mary, vor the zquire."

Mary, a fair skinned, homely looking woman, freckled and made coarse in hands and face, by exposure to sun and wind, and by toil, placed an old arm chair, evidently the seat of state, for the squire, while the two little girls sat on a low form by the fire place, and looked up with awe at the strange gentleman. It was plain that they could not go to bed until that room was cleared.

"Canst brile Measter Elmsley a slice off the cushion?" asked Steeve.

And his wife replying in the affirmative, he reached from the roof a small piece of bacon, and cut therefrom a nice-looking rasher. Some sticks were brought from the rear of the cottage, and the rasher was soon hissing cheerfully. The girls, glancing, with their pretty brown eyes, at the guest on every opportunity, cleared the table, and a clean, though scanty cloth, a knife

and fork, a wooden saltcellar, a white plate, and so forth, were soon arranged.

"I be very zorry, zur," continued Steeve, as he deposited a brown loaf upon the table, "that we han't got any beer, because I knows you gentry likes a drop o' beer with your zuppers. We ha' got zome tea left though, Mary; we can make Measter Elmsley a cup."

"No, thank you, never mind," said Elmsley, "I shall do extremely well as it is. Egad, it's a lucky thought! I remember Nat Hackley putting a bottle of brandy into the seat of my chaise as a sample: that was about a week ago, and I don't believe it has ever been taken out. Go and see, Steeve, there's the key; we'll have a glass together, and you shall tell me all about the haunted house."

Steeve departed, and soon returned in high glee, having found not only the brandy, but a packet of choice tobacco, which Elmsley recollected was deposited at the same time. He had brought it, he said, because he thought the squire smoked, and might miss his pipe, but it

was so easy to see the poor fellow's mouth watering for the tobacco, that the squire insisted upon his having a pipe at once.

Steeve wanted little pressing, and the rasher being done, Elmsley sat down to a far more comfortable meal than an hour before he had thought it possible to get. When his supper was ended, the table was pushed back to give more room, the kettle steamed, a single glass, and two halfpint earthenware mugs were produced, and Elmsley proceeded to mix the brandy and water.

"Stay!" he exclaimed, "this won't do; have you nothing but brown sugar?"

"I really do think, Steeve," said Mary, "that there be some vine white sugar in the back of the cupboard, left since Hannah's illness."

A search was made, and in a small paper packet, put carefully away, were found some ten or a dozen knobs.

"Ah! this will answer capitally!" cried Elmsley, "but have you had a child ill?"

"Ees, zur, we have lost one," explained

Johnson, sighing as he spoke, "and she wur a nice little wench to be sure. The ladies down at Deaconstone, used to be very kind to we, and they did take such notice of my poor gal."

"What ladies?" asked Elmsley.

"The parson's wife and darters, I mean," continued Johnson; "my gal did go to their school, and when she come to be thirteen or vourteen, I zays, 'Hannah,' I zays, 'thee beest growing a stout little maid now, like, we wull see if we can't get thee a pleace.' Vor you know, zur, she wor a main good scollard, she could read any chapter in the Testament, ah, and all the long words in the newspapers too. I don't zuppose there could be a more better scollard than our Hannah, and she wor always so gentle and biddable like."

Here Johnson paused to smoke for a few seconds, and his eyes were evidently getting watery.

"Our ladies were so proud on her; they taught her to read and to zow; that wench, zur, could make a zhirt or a pinner wi' the virst

lady in the land. I don't zay as she wur 'zackly up to your most bestest work, your bridery and your nick-nacks, but she could make zhirts beautiful. Zo these ladies zays, 'Stephen,' they zays, 'thee'st better let thy little maid stay at whoam a bit, vor she is too weak and delicate vor a pleace, and we will zee thee dosn't hurt by it.' Zo I agreed, and these ladies were allus very kind, and brought her jellies sometimes, and real furrin wine. And Measter Heaver too, our parson, he would come and zit wi' she vor a hour at a time, and they would talk,—lor a massy! zur, it wur just like a book, and he would zay," here Johnson paused again, to sniff once or twice, while his visitor murmured, "Poor fellow!"

"We wor obliged to move out this way, then," resumed Steeve, clearing his throat with an effort, and speaking in a higher key, "but they ladies drove out twice a week to zee us. Zo my gal zays, 'vather,' and I zays, 'Hannah,' I zays —it wor about this time a year too, with the zun a shining, and the birds a zinging, and she

wor zitting by the window when I had come in to dinner like; 'vather, take me to my bed, vor I do veel zo weak; I shall never run on the downs again, vather, and thee won't carry me by theeself when I come through this 'm room again.' And she wor right," continued Johnson, a large and undisguised tear trickling down each cheek, "but if any one ever died happy, our poor Hannah wor that one. Measter Heaver zaid, vor he wor in the house when she died, he zhould be thankful if a' could but hope his end would be like that little maid's; he zaid we zhould rejoice to zee zo delicate, and timid, and good a gal, go to peace and happiness. He wor quite right, quite right; but I did zo love my pretty little gal," concluded Johnson, with a sob in his breath, "that I would not ha' taken, not —no, not two hundred pounds vor she."

Saying this in all simplicity and affection, evidently believing he had, by fixing that standard, shown how intense had been his love for his daughter, Johnson finished, and drank from his cup.

"Let me fill again for you," said Elmsley. "Try that. I suppose now, you would be in bed by this time if I hadn't come."

"Ees, zur," returned Steeve, "we do generally go to bed by eight, or thereabouts, and it be past nine now, but never mind we, zur."

"Oh, I shall not keep you up very long," said Elmsley, "how close and hot the night is getting again! By the bye, tell us about this Judgment House; you have forgotten that."

"It wor as well to tell such a story in the marnin'," said Johnson, "not that we need mind any thing in it; still marnin' is best for they zort of things."

But Elmsley would hear of no postponement; so, as it was but rarely Steeve tasted brandy, and as it was plain his visitor would keep all the goblets filled while they sat up, the cottager overcame his objections, and narrated—in his dialect of course—the incidents which led to the desolation of the large house, and gave rise to its singular name.

CHAPTER VI.

MANY years ago, a wealthy farmer named Anderson lived at this lonely farm, and built the large house which now lies in ruins. He was a burly, loud-voiced, overbearing man of some fifty or sixty years of age, with a wife who soon became known to all their servants as a most ill-tempered vindictive, and passionate woman. From such a pair good children were not likely to spring, and with such examples young people could hardly grow up amiable and generous. Nor was their only son, only child indeed, Frederick Anderson, anything but such as might

have been expected. He was a tall, strapping, good-looking young fellow enough, but selfish, cunning, headstrong, and impatient of control. Around the farm yard were large out buildings, part of which had been fitted up as dwellings for two or three labourers who came to live out there for the sake of the work; and many left the farm after violent quarrels withthe farmer or his wife, through their tyrannical conduct, or from worse quarrels with the son, if the labourer happened to have a pretty wife or daughter.

At last things mended a bit, for a handsome young woman, Miss Mary they called her, came to live at the farmhouse, and she was so gentle and mild, that she seemed actually to soften the fierce old farmer himself, and, which was more wonderful, his disagreeable wife. Besides, she was so kind, and had so many nice ways, that the servants cheerfully put up with many things from the other members of the family, because they were sure of a pleasant look, or kind word from her; she was an orphan, it was stated. As

for Fred, he was very soon deeply in love with his pretty cousin (for Mary was a distant relative), and so he became rather steadier. Things went on like this for more than a year; when Mary, who had always been noted for her blithe, cheerful manner, began to look pale and harassed, while many other circumstances combined to raise Mrs. Anderson's easily-awakened suspicions.

The farmer was therefore told by his wife, that she was sure they had better get rid of that young hussey at once, for if anything wrong became known in the neighbourhood, it was quite certain that Mr. Elford, of Stony Cross would never let his daughter have anything to say to Fred. The old man burst into a paroxysm of rage, as was his wont, and was for immediate execution of justice; but his wilier mate persuaded him from his design, and it was agreed that she should speak to Fred upon the subject, and indeed, take her own way in the matter. Accordingly, on the next day, she found an opportunity of speaking to her son alone, and said:

"Fred, what would you say to a rich wife?"

Fred laughed, but looked confused, and replied that there was time enough for that years to come.

"Now I can tell you what you mean," returned his mother, "it's Mary who is running in your head. You have got yourself into trouble with her, but there must be an end of that, you must send her off at once."

"Why? who dares to interfere with me? who dares part us?" demanded the young man, the old temper rising quickly, and his face flushing.

"I can see it's true," continued Mrs. Anderson, "but I tell you she must be got rid of directly. I don't want you to be harsh with her."

"Harsh with her! mother, hold your tongue," retorted Fred. "Go and manage things that you are fit for, and frighten people who fear you; and don't waste your time upon me."

Now, on any other occasion, his mother would have raged furiously at such a speech, and I don't think she would have been far wrong, but

now, to her son's astonishment, she merely smiled and laid her hand upon his.

"Ah, foolish Fred," she said at length, "how you would throw away your fortune; I should only be punishing you properly if I allowed you to go your own way; but I can't afford to lose the finest chance we can ever hope to have. You know Mr. Elford—you know the Stony Cross Farm."

"Of course, I do," replied her son, coarsely, for he could not see the drift of his mother's language, "and I know White Horse Hill, and Deaconstone Church, what then?"

"Well, my dear Fred," his mother went on, "a little bird has told your father, that old Elford will give the whole of Stony Cross freehold to whosoever marries his daughter, and the same bird sings that Nancy Elford is smitten with Farmer Anderson's son, and that in spite of his pride, and sour religion, that the old man does not object to him."

Fred's colour went and came, and went again, he rose nervously, and again sat down.

"It's out of the question, mother, I can't do it," he said.

"Oh, why not?" persevered the woman, "why not? Never mind the little pale-faced chit in doors, she won't fare worse than thousands have fared before her; besides Fred, with such a property, such a connection, you can hold up your head among the proudest in the country, yes, and provide well—handsomely for her."

"It can't be! it's impossible!" cried Fred, "why have you not told me this before?"

"Because we have but just known it for certain ourselves," replied Mrs. Anderson, "but don't say it's impossible; you can go away for a few days, leave me to deal with Mary; I'll persuade her into going a hundred miles off, I'll warrant, and there she may stay, and you can send her what you think proper."

Fred groaned and stamped.

"I know you would like above all things in the world," continued his mother, "to be master of Stony Cross, and you have only to be careful and you can walk in at once; but you never

will be, if Mary has a baby here, and you are known as the father—let us speak plainly, Fred."

"I will! I will!" screamed rather than spoke her son. "Curse old Elford for his tardiness—curse you, for not giving me a hint of what was going on—and curse, ten thousand times, Mary Lewis! for like an easy, pitying fool as I am, overcome by her miserable face, and continual whining, I—"

"What! what! for God's sake what?" cried the old woman, rising in her agitation and seizing her son's arm.

"I married her last week! Damn her!" shouted Fred, and pushing his mother from him, glared fiercely at her.

'Tis of no use to tell the story in detail. Mary evidently led an awful life, and all the servants on the farm could see it; beyond harsh words and poor fare, blows were known to be given.

Fred was seldom on the farm, and his mother was trying to drive the poor girl to flight or suicide. Indeed, there was not much comfort

when Fred was at home, for all could see that he answered his wife—though none knew she was his wife—as roughly, and he turned away from her as churlishly as his mother herself.

Once, and I knew the man who did it, well, and have often heard him boast of it; once, a farm servant was carrying a large bucket of wash for the pigs across the yard, and at the back of the house poor Mary was standing, thoughtful and sad, as she was always now, and with the water in her eyes. However, she brightened up and smiled when Sam (that was his name) passed her with a rough bow; Sam, who was a married man, fancied he could see an alteration in her figure; to satisfy himself, he put his bucket down on some excuse, that he might have an opportunity of noticing.

Just then, the old brimstone came out of the house, and began bawling away at Mary, for idleness, and Lord knows what beside; well, it made Sam's blood tingle to hear her abuse such a poor, delicate, scared looking thing as that;

perhaps because he was looking at them, Mary ventured to say a few words in her defence. That was enough, the mistress had a wet cloth in her hand, and she instantly hit the girl across the face with it, making her stagger. Before she could recover, or her persecutor strike another blow, Sam snatched up his bucket, and flung, with all his force, the whole of the wash into his mistress's face, knocking her down heavily among some pails and cans with the shock. Mary screamed, and ran to help her up, but Sam walked off, put on his hat and smock, and left the farm for good and all; leaving word, however, for he wasn't the sort of man to shrink from going on with what he once began, that he should be at the Wheatsheaf, in Deaconstone, till night time, if young Mr. Fred, or any one else wanted him.

However it happened, certain it is, that no one interfered with Sam; perhaps the injured party was afraid of drawing too much attention to her proceedings, and so made no stir in the matter, although she was terribly bruised and

lamed by falling so heavily on the edges of the pails.

The farmer, who had not been told of his son's marriage, came home one day, just about this time, rather flushed with drink, and in an exulting manner announced to Fred, that Stony Cross Farm, and the prettiest wife in the county were his for saying 'yes.' Fred did not, in his father's mood, like to irritate him by confessing the truth, so said, forcing a laugh, that he was always a lucky fellow, and withdrew.

As he left his father's room, in no very good temper, as may be supposed, he met his wife; she looked hollow-eyed, pale, and spiritless; all her former good looks had fled, all her cheerfulness, yet she mustered a smile at the sight of Fred, and said a few pleasant words; he savagely jerked her from him, and passed on. That evening Fred had a long consultation with his mother; he was over head and ears in debt, and his creditors were becoming disagreeably importunate; his father, it was plain would do nothing for him if Mary Lewis were owned as Mary An-

derson, while not only would there be plenty of money on both sides, if he married Nancy Elford, but the very rumour of such a match, would shut every applicant's mouth for a twelve-month.

At twilight, this same night, Fred sought Mary in her lonely room; she was weeping, as full good cause she had. He briefly proposed to her to leave the farm, and go to any part of the country she pleased, not less than one hundred miles off, for, he said, it was plain that their tempers were quite unsuitable; in return he offered a sufficient allowance, with a promise never to disturb her, do what she may. These proposals Mary indignantly rejected, and upbraiding him for the first time with his unmanly conduct, declared her intention to avow their marriage on the ensuing morning, and claim protection of his father from the cruelty exercised towards her. She wept as she spoke, but her words were so bitter and decided, that Fred felt she was thoroughly in earnest, and abashed and overwhelmed, he slunk from her presence.

Farmer Anderson, already somewhat "sprung," pledged his son, his son's intended, her father, and all parties in any way connected with the great match, so often that night, in company with a couple of stray cattle dealers, who happened to look in on business, that his guests were not very sober when they departed, while he was helped to bed quite drunk.

It was remembered after, that Fred and his mother sat long in the parlour after Anderson had gone to bed, and one of the men chancing to wake in the middle of the night, saw a light still burning in the house—the men, of course, living in the outbuildings spoken of before. Nothing, however, occurred to disturb any one, but in the morning it was found that Mary was absent.

A great stir was made; three or four small tradesmen, who did duty as constables in the neighbouring villages, were ordered to look after her, and furnished with a verbal description, while the nearest magistrate, who happened to be nearly ninety years of age, and pretty far

gone in second childhood, was also informed of her disappearance.

The Anderson family, having thus done all that could reasonably be expected from them, troubled themselves no more about her; and, as the poor girl had no other friends in the world, she was shortly forgotten, and her name was never mentioned, save in some occasional expression of wonder on the part of some rustic to whom she had been, as far as lay in her power, friendly and kind. Always excepting Sam, the old man spoken of, but who was at that time, a young man; he often, especially over his beer, expressed his belief that Mary Lewis had met with foul play. No heed, of course, was taken of the half drunken bravado of an angry labourer, and soon better topic for discourse was furnished in the rumoured alliance between the Andersons and Elfords.

All parties to this contract being willing, no trying delays were allowed, but the wedding day was fixed almost as soon as the courtship began. Mr. Elford, who was a sour, severe

old dissenter, being supposed, in popular opinion, to waive his better judgment, which set strongly against young Anderson, in consideration of his daughter's wishes, for she, an only child, was well known to be quite love sick for the tall, handsome young farmer; Elford therefore shut eyes and ears to much which would have given him offence.

It is a trite observation, but we are forced to make it; when it is known that a man is about to be married, gossip is as rife about him, and observation as keen as though he were going to be hung. And so those who knew him observed a change coming over Fred, the more decidedly the closer his nuptials approached, and that this change was not for the better. He would drink deeply now; he had always been given to indulge, yet had not been a drunkard; but now he drank in a wild, reckless manner, as though he did it for the sake of the liquor alone, and not for any enjoyment he found in the company around him. Not unfrequently, he would rise suddenly, and rush from the room where he

had been sitting with his comrades, uttering wild but incoherent ejaculations; sometimes he would with no perceptible cause, break into boisterous laughter, and sometimes sit for the hour, thoughtful, abstracted and gloomy. Still, as he never solicited any one's sympathy, it was never offered, and time rolled on until his wedding day drew nigh.

Those who had the opportunity to notice, declared that a change had also come over Mrs. Anderson; that her former violence had almost wholly disappeared; seeming absorbed in a feverish anxiety for the approach of her son's wedding. She seemed, also, never easy if he were not within sight, and when he went to market, or on any business expedition, would go half distracted if he were absent but for one minute beyond the time named for his return; and yet it was very clear that Fred returned not her solicitude.

He avoided his mother, and though, as just said, he was sometimes boisterously merry abroad, he was always cold and sullen at home. Billy

Toppins, the young cowherd, who slept in the house, averred that Fred never went to sleep, for whenever the said Billy awoke, he could hear him muttering to himself, and now and then laughing in a low and horrid tone; he always burnt a light too, Billy said. But the tide of wealth and success was with Fred, so Billy was warned against taking too much beer, and eating too much cheese of a night.

At last came the eve of the wedding, for which great had been the preparations, and about which great was the excitement; it was harvest time, and the day had been gloomy and sultry, when in the latter part of the afternoon a tremendous thunder storm burst over the hills, driving the labouring men and women who were returning from work, to an old barn for refuge.

This barn, or rather shed, for it scarce deserved the name of barn, was built almost close against a high bank, the space between the building and the earth being filled with loose stones and rubbish, the accumulation of years. As the labourers stood watching the dark sky, seamed mo-

mentarily with the fiercest lightning, or listened to the crashing and almost incessant thunder, a man suddenly rushed into the shed, and uttered some coarse exclamation in reference to the storm.

It was Fred Anderson, and it was immediately seen that he was again intoxicated. He spoke to no one, but paced to and fro with uneven steps close to the entrance, the labourers falling back, for none cared to disturb him in his sullen mood.

At last the storm grew fiercer and nearer; Fred looked wild, and as one deranged, muttering incoherently, and stopping sometimes to gaze with glaring eyes upon the tempest. Though he had evidently fled there for shelter from the rain, and had shaken his hat and coat upon entering, he now appeared quite heedless of the falling torrents, for he stood without the building and looked abroad upon the storm from a spot where the rain beat almost as fiercely upon him, as it would have done had he stood in the centre of his widest field. Suddenly a blinding flash

seemed to hiss through the barn, a short, terrific peal followed, then, with a crash, and a cloud of stifling dust, one end of the shed was riven to splinters.

All recoiled with ejaculations of terror, but a different, more thrilling cry, came from those who stood nearest the shattered part, for a ghastly object rolled upon the floor of the shed, from the pile of earth and stones behind. It was a dead body, loathsome and decaying, in the clothes of a female. The women shrieked, while the men after the first shudder of horror, cautiously advanced towards the corpse, too terrified as yet to speak, when they were suddenly flung aside, and Fred Anderson stood by the body.

"Ha! ha! ha!" he laughed, and wild and hideous was his laughter, "I knew it must come. Don't be frightened of her! as you see her now, ladies and gentlemen, I have seen her every night for weeks; with the staring eyes, the bloated face, the cord round her neck, and all."

A murmur arose among the men, and two or three of the boldest drew nigher.

"Curse you! are you afraid of one man?" exclaimed Fred, "I tell you it is Mary Lewis, as you called her, my wife, and almost mother to my child. She has lain by my side oftener since her death than during her life. I knew it must come, and I am glad it's over. I thought, as she stood by my bed last night, and looked sorrowfully, not angrily at me—she never did look angrily, no, not even when she woke with the tightening of the cord, and those eyes looked at me once, before they darkened for ever—I thought, I say, there was a deeper meaning in her gaze last night than usual."

He ceased, then strode abruptly into the midst of the scared group; the men, after a moment's irresolution, secured him, and without loss of time he was hauled to the nearest village, he offering no resistance, and not opening his lips the while; the startling news of course flying like wildfire in all directions. Suffice it to say that Fred was lodged in prison, and an inquest

duly impannelled to inquire into the death of poor Mary.

From various circumstances which were now remembered, and which bore with fearful weight upon the shocking transaction, a verdict of 'Wilful Murder' against Elizabeth Anderson, and her son, Frederick Anderson, was returned; but the woman fled, and Fred died in gaol ere his trial came on—unfortunately, as Johnson said.

It was evident what notion the narrator of the tale had formed respecting the most fitting exit for such a person.

Old Anderson, who really seemed shocked at Mary's fate, apart from the character of his own connection with it, soon broke up his farm, and quitted the neighbourhood, not, however, without leaving a sum of money to furnish a handsome stone in memory of the poor girl. His wife was never again heard of, and she was commonly supposed to have destroyed herself. Nancy Elford was almost heartbroken at the catastrophe;

but it was believed that she recovered in a degree, at any rate, for in ten months time, she married, much to her father's gratification, the minister of their chapel, and at her death, many years after, left fourteen children.

The farm passed into other hands, but was soon vacated, nor did the next comer stay long. In short, it soon began to be reported that Owlet Farm, or, as it was more commonly styled after the apparently miraculous discovery of the murder, God's Judgment House, shortened at last to Judgment House, it soon began to be reported that the place was haunted. Truly or falsely so reported, certain it is that five successive families abandoned the dwelling in great dismay, so that at last it fell into neglect and ruin. A cottage was built hard by, for the shepherd, but those who owned the farm always lived at a distance.

"And zo, zur," concluded Johnson, whose narrative, to save time and space, has been condensed, and rendered into ordinary language,

"and zo, zur, thee casn't wonder at we poor folken being vrighted at what would daunt a Oxford scollard."

"Then you believe it, Steeve?" said Elmsley.

"Zartainly I do," replied the man; "I never zeed the gwost myself, but I've a knowed they as have zeed 'em; vor zometimes there be two or dree, but mostly only one; and that little room, zur, where thee be'est a gwoin to zleep, be the very place where the poor zowl was murdered."

Elmsley changed colour slightly at this, and sank for a few moments into deep thought; he roused himself, however, with an effort, and exclaimed cheerfully:

"Come, Steeve, let me try my new lodgings. I shall want you to light me there once more; see that you have a whole candle in the lanthorn. Good night, Mrs. Johnson. Now Steeve!"

The cottager rose, took his lanthorn, and they were soon picking their way again through the wilderness which had once been a garden.

It was intensely dark, although the rain had nearly ceased, only a slight drizzle falling, but the air was oppressively close and heavy. If it were close and heavy outside, the atmosphere in the little room chosen by Elmsley, was almost stifling; when he looked round upon its mouldy, crumbling walls, and through the dismantled door-way into the deeper gloom beyond, and thought of the stealthy footsteps which must once have crossed the threshold, at midnight, what a deadly struggle, what an infernal crime those walls must once have witnessed, he felt half inclined to sleep in his chaise, or on the wet downs, rather than in such a chamber. But the brandy was strong within him, and the shame of betraying any fear still stronger, so he manfully bade Steeve "good night," and utterly rejected his offer of waking up his two boys, aged twelve and fourteen years, to sleep with him.

So Steeve left, and, as he went, a deeper shade seemed to shroud the room, and dim the feeble gleam which struggled from the lanthorn.

Drinking a final dram from the bottle which he had taken the precaution to bring with him, Elmsley laid down and tried to laugh himself out of his timidity. He looked at his watch, it was eleven o'clock; of course all was silent there, no living thing, beyond the rat or the rabbit, stirred in that solitary ruin; he knew that, yet, in despite of his reason, he sat up and listened intently for a few minutes. A sudden something, he knew not what, had roused him; it rushed through every nerve with the force of electricity, as he was sinking to sleep, and so, scared and palpitating, he sat up, and as just said, listened with painful intentness.

No: not even his nerves, which he began to feel were terribly excited, could detect other sounds than the creeping of the rain drops down the panes, or the hollow murmur of the faint breeze. And so, sobered down at last, by the silence and solitude, into a sad and melancholy tone of mind, John Elmsley slept soundly in his strange chamber.

Yes, he slept there; the hours of darkness

moved slowly on, and in the spot where foul and treacherous work had been done, and where the shadows of the dead still visited, John Elmsley slept. If, in past days, men as bold as he, women as pure as purest woman is, had been forced to quit that house of guilt, by sights too horrible for mortal eye to bear, why should not John Elmsley fear, lest he also should behold the vision? Still, however, he slept, and had any human eye been there to mark him in the gloom but half dispelled by his faint light, it would have seen him sleep on until the morning, without a break in his slumbers: but in sleep come dreams.

CHAPTER VII.

Soon after the sun peeped over the Wiltshire hills, Steeve Johnson arose, feeling rather giddy and qualmish it must be owned, from his unwonted excess of the previous night, but with his thoughts sufficiently about him to arouse his household, and to order tea to be at once prepared while he went to see after the 'Squire. So Steeve left the cottage, and was crossing his little garden, when, to his surprise, he saw that gentleman in the shed where the chaise had been housed, and, moreover, "King's Arms" harnessed, and Elmsley evidently upon the point of departure.

Steeve uttered an ejaculation of astonishment, but Elmsley said quietly:

"I thought you would be up before I got fairly away, Johnson, but if not, I should not have disturbed you."

"Thee zurely won't go away wi'out a drap of tea?" exclaimed the shepherd.

"I shall indeed," said Elmsley, "I am very anxious to leave here—I mean, I am anxious to reach home early."

"Well, I be very zorry vor that," said Steeve; "but how hav'ee slept, zur?"

"Oh! I slept all night," briefly replied the 'Squire. "Yes, slept all night."

A certain air of abstraction and thoughtfulness about the speaker made Johnson bestow a closer scrutiny upon him, and he saw that he was pale, his eyes wandering, and his whole manner nervous and fitful.

"I'm afraid, zur," began Johnson, "thee have a took cold in that unkid place; don't'ee veel well, zur?"

"Eh? well? Oh! yes, perfectly; quite well,

Steeve, quite; but I am off now. There's a sovereign for you, Steeve; say no more, you are very welcome. Good morning."

Then, cutting short the speech of the grateful shepherd, Elmsley applied the whip with unusual force to the sides of King's Arms, and was in a few minutes out of sight of the cottage, and of the ruin beside it.

When they were fairly hidden behind the hill down which his descending road lay—and Elmsley turned his head often and anxiously, as though to ascertain—he heaved a sigh of relief, and wiped his brow, on which the perspiration stood damp and clammy. More than one rustic in going to his work that morning turned to watch Measter Elmsley, and remarked afterwards to his comrades that he thought the squire was looking very poorly like. Elmsley, however, reached his house in safety, and soon regained his ordinary aspect, if ever he had varied from it, for no one during the next few days observed anything unusual about him, save, perhaps, a little gravity, not quite in keeping with his ordinary cheerful-

ness; but a man who is about to see two daughters married on the same day, may well be excused if he look a little serious about it.

Chalkingdon, where the ceremony was to come off—ceremonies we ought, perhaps, to say, but then the service is only read once, even if a score of couples are married at the same time—at any rate, Chalkingdon was going to be all alive on the day. The bells, of course, were to ring; this was "of course," for the little town boasted a set of ringers who carried their enthusiasm for their art almost to a nuisance: they seized upon every possible occasion; accessions, coronations, royal birthdays, royal wedding-days, ordinary marriages, feasts, festivals, christenings, good news, elections, in short, everything; so how could they do otherwise than ring their best and loudest for a double marriage in the same family? How could they do otherwise than ring their best and loudest, and find it necessary to practice from seven until nine p.m. five times a week, to the admiration of some, and the dis-

traction of most, of the inhabitants? How, we say, could less than this be done for a wedding with twelve bridesmaids; a wedding at which, to put down the lowest figure, at least a score of carriages were expected to be present; and in honour of which, the largest order for cakes, ices, and wines ever heard of in Chalkingdon, had been given?

The girls, by the bye, were anxious to have a London confectioner to supply and arrange the materiél for the day, but although they got their own way in most things, on that point Elmsley was firm. No, he said, no; he lived among the Chalkingdon people; they knew him, and he hoped liked him; there were respectable tradesmen at Chalkingdon, who, if not quite so clever or famous, or expensive, as your London men, would do very well, he was sure. When he had any money to spend, he should spend it with his neighbours: how could people pay rent, and taxes, and rates, and bring up children, if even the county families, when anything extra was to be gained, brought in strangers to reap the

harvest? No, no; everybody in their little sphere that his influence could reach or benefit, should have cause to recollect, with pleasure, the wedding of his girls. They were John Elmsley's sentiments, and what John Elmsley said, he meant to stick to.

Some talk arose of a bonfire on Chalkingdon hill, and the giving away of various barrels of strong ale in the market-place, but Elmsley, like a plain, practical man as he was, decided against this scheme. He liked enjoyment, he said, as well as anybody, but not drunkenness nor riot; so while his kind friends at Chalkingdon would content themselves with flags and festoons of flowers, he would agree to give a gallon of beer, and a substantial joint of meat, to one hundred poor families, if so many could be found, who would accept the gifts.

At least five score very pretty and eligible young ladies were thrown into the highest excitement and agitation by the eager hope of being among the twelve selected for bridesmaids, and of course eighty-eight were bitterly indig-

nant, and protested their determination of not going near the church on the day. Not so, however, with Sir Roger Hawberry; he not only signified his intention of being present, with Lady Hawberry, at the ceremony, but promised the finest buck from his park, on condition that he was allowed to give away one of the brides: his old friend, "that fine specimen of the real old English country gentleman," as the local papers styled him, Sir Giles Vetch, Bart., M.P., solicited a similar honour, and promised a similar present. Surely, then, there was ample reason for the ringers to ring their loudest and quickest, and to entangle themselves in the inscrutable mysteries of triple-grandsire-bob-majors, with 5999 changes—whatever such things may be.

Hackley was to be at the banquet; he had, at first, modestly tried to excuse himself, and spoke of assisting and directing the servants at breakfast and dinner, but Elmsley would not hear of such an arrangement. Hackley should come as a guest, and sit at the table, or his,

Elmsley's foot, should never more cross the threshold of the Railway Arms. It was so decided, therefore, and a proud man was Nathaniel Hackley, and loudly did he vaunt the character of the spirits and beer he intended to supply on the occasion. The wine was to come from the Bell, the beer for the hundred poor families from the Crown at Chalkingdon, and Nat was amply satisfied with this division of the patronage.

About ten days before the weddings were to come off, the night, indeed, previous to the rural fête at Knollington, three choice spirits, in company with spirits nearly as choice, sat in the pretty bar parlour of the Railway Arms. They were Hackley, Robert Parsons, and Fred Harley (the young railway clerk, the reader will of course remember). The conversation, we may be sure had borne chiefly on the approaching nuptials, and, to prove that love of dress is by no means confined to the fair sex, we will observe that Hackley had produced for the inspection, and very much to the admiration of

his friends, a bran new suit of superfine wool-dyed, West of England, black cloth, made expressly to enable him to appear, in style befitting, at the festival.

"Do you know, Mr. Parsons," said Harley, "that I used to fancy your governor was rather smitten in a certain quarter—*you* know where I mean, Nat."

"Ah! so used I," said Hackley. "He means with Miss Julia, Bob; though, if so, how he could have had the impudence, I can't think. What's your opinion on the matter, Parsons?"

"Well, I hardly know what to think about it," returned the clerk. "I am sure there is something wrong about him, but what it is I can't say. I can tell you this though; if the young lady was my sister—and, thank God, the only relative I have alive, a very dear sister, is not in England to feel ashamed of me!—if she were my sister, Nat, I would rather give her to an Ouran outang, than to my cold blooded master!"

"Lor!" ejaculated the young clerk, somewhat

startled by the energy of the speaker, and the angry gestures with which he accompanied his language.

"I am sorry I put you on the subject," said Hackley after a pause, during which he thoughtfully pinched his cheek as he looked at his friend, "I know you never could bear to talk of him, and I think you get worse."

"How can I help it?" exclaimed Parsons. "It was but this morning that he told me I grew shabbier and more disreputable every day; I know I do, I know it but too well—and he said that my proper sphere was the workhouse or the jail. This he said before some of the most respectable of our clients, or I could have borne it. Latterly, whether he wants a butt for his wit when gay, or for his malice when ill-tempered, 'tis all the same; he seems to take a devilish delight in goading and humiliating me. But I will be even with him, Nat, before many weeks are over; I will find means to requite him in some manner."

"I wouldn't talk like that, if I was you, Bob,"

said Nat, "it's dangerous; you don't mean him any real harm, I know—"

"Don't I, by Heaven!" ejaculated Parsons, with a short and bitter laugh.

This exclamation and laugh discomposed Hackley a great deal, and he was compelled to stroke his face gravely several times before he could go on.

"At least," he said, "people will make a great deal more of it than you mean, Bob; now I'm a Londoner, and have seen a good deal of these things."

A vague expression, by the way, of which Nat was very fond; though sometimes, as in the present case, he might have found it difficult to cite any passages in his life justifying his claim to experience in "these things;" however, he continued:

"I have seen a great deal of these things, and know no good comes of talking too much. After all, Bob, you know, bad as Chapman is, and poorly as he pays you, you can't afford at

present to leave him; you can't very well do without him."

"A man wound up to my pitch, can afford to do and dare everything," replied Parsons, "if there's a pond in the county, I need never be at a loss for a refuge."

This speech opened up so dreadful a perspective to Nat, that although he was a Londoner, and knew what life was, he felt himself unequal to a reply; so he drank a little more grog, with the brief toast of "Well, here's to our better luck."

Fred Harley, who had felt rather uncomfortable during the last few minutes, and had preserved silence, knowing how hopeless it was for him to interfere, where so great an authority as Nat Hackley was plainly unequal to the occasion, here struck in with a joke which he had culled from some recent publication, the point of which was something excessively ridiculous about footmen—flunkeys, as they were called. Glad, perhaps, of the diversion, Hackley said:

"I don't see anything so very witty in that, Fred, nor I don't see anything wonderfully good in the jokes you are always telling me about the flunkeys. For my part, I think it's a very cowardly thing for gentlemen as was brought up at college, and in newspapers, and all that, to keep on day after day, and month after month, pitching into a class as can't help themselves, as don't hurt them, and say the worst you can of 'em, gets their living honestly and respectably."

"Oh, I don't say anything against footmen and butlers maliciously," returned Fred, "but you must own they are very ridiculous with their fine liveries, and the importance and manners of their masters at second hand."

"I don't, I really don't see why I should own it," argued Nat; "of course I can't go on in the way that they do as makes fun of 'em, and that's where it is; all the talent and influence is on one side, and there's no more use in a poor servant saying his awkward words in his own defence, Fred, than there would be in knock-kneed

Charley, at the station, having a round with Bendigo."

Fred nodded, as if this powerful illustration told.

"If it comes to liveries," continued Nat, "why should the men be ridiculed for wearing them? They didn't invent them; they don't insist upon 'em; and I can safely say that most of them would cheerfully wear a nice suit of plain clothes instead. But if it's the custom of service, and the wish of their masters, why are the men to be caricatured, I should like to know? You don't ridicule a postman for wearing his red coat, nor the guards on your line for wearing their green ones. As to the importance, and so on, of butlers, I can tell you, Fred, that masters would be very angry—and the men that writes these things first of all, I'll be bound, that is, if they keep any—if their servants wasn't always grave and steady; it's as much a part of 'em as their livery. And a servant has got a good bit to put up with, mind you, in the way of tempers and that. I am as jolly as anybody now, but

when I was in service, I was obliged to do what my employers wished, and look as they wished me to look."

"My dear fellow, I didn't mean to hurt your feelings!" cried Harley; "I forgot you had been in service."

"Oh, never mind that, my boy; I know you too well to think you intended the slightest sneer at me," said Hackley, "but let me have my say out. Of course there is good and bad of all classes, but what I mean is this: it's cowardly to keep on abusing and annoying men who can't defend themselves, and who ain't responsible for the things ridiculed; and as for their bad grammar and that, how can they help it? I was a footman once, and got to be butler; I lived sixteen years in two families, and believe I had my master's respect as much as they had mine. I had the charge, in one house, of a thousand pounds' worth of plate, and in that way my mates are trusted to a great extent, and seldom deceive their employers. A man as behaves himself well, is respectable and honourable,

whether he's a footman or a—a—Lord Mayor of London."

"Bravo, Nat!" cried Parsons; "we shall have you Solicitor-General before long. You might have added, though, that it's no more the fashion to sneer at flunkeys now, than it was once at the lawyer's clerks—ah! and at one time, even authors themselves. The next generation may find some other mark for their ridicule. So here's 'prosperity to servants,' and we'll say no more about them."

"Well me must say just a little more about them," returned Hackley, with a smile, "you see it's very inconvenient for me to go to these weddings, (though I wouldn't miss them, mind you, for a ten pound note), and I'm obliged to get the clerk from the brewery to come and help me."

Each of his comrades agreed that it *was* very inconvenient.

"Now," continued Hackley, smiling again, "it wouldn't be so bad if I had got a wife; so, gentlemen both, as I said I was going to have a

few more words about servants, I shall give you the health of Miss Eliza Linford, lady's maid to Mrs. Froissart, but as will soon be Mrs. Hackley."

This toast was of course drunk with the utmost enthusiasm, and Parsons made a speech in reference to it, which greatly, though secretly, gratified Hackley, for he had heard from Mr. Elmsley an account of the manner in which Mr. Fielding had announced his son's intended marriage, and Nat had imitated it, so was delighted to find the resemblance kept up by Parsons making a speech, even as Mr. Sleekie Topper had done. Nat further informed his friends that he intended to get married in about three months, at just about the dullest period of the year for business, as he explained.

It was now near the time when the train was expected, so Parsons, finishing his glass at a gulp, bade his friends good night, and betook himself to the station. He had not long to wait for his master, who, on joining him, briefly asked if he had brought all the papers; Parsons,

who had lost whatever animation he had shown at Hackley's, and had subsided into a dogged, spiritless demeanour, replied as briefly, that he had done so.

"Then follow me to Mr. Elmsley's," was his master's rejoinder.

They set off, soon reached the Lodge, and Chapman rang the bell. As he halted to do so, the bright rays of a naptha lamp which burnt above the gate fell upon his face; Parsons, who happened just then to steal a glance at him, could not help seeing how cadaverous he looked, and how nervously his lips were twitching and working. The clerk, however, had little leisure to speculate upon the cause of his master's ghastly aspect, for the gate was almost immediately opened, and they entered.

Chapman enquired for Mr. Elmsley; the girl replied that he would be with him in a few minutes, would he please walk into the sitting room. Chapman complied, Parsons following with due docility, but as the lawyer stepped into the room, he recoiled upon Bob's toes, with

an exclamation of surprise and chagrin. Recovering himself, however, he entered, with a bow, which was quietly returned by Miss Julia, the only occupant of the chamber, and who was seated at a table, reading by the light of the large moderateur lamp. Chapman coughed, put some papers with much ostentation upon the table, coughed again, then with a most embarrassed assumption of being greatly at ease, took a seat, and motioned Parsons to do the same.

A profound silence ensued among them for the space of perhaps three minutes, during which pause Parsons was painfully conscious that something more than ordinary was confusing his master, and was himself annoyed and made nervous by the very distinct ticking of a gilt clock upon the sideboard, and by the tapping of leaves upon the window from the outside. These two sounds, insignificant as they were, seemed to pervade the whole place, and seemed in some manner to chime with Chapman's embarrassment, and not only to chime with it, but

to increase it, for Parsons felt, therefore he knew his master must feel also, that those monotonous sounds had so seized upon the ear, that the first word spoken would produce as great a sensation as would the report of a pistol. So they sat motionless and silent, and would probably so have remained until Mr. Elmsley's entrance, but at last Julia, laying down her book, and looking across the table at the lawyer, said:

"My father will not detain you long, Mr. Chapman; a gentleman has, unfortunately, just called upon business, but I am sure he will not stay many minutes."

The words in themselves were nothing; as common-place, perhaps, as could easily be selected, but Parsons, watching from his corner, thought he had never heard so silvery a voice, or seen so sweet a smile.

"Oh, pray don't—not the least consequence —I am not—don't for a moment—he! he!"

So with a feeble titter, Chapman ceased his incoherent speech, and, first thrusting his hands

into his pockets, then taking them out again, shifting his position in his chair, and nervously unfastening and feigning to examine his papers, he sat the prey and victim to the most palpable uneasiness.

"Oh! you will be so sorry, Mr. Chapman," suddenly exclaimed Julia, "to hear that one of my fowls, those little beauties in which you took so great an interest; you remember?"

"Certainly, Miss Julia. Ha! ho! yes; he! he! he!"

Parsons was completely amazed at hearing such unconnected sounds, and still more at the confusion which in each moment grew more marked in his employer's countenance.

"You will be so sorry to learn that one is dead!" said Julia.

"Indeed!—impossible!" ejaculated Chapman, who having no clear perception of what Julia was saying, or of what he himself answered, looked no less confused than before.

"Yes," sighed Julia, "the smallest of the five too, it was rather sickly from the first; but I

took so much interest in that particular bird; do you know, sir, we always called it your chicken."

"Indeed—charming! Greatly obliged, I am sure," murmured Chapman.

"Yes, you remember my saying that we should name them," continued Julia; "well, everyone wished to christen the little pets, but I determined that one should be named in honour of yourself, and in remembrance of our morning's walk. The last, therefore, I called Zaccheus—you don't, I hope, consider it too great a freedom."

"Delighted, I am sure," gasped Chapman

"So poor Zaccheus—his brethren were cruel to him, I am afraid," resumed Julia, "their names, by the bye, were Crawler—such horrid names, you know, but my sister and others would give them—Creeper, Crawler, Vanity, Presumption, and this darling little Zaccheus. Well, this poor thing, alas! pined and died. We were all so sorry; everything was done to save it, but in vain."

"Extremely unfortunate—calamitous," again gasped Chapman, whose scorched and dry lips could scarcely sound his words. "May I hope Mr. Elmsley will be here soon?"

"Oh, very soon, indeed; I think I heard him ring for the servant, almost as you spoke," replied Julia. "Shall you be at the fête at Knollington to-morrow, Mr. Chapman?"

"Eh? why—no," returned the lawyer, "I shall be otherwise engaged."

"I believe those rural festivals are considered very admirable things," pursued the young lady.

"Oh, very. Remarkably so," assented Chapman.

"So calculated, as the prospectus says, and which by repeated quotation my father has thoroughly graven on my memory, 'so calculated to promote the prosperity of the villager, and to elevate him in the social scale'—don't you think that is beautiful language, Mr. Chapman, so sentimental?"

Mr. Chapman assented by a bow.

"So sentimental, so original, so like those beautiful quotations from Shakespeare, Dr. Watts, Tate, Brady, and other poets, with which you so often favour us."

It was easy to see that, all this time, the solicitor was undergoing little short of the pains of martyrdom, but the young lady smiled at her ease, and appeared to be totally unaware that her companion was suffering the slightest inconvenience.

"You have nothing of the kind, I believe, in Chalkingdon," she continued, persevering in speaking on a subject in which, as she well knew, the lawyer took not the faintest interest, and to give the slightest attention to which, while his mind was in a chaos, was torture unmitigated.

"No, we have not, Oh! dear me, no," he said, then anxiously looked at the door, as though impatient for the appearance of Mr. Elmsley.

"So I understand," resumed Julia; "yet I am more than a little surprised, Mr. Chapman,

that a gentleman of so cultivated a taste as yourself, one who unites in his own person so much of the poetical, with so thoroughly practical a spirit, should not have devised some means to—— what is it? oh, 'to promote the prosperity of the villager, and to elevate him in the social scale.' "

Chapman, involuntarily as it seemed, walked nervously across the room, sat down again, untied, tied, and untied again his papers. Julia smiled as before, but the little gentleman's purgatory was nearly at an end; a quick tread was heard in the hall, the door of the room was opened, and Mr. Elmsley, with profuse apologies and hearty shakes of the hand, entered.

Julia rose, and, with a ceremonious curtsey, bade the attorney good evening; then stifling a laugh, left the room and went to join her mother and sister. The painful expression upon her victim's face, which was so soon followed by a most evil scowl, and that again by the old sickly smile on the discontented lips, might have checked her tendency to mirth—but these

changes she marked not. Mr. Elmsley noted nothing unusual in the lawyer's deportment; he (Chapman we mean) staid for an hour or two in deep consultation with his client, about the marriage settlements.

Much to his clerk's surprise, he launched not a single joke or sarcasm at that dependent during the whole of their ride homewards. Parsons meditated profoundly upon this phenomenon, as he stood at the bar of the Bell, drinking his pint of ale. But nothing could be made of it, so Bob wended his way to his solitary back-room, and soon forgot all about master, the office, and the law altogether.

CHAPTER VIII.

THIS was the day on which the Union Jack floated from the spire of Knollington church; now had arrived the period when Sir Roger Hawberry, Baronet, Colonel of the South West Berks Yeomanry, lent to the village authorities the band of that distinguished corps, and lent, moreover, his distinguished presence. This was the day when surging crowds of strangers, to the number, perhaps, of two hundred and fifty, thronged its streets—by "its" streets we mean the streets of Knollington,—to repeat proper names often is very awkward, so we hold our-

selves at liberty to strike out such new forms of speech as may seem suitable—when a tide of vehicles rolled into the inn-yard, and surrounding stables; when the village club marched in imposing array to church and heard a sermon; such being the manner in which the good people of Knollington commenced all their holidays. Who laughs at them for it? None of our readers, we are sure.

Well, the throng passed along its streets—"its" again, the reader will please to observe—and gradually filled, or, at any rate, made very cheerful and gay the extensive park, and tastefully laid out demesne, (indebted to the prospectus again, here,) attached to Clarencieux Hall, the seat of the Rt. Honble. the Earl Clarencieux, K.G., G.C.B., &c.

It is not for us to dwell upon the glories of the day; long were they remembered in Knollington, and three full columns of the Mid Western Chronicle did the glowing, graphic, poetically written report occupy. Those who are desirous of reading a circumstantial account

of the festivities, can easily gratify themselves by turning to a file of that important local journal for the year in which the fête occurred.

We cannot linger so long on the details of the festival as we could wish, having to speak of the incident which filled another column in the same number of the excellent paper just named. It may, however, without much aid from ourselves, be very easily understood that John Elmsley enjoyed himself wondrously; that he wore a white rosette; that he bustled from tent to tent twice as often as all the other committee men put together; that he fancied he had reached the apex of human felicity when he was introduced to the Marquis Norroy, and his hand was shaken by that distinguished peer; but that he climbed a still loftier height, when his health was proposed by the same nobleman in a complimentary speech at dinner.

Elmsley had certainly never been so happy in his life; he seemed to tread, not on ordinary turf, not through the walks of a terrestrial park, but on buoyant air, and through the mazes

of fairy land. The throngs of well-dressed people, the respectful touchings of the hat by the smart, honest-looking rustics, the music which floated from the orchestra, all united with the champagne, and the still more exhilarating speech of lords and knights, to produce an effervescence and sparkle in John Elmsley, far beyond his ordinary good spirits.

We have said nothing of Mrs. Elmsley, the chief reason being that we have nothing to say; well, even expensively, though very quietly dressed; reserved, retiring, she shunned the observation her worthy lord so eagerly courted, and though she smiled when the prizes were delivered, the beam soon passed, and she again looked the careworn woman of yesterday and years before.

It was, indeed, a pleasant sight for any one to behold the distribution of prizes; to see the withered old men, clad in long-skirted blue coats, with metal buttons, the "Sunday" coat of a dozen years, or in snowy smock frocks; to see them come, hat in hand, to the chief table,

smoothing the scanty thin hair meanwhile; to see their old faces lighted up with a blush of pleasure as their members, real live members of parliament, handed them the small premiums, with kind and flattering words, worth the money ten times told.

John Elmsley's last official act in Knollington —no, stay; it appears to us upon due consideration that the performance was decidedly extra official, so we will amend the description—his last public act in Knollington, was the giving of every child attending the church school there, the sum of sixpence; and that in a single bright, bran new and glittering coin, worth, to any person of taste, at least eighteen pence in dull, common money; he had brought a packet from Chalkingdon Bank for the express purpose.

A proud and happy man as John Elmsley had felt himself that day, and that he was so, we repeat, at all risk of being considered tedious, he had at no time felt so proud and happy as when he drew forth his packet and looked down the double lines of smiling, cherry faces, the

boys so eager, yet so confused and awkward, the girls so bashful and timid, and all forty of the faces freckled in the fullest possible pattern. So Elmsley gave his largesse, and as he passed along the ranks, had a kind word for every pretty little girl, as she glanced at him from the depths of her bonnet, or a pat on the head for every boy in his clean pinafore.

The reader may bear with all this, for one likes to linger on such a scene; besides, it will hereafter be seen that John Elmsley craves a little indulgence on this day.

Evening had come; King's Arms, all fresh and Arablike, was in the shafts; Mrs. Elmsley was in the chaise, John Elmsley was in the midst of a cluster of the principal magnates who had that day assisted at the festival. There he was, shaking two hands at once, and giving and receiving such multitudes of invitations as would have kept him from Royal Lodge for a good twelvemonth, saving and excepting those days in which he would receive a tide of company. This was over; he mounted to his seat, and receiving

a cheer, a positive cheer, spontaneous and hearty, first from his friends, then repeated in louder chorus from some two score rustics who had assembled round the Lamb door to see the gentry depart; with cheering and waving of hats, John Elmsley passed from the eye of his companions, and from Knollington.

The moon was in the sky, though the sun had scarcely set, and no fear of a dark night, or a mistaken road, could now exist. As the twilight crept on, and the duskier night followed, the light of the moon grew stronger and stronger, until at last she shed a full flood of light over down and hill, cottage and barn, field and thicket, silvering and beautifying all.

The road was clear and distinct as at noonday; everything was so bright in the splendour of the moonbeams, that even King's Arms seemed unusually alert, and executed several decided frisks or capers, while Mr. Elmsley felt inclined to try a song. But, as he thought of it, the beauty of the night sank more deeply into his soul; the hush and silence of the wide plain they

were traversing became almost solemn, and as the road wound under an immense knoll or "barrow," in whose shade they lost for an instant the lustre of the moon, he felt that it would be akin to sacrilege to sing *there*—save, indeed, he sang a hymn.

They had crossed the Downs, and now commenced the descent of the hills; behind them, as Elmsley turned to take a last look, lay the wide spread, monotonous expanse of green; undiversified save by an occasional swell of the ground, or a patch of gorse or furze. Immediately before them was the steep, rugged descent, and beyond, a beautiful country sleeping in the brilliant moonlight, fretted with innumerable hedgerows, and studded with a profusion of trees. Here and there, too, the modest spire of a village church glistened white and cold in the light, while could just be seen, peeping from the trees, clustered round about the churches, the quiet village cottages.

It was but a moment's glance which Elmsley gave to the scene, yet all was so distinct and

vivid, that the eye seemed at once to embrace every feature in the landscape; the long, smooth canal, glittering here, dark and sullen there; its heavy, wooden swing bridges; the parti-coloured hay stacks from last year, and the bright new ones; the thousand clusters of wheatsheafs left in the silent fields; the sleeping cattle; the road-side inn; the lines of black barns ranged around the farmyard, were all seen in that momentary glance.

After this pause, King's Arms was once more awakened to a sense of duty, and they jogged steadily on; Elmsley grew chatty, and discoursed cheerfully of the approaching weddings, discussing chiefly the characters and merits of the husbands that were to be. It was plain enough that the old gentleman was chiefly pleased by Julia's marriage; he probably liked Smith the better of the two young men, and thoroughly appreciated his sterling honesty, but the alliance with the Fieldings, of Fielding Hall, had dazzled him, and for once that he mentioned the name

of his youngest daughter's lover, "Edgar Fielding" passed his lips a dozen times.

So conversing, they descended the hill in safety, and then moved briskly along the Vale of White Horse, in which district, as of course every one knows, the important cities, towns, and villages, hitherto treated of in this record, are situate. They were to cross the Great Western Railway at a level crossing, as by so doing they would save a mile, as compared with the distance they must travel if they went round by the station. On arriving at the gate, Elmsley shouted, somewhat surprised to find no policeman promptly swinging it open; but, to his greater surprise, no one responded to his halloo. With an angry exclamation he alighted, and after looking into the policeman's empty box, and registering a vow to report the absent official, proceeded to open the gate himself.

Now, that no policeman was there happened in this wise:—Jack Bell, the custodian of the post for that night, had gone on duty in manner

regular, like a trusty servant as he was, and a well paid one (for he received seventeen shillings per week, and when one considers that on his sobriety and attention frequently depended scores of lives, one hardly grudges it to him), like a trusty servant as he was, we say, had remained at his post for some time, and would, doubtless, there have continued, but for an accident.

Poor Jack stumbled in traversing the line, and, falling heavily across the metals, broke his arm. There was no assistance to be procured near the place, so he walked up the line to the station, to report his injury, and send a deputy to his post. This was immediately done, and it was in the interval between his leaving the crossing and the second man's arrival, that our travellers reached the spot.

Finding no policeman there, Elmsley, as has been said, opened the gate himself, and led, with some trepidation, King's Arms upon the line. At that instant a faint hollow sound became louder, and in the stillness of the night he could distinctly hear a train approaching from a

cutting which had hitherto deadened the sound, and, from its curve, had hidden engine, steam, and all, from his sight. King's Arms hearing the noise, grew nervous, and shied and jibbed to Elmsley's infinite horror, for the chaise was full across the down line, and it was a down train now approaching; Elmsley could tell that, as he was quite familiar with the working of the line.

At last, with a tug, and a fiercer oath than he often rapped out, he drew the obstinate brute from the rail, and within a minute after, with a roar like thunder, the tremendous engine, with its dark trail of carriages, came with a hurricane speed round the curve.

"Thank God!" cried Elmsley, and the cold drops stood thickly on his forehead. "Thank God!"

A shriek from the engine, as the driver caught sight of him upon the line, followed, and the man made frantic signals to Elmsley as he flew by with deafening clatter; and the lighted interior of the carriages flashed past, showing in

one brief, less than momentary glance, as who amongst us has not? the passengers in every posture which fatigue or ennui could suggest; the hat boxes pendant from the roof, the travelling cap, the rug around the shoulders, the shawl, the sleeping women, the confused pile of parcels in the guard's box, the thick padding of the first class carriages, with the profusion of newspapers lying about, and the hard naked sides of the second class; all this Elmsley saw, and holding tightly the quivering King's Arms, he smiled, and waved a recognition of the driver, who was, he could see, "Thomas."

"All right!" cried Elmsley, though Thomas, he knew, going at fifty miles an hour, could not hear him. "All right!"

Another and fiercer scream: it was from the vanishing engine surely, yet seemed so close and unearthly that Elmsley turned to look;—one brief phantasmagoric glance filled his eyes, one confused idea of an overwhelming mass with blazing lights and wreaths of smoke, one more scream, one exclamation of agony and horror, and the

UP train swept by with all its life, rattle, and thunder, and on the level crossing lay a bloody wreck! Shattered wood and iron, a mangled horse, and two human bodies, in horrid entanglement, lay there!

In one minute more arrived the deputy policeman, whistling cheerfully in the placid, heavenly radiance of the night, and noticing as he came along certain alterations necessary in his little garden, which was nigh unto the level crossing. Thinking, then, of his beans, his potatoes, his cabbage, and his celery, the deputy policeman went on, whistling as before, till, nearing his post, he saw lying on the farther side of the line, a confused, mysterious heap, which was not there aforetime.

Uttering an ejaculation of alarm, for all railway men know what a dark object, lying athwart the metals, means, he ran over, and there saw a sight which caused him to stagger against the gate, and bury his head in his hands. Rousing himself, however, he paused to consider where he should best run for assistance, but ere he

could fairly make up his mind, the boding whistle was again heard, and coming swiftly from the station, yet less swiftly than it had gone up, the engine which had passed but now with such fatal effect, re-appeared, with only an open truck attached.

Like a thoughtful fellow, the driver felt sure he had done some mischief, so slackened not until he arrived at the station, when the occurrence was instantly reported, and, in less time than we have taken to describe the accident, the scanty staff of police and porters were aroused from their slumbers, dressed, and down upon the platform, the engine was uncoupled from the train, an open truck hooked on, a surgeon was found among the passengers, and the locomotive was steaming on its backward journey.

Elmsley was the first picked up; he was living, but a wound across his head from temple to temple, from which the blood poured as they lifted him, augured sadly for his restoration. Mrs. Elmsley was quite dead; so fearfully mangled was the unfortunate lady, that—but no,

such horrors may be read far too often in the newspapers. A rug was prepared, and her remains were carried in *that.* As for poor King's Arms, he had made his last trip, and was so completely shattered, that he scarce bore any resemblance to a horse.

When Elmsley had been carefully laid by the willing arms of the sturdy porters upon the truck, the surgeon sitting by his side, and bandaging as well as he could the wounds; when the mangled remains of his companion were placed, as decently as their condition would allow, at the far end of the carriage, soaking in their blood; then once more the whistle sounded, and hedge, tree, stack, cottage, and rick, flying blurred and indistinct past them, they were at Chalkingdon Road station almost instantly.

The report of an accident had attracted every one who dwelt in the sprinkling of cottages nigh unto the station, and of course amongst them was Nat Hackley. The whole of the male portion of the passengers had betaken themselves to his house, during the absence of the engine,

and unprecedented was the consumption of bottled stout and pale brandy; many were the conjectures or assertions, according as the speaker was bold or timid, launched relative to the cause and extent of the damage. In a very short time the whistle of the returning expedition was heard; the sound cleared Nat's house as though by magic; Hackley's curiosity was no less than that of his guests, so telling his maid to have an eye to the bar, he seized his hat and hurried after the throng to the station.

The engine was alongside, and on the platform a large group of the passengers crowding to one centre, from which proceeded ejaculations of horror, mingled with expostulations as to the pushing, told Nat where to go. As he ran along the echoing platform, two or three gentlemen detached themselves from the throng, and joined a cluster of pale, frightened women, who stood at some little distance. Hackley paused as he passed them, and heard a gentleman expressing his regret at having gone to see so shocking a spectacle.

Nat joined the principal group, and asked a stranger on the outside what was the extent of the mischief; as he spoke, a voice cried from the interior:

"Oh, here is Mr. Hackley. He will do. Come in here, if you please, Mr. Hackley."

The crowd made way for him, and he reached the centre, where he saw a man lying on a stretcher, with pallid, blood-streaked features, and a cloth around his head. Near him two porters were lifting a large shapeless something in a blanket or rug; a dark stain upon the bottom of the wrapper, and the plash of drop after drop upon the platform showed the character of its contents.

"Do you not know who it is?" asked the station-master.

"No. Who is it?" asked Hackley in return, looking again at the still figure upon the stretcher.

"It's poor Mr. Elmsley," said the official, in a low tone, "and his wife is killed."

Nat recoiled, turned as pale as the wounded

man himself, and was for the moment unable to speak.

"Good God! Mr. Elmsley!" he gasped out at last, "it can't be possible. For Heaven's sake, Mr. Kendrick, say that you are not sure!"

"We are but too certain, Hackley," returned the station master, "and what we require of you is to go to the Lodge at once, and prepare the family for what has happened, while they bring the poor gentleman on. Mrs. Elmsley's body will be taken to your house. We have fortunately a surgeon here, who was a passenger in the train; he will stay all night with Mr. Elmsley."

"My good sir," said Hackley, with a great effort, "I am the worst man in the world for such a task. Although a Londoner, and used to these things, yet the sight of women in distress is always too much for me."

"You must go, Hackley, you must indeed; there!" exclaimed, the other, "the men have started with him you see; now, by going across

the fields you will be there at least ten minutes before them. Go, for God's sake!"

Thus adjured, the good hearted fellow hesitated no longer, but at full speed left the station, cleared a dwarf hedge at a bound, was seen for a moment, his white coat conspicuous in the moonbeams, skimming over a meadow, and then he disappeared.

A good runner, and full of excitement, Nat was quickly at Royal Lodge, and in accordance with a resolution formed while on his way, he allowed himself not an instant for consideration, but rang the gate bell strongly. He noticed the lights were in the parlour, from which he divined that the young ladies were sitting up for their parents.

"As I *must* tell them," murmured Nat, "it's a good job they are up, and that I haven't got to wait while they dress;—oh, here's Sarah."

The trim housemaid came tripping to the gate, her face changing first to a surprised expression, as she saw Hackley instead of her master and mistress, who she had naturally

expected to find at the gate; then she assumed a smile, for Nat was a great favourite with all the Abigails of the vicinity.

"Why, Mr. Hackley," exclaimed the girl; "good gracious! what brings you here at this time of night?"

"Business, my dear," said Nat, "instant business. I must see your young ladies at once."

"Very well, Mr. Hackley, they are sitting in the parlour, so I dare say you can see them soon enough," said the girl, who had led the way to the house during this brief conversation.

She tripped off, and returning in a few seconds told Hackley to go to the parlour. It took him but a moment to steal to the outer door and listen anxiously, fearing lest he might already hear the tramp of those who bore the litter, and their subdued voices; but all was still. With far more hesitation and timidity than he would have faced the Champion of England, Hackley entered the quiet, comfortable sitting-room, and confronted the young ladies. Both were reading; both looked up and smiled

a welcome to Nat, who thought he had never seen either of them look so pretty.

"Why, Mr. Hackley," exclaimed Agnes, "you are certainly a very late visitor, but, nevertheless, a very welcome one. Did you wish to see my father? He is not at home, but we expect him instantly; indeed, I thought your ring was his."

"But we missed the prance and gallop of our war horse, Ag.," said Julia; "that royal steed would not approach so quietly."

It seemed to Hackley as though fate had resolved that the ladies should choose the style and topic most calculated to embarrass him in his mission; so what with his desire to commence his painful disclosures in the most delicate manner possible, and his desperate fear lest the party should arrive ere he had executed his task he was able to do no more than cough, and smile faintly.

"Pray sit down, Mr. Hackley," said Julia; "I was about to ring for supper; you will of course join us?"

"No, thank you; I am much obliged; would rather not," returned Nat, and his internal reflection was, "Confound it, there's another minute gone."

"Why not,—" began Julia, but she was interrupted by Agnes, who rose, closed her book, and, with changed colour, laid her hand upon her sister's arm.

"My dear Julia," she said, and something in her tone made Julia look swiftly up, "my dear Julia, let us hear what Mr. Hackley has come to say. You have some unpleasant intelligence to communicate, sir, have you not?"

"I—I'm afraid I have," stammered Nat.

"Speak on, Mr. Hackley," continued Agnes, growing still paler, "we can hear it calmly."

"I hope and trust, my dear young ladies," said Nat, "I hope and trust that things are not really so bad as they seem;" a rising in Nat's throat, and a swimming in his head as he began rendered him slightly uncertain of what he did say, "but I am sorry to inform you that there has been an accident to-night upon the railway,

and—and, my dear young ladies, your father will be here almost directly, and he has received some injury—I hope not a very bad one."

"And my mother, sir?" demanded Agnes, calmly, as she had promised, but still very pale.

"Your mother—Mrs. Elmsley," said Nat, correcting himself, "I am sorry to say will not be able to come home to-night, she will remain at my house till—till—for the present."

A groan burst involuntarily from the lips of the speaker, as he recalled *what* it was which now was lying at his house, and for what purpose. Agnes buried her face in her hands for a minute, and the messenger, turning his eyes from her, encountered Julia's keen gaze, which seemed to the confused Nat, to be literally reading his thoughts. It was with a feeling of positive relief then, as forestalling the questions which were so clearly coming, that the sound of many feet was heard outside the house, accompanied with a murmur of voices.

In an instant the girls were out of the room, the servants summoned, and the door thrown open. Of course, but one spectacle could meet the daughters; in the midst of a cluster of some dozen men, four railway porters bore a stretcher, and on it lay their father. At sight of the death-like form, and the horrible blood stains, Julia gave one piercing shriek and fainted; Agnes shook from head to foot like an aspen, but was calm again instantly A few soothing words were spoken by the surgeon, and by the station-master, who had kindly accompanied the cortége, and then poor Elmsley was put to bed.

Agnes wept bitterly, but silently, and was all in all by the side of her father. Her remembrance never forsook her, even for a moment; she knew where everything wanted was to be found, and assisted, with a quiet, self-possessed manner, invaluable at such a moment, to undress the wounded man, and was at the right hand of the surgeon when required. It is true that, when a faint groan escaped from her father's

lips, the first sound he had uttered, and they found, on pulling his coat off, that his left arm was broken, then Agnes again buried her face in her hands, and ere she resumed her duties, stooped over her father, kissed him, and uttered a short prayer. But otherwise she was, as just stated, quiet and collected, and ere Julia had been recovered from the hysterics which followed her swoon, her sister had sent a man to Chalkingdon, mounted upon Hackley's best horse, to fetch Doctor Williams, with his instruments, &c., had written letters to her uncle and Smith, and had ordered the household for the night.

The men from the station had returned to their duties or homes; the superintendent had followed; and Hackley, who had volunteered to sit up during the latter watches of the night to relieve the surgeon, (the latter, of course, remaining at his post until the arrival of his senior from Chalkingdon,) was leaving to close his house, and had his hand upon the lock of the front door, when he felt a light touch upon his shoulder. He turned and saw Agnes.

"Mr. Hackley," she said, "I look upon you as a man of so kind a heart, that you would do everything to avert or postpone any evil which threatened our family; but I am certain, also, that you are too honourable and truthful not to see the necessity of an open answer to a direct appeal."

"My dear, good——dear, good——" Nat paused to think of some stronger epithets, but failing to find them speedily, he abandoned the sentence, and began another.

"I am really too agitated, Miss Agnes, to answer any questions, so pray don't ask me any."

"I ask you, Mr. Hackley," said Agnes, and her overpowered listener found himself noticing how steady her pale lips were, and how calm her eye, "I ask you plainly, and charge it on your honour to answer truly—what has happened to my mother?"

"My dear Miss Agnes, I really—well," said Nat bluntly, seeing the girl was about to speak, "then, Miss Agnes Elmsley, may the Almighty be your protector, and strengthener, and com-

forter, for your mother is killed. I think I have done right in telling you, and so God bless you."

With these words, Hackley threw open the door and hurried off.

Agnes, who had drawn a deep breath, and pressed her hands upon her bosom as he spoke, stood for a few moments at the door, vacantly watching his retreating figure, and then marking intently the shrubs and trees which fringed the little lawn; the deep shadows thrown by them here, and the unclouded glory of the moonlight there; the moon herself, one splendid shield of silver in the pure blue sky; then the elms lower down the road, and the long line of hedge which carried the eye to the base of Chalkingdon Hill, —all these things seemed to occupy her mind, to the exclusion of the terrible intelligence just received, until with a shudder, she turned from the door, closed it, bowed her head and wrung her hands for a moment; then stifling one almost irrepressible cry of agony, she entered the sick room, and once more bent over her father and

kissed him. The surgeon, who was apparently engaged in reading a book he had taken up, glanced at Agnes, and saw a change in her which caused him to murmur:

"She knows the worst; By Heaven! she's a good and noble girl!"

CHAPTER IX.

As he was brought home, so John Elmsley remained, no improvement being visible, even to the anxious eyes of his daughters; alteration for the worst, save in *one* way, there could not be. Had he but been sensible, the horrors even of his situation would have been mitigated by the flattering attentions paid by the county families around, who sent their servants, or called in person at Royal Lodge, almost continually throughout the day. A general sympathy for the misfortunes of the family was felt all around Chalkingdon, and many a splay-footed rustic,

tired with a long day's work, went out of his way at eventide to ask after "poor Measter Elmsley."

On the second night, about four and twenty hours after the accident, William Elmsley arrived, and on seeing his unfortunate brother, burst into a flood of tears, the outward token of a grief which carried him completely away. Edgar Fielding, who happened to be in the house at the time, led him from the room, and could not help owning to himself that William Elmsley overflowed with affection far beyond the common fraternal measure. But as Edgar was a light, flippant young man, he did not appreciate so highly as others might have done the discourse with which the afflicted gentleman favoured him, and thought the long and eloquent prayer which concluded it rather tiresome and out of place.

Fielding had been at Royal Lodge nearly all day, and so had joined with the family in every meal, and ere he mounted his horse to ride home, he sat down with them to supper. Now

on each of the previous occasions, although the shadow was too plainly over them, yet the girls gave no violent demonstration of grief, but spoke and looked as cheerfully as might be under the circumstances. The affection of William Elmsley, however, was too ardent in character to permit his sorrow to flow in a silent channel, therefore he sobbed audibly and oft at the supper table, and delivered many eulogiums upon his poor brother, whose fate he felt compelled, as a lover of truth, to own, was sealed. The effect of all this, naturally enough, was to excite the daughters, and so render them far more nervous and hysterical than they had been at any period during the day. The excellent gentleman, however, tendered good service by offering to sit up all night; a nurse had been engaged from Chalkingdon, but it was of course desirable to have a member of the family in attendance also.

As Fielding mounted his horse, Hackley came to make his final enquiry for the night; the former answered by a shrug of the shoulders and

an angry exclamation when Nat asked after the family. Surprised at such unfeeling conduct, Hackley rang, and was shown to the sitting room, where he at once saw that something had occurred to distress the young ladies since his last visit. They had, of course, throughout the day appeared pale and worn, but now they were weeping, and had a wild, incoherent look, which he had not observed before.

After a few homely words of sympathy, Nat was about to withdraw, when Mr. William entered the apartment. He knew the landlord slightly, so, in answer to his respectful bow, said:

"Oh! Hackley, I believe. I hope you are well, Hackley."

"Pretty fair, so far as that goes, sir," returned Nat. "I am sorry to hear so bad an account of poor Mr. Elmsley, sir. A dreadful affair, sir."

"Yes, Hackley, 'tis indeed a calamitous visitation," said the gentleman, who seemed disposed to treat Nat with no excess of cordiality; "you

can say, that to remain undisturbed is the best thing for my dear brother. I presume you have called to enquire on behalf of some gentleman."

"No, sir, I havn't, I've called to enquire for myself," returned Nat; "I should be very sorry to let the night go over without knowing how Mr. Elmsley was."

"Oh!" was the cold ejaculation in reply.

"I know he would have come to enquire about me," continued the landlord, who was nettled by the tone and manner of the speaker, "and anything as it was in my power to do for him, or the young ladies here, I'm sure I'd do as soon as if it was for myself."

"Yes, Mr. Hackley," said Agnes, "we know that. We look upon you as one of our best friends. My uncle knows that also."

Nat looked triumphantly at the gentleman, then made his parting bow.

"We are not in need of any assistance, thank you, Hackley," said Mr. William. "Should we want you or your potman, we will send."

Ned turned, for he had reached the door while Mr. Elmsley was speaking; he turned, drew himself up, gave a visible gulp to swallow his indignation, then looked fixedly at him. The gentleman, however, had quietly sat himself down as he concluded, and was now engaged, with seeming interest, in perusing a pamphlet: Nat shook his head forebodingly, two or three times, then walked straight from the house.

He held that night, in his own bar parlour, a conversation with Fred Harley, the results of which was not to put off from going to the Lodge, by any airs uncles or brothers might choose to give themselves, but to persevere in offering all the sympathy and service in his power. Nat further expressed his determination of keeping an eye on the family, for the purpose of seeing that all was fair and above board; no tricks or chicanery; he had immense confidence in the value of such supervision, and Fred Harley had still more.

The next day came and waned, and the next; until a week drew slowly past; the only change

perceptible in the wounded man being a diminution of strength in pulse and lungs; hope there was none. Fielding was often at the Lodge, but Smith had not even written, which conduct caused much wonder to all, and painful anxiety to Agnes. The utmost haughtiness and superciliousness could not daunt Hackley, or diminish what he deemed a due quota of attention, by a single visit. The daughters, who dreamt not of any slight being offered to so great a favourite as Nat, were glad to see him, and always made him very welcome; this, perhaps, compensated for the brother's coldness. Not that he was cold to his nieces; oh! no! to them he was almost too full of sympathy, too full of grief, too little able to stifle his emotions:—after the first evening of his arrival, Julia was not once seen to shed a tear, or apply the kerchief to her eyes, the reason being, as she confided to Fielding, that she saw far too much of such demonstrations in her uncle.

On each day, William Elmsley rode over to Chalkingdon, he felt after the confinement of the

house, and his constant agitation and anxiety, that a little air and exercise was indispensable, if he wished to bear up, and continue to perform his duty has a brother—probably such was the case. On each occasion, he called upon Mr. Chapman, and made visits of no brief duration. Whatever these visits concerned, it was evident that they were of a private and important character, for the lawyer and his friend were invariably closeted in the former's sanctum, and none were allowed to intrude upon them.

Parsons took especial care that they should not be intruded upon by him; for he soon found himself to be no favourite with Mr. William, and his master, emboldened by the presence of a kindred spirit, improved in sarcasm and insult. Bob writhed under the stings which grew daily more insupportable, and was once or twice unable to suppress a brief retort: he was cautioned as to indulgence in such insolence, and was fain to express contrition.

On Mr. William Elmsley paying his third visit to the solicitor, he was admitted by Mr.

Chapman himself, such office generally falling to the share of Parsons; he enquired where the clerk was, and was informed that he was absent without leave, a practice he was greatly addicted to, and which had decided Chapman upon getting rid of him altogether.

As usual a conference took place this day in the lawer's room; it was brief, but important, if their faces offered any index, for each came forth pale as ghosts, with b.oodless lips, and unsettled eyes—which latter never met. Zaccheus pushed open the door of the clerk's room, and glanced hurriedly in; Bob had not, however, returned. The lawyer then unfastened the street door, for his friend's exit—it was observable that upon entering, he had turned the key in the lock, and left it therein. Mr. William's horse stood at the door, tied to a post; he mounted, and rode very slowly away, Chapman walking by the side of his horse for, perhaps, a hundred yards down the street; they spoke several times, and several times cleared each man his throat, such difficulty had they in

uttering a few words; yet their speech was on the most commonplace and ordinary subjects, and still their eyes never met.

At last Elmsley rode off at a brisker pace, and Zaccheus slowly and thoughtfully returned; on entering his house he saw his clerk sitting in an orthodox form and manner at his desk, writing composedly and steadily away, as though he had been so engaged for an hour. Chapman started, for he was positive no one had entered the house while he was walking with his client, but a glance at the open casement gave a clue of which he availed himself.

"Where have you been, you drunken scoundrel?" he began, for he fancied he could detect an odour of gin, not previously in the office.

"Only stept out for a moment, sir," replied Bob.

"For a moment!" exclaimed his master, "you have been at the Bell, as usual. Don't deny it; you're not sober now."

"I have not been there," retorted his clerk.

"Don't contradict me!" cried the lawyer,

"you have, and have come back through the garden, and in at the window. I have not been out of sight of the street door, and will swear you never entered there." He paused, as though expecting a reply, but Bob wrote doggedly on. "Motives of charity, sir, generous motives," resumed Zaccheus, "have induced me to allow such a man to remain in my employment, not to speak of the salary I pay you, but I warn you, Robert Parsons, that on your next offence, you shall be ignominiously expelled."

Bob had bent his face closer to his writing, while his employer spoke, but now lifted it with an expression of malevolence so strongly marked thereon, an expression so totally different to the general loose, good-tempered cast of his features, that Zaccheus receded a pace or two, a sudden dread of the clerk's hurling an inkstand at him with deadly force, seizing his mind. Nothing of the kind, however, was offered; Parsons spoke between his set teeth, and wore still the same malicious aspect, but his tone was subdued, and his words were cool.

"I think we had better part, sir," he said, "we appear to hold each other in similar estimation, and as I should not like to remain with any person who disliked me as much as I dislike you, we will part as soon as you can make it convenient."

Chapman was evidently not prepared for this, and did not at all like the idea of his clerk's striking the decisive blow; however he appeared to treat the matter lightly, and said—

"Oh! very good, Parsons, very good. When do you think of leaving?"

"This day week will perhaps suit us both," returned Bob, "and as I wish to preserve peace, take my advice, and don't make me your butt so much as you have lately done."

Chapman muttered something confusedly about not knowing what he meant, then left the office, and, according to the bulletins issued at brief intervals by the servant, was unbearable in his temper for the remainder of the day.

Stimulated, no doubt, by the prospect of his approaching emancipation, though where, besides

the workhouse, he was to go, it was hard to say, Parsons imbibed one or two extra glasses at the Bell, that evening, and being smitten with a desire to walk over to his friend Hackley, set forth on that errand, and presented himself at the Railway Arms, barely sober. Nat was grieved to see the clerk in such a condition, as he had a real liking for him, and knew how fatally he had been his own enemy, by his too warm attachment to the glass, and how likely he was to get into trouble if allowed to go about so much the worse for liquor. So the kind-hearted fellow offered his visitor a bed, and promised, moreover, if he would accept the said offer, to drive him over to Chalkingdon, in time for business, the next morning. To his great chagrin, Parsons would listen to nothing of the kind; usually, when he had exceeded in his cups, he was very quiet and docile, the principal change in him being that he looked rather "seedier" and more slipshod than when sober; but, on this night he sought the tap, in lieu of his accustomed seat in the snug bar-parlour, and

there, in company with four or five labourers and tramps, he sang songs and drank beer until the house closed. Then he fell asleep, with his head upon the table, until Hackley roused him, and made another effort to persuade him to go to bed.

Still perverse, he took offence at his friend's well-meant remonstrances, and denouncing him as a traitor, a hypocrite, and a maglinant sycophant—for Parsons was profuse and tasteful in his epithets when not sober—he staggered from the inn, with solemn, though hazy and indistinct denunciations of human nature, and would not allow Nat to accompany him. Nat persevered for a short time, Fred Harley being in attendance, for he was anxious to persuade Bob to stay at the tavern, as the poor fellow was now evidently starting on a homeward walk; and in his state a thousand accidents might happen in a five mile journey at midnight. At last, however, in compliance with Bob's dignified and repeated mandates, he gave up the attempt, and paused to watch the clerk's sinuous course.

"Poor fellow!" he said to Harley, "there's something wrong with him to day, I'm sure. I know there must be something wrong, when Robert Parsons don't warm to me the more he drinks."

With a sigh of compassion for his friend's infirmity, Hackley was about to move slowly homeward, when Parsons suddenly halted, and turning, reeled his way back to them.

The moonshine showed a deep solemnity in his visage, and a mystical tipsy light in his eyes; as he turned, he beckoned, and said—

"Hi!"

Then came on in silence, until he could grasp Hackley's hand. This he took, and shook gravely for a considerable period, then his lips parted.

"Hackley! Nathaniel Hackley! I respec' you as a friend, as a friend." More shaking of the hand, and tears came into Parsons's eyes. "I know my friends, Nat, and respect 'em. Some men are friends and some men are enemies, but here is a heart, Nat," here the clerk smote his

collar bone smartly several times, "here is a heart, Nat, as respects its friends, and conquers its enemies. I hate Chapman; I defy Chapman; I renounce Chapman. Chapman and me, sir, are foes; in spite of his quotations, and his monkey face, and his large brass plate, and his twenty two shillings per week, we are enemies, sir. I have dismissed him, sir, and shake the dust off my shoes next week."

Another phase, probably, of Bob's woes came before his mental vision, for he paused, looked pensively down the silent road, and shook his head gravely. A tear again filled his eye, which —after a few moments consumed in fruitless search of a pocket handkerchief—was wiped away by a tattered Berlin glove. This done, he turned his face slowly towards Hackley, the sight of whom seemed to recall him to a sense of his wrongs. In a low stage-like tone he began.

"But beware! beware! I shall be upon the viper's head shortly, sir; yes, Nathaniel Hackley! if he was to swallow all the drugs you put into your beer, according to the teetotallers, his

vitals wouldn't be so scorched as I shall scorch 'em; if all the horses you are licensed to let—without the neat flys—were pulling his vile frame in all directions, it wouldn't be so rent as I shall rend him. No, sir!" he exclaimed very loudly and suddenly, making Harley start with the shock, for his previous sentence had been delivered, as said, in a low, hissing tone. "No, sir! he wouldn't. And when you hear my name proclaimed from the house-tops, and see triumphal processions formed to honour me, and statues sculptured of me, and even public houses indebted for their signs to my name—then, sir, then say 'I knew him, and he will never desert a friend!'"

This was the conclusion of an harangue sufficiently mystical to Hackley and his companion, yet sufficiently explanatory withal to let them see that something had occurred to sever his connexion with Chapman. Nat was truly sorry to find that his good tempered, but fallible acquaintance, had cut himself adrift at a time when, there was very little reason to doubt, he

was completely without other resources. He did not allow the orator to depart without a renewal of his friendly offers, which, however, were loftily rejected, with an assurance, comforting in the extreme, that he, the said orator, would never forget a deserving man, however lowly his station.

The course of this tale demands that for some few pages we follow the fortunes of Robert Parsons; for not only were they of the highest interest and paramount importance to himself, but were deserving of some attention from those who wish clearly to understand this authentic history. It must be borne in mind, by the bye, that, although we have spoken of John Elmsley lingering in his desperate condition for a week, as in sooth he did, yet these sayings and doings of Robert Parsons, chronicled and to come, and the visit of William Elmsley to Mr. Chapman, do not follow the week aforesaid, but are comprised within it; and, consequently, the appearance of Parsons at the Railway Arms was on the fourth night from the accident; this may be

of no real consequence, but exactness in dates is a virtue in our eyes.

With aching head, and unsteady fingers, the clerk sought his work next day, nerving himself with the courage of desperation to meet the reproaches and jibes of his master, which, he had no doubt, would be unusually severe, as no reason could now exist for restraining them, and the time for their indulgence grew short. To his surprise, however, Chapman was something more akin to civil in his demeanour on this morning than he had been for months, and so he continued even on the next day.

The reason of this change was to be found in the fact that the lawyer was in reality sorry to let Parsons go; not from motives of kindness, or from any reluctance at parting with a servant, but because, with all his faults, Bob was so well "up" in his master's business, as to be quite his right hand, and at present he had no one in view who could replace him.

He was quite sure that Parsons meant to leave—that he was heartily in earnest there

could be no doubt, and as it would never do to ask him to stay, the lawyer scarce knew how to act. At last he decided on finding some pretext for employing him beyond the week of warning, after which, he argued, it would be very easy to get up a little joke upon their wrangle, and Parsons would stay, until his employer could better afford to dispense with his services—that he should go *then*, Chapman was quite resolved. On the third morning after the explosion, therefore, he approached Parsons with a roll of papers in his hand, and thus began.

"Ahem! Mr. Parsons."

"Sir," returned Robert.

"If not very inconvenient to you," continued the lawyer, "I have business of some importance at Bristol, which I should wish you to transact for me; you may, it is just possible, be detained there a few days; I need not tell you, jocularly, that the course of true law never does run smoothly—the course of true *law*, not *love*, you observe; that's pretty good, I think, Robert?"

"Excellent, sir," returned Parsons.

"Without premeditation too—an impromtoo, as the French say; I've often wished I could speak French, it's a very fashionable language, I believe, Robert?"

"Decidedly a fashionable language," assented his clerk.

"I should imagine that with a little application—but there! so many things are to be thought of—the course of true law! really it is not so bad. Well, well, to business. This little affair at Bristol may detain you a few days, and if you have made other arrangements why, perhaps, you would not be able——"

"I can undertake it, sir, as one or two days will make no material difference in my plans," said his clerk.

"Ah! thank you," returned Zaccheus; "as suits you, of course. To be or not to be, they are the questions. Then if you will start this evening, I should like it; your expenses, of course, will be allowed. Can you start this evening?"

"Yes, sir, as well as at any other time," replied Parsons.

"Very good, then, there is the address, 'Mr. Wigley, Park Street,'" continued his employer, "and here is a week's expenses beforehand; you may not be gone so long, perhaps you may, but we must be prepared for all contingencies, for you know the course of true law never did run smoothly — he! he! he! — true law! he! he! But to return to business, I will now give you your instructions."

These instructions were, doubtless, duly imparted, for Parsons left Abbeycombe station that night, as second class passenger for Bristol. Abbeycombe is almost as near to Chalkingdon, as is Chalkingdon Road Station, and being, as a reference to Bradshaw will show, one stage nearer to Bristol, is generally used by the Chalkingdonians when going down the line, in preference to their own station.

Will posterity, when posterity reads the six or seven hundredth edition of this book, will it understand what is meant by a reference to

Bradshaw? Will Bradshaw still flourish like a green bay tree, or will its glories be numbered with the Assyrian and Egyptian monarchies, and so interest only the antiquary? Will posterity have the faintest idea that "Bradshaw" means Bradshaw's Railway Guide? or will those words, familiar now to all who speak the English tongue, fall without significance upon the ears of the little domestic circle of Lord Macaulay's New Zealand traveller?—such said traveller, like a good fatherly man, as we have no doubt he will be, being engaged in reading this tale aloud. Will posterity, again, have the faintest idea of the bewildering mazes of this Bradshaw? Will posterity know, any better than ourselves, whether to class it as a public good, an institution to be proud on, (Shakespeare says "proud on,") or a fiend in a yellow garment, goading a peaceful community to distraction?

Ere quitting this subject let us point out how a parvenu has suddenly obtruded himself into the choicest company; how a stranger of the most innovating character has suddenly stept

over the charmed circle, and become the principal figure therein, even as the undesired and pugnacious cuckoo cuts the chief figure in another bird's nest. We mean this same New Zealand traveller. Who talks about posterity now? Or if any dare talk about posterity, his sentences are always obliged to be rounded off and finished with an allusion to this antipodean, who has suddenly assumed to himself the right of standing as the type of all future ages. Well, after all, there are now two strings to the bow in lieu of but one.

Accordingly, (mark that, if you please), accordingly, we say, Parsons got safely to Bristol, and on the next morning, as he had arranged with his master, called upon Mr. Wigley, of Park Street. That gentleman saw him, and requested him to leave his papers with him, promising to examine them at his earliest convenience, but fearing that it would be of no use his calling again for a couple of days at least; he was very sorry, but hoped it would not make any serious difference to Mr. Chapman. Robert

made his bow and his exit on hearing this, and was now to employ himself as best he might.

As the business with which he was intrusted was of so slight and straightforward a character as to admit of its being transacted by post, and as, supposing a personal interview desirable, Mr. Wigley's part would scarcely have occupied him twenty minutes, it became tolerably clear to Bob why he was sent down, and that the solicitor at Bristol was playing into Chapman's hands. He adhered, however, to his determination of allowing nothing to bind him to Chapman, and, first writing to Hackley, explaining where he had gone, and requesting him to be sure to let him know if Mr. Elmsley's injuries should produce the dreaded catastrophe, he amused himself by strolling about the romantic environs of the old city.

Amongst other places, the tremendous gorge of the Avon at Clifton became, of course, a prime favourite, and on each of the four days he remained in Bristol, he walked to the Hotwells, and climbing the Zigzag, strolled along

the downs, feasting his eyes on the magnificent panorama of Somersetshire displayed from thence; or, as was still more to his taste—for in Parsons's constitution was a strong tinge of melancholy,—whiled away the hours at the base of the gigantic rocks which frown on either side of the river, and appear as though rent asunder by an earthquake. The discoloured tide rushing down with its rapid flood at the full, or fallen so that it lay at the bottom of a deep gulph, and shooting sullenly along its narrowed channel, had great charms for him; and especially at evening was the spot attractive.

Each night he saw the shadows of the towering bastions of rock grow longer, and the river grow darker; the mist above Bristol become denser and spread wider, until at last a solemn gloom filled the gorge, and all the grand adjuncts of the scene grew dim and indistinct; the frowning precipices behind, the woods in front, the distant city, the restless river, only distinguishable by its hoarse murmur; upon all fell the gloom, until a thousand faint lights twinkled on

the high ground of Clifton, and in Bristol at its base.

Parsons was fond, too, of climbing, in the twilight, the lonely ravines which scar the face of the rocks, where these are less precipitous; the stern, savage character of the hollows seeming such as would be far meeter for a northern wild, than the vicinity of a great English city. Few persons have trodden these, or the intricate Leigh woods, at evening, without a sensation of loneliness, and a feeling that such were fitting spots for deeds of blood and mystery. Such deeds on either side of the swift Avon have been done, and each bank has its tale of foulest murder.

Here would Parsons linger, until the small rain, which so often sets in at nightfall in those parts, drove him to shelter. This was to his lodging, a small public house in the Hotwell Road, and one much frequented by sailors. As may be readily supposed, his besetting weakness soon made him "hail fellow" with the grog-loving tars; and from his possessing the ability

to sing a good song, or tell a good story, he was at once a prime favourite with them.

Many of the blue jackets attached to the vessels lying in Cumberland Basin knew "old Bob Parsons" ere old Bob Parsons had been eight and forty hours in Bristol, but a certain group of seamen were his especial cronies, and in return looked upon him as a friend above the common run.

These were a portion of the crew of a vessel bound for New Orleans, which had dropped down the river to Pill, a hamlet some few miles from Bristol, and the mate, with a few seamen, were to join her on a certain night, they having been unexpectedly detained on some business aboard another vessel belonging to the same owners. It happened, moreover, that on the morning of the same day, the night whereof was fixed for the sailing of the clipper brigantine, "Euphemia Bullock," Parsons had at last completed his business with Mr. Wigley; so, if the sailors attached to the clipper brigantine aforesaid, felt inclined for a parting carouse, Parsons,

now being completely at liberty, was thoroughly ready to keep them company.

The ship was appointed to sail soon after midnight; it was arranged, therefore, that a fly should call at the hotel where Parsons was staying at ten o'clock, this hotel being considered as head quarters. Long ere that hour, however, the whole of the party were tolerably far gone in liquor, which had, up to a certain time, only made its effect known by inspiring them with a great relish for vocal music; which enabled, as they sat with their windows wide open, an irritable, gouty gentleman, who lived on the heights behind the road, to count twenty-three sea songs, all sung in chorus. As the time waned, and the hour for their departure drew nigh, a brilliant suggestion was suddenly uttered by Parsons; he proposed, and the idea was so palpably excellent and desirable, as to admit of no debate, he proposed that they should, in honour of their approaching exodus, and of the clipper brigantine, "Euphemia Bullock," take a public farewell of Bristol.

With cheering, evoked of course by this out-and-out scheme, cheering, it must be owned, somewhat uproarious and disorderly, they sallied forth. There were four sailors, the mate, and Parsons, so they formed three pairs, and arm-in-arm, perambulated the chief streets of Clifton, screeching out at the same time the choicest of their sea-songs, as loudly as mortal lungs would allow, pausing at corners of quiet squares, and the like, to give a louder yell, if possible, than ordinary. Despite frequent opening of windows, by indignant householders, despite occasional interchange of compliments with angry passengers, despite, too, a great and general desire felt by the party to fight any body, any where, the serenaders managed to regain the vicinity of their rendezvous without serious mishap.

There, however, two of the city police appeared, and, having no music in their base souls, did curtly, and tyrannously, and tyrannically order them to stop that infernal howling. Justly incensed at receiving so uncourteous and unreasonable a mandate, the vocalists, strong in a

good cause, and being, moreover, much the larger party, did, against the peace of our Sovereign Lady the Queen, and the statutes in that case made and provided, maul, molest, and towzle these officers.

The fray grew serious; the police determined to arrest at least a couple of the seamen, and each grappled a victim. The sailors fought desperately, and the police, finding themselves overmatched, sprung their rattles. A mob of course was soon collected, and the mate, malgré all his exertions, was being hauled off, when Parsons struck his captor a blow on the ear, which laid him senseless and apparently lifeless upon the pavement. The remaining officer sprung his rattle again, and amidst a confused hubbub of shouts and yells, and cries from the crowd of "Stop them!" "The man is killed!" "Now cut it, men!" "Run! run! the bobbies are coming!" the choristers broke through the throng, flew to the coach, which was luckily within sight, and drove rapidly off, just as half-a-dozen blue-coated officials hove into view.

The sailors were thoroughly impressed with the belief that the man who had been knocked down was dead, and with true vinous chivalry determined, at all hazards, to screen his actual slayer. Him, in their admiration and friendship, they plied with rum, and gin, and Hollands, and other liquors dear to seafaring men, until he was totally incapable of taking care of himself; the more need then, they argued, for his friends to take care of him. It is hardly worth mentioning, perhaps, but being prone to err on the score of fastidious exactness, we cannot help explaining that the officer, so far from being "a body, an unpleasant body," was well enough to join in the fruitless chase after the rioters.

Of this, however, the sailors knew nothing, and Parsons knew least of all; a chance blow on the forehead received in the melée had doubtless some share in reducing the clerk to a state of stupefaction; but, at any rate, when the party arrived at Pill, he could neither stand nor speak. In this emergency the mate decided upon smuggling him on board, as, if left at Pill, he would

certainly fall into the hands of the Philistines. The upshot was, therefore, that Parsons was secretly conveyed on board the "Euphemia Bullock," which fast-sailing, copper-bottomed vessel, weighed anchor without loss of time, and was, by morning, in the Irish Channel. In the morning, too, the breeze, though still in a favourable quarter, had increased to something very much like a gale, so that by the time the mate took courage to inform the skipper of the presence of this unlooked for passenger, it would have been impossible to put him on board any Bristol bound craft, even had he been in a fit state for removal.

But Parsons slumbered heavily, from the combined effects of rum and the blow upon the head, until evening. At last they succeeded in rousing him, and totally bewildered and panic stricken, he was taken upon deck, to receive a volley of curses from the enraged master, to find himself out at sea, the vessel flying through the boisterous waves, to turn horribly sick, and to learn that he was more than one hundred miles from Bristol.

CHAPTER X.

At last came to Royal Lodge a letter from James Smith. It came on the day of the funeral of Mrs. Elmsley, and was delivered to Agnes as she sat in her own room after her return from the sad ceremony. It was a light, cheerful letter, and spoke of his approaching visit to Chalkingdon, and of the double nuptials. He wrote from Yorkshire, where, it seemed, he had gone upon business, and, as his letters had not been forwarded, he knew nothing of the catastrophe which had postponed his

marriage; he should be in London, he said, by the time she received his note.

To receive this letter was a great comfort to Agnes, who had harassed herself with a thousand conjectures to account for his silence, but who now felt her anxiety transferred to him, in fear lest the sudden shock which he would experience on his return to London should prove serious. Agnes remained in her own room and wept; yet was hers now a softened grief, and the oft read letter, though its tone was strangely out of keeping with her situation, was more than a friend to console her.

The day was in its decline, and Julia, having left her father's chamber, was in the principal parlour or sitting room, which ran from front to back of the house. From the rearward window, screened by the long muslin curtains within, and the flowers outside, she watched her uncle as he paced to and fro at the farther side of the garden, until the dusk grew dark, and he was no longer distinguishable.

There had been a strangeness in the demeanour

of William Elmsley during the day, which had irresistibly attracted the attention of his elder niece—not but that much the same unevenness and irregularity of behaviour had been visible nearly all the time of his stay at Royal Lodge, but it was greater in degree to-day than heretofore, and seemed to reach a culminating point; his measured patrol of the garden walk for two hours, quite alone, did not diminish Julia's curiosity. At one moment he would beseech the girls to mingle their sorrows with his, and in the next, moved by some strange and unknown revulsion of feeling, would rise and leave the room, muttering as he went. His air altogether was abstracted and wild, and his bursts of grief, which were as elaborate as ever, seemed to be made in accordance with a predetermined plan, and not spontaneous or natural.

He had been most subdued and even in his manner at the funeral; from, no doubt, absorbing grief, he had preserved an almost total silence, and had scarce looked up once during the ride to the church, the ceremony, or the return. Im-

mediately afterwards, however, his restlessness returned, and a dozen times during the afternoon he had complained of thirst, and called for a glass of water; but in each case which came under her notice, Julia observed that he had merely put his lips to the liquid, and had then set the glass down, risen from his seat, and paced the room, fanning himself meanwhile with his cambric handkerchief, complaining of the heat, although in reality the day was remarkably cool for the time of year.

He had been very little in the sick room, too, and exhibited the same strange appearance of acting in accordance with some plan in that, as in other things; for he would walk, and Julia noted it well, for a few minutes in the passage near his brother's chamber, as though nerving himself to enter; then he would suddenly seize the handle of the door and enter abruptly. Of all these things Agnes was ignorant, nor would she, it is more than probable, have been able to piece together the scattered fragments of his behaviour had she known them.

Fielding had ridden over to the funeral, but had left immediately afterwards; the young ladies, exhausted by long vigils, and the distressing event of the day, had, in compliance with the recommendation of the nurse, retired early to rest, so that Mr. William Elmsley sat down alone in the parlour to his supper. Something ailed him; the food remained untasted upon his plate, although from the large quantity to which he had helped himself, it seemed as though he contemplated making a very hearty meal; unconsciously, too, he had filled three different glasses with ale, and from each had taken but a sip.

At last he turned his chair from the table, and sat gazing upon the fireless grate, thoughtfully regarding its screen of ornamental paper, twisting and tying into knots the while his white handkerchief; it seemed impossible for him to sit quite still; when a tap was heard at the door, and the nurse came in.

Her business was to request either Mr. Elmsley, or one of the young ladies (though

they, poor things! she heard, had gone to bed tired enough), to sit for a short time with the dying man. She wished for a few hours' sleep, a very few would be sufficient for her, she said, and would he please say who was to take her place meanwhile.

But Mr. William was unexpectedly cross and sharp with the woman; he pointed out to her how unfit she was for her place if she could not exercise a considerable degree of foresight; how impossible it was to arouse Miss Julia or Miss Agnes; how he was too excited and fatigued himself to undertake the charge; and, finally, that she ought to shake off any sleepiness she felt, and remain with the patient until the morning. It was her duty, he said, and he owned to no little surprise at finding a person so highly recommended as she had been, so completely oblivious of her duty. The nurse, however, was firm; she knew what ought to be expected of a nurse and what ought not; she didn't want him to distress himself, she must say from what she had seen of him it wasn't at

all likely that he would; but, if he couldn't sit up, she could send for Mr. Hackley, who had offered to come and stay any night; go without sleep any longer herself she could not; he might do just what he liked about it, she didn't care.

Finally, Mr. Elmsley agreed to watch at his brother's bedside for four hours, but again upbraided the nurse bitterly for not having warned him beforehand of the necessity for providing a relief. It was about eleven o'clock when, after a brief absence, the woman entered again, and announced that all was ready; she held a candlestick in her hand, and was evidently just going to bed, and her substitute knew himself to be the only watcher in the house. Mr. Elmsley, the nurse said, had been talking a little in a wandering way; if he got very bad, call her please, but she didn't think there would be any occasion.

The gentleman heard her in silence, and, as she went up stairs, repaired to his brother's room. The almost invariable dim light of the

sick chamber was there, a night light burning on a small table; the bed was white and quiet; the patient lay still as a corpse under the clothes, the bandages swathing his head were streaked with blood, from a recent bleeding of his wound. Everything was profoundly silent: as William Elmsley took his seat in an arm-chair by the bedside, and drew a book from a shelf behind him, he listened in vain for the slightest sound, within or without.

There was not light enough for him to read by, so he replaced his book, and composed himself for his watch; the light, however, was just strong enough to throw a strange and spectral aspect upon the most familiar and commonest objects, to his great annoyance in his excited and nervous state. Twice he rose from his seat, to assure himself, by actual examination and touch, that the window curtains were but window curtains, and that no unseen mysterious something lurked behind them.

The same restless uneasy mood which had held him all day, left him not now, and, as

many times before he had done, he wiped his face with a nervous hand, and put a glass of water repeatedly to his lips. After every uneasy action, and plainly in spite of himself, his eyes turned towards the bed, and fell upon its silent inmate, his swathed head, and his features, which, as could be just seen by the feeble light, were wan and pale from loss of blood.

Still the same deathly silence; no footfall without, no voice within the house. He glanced at his watch;—only an hour gone! He would look out upon the night, and see if the lights at the station were visible; even they would be some company. He rose, drew back the curtains, and was looking out, when startlingly shrill, in the silence of the midnight, rose the unearthly scream of an engine. He recoiled from the casement at the sound, connected as it was with the fatal blow which had descended on the household amongst whom he now dwelt, but mustering a faint smile, approached the window. Then, as if that piercing shriek

had been the signal to break spell which so long had bound him, he that lay in the bed moved slightly, and uttered a long drawn sigh. William Elmsley, still holding the curtain in one hand, turned his face towards the couch, and listened with painful anxiety. His anxiety was rewarded.

"William," said a voice; low, but clear and distinct, "come to me, William."

At once the brother obeyed, and stood by the brother's side. John Elmsley's eyes were wide open, and a faint smile was upon his lips.

"Lift me up, William," he said; "higher! place pillows behind me."

"Do you not think, my dear John," said William, "that you had better remain perfectly quiet? If you particularly wish it, I will call the nurse—"

"Call no one!" returned his brother, "but let me speak while I have strength and sense to do so. This brief speech ended, you will never see my lips move again."

"Oh, John! my dear John! I trust and hope—"

"Silence, my dear William! you must know I am sinking fast," said his brother firmly; "trust and hope for nothing beyond my passage from here without further pain. I am so thankful, my brother, that you are by my bedside in this hour. I always prayed that it might be so, and God has granted it. You know all; you know the peculiar circumstances of my life, and to you my children will look as to a father, William, heaven bless you! Watch over those that are left, and for your own sake my brother, and theirs, strive to be more worldly, less confiding, than you are."

He paused, and closed his eyes, evidently exhausted; but the pallor on his face, the blueness of his lips, were fully equalled in William, who shrunk with a shudder from the bedside.

"I know Mary is dead. I know she has this day been buried. I know my children will be completely orphans, but God's will be done."

He spoke this without turning his head, and

lay for a few moments again, apparently too much fatigued to speak on. At last he opened his eyes, and in that brief space they had grown wild and unsettled; with his uninjured hand he seized his brother by the arm, drew him toward him, then with a gaze that froze his listener's soul, began:

"William! 'tis well to have a good man with me now, for I have seen them again. Hell tempts me to madness, and conjures up lying visions. Once at Owlet Farm I saw the spirits of the murdered and her murderer; they were but two, then, with hooded heads, and shapeless bodies. They have been with me again, passing and re-passing my bed in ceaseless march."

"Pray be silent, my dear John, you but distress and excite yourself; these are the wanderings of your poor brain," said his brother.

"No! no! I am not wandering," cried John, "speak to me on any other subject, try me in any manner, and I shall be found to the full as collected as yourself."

William shook with terror, like a leaf in the breeze, and but that he was clutched so firmly by the sick man, would have sought the nurse, or alarmed the whole household; while he hesitated how best to extricate himself from his position, Elmsley went on:

"But to night a third one was with them, and *his* face was not shrouded!" The speaker's voice grew hoarse and wild, while the unsteady light of his eye was brighter. "No! the fiend mocked and grinned at me as he passed, and the hideous thing wore a diabolical likeness of you; of you, my brother!"

His voice heightened as he spoke, and, his delirium doubtless increasing, he sat upright in the bed, and still retaining his grip (which tightened to a painful degree), of his brother's arm, glared across the room with an expression of wild horror awful to behold.

"It was I you saw, my dear John," exclaimed Mr. William. "I have been sitting with you for a considerable time."

"No! no!" cried Mr. Elmsley, with more of

coherency in his answer than his listener had expected. "No! I saw you meanwhile sitting in the arm-chair; but the devil had conjured up a shocking likeness of you, to shake my mind, and send me raving, perhaps blaspheming, into eternity! But never! spite of the shrouded faces that haunted me at Owlet, spite of the wicked, wicked mockery on your image, I know you still, my brother, and die a happy man in knowing you, in trusting you, in loving you! Ah!" he shrieked, and his gaze was swiftly directed to the part of the room immediately behind his brother, while the expression of his face grew unnaturally wild and maniacal. "Ah—h! No! no! Do your worst, devils! I see them now, William! Hold me! hold me! Turn not your head, the mocker is behind you! I know you to the last! Those eyes, they—they—oh! God! it IS your face!"

Then, with one wild, frenzied yell, which rang far into the silence of the night, and startled those who travelled late upon that lonely road, which awoke all who slept in the

house, and brought a group of half dressed, terrified women to the chamber, with one fierce yell and a convulsive spasm, John Elmsley plunged forward, rose again, then fell a corpse upon his pillow.

CHAPTER XI.

THE blinds at Royal Lodge were all closely drawn; the undertaker had been, the daughters of the dead man had wept themselves to sleep, and a close sultry evening had set in, when Mr. William Elmsley left the house and walked towards Chalkingdon.

His way lay, of course, along the Chalkingdon road; he would perhaps have ridden on so dusty and toilsome a journey, but that he felt a desire for a long, solitary walk, to think and collect himself for proper action in the circumstances in which he was now placed. This, he seemed to feel,

could be done far better abroad than at home; for, though the outward uneasiness of yesterday had left him, he was still very pale and harrassed looking, and was painfully conscious of his inability to fix his thoughts upon the work which remained to be done, or to prevent them from rambling in an incoherent, irregular manner to the frightful scene of the previous night. This had given his mind a shock, from which it needed all his determination, all his resolution to adhere to a given purpose and to obtain a proposed end, to recover.

For he had a purpose to follow, and an end to achieve, and his purpose and end were such, and he himself was such, as to leave little doubt of his earnestness in his efforts.

So we say he had chosen to walk, that he might think more undisturbedly over his position. He could not—no, spite of his well-educated mind, and his freedom from superstitious weakness—he could not, in that house, settle to any topic which was not constantly intruded upon by the remembrance of his brother's deathbed;

read what he would, he heard his last blessing: look at what he would—and many times during the day he had resolutely planted himself before a picture, or even a blank wall, to stare at it, and it alone—he saw John Elmsley's face, distorted by delirium and pain, but with an expression of confidence in his brother which showed to whom he clung in his last hour, and which was, strangely enough, the most painful item in that brother's remembrance.

It happened, unfortunately for his meditations, that it was now the period for gathering in the harvest, and numerous parties of labourers, who had worked in the fields until almost the last glimmer of twilight, met him as he journeyed towards Chalkingdon. These honest, sun-burnt fellows, checking their slow teams with a "Woa! Smiler, Woa! Dobbin, woosn't?" would, on recognising the gentleman, approach, and after respectfully doffing the straw hat, make some inquiry as to the time of the squire's death, or concerning the young ladies. These well meant questions, always followed as they were by some

rustic expressions of sympathy, of course disturbed Mr. Elmsley a great deal, and rendered him unable to dwell upon his chosen topics, whatever they might be, with the earnestness natural and desirable in such a case.

The last and most vexatious interruption of all occurred within half a mile of the entrance to Chalkingdon. Just as he arrived with thoughtful air and steady pace, at a gate in the hedge, it opened, and a waggon, swaying heavily under its toppling load, and drawn by three horses, debouched upon the high road, and thus, by crossing immediately in his front, detained him for a few moments. It was very nearly dark, and the men who guided the waggon had enough to do to keep the load from a complete overthrow in its progress down the uneven slope, so paid no attention to the stranger who waited their passing.

There was just light enough, however, for a great burly farmer, who rode a diminutive steed in the rear of the waggon, to recognise the pedestrian.

"Zarvant, zur," said the red-faced horseman, "hope you're pretty well, zur."

Elmsley looked up, and saw a man in a long, square, white coat, white waistcoat, breeches, and leggings; a man with a straw hat, and, as he could just distinguish, a broad, sun-burnt face. He had no knowledge of him, so briefly answered that he was quite well, and, as the waggon was now toiling slowly along the dusty high road, prepared to pass on.

"Zo we've a lost poor Muster Elmsley," continued the farmer, "God bless 'un I zay, a better man never broke bread. Did 'a zuffer, much at last?"

"No, not greatly," returned Mr. William, who saw at once that the man must be an acquaintance of the family, and probably a wealthy and influential one.

"And how be his darters?" asked the horseman, "I zhould ha' come to zee 'em, but I hardly liked to trouble 'ee just now."

"They are as well as can reasonably be expected," returned Mr. William.

"Ah!" ejaculated the farmer, thoughtfully, "this be a strange world, only to think!—well, well, Providence knows best zur, God's ways ben't as the ways of men, and as a Oxford schollard, as I'm told you be, you must know 'tis our duty to submit. But mind this, zur, when we talks of schollardship and that, Measter John Elmsley hadn't a had, as I've heard him zay myself, owver and owver again, the very best of larning, but there's many a man, zur, and you'll zee it through life, as have got a good edication, but a heart desperately wicked, as the bible zays."

"I must bid you good evening, sir, as my business is of importance," said Elmsley, who by no means relished the turn the yeoman's harangue was taking.

"He wur true as steel," continued the farmer, without heeding the very broad hint just given, "vond of his wife and his children; his only vault wur, he wur too easy, too ready to think they as wur about 'un meant 'un well, and wur as honest as himself. God bless 'un, I zay again,

zur, and may you make as good a man. Good bye, zur; please take John Bruffle's best respects and duty to the young ladies. Good bye, zur."

Then, with a touch of his hat, and a kick at the ribs of his little pony—which latter effort was a vain one, expending itself in air, by reason of the great length of his own legs—the stout Farmer Bruffle rode off. William Elmsley hurried on without returning the parting salute, and the brief conversation had in no degree improved his temper.

In a few minutes more he was descending the chief street at Chalkingdon, and soon stood at Chapman's door. To his knock a youth responded, and on hearing his name, led, without further question, the way to his master's private office, evidently expecting such a visitor to call. Zaccheus was poring, by the light of a couple of tall candles, over the invariable pile of papers which grace every lawyer's desk. Looking up as Elmsley entered, he smiled his usual sickly smile, and rising, shook his hand in his usual cold manner.

"Your clerk has not returned then?" said his visitor, and it was certainly somewhat odd that his speech should so begin.

Parsons, it was true, had not returned, and the fact of a youth, and a stranger, opening the door, might possibly have recalled his name to the visitor's mind; still, his errand had nothing to do with the absent Robert, nor was that person in any matter whatever so connected with Mr. Elmsley, as to need him to commence thus abruptly, in neglect and defiance of the usual ceremonies observed when friends meet.

"No; no;" returned the lawyer thoughtfully. "The papers, as I told you, came from Bristol duly signed; his business was quite concluded, yet he has not come back, nor has he again called (so far as I know), upon Mr. Wigley."

"Did he hold any money of yours?" enquired Elmsley, "if he did the mystery is solved."

"Not a farthing," replied Chapman, "on the contrary I am something in his debt for wages. I am afraid some accident has happened to the poor fellow."

"I dare say you will not be inconsolable, even in that case," said his visitor, "attorneys' clerks are not rare."

"True," assented the lawyer, "very true. A numerous and useful body of men; so numerous that we may say, jocularly, there are more cats than catch mice. He! he!—I allude of course to the profits; you see some do not get a living, don't catch the mice—a sort of, not exactly a pun, but—"

"Ah! precisely so," interposed Elmsley, "but we will change the subject. I did not come here to sing the praises of your vagrant clerk, whom I disliked from the first day I saw him, and who is, I trust, dead and buried ere this."

"With all my heart, I am sure," said Zaccheus, "I had no great cause to like him, myself, but I miss him just now, as I am extremely busy."

"I have an instinctive dislike of men who are dangerous," continued Elmsley, "and he was one. Now where is the will? You know, of course, that John Elmsley is dead."

"Yes; ah me!" sighed the lawyer, "but alas! what avails grief? Can we restore the departed, or pull up Leviathan with a rope? Let me see, where are my keys? How many frightful accidents we hear of nowadays to be sure; 'whene'er we take our walks abroad,' as an eminent poet says. Oh, here they are, by the candlestick. Poor gentleman—well, well."

As the lawyer spoke, he inserted a key into the lock of an iron chest, and was about to turn it, when, as if a fresh thought had struck him, he suddenly stopped, confronted his visitor, and said:

"Let us have a few words first, sir. Pray take a chair; I am ashamed to think you should have been standing all this time."

Elmsley complied, and the solicitor, his sour, uncomfortable looking face, wearing its sourest, most uncomfortable expression, although he strove to smile, sat down also. Leaning his chin on his left hand, the elbow resting on the table, he looked steadfastly at his visitor, and began:

"We cannot afford time to beat about the

bush, Mr. Elmsley, and I am glad to see a straightforward air of business in you to-night. Now, bluntly, if I destroy this will, what security have I for my five thousand pounds?"

"My fear of exposure," retorted his client.

"Not sufficient. In our positions it is impossible for me to take any steps for your exposure or injury, which would not affect myself in precisely the same degree," returned Chapman; "I must have a bill for the amount. Don't refuse; I see you are about to do so. You will of course have the bond back when you pay me, and I cannot demand a farthing after you have it."

"But should the existence of such a deed become known," urged Elmsley, "what suspicion it would excite. I dare say you would take care to draw it up in the most ordinary manner, but its very existence would breed a thousand doubts. You might die, you know, or a hundred things might happen to bring it to light."

"Of these things you must simply take the risk," replied Chapman; "it would be easy

enough, for me on my part, to conjure up a host of possible ways of my losing the money. I jeopardize a great deal, risk everything in fact, and must have a certainty of reward."

"Let it be so," returned the other in a decided tone, "if we are both in earnest, 'tis folly to split straws over the matter. You have the bond of course ready; a man of your business habits would not make any such proposition without having the means at hand to carry it out."

"Certainly he would not," said Chapman, "certainly he would not; and here is the bill—not, in this case, substantive, a bird's beak, but as we may say, jocularly, something a great deal sharper."

"There!" exclaimed Elmsley, as he scrawled his name at the foot of the document, "now, as your wishes are complied with, get out the will."

"He! he! he!" tittered the lawyer as he unlocked the chest, "they won't be able to take the will for the deed, for this deed deprives them of the will—there it is."

So saying he drew forth a parchment from the repository, and—having first glanced hurriedly at the just affixed signature, and stowed away the bill in some secret drawer—threw it to his companion.

The latter quietly unrolled it, glanced at the contents, then, with closed lips, lighted a corner at the nearest candle, held it downwards until the flame burnt fierce and high, then threw it into the empty grate, and steadily watched until the flame died out, and only a black, wrinkled bit of tinder was left within the bars.

The lawyer, who had looked on in silence, rubbed his hands when the last mite of flame quivered for a moment above the parchment, then threw out a spark or two, leapt up and vanished; then with a smile he began:

"The deed is done, sir, and if a jest may be allowed—"

"Chapman," said Elmsley coldly.

"Sir."

"A jest may not be allowed. You will very much oblige me by making in future no remarks

or allusions whatever relative to this transaction. Don't, however, feel offended with my words," continued the gentleman softening in his tone, "I merely point out what I am sure is the best course. I feel it is incumbent upon me for the sake of example, to act as I am now acting; but I really do not wish to be reminded of the actual transaction oftener than is unavoidable."

"I thoroughly agree with you," said Chapman, "and as the affair is settled, suppose we go down stairs now, and have a little light supper."

"No, thank you," returned Elmsley, "I now feel anxious to get home. I have been very feverish and unwell during the last two or three days. I know why it is so, and I shall not be myself until after the—the—till after all is over."

He could not bring himself to say "funeral." He rose, and Chapman lighted him to the door, we mean followed him thither, for Chalkingdon has gas works, and Chapman had a jet in his

passage. The fact is not of the slightest importance, nor does it bear in the remotest manner upon our tale; it merely serves to show how scrupulously anxious the editor is to furnish the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, in even the minutest details.

"A—oh—there is one thing I forgot to mention," said Chapman, as they stood just within his threshold, the street door being open, and his visitor pulling on his last glove, "you will of course take care that I am invited to the funeral."

He did not hesitate to say the word; he was a man of few sensitive fibres.

"As an old friend of the deceased I ought to come, I think, and besides, the solicitor to the family, you know—"

"Yes, yes," said Elmsley hurriedly.

"You were with him when he died, I think," continued the lawyer.

"Yes," was the brief and vexed reply.

"Ah! poor soul!" sighed Chapman, "was he conscious, sir, did he know you?"

"Good night, sir," said Elmsley abruptly, and he walked hastily from the door, with a knitting of the brow, which showed how little to his taste was the lawyer's perseverance on the subject.

Chapman watched him as he crossed line after line of the rays which streamed from gaslight after gaslight, and soliloquized thus:

"There he goes. He will very soon be worth forty thousand pounds: now I shall only have five. Many lawyers would have held out for half, or at least ten; yet I don't know either, I don't think they would have got it. He wouldn't give any more, though I tried all I knew; but I always was too easy in my disposition. Dear me! I'm afraid he'll have some rain before he gets home, it looks very black over the 'Bell.' To burn a will is a very different thing to forging one; it's not half so wicked, and very much less dangerous. Perhaps he would have made it six, if I had tried again to-night; it was unfortunate that I was so hasty; but it's in my nature, I'm afraid, to be rash and thoughtless.

Ah! good evening, Mr. Kobbles, good evening, sir. Yes, a very close night indeed; shouldn't wonder if it were to rain. No, I havn't heard anything of Mr. Parsons yet; I'm quite uneasy about him, we really do hear of such terrible things lately. Yes, he's gone, poor gentleman! he is to be buried on Wednesday, I hear; his brother was here this evening. Ah! we are but grass, and born to fly upwards like the sparks, Mr. Kobbles. Good evening, good evening; I hope Mrs. Kobbles is well."

The passing neighbour passed, and Mr. Chapman, shutting his door, retired.

Not very long before Mr. Elmsley had started from Chalkingdon, Nat Hackley was sitting meditatively in his bar, and thinking first of his poor dead patron, and then of the lost Robert Parsons: recalling how the former was wont, on such hot, close nights as the present, to walk out for 'a breath of fresh air,' as he would say, and how his exercise ground was always in the vicinity of the Railway Arms. Then Nat recalled also the frequent cheerful chats over the

foaming bottle of pale ale, and shook his head dejectedly when he thought of the girls who were now orphans, and of the extreme improbability of the present male representative of the family ever ordering him to open a bottle of Allsopp's bitter beer. The family would, doubtless, soon disappear from the neighbourhood; Fielding would have one young lady, Smith the other; then, with the Elmsley's dead or dispersed; Royal Lodge empty, the Railway Arms wouldn't be worth living in. Except, as he amended his reflection, except to a fellow as was likely to get married.

This naturally diverted the current of his meditation for a time, and while he smoked the remainder of his pipe, he saw himself on a sunny Sunday afternoon, the pride and envy of all the country round, driving Mrs. Nathaniel Hackley in a pink bonnet and white lace cape, behind his well-known fast trotting mare, and he felt that under such circumstances considerable alleviation of the Elmsley deficiency might be obtained.

Then his thoughts turned to Parsons—harmless, much-enduring Bob Parsons,—who, in the few years during which Nat had known him, had slid steadily down the scale of respectability, and had, in times long past, according to those who were his earlier acquaintances – few of whom, however, held fellowship with him now,—had slid from a higher position still. Where could that threadbare, improvident man be? Was he now in a workhouse, a hospital, or a gaol? Or did he, cracked boots, shabby hat, darned coat and all, lie still and lifeless at the bottom of some lonely Gloucestershire pond; with the cold water, shaded by this darkening sky, above him; grass growing freshly around; and where on breezy mornings, sheep stood quietly to drink, and skimming swallows dimpled the smooth surface? Had he escaped from his petty creditors, his loneliness, his shabbiness, his poverty, and his harsh master, by self-destruction? It seemed more than likely to Nat, and he was sadly troubled thereat, for brief though his delay in returning had been, yet it was known that his

business was quite finished in Bristol; that his money was but little at first, and Nat well knew, besides, how desperate had been, on several occasions lately, his poor friend's mood. So his meditations were profound, and of a sombre cast; none the less so because he had forgotten, until that evening, his promise to write and inform Parsons of the death of Mr. Elmsley, not, as he felt, that it could greatly matter, still he had not kept his word, and felt open to self-reproach.

He was now aroused by a double interruption; firstly, by his servant maid entering and lighting the naptha lamp in the bar; secondly, by the stopping of a cart outside his door. From the vehicle a man leapt, and entered the Railway Arms.

Recognising one of the aborigines of Chalkingdon, Hackley greeted him.

"Good evening, Mr. Scavell; heard nothing of your lodger, I suppose?"

"Noa, I han't," returned the other, who was a rough-looking countryman, "and I be come to

zee what thee be gwoin to do about his boxes and like."

"I don't know what you want me to do about them," replied Nat; "I'm in no ways concerned about him."

"Oh, very well, replied the fellow, "I thought I'd zee; there be three boxes, old thengs enough, too, they be, in this cart; I thought, may be, thee'd a pay his rent and take 'em, as thee bee'st his vriend. I shan't wait no longer, but I shall break 'em open and zell his clothes."

"Why, he may be back to-morrow!" exclaimed Nat; "you must not do such things as that. His friends are a little uneasy, it's true, about him, but he has only overstaid his time a day or two; you musn't go doing such things as that, I tell you."

"Oh! maunt I though," said the man; "be I to let his rubbishy old thengs vill up my room, and the rent a running on? As vor he a coming back, he'll no more come back nor I shall buy all Chalkingdon. I allis suspected

'un to be a bad 'un, but I did not think a' would ha' zneeked away from 'as lodging like as this."

"How much does he owe?" asked the publican.

"Why, come Zaturday, he'll owe vour weeks; that's eight shillin'," explained the man, "and ninepence I lent 'un to buy the last Zunday's dinner wi' as ever he sat in my house. My missus said I wur a vool, and so I wur—and zeven pence beside vor washin. That be all, I thenk. There ought to be a week's notice, but if thee pays the rest, I zhall let 'un off that."

"Nine and fourpence altogether then," said Hackley.

"Ees," assented the fellow; "Measter Dawkins wur a comin to steation, zo I thought I'd a breng the boxes and zee if thee woo'st ha' 'em. But do as thee lik'st; I dare say there's enough to pay I."

"Well, confound it!" exclaimed Nat, "I'll never allow poor Bob's things to be seized and sold for a miserable sum like that—never. So sign a receipt, and bring in the boxes."

Evidently much relieved at receiving this command, in spite of his just expressed belief that there was sufficient property to pay him, the man hurried to the cart, and speedily returned with another fellow, bearing between them three shabby, broken, mean little boxes; about such articles as boys keep their playthings in at school, or such as the more eminent gentlemen of the P.R. purvey at a reasonable charge, for the boxing gloves of their pupils. These were left in custody of Hackley, he duly paying the sum demanded in lieu thereof; and the landlord departed.

It was with an additional touch of regret that Nat directed his servant to carry these tokens of his missing friend into the back attic, used as a lumber room.

"There they shall remain," he said, "until Bob comes back, or I leave the Arms. Ah, poor fellow!"

The crazy old boxes were accordingly stowed away as directed, and Nat's attention was called off by a sudden influx of custom, betokening

the arrival of the something thirty-five from London.

Among his customers he was pleased to find Mr. James Smith, who had hurried down on learning the melancholy events at Royal Lodge, and who had called *en passant* at the Railway Arms to glean the latest intelligence. After a brief dialogue, the young man hastened on, and Nat expected to see no more of him that evening, but, to his great amazement, in a comparatively short time, he re-appeared, and engaged a bed for the night.

Smith explained that the young ladies had retired, while their uncle, who had not long returned from Chalkingdon, was so distant, and so plainly undesirous of his company, as to make the Railway Arms, or any where else, quarters preferable to Royal Lodge.

"I am reluctant to judge any one harshly," said Smith, "but if he does not prove a bad one, I don't know my right hand from my left."

CHAPTER XII.

In compliance with the oft-expressed wish of his poor dear brother, William Elmsley determined to have a very unostentatious funeral. This was of course readily acceded to by all those concerned, but it soon became sufficiently apparent that his idea of an unostentatious funeral differed considerably from that entertained by the family and friends of the deceased. With him it evidently meant meanness.

He was, at first, desirous of having but a single mourning coach, in which himself, Julia, and Agnes were to follow, but the presence of

Smith and Fielding somewhat clashed with this plan, and rendered a little farther outlay indispensable.

Some unexpected spirit, too, shown by Agnes, when these arrangements were under discussion, had staggered Mr. William in a remarkable degree, and had shown that he was not to consider himself in supreme authority. His conduct towards the young men—of course Smith and Fielding are meant—was characterised to a strange extent by that irregular, fitful manner which had marked him so strongly of late. At one time he would be rude and quite insulting in his speech to them; at another, he seemed all anxiety to conciliate, and ready to grovel, as it were, before them.

Fielding took very little pains to conceal his dislike of the gentleman, and on the day before the funeral, when for a short period Mr. Elmsley had been more than ordinarily civil, he said, as he sauntered with Smith in the garden:

"What do you think, Mr. Jem, of the hot and cold style of our uncle-in-law?"

"I really scarce know what to think of it," replied Smith. "I can't say I have troubled myself much about him."

"But I have," returned Fielding, "and I'll tell you what it is. That fellow owed poor Elmsley a devil of a lot of money, and he's afraid the executors will claim it."

"Who are the executors?" enquired the Londoner.

"Oh! I don't know," said Fielding; "some tough old customers, depend upon it. Well, as I was going to say, this fellow don't know how to treat us; at one time he thinks to frighten us into taking no notice of the debt—as of course it will be our money after the marriage, poor Elmsley having no relation, save his daughters and old Sleekwhisker himself, in the world; —at another, the spirit moves him to fawn upon us, and so cajole his two nephews that are to be, into forgiving him the payment. Don't you think so, Smith?"

"Hum! I hardly know what to say," returned the other; "his manner is most dis-

agreable 'tis true, and rather more so when he is civil than when he is rude; but I haven't the impression that he's afraid of us."

"Of one thing I am assured," said Fielding, "and no power on earth shall shake me. If we are to be married quietly, and if old Sir Roger and his friend are not to officiate, he shan't give the girls away; Jule may be anxious for him to have that honour, but I hate him, and he shan't do it; I'll affront him first."

"I wish we were more settled about this marriage," replied Smith, half to himself, it seemed. "He fights very shy of any allusion to it, nor does he, mind you, Edgar, ever allude to his return to his pupils in London."

"Pupils be—; well, I won't swear, as you don't like it: but it's my firm belief that he's only a parish clerk, or a sexton, or a beadle, or something," said Fielding; "but what inference does your commercial mind draw from these facts? I say, my boy, you won't feel annoyed at my saying 'commercial mind?'"

"Not in the least."

"Ah! that's right; you see," continued Fielding, "my friends are always harping about town families and county families, like poor old Elmsley was; about commercial and landed people, and so on; so, when I speak of you as a grocer, they evidently wince, and for their parts always describe you as a merchant."

"It's very kind of them, very kind indeed," said Smith, with a smile; "but you were asking—"

"Oh! what inference do you draw from the fact of Mr. W. Elmsley, M.A., Oxon, always shirking the subject of our marriage, and his own departure?"

"For our marriage I can say nothing, because I don't understand his conduct," returned his companion; "but I am strongly of opinion that he doesn't meditate a speedy removal from here."

"Why, what the devil does he meditate?" cried Fielding. "I shall come and live here; and he may be sure I don't want him to live with me; I'm pretty certain, too, he wouldn't be very much at his ease."

"There's something to come, Fielding," continued Smith; "I'm sure of it. Hackley, too, tells me that several large trunks, and so forth, directed to him, are now lying at the station, to be called for."

"I'm glad they are going to let that poor Hackley come to the funeral, after all," said Fielding. "Why shouldn't they? Yet see how he," indicating by a jerk of his head towards the house, to whom the pronoun referred, "see how he strove against it. Gad! I didn't think Agnes had so much fire in her. 'A humble, but sincere friend of her father's!' So he is. Old Sir Roger, too, not only sending his carriage, but coming himself, like a brick; the stupid, good-hearted old colonel of militia. There's Julia in the sitting-room; come in, Smith."

Thus the colloquy ended, but the uneasy feeling of the Londoner's mind, and his vague sense of some unpleasant incident being about to occur, did not end with it.

The morning dawned and ushered in the day

which was to see the last rites performed over John Elmsley, late of Royal Lodge: and a brown cloudy sky, with rain, and shrill squalls of wind from the south-west, made that day an unpleasant one. But Mr. William had remained in his room until the arrival of the first of those who were bidden, Fielding and Smith of course not included, for they had come very early.

The gentleman sat at his chamber window, and looked anxiously and constantly down the Chalkingdon road. The fitful gusts shook his casement, and the rain dashed sharply against it for a time; then would come a lull, the wind and rain would cease, while the trees and shrubs in front of the house dripped from every leaf. Occasionally would pass within sight a solitary labourer, an old sack, may be, thrown over his shoulders; his heavy tread leaving a hollow in the sandy path at every step, converted instantly into a tiny pool, and in the stillness of that little frequented road, the "slicking" sound of his boots on the soddened earth could be dis-

tinctly heard. Then another gust of wind, bringing the rain over the hills, which for the time disappeared in mist, would follow, and in the midst of one of these squalls, the well-known "Crown" fly arrived, and Mr. Chapman got out.

Him Mr. William Elmsley joined, and, in one of the smaller rooms, remained in close converse. Earnest converse, in the main at least, was theirs, though varying from intent whisperings to disjointed wandering remarks; but then their attention was momentarily drawn by long though subdued peals at the outer door, preceded usually by the arrival of a carriage.

"There's Sir Roger!" exclaimed Chapman, who was peeping stealthily from a corner of the window, slightly raising the blind for the purpose; his coadjutor was reclining, with no very pleasant expression on his face, in an arm-chair at the farther side of the room, "there's Sir Roger, I declare, and looking better than I've seen him for many a day; you'll go down to him, won't you, sir?"

"No. What should I go down to him for?" demanded Elmsley.

"Oh--nothing," hastily replied Chapman; "only as he is the——but there, of course you know best. Ah! there's Bruffle. Walking, too, through all this rain; there's a look about that Bruffle, sir, which would make me think him a very unpleasant man to deal with; a red-faced obstinate look—very passionate, too. Whose carriage is this? Sir Giles Vetch's, I declare! and—no—yes; yes! he is inside; you'll go down *now*, sir, I suppose—I beg your pardon, no, no, of course you won't. And here's some one else walking. Oh, it's Hackley. Curious thing to invite him to meet Sir Roger and Sir Giles Vetch. Ah! this is the Fieldings' carriage."

"Chapman," suddenly said his companion, in a low, hoarse tone, which from its harshness and abruptness almost startled the lawyer; "Chapman."

"Sir," returned Chapman, dropping the corner of the blind at which he was peeping.

"Have we quite decided on our exact course?" said Elmsley; "do we thoroughly understand each other?"

"I hope so—I believe so; yes, I should say we do," replied the other.

"There will be no doubt or hesitation if firmness be required," continued Elmsley, preserving the same low hoarse tone; and, Chapman moving to his side, they engaged in a subdued conversation, full of interest to each, as appeared from the occasional gesture, or the knitted brow. Thus they remained until summoned by the undertaker.

That functionary was gaunt and lean, with a brow like a title to a tragic volume, and wore an expression of woe deeper than exhibited by any of the group now assembled. His was not a goodly, unctuous figure, such as Mr. Mould could boast; we mean, of course, the eminent conductor of interments who had the plump daughters, and who buried Mr. Antony Chuzzlewit.

The room was pretty full of mourners, and

glancing, as he fitted on his gloves, through a chink between the blinds, Mr. Elmsley beheld not only the hearse, but a long string of funeral and private carriages, standing before the lodge gate. Some of the owners thereof were, no doubt, in the room, although from his late entrance he had not spoken to them: Smith seemed acting as master of the house more than any one else, at least, if he had not addressed a few words of common courtesy and welcome to each stranger as he arrived, a degree of embarrassment and confusion must have prevailed.

At last the undertaker, gliding from group to group, gave the signal for departure, and soon the procession moved towards Chalkingdon. In the midst of their grief, Julia and Agnes could not avoid seeing, and being gratified at the sight, that every shop in the town was closed, while the streets were lined with decent, grave groups, who moved as the cortége passed them, with the evident intention of following it to the church-yard.

It was impossible for the good people of

Chalkingdon to forget that a very different procession of the Elmsley family was intended to have taken place about this time: when bells were to have rung cheerfully, not tolled with a heavy ominous boom, as now; when flags and banners were to have waved; when feasting and mirth were to have been universal, and when the two handsome girls, who now rode slowly past in the sombre coach, were to have been two happy, envied brides.

It may be doubted, however, if any person among the company felt so much pleasure at witnessing this general manifestation of respect to the dead John Elmsley as did Nathaniel Hackley, and he showed that feeling in a manner novel to him. While preserving a decorously grave aspect, Nat was not so much a hypocrite as to feign violent grief, or apply his pocket handkerchief to his face; yet, when he saw these unexpected tokens of esteem and regret for his lost friend, his eyes twinkled, he hemmed twice or thrice, and finally was com-

pelled, in spite of all evasions, to rub his eyes more than once with his handkerchief.

His companion in the coach took no notice of these proceedings on the part of Nat, nor, indeed, of Nat at all; on entering the vehicle he had thrown himself back in a corner on the opposite side, covered his face with a mask of white cambric, and had so remained. This might have been the natural effect of grief, but Hackley had little faith in that idea; he felt sure the show was made to avoid speaking to or noticing him, Nathaniel. For in the distribution of the mourners among the respective coaches, one error—one very slight, but embarrassing error had been made. Mr. Tressels, the undertaker, knew his business as well as any man could know it, and a hint from his employers was sufficient, and it was the pride of his life never to mar or confuse the arrangements entrusted to him. Yet was he but mortal, and we know, for we have all heard it often enough, that to err is human; Mr. Tressels, for once

then, had made a trifling mistake. A hurried whisper from William Elmsley had told him that it was his particular wish that Mr. Chapman should ride with him; the undertaker's error was simply this,—he had understood the gentleman to express a particular wish that Mr. Chapman should *not* ride with him. Acting upon this order, then, Mr. Chapman was, before he had time to express dissent or doubt, dexterously whisked into the carriage with Hackley, while, as all the other arrangements were faithfully carried out, Mr. John Bruffle, the burly yeoman of Daisyfield Farm, was compelled to ride with Mr. Elmsley.

More incongruous companions on such an occoccasion than Nat and Mr. Chapman could not well have been selected. The latter threw himself back in the carriage it is true, as has already been said, and buried his face, as is decorous and customary among those who go to funerals, especially those who were least intimately connected with the deceased. But as for real emotion, as for any thickening of the throat,

or dimming of the eyes when the closed shops were seen, it would have been as well to expect them from Mr. Tressels as from the lawyer.

Chapman had, as has been often said, few sympathies: most men have many. Most men are susceptible of pleasure, at merely seeing another pleased; he was not. Most men, therefore, have more of good in them than evil, in spite of the bitter things one feels forced to think now and then, when money gets short, or tempers ruffled. Who is there that, walking on a scorching day, along a dusty road, and seeing a panting dog stop to drink at a trough of water, and seeing the eager lapping and grateful air of the poor brute, does not take a high pleasure in the sight, which pleasure can in no means be selfish, or allied to self; and who does not mentally thank the kind and thoughtful hand which placed the trough there? Chapman was one of the few men who might have passed such a little incident without a tinge of gratification; at any rate, to return to our sheep, he and

Hackley exchanged no syllable during their ride to and through Chalkingdon.

The church was reached, the service performed, the body interred. The burial ground was thronged with people, spite of the wind and rain, all close observers of the manner and bearing of the chief mourners. Julia and Agnes behaved much as women usually do on such occasions, and nothing but the most heartfelt sympathy was evinced for them, made evident by many a kindly murmur or pitying ejaculation.

It was noticed, however, that although Mr. William Elmsley appeared absorbed in grief, and so buried his face in his handkerchief that it seemed difficult for him to see his way down the aisle, yet that he nad contrived to say a few words to the solicitor, and to detach him from the side of Hackley, where in lieu of him was seen the portly figure of the yeoman from Daisyfield.

In a few impressive sentences the vicar addressed the crowd—such was the custom at

Chalkingdon, on remarkable occasions;—the uncovered heads, and attentive faces, showed how good a custom it was. There was no time for a long harangue, even had the weather permitted it, nor was the clergyman desirous of merely exhibiting his eloquence, although he had much of *that*, but in a few simple yet weighty words, he drew a lesson and a warning from the catastrophe which had hurled so well-known and well-liked a pair into their graves.

The funeral train left the churchyard, Hackley's change of companion proving permanent, and Royal Lodge was soon reached. Here, of course, most of those friends who had followed in their carriages, departed, after a kindly leave taking, and with many expressions of condolence, and good wishes. Those who staid a little longer, to partake of some refreshment, soon followed their example; one or two going, it appeared, somewhat to their own surprise; as Mr. Elmsley, who had taken a more active share in the departure ceremonies than he had in those of the arrival, helped them off

by volunteering a shake of the hand, and expressing his thanks for the kindness and honour shown the family by their attendance.

Among this latter number was John Bruffle, and among them would have been Nat Hackley, had it not been for a somewhat unexpected movement on the part of Smith. The Londoner had seen, with great astonishment, the half involuntary exit of two or three persons who were so intimate with the late master of the house, as to make it very probable, in his opinion, that they were interested in the will. But when he saw Bruffle half bowed, half pushed out, his amazement rose to suspicion, and only a nervous hesitation at disturbing the sacred character of the assembly withheld him from speaking out at once. When, however, Hackley was subjected to the same process, and the worthy publican, crimsoning to the hair, in fear lest he had been guilty of some gross rudeness in staying so long, rose to depart, Smith exclaimed:

"Do not go, Mr. Hackley; I wish you to remain."

"But perhaps I had better—if you think—" stammered Nat.

"Stay, if you please, Nat," continued the Londoner. "I particularly desire it."

Nat, anxious to oblige, sat down at once, while Mr. Elmsley and Mr. Chapman first exchanged looks with one another, and then scowled in concert at Hackley.

There thus were left in the apartment only these following:—Mr. Fielding and Edgar, James Smith, Mr. Chapman, and Hackley; besides, of course, the Misses Elmsley and their uncle. These, then, formed the circle which now awaited the reading of John Elmsley's will.

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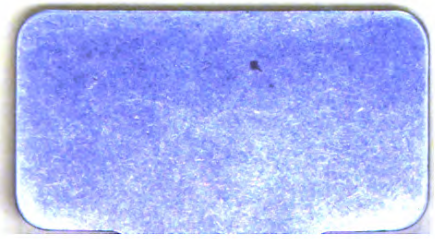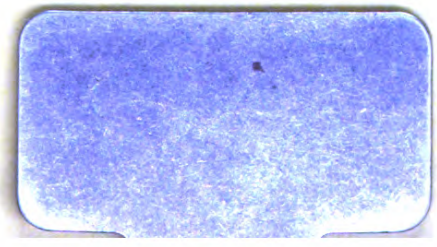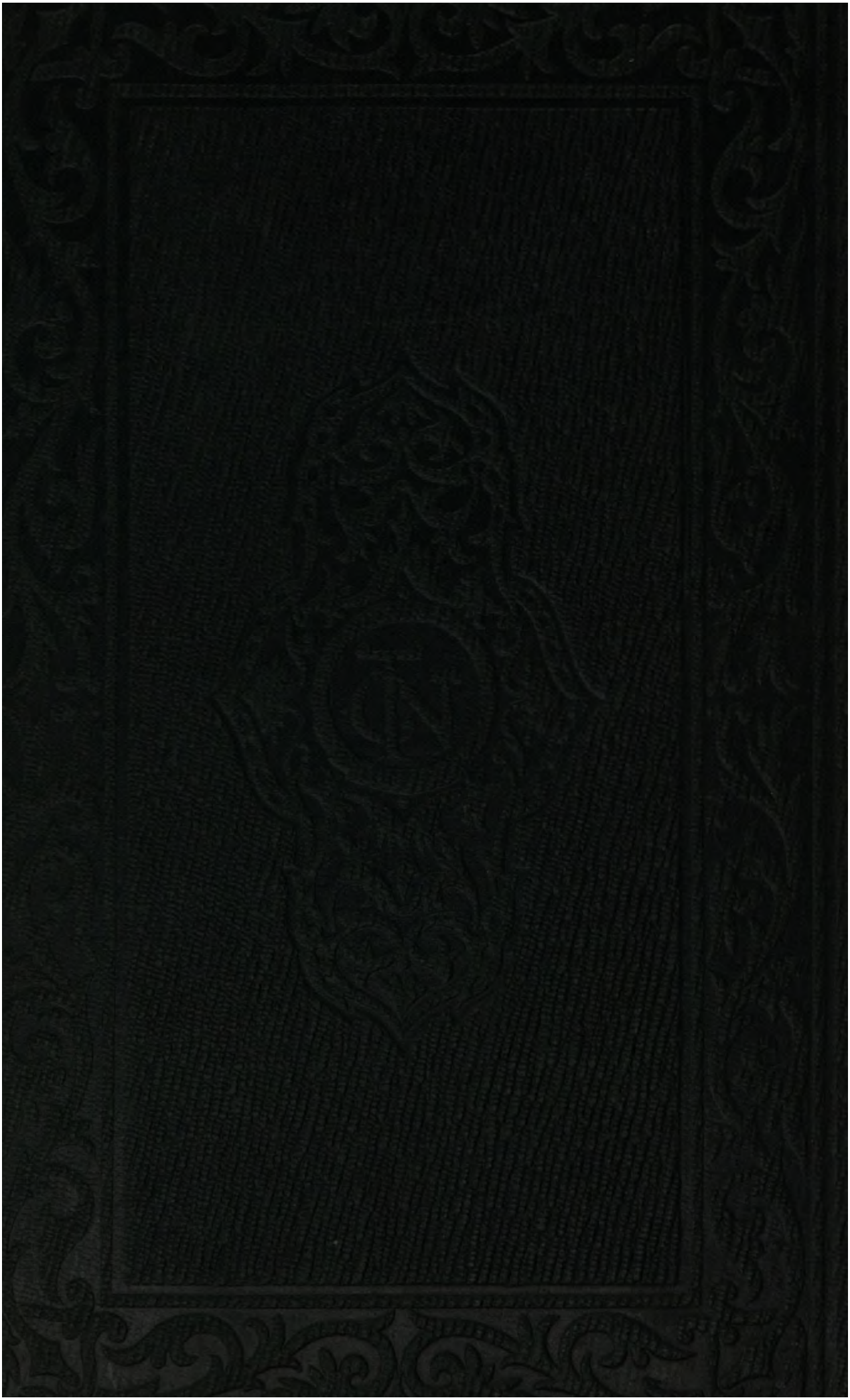
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