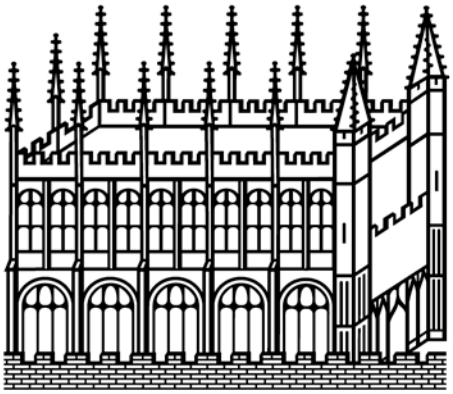

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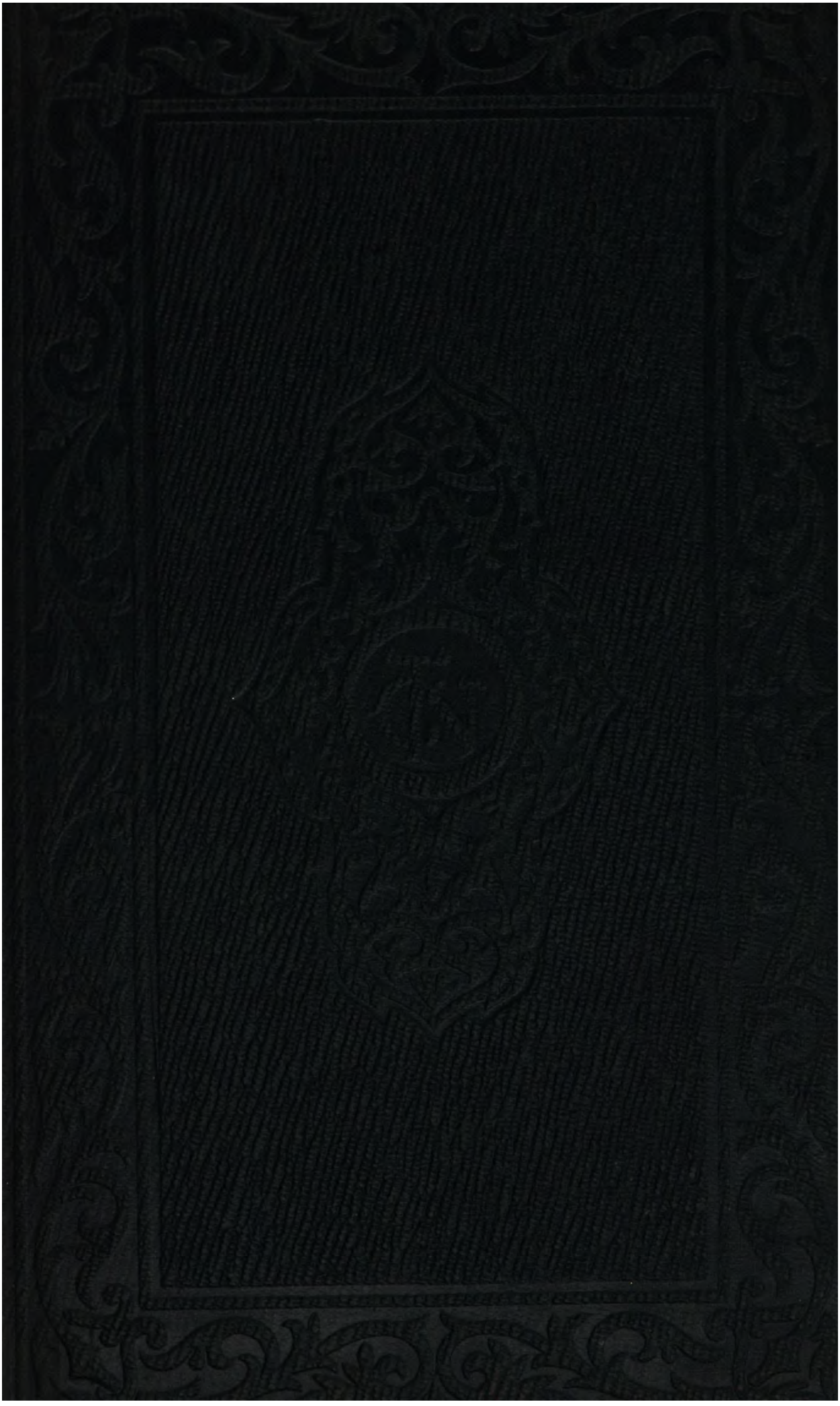

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EBB AND FLOW.

A NOVEL.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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

HAMLET.

VOL. III.

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ARE RESPECTFULLY INSCRIBED

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.

It would happen, at intervals irregular and completely indefinite, that the dwellers in those parts would establish races: by dwellers in those parts, we signify the aborigines of the Chalkingdon district; and by races, we mean one day's sport which usually comprised three events.

Firstly, a race for a new hat, saddle, bridle, and five pounds, open to all riders of a certain

class, and riding horses not exceeding so many hands high; in heats. Secondly, the Great Chalkingdon Stakes; being a handicap of three sovereigns each, two forfeit, and one only if declared, &c., with twenty-five added. (This last phrase is borrowed from "Bell's Life in London," in which profound periodical it appears some four or five hundred times per annum, and popular belief runs that neither editor, reporters, compositors, readers, nor any other person or persons employed on the establishment, have the remotest idea what "if declared, &c.," means.) Let us see—well, the Chalkingdon Stakes, the Great Chalkingdon Stakes, we should say, was also in heats. There was, thirdly, the Chalkingdon Grand Gold Cup, value twenty sovereigns, presented by Canute Froissart, Esq., M.P., and Sir Giles Vetch, Bart., M.P.,—there were three members for the division of the county in which the races took place, but the Hon. St. Vitus Dolor was returned by the evangelical interest, and did not subscribe to races, or in any way patronize or notice them, further than by send-

ing two or three lean, cadaverous-looking fellows, upon the course with bundles of tracts, replete with every slander and distortion of fact which could be raked up against sporting. With tracts such as these, and with handbills shocking in their blasphemy, did these fellows haunt the skirts of the course, and excite the derision of the throngs of pleasure-seekers. The Hon. St. Vitus would have deemed it the fairest and most legitimate style of argument imaginable, to publish a volume containing the name of every criminal, with brief particulars of his life, who could be proved, at any one period of his career, to have speculated a sixpence in sporting, or to have once read "Bell's Life." Though what he would have said to a similar catalogue, drawn from his own army, may be very easily conjectured. Yet the idea is worth a passing thought; for if it be fair to represent the amiable Thurtell, or the still pleasanter Palmer, as fit types and samples of all sporting men, why, it is difficult to see any reason against carrying the war into the enemy's camp, on a

similar plan; for 'tis sport to see the engineer hoist with his own petard.

These races were commonly got up by the yeomanry officers, and as it was but seldom that the gallant corps was mustered, it was of course but seldom that the sports were afoot; but it happened that just at this period, at the period which fits exactly to our last chapter, the races were coming off. So it happened also, that Fred Harley, in lieu of starting by first train in the morning, as was his intent, made enquiries of his friend, the ostler, as to the purport of an unusual bustle plainly noticeable on the most-time quiet road, and was by that functionary informed that the Chalkingdon meeting was on. He found, too, that the four miles to be traversed ere reaching the course were directly in his way, and, in fact, part and parcel of the road to Coneyfield: this, by the bye, was the name of the little village to which Nat was transplanted, a piece of information not previously, we think, communicated to the reader.

It was natural enough for a very young man

like Fred, to wish that he could take these races on his way to Nat's, especially when we consider that his fortnight's holiday broke the daily routine of attendance in a banking house; for Fred had long since left the rail. He was still hesitating, and the balance of his mind was somewhat inclining to the train, for he left the Elmsley Arms, and was, with a lingering, pausing pace, it is true, moving towards the station, from which he momently expected to hear the loud ringing of the train bell, when suddenly a hearty, familiar voice exclaimed:

"Why, Measter Harley, how be'est thee?"

Looking round he beheld, seated in his well-known gig, the stout figure, and broad, honest red face of Farmer Bruffle. *He*, at least was clearly bound for the races.

After a cordial shake of the hand, and an equally cordial invitation to have a glass of beer, which invitation Fred declined, the farmer continued:

"Soul alive! how thee has grown! why, mun, thee wur a little sapling of a boy when thee wur

at the station; but there, dang it, jump up, thee may as well ride wi' I as anybody else."

"But were are you going, Mr. Bruffle?" was the very natural enquiry of Fred.

"Going! why going to the races, sure—be'ant thee going?"

Harley briefly explained how the case stood, that he was desirous of seeing these same sports, but wished, moreover, to visit Nat, and that he intended if convenient, to take up his abode with his old acquaintance for the remainder of his holiday.

"Then dang it, mun," exclaimed the yeoman, "jump up, do'ee. Poor Nat will be as glad to see thee as glad can be. There, that's he—now Smiler! I wur very glad thee woo'snt have no beer at the new house, Muster Fred; the landlord may be all very well in's way, but I never drink wi' he if I can help it. Ah! times be changed wi' poor Nat terribly."

"I was afraid from what I could learn at the Elmsley Arms," replied Fred, that his "circumstances were not so prosperous as they had been."

"Bless'ee no," said the farmer, "if it hadn't a been for Sir Roger—you knows old Sir Roger Hawberry, of Hawberry Hall, of course."

"Yes," said Fred.

"Well," resumed Bruffle, "if it hadn't a been for he, and two or three more (and I shall vote vor Sir Roger's friends just when ever he likes to ask I), I do think poor Nat would ha' starved or a drowned hisself like poor Bob Parsons."

Bruffle might, as the reader knows, have taken a little credit to himself in the matter, but had far too much delicacy and real modesty to think of any such vaunting.

He promised Fred in the course of their conversation, not only to drive him to the races, but to take him on, after the conclusion of the sports, to a point within a mile and a half or so, of the village where Nat was now located. Fred learnt during the ride to the course, all the particulars connected with the decline and fall of the worthy publican, considerable stress being laid on the absurdity of his underground speculations, a clear understanding of which Bruffle

seemed destined never to arrive at. Fred made one or two efforts to explain the matter to him, as he very soon saw more clearly into the business than the farmer, but soon abandoned the attempt.

Bruffle spoke freely, moreover, of the two sisters, Julia and Agnes, and repeatedly expressed his wonder at the former's mysterious disappearance, for no tale or tidings of her had ever reached Chalkingdon road, and he asked Fred if he thought it likely that she had gone over to them foreign parts where Smith and Agnes were living.

Sure of the good farmer's sympathy, knowing the warmth of his heart, and bearing in mind too, all his past liberality to the young ladies, words which Fred had come into Berkshire to speak, rose a dozen times to his lips, but as often he checked himself, and determined to learn a little more before he spoke.

At last, and it was not very long first either, the little race course was reached, a description of which need not be given here, for 'twas merely

a rough apology for a course, and by no means calculated to gratify a Newmarket habitué. But there were crowds of merry people, booths flaunting with their flags of all kinds innumerable, round abouts, swings, targets to be fired at, and sticks, surmounted by valuable prizes, to be "shied" at.

At Chalkingdon Races, the free and easy gaiety of the fair was generally attached to the more serious business of the day, and heartily were the rudy throngs enjoying themselves. At last the sports began: prior to this, however, Mr. John Bruffle had given his nag into the care of an ostler at one of the chief booths, and by way of preparing for the excitement and fatigue of the day, had settled himself down to a somewhat substantial lunch In this repast, Fred was for appearance sake, forced to join, but neither in the mastication of firm salt round of beef, nor in drinking bottled ale, was he at all fitted to cope with the jolly farmer; it was with a feeling of relief, therefore, that he saw two other portly yeomen approach the table, shake hands with

Mr. Bruffle, and, after a muttered conference, settle themselves to assist in the meal.

Their talk was of bullocks: of bullocks, swine, oats, pease, beans, barley, wheat, rye, clover, ricks, stacks, markets, rats, dogs, horses, carts, carters, waggons, waggoners, taxes, and poor laws. All highly important, practical subjects, and such as the agricultural interest do chiefly take delight in, but which, after the first two minutes, but faintly excited Harley's attention, a result by no means surprising, even without taking into account the fact of such discourse being delivered by gentlemen who spoke with low, deep, grumbling voices at best, and which said voices were now slightly impaired by most of the conversation being carried on with moderately well-filled mouths.

As from the booth in which they sat, a slanting view—diagonal we mean—could just be obtained of an extreme corner of the course, and as there—supposing the riders to keep the outer side, and that no great change in the disposition of the crowd took place—as there a

glimpse of the horses could be, by a conjunction of these chances, obtained; these three farmers decided that they had secured a capital place for seeing the sport, and that any attempt to improve their position would not only involve the suspension of their lunch, but would be in itself sheer madness and folly.

On hearing them arrive at this determination Harley resolved upon a decided step, and asked Mr. Bruffle if he would excuse his absence for an hour while he strolled about the course. A gracious answer being returned, the young man left them to the full enjoyment of their lunch, and mingled with the swaying crowd which filled the open space in front of the booths.

He had been there but a very short time when he saw a face familiar to him; the recognition was mutual, and he shook hands with a young man who had once been his fellow clerk. This was delightful, and was all Fred needed to make the scene thoroughly enjoyable; so, linked arm-in-arm with his new found acquaintance, he walked the course in the interval between the

races; for the first, or harness race, was over, and was won by Mr. Brown's (Mr. Brown, of Cockatoo Inn, his friend explained), was won by Mr. Brown's Maggie Lauder. The next race was the chief event of the day, viz.: The Great Chalkingdon Stakes of three sovereigns each, two forfeit, and only one if declared, &c., with twenty-five added, as before said; for this, Jolly Boy and Lick Spittle were the favourites; but it was doubtful, continued the informant, if the Gold Cup did not this day command the greatest share of interest. This latter race would be contested by gentlemen riders; five were expected to start, and some heavy betting had taken place among the supporters of Mackerel (six years, ten stone ten; mentioned by the friend in parenthesis); Bluebottle (aged, ten stone two); and Will-o'-the-Wisp (six years, ten stone twelve); *he* thought, Fred's friend thought, that is, that Will-o'-the-Wisp was the horse.

Did Fred see those carriages?—no, not those, but *those;* well, that tall gentleman was going

to ride Will-o'-the-Wisp, and the lady he was talking to was was the young lady he was going to marry; she and a large party of friends had come to witness his expected triumph. As Harley could not be made to see the gentleman in question, his friend hurried him to the spot, and there, from the cover of a hedge, they were enabled to see distinctly a large and gay party in carriages or on horseback.

There were three carriages, filled chiefly with ladies, while a dozen cavaliers were clustered around. Many of these distinguished persons were tolerably well known to Fred; in the vehicle nearest to him was Mr. William Elmsley, and with him were three ladies,—Mrs. William and two ladies visiting at Crossbelts, as the friend explained in a whisper; that gentleman, the short, stout one, with the red face, mounted on a very tall horse, was Major Harper, of Crossbelts. That next carriage, ah! yes! that was the one, but where was the rider? well, at any rate Fred could see that tall, magnificent girl standing up in the carriage,

she with the white parasol. Yes, Fred could see her. Well, wasn't she beautiful? That was Miss Le Guernsey, only daughter of Squire Le Guernsey, and she was to be married to—oh! there he was, that was the gentleman holding the bridle of that bay mare.

Fred had seen him, Fred recognized him quickly enough; the tall gentleman rider was Edgar Fielding, and the smile which lit up the face of the wealthy heiress (who was known to Harley in old times, by report), when he spoke to her, showed upon what footing they stood. To his new friend's great disgust, Fred would not move from this spot, and interested as the former naturally was in the rider of Will-o'-the-Wisp, he could not think of wasting the best hour of the day in looking at him; so he went off, while his companion, throwing himself under the shade of a tree, watched, through the openings of a ragged hedge, the party in which he took so much interest.

He saw, while he lay there, many of the beauty, rank, and fashion of the Chalkingdon

Race company ride up, and speak and laugh; some were known to him, some were strangers, but all seemed to make a point, whoever else they spoke to first, of exchanging a few words with Edgar and the lady. It was very clear then, that they were the principal objects of attraction in that group.

It was very clear also, that Mr. William Elmsley was not in such high favour as Fred remembered, for very few reined in their horses at his carriage, and those who did, commonly spoke to Major Harper or the ladies, and merely bowed to the gentleman in the vehicle.

The looker on found it not very difficult to fancy that Elmsley took but little interest in the sports, and that his attendance there was not of his own will; for few smiles crossed his face, and at the moment when the horses tore past, in the deciding heat for the Great Chalkingdon Stakes, when every eye but his was straining after them, when the air was rent with shouts of frantic excitement, and ladies waved a host of fluttering white handkerchiefs; *he* shouted not, nor gazed

after the contending steeds; at that instant, for Fred mastered himself sufficiently to tear his now fascinated gaze from the course and watch him, at that instant he was examining, with a glum and serious face, the contents of his pocket book.

The race was over, and now came a stir among the party watched by Harley. More cavaliers rode up; many gentlemen, and not a few ladies, alighted from their vehicles and gathered around; Edgar, all smiles, and confidence, and bows, shook hands with at least a score of well wishers, while a sudden display of rosettes was made, worn by the gentlemen in their button holes, and by the ladies on their parasols, or round their arms. Then with more smiles and more bows, Edgar was seen to remount his mare, break from the group, and canter gaily towards the weighing house, a temporary erection at no great distance.

Previous to his departure, Fred saw the handsome young lady, who bore the white parasol, hand a small parcel from the carriage to Mr. Fielding, and from the latter's manner upon re-

ceiving it, he (Fred, that is,) thought it must contain his riding jacket.

There was a triumph expected then, no doubt; the open display of these colours before the race, by his partisans, proved that Will-o'-the-Wisp was expected to be the hero of the day, and Fred prepared himself to watch the contest. Not long was he kept in suspense, the five riders were soon at the post, and a tumultuous shouting, and offers and acceptances of bets, with a general commotion and swaying to and fro, betokened the interest excited.

A shout of double strength, followed by a groan of disappointment, proclaimed a false start, then another shout, a prolonged one, showed they were "off"—Fred caught sight of them now; ah! Pink and White was ahead, and Stripes at his haunches—here they come! there they go! All Blue makes a rush, he is too late; Stripes does not gain a foot, and with a tremendous roar from the crowd, Pink and White flashes past the judge, and the first heat is won by nearly a length.—Huzza for Mr. Fielding!

Now then, for more betting, and angry disputes and oaths, personalities are exchanged, and several short fights take place between those who believe that Mackerel (Stripes), could have won the heat had his rider pleased, and those who feel that there was no mistake at all about it.

However, the second heat was at hand and the betting settled down to pretty nearly even between Mackerel and Will-o'-the-Wisp; for in spite of the latter's apparent success, a great many on the ground had much confidence in the crafty, experienced old head which guided the former, and believed that when he ran second in lieu of first, he was only "foxing" to get his money on at a better figure; so that upon the whole the horse was as good a favourite as though he had won the heat.

The question was soon set at rest, the flag was lowered, the horses got off at the first attempt, three minutes of frenzy, of yelling, and waving of hats; Fred himself was for the moment absorbed in the race, and cheered vociferously

as the horses rushed by, the struggle evidently between the two favourites again: then a thundering cheer from half the multitude, and Will o'-the-Wisp had won by a neck.

Fielding could just be seen towering above the crowd, as he was led slowly through the press, to the weighing house, then he disappeared, but was soon out again, and mounted upon his own mare, was once more by the side of the carriage.

Emboldened by the confusion and noise around, Fred himself drew near the victor, and feigning ignorance of the parties, asked more than one of the cheering throng who the lady was to whom Mr. Fielding was speaking. In every case the answer contained substantially the information already received from his friend, and each respondent added that they would make the handsomest couple in Berkshire. Once he caught Fielding's eye, and shrank involuntarily from the glance, but his fear was needless, the eye rested for a second coldly upon him, and was then turned away.

He could not leave without lingering for a short time about Mr. Elmsley's carriage, and observed as he had done before, how few spoke to that gentleman, although many paused to greet his lady, or the red-faced horseman by her side. Elmsley seemed fully aware of this neglect, for he scowled furtively at every one who approached, and to the slight touch of the hat, which was usually all the notice taken of him, returned a sullen, ungraceful nod.

More time for observation, however, Fred had not, for the races were over, and Mr. Bruffle would certainly be expecting him; he at once, therefore, proceeded in search of that yeoman, whom he found in a state of great passion and bad temper, having, in his deep dislike to Mr. Edgar Fielding, laid three several bets against Will-o'-the-Wisp, namely, a new hat—half a gallon of brandy—and a pair of boots. It is unnecessary to say that his ventures were lost. This exasperated the worthy farmer, although the loss did not seem of so much consequence as the reflection that "young Fielding" had been the in-

strument of his discomfiture, and had himself won the Gold Cup.

Against the victor then, did John Bruffle, with temper more inflamed even than his face, pour forth unceasing abuse, and upon his head did he heap unnumbered maledictions, while continuing his journey with Harley. His angry mood deterred his young companion from making a confidant of the yeoman as he had felt disposed to do, or at least showed the propriety of postponing his revelations until some more fitting season.

A short drive brought them to the promised spot, where Bruffle must turn off, unless he wished to add greatly to his horse's labours; the farmer himself was half inclined to do this, to go on and see Nat Hackley, and enjoy himself for the evening; but Fred saw plainly enough that a quiet ride, in the cool of the day, would be far better for him in his then state, excited bodily and mentally as he was; so, refusing to hear of such a proposal, he leapt from the gig, shook hands with

his friend, sent messages to Mrs. Bruffle and the children, and so parted.

He turned once to look after the farmer, who was then steadily jogging homewards, evidently sunk in a profound reverie, which was doubtless, as Fred smiled and muttered, brought on by a remembrance of his losses that day.

CHAPTER II.

In pursuance of the excellent plan on which we have already lauded ourselves, we shall continue to follow Mr. Fred Harley for the present, and therefore, without more ado, take him up where we left him, that is to say, immediately after his parting with Mr. Bruffle.

They had ridden, perhaps, four or five miles from the course, and Fred now struck into a bye-way, pointed out by Bruffle as being the shortest road to Coneyfield, and after the noise, glare, thronging and excitement of the day, it was quite a relief to stride along the quiet road,

secluded by its earthen banks and high hedges; with only occasional glimpses, through gates, or adown lanes, of the open, silent country, the distant hills, and the humble, solitary cottage, with its thin wreath of smoke ascending from evening fire. For the day had waned now, and "tea time" had come; except in those fields where men worked late to secure the harvest, (and there were not many cornfields just there,) few were to be seen abroad, either in meadow or path, and when, after a pleasant walk of half an hour, Fred came in sight of the straggling village, where dwelt his old friend, he thought its low thatched dwellings, its suburb of substantial farmhouses, with long lines of long black barns attached, its pond, at which some cows stood drinking, lifting their mild eyes at the sound of his quick tread—he thought a sweeter, more peaceful place, he had never beheld.

Ha! and there was the house!—yes, that was the "Running Horse," and surely the man at the door was Nat! Involuntarily breaking

into a run, Fred hurried to the beer-house, plainly exciting the curiosity of the landlord, who, pipe in hand, solacing himself after the cares of the day, failed at first to recognize him. His uncertainty remained until Fred was face to face with him, and, seizing his hand, shook it warmly—to the still more evident astonishment of the host.

"Why Nat, my friend," exclaimed Fred, "you don't mean to say you have forgotten me?"

"Eh! why it *is!*" cried Nat. "Eliza! here's young Mr. Harley come to see us. How do you do? How *do* you do? Why, my dear fellow, you have grown so manly, and have such an air—altogether quite a London air, you know, that I——you'll stop a little while with us, won't you?"

"I have come to stay a fortnight, Nat, if you can accommodate me."

"If I can! I should think I could, Fred—excuse my calling you Fred, but it really come so natural."

"Bah!" exclaimed the young man, "no non-

sense, Nat. Oh, here is Mrs. Hackley. Why Mrs. Hackley, a village life agrees with you, for I am sure you look younger and more blooming than when first I had the pleasure of seeing you."

"Ah! Mr. Harley," said the lady, "we know how polite and kind you always were, so can't believe all your compliments."

"No compliment at all!" cried Fred; then looking round, he continued, "What a delightfully quiet spot, and what a nice open country: I don't know when I've been so pleased with scenery."

"Yes, it's very pretty, Mr. Fred," said Nat; sighed Nat, we might almost say, for he took his pipe from his mouth, drew and expelled a long breath, looking meanwhile wistfully at the young man, as though to say, "you can't be in earnest, for I'm not myself, when I say so."

"Wouldn't Mr. Harley like a cup of tea?" said Mrs. Hackley; "we are keeping him at the door, Nat, and I have no doubt he is tired, and hot, and dusty."

"Well, thank you for the suggestion, Mrs. Hackley," said Fred; "you are quite right, I should like a cup of tea, and should like to have it, too, in that cool room which I can just see, beyond the tap."

So Fred was led in, across the large common room, or kitchen, which was now devoid of guests, into a smaller apartment behind, which had been fitted up with a poor attempt at imitating the comfort of the Railway Arms; a scanty, faded carpet was there, a small mirror was over the mantel; small it was, yet large enough, perhaps, for the room, clean curtains were at the window, and on the shelves were a few books. Nat's portrait, and his wife's, still hung on either side of the fire-place, and but little ornament else could the room boast.

It was evidently their only parlour, and Fred, seating himself at the round table, on which Mrs. Hackley immediately placed a snowy cloth, a small tray, and one large cup and saucer, forthwith launched into praises of its cool, airy character, and of the fine open view at the rear.

Nat again looked at him half sadly, yet half pleased, as divining well his motive in thus speaking; he knew that Fred was anxious to prevent any embarrassment being felt on Nat's part, at thus, in these changed circumstances, receiving a friend.

"Aha!" exclaimed the guest, who was still looking through the window, "and is that the little Miss Hackley of whom farmer Bruffle spoke so much? that is the prettiest baby in the county, is it? Thank you, Mrs. Hackley, this will do extremely well; no, no eggs—I would much rather not."

This was in answer to the mistress of the mansion, who now, pouring out a cup of rich, dark, fragrant tea, and placing before him brown bread, and firm cool butter from the stone cellar, with some small salad, did propose in addition, eggs. As just seen, these he declined; but he insisted on having the baby brought in from the garden—for the freckled girl in the cylindrical bonnet was at this moment indulging in her favourite promenade around the

pigstye. He could not, so Fred said, make a comfortable meal, unless he had a child to talk to. Mrs. Hackley, very much gratified, ran out for the baby, but Fred was obliged to make his meal as well as he could without the desired companion, as a mysterious delay ensued before Agnes Julia made her appearance.

During this pause he happened to mention the races, and Nat was instantly all eagerness to hear the results and details of each stake. He lamented very much his hard fortune in not being able to attend the meeting, as he should, he doubted not, have picked out the winner in each case, although, he said, it would have gone much against the grain to have won anything by backing young Fielding, relative to whom he used some very strong language. Fred was much surprised to find so bitter a spirit animating both Bruffle and Hackley, as he felt sure that they could not know all he knew, or they would have made that a foremost charge against him. A few questions, however, told him how very well aimed were their suspicions, but he found

Nat desperately indignant with him also, for forming an intimacy with William Elmsley. It appeared that Edgar was a pretty frequent visitor at Royal Lodge, "a place," as Nat said, "as nobody would have thought he ever could have gone in, while that fellow was there."

It required very little effort on Fred's part to bring Nat back to the races again; he had merely to enquire why he didn't come.

"Why, you see, Mr. Fred," explained Nat, "I was very busy with a job as ought to be finished out of hand, because our feast is next week. You see them palings over there—at the further end of the garden. Well, that's a skittle ground I'm a making."

"A skittle ground! is it, indeed?" exclaimed Fred.

"Yes," continued Nat, "it's a skittle ground. Why before I came here, there wasn't a skittle ground in the village; in fact, I'm blessed if I believe as a good many grown up people here, has ever *seen* a skittle."

"Lor!" ejaculated Fred, as the pause his

host made, evidently appealed to him, "is it possible?"

"Ah, you may well be surprised," said Nat, "I was at first. Well, of course there was an opening there, as any man with his head screwed on the right way couldn't help taking advantage of. So I took advantage of it. They—they hadn't seized them, I mean the skittles," he went on, somewhat unsteadily, however, for this was his first open allusion to his downfall, or, at any rate, to the culminating point; "so I brought 'em from the old house, at the bottom of the cart; they was very lumbering, it's true, but then we hadn't a great deal of furniture to bring away, and the cart was a good one, so we managed it."

"Well, I hope you found it a good speculation," said Fred.

"Pretty fair, considering," replied Nat; "you see, not having a regular ground, and the people about here not caring much for the game, why we couldn't expect to do much at first, but after a bit you know—ah! here she comes! Who's this, Aggy?"

The baby was at this juncture introduced, decked with the cleanest and crispest of caps, and whitest of frocks; it was probable then that Mrs. H., with a due regard for the credit of her management, and her baby's good looks, had occupied the unexplained pause, by improving the baby's toilet.

A very pleasant evening Fred spent, even in that obscure, silent village, chatting with his entertainers, hearing poor Nat's troubles of the past, and joining with him in hopes and plans for the future. On this first night he would not, he thought, disturb the comfort which had settled down upon Hackley, and which his considerate young friend had reason to guess, was not his frequent companion—by speaking of the matters which were uppermost in his mind. Nat would have been eager enough to have heard and talked of nothing else, but he was very happy as things were, and

> "Joy so seldom weaves a chain
> Of bliss like this, that oh! 'tis pain
> To break its links so soon."

CHAPTER II.

UNUSUAL sounds aroused Fred Harley while the morning was yet young; sounds not wonderful or mysterious in themselves, but unusual to him. For at the back of the house, directly below his window, did Nat sharpen upon a steel the knives which he always took with him to the Large Mansion wherein his mornings were employed, whistling loudly meantime, an accompaniment to the same. In emulation thereof, a hundred small birds, perched on trees or bushes hard by, strained their throats in sharp twitterings, while the pigs—*the* pigs, be it re-

membered, the pride and envy of the neighbourhood—did spontaneously, no, simultaneously, we mean, set up a grunting which was at once vociferous and voracious.

Ere these latter minstrels had been quelled and quieted by the receipt of their morning supplies, Fred was in the garden, and had fallen into extacies with Nat's potatoes, parsnips, and onions; acknowledging their great superiority to all of similar kinds observable from that point of view, and owning that, after all, there was nothing like Londoners for anything.

This being settled, Fred asked if he should walk to the aforesaid Large Mansion with his host—the reader will please to observe our elegant paraphrase, and that we eschew the more vulgar and less agreeable name by which the parochial or national institution is commonly known, and substitute for it the pleasing title of the Large Mansion, carefully observing to spell those words with capitals. To resume, Fred asked if he should walk with his host to the Large Mansion; full particulars of his en-

gagement thereat, embodying, of course, Sir Roger's kindness, and the decisive defeat of Mr. William Elmsley, had been duly communicated over night. Nat was only too delighted, and said he should start immediately after breakfast.

The meal was at this moment announced by the freckled girl, in the cylindrical bonnet, to be ready; said girl appearing with baby, Miss Hackley being an early riser. In fact, during his stay at the "Running Horse," Harley rarely had an opportunity of beholding the handmaiden unfurnished with this adjunct, which she seemed to bear upon her bosom as constantly as though it were an order or decoration. To breakfast they repaired, served, of course, in the little room in which the banquet of the previous night had been held, and there, early as it was, was pretty, smart Mrs. Hackley, who, with nothing to set her off, beyond her neat, well-fitting cotton morning frock, her bright eyes, and her smooth brown hair, looked prettier and smarter than ever.

Nat always seemed proud of his wife, and he was not without some reason for his pride, for her presence enlivened and brightened the quaint little room, which without her would have been somewhat dull, and of the whole house she was certainly the chief ornament. Fred was so pleased to find his friend bearing his reverses thus manfully, that it put him into good humour with everything and everybody, and imparted additional zest to the bread, the butter, the rasher of bacon, and the steaming tea.

"'Pon my word, Nat," he said, "I must repeat that you have a very snug place here, very snug indeed; and what a splendid piece of ground at the back! Compact little house too, and everything so comfortable."

"I am glad you like it, sir," said Mrs. Hackley, "I was once or twice going to apologise for our poor accommodation—"

"Quite needless; nothing could possibly be better," interrupted the guest.

Mrs. Hackley smiled, and continued,

"But I remember that you must know how times have changed for the worse with us, and that all we can do now is to show the will, as we have so little left of the power to make you comfortable."

"I tell you what it is, my boy!" exclaimed Nat, forestalling the speech which Fred was about to deliver, "we're precious glad to see you, because, besides our liking for you, it shows there is one more friend with his heart in the right place. As for the village, I begin to like it myself; I did feel down at first, I own, for there was very little trade to the house, the thing altogether was what I hadn't been used to, the people about were of course all strangers, and nearly all as poor as mice. Fred, my boy! I kept up my spirits as well as I could, and while these hands had life in 'em, I'd have worked for them as belonged to me—but I do truly and really believe if it hadn't been for Sir Roger, we should actually have come to the workhouse!"

"Oh no!" began Fred, but his host went on.

"Ah, yes! we should, *I* know—but God bless his old heart, all that's changed, for not only do I earn my six pound a quarter, but other gents has come forward, and give me turns in various ways; such as waiting when they've got a party; attending when they've got anything particular in the sporting way, ordering their flies of me, and so on; by which I don't make less than another ten shillings a week, take one week with another. Then again, the people have come round to me, and I've come round to them, and though they haven't much money to spend—and how can they have, when ten shillings a week is something extra in the way of wages?—yet they're very kind and neighbourly, and always ready to lend a hand, or do a turn. But Eliza! I must be off; it's getting late."

So with a little bustle Nat changed his hat and coat, rolled up in brown paper the knives he had so carefully sharpened, and rolled that parcel again, in a clean apron, produced by his

wife, and which he carried under his arm; then announcing that he was ready to start, left the house accompanied by Fred.

The latter immediately introduced the subject uppermost in his mind, asking if it were true that Fielding was about to marry the young lady in whose company Fred had seen him at the races; and if nothing was known for certain of Julia Elmsley. Hackley replied that though not quite so much in the way of hearing the latest intelligence as of old, yet he was well aware that common report gave the lady in question to Edgar; but as for Julia Elmsley, he very rarely heard her name mentioned, save perhaps by John Bruffle, who never failed to speak of the two young ladies when he came to the Running Horse. Then Fred explained his reason for making the enquiry, and told how Edgar Fielding had rented apartments at his mother's in Kensington, how he was always called Mr. Pearson, and how the Mrs. Pearson was Julia Elmsley, and how she had now suddenly left, and they knew not whither she

had gone; and, finally, how that her sister and James Smith had returned from Africa, and were anxiously seeking her.

These revelations were clearly astounding to Nat, and bitter in the extreme. He changed colour, clenched his fist, and shook it, holding up the rolled apron as a sort of dummy, which he menaced repeatedly with his knuckles. When Fred had concluded, the Large Mansion was too near at hand to admit of any lengthened discussion, but Nat hurriedly said,

"There—there! For Lord's sake, Mr. Fred, don't say no more! To think that ever I should live to see and hear the things as I have seen and heard about that nice, good family! it's enough to make a man poison himself and everybody else. But I do really think I can find out where she is: this accounts for that rascally, sneering, sneaking blackguard, Tom Bowles—(head man, you know, I dare say, on Fielding's farm, and a great favourite with Edgar,) it accounts for what he said once when he called at the Running Horse."

"Did he say then, that he knew where Miss Julia was?" asked Fred.

"Oh, no—trust him for that, the villain!" returned Nat; "but I could see he had merely come to triumph over me because I was down, and to tell me how sorry he was for me, and that Mr. Grawler at the Elmsley Arms was doing so well, and was so much liked by everybody, as he was such a respectable man. I thought his sneers and insinuations about those poor young ladies was all of a piece, but I can see now that he knew a good deal more than he said: here's my journey's end, Mr. Fred, I'm in pretty good time I see, but we've walked fast, I always do when I'm excited."

"But you have not told me what he said," returned Harley, "nor have you explained how you can find her out. As you and this Bowles do not seem very friendly, you can hardly expect him to tell you."

"He! the scoundrel—no," said Hackley, contemptuously; "if I get it out of him I shall have to thrash it out. But the long and the

short of it is this, Mr. Fred; my Eliza has got a aunt who is a widow, and keeps the Post Office at Knollington; a nice, plump woman, who I dare say you well remember coming once or twice to the Railway Arms, when times was better—with a little scar on her cheek, where a rat bit her when she was a baby—you remember?"

Fred was obliged to own that he did not remember the lady.

"Well, it don't matter," continued Hackley, "but it's her. She keeps the Post Office at Knollington, and this fellow is always a sneaking up to her, and making love in his way, but she'd no more have him than she would a wild man of the woods. Now, if he hasn't told her anything about Miss Julia yet, he very soon will if she asks him, and she'll very soon ask him, if it will oblige me; and, besides, there may be letters coming and going, and Post Office orders, and all sorts of things; so when I come back this morning—ah! there's the clock a striking—Good bye; when I come back, we'll talk it

over. Good bye; make yourself comfortable."

So saying, Nat opened the wicket in front of which they had been standing, and hurried across the grounds pertaining to the Large Mansion, while Fred strolled thoughtfully back. Thoughtfully at first, but ere he reached the Running Horse, the fresh, cool air of the morning, the bright sun, the carolling of a thousand birds, the murmuring of road-side brooks, the waving leaves and branches of road-side elms, the honest brown faces of labouring men in fields, who cheerfully saluted the stranger as they plodded heavily over ridge or furrow, the equally cheerful greeting of red-faced, square-coated yeomen—John Bruffle's brethren, who on sturdy cobs overtook or met him—all these things were calculated to dispel thoughtfulness, and Fred's thoughtfulness was dispelled.

His hotel was reached, and, in default of the guns and fishing tackle and pigeons of the Railway Arms, he borrowed his host's spade, and asked permission to dig for an hour or two

in the garden. This permission was most cheerfully accorded, so off went Fred's coat, on went a straw hat, and to work he applied himself with immense zeal, for nearly a couple of hours. At the end of that time, having very nearly tired himself, and feeling disgusted, moreover, (as most novices do,) with the very poor show his labours made, the very small patch he had turned up, he decided to leave off for awhile.

Mrs. Hackley had probably been watching in expectation of some such resolution, for she called to the freckled handmaiden, who, baby in arms, and with widely opened eyes, had been at Fred's side during the whole of the proceedings. Her interest in him, he being a young Londoner and stranger, who had a real goold watch, and a real goold pin in his tie, was merely of that kind which would have led Fred, in his turn, to gaze upon a giraffe, or a phœnix, or anything of that kind; but it was, nevertheless, somewhat embarrassing at first; especially as this attendant jerked the baby up and down, on any symptoms of restlessness displaying themselves, and told

the "pratty zowl" to look at the London gentleman. However, he got over this at last, and then, as just said, Mrs. Hackley called the young lady away.

Fred cast himself down, very tired and hot, perspiring and panting, in the shade of a rough attempt at a summer-house, that was to be, next year, a model of all that was elegant: here he lay, wiping his heated face with his handkerchief, when suddenly a light step was heard, and looking up he saw Mrs. Hackley, who bore a tray covered with a fair white cloth. Setting this tray down upon the rude table within the bower, Fred saw that it carried a small loaf, a piece of rich cheese, and a jug of foaming ale.

"I took the liberty of bringing you a crust of bread, and a cup of our best beer," said Mrs. Hackley with a smile, "for I am sure you must be tired, so hard as you have been at work, and so little as you are used to it. Now, do just take a sip of the beer, Mr. Harley, for our Nat is quite proud of it."

"I declare, Mrs. Hackley," cried Fred, rising to

a sitting posture with the utmost alacrity, "that I never saw anything which looked so inviting in my life; no, nor ever felt so thoroughly able to do justice to it. Ah—h! Nat may well be proud of that ale. I am very much obliged to you, and entertain the highest respect for your judgment, Mrs. Hackley; but I cannot relish it thoroughly unless you join me in the lunch. Now—but whom have we here? Why—hallo! —why it *is*!"

As he spoke, a man was seen to emerge from the house, and come smiling across the garden towards them: it was Smith. With a cordial welcome, Mrs. Hackley hurried towards him, and after a hasty inquiry or two, said,—

"Mr. Harley, you know of old."

"Mr. Smith did know me of old," said Fred, rising with a smile and advancing with outstretched hand to his former acquaintance, "but I have good reason to know that he has now forgotten me."

"Why this is never young Harley, as we used to call him," cried Smith, shaking heartily the

proffered hand, "I recollect you well enough now, Fred, and I also remember having seen you the other day in Kensington, although I had not then the faintest idea who you were. Why did you not reveal yourself?"

"Well—the fact is—" began Harley, with a little hesitation, "I had, what seemed to me a good reason for remaining incognito; we will talk more when Nat comes home, but at present it will be enough for me to say that I think we are both down in Berkshire on the same errand."

A shade fell for a moment on Smith's face, but with an effort he roused himself, and desired to have the baby brought to him and demanded, likewise, that its name should be told to him.

He was immediately gratified in both particulars, and after a short spell at nursing, and some encomiums on the beauty of the young lady, and her remarkable "forwardness," which from their novelty and unimpeachable impartiality, won the heart, not only of the mamma,

but of the cylindrical servant; after this, we say, Smith volunteered to join Harley in digging. To this the latter replied that he might have it all to himself, he, Harley, having had almost more than enough of that salutary exercise, and that he (Harley, as aforesaid), would cheerfully look on and eat his bread and cheese, and drink his ale, while Smith worked; and, further, that he had no objection to aid and stimulate him in his labour, by such advice or remarks, meanwhile, as his greater experience might suggest. The upshot was, that Smith ignominiously declined the employment, and fell to upon the lunch, in conjunction with Harley, to the latter's infinite anger; rousing him, thereby, to strong denunciations of drones, and the utterance of condemnations in the Latin tongue, of those who without labouring themselves are born to consume the fruits of the earth; but which denunciations lost much of their effect upon Smith, from the reason that besides a few sentences of mongrel Dutch, acquired in Natal, he understood none but the vulgar tongue.

There seemed a tacit understanding on the part of the two Londoners, to postpone any reference to the subject in which both were so interested, until the return of Nat; no direct agreement was come to, but it was felt; so, after the meal was despatched, they set out to explore the Lions of Coneyfield. They were soon visited, the following being the chief points of interest embraced in the Town: the two pigs, in the farther corner of the garden, which were pronounced to be thriving amazingly; then, leaving the grounds by a small swing gate, they walked past the baker's and the butcher's, the former being also the carrier. The horse-pond next attracted attention; then the chief hostel was reached, after which an easy walk of three minutes, across a field at the back of the village, brought them once more to the Running Horse, and their circuit was ended.

With chatting to pleasant Mrs. Hackley, however, and with occasional spells at nursing the baby, the young men managed to beguile the time until Nat's return, which took place a little

after noon. The worthy host was delighted to find Smith at his house, and wrung his hand repeatedly in token thereof; nevertheless he was unable, even in the fulness of his joy, to repress the utterance of a wish to the effect that he had rather Smith should have come down at a later period, so that when Harley was gone, some one might have been with him to enliven the Coney-field dullness. However, as they were here, concluded Nat, why God bless 'em both, and all he hoped was that they would make themselves at home—had they had any lunch? To this enquiry an affirmative answer was of course returned; very well, he said, then that was all right. They must, he was sorry to tell 'em, occupy the same room; times wasn't as they was; if it had been at the Railway Hotel, now, they might have had half a dozen—but Lor! what was the use of talking?

To effect a change in the somewhat gloomy tone of Nat's thoughts, for it was clear that the remembrance of "the old house at home" was a painful one to him, Smith bespoke his attention,

and that of Mrs. Hackley, while he—Smith—unpacked a parcel, which, with a carpet bag, constituted his luggage. But here let us pause to say that, although we have not mentioned them, the reader will do Nat and his wife a glaring injustice, if they do not suppose that eager and kindly enquiries had been made about Mrs. Smith, and a hundred ardent and sincere wishes for her health and prosperity expressed. These being among the numerous things which can so much more easily be imagined than described, we have had not felt it necessary to dwell upon them.

From the parcel just alluded to, were produced such treasures in the way of frocks, caps, and goodness only knows what besides, for Miss Hackley, and such choice pieces of lace for Mrs. Hackley, that all but expressions of wonder and delight were for the time being banished. Directly after this excitement had subsided, dinner was ready, and those who had been eating luncheon, now found appetite for another meal.

This concluded, Nat produced his invariable pipe, and was in the act of filling it, when Smith asked him to accompany him and Fred for a short walk; the compliant host instantly assented, and the three issued forth upon the high road, and chose the direction of Deaconstone for their ramble. It would but be inflicting a twice-told tale upon the reader, if we detailed the conversation which ensued; for the reader aforesaid must know what Smith had to tell, and what Harley; and can easily guess what Hackley would reply. It will be enough, therefore, if we say that after some discussion, carried on frequently in a high key, and with abundance of gesture, it was resolved that they should that very afternoon, walk over to Knollington, and there, from Nat's relative (or to speak more strictly, from Mrs. Hackley's relative, who kept the post office), endeavour to glean such information as she might be able to afford.

Soon, therefore, as the fiercest heat of the sun was a little abated, for the way was long and

dusty, and the road from Coneyfield to Knollington is nearly all up hill, the three set out, and in something more than an hour and a half's good walking reached the Lamb, at Knollington. Certainly our readers remember the Lamb? the inn where unfortunate John Elmsley sat in high committee with the energetic gentlemen who 'got up' the flower show, and general agricultural display, with the view of promoting the prosperity of the villager, and elevating him in the social scale. Pausing here but for a moment to refresh their parched throats with a glass of ale each, the trio lost no time in seeking Mrs. Linford—this being Mrs. Hackley's aunt, who kept the Post office.

Mrs. Linford, whose establishment was the grocery and general store of the village, was a neat, plump, buxom, Mrs. Lupin-ish sort of woman, and very pleased to see Nat she was, and not a little confused by a visit from two strange gentlemen. However, she was not so confused but that she could show them into the coolest and neatest of parlours, fragrant with

the scent of flowers; for the large old-fashioned window ledge was filled with pots, and the trim little garden beyond was well stocked also.

Hackley was not long in introducing their business, which was briefly this: to enquire if letters were ever left there for Mr. Edgar Fielding; if he were in the habit of getting money-orders; if he sent letters away with any appearance of mystery or secrecy; and, in short, could Mrs. Linford give them any information calculated to prove that Edgar was carrying on a clandestine correspondence with any one in London? Nat explained that they were trying this as a possible chance only, knowing that Edgar might just as easily use the Post Office at Deaconstone, nearer to which village his house lay; but they were in hopes that he would prefer Knollington because it was a mile or so further off, and indeed at Deaconstone there was no money-order office. If Mrs. Linford could give them no information, she might, Nat suggested, sound Bowles, who was

pretty well known to be deep in his master's confidence.

But there was no occasion to sound any one, for the good lady's suspicions had been aroused by the steward's proceedings, and all that was wanted to fan the smouldering spark into a blaze was supplied by the questions of her visitors. As her account was somewhat prolix, we shall not follow her verbatim, but give an abstract of her information.

Mr. Edgar for a long time, she said, had lived away from home very much; he was always running up to London, and staying there, which led, as was generally understood in the village, to much disagreement with his father. The old gentleman, too, was very anxious that his son should marry, and it was also well known that Miss Le Guernsey was the young lady selected. Edgar was for a long while obstinate, and violent quarrels took place in consequence; suddenly, however, a change came; the young gentleman returned to Deaconstone, and rarely left it, and was most assiduous in his attentions to the

chosen one, who on her part was full ready to regard him with an eye of favour, for Edgar's good looks were the admiration of nearly all the belles of that quarter. His abandonment of Miss Elmsley, after her loss of fortune, was of course matter of notoriety, but a woman rarely resents a man's ill-treatment of another woman, if he will only be attentive to herself. "Good Lard! we be such fools!" Mrs. Linford here sententiously exclaimed, upon making this reflection.

About this time a letter came, in a lady's handwriting, directed "Edgar Fielding, Esq., Post Office, Knollington," which was given to that gentleman, on his calling to enquire if any such missive were there for him. Another followed, and another, in the same hand, then no more came, but the shrewd mistress of the Post Office noticed that Bowles, the low, coarse steward of Fielding's farm, called often to enquire if there were any letters for *him*, a thing he had never done before, and, strangely enough, there came frequently missives directed

to him, as Mrs. Linford soon perceived, in the same handwriting as were those formerly directed to Mr. Fielding, and all, like those, bearing the Islington post mark. This in itself was enough to rouse a woman's curiosity, but just then Bowles became in the habit of procuring money orders for "J. P." on the Islington Post Office, all of which were sent by Thomas Bowles. These were usually taken away by him, and afterwards sent up, as Mrs. Linford supposed, in letters which she often found in the box, directed to "J. P., Post Office, Islington, London, to be left till called for." These were generally in Bowles's half legible hand, but sometimes the writing was evidently that of a better scholar, in imitation of the scrawl, and once, written in a hurry, she supposed, the direction was undisguisedly in Mr. Edgar's own handwriting. Of late, she said, there had been very few orders; there was one a week for about four weeks, then there was one in a fortnight, but for no larger sum, while in the last month there had been but one, and that of small value—yet Bowles

had received, she thought, more letters than usual.

This was the substance of Mrs. Linford's information, she could tell them nothing more, but she had said enough to cause Smith instantly to determine upon his plan. It was this; to cross over at once to the Chalkingdon Road station, catch the eight o'clock up train there, sleep in Oxford Street that night, and so be ready for a visit to Islington the first thing in the morning. His friends, although extremely sorry to part with him, could not oppose his resolve; so a chaise was ordered from the Lamb, Nat promising to send the carpet bag by an early train, and they parted.

Conversing deeply on the somewhat exciting topic which filled their minds, the two companions left Knollington, but paused for an instant at the commencement of the descent which lasts until you have almost arrived at Coneyfield, to watch the distant chaise, now diminished to a speck upon the dusty road, which leads to Chalkingdon. From that lofty

point are visible too, the station itself, although nearly hidden by trees, and, though, only to be discovered by an eye familiar with the spot, the chimneys of Royal Lodge—the association of ideas on seeing at once them and the distant chaise, was sufficient to damp the spirits of the two wayfarers, and for some miles they held but little conversation with each other.

CHAPTER IV.

It was at the moment, as near as possible, of Hackley and friends leaving Coneyfield, on their excursion to Knollington, that a man paused at a point some half mile distant from the further end of the former village, and looked wistfully at the finger post which stood where the road divided. After a brief hesitation he seemed to have made up his mind, and taking the branch which led to Coneyfield, limped slowly along its dusty course.

His hesitation seemed not that of a stranger uncertain of his road, but rather that of a man

who could hardly make up his mind as to the best of several paths. He limped too, we have said, but he limped as a footsore, weary, travel-worn man, and not as one naturally lame or crippled by accident.

The day had been distressingly hot, and the sun, though now in the latter portion of his daily course, still poured down blazing, dazzling light, and the white road, here some inches deep in dust, still reflected the glare, to scorch and pain the traveller's eyes; and the jaded pedestrian, who slowly plodded towards the village, seemed sick and giddy with the too great brightness. He was poorly clad, in threadbare dress coat, once black, but now rusty; common oilskin cap; dingy, stained white trousers, of the loose cut ofttimes worn by seamen, but these were frayed at the ancles, and split at the knees, even as the coat was out at elbows, and ragged at the wrists. If footsore he were, it was not for lack of ease in his boots, for they were cracked at the sides and gaping at the toes; the injury must rather have arisen from

the deficiency of sole, of which very little was left.

At last he entered the village, and limping painfully through its silent street, took out his money to count as he went. It was soon reckoned, a half-penny and two farthings. The baker's shop was at that instant upon his right hand, and the corpulent crusty brown loaves upon the counter within could be distinctly seen; no vulgar show in the window, such as your London tradesmen make, was affected at Coney-field; and the baker himself, in white coat, was leaning—a plump man with grey hair, too, was he—was leaning against one of the large wooden bins which were built against the side of the shop, and which were full to running over of fine white flour, as could be perceived where a lid was left up. The baker was talking to the baker's wife, who was sitting at the counter making a child's frock, and the pair seemed so comfortable, and the thought of customers seemed so foreign to their minds, that the shabby man was half afraid to offer his poor coin in so cosey

a p ace. As, however, he was very hungry, and as he knew that no village or house where bread could be bought lay in his road for some miles after leaving Coneyfield, he conquered his hesitation, and going to the half door, or hatch, of the baker's shop, pushed it open. Had he known how perseveringly and unpleasantly a cracked bell would have persisted in ringing, on his doing so, it is probable that his hesitation would have been a little stronger, and might have prevailed.

However, there he was, and with an apology for troubling them, he asked to be accommodated with a pennyworth of bread. The mistress of the house had a rooted dislike of tramps, and other suspicious customers, and although relieved to find this to be one of the more respectable class, who came to buy, and not to beg, yet rose to give an unfavourable answer, to the effect, namely, that they did not keep penny loaves, and that the good man had better go somewhere else for them. A fuller view of the customer's face, however, made her pause, as

Hamlet would say, and the sunken eye, furrowed cheek, pale lips, and careworn aspect of the man, pleaded strongly with her woman's heart. So, in lieu of refusing him, she covertly glanced at her liege lord and master, who in return, from his safe position behind the stranger's back, nodded assent, and furthermore made signs to the intent that she was to give him a large piece. With this, Mrs. Gregory—for "Gregory" was the name painted in white letters upon a blue ground over the door—cheerfully complied, and the shabby traveller received a double quantity of bread. With a bow he took his purchase and moved one pace towards the door, then stopping and speaking in a broken, but pleasant voice, said,

"I think I remember this road, but I am not quite certain; I believe I am about ten miles from Chalkingdon Road Station, am I not, ma'am?"

"Eleven mile if you be an inch," returned the good lady.

"Ah, thee casn't do't in eleven," said the

baker; "Billy Dawkins, our postman, as knows every voot in these parts about, zays it be nigher to twelve nor eleven."

The traveller thanked them, and with a sigh left the shop, and was seen crawling slowly past the window. Once again did Mrs. Gregory look at Mr. Gregory, and Mr. Gregory look at her, then exclaiming, "It wun't do we no good," the baker hurried to the door and cried,

"Hi!"

The tramp looked round, and was returning, but the kind-hearted baker, noting his lameness, hurried to meet him, and returned him his penny, or at least *a* penny.

"There — there, take the money; I think thee hasn't got another varden in the world. Bad as times is we can spare a crust o' bread yet: get thee a drap o' beer wi't."

The ill-shod traveller, with a grateful bow, accepted the gift; and, as he limped onwards, looked around him, apparently with the desire of finding some place where he could comply with the baker's injunction: he remembered the

large, half deserted inn, at the entrance of the village, but his blistered feet pleaded against the retreating of a single yard; so on he went, till, on turning an angle caused by a projecting house—for in Coneyfield the houses were not built on the most regular plan—he saw, just before him, the Running Horse.

The little hostel was lying quiet and glowing in the last flush and glory of the summer sun, but a chesnut tree which grew near, and under which was a rude seat, offered a tempting prospect of shade and rest. Beneath its branches then the traveller reposed himself, and looking wistfully, first at the house, and then at the horse trough and pump, seemed hesitating between two antagonistic courses. Prudence and economy prevailed; so taking off his cap, and applying his lips to the spout of the pump, he took a good draught of the cheaper liquor, then, resting his lamer foot by stretching that leg upon the seat, he broke a crust from his bread, and so began his frugal meal.

The baker and his wife, however, were not the

only charitable and well-disposed persons in Coneyfield, as the stranger was destined to discover, for Mrs. Hackley, having noticed his approach, had naturally anticipated an appeal for charity; so, bending her pretty features to the sternest aspect they could assume, had prepared herself for a refusal. But when she saw the poor lame, wayworn man sit humbly down, and break his dry bread, dry but for the draught of water which preceded it, her heart smote her for the unneccessary severity called up, and demanded some kindness for the stranger. The handmaiden was at the rear of the house, getting Miss Hackley to sleep, by means of the usual promenade, accompanied with the Morning and Evening Hymns: Nat, as the reader knows, was absent, and no loiterer was in the tap, so Mrs. Hackley, after a minute's hesitation, drew a small mug of ale, not Nat's best, of course, and going to the door, cried, still sternly though, as a person who was very determined and not to be cajoled one inch farther than she had resolved, would cry:

"Here!"

The stranger looked up, changed colour, then, laying down his bread, rose, and shuffled with a humble air towards her.

"I suppose you are thirsty——" began Mrs. Hackley.

"No—no, ma'am," replied the stranger, seeing she paused: "I was only very tired and rather lame; I took the liberty of sitting on your bench, and if you would allow me to——"

"Oh! my good man, I don't wish to send you away," interrupted the lady,—"not at all; but I thought if you had been thisty I could have given you a drop of beer."

At this juncture, with quite a dramatic effect, Mrs. Hackley produced the jug, and offered it to the stranger; lifting his cap, and again showing his thin hair, fast turning grey, he took the jug, and with a few words of thanks, returned to his seat. He was evidently of so different a caste to the majority of poor travellers who tramped through the village, that Mrs. Hackley could not help feeling a little curiosity about him, and

so lingered at the door to watch him. The bench on which he sat was so close to the house that they were within easy speaking distance, and she asked him if he had far to go that night.

"Yes, ma'am," he replied, "a long way; for one so tired and unwell as I am, a very long way. Do you know the Chalkingdon Road Station, ma'am?"

"I should say I did," returned the lady, "few people know it better."

"I know my road there very well," continued the traveller, "for once I lived in those parts, but I had fancied it was only ten miles from Coneyfield, and I am sorry to learn that it is more than eleven. Ah me! every mile tells."

"Oh! 'tis quite eleven," said Mrs. Hackley, "my husband calls it twelve, but it is not quite so far as that. You cannot have lived near the station very lately, for we have not left that neighbourhood any great while."

"Indeed!" exclaimed the stranger, looking up with an air of greater interest than he had hitherto shown, "then perhaps, ma'am, you can

tell me if Mr. Nathaniel Hackley still keeps the Railway Arms there!"

"He does not," returned Mrs. Hackley, in some surprise, "for he—but why do you ask?"

"Not live there!" ejaculated the man, with an expression which looked like alarm crossing his face, "oh! then where does he live?"

"Here," said the lady, "this is the only house he rents now; you must indeed be a stranger here if you have not heard of his misfortunes."

The stranger, with a wild and changed look, laid down upon the bench his crust and his jug, then rising, approached Mrs. Hackley, and eagerly, yet respectfully, said—

"Excuse me, ma'am, I have strange reasons for all I say; but are you—is he married?"

"Yes, he is," replied the hostess, and slightly shifted, as she spoke, the needlework she held in her hand, so that her wedding ring was uncovered, and as no other article is so conspicuous in proportion to its size, as that slender wire, hi eyes instantly fell upon it.

"I was a very close and warm friend of Nat's

once," he continued, still in an agitated, wild manner, "and sincerely grieve to find that adversity has not spared him any more than myself —is he from home?"

"He is at present," was the reply, "but will be back this evening. He has only gone to Knollington."

"Knollington! ah! how familiar and dear all the old names sound," exclaimed the traveller, "I will wait his return here if you will allow me, for I have much that is important to say to him; and even if I had not, Nat would not turn away from me when he found that poor as I always was, I had come back poorer, that I had returned in rags and want."

"If you do really know Nathaniel," said Mrs. Hackley, "you can come into the kitchen and wait for him; for you say no more than is right, he will never turn from a friend because he is poor."

But the stranger heeded not her invitation; with uneven steps he sometimes strode, and sometimes limped, to and fro in front of the house,

his face working, and his lips moving, as though in rapid speech, while his hands were restless and wild in gesture.

Watching him for a few moments, Mrs. Hackley was suddenly seized with the idea that he was insane, and stricken with terror at the discovery, she was shrinking into the house, when, with his face working more convulsively, and his eye wilder than before, the man stepped swiftly towards her.

"I must ask it," he said, "I must ask it."

Yet here he broke off abruptly, and, in the pause, two well-known, decent labouring men came up, and entering the Running Horse, to Mrs. Hackley's great relief, called for a pint of fourpenny ale. With an apology for leaving him, she was turning from her strange companion, when he suddenly laid his hand upon her wrist, and begged her to stay but for one moment. She looked round; the two men were close at hand, and were, either of them, twice a match for the poor, exhausted tramp; while he, on looking at him again, seemed only eager and

excited, and by no means savage: the dust and the heat, and his incongruous garb gave him a wild look, not truly the attendant of that grey hair and careworn face; so she plucked up sufficient courage to stand calmly, awaiting his further speech. But after a brief pause, he clasped his hands together, and with a kind of agony said,—

"No—no! I cannot ask any one but him. No—go in. God bless you for your kindness to a sinking stranger, but I must ask only Nat—go in, think no more of me."

But he was thought of, and ofttimes wonderingly looked at from the safe ambush of the kitchen, and endless conjectures as to his identity passed through Mrs. Hackley's mind.

At last Nat and his companion entered Coneyfield; entered it when the blue of a summer's eve had given way to the blue of a summer's night, and when the cool breeze from the hills made pleasant rustling in tree and hedge: deep quiet was upon Coneyfield, early though the hour was; and the muffled sound of

their feet upon the dusty road when they drew nigh, was the only sound which broke the silence. The starry night showed the dark chesnut tree which stood before the Running Horse, and the bench which ran around its trunk, and showed sitting upon *that* a man.

A sight so common did not arrest Nat's attention for a moment, and he passed quickly by, talking cheerfully, as was his wont, with his companion. But the figure rose, and with hasty though uneven gait hurried to his side, and touched him on the shoulder.

"Well!" said Nat, turning at the tap, "what now, my friend?"

"I want a few words with you, Mr. Hackley —no!—not Mr. Hackley, but Nat! Nat! Don't you know your poor old friend, Nat?"

The man paused, and, as he had done before, clasped his hands eagerly together. Hackley recoiled for an instant with a half uttered exclamation, then moving slightly, so as to obtain a fuller view of the stranger's face, cried—

"Is it reality! are you a living man or a

shadow? Are you really Robert Parsons, or can the dead come to life again?"

"Flesh and blood, Nat, and Bob Parsons in reality! returned after years of hardship and adventure, to his only friend."

"Then come along in, do, and sit down. You remember our friend Parsons, of course," said Nat, turning to Harley, but seizing the newly found one at the same time, and pulling him into the kitchen.

"Most certainly," returned Harley, "and I am heartily glad to find that the rumours of his death were groundless."

"Now, 'Liza," continued the landlord, "this is my old acquaintance, Robert Parsons, that I have talked about so often; so get a rasher of that bacon on to the fire at once. Sit down there, Bob, do—come, give us another shake of your hand; that I may be sure it is no deception. Gad! how right and proper and familiar it seems to have *you*, Bob, sitting in my house! But where *have* you been all this while? Hallo! Hallo! Come my friend, don't give way like that."

These latter words were added as Parsons suddenly bowing his head, covered his face with his hands, and burst into a wild, vehement fit of tears and sobbing.

"Come, Bob," said Nat, soothingly, and trying to remove one hand from his face, "come, come; don't break down now. All your hardships are over now, remember you are among friends, friends you knew of old; come, come!"

"Thank you, bless you, Nat!" sobbed the poor scarecrow, "but I can't help it. To think that you should not turn away from me;—that your own troubles haven't hardened your kind heart;—that want and wretchedness don't make a man hateful in your eyes, and that I should at last find a welcome and a friend, is too much, after all I have gone through! But I can make some return, your kindness shall be rewarded even in this world, Nat. Do you know anything about my boxes?"

The abruptness and singular character of this question, so utterly irrelevant, and so insignificant, struck Nat, as something extraordinary; and he entertained, as his wife had done, strong

doubts as to his old friend being entirely compos mentisish, as he was wont to say.

"Oh yes! they're all right, Bob," he said, "don't trouble yourself about them to-night. I've got 'em."

"No, but have you?" persisted Parsons, "and are they unopened? Don't trifle with me, but speak the truth, on your soul!"

"They are quite safe, Bob, and have never been opened from the time you went away, I swear," returned Nat, "poor fellow!" he muttered, "he's certainly wandering. They're all right, Bob," he continued aloud, "and they are in this house, untouched, unopened. Ah! that's right, 'Liza; now here's the bacon, Bob; before you say another syllable, eat that."

But Bob could not begin his meal until he had shaken hands with each of his entertainers, more than once, and had showered down blessings and promises of rewards upon them. As these blessings and promises were inextricably involved with references to his boxes, Nat began to have an idea that Parsons, impressed with pity for his,

—Nat's—changed condition, had magnanimously resolved on sharing with him the tattered shirts or stockings which the said coffers might contain. This was a very unpleasant idea, and for a minute or two, Nat sat, in profound silence, casting about for the means of avoiding such an offer, or of declining it when made. Ere, however, he had seen his way out of the difficulty, and ere Parsons had despatched one half of the ample rasher, the latter laid down his knife and fork, and, despite of all entreaties, would eat no more.

"No, Nat;" he said, "hungry as I was before, the sight of you, your kindness, and that of your generous wife, and the knowledge of the task I must now take in hand, quite quelled my appetite; I only ate at all, to gratify you. Don't think me selfish, or unmindful of my best friend's misfortunes, if I make, at present, no enquiry into your affairs; I can best help you, my good, generous Nat, by speaking and acting on other matters. You are quite certain my boxes are all right?"

"Lor! yes!" cried Nat, not a little vexed at this sudden down dropping in the matter of what he thought was going to be a very important harangue. "I have told you so, my dear fellow, before."

"Ah! and did Mr. John Elmsley ever recover?"

"No," replied Hackley, "he died in a week or so after the accident."

"And then," continued Parsons, "I am sure some strange revelations were made, and that Mr. William Elmsley came into a fortune."

"You are right, Bob!" exclaimed his host; "though how you should know that, if you hadn't heard that John Elmsley was dead, I can't tell."

"I shall tell you many strange things before this time to-morrow night," returned Parsons: "but first let me hear how the two young ladies fared, and what kind of revelations these were."

Then, in telling over the tale of Elmsley's death, and his daughters' reverses, Nat employed the next few minutes; the tale was more than

a twice told one to all but Parsons, but the extraordinary interest he seemed to take in it, the emphatic gestures, and strange ejaculations he indulged in, excited the others, and all hung with breathless interest upon the painful narrative.

When all was finished, even the visit of that day to Knollington, and its object, having been something more than hinted at, and the strange reverses endured by the two orphan girls having been fully detailed, Parsons again buried his face in his hands, and sat in a fit of apparently very painful reflection for a brief space; then, looking up, he forced a smile. But the expression died away from his face as he began to speak.

"I have been a wanderer," he began—"a wanderer, Nat, in strange lands, and have suffered the extremity of want, misery, and toil; short of that which would kill a man, I have suffered everything; yet, while vainly struggling to obtain the means of reaching England, and enduring all this, the bitterest

sorrow in my heart was the dread lest some horrible calamity had overtaken these poor young ladies, and which my presence alone could remove, but never did I dream of such complete, hardened villany, as this."

Bob paused, and his three hearers regarded him with visages of amazement, and with open mouths; his language was so extraordinary, that, but for its coherency, and his steady earnestness, they would again have deemed him mad, but there was now an end to that suspicion, and, quite bewildered by his words they waited further explanation.

"I will not detain you to-night," continued Parsons, "by telling all I have seen, all I have gone through. I have been in California, since last I saw your face, Nat; I have crossed the continent of America, have been a gold digger, a shoeblack, and have worked my way home before the mast; I have twice been robbed of my small hoard by the ruffians of the gold fields; have once been near death by a stab, here," placing his hand upon his side as he

spoke, "and once from the fever at Sacramento. I have been unfortunate from first to last, but I have been preserved, I feel, even miraculously, and the work I have been preserved for, I have now come to do."

Parsons ceased, and the last few words he uttered had been spoken so seriously, nay, solemnly, and in his face there was such a fixed purpose, that, when his voice fell, none broke the silence for some minutes, although Nat had been burning with unsatisfied curiosity, and was eager to ask him how he came to be in America at all; but he was awed by his friend's manner, even as were the others.

"I shall be glad of your assistance, Mr. Harley," resumed Parsons; "and if you will join Nat, in looking over my boxes with me for a few minutes, I can make plain all which seems at present dark, and convince you that my words are not those of a crazy man."

Bob smiled as he finished, and Hackley, finding his secret thoughts thus easily penetrated, became intensely red in the face, and very con-

fused in manner; commencing also a protestation against the possibility of anybody thinking any such thing, but finding he got on very poorly with it, broke off abruptly, and hid his embarrassment by lighting an extra candle, and offering to lead the way to the oft-named boxes. Accordingly, the three went up stairs together, Mrs. Hackley looking mightily as though she would fain have accompanied them; and for half an hour, in the quiet of the house, the murmuring of their voices in constant conversation, mingled with a steadier, monotonous sound, as of one reading, reached her ears. Then the three descended, her husband and Harley with grave, serious faces; somewhat scared too, was the look each wore; while Parsons, in some new excitement, seemed to have forgotten his limp, his fatigue, and his care-worn aspect, altogether; and now trod firmly as anyone there, showing, moreover, a resolute, if not defiant, bearing. But further satisfaction of her curiosity Mrs. Hackley could not obtain, one or two hints thrown out by her produced no

effect, and an instinctive perception of the serious character of the business they had in hand, prevented her from being too inquisitive.

The little party sat late, but the comfortable, genial tone of the previous day was gone; Harley and Nat, indeed, seeming now more impressed with the newly acquired knowledge, whatever it was, than Parsons himself. Such few remarks as were dropped, seemed only to heighten Mrs. Hackley's curiosity, and to thicken the mystery in which she found herself wrapt. For instance, she gathered that Parsons—who was to sleep on a bench in the kitchen for that night—was to go up with Harley to London by the first train in the ensuing morning, and that it was essential for them to see Smith immediately after their arrival. One or two such hints as these were all she gleaned, until the hour came when they parted for the night, Harley, Nat, and Parsons shaking hands gravely before the last named was left to the enjoyment of his narrow couch.

CHAPTER V.

BROWN STREET, Islington, was, at the epoch of this history, and may have remained so ever since, a dull, shady, cheerless street; opening at one end upon a larger, but also dull and shady street, and losing itself at the other end, in a vague wilderness of waste ground, called still, so powerful is the force of tradition, Brown's Fields. It was a new street, but wore a prematurely aged look, for no coats of paint had the area railings or window frames received since the primeval one; no replacing had there been of the split and cracked cement, which was peeling off daily, and

leaving, as one might say, irregular shaped, "raw" places on the house fronts. Neither had the Commissioners for Paving and Lighting even deemed it worth their while to do more than run a narrow strip of second hand flag-stones down each footway, while the road was allowed to shift for itself, so that it was sometimes questionable if the undisguised wilderness, with its tumuli of oyster shells and rubbish, and its pitfalls, whence gravel had been feloniously abstracted, was not better than the indented roadway of Brown Street.

Yet the houses were of fair size, and of tasteful design, the street was intended for a smart, respectable street enough, but a smash in the building trade had come, Brown Street, with its twenty others adjacent, had been abandoned when half completed, and though some years had passed, no one seemed inclined to build additional houses which should fit into those which reared their notched, sawlike edges of bricks, and dangling strips of iron against the sky. At each corner, meaning of course, the

finished corners, where the houses formed, indeed, parts of the longer thoroughfare, were shops; large, lofty, plate glass windowed shops; in which, beyond doubt, the prophetic eye ot the sanguine builder had beheld a flourishing, showy linendraper, to be faced, of course, by a very superior grocer's. Now, in the one shop, in its height, depth, and vastness, a few potato bins lost themselves, and a few withered bundles of greens reposed on basket lids, while large, dirty bills, stuck upon the plate glass, announced that the best Wallsend could be purchased there at so much per cwt., while gas coke was some very low price per bushel. This then was the green grocery and coal depôt of the neighbourhood. The other corner was a superior eating house, in whose dusty windows appeared, at distant intervals, a small leg of pork; the gradual dimunition of which seemed to imply rather a family than commercial consumption.

Such was Brown Street, and such—save a number of square cards, notifying that lodgings were to let, and which averaged three or four to

each house—such were its principal features. Yet here lived Julia Elmsley, and now in the front parlour of No. 6 she sat, her elbow resting on a table, and her head upon her hand, thoughtfully gazing from the window, as though watching the bright beams of the morning sun which played on the upper stories of the opposite houses ; but it was not difficult to see that her thoughts were not with her gaze.

There was a change in Julia: when last she was before us, we remarked that she was changed, but the change was now a new one. Dressed plainly in black, with few of those ornaments in which she had seemed so to delight when at Kensington, her face was paler, her brow more thoughtful, her general aspect telling more of care;—in fine she looked older and sadder than before.

It was a commodious room in which she sat, and neatly, though somewhat sparely furnished; yet all was very different to the home at Kensington, and told plainly as did the shaded face, of a change in her fortunes. Suddenly her

features lighted up, then rising, she went closer to the window, and from behind the muslin curtains looked out: the quick double knock of the postman was heard in the street, and the scarlet mercury was crossing the road towards her door as she looked. He was coming there —no, it was the next house—now! now! no, he had gone past. Another knock at a door below, and then, with quick strides, he was seen leaving the street.

Julia sat again at her little table, but this time her face was buried in both hands; rousing herself, however, with a perceptible effort, she touched a bell handle which was fixed in the wall, and very soon the mistress of the house appeared. This was a tidy, good looking little woman, seeming to be, as indeed she was, a mechanic's wife; and there, completing the drying of her newly washed hands, she stood.

"Mrs. Harrison," began Julia, "I am sorry to say that the country post has come in, and that no letter is sent from the office."

She paused, her landlady assumed an expres-

sion of sympathy, but said nothing. Julia continued,—

"I have no doubt, Mrs. Harrison, that you have reckoned, as you were entitled to do, on receiving the money owing by me, this morning; I must do all I can to prevent your being disappointed."

"Why you see, ma'am," began the mistress of the house, looking not at her lodger, but at her own fingers, which were nervously twining and untwining with each other, "why you see, mum, it ain't me as feels it, it's Harrison. I don't mean to say, you know, I ain't disappointed, because I am, and I'd scorn to deceive you in such a thing. But I know, Mrs. Pearson, as you'll pay some day, and I'm willing to go on for ever, but it's Harrison, mum. Not but what he thinks just the same about it as I do, mum, but you see he's bin out o'work now for this seven weeks, leastways, he's got work now, but it's a great deal of time to pull up, with three little children to feed, and I know he counts upon your money."

Julia had listened patiently, and with a friendly smile upon her countenance, to the good woman's harangue, and now said—

"I will not allow Mr. Harrison to suffer any inconvenience, I assure you. I think he has been very kind and forbearing, considering his affliction and care, in refraining from pressing me for the rent—"

"Why you see, mum," interposed Mrs. Harrison, "we had such a recommendation with you from his sister, at Kensington, and Harrison knows, as every body does, that you're a lady born and bred, and so we can depend upon you, but still, you see, mum, times is very hard, let alone a man not having no work for seven weeks, all along of burning his wristes."

"I have a favour to ask of you," resumed Julia, "I am not acquainted with the neighbourhood, and do not know where best to go, perhaps Mr. Harrison, on his return this evening, would be kind enough to sell this for me."

As Julia spoke, she drew the massy guard

from her neck, and laid it with watch, seals, &c., upon the table beside her landlady.

"It should produce a considerable sum. It was one of the last gifts of my father, but I select it as being the most valuable article I have by me."

"Oh, Harrison will do it for you, mum, with pleasure," said the landlady, "or so I would myself; but if you think, mum, that your horders will come in a day or two, I'm sure he would rather wait than you should do such a thing. Suppose you wait a bit, Mrs. Pearson?"

"No, thank you," returned Julia, "I would rather not—the receipt of any remittance is now uncertain. If you can dispose of the watch to the same advantage as your husband, you may do so; I thought he would probably be the better qualified."

"Our landlord, mum, is a pawnbroker and dealer in watches, jooellry, and broaches," exclaimed her companion, "and Harrison would trust to him if he had it to sell, and so should I.

So if you *have* made up your mind to part with your pretty gold watch, I could manage it for you just as well as my master could."

"Then I shall feel obliged if you will do so as soon as possible," replied Julia, pushing the watch and chain towards Mrs. Harrison, "as I am very much in want of money: where is the girl?"

"She has took Master Johnny to the Post Office to make sure, as you said, mum, that there wasn't no letter there, in case the postman might forget to bring 'em on as you wished. I shall go at once, if you please, mum, to our landlord's, as I am likely to see him himself in the morning, and I shall come back before I sells it, to let you know what he offers."

Julia nodded assent to this proposal, and the landlady withdrew shortly after; she was heard to close the street door, and then Julia saw her pass the window, tying her bonnet strings as she went, by way of saving time.

Not many minutes had elapsed, and Julia had

sunk again into a deeply thoughtful mood, when the girl for whom she had enquired, and who had taken the baby out for an airing, turned into Brown Street. By her side walked a short, spare, sunburnt man, who, guided by the handmaiden, soon reached No. 6—Julia's residence.

He knocked a modest double knock, it was unanswered, and he knocked again. Julia, in her fit of abstraction, had not seen him pass the window, and knew not who was at the door, but it flashed suddenly across her mind that she was alone in the house, and that, landlady and servant both being out, it devolved upon her to admit all visitors, or they would have to await Mrs. Harrison's return. Little expecting, however, that it was anyone upon an errand to herself, she left the room, and opened the street door; she saw, for an instant, the figure of the stranger, with the servant and child by his side; he uttered a hasty ejaculation and stepped forward, but ere he passed the threshold, Julia was lying senseless on the floor of the hall.

"Oh my good gracious me!" exclaimed the

girl, in horror at such a catastrophe; "shall I go and fetch the doctor, sir?"

"No," returned the visitor, who, it is hardly necessary to say, was Mr. James Smith—"no; but shut that door, and while I carry your mistress into this room, go and fetch some water."

The girl obeyed, and Smith, placing Julia on a sofa in the parlour, moistened her brow and lips with the water she soon brought him. While so engaged, a key was heard to turn in the street door, then a hurried step in the hall, and Mrs. Harrison made her appearance.

"Oh, if you please, mum—" she began, but was there suddenly arrested by the wholly unlooked for spectacle which met her eyes. Understanding, at a glance, sufficient to excite her sympathy, she immediately joined Smith in his efforts to restore the insensible girl, and in a very few minutes some long sighs announced the return of consciousness.

"Are you the person she was expecting of?" whispered the landlady. "I mean as was to have sent her the letter."

"No," replied Smith in the same key; "she did not expect to see me, and the recognition has overpowered her."

"You ain't her husband, I suppose?" enquired Mrs. Harrison.

"No," again replied Smith; "don't you know her husband?"

"Not myself, exactly," said the woman, "but my sister does, leastways she says she does," a slight emphasis was, or seemed to be, laid upon these last words, "because she used to work for 'em at Kensington. Ah-h-h! this lady's of a high sperrit, sir, and if I may be so bold as to give advice where no advice is asked, be kind and patient with her, sir, even if she hasn't pleased you in everything."

"Why should you think she has displeased me?" asked Smith, "and why should you think that I have any right to be otherwise than kind to her?"

"Well, sir—no offence I hope, but them as lives longest will see most," oracularly returned the matron; "you can't live with people with-

out knowing people's ways, and thinking of things as comes before your eyes. But you don't see people go off like this for nothing; and though I won't presume, yet she is a lady after all, and of a tender and lofty sperrit; so don't forget it, sir. Ah! that will do, mum, now you're coming to: you're all right now, Mrs. Pearson, but I'm very busy, and can't stay any longer, my dear. I shall be just below, sir," she continued to Smith, "so if you should want any help, sir, I shall be with you in an instant. Go along do, you great stupid, staring thing!" this was to the girl; "go and see if you can't find something to do."

So with a delicacy of feeling which overcame her curiosity to hear the exact relation of her somewhat mysterious lodger to this stranger, and the cause of her swoon, Mrs. Harrison left the room under the plea, as just detailed, of great press of business.

"Julia!—my dear girl! Julia!" exclaimed Smith, as the eye languidly unclosed and looked at him, vacantly at first, but soon with a gather-

ing meaning. "Julia! forgive my too sudden appearance; I should have prepared you for my visit. Nay, nay, do not give way to such weakness; rouse yourself, my girl, for Agnes is in London, and awaiting you. Come—come! this is not my welcome to England, is it?"

There was one moment's pause, during which Julia bent her head, and in her hands hid her face; a strong shudder ran through her frame from head to foot, and then she looked up. She was quite recovered from her swoon now, and though there was a wildness in the piercing look which she fixed for one brief moment upon Smith, it proceeded from the searching intensity of the gaze, and from no remains of her late weakness. In despite of himself, Smith felt his own eyes droop before the piercing glance, and a crimson blush passed like a wave over Julia's features. This was succeeded by a dreadful pallor, as Smith saw when he raised his eyes, and he stretched an arm towards her, expecting that she was about to faint once more; but with a slight cold smile Julia shook her head,

and waved off the proffered assistance. She spoke, hitherto she had not done so, and her voice came low and husky, as though her mouth was parched, and she uttered her words with difficulty.

"You have indeed surprised me, Smith," she said. "How came you to trace me to this spot?"

"By simple means, my dear Julia, by very simple means," returned Smith, in a cheerful tone, "our sisters cannot so easily hide themselves. Now do not delay on account of some kaleidoscopic change of dress being required, but let the servant fetch a cab, and come at once to Agnes, she will be anxious and restless until we return; she has already been disappointed in our search."

"Where then have you sought for me," said Julia, and her voice again was husky, while her face was pale as before."

"In Kensington, dear Julia," replied Smith, "and enquiry at the post office discovered your former residence, but the landlady knew not

where you had gone: the disappointment has made Agnes quite ill. On the hope of seeing you again she dwelt during her long absence from England, almost unceasingly; and during our homeward voyage, no day dawned, and no night closed upon the waters, in which your name was not the first and latest upon her tongue."

"I know it—I am sure of that—my dear, dear Agnes!" and her voice, which was husky before, was broken now by sobs, and tears ran down the pallid cheeks. "I will ask you no farther, Smith, I see it is needless: God bless you both! I am ready, take me away at once. But of course I cannot go without the baby; I will order the servant to dress him."

"Go without him! certainly not. We could not think of going without *him*!" exclaimed James, "Agnes, in losing her own children—two such endearing little babes, Julia—has but learnt to love yours the more, I am certain."

"Once more I say God bless you, Smith," said Julia, and coming of her own accord close to

him, she kissed him several times, then her head dropped upon his shoulder. So it rested for a minute, then rising, she dashed away the tears from her cheeks, and was more herself than James had yet seen her. She touched the bell and the landlady was quickly in the room.

"Mrs. Harrison," said Julia, "please to tell Mary that she is to put on the baby's hat and frock at once. I am going to the other side of London, and may not be back for some hours."

"May not come back at all, Julia," suggested Smith."

"Oh! I must come back at least once," she said with a smile, "but do you wish to say anything to me, Mrs. Harrison?"

It was pretty clear that Mrs. Harrison did wish to say something, for she was making mysterious grimaces, and signs which might be considered as fragments of a very complex deaf and dumb alphabet.

"Why yes, mum," replied the good lady, "ahem! there's that little affair that I went out about, mum; but perhaps you are agoing

upstairs to dress, and we can talk it over there. I didn't let it go, because I didn't think he offered enough."

"Oh!" ejaculated Julia, pale no longer, as the perception of the landlady's meaning rushed upon her, for in her excitement she had forgotten all about the watch. "You were quite right, Mrs. Harrison; I am going up stairs, and shall be glad to hear what you have done."

Then, with a few words to Smith, she quitted the room: he, on his part, proffering to procure a cab by the time she was ready. This offer or promise he redeemed, and something more, having, indeed to allow the cabman one shilling, besides a glass of gin and milk at the nearest public house, on account of the delay, ere the lady made her appearance. At last she came out, and with a swift step crossed the pavement, and entered the vehicle; here she leant back, and spoke not all the way to Bayswater, save that once she said,—

"Are any strangers with Agnes? I mean any of *your* friends?"

"No, not a soul, Julia," and then both relapsed into silence, and anxious as Smith was to break it, and start some conversation which should render his position less embarrassing, he knew not how to accomplish his object.

Finally they reached Bayswater, after a ride which seemed to him interminable: the door was opened, Julia preceded Smith into the hall, then a dear, well remembered form, a dear, well remembered face, though now marked with lines of care and trouble, sprang from the parlour, and with a wild cry of joy hung around Julia's neck.

Ere the first throb of delight was past, ere the tears which started from each sister's eye had been stayed, ere one coherent word had been spoken, the trio found themselves, they scarcely knew how, seated in the cheerful, shady parlour of Agnes's new home. Much was there to be said, which their trembling lips refused to utter; much had been in the mind of Agnes to propose and arrange, but which was now all confused or lost; so that little was spoken, save

by Smith, who made efforts to prevent a silence which might easily sink into sadness. For even in the golden sky of their new happiness there was a cloud: and the unconscious child who was now sleeping in his aunt's arms *was* the cloud which, as Smith well knew, might throw a deep shade over all their hope and joy—he did cast a shadow even now. It was impossible for Agnes, with her kind face and gentle manners, with her habit of clinging to anyone, and of trusting to other guidance in lieu of her own—it was impossible for her to appear as a protector or patroness; yet now Julia was the more subdued of the two, and, as she embraced her sister, or spoke a few low words in answer to the hopeful visions which Agnes soon began to depict, it seemed as though the sisters had changed places, and that the younger now had the firm decisive mind, while the elder had become the bashful, diffident, self-doubting one.

Scarcely had the embarrassment worn off, even partially, and scarcely had Agnes fairly comm.nced her plans for the future, when the

little party received an interruption. A cab was heard to clatter rapidly down the quiet Grove, and to the great surprise of all it stopped at Jessamine Cottage, (if not previously explained, the reader is to understand that Smith's new home was Jessamine Cottage,) a tremendous knock followed, a man's voice was heard to enquire for Mr. Smith, and then Fred Harley presented himself. He greeted Agnes warmly, but was clearly ill at ease with Julia, who, on her part, drooped from the moment of his entrance.

After a brief apology for his intrusion, Fred explained that his object in calling was to request Mr. Smith's attendance at a neighbouring tavern, where one or two gentlemen were waiting to see him on business. No further explanation would Harley give; the business was important, he said, and the other persons concerned were not entirely unknown to Smith; but no further light would he throw upon the matter. James was somewhat disinclined to go, but the ladies, whose curiosity had been strongly excited by the

mysterious interest thrown around the message, urged him to accompany Harley, and to be sure and tell them all about it when he came back. Unable longer to resist, Smith expressed his willingness to go, and left at once. Harley did not speak on the subject of his business during their very short ride, he briefly expressed his gratification at seeing Mrs. Smith looking so well and happy, and said no more.

The vehicle soon stopped, and Smith followed his conductor—he had been told by Harley that he was going on important business, and he soon found that the young man had not deceived him.

CHAPTER VI.

SMITH followed his friend, agreeably to his expectations, into a tavern in the neighbourhood, and going up stairs, into one of the less frequented rooms, he saw a man standing by a window. This man had evidently been looking into the street, but had turned round as the gentleman entered. He was plainly but respectably dressed, while his features were pinched and worn, as though he was one who had seen and suffered much; on a table near him lay a roll of brown paper, or at least something enveloped

in it. He bowed to Smith as the latter ended and Harley said:

"I don't think, Mr. Smith, you remember this gentleman: do you remember Mr. Parsons, or I had better perhaps say Robert Parsons, formerly clerk to Mr. Chapman, of Chalkingdon?"

Mr. Smith did not remember such a person, but was very happy to make his acquaintance now.

"Very well," Harley said, "then, Robert, this is Mr. Smith—he knows you well enough by name, Mr. Smith, as he was acquainted with the Elmsleys, especially with Miss Agnes."

"Oh!" said James, and was at a loss what else to say, wondering much what was to come of all this.

"Mr. Sharpe has not been here, I suppose?" continued Harley.

Parsons shook his head, and Fred continued.

"He must be here directly, so we will make ourselves as comfortable as we can—that is, if you can restrain your impatience, Mr. Smith;

for as we must tell the gentleman for whom we are waiting all that we have to tell you, it may as well all be done at once."

"Certainly, as you please," returned James, and then, as the others had done, seated himself and began to read. He had taken up the advertisement part of the "Times," he found, and for ten minutes read a series of advertisements respecting leasehold, freehold, and copyhold estates, with or without handsome and commodious mansions, fit for the occupation of a family of the highest respectability, or for a gentleman, as the case might be; and which would be sold on a given day, if not previously disposed of by private contract. In this exciting pursuit he passed a short time, short in reality, as not exceeding ten minutes, but to him it appeared the most tedious pause he had ever known; nor was he singular in such a sensation it would seem, for as his ears caught a quick step ascending the stairs, so did those of his companions, and each laid down his portion of the paper with a sigh of relief. A

rap at the door was heard, and then a gentleman, attired in black, entered the room.

"Good morning, Mr. Harley," he said, as he entered, "good morning, gentlemen. I am sorry to find I have kept you waiting, but have only just returned from the city. Immediately upon receiving your pressing summons, I lost no time in attending to it."

"Thank you, sir," said Fred, "our business *is* somewhat pressing, as you will find. Mr. Smith, of Oxford Street, married, I should explain, to the younger daughter of the late Mr. Elmsley, —Mr. Sharpe, Solicitor, of Bayswater,—Mr. Robert Parsons from America, but formerly of Chalkingdon, Berkshire, clerk to Mr. Chapman, solicitor there."

This introduction concluded, the new comer sat down, while Smith, whose amazement was not in the slightest degree abated, looked anxiously from face to face: nor was the lawyer devoid of some wonder, for he, despite of professional stolidity, or solidity, if the latter word

be preferred, was somewhat fidgetty and impatient.

"Now, Parsons," continued Harley; and the individual so addressed coughed a little, as though to clear his throat, and commenced untying the roll which lay before him. Harley proceeded:—

"My friend, Parsons, as just mentioned, has recently returned from America; owing to his absence there, and the great privations suffered by him, which prevented his reaching home, a great and important task is now to be begun, which should have been finished years ago. It intimately concerns Mr. Smith; perhaps, indeed, he is the chief party concerned, and we shall require a legal adviser, so you now see, sir, why you were summoned. Mr. Parsons is ready to begin his tale, I see; it is rather a long one, but I don't think you will find it at all tedious. Now, Parsons."

Making a short bow, and giving another little cough, the ex-clerk, still holding the roll in his hand, commenced, without delay, his narrative.

"A few years ago," he began, "I was, as Mr. Harley has told you, clerk to Mr. Chapman, solicitor, of Chalkingdon; than whom, with one exception, a greater scoundrel does not exist."

Harley nodded his head approvingly, then glanced at the others, as if to say, "You see he knows what he is talking about." Parsons continued:—

"He is a jealous, suspicious, and ignorant man:—it was not his fault, I know, that I was a dissipated, threadbare wretch, without character, without friends; though I had never done a soul an ill turn, myself excepted, nor had I ever wronged a creature of a penny. But he delighted in annoying me and humbling me, it was the petty tyranny and revenge of his miserable mind, which found relief in throwing off upon one perfectly defenceless, a part of the scorn and contempt he met with daily; and I loathed him for it."

The lawyer, Mr. Sharpe, here gaped slightly, as though not as yet very deeply interested in

the narrative. He concealed the yawn, however, and, indeed, managed to convert it into a tolerable cough; shortly afterwards he felt no further inclination to gape.

"A grosser affront than usual from him, or an unwonted display of courage on my part, led to notice to leave being given. I almost forget now who gave it, but it was decided that I should quit him in a week. About that time, however, the frightful accident by which Mrs. Elmsley, and, eventually, Mr. Elmsley were killed, took place, and Mr. William Elmsley came to Royal Lodge. Now I was aware, and had been so for some time, that Mr. John Elmsley and the lady who passed as his wife, were not married, for Mr. Chapman had been entrusted with the making of the gentleman's will, and I had seen it. I was ready to believe any thing bad of Chapman, or of Mr. William Elmsley, but my suspicions might not have been excited had they not spoken of their plans in my hearing. How that occurred, was thus:—I was at the open window of the upper office, when they came to that of the lower,

and there, not deeming any one to be nigh, they said enough to show their infamous designs."

There was no lack of interest now upon the faces of the hearers, the lawyer appearing, perhaps, the most excited of the three. After a moment's pause, Parsons went on.

"I took care to ascertain when next William Elmsley was expected, and feigning business of my own, got leave for that hour; this was cheerfully granted, but I merely went out and came in again, and by dint of hard listening, heard enough to confirm the words of the morning. Elmsley knew, and I have already said Chapman did, that his brother was not married; knew that a will in favour of the daughters existed; and so, pointing out to him that there was no great risk incurred, as there was to be no forgery committed, nor no elaborate scheme to be carried out, he offered Chapman a large sum of money to burn the will."

"The scoundrel!" muttered Smith, "the treacherous villain!"

Harley held up his finger as a sign for silence, and the clerk resumed.

"He pointed out that his brother could not live; that very few persons knew of the existence of the will, and that it was of no consequence even if hundreds knew, for Chapman had only to say it was destroyed, and no one could contradict him;—he might say that his brother had desired to cancel it, and so had destroyed *that*, with the intention of having another drawn up. I should not have heard all this, but that Elmsley grew angry at intervals with Chapman, for his timidity, and raised his voice above its ordinary pitch. At last it was decided that Chapman should give an answer in two days, and with this understanding they separated: I slipped down stairs, and with a great deal of noise opened and shut the street door. Immediately afterwards Elmsley left. I knew that Chapman would consent to the proposition, I was quite certain of it; for even had his avarice been less than it was, or had he possessed any thing approaching to a religious or moral principle, his desire for revenge upon

Miss Julia Elmsley, for a cutting slight passed upon him, (too contemptuous I own), would have determined the matter. So, therefore, I lost no time in my operations, for I at once resolved to confound them."

"Ah—h!" said the lawyer, "go on, sir, my dear sir, go on."

"I was a poor man, as I have said, and while anxious—sincerely anxious on my soul—to defend those poor young ladies, and to do right by them, I was also desirous of doing it in a manner which should put my claims strongly before them, to ensure me a good reward."

"Quite right, quite business like and proper," murmured Mr. Sharpe, to whom Parsons appealed by a look; the look was perhaps involuntary, but the lawyer answered it, "quite right; but go on, my dear sir."

"During the whole, or at least the greater part of the next day Chapman was from home; I knew where to find his keys; I took them, and before he returned had prepared a counterpart of the will, which was a very short one. I, of

course, imitated the signatures of the witnesses and so forth; and as I was always noted for a knack at such imitations, it was difficult to tell the spurious from the true will. This counterpart I left in the strong box, the original I removed. As no will was found, and as the tale I expected to hear was circulated, the confederates no doubt burnt it——"

"But," interrupted Smith, springing to his feet, "the destroyed will was—?"

"A counterfeit," said Parsons.

"And the real will, the original!" cried Smith.

"Is here!" shouted Parsons, exultingly, throwing open the roll which he had all along held in his hand. "Is here! and your wife is heiress to twenty thousand pounds."

"Ha! ha! ha!— capital! capital!—quite melodramatic," exclaimed the solicitor, while Harley clapped Parsons triumphantly on the shoulder. Smith, however, had dropped his head between his hands, apparently overcome by the rush of mingled emotions which this

strange revelation had called up. His first thought, and that it was so did credit to his heart, was of Julia.

"At another time," the narrator continued, "I will tell you all of the strange manner in which I left England. So suddenly did I go, that I knew not whether poor Mr. Elmsley died or recovered. In my box at my lodgings was the original will—the identity of which it will be easy to establish, as both the witnesses who signed it are alive—I was sure that Nat Hackley would redeem my boxes from my landlord, so sure that I scarcely asked the question on my return, but I was almost mad with anxiety, lest from any accident they might have been destroyed or lost sight of. Often have I started from my sleep in the night, roused by a dream of Nat's house in flames, and my boxes burnt to dust in the midst. I shall say no more about myself, but I think I may safely hazard this opinion;—if Mr. Elmsley left his property worth forty thousand pounds, its value has not diminished in his brother's hands, and that Miss

Agnes of old times, Mrs. Smith now, will find her inheritance has only been postponed, not lost or diminished—God bless her!"

"I presume, sir," said Smith, speaking to the lawyer, "we had better leave the management of this matter in your hands. Take what steps you deem necessary, only, for the sake of dealing out justice to the two chief scoundrels, be not slow in your operations."

"By to-night, sir—no, perhaps not to-night," said the solicitor, glancing at his watch, "the day is almost too far advanced; but to-morrow, sir, I trust to find both these excellent persons, lodged in the county gaol. I shall now take the liberty of asking you for a few additional particulars, Mr. Parsons, and shall then require you to accompany me into town. Oblige me, Mr. Harley, by passing that inkstand. Thank you. Now, Mr. Parsons"—For half an hour did the man of law narrowly question our friend Robert, and at the end of that period he rolled up the paper on which he had been jotting down

his notes, and, turning with a triumphant smile to the company, said:

"Nothing can possibly be clearer, nothing more straightforward. With your permission, gentlemen, we will lose no time, but set about our business at once."

So saying, he touched the bell pull, and to the prompt waiter gave orders for the obtaining of a couple of cabs, and in these, when procured, they entered, and in a few seconds were in full trot for Bow Street.

A note was hastily written by Smith, and forwarded from the tavern, which explained, briefly, that he was compelled to go into the city with Mr. Harley. This intelligence caused his wife and her sister some little wonder, but it was soon forgotten, and they passed the day together happily, little dreaming what a strange change in their fortunes was impending.

They passed the day happily, we have said, yet with a happiness not unalloyed. Their reunion after so long a separation, when they had so much to say to each other, and when each

felt as though she could never tire of sitting by her sister's side, and of gazing into her loving eyes, this made them happy; yet even then a mist, which was destined to grow darker, a barrier which would in time rise higher and higher, was between them, and the subject which was avoided, though always in each mind, and lurking behind each lip, and which covered poor Agnes with scarlet every time she fancied her words might seem to bear some allusion to it, was enough to render their happiness imperfect, and to sow, had they sought them, the seeds of destruction. But "sufficient for the day is the evil thereof," and the sisters were happy together.

Time wore on, and Agnes began to grow uneasy at Smith's protracted absence, when, just as the soft twilight of the evening darkened to its duskiest shades, a cab stopped at the door, and he jumped out. All eagerness to know where he had been, Agnes ran to meet him, and ask an explanation; but how disappointed was she at being told that he had only called at

home to say that he was obliged to go down to Chalkingdon that night, and did not know precisely when he should return. What was he going for? Who was he going with? Who was he going to see? These were questions of course asked, but not answered. Stopping his wife's hasty enquiries with a kiss, James informed her and Julia that his business was for the present a secret, but that they would soon know all, and would have cause for wonder and joy. This answer, sufficiently enigmatical and stimulating, did in no degree allay the curiosity of Mrs. Smith, but all her pressing was of no avail; with another kiss, her husband untwined her arms, broke away, and was soon rattling swiftly towards Paddington.

CHAPTER VII.

ROYAL LODGE still stood on the Chalkingdon Road, as trim, as pretty, as ever; and on the hot afternoon of the day following that with which we have just been dealing, the cows in its smooth paddocks lay quietly under the shade of bordering elms, and there also stood the two long tailed ponies, successors to King's Arms. These latter were also seeking refuge from the fierce sun, and but for the frequent whisking of the tail, as intrusive flies settled upon them, were as motionless as the cows. The train which could be seen flying along the embank-

ment some two or three miles off, was marked by no long voluminous stream of vapour; in the hot and rarified air of that autumn afternoon, nothing save a thin blue mist appeared above the engine. The red gravelly stones around the station made the eyes ache, and so did the long white road, with a trembling haze upon it, or not so much a haze as a quivering reflection of glaring light. Labouring men and women, burnt to a gipsy brown, and perspiring from every pore, languidly filled the waggon with the last sheaves of the harvest, and stray wayfarers toiling slowly up the dusty hill side road, were prone to lay under hedges to rest, or to halt at spots where little rills fall into tanks, and offered tempting refreshment to the panting pedestrian.

On the shady side of Royal Lodge, where the pretty lawn ran up to the walls, and where the windows looked upon the sweetest part of the flower garden and the paddock beyond, and beyond that again upon a picturesque succession of field and hedge, of mound and dell, with here

and there a white cottage or farmhouse, and with more than one spire of humble village church—to Chalkingdon Hill, crowned by its grove of tall straight trees, in one direction; and adown the fertile Vale of White Horse, as far as the eye could reach in another; on this side of the Lodge, we say, the window blinds were up, and in his study Mr. William Elmsley sat. He was not sitting there for pleasure, pleasant as the room was; the table covered with letters and rolls of paper indicated that—yet indicated it less plainly than the thoughtful air and knitted brow of the owner of the mansion. He was now awaiting an arrival, *that* was evident, also, from his manner; at short intervals he drew his heavy gold watch from his pocket, and after glancing at it would look with increased impatience at the brow of a hill some half a mile distant from the Lodge, where the road could be seen for a few score yards as it crossed the ridge, and where, of course, any person travelling from Chalkingdon must be seen by Mr. Elmsley. At last his watching was rewarded, for moving

slowly, as though tired with his walk, or spent with the heat of the day, a man appeared on the crest of the hill, was seen for a minute while descending, and then the curve of the road and the tall hedges hid him from sight.

"The miserably mean wretch!" muttered Elmsley; "an hour behind time because he will not go to the slightest expense in riding. Who could have dreamt of his coming here on such a day on foot! I'm very tired of him—and of every one else."

He said no more, but throwing himself back in the arm-chair, awaited, as patiently as he might, the arrival of the pedestrian he had seen. In a few minutes a ring was heard, then the servant, after opening the outer door, announced:

"Mr. Chapman."

"Come in, Chapman!" exclaimed Elmsley, peevishly; "what on earth could have induced you to walk over here to-day? You are behind time, and don't look fit for anything but to go to sleep."

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Elmsley, I'm sure,"

began the lawyer, who saw that his patron was not in the best of humours; "I did not think I should be so long in coming. I'm very sorry, indeed—but if you will allow me to rest for two minutes, you shall find that I am not altogether unfit for business. Pooh—h—h, oh dear me!"

With these exclamations Chapman fell into a chair, and taking off his stock, began fanning himself with his hat; and, truly, the little lawyer looked almost dead from heat and fatigue. His face was copper-coloured all over, his straight hair hung in lank ropes upon his cheeks and over his ears, and from the ends thereof still trickled the streams of perspiration; while his collar, always so erect and symmetrical, lay limp and dishevelled upon his coat. Elmsley regarded him for a moment with an expression of dislike, then, with an ill-concealed sneer, turned in his chair, and gazing from the window allowed the lawyer to recover himself at his leisure. Chapman, on his part, noticed the contemptuous demeanour of his host, and grew considerably em-

barrassed under such treatment, so, cutting short his fanning process, he exclaimed:—

"Now, sir, I am at your service—quite recovered now, Mr. Elmsley."

"Oh!" said the gentleman addressed.

"Yes, sir," continued Chapman, somewhat more disconcerted by the dry rejoinder, "I am ready to receive your commands. Hem!"

The lawyer was obliged to cough here, although he smothered the explosion as far as possible; the hot walk on the dusty road had parched his throat, until it seemed as dry as the back of an oven.

"I thought I requested you in my note, to bring your clerk with you," said Mr. Elmsley; "how is it he has not come?"

With another painful clearing of the throat, Mr. Chapman explained that his clerk had gone to a neighbouring town on important business, but would call, on his return, at the Lodge; and that his return might be looked for immediately. This explanation was interrupted by several coughs, arising from the dryness of the unfortu-

nate lawyer's throat, and at each cough a frown of vexation appeared for an instant upon Mr. Elmsley's face.

"Well!" exclaimed the latter, "since you have come at last, let us make up for lost time by going to work at once. I would come in a wheelbarrow, if I were you, next time, rather than walk so far in the sun."

Chapman smiled a sickly smile at this sarcasm, and his patron went on:—

"I am going to leave Royal Lodge—"

"Sir! what!" exclaimed the lawyer, scarcely trusting his ears, "what *did* you say, sir?"

"What I mean," retorted Elmsley, "but what are you making those confounded grimaces for?"

"If I could have a glass of table ale," humbly suggested Chapman, "or milk—or water even, I think I should not feel so dreadfully parched in my mouth; then we should get on, sir, all's well you know, that ends well, sir."

With another gesture of impatience, Elmsley rang the bell, and awaited in silence the entry of

the servant, and her return with a tankard of ale. From this vessel Chapman imbibed a refreshing draught or two, then stealthily and nervously watching his employer the while, hurriedly replaced his neckcloth, adjusted his tie, and pushed his damp hair from his forehead. This done, he gave one or two coughs of another kind, such as were designed to attract Elmsley's attention; failing, however, to obtain the slightest notice by such means, he said:—

"Now, if you please, sir, I am quite restored and ready for work."

"Very good," returned Elmsley, rising and wheeling his chair to the table, then reseating himself, went on, "in those papers before you, you will find all particulars pertaining to two important matters. I am about to leave Royal Lodge, and this portion"—indicating the papers meant, by a wave of the hand, "this contains my correspondence with a gentleman who is in treaty for the house and lands; you will see what he wants, and will transact the business with him, with as little delay as possible. That pile of

papers refers to an estate which I am thinking of buying, near Glasgow, in Scotland."

"Near where; my dear sir!" cried the solicitor.

"Near Glasgow, have I not said!" retorted the other, somewhat tartly, "if you are incapable of following the plainest language, to day, Mr. Chapman, say so, and we will wait your clerk's arrival."

Chapman's smile at this was fainter and more sickly than even his smiles were wont to be.

"I am in good order, sir, 'Richard is himself again,'" said he, "but you must not quarrel with a natural expression of surprise at such a sudden and total desertion of your friends—and such a long removal too! What does Mrs. Elmsley say to it, sir?"

"She knows nothing of it," was the brief reply.

"Oh!" ejaculated the lawyer; and he then went on arranging the papers nearest to him. He could not, however, restrain himself long, but

burning with curiosity, determined to ask *one* more question.

"If not too bold, sir," he ventured to say, "I should like to enquire your reason for this very sudden, and to me, melancholy change."

Elmsley frowned, and seemed about to give an angry reply, but checking himself, said, after a moment's thought:

"I will tell you, Chapman. I am sick of this neighbourhood; of the arrogant, bloated squires, and others with whom I have to deal, who can treat you cordially, or give you the cold shoulder just as it suits their convenience. Confound them! What! shall I submit to be slighted and passed, or noticed by a contemptuous nod? shall I stay among the ignorant louts to be whispered and glanced at, and shrunk from? No—never!"

"Good gracious me!" exclaimed Chapman, who had not in the slightest degree anticipated such an outbreak, "you must be under some extraordinary delusion, sir. So useful a magistrate as you are, the life and soul of the board

of guardians too, and then Mrs. Elmsley's friends, too, are so numerous and influential—"

"I know it," interrupted Elmsley, "and if any section be more offensive to me than another, it is her friends, with their contemptuous toleration, and their cold civility. Mrs. Elmsley does not see it, it does not affect her; they are of her own circle, and that is enough for her. As to my fellow magistrates, were it not that I am resolved to show them what little effect their arrogance has upon me, I would never go among them again."

Chapman replied nothing to this, but quite overwhelmed by finding his patron, whom he considered, from his wealth and position, ought to be the happiest and most influential man in the county; to find that he was slighted, avoided, and insulted, was such a blow, that for a minute or two he could do no more than chew the end of his pen, and gaze vacantly into the garden. Recalling himself, however, by a great effort, he plunged into his papers again, and continued at his work until the arrival of his clerk.

As the reader knows, this satellite was of a very different aspect to Robert Parsons, boasting unexceptionable gloves, collar, and tie, while his whiskers and curling locks were the envy of half Chalkingdon. As on the previous occasion of this young man's introduction to the reader, it was observable that he paid much more deference to the master of Royal Lodge, with whom he was nevertheless very intimate, than he did to Mr. Chapman; indeed, between the latter and himself, no great amount of cordiality seemed to exist. This of course may in some measure be accounted for by remembering that Mr. Elmsley was his chief patron, that he had introduced him to Chapman, and that he was known to take a great interest in Mr. Taylor's welfare; the reader recollects, doubtless, that the clerk's name was Taylor.

Chalkingdon was a town replete with scandal, not more, perhaps, than are other country towns, but our readers know, if they know anything about such places at all, how little reliance is to be placed upon the injurious tattle of Chalking-

don and its congeners. We, therefore, do not mind saying, having thus neutralised the venom of the rumour, that speculation having been rife about Mr. Taylor, as it would have been about any other stranger, had settled down to the following facts, and from them drew certain injurious deductions, which, with a due regard to the character of this volume, we decline to repeat.

That Mr. Taylor was from London, as was Mr. Elmsley; that his name was William Taylor; that it was moreover William E. Taylor, but that no one knew what was his second name; that Mr. Elmsley took a very great interest in him, as aforesaid, in virtue of which interest the young man gave himself airs; that there was a remarkable, and not-to-be-disputed resemblance between the above-named gentleman and Mr. Taylor; and, finally, that the latter was never known to speak of his father.

Dismissing these matters, we proceed to say that the trio sat for some time longer in Mr.

Elmsley's study, and that the lawyer took divers instructions about the business in question, until Elmsley somewhat abruptly rose and said:

"I must leave you now. I have an appointment this evening at Knollington."

"This evening! Knollington!" ejaculated Chapman.

"Yes," retorted the other; "this evening, at Knollington. I have to see a gentleman about a mortgage;—more business for you, Chapman. I am about to call in all my money, which is, as you know, very much scattered; I am anxious to have it all in one or two investments only, for I shall then have less trouble with it. As this Scotch estate, allowing that I purchase it, will not require above half my capital, I have been anxious to obtain good security for the remainder. Mr. Seymour is willing to borrow the whole, and will cross over from his place to Knollington this evening to meet me. If I don't see him to night, it is uncertain when we may meet."

As he finished speaking, the servant entered,

and said that George had brought the carriage round, if you please, sir, as you told him.

"Now," said Elmsley, "it is six o'clock, I can be at Knollington by seven or a little after, if I put my horses to their best; I shall not be detained very long, I daresay, so shall probably be home before ten o'clock, but if I should be late, if I should be kept there longer than I anticipate, you must wait for me, remember, even if it should be midnight before I return."

"Certainly, sir," assented Chapman.

"I may have some hasty instructions to give you about this mortgage, for from some words let fall by Mr. Seymour, I think if he has the money at all he will want it very soon," continued Elmsley; "I have no doubt that you will find enough, and more than enough, to occupy you until I return."

So saying he left them, and mounted his trim, open carriage, the servant being duly installed behind.

From the windows which looked towards the road, the blinds being now drawn up, Chapman

and his clerk saw him depart. There had always been an air of consequence and importance about Mr. Elmsley, and of late those who knew him best had seen that it was much increased; perhaps feeling that he was sinking from his old position among his neighbours, he found it necessary to compensate by an assumption of dignity, for the depreciation which it was too plain he was undergoing in public opinion. Now, as he took the reins from his obsequious servant, Chapman could not help admiring the stern, collected air with which he glanced around, and which seemed to proclaim his importance and superiority.

Nor could the lawyer avoid an expression of wonder at the possibility of such a man being driven from his chosen neighbourhood by the fancied dislike of a few insignificant people; *he*, Chapman thought of himself, would never abandon such a position if backed by wealth and influential friends; he did not say this fully to his clerk, for, as hinted previously, the two had no great love for each other.

Yet with this wonder, and involuntary admiration within him, this bowing down and cringing of spirit before a superior mind, the lawyer had, nevertheless, a secret gratification in reflecting that he himself would at any rate be free from a certain mastery and control which Elmsley had managed to exercise over him, and thus, even if he lost the profit of his patronage, he should yet be more comfortable in some other respects. On the whole, then, as he turned the subject over in his mind, he was very glad the gentleman was going.

The evening wore on in silence, or nearly so, as far as the lawyer and his clerk were concerned, each pursued his task with few remarks, and took but little notice of the other. Mrs. Elmsley, by the bye, was visiting at Crossbelts, so the house was very quiet. At last it grew too dark to write, and Chapman, after ringing for candles, declared his intention of refreshing himself by a walk in the garden until they were ready, and accordingly opened the window doors and stepped out upon the lawn.

It was not dark, but a soft, dusky obscurity was in the sky, save where, over the long stretching hills, the moon was rising, with about one-third of the shield silvered, and the darker portion plainly to be seen in the evening light, as Chapman paused in his walk to observe and admire. The flowers which were still in bloom revived with the coming twilight, or at least, their fragrance was more perceptible, till the air was filled with the balmy scent, and the lawyer, in his pacing too and fro among the beds again marvelled how a man with such a home, and such a garden, should, for mere whims, leave them.

After the heat of the day, and the attentive poring over Mr. Elmsley's papers, the saunter in the cool garden was doubly welcome to Chapman; and taking off his hat more completely to enjoy the gentle breeze, too faint, however, to be thoroughly refreshing, he sat down upon a rustic seat, which faced the room just left. How quiet! how solemnly quiet! Too dark to distinguish objects in detail, yet with light enough

to note the bolder features of the scenery; the irregular hills, the tall trees which were ranged along their highest rims, like darker shadows against the shadowy light, could be seen; but not the cottage or the farm, save where a faint sparkle shone from the taper in some distant window.

"Now fades the glimmering landscape on the sight,
And all the air a solemn stillness holds."

Chapman was in a mood to feel the beauty of Gray's opening verses, had he known them; as it was, his thoughts naturally reverted to other scenes which had been enacted in that garden, nor was the melancholy that tinged his thoughts diminished by the remembrance of Julia, which of course filled his mind, and he again heard her voice and saw her glance, as once she spoke and looked in his presence, near to the very spot where now he sat.

A sudden flash of light from the study drew his attention, and looking round, Chapman saw

through the open doors the maid servant enter with candles, and place them on the table; he could see too, that Mr. Taylor was exchanging some badinage with the girl, for as he spoke she simpered, and looked confused.

This was of course, quite plainly seen by Chapman as he faced the illuminated room, and he half muttered a wish that when Mr. Elmsley did go, he would take his protegé with him. The girl retired, and Taylor, after glancing once or twice towards the garden, as though wondering at his chief's delay, went on with his task.

Rumours had reached the lawyer, as rumours of evil will spread—seal up the evil as hermetically as you will—that all was not well with Julia Elmsley, and although nothing tangible was said, nothing definite known, yet he was able to give a very close guess at the truth, and, although a man of little sensibility, and as little given to remorse or repentance as any one who broke his fast that day in England, yet at that hour and in that mood, his share in the transaction, which had beggared the unfortunate young

ladies, rose before him with a sternness and force which had never before been felt.

He rose hastily, and walked hurriedly to and fro for a minute, as though determined to shake off the depression; as he did so, he heard the noise of some vehicle coming quickly from the direction of Chalkingdon. This was the first sound, beyond the distant yelp of a dog, or once the slow plodding step of a labourer as his heavy boots "crunched" the dust on the high road, which had met Chapman's ear, since he had entered the garden.

"Parties for the station," he murmured, as the vehicle passed the house; "no, surely it has stopped; I wonder where they can be going?"

Giving, however, no second thought to the matter, he found his hat, after a moment's search, and moved towards the study. As he entered the full strength of the light which issued from it, he paused, for he fancied he heard footsteps in the garden, and very close at hand; ah! it was so; could it be Mr. Elmsley back so soon? As this reflection crossed his mind, two or three

figures came into view as they turned an angle of the house, and though his view of them was indistinct, they could see *him* plain enough, as the light fell brilliantly upon him.

"There is Mr. Chapman," said a voice, and in the next moment four men passed into the study, while three or four more clustered round the little lawyer.

"What is it? what do you want?" he asked, pushing away the men nearest to him with his elbows, for he did not relish such intrusiveness; as he spoke he observed that the men who had entered the study had left it, after exchanging a few words with Taylor, and gone into the house.

"What do you want?" demanded Chapman, again.

"You, sir," returned one of the men, "don't make any fuss or bother, and then we can do things quietly; but you are our prisoner, sir."

"Prisoner! Oh, nonsense! I owe no man a sixpence. You must be arresting me for some one else; my name is Chapman."

"I know it, sir," returned the voice, "but

this isn't a civil process; you are my prisoner for felony; conspiracy to destroy a will!"

"Destroy ——!" Chapman could not get out a sentence.

"To destroy; with perjury likewise, in swearing that it was cancelled," retorted his captor.

The lawyer's heart failed him at once; the horrid certainty that where so much was known everything must be known, appalled and unmanned him, and but for the assistance of the man who had spoken, he would have fallen on the turf. As they helped him into the study, the men who had passed through into the interior of the house returned, and one of those who stayed with Chapman exclaimed:

"Have you missed the principal, Mr. Sharpe?"

"I am sorry, Mr. Smith, to own that we have," returned a dark, keen looking gentleman. "I don't suppose, however, that it will make much difference; the servants here all say he has gone to Knollington, a village only a few

miles off. I propose that you, with two of the officers, go over there, while I, Mr. Harley, and the others remain here, in case of his arrival."

"Very good," replied Smith, "but let us lose no time. What is that? Lightning? I hope we shall have no storm."

The companions of the speaker turned, naturally, to glance at that quarter of the heavens where the clouds were darkest; but Chapman's eyes were riveted, as though by some horrible fascination, upon the features of one of the strangers, who, in his turn, eyed the fallen lawyer with a calm vindictive triumph. It was he! there could be no mistake; wonderful as was the resurrection, it was he nevertheless. That was his clerk, Robert Parsons, and but that the hair was greyer, and the features sharper, he stood before him just as he had seemed of old. While a brief conference took place among the others of the party, Chapman, impelled by an impulse he could not resist, beckoned to the man who had so fascinated him. The stranger took one step towards

him, and then, standing close by his side, with the same mocking smile upon his lips, said:

"Well, Mr. Chapman, we meet once more."

Ah, it *was* Parsons. The last hope was dispelled; no, not hope, that had vanished the instant he saw that well remembered, careworn face; but though he knew no other voice could issue from those lips, still, when he heard it, the last doubt was shattered. He knew now, too, instinctively, whence the blow had come. How, he could not even frame a guess; had he been as calm and firm as he was bewildered and beaten down, he could not have done so, yet he knew right well whence the blow came.

"Yes, yes; we meet again, Parsons," he gasped out. "I—I thought you were dead."

"Had I been dead, and but half the ghost stories we hear, true," retorted his clerk, "I would have risen from my grave to help you to your proper reward. But say no more to me, you are fallen as low and as irretrievably as I could wish, and so I will not repay your insults."

"Now, gentlemen, to business. Davies," said the thin dark man, Mr. Sharpe, indeed, and one of the strangers touched his hat respectfully as the lawyer spoke, "see to Mr. Chapman, he looks faint. Oblige me, Harley, by touching that bell-rope."

The request was immediately complied with, and a servant appeared, her great round eyes rolling in amazement over the party.

"Bring some wine if you can get at it," continued the speaker.

The girl made her curtsey, and retired, staring her hardest to the very last.

"And now, Mr.—"

He paused and looked round the room, while Harley exclaimed:

"Ah! where the deuce is that clerk? who saw him go out?"

Nobody. Taylor was sitting there when they re-entered the study, but he had vanished utterly now, and no one had seen him go.

Whether he could not endure the spectacle of his master in distress; whether he felt uncertain

as to whose turn it might be next, and a wholesome desire to shift from dangerous ground; or whether some other sufficient motive had actuated him, none of course could say, but gone he certainly was, and without leave taking.

"There's lightning again!" exclaimed Smith, "I wish we had not lost so much time in hunting up Hackley, especially as we could not find him after all, or that these Berkshire magistrates were not so slow in accepting, or endorsing, or whatever you call it, a warrant."

"All in good time, Mr. Smith," said Sharpe, "we must have him, and an hour earlier or later will make very little difference. Now, my girl, give me that wine, you have been long enough in fetching it; Mr. Chapman, will you take a glass of wine?"

The little lawyer made a feeble motion of acquiescence, and drank a first glass, then made a sign for more, and after emptying a second glass, held it out for still more; this also was given him, but his appeal for a fourth was not acceded to, whereupon the miserable prisoner heaved a

deep groan, and rolled over upon the sofa upon which they had seated him.

"Let him lie there," said Mr. Sharpe, "he will be as well so as any way. Mrs. Elmsley is not expected home to night, or I would send a messenger to stop her. Are you ready, Smith?"

"Certainly, and anxious to start," returned the person addressed, "so as to get over as much ground as possible before the storm comes on—there, hark! that was distant thunder."

No time was now lost; one of the officers was a local thieftaker, and well acquainted with every foot of the country for miles around, and who knew the road which must be taken by any person coming from Knollington to Chalkingdon Road. He therefore was to drive, for the chances were, that William Elmsley would be met upon the road, and it was only for the purpose of making very sure, and avoiding all those accidents which will arise, that induced the lawyer to send out for him at all, in lieu of quietly waiting at Royal Lodge for his return, and so making the capture.

Smith, with his two companions, were soon re-installed in the vehicle which had brought them, and while settling down in their places, the former noticed how gloomy half the sky had grown within the last half hour, and how, where the darkest clouds rested on the hills, a momentary gleam flashed and quivered, with only brief intervals of blacker darkness.

"We shall have rain," he said.

"Ees, sure, sir," said the driver.

"If that poor devil of a clerk, has set out to walk all the way to Chalkingdon, he will have enough of it."

"Ah-h!" said the driver between his teeth, "do'st thee know Measter Taylor, sir?"

"Taylor, was he the clerk?" asked Smith, "if so, I do not."

"Ah-h," said the constable again, "I do, sir. He's a most terrible deep fellow, is Measter Taylor, to be sure; I don't much think he be set out to walk to Chalkingdon to-night."

"Well, what do you think?" demanded Smith.

"Well, sir, we shall see," was the oracular reply; "all I says is, we shall find, I think, as he bean't gone to Chalkingdon to-night."

"If you ain't got no more sensibler talk than that, drive on and hold your jaw," said the second officer, who was from London, and was a man of irascible and not over social temperament.

The provincial gave an angry thwack to each horse, and uttered a strong epithet or two, then concentrating all his faculties upon his task, set out upon the undesirable journey, up the Wiltshire hills.

CHAPTER VIII.

EXCEPT for a natural and laudable desire, felt, we trust, both by author and reader, that everything in this important chronicle, should go clearly and steadily on, with no purposed obscurity in the narrative, it would be scarcely worth while here to explain why Mr. Chapman fell into the hands of the Philistines at so late an hour, in lieu of receiving a harsh awakening from his dream of security much earlier. He would have been seized with morning's dawn, but for the advice of Mr. Sharpe, who preferred waiting in the first instance upon a Berkshire magistrate,

and naturally chose one for the purpose who did not live in the immediate vicinity of Chalkingdon Road. Then, again, he was anxious to see Hackley, who would, it was evident, be required as a witness, and so, having time enough and to spare, that gentleman—Mr. Sharpe, of course, we mean—with Harley and Smith, chartered a chaise, and went across to Coneyfield. Parsons was left at a small alehouse between Chalkingdon and the station, where the people were unknown to him, and where, on his complaining of illness, he was allowed a room to himself, where he laid down until his friends called for him on their road to Royal Lodge.

The hearty host of the Running Horse was not, however, at home; he had gone, as his pretty wife informed them, to a certain little village a mile or two on the other side of Knollington, to see about, or leastways to make arrangements, as she might say, about two gentlemen—two parties, she meant—that she thought was a coming there to lodge. Mrs. Hackley blushed a little, and stammered a

little, in making this explanation, but the gentlemen who were listening, took little heed of her confusion; the truth in reality was this: Nat had gone to this distant village, to visit Lankey Bob Wallis, who was, as all intelligent readers must know, the best trainer going, and who had at this moment under his especial care and fostering wing, Charley Manners, the Camberwell Doctor. The gentleman with the medical appellation was at this time in training to fight for one hundred pounds aside; and Nat, having reliable hints given to him that Lankey Bob Wallis was much dissatisfied with the accommodation provided at his present quarters, had gone that afternoon in the hope of gaining the pair as lodgers pro. tem. at the Running Horse. This was why Mrs. Hackley stammered and blushed; for although she did not object to the warlike inmates, and found them very regular "parties," early risers and early retirers, during the training, yet she did not know what the sentiments of her visitors might be, and so was glad when she had finished her explanation; this

she did by adding that it was a long way, and a tiring walk for poor Nat, and she wished to goodness they could keep only just such a pony as they used to have at the Railway Tavern. To this a suitable reply was made, and a due enquiry after the health of Miss Hackley having been tendered, her visitors left.

They returned to Chalkingdon, and then found, as is already known, that Chapman had gone to Royal Lodge upon business. This produced another postponement of the capture, but it was the less regretted as there seemed a certainty now of landing both their victims at one cast of the net. This was therefore attempted, with what success has been duly told.

We now see our way clear, and the reader is prepared to accompany Smith on his dark ride to Knollington. We must correct ourselves here, precede, not accompany, should be the word. He started, as the reader knows; the Elmsley Arms was passed, soon, it was more than likely, Smith thought, to change its sign; then the station was reached; then the railway bridge was crossed;

and then in silence, save but for the tramp of the horses, and more than once a low growl from the blackest clouds; in darkness, save but for the fitful lightning, and the fierce glow from the cigar of the London office; they pursued their journey.

A very few hours before, whilst traversing the selfsame road, William Elmsley had stood erect in his carriage as the long-tailed ponies toiled slowly up a long and heavy hill, and looked back at the place whence he had come. He had a good view of Royal Lodge, of its gables, its stone facings, its smart windows, its quaint chimneys, and all the salient features of the building, and very well it looked in the calm brightness of the sunny evening, with all its rich foliage about it, its tall grave trees, its shrubs, and trim hedges; the man's heart softened as he looked (albeit, it was a heart as little prone to soften as any mentioned in this tale, or in any other story equally true), his heart softened as he looked, and a twinge of regret at leaving his pretty home, came across him. But

the feeling was gone, almost as soon as he was conscious of it, and giving one more glance around him, at the rich smiling vale below, and the naked green hills he was now climbing, he became at once himself again.

Knollington was reached in safety, and the steed duly stabled at the Lamb; Mr. Seymour was punctual, and a very short time sufficed to decide on the various preliminaries to the business; this done, the two gentlemen sat for half an hour over a bottle of wine, and then parted.

Elmsley summoned the waitress, and gave orders for the immediate preparation of his carriage, and while these were being executed, sat near the window, looking thoughtfully out upon the night. He saw with some anxiety that the sky had changed its aspect very much since last he had observed it, that the clear blue, the stars, and the young moon, were hidden by one gloomy sheet of cloud, and that the air through the open casement seemed less fresh and reviving than it had been but now, and was of a warm, oppressive character. A low peal of distant thunder, too,

broke while he watched, and the ominous change in the night chiming strangely with his disturbed and harassed mind, made him resolve upon awaiting his carriage in the coffee-room. His own apartment was small, and dull, and gloomy; he might have added, and solitary; it was with the hope, then, of finding a more cheerful room, and perhaps some company, that he descended to the coffee-room.

One person only was there, and his back was to Elmsley, for he was standing on a seat, and looking out at a window, the upper sash of which had been lowered on account of the heat, and he seemed to be, as Elmsley had been, watching the approaching storm. The new comer walked deliberately down the whole length of the room, and as the second person was near the door, Elmsley had to tread several of his sonorous, creaking paces, after passing him. But the stranger did not look round, so Mr. Elmsley addressed him:

"I fear, sir," he said, "we are about to have an unpleasant change in the weather."

At the sound of his voice the other turned quickly round, and, with an exclamation of surprise, leapt from his pedestal. It was a man whose presence was more disagreeable to Mr. Elmsley at that moment, than would have been that of almost any person in the world. It was Nat Hackley. There was a single instant of angry gaze between the two, then Elmsley, with a contemptuous "Psha!" turned away, and taking up an old newspaper which lay at hand, proceeded to read with great interest; had he been nearer the door than Nat was, he would probably have left the room, but he did not like to stalk past him again, in palpable retreat.

Nat was usually so quiet, and so little prone to commence hostilities with any one, that although he hated Elmsley for a multitude of crimes against himself and his family, and against all those whom Nat had most respected, yet, in all probability, nothing would have been said by him, and he might, perhaps, feeling exceedingly uncomfortable where he was, have

slipped out of the room as soon as possible but for four reasons. Elmsley had broken the ice by speaking to *him*—he had turned from him with a sneer of the utmost contempt—Nat's mind was already in a state of great excitement about the gentleman and his transactions—and, in enhancement of these excellent reasons, he had had a glass of ale or so that day beyond his customary allowance. So Nat spoke:

"Well, Mr. Elmsley," he said, "we havn't had the pleasure of meeting for some time; I've had a good deal to thank you for of late."

"Have you?" retorted Elmsley; at another time he might have treated Nat's words with cool disdain, but he too had his reasons for speaking;—they resembled the two last named of Nat's, as they were good wine and bad temper, "don't thank me for the little I did, Hackley; it was nothing to what I wished to do for you; and some day I shall add to the obligation."

Nat looked bitterly at him for a moment, but, remembering that it would never do for a Londoner to lose his temper, and so be worsted in

an argument, he spoke coolly enough and said:—

"I expect as much, sir, if you can: you've showed pretty well in my neighbourhood, my old neighbourhood, I mean, that when you take a job in hand, you don't do it by halves."

As Nat spoke, a louder and nearer peal of thunder was heard, a flash of lightning having preceded it, and then the first rush of the big rain drops followed.

"I can tell you, Hackley," said Mr. Elmsley, who had paused involuntarily to listen to the outbreak of the storm, "I can tell you that a strict watch shall be kept over your beer-shop. I am not without some information about you already, and as such low pot-houses as yours are notoriously the bane of any district, we shall make an example of you, be sure of that."

"It's out of your power to make a more striking example of anybody than you have done of yourself," said Nat, "but you mind what I say; somebody else will come and finish your work, and that pretty soon, too.

As to my beer-shop, you know I had a better once, and you know how I lost it. Where I am, I live, I'm thankful to say, honestly, and on what I earn for myself; all I've got, I've got honourably, and what would you give to be able to say *that?*"

"Hold your tongue, my good fellow," said Elmsley, who felt that he was not gaining greatly in the discourse, "I have no leisure for talk with you."

"You began it," replied Nat, "but as you want to cut it, I'll do so;—only hear these last words."

Elmsley, despite of himself, looked up from his paper, and Nat continued:—

"When you turned me out of my house and home, me, a man as had never harmed you, I felt that in my heart as would have been the death of you, and no mistake about it, before the night come after the morning when my goods was sold off. But my wife saved your life, scoundrel; yet, even with her words ringing in my ears, I don't think I could sit here, facing

you, quietly, when I think of her and her baby, and of all our troubles which she has borne so well—no! I should twist your neck for you at once, robber, swindler, and thief! Only I know others are at your heels, who will pull you down like bloodhounds; only I know that your game is up, at last, and that nothing can save you, villain as you are!"

Nat finished, and with a stern mien stalked from the room, at the same instant that the servant appearing at the door said, with a touch of his hat,

"Carriage ready, sir—rains very hard."

"Presently," returned Elmsley, waving his hand, and the groom vanished.

What could the fellow mean? was he drunk, were his words but random threats, or was the end in truth coming? Elmsley rose and paced the room with uneven steps—despite of his self-assurance that Hackley's menaces were only the chance words of an angry and injured man, yet his mood to-night was such that they struck home and deep through every shield. His

threats were so awfully ominous! He could not, it was utterly, totally impossible that he *could* know anything of the one great crime; yet, had he known of it, his words must have been the same, if vengeance had at last really awoke, as those he now uttered. Curse the rain! what a night to travel down those steep roads, with the lightning growing fiercer, and the thunder growling louder every moment! He would stay at Knollington all night. Chapman was waiting for him at Royal Lodge, it was true, but let him wait,—the sly, cowardly, slinking instrument, which had now been used almost enough.

Ah! what was that? A horseman; and galloping madly through the uneven street of Knollington on this night:—he stops at the Lamb, too; some benighted traveller of course. A man sprang from horseback into the hall of the inn, a few hurried words were heard, and then, streaming with rain, and with wild and haggard face, William Taylor, the clerk to Mr. Chapman, stood before him.

"Why, William!" exclaimed Mr. Elmsley,

completely astounded at his unexpected appearance, "what can have brought you here through such a storm? Is anything wrong at home?"

"Yes, sir, every thing is wrong," said the clerk, "and I dare not lose time in breaking the matter to you;—have you any reason to dread the disclosure of any transaction in common with Mr. Chapman?"

Elmsley did not speak, but his sudden pallor, and his nervous clutch at the nearest chair for support, said enough.

"If so," continued the clerk, "you had better get a good horse from here, and ride to Bristol to-night."

"Bristol!" vacantly repeated Elmsley.

"Ay, sir," returned the clerk, "and get away in the first sailing ship, no matter where bound."

"Why—why, what is wrong?" at last the elder gentleman found nerve enough to say, "speak clearly, William."

"Well, sir, I must then," returned Taylor.

"A party of officers are at Royal Lodge, who have seized Chapman, on a charge of destroying a will, or of conspiracy for that purpose; he is quite overcome, and is plainly guilty, that *I* can see. You are also sought, and some of the officers will be here immediately."

"Can't I have your horse?" demanded Elmsley, whose face was wild from surprise and terror; he dreamt not for an instant of asserting his innocence, or assuming a swagger; "and I have very little money, William."

"My horse is lame; I don't believe he will ever be worth a shilling," replied the clerk; "I have ridden him so fast up the hills. As for money, you must manage as well as you can, until you can let me know, safely, where you are; but if you do not wish to stay and face them, sir, be away at once, for Heaven's sake!"

"No! no!" exclaimed the other, "I think it would be best to avoid them at present, because —but who has led them on? who gives them this information?"

"A man named Parsons is with them," re-

turned Taylor; "from something I heard let fall, I believe he was once a clerk of Chapman's, and is now the informer."

"*He* with them! Oh, then all must be lost! This man was supposed to be dead; I know not, William, how he could have learnt anything, but if he have come back—"

"You are losing most valuable time," interrupted the clerk. "I feel sure they mean to come over here, and if so, I can't be very much ahead of them."

Elmsley needed no further urging, but controlling his agitation as well as he could, ordered a saddle horse from the Lamb stables, with the promise of an extra shilling to the ostler if it were ready directly. Such an order produced the greatest astonishment in the Lamb, for the storm was raging fiercely without, and his own carriage and pair standing in the archway for shelter, were awaiting his pleasure. Still, he was Mr. Elmsley, a man of known wealth and respectability, and must therefore be accommodated; so in a very brief time a horse was

saddled, and in readiness at the side door of the inn, under the aforesaid archway.

During the brief interval of its preparation Mr. Elmsley had been in close conversation with the clerk, and all the bar loungers noted how pale and changed he was; among these observers was Nat Hackley, who was waiting the sallying forth of the mail cart, the driver whereof had promised him a ride. Nat of course had had his share of wonder, while stealthily glancing at the face so suddenly grown pale and wild, and put the change down, as did all the others, to some bad news brought him by Mr. Chapman's clerk; they little knew how very true their conjectures were.

No time was lost, Mr. Elmsley mounted, his waterproof coat was taken from the carriage, the horse was led into the street. Taylor remained under the archway, watching his anxious and hurried movements, and as he did so, muttered to himself:

"I knew it was true; I felt it. What did he stay in England for, at such a risk?"

The rider hastily adjusted his coat, waved his hand in token of farewell, then striking his heels into the animal's side, William Elmsley trotted swiftly away, down the dark road in a direction contrary to that which all who saw him depart (save one), expected he would take; and never again did he ride through Knollington. Nor did any man ever see him again, alive.

He left the village by a road which, winding its way among the hills, and over wide downs, was easily lost, especially by a man so imperfectly acquainted with the country as was he. The drenching rain fell heavily and fiercely; his horse was timid, and the peals of thunder rattling close and frequent, startled it; whilst the intense darkness of the night was changed every other minute by a blazing flash of lightning, which for a moment lit up the country around with a flood of ghastly blue light, dazzling to look upon, and painful for the suddenness and briefness of the illumination, which mocked the strained eye in its endeavour to take in the features of the scene.

And so, in doubt and fear, and in darkness; mid the bellowing thunder, and the cascades of rain, and the fierce lightning, which seemed to *hiss*, William Elmsley fled from the avenger. But he was riding to his doom, and he met it. The shaft was already launched, and it struck home. How he fared, how he went astray, no tongue shall ever tell; whether he was thrown from his terrified steed, or whether he had of his own will, in the frenzied despair of his guilty mind, wrought justice, or at least retribution on himself, none may ever say; although with a man of his temperament the last supposition is not a very probable one; however it was, when the morning came, and the storm was gone, and the sun shone out, some labourers, taking their lonely way to a distant sheep-fold, saw a horse grazing quietly among the furze. It was saddled, but no one was near, so, their curiosity being excited, they left their path and went up to the animal. It was grazing, as just said, quietly; they looked around for some tokens of an owner or rider, but in vain.

Where they stood they could see for many miles around, the view being unobstructed by more than the low furze bushes which prevail there, yet no one was to be seen. The men then commenced a search around the spot, and ere long the mystery was solved.

In a small, but deep and lucid pond, close by, so small that a child might toss a pebble across its widest diameter, and so clear that the weeds at the bottom could be distinctly seen, they found the body of a man. The majority of the discoverers were for leaving it untouched till they could send a constable from the nearest village, who would see that all was prepared for the crowner's 'quest; many rustics having a vague fear of the consequences of meddling with a dead body. But some bolder spirit among them overruled this counsel, and by the aid of a long stick, the corpse was drawn to the bank, and lifted out upon the turf.

The first glance convinced even the dull men who looked upon it, that no violence had brought the man to his end, for no bruise or wound was

upon the head, and the heavy guard, the jewelled pin, the massive rings were untouched; while a closer inspection enabled one of the number to recognize, even through the altered expression of death, that William Elmsley, of Royal Lodge, lay cold and lifeless before them.

So one of the party ran off to the nearest village for assistance, while the remainder watched by the corpse; assistance soon came, and in a farmer's cart, laid with some attempt at decency and care, upon some clean straw, was the lifeless body of the influential magistrate jolted to Knollington.

It was still early in the morning, and although in that neighbourhood all the natives had been up for hours, yet three visitors to the Lamb, who had been detained there by the storm of the previous night, had not finished the early breakfast which they had ordered preparatory to their return to Chalkingdon Road. The reader knows who these were, and while the meal was being despatched, earnest, and, as far as the officers

were concerned, angry discussion took place, regarding the best course to be pursued in following the fugitive.

But ere anything had been settled, and while the professionals were in the heat of their argument, there came through the open window the rumble of a heavy cart approaching slowly; and then several men were seen to run in the direction of the noise. Then the vehicle stopped at the Lamb, and a large cluster of persons speedily formed round it, and from whom proceeded many ejaculations of horror.

Smith and his companions naturally rose and went to the window, which was sufficiently elevated to enable them to look over the heads of the crowd, and there lay, just beneath them, the object of their search. His wet hair, his soaked garments, no longer in trim and neat order, but clinging to his motionless figure, told at once how he had come to his end.

Smith recoiled at the shocking spectacle, and involuntarily clasped his hands upon his eyes;

but recovering himself, he left the room, and making his way through the throng, just as the men were lifting the corpse from its rude bier, he soon learnt what little there was to be told.

CHAPTER IX.

THE storm had cleared up, as the reader knows, and at Royal Lodge, as upon the Wiltshire hills, the air was fresh, and pure, and cheering; and in the sitting room which has seen so many changes since we first looked into it, which has seen feasting and mourning, triumph and sorrow, with the rise and fall of several domestic dynasties; in this apartment sat Mr. Sharpe, the lawyer, who was evidently enjoying himself over his breakfast.

From the window which looked upon the

garden, Harley and Parsons could be seen walking to and fro in earnest converse; a slighter, hastier meal,than suited the lawyer had sufficed them; *his* experienced nerves were not easily shaken, and their apology for leaving him to finish his repast alone, had been graciously accepted. So Mr. Sharpe sat there alone, and sipped his tea, or read his book at leisure.

Zaccheus Chapman had long ago set out under the escort of the remaining officer, for Abingdon Gaol, where he was, there was no reason to doubt, safely lodged at this moment. The lawyer, the London practitioner of course is meant, glanced ever and anon at his watch, as though his thoughts recurred to Smith and his expedition, but he evinced no impatience, nor did his anxiety, if anxiety indeed he felt, in the slightest degree interfere with his meal.

But his meal was interfered with, despite his calmness, for on looking up at the sound of hoofs, he saw a horseman ride past on the high road, and as the outer bell rang directly afterwards, he naturally supposed, especially as the rapid

trot was no longer heard, that it was the horseman who rang.

His doubts, if any, were soon resolved, for a loud voice was heard to exclaim in the hall:

"No, Betsy, no thank you. I can announce myself, thank God!"

After this ejaculation of thanksgiving, the speaker threw the door open, and to Mr. Sharpe there entered, with pompous stride, and authoritative air, a stout, red-faced, angry-looking gentleman.

"Ho! good morning, sir!" exclaimed this gentleman, seating himself at once, "may I have the pleasure of asking your name, what you want here, and what the devil is the meaning of all these cock and bull stories which are flying about?"

"I shall be happy to satisfy you as far as I can, sir," returned the lawyer with his blandest smile; "but first allow me to have the honour of enquiring *your* name, what *you* want here, and what particular cock and bull stories you refer to?"

"Aha!" exclaimed the stranger, "you want my name, do you? Well, you shall have it, sir."

Here he gave an emphatic rap upon the floor with a stout cane he carried.

"My name, sir, is Harper, sir, Major Harper, of Crossbelts, sir, and damme what do you think of that, sir?"

"My name sir, is Sharpe," retorted the lawyer, "and I will further inform you that I am a solicitor, and that my business here is of the greatest importance. As to what I think of your name, I can't say that I have as yet formed any decided opinion: with yourself, you will pardon me for observing, I am not impressed favourably."

The cool air and bearing of the solicitor had its effect upon his visitor, in whose face, ill disguised by an assumption of anger and incredulity, was plainly enough to be seen anxiety and nervousness.

"Well, well, Mr. Sharpe," he returned, "I must beg your pardon if my roughness has offended you, but I have come over here in con-

sequence of an extraordinary report which has this morning reached me."

He paused; Mr. Sharpe merely nodded, so the Major went on again.

"Mr. Grawler, a decent sort of person, who keeps the Elmsley Arms just by; you may know him? you don't; well that is not of much consequence,—but he took the trouble to ride over to Crossbelts this morning, to tell me that he had heard, on very good authority, that Mr. Chapman, attorney, of Chalkingdon, was in prison, or on his road thither, on a very serious charge; and that my son-in-law, sir, Mr. William Elmsley, the owner of this property, sir, and a magistrate for this county, sir, was a fugitive from justice, being involved in the same accusation."

"Your informant was perfectly correct, sir," returned Mr. Sharpe, "whatever was his authority; excepting where he speaks of Mr. Elmsley—"

"Ah! I knew it!" exclaimed the Major, with another bang of the stick, "I knew it; excepting

the part which speaks of William Elmsley, as flying from justice."

"You are wrong, sir," quietly continued the solicitor, "except where he speaks, I was about to say, of Mr. Elmsley, as the proprietor of this estate. It was only by the grossest villany that he obtained possession of the property; his fraud is now exposed, and if he can be seized, a heavy punishment awaits him."

"Well, but, my dear sir, how is this? I beg your pardon for interfering with your breakfast," apologized the Major, who was changing rapidly, "but I am very much concerned in this matter. My daughter is married to the gentleman in question, and anything like heat or abruptness on my part must be put down to my natural anxiety. How was all this fraud and so forth committed?"

"No apology whatever is needed, sir," returned the lawyer, "and so far as is consistent with due discretion, I have no objection to let you know the charge brought against Mr. Elmsley."

Then, to the Major's increasing horror, Sharpe related the history known to the reader; all his hearer's violence and loudness disappeared during the recital. His pride broke down when he thought of the degradation of being allied to such a man; and to do him justice, the old gentleman thought still more of his daughter's wrecked happiness, till at last he fairly sobbed aloud.

Sharpe said what he could to soothe the natural grief which thus broke forth, but his visitor was not to be comforted; however, after giving vent to his tears for a few minutes, he rose, made an apology once more for the trouble he had given, and for his rudeness; the solicitor felt truly sorry for the rough and bluff old soldier, in whose throat the words seemed to stick, almost to choking. He did not know what to say himself, that could be consoling, but, nevertheless, rose, and offered his hand, which the Major took, in token of sympathy and amity. At this moment he saw Parsons and Harley start suddenly from the farther end of the garden, and

run towards the front gate—that, of course, which opened on the high road.

In answer to an expression of regret which Mr. Sharpe uttered, at being involved in so unpleasant a task, and his sorrow at being forced to wound a lady's happiness, through another, and so forth, Harper replied,

"No apologies, Mr. Sharpe, are necessary: you are doing your duty, and if the man you are in search of, is the man you describe him, you are but doing a public service in marking him down. I am sure you are a gentleman, although I fear, from my uncouth behaviour at first, you cannot feel at all certain that I am one; still, if you should ever come near Crossbelts—"

He was here interrupted by a sudden rush of feet in the lobby, and by the hasty throwing open of the door—Harley and Parsons, with agitation and alarm in their faces, were there, and behind them a couple of men, strangers both to the Major and Mr. Sharpe.

"Oh! sir," exclaimed Fred, addressing the latter, "a most tragical and dreadful end is put

to our labours—these men have ridden over from Knollington with the tidings that—"

"Stay!" cried the lawyer, "if you have any news of importance, give it to me privately. This," he continued, with a meaning look at Fred, "is Major Harper, of Crossbelts, father-in-law to Mr. William Elmsley, a connection of which you are probably aware."

"I had heard that it was so," said Fred, with a bow, "although I did not know Mr. Harper. Will you be kind enough then, Mr. Sharpe, to see the men as soon as possible, for their news is of importance?"

"If you would allow me to speak," said the Major, "I would request that these messengers be desired to give their tidings at once. I can see that something has happened, and whatever it may be, you cannot hope to keep me long in ignorance. I assure you, Mr. Sharpe, that I shall feel callous, now that the first shock is passed, to any fresh trouble."

Sharpe accordingly signified to Fred that he might speak, and the young man resumed:

"The express sent last night from Knollington informed us, you know, sir, that Mr. Elmsley had escaped, and that the search for him was to re-commence this morning. But before Mr. Smith or the officers could start, some labouring men crossing the Downs, a few miles from the village, found first the horse on which he had ridden off, and afterwards, in a pond close by—"

"A pond close by!" ejaculated the horror stricken Major; "but pray proceed, I beg, sir."

"In a pond close by," continued Fred, "they found the body of the unhappy man. He was quite dead, and had probably been so for some hours. He is now lying at Knollington. Mr. Smith will of course see that all necessary steps are taken."

"Is it supposed that he has committed suicide?" asked the lawyer of the two men, but receiving no answer to his enquiry beyond a bewildered stare, he repeated it, somewhat varied in form, "do people think he did it himself?"

"Zartainly he did," returned one of the men; "nobody wur out on the Downs zuch a noight as that but he, and the pond wurn't bigger nor this'm room."

"Well, go to the kitchen and get some breakfast," said Mr. Sharpe, and with a profound bow each, of the best Berkshire pattern, the men disappeared.

"I am very sorry," continued the lawyer, addressing Major Harper, "that you should have heard so shocking a piece of intelligence in so abrupt a manner; it is a truly dreadful business, still, as you must have heard it before long, it is perhaps as well that you have learnt it early, as you will be best able to break it to Mrs. Elmsley."

"And so this is your end, William Elmsley!" said the Major, not in reply to Mr. Sharpe, but speaking, with a straight, fixed gaze, which yet evidently saw nothing, "and so this is your end! Not two days ago you were looked up to by all, as the most rising, prosperous, and correct man of these parts; now you are forced to escape a

worse fate by self-murder, dying a hunted fugitive from the law; and I find I have given my daughter to a base and dishonourable schemer! Well, gentlemen," he continued, rousing himself and speaking in a higher key, "I am not about to inflict any of my bitter reflections upon you; yet you might pardon me even if I did, for I was the chief bringer about of my daughter's marriage with this man, and my thoughts at this moment are *very* bitter; but I repeat, I am not going to inflict them upon you. I thank you, sir, for your explanation, and for your bearing with the abruptness of a man at once alarmed and indignant. After this melancholy affair has subsided (if indeed it ever does subside), if you find yourself at any time in the neighbourhood of Crossbelts, come and see me. I will make you welcome."

The lawyer returned a suitable answer to this, and then, with a distant bow to Harley and Parsons, the gallant major, mustering all his dignity, marched from the room, and, mounting his horse, rode off to his seat, in as wretched

and downcast a mood—from dread of the task before him—as any man could well be.

How he executed the said task, we know not, but Mrs. Elmsley left the neighbourhood at once, as shortly after, did her father. As it is very unlikely that the course of this tale will bear us near them again, it may be advisable to say here, that Fred Harley, on obtaining a holiday next year, availed himself of the opportunity to see something of North Wales, and that while there he saw also Mrs. Elmsley. She was not travelling under that name, however, as she was upon a bridal tour with her second husband, who was, as Fred had an opportunity of noting, a tall, fine, slashing looking man—a soldier; and was, indeed, Captain Horace Adolphus Reginald D'Amboise, of the 8th Dragoon Guards. He seemed happy and absorbed in his wife's society, and she, on her part, seemed to have forgotten, in the handsome Dragoon, the remembrance of the solemnly respectable William Elmsley.

The rumours of these unusual and exciting events—it is not necessary, we hope, for us to

explain that we cannot possibly mean Mrs. Elmsley's re-marriage, as that event did not take place for twelve calendar months after the date of this chapter.—The rumours, we say, of these unusual and exciting events spread, in the ordinarily quiet district of Chalkingdon, with more speed than attaches to the usual and orthodox article of comparison—wildfire; and intense interest was taken in the matter by all who knew any of the parties concerned; and quite as much, or perhaps a little more, by those who did *not*.

That very day Sir Roger Hawberry drove over to Knollington in all due state, and waiting upon Mr. Smith, begged that gentleman to remember that if he, Sir Roger could be of any service to the cause of the Misses Elmsley, Mr. Smith might command him. He had heard of Mr. Smith, the courteous Sir Roger said, Lady Hawberry had heard of him, and it was a proud reflection to any Englishman who heard Mr. Smith's name, and knew of his magnanimous and honourable conduct, it was, he repeated, a

proud reflection to any Englishman, when he remembered that our commercial classes were capable of producing such a man, and he could not help hoping, many such men.

Smith, somewhat astounded by this unexpected speech, thanked the excellent baronet as best he could, and failed not to tell of the lively interest still taken by Mrs. Smith in all which concerned Sir Roger and his lady, and of the gratitude still felt for their unvarying kindness. So this was got over, but Smith found his post of *chargé d'affaires* at Knollington, no sinecure, for all day long he was besieged by shoals of the curious or the sympathising.

And wonderful it was, to see how many persons on the first rumour of this crash, found a dormant tenderness and respect for the two sisters waken into strong life, and were impelled to wait upon Smith or Hackley, or any known friend, with offers of service.

While the next few days teemed with excitement to our circle of friends, and incessant exertion and anxiety wore the more active members,

William Elmsley's body lay stark and cold in the quiet tavern at Knollington, the most cunning brain, the most deceitful tongue, the keenest, hardest eye of all among his fellows, stopped for ever. Soon came the inquest; in presence of the ominous and suspicious facts of the case, it seemed for sometime probable that he would be buried like a dog, as are those who deliberately murder themselves; but the coroner was a friend of Major Harper, and he addressed the jury so strongly on the great probability which existed of a stranger mistaking his way, and so riding into the pond, that the jury, after some little hesitation, returned a verdict of "Found drowned," and William Elmsley was suffered to lay in consecrated ground, and to his corpse was not denied the burial service.

Leaving Mr. Sharpe to act for him, Smith, as soon as he could be spared, as soon, that was, as the inquest had been held, and Chapman committed to take his trial at the next assizes, Smith, we say, ran up to London. He was accompanied by Harley, whose holiday had almost expired,

and who now began to complain that he had done nothing to amuse himself during its lapse; yet it is questionable if Fred ever found the time pass so quickly before.

On reaching his house at Bayswater, Smith was full of spirits, delighted with the success of their plans, full of exultation at his own share in them, and naturally somewhat excited at the prospect of an addition of some twenty thousand pounds to his fortune.

Hurried as the examination necessarily was, enough had already been learnt to prove that William Elmsley had died a richer man than his brother, and that by the real will, the property was to be divided equally between Julia and Agnes, save a legacy of five thousand pounds to William, who was also forgiven his debts.

But Smith was not received in exactly the manner he had expected; love and affection there was, of course in the greeting, but in place of joy and triumph, there were tears, and sobbing, and hysterics. For these poor girls could not calmly bear the restoration of their rights, and

having had for some days no company but their own, each had increased the nervousness of the other, and so, by the time that Smith returned, they had dwelt so much upon the changes they had undergone, and the dreadful events which had brought them about; had spoken so much of their poor dead father and mother, and had shuddered at the wretched end of their uncle, perishing solitary and despairing, in storm and darkness, on a lonely heath—that they had grown, as just said, to be sobbing, tearful, and hysterical.

This was infinitely to Smith's chagrin, for he had not been long enough in England to lose his keen enjoyment of its pleasures, and during his ride from Chalkingdon, he had determined to mark the next few days by a series of pleasant excursions to Richmond, Hampton Court, Windsor, and so forth, to which, as often as might be, Fred Harley was to come, and at which everything was to be, as that young man defined it, "clipping."

Now was this all demolished, and Smith found

he had more than enough to do, in soothing his two companions.

If there were trembling and weeping at Bayswater, assuredly Smith found no lack of exultation in Oxford Street, for his father, so to speak, was always over head and ears in this exciting business, and welcomed his son as a most energetic, clever, and successful diplomatist. It answered no purpose for James to explain that he was but an assistant in the scheme, that to Parsons chiefly, and Hackley and Harley next, was the chief merit, if any, due; this, we say, answered no purpose, for the elder Smith had opened his eyes with amazing wideness to the fact that his son had gained the sum of twenty thousand pounds at least, and he was now determined to shut them to everything which could detract from that son's merits.

In obedience to instructions received from Mr. Sharpe, Smith prepared the sisters for a journey, as it was desirable that they should be at hand when Chapman's trial came on, in case

they were wanted; although it seemed very unlikely that such would be the case. To make sure, however, it was decided that they should, without loss of time, go down to Abingdon. This was accordingly done, and at once, for the assizes were close at hand; and so, in a day or two after his arrival in London, James Smith once more journeyed into Berkshire; a little earlier, it is true, than he would perhaps have done, if all his pleasant schemes of holiday making had not been so decidedly crushed.

Lodgings were secured for the sisters a little way out of town, but even here their new friends and sympathisers followed, and Smith found all his tact necessary to prevent his wife and Julia from being subjected to constant intrusion, and at the same time to avoid offending the intruders.

CHAPTER X.

It was still charming harvest weather, glorious, blazing, tanning September, and the shorn fields, naked of all but the dried, withering stubble, showed for miles below Knollington, how favorable the season had been. We say below Knollington, and we mean it literally, for on the lofty ground which lay immediately around the village, but little grain was raised, nevertheless, the rich vale below told of a successful and abundant harvest.

From the window of her parlour at the back of the shop, which was at once the grocery depôt

and the Post Office, Mrs Linford (an acquaintance, though but a slight one of the reader's), could see a prospect sufficiently beautiful to arrest even the attention of a not over sentimental villager, to whom the sight was familiar to that degree which breeds indifference. Perhaps, however, it was not the prospect, but the fine breeze of the morning blowing in at the open window, which inspirited the buxom dame; or perhaps, again, it was not that, but the pleasure at having got her room so nice and tidy so early in the day, which pleased her; or perhaps, once more, it was merely her natural good temper and cheerfulness, of which indeed she had plenty, which stimulated her to sing all her blithest songs as she knitted or darned in the parlour aforesaid, and by the window also aforesaid. Because, you must understand, they had a better way of conducting business in Knollington than they have in London, or such places; there was nothing to harass or worry you in a Knollington business, nothing to pinch, irritate and shorten life; but on the contrary, everything which could

conduce to a state of mind favourable to the preservation of health, and the attaining of a good old age.

For instance, Mrs. Linford had no occasion to stand all the weary day behind the little counter in the dusky shop—dusky with the multitudes of useful articles dependent from the roof, or stowed in the not over large window—for those who did not purchase of her, could go nowhere else within some miles. Then the customers came at tolerably lengthy intervals, and did not mind waiting a couple of minutes before any one came, and so on; therefore Mrs. Linford was completely justified in shutting herself in her little parlour, although it was prime of morning, and in singing blithely.

Engrossed, however, as she seemed in her work, and merrily as she sang, she was nevertheless sufficiently on the alert to hear a step cross her threshold, and she disengaged her work at once in order to be in readiness for the expected customer.

In lieu, however, of the customary number of

paces across the little shop to the counter, her ear was somewhat startled to find that a man's tread was advancing to her parlour door, and looking up she saw the unwelcome visage of her persevering, but little encouraged suitor. We mean, of course, Thomas Bowles, bailiff, or whatever else he chose to call himself, to Mr. Fielding.

"Drat the man, what can he want to-day?" was her mental ejaculation.

Time for further reflection she had not, for, with a single tap at the door, the visitor opened it and entered, although the usual invitation had not been given.

"Marnin', Mrs. Linford, glad to zee'ee lookin' zo well," said Mr. Bowles.

"I be pretty well, hope you be the same," was the orthodox reply.

Mr. Bowles paused, coughed, looked for a few moments from the window, and turned his hat uneasily in his hand, as if he found some difficulty in opening the conversation. At last, however, he began:

"Well, neighbour," he said, "hav'ee thought any more about they matters I wur a neaming a day or two agwo?"

"Yes," returned Mrs. Linford.

"Well, now," pursued Bowles, "I hope thee have a made up thee mind to agree wi' I."

"No, Measter Bowles," said the lady very composedly, "I haven't, no, nor a shouldn't if there wurn't another man in Berkshire. I likes to be civil to volks, as mean to be civil to I; but I really do tell'ee that I don't like thee nor thee ways at all, and I do hope thee won't come in here again without being asked."

"Well, Missus Linford, I be zorry to hear this, but thee shall vind I can take 'noa' vor a answer as well as any one," replied Bowles, who had, it was not difficult to divine, made an offer of marriage to the buxom keeper of the post office; his rejection will of course cause no great surprise to the reader, who knows Mrs. Linford's sentiments, "but us may be vriends, Missus Linford, zurely, and zurely there bean't no harm in dropping in to have a chat wi' a neighbour."

"Perhaps there mayn't be no harm," retorted his companion, "but I don't like it, Measter Bowles, and as after all thee won't take 'no' for a answer, for all thee says so, I tell'ee I don't like thee neither."

"That's plean speaking, Missus Linford," said Bowles, writhing under this thrust, which went home beyond all doubt, "and I zhall mind as I doan't darken thy doors again zoon; but we'll part vriends any how. How be our old acquaintance, Nat Hackley?"

Anxious, perhaps, to mollify the effect in some degree of her very plain speaking, and easily drawn out also upon such a subject, Mrs. Linford spoke more affably and freely to the steward in answer to this inquiry. She told when she had last seen Nat, of how well he was looking, how well was Mrs. Hackley also, and Miss Hackley, the baby, in praise of, and in honour of whom, there ensued a long digression, including a description of the measles, a disorder from which she had but just recovered. To all this Bowles listened with a gravity and attention

which bespoke him as possessing either great fondness for children, so great indeed as to interest him in the tedious list of symptoms attending their disorders, or it showed that he had some further object in view in thus patiently sitting out his companion's verbosity. This section finished, Mrs. Linford went on, with very little prompting from Bowles (there *was* a very little, however,) to tell how much everybody thought of Nat now, how he was at Abingdon with Mr. Smith, and from this of course the transition was not only natural, but almost unavoidable, to Mrs. Smith, and to Miss Elmsley.

Here, however, the good lady displayed somewhat more prudence than her loquacity would have foreboded; she hesitated not to inveigh against Chapman, or to give a general and sweeping condemnation of all who had practised in any manner against the welfare and happiness of the two sisters; but she was very guarded in her allusions to Mr. Fielding, nor could the hints and feelers thrown out by Bowles

elicit anything important. The good lady saw, it is more than likely, with a woman's quickness, that when she ventured upon an allusion to Mr. Edgar, she touched the only subject upon which her hearer really cared to listen; and so, without knowing what, or if any, danger existed, she determined to keep a safe course by baulking his curiosity entirely. Once only did she hazard anything like a remark hostile to Mr. Edgar, and that arose from a better aimed shaft of Mr. Bowles; he had expressed a hope that they should see Mr. Smith and Nat, at least, at his young master's wedding. All the woman blazed up in Mrs. Linford at this, and for the moment irresistibly; she said she hoped they would see at least *them;* her Nat had told her as much as to say it was likely they would be there, and good might it do Mr. Edgar if they was, that was all. Bowles seemed a good deal roused by this sentence, and pressed anxiously for an explanation, but in vain; Mrs. Linford could not be led to commit herself, and was so plainly immovable on that point, and was so very forcible

in her hints to the steward to go, that he had at last no other resource but to depart with what he had got.

He took his leave with great apparent warmth, although on Mrs. Linford's side there was nothing to encourage such a display of feeling, and then, in deep thought, walked straight away to Fielding House, which, as the reader will probably remember, stood a mile or two from Knollington. There the steward enquired for his young master, but found that about five minutes before he had ridden out; he had enquired, so the men said, for Bowles, and had waited as long as he could, to see him; he had left word that Measter Thomas was sure to be in the way when he came back that afternoon. Bowles expressed his intention of complying with this request, but added, mentally, that his master was a headstrong young fool for not waiting to see *him*.

The handsome cavalier who had ridden the winner of the Chalkingdon Gold Cup—by the bye, it would be as well to explain that this was a mere "façon de parler," that the cup was in

reality only silver gilt, else for the sum of twenty pounds or so it must have been an egg cup—was on his steed again. He was riding leisurely along the high road, for the day was hot, and he was anxious to spare his horse—not, of course, the steed which had borne him in triumph at the races. Ahead, a couple of miles away perhaps, but very conspicuous from its size and position, stood a handsome house, within its own grounds; and Edgar once or twice fancied he could distinguish the white dresses of ladies appearing and vanishing in the shrubberies. As he neared the mansion he rose several times in his stirrups as though to ascertain; then, as if he had at last convinced himself that it was so, he put spurs to his horse, and with a brighter face trotted briskly towards the scattered village near which the building stood.

This was the residence of Squire Le Guernsey, and Edgar entertained no doubt that one of the ladies whom he could see walking in the grounds was his affianced bride. To her of course was his visit chiefly directed, for he was a daily

visitor at the "Elms," as how indeed could it be otherwise, when the wedding day was fixed, and was now drawing very near?

We have said above, that Edgar's face brightened; this expression will imply that previously his face was not wearing its most cheerful mood. It was even so. He had waited at home for the return of his steward until the last possible moment, and either the disappointment of not seeing that functionary, or some cause not so easily divined, had clouded his brow, and given to his features an air of vexation and sullenness.

Now, however, the clouds vanished, with a smile upon his lips, and with the confident bearing of an accepted suitor, he trotted gaily to the lodge gates, which being instantly opened, he was at the "Elms" in a few seconds, and throwing his bridle to a servant, had hurried blithely into the house.

He had merely meant to pass through, giving a glance into her favourite room, to make sure that Augusta Le Guernsey was not within the

house, he had then intended to seek her where he imagined he had seen and recognised her dress. To his inward annoyance, however, although of course no outward sign of vexation was allowed to escape, he met, in the hall, the lady's father, a man not liked by Edgar, but rather dreaded, from his serious manner, and his reputation for rigid morality. Assuming, however, the utmost cordiality Edgar seized Mr. Le Guernsey's hand, and shook it heartily, expressing meanwhile his hope that he had quite recovered from the slight attack of rheumatism under which that gentleman was labouring a day or two past. The hand was withdrawn without an answering shake, and to the kind inquiry no direct answer was given; this struck Edgar as being a cold reception, colder than even the squire had been ever wont to give, still he was so very grave a man, that nothing very ominous could be augured from his present repulsive mood.

"I was seeking Augusta," began Edgar, "I presume she is in the shubbery."

"She is," answered the old gentleman, "but, Mr. Fielding," he added, as Edgar was about to hurry off, "before you join my daughter I wish to have a short conversation with you."

"Indeed! sir!" exclaimed Fielding, "I am at your service then—I shall be most happy I am sure."

"I am not so sure," returned the other, "but step into this room. Now we can speak freely. I have been waiting at home this morning on purpose to see you, Mr. Fielding, judging it likely that you would visit the 'Elms,' as usual."

"Indeed, sir," returned the young man, who knew not, in good truth, what to say.

"I am a man of very little compliment," resumed Mr. Le Guernsey, "and not fond of idle preface. I come at once then to the subject I have in my mind. It is necessary that you should be informed, Mr. Fielding, if you do not already know, that rumours of a shocking and condemnatory character are afloat regarding you. They relate to a young person whose unfortu-

nate and startling history, is but too familiar to us—I mean Miss Julia Elmsley."

With a sudden gasp, Edgar rose from his chair, but recollecting himself, sat down again, and as calmly as might be, said:—

"Well, sir?"

"Need I say any more?" asked his companion, "if so I will at once. You are accused of the basest, cruelest, most mercenary conduct that can well be laid to the charge of a young man. Do you deny having been on terms of intimacy with this poor young lady, during her stay in London?"

"Let me know the name of the false scoundrel who has been traducing me!" cried Edgar, furiously, "give me your authority, sir, and if a man, he shall not sleep to night with unscored shoulders."

"As to the channel from whence I derived my information," began the elder gentleman, "it cannot concern—"

"But it does concern me," interrupted Edgar, "vitally concerns me. For all I know, you may

have been influenced by some anonymous liar, or some one who has private malice to slake, and so gratifies it. I am surprised, Mr. Le Guernsey, that you should stoop to heed the forgeries of spies and liars—give me my enemy's name!"

"In this request you will not at present be gratified," returned Mr. Le Guernsey, "nor do I see that the name of the accuser is of so much consequence as the truth of the accusation. Refute that, and you refute him—admit that, and all your violence as regards him will not avail you."

"Let the scoundrel who has defamed me support his assertions," retorted Edgar, "the proof rests with *him*. Such assertions can be made of any man, sir, but against me they strike harmlessly, I can afford to despise all such petty scandal."

"But," urged his companion, "this is not petty scandal, Mr. Fielding; at least, in whatever light you may regard it, I look upon it as serious enough, if true, to banish all idea of an alliance between our families."

"But how am I to disprove it," cried Edgar, mastering by a great effort the rage which was boiling within him, for he felt how critical was the moment, that his success and prosperity for life hung upon the next few minutes, and that a single false step might ruin him, "how can I disprove that which has no settled form? what can I do against stabbers in the dark, and spies, and liars?"

"Your course shall be pointed out to you, and 'tis a very plain one," said the other; "all the proof I ask is, that you will consent to my having an interview with Mr. Smith, of whom we have heard a great deal lately."

"Mr. Smith!" exclaimed Fielding, to whom the name was the most unwelcome sound just then, that lips could utter, "what has he to do with my affairs?"

"He is the husband of Miss Elmsley's sister, and their only male friend," replied the elder gentleman, gravely, "it would be easy enough, of course, for me to see him, were I so disposed, for he is at Abingdon, with the ladies in ques-

tion, and is, I hear, very likely to show you how far he takes an interest in your affairs. Briefly, however, will you procure an interview between Mr. Smith and myself, at which you shall be present?"

"No," was the flat reply.

"I am to take that as my answer?" said Mr. Le Guernsey.

"You are."

"Then take this as mine," coldly continued the elder gentleman; "I was certain, before I spoke to you, of the truth of my information, but you would amply have confirmed it, had there been room for doubt;—my daughter does not wed a profligate."

"Sir!" cried Fielding.

"Your horse is at the door, Mr. Fielding, we need not prolong this," said Mr. Le Guernsey, "my daughter will never wed a profligate; she will never marry you. Good morning, sir."

Foaming with rage, bursting with passion for which in his confusion he could find no words suffi-

ciently bitter to express himself, Edgar paused for a moment, as though a thought of striking his tormentor had crossed his mind, then, with a curse linked to some coarse, contemptuous words, he flung from the house, sprang upon his horse, and driving his spurs deep into the animal's flanks, was soon riding furiously along the high road.

He reached his home in safety, though he saw but little of the objects around him in his journey; his horse stopping of its own accord at the familiar door, told that he had reached the house, otherwise he knew not where he was. Giving the bridle to a man who saw that in his face which caused him to report to the household that "Master Edgar had come home in a terrible taking,"—he went straight to that part of the building where Thomas Bowles was generally to be found.

As stated a few pages back, Edgar had left word for this man to await his return, but now he was nowhere to be seen. This incensed his

master, but a man explained that Bowles had spoken of his intention to be at home at the hour when Mr. Edgar usually returned; to-day he was of course very much earlier than was customary.

Edgar was anxious to learn, and Bowles was the person most likely to inform him, what report said of his intimacy with Julia Elmsley; this anxiety had been felt prior to his visit to the "Elms," but *that* had of course increased it to a painful degree. It was in pursuance of directions from him that Bowles had waited upon Mrs. Linford, for they rightly judged that from her intimacy with Hackley, she would hear all the news which fed the popular rumour.

Edgar was anxious also to find out if it were really true that Julia was at Abingdon. He did not wonder at Smith being there, the trial of Chapman was sufficient to account for *that*; but what did the starched old fool mean by telling him that Smith would soon take an interest in his—Edgar's—affairs? Confound him, and all the crew! If he dared to meddle with his plans

he would soon teach him better by horsewhipping him in broad daylight.

But then, there was Miss Le Guernsey. Was she really lost? There was no doubt but that she was, so far as depended upon the sour old Puritan, her father, but many a time before, daughters had been yielding, when father's were stern; could he gain speech with Augusta for only a few minutes, it should go hard indeed if means could not be found to baulk the old curmudgeon. And at this thought Edgar laughed aloud; he had been at home now for nearly two hours, brooding upon his insults and wrongs, and had sunk into a mood of despondency and irritation mingled, but when this thought flashed upon him, he brightened up, and laughed aloud.

It was such a fine idea! there would be such a grand, triple revenge in it! It would be a thousand times better than a straightforward humdrum marriage; to fly with Augusta to Scotland; marry her at Gretna; confound and exasperate her father and Smith, and all the canters—ha! ha! ha!

The room was still ringing with his laugh, when the door was flung open sharply, and his father presented himself.

"Well, sir," exclaimed the elder Fielding, "I hear you are merry. It is well that you can be so."

"Why should I not be so, father?" asked his son.

"Only that most young men, on ruining their prospects in life, especially when those prospects are of the fairest, would sober down a little, that is all," said Mr. Fielding.

"Curse it! he has heard of it," was Edgar's mental exclamation; then he added aloud, "what do you mean, sir?"

"Don't trifle like this," retorted his father, angrily. "I have just come from Mr. Le Guernsey's;—why do you start, if you are so innocent as to be obliged to inquire what I mean? You are shut out for ever from there, the young lady being rather more incensed against you than is even her father."

"Aye, her father tells you so, no doubt," said the young man.

"*She* tells me so," replied Mr. Fielding, "I have seen her. There is no passion, or hysterics about her, but a cold, disdainful contempt, which you will find some difficulty in overcoming. Why should you follow up that poor girl Julia Elmsley, and why—?"

"Let her go!" interrupted his son; "let her go! there are prettier and richer girls in Berkshire than Augusta Le Guernsey."

"Possibly," said his father, "though I must confess that I don't know of many such; with this public and notorious scandal, too, hanging over you, you will find your admission to the houses of these same girls not so easy as heretofore."

"If Le Guernsey were not an old man, I would horsewhip him," exclaimed Edgar, passionately; "and as it is, he had best hold his tongue on my affairs."

"*He!*" cried his father; "it does not matter much now what he says; but do you know that your former acquaintance, that grocer of London —Smith—is at Abingdon?"

"Yes—what then?" added the young man.

"Only this," replied his father, "that he came down here earlier than Chapman's trial required in the belief that you were about to be married, in which case he was prepared to interrupt the ceremony."

The old gentleman paused; his son made no remark, but remained looking sullenly upon the floor, and drawing figures thereon with his riding-whip.

"He, now, is a great deal more likely than Mr. Le Guernsey to say something more about you; altogether you have made a very fine thing of it," continued his father; "had you been constant to Miss Elmsley, twenty thousand pounds would now fall into your hands, while if you had left her alone entirely—"

"Never mind any more possibilities or probabilities," exclaimed his son. "I have had already more than enough. Some one shall smart for all this, I warrant."

Then, cutting short the interview, he rose abruptly, and left the room. He had been

wrought up by the events of the day, and the reproaches of his father, to something like ferocity, for everything conspired now to exasperate him.

The only woman he had ever truly cared for was Julia Elmsley, but his interest, so he had imagined, had prevented him from marrying her, for a more selfish young man than the handsome Edgar Fielding was not easily to be met with; and now it was maddening to reflect that he had lost a handsome fortune and the love of the only woman who had power really to interest his feelings.

Then Miss Le Guernsey was lost; he was afraid there was no room for doubt or hope on that score; not only too was she lost, but he had been dismissed with contempt and insult. There was moreover a hidden, but terribly powerful agent, at work in his mind to increase the bitterness of his feelings. Her money had been anxiously counted upon, not only by himself but by a shoal of eager creditors, for Edgar had never been very discreet in his expenditure, and

on the strength of this addition to his wealth, had of late been more lavish than usual;—"more lavish than usual," however, is not the way to state that the young man had grown a confirmed and reckless gambler and debauchée, that he was unlucky in his speculations, and consequently more ardent in them; and that he was over head and ears in debt, overwhelmed with debt, and now desperate with debt.

A large sum of money had been left to him by his aunts, it is true; but, although he had always reckoned otherwise, he was not to receive it until after his father's death, which might be, from the stalwart form and robust health of the elder Fielding, many years distant yet. He was distracted at the evident impossibility of staving off his countless creditors now that his prospects were changed so much for the worse; he knew that with the first rumour of this crash, a locust-like swarm of pressing, clamorous duns would beset him, and what to do with them he knew not.

In this mood he met his confidant, Bowles, and of him he demanded what he had learnt of Smith's

movements, and how his (Edgar's) treatment of Miss Elmsley had become so generally known. To these questions he obtained no very satisfactory answers; in addition to his visit to the Post Office, Bowles had been pushing enquiries in other quarters, but he could only tell what Edgar had heard before, that Smith had come down early in order to forbid Edgar's marriage, supposing it to be about to take place, and this not from any power he possessed of arresting the ceremony, but with the hope of disgusting the bride and her friends, and so causing a permanent breach between the parties.

Fielding ground his teeth at hearing this, but enquired if Bowles had been able to trace the report to any particular person;—well, yes, Mr. Bowles went on to say, he had: Nat Hackley, as used to keep the Railway Arms, had been in the village a good deal of late, and had been talking a good deal to Mrs. Linford, of the Post Office, and others as well, and he believed as how most of these things come from him.

While talking they had reached Bowles's room,

and the steward, producing a bottle of brandy, pressed his young master to have some, as he didn't look hearty at all. Edgar drank, and drank very freely, listening meanwhile to all the gossip upon the subject which the underling could rake up, or invent; for, seeing the mood his master was in, and how eager he was for all which could incense him still more against his fancied defamers, and add fuel to the fire which was raging within him, Bowles did not hesitate to forge any lie which seemed likely to be acceptable.

At last, with a sudden curse, with a brief, but tremendous explosion of anger which startled the parasite, Edgar leapt to his feet, and ordered his horse to be instantly brought out. Bowles performed this task himself, being glad to escape from the suddenly changed mood of his master; when he appeared with the animal, Edgar's violence was gone, and a sullen frown, which warned Bowles to beware of rousing him, was on his face. Edgar mounted, and was riding off, when the man cried:

"Here is your whip, sir," holding up at the same moment, the elegant silver-mounted whip which Edgar was wont to bear.

"I have a whip, you fool," was the retort.

And Bowles, as his master disappeared, saw that he carried a long, heavy, gutta-percha thong —half whip, half bludgeon, which had long lain unused in the harness room.

CHAPTER XI.

THE sun was sinking in the west as Edgar rode forth on his errand of vengeance. It was still light, gloriously, beautifully light, and the farther end of the rich vale, above and alongside which his road skirted, was a flood of gold, dazzling to look upon; nevertheless before him were gathering soft, dusky shades, which told that the brief twilight of September was at hand.

Nothing did this horseman heed of the twilight, of the sun's dying radiance, of the smiling country below, of anything but his own angry, boiling passions. He did not, could not possibly know,

that nothing was farther from Smith's intentions, or more abhorrent to his feelings—not to speak of Julia, whom such a course would have killed, than the plans, which had been attributed to him; or that all this gossip took its rise from some casual words dropped by Nat Hackley as to what he wished his London friend would do, and what he would do himself in like case.

All uttered by Bowles had been received as gospel by Fielding; for he felt a bitter, savage hatred of Smith, combined with a vague dread of what he might do, and so was prepared to credit any reported malice of the man whose feelings he judged by his own. Besides, the tale was corroborated and borne out in some of its most important particulars by his dismissal that day from the Le Guernseys: so it must be all true.

Excited then by passion of mingled character, and not slightly so by the strong liquor he had for half an hour been drinking, Edgar rode blindly and rapidly in the direction of Abingdon. For he had resolved on seeing Smith, on

extorting an explanation from him; what good he sought or expected from such a course he knew not, nor did he stay to consider; but he was bent upon knowing the worst, and how much he had to dread from the malice of his quondam friend. He could not live, as he owned to himself—he could not live if that artful, persevering fellow, was working against him in the dark, so that he should be only able to know that mischief was intended, and never be able to guess in what place, or hour, or manner, it would show itself. There might, he argued, be an action commencing against him at this moment, it was just the thing Smith would be guilty of; and he was just the fellow if once he began that, or any other business, never to drop or lose sight of it.

So on he rode, reasoning in this manner, to the best ability of his excited and confused faculties, and, as he scoured along almost at the top of his horse's speed, he was soon in Abingdon. Now then he was to find out Smith; no very difficult task, he knew, for no one could

hope to remain unnoticed in a country town where the staple amusement is minding your neighbour's business; and least of all such a party as were now collected under the care of James Smith.

It was pretty nearly dark by this time, and as Edgar reined in his horse a little way inside the town, a man emerged from the archway of a neighbouring inn with a candle in a glass lantern, which lantern he proceeded to hang upon one of the gates—this was to disfigure, or present gas, for gas itself was not come-atable in those parts at that time. Fielding recognised the man immediately as an ostler to whom he had often given a six-pence for attending to his horse on market days; so calling the man to him, he asked if he had seen such a person as Smith, describing him as well as he was able.

It happened, propitiously for Edgar's wishes, that this man was quite familiar with Smith's appearance and name, as it proved that this was the inn at which that individual occasionally took his glass of ale, when returning from a

stroll: the ostler described him as the rich Lunnoner who had married the rich young lady from Chalkingdon Road, and as had come down with a power of money, surely, to have that thief of a lawyer hung, and to right both the young ladies from Chalkingdon Road, with all they as had wronged 'em. Stopping his informant here, Edgar asked if he could tell him where he could find Smith now; the man said he could, almost; Smith was not now at home, he having just before passed the inn, in company with Master Hackley, he as used to keep the Railway Tap. They were walking from Smith's lodgings, so would certainly return that way, at least, so the man predicted. Stimulating the ostler to further loquacity by the gift of a shilling, Edgar asked if any other gentleman was of Smith's party; that is, was he likely to find any gentleman within, if he went to Smith's temporary residence? This he asked in consequence of a sudden impulse which prompted him to visit the young ladies, if they were alone—such a step seemed, even to his excited

mind, daring and insolent enough, but he would have risked it, although not seeing clearly what was to come of it: let him but get into Julia's presence, was his only approach to reflection on the subject—let him but get into Julia's presence, get to speak to her, and he would trust to his ready wit to turn the opportunity to some good end. But the ostler's answer was unfavourable.

"Whoy, 'ees," he said, "there wor the girt Lunnon lawyer there, he wor amost allus at whoam, zo Measter Fielding if thee wants to zee 'un, thee beest pratty zure to vind 'un."

Edgar, however, did not want to see *him;* of all persons in the world the one he would, perhaps, at that moment have least desired to see, was Julia's solicitor. So he thanked the man, who left him to go about his work, and sat on his horse outside the inn, debating where he should go, and what was best to be done.

The first fruit of his meditations was a resolve to have a good stiff glass of brandy and water, cold, for his ride and the excitement had

parched his throat, and though the night had now pretty well set in the air was too hot to be refreshing, so, still seated on his horse, as just said, he resolved to quench his thirst with cold brandy and water, and immediately made the attempt. Summoning the waiter by a shout, his want was soon supplied, and he drank a deep draught of the potent beverage. Several persons passed with whom he was acquainted, and in the recognition which he received from each there was, he fancied, a mixture of curiosity and avoidance, which was particularly disagreeable to him. He fancied too, that after passing him, most of those who knew him stopped at some little distance, and entered into whispered conversation with others, looking at him all the while.

Doubtless they were muttering, so his jealous and excited imagination would have it,—"There! that is Fielding, who has missed such a chance with Augusta Le Guernsey," "That is the man whom the Londoner has tripped up so cleverly," "Two fortunes missed by young Fielding, who sits there."

These were the sentences which he could almost hear his acquaintances exchange. Nevertheless, unpleasant as all this, or the imagining of all this, was to him, he resolved to show that he could not be affected by their consultations, or insulting stares, but would sip at his leisure his brandy and water, and, outside that inn, await the return of Smith.

He had not very long to wait; only just long enough to finish his liquor, for as he was handing the empty glass to a waiter, he saw, coming slowly towards him, two men. He saw them but for a moment, as they crossed the light which streamed from a shop window, but although they were lost immediately in the darkness, he had recognised them, and assuming unconsciously a sterner look, he drew himself up in his seat, and prepared for the interview. In a few seconds they were close to him, and engrossed in earnest conversation, would, probably, have passed without noticing him, but that Edgar, jerking his horse's head round so as to face them, cried out:—

"Smith! Halloa! Smith!"

The person hailed, turned with a start of surprise, which feeling was increased when he saw who, above all persons in the world, was so accosting him.

"Well, Mr. Smith," continued Edgar, "I want to have a few words with you."

"I think, Mr. Fielding," coolly replied the Londoner, "any message you may wish to forward to me, can be sent by another channel."

"Ah! I know what you mean!" exclaimed Edgar, "'go to your lawyer' you would say, 'employ your solicitor.' I know. This suits your snobbish, cold-blooded sort of feeling, but it don't suit me. Now, Mr. Smith, to be short with you, I want to know what business you have to meddle in my affairs?"

"I can't tell what meddling you allude to," returned Smith, "I shall be much obliged to you if you meddle as little with me, as I wish to do with you. I shall take my leave of you, Mr. Fielding."

So saying, Smith was about to pass on, but

Edgar dashed furiously at him, riding so close to him, that he and Hackley were forced to spring back to avoid injury. Fielding was now directly in their path, so that, without doubling and feinting, they could not pass; Smith, who had been willing enough to avoid a street broil, was by no means anxious to adopt this plan, especially as a few of the passers-by were now gathering to watch the group.

"If you won't stop and give me an explanation," said Fielding, "I'll follow you as long as you run, and horse whip you until you yelp like a cur."

"Will you?" suddenly exclaimed Hackley, "will you? Don't stop me for a moment, if you please, Mr. Smith—if it wasn't for the law, you upstart yokel, I'd have you off that horse, and in the dust here, before you could roar for help."

"Hold your tongue, fellow," retorted Fielding. "Now, Mr. Smith, I wish to know what you have been saying about me?"

"I have said nothing which could flatter you,

I am sure," returned Smith, "yet all the language I can master is not strong enough to describe your villanous, cowardly, mercenary conduct."

"Oh! Oh! it isn't, isn't it? Ha! ha! ha!" The laugh was very forced, however, which came from the young man. "I can settle with you for this at another time, just now I am not anxious to learn your private opinion of me; I want to know what reports you have been sneaking about the country with, and relating to all who would listen. What have you said of me to the Le Guernseys?"

"Le Guernsey!" exclaimed Smith, who knew nothing of the other's meaning.

"Ah! Le Guernsey!" repeated Fielding, "and no evasions, curse you—you see this whip, 'tis a gutta percha one, and I will cut it to shreds over you, if you don't confess. Now then! come!"

"Keep off, fool!" cried the Londoner, as Fielding again made a plunge at them, but the half-intoxicated young man was excited, by his

retreating a pace or two, to a fresh dash, and rising in his stirrups with a savage shout, struck a vicious blow with his weapon: it fell upon Smith's arm, which was literally cut to the bone, by the force of the stroke; another slash whistled through the air, but, ere Smith could make a movement in defence, Hackley leapt forward, caught Fielding's wrist, by one powerful wrench tore the whip from his grasp, and with the whole of his strength dealt a blow in return. The heavy whip struck, not the rider, but the horse, and the terrified beast smarting with agony, gave a convulsive spring, and Edgar Fielding was flung with frightful violence from his seat.

He fell with his face downwards, and in contact with the line of stones which bounded the footway, and there he lay, motionless.

Smith, Hackley, and five or six others who stood by, ran to lift him, and all for the moment thought him dead. But he still lived, for as they raised him, he groaned; he was, however, quite senseless, and his face, which had struck

upon some ragged flints, presented a hideous spectacle.

"He brought it upon himself; I saw it all," said a gentleman, one of those who had come foward on witnessing the accident; "I saw him strike you, Mr. Smith, and saw that your companion acted only in self-defence."

This was a very acceptable speech to the Londoner, for he recognized in the speaker a magistrate, and a man of great activity and local influence.

Without loss of time Edgar was carried as carefully as possible to the nearest surgeon's, and men were sent off to summon two or three other medical gentlemen of the town. These latter soon arrived, and aided in the examination, already begun, of Edgar's wounds. The blood was sponged from the mangled face, and it was immediately seen that the greatest injury was about the bridge of the nose, and on a level with it on either side; he must have been thrown, so the surgeon said, full upon the jagged curb, or, rather, line of flints, so that the upper part of

his face came with smashing violence upon it, and there rested, while the lower portion was uninjured. It was a horrible case, the chief surgeon continued; with care it was just possible he might recover, but his nearest friends would hardly wish it; for even if it should prove that there was no serious injury to the brain, and he should eventually recover the full use of his faculties, yet the sharp flints had struck with terrible force into each eyeball, both of which were utterly destroyed and ruined, so that if he should otherwise recover, he would be dark, blind, and helpless for life. And on hearing this they left him; left him groaning with low, sobbing moans, upon the surgeon's bed;—a messenger had, of course, been early despatched to his father with the melancholy intelligence.

Thus closed the day upon Edgar Fielding, who little dreamt, when he mounted, in the full flush of health and strength, his glossy steed that day, that the hour of retribution was even then tolling.

CHAPTER XII.

SELDOM had a prisoner been introduced within the walls of Abingdon Gaol, who exhibited so total a prostration as the unhappy Chapman. From the first he despaired; all courage, hope, and firmness forsook him, when he saw the face of Parsons, and heard him speak. Yes, even before he could form any idea as to what share in the business his ex-clerk was to bear, before the existence of the will was known to him, he had abandoned hope. A sheeted spectre, the most horrible apparition ever conjured up by a madman's brain, would not more thoroughly have

unmanned and prostrated the little lawyer, than did the sight of his old dependent; nor could anything have filled him with a more overpowering sense of inevitable, though vague and unknown danger.

He was charged not only with conspiracy in the matter of the will, but with perjury; for in the brief legal proceedings which, as we have before mentioned, were commenced against Mr. Elmsley, he—Chapman—was obliged to make a certain affidavit, which was, as the reader may imagine, wholly false. The case was so clear against him, and he could so plainly see, when on his preliminary examination, that every one, even his own counsel, felt it to be so, that he was tempted to make a clean breast of it, and, so far as in him lay, propitiate his prosecutors and judges by bowing before them, and giving up all show of resistance.

On consulting the barrister whom he had retained, on this point, he found that gentleman thoroughly of the same opinion as himself, and was most decided in recommending such a step;

as every attempt to rebut or even soften the evidence was clearly hopeless, it was as well to try how far an appeal to mercy would ease his fall. Of course the probability of destroying the force of Parsons's testimony by damaging his character, and throwing doubt upon the authenticity of the will, was fully discussed; but, unfortunately for their interests, both witnesses who signed the document were still alive, and had each admitted their signatures to be genuine.

It was therefore speedily known that the trial of the Chalkingdon solicitor would lose all its interest, as the defendant intended to plead guilty; in due course of time such proved to be the case. His counsel, Mr. Sergeant Screw, from London, was allowed to address the court in behalf of his unfortunate client, and he did so to the best of his ability.

He showed the judge and the jury—the latter chiefly from habit, for their occupation was gone in this case—he showed in language which sometimes flashed with withering scorn and

fierceness, and sometimes sank to a pathetic strain, which produced sobs in court; he showed how the unfortunate gentleman at the bar—whose great fault had been a too easy compliance with the wishes of others, when those wishes had been urged with all the frenzied energy of a despairing man—he showed how that unfortunate gentleman had fallen into the snare of the Tempter, of the designing, calculating man who was now gone to that bourne from whence no traveller returns, and therefore Sergeant Screw's tongue was fettered, my lord, and he should restrain himself from saying all that even his duty to his unhappy client would urge, although never, in the whole course of a long and not uneventful professional career he had never before felt such difficulty in observing the excellent maxim, *de mortuis*, &c. To resume, my lord; this man, designing and treacherous, knowing his unfortunate client's too yielding disposition, had cast himself at his feet, had avowed himself a ruined man, and a destined self-murderer, if the will of the late Mr. John

Elmsley were ever permitted to see the light. Sergeant Screw would not harrow the feelings of every hearer by depicting the anguish of the mental struggle which his unhappy client underwent; he would not cast a never-to-be-erased stigma upon the memory of the wretched man, who had now gone to his long account, by tracking him through every insidious wile and well-acted emotion; the repeated and solemnly confirmed pledges to watch over the interests of the orphan ladies, should not be here re-produced; they could be imagined.

In a fatal moment, his unfortunate client, overwhelmed by the frenzy and despair of the Tempter—in a fatal moment he had consented to the criminal proposal; the will was destroyed, or supposed to be so, and never from that hour, my lord, to the present, when he stands before you borne down by misfortune and remorse, has he enjoyed one moment's happiness.

No! and Mr. Serjeant Screw elevated his voice and his head as he said it—No! and the best proof he could give of his unfortunate

client's desire to repair the wrong he had been seduced into committing—of his incessant remorse at the part be had taken—was the plain statement of the fact that his unfortunate client had gone to Bristol, the ancient and venerable emporium of the West of England, had gone thither, and in the height of his prosperity offered, as a slight compensation, his hand, his heart, his fortune; to Miss Julia Elmsley—Pearson he meant.

He should not dilate upon the specious arguments put forth by the unhappy man who was now to be judged by a higher tribunal; he should not dwell, he repeated, on the specious arguments put forth by him under the veil of an intense zeal for morality; although as his unfortunate client was known to be irreproachable on that score, and peculiarly sensitive in his horror of any breach of its laws, it might serve to show what a powerful engine the misguided man, who had now shuffled off this mortal coil, had employed, when he appealed to Zaccheus Chapman's sense of morality and religion.

In this way did the learned Sergeant seek to thaw the somewhat icy judge, who sat unmoved amidst this blaze of eloquence, and never did any man try harder to deserve a twenty guinea fee than did the Sergeant. At last he finished, and the judge proceeded to have *his* say, which, if shorter, was not less to the point.

Mr. Baron Minos simply remarked that if the prisoner had suffered his feelings to be overcome by the heartrending appeals of his friend, Mr. William Elmsley, he had yet retained sufficient presence of mind to stipulate for a handsome reward, before he allowed his sympathy quite to carry him away—this was not a good feature in his case. He did not know anything about his offer of marriage to Miss Elmsley, excepting that she had flatly rejected him; the young lady was assuredly right in so doing. Finally he could not avoid remarking that the anguish which had preyed for so long a time upon the prisoner would have been more deserving of notice, and would have "told" more had it shown itself openly, and not have allowed

him to enjoy the fruits of his dishonesty to the very last moment in which such enjoyment was possible—this was not a good feature in his case. He should now proceed to pass sentence, and he felt that he should not be doing his duty if he did not mark by a severe punishment his sense of the prisoner's conduct, than which he could conceive nothing more base:—the fiat went forth, and Zaccheus Chapman left the dock under a sentence of fourteen years' transportation.

The local papers gave the speech of Mr. Sergeant Screw, and the briefer delivery of Baron Minos, verbatim; and with fact, conjecture, and gossip, managed to fill three or four mortal columns each, with the "Denouement of the Chalkingdon Mystery;" the mighty London journals condescended to notice the trial to the extent of about twenty lines apiece. Mr. Zaccheus Chapman was removed to Milbank, and afterwards to Bermuda, and so ended his career so far as affects our tale. At the date of this present writing his sentence had not expired,

but whether he survives, or whether the climate of Bermuda has conjoined with the anguish so feelingly alluded to by Mr. Sergeant Screw, to end his life, this deponent sayeth not.

Smith, with Julia and Agnes, returned to London, there to revolve and resolve upon plans for the future; but prior to their departure the gentleman had an interview with John Bruffle. That stalwart yeoman had seemed more delighted, had shown his pleasure more undisguisedly, at any rate, than any one else, when the great and happy revolution we have detailed, was wrought in the fortunes of the young ladies. What a supper he and Nat Hackley, with of course Parsons, and one or two more, made at Abingdon the day after the trial! Smith was not there, although strongly solicited to join them; he was not fitted to enjoy any such triumph; his mood was anything but one of exultation, there was too sombre a skein in the web of Fortune, to allow him to be light and cheerful now.

Death to one, ruin to another, disgrace to

several, although to the less reflecting among the circle of not sufficient importance to mar a single hour of proposed enjoyment, yet had so saddening an effect upon Smith, as to render him very unfit to join a festive party. Not so with hearty Mr. Bruffle; two confounded rascals had been justly served, let off rather easy indeed, *he* said; the young ladies and Master Smith had been kept out of their rights for years, and now they had got 'em again; well, wasn't this a time for feasting? As for the bad luck of Elmsley and Chapman, it never was to be expected that their going out would be anything but a kicking out; a disagreeable sort of job to all parties, and one as it was a good thing ha' done with, but out they wor now, and here was his wish—"May all such be zarved like 'em." Thus did John Bruffle argue, when Smith waited upon him, as has just been hinted, upon other business.

One chief object, of course, was to renew their joint thanks for all the unwavering kindness shown by the yeoman to Julia and Agnes;—this, however, was obliged to be despatched in a

briefer style than Smith had intended, for the farmer was too uncomfortable under the acknowledgment of his friendship to endure it long. Independent John was sufficiently well off, and it was a comfort to know it, to render all offers of remuneration out of the question, mere straightforward remuneration, we mean; so Smith contented himself with ordering a number of not inexpensive presents, at London, for Mrs. Bruffle and the family, the arrival of which same filled Daisyfield with a gorgeous display of finery and grandeur not commonly exhibited in that mansion.

The visit in question, however, did not refer to John's household, but had reference to the affairs of Mr. Nathaniel Hackley. It was rumoured, and the rumour had reached Smith, that Mr. Simon Grawler of the Elmsley Arms, was not indisposed to resign his business, on a fair consideration being given for the same, and as it was clear that the dearest wish of Nat's heart —despite his lofty contempt for the country, and the country people—was to occupy again the

Railway Tavern and Family and Commercial Hotel, at Chalkingdon Road; why, Smith had called upon Bruffle to empower him to buy up the interest of the said Simon Grawler, forthwith close the Elmsley Arms, and restore Nat to his old position; a transfer of the license could easily, he thought, be obtained.

Bruffle was delighted with the commission, and when he heard the high amount to which the Londoner was disposed to go, in order to reinstate Nat, he seized his hand, and wringing it with a force which almost crippled him, but which was meant to shew high admiration of his conduct, told him that he should come off better than *that*. He knew a way, did John Bruffle, to frighten Simon Grawler off, he knew how to make him glad to let Nat in easily—let him alone, he'd see all about it.

At first, Smith was rather alarmed, and disposed to enquire earnestly into the proposed means; for he remembered how that when the Baron of Bradwardine was anxious to return to his forfeited estate, how the new holder was

frightened into an easy compromise by, among other things, John Heatherblutter taking a shot at him in the gloaming; for the moment he really felt uneasy on the subject, knowing as he did, that Mr. Bruffle's legal ideas were not so well defined as might be desired. However he checked himself, and merely telling the worthy yeoman to be cautious, left the matter in his hands. Smith learnt, during his visit to Daisyfield, of the disappearance of Mr. William E. Taylor, the sometime clerk of Mr. Chapman, and favoured protegé of Mr. Elmsley. It was, of course, to be expected that with the death of his patron, and the collapsing of the lawyer's affairs, that Taylor would have to seek "fresh fields and pastures new;" such was the case, and for a person who had dwelt so short a time in any given place, as he had done in Chalkingdon, his departure excited an unusual degree of excitement and regret. If any portion of this regret were due to his glossy curls and faultless whiskers, it was the fairer portion of the residents who suffered; but the greater pang was

felt by the more prosaic class, that is to say, the tradesmen; for William E. Taylor left the town steeped in debt, owing every tradesman in it, as much as that tradesman would allow him to owe. An examination gave strong reason for believing moreover, that on his departure, he had not scrupled to take divers valuables from Chapman's house; and it was certain that he presented a cheque on the morning after Mr. Elmsley's death, as soon as the bank was open, and before the catastrophe was generally known, for nearly the whole of the balance—not a very large one, as it happened—standing in that person's name at the Chalkingdon Branch of the Uffington Bank. Whether he had been entrusted with a cheque, in case of any emergency arising, with Elmsley's signature, but otherwise a blank; or whether he was merely a skilful forger, was not known; and probably never will be, as the chances of W. E. Taylor ever coming forward to explain are excessively remote. But be this as it may, the cheque was paid unhesitatingly, and the young gentleman got off with nearly a thousand pounds.

Smith left for London without further delay, beyond paying a visit to Parsons, who was quartered pro. tem. at Nat's, where he was to remain until Smith's return, when something would be done for him. Smith left, we repeat, and John Bruffle commenced his operations on the very next day. Knowing pretty well the character of the man he had to deal with, John shaped his course accordingly, and went to work in a manner not ill calculated to win the battle. Although shrewd enough in reality, and fully conscious of it; giving himself, perhaps, credit for a great deal more artfulness than the case justified; yet John felt that in a combat of tricks and subterfuges, the serious host of the Elmsley Arms might possibly be too much, even for him, so he wisely adopted other tactics.

Putting "Smiler" into the gig, he drove in open daylight to the tavern, and stalking into the parlour, ordered a jug of the best beer, and sent a message by the maid to the effect that he wished to see Mr. Grawler as soon as he was at leisure. Bruffle had noticed that his entry, in

itself no common event, had caused some stir and whispering, and this message, he judged rightly enough, was not likely to diminish the excitement. Howbeit, in a very short time, with soft step, and low voice, as he was wont to speak, Mr. Simon presented himself, and said how glad he was to see Mr. Bruffle, and how he hoped he was quite well.

"I be well enough, Measter Grawler," said John, "and hope thee bee'st the same. Zet down. That's it. I be'nt come here to talk on nothin' but business; thee wants to leave this house, do'ant'ee ?"

"A—why—really, I can hardly say, Mr. Bruffle," began the host, but John cut his hesitation short:

"Then do'ant'ee zay, that's all zur," he exclaimed; "if thee really wants to go, and a trifle of money will help thee off all the sharper, I be ready to talk about it, if not us can do wi'out talking to 'ee."

"A trifle of money, Mr. Bruffle! A trifle of money, sir!" exclaimed Grawler.

"'Ees, sure, a trifle," retorted John; "the

trouble of moving, and the inconvenience like, and so on, thee ought to have a trifle vor, that I know, but what more?"

"Allowing I wished to leave," began the host, but he was again interrupted by his impetuous visitor.

"Allow it! of course we allow it; thee knows thee wants to go, do'osn't? What be'est trying to beat about the bush wi' I for? Speak out, mun."

"Well, then, we'll say I do wish to leave," resumed Grawler, "it might strike you that the good-will of such a house as this was worth something."

"The good will! rot thy greediness!" cried John; "every varden thee gets vor *that* would stick in thee throat I should thenk. Measter Grawler, thee shall have just a' much vor the good will as thee paid vor it."

"Oh, that has nothing to do with it," replied Grawler, rising as he spoke with a disconcerted air; "we had better not continue this discussion, Mr. Bruffle."

"Well, mun, just as thee likes," said John;

"only look'ee here, Measter Grawler, Nat Hackley wants his old house again—"

"Ah! does he?" exclaimed Grawler, with a bitter smile; "I thought as much, sir; I could see through your game."

"Zee through what? thee miserable vool!" cried John; "there warn't nothing to zee through. I've a' come here to tell thee he wants 'un, and what's more, my vine veller, he'll have 'un too. He'll have his old house, and Sir Roger will help he to get his old license back, and what's think o' that, eh? How much treade wilt have at the Elmsley if the Railway Hottell be opened, eh? That staggers thee, do'osn't it?"

Mr. Grawler was certainly staggered; he knew right well how general was the sympathy with Nat, and how great an impulse it had received from recent incident; he therefore dreaded, with great reason, that in the event of Sir Roger Hawberry, or any other magistrate, taking up his case, that the former host of the Railway Arms would have his own again. So he merely told

John Bruffle that he was too hasty; that between people who meant business a few words more or less should not be noticed, and then sat down again by his side. Now, however, the advantage was with John, who by a little judicious Hectoring, and an appearance, half real, half feigned, of indifference to the course Mr. Grawler might choose to pursue, succeeded in frightening that respectable individual to a requisite pitch; and ere he left the Elmsley Arms, a bargain for lease, fittings, and good will of the house was struck, at about one-third of the price which Smith deemed it probable he might have to pay.

It may easily be imagined that Smiler was compelled to trot briskly, that very afternoon, over to Coneyfield, but it would not be quite so easy to imagine Nat's extacy at the tidings which its master brought, or the enthusiastic admiration awakened by a recital of John's diplomacy.

The proceedings which followed upon this communication, and the movements of Nat in

consequence of it, are too important and interesting—or were to honest Nathaniel at any rate —to be irreverently lugged in at the end of a long chapter. Contracted as has now become our space and our time, enough of each shall be spared to render due honour to the happy restoration of the Hackley dynasty, and with this resolve, we solemnly commence another section of our tale.

CHAPTER XIII.

To narrate in due form this episode in Nat's career will be, of course, to run far ahead of the incidents of our tale in which the rest of our characters were concerned, and which were of far higher general importance. But we have given, we doubt not, pretty strong proof on several occasions, that our scruples of conscience on such points are not very acute or painful, and as in all courses of guilt each successive act is smoothed in its path by the crime preceding, so we have, by repetition of the offence, grown at last hardened and callous, and "don't care for nothing."

Nat's first care, after obtaining a new lease of the premises, was to refurnish the Railway Tavern and Family and Commercial Hotel, and to stock it once more with the choicest and best of spirits, wines, and beer; announcing at the same time in all the county papers, that upon a certain day the house would be re-opened with a grand dinner under the patronage of Sir Roger Hawberry, Bart., Sir Giles Vetch, Bart., M.P., and Canute Froissart, Esq., M.P., the chair to be taken by Mr. John Bruffle, of Daisyfield Farm. Of course, in the interim, the proper steps had been taken to obtain the restoration of his license, and Mr. Grawler quietly left the neighbourhood.

Not only did Nat announce his return to his old house in the county papers, as just said, but staring, flaunting posters, with huge red letters, notified the same on roadside barn doors, or in the windows of accommodating tradesmen—and John Bruffle has been often seen, when he thought himself unobserved, to stop Smiler, if riding, or to halt, if on foot,

before these bills, and peruse them from head to foot with great relish, and with a grin of delight when he came to his own name.

At last the day came, and was in due course of time followed by the night, when the Railway Tavern and Family and Commercial Hotel—no reader could be so vitrified of heart, we are sure, as to wish us to curtail, for even once, in this chapter, the proper name, style, and title of the caravanserai—the day and the hour came when the house was to re-open with more than pristine splendour. Winter time though it was, and although darkness set in early, and travelling after nightfall on that lonely road was not desirable; yet was the capacious stable yard, and the ground in front of the inn itself, covered with gigs and chaise carts, the owners whereof had assembled to do honour to the occasion.

It was but rarely that any great event galvanised even the dwellers in Chalkingdon itself to the feeble attempt at illumination which little country towns sometimes display, and when

they were so roused, they adhered to the good old fashion of candles stuck into blocks of clay, and placed in the windows of the houses. Not mind, that there is any fault to be found with that; the art of the pyrotechnist, or designer has not yet contrived a prettier illumination than a tolerably regular street so lit up. This however, would not do for Nat; had he lived in Chalkingdon, where gas could be had, he would have doubtless ordered all sorts of complicated, snaky-looking patterns in iron; as it was, he had a star and V. R. in gloomy oil lamps, which were, nevertheless, although gloomy, looked upon as monstrous fine.

At any rate the blaze from his great room, added to the soberer rays from his lamps, the lights which streamed from every window, crevice, chink, or cranny in the house; the rattle of wheels, the clatter of horses, the frequent laugh, and the incessant bustle as the company arrived, told that all the life and gaiety of the neighbourhood was for this once concentrated in the Railway Tavern, &c., &c. The Elmsley

Arms was now black and silent, as many an eye that night observed, save where a faint light, twinkling in an upper room, showed that the labourer and his wife, who lived there to take care of the premises, were retiring to rest; the desolation of the one was heightened by the blaze and glare of the other.

Nat's arrangements were perfect; so he thought, so everybody said. Not only was the furniture of his "club room" of the newest and best, not only had he clusters of additional lights to cheer and dazzle, not only did the fire at each end of the room leap and roar in the "spiciest" and most elaborate of steel grates; beyond all these things Nat had purchased a very good harmonium, and had invited Mr. Ezekiel Isaacs, an Israelitish gentleman of his acquaintance, to come from London on purpose to play the same, and to sing; and that nothing might be wanting, had authorised that gentleman to bring two other Apollos.

Nat wavered for some little time between the eligibity of engaging these professionals, or four

superior Ethiopian serenaders whom he knew; the latter entertainment was certainly Nat's favourite one, and indeed he had a secret ambition to act as "bones" himself, vagrant thoughts as to the delight of such a life having occasionally crossed his mind, when in difficulties. But Mrs. Hackley having the casting vote—as was quite right and proper, and as is the case in all well regulated households—gave it decidedly against the "niggers," the superior gentility of the other performance determining her choice. And so, appropriate music, as the county papers judiciously described it, and as many other papers before and since have done on similar occasions; appropriate music was sung after every toast, to the uproarious delight of the forty guests. Thus:—

"The House of Commons, gentlemen, coupling with it the names of our admirable representatives, Sir Gilbert Vetch and Canute Froissart, Esquire."

MADRIGAL.—Down in a flowery vale.

"Our honoured guest, Mr. Smith, of London,

gentlemen—with three times three—and may prosperity attend him."

ROUND.—Hark! 'tis the Indian drum.

"Mr. Sharpe, gentlemen, and may he be the model and standard for every lawyer in England."

GLEE.—Here in cool grot and mossy cell.

And so, with such appropriate music, and with such good wishes, the evening waxed and waned.

As just said, some forty persons sat down to Nat's opening dinner, and very great satisfaction the dinner gave—but first of all we should state that Sir Roger Hawberry and Sir Giles Vetch had kept a promise made to Nat, by graciously visiting the house that day, and mixing with the throng of sturdy yeomen and tradesmen, who filled Nat's great room; they expressed, at the same time, great regret at not being able, on account of previous engagements, to remain and partake in the festivities, but hoped in the course of a long and prosperous career on Mr. Hackley's part, to have many opportunities of

partaking of the far famed good cheer of the Railway Hotel. Then, amidst a storm of cheers, the two gentlemen left. From C. Froissart, Esq., a letter of apology was received; but, as Nat remarked, in confidence to his wife, he hadn't much expected to see *him;* he wasn't, after all, of the good old English sort, as Sir Roger and Sir Gilbert was.

John Bruffle took the chair, amidst general applause, and with the aid of a very little prompting from his right hand and left hand man, made a capital president; coming out to a degree, especially in the speech making department, which surprised everybody else, and perfectly astounded himself, when in after life he sought in vain to account for it. The right and left hand men spoken of were Mr. Smith and Mr. Fred Harley, who had both run down from London to assist; Mr Sharpe, it has already been hinted, was there; as a matter of course, was also Parsons; as were the station master and all the clerks who could get away, while the bulk of the company was composed of

neighbouring farmers or tradesmen from Chalkingdon.

After, as the dinner reports always say, the usual loyal toasts had been given, and eminently loyal are the yeomen around Chalkingdon, after these, we say, many toasts were drunk in honour of many persons. Smith's health, as already has been seen, was given, as were those of the county members (or two of them, at least), so were "the ladies," which same toast involved a reference to Mrs. Hackley, that elicited a frantic burst of applause; but the grand toast of the evening was, "Prosperity to the Railway Hotel, and long life and happiness to its landlord." Bruffle was particularly great when he gave this toast, and the only thing weighing at this moment upon the editor's mind, is the regret that the services of an experienced London reporter were not secured for the occasion. If a slight tendency to rambling might have been noticed, by a captious or fastidious listener, if subjects hardly bearing upon the matter were introduced, let it be remembered that John had

at least surmounted his grand difficulty when he conquered his repugnance to speaking at all. And if anecdotes relating to last great market day at Chalkingdon did once or twice find their way into his oration, and if the price which he obtained for his choice wethers had no very visible relation to Nat's health in the eyes of the London strangers, yet who knows what hidden, mysterious sympathy between the subjects, the aborigines might not have found? At any rate that part of John's speech was applauded more mightily than any other.

Suffice it to say, in default of the experienced reporter afore mentioned, that Bruffle was particularly great in his speech; so great indeed was the effect produced, that Nat twice essayed to speak in reply, but was overwhelmed by the cheering, and it was not until a third attempt that he succeeded in making himself heard. We know of old that eloquence was not Nat's forte, and upon this occasion he felt fully as much embarrassed as when we last heard of his making a speech: he said—and while saying it

he buttoned and unbuttoned the lowest button of his waistcoat so often, that he seemed to be playing upon some musical instrument, even as did Mr. Toots at Dr. Blimber's grand soireé—he said;—

"Well, gentlemen, I'm not used to public speaking, but I rise to return my sincere thanks for the very superior and excellent manner in which you have drunk my health," (Huzza! Nat! —bravo! Nat bowed and resumed) "whereby I am proud to see you all, and hope to see you here very often again (great cheering here). I am a poor hand at a speech, I know (no, no! Nat, that thee bisn't), but then I don't see as it matters after all, so long as you make people understand you (bravo Nat!). This, gentlemen, is the Railway Arms (bravo! hear!). This, gentlemen, is the Railway Arms Tavern and Family and Commercial Hotel (great cheering), and here's the landlord of it, as never will forget the kindness he has received, or will neglect to help them as have helped him—if soever they should want it, which I hope they mayn't (tre-

mendous applause, and numerous individual drinkings of Nat's health). Thank'ee, gentlemen, you can all see I'm very much obliged to you, I'm sure, and as I am rather uncomfortable at doing anything in the speaking line, I shall take the liberty of sitting down. Hows'ever, here's all your healths, gentlemen, and may the present moment be the worst of your lives."

The deafening plaudits which hailed this speech showed clearly enough the utter futility of an attempt upon the part of any one else to follow in Nat's wake, as an orator, and, consequently, the remainder of the harangues were brief enough.

Such a banquet had not been heard of in those parts for many a day, and the night had crept on, and departed, and the small hours of the morning had come, ere the company dispersed, and the jovial farmers, in twos, threes, and fours, journeying homewards, awoke the echoes of the distant hills with their lustily trolled choruses. At last all were gone, save of course one or two who were not likely to leave

so abruptly; and gone, with many a hearty shake of the hand, and with a profusion of friendly wishes; all had departed, even the Hebrew minstrels had gone, and were now lying on the not over luxurious benches in the waiting-room of the station, in readiness for the up mail, which was about due. There, too, sat Mr. Sharpe, the lawyer, awaiting the arrival of the same train. The illumination on the front of Nat's house had spent itself, and was now as black and sullen as all other objects around, save where a feeble green or blue lamp at one or two far-separated spots still shed a sickly gleam.

The select one or two alluded to a short time back, meant Smith, Harley, and Parsons; and these three now sat with Nat in his bar parlour —not the old bar parlour in the old portion of the house, but a far finer place, augustly splendid with mirrors and mahogany. For, as the reader has doubtless divined, the extended Railway Tavern, &c., &c., was of a double character; the new, smart, London looking side had been welded, as one might say, to the original build-

ing, without much regard to the fitness of things, and in this new portion were the chief rooms, the old ones being now destined for meaner purposes. For, unlike most "Railway Armses," the inn was an old house—a snug old house, not a brazen, stuccoed, rectangular, day-before-yesterday sort of place, having been indeed a substantial farm-house, until the unexpected apparition of a railway in those parts had demanded the opening of an hotel.

Mrs. Hackley, tired and pale from the excitement and exertion of the night, but still pretty, neat, cheerful Mrs. Hackley, was making a cup of tea for her friends, ere they retired; "a out and out thing," Nat averred, "after a noisy evening."

It is common to all, we think, to feel with the lassitude which always follows great excitement, a depression of spirits, and a proneness to yield to melancholy thoughts. (This was the case, our readers may remember, with Mrs. Nubbles, the morning after her visit to Astley's). This feeling it was, perhaps, which influenced Smith,

and caused him to say, while sipping his tea:—"A banquet at your house, Nat, seems the signal for departure for some one; on the last occasion I and my newly made wife were about to start for Africa; we thought that a measureless distance, but how much farther our friend Robert is going! When do you sail, Mr. Parsons?"

"In a week, I believe," returned the person addressed; "the vessel is advertised for the day after to-morrow, but I don't believe that we shall get away under a week."

"What sort of a place is this 'Obart Town?" asked Hackley. "I knew a party once as come from there, and he said there was nothing but thieves and convicts there then, but I dare say things is better now."

"Oh, yes," replied Smith, "Hobart Town has very much improved of late; in fact, it is now just the very place for Mr. Parsons to make his fortune."

"I don't seek to do that," said Robert, with a faint smile; "I don't expect it, and scarcely

wish it; but as my only relative in the world, a sister, is married and doing well there, why, *there* is my best chance of a home."

"I wonder, Robert," said Harley, "that you had not gone before; we are all, of course, very glad that you did not, but I think that if I had been in your place I should have tried my fortune there."

"Ah, Mr. Harley," said Parsons, shaking his head sorrowfully, "I could not, poor as I was, make up my mind to go out and be a burden to those that had, I doubt not, enough to do in supporting them that were depending on their exertions. I had a fatal habit, too, which rendered me at once unfit for enterprise, and careless of success; this habit I have now, thank Heaven! conquered, and I look forward with hope and confidence."

"Of course you do," exclaimed Nat; "who should, I should like to know, if you didn't. Well, Bob, I hope you will send us home a cockatoo, and a monkey; and, as I like all live things, one of them flying fishes that we read

about, if there's any way of bringing them over alive. And some genuine tea, I should like to have; I know, Bob, you'll feel a pleasure in sending anything as grows over there, and that I'm as welcome as the sun in harvest."

Parsons nodded assent, smiling at the same time as though Nat's catalogue of requisites might cause rather a wide search at the Antipodes; then the latter resumed, and expressed his regret at losing his newly-recovered friend, but owned at the same time that it was all for the best. It is hardly necessary to say that Parsons did not start on this voyage with empty pockets; his reward for the preservation of John Elmsley's will was sufficient to ensure his well-doing in Tasmania, so far as money could ensure it, and the ex-clerk sailed in a few days with brighter prospects than for many years had shone before him.

CHAPTER XIV.

Now the goal is reached: now the expiring taper flickers with but a sinking light; now falls the curtain upon the scene. Of what avail is it to lengthen detail, and to dwell with painful minuteness on our story, when the interest is exhausted, and nought remains to be given but the few explanatory pages which all expect?

In face of the positive evidence of the will, of course no resistance could be offered to the inheritance of their father's property by the two young ladies—even had there been any left to resist; therefore, in a very brief space of time, Royal Lodge, with the premises and lands there-

unto pertaining, came once more into their possession. But Smith, who was, of course, chief in direction of the business, felt little inclination for taking up his abode at a house to which so many remembrances of a painful nature were attached, and the sisters fully shared in this feeling.

Royal Lodge was accordingly sold, and, save for an occasional visit to Nathaniel Hackley, Chalkingdon and its district knew Smith no more. He felt no inclination to withdraw from the active life he had always led; it was no thirst for greater wealth which impelled him, but a consciousness that if he abandoned business he should lack an object for his life, and so he remained chief manager of the house in Oxford Street, and soon the balance sheet showed the effect of his vigilant superintendence He dwelt in a pretty little villa at Hampton, and in the noble Bushy Park, we are happy to say, Agnes has since been seen walking with her nursemaid, and two chubby, healthy looking boys in company.

We are glad in being able to record this, because she was so good, so kind, so true a young woman, and had been so unfortunate with her first-born children. Doubtless though, even while walking, peaceful and happy, under the shade of those pyramids of trees in Bushy Park, with the healthy English breeze blowing around, and the velvet of English green turf beneath her feet, doubtless even then her thoughts were sometimes at the wild resting place of her two little girls, in far off Natal. Well, well, they sleep soundly there, Agnes, and those who die young die happy; from this and similar apothegms, Agnes, derive such comfort as a mother can; which is not too much. She was as happy as she deserved to be; happy in her husband, happy in her children, happy in her home, happy in herself; in simple pleasures, the greatest among which was walking to meet James on his return from business, or rambling with her boys through the Park, or by the clear river's side when the summer's sun was sinking, she passed her happy days; if shade upon their

peaceful home there was, it was not of *their* making.

Was never a taller, darker, prouder one than Agnes seen in that elegant house? Did not Smith, with his long standing admiration of Julia, insist upon their forming one common household? He did so strive, but in vain. Never was Julia seen within his walls; never did her once haughty form appear by the side of his gentle wife, in her walks when the children gamboled before her among the rustling leaves, or when leaning on Smith's arm she listened to the soft ripple of the tide, and watched the play of the moonbeams upon the tiny waves; no, and never did she come where gaiety and happiness were, or where little children's voices rang in merry laughter. To Smith's great disappointment, we may almost say, to his horror, she firmly refused to dwell with, or near him, and the pallor of her face, and the "drawn" look, adding in seeming ten years to her age, told of the struggle within; but she was firm.

She also formed another resolve, and with the aid of Mr. Sharpe, the solicitor, put it into practice, and that so suddenly and secretly that no opportunity was given to those who would have remonstrated, to offer their persuasions. Without personal leave taking she retired to a small house which she had purchased, and which stood near a small town on the wildest part of the northern Cornwall coast, and in this abode she declared, in a letter to Smith and Agnes, it was her intention to pass her days. Almost directly upon receiving this extraordinary communication, Smith went down to the spot indicated, and there, surely enough, he found her; buried alive, or little better. Here he found her wearing her life away, beneath the constant fretting of her restless spirit, now so unnaturally severed from all kindred souls.

The town was dull, straggling, and insignificant; and down a narrow road, or lane, at some half mile from its outskirts, was her house. A long, dreary moor lay beyond, disfigured with irregular piles of refuse, where mines had been,

or were now worked; while on the other hand were the broken green and white waves of the Atlantic Ocean.

Her child was not with her; he had been sent away to some family recommended by Mr. Sharpe, where, Julia would not say, and the lawyer was pledged to secrecy. And here, in this wretched, lonely home, in this wild and desolate spot, was Julia Elmsley, and here did she resolve to live and die. There was nothing more in common with her and the world; she abjured it; she fled from it; she showed no abatement of affection for Smith, and seemed to love Agnes beyond all former measure, but she would not return. After many attempts to change her resolve, all unavailing, Smith, with a heavy heart, was compelled to leave her; and he started on his solitary homeward journey, with a fear that her misfortunes, and the exciting vicissitudes through which she had passed, had unsettled her mind, and that her wild unnatural resolution was the first fruits of insanity. It is more than probable that Smith was right,

although Julia never, so far as this historian knoweth, betrayed any aggravation of the symptoms.

Agnes visited her at least once a year, Smith somewhat oftener, but no change was seen in her: and on that storm beat coast, on that wild moor, she lives now.

A remarkable feature of her eccentricity, if eccentricity indeed it were, was, that no one ever heard her mention Fielding's name. This peculiarity had shown itself very early, for, even at Abingdon, where of course it was impossible to keep such an event from coming to her knowledge, she never enquired as to his recovery from the accident which had so nearly proved fatal. It is true that upon her first hearing of his injuries, she sought her own room, and there remained in solitude for many hours, but farther sign of emotion she showed none.

He survived the accident, yet little cause was there for congratulation, for, had his eyesight been preserved, the horrible disfigurement of the upper part of his face would have rendered

his life a burden, but *that* particular sorrow he was spared; he was blinded for ever. In his fate there is a certain resemblance to the self-inflicted banishment endured by Julia, for he drags out his long, weary days in seclusion, in failing health, and in sorrow,—finding his querulous temper involving him in daily squabbles at his father's house, and anxious too to remove from the sight of those who had known him in past time, and who whispered his just punishment to strangers, as often he had heard, while riding in his low chaise; he determined to bury himself at a little hamlet, a mere handful of houses, lying far back upon the Wiltshire Downs, and there he drew out his joyless existence.

He was not so far removed but that fresh bitterness was added to his spirit by hearing of Miss Le Guernsey's marriage, and of the festivities consequent thereon; or of the occasional visits of Smith to Hackley.

Him—Smith we mean—did Fielding seem to hate with a strange intensity, and rarely men-

tioned his name without coupling to it some harsh epithet, or bitter wish.

When the first paroxysms of despair at his loss of sight, and his ruined expectations were past, when the monotony and dullness of his life grew shocking to him—shocking they would have been to most men, but doubly so to one passionately attached to sports of the field, used to a life of gaiety, and with but few resources in himself—he made several efforts to obtain the company of his little son; but in vain. All his endeavours were fruitless, even though he surmounted his antipathy to Smith sufficiently to allow him to write a letter, humble in tone, begging that the child might be allowed to visit him. To this Smith returned for answer that he knew not where the boy was, and had no means of ascertaining, which was indeed the truth; but Fielding, believing that he was mistrusted, wrote again—of course it is understood that an amanuensis wrote for him—he wrote a long letter, imploring and beseeching Smith to let him have the boy, if but for a couple of

weeks in each year. He pledged himself by the most sacred oaths not to attempt to detain him longer, and not to make the slightest effort to discover Julia—for these, he thought, were the motives which influenced Smith, and caused his refusal. He also offered to execute any deed which would secure to the child the whole of his —Fielding's—property.

To this application, also, Smith was compelled to declare his ignorance of the child's abode; he felt very much inclined to procure the desired boon, for his "commercial mind," as Fielding had once styled it, was strongly impressed with the advisability of securing for the boy the reversion to his father's money, but he was unable to accomplish it. Mr. Sharpe knew where the child was, having, indeed, been the person who selected his guardians; he was of course applied to, but the application was of no avail. He had pledged himself, so he said, not to give the information asked, to any one, but had specially promised not to let Fielding know, under any circumstances. And further, Mr.

Sharpe went on to say, he would advise that no very strenuous efforts were made to oblige Mr. Fielding, for he had good reason for saying that Miss Elmsley, if thwarted in her desires on that subject, would most probably leave the country, with her child,—a step, in her irritable and excitable state, not to be desired.

Therefore, the second answer to Edgar was the same as the first, and then, as before, he entirely disbelieved Smith's plea of ignorance. He therefore dispatched a third letter, couched in the most insulting and violent language, heaping the foulest abuse and slander upon the Londoner. This closed the correspondence, and Edgar drifted as completely from the sight and knowledge of our circle, as though he had been dead.

Of Parsons good news was heard; not, it is true, such news as we are accustomed to hold as good, when coming from the Antipodes; he had discovered no monster nuggets of gold, nor did he own fifty thousand sheep, and a gigantic Salisbury Plain for grazing them; but he had

found all well in the family he had sought, was very happy there, and had settled down in peace and comfort; this surely was good news, such a close, to such a life.

Nat Hackley was of course his correspondent, and about once a year Nat wrote to him, and it is not the least gratifying part of our duty to say that Nat was always able to speak of his increasing prosperity, for the Railway Tavern and Family and Commercial Hotel and Refreshment Rooms flourished like a green bay tree. It was observable that Nat lengthened the title of his caravansera, every time it was painted, so that the waggish among his friends declared that a false front, or wings, must be added to the mansion in course of time, to bear the inscription which a few years would inallibly produce.

Never mind, as Nat said, he didn't care for their jokes so as he got on; and get on he did, and so did Mrs. Hackley; for on Fred Harley's last visit to Chalkingdon Road Station, he became god-father to a Frederick Hackley, as Mr.

Bruffle had previously been to a John Hackley, while Mrs. Smith had "stood" for an Eliza Hackley, there being already an Agnes Julia; so, you see, Mrs. Hackley got on too.

Nat went now and then over to Coneyfield, partly because he used to come home with a keener sense of relish for the comforts of the Railway Arms Tavern, &c., &c., and partly to see those among the simple villagers who had been kind to him in his poverty. On his first visit thither he was charged with a commission which he was a proud and happy man to execute; by Parsons' desire, and at his expense, Mr. Gregory, the baker of Coneyfield, who gave the sinking tramper, with kind words and looks, the piece of bread, received an eighteen gallon cask of the strongest and finest ale known to us degenerate moderns; four years old, clear as sherry, soft as milk, and strong as brandy—such was Nat's eulogium, and such the hearty baker and a few chosen friends found it.

Two events occurred during the twelvemonth which followed Nat's restoration, each of which

caused him intense joy, and it it difficult to say which had the greater effect. The first was the pulling down of the Elmsley Arms; the railway people wanted a road from the farther end of their premises to the highway, and the best possible route carried them over the site of the Elmsley Arms, so that malevolent building was doomed; and on the fine bright summer mornings, as he gave his wonted glance at the sky and weather while dressing, Nat always seemed to breathe more freely when he looked at the distant hills and patch of sky which had once been hidden by the square, ugly outline of the rival house; besides there was a sensation of safety in knowing that it was totally abolished.

The second event was—marvellous to tell! the discovery by a new and very large company—the Wheal Vortigern, that some of their most promising lodes ran into the Trepolipen district, and that therefore this latter district was not only enormously valuable in itself, but indispensable to their success. The Trepolipen had not yet done winding itself up, such a process

being too keenly relished by the lawyers in charge to allow of its being hastily galloped over, and the idea which occurred simultaneously to each and every of its shareholders, directors, secretaries, and solicitors, was to demand of the Wheal Vortigern Association the highest possible sum which the most sanguine imagination could hope to extort, under threats, too, of re-working the Trepolipen district themselves. This was done; the Wheal Vortigern paid the same; as they did so with little hesitation, a great murmuring arose among the keener Trepolipen hands—who had been about to declare a dividend on their estate of about four-pence in the pound—that the property, and *such* a property, had been scandalously and recklessly sacrificed, and that at least twice as much should have been asked. Among these grumblers, however, was not our friend Nathaniel; his share, in virtue of his five hundred pounds, was six hundred and seventy six pounds ten shillings, which, less two hundred and thirteen pounds five shillings and seven pence, for his quota towards the necessary

legal expenses, left four hundred and sixty three pounds four shillings and five pence. To this lost and found nest egg, Nat religiously vowed to stick, or only part with it for investment either in houses or land, or in the Three per Cents. before spoken of; eventually the money went, with some additions, to make the lease of the Railway Arms Tavern, &c., &c., his own—nine hundred and ninety nine years, at a pepper corn.

We have spoken of a visit from Fred Harley; he usually spent his holidays at Nat's and on one occasion brought down a very handsome young lady from London, whom he introduced as Mrs. Fred Harley, and she was soon much liked, as she was from the first admired, by the host and hostess. The liking or loving, and admiration, did not go quite side by side you see, by reason of a bonnet and cape of extraordinary beauty and magnificence displayed by the young stranger, and which took Mrs. Hackley some little time to get over—for the hostess was still the pretty hostess, and felt her justifiable pride in

her best bonnet and pelisse wither and shrink up instantly on her beholding Fred's wife. Still, she got over it, and forgave the injury; nevertheless, Nat was shortly afterwards compelled to pay what he deemed a most unreasonable sum, for a deal box from London, and his wife appeared at Chalkingdon Church on the following Sunday, as a person of her respectability should appear; at least three score and ten tea tables that evening heard her attire discussed, and of course violently censured—a general imitation following. Fred is a rising man in the bank, and hopes some day to be chief clerk therein; a post which, in the eyes of juniors in such establishments, wears much such an august and distant appearance as does the Archbishopric of Canterbury to a meek young curate of three and twenty. Fred's friendship for Nat remained undiminished, although his wonder at his immense learning and sagacity, so far as related to sporting matters, was perhaps hardly so great as of old.

As for John Bruffle, there is scarcely any need to tell the reader what happened to *him;* only let him go down to Chalkingdon (we mean the reader, not hearty John), and inquire for Daisy-field Farm, and he will see not only John and his wife, and such of the children as are not yet married, but he will certainly be shown the massive silver tankard which stands on John's sideboard, and the elegant silver tea pot, cream jug, etc., etc., which Mrs. Bruffle sports on high days and holidays, and the resplendent cottage pianoforte which stands in the parlour, and all these things were presented, as John will eagerly tell you, by his London friend, Measter Smith. It is not often that a man with an open hand, and a warm heart, thrives in a worldly sense, but all our readers will be glad to hear that Mr. Bruffle does, notwithstanding the spirit of gambling which we have seen him exhibit. This still remains, and when Slashers or Pets from the Railway Arms enter the lists, John Bruffle is generally seen at hand; and in his company is

usually the gentleman farmer who now inhabits Royal Lodge—ergo, a very different man to its previous tenant.

So now gathers the mist around hill and over dale, our characters fade from the eye, and vanishing quickly, are seen and heard no more. Woven is the woof, ended is the tale, yet ere the book is finally closed, listen to one brief remark.

Although the error which gives a plot and story to the book, is the commonest of all errors; most productive of pain and change of all; although in every one's experience some glaring instances are seen, yet it is rare for an author to degrade his heroes or heroines by stamping them with illegitimacy,—this, with much false delicacy and inconsistency, is reserved for minor personages. But real degradation for another's fault there cannot be; no and never can, even though injustice and harshness should sway the world for all time to come, as much as it does now,—than which we will hope better things. Nevertheless, wrong is wrong, and from evil comes

not good. Just so far as the characters of this tale departed from the plain, straight path of honour and duty, so were they unhappy in themselves, or worked unhappiness to those dearest to them; the whole of the misery and crime interwoven with the tale would have been avoided had not John Elmsley, kind and liberal man as he was, committed one great wrong:— and hackneyed as the moral inculcated may seem to be, it is none the less true, that, as you plant so shall you reap, and that they who sow thorns, shall not gather roses.

THE END.

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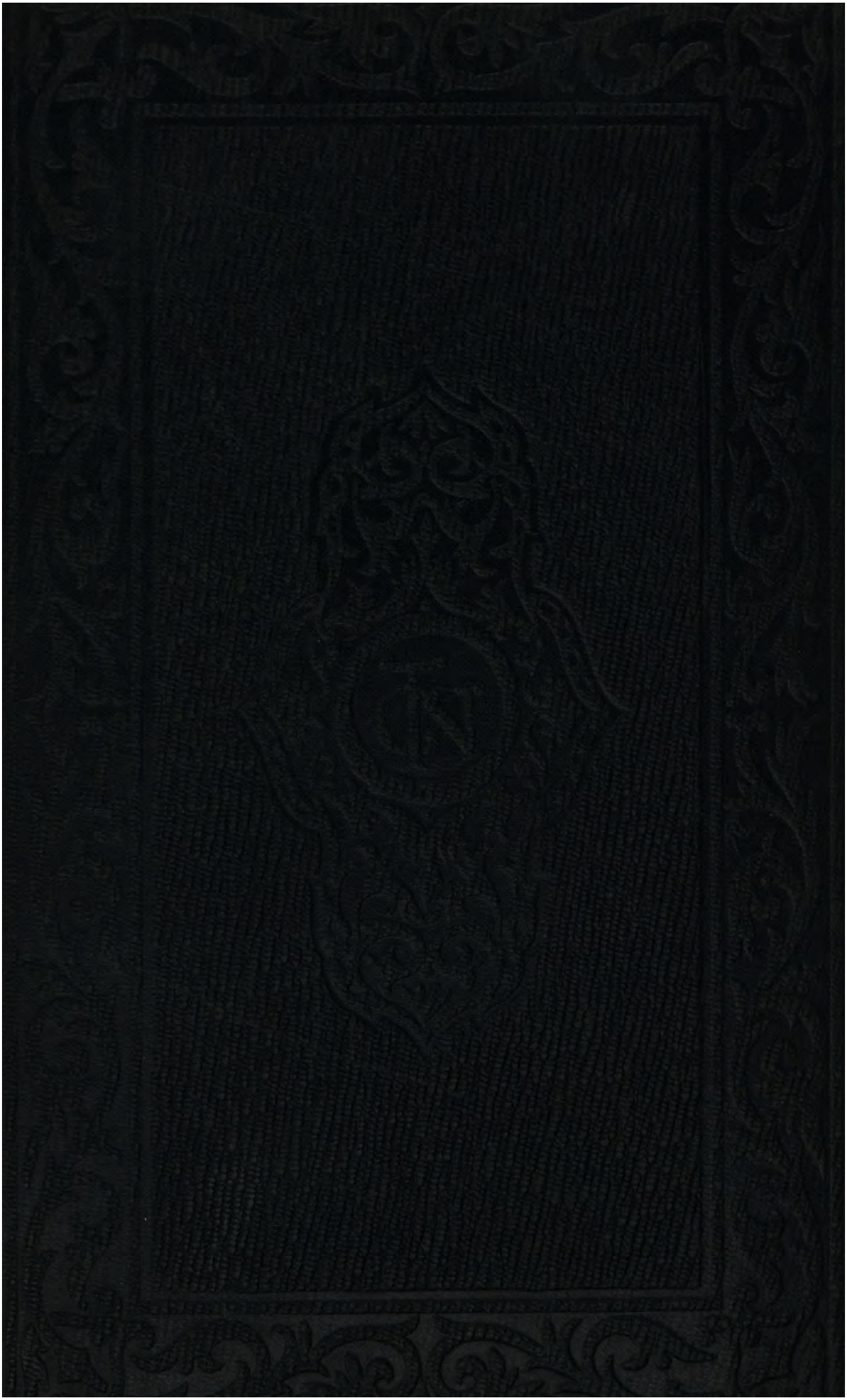
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