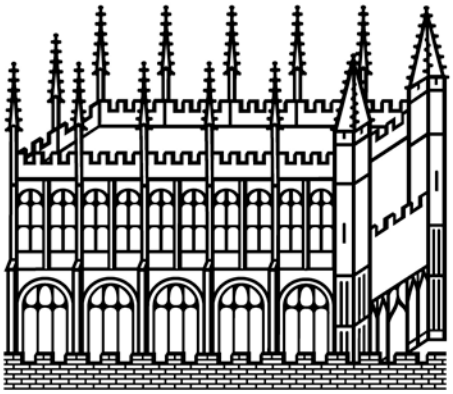

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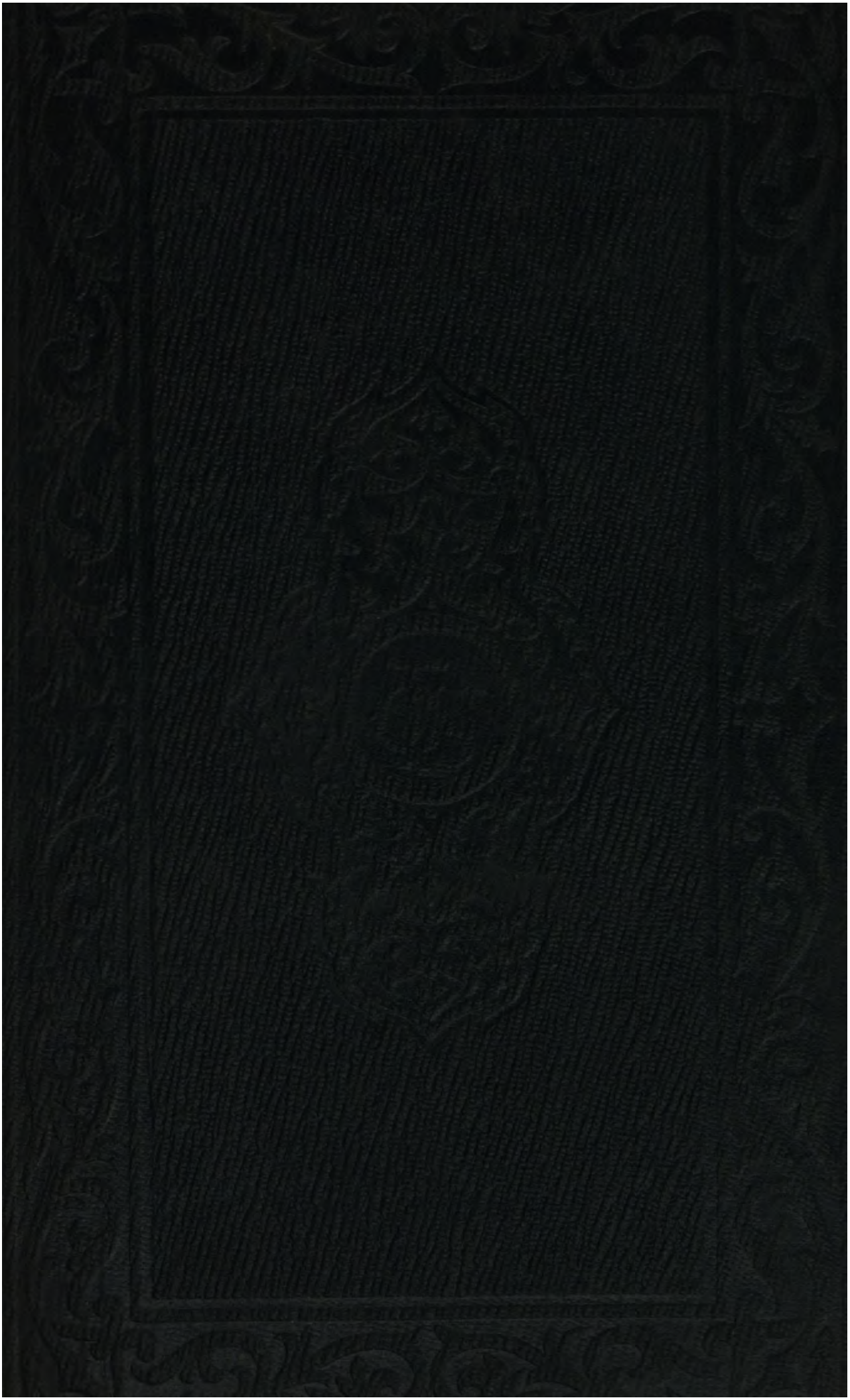

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EBB AND FLOW.

A NOVEL.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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

HAMLET.

VOL. II.

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TO

DANIEL GOOCH, Esq.,

WHOSE EMINENT GENIUS IN HIS PROFESSION IS EQUALLED

BY THE SKILL AND IMPARTIALITY WITH WHICH

HE RULES HIS EXTENSIVE DEPARTMENT OF THE NOBLEST

RAILWAY IN THE WORLD.

EBB AND FLOW.

CHAPTER I.

A CLUSTER of such ill-assorted persons as those now assembled at Royal Lodge, could not perhaps, be expected, under any circumstances, to be cheerful or pleasant, and after such a ceremony as the one at which all had that day assisted, the constantly obtruding remembrance of the man buried from the house, and the vague uncertainty as to the disclosures which might be contained in the will, an air deeper than gravity might perhaps be looked for. But there was

more than the customary heaviness upon them. The circle sat for some time as gloomy and silent a group as well could be; Mr. Chapman once or twice addressing some remark in a low tone to his patron, and Smith as often trying to remove a little of the embarrassment which so clearly hung upon every one, but in spite of his efforts the cloud remained as before.

Julia and Agnes, timid and unnerved; unused, too, to all forms of business, knew not what was expected of them, or if anything; and so sat together cowering at a window. At last old Mr. Fielding spoke, and his determined tones broke the silence and the charm at once.

"Now, Mr. Elmsley, and Mr. Chapman," he said, "I address you, gentlemen, because I think you are the best qualified to give me an answer. I am a very plain man, as you know, so you must excuse me if I am out of form."

He paused; William Elmsley looked steadily at him, and slightly bowed; Chapman gave one or two harsh, dry coughs, and kept his eyes fixed upon the floor.

"I make bold to enquire," continued the old gentleman, "as a very intimate friend of the poor Mr. Elmsley that's dead and gone, and as likely a person to be an executor as any one I know, if there is a will? and if so, whether it will be convenient to read it now?"

"I have asked the same of Mr. Chapman," began Elmsley, and though he no longer looked Mr. Fielding in the face, it was easy to see that his lips were white and trembling; the latter would indeed have been betrayed by the quivering tones of his voice, even had it been pitch dark. "I have asked the same question, and find that there is no will."

"No will!" exclaimed Mr. Fielding, his son and Smith echoing the words, while the young ladies, although perhaps scarcely knowing the importance of the subject, could not avoid looking up in surprise.

"You astonish me, sir!" resumed Mr. Fielding, "and I think you must be mistaken, for our poor friend told me distinctly that he had made

a will, and I really understood him to say that I was an executor."

"Well, sir," returned Mr. Elmsley, with a little more hauteur than the occasion seemed to demand, "you perhaps know best; I can, however, enter into no discussion with you upon the subject. Mr. Chapman, I presume, is the perso best qualified to answer you."

"No harm is intended, sir," cried the old gentleman, reddening at such a reply, "I trust, therefore, no offence will be taken. Mr. Chapman, will you, can you, explain?"

"Yes, ahem! yes," returned the lawyer, on being thus appealed to, "yes. Mr. Elmsley —the late Mr. John Elmsley, of course I mean—"

"Certainly," growled the elder Fielding, "who are we talking about?"

"Mr. John Elmsley," continued Chapman, "did make a will. That will was in my possession; but only a few days—a very few days before the lamentable accident—"

Here Chapman paused, and drew forth his

white handkerchief, but after shaking it out, as though preparing it for use, he returned it to his pocket.

"I say," he resumed, clearing his throat with another of his dry, hard coughs, and speaking in a somewhat higher key, "that Mr. Elmsley, being desirous of making material alterations in the document, such as could not easily be effected by a codicil, obtained the will from me and destroyed it, intending, as I knew at the time, to make a fresh one."

"Are you certain he destroyed it?" asked Mr. Fielding, no one else seeming inclined to press the subject.

"Quite certain," replied Chapman, "for I saw him burn it. In that will you were, in conjunction with another gentleman, appointed executor. His favourite tankard was left to you; thus much I think I may say without any improper betrayal of confidence."

"Certainly," murmured Elmsley.

"Ah, well! if that's the ease," said Fielding, "I have no more to say about it. I daresay, as

he was a man fond of his children, the property will go much as he would have left it. I don't think I will stay any later; come, Edgar. I shall just say 'good bye' and 'God bless you,' to the young ladies, and then—"

The old gentleman rose, as if about to cross over to the sisters, but Elmsley rose too, and waved his hand. Fielding stopped, and looked for explanation.

Elmsley was standing with his back to the western window, from which, at this autumn twilight, (for the day had waned low), the chief light came; yet he grew visibly paler, and his lips trembled the more.

"One moment, sir," he said, and his teeth chattered as he spoke, "but one moment. Ju—Miss Julia, and Miss Agnes!"

The girls half rose, and fixed a wondering gaze upon their uncle; he handled nervously his white kerchief, and looked not towards them.

"You had best, I think, retire for—for a space. We are now to speak of matters—of

business—at which ladies need not assist. We will call you soon. We will call you soon."

He repeated this last sentence as if at a loss for words; the girls bowed and immediately left.

"Will you please to speak on, sir?" said the quiet, firm voice of Smith, who seemed now thoroughly aroused and suspicious, for he bent from under that straight, ill-kept hair, such a keen, piercing glance upon the M. A., that, even through the thickening twilight, the latter felt it, and winced.

"Had we not better have lights?" demanded Mr. Fielding.

"No—no!" exclaimed Elmsley; "No. I can say what I have to say at once: I would have chosen, for my own part, a more select circle before which to make the painful revelation duty now forces upon me, but I bowed to others."

"If it's me you mean, Mr. Elmsley," cried Hackley, "I can very soon go. It's only the respect I have for others of the family which

has kept me here so long—not any great pleasure I feel at being here, I can tell you."

"No, Hackley, stay!" said Smith; "Mr. John Elmsley was fond of you, and none who really mean well by him or his, would wish your absence now."

"Unhappily," resumed William Elmsley, "the whole world will soon know, and in its wicked uncharitableness exult, in the announcement I now make. I have a painful, a very painful duty to perform, but—but I will hesitate no longer. You spoke but now, Mr. Fielding, of the property being likely to go as my poor brother wished it."

"I did," bluntly interposed the old gentleman; "and, to confess the truth, I can't for the life of me divine what you are driving at."

"I hope his intention, when he destroyed his will," Mr. William went on, "was to rectify and redeem, as far as in his power remained, the wrong he had committed in the earlier part of his life. It was a bitter ordeal for me to undergo, the visiting here, knowing what I

know; and particular in my own conduct as I trust I have always been, but I entered it for my poor erring brother's sake Gentlemen, I was the only relative he had in the world, no other, of any degree of kith or kin existed, in this house or out of it—nay, be silent for one moment longer—for he was never married in his life, and these, his children, are illegitimate. Chapman, ring for candles, if you please. I have no more to say, gentlemen."

A long, deep exclamation broke from all, save only the little lawyer, whe rose and rang as required; this long " Ah—h" was deeper and longer than even so astounding a revelation would have called forth, had not all seen, threatening though indistinct, beneath the surface of the speaker's words, a greedy, wicked purpose, which loomed through all his hypocritical screen, and augured ill for those who were helpless, supposing his tale true.

A dead silence followed, during which the servants entered bearing lights; the blinds were

drawn, the girls retired, and all was quiet again. As William Elmsley sat, the light of one of the candles fell upon his face, and he was directly in the view of James Smith; it was curious to notice, and more than one of those present *did* notice, how anxiously he moved, as stealthily as might be, until he had freed himself from both inconveniences.

"As your announcement has taken us all by surprise," began Smith, "and as no one else seems willing to question you upon the subject, I will venture to speak. You will have, Mr. Elmsley, to give the clearest, most irrefragable proof in support of what now appears a base and infamous fabrication—"

"Those proofs are forthcoming, sir!" interrupted Elmsley, "and have a care, sir, what you say."

"When you have proved it," steadily returned Smith, "of your power to do which I have an utter disbelief, you will then have to reconcile your long connivance in the 'error,' with your ill-timed exposure; your never ceasing

mendicancy upon your brother, with your evident purpose now."

"What, sir! How dare you utter such insinuations?" exclaimed Elmsley, turning in his anger so as again to confront the speaker.

"Oh, don't rave at me," replied Smith, in the firm, collected tone he had hitherto employed. "I do not fear you, sir; and I so plainly see that your mind is made up, as to have no dread of changing you for the worse. But I warn you: these orphan girls are not without friends, powerful friends, and if any chicanery or fraud be attempted with them, you will find yourself at the entrance of a long path of trouble and expense—I trust, also, of eventual defeat and ruin."

"He is right enough," said Mr. Fielding; "if your account is true, of course we can't help them; but if not, you will have to fight your way, sir."

"True or false, he shan't have everything without a struggle," muttered Hackley: "if there's a leg to stand on, the best lawyer in London shall be engaged."

"We shall not continue this unpleasant theme now," said Elmsley; "ample confirmation of my assertion can be produced, and, at the proper time, shall. For the present let this proof suffice. Mr. Chapman!"

"Sir," exclaimed the lawyer.

"You have, I believe, in your possession at this moment, several letters written by the late John Elmsley, in which he acknowledges his never having been married."

"I have, sir," returned Zaccheus briefly.

"You have also known from his own mouth that such was the case, and had reason to believe that others, myself among the number, knew it likewise."

"Quite true," was the short reply.

"I have done, gentlemen," continued Mr. William; "I expected to see you surprised and sorrowful, but hardly thought to hear the remarks which have been made. We had now, perhaps, better separate; another time I trust to see you again, but at present, I think——"

He paused, and Mr. Fielding, Edgar, and

Hackley rose, evidently with the intention of making a speedy departure, but Smith kept his seat.

"I shall not leave immediately, sir," began the grocer, "your dismissal is not accepted by me. At present you must be contented with my looking on you only as a visitor, like myself. I have a question, moreover, to put."

"Mr. Elmsley has signified his desire to have no farther discussion to-day," commenced Chapman, in his blandest manner, (it was not very bland); "permit me to suggest, then—"

He rubbed his hands and looked at Smith, but the latter went on:

"No doubt Mr. Elmsley would wish to avoid discussion to-day, or on any future occasion, but it may not suit others concerned. I wish to know, sir, what your intentions are, supposing you to substantiate your assertions with respect to the young ladies; what will be done for them?"

"I—I cannot, will not, answer you now," replied Mr. William; "your manner is most rude,

sir; your inquiries ill-timed. Good evening, gentlemen; I am not well enough to continue this scene."

And so saying, he hastily withdrew from the room.

Hackley heaved an immense sigh of relief as he vanished, but, his eye falling upon the lawyer immediately after, he shook his head ominously.

"Well, Edgar!" continued Smith, "what do you intend to do? I have not heard your voice this evening."

"I scarcely know what to do, say, or think," returned the younger Fielding; "at present I shall leave with my father, and shall of course reflect anxiously upon the matter. I'm afraid," he added, dropping his voice, "I'm afraid it's true."

"Very likely," retorted Smith drily, with a glance at the speaker, showing anything but approval of his words or manner. "Then you are going now—at once."

"Yes, Mr. Smith!" exclaimed the old gentleman; "we don't wish to intrude any longer, and perhaps it would be as well if we did not

farther disturb the young ladies to-night. I'm ready, Edgar; our horses are at your house, Mr. Hackley."

"All right, sir, I'll be with you," said Nat. "Good bye, Mr. Smith, for the present—hem!—"

Nat paused, as if undecided how to act, but making up his mind, said:

"Good night, Mr. Chapman."

The lawyer took no notice of this salutation, and the Fieldings, after a hasty leave-taking, departed in company with Hackley, leaving Chapman and Smith alone in the room, with the French clock which had so embarrassed the former and his clerk a week or two before, and which now ticked sharper and stronger than ever. Chapman sat with his sickly smile upon his lips, and his eyes on the ground, taking no no notice whatever of his companion. Smith stood for a minute or so, with folded arms, regarding him narrowly, then he turned, and with the same calm determined air which had marked all his movements, walked from the room.

CHAPTER II.

In the drawing room of Royal Lodge were Julia and Agnes Elmsley. They were awaiting, silently and wonderingly, the termination of the conference so mysterious to them; so full of ill omen, and vague, undefined evil; so they felt it to be, so it was.

The room was large and well furnished; the costly piano, the glittering mirrors, the richly-framed prints, the expensive toys of the mantel, the showy books for the table, the soft, thick carpet, were not wanting there; but the single candle shed a dull, imperfect light, over the

apartment, and a heavier gloom than the darkness of the night was within it.

For no single article of furniture or ornament could those girls see, which was not connected with some incident in the life of at least one dead parent; this was bought on Julia's birthday; that was brought to Agnes as a present from London; this had been acquired by long teasing and importunity; that had been bought as a pleasing surprise, and given with John Elmsley's best, kindest smile on his frank old face.

The girls, in their long black dresses, were not side by side, were not mingling their griefs, their doubts, their fears. Agnes sat drooping in an arm chair about the centre of the room; Julia, with her mass of ringlets thrust disorderly back, stood at the large window, and leaning her elbow on the sill, her chin upon her hand, she looked out upon the dreary night, or the transient gleams of the moon; as the hurrying clouds broke, and her fitful light showed the long, monotonous roadside hedge, stretching into

the obscure distance; or the dark copse on the hill, lying in masses against the deep blue sky. Then more clouds, and all was gloom and silence again, save for the moan of the wind, or that sound, so much in keeping with a lowering sky, the scream of the distant locomotive. The light which burnt in the drawing room was too feeble to do more than show dimly the figure of Julia, as she stood at the window, nor were there any to see her, had she been the centre of a shield of light—nor, again, would she have heeded, in her then mood, how many, or who saw her.

After a long pause, the tread of feet was heard below, doors opened and closed; then Julia could see, by the lamp over the gate, three figures leave the Lodge, and could just distinguish that the Fieldings were of the number. A flash of surprise, mingled with something like anger, ran through her mind, at finding Edgar could leave without first seeking her; she calmed herself by reflecting that it was likely something had occurred to cause this hasty departure. She had not ceased to think of it, however, ere she caught

the sound of a nearing footstep. The step was that of a man; it ascended the stairs; it approached the drawing room door; then Smith presented himself.

Agnes rose with an exclamation of joy, while Julia left her post by the window, and advanced towards him. She had intended to express her pleasure at seeing some one at last, but the face of Smith had that in it which daunted her, and without knowing why, she checked herself, and involuntarily sinking into a chair, awaited his speaking. Not so Agnes; though quick and penetrating enough by nature, she had not learned to seek or acknowledge in her lover's countenance, any expression but one, and eagerly declared her delight at his presence.

Smith took her small hand in one of his own, passed his other arm round her waist, and kissed her cheek—in this, though a process common enough, there was a gravity which for the first time startled the girl, and she looked wonderingly at his face.

Then she too, even as Julia had done, sank into a chair, and watched his lips.

At that moment in the dead pause, a step was heard in the room beneath them; it was distinct and deliberate, it was William Elmsley's. With one accord the group waited in silence until that creaking tread had crossed the house, and entered the sitting room, where, as will be remembered, Chapman still sat. The door was heard to close, and the sound echoed through the building; then Smith spoke:

"Your uncle, then, has not been with you, Agnes?"

"No, James," was the reply.

"He will be here shortly," continued Smith, "he must come here, unless, indeed, he delegates his task to his creature below."

"What is wrong, James?" asked Agnes timidly; "I see, I am sure, that something is amiss. You cannot—no, you cannot have quarrelled."

"My dear girls," said Smith, addressing both, "we are likely, I think, to have a deep and per-

manent quarrel. I never shrink from an unpleasant task; therefore I am here to inform you that a great misfortune, a great sorrow, awaits you."

"Speak on then!" exclaimed Julia, "we cannot now hear of the loss of a parent; the worst sorrows that we can see, Smith, we have seen. Is it that we are not so wealthy as was supposed? Is it in any manner connected with money?"

"It is very closely connected with money," answered the young man; "I doubt not that if money were not involved in it, there would be nothing for me to say; but it is far from all."

"Then do not fear to tell the new misfortune; we can bear it, sir," said Julia, proudly, "we, who have survived the last few weeks, need fear but little any farther trouble."

"That is an unwise belief, Julia," returned Smith. "I wish your uncle was here that he might hear me speak. Do you believe him to be a good and generous man?"

"Yes, James," said Agnes, for Smith's ques-

tion was addressed to both, "at least, we ought to think so; he has always been very kind to us, very polite and affectionate at any rate. I am so easily prejudiced that I cannot help—"

"Agnes does not like him," interrupted Julia, "nor I, Mr. Smith. If you have any wickedness to tell us of him, we shall believe you readily."

"Oh, Julia!" murmured her sister, but the gentle rebuke was unheeded.

Smith paced once or twice from side to side of the room, as if seeking in his own mind, the best way to proceed; at last he turned and said:

"Do you know the amount of your father's property?"

"No," said both the girls, but Julia added:

"I am sure he was not embarrassed, Smith, I am sure he was wealthy—does Chapman or William seek to deny it?"

"No," said Smith, "your uncle would wish the amount trebled, I doubt not. Julia, you are the eldest and most likely to know—at what church were your father and mother married?"

Agnes again looked wonderingly at him, but Julia's face was in an instant the deepest crimson, then bloodless and pale; she half rose from her chair, her left hand supporting her, and tightly grasping the arm; her lips parted, but no sound came, then she sank down without speaking.

"I see," pursued Smith, "that you appreciate the importance of my inquiry. If you, or some one else, cannot tell me when and where your parents were married, William Elmsley is heir to every shilling and every acre—for he asserts, and his compliant tool supports him, that they were never wedded, and that you, consequently, in the eye of the law, are of no kindred whatever to them."

"Oh, James!" cried Agnes, and then her eyes sought Julia's face, as if to gather counsel and strength from her

The elder sister rose again; she was paler, but haughty.

"What does he mean by this slander?" she said. "This makes true and clear all my indis-

tinct warnings and forebodings—but why does he forge these lies? In any case we are still John Elmsley's children."

"True," returned Smith, "but I must repeat, Julia, that the law would not recognise your existence. You heard them say there was no will."

"I did," said Julia.

"The absence of a will, should his statement be true," continued Smith, "makes William Elmsley master of this house, and all that pertained to its late owner."

"But, my dear James," said the soft voice of Agnes, "you do not, you cannot tell us to credit this fearful assertion."

"Of course he does not, Agnes," interposed Julia: "he feels, I am right sure, that, to serve some hidden purpose, our uncle is fabricating this calumny on his dead brother and his wife, ere they are cold in their graves—is it not so, Smith?"

The young man paused, his hand shading his eyes, without speaking.

"Say on, James Smith," resumed Julia, "if you were the only man in the group, the only one who dared inflict this necessary pain, do not break down now, but say on."

"I will," said Smith, firmly. "My belief is, Julia, that we shall find this tale too true, and that your poor father has imprudently destroyed one will without having another instantly drawn out; that your uncle is omnipotent now, and you are at his mercy."

As he finished, he glanced at Agnes; she was bending over the side of her chair, her face hidden by her kerchief, weeping bitterly but silently, save for an occasional low sob. Ere any one of the three spoke again, steps were once more heard in the lobby, and Smith, turning to face the door, saw Elmsley and Chapman enter.

The first wore a grave, lofty expression of feature, as of a man whom a high sense of duty and moral obligation had nerved to perform a difficult and unpleasant task; the latter slunk in downcast, as was his wont, and as is the wont

of some of the meaner beasts of prey. Mr. William bowed solemnly to Smith, as to a stranger, or rather as to one of whom he had some knowledge, but had not expected to meet there. He advanced to his nieces, while Chapman took the nearest chair.

"Julia and Agnes," began Mr. Elmsley.

Agnes looked up and said:

"Yes, uncle—sir," as he paused.

Julia spoke not, moved not, but her bright, dark eye, darker and larger in appearance from her bloodless features, was riveted on her kinsman with a steadiness which demanded all his nerve to bear without shrinking.

"I presume," continued Elmsley, "that Mr. Smith has made you aware of the—of the announcement which I have been obliged—compelled—painfully obliged and compelled to make."

"He has, sir," said Julia; "I utterly disbelieve it."

"I can forgive any outbreak on your part, I am sure," said Mr. William, "your feelings have

of course, received a severe shock; but I have a duty, an imperative duty to perform. It is that which sustains me. I have requested Mr. Chapman to be present at our interview, because I am anxious to do nothing clandestine, nothing—"

"You will allow me to say, sir," interposed Julia, "that you are taking upon yourself a manner wholly unfitted to you, at least in the presence of the mistress of this house. Tell me plainly, sir, what it is you are about to do, which demands the presence of your solicitor—your solicitor and, unfortunately, ours. Tell me what duty you have to perform beyond returning to your calling in London."

"My duty, Julia, is this," returned her uncle, with immoveable composure;—he was composed now, and Smith could see clearly enough, from the expression of his face, that there was to be no more faltering, no hesitation; that his mind was duly nerved, that now the blow was to be struck with the proper strength and decision;

"my duty is to show the world that I do not countenance conduct which your presence forbids my characterizing in strong terms. Were I to depart, and leave events to take their course, should I not, as far as in me lay, be striking a blow at the foundation and root of the moral ties of society? Should I not be showing an indifference to good and evil which would in me be highly culpable? But be certain of this, and let the assurance restrain your tongue at any future time from hasty speaking, as it will show you how mistaken you have been in the meaning of the person who now addresses you; be certain, I say, that I will never see you want: that though legally you cannot demand one farthing of this property, and have no right even to the clothes you wear, yet forbid it, that I should adhere to the letter of the law. No; you are in yourselves innocent, and I will see that you do not come to poverty."

"Good God! what a scoundrel!" ejaculated Smith.

Elmsley's eyes rolled for a moment in his di-

rection, but he took no further heed of the exclamation.

Julia stood erect, and pressing one hand tightly on her bosom to keep down the overswelling passion, gasped in a voice grown suddenly husky and broken:

"Fiend! villain! oh, for speech fit for your ears! Agnes! Agnes! leave his presence. Give me your hand, Agnes."

The younger sister rose, and they left the room together, passing close to Mr. Elmsley, who shrank from them, and whose eyes, beneath the wild glare which they met, at last faltered, and sought the ground.

But they passed from the room and he recovered, a long, sighing breath testifying to the relief afforded by their absence; Chapman, too, seemed more himself, and mustered courage to speak.

"I am sure, Mr. Elmsley," he began, "your conduct does you the highest credit. Many gentlemen, under the circumstance, would have felt justified, not to say, forced—would have felt

justified in renouncing at once all farther intercourse with so unfortunate a connection. But you are the soul of liberality, sir. Your reason not only feasts, but your soul flows, as has been forcibly remarked."

"Oh, Mr. Chapman," returned Elmsley, "you are too good. I do not claim any praise for what I am doing; I reckon no sacrifice too great to which the path of duty leads. I merely—"

"By Heaven I shall go mad if I listen any longer!" cried Smith, "if this be not all some wretched mockery, and well-understood hypocrisy that you are playing; if you really are dealing out these compliments and self-denying phrases in earnest, then does the world contain men more wicked than I at the worst had thought possible. In parting, I again deliver my warning, Mr. Elmsley. These girls are not friendless; and ere twenty-four hours have passed and gone, a first-rate lawyer shall be your opponent. And mind, for I deem you capable of anything bad and cowardly, do your worst in

this matter, as I know you will, but let not one unfeeling or insulting speech to those poor girls pass your lips! If you annoy them but by a single sentence, and I know it, I will horsewhip you till you howl."

With this threat Smith flung from the room, dashed down stairs, and left the house.

His road led him to Hackley's, where, as may possibly be remembered, he slept. It was rather late, and the train for which Nat always waited had come in; the house was therefore closed and dark, save where a faint light, glimmering beneath the door, showed that some of the inmates had not yet retired. Smith rapped gently with his knuckles, for knocker at the Railway Arms there was none; the door was immediately opened by Hackley himself.

The landlord eagerly welcomed his lodger, and led the way to the little bar parlour, where a small fire was burning, quite acceptable in the chilly autumn evening. Nat had been smoking, and indeed still held his long clay pipe between his lips; his good-tempered visage

was shaded and troubled as he invited his guest to enter the sanctum. Smith took a seat on one side of the fire, Hackley planted himself on the other, and each seemed waiting for his companion to speak.

"Well, sir," began Hackley, "what do you think of things now? I'm afraid we don't know the worst even yet."

"Why, Nat, I should fancy we do," returned Smith, "I don't see what more there is to come. Elmsley is evidently determined to act a most knavish and unnatural part, and he will be admirably supported by Chapman. Nevertheless, as they have declared their intentions pretty plainly, we have not much more to learn."

Hackley shook his head in token of dissent, took a few thoughtful "pulls" at his pipe, and then said:

"You of course believe this account? Ah! I could see you did; so do I. That fellow, sir, those fellows I may say; for one's as deep in it as the other, knows what they are about well enough, depend upon it. I never liked the look

of that brother—not that *that* goes for much, because everyone could see with half an eye that he never liked the look of me. He never was no more to compare with the Mr. Elmsley that's dead than I'm like—like nothing at all. But as I was saying, sir, I don't think we see the end of it yet."

"What do you mean?" asked Smith, rousing himself from a thoughtful fit into which he had fallen; "you have something to disclose, I see; what is it?"

"Perhaps I ought not to talk about it," replied Hackley, "and I certainly shall not name it to anyone but yourself, but it's my belief that this will have a very unpleasant effect on certain friends of the family."

"Not at all impossible," said Smith, "nothing that I can think of is more calculated to do so."

"Ah!—but," continued the publican, "some one will act very unhandsomely, I fear. Do you know if what they said about the law was

right—I mean as to all the property going away from the young ladies?"

"Quite right, I am sorry to say," answered Smith; "I am very much more sorry on their accounts than my own, although I am, of course, very much concerned for myself. Poor girls! how will they bear this treble blow—loss of parents, fortune, and position?"

"I know you are sure to do everything as a gentleman and a Londoner ought to do," said Hackley, "but to one of the sisters the blow will be more than trebled. Miss Julia will lose a husband."

"What! Why do you say this?" exclaimed Smith.

"Mark my words," gravely replied Hackley; "if them young ladies have lost their fortunes, Edgar Fielding isn't the man to make it up to either of them. I heard some words drop to-night which told a good deal; father and son think pretty much alike too, I can tell you."

Smith made no remark upon this, but sat thinking over with painful intentness, the pro-

bability of such a desertion, and was obliged to own from what he knew of the light, flippant tone of Edgar's mind, that such conduct was not at all impossible. He did not feel inclined to push his enquiries, and ascertain the exact amount of confirmation Nat could give to his conjecture, for the excitement of the day, so varied and trying, was dying away, and he felt spiritless and sick at heart. Therefore he remained in moody silence by Nat Hackley's fire; the good landlord, noting how jaded and worn he looked, forbore to harass him with any further conversation. They sat in silence, therefore, until they parted for the night.

CHAPTER III.

A clap of thunder, a flash of lightning, or an earthquake, are all very sudden and startling things in their way, but are too hackneyed for our use, and miserably insufficient besides, to express one tithe of the amazement which fell upon the good people of Chalkingdon, when they heard the revelations contained in our last chapter. The first sentiment pervading their Chalkingdonian minds was that of total incredulity; the next, was belief in the first part of the story, but disbelief in the possibility of a brother acting so unnaturally to a dead bro-

ther's children, as was rumoured of William Elmsley. This passed away, and then the good people of Chalkingdon were filled with abhorrence of Mr. Elmsley and his coadjutor, the solicitor. This feeling was not absolutely inactive in character, for most of the gentry who lived thereabouts came to an agreement to cut the former, dead; while the indignant tradesmen of the town resolved to have nothing to do, socially or professionally, with the latter.

The lower classes, always extreme in their sympathies, and with whom the dead squire was a favourite from his somewhat profuse liberality, carried their feelings into overt acts; insulted William Elmsley when he rode through the town; called his servants opprobrious names, challenging them, too, to trial by battle on every possible occasion, and finally broke the lawyer's windows.

Alas! however, for poor human nature; in time—for as we are running a-head of our tale, we may as well stretch out a little farther before we put about—in time, we say, when the first

burst of enthusiasm had died away, when other events had arisen to cause the Elmsleys no longer to interest any beyond their own circle; when t was found that William Elmsley had (as of course he had), as much ready money as his elder brother; that he knew how to use it as well or better; when he was found to be a dangerous enemy or a smooth friend; when he had taken the chair at the Bible Society's meeting, and had become one of the vice-presidents of the Chalkingdon Branch; when it was seen that he was far more regular in his attendance at church than the late John Elmsley; that he could be ten times more inexorable in money matters than he, while at the same time he knew as well as any man where best to lay out a few pounds in charity to "tell"—then, we say, the tone of public feeling changed.

It began to be seen that he was a highly respectable man, an intensely moral and particular man; and, after all, it could not be denied you know, that John Elmsley had not acted in a proper manner, and some allowance should fairly

be made for the feelings of a man, only too desirous, possibly, of the world's esteem, and anxious above all things to remove from himself the shade of a suspicion of his countenancing such glaring impropriety. At last, then, he became a popular man, though not one familiar with the crowd; and when the next election came, he was an effective and much cheered, and highly belauded partisan of the successful member; he was sure to side with the successful member; he was a lucky man, and all he *now* did prospered.

As for the legal bearings of the case itself, poor Hackley soon found that there was not even a single leg to stand upon; a score of letters were produced, in which the late owner of Royal Lodge expressed his uneasiness at his position, and his desire to repair, so far as was in his power, his error.

The tale would be long to tell in full, nor would it now be worth the telling; it will serve our purpose if we state briefly that John Elmsley, when a young and struggling tradesman,

and unable to support, as he persuaded himself, a wife, had fallen in love with, or taken a liking to, as the reader pleases, a very pretty barmaid at a tavern near by. This pretty barmaid was the Mrs. Elmsley of our history. Ere he deemed himself rich enough openly to take a wife, John Elmsley found himself the father of two children, and, as procrastination is the thief of time, why the ceremony which should have been performed at first, was put off, and put off again, until it was never performed at all. Changing the locality of his business, Elmsley had ventured, in a new neighbourhood, to introduce the mother of his children as his wife; a few old acquaintances had always known to the contrary, but strangers cared not to enquire narrowly into the social relations of a prosperous, money-lending man.

So time had rolled on, and he grew wealthy and wealthier, but with each succeeding year he found the difficulty of acknowledging and repairing his error increase, for he dreaded lest an union, though performed ever so privately, should

get noised abroad, and mar his daughters' prospects by branding them as illegitimate. As for the wedding portions, and the queries likely to be made in drawing up the settlements, he had, as he fancied, hit upon a plan for evading the most "ticklish bit of law," by giving each girl a casket containing ten thousand "golden sovereigns," which would not require such long-winded yarns, he said, as your houses or land. He might have found his scheme very flimsy, but he was not a learned man. Besides, he always felt in his own mind that his daughters were so good and so beautiful, that let them but start fair, and they would make the best matches in the county; but let strangers be prejudiced, he argued, by the knowledge of their clouded birth, and none but commoners and second-raters would seek them.

His brother, of course, knew the secret, as did Chapman, for in his will he was obliged to describe his daughters properly. The will, however, was gone, and his girls were but beggars. This sentence brings us round to the young

ladies, who surely have not fallen one jot or tittle in the opinion of our readers because they were unfortunate.

The severest moralist, or starchest hypocrite, cannot surely impute a fault to *them;* yet, we know not how it is, those who affect a peculiar odour of sanctity generally seem to think that one grand mission of a moralist is to take the execution of the penal part of that commandment which threatens the visitation upon the child of the parent's sin, out of the hands of their common ruler, and deem themselves almost weakly merciful if they only abandon, and do not scourge or persecute. There were many such exemplaries in Chalkingdon; many indeed who would

> "Compound for sins they were inclined to,
> By damning those they had no mind to;"

and many who went much farther, and shunned these poor girls, because an exhibition of severity and zeal sat well upon them; because indignation and horror of vice was always the

right thing to show, and could now be practised cheaply, while, had all men their deserts, they themselves would certainly not have 'scaped whipping. There were, we repeat, plenty such around Chalkingdon; indeed, the girls seemed to find few others, for, after the first burst of sympathy had passed, after the truth of the tale told by Mr. William was pretty well ascertained, they found themselves left indeed alone and helpless.

It may readily be imagined that Smith did not sink tamely, nor give up the struggle without another effort; but the eminent lawyer to whom he carried his case, being almost a conscientious one, did not lead him into a hopeless suit, but crushed every idea of success at once.

There was no home at Royal Lodge for Julia and Agnes Elmsley now, and some little difficulty might have been experienced in selecting a retreat for them, had not one man chivalrously come forward. Their temporary home was at Farmer Bruffle's;—the reader remembers Farmer

Bruffle?—the yeoman who on William Elmsley's walk to Chalkingdon somewhat annoyed that mourning gentleman by his inquiries and remarks; he too who was at the funeral, and on the churchward part of the journey was, by error of Mr. Tressels, seated in the wrong carriage.

He was almost the only man who stretched the hand of kindness to the orphan girls, and at his cheerful farmhouse—Daisyfield Farm its name, and full of curly headed young Bruffles it was—at his cheerful farm house they tarried, while they resolved upon their course of life. Farmer Bruffle needed no stimulus or support in his carrying out of an object which his sturdy, staunch, straight-forward mind believed to be right and just; nevertheless, he could not help perhaps feeling somewhat of an extra incitement to his hospitality in the unexpected coming forward of Sir Roger Hawberry, who called twice to see the young ladies, and though he had very little to say, not being a man of eminently quick parts, yet, as his visits were so evidently in kindness,

and as he was Bruffle's landlord, and as he, moreover, delivered himself of a highly complimentary sentence relative to England's yeomanry being England's pride, his sympathy, had, doubtless, a good effect.

It was not, as they (the girls), soon found, the easiest possible thing to decide upon their course. Beyond agreeing to the propriety of one thing, the immediate and contemptuous rejection of the thirty pounds per annum each, so munificently offered by their uncle, they could make up their minds to nothing.

The just named allowance was offered, through the medium of Chapman, by aid of whom most of their very limited negociations were carried on, and they were to enjoy it so long as they remained unmarried; the girls needed no counsel on the point, but all their friends (a very small number now), were angered at the mingled greed and insolence which could offer such a sum. Not, however, that twenty-fold its amount would have been accepted, or anything from William Elmsley. He was heartily glad at their almost

immediate departure from his house, as it saved the scandal of a violent dismissal on his part; and so alarmed had he been by the violent gestures and excited manner of Julia in a single quarrel—the single interview, indeed—after the day of the funeral, that he determined to rid himself of her at once, at any hazard. For, he said to himself, as he sat, with pale face and quivering lips, in his own room, that girl would stab him if opportunity offered, and a man might as well attempt to reason with a tigress.

Smith, who had managed again to obtain a short holiday, now held frequent conferences with Mr. Bruffle and Nat Hackley, conferences held either in the snug farmhouse parlour, over jugs of the yeoman's three year old ale, or at the Railway Arms, assisted by steaming glasses of whiskey and water. To these conclaves Fielding was several times invited; he attended the first, but no other.

On that occasion Smith proposed to marry the girls off hand, and so settle affairs at once;

but Edgar saw grave objections in the way. Fresh arrangements, he said, were clearly necessitated by recent events, and moreover, his friends would think it highly indecorous for a wedding to take place so soon after the death of both parents of the lady. Bruffle, somewhat bluntly, no doubt, made known his disapprobation of the young man's language, to which remark Edgar replied with unexpected and uncalled-for tartness. The farmer expressed regret for having said anything which could be considered harsh, but Fielding was not to be pacified. In his turn he was rude, and, persisting until he irritated Bruffle, succeeded in fixing a quarrel upon him, and at last rising in anger, declared he would never again cross the farmer's threshold, and so left.

Hackley and Smith were full of expressions of sorrow at this untoward event, and declared Edgar would think the matter over when cool, and be sorry for his language. But the astute old yeoman was not to be deceived; he said, and adhered unshakeably to his opinion, that Edgar

was anxious to obtain any excuse whatever, for slackening in his attentions to Julia, and, despairing of any better one, snatched eagerly at the opportunity of quarrelling with her protector, and so gaining a fair plea for seeing her less often.

His companions, though with many internal misgivings the while, would not hear of such motives; but time passed, and Edgar came not near to Daisyfield Farm, nor would he attend any more of the consultations, though held at Hackley's. He wrote in his usual light strain, to Smith, once or twice, and once or twice he wrote to Julia, advising her to be guided by the counsel of Smith, hoping that he should shortly be able to see her as often as of old, and deploring the perverseness of his friends, who threw every obstacle in the way of his achieving the object dearest to his heart.

This was all very well, but still there remained the old question undecided; what were the girls to do? Smith did not like to marry without Fielding doing the same; partly because he

thought Julia would be so lonely, and partly because he felt that Edgar would find it easier to cool down when the slight stimulus which Smith's arrangements afforded was removed, and the latter was no longer in communication with him. However, the Londoner determined not to postpone his marriage for any great while; but still, as just said, there remained the old question: "what were the girls to do?"

Bruffle gave them shelter, and was willing to continue to do so, but of course they felt it to be impossible to take advantage of his solitary liberality, and inflict on him, who had a large family of his own, such a burden. For the sisters were almost literally penniless; on their rejection of his bounty, William Elmsley seemed to hold himself relieved from any further care or consideration whatever, as related to them, so even the major part of their clothes remained at Royal Lodge, and excepting a good gold watch and chain each, they had nothing of any great value with them.

The resource so naturally sought by most re-

spectable young women was not open to them; it had been proposed, for Smith with unwilling lips had advised their seeking governess's situations. But they were not fitted for such posts.

Superficial and defective as, God knows, the education of a governess generally is, or has been, for things are changing now, the Elmsleys were below even that standard. Indifferent playing of the piano, a smattering of bad French, something of a knack at embroidery and the like, good dancing, irregular and faulty drawing, with, in Julia, a taste for painting flowers, comprised all these girls could offer; for Agnes was not even free from mistakes in spelling, and was much confused by double letters, and by final s's, of which her epistles generally showed a superabundance. Julia was, in that respect, a little better, but was not qualified for a governess, and had, moreover, a hasty temper, and a perfect hatred of teaching, so that idea was abandoned.

With nothing decided upon, Smith took his leave, having at last made up his mind to marry Agnes at once; so that something after all may

be said to have been decided upon, but the others of the little circle knew not of his resolve.

He promised on leaving to come down and see them all soon; while Bruffle, who accompanied him to the train, had come also to a secret determination. He saw that the young ladies were uncomfortable and pining; and felt sure that they were always accusing themselves of intruding improperly upon his hospitality; though the good farmer grudged them not the shelter he had so generously accorded, nor the seat at his table; for in Daisyfield, although there was little of luxury or show, there was no stint, a cheerful plenty was always there, for John Bruffle was a prosperous farmer. Besides, in reference to the aforenamed seats at his table, the yeoman was wont to declare that the two girls didn't "eat no more nor a couple of rabbuts."

As for the speedy coming forward of Fielding to marry Julia, and for which offer he believed Smith to be waiting, John had no reliance on

such an event at all. He had had always a secret dislike to Edgar, and was perhaps too ready to believe anything to his discredit; at any rate he believed certain rumours which reached him, but which he carefully kept from his guests, of unfeeling remarks at various times made by the young gentleman.

So he strode manfully—much now, we should say, as at such a moment Dandie Dinmont would have strode—towards Hawberry Hall, the seat of our oft-mentioned friend, Sir Roger Hawberry.

It was past the time of sunset when Smith departed, therefore twilight was tingeing everything around with grey, as Bruffle stalked along the bye road leading to that dull but respectable mansion. It was not by any means dark, however, so as he turned an angle in the road, and came suddenly upon a group of gentlemen who had evidently been shooting, he at once recognised them all. He recognised them, and they knew him; he touched his hat respectfully, for some among them (some six or seven in all), were wealthy squires, and all might have gone

on well, but that William Elmsley chose to advance from the rear and speak to him.

Perhaps Elmsley was anxious to show his friends how perfectly at ease with himself he was; how satisfied with all he had done; perhaps to show he entertained no dislike to the man who cherished those whom he had felt it necessary to disown; perhaps he had no motive beyond a desire to patronize, and say something to an inferior, as such respectable people sometimes will do.

"Good afternoon, Bruffle," he said; "I hope you are well, Bruffle."

"What, be'est thee there!" exclaimed the farmer; "I be dommed if I wouldn't zooner ha met a raven, or a squinting woman. Go whoam do, devourer of the orphan!"

And with these words Bruffle strode on again; redder in the face, perhaps, than before, and his stout stick clenched with an ominous, although quite unconscious, tightness, which told how his thoughts were employed; what Mr. Elmsley

said to his friends, or what they said to him, we never knew.

Bruffle soon arrived at Hawberry Hall, and, upon inquiry, found Sir Roger was at home, as was also Lady Hawberry; on expressing his wish to see them both, his message was immediately taken in, for he was well known to all the servants there; firstly as their master's chief and best tenant, which was something; secondly as the brewer and liberal dispenser of the best ale within ten miles of Chalkingdon, which was more.

He was speedily admitted, and found the baronet and his lady together. Sir Roger acknowledged his rustic bow, and begged him to be seated; Bruffle thanked his honour and would take the liberty: he hoped her ladyship was quite well. Her ladyship informed him that she was perfectly in health, and gratified the farmer by inquiring after each of his children by its own individual, separate, proper Christian name.

These preliminaries over, Bruffle straight-

forwardly introduced the business which had brought him to the Hall. He reminded Sir Roger of the desolate condition of John Elmsley's orphan daughters, of the more than traitorous conduct of their uncle, their anxiety to find some respectable way of maintaining themselves, and finally, with a tact which surprised himself, and which, as it was very foreign to his character, showed the interest he took in the matter, he said that the well-known kindness and liberality of Sir Roger and Lady Hawberry had naturally induced him to appeal to them.

Lady Hawberry answered him. She, as we think has been hinted in an earlier page of this chronicle, was tall and bony; a stately-important and not altogether unridiculous (a patent for that compound), woman; but though Lady Constance Joanna Margaret d'Anjou Hawberry was bony, stately and important, and fond of a due proportion of homage, she was of a good heart, after all. As just written she answered the farmer.

"Mr. Bruffle," she said, "Sir Roger and I

have more than once spoken together on this subject; we are much concerned about these unfortunate young persons, and I am quite sure will do all we can to assist them."

"Thank'ee, my lady," said Bruffle; "the poor girls doan't know where I be come, but if so be they did, they'd know as I'd a come to the fittest and best and kindest of all our girt folk."

"Now," continued the lady, "most girls look to the profession of a governess; have they thought of that? We might assist them in their endeavours, if wished."

"Why, ma'am, your ladyship I mean, but I beg your pardon, I'm zure," began Bruffle, "we have a talked that over, but they thinks—poor timid things that they be! they thinks as they be'ant clever enough. Miss Julia do zay she can't play the pianny well enough, but Lord!" continued he, warming at the remembrance, "my Jenny have been a learning of she, and to hear she—Miss Julia I mean—play 'Buy a Broom,' and 'Old Towler,' why—there!" he ex-

claimed, obviously breaking down for want of words to do justice to his subject, "there!—it's like a angel."

"If they really are doubtful of their ability," resumed Lady Hawberry, who had waited patiently until Bruffle had finished his burst of enthusiasm, "I should not advise them to select such a profession. Indeed I am rather glad to find they are not bent upon becoming governesses: there are such throngs of accomplished girls who have no other resources, and who crowd into the limited field in such numbers, that a governess is but too often an ill-paid, slightly-valued servant."

"Too true," said Sir Roger, solemnly; "too true."

"Too true," said Bruffle, finding a pause made here, although it is doubtful if he achieved more than a dim, general understanding, of Lady Hawbery's meaning; however, he thought he could not be far wrong if he said, "ditto to Mr. Burke," by echoing Sir Roger's words. The lady resumed.

"Now, if no false pride exists in these young orphans, if they are willing and wise enough to allow substantial comfort, and a far more independent position, to outweigh the fancy of a name, I can offer them suitable and respectable situations."

"I be zurtain, your ladyship," interposed John, with another bow, "that they poor things would be glad of any comfortable home. The Lord do know that they're as welcome at Daisyfield as ever was flowers in May, but they've a got a sort of veeling—you know what I means, your ladyship."

Her ladyship bowed, in token of perfectly comprehending Mr. Bruffle's somewhat obscurely expressed sentiment, and proceeded,

"At least, you could make the proposal to them," she said. "I am in want of a pleasing, good-tempered young person, to act as lady's-maid, and partly, indeed, as my companion. My sister, Lady Gorsebush, has just written to mention her want of a similar assistant: now, if you think these situations are worthy their

acceptance—of *that*, however, I am quite certain—but if you think the Misses Elmsley will accept them, you are quite at liberty to say they can have them."

Now to John Bruffle, although a well to do farmer, there was nothing at all repugnant to his feelings in this offer, nor would there have been had it been made in respect of his own children; so he heartily thanked her ladyship, and did then and there, in the name of Julia and Agnes, unconditionally accept the proposals.

"If," said her ladyship, after he had so expressed himself, "they are willing to come, as you imagine, pray, Mr. Bruffle, try to spare an hour to bring them to the Hall to-morrow afternoon: if you cannot come with them, perhaps Mrs.——"

"Not a word more, if your ladyship pleases!" exclaimed the yeoman; "I shall be only too proud to come, and zo will they, poor things."

Then, this business being settled, Sir Roger asked him to have a glass of wine, to which John Bruffle agreed, and then forthwith they

all three plunged into a profound and bewildering discussion upon farming. We say "all three," for Lady Hawberry was quite as well versed in these matters as Sir Roger; indeed, the lady got credit, rightly or wrongly, for almost everything Sir Roger knew, said, or did; at Hawberry Hall the grey mare was the better horse, it is true, but popular report was surely in error when it assigned to her the task of drilling her husband into a respectable familiarity with the words and exercises necessary to a colonel of militia.

After John Bruffle had staid as long as he deemed consistent with good breeding, he took his leave with renewed thanks, and once more striding along the road, was soon in his own home again. But short as the walk had been, rapidly as he had achieved it, it had been long enough to allow the worthy yeoman to cool down a little, and to see difficulties which had not previously presented themselves. He began to consider that Miss Julia—for she was the principal in his eyes—might have notions about "going

out to service," even in the highest possible families, which would differ very materially from his or his children's. Bruffle naturally recurred to the time, but a day or two past, it seemed, when Julia Elmsley was looked upon as the handsomest, proudest, finest young lady in those parts, and he wished heartily, as he paused, leaning on his own gate, that he had been less precipitate in decidedly accepting the offer of Lady Hawberry. Now, however, all that was left for him was to put the best face on the matter; break it as well as he was able to the young ladies, and assure them that it mattered not how long they were in making up their minds, for that he, John Bruffle, found them of great value in teaching his cluster of girls music and embroidery, and all them things. So the farmer soliloquized, and thus he determined to act; yet it was with a slow and reluctant step that he entered his house.

Fortune, however, was disposed to favour him in an unlooked-for manner; he opened the door and looked in. It was a pleasant scene which

met the eye of the kind husband and father, and thoroughly such was John Bruffle. The chamber was neither very large, nor very richly furnished, but a fire heaped with thick logs, roared and crackled in the ample grate; warm, though faded and old-fashioned curtains were drawn before the window; a carpet was on the floor, and in the oval, gilt-framed mirrors, (which had been the yeoman's mother's), the stout Windsor and padded arm chairs and Pembroke tables looked brown and cozy enough. So did the samplers on the walls, and the pair of oil paintings, which professed to represent Mr. and Mrs. Bruffle; but nothing gave the room half the charm as did the groups of fair curly girls clustered around Julia and Agnes Elmsley. The former was explaining a map to three eager listeners, while the latter was deep in the mysteries of crotchet, a pattern of which she was imparting to the same number. The good wife, too, sitting near the latter, suspended her employment (that of stocking darning), to listen, yet furtively, as though vexed with herself for taking interest

in such a trivial thing, and ashamed lest any one should detect her.

Bruffle was soon perceived, and, as a matter of course, swarmed upon, legs, arms, and neck, immediately. After a little trouble he shook his embracers away, and in a few words said that he had seen Smith safely off. The girls were thinner, perhaps, than when the reader last saw them, aud certainly looked graver and more thoughtful, but their black dresses may have aided such an impression.

We have not felt it necessary to dwell upon their departure from Royal Lodge; we have just hinted how the course of events ran, and that will doubtless suffice. The reader can certainly imagine the cold, infernal composure of Elmsley, and how "he left everything to his solicitor," how being galled by a keener shaft than ever from Julia, and, as said, somewhat alarmed by her manner, he had refused to transact any business with the young ladies in person; how Chapman intimated to them that a speedy departure was desirable; and how—moved thereto,

it was commonly supposed, by Hackley, who waited upon him for the especial purpose—Bruffle came in his modest gig, and offered to the orphans a shelter and a home. All this, we say, would be but a work of supererogation to repeat, and as it would be paying the reader a poor compliment to assume that he cannot imagine far better than we can describe, we dwell not on the subject.

In presence of the girls, Bruffle found himself much more confused than before, so determined to postpone the telling of his news until after tea; this period arrived in due course, then he only found himself unusually silent, and prone to stir the fire forcibly, or look at his watch about twice in the minute. Presently, however, and for a short time previously there had been so dead a silence that her voice startled him, Julia said:

"I think, Mr. Bruffle, that I had better lose no time in informing Mrs. Bruffle and yourself of a determination we have come to this day; Agnes and I, I mean."

Mrs. Bruffle again suspended her darning, and looked inquiringly over her spectacles at the speaker. John said:

"Determination! Ah! sure—yes."

"We have decided," continued Julia, "upon abandoning all thoughts of obtaining engagements as governesses; indeed, we do not think it would be in our power to obtain them. But, for the present, we are resolved to seek situations of another kind; we see how absurd would be our preserving any wretched pretension of fastidiousness now; and therefore, Mr. Bruffle, if you can extend your kindness (and we can never be sufficiently grateful for all you have done)—"

"Welcome, I be zure," murmured Bruffle.

"If you can extend your kindness," pursued Julia, "and assist us in procuring any respectable position, we shall be thankful. I should suppose that about the person of a lady, as companion for instance, or lady's maid, such engagements are frequently obtainable."

"Do'ee really mean it?" exclaimed the farmer,

gazing in astonishment upon the speaker; "and hasn't no one been a talking to thee."

"I mean it, certainly," replied Julia; "and I trust you approve."

"Approve! approve!" cried John, with something like a howl of delight, in his ecstacy at the prospect of such an escape from his dilemma. "Why, it be the best thing, but really now hasn't thee been consulting with any one?"

"With no one," replied Julia; "I have not had an opportunity."

"Well then, there's the vinger o' Providence in it," said Bruffle, "for it wur only this afternoon I see Lady Hawberry," and then he narrated, with many apologies for his boldness in taking such a step without their sanction, his visit to the Hall.

He was profusely thanked by both the young ladies—for so we must continue to call them—but it struck him that the one most grateful in reality was she who said least—Agnes. Julia had, it was true, commenced the subject; Julia was most fluent in her thanks; yet for all that,

her kind host thought he could perceive an expression, doubtless involuntary, of humiliation and regret steal upon her face, when she paused, and was fully assured of the certainty of obtaining the situation.

Mrs. Bruffle extolled the goodness of heart of the Lady, remarking that she certainly was "a little odd" in her temper, but that to a person who made proper allowances and got used to her ways, she would be a kind and liberal patroness. For her sister, Lady Gorsebush, she could say little, as she knew little of her; she was, she believed, younger than Lady Hawberry, was somewhat of an invalid, and lived near Bristol.

The good wife then asked which of her young friends would be willing to go so far away. This question was soon answered; Julia instantly declared her readiness to do so, and averred that she had always felt a dislike to Lady Hawberry, the true reason being that she dreaded living as an inferior in a neighbourhood where she had once borne herself so haughtily. So *this* was left to

Agnes, who might on her side, perhaps, have had reasons equally strong for wishing to go away, but as Julia had made her election, and as *she* was not consulted, it only remained for her to assent. The visit to Hawberry Hall on the next day was agreed upon, and with that all was settled which could at that time be settled.

Great was the tribulation, and loud the weeping, on that night, among the battalion of little Bruffles; who, when they flowed into the room, even as a mighty tide, to bid their parents and friends "good night"—here it must be confessed, the simile hardly holds good—were indiscreetly informed by their mother, who was just as indiscreet as all mothers are, that Miss Julia and Miss Agnes would soon leave them. With the majority, expulsion by force had to be resorted to, so tight was the clinging, so plenteous were the kisses; and deep in the watches of the night, as Nanny the servant did on the ensuing morning depose, deep in the watches of the night, Polly Bruffle, aged four,

awoke, and cried loud and long at the remembrance of her impending depriviation; so that Jenny Bruffle, aged six, and Tommy Bruffle, aged three, were awakened by this mournful alarum, and, stimulated by the example, refreshed by the reminder, did lift up their voices also and weep, so that sleep fled the eyes of Nanny the aforesaid, until the cock, with cheerful din, did scatter the rear of darkness thin.

CHAPTER IV.

In the small, but neat and cheerful bedroom, assigned to them at Daisyfield Farm, were Julia and Agnes Elmsley. They had just bidden the farmer and his wife "good night," and now Julia stood before the looking glass, but evidently seeing nothing which its surface reflected; one hand clasped within the other, her lips closely shut, and her brow bent and angry. Agnes stood watching the gloomy face, afraid to break in upon its silence, until, her sister moving a little, their eyes met.

"Well, Agnes," said Julia, noting instantly the anxious look, "what have you say?"

"Nothing particular, my dear Julia," returned Agnes, "only this; 'tis of no consequence perhaps, and of course I leave everything to you, but I was not prepared to hear you introduce the subject we had been speaking on, to Mr. Bruffle this evening."

"And why not?" demanded Julia calmly; "would you have us remain here from month to month, drawing our support from the farmer as long as it could be drawn, and removing when at last he was compelled to ask us to do so?"

"No; of course not," said Agnes.

"Then," continued Julia, "would you write periodically to Smith, and with some of the excuses which our father used to receive in such numbers, request the loan of two or three pounds until our expected remittances come to hand?"

"You know I would not, my dear Julia," remonstrated Agnes.

"Then tell me what you would do," said Julia.

"Why—of course, as I said, you know much

the best, and I leave everything to you," began Agnes; "but do you not think we are a little too precipitate. Would it not be as well for me to write to Smith, yourself to Fielding, mentioning what we now consider the only resource open to us, and so obtain their opinion? Perhaps they would like to be consulted before we took so decided a step, perhaps—perhaps—" faltered Agnes.

"Perhaps they would marry us at once, you mean to say," interrupted Julia; "ah! I thought that was at the bottom of all your discretion and caution. You may write, if you are so disposed, to James Smith, and ask him to be good enough to marry you directly, if he pleases—"

"Oh, Julia!" said Agnes.

"Your letter must be much the same in meaning, frame it how you may," said Julia, "and what would his answer be?"

"Well, Julia!" exclaimed the younger sister, in a somewhat higher key, "you have chosen to put the most unpleasant construction possible on

my words, but since you have done so, I will say that I am certain there would be but little impropriety in my so writing to James; he is so nearly my husband that I would not hesitate to do it. As for his answer, I am quite sure that it would be everything I could hope or expect. You underrate Smith, Julia," continued Agnes, and the lip trembled now, while a watery brightness appeared in the eye, "you know he is deficient in brilliant qualities, and has not the handsome face and figure of Fielding, but—"

"But he is the soul of honour and integrity, Agnes," cried Julia, drawing her sister near and kissing her; "he will have the best wife in the world, but, good as she is, he deserves her. Forgive my ill temper, Agnes; you will, I am sure when I explain its cause. Now don't let any more of those great round tears start from your wet lashes; there, now we are well again. I mean you to write at once to Smith, announcing your intention: we will see this lady to-morrow, but if James be as ready as he doubtless will be, you need take no second step in the matter."

"And you! you will write to Edgar?" asked Agnes.

"I have no occasion to do so," returned the elder sister, "he knows my plans already, and—yes! had any lips but his own told me, I should have disbelieved, had they been an archangel's! he knows and approves, Agnes. This afternoon, as you are aware, during Mr. Bruffle's absence with Smith, I walked out for an hour. Almost the first person I saw was Fielding. I hardly knew how to meet him, his conduct of late has been so strange, and I think, neglectful. His manner on seeing me, however, was the same as of old, and he walked by my side until I returned. I told him how utterly helpless we were, how completely at a loss for a mere existence we found ourselves; and finally told him our recent discussion, Agnes."

"Yes, dear, and what did he say?"

"He said," resumed Julia, biting her lips, and speaking with forced calmness, "he said that he feared I could not do better. His friends were so opposed now to our union, that it would be

utter ruin to his prospects, if he persisted. A time would shortly come when he might act as he pleased, but at present for my sake, not his own, he forbore to—well, he finished by assuring me that the change would make no difference to his affection; that I should be worthy in any station, of an emperor."

She paused, and the bitter smile which writhed her fine features, showed how well Edgar's compliments had been appreciated.

"Advising me to remove to a distance, and still confide in him. Oh, Agnes, Agnes! if men *do* love, how different is their love to ours! Would I, could I have stood calmly, smilingly by, while he told me of any crushing, ruinous woe which overhung him; could I have failed to pluck him from it, when in me, and me only, lay the power to do so? No, no,—and so, Agnes, I must go; I only hope you may be more fortunate. Oh, Edgar! Edgar!"

And then Julia flung her burning face and streaming eyes upon the bed, and all the kindness of her sister was for a long time insufficient to

check her emotion. At last she rose, mastered herself by a strong effort, and spoke no more on the subject that night.

By the first post the next day, a letter was despatched to Smith, informing him of the offer made, and asking his advice thereon; and no pen can write a good and sufficient description of the nervousness of Agnes while penning the epistle, or of her fears, and anxious desire to recall it after its despatch, lest she had said more, or less, or other than she should have done.

Hackley managed to run up to Daisyfield during the day, as his young friend on the railway was off duty with a sprained ancle, which, while it disabled him from standing in the booking office, did not incapacitate him from keeping an eye upon Nat's servitors. To him (Nat, of course being meant), as to Bruffle, the proposed change conveyed both sad and pleasant feelings; he was glad to find a home of some kind opened to the ladies (for so Nat always most religiously styled and considered them), such an asylum

being doubly valuable from the doubtful conduct of Fielding, with which Nat was well acquainted, understanding it far better, perhaps, than most of those concerned. But he also felt it as a great humiliation for the daughters of John Elmsley of Royal Lodge; the John Elmsley, of whose wealth, liberality, and friendship for him, Nathaniel Hackley, he was never tired of talking; those young ladies, who had been for years his unapproachable standards of beauty, fashion, and high breeding; it was, he felt, disguise it as he would, a great misfortune, and bitter humiliation for them, to be compelled even to think of going out to service.

Yes, it was going out to service, and nothing else; so Nat was forced to own to himself as he walked slowly homewards;—the little drudge from the labourer's hovel, who, with unkempt hair, and slatternly frock, earned her sixpence per week by minding the baker's children, or by scouring Goody Brown's red-bricked cottage floor, was now akin to them, and differed but in degree.

"If it wasn't them," muttered Hackley, "I shouldn't care. There's no harm or degradation in being a servant; no, I've been one myself, and yet I consider I'm as good a man as any about here, but then it's *them*. There will be so many who envied and imitated them in their better days, as will be proud and glad to talk, and mock, and sneer at them! Ah, well! God's will be done; it's all for some wise purpose I dare say, I only hope they can think so."

As Hackley's reflections were, so were Julia's, and so to a great degree thought Agnes. The bitterness of the change was fully felt, and for an hour previous to their entering their generous landlord's chaise, they wept together in their own room. But by a great effort they abstained from allowing Mr. Bruffle to see how keenly they were affected; each felt that if the farmer but suspected their deep repugnance to the proposed scheme, he would insist upon its immediate abandonment; they took their seats, therefore, in the modest vehicle, with all the cheerfulness they could command.

With the natural tact of a kind heart, Bruffle disturbed them not by conversation, but, during the three miles' journey, preserved an almost total silence. It was a cold, cheerless afternoon, and on the rising ground in the distance Hawberry Hall looked square, frigid, and frowning, and the poor girls drawing their large shawls partially over their faces, conjured up pictures of the haughty, supercilious mistress of the mansion, and the mixture of patronage and domineering which would probably mark their reception. Speaking to each other afterwards upon the subject, they found that the same topics had occupied both; the same forebodings, the same almost mastering impulse to pluck John Bruffle by the sleeve, and beg him to return. Failing to do this, however, the little cob was allowed to jog steadily on, and the Hall was very soon reached.

With faces a little paler still, with hearts fluttering a little more, they alighted; assisted by the farmer, who now spoke cheeringly to them, and prophesied a happy home for each.

The girls smiled faintly, but a swelling sensation in the throat prevented speech, and they followed him in silence.

One hour elapsed, and the three trod the entrance hall again, but this time the step was lighter and the eye was brighter. (This, as Mr. Peggotty says, is verse, though we hadn't such intentions.)

With a friendly joke or two to old Mr. Daniel, the grey-headed butler, who accompanied them to the chaise, Bruffle assisted the young ladies into their former seats, and with a crack of his whip, and a cheerful cry to old "Smiler," drove off.

"There now! what do'ee think of Lady Hawberry now?" demanded the yeoman, turning with a smile to his companions; "you looks a little better again. Lard! when I took'ee into the hall, I wor frightened, you did look so mortal bad. But she doan't znap your heads off arter all, do she?"

"She is a very, very kind and thoughtful lady," answered Julia; "I had heard so much of

her pride and coldness, that I dreaded the interview. I feared cutting, contemptuous superciliousness—"

"Ah—that's it!" exclaimed Bruffle," do'ee go on now. I wants our Jenny to larn just they there sort of words. I doan't exactly understand what words they be, but I knows just what they do mean—now go on, do'ee."

"So I was not prepared," continued Julia, laughing with a franker, more cheerful laugh, than for many a day had broken from her, "I was not prepared for anything like the gentleness, the tenderness, indeed, of her manner. I see that truly the wind is tempered to the shorn lamb"

"Well, now, you see," rejoined Bruffle, "if you bean't as happy as the day be long. I don't suppose you will stay any very great while here, but depend upon it, Miss Julia, and you, Miss Agnes, you will make friends who'll never leave you. Besides—haw! haw! my old goose of a wife was sayin' haw! haw! haw!—women be all alike! was saying that, who knows? you will

see all sorts of people at Gorsebush, and may very soon, if you like, marry a squire, or a duke, or a parson, or something of that sort down there, haw! haw!"

Agnes echoed his laugh, but, fortunately, the farmer was too well pleased at the remembrance of his wife's castle-building—the accidental passing, too, at that moment, of a friend in a gig, helping to distract his attention, to notice that Julia sank, with a changed face, back in her seat. For it instantly flashed upon the girl's mind, that they must have been speaking of her too evident desertion by Fielding; now, doubtless, she bitterly thought, the subject of general gossip and jest, and that the good wife had found some consolation in hoping and prophesying her meeting with a still more eligible offer.

Agnes, however, saw the sudden pallor, and it was her voice which answered Bruffle, and led him to another topic. It was all one to the farmer; he had an immense respect for both the young ladies, which had rather increased than

diminished as their prosperity had waned, and by their changed fortunes, they were brought below his own level. By just so far as he could have become familiar and forward, just so far did he, in his way, show how little he was changed. So mind, reader, for above all other tests and proofs of John Bruffle's metal, which have been, or may hereafter be, contained in these pages, such a test as this must be the most convincing; the yeoman of Daisyfield was not a bad man.

One clear day elapsed, and then came a letter from Smith. It was a long, and, for him, unusually ardent epistle. Unfortunately, however, he was obliged to counsel the acceptance of the situations, and bitter were his words, and bitter evidently were his feelings. For Smith had, it seemed, immediately upon the receipt of Agnes's note, consulted his father as to the propriety of a proposal of instant marriage to the young lady, suggesting that he might urge to her the peculiar circumstances in which they found themselves, as a sufficient reason for abrogating

the customary period of mourning. To his horror, however, he found his father utterly adverse to the marriage altogether, and that he had only been waiting a fit and proper opportunity, which this proposal furnished, for displaying his changed sentiments.

It was in vain that Smith pointed out how every principle of honour, integrity, and manhood, demanded his adherence to the contract entered into in days of prosperity: in vain he resorted to the more lover-like argument that Agnes was dearer to him than life itself. The proverbially flinty heart of a father was not so to be softened, and the unhappy circumstances attending the ruin of the elder branch of the Elmsley family, furnished Smith, senior, as it had done scores of others, with ample and fair-sounding excuses for repudiating these poor girls. It was not their poverty, he said, oh, no! not for a moment; but could he give his consent to his son's marriage with a—well, never mind, James knew what he meant. No—never. If James was so blinded, so forgetful of all that was

due to the respectability of such a family, such a business as theirs, he, James's father, possessed more pride, more honest, honourable pride, thank Heaven! and would never allow it. No, no, was the summing up, let it drop, let him hear no more of such nonsense. If James liked, for he, James's father, was never the man to do a mean thing, far from it, if James liked there was a hundred pound note at his service; let him buy a present easily turned into money, jewellery for instance, and send it to the young person.

James, in answer, told Smith senior, that he hoped he would think more liberally on this matter; that he, James, was by no means shaken in his resolve, and though he had never taken any great steps without his father's consent, yet, he felt himself bound to say, he should marry Miss Agnes Elmsley with or without it. Smith, senior, was highly exasperated at this reply, and expressed his determination to place his younger son, Joseph, in the business in place of James, if the latter did not at once recant. This, how-

ever, James declared he would never do, and with many protestations to that effect the letter closed.

The reader must not suppose that all our information on this subject was derived from the letter, or that James Smith would enter upon such unpleasant themes—or at any rate do more than obscurely hint at them—when writing to Agnes, not for a moment. But it was necessary as everyone must own, to mix and jumble various things together, and to confound various sources of information, to enable the reader to see that Smith was honest, sincere, and really in difficulty, and not courting opposition, or acting a part, as Fielding certainly was doing. We say the letter ended in such and such a manner, so it did; but had we been merely dealing with its contents, we should certainly have mentioned in its proper place that James counselled Agnes to take the situation for a time, if not utterly repugnant to her feelings—if it *were*, he said, the proper alternative should be adopted at once, and they would marry from

Bruffle's. But he hoped, if she could make up her mind to the change, that a few months' reflection would cool his father, and show him things in their true light; while, if not, the pause would doubtless, enable him, James, to obtain, among their many commercial friends, an eligible situation.

This letter determined Agnes; satisfied in the constancy of her lover, good-tempered and placid as she was always, she viewed the acceptance of this situation with none of the disgust which, it was too evident, was really felt by Julia. She wrote a warm and grateful reply to Smith, in which she detailed her interview with Lady Hawberry, the kindness with which that lady spoke and treated her, and declared that she should look upon her residence at the Hall as an agreeable change, a sort of prolonged holiday.

Lady Hawberry also wrote about the same time, fixing the day on which the girls were to repair to their new homes: and the day soon came. There was weeping in the tents of the Bruffleites; open, loud, and clamorous on the

part of the young ones, and Nanny, the servant; more subdued as regards Mrs. Bruffle, but visible in all; even in the red-faced yeoman, who with his hands in his pockets, and a simulation of hard-heartedness on his visage, as he paced up and down, gave way at last most palpably, and blubbered like a school-boy, when the fly, (from the "Crown,") provided by Lady Hawberry, was announced as being at the door, and the girls, with many tears and broken expressions of gratitude, took their farewell of him. Finally, they broke suddenly away from the kind circle, hurried to the vehicle, got quickly in, the driver banged the door after them, mounted his box, gave one jerk at the reins, one smack with his whip, and then the girls, looking from the window, saw the last, as a home, of Daisyfield Farm. They saw it but indistinctly, for the tears which swam in their eyes veiled and dimmed everything, yet could they distinguish a dense cluster of rosy, curly boys and girls at the door, all stanching their tears with pinafore or handkerchief, while the

background was filled by the father and mother, who waved their hands in token of good wishes. Another turn of the wheels, a jolt, and they were in the high road, and the hedge upon the bank hid the house from their view.

This was the first day of separation; never before had Agnes and Julia been divided, save for some brief holiday, perhaps; sisters, playfellows, and schoolfellows were they, and acutely did they now feel the separation. Much had they meant to say to each other, a thousand subjects had been in each mind as necessary to be spoken, but now their girlish tongues refused to utter any but sounds of sorrow, and clasped in each other's arms, and still weeping, they passed their farewell ride.

Ah! well a day! it was a sore trial for them, and no reader will refuse to bear with the grief which these poor things could not repress; for on that very road stood their comfortable, elegant home; its smart gables visible as the chaise turned into the bye-way which led to Hawberry. Times out of number had they

ridden on that road behind poor "King's Arms," driven by their indulgent, happy father; from the upper windows of that vanishing house, often had they watched the scarce vehicles, and speculated as to whether they would come straight on, or turn off to Hawberry Hall. And now—the change must have been a sore one, you see—they were orphans, homeless and penniless; father, mother, wealth and name, all gone, and the cheerful home in the hands of one far worse than a stranger. The stone was set a-rolling, and was now crashing down its path, but the base was not at hand, the goal was nothing nearly reached. In all, quiet circles, where from year to year no alteration is visible, where, save the gentle mark of time, nothing seems to differ from what it was yesterday, or a thousand years back; let but the tide of change once set in, and it is always a torrent which is not stopped or stayed until all is overthrown or altered. If a stone be loosened in the moss grown structure, it is always the keystone. Now we say, being unable to correct a bad

habit we have somehow acquired of running far ahead of the tale we are telling, we say that all the slides have not yet been put into the magic lantern, and that—but no; time will show.

Agnes was of course deposited at Hawberry, where her sister alighted for a short time, and, although the refreshment seemed as if it would choke her, was forced by the lady of the bony presence, to drink a glass of wine; then, with a few kind words from the same lady, and a final embrace from Agnes, Julia re-entered her vehicle, and was driven off to Chalkingdon Road Station, in order to catch the next down train.

There was not a great deal of time to spare, but, short as it was, Nat Hackley contrived to be on the platform before the train came up, and taking off his hat with all the politeness which became an innkeeper and a Londoner, hoped Miss Elmsley was well. Julia could not forbear smiling even in the midst of her grief, when she saw their cheerful, hearty, faithful friend—formerly their humble friend, now a kind and protecting friend. Nat's object was,

firstly, to see her off, and, secondly, to beg her acceptance of a small present. It was not much, he said, just a little plain writing desk, which he thought might come in handy, he had sent a similar one to Miss Agnes, and if his freedom might be excused, he should be the proudest man in Berkshire, if the young ladies would accept something to remember him by.

Julia thankfully allowed him to place it in the carriage, when the train came up, but before that occurred, Hackley delivered himself of another speech. He was going, he said, to take another liberty, and only his great desire to serve and please the young ladies could excuse him, but he hoped as that would; he was a-going to be married, to a very nice, respectable young woman, though he said it, as perhaps shouldn't. Julia smiled again, and told Nat she trusted he would be happy; she was sure he would, so kind and cheerful a man would certainly have a cheerful home. Nat bowed; well what he was going to say was this—his was as respectable an inn as any thereabouts, and he

was a-going to enlarge it, and do it up, so that it would be quite a hotel; now, would Miss Julia condescend and oblige, when she had leisure, would she excuse his boldness in asking her to spend a week, or a month if she could, at the Railway Arms? It was to be called in future, he explained, the Railway Arms' Tavern and Family and Commercial Hotel.

Julia did not now smile, but sank upon a seat, and buried her face in her kerchief; Nat was terribly afraid he had offended seriously, but at that momont the train came in sight, and in another it was lying alongside the platform. Rising, and hastily brushing away the last tears, Julia gave Hackley her hand and said,

"God bless you, Nat," then hurried into a second class carriage. Hackley stowed his present under the seat, the engine screamed, and then, roaring and panting, rocking like a drowsy thunderbolt, before it got into its speed, the train went off.

We may as well remark here, as the drop scene marking the conclusion of an act falls at

the end of this chapter, that, when Julia opened her present, she found a not very small sum of money therein, accompanied by a respectful letter from Nat, soliciting her acceptance of the same as a loan, to be repaid in better times; she did so accept the money, for she was nearly penniless.

Nat paused, as everyone in such circumstances does, to gaze after the train, such gaze continuing some little time after the carriages were completely out of sight, then, with a sigh, he turned and left the station. He had but just gone, when a gentleman who had evidently waited his departure, followed. This gentleman had, from a sheltered corner of the waiting-room, witnessed the scene on the platform between Nat and Julia, and pale as he was when he entered the station, he was far paler when he left. It was well—if he had any desire to see Miss Julia—it was well that he did go to the station on that day, and did look upon the features of the young lady, for, although he was uncle and she was niece, although he was

William Elmsley, and she John Elmsley's daughter, he never saw her face again.

So now all to bed: the little Bruffles in their white cots, sobbing sometimes even in sleep; Nat Hackley in his bachelor room to dream of the expansion of his house into the Railway Arms Tavern and Family and Commercial Hotel, with visions, doubtless, of its pretty mistress; Chapman, with busy brain, now dormant, at Chalkingdon; Agnes and Julia in their new mansions; and William Elmsley, peacefully, morally, and respectably, at Royal Lodge.

And poor Robert Parsons, where was he on this night?—no one thought of him now, save perhaps Nat Hackley; but how was Parsons faring?

CHAPTER V.

THERE is a very small church in the very small village of Boxwell, near which village stands Hawberry Hall; it would, perhaps, be better to say, that near Hawberry Hall stood the village of Boxwell; for, in the minds of the simple rustics who dwelt thereabouts, the grandeur of the Hall threw the village into the profoundest insignificance. This church stands in a quiet little burial ground, which is bounded on two sides by the open green fields, by the trim rectory on the third, and by the village lying below, and reached by a short sloping path, on the

fourth. There was no imposing architecture to dignify the church in our eyes, or to cause its introduction here; few would care to study its plain square tower, or linger in its narrow aisles; nor was ever tourist known to sketch its chief window, for little was there in it worth the sketching, and few were the tourists who came to Boxwell. Scant were the monuments, plain the fittings; there (but pardon the alteration, the almost sacrilegious alteration), there does

> "—— memory o'er the tombs no trophies raise,
> Nor through the long drawn aisle and fretted vault,
> The pealing anthem swells the note of praise."

On Sundays, in morning, or in afternoon: in afternoon, when the "fly buzzed i' the pane" and all was hot and drowsy, and none, save severe, unwinking schoolmasters or churchwardens, forbore to doze at intervals; and in mornings, when fresh and bright as the day itself, long streams of men and lasses filled the seats, and the sunbeams threw upon the walls strange prismatic reflections from snowy smock frocks,

and from ribbons of kaleidoscopic hue—there did then assemble, in the choir of Boxwell Church, a clarionet, a serpent, a bassoon, a bass viol, and eke a flute. To this accompaniment, sweeter far than trumpets or shawms, did the elders and juniors lift up their voices and sing.

Time moved slowly in Boxwell; nay, his actual flight was as quick there as in the whirl of a city, or why those mounds which studded so thickly the grave-yard, and why the frequent appearance of babies, where babies before were not? But time, as marked by change of habits, moved slowly in Boxwell, and at the period even of the date of this history, did those who sang, sing from books which had served their ancestors; ere they left the occasional occupancy of the inside of the church, for a permanent situation just without. For convenience sake, and as, doubtless, there were many who objected to new fangled ways, these books would contain both versions of the Psalms; the high, majestic poetry of Sternhold and Hopkins, and the lighter strains of N. Tate, and N. Brady. To refrain

from Sunday church at Boxwell was a crime but little known, and regarded as combining the seven deadly sins in one; so that stray wayfarers losing the road, and so coming upon the village, were fain to wander, even as vagabonds, about its various limits, or sit in shade of central elms, until one o'clock arrived; ere they could beg the cup of milk, or of water, for hostel there was none.

Nevertheless, the aborigines were cheerful and hospitable, and would disport themselves, at all fitting periods, Sunday evening seeming the fittest, at cricket or quoits, or such other sports as are loved by country youth. Till twilight grew to its darkest would bats be wielded, and wickets assaulted, then homewards to an early supper, and an early bed; and so would profounder peace fall upon Boxwell.

O, charming innocence! O, exquisite simplicity! O, ye unsophisticated rustics and your harmless pleasures! How one burns to erect the maypole, to make general the pipe and tabor, and the crook, and the pet lamb, and the short

muslin frock, and the hat with ribbons. O, more than Arcadian bliss! O, charming rural life!

And yet, it was very dull: and somehow, i the men did not often get drunk at Boxwell, for want of the accommodation to do so, they embraced every opportunity of befuddling themselves elsewhere; and if they did go to church with such exemplary regularity, nevertheless, few of the artless maidens married without a wholesome and seasoning acquisition of maternal experience. Thus the trail of the serpent was just dimly visible, even in Boxwell—albeit the leading farmers of the vicinity inculcated a severe morality, by never paying more than eight shillings per week for a grown man's labour—and if that be not the way to keep men sober, and to purge them of unclean thoughts, the deuce is in it.

But to our church; here was—unwonted spectacle! a coach; nay, there were two. There also was Mr. Splitter, the good old clergyman, (followed by his shadow, the clerk, who had just summoned him,) walking from the rectory to the

church; and see, ye who are there to see, what a gay company descend from the vehicles. Then there is a marriage toward; it has been rumoured in the village that such an event was "coming off," and lo! now it has come.

There is Nathaniel Hackley, darkly resplendent in that suit of black, which was so glossy as almost to produce a winking in the eyes of those who beheld him; there was tall John Bruffle, in a less orthodox suit, but amazing fine, nevertheless; there was Fred Harley from the station, and there was James Smith. It is not to be supposed, as a wedding was afoot, that no ladies were there—a very pretty buxom girl, soon to appear on a similar occasion as principal, was one bridesmaid, this was the Miss Linford, whose health Hackley had proposed on a certain evening, not forgotten, we trust, by the reader. Julia Elmsley was there as another bridesmaid, but Julia looked worn and ill at ease; while Agnes was the bride.

Yes, she was to be married, and *was* married at the little church of Boxwell, but was mar-

ried in the name of Agnes Pearson, that having been her mother's name. On all future occasions, however, (without we see fit to do otherwise,) she will be called Elmsley—at least, Julia will, for Agnes is now, of course, Agnes Smith.

No description of the ceremony is needed; there was nothing of pomp about the affair; all that was to be remarked, as at all singular, was a certain air of gravity which hung over all present, even upon Nathaniel of the Railway Arms, and which was certainly not in keeping with a wedding party. However this may have been, whatever its cause, married James and Agnes were, and in a very short period from their first appearance in the village, the group re-entered the vehicles, and amidst the shrill cheering of three little boys, and four little girls, —all the disposable force of idlers in Boxwell— drove off.

They drove to the Railway Arms, where awaited them a good dinner, provided at the sole expense of Hackley, whose urgent request to be allowed this treat, had, after some demur

on the part of Smith, been granted. The inn, as its owner had promised, had been enlarged, and now called itself the "Railway Arms Tavern and Family and Commercial Hotel," and in the chief room of this hotel, was served the banquet.

Still hung the same gravity over the party, as it had hung all day, and Agnes, though known to be fond of Smith, proud of him, and assured of happiness, (so far as happiness can be assured), with him, yet kept closer to Julia than to her husband, and both girls showed their eyes often swimming with tears, and these not the bright, glittering drops which so well become the lashes of bride or bridesmaid. Dinner, a very early dinner, too, was dispatched: had it not been for the zealous exertions of Hackley, Bruffle, and Harley, scanty justice would have been done to the repast. The noisy, contagious mirth, proper and orthodox for weddings, was not there; slack and rare was the jest, flagging the merriment. Repeated encomiums upon the excellence of the fare, delivered it is true by

those who seemed to take little or nothing of it, made the generous entertainer happy, and when after dinner he produced some port which had not only lain bottled in his cellar for a good six years, but had been so bottled for a fabulous length of time previously; when a glass or so had been taken, and Nat, after many signs of irresolution and uneasiness, suddenly jerked himself upon his legs to make a speech; the heartiest burst of cheers and laughter which had yet been heard, greeted his uprising.

"Ladies and gentlemen," began Nat, and as though it were some mysterious and powerful talisman, he kept turning over and over, putting down and taking up a small biscuit, "I will go a step farther, if I may be so bold, and say my very kind friends. (Hear, hear.) I am going to propose the health of our newly married friends, my friends, and I am sure we shall drink it sincerely. (Considerable applause from the three disinterested hearers.) I'm sure I never thought I should have this honour, and, after all, proud as I am to have it, I wish others

as was agoing to do it, had done it: if things had been as they ought to have, you wouldn't have heard me making a speech now." Profound silence here, and Nat, feeling himself upon delicate ground, grew nervous, and squeezing his biscuit with unusual force, crushed half of it to powder. However, he went on manfully. "Well, I don't see as it's any use talking, if you don't talk of what you are thinking about, and I'm sure there isn't one here as ain't thinking at this minute what sort of a display we should have had if people had acted right, even after so much had gone wrong—if right was right, things wouldn't be as they are. ('Well done, Nat,' from Bruffle.) However, I do hope that in time affairs will come round, and then all will be square again—but what I've got to say now is this; I drink Mr. Smith's health, and that of the young lady who is his wife, and who he will value as he ought, I know, and I propose their prosperity, and best of fortune to 'em. And I hope that go where they will, do what they may, they will be happy

and fortunate, and come some day again to the Railway Arms at Chalkingdon station, and that Nat Hackley, their well meaning friend, who they never was too proud to notice, may have the honour of waiting on 'em in this very room, and so I say God bless 'em."

Everybody applauded Nat's speech most vehemently, but Bruffle was especially lost in admiration of it, and whispered to Harley that it was a main fine thing to be a scollard; to which Harley assented. Bruffle farther remarked that he, Nat, must ha' took a deal of pains to indite such a speech, (the farmer said "indite," the word is of his selection, not ours); to this Harley, answering to the spirit and not the letter, agreed, as well he might. For on the previous evening the clerk had spent a full half hour in drumming into the host's ears something like a complimentary and congratulatory speech, of which some faint and uncertain traces could be discovered in the oration this day delivered.

Smith returned thanks for the honour done him, very briefly; he, too, looked thoughtful

and grave, although he forcibly roused himself at times; indeed, after the enthusiasm evoked by Nat's eloquence had subsided, the same soberness again settled upon all.

"You must really excuse me," began Smith, "if I fall somewhat short of our host's standard of eloquence, but 'I am no orator as Brutus is;' however I thank you all sincerely, and sincerely do I thank him. I do not, I swear, regret the absence of those who are cold, or changed, or that we have no display; it pleases me more to take my farewell of England surrounded by a few trusty friends, than it would to say my parting words in the midst of a hundred strangers. I look around this little circle, and there is not one cold face or heart in it, I am sure. Time would not allow me, were this the place, to speak all I owe, in my wife's name, to you, John Bruffle, or to you, Nathaniel Hackley; but I may say something. I may say that when all was lost, all friends estranged, the hard world frowning its harshest, and the orphans were helpless, then, like the generous men you

are, you came forward as their guardians, and spared or stinted not in their behalf. We shall never forget it. The darkening of the day warns me that my minutes are numbered, I briefly then say to all, I thank you; my wife thanks you. We leave England, but we leave it with the remembrance of kind friends, with their hearty wishes sounding in our ears, and when we think of our native land—and when shall we not think of it?—we shall always see the group our eyes now rest upon, and so think of England in its best."

Smith sat down, some faint applause followed, but the knowledge that within the hour, the train by which the newly wedded pair were to start for Bristol was due, checked the feelings of all, and brought the old gravity upon the group again.

Agnes retired to change her dress, so did Julia; in a very brief space they reappeared, equipped for travelling. Julia was to accompany her sister to Bristol, where she would, of course, leave them, and go on to her situation. There

wasa hurried leave ta king, a wringing of friendly hands, many tears; then the warning bell from the station was heard, and Smith, with his bride and her sister, left. Bruffle, Harley, and Hackley sat in gloomy silence for long after their departure, until the train had come in, gone out, and its last rattle had died in the distance, and then, indeed, it was only the re-appearance of pretty, cheerful Miss Linford, who had seen the travellers off, which roused them from their torpor.

If the principals in the events of the day, had not been markedly gay heretofore, it was scarcely to be expected that on this, their short and fare-well journey, any great hilarity should be per-ceptible: Smith made a few feeble attempts at jocularity, promising to send home eggs of the phœnix, and a selection of unicorn's horns; but his jests had a sickly weakness about them, and the responses were as much sobs as smiles. At last, and this was in no great time, Bristol was reached, and on the platform there, did those poor girls take another, a parting embrace; then

with a broken ejaculation, with quivering lips and streaming eyes, they tore themselves asunder, and Smith, having procured a couple of flys, Julia entered the one, Agnes the other. The former was driven off to Lady Gorsebush's, at Brislington, the latter, with her husband, sought an hotel in the vicinity of the Basin.

For on the morrow they were to embark on board the good ship "Zulu," 310 tons burden, A 1, copper-bottomed, and warranted to cross the bar at Natal. To Natal, on the eastern coast of Africa, the newly wedded pair were going; the weight upon the party at Hackley's, will appear, therefore, reasonable and natural.

All Smith's efforts were in vain; he could not induce his father to sanction his marriage, indeed that inflexible old gentleman gave him to understand that there was no longer a home for him within the paternal walls if he persisted in his resolve. This intimation brought things to a climax. James felt he could not with honour (to say nothing of his own feelings), abandon Agnes; his own capital was much too slender to

start with in trade, so he sought amongst his business acquaintance for a situation. Just then, as always happens when most wanted, he found situations were at the scarcest, and at last, instead of getting a good, profitable, confidential appointment in London, as he had hoped, he was fain to undertake the management of a new store which a speculative friend was about to establish in Natal, and in which venture he was allowed to embark his own slender funds. And thus, for we have told this tale of his very briefly, and thus we find him at Bristol, awaiting the sailing of his ship.

He had seen, very clearly, that with the slightest encouragement, Julia would have resigned her position, and accompanied them to Africa. But he did not feel justified in affording that encouragement; glad as he would have been for his own sake for her company, anxious as he was to make her happy, and still a stronger reason, the joy he knew it would give his wife, still he felt to have her with him until the success of the speculation was established, would be

unfair for both parties. Agnes agreed in this decision, although her heart ached for Julia, and yearned for her company in the solitary exile they sought. But Agnes submitted to her better sense; which same sense had dictated, we may remark, an earnest, assiduous fulfilment of her duties during the short period she was with Lady Hawberry, and so much did she win upon that stately lady and Sir Roger, that not only did they express the best wishes for her happiness with her husband, but presented her with an outfit for her voyage, &c., worth at least fifty pounds.

The season was now earliest spring, or latest winter, as a bleak, raw March wind day be considered, and cheerless enough was the morning which dawned on their departure. The best cabin of the smart little vessel had been engaged for them, but beyond its limits all was discomfort and confusion. A shrill cold wind blew down the valley of the Avon, and whistled through the cordage, driving before it a small sleet at times; the houses which looked upon the Basin seemed sharper and more angular than usual; the high

ground on the Somersetshire side was bleak and naked; the few foot passengers hurried along the roads cowering and chilly; while on board all seemed out of temper and awkward. However, to all things there is an end, and to even the slow process of clearing out comes a finish; the day waned, the tide served, and at nightfall Smith and his bride were tossing on the uneasy swell of the Bristol Channel.

Many a day dawned and closed after that, many weary, tiresome leagues of water did they traverse, and much of storm and danger did they encounter before their new home was reached, but reached it was at last, in safety. Now, therefore, we leave them, trusting that no gnawing regrets for the land so many thousand miles away will embitter the prosperity they hope for;—all countries and places are the same to the virtuous man and philosopher; but what virtuous man or philosopher ever found it so?

"For there was never yet philosopher
That could endure the toothache patiently,
However they have writ the style of Gods
And made a pish at chance and sufferance."

CHAPTER VI.

It was, as has been hinted, in early March that Smith and Agnes left England;—how strange it seems to write Mr. and Mrs. Smith! Since then spring had ripened into summer, and summer was dying into autumn, and friends at home began anxiously to count the days which might be expected to elapse ere letters could reach them from the travellers.

Changes had, of course, taken place, one of the chief as regards the current of this tale being the marriage of Hackley with Miss Linford, an event celebrated with sufficient eclât at Chalk-

ingdon Church. Mrs. Hackley, it has already been said, was an extremely pretty young woman, calculated, as her husband enthusiastically averred, to adorn any sphere of society, but especially the bar of such an hotel as the Railway Arms. She had been always renowned for wearing the newest style of caps, and wearing them in a manner more bewitchingly smart than they could be worn by any one else; this peculiarity, it may be supposed, did by no means diminish when she took the direction of affairs at the above hostelry. Beyond all doubt many a gig was stopped, and many a passenger halted, at the Railway Arms Tavern and Family and Commercial Hotel, simply on account of the prettiness of Mrs. Hackley—certainly Nat saw no reason to regret his entrance into the holy state of matrimony.

Mr. Chapman, during this interval, had purchased the commodious house occupied by him in the market place of Chalkingdon; and a report gained ground that Mr. William Elmsley was a marrying man—and, moreover, that he

meant to select a wife from amongst his neighbours.

There wanted nothing more to make the latter a most popular man, and restore Chapman to his pristine favour, or, indeed, something beyond it. A man who could afford to give down three thousand pounds in hard cash, for certain property—for some meadow land went with the house—must be a respectable man, and a lawyer (if a lawyer, as in the present case), who could afford to do you justice, and who might safely be trusted. So he was pardoned.

As for William Elmsley, every man of any standing thereabouts, who had daughters or sisters to dispose of, was most assiduous in his attention to the respectable, moral, wealthy bachelor; and the invitations for shooting, fishing, and hunting he received, the warm and not-to-be-denied pressing to visit his new friends which were forced on him, were something really astonishing.

A man like him, too, it began to be said, should be in the commission of the peace, and interest

was made with the lord lieutenant of the county to that effect, which interest proved speedily succesful. Yes, yes, he was exactly the person for a magistrate: there was nothing to be said against poor John Elmsley, of course, no, God forbid! that they should speak ill of the dead; nevertheless he was a very different man to his brother. Why, you know, John Elmsley would ride twenty miles to see a prize battle, and was known to have paid the expenses of Chickens, Pets, and Slashers, to fight in his district; well, really, that was not quite the thing, after all. And as to being moderately, wholesomely severe with gipsies, and beggars, (excepting able-bodied beggars, of whom with his own hand he had horse-whipped more than one), as for being properly strict with them that was quite out of the question with John Elmsley. Nay, it is true, he could not do so much as a magistrate, but still there was an example to be set by everybody.

Now this gentleman, Mr. William Elmsley, was known to be particularly opposed to all

the classes enumerated, and was expected to clear those parts of such nuisance; and in justice to him it may be said that he did not belie public opinion.

The poor, the helpless, the tramper, the gipsy, the Irish family, soon learnt to avoid the vicinity of Royal Lodge as possessing a poisonous atmosphere: no matter what the excuse, the widow with her babies, the sailor with his wooden leg, the shivering Lascar, with his handful of tracts, appealing to his "kind christian friends," the mutilated remnant of humanity with his canvass picture of the accident at Deadly Main Coal Pit—to all was the same measure meted—the county prison for a term with the additional charm of hard labour. As for boxers, he was particularly severe upon them, and zealously put the county to an outlay of several hundreds of pounds in the course of the year, by hunting them from their wild, heathy rendezvous, and prosecuting them at the quarter sessions. Often, in this same zeal, has he given passionate Giles, who punched aggravating Simon's head at the "Lion," a heavier sentence

than that adjudged to Pat Whelan, or Barney Flaherty, or Con Reilly, as the name might have been—who waited in a lurking place at the hedge corner, and there with his reaping hook gashed the man with whom he had quarrelled some hours before.

The familiar, half-witted being, too, who with about as much sense as Davie Gellatly, enough to amuse himself, but not enough for work, had been for twenty years the privileged mendicant of Chalkingdon, was, by the energetic advice of William Elmsley, Esquire, seized and dosed with the infallible nostrum which agreed with all alike. As a rank, idle, vicious impostor he was punished, and the Elmslian recipe was probably more successful in his case than in any other in which it was tried. Silly Billy died in three weeks; sheer obstinacy, clearly.

These remedial measures were generally and loudly commended at first, but, as time wore on, the applause sank to a faint and feeble utterance, and Mr. Elmsley was hardly regarded as a model

of all that was desirable in a county magistrate and a neighbour.

That is, among the populace, he was waning in popularity; it had been no great risk to run had a prophecy as to his speedy loss of the voice of the multitude been hazarded. For the qualities which he displayed, however commendable and admirable in themselves, are not exactly formed for attracting the affections of the masses. With those of his own grade, however, he held his ground. We have alluded to his becoming a vice-president of the local Bible society, he did so; he was also on the committee for promoting the conversion of the Jews, which, from its eminently practical and successful plans, doubtless, was a great favourite in Chalkingdon. Not that William Elmsley cared vehemently for the welfare of either association; without being uncharitable, we may venture a conjecture that he would not have cared for the dissolution of either, as he had never subscribed to, or manifested the slightest interest in one or the other

of them until he came to Chalkingdon. But we have said, and here repeat it, that none knew better how to invest a few pounds in charities than he; and those who know Chalkingdon know that whomsoever the rector patronises, him do the elderlies and respectables also delight to honour.

About this time, too, there was started in the quiet town a branch of a new association; not that the main object was a new one, but the means by which its supporters sought to obtain their ends was strikingly novel. A society for the extension of temperance—temperance as run to seed in what is best known as teetotalism, we mean—sent a lecturer to stir up the well disposed in Chalkingdon in furtherance of his views, which embraced not so much the making of converts, as the getting together of those who would force others, not themselves, as an Irishman would say, to abstain. The object of this excellent society was the closing of all breweries, distilleries, public houses, and beer-

shops in England, by simply obtaining an Act of Parliament, which should render the selling of any strong drink punishable by hard labour in a prison. Fond of his punch, and his port too, as William Elmsley was, he would have found, one would suppose, immense difficulty in joining such a body, which difficulty would certainly have been fully shared by most of his fellow magistrates and neighbours, but for an admirable provision in the rules of the association. It was *not* necessary for the committee to be teetotallers themselves. This removed every obstacle, and the society became the most popular in Chalkingdon, for few of its friends cared for the miserable absurdity of its rules, and the wide field of "putting down," the wholesale crusade, was too tempting to be resisted.

Many of the supporters signed a resolution pledging themselves to employ no labourers who would not become total abstainers, or in other words take another kind of "pledge," but as these supporters were chiefly elderly maiden ladies, or still more elderly gentlemen, who em-

ployed no labourers at any time, a very great revolution was not thereby effected.

William Elmsley adopted no such scheme, and, indeed, beyond a punctual attendance at the monthly meetings, with a short harangue on behalf of the association, and the giving his yearly guinea, it would be hard to say what he did to further it, but then nobody did any more, few so much. Yet even this amount of partisanship—while it certainly brought him into contact with the people he was most anxious to conciliate, and made him useful to them, and caused his name to rise whenever any practical, attentive, strictly moral person was wanted; yet it once involved him in a slightly disagreeable contretemps.

A gentleman had announced a lecture on the favourite subject, and to give variety and colouring to the somewhat exhausted and faded theme, it was further announced that some practical experiments on animals would be tried; to illustrate, of course, the pernicious character of the

beverages usually imbibed by those who still "adhered to the unhappy drinking customs of the country." To sum up briefly, we shall just say that the lecture came off with rather more than customary éclât, for whether a natural curiosity stimulated them, or whether some rumours of the character of the exhibition had got afloat, we know not, but certain it is that many beyond the usual attendants of these meetings were there.

The members of the Literary and Scientific Institution came in great force, for of course Chalkingdon had a Literary and Scientific Institution, and the hall in which this lecture was to be delivered, was the hall in which *their* lectures were delivered; but on no previous occasion had so many of the younger members been present, which was odd, considering how admirably the subjects for illustration were chosen, considering the audience was selected from a small country town, and its bucolic environs. The prospectus for the year in question is subjoined:

CHALKINGDON LITERARY AND SCIENTIFIC INSTITUTE.

WINTER SESSION.

Oct.—Thessalonica and Macedonia—their Geology—their Fossil Fauna and Flora ... *Rev. J. Brown.*

Nov.—Sulphurated Hydrogen, and Carbonated Oxygen, with their analogy to superphosphate of alkali .... *Rev. W. Jones.*

Dec.—Proper names of Scripture, with illustrations from the Book of Numbers ..... *Rev. T. Robinson.*

Jan.—Scandinavian Architecture ..... *Rev. B. Smith.*

Feb.—Mrs. Barbauld's Poems..... *Rev. F. Davis.*

March.—Anatomy and Meteorology compared; with their reference to unfulfilled prophecies ..... *Rev. X. Ball.*

It is strange, on reading the foregoing syllabus, to think how few attended these admirable discourses, and how irreverently the younger members were heard to speak of the lecturers. In justice to the excellent president of the institute, we must not fail to tell that he rose in his place, in the midst of the lecture on Mrs. Barbauld's poems, and solemnly warned his hearers against being led away, by the levity and frivolity of poetry, from more serious pursuits, but even this did not increase the attendance the next meeting.

All this, however, is digression, and we had just announced our intention of briefly summing up; confound bad habits! we are a perfect slave to discursive writing. At any rate, on the night of the temperance lecture there was a goodly array in the Hall, and after fifty minutes of energetic denunciation of the publicans, who were not, it seemed, called into existence by the general liking of strong drinks, but by the singular reversal of ordinary laws, they or their predecessors had called forth the national taste for beer by their existence—after fifty minutes of this, we say, the experiments began. Cats and lapdogs, and birds were made giddy and stupid, and the smaller animals indeed killed by vapours and fluids administered by the lecturer, and this, being somewhat novel, was considerably applauded; the heartiest round was, however, somewhat unfeelingly given; it was when the demonstrator opened a bottle by mistake, and nearly strangled himself with the pungent effluvia.

When the experiments were finished, Mr.

Elmsley addressed the audience. He pointed out, of course, what deleterious stuff the people were in the habit of imbibing; earnestly and affectionately requested all who heard him to forsake such suicidal practices, and wound up by announcing that the fluids which had been proved by unmistakable demonstration before their own eyes, to be so injurious to life ("inimical," he said, as being a word vaguely terrible to the majority of his hearers), were merely portions of different kinds of beer purchased at a house, called commonly a very respectable house, in that district; he meant the Railway Arms, at Chalkingdon Road.

A sensation seemed to run through the assembly at hearing this, and although every one was prepared to hear that the poisons exhibited were of that subtle kind called "beer," and consequently must have been purchased somewhere, yet the announcement was calculated to do Nat no great good. Some little confusion was created by an old man insisting upon speaking, and demanding of the lecturer

why, "if a spoonful o' that there beer did kill a cat or make her have a vit, why doan't two or dree quarts kill I?" However, the old fellow was hustled out of the room, and the lecture was over.

We may be very sure that the news of this injurious affair soon reached the Railway Arms Tavern and Family and Commercial Hotel, and that Nathaniel Hackley was precisely the man who would wax extremely wroth at hearing such news. His first impulse, and what a natural impulse to most of us mortals it is! was to go and "punch Mr. Elmsley's head;" but he was reasoned out of that somewhat rash determination as being likely to end in expense and trouble to himself, and triumphant gratification to the gentleman assaulted. Nat's sense told him that his advisers were right, but he was far too exasperated, and so was Mr. Bruffle, to allow the matter to blow over without some slight attempt at retaliation.

On the next lecture evening, accordingly, Bruffle and Hackley presented themselves at the

Hall, to the great astonishment of the habitués —we are somewhat wrong, it was not a lecture evening, but an ordinary monthly meeting of the association. However, there was William Elmsley in the chair, and he changed colour visibly, when he saw his unexpected visitors. All went on pretty well for a time until just before the termination of the proceedings, on a pause occurring, Nat advanced to the platform, and begged to be allowed to say a few words.

Permission was of course granted, and Nat producing a large bottle from his pocket laid it upon the table; he then explained that that was some of his beer, and challenged the chairman, or any one else, to perform such tricks with it as had been shown at the last meeting. Mr. Elmsley declined the challenge, and desired Nat to stand down, adding that the business of the society could not be interrupted by designing persons, whose nefarious system was attacked by the exertions of its members.

"Why, now, look here," said Nat, "I've a right to defend myself in public, after being at-

tacked in public; I don't think you will deny that—if you do, it won't go down with me; I'm a Londoner, and knows what things is, as well as you do. I say that the stuff you poisoned them dogs, and cats, and sparrers with, wasn't my beer, genuine, but was mixed up with something by you. Now, gentlemen all, ladies and gentlemen I should say, you all know me, and you all know Mr. Bruffle; you know, I hope, I wouldn't do anything unfair, and I'm sure you know he wouldn't."

"My good man—" began the chairman.

"You hold your precious tongue, if you're wise," said Nat, fiercely,—"now, my friends, Mr. Bruffle has got a bottle in *his* pocket same as I had in mine. He drawed it himself from my cellar, without my seeing him doing of it, and so there can't be no mistake. Now, ladies and gentlemen all, I'll bet any man here ten pounds, to half-a-crown, and stake the money," here Nat waved a couple of bank notes before the eyes of the members—who, by the bye mustered in unusual strength when it was rumoured that

Hackley and Bruffle were in the room; a scene was of course expected; "I'll lay them odds that nobody here can't do with my beer before my face what was done behind my back."

"And so will I," exclaimed John Bruffle, rising, and showing a small canvass bag, "and so will I."

A round of cheers followed these defiances, and all eyes were turned to the chairman.

"I shall have nothing to do with you," said Mr. Elmsley, "I shall leave the room; but not before I have expressed my astonishment at the members tolerating for a moment such a display!"

"Why do they do it?" roared Nat, as Mr. Elmsley descended the platform, "because they likes all square and above board, and mind this my boy—you're a slanderer and a liar, and if ever you put your foot over my threshold, I'll kick you across it again."

So with this threat Nat left, his face red with excitement, and carrying his head an inch higher than before.

All sorts of predictions were hazarded by the gossips of Chalkingdon, as to what Mr. William Elmsley would do in this matter, and widely diversified as were the predictions, and much as the town differed in their opinions on his conduct, on one point all, friend or foe, seemed agreed. No one supposed William Elmsley, of Royal Lodge, was a man likely to lie tamely down after such an insult, or that he would not make something like an effort to be even with Nathaniel.

It seemed, however, as if these good people were all at fault; Nat went his way, Mr. Elmsley went his, and nothing came of the explosion. The only noticeable thing in Mr. William was his commencing to build a house: this he did on a piece of ground near to Royal Lodge, but still nearer to Chalkingdon Road station, and which he purchased at a trifling price—for 'twas a small, irregular, unproductive, weedy bit of ground—for the purpose. As it was tolerably clear that no more houses were required in that locality, those who could see farthest into a millstone,

shook their heads sagely and said that we should soon have an Elmsley Folly, to match with Gubbins' Folly, now lost in the choicer title of Royal Lodge. Yet there were those, and not few were they, who opposed these far-sighted ones, and declared with a dogged perseverance that nothing should persuade them that William Elmsley was the man to throw away his money in unprofitable speculations, and that those who lived longest would see most. Among this latter body it may fairly be supposed our friend Nat Hackley was to be found; time showed he was right.

But—and the fact ought to be a wholesome lesson to us, knowing our besetting sin—but, we say, we did not begin this chapter to talk of William Elmsley, or of Chapman, or of Hackley; no, candidly and seriously speaking, we began this division of our tale with a full and honest intention of confining our pen to Julia Elmsley and her immediate affairs. (Let the reader once again and finally understand that, without we have special reason for doing otherwise, we

shall continue to call her Julia Elmsley.) Yet lo! behold and see! until this moment we have not mentioned her name, no, nor have we alluded to her ever so distantly. As the best, and indeed only fitting amends we will commence a new chapter, and so introduce her with all proper respect.

CHAPTER VII.

AUTUMN had come, or at least summer was long past its prime, for it was now the close of August: a year you see had rolled its round since the commencement of our narrative. On the particular day on which we take up our tale, Julia was walking, solitary and sad, in the lonely fields which lie beyond Brislington.

She was not happy, had never been so from the day she joined Lady Gorsebush, and perhaps it was hardly to be expected that she should be. But she was not even decently resigned, and so far from governing her temper, and speaking in

"a bondman's key, with bated breath and whisp'ring humbleness," her strong spirit had gained the mastery over her, so much and so often, that, had her mistress been other than the kindest and most indulgent of ladies, her departure from the mansion would have been sudden and early.

But the lady of the mansion, unlike her sister, Lady Hawberry, was a delicate, sickly woman, of a heavenly temper and kind to a fault. She trusted that time would amend the temper of her capricious attendant, and never ceased to remind herself of the allowances necessary to one who had experienced so great a reverse. Thus Julia still remained in her situaton, yet rarely did she enter her mistress's presence but with a lowering brow and threatening eye. Reproof she never received, but kindly warning and instruction the lady was sometimes forced to give, which were never heard but in sullen silence, with downcast gaze and hanging lip. Nevertheless, she knew herself to be in the wrong, and oftimes on leaving

her gentle mistress, after wearing her worst looks with her, she would cast herself upon the floor, and writhe, and sob, and bite her lips in shame and remorse at not being able to govern better her froward temper. Oh! that she had the mild, soft temperament of Agnes! she would oftimes cry; for *she* had filled her duties modestly, becomingly, and with the love and respect of all in the house: but Julia felt that in her case she would soon find every one's hand against her, and her hand against all.

Bitter were her feelings as she sat on a bank overlooking the wild scene at the Hanham Ferry; the rugged path winding its steep and hazardous way among the riven and shattered rocks; the ferryman's pretty cottage at her foot; the dark river; the quarries on the further bank; the railway, visible for a few hundred yards, but lost at either end in huge yawning tunnels; were all before her eyes, but seen not by them.

Yet was her manner, at intervals, that of one who awaits with a purpose and expectation, for though the shriek of the engine, as it issued

from one tunnel, its rattle as it tore past the stern rocks while in the open air, and its second scream as the next tunnel was reached, drew not her attention, or roused her for an instant, yet her eye lighted up, when once or twice a figure appeared upon the farther bank, descending the little piece of white road, visible from where she sat.

Twice this occurred, and twice the flash died away; the ferryman pushed over, returned, his passenger climbed the tangled path, and passed, with a wondering look at the unexpected figure, close to Julia, but she took no farther notice.

Then a third form appeared, breaking the vacancy of the hot, glaring road; again the eye flashed, and then the face was a deep crimson. The ferry boat again, with lazy motion, reached the Gloucestershire side, and again returned. Julia buried her face in her hands, and as her head fell upon her knees, some emotion shook her frame as would a spasm.

A step was heard upon the stony ascent, and

Julia lifted her face, pale now, but composed. Another instant, and a man leapt over the stile, and seeing Julia, sprang to her with an exclamation of delight, and took her in his arms. The new comer was Edgar Fielding. His manner to Julia was impassioned and eager, far beyond his former demeanour; and so to seek the girl when ruined in fortune, deserted, and homeless; so to exceed in his manifestations of love, was of course a generous deed, and would seem to do him the highest honour.

At first they spoke little, but, striking off, as if by mutual consent, into a bye path, seldom trodden, as it led but to an abandoned quarry, and hidden by trees from the roads and open country, they walked to and fro for some time in almost total silence. When at last they spoke, it was evident from their language that this was by no means their first meeting; that their correspondence was clandestine, and that Fielding's father was opposed as much as ever to their marriage. It was not long, too, before Julia narrated what had occurred to her since

their last meeting, and of the trials she was daily forced to undergo.

"Curse the capricious fool!" cried Fielding, when Julia had told him of some imaginary hardship suffered at the hands of her mistress; "could I have my will, I would confront her this instant, and tell her and her sanctified husband to their teeth, that the only lady in their household, scorned to dwell there another hour."

"Would that you could, Edgar! would to Heaven that you could!" exclaimed Julia; "but we will change to pleasanter themes. I am wrong; I feel and know that I am very wrong to allow harmlessly-meant language so to annoy me. We will leave the subject."

"But my dear, dear Julia," resumed Fielding, "on what themes are we to speak? By Heaven! I don't know where to look for comfort; I have sounded my father since I last saw you, and he is perfectly unapproachable. You are convinced now; but how cruelly you mistrusted me for many months."

"No, Edgar, not in my heart," said Julia,

"fear lest I really had lost your love made me nearly desperate; but always, even at the worst, in my inmost heart there was a feeling which told me you were true."

"And so you have found me!" exclaimed Edgar, "but, I remember, we were to confine ourselves to-day to cold, hard, business-like conversation. Stay; let us sit down upon this bank; we are as perfectly screened from observation here as though we were in your own old drawing room. Well now, my dearest Julia, what plans or schemes have you formed?"

"None, my dear Edgar—none. By day and by night, sleeping or waking, have my thoughts and dreams been upon our last conversation; but, if your father remain obdurate, I do not see—cannot see—any means of changing our position."

"But at any rate," resumed Fielding, "you must be released from this irksome, degrading slavery. When I gave my consent to your acacceptance of the situation, I had not, I must

confess, thought sufficiently on the matter. I did not then feel how harshly it would grate upon my ear to hear you spoken of as a servant; nor did I in the least dream of the galling, intolerable chains you would have to wear."

"Ah!" interposed Julia, "I fear I am chiefly in fault there."

"Never, my dear Julia!" cried Fielding; "are you, who have hitherto won the love of all with whom you have been associated; you, who were always forbearing and gentle; are you to be considered the cause of your mis—bah! of Lady Gorsebush being irritable, capricious, and ignorant of all feelings of finer natures? Forgive this little outbreak, Julia, for I will be practical now. Had you not better leave the situation in any case?"

"Gladly, eagerly would I do so," replied the girl, sadly enough, too, she spoke, "could I see a prospect of obtaining a subsistence, a mere living, elsewhere."

"Then, Julia, I can point out a method,"

cried Fielding; "but before I explain, let me beg that you will not allow any false delicacy to stand between you and independence."

"Surely my being here at this moment will answer for *that*," said Julia; "all that I may do, I will."

"You know that Miss Abigail, the younger of my aunts, is dead," said Edgar "—well, Judith, the elder sister, is now eighty years old, and, poor soul! in what is doubtless her last sickness, although that may be a lingering one. Now, Julia! at her death I shall be rich, comparatively, so at any rate, and I know my father so well, that I am sure when he sees I can do without him, he will come forward with his friendship and assistance. In London, Julia, a lady with your talents in painting, especially flower painting, an art that is in ceaseless demand, might realize a handsome income; —why not try that for a short time? There is an escape, a legitimate, irreproachable one, from your present position."

"Oh! but, Edgar!" cried Julia," how am I

to battle in such a place as London? Without friends or money, unskilled in the ways of business, strongly doubting my ability as a painter, thrust on one side, as I am sure I should be by throngs of better artists—oh no! Edgar."

"But it will be for a short time only. I feel certain—without any indecent anticipation, but speaking as of an acknowledged fact—that in a few months I shall be able to act for myself."

"Then the less cause for haste," returned Julia, "if in so short a time, my dear Edgar, you tell me to look for relief, I shall be better enabled to bear the petty trials I have to encounter."

"But you must consider me a little more," urged Fielding. "I am anxious to get you from here. I see the false step I made when I recommended you to come, and am anxious to retrace it. Whatever Smith might do, I could not marry a servant—Now, now! you must not weep. I meant no unkindness, my dearest Julia, I only wish to persuade you for your benefit; our mutual happiness."

"I know it—I know it," said Julia, the bitter tears starting freely from her eyes, "but there is no help. Your plan is impracticable. The sun is going down, Edgar, and this place is growing dim and shadowy; I must return, for I have long overstaid my time. God bless you! come to see me again soon; good bye, Edgar."

"Stay but for one minute!" exclaimed Fielding, rising as she rose, and taking her in his arms; "listen at least to all I have to say. Nay, if you are so anxious to return, we will walk as we speak. Why not go to London? Why not be happy and independent there? I know your too fastidious mind shrinks from incurring obligations to me, but you need not refuse others. Miss Judith, though haughty and proud enough, loves me dearly, and I have succeeded in interesting her in your behalf:—were she to offer to defray your expenses for the first year, would you accept the assistance? I hope, long ere that time, to call you mine; but in any case, at the end of that period you could do as you pleased

about continuing the experiment. I am authorized, Julia, to make this offer."

"No;—I think not;—it cannot be," returned the girl.

"But why not?" urged Fielding. "I should have imagined that in our present relation to each other, you might have accepted such help from me, even from me, Julia; but every objection must certainly be weakened, if not entirely removed, when a lady of such wealth and respectability offers her aid."

"I cannot answer now," replied Julia, "it would be rash to do so. I am afraid that you greatly overrate my abilities; but I will think upon the proposition. And now I must leave you, dear Edgar; I have staid so long beyond my time that I fear—Good bye; Heaven bless you!"

With a few brief, earnest words, entreating her to consent to his plan, Fielding embraced her, bade farewell, and hurrying to the path which led down the rocks, was out of sight immediately. Julia slowly retraced her steps to Gorsebush, although from the length of time she

had been absent, she needed rather to hasten. But she reluctantly approached her home, for she dreaded the reprimand she knew was but too well deserved; she dreaded the inquiry, and the falsehood she must tell to meet it. The invitation given by Fielding, the offer of assistance held out, contributed to confuse the brain, and seemed to demand her exclusive thought: it was tempting, it was inviting her to a life a thousand times preferable to her present mode; yet there was a something about the scheme which gave hollow sounding warning of its dangers, which told her that her position would be then of double and treble the dependence on another's good will or caprice, compared to that of which she now complained so strongly. Still, with specious arguments, and wilful blindness, and deafness to her mind's warnings, she sought to convince herself that it was fastidious, and of an unseemly haughtiness to reject, or even to hesitate in her acceptance of the offer. Then, in spite of herself, would her distrust return, and

her brain reel with the agitation; and with this disordered mind, she reached her employer's.

She had been expected there an hour earlier, and Lady Gorsebush had, unfortunately, been taken very unwell, so that Julia had been missed and sought for, and great inconvenience occasioned by her absence. The lady asked for an explanation: Julia stood before her, her eyes on the ground, 'tis true, but with no other sign of an abashed attendant, conscious of having offended her mistress. No explanation was given, yet very brief and mild was her rebuke, and more like asking a favour than the laying on her a command, was the request to be more punctual in future; nevertheless, Julia's face was flushed with an angry scarlet, a scornful smile just wreathed the lips, and distended the nostril; defiant was the glance, and piercing, which she threw upon her mistress as she curtsied and withdrew.

Seizing the opportunity, she hurried to her bed-room, and with clenched hand, and passion marked face, trod its limits, chafing like a caged

lioness. Ah! more degradation still! more humiliation! surely anything would be better than this galling, maddening slavery! More sulphur had indeed been cast upon the flames, the angry fire burnt fiercely in Julia's bosom, and she half regretted not having instantly acceded to Edgar's proposal, which now seemed to offer the fairest, if not the only escape from her wretched bondage. Ah, Julia! Julia! how often experience shows us that 'tis better to bear the ills we have than fly to others that we know not of: the greatest writer among uninspired men gives you that thought to make you pause, and 'twere best to heed his warning.

She was soon compelled to be again in attendance upon her mistress; so, controlling her temper by a great effort, she went to her duties. Lady Gorsebush sought by unusual gentleness to soothe the girl, who was, as she could easily see, writhing under the not very severe reproof administered, and Julia insensibly forgot her anger, and became as calm as before. This evening was marked by a pleasant incident; an arrival

long looked for took place, and with an exclamation of joy Julia received a letter in the well-known handwriting of her dear sister, and posted at Natal.

Attracted by her irrepressible ejaculation, Lady Gorsebush looked at her, and seeing the unusual sparkle of her eye, asked, with a smile, the cause. A few words explained, and the lady, sympathising with her servant, dismissed her for the evening, saying she knew Julia was anxious to have "a good long read, and a good long cry," over this foreign arrival. Thus released, Julia flew to her room, and tore open the thin paper; she had not thought she loved her sister so much; and never felt their separation so severely as when, with eyes misty with tears, and her heart beating high with excitement, she commenced the perusal of this letter.

It was long, of course; the writer declared herself to be completely happy, save for the remembrance of England; she had seen very little of her new country yet, but Smith was the dearest, kindest husband in the world, and no

one could be other than happy in his company, anywhere.

Much there was in the letter to interest Julia, yet very little demanding our readers' notice. In conclusion, after an earnest request for a long, long letter, in which every friend was to be named, Agnes expressed a fervent hope that ere long she should have her sister out with her. On this last phrase Julia paused, and after again and again reading the words it contained, sat many minutes without stirring. Her head leaning on one hand, the other hanging by her side and holding the open letter, she sank into a prolonged, absorbing reverie.

CHAPTER VIII.

More days, more weeks, more months; autumn gone; winter, heavy, gloomy, rainy, rainy, Bristol winter come; still the same uncongenial occupation, still the same uncurbed temper, and still Julia was wretched. Several times had she seen Fielding, and on each occasion he had pressed, with fresh and specious arguments, his proposal for her removal to London; and as her familiarity with the idea increased, so did her objections diminish, and so did her disgust at her duties grow stronger.

Twice again had she heard from Agnes, dear,

distant, warm-hearted Agnes; and each letter contained a warmer hope of seeing her sister some day at Natal, a hope, she said, which the prosperous condition of the young speculation justified; and in the last letter was a half hinted something, a timid allusion to a coming change, followed immediately by a warmer wish than ever for her sister's presence, which led Julia to think that she might have soon to speak of a South African niece or nephew.

Of these invitations she had told Fielding, and had expressed a desire to avail herself of them, but Edgar conjured her in the strongest manner to dismiss the idea at once and for ever. Could she, formed for the elegance and polish of refined society, endure the rude habitants of that wild and lonely African settlement? Did she even believe her sister, a being of far less soul than herself, to be happy? If she did, let her read the letter over again, and see what a strain of melancholy, indefinable possibly, but certainly existing, was there. Was she not clearly pining to return? And if she, more placid,

more easily satisfied, less ardent, less impulsive than Julia, so felt, what could *she* expect but to wither and droop as though in a vast prison? So he combatted her idea of emigration, and so, by the easiest possible transition, showed the superior advantages of his plan. However, nothing was settled or clearly determined in Julia's agitated mind, and so, as just said, time wore slowly on, and she was still at Brislington.

It was in the winter time, and Agnes had left England nearly a year, when Julia, sitting at a window of Gorsebush Hall, saw a "fly" jog steadily along the road; this was, of course, no great novelty, and so she continued to sit at the window and gaze moodily out upon the naked wet trees, the damp looking fields and hedges, the empty road, and the river—a couple of barges, drawn slowly along by a wretched white horse, moved lazily on, and she often remembered, when she recalled that day, how a man was leaning against the tiller of one of the craft, clad in a huge tarpaulin coat, with a flap hat of the same material, while she could see

distinctly the puffs of white smoke from his short pipe. When not actually in attendance upon Lady Gorsebush, Julia had no better employment than this; the weather was too cold and wet to suffer her to go out, and thoroughly isolated from the remainder of the household, with whom she had nothing in common, who knew not how to treat her, and whom she knew not how to treat, her spare hours hung heavily and her gnawing mind became more and more restless.

She could not see, from where she sat, the main entrance to the house, nor had she heard the ringing of the bell at the porter's lodge, yet it was evident that some one had lately entered, for one of the housemaids came into her room, where Julia was supposed to be at work upon some fine raiment, name unknown to us, but intended for the lady of the house: the housemaid, we repeat, came in, and said that a gentleman was waiting in Mr. Bailey's room to see her. Mr. Bailey's room was the one in which

the steward of the Gorsebush property was accustomed to transact business, see the tenants, and so forth; and was, therefore, a nice medium sort of place for the lady's maid and companion's friends to be shown into. Startled and flushed, Julia obeyed the summons, and while slowly descending the stairs, strove in vain to form an idea as to whom her visitor might be. No one had ever called upon her before, and of the few friends left in England she could recall none who were likely to do so now, save Bruffle or Hackley, (Fielding was of course out of the question,) and neither of them would call without some previous intimation.

In a very few seconds the mystery was solved, for upon entering the room she at once recognized the gentleman. Mr. Chapman was her visitor. Julia involuntarily recoiled, and uttered an exclamation of astonishment, Chapman rising at the same moment and making a profound bow. The little lawyer looked common, vulgar, sickly, and cunning, just as he had done

a year or two before, and the discontented air was there too, nor was the harsh voice improved, as soon Julia was enabled to discover.

"Ahem!" began Chapman; "I am quite a stranger, Miss Elmsley, quite a stranger; you did not, I dare say, expect to see me."

"You are quite right, sir," returned the young lady, "I expected you as little as I wished for you."

"Don't let us quarrel, when I come to bring the olive tree," said Chapman.

"Quarrel! sir!" exclaimed Julia; "I trust our interview will be too short to admit of a quarrel. If you have business, proceed with it."

"Yes, yes," continued Chapman, but evidently more in pursuance of his own remark than in answer to anything Julia had said, "'Birds in their little nests agree' and, of course, 'nests' means 'houses' figuratively; but excuse me, Miss Elmsley. Excuse me also if I say that times are altered: ah! we're here to-day and gone to-morrow. But there is a Providence above."

"There is," said Julia, "and to it I look for retribution, which if *you* feel not!—but say your errand, Mr. Chapman, and detain me no longer."

"Why—a—I hardly know," began Chapman, a great nervousness which had been all along visible in him, increasing to a distracting extent; "first allow me to hope, Miss Julia, that you entertain no ill feelings towards me in connection with the past."

"Are you mad, sir?" demanded Julia.

"You cannot, at least, you ought not to blame a quite neutral person," urged Chapman; "you saw me do no more than any professional man would have done; and I am sure when I have disclosed my business here, you will see that *I* bear no malice or hatred in my heart."

"Guileless, forgiving man!" exclaimed Julia, who kept her eye with amazing steadiness upon the lawyer, he evidently fast becoming bewildered under the combined influence of that riveted gaze, and his increasing nervousness.

"I have had many arguments with myself

about this," he continued, "and have decided at last, that you need not—cannot have any—should not, I mean, have any dislike to me because I was employed by your worthy uncle—I beg pardon, your uncle then."

This correction was produced by a swift bending of the brow, and a fiery kindling of the eyes of his auditor.

"I have had the honour before now of naming —hem!—would it be too much, Miss Elmsley, if I asked for a glass of water?"

Julia pointed to a sideboard on which stood a decanter and glass; the little man rose, helped himself, and then, after an elaborate rubbing of his mouth, drying his hands, and so forth, again sat down.

"I had the honour and pleasure, Miss Elmsley, some time back, of making an offer of a certain kind—to you—which offer you—"

The last few words had come forth jerkingly and with difficulty, and now he seemed fairly to have broken down. He made a dead pause, but Julia came to his relief and said:

"Which I decidedly rejected."

"Which you decidedly rejected," repeated Chapman, snatching at the words, although they were not the most pleasant or flattering, in his utter destitution, "but not straightforwardly, permit me to say. You showed me that you rejected me, and harassed—I mean harrowed, although harassed would do—harrowed my feelings frightfully. Yet I forgave and loved still."

Chapman paused again, again to wipe his mouth and rub his hands; Julia's expression of astonishment heightened, but she spoke not, so he resumed:

"I can easily see, Miss Elmsley, that the present is not your proper hemisphere, that you are wasting your sweetness on deserted air; but I have the honour once again to lay myself at your disposal. I am very much improved in circumstances, Miss Elmsley, and am likely to continue to improve; but no increase of pride, I may confidently say, has accompanied my advance. You will find me the same as ever."

"I completely believe you," interposed Julia, "and therefore—"

"No, stay—hear me out, I beg!" cried Chapman, who seemed to have gained courage now the first plunge was over. "I declare solemnly, Miss Elmsley, that my home seems dull, lonely, and cheerless to me; that I think of you in the morning, and dream of you at night. If I have seemed to do you any wrong, let me so repair it. Think, before you utter the words which your cruel-looking eyes tell me you are about to speak, think that I must be sincere in my vows, when I seek you a second time, and after such bitter mockery as I have received at your hands; think, too, I must be disinterested; and think also,—and though in your proud mind it may be the least weighty consideration, still it is worth something,—think that it is no mean home, no humble house, of which I invite you to be the mistress! Oh, Miss Elmsley, unknit your brow! I will befriend your sister; I can do it, and will. Command me in any thing, and I will obey. My in-

fluence with your uncle is considerable, I may prevail upon him to come forward—"

"Pray, sir, be silent," interposed Julia; "I will allow you the credit of meaning well, but you so utterly mistake the character and feelings of my sister and myself, that I must check you in your speech. Our uncle has nothing to offer that we would accept; no, not though he halved his ill-gotten wealth with us. For your personal suit, sir, I do myself violence in saying I am flattered by the compliment you probably intend to convey; I cannot listen to you, my sentiments are unchanged; and now let me beg you to terminate this interview, and to consider my answer as final."

"I did not expect this, not quite this," returned Chapman; "I have read a great deal about the timidity and gentleness of the softer sex, but really, you will pardon the observation, it has not often been my lot to mark, as the poet says, a great deal of those qualities in you, Miss Elmsley. Is it possible that you can, upon calm

consideration, throw aside the opportunity of leaving service? I don't want to convulse your bosom by emotion, but everybody in Chalkingdon is talking about the breaking down of your pride, and sneering at you. Now, as mistress of my house, partner of my heart, you would by no means be a person to be slandered or sneered at; a very little is actionable, and so they should find."

Here Julia, who had averted her head, waved her hand twice or thrice impatiently.

"Now don't!" urged the lawyer.

An angry stamp was his reply.

"I'm going then, Miss Julia, there! there! I'm going. But let me urge you to take time. I'm not very busy just now, and as I am down here, may as well look about me a bit, so if you will permit me to call for an answer to-morrow, I should not feel dull in the interval, and you would perhaps see things in their proper light. Shall it be so?"

"No, sir," curtly replied the lady, turning her face towards him, "no, sir. Go. And

may God grant me never to see your face again!"

With a blank visage, a crushed and overwhelmed air, Chapman gathered up his hat and gloves, and in the chaotic tumult of his mind put them all on, and stalked solemnly from the apartment without uttering another syllable. Julia again sought her room, and sat gazing sadly upon the "glimmering landscape" until it was shrouded in thickest twilight, and she was summoned to her mistress.

Meanwhile Chapman had re-entered the "fly," and was in due course of time deposited at the railway station, where he learnt that there would be no train for Chalkingdon or Abbeycombe for nearly two hours. So he had nothing left for it but to stroll about the vicinity of the terminus "chewing the cud of sweet and bitter fancy," and wondering at the obduracy and improvidence of Julia in rejecting his offer.

He could not bear, as many persons so waiting cannot bear, to stray far from the railway station; so he sauntered thoughtfully to and fro

by the side of the Avon, and shuddered as he saw little children playing on the brink and face of the steep and lofty banks, while the turbid tide rolled fiercely some forty or fifty feet below them.

"A hazardous road indeed, for a stranger to travel in the dark," thought the lawyer; a few scattered bushes, too, which served as a feeble apology for a fence on the further side of the river, seemed from their treacherous irregularity and deceptive shadow to make the gulf more dangerous. And so, from thinking thus, and speculating on the ease with which a careless or drunken man might here perish, it suddenly flashed into his remembrance that it was at Bristol his former clerk had disappeared, and that nothing was a more likely thing than for the poor fellow to have stumbled from the bank, while reeling from his favourite haunts, and so to have perished. The more Chapman thought over this idea, the more feasible it became; he had often felt a vague uneasiness at the complete and inexplicable disappearance of

his clerk, but now that he looked upon this unguarded precipice, this torrent of water, and saw how easy a thing it would be for such a man to fall and drown, and how likely the strong tide was to sweep his body far away, even out to sea, so that none should ever find it, and no tongue tell the tale; he felt at once a twinge of sadness and a considerable relief.

For, without knowing why it should be so, he had for a long time associated the remembrance of Parsons with some evil; he did not like to speak of him, nor that his name should be mentioned in his presence; yet why, as he often argued with himself, why he should care for that threadbare, slipshod, shaky dependent, if he were alive, or for his memory if he were dead, he could not understand; but so it was. Now, however, that he had come to Bristol, and had seen how numerous were the streams, or canals, and remembered Parsons's failing, he felt more at ease, and could afford to be a little sorry for him.

At last the hour for his departure arrived,

and without let or hindrance he was borne in safety to Chalkingdon Road Station. It was of course late at night, not very late, but long after dark, and no vehicle was to be obtained for his conveyance to Chalkingdon, save at such a rate as by no means agreed with the lawyer's ideas of economy. It also happened that no one got out at the station but himself, so that there seemed a long, dark, solitary walk before him; he was thirsty too, and though the Railway Arms Tavern and Family and Commercial Hotel stood invitingly open, and the lights streamed from its doors and windows upon the dark and silent road, yet, like Shylock, he had a vow, a vow in heaven, never more to patronise the insolent Nathaniel Hackley, and so he pushed on.

He was passing Royal Lodge, when a thought struck him, on seeing a light shining from the parlour, and he determined to beg the favour of a drive to Chalkingdon. He rang, enquired for Mr. Elmsley, and was at once admitted.

Mr. Elmsley was, as has just been intimated, in the parlour, but which room was now styled the "study" (a chamber for which the late John Elmsley, of Royal Lodge, had but little use), and he rose from his seat to welcome the lawyer. The apartment was now handsomely but soberly fitted up, as became a library and study, and as became the room where offending rustics and too compliant damsels were ever and anon ushered into the awful presence of the magistrate. A large, official-looking table, with leather surface, the writing desk placed upon it, the rows of massive calf bound books, the rolls of paper carefully tied with tape, the maps and almanack upon the wall, the books and letters on the table, all bespoke the man of business, the zealous, indefatigable justice of the peace.

William Elmsley was stouter decidedly, balder decidedly, and graver decidedly, than when we first knew him; indeed his stoutness was then only sleekness, his baldness had not shown itself, and his gravity was but in embryo, as a gentle decorous manner.

"At business still!" cried the lawyer, glancing at the table. "Dear me! Mr. Elmsley, how do you keep this up? What you go through would kill many men."

"Perhaps so, perhaps so," returned Elmsley; "but where you find out of half a dozen magistrates that five look upon their office but as an amusement, it behoves the sixth, surely, to be active in his duty. But let me ask what brings you here so late this evening, Chapman?"

"To beg two or three favours, sir," said the lawyer; "in the first place I should be much obliged for a mug of ale and a crust; in the next, I would ask for a drive to Chalkingdon, as I feel almost too tired to walk there,—if your horses and servants are not otherwise engaged."

"My horse and gig are at your service, Chapman," answered Elmsley, "and I will order a tray to be brought in here. I should like to have a few minutes' speech with you, and I dare say some faint idea of business was lurking in your mind when you opened my gate."

The solicitor smiled his feeble smile, and com-

menced a protest of the absence of any such thought.

"Oh, never mind, Chapman, we know what lawyers are," returned his host, smiling in turn, as he rose to touch the bell rope.

The servant answered the summons, an order for the immediate serving of supper was given, and for the harnessing of the skewbald to the gig.

Until the first command was attended to, Mr. William Elmsley stood with his back to the fire, humming an air, and leisurely looking round the apartment, or at Chapman; the latter, for his part, sat crouching on a chair, seldom meeting the eye of his companion. It was clear which was the master spirit, that Elmsley had obtained the supremacy over his coadjutor, and, although each was equally in the other's power, that something—possibly nothing more than his composure, his respectable steadiness, and his magisterial elevation—had cowed Chapman, and given the ascendancy to his companion.

Supper was served, and the lawyer ate; un-

easily though, and awkwardly, with a sensation of being watched (for Mr. Elmsley partook not of the meal), which embarrassed him greatly, more especially as he had taken the leg of a cold fowl, and knew not very well what to do with the bones.

"You were speaking some few weeks back," said Elmsley at last, "of an intention on your part of renewing an offer you once made to that unfortunate young woman, Julia Pearson. Have you thought any more of it?"

"Yes, sir," replied Chapman, "I have thought a very great deal about it."

"Oh!" said Elmsley, "and have you done anything in it?"

"Why—yes, sir," replied Chapman again, "finding you had no objection to such a course—"

"Objection! I! How could it concern me?" ejaculated his friend.

"I thought I would go down to Bristol without farther delay, and ascertain the young lady's —person's—woman's—sentiments."

"Very good," murmured Elmsley, finding

himself appealed to, as it were, by Chapman making a pause.

"Well, sir," pursued the lawyer, "so I went, and saw her. She looks really more beautiful than ever, I do think, and yet worn and thoughtful, as though she had seen a deal of trouble—ahem!"

The lawyer checked himself, and coughed in his confusion, for he remembered that he was scarcely speaking in the manner most pleasing to Mr. Elmsley; the latter, however, as Chapman glanced furtively at him over the edge of his glass, preserved entire calmness, seeming to listen with just the amount of curiosity due to an indifferent tale, nothing more.

"I renewed my offer, sir, and am sorry to say she again rejected it. More strange and incomprehensible conduct I never heard of—I never heard of."

"It is neither strange nor incomprehensible to me," said Elmsley, with a smile. "The reasons which operated against you before, still influence her."

"Not exactly, sir; at that time she was receiving the addresses of Mr. Edgar Fielding, but, as is well known, the cause of true love did not go on smoothly."

"Smoothly or not, Mr. Chapman," returned Elmsley, "the cause, as you have it, is now being pleaded between the same parties. You start—but I am quite positive. I know from undoubted authority that young Fielding has been seen with her in the neighbourhood of Bristol. If all we hear of his doings in another quarter be true, for I suppose you know of his engagement to Miss Le Guernsey, the young person will have no great cause to rejoice in her obstinacy to you. Let that console you, Mr. Chapman."

"It does *not* console me, sir," returned the lawyer; "I have forgiven her the first insult, and feel as though I could forgive her anything. If she comes to any harm, the last emotion I should be likely to feel would be joy. Fielding must be a thorough scoundrel if he could harm

such a being! Excuse this burst of feeling, sir, but nature, sir, nature."

Here Chapman produced his handkerchief, blew his nose vehemently, and then touched his eyes with the corner of it. Elmsley watched him with the first symptoms of impatience he had yet shown, and at last broke out with an angry "Psha!" and moved with a couple of strides from where he stood, returning immediately, however, and that not irresolutely, but as one who had not finished his task; he resumed, after one or two clearings of his throat;

"Did you have much conversation with Julia —Julia Pearson?"

"Pretty fair, sir; yes, I did."

"And did she," continued Elmsley, "did she allude, more or less, to—to me, for instance; to her old life here; did she express any anxiety to return?"

"Not in the least—I mean she didn't seem anxious to return," said Chapman.

"Oh! was the subject mentioned at all? It was not? Do you think now, from her manner,"

pursued Elmsley, "that an addition to her proposed allowance would be accepted by her? If you think so (and *I* think so most certainly, as she is, I am sure, very unhappy as a servant), I should have no objection to double or even to treble it; nay, if she manifested a proper spirit, I might in time consent to her returning here as a visitor, for as long as she pleased."

He paused, and awaited Chapman's reply. Chapman paused too, and either from the effects still lingering of his late emotion, or from his dislike to say anything unpleasant to his patron, or from both combined, he screwed his features into a most melancholy and ominous expression. Elmsley watched him closely, and as he marked the change in his face, turned pale, and bit his under lip. At last the attorney spoke.

"I'm very sorry to say, sir," he began, "that what I have seen to-day does by no means induce me to think Miss Elmsley altered. (Excuse me for calling her Miss Elmsley, but really 'Pearson' seems a stranger's name altogether.) I do believe, sir, that if I was six feet and a half

high, had mustachios, was a soldier, and so in every way calculated to fascinate a lady, I do believe she would reject me; and I fear, sir, if your pounds were thousands, and Royal Lodge Windsor Castle, she would disdain them, and all you could offer."

"Oh," said Elmsley coldly.

"But you know, sir," resumed Chapman, "there would be no harm in trying; you can write to her about it, or I will if you prefer it."

"Thank you," returned his friend, still coldly, "I shall not trouble you. I hear the gig at the door, Mr. Chapman; it is at your service."

With a profusion of thanks Chapman expressed his gratitude, being moved to an excess of words by a consciousness that while he had been most anxious to conciliate his employer by obsequiousness and humility, he had contrived to render him particularly uncomfortable.

As for himself, he contemplated his bachelor life, and the dull home to which the fast-trotting skewbald was rapidly conveying him, with

higher disgust than ever, and mentally formed a resolution to marry somebody, and that immediately. His too sensitive heart could not repress a sigh as he came to this determination, and thought, also, how unlikely it was, that among the whole circle of his female friends, another Julia Elmsley, (alias Pearson, as he added,) could be found.

CHAPTER IX.

At last then the ringers of bells at Chalkingdon have the long coveted opportunity afforded them, and a grand marriage gives them the chance of "coming out strong." Right nobly do these enthusiastic men avail themselves of the opportunity, and the staunch old tower of Chalkingdon church trembles and quivers night after night with the energetic, almost too energetic, the zealous, almost too zealous, training, qualifying, and practising, to which these Berkshire Campanologians devote themselves.

The rooks, such among them as were young, and of irritable temperaments, got no sleep o

nights; for the tall old trees which held their sable colony, overhung the churchyard, and were wrapt, so it seemed, in an atmosphere of bell metal, while the birds were almost shaken from their nests by the vibration of clappers. The elder rooks, however, being habituated to a country clerical life, had become sleek, indolent, not given to nervousness, and, probably, gouty; these slept on as they were wont.

Of course, the Crown prospered somewhat by these gymnastics; in the snug tap of that hostel after the evening's practice, the flushed, red hot ringers would assemble, and many a quart of ale was drunk there, and there many a warm argument was held as to the merits of divers ringers, past and present. For there, of course, as well as elsewhere, were one or two critics who swore by the good old times, and who averred that since the days of bandy Bill Jarvis and Tom Wickets the one-eyed, the science and practice of Campanology had fallen into sad decay and degeneracy. As these renowned men had gone, we may hope, to practise upon different instru-

ments, and in a better world, at least some two or three and twenty years back, it was but natural that the present corps should stoutly deny the supremacy of the great defunct, and cast heretical doubts on their powers of properly giving to the world a triple bob, or a grandsire, or whatever is the topmost crown and glory of bell-ringing art.

Whatever the facts might have been, whichever was right, matters not; for after all, each party agreed upon two things, videlicit: firstly, that it was a great pity poor Bob Parsons was drowned, for that a better judge of ringing and ringers was not to be found in the united counties of Berks and Wilts; even the advocates of the old school, they who stickled most warmly for the laurels of William Jarvis, the bandy, and of Thomas Wickets de la borgne, hesitated not to own that Bob Parsons was indeed a man who had a perception of what things ought to be. Secondly, that this would be a very grand wedding, deserving of all that could be said, sung, rung, or drunk, in honour of it.

Any one overhearing their debates would soon gather from them that William Elmsley, Esquire, of Royal Lodge, Chalkingdon, J.P. &c., was about to lead to the hymeneal altar the fair and lovely Henrietta Georgina, daughter of Major Harper, of Crossbelts. Crossbelts, as every reader knows who is at all familiar with the vicinity of Chalkingdon, is the name of the seat which perches so prettily upon a fine bold knoll, lying some half mile back from the main road, at a distance of three miles from Chalkingdon. And a very good match, too, it was unanimously agreed, Mr. Elmsley had made: he was the sort of man who *would* make a good match, and as he had not been in a hurry to choose his partner, his deliberation was rewarded by his choosing about the most eligible in every point of view that his neighbourhood afforded.

The Major was portly in form, his face might be described as porty; well filled were the Major's coffers, and numerous his acres; gifted, too, was he with the inviting air and voice of a drill serjeant, the portentous tones of the latter

rolling with equal depth and harshness at his own table, or at the bench of justice—for he was a magistrate, and hence the acquaintance. Miss Harper was not very young, but neither was she very old; her age was thirty, and a pleasing, good-looking lady was she.

Never was the oft quoted Shakesperian line more at fault than in this case; the course of love ran extremely smooth here. The gentleman saw the lady, and felt that she of all the fair ones thereabouts was the maid for him; she, ready of course, as most ladies are, to accept the first fair offer—aye, and to grow to love and worship the offerer, and to make them true, kind, fond and devoted wives, for such is the wont of women—she really did like Elmsley, he seemed so learned, so correct, so very gentlemanly.

As for his treatment of the poor orphan sisters—tut! that was having the web which those busy spiders, Time and Prosperity, are ever spinning before faults, woven rapidly over it: and besides, as said before, besides, you know, really—it was a bad thing for the girls,

of course, but really, if morality is to be studied at all, what could he do? Upon my word, after all, the least said about such very shocking affairs the better, and Mr. William Elmsley was looked up to so much.

And so, then, he was to be married to Henrietta Georgina, only daughter and heiress of Herbert Dionysius Harper, of Crossbelts, Chalkingdon, Berks, and late Major in Her Majesty's Dragoon Guards. Yes, and he was married too, and the happy pair, immediately after the ceremony, pausing of course for a déjeuner at the Major's, started on a bridal tour into the Lake Districts.

We have nothing particular to say about the ceremony, or the preparations necessary thereto, everything was doubtless done that at such solemnities it is customary to do, and though no flags waved from windows, and no festoons of flowers graced the street, as would have been the case at the espousal of John Elmsley's children, yet all was very grand and sumptuous, nor was awanting a crowd of gazers as the

happy couple issued from the portals of the church. There was not much cheering, however, as the carriages drove off, for the good gentleman had reached his culminating point of popularity some time since, and was now perceptibly on the wane.

Mr. Chapman was to have supported his patron at the altar, but among the white-gloved, rosetted groomsmen who were there gathered together, Elmsley's eye sought in vain for the diminutive figure of his solicitor. An inquiry or two as to the cause of his absence, which the bridegroom made while in the vestry waiting to sign his name, elicited no information, as those who were intimately acquainted with Chapman, and had seen him recently, could only tell that he had expressed his intention of being at Crossbelts in time to join the procession.

He might be ill, Elmsley considered, or detained by some sudden and pressing business; fifty things might have arisen to prevent his attendance; and, after all, it was of no great

consequence, they could do very well without him. Yes, that was very true; as regarded his importance, and the figure he would present as a member of the procession, Chapman could very well be spared; nevertheless, without a jest, the bridegroom felt that he could indeed have better spared a better man. In spite of himself, he was more vexed than seemed fitting for so trivial a cause, and though he strove to restrain the slightest exhibition of anxiety, his eye wandered restlessly many times to the vestry door, ere the registration was completed. At last all was done; the carriages were entered, the crowd, as above hinted, gazed their fill, some uncertain shouting was raised, which produced a less cheerful effect than even total silence would have done, for it showed how little enthusiasm was in the majority when they would not join in the attempted cheer. As the carriages swept from the vision of the people of Chalkingdon, it was generally agreed that a better appointed wedding had never been seen in the town, so *that* was something.

Having so recently furnished a specimen of bridal festivity, and bridal eloquence, and as this chronicle deals with other things besides marrying and giving in marriage, we may be excused from dwelling on the proceedings at the breakfast. It will answer every purpose if we say that Major Harper was sorrowfully eloquent, and addressed Mr. Elmsley in the course of his harangue, as though he were violently denouncing him, but his words were far too forcibly pronounced to allow of the probability of any one within the longest possible earshot failing to catch all the compliments bestowed upon the bridegroom.

When, however, the banquet was over, and the bride had retired to assume a travelling dress, and the guests, having broken up, were merrily chatting in groups of two or three, the door of the apartment was thrown open, and with a hasty step Chapman entered. · A burst of laughter from the assembled gentlemen, with ironical congratulations upon his punctuality, greeted him; but Elmsley saw that his face was

paler than usual, and that his manner was scared and flurried. He was not one of those, therefore, who joined in the laugh, nor was he surprised when, after a few feeble, nervous attempts at retaliation, the lawyer asked if he could have a few minutes' conversation with him in private. Immediately assenting, Elmsley led the way to a small room.

"Now, what is the matter?" demanded the bridegroom, closing the door after him, and looking coldly upon the lawyer as he spoke.

If he felt anxiety as to the occasion of this somewhat mysterious interview, he knew well how to suppress it, or at any rate its exhibition; and if he were desirous of overawing and cowing his companion, he took a way well calculated to do so.

"Now, what is the matter, Chapman? I see by your manner that you have something to communicate; do it at once."

"Why, Mr. Elmsley, nothing very serious perhaps," returned the lawyer, "at least to you; don't be alarmed—"

"I am not alarmed," interposed Elmsley.

"Ah!—no! I see you are not," continued the solicitor, "and perhaps it is weak and foolish in me to make such a stir about such an affair. I daresay you were disappointed in not seeing me at the ceremony?"

"I had certainly expected to do so," was the reply.

"I had, of course, fully intended to be there," pursued Chapman, "but that noisy fellow, that Mr. Bruffle, the farmer, came to me just as I was starting, to tell me that Miss Julia Elmsley —I beg pardon, I mean Miss Pearson—had suddenly, and indeed mysteriously, left her situation."

"Well, sir?" said Elmsley.

"Why, there's not much more," returned Chapman, eyeing uncomfortably the fixed features of his patron, on which a sterner expression was gradually settling; "he said she had left her situation—Mr. Bruffle said Miss Pearson had left her situation, I mean—"

"Of course you do," muttered his companion.

"He said she had left her situation and had gone up to London; thus much he knew from herself, and he had reason to believe, to fear, at all events, that it was likely to be an unfortunate affair. You remember giving me a warning one night late, at Royal Lodge, that she was still in a correspondence with Mr. Fielding? Well, Bruffle thinks that this change is made through him—through Mr. Fielding—through Mr. Edgar Fielding, I mean."

Chapman paused after the delivery of these tautological fragments, which had evidently only been uttered in default of better phrases wherewith to finish his sentence. He paused, and clearly expected his companion to speak; so he did, but it was only to say, with greater coolness:

"Well, sir?"

"Well, sir! Well, sir!" exclaimed Chapman, nettled and vexed into the outbreak, "can't you see anything to interest you in my tale? Have you no other words for me but 'Well, sir! well, sir!' like a parrot? Don't you care what becomes of the poor girl?"

"No, Mr. Chapman," was the reply, "not for a moment. Let her be what her mother was; she is sprung from a tainted stock; let her prove herself worthy of her parentage. She is nothing to me."

"Well, even if she isn't, you might, I should think, take a little more interest in the matter, Mr. Elmsley, from it so closely concerning me," urged the lawyer; "I was so affected by the tale, that I could not—no, I could not bear to present myself at an altar which would have reminded me of my blighted hopes."

"We are wasting time here," said Mr. Elmsley, "and I shall be waited for. Have you anything more to say?"

"Don't be so cold, Mr. Elmsley," retorted the lawyer; "you find it answer with me generally, I don't doubt; but remember that a bosom can be harrowed and unstrung to a pitch which may snap its chords."

Elmsley smiled, in despite of himself, at this appeal.

"At all events, sir, don't you intend to make

one more effort to save so unfortunate a young person? Don't you mean to do something a little more liberal than anything you have yet offered, and to do it in a warmer hearted sort of way?"

"No," briefly returned Mr. William Elmsley,

And opening the door as he spoke, he walked from the room and left the lawyer to his meditations. These were but short, for after a start of astonishment, utter, spasmodic astonishment, which subsided into a frozen stare at the door by which Elmsley had made his abrupt exit, Chapman roused himself, shook his head solemnly twice or thrice, heaved a sigh, and returned to the drawing room.

The happy pair, as before stated, departed immediately *en route* for Cumberland, and the local papers announced, as did in due course the "Times," that on the 10th inst., at Chalkingdon Church, &c., &c.; the style is very familiar to us all, and needs no illustration here.

Chapman was pressed to stay at Crossbelts, to partake of divers festivities which were intended

to run far into the night, but the little lawyer, pleading a severe headache, excused himself, and sought his own mansion. If, as told at the conclusion of our last chapter, his home seemed dull and cheerless to him before, it may easily be conceived that it was not improved in his eyes by the recent announcement, and while sitting at his solitary supper, he could not help conjuring up a vision of Julia sweeping through his murky rooms, brightening and cheering everything; how enhanced would his bread and cheese and celery have been, had she but been there to share it with him!

The idea was too touching; it was excruciating, and as he filled his solitary glass with table ale, a tear dimmed his eye for a moment, and he felt that his resolution of a few months back, to marry somebody at all hazards, was utterly broken and ruined.

On that morning two letters had been delivered at Daisyfield Farm—the dwelling, as will, of course, be remembered, of worthy John Bruffle, —and a most unusual circumstance was that, for

the farmer's correspondence was on a minimum scale. One was to himself; the other was directed to his wife. The latter was from Julia Elmsley, and informed the good lady that the writer had at length made up her mind to leave Gorsebush Hall, partly because she felt herself becoming more and more unfitted for her post, and partly because an opening presented itself in London. She returned a profusion of thanks for all the kindness shown to her at Daisyfield, and especially for the interest Mr. Bruffle had taken in her, in troubling himself to obtain for her the situation which she was now compelled to resign. She enclosed an address ('twas at a post office), where any communication for her might be sent, and so ended the letter.

In itself, this note would certainly have excited some conjecture, and no little astonishment, insomuch that the farmer and his wife would have been greatly surprised at her giving up her place, and would have been utterly at a loss to divine what resources were open to her in London *now*, which were not previously available.

Nevertheless no steps would have been taken by them in the matter, of that we may be sure, had no further information reached them; but the second letter was of a different stamp, and from a different person.

This was from the housekeeper at Gorsebush Hall, and was written, too, by desire of the lady of that mansion, and after informing John of Julia's disappearance, went on to say that Lady Gorsebush was very uneasy on the subject, not only from her abrupt departure, but from its being generally understood that she had no intimate friends in London; and chiefly from a rumour which existed, to the effect that she had gone thither at the instigation of a Mr. Fielding, and in his company.

This person, the housekeeper went on to say, had certainly been several times been in the neighbourhood, and had once or twice been seen walking with Julia. It was but right, Lady Gorsebush thought, to inform so steady a friend of the orphans as Mr. Bruffle had proved himself, of Julia's proceedings, and he would be the

best judge as to what character they bore, and whether any further steps should be taken. The letter concluded by saying that the most unpleasant part of the matter was the fact that Julia had left no address beyond a Post Office, which seemed as though she did not know where her future home would be, or was anxious that no one else should know it.

Mightily disturbed, John Bruffle, after a brief, but earnest consultation with his wife, harnessed old Smiler, and drove in his gig speedily to Nat Hackley's, to communicate the intelligence, and consult with that astute personage; for Nat was a sort of oracle to many of his acquaintance. The host of the Railway Arms and Family and Commercial Hotel, was greatly excited by the news, and his wife proposed that he should instantly visit London to see after the missing lady. But Nat opposed such a step; he had no right to interfere with Miss Elmsley, or to fetch her back from anywhere she chose to go; God knew there was a home for her there whenever she liked, but how did they know as she hadn't gone to be

married to young Fielding? they was as fond of one another as—as anything.

This struck his wife and Bruffle as being a very possible contingency, and one which both parties might wish to keep secret for a while; mcreover, it was one that would place any officious third person in a most embarrassing position.

Nat saw the impression he had made, and was gratified; but after a pause, went on:—it wasn't for him to say one way or another, things might be or they mightn't, but for his part, mind you, as a man having a great deal of experience in life, he didn't believe as it was the case. He believed young Fielding was a rank bad one, and meant no good to Julia; now if Bruffle wouldn't mind him giving a little bit of advice—

"Why, mun, what be I come vor?" naturally demanded the farmer.

Well then, this, he should say, was the plan. He didn't like Chapman, Mr. Bruffle didn't like Chapman neither, but in such a case as this they mustn't stand upon trifles. Chapman knew

everybody, and everybody's business, these lawyers always did: let Mr. Bruffle drive to him, tell him all about it, shew him the letters, and ask him if he knew whether it was likely that young Fielding would marry Julia, and whether William Elmsley, supposing such to be the case, would give her something handsome to start the poor girl in life, now she had nothing to depend upon.

If all as he heard whispered, Nat said, was right, Bruffle would find Chapman, though as big a screw as ever was, ready enough to take up Miss Julia's rights so far, without any money. Chapman had great influence with Mr. Elmsley, that was very clear, and if the young people really had got married, it must be without the knowledge of the elder Fielding, and so a little help just now would be of great importance.

Convinced by these and like arguments, the farmer made no delay, but put "Smiler" to his mettle, and managed to arrive, as the reader knows, in time to catch the lawyer, ere he started to assist at the ceremony.

This, therefore, was the cause of that gentleman's non-appearance, and this accounts for the farmer waiting on one upon whom he expended very little love in ordinary seasons. As the reader knows also, the information much disturbed Mr. Chapman, the more so, as from private, or rather professional sources of intelligence, he had strong reason to imagine that a marriage of Edgar Fielding to Julia Elmsley, was about the least probable occurrence which could be imagined.

CHAPTER X.

At a quiet, respectable house in Kensington, lived Julia Elmsley; and if her new experiment had enabled her to rent and keep up so handsome a drawing-room and so forth, as she now inhabited, truly this same experiment was a very succesful one, and the fine arts, especially flower painting, are in nowise to be despised in a mere commercial and speculative sense.

In telling a tale which follows the history, or is the history, rather, of an episode in the life of a woman, or of several women, it is impossible to keep within the bounds which are usually

supposed to be necessary for condensing and intensifying the interest. It was summer time when last we spoke of Julia, it is summer time now; but though the same sun which is now sinking behind Holland Park, its brightness lingering on the old tree tops, while all below is in a soft cool shade, delightful after the fierce day in which we have been scarce able to breathe, though the sun is in the same sign as when he shone so brightly and auspiciously upon the wedding morning of Mr. William Elmsley, yet two years have passed since his carriage, with its rosetted postboys, dashed off from Crossbelts towards the railway station.

Julia was two years older now than then, but this is an effect so commonly produced on us by the lapse of twice twelve months, and her age was still so decidedly in its spring, that the added gravity in her face, the thoughtful eye, downcast, and the slower step, were surely not so to be accounted for.

Yet was Julia more beautiful than of old; despite of an indefinable something, which was

a shade a little too deep in a lovely picture, a something which looked like care visible in her face, even to a passer by, she was handsomer than ever. There was more attention to her dress and adornment visible, and her dress and adornments were of more expensive character than the simple attire and scanty ornaments she wore in past days; worn by choice during her father's life, and from necessity afterwards. Few passed her without a second glance, as she thoughtfully trod and retrod the quiet, retired roads and paths of Camden Hill.

At last, when the sun had fairly set, and the distant Surrey hills were becoming gray and indistinct, she roused herself slightly, and at a somewhat quicker pace reached the house where as not long since said, she dwelt. On being admitted, which was almost immediately after her resounding peal at the door, (and yet the interval was long enough to bring a dozen female heads covertly to the windows of the neighbouring houses, from whence, by aid of the curtains, they looked stealthily out; Julia knew

it not, but the landlady, and the landlady's servant could have told her, that she seldom came in or went out, without the same gratifying mark of attention,) when admitted, Julia went to the drawing-room.

This was a large and handsomely furnished apartment, with three windows looking upon the street; these were now all open, to cool the room, for the day had been intensely hot, but now that the twilight had come, and the light evening breeze was blowing, the apartment was very pleasant, and the scent of the flowers which filled the small balconies floated in, and added to the refreshing coolness of the hour. Though it was in London, and although the street was not a particularly wide one, most of the houses had trees in the little gardens which lay in front; at any rate, one grew before Julia's window, and its boughs waved, and its leaves rustled with a sound quite of the country, quite of Chalkingdon in short, with which spot all ideas of peace and comfort were in Julia's mind associated.

"No—no lights yet," she said, in answer to a remark from the servant, "and let me have tea at once, in here. Set a table near this window."

While the servant, with officious eagerness hastened to obey, Julia threw off her bonnet and shawl, casting them on the piano: her fingers afterwards touching, but half consciously it seemed, the keys. Yet although she touched the instrument without thought at first, she soon, (as most persons will do,) commenced playing fragments of tunes, which in their turn gave way, and when the servitor, with a respectful bob, announced that tea was ready, mum, if she p.eased, Julia was playing Weber's "Last Waltz." She broke off abruptly at sound of the girl's voice; gazing with a vacant eye an instant at her, as if for the moment she knew her not; then with something like a shudder she quitted the piano, and took her seat by the open window where the tea was served.

The street was quiet and shady, the evening air was cool, the flowers were fragrant, yet, had any eye been there to mark, it would have been

easy to see that her frequent glance through the open window, and her position close by, were not for the odour of flowers, or the repose and shade below. There was expectation in the look. At last she rang for lights; the blinds were drawn down, but the window left open, and Julia unlocked a writing desk, which stood upon a table, and took from thence a letter.

At that moment the cry of an infant was heard near at hand; she looked anxiously up, and then Sarah, the servant, bore into the room, with a profusion of kisses, and loud expressions of admiration, a child of some few months old. He was a darling! a tootsy topsum he was! and would he cry when his own Sarah had got him? There was his ma, then, and her little petsy wetsy should go to his ma, then. Of course, as the reader may conjecture, after such a speech as that, he did go to his mama, then, and mama fondled the petsy, as mamas are wont to do.

If the smile on Julia's face, as she looked down upon the cooing, crowing boy in her lap, were less decided than in days gone by, if the

sarcastic air which so often sat upon her features, of old were gone, and a graver, more pensive tone were in its place, what then? Take the gayest, giddiest girl, unthinking and vain, shallow and giggling; take her, marry her, let her become a mother, and she must be unthinking and giddy indeed, far so beyond any woman we ever saw, if, when she sits in her own room, her dimpled baby smiling in her lap, if her smile and eye are not sobered down, and the careful, anxious look of the mother be not there instead. So, why should not Julia wear a pensive smile, since all mothers wear it?

The boy was presently handed to his nurse; this nurse not being his own Sarah, but a younger attendant, answering unto the name of Kate, and Kate took the duck of diamonds upon her knee, and proceeded to feed that potentate. His mother again took up the letter before alluded to, and again read it.

It was not for the first time that letter was now being read by her, nor for the second or third time was she reading it. The writing

was that of Agnes; and certainly the contents were such as might account for the shadow which gathered so visibly upon her sister's brow, as she read; though hardly enough to make her drop the thin sheet, and cover her face with her hands for a minute, until a tear or two fell upon the table. Not but that there was some painful intelligence there to be read, for of a truth there *was*, but the emotion of Julia, as she leant forward upon her elbows, seemed of a bitterer character than even the tidings of t letter should call forth.

A second child had been born to Smith and Agnes, a girl, as the first had been, and it had been laid to sleep by its sister's side, in a little lonely grave at D'Urban. Agnes wrote as one sorrowing, yet not without hope. There was, it seemed, a prospect of their speedy return to England, and she dwelt, with the evident purpose of showing to Julia how far she had recovered from the shock, upon the delight she should experience in seeing her again. She congratulated her, too, on being so comfortably

established in London, and on her being able to follow, and so successfully too, such an elegant and lucrative art as flower painting; Smith, she said, was continually surprised, as each mail from England reached them, to find that she was still so prosperous; for he had always associated difficulty and struggles with a lady's attempt to support herself by such means. And she hoped Julia might soon get married, that when they came back to dear, dear old England—several thick lines were scored under *dear*, *dear*, old England—they might find a nice brother-in-law, as good a one as Smith; only, for she knew Julia's taste, he was to be tall and handsome, with a moustache, and patent leather boots, and lemon-coloured kid gloves, and a gold-mounted cane, and a bay horse, "and all just as we used to talk, you know." Then, spoiling it all, came in a short wail for the lost babies, and an irrepressible burst for her crushed hopes. Two little weak-looking strands of hair, clipped from their tiny heads, came in the letter, with the remark that "the darkest was Julia's."

There was more of this, but nothing to make the reader bite her lip, and glance around, as she lifted her head from her hands, with a wild wretched glance which seemed almost frenzy; her eye lighted upon her own child, who, with hunger appeased, and temper improved, was laughing and crowing in answer to Kitty's toying. Swiftly then rose Julia up, swiftly she crossed the room, and falling on her knees by the nursemaid's side, to the infinite amazement, not to say terror, of that servitor, she clasped the child to her breast, and, while kissing and embracing it, shed a shower of burning tears. It passed—the passion passed—as quickly as it had risen, and, erect and calm, she told the girl to take the baby into the nursery, with which mandate the wondering Kitty complied, and the room was silent again.

Julia once more approached the piano-forte, but its tone was changed, and its notes were harsh and thin; she took a book, but Thackeray was no longer a wonderful compound of wit, satire, and pathos; so she sat listlessly on a

chair by the window, and seemed to wait an arrival.

Soon now were her expectations fulfilled, not so soon, however, but that there was time for one disappointment. She saw, for the blind were so arranged, a tall figure, a man's figure, enter the little fore court—having listened to his resounding step ever since he entered the silent street—a double knock followed, and the change in Julia's face, her assumption of a better attitude, and the involuntary smoothing of the hair upon her forehead, told that she supposed the visitor to be for her. As just said, she was disappointed; the stranger, whoever he was, was admitted, and she could hear him enter the parlour, which was her landlady's sitting-room. Julia sank back on her seat again, again watched, and again listened.

In a very few minutes the sharp rattle of a Hansom cab was heard; it drew up at her door, again a tall man crossed the garden, and again Julia roused herself, this time with an air which showed plainly that she felt there was now no

mistake. She was right: a quick, firm step was heard upon the stairs, the door was thrown open, and the visitor entered.

"My dear Edgar!" exclaimed Julia, rising and hurrying to meet him, "how happy I am to see you again, and how long—oh! how long and weary the time has seemed without you."

"My dear Julia," returned Fielding, but his tone was not the tone in which he was addressed; there was as much remonstrance as affection in his manner; "only a fortnight; not so very long."

"Oh, no, Edgar, I know that; I know, too, you have hurried home; I know you have felt it as much as I, and have been harassed with tedious business besides, so I ought not to complain; yet the time has seemed very long to me, Edgar."

"Well, well, here I am now," said Fielding, slightly returning her embrace, and setting a chair for her, which Julia obediently took; "but I am sorry to say that the business is not nearly settled, and I am likely to be at Chalkingdon a

great deal in future; that is, of course, for some time to come."

"Oh! I am so sorry to hear you say so!" exclaimed Julia; "but why can they not settle this law business without you? You must forgive my ignorance, but I should have thought that the lawyers could have arranged all about this disputed boundary without you."

"Why you see, Julia, as I thought I had explained over and over again," said Fielding, "that if my father is getting too old to attend these consultations, and to read all these long reports and so forth, and if he wishes me to act for him, I don't see how I can absent myself."

"No, dear Edgar, certainly not," returned Julia, "but I am so sorry to hear it."

"Yes, of course; it's unfortunate," said Edgar, rising as he spoke, but sitting down again without moving from the spot; he appeared anxious, too, to avoid meeting his companion's eye; "order supper, will you, Julia, for I am tired and hungry."

"You seem far from well," said Julia, ringing

as she spoke; "you are affected by the toil and anxiety connected with this dispute."

The servant now appeared, and received directions to prepare the supper.

"I told you how bad our poor little boy has been," continued Julia; "Dr. Stanney says, however, it is only his teeth."

"Oh! ah! poor little fellow. Where is he?" asked Fielding.

"Kate has him in the nursery," replied Julia, her face lighting up as she spoke, "but I will call her down if you please. Do let me! he has grown so much since you saw him."

"No, never mind; I will see him after supper," answered Fielding.

"Shall we have him christened to-morrow, Edgar? When I call him by his name, I am vexed to think he has none from the church yet."

As Julia finished, her voice suddenly faltered, and a rush of blood dyed her face, brow, and neck the deepest crimson; she hastily went on, as if to prevent her emotion from being observed:

"Let our little Edgar be really our Edgar to-morrow."

"Well, Julia, I have no objection," said Fielding, "but I think we will not have him called Edgar."

"Not Edgar!" exclaimed Julia.

"No," he resumed, "I think not. I have, and always had, a dislike to handing down the same name from one to the other; and besides, it might be more gratifying to you, Julia—I don't say it would if I had not proposed it—but it might gratify you to have him named after your father. Suppose he is called John, then?"

"As you please, my dear Edgar," was the reply; "but, if you are seeking to gratify me, as you are, and always do, I must tell you that no name will please me like your own. I have so accustomed myself to call him by it, thinking he could have no other, that even my father's name will seem strange."

"Never mind; it shall be John. Oh! very well, Sarah."

The servant had just announced that supper was ready.

"I have had another lettter from Natal to-day," said Julia, as she rose, "and such a letter! Poor Agnes has lost her second child."

"Has she? Poor girl!" exclaimed Fielding, with something like feeling in his tone, "and how does she bear this visitation? And how is that excellent, plodding old Smith?"

So speaking, they entered the supper room together, where was spread a sufficiently inviting repast, to which they both sat down. Fielding had spoken of himself as being very hungry, but so far from giving any evidence of it now, he scarcely touched the food before him, and seemed ever and anon to sink into a fit of complete abstraction; as before, too, he avoided meeting Julia's eye, and once or twice when his furtive glance had caught hers fixed anxiously upon him, he had risen nervously and sat down again, without any apparent object. Julia at first anxiously pressed him to eat, but finding

him irritable and peevish, abandoned her efforts; the meal then passed in silence, or rather, the time so passed, for it was but the shadow and pretence of a meal. At last Fielding rose and exclaimed:

"Good Heavens, Julia, how stiflingly hot the room is! I feel faint and giddy with the heat. Let us go for a cool walk somewhere; anywhere; —by Holland Park, I don't care where, so that I get out of this choking room. Make haste and get your bonnet on."

With an assenting smile, Julia hurried to the next room, and in a few seconds was with him again, equipped for walking. They went down stairs, and when they reached the hall Julia said:

"One moment, dear Edgar, while I speak to our landlady about baby."

So she tapped at the parlour door, and it was opened; she then saw, instead of the black silk dress, smooth collar, and neat cap of the mistress of the house, a tall, slender, good-looking young man, who was, she judged, from the strong resemblance, her son.

"Can I speak to—" she began, when the stranger, either from excess of bashfulness, or some unknown cause, stammered out something confusedly, and left the door abruptly.

In another moment his place was supplied by the person in request.

Julia's business was merely to request her to listen for baby's crying, as he had only Kate for a guardian; and if he cried very much, would she please to send Sarah up, lest the aforesaid Kate should have fallen asleep. This was readily promised, and Julia left the house with Edgar.

"Why, my dear Fred!" exclaimed the landlady to her son, as she re-entered the parlour, "whatever caused you to stumble back so confusedly? and how was it you could not speak to Mrs. Pearson in a proper manner?"

"Oh, is her name Pearson?" enquired the son in reply.

"Yes," answered the landlady, "but why do you ask?"

"I suppose then," continued the young man,

"that the gentleman I saw with her was Mr. Pearson."

"Yes, and very nice people they are," said his mother. "He is a commercial traveller I believe, or something of that kind, in a very superior way, of course; but I know he takes long journeys on business, and is away a week at a time, and on this last trip he has been absent a fortnight."

"And Mrs. Pearson," resumed Fred, "is she superior, too, like her husband? and what is her Christian name?"

"Lor, Fred!" exclaimed his mother, "what strange questions you do ask. Do you know her?"

"Yes;—at least I think I have seen her before," was the reply, "but you have not yet told me her Christian name. Is it Julia?"

"Yes, it is," said the lady, "so I suppose you have seen her. I think from some few words they let fall before the servant, not before me, Fred; for bless you, though they are the quietest, most respectable people I ever had in my house,

yet they are as close as the grave; they never say anything about their own business, and I don't believe they ever enquire into other people's."

"Very sensible of them," said Fred as his mother paused, "but what did they say before Sarah?"

"Oh, why this—I know very little about them you see," the landlady remarked, in explanation of, and apology for, listening to the servant's gossip; "so I am naturally a little anxious, as I take a great interest in them. Well it appears they are waiting for the death of an old maiden aunt, to make a move in the world, perhaps to start in business on their own account, and perhaps, *I* think, to acknowledge their marriage to some influential relatives of his in the country. I know he has been down this time, besides his regular business, whatever that is, to manage some important law affairs for his friends —of what kind I don't know, for, as I have just told you, Mrs. Pearson is very close indeed."

"Does she paint?" asked Fred.

"No; I don't think she does," replied the landlady, "at least I've never suspected her of it; though, now I come to think, she has got sometimes a very brilliant colour."

"Nonsense, mother," laughed her son, "I mean, does she ever paint flowers or anything of the kind, for sale?"

"Lor bless you, no! I think I see Mrs. Pearson doing such a thing," cried his mother, laughing in her turn at the absurdity of the idea. "Oh, no, she is a lady bred and born, depend upon it, though her husband is obliged to take up with something to help out their income—but let us have supper now, Fred, for the ham will be getting cold. So don't let us talk any more about Mrs. Pearson at present."

CHAPTER XI.

With the irregularity which marks, we fear, but too strongly the course of this narrative, we have now to write a couple of chapters containing events prior to those detailed in the one just finished. It would perhaps be easy to remedy this even now, did not chronic laziness forbid it, but as things are, so let them go—what is writ is writ.

On an afternoon some few days previous to the occurrence in our last chapter, then, Zaccheus Chapman, solicitor, sat in his own office at Chalkingdon, and pored intently over papers,

or at intervals wrote, as such men are in the habit of doing. While so engaged, a tap at the door aroused him, and his boy looking in said:

"A gentleman down stairs wants to see you, sir."

"Did you tell him that I was busy?" enquired his master.

"Yes, sir," returned the boy, "but he said he was sure you would see him—here's his card, sir."

The lawyer took the card, read the brief inscription, and his hollow cheeks turned paler instantly.

"Show him up," he said, and the fag vanished.

"What can *he* want here," muttered the lawyer; "I cannot forget his last visit, and surely *he* cannot. I wish I was more myself now; I can hardly bear—"

But his soliloquy was terminated by the entrance of his visitor. It was Mr. Edgar Fielding, and by the easy manner with which he

swung into the room, and the frank, familiar style in which he accosted the lawyer, it was clear that he either felt none of the latter's embarrassment, or was particularly successful in concealing it. After a few common-place courtesies had been interchanged, the young man said:

"But I must not forget business, Mr. Chapman, as I daresay your time is precious. You are of course aware that Miss Fielding, the survivor of my very aged aunts, is dead."

"Yes," replied the lawyer, "yes; I am aware, sir, of the melancholy fact. With persons at her age, sir, too often we may say 'physicians are in vain.'"

"I know that you were her chief adviser and right hand man," continued Fielding, "and being completely in her secrets, at least, as far as regards her habits of business, are the fittest person to settle her affairs."

Chapman gave a bow to imply gratitude and assent.

"Very well then, my business is very simple

and soon concluded," said Fielding, "you will come over to-morrow, if you please, to Cypress Cottage, her residence when alive, and go through the various items of her property; you will know if anything is overlooked, and you will take means to turn them all into money."

"Very good, sir," said the lawyer; "you wish then to realize?"

"Yes, of course," returned Edgar. "I am her heir, as you know, and I hate a pack of bonds, and miserable bits of scrip, to represent my money. No, I shall buy a good farm for myself with the cash."

"Very judicious," said Chapman, and then proceeded to ask his client a great number of questions, which would not in any manner interest the reader, were they here detailed; and took down in his memorandum book divers particulars relating to the somewhat profitable task he was about to commence. Yet, though it was business, and business of a highly lucrative character, with which he was dealing, the lawyer's thoughts were often wandering to other

themes, and his tongue tingled with a desire to ask certain questions of his visitor.

These, however, were clearly not to be asked, and the visit drew near its termination. So earnestly were they engaged in the consultation that they had not heard the house door open, and did not know, until the sound of their footsteps were heard close by the office, that two fresh visitors had been admitted. But such was the case; two persons had been admitted by the servant, who did not know that her master was engaged, and, taking advantage of his intimacy with Mr. Chapman, one of these new comers did not go through the formality of sending up his name, but led his companion at once to the lawyer's sanctum.

Both the gentlemen already in the office naturally looked up in some surprise when the door was thrown abruptly open, but the surprise was heightened, and mixed with still more embarrassing feelings when Mr. William Elmsley and Edgar Fielding saw each other. Elmsley made an awkward pause, his hand resting upon

the lock, and looked for a moment with an embarrassed and hesitating air at the unexpected client. The latter, however, who wanted not for presence of mind, rose quickly from his chair, and advanced with outstretched hand to Mr. Elmsley. The cue was given and instantly acted upon; the hand was shaken with an appearance of the extremest cordiality, enquiries after mutual health and welfare were exchanged, and Chapman, who had gazed helplessly from one to the other, heaved a sigh of immense relief, as he saw the two gentlemen assume so amicable a footing.

"I am very sorry to have intruded so rudely," said Mr. Elmsley, "but as Mr. Fielding has kindly expressed his forgiveness, I hope that my being unaware that you were engaged will be my excuse, Mr. Chapman."

"Oh, certainly," said the lawyer.

"The object of my visit here to-day," continued Elmsley, "was to introduce the gentleman of whom I spoke to you. Mr. Taylor, this you have doubtless discovered, is Mr. Zaccheus Chap-

man—Mr. Chapman, Mr. Taylor,—Mr. W. E. Taylor."

Chapman rose and made a small bow to the gentleman indicated, who had, as before explained, accompanied Elmsley; and then Mr. Taylor was introduced to Mr. Fielding. This done, a great deal of conversation ensued, from which Edgar gathered that this Mr. Taylor was a protegé of Mr. Elmsley's, and that he was now installed in the solicitor's office as clerk, and to improve his knowledge of the legal routine. One thing, however, struck Edgar as being somewhat odd, and this was the great freedom with which the new clerk struck into the conversation, or led it; the familiar and easy mode of his address to Mr. Elmsley, who replied in similar manner, and the almost patronizing air he assumed to his new master. Fielding noted this last, and Chapman noted it too, and though the latter could not help, for it was in his nature, being overawed by the dress, style, and manner of his new assistant, and his evident familiarity with their chief patron, yet it was

very clear that he did not like it, and that a young man with less jewellery, curls not quite so glossy, and a style not so intensely aristocratic, would have pleased him more.

The conversation lasted long, and assumed, so far as regarded Fielding, Elmsley, and Taylor, quite a hilarious character; loud and frequent laughter attesting the wit of each gentleman, and the highest possible desire to enjoy it among his companions. Invitations to Royal Lodge and to Fielding House were freely exchanged, and a stranger entering the apartment would certainly have deemed that Elmsley and Edgar were two genial, cordial friends.

Among the jovial characteristics of the chat, was a tendency to rally and banter each other, in a perfectly good-humoured and complimentary manner, of course, and after touching upon one or two matters of merely local interest, Mr. Elmsley alluded to a subject which was the frequent theme of discussion in most circles at Chalkingdon.

"Now, when are we to have the pleasure of

attending you to Chalkingdon Church, or Deaconstone Church, if you prefer it?"

"What do you mean?" asked Fielding.

"Now, never be so timid; we know who the most beautiful and richest heiress in these parts is," said Elmsley, "and we know whom she is about to marry, but we don't know when. Come, when is Miss Le Guernsey to be Mrs. Fielding?"

There was another explosion of laughter here, for this was clearly a witticism, and one of the keenest description; Fielding joined in the mirth and then said:

"Why, if you will persist in fixing such an honour upon me—"

"Oh, for shame! Mr. Fielding," interrupted Elmsley; "now, between friends, why all this mystery?—come, come!"

"Well, then," continued Fielding, "I will not deny that a little something of the kind may be in contemplation, but upon my word nothing definite yet; and at any rate you may rely upon this, that the first invites shall be those for Royal Lodge."

"Bravo! that's manly!" cried Mr. Elmsley; "and I confess myself proud of the preference. But, Mr. Fielding, you must not make yourself so much of a stranger; I know you are almost always running up to London; now I need not tell a lady's man like you, that the fair sex are jealous of any counter attraction, whether it be sporting, or pleasure, or any of the pursuits which may draw Mr. Fielding from the path of his duty."

"Mr. Fielding is doubtless making the best of the little liberty which remains to him," said Taylor; "you should not be too severe upon him for that; remember that when a man is condemned at Newgate, they let him enjoy himself pretty well as he likes; so with Mr. Fielding."

There was more laughter at this, so pleased seemed these three members of the company with each other.

"Well, well," said Fielding, "I suppose I must reform now. I have been rather a truant I own, but in future, as I have already made

up my mind, I shall be different. I won't go to London or anywhere else, so often as I have done."

"Don't say 'anywhere else,'" retorted Elmsley, "for if you remain in *this* neighbourhood, I think I know somewhere else where you will pretty frequently go."

This was a hit, a palpable hit, and hearty mirth from all three showed how well it had told.

"You are too severe, really," said Edgar, "I must amend my plea—is that a proper legal expression, Mr. Chapman?"

The lawyer thus suddenly appealed to, bobbed forward in his seat, and groaned out something, but whether in assent or dissent, it was hard to say; he then subsided again into the silence he had hitherto preserved.

"So I must amend my plea," continued Edgar, "by saying that I shall not roam from this neighbourhood so much as I have hitherto done."

"God bless me, how the time runs!" exclaimed

Elmsley; "I had no conception it was so late. You will come over to the Lodge with us to dinner. No refusal; I am sure Mrs. Elmsley will be excessively disappointed if I tell her you would not come."

"Such an argument is not to be resisted," said Fielding; "and I am at your disposal."

"Thank you: I have my chaise at the Crown, so we will walk there if you have no objection. Good afternoon, Mr. Chapman—Mr. Taylor will enter upon his duties to-morrow then, it is understood."

"Yes, sir, if you please," returned the lawyer.

"You have his room ready, you tell me, so there remains nothing more, I think, to be settled. Come along, Taylor—are you ready, Fielding?"

So the party got fairly under weigh, the new clerk shaking hands with his superior at parting, and telling him that he knew they should get on "rattling" together; telling him this too as "Chapman," appearing to think

"Mr. Chapman," as altogether an unnecessary piece of formality between friends.

They went, descending the stairs with more jokes, and more laughter, the new clerk's voice being very conspicuous, while the lawyer was left to his own meditations. These were very long, and marked by frequent and lengthy soliloquies; so long, indeed, did he sit pondering over the events of the afternoon, that darkness had come, and the stars were out, ere he descended to his long overdue tea.

"What can all this mean?" he muttered; "there is not, cannot be any liking between those two men; then why should they swear so sudden a friendship? With Elmsley's share in the business I am not much surprised, as I know he gets the cold shoulder from a good many of his old acquaintances now, and is naturally anxious to secure any fresh ones he can, especially where he had reason to suspect enmity. But Fielding?"

The solicitor paused in his soliloquy here, and for a long time remained gazing out upon

his darkening garden, and the lights which one by one began to twinkle in the neighbouring houses; at last he muttered again—and it showed how thoroughly occupied he was with the subject—taking up his reflections as though he had but just ceased speaking.

"Fielding, too, must have some motive. He must have one, and what can it be? It must be the same nearly as Elmsley's. He must have done, or must be about to do, something which makes him anxious to conciliate his neighbours. It can't be his marriage, for that will give him additional importance of itself, while the death of his remaining aunt makes him a rich man. It must be something about Miss Julia, whose disappearance has never been cleared up. My head upon it, I can see what it is."

And then the lawyer fell again into a fit of musing; and when he roused himself again with a start, it was to find, as has before been stated, that it was quite dark night. He rose and left his office, his last words being,—

"And as for that clerk, I am very certain I shan't like him. I'm not going to pay wages to a man who calls me 'Chapman'—but then who the deuce can he be, to take such freedoms with Mr. Elmsley?"

To his solitary tea he went, his housekeeper remarking of him in confidence to a neighbour, that "really he do get so unkid like, and strange, that I can't tell what have come to he."

But such a stylish clerk as soon appeared in Mr. Chapman's office, dazzled the eyes of the neighbours, and nothing strange or "unkid" was noticed in the lawyer.

CHAPTER XII.

QUARTER sessions had just been held in Chalkingdon district; they were not, however, held in that fair town, but at another of ancient fame, some ten or twelve miles distant; and at quarter sessions William Elmsley, Esq. was a great man. A man of mark; a busy, active magistrate, who was liked by his brother justices because he shrank from no disagreeable duty, would take any amount of responsibility upon himself, was forward in proposing or objecting to anything or anybody where his fellows held back, from old association, perhaps, or perhaps from delicacy.

Yet was he particularly careful to ascertain the feelings of his coadjutors on any of these subjects, and so always contrived never to forward or obstruct anything, excepting where he knew his conduct would be palatable to the bench. Thus he was important, influential, and his presence was much desired: not that he was liked personally in any very great degree by the magistrates, although they liked him well enough for qualities which he possessed; there was one quality, however, which he did not possess, and would never attain it in the slightest degree. He could not make the hearts of men warm towards him as could many a man who boasted not one tithe of his sagacity or deepness of policy. To every one on the bench, in turn, he had managed to render some small service, never soliciting any favour in repayment; thus every one felt under an obligation to him, and was very unlikely to oppose him in any little matter in which he seemed interested; and so, on this last occasion, this last holding of the Quarter Sessions, we mean, in a very thin bench of magis-

trates, he had carried a point which had long lain at his heart, although no man had ever heard him name the subject.

Those travellers who had occasion to alight at, or start from the Chalkingdon Road Station, such, at least, as had ever done so before, beheld a change about this time which amazed all, and vexed many. The reader will remember that in an earlier page brief allusion was made to a building speculation of Mr. Elmsley's, which had given rise to much conjecture among the neighbours; and the reader will also doubtless remember that in the same place it was stated, how considerable division of opinion existed in reference to this same undertaking. Many were disposed to consider it a mere freak, and, as there stated, called it "Elmsley's Folly," deeming the speculation a rash and injudicious one; while the more astute, although, perhaps, the least numerous party, averred that William Elmsley was by no means the sort of man to waste his money or make himself a laughing stock. Among this latter number, we stated,

Nathaniel Hackley was to be ranked, and as Nat always prided himself upon his shrewdness, there was a certain gratification, perhaps, to be derived by him from the fact that he was right.

About this time, we say, Mr. Elmsley's new house, and a raw-looking, hard, ugly, square, straight-waisted house it was, too, hastily run up, and barely finished, suddenly displayed all the usual tokens of an hostel; such as, for instance, the bright blue boards with gold letters outside, and the tempting and highly ornamental placards within, not to speak of the sign post which stood a few feet from the house, and which, of course, bore an inscription. Yes; "The Elmsley Arms" was boldly displayed on this shield; not the real, pictorial crest, however, "a hyæna cowled," but simply the words, "The Elmsley Arms." But this was only half the change; the other and sadder portion was to be seen across the road, for there, almost directly opposite, stood the Railway Hotel, now but the dusty ghost and sombre shadow of its former self.

For Nathaniel Hackley, whilome licensed to deal in foreign and British wines and spirits, had now lost that license, and Simon Grawler, of the "Elmsley Arms," had obtained that privilege.

"Time, indeed, that it was so, gentlemen; the laws are to be obeyed, or they are not; we are honoured by the confidence of our neighbours, and the favour of our Sovereign for some purpose, or we are not; we sit here as men determined to do our duty without fear, favour, or affection, or we do not. I ask you all, then, as magistrates, as the custodians of the law, if we are to be braved in our very teeth by a hardened offender, a man on whom reproof and warning are thrown away—nay, treated with the most digusting contempt. In short, I beg to move that Mr. Simon Grawler, who applies for the first time, I find, for a license for his new house at Chalkingdon Road Railway Station, do have such license granted him; and as Mr. Hackley's application for a renewal is before us, I beg to say I shall oppose such renewal to the

utmost of my ability. Of what avail are our attempts to put down those disgusting breaches of the peace, so prevalent in this vicinity, if we allow the preparations for them to be brought unchecked to maturity at our own doors? You are aware that considerable expense has been incurred on this very score, and that solicitor's charges to the amount of three hundred and seventeen pounds ten shillings and eleven pence were passed last year" (a groan from several of the magistrates here, with serious shaking of heads, implying that they were quite aware of it, and not by any means likely to forget the same), "and that considerable dissatisfaction has been expressed by the ratepayers in consequence" (more groaning and head shaking here). "Well then, gentlemen, the obvious course to be pursued is to make an example of some notorious offender, and a better opportunity than the present will never offer itself."

The foregoing is an epitome of Mr. William Elmsley's speech at the Quarter Sessions alluded to, and fatally successful was his opposition.

There were few Magistrates in the room at the time, and one or two of those were so feeble, so old, and so deaf, that for years they had done nothing but sign their names, or say "no" or "yes" as they noticed certain fugle-men sign or say; now, William Elmsley was such a fugle-man, and a very good one he made. One or two of the others thought it was a pity that poor Nat should lose his license, for what they deemed a venial crime, a crime hereafter to be explained, but did not care to oppose a brother justice; while the others present, caring very little about the matter, agreed with the speaker, on the principle that he must know what was best for his own neighbourhood, as they, of course, did for *their* neighbourhoods.

Only one person spoke besides Elmsley, and that was old Mr. Clump. old Ikey Clump as he was oft-times called, and he, having been a little annoyed by certain proceedings of Elmsley's, took upon himself to say,

"Well but, Mr. Elmsley, isn't this rather inconsistent; the house is yours, is it not?"

"It is, sir," was the reply.

"Very well, then," continued Mr. Clump, "if you are at the head of an association for closing all public houses and the like, with what show of reason can you endeavour to get a house of your own licensed?"

"Allow me to say that there is no relation between the two things," began Elmsley.

"Just what *I* say," persevered Clump.

"Allow me to say, sir," continued our friend, slightly elevating his voice, "that the great body of the people are not ready for such a change, and that, unhappily, a demand exists for such houses, and one is required at the station. This being the case, it is clearly to the advantage of the community, since such places must be, to have them conducted in a proper manner. There is nothing inconsistent in my conduct at all, sir, and when we obtain the legislative enactment for which we are striving, no one will close his house with more pleasure than I shall abolish mine."

Mr. Clump was silenced, if not convinced, and so Mr. Grawler, a serious looking man with

a cast in his eye and lank hair, got the license, and Mr. Hackley, to his horror and more bewildering amazement, lost it. But why, oh why! Nathaniel Hackley, did you go on so? Why, in breach of the peace of our sovereign lady the Queen, and of the statutes in that case made and provided, did you encourage the coming of Pets with high cheek bones, and of Chickens with indented beaks, to make your house their training quarters? And why did you so often, on Tuesday mornings especially, put to your gig the fast-trotting grey mare, which was the pride of your heart—after, without doubt, Mrs. Hackley and baby Hackley—and why drive Pet or Chicken, as aforesaid, to distant downs, there to do battle with pugnacious and combative Sloggers or Slashers? All these things were against the law, and Nat knew it, or ought to have known it; perhaps we may say he did know it, but deemed such laws

"——like forfeits in a barber's shop,
As much for mock as mark."

At any rate, he vaunted of his visitors, and paraded them before his customers, and was proud to find so many gentlemen and farmers dropping in to have a chat with these men of war; of whom nothing ill, or even unusual, was ever reported during their stay at Chalkingdon Road, in spite of their bony faces and hoarse voices, saving that, upon one occasion, Sam Billings, the Clerkenwell Hero, did, to within an inch of his life, maul and maltreat ugly Dick Giles, the giant and bully of the place, for knocking down a wretched strolling woman at Deaconstone Wake.

Had the unfortunate Nathaniel dreamed of the hostile eye which never winked or slumbered in its watch upon him and his house, it is probable that he would have been more circumspect, and, at all events, would not have blazoned his wrong doing so openly; certainly he would not have boasted of his winnings upon the last "mill," and would not have worn a staring neckerchief, recognisable by all as the colours of the latest Chicken, nor would he have caused his helpmate,

Mrs. Hackley that is to say, to wear an apron of similar pattern. But it was to be; the measure of his iniquity was filled up, and with the consciousness of being a ruined man, did Nathaniel Hackley lay his aching head upon his pillow that night.

He was a ruined man, for misfortunes rarely come singly; gregarious like vultures, they, like them also, scent from afar the stricken and the helpless, and on his head descend in a cruel, cowardly flock. Five hundred pounds had Nat saved during his rental of the Railway Arms, afterwards, (as already repeatedly explained,) known as the Railway Tavern and Family and Commercial Hotel, and this sum he had invested upon the advice of a shrewd and knowing friend, in shares in the Wheal Trepolipen Mining Company, the returns from which, it was confidently expected, would vary, (according to the best data, and an eminent mining engineer's report,) from 41¾ interest per cent., to 57 5-16ths per cent., per annum. Hackley was naturally a cautious fellow; although a sanguine, good-

tempered man enough in most things, he was, nevertheless, careful of his savings, and, had he been the only person to be thought of, would, like Lord Stowell, have preferred the "elegant simplicity of the three per cents." But, as before hinted, there was a baby Hackley, a girl baby Hackley, an Agnes Julia Hackley; and the father's anxiety to make a little heiress of her, launched him into an imperfectly understood speculation.

So the extensive alterations at the Hotel were not yet wholly paid for, as Nat preferred to discharge the debt by yearly instalments, rather than kill the goose which was to lay such golden eggs; for this reason, too, he was behind hand, although not very seriously, with his brewer; and the day on which he lost his licence, he received a formal letter from the solicitors to the Wheel Trepolipen Mining Company, informing him that steps were about to be taken to wind up the said W. T. M. Co.; the shares of which, as too well he knew, had been unmarketable for many a day: for the lodes were broken and false,

the soil was varying and difficult to work, while the water, from some unexpected source, had flooded the whole mine, and half the capital had gone in pumping it out. Yet had Nat Hackley preserved his cheerfulness and his confidence even in spite of all these things, for he entertained a strong conviction that when once they could get fairly to work, the mine would be a mine of wealth indeed. Of course all was dissipated now; the hard-hearted, cold letter from Hawkes and Traps, seemed to show but too plainly that all hope was abandoned, and that his hardly won, dearly prized five hundred pounds, was irretrievably lost, every farthing of it.

When the second blow told, when poor Nat's licence was cancelled, he was more stupified, giddy, and confused, than wild or frenzied. He thought as a dreaming man seems to think, of his wife and his baby, and of his creditors; but felt half a belief that he should awake from this dreadful nightmare; that he should shortly see his way out from this desperate position. He

had friends, plenty of them; no man's tongue wagged against the cheerful host of the Railway Arms, saving and excepting, of course, that of the owner of Royal Lodge. He would appeal to those friends, he would interest every body in his behalf, he would make known his sad loss, the whole country would be on his side, and then, for shame's sake, the magistrates would surely give him his license again;—his creditors, but, psha! there was no occasion to concern himself about them; they would not be hard upon a man who had paid his way honourably for so many years. So, having thus firmly built his house upon the most substantial of quicksands, Nat set about canvassing his friends.

Ah! where was his memory? He should have remembered how soon a harder case than his had died out of the general mind; how the orphan girls of Royal Lodge had seen, in a very few months, the friendship and sympathy professed for them, transferred to the powerful and fortunate; and remembering *that* he should have hoped no better for himself. At any rate, he

met no better fortune, for though (not to prolong this account), his expulsion from his old house was speedy, he stayed there long enough to see his rival and successor flourishing like a green bay tree, and to note, with an aching heart, how the old familiar gigs and light carts, driven by old familiar farmers, stout and jolly as ever, or by dapper tradesmen from Chalkingdon, did pull up at the Elmsley Arms; and how the light streamed at night from all its front windows: and how, when the trains came in, the rush of disembarking passengers filled the hostile bar; while all day long, and all the evening, the Railway Hotel was dull, silent, and void; save, perhaps, for a stray rustic, in homely smock frock, who took his pint of fourpenny with Measter Hackley, for old acquaintance sake.

As for his creditors, they, as may have been gathered from the preceding lines, were each chiefly anxious to be first in the field when they found Nat was in difficulties; and his brewer, his landlord, and his builder, ran a race for the earliest picking of the bone. Nat's appeal to the

neighbouring magistrates, too, procured him a great deal of commiseration, and nothing more; for he found none of them willing to thwart and vex Elmsley, by proposing the restoration of the Hotel license, although several hesitated not to assure him, that had they been present, they would have opposed its forfeiture.

A day, therefore, came, and swiftly did it come, when travellers in the vicinity of Chalkingdon might read from posters, damp with new paste, that on the 20th inst. Mr Knocker would sell, on the premises, all the excellent household furniture, business fittings, and stock in trade of the Railway Arms and Family and Commercial Hotel, at the Chalkingdon Road Station, Great Western Railway: Also a sound pony, aged seven years, well known as a safe and fast trotter, with a nearly new dog cart: Also, a double-barrelled gun by Westley Richards, in excellent order: Also a number of rare and valuable pigeons, collected at great trouble and expense by Mr. Nathaniel Hackley; Also, &c. &c.

The sale came off, the few out standing ac-

counts were got in, everybody was paid, or very nearly so, and Nat was ruined and homeless. No, not quite homeless, for John Bruffle, after an explosion of anger at the unhappy Nat for being such a gormuck as for to go and bury all his money in a underground mine, where nobody couldn't get it again (which seemed to be the worthy farmer's idea of the transaction), went straight to a friendly brewer, a distant relative indeed, and procured for the expelled publican the offer of a small roadside beerhouse, at the entrance to a village, lying some dozen miles from the Chalkingdon Road station, which happened to fall vacant at that time; with an offer of credit—John Bruffle being surety—for a month or two, until Nat could turn himself round. But of all difficult operations, transcending all the miracles which attitudinarian professors are wont to luxuriate in, surely beyond and above them all in difficulty, is the simple "turning one's self round." How many try all their lives to do it, and die grey headed, and careworn, and faint with the struggle, without having accomplished it!

To return to Nat, however, the offer was thankfully accepted, and in a day or two after the sale the farmer sent a cart to assist in his migration. After stowing therein such articles of furniture, they were not very many, as the generosity of his creditors had spared—said creditors having received eighteen and sixpence in the pound to begin with—Hackley assisted his weeping wife and little baby into the vehicle, and re-entered his desolate halls to take a last look around, and to assure himself that nothing was left therein. With one exception he found a clear sweep had been made, and that nothing was left to deaden the reverberation of his footsteps through the empty rooms and passages, or to intercept the light from the bare, naked windows, beyond the ugly, hateful, large, printed bills, which were stuck in every casement.

We have said there was one exception, and that was such a one as made Hackley heartily glad he had taken this parting glance—poor Robert Parsons's boxes. There they lay, as years before Nat had stowed them away in a sort

of loft which ran under the roof; and small, and indifferently filled as they were, it was no great task for him to carry all three down to the cart, after brushing the accumulated dust from them.

His wife, who had never seen or heard of these boxes, dried her tears for a time, to ask whose they were; and as the cart moved from the spot, and they took a farewell of their ruined home, Hackley began the sad episode of poor Bob Parsons's mysterious disappearance.

It was a poor home in which Nat was about to begin the world again; straw thatched partly, and partly tiled; two rooms above, and three below, was all the accommodation it afforded, public or private; a brown board swung from creaking irons just below the roof, on which was a lavender coloured disc, and on this again was painted a greyhound, at least, so it seemed to those who were strangers in that part, but the name, style and title of the house was the "Runing Horse," and this seeming greyhound disfigured, or did present, a high mettled racer.

The village adjoining to which it stood, was a

small, straggling hamlet, with a little, dingy Wesleyan Chapel, all askew, for its only place of worship, and a cemetery not much larger than an omnibus for its only place of sepulture; and as the houses were all small and mean, the shops few, and the inhabitants poor labouring people, and as, moreover, one beershop was there besides the "Running Horse," and as at the farther extremity of the village, there stood a great, dull, barn-looking place, once, no doubt a thriving inn, in the coaching times, but now a decaying public or pot house; why, all these things being taken together, it was clear that Nat need not expect to make his fortune just yet.

However, he was a cheerful man, and a man by no means accustomed to look on the shady side of things, and his wife's natural and irrepressible burst of grief on entering her new house, showed him how necessary it was to keep his own spirits up lest he should make her worse; so he soon found that they had removed to a far more cheerful spot than Chalkingdon Road; the view, as he said, the view from their bedroom

alone, being really worth something. 'Twas a beautiful view;—a long succession of ugly turnip and mangold wurzel fields, treeless hedges and roads, round naked hills in the distance, the railway running near, but in a deep trench, so that the rattle and scream could be heard, but nothing beyond a few puffs of steam seen,—'twas an inspiring view.

Then the garden was a large one, and as he hoped—hoped!—to have a great deal of time on his hands now, it was deuced odd if he didn't show these yokels what a Londoner could do in their own line, when once he set his wits fairly at it; besides, in that farther corner there was an old pigstye; a very little repairing and it will do out and out well, and Bruffle (who will often drop in and see us, and God bless him! but don't go on so, there's a dear, Eliza!) Bruffle had promised them a couple of young pigs, which could, of course, be very easily kept from what would otherwise be the refuse and waste of the house; so what with the garden and the pigs, it would not cost them much for living.

Then the new brewer sent in the stock, and for a day or two there was plenty of employment in arranging that; while Eliza—Mrs. Hackley, of course, being meant—having obtained a freckled, wild-looking girl from the village, in a long straight pinafore, hob-nailed boots, and cylindrical bonnet, to come and nurse Agnes Julia, was soon too busy in making the most of their scanty furniture, to think quite so much of their reverses.

Soon, too, appeared on the scene the pigs; which were of a rare and choice breed, only obtainable by Bruffle and a few select feeders, so the farmer vaunted, and so, beyond all doubt, he religiously believed. These throve so famously, (the pigs throve so famously, the reader will, of course, understand, and not Mr. Bruffle and the select feeders,) these throve so famously, we repeat, as to become the pride of Nat's life, and the apple of his eye, and even extorted grumbling praise from a stray farmer or two who dropped in—not to speak of the intense admiration felt for them by the freckled servant who came for

her board; *her* favourite promenade was in the vicinity of the stye, partly because Agnes Julia crowed and jumped when she saw the pigs, but chiefly because the freckled girl was one of a large family, had been always half starved, and had come to look upon pigs as walking treasuries of pork.

Nor were the pigs and the garden the only alleviations of Nat's troubles; there came a relief greater even than either or both of them, and the relief came in good time: with all his "pluck" and cheerfulness, Nat felt his misfortunes so severely, though infinitely more on behalf of others than upon his own account, and so keenly upraided himself for his rash meddling with speculations of which he was wholly ignorant, that he had grown seven years older in appearance within as many weeks of the sale, and many a hair of silver white drew its line through his dark, crisp curls. Not that Hackley reproached himself openly, no no; he knew his wife too well, and had too much real manliness for that; he knew that nothing would add such bitterness

to her troubles, as the fear that her husband was breaking down under them, or that he fretted because of his share in bringing them on.

But, as we said before, a relief greater even than pigs or garden was at hand, and this was the manner of it. Hard by stood the workhouse—the road would have been rather dull of a night, Nat said, only luckily there was so large a building just at the other side of the village—hard by stood the workhouse, and in this national or parochial edifice the services of a shrewd man were required from nine until one o'clock every day, to assist in cutting up the meat for dinner, issuing stores, and apportioning tasks, in fact, to act as assistant to the master; and unexpectedly, (for he had not even known of the vacancy,) Nat was appointed to this post, with a salary of twenty-four pounds per annum. He had but little to do at the Running Horse during the early part of the day, so he could well undertake the work; and it is very much to be doubted, if, during the time of his prosperity, any stroke of good fortune, however

great, could have affected him so keenly, or would have made his lips tremble when he told his wife; or would have made his eyes glisten with tears as he took the sleeping baby from her lap and kissed it.

His patron was Sir Roger Hawberry, who it was afterwards reported, "came out" in a most unusual manner at the board of guardians, who were assembled in solemn council when the appointment was made; whether stimulated to such vigour by the lady at home, or whether acting upon his own impulses, is not known, and it boots not to enquire. But the Baronet took the initiative by proposing that the salary annexed to the vacant office should be twenty-four pounds per annum, in lieu of eighteen pounds, the amount which the last deputy had received; for this sum, he said, they might obtain a better, more intelligent man, one who could be useful to them in a variety of ways. He was chairman, so his proposition was at once adopted; then, he said, he should name as a fit and proper person, Nathaniel Hackley, late of the Railway Arms,

Chalkingdon Road; a very worthy man, though unfortunate, and who was, he believed, residing in the neighbourhood. This proposal gave great pleasure to the magistrates who were on the board, for most of them knew Nat, were sorry for him, and were glad at having an opportunity to make up in some degree for his harsh treatment.

Mr. Elmsley, however, who was present,—for this was a workhouse accommodating a dozen large rambling parishes,—rose; he doubted whether this man was altogether the sort of person he should have selected for such an office; he had nothing in particular to say against Hackley, who was, he hoped, altering in his courses; another time, and he should be the first to assist him, but really, an official situation! Did they not think it was rather like flying in the faces of the whole bench of magistrates?

"Sir! Mr. Elmsley!" said Sir Roger, and the guardians there assembled turned to their chairman; the person addressed, with a defe-

rential but confident smirk, the remainder with some little anxiety on their faces, "Mr. Elmsley, you are almost the youngest man amongst us, by years or by appointment, yet you have kindly tried to relieve us on many occasions of all responsibility and power, but with me, for one, sir, such conduct will not suit. You have ruined this poor man; let that content you, as it is clearly what you have been striving for. You may be anxious to make your position as magistrate favour your private malice, but we are not all willing to become your tools. You need not frown, sir; your friendship or dislike are equally indifferent to me. This appointment is confirmed, and I trust, gentlemen, if any of you can do more to assist a persecuted and kind-hearted man, you will do it."

Thenceforth, from that very day, William Elmsley lost caste; it has been stated already that his popularity was somewhat on the wane, especially with the multitude; it needed, therefore, but for some one of position and influence to set the fashion, to cause the "cold shoulder"

to be generally shown him. This example was now given, and faster than he had risen did the magistrate descend, his, erewhile, most friendly coadjutors greeting him with a stiff and formal bow, where once would have been a hearty shaking of the hand. Although he felt these slights deeply, bitterly, beyond any one's knowledge or suspicion, and though he could have stabbed himself or them in his anger, yet no token did he show of his feelings. Few thought him likely to forgive, but fewer still deemed how savage a spirit he nursed. Imperturbable and civil, cool and unabashed, he attended his duties as regularly, though, perhaps, less zealously than before, and under his calm exterior fostered hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness, and trusted that his time would come.

CHAPTER XIII.

Now do we proceed to deal with persons intimately connected with our narrative, yet who have been out of sight for a long time, though hardly out of mind, for they have been frequently named; we mean James Smith and Agnes his wife.

They have an object in their walks now, whenever, as rarely hitherto has been the case, though often is it so now, they leave home together; and often do they walk towards the bay, and linger upon its shores, watching with unusual interest the few ships which lie there.

This interest would be unaccountable but for the fact that in one of these vessels—dingy and shabby enough to ordinary eyes, but an ark, a model of beauty, a fairy frigate to them—do they sail for England! Merry England! Dear old England! And this is how their return was, happily, brought about.

Smith, senior, was a hard-headed, unreasonable, obstinate old man, who had given to himself, while his docile, intelligent James, was with him, all credit and praise for the success and rapid extension of the great business in which he had long ceased to take a leading part; so, as he always underrated his eldest son's abilities, he had very little doubt of being able to do as well without, as with him. Accordingly, as is known to the reader, the second son was duly installed in place of James, who, in his part, was compelled to shift as best he could; but Smith, senior, soon found that though you may call spirits from the vasty deep, you may not be able to make much use of them when they come; and Smith, junior, the second, was, although a

good young fellow enough in his way, in no degree comparable to his elder brother.

The business very soon showed an alteration; like a strong horse with an unskilful rider, like a ship with a bad helmsman, it was soon evident that the thriving trade was no longer going straight ahead, but, on the contrary, gave every evidence of "losing way." Astounded at this most unexpected result, Smith, senior, strove by dint of increased energy, such as swearing at and "rowing" everybody, to put things to rights, but only succeeded in putting them a little more "to wrongs."

Next he and his son quarrelled, and the cause of the quarrel was one which (if precedent or analogy were to be in any way considered), hardly admitted of the old gentleman speedily coming to a reconciliation. It was bad enough to find their united efforts insufficient to perform that which James had easily managed alone; it was bad enough to find that his allowance must needs be double the amount which had contented his brother; but what were those things com-

pared to the finding out that he was married—privately and secretly married! and horror upon horrors! that he had married an actress! If James were not to be pardoned for marrying the girl he had wooed and won, with the knowledge and consent of his father, what should be done to his younger brother, or the smart, dark eyed, pretty girl he was seen driving in a dog cart to Hampton Races? Smith, senior, repeated at least fifty times that he wouldn't have thought it of him, he couldn't have thought it of him; so young, so quiet, so studious, where could he have been to have picked up such a person? Not, mind you, that I see much to find fault with in the young woman; quite otherwise, if she was anybody but who she is. You can't find fault with her, it's out of the question; but where could he have picked her up? Well, father and son quarrelled, and the latter left home, going, indeed, to Australia, and John Willet was never more completely "dumbfoundered" with astonishment than was Smith, senior, at the extraordinary propensity his sons seemed

to have for plunging to the uttermost parts of the earth. Things were not much improved by this, and in fine he saw, and every one told him that if he could not contrive to get James back, the business would be speedily in such a state as to need no one's care.

At first, after the manner of choleric old men who feel themselves in the wrong, Smith, senior, would not hear of such a step, but swore with special vehemence at the bare idea; nevertheless, when his passion passed, conviction came strongly upon him, and so one night, after a more savage explosion on the subject than usual, he wrote a long and most penitential letter to James, begging him to return upon any terms, if he did not wish to bring his father's grey hairs with sorrow to the grave.

As the reader has gathered from the opening of this chapter, James readily assented, and the assistant under him being promoted to the charge of the store, no obstacle existed to his return to England; and in due course of time, although the day had seemed as if it would never

come, he and his wife stood upon the quarter-deck of their ship, as a light breeze filled its sails, and watched the receding African shore.

They had grown to be generally known and generally liked, for in that little community every one, although retiring and quiet as were the Smiths, were sure to be well known to their neighbours,—and many friends had accompanied them to their ship. A few of these had not quitted them until the vessel was fairly under weigh, and a mile or two of water was rolling between them and the shore; these still waved their adieu from the boat; while on the beach, still within sight, lingered a few others; chiefly the younger colonists, that is, those newest from England; and many a man went about his business for the remainder of the day, saddened by the departure of the Smiths: not because they had gone, but because *they* were left behind, and England, with its smiling green fields, devoid of snake and beast of prey; and London, mighty London, with its gas and its

carriages, and its miles on miles of streets, and its theatres, and parks, and its roar of thronging, busy multitudes, was as far off as ever. This feeling had often been experienced by our pair, and well could they pity it in others; yet, with the very best of us, self love is and must be predominant, so it is questionable if the knowledge of the envy and longing felt by those left behind, did not add a zest and keenness to the delight they experienced as the ship drew slowly across the bay, and the houses and other objects on the shore they had quitted, grew indistinct.

No more, no never more, would the aching eye rest upon the deep sands or wild hills of Natal, no more would the strange, fantastic foliage of unknown trees and shrubs meet their view instead of the old familiar trees and hedges; no more, as the short twilight darkened into night, would the whistling breeze bear the distant sullen roar of the lion, the yell of the hyæna, or the growl of savage beasts unknown. These had been their vespers for many a day, and ever as she

laid her down to rest in her fragile house, would Agnes tremble as the ominous, wild sounds struck her ear; but all was now to be changed. Farewell the blazing sun, and the hot airs which overcome the brain and eyes as though they had been breathed from the mouth of an oven; farewell the lonely pathless wilds, difficult to tread from deep sands, and dangerous as holding the loathsome adder, whose bite is putrid death, and kindred reptiles hateful and abhorrent to man. Many a tale of terror or of daring reached the timid Agnes, of those who had encountered the boa, the lion, or the panther; and with her own eyes had she beheld these monsters, when once or twice she had been tempted, under protection of a numerous party, to make excursions to settlements inland: so, with a deep and grateful feeling of thankfulness and joy, she watched, as before said, the receding shores of Natal.

Yet thither she felt her thoughts would often turn, and time proved she was right; painful as had been the term of her exile, yearning as ever did her heart for England and the friends therein

left, it was impossible to quit the colony without a sadness nearly akin to regret. For she was a mother, though childless, and her two little babies, lying cold and alone in the wild burial ground in which their graves were dug, seemed deserted and neglected by her departure. This remembrance it was which brought the tears into her eyes, and caused her to leave the taffrail and seek the cabin; it was a great comfort to her to remember that their successor in the management of the business had promised to see that the little grave was always kept in order, so long as he remained in the colony; and Mrs. Dortenschaft, a friendly neighbour (half their neighbours were Dutch, or of Dutch extraction), had promised the same thing. This latter lady, it may be remarked, *en passant*, showed vividly to Agnes why *she* would not make a good colonist, and what kind of woman would:—she was hardy and stout; always cheerful, bustling, and contented; could not see (she spoke what she deemed admirable English, by the bye) what peoples should vant to be in von place more as anoder

for; dat vos de place for her where she could make de mosht money, hur! hur! hur! Mr. Dortenschatt found his store to answer ver well here, ver much tolerable indeed; while in Europe it was all vork, vork, and no pay, not hardly at all: why couldn't Mrs. Schmidt be comfortable here, de place vos not very lively, but den, vhat do people vant to see other peoples for! Nonsench, be a good lady and not tink of noting.

The voyage homeward was marked by nothing to distinguish it from a hundred other voyages, but the tedium of this one was considerably relieved by the never ending theme for discourse and speculation afforded by Julia's most successful career. Should they go and live with her? or should she come and live with them? And then, again, where did she live? of late, since, indeed, her quitting her situation, their letters had been directed to her at the Kensington Post Office, her motive for such a proceeding being, as she said, that in case of her removal at any time, her letters could lay in a safe place until she could send for them. And besides Julia,

there was Nat Hackley, and B uffle to talk about; not to mention the thousand and one plans concerning themselves which were proposed, discussed, adopted, and each in turn rejected for the next new one. It was remarkable however, how few were their allusions to Royal Lodge, and its present occupant, or indeed to Agnes's life there. All their talk was on the future. In spite, however, of all these topics, they were heartily sick of the vessel, its cock roaches, its bilge water, and its frequent smell of boiled salt pork; and right glad were they to land at Southampton, and to see a busy English town again, to hear none but English words, to see few but English faces, and eventually to whirl at thirty miles per hour through an English landscape.

And then came London again! London with its familiar canopy of smoke, its confused and endless mass of houses, St. Paul's towering in the midst, and all the features so dear and well remembered, by Smith, especially; as dear to his sneered-at Cockney feelings (as if the heart's affections could be acted on by certain objects

only), as dear as ever was mountain peak or pebbly strand to Switzer or fisherman. Hurra! for a cab! a cab once more, ha! ha! a man with a badge, and a cab with a number! ha! ha! ha! "Oxford Street, sir! yes, sir," and the rattling vehicle, its glass trembling and chattering with the incessant jolting, bore the newly arrived pair to Smith's home.

Here they were well received: Smith, senior, had made up his mind to meet his son purely upon a business footing, just the same as he would any one else connected with the trade, whom he had not seen for some years. But, as the hour drew near, and it was uncertain, as each day dawned, whether *that* would not be the one on which he would see James, and as a fortnight beyond the expected time passed, and those who knew the old man, and felt interested in his son, began to call with frequent inquiries, and to look grave, and with serious shakings of the head, urged him to hope for the best; *then* Smith, senior, began to feel that, of a verity, it was not in his power to decide how he would receive his son.

He was in his shop, in his little counting house, but not even feigning to work, for while his clerk, with busy fingers, wrote, added up, ruled, folded, and sealed, Smith, senior, pored intently over the shipping column of the "Times," for the twentieth time that day, in the desperate hope of lighting upon some unnoticed scrap of information respecting the over due ship; nothing, however, could he discover, yet still he pored and pored.

Amidst the roar of thronging vehicles, he did not hear the stopping at his door of a cab, nor did he look up when strangers entered the shop. But suddenly a general murmur ran through the long double line of assistants, exclamations of surprise were heard, and a voice said, "In the counting house, sir;" then a long unheard, but well remembered footstep came swiftly down the shop, and Smith, senior, looking up, saw his son, and felt more strongly than ever, and showed it, that it was not in his power to decide how he would receive him.

CHAPTER XIV.

It must assuredly be owned that of one merit, at least, this tale can boast in an eminent degree. No purposed tantalizing of the reader is indulged in, no abrupt and unexpected breakings off are made, leaving the anxieties respecting this or that one wrought up to the highest possible pitch: nothing of this kind is done for the mere pleasure of doing it; on the contrary, the narrative proceeds in the clearest, most unbroken manner, consistent with due attention to each of the parties concerned. Were it otherwise, did not our over-ruling conscience,

which is with us all powerful, did this not dictate an adherence to the above excellent plan, we should now skip pleasantly off for four or five chapters, and so keep the reader in tormenting suspense as to the proceedings of Smith and Agnes. This sort of thing hath immense charms, but in vain does the sweet seducer blandly smile upon us; resisting all such temptation, we now proceed to relate what befel our ex-colonists.

So delighted was Smith senior with their return, so anxious was he to pour out all his troubles, which, as he said, "had been accumulating in stock for years," and so earnestly did he beg for their company for the remainder of the day, that Smith postponed his intended visit to Julia until the morrow, the evident fatigue of Agnes, too, reconciling him to this, although both were most eager to see her.

Before night came all sorts of engagements had been entered into; including a cottage at Bayswater, where the early omnibuses passed en route for Oxford Street, and delightfully close to Kensington Gardens; an ample salary, or a

share in the business, as James pleased; everything his own way: and for Heaven's sake, his father said, make a little allowance if even a self-willed, obstinate, conceited old man should say a trifle more than he meant, if you know that, after all, his heart is in the right place.

Of course, one of his first outpourings was a lengthy account of the extraordinary behaviour of his second son; how he was such a mild, studious young man, so quiet and shy everybody thought him cut out for an old bachelor, in short; how he was always asking for an increase of salary, how Mr. Gummer, one of their wholesale people, had seen him at the races with a showy lady, in a dog-cart, and heard him take "four to one in fivers"—such was Mr. Gummer's startling expression—about "Ankle-jack" for the Queen's Plate. How that Smith's, senior, suspicion had been aroused, and how he found that at Joseph's lodgings there certainly was living a young person, whom he further found out had been acting during the past season at the Adelphi Theatre; and how, at last, the crash

came, and the young man, on being taxed with what was considered his terrible conduct, owned, as the old man naïvely said, to something a great deal more terrible, namely, that he was married to this young person, and moreover that a baby was soon expected. Despite their desire to sympathise with the poor old gentleman, who told this lamentable story in the most serious manner possible, James and Agnes were both compelled to break into hearty laughter at the tale, and the more serious Smith, senior, looked, and he did look very serious when they exploded, the heartier was their laughter.

At last all was amicably settled, everything was agreed to that any body proposed, and with happy hearts did the returned exiles lie down that night. Naturally enough, their first object on the following day, was to see Julia, and consequently, in the course of the morning, they found themselves in Kensington, where a few enquiries at the house to which their letters had been directed, obtained her address. The shopkeeper knew the lady from her dealing with

him, but didn't know her name was Miss Elmsley, till he had her letters; he always thought the lady he had seen was—but perhaps he was mistaken. Was Miss Elmsley a tall, rather dark, striking looking person? Ah, then it was her he knew, sure enough. Well then, that was her address, (mentioning it,) but he had not seen anything of her for a long while now.

It struck both Smith and Agnes that his manner was somewhat odd; they could not say how exactly; he was not uncivil, or reluctant to give the information, yet there was a something unpleasant in the interview. However, they agreed that after all, perhaps, it was only his way, and by the time this conclusion had been arrived at, they were at the address indicated.

It was a respectable, quiet looking house, but in the parlour window swung a card, suspended from a nail by a ribbon, and on this card was written the very familiar sentence "Apartments to be let, furnished." A knock brought a somewhat grimy servant to the door, who seemed, from one hand still holding a black lead brush,

to have been interrupted while cleaning the grates; of her they enquired if Miss Elmsley were at home. No, she warn't, Miss Elmsley didn't live there, hadn't never lived there as she knowed on, she hadn't been there very long herself though.

"Who did live there, then?" was the very natural question which followed.

Why her missis did; her missis was a widder lady and lived in the house by herself and her son: she was out now, but did they want to see the rooms? because she could show 'em if they did. No, they did not want to see the rooms, but was she certain there was no person living in the house besides those mentioned? Quite sure, and she ought to know, she should say, leastways she had had to scour every blessed room, from the hattics to the kitchen, as there was in the house, that very week. Testimony so thoroughly undeniable as this could not, of course, be disputed, so, after an enquiry if any person so named were known in the neighbourhood, to which the grimy servant returned a ne-

gative, Smith ascertained the time at which she expected her mistress to return, and left.

Agnes was very much alarmed at this disappearance; it was clear that no mistake existed upon the part of the keeper of the post-office, as they returned to him and told the result of their visit; he, however, convinced them that he had referred them to the right house, and was so minute in his description of the lady, as to leave no doubt of her identity with Julia. More than once, however, as in the first interview, he seemed about to say something further, but each time checked himself; they thanked him, and left his shop.

"Now, Agnes," said Smith, "I will put you into a cab, and send you to Oxford Street, while I wait here until I have seen the landlady of the house."

"But why not allow me to wait also?" asked Agnes; "I have a foreboding of evil; I don't know what I dread, but I have a presentiment of something terrible having occurred; suppose we find she is dead?"

"Tut! nonsense! anxious, self-tormenting Agnes!" exclaimed Smith, feigning a smile; "the servant would assuredly have heard of *that*, though she seemed too stupid to remember anything else. No, no, Agnes, rely upon it she is close at hand, and I have no doubt that she has left her address with the mistress of the house. Come, let us walk on, and get a cab."

"But why not let me stay with you, my dear James?" again asked his wife.

"Because, my dear, it may be much more than the hour spoken of before she returns," replied Smith, "and I really should scarce know what to do with you the while; because, too, my father will be growing nervous at our long absence, and dreading that we have been run over, or have lost our way; or, what will always seem to him as very likely, have suddenly rushed to the docks, and got on board the nearest ship which we could find bound for the Antipodes."

Agnes smiled, and, as was her habit, gave

way instantly, and was rattled off in a cab within the next five minutes.

When she was fairly gone, Smith's face assumed a graver aspect; the smile disappeared, and a serious thoughtful frown settled on his brow. For he had *his* forebodings, even as Agnes had had hers, albeit his pointed to a very different object of fear. It was this presentiment of some unpleasant disclosure impending which induced him to insist upon Agnes returning home at once, as he dreaded the effect an abrupt revelation of any evil or misfortune might have upon her; that some such disclosure would take place now, or shortly, he doubted not for a moment. There was a mystery in the matter, but James was a tolerably shrewd man, and he had already, although working in the dark, formed a guess not very wide of the truth.

It had always seemed to him as the strangest thing possible, first, that Julia should resign a respectable situation for the precarious and uncertain pursuit (as he had always considered it),

of flower painting; next, that she should succeed so completely in it, for her correspondence furnished trifling but certain evidences of her living in something more than a comfortable style; and, thirdly, that she should always have her letters directed to a post office. This last was the strangest and most suspicious looking circumstance of all; even, Smith had thought a hundred times ere this, and the idea of course came stronger now than ever; even if upon her first arrival in London there had been any necessity for this course, it could not have lasted long, especially as her letters never spoke of removal or change of any kind; besides, besides—but he would ponder no more, he would wait for the landlady; he did so, waiting for her, until, after a quiet chop at a neighbouring tavern, the time had come to wait upon her.

As just said, he called a second time at the address given as Julia's, and on the last occasion the servant, who was not quite so black now, informed him that her missis was in, and Mister Fred likewise. Smith was accordingly shown

into a comfortable parlour, where he found an elderly but cheerful looking lady, dressed in black silk, with a tall, slender young man by her side. He briefly apologized for troubling them, and announced his business, saying also how anxious he was to see Miss Elmsley. It did not escape him that during even this short speech the lady's face had changed its expression, and had become graver, while once or twice a glance of peculiar significance was exchanged between her and the young man.

"We have had no one in this house giving the name of Elmsley, sir," returned the lady. "I have lived here for fifteen years, and am quite sure that, during that time, no such lady has lodged here."

"Perhaps she gave another name," continued Smith, as the recollection of so probable a contingency flashed upon him, "the name of Pearson might have been used with equal propriety by the lady."

Another glance was exchanged between mother and son, and the former replied:—

"I thought, sir, you were inquiring for a *Miss* Elmsley?"

Smith made an affirmative sign and the lady resumed—

"We have had a Mr. and Mrs. Pearson, with their child, staying here for a considerable time; but of course as you wish to find a Miss Elmsley or Pearson—"

It need hardly be said that Smith's curiosity and anxiety were aroused by this information, and in a very few eager questions he learnt all that was in the good lady's power to commuicate. There had been, as she said, a Mr. and Mrs. Pearson staying with her; the former a tall, fine looking gentleman, with a moustache; the latter tall also, and dark; they had one child, a boy, whose name, she understood, was John. They had been with her a considerable time, but about two months ago had left quite unexpectedly, but not clandestinely, she hastened to explain, for not only was all her rent, then due, paid, but she received a sum equal to a month's warning. She had not the slightest idea as to where they came

from at first, where they had gone to now, or what the gentleman was, except that he represented himself, this was said with some emphasis, that he *represented* himself to be a commercial traveller. And this was all she knew.

Despite all Smith's questions and conjectures, the old lady could say no more, and, finally, with an apology for the trouble he had given, he took his departure with a heavy heart, and spent the whole of his homeward walk in fabricating a tale to suit Agnes. He had no doubt at all as to the lady calling herself Mrs. Pearson, being Julia Elmsley, and was equally assured that she had purposely left the neighbourhood before he was expected home, with the view of avoiding him, and, of course, his wife. Who the gentleman could be, confounded Smith, and all his guesses were mere wild haphazard speculations; his suspicions did not turn to Fielding, partly because he knew (as he considered), that a total separation had taken place between him and Julia, and partly because the landlady had spoken of a gentleman who wore a moustache. At the

period of his intimacy with Edgar, the latter did not rejoice in this formidable appendage, but had he known that he had since become a lieutenant in a yeomanry corps, he might have been less deceived by the lady's description.

He had a difficult task to satisfy Agnes, and, indeed, failed in the attempt; for the latter slept but little that night, and arose on the following morn with all her misgivings stronger upon her mind than ever.

When Smith had left the house in —— Street, the landlady exclaimed, speaking to her son:—

"Did you see how he changed colour, Fred? Depend upon it he's some relation of that Mrs. Pearson's; Mrs., indeed! well I can truly say I never liked her from the moment she first put her foot into my house."

"You held very different language once, mother," said Mr. Fred, "and unless my memory misleads me strangely, you used to take a pleasure in telling your friends what a very lady-

like, amiable, accomplished lodger you had found. Is it not so?"

"I certainly may just have said she was a quiet sort of person," returned the lady evidently nettled by her son's words; "but it's really no pleasure to speak before you, Fred, you seem to have a delight in contradicting one, and proving me tell falsehoods."

"Oh no, mother, very far from it," returned Fred, "I only suggest that your language respecting Mrs. Pearson is somewhat different to such as I have been accustomed to hear from you."

"Don't call her 'Mrs.,' for Heaven's sake," interposed the old lady.

"Very well," said Fred, with a smile, "I won't. I won't call her anything, for we will say no more about them. I think, instead of going into the country to-morrow morning, I shall start to-night: you have everything ready, I believe."

A conversation then ensued which certainly need not here be detailed, but from which it

appeared that Mr. Fred Harley, having obtained a fortnight's leave of absence, was about to spend his holiday at Chalkingdon Road Station, making, at least, the tavern there his head quarters; and that it had been his intention to go down on the ensuing morning, but, for some reason, he seemed suddenly to have altered his mind, and now determined to set off that night. This he did, and Fred—by the bye he was a great deal altered since the time when we used to know him as stationed at Chalkingdon Road, a lodger with Nat Hackley, and a profound admirer of his sporting genius; he was older, taller, and altogether so changed, that Smith had no recollection of him, although he knew the latter immediately. He did not make himself known, however, from an instinctive feeling that it would not do to take his mamma too freely into his confidence.

Fred, as we were about to say, a few lines back, was in deep thought, and that of no pleasant kind, during the whole of his journey, and it was with some effort that he roused him-

self even when the familiar lamps—oil, not gas, by the way—of the station came in view, and even in the darkness he recognised the flint walls, and penthouses of the platform, and heard once more the well-known cry of "Chalkingdon Ro-ad." "Chalkingdon Ro-ad." It is somewhat amusing to note how the varying accent, or brogue, if one may call it so, marks the progress of the traveller by any line of rail; and we have no doubt but that a person well used to any particular road, could tell where he was in the darkest night, by the sound of the porters' voices, even though he could not distinguish one word they said—at least so Fred had often fancied.

Giving up his ticket to a policeman, with a friendly nod to the man, for he was well known to him, Fred hastened through the station, intending to surprise Nat with his unexpected appearance at the Railway Arms; but the surprise was all upon the other side, for, to his complete amazement, darkness and obscurity reigned where erst the cheerful rays shone from

bar, tap, and parlour of the well known tavern, while a little lower down, and on the opposite side of the road, a couple of gigs were drawn up before a house which formerly was not, but which was now, clearly enough, the local hotel. Marvelling greatly at this, Fred repaired to the new establishment, and in a few seconds learnt such an account of the downfall and disappearance of Hackley as it suited the purpose of Mr. Simon Grawler to give.

Oh! what a different place in Fred Harley's eyes, was the Elmsley Arms to the Railway Tavern! Everything new and raw about the house, the furniture staring and slender, the rooms all symmetrical, square, and chilly; nothing of the irregular, cosey, warmly furnished, snug old air, about it at all.

It was with some difficulty that Fred learnt the new abode of Nat Hackley; indeed, he failed to do so from the not too loquacious or civil landlord, with whom his predecessor seemed no favourite. However, a stray sixpence to an ostler was a key which unlocked the mystery,

and Fred retired early to rest, with the determination of taking the first down train in the morning which called at Chalkingdon Road, as that would put him down within two miles or so of Nat's new dwelling. For he had not only recognised Smith, as before said, but had long known who Mrs. Pearson was, and had in his own mind formed certain conjectures, the truth of which he was determined to test, and it was with this end in view that he sought Chalkingdon Road.

END OF VOL. II.

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