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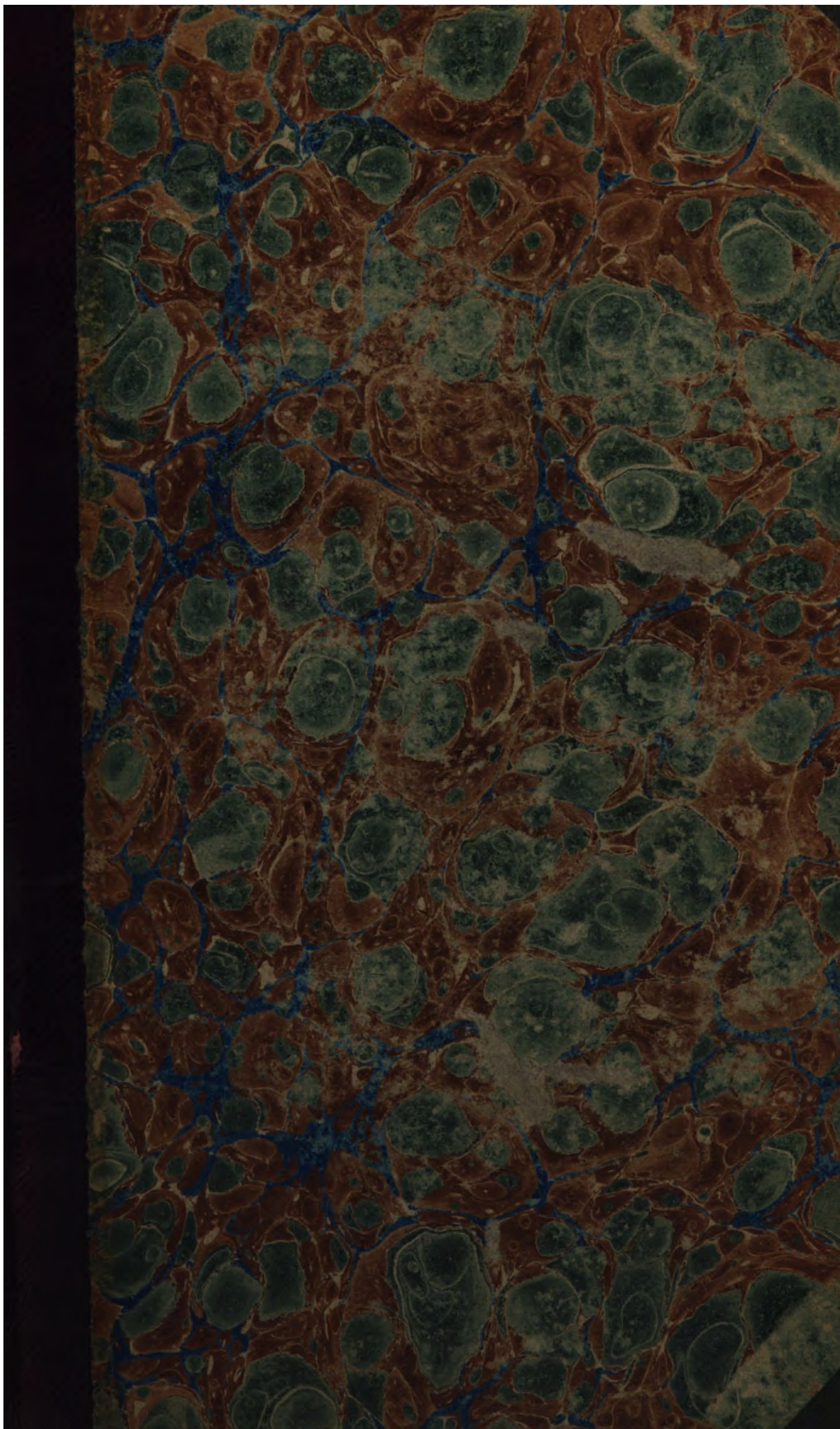
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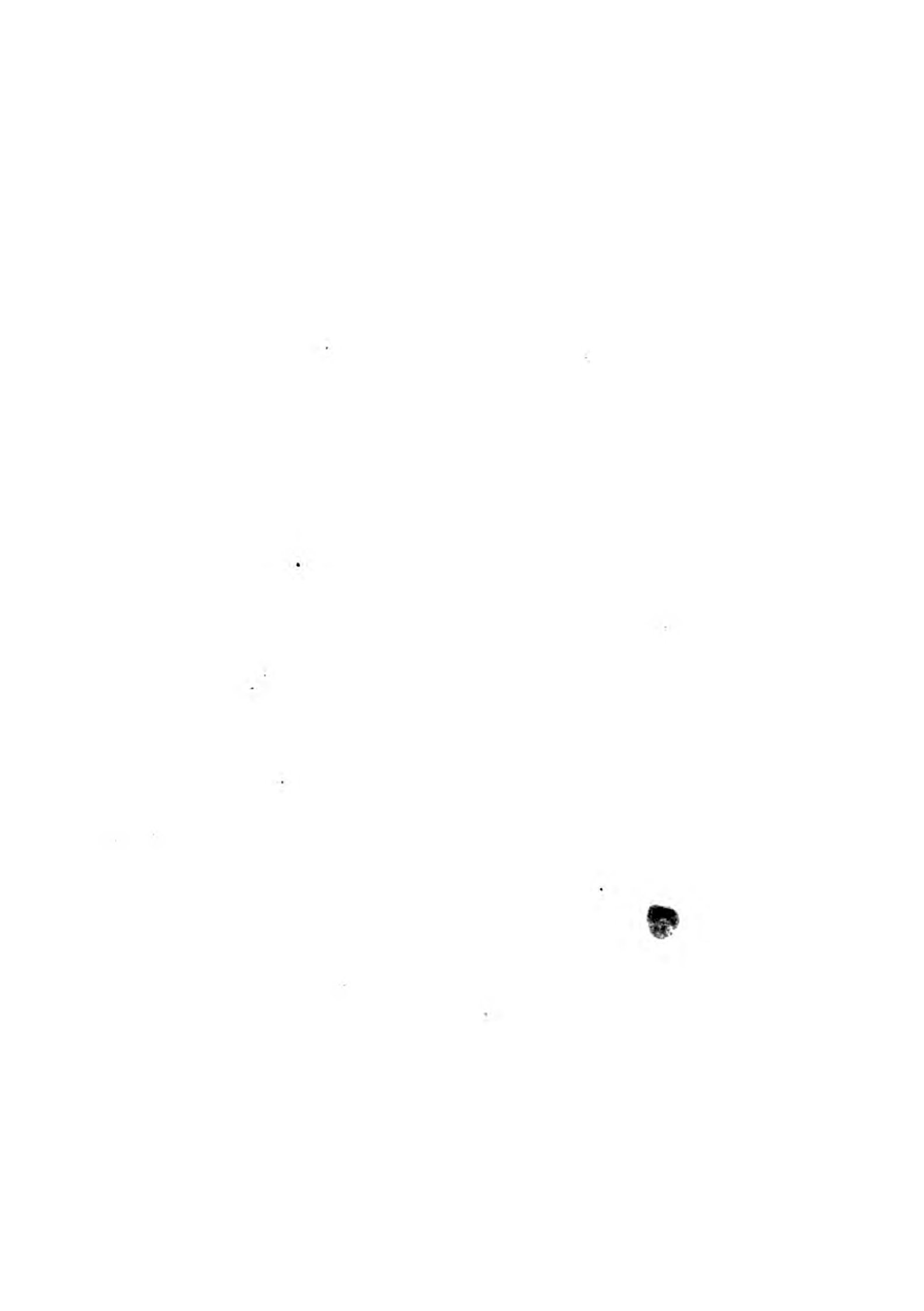


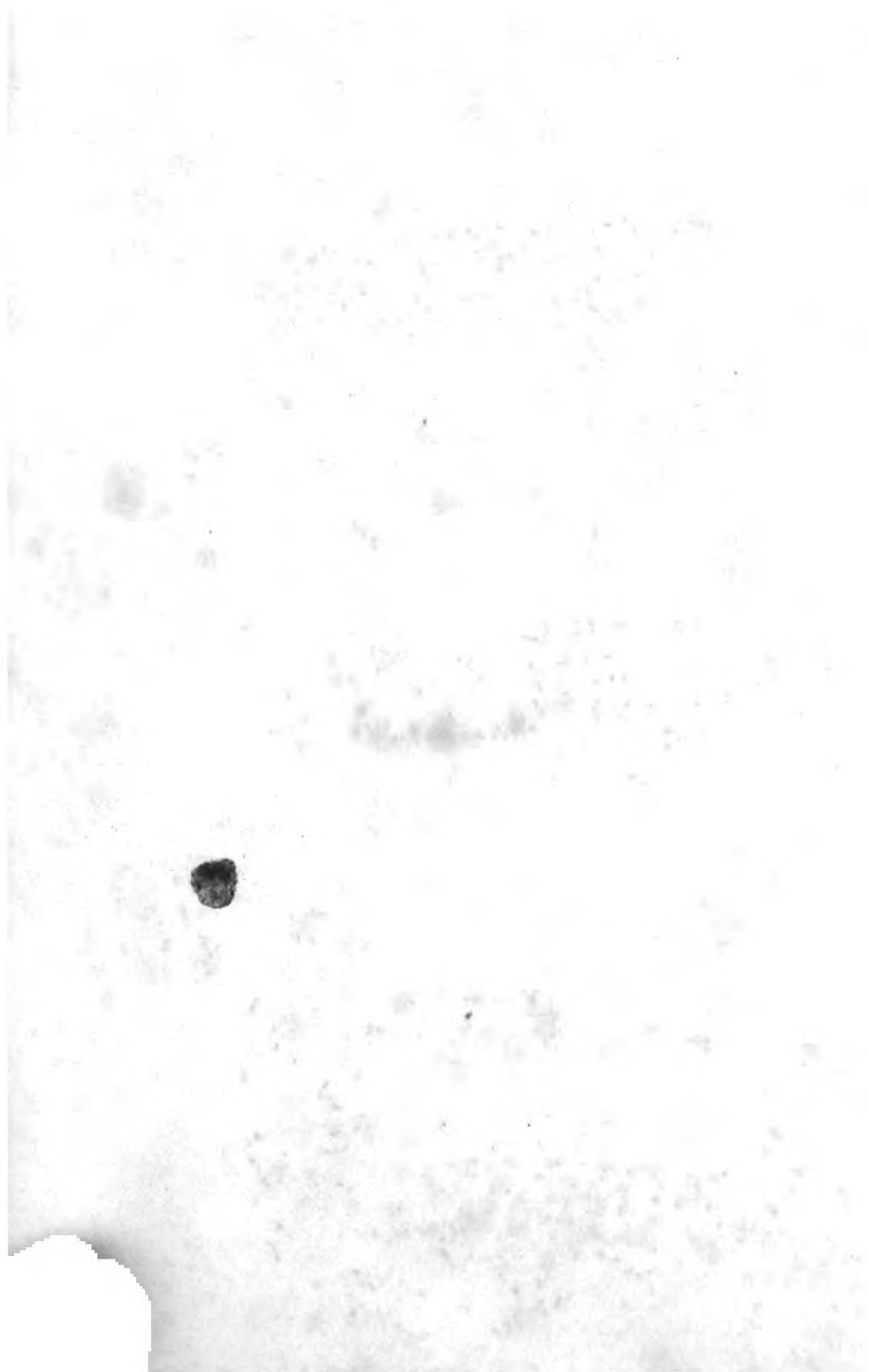
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THE OLD HALL;

OR,

OUR HEARTH AND HOMESTEAD.

BY

JOHN MILLS,

AUTHOR OF "THE OLD ENGLISH GENTLEMAN," "THE STAGE COACH,
OR THE ROAD OF LIFE," "THE ENGLISH FIRESIDE,"
"THE SPORTSMAN'S LIBRARY," &c. &c.

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THE OLD HALL;

OR,

OUR HEARTH AND HOMESTEAD.

CHAPTER I.

“ As we do turn our backs
From our companion thrown into his grave,
So his familiars to his buried fortunes
Slink all away.”

THE day following John Hardy's singular nocturnal adventure at the Lion had scarcely begun to peep, when an old and heavy post-chaise was seen rumbling up the long avenue, flanked by stalwart oaks, leading to the Range, with Blossom, the squabby cob, tied by the reins to

the rear. For the purpose of obtaining assistance on his way, Blossom threw the entire weight of his body on the bridle, and thus permitted himself to be dragged, with as little exertion as possible on his own part, towards his journey's end. Upon the antiquated carriage stopping at the porch, the face of John Hardy emerged from the dropped window ; and ere the deep-toned bell, which the post-boy—his venerable appearance betokening the sere and yellow leaf of life—tugged as a summons to their arrival, ceased to swell through every nook and corner of the house, that active little man had escaped from the confinement of the carriage, and was offering his assistance to the safe descent of his companion, the eccentric and volatile hero in the scenes of the preceding night.

“A neat box this,” said he, taking John's hand, and glancing at the gray and time-worn walls of the old mansion, “very.”

“Ah, sir,” replied John, rubbing his hands with glee, “it's none of the lath, white-wash,

and plaster kind, but as solid as good oak beams and bricks can make it. Egad ! the wind must be a burly one to cause a rafter even to creak." John Hardy's attention was now turned to the releasing of Blossom, which would have been easily effected, had that wilful animal rendered the slight assistance required, by leaning a little forward to relieve the strain on the bridle ; but this he resolutely refused to do.

"Come, Blossom, my pretty fellow," said his master, coaxingly ; "come, move a step nearer, so that I may untie the knot."

It is impossible to give the reason, any more than it is the accounting for many equally strange and obstinate determinations and practices on the part of the nobler animal man, for Blossom's perverseness ; but there he remained, deaf to all entreaty, stretching himself backwards, and throwing every ounce of the specific gravity of his body into the reins which bound him to the back part of the post chaise.

"Dear me !" exclaimed John Hardy, "what

a stubborn Blossom to be sure!" and then he patted the squabby cob, and by many fruitless allurements, endeavoured to prevail upon him to yield to his persuasions.

"Shall I tip him a touch o' the flax, Sir?" inquired the post-boy, preparing his heavy thong for the infliction of the punishment to Blossom's sensitive behind.

"Decidedly not, good man," said John, in as stern a tone as he could possibly deliver himself of; "I never allow my horse to be flogged by the hand of a stranger."

"Columbus, you may have heard," said Tobias Smith, addressing John Hardy, astonished the natives about making an egg stand. Now," continued he, going to the heads of the two bony and raw animals, fixed by some very brown and shabby harness to the pole of the post-chaise, "I will imitate that eminent discoverer's example by an equally simple illustration of what may be easily effected when properly managed;" and jerking the horses

forcibly by their bits, the carriage rolled backwards, and down went the squabby cob upon his haunches.

Blossom was not prepared for this kind of attack, and evinced his sensibility of complete defeat by submitting, in a dogged, surly mood, to be unfastened by the hands of his master, without further resistance.

There were now signs of a speedy answer to the summons. Bars were heard to clink and clank as they were drawn from their fastenings, and bolts creaked and squeaked in their sockets, and, at length, the massive door was wheeled slowly back upon its hinges, and revealed the rubicund features of the Squire in the fore-ground, while a cluster of faces were peeping and peering immediately over his shoulders.

“ I saw it was you, John,” said he, hurrying forwards, and seizing his old friend by both hands, and giving them a hearty wring ; “ I saw it was you, John,” repeated he,

“ from my bed-room window, and I could not resist being the first to welcome you back again.”

There was so much sincerity in the friendly greeting of the Squire, and the haste of his toilet was so palpable in the night-cap still surmounting his brows, that the feelings of John Hardy were quite overcome; and if it had not been for the presence of Tobias Smith, it is less than questionable that he would have thrown himself into his old friend's arms, and cried like a petted child spoiled in temper. As it was, he could not speak, but stood silently clinching the Squire's fingers, while the tears rose and swam in his o'ercharged eyes.

“ I beg your pardon, Harry,” he managed to utter at last, after innumerable struggles to effect the delivery of speech; “ but permit me to introduce a stranger—that is, a friend of mine, Mr. Tobias Smith.”

The Squire lifted his night-cap from his head, and made a profound reverence, which

was as politely acknowledged by John's *quondam* acquaintance.

"We arrive, Sir," said Tobias Smith, in a tone and manner that may fitly be described as insinuating, "at a truly unseasonable hour; but I must leave it to your friend to explain the circumstances, pleading my apology."

"Say not a word," returned the Squire, ushering the twain into the hall; "but hasten in from the cold, and a cup of mulled wine shall warm ye."

"We've been up all night, Harry," observed John, raising his hands as if he had committed an unpardonable sin.

"Then you require rest," responded the Squire; "and when you've refreshed yourselves with a toast and some spiced sack, you shall have a shake-down among the soft feathers of the goose."

The measure of duration is stealthy in its tread. The day dawns on the close of night's murky darkness, and the night draws her sha-

dowy curtains round ere the bat and the owl are roused from the honey-heavy dew of one brief slumber. Thus the grains of ages fall upon the shores of time!

Within a few brief hours of John Hardy's arrival at the Range, there was a small party sitting round a cheerful log-fire, with absorbed attention, listening to the following o'er-true tale—true yet strange, and stranger than fiction.

“To say that I was *brought* up,” commenced Tobias Smith, clearing his voice, “would be paying a compliment to my guardian. From a very early stage of helpless infancy, the Fates decreed that I should lose my natural protectors, and become a burden to an old bachelor uncle, who, from the moment that I drew a farthing from his purse, regarded me in the light of a positive and unpardonable nuisance. Buffeted, cuffed, kicked, and neglected, I soon began to learn that self-protection was about the most useful acquirement for the human

species; and I can say, without a shade of variation from the truth, that I was a boy of the world as soon as I entered my teens. Doubtless, with the amiable intention of getting rid of me, my uncle obtained a commission for me in a marching regiment before twenty summers were numbered as my age. The army, Mr. Lawrence," continued the narrator, "is a fine school for a young man. There is a polish on the surface of a soldier which cannot be imitated; and if, from association with the merciless usages of his profession, he becomes less sensitive to the claims of devoted sympathy and pity, still, like pebbles brightened with friction and continued jostling with each other, he, above all other men, quickly becomes sensible of the demand of society, enjoining 'the assumption of a virtue if ye have it not.'

"We are all imitators, both in our virtues and in our vices, and, for the support to the title of good actors, we should adhere closely

to the forms set for the novice within the radius of society's respective circles.

“ This being my creed, gained by observation, at the onset of my career, I took my model from a young lieutenant in our regiment, whose name, for the nonce, I will keep secret. He was but three or four years older than myself—an ardent, daring fellow, with a frame like Hercules, and as lion-like a heart as ever throbbed within a human breast. Quick in quarrel—and as ready to forgive and to forget acts springing from impulse—he was at once the favourite of the mess, and the frequent cause of the disturbance to its harmony. In a constant state of excitement, occasioned by his own natural disposition, and the love that he entertained for potations deep, games of chance, and exhilarating and dangerous sports of many kinds, my companion—for he quickly became a companion after our introduction—formed one of those beings who may occasionally be met with; attractive, and yet whose very allure-

ments should be a sufficient beacon to warn the associate from the hazard of acquaintance.

“ Soon after my joining the regiment, then stationed in a northern part of Ireland, my friend obtained leave of absence ; and when he returned, to the astonishment of all who knew him, he was accompanied by a wife. And now the greatest change that ever took place in the nature of man took possession of him. Instead of being the leader in the revel, the reckless gamester, and seeker, rather than the avoider, of brawls, he withdrew himself completely from society, and devoted his entire attentions to his affectionate and happy bride. It is unnecessary, for the object of this narrative, to enter into the details of particular description ; but I may state, that a more beautiful woman eyes never beheld. With a figure rounded in a faultless mould, she possessed features of transcendent loveliness. Her eyes, of the darkest purple, were fringed with long, silken, and web-like lashes ; and the brow was marked by so fine a

streak, that it looked as if a pencil had drawn the arched line. Dark nut-brown hair hung in floating curls upon her shoulders ; and, in short, she was all that the imagination could picture of a lovely girl just budding into womanhood.

“ To this idol, and from everything else, my friend turned his earthly devotion. I know little, perhaps nothing, of love in the sense of its purity ; but my belief is, that there was more of the scorching heat of passion in the feeling than the affection of a more sober judgment. However this might be, he loved her ‘ well if not wisely.’ Jealous to almost an insane degree, he seldom permitted her to be out of his sight, and, with the exception of myself, never allowed anybody to visit them at home. Thus by many he was regarded as a love-sick, uxorious simpleton, and by a few a man in the incipient stage of madness.

“ Within three months of their marriage, the revolutionary war broke out in America, and we were ordered, as part of the force, to

embark for the subjugation of the rebels. I shall not enter into the particulars of what took place in the far West, excepting so far as regards the linking of events connected with the private history of the individual I am now relating.

“ We had been in America a few months without obtaining any decided success, and were stationed in Staten Island, in the Bay of New York, when the petrifying report announced that my friend was a proclaimed deserter, and that his wife had accompanied him in his flight. For a British officer to dishonour himself is so unusual a circumstance, that we could not, at first, give credence to the evidence of his infamy ; but, upon inquiry, it became so conclusive, that no doubt could be entertained of the truth of the accusation. The motive for such an act appeared quite inexplicable ; but that he was gone was beyond a question.

“ In the autumn following this event, which took place in the spring, and when it still

formed an object of discussion and interest throughout the whole army, a bloody fight took place at Brooklyn, between the Royal troops and the rebels, in which the former proved victorious. A number of prisoners was taken, and, among them the deserter and degraded officer. It is needless to say that he was immediately brought to a court-martial; and, if ever a case was more indubitably clear against an accused man than another, it was this that I am now alluding to. When the case for the prosecution was closed, there was not the remotest hope for him, although, when he drew his noble figure to its height, and looked with a bold unflinching gaze round the Court, and began, in a calm, though husky voice, his defence, not a syllable faltered from his tongue, and his semblance was that of the wronged rather than the doer of wrong.

“ ‘ You are aware,’ said he, after the formal introduction, ‘ that there have been instances where, for the attainment of information of

importance, officers have consented, and generally with great reluctance, to become spies within the camp of the enemy. I will not dwell upon the danger and discreditable service, nor the countless objections raised by me, when urged to accept it by the General in command. All that a man could say, ungifted with eloquence or sophistry, I said in the endeavour to excuse myself from the obnoxious duty ; but I was sternly told that I had been selected to perform it, and that my promotion depended upon my ready compliance. In a sad and evil moment I consented, and then, having pledged my honour to fulfil them, *sealed instructions* were given me. God help me !' ejaculated the wretched man, clasping his hands in despair, while globes of cold sweat trickled from his brow, ' I cannot describe what I felt when I found that, to appear a deserter, in order to insure the greater chances of success, was among the odious conditions required of me. The rest is quickly told. I went over to

the enemy, and endeavoured to act a part but ill suited to me, and was at once suspected. An incessant watch was kept upon my movements, and I had no opportunity of communicating the required information relative to their forces, nor of getting away. In order to prove me, I was placed in one of the foremost ranks in the last engagement, with orders, that if I exhibited the slightest intention of deserting from my post, to shoot me instantly on the spot. Determined, however, to run the risk of my life rather than stand in the ranks of the enemy of my country, I was, at the very moment, prepared to make the effort to escape, when a charge was made by my own regiment, and I was taken prisoner. This,' concluded he, placing his hand energetically upon his breast, 'is the simple truth, simply told.'

“ ‘ Who was the General Officer giving you the instructions?’ was a question from the Court. ‘ General ——,’ replied the prisoner, ‘ who was shot on the day that I was taken.’

“ ‘ Where is the document to which you have referred ? ’ asked the Court.

“ ‘ Destroyed, ’ was the reply, ‘ in accordance with my orders. ’

“ ‘ Have you no evidence to offer ? ’

“ ‘ None. ’

“ So closed the trial, and, after a painful suspense of nearly six hours, the verdict was, ‘ *Guilty,* ’ and the sentence ‘ *Death.* ’

“ At such times, and in such matters, the period given is short between the sentence and the execution of it. The following morning, at sun-rise, the dread punishment was fixed to be carried into effect.

“ With regard to the verdict, there were various opinions concerning its justness, although the greater number by far considered the prisoner guilty of the imputed charge. I, however, was one of the few who did not; and was the first to visit him and declare my conviction of his entire innocence.

“ ‘ You are right, ’ returned he, pacing to

and fro the narrow room in which he was confined, guarded by two sentries. ‘ You are right; I *am* innocent, and as free from dishonour as —,’ and he pointed to the inanimate form of his wife stretched upon the floor, and beside which the chaplain was kneeling— ‘ as the child of whom she will be the mother in, perhaps, a few hours. Heaven have mercy upon her!’ exclaimed he, in a tone of agony that showed the torture he was suffering.

“ I scarcely knew what to say by way of consolation and assuaging the grief that now seemed ready to anticipate the awful doom; but I clutched his hand, and asked him if there was any request that he had to make, or anything that I could do for him or any one belonging to him?

“ ‘ Yes,’ replied he, regaining, by a superhuman effort, an approach to calmness. ‘ You can, and I am sure will, do much for me. I need not scarcely,’ continued he, in a hoarse whisper, ‘ tell you that there is no provision,

not a farthing, for poor Mary there. She is a beggar, homeless, and friendless, and——’

“ He could not proceed for some minutes.

“ ‘ I would have her return immediately to England,’ he at length resumed. ‘ See,’ and he pressed my hand in his iron gripe, and looked me steadily in the eyes, ‘ see that she does so at the earliest opportunity after,’ and he dropped his voice to scarcely an audible tone, ‘ my execution.’

“ I could give no answer.

“ ‘ I see,’ said he, ‘ that you will conform to this last and only desire that I have to make. If funds are wanting beyond the little money in my possession——’

“ ‘ Anything that may be required,’ interrupted I, ‘ will be forthcoming. I was commissioned to say so by a dozen, eager to render assistance.’

“ ‘ God bless them!’ ejaculated he fervently. ‘ I withdrew myself from their society of late, and know that I lost much of their former

esteem ; but this is no time to speak of that. What I have to add will not occupy many minutes. To-night I will prepare a letter, which will be directed to ——'

" Shall I mention the name ? " inquired the narrator, turning to John Hardy, who sat listening, with his face buried in his handkerchief.

John gave a nod signifying an affirmative ; but, for some unaccountable reason, he kept his countenance hidden.

" Which will be directed to *John Hardy*," said Tobias Smith, continuing his story.

The Squire started as if he had received the charge of a galvanic battery.

" Who ? " exclaimed he.

" Hush, Harry, hush ! " returned John, presenting his features bathed with tears. " Listen."

There was a pause for a short time, and then Tobias Smith resumed :—

" My unhappy friend," said he, " then en-

tered into a few particulars concerning his private affairs, which, hitherto, had been kept a profound secret from me and from all his brother officers, and I now learned, for the first time, the peculiar history connected with his wife. It appeared that he was under the deepest obligations to a kindhearted, noble gentleman, upon whom he had not the smallest claim of affinity; but, from a spirit of the purest friendship, and an acquaintanceship from boyhood, this patron chose to act the part of disinterested friendship. When launched upon the world, young and without a helm or compass, he was asked his wish? 'A commission,' he replied, 'and but the opportunity to earn distinction.' This was freely given him."

It was quite obvious that at this moment John Hardy had much difficulty in stifling some sounds which tried to escape from the handkerchief.

"Within a twelvemonth after, this excellent man was about to be married to a very beauti-

ful woman, much younger than himself. Unfortunately for all concerned, my friend was introduced to the bride elect; and, forgetful of the kindness that had been rendered him, and yielding to one of those fiery impulses which then ruled almost every action of his life, he abused the confidence reposed in his honour by seeking to wean the affections of the intended wife from her unsuspecting lover. Suffice it for me to add, that he was successful."

John Hardy's grief grew more intense as the narrative proceeded; and, at this juncture, he wept like a child.

"It further appeared," continued Tobias Smith, "that there had been no correspondence between the wronger and the wronged, except a letter from the former, asking forgiveness for the act of ingratitude, and one from the latter, briefly, but earnestly, extending it; and these had passed soon after the elopement, now about two years since.

"Without the smallest attempt to extenuate

or justify his conduct, my unhappy companion rendered this information; but dwelt with the greatest satisfaction upon the reflection that he had strictly fulfilled the promise to his wife, that of making her a fond and devoted husband. ‘And now,’ said he, ‘my last request is, that this letter may be delivered to Mr. Hardy upon the return of my wretched wife to England, if,’ he continued in a suppressed tone, ‘she lives to get there. I know that she will then find a protector, notwithstanding what has passed; for when *John Hardy forgives an injury, he forgets it.*’

“ I promised to see his behests obeyed as far as I possibly could; and, in the assurance that I would do so, he obtained an unprecedented calmness of mind, considering the trying and awful situation in which he was placed.

“ ‘ I have but one other earthly hope, now,’ said he, rising from his chair, ‘ and that is, that she,’ pointing to the still swooning form of his wife, ‘ may not become conscious until I am

wrapped in my last, long slumber. God bless ye !' he continued, wringing my hand. ' Pardon my taking leave of you thus abruptly; but I have much to prepare before sun-rise, and but a few short hours left to finish the labour in.'

" So we parted; and the next morning, at the prescribed hour, Lieutenant Gordon, of the ——Fifth regiment, was shot, a victim to his duty."

" Marvellous!" exclaimed the Squire, raising his hands and looking quite confounded with what he heard.

" Have you anything more to say, Sir?" inquired Master Tom, impatiently.

" But little," returned Tobias Smith, again taking up the thread of his narrative. " Soon after this melancholy affair, I was wounded severely in a skirmish, and rendered useless for service. I obtained leave to return home. Mrs. Gordon, who had remained in a state of stupor since the miserable fate of her husband,

can scarcely be said to have consented to accompany me to England ; but she did so, and on her passage gave birth to a son. From this moment she improved and regained a much better state of mind and body ; and, exercising all the tender duties of a young mother, by the time that we arrived at the end of our passage, she was in far more desirable health than myself. Indeed, such was the difference between us, that she could travel and I could not ; and, therefore, upon our arrival, I besought her to discover Mr. Hardy immediately, unaccompanied by myself, for the purpose of conforming to the urgent and last request of her husband. She left me, as I believed, to effect this ; but, shortly afterwards, I received a letter, stating that ‘ nothing earthly would induce her to meet Mr. Hardy—not even the solemn and imperative request of her sacrificed husband. That she had yielded to the most weighty part of the contents of the epistle, although it had cost her the torments of the condemned ; but

more she would not say, and bade adieu to me for ever.' This was the substance of the letter ; and, from that moment, until within a few days, I knew nothing, until I accidentally learned that ——"

" Poor Mary had intrusted me with her son," interrupted John Hardy, hurling the handkerchief from his face, and, throwing his arms round Master Tom's neck, he smothered him with caresses.

" Marvellous, extraordinary, most wonderful!" exclaimed the Squire, almost bewildered with astonishment.

" But not less true, Sir, for all that," remarked Tobias Smith.

" Does no one know," gasped Master Tom, almost struggling to make himself heard, " what became of my mother?"

" No one, as it appears, that we are at present acquainted with," replied Tobias Smith.

" Never mind! never mind!" ejaculated

John Hardy, convulsed with excitement, " We will find her out if alive, and if ——" perhaps he would have added " dead ;" but the word died upon his lips, and he could say nothing more.

CHAPTER II

“ Who are the violets now,
That strew the green lap of the new-come spring ?”

A BRIGHT ray of sunshine flashed against the glazed panes of Job's dormitory, and, by dint of a struggle, squeezed itself through a crevice in the chequered curtains, drawn across the latticed casement, and streaked directly on the tip, point, or terminus of Mrs. Sykes's nasal organ. From either refraction or reflection, or, perhaps, the effect of the combined causes, the worthy dame awoke, suddenly and abruptly. Grave—even to severity—Mrs. Sykes turned her eyes to that quarter of the bed occupied

by her partner legally and equitably in joint possession with herself. Wrapped and buried in the lulling clasp of soothing slumber, Job, forgetful of the aches and penalties to wakeful existence, emitted sonorous noises from his dropped jaw, commonly known under the title of "snores."

"I dare say," soliloquized Mrs. Sykes, in a *soprano* tone, "that he's got a precious headache this morning, and it serves him right. How men can make such nasty Christians of themselves — *I* can't think. It's abominable! They," continued she, gradually raising her voice, without being conscious of the increase of its powers, "unlike their wives, elderly and properly behaved females, who, when taking their pleasure, go out for a nice little chat about their neighbours over a cup or two of tea; but they — these men, forsooth! — must eat and drink, and smoke, sing roisterous songs, tell —" Mrs. Sykes shook her head with indignation — "rum-titiddity jests and rollicking stories, and make

themselves, what *they* call, jolly! It's sad, very sad," said the old lady, "very sad indeed to think of, more especially when the bout winds up by half the sottish company sleeping under the table, and the other half being sent to their homes in wheelbarrows."

"Wheelbarrows!"

Job stretched himself and yawned.

"Wheelbarrows!!"

"Again the conclusion of Mrs. Sykes's soliloquy seemed to ring in Job's ears, and roused him fairly from the vagaries, ideal fantasies, and imageries of his heated brain.

"Did you speak, my dear?" inquired Job, in a voice denoting hesitation and want of confidence in his address.

Mrs. Sykes made no reply.

"Well! that's queer enough," continued Job, pressing a hand upon his brow. "I thought that I heard somebody say something about wheelbarrows."

"Mayhap you were dreaming of coming

home last night," sarcastically returned his better half.

"I don't think I was," rejoined Job, taking off his nightcap, and rubbing his brow vigorously, in the endeavour to polish a few of the clouded and bleared ideas still in the fog and fume of potent draughts imbibed when the moon was up.

"You've got a nice, smart headache," remarked Mrs. Sykes with satisfaction, by way of opening her masked battery on her defenceless spouse, in the form of a matin curtain lecture. "I hope," resumed she, after a slight pause for due effect, "that you feel at this moment, Job, the force and truth of what I've so constantly said to you, for upwards of seven-and-twenty years, regarding smoking and drinking, and all that sort o' thing. You now know that——"

"Yes I do," interrupted Job drawing his fingers over his heavy eyelids and looking about as happy and enviable an animal as a cur tied to a gate pelted by schoolboys.

“ Yes, I do, Betsy,” repeated he, “ thank you. I feel it all, and know everything ; so don’t trouble yourself about repeating the matter.”

“ Oh,” returned Mrs. Sykes, “ it’s no *trouble* to me to point out the wickedness of sinful Christians. I deem it a duty, Mr. S., and so long as my powers last, with the blessing of God, I’ll continue to exercise ’em.”

When Mrs. Sykes used the abbreviation of her husband’s surname by applying only the governing letter, it was an unexceptionable symbol to Job that the homily would prove tedious in its length, and more than ordinarily severe. Like a landed fish, therefore, he threw himself on the flat of his back, and, with a groan expressive of his exquisite endurance, passively submitted to the ordeal prepared for his penance.

“ Isn’t it dreadful,” resumed Mrs. Sykes, “ that a man can’t turn from the pit when somebody—it may be his wife—stands like a direc-

tion-post, or a guardian angel, to turn from the gulf without a bottom, and where there's nothing but brimstone-flames and red-hot pokerers? I say, isn't it enough to make one's blood creep, and one's hair stand on end to think of it?"

Job was as mute as the direction-post to which Mrs. Sykes referred as a familiar similitude; but a smothered sigh oozed from his compressed lips.

"Now there *you* are," resumed Mrs. Sykes, "a husband and a father, and yet, with all the responsibility of a human being in such a position, you—Job Sykes, a husband *and* a father, and huntsman to Squire Lawrence of the Range—to come home in a *wheelbarrow!*"

The eloquent dame's nose curled with haughty indignation at the reflection, and her eyes sparkled with passion from between the double rows of crimped cambric frills which so lavishly adorned her nocturnal head-gear.

"But what could be expected under the

circumstances?" pleaded Job, in a faint, spiritless voice.

"What could be expected?" repeated Mrs. Sykes, slightly raising herself on her elbows. "Goodness gracious! not that you should be driven home in a wheelbarrow, I suppose!"

"No," rejoined the huntsman, feebly; "but to get a little drop too much on such an occasion wasn't out of all decent reckoning."

"I don't know what you call *decent*, Mr. S.," said the dame, "and I'm not particularly desirous of being informed; but how you can talk about the *occasion* justifying your getting in a dreadful state of intoxication, I can't imagine."

"Didn't ——"

"Of course he did," snappishly interrupted Mrs. Sykes; "of course he did."

"You won't let a fellow put in a single word," expostulated Job. "What I was going to say is ——"

"That Master Tom, being found out to be

the son of a real, true-born gentleman," continued Mrs. Sykes, taking, both literally and figuratively, the words out of the mouth of her husband, "the Squire gave the tenants, and everybody within the boundary of the parish, a Christmas revel in the month of March, and then and there let them one and all know who their future landlord would be. This was as it should be, and few, indeed, but felt in accordance with their words when draining their cups and horns to the young gentleman's health and long life. But when this was drunk, as it was in my presence over and over again—why couldn't you take pattern by me, and come to your home like a respectable man? Instead of which, you must sit up till you couldn't sit any longer, and then be trundled home like a pig in a wheelbarrow. Oh! Job, Job!" continued Mrs. Sykes, with a melodramatic shake of the head, and an appropriate clasp of the hands, "it's enough to make a bed-post savage."

“ There were others besides me,” rejoined Job.

“ A pretty excuse, indeed,” added the dame. “ And so, because, I suppose, there may be heathens who worship stocks and stones, you’re to do the same.”

Job muttered something about going to church as regularly as his neighbours.

“ Now, don’t,” resumed Mrs. Sykes, “ don’t exhibit all your ignorance at once, Job. If you wish to acknowledge yourself a fool, do it by degrees. A sudden plunge might take one’s breath away.”

At this juncture the huntsman turned his leaden and bloodshot eyes upwards, with a view of giving his customary wink at the ceiling; but finding the glance intercepted by the snowy and bleached dimity overhead, he was obliged to forego the exchange of civilities with his wonted confidant.

“ Time was,” continued Mrs. Sykes, “ that fathers set proper examples to their sons, but

now it seems the case is altered. James came home as steady and as sober as a clergyman of the church of England.”

Notwithstanding Job's superlatively seedy condition, so conducive to a depression of the animal spirits, a hearty laugh burst from his lips, and he sprung out of bed and threw open the casement, in a convulsion of merriment.

“And pray, may I inquire what you're laughing at?” said Mrs. Sykes, with becoming gravity. “But I suppose,” continued she, with the bearing of a martyr, “that it's me, your lawful wife.”

“No, no, no, Betsy,” replied the huntsman, checking his mirth, “it's not you, indeed. But when you said that James was as sober as a parson, I remembered assisting our worthy vicar up stairs, and when in bed he kept on hallooing out, ‘One more, let it be a bumper. Now, as you like him—Hurrah.’ Then Mr. Hardy, mounted on Master Tom—I never shall be able to learn to call him Gordon—mounted

on Master Tom's shoulders, quickly followed in just the same state, but nothing could dissuade him but that he was on Blossom, and he continued chirruping like a singing bird, and saying, 'Come up my pretty fellow—gently there—who—hoooo—oo,' while the Squire laughed till the tears streamed down his face, and he could scarcely stand for want of breath. There never were such doings at the Range."

Mrs. Sykes observed, by way of a parenthesis, that "there ought not to have been."

"Old Ned Dixon," continued Job, "insisted on proposing his own health, 'with all the honours and a little over,' when the Squire was gone; and because we wouldn't give him more than nine-times-nine, he said, between the loudest hiccups *I* ever heard, that he considered himself an injured man, and, sinking on the floor like a butt turned over, he fell at the same moment into a sleep so sound, that you might suppose he'd been composing himself for a full hour."

“ Mr. Dixon, as a parent and a landlord,” remarked Mrs. Sykes, closing her eyes, and having a visionary Edward Dixon of the Lion before her, in a helpless, maudlin state of intoxication, “ ought to have known better.”

“ We all ought to do that, Betsy,” replied Job. At least,” continued he, “ all those who have had the chance of learning. There’s a few who, when condemned for bad conduct, can say that they never knew what *better* was; and in these cases I’ve often thought the fault didn’t enriely lie at their doors, but perhaps in a great degree with those who sat in judgment upon them, and who considered themselves *their* betters.”

Finding that Job was getting prosy, Mrs. Sykes gave no reply, except in the doubtful and equivocal exclamations of “ Ha! Well-a-day! Humph!” and in silence permitted her spouse to commence his toilet.

“ The sun is somewhat gaudy,” said Job,

looking round, as he stretched his head out of the window, and inhaled the cool, refreshing breeze, as it fanned against his brow, laden with the fragrance of dew-lipped violets and primroses, and all the welcome blossoms of the spring. "But the wind," continued he, "isn't half a point from due south."

"The freshest of the morning to you, father," cried a voice. "How's your head?"

Upon peering through the tendrils of the ivy and woodbine twining themselves in luxuriant thickness over and about the entrance to the cottage, Job caught a glimpse of the form of his son just emerging from the doorway.

"Ah, James, my boy!" returned the huntsman, "is that you?"

"A tolerably good resemblance if not the genuine individual," replied James, laughing. "But how's your head?" repeated he.

"Not quite so clear as I could wish it," returned Job; "but after a good breakfast and a

cup of ale I shall be as fresh as a trout just hooked."

"You needn't come to the kennel first," rejoined the whipper-in. "I'll see that all's right there; and so let your thoughts be turned to making yourself fresh and comfortable."

"If Purity shows any footsoreness, draft her," said the huntsman, "for it won't do to take a lame hound out with us on the last day of the season."

"A lame 'un," responded James, "couldn't live with us to-day if I'm not out of my judgment."

"You think the scent'll be tip-top, eh?"

"A burning one," replied the whipper-in.

"I'm rather doubtful o' that," rejoined Job; "the sun's too bright, and the wet hangs on the grass like tears on a child's face."

"But the wind's soft," added the whipper-in, "and there'll be but little of the dew, ex-

cept in the valleys, by the time we throw off."

"Well, well!" said Job, "we shall see. Get thee gone, lad—get thee gone."

CHAPTER III.

“Thy hounds shall make thew elkin answer them,
And fetch shrill echoes from the hollow earth.”

Not one with pure English blood flowing through his veins—let him be the veriest cockney never without his land-mark of St. Paul’s being in view—but must have felt a glow of pleasure as he joined the meet at Lary’s-hollow. It was the last fixture for the season; for the Squire would not run the risk of killing a vixen later than March; and he was one of those possessing antiquated notions relating to the preservation of foxes, as well as to their fair destruction, and considered the interest of the occupier of the soil of too much import-

ance to countenance even the chance of injury to his crops and fences at a later period in the year. "A true sportsman," he would often say, "always studies to avoid injuring his best friend, and that is *the farmer*."

It was a gallant sight, let who will gainsay it. For leagues around sportsmen of every degree came to the meet, as thick as bees to their hive at sundown. Horses of faultless symmetry, and with blood as pure as that of the Ptolemies, to the bony and rough quadruped whose fodder and precarious living had been cropped from foalhood to ripened age on the bare common and banks flanking the lanes in the vicinity of his owner's dwelling, were there, ready to test their respective merits in the approaching struggle for priority. Scarlet, and green, brown, blue, and black—the costumes of the motley crowd varied as much as the colours of the kaliedescope. Arrayed in dashing red were the scions of aristocratic families, and in the more sombre hues stout British yeo-

men, with lusty strength in every thew and sinew, were mounted for the sport, of all others, that they love the best.

In carriages, gigs, carts, and even lumbering wagons, were congregated beautiful women, both young and old—for are not the old the gray ruins of beauty? and to see their bright glances and crimson-tinted cheeks, and to hear the din of many tongues in “musical discord,” expressing hope, fear, and conjecture: it made the heart glad and buoyant to witness that “right merrie companie.”

And now “here they come,” resounded from all quarters. The first signal of the approach of the hounds was given by an urchin perched on the topmost limb of a towering tree, and then, making his piping voice echo and ring far away, he cheered and halloed as heartily as if his interest was as deeply absorbed as any in the approaching event.

From a defile leading on to the large open space where the horsemen and vehicles had

assembled, the Squire, accompanied by John Hardy and Master Tom, became visible. Henceforth, however, we must drop this juvenile appellation to our hero, as the beard, soft and thin as might be a spider's web, already begins to sprout on his upper lip.

Mounted on his favourite hunter, a powerful jet-black mare, the Squire rode at the head of his hounds, looking every inch a sportsman, albeit some remarked, that his seat was not so firm as formerly; and instead of the erect and manly carriage which attended his gait in days of yore, he now stooped forwards, and appeared bent with the iron hand of Time. About fifty yards behind came Job Sykes, with two-and-twenty couples of the choicest hounds; and at a little distance in the rear, followed his son James, in the capacity of whipper-in.

Hats were raised and beavers touched, as the Squire mingled with the group; and, after many friendly greetings were exchanged,

Job received instructions to throw the hounds into the adjoining cover.

It is needless to say that John Hardy was displaying his equestrianship on the back of Blossom, the squabby cob, kept in propriety and a due state of order by his attendant, Mike Crouch, the earthstopper, whose authority was combined in three feet of stiff ground-ash which he carried in his hand. Our hero, who was now commonly called "the young Squire," formed the focus, however, for the general admiration; and as he rode through the throng with his appointments as complete and perfect as good taste could render them, from the glittering bit in his horse's foaming jaws to the polished spurs buckled to his heels, many a maiden's pulse fluttered quicker than was its wont, and the blood mantled in the cheek like the pink of the apple-blossom. And was there one among that light-hearted crowd whose eye sparkled brighter than the rest when his caught hers and "darted light into each other?" Well! perhaps there

was, and, if so, time will recall all hidden secrets.

“Hoik in, there!” cried Job, crashing through a bullfinch as if it had been made of tissue-paper. “Hoik! wind him!” and every hound rushed to the summons like needles to the magnet, and flew into the furze-brake with a dash that showed their true blood and spirit, and for which they were so justly celebrated.

As may be anticipated, the last fixture for the season was “a sure find,” although, from the great and merited popularity of the master, few, very few blanks, had to be recorded throughout a series of seasons.

Scarcely had the hounds been in cover a short five minutes, when “Hark! a whimper. Yes, they’ve found,” was heard to burst from more than twenty lips.

“Gently, gentlemen,” said the Squire correctingly; “let them get well at him.”

There was now a silence, which seemed to give a denial to the raised hopes of many.

“ I fear it was only a puppy’s babble,” said one in an under-tone.

“ Perhaps so,” replied a second ; “ and still Jobs cheers to it.”

“ Have at him !” hallooed the huntsman. “ Drag on him ! Wind him ! Hoik, hoik !”

Now the deep-toned note of a hound announced that the intelligence was genuine, and that skulking reynard was afoot.

“ Hark to Struggler !” cried Job. “ Hark, hark to Struggler !” and every hound flew to the challenge with the speed of light ; and then the music burst from their throats like a merry peal of bells, rousing the dozy owls in their rotten, crumbling, time-worn homes, and driving the denizens of the wild from dingle and dell, like scared and frightened sprites, through which moon-beams stream unimpeded, at the crowing of the cock.

“ Have at him !” cried Job. “ Hoik, hoik, there ! Have at him, ’Chantress, Dauntless, Prosper. Hoik, hoik, my beauties !”

Through the stiff and thorny furze the fox was pressed, at a speed which told that the shelter was much too hot to hold him any longer, unless his intention was to be chopped like a cur upon his own hearth; and it was clear to everybody, eager to view him away, that he must either run or die, and that, too, without delay.

Like a flash of light, bold Charley broke, and a noble fellow he looked, with a tag at the tip of his brush as white as snow.

“Tally-ho!” cried a voice, and in a moment back into the cover the fox turned.

“Confusion!” exclaimed the Squire, while the blood mounted to his cheeks with anger, and his eyes lightened with an unusual fire; “confusion!” repeated he; “they’ve headed him.”

“Headed him?” echoed John Hardy, looking through, as would seem to the observer, an unnecessary large pair of silver spectacles, and endeavouring to discover the meaning of

his friend's remark by making, in nautical parlance, a sweep of the horizon.

"I must beg of you," said the Squire, riding up to the side of the offender, "to be quiet. It is far from my wish to say any thing that might offend or wound the feelings of the humblest individual who joins my hounds; but I will not permit anything like unsportsmanlike conduct. A view-halloo, Sir," continued the Squire, in an admonitory tone and manner, "may be all very proper at certain times; but for a fox in cover, it is not only unnecessary for assisting the hounds, but, nine times out of ten, proves highly detrimental, as in the present instance. Learn to be quiet, Sir, learn to be quiet, and you'll set the best example that heads the rules for gentlemen to observe in the field."

"He'll be chopped now, I've no doubt," conjectured one.

"Nothing more likely," replied a backer of the opinion.

"If *I* was the master," added a third, "I'd

have put my double thong round his shoulders.”

In a few minutes, however, the fox broke unscathed from another quarter of the brake; and the clear, musical “gone-away,” from the whipper-in, showed that matters were as they could be wished.

“Gone-away! gone-away!” now rang far and wide.

“For’ard,” shouted James. “For’ard, for’ard.”

“Hold hard, gentlemen,” cried the Squire; “let them settle to him, and then ride over ’em if ye can.”

A bunch of hounds swept out of the gorse before the fox had gained a hundred yards in advance, and away they went, as if resolved to race him down at once without let, check, or stop.

“They’ll find them fast enough to-day, Tom,” remarked the Squire exultingly.

“That they will,” replied our hero, laugh-



ing, as he gathered up his reins, and sat his fiery and impatient horse with the ease and confidence of one both bold and capable.

Cap in hand, Job spurred his way out of the brake, and, making the welkin ring with his halloo to bring the tail hounds with him, he lifted them hard to the front, and in a pinch of seconds the whole pack, with the exception of three couples of puppies which James was bringing up at his best pace—for he never was known to leave a single hound in cover—was streaking along like a shadow from one body, and every tongue throwing melody to the breeze.

“Get well away with them, Tom,” said the Squire, waving his hand for his *protégé* to leave his side, “and give me a good account of it; for I feel that I cannot live with them to-day, although I must try to nick in here and there.”

“Let me stay with you, Sir,” replied our hero. “I’ll be your pad-groom, and it shall

go hard but that I'll lift ye there or thereabouts if the run lasts till midnight."

"No, no," rejoined the Squire smiling. "Go, my boy, ride and stick close to their sterns as you can, as you should, and as I love to see ye."

Without further remark, our hero slackened his reins, and, leaning slightly forwards in his saddle, away his horse went like a bird on wing, and skimmed the ground so lightly, that he appeared not to touch it in his dainty tread.

"Mike!" said John Hardy.

"Sir," replied his attendant, lifting his trusty staff in preparation for applying it, anticipating some directions with regard to Blossom.

"I shall not follow the hounds to-day, except for a short time, at a very respectful distance," rejoined his patron; "and therefore you can leave me if you have any occupation requiring your attendance elsewhere."

“ Thank’ee kindly, Sir,” returned the earth-stopper; “ but I’ve no particular business of any kind before nightfall.”

“ And what have you to do at that unseemly hour, Mike?” inquired John Hardy, bumping along over a deep piece of fallow, much to the disinclination of the squabby cob.

“ I must come and open all the earths again, Sir,” responded Mike; “ for there’s a litter or two of cubs hard by, and when *I* mortar up the burries, nothing but a spade or pickaxe can open ’em again.”

“ Indeed!” exclaimed John Hardy. “ Ha. Indeed!”

“ Hadn’t we better try and get on a little faster?” said the earth-stopper, in a tone that may be described as “ insinuating.”

“ We seem to be last, certainly,” replied John, gazing through his huge glasses in vain, for a glimpse of the chase.

“ The varmint’s pointing for the Limestone-quarries; and if we turn into this lane and

rattle down it for a matter of three mile," returned Mike, "we shall be leaders instead of all-over-behinds."

"Is that your *firm* conviction?" asked John, emphatically, and coming to a dead stop, while he gazed earnestly at the earth-stopper over the circular glasses perched across his prominent feature.

"It is, Sir," briefly replied Mike, and looking as stern as a tickling inclination to burst into a roar of laughter would permit.

"Then stir up Blossom," rejoined his patron. "I should like to astonish the public, at no great cost of personal risk, trouble, or inconvenience, by showing in front when expected to be far, far behind. Such coincidences point a moral to the proud and ambitious," continued John, with the air of a stoic.

Much against his will and inclination, the squabby cob was urged along the lane after the fashion that a reluctant donkey may be seen to bear a burden in fear of a cudgelling from

behind, which, although a familiar stimulant to his energies, had by no means become, on that account, a jot less objectionable. Obstinate to a more than ordinary degree, Blossom rendered his rider on this occasion as superlatively uncomfortable as his comprehensive powers of making himself a nuisance permitted. By way of a little variety in his general jolting, undecided pace, he ran so close to the thick hedgerow, that John's hands and face were frequently sensible of the effects of thorns and brambles; and whenever he came to a miry pool, which frequently intercepted the path in that lonely road, he jumped all four feet into it at one and the same time, causing the mud and water to fly high above his master's head, so as to fall in a cool, refreshing shower upon and around him.

“Really!” gasped John Hardy, after one of these strong inventions of the enemy, which had succeeded in bespattering him from head to heel; “really, this is very disagreeable,

Blossom, and I'm quite sure you might avoid both scraping me against the briars and peppering me so excessively with mud."

"To be sure he could, Sir," replied Mike, "but it's his *wice* to go con-trary. Nothing but wice," continued the earth-stopper, pitching his cap on the tip of his nose, and stretching his hands into the bottomless pockets of his breeches, as he followed in the wake.

"I begin to think so myself," rejoined the owner of the squabby cob. "I certainly begin to entertain such misgivings."

"Misgivings!" repeated Mike, with a sneer of contempt, without being aware of the exact meaning of the term. "If he was mine, I know what *I* would *give* him," continued he, with a menace of an unequivocal nature.

"A gentle correction would not be ill-timed," returned John, at that moment being subjected to a shower bath. "Give him a slight tap or two."

What Mike's conception of slightness might

be, does not appear ; but upon administering a quick succession of blows upon Blossom's carcase, it was quite conclusive that there was a great variance between John Hardy's and the earth-stopper's.

“ Stay, stay, that will do,” shouted John. “ That is quite, even more than, sufficient. Always,” continued John Hardy, in a voice as solemnly affective as the kicking and capering of the punished Blossom would permit, “ always,” repeated he, “ season justice with considerate mercy.”

Mike grinned, and replied, “ that nothing was more proper, and hoped, if it should ever be his misfortune to be *lagged* before a justice, that somebody might be present to put his Worship in mind of them very words.”

The means used to convince Blossom of the error of his proceedings, seemed to be successful beyond any reasonable expectation ; for he now sped along in the middle and best parts of the road, and went so far as

even to—using a familiar phrase—*pick* his way. This proved extremely satisfactory to his rider, who encouraged this reform by many terms and addresses of endearment; such as, “Well done, my pretty fellow. Excellent! Famous! Ca-a-pital!”

What could have been the original design of the constructor of the lane, down which John Hardy, Blossom, and Mike were now making quick progress, it is impossible to say; for it appeared to begin and end at no particular place or defined locality, in the most round-about serpentine fashion that can well be conceived. At every fifteen or twenty yards there were sharp corners to be turned both right and left, and the banks which reared themselves on each side, to a great height, excluded all view of the regions in the immediate vicinity.

Upon turning round one of these abrupt points, John Hardy became conscious that he had upset somebody, or something, or been the cause of some accident, the possible extent

of which, flashing across his brain, amidst the clashing of matter, almost stunned him, as if a two-ounce bullet had struck the centre of his *cerebrum*.

“ Good heavens !” ejaculated he, tugging at the bridle of the squabby cob, who of course pulled with more determined resolution to go on. “ Good heavens !” repeated he, “ who—where—what have I done ?” But in consequence of Blossom’s determination to proceed, in spite of all exertion to stop him, John Hardy could obtain no ready intelligence to his anxious inquiry. At length, after a terrific effort, he managed to effect a halt, and turned to retrace his steps, in order to discover the nature of the damage or injury.

His attendant was not in sight ; but upon proceeding a few paces, he discovered Mike in the act of stooping over a heap of material, the exact nature of which was not discernible in the distance. Upon a nearer approach, however, a human figure was perceptible, extended

on the ground, an over-turned grinding machine, and a dog squatting on his haunches, licking the face of the prostrate man.

“Come, Peter,” said the earth-stopper, “wake up, my old pal. There isn’t much of the crockery broken.”

“Who—what is it?” stammered John, arriving at the spot in an inflamed state of excitement.

“Merely the upset of a little establishment,” replied Mike. “This, Sir,” continued he, “is Peter Parkins, the razor-grinder; that thing like a barrow, a little the worse for your knocking it over and breaking the stone in halves, is his means of picking up a living; and that animal there,” continued he, pointing to the erudite Toby, trying to lick a little sense into his master, “is his companion, and about the deepest card in the pack.”

“Is the poor man injured?” asked John, with trepidation, as he dismounted to make a closer examination.

“ He’s what we call in these parts *dozzled*,” replied Mike.

“ And what’s that ?” said his patron, bending over the fallen, and apparently stunned, Peter Parkins.

“ Why !” rejoined the earth-stopper, a little at a loss to give the required explanation, “ his head feels as thick as pea-soup when the spoon stands in it, and he doesn’t know at this moment whether he’s on the earth, above it, in, or under it.”

“ Poor fellow !” exclaimed John Hardy, clasping his hands, “ his feelings must be terrible, indeed. What can be done ?”

“ Leave him alone, Sir,” returned Mike, without exhibiting the smallest solicitude for the condition of his friend. “ He’ll come to himself by an’ by ; only give him time.”

While he was speaking, the razor-grinder gave symptoms of returning consciousness by heaving a deep sigh, and opening his, hitherto, closed eyelids.

“Are you better, my good man?” inquired John Hardy.

Peter gave no direct reply; but Toby took upon himself the responsibility of returning an answer by giving a wink conveying an affirmative.

“He’s coming round, Sir,” said Mike; “an’t ye, my hearty?” continued he, addressing the razor-grinder, by hallooing as loudly as he could close to his ears.

“Ye—yes,” replied Peter, placing, as if by instinct, a hand over the ear, ringing with the roar from the earth-stopper’s stout and lusty voice.

In two or three minutes the discomfited Peter was enabled to rise, and, with the exception of a few slight contusions, no grievous calamity had befallen his person to awaken that priceless offering to the afflicted—tender sympathy.

“I cannot sufficiently express my regret that I should have been the cause of any accident

to you," said John Hardy; "but I assure you," continued he, earnestly, "that it was far from being intentional on my part."

"I don't doubt that, Sir," replied Peter Parkins, drawing his hands over his eyes, as if to obtain a clearer vision of the party addressing him, and then, turning a look upon the upset and fallen machine, he shook his head dejectedly and even sorrowfully.

"Oh!" said John, anticipating the cause of the not-to-be-mistaken movement of the razor-grinder's head, "I'll make good any loss that you may have received to your—" John was at a loss to describe the peripatetic and rotatory piece of invention, which, in a slightly damaged condition, lay before him, and so he added, "utensil."

Peter Parkins sighed heavily.

Toby dropped his tail, and, hanging his jaws between his fore-legs, looked as tame and spiritless a picture of canine wo, as can be pencilled to the most vivid imagination.

“I shall be quite content, Sir, with what you will give me,” returned Peter; “I’m a poor old man, and cannot afford to lose by a mischance of this kind, but I don’t want to make any profit out of it.”

“Honest creature!” whispered John Hardy to himself.

“He’s brick and mortar, Sir,” observed Mike, admiringly, in an under-tone to his patron; “nothing *but* brick and mortar!” continued he.

“What did your utensil cost?” inquired John.

“When new,” replied the razor-grinder, “it cost me a matter of three-pound-ten.”

Without another observation, John Hardy dived a hand into the secret recesses of some lateral portion of his attire, and extracted five bright guineas.

“There,” said he, placing the broad gold pieces into the itching palm of Peter Parkins, “I trust that will compensate you; and if

you should feel any ill effects from the concussion, pray come to the Range, and every attention to your health shall be shown to you."

"I return many grateful thanks, Sir," responded the razor-grinder, accepting the money, while his eyes twinkled with pleasure, and making a succession of profound reverences.

Toby, as in duty bound, gave a skip, after the fashion of an opera dancer, to insure attention, and then effected a bow, which might be imitated to advantage by many a more ill-mannered dog.

"Hark!" ejaculated Mike, pointing with a straightened finger to a particular quarter. "Hark," repeated he.

There was a dead silence for a few seconds.

"That's them," said the earth-stopper. "I thought the Limestone-quarries would be his point. Jump up, Sir, and we'll show 'em what it is to be in the first flight."

“What do you mean?” innocently inquired his patron.

“The hounds will cross Reby Downs at the end of this lane directly,” replied Mike. “Don’t say another word, Sir, but jump up.”

With an effort, John Hardy gained the saddle, and Mike, after hissing the words, “Be at the kennel at nightfall,” to the razor-grinder, urged Blossom to his best speed, to regain the time lost by the accident.

In a few score yards from the spot of the adventure just detailed, the squabby cob emerged from the lane on to a spacious and sterile heath. It was almost as flat and level as a bowling-green for a great distance; but at certain intervals there were large open ditches, and long flights of rails, for the purpose of preventing the cattle belonging to different proprietors from straying on to the land over which they had no right to crop or graze the scanty herbage.

“Pull up, Sir,” said the earth-stopper; “we

shall see them dip into the valley over the brow of that hill yonder, presently."

"I don't see or hear any signs of the hounds," replied John Hardy, again sweeping the horizon with his spectacles.

"Here they come, the beauties!" exclaimed Mike; "see them."

"Where?" asked his patron.

"Look," returned the earth-stopper, pointing with his finger, "as far as you can see, in a line with the old pollard that stands by itself, Sir."

John Hardy shook his head.

"Now then, you'll see them," returned Mike; "for here comes a red-coat, and now there's another," he continued, pointing to the same distant quarter.

"Oh! yes! now I see," added John Hardy, rubbing his hands with glee; "to be sure—here they come."

"We'll post ourselves at this corner," said Mike, "until the hounds cross the dyke; for

we must take good care not to head the fox; but when they are on this side you must ride, Sir, like a Briton," continued he, emphatically, "and lead the whole field."

"I will," responded John Hardy. "I will, indeed."

The whole pack was now in sight, flying down the slope like a flock of sea-gulls, and not far behind them three or four horsemen were visible.

"We shall see how they'll manage the rails and ditches presently," remarked Mike, chuckling with glee. "I shall be surprised if a few of 'em don't find them teasers."

The hounds swept to the bottom of the hill at a racing pace, but here, from some scared sheep rushing along before them, the ground became stained and the scent lost.

A figure was now seen to spur hard to their heads, and to turn the frightened cattle, while another rode at an increased rate forwards, and lifted the hounds through the difficulty—with-

out the loss of many, at this time, valuable moments.

“ That’s Mr. Job and James doing the trick, I know,” said Mike, in a tone and manner of the deepest admiration. “ What hounds can’t do, they can, and so it is that no fox can stand long afore the bunch.”

The pack was now making a direct line for a high and thick brake, in the centre of which were some strong earths in an old and abandoned limestone quarry, and would, from the direction taken, pass within a few yards of the station occupied by John Hardy and his attendant.

“ I thought so,” said Mike, in a scarcely audible whisper. “ Here Charley comes, with his red rag out and his brush unstarched.”

“ There’s the fox, I *do* declare!” shouted John, pointing to the beaten “ animal,” as he galloped by at a sorry pace. “ Well, I never!” exclaimed he, with momentarily increasing enthusiasm ; “ did you ever ? ”

“Give him a good tally-ho, Sir,” suggested the earth-stopper; “it will help him along a bit.”

John essayed to make the attempt to give the view-halloo in a clear and melodious tone, as he had frequently heard it given by the Squire; but there was a sad falling off between the intent and its practical development, for the cheer sounded much like the hoarse note of an antiquated rook, labouring under the effects of the influenza.

“Shall I begin to ride now?” inquired he.

“No, no, Sir,” replied Mike, “wait for the hounds. Recollect, you can’t kill the fox by yourself.”

“I long to be off,” said John Hardy, while his eyes flashed through his spectacles, with the warmth of the excitement smoking through his veins and intricacies.

“Wait but half a minute,” returned the earth-stopper, “and then you shall take the lead, Sir, like a Briton.”

“ But won't the fox get into the holes,” inquired his patron, “ that you spoke of?”

“ Never be afeard of a varmint's creeping into an earth that my spade's stopped,” returned Mike, with pride.

The merry pack neared, and soon swept by, making the air tremble with the cry they rung tunefully forth; and as the leading hound rattled past, with his head up and stern down, the huntsman threw out his whip-hand and called out, “ Hie-over!” and crammed his horse at a flight of rails, introduced by a yawning ditch. Clear, and without a splinter being brushed, his stout-limbed, bony horse carried him across, and James, light as floating gossamer, followed his example. Then our hero rushed his ardent steed at the bold stop to his course, and flew it like a pigeon.

“ God bless me!” exclaimed John Hardy; “ how extremely fraught with danger to dislocation and fracture of the bones, both simple and compound.”

“The field is coming up,” said Mike eagerly. “Get ready, Sir, for very few will attempt that jump, I know; and, then, as they crane and stare about, how jealous you’ll make ’em of place.”

The tail hounds passed at this juncture, and Job was thundering close to their sterns, and cheering the leaders as they were running their fox down from scent to view.

The critical moment had arrived.

“Ride, Sir, ride for your soul’s salvation!” hallooed Mike. “Now’s your time, or never!”

Heels, cudgel, arms, and voice, went to work with a vengeance that Blossom never before experienced. The squabby cob felt, without a doubt, that “e’en must when the devil drives,” and therefore put his full pressure of steam on at the beginning. With a flirt of his tail, and bearing his under jaw nearly to the ground, Blossom sprung forwards, and bore his rider with the speed, and after the mode, of a hungry pig to a well-supplied trough.

“Go it! Well done! That’s it!” shouted the earth-stopper, urging the squabby cob forwards with various kinds of frightful sounds and gestures.

To the utter astonishment of Job, who saw John Hardy flying in front for the first time in his life at nearly the end of a run, and everybody else in the rear, the huntsman gave his horse an involuntary pull.

“Is it his ghost?” said he, “or an accidental nick in?”

“Who-whoop!” cried John Hardy, in accordance with the directions received from Mike, as the earth-stopper dragged the fox from the jaws of his victorious enemies. “Who-whoop!” repeated he, with the smile of a conqueror. “How strangely remarkable,” continued he; “and yet how excessively gratifying to one’s feelings.”

CHAPTER IV.

“ Love is a smoke rais'd with the fume of sighs ;
Being purg'd, a fire sparkling in lovers' eyes ;
Being vex'd, a sea nourish'd with lovers' tears.
What is it else ? a madness most discreet,
A choking gale, and a preserving sweet.”

At the entrance of Job Sykes's cottage, was one of those little rural arches composed of lattice work, over which honeysuckle and woodbine crept, and in the summer evenings this was a favourite spot for the huntsman to sit and smoke his well-loved pipe in, secure from the alloy to the pleasure of Mrs. Sykes's tongue. Occasionally, it is true, the good dame wheezed and coughed from the inside by way of supporting her prerogative to oppose the ob-

jectionable propensity on the part of her husband. Considering all things, however, Job was a free and happy man, when, ensconced in his bower, he sat puffing the sweet and narcotic weed and his cares to the winds at one and the same moment.

It was sunset on one of those glowing days in early autumn, which leaves all nature parched and athirst. The flowers drooped and flagged upon the ground, and the scorched leaves hung flapping in the faint breath of the wind, with feverish heat in every fibre. Gaping cracks divided the solid earth as if it opened its jaws for drink; and even the brook, instead of the pure and crystal draught, offered nothing but a series of thick, pasty, muddy pools. The lowing herds, with out-stretched tongues, sought every oozy spot, and bellowed forth their dissatisfaction at the failure of their seeking. The very birds were silent, and sat perched aloft with open bills, and all things of the earth craved assuaging water.

At his ease—most particularly at his ease—sat Job Sykes in his bower, in company with that portly and apoplectic figure, Edward Dixon, the worthy host of the Lion. Whether the former or the latter had set the example is not exactly known, and, happily, forms no matter of import in the connecting of links concerning this history, but both of the boon companions were divested of their coats and cravats, and were reclining, with their feet elevated on the couple of benches placed as fixtures in the recess, in the least stiff and formal manner possible to be imagined or described. A tankard of ale with frothing head, looking as much like the person of Edward Dixon as any inanimate body could do, stood on a miniature table placed between the toppers and smokers, and for miserable sinners taking their ease and rest from the transitory wretchedness of this heart-ache world, few, perhaps, ever looked less miserable than Job Sykes and Edward Dixon.

A by-stander, without possessing much keen-

ness of observation, would have observed a spirit in the huntsman's inhaling and exhaling which was not exhibited in the method of his companion. Job gave a vigorous puff, and paused as if to contemplate the pleasurable effects, and then, when they became faint and weak, he gave another. But the landlord of the Lion, by some action which was one of the many mysterious secrets in his capacious bosom, delivered from his compressed lips a continued stream of vapour, not dissimilar to the spout of a tea-kettle. There was no check to the thin volume of smoke, but upwards it curled as if from a chimney, and one, too, of no ordinary powers of creating a considerable draught.

It would appear that there had been a long, deep pause; for a silence reigned, which may aptly be described as one of those unruffled surfaces of the waters when not a dying sigh of the zephyr had left a ripple to mark the trace of his breath. At length, Edward Dixon

removed his pipe from his lips, knocked the consumed ashes from the bowl on the tip of his shoe, and, reaching the tankard, took a deep dip of its contents with great deliberation. Arriving at the finish of his sip, which was invariably measured by the capacities of his lungs, he fixed his dull and leaden orbs upon Job, and said:—

“What do ye think of our little kids?”

“Kids!” repeated Job, evincing something like amazement at the query in his tone and gesture.

“Aye,” rejoined Edward Dixon, “don’t you think our little kids are bringing matters to a focus?”

“Oh!” returned the huntsman, “you mean my Jem and your Nancy.”

“The same individooals,” added the landlord.

“Why I must say,” replied Job, smiling, “that I expect we shall be axed to consent to an early day for the event to come off.”

“ You do, do ye ? ” replied Edward Dixon, somewhat sharply for so very plethoric and heavy a subject. “ Pray, has it been mentioned, in what I may call, an orthodox manner ? ”

“ Oh, no ! ” responded his companion. “ I know no more than yourself. ”

“ In that case I am satisfied, ” returned the host of the rampant animal ; “ perfectly so. All I desire is to know as much, but no more, than my neighbours in matters concerning myself. It has happened, ere now, ” continued he, in a sententious tone, “ that some o’ my neighbours have pretended to know a little more of Edward Dixon and his business than he did himself. Now this is d—d vexin’, and I won’t have it. ”

“ Perfectly right, ” said Job, who made it a rule to coincide with (giving rope he called acquiescence) his companion when sparks of temper were perceptible ; and never were they more coruscant than when Edward Dixon

forgot to observe the Quaker's excellent rule to "swear not at all."

"I'm not a proud, ambitious, conceited spark," resumed the landord; "but I know what's my due and my rights, and I like to have 'em, as every true-born, thorough-bred Englishman should. Now," continued he, "as the male parent of Nancy Dixon, I opine that I'm as much entitled to know the full particulars of what's going on as you, Mister Sykes."

"To be sure you are," replied Job, "and do, as far as I'm aware of."

"That's quite satisfactory," rejoined the host of the Lion. "I'm on velvet now again," and he proceeded to refill the bowl of his pipe.

"It takes very little to ruffle your hackles, Ned," observed the huntsman.

"I'm a bit of a peppery blade, I believe," responded his companion, with an inward chuckle, as he applied a light to his charged pipe. "But I hate a man without any fire in

his blood. He's like a screw of backy without a match to light it."

"So he is," rejoined Job, "and I quite agree with ye; but at the same time, a man should be careful not to flare up at every trifle, because people become so used to the flame and smoke that at last they don't heed it."

"That's a wise observation," returned Edward Dixon, casting his eyes upwards, and shaking his head with an air of patronage. "A sentiment like that; Job," continued he, "sinks into one's buzzum like a——"

The landlord was at fault but, after a pause for reflection, which invariably resembled a short doze, added, "rasher of bacon."

At this moment, a female, dressed in deep mourning, was seen to approach the garden gate, and, turning the sharp corner of a lane, which flanked one side of the cottage, she was close at hand previous to being seen.

"Who can this be?" said the huntsman, in an under tone.

Edward Dixon regarded the figure referred to by his friend with a kind of dreaming, sleepy look, but made no comment in reply.

As she arrived opposite the gate, the stranger stopped ; but as if in hesitation she again proceeded, and might have gone some dozen yards, when she staggered and fell reeling against the garden fence, and then heavily to the ground.

“ Good God ! ” ejaculated Job, springing from his recumbent posture, and hastening forwards at his best speed. “ What can be the matter ? ”

Edward Dixon, too, bowled himself in the rear, at a terrible pace for him ; for, although his heels were heavy, few possessed lighter hearts, or more sensitive ones to the claims of humanity, than the egotistical landlord of the Lion.

Upon arriving at the spot where the woman fell, Job raised her instantly in his arms, and bore the apparently inanimate body quickly towards his house.

Mrs. Sykes, who had heard the involuntary exclamation of her husband, dropped her knitting needles to institute inquiries concerning the cause, and was just in time to meet Job on the threshold with his burden.

After a succession of rapid exclamations, the worthy dame, with upraised hands and starting eyeballs, asked "Whom, when, where, how, and what it was?"

"It's a fit," replied Edward Dixon, "I think."

"The lady dropped nearly opposite the door, my dear," said Job, somewhat at a loss for breath.

"Bring her in, poor dear thing!" rejoined Mrs. Sykes, bustling into the house, "and lie her carefully on our bed, Job."

Obedying the mandate, the huntsman carried the object of Mrs. Sykes's commiseration into their dormitory, where she was soon under the treatment of that practical woman in the surgical art of every branch, kind, and description.

Ha! did a neighbour's bantling exhibit symptoms of the hooping-cough, cow or chicken pock, or any one of those many and varied ills to which the incipient stage of the animal being pertaining to mortality is subjected, who was the oracle appealed to? Who closed her eyes, elevated her chin, and shook her head with all the professional effect of a regular practitioner as she prescribed salts and senna, rhubarb and magnesia, brimstone and treacle, Dover's Powders, blisters and camomile, and such-like simples? Who was it when ague, rheumatism, colds, phthisic, and similar afflictions crippled and bent the young and the old, advised gruel, caudle, egg-flip, hartshorn, and similar mollifiers to pain? Who, aye who, but Mrs. Sykes.

As if by magic, the good Samaritan produced from her hidden stores a superabundant supply of cordials and restoratives, and after unfastening the bonnet strings, loosening the corset, sprinkling the pallid face with fresh

spring water, burning feathers under the nostrils, and a liberal application of a monster fan, returning consciousness was perceptible in the countenance of the invalid.

“She’s coming round,” whispered Mrs. Sykes to the attentive Job.

Job gave a nod by way of a response, while Edward Dixon made known his entire acquiescence in the reported recovery of the patient, by giving two slow and deliberate winks to himself.

A few deeply-drawn sighs, and the stranger raised her languid eyelids. Fixing a steady gaze on Job’s features, she said, in a scarcely audible tone, while a tremor thrilled through her frame, “Where am I—who have brought me here?”

“Don’t be afraid, ma’am,” replied Mrs. Sykes, soothingly. “My husband brought you here; but you needn’t be frightened at him, ma’am. No one, not even a babby, need be afraid of Job.”

“ You dropped down, my lady,” added the huntsman, for he knew that so soft and sweet a voice, and such long, white, and transparent hands could belong only to a lady. “ You dropped down, my lady,” repeated he, “ nearly opposite our cottage, a little over-marked by the heat, I suspect.”

“ Baked, ma’am,” chimed in Edward Dixon; “ baked is the proper term.”

“ Yes, yes,” hurriedly replied the stranger, pressing a hand upon her brow, “ I know all now.”

“ Excuse me, ma’am,” said Mrs. Sykes, “ but I see you want a little quiet and rest, and so long as Job remains in the room, it’s quite impossible to enjoy either one or the other; for of all the tiddytoddy magpies that ever lived, my husband, ma’am, is the greatest chatterer.”

“ We’d better make ourselves scarce,” suggested the landlord of the Lion, to Job, in a whisper.

Job seemed too think so too; for without any remark he scraped a bow to the invalid, and quitted the apartment in company with Edward Dixon.

CHAPTER V.

“ O, what authority and show of truth,
Can cunning sin cover itself withal !”

MIKE CROUCH, Peter Parkins, and Toby, were assembled in secret conclave at the kennel, when the curtains of night were dropped upon the parting day, and all was wrapped in darkness.

Toby, from some motive which baffles explanation, took no part, and seemed to have little interest, in the subject under discussion, for he lay with his nose squeezed between his fore-paws, in a position of extreme listlessness.

“ Strike me lucky !” said Mike, “ but matters might have turned out worse. If we’d been found out——”

“ If we’d been found out ! ” interrupted the razor-grinder, with a sneer. “ Why, then,” continued he, “ like many other rogues, who pass themselves off for honest men, we should have had to pay the penalty for the discovery.”

“ It makes good the old saying,” returned Mike, “ of there being ‘ many a slip between the cup and the lip.’ I thought,” continued he, “ that we were as sure of sharing the swag as if it had been already divided.”

“ Ah ! ” sighed Peter Parkins, “ its quite surprising how many shadows are seen from substances as difficult to touch as one of those countless buildings erected in the air, called castles. *I* used to see as many as most folks,” said the razor-grinder, emphatically; “ but that was a long time ago.”

“ What flam was it that you were going to make Mr. Hardy believe ? ” asked Mike.

“ I’ve dealt in what is called, by the flowery-tongued, the *ideal*—by the coarser, *lying*—to some extent in my life,” replied Peter ; “ but

I never, in the whole course of my experience, had got up a finer sample of fiction, with all the shades of truth, than the one I was prepared to gull your best earthly friend with, Mike."

"Its a great pity," said the earth-stopper, with an air of vexation, "that the fruit should have dropped before it was ripe. What were you going to say?"

"Oh!" returned his companion, carelessly, "by way of introduction, I was going through the details of the Peninsular war, the storming of St. Sebastian, and a few trifling matters of that kind. In one of our terrific and bloody engagements—the storming of some town, the name of which has escaped my memory—I rescued from impending destruction—the house, if I recollect rightly, was on fire—an extremely beautiful and interesting young female. Sharing with me my rations and my dangers, she accompanied me throughout the campaign. In the dreary night, when a sen-

tinel in the outposts, this faithful girl crept unperceived to my side, and during the long and gloomy watch, guarded me like a protecting angel under the shadow of her wings."

"Or her petticoats," said Mike, with a laugh.

"Either would have been quite as true," resumed Peter Parkins. "I then, after dwelling greatly on her spirit and virtue, should have added, that upon the proclamation of peace, I received my discharge, but unfortunately not getting a sabre cut, wound from a bullet, loss of a joint, or harm of any kind in the service of my country, I did not have a pension bestowed upon me. Upon reaching my native shore, nothing but poverty stared me in the face. Scorning, however, all selfish consideration, I immediately led my gazelle of the desert—"

"What's that," inquired Mike.

"You don't understand the value of fine names, Mike," replied the razor-grinder. "*I*

do. ‘Gazelle of the desert’ conveys more pretension and interest, than *my tramp*. However,” resumed he, “I was about to say that I conducted the object of my adoration to the altar. A stranger to our land, our religion, language, mode, and manners, I now clasped the choice exotic to my breast as my lawful and wedded wife. Without the knowledge of a trade—for I was brought up the son of a poor and proud gentleman, possessing a slight, and, as his death proved, fragile annuity—ignorant of any profession, devoid of friends or money, beyond the amount of three pounds three and ninepence, the balance in hand, after the payment of the expenses of our union, I deemed it expedient to invest this small capital in some ready-money business, and forthwith embarked my all in the purchase of a grinding machine.”

“Ha, ha, ha!” laughed Mike. “Ha, ha, ha! you talk better than a book, Peter.”

“Perambulating the country,” continued his companion, without noticing the flattering in-

terruption, " I managed to obtain an honest— all men say so, when the source of their income is referred to—but scanty living. In due course of time the pleasing communication was made to me, that I was about to become a father. This joyful announcement, however, was not without its alloy. The thought of having no home, no fixed habitation, no means of preparing the common necessaries for the mother and her child, made me a despairing and unhappy man. At length, the hour—the moment—arrived which was to render me a parent, and as it did so, I found myself a bereaved and solitary wretch. My wife was dead."

" There'd been a mistake in that part of the yarn," said Mike ; " don't you remember that I told ye it was a woman that delivered the hamper to me, and round the neck o' the contents was a label asking Mr. Hardy to be a father to the fatherless ?"

A cloud passed over the countenance of the

razor-grinder, both thick and dark; and his brow was knitted as if in deep thought.

“By every saint in the calendar, Mike!” returned Peter, “I forgot that part of my instructions.”

“There’d been a link wanted in the chain,” added the earth-stopper, “which Mr. Hardy would have seen, although he’s not a gentleman of the sharp school.”

“I wasn’t brought up a hedger and ditcher,” rejoined Peter Parkins; “but I could have managed to have stopped that gap, I know.”

“Go on,” said Mike, “I should like to hear what you were to finish with.”

“I was going to say,” resumed the razor-grinder, “that knowing through *you*, Mike, what a noble-hearted gentleman Mr. Hardy was, I resolved to trust my first-born to that little angel of a man.”

“You were not going to bring me into the net, were ye?” inquired the earth-stopper.

“Only as you could desire yourself,” replied

Peter, and as must contribute to your advantage. Having executed my plans by causing my son to be conveyed to you in the shape of a parcel for immediate delivery, I was pleased to find the confidence placed in Mr. Hardy's well-known and widely-spread charity was not misplaced. I saw, and was gratified in seeing, the son of an old soldier——”

“As precious an old soldier,” interrupted the earth-stopper, with a grin, “as ever lived.”

“Taken so much care of,” resumed his companion, without noticing the interruption. “I need not say,” continued he, “that I should have dwelt forcibly on the violence done to my affections in the first instance by parting with my child, nor the impulses often felt when, in the pursuit of my honest calling in the neighbourhood, I saw my boy in the bloom and innocence of prattling infancy, unconscious of the yearnings of a fond and devoted parent——”

“Ha, ha, ha,” laughed Mike; “ha, ha, ha, what a parson you would ha' made, Peter.

But you needn't trouble yourself by going into them particulars ; I only want to hear the framework."

"The reason for not declaring myself the father of the young Squire before," said Peter, "would have been the reluctance of running the risk of injuring his worldly prospects. If, as nature might prompt him, my son had determined to link his interests and fate with mine, there would have been nothing but a share in the grinding business and the small stock in trade by way of reversion at my decease. I, therefore, checked the strings of parental love, and suffered the long lapse of years to pass, until, learning on my bed of sickness——"

"Oh ! you were to be a-bed, were ye, when giving tongue to these lies ?" said the earth-stopper.

"To be sure I was," replied Peter ; "not only for show, but for the double purpose of smothering a laugh should one tickle me beyond the bearing of a serious Christian."



“ I can understand the rest,” rejoined the earth-stopper ; “ and I will say,” continued he energetically, “ that it was a good, bold, bang-up scheme.”

“ Like many others of the same complexion though,” returned his companion, “ it brought no grist to the mill.”

“ We often sow where we cannot reap,” added Mike—“ worse luck ! ”

“ That’s true,” said Peter ; “ but we must consider ourselves fortunate in not getting the gaff blown before.”

“ Yes,” replied the earth-stopper ; “ if this Mr. Tobias Smith had turned up the right card *after* your false trick, instead of just before, it would have been all up with your patchwork.”

“ There would have been no more snacks at the Hall, I suppose,” observed the razor-grinder.

“ My opinion is,” said Mike, “ that you would ha’ cooled your heels in the stocks for a few hours.”

“Ha!” ejaculated his friend, “my face has been submitted to public inspection in a far more disagreeable manner.”

“Pillory?” briefly asked Mike.

The razor-grinder gave a short but expressive nod.

“Humph!” returned Mike thoughtfully.

“That must be consu—med nasty work.”

“I speak from experience,” added Peter Parkins. “It is.”

“I do nothing but think of it,” said the earth-stopper, “and shall dream o’ the matter, occasionally, as long as I live! To think,” continued he, “that the milk should be spilt just in the nick o’ time. Another half-dozen hours or so, and a precious different tale Mr. John would have been told.”

“D—n it!” exclaimed Peter. “One might have answered the purpose quite as well as the other.”

“Ours at least,” replied Mike. “No matter,” continued he. “I mean to enjoy myself

at the revel to-morrow, and 'twill go hard but I'll take a few o' the prizes."

"There hasn't been such a promise of sport in these parts for some time," remarked the razor-grinder.

"No," said his companion. "We don't hear of twenty and ten-pound prizes for wrestling matches every day. But then, we don't hear of such a revel as to-morrow will be, more than once in a long life."

"The Squire's going to be uncommon liberal, is he?" rejoined his wily companion.

"The likes of it'll never be forgotten," responded Mike, confidently. "The Squire and Mr. Hardy have made up their minds to make the folks remember the joy of discovering the young Squire pedigree."

"I wonder if they'd have acted in the same manner, if *I* had been the found progenitor," remarked Peter, musingly.

"It's doubtful to my mind," replied the earth-stopper.

“ Well, well ! ” rejoined Peter Parkins, “ no matter. The web’s broken, and it’s useless to speculate upon what the meshes might have caught.”

“ I’ll catch something worth landing, before the sun sets to-morrow,” returned, Mike rubbing his hands.

“ I shouldn’t like to be thrown by ye,” returned his companion.

“ That ye wouldn’t,” replied the earth-stopper, while his eyes flashed with the determination of his words. “ I’ll throw my men,” continued he, “ like blind kittens upon a brick floor.”

“ It will be a case of fracture, then ? ” remarked his companion.

“ I’ll smash ’em,” rejoined Mike, clinching his fists in a menacing attitude.

“ The devil you will,” returned Peter. “ Then all I have to say is, that I pity the poor mortals who’ll come under your hug.”

“ I’ve been preserving myself lately,” added

the earth-stopper, baring his dexter arm, and showing the hard and sinewy limb, "and I'll show 'em what a crook is to-morrow."

"May heaven have mercy upon your enemies!" said the razor-grinder, rising as if about to take his departure, "upon your friends," continued he, "and more especially upon myself. Come, Toby, let us toddle."

CHAPTER VI.

“O, you Gods, think I, what need we have any friends if we should never have need of them? they were the most needless creatures living, should we ne'er have use for them; and would most resemble sweet instruments hung up in cases, that keep their sounds to themselves. Why, I have often wished myself poorer, that I might come nearer to you. We are born to do benefits: and what better or properer can we call our own, than the riches of our friends? O, what a precious comfort 'tis to have so many, like brothers, commanding one another's fortunes!”

THERE had been great doings at the Hall of late. The church bells sent forth their pealing din from sunrise to sunset. For miles around it was one continued jubilee. Feasts had been given to the Squire's friends, tenantry, cottagers, and villagers, and for a week past the

huge kitchen chimney had never ceased to belch forth a volume of sooty vapour as the preparations proceeded for the celebration of the general joy. There was now no doubt as to whom the estate would descend, as the Squire had proclaimed our hero his heir, to the glee and satisfaction of everybody; for no one whose inclination to please all could have more completely succeeded than his *protégé*. With the rich, his unassuming manners, gentlemanly address, and handsome exterior, had won their admiration and esteem; and with the poor, his affability, kindness, and generosity, linked him to their best affections. Wherever he went, a smile greeted him, and a blessing echoed in his footsteps.

Tobias Smith, who had taken up his quarters at the Hall, with no hesitation and little ceremony, seemed to be quite at home in his new abode. He quickly made himself acquainted with the mysteries of the cellar and the larder, and took upon himself the arrangements of

both these depôts for stores of good things, much to the silent wonder and annoyance of the old steward and the butler. It is quite impossible to say how he effected the position of general in command over these particular localities; but scarcely had he become an inmate in the Hall a little month, than he installed himself a sort of major-domo, and exercised unlimited authority.

“ Our friend, Mr. Smith,” observed John Hardy to the Squire, upon one occasion, “ is a most obliging and useful person.”

“ Very much so,” replied the Squire, drily.

“ And he makes himself so much at home,” rejoined John.

“ In every respect,” returned his friend, in the same tone.

“ I wonder,” added John, hesitatingly, “ if ever he intends to leave us, Harry ?”

“ Certainly not,” responded the Squire. “ Nothing is farther from his intention.”

“ Dear me ! ” ejaculated his companion.
“ How very remarkable.”

“ It may be to you, John,” said the Squire ;
“ but it is by no means to me. There are
many such spirits in this world, who, when
they come, are very difficult to get rid of.”

“ I don’t exactly want to get *rid* of him,”
said John ; “ but,” continued he, “ I think it
high time that he should start on the fulfilment
of the duty he is so well qualified to perform,
and which he imposed upon himself.”

“ That of discovering—”

“ Yes, yes, Harry,” interrupted John hurriedly,
“ to be sure. And it seems to me that
we have been too dilatory in the matter.”

“ But a short space of time has elapsed since
we got upon the trail,” rejoined the Squire.
“ However,” continued he, “ after the revel, I
will speak to our mercurial friend, and despatch
him at once upon the mission.”

“ He requires a little urging, I must say,”
remarked his companion.

“ You must remember,” said the Squire, “ that he has not, perhaps, the same feeling of interest with ourselves.”

“ He appeared to take a very great deal of interest,” replied John Hardy, “ upon his offering to undertake the responsibility.”

“ Well, well,” added the Squire, “ I’ll take especial care that he shall no longer lie idly upon his oars; for if not driven a little, I see very clearly that he’ll hang in covert here till doomsday.”

With this decision to start Tobias Smith from the Hall, John appeared perfectly satisfied, and here the object of discussion made his appearance by suddenly entering the apartment, accompanied by our hero, who was indulging in a hearty laugh.

“ The arrangements are completed, gentlemen, I am happy to inform ye,” said Tobias Smith, whose person, from head to heel, was covered with flour, treacle, soot, grease, and dirt of many kinds and descriptions. “ The arrange-

ments are completed," repeated he; "and, although I say it myself, they reflect immense credit upon the humble director of them."

At the conclusion of the sentence, the speaker gravely bowed.

"I never saw such preliminaries in my life," remarked our hero.

"Let us hear what they are," said the Squire.

"The young Squire was about to reply, but Tobias Smith anticipated him by saying, "Let that task devolve on me. 'Tis mine by right, and justice awards the claim. In accordance with my expressed desire, Mr. Lawrence," continued he, "you permitted me to superintend the classing and order of the great revel which is to begin at the hour of twelve to-day. As master of the ceremonies, I considered five-hundred hard dumplings, soaked in treacle, and suspended on long lines, indispensable as a striking feature in the arrangements. Then I have had a ring, twenty feet in circumference,

staked and roped at the bottom of Chesnut-tree-hill, so that the multitude can witness the wrestling in the most desirable situation. A straight pole, remarkably well soaped and greased, I have had firmly driven into the ground hard by, and on the top is fixed as fine a leg of mutton as was ever eaten in conjunction with turnips and caper sauce. Two dozen sacks with running nooses are prepared for an equal number of old women to run for a prize in the shape of that very useful garment termed a smock. A horse-collar is conveniently placed for the exhibition of grinning grimaces through it. A beautifully shaded and level piece of turf I've selected for dancing, and the mash-tub, covered over with boards, is the elevation on which the fidler will scrape in conjunction."

"The mash-tub!" ejaculated the Squire.
"Why not have used an empty hogshead?"

"My dear Sir," replied Tobias, "I pray you ask me no questions; but rest satisfied that

for every part of the arrangements there has been a well-digested motive."

"Well, well!" returned the Squire, laughing. "Go on; let us hear the remainder."

"A wheelbarrow of soot," resumed Tobias, "slightly saturated with lamp oil, is prepared for the urchins to scramble for pieces of silver in, and one of flour, by way of giving them the magpie variation of black and white. This," continued he, "I think, concludes the preparations for the diversions."

"Ah!" exclaimed John Hardy, "they put me quite in mind of my young days. They're the old English sports that used to be enjoyed in every village some forty or fifty years ago."

"Yes, John," said the Squire, "and I should like to see them revived again throughout the country, as of old. Then there was plenty of life and fun among the poor; but now they sit over their beer and talk politics, and read some Radical print, which sets their

blood on fire, and makes them discontented with their condition. I wish to see the labourer," continued he, "work with a smile on his lip, and when his daily task be done, enjoy himself as much, if not in the same way, as his master."

"Your wishes are gratified, Sir, I think, as far as those under your own employ are concerned," observed our hero.

"I must say," added Tobias Smith, with a smack of his lips, "that happier specimens of the forked animal I never beheld."

"And it renders me happy to see my servants so," returned the Squire; "I could not exist to see a set of frowning, wrinkled-faced, miserable people about me."

"I quite agree with you in that particular, Harry," added John, as if he ever did to the contrary. "It makes me feel spasmodic to observe long, flute-like features, with deep-cut wrinkles in them," continued he; "I can't bear the sight."

“There’s no fear of your feelings being harrowed to-day,” remarked our hero.

“We have no reason to suppose so,” observed the Squire.

“Well, gentlemen,” said Tobias Smith, “having heard my arrangements for the fête, what think you of them?”

“Fête!” repeated the Squire. “Call it by its proper name, an English revel.”

“By all means,” acquiesced Tobias, “if you so will it, my dear Sir.”

“In my opinion,” replied the Squire, “they promise fair for plenty of merriment; but the proof of their value remains to be shown.”

“The good folks are streaming into the park thickly now, I see,” said John Hardy, looking out of the window.

“There’s Joe Harris, the blacksmith’s son,” observed our hero. “I expect he’ll take the first prize in the wrestling.”

“He’s a fine, athletic young man,” replied the Squire.

“ But does not our earth-stopper, Mike Crouch, intend to play for it? ”

“ I think not,” rejoined our hero. “ I asked him,” continued he, “ but he gave an evasive answer, and I conclude that he considers Joe more than a match for him.”

“ I shall not interfere in the making of the matches,” said the Squire, “ but I should like to see those two try a fall together.”

“ There’s plenty of bone and sinew between them,” remarked Tobias, “ although of very different mould.”

“ Yes,” said John Hardy, “ Mike is an ungainly lad, and Joe’s considered the handsomest fellow in the whole village, I’m told.”

“ Such is his character among the maidens, I believe,” returned our hero, laughing.

“ Who is that walking by the side of Mrs. Sykes? ” inquired Tobias, as the huntsman’s better half passed the hall at some little distance, supporting a lady dressed in deep mourning. The gait of the latter was faltering and

weak, and she had all the appearance of being an invalid.

“It’s the lady who was taken ill opposite Job’s house a few days since, I expect,” replied our hero; “although,” continued he, “I’ve not seen her before.”

“Without doubt it is,” said John Hardy. “Our worthy friend the rector, who has visited her daily since her indisposition, informed me that she is a most amiable and Christianlike lady.”

“We must make her acquaintance,” returned the Squire, “and learn whether we can be of service to her. Does she intend staying in the neighbourhood for any length of time?”

“That I haven’t heard,” replied John Hardy, “but she, as yet, is too unwell to leave.”

“What is her name?” asked the Squire.

“Weston,” responded John Hardy, “and a widow, as I am told.”

“I wonder if she’s any relation to the Turniptop Westons, of Shrewsbury,” remarked

Tobias Smith, by way of a random, imaginary speculation. “*They* are a family of unequivocal *status* in society, and with whom I have the honour of acquaintanceship.”

“If she should prove to be an off-shoot of the Turniptops,” observed the Squire, smiling, “you had better pioneer the way for our introduction.”

“Undoubtedly,” rejoined Tobias, running his fingers quickly through his strong, bushy locks. “Undoubtedly; I’ll take an early opportunity of solving the matter as quickly as possible, by calling at the huntsman’s cottage to-morrow morning.”

CHAPTER VII.

“ By how much unexpected, by so much
We must awake endeavour for defence ;
For courage mounteth with occasion.”

FROM all points of the compass, in groups, throngs, and parties, holyday folk in holyday gear wended their way through the Hall-park, much to the discomfiture of its countless denizens. Some old, toothless hunters, who, having done their duty, were turned out for the remainder of their natural lives to range over the broad acres of emerald turf as it suited the bent of their inclination, pricked their ears and stood snorting at the uninterrupted stream of human forms in a perfect labyrinth of wonder. Some deer, too—a fat,

panting herd—swept from one part of the enclosure to the other, and tossed their branched antlers and stamped the ground with their cloven feet in anger at the cause of their unusual disturbance. Hares and rabbits skipped from their forms and flashed their scuts in the high-topped fern, seeking estreats in the depths of the covert. Gaily-plumed pheasants startled many a wayfarer as they rose from cozy nooks 'mid twining briar and bramble, and the dove and wood-pigeon whir-r'd from the dark-green shades of the fir, affrighted at the interlopers to their solitudes. Rook cawed to rook, and many a sentinel, perched upon a topmost bough, to give intelligence of approaching danger, spread his broad jet-black wings and hoarsely croaked his fears and disquietude.

“I tell ye what it is, Job,” said the worthy host of the Lion, as he rolled his plethoric body by the side of the huntsman, some few yards behind Jem and his daughter Nancy. “I tell ye what it is,” repeated he, measuring his

words with a kind of round, drop-shot dignity.

“I think Mrs. S. might have taken my elbow on this hoss-picious o-casion.”

“Hoss what?” inquired Job.

“Picious,” replied Edward Dixon. “I offered the joint to her,” continued he, pushing up the roll of fat familiarly termed a double-chin; “but it was declined.”

“My good woman, you see,” rejoined the huntsman, in the endeavour to appease the wounded dignity of the landlord, “had to support the lady in her walk here, and she couldn’t do both.”

“I don’t see, for my part, what a *lodger* has to do at a revel,” problematically observed his companion.

“Oh!” returned Job, “it was by our persuasion that Mrs. Weston came at all. We thought the change of scene might rouse her spirits, poor thing.”

“A *lodger*,” said Edward Dixon, who appeared to have flown by a tangent on a new

subject, "is by no means a bird of the first plumage in my eyes. I took one once, many years ago, at the Lion, and he had the stiff, stark-naked impudence to call my best tap *whistle-belly-vengeance*. There," continued the host, surveying his friend slowly and with a deliberate look from heel to head, "what do you think must be my religious opinion concerning *lodgers*?"

Job, who could not perceive with any clearness what Mrs. Weston had to do with the case in point, gave an equivocal "Humph."

"But the worst remains to be told," resumed his loquacious friend. "This *lodger*, after telling me to my face, in the presence of the late lamented Mrs. Dixon, that my primest butt was not split-skull, nor knock-me-down, nor *common* swipes; but unsophisticated — that was the word, which I never shall forget — unsophisticated *whistle-belly-vengeance*, budged one night without any notice, leaving everything behind him, even——" here Edward

Dixon's voice dropped to a whisper, which carried inexpressible effect with it—"his bill."

"And what did the everything consist of besides his bill?" inquired Job, laughing.

"In course his luggage," replied the landlord. "But I'll leave ye to guess what my feelings was, Job, my friend, when, after putting three notices in the *County Chronicle*, at a cost of ten-an'-sixpence, that I should sell by auction the luggage and hereditaments if not taken away, on payment of the charges, I opened, in the presence of witnesses, the carpet-bag, and found only a handful of old newspapers, one slipper, and a worn-out tooth-brush."

The huntsman laughed heartily at his companion's description of his unprofitable lodger, and his mirth occasioned Edward Dixon to consider that he had said a good thing or two.

Edward Dixon was silent while his companion continued to indulge in his cachinatory demonstration; but upon a cessation of

his laugh, the host pointed to his daughter and Jem, some forty yards in advance, and remarked "That such tits were not to be seen every day."

"They're a goodish-looking couple enough," replied Job; "and what's better still, their conduct's as much to be admired, as their mould."

"Ha!" ejaculated the landlord. "There's a wonderful deal in training. It's no use to have a good colt or filly unless you bring 'em up to the mark. When I hear folks talk," continued he, "of wild and obstinate sons, and kicking, runaway daughters, I always think there must have been great fault in the breeding. Some people give too much rein at the start; but my belief is, that where one's spoilt through too much liberty and indulgence, there are twenty made as obstinate as mules through kicks, cuffs, and ill-usage."

"I quite agree with you in that respect, Ned," rejoined his friend. "Keep a steady,

mild, yielding hand upon the young 'uns, I say: never check 'em short. It only pulls 'em back upon their hocks for the time, and makes 'em more resolved to plunge for'ard when they can get their heads."

"We're two feel—osophers, Job," returned Edward Dixon. "That's what we are, you may be sure; and as such, should be regarded by the public in general, and by parents in particular."

What Jem Sykes was whispering, in accents falling "like music soft and low," into Nancy's ears, must remain, as it was intended, a secret between the young couple; but from the smiles and dimples which came and went on Nancy's cheeks, mantled with the hue of the peach blossom, like the surface of water ruffled by a zephyr's sigh, it was beyond a question that honied words were sinking deeply where they would be treasured as beads on memory's rosary.

Not that the young whipper-in and bride-

elect were the only "loving twain" within view. Oh no. Under the dark-green, luxuriant foliage of almost every tree, there were many to be seen stealing from the crowd to exchange those tender sentiments with which their hearts were charged. With quickened pulse and throbbing hearts, eyes darting light into each other, and clinging lips, tales were told and thrice told o'er, unwearying and unwearied.

Sitting on the cramped root of a wide-spreading tree, which reared itself some distance from the earth, the lady referred to by Edward Dixon as the huntsman's *lodger*, Mrs. Weston, remained at a considerable distance from the spot where the sports were to take place. Job's better-half stood close by, and at intervals gave such information as she thought likely to prove interesting to the lady.

"There, ma'am," said Mrs. Sykes, "goes Madam Stiggs and her flaunty daughters. I always call her *Madam*," continued Job's monitor, with a satirical chuckle, "on account of

the airs she gives herself over her betters. You'd scarcely suppose it possible, ma'am," continued Mrs. Sykes, "that that brazen-faced woman had the impudence to say in the general shop in the village of a Saturday night, that she couldn't visit me on account of my being the wife of a servant—*menial* she had the audacity to call Job."

"Such observations," remarked Mrs. Weston, in a quiet tone and feeble manner, "are extremely uncharitable among neighbours."

"Uncharitable, indeed!" indignantly exclaimed Mrs. Sykes; "and what do you think, ma'am, the Stiggs's are?"

"It is impossible for me to guess," replied her companion, with a slight smile spreading itself over her thin, wan features.

"Pork butchers, ma'am," rejoined Mrs. Sykes. "Think of that, ma'am, for family pride. Dealers in fat, greasy, grunting swine. It's enough to make the stones preach against the pomp and vanity of such heathens."

The invalid made no observation to this remark; but kept her eyes steadily bent upon a particular quarter of the park, from which four figures were seen approaching.

“There goes *my* Jem and his wife that is to be, ma’am,” said Mrs. Sykes resuming her subject, as the young whipper-in and Nancy passed at some little distance. And here,” continued she, “comes Job and his friend, the landlord of the Lion. To tell you a bit of my mind, ma’am, I wish they were not quite so intimate as they are. Mr. Dixon is rather disposed to the evil habits of smoking and drinking, and we all know, ma’am, that ‘evil communications corrupt good manners.’ It has been part of my duty to check Job’s tendencies in these respects for many years, ma’am, and I think I should have succeeded better if it hadn’t been for the example set by his companion. However, he’s a good man in the main, and has brought up his daughter in the way she should walk, which is saying a great deal for *any*

father; let alone one who's generally called bosky."

"Who is that strange figure passing?" inquired Mrs. Weston.

"That's Mike Crouch, the Squire's earth-stopper," replied Mrs. Sykes, "and by his side is a tramping razor-grinder, called Peter Parkins. They're two great rogues, in my opinion, and ought not to meet with so much favour as they do. But here," continued she, "comes the Squire and his friends."

The invalid strained her eyes as the four neared the place where she sat, and an expression of intense anxiety was perceptible in her features, and a hectic flush glowed in her cheek, while her lips quivered and shook as if with an ague-fit.

"Are you not so well, ma'am?" asked Mrs. Sykes, alarmed at the sudden change in her companion.

"Yes, yes," hurriedly replied Mrs. Weston, in a dry, husky voice, and staring with un-

blinking eyes at the group as they approached her.

“ Oh, ma'am !” ejaculated Mrs. Sykes, clasping her hands, “ I'm sure you're not. Let me call for assistance.”

“ Hush !” resumed her companion, while the swelled veins started upon her brow ; “ hush ! speak not a word.”

Mrs. Sykes stood gazing in doubt as to what steps she should take, when Mrs. Weston rose suddenly from her seat, and said, “ Let me return instantly. I—I—I must go back.”

“ I'll call Job to assist you, ma'am,” returned Mrs. Sykes, frightened at the altered appearance of the invalid.

“ No, no,” rejoined Mrs. Weston, clutching the huntsman's wife by the arm, as she was leaving her side. “ Do not draw anybody's attention to me. I can proceed very well with your assistance ;” and thus saying, she feebly walked, with her face buried in her handkerchief, towards Job's cottage, just perceptible

through the thick foliage of some trees at the bottom of the park.

The revel now commenced, under the immediate directions of Tobias Smith, who was little less active than a parched pea on a drum-head.

“Hats off! Sit down in front! Now then, ma’am, shut up that umbrella,” halloed he, standing in the centre of the roped area appropriated as the wrestling ring. “I must have fair play,” continued he, “for short, tall, lean, and fat, or whatever sort, kind, or description ye may be.”

In a few minutes the congregated mass had so arranged themselves without the ropes, and up the side of the steep acclivity at whose base the ring was formed, that everybody could obtain a fair and uninterrupted view of “the tug of war,” about to be commenced.

The Squire was the appointed umpire in the sports, and, by virtue of his office, occupied a seat within the staked area, supported by his

council, as he called them, John Hardy and our hero.

“Are you ready, Sir?” inquired Tobias Smith, addressing the Squire.

“Quite so,” was the reply.

“Now then, listen,” said the master of the ceremonies, in a loud, sententious voice. “The prize to be awarded to him who proves himself the best wrestler, in three bouts, consists of a purse of ten guineas.”

“I thought the Squire would be liberal,” whispered Peter Parkins to Mike, as they sat upon the greensward, a little removed from the crowd, with the observant Toby crouched between his master’s feet.

The earth-stopper grinned an acquiescence in his remark, and Toby threw himself upon his back and kicked in sheer ecstasy at the thought.

“Nothing now remains to be done,” resumed Tobias Smith, “than for a champion to come forwards with a challenge, and for another to accept it.”

In an instant a hat came whirling over the heads of the throng, and fell rolling into the middle of the ring.

A low murmur ran through the crowd, and all eyes were turned to the quarter from whence it came.

“ Whose is it ? ” inquired the razor-grinder, straining his view to catch a glimpse of the intrepid challenger.

“ Young Harris’s, I expect, ” replied Mike, while his eyes flushed as he spoke, and his even white teeth snapped together like a shark’s at his prey.

“ Why, it raises your hackles, I see ! ” remarked Peter. “ Ha ! ” continued he, “ I like to see that. There’s nothing like a spice of the devil in a man when a rough game’s to be played. ”

Toby expressed his full concurrence in this sentiment of his master by raising to the perpendicular every hackle upon his back.

“ I thought so, ” observed the earth-stopper,

as the blacksmith's son threaded his way through the crowd, and entered the ring amid the cheers of the assembled numbers.

"You'll not get such a hurrah as that I'll be bound," said Peter, "when you go in, Mike."

"And I don't want one," replied the earth-stopper, savagely. "A groan's just as musical to my ear as any other noise."

"I dare say you'll have one or two of them, then," returned Peter.

"With all my heart," returned Mike, adding, "I'll take good care to hug one groan out of a body, that shall sound as natural as a chirp from a cock sparrow."

"Ha, ha, ha," laughed the razor-grinder. "Ha, ha, ha."

And then Toby joined in the mirth by wagging his stump of a tail, at such an inordinate rate, that it might have proved difficult to one dull of vision to have caught a glimpse of it.

The challenger who had so readily answered the call, and now stood preparing himself for

a trial of pure strength and skill, was a young man just arrived at the very zenith of vigour and power of bone, thew, and sinew. Light-brown hair crisped itself in short, thick curls upon a brow unusually lofty for one whose labours consisted wholly in earning his bread by the sweat of it. His shoulders were broad and of herculean mould, and his chest expanded like that of a full-grown ox. The veins upon his bared arms and legs developed themselves in hard purple streaks, and swelled from his brawny limbs, like those of a race-horse fretting for the start. Good-humour sparkled in his clear blue eyes, and although there was an expression of bold determination in his thin and compressed lips, still a smile of kindness played about them; and, in short, he looked one capable of meeting an antagonist, only in the spirit of an Englishman.

“ Are ye going to try him in the first round ?” asked Peter.

“ No,” shortly replied the earth-stopper.

“Don’t let the spur prick too deeply,” rejoined Peter Parkins, and his small, gray eyes twinkled as he spoke.

Toby shook his head and blew his nose, in token of expostulation.

“The gaff always stirs my very marrow,” returned the earth-stopper, between his ground teeth, “when I see a fellow like that take every word, hope and wish for his winning the prize. “There’s not,” continued he, “a woman present, old or young, maid, wife, or widow, but would roar with glee, to see that lily of a chap fling me a fall. And why?”

“Exactly so,” said Peter Parkins, well pleased with the savage humour he had mainly been instrumental in exciting in his companion. “And why?”

“Because,” rejoined Mike, “he is sightly to the eye, and *I* am ugly. So it is that favour’s shown in this world.”

“Rats may squeak, and toads croak sermons, after that,” returned the razor-grinder, laugh-

ing. "I like to hear such words. It makes me know that the world goes round."

At this moment another hat flew into the ring, and immediately afterwards a tall and slender stripling entered. He was evidently some five or six years younger than his opponent, and far inferior in strength. Still there was a confidence in his bearing which would lead an observer to suppose that more was screened than met the eye.

"Ned Alworthy will be thrown," said Mike, raising himself from the reclining posture that he had thrown himself into. "But he's as game as a chicken, and will give his man some work, I know."

"He looks a trump," responded Peter; "but I fear there an't metal enough."

"Fear?" repeated the earth-stopper. "I should be sorry if there was. It would spoil my hopes of upsetting as fine a pail of milk as was ever seen."

After a few preliminaries the opponents were ready for the fray; and, exchanging a grasp of

the hand in token of no vindictiveness being entertained on either side, the two eyed each other as men do when about to test each other's strength and courage.

For a short time there was a reluctance on the part of the more slender of the twain, Ned Alworthy, to close with his powerful antagonist, and he slipped and dodged adroitly from his attempted hold. At length, however, after several feints, a mutual clasp was effected, and the tug commenced.

Fast locked within each others' arms, the ardent youths strained every nerve. Now the subtle manœuvres of the skilful and practised were tried. Limb twined within limb, and pull, twist, and thrust, were each tried in turn. The far greater strength, however, of the blacksmith's son, soon began to be perceptible in the waning power of Ned Alworthy. This weakness slowly but surely increased, and after a fruitless endeavour to avert his fate, he was hurled from his opponent's arms, and sent staggering back upon the ground, without

more strength remaining than a weak and puny child.

“It was good play,” observed Peter Parkins admiringly,” and does as much credit to Ned as to young Harris.”

“Quite,” replied Mike, “and in my opinion a little more; for Ned must have known he was over-matched, and yet he stood up like a man.”

Poor Ned! Like many other ambitious mortals, he burned to make known his deeds and revel in applause. There was one, too, present whom he knew would rejoice in his success beyond the power of words to convey. Sad, sad, is the difference between the anticipation of our hopes and their realization! Ned, pale and dejected, regained his erect position; and as he quitted the scene of his discomfiture, an observer might have seen unshed tears swimming in his eyes.

“Now Mike, my pink,” said Peter, “go in, and show ’em what a fall is.”

“Not yet,” replied the earth-stopper; “let me bide my time.”

At the conclusion of the first bout, Tobias Smith gave directions for the broaching of a hogshead of strong beer, which had been rolled under the shade of a thick cluster of trees, and, sitting astride the capacious butt, the master of the ceremonies superintended the filling of the horns successively placed under the drawn spigot, and passed from hand to hand, and from lip to lip.

After the throng had been refreshed by potations from the generous, freely-giving barrel, Tobias sprung from his bacchanalian throne, and, returning to the ring, again called for "a hat."

At the same moment, two of these rustic symbols of defiance, in rude imitation of the gauntlet in tilt and tournament of the olden time, came whirling into the arena, and immediately after their respective wearers of the beaver.

"It's young Harris and Tom Besey, I see," remarked Peter Parkins.

Toby gave his master a somewhat disdainful look, as much as to imply that the observation was unnecessary, inasmuch as others had the same means of ascertaining the fact as himself.

“Tom’s a stiff, resolute chap enough,” said Mike; “but when his strength’s a little spent, he’ll be thrown like a baby.”

“Or as you will throw Jem Harris,” returned the razor-grinder.

“No,” added Mike. “He’ll be more tender with Tom than I shall be with him, I expect.”

“Why?” shortly asked his companion.

“Because,” replied the earth-stopper, “I hate him with all my heart, and with good cause.”

“Ah!” ejaculated Peter. “May I ask the why and the wherefore?”

“Yes,” replied Mike, doggedly; “and be told for what I care to hide ’em. D’ye see,” continued he, with a sneer, “how all the maidens laughed, skipped, and clapped their

hands with glee, when he gave Ned Alworthy a fall? And did ye see the cur strut from the ring, like a crowing bantam cock? And do ye see him now," continued the earth-stopper, pointing to his rival, "standing with more confidence and pride than a fresh-fledged jay?"

"There's plenty of starch about him, certainly," rejoined Peter, while his small eyes twinkled again, as he saw the bitter jealousy displayed in his friend.

"You may now know," added the earth-stopper, "my reason for hating and loathing him. *That* which makes me enemies, and him friends, are the roots. I'm ugly as a scarecrow, and he's the best-made, smoothest cheeked lad in these parts. *Now* do ye understand my drift?"

"Perfectly," responded the razor-grinder.

Toby conveyed his comprehension of the point under discussion by making a slow and mechanical movement of the last two joints of his tail.

The blacksmith's son, so favoured by the fair, held now in his inimical clutch a very different specimen of the *genus homo* than that he had just encountered. Tom Vesey was a long-bodied, bandy-legged, sturdy-built, fellow, possessing a head as round as a button, without the smallest vestige of a forehead, and fixed on a neck as thick as a bull's. Bone and muscle were alone perceptible in his well-knit frame; and from the remarks, nods, and winks exchanged by many surrounding admirers of a good bout, more than usual sport was evidently anticipated.

Quickly the reciprocated hold was made, and then followed the pull, lock, and wrench of hardy limbs and sinews of iron strength. The blacksmith's son soon discovered the herculean power of his antagonist, and, finding that he could not hope for victory from the inferior exercise of his own, sought the aid of stratagem, and the more masterly skill which he possessed. Avoiding the close clutch of

his opponent, he flew round him at a speed sadly confusing to Tom Vesey, who soon began to show symptoms of distress, and, as much to the surprise of himself as his admirers, he found himself, in something less than five minutes, in a favourable position for scanning the cerulean vault of heaven.

Loud were the plaudits as the blacksmith's son stood with folded arms in the centre of the ring, again the successful champion. Mike's teeth snapped and ground together like an angry dog at the length of his chain, as the "hurrahs" echoed far and near, at the success of the rival, towards whom he entertained such inveterate jealousy, and rising with a bound upon his feet, he said, "Now I'll show ye what a fall is, Peter."

"You'll have to make your standard first, I suppose," observed the razor-grinder.

"Well thought of," rejoined Mike. "I'm like a hungry fish, a little too eager to swallow the maggot."

“Capital!” returned Peter Parkins. “Ha, ha, ha.”

“I must throw two or hold out, and throw one before I can tackle Master Harris,” said the earth-stopper, thoughtfully.

“Those are the laws of wrestling,” replied his companion.

“Then, as you shall share in what I net,” replied the earth-stopper, “be the first of ’em. I sha’n’t,” continued he, “spend much of my strength or wind in casting you.”

“Will ye,” responded Peter, earnestly, “will ye be tender with my poor old bones?”

“If they were made o’ straw,” replied Mike, while a sly smile played about his lips, “I wouldn’t be more mindful of treating ’em;” and as he gave the razor-grinder this assurance, he threw the crushed and battered remains of the hat, which had not been changed within the memory of the earth-stopper’s oldest acquaintance, into the arena.

“Ah!” exclaimed John Hardy, recognising

the wreck and ruin of the earth-stopper's shelter to his head, "we are going to have Mike, I see."

"I'm glad of that," remarked the Squire, "for he's pretty sure to make his standard, and then I shall see the match played that I wish between him and Harris."

Scoffing, jests, and sneers were liberally poured on Mike's devoted head as he strode, with his usual awkward gait, into the ring, both hands buried in the pockets of his trousers, and his shoulders elevated even with his ears. The mirth, however, grew fast and furious, as Peter Parkin's declared himself the acceptor of Mike's challenge; and this was in no way abated by Toby taking a mathematically correct centre of the ring, and squatting himself upon his haunches, to jot down notes of observation.

It might be that the earth-stopper's choler was excited by these manifestations of his unpopularity, and caused him to forget his pledge

to the razor-grinder of "using him tenderly." A suspicion may also exist that Mike had no intention of keeping his word, from the doubtful expression upon his features at the time of plighting it. Be this as it may, no sooner had Peter Parkins signified his readiness, by shaking hands with his opponent, than down he flew flat on his back, with a sound not unlike distant thunder.

The roar of laughter following this sudden and unexpected termination of the razor-grinder's bout, echoed and re-echoed a mile away. Nevertheless, a joke to some may be anything but fun to others, and this appeared to be clearly illustrated in the case of Peter Parkins.

"It wasn't a consent fall, I'll be bound," observed a sturdy yeoman to a companion.

"No," replied the other, laughing until the tears streamed from his eyes, "that I'll be surety for."

With a succession of fairy lights, endless as

the suns to other spheres in the infinity of space, flitting in his eyes, and an indistinct, smoky perception of causes and effects, looming like a farthing rushlight through a November fog, Peter Parkins, after being refreshed by sundry licks from the attentive and philanthropic Toby, rose from the ground. With features stretched to an unnatural length, and of a bilious, ashy hue, the razor-grinder limped from the arena, looking as miserable an individual as ever quitted the scene of his overthrow.

“There’s no occasion for law to be given to Mike,” remarked the Squire, with difficulty getting the mastership of his mirth; “he may as well challenge again at once.”

“Certainly,” replied Tobias Smith, “there’s no occasion for delay;” and, giving the necessary instructions, again Mike’s dilapidated beaver was cast into the ring.

There now followed an inexplicable silence. In each countenance an inquiring gaze was

bent, but for a considerable time there was no palpable reply.

The master of the ceremonies called in vain for an acceptance of the challenge, and it was not until many flowery sentences, spurring dormant valour to the onset, were quixotically delivered by Tobias Smith, that the courage of one of that "numerous companie" could be found at the sticking point. At length, however, one came forth from the crowd, reluctantly, goaded by the taunts of his companions, the very mould of Hercules himself. Tall, broad, and sinewy, he looked equal to cope with aught within the compass of the strength of man; and as he threw out his giant chest, and laid bare the muscular strength of his arms, Mike appeared like a pigmy about to be annihilated in the clutch of a Cyclops.

The earth-stopper grinned, and seemed to publish the remotest back-tooth in his head, as he stepped forwards to the rencounter. The tower of human flesh, in the shape of his op-

ponent, looked uneasy as the gripe was exchanged; and whether from anticipated defeat, or the twinge of torture that his fingers suffered in the grasp, it was observed by many that an expression of pain passed over his visage, and he bit his nether lip until the blood spurted from it.

How, no eye could discover, although many pretended to give the cause for the effect; but no sooner had Mike twined his long, spider claws around the neck of his antagonist, than, like a tree severed by the main root from its earth-bound ties, he tottered, reeled, staggered, and, at last, fell with such stunning force, that it was generally believed Mike had ejected the last spark of life remaining.

Fortunately, however, the embers of vitality were not extinguished, and in a few minutes all such fears were dissipated by the resuscitation of the vanquished, who, with assistance, quitted the ring without waiting to receive the condolence of his disappointed friends.

Mike grinned broader than ever, and the crowd became dumb with amazement. Some whispers and foreboding looks were exchanged concerning the probable fate of the blacksmith's son; and if a few of the maidens' eyes had possessed the power of the basilisk, the earth-stopper would have at once yielded his immaterial spirit to mingle with things through which the beams of the pale lamps of night streak without impediment. Such, however, is the impotency of mortals' power, that, notwithstanding the sincerity of the will, Mike stood as unconcerned, and as scatheless from all harm and danger, as if a shower of blessings and good wishes were being poured upon his head.

Thrice did Tobias Smith inquire with stentorian voice whether there were any more combatants, and, receiving no answer, he called upon the blacksmith's son to stand forward and contest the tempting prize with the earth-stopper.

Readily the summons was obeyed, and as the favourite with the many again made his appearance in the ring, breathless anxiety pervaded through the mass.

As the two stood waiting for the signal to commence, the contrast was very striking. Mike, with his long arms stiffened down his sides, and his head buried between his shoulders, looked like an imp of darkness ; while his opponent threw out his broad and ample chest, and, assuming a bold and becoming attitude, looked the very model of a man, faultless in shape, and resolute.

Eager for the fray, no sooner was the signal given, than the two clutched each other as fast as the hold of a vice would give. Thus locked, they stood for a few moments, without moving a limb or joint, although each thew and sinew were strained to cracking in anticipation. The blacksmith's son, however, began the play by dexterously clasping Mike round the waist, and lifting him clear from the ground.

The plaudits were both loud and general at this athletic feat, and a large majority were sanguine that Mike was about to meet with defeat.

The earth-stopper, however, laughed loudly in defiance, while in this apparently precarious condition ; and although to an inexperienced bystander it might have appeared an easy task to throw him, one skilled in the science would have perceived that Mike had rendered himself safe from anything like immediate danger, by locking a leg round one of his opponent's. Like a cat he came nimbly on his feet, when his antagonist essayed to hurl him to the ground, and, in jeer to the effort, whirled himself two or three times round, and then threw a somerset by way of a finish.

“ He's an active chap,” remarked the Squire, “ and I shouldn't wonder if he bears away the prize.”

“ I really hope Mike may,” replied John Hardy, looking over his spectacles at the sport.

“ I really hope he may,” replied he, “ for that turn-over-heels was quite remarkable.”

“ The chances look more in his favour than I expected to find them,” observed our hero.

The adversaries again commenced the trial of strength and skill ; and the earth-stopper reversed the order of the former bout by beginning the attack. Fixing a grasp round the neck of his opponent, and the other twined about his waist, he hugged him so closely that the face of the blacksmith's son became both purple and livid, and his lower jaw dropped as if undergoing the pain and penalty of strangulation. In vain he tried to break the torturing hold ; and, notwithstanding his sinews and swollen veins stood out like fibres upon a vine leaf, with his herculean exertions, Mike lifted him clear from the ground, and bore him round the ring with little less ease than if he had been a kitten.

During this inglorious exhibition of the public's favourite there was a dead and unbroken

silence. When, however, the earth-stopper arrived with his struggling burden opposite the spot where John Hardy was posted, that enthusiastic little gentleman skipped upon the extreme tips of his toes, and, taking off his low-crowned, broad-brimmed hat, gave a loud and shrill "Hurrah."

It was a solitary cheer; but no sooner given, than Mike, with the condensed strength of his wiry frame, in one terrific effort threw his antagonist whirling above his head like a hoop, and down he came on the flat of his back, as apparently lifeless as a clod of earth.

Grinning with triumph, the earth-stopper looked slowly round at the dismayed countenances, and then, folding his arms, strode from the scene of his victory like some exulting nightmare.

John Hardy again gave his single cheer, and the Squire and our hero clapped their hands loudly; but no other sounds of approbation met the ear.

With attention, and it was given promptly, the blacksmith's son quickly regained his temporarily ejected sensibility ; but it occupied some time to dispel the general gloom caused by his overthrow. At length, however, with Tobias Smith's strenuous exertions, and the aid of the strong ale, to which there were no restrictions as to quantity, something like approaching cheerfulness was regained.

Running in sacks, climbing a soaped pole for legs of mutton, bobbing for rolls soaked in treacle, and suspended on lines, and other old English games, followed, amid shouts and roars of laughter. Then came grinning through a horse-collar ; but, as Mike was the first candidate for the prize, he succeeded in producing so fearful a distortion of features, that no second appeared ; and he again was successful in carrying away the reward.

Dancing round a pole, gaily decked with flowers, to the merry tunes of three of the most renowned of village fiddlers, then commenced ;

and after as hospitable a banquet of substantial dainties as was ever spread to appreciating appetites, it was universally admitted that among all the frolics enjoyed or heard of by the oldest present, not one approached this memorable revel.

CHAPTER VIII.

“ You were used
To say extremity was the trier of spirits;
That common chances common men could bear;
That when the sea was calm, all boats alike
Show'd mastership in floating—”

Mrs. SYKES was puzzled beyond description at the cause of the evident distress suffered by Mrs. Weston on her arrival at the cottage. In vain did that good woman inquire if the ache or pain was centred in the tooth, ear, or abdominal regions.

“ Pray, ma'am,” said she entreatingly, “ let me send for Mr. Jalap, the doctor. He would soon find out what's the matter, and set all to right again in a jiffy.”

“ No, no,” replied the lady. “ He could not render me the smallest service, I assure ye,” continued she, pressing her hands upon her pallid brow and throbbing temples.

“ Your head aches, ma’am ?” rejoined Mrs. Sykes, interrogatively

“ Yes, it does, indeed,” rejoined the lady.

“ Poor dear !” returned the sympathetic Mrs. Sykes, about leaving the room for the purpose of obtaining some of her restoratives, of which she possessed an extensive store for the more common ills to which suffering humanity is exposed. “ I’ll fetch a little hartshorn.”

“ Give yourself not the least trouble about me,” added Mrs. Weston. “ I shall be better in a few minutes if left undisturbed.”

Mrs. Sykes, however, had no ideas of leaving people undisturbed; and, therefore, at once proceeded to torture her patient by holding a vial of stifling liquid to her nostrils, pouring vinegar over her forehead so that it trickled smartingly into her eyes—and other corre-

sponding ways and means of rendering herself as unconsciously disagreeable as possible.

With great stoicism, the invalid submitted to the ordeal, and after a long trial of her patience and fortitude, she was asked by her attendant, "How she found herself then?"

"I'm much better," was the reply.

It always was so. Night or day, when smothered groans of anguish escaped in spite of the effort to prevent them, and cold and clammy beads of perspiration stood upon lip and brow, the low and gentle voice always said, "I am much better."

"It's quite surprising, ma'am," rejoined Mrs. Sykes, upon receiving this assurance, and taking it for granted that it was the result of her skill in pharmacy. "It's quite surprising, ma'am," replied she, "the number of persons I've cured in spite of, what I may call, their very selves. I don't mean to say, ma'am, that I forced 'em to take my herbs and mixtures by cramming them down their crops, like stuffing

turkeys for the Christmas market, or that I rubbed in my ointments and salves while they were tied down on their beds or chairs; but whenever, wherever, and by whomever, I'm consulted, it's a settled rule with me never to take heed to what is said. Take and do what I send and tell ye, is my answer to everybody, and then leave leave the cure in my hands. It isn't often," continued Mrs. Sykes, with a sage nod of the head, "that I meet with opposition; but when I do, I always come off the best. There was Job, my husband, ma'am, last winter sadly afflicted with chilblains; so much so, that he couldn't walk across the room. I recommended a rod of holly to whip them with; but, Job, obstinate and self-willed as he always is, positively refused the treatment. I tried to show him the error of his ways, as I do upon all occasions, by mild and proper talking to; and finding that of no avail, I took advantage of his position, ma'am, when he least thought of it."

The loquacious Mrs. Sykes paused at this stage of her communication, perhaps for breath—perhaps to learn the effect produced by her discourse.

Mrs. Weston gave no reply; but kept her eyes bent steadily on the ground, as if in the deepest abstraction.

“This position, ma’am,” resumed Mrs. Sykes, “consisted in Job’s feet being exposed from the bottom of the bed, at daylight one morning, a habit he had at that time, and which, I’ve no doubt, was the original cause of the chilblains, when I got the bunch of holly, and, sitting upon his shins, tickled his toes well before his unmanly kicks sent me like a pumpkin, ma’am in the middle of the floor.”

“Ah, me!” sighed the invalid.

“I wasn’t injured, ma’am,” returned Mrs. Sykes, taking the ejaculation to her own account. “I’m well made for a little tumble o’ that kind. It’s almost as impossible to bruise me as a feather-bed.”

“ My stay with you has been a very happy one,” observed Mrs. Weston, without noticing the uninteresting communication of her talkative companion, “ and I wish that I could reasonably hope to pass the remainder of my life— Life !” she repeated in a whisper.” Can mine be called a life, or the penance for the one to come ?”

Mrs. Sykes, in a figurative sense, found herself in the clouds at this remark ; but in the belief that a compliment had been paid to herself, or the establishment generally, she felt bound to be eloquent in her reply.

“ I’m sure, ma’am,” said she, “ it makes me proud to hear what you say. Change in name, and change in circumstances with our sex, ma’am, make, oftentimes, wonderful sudden alterations in our friendships. Now, there’s that starch-backed Mrs. Stiggs, when Lucy Crump, was as sociable and merry a girl as ever lived. We,” continued Mrs. Sykes, warming upon her subject, “ that is her and me,

used to vow eternal love and constancy three times a week; but no sooner did she become a Stiggs and I a Sykes, than she became cold as any leg of mutton boiled a month ago. It was never so with the Dabchicks, ma'am. *I'm* a Dabchick. When any one of the Dabchicks changes her name, she's the selfsame person, inwards, as before. *As* a Dabchick," said Mrs. Sykes, "I maintain the same principles. If, ma'am," she continued, dropping her voice, "you will give me credit for what I've now told ye, you'll not hesitate to believe the sincerity of my wish for you to remain with us and make our home yours, ma'am, on whatever terms you please; for the bit and sup, we, thank heaven, shall never want."

"May God bless you!" replied the lady, bathed in tears. "Would that I could accept your generosity; but—no matter what," she resumed, after a pause. "To morrow, I must leave. Business of an urgent nature calls me far from hence, immediately."

“ Indeed, ma’am !” exclaimed Mrs. Sykes, surprised at this announcement. “ I think your present state of body a very poor one for travelling.”

“ In truth it is,” rejoined Mrs. Weston ; “ but still I must strive to bear up against the fatigue. The London coach passes the end of the village early in the morning, I believe,” continued she.

“ The mail does,” returned Mrs. Sykes, “ a little after five.”

“ I regret much that I should disturb you at so early an hour,” added her companion ; “ but necessity compels me to take my departure.”

“ I’m very sorry to hear you say so, ma’am,” said Mrs. Sykes, “ and I am certain Job will be.”

“ Both yourself and husband have been extremely kind and attentive to me during my stay with you,” replied Mrs. Weston, taking a hand of her companion between the pressed

palms of her own ; “and although I cannot make an adequate return for your disinterested friendship, yet be assured I shall ever think of it with the deepest gratitude.”

Mrs. Sykes—good soul!—felt her eyes suddenly become moist at this address, and her under lip and double chin quivered at an alarming rate.

After a strong cup of tea, with a few drops of comfort, as Mrs. Sykes called brandy when taken medicinally, she expressed herself as feeling considerably better.

“And so you must go, ma’am?” said the good woman, looming through the steam of her eighth cup as she raised it to her lips.

“I am obliged to say yes,” responded her companion, “with the very greatest reluctance.”

“Well!” exclaimed Mrs. Sykes, with a sigh, “I’ve heard say this world’s made up of meetings and separations, and it appears to be too true.”

“ Ay,” replied Mrs. Weston, “ it is so indeed. We meet and part, perhaps, never to meet again ; and yet the hope, faint and improbable as it may be, always points to the time when parting friends *may* meet again.”

CHAPTER IX.

“ And do you tell me of a woman’s tongue ;
That gives not half so great a blow to the ear
As will a chesnut in a farmer’s fire ?”

WITHIN a month from the day of the revel, James Sykes led the pretty Nancy Dixon, blushing like the peach-blossom, to the altar, and there, in the presence of their respective friends and neighbours, plighted heart to heart, and exchanged each other’s troth to love and honour, as becomes those sworn to be all in each other, before God and man.

The young couple were now living in a house beautifully situated in a valley in the Hall-park, called the Home Farm ; and although a very secluded spot, it seemed to produce no dullness

of spirits in the youthful wife ; for her laugh and song were to be heard ringing from morn till night, as merry as any bird trilling on twig or spray.

Whether it was the check James formerly held upon his mother's tendency to—in familiar parlance—hen-peck her husband was now removed, or whether Job's habits became daily more offensive to Mrs. Sykes, is a matter of doubt and uncertainty ; but it is quite clear, and an authenticated fact, that that loquacious dame now gave vent to such a torrent of homilies, at all seasons and upon all occasions, that poor Job had little opportunity of quiet enjoyment at any time of the day or night. It would appear that she became even watchful in her sleep ; for let Job but give the slightest symptom that he was not in the land of dreams, and—to use his own graphic simile—she was down upon him like a hawk upon a chicken. His pipe had become a thing to which he was

estranged from want of association, and Job's countenance began to assume so doleful an expression, that any undertaker might have hired him at a high premium for the black yard business.

"I ca'n't stand this any longer," soliloquized he, as he lifted his pipe from the mantel-shelf and blew out a cobweb which some weaving spider had spun in the bowl. "I ca'n't stand this any longer," repeated he, charging it hard and fast with tobacco.

At this moment Mrs. Sykes, who, it is needless to say was absent during this proclamation of revolt, was heard returning; as her footfall became more distinct as it approached, Job's valorous determination oozed gradually out, and by the time she made her appearance the huntsman had replaced the pipe in its wonted place, and looked as tame and meek as any snubbed child.

"An' well, Job!" exclaimed Mrs. Sykes,

elevating her eyelids, and making a slow survey of her husband from head to heel. "What are you standing there for like a booby?"

Job stammered out, "That he didn't know."

"Don't know!" repeated his better half in a shrill voice. "You really ought to be ashamed of yourself."

"What for?" innocently inquired Job.

"*What for?*" returned Mrs. Sykes, in a still more elevated key, and again measuring the figure of her husband in her searching gaze. "There's a question to put to your lawful wife," continued she. "Is there scarcely an hour of the day but you do, say, or think something which you ought *not* to do, say, or think?"

"What have I done *now?*" said Job, alluding more particularly to the time of the error of his doings than to the general nature of them.

"How should I know?" rejoined Mrs. Sykes. "How is it possible for me to tell

what you've been a doing of while my back was turned? No one but a sap would have asked such a question."

Job cast a look to the ceiling; but he did not wink. He was too far gone—too sunk in the depths of despair for that.

"It's a marvel to me," said Mrs. Sykes, after a short pause, "what you can expect—what *can* be your hopes to go on in the method you do, day after day. Whatever I may say seems to be of no good. I talk and point out the morals for your ways; but I might as well speak Welch, or any other foreign language, as far as any good's concerned.

"Then why don't ye hold your tongue, Betsy?" replied Job. "I would, if I were you."

"You would if you were me!" repeated Mrs. Sykes, in a tone between indignation and surprise. "To be sure you would; I've no doubt of that. It's your principles to stand by and let a fellow Christian run the wrong

way, like an obstinate pig, just for want of a little proper perseverance in turning him the right. No, Job," continued she, melodramatically; "don't ask me to hold my tongue. Never expect that. I may succeed, and I may not; but with my latest breath—yes, with my last words—I'll tell ye what you *ought* to do, and what you ought *not* to do."

Job groaned audibly at this threatened infiction.

"It's no use your grunting," resumed Mrs. Sykes. "Nothing can be more unmannerly than such a noise in the presence of a decent, respectable female. Pigs——"

The remark was abruptly broken off, by the rumbling and rattle of wheels, and the appearance of a huge, unwieldy, old, and dilapidated post-chaise, drawn by a single raw and bony flea-bitten gray horse, which was being driven by somebody inside the vehicle, with the assistance of a long pair of reins. The windows were all let down, so that the "wo—

ho, my pretty fellow," came quite clear and distinct.

"That's old Dixon's voice," said Job, exultingly. "Gadzooks!" exclaimed he, bringing the palms of his hands together with a loud crack, "I'm glad of it;" and out he ran from the cottage, like a schoolboy just freed from solitary confinement.

"Here I am," observed the landlord of the Lion, thrusting his scarlet visage out of the carriage, as he arrived opposite the huntsman's garden gate. "Here I am, Job Sykes," repeated he, letting himself down gradually, and with the greatest care, on to the ground. "I'm a man o' my word, as you shall see presently. There," continued the plethoric host, inflating his rubicund cheeks, pitching his round fur cap on to the bridge of his nose, and striding his feet as far apart as was practicable, "what do ye think o' that?"

Edward Dixon referred to the post-chaise, and he appeared to be much interested in

the object on which his attention was riveted.

The huntsman made a cursory examination of the rickety vehicle, and replied, that "it seemed nearly done up."

"Ha!" ejaculated his friend, raising his shoulders to his ears, and dropping them again with a sudden jerk. "You'll find that old po-chay, Job, the best friend you ever had in your life."

As may be very naturally supposed, Job felt a great degree of amazement at this announcement, and he expressed it by staring, in inquiring silence, at the landlord of the Lion.

By this time, Mrs. Sykes had joined the party, and, after a few hurried inquiries touching the state of Mr. Dixon's health, begged to be informed the object for which the crazy carriage was designed, flattering herself with the slight belief that it was intended for her to ride in state to church on Sundays, when either the

ground was damp, or the weather somewhat showery.

“ All in good time,” replied Edward Dixon, patting Mrs. Sykes between the shoulders in a patronising manner. “ You shall hear all in good time, my dear woman,” continued he. “ But lend us a hand first, Job, to take the harness off *Velocipede* here, and I’ll be sworn, no sooner is the bit out of his mouth than he’ll be ready to put a *bit* in again.”

It is imagined that the landlord of the Lion never perpetrated a pun before in his existence; for if he had, with his love of self-preservation, he would not again have ran such imminent danger of instantaneous suffocation from excessive mirth. The effects, with the exception of a dark, mulberry hue being generally diffused over the entire countenance, and the bloodshot appearance of the eyes, were entirely internal. The explosion, however, was not the less violent on this account; and until the high pressure was relieved from pure ex-

haustion, the anxiety of both the huntsman and Mrs. Sykes was painfully acute.

“It won’t do,” gasped Edward Dixon, wiping the tears trickling down his rubicund cheeks on the sleeve of his jacket; “it won’t do for me to be too funny; it won’t, indeed.”

With Job’s efficient assistance, Velocipede was quickly released from the pole, and in due time found himself at liberty to luxuriate on good corn and hay; while his considerate master proceeded to refresh his inward man by making a very sensible impression in a stoup of his friend’s best and most sparkling ale.

Not without a struggle — not without a strenuous tug upon her irresistible powers of curiosity—Mrs. Sykes endeavoured to suppress all allusion to the mysterious post-chaise; but her exertions, in the end, proved futile and impotent. She could not sit at ease and see Job and the landlord pass the tankard from one to the other, with winks and nods, and other confidential signs, minute after minute,

without either making the smallest reference to the subject uppermost in her mind. It was past all bearing, and so at length she intimated her desire to have the secret unbagged without further delay.

The landlord of the Lion cleared his voice, and thus began:—

“For some time, my dear,” commenced he, “I may say, for five-an’-twenty year’, it’s been a thought with me how certain little unpleasantries to you might be got over.”

“Gracious me!” exclaimed Mrs. Sykes, quite charmed with Edward Dixon’s gallantry, “how very kind and oblaeging you are, Sir.”

The good woman was quite sure now for whom the chaise was intended, and she had already a mental view of herself being “the observed of observers,” in all the pomp and circumstance of a close carriage.

“Job is partial to a loud, rollicking song,” resumed Edward Dixon, giving a scarcely perceptible wink at his friend.

“More’s the pity, he is,” replied Mrs. Sykes; “but I’ve put a stop to *that* since you were here. We have no singing now.”

The huntsman heaved a sigh, and added, dolefully, “Not since Jem left.”

“He’s fond of his friend’s company and glass of an evening,” continued the host, in a bland tone and manner.

“Which none but a sot would be,” rejoined the irate dame, darting an angry glance at her husband.

“Then, again,” said the landlord of the Lion, “he loves his pipe.”

“And a dirty, filthy, idle habit it is,” returned she. “Puff, puff, puff, filling the house with stenching smoke, to make me wheeze and cough the livelong day and night! No one but a brute would think of treating a delicate, defenceless woman in such a manner. But,” continued she, “I’ve put a stop to *that* since you were here.”

“Well, my dear!” added Edward Dixon,

“ taking all these objections to my friend Job’s enjoyments on *your* account, not on his, remember, I at last hit upon a plan by which *he* may indulge in his comforts, and *you* may not be annoyed with them.”

Mrs. Sykes began to wax suspicious. There was a waggish twinkle in Ned Dixon’s eye, which created much distrust in the good woman’s breast, and she felt that advantage was about to be taken of her confidence.

“ The po-chay, my dear,” resumed the host, “ that *Velocipede* brought here to-day, has been out of reg’lar work for fifty year an’ more. We’ve done a few jobs of a night with it, when nobody could see the few spokes wanting in the wheels, and the springs tied up with rope; but this was only when an extra was wanted—as in elections, ’size times, and so forth. Now, said I to myself, last night :— Ned, you shall drive *Velocipede* over to-morrow morning with the chay, and make it a present to your friend and connexion Job Sykes,

for the intent and purpose of having its body lifted into the forked branches of the old chestnut tree near his dwelling. And, then, said I, with a short ladder, which he can draw up after him, if he likes, to prevent interference, Job and his companion — for there's room for two — can sit and sing, and drink, and smoke their pipes, without being any trouble to dear Mrs. Sykes, or anybody else."

Notwithstanding the plausibility of Edward Dixon's reasoning, and the considerate turning he, with the craft and cunning of a wily politician, gave the balance in favour of the power he was exercising his best energies to subdue, Mrs. Sykes saw through the design, and essayed at once to overthrow it.

"Mr. Dixon," said she, with an air between offended majesty and bitter chagrin, "don't saddle yourself with the notion that I can't see as far into a brick wall as yourself. I know all, and understand everything. The po-chay, Sir, is nothing more than a plot to upset the proper

powers of a wife to check and stop the transgressions of an erring husband. Don't deny it, Mr. Dixon," continued she, in a voice approaching the sepulchral, "or I shall expect to see your tongue swell into one entire white and watery blister."

The landlord of the Lion was silenced; and Job, although he would have given anything he could spare for the capacity to make a flowery reply, found his tongue locked, and he could say nothing.

Finding that, in familiar phraseology, the right nail had been hit upon the head, Mrs. Sykes resolved to follow up the advantage gained, and continued:—

"It's a painful, a very painful circumstance," said she, "to find oneself deceived by those we have a right to look to for help in the hour of need; but I've said enough, and I shall add only, that I desire to see the po-chay driven to where it came from, or, anywhere, from these premises, at the option of the proprietor,

as soon as it may suit his convenience so to do."

With this, the indignant Mrs. Sykes rose from her chair, and swept out of the apartment.

As soon as she was gone, Edward Dixon gave a long, low, whistle.

"The old ooman," said he, "is too deep a bird to be tricked, and caught with chaff."

"I knew it was all up the country with us long before you came to a check," replied Job, deeply in the dumps at the failure of the speculation.

"I thought," rejoined his companion, "that I was coming the artful over her in tip-top style."

"You don't know her as well as I do," returned the huntsman, "or you'd have dropped such a thought as soon as you would a hot 'tater."

"Well!" added the landlord of the Lion, "if tenderness won't do, we must try a little

gentle violence ; for up the chesnut tree the old po-chay shall go."

" Betsy'll blow the very roof off the house if you oppose her, Ned," said Job, feeling sick at the very suggestion.

" Tut, tut, tut!" responded his friend. " If it hadn't been for your giving her so much rein she would never have taken head, and run, jib, and shy, just as she likes. Howsomever," continued he reflectively, " what's done can't be undone, and so it's no use to think o' that. I've a plan that will cure her, I know."

" What is it?" asked Job eagerly.

" I'll mount *Velocipede* — there's a saddle at the bottom of the po-chay, as if I was going home without the vehicle, and then I've no doubt the good 'ooman will give both you and me the rough edge of her tongue. This she'll keep up for—"

" A week," chimed in the huntsman.

" No, Job, she won't," added Edward Dixon, with the confidence of a man who knows the

correctness of his allegation. "I'll take care o' that. But as your spirit may quail in backing my manoeuvres, I won't tell ye beforehand what they are. Leave 'em in my hands, and I'll show you what may be done with a kicker without bruising her heels either."

"Ah!" exclaimed Job, "that must be part of the bargain, recollect. I wouldn't have the old dear hurt—*really* hurt—to save my four limbs."

"Not a hair of her head shall be touched," replied his companion; "and so don't be afeard."

With this assurance, Edward Dixon, accompanied by Job, quitted the apartment for the purpose of preparing the flea-bitten gray for the departure of his master.

"A pleasant *drive* home, Mr. Dixon," said Mrs. Sykes, with a chuckle, making her appearance at the open casement of her dormitory.

"Thank-'ee, ma'am," replied the host.

“ The *ride*, I’ve no doubt, will be pleasant enough.”

Covertly Job smuggled the saddle from the carriage, so that his wife might not learn the practical denial of obeying the order to the latest possible moment, and to carry out this intent Edward Dixon mounted in the stable ; and it was not until Velocipede stumbled over the sill with his master balanced across his sharp spine that the truth became palpable to that angry, indignant, and astonished woman. We say “ astonished,” because Mrs. Sykes concluded, from the tame and crest-fallen manner in which her positive injunction had been received, that there was not the slightest opposition to be apprehended.

“ Do—do my eyes deceive me ?” said she, drawing the backs of her hands across her optics after the fashion of the tragedy heroine in *The Castle of Horrors*, when she sees the vision of the bloody spider crawling o’er her hopes.

“ I should say,” replied the landlord of the Lion, checking the not-unwilling-to-be-stopped Velocipede under the window at which Mrs. Sykes stood in an attitude of bewilderment, “ that your eyes never were truer since they *were* eyes.”

And with this cool and collected answer, Edward Dixon drove his heels into the flanks of his horse, and hurried, if the pace can be strictly so called, out of the ring and boundary of the premises.

“ Stop !” shrieked Mrs. Sykes, and echo answered “ stop ;” but no heed was taken of the summons.

In the twinkling of a bird's-eye the angry dame stood with arms akimbo before her husband, and shaking her head, as if fixed on pliant wire, “ begged to be informed what was going to be done with the po-chay ?”

“ It's to be left here, I believe,” replied Job, in all humility.

“ For your boozing-box ?” rejoined she.

The huntsman stammered out "not exactly."

"Mrs. Sykes gave a hollow and almost convulsive laugh upon receiving this reply, adding, "I'll show ye what it is to dare to thwart my wishes and orders. Yes," she continued, "I'll give your boozing-box a warming, and such a warming that there shall be no risk of your catching the rheumatics from its dampness."

With this threat, Mrs. Sykes hastened into the stable, and gathering a bundle of dry straw, she crammed it into the door of the luckless old vehicle; and on this, a fagot of furze, drawn from the stack hard by, was piled, preparatory to its destruction.

"Surely," said Job, amazed at what he saw, "you're not going to burn the po-chay!"

"But I am, though," returned she. "Yes, every stick and splinter."

For the first time in his life, Job resolved to resist this act of tyranny, even by force; and as Mrs. Sykes issued from the kitchen with a flaring ember in her hand, he snatched it dex-

terously from her grasp, and trod it under his feet.

“No, Betsy,” said he, “I’ll not stand by and see *that* done. Ned Dixon didn’t bring a po-chay here to be made a fire of.”

For a moment Mrs. Sykes felt at a loss what to do, what to say, or how to act. At length a mop caught her view, and seizing the instrument with both hands, she was about to drop it, with anything but charitable intent, on her husband’s pericranium, when a voice hallooed out, “Here come the *skimmeters*,” and, as if by magic, down fell her arm, and from the expression of passion distorting her features, it changed to one of intense trepidation.

Hallooing, laughing, and a confusion of boisterous noises were now heard approaching, as if a rough, unruly mob was bent on some malicious fun or other.

“You’ve brought all this upon yourself, Betsy,” observed Job. “D’ye hear what’s coming?”

“Oh! oh! oh!” ejaculated Mrs. Sykes, clasping her hands in despair. “Oh, Job! they’re going to skimmet us. I sha’n’t outlive the disgrace. I shall die outright.”

“Get in doors,” returned her husband, taking her by the hand, and leading her into the dwelling. “Be quiet, and they’ll soon leave.”

Humbled and in tears, Mrs. Sykes now entered the house, and just as she did so, it was surrounded by a gathering of the unruly and turbulent, that appear always to be met with when mischief is brewing.

Two of the ringleaders were mounted back to back on a donkey, and in this position—typical of the matrimonial journey through life of Job and Mrs. Sykes—fought, pulled, tugged, kicked, and clawed each other with such a hearty good-will, that the acted scene fell little short of many an one of stern reality. Some were engaged in closely imitating the snarling of quarrelsome dogs, others the cater-

wauling of rival tabbies; a few rattled pieces of crossed wood, significant of the opposite tempers of the couple now receiving a practical lesson of their differences, and everybody was occupied, in various ways, in adding to the din and uproar.

Mrs. Sykes heard all, but saw nothing. With her face buried between her hands, she sat rocking to and fro on her chair, weeping and lamenting.

“That it should come to this!” from time to time she would exclaim, “for a Sykes to be skimmeted. Why was I born to disgrace the family name?”

“Now, now!” returned Job, soothingly; “don’t take on so, Betsy; we all have our faults. I have mine, you know,” continued he, “and if you *have* been a little too hard upon ’em, now and then, I forgive it—God bless ye!”

“What will all the neighbours say?” added she, in a deluge of tears.

“ Confound their sayings,” replied Job, emphatically.

“ What will Mrs. Stiggs say ?” rejoined the not-to-be-comforted dame.

“ Choke Mrs. Stiggs !” rejoined Job.

“ What will the Squire say ?” returned Mrs. Sykes, turning up her tearful visage imploringly to her husband.

“ Nothing,” added the huntsman, respectfully touching the forelock on his brow.

“ And Mr. Hardy ?” said she, bursting out afresh at the thought of retrograding in the good opinion of that angelic, little spectacled individual.

“ Pooh, pooh !” said Job, “ he’ll never think or say a word against anybody or anything.”

“ And our dear young Squire ?” continued the excited dame, “ What will that cherub of a boy—at least, I should say man now—think of my bringing such a stain on the family honour of the Sykes’s ?”

“The young Squire will only laugh at the frolic,” responded the huntsman.

“Laugh!” repeated Mrs. Sykes, bitterly. “Oh! Job, that I ever should live to be laughed at!”

“Fal-the-ral-tit!” returned the huntsman, derisively. “Don’t you laugh and sneer at Mrs. Stiggs and many other of your neighbours, and do ye suppose they, one and all, don’t laugh, sneer, and tittle-tattle of *you* in return? Betsy, Betsy,” continued the matter-of-fact and sensible Job, “never deceive yourself; it’s the worst kind of deception you can be guilty of. Believe what I say, and let this skimming—”

Mrs. Sykes groaned.

“Let this skimming,” repeated the huntsman, “convince ye that what is said and done under your own roof is by no means a sealed secret. People are too apt to consider they wear a mask through which no eye can peep, while their neighbours only hide their faces

under muslin. 'Tis a mistake," continued Job, "and, as much as we may laugh at others, rest assured, we get as much laughed at."

These words sunk into Mrs. Sykes's brain like pebbles in a brook, and she began to feel her own inferiority of judgment.

"I wonder what they're at now?" said the huntsman, as loud "Hurrahs" quickly succeeded each other from without.

Mrs. Sykes could not refrain from taking a stolen peep also at the proceedings; and as she did so, she saw the body of the post-chaise swinging by ropes in the air, and soon afterwards fixed in the great forked branches of the old chesnut tree, amid the cheers and whooping of the crowd.

At this juncture, Mrs. Sykes entertained a shrewd suspicion that Edward Dixon was the leading spirit in the skimming; and although she thought so then, and ever afterwards, she maintained a rigid and unbroken silence concerning her mistrust.

When the post-chaise was firmly fixed in its elevated position, the mob gave three triumphant cheers, and quickly afterwards dispersed.

That night, Mrs. Sykes placed Job's pipe and the tobacco-box on the table, and, mixing a tumbler of potent grog, begged that he would enjoy himself.

CHAPTER X.

“ But love, first learned in a lady's eyes,
Lives not alone immured in the brain ;
But, with the motion of all elements,
Courses as swift as thought in every power ;
And gives to every power a double power,
Above their functions and their offices.”

As soon as our hero had so far ingratiated himself into the best affections of the Squire and John Hardy, as to be transferred from the nurturing kindness of Dame Woodley and her humble cottage to the Hall, a tutor had been provided for him in the person of Mr. Baldwin, the rector of the parish, residing in one of the prettiest and most retired spots that a scholar or bookworm could wish to live in. The parsonage, a low-roofed, snug-looking building,

was situated at the base of a gentle slope, at the back of which a thick plantation of firs acted as a screen to the northern blast, and sheltered the flower-beds, dotted here and there about the dwelling, from the nipping wind. A rapid, noisy, and rippling stream swept over the clear pebbles, within a stone's throw of the house, and here might be seen and heard the speckled trout rise and dash at the party-coloured ephemera hovering in multitudes over the water at sunrise and sunset. A dove-cote stood at the sunny corner of the garden, and a numerous colony of pigeons occupied the tenement, cooing, quarrelling, and making love to each other without intermission. Not far removed was a row of hives, and the thrifty bees had not to wander far to lease their store; for so luxuriantly the flowers grew around, and the woodbine and jessamine crept and climbed in festoons about the walls and eaves of the house, that the air itself was laden with their sweetness.

Here, in this cozy nook, the rector lived, a wise, a virtuous, and a happy man. Of the world, and yet removed far from its strife and struggles, its heartlessness, deception, and ingratitude, he knew but little of the dark side of humanity, and remained contented with his ignorance. Surrounded with old books, kept free from damp and dust, as things of priceless worth, he would sit and study, and reflect upon the great and good, and become better as he reflected. To those pages wherein the immortal thoughts of men are recorded to lead the way like lights in darkness, he turned with reverence, and moulding his life from the best of precepts, he found himself at peace with all mankind; in charity and good-will towards all men.

The apartment appropriated for his study was a dark panelled room with a stained glass window, through which the purple and mellow light streamed in varied tints, and here our hero used to sit and listen to that soft, low

voice, instilling the choicest of knowledge and counsel into his apt and pliant mind.

Mr. Baldwin had been left a widower within the year of his marriage, the child—a daughter—having been the cause of the bereavement of his young, loved, and loving wife. His child, being the sole object of his tenderest care and attention, became his constant companion, and was seldom to be seen absent from his side, either in the hours of study or relaxation.

Long before she could lisp her first infant lesson, little Mary would sit at the feet of her father, with her long, light, silken curls waving upon her shoulders, and her dark violet eyes bent intensely upon an opened page. Thus she would remain, patiently waiting for the hour when both would quit the philosophy of books, to wander in the fields and woods, and watch the gay-winged butterflies, and gather wild flowers from mossy banks, dingle, and dell

Master Tom had not been a regular attendant at the Rectory more than a week, when little Mary made it a rule to meet him at the garden gate, and invariably accompanied him homewards as far as this boundary.

It has often been the subject of remark that the gentle and timid are fond of the bold and resolute; and those possessed of animal courage and daring turn with tenderness to the weak and fearful. This may easily be accounted for from the influence of sympathy, and was doubtlessly the cause of the engendered and growing affection between Master Tom and little Mary. Be the cause what it may, however, they loved as others have done before them, and they never thought of inquiring why or wherefore.

As years rolled on, it never seemed to occur to the mind of the rector that there was any necessity to put restraint or restrictions on the close companionship of Mary and his pupil. To him they were the same boy and girl of a dozen years ago, and he dreamt not of the

sparks and tinder that time prepares in the breasts of the young. And so Mary and her youthful lover grew like the tendrils of a vine, interwoven and clasping each other.

Once or twice, it is true, Mr. Baldwin thought it somewhat strange that Mary should sit in the study for many long hours, and listen to the efforts of his student in solving the problems and theories of Euclid, and composing Greek verses, when she might have been far more pleasurably occupied. The rector, too, chanced to catch Master Tom peeping over the top of his Virgil on one occasion, and making sort of telegraphic communication with his lips to Mary, whose face, upon being discovered in this silent correspondence, became of the hue of the wild poppy. This proved somewhat perplexing to the rector; but quickly forgetting these trifles, light as bubbles, he gave them no second thought.

If Mr. Baldwin, however, exhibited undeniable symptoms of short-sightedness in the

unalloyed and tender attachment between his daughter and Master Tom, there were those who did not evince the same want of perception. John Hardy, with the aid of his spectacles, was the first to discover the state of the case, and, in confidence, to convey the information to the Squire.

“The young dog,” said he, exultingly, “I saw him myself, Harry, pluck a bunch of primroses, and, weaving them into a wreath, crowned little Mary with his own hands, and called her *his* Queen of the Spring. Ha, ha, ha. What do ye think of that for gallantry! But it didn’t end there,” continued John. “After he’d done this, he stood looking at her just as if he was admiring a pretty picture, and then pressed a kiss upon her red, pouting lips, which sounded like the crack of a whip.”

“God bless them both!” replied the Squire. “They’re two young, giddy things; but as free from guile as a couple of angels.”

“That they are,” rejoined John Hardy;

“and I love to see them so happy and kind to each other. Who knows,” said he, “but what it may last, and——”

“Nay, nay,” interrupted the Squire, with a smile checking the galloping enthusiasm of his companion. “We must not anticipate such results so far off. Remember, they are but children.”

It was quite true; they were but children. Still, the intimacy meeting with no interruption, and the exchange of thought and sentiment being unbroken and constant, Mary, when budding from girlhood into womanhood—gentle as ever, beautiful, and warm-hearted—worshipped at the same shrine, that in infancy she bent her first affections to.

The bitter satire of the poet, that, “man to man so oft unjust, is always so to woman” was denied in the return our hero made in the requital for the love borne for him; for now in riper years, as in those long since sunk on the shores of time, the wish, the study, the hope,

and endeavour, was to please and contribute to Mary's happiness.

It was one bright and bracing morning in Autumn, that Mary and her young lover were strolling in the neighbourhood of the Rectory. The blades of grass were just tipped with the hoar-frost, which glittered in the pale rays of the sun like endless gems. The tops of the elms already began to turn yellow, and now and then a sered leaf would whirl to the ground, heralding the decay of nature's spring-tide charms. A few scentless flowers still reared their heads in spite of the sneaping air; but they were the last, lingering blossoms of the year.

"I fear," said Mary smiling, "that now you are going to quit your studies altogether, I shall not see you nearly so often."

"You fear nothing of the kind," replied our hero, placing an arm round her waist, and pressing her gently to his side. "You know that I shall be here daily."

“What assurance have I for that?” rejoined Mary, looking archly in his face.

“My affection for you,” returned he warmly. “An affection whose germs took root in my earliest youth, and which can end only in the last moment of my life.”

“Dear Tom!” said Mary fervently, “How kindly you spoke those words; and I feel quite certain,” she continued, “that they are as true as they are kind.”

“That you may, dearest,” added he; and then there was a seal placed upon the pledge given and received, which frequently was exchanged in discussions of this tender kind.

“I had a dream last night,” observed our hero, after a pause in the conversation, “which somewhat disturbed me.”

“Surely you’ve not grown superstitious of a sudden?” responded his companion.

“No,” rejoined he. “And yet,” he continued, “you will not wonder at a little nervous-

ness it might have caused when you learn the particulars."

"Let me hear them," returned Mary. "You have roused my curiosity."

"I dreamt," said he, "that a female figure, dressed in flowing drapery as white as snow, drew aside the heavy curtains of my bed, and it seemed to be as natural as I now see you. At first the form of her features, and the expression of them, was indistinct; but, as if the light of morning gradually broke, they at length became palpable, and I then saw a face that I never can forget."

"Was it so terrible, dear Tom?" inquired Mary."

"Oh no!" he replied. "It looked so calm and beautiful, and yet so melancholy and wan, that nothing could surpass."

"I feel quite interested," rejoined Mary. "Tell me if it resembled anybody you have ever seen."

"No," said he, thoughtfully. "No one that

I have seen save in my dreams. And yet," he continued, "that face is no stranger to me."

"How so?" asked Mary.

"I can scarcely explain to you," replied her companion. "But as long as I can remember, there has been the reflection of an unknown face impressed in my imagination, and this appeared to me in my vision of last night."

"You have never told me of this before," observed Mary.

"I thought it not of sufficient import," replied he.

"Did the dream last long, and how did it terminate?" inquired Mary.

"After apparently looking at me intently for a few seconds," responded our hero, "darkness again appeared to drop upon and around the figure, and then as gradually to disperse and be lifted from it. Then, instead of the snowy robes, and the young and lovely features that I had seen before, a wrinkled and careworn countenance, with grizzled locks hanging

dishevelled down her cheeks, and her form decked in deep black, met my view. The face seemed to be the same; the difference being between youth and loveliness, age and misery."

"Did it then vanish?" said Mary, deeply interested at the recital of the dream.

"Listen," replied her companion. "With a cold and glassy stare, the figure stood looking at me, for it seemed, some minutes, and then slowly lifting up the forefinger of her right hand, said in a dry and hollow tone, '*I am thy mother; as she was and as she is.*' With this it again became obscure, and, at length, gradually faded away."

"How very strange," observed Mary. "Were you not alarmed?"

"Upon waking," replied her companion, "I found drops of perspiration trickling down my brow and cheeks, and my tongue cleaved dryly to my mouth, and fearing that I might be again troubled with a repetition of my dream,

I sprung from my bed to refresh myself with the morning's maiden kiss, and—— ” he paused and then whispered——“ my Mary's,”

“ Nay, nay,” she rejoined, turning aside her blushing cheeks. “ Tell me what you think of this remarkable vision ; for I can see, strive to hide it as you may, that there is a cloud in your thoughts, which the attempt at gaiety makes the more evident.”

“ I must be honest, in spite of my inclination then,” returned he. “ I will confess,” he continued, “ that, childish as it may sound, my mind and nerves are disturbed and shaken at that which I have now related. With regard to what I think about it, let it be called superstitious folly, or what it may, is this :—my dream was the shadow of a reality both of the past and of the present.”

“ Would that we could obtain some clue to the reality you refer to !” exclaimed Mary, energetically.

“ Ay,” returned her companion. “ It ap-

pears a difficulty beyond our reach. The fate of my poor mother will remain, I fear, a sealed secret."

"And yet an accident may reveal it," replied Mary. "How often do such instances occur?"

"Call them not accidents," rejoined he. "There are inscrutable causes for the most trivial effects as for the most important and momentous; and that which seems the act of mere chance, is as much the control of the All-Governing power, as the evolutions of the earth upon her axles."

"You must not confuse me with your philosophy," returned Mary, with a smile. "My poor little head will not bear the pressure."

At this juncture a footstep was heard approaching, and peering through the dark-green foliage of some laurels, flanking the serpentine walk, the tall, thin person of the rector was perceptible.

"Here comes my father, remarked Mary.

"His bald, silvery head," said our hero,

with a laugh, "flashes through the leaves like a mirror in the sun."

"I will not have him ridiculed," replied Mary. "Let us go and meet the good, dear old man."

CHAPTER XI.

“ An envious sneaping frost,
That bites the first-born infants of the spring.”

IN a thick shower the flakes of snow fell whirling to the ground, wrapping in a bleached mantle the naked boughs of the trees, and burying the ground in one sheet of winter's garb. A stinging wind swept humming through the thorn, and nipped the leaves of the hardy laurel and ivy, until they drooped and curled in his hostile pinch. Chilly birds stood balancing themselves first on one leg and then on the other, chirruping disconsolately in doleful cadence.

It was cold, very cold, and all external

things, both animate and inanimate, gave unequivocal signs of their cheerless condition.

With a badger's-skin cap drawn over his ears, some hay-bands twined round his legs and feet, and a sack thrown over his shoulders, Mike stood pelting diminutive snow-balls at the window of John Hardy's dormitory.

John had just woke from one of those blissful dreams in which his imagination led him to believe, for the nonce, that he and his friend Harry Lawrence, were two fat, chubby boys again, and they were now once more playing marbles, bowling hoops, and flying kites together. It can scarcely be alleged, in strictness, that John felt disappointed to find, at cockcrow, he was not the plethoric child represented in the vagaries of his dream; but still there was a feeling something akin to a miscarriage of hope.

“Dear me!” exclaimed John, becoming conscious of some unusual sounds at his window. “What can be patting so at the glass?”

Perhaps," continued he, raising himself on an elbow, "it's that bob-tailed cock robin."

Another, and another, of the snow-balls, came in quick succession against the panes.

"Gracious!" ejaculated John. "It's somebody throwing at the window. Who can it be?" and with this query he stepped out of his warm bed, and hastened forwards to discover the cause of his disturbance.

On peering through the frosted windows Mike's form was visible; but as a preliminary to throwing up the sash for the purpose of learning the nature of his errand, John muffled himself in a variety of raiment, and when he ventured to brave the cold, his figure bore a striking resemblance to an Egyptian mummy, with the upper division of the face exposed.

"Your pardon, Sir, for disturbing ye," said the earth-stopper, respectfully touching the front of his cap. "But there's a capital walk of snipes in the dyke moor, this morning, and a flock of teal in the dam of the old mill."

John Hardy's teeth chattered as he gave a reflective look at his informant.

"You know, Mike," replied his patron, "that I never did, and never shall, bring one of those extremely quick-flying birds down. "I really believe," continued John, emphatically, "that I might as well shoot at the moon as a snipe."

"I thought, Sir, you would like to try your luck," rejoined Mike, "and so I came to let ye know."

"You're very obliging," returned John Hardy; "but as there's no probability of my getting a sitting shot, it's no use of my going alone."

"Very true, Sir," added Mike.

"The way will be," resumed John, as if weighing a matter of deep import. "to make a little party after breakfast, and join in a general attack."

Mike thought this plan unobjectionable, and expressed himself to that effect.

“Go, therefore,” continued John Hardy, into the servants’ hall, and tell them, from me, to set a good substantial breakfast before ye, with a stoup of ale with the chill off. Mark!” said his patron, in measured terms, “with the chill off, or you may get the whistles on your stomach.”

This was precisely the anticipated success of the earth-stopper’s speculation, and, promising to guard against the likelihood of being visited with the whistles on the stomach, he took his departure with the intent of taking advantage of the hospitable offer.

Within a couple of hours afterwards, Mike, with a somewhat flushed cheek and swaggering gait, conducted the Squire, John Hardy, and our hero, across the Hall-park, on their way to the moor stated to contain a good walk of snipes. Double-barrelled guns and shot belts were slung across the shoulders of each, and a capacious game-bag belted about the person of Mike Crouch.

The frost and snow broke crisply under their tread, and dazzled their eyesight with its brilliancy. The air, too, rasped the tips of their noses to the hue of the sloe-berry, and squeezed the tears, cold as icicles, down their cheeks. It was cold, very cold.

“Do what I will,” remarked John Hardy, puffing upon his benumbed fingers with great perseverance, “I can’t keep feeling in my extremities.”

“Egad!” ejaculated our hero, touching, without being observed, the elbow of the Squire. “I don’t wonder at that. *Old boys* must expect to feel the effects of age.”

“Ha, ha,” laughed the Squire. “Ha, ha, ha.”

“Ha, ha,” returned John Hardy. “Ha, ha, ha.”

John had twined a great shawl round his throat and mouth for the more effectual preservation against the influence of the cold, and as he spoke, his voice, comparatively speaking sounded like a muffled bell.

“ I saw a skein of geese pass very low this morning, Sir,” observed Mike to the Squire.

“ They were making for their usual haunts, the lower water meadows, I suppose,” replied the Squire.

“ Bless me !” ejaculated John Hardy, “ I wish I had known that. If you recollect, Harry, I was singularly fortunate at a shot I made there last year.”

“ By cutting the tail out of one, and frightening the rest away,” added our hero.”

“ Tom !” exclaimed John Hardy, coming to a halt in his walk, and peering over his spectacles. “ How can you step aside from the narrow but straight path of truth ?”

“ Why, you didn’t stop one,” replied the Squire.

“ That may be all very true,” rejoined John, “ as far as not stopping one is concerned ; but I most decidedly tickled the majority of the flock, besides despoiling a veteran gander of his tail.”

The Squire, our hero, and Mike Crouch, broke, simultaneously, into a violent roar of laughter, at this rejoinder of John Hardy's; and the extreme gravity with which this ebullition of mirth was received was rather an incentive than a check to its continuance.

"Upon my veracity, gentlemen," observed John—and John comprised Mike Crouch in his address. "Upon my life, gentlemen," repeated he, maintaining his seriousness by an effort, "you seem to find a fund of amusement in my wild-fowl shooting. However," continued he, "we shall see who bears the bell to-day."

Close to the heels of the Squire, a couple of jet-black spaniels trotted, and, both being of a plethoric habit, panted and struggled awkwardly through the snow,

"I fear that Dash and Flora will be of little use to us," remarked he. "They are so horribly fat."

"It will be their flesh alone that prevents their being of service to us then," replied our

hero; "for better dogs never entered a field for snipes and woodcocks."

"But they can scarcely run now," rejoined the Squire, "much less hunt, and for their condition, I believe, we are indebted to you, John."

"Why, certainly," returned John Hardy, "I've been in the habit of attending to Dash and Flora's natural wants. They're exceeding pressing at meal-times for my tit-bits and superfluous gravy, and yielding, as I have done, to their solicitations, they decidedly are become extremely corpulent."

"Everything you attend to becomes fat and lazy," observed his friend.

"No, no," expostulated John. "Don't say everything, Harry. Look at Blossom now, continued he; "you can't call him lazy, although somewhat bulky."

"Not lazy?" ejaculated the Squire. "I never saw a greater drone."

"What, Blossom a drone?" rejoined John

Hardy, in amazement. "Only let Mike run behind him with a cudgel down hill, and then tell me he's a drone. That's all!"

"Yes," added our hero slyly. "But tell us what he would do up a hill without the cudgel?"

"I should say," replied John, "the probabilities are that he would stand perfectly still."

It was quite impossible to withstand the quiet humour of John Hardy this morning, and so his companions laughed at each succeeding exhibition of it more heartily than before.

"I hope," observed the Squire, as they passed at some short distance from a herd of well-conditioned deer leisurely pulling at a row of racks filled with sweet hay, "that Morgan has supplied them with plenty of oats this morning, for they can't get a blade of grass."

"I saw him do so," replied our hero, "and was much amused at the greediness of that

stag there," continued he, [pointing to one of the largest of the number. "He followed the truck, in the endeavour to thrust his jaws into the bulk, and by the time it became empty there was scarcely a grain left."

"Grasping at the shadow and losing the substance, eh?" rejoined the Squire.

Upon leaving the park and crossing some fallow fields which resisted the pressure of their tread as if walking on the rugged rock, the shooting party entered a low moor, in which a few, warm springs rose and bubbled over the surface. Rushes, and tall, rank, wiry grass grew in large patches for a considerable distance, and reared themselves above the hard brittle snow, while their roots were buried in black and oozy mud, kept soft by the water continually flowing through them.

It was the place of all others for snipes and suchlike wintry denizens of the swamp, and no sooner had the spaniels been "hey'd off" than

Flora wagged her silky tail, and with a quest flushed a jack-snipe close to John Hardy's dexter foot.

" Bless my soul ! " exclaimed he. " What's that ? "

" Shoot, shoot ! " cried the Squire, energetically.

" Shoot ! " repeated John Hardy, in the most collected tone and manner possible to be imagined, " what use, Harry, would there have been in my wasting powder and shot at such a little, fast, dodging bird as that ? "

" Why, it was a jack-snipe, " rejoined the Squire, " and a capital shot for you. "

" I don't deny its being a jack-snipe, " returned John deliberately ; " but as to the bird presenting a *good shot*, I must beg to express a very different opinion. "

" The bird rose close to you, " said our hero.

" Yes, but I didn't see it sitting, " added John ; " and unless I do this, it's quite im-

practicable for me to obtain an aim with anything like a probability of success."

At this moment a couple of snipes rose together within easy range. Bang, bang, roared the pieces of the Squire and our hero, and down fell the fleet-winged birds at one and the same moment.

"Down charge," hallooed the Squire, and in an instant the plethoric spaniels were crouched upon the ground.

"Obedient animals!" observed John Hardy, admiringly.

"It's not often that you see spaniels so steady as that," returned their master; "but without they are so you had better be without their company at snipe shooting. Hey off," continued he, upon the completion of priming, and away the dogs ran to the order.

Ranging within gun shot, and scouring over every inch of the ground, there was little chance of missing anything that might be

ensconced within the flags, tall rushes, and rank grass growing in profusion around. Every now and then, a snipe would be flushed and with a loud "scape" try to get from the vicinity of danger ; but by far the greater number were cut from air to earth in the attempt, amid the ejaculations of astonishment and delight of John Hardy.

"It's quite wonderful," said that little man, "how you manage to obtain an aim so readily. I positively believe," continued he, "that it would occupy nearly three minutes for me to effect a sight at the barn door if provided with a pair of wings."

Both the dogs were now busily engaged in threading some thick and sered reeds, bent to the ground with the snow clinging to them, when a large, long-legged bird rose majestically from the middle of the patch, and flapped his broad wing over John Hardy's head.

"Goodness!" ejaculated he, bewildered with astonishment, "It's an eagle."

“ Let drive at him,” shouted the Squire who was some short distance out of gun-shot, “ it’s a bittern.”

In accordance with this direction, John brought his gun to his shoulder, shut both his eyes, and pulled the trigger.

At the same time our hero levelled at the bittern, and fired simultaneously with John Hardy ; but one report could be heard, and down the bird plumped, with a fractured pinion.

To say that he was *amazed* at witnessing the effect of his own imagined skill, would poorly convey the impression created on the mind of John Hardy. To say that he *triumphed* in the supposed result of it would inadequately express the joy glowing in his breast.

“ I’ve shot it ! I’ve shot it !” he exclaimed, throwing down his gun, and rushing in pursuit of the wounded victim.

Mike and the spaniels, too, joined in the run through the boggy waste ; but the Squire and

our hero remained quiet spectators, if laughing heartily can be admitted an exception, in a quiescent state.

Running with great speed, dodging actively among the rushes, and occasionally using his wing to flap over them, it was some seconds before any likelihood of a capture took place. Dashing through the mire, however, heedless of all consequences, Mike and the dogs quickly forced the bittern to extremities; and had he not made an adroit double, a sturdy blow from Mike's cudgel would have quickly ended the matter.

"Here he is! here he is!" hallooed John, flushed with excitement, as he made a grab at the bird; but as he did so, a loud "Oh!" was heard, followed by a succession of similar exclamations.

The attacked had now become the attacker. Pecking at John Hardy's legs, the bittern, as when wounded he invariably will, drove his strong, sharp-pointed bill at the most vul-

nerable point of John's body; but more especially in the rear.

"Murder," halloed John, "murder. He'll murder me, Harry; he will, indeed!"

"Take care of your eyes," returned the Squire, seriously, as he strode forwards to the rescue.

The earth-stopper, however, was before him, and, as the revengeful bird had just withdrawn his bill from that part of John's frame, known as the local seat of honour, for the purpose of renewing the attack, a crack on the cerebrum left him at the mercy of his captors, which was extended to him in the form of an instant and summary execution.

"You're not hurt, I hope," said the Squire to John Hardy, who stood rubbing the injured division of his body with a very rueful countenance.

"Thank heaven, no!" replied John. "That is," continued he, "not to any extent. But what an escape, Harry!"

“You’ll be careful for the future,” replied his friend, “in approaching a winged bittern, I’ll be answerable.”

“That you may,” rejoined John Hardy. “I wouldn’t go near one again, if I were to shoot twenty.”

“You think that you shot this one?” returned the Squire, interrogatively.

“*Think!*” repeated John, emphatically. “Can there be a doubt about it?”

“I should say,” replied the Squire, drily, “that there can be no *doubt* about it.”

“Precisely so,” added John, with perfect satisfaction; “exactly so. Those are my sentiments about the matter.”

“The young Squire, glad of an opportunity of any pleasure or gratification to his good, old friend, put forth no claim of participation in the achievement, and thus the honour remained sole and undisputed.

The snipes having been killed or driven

from the moor, a movement was made for other quarters.

“ We shall meet with the teal below the mill-dam, I expect,” observed the Squire, “ unless I am mistaken.”

“ They were above it this morning, at day-break, Sir,” replied the earth-stopper.

“ How far ? ” inquired his master.

“ About half a mile,” responded Mike.

“ We shall be sure to find them, by drawing up the stream,” rejoined the Squire, “ and therefore we’ll make sure by stretching from the bottom.”

Just as they were quitting the swamp, one of the spaniels sprung into a clump of straggling briars, and out flew a small, dark bird, very like a moor-hen. With its legs stretched awkwardly down, it winged its flight slowly for some eighteen or twenty yards, and was about to drop again into a thick bush, when our hero pressed trigger, and a few black fea-

thers blown back by the wind, told the correctness of his aim.

“It’s a bilcock,” remarked the Squire, taking the dead bird from the hand of Mike, “and if cooked just like a woodcock, is the most delicious morsel that’s placed upon the table.”

“I’ve ever considered it a bird unfit for anything, save to puzzle and weary your dogs,” remarked our hero.

“In that case, Tom,” replied the Squire, “order the cook to give you a proof of his quality by sending this bilcock, dressed in his best style, for your especial supper, in the course of a week, and I shall hear a very different account of your ideas of its utility.”

In something short of a mile the party came to a narrow, but swift-running brook, thin, transparent cakes of ice clung to the banks, and floated down the stream; and, here and there, a bramble, laved by the water, was clogged with the frigid substance.

“Come to heel,” said the Squire, as the

spaniels evinced an eagerness to hunt the banks for whatever they might contain. "Come to heel," repeated he; "we must be wary in our proceedings now."

In silence they continued their walk for some time without meeting with the teal, and their hopes of so doing began to flag, when Mike called out, "Mark!" and, skimming round the sudden turn of the stream, the wing of a teal was seen to flash.

The Squire brought his gun to his shoulder, but quickly recovered it, saying, "The chance was ten to one against my bringing him down, and I expect there are more not far off."

Scarcely had he made the remark, when a couple of teal rose from some frozen sedges, and were skimming, like fast-flying woodcocks, down the stream, when both were stopped by the unerring aim of the Squire and our hero.

"Magnificent!" cried John Hardy. "It really is magnificent to see such an exhibition of skill!"

Flora, who was an excellent retriever, at the mandate of her master, plunged immediately into the water, and picking up the floating birds in her mouth as tenderly, as Mike graphically termed it, "as if they'd been hot 'taters," and without ruffling a feather, made her way to the shore. Perhaps, from an indulgence in the pleasures of imagination, or more probably from a reminiscence of John's tit-bits and gravy, Flora, instead of proceeding to the spot occupied by the Squire, in accordance with her duty, trotted to where John Hardy was standing, and dropped the teal, with sundry wags of her tail, at his feet.

"Pretty creature!" said he, rewarding Flora's compliment with many taps on the head; "she thinks," continued he, patronisingly, "that having shot the bittern, I must have shot the teal."

"Her powers of discrimination are very great," replied the Squire.

“Without doubt,” rejoined John; “without doubt, pretty creature.”

Still keeping on the verge of the brook, in the expectation of meeting with more of the smallest of the duck tribe, the party continued to walk. For some distance nothing presented itself, and, at length, John Hardy, becoming wearied with the monotony of doing nothing, and seeing nothing done, gave a loud “Halt.”

“Who said Halt?” asked the Squire, turning upon his heel to the order.

“I,” replied John, flattering himself that he wore a remarkably fierce look, worthy of a great commander.

“We wait your further orders, Sir,” rejoined the young Squire, resting the butt of his gun upon the ground.

“Then who’s for cherry-bounce?” returned John, extracting a large leathern flask from one of his pockets, and holding it up for the admiration of general beholders. “Or,” continued he, after a slight pause, “if a stronger

liquid be preferred, here is——” and as he spoke he produced a corresponding vessel from a pocket in juxtaposition—“a choice drop of usquebaugh.”

“What a thoughtful boy you are,” said the Squire, taking the last-proffered refreshment, and lifting it to his lips.

“Was I ever otherwise than a thoughtful boy?” returned John Hardy, handing the other flask to our hero.

“I prefer the usquebaugh,” replied the young Squire.

“No, no,” expostulated John. “It’s much too strong for children. Cherry brandy,” continued he, “is a stimulant in a milder form.”

“Children!” ejaculated the Squire, at the conclusion of a “Ha,” ejected by the power of the dram. “You don’t call Tom a child, do ye?”

“Of course I do,” replied John. “He was an infant less than twenty years ago.”

“But he shaves now,” rejoined the Squire.

This observation appeared to possess an immense store of fun to John Hardy; for he laughed so long and inwardly, that the tears chased each other in streams down his face.

“Come,” said the Squire, “let us proceed;” and, after the remainder in both the flasks had been drained to the last drop by Mike, the party resumed their sport.

For some five hundred yards they continued up the banks of the brook without flushing more of the teal; but upon turning one of the many precipitate bends in the stream, three couple rose on the wing at the same time. Two fell over the right and left barrels of the Squire’s gun, and one dropped to our hero’s account.

“With a little lemon juice and cayenne pepper,” remarked John Hardy, picking up one of the birds as it fell, fluttering in death, on the edge of the water, “what a charming dish you will make, to be sure!”

“Come, I think that will do pretty well,”

said the Squire, "for one morning's work. Six couples of snipe, two couples and a half of teal, a bittern, and a bilcock."

"Amazing fine sport," returned John; "and if I cannot claim killing the greater number, I can the *largest* of the number."

"So you can, John," added the Squire; "and now we will bend our footsteps homewards."

CHAPTER XII.

“O, world, thy slippery turns! Friends now fast sworn,
Whose double bosoms seem to wear one heart,
Whose hours, whose bed, whose meal, and exercise,
Are still together, who twin, as 'twere in love
Unseparable, shall, within this hour.
On a dissension of a doit break out
To bitterest enmity—”

“WALK in Peter, walk in,” said Mike Crouch, as he threw back the faggot forming the entrance to the kennel, and seeing the form of the razor-grinder standing before it, with Toby squatting at his feet.

Peter Parkins gave a dry cough, and replied ambiguously that, “he didn't know that he should.”

Toby gave an emphatic sneeze, as much as to say the matter must be further considered.

“ Oh ! ” rejoined the earth-stopper, with a grin, “ you haven’t decided, eh ? ”

“ It’s some time, ” returned Peter, “ since we’ve met. ”

“ Yes, ” added Mike ; “ but we shall soon part again if you’re going to keep me long in the cold. ”

“ It’s a day or two more than ten weeks, ” said Peter, without noticing the cool and careless remark of the earth-stopper.

“ Indeed ! ” replied Mike. “ I haven’t kept a tally of the time. ”

“ My bones have, ” briefly rejoined Peter.

Toby made a feeble whine, by way of conveying his sympathy with his master’s afflictions.

“ Bones ? ” repeated the earth-stopper, pretending unconsciousness to the allusion. “ How so ? ”

“ They left off aching yesterday, ” responded Peter Parkins.

“ And when did they begin ? ” considerably asked Mike.

“ At the moment my back met the ground from the *friendly* fall you gave me at the revel,” answered Peter, satirically.

“ Ha, ha, ha,” laughed Mike. “ I remember what you’re pointing to now. It certainly seemed a little too rough play on my part,” continued he.

“ *Seemed !* ” repeated the razor-grinder. “ There was no false appearance about, it I’ll be sworn.”

“ So you think, and, perhaps, not without some cause,” rejoined Mike ; “ but I can explain that trifle. Walk in.”

“ A trifle to one man may be a serious matter to another,” philosophically remarked Peter Parkins, still exhibiting symptoms of unwillingness to accept the invitation to enter the earth-stopper’s rude dwelling.

“ I don’t deny that,” returned Mike. “ To end all palaver, however,” continued he, “ are

you coming in or not? Because, if ye are, there's a rasher of bacon frizzling on the fire, and a gallon of spirit in the jar, which never paid a farthing duty, at your service. If not, I shall shut the door."

"You're rather short with an injured friend," observed the razor-grinder in a dogged manner.

"No, I'm not," said Mike. "What can I say more? Keep out, or come in—that's your choice. I've been plain enough in the offer, haven't I?"

"Quite so, Mike, quite so," replied Peter Parkins. "No one could quarrel with you on that head."

"In that case," rejoined the earth-stopper, "say which it's to be."

"We've been old friends for some years—"

"That's no reason we shouldn't quarrel," interrupted Mike. "The best of friends do that now and then."

"I'm aware of that," said Peter, yielding gradually like a snowball in the sun.

Toby, quite satisfied that his master intended to embrace the proffered hospitality of Mike Crouch, anticipated his acceptance by running into the kennel and sprawling himself before the crackling faggot on the hearth, at the same time gratifying his olfactory nerves with a succession of epicurean sniffs at the bacon before mentioned.

“It’s too cold to stop here any longer,” returned the earth-stopper. “Come in, my old poultice, and I’ll take the cramp out of your bones and brains.”

Impossible to withstand this pressing, if not refined invitation, the razor-grinder at once struck his colours, and once more cast his shadow across the threshold of the kennel.

“Sit there,” said Mike, rolling the block before the fire. “I see your teeth chatter.”

“I really am a little chilled,” responded Peter, occupying the seat.

“Let me give ye a dram,” rejoined the earth-

stopper; "I'll make the blood tingle in your toes and fingers in a jiffy."

Without anything like a murmur or dissent from this proceeding, Peter Parkins permitted a liberal quantity of the fiery liquid to be poured from a stone bottle into a horn, and forthwith transferred to the interstice between his lips and stomach.

"Isn't it rasping, stinging, blazing stuff?" inquired Mike, enthusiastically, as the tears stood in his friend's eyes from the potency of the spirit, denying a ready utterance to his tongue. "It puts me in mind," continued he, "of a hedgehog being jammed down one's throat."

"It—it—it—" gasped the razor-grinder, "certainly does put one in mind of a hedgehog—old file—or something o' that sort. I never felt such a scraper in the whole course of my life."

"And yet," resumed he, smiling with self-conceit, as he gurgled a corresponding measure

into the drinking cup, and holding it above his head, "it only shows what practice will do;" and with this he jerked the whole of the contents down his throat, and immediately gave a long, loud, and shrill whistle.

"What a lining you must have!" observed his companion. "I thought my—" and he tapped himself significantly on the breast, "was proof against anything like, what I may call, *surprise*; but it's a baby's, compared to yours."

"Ha!" exclaimed the earth-stopper, drawing his breath through his teeth with a hiss. "I could drink anything except fire itself." "That," continued he, "might scorch my in'ards."

"It's a great thing," returned Peter Parkins, "to be possessed of such materials. I wish I could say as much; but—" and then he shook his head despondingly.

"You're a tender chicken, are ye?" added Mike.

“I’m becoming one,” replied his friend.
“There was a time when I was as hard as a brick; but my poor old bones, now-o’-days, tell a very different tale.”

“They’ll come all right again next summer,” rejoined the earthstopper; “it is but a little touch o’ the cramp and rheumatism.”

Peter rubbed his shoulders, and added,
“With the bruises, mayhap.”

“You’ll never forget those bruises, I s’pose,” said his companion, laughing.

“I’m afraid,” replied the razor-grinder,
“that they’ll never let me.”

“Ha, ha, ha,” rejoined Mike. “Ha, ha, ha. It was a buster, I must confess.”

“And to serve an old—”

“Sly, oily, slippery rogue so!” interrupted the earth-stopper, in a reckless humour; “it was certainly a little too bad.”

“Well, well!” rejoined Peter Parkins, in no way offended at the appellation bestowed upon him; “if I am a rogue, what are you, Mike?”

“As big a one, I hope,” replied his companion. “For,” continued he, “although there may be some damn’d rogues on this earth, I won’t admit there’s a damn’der than myself.”

“In that case,” rejoined the razor-grinder, “rogue ought not to split on rogue. There’s great danger honest men will come of their own when that takes place.”

“Let’s have none o’ your morals,” returned Mike, “Come; the bacon’s done.”

Lifting the crackling rashers from the embers by those familiar instruments—preliminary inventions to forks—his fingers and thumbs, on to a couple of thick slices of bread, placed upon the rough board y’clept a table, Mike invited his friend to commence the repast by unceremoniously telling him to “gnaw away.”

During the repast, Toby sat upon his haunches, bestowing alternate looks upon his master and Mike, and adroitly catching the scraps which, from time to time, were thrown for his particular use and benefit.

“Have you had any windfalls since we last met?” inquired Mike.

“Not one,” replied the razor grinder, as well as the wedge of bacon and bread in his mouth would permit.

“Humph!” rejoined his companion, reflectively. “Ten weeks is a long time for you not to pick up what many men would give good reasons to let alone.”

“It is,” returned Peter Parkins; “but I haven’t had a bit of luck lately.”

“Not so much as a stray pig, eh?” said his friend.

The razor-grinder coughed, but returned no answer. Perhaps a fragment of the material under discussion stuck in his throat.

“I say,” repeated his friend, “not so much as a stray pig, eh?”

“Why, as to that,” said Peter, with ill-concealed reluctance, “you shouldn’t give way to questioning folks too particularly. There are little family matters and delicate subjects not

to be inquired into by the disinterested at all times."

"Very true," replied the earth-stopper; "but I thought Mrs. Sykes's sucking porker might have escaped your recollection."

"No," rejoined his companion. "I wasn't aware that you were acquainted with that trifle."

"I guessed into whose wallet it had gone," returned Mike, "when I heard you had been in the neighbourhood, and it was missing."

"You might have made a worse one," carelessly added the razor grinder.

"I thought so," said his friend. "Why didn't you bring it to the kennel? You know I'm a capital cook."

"I hadn't got over the bruising sufficiently at that time," replied Peter, "to share such a tit-bit as that proved to be;" and, as he finished the sentence, he smacked his lips with a pleasurable reminiscence of the feast.

"Ha!" rejoined the earthstopper; "if we

bear malice in the heart, we should never bear malice in the stomach."

The meal being concluded, and Toby having resigned himself to the land of Jack-o'-dreams, in a position which monopolized the best position before the fire, his master remarked, that "there was a little matter of business which remained unsettled."

"What's that?" shortly asked the earth-stopper.

"I, by agreement, was to stand in for the wrestling prize," replied the razor-grinder.

"To be sure you were," rejoined Mike.

"I was to have a third, I believe," meekly returned his companion.

"Half, if ye like," added the earth-stopper.

"You're very generous——"

"That is, of what's left," interrupted Mike.

"And may I ask what that is?"

"And be told," flippantly answered his friend: "the remains in that stone bottle. The rest," continued he, "is——" and he

conveyed the sense of the remainder of the sentence by blowing the tips of his fingers.

“You’re not in earnest?” remarked Peter Parkins.

“Never more so than when I flung that pretty boy, the blacksmith’s son, a fall he’ll remember the longest day he lives,” replied Mike.

“Then you’ve broken your word,” rejoined Peter, angrily.

“No, I’ve not,” returned the earth-stopper. “I told you”—and his eyes twinkled as he spoke, and he could scarcely forbear from giving vent to his pent-up laugh—“I told you that I would share the prize after the wrestling, and at our first meeting here, I am ready to do so.”

“But the prize meant the whole of your gains,” pleaded Peter Parkins.

“Then you should have come before they were spent,” added Mike.

“In what way have you made ducks and

drakes of so much money?" inquired the irate Peter.

"Drinking your speedy recovery to health," replied the earth-stopper.

"I see through it all now," rejoined the razor-grinder, rising hastily from his seat; "you threw me that fall so that I might not be able to make my claim before it was too late."

"No, no," said Mike, "don't chalk that on my slate."

"But I will," cried Peter. "It's true, and you know it."

"Why you've set your hackles up, man!" coolly responded the earth-stopper, filling the horn again from the stone bottle. "Wil't drink?"

"Never with you again," rejoined Peter Parkins.

"You have your choice, then, to leave it alone," added Mike, emptying the cup himself.

The razor-grinder strode to the entrance of

the kennel, and, kicking the fagot from it, turned upon his heel and said, "Remember, I owe *you* a fall, and I'll pay ye before long."

"Ha, ha," laughed Mike Crouch. "Ha, ha, ha."

CHAPTER XIII.

“ Tu-whit, to-who, a merry note,
While greasy Joan doth keel the pot.
When all aloud the wind doth blow,
And coughing drowns the parson's saw ;
And birds sit brooding in the snaw,
And Marian's nose looks red and raw ;
When roasting crabs hiss in the bowl,
Then nightly sings the staring owl ;
To-who ;
Tu-whit, to-who, a merry note,
While greasy Joan doth keel the pot.”

THE petition of Job Sykes, frequently and fervently made, that the ice-bound chains of winter might speedily be broken, seemed in no likelihood to be acceded to with that speed which his ardent expectation led him to desire. Day followed day, and still the frost continued

in all its unabated severity. In vain the huntsman sought information from the almanac containing every authentic information concerning the diurnal regulation of the weather, and which seemed as directly opposed to the truth as the poles are to each other. In vain he glanced at the old rusty weather-vane on the roof of the Hall, twenty times an hour, for a change in the wind. There it remained, fixed to the north-east, without the perceptible alteration of the hundredth part of a point. In vain he crept from his warm bed, in the dead and silent hour of the night, noiselessly as a mouse, so that he might not disturb the profound repose of his better half, to feel the corner of the damp towel suspended out of window, and learn from its horny crispness, or the reverse, whether his hopes were gaining strength, or his disappointment confirmation. Job, with praiseworthy patience, continued his tests; but there was a sameness about them, which amounted to monotony.

“It’s no use,” said he one morning, closing the door of the outer court of the Kennel, “I’ll not pray any more concerning *this* matter. The frost won’t break, say what I will. The hounds are getting fleshy, the horses out of condition, and the season’s running out with but twelve brace of masks to score. It’s enough to make a man swear a little,” continued the huntsman; “but I won’t.”

With this praiseworthy decision, Job took his way homewards, in gloom, but not in anger.

It can scarcely be stated by what means, but it was generally known in the neighbourhood of the Hall, that there would be, what was called, “a snow frolic,” on the large store-pond in the park, on this particular morning. Many of the hardy “sons of the soil,” being out of work from the inclemency of the season, resolved to take advantage of the opportunity for enjoyment, and at an early hour a motley crowd, of all ages, began to collect on and near the frozen sheet of water.

“Come, John,” said the Squire, endeavouring to tug an obstinate strap through a buckle, “put on your scates.”

“I can’t make up my mind to do so, Harry,” replied John Hardy, gravely.

“I thought you had promised Tom to make a trial,” rejoined his friend.

“It was not exactly a promise,” returned John. “If it had been, I should not have considered myself at liberty to have changed my mind. I certainly did say,” continued he, “that I might, with the young Squire’s assistance, just learn what the sensation of scating was; but I think I’d better not.”

“There’ll be no danger of your getting a fall, if he holds you up,” added the Squire, completing the task of putting on his scates.

“I’m not convinced of that, Harry,” sagely replied John. “I don’t see how he is to prevent my heels from running under me, in case they should *insist* upon it.”

“Where has Tom gone!” asked the Squire.

“ To the Rectory, I expect,” res ponded John, “ for the express purpose of meeting Mary and her father.”

“ They’ll be here presently,” returned the Squire ; and then, although age had now curved his once straight and upright spine, he glided off boldly, and skimmed along the clear, smooth surface of the ice, with the spirit of young and youthful days.

Right and left the throng separated, as the Squire approached and passed fleetly and lightly through the congregated masses ; and hats were lifted and bows made, scraped in all the honesty of deep respect. There was no cringing ; no bent neck, and cunning, sneaking eyes ; but men looked like *men*, and paid their happy deference with sincerity.

That such causes were more frequent ! If to those whom Fortune has proved kind in her casts of favours would but think of the real value of the tribute of *one* grateful bosom—of one bright, sunny smile conveying the secret

thanksgiving in the heart, how often would the invaluable pleasure be bought. *Aye, bought!* That is the term. Bought by the dealer in, and dealer with, to render both, in each other, the blesser and the blessed. We are told that men have been, are, and will be selfish. It may be so. Let the most selfish that ever crushed the bossom of a daisy, make one trial of a generous deed, and should it not return him interest fair and beautiful, but no faith in:—
“he that giveth to the poor lendeth to the Lord.”

There they were, a merry crew. Snow-balls flew in showers around, and wide long slides were cut and follwed up in strings of hallooing, laughing companies. Now a false movement would be made by some leading bungler, and over a score would fall in a heap of kicking, struggling legs and heels. Shout rose above shout, and the fun grew fast and furious, when John Hardy was seen to “gather himself up,” and prepare for an attempt on one of the slippery lines.

“Stop! mind, get off there!” cried twenty tongues; and by the time that John was prepared to start, there was a clear course and a dead silence.

Under his spectacles, over his spectacles, and through his spectacles, John Hardy examined the slide as a preliminary to making the attempt; and when he appeared to have summoned his resolution to the sticking-point, and was about to make a start, a light, clear, ringing laugh operated as a stoppage to the essay.

Upon looking to the quarter whence the sound emanated, John Hardy perceived the near approach of the young Squire, Mary, and the Rector.

“Surely you are not going to run such imminent danger of a fall, Mr. Hardy!” exclaimed she, suppressing the mirth which played about her lips and flashed in her clear, sparkling eyes.

“Why, my dear,” he replied, “I certainly was about trying whether I could slide or not.

I used to enjoy the sport immensely when I was a boy."

"But remember, my dear Sir," expostulated the Rector, "what we can do in our young days, without risk, may be extremely hazardous in our maturer years."

"Maturer years!" repeated John. "Maturer years, Doctor, eh?" and then he laughed as if the facetiousness of the joke was a little more than could be withstood.

"I really think, Sir," observed our hero, appealing to the Rector, "that Mr. Hardy considers himself not arrived at maturer years yet."

"How can I be if I'm a boy?" rejoined John. "And doesn't Harry Lawrence call me an old boy twenty times in a day?"

The Squire now came up, and from the speed of a fleet-winged bird brought himself to a stand-still close to the feet of John Hardy.

"Bless my heart!" ejaculated John, stepping back, and almost causing the upset of his per-

son from the inclination of his heels to slip from under him. "Bless my heart," repeated he, "what a harum-scarum fellow you are, to be sure!"

A little out of breath, his face in a glow from the exercise, and health and strength bracing every vein and nerve, the Squire looked the very essence of a man in the lusty and kindly winter of his life.

"Mary, my love," said he, "either run and warm yourself, or go immediately to the house. Your nose, more especially the end, looks like a black grape."

"You are really very flattering, Mr. Lawrence," replied Mary, laughing. "I was not aware that my nose had become of such a hue."

"I can bear testimony of the truth of the assertion," returned her father. "It is exceedingly like a black grape."

"I'll no longer remain to have my prominent feature abused," returned Mary, turning upon her heel.

“Nay, nay,” added our hero. “You must not leave us. We will walk briskly round the banks, and the effects of cold will quickly disappear.”

Whether the influence of the sneaping frost was broken by the speed at which the young Squire supported his fair companion, or the animation of his discourse, is a matter involved in doubt; but upon making one circuit of the pond there was not the vestige of cold in Mary’s pretty face.

“Now that I am quite warm, *quite* warm,” said she, emphatically, “let me see you, Tom, try your agility on the ice.”

“Stop one moment,” responded John Hardy. “I was about to learn whether I could slide or not when you arrived. My mind,” continued he, “was just made up, and although the resolution’s a little shaken from the unseasonable caution of the Doctor here, I am still inclined to make the trial with your assistance, Tom.”

“I am quite ready to lend it,” replied our

hero. "But much of the satisfaction will be denied you in the event of success, provided it depends on my aid."

"That's true," rejoined John, "and therefore I'll e'en venture by myself."

"Pray be careful," suggested the Rector.

"Lean forwards," said the Squire, "and if you find yourself falling slip down on your knees."

"Very good," rejoined John, and putting himself "in form," he was again ready for the ordeal.

Scaters and sliders quitted their diversions, and those engaged in football and pelting each other with hard-pressed balls of snow left their rough, hardy sport to witness the result of John Hardy's attempt.

Making a last survey over the tops of his glasses, he gave two or three agile skips, and then on to the smooth slide he launched himself with indescribable confidence. Along the smooth, glib, slippery surface he went straight

and quickly, until he arrived in about the middle of the line, when, from some unaccountable inclination of his heels to take precedence of his toes, John gradually lost the command of his position, and began to turn slowly round. He staggered, and reeled, and threw up his arms in wild convulsions; but all was of no avail. Fate decreed his downfall, and backwards he rolled, in one promiscuous heap.

Everybody rushed to the spot in order to render a well-meant but dangerous assistance. E-r-r-r-ak flew the ice, and a dozen long white lines were seen to star themselves round the spot where the crowd had congregated.

“ Hold back, for your lives!” hallooed the Squire. “ Get back, in the name of heaven!”

A few of the most timid responded to the summons by immediately taking themselves to the shore; but the many, anxious to learn the extent of the damage to John Hardy’s person, still pressed forwards.

Again the ice groaned, and ominous rents were heard from every quarter.

“Do ye hear?” shouted the Squire, in a husky voice. “Get back, I say.”

So stern was the order, that, fortunately, numbers at once obeyed it; but as some six or eight grasped John to raise him from his prostrate state, the threatened separation of the body of the ice took place.

Each clutched, grasped, and scrambled at anything to save himself and in two or three seconds all were free from danger except John Hardy, who still remained in a partly immersed condition, looking around him in a state of mind which may fitly be described as “addled.”

Reclining on his elbows, with his head slightly elevated, John appeared in a very precarious condition.

“Remain perfectly still,” said the Squire, in a quiet, collected tone. “We will soon render ye assistance.”

John might have comprehended the instruc-

tions; but, from the vacant stare he received them with, there was no evidence of his so doing.

“The ice will not sink further,” said the Squire, “if you continue quite quiet.”

“Oh, Mr. Lawrence!” exclaimed Mary, clasping her hands with agony, “What can be done?”

“Hush!” replied the Squire energetically, “say not a word.”

“Shall I run for a rope?” eagerly asked our hero with a blanched cheek and flashing eye, ready to risk his life and limb for his good old friend, and yet in trouble and doubt how to proceed.

“Let us form a line, hand in hand, from the bank,” suggested the Rector, “and select the lightest—”

“A wise thought,” interrupted the Squire. “Stand here,” continued he, thrusting some on the bank, and directing a few of the slightest to kneel and stretch themselves along the ice,

and grasp each other's legs. "And mind," continued he, authoritatively, "if one of ye let go your hold, under any circumstances, I'll have him branded for a coward and a cur."

Under the superintendence of the Squire, a line of human heels and arms was formed, and when another would reach John Hardy, our hero threw himself forwards, and, climbing over the out-stretched forms speedily laid a firm hold of the saturated victim of his own temerity.

With loud cheers John was dragged in safety to the shore, and then, mounted on the shoulders of four lusty men, was carried quickly in triumph to the Hall.

It was some time before he had sufficiently recovered, with the aid of strong and reeking brandy-and-water, and other restoratives, to clearly comprehend the exact state of his sublunary existence; but upon receiving the fourth jorum of grog from the hands of the attentive Squire, and perceiving the number of friends

round his bed, smiles spread themselves over his pallid countenance like a succession of circles upon disturbed water; and, although silently, John *expressively* conveyed the improvement of his condition.

CHAPTER XIV.

“The wound of peace is surety,
Surety secure ; but modest doubt is called
The beacon of the wise, the bent that searches
To the bottom of the worst.”

“It is somewhat strange that we hear nothing of our Mercury, Tobias Smith,” remarked the Squire, sipping his tea at the matin meal.

“The letter-bag has not come in yet,” replied Tom ; “we may receive intelligence this morning.”

John Hardy was in the act of shaving a thin fat and lean slice from a juicy ham, when our hero made this anticipatory observation ; and, abruptly quitting the task, nodded his head,

and rejoined, in a portentous voice, that, "He shouldn't wonder."

"Why?" asked the Squire.

"For three successive nights," returned John deliberately, "I've dreamt ——"

"Pooh, pooh!" interrupted the Squire, "I put no faith in dreams, more particularly in yours, since, upon one occasion, your imagination led you to make a bonfire of this old place."

"Well, well!" returned John, resuming his knife and fork: "as you please, Harry; but, depend upon it, I haven't dreamt of seeing a sort of snow-storm of letters for nothing."

"Were they sealed or wafered?" inquired our hero, laughing.

"You're a heretic, Tom," responded John Hardy, "and I shall not reply to the query."

"If we don't soon hear something more satisfactory than we have done hitherto from Mr. Smith," said the Squire, "I shall propose new measures to obtain a clue to our object."

“He has apparently gained no intelligence,” returned our hero. “We have but his assurance to persevere, and hope of ultimate success.”

“There’s one proof of his sincerity, I think,” observed John.

“And what may that be?” said the Squire.

“His travelling expenses,” replied John. “Mr. Smith must be continually on the move to require such constant and, I may add, large supplies.”

“The proof is a doubtful one to my mind,” rejoined the Squire; “our messenger is of that quicksilver class on which little dependence can be placed where money is concerned.”

“The stories that he relates of himself prove this to be the case,” returned our hero; “he regards the purses of his friends as his own.”

“And serves them alike,” added the Squire, “by emptying their contents with all convenient speed. However,” continued he, “I care nothing for the money that he draws, provided

our end be 'gained: at whatever cost, it would be cheaply bought."

John Hardy sighed deeply, and our hero's nether lip quivered as these words were spoken. There was an earnestness about them, which showed how great was the interest felt.

"Generally," resumed the Squire, "there is but little difficulty in discovering the fate, either living or dead, of the most humble. Relations or connexions, friends, neighbours, or acquaintance of some kind or other, can render any such required information. But it would seem that Tom's poor mother entirely withdrew herself from the observation of every soul with whom she had been acquainted previous to her departure from England, and thus all trace seems lost. Probably she changed her name; and if so, I must confess I cannot see what reasonable likelihood there is of our succeeding in our search."

"But you would not have us give up, Harry, would ye?" inquired John Hardy.

“Certainly not until we’ve tried every measure that can be devised,” replied his friend. “But,” continued he, “month after month is rolling on, and our anxiety remains unabated, while there appears to be no approach of a termination to it.”

“What would you suggest, then?” asked Tom.

“That’s a difficult question to answer,” rejoined the Squire; “but I am of opinion something definite should be considered.”

“I’ve no doubt but that you are quite right, sir,” returned our hero, in a melancholy tone and manner. “For myself, however,” continued he, “I shall never consider any attempt definite which is not crowned with success.”

“My dear boy,” added the Squire, kindly, “I can enter into your feelings to the full extent, warm and ardent as they naturally are. But age has given me that which it must bring to you—experience; and cold as it may and will appear, you must submit to be directed by

it until that time arrives when you'll require no such monitor. With little less possible interest than that entertained by yourself, I have willingly joined in all the schemes set afoot for the attainment of our object. Every means which publicity could give have been resorted to, and in vain. Every nook and corner have been searched where there existed the remotest chance of a discovery. Agents have been appointed, parish registers searched, and, in short, all has been tried that human ingenuity could devise. It is true that our friend—" and the Squire smiled as he spoke—" Tobias Smith is still in search; but I fear that it has now become a hopeless one."

"And yet you stated that you would not have us abandon our attempt, Sir," remarked our hero.

"I think I added," replied the Squire, "not until all measures have been tried that can be devised. The question is, whether there are any remaining?"

“I hope there are, Harry,” rejoined John. “I hope there are. It is my prayer, night and morning, that I may know, ere I die, the fate of—” Poor John struggled hard to suppress his grief, but the bubbles would rise and discharge themselves in broken tears upon his cheeks.

“I trust that I am not misunderstood,” added the Squire. “It is not, I call heaven to witness, from any flagging desire on my part. I am as desirous as either of ye to attain our end; but, if it be clearly impracticable, I think the sooner active measures are dropped, the sooner a very great deal of the sting of disappointment will be alleviated.”

“There’s reason in what you say, Harry,” returned John, “as, indeed, there is in everything uttered by you. But surely we have no cause to despair.”

“I know not why,” added our hero; “but I feel certain that we’re on the eve of succeeding.”

“ May your expectations be realized !” added the Squire fervently “ But I must be allowed to ascribe no little share of the feeling to the enthusiasm attending it.”

“ It may be so, Sir,” said our hero, “ and yet I assure you, I speak only as I really think.”

“ That I am quite satisfied of,” responded the Squire.

“ In Tobias Smith’s last letter,” remarked John Hardy, “ he led us to hope that his new measures would be crowned with success.”

“ Did you ever know them to vary in this particular?” asked the Squire.

“ I must say never,” replied John.

“ And you might have added,” said the Squire, “ never will.”

“ His interest is to keep up this lively hope, most unquestionably,” said our hero, “ and I am uncharitable enough to place but little faith in his real integrity of purpose.”

“ Circumstances make men,” replied the

Squire. "Perhaps our eccentric friend, whose ideas concerning the use of others money, concentrate themselves into something like an approach to abuse, might have proved an exemplary member of society had the treatment he received in early life been of a different kind."

"No doubt, Harry, no doubt," rejoined John Hardy. "I've often thought," continued he, "that when vice and crime are met with their punishment should rather be inflicted on the cause of the sin, than the sinners themselves."

"And yet," returned the Squire, "it would be impossible to carry such a theory into practice. A thief might trace the origin of his being one to the evil example set him by an abandoned parent, and the parent to his father through successive generations; but for the general good, the plea could not be admitted."

"The precedent would indeed be a dangerous one," remarked our hero.

"I quite agree with you," said John Hardy.

But I still think great discrimination might be made in dealing with the errors of our fellow creatures. You know 'to whom much is given much is expected;' and by an opposite code of reasoning we are led to suppose that little is expected when little is extended."

"Like all your sentiments, John," responded the Squire, "this is worthy of the source whence it sprung. I do not see, however, in what practicable mode justice is to be so dispensed by mortals."

"Justice," returned John Hardy emphatically, "can always, at least, be tempered with leniency to the ignorant and weak, and unprotected. When the scourge is to be applied, let the back be first looked at. But is this so?" continued he. "No. The poor and friendless and least capacitated to bear, must suffer the full penalty; but those in strength and power and chairs of authority are selected for the objects of mercy and compassion."

“ I fear what you say is too true, John,” said the Squire.

“ In greater matters as in small,” resumed John Hardy, “ the judgment and opinions of men are formed in accordance with the success or overthrow of their actions. The difference between a rebel and a hero is, the one mounts the scaffold to expiate his defeated treason ; and the other, perhaps, the throne on its triumph.”

“ Such are the ways of the world,” replied the Squire, and of life.”

“ Thus,” continued John, “ justice becomes a mockery. It is not by the merits of actions that rewards and praise are bestowed ; but in proportion to their success, irresponsible of the cause, is the metre of recompense awarded.”

“ Aye,” returned the Squire. “ And so it is that the dolt and quack, by accident or knavery, so often bear away the palm which alone, by right, belongs to honest deserts.”

“ Whatever we may say or think, however,”

rejoined John, "the world will wag in its old course, and our voices produce no more effects than the chirruping of grasshoppers."

"True, true," said the Squire.

"We appear," remarked our hero, "to have flown off at a tangent, and completely lost sight of our original subject of discourse."

"I stand, or rather sit corrected," responded John Hardy. "Mine was the fault, I believe, that occasioned the digression."

"Do you think, Sir," said our hero, turning to the Squire, "that all has been done within our power to discover the fate of my poor mother?"

"I know of nothing remaining," replied the Squire. "But if any suggestion can be made, I shall be most ready to coincide with it."

"Perhaps, with some more reflection we may yet improve our plans," remarked John Hardy.

"If such be your opinion," resumed the

Squire, "by all means let us take further time for consideration."

"Anything," ejaculated our hero, energetically, "but an abandonment of our design."

"If, then, but for your gratification," returned the Squire, "it shall be continued."

"Many thanks, my dear Sir," added our hero. "I feel," continued he, "that I would rather make a circle of the earth barefooted, than let the doubt remain as it does. I shall never rest until the suspense be removed."

"Then let the subject drop for the present," said the Squire. "Perchance time may reveal that which now appears beyond our reach."

CHAPTER XV.

“ When shepherds pipe on oaten straws,
 And merry larks are ploughmen’s clocks ;
When turtles tread, and rooks, and daws,
 And maidens bleach their summer smocks ;
The cuckoo, then, on every tree,
Mocks married men, for thus sings he—
 Cuckoo ;
Cuckoo, cuckoo—O word of fear,
Unpleasing to a married ear.”

WITH creels slung across their shoulders, cased fishing-rods in their hands, and their appointments in every particular complete for a fishing excursion, the Squire, John Hardy, our hero, and the earth-stopper, took their way across some meads, now spangled with the fresh and earliest flowers of spring, towards a fast and

flashing stream just perceptible at the bottom of a rich valley in the distance.

No wonder that smiles played on the features of all. The most ascetic must have yielded to the gladdening influence. Young, laughing Spring, heralded by the bird, the bee, and the butterfly, was dancing in the dew and sunshine, and all things betokened the season of bursting hope and joyousness. The primrose pale, the daisy, and daffodil, were blooming to welcome her coming. Leaf and blossom tinged the spray and bough, and nature, in gushing sunshine, revelled in her fresh-born beauty.

After a silence of some duration, and during their walk towards the banks of the stream, our hero began the quotation of the following antiquated lines :—

“ Tom Trout by native industry was taught
The various arts how fishes might be caught.
To baskets oft he'd pliant osiers turn,
Where they might entrance find, but no return :
When he would a great destruction make,
And from afar much larger booty take,

Through the quick stream he'd very shrewdly set,
 From side to side, a strong capacious net ;
 And then his rustic crew, with mighty poles,
 Compell'd the fish to quit their oozy holes ;
 Pursuing them down the rolling flood,
 Gasping for breath, and almost choked with mud.

Dick Trot, who lived below, ne'er thought his beer
 Was good except he had his water clear.
 He goes to Trout, and thus begins his tale :—
 " Ah ! if you knew but how the people rail ;
 They cannot boil, nor wash, nor brew, they say.
 With water sometimes ink, and sometimes whey,
 According as you meet with mud or clay.
 Now is it not a dismal thing to think
 That we old Trots must live and have no drink ?
 Therefore, my friend, some other method take
 Of fishing, were it only for o sake."

Says Trout, " I'm sorry it should be my lot
 To disoblige my neighbour Trot.
 The fault's not mine—'tis Fortune that thus tries one,
 You know ' what's one's man's meat is another's poison.'
 Therefore in patience rest, though I proceed ;
 There's no ill-nature in the case—but need.
 Though for your use this water may not serve,
 I'd rather you should *choke* than I should *starve*."

" Your verses, Tom," observed the Squire,
 " are somewhat of the milk-an'-water—"

" Mud-and-water, Sir," replied our hero,
 laughing.

“ Well, well,” rejoined the Squire. “ I can answer for the concomitants being extremely unpalatable.”

“ By the way,” returned John Hardy, diving his fingers into a huge black pocket-book, nearly as large as a family Bible, “ do me the favour of inspecting, Harry, my last attempt at the fabrication of an insect coming under the class of ephemera in entomology.”

“ And what do you call this ?” asked the Squire, glancing at the representative of one of the short-lived order. “ And what do you call this ?” repeated he, holding the object between his finger and thumb, at one moment close to his nasal organ, and then drawing it gradually off, as if to obtain a proper focus.

“ The design was,” replied John, evincing no disappointment at the doomed specimen of his craft, “ a March Brown ; but I freely confess that it bears a much stronger resemblance to a *Bluebottle*.”

“ *Bluebottle !*” reiterated his companion,

with rivetted gaze still fixed on the amalgamated ball of feathers; "it's more like a black-beetle."

"Capital! famous!" exclaimed John, skipping like a lambkin in the merry month of May. "So long," continued he, pausing in his capers, "so long that there is a semblance to some creature gifted with vitality, no matter what, from a cockroach to a rhinoceros, decided victory and proclaimed success is mine; for you'll remember," said John, with great dramatic effect, "that the last fly, a gray-palmer, I exercised my ingenuity to fabricate, was unlike anything on the earth, in the earth, or in the waters under the earth. That is, if I am to confide in what I never yet questioned, your profound and unerring decision."

"There may be an improvement," rejoined the Squire; "but I must add," continued he, "that it is but a sorry one."

Flattered even with this admission, John Hardy consigned the poor representative of

ephemera to the repository from whence it was taken, and monopolized his gratification by keeping it entire and within himself.

There may be, nay, there are, wider, deeper, and fleeter rivers within the belt of the sea-girt isle than the Exe, holding, withal, heavier and even greater numbers of "the foxes of the stream;" but for romantic and beautiful scenery — the poetry of vision — not one can excel this Queen of the West. From her source to where she mingles with the surging wave, and quits the water-flag to meet the green sea-weed, all is a picture worthy of the noblest limner's art. Now roaring o'er her rocky bed, flanked by oak-capped hills towering to the clouds, foaming, frothing, and lashing at their base, like a courser spurred in madness to the goal, she rushes on. In deep, black eddies, whirling round and round, the narrow, but unobstructed channel is cleared, and then down sweeps the precipitate and sudden fall, tossing showers of spray to be wafted on the

rakish breeze. In very wantonness she murmurs, now through dark-green, sombre valleys, rippling past bare and earthless roots, and saluting every twig bent upon her bosom. Over the ford, dashing against the old gray stepping-stones, on which many a foot has trodden never to tread again, she speeds away in her fickle spirit, like a flattered beauty conscious of her charms. Rapid and slow, shallow and deep, noisy and still — now veiled by thickly-grown trees, and then flashing in the broad, unhidden light—the Exe throws back on her crystal surface, as solitary and as lovely of nature's beauties as any of her sister tributaries to the trackless waste of waters.

Winding along this charming river, the three fishermen bent their course to a well-known locality, from being a favourite haunt of the red-deer still roving wild in their native solitudes.

The heavy drops of morning dew fell pattering from branch and spray, and the mist hung

in rolling folds upon the water, and wreathed itself along the heights just tipped with the rising sun. The light wind from the south toyed with the leaf, and now and then lifted the fleecy, fog as he saluted the opening bud and blossom with the fresh morning's maiden kiss.

“ I don't see a fish rise,” observed our hero.

“ The fly has not yet dipped his wings,” rejoined the Squire ; “ but by the time, John, you have made your selection from that huge book of yours, there'll be a myriad here.”

“ And what do you think, Harry,” inquired John Hardy, “ will be the hue and colour for our choice ?”

“ At a guess,” replied the Squire, “ I recommend a golden-palmer ; but until the ephemeræ show on the waters, there's no certainty.”

“ And that's the reason I never prepare a cast of flies beforehand,” rejoined our hero, squatting on a stone, green and gray with varied moss. “ I've so often been mistaken in my

set that I now never bring one, but as soon as I discover the fly on the water, I imitate it to the greatest nicety, and this saves me an immeasurable loss of time."

"But as the insect occasionally changes half a dozen times in an hour," returned the Squire, "your attention may be entirely occupied in the fabrication of flies."

"And so it is when the day changes, or the river fills or lowers," added our hero. "These things will occur in matters the best regulated."

At this moment, there was a splash heard in the stream, at a short distance from where the fishermen were standing, and a deep bubbling noise followed.

"There's a rise!" exclaimed the Squire, "and a greedy one too."

"It's a stone fly, Sir, I see," observed Mike, catching one of the insects now flitting over the stream in numbers.

"Dear me!" ejaculated John Hardy, in a

tone of vexation, "I had just fixed my length with the golden-palmer;" and he recommenced turning over the pages of his huge volume with fresh assiduity.

"I told you," replied the Squire, taking from his well-assorted cast of flies, hooked round his hat, the imitation of the desired insect, "that it was a speculation."

Our hero extracted from a little canvass pouch, some feathers, hackles, hare's-ear, and a mixture of varied concomitants, and began to tie as taking a representative of the original fly, as the excellent judgment, and practised fingers of a confirmed artist could produce. "I'll show ye," remarked he, exultingly plying his handicraft, "a more seductive specimen than the creature itself."

"You may thank Mike, for the tutorship," observed John Hardy, still searching, with the aid of his spectacles, through his huge volume for the artificial insect, now required to be used.

“That I may,” replied our hero, progressing quickly in his task.

The earth-stopper grinned his satisfaction at the acknowledgment, but said nothing.

By this time, for it occupied but a few moments to arrange his simple rod and line, the Squire was ready to throw his fly. Back the silver gut flashed, and then, with a sudden spring of his supple wrist, forwards it flew without wave or curve, and such was the skill by which the line was whipped, that the fly seemed to flutter ere dropped.

“Beautiful!” exclaimed John Hardy, watching the movement; “beautiful in the extreme.”

It might have dipped, but scarcely had the deceptive feather touched the water, a little above where a fish had been seen to rise, than whir-r-r, whiz, flew the reel, and the bending of the rod in a pliant arch showed the capture of the victim.

“Give him time,” said John, leaving the examination of his gigantic volume of illus-

trated entomology: "give him time," repeated he; "play him well, until he's drowned."

"Before, however, he had finished his caution, a good-conditioned, finely-speckled trout laid flapping and springing on the greensward.

"Never lose time by playing a fish, and scaring his fellows away," returned the Squire, pitching the fish into his creel, and preparing for another cast. "Time must be given to the heavy ones, on account of the tackle; but, in all cases, the sooner that a hooked fish is in the basket, the sooner he's out of danger."

John Hardy turned over the pages of his great book again, and our hero plied himself busily in his work, while the Squire fingered and puffed his fly a little into shape, as a preliminary to a second essay of his skill.

Down, and yet across the wind, so as to fall as lightly as the gossamer-winged ephemera, the fly was again sent dexterously as before, some few yards from the *locale* of the capture

Fortune again favoured the fisherman. The fly dipped, and then skimming along the surface, by the point of the rod being elevated and drawn gradually back, a trout rose from the depths below, and, like many a larger fish of different growth, was deceived by false appearances.

Again the reel flew round; and it was evident, as the yards of line turned off, that there was a fish of substance on the hook.

“They’re ravenous this morning,” remarked our hero, making desperate efforts to complete his task.

“God bless my life!” exclaimed John Hardy, worked to a fit of desperation, and, like an over-heated bottle of ginger-beer, ready to burst its cerements, “I can’t find a stone-fly, if it were to save my soul, although there appears to be every other hue, shade, and texture in my book.”

Down the stream the Squire strode, having got his victim under the command of a short

line as soon as possible, and preventing his rubbing his nose into the bottom by the judicious and delicate purchase with which he held him. Now, with desperate energy, the fish flung himself from the water, showing as honest four pounds weight as ever went to scale. Like an arrow he struck away, and had it not been for the ease given at the moment he made his struggle for escape, the design would have been crowned with unequivocal success. As it was, the hair whirled off the reel, and the trout gained distance between him and his captor; but still he was held securely, although with a strain as tender as if the line had been made of the spider's film.

Tired with his efforts, the fish yielded, and gradually the captor wound up his reel, and drew the victim's nose to the surface of the water. Pulling him gently with the stream, the Squire looked out for a sloping shallow, and towed the drowning fish into the favoured spot for landing him. Then sticking the point

of his rod into the ground, he dropped on his knees, and crept quickly, but cunningly, to the water's edge, and placing his hands carefully under the trout, lifted him adroitly to the shore.

“Nobly killed!” hallooed John Hardy. “Beautifully managed, I declare, from first to last.”

“When are you going to begin?” asked the Squire, with a flushed cheek and bright eye, as he placed the fish in a hamper which Mike carried as a receptacle for the “big ’uns.” “You’re two of the slowest fellows,” continued he, “from different causes, that I ever saw in my life.”

“My fly’s just finished,” replied our hero, exultingly.

“And I have found a stone-fly at last,” added John Hardy, holding up the discovered object of his search.

A minute more, and the three fishermen were occupied in thrashing the stream at different

points with unrivalled energy and whetted expectation.

For some short period each had been exercising the most seductive art within his power, and the Squire had made, perhaps, twenty unsuccessful throws, although the fish rose in every direction, when he was seen to catch an insect flitting past him, and, after examining it carefully, to make a change from his little, but well-assorted collection round his hat, in his fly.

“What are you doing?” inquired John Hardy, observing his movements.

“Putting on a fresh fly,” replied his friend, with a quiet smile.

“But surely not a different sort?” rejoined John, with an aghast look.

“Yes, I am,” returned the Squire, smothering a laugh; “and if you’ll take the trouble of watching the ephemeræ on the water at this moment, you’ll discover the necessity of so doing.”

“Confusion!” ejaculated our hero; “just as I had finished my fly, to find it of no use.”

“And just as I had found mine!” echoed John Hardy. “I’m almost determined to abandon fishing from its very precariousness.”

The couple of discomfited heroes, with chagrined visages, retook their sitting positions, the one to fabricate a resemblance of the insect now on the stream, and the other to search through his weighty volume.

At the second throw with his new fly, the Squire caught a fish; and, being a small one, landed it as soon as it was hooked. In less than ten minutes after this, and before our hero had constructed his insect, or John Hardy had found the *fac simile* of the tempting fly now so eagerly snapped at by the fish, the Squire’s creel held twelve brace.

“The fates are propitious to you, Harry,” observed John. “I never saw fish rise and take better in my life.”

“You’re taking no advantage of the keen-

ness of their appetites," remarked his friend, slyly.

"I shall be with ye presently, Sir," said our hero, "and it will go hard but I'll make up for lost time. But where are my fancy hackles?" continued he, groping impatiently at the bottom of his canvass pouch, and emptying its contents into his lap, he at last found the desired assistants.

"What's the name of the fly now on the water?" inquired John Hardy, industriously thumbing his volume.

"The grey coughlin," replied the Squire, with a smile.

"Then, hang me, if I've one in my whole collection," rejoined John, closing his big book, squeezing it into his pocket, and adding, "so there's an end of my sport."

"Are ye tired?" asked the Squire.

"No," replied John; "but I'm disgusted. In my whole collection of flies, made and selected by the best maker in London, amounting

to five hundred, I couldn't discover a gray coughlin among the lot."

"It must have been like looking for a needle in a haystack," remarked his friend.

"It was," innocently responded John; "it was indeed."

"I have heard," rejoined the Squire, dabbing the spike of his rod into the earth, and folding his arms like a man about to deliver himself of some conceived sageness, "that it is a matter of extreme difficulty to see the error of our ways."

"No doubt of that being a fact," returned John—"a great fact."

"Now there are you," continued the Squire, "with such a multitude of flies that you cannot find the one required; and there's Tom without a single set. *You*, John," continued he, "lose your time and labour by the number and great scale of your preparations; and *he*, by the total want of anything like a reasonable supply. There's not a fisherman in England who can

handle a rod or tie a fly better than our Tom; but with a foolish whim of his, he never starts with the probable kind of flies that will be required, confident that he can make any that may be wanted. It is quite impossible to know exactly the nature of the ephemeræ that will be on the water; and therefore to be able to tie a fly is an essential accomplishment in a fisherman desirous of obtaining perfection in the art; but by making allowance for the wind and weather, the state of the water, and the change of the seasons, we can form a pretty correct opinion of the desired fly. Previously to the commencement of fishing, therefore, you should consider what will be likely for you to want, and make your selection from the stock according to your judgment."

"I see clearly your meaning," replied John, "and an exceedingly great improvement on my plan, and Tom's too, it appears to be."

"You'll find it such upon adoption," re-

joined the Squire ; and, as he arrived at the conclusion of his practical lecture, he plucked his rod from the ground, threw his line backwards and forwards, and whipping the fly light as thistle-down on the stream, the whir-r-r of the reel again proved the index of “ a fish worth having.”

CHAPTER XVI.

“ The gaudy, blabbing, and remorseful day
Is crept into the bosom of the sea ;
And now loud howling wolves arouse the jades,
That drag the tragic melancholy night ;
Who, with their drowsy, slow, and flagging wings,
Clip dead men’s graves, and from their misty jaws
Breathe foul contagious darkness in the air.”

COMFORTABLE ! that is a purely English expression. In no other language can it be translated so as to convey a sense of its purity. To have happy and cheerful faces around us ; to hear the ringing laugh and shout of merriment ; to be warm and cozy ; to be free and oblivious of the real and imaginary ills of life ; to love and be beloved by those both near and dear to

us ; to fill and drain to the hearty toast and sentiment ; in short, an ENGLISHMAN'S FIRE-SIDE is, perhaps, the best illustration of that enviable condition which may fitly be described as being comfortable.

And where was there a more comfortable scene, humble as it might be, than that of which we are about to lift the curtain to our readers ? There was Mrs. Sykes in Sunday gear, all smiles, and, if we cannot say with poetical truth "dimples," yet the ruins of where they had been. And there was her daughter-in-law, charming Nancy, with her dancing ringlets and peach-blossom cheeks, and James, her young and devoted husband ; Edward Dixon, the landlord of the Lion, arrayed in the pink of his wardrobe, and honest Job the huntsman, surrounding the crackling faggot blazing on the hearth of his cottage. A warm light was shedding its rays upon the portraits of the Sykes family adorning the walls, and the grimness of the expression of many of them

seemed to be thawed in its influence, and the old fellows blinked, and winked, and grinned in the flickering flames, as if conscious of the merry occasion. It were almost needless to add that a goodly array of "creature comforts" stood on the polished mahogany at hand; for if a fault, albeit a generous one, was shared with balanced equality between Job and his wife, it was the one of extended and almost boundless hospitality.

"Well!" exclaimed Job, slapping his kersey-mere "shorts" with an air of satisfaction, "this is what I call *comfortable*."

"I've been more miserable, certainly," replied Edward Dixon, winking pleasantly at Mrs. Sykes, and looking at every one as if he had earned a compliment, and merited payment at sight.

"You're a dry dog, Ned," rejoined the huntsman, giving the landlord a slight poke in his well-lined ribs with a straightened finger, and then followed sundry nods of acquiescence in

this assertion, and "if there was not a great deal of wit there was a great deal of laughter."

"I always was an odd fellow," returned Edward Dixon, self-approvingly. "My respected mother called me her little wag afore I could well run alone."

"I've heard ye say many a thing that almost bu'st my ribs in," added Job, resolved to make the landlord superlatively happy with himself, and, consequently, with everybody else, this evening.

"Fun, Job," said the host of the rampant animal, "was always my forte. You remember," continued he, "what I said about *Velocipede's* bit?"

"I never shall forget it," responded Job.

"No," rejoined Edward Dixon, thrusting his hand into the snowy and frilled bosom of his shirt, and scanning the ceiling immediately above his head. "*That's* not to be forgotten by, what I may call, a shake of the head."

"But you shouldn't praise your own wit,

father," observed Nancy, smiling, and exchanging significant looks with her husband.

" I beg your pardon, my dear," replied the landlord, with a tone and manner of positive issue with the allegation. " In self defence," continued he, " I'm *compelled* to praise myself, or I should fall uncommon short of my deserts. Think o' the smart things I've said in the bar and tap of the Lion, for the last five-and-thirty years, and how little praise, except I've given myself, for 'em! It's enough to make a man wish he'd been born dumb; it is, indeed."

" No, no," rejoined Mrs. Sykes. " Pray don't say that, Mr. Dixon. The gift of our tongues," continued the good woman, with unalloyed sincerity, " is, in my opinion, the greatest blessing of our lives."

" The use, ma'am, is, no doubt," returned the landlord, with unequivocal meaning. " But in the *use* we should take great care to avoid the *abuse*."

“ Bravo !” returned Job, with fervent admiration. “ That’s a sentiment worthy to be cut in letters of gold.”

“ Or brass,” pithily added Mrs. Sykes.

“ Well done, mother !” ejaculated James, bursting into a hearty roar. “ That was down upon him like a hawk upon a chicken.”

Feeling that her triumph was very like this familiar simile, Mrs. Sykes glowed with satisfaction, and this refreshing and stimulating was in no way abated by the good-natured way in which her sarcasm was received by the object at which it was levelled.

“ Some folk,” remarked Edward Dixon, “ can pinch, but can’t bear pinching. Now I’m not one of those. I’m a man not only who can give a joke, but can take one.”

“ I was sure o’ that, Sir,” replied Mrs. Sykes, stifling the remains of her titter, “ or I should not have ventured quite so far ;” and with this gratifying of her powers of daring she handed, unasked, and uncanvassed, a snowy

pipe, which, with a bundle of others, she placed on the table.

“Where did you put the backy, my love?” inquired she, appealing to Job.

“I think, my dear,” replied he, in an equally affectionate tone and manner, “that you’ll find it in the cupboard.”

Here was a change—here was a reformation. No wonder that Jem found it extremely difficult to maintain a respectful gravity during this brief colloquy. The many, nay, the countless disputes he had been called on by a sense of duty to settle on this very point, and now to find it the subject of affectionate intercourse. Well! we change and others change, and thus it is the world becomes newly fashioned.

Edward Dixon, although of the somewhat dull and sleepy order, was sufficiently awake to the effect produced; and taking to himself, as a matter of course, the greatest share of the triumph, looked, if possible, more egotistical and inflated than ever.

“ Perhaps,” said he, with dignity, “ I may be allowed to give a toast on this oss-picious meeting.”

“ Ah! certainly, Ned, certainly,” replied the huntsman.

“ To be sure, Mr. Dixon,” rejoined Mrs. Sykes, in the most flattering manner. “ By all means.”

“ Permit me ma’am,” returned the landlord, of the Lion, with the politeness of a courtier, “ to mix a glass of knock-me-down for ye.”

“ Really, Mr. Dixon,” added Mrs. Sykes, with a coquettish nod of her head, “ I trust the liquor will not quite upset me.”

“ No, no, ma’am,” said the host, “ I know how to mix for ladies,” and with this remark he began the office of mingling the ingredients of—taking the odoriferous vapour as a proof of the quality—“ a very pretty tipple.”

In a few mintes there was a full glass to—applying the graphic description of the landlord of the Lion—“ every cheek,” and upon

the completion of this task Edward Dixon, with a preliminary clearing of his voice, observed, "That it fallen upon him to be a father. Other folks had been fathers before him, and, he had no hesitation in saying, would be fathers after him. Be that as it may, however, a parent could feel like a parent only could feel ; and he defied—nay, he challenged any one to come forward and explain what the feelings of a family man was unless he had a family. He stated this as a fact, without fear of contradiction, and facts—as everybody knew—were stubborn things. He believed he had a daughter. In short, he would go so far as to say that he *knew* that he had. For although it had been said it must be a wise child to know its own father, he'd never heard that it must be a wise father to know his own child. But even if this was required, if—he meant to say—a leader of a mind was requisite in such a drag, he considered that he shouldn't be saying much too

much for himself in stating the *right* passenger had been waked up."

"Very fair ; very good, indeed!" said Job, approvingly.

"I'm not going," resumed Edward Dixon, "to make a great many words about a trifle. I've always thought, and always stated, the most said in the fewest words, is the very cream of speech making. As a public man, or publican, which is the same thing, I've jotted this down in my memorandum book," and as he spoke he figuratively referred to the volume in question by pointing with a finger to the centre of his forehead. "The Lords and Commons," continued he, "and many other jabbering, tinkittle spouters, would do well to take a note from a page or two of my memorandum book, Job."

"No doubt o' that," replied the huntsman.

"It's well filled," continued the landlord, "although not so crammed but every day, almost, adds a note o' worth to it. However,

without beating about the bush any longer, I'll propose the health of two individuals in which all of us present take no little interest; not excepting the parties themselves. It's the first time since the day they were spliced into one—just a month, I believe—that I have the opportunity given me of draining a glass in their—what I may call—joint and collective presence, to their happiness, although I've drunk more than a few to the same text in their much-missed and lamented absence."

"Hear! hear!" cried Job. "Very good, indeed."

"It's a pity, and a great pity," resumed Edward Dixon, "that friends whom we love, and by whom we are beloved, can't be with us always. But this is impossible. The daughter must leave her father's bosom, and the son must leave his mother's breast."

Here Mrs. Sykes gave an audible sob, smothered as the feeling was under cover of the pressed palm of one of her hands.

“ I don’t wish to be too mealy,” said the speaker in continuation, observing the ebullition of feeling on the part of his hearer. “ It isn’t my intention of being too soft. But like little birds when hatched and fledged take leave of their nests and parent birds, so our children quit their homes and us to mate and build for themselves. And very properly so. I’m not a man to uphold the system of treating children like a parcel of young cabbage plants, all in a heap. In a heap they’re no better than a lot of weeds, but transplant ’em and give ’em room to grow and flourish, and they become an ornament to a boiled leg of pork, and many other suchlike dainties. Those are my maxims ; them’s my sentiments !”

“ And good uns, too,” returned Job, “ let who will gainsay ’em.”

“ I hope they are,” added Edward Dixon, in a confident tone.” “ I hope I may take a notch for such sentiments as them, and, in cutting it, it’s done only with the pride of merit ;

not with the leastest flavour of the spice o' vanity. I shall say nothing more, but drink a hearty bumper to the joy, happiness, and prosperity of my son-in-law, James Sykes, and his wife, my daughter Nancy, and that each new-year may bring new friends, and the old uns last for ever!"

With great, nay, with stunning effect the toast was responded to by Job and the proposer; and although Mrs. Sykes, did not add to the din by her voice, yet, as she nodded to the twain objects of its reference, her eyes spoke the silent and joyous language of a full and o'ercharged heart.

In few words, and yet to the purpose, James returned his thanks for the compliment conferred upon himself and his wife, and the reign of perfect harmony was confirmed.

"May I ask a favour?" inquired Nancy, after a short silence.

"I should say, my dear," replied her father, that you might, without fear of being refused."

“ In that case,” rejoined Nancy, “ I shall call upon Mr. Sykes to relate one of his hunting stories.”

“ Nothing could be better !” added her father. “ It’s the very thing of all others I should like to hear.”

“ Upon my word,” expostulated the huntsman, “ I don’t think——”

“ Pooh, pooh !” interrupted Edward Dixon. “ Don’t let us have a parcel of fal-the-ral excuses. Such a budget as you’ve got never can be sucked dry.”

The huntsman knocked the ashes from his pipe, tipped the remainder from his glass, and remarked, that “ he supposed what must be, must.”

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