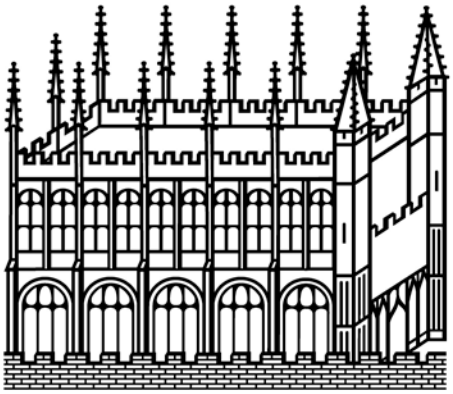

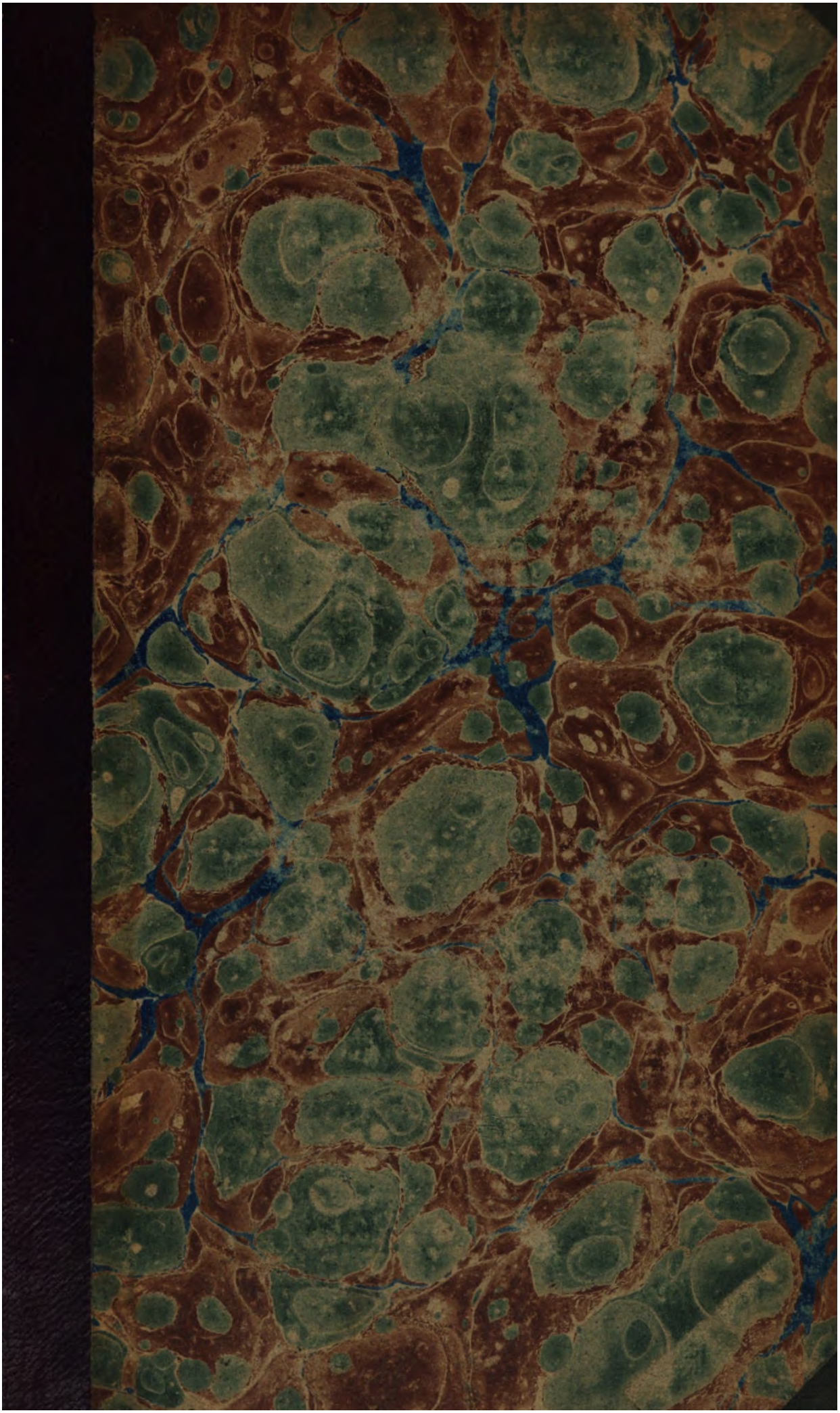

THE OLD HALL;

OR,

OUR HEARTH AND HOMESTEAD.

BY

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CHAPTER I.

" A merrier man,
Within the limit of becoming mirth,
I never spent an hour's talk withal:
His eye begets occasion for his wit;
For every object that the one doth catch,
The other turns to a mirth-roving jest;
Which his fair tongue (conceit's expositor)
Delivers in such apt and gracious words,
That aged ears play truant at his tales,
And younger hearings are quite ravished;
So sweet and voluble is his discourse."

"HA!" exclaimed Job Sykes, drawing the breath through his clinched teeth, and pointing with the end of his pipe to the four horse-shoes suspended in a row on the wall of his sit-

ting-room, and which, from the periodical friction bestowed upon them by Mrs. Sykes, were as bright as polished silver. "Ha!" repeated he, "there's a tale about those bits of iron worth hearing."

"So I've heard ye say before," replied his boon-companion, Edward Dixon, looking askance at the objects referred to by the huntsman for a few brief seconds, and then veiling them from his sight by emitting a thick curling volume of smoke from his ponderous jaws.

"You see that old image there?" said Job, pointing with his dexter thumb at a professed portrait of one of his quaint-looking ancestors, suspended in ebony and black-oaken frames round the apartment.

Edward Dixon nodded assent, keeping his eyes bent sleepily on the picture.

"You may go some distance before you'll meet with such a curiosity as that," continued Job. "He was my great-grandfather, and lived stable-boy, second whip, first whip, and

huntsman, with the Squire's grandfather, not a great deal less than two hundred years ago. They're both," said Job, reflectively, "laid in the same churchyard, close by; only one's under marble, and the other's covered with daisy speckled turf."

"Humph!" returned his companion, by way of a parenthesis; "both are equally comfortable, I've no doubt."

"There's little fear o' that," added Job; "for, if true what everybody says, a better master, or more faithful servant, never lived."

The host of the Lion rose from his chair at this juncture, and closely inspected the likeness of the latter object of the huntsman's praise. After sufficient time for examining the full-length portrait from heel to head, Edward Dixon re-occupied his seat, with the observation that "the individooal wasn't handsome."

"No," replied the huntsman, laughing, "certainly not, as he's there painted. But even

you, Ned, would look comical with such a powdered pigtail, cocked hat, and gear as that."

"Perhaps I might," rejoined the landlord of the Lion, pulling up his neckerchief encircling the roll of fat composing his double chin; "but it isn't dress, Job, my friend, that makes the man."

The huntsman coincided in this opinion, and then resumed. "Well! I dare say you know that, in the olden time, in the days of Jacob Sykes there—— "

"Our family," interrupted Mrs. Sykes, lifting a finger, authoritatively, for her husband to maintain silence while she spoke; "the Sykes family," said she, "were always fond of Scripture names, on the side of both the fathers and mothers, Mr. Dixon. I think it was an aunt or a cousin, but I'm sure it wasn't an uncle on *my* side—the Dabchicks—who, having four sons christened Mathew, Mark, Luke, and John, called the fifth Acts."

"Indeed, ma'm!" returned Edward Dixon, in no way pleased at the interruption.

Mrs. Sykes intimated, by letting her finger gradually fall, and resuming her knitting, that, for the present, Job had the course clear to himself, and might once more give rein to his tongue.

"In the olden time," recommenced the huntsman, "a great deal of land now cropped with corn, and through which the ploughshare yearly cuts deep furrows, was nothing but wood and waste, and kept as hunting grounds for the wild boar and stag; and great meres covered with tall flags, rushes, and rank grass, now drained and dry, were haunts for the heron, preserved for the noble sport of falconry. I've heard," continued Job, "that the spirit for the chase ran so high, in the times I am speaking of, that whole villages were pulled down, in some parts, to make the forests larger and less likely to be disturbed by the deer-killer and poacher. By the law, too, it was death to slay a deer, and the like punishment for even taking the eggs of the heronshaw.

"The Squire of the Range, with whom Jacob Sykes lived, was the first, in these parts, to commence felling scores of broad acres of oak, beech, and elm, and sweeping the boundless woods and coverts which were to be seen as far as the eye could reach. In truth, until now, the tenants of the former Squires were what they called serfs, living by taking their cattle to the barren land to feed, and sharing their flocks and herds with their landlord. It may not be true," said the narrator, dropping his voice to a confidential whisper, "and it would ill become me to speak a word against a Lawrence of the past as it would be of the present; but I've heard say the lion's share used always to be set apart for the Squire, and the tenants, or serfs, were a poor, miserable, meek lot, as you might see every day in a parish workhouse."

"They're a different breed now, I ween," observed his companion.

"Yes," rejoined the huntsman. "I should like their forefathers just to peep from their

grassy mounds and see the noisy, hallooing, rollicking set at their Christmas or rent-day dinner."

Both Edward Dixon and Job hob-an'-nobbed their beakers, at this point of the narrative, and at the conclusion of the refreshment the huntsman continued:—

"As you may suppose," said he, "the face of the country became greatly changed with these clearances; and the sport, as a matter of course, changed with it. The wild boar, from want of thick forests, soon changed his quarters for more distant parts; and the deer quickly, from being as thick as bees in a hive, dwindled down to a few shy herds, as fleet and wild as hawks. For I should tell you, a stag used to browse continually in covert, is a very different animal to one driven to the open plains for provender. The one is a fat and slow animal, and depends more upon his craft and cunning than his speed, while the other trusts to his swift limbs alone.

" The hounds at this time used for hunting, were the bold and heavy talbot breed; and while they had to thread the dense woods in pursuit of game, their great certainty and power to pick along a cold scent, enabled them to run into and pull it down, in a style which faster hounds could never manage.

" The pack kept by the Squire, when Jacob Sykes was huntsman, consisted of twenty-five couples of talbot hounds; and each was so pure and untainted, that not a black or coloured hackle was to be seen in the whole number. All were as white as a snowdrift. The pride of Jacob's heart was his hounds; and as he unkenneled his pack at the first tinge of dawn, as was their wont in these old-fashioned days, it was his boast that, 'let them but once settle to a deer, nothing could save him.'

" At nearly the end of one memorable season, however, this oft-repeated assertion proved greatly at variance with the fact. The runs were innumerable, but seldom had blood re-

warded the noble hounds for their gallant exertions to reach their game. For three weeks they had not viewed a stag after rousing him from his lair, and it began to be whispered abroad that the Squire's hounds were no longer stanch nor true. This was not only sadly vexing to Jacob, but it puzzled him beyond bearing with anything like resignation. In vain he gnawed the end of his pig-tail, conning in his disturbed brain the 'whys' and 'wherefores' of these perplexing effects. In vain he sought information, with the eagerness that boys seek birds'-nests and race after butterflies. 'My hounds are harder than flints, and sleeker than moles,' Jacob would say. 'Their condition was never finer; and yet, somehow or other, they can't taste blood. What *can* be the cause?'

"As usual in such cases of mystery, opinions were given in great variety; and the only circumstance worthy of remark is, that no two were found to be alike.

"Jacob was perplexed more and more. He could not solve the mystery, which, like a spider's mesh, was woven in a thick film about his mind's eye; and, despite his labour to break it, there it remained, a clinging trammel of doubt and wonder.

"'It's no use,' sighed Jacob. 'The hounds are bewitched—I am—or the deer is. What *can* be the cause?'

"Thus ruminating with troubled thoughts, the hale and hearty old huntsman wandered about, a living puzzle to himself.

"His master, who, as his likeness bears witness in the long portrait gallery at the Range, was a tall, wiry-made gentleman, with a head all forehead, and a face as smooth as any looking-glass, happened to meet with his huntsman in one of his most disturbed and miserable moods.

"'Well, Jacob,' said he, 'what's the matter, man? I hate to see frowns and wrinkles as I do weeds and brambles where the vine and hop should climb.'

"'May it please your honour,' replied Jacob, 'and so do I. But how's a man to smile, and look pleasant and comfortable, if so be he's bent double with the willy-wabbles?'

"'Willy-wabbles!' rejoined his master, laughing. 'What part of the body is that affliction centred in?'

"'Every part, Sir,' returned Jacob. 'I'm all over as miserable as a half-hanged cur, and wish some kind Christian would put me out of my troubles at once and for ever.'

"'Let me hear the reason,' added the Squire.

"'Your hounds, Sir,' said Jacob, looking his master steadily in the face, 'must begin, I know, to give you dissatisfaction, and not without cause. I can't tell why, hard as I've tried, but we're all over behind, Squire, and it breaks my heart to think on't.'

"'Well, it used not to be so, certainly,' replied his master, looking as grave as he could, to keep company with his huntsman's long, doleful countenance.

"'No,' rejoined Jacob, slapping his spotless buckskins with his broad open palms, 'and that's what it is makes such a fog in my head. The hounds are in the very bloom of condition: they're eager as ever for blood, *more* eager for the want of it, and yet they can't go the pace to get it.'

"'*And never will*,' coolly returned the Squire.

"If a cannon ball or a thunderbolt had fallen at Jacob's feet, he could not have been more stunned or bewildered than at these words.

"'Never will!' he repeated, looking aghast. 'Never will, Squire!' and then the old man's under lip quivered, and there was a struggle to check a brace of tears from floating down his cheeks.

"'You'll scarcely understand what I mean, perhaps,' added his master; 'but we must cross the breed, Jacob, and get a different kind of hound, both lighter and more speedy, for the work in these times.'

" His huntsman did not argue against this proceeding, because he in no way comprehended what was meant; but he pondered upon the words the live-long day, and spelt them in his uneasy dreams by night.

" A few years flitted past. The pattern set by the Squire to fell great woods and turn wide wastes into tillage was quickly followed by the adjoining landowners, and copied by others from them. The game became scarcer and more difficult of approach than ever, and Jacob's pack was now even a subject of scoffing and ridicule. Occasionally an old, impoverished buck was taken, and a lean, weak hind, lame or injured in some way or other; but as for a three, four, or six-year old stag, he was never viewed again after being once emprimed.

" Jacob's hounds were now called 'the creepers.' Chafed beyond endurance at the many jests cracked at the expense of his favourites—well loved still, notwithstanding their sunk and entombed popularity—he withdrew

himself from all companionship, and screened his deeply-seated mortification in the gloom of his own cottage.

"From the day, however, that his master mentioned the necessity of making an alteration in the breed of his hounds, secret and slow, but sure changes were taking place. Superintending the management himself, the Squire regularly visited a part of the kennel separated from the rest of the courts and lodging-houses, for his trials and experiments. Fresh dogs were brought from distant parts, and drafting and entering the progenies of successive generations with great care and judgment, a pack was at length got together of the mould and form of our modern fox-hounds, only somewhat bigger and heavier of limb.

"'Now, Jacob,' said the Squire to his dispirited servant, 'what say ye to try our new pack to-morrow at this ghostly stag I hear so much about, and which has challenged our old

talbots so long, and beaten 'em next to skeletons?'

"His huntsman gave a sickly, hopeless smile, and replied something about 'his willingness to obey orders.'

"'What is the truth about this strange animal?' rejoined the Squire. 'I hear a great many wonderful stories about it.'

"I really don't know, Sir,' returned Jacob. 'Some say one thing, and some another.'

"'Let me hear what they say,' added his master.

"'A few think, Sir,' said Jacob, the blood slightly tinging his cheeks, 'that it is a sort of warning to you for clearing away the old coverts.'

"'Ha, ha,' laughed the Squire. 'Ha, ha, ha.'

"'Others say,' continued Jacob, 'that our hounds, having made game o' the deer for so many years, are now, in turn, being made game of.'

"'Ha, ha,' laughed the Squire. 'Ha, ha, ha.'

"'What I know myself, Sir, is this,' resumed the huntsman, with increased seriousness of tone and manner; 'for twenty-one days in succession we have hunted the same deer, and for the same number of nights he has visited the kennel.'

"The Squire started, and ejaculated the monosyllable, 'What!'

"''Tis true, Sir,' returned Jacob. 'Ive seen him myself, in the mist of the early dawn, standing within a hundred yards o' the kennel, tossing his branched antlers, and stamping his cloven feet on the ground, as if inclined to charge the very walls separating him from the hounds.'

"Are ye sure,' added the Squire, pointing with a fore-finger to the centre of his forehead, 'are ye sure,' repeated he, 'that the mist was not there?'

"'I'll be sworn, Sir,' replied Jacob, 'that I saw him day after day as plainly as I now see you.'

"'No matter,' rejoined his master reflectively. 'To-morrow *I'll* draft the pack.'

"The first pale, flickering streak of the early light had scarcely broken the murky darkness of the east, and the watchful cock still dozed upon his roost unconscious of the near approach of day, when Jacob and his master pressed foot in stirrup, and jogged slowly towards the remnant of a covert, then called Oakford forest, but of which not a single tree now remains. Both were mounted on the stamp of hunters so much admired at that time —sinewy, strong, bony animals; short in back and leg, and up to the heaviest weight, over any description of country, from sunrise to sunset. There was little daylight to be seen under horses then. Close to the ground, and yet capable, withal, to go over or through it: they were made for use, Ned, as good beer is for drinking."

Edward Dixon deemed this to be a hint to replenish his horn with Job's last and best Oc-

tober brewing, and charging it to the brim, he tossed it off with a satisfactory smack of the lips, and, in nautical parlance, "brought to" with a "Ha!"

"Jacob," continued his companion, "possessed very little confidence in the fresh hounds placed for the first time under his command and management in the field. And, if truth must be told, so fond was he of the old pack, and confident, notwithstanding the uninterrupted succession of defeats, in their power and capacities, that he wished his master's 'new-fangled curs,' as he called them, might meet with the giant hart, the taunting defier of his stanch talbots, in order that his creed in the game being gifted with supernatural powers might be strengthened.

"'You generally find this mysterious challenger of our hounds in Oakford, Jacob,' observed the Squire, on reaching the verge of the covert.

"'We've done so for twenty-one ——'

" At this moment the sered leaves and twigs were heard to rustle and crack, and before Jacob could finish his reply, a huge and majestic stag sprang from the thicket, and stood as motionless as if carved from a block of granite, not fifty yards before their horses' heads.

" ' By Saint Paul!' exclaimed the Squire, between surprise and admiration, as he pulled hard upon his bridle to survey the noble beast. ' What a hart! I never put eyes upon his fellow in my life.'

" ' It's the dev—' Jacob checked his supposition, and left it unconcluded.

" ' Bold, too, as he's handsome,' continued his master, with the enthusiasm of a true sportsman. ' Egad! to give us his front at the outset, without the delay of hide-and-seek. It beats all that I ever saw or heard of!'

" ' Aye,' rejoined his huntsman, in a hoarse whisper. ' And he'll surprise ye more yet, Sir; for, if I'm not mistaken, he's at bay.'

" ' Wo to the hounds if he is,' returned his

master. 'He'll rip up the entire pack, and send them flying in the air like oyster shells.'

"With eyes protruding from their sockets, and glaring upon his foes, the hart remained with outstretched limbs and branched antlers tossed aloft, with the pride of the monarch of the wild that he was. At length, with dainty tread he turned slowly round, and, giving one sidelong glance behind, he leaped with a mighty bound into the air, and away he sped, fleet as any swift-winged pigeon.

"'Chevy-ho, for'ard hark!' hallooed the Squire, rising in his stirrups as he took off his cap and laid the hounds on. 'Gone away, gone away!'

"'Yes,' said Jacob, as the merry pack, heads up and sterns down, threw their ringing music to the breeze, 'he's *gone away* and no mistake.'

"Much to the astonishment of the huntsman, no sooner had the hounds settled to their game, which they did in one solid body at the

cheer, than he found it necessary to begin spuring and urging his horse forwards, which he never had to do when riding to his old talbots.

" ' A murrain to ye!' cried Jacob, testily driving the rowels deeply into his horse's flanks, and speckling them with crimson blood from neck to buckle. ' Are ye grown slower than a snail all at once?'

" The horse answered the unusual call upon his powers with a will to do his best; and Jacob's unctuous pigtail stood stiffly out in the chilly breeze of morning, a thing of note and personal identity.

" Faster than any hounds the huntsman had yet seen go, and fleeter than he had ever expected to live to see, the ' new-fangled curs ' skimmed along at a pace that threatened to distance and throw out Jacob at the start. With whip, spur, and voice, he goaded his hunter to the utmost stretch of his speed; and only then it was that he could just manage to live

within an occasional view and hearing of their tongues.

" The Squire laboured under a similar difficulty, and his persuaders were as busily at play as Jacob's. When, however, the horses had caught their second wind, they mended the places of their riders, and carried them closer to the flying chase.

" ' Yodoit, have at him ! Endless, Eager, Dashaway !' hallooed he, in ecstasy, as the hounds streaked up a sloping piece of turf, and over the brow of which the hart dipped, tossing his gigantic antlers right and left, as if in derision of his pursuers.

" Wood, moor, and farmstead, were passed in rapid succession. Now over the plain, and up the hill, and through the vale, the stag led the way ; topping high walls, and flying brooks and fences, with the ease of a strong-pinioned bird.

" The thin gray mist, which, like a veil, hung shading, but not concealing, nature's

charms, lifted before the sun's glowing rays, and every bough and twig and blade of grass, loaded with clear crystal drops, flashed and sparkled as though studded with gems, or lighted with an endless succession of fairy lamps. The owl, the beetle, and the bat, sought their retreats in the ivy-twined ruin, to slumber, while the sun was up, and the things of day revelled in his brightness. Rook cawed to rook, and stretching their jetty wings, wheeled from the lofty tree to seek their matin meal with greedy stomachs. Lowing cattle wended their way to rich pastures; the shrill whistle and snatch of some old ballad from the herdsman's lips, as he followed them o'er the lea; the bay of the watch-dog to the unfolded flock; the playful shout of children; the hardy peasant going to his daily toil—now broke the stilly reign of sleep and silence.

" Fast and faster yet the chase proceeded. The ringing cry was stilled, and every hound raced along as if his tongue was muffled. Mute

though they were, there was no lack of ardour. Each strained his best to reach the game, and not a spirit among them but what would have haunched or throated him with the last throe of life remaining.

"'Yoiks, my beauties!' shouted the Squire, as they flashed over a sterile heath with the hart in view, as noiseless, save the beating of the horses' hoofs, and fleet as the shadows of fleecy clouds before a gale. 'Yodoit! Antic, Damper, Venomous!'

"The hart having so frequently distanced his pursuers, and even challenged and courted trial after trial of their strength and speed, began to show symptoms of a very different kind to those he evinced at the beginning of the run. Instead of tossing his antlers with apparent mocking at their endeavours, he now threw his branched head back upon his haunches, and stretching his pliant, willow-wand limbs to the utmost strain of power, rattled away at a pace which nothing with legs alone could live with.

" ' He'll beat us,' remarked Jacob, shading his eyes, and seeing the stag skim out of sight over the flat, ' as easy as a bird would.'

" ' Not if it takes a week to run into him,' replied his master, bringing his teeth together like the snap of a dog. For the Squire was a firm, resolute man, whom nothing could turn and nothing blanch.

" Hours fled. The glowing sun at noon—for the corn was scarcely cut before stag-hunting commenced in these days of old—streaked down hotly and fiercely; and yet there was no pause, let, or cheek.

" There was no ring—no seeking of covert or soil that had been traversed before. Straight as the sinking sun from east to west the stag held his course, and never bent or swerved an inch from it. Upon his fleetness he depended for escape, and onwards he swept, like a barbed arrow from as trusty a bow as was ever bent by archer good.

" Athirst and exhausted, the pack now began

to tail and drop into a long broken line; and notwithstanding the Squire spurred hard to their heads and cheered them with his hearty voice, not half could answer to the call by renewed exertions. Their bolt was shot, and the steel spent.

"'We can't get 'em on, Sir,' observed Jacob, quite satisfied that nothing in the shape of hounds could pull down the hart; or, indeed, anything else.

"'No matter,' returned his master. 'Leave those that can't go for those that can. Chevy-ho, hark for'ard, hark!'

"A few—three couples and a half—threw their heads up at the cheer, and again made hill and vale echo with the music of the chase. And then, with sterns down, and close upon the ground, they streaked away as only the brave and gallant can when stirred to gallant deeds.

"Side by side Jacob and his master rode, and although their horses reeled with uncertain strides from long and breathless exertion,

yet they still maintained the pride of place which the true sportsman loves to hold.

"'We shall live with 'em yet!' shouted the Squire, taking a pull at his horse as they came to a wide and deep water-course, through which it was impossible to go, for the abruptness of the banks and the mire in its bed; 'although,' continued he, 'this *is* a puzzler.'

"'We can neither get over nor wade it, Sir,' replied Jacob, dismounting, and making a trial of the black ooze with his boot. 'It's a desperate yawner for a fresh horse to take, much more for our blown ones; and as to setting foot upon it, we might as well cast 'em upon their backs in a mud pit.'

"'And we may ride miles before finding a better place,' rejoined his master, 'and, perhaps, be thrown out altogether.'

"'No doubt of it,' returned Jacob. 'That's the very reason he made his point here, just to vex us the more by bringing us to a standstill.'

" ' The hounds, too, will quickly flag, no one being with them,' added his master, watching the remnant of the pack scramble from the mire, and again settle to their game with the spirit they showed at break of day.

" The Squire knitted his brow and remained for a moment in hesitation. At length he ejaculated, ' If it's my death I'll try it ;' and taking his horse some thirty yards from the edge of the bank, he drove him forwards like a whirlwind. The horse, putting forth his remaining strength, rose at the leap, and strode across it in a style that the best can only show.

" ' Hie-over !' cried the Squire, throwing out his whip hand. ' Hie-over ! have at him !'

" Jacob's slower blood began to flow more quickly through his veins when he saw this daring exploit of his master, and after standing a few moments to bite the end of his pig-tail, as was his usage when greatly perplexed, he climbed into the saddle, pulled his cap well over his ears, shortened his reins, thrust his

feet home in his stirrups, and took his horse about the same distance from the yawning leap as the Squire did. Then urging him on with a vigorous application of his tormentors, and giving no chance of flinching or swerving, the willing horse made a mighty spring, and fell with his hind feet on the edge of the crumbling side of the dike. Hard was the struggle to save himself. At every plunge the earth broke from under his hoofs, and more than once it appeared certain that backwards he must fall to inevitable death. Jacob threw himself forwards, and endeavoured to free his feet from the stirrups; but in consequence of the violent efforts of the horse he could not succeed; and thus fixed to the agonized animal, they both wavered and balanced on the brink of destruction.

"'Heaven have mercy on me!' ejaculated Jacob, throwing himself at a venture from the saddle; and as he did so, he felt his near foot slip through the stirrup, and thus link him irremediably to the fate of his horse. The first

thought was — ' Even if he clears himself, I must be *dragged to death.*'

" Horror made his brain reel. Raising himself on an elbow, he tried to watch the result of the animal's struggle; but his blood-shot starting eyeballs refused their offices, and he could see no more than if it had been the hour of black and pitchy night.

" How long he could never tell; but it seemed to be an age, when a thick cloud appeared to be lifted before his feverish gaze, and then he saw his horse lying motionless with his haunches hanging helplessly across the brink of the dike, his forelegs stretched out, and between his clenched teeth the strong leaves of a dockweed, firmly fixed, which alone kept him from falling backwards over the brink.

" Afraid to move limb or muscle, the huntsman continued motionless, and yet he perceived the handful of green leaves cracking one by one, and the strained root gradually quitting its hold.

" Thews and sinews must have snapped if the more than natural exertion had failed. With desperation in the effort, the horse threw himself forwards, and, catching a firm hold with his upgathered feet, he flung and rolled himself a few short yards from the impending danger. Exulting at the dread escape, he sprang upon his legs, and, with a loud neigh, was about to rear upon his haunches, when, seeing the prostrate form of his rider, he became like sculptured stone, and stood as motionless, save for his quivering and distended nostrils.

" Rising and disengaging his foot from the stirrup, Jacob wiped the large beads of perspiration from his forehead, and, after two or three convulsive sobs, and a brief thanksgiving for his dread escape, he again mounted his horse, and pushed on in the course the chase had taken.

" ' A servant owes this duty to his master,' said he, picking his way by the tracks imprinted on the oozy moor. ' He should never leave him whilst in danger.'

" The Squire, in the belief that his huntsman had refused to follow him, redoubled his energies to get on the few remaining hounds. If one flagged, or showed the least symptom of 'tailing off,' he cheered with a hearty 'Yodoit, my beauty! Yoiks, for'ard, hark!' and, as if magic was in his voice, the hound would throw up his head, and sending forth a deep, musical note by way of response, streak to the front, and, perhaps, lead the run.

" The last rays of the sinking sun now tipped the tree top, and long, dark shadows began to fade into one deep and sombre hue. The heathcock challenged, and the mounting lark, high poised in air, dropped from trilling his vesper song, and sought the greensward already wet with evening dew. In the valleys, a light, fleecy cloud curled from the ground, and spreading itself in weblike folds on bough and twig, charged the petals of wild flowers with crystal drops. Night began to close around.

" 'By St. Paul!' shouted the Squire—it was

his favourite oath—'By St. Paul!' repeated he in a husky voice, and straining his eyes towards a particular point of the compass, 'I think I viewed him there.'

"Now he was sure. The branched antlers of the hart showed themselves clear and distinct in the western light.

"'Chevy-ho!' hallooed the Squire. 'Chevy-ho! Yodoit! Have at him! Now, Fearless, Victor, Rattler, boys, hark!'

"Gallantly the little pack answered the cheer. Away they flew with the speed of thought, and, as the scent grew hotter at every stride, they occasionally gave tongue, despite of exhausted lungs. At length, from scent to view they raced their game, and then, like a peal of bells, opened their ringing music within a few yards of the deer.

Dusk as it was, the Squire could see at some distance off, that the hart was beaten almost to a standstill. His tongue hung far from his jaws, and his heavy breathing could

be distinctly heard as he entered a thick clump of fir trees with the hounds snapping their eager teeth at his haunches.

"A faint howl, and then another, with the crash of a heavy body falling through the underwood, told the fate of some of the brave and foremost of the pack. In an instant, the Squire threw himself from the saddle, and rushed forwards to save the hounds and secure the hart. With his drawn knife between his teeth, he darted into the thicket; but had not entered more than some twenty yards, when he found it necessary to abate some of the heat of his determination; for although a bold man, the Squire withal was a cautious one.

"At bay, and with his antlers couched, ready to tilt with any foe, the noble animal stood, giving as courageous a front as was ever offered to an enemy. The lifeless bodies of three of his pursuers were stretched out within a few feet of him; and the remaining four, in their endeavours to fix themselves

upon him, would quickly have met with the like fate, had it not been for the timely interference of 'Get away; back!' accompanied with a few cracks of the double thong.

"Knowing that he could not approach the deer without assistance, the Squire, in the forlorn hope of receiving some, blew a loud mort upon his horn; but, as he took it from his lips, he was astonished to see the hart bound forwards, and roll headlong to the ground, as if a bullet had crashed through his brain. Springing upon his neck, the Squire was about to draw the ready blade across his throat, when he discovered that there was little need of the sharpened steel to complete the triumph. The deer was dead: his life's bolt was shot.

"The distant wind of the horn fell upon the ear of Jacob Sykes, and making the best of his way to the quarter whence it came, he had the satisfaction, mingled with something like regret, as he thought of his favourite

talbots, to see the bold defier of his hounds at length stretched upon the ground defeated.

"In the entrance hall," continued Job, "are now the antlers of this famous hart; and underneath are nailed his feet, tipped with silver. Not having anything as a memento of so gallant and eventful a chase, Jacob Sykes had the shoes of his horse taken off, and hung up where they now are," said the narrator, pointing to the polished bits of iron on the wall; "and where they will remain," said Job, emphatically, "as long as I live, and many more of my name, I hope."

"Amen!" responded Edward Dixon.—"Amen, with all my heart."

CHAPTER II.

" But whate'er you are,
That in this desert inaccessible,
Under the shade of melancholy boughs,
Lose and neglect the creeping hours of time;
If ever you have look'd on better days,
If ever been where bells have knoll'd to church;
If ever sat at any good man's feast;
If ever from your eye-lids wiped a tear,
And know what 'tis to pity and be pitied—
Let gentleness my strong enforcement be."

It was one of those evenings that tempt the birds to loiter on bough and spray to sing a few notes of their early summer songs, and yet, notwithstanding the deep, dark shadows cast by the lingering sun-set, and the gentle waving of the green, fresh-robed trees, there was a

chilling air which made the hearth more welcome than a wander on the hill, through lane, or mist-robed valley.

In his lonely and confined domain, Mike Crouch sat before a handful of dying embers. His elbows rested on his knees, and his chin upon his hands; and in this posture he appeared to be buried in profound reflection.

"I wonder," he at length said, "whether that razor-grinding, scissor-sharpening, knife-whetting, old prig, Peter Parkins, will really try to take a spoke out o' my wheel, or whether it's only cheek?"

At this stage of the soliloquy, the earth-stopper paused, and seemed to be puzzled in untying this knotty point.

"There's no doubt," continued he, "that I've set his hackles up, and not without cause —*that* I must confess. But what care I?" said Mike, snapping his finger and thumb. "It was my humour, and I enjoyed it. A dog worries a cat or a rat—what for? It's his sport,

and so 'twas mine, to mangle that mouldy old sinner. I hate him! and always did. It's as natural for rogue to hate rogue, as it is for fish to swim. A fox won't share his chicken or rabbit with the vixen that whelped him; and a rogue has the same liking for the swag in his grab. Share and share alike may do well enough where honesty's concerned; but it won't do when you come to prigging."

Mike again stopped, and permitted a long check before he resumed the train of his consideration.

" Even if his will be good and strong," said he, " I don't see what harm he could do me. Supposing he splits in that little matter concerning Tom, and tells how and who spread the net—where's his proof? I'll say it's a lie, and, word against word, I know who'll come off best in that bout. There's been no neighbours' eyes nor ears to witness our meetings. The kennel's not a place for clapper-tongued gossips. No, no," and then Mike rubbed his

hands with glee, and chuckled with inward satisfaction.

"If the cross-grained varmint was believed," said the earth-stopper, losing some of his levity, "I should get the sack to a certainty, and then it would be all up with my patchwork. But—" and Mike's large, white, and even teeth, snapped together loudly as he spoke, and he clinched his fists with savage earnestness, "if he does turn over my barrow o' luck, I'll spill the last drop of blood in his skin, if I'm hanged on the highest gibbet that was ever raised."

With this fierce resolve, the earth-stopper rose from his lowly seat, and strode—it took but two steps of his long, spider legs—up and down the room, not unlike the restless move ments of some wild animal confined in a cage.

"What's that?" said he, quickly stopping in his walk, and listening, like a startled hare with pricked ears, to some sound without.

There was a slight pull at the faggot forming

the entrance to the kennel, and then, as the feeble effort to remove it seemed to fail, Mike sent the bundle of sered sticks rolling before the sturdy kick he bestowed upon it.

"Now then!" cried he, thrusting his head and shoulders out. "Man, woman, child, ghost, or devil, come in, and let's know your errand."

The earth-stopper's roughness of bearing, however, became greatly changed as he saw, much to his astonishment, the slight form of a female figure dressed in black standing within a few feet of him; and his first thought was, that he might have been too hasty in "summoning spirits from the vasty deep."

"Pardon me if I'm an intruder," said a weak and plaintive voice. "But I was informed that Mr. Lawrence's earth-stopper, Mike Crouch, lived here."

"Your servant, ma'am," replied Mike, respectfully. "I'm the Squire's stopper, and that's the name I go by in these parts."

"Can I then speak to you for a few minutes?" rejoined the stranger.

"In course, my lady," returned Mike, fully impressed that one was addressing him. "Perhaps—" the earth-stopper hesitated; "perhaps," repeated he, "you wouldn't object to take a seat at the fire. I can soon make a blaze, although it looks a little dull just now."

"I feel much obliged by your kind offer," added the stranger; "for I am far from well, and the evening's very cold and damp."

With as much politeness as he was possessed of, Mike ushered the stranger into his dwelling, and wiping the well-polished log which served him for a seat, expressed a "hope that the lady would make herself as comfortable as his poor means would permit of."

"You do not recollect me?" said she, inquiringly, drawing aside her deep fall of crape which, hitherto, had secreted her features.

The earth-stopper glanced at the wan and

deeply-marked countenance with a scrutinizing look.

"No, ma'am," replied he, "I can't say that I do."

"And yet," she rejoined, "this is not our first meeting."

This sorely puzzled the earth-stopper, for it had not fallen to his lot to meet with many ladies in the course of his life; not so many, at least, but that he could easily reckon them up in his memory.

"Perhaps, ma'am," responded Mike, diving his hands into the pockets of his trousers, and lifting his shoulders to his ears, "you take me for somebody else. And yet," continued he, exhibiting every tooth in his head, "it wouldn't be easy to do that either."

"No," returned the lady, in a mournful tone, "I am not mistaken. So long as my poor brain could retain a thought, it would be impossible *not* to think of the day and hour that we met and parted—once, 'twas only

once," she added, dropping her face between her hands and stifling a choking sob.

Quickly as a meteor's flash the truth darted into the murky brain of Mike Crouch. It almost stunned him, while he stuttered, "you, you—'twas you that gave me—"

"My child," interrupted the stranger, deeply affected. "My own pretty child."

The earth-stopper could not give utterance to a thousand questions which crowded in a moment upon his tongue. Speech, for the nonce, being denied him, he gave vent to his inexpressible feelings in a long, loud, and shrill whistle.

"I suppose, ma'am," he at length managed to stammer, "that you're aware you've been sought after, like a needle in a stack o' hay for years past. I might almost say," added Mike, "from the morning you gave me the hamper containing Master Tom, till this very moment."

"Not until lately," replied the stranger.

"Nor indeed," she added with a sigh, "had I an opportunity of so doing."

"Have you been, or has anybody been, to the Hall to inform 'em of your turning up in this way, my lady?" asked Mike, with almost painful anxiety.

"No," returned she, "I wished to learn a few particulars concerning several matters previous to my letting anybody there know of my arrival. And in the belief that you could render them, and would conform to my wishes in the *way* that I desire the information to be conveyed, I first came here to seek your aid."

"What a pippin o' luck!" ejaculated Mike, clasping his hands energetically, and turning up his eyes. "I'm a made man from this very night."

"How so?" inquired the lady.

"The reward, ma'am," replied Mike, "just for taking the news of your being here, will be more than I shall spend during the rest

of my life, if I do nothing, smoke like a chimney, and drink like a fish."

"Still be not too hasty," rejoined she. "I hope that you will observe my directions with strictness, and not be led away with imprudent haste from selfish motives."

"Obey orders if ye break owners, ma'am, is my rule," returned Mike. "If my blood," continued he, "be a little flushed at the unexpectedness of the windfall, don't be alarmed but I'll go by your directions, let 'em be what they may."

"From your sincerity of manner, I am satisfied your intentions are honest," added she, "and that I may rest satisfied of your fulfilling them. And now tell me, were you not my boy's early companion?"

"Yes, my lady," replied Mike. "We used to rove about, as soon as he could toddle, and before that time when nursing—dry nursing, ma'am, at Dame Woodley's—I used to sit on the threshold o' the cottage door, and

rock him asleep in the sunshine for hours together."

"And did Mr. Hardy often visit him?" inquired—yes! it was the *mother* that asked that question.

"Daily, ma'am, as regularly as the day came round," responded the earth-stopper. "And after he could run by hisself, and prattle just half a dozen words I learned him, Mr. Hardy used to be more at Dame Woodley's cottage than at the Hall."

"God bless him!" rejoined the lady. "It's like his warm and generous heart."

"I don't remember how old," continued Mike; "but he was but a suckling when an order came for Master Tom's removal, bag and baggage—it was but a little brown paper parcel, ma'am—to the Hall. Lor' what a tale it made in the country to be sure; there wasn't an old woman within twenty mile' round, whose tongue didn't ring and babble with it. Many said this, others said that; but the

lot seemed to be agreed in putting the boot on Mr. Hardy's leg."

"What you do you mean?" asked Mike's interrogator.

"Why, ma'am," replied he, while his cheeks, unused to blushing, became slightly tinged with a crimson tint, "folks seemed to say, Mr. Hardy had been and put his foot in it."

"I am still at a loss," rejoined the lady, puzzled at the vague language of her informant.

"To be plain, then, ma'am, as a pike-staff," returned Mike, "people considered Mr. Hardy was the real father of Tom."

"Indeed!" she exclaimed, "and was this slander removed?"

"Not for a long time," he replied. "But when such heaps of money were spent and thrown away, for months and even years, in trying to make out the pedigree of the foundling, as some called him—but which I think ought to have been changed to the *sendling*—

the report was no longer raised, and Mr. Hardy became free o' that trap."

"Pray proceed," returned Mike's anxious listener. "Every word is valuable beyond price to me, for although I gleaned some of the intelligence you are giving me, a short time since, all is of the greatest interest to me."

"I'll keep in the same track then, ma'am," added the earth-stopper, "and give ye a little account of what's taken place from the day your son began to live at the Hall, up to this. As soon as he was full enough in the tooth, or I should say to you, my lady, old enough," said Mike, correcting his phraseology, "Mr. Hardy took him in hand, to teach him reading and writing, and so forth; but he was always fonder of walking about the fields and woods with me, and listening to lessons about hunting, shooting, and fishing. Ah!" ejaculated Mike, "it was I who first taught him to tie a fly, spin a minnow,

tally-ho a fox and halloo to hounds. It was I that showed him how to get his level, and cut his birds from air to earth like a true sportsman should do, and like one that he is. It was I—"

"Stay, stay," interrupted Mike's hearer, "I shall learn all this, no doubt, from himself. Tell me of what transpired, as far as you know, of a more general interest."

Mike scratched his left ear vigorously, and then continued:—

"As soon as Mr. Hardy's brain became like a blown egg, and Tom had sucked it quite dry, he was sent to our parson, Mr. Baldwin, where he found a charm that led him to the Rectory early of mornings, and kept him there till late of evenings."

"And what was that?" asked the lady.

"Miss Baldwin, ma'am," replied Mike, "the rector's only child, and considered the prettiest and best-natured young lady in these parts."

"Are they then attached?"

"Rivetted together, ma'am," rejoined the earth-stopper. "That is to say," continued he, "as far as promises, given and received, go. The time isn't fixed, I believe, for the match to come off. And now I think, my lady, you've heard, in about as few words as I could invent the chief parts o' the history of your son, since he was a little sucker. He's as great a favourite with the Squire as he is with Mr. Hardy; and long since it has been determined, that when the Range shall lose the present master, he shall fill his place."

"God grant that it may be a long time to come!" fervently exclaimed she. "Was not a Mr. Tobias Smith an inmate of the Range some time since?"

"Oh yes, ma'am!" replied the earth-stopper, grinning; "and a queer fish he is. It was him who brought the news of Tom's pedigree, and unravelled the whole mystery concerning him; and he is now, as he has been for months past, trying to discover what

might have become of—I may be bold enough to say, I hope, without offence—*you*, my lady."

"Thank you, thank you very much," earnestly rejoined she. "I am now acquainted with sufficient for my purpose. Will you now," she continued, "pay strict observance to my injunctions?"

"I'll do my duty to you, ma'am," returned Mike, "if that be what you mean."

"Then go to the Hall, and frame some excuse to see my son alone," added the lady. "Tell him that a person here has something of the greatest importance to communicate; but, on no account, either by word or gesture, let him learn who I am, or what the nature of the business is."

"I'll do my best," said the earth-stopper; "but I don't think he'll like to walk up here at this time o' the evening, without knowing who wants him, or for what he's wanted."

"If he objects, be more earnest in your

entreaty," returned she ; " I think that I may depend upon your powers of persuasion."

" Well, my lady !" added Mike, " I'll do my best, and no man can be expected to do more ;" and, with this resolve, the earth-stopper turned upon his heel, in order to fulfil his mission.

CHAPTER III.

"The silent hours steal on."

The large, rambling room, appropriated as the common sitting apartment in the Range, never bore a more pleasant and cheerful appearance. A massive lamp, suspended by a long, thick-linked chain, and fixed to a beam of solid oak in the centre of the ceiling, threw its flaring rays around, and made the grim old figures, worked in tapestry, on part of the panelled walls, look renovated in their mouldy decay. A fire—such a fire—blazed and roared on the yawning hearth, and fagots and Yule logs were heaped together in mingled confusion, and, in serpent flames, reared themselves and licked

the chasm of a chimney like a fanned furnace in its hissing anger. All looked bright, and warm, and genial. Not a draught of air from chink or crevice in the latticed casements could force itself, and if it had, the wide and thick curtains, drawn closely across them, would have baffled all chilling influence.

In a semicircle the party formed about the fire. There sat the Squire, in a carved and antiquated chair, listening to some harmless jest or story of the olden time, narrated by the Rector. Opposite was Mary and our hero "all in all" to each other, and occupied as such can only be when hearts twine, like the tendrils of creeping plants, clasping and clinging in folds never to be untwined, but oftentimes destined to be broken. And John Hardy, too, was there—glowing-hearted, glorious John! For what object or particular purpose it is impossible to define with any degree of strictness, but a silk handkerchief was thrown over a portion of his bald and shining pate, and beneath this

canopy he sat in a dozy, winking, blinking condition, as if he was really too comfortable totally to slumber, and yet not to do so became a gentle effort of the eyelids.

"Why not make up your mind at once to enjoy a nap?" inquired our hero. "I see you must, in the end, yield to the honey-heavy dew of slumber."

"I beg your pardon," replied John Hardy, in a soft, silky voice; "I've not the slightest intention of going to sleep. When a lady's present, how could you suppose me capable of such a dereliction of gallantry?"

"Pray do not study my presence," replied Mary, smiling. "There's not the smallest occasion for your paying any regard to that, Mr. Hardy."

"The truth is," rejoined John, shaking off a little of his lethargy, "I begin to suspect both of ye wish me in the land o' dreams."

"Now, why should we wish that?" asked our hero.

"Aye," returned Mary, "why should we wish that?"

"Haven't you heard the proverb," added John, with one of the deepest winks, he fervently believed, mortal ever gave: "Old gossips say, when the cat's asleep the mice will play."

"Old gossips talk a very great deal of nonsense," said Mary.

"A very great great deal of nonsense," repeated our hero.

"Upon my word," rejoined John, "you support each other to the echo."

"And may they continue to do so to the latest hour of their lives!" said the Squire, joining in the conversation.

"Amen," responded the Rector, in a whisper just audible.

"Amen, with all my heart," added John, in a tone which could not be mistaken for the sincerity of its source.

Between the folds of the heavy curtains drawn across the windows, the bright moon-

beams streamed; and, rising from her chair, Mary threw them still further back, and was observing something about the beauty of the night, when she gave a stifled exclamation of fright, and hastily receded from the spot.

"What is the matter?" was the simultaneous question from everybody present.

"I know not," replied Mary faintly, as she was supported to a chair, "whether I am right, but I thought I saw a face pressed closely against one of the lower panes of the window."

"You must be mistaken, I think, my dear," rejoined the Squire, soothingly; "we have no eavesdroppers or watchers here."

"The light deceived you, Mary," returned her father.

"Perhaps it did," added she; "and if not, it was very foolish to be so unnecessarily frightened."

"It might have been some booby or other," observed John Hardy, indulging in a little curiosity.

"If so," added our hero, with a resolute air, "his ears shall suffer for their owner's impertinence;" and, with this determination of inflicting condign punishment, he hastily quitted the room.

Mary Baldwin was not one of those mincing young ladies who, having unwittingly been the cause of a sensation, was desirous of maintaining it by the maudlin and sickening art of affectation. In a few minutes every trace of her disturbance was expunged, and her former cheerfulness regained, albeit the prolonged absence of our hero made its completion a matter of no trifling effort.

"Tom is away longer than I expected he would be," remarked John Hardy, with a fidgetty shake of the shoulders.

"If occupied in tugging the ears of the intruder all this time," said the Rector, laughing, "they must tingle most unenviably by this time."

"In sooth they must," replied the Squire;

"and I would prefer their belonging to the head of anybody else than my own."

"I'm not quite certain whether that's not a selfish sentiment, Harry Lawrence," remarked John.

"Selfish I've no doubt it is," rejoined his friend; "but I'm quite positive of its truth."

"Ha!" returned John, with well-feigned solemnity; "what a world it is we live in! we'd prefer having anybody's nose or ears pulled to our own."

The Rector seemed to relish this sly joke of John's amazingly, if the heartiness of his laugh was any proof of his enjoyment.

Minutes, and then an hour, fled; and then another was added to the quicksand of engulfing time.

"What *can* make Tom loiter so?" said John Hardy, with palpable anxiety and restlessness of mind.

No one returned any answer; but Mary

Baldwin had become little less blanched than chalk-stone.

"Perhaps," she at length faltered out—"perhaps——"

"What, my dear?" interposed the Squire, as she hesitated to complete the sentence.

"I scarcely know," rejoined Mary, drawing her fingers across her brow, confusedly; "but I fear something must have happened—some accident, perhaps."

"We'll institute an inquiry," returned the Squire, gingling the hand-bell on the table.

In a few seconds the summons was answered; for it was an unexceptionable rule with old Robert, the gray-headed butler, to allow of barely possible time to elapse between making his appearance and the knowledge of its being required.

"Did you see your young master quit the house?" asked the Squire.

"Yes, Sir," replied Robert, "somewhere about two hours since."

"Which direction did he take?"

"I saw him pass the end of the garden-wall, Sir," replied the butler, "with somebody walking by his side."

"Who was it?" hastily inquired Mary.

"I can't say, Miss," returned Robert. "It was too dark for me to see."

"This seems very strange," observed John Hardy.

"There may be something more than ordinary in his leaving us for so long a time under the circumstances," observed the Rector; "but I cannot discover any cause for alarm."

"Not the slightest in the world," said the Squire; "but like children, in catching alarm, we quickly innoculate each other. Tom," continued he, "will quickly return to laugh at our silly anxiety about him."

"I think I hear his footstep now," remarked John Hardy, springing with inconceivable agility from his seat, and hastening to the window.

John, however, was doomed to disappointment. There was no footfall, save its imaginary echo in his brain.

"Come, come," said the Squire, after a momentary pause, to learn whether his friend's anticipation was correct or not, "we'll have done with this vapourish folly. What say you, Doctor, to a game of chess?"

"With all the pleasure in life," replied the Rector, and in a few minutes the attention of both was absorbed in the display of their respective skill.

It was worse than useless to disguise it; for the very attempt, lame and impotent as it was, made the development more strikingly palpable. John Hardy could not — twist, turn, and twine as he would, into every imaginary position—maintain an easy posture in his chair. A dozen times—aye, twenty, within the ring-fence of five minutes—he dragged his dropsical-looking watch from his fob, with a strain that threatened to sever the massive links of the

chain to which it was attached, and studied its dial with laboured exactness.

There were no corresponding effects in the uneasiness displayed by Mary Baldwin, and yet the wrinkled brow and flushed cheek, and ceaseless listening, betokened a mind disturbed with fretful thoughts.

"I can't bear this any longer," said John, rising from his chair with a sudden jerk. "I shall order my great-coat and umbrella, and go in search of Tom, myself."

"Pray do nothing of the kind," replied the Squire. "You'll catch a severe cold, perhaps, and there is no probability of your learning anything of him, or the cause of his absence, until his return home."

"My patience is quite exhausted," rejoined John Hardy. "I must make the attempt."

Mary, who highly approved of John's measure, remarked, by way of an incentive, that "perhaps some harm had befallen him."

"To be sure, my love," returned he. "Who

can tell? I quite blame myself," continued he, "that I did not commence a search before."

"And now it's too late," added the Squire, triumphantly. "Here he comes; I hear his footstep."

Before the Squire had finished speaking, the door opened, and in rushed—for the gait was too hurried to admit of any other description—our hero.

Breathless, and with features little less white than those belonging to a corpse, he staggered to a chair, and threw himself into it with every effect of extreme excitement and exhaustion.

As fast as tongues could be made to utter sentences, questions were put, with every variety of tone and gesture, to learn the cause of Tom's worn and jaded appearance.

"Have you been chasing a robber?" asked John Hardy.

"Or a poacher?" said the Rector, forgetful

that the time present was a season of rest to that nightly marauder.

"Or a Will-o'-the-wisp?" rejoined the Squire.

"Tell us, pray, what it is," entreated Mary.

"Stay for one moment," replied he, taking a deep breath. "I'm not capable of complying with your wishes for a short time."

"A glass of wine—a bumper will restore him," said John Hardy.

"Perhaps two will be better," added the Squire.

"The amendment is, beyond doubt, a good one," said John; and then, in a manner which bordered on the authoritative, he directed Tom to swallow, without ceremony, the contents of a couple of generous glasses, which he himself charged to the brim.

"I know that you are all naturally desirous," he began, "to learn the cause of my prolonged absence, and self-evident disturbance. Learn, then," he continued, in a

measured tone, "that I have this evening received intelligence of——*my mother*."

Electrical were the effects of these words. Each stared at the other in mute wonder and astonishment, and for some moments not a word was spoken.

At length John Hardy stammered out, "And is she—is she alive?"

"Yes," briefly responded our hero.

"God be praised!" ejaculated John, and then he sunk into his chair, weeping like a child.

The Squire's emotion was little less intense; and pressing his friend's hand in silence, he turned away his head to conceal it as best he could.

"Go on, go on," said John Hardy. "Let me hear all you know, Tom."

"Rest content in knowing this, Sir," replied he—"that my mother is well, and to-morrow will be here to tell the tale which has so long kept her a stranger from us. I will not deny

that I am acquainted with it," continued he; "but a strict promise was given, on my part, not to divulge the particulars to-night; nor, indeed, at all, unless some improbable chance should prevent them from being recounted to-morrow as intended."

"This night, then, will be the longest of my life!" exclaimed John, unable to restrain the ebullition of his feelings.

"You must endeavour to check this excess of emotion," observed the Rector, quietly placing a hand upon John's shoulder. "For the joy which has been vouchsafed to us by the inscrutable Ruler of events, let us return our meed of ready and heart-felt thanks," and with bended knees, each and all, breathed an acknowledgment to the altar of mercy and to the source of every blessing

CHAPTER IV.

"The crow doth sing as sweetly as the lark,
When neither is attended; and, I think,
The nightingale, if she should sing by day,
When every goose is cackling, would be thought
No better a musician than the wren."

THERE are a great many sage aphorisms upon the subject of "extremes." Some philosophers have asserted that "extremes meet." Others, that "extremes are dangerous." Without entering into a solution of these theorems, we shall content ourselves with the assertion of the simple fact, that since the eventful evening of Mrs. Sykes's "skimmetting" she had been daily and hourly relaxing her austerity towards Job, until her indulgence began to assume the shape

of extravagance. Lectures, hints, admonitions, counsel, suggestions, advice and instruction, had all been laid aside, and now her sole study seemed to be how to insure him the luxuries of existence, in the form of an uncomplaining wife, a cheerful home, and all the rights and liberties so attractively pertaining to both.

Yes, the eyes of Mrs. Sykes, in a metaphorical sense—were opened. She had—rather late in life, it is true; but then the adage says, "Better late than never"—discovered her own happiness was greatly augmented by studying that of her husband's. The temper is a blister which, by no means, galls the person only on whom it is administered. The burn is pretty equally divided between the giver and the taker, and it would be well for the choleric to cut this notch deeply in their memories before giving rein to the rancour of their tongues.

Even her policy and prudence may be questioned, at this juncture, when it is made known that Mrs. Sykes had given her consent for Job

to pay a visit to the Lion, unaccompanied by her. Not that the Lion was deemed, in the remotest degree, a resort for the gay, the thoughtless, and the free; but for those two jolly, rollicking old boys, Job Sykes and Edward Dixon, to be permitted to do as they thought proper—to range, unchecked and untethered, within the limits of the Lion—it was more than could be expected. However, there Job was, and devoid of all inclination of being elsewhere.

That *sanctum sanctorum*, the bar parlour at the Lion, possessed attractions of no common order. It was one of those nut-shell retreats in which the senses were gratified in the condensed essence of pleasure. There were rows of sweet-smelling lemons suspended above bottles, glasses, and deep and wide punch-bowls, piled on shelf above shelf, with jugs, mugs, beakers, and tankards of every sort, size, and description; from the aristocratic measure composed of silver, down to the plebeian pewter.

There were butts in miniature, too, with bright and polished copper taps, containing the choicer liquids; and as an additional attraction to this scene of enchantment, there was the portrait of Edward Dixon, himself, suspended over the mantelshelf. For some reason which was never fully explained, he directed the artist to paint him winking his left eye, and notwithstanding the many years which had passed since the completion of the limner's work, the host would frequently burst into convulsions of mirth as he sat gazing at the facetious design and extolling its merits.

"That's me, Job," said the landlord, directing his companion's attention to the canvass. "That's Edward Dixon, all over."

The same allusion had been made on several occasions before to the huntsman; but he replied, with a freshness which would lead anybody to suppose that the remark was new, at least, to him—"That's you, Ned, and no mistake."

"Ha!" rejoined the landlord. "Do you know what I was painted a-winkin' for?"

"I guess," returned Job.

"So have many others," added Edward Dixon, "without guessing o' the truth. There was Tom Cross, our blacksmith, who said he supposed it was on account of my getting a fly in my eye, and I didn't undeceive him."

"Why so?" inquired his friend.

"Because I never have, and never will," replied the landlord. "No, Job Sykes," continued he, pressing a hand upon the frill of his shirt, "that's a sealed secret in this buzzum. It may be hit upon, and it may not; but whether or no, I shall always keep the matter mum."

"My idea about the business is this," rejoined his companion. "Being about the smartest chap that ever walked in shoe-leather, you wish to let the folks understand your nature by just a look at your picture. Now," continued Job, "in ninety-nine out of every

hundred of portraits, nobody can form any judgment of what sort of people they are or were. One would suppose, everybody painted always was in a good temper and a new suit of clothes. Now, there you are, as you always were, and always will be, Edward Dixon, as he looked in flesh and blood."

The host of the rampant animal gave a dry cough at the termination of this complimentary opinion on the part of his companion, and, rising from his chair, he took a glass from a shelf, examined it minutely, inside and outside, and after assuring himself satisfactorily that there was no speck of dust on its polished surface, he turned one of the bright copper taps, and gurgled it full to the brim of the contents of the butt in miniature.

" Take that, Job, my friend," said he, " and let it go down gently. Usquebaugh like that isn't to be met with in these parts, except at the Lion, and then only for Edward Dixon's *particulars*."

"But you haven't told me," replied his companion, accepting the proffered dram, "whether, in the matter of the picture, I was right or not."

The landlord put a forefinger across his lips, and made a most significant demonstration of irrevocable silence on this subject.

"The Lion isn't what it used to be," remarked the host, changing the subject.

"How so?" inquired Job.

"Customers have got flat since Nancy left," replied Edward Dixon. "There are no jokes here now, except what I make; and with no assistance, joking's hard work."

"Was Nancy, then, any help to ye, in that line?" asked the huntsman.

"In one way she was," returned the landlord. "For although she didn't exactly make jokes herself, she was the cause of jokes in others. There is Bill Cripps, the driver of the Nightingale," continued he, "I never saw a chap so altered, for the worse, in my life. He

used to jump off the box always, seven minutes and a half afore time, and stop seven minutes and a half after it, just to have a quarter of an hour's chat with Nancy, laugh fit to kill hisself, and drink brandy and water, as if his life depended on getting rid of as much in the least possible time as a man could swallow. But now he pulls up at the very nick o' time, crawls off his seat, comes to the bar, looks about, and starts again to the second, as though his orders were grown uncommon strict, all of a sudden. Poor Bill!"

"But there are not many more similarly altered, I suppose," remarked Job.

"Oh yes there are!" rejoined the landlord. "Several of our commercials have changed for the worse in the same manner. I recollect the time when not one on the road but what would come into this very bar parlour, order a bottle o' wine just like a lord, and spend more money in a night than they now do in a week."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Job, "how very strange!"

"But not less true," added his friend. "There's a commercial at this moment in No. 6, eating an overdone beefsteak; he ordered it over-done like a hermit, and washing it down with hard beer. I told him," continued Edward Dixon, "that our malt was rather sour. 'So much the better,' said he. 'It matches with my blighted heart, my temper, and my witals.'"

"He's miserable, I suppose, then," observed the huntsman."

"Very," replied Edward Dixon, shaking his head.

"Supposing you invite him in here, Ned," rejoined Job.

"A Christian thought!" returned the host. "I'll go and ask him at once; we may get rid of his melancholy."

In a short period the blighted commercial entered the bar parlour, and, after exchanging

civilities with Job upon their introduction by Edward Dixon, threw himself with a sigh into a chair, and seemed at once to become enshrined in the gloomiest thoughts that ever preyed upon the spirits of a mortal.

Tom Cross, the blacksmith, referred to in a preceding page, being one of the privileged, entered soon afterwards, and a few others of the like ilk quickly followed.

"Come," observed Edward Dixon, satisfactorily measuring the various ingredients in accordance with the respective orders given; "we muster a good round party to-night."

Tom Cross, who made it a rule to roar with laughter at the most trivial observation by the landlord of the Lion, became nearly convulsed at this remark, and said, "It wouldn't do for Ned to go on in that style; people's ribs weren't made of wrought-iron."

"I tell ye what it is, Sirs," said Edward Dixon, making himself a glass of "hot, sweet and strong, and plenty of it," by way of a

temporary check to his labours, "I've a treat in pickle for all of ye."

"A new bit of fun, I'll warrant," returned Tom Cross.

"I'll thank you not to be too fast," rejoined the landlord, authoritatively. "Drop the skid on your tongue, Tom Cross," continued he, "and listen to what *I've* got to say."

The blacksmith became at once dumb as his sledge hammer.

"There are some things," resumed Edward Dixon, making a general survey of all present, "that I could listen to for ever, besides hallylooyers, and those are Job Sykes' hunting stories."

"Bra-vo!" shouted Tom Cross.

"Capital!" "Famous!" echoed the rest.

"Supposing," continued the host, "I call upon my friend and connexion—" (the commercial groaned heavily)—"to give us one of his tales of field and flood?"

"Nothing could be better," was the general reply.

"I thought—I considered such would be the sentiments of this company," rejoined the landlord. "Now, Job, lead away."

"I wasn't prepared for this," returned the huntsman; "but as I hate a blank to be drawn, I'll try what can be done."

With this brief introduction, he thus commenced a tale of the olden time.

CHAPTER V.

"Yet hath my night of life some memory,
My wasting lamp some fading glimmer left."

"It was in the days of old, when the sportsman tally-ho'd the fox before the lark soared from her grassy bed to shake the dew-drops from her wings—when he whipped the stream in powdered wig and velvet cap—bagged partridges with setters and net, and brought his racer to the post to run four-mile heats for a whip of the value of forty shillings—it was in these quaint old-fashioned times that Sir Godfrey Flamstead lived, as his forefathers had

done before him for a succession of generations, at Wynford Grange, on the borders of one of the Western counties. What Wynford Grange might have been in its pristine condition, it is impossible to say; but at the period I am called upon to describe its condition, it was anything but an attractive residence. The building was in a ruinous state, from a want of due regard to painting and repair. By far the greater number of the wide and diamond-paned casements, were stopped with common boards nailed across them; and some of the wooden water-spouts, jutting from the angles in the roof, having crumbled and become rotten in the winters and storms of ages, the walls were covered, here and there, with a dark-green slimy matter, vegetating on the damp. The chimneys, surrounding the high and sloping roof, were so cramped, twisted, and crooked, that even the smoke must have struggled to have found vent through the intricacies. Now, however, with the exception of two or three,

the jackdaws were permitted to build their nests in them; and it is a matter of uncertainty which would have been the most surprised at a volume of dense vapour rolling upwards and vomiting itself out of one of these disused chimneys—a family of fledglings reared and nurtured within them, or the gossips in the vicinity. Certain it is that one and all would have been set agape with wonderment. A large, rambling, neglected place was Wynford Grange. The land surrounding it, which was of immense extent, had the appearance of a desolate heath: for, far as the eye could reach, scarcely a twig intercepted the view; and, but for the soft velvet turf which grew so luxuriantly on the surface, thickly interspersed with the fragrant clover flower, there would have been little difference between the broad acres comprising the park belonging to the manorial domain, and some uncultivated, sterile waste. To be sure, there were a few lopped and stunted pollards growing at long distances apart,

the only crippled remains of timber standing—all besides having long since fallen under the sharp stroke of the woodman's axe. Stripped, bare, and naked, looked all and every thing. Some tall and gaunt-looking fir trees reared themselves not far from the mansion, and marked the spot where the drive led from the entrance; but rank grass and weeds had been allowed to grow over the gravel road, so that not a vestige of it was now visible. There had been an extensive rookery within a stone's throw of the ruinous old house; but the felling of the trees had driven the colony from their homes, with the exception of a score or two of hoarse-throated, jet-plumed fellows, who resolved, come weal, come wo, to stick to the home of their fathers. A few lean and antiquated fallow-deer still browsed disconsolately together, forming a meagre herd; and had it not been that they were wedded to the frequented spot by many, many long years of pleasant association, they would doubtless have

wandered elsewhere ; for the shattered fences, and broken-down rotten gates, formed no barriers to their inclination, had it been of a roving tendency

" In a large and lofty room, hung around with faded arras, the scenes but faintly legible in the once rich and curiously-wrought tapestry, and as much hidden by dust and cobwebs as effaced by the mouldering hand of time, sat Sir Godfrey Flamstead, before a large polished oak table, on which was placed a very small and frugal breakfast, consisting of a single egg, a loaf of brown bread, and a plate containing a limited supply of butter. Tea, although not unknown at the time we are recalling, was not a decoction of which the Baronet was fond ; and in lieu of this now common beverage for the matin meal, a stone jug of foaming beer stood at his elbow.

" The Baronet appeared to be about sixty years of age, and his good looks denoted that he must once have been an exceedingly hand-

some man, although a cloud now hung upon his brow, and his lips were knit together as if the reverie in which he was wrapped was anything but of an agreeable nature, and proved highly detrimental to the expression of his features. His forehead was lofty and smooth; his countenance was scarcely marked with a wrinkle; and, but for the few scanty and bleached locks covering his head, none could have believed that so many winters had passed over it. His stature was of the middle height, with a figure somewhat portly; and altogether, there was an aristocratic bearing and air about Sir Godfrey, that gave sufficient warrant of his eyry having been in the cedar top. His costume consisted of the old doublet and trunk-hose, with a long-waisted coat devoid of collar, and profusely decorated with polished steel buttons. In his shoes were large buckles, and from heel to head, the Baronet was quite 'the gentleman of the old school.'

"'Humph,' muttered Sir Godfrey, taking the

solitary egg between his left forefinger and thumb, and giving it a gentle tap, on the uppermost end, with a spoon composed of horn. 'Humph,' repeated he, 'I really don't know what to do. That rascal, Dickory Crump,' he continued, extracting a letter from a deep pocket in his lateral attire, and glancing at its contents with a curl upon his lip, 'says *he* can raise more money if *I* can produce a corresponding security. Now he knows,' said the Baronet, hissing the words through his teeth, 'that the estate is mortgaged to the last shilling that it will bear; that every stick of timber is cut, and that the family pictures and plate found their way into the hands of the Israelites some three years ago. I haven't even a silver egg-spoon left,' and, as he spoke, he pitched the horn one from his hand on to the table, rolled the egg after it, and, throwing himself back in the chair, buried his hands in the pockets of his doublet.

"For a few seconds Sir Godfrey remained in

mute reflection: but this was quickly dissipated by the door of the apartment being thrown open, and his son entering, with an infirm old servant tottering in his wake.

"'Good morning, father,' said the young man, with a smile upon his handsome visage, and shaking the Baronet heartily by the hand. 'I began to fear that I had been playing the laggard; but by your untasted breakfast, I see that I am closely on your heels.'

"'I've not been up long, my boy,' replied Sir Godfrey; 'but as for breakfast,' continued he, addressing the servant, 'I think, Thomas, you might have supplied us with a less sparing hand. A single small egg—Faugh!'

"'I did my best, Sir Godfrey, I do assure ye,' rejoined Thomas, in a thin, piping tone, as he placed a corresponding object of the Baronet's contempt before his young master.

"'Bad, truly then, is the best,' returned the Baronet.

"'I couldn't——'

"'Silence!' interrupted Sir Godfrey, irritably. 'I do not wish to hear of your inabilities, any more than to think of my own. Leave the room, Thomas.'

"The last sentence was spoken in a more subdued tone, and the faithful and obedient servant left the apartment with a slow and profound reverence.

"During this brief colloquy, the heir to Wynford Grange sat ostensibly engaged in chipping off the shell from the egg: but from the furtive glances that he gave his father, it was obvious that he was endeavouring to discover the cause of the anger which disturbed the Baronet's usual equanimity.

"'Ned,' said Sir Godfrey, upon the closing of the door, drawing his fingers over his brow, as if about to make a reluctant disclosure; and then abruptly stopping and seizing the jug, he added, 'your health.'

"'Thank you, father,' responded the young man.

"Sir Godfrey coughed slightly at the termination of his draught, and remarked that 'the beer was very small and thin.'

"'The strong ale is all drunk, I believe,' replied his son.

"'Yes, it's *out*, Ned, so I am told,' rejoined the Baronet, 'as, indeed, is every thing else with me, until, at length, I'm out of humour.'

"'Is there any cause to distress or annoy you of which I am ignorant?' asked the young man, in a kind and soothing tone and manner.

"For a short time, Sir Godfrey made no answer. At length he appeared to overcome the conflicting emotions with which he was struggling, and screwing his determination to the sticking point, thus began the recital of his woes:—

"'You know, my dear Ned, that our affairs, for a considerable period, have been in anything but so flattering a condition as we could wish.'

" His listener could not prevent a smile at this specious opening of the family exigencies.

" ' It's of no use blaming myself; and as little my being blamed by any body else, Ned,' resumed Sir Godfrey, ' for the skeleton state in which we are. I confess that my want of economy, and gratifying the many expensive tastes in which I have indulged, may be traced as the origin and true source of the deplorable state of our exchequer. A man can but confess,' continued the Baronet, elevating his eyebrows, and placing his two thumbs in the arm-holes of his doublet, ' his improvidence, misdeeds, and so forth; at the same time, one cannot but regret that the confession, acting as a wholesome penance, does not generally produce more beneficial results. For example: There's not a man within the dominions over which King George reigns, more ready to admit his errors, both commissions and omissions, than myself; and yet, by the faith of a Christian, if I were to have my humility cried

in every market-town throughout the kingdom, it would not bate a jot—no, not so much as the value of a bushel of meal for my hounds, in the multitudinous items of my unpaid liabilities!'

"Ned, as his father abbreviated his name, felt a strange inclination to laugh outright, as Sir Godfrey proceeded; there was something so peculiarly exciting to the risible muscles in the tone and manner in which he gave a full, true, and particular account of his pressing troubles.

"'Upon your leaving Eton,' resumed the Baronet, 'which was about a month previous to your arriving at your eighteenth birthday, and within three of the lamented and premature decease of your estimable mother—I am particular in these two events, for a purpose that will presently appear—you were, for the first time, made acquainted that I had been, and then was, living far beyond the nett returns of my rent-roll. With that ready and

affectionate regard to my wishes, whether expressed or implied, which you display on all occasions, Ned, you immediately gave your promise to cut off the entail of certain broad lands upon attaining your majority; which engagement was faithfully kept on the very day that you arrived at man's estate. This proved of immeasurable assistance to me at the time, and kept at bay a host of impatient and clamorous creditors. The settlement, too, made on your mother for her life at our marriage, fell in at the time I am referring to, which you cannot but perfectly well remember; and thus I was enabled to put the derangements and running accounts, of many years' standing, upon a very pleasant and easy footing. My damaged credit became good and sound again, and my friends took advantage of my position. Yes, Ned, my dear boy, our friends have proved to be our greatest enemies. The house was always as crowded with them, the four seasons round, as a hive is full of bees. They

borrowed and won my money; eat, drank, and fleeced me from one year's end to the other; and yet, in my foolish confidence, I regarded each and all as the very paragons of honour.'

"As Sir Godfrey proceeded, he became more serious in his deportment, and his son lost every trace of levity.

"'I need not say,' resumed the baronet, 'that money, vast sums of money, melted away like the snow at noon. Mortgage after mortgage was raised, timber felled, and at length, much against my inclination, I was compelled to ask for a return of some of those loans I had assisted my countless friends with in the time of alleged need and difficulty. Then, and not till then, I saw the truth stripped of all guise and deception. It was known that nothing but *want* could have made Godfrey Flamstead ask for payment from anybody, much less from a friend; and, as we are told, wandering sprites flee from mortal gaze at cock-crow, so my troops

of fawning sycophants vanished and left me to profit by a lesson gained too late.'

"Sir Godfrey stopped in his address to refresh himself with a draught of the beer, and then proceeded :—

"'When the foundation sinks, the superstructure quickly follows. Claimants again poured in upon me as if a floodgate had been opened, when it became generally known that my resources were exhausted. Neither let, check, nor stop were given. Lawyers, duns, and bailiffs joined in full cry to pull me down, and break me up; and it was not until every feather had been plucked that I was freed from the yelping pack of carrion curs. That fox-eyed, long-nosed rascal, Dickory Crump, turned every available article belonging to me into cash; and, after getting rid of all the suits against me and the debts, had the assurance to say, 'Now, Sir Godfrey, let me offer my congratulations to you; for your difficulties are completely removed, and your income, after

payment of the interest of the mortgages, will be a clear hundred and fifty-three pounds ten shillings and sixpence *per annum*.' Think of that, Ned,' continued the baronet. 'The impudent rascal knew that it would scarcely supply me in claret, and yet with a serious face he wished me joy of the event! Well, I put up with the affront as well as I could; and determined that you, my dear boy, should not be inconvenienced by my follies, I kept on the hounds on a reduced scale, maintained two of our best horses, preserved the manorial rights of sporting, and effected the production of a bottle of good wine every day after dinner for our joint and several benefits. I assure you, and I am certain, Ned, that you will give me full credit for the assertion, that for the pangs entertained by me occasioned by my reverses, there was no consolation so great as the reflection that *you* had not suffered any diminution of your personal comforts. You still could hunt, shoot, fish, drink, and dress as befitted

your rank and birth. I have hidden as much as possible the numerous shifts that I was put to, in order to support the remains of our own princely establishment; but I at last find myself compelled to acknowledge that I am at my wits' end. Dickory Crump writes to me by the last mail, that he cannot borrow on bill, bond, or any kind of instrument, another guinea for me; and that, as I have anticipated two half-yearly payments, he will not make any farther advances. Now, Ned, without money, credit, friends, or the remotest chance of obtaining either one or the other, what is to be done?'

"Sir Godfrey stopped at this query, and regarded his son with an earnest gaze.

"'And do you think, father,' said the heir to the wreck of Wynford Grange, as rising hastily from his seat, and striding towards Sir Godfrey, he clutched his hand in both his palms and pressed it warmly as he spoke; 'and do you think, father,' repeated he, 'that I was not

already aware of what you have now told me? I have listened patiently to every syllable of your communication; but there was not a word throughout the whole of it, of intelligence to me. I knew the kindness of your intentions, and heaven forbid that I should have frustrated them by betraying a knowledge of your affairs previous to your expressed desire for my so doing. I know not whether I am right or whether I am wrong,' continued the young man emphatically; 'but I have ever deemed strict obedience to a parent's wishes, whether expressed or implied, the paramount duty of every child. I believe, father, that I can conscientiously say I have always acted up to this principle?'

"'You can, Ned, my dear boy,' replied Sir Godfrey, making an effort to steady his nether lip, and brushing something away which suddenly affected the clearness of his vision; 'you can, indeed.'

"'You've asked me what's to be done,' re-

joined his son cheerfully. 'Do you remember your old motto, '*Never give up?*'

"'That was old bluff Harry Flamstead's cry at the battle of Hastings,' returned the baronet.

"'To be sure it was,' added the young man. 'And shall one of his descendants dishonour it? No, not if ruin and death stare him in the face—a Flamstead *never gives up!*'

"'Egad, Ned, but your words warm me, boy!' responded Sir Godfrey. 'But remember, these are not times wherein lance, mace, and broadsword can retrieve a lost fortune.'

"'Hear me,' said his son. 'You have asked me for my advice—and I will give it. The hounds and horses must be sold; the remaining servants dismissed, except Jacob, whom to discharge from our service would be to destroy; the house must be shut up, and the park also turned to a better advantage than supporting a herd of thin, old, toothless deer. *I* must embrace a useful profession or occupation, and *you*

must be satisfied with a pint of good port *per diem* instead of a quart of the best claret. Consent to this, and your troubles end with the word.'

"'What, turn our backs on the old house, Ned?' said Sir Godfrey, in a disconsolate tone and manner, which told how much the suggestion grieved him.

"'Yes,' replied his son, 'until we can return again with mended fortune. For what can avail our remaining,' continued he, 'until it crumble down about our ears?'

"'I must e'en confess that repairs are greatly wanted,' rejoined the baronet.

"'A few more seasons,' added his son, 'and our quitting will be no matter of choice. The roof is now but little more water-tight than a sieve.'

"'It's sadly dilapidated certainly,' returned Sir Godfrey, 'and a considerable outlay is necessary to render the place longer tenantable.'

"'But which we cannot supply.'

" ' True, very true,' responded Sir Godfrey; ' and therefore we will make a virtue of necessity, and yield to the stern demand with all the grace within our power. To your able dictatorship,' continued he, ' I now submit myself, Ned.'

CHAPTER VII.

"If I depart from thee, I cannot live :
And in thy sight to die, what were it else
But like a pleasant slumber in thy lap?"

"It can scarcely have escaped the notice of the most casual observer, supposing him to be a little more of the peripatetic order than a bulbous root, that there are persons possessing the influence of wealth labouring under the, oftentimes, imaginary disadvantage of birth and aristocratic connexions. What, however, will not gold effect? Look around, and we shall, among other of its marvellous effects, find it mingling the puddle blood of the plebeian with blood as pure as that of the Ptolemies.

" Within a mile of Wynford Grange there was a newly built, prim-looking building, called Franka Villa. It had been erected in accordance with the taste of its late proprietor, Mr. Francis James Jones, a successful speculator in indigo, and christened by the present occupier, Mrs. Francis James Jones, now a widow, fair, stout, and, if truth must be told, a little over that standard age for widows, forty. The lucky dealer in the plant for dying blue, wanting an investment for his accumulated wealth, became the purchaser of a large portion of the estate sold at the time Edward Flamstead became of age; resolving to build a house upon his property, retire from business, and become a country gentleman. The first two divisions of his design he lived to accomplish; but just as he began to discover the difference between a hare and a rabbit, a hound and a poodle, mounting his horse on the near, instead of the off, side, and ramming his shot into the gun *after* the introduction of the powder, he died.

Possessed of a handsome jointure, Mrs. Francis James Jones mourned for her husband in the most approved style. Her daughter, and only child, Emily Matilda, at this time a lisping miss of sixteen, was taken from a fashionable boarding-school to become the companion of her mamma, and, as the relict of the speculator in indigo fondly hoped, at no distant day, the link by which the Joneses might be coupled with the oldest and best family in the country. For it should be here stated, that the sanguine and watchful Mrs. Jones had, from the day she first beheld the elegant and accomplished Edward Flamstead, determined, in secret communing with herself, that Emily Matilda should become the bride of the heir-apparent to the Baronetcy. 'Only think,' would the ardent dame soliloquize, throwing out her farthingale and tossing back her head, frizzed and powdered as of yore, 'only think what the *Browns* will say when they hear of my daughter, Lady Edward Flamstead!'

" This brooding thought, perhaps dressed in other words, was often expressed; and, as may have happened with other architects so frequently met with in building magnificent edifices in the air, it is no wonder to people of less valuable, become more common sense, that the superstructure should occasionally totter from a want of due attention to the solidity of the base. We have often thought that the phenomenon of a shower of pebbles occasionally falling from the clouds should be no longer deemed a wonder, or subject of speculation to the philosopher; for when half mankind are occupied in building castles in the air, where is the wonder that a few of the stones should fall?

"It had been an absorbing desire for some time past with Mrs. Francis James Jones—her husband having been dead now for more than a year—to see the spark of acquaintanceship which existed between Edward and Emily Matilda fanned into a burning, glowing, crackling, hissing flame of love. For

some cause, which the old lady could not fathom, little or no progress seemed to be made in the project. In vain did the careful mother study the latest fashions at Court, and, with lavish expenditure, deck her personified hope in all the finery of the age, when Edward was to be present. In vain did she invite Sir Godfrey and his son to snug little dinner parties, displaying her massive plate and costly wines, and making quite a show of her possessions. Sir Godfrey drank the wine, and Edward made himself agreeable to Emily Matilda; but further, there was nothing.

"'Tis very strange,' said Mrs. Jones, after a run of defeats, 'very strange indeed. They must want money, that every body knows, and yet all I can do makes no impression.'

"That which excites the surpise of one may, like the discovered trick of the juggler, be no cause of wonderment to another; but to our purpose.

"It was a bright morning in early spring. There was music on every bough and twig. Birds—happy, wild, roving birds—were twittering and chirping in the spirit of their joy, as if their trilling throats would split with merriment. Bees and butterflies sipped and sucked the early and fresh-born flowers. The thrifty ant quitted her earthy home and again sought the replenishment of her store; and even that dull laggard the spotted toad, roused him from his long, long sleep, and croaked in doleful cadence his heart-felt satisfaction. Not a creature, not a thing—not even the meanest wild flower that grew unnoticed or uncared for—but looked the very type of unalloyed, unqualified happiness.

Glistening beads of dew filled the petals of the daisy and the buttercup, and the mist still hung in folds, veiling, but not hiding, the brook, rippling and murmuring its way through the valley, when the slight forms of two young persons might have been seen, within a short

distance of Wynford Grange, strolling side by side at this early hour of the morn, when all nature was being kissed by her fresh maiden lip. One was Edward Flamstead; the other a young and lovely girl in the ripening time between the budding girl and blooming woman.

"'I tell ye, Kate,' said her companion, 'that our separation for the time I have named is indispensable. Exertion, and great exertion on my part, is necessary to retrieve our shattered fortune. Instead of remaining here in our penniless beggarly condition, I must prepare myself, by reflection and study, for an active life, although I cannot as yet determine on what particular course to take. Perhaps I may try to carve my way to distinction with the sword——'

"'Nay, nay, I beseech you not to think of that,' interrupted the fair girl, entreatingly. 'Let me never have to associate *you*, Edward, with cruelty and bloodshed, if—' and her

voice trembled as she spoke, 'if we are not to meet again on earth.'

"'Pooh!' exclaimed Edward, gaily, as he passed his arm round her taper waist, and pressed her gently towards him. 'Why you speak like a child, Kate. If I thought that, we would never part. Surely,' he continued, in a bantering tone, 'you are not fearful of—'

"'Nothing but your safety,' added his companion energetically, while unshed tears floated in her dark-blue eyes, curtained by long silken lashes, as jetty black as the plume of the raven's wing.

"'Tremble not for that then, Kate,' rejoined he laughing; 'for the worthless seldom meet with harm.'

"'I pray that you do not jest,' she returned. 'I cannot bear light words at such a time as this.'

"This was spoken with such deep emotion, that Edward Flamstead at once changed his tone and manner.

"'I see, Kate,' said he, tenderly taking a hand between his own, 'that you *will* be serious in spite of my endeavours to prevent your being so. Well! e'en must when there's no choice, and so to yield without further struggle. Now listen to my designs. Upon the expiration of the time that I intend to devote to the study of a profession, or the attainment of some profitable employment, which must depend on the result of applications which will be made to certain quarters upon my father and myself arriving in London, I shall, when successful, and successful I feel sure to be, proudly return and claim you, dear Kate, as the reward of my victory. Then we shall have no longer to fear the pains and penalties, and contempt, which track the heels of the poor gentleman; and instead of tears, and sighs, and evil forebodings, we shall have nothing but sunny smiles, joy, and pleasurable anticipations.'

"'You are very sanguine, Edward,' observed his companion.

"'But not more so than I feel that I have a right to be,' returned he. 'I am sanguine, because I know that I may depend upon my own exertions, which I will use to the best and utmost of my ability. Confidence is the choicest herald of success.'

"'As you think, so must I,' added Kate; 'although,' she continued, 'I never felt so great a reluctance to agree with you before.'

"The speaker was the daughter and only surviving child of Dr. Owen, the worthy and and excellent vicar of Wynford, who, when a poor and friendless curate, had been presented with the living, by his patron, Sir Godfrey Flamstead. It was anything but a wealthy one; but it enabled the Doctor to live comfortably in the neat little house called the Rectory, within a short distance from the Grange, and to gratify his taste in purchasing old books and manuscripts. The Doctor, a

thin little man, with a high bald head, and mild benevolent countenance, was deeply read in classic lore, and, being appointed tutor to Edward Flamstead, when a stripling, it was one of the great objects of his life to make his pupil as accomplished a scholar as himself. Much to the estimable Doctor's delight, he discovered that Edward was never so happy as when at the Rectory poring over his books. It had escaped the short-sighted little Doctor, that, while his pupil was apparently absorbed in study, he frequently peeped over the top of his book, and exchanged smiles with Kate Owen, who made all sorts of excuses to remain in the apartment, notwithstanding the remonstrances of her father.

"'The weather is extremely fine; why not take a ramble this morning?' the Doctor would say, wiping his barnacles.

"'Don't you think it will rain?' Kate replied, taking her knitting needles, as if her purpose to remain was fixed.

" ' Rain, my dear?' exclaimed the Doctor, looking over his glasses, and for the first time discovering the stolen glances between his pupil and his daughter. ' The bar — o — meter — ' he could get no further. Like electricity the truth flashed through the nerves of the Doctor, and it quite took his breath away.

" Pretty Kate crimsoned like a peony, while Edward became suddenly afflicted with an extremely dry, hacking cough.

" This trifling and light occurrence had taken place years ago; but it made an indelible impression on the minds of all parties concerned. How Sir Godfrey was made acquainted with the affair, was never exactly known by the young couple; but soon after its occurrence the Baronet joked his son immensely about his *studies* at the Rectory, and seemed to enjoy Edward's confusion to an amazing extent. Far from objecting or throwing any obstacles in the way of his son's attachment, the good-natured Sir Godfrey considered it a great blessing to

have the prospect of so charming a daughter-in-law in view. And if a thought of the dearth of means occasionally proved an alloy to the pleasurable reflection, he would breathe a prayer that he might sooner die than be in the way of preventing the consummation of Ned's wishes.

"The worthy, little, brisk Dr. Owen scarcely credited his senses, when he learned that Sir Godfrey was not opposed to the match. 'To be sure,' said the Doctor, in confidence to himself, 'Kate is a comely lass, and few can translate Latin and Greek, make pies and puddings, sing and knit winter hose, as she can. But to become the wife of Sir Godfrey Flamstead's son!' and then the Doctor became lost in a labyrinth of amazement, and wandered, like his thoughts, a great way off, without rhyme or reason for his guide.

"So matters stood on the eventful morning of Kate Owen's introduction.

"Steeling himself to the purpose, Edward had arranged this early walk with his beloved, that

he might make known to her the pressing difficulties which surrounded his father and himself, and the necessity for immediate activity on his part to obtain a livelihood. The former part of the communication caused no regret for *herself;* she would, not having a dowry, rather wed Edward as a poor man than a rich one. But when she found that a separation was necessary, it struck like an icicle into as warm a little, foolish, palpitating heart, as ever throbbed in woman's bosom.

"'We will not speak any more about it now,' said Edward, as they bent their footsteps towards the Rectory. 'This world is made up of meetings and separations, and were it not for the latter we could not enjoy the pleasure of the former.'

"'But it seems so very sad that you should leave me,' replied Kate. 'I never thought we were to part for any length of time,' added she, tearfully.

"'Cheer up, dearest,' responded Edward,

'and let not another word be spoken on the subject.'

"'My father will be sadly grieved to hear of this,' returned Kate.

"'Not so much as you anticipate,' added he. 'One of the last valuable aphorisms that he used his best endeavours to impress upon my mind was, 'Confide in the future rather than fear it. For the events to come are as strictly, although mysteriously, defined as those of the past; and if ye can conscientiously declare that for the past there is no cause to dread, put your faith and trust in the great Ruler that such may be the result of time hereafter.'

CHAPTER VIII.

"We will, fair queen, up to the mountain's top,
And mark the musical confusion
Of hounds and echo in conjunction."

"JOHN PRETTYMAN had been in Sir Godfrey's service in the capacity of huntsman for thirty-two years, and during that time neither master nor servant were heard to make a complaint of the conduct of each other in their relative positions. John was a long-bodied, bandy-legged individual, without any remarkable personal distinction, save a more than ordinary expression of gravity in a set of very round, rubicund features, and an immoderate share of

vanity in possessing a long, thick pigtail, which occupied the greater portion of its proprietor's leisure hours in maintaining it in perfection of order and condition. This now obsolete ornament to the human form was, with John, the focus of all the diffused rays of vanity darting from the sun of conceit centred in his bosom. Never, certainly, did a pigtail have more attention bestowed upon it in shape of combing, brushing, tying, powdering, greasing, and perfuming, than the luxuriant thatch of John Prettyman's cerebellum, and its immediate vicinity.

"As has been before stated, John was a grave specimen of the *genus homo*. He detested to laugh with all his heart, on account of the risible muscles in motion destroying that dignity which he so highly prized as an attribute of his station. For it should be observed, that as huntsman to Sir Godfrey Flamstead, John Prettyman deemed his position in society as something above the ordinary quality; and when, in

the zenith of his master's prosperity, he had seventy-five couples of hounds in the kennel, and ten horses in the stable for his exclusive use, it would have taken the breath away of many a modest individual to have seen him arrive in all the pomp and circumstance of state by the cover side.

"I am speaking of 'the days of old;' and therefore, in stating that John's hour for throwing the hounds into the brake was just as Reynard had licked his lips from his dainty nocturnal meal, need occasion no astonishment. Then it was, when the stars were just fading before the early beams of morning, that John, dressed in his showy livery, with his pigtail unctuous with clammy grease, and floured as white as a snow-drift, with all the importance of a commander-in-chief about to fight and show his tactics with the enemy, cheered his gallant pack and woke the day with his ringing halloo. Then it was, that, knowing the eyes of Sir Godfrey and the gentlemen of the hunt

were upon him, he rose in his stirrups, and, as the first whimper gave intelligence of the "varmint" being afoot, he blew the great bugle slung across his shoulders, and made the hills and valleys echo and re-echo with music that sent a myriad of fairies to hide in the petals of the wild flowers growing in the dell.

"It is scarcely necessary to say, that much of John's supreme dignity became greatly tarnished as the hand of adversity stretched his skeleton fingers over Wynford Grange. The number of hounds, by degrees, dwindled down to ten couples, and the ten horses to one. Instead of two whippers-in, and three kennelsmen, who were placed under his immediate arbitrary control and government, these offices had long since been abolished, and the whole now were condensed and united in the person of John Prettyman. No banished lord, no prime minister ejected from the feast of loaves and fishes of office, could feel more the loss of his power and tinsel of grandeur than did John;

but with the submission of the Arab to the decree of destiny, he bowed to fate, and, in his own graphic language, 'made the best of a bad job.'

"Little did John Prettyman think, when chewing the cud of the bitter downfall of his grandeur, that he should be called upon for a further pressure upon his resignation. But I anticipate.

"For once the huntsman stood with the rein of his saddled horse in his hand before the entrance of the principal court in the kennel, in a spiritless, and, if the expression may be used, hang-dog, wretched, blue-devilish mood. One hand was upon the latch of the gate, while the other held the bridle of his horse, which, perhaps, to keep him in countenance, imitated his sorrowful expression by drooping his head between his knees, and standing so as to rest three of his legs out of the four.

"John Prettyman's neckerchief was tied with the same scrupulous care as ever, and his pig-

tail evinced, in the arrangement of every hair, that that devotion had been put to it which its proprietor never failed to display. His boots bore the original polish, his spurs their first brightness, his double-thong its whiteness, and the entire appointments that extreme delicacy of touch which the surface of John Prettyman, in his full uniform, always displayed. Still there was something within which subdued, and, as it were, extinguished the glitter which would have shone and sparkled on another occasion.

"'And it's come to this, has it?' said John, shaking his head, and heaving a deep sigh from the inmost recesses of his heart. 'And it's come to this, has it?' repeated he. 'Here's the last time I shall ever unkennel Sir Godfrey's hounds, and, mayhap, anybody's else. It seems a dream," continued John, 'but it's a fact.'

"The huntsman paused here, and after sundry wry faces, continued—'After growing

gray in the service of so good a master,' said he, 'to find myself forced to quit him! By Saint Paul!' exclaimed John, 'it's enough to make a man wish for a shower of pitchforks. As far as the wages are concerned,' continued he, 'I'd have gone on, as I have done for the last three years, in a sort of running accounts without any end, until that day of reckoning comes when all debts are paid. But that wasn't to be, it appears. No.'

The huntsman again came to a check, and then, catching the shadow of his fore-thought, hit off the conclusion of his soliloquy.

"'This is the last day of the season,' resumed John, 'and, as I was told yesterday, it's to be the last of all the seasons as far as Sir Godfrey's mastership is concerned. Well!' continued the huntsman, his eyes flashing as he spoke, and his blood running hotly and speedily through his veins, 'the ashes from such an ember should burn brightly to the end. This day shall never be forgotten in

these parts;' and thus speaking, he threw open the gate, and out rushed the joyous, expectant pack.

"The number did not exceed five couples; but the admirer of the symmetrical, however fastidious he might be, would have been puzzled to have found a single fault in the shape, size, speed, and spirit of these remains of Sir Godfrey's former matchless hunting establishment; and it was proverbial throughout the country, that a fox *must*, when once their tongues were opened at him, run to earth, or die.

"Grouping round the huntsman, the hounds expressed their delight, by springing and leaping about him; but, instead of, as was his wont, acknowledging their gambols, calling their names, speaking to, and cheering them, John took no notice of his favourites, but, in a gloomy silence, threw himself into the saddle, and proceeded, in accordance with his orders, to the spot appointed for the meeting.

"If the news had been spread by the fleet pinions of the wind, it could scarcely have been more generally or more speedily known that Sir Godfrey Flamstead was about to leave the home of his fathers for years, and it might be for ever. To say that universal regret was expressed for leagues around at this intelligence, is to give but a poor description of the feeling so generally entertained. In all grades of society, but more especially with the poor, the Baronet was deemed, and rightly so, the best among the good; and although for some years past he had not been able to keep open house to all, yet his profuseness and boundless generosity in former times had not been forgotten, and never could be. And even now, although friends had turned their backs on his fallen fortune, and he felt the fangs of ingratitude, yet, as far as his means extended, he never permitted the needy and distressed to go from his door unrelieved or unsolaced.

"'God bless him!' was the prayer whenever

his name was mentioned; and then tale after tale would be told of his liberality, his dashing deeds by field and flood, his jokes and jests; for few, indeed, were they who, living within a score long miles of Wynford Grange, could not tell many a story concerning Sir Godfrey Flamstead.

"Far and wide it was known that the last opportunity of ever beholding the Baronet at the head of his hounds, or, probably to many, ever on earth again, was on this closing day of his mastership. Crowds, therefore, from every quarter of the compass congregated at the place where the meet was to be held. Old men, leaning heavily on their staves, with long white locks flowing to their shoulders, tottered forwards, saying, 'It would go hard, indeed, not to see his honour once again; for they remembered him a boy fifty years ago and more.' Their dames, too, with crutch-stick in hand, followed in their wake, with palsied limbs, adding, 'Ay, forsooth, those *were* times, those

were!' Sturdy peasants, troops of urchins, and maidens dressed in holyday gear, assembled to pay their parting respect to Sir Godfrey. The ploughshare was abandoned, the flail no longer swung on the barn floor, and the hum and bur-r-r of the spinning-wheel was hushed in silence. Not a creature, not even the spectacle-nosed master presiding in dreaded authority, was to be seen in the village school-room; and even the club-footed tailor deserted his board on which he had sat and stitched away the greater portion of his life, crooning old ballads to himself. All had gone to take a respectful and reluctant farewell of the good Sir Godfrey Flamstead.

"'Here they come!' hallooed a hundred tongues, 'here come the hounds,' as John Prettyman made his appearance from the end of a long winding lane, leading on to a sterile waste called Gipsy's Hollow.

"'It was a different sight, I ween, some twenty years ago,' whispered one to his com-

panion, as the huntsman conducted his limited pack through the throng, mounted on a horse showing the effects of time and hard work. 'I remember,' continued the speaker, 'when the meet was gayer than a fair day.'

"'So do I, right well,' replied the other. 'But look, here's Sir Godfrey coming up, and the young Sir Edward that is to be, with him.'

"'And a noble young gentleman he is,' returned the first speaker. 'Nobody could mistake him of being a sprig from the old stock. He's a Flamstead from head to heel.'

"'And in heart and speech, too,' was the rejoinder. 'For he has not only a kind feeling towards everybody, but a kind way of letting one know that he has.'

"The crowd, both mounted and on foot, gave way as the Baronet and his son arrived; and as they passed, audible whispers were heard showering down all sorts of blessings upon their heads. Sir Godfrey rode through the congregated mass of his humble but sincere

well-wishers, exchanging salutations with all within hailing distance, and bowing to the yeomen with the same punctiliousness that he would have done to his Sovereign.

"To many he gave his hand, and long hearty gripes were given in silence; although, if eyes ever performed the office of the tongue, many spoke on this occasion.

"Prettyman, with no assumed gravity, had withdrawn himself and his hounds to some little distance off, where, on a small hillock, he remained contemplating the scene before him with as dejected a countenance as a man, bereft of every earthly happiness, can readily be conceived to wear, without any very great stretch upon the powers of the imagination.

"Perceiving that his master was approaching, he settled himself in his saddle, raised his whip-hand to the peak of his black velvet cap, and spurred a few paces to meet him.

"'Now, John,' said Sir Godfrey, 'we are ready.'

"The huntsman slightly raised his cap, turned his bony horse round, and, giving him both the rowels deeply in his flanks, crashed through a tall bull-finch hedge into the furze brake called Gipsy's Hollow.

"'John, I see,' remarked Edward, with a smile, 'has determined to give us a touch of his best quality to-day.'

"'Poor fellow!' responded the Baronet, 'it will be more from his courage and resolution to burn brightly to the last, then, than from any pleasure he can feel. Pish! I'm getting as sentimental as that pale, pasty-faced Emily Matilda Jones,' continued Sir Godfrey, laughing.

"'High, wind him!' cried John. 'Hoik, hoik! Drag on him! Have at him; hoik, hoik!'

"With a dash and a spirit that showed the purity of blood and metal of their kith and kin, the gallant little band swept through briar and brake, and answered their hunts-

man's cheer by redoubling their efforts to discover the retreat of 'cute Charley.'

"'Give it him! hoik—'

"'A whimper.'

"'Hark!'

"'By the gods, 'tis a find! The hound throws a deep-toned, bold challenge forth, drowning all doubt of its being a deceptive babble.'

"'Hark to Ringwood!' hallooed John, with his heart in his voice. 'Hark to Ringwood! hark, hark to him, my beauties!'

"Like a flash of light the hounds flew to the leader's cry, and in an instant the air was laden with the music of their tongues.

"'Gently there, gently there, for'ard!' said Sir Godfrey, as a few of the ardent pushed to the end of the cover. 'Keep still and quiet, as you value your day's sport,' continued he.

"'There he goes!' shouted one, pointing with a straightened finger and starting eyes as the fox gave himself to view.

"'Here he is!' cried another.

"In a few minutes the hounds pressed the unwilling fox from the thicket, and the clear, musical 'Gone away' from Edward Flamstead, showed that matters were as they could be wished. 'Gone away! gone away!' now rang from twenty tongues.

"'For'ard, for'ard!' hallooed the huntsman.

"'Hold hard, gentlemen!' cried Sir Godfrey. 'Let them get well at him, and then ride over 'em if ye can.'

"Ringwood, with two couples of his companions, swept from the gorse before the fox had gained a hundred yards in advance, and, settling to him, away they went, as if resolved to race him down at once.

"Cap in hand, and his pigtail standing stiffly and fiercely out, John spurred his way out of the cover, and, bringing the bunch of tail hounds with him, he lifted them hard to the front, and in a few seconds the whole were streaking along like a shadow from one body, and every tongue throwing melody to the breeze.

"'Tis a burning scent,' remarked Edward Flamstead to his father, as they galloped over the flat at the commencement of the run.

"'Aye, Ned,' replied Sir Godfrey, 'he who lives to the end of this must show his possession of the three essential qualifications in a sportsman—skill, courage, and judgment.'

"'Which, doubtless, we shall see displayed in yourself,' rejoined his son, laughing.

"'Ah!' returned Sir Godfrey, shaking his head, 'I want the fire of youth; but I must try to be there or thereabouts to-day.'

"At the onset of the chase, the fox led across the open heath for about a mile, and, there being none of those impediments to cause the irresolute to crane and falter, the whole field scoured across it without any diminution of the numbers. With extraordinary determination to be in front, where there were no difficulties to encounter, a few urged their horses with whip, spur, and voice, in the leading flight; but at the first barrier, which was a high bank

with a strong growth of hawthorn on the top, these ardent and ambitious Nimrods drew their bridle-reins, and, standing in their stirrups, stretched their necks over the stop to their course in hesitating fear.

"'Clear the way!' hallooed John Prettyman, coming up; and cramming his old, well-tutored hunter at the fence, he flew through and across it with the ease of thought.

"'Hie—over!' cried Edward, throwing out his whip-hand, and charging it at the same moment with the huntsman.

"'Now, gentlemen,' said Sir Godfrey, in a rallying tone, 'what *are* you looking at?' And while he spoke, his horse rose like a bird, and dipped across the rasper as lightly as if possessed of feathered pinions.

"The way being led, many who feared to pioneer the course for themselves, now followed in the rear, and vainly strove to recover the distance lost. For such was the pace, that but a

few yards forfeited to doubt were never to be regained.

"Now, flying over elastic and velvet-bladed turf; then scouring through the deep and heavy fallows; at one moment skimming up the steep acclivity, and then over the top they dipped, and down the slope they rattled, at breathless speed. On went the chase!

"Gates, rails, walls, banks, brooks, and fences were taken in the course without a thought of their difficulty or danger. The ardour waxed warmer at every stride, and that which, at an earlier period of the run, would have made hearts and nerves flutter, was not even heeded with a thought. On went the chase!

"Flocks of sheep, and herds of frightened cattle scampered to the corners of their boundaries, and stared at the fleet hounds and throng sweeping past in dumb amazement. Horses, ranging idly in rich pastures, roused by the well-known sounds, stood statue-like at first, with pricked ears and distended nostrils, and

then, as the gladdening cry of the pack gave notice of its approach, their eyes flashed fire, and, scorning all restraint, away they rushed over rail, hedge, and ditch, to join in the noble sport. On went the chase!

"Mile after mile was scoured, and yet with unabated vigour the hunt continued. Occasionally a view-halloo was heard at a short distance forwards, announcing that reynard, with all his desperate struggle to get ahead, and make the space long between him and his enemies, had met with very indifferent success, considering the great exertions used. Fly he must, and fly he did; but there were those in his track that kept pace with him.

"Abreast of John Prettyman, rode Edward Flamstead; and it was a gallant sight, let who will gainsay it, to see both ride with such skill and noble spirit. There were no swerving—no faint hearts with them. Straight as feathered shafts they flew at the yawning impediments stretched before their horses' heads, and, neck-

and-neck, held the enviable position of leaders of the van.

"'Heads up, and sterns down!' cried the huntsman, in an ecstasy of enthusiasm, pointing with his whip to the hounds not two hundred yards in advance; 'that's the way, Mr. Edward, I love to see 'em go.'

"John, having addressed his young master by this juvenile title, when, in long winter nights, he used to charm his ears by relating daring deeds by field and flood, as he sat astride upon his knee, a mischievous, fat, chubby boy, still observed his ancient custom by calling him 'Master Edward.'

"'What a head they carry!' returned Edward, admiringly.

"'Yes, Sir," added the huntsman;' and if I'm not out of my reckoning, and no accident happens in the shape of an open earth, they'll hold it for some time to come.'

Sir Godfrey, as was his habit, held a conspicuous position; and if it was not so forward as

his son's, still he well maintained his declared resolution 'to be there or thereabouts.'

"Like leaves in autumn weather, the field now dropped off one by one; and, instead of the motley number thundering along helter-skelter, as at first, there were but a select few left in their glory alone. And even this choice number gradually became more choice, until some half dozen only had the power of living with the pack. On went the chase!

"Through dark, deep woods, and across wide, open fields, and down green vales, and up steep, precipitous hills, and over heath, common, and waste, the hounds continued the rapid race between life and death—life in escape and death in defeat. There was no lack of ardour in either the pursuing or pursued. The latter evinced his love of existence by the terrific struggle made to preserve it, and the former the keen and whetted appetite for blood, in the desperate effort to pull their victim down, and let flow the crimson current from his arteries.

"Hour after hour fled. Long shadows streaked themselves upon the earth; the sinking sun gilded the tree-top, and, at length, the thickening shades of evening fell in misty folds around; but still the chase went on.

"Sir Godfrey's jaded horse had for some time exhibited those symptoms of distress, which told that nature was exhausted; and his rider, finding that he could go no further without the torture of force, pulled him to a stand-still, with the determination of not going a step further.

"'By the Saints!' exclaimed the Baronet, dismounting, 'this run will last until midnight.'

"There were now no followers left except John Prettyman and Edward Flamstead. All the rest had been beaten off; but they still held their places. The flanks of their horses, however, told the severity used to keep them at the breathless speed, for the rowels of their spurs and their heels were speckled with gore—and

mire, foam, and sweat, covered their bodies from crupper to bit.

" Night now began to drop darkly around. The moon struck her pale beams through thin fleecy clouds: still the chase went on. Bright stars twinkled in the blue firmament, and were reflected in the mirror of waters: still the chase went on. Rustics, who had finished their labours for the day, paused in their return home, or rushed to their cottage doors, to listen to the unusual sounds at so late an hour; and then, as silence became suddenly again restored, began to question the correctness of their senses.

" ' I can go no farther,' shouted Edward, in a dry, husky voice.

" ' Hold on,' returned John in a similar hoarse tone, ' hold on, Sir,' repeated he, ' for a minute longer. He's not fifty yards afore 'em.'

" Thus cheered, Edward pricked his beaten horse forwards; but, staggering for a few yards

with a last effort, his head dropped between his knees, and he fell dead on the green-sward.

" His rider was thrown lightly, and without a bruise, and disengaging himself from the stirrups he sprung to his feet, just as a loud, hearty, and ringing 'Who-whoop!' burst from the lips of the huntsman.

"'By Heaven, they've killed him!' exclaimed Edward, running forward to witness the victory of the hounds.

" He had not proceeded far when he saw the indistinct form of John returning. The huntsman was leading his horse, and the hounds were following, panting and exhausted, at his heels.

"'Well, John!' ejaculated his young master, 'the success has cost us dearly,' for the roan dropped dead from under him; 'but where's the brush?'

" The huntsman replied in a thick, inarticulate, mysterious voice, that 'he didn't know.'

"'*Not know!*' echoed Edward. 'What do ye mean?'

"'Exactly what I say, Master Edward,' replied John, in a slow, measured voice. 'I saw the fox,' continued he, 'as plainly as I now see you; and I had done so for minutes before, when we were running him from scent to view. I say, Sir, that I saw this with my own eyes, and I also saw the hounds run in to him, and pull him down in the middle of this very grass field that we are now standing in.'

"'Well!' said Edward, as the huntsman arrived at a pause in his narrative.

"'With a who-woop, which you might have heard, Sir,' resumed John, 'I jumped off to save the brush and pads, when there was nothing left to save or to see.'

"'Ha, ha, ha!' laughed Edward. 'What, they swallowed him, skin, marrow, bones, and all!'

"'Swallowed him!' ejaculated the huntsman. 'Could five couple of hounds, Sir, break up

and gorge a fox, while a man was throwing his foot out of the stirrup? No, no, no,' continued he; 'I thought a miracle would be worked on the last day of Sir Godfrey Flamstead's hunt — and I didn't live to be mistaken.'

CHAPTER IX.

"Too old, by Heaven: let still the woman take
An elder than herself; so wears she to him.
So sways she level in her husband's heart."

"MRS. FRANCIS JAMES JONES sat in the breakfast parlour of Franca Villa, in a gloomy disconsolate mood. Before her on the table were some writing materials, and the County Herald, containing in one column an advertisement for the disposal of Sir Godfrey's horses and hounds, and in another a paragraph announcing that the Baronet and his son were about to proceed immediately to the Continent, much to the regret of everybody in the vicinity of Wynford Grange.

" Seated at some little distance was Emily Matilda, busily engaged with pencils and colours, in the endeavour to draw the representation of some animal with legs and wings, but whether it was intended for an eagle, cock-robin, butterfly, or grasshopper, would have puzzled a naturalist of high pretensions. Emily Matilda was certainly that which Sir Godfrey designated her to be, 'a pasty-faced girl.' There was no appearance whatever of blood in her features, and her lips had that ashy hue which might lead an observer to conclude she was in the constant habit of munching pickles. Her hair was red, if not positively of the shade called 'carroty;' and her figure had that want of roundness in all points, that her chronicler would be unworthy of credit, and prove himself to be a gross flatterer, if he described it by any other term than the graphical one 'scraggy.'

" 'Matilda, my love,' said Mrs. Jones.

" 'Yeth, ma?' returned the young lady.

"'Leave the room, child,' replied the mother. 'I wish to be alone for an hour.'

"The request was readily obeyed, and Mrs. Jones left alone: that is, if the society of a small fat spaniel, snoring on a neighbouring footstool, is to be considered as nothing.

"'So,' said Mrs. Jones, glancing for the fiftieth time at the paragraph in the newspaper, 'they are going to leave, and my hopes are doomed for ever to be blighted. 'Tis useless to deceive myself,' continued the widow, rising hastily from her chair, and pacing the room hurriedly; 'I never have, and I never will. Emily Matilda *is* plain, and far from being so accomplished as the money spent on her education would lead one to hope. But then her fortune I depended on as the attraction; and this, notwithstanding my frequent hints to the son, and plainer intimations to Sir Godfrey, has proved, from first to last, a complete failure.'

"Mrs. Francis James Jones said no more

aloud; but her lips continued to mutter, and she walked the length of the apartment a hundred times, as her limbs sympathized with the rapidity of her thoughts.

"At length she paused. Doubt was in her glance. Her brow knit deeply, and then her lips compressed, as if the purpose was resolved and fixed.

'"I'll do it,' said she, 'let the result be what it may;' and, sitting down, Mrs. Jones seized a pen, wrote, and addressed a note to Sir Godfrey.

"After despatching this, she summoned the tirewoman, and commenced her toilet with scrupulous care.

"The rich brocaded silk dress, with sweeping train and farthingale beneath, was put on, with due attention for effect to every fold and crease. High-heeled and buckled slippers, tightly, and even pinchingly, encased her feet. The most becoming wig, powdered and perfumed, rose like a pyramid above her

head, and surmounting this was one of the neatest, most coquettish, useless, captivating, little coifs, that ever lured the admiration of man, in maid, wife, or widow.

" Black patches were then placed where formerly there were dimples; for their places had long since been usurped by other indentures called 'wrinkles.' A touch of rouge was then administered to the cheeks, and, after softening down the bridge of the nose, the centre of the forehead, and the chin, with a white powder, Mrs. Francis James Jones's mirror gave evidence that the labour of art was complete.

" 'Just in time,' observed the widow, as a knock at the hall door of Franca Villa announced the arrival of the expected visitor.

" In less than a minute more, Mrs. Jones, with a slight but palpable trepidation of feeling, entered the withdrawing-room, with all the grace and dignity of that formal era, giving the tips of her fingers to Sir Godfrey,

to conduct her, with a profusion of bows, to a seat.

"At the conclusion of this ceremony, the usual questions and answers, commonplace then as they are now, concerning health and the weather, were interchanged, and then an opportunity was afforded to the widow to open her masked battery by the Baronet observing, that he had had the honour of a note requesting his early attendance at Franca Villa, and it was a great pleasure to reply to it in person immediately upon receiving the intimation.

"Mrs. Francis James Jones coughed, drew her laced handkerchief across her lips, and replied, that "Sir Godfrey would doubtlessly consider her a strange creature when he learned the cause of her desire to see and consult him. But the truth was, she had lately thought of a matter on which no one could give her so much valuable information as Sir Godfrey.'

The Baronet was quite delighted at the

preference shown to him, and expressed his readiness to reveal all within his power and keeping.

"'Without further mystery, then, Sir Godfrey,' resumed the widow, bending her eyes on the points of her slippers, 'I intend to purchase your fox-hounds.'

"'*Fox-hounds!*' exclaimed Sir Godfrey, astonished beyond the power of description, and as if his breath had been taken away, by the sudden plunge of Mrs. Jones thus diving at once to the pith of her subject.

"'Yes,' returned the widow. 'I find that you are really going away from us, and it would be too much to part with the comfort and life of the neighbourhood all at once; so I have resolved, in the absence of their master, to become the mistress of the dear dogs.'

"Mrs. Jones spoke feelingly and with greater effect than she could have even hoped, however sanguine she might have been.

"'Are you serious, madam?' inquired Sir Godfrey.

"'I was never more so, I assure ye,' replied the widow. 'Yes, Sir Godfrey,' continued she, 'I will not be denied. The hounds must be mine, at whatever cost.'

"'You must excuse my astonishment, my dear madam,' rejoined the Baronet, better pleased with Mrs. Francis James Jones than he had ever been in the whole course of their acquaintanceship; 'but it is so very unusual a circumstance for a lady to become an F.M.H., in other words, a Master—or more properly speaking, a Mistress—of Fox-hounds, that a little surprise may not only be natural, but pardonable.'

"I'll have the greatest care taken of them for *your* sake, Sir Godfrey,' added Mrs. Jones, emphatically. 'I, by your leave, will take your old huntsman, too, with the charming pigtail, into my service, and the pets of horses must accompany him. I couldn't live,' con-

tinued the widow, 'without one and all of them.'

"If ever Sir Godfrey Flamstead, of Wynford Grange, felt at a loss for words to frame a polite reply, he did so on this occasion; for he sat tongue-tied, and yet wished to speak with conceived but inexpressible eloquence.

"'Possessing these companions of your happiest hours,' resumed Mrs. Francis James Jones, discovering, with a woman's quick perception, the rising bubbles in Sir Godfrey's sensibilities, 'I shall have the pleasure—a melancholy one, it is true—to recal the pleasant associations with which the past is replete, and endeavour to retrace in memory that which never can be renewed.'

"Sir Godfrey was quite overcome. He rose from his seat at a bound, and, scarcely knowing what he did, he seized the widow's hand between his own, and pressed it warmly to his bosom, and thence to his lips.

"Mrs. Jones did not withdraw the hand. On

the contrary, when the Baronet was disposed to separate the treasure from his lips, a slight movement on her part kept it there longer than was intended, and the position, from its length, became almost painful to Sir Godfrey.

"'My dear Mrs. Jones,' at length he found an opportunity of saying, 'if I could only think that I was worthy of so much regard, my happiness would be very great.'

"The widow's bosom heaved a deep-drawn sigh.

"Sir Godfrey felt a cold moisture ooze upon his forehead.

"The critical moment was arriving; and Mrs. Francis James Jones knew it; and in order to quicken the proceeding, she burst into a flood of passionate tears.

"Nothing is more soothing to grief than the word of comfort dropped in whispered accents. Perchance Sir Godfrey thought this as he gallantly bent his knee, and poured forth a flow

of words, such only as the inspired can command.

"And here we will throw a curtain around, and close the scene.

"Much might now be said; but little is needed for the finish of this slight history. Sir Godfrey, it is hardly necessary to tell, was an accepted suitor, and led to the altar the gratified and successful Mrs. Jones. Desirous of aggravating the envy of the Browns, the Lady Flamstead was lavish with her means of reinstating the grandeur of Wynford Grange, and phœnix-like the ancient house rose from its ashes and, looked again as in days of old.

"Shortly after his parent's union, Edward took his departure, with the independent desire of acquiring his own fortune; but within a few weeks of taking his leave he was summoned to return, in consequence of the unexpected and

sudden decease of Emily Matilda. Poor girl! she caught cold from a short exposure to the damp; and possessing no better constitution than a young and tender linnet, parted from her life with the ease of a candle snuffed out.

"Edward had always been greatly admired for both his personal and mental qualities, by his stepmother, who, with all her vanity and powers of finesse, possessed a good, warm, and generous heart; and after the loss of her daughter she would not listen to his quitting his home again. Next to pleasing Sir Godfrey, her study was to anticipate and gratify his son's inclinations and wishes, and, learning how the tide of affection flowed in a certain quarter, it falls flat and superfluous to add, that Kate Owen soon pledged her troth to him to whom her willing heart had long been plighted."

"What a remarkable gift you've got of the gab, Job," observed Edward Dixon, upon the conclusion of the huntsman's story. "I could listen to such yarns for ever and a day."

" You'd get a little dozy over them in that time," replied his companion, " like a few of the rest of my hearers."

The landlord surveyed the company present, and, upon seeing the blacksmith and the blighted commercial buried in profound slumber, said, in a tone bordering on indignation, that " It was quite time to shut up the Lion for *that* night;" and with the intention of closing the shutters, he rose abruptly from his chair.

CHAPTER X.

"Pity me not, but lend thy serious hearing
To what I shall unfold."

Could words convey anything like a semblance of the meeting of our hero and his long-sought mother in the earth-stopper's rude abode? could they express the wild joy of John Hardy, upon descending to the breakfast-room the following morning, and seeing—yes, it must be, Tom's mother; but his brain reeled, and his flooded eyes denied their offices, as he rushed forwards to clasp that attenuated, pale, and sorrow-stricken form to his breast?—could

they but give the faintest trace of all these scenes, then, instead of leaving their delineation to the fertile imagination of the reader, each particular should be recorded and measured in terse sentences and syllables. This being impracticable, however, with a poetical licence not unprecedented, much must be left to that which can scarcely fail to please one and all, their unshackled will and pleasure to string the beads, best suited to their several tastes, as may be left unstrung on this rosary of events.

After a degree of composure had been restored in the feelings and manner of everybody present, John Hardy inquired, as well as his choking voice would permit, "where she had passed the night?"

"At the huntsman's cottage," replied Tom's mother, "where I stopped during a sudden illness some few months since."

"Were you then Mrs. Weston?" asked the Squire.

"Such was the name I went by," returned she.

"And for us to be in ignorance of your being there!" exclaimed John, raising his hands.

"Mr. Baldwin little thought who the interesting stranger was, he called you, mother," added our hero.

"He was very attentive and kind to me," she rejoined; "but never intimated a wish to know the cause of my being in the neighbourhood."

"He would have considered it rude to have expressed the most trifling curiosity," said the Squire. "But as we are not gifted with the like virtue of forbearance, let me ask you, my dear Mrs. Gordon, to enter upon that history which, you must be well assured, all here are feverish to learn."

"Perhaps," remarked John, "you are not sufficiently refreshed to speak much at present."

"In that case, of course let my request be postponed," replied the Squire.

"Oh no!" rejoined she. "I would as soon —and, indeed, much prefer, at once, to relate what I have to tell without further delay."

After a pause, as if the effort was doubtful of success, Mrs. Gordon summoned resolution to begin.

"You know already, it was my sacrificed husband's wish that I should, upon my arrival in England, throw myself and infant upon the protection and kindness of one who had been so grievously treated and basely wronged by both him and myself."

"Hush, hush," interrupted John, squeezing both her hands between his own. "Don't speak of that. It's all forgiven and forgotten, Mary, long since."

"I made no promise to do so," continued she, looking her gratitude for John's heartfelt consideration, "for when expressed I was unconscious of even the possession of life. As

far as myself was concerned, however, I resolved, upon learning the request, not to accede to it. I felt that my punishment was merited, and a just retribution had been visited upon me. Believing, however, that Lieutenant Smith, in whose care I had been entrusted, would, if aware of my determination, use all his power to frustrate it, I apparently consented to the views of his guidance for the purpose of having no obstacles thrown in the way of my own. Feeling that all social ties had been broken, I could not bring myself to meet a single creature with whom I had formerly been acquainted, much less *you*, Mr. Hardy; and with the intention of secreting myself from the observation of every body in possession of my sad history, I bent my way towards London, in the belief that I should there be secure from the scorn which I so much dreaded, and yet so well deserved. Poor, friendless, and a stranger to the great difficulties of obtaining a livelihood, I took up

my abode in an humble dwelling, with the intention of working for my daily bread. Alas! little did I know how many, much more capable than myself, were then in want of the hardest employment, goaded by stark necessity. Day after day flew by, and notwithstanding I walked from shop to shop, in the endeavour to find needlework, for hours each succeeding day, I could get none whatever. My little funds had now dwindled down to the last shilling, and I began to feel the pangs of absolute want. My child wasted, pined, and wept unceasingly for that which, as a mother, I had hitherto yielded, but now unsupported nature denied. The thought that he would die was madness, and yet that he must, seemed to be inevitable. In my agony, I cried aloud 'What shall I do?' when a voice seemed to whisper softly your name, Mr. Hardy."

"My name!" exclaimed John. "Dear me! But pray proceed, Mary."

John Hardy appeared to take great pleasure in addressing the narrator by her Christian name, for he repeated it whenever there was an opportunity of so doing.

"Yes," resumed she, "your name, as plainly as I could now speak it. Strange as it may seem, I was influenced by this imaginative sound, and after the bitter struggle between the reluctance of parting with my boy, and the duty of so doing, I decided to compromise my husband's request by throwing him upon your bounty and goodness, and to brave the worst myself, even if *that* should be in the shape of a lingering death. Parting with the few remaining articles on which I could raise a little money, I hastened to put my design into execution. A few hours brought me in the vicinity of this place, where I learned, to my great joy, you were still staying. The difficulty then seemed to be the method of conveying my child, without your knowing from whom it came."

" But what could be the objection to my knowing whose dear little babby it was, Mary ?" inquired John Hardy.

" I was frightened," continued she, " that such a knowledge might open many a wound then, I fervently trusted and prayed, healed, and, if not forgotten, remembered without the poison of rancour or hatred."

" I never felt either, Mary," observed John. " Never from the first."

" That I believe," resumed she, " and yet with my faith of your powers of forgiving all the trespasses against you, I dared not trust so fully in them as subsequently is proved I might have done. Indeed, the only reason of my resolve to keep the secret from you was the fear of again being the cause of renewed, if not of fresh injuries ; and this I solemnly vowed I never would be, if in my power to prevent them."

" It was ill-judged Mary," observed John, shaking his head. " Very."

Perhaps so," rejoined the narrator. "But to continue. Puzzled in what way to send you my child, and with little time to mature it, I thought of the expedient of—"

"Packing him in a hamper, Mary," interrupted John, with a somewhat impotent attempt to appear cheerful, in order to instil cheerfulness in others.

Our hero's mother smiled faintly. "Yes," she replied, "such was the humble vehicle; but the best that I could devise. Heaven knows only," continued she, "what my feelings were upon abandoning—yes, that's the word—*abandoning* my infant. Even the wolf would not so have acted; and yet, before judging me or my cruelty, reflect on the wretched despair which drove me to the deed. I could not see *him* perish. If one must die, that *one* must be myself."

"Enough, enough!" ejaculated John, almost overpowered with emotion. "Say no more on that head, Mary."

"Returning to London," continued she, "I strove to smother the misery of the separation from my child in the reflection that, had it not been done voluntarily, death must soon have snatched him from me. Notwithstanding the consolation which I endeavoured to extract from these thoughts during the day without rest, and throughout the long, sleepless night, a raging fever took possession of me, and I became——"

The speaker apparently hesitated to proceed.

"What?" inquired our hero, softly.

"*Mad,*" replied his mother.

Both the Squire and John Hardy made an involuntary exclamation of horror at this reply.

"Mad?" repeated our hero, as if the reply had petrified him.

"Aye," she rejoined, "mad as any brain that was ever scorched by misery."

"Great Heaven!" ejaculated the Squire. "And what became of you then?"

"I can scarcely tell," returned she. "One chaos of horrors seemed to whirl for ever before me. Jibbering spectres haunted me, babbling and shrieking, while they offered blood to assuage my raging thirst. Fierce flames licked themselves around in blistering heat, drying my flesh to open in gaping cracks —and yet I could not die. But let me not speak of this," continued she, as if the subject was too painful to dwell upon. "When it pleased Heaven to mitigate my wretchedness, and glimpses of transitory reason were restored, I became conscious that I was in an asylum for the deranged. I need scarcely add that it was a receptacle for the impoverished so afflicted, or *I* should not have been one of its miserable inmates. I cannot detail the sufferings endured in this horrible prison, nor is it necessary that you should learn them; but you may imagine what the torment was, when my tale of wo and sadness, my entreaties and supplications, were the subjects of ridicule and savage

mirth with those who held unlimited control over me. Thus treated and goaded to say and do what the mad can only think of, I lingered month after month, year after year, until I learned to bear all and suffer without a murmur. Then, and not till then, it was decided that I was cured, and permission given me to take my departure, after a captivity of twenty-one years."

At this moment the speaker's voice failed, and she appeared incapable of proceeding.

"Say no more," said John Hardy; "say no more, Mary. We have heard enough, heaven knows, this morning!"

"I've little more to add," resumed she, "and I prefer concluding it now. As soon as my limbs were free, I bent my steps hither for the purpose of learning the fate of my son. Weak and exhausted, I fell senseless opposite the door of a cottage, in the occupation, as I subsequently learned, of Job Sykes. From his wife I gleaned the particulars concerning his

adoption, and the generosity which had been acted towards him from his earliest childhood. But, notwithstanding her loquaciousness on the subject, she never informed me of the desire of my being discovered, nor the search then being made for me. On the contrary, she stated, with a degree of apparent accuracy, the particulars of my death."

"I can explain that," returned the Squire. "The search for you in particular, my dear Mrs. Gordon, was not at that moment commenced. For a series of years the *general* intelligence respecting Tom's birth and parentage, had been the object of inquiry; but it was not until a short time after our friend Tobias Smith made us acquainted with the history which he so well knew, that we instituted a pursuit for the destiny which might, we hoped, be learned of you. Of course," continued the Squire, "the fabrication of your decease was merely one of the countless speculations upon the same subject."

"You've not explained, dear mother, " said our hero, " why you kept us in ignorance of your existence, and quitted the neighbourhood without letting any one know who you were—even *me*," he continued, emphatically.

"I dreaded," she resumed, "that my presence might still be the cause of some heart-sore reminiscences; and knowing that it could be productive of no real benefit, I deemed it best, after wavering consideration, to leave ye to the happiness which attended you, and be, as then thought, dead to one and all."

" What happy source was the reason of your altering this design, Mary?" asked John Hardy.

" A mere accident," she replied. " I chanced to learn, from a wandering razor-grinder——"

" Peter Parkins, no doubt," interrupted John Hardy.

" Such is his name," returned the narrator. " It was he who informed me of the unceasing efforts made to discover me, and the cause of my seeking the——"

"But he didn't know who you were?" again interrupted John.

"Not at all. He thought he was merely amusing me with the gossip of the country that he travels."

"And where were you at this time?" asked the Squire.

"At the next market-town, Turnbridge," replied the speaker, "where I had obtained a little employment."

"The ways of heaven are inscrutable," rejoined John Hardy; and, raising his hands, he fervently added, "may God's will be done!"

CHAPTER XI.

" The charm dissolves apace,
And as the morning steals upon the night,
Melting the darkness, so their rising senses
Begin to chase the ignorant fumes that mantle
Their clearer reason —"

PETER PARKINS wore a grave, thoughtful look, as he wandered down a lane flanked by two precipitous banks leading to the Hall, engaged in the meditative occupation of nibbling his finger nails. Toby, who trotted mechanically in the rear, endeavoured to imitate the contemplative mood of his master, by occasionally, and at measured distances, squatting on his haunches, and giving three or four deliberate shakes of the head. " And so," said he at

length, "Master Mike, you've turned upon your old pal, eh? Ha, ha! I've heard of worms turning when they're trod upon; but you'll find me a worm with a sting in his mouth."

"The devil I shall!" replied a voice, and at the same moment down the side of the steep bank the figure of Mike Crouch glided, and he alighted nimbly on his feet within a yard of the astonished razor-grinder. "The devil I shall!" repeated he. "Now's your time, then; sting away."

"Let me pass," rejoined Peter.

"Not so fast, friend," returned Mike. "I've a little business to settle with you before we part."

"Mind," added the razor-grinder, raising a finger cautioningly, "it's felony to stop a subject on the King's highway."

"Subject!" repeated Mike with a sneer, and diving his hands into the pockets of his trousers. "You're a pretty sort of a subject, aren't

ye? I'm in a very great mind to spoil some of your beauty."

"Oh, remember!" supplicated Peter, greatly altering his tone and manner, "that I'm a poor old man! Spare my bones, Mike," continued he, trembling like an aspen leaf, "for old acquaintance sake!"

"Ha!" ejaculated the earth-stopper. "Like a great many other folk I've heard of—and spicy Christians too in their own conceit—you can pray when it suits your purpose."

"But our betters tell us to do so," replied Peter.

"Then our betters are the better hypocrites, that's all," rejoined Mike. "But listen," he continued, "to what more concerns ye."

"To be sure," returned the razor-grinder; "I'm quite ready."

"You're quite certain o' that?" said the earth-stopper, banteringly.

"Quite," was the short reply.

"What a surprising change a little whole-

some dread of a good, sound drubbin' will make, sometimes!" added the earth-stopper, with an inward chuckle.

"In me it always had the same effect," observed Peter. "I never waited for the real thing itself."

"Some would call that prudence," responded Mike. "Others, rank cowardice."

"I'm not nice to a shade what either I, my sayings, or doings are called," rejoined the razor-grinder; and never was."

"You're a rogue by nature," returned Mike.

"And——," Peter Parkins hesitated.

"So am I, you'd say, if you had the pluck," added the earth-stopper.

"I would," briefly responded Peter, at the same time expressing a little trepidation at his own temerity.

"Don't be afeard," rejoined Mike; "we sha'n't growl over that bone. Haven't you heard," continued he, "of the risks rogues run when they quarrel among themselves?"

"Honest men come by their rights," replied the razor-grinder.

"A shrewd guess," returned Mike. "Well!" continued he, "the like end may come of our brawl if we're fools enough to let it."

"I didn't seek the quarrel," added Peter. "It was your making, from first to last."

"Supposing I say it was, what then?" said the earth-stopper.

"It would go a long way towards rubbing the hackles of my temper down again," responded Peter.

"Good," rejoined Mike. "And what would smooth 'em altogether as before?" inquired he.

"My share of the money you promised me," replied the razor-grinder.

"You shall have it," rejoined Mike.

"A fair promise," returned Peter Parkins, with twinkling eyes. "But when?"

"Before sun-down," replied his companion.

"Ha?" ejaculated the razor-grinder, peering

through his shaggy and knitted brows. "What fresh game's afoot?"

"Something well worth the net," returned Mike.

"And I'm wanted to assist in the taking?" added Peter.

"Not exactly," said the earth-stopper. "But, first of all, are we friends?"

"If I may depend upon your keeping word with me we are," replied Peter.

"That condition I agree to," rejoined Mike; "so there's my hand."

"And there's mine," returned the razor-grinder, giving his dingy fingers to be grasped by his companion. "It would be a pity," continued he, "that such old pals shouldn't remain friendly."

"You were on your road to give me a wipe for the old score of grudge you owe me," remarked the earth-stopper.

"I certainly was," said Peter Parkins, after some hesitation.

"I thought so," replied Mike, "when I watched ye pointing for the Hall this morning. And what were you going to do?"

"Split," briefly rejoined his companion.

"Humph!" returned the earth-stopper, in a tone of reflection. "You'd have 'peached, eh?"

"I certainly should," added Peter Parkins. "It was my intention to let Mr. Hardy and the Squire know all about our plan of fathering Master Tom, and every bit of our partnership concerns from first to last."

"And now you won't?"

"Not if——"

"Oh! there's an *if* in the case, is there?" interrupted Mike.

"I was going to add, if you're honest with me," continued the razor-grinder, "I'll be honest with you."

Toby, who had been a patient listener to the discussion, wished to convey his approval of this equitable sentiment on the part of his

master, and, in order to do so, stretched himself out, and bowed his best.

"That shall be our agreement, then," rejoined the earth-stopper. "Now then, listen, with pricked ears, to what I have to say."

"They're as ready as a fox's, when he hears the tongue of a hound," returned Peter, graphically.

"You've often told the young Squire's history to the gossips in your rounds?" said Mike, interrogatively.

"Frequently," replied Peter.

"Do you recollect informing anybody lately of it in Turnbridge?"

"Well," rejoined the razor-grinder, "I was telling a poor needle-woman living there, the day before yesterday, while putting an edge to her scissors, and she cried while I told her."

"Now, you little thought at the time," returned Mike, "that it was the best bit of news you ever carried."

"How so?"

"That poor needle-woman, as you call her," said the earth-stopper, measuring the words slowly as he spoke, "was the young Squire's own mother."

Peter Parkins reeled backwards, as if he had received a sudden kick in the centre of his body.

"You're—you're joking," stammered he.

"Am I?" seriously rejoined Mike. "Do I look as though I was joking?"

"No," returned Peter, staring at his companion; "you certainly don't."

"I tell you again," said the earth-stopper, "that she was the young Squire's own mother."

"Do they know it at the Hall?" eagerly asked the razor-grinder.

"By this time, every thing," replied Mike.

"How?"

"Through me," rejoined the earth-stopper.

"Then you claim—"

"*Half* the reward for her discovery," returned Mike. "Are you content to have the other half?"

"Quite, quite—more than contented," replied Peter, quickly.

"Agreed," returned the earth-stopper. "It's a bargain."

"But why," inquired his companion, hastily, as if some some suspicion flashed through his brain, "why deal so liberally with me?"

"Because, upon second thoughts," replied his companion, "I considered you deserved the half. Your information," continued he, "caused the lady to come to me, and—"

"I see, I see," interrupted Peter. "I see all now. Both have a right to a cut from the pie, and you were afraid that this wrangle might cause the dish to slip through our fingers, eh?"

"You might have guessed again, and been further from the truth," said Mike, carelessly.

"Well, well!" exclaimed Peter Parkins,

rubbing his hands with satisfaction. "So long as we quite understand each other, that's every thing."

"Mum's then the word about all that's taken place between us," said the earthstopper.

"The grave shan't be more silent," responded Peter.

"You'll never split about my nooseing a few odd hares, pheasants, and such like?"

"Never," promised his companion, with a solemnity of look and manner.

"Nor 'peach concerning the trap set for Mr. Hardy?"

"Never," again replied Peter Parkins.

"Nor, in fact," continued Mike, "let anybody know aught against me, now a secret between us?"

The razor-grinder repeated his plighted word.

"Very well," returned his companion. "Now remember," said he, in continuation, "if from any reason whatever you fail to keep

your promise, "I'll take the earliest opportunity of meeting with you in a bye-lane, like this perhaps, and then—Mike picked up a sered twig from the ground, and snapped it between his finger and thumb—"I'll serve your neck like that."

Peter Parkins breathed a vow, with the intention of keeping it religiously strict, never to run the smallest probable chance of a dislocation by violence; and it is nothing but common justice to add, that to the end of his days his solemn engagement was maintained.

CHAPTER XII.

"Dar'st thou die?
The sense of death is most in apprehension."

It was some five weeks after the gladdening arrival of our hero's mother at the Hall, and the feverish excitement attending it began to subside into a more pleasurable calm, when the Squire was seen to stagger as he entered the breakfast-room, one morning, and with difficulty to steady himself from meeting with a heavy fall.

With exclamations of terror, Mrs. Gordon, Tom, John Hardy, and Tobias Smith, rushed

towards him to proffer him their ready assistance.

"Stay, stay," said the Squire, raising his hands, while a quiet smile spread itself over his blanched features. "Not too fast, kind friends. Not too fast," repeated he. "Give me your arm, Tom. There; you'll not find my weight much. Support me to my room again."

"Take a chair here, Harry," returned John Hardy. "You're only a little faint. Don't leave us."

"Not leave ye?" said the Squire, in a scarcely articulate voice. "We must all part, John, when the hour comes."

Paying little attention to these words, all assisted in bearing the Squire speedily to his bed-room, in accordance with his repeated wish, and there every means and attention were used that kindness and solicitude could devise. A messenger was instantly despatched for a doctor of proverbial skill, living within a

short distance, who, upon his arrival, pressed his jewelled finger upon the fluttering pulse of his patient; smelt the gold top of his polished cane; shook his head; pocketed his fee; and took his departure.

"Never let me be troubled with his presence any more," said the Squire, slightly raising himself in the bed. "I would have the time allotted me to live more profitably employed."

"But you'll take the physic, Harry, won't ye?" inquired John, in a beseeching tone.

"If it will please you, John," replied the Squire.

"Then it will," rejoined his old and anxious friend. "It will very much, indeed."

It need scarcely be stated, that the moment it was learned throughout the house that the Squire was seized with indisposition, than every domestic flew to learn the particulars; and throughout the long corridors the tramp of feet, murmured questions, and whispered

answers were heard, causing a humming and confusing noise.

"Tell them, John," said the Squire, "but tell them in all kindness, that they disturb me. I must be kept in quietude, as I feel disposed to sleep."

Readily, and in accordance with the directions, John Hardy conveyed the Squire's wishes to the throng waiting without the apartment; and from this moment, the footfall of a mouse might have been heard throughout the reigning silence in the old rambling house.

From hamlet to cot the evil tidings were borne, and there were more dejected and sorrowful faces within a wide ring of the Hall that day, than had been seen within the memory of the oldest living.

"You are so gentle," observed the Squire to Mrs. Gordon, "that I must ask you to be my nurse, and continue with me while I sleep."

"May I not stay also, Harry?" asked John

Hardy. "I am a capital old nurse," continued he.

"I think, John," replied the Squire, in an exhausted voice, "that you and all, save my kind attendant here, had better leave until I wake again."

"Yes, yes," rejoined our hero. "Repose will doubtlessly refresh you; and the fewer people here, the greater the likelihood of your meeting with it."

Without further observation, all quitted the room, except Mrs. Gordon.

As the door closed, the Squire beckoned his nurse to approach nearer his pillow.

"Tell me," said he, in a low whisper, "did you ever, my dear Mrs. Gordon, see a person die?"

"I have," she replied, quietly.

"Is there not always something peculiar"—rejoined he, in the same tone—"something to be seen, and yet not to be described, about the dying?"

"I think there is," returned she, subduing a rising emotion.

"Don't you," he added, drawing nearer to her side, and gazing earnestly in her face; "don't you," repeated he, "*see* this mark—the stamp of death, I mean—on me?"

A choking sob burst from Mrs. Gordon's lips, and she sank into a chair by the bedside, bathed in tears.

"Hush, hush!" exclaimed the Squire, slightly raising his voice; "I thank you from my heart for this honesty, but restrain all ebullition of grief. My reason for asking ye," continued he, "was to confirm what I felt. I *felt* the hand of death was upon me; but I wished to have the convincing testimony I have now received. God bless ye for it!"

Mrs. Gordon struggled with her overwhelming feelings, and at length effected a check upon her sorrow.

"I've not left the calls of life, affecting the interests of others, to the last," resumed the

Squire, taking the hands of his attentive listener between the parched palms of his own. "I've set my house in order, and all is as I could wish it to be. Nothing remains, I believe," continued he, "for me to do, but take leave of those I love, and say—good night."

Tears streamed over the hands held by the Squire as he proceeded; but no sound interrupted the delivery of his calm and collected thoughts.

"It will be a hard parting for poor John," said the Squire, with a deeply drawn sigh. "You, my dear Mrs. Gordon, must break the matter to him, with that gentleness and kindness which a woman can only exercise. Let him be impressed with the knowledge that it was my earnest wish, and daily prayer, not to have a lingering death-bed; and the granting of that petition is rather a subject for thanksgiving than one of lament."

"I will do my best to console him," replied she, as well as her choking grief would per-

mit; "but I know the information, conveyed in any form, will be heart-breaking."

"So *I* fear," rejoined the Squire: "still," he continued, "it must be done, and that, too, quickly. I would not have him see me again until he's aware of my approaching end, and a sufficient time has elapsed for him to regain something like composure."

The Squire fell back on his pillow, with closed eyes; and such was the pallid hue on his cheeks, that his attendant started to her feet, in fear that he was then dying.

"Not yet, not yet," whispered he. "Do not be afraid. I've a little more to say. Is the Rector here?"

"Yes," replied Mrs. Gordon; "I saw both him and Mary at the bed-room door, when you expressed a wish to be left with me."

"Then, while you're absent," rejoined the Squire, "let him be told that I wish to see him alone; and, during the time he is with me," continued he, "let no one disturb us."

"I will attend to your wishes," returned Mrs. Gordon, gliding noiselessly from the room.

Scarcely had she done so, when her place was filled by the worthy Rector.

"My dear friend," said he, pressing the Squire's outstretched hand, and looking anxiously in his face, "they tell me you are very ill. Let me be assured that their fears have exaggerated the truth."

"No, no," replied the Squire. "This is no time to deceive myself nor my friends. I have received a summons, which all must obey."

The Rector could make no reply. His cleaving tongue and quivering lips refused the utterance of a word.

"I'm an old man," said the Squire, "one whose life has been extended beyond the span of usual mortality. Four-score years, and upwards, have I numbered; and now the light is about to be extinguished."

"Is there not undue haste in coming to so

serious a conclusion?" asked the Rector. "I learned from the doctor, that he by no means despaired."

"Set no value on his opinion," rejoined the Squire, shaking his head. "There's a voice within, which tells me all such hope is deceptive."

The Rector was moved beyond expression at these words, and he smothered his feelings with great difficulty.

"Shall we pray?" said he, in a wavering tone.

"Aye," replied the Squire, placing his hands together, "with all our hearts, and with all our strength, that that mercy be vouchsafed to me, and to all who humbly and with contrition confess their sins and seek for pardon through the mediation of *Him* who died to save mankind."

"Amen," returned the Rector.

Hours fled. The shades of evening fell around. Hoarse-throated toads croaked in

doleful cadence to each other; and, now that the swallow had sought her nest, the bat cleaved through the air — a drowsy thing of darkness. The screech-owl stooped from the hollow in the oak, and flapping her broad wings in the thickening darkness, made the hill and valley echo with her discordant scream. Humming beetles drummed lazily through the air, and all the creatures of the night began to revel in its murky darkness.

In fitful gusts the wind went and came, and sighed and moaned through the trees, and rattled against old and ricketty casements. Doors, too, creaked and jarred upon their hinges, and there was nothing but mournful and cheerless sounds.

For some time the Squire slept the peaceful and unbroken slumber of a child. Just at sunset, however, he awoke with a start, and said, "Who calls?"

"No one spoke," replied the Rector.

"No one?" repeated the Squire. "Did no one call me?"

"No, my dear friend," rejoined the Rector, soothingly. "You've been in a profound sleep, and, I sincerely trust, wake refreshed."

"I remember now," returned the Squire, faintly. "And have you been with me all the time alone?" continued he.

"Yes," added the Rector. "It was your request not to be disturbed; and upon my informing Mrs. Gordon that you had fallen into a sleep, she has prevented everybody from coming even near the door."

"She is very, very kind," said the Squire; "and so are all to me. But now, say that I wish to see them."

In a few moments the Squire's bed was surrounded by his weeping friends.

Poor John Hardy, upon learning that his old friend and companion was about to be snatched from him, could not find vent for

his grief, and stood staring with tearless eyes and a rising gorge, upon receiving the information, like one suddenly bereft of every sense. At length, with judicious consolation and reasoning, relief was afforded in the shape of a flood of tears, and then he became much calmer and more resigned.

John," said the Squire, "I've but just woke from a very long sleep, or I should have sent for you before."

"This day has been the longest of my life, Harry," replied John, struggling with his emotion; "but tell me," he continued, "how do you feel now?"

"A little weaker," replied the Squire; "that's all."

"Do you not find yourself improved, after your long rest?" inquired our hero.

"No, Tom," replied the Squire; "no."

After a pause, he continued—

"I'll not dwell upon anything which may cause unnecessary pain, nor have I strength

remaining to speak very long. Give me your hand, Mary. Tom, where is yours?"

Each placed their hands in those of the Squire.

"It was my wish," he resumed, "and the only one remaining of my life ungratified, to have seen these united. As this, however, is denied me, take that blessing which then would have been given, and may your lives be happy and exemplary. Nay, nay," continued he, "do not weep. Remember, all that meet are doomed to part."

"Oh, Harry!" ejaculated John, unable to control his feelings longer. "Don't say so. Think of the long, long years we've been together. Never let us part."

"It is but for a season, John," replied the Squire.

"True," rejoined the Rector; "and that should be our greatest consolation to know, the earthly separations of the good are but temporary ones."

"Ah!" returned the Squire, "and at such a time as this, how priceless is such an assurance!"

"Let me moisten your lips," said Mrs. Gordon, handing a cup of wine and water to him. "They look dry and parched."

"Many thanks," replied the Squire, accepting the offer.

It was obvious to all that the invalid was now gradually sinking; and although his mind seemed to possess all the vigour of health, yet there was a general feebleness creeping on, which showed the lamp was burning gradually out.

"Let the servants come in," said the Squire. "I'm sure they wish to see me."

In a few moments the room was thronged with the old domestics, who crowded round the bed, and bent their eyes upon their dying master with that solicitude which the beloved and loving can only feel.

Extending his hand, each clasped it and

bathed it with warm tears, fresh from the green depths of human hearts. All had much to say, and yet none could speak a word.

"May God bless you all!" said the Squire. "Leave me now. I feel—I feel—"

"Let me hold your hand, Harry," said John Hardy, as the Squire clutched at something.

"Yes, yes," added he, smiling. "Yes, I come."

And so died this good old man; the last of his race.

CHAPTER XIII.

"The bird is dead,
That we have made so much on. I had rather
Have skipped from sixteen years of age to sixty,
To have turned my leaping time into a crutch,
Than have seen this."

"MAKE haste, Job," said Mrs. Sykes, withdrawing a handkerchief from her bloodshot eyes. "I fear you'll be a little late."

"Ah!" sighed the huntsman, making slow progress towards the completion of his toilet. "One can't help being tardy in movement when the heart beats as slow and heavy as mine does."

"Heavy, indeed!" ejaculated Mrs. Sykes, with tears again streaming down her cheeks.

"I shouldn't envy the feelings of anybody in these parts whose heart wasn't heavy on this day."

"There isn't," rejoined Job, with a groan. "There isn't one, Betsy, I know."

"I believe that," returned she. "At least I couldn't put my finger on a creature living, unless it be *Madam* Stiggs."

"It isn't right to think that even she feels differently than her neighbours," added the huntsman.

"Her sentiments," said Mrs. Sykes, are opposite to her neighbours on most subjects, and it's well for them that they are so, or the very heathens we read of would be superior Christians, notwithstanding they worship stocks and stones."

"Don't speak of Mrs. Stiggs to-day," replied Job. "We shouldn't have uncharitable thoughts at such a time as this."

"True, true," rejoined his wife." I stand corrected, Job, and I'm glad you've reminded

me of my duty. I'll not speak another syllable of *Madam* Stiggs."

"There," observed Job, after a pause, "I'm dressed to follow, for the last time, as good a master as servant ever had."

"The best," replied Mrs. Sykes, with a succession of sobs, "the best, I'm sure."

"Well," rejoined he, "perhaps the best; for better could not be."

"It's some consolation, however," returned Mrs. Sykes, "to know that his place will be filled by so worthy a gentleman as the young Squire."

"So it is," added the huntsman; "and we should thank God for the blessing. I don't know," continued he, "what would have become o' the tenantry and poor people if some stranger had come among 'em."

"Nor I," said Mrs. Sykes. "It would have broken half their hearts."

"As far as the bounty and kindness are con-

cerned," resumed Job, "they'll be found at the Hall just as usual."

"No doubt o' that," replied Mrs. Sykes. "There'll be no change in those respects."

"Heigh, there!" shouted a voice; and upon Job and his wife turning their eyes to the quarter whence it came from, Edward Dixon was visible at the garden gate, mounted on the flea-bitten gray.

"I feared that I should be too late," remarked the landlord, dismounting, as his friends hastened to welcome him.

"No," responded Job, shaking his hand; "there's a full half hour yet, Ned."

"Then *Ve*-locipede must go quicker than he seems," rejoined the host of the Lion. "His pace," continued he, "is a walk, if you want to see him to advantage; but I brought him along at a good jog-trot."

"He looks a little warm," remarked Job.

"Well! so he is," returned Edward Dixon, regarding with a look of admiration a small

patch of froth on the loins of his horse. "It's more than fifteen years ago since I saw *Velocipede* in a sweat," continued he, "and I never expected to witness it again."

"Go into the house," said Job, taking the reins from the hand of his friend. "I'll attend to your horse."

"Are James and Nancy coming here?" inquired Edward Dixon.

"I don't think they will," said Mrs. Sykes. "They'll go straight to the Hall, I expect."

"Humph!" rejoined the landlord, swaying his head to and fro. "A stranger would think, coming along the road," continued he, "that a dreadful fever, or something of that sort, had taken place in these parts, and everybody lost a father, mother, sister, or brother."

"How so?" asked Mrs. Sykes.

"Why, ma'am," returned the host, "I don't believe man, woman, girl or boy, and I might chuck in hinfants, but what wear a bit o' black in some part of their dress or other."

"Bless their hearts!" exclaimed Mrs. Sykes, unable to suppress her tears. "All show the good old Squire respect to the best of their means."

"They do, indeed," said he. "Some have a black riband, others hatbands, and so forth; but the poorest wear a little mourning."

"All work is stopped, too, I believe," returned Mrs. Sykes.

"I'll be sworn," added Edward Dixon, emphatically, "that there's not a plough, nor a team, nor a yoke of oxen going within ten miles o' the place."

"Come," said Job, making his appearance, "it's time for us to be going."

"I'm at your service," replied the landlord; and politely offering his bent elbow to Mrs. Sykes, the three turned their steps towards the Hall.

Upon arriving in sight of the spacious oval forming the lawn, a dense throng was perceptible, consisting of the tenantry, villagers, and

others in humble life, to whom the Squire was endeared, and who had now come to pay their last tribute of respect to his memory. These were no hired performers to mock the dead by dissembling the sorrow they could not feel. Heads were not bent to conceal the mask of grief. No! each breast heaved with true and deeply-rooted regret; and the tears that flowed, flowed from the fountain of friendship.

"'Tis as I expected," remarked Job, as they approached the house. "No one that can hobble along, but what will follow."

"The crowd's even greater than I expected to see," rejoined Mrs. Sykes.

"And it's still increasing," added Edward Dixon. "From all quarters they're continuing to pour in."

"There's our James and Nancy," said Mrs. Sykes, pointing to the whipper-in and his wife crossing the park.

"We'll join them before we go into the house," replied Job.

"Yes, yes," rejoined the landlord. "I wish to speak a word or two to my Nance. I dare say the poor thing wants a chirrup of comfort."

"She takes it sorely to heart," observed Job.

"I thought she would," responded Edward Dixon, with a nod of the head. "Nancy's like her father—tender in the buzzum. That's the spot where the Dixons feel, Job—in the buzzum."

"Yes," rejoined the huntsman, abstractedly. "No doubt."

"We've been quite noted for our softness," continued the host of the Lion, still dwelling upon his subject. "It's quite remarkable what a little would make me pipe my eye when a child. The mere sight of a birch, ma'am," said he, addressing Mrs. Sykes, "was quite sufficient. I could, and did, bellow for a whole hour if one was only shown me."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Mrs. Sykes.

"Yes," returned Edward Dixon. "It's true, ma'am, I assure ye."

Nancy and James now came up, and, the salutations past, all entered the back entrance to the Hall together.

Between three and four hundred had now assembled on the lawn; but so silent and noiseless were they, that for aught any noise or confusion was concerned, less could not be.

The church-bell boomed monotonously on the ear, and its saddening tone sunk into the breasts of all within the range of the mournful knell. For ages it had swung in its moss-grown tower, and as each of the Squires of the Old Hall were gathered to their fathers, the bell sent forth the same dull note. It was now tolling for the last.

The porch door wheeled shrieking back upon its hinges. Every hat was lifted, and all heads bared, as the funeral procession first made its appearance. Hush! let not a word be breathed.

Tramp, tramp; hearts sunk deeper, and eyes filled with glistening tears, as those heavy footsteps neared. Now the sweeping pall is seen. Choking sobs burst around, and told how much the object beneath, in death, as he had been in life, was loved and venerated. On the shoulders of his servants, those who had been with him for long, long years, the treasured body of their master was borne. No cold, unfeeling hirelings were permitted to carry him to his last home. Tramp, tramp. Hush! let not a word be breathed.

Next to the coffin, John Hardy tottered; for it can hardly be said that he walked, supported by our hero. Poor John! he looked nearly blind with weeping; and as he leaned heavily on the arm of his companion, he seemed scarcely conscious of what was going on.

Following them, were Mary Baldwin and her father; for the Rector felt incapable of officiating at the ritual ceremony, and a substitute had been procured. In succession, came many

friends and neighbours; then all the domestics. The tenants—honest, lusty yeomen—and the villagers and peasantry brought up the rear.

Filing off, two by two, the whole followed with measured tread in the path leading to the church hard by. Tramp, tramp. Hush! let not a word be breathed.

Quicker and quicker the bell jarred upon the ear. At the wicket marking the boundary of that green and shady ground, in which generations slept the unbroken sleep of death beneath daisy-speckled turf, the priest met the procession, and commenced the beautiful service for the dead:—

"'I am the resurrection and the life, saith the Lord: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die.'"

In a marked, solemn, and feeling manner, the duty was brought to a close; and then in the tomb of his ancestors, over which a tall, dark cypress reared its waving branches, they

lowered him—the last of a long line of "fine old English gentlemen."

Reluctant to leave the spot, many continued to linger near the grave, and converse of his goodness and virtues, and, it was not for many hours that the place became deserted, and left to the calming influence and silence of a country church-yard.

"I almost wish," sobbed Mrs. Sykes, upon regaining her cottage, "that I hadn't lived to see this day. I shall never get over it, I'm sure."

"Nay, nay," replied Job, soothingly; "don't take on so, Betsy. We should be reasonable in our sorrow as we should be in our pleasure."

"A very wise remark, Job," replied Edward Dixon. "I made the very same obserwation or nearly so, to that commercial traveller you once saw at the Lion, only a night or two ago. Says I, 'what *is* the matter?' Says he, thumping his left side like a madman, It's here.

'Indigestion?' says I. 'Pooh,' says he, more savage than ever, 'it's my heart-a-breaking.' 'In that case,' says I, 'mortar it up again, with reason for a trowel and resignation for the lime and horsehair. Since then," continued the landlord, " he's been better."

CHAPTER XIV.

" To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow,
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day,
To the last syllable of recorded time;
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
The way to dusty death."

As the varying colours and shades are reflected in the kaleidescope, so the succession of changes, in all their diversified hues, are met with in the prism of time. To-day, our hearts are light and elated with joy; to-morrow, and the sunshine is obscured with clouds and darkness. Mutability is the law governing all things—from the flower, to the great globe

itself; from man, to the blind and creeping worm.

Months flew past, and the seasons rolled on in their endless tide. The green leaves of spring burst from bough, spray, and twig, and then flourished to fall and rot in the sered and yellow tints of autumn. And thus, ages sink in eternity.

Two years had passed since the Squire's death, when Job Sykes was seen, one extremely fine and glowing autumn evening, exercising himself by dancing a fine, plump, healthy, and fat child upon his knee. The boy—for the reader's indulgence is craved to anticipate the sex—appeared to enjoy the fun immensely, and expressed his delight by screaming at the pitch of his voice, and kicking his nurse's calves and shins, with the entire force of his juvenile powers.

"Luke and John," said Mrs. Sykes, appearing on the threshold of the door, and raising her finger admonishingly to the boisterous

child in her husband's arms. "Luke and John," repeated she, "don't kick poor grandad's legs so; it's cruel, sir."

"Me spur," replied the boy, kicking as vigorously as ever. "Me spur de old oss."

"He spurs the old horse," interpreted Job, hugging his charge to his breast in raptures, and squeezing him until he turned blue in the face. "Upon my life," continued he, "I don't think there ever was such a boy in the world before!"

"You'll spoil him," rejoined Mrs. Sykes. "You'll spoil Luke and John. I told James so this morning."

"Talk of blood, pedigree, or breed," returned the huntsman, without noticing his wife's remark. "Doesn't he prove what they are? Doesn't *he* show the natur' of the stock he comes from?"

Mrs. Sykes closed her eyes, and said, "Certainly, anybody might see he was a Sykes all over."

" Every inch of him," added Job. " There's not a barley-corn of his body but what's genu*ine*. Let him wake in the night," continued he, " what does he ask for but his whip? And if I jog him on my knee, what does he do but say 'me spur de old oss.' Upon my life, I don't think there ever *was* such a boy in the world before!" and then the object of his admiration was again subjected to the effects of physical pressure.

" It's time for Luke and John to go to bed," observed Mrs. Sykes. " When at home, he's asleep before now, and I promised Nancy to make him keep good hours."

" In that case," replied the huntsman, " he shall go."

It was one thing, however, to say that Luke and John—so christened by the explicit desire of Mrs. Sykes—should perform certain duties, and another to get his approbation and will to do them. The moment he found himself about to be transferred from Job's arms to those of

Mrs. Sykes, he offered an energetic resistance to the measure, and, in addition to squealing most lustily, essayed to rend into fragments the ornamental parts of her cap, and made use of his heels with considerable effect on the abdominal regions of her body.

"Really, Luke and John," said the good woman, hurrying her charge off in the same fashion that a person might be imagined to carry a clawing and scratching cat; "really," repeated she, "you're a very naughty boy."

"Me spur de old oss," replied her burden, kicking with might and main.

"Ha, ha, ha," laughed Job. "Ha, ha, ha."

Immediately after the disappearance of Luke and John, his father, accompanied by his wife, entered the garden gate.

"What are you laughing at?" asked James.

"Laughing at!" repeated Job. "If ever I die with laughing, Luke and John will make me."

"You'll quite spoil him," returned Nancy. "I'm sure you will."

"Not I," added Job, "not I. Go and see him bedded down, and then tell me if he looks spoiled."

The young mother, upon learning that her first-born and only one was about to be consigned to the arms of Somnus, hastened to take one fond kiss, and ask a blessing for her pretty baby boy.

"Come, James, what say ye to a flagon o' the prime old stingo, eh?" inquired Job.

"With all my heart, father," replied the whipper-in. "I'll dip my beak deeply into his foaming head with pleasure."

"Ha!" ejaculated the huntsman, rising. "If I didn't think ye would, though you're my son, I wouldn't draw a thimbleful."

"But you know," rejoined James, "that you run no risk in that respect."

"I do," returned the huntsman. "It's far

from being one o' my maxims for people not to know or relish what's good and superior," continued he. "It's real waste to let such folk have anything of the top-sawyer kind. I remember a sort of hang-dog-looking bagsman, o' the name of Binks, telling Ned Dixon, just as he was about cutting him a clean juicy slice from as nice a sirloin as was ever seen, that he didn't care what he ate—he could eat anything. 'Then why,' said Ned, putting down his knife and fork, and looking the chap full in the face, until it looked as red as the gravy in the dish; 'then why,' said he, 'did you go for to come to sit down at *this* ordinary, Sir? If so be you can eat anything, and don't care what ye eat, why the devil, Sir, did you put up at the Lion? And then Ned commenced eating his own dinner, and took no more notice of the bagsman than if his chair was empty."

"That wasn't the way, though, to keep his business together," remarked James.

"No," replied Job; "but some can afford to look above their business and a little over it, and Edward Dixon happens to be one of them."

As the huntsman concluded this observation, he slapped the pockets of his breeches significantly.

"Yes," said James, smiling, as if he perfectly comprehended the telegraphic communication; "that's very true."

In a few seconds the flagon of foaming ale was produced by Job from some hidden, mysterious recesses in the cottage, and after each had paid due attentions to its charms, the huntsman observed, that "he was about to say something which might astonish his son a little."

"What's that, father?" inquired James.

"I've had several private meets with the young Squire," replied Job.

"Ah?" rejoined his son, raising his eyebrows. "On what head?"

"I told ye in the morning, at the kennel," returned his father, "that I wanted to see you particularly this evening."

"You did," briefly rejoined James.

"Have you remarked that I haven't been able to get away with hounds as usual for the last two seasons?" asked Job.

"No," replied his son, after a short, very short, pause. "I have made no remark about your duties, father."

"But haven't you fancied of late that I couldn't keep for'ard as usual and help hounds through difficulties, and, in fact, hunt 'em as I did years ago?" rejoined Job.

"N—n—no," returned James. "I think you gave a good account of as many foxes last season as any I remember."

"With your help," quickly added his father. "Now listen to me, Jem," continued he. "I take some credit to myself for knowing that my powers as a huntsman are failing."

James was about interrupting, but he was checked.

"Not a word," said Job. "I'll not hear a word. Most men," continued he, "don't know how to pull behind when they can't show in front. It's the same case with women. They never seem to understand that between seventeen and seventy there's a very great difference, and all strain and stretch to make up with harness what they want in flesh and gloss."

"You're an out-and-out preacher," said James.

"But, unlike, the greater number of preachers," replied Job, "I mean to act up to *my* sermon. That's what I like to see. Let those whose office it may be to teach us the right way to go, take the lead, and show us the way."

"Very good," rejoined James. "Nothing can be more reasonable."

"Well!" added Job, "as I was about to

say, I am quite certain my bolt is shot. It's no use beating about the bush. Plain thoughts should be spoken in plain words. Activity is the leading and necessary quality in a huntsman, and age is sure to grind it from our bones, blood, and sinews. In me, if not gone, it's nearly so, and before quite burnt out, I wish to see my place filled by one more capable, and that is, yourself."

"All I know," replied James, "has been taught by you, father."

"True," rejoined he, "and it's my pride to know you've profited by the instruction. However, without more ado, I tell ye, I've given up my saddle to you, Jem, and to-morrow you'll occupy the post of huntsman, instead of whipper-in."

"But what did the young Squire say, when you told him of your intentions?" asked Jem.

"Everything to dissuade me," replied Job;

"but my purpose was fixed before naming a syllable to him."

"Who'll whip to hounds, then?" inquired James.

"I shall assist," replied his father; "but young Tom, the kennelsman, is to be the whipper-in."

"All is settled, then," rejoined James.

"Everything," returned Job. "I shall employ my spare time in farming a few acres, and potter about to the end o' my days as comfortably as any mouldy old fellow could desire."

"You've been uncommon cunning in your manœuvres," observed his son.

"I don't like much dust from few feet," responded Job. "There's a time for everything, and *at* the time should we suit our actions to our words."

"Since, then, it's all arranged that I should sit in your pigskin," said James, "I suppose my offering a word against it is of no use."

"None in the least," replied his father.

"Will you, then, repeat to me what the duties of a huntsman are?" asked James. "You've frequently done so before, from time to time," continued he; "but on the eve of my undertaking them, I should like to hear the instructions once again."

Nothing could be more gratifying to Job than such an appeal, and with a beaming face he cleared his voice, and commenced the recapitulation of the onerous services of a huntsman in the field.

"It's a good rule," began he, "to take time by the forelock, and be a little before instead of a little after an appointment; but at the meet, you should never be a second before the hour named. You may be as punctual as you like; but it is better to be rather behind time than before it. Previously to leaving the kennel, you should receive instructions as to the coverts you're to draw in succession.

Some parts of the country require more hounds than others, from the size and thickness of the covers. You should, therefore, consider this before going into the kennel to draft, and, also, the number of young hounds you may venture to draft with the older ones. The larger the covers to be drawn, the greater number of old steady hounds will be required; for the difficulties, that must of necessity present themselves, should be lessened as much as possible, by having but a few young hounds in the pack. It should be remembered, however, that unless young hounds be often hunted and brought to their work, they can't learn how to press and pull down their fox, any more than a child can be taught to spell without a chance being given him of learning the alphabet. In drawing, you should begin with the cover farthest down the wind, and so draw up until ye find. When this work is being done, you should cheer your hounds, and let

your heart be in your voice; but there is no good in keeping up a great noise; as, perchance, a halloo may not be heard when of the very greatest importance. It is not an uncommon fault with huntsmen, when their hounds are drawing, or are at fault, to make so much noise themselves, as to be incapable of hearing anything else. This often lets a fox get miles ahead, and he beats them at breaking cover. Upon leaving, the same objection does not arise. You may then blow your horn, halloo, and kick up as much noise as you please. It can do no harm, and it may do some good.

"A slow huntsman is a sad damper to hounds; and unless they have a high, burning scent, and require little assistance in killing their fox, it is a horse to a hayseed that they lose hin. As I said a short time since, *activity* is the first quality in a huntsman. The want of it, no judgment can make amends for.

Hounds very often require to be helped; and as they should at all tines be kept *forward*, it is quite impossible that this can be done by a slow huntsman, who generally is behind. You should be ready to assist the hounds, the moment they are at fault. A huntsman, now and then, will be thrown out of his reckoning; but this will be but rarely, when he knows, as I am sure you do, Jem, every inch of your country.

" I need hardly say that your place is but a little distance from the sterns of your hounds. There is your post, and nothing but a bare accident should see you absent from it.

" When hounds are at fault, time should be given for them to made their own cast, and very often, if this be given, they'll hit off the scent by themselves. To rattle hounds away the moment they come to a check, cast them wide, and, perhaps, bring 'em back again to the very spot where they hunted their fox up

to, is a bungling proceeding. In the first place, let them alone, and give time to make their own cast.

"I don't like *lifting* hounds; it isn't hunting. To ride down a fox is a very different thing to pulling him down in a sportsmanlike manner. Sometimes, however, it may be necessary to lift 'em. Hounds will tire on a cold scent, when stopped by a flock of sheep, or any such stained ground; and when they're no longer able to get forward, will often try to run the heel. It is useless to allow them to pick a cold scent through sheep. The fox is not suiting his pace to theirs, but is running miles while they are running, perhaps, as many yards. He may thus gain what can't be made up, and therefore to lift hounds through such difficulties is not only proper, but part of your duty. Recollect always to get hounds to *hunt* when they can't *run*, and stop their hunting when they *may* run.

"To a beaten fox, hounds may be lifted; for when the varmint's steel is shot, he can't show more sport, and he may creep into an open earth, slink on the top of a thick hedge-row, or be lying up somewhere or other, and so save himself when he should be broken up. When a cast is made, it should be true and complete one way before you try another. Time is lost by going backwards, and forwards; the scent's getting cold, and the difficulties increased of hitting it off. On making a forward cast, which proves useless, you should return fast to try another. Some come slowly back, not thinking that the fox may then be running miles, and every second at check is making the space wider between him and the hounds.

"On bad scenting days it is more necessary that you should be near your hounds to keep them forward. Foxes will run the roads when they are dry and hard, in large covers; and if hounds be at fault, they should not be turned

too soon, nor until you are sure that the fox has not gone on.

" In a country where there are strong earths, a fox that knows the country, and tries any of them, seldom fails to try the rest. You may take advantage of this: they're certain casts, and may help to get nearer to your fox.

" Wide casts are not killing ones, with a tired fox and tired hounds. Long as you may be in recovering him, they should hunt him inch by inch.

" Where foxes are plentiful, care must be taken that your hounds don't run heel; for it often happens that hounds hunt the wrong way of the scent better than they can the right, when one is up the wind, and the other down. When a fox is tally'd away, you should get for'ard with the bunch of hounds you may have with you. The rest will soon join when their tongues tell they are on the scent. Lift, however, the tail hounds, and get 'em for'ard

as fast as possible; for it is the glory of sport to see the whole pack settle to their fox at the burst, like a flock of pigeons.

"When hounds are picking along a cold scent on unsoiled ground, they should be let alone; but when they're at fault with such a scent, the cast should be made slowly and cautiously. With a good scent, a quick cast may be made; and with a cold one, slow and sure is to be observed. If hounds are making, however, a good and regular cast, trying for the scent as they go, not a word should be spoken to them. It can't do any good; for all that can be wished is being done, and any interference may make them over-run the scent.

"When at check, you should keep an eye to the tail hounds. They're least likely to over-run the scent, and by them you may see how far they brought it. There are some hounds which will show the point of the fox, and, if attended to, will direct your cast. When such

hounds follow unwillingly, you may be certain the rest of the pack are running without a scent.

" In large and open enclosures wide casts are necessary ; but in woodlands they should be much closer.

" Never be over-wishful for the whole of your hounds to be turned after ye when making a cast. The more that hounds spread at fault, the better, so long as they're in sight or hearing. Many a skirting hound has hit off the scent, when none o' the body could in casting the wrong way.

" All hounds go fast enough with a good scent. 'Tis to get them for'ard with a cold one, and to keep 'em close to their fox, that tests the knowledge and judgment of the huntsman. In truth, with a high burning scent, there is no hunting required. Hounds must go, and all to be done is, to keep close to 'em until they run to earth or pull their fox down.

" When hounds flag, from a long day or frequent changes, it is necessary to press them for'ard and keep 'em on; for it isn't likely in this case that they should over-run the scent. At these times the whole work is done by a few hounds; and you should keep close to 'em, to cheer and assist them in trouble and difficulty.

" The many chances against hounds in fox-hunting, such as changing of foxes, their being coursed by curs, long checks, cold hunting on tainted ground, the dying away of scent, an unruly field riding over it, rattling too close to hounds up lanes and roads, and thus driving them on to over-run the scent, make it necessary to keep them as near to their fox as possible. Do this, keep within living distance, and difficulties may easily be got over; but if you are far away, it's likely they cannot.

" If hounds in cover have a brace or more foxes afoot, and divide, you had better take away with the first that breaks. The ground

will soon become tainted, and no good can be done by remaining there.

" When a fox has been headed back on one side of a cover, and you know there's nobody on the other side to view him away, the first fault your hounds come to, cast that way, lest the fox should have broken, and if he has not, you may still recover him.

" These," said Job, taking a long breath, as if the lesson in hunting had taken a puff out of his sails, " are the main rules for your guidance, Jem."

" Not one of which I'll ever break," replied his son.

" Then here's to your health as huntsman," rejoined Job, quaffing a hearty draught.

At this juncture Mrs. Sykes and Nancy returned from superintending the " bedding up" —as Job himself termed the office—of Luke and John.

" Well!" observed the good dame, with a

cheek somewhat flushed, and a little in want of breath, "Luke and John has settled down at last."

"Was the young colt restive, then?" inquired Job.

"I never saw him more so," replied Mrs. Sykes, still panting. "In spurring de old oss," continued she, "as he calls kicking my ribs, he really made me feel quite all-overish."

"He's much too rough in his play," rejoined Nancy. "He must be taught to be more considerate."

"Pooh, pooh, my dear," returned Job. "The rougher he is, the better. I can't bear to see tame, chicken-broth, water-gruel, milk-soppish, chalk-and-water-looking boys. I love to see 'em bold, wild, and resolute."

"But still, father," added James, "we should keep a rein upon them."

"With a nice gentle hand, I agree with ye," said Job.

"I fear, however," remarked Nancy, "that there's no rein of any kind kept on Luke when here."

"I beg your pardon, my dear," replied Mrs. Sykes. "I never permit the most trifling fault or error of his ways to go unreproved. A task it is, and one that admits of very little rest, to point out the many acts of wanton mischief he so continually is occupied in; but knowing the heavy responsibility of a godmother, I never allow one to pass unnoticed."

"And a great deal he cares for that," rejoined Job, laughing.

"Still," resumed Mrs. Sykes, closing her eyes, and placing the tips of her fingers together, "we should persevere in good works, even if the fruits be——"

"Backward plums," interrupted Job.

James and Nancy laughed heartily at this; but Mrs. Sykes sighed deeply, and shook her head, in an impressive, if not solemn manner.

"I trust, Job," observed the good dame, after a pause, "that you possess the principles of a Christian."

"I hope so, Betsy, my dear," replied her husband.

"We should all hope," rejoined Mrs. Sykes, emphatically; "but the question is, whether you're entitled to consider yourself a Christian, with such heathenish notions as you, now and then, seem to possess."

"I'm not aware of having 'em, my dear," returned Job.

"More's the pity!" added his better-half. "I'm sure of one thing," continued she, "that you've no right to plead ignorance of having them. It's been one of my duties to——"

"Now, mother," said James, perceiving that the loquacious dame was about to deliver a lecture with which, although now like certain celestial visits, she occasionally tested her

husband's powers of patience and endurance, "now, mother," repeated he, "shut up."

Magical was the effect of these words. Mrs. Sykes became as mute as a dumb-waiter.

Job gave a wink at the ceiling, and, after this secret and silent communication had been made, expressed a hope that the earths were well stopped in Gorhambury-thicket. "For if not," continued he, "your first rattle at the cubs to-morrow will be of little use."

"Mike is sure to have done that work, I think," replied his son.

"I'm not so certain," replied Job. "I saw him early this morning, very drunk."

"He's always in that state now, I believe," returned Nancy.

"Yes," added Mrs. Sykes. "The money which he had will be soon all wasted in drink. I'm quite disgusted with the wretch."

"I'm told," said Nancy, "that he may be heard, laughing, singing, hallooing, and

shrieking in his wild riots every night, and reports are going about that evil spirits keep company with him, too."

"The only evil spirits to be found in *his* company," replied Job, with a mirthful chuckle, "are whiskey and rum."

"You're in the right there, father," rejoined James, "and it would be well for him if they were driven away with a stronger power than the crow of a cock."

"He's a disgrace to the Squire's service," remarked Mrs. Sykes. "I hope he'll have his deserts one of these days, and then he'll get his discharge."

"If he is to meet with his deserts," responded Job, "he'll have to meet 'em in a different way than that. The Squire," continued he, "will never give him the sack."

"You may rest assured of that," rejoined his son.

"He presumes upon the kindness shown

him," returned Mrs. Sykes. "Perhaps he may go a step or two too far."

"He has done that already," added Nancy, "if we may judge by his acts."

"But still," sagely observed Mrs. Sykes, "there's an end to the longest thread, and he may chance to find it slip through his fingers when least expected."

"Let us hope not," said Job. "Mike has his faults who hasn't?—But then," continued he, "in judging others we should be careful not to measure their virtues or their vices by our own. It often happens that one, who sets himself up as a post for the direction of his neighbours, forgets that his position is in no way indebted to his own digging. I've seen oily-tongued, smooth-faced, fish-blooded folks turn up their eyes and groan at the little sins of others, without taking into the scale what might have left their own, if put in the same balance, as lumps of lead is to feathers. Ah!"

sighed Job, "many of your saints will be astonished when their reckoning comes to be made up."

"I don't stick myself up as a saint," observed Mrs. Sykes, taking her husband's stricture generally as a personal reference.

"No, no," replied Job soothingly. "I'm sure of that, my dear. And yet, as a female or she saint, there have been numbers so earmarked, without half the right to the claim to the brand."

Mrs. Sykes's feelings were mollified by this admission on the part of her spouse, and, like oil upon troubled waters, his words caused the surface to become smooth and unruffled.

"That cunning-looking old rogue, Peter Parkins, called at our house this morning," remarked Nancy.

"Did you count your chickens after he left?" asked Mrs. Sykes.

"I didn't take that precaution," replied her daughter-in-law, laughing.

"You would, I suppose," rejoined Job, "if you knew that a fox had been paying a visit to your hen-roost?"

"I certainly should," returned Nancy, "although the numbering would let me know the exact nature of my loss—a result, I've been told, not always wise to discover."

"Perhaps not," added Job; "but I'd always try to know the worst as quickly as I could, as then we defy the worst of evils—up-and-down, see-saw, humbugging doubt."

"Honesty for ever!" cried James, in a clear, musical, sportsmanlike voice. "Wind him, and cross him! Eloo-in, hoick!"

"That's it!" responded his father, in a tone of admiration. "Egad, Jem, but what music there's in a Sykes's voice! Talk about singing," continued Job, slapping his dexter thigh. "It beats the psalms on Sundays out an' out."

"Have at him!" hallooed the young huntsman, seeing that his father listened for more of

his woodcraft tones. "Have at him, Whirlegig, yo-dooit, Nimble; hoick, hoick. Avoy, avoy, my beauties, my darlings; hoick, hoick, there, give it him! Tally-ho! gone away! For-'ard, for'ard, my lads, yoicks, gone away! Whowhoop!"

"*Beau*—tiful!" exclaimed Job. "Upon my word! to hear a Sykes's halloo, it's enough to make a man wish there was nothing else but hallooing as long as he lived."

"Come," said Nancy, looking proudly at her husband, as he ceased to make the rafters ring with his echoing voice, "it's time for us to take our departure."

"Aye," repeated he, "we're dipping into the night."

"God bless ye!" said Job, imprinting a kiss upon the cheek of his daughter-in-law.

"Peace be unto the house," returned James, pressing his hat over his brows; "but war for ever unto the larder and cellar."

CHAPTER XV.

"For herein fortune shows herself more kind
Than is her custom——"

"THAT time never flies faster than when his way lies among flowers," the poets have sung, and never was this aphorism made more clearly manifest than in the few years following the union of our hero and Mary Baldwin. All in all to each other, not a word, thought, nor action but was studied for reciprocated delight and affection, and so passed their happy lives.

The boundless hospitality at the old mansion was still kept up with all the pristine generosity of its former proprietor. At Christmas the

holly branch shone upon the walls, and the misletoe hung beneath the oaken beam, and light heels danced, and lighter hearts laughed, as in the days of yore. It was not long either, not many years, before, at one of these revels, a child, with long silken hair floating over his back, and a face such as angels have, might be seen mounted on the shoulders of Job Sykes, and shouting in ecstasies of delight as he was borne through the dance.

"Again, again," cried he, when his bearer came to a stop.

"No, no, Master Tom," replied Job, placing him on the floor; "my back tells me you grow heavier every Christmas. I must take shorter turns with ye."

"Ha, ha," laughed the boy, as he was whirled under the Druidical branch, and there smothered with kisses; "ha, ha, ha."

John Hardy and Mrs. Gordon, of course, remained at the Hall; and often would they stroll together, arm in arm, and speak of by-

gone years with an interest which occasionally brought tears to the eyes of both; and yet they talked on, although the tale was twice ten times told, and more.

Frequently, too, they might be seen bending their footsteps towards the churchyard, to attend some flowers and creeping plants placed round the Squire's tomb. John's eyes invariably moistened with tears at these visits, but he was always more cheerful upon his return; and, if his laugh never sounded so hearty and long after the death of his old friend, still he was far from being dull or gloomy. Mrs. Gordon became his constant companion, and it was at one time whispered, John might, perhaps, ask for a fulfilment of that promise which had been given him many long years ago. By some means, he had heard of this fleeting report, and at once silenced it, by saying, "As the tree falls, so let it lie. *That* day is gone, never to be recalled."

The Rector became a constant visitor at the

Hall, more particularly of an evening; but from a reason, which he maintained a secret within himself, he never would allow the chess-board to be produced.

One of his greatest pleasures consisted in teaching his grandson to lisp the rudiments of Latin and Greek, the moment it was discovered that his tongue was gifted with the power of utterance. If the Rector was to be believed—but then great allowance must be made for his biassed opinion in favour of his pupil's merits—such a prodigy had not been on the earth since it began to revolve upon its axis.

"It's quite surprising," observed he, upon one occasion, when the young heir's merits were being canvassed, "what that boy can do!"

"It certainly is," acquiesced John Hardy, with a chuckle of delight. "I saw him this very morning," continued he, "tie a pin to a long stick, and then prick Blossom's behind in such a manner as to cause him to kick like an elephant."

"Putting aside these little foibles," rejoined the Rector, "just listen to his declining dormio. Now, Tom, my dear," continued he, addressing the object of his admiration, who, at that moment, was particularly engaged in munching an apple, "let me hear you decline dormio."

Without taking the smallest notice of the request, the young gentleman continued to eat his apple in silence.

"You see," returned John, laughing, "he *does* decline dormio."

"Dormio, my love," said the Rector, in the most persuasive tone.

"Mo," briefly repeated his pupil.

"Yes, my darling," rejoined the Rector, who hoped that a start had now been effected. "Pro—ceed."

"Door—mi—as, doormat."

"*Doormat!*" interrupted John Hardy, throwing himself back in his chair, convulsed with laughter "What a boy he is, to be sure!"

"There's a degree of shrewdness about him quite astonishing," said the Rector.

"He's a wag," replied John, hugging the child in his arms. "He's a little, wicked, saucy wag."

Job and Mrs. Sykes continued on their amicable terms, and the huntsman smoked his pipe of an evening with the comfort of a man in the full enjoyment of all the liberties of the subject. Notwithstanding his abdication of supreme government of the pack, he frequently paid a visit to the kennel, and assisted his son in the important duties therein to be performed. Not but that James was fully capable of the office he had undertaken; but still, as Job quaintly observed, "two heads were better than one." As he himself confessed, however, the opportunities were few and far between of rendering any help in the field, and they became, with every succeeding season, fewer and fewer.

"Ah!" Job would sigh, "activity is the first

quality in a huntsman, and to me it is quite lost."

"But you've had your day," Mrs. Sykes would reply. "I'm sure," continued she, "that a spryer or more active young spark never lived."

"'Tis the old ember now, Betsy," rejoined Job.

"But there's fire remaining in it," complimentarily returned Mrs. Sykes.

"Well, well!" added Job, pressing a kiss upon the ruddy cheek of his old wife; "I think my years sit lightly enough, although they're anything but a feather-weight."

"The rheumatism makes ye feel a little queer and out o' sorts just at this season," said Mrs. Sykes; "but when next summer comes, Job, you'll be as gay as a butterfly again."

James and Nancy — blooming, laughing, merry Nancy — set the very pattern of domestic happiness. Her curls, notwithstanding there were other cares springing up in the form

of future huntsmen and whippers-in annually, were still as captivating as ever; and if the coachman or blighted commercial had chanced to see her, years after she had become a loved and happy wife, it is quite uncertain what the result might have been. Contented and prosperous, their wants few, and their supplies more than sufficient, what state could be more enviable? Long may it remain unchanged and unaltered.

Edward Dixon—that philosopher and condensed essence of a plain matter of fact—continued the host of the rampant animal, and occasionally, through the aid of *Ve*-locipede, paid a visit to his friend Job. The old horse, like his master, grew grayer and slower, both mentally and physically, as the seasons danced round; but both managed to keep on the best of terms with each other.

"I think of riding *Ve*-locipede to hounds soon," said the landlord, dismounting from the

back of his steed at the gate of Job's cottage on one of his evening calls.

"Indeed!" replied Job, mistaking his friend's meaning. "I suppose he's fit for little else now."

"Little else!" repeated Edward Dixon, raising his eyebrows in surprise. "What is the proof of a nag's valee unless it be his going to hounds?"

"The best go to 'em," rejoined Job, sadly. "Yes," continued he, "the best go to the dogs."

"I s'pose *you* mean in a knacker's cart," returned the landlord.

"That's the vehicle," added his companion.

"But sure*ly* you were not alluding to *Ve*-locipede?" said Edward Dixon, almost staggered with the bare supposition.

"Eh?" responded Job.

"I say," rejoined the host of the rampant animal, "that you couldn't think *Ve*-locipede

was going to be boiled down for broth and kit when just in the prime of his life?"

"Prime of his life!" repeated Job, in a tone of wonderment.

"Aye," returned the landlord, confidently. "I'm quite sure he was never more steady in his paces; and if wanted to show in the first flight with hounds, he'd do it, for a little way, as well as the best of 'em."

"The distance must be very short, then, Ned," observed Job.

"He never was long-winded," replied his friend, "and therefore ye may be right; but I'm only speaking of as far as he could go."

"We'll not dispute that point," rejoined Job. "As far as he could go," continued he, significantly, "you may be not much out of the way."

"You recollect what I said about his bit?" said Edward Dixon.

"Perfectly well," responded his companion.

"Ha, ha," laughed the host, at his stale

joke. "It takes something to make a man forget one of Edward Dixon's smart remarks. Yes, yes," continued he, "they're not things to be easily forgotten."

"You've said as many good things in your lifetime, Ned, as most men," remarked Job.

"I should say I just had," egotistically replied the landlord. "Did ye ever hear how I took a peg or two out o' the conceit of a preacher that hired the Lion some five weeks since?"

"The Lion?" repeated his companion in surprise. "Hired the Lion?"

"Aye," rejoined Edward Dixon. "A lean, lank-jawed fellow came along, and hired the market-room at a matter of twelve and ninepence for one evening, to tell the people in our neighbourhood when the world would be at an end."

"Very friendly of him," observed Job.

"Uncommon," resumed the host. "But he tried to make hay while the sun shone, by

charging sixpence a head. Well!" continued he, "after proving that the extinguisher was just about to be popped upon *our* rush-light, he said, 'that if anybody present had any question to ask, he should feel proud in assisting the individual to the information required.'

"Nobody spoke a word for a long time. At last Jack Hally, our parish clerk, nudged my elbow, and whispered, 'Ned, go in and win.'

"With that, Sir, I stood on my legs—the very legs I now stand on—and said, said I, 'I've a few simple questions to put, Mr. Parson, to which I want a few as simple answers.'

"Mr. Preacher bowed like a wet rag.

"'Can you tell me who Noah was?' said I.

"The chap stared, I can tell you.

"'Because'—I pitched it at the top of my voice, without waiting for a reply—'*I* can. He was the master and owner of a double-

decked lighter, bound for nowhere, and partial to a little quiet yachting.' "

" Ha, ha, ha," roared Job. " Ha, ha, ha."

" There was a laugh at this, you may be sure," continued Edward Dixon, " and the parson looked precious uncomfortable. ' Now, Sir,' said I, ' can you tell me who Jonas was ?'

" The chap looked as blue as paint.

" ' Because,' said I, down upon him again like a duck upon a June bug, ' *I* can. He was a gentleman of the old school, and had a seat in Wales.' "

" Ho, ho, ho," laughed Job, holding his sides as if there was a pang mingled in the expression of his mirth, " Ha, ha, ha. Ho, ho, ho."

" Mr. Preacher couldn't stand it any longer," resumed the landlord, " and amid as noisy a shout as ever sa-looted the disappearing ends of the skirts of a fellow's coat, he crushed on his hat, and ran down stairs *without waiting to pay the twelve and nine.*"

"And so you were done in the end, Ned?" rejoined his friend, growing fast and furious in his mirth.

"No, I wasn't," returned the host of the rampant animal, peering knowingly out of the corners of his dull, fishy eyes. "Like many a rogue, he *forgot his silk umbrella*, and so, unintentionally, *paid his rent*."

Tobias Smith, after a long sojourn at the Hall, quitted his hospitable quarters with a full purse and ample provision for the remainder of his days. It need scarcely be stated, that he blushed deeply when the generous offer was made; but still he *accepted it*. His mercurial spirits led him, like the will-o'-the-wisp does the wanderer of the night, into many bogs, and oozy places, from which to extricate himself was a work of no ordinary labour. Still, like a shuttle-cock, now up, now down, he managed to keep his feathers in the air, and, to apply his own graphical language, "fly his kite without a great deal of puffing."

Without any apparent end in view, he roamed from one part to another, seeking just the occupation or amusement of the hour. After an absence of upwards of three years, and during which, little or nothing was heard of him, he suddenly made his appearance at the Hall, one morning, during breakfast.

"Here I am," said he, bursting unceremoniously into the room, in which were our hero and Mary, John Hardy, and Mrs. Gordon. "Did ye think I was dead?"

As may be supposed, this abrupt announcement and query somewhat startled the family circle.

"Bless my life!" ejaculated John, with the greater portion of his breath taken away by the shock. "It's our friend Tobias Smith."

"The same, Sir," replied the stranger, running his fingers quickly through his bushy curls, now beginning to be frosted by time. "The same individual, Sir," repeated he. "How are the children?"

"Children!" exclaimed the young Squire, laughing, as he exchanged a friendly grasp with the volatile Tobias. "How do you know that we possess them? Have you inquired?"

"Not I," replied he. "But there's been time enough for a couple of events to come off in the shape of a brace of 'pledges of affection'—as the dealers in romance call the squeakers—and I take for granted, these facts are realized."

"They are, they are," rejoined John Hardy, with portrayed enthusiasm. "Go into the nursery," continued he, "and you'll see as charming a pigeon pair as your eyes ever beheld."

"Thank you, my dear Sir," returned Tobias, taking his seat at the table. "I'll pay a visit to the pigeon pair after a little attention to this exceedingly charming pigeon pie."

"Where have you been all this time?" inquired Mrs. Gordon.

"My dear madam," responded Tobias,

" everywhere. In Turkey and Greece, and the Australian colonies. Visited upper cataracts of the Nile—Niagara, Timbuctoo, Pekin, and so forth."

" When do you intend to settle, and live a quiet, sensible life?" asked Mary.

" Settle!" repeated Tobias, dropping his knife and fork, and looking like one amazed. " When shall I settle?" continued he. " Inquire, my dear lady, when the tide will cease to flow, the waves to roll, the wind to blow. Inquire when——"

" Impossibilities may become practicable," interrupted our hero.

" Precisely so," rejoined Tobias. " When I settle, the stars will fade, and the sun grow dim."

" In that case," returned Mary, smiling, " I trust you'll continue your wanderings."

" Your trust shall not be placed on a broken reed," added Tobias.

Peter Parkins, the razor-grinder, and Toby,

perambulated the country as usual; and from several complaints of the loss of poultry, it is supposed "that which is bred in the bone will never come out of the flesh." Upon learning that our hero's father was a soldier, Peter claimed the honour of having served under him; but from the rambling statement, given as the chain of evidence, it is supposed, for some sinister purpose, he indulged in the romance of a heated imagination.

Mike Crouch still occupied "the kennel," and the onerous post of earth-stopper. Some intimation had been given him, that many of his peccadilloes were no longer secrets in certain quarters, and he therefore determined to avoid bad company, by cutting Peter Parkins, and begin a new—because honest—life.

It was the subject of remark, however, that Mike's nose became tipped with the hue of vermilion after receiving the money shared between the razor-grinder and himself. Upon being taxed with the fact by a quondam ac-

quaintance, the earth-stopper snapped his fingers, dived them deeply in his pockets, and raising his shoulders to his ears, said, "And it took something to paint it. More," continued Mike, "than the parish church. Ha, ha, ha."

Blossom, the squabby cob, continued as perverse as ever whenever his services were required. John Hardy, however, having given over "riding straight to the hounds," no longer permitted an undue exercise of his powers, and therefore the stimulating from Mike's cudgel was dispensed with on all occasions, leaving it entirely to his own free will, either to go" or not, as it best suited his inclination.

And now, having taken a retrospective glance of the scenes and characters wound to a close in the Old Hall, let the writer, like an actor who has "fretted his brief hour upon the stage," take a long, a lingering, and, perhaps, a *last* farewell of those kind readers with whom, from

the flattering reception with which his efforts have been received, he is led to believe, that if not missed, he may, at least, not be forgotten. There is a tie, an association, which binds an author to the companions—aye, that is the term, the *companions* of his labours; for if he writes *for* them he can scarcely be *without* them—and in the breaking of which makes one heart, at least, solitary and sad.

THE END.

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