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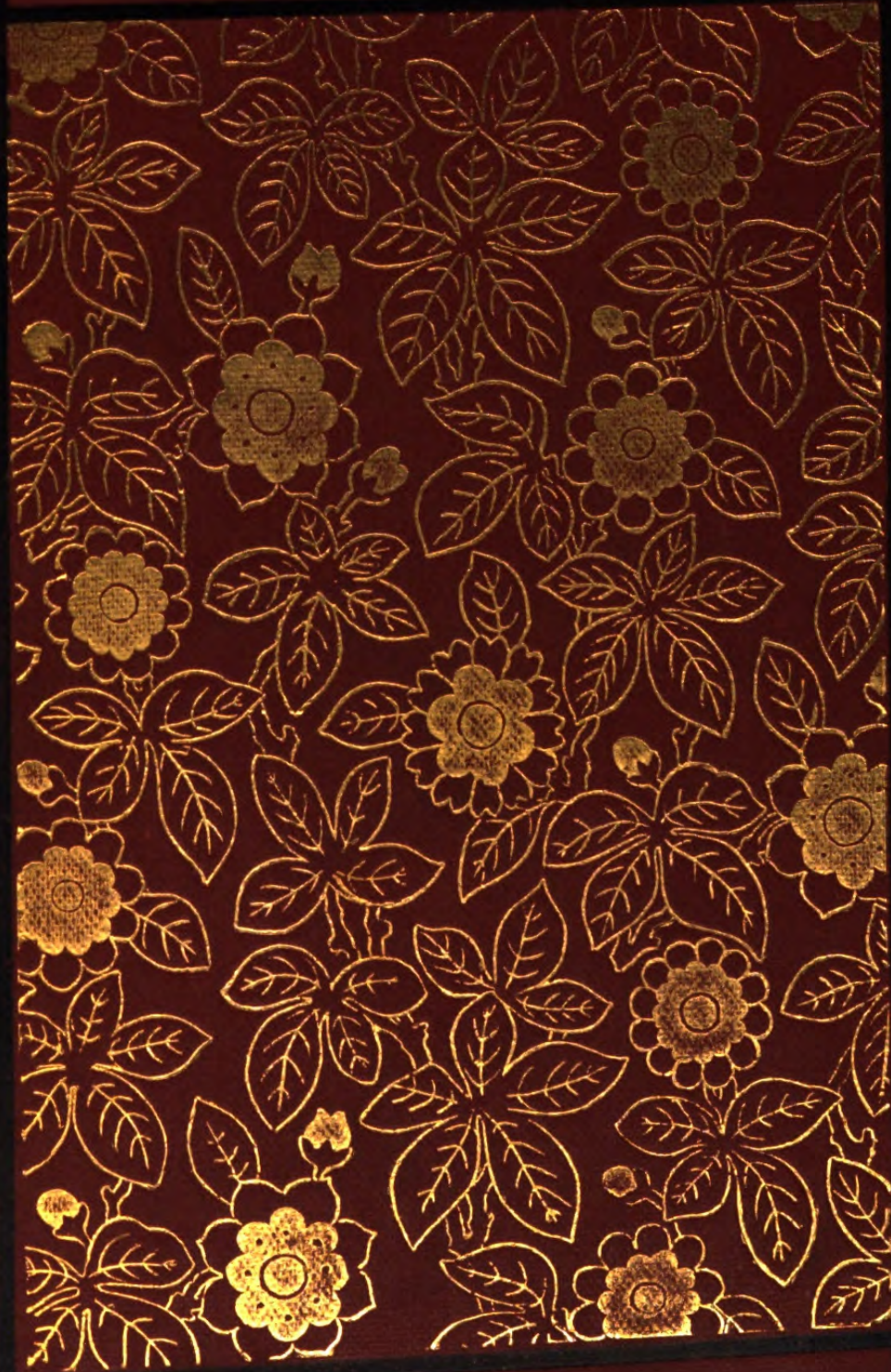
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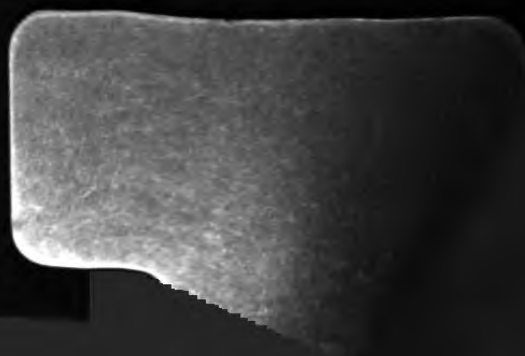
JAMES DUKE



WILLIAM GILBERT



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JAMES DUKE, THE COSTERMONGER.

CHAPTER I.

THE HERO, WITHOUT A LOCAL HABITATION OR A NAME, MAKES
HIS FIRST APPEARANCE ON ANY STAGE.



ONE Saturday evening, in the month of November, 1835, Mr. James Sparkes, full private in her Majesty's regiment of Scots Fusilier Guards, then quartered in Portman Street Barracks, left the house of his wife in Blue Anchor Yard, York Street, Westminster, to take home some linen which had been entrusted to her to wash by a family residing in Dean's Yard, near the Abbey. James's duty on the occasion consisted in wheeling the barrow, on which were placed two baskets of clothes, while his wife walked by his side and watched that no light-fingered wayfarer in the Broadway or Tottenham Street made free with the cargo she had charge of—no unnecessary precaution, as will readily be admitted by any one acquainted with the locality. Nothing, how-

ever, occurred on the road to cause her either alarm or uneasiness, and the pair arrived safely at the house, when Mrs. Sparkes, having smoothed down her apron and adjusted her bonnet-strings and shawl, knocked a modest single knock at the door, which was opened by a neat maid-servant.

Mrs. Sparkes entered the house, requesting her husband to follow her with the baskets. James, who was in the habit of obeying the orders of his wife as implicitly as he did those of his colonel, and as silently, immediately took up one of the baskets and carried it to the further extremity of the passage. When there, he found his wife and the maid-servant engaged in the usual dispute about something which had not been sent home the week before. As Mrs. Sparkes was apparently getting the worse of the argument, she appealed to her husband for support, and requested him to endorse her statement. This, as usual, he did, without the slightest hesitation, and without in the least understanding the merits of the case; not from any disregard to truth, but from the settled conviction in his own mind that everything his wife said was right. The girl, however, stuck to her point, without in any way convincing Mrs. Sparkes, or in the slightest way shaking the dogged testimony of her husband. The argument continued for some minutes without much advantage to either side, when the girl remarked that as the night was cold and the door was open, it would be better for Mr. Sparkes to bring in the other basket, and they could talk over the matter afterwards.

James immediately acted on her suggestion as far as going for the basket was concerned, but he delayed so long in returning, that both Mrs. Sparkes and the maid became uneasy at his absence, and went to the door to inquire the cause. When they looked into the street they were greatly surprised to find that James was nowhere to be seen. Mrs. Sparkes was at first greatly alarmed, thinking a robbery might have been perpetrated, but the next moment her fears were allayed, not only by finding that the basket was still on the barrow, but also that the clothes contained in it had not been disturbed.

If, however, her fears were allayed by the certainty that the linen was safe, her surprise was in proportion increased at her husband's absence, as there now appeared no plausible cause for his singular behaviour. After waiting a few minutes longer, great as her surprise was before, it became much increased when she saw him return, carrying in his arms a strong lively child, about three months old, who was crying lustily.

James, without being questioned on the subject, shortly explained the cause of his disappearance. On going to fetch the other basket his attention had been attracted by a child's cry, when, to his great surprise, he found the baby lying on the basket of clothes before him; but how it came there puzzled him extremely. He looked hastily around him to find out who might have been likely to have placed the poor little creature in the position it was; but not a soul was to be seen. Still, as it could not have dropped from the skies, some

one must have placed it on the basket, and he determined, if possible, to find out the culprit. With this intent he took up the child in his arms, and ran with it into the adjoining street, but no one did he see who, with the slightest possible reason, could be accused of the heartless trick which had been played off on the poor infant.

A council of war, consisting of Sparkes, his wife, and the maid, was immediately held in the passage. In the first place, the infant was carefully examined, not only by the maid, but also by the more experienced and matronly tact of Mrs. Sparkes ; still nothing could be found that furnished the slightest clue to its history. This was the more annoying, as the foundling hero of every tale is traditionally clothed in linen that showed its parents to be in a somewhat superior condition in society ; but here was an extraordinary exception to the rule, as the poor baby had on but one garment, and that was not only coarse in quality, but dilapidated in condition. Also, it need hardly be stated, that the purse of gold which is generally found in the drapery of novel-foundlings, as well as the scrap of paper with the Christian name of the infant written in pencil and pinned on to its dress, were both wanting. There was also another peculiar circumstance—it had not the delicate lineaments of gentle birth so commonly characterising infants in its unfortunate position, in light literature. It was, on the contrary, a remarkably commonplace, sturdy, dirty, unattractive little creature, with vast power of lungs, which it was then exercising with so much energy, to prove that it was

cold and hungry, that Mrs. Sparkes was fain to wrap it up somewhat tightly in her shawl to prevent it disturbing the family up-stairs. The result of their deliberation was that it was a very serious affair, and that nothing ought to be done in it without the best legal advice ; and, as determination in action was one of Mr. Sparkes' principal characteristics, he immediately brought in the other basket of clothes, and, without terminating the question about the things which had not been brought home last week, he, with his wife and barrow, started off in search of a policeman.

Though both husband and wife kept a careful look-out, not a policeman was to be found until they arrived at the Broadway. The one they found there could give them but little assistance in the matter. He told them he knew but little of the law in relation to cases of the kind, but he thought their best plan would be to go off immediately to the workhouse in York Street, and make the parochial officials take charge of the baby ; leastwise, he should act in that manner if it were his own case.

Sparkes and his wife, after thanking the policeman for his advice, started off immediately for the workhouse. When they arrived, they had to wait some time before they could see any of the officials. These were at the moment admitting applicants into the tramp wards, and till that was finished they could attend to nothing else. The result was that Mrs. Sparkes was obliged to wait in the vagrant crowd that were expecting admission. This was particularly annoying to the good woman, as personal cleanliness was precious to her both from her

natural taste and her profession as a washerwoman, and those around her appeared by their persons and dress to hold washing in abhorrence. She attempted to stand apart from them, but this was difficult, because the ante-room in which they were crowded was small, added to which the voice of the infant, who persisted in making himself heard, attracted round her the female portion of the crowd, all of whom exhibited the strongest curiosity to see the baby as well as to learn its history. At last, however, the admissions were completed, and Mrs. Sparkes stood face to face with the master of the work-house, her husband the while waiting outside in charge of the barrow.

The master listened with considerable impatience to Mrs. Sparkes' narrative, short as it was.

"My good woman," he said, when she had finished, "It's a great pity those policemen are not taught their duty better. You have no claim on the parish for that baby. How do I know that what you have told me is true? It may be so, and I don't doubt it; but you must see yourself, if I admitted your claim simply from your statement, we might have half the babies in the parish thrust upon us to bring up. You must take that child to the police-station, leastwise that's my advice, and insist upon their taking charge of it; and if I was you I would not go till they did. Now you must leave here, for I have a good many other things to attend to."

Mrs. Sparkes, having no alternative, joined her husband and followed the master's advice. When they arrived at the police-station they asked to see the in-

spector, who listened with attention and good feeling to the poor woman's statement.

"It is really disgraceful," he said, "that the master of the workhouse should have sent you here. He must have known perfectly well we can do nothing with an infant like that. You must take it back again and insist on his taking it in."

"But he said, sir, I was to insist on your doing it, and not to go away till you did it."

"Did he?" said the inspector; "then I'll prove to him he's wrong this time, at any rate. I'll send a sergeant with you who'll take all the trouble off your hands, and you'd better go at once, as the child seems very fractious."

"Poor dear, and no wonder," said Mrs. Sparkes, "for by this time he must be pretty well starved."

Mrs. Sparkes, her husband, and a police sergeant, now started off for the workhouse. As soon as they arrived, Mrs. Sparkes and the sergeant were shown into the presence of the master; James, as usual, waited outside. The sergeant was spokesman on the occasion. He showed the master clearly enough that at the station they had no accommodation for a child of that age, and that law and common humanity required that the poor-law authorities should interfere in the matter, as it would be a very hard thing for the poor washerwoman to have the child thrown on her hands.

The master replied that the humanity of the British poor laws was too well known and appreciated to need any remark from him (this by-the-by, was true to a cer-

tain extent) ; and as for the law, he was as well up in the subject as the inspector, and indeed far better, or he should get on but badly.

The sergeant fired up at this attack on his inspector, and replied that he wanted no more conversation on the subject, but the master was to take in the infant, and, beyond that, be answerable that it was properly taken care of.

The sergeant was, in his turn, requested to take charge of the infant himself, and some strong words ensued between the two, Mrs. Sparkes standing by the while. It is hardly worth while to report the conversation ; suffice it to say it assumed a bitterly sarcastic tone, as was shown by the sergeant declining to take charge of the baby, none of his men being nursing at the moment ; but as soon as one was he'd let the master know. It also became personal, as was proved by the master informing the sergeant that his inspector was an ass, and that if he did not know the law he, the master, would teach him. Moreover, he requested the sergeant to convey that message to the inspector with his compliments. The sergeant, who, at best, would have been no match for the master, on the legal question, was now, from having lost his temper, immeasurably his inferior ; and finding himself getting the worst of the argument, thought it advisable to beat a retreat, which he did, under cover of many threats of the inspector's vengeance, all of which were treated by the master with supreme contempt.

As soon as the sergeant had left the building the master told Mrs. Sparkes that she also must go, but

advised her to again apply at the police-station, and not to leave this time till she had obtained redress.

When Mrs. Sparkes joined her husband in the street, the pair were fairly puzzled what course to pursue. They mooted the question of again applying at the police-station, but although they were somewhat undecided the baby was not, for it screamed and plunged so violently at the delay of its supper, that an impertinent boy passing by had the insolence to advise her, if she had stolen a pig and put it under her shawl, to get home with it as soon as possible, for if she met a bobby she might come to grief. Mrs. Sparkes made no answer to this taunt, and James contented himself with casting a look of withering contempt at the culprit. The word "home," however, uttered by the boy, appeared to decide them, and they resolved to give the poor little creature a night's hospitality, and to find out properly the next morning whether the police inspector or the workhouse master was right in his reading of the law of settlement. Without further delay, then, they wended their way to Blue Anchor Yard, and after Sparkes had returned the barrow he had borrowed, they arrived safely at home.

CHAPTER II.

MRS. SPARKES AT HOME—THE HERO BECOMES A VICTIM TO THE
GLORIOUS UNCERTAINTY OF THE LAW.

HEN Mr. and Mrs. Sparkes reached their home they found their daughter Jemima anxiously awaiting their arrival. Jemima, who was the only child of the worthy couple, was about eight years of age, exceedingly ugly, with a freckled complexion and fiery-red hair. In figure she was very thin, awkward, and angular, and certainly far taller for her years than the average of children. She was not a little surprised at the burden her mother was carrying under her shawl, and so great was her curiosity to see the baby, that she appeared to have forgotten the hungry state she was in before her mother had entered. Mrs. Sparkes released her *protégé* from the shawl; and she and Jemima contemplated the baby for a few moments with much interest. Jemima even went beyond her mother, and in spite of the screams and kicks of the little savage, almost smothered it with kisses. At last, Mrs. Sparkes said, with great determination, that as she was in for it, the poor little thing should want for nothing while it remained under her roof; and to prove that this was no idle vaunt, she then and there sent Jemima out

for a halfpenny-worth of milk for it, while she in the meantime occupied herself in washing it with some warm water Sparkes had handed her, and which had been put on the fire for their tea. Afterwards she improvised some clothes for it, so that when Jemima returned, so great a change for the better had taken place in its appearance that, had she not known it to be the same, she should hardly have recognised it.

The baby was then made over to Jemima, while Mrs. Sparkes busied herself in preparing the meals, not only for the infant, but also for themselves. When ready, Mr. Sparkes immediately occupied himself with his supper, and while thus engaged he watched with grim satisfaction the operation of feeding, or rather cramming the baby, who swallowed its food with a vigour and gusto which proved that there was not the slightest attempt at imposition in its cries of hunger. The kind behaviour of Mrs. Sparkes and Jemima was not lost on the baby ; and immediately after its meal it showed its gratitude to its benefactors by going to sleep. A short consultation was then held as to its disposal for the night, which terminated, to Jemima's great satisfaction, by its being adjudged to her as a bedfellow. The time had now arrived for Mr. Sparkes to leave his wife's dwelling and seek his own barracks and bed ; but, before going, he went to take a last look at the little stranger. Jemima, who was already in bed, and against whose side it had comfortably nestled itself, cautiously drew down the quilt that her father might see it. The old soldier gazed at it thoughtfully for a moment as if it brought

something back to his memory of great interest ; then, stooping down, he kissed his daughter and the child, and immediately afterwards left the house.

After breakfast the next morning Mrs. Sparkes donned her bonnet and shawl and proceeded to the workhouse with the baby in her arms. Jemima, who had already conceived a great affection for it, cried bitterly when it went ; and, notwithstanding the strict military discipline usually maintained in Mrs. Sparkes' establishment, the girl grumbled most audibly and mutinously when her mother refused to allow her to accompany her. Her sorrow, however, was not of long duration ; for it being Sunday, there was no superior official at the workhouse, and the question of the baby's admission could not therefore be entertained. Mrs. Sparkes had also called at the police-station, but with no better success, for she found the inspector quite as resolute on the subject as he had been the day before ; perhaps even more so, from the report he had received of the conversation which had taken place between the sergeant and the master of the workhouse. The poor woman, finding herself without an alternative, then turned her steps homeward, hardly to her own sorrow, for she began to feel an interest in the baby, who was received by Jemima with intense joy and satisfaction.

During the whole of Sunday baby behaved in a most exemplary manner, and thereby gained considerably on the good opinion of Mrs. Sparkes, who, having no washing to do, occupied herself principally in nursing it, occasionally, as a treat, entrusting it to Jemima. In the

afternoon, when baby was asleep, and Jemima at the Sunday school, she, without the slightest intention, and indeed quite mechanically, found herself in the act of cutting up some old linen, and afterwards running it together into that extraordinary form of shirt which experienced matrons appear to consider so perfectly adapted to the infant form.

Sparkes at the usual time reported himself to his wife in the evening, who, with something like womanly pride in her face, held up the baby to him in its hastily made clothes, and said something to him in a whisper which was evidently not intended for Jemima to hear, and to which Sparkes replied by drawing his cast-iron visage into the nearest approach to a grin its natural rigidity would allow it to assume. The evening passed pleasantly enough, and before Sparkes left baby had been undressed and again placed under Jemima's care for the night.

On the Monday morning Mrs. Sparkes' first duty was to collect the linen from the three houses for which she washed, and to receive the amounts due on the last week's bills. All this, however, was finished by eleven o'clock, and then, having put on the baby its new bib and tucker, she started off with it to the workhouse, this time, in her own phraseology, determined to stand no nonsense. She was in one respect more fortunate on this visit than she had been before, for she contrived to obtain an interview with the clerk of the Board of Guardians, who listened with both patience and civility to her tale. When she had concluded, he asked her if he had rightly understood her, that she had found the child in

Dean's Yard. "I think you must be mistaken," he said. Mrs. Sparkes assured him on her word of honour that it was a fact.

"I am sorry for it, for your sake," said the clerk, "for Dean's Yard is extra-parochial, and as such pays no poor's rate, consequently a child from it has no claim on the parish for relief."

"But what am I to do with it, sir?" said Mrs. Sparkes. "We cannot afford to keep it, we are too poor for that. Just imagine the expense—besides time and trouble, which is much the same thing—it would occasion to bring up a poor little creature like that by hand."

"It's a hard case, certainly, I admit, but I can't act as your legal adviser and that of the guardians as well. Still, I do not mind saying, if I were in your place, I would go to the police-station, and insist upon their taking charge of it. They will give in if they find you are resolute and civil at the same time."

Mrs. Sparkes, without any great hope of success, went again to the police-station. This time she saw only the sergeant, for the inspector was absent on some errand to head-quarters in Scotland Yard. She attempted to show both firmness and dignity in her behaviour, but she signally failed in both. Firmness, except to James, was by no means a prominent attribute in her character, and dignity sat but badly on the meek-minded washerwoman. To the sergeant's kindly expressed determination that they could not take charge of the baby at the station, she told him she trusted he would at least advise her what to do.

He would do so, he said, with great pleasure, but he was no lawyer. Still there was one course open to her, which could by no possibility do harm, and which might do good if she adopted it ; he would, if he were in her place, do it, and without losing a moment ; and that was to apply to the magistrate at the Westminster Police Court. He was a very kind man, and would hear her patiently, and assist her if he had the power, he was sure. If she went at once she would be certain to see him without any delay, as the night charges were by this time ended and the remands would not yet have been called on. Mrs. Sparkes, convinced that the sergeant spoke conscientiously for her good, followed his advice, and marched off immediately to the police-court.

When she arrived, she found she could not obtain the ready access to the magistrate which the police-sergeant had promised her. Not that the night-charges were not finished, nor yet it consequence of the remands having been called on, but simply from the fact that his worship was discussing a chop in his private room, and the course of justice had to be stopped the while. This behaviour on the part of the magistrate was perfectly excusable to every honourable and well-regulated mind. It is true that his worship had only seven hours' duty a day imposed on him, and which he shortened by invariably arriving at the court an hour after his time ; it is true, also, that, not to allow his mind to be overwhelmed by fatigue, a beneficent legislature had allowed him two hundred and twenty days' holiday out of the three hundred and sixty-five days which compose the year, with

the liberal payment of fifteen hundred pounds for the days he was on duty, compensating him so munificently in order that bribery to do dishonest actions should be inert upon him—pity the same theory is not carried out to a similar extent in other professions and occupations as well as the law;—still it was only just that another hour should be deducted from his services in the most valuable part of the day to keep his nature from utter exhaustion.

Mrs. Sparkes waited patiently till his worship's lunch was over; not so the baby. He seemed to have an instinctive idea that hunger in his case was as worthy of sympathy as in his worship's; and he expressed his opinion, if inarticulately, at least loudly, and with such energy that the usher, fearing the noise might disturb his worship at his repast, somewhat rudely told Mrs. Sparkes that she must either keep the child quiet or take it away. Fortunately at that moment his worship entered the court, and his attention being attracted by the noise he ordered Mrs. Sparkes to be brought before him.

The magistrate listened with patience and attention to Mrs. Sparkes' statement.

"If," said he, "what you tell me is true, it is certainly a very hard case that you should be subject to so much inconvenience for acting, as you appear to have done, a most humane part on the occasion. At the same time the behaviour of the workhouse officials appears so contrary to what I generally hear of them, that I cannot help thinking there must be two sides to the question. I will

immediately send a messenger for the relieving officer, and after I have heard him, I will decide what you had better do."

A messenger was immediately despatched to the work-house. He, however, did not succeed in finding the relieving officer, or, indeed, any of the superior officials, but after some delay he returned with the under-porter, and a clerk from the office of the parish solicitor. Mrs. Sparkes was then requested by the magistrate to repeat her statement, which she did lucidly enough.

"I have no occasion, your worship," said the law clerk, "to ask the witness any questions; on the contrary, I admit everything she has stated to be substantially true. At the same time, I must submit to you, that as Dean's Yard is extra-parochial and maintains its exemption from poor's rates, the power to oblige the parish to take charge of the infant does not come within your worship's jurisdiction."

"If you can show me that," said the magistrate, "I am afraid I cannot afford the poor woman any redress, or I should certainly have made an order for the parish to take charge of the child. At the same time, it appears a hard case that the infant should be thrown upon her hands for support."

"It certainly does so, your worship; but we have no more power to depart from the law than yourself. It is certainly a very hard case, but we can do nothing in the matter."

"But I hope, sir," said Mrs. Sparkes to the magistrate, "you will advise us what to do. We are too poor to

bring up the baby ourselves, and yet, God knows, we should be very loth to treat it unkindly."

"The only advice I can give you," said the magistrate, "is to consult a solicitor."

"But I suppose I must pay him, sir, if I do!"

"Certainly," said the magistrate. "It is not to be expected he would give his services without remuneration."

"And if you paid one," said the lawyer's clerk, "you would only be throwing your money away. Our case is too good a one to be easily shaken, I can tell you."

"But pray tell me what I am to do, sir," said Mrs. Sparkes. "We cannot afford to keep the child. I am only a poor washerwoman, and my husband is a private in the Guards, and we have sometimes to manage very carefully to keep the wolf from the door, as it is."

"What you are to do, my good woman, as I said before, is a subject for your consideration. I advised you to consult a solicitor, and I can say no more. Call the next case."

The law clerk, finding he was no longer wanted, left the court, and Mrs. Sparkes, in a great huff, started off to take home the baby, who was now in a famishing condition. The weather was bitterly cold and it was raining fast, so she broke off into a run to get home as quickly as possible. But rapid as was her pace, she was overtaken by the workhouse porter before she had arrived at the corner of York Street. When he had reached her he tapped her on the shoulder, and said he wanted to speak to her, or rather she understood him to mean so, for he was a fat man, and scant of breath from

the exercise he had taken, the nature of his occupation precluding him from taking much exercise. As soon as he had recovered himself, he addressed her as follows :—

“It is certainly a very hard case that a working woman like you should have a child thrown on your hands for support ; at the same time if you act legally you may make the parish take it yet. As I speak only for your benefit you must not tell any one what I am going to say, or you will get me into trouble. There is no occasion for you to employ a lawyer, and the law clerk who told the magistrate that the guardians could not be obliged to take it, talked nonsense. I know the law as well as he does ; perhaps better. Now I’ll tell you what to do. You stay here for a minute or two with the child, and I will go on to the corner of York Street. As soon as I see a policeman coming up, I will hold up my hand. Do you immediately lay the baby on the ground under that archway—take care no one sees you, by-the-bye,—then come up to the policeman and tell him you saw a baby lying on the cold stones crying, and you think some one has deserted it, and if it lies there much longer it will die of cold. The policeman can’t do less than go and take it up. The deserted child being found by him within the parish boundary, the guardians must take it ; and they can’t hurt you if they find out afterwards that you did it, for the child ain’t yours, and they can’t prove any legal obligation on you to contribute to its support.”

“And you would advise me to put the baby on the cold ground there ?” said Mrs. Sparkes

"The colder and damper the better," said the workhouse porter, "as it will show the greater inhumanity in the policeman if he does not take charge of it."

Mrs. Sparkes gave no other answer to the porter than an indignant glance. She folded the baby somewhat tighter in her shawl, and bending her head to the wind and rain, proceeded homewards with a decided and somewhat stern expression of countenance. All doubts as to what she should do with the baby had now vanished from her mind. The porter's proposition had decided her. Her womanly feeling had been so shocked at the idea of the helpless little creature being treated in the manner suggested, in addition to the objections raised against it by the parish authorities, that she resolved to keep the child herself. "Where there is enough for three," she reflected, "there is enough for four; and God never makes mouths without giving something to put into them." Jemima could take care of the baby, and as for Sparkes, she knew him too well to fear any opposition on his part. No, she was resolved she would bring it up as her own. At any rate, there would be nothing on her conscience if she took care of it; and perhaps, after all, God had sent it to her on purpose—who knows? More unlikely things than that happened in the world.

With these and other reflections of a like character, she occupied her mind till she arrived at home.

CHAPTER III.

THROUGH LOSING HIS PROCESS AT LAW, THE HERO OBTAIN
BOTH A LOCAL HABITATION AND A NAME.



It has been before stated that the dwelling of Mrs. Sparkes was in Blue Anchor Yard, York Street, Westminster. To judge from its entrance from the street, a more undesirable residence for a person fond of a picturesque locality could hardly have been imagined. The narrow gateway by which it is entered has a most squalid appearance, and the houses in the yard, all of which are densely inhabited, betray, with the majority of their tenants, an idea of dirtiness hardly in keeping with the reputation which Mrs. Sparkes had acquired of being of the strictest personal cleanliness, as well as a neat and skilful washerwoman. The fact is, she would hardly have rented the house she occupied had her taste only been consulted, but as good house accommodation for her line of business was extremely scarce in Westminster, and as the house she lived in suited her occupation admirably, her own private feelings were set aside by her on the occasion, and she was only too well content with her good fortune in being able to obtain it at the moderate rent with which she was charged.

It was situated on the right-hand side of the court, nearly as you enter it, and the last house in it. The messuage or tenement abutting on Gardner's Lane, as the owner called it in the agreement she held of him, consisted of four rooms, two above and two below, with a small back shed, and a narrow yard about thirty feet long, for drying the clothes. The yard was enclosed by windowless backs of houses on the northern, eastern, and western sides, but open to the south, with the exception of a wall, fortified by broken bottles, and about seven feet high, so that it formed a strong barrier against dishonest visitors, but was not so high as to impede the rays of the sun when she wished to draw upon them for drying the linen entrusted to her charge.

The interior of the house was divided in the following manner. Mrs. Sparkes was tenant in chief. She let off the two top rooms to two under tenants, a brother and a sister. The man was a porter in a house of business in Piccadilly. As he will not be wanted in the plot of our drama, there will be no occasion to occupy the reader's time with any further description of him than saying that he was an honest, sober, steady man, about forty years of age, possessing what, in Mrs. Sparkes' eyes, was a great recommendation, a sincere affection for a lame sister who lived with him, and who assisted to a considerable extent in supporting herself by working for an army clothier in the Strand. Nor is any further description than the above required of her, as she only appears once or twice upon our stage, in very secondary business, and is heard of no more.

The whole of the ground floor Mrs. Sparkes retained

for her own use. The front room was used as a reception room or parlour, and was arranged with much care for effect. The furniture was old, but not dilapidated—poor, but of exceeding cleanliness. It was moreover not bulky, nor in fact did it crowd up the room in an inconvenient manner. Nor was the apartment without ornament. Against the wall, and opposite the window, was a print portrait of the god of the idolatry of Private Sparkes—the Duke of Wellington. There was also a Dutch clock, a looking-glass, and one or two plaster images, not particularly sharp in the casting; on the contrary, they had a decidedly “gummy” look about them, which would have taken a great deal from their value in the eyes of a connoisseur, had such a character ever entered the locality—a most remote probability. But the principal ornament of all consisted of a row of flat-irons ranged rigidly in a line over the chimney-piece, with their plane surfaces towards the spectator. These irons constituted the joy of Mrs. Sparkes’ heart. She loved and respected them. They were almost her household gods, for to them she generally turned her eyes as if for consolation and counsel on any knotty point; and apparently, from the frequent glances of satisfaction she gave them, she did not apply to them in vain. Had they been her children she could hardly have taken more pride in their appearance than she did, and the care she bestowed on them, in making their flat surfaces shine as if they had been case-hardened, was worthy, from the industry she showed, of the greatest commendation.

The back room might almost have been termed her

laboratory, for though the coppers were in the shed before named, the hooks for airing the linen, and drying it too when the weather obliged that operation to be carried on indoors, as well as the ironing-board and clothes-baskets, were in it. The floor was boarded, which was a great advantage, as it drove off rheumatism. There was also a very good stove, which was used not only for warming the flat-irons, but for cooking. These articles, with a table generally placed in a corner so as to leave the centre of the room clear, a couple of chairs, and a sham chest of drawers, which, without a harlequin's wand, was transformed every evening into a bedstead, completed the furniture of the room.

When Mrs. Sparkes arrived at home, she found Jemima, who was naturally blessed with a good appetite, in almost as famishing a condition as the infant itself. Nor was the girl without excuse, their ordinary hour for dining being twelve o'clock, and it was nearly three before Mrs. Sparkes had returned from the police office. Acute as the poor girl's hunger was, it vanished the moment she heard the baby's cry. She seized the little creature in her arms, and almost tore it from her mother before she had even time to seat herself in a chair, and immediately, in an ecstasy of delight, commenced nursing it. All attempts to quiet it, however, were useless, and poor Mrs. Sparkes was obliged to rise from her seat and take off her bonnet and shawl, to prepare it some food, consoling herself with the idea that the cold boiled mutton for her own and Jemima's dinner, on the table, could not get colder the while, cold as the day was. In

a short time the baby was fed, in five minutes more it was asleep, and immediately afterwards Mrs. Sparkes and Jemima were comfortably seated at their dinner.

Their meal over, Mrs. Sparkes began sorting out, in the back room, the linen she had brought home in the morning. This she accomplished not only in a systematic, but almost in an artistic, manner. She spread it over the floor in little heaps at regular distances, tallying them with the lists which had been given of the number and description of the articles when she fetched them away in the morning. That finished, she commenced the audit of her accounts, but was interrupted in the midst. Baby had woke up, and Jemima, after endeavouring to pacify it, was obliged to give up the task to her mother. Mrs. Sparkes, with some little difficulty, succeeded better than her daughter, and contrived to get it to sleep again. The act itself would have hardly been worth the narrating had it not been for the psychological phenomenon she exhibited in its accomplishment. Some have doubted the duality of the mind, but Mrs. Sparkes on this occasion went far beyond it. Taking the infant with her into the back room she commenced singing to it a ditty, in a manner that almost justified its ill-humour, thinking at the same moment how she should put the matter to Sparkes when he returned. Not that she stood in the slightest awe of him; on the contrary, as his superior officer she knew such a feeling would have been derogatory on her part; but she was sincerely attached to him, and she feared that the attention a baby would require in their establishment might be annoying

to a man at his time of life. At last her dread somewhat abated when she remembered that James was only at home in the evening, and then it was more than probable that baby would be asleep. But her mind was at the same time occupied by other things than her song and her considerations for her husband's feelings: she was also deliberating in what manner she should dress the child, and how she could make some of Jemima's old garments into new ones for it,—no easy matter in itself, but one requiring the deepest thought, as Jemima had a habit, not only of wearing her things till the gloss was off, but far beyond it. She also thought in what manner she could economise the time necessary for a proper attention to baby, and many other things too numerous to mention, but which will easily be understood by the reader, if she happen to be the mother of a family herself. But the most extraordinary fact, in a scientific point of view, was the wonderful control her brain kept over her muscular action during this complicated series of thoughts. Rocking the baby in her arms precisely and accurately *out* of time to the tune she was singing, she continued the whole time walking about the room, sometimes diagonally, sometimes up and down, sometimes across, and sometimes even backwards, without in one single instance, notwithstanding the active working of her mind, touching one of the little heaps of linen she had spread over the floor, rivalling by the feat the celebrated hornpipe among the eggs, as danced by the renowned master of the ceremonies, Mr. Baron Nathan, of Rosherville Gardens, Gravesend, Kent.

The baby was at last asleep, the linen had disappeared, and the tea was made before Mr. Sparkes had joined his family circle. After his usual caustic manner of salutation was over, he seated himself in his accustomed place by the fire. Mrs. Sparkes drew up the table with the tea-things upon it. Her husband cast a glance on it, and in a moment detected the absence of the bread and butter. He made no remark, however, proving by his silence his naturally amiable temper, and his wife's good discipline. His patience did not go long unrewarded, for in a moment afterwards he saw his wife emerge from the back room with a plate of muffins of such proportions, that nothing but the stomach of a hungry guardsman, and a bold one too, could have had the courage to attack it, with the faintest hope of demolishing it.

To tell the strict truth, the whole of the affair was a piece of theatrical effect got up by Mrs. Sparkes. She knew the principal weakness of her husband to be muffins,—well buttered, be it remembered, and with the best salt too,—and she determined to seduce him with them before broaching the subject of the baby. To this intent, and with an eye to greater effect, she had lighted the fire in the back room, for which, being Monday, there was not the slightest occasion, and there having prepared the muffins, she brought them in unexpectedly, and placed them before him. In a moment she was satisfied with the extraordinary effect they had produced upon him, and she rightly augured that the remainder of her task would be comparatively easy.

Sparkes' eye dilated with pleasure the instant he saw

the muffins, and after two or three efforts he contrived to get a smile on his face. This had already satisfied her, but assurance was made doubly sure by the glance of gratitude he cast on her after having swallowed the first mouthful. So artistically had she arranged them, and so exactly had their equal proportions been amalgamated, that it was impossible to say whether the muffin or the butter predominated either in quality or quantity.

After tea, Mrs. Sparkes began a full, true, and particular account of her day's adventures, concealing nothing, nor setting down aught in malice. Sparkes listened attentively, and being most undemonstrative by nature, remained without any particular sign of emotion until she had arrived at the episode of the police-court and the advice given to her by the workhouse under-porter on her way home. Here visible signs of internal agitation presented themselves in the physiognomy of the gallant soldier. Strange, unnatural, spasmodic actions of the muscles of the face were seen, his brow contracted, and his eye had a particularly dangerous, threatening expression in it. Moreover, the muscles of his face hardened till they had acquired the apparent rigidity of wood. Still not a sound did he utter. The evident emotion he was labouring under continued, and was clearly trying to develop itself in words, but for some time without effect, so inflexibly iron-like were his cast of countenance and organs of expression.

At last human nature could support the torture no longer, and he exploded with so tremendous an oath that it cracked a pane of glass, and nearly caused the

row of flat-irons on the chimney-piece to vibrate. At least Mrs. Sparkes said he had broken the glass, but James said he had not, and that it had been done a week before by a boy in the yard with a stone, to which excuse Mrs. Sparkes rejoined playfully that he only said that to conceal his own wickedness.

After a few moments' silence James again vented a volley of anathemas against parish officers and police magistrates. He kept on in this manner for nearly an hour, Mrs. Sparkes taking no notice of it, notwithstanding her aversion to bad language, as she knew it would end in his willingness for her to take charge of the baby—and she was right. When he had acquired his equanimity, the worthy couple talked the matter over together, calmly and reasonably, and the result was a determination that the poor little creature should no longer be the shuttlecock of parish officers and police authorities, but that they would bring it up in every respect as their own child.

The next morning Jemima, now formally inducted into the office of nurse, took the baby for an airing into York Street. She had no little pride in the trust reposed in her, but still she did not wish to appear proud; so she determined she would not avoid her young acquaintances, whom she might meet there, but yet would follow her mother's advice, and not thrust herself on their notice. If she really wished for anything like seclusion in her walk she was disappointed, for in a few moments a numerous auditory of little girls, varying from ten years of age downwards, had collected around her. After all it was an absurdity on the part of Mrs. Sparkes to advise

Jemima to avoid, if possible, her acquaintances, for the very sight of a baby, and a perfectly fresh one too, was too great an attraction to pass unnoticed in a locality of the kind, with so dense a juvenile female population.

Jemima's acquaintances, who had collected about her, had one or two characteristics in common, which almost gave them the appearance of belonging to one and the same family. In the first place, there was a certain freedom from anything like coquetry, as far as cleanliness went. The clothes of the whole, with the exception of the very youngest, were too small for them, and the exceptions were distinguishable from having fallen into the contrary extreme—their clothes being not only much too long for them, but also too wide. But the most marked peculiarity among them, at least the elder part, was in their bonnets. In those days that article of female attire was worn absurdly large, and Jemima's friends, as far as the size of their bonnets went, were all in the height of the fashion, the preposterous size appearing the greater from the diminutive stature of the wearers. At the same time, it should be remarked, all the bonnets were not only lamentably out of shape, but, judging from their limp and faded condition, they had evidently each adorned in turn several heads before they were applied to the uses of their present wearers.

Jemima was, in a few moments, so completely overwhelmed with questions about the baby, that any attempt at reserve on her part would have been utterly useless. She was obliged—perhaps not much against her will—to give a minute history of its antecedents, as far as she

was in possession of them, while the dilated eyes and breathless silence of her auditors told how much they were interested in the narration. The history over, a most minute and searching personal examination of the baby was commenced, especially its arms and legs; and afterwards its clothes underwent so careful an inspection, that the French custom-house examination on the frontiers of Switzerland in the worst time of the Bourbons, when Swiss jewellery and watch-wheels were strictly prohibited, was trifling to it in point of strictness.

The personal examination over, each in her turn insisted on nursing the baby, greatly to Jemima's terror, as more than one among them seemed to be destitute of even the most rudimentary elements of the science. Nevertheless, as she was a good-natured girl, and did not wish to displease, she contented herself by watching narrowly each successive applicant as she took the baby in her arms. All went on smoothly enough for some minutes, till at last Jemima was accused of gross favouritism in allowing the baby to remain a longer time in the arms of those she loved most, to the prejudice of those who were less dear to her. In the end the dissatisfaction increased, till it assumed the proportions almost of a breach of the peace, some attempting to take the baby by force, others loudly accusing Jemima of being proud, because her mother had found a baby, and reminding her that all their mothers had, one time or other, found babies, or had got them from the doctor; so there was no call for her to hold up her head so high about it after all. At last one agitator, with a prodigious bonnet of no

particular form, having innately some vague and undefined notions of a law of "Treasure Trove" of her own, propounded the following question to the meeting:—"If the baby had been found in Dean's Yard, why should it belong to Mrs. Sparkes more than anybody else?" and, without waiting for any discussion on the subject, followed up her proposition by a suggestion that the baby should be the joint-stock property of the assembled company. This proposition, infamous as it was, was received with so much enthusiasm by the meeting, that Jemima became intensely terrified, and clasping the baby tightly in her arms, she rushed off with it as fast as she could towards Blue Anchor Yard, where she arrived safely, her greater length of leg giving her an immense advantage over her pursuers.

As soon as Jemima had entered the house, she rushed to her mother, who was occupied at the tub, to inform her of the dangers the baby had encountered. To the girl's great surprise, her mother appeared to take no notice of the circumstance, but quietly wiped the soap-suds from her arms, and then dried them on her apron. She then went to the cupboard and took down her bonnet and shawl, and, after arranging them on her person to her perfect satisfaction, she told Jemima to get the baby to sleep, if she could, and on no account to leave the house till she returned. She should not be longer, she believed, than half an hour.

The cause of Mrs. Sparkes' abrupt departure was as follows. While occupied at the tub, her thoughts had been bent on the infant she had adopted. She had

reflected that one of her self-imposed duties as a mother had yet to be performed. True, she had provided it with a home, but it yet wanted not only a name, but reception as well into the bosom of the Christian Church. The omission being proved and her resolution to rectify it being taken, she had yet to determine in what name the child should be baptized. The Christian name was soon decided on. She determined to call it James, after her husband. She had also another reason for it. She had formerly lost an infant son about the same age as baby, a misfortune which had been sorely felt both by herself and husband, and it was the reminiscence of that loss which had caused the pathetic look which Mr. Sparkes had cast on the helpless little creature, the evening they had found it, preparatory to his leaving for the barracks. So, setting aside a common prejudice against naming a second child after one that has died, she determined that his Christian name should be James.

She had now to decide on a surname, but that was a far more difficult conclusion to arrive at. She could not, or rather would not, call it Sparkes, for reasons she had determined on in her own mind, but what other name to give it puzzled the good dame exceedingly. After turning it over in her thoughts during the whole time she was occupied in washing six pairs of stockings, she finally resolved it should be called Duke ; in honour, she said, of the Duke of Wellington, the being of all others she considered it her duty, as a soldier's wife, to respect and admire. It was at the precise moment she had settled

the point, that Jemima had entered the house, and as Mrs. Sparkes was an energetic woman and accustomed to act determinedly on any subject she had resolved on, she betook herself immediately to the Broadway Church to know at what hour the next Sunday the child should be christened ; and after having satisfactorily ascertained all the particulars, she returned to the house, and in the evening told her husband and Jemima of the step she had taken.

The next Sunday, at the appointed time, the procession was formed, and literally marched to the church. The ceremony came off in a proper and becoming manner. Mrs. Sparkes acted as godmother, and her husband as one of the godfathers, the other being a fifer in the regiment, who, out of friendship to James, combined with the promise of a pipe and a glass of gin and water in the evening, took upon himself the onerous duties of the other sponsor. As soon as the child was christened, and its name duly entered in the parish register as James Duke, the whole party marched back again to Blue Anchor Yard, there to spend a pleasant evening together.

When the ceremony was over a weight was removed from the minds of both Mr. and Mrs. Sparkes, as it appeared to settle the fact that the child was now part and parcel of their domestic establishment. But to Jemima the satisfaction it created was greater than to either of her parents. By some obscure reasoning of her own, she had come to the conclusion that the registration of the child's name in the parish books gave her parents an indisputable title to have and to hold it as

their own ; and that now in case any of the unruly little girls she was accustomed to meet in York Street should attempt to tear it from her arms, she had only to call the attention of the police to the parish register to prove that her assailants were acting in an illegal and unjustifiable manner, and perpetual imprisonment at the least would be their punishment should they repeat it. She then entered on her duties as nurse energetically and conscientiously, but not without the hope of fee or reward for her services, for she had been promised by her parents that if she did her duty by the baby, as soon as it began to talk it should be taught to call her—aunt.

CHAPTER IV.

IN WHICH THE HERO BECOMES A PERSONAGE OF SOME IMPORTANCE, AND DIVERS CHANGES TAKE PLACE IN THE PARTS OF THE OTHER PERFORMERS.



LAPSE of thirteen years has taken place between the fall of the curtain on the last act of our drama and its rising on the opening scene of the present. During that period, however, several vicissitudes must be assumed to have taken place. In the first place, time had not only left its trace on Mrs. Sparkes' form and features, but sickness had marked them as well. She had become much thinner, and stooped considerably; a change the more remarkable in her as she had always imitated the bearing and walk that ought to characterise a Guardsman's wife. There was also a considerable change in her dress. She had always affected neatness and quiet colouring, but now she was always dressed in black. Moreover, for the last twelve years she had worn a widow's cap, her husband having been gathered to his fathers about nine months after his first introduction to the reader. He had always wished to die upon the field of battle, but that was denied him. The manner of his death, or rather the accident that caused it, was in some

slight way mixed up with his country's glory and its deeds of arms, which allayed in the mind of his wife any stigma that might have attached itself to his memory from the proximate cause of his death.

On the first anniversary of the battle of Waterloo after our opening scene, he had been talking over the incidents of that eventful day with some comrades, who, like himself, had fought in it with honour to themselves and glory to their country. The arguments were long and interesting, and in the course of the debate, which was held at the "British Grenadier," they had occasion to drink the Duke of Wellington's health more than once, to show him they did not forget him. When the party left the tap-room not one of them was the worse for liquor, and poor Mrs. Sparkes always quoted that fact, which had been told her by Sparkes himself, poor man, on his death-bed; but the day was hot, and the sun was in his eyes, and what with thinking of the battle, and one thing or another, his mind got so confused that he took the pathway for a brewer's dray, and the brewer's dray for the pathway, and before he had discovered his mistake he was under the dray, from whence he was taken to the hospital with a compound fracture of the thigh, from which he never recovered. His loss was severely felt by his family. With all his little soldierlike faults he had been a good husband to his wife, and a kind and indulgent parent, not only to Jemima, but to little James as well, whom he had never ceased to regard as his own child. Poor Sparkes had possessed in his temperament a singular combination of the attributes of the lion and

the lamb. A braver man, or a more devoted soldier to his country, never lived. Fear was unknown to him. He would at any moment have laid down his life in the way of duty with as little hesitation as he would have placed his head on his pillow at night. At home he was as mild and docile as a child, and would frequently assist his wife in little domestic duties of the most antagonistic character to the profession of which he was so worthy a member. It was no unusual circumstance to see him in the afternoon busily occupied with the heavy things at the wash-tub, handling the soap, and rubbing vigorously with his iron knuckles the articles submitted by his wife to his charge, in a manner that few washerwomen could have excelled. But it was in wringing the greater things, such as blankets, curtains, and sheets, that his services were particularly valuable to his wife, and which made her often thank Heaven for the excellent husband it had in its goodness awarded her.

After his death his widow had contrived to struggle on, and not only succeeded in maintaining herself and family in comfort and respectability, but, by strict economy, she had contrived to invest a few (a very few) pounds in the savings bank. Justice, however, should be done to her daughter Jemima in the matter. She was a good and dutiful child to her mother, and in the business also, as far as the tub went. It was no fault on the part of the girl if she had not made herself equally useful at the ironing-board as well, but a physical impediment prevented her. Her body had stopped growing when she was about fourteen years of age, but her legs had continued

to grow for some years afterwards. The result was, they had become considerably too long for her body. They raised her to such a height above the ironing-board, and thereby obliged her to stoop so much when she worked at it, that Mrs. Sparkes' druggist's shopman, who generally acted as medical adviser to her family, thought such an occupation would bring on disease of the lungs, and strongly counselled that she should seek some other employment. Jemima, who was now more than twenty years of age, was an amiable, industrious, kind-hearted creature, and of excessive simplicity. In person she was exceedingly tall, with a strongly freckled, inexpressive face, lightish green eyes, and intensely red hair; but, as she had far less vanity than her sex generally, these defects gave her but little annoyance.

James Duke had grown up from a baby into a strong, sturdy boy, about the average height, with plain, but not ugly features. He was a good, industrious boy, working hard at the clothes-basket, the only inheritance he had received from Mr. Sparkes. The widow had retained the boy with her in the house for several reasons; the first (which, by-the-bye, she quoted the least) was from the affection she bore him, the second to see that he did not get into bad company, a casualty easily met with in York Street and Tothill Fields. Another was, that she could superintend his education as far as sending him to school and paying for it went. And lastly, that he might save her getting another person to assist in the outdoor duties of her business. In temper young James was somewhat self-willed and argumentative, but he was an

affectionate, obedient boy to the widow, and excellent friends with his (pseudo) aunt Jemima. In his moral character but one subject gave the widow any pain—she occasionally detected him uttering the most radical sentiments in relation to the constituted authorities ! and as she herself possessed, in the highest degree, respect for everything that appertained to Church and State, it may easily be imagined such language gave her considerable pain. With that exception, however, she had every reason to be perfectly contented with his behaviour.

In the decorations and properties of our stage there is little change to report. The principal was that when James had attained his eleventh year, several shillings, which Mrs. Sparkes had accumulated towards a fund for the purchase of a mangle, were invested in a bedstead, which was placed in the ironing-room, while the transforming chest of drawers already alluded to were brought into the front room, and in them, when metamorphosed into a bed, Jemima and her mother slept nightly.

The thread of our narrative recommences about noon one fine day in the month of July. Jemima and James were occupied in hanging up some clothes in the yard, when Mrs. Sparkes, who had left the house about ten o'clock, entered. It has already been stated that her health had for some time past been declining, and that the effect of the change was that morning more visible than usual. Her countenance was more pallid, and there was a singular expression on it. This was the more noticeable after she had taken off her bonnet, and seated herself on a chair. The expression alluded to is

difficult to describe. There was something exceedingly serious about it, but it neither betokened anxiety, anger, pain, nor care. There was too much mildness about it for either. She sat quietly, apparently absorbed in thought, for more than a minute, when Jemima's voice caught her ear in the scullery, saying something to James in the yard. She turned her head gently round, and looked in the direction of the voice, but without uttering a word. Her eyes gradually filled with tears, but she had sufficient command over her feelings to restrain them from falling; then, by a sudden effort, she rose from her chair, and having replaced her bonnet and shawl in the cupboard, she commenced quietly to occupy herself with her household duties.

Although, from the above description, little may be gathered as to the state of the poor woman's mind, the feeling that caused the behaviour was grave enough in itself. She had, since she left home that morning, received a sentence of death, nor could the judge who gave it hold out the slightest hope of mercy in this world.

Although her health for some time past had been exceedingly delicate, she had paid it but little attention, considering, perhaps, that at her time of life she had no right to be surprised at infirmities oppressing her, and she contented herself with what simple remedies the druggist's shopman before alluded to advised her to take. Unfortunately, however, in her visits to the shop, she told her medical adviser only half her ailments, and, still more unfortunately, those she concealed were precisely those

requiring the most care and attention. The result was, that the evil grew till she was obliged to admit its serious nature, and then at last she resolved to apply to some good medical authority for his advice.

The morning we are speaking of she had left the house soon after breakfast, without giving either Jemima or James information of her intentions, and she did not return till nearly dinner-time. When she left her home it was for the purpose of consulting a physician of eminence, who then lived in Queen's Square, and who formerly held the appointment of accoucheur to the wives of the soldiers of the three regiments of Guards. When in his presence she explained to him without reservation her sufferings, which hitherto, with great determination, she had concealed even from Jemima. The doctor listened to her patiently, and, after going deeply into her case, concluded by saying,—

“My good woman, you are very ill.”

“Dangerously so, sir?”

“Well, as I said before, you are very ill. What is your occupation?”

“I am a washerwoman, sir.”

“Then you must leave it off. It is far too hard work for you. That is to say, if your circumstances will allow you.”

“I think I can manage that, sir. My daughter understands the business well, and is a good industrious girl, and my son” (she always called James her son) “also assists in the outdoor work.”

“I am happy to hear it,” said the doctor, preparing to

write a prescription, "for work of any kind will be injurious in your case."

"Do you consider me in any danger, sir?"

"I can't tell you more than I have done. You must, as I have said before, take great care of yourself;" and he continued writing the prescription.

Mrs. Sparkes was silent for some moments, but taking courage she again addressed the doctor:

"I beg your pardon, sir, but I should be so much obliged to you if you would tell me if my complaint is dangerous. I don't ask for myself, but when I am gone my two children could not carry on the business by themselves, and I should like to see them in some respectable employment before I die."

"All cancers are dangerous," said the doctor.

"Thank you, sir; for some time past I feared it was cancer, and now I know the worst."

"I am glad you take the intelligence so courageously," said the doctor, handing her the prescription.

"Oh, sir," said Mrs. Sparkes, taking it up, "I am the widow of a soldier who fought for his country at Waterloo."

She then thanked the doctor for his kindness, and proceeded to her home.

Perhaps, reader, you have never mixed much with that singular class of beings—soldiers' wives. They present, as a body, the most singular contrasts—the extremes of good and evil being found among them. At the same time, it should be understood that the good is their own; their bad, the infamous neglect of the War Office authorities to their well-being, acting on beings possessing an

average amount of human weakness. All of them are courageous. Talk of the courage of the British soldier ! It is vast, certainly ; but quote an act of heroism the bravest of them may have performed, and another done by some soldier's wife can be quoted that shall equal or surpass it. Theirs is a courage apart. They do not defy death. They do not hold him in contempt. They have none of that courage which oozes out of an insensibility to danger ; on the contrary, they keenly appreciate it and avoid it if they can, calmly and quietly, it is true, and yet occasionally not without great dignity. They do not boast ; they rather affect timidity, and yet they have not simply the courage of the lion, but superior to it. If by chance they are in any great danger, and the shock of the intelligence has not been so sudden as to shake the acute sensibility of the female nervous system, they are cool and collected. Even on the battle-field these women have frequently been seen to stand fire with the courage of the veteran soldier without the excitement of the fight to stimulate them. Under pain, their heroism is wonderful. Examples of it might be quoted so astounding, that although perfectly true, the author who would describe them would probably incur the accusation of gross exaggeration, even if the subject were suitable for a work of light literature. But the grandest feature in their courage is the astonishing resolution they show in meeting inevitable death from sickness. They may frequently be seen standing quietly before the king of terrors face to face, without the tremble of an eyelid, and without an appeal or look for mercy or pity.

Of these last was Mrs. Sparkes. When she left the

doctor's she knew perfectly well she was condemned to death. All women understand, instinctively, something of medicine, and she knew too well the meaning of the word "cancer" to think there was for her, at her time of life, the slightest chance of escaping. The certainty of the result did not in the least disturb her. God had given her his order to leave the world, and the route, and she was quite ready to obey Him. The only thing that weighed on her mind was that Jemima and James would no longer have her to assist them.

When seated on her chair, after her return from the visit to the doctor's, it was not simply fatigue that caused her silence. She was the while offering up, in her simple phraseology, a prayer to the Almighty ; so silently that He alone heard it. It was not to escape her doom : "Not as I will, but as Thou wilt," was her address to Him, without one thought of the text which she had translated into her own vocabulary, and was quoting. She was perfectly resigned ; her petition to Him was for counsel and help in providing respectably for her two children, the thought of whose helplessness had filled her eyes with tears before she rose from her chair.

She then busied herself in preparing the dinner, and, before they were seated at their meal, she felt certain in her own mind that her prayer had been answered ; certainly she had resolved on her course of action. During the dinner she was cheerful and contented, but made no mention of her visit to the doctor's, nor the resolution she had arrived at. If there was any difference observable in her behaviour, it was that she appeared in better

spirits than usual. The meal over, Jemima and James went to their previous occupation, and after Mrs. Sparkes had occupied herself in removing the dinner-things, she quietly, and without informing either of her children of her intention, left the house.

Her first visit was to the barracks in St. James's Park, where with some little difficulty she contrived to obtain an audience of the Adjutant of her husband's regiment.

She told him simply that Sparkes had been for many years a soldier in it ; that he had also served at Waterloo : this was always with her a great card. Her husband, she continued, was now dead, and she also felt her end was rapidly approaching ; but before it occurred it would afford her great happiness if she could see her son, or rather a boy that both she and her husband had brought up as their own, admitted into the regiment as a drummer. The Adjutant listened to her with great good-humour. He remembered her husband, he said, perfectly well. He was a very steady man, and a good soldier. He should have much pleasure in aiding her in the object she had in view, and if no unforeseen obstacle presented itself—and on his part he did not anticipate any,—if there were no medical or other objections, over which he had no control, he had no doubt he should, in a short time, be able to present her son with a pair of drum-sticks in that renowned regiment—the Scots Fusilier Guards.

Mrs. Sparkes then left the barracks with a thoroughly grateful heart : one-half of her wish was now accom-

plished ; if she only was as fortunate with the other she would then have but little to wish for in this world. She now directed her steps to the dwelling of one of her customers who kept a lodging-house in Pimlico, a person in whose judgment and respectability she had implicit reliance. Fortunately she not only found her at home, a very common occurrence with lodging-house keepers, but found her unoccupied as well, a far rarer circumstance, at least for any who do not come to look at the apartments. Mrs. Sparkes told her that she wished to find Jemima a housemaid's situation, but as the girl had never yet been in service, she was afraid there might be some difficulty in finding her a good mistress. Could the lady help her in the matter ? If she could she would be doing her a great favour.

Singularly enough the housemaid of the lodging-house keeper had given warning that morning under the plea that with her weak knee, to work from six o'clock in the morning till twelve at night was too fatiguing. This little fact the mistress omitted to mention to Mrs. Sparkes, but she promised her that as soon as her present servant's month had expired, she would take Jemima in her place and give her a fair trial.

Mrs. Sparkes sincerely thanked her for the promise; and then returned home with a grateful heart. When she laid her head on her pillow that night, she offered up a prayer of thanksgiving to the Almighty, the fervour of which it would have been difficult to exceed, for the bounty and goodness He had shown her that day.

The disease now progressed rapidly, so much so that

Mrs. Sparkes began to fear her death might take place before her plans for the future of Jemima and James were carried out; but in this she was fortunately mistaken, for she not only lived long enough to see her daughter obtain her situation in the lodging-house, but also James receive his appointment as drummer in the Scots Fusilier Guards. She had not seen him since, as the regiment was in Windsor, but it was expected shortly to arrive in London, and would then be quartered in Wellington Barracks, and in consequence be very near her.

As soon as her children were thus provided for, Mrs. Sparkes' health began to sink with great rapidity. Hitherto her mind had apparently struggled with the disease, and although it did not stay its progress it seemed at least to retard it; but now that her doubts were at rest with respect to her children's welfare, she gave up the contest and quietly determined to smooth her pillow for her approaching death. It must not be imagined that she wanted either assistance or nursing in consequence of the absence of Jemima and James. Those must know but little of the respectable poor who could arrive at such a conclusion. Not only all her neighbours respected her, and would have assisted her to any extent in their power, but her two female lodgers, both needlewomen, attended her with great kindness and consideration. One of these (Mrs. Murphy) had been with her since the commencement of our narrative, and has been already noticed; the other supplied the place of Mrs. Murphy's brother, who had died about six

months after Sparkes. It is true it would have been more lucrative for Mrs. Sparkes to have taken a single male lodger, but dreading the slightest appearance of scandal she resisted the temptation, and accepted a seamstress ; although so much delicacy of sentiment was hardly necessary on her part, as any one acquainted with her appearance and manners would readily admit. Fortunately, the little money she had accumulated in the savings bank supplied her with what little superfluities or delicacies she required, and in all respects she was as comfortable as the circumstances of her case would admit.

Perfectly aware of her situation, she determined to examine into the state of her soul, and to prepare herself for the serious change which would shortly take place. She first spoke on the subject to Mrs. Murphy, her lame seamstress lodger, who was herself a woman of great piety. She immediately advised Mrs. Sparkes to procure the assistance and advice of a minister of religion, and proposed to send for one whose chapel she had constantly attended for many years. But Mrs. Murphy was a Dissenter, and the minister she named was of the same persuasion ; and it struck Mrs. Sparkes that as her husband had been in the army the assistance of a clergyman of the Established Church would be more effectual—not that she meant any disrespect to the dissenting minister. Mrs. Murphy being a liberal-minded woman, she immediately called on one of the parish curates, and told him how anxious her friend Mrs. Sparkes was to see him, and she hoped he would call on her. This was

most readily promised, and the next day he kept his word.

The curate, who was a kind, amiable man, with great experience among the poor of his parish—and their name was legion—remained with the sick woman for a considerable time. He left her much easier in her mind, having (to use her own phraseology) talked very comfortably to her. In fact, he was too well acquainted with the respectable working classes of the district, not to know how large a vein of pure Christianity existed among them with all their faults, and he soon discovered that his penitent, by her very humility, was one of the best of that class. He left after advising her to examine carefully the state of her conscience ;—whether she had acted unjustly to any one, and if so, to pray for forgiveness and make all reparation in her power ; to forgive her enemies as she hoped to be forgiven, and if she had acted unkindly or uncharitably to any, either by word or deed, not only to repent of it, but to ask pardon, if possible, of the person offended. He gave her further instructions respecting her sins in general, and after leaving her a few short printed prayers applicable to her situation, for daily use, he took his leave, promising, to her great satisfaction, that he would call and see her again.

As soon as he had left the house she commenced the examination of her conscience, taking each subject separately. On the forgiveness of injuries, she, with two exceptions, the one slight—the other of far graver degree—had little to blame herself. No doubt she had occasion-

ally received offences which had irritated her, but she soon remembered that no doubt she had frequently annoyed others : and so the account was balanced.

The first exception alluded to was as follows :—She had for a long time refused to forgive, and had borne malice against Mrs. Saberton, whom she had allowed to take home some linen to wash which had been entrusted to her, Mrs. Sparkes. She did it because she, the said Mrs. Saberton, was at that time nursing her baby that was sick, so she could not leave it to work at Mrs. Sparkes' own tub. When Mrs. Saberton, who could do her work well—that it was only fair to say of her—had got up the linen, instead of honourably taking it back to Mrs. Sparkes, she most dishonourably pawned it. Afterwards, instead of acknowledging her fault and returning the duplicates, she allowed her children (she was always a slovenly, careless woman) to play with them, and they were either burnt or lost ; whereby Mrs. Sparkes not only lost an excellent customer, but some very unpleasant remarks were made as to her integrity besides. Upon hearing this, Mrs. Sparkes immediately offered to pay for them, but she was told that a pair of cuffs and a collar of the things lost had been worked by a married daughter of the customer now in India, and that no money could replace them. However, though she had cherished her anger against Mrs. Saberton for a long time, she had forgiven her years ago, for the poor woman after all had a large family and a drunken husband, and was much to be pitied.

The other case was a far more serious affair. Here,

without the slightest doubt, she had nourished hatred and malice for many years ; and although since Sparkes' death it had remained almost dormant, the original cause of offence had never been forgiven. It was altogether a sad story, but as this is a faithful history, it must be given without concealment.

The reader will remember that Mrs. Sparkes took great pride in a long row of flat-irons which were arranged over the chimney-piece in her sitting-room. These were at least twice as many as were required for her business. But beyond the pride she had in them as an attribute of her trade, for several years they were the symbols of a revengeful triumph over a rival washer-woman. About four years before Sparkes' death, a Mrs. Jackson set up in business as a laundress in Gardner's Lane. She was a showy, handsome woman, a widow, about five-and-thirty years of age. She talked plausibly and well, and soon made many acquaintances in the neighbourhood, and among others Mrs. Sparkes, who at last began to entertain for the new-comer a great friendship. Mrs. Sparkes had no jealousy as a washer-woman, for there was, she said, in Westminster room enough for both. She did more. Finding that Mrs. Jackson had but little custom, she introduced her to more than one family. But she was after all but a double-faced creature, and attempted also to get into Mrs. Sparkes' connection, and succeeded in more than one instance, which caused a breach in the friendship which had hitherto existed between her and Mrs. Sparkes, and the rivals no longer spoke when they met.

The behaviour of the women during their estrangement offered a singular contrast. Mrs. Sparkes was cool and dignified, Mrs. Jackson flaunting and impertinent. One thing Mrs. Sparkes at last discovered, that caused her the greatest pain and uneasiness. Although Mrs. Jackson never attempted to speak to her, she not only made an invariable point of speaking to Sparkes, but even put herself in his way in York Street when he was coming home from the barracks. Terrible as was this offence, she was guilty of another immeasurably worse. She was once heard to say, when she knew Sparkes was within hearing, "What a pity it is that such a handsome fellow as that soldier should have such an ugly, cross-grained brute for a wife, when he might have had the handsomest girl in Westminster for the mere asking!"

The fact cannot be disguised that this remark caused in the bosom of Mrs. Sparkes the most intense hatred against the aggressor. Against her husband she had nothing to say. Sparkes evidently treated the remark with the most profound indifference, but the wound it occasioned to the feelings of his wife was incurable. She silently determined, if ever an opportunity of revenge should offer itself, to profit by it. It fell in her way, and she kept to her determination.

Mrs. Jackson, from her carelessness, soon lost the customers she had acquired. She got into debt for her soap, and into arrears for her rent. An execution was placed in her house, and she decamped the same day, and was never heard of afterwards. Mrs. Sparkes then took her revenge. She went to the house before the

goods were removed by the broker. Among other articles were six flat-irons, and she determined to become the mistress of these, and keep them as the spoils of the vanquished. The *woman* showed herself in the transaction. She went to an ironmonger's and inquired the price of the article when new. She then offered the full price to the broker's man for them, knowing at the same time she could have obtained them for a smaller sum ; but, she said, she would not be beholden to her for a farthing. She took the irons home, polished them, and placed them with her own, and regarded them with pleasurable vindictiveness (a feeling she never confided even to Sparkes) till after her husband's death. Afterwards she simply looked on them as ornamental attributes of her business.

It was the knowledge of the many years of hatred and ill-feeling she had borne against Mrs. Jackson that oppressed her conscience. She prayed she might be forgiven, frequently and fervently. At first she thought of requesting Jemima to conceal the flat-irons from her sight ; but there was some difficulty in distinguishing those which had belonged to Mrs. Jackson from those which had been her own. She at last determined they should remain in their usual place, as they would for the future remind her of her fault. Thus her sin had fallen on her own head. Those irons which had been for so many years not only her pride, but the symbols of her successful revenge, were now a remembrancer to her wounded conscience.

She next examined herself on her conduct as a wife

and a mother. Although she did this with great rigorousness and severity, she could find nothing which gave her uneasiness; on the contrary, it was impossible for a conscience to be clearer on both points than her own, and she dismissed the subject from her mind as one without danger.

On the question of integrity she dwelt but a short time. The most conscientious washerwoman in existence could not have acted more honourably than she had done both to her customers and the public at large. She had always given to every one his due, and nobody could accuse her of owing a penny to any one. On no occasion where a collar, or cuff, or stocking was missing, did she fail to return it with the next week's washing, or make an offer of compensation for it if not found. Never had she offered to take her Bible oath that an article which she had lost had never been put in the bag or she should have seen it. Never on any one occasion in her life had she used any deleterious fluid or chemical, prejudicial to the quality of the linen placed in her charge, to save her own knuckles the amount of labour justly required of them. Never had she worn, or allowed Jemima to wear, any article of dress entrusted to her, although in the case of Jemima, when budding into womanhood, she had been sorely tempted to array her young charms in some particularly becoming article of dress, for the moment in her possession; but she had resisted the devil, and he had fled from her.

The schedule of the pomps and vanities of this wicked

world was not got over so smoothly. It had been gone through satisfactorily enough till she came to the article of gin, which detained her for a considerable time. She was slightly given to gin—most washerwomen are, especially when Westminster bred and born,—but with justice it may be said that she was among the most temperate of her order. She endeavoured to persuade herself that the use of that stimulant was necessary to support her at the tub ; but in this she greatly failed, for she also remembered that on certain occasions when strict economy had to be practised, she had done without it with no injury to her constitution, or injustice to the things in the wash. She now began to calculate that, small as had been the sums she had expended on gin, in the aggregate they would have amounted to sufficient to purchase a mangle, and she might then have started Jemima in life with it in credit, independence, and respectability, instead of, as now, being obliged to work as a servant in the house of the stranger. Moreover, one particular stern, harsh fact, which there was no evading, stared her in the face. One afternoon she had been unmistakably and decidedly “overcome ;” but then, as it was upon an empty stomach and the children had not seen her, she hoped she should be forgiven.

In many parts of her self-examination she hardly did herself justice, but this was rather due to her humility than indifference to the subject, that virtue concealing from her others of which she might justly have been proud. For example, charity, which covers a multitude of sins, was strong within her. She had frequently given the house-

less female outcast shelter for the night (when she could do it without being seen, for on questions of female respectability she affected great severity of principle), and a breakfast and good advice before she sent her on her way the next morning. She had often placed a meal of bread from her widow's store in the hands of the broken-down wayfarer. She had often done that noblest feat of charity, the finding respectable employment for the idle youth of both sexes who swarmed in the Yard ; but for this she took no credit to herself, the superiority of her aristocratical connections among tradesmen around her, as well as the families she washed for, gave her greater facilities than were possessed by her neighbours. She had given innumerable cups of water to innumerable of the little ones, and had wiped as many tears from their eyes with her coarse apron. One noble act of charity she had performed, but she omitted to take any account of it, although it had been duly registered to her credit in Heaven's chancery. Thirteen years before, she had one bleak night found in the street a wretched, naked, half-starved infant. She had warmed it at her breast, and when it was refused assistance by the agents of an execrable law, she had taken it to her own home and fed and clothed it. She had brought it up as her own, without the hope of fee or reward. She had taught it to place its pudgy hands together and repeat after her certain infantine prayers, of which it understood not one word ; but learned, at least, from her of the existence of a Being at once both wise and beneficent, who had the power to punish, but whose greatest attribute it was to

bless; who watched over it sleeping or waking, and whose every law was for its benefit. As reason became more matured, she easily taught it to remove its adoration from her own humble person and offer it to the Divinity, whose place, in the imagination of the child, she had hitherto, without being aware of it, occupied. After the death of her husband, when poverty more frequently threatened her, in no instance did she diminish her attention and kindness to the child of her adoption. From her scanty widow's earnings she still clothed and fed it, and moreover paid from her own slender purse the few weekly pence necessary for its education. Industry she had taught the boy both by principle and practice, and from his earliest childhood instilled into him sentiments of the most perfect integrity; and when gaunt, certain death stared her in the face, his future welfare was one-half of her earthly care: and it was not till she had carved out for him his future career, one, in her humble opinion, of high chivalry and honour, that she wiped the subject from her mind and applied herself to the welfare of her own soul.

Having now made all her worldly arrangements to her satisfaction, having provided for her daughter and adopted son as well, and moreover having strictly examined her conscience respecting her sins, she determined on following exactly the advice of the curate, in reading her Bible and studying and repeating the prayers he had left her. In this she was assiduously assisted by the lame seamstress. The two poor women read and prayed together with earnestness and simplicity, nor could the quaint

commentaries which they occasionally expressed on the different subjects as they presented themselves to their imagination, deprive their devotions of any portion of their beautiful sincerity and humility. Although reading carefully and attentively all those parts particularly recommended by the curate, those episodes in the Scripture history especially relating to children had for the poor washerwoman attractions superior to all others. The story of Joseph and his brethren interested her exceedingly, and she somehow by some obscure reasoning of her own assimilated the "coat of many colours" with the drummer's uniform she hoped soon to see James appear in. Samuel in his youth, and the judgment of Solomon, were both full of attraction for her; but it was from the New Testament she received the greatest pleasure and consolation. Apart from its theological aspect, the exquisite beauty of the Saviour's character must be apparent to all; but to none does it stand out more prominently in relief than to respectable women of the working classes. The quiet resignation and placid courage, the kindness, love, and respect He showed to his parents, his dignified submission to his fate, are all understood and appreciated by them.

After the lame seamstress had read a chapter, the two women would pause and converse over it; but, without the slightest irreverence, the eccentricity of their remarks frequently approached the ludicrous. They dwelt with great interest on Christ disputing with the doctors in the Temple, all of whom they imagined to be medical men of high standing, and they pondered over his humility in

submitting without hesitation to his mother when capable of arguing on such abstruse subjects with men of such eminence. Another incident claimed their great admiration and respect, the curing of the woman who had been suffering from an issue of blood for twelve years. The whole description of this miracle excited their great admiration, less, perhaps, for the wonderful cure performed than for the manner of its performance. It was done in a way which told particularly on their intelligence. They pictured to themselves the poor woman urged by her painful malady to seek the Saviour's assistance, though surrounded by the crowd, and, to spare herself the cruel necessity of explaining it, touching Him by the hem of his garment, in the hope of receiving assistance from it. They thought of Him turning round to her, and while perfectly understanding both her wish and her malady, saying to her in an under voice, "Woman, thy faith hath made thee whole," explicitly communicating to her, without allowing those around Him to understand the precise nature of her affliction, that her prayer was granted. The sick woman and the lame seamstress were particularly struck by this delicacy on the part of Christ. And I have often observed that the power of understanding a complaint with little explanation, is a faculty in their medical adviser which is much appreciated by respectable women.

"He might have been," said Mrs. Sparkes in conclusion, "the son of working people, but He was a gentleman in his heart for all that."

But the scene of the agony in the garden was, perhaps, the chapter of all others which afforded them the greatest admiration. The whole current of feeling there displayed was beautifully adapted to the comprehension of the two poor helpless women. The keen apprehension of the danger and ignominy in store, the wish if possible to avoid it, the mild, amiable resignation to the terrible fate which awaited Him, were exactly such points, full as they were of the noblest characteristics of female courage, as were likely to be perfectly appreciated by them. Often and often did they read and ponder over that exquisite chapter, and their wonder at the sublime episode it contained increased on each successive reading.

One Sunday afternoon, about a fortnight after James and Jemima had left her, Mrs. Sparkes received her summons to appear before the throne of her Maker. She meekly bowed her head to the command, but prayed that she might be spared a few hours to see her children before she died. This blessing was accorded her. A neighbour, when she heard her wish, went for James and Jemima, and both were fortunately able to answer the summons. Jemima was the first to arrive, and the widow's heart leaped with joy when she saw her. Shortly afterwards James made his appearance in full uniform. An expression of gratified pride passed across the old woman's face when she saw him in his (to her) magnificent dress. A host of recollections of days long past seemed to rush back to her mind for a moment, as she cast her fast-fading glance upon him. She put out her hand to him, which he took, and he then burst into a

hearty boyish flood of tears. The lame seamstress, who was in the room, sympathising with the lad, rose from her chair, and going up to him attempted to take the huge grenadier's cap from his head. The boy angrily turned round, and quitting the old woman's hand, he fixed his cap tightly on his head, saying, through his tears,—

“Leave me alone, will you? don't you know a soldier never takes off his cap? You ought to know that.”

The old woman cast a glance of satisfaction on him, and it was the last symptom of intelligence she showed in this world.

And thus ended Mrs. Sparkes' earthly pilgrimage. Nothing had she brought with her into this world, but she did not leave it destitute. She took with her the record of a life in which un murmuring resignation to her lot, perfect integrity, untiring industry, charity, unceasing patience, long-suffering, and humility were among the principal items; and the poor old washerwoman, whose eyes a moment before had dimmed on her ungainly daughter, the tawdry uniform of the little drummer boy, the kind-hearted lame seamstress, and the simple furniture of the room, now stood in the presence of the Almighty, as bright and beautiful a spirit as any of the seraphic host that surrounded Him. To doubt it would be to doubt the existence of a God of mercy and justice.

The funeral of the poor washerwoman consumed the remainder of the little money she had accumulated in the savings-bank, and the sale of her furniture, tubs, and

flat-irons hardly realised more than was sufficient to provide decent mourning. Nevertheless it would have been difficult to find a being in this world better loved or more regretted by those who stood beside her grave at her burial.

CHAPTER V.

IN WHICH THE HERO APPEARS IN A NEW CHARACTER.



TWO years are assumed to have passed over in our narrative since the termination of the last chapter. During that time Jemima had kept her situation and was much liked by her mistress: a slight change, however, had taken place in her duties. From housemaid she had been promoted to the office of cook to the establishment, partly from exhibiting on divers improvised occasions considerable skill in the culinary art, but more so from her ungainly appearance having been the cause of unpleasant remarks being frequently made by the lodgers, and from the jokes of ribald cabmen and others when, as housemaid, she answered the door, such as saying they remembered her when she was at the Zoological Gardens, and other impertinences of the same description.

James still continued in his regiment, but a change had taken place in him also. That magnificent coat of his, plastered over as it was with coachmaker's worsted lace, and which he had thought so much of formerly, had now entirely lost its charms. Still, he knew it excited envy and admiration in the minds of all the street boys he met, but at the same time the unpleasant certainty

before him that, if he dared to consider that coat as his own, and attempted to do with it as he pleased, he would be severely punished, had depreciated its value to *nil* in his eyes. Again, as has been before stated, he was innately imbued with radical principles and an invincible desire to argue with his superiors on the utility of the different orders he received, and the indulgence in that desire had frequently brought him into disgrace. As each successive punishment he received was severer than its predecessor, his disgust at the Service had increased in proportion, and his wish to leave it the greater. This feeling of dislike for the army at last became so painful that he began to turn over in his mind the question of deserting. He would certainly have remained but a short time in doubt had it not been for the sincere affection he entertained for his aunt Jemima, as he still continued to call her. If he left his regiment surreptitiously, of course he would be obliged to leave Westminster, and thus they would be separated.

At last he summoned up sufficient courage to consult Jemima herself on the subject. She listened to him with impatience, and even with anger. She impressed on him how dishonourable an act desertion was, and how lasting would be his disgrace should he abandon his drum-sticks. She showed him that he was the servant of the Queen, and to quit her service without being duly discharged would be a gross act of cowardice. James listened to Jemima's arguments with great attention and respect, and in the end resolved to give the Service a longer trial. He did so, but with no better success, and

at last even Jemima, with her stern sense of duty, was obliged to relent ; but at the same time she advised him to wait and see if it could not be possible for her to devise some scheme by which he could quit the army in a legal and honourable manner. After talking the matter over with him for some time, she bade James good-bye, promising to turn over in her mind, before she saw him again, some plan that might be carried out with honour to all parties concerned in it. In the mean time he was to go on with his duties as strictly as he possibly could.

Jemima was not a person to make a promise and fail to perform it. She formed her plan of operations deliberately and conscientiously to the best of her abilities, and the day she proposed carrying it out was on the occasion of her next holiday.

The day came, and in the afternoon James, in full uniform, met her in St. James's Park. They walked up and down Constitution Hill together for some time in deep and earnest conversation, Jemima apparently endeavouring to persuade her nephew to adopt some course of action she was proposing, to which he seemed strongly to object. At last a cloud of dust was seen gathering in the upper part of the Hill, and considerable excitement appeared to seize the bystanders. Presently a carriage was seen coming rapidly along, and the respect all showed to it proved it was not only the Queen's, but that her Majesty herself was in it. When she approached the spot on which the couple were standing, Jemima gently pushed her nephew a step forward : " Now, James," she said, " remember you are the Queen's servant, and be-

have honourably, like one." So saying, she retired some paces backward. James stood still till the carriage was close to him, then drawing himself up to his full height, and making his military salute, he exclaimed, in a voice tremulous with emotion,—

"If you please, your Majesty, I will trouble you to provide yourself with another drummer by this day month."

Her Majesty, who of course had not heard one word he had uttered, and possibly was not even aware he had been speaking, bowed graciously to him as she passed, and the carriage was soon out of sight.

"Now, James," said Jemima, advancing, "you have given the Queen proper warning, and you have got the law on your side, and I am your witness. Do not tell any one about it till the warning's out, and then I'll tell you what to do." So saying, they turned towards Westminster Bridge, as Jemima had promised her nephew to treat him to Astley's.

The month passed quietly enough; James, acting under the advice of Jemima, did all in his power to please his superiors, and, judging from their silence, he succeeded. Before the expiration of the notice he had given to the Queen, Jemima had obtained for him half a bed in a lodging-house in Southwark, and had also provided for him in the back kitchen of the house she lived in, a second-hand suit of corduroy clothes, with shoes and shirt to match, as Jemima held high principles of integrity, and had resolved that nothing should remain in her nephew's possession on which her Majesty had the slightest claim.

All things being now fully arranged, James called on her on the evening of the day month when he had given warning, and Jemima immediately sent him into the back kitchen where she had displayed his civilian suit of clothes on a knife-board, and a few minutes afterwards James returned to his aunt. The change which had taken place in his appearance in the interim was perfectly miraculous. It was a metamorphosis scarcely less surprising than that of the butterfly from the caterpillar, although the effects were reversed, for James had gone in as the butterfly. His uniform had appeared on him that evening even more resplendent than usual, possibly from the extra brush he had given the buttons that they might be returned in good condition. He left the back kitchen in the cast-off clothes of a seedy errand boy in the greengrocery and coal line. Jemima herself was obliged to acknowledge that the change in his appearance was lamentable indeed; nevertheless his happiness was dearer to her than his appearance, and she smothered her vexation at the deplorable figure he cut in his *bourgeois* suit of clothes. As soon as the hour was sufficiently late for him to escape detection, she tied a handkerchief round his mouth as if to protect him from the cold, though the night was exceedingly warm, put eighteenpence in his hand, and telling him to go straight to his new quarters, she bade him good night.

He had no sooner left the house than Jemima began to consider in what way she should be able to get his clothes to the barracks so as to avoid detection. She determined at last she would go to Vauxhall, or some

other locality in the neighbourhood, and send them from there by the carrier. But how to pack them up was the difficulty. All the apparatus for packing she possessed consisted of an old bandbox. This, as far as holding the uniform, shoes, &c., went, was ample, but what to do with his sword and cap puzzled her greatly for a long time. She tried to tie them in an old apron, well pinned together, and strengthened with packthread, and many other devices ; but so impracticable were the natures of the two objects, the sword and the cap, that by no contrivance whatever would they travel comfortably together.

At last she resolved on the only plan which appeared at all practicable. About eleven o'clock one night, just as her mistress was going to bed, Jemima informed her that there was no blacking in the house, and she further reminded her that the front parlour, who was very particular about his boots, was to leave to-morrow morning before eight o'clock. Her mistress not only scolded her for not having thought of it before, but also expressed a doubt as to the veracity of her statement, saying, also, that she considered it merely as a despicable excuse to get out. Jemima, of course, indignantly fired up at this, and invited her mistress to go down herself and inspect the bottle, and said she did not like to stop in a place where she was not believed, and, in fact, acted the part of injured innocence to perfection. Her mistress at last getting tired of the dispute, told her to go at once and get the blacking, and to come back again as quickly as possible ; but as Jemima had

determined in her own mind that every shop in the neighbourhood should be shut, and that she should have to go as far as Tothill Street for the article she wanted, she made no remark on her mistress's advice, but dived at once into her kitchen. As soon as she had put on her bonnet and shawl, she concealed under the latter as she best could the drummer's cap and the sword, and she then quietly left the house. Never was a poor girl more perplexed than Jemima in her endeavours to conceal the two articles she carried from public gaze. Although it was now getting late, there were still many people about, and every one she passed, in her idea, looked at her suspiciously. Nothing at that moment could have induced her to pass a policeman. Every one she met caused her to turn round till she could get through some back street without being seen.

At last she arrived at the Birdcage Walk, her heart throbbing almost painfully with excitement. She kept the side nearest the park, so as to be as far from the gas lamps as possible, and thus to escape observation. At last, slackening her pace, she watched her opportunity when nobody was near, and then crossing the road, she approached the barrack palings, and threw the cap and sword over them into the yard. No sooner was the feat accomplished, than a painful sensation of terror came over her, and she started off homewards with the grace and celerity of a terrified ostrich; nor did she slacken her pace till she had arrived at her own door.

When she entered the house she met her mistress, who, noticing her excited and heated condition, asked

her for an explanation, which Jemima could not give her. She then asked for the blacking, but Jemima had forgotten it altogether. She was for a moment sorely puzzled for an answer ; but as, according to Schiller, "the devil is not so wicked as to let one of his servants perish for want of a lie," he immediately suggested to Jemima one of those he keeps ready for the use of maids-of-all-work in difficulties with their mistresses. She replied off-hand that she had called at every shop between there and Westminster Abbey—at least twenty—but they were all closed ; she promised to be up very early the next morning and get it at the tradesman's she usually dealt with. Her mistress immediately knew the excuse to be false, but she said nothing. Jemima was an excellent hard-working servant, and if she quarrelled with her for telling a story it was more than probable the next she hired would be equally untruthful without Jemima's good qualities.

Two days afterwards Jemima had her holiday, and she then took the bonnet-box containing the uniform to a carrier in the Vauxhall Road, placing inside a note in most objectionable orthography and worse grammar, addressed to the colonel of the regiment, stating that the clothes belonged to Mr. James Duke, and that the cap and sword had been already sent.

Although Jemima now considered the affair as terminated, her Majesty, or rather her representative in the regiment, did not consider the month's warning which had been given to be strictly within the rules of military law, and the hue-and-cry was raised to find Mr. James Duke.

The police managed to trace him to the house at which Jemima lived, but then all clue as to his whereabouts was lost. Many were the inquiries which were made of her on the subject, all of which she skilfully evaded ; but her anger was intensely aroused at hearing James described by an adult drummer, who had accompanied the policeman, as a cowardly cur. She made no remark at the moment, but mentally determined on going to the barracks the next morning, and there having the whole "fairly out," as she called it.

Having framed her course of action to her own satisfaction, she started off on the morrow to wait on the adjutant of the regiment, as she had heard he was the officer invested with supreme authority in cases of the kind. When she arrived at the barrack gate she occasioned not a little surprise, mingled with much satisfaction, in the breast of a sergeant on duty, who thought he had discovered, disguised as a woman, a gaunt recruit from the north of Ireland who had deserted some months before. Finding his mistake, he simply swore at her for an ill-favoured thing (thing was not exactly the word he made use of, Jemima afterwards said, but another far too frequently in the mouths of the soldiers of the Guards when speaking of ladies too respectable to listen to their addresses), and ordered her to go away. This, however, she refused to do. She had come, she said, to see the adjutant, and she would not go without speaking to him.

Had she uttered any blasphemous expression, the sergeant would neither have been surprised nor scan-

dalised, but the presumption of a woman in her position in society wishing to speak to the adjutant was more than his feelings of propriety could support, and he immediately ordered her to leave the barrack-yard, or he would turn her out, and give her in charge to a policeman. Jemima, however, was a soldier's daughter, and not easily alarmed. She not only refused to go, but positively set the sergeant's authority completely at defiance, and affairs began to wear a very warlike aspect, when, fortunately, a superior officer happened to pass, and he inquired the cause of the disturbance. Finding, though with some difficulty, in consequence of the state of excitement that Jemima was in, that her visit was relative to the desertion of Mr. James Duke, he ordered her to be ushered into the adjutant's presence, which was, sorely to the sergeant's disgust, immediately done.

Jemima, to the adjutant's intense surprise, did not attempt to offer the slightest excuse for James's conduct; on the contrary, she asserted he was fully justified in the course he had taken. He had, she said, given a month's warning, and she was a witness, and neither the Queen nor any other "missus" had a right to expect more. She further stated that his uniform and accoutrements had also honestly been returned. More than that, rather than not behave honourably to her Majesty, she was willing that the arrears of pay due might remain in her Majesty's hands, and she would say no more about it.

"Pray, then," said the adjutant, "what may you want of me? You seem to have taken the law pretty well

into your own hands as far as you have gone. What else may follow remains to be seen."

"But I don't intend going until I have had justice done me."

"Justice done you!" said the adjutant; "and what in the name of fortune have you to complain of?"

"Why, one of your drummers had the impertinence to call him a cowardly cur, and I want to have him punished."

The adjutant had some difficulty in keeping his anger within moderate bounds when he heard her request. He not only endorsed the drummer's statement, but ordered her immediately to leave the barracks, or he would infallibly give her in charge of the police.

Jemima, although she left the barracks, was by no means conquered or dismayed, and she resolved she would apply to the Duke of Wellington for justice, and even went so far as to arrange a little speech she was to make on the occasion, showing how it was his duty to move in the matter, seeing that James Duke had been named after him. She further resolved that, if she could not obtain justice from the Duke, she would apply to her Majesty on her throne; but such an alternative was fortunately unnecessary, for Jemima in the mean time received intelligence indirectly, through a young woman of her acquaintance, who had a young man among the drummers, that the War Office did not intend troubling themselves further about James—that is to say, if he kept out of the way for a time, and took care not to show himself in Westminster. If he did, he would certainly be arrested, and very probably flogged, or, at

the least, sent to the treadmill. Jemima, determined as she had been to stand up for justice, was thankful for the intelligence, and took the opportunity one evening of visiting James and informing him of the good news, and also of cautioning him not to be seen for some time in the neighbourhood of the barracks. She then placed some money in his hand, which she had taken from her own scanty savings, and after giving him a volume of good advice, telling him to seek a situation as errand boy on the Surrey side of the water, and offering strong prayers that he would always resist temptation, she took her leave.

It must not be imagined that this relaxation of discipline on the part of the regimental authorities was occasioned by any feeling of pity towards Mr. James Duke, for such an opinion would be utterly erroneous. It arose, in fact, from two causes. The first was, that Jemima had taught the adjutant a new sensation. He had hitherto imagined that nothing could frighten him, but she had let him know that he could show the white feather on occasion as well as his neighbours. On the memorable day of her visit to the barracks she had solemnly threatened him that whenever and wherever she met him in the streets, she would not only tell him a piece of her mind, but, beyond that, she would inform all the bystanders what a hard-hearted tyrant he was. This threat operated on him in such an extraordinary manner that she became the bane of his life. If he walked down St. James's Street or Pall Mall he was perpetually in fear of meeting his ungainly

opponent. When relieving guard at St. James's Palace he would stand, while the band was playing, with his eyes fixed on the ground, terrified at the idea of finding her among the spectators ; and on one terrible occasion, when, opposite Buckingham Palace, and in full uniform, he was talking with some ladies, he suddenly turned so pale that they asked him if he were unwell. He said that he was not, but that he had forgotten an order that he ought to have left at the barracks ; would they kindly excuse him ? And he then hurried off as rapidly as he could consistently with the dignity of his position. All this extraordinary behaviour on his part was caused by the real appearance of Jemima approaching him, who, however, fortunately for him, did not recognise him.

But to do the adjutant justice, he would not have been guilty of this neglect of duty had not his wishes been strongly endorsed by the surgeon of the regiment, who had latterly noticed a peculiarity in Mr. James Duke's physical conformity, the contrary of that which was the principal defect in Jemima's. Her lower limbs, it has already been stated, continued growing long after her body had ceased ; with Mr. James Duke, on the contrary, his legs suddenly stopped growing, while his body progressed in a manner that promised it would be, when full grown, like a grenadier's. It should be mentioned, however, that the stoppage in the growth of his legs was rather longitudinally than laterally, for in the latter respect they threatened to develop themselves into a positive outward curve, a threat which it may here be acknowledged they afterwards carried out into full effect.

Jemima, now considering that James's resignation of his commission was a *fait accompli*, turned her thoughts on his future welfare. This gave her no little anxiety, as she well remembered a maxim of her late father's, that "when the devil finds a man idle he generally puts a job into his hands," and she resolved, if possible, that her nephew should be subjected to no temptation of the kind. But how to find him employment was, indeed, a difficult problem for her to solve. The little patronage she had was solely confined to her own neighbourhood, and there James dared not make his appearance. She contrived, with some difficulty, through the influence of her mistress, to obtain for him the appointment of cheap page, out of livery, in the family of a second-class government clerk, whose wife was afflicted with gentility, in the neighbourhood of Kennington Common. From this, however, he soon got dismissed, his utility being small and his appetite large. For some time afterwards he was obliged to live on the small accumulated savings of Jemima, although, to do him justice, it was sorely against his will. Many and many were his attempts to procure employment, but without effect; indeed, it appeared a mystery what occupation he was fitted for. References he had none to offer, and if he had, it is doubtful if they would have been of any service, the studies necessary for proficiency as a drummer being considered conducive to but few other occupations, and less than any to service in quiet private families, such, in fact, as Jemima ardently wished to see him employed in.

He managed to eke out, however, the money he had

received from Jemima by "chancing it." This term is, perhaps, unknown to the reader. It simply means walking about the streets in the hope of finding horses to hold, or hanging about the railway termini, or steamboat wharves, to carry carpet bags for passengers. Again, he would linger for hours together in Leadenhall Market, seeking for the privilege of carrying fowls or other commodities purchased by City gentlemen to the different railway stations. By these means he frequently managed to spare Jemima's funds for a week together. The emolument, however, was never large, and sometimes, in wet weather, he would remain for days together without earning sixpence, his shoes perceptibly deteriorating the while, and his clothes becoming the seedier, and consequently less respectable in appearance.

The tattered state of the boy's clothes began to have a most prejudicial effect on his fortune. The small amount of respectability their former appearance carried with them was now lost, and commissions of the character he formerly obtained were no longer to be had. Every City gentleman whose parcel he offered to carry now treated him with harshness, and instead of confiding his purchase to his care, only clutched it the firmer, as fearing if he transferred it from his own hands to James's it was more than probable it might disappear altogether before it arrived at the station. At the steamboat wharves he fared equally unfortunately, and to be ordered away by the constable on duty was a daily occurrence. He was now so frequently called "young slippery" by the police that he began to recognise it as his name,

and take it without any hurt to his feelings ; and yet never in one single instance had he committed the slightest breach of integrity. Leadenhall Market, before daylight, was now the only locality which seemed open to him. There, in the obscurity, he occasionally picked up a trifle, but so seldom, and at such long intervals, that it was utterly impossible for him to keep life and body together upon the proceeds, so trifling were they.

He had now drawn so heavily on Jemima's resources, that she was nearly as poor as he was ; indeed, the whole state of affairs began to take a most desponding appearance. What to do with him she did not know, and yet the thought of abandoning him never entered her head. The trifle she had left—only a few shillings—would soon be gone, and then what would be his fate ? If the parish ever suggested itself to her mind she soon abandoned it ; besides, had he applied to the poor-law authorities for assistance, what would have been the result ? They would have inquired into his antecedents, and it would have been discovered that he was a deserter, and as such he would have been handed over to the military authorities, who now, willing enough to shut their eyes to the fact that the warning he and Jemima had given her Majesty was hardly within the limits of military law, could no longer have avoided taking cognisance of it, and as flogging was then more frequently practised in the service than in the present day, it was more than probable he would be subjected to a severe punishment before he escaped from his captors.

One winter afternoon, after he had unsuccessfully tried

to earn a trifle, he called upon Jemima. The poor girl was greatly distressed when she saw his fatigued air, and dilapidated and muddy clothes. She was at the time occupied in preparing a couple of fowls for the dinner of one of the lodgers, but the sorrow his appearance brought on her made her relinquish for the moment her task, although she was somewhat behind her time, and one fowl only had been under her hands, and even that was not yet perfectly prepared for the spit. Moreover, Jemima was that day somewhat indisposed, and felt very low-spirited even without James's presence to sadden her. She set herself for a few minutes on a chair by the fire, and her eyes filled with tears as she reflected on his deplorable condition, and her own inability to aid him. There was nothing he appeared fit for. It has already been noticed that his legs had refused to continue their growth, while his body energetically did its duty in increasing with his years. This incapacitated him from entering domestic service of any kind, and the little patronage Jemima possessed was confined to that line of life. She reflected mournfully over the subject for some minutes, then suddenly the expression of sorrow on her countenance changed to one of surprise, and the moment afterwards that made way for another of intense satisfaction. The cause of these rapid changes was as follows :—while seated in her chair, and absorbed in her own melancholy reflections, James, by way of assisting her, commenced the preparation of the other fowl, and showed so much ability in the task, that Jemima was at last perfectly delighted. She had discovered

some occupation for which James was evidently fitted by nature. She rose from her chair and silently watched him. Not a fault in his *modus operandi* could she discover. The tact and ability he showed in the plucking, and the neatness and rapidity with which he performed the drawing (if that be the proper term for the abstraction of the viscera), showed that he was proud that he possessed a natural genius for the operation. But in this case, as in many others, natural genius was merely a facility of learning combined with a love for the study to be learned. James was naturally fond of the post-mortem study of poultry, and during the long hours he had lingered in Leadenhall Market he had watched the different journeymen as they prepared the fowls for the market, and now, at his first attempt, he had shown his powers both of observation and imitation. Strange to say, even his previous experience as a drummer boy was in some sort an assistance to him in the present instance ; it gave him great flexibility and strength of wrist and hand, which, for the future, he would bring to bear in his duties as a journeyman poulterer, should his good fortune ever succeed in placing him in so elevated a position. And it did. Jemima the next day applied to the poulterer who supplied the lodging-house, and he, to oblige her, appealed to the wholesale house in Newport Market which supplied him, and the end was, James received the appointment of shop and errand boy in a very respectable establishment, with a yearly salary of ten pounds and his board and lodging.

CHAPTER VI.

OUR HERO MARRIES AND SETTLES.



TEN years are assumed to have elapsed before we again take up the thread of our narrative, yet, at the same time, it is necessary for its better understanding that we cast a slight glance at some circumstances which have taken place in the interval. James continued for more than six years with the firm in Newport Market, rising gradually in his position, till at last his wages amounted to eighteen shillings a week. Nor must it be imagined that the sum of money he received arose from any particular favour or affection on the part of his employers. Although thoroughly satisfied with his behaviour, both as regards industry and integrity, beyond a small sum of money as a Christmas-box annually, they paid him nothing for which they did not receive a full equivalent. Not only was he, as already stated, industrious, but he had arrived at an amount of skill in the art of trussing and preparing fowls for the table rarely surpassed. To watch him occupied at their toilet was a pleasure to behold. The rapidity, delicacy, and power he used in the preliminary operations, almost entitled them to rank as skilful surgical operations, while the neatness he showed in divest-

ing them of every particle of a feather or stump was equal to the manœuvres of the most *habile épileuse* that could be found in the French capital. But the acme of his dexterity was shown in the application of the powder. Here the art of the *épileuse* changed to that of the monthly nurse ; not one be it understood of the Mrs. Gamp school, but of those respectable matrons who attend in the chambers of the aristocracy. He would balance the fowl on his left hand, and as he applied the powder with his right, he would turn it from side to side, and from breast to back with such rapidity, yet at the same time with such gentleness, that many ladies (doubtless) witnessing him, must have wished their babies had been in his hands instead of the clumsy female who had had charge of them. In appearance he was greatly changed, in some respects for the better, in others for the worse. His face, had he shown more intelligence in it, might have been quoted as almost good-looking. His *torso* was by no means objectionable. It was well made, especially about the shoulders, showing indications of great strength, and his chest was broad and powerful. Would that our description could stop here ! but as faithful chroniclers we must disguise nothing. The lower extremities were objectionable in the highest degree. They had not lengthened an inch since our last chapter ; true, they were considerably stouter, and described a more perfect curve, but anatomically speaking, they were not to be admired. The best compliment which could have been paid them was, that they promised, after James's departure from this mortal life, to become

favourable specimens of morbid anatomy, even to the extent of insuring their admittance into a museum.

When our narrative reopens, Duke was no longer with the Newport Market firm, but had obtained employment in a highly respectable poulterer's in Bond Street, where, as in his former situation, he gave his employers perfect satisfaction.

With Jemima things had also changed, and in every respect, except that of appearance, for the better. With regard to the latter, we regret to say nothing can be said in her favour. She was still immensely tall, and very thin, her freckles had by no means disappeared, and her hair had continued the same *blonde ardent*, with a touch more perhaps of the vermilion in it. If her personal appearance cannot be mentioned in favourable terms, her moral qualifications can be spoken of, without flattery or sarcasm, as most honourable. Unflinching honesty, indefatigable industry, amiability, and patience—the latter qualification probably due to her apprenticeship as a lodging-house drudge—were attributes justly her due. To these may be added another—a most affectionate heart. It may be inquired how this latter qualification was known, and in what manner she had had an opportunity of showing it. The question is easily answered: when our narrative reopens, the reader finds Jemima no longer a lodging-house servant, but a respectable married woman, living in good lodgings of her own in Pye Street.

From the affection we bear Jemima, we will offer to the reader, though perhaps we run the danger of a charge

of indiscretion, a short sketch of her first and only love affair, because, for the future, she will only appear in these pages as the dutiful and affectionate wife. Jemima's love germinated in the purest of all affections, the interest she took in a poor, helpless, and, to her view of the question, an ill-used lad. After, through her patronage, she had obtained for James the appointment at the poulterer's, she watched his progress with intense interest, and, in a short time, with equal satisfaction. Nothing could be desired in his behaviour, and her mind was soon at ease on that point. Every Sunday evening James spent with Jemima, but he no longer called her aunt, nor did she seem displeased at his want of respect; and she generally contrived, under the excuse of going to chapel, to convoy him home. As time passed on, James began to take more interest in his dress, and occasionally drop hints of the admiration he was held in by certain servants at the houses he had to call at for orders, and other remarks, which considerably excited Jemima's anxiety. She truly and rightly considered the best companion for a young man was a good and industrious wife, but how to find one for James, occupied as she was the whole of the day, was a problem which at first sight seemed difficult indeed for her to solve. By degrees, however, the difficulty began to diminish. This was owing, at first, to Jemima's hearing that a widow that lodged in her house was going to be married to a young man twenty years her junior. The widow was, at the same time, a remarkably nice woman, as Jemima well knew, it being her duty to wait on her, and she had

already given Jemima several articles of dress which shortly she would no longer require. The young man she was going to be married to was also much to be admired. He was a curate, and a very religious young man, and that in itself was a guarantee that there was no impropriety in a match of the kind.

Jemima, without any particular leading to the subject, found herself one night, on retiring to her couch, calculating the difference between her age and James's, and the age of the curate and the widow. She was singularly struck at the small disparity which existed between her own and that of James, as compared with the other couple's. It has already been shown that there was no impropriety in the widow's marriage, and that was almost a proof to her that a union with James would not only be without blame, but, very probably, commendable as well. Then, shocked at the turn her thoughts were taking, she turned them to the boots she had to clean the next morning, but in spite of herself they returned to their original train, and at the same time did not appear so shocking as at first. To make a long story short, by reflecting over the subject all the objectionable phases it at first presented vanished, and she resolved to bestow on James, in her own person, a loving, dutiful, and obedient wife.

Of their courtship there is no record, so it is impossible to say how it was carried on or who made the offer; probably Jemima herself. Suffice it to say, their union was a very happy one, and they were perfectly well matched, all things considered. If Jemima was con-

siderably taller than her husband, she compensated in some way for his stunted growth ; and as he had tacitly determined on considering Jemima a year or two younger than she really was, and as Jemima on her side had resolved on considering James to be in mind as well as appearance at least three years older than men at his time of life generally are, there was no great disparity between them after all.

The direct thread of our narrative recommences when the average ages of the couple were about twenty-eight years. They had enjoyed several years of married life without anything to mar their happiness, with the exception of their having no family. Their worldly prospects were of the most satisfactory description. James received good wages, and Jemima assisted their joint exchequer by her earnings as a charwoman. Her emolument in this occupation was really considerable, and she was in constant work. Indeed, in a country so celebrated as England is for fostering true talent, it would have been hard indeed if a charwoman, possessing so much conscientious industry as she did, combined with such an extraordinary reach of arm in scrubbing, had not secured for herself a considerable amount of patronage. Another circumstance also contributed to raise their worldly means far above those of others in their position in life. Both Mr. Duke and his wife were rigid teetotallers. This, combined with strict economy in all things but one, had allowed them to put aside a considerable sum of money in the savings bank. The exception in the general economy of their housekeeping alluded to

was house-rent. In this Mrs. Duke was somewhat fastidious, and she had chosen for their domicile a parlour and bedroom on a ground-floor in New Pye Street, Westminster. The reader is specially requested to note that it was in New Pye Street, there being a new and an old Pye Street in Westminster, and the latter of much inferior respectability to the former, and, indeed, as Mrs. Duke frequently justly expressed herself, it was little better than Duck Lane itself.

But uninterrupted happiness is not the lot of mortal life, and Mr. and Mrs. Duke were no exceptions to the general rule. James one day being occupied in preparing a hare (rather in a high condition) for the spit, wounded his left hand with a skewer so seriously that he fainted from the loss of blood it occasioned. As soon as consciousness had returned, his employers told him he had better go home and get his wife to nurse him. This he did, and for some days James remained away from business. At last his hand seemed sufficiently recovered from the wound it had received to allow him to return to his work. He had calculated, however, upon most imperfect data, and here we may acknowledge that an excusable feeling on the part of his wife had contributed to a certain extent to the conclusion he had arrived at. Mrs. Duke, who was proud of paying every one his due, and receiving favours from none, considered the hospital as low and the dispensary as worse. Instead of availing herself of either of these institutions, where her husband's wound would have been scientifically treated, she went with James to a druggist's, who, without know-

ing the depth of the wound, attempted to heal it. Superficially he succeeded, but a considerable portion of the poison remained in the wound, and after two or three days' attendance at his employment, our hero was again obliged to leave and put himself under the guardianship of his wife. Mrs. Duke's sense of gentility now gave way to the urgencies of the occasion, and she accompanied her husband to the hospital. Here affairs were found to be far worse than they had anticipated, and that a considerable amount of inflammation not only extended up the arm, but there was also an alarming swelling of the glands beneath it. Proper applications and remedies were ordered, and James went back to his home with the uncomfortable assurance that it would be weeks, if not months, before he would be fully able to resume his usual occupation.

If Jemima had been loved and admired by her husband before his accident, those feelings increased, now he was thrown on a bed of sickness, to a height little short of adoration. Night and day she was incessantly by his side, nursing him with the most affectionate care. To such an extent had his malady increased, that the hospital surgeon requested he should become an in-patient, but Jemima pleaded so anxiously that he should be allowed to remain at home under her care, that the surgeon gave way. Nay, more, he was so struck with the urgent manner in which Jemima had addressed him, so different from what he might have expected from her gaunt masculine appearance and tone, that, contrary to all rule, he kindly promised he would visit the invalid

in his own home. He furthermore appointed a two-year student to call every day to dress the wound in the arm-pit, which was now broken and suppurating, so that the invalid should have no want of skill in attendance.

For some time the student continued assiduously to attend to James, but he had also his classes and lectures to attend, and he therefore instructed Mrs. Duke in the manner of dressing the wound and applying the bandages, which she soon did in a proper and scientific manner.

From the great suppuration from the wound, James's strength began to sink most alarmingly, and the better to enable him to support this strain on his constitution his medical attendant ordered him to take daily a certain quantity of brandy. At the commencement the teetotal principles of Mr. Duke were so strong within him, that he openly mutinied against the authority of the doctor, and that in so unqualified a manner that the latter threatened to leave him to his fate ; and it was only on the entreaties of Jemima, who became bail for her husband's better behaviour, that he changed his resolve. Although the little man was proof against the authority of the doctor, he succumbed to that of his wife ; and though with much repugnance and many grimaces he commenced taking the brandy which had been prescribed for him, by degrees his dislike to his medicine began to give way, and as the surgeon found it benefited his patient's constitution, he submitted to an increase of the dose without opposition. Gradually he even began to like the taste of it, although he concealed the fact both

from Jemima and the doctor. He now contented himself with making a hideous face each time he swallowed it, thereby attempting to calm his conscience by the hypocrisy he practised—how far he succeeded, he alone knew.

A strong change for the better had now taken place in his ailments, still the suppuration continued, and still the stimulant was swallowed. He got better and better, till at last he was almost convalescent. Jemima, however, who had attended him all through his illness with the greatest care and attention, now began to feel that the unremitting attendance she had given to her husband had not passed without its effects upon herself. An inflammation began to show itself in the right eye, which she treated at first as of little consequence, but which in a few days manifested very serious symptoms. From what source the inflammation originated it is impossible to say: probably she had inoculated herself with some of the virus from her husband's wound. As James got better, the health of his wife got worse, till at last the inflammation only subsided with the loss of the sight of her eye, leaving on her already ungainly face the trace of a deep scar as well.

When both were restored to health, the grief of Mr. Duke for the loss of his wife's eye was overwhelming, but there was no help for it; the mischief was done. Although the loss of this particular charm was a great detriment to her face—a stern fact he was obliged to acknowledge—it in no way diminished his admiration and love for his wife. Considering the kindness he had

received from her while on a bed of sickness, it would, indeed, have been ungrateful on his part had his love decreased; but that his admiration for her personal appearance, of which he had always been proud—justly or unjustly, according to the taste of the reader—should have increased, certainly did him credit. He now resumed his duties at the house of business, but, to his great dismay, he found his favourite place at the counter had been assigned to another assistant, who had contrived to make himself much liked. This irritated our hero immensely, he being naturally of a jealous disposition, and some very strong language passed between them on the subject, in which, with great grief we must add, the foreman adjudged Duke to be in the wrong, and likewise informed him that if he expected to be continued in the house he must for the future exhibit a more amiable temper. James somewhat sulkily gave way, and the matter dropped, leaving, however, a rather unfavourable opinion of his temper on the mind of the new hand.

Can a man touch pitch and not be defiled?—can a man drink brandy for any length of time and not acquire a liking for it? James, unfortunately, during his illness had acquired a taste for strong drink, which commenced, however, with considerable moderation. One day, in conversation with a man who had formerly been acquainted with Jemima, Duke mentioned the sad loss of her eye, and how much he regretted the circumstance, and remarked that he would willingly give one of his own, and a finger besides, if he could by any

means get it restored. The man, who was an habitual tippler, replied, "I know what I should do if I were you; I should get drunk every night, and then I should see double." "How would that help me?" said James. "Why, if you saw double, you would see two eyes instead of one, wouldn't you?" Here the fellow, to Duke's great disgust, burst into a hearty laugh at his own wit, and the conversation terminated.

Although our hero paid not the slightest attention to the absurd remark, it did not escape from his memory.

A change somewhat for the worse now took place in the habits and manners of Mr. and Mrs. Duke. Instead of, as formerly, contenting themselves with a quiet cup of tea in the evening, they now sought comfort in a glass of gin and water, and strict truth obliges us to state that Mrs. Duke was as fond of it as her husband. But the habit of drinking is hardly one likely to remain at a settled point, and the quantity which sufficed at the commencement to cause an exhilaration of spirits was soon unfelt, and a further amount had to be swallowed to keep up the pleasing effect. One cold Saturday night, after they had been indulging at home to a considerable extent, Mrs. Duke remembered that they wanted something for the Sunday's dinner, and she proposed walking as far as the market in the Broadway, to procure it. To this her husband strongly objected. He was not only courageous in his cups, but immensely gallant as well. He was then as perfectly chivalrous as Don Quixote, and as ridiculous too. He told his wife

that he felt hurt at her proposition to tempt alone the terrors and dangers of the Broadway, when she must be aware how much it would pain him to know she was employed in such a manner, and he remaining at his ease at home. No, he would go in her stead. To this Jemima mildly objected, saying that, willing as she knew he was to execute the commission himself, he might be imposed upon in the transaction ; for although an excellent judge of poultry, in the articles of meat, fish, or vegetables, he was by no means so expert. This amicable dispute at last ended by James's allowing his wife to make the purchases, while he accompanied her as her bodyguard. No sooner was the resolution arrived at than it was acted upon. Mrs. Duke put on her bonnet and shawl, and James, in a semi-jaunty, rakish manner, threw his hat on his head, and they started off together.

The night was clear and cold, the streets were less crowded than they had been, as the hour was late, still there were many people about. The coolness of the atmosphere acted somewhat prejudicially on the couple. They had, it must be admitted with sorrow, taken considerably more than nature required to do them good, and the fresh breeze striking on their faces increased the ill effect. It must even be admitted that the gait of Mrs. Duke was, in the beginning, somewhat uncertain, though not sufficiently so to attract the notice of the passers by ; and even this went off. Duke's gait, on the contrary, had something almost imposing in it. The knowledge that he was on duty to protect the beloved

wife of his bosom, added a dignity to his march that made it more like that of the drum-major than the simple drummer's. They arrived at the Broadway, and commenced their purchases; but the delay they had made was now apparent; all the best articles were sold, and the remainder hardly suited Mrs. Duke's taste, who was rather fastidious on the subject of housekeeping than otherwise. With considerable difficulty, at last they were suited, and their various purchases were deposited in a little basket Mrs. Duke carried on her arm. It was much past ten o'clock before their marketing was completed and the couple thought of returning. Presently Duke noticed his wife press her hand on her bosom, as if in pain. He inquired anxiously the cause, and received for answer that she did not feel very well, and that she feared she had received a chill from the night air, and that it had settled on her chest. Her reply struck her husband with terror; from what cause it is impossible to say, for a heartier-looking woman it would have been difficult to meet. Duke always entertained the supposition that his wife had weak lungs. He immediately proposed they should enter a public-house which was near, and that she should take something to keep out the cold. After a proper degree of hesitation, Jemima consented, and the couple entered the public-house together. The place was crowded, and Duke recognized in it more than one of his acquaintances. A restorative was called for, for Mrs. Duke, which, however, she refused to take, unless her husband accompanied her. Duke's gallantry was not proof against the invi-

tation, and the affectionate couple drank to each other's health. Afterwards James entered into communication with some of his acquaintances, and introduced his wife. Of course, the honour was fully appreciated by the persons who had acquired the happiness of possessing Mrs. Duke's acquaintanceship, and one, in a fit of gallantry, insisted on standing treat, which was accepted; and then, as Duke had a great aversion to receiving an obligation without returning it, he insisted on treating the whole party in his turn, who were too courteous to refuse his invitation, and shortly afterwards Duke and his wife left the house.

We now come to a truly painful episode in our narrative. When in the cold air, the spirits they had taken began to act most prejudicially on the intellects of both husband and wife, and on the gait of Mrs. Duke in particular: in fact, she began to find locomotion exceedingly difficult. Her husband, fortunately, did not perceive it; his admiration for his wife at the moment had risen to such a point that it would have been difficult indeed for him to have found a single blemish in her. She stood still for a moment, and Duke regarded her with admiration. Suddenly the advice given him by his tippling friend, that if he drank he would see double, and the loss of his wife's eye would be no longer apparent to him, flashed across his mind. It was true. He had been in her company the whole of their walk, he had frequently gazed at her with affection in the public-house, but the defect had been lost upon him. He had never in his life felt so happy as at that moment, and

he expressed his feelings to her in terms of strong admiration.

"Oh, no," she replied, with simpering modesty, "you only say that to flatter me, I know."

"Upon my honour it's true; a handsomer woman I don't know."

"I am getting quite old," she remarked, in a deprecatory tone.

"No, you are not, and I ought to know; I tell you, you are a handsome woman. A good many come to our shop, so I ought to know what a handsome woman is. Give me a kiss."

"Not now," she said, her tipsiness not being sufficient to blind her to the impropriety of an act of the kind; "not here in the streets."

"I say I will have one," said James, in a tone that admitted of no refusal, and immediately attempted to place his arms round his wife's neck.

"Here's the police," said a butcher's boy, who was passing.

Mr. Duke immediately released his wife from his embrace.

"I tell you what it is, young fellow," he said, with great dignity of manner, "you'd better be off, or you'll get yourself into trouble." He again attempted to embrace his wife.

"Police!" shouted the butcher's boy.

Dick turned round, and made a step or two towards the culprit. "Now take my advice, young fellow," he said; "if you don't leave me alone, you'll get the worst of

it, I can tell you. I won't stand any more of your impertinence. Now, be off."

"I shall not be off," said the butcher's boy; "you ought to be ashamed of yourself, putting such ideas into people's heads."

"Now take care," said Duke, turning his head partially round; "I give you fair warning."

"Oh, I'm in no hurry, sir," said the boy; "I'll wait till you're done for my turn."

Duke now turned round on his tormentor, his passion being still further aroused by the loud laugh of the bystanders, and ran after the boy.

"Oh, I beg your pardon," said another street-boy, "he wasn't going to do it; it was only his fun; she's a good deal too old and ugly for that."

Duke's anger at the butcher-boy's behaviour vanished; he flew after his new tormentor, who dodged about in a manner which made it impossible to catch him, and at last ran away. Duke followed him into another street, and had nearly caught him in his grasp, when the butcher's boy made his appearance.

"Oh, please sir," he said, "there's a policeman's got his arm round your lady's waist, and he's precious sweet upon her, I can tell you. You'd better come back and stop him."

Duke was now fairly aghast. He knew human audacity could go great lengths, but, at the same time, it had its limits, and the act spoken of by the boy seemed to surpass them immensely. He reflected for a moment, during which the other boy made his escape, crying out

at the same time at the top of his voice, "He's afraid of the policeman."

This taunt completely settled the question in Duke's mind, and he immediately returned, when, to his intense horror, he found the information true, at any rate, as to the policeman's arm being round Jemima's waist. His indignation now knew no bounds, and pushing violently through the crowd that had collected round her, he rushed at the policeman, and without a word struck him a violent blow on the face. The policeman, partially stunned by the blow, and oppressed by the weight of Jemima, who had nearly fainted from fright or from some other cause when her husband had left her, fell heavily on the ground, Jemima falling on him. Duke immediately attempted to raise his wife, but was prevented. Some one had seized him by the arm with so strong a grasp that it felt more like a blacksmith's vice than anything else. He raised his head for a moment, and found his assailant was another policeman, who now took him into custody for the assault upon his brother officer. Duke made a violent though ineffective resistance, not only assaulting the officer, but doing considerable damage to his clothes as well. In the mean time the bystanders had raised Jemima, who, seeing the danger her husband was in, collected her scattered senses sufficiently to compass the occasion, and earnestly pleaded that the policeman would let him go; but his brother constable's plight, as well as his own, had extinguished every spark of pity in his breast, and the two dragged Duke off to the station, utterly regard-

less of Jemima's tears and entreaties. When they had arrived, the charge was entered on the charge-sheet, and Duke, for the first time in his life, found himself in a police cell. Jemima earnestly begged that he might be released, but without avail. So clamorous was she, that the sergeant at last threatened to lock her up as well, if she did not go away, and he received for a reply that it was just what she wanted ; but on its being explained to her that she would not have the satisfaction of being locked up with her husband, she changed her mind, and, after explicitly stating her opinion that the whole police force were simply human tigers, or worse, she left the station, and proceeded homewards to her solitary couch.

CHAPTER VII.

TROUBLOUS TIMES.

 OR some hours after his incarceration Mr. Duke's passion was so great, and his annoyance at the indignity he was suffering was so complete, as to preclude anything like reason in his thoughts. When, however, daylight began to break, he became somewhat more composed, but still his anger at the behaviour of the police was excessive. He at first occupied himself by assailing them with all the threats he had at his command, but at last he got somewhat fatigued, and he then contented himself with firing at them occasional volleys. As he became more sober, these by degrees assumed some coherence. At last he ejaculated, "They are a set of villains from one end of the force to the other, and a disgrace to the name of Englishmen."

"You are right," said a voice in the corner of the cell, "you are right, they are a disgrace to the name of Englishmen, and that has always been my opinion."

Mr. Duke was somewhat startled at finding he had a companion, and he looked towards the corner of the cell from which the voice proceeded, but the darkness incapacitated him from seeing his fellow-sufferer.

"You did not know I was here, did you?" continued the voice. "I was well aware that you were with me, though, and I have been listening all the night to your remarks, and I perfectly agree with them; they are just my own in every way."

A slight doubt crossed Mr. Duke's mind whether he ought to be particularly satisfied that his thoughts and words had been subject during the whole of the night to the criticism of a stranger. As sobriety increased in him, the more reason he had to believe that he might have made use of many expressions which had been better unsaid.

"I dare say," he said, "you may think I have talked a good deal of nonsense, but if you only knew how I've been treated, you would not think it at all strange."

"If it is against the police, as I judge it is, you have said nothing that was not natural, at least, to my way of thinking. What are you in for?"

"Because I defended my wife from the insults of a policeman."

"How did you do that?"

"I knocked him down."

"I say, though, that's dangerous work unless you can prove he deserved it. Mind, I don't say he did not, for I can believe anything that's bad of them; but the beaks, especially the Westminster ones, are precious hard on all assaults on the police, and I know those fellows will swear black's white, so I'd advise you to get up some witnesses to show how they insulted your wife, or you may get the worst of it, innocent as you are."

"As for witnesses," said Duke, "there's my wife, and I'm certain her oath is as good as any three policemen's."

"That I've no doubt of," said the other, "but you see neither of us will have to decide the matter, so I'd advise you to look up some others. In the first place, it is possible—mind, I do not say it is so—they may say you had been drinking, and then the magistrate will believe anything against you."

"Well, as for that," said Duke, "I had taken a drop, and that's a fact, but I knew well enough what I was about."

"I am not altogether sure," said the stranger, reflectively, "that that will assist you much in the matter. How was your wife?"

"As sober as you are," said Duke, somewhat indignantly.

"No offence," said the stranger, "no offence, but I think I heard one of those fellows that brought you in say she was not; but as I said before, they'll swear anything."

"She was never tipsy, or in any way given to drink in her life," said Duke.

"Well, if you can prove that, it will go a long way, certainly. I am glad to hear that, anyhow. How did the row begin?"

"Why," said Duke, somewhat sheepishly, "you see my wife is very delicate, and she felt very unwell from the cold, and so I just took her into the 'Joiners' Arms' to give her something warm, and as we came out again an impudent butcher's boy began mocking us."

"Did what you gave your wife do her much good?"

"No, not much," said Duke, "and she had great difficulty in walking from the pain in her chest."

"U'm. Yes. I thought it was that, but you see, unless you take care, those policemen, to get themselves out of a scrape, will swear it was not the pain in the chest which kept her from walking. Take my advice, and if your wife comes here to bring you your breakfast in the morning, tell her to get all the evidence she can to prove the policemen were in fault, or you'll come to grief, depend upon it."

Duke was silent for some minutes, and very unpleasant recollections came crowding together on his brain. Presently they assumed so distasteful an aspect that he determined to seek some other subject to dwell upon, so he asked his companion what he was locked up for.

"For the villany of the police. A friend of mine lent me three sovereigns, and a detective said he didn't."

"But what did your friend say about it?" inquired Duke. "He ought to have got you off."

"Well, the fact is, after he had lent me the money, I determined to treat him for his kindness, and he took a drop too much and could not give evidence at the moment."

"But when the case comes on he'll be sober then, so you'll be all right."

"Of course," said the stranger; but had Duke been as sharp as his new-found friend he would have detected a considerable amount of doubt in his tone.

The two prisoners now both became silent and drowsy,

and in this state they continued till about eight o'clock, when a gaoler opened the wicket of the door and told Duke his wife had come to see him. Duke immediately arose from the bench he had been stretched upon, and advanced to speak to Jemima. The interview was sorrowful enough. Jemima wept bitterly when she saw her husband's face at the wicket, and James on his side melted into tears at the sight of his wife's sorrow. After a little time they became more composed, and they began to talk over the defence he should make before the magistrate on the morrow. When they had concluded, things appeared to both husband and wife in so gloomy an aspect, that, to use their own phraseology, they were both downhearted about them. The only witness that could possibly come forward in Duke's favour was his wife, and she was obliged to acknowledge that from her delicate state of health at the moment she had been unable to give that attention to what was passing around her which would enable her to give very lucid evidence.

Before Jemima left she asked Duke what he would like for his breakfast. No sooner had she uttered the last word than the stranger, who from a feeling of delicacy had retired to the back of the cell during the previous conversation, now came forward and suggested that it had better be coffee, as that was generally in favour at the metropolitan police cells. As any kind of food at that moment would have appeared tasteless to Duke, he made no objection, but requested his wife to obtain some, and also bread and butter.

"Perhaps," said the stranger, "while you are about it, you would get some for me at the same time ; I will pay you to-morrow. As I told you, the police have three sovereigns of mine, and as they want to grab it all, they won't allow me to have a penny of it if they can help it ; but as I said before, I shall have it to-morrow."

Duke, who was rather taken with the stranger, made no objection to the proposition, and Mrs. Duke left on her errand. She also obtained them their dinner, as well as breakfast the next morning, for all of which she paid, expecting the stranger's portion of the money when he should receive his three sovereigns from the hand of the magistrate.

It would be useless taking up the reader's time with an account of the dreary manner in which Duke passed the next twenty-four hours in the police cell, with the prospect, at the termination, of paying a heavy fine, or of Jemima's solitary misery although at liberty. The interim will perhaps be better employed in introducing to the reader Mr. Meffy, the stranger whom Duke had found in the police cell, the more especially as he will for the future frequently appear in these pages. That Mr. Meffy was a native of the British Isles was certain, but from what portion of them he originally came was unknown. A like obscurity existed as to his parentage ; he had never been known to speak of either father or mother. In fact, there was a certain occult mystery over everything connected with the man. The few details of his life the author has been able to collect are extremely unsatisfactory, except so far as relates to the obscurity

hanging over him. The first record of him that can be proved to be correct is that he appeared for three seasons as an imp in the Victoria theatre pantomimes and other pieces requiring supernaturally bad, or positively diabolical, juvenile characters. He continued in this position till an enraged demon one night gave him so violent a kick that it sent him howling to the regions below with almost the velocity of lightning through an open trap-door. The result of this treatment was a dislocation of the ankle joint, from which accident, although the surgeon of the theatre's young man bathed it with a cooling lotion for more than a fortnight, he never recovered ; in fact, he remained lamed for life. His crippled state obliged him to leave the theatre, and a blank appears in his biography. Some years are lost. During this time, however, he contrived, by some means utterly incapable of explanation, to obtain a very decent education, which was afterwards greatly improved by the second occupation he was found to be employed in, that of a printer's devil in a newspaper office. In this position he continued for more than a year and a half, but as during the whole time he was employed on the newspaper gross irregularities were perpetually being committed by the other boys, in all of which he was strongly suspected to be a participator, though on no occasion was he actually detected, the idea at last entered the manager's head that if Meffy were dismissed things might go on better ; and the experiment was tried, and succeeded to admiration.

Another twelve months' interim takes place, of which

no account can be rendered, and he then appears as an office boy in an Old Bailey attorney's office. Here his education seems to have been completed. Before he left, or rather was turned out of, his situation, he had contrived to gain a very considerable insight into criminal law, and might probably have obtained, if fortune had favoured him, a considerable reputation in the practice of that branch of the legal profession, had not a certain simplicity occasionally mixed itself with his cunning, neutralising the confidence which ought to be placed in every member of the profession. So extraordinary, however, were some of these acts of simplicity, that his employers on more than one occasion suspected he was playing them false, and carrying information into the enemy's camp. Although a strict watch was set on him, on no single occasion was he ever detected in the slightest act of disloyalty. At the same time, more than one treasonable act was detected among the other subordinates, in which he was strongly suspected to have taken a part; indeed, so strong was the suspicion, that the firm acted on it as a fact, and Meffy was dismissed from his appointment.

Of the life Mr. Meffy led after having been dismissed from the solicitor's office, a good deal is known, though from its vagabond description it would be difficult to give an exact account of it. His whole career was characterised by suspicion hanging over him without (except in one or two cases too trifling to particularise) conviction following. On no occasion, however, was he ever suspected of committing or encouraging others to

commit any act of brutal violence. It cannot be for one moment supposed that any virtuous element in his nature deterred him from assisting in acts of the kind, but he seemed to be imbued with a higher and more intellectual genius for evil, and he held in contempt the idea of using brute force as long as cunning would answer his purpose as well—or better.

Occasionally Mr. Meffy's name had figured in the police reports, in transactions connected with ring-dropping, cheating at cards, skittle-sharpping, and other ingenuities of the same kind, but, by singularly good fortune or great cunning, he had hitherto invariably escaped punishment, either from a break-down in the evidence, or some defect in the law, although the police on all occasions, with a unanimity rarely met with among men, swore he was the constant associate of thieves and bad characters. These escapes, however, did not take the appearance of accident at all times. In most transactions of the kind in which the prosecutor complained of fraud, it was skilfully brought out on cross-examination that at the time the complainant met with his loss he was insensibly drunk, or very near it, and of course no worthy magistrate, and still fewer intelligent British juries (and Mr. Meffy on more than one occasion had enjoyed the privilege of a Briton's first birthright—trial by jury), would place any reliance on the oath of an intoxicated man.

It would appear at first sight that the etymology of Mr. Meffy's name is a matter of little importance, but that is hardly the case. We are told by no less an

authority than Shakespeare that "a rose by any other name would smell as sweet," still there is no doubt its particular odour would be better understood when it is spoken of by its proper name. Again, we are told on very good authority that there is a great deal in a name, and if the possible derivation of Mr. Meffy's be a correct one, it would singularly bear out the latter statement. It is supposed, but from what source cannot be ascertained, that the name of Meffy was not, as was originally imagined, a corruption of the word Murphy, but a contraction badly spelt of Mephistophiles. We do not pretend to say it was the case, but certainly Meffy's character had a considerable resemblance to that of the bad spirit raised by Goethe, and the power he held over Faust and Marguerite was scarcely more prejudicial, though vastly more poetical, than that exercised by Meffy over the fortunes of Duke and Jemima during the remainder of our narrative. During the time he was incarcerated with our hero, he completely succeeded in gaining not only his admiration, but his confidence ; for although he said but little particularly entitled to respect, not a word was uttered by him at which Duke's strict principles of integrity could take the slightest umbrage.

When the Monday morning's sun peeped into Duke's cell, it found him pale and haggard. He had had no rest during the night, and he feared greatly the result of his Saturday night's folly and rashness, far less from the heavy fine he expected would be levied on him, than the disgrace of a broil of the kind. He feared if an account

of the transaction should get into the newspapers, it might come to the ears of his employers, who were men of high respectability, and a severe lecture, if not dismissal, would be the result. Even Meffy seemed to be somewhat uneasy on his own account, but, like his companion, he was silent and thoughtful, nor did a word pass between them till Jemima brought Duke his breakfast, and then it was simply a request on his part that she would kindly repeat her good action of the day before, and bring him his coffee and bread and butter, which, at the desire of Duke, she complied with.

The time now arrived for the night charges to be heard. Fortunately for Duke, the station adjoined the police-court, so he was saved the misery of a ride in that opaque-looking van which is so frequently seen about the streets of the metropolis, bearing on it, for ornament, her Majesty's monogram. Jemima was the only witness in his favour. Unfortunately, on the side of the police were several, including, among others, the butcher's boy, who seemed perfectly delighted at the honour of being a witness in a British court of law. To poor Duke the minutes now seemed hours, but at last he was ushered into court and placed in the dock. The sensation came over him at the moment—true enough in itself—that he looked downcast and guilty, and, to avoid that appearance, he put on a forced air of swagger and bravado, which sat on him even less comfortably than his former bearing had done.

The policeman entered the witness-box, and the oath was administered to him; which he took in a perfectly

professional manner, and he then turned to identify Duke. Our hero quailed when he caught a full view of the man's face, for it bore on it, most unmistakably, a proof of Duke's strength of arm, in the shape of a fearful black eye. The evidence of the policeman was truthful enough. He described his finding Mrs. Duke in a falling condition, and he was trying to hold her up when her husband rushed through the crowd and dealt him, without the slightest provocation, a tremendous blow on the eye, which knocked him down. As soon as he could rise, he sprung his rattle, and, a brother policeman arriving, they succeeded, though with great difficulty, in taking the prisoner to the station, so furious was the resistance he made. Duke, on being asked by the magistrate whether he had any questions to ask the witness, replied that he had, and attempted to make the policeman admit that he was improperly holding Mrs. Duke round the waist at the time he struck the blow. This, however, the policeman positively denied, and the other constable was called, who fully corroborated the evidence of the former as to Mrs. Duke's condition. Two other witnesses were heard, as well as the butcher-boy, all of whose evidence went clearly to prove that Duke had acted with unjustifiable violence.

Duke was now called upon for his defence. He began by accusing the police of gross tyranny and violence, and again insisted that he should not have acted as he had done had he not seen the policeman taking most unwarrantable liberties with Jemima. He was asked if he had any witnesses, and he somewhat sheepishly replied that

he had only his wife. Jemima now entered the witness-box, and attempted, as far as possible, to corroborate her husband's statement ; but unfortunately, from her infirm state of health on the Saturday evening, which seemed to have had an extraordinary effect on her memory, her evidence was of the most confused and unsatisfactory description. One thing, however, she swore to most distinctly—that the policeman had called her by such names as she should be ashamed to repeat.

The magistrate inquired what names the policeman had called her.

Mrs. Duke, in reply, said she should be ashamed to repeat them.

"I should be exceedingly sorry," said the magistrate, "to oblige you to make use of any expressions painful to your delicacy ; still, if you wish me to take into consideration the provocation your husband received, I must know what they were."

Jemima attempted to speak, but the words would not leave her lips. She made a second attempt with no better success. "I really cannot utter them, your worship," she at length said.

"Then I cannot take them into account in your husband's favour ; at the same time, painful as they may be to you, I think you had better say them."

Mrs. Duke hesitated for a moment. She then cast a look of intense affection on her husband, and afterwards, turning to the magistrate, said in a scarcely audible whisper,—

"Carrots, your worship."

"And what else?" said the magistrate.

"Nothing that I can remember correctly," said Jemima, somewhat surprised that his worship did not consider the insult as to the colour of her hair to be a most outrageous one.

The magistrate then asked the policeman if he had made use of the disrespectful term alluded to, but he indignantly replied that it was entirely false, and appealed to the other witnesses that he spoke the truth. The magistrate then inquired of the butcher's boy whether he had heard the policeman make use of the offensive word alluded to. The butcher's boy, who with the greatest readiness would have sworn anything against the police he conscientiously could, stated that the constable had made no allusion to Mrs. Duke's personal appearance whatever. He acknowledged, however, that he had heard some one say, when she was on the point of falling, "Now stand up, carrots;" but it was not the policeman, that he was certain. He might further have said that he knew perfectly well who the culprit was, but he added nothing more to his evidence.

The magistrate now passed judgment on the case. He said it was seldom that a more unprovoked or outrageous assault was brought before him, and that it was made still worse by the line of defence which had been adopted—attempting to injure the character of the policeman without the slightest possible excuse. He should show his sense of the whole transaction by giving a proportionably severe punishment. He should sentence the prisoner, without the alternative of a fine, to

two months' imprisonment, with hard labour, in the House of Correction.

Mrs. Duke, when she heard and fully understood the severe sentence her husband had received, went into violent hysterics, and was borne by six men from the court, screaming violently, and her husband was removed, almost in a state of stupor, from the dock.

Mr. Meffy's case was next called on. He entered the court with a marked expression of virtuous innocence on his countenance, much calculated to raise a strong feeling in his favour with those who had not the honour of his acquaintance. The complainant, a weather-beaten old sailor, then got into the witness-box. His evidence was very confused and unsatisfactory. He remembered coming to the west end of the town to look at the different sights, and while admiring the statue of the Duke of Wellington, on the arch at Hyde Park Corner, the prisoner came up to him and asked him if he could get his brother a ship. He had, he said, been loafing about town for some time, at a great expense to him (the prisoner), and now he thought it was high time he should go to sea again. The prosecutor thought so too, and said that if his brother was a smart lad he had no doubt the captain of his own coal brig would willingly take him. The prisoner seemed delighted with the news—so much so, that he then and there insisted on treating the old sailor to something to drink. After a little proper hesitation, the prosecutor accepted the proffered hospitality, and they went from one public-house to another till, at last, he felt very giddy and stupid, which ended by his

falling fast asleep in a tap-room ; and when he awoke he found he had gained a severe headache, but had lost a round tobacco-box containing three sovereigns, and its place in his pocket was filled by a Britannia metal shaving-box, about the same size as the tobacco-box, containing nothing at all.

The prisoner was asked if he wished to put any question to the witness. Mr. Meffy, for a moment, looked sorrowfully at the prosecutor ; then, heaving a deep sigh, said he would rather not put any questions to him.

The next witness called was a police-constable, who deposed that on Saturday afternoon he was on duty in plain clothes on Constitution Hill, and he noticed the prisoner, who was well known to him. Here the prisoner gave such a tremendous start of virtuous indignation that the gaoler was obliged to request he would keep quiet, and the magistrate assured him he should have full opportunity of answering the policeman's statement at the proper time. The policeman then continued his evidence. He stated that he had followed the prosecutor and the prisoner to different public-houses in Westminster, but he could discover nothing in the behaviour of Mr. Meffy which would have justified his interference till they entered the "Coopers' Arms," when he told the barman to watch the prisoner, which he did. Presently he informed him he saw the prosecutor take from his pocket a metal tobacco-box to help himself to a quid therefrom, when the prisoner noticed the gold, and told him that he ought to take great care of his money, as

there were bad characters about, and he might be robbed of it. The barman then saw Mr. Meffy fumbling with the prosecutor's pocket, as if assisting him to put something into it, as the latter appeared too tipsy to do it easily himself. The policeman immediately went to apprehend the prisoner, but he had contrived to escape by a back door. He was, however, instantly followed, and, in consequence of his lameness, soon overtaken. When brought to the station-house he was searched, and the three sovereigns found upon him, but no tobacco-box.

The magistrate inquired if Mr. Meffy had any question to ask the witness, but received in return a somewhat indignant negative.

Mr. Meffy, on being called upon for his defence, justly said that he found himself in a most unpleasant position. He was obliged, by a great moral duty he owed to himself, to dispute the statement of the prosecutor, for whom, in every other relation in life, he entertained the highest respect. It went to his heart, he said, to see a man, who had probably fought and bled for his country, make himself the agent of a despotic and unscrupulous police. The facts of the case were simply as follows:—He did address, as stated by the policeman, the prosecutor on Constitution Hill. He did ask him to assist him in rescuing a younger brother from the sin of idleness. He did, in the joy of his heart, on hearing that the prosecutor would help him, offer him a glass of grog. He did, but at the request of the prosecutor, go into other public-houses for the purpose of drinking; but when at the “Coopers' Arms,” if the barman had listened more atten-

tively to the conversation, and truly reported it, instead of contenting himself by peeping through a hole in the blinds, and catching a word here and there, the affair would have worn a very different aspect. Painful as it was to his feelings, he would candidly inform his worship of the conversation which had taken place between him and the prosecutor. He first told the gallant veteran that the expenses he had been put to in consequence of the extravagant behaviour of his only brother had reduced him almost to his last shilling. "You are very much to be pitied," said the prosecutor, "and if you will not be offended at my offer, and three sovereigns would be of any use to you, I would willingly lend them to you." "I told him I was most grateful to him for the feeling he showed on the occasion, but I would not think of accepting his offer without leaving some security in his possession for the repayment of the loan with interest. I would, I said, place in his hands a pledge of but small intrinsic value in the eyes of the world, but above all price in my estimation—a shaving-box, which had been given me as a keepsake by my poor mother on her death-bed." (Here the magistrate inquired where the prisoner's deceased mother lived when in the flesh, but the question aroused such painful feelings in the breast of Mr. Meffy, that he was unable to answer it; after two or three vain attempts he continued his defence.) He stated that he considered a pledge of the kind more than sufficient for the sum advanced, "and he kindly lent me the money. Your worship will, I am sure, easily perceive that the fact of my leaving a pledge

at all deprives the transaction, on my part, of the slightest dishonest aspect, and, in fact, places it altogether without the pale of the criminal law."

"I am not so certain on that point," said the magistrate; "you have not explained why you took the tobacco-box, which was about the same size. The prosecutor accuses you of substituting the one for the other."

"But I am sure your worship cannot think I was guilty of taking the tobacco-box. You have only the prosecutor's word for it; and, as you heard, he was quite drunk at the time."

"And at the time you say he lent you the money?"

Mr. Meffy* appeared somewhat puzzled for an answer, but attempted to conceal his embarrassment by wearing an extraordinarily virtuous expression of countenance.

"You cannot imagine," continued his worship, "that I place a word of reliance on your defence. You evidently made that old man intoxicated for the purpose of plundering him. You took his tobacco-box, which contained his money, and put the shaving-box in his pocket instead, so that he might not feel his loss till you had time to escape. When you ran off you contrived to make away with the tobacco-box, and I shall punish you for the robbery. Is anything known of this man?"

Here every policeman in court, with a spontaneity and unanimity only to be equalled by an opera chorus, testified that they had known him for years as an associate of thieves and bad characters; and although they were aware that he had never been convicted, it was by his cunning

in placing the blame on some one else that he had contrived to escape.

His worship then sentenced Mr. Meffy to two months' imprisonment, with hard labour, and ordered the money to be returned to the sailor.

In the mean time Mrs. Duke had been waiting in the yard of the station-house in the hope of again seeing her husband, if but for a moment, when he should enter the van. She wept incessantly, and really excited great commiseration in the minds of all that saw her but one, and that was the butcher's boy. When he passed her and saw her weeping, he set up the most dismal howl, as if overwhelmed with sorrow. Poor Jemima, hearing the noise, raised her head and recognised her tormentor.

"Ah, you wicked boy!" she exclaimed, "I wouldn't be your mother for any money."

"No, ma'am, I'm sure you wouldn't," he stammered out, pretending to sob at the time. "I'm sure you wouldn't; you're too much of a lady for that."

"See what you have done by your wickedness; you'll come to no good, you may depend on it."

"I am sure, ma'am, I'm very sorry."

"You ought to be, if you've any good in you."

"I am indeed, ma'am; look at my face and see how sorry I am."

"I hope your face speaks the truth, then," said Jemima:

"It does indeed, ma'am; I wouldn't deceive you, and I look just the same all over."

Jemima's anger was now fairly kindled, and she made

towards her tormentor, but a policeman put a stop to the scene by politely taking the young gentleman by the collar and turning him into the street.

After waiting till the van called for the prisoners, and pressing her husband's hand for a moment as he passed by her, Jemima returned sorrowing and almost broken-hearted to her home.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE HERO IN AN OFFICIAL CAPACITY.



THE acquaintance which had been formed by Duke and Meffy in the station cells was renewed in the prison van, and they agreed to meet when the term of their imprisonment had expired ; indeed, Meffy asked Duke for his address, that he might call and pay him the money for the breakfasts which had been furnished by Jemima. The arrival of the van at the prison gates put an end to their conversation, nor had they an opportunity of renewing it till the term of their imprisonment had expired.

We will not attempt to describe the meeting between James and Jemima when the former was released from his punishment ; suffice it to say the affection of each for the other seemed rather to have been increased by the separation than diminished. He remained with her the whole day, and the next he presented himself, with a somewhat sheepish look, at the house of business. He remained but a short time in it, for the report of the assault on the policeman had been read in one of the Sunday papers by the new comer, who had usurped James's place at the counter, and he immediately took good care that the whole affair should come

under the notice of the master of the shop. He, being a just man, determined to make further inquiries into the matter before deciding what course he should adopt in his behaviour to Duke, and sent a person whom he could trust to obtain for him the whole particulars of the case. The person employed on this important mission did his duty faithfully and without any prejudice against Duke, but the more inquiry he made into the affair the worse it appeared; and the result was, that James Duke had hardly made his appearance in the house of business before he was ordered to leave it, and never to set his foot in it again.

Duke sorrowfully returned to his wife, and indeed so hurt was he with the reception he had met with, that he had not the courage that day to make inquiries in any other establishment for employment, and his wife seeing his depressed condition advised him to remain quietly at home till the morrow.

As they were seated that same evening at their tea, they heard a voice inquiring of a child who lodged in the house if Mr. Duke resided in it. The question was answered in the affirmative, and Duke went to the door, and recognised in the visitor Mr. Meffy. He was immediately invited to enter, and being but little troubled with bashfulness, he readily accepted the invitation. Indeed, he had come, he said, on purpose to pay the debt he owed to Mrs. Duke, and to express his gratitude for the kindness she had shown him. Duke received him warmly, for he had conceived a strong feeling of liking for the fellow, and Jemima, though far

colder in her manner, behaved to him civilly enough. She took the trifle he owed her very graciously, and asked him if he would not take a cup of tea, which Mr. Meffy immediately accepted. Neither Duke nor Meffy made one word of allusion to their incarceration, although they remained together the whole evening. Duke's hospitality was not confined to a cup of tea, and as Mr. Meffy appeared over his gin and water to be a most intelligent fellow, the good feeling of his host and hostess towards him increased the longer he stopped. Mr. Meffy entered on many subjects of conversation, and with great tact drew from his entertainers that they had an account at the savings bank ; indeed, it must be frankly admitted that Jemima especially was somewhat ostentatious when speaking on the subject of their worldly possessions. The fact of their having money in reserve was most grateful to the feelings of Mr. Meffy, and he entered largely on the subject of financial investments of different descriptions. He told them it was his intention to start a benefit club, but he wanted to find some respectable, honest man who would act as treasurer. He had, he said, plenty of members to join it, but the great difficulty was, in an association of the kind, to find a responsible person in whose hands the money of the association might be placed without fear of loss. He intended to secure the post of secretary for himself, although the emoluments would be of the most trifling description. Chairman or treasurer, although the fees would be greater than the pay of the secretary, he would not be. He was a poor man, and

he was not ashamed to say it, and, as he said before, the chairman or treasurer ought to have some money of his own. Duke inquired what capital the chairman ought to have, and Mr. Meffy said that unless that officer was a person of great ability, in which case less would suffice, he ought not to possess less than twenty pounds. Jemima looked at Duke in a significant manner—they had fully twenty-five invested in the savings bank. Duke then asked what the money would be required for, and what were to be the profits of the chairman. He found that the former was to be a security for the funds lodged in the chairman's hands, which, of course, would be but a mere matter of form, as he would only have to be answerable for the cash placed with him; and the emolument would be derived from the fees on attendance, and Mr. Meffy estimated that, in a short time, they would require one meeting a week, and the chairman's fee at each meeting should be half-a-crown, besides participating in the profits, which would, of course, be very considerable. Duke and his wife had listened with great attention to every word which had fallen from Mr. Meffy's lips, and on his part he was fully aware of the impression he had made. He left them at a late hour in the evening, promising to call on them again as soon as his plans for the benefit club were fully matured.

The next morning Duke went the round of the different West-end shops, seeking for employment, but when asked for his reference, he avoided answering the question, being terrified at the idea of the inquiry resulting in the intelligence that he was a drunkard and a

brawler, and that he had just been released after a two months' imprisonment for a brutal and unprovoked assault on the police. The next day passed with no better result, and when Duke presented himself to his wife in the evening, the expression of his countenance was so sad that she abstained from asking him any particulars of his day's labour, from the fear of increasing his annoyance. In the evening, Jemima, with much sympathy in her tone and manner, told him she perceived he was worried and tired, and proposed that he should take a glass of something warm to console himself. Duke accepted the offer willingly enough, and, in a short time, the couple were seen enjoying themselves over a strong tumbler of hot gin and water. Their spirits rose in proportion to the quantity they swallowed, and Duke at last got talkative. He told Jemima that he was tired of the drudgery of a poulterer's life, and that if he could see his way to make a living in any other line of business, he should certainly adopt it. He felt he was intended for something superior to drawing and trussing fowls all day, and he began to think he did both himself and Jemima an injustice in continuing longer in so degraded a position. Mrs. Duke, although hardly agreeing in all Duke said, was still of opinion that he was evidently intended for a superior position in life to the one he was in; and while debating this point with her husband, a tap was heard at their room door, and immediately afterwards Mr. Meffy entered. The couple expressed considerable pleasure at seeing him, especially Duke, and he was asked to partake of the gin and water; an

invitation, it is hardly necessary to say, he immediately accepted. In the course of the evening, Duke asked Mr. Meffy what progress he was making with his benefit club. Meffy replied that he was going on most successfully in all things but one. He had already several good men and true who were willing to join it, and who were just the fellows, not only to pay up their subscriptions, but to find plenty of other members to join the club as well. The point that still puzzled him was the choice of a chairman and treasurer, who would, at the same time, act as guarantee for his (Mr. Meffy's) integrity, which, after all, as he said before, was a mere matter of form, as the funds would be regularly handed over to the treasurer, and he must be a fool indeed if he couldn't take care of them. He had found the landlord of a public-house in the Borough, who would let them have a room for nothing, on the condition that twopence was to be spent at the bar, in addition to the fines for non-attendance. "Of course," said Mr. Meffy, "I should have no difficulty in finding a chairman; hundreds would be glad to act for me; but I am very particular what sort of man he is. You do not know any one of your friends who would like it?"

Duke did not know anybody, he said; but, from the expression of his face, Mr. Meffy easily divined that he did, and that the individual thought of was himself.

"Well, if you do not know any of your friends who would do, why don't you be chairman yourself? I am sure, from what I know of you, we should get on very well together."

"Oh," said Duke, "I should be very glad, but you see I don't understand the business; if I did, I shouldn't object for a moment."

"Oh, as to the business, that is to say, of the chairman, that's easy enough. You have to sit in a chair every night of meeting, from the beginning to the end; take the money while I enter it in the book; see that the fines are spent in drink, for the benefit of the house; be convivial, and when the time comes for the meeting to dissolve, pocket your half-crown, and go home to your wife happy and contented."

"But," said Mrs. Duke, "is that all the chairman has to do?"

"All, I assure you. In the greatest public companies it's just the same; if they don't drink for the benefit of the house, they get a precious sight larger fees. And you must remember that many a man, whose wife is now rolling about town in silks and satins, began life as chairman of a benefit club, or not so good."

If any doubt had existed in the mind of Jemima as to the advisability of her husband's becoming chairman of the benefit society, the last remark of Mr. Meffy's completely dispelled it. She entered now warmly into the discussion, and Duke, seeing his wife so much interested in the matter, agreed to accept the appointment. The remainder of the evening was spent in talking over the various arrangements to be made, and discussing the rules which would be proposed, so that all parties should be secured against risk. True it is many of the points brought forward by Meffy were objected to, such as that

Duke should be security to the landlord for the expenses incurred in the public-house in which their meetings were to be held, and on other subjects hardly worth dwelling upon; but Meffy so clearly proved to him that all these apparent dangers were simply matters of form, from which he would be secured by holding, as treasurer, the funds of the society in his own hands, that at last Duke was perfectly satisfied; and before Meffy took his departure it was arranged that he should call for Duke the next afternoon, and then they should go over to the Borough, and Duke should be introduced to the landlord of the public-house in which the meetings were to be held.

The next day Duke was so interested in the new appointment he was likely to fill, that he took no steps towards finding occupation in his own line of business. In the afternoon Meffy called for him, and they walked together to the Borough, and at last they arrived at the public-house. It had nothing whatever to recommend it as to external respectability, and the landlord, to whom Duke was introduced, seemed perfectly fitted to carry on an establishment of the kind. He received Duke, however, in a very friendly manner, and conducted him and Mr. Meffy to the club-room, a dirty den on the first floor, where they found some five or six members already assembled. Duke was received with great honour, and immediately it was proposed by one of those present, that he should be elected chairman and treasurer of the club, and he was at once inducted into the chair, which was placed at the end of a remarkably

dirty, beer-stained little table. As soon as he was seated he was reminded that a secretary was wanted who could write. It need hardly be said this was immediately admitted by all present, and as Mr. Meffy seemed known to all as an excellent penman, he was directly proposed for the post by a gentleman who feelingly said that he had as much faith in his (Mr. Meffy's) integrity as in his own. It need hardly be said Mr. Meffy was unanimously elected. His salary was to consist of two shillings and sixpence every night of meeting, being the same as the chairman's, which was also unanimously carried. It was further proposed that their excellent chairman should provide the secretary with the small sum necessary for a set of books, and that they should meet the next evening to discuss the rules.

It would be taking up the reader's time most unjustifiably to dwell long upon the affairs of the club. It flourished for three weeks, at least. True, there were many things about it which showed weakness from its very birth ; among others, and not the least important, was, that they omitted to obtain the benediction of Mr. Tidd Pratt upon their undertaking. The number of the members during that time rose gradually from six to eight, at which latter point they stopped. Then several elements of weakness crept into the undertaking, causing great uneasiness to Mr. Duke. The fines were not regularly paid, but their amount was regularly drunk out for the benefit of the house. Again, things went wrong in consequence of the forced absence of Mr. Meffy in the country, more than one of the members observing

that they did not like to pay up their subscriptions in his absence, not that they doubted their chairman's integrity, but that they did not consider his learning equal to the emergencies of the occasion. Later, more than one thought their treasurer ought to give some security for the funds, not only that were in his possession, but for those which might probably be. This Duke demurred to, and the leader of the insubordinate members rudely remarked that he much doubted whether Duke was possessed of any money to offer as guarantee. Duke immediately fired up at this, and promised that the next night they met he would produce enough to prove to them that he had ample means, and to spare. This was disbelieved by the members who had attacked him, and the result was that Duke determined that, on the occasion of their next meeting, he would prove what he had said to be perfectly true.

Before the next meeting night, Duke had withdrawn twenty pounds from the savings bank, with the intention of proving to the subscribers how little they had to fear from any insolvency on his part. At the meeting he produced the money, and received the congratulations of the members on his wealth. An amicable conversation now took place as to the best means of carrying on the operations of the society in such a way as to insure the confidence of the public, and thereby obtain a greater accession of members to their club. At last it was proposed by a member, a great friend of Mr. Meffy's, that Mr. Duke should allow the twenty pounds to remain in the cash-box of the society. There could be no danger

to their treasurer by so doing, as the cash-box was every meeting night placed in an excellent iron safe, with a patent lock, which the landlord had lent them, and of which the treasurer kept the key. To this Duke made no objection. The money (four five-pound notes) was placed in the box, after having been counted by Mr. Meffy's friend, the safe was locked by Duke, who, putting the key in his pocket, left the house.

On their next night of meeting the iron safe was opened, and the cash-box taken therefrom ; but on opening it to verify the amount it contained, it was found that the four five-pound notes of the governor and company of the Bank of England had been changed for four of the Bank of Fashion, for the same amount. Poor Duke, when he realized his loss, almost fainted. The members waited for some time to see if Mr. Meffy's friend, who had counted the money previous to the cash-box being placed in the iron safe, could give any explanation of the transaction ; but he did not that evening think fit to enter an appearance. As the chairman, from his agitation, was not in a fit state to transact business, the meeting adjourned. To shorten this most unpleasant part of our narrative, we may say the money was never found, although Mr. Meffy made every inquiry after the villain who had abused his friendship ; the club was broken up, and poor Duke was little better than a ruined man.

CHAPTER IX.

DOMESTIC ARRANGEMENTS.

T need hardly be said that the loss of their little fortune was a sad blow to Jemima, and this was increased in severity by insuperable difficulties Duke experienced in finding employment. All her broken visions of rolling about in silks and satins, which had formed so strong an argument in her mind for allowing her husband to become the perpetual chairman of the benefit club, were lost in the bleak prospect the future presented. They had not now four pounds left of their savings, and that would not last long, especially if they continued in as respectable lodgings as those they occupied in New Pye Street. It was indeed a sad thing, with Mrs. Duke's almost aristocratical ideas of respectability, to be obliged to search for a lodging in such localities as Old Pye Street or Duck Lane, and she resolved that while she bent to the stern necessity of moving, she would reduce the amount of pain to her feelings as much as possible, and seek for a new home a few streets off. Presently a new difficulty presented itself to her—what sort of an apartment should she take? Duke had lately formed the acquaintance of a respectable costermonger in the green-

grocery and apple line, and he, knowing the unfortunate position Duke was in, advised him to embark in a similar line of business. With Duke's capital he might command a very good trade, especially if he started in the fish line, and avoided apples and green-grocery, which was not as good as fish and poultry, to which Duke had been accustomed ; and if he could find a good beat open for him, and he did not think there would be much difficulty in finding one, James might in a short time establish a very good business. A great deal would depend upon Duke's having a fine voice ; Duke said he did not know his own capabilities on the subject, but he rather thought he had not.

"No matter," said the costermonger, "if you've a little voice it will improve as you work it. It gets stronger by degrees. When I began, for the life of me I couldn't send my voice up to a second-floor window, and now, if I stand at the Duke of York's column I can make myself heard in the Quadrant. Still, for costermongering no man's voice is equal to a woman's ; it's heard farther and does not appear so loud. I often wish I was married."

"In the first place," said Duke, "I should not like my wife to be exposed to gain her livelihood by selling things in the streets, and, in the next place, she has weak lungs."

"Well, of course that's an objection, although she does not look it."

"But I'm afraid," said Duke, "that while my voice is getting strong, I shall be losing money. Besides, I ain't up to the different dodges for selling things ; I ain't had no practice."

"Well," said his friend, "if you like to work with me for a week or ten days, you can. You can practise your voice and see how I do. I can't offer you any pay for it, because I don't want any help."

Duke thanked him for the offer, which he gratefully accepted, and the two friends started off together the next day. Jemima, in the meantime, occupied herself in looking for lodgings. Her task was by no means an easy one. From the immense destruction of poor men's houses for the formation of Victoria Street, and other improvements, lodgings were scarce, at least such as would suit her means, and she could meet with only two that were at all likely to suit them.

When Duke returned in the evening, his wife was greatly surprised in the first place, and alarmed in the second. For some time Duke had not only not spoken to her, but even neglected to notice the observations she made, and the questions she put to him. Presently she found he was unable to speak. The exertion his voice had undergone in the course of the day had made him so hoarse she was unable to understand a word he said, even when he attempted to utter one. She proposed, in her alarm, sending for a doctor, but her husband would not allow her, and she remained for two hours in a state of intense anxiety, when their costermonger friend entered. Jemima immediately applied to him for advice, and he readily assured her she had nothing to fear; it was simply a very common effect felt by persons in his way of business, when first starting in life, but which would soon go off by practice; still, at the same time, it

occasionally happened that men were unable to continue the occupation, although women were rarely obliged to give in from a reason of this kind. He further assured Mrs. Duke there was not the slightest cause for alarm, that her husband would be somewhat husky the next morning, but that it would wear off after breakfast. He advised that he should not leave the house till he (the costermonger) called for him, which would not be before nine the next morning, and that even then he would not allow Duke to exert his voice during the whole of the day, but he would see that he confined himself solely to the barrow. Mrs. Duke was fain to content herself with the consolation contained in the costermonger's remarks, and wait till the next day before she questioned her husband on the events he had met with in his first day's work in his new occupation.

On the morrow, as the costermonger had predicted, Duke was exceedingly husky, which, however, somewhat subsided after breakfast, enough so at any rate to allow him to converse with his wife on the adventures he had met with the preceding day, all of which Jemima listened to with great interest. The conclusion Duke had arrived at was, that a good deal of money was to be made as a costermonger ; still it was hard work, and in the fish line he could easily perceive it was not unattended with risk. In the greengrocery and apple line, what did not sell one day would do for the next, and with skill and caution might even do for a week, and then look as well as ever by the street lamps, but there was no disguising half a dozen cod in a partial state of decomposition

Again, with greens, if they were not fresh, there was not the objection to have them in your bedroom that there was with fish, so that the expense of house-rent would be increased from the necessity there would be of keeping your stock in trade in a second room or out-house. At all times, greens in any state give a general idea of the pleasures of rural life, but there were no pleasant thoughts connected with fish beyond the money you could make by them. Still, he could see enough to prove that the sale of fish in the streets, if properly managed, was not without its charms. The profits were frequently very considerable, and there were much greater facilities of forming a good connection in that line of costermongering than in any other. At any rate, he was determined to try it, and he felt assured that with industry and integrity he should succeed, and he was not without hopes that in time he should rise to be the owner of a stall in the Broadway.

Mrs. Duke listened with great attention to her husband's remarks, and agreed with him in all he said, and the conclusion he had arrived at. She said, moreover, she had no doubt they should be as happy in that line of life as in any other; and although ambition certainly had taught her to hope that she might be some day "rolling about in silks and satins," she should be as happy in her husband's society without it as she would have been had her higher aspirations been carried out. Before the friendly costermonger had joined them, Jemima had received instructions from her husband again to search for a new lodging, but she was to take particular care

that it was on the ground-floor, that they could have the run of the yard to wash their fish, and a second room or outhouse in which it could be placed at night. All these instructions having been perfectly understood by Mrs. Duke, her husband joined his friend, who was waiting below with a barrow of greens, and the two started off on their day's work.

When they met in the evening, Jemima found that a considerable portion of her husband's hoarseness had fled, although he had practised his voice considerably in the course of the day; and he related to her distinctly the events they had met with, telling her in what streets they had transacted business, how the profits of the day had not been large, scarcely exceeding two hundred per cent., and noticing the different plans to be taken to please customers, and many other details of the same sort, which, however, would be without any sort of interest to the reader.

Mrs. Duke, in her turn, gave her husband an account of her search for a new dwelling. She had not been altogether successful, nor had her exertions been altogether fruitless. She had visited many houses in Westminster, which would not in any way answer their purpose, the accommodation being very small, and the rents in proportion enormously high. They thought nothing, she said, of asking three shillings a week for a very small room on the second floor. The only house, she continued, likely to suit them was so near their present dwelling as to make it rather unpleasant to her feelings, but still she would smother them if Duke desired it. The house was situated in Smith's Rents. The apart-

ment she coveted was on the ground-floor in a house to which there was a back yard, with a pump. The entrance passage, moreover, was wide enough to admit a full-sized barrow with a moveable lid. There was, however, one disadvantage attending it. The ground-floor was occupied by an old man, who was willing to let the front room; but the back, which was no bigger than a large cupboard, he insisted on keeping for himself; at least for some weeks. He was a very silent old man, and would not explain to her his reason for keeping the back room, nor what the prospects were that he would leave the house in so short a time. She went further into detail in the matter, and the conclusion they at last arrived at was that they should go immediately and inspect the premises, and see if it would not be possible to enter into some arrangement with the present tenant. Acting on the spur of the moment, they started off at once. Duke examined the premises minutely, and found they would answer admirably, if they could only get possession of the little back room; but, in spite of all their arguments, the old man continued impracticable, answering all their propositions with a simple negative, but asserting, without any further explanation, the strong probability that in a few weeks he might leave the neighbourhood.

Finding it was impossible to make any impression on him by dint of reasoning, Duke and his wife were obliged to make up their minds to the conditions he offered, and the result was they agreed to take the front room on the direct understanding they should have the

refusal of the back room whenever the present tenant should give up possession. A week's rent was immediately paid in advance, which the old man took with evident satisfaction—the only change of expression which had appeared on his countenance during the whole time of their conversation,—and Jemima promised to call the next day for the purpose of giving her new apartment a thorough cleansing, an operation of which it stood greatly in need.

These preparations being completed, Duke and his wife entered on possession. The new abode suited them admirably in all respects with the exception named. Duke had purchased a barrow, for which there was ample room in the back yard. He had, moreover, gained considerable knowledge of his new occupation. By dint of practice, his voice had now become much stronger. He had several times attended Billingsgate Market at early morning, and had not only become a good judge of fish, but had also obtained a perfect insight into the best manner of making his purchases. He bought two or three knives adapted for the business, a set of scales and weights of remarkably unpleasant appearance, and lastly, Jemima had made up for him two of those extraordinary aprons, half flannel, half blanket, used by the craft, and he was now ready to commence business with comfort and respectability, when the old man suddenly gave up possession of the back room, and Duke and his wife had the satisfaction of having the ground-floor all to themselves. Some time after the old man had left them they inquired

his history of the neighbours, but so little was known of him they could obtain only its termination.

It appeared he had come into the Rents about a year previous to Duke's taking the lodgings. He was accompanied by a very pretty child, between six and seven years of age, who, he said, was his granddaughter. He was very tall, but stooped considerably; very taciturn, and some said very proud, but perhaps the only reason for that report was his silent, abstracted manner. It was said that formerly he had been in very good circumstances, but there seemed no foundation whatever for the report beyond his personal appearance. He wore a frock coat, which formerly had been black, but how long since it was impossible to say, so much had it changed its colour. On his hat he wore a crape hatband, which he had never taken off since he had lived in the house. From exposure to the weather, and frequent saturation with the rain, it had more completely lost its colour than even his coat, and had assumed at last the form of a roll round his hat rather than that of a crape hatband. He appeared to take little interest in anything except the child, but his whole happiness seemed wrapped up in her. He became a great favourite with the women of the locality for the kindness he showed her, and they paid her considerable attention when the old man was away, which was generally in the mornings till eleven o'clock, and for a couple of hours in the afternoon.

When he first arrived, and for several months afterwards, he supported himself and his granddaughter by selling water-cresses. This he did with great regu-

larity, though with some difficulty, as he suffered severely from an asthma, which frequently obliged him, in going his rounds, to rest for a quarter of an hour at a time, his head the while leaning against the area railings of the houses in the streets he visited. Still he never uttered a complaint, but seemed perfectly contented, or rather resigned, if his earnings sufficed to meet his moderate expenditure. He appeared to have but little religious feeling, but this conclusion was probably erroneous. Perhaps it arose from the fact that he was usually in the streets about church-time on Sundays, both morning and afternoon ; but, at the same time, he found a woman in the neighbourhood to take his granddaughter regularly to chapel ; whether he gave her any instruction at home it is impossible to say. From a circumstance mentioned of him, he appeared to have strong religious feelings. One Sunday morning, as the people were going to church, he was seen carrying his basket towards home, with some few remains of water-cresses in it, when a lady, a passer by, addressed him. "Do you not think, old man," she said, "it would be more becoming in you to pray to your God on the sabbath, rather than sell things about the streets?"

"I do pray to Him," he said. Then raising his eyes to heaven, "I thank God for giving me the strength to do what I am now doing."

Winter came on, and with it a season of distress for the old man. His asthma increased in severity, and he could not attend the early market to obtain his supply for his day's sale, and he sank from a dealer

in water-cresses to a vender of chickweed for singing birds. Whether from the diminished profit on the chickweed rendering his own and his granddaughter's food insufficient, or from some local causes, the child was attacked by a slow fever. Her illness excited great commiseration in the locality, and the women paid her every attention in their power, but the disease increased so rapidly, that she was obliged to be removed to the hospital. Here, of course, she received every attention her case required, but with little advantage. The old man called to see her the next day. She smiled when she saw him, and he returned it, but little conversation passed between them. He remained the full time allowed to the friends of patients to visit them. On leaving the building, the porter called his attention to his dirty appearance. He was miserably shabby and untidy it must be admitted. At first he hardly seemed to understand what was said, and when it was repeated, he merely said he would not offend again. The next day he again visited the child. This time he was cleaner in appearance, but in other respects there was no change. He seated himself at the foot of the child's bed, and after their first words of meeting were over, he took, with an air of considerable pride, from his breast, a child's book of birds, gaudily coloured, which he placed before her. The child seemed much pleased with the present, and, sitting up in bed, began turning over the leaves. The old man smiled at the success of his present; but, after turning over two or three of the leaves, she closed the book, and laid herself languidly

back on her bed. That day she was evidently worse. The self-satisfied smile vanished from the old man's countenance, and he never smiled afterwards. The next day delirium had set in, which continued during the run of the disease. Each visiting day the old man came to see her, and remained seated at the foot of the bed the whole time without speaking. Occasionally he would clasp his hands together, and hurriedly move them up and down for a few seconds, but he made no remark to any one.

The child died, and was buried by the parish. The grandfather was not present at the funeral, for he was obliged to enter the hospital as a patient, from the severity of his asthma. It appeared that he had spent several nights before the child's death in St. James's Park. He had formed an acquaintance with the night porter at the hospital, and as each hour had struck, he had called at the building to inquire after the patient. The immediate acute symptoms of his disease soon gave way under the treatment he received, but he never recovered. An alarming weakness set in, which defied all the stimulants given him. He was grateful for every kindness shown him, thankfully obeyed every instruction given him, but he sank gradually, and a fortnight after his grandchild's death the old man followed her.

Duke and his wife now began not only to find themselves again in comfortable circumstances, but enjoying an amount of independence they had never been accustomed to. Few who have not deeply studied the matter can form an idea, notwithstanding its occasional hard-

ships, of the charms of a costermonger's life. True, the inconveniences from tyrannical policemen (a class evidently given to costermongers for their sins) are frequently great and excessively irritating. It certainly seems "hard lines," when a fellow has only forty shillings in the world, that he should pay twenty of it to government for a licence to trade with the remaining twenty. In the fish line a series of evil days may confine you to the house, in company, possibly, with an investment in herrings (fresh), the most delicate of all fish, suffering more from nostalgia than any other, and pining more for the green ocean of their birth. Still, as we said before, the avocation is not without its charms. There is, with the exception of the aforesaid police, a total absence of tyrant masters. You are not shut up in a stifling shop all day, under the eye of a supercilious foreman. Here you rove about just as you please, without any one to control you; you go out at the hour you please, and return when you are tired, without an individual to make a remark if you have not done a good day's work, or to blame you for being idle.

We must now give a short account of Mr. Duke's new domicile in Smith's Rents, and a sketch of the lodgers it contained. The house was composed of three rooms, one over the other, the little outhouse or lean-to, which had been kept by the old man, being rather an appendage to the house than a portion of the house itself. Each separate room contained a different family; but the back yard was common to all. Duke and his wife, as has been said before, occupied the ground-floor. On

the first floor resided Mrs. Moggs, a short, stout, florid-coloured woman, by no means particularly clean in her person, with the exception of a widow's cap, which was scrupulously in order, and very deep. She was always dressed in shabby, rusty black. Generally speaking, her language was good, but little was heard of it, as she kept herself very much aloof from the other lodgers. With every respect for the widow, and a strong natural tendency on the part of the author to conceal the little defects of ladies, it must be admitted that the face of Mrs. Moggs boldly and undisguisedly accused her of drinking, and, unfortunately, there is too much reason to believe the accusation was a just one. Mrs. Moggs, considering herself to be superior to the other tenants in social position, not only from occupying that post of honour, the first floor, but also from some obscure hints she had dropped on more than one occasion that she was by birth a lady—a circumstance that certainly would never have been divined,—mixed but little with the inhabitants of the “Rents” generally. Probably part of her reputation for gentility arose from the mystery which appeared to surround her. In what manner she obtained the money to pay her rent and find the means of existence it is impossible to say ; at any rate, that question was a riddle to Jemima for some time. The veil of mystery, however, was to a certain degree raised one day ; and as it frequently happens when things are brought to the light that a considerable portion of the romance which had enveloped them in obscurity is lost, so Mrs. Moggs's reputation lost by her character being better known.

Mrs. Duke was one morning engaged in her apartment, when she heard a man's footsteps descending from Mrs. Moggs's room. His temper seemed to have been ruffled, and he continued talking to her as he came down-stairs. "Now I tell you what it is," he said, "if you do not mind what you are about, you'll come to grief as sure as you live."

"I do not know what you mean, sir," said Mrs. Moggs. "You ought to be ashamed of yourself to behave in that manner in a lady's house."

"You don't know what I mean, don't you?" said the male voice, in a louder tone; "then I'll tell you. You're more trouble to me than all my money, and I won't stand it much longer."

"And who are you," said Mrs. Moggs, "to talk to me in that manner? Go along, I am not afraid of you, notwithstanding all your threats."

"You don't know who I am, don't you? Well, then, I'll tell you. My name's Horsford, and I am the Mendicity Society's officer. Now I'll tell you who you are. You're one of the most impudent begging-letter impostors in London, and you give us more trouble than enough, and if it had not been for your sister you would have been locked up long ago, I can tell you."

Mrs. Moggs had hitherto conducted her part of the conversation in her own room, but the allusion to her sister seemed to arouse her anger to an extraordinary degree, and she immediately followed the officer down-stairs.

"You infamous fellow," she said, "what right have

you to speak of my sister? She has done nothing to offend you, at any rate."

"I did not say anything against your sister," continued the officer. "On the contrary, I tell you you'd have been taken up long ago if it had not been from pity for her."

"Pity for my sister, you contemptible fellow! Pity from you, indeed! She's a lady, and that's more than any one is belonging to you."

"Just as you please," said the officer, leaving the house; "only remember I have said nothing against your sister. I do believe in her, but I don't in your son. He's been killed too often for me to have much faith in him." So saying, he left the house.

As soon as he had gone, Mrs. Moggs's courage gave way, and she burst into a flood of tears. Now it is a well-known fact that, taciturn as a woman may be on other occasions, she cannot keep silent when crying, if by any chance she can get another woman to converse with. And so it was with Mrs. Moggs. Seeing Jemima standing at her door, she immediately accosted her. "Did you ever hear, ma'am, anything more infamous than the manner in which that fellow abused my poor sister?"

Now Jemima had certainly heard no abuse whatever, but as Mrs. Moggs made the accusation, of course Mrs. Duke admitted it was shameful; but she added that the remarks he had made about her son were infinitely worse.

For a moment Mrs. Moggs was silent, and then recovering herself she commenced with great volubility:—

“Shocking indeed, ma’am. Can anything be too bad for a man who would not spare the feelings of a mother? My poor son, before death deprived me of his aid, was the support and consolation of my life. A better son never lived. I wanted in his time for nothing; and you may imagine, bred up in luxury as I have been, how terrible is my present position. After the duties of the day were over he would return to our humble fireside, and beg me to support with patience the reverses we were suffering from, for my poor husband had been reduced from affluence to comparative poverty by the villany of his partner. Ever since my son’s death I have supported myself as a daily governess, but a fit of illness incapacitating me from following my profession, I am now reduced to such poverty that I am obliged to solicit the kindness of the benevolent. My misfortunes I believe are but temporary, and if I could only raise sufficient to purchase respectable clothing, I have no doubt I should in a short time obtain through my highly influential connection a sufficient number of pupils to support me in comfort if not affluence. I have, ma’am,” she continued, diving her hand into a most capacious pocket, and bringing from it a mass of dirty envelopes, “references and credentials from people in the highest position in society, acknowledging the obligations they are under to me for my services, all of which you can read, if it will be any satisfaction to you. All the clothes I have in the world I now wear on me, and, as you may imagine, they are not of a description to allow me to present myself in any respectable establishment. I assure you, ma’am, my

necessities are now such that I should be grateful even for the loan of a few shillings, which would be faithfully repaid, or (for your kind reception of me proves I may say it in confidence) any articles of clothing you may not be at present in need of would be most gratefully accepted."

All this was said with such fluency that she appeared rather as if repeating a well-learned lesson than speaking on the impulse of the moment, nor did she address Jemima as if she expected anything from her, but as if she were repeating a string of sentences while thinking on some totally different subject.

Jemima seemed to take her remarks in the same spirit they were uttered in. The allusion to the widow's son, however, seemed to dwell principally on her imagination, and she asked in what line of business he was.

"In no business, my dear. He was brought up as a gentleman, and had the education of one."

"How did he manage to support you, then?" inquired Mrs. Duke.

"He was a lecturer on philosophic subjects; in fact, the sale of his apparatus supported me for some months after his death."

"Has he been long dead?" inquired Mrs. Duke.

"About six months, ma'am," said Mrs. Moggs, slowly and sorrowfully, her eyes filling with tears at the moment, though at the same time to an acute observer, the tears would hardly have appeared so natural as those she shed when speaking of her sister. Moreover, it may here be remarked that occasionally when speaking of the unfor-

fortunate death of her son there were great discrepancies in the date ; he sometimes, as at present, having departed this life about six months since, while at others his decease happened as many years back. The conversation with Mrs. Duke, however, ceased at this point, and Mrs. Moggs went up-stairs to her room, while Mrs. Duke entered her own. Shortly after, Jemima having to leave the house put on her bonnet and shawl, when, on opening the street door, she perceived lying in the passage some of the envelopes and papers which Mrs. Moggs had taken from her pocket and had inadvertently let fall when putting them back. Mrs. Duke immediately postponed her intention of leaving the house, and taking up the papers, proceeded to Mrs. Moggs's room to return them. Candidly, perhaps, it ought to be stated that Jemima was not sorry to profit by the opportunity of seeing something of her fellow-lodger's domestic arrangements. Moreover, one of the few weaknesses possessed by Mrs. Duke was a hankering after gentility. She had always thought Mrs. Moggs looked like a woman who had seen far better days, and the conversation they had had together in the passage now confirmed it.

When Mrs. Duke arrived at Mrs. Moggs's door, she tapped at it softly and genteelly,—indeed, so much so that Mrs. Moggs did not hear her, and Mrs. Duke in consequence quietly opened the door. For a moment she did not enter, so much was she surprised at the scene which presented itself to her view. The room contained only a miserable truckle bed, a small table, and two chairs,

one of them an old arm-chair. In the latter was seated a remarkably stout old woman, certainly not less than seventy years of age. The expression of her countenance, or rather the lack of it, told she was idiotic, and besides the poor creature was paralytic. She stared vacantly at Mrs. Duke, and then, with a low whine and a glimmer of intelligence on her face, turned her head towards her sister. Mrs. Moggs was seated in the other chair, leaning her head on the table. Although perfectly silent it was easy to perceive she was weeping bitterly; indeed, so absorbed was she in her sorrow that she remained totally insensible to the inarticulate low cry of her sister occasioned by the presence of her visitor.

As soon as Mrs. Duke had somewhat recovered from her surprise she advanced into the room and kindly placed her hand on the weeping woman's shoulder, who, feeling its pressure slowly raised her head. She uttered no word of surprise at seeing Mrs. Duke, but gazed at her for a moment with an expression of such intense sorrow, the tears chasing each other down her cheeks the while, that it fairly went to Jemima's heart, and she stood for a moment speechless. Suddenly remembering the excuse which had ostensibly caused her visit, she placed upon the table the old letters and papers, saying that as she was afraid Mrs. Moggs might probably be inconvenienced without them she had brought them up to her. Mrs. Moggs merely bowed her head as if to thank her for the trouble she had taken, but her heart was evidently too full to speak, and Jemima with a feeling of delicacy

which did her credit quietly left the room, resolving in her mind, however, that she would become better acquainted with her lodger, and render her whatever womanly assistance she could in nursing her imbecile sister.

CHAPTER X.

MRS. MOGGS LEAVES THE RENTS.



FOR some weeks after they had taken possession of their new quarters affairs progressed most favourably with the Duke family. Jemima, from her regularity in paying her rent, had become a great favourite with her landlord,—so much so, in fact, that he agreed to let her the whole house, looking to her as his sole tenant, and not as heretofore collecting the rents from the lodgers himself. By this arrangement she became tenant in chief, and Mrs. Moggs, as well as a blind basket-maker with a consumptive wife and seven children, who inhabited the room on the second floor, were her sub-tenants. It might at first sight appear a difficult tenantry to collect rents from, but such an opinion would be erroneous. True, Mrs. Moggs was occasionally a week in arrears, but she generally contrived to raise the money within a fortnight, and the blind basket-maker set aside two shillings and sixpence a week he received from the parish for the purpose of paying his rent.

With all Jemima's tact she could hardly form an intimacy with Mrs. Moggs, although she much wished to do so. Mrs. Moggs had evidently formerly been in a

respectable position in society, and Mrs. Duke had an innate love for the aristocracy, and therefore sought the acquaintance of her tenant ; but Mrs. Moggs was somewhat reserved, and although frequent civilities passed between them, and many acts of kindness were shown by Jemima to the imbecile sister, there was no great friendship. Mrs. Duke was somewhat annoyed at her want of success, but she consoled herself by remembering that if Mrs. Moggs was above her in position, still she (Jemima) was never guilty of the unladylike habit indulged in by Mrs. Moggs, of making occasionally an undue use of stimulants.

With Duke everything progressed as favourably as his most ardent wishes could desire, with the exception of establishing himself with a stall on Saturday evenings on the Broadway. He had in a remarkably short space of time, considering the difficulty of the study, made himself a skilful master of the art and science of buying and selling fish. He had, moreover, established himself in an excellent beat on the Clapham Road. He had contrived to obtain a very respectable *clientèle* among the inhabitants of the locality ; and as he transacted business in a most honourable manner, never placing the viscera of fresh fish in the persons of stale fish, or any other despicable act, occasionally practised by the more disreputable class of costermongers, he had contrived to gain the confidence of a settled class of customers. The only impediment he laboured under, and that was a very serious one, was a severe hoarseness which harassed him occasionally very painfully. It was not to be imagined

that so faithful and loving a wife as Jemima could see this physical weakness in her husband without great sorrow, and at last she determined, although sorely against Duke's wish, to accompany him in his rounds. Her strength, she said, was great (it was a most modest way of speaking of herself, as gigantic perhaps would have been a more fitting word), and judging from her bulk, which had greatly increased, she was perfectly able to assist him in pushing the barrow ; moreover, she had a voice to match. Unlike many people whose frames are large and whose voices are weak, Jemima had one which with a little practice might be heard easily at the distance of a quarter of a mile, and she justly considered, with gifts and accomplishments of the kind, it would be something very like a sin to hide her talents in a napkin, and not develop them for the benefit of her loving lord and master. Duke, finding his wife resolved on the point, gave up his objection, and Jemima, arrayed in her professional apron, and those impracticable boots generally worn by female costermongers, and which puzzle those best acquainted with the metropolis to divine in what shops they could be purchased, started off daily in company with her husband.

If Duke's business had been satisfactory before his wife had joined him in his rounds, it was vastly more flourishing after she had brought her talents to bear in the matter ; indeed, so lucrative was it, that Duke had more than once entertained the idea of buying a moke (*Anglicè*, donkey) to draw the barrow.

One very hot day, when resting in the high road, the

conversation on the subject was carried on between husband and wife with considerable animation. Mrs. Duke was somewhat averse to the project, as she thought it was probable that then her husband might propose her remaining at home ; still she admitted it would be far more genteel, and that had always great weight with her. Duke was talking to her very earnestly on the subject, and Jemima listening with great attention, her head bent down, and her foot mechanically pushing some refuse portions of fish they had sold, such as fins, &c., down a gully into the sewer, in direct disregard of the Metropolitan Local Management Act, when, suddenly raising her eyes for the purpose of replying to some remark he had made, she gave a slight start, and appeared greatly confused, for, standing close behind her husband, she recognised Mr. Meffy. Of all men living, when selling fish in the street, she would have avoided him. She somehow considered Mr. Meffy something of a gentleman from his manner of talking, and she remembered the pleasant dream he had given her of rolling about the streets in silks and satins, and she keenly felt the difference between that and her present occupation.

If she had any repugnance to be seen by Mr. Meffy, the feeling was by no means reciprocal, for he seemed delighted to meet her and Duke. Our hero, on his part, seemed equally pleased to see his old acquaintance, and inquired the reason he had never called on them.

Meffy, in reply, said that he had called at Duke's old lodgings in Pye Street several times, but could obtain no

knowledge of his whereabouts. A slight blush suffused Jemima's cheek as Meffy said this, for her conscience was not altogether clear on the subject. In fact, dreading that Mr. Meffy should find them in their present humble lodgings, after having known them in the more aristocratic quarter they formerly lived in, she had requested the lodgers remaining in the house not to give their new address to any one. It was readily promised, and as faithfully kept. Indeed, in many parts of Westminster, it is a usual request that those knowing the locality to which a tenant is about to move should keep it a secret ; and those who make the promise of secrecy generally observe it, knowing they may soon possibly have to ask a similar favour, and it is, therefore, as well for them to do as they would be done by.

Duke, who had no feeling of foolish pride about him, willingly gave Meffy their new address, who promised to call on his friend as soon as possible ; and faithfully and promptly he kept his word, for the same evening, as Duke and Jemima were seated over their tea, after a fatiguing but lucrative day's work, who should tap at their window but Meffy. He was immediately invited to enter, which he readily did ; another cup and saucer were produced for him, and in a few minutes he was as completely at home with them as if he had been one of the family. In conversation, as usual, he was brilliant. He deplored in the most pathetic manner the infamous swindle which had been practised on his friend in the matter of putting the sham notes in the cash-box. As soon as he (Meffy) returned from the country he tried

every means in his power to find the rascal who had plundered them, but without success. When he found his unassisted efforts were useless, then he called at Duke's lodgings to see if he could advance five pounds, so that he might put the police upon the scent, much as he disliked them ; but as nobody could give the address, he was obliged to give over the search, although it grieved him much to let so much wickedness go unpunished. He did not, he continued, think it was even now too late to go on with the affair, if Duke would advance a little money.

Duke, however, replied that although the whole affair had caused him great annoyance at the commencement, he had now got over it, and was determined to think no more about it, and Jemima perfectly agreed with him on the subject. Had Meffy called on him immediately after the loss, he would willingly have advanced the money, but now he was resolved to take no further steps in the matter. Mr. Meffy finding Duke was determined, said he had no doubt he was perfectly right, although he added, with much appearance of truthful candour, he greatly regretted he had not met Duke after the robbery.

After a little more conversation the tea-things were removed, and a bottle containing a colourless fluid closely resembling water in appearance, two glasses, and a couple of pipes, were placed upon the table, and Mrs. Duke filled up the kettle, which had been partially emptied for their tea, and then replaced it on the fire. Duke inquired why there were only two glasses, when Mrs. Duke replied, with great modesty and abnegation of

manner, that she did not intend taking any, but both gentlemen objected so strongly to her decision that Jemima, for the sake of peace and quietness, gave way, and in a very short time they were all three seated round the table thoroughly enjoying themselves.

If Mr. Meffy's conversation had been attractive at the tea-table it was now positively dazzling. Among other subjects of interest he brought forward was the present occupation of Duke and his wife. Duke informed him that although it was not perfectly either to his own or Jemima's taste, it was by no means unproductive, and that he always liked to speak well of a bridge which carried him safely over.

"Then you're quite right to keep to it," said Meffy, "but it strikes me if you could join the poultry line to it, it would be an advantage. I know something about that way of business, and I know the profits are greater than in the fish way, and not so fatiguing."

"Of course," said Duke, "I should like my old line of business best, but it requires more money than I have got to carry it on. A fellow ought to have at least a hundred pounds at his command if he really intends to do a good business in the poultry line, besides the risk of house rent."

"I only mean," said Meffy, "that you should sell it as you do your fish now."

"But I can't buy in any quantity, you see," said Duke ; "the large houses buy up all the best fowls, and I shouldn't like to sell any second-rate goods."

"I am the last man in the world to advise you to do

anything of the kind," said Meffy, "but I know, if you go to work in the right way, that you can buy capital goods very cheap indeed. I didn't mean to say you could do it at Leadenhall Market, but I know some friends in the country who would supply you at very reasonable prices. I'd take to the poultry line if I were you," said Mr. Meffy to Mrs. Duke; "it's much pleasanter work, and a great deal more genteel."

Mrs. Duke thought so too, and they began to talk over the matter very seriously. To Duke's great surprise Meffy seemed as well acquainted with poultry as himself, and he inquired how his friend had obtained his information, but Meffy rather avoided the point. Fortunately, however, from the effect of the gin-and-water, Duke did not notice the embarrassment, and Meffy rapidly recovered himself. He remained with his friend till it was past eleven o'clock; and when he left, it was agreed, as Mr. Meffy was about to remain for a week or ten days in a poultry-rearing part of the country, that he should make more perfect inquiries on the subject as to the amount of supply, prices, carriage, &c., and inform Duke of the result as soon as he returned to town.

Things continued to progress most satisfactorily with Duke and his wife; fish continued plentiful and cheap, and his customers appeared to increase in proportion with the supply. Mrs. Duke generally accompanied her husband in his rounds, but his wholesale purchases were made by himself in Billingsgate. Fond as he was of the society of his wife, and much as he was grieved to re-

fuse her anything, he prohibited her accompanying him on these occasions, the business of Billingsgate being conducted as early as three or four o'clock in the morning, naturally necessitating his leaving the house an hour earlier, and on Jemima's weak lungs he feared the cold morning air from the river might have a most prejudicial effect.

Jemima, on her side, conducted her house in an admirable manner so far as her own domestic economy was concerned, but with her tenant, Mrs. Moggs, we grieve to say things did not go on so smoothly. Her rent was certainly paid, if not regularly, at least so much so as to obviate the necessity of any serious complaint, but her habits of intoxication increased so much that Jemima determined that, notwithstanding her tenant had evidently formerly been a lady, she should leave the house, and also resolved that the next cause of complaint she should have she would put her determination in force.

Mrs. Moggs did not leave her long without an excuse. One morning, between two and three o'clock, Duke rose to go to market, and Jemima had left her bed to fasten the door after her husband's departure. She had hardly done so, and regained her solitary couch, when she heard some one beating against the street door, evidently with their fists, from the dull sound of the blows. Mrs. Duke sat up in her bed, for a moment wondering at the circumstance, the more so as there was a knocker on the door. The thumping was repeated, and Mrs. Duke immediately got out of bed, and was going to the door, when she remembered that her costume was not exactly

that in which she should like to make her appearance before a stranger, and that stranger probably a policeman, and she delayed opening it till she had arrayed herself in a proper manner. This took some little time, as she had no light, the thumping continuing unceasingly the while. Mrs. Duke's temper now rose considerably, and she determined that she would give the individual, whomsoever he might be, such a lesson as should not easily be effaced from his memory. She opened the door, and before she could utter one word some one fell against her with such violence as would have overthrown any less stable person than Jemima ; as it was, it completely drove her some steps backwards, the intruder herself, for it was a woman, falling heavily on the ground. Jemima, as soon as she had recovered herself, advanced to the prostrate form, and although gas had not yet made its appearance in the "Rents," she had no difficulty in identifying Mrs. Moggs. But identification seemed for some time the only satisfaction Mrs. Duke was likely to obtain, her tenant was so helplessly intoxicated. By degrees, however, and the use of the strength for which she was so remarkable, Jemima dragged Mrs. Moggs further into the passage, and closed the street door. What next to do fairly puzzled Jemima. Strong as she was, she could not carry Mrs. Moggs, who was a very heavy woman, upstairs without assistance, and to let her lie in the passage would be most inhuman. While deliberating in her mind whether she should call the blind basketmaker to assist her, Jemima was delighted to hear Mrs. Moggs utter some articulate sounds. She

immediately spoke to her, and to Mrs. Duke's great satisfaction she received an intelligible answer. Knowing it would be bad policy to quarrel with Mrs. Moggs at such a moment, Jemima spoke kindly to her, and at last got her to rise from the floor into something like an upright position. But now arose the difficulty of getting Mrs. Moggs upstairs. Had there been room enough, Jemima could have managed it by putting her arm around Mrs. Moggs's waist; but the staircases in the "Kents" were so exceedingly narrow, that to do this was an impossibility. Jemima, however, was not to be dismayed, so, passing both arms from behind round Mrs. Moggs, she contrived to half lift her, half push her upstairs, Mrs. Moggs the while uttering a thousand excuses about the rheumatism in her knees, which had afflicted her since she had been a child.

At last Mrs. Duke contrived to get her *protégée* into the room, but a difficulty here for a moment occurred—how to place Mrs. Moggs in a safe position while a light was being obtained. Fortunately a chair stood by the table, and into it Jemima thrust Mrs. Moggs. Her next task was to procure a light. She remembered having seen a box of lucifers on the chimney-piece, and Mrs. Duke groped her way to it. She lightly passed her hand over the surface, and fortunately found the box. She took from it a match, and lighted it. The blue flame lit up the room for a moment, showing the objects in it distinctly, and Mrs. Duke cast her eye around her to find a candle. Suddenly she uttered a loud shriek, the match became extinct, and the box fell from her hand on the

floor. Mrs. Duke caught Mrs. Moggs by the shoulder to arouse her, and attempted to call her attention to something she had seen, but she was so terrified that she could not utter a word. Suddenly the thought struck her she would procure another light, and she returned to the spot where she had dropped the matches, but accidentally treading on one it ignited and set fire to the rest. Fortunately they had fallen on the hearthstone, so that no danger was incurred from their burning, but their light brought clearly enough to view the cause of Mrs. Duke's terror. On the ground near the bed, with the unmistakeable pallid hue of death upon her face, now made more ghastly by the blue light of the burning matches, was stretched the lifeless body of the imbecile sister. The attention of Mrs. Moggs, stupefied as she was, was riveted on the corpse, and she gazed at it with an expression of stolid wonder. Neither Jemima nor Mrs. Moggs stirred, and the matches having burnt out, the room almost suddenly again became dark.

In the obscurity Jemima regained possession of her presence of mind, and she bethought herself of what steps should be taken in the emergency. It was somewhat difficult to arrive at a conclusion, but she could do nothing without assistance. Mrs. Moggs was of course useless, and there remained in the house but the blind basketmaker, his wife being almost helplessly confined to her bed by the severity of her complaint. She tapped at his door, and the sick woman soon heard her, and as soon as she had recognised Jemima's voice she requested her to enter. Jemima rapidly explained to her what had

taken place, and requested the basketmaker to render her all the assistance in his power, and also that they would lend her a lighted candle. Both requests were readily granted, and Jemima went down-stairs with a light in her hand, the basketmaker promising to follow her immediately.

When Mrs. Duke had entered the room, the full extent of the misfortune became apparent. The poor old woman had fallen off her chair on the ground, and was dead, but whether from a fit or weakness it was impossible to say. Mrs. Moggs was utterly unable to realise her loss. She gazed at her sister, not with stupified indifference, but as if she was in the presence of a misfortune whose magnitude it was impossible for her to compass. Presently the blind basketmaker entered the room, and Mrs. Duke conducted him to the corpse, and by the exertions of both it was placed on the bed, and Mrs. Duke performed the last office of closing the poor creature's eyes, the blind basketmaker the while feeling his way to the wall, when, placing his back against it, and raising himself to a rigidly erect position, he addressed Mrs. Moggs without turning his head to the spot where she was seated:—

“Mrs. Moggs,” said he, “this ought to be a warning to you. The same thing which has happened to your sister might have happened to you, and how would you have been taken? You would have started from a drunken fit direct into the presence of your Maker, and what sort of a defence would you have made?”

Mrs. Moggs looked at him with wonder, and appa-

rently began to comprehend what was passing around her.

"Your poor sister," continued the blind man, still holding himself stiffly erect, and speaking as before across the room, "had nothing to blame herself for, but you have. Your sister, while you were drinking in a public-house, fell upon the ground and died, and that will always be on your conscience."

"Oh, don't say that," said the drunken woman, now returning to sensibility and beginning to cry; "don't say that; I've enough upon my mind at the best of times, and you have no right to add that to it."

"I don't want to hurt your feelings," said the blind man, slowly and sententiously. "I only want to call your attention to what has occurred. It was your sister's lot to-night; it may be yours to-morrow, and you will not have the excuse to offer she had."

"Would to God," said Mrs. Moggs, appearing, by the abundance of her tears, to become more conscious, "would to God that I, and you, and all the world, had as little occasion for excuse as she had. A better creature never lived."

"Well, I don't want to say anything to hurt your feelings, only take warning."

Mrs. Duke thought it was better to put a stop to the conversation, so, thanking the basketmaker for the help he had afforded her, she took him by the hand and led him to his own room.

She then returned to Mrs. Moggs, resolving to sit up with the poor creature at least till reason had returned to

her. She seated herself on the chair from which the imbecile woman had fallen, and remained quietly without speaking. Mrs. Moggs, on her side, continued to weep, but so abundantly that the quantity of tears she shed appeared rapidly to clear her brain, and before daybreak she was in a state of perfect sobriety. At last she arose from her seat, and with unfaltering step approached the bed. By it she stood, and, without uttering a word, she appeared, from the movement of her head and the expression of her face, to be mentally addressing her dead sister.

Presently she turned round, and taking Mrs. Duke's hand, she attempted to speak to her ; but, although she tried more than once, the words would not leave her lips. As she did not succeed, we will take upon ourselves to explain to the reader what her communication probably would have been had she been able to utter it. She would have told how, when quite a child, her dead sister, ten years older than herself, had acted towards her the part of their dead mother, for they had been left orphans. That, although capricious and flighty, she always had a great affection for her sister, who was unmarried, and who kept a small but respectable school. It was here Mrs. Moggs received the education which afterwards enabled her, given as it was for other uses, to prey upon the public. When she was eighteen years of age, instead of assisting her sister in the school, she ran away with a swindler and married him. Three months later he deserted her, and she shortly afterwards found he had another wife living. She was then in a destitute condi-

tion, and she returned to her sister, who received her with open arms, but not one reproach. She then continued, for two years, steady enough, but at the end of that time she again left her sister to marry a French usher in a school, a man without a shilling, and considerably her senior. He entered into some small line of business, and was unsuccessful. Although he had few attractions, he contrived to obtain complete power over his wife, who was his willing slave in all things ; so completely so that it is more than doubtful whether it was not her hand that forged her sister's name to a bill of exchange for fifty pounds, on which the Frenchman raised the money to relieve himself from his impending ruin. Certainly the schoolmistress thought so, for she paid the money, and at the same time wrote a letter to Mrs. Moggs, telling her that, great as had been her difficulty in raising the money, and inconvenient as it had been for her to part with it, both sank into insignificance when compared with her sorrow for the act her sister had been guilty of. Mrs. Moggs took this letter in high dudgeon, possibly the more so from its truth, and answered by saying that after so gross an insult she could no longer entertain for her sister the affection that she had hitherto felt, and proposed that for the future they should be strangers to each other. The sister made no answer to this epistle. Mrs. Moggs herself shortly thought no more of their quarrel, and (her husband having left her) she returned to her sister's house with as much confidence as if nothing unpleasant had passed between them. Her sister received her as before, with

great affection and without one word of reproach, and Mrs. Moggs remained domiciled with her for more than a year, when she again left her sister, to whom she shortly afterwards wrote, informing her that she had married a Mr. Moggs, whose name she afterwards bore. For some time afterwards the history of Mrs. Moggs is unknown. Rumours were abroad that Mr. Moggs was as much a myth as the son on whose misfortune she traded. After five years' absence, which she said she had passed on the Continent, she again entered her sister's house, and again in a state of destitution. The sister received her willingly enough, but there was a singular change in her manner. She seemed somewhat apathetic. The infirmities of age had also grown on her, and she had increased so much in size that she was now unwieldy. Shortly afterwards, she was seized with paralysis, which was followed by idiotcy.

The better part of Mrs. Moggs's character now shone forth. From the utter incapacity of her sister, she was obliged to take charge of her affairs, and in a most confused state she found them. The school had gradually dwindled away till all the scholars had left it, and after payment of her debts the value of the furniture was all that was left them to live on. To eke this out to the best advantage, Mrs. Moggs determined to exert herself, but, unfortunately, the system she adopted was hardly to be commended. She began by writing some letters to their former friends, requesting small loans of money on her own account. As these met with partial success, she next attempted business on a larger scale, and wrote to

strangers, and by degrees she culminated in the professed begging-letter impostor. But the profession is not so lucrative as is supposed, and by degrees she became known to the Mendicity Society ; her profits fell off immensely, and to avoid the pursuit of the police, as well as urged by the claims of her different creditors, she was perpetually changing her lodgings. When driven from house to house owing to her disreputable manner of living, she took with her the helpless old woman without murmur or further regret than the inconvenience the poor creature had to suffer. And, stranger than all, when practising her begging-letter impositions on the benevolent, putting forward the death of her mythical son, sometimes an officer in the army, sometimes a lecturer, sometimes a tradesman ruined by a friend he had trusted, as a plea for obtaining money, she had never made the misfortune of her sister an excuse for her roguery ; but apparently actuated by some feeling of respect for the poor old idiot's misfortunes, she kept the fact a secret from all.

The next day a coroner's inquest was held in a neighbouring public-house on the body, and a verdict returned that the poor creature had died by the visitation of God.

As soon as the inquest was over, Mrs. Moggs busied herself about the funeral. The latent sentiment of respectability still existing in the wretched creature now acted most painfully on her, for it seemed impossible to avoid that terrible degradation in the eyes of the poor—a parish funeral. But Mrs. Moggs was not to be daunted by difficulties. She found the cheapest funeral would

not cost less than three pounds, and at the time of her sister's death she did not possess as many shillings. Nor had she anything she could turn into money. Her clothes and those of her sister would not realise half-a-crown, and the sale of her miserable furniture scarcely as much more. She therefore set about raising contributions from the benevolent, but without success. Her reputation was well known in the houses she had already visited, and she got nothing ; where she was not known her now genuine sorrow spoilt the usual glibness of her tongue, and she obtained in all but a few shillings. To make up the remainder, she sold her bed, table, and chairs, telling Mrs. Duke it was her intention to leave the house as soon as her sister was buried, and hoping she would give her credit for the fortnight's rent owing. Jemima immediately and kindly forgave her the whole debt. Mrs. Moggs had now scraped together two out of the three pounds wanted, but where to look for the remainder was more than she could divine. At last, in a fit of despair, she applied to the parish authorities to let her have the twenty shillings still wanting, urging as an excuse, with considerable tact, that it would be a saving, as the funeral would of course cost more than the amount she wanted if she threw it upon the parochial authorities. The parish officer listened patiently to her tale, and then told her, with a real expression of sympathy on his countenance, that to oblige her was impossible ; that the Poor Law, in its wisdom, prohibited guardians assisting the poor to bury their relatives. If she was not able to pay the expense, the parish would

undertake the funeral themselves, and pay the whole, but to pay a portion was forbidden them.

The wretched woman left the workhouse in a state both of anger and despair. Although she knew perfectly well that if she allowed the parish to bury her sister she could still attend the funeral, and the forty shillings she had collected would have remained her own, yet not the vaguest idea of accepting the offer entered her mind, and she now returned home to her room, and there, seated beside her dead sister, turned over in her mind what further steps she could take to shield the remains of her relative from the indignity of a parish funeral.

Long and fruitless were her cogitations, and it was only through the intervention at last of the blind basket-maker that the matter appeared likely to come to a satisfactory conclusion. In the evening, when the men had returned from their work, he got one of his children to lead him to the extremity of the Rents, and soon got a small crowd of the inhabitants round him. He there explained to them the terrible strait Mrs. Moggs was in, and expatiated strongly on the degradation of a parish funeral. He concluded by saying he intended to subscribe threepence towards assisting her, and he hoped that others would do what they could to help her.

Although Mrs. Moggs was no favourite in the Rents, as she was strongly suspected of being proud, the basket-maker was, and his appeal was listened to patiently and responded to liberally, considering the poverty of the district. But, with all their liberality, the sum was still

eight shillings short of the amount required ; this was met, however, by the liberality of Duke, who, having made that day a most successful speculation in the Herne Bay shrimp line, determined on making an offering of thanksgiving to the Lord, and gave out of his own pocket the balance required for the funeral, and to this Jemima added four shillings from her private purse to buy mourning.

The next day the funeral was performed in a manner perfectly satisfactory to the feelings of Mrs. Moggs. If no stolid-looking mutes stood at the door awaiting the exit of the corpse, all the children in the Rents did, and their name was legion. At last, the undertaker's men brought down the coffin, and a silence prevailed in the Rents such as only is found on occasions of the kind in that usually noisy locality. Poor Mrs. Moggs, weeping bitterly, formed the whole of the procession which followed the body, and she no more afterwards appeared in the Rents. All that is known of her is that, as she was seen the same evening almost helplessly drunk in the Broadway, and under the charge of two policemen, it is probable the money given her by Jemima had not been spent in the purchase of mourning.

CHAPTER XI.

DUKE, ON THE ADVICE OF MR. MEFFY, ENTERS A NEW
LINE OF BUSINESS.

S soon as Mrs. Moggs had given up possession of her room on the first-floor, Jemima commenced its thorough purification.* She had, we have already stated, a natural genius for charring; and a difficult piece of cleaning, such, in fact, as would have driven mere commonplace charwomen to despair, was for her rather a stimulus to exertion than otherwise. And Mrs. Moggs had left Jemima such a task as called out all her energy and genius, personal or domestic cleanliness being of the least of that amiable lady's attributes. Jemima, however, nothing daunted, resolutely buckled on her armour, or rather took off as much of her dress as she conveniently could, strict regard being had the while to the most rigid propriety. She then took a pailful of hot water, some soap, and a scrubbing-brush, and proceeded to the room on the first floor; as she justly said, she should be ashamed to show it to a new tenant in the state it was then in. She commenced operations, and as she proceeded with her work the more energy she showed in it. There, in the centre of the room, on her knees, her

magnificent reach of arm was seen to the greatest advantage. See appeared to work in a circle, turning herself round as occasion required, and reaching from her pivot without difficulty the four corners of the small room. At last she got so excited with her work that she sang to it. It was a plaintive *adagio*, admirably adapted, both for time and tune, to the hissing sound of the scrubbing-brush accompaniment. At last her voice rose almost to enthusiasm, and, turning round her body in one magnificent swoop, who should she see standing at the door but Mr. Meffy! He was of all men, on an occasion of the kind, the one she least wished to see. Her Majesty, leaning on the arm of her prime minister, and followed by a beef-eater with his halberd, would perhaps have occasioned her less annoyance and agitation than Mr. Meffy's apparition. To collect her scattered ideas, she first wiped her mouth with her apron, and then proceeded to dry her hands upon it, receiving the while her visitor's excuses for having disturbed her. As, he said, he could find no one below, he came upstairs and knocked at the door, but, probably occupied with her work, she did not hear him. He concluded by asking if Mr. Duke was at home, as he wished to see him very much, having something very particular to say to him.

Mrs. Duke, in reply, said that she expected her husband home in two or three hours, but if he (Mr. Meffy) wished to see him and would call again in the evening, she was certain he would have much pleasure in the meeting. Mr. Meffy immediately left the house, pro-

missing to call again as advised ; and Mrs. Duke, whose composure had been considerably ruffled by Mr. Meffy's appearance, gave up her work for the day, and descended to the ground-floor room.

Duke came home early that day, and Mr. Meffy, according to his promise, called again in the evening. But how great was the change which had taken place in Mrs. Duke's appearance since the morning. Who would have recognised in that stiff, matronly-looking woman the blousy charwoman of the earlier part of the day? In fact, there is no use disguising the matter, Jemima had, without the slightest *double entendre*, the greatest respect for Mr. Meffy's opinion of gentility. Not that ever he boasted ; on the contrary, he was always modest when speaking of himself ; but there was a certain air about him that showed he knew what was what, and she did not wish to be judged disadvantageously by a man who evidently knew the world so well.

The great aim and object of Mr. Meffy's visit was to report to his friend the result of his journey into the country, as far, at least, as his experience in the poultry line went. He told Duke that he had made arrangements with some friends of his to supply Duke with poultry, at a cost considerably under what it could be purchased at in Leadenhall or any other market. Also, that there would be far less trouble and fatigue for Duke in the poultry line than in the fish. Instead of getting up at two or three o'clock to attend the Billingsgate market, all that Duke would have to do would be

to meet Mr. Meffy's friend, about five in the morning, near Kennington Common, and the poultry would then be handed over to his custody. Mr. Meffy, however, submitted to Duke that, as he (Meffy) would have all the trouble of making the purchases, it was only fair he should receive a share of the proceeds, and proposed that that portion should be one-third of the day's profits, to be settled every evening. Duke did not consider such an arrangement at all extravagant, the more so as the partnership was to be broken by either party at an hour's notice, if discontented or wishing to take up some other occupation.

Among other questions put by Meffy to Duke was whether he, Duke, could recommend him to a quiet room in the neighbourhood, so that they might be near each other, which would, by allowing more immediate co-operation, be an advantage to both. Mrs. Duke made no answer to the remark, but wondered that her husband, who was mentioning the different rooms which were to let in the neighbourhood, did not remember that they had also one which required a tenant. At last Meffy himself asked who it was they intended letting their first-floor to, and then, for the first time, it occurred to Duke they had no tenant in view, and that in all probability it would be exactly the thing for Mr. Meffy, and in a short time it was determined he should rent it; and as Mrs. Duke had that day put it into a thoroughly clean condition, it was further agreed that Meffy should enter on possession the next day. This he did, and brought with him an amount of luggage which

might have offered his landlord a security for a week's rent, and nothing more. But he also brought with him, for Duke's wear, a countryman's hat and a smock-frock, that he might have the appearance of a person fresh from the provinces, who most probably had bred the poultry himself. Duke at first made some little demur to appearing in masquerade, but when it was shown him that his fishmonger's apron was quite as much a travestie as the smock-frock, he gave way, and tried on the garment and hat, and his droll first appearance in that character caused great merriment both to Jemima and himself.

CHAPTER XII.

SMITH'S RENTS.



THE result of the poultry speculation was a decided success, the profits being far in excess of even those promised by Meffy. As for some time there occurred nothing particularly worthy of note to our principal actors, with the exception that Mr. Meffy regularly paid his rent, we may as well fill up the interim from their first entry into the poultry line till a catastrophe occurred which induced them to quit it, with giving a short description of the locality of Smith's Rents, in which the greater proportion of the scenes in our drama take place.

Smith's Rents, in point of appearance, differed but little from many other localities in the metropolis inhabited principally by our "social deposits." They are to be found even more frequently in the eastern than in the western districts, on both sides of the water. In the western portion there are, perhaps, more of those miserable collections of dwellings generally known as the back slums, in proportion to the population, than in most other parishes. These parts, though frequently designated as "Rents," possess also other titles, but all bear a strong similarity to each other in appearance.

Gorman's Buildings, Foot's Folly, Sponge Alley, Love Lane, have all so perfect a resemblance to each other, that a stranger having entered one, and afterwards penetrated into another, might have thought he had got again into the locality he had just left. The road to them is generally along a dirty thickly-populated street, from which you turn into a squalid narrow lane, from which again the Rents or Follies are entered through a narrow passage, totally impervious to any of the nobler quadrupeds, with the exception, perhaps, of a costermonger's donkey. One peculiarity, perhaps, may be noted in these places, that dense as the poverty and squalid as the people appeared in the street from which you turned, they were almost aristocratical in appearance compared with those you meet in localities such as these.

Of the houses themselves little more need be said than that they appeared to be as little adapted for the protection of life as it is possible for human intellect to imagine. No ventilation, a total absence of cleanliness, and, till the Metropolitan Local Management Act came in force, and at the date of our narrative generally, no water, save what had been collected from the soot-covered roofs, and preserved in whatever homely utensils the tenants had handy for the purpose. Sometimes, indeed, the water might have been laid on to one house, which was to serve the others in the court, but this was the exception, and not the rule. Of other domestic conveniences we cannot speak.

In Smith's Rents, which was a somewhat larger locality than most of the class, there were at least thirty

houses, fifteen on each side. Although the houses were not high, being all similar to the one occupied by Mrs. Duke and already described, the space from one row of houses to the other was so narrow that the sun could not enter the court above one hour in the course of the day. Most of the houses were in a dilapidated condition ; perhaps the one in which our hero lived was the only one which was waterproof, and that in a violent shower of rain frequently threatened to follow the example of its neighbours. The inhabitants of the top floors of these thanked their good fortune if they had umbrellas to hold over themselves when in bed.

Of the date of the building of Smith's Rents, Allan Cunningham has given us no record, but it was certainly antecedent to the great Westminster Improvement Act, when house accommodation was more abundant than at present, and when probably each tenant had a house of his own. As successive improvements (which, by-the-by, appeared principally to consist of pulling down the wretched dwellings of those who with difficulty could get a roof to shelter them, and allowing the land on which their houses stood to remain unemployed) were carried on, those ousted were obliged to seek other shelter, and hovels which before could with difficulty find a single tenant to each, were now readily rented, not by houses but by single rooms, and property which had hitherto been almost valueless now afforded a rich harvest to those who had sufficient nerve to enter the fever-haunted dwellings to collect the rents.

Again, the different localities were tenanted with

greater rapidity as the class of dwelling was the less suited to the requirements of the family, though more in proportion to their pockets. The mechanic, the shopman who did not sleep in his master's house, the different lower subordinates of the various public offices, the families of non-commissioned officers in the Guards, and others whose means were proportionate to the hire of a decent room, of course had the choice of the better localities, while those whose means too frequently represented protracted starvation, congregated together in places similar to Smith's Rents, there to seethe and fester and die. Did no one, it may be asked, having the means of making himself heard, raise his voice in the matter? Did the parochial authorities, especially that portion of them known as the guardians of the poor, not step forward and claim public attention to the fact that so much hardship was practised upon those unable to defend themselves?—to the fact that hundreds were living in a manner destructive to their health and comfort? They did so, and eloquently enough. But for justice to these poor creatures they did not apply. They simply contented themselves with calling the attention of the higher authorities to the demoralised manner in which the inhabitants of certain localities lived, spreading disease around them, and increasing the parish rates; and in most instances their appeals were responded to by fresh demolitions being ordered, increasing in still greater severity the miseries the poor were already labouring under.

Let us take Smith's Rents as the type of a locality

of the kind. Here might be found herding together all classes of the poorest, from the noblest specimens of integrity to the lowest of dishonesty. Unfortunately, with rare exceptions, all were more or less, according to their means, in the habit of drinking, women as well as men. And was it to be wondered at, that in misery such as theirs they were thankful for that which could even for a few hours shut out the world from them,—what, in their case, was simply chloroform to the mind in pain? Was it to be wondered at if the wife of a soldier, a woman who had formerly been a respectable domestic servant, required something to nerve her to support the scenes she lived in and the society she was compelled to associate with? Still more excusable was it that the hard-worked man should seek in the evening the light, warmth, and splendour of the gin-palace, rendered still more attractive by the wretched squalor of his own home.

But degraded as the society was, and as wretchedly poor, it was astonishing to what an extent charity, kindness, long-suffering, and forgiveness of injuries were practised among them. The ready manner they would assist each other in trouble might frequently have been pointed out as a lesson to be followed by those whose position in society was the highest, and whose reputation for charity was justly honoured. If all things are great or small by comparison alone, the charities of the Rents in proportion with their means exceeded a hundredfold those of the House of Lords.

The principal production of the Rents seemed to be

children—and such children! They might be seen to the greatest advantage on a day when the sun contrived for a short space of time to peer into the Rents. It appeared by its power to call the children into existence. They seemed almost to spring from the earth. Numerous as they were believed to be in the Rents, they surprised on those occasions the denizens of the locality itself. They would then huddle together in the corners where the sunbeams dwelt the longest, and something like childish merriment was elicited by their warmth. Their tongues were then loosened, and they talked as children talk. Even the staid matron of seven, with two still younger clinging to her skirts, and a dirty bundle of rags in her arms from which a low faint cry occasionally told that it concealed a baby—if the emaciated specimen of mortality was worthy of the name,—laughed and talked as if she had not a large portion of the domestic troubles of her establishment thrown upon her mind. There they warmed themselves, and chatted and laughed, and even got up among themselves some inexplicable games of play, which seemed to have neither beginning, purport, nor end.

Of these children we have something more to say. We would inquire of our municipal authorities how it is that their condition in localities such as the Rents is never made a subject for legislative action. They cannot close their eyes to the manner in which these children are swept from the face of the earth. Are they aware—or is the subject too trifling to be noticed?—that out of five children born in crowded localities

similar to the Rents, only one reaches five years of age. Does the reader doubt it? If so, let him visit the Rents, and notice the extreme youth of all the children he sees; how those younger than four years of age swarm about, so that if he enters the locality when the sun is on it he must look to his feet, that he does not tread upon some rickety little creature. Let him then look round, and count how many he meets with six years old and upwards, and compare them with the younger, and they will not average one in twenty. Let him mark the form of the younger ones, and a serious doubt will possibly arise in his mind whether it would not be a gross act of cruelty to take them from the Rents. There they are almost certain to die quietly, and without pain; but what would be their fate if they lived on, with no vital stamina to support the battle of life, with no one to instruct them at the only period when education is of use in forming the moral habits of the future adult?

Among the children in the Rents almost every form of infantile decay might be perceived, but perhaps the saddest was that of blindness. The number of children suffering from this terrible infirmity is always considerable in dirty crowded localities. We said these were especially to be pitied, and for this reason. Among the poorest, when a mother has a blind child, it is always her special favourite, and as such is more petted and cared for than the rest of her offspring; and thus, with extreme delicacy of constitution, natural to the children of the locality, added to the loss of sight, their lot in life promises to be sad indeed as soon as their own age or

their mother's death deprives them of her consolation and assistance. In the Rents was a beautiful specimen of the affection of a mother for a blind child. The lad was about fifteen years of age, and an only son. His mother was a widow, who appeared to have married late in life, or perhaps this might have been the youngest and only remaining one of her family, as she must have reached nearly sixty years of age. What she was formerly is uncertain, but she had evidently been respectable, as her language was good and well chosen. She supported herself and this boy by making soldiers' shirts for an army clothier's, near Charing Cross. Her earnings were naturally of the smallest, yet she contrived with them to keep up an appearance both of decency and comfort. She inhabited with her boy a single room, but this was the less inconvenient for her from her son's blindness, although generally family delicacy was little studied in the Rents. From the love she showed her son, it almost seemed that he contained in his person a sort of journal of those episodes of her life which had principally interested her, and on which she could dwell with the greatest pleasure. The son, on his part, without any figure of speech, seemed to look upon his mother as a part and parcel of his existence. With rare exceptions, when some neighbour's child would lead him into one of the adjoining streets, he was never seen without his mother, and the happiest moments of the existence of both were when she was taking him for an evening walk in the neighbouring park. A singular respect seemed to be paid in the Rents to the misfor-

tune of blindness by the other children ; they never attempted to joke or annoy any other child afflicted with it, while any natural deformity of frame, or that terrible calamity which almost as frequently afflicts the children of the poor in densely crowded localities—idiotcy—was frequently made a theme for ridicule and annoyance.

But it may be asked, Are there no good Christians in localities such as Smith's Rents, no municipal authorities to interfere in abuses such as we have described ? To this we answer, the reader should bear in mind, the description we are giving dates some ten years back, before many of our present laws were in force. In those days a policeman might occasionally visit the Rents, but if he saw nothing in the shape of a disturbance, or was not on an especial errand to arrest some thief against whom he had a warrant, he rapidly quitted them. No person with a gentleman's coat on his back was ever seen there, except, perhaps, some stray medical student from the hospital, who had agreed to attend a maternity case gratuitously for the sake of practice. Not even a Roman Catholic priest ever made his appearance there, and that class, as a rule, seem to hold the fear of contamination from misery in greater contempt than any other class of people.

At the present day matters are certainly better, but there is still a vast amount to be done. The inspector of nuisances busies himself most advantageously there he, like a second Hercules, would clean out the Augean stables of the metropolis were the task no greater than that imposed upon the heathen god. But, after all, our

excellent municipal authority is but a man, though a bold one, and to purify many of our London slums is a task, we hold, no man nor demi-god can achieve, and Smith's Rents is among the number. Now, also, Westminster has a far more energetic class of clergy than it possessed formerly, and both Catholic and Protestant clergymen are frequently seen in the Rents. A more powerful agency than these gentlemen, admirably as they may work, is also to be met with in a corps of ladies and Bible women, who do more to humanise the inhabitants in these localities than all the clergy together. They are the principal agents in establishing the ragged schools and the workmen's clubs, and they form the link of connection between the lying-in woman and her starving children and the richer portion of the community; they clothe with the cast-off clothes of the rich the shivering outcast, and endeavour to establish prudence and sobriety in those who have money. Still the great cause of overcrowding and all its attendant miseries works on undisturbed. Destruction of the dwellings of the poor is carried on day by day with a vigour which, by comparison, renders a bombardment trifling, and every project that shall increase the misery seems adopted without hesitation by a Legislature continually boasting of their Christian principles and charitable feeling.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE INHABITANTS OF THE "RENTS."



HAVING given a general sketch of Smith's Rents, we will now attempt a description of some, if not the most notable of its inhabitants, at least of those who will appear more or less frequently in our narrative. Mrs. Moggs and her sister we have already described; we have also mentioned the blind basketmaker, his consumptive wife and seven children, and in the last chapter a widow and her blind boy.

One of the most conspicuous personages in the court, and perhaps the most disreputable, was a certain Mrs. O'Flaherty, who, although possessed of an Irish cognomen, had not the slightest *soupçon* of the brogue, and it is more than probable was not in law entitled to the name. She was a tall masculine woman, between forty and fifty years of age, with a hoarse voice and inflamed eye. Whether she had ever been respectable it was impossible to say; no one who knew her remembered it. To her occupation and means of living when younger we will not allude at present; her principal weaknesses were quarrelling and drunkenness, the latter being kept alive by her inveterate habit of thieving. She was not

only known to every policeman in Westminster, but had been so often convicted that no gaoler could remember the number of times, when the worthy magistrate put the question to him. She rarely made her appearance in the day, but was frequently out all night. She was particularly partial to the society of drunken men, and by a singular coincidence, all of them whom she took under her protection found they had no money in their pockets the next morning. She was exceedingly passionate, and very dangerous when enraged, and her language on these occasions generally execrable. At first sight, and even after a somewhat lengthened acquaintance, every attribute of the woman seemed beaten out of her, but that was hardly the case, as her behaviour to her fellow-lodger, Mr. Stride, will show.

Mrs. O'Flaherty inhabited the ground-floor of No. 7, and Mr. Stride the second-floor or garret. He was a little, humble, meek man, who had formerly been in better circumstances; indeed tradition stated that he had been a respectable chemist and druggist. He had come down in the world; his relations had all died off, and his friends had forgotten him. But there was another reason which made him objectionable in his poverty—he was afflicted with cancer in the lower jaw, which caused a frightful wound. He had paid for medical attendance as long as he had a shilling left, and he then applied to an hospital for assistance. His disease being incurable, he could not be admitted, but he was advised to apply to the workhouse. He did so, and after having had more trouble thrown in his way to prove

his settlement than it would have taken to prove a disputed title to an estate, he was at last admitted. But his disease rendered his presence objectionable to the other paupers, and at last the parish agreed to allow him four shillings a week if he would live out of the house. The amount was somewhat objectionable, as there was a difficulty in starving on it ; but he accepted it rather than be condemned to that purgatory for the respectable poor—the wards of a parish workhouse. But another difficulty arose when he quitted the workhouse : nobody in any respectable locality would admit him as a lodger. After wandering about for some days, a cripple mendicant, who was starting on a tour in the provinces, advised him to apply for his room in Smith's Rents, as there they were by no means particular. Although, he said, the roof let in water like a cullender, it was not so bad in fine weather. Poor Stride told him he was afraid they would refuse him and take a more eligible tenant, but the cripple, who appeared well up in the law of landlord and tenant, replied, that if Stride pleased, he would sub-let the room to him, and leave in it his bedstead, on condition that he should receive sixpence in addition to the rent, which was one shilling and sixpence a-week. As this would still leave Stride two shillings a week to find himself in food, clothes, and fuel, the bargain was immediately struck ; the beggar introduced Stride to the room, and after giving up possession, and receiving a fortnight's rent in advance, leaving the new lodger to pay the landlord, he packed up his wallet and departed.

Poor Stride managed to live upon his stipend, assisted

by an outdoor patient's letter he had for the hospital. His terrible disease increased rapidly, so much so that it was impossible for him to dress his own wounds, and he was allowed to go to the hospital only twice a week ; but, fortunately for him, his lot, bad enough in itself, Heaven knows, was better than might have been expected. By some means—for he generally concealed his terrible malady by a thick shawl when he left the house—Mrs. O'Flaherty became aware of his misfortune, and the irreclaimable thief and vagabond took pity on the forlorn creature, and every morning not only dressed his wound for him, but performed what little domestic service his exceedingly limited *ménage* required. Moreover, in wet weather she cooked his food for him at her own fire on the ground-floor, the rain having a chronic habit of swamping Mr. Stride's hearth on every possible occasion.

The behaviour of the virago to poor Stride offered a singular psychological study. There was no romance about it whatever. The tenderness of manner shown by bad women to those they love, so often now spoken of in fashionable novels, was totally wanting in her, with the exception of her light hand, when dressing his wounds. She used to bully him, and in language it would be impossible for us to give the slightest idea of. Often she would offer to strike him or throw his food at him, but her hand never descended on him. She would abuse him as a lazy gormandizer, who ate up everything he could get hold of (his appetite, from the nature of his disease, was large, but upon two shillings a week he could hardly have been a glutton), and swear she would

hide his food from him ; but in the evening she would probably bring him home a saveloy she had bought,—that is to say, if she had had no opportunity of stealing it. It was also remarked that since Stride had resided in the house she had not been locked up by the police. Once, indeed, she had had a narrow escape. She had been engaged in some row, from which she was being handed out by a policeman who threatened to take her to the station. They had advanced a few yards, when suddenly she said to him, “ I say, Bobby, let us go this time, there’s a good fellow ; I’ve got a poor devil at home whose throat I have to dress every morning, and he’ll get very bad without me.”

The policeman burst into a laugh, which so irritated Mrs. O’Flaherty, that she attempted to kick him ; but, fortunately for her, she did not attain her object. At the station she pleaded so hard, that the sergeant, finding there was really very little against her, let her go, and in return she thanked him warmly, and in far better language than those who had the pleasure of her acquaintance would have considered her capable of using.

The next person we shall introduce to the reader is an individual living at No. 4 on the ground-floor. What his proper name really was it is impossible to say, for although he had lived some years in the “ Rents,” and even in the same room, yet no one had ever heard it. But a nickname served the purpose just as well, and he was known to all under the name of Gobby. What it meant or what was its etymology no one knew. He was an exceedingly quiet, taciturn man, about fifty years of

age. He had formerly, it was said, travelled a great deal, principally in southern latitudes, but he spoke little about the countries he had visited. His manners were peculiar, and his method of living very eccentric. In his room he had but little furniture, but, though very poor, it was all neatly kept. Although there was hardly a thing in it worth stealing, his door, when he was absent, was always carefully locked, and moreover the lock was an excellent patent one. He was exceedingly careful that no one should ever see him at his toilet, and this peculiarity occasioned many remarks, as personal delicacy was hardly an attribute of the inhabitants of the "Rents." Over his head resided a lively nest of young thieves, and these, although they treated him with great outward appearance of respect, occasionally indulged in the very reprehensible habit of watching their fellow-lodger, and more than one stated that when by any accident Gobby allowed his naked legs to be seen, there were also noticeable two very extraordinary scars, which extended completely round his legs just above the ankle-joint. One also said he had once seen Gobby changing his shirt, and that he had noticed his back was covered with marks similar to those on the breast of a young lady mentioned in the "Arabian Nights." How far that might have been true we have not the power of deciding, though at the same time we admit the fact as to the scars on the legs.

Shortly after his return to his native country he attempted to gain a livelihood as a hawker, but for some unknown reason the police to a man appeared his sworn

enemies. Why, it would be difficult to say ; if any cause really existed, it arose prior to his starting on his travels : certainly beyond attempting to sell things without a hawker's licence, and thereby getting himself punished as a rogue and vagabond, since his return his integrity had been without blame. By degrees, however, the police appeared to give over their persecution, and he managed to obtain sufficient to support himself by the sale of a variety of totally useless articles about the principal thoroughfares of the metropolis. One week he would be seen selling "very pretty card-racks, made of the best materials by an eminent manufacturer, and beautifully gilded and varnished, having on them very pretty pictures, warranted oil, for the small charge of twopence each. Ladies wishing to place a handsome ornament in their room had now an opportunity they might never have again." The next week he would be seen in Tottenham Court Road, with handsome watches, equal in appearance to real gold, with a chain and key, for the small charge of one penny. Again he might be seen in the neighbourhood of Covent Garden, selling a doll's kitchen battery, with fireplace and saucepans complete. Another week he would be seen in the literary line, selling beautifully bound memorandum books of the last year, equal to new, for the small charge of one penny each. From what source, with the exception last mentioned, he obtained the articles he sold, it would be impossible to say. No one ever appeared to manufacture them, nor were they to be seen in any shops ; moreover, they were not the handiwork of Gobby

himself. Another peculiarity might be mentioned in him, and that was the monotonous fluency of language he made use of when selling his wares, compared with his usual taciturn habits. As an inhabitant of the "Rents," he was neither liked nor disliked; nobody ever attempted to jest with him, nor did any one ever offer him the slightest annoyance.

We stated that the first floor of Gobby's house was tenanted by a nest of young thieves. Whence they came or who were their relatives no human being appeared to have the slightest idea. To judge from their habits, manners, and language, not one among them ever had a mother, and from their dress and cast of countenance they might all have been members of one family. Those who have formed their idea of the young London thief from Mr. Ainsworth's description in his "Jack Sheppard," or judged of his appearance by Mrs. Keeley's representation of that hero at the Adelphi, would have thought the members of the nest we are speaking of had sadly degenerated from "the good old times." Even Mr. Dickens's admirable description of the "Artful Dodger," except in the article of clothes, hardly portrayed the thieves we are speaking of. They had none of the animation and muscular activity of Mr. Dawkins, neither did they possess his ready wit; not that they wanted shrewdness, but theirs was of a different kind. In age they varied from fourteen to sixteen, but from their diminutive forms they appeared younger. They were all of stunted growth, pallid complexions, narrow chests, and small muscular development, and all with defective

teeth. Not one among them bore the marks of vaccination, but all without exception those of scrofula in the throat. Their method of living partook somewhat of the nature of a co-operative society ; they never stole from each other, or at least very rarely, and never on any occasion was one known to "peach." Temptations to the latter vice were not wanting, but, with all their faults, they resolutely resisted them. Tradition even went so far as to point out one, the weakest and worst fed of the party, who was standing at the entrance to the "Rents" one day to get a little sun, when he saw one of his pals rushing up the street with great velocity, followed by a stout gentleman and a policeman. When the fugitive arrived at the entrance to the "Rents," he darted into them with the velocity of lightning. The gentleman and the policeman, seeing the impracticable nature of the locality, stopped short with a look of great disappointment.

"Have you lost much, sir?" inquired the policeman.

"Only a handkerchief," was the reply. "I do not care about the loss, but I am exceedingly annoyed at the impudent manner in which the theft was committed ; but there is no help for it, I suppose."

"I say, young slippery," said the policeman to the invalid young thief at the entrance, "was that young gentleman a pal of yours?"

The young thief assured the policeman he had never seen him (by-the-bye, he was his bedfellow) before in all his born days.

"Come," said the policeman, "that I know is a lie."

"Upon my honour it ain't."

"Now," said the gentleman, taking a sovereign from his pocket and placing it on his open hand, "if you will tell the policeman where he can find that fellow, I'll give this to you."

The young thief's dull eye lightened up for a moment, and then suddenly dimmed again.

"No, I won't take the money," he said sorrowfully, as he turned round and walked into the "Rents."

On the second floor of the same house resided the wife of a soldier in the Guards, who had been guilty of marrying her without leave. She was a woman with a mild, amiable expression of countenance, much attached to her husband, who appeared to return her affection with interest. They had been married about seven months, and although she had formerly been in domestic service, her present interesting condition rendered it impossible for her to assist her husband in obtaining money by any labour of her own. She was an excellent needle-woman, but as she found it now excessively inconvenient to leave the house, she had no opportunity of finding work, especially as at the time it was not particularly abundant, and those who could attend at the warehouses had the first opportunity of securing that which was given out. From her husband's pay of course she could receive but little assistance, and by degrees the decent servant-girl's wardrobe went piece by piece, some to supply the ordinary means of existence, the others to be made up into very diminutive garments for the expected little one. The greatest consolation she had in her trouble—and that appeared of sufficient magnitude to

counterbalance all the inconvenience and privation she was enduring—was the unceasing attention and affection of her husband, who appeared to lose no opportunity of affording her every assistance in his power.

At No. 14 on the ground-floor resided a woman about seventy-three or seventy-four years of age. She had come down greatly in the world ; indeed, she had been sinking gradually since the death of her husband, who had died when she was about fifty. He had been a respectable tradesman, and at his death had left his wife and son not only a lucrative retail business, but also a considerable sum in ready money. Unfortunately, the son had strong notions that his father's method of conducting business was not in accordance with the ideas of the present day, and his mother, partly convinced by his arguments and partly blinded by her affection for him, gave way to his wishes. A new shop-front soon replaced the old-fashioned one, and they commenced business on a more extended scale. However, success did not follow their efforts, and before three years had passed since the death of the husband, they were compelled to give up the house and start again in a more humble manner. About eight years after the husband's death the son followed him. Consumption, accelerated by chagrin at the bad success of his mercantile speculations, had brought him to a premature grave. After his death his mother attempted to continue the business, but so poorly were her exertions rewarded that she was obliged to sell the goodwill for what trifle she could get for it, and try to start a small school. For some time a mode-

rate amount of success attended her efforts, but an attack of the palsy obliged her to close her establishment for some months, and when she opened it again her pupils had gone elsewhere. She tried another in a far poorer locality, but the incessant shaking of her head from the effects of the palsy did not please the mothers of families, who considered that she must be ill-tempered, and she met with very indifferent success. In short, she got older and older, and at the same time poorer and poorer, yet never for a moment did her courage give way, or an appeal either for charity or parochial relief present itself to her mind. All she asked for was assistance in getting pupils, and that she rarely got. She continued falling from bad to worse, till at last she opened her small school at No. 14 in the "Rents." Her pupils were few, and the proportion of the defaulters among them large. She had only six on whom she could count, and the amount they paid was only threepence a week each, which, with the addition of the money paid her for making three or four soldiers' shirts—which she contrived to accomplish by the aid of a powerful pair of spectacles, and for which she probably netted a shilling or eighteenpence—was all she had to depend on. How she contrived to keep body and soul together, God and the poor woman only knew. Still she struggled on resolutely, and, as she often expressed it, would rather starve than apply to the parish for assistance.

It would occupy too much space to give a detailed description of the other inhabitants of the "Rents," with one exception necessary for our story. They were, as

far as poverty went, all of the same class ; as far as respectability of life, or dishonesty, or profligacy is concerned, there could not have been greater discrepancies. Of religion and its attributes there was very little, with one exception, and that the beautiful one of charity, which was carried to an extraordinary extent among them, showing itself frequently in the most eccentric forms, but remaining charity pure and unadulterated the while. If, as in our Protestant view of theology, good works without faith avail us nothing, we fear the condition of the "Rents" was lamentable indeed. If, on the contrary, the Jewish theory, that charity is prayer in action, be true, the piety shown in the "Rents" would equal that of an archbishop's palace.

The exception above alluded to was a certain Theodore Walters. He was the most aristocratical personage in the "Rents," for with his wife and son he rented a whole three-roomed house. He was a tall, powerful, and at first sight not bad-looking man, about fifty years of age, but the favourable impression at first conceived of his good looks generally went off at a second glance. There was not one of his features which could be objected to as ugly, but there was a singular expression of insincerity and falsehood in his eye. So strong was it that the open, plausible manner which he affected in speaking could not neutralise it, and he was looked upon with suspicion by all the inhabitants of the "Rents." And yet the feeling among them was certainly without reason on their part, for not one of them could justly complain of his having done them an injury ; on the

contrary, he was civil and obliging, even to ostentation, to all. He would talk to the women and children freely and good-naturedly, and to the men he was the good companion all over ; but the women never spoke of him in terms of admiration, nor the men in those of good-fellowship. He had no ostensible profession or business ; sometimes he would be absent for a week together, and when he returned he never gave the slightest account of his actions. He was generally, if not always, respectably dressed, and he was evidently not without some education. The most credible report, and indeed the only probable one extant, was that he was an ex-policeman,—a conclusion which, from his being seen continually in conversation with different members of the force, was not without some foundation ; yet in not one single instance was he ever known to have given the slightest information against any inhabitant of the "Rents ;" and it must be admitted he could have made himself most obnoxious in that respect had he chosen. Even the nest of young thieves looked upon him without apprehension or defiance, and even occasionally were seen speaking to him, if not with confidence, at least without the slightest restriction.

Mrs. Walters was a mild, amiable little woman, apparently in delicate health, and about forty-five years of age. She was certainly younger than her husband, but not so much so as to make any very material difference visible. In her manner she was quiet and somewhat reserved. She evidently had great love for her husband, and obeyed him willingly in all things ; and, to do

Walters justice, he behaved exceedingly well to his wife.

But if Mrs. Walters's affection for her husband was great, that for her son amounted to a species of adoration. The latter was a fine-grown young fellow, about twenty or twenty-one years of age, who would have been handsome had he not had so much of the appearance of a bully about him. He was a journeyman carpenter, an indifferent workman, and by no means a favourite in any shop he was employed in. He was, like his father, frequently seen in the society of the police, and it is certain he frequently acted as a sort of agent for that body. On this subject, however, nothing, with one exception, is known for certain. Young Walters was a great admirer of the prize-ring, and frequently attended the fights. It, however, began to be noticed among the members of the Pugilistic Benevolent Association that whenever young Walters attended a fight the police were sure to interfere. However, excessive suspicion not being an attribute of the pugilistic profession, this for some time was taken no notice of, till at last it was remarked that no matter how expensive the ticket might be to see the fight—and it sometimes amounted to three guineas—young Walters was always present. This, coupled with the knowledge that his means were only those of an operative carpenter, and that he was frequently out of work, induced inquiries to be made on the subject through some gentlemen of the press employed on "*Bell's Life*," and the result was that young Walters was proved to be in correspondence with the police,

being engaged, by a society of gentlemen wishing to put down boxing, to give information of every coming fight. This method of raising money came to a termination, but not without young Walters receiving a proof how much the "Fancy" disapproved of his conduct. They took the occasion of meeting him one evening in a certain sporting-house, where two boxers whose fight young Walters had prevented from ending comfortably, met him, and then and there gave him physical proof of their disapprobation. The result was that he gave up all connection with the "Fancy" that evening, carrying away with him a broken nose, which was never thoroughly set straight, and which ever afterwards considerably disfigured his otherwise handsome countenance. In his dress and appearance, Edward Walters was what is termed "flashy." He was a great favourite with the humbler class of maid-servants, such as those of all-work, and he had on his visiting list a considerable number of those who were struck by his person and manners, and it is greatly to be suspected that the small proceeds of the little work he did were increased by the loans he obtained from these poor girls. With one of these he was particularly intimate, and there is no doubt she loved him devotedly. She was the only servant of an eccentric wealthy old bachelor, who resided in Lambeth; and till she had formed the acquaintance of young Walters she was a girl of unblemished reputation; and even then her fault was known only to him and herself. He had offered her marriage, and had even introduced her to his mother, who had received her with great cordiality, the

more so as she particularly wished to see her son married to a respectable young woman. She thought that a connection of the kind was all that was wanted to increase the steadiness of her son's behaviour and to make him an estimable member of society, and with this end she pressed on the match, but with little success. The young scoundrel her son had simply formed the acquaintance, in part for his amusement, in greater part for the money he could obtain from the poor girl, if not to make her his tool in acts of direct dishonesty.

CHAPTER XIV.

WHICH INTRODUCES THE ONLY WEALTHY CHARACTER IN
OUR DRAMA TO THE NOTICE OF THE READER.



R. MOSTYN, the gentleman with whom Jessie Morgan, Edward Walters's sweetheart, lived, was, as we have already said, an eccentric old bachelor. He lived in a small house in a somewhat secluded neighbourhood, and, although a man of undoubted wealth, kept but one servant.

Jessie was a woman of some five or six and twenty years of age. Without being absolutely pretty, there was something exceedingly engaging in her countenance, and an expression of perfect integrity and candour which told that she was honest herself, and thought well of others. She was thoroughly contented in her situation; indeed, with the exception of want of society, if a maid-of-all-work is allowed a weakness of the kind, she had nothing whatever to complain of: her master gave her but little trouble; he kept a good table,—had it not been so, it would have been more her fault than his, for she was entirely mistress as far as the housekeeping was concerned,—and her wages were liberal.

Jessie Morgan was in love, deeply so, with the scamp

Edward Walters. How to describe her passion is exceedingly difficult. There is something especially ludicrous—why, we know not—in the love of the servant-girl, and to speak of it generally excites a smile. The conventional idea of a maid-servant in love is connected either with a clumsy-looking soldier, or with stealing cold mutton to give to a policeman. Those who take upon themselves to instruct the public, either by pictures or caricatures, generally paint her as a blowsy-looking female, seated at an inconvenient table, biting a pen, with a sheet of paper untouched and an inkstand before her. She seems also to take the most inconvenient times possible to concoct her letters, for we notice there are always at least three of her mistress's children quarrelling or crying in the room at the moment, and her mistress herself, aroused by the noise, is entering an appearance. We are, nevertheless, of the opinion that a servant-girl can love as faithfully, as ardently, and as honourably as anybody else; at least Jessie Morgan could and did, greatly, as it afterwards turned out, to her sorrow.

Although Mr. Mostyn's establishment was humble, he was by no means a miser. He kept no company, and the only person who visited him was a nephew, a man about fifty years of age. His visits, however, were few and far between, and little affection seemed to exist between the uncle and nephew.

The furniture of his house was old-fashioned, but of excellent quality, and he possessed also a considerable quantity of valuable plate, a large portion of it being in daily use. It was fortunate for him he had so honest a

servant as Jessie Morgan, not only on account of his plate, but also as he had the habit of placing in her hands, as each quarter-day arrived, receipts for a considerable amount of money, which she exchanged with his various tenants when they called to pay their rent, Mr. Mostyn having a great aversion to seeing strangers. When all the receipts were given, Jessie gave over the whole proceeds to her master, and received from him, from time to time, the money required for housekeeping, as it was a portion of her duties to pay the tradesmen's bills. Her master had no banker, and it was therefore to be assumed that a considerable sum of money was always kept in the house locked up in an old escritoire, in which he kept his papers and memoranda ; but of this, beyond the fact that the money was there, Jessie knew nothing. Fortunately both for her master and herself, Jessie was not of a curious disposition ; and she also knew that, although he placed great confidence in her, he was, when aroused, not only irritable but suspicious, and that nothing would offend him more than the thought that he was watched by his servant.

How Jessie Morgan first got acquainted with Edward Walters we have no record to show ; probably when she went for the beer, for it is generally at the public-house that the different kinds of evil which beset these poor girls take their origin. At the time we are speaking of they had been acquainted about five months. Jessie had already had the pleasure of spending several evenings with her lover at that maid-of-all-work's Paradise, the theatre, as her master was good-natured enough to sit

up for her, but Walters had never yet been admitted to the house, as all strangers, especially male, were prohibited from setting foot inside the hall door; and Jessie, notwithstanding her love for her admirer, was too honest a servant to disobey the prohibition, although strongly pressed by Walters to do so.

A change took place in the housekeeping for a short time. Mr. Mostyn was seized with some unfavourable symptoms of disease of the chest, and was strongly advised by his medical attendant to try for a few weeks the climate of South Devonshire. At first he made strong objections, but as his health did not improve, and as he was by no means tired of this sublunary world, he at last consented to try the experiment. After considerable procrastination he at last departed, leaving Jessie in charge of the house. Of course, strict injunctions were given her to keep everything locked up, always to open the door with the chain on, and many other directions of the same description, ending at last with the strict order that no one was to be allowed to enter the house. All which Jessie faithfully promised, and as faithfully intended, to observe; but unfortunately, the second evening after Mr. Mostyn's departure, who should ring at the bell but Edward Walters, accompanied by his mother!

What was Jessie to do? For some time she stood talking with them at the door, but at last the thought struck her that that was but scant hospitality, and then she remembered that when she called on Mrs. Walters that worthy woman brought forward her tea-caddy, and

would take no excuse, but insisted on Jessie's taking a cup of tea. For a short time Jessie balanced in her mind whether she should obey her master's injunction and still keep them at the door, or whether she should ask them in, and return as far as she was able the hospitality she had received. The latter resolution was at last carried, and Mrs. Walters and her son were invited to enter. It may easily be imagined that no repetition of the offer was required, and a few minutes afterwards Edward, his mother, and Jessie were comfortably seated at the table and at tea.

Happily, most happily for Jessie, did that evening pass. It was an event in her life to be marked with a white stone. She seemed already almost admitted into the Walters's family, and doubtless the thought frequently crossed her mind, that the pleasure she was then enjoying was but the foreshadowing of greater to come. Mrs. Walters stayed till a somewhat late hour, and when she left she kissed Jessie tenderly, and told her that as soon as Mr. Mostyn had returned, she hoped she would come and visit her, and moreover, that her husband would be as happy to see her as she would.

The French proverb, *Ce n'est que le premier pas qui coûte*, is now almost naturalised in our language; and it is worthy, well worthy of the honour, as, unlike most others, there is not another extant which flatly contradicts it, and poor Jessie was an example of its truth. The next evening Edward Walters called again, and was this time admitted. He remained for the evening with her, nothing particularly worthy of notice occurring, as the

request Walters made for the loan of a few shillings was now of too frequent occurrence to be worth mentioning.

It would have been well if poor Jessie Morgan had contented herself with admitting her lover into the secret of her pecuniary affairs only to the extent of the floating balance she kept in her box up-stairs, but unfortunately one day, probably with the intention of making herself more interesting in his eyes, she mentioned that she kept an account at the savings bank. This, it may be remarked, amounted to the sum of thirteen pounds, for Jessie was naturally exceedingly economical. If she really did mention it to increase the value of her attractions, she certainly succeeded. No one could be more affectionate than Edward Walters was that evening, and no one could talk more reasonably. He painted in very brilliant colours his prospects in life if he had only "a matter of twenty pounds" to back him, but unfortunately without money a fellow could do nothing. With twenty pounds and a good little wife he was sure he could make his way in the world. Jessie asked him in what way. Well, he could take under-contracts for carpenters' work, and a precious deal of money could be made that way, he could teil her. He knew many fellows who were now among the richest men in London who began in no better way, and now look at them. Why, there's no lord in the land that can compare with them, and as for their wives and families, they are more like duchesses than anything else.

Jessie said nothing at the time, but she treasured all these sayings in her heart.

The courtship went on smoothly enough. The wedding was determined on,—that is to say, nearly so. It was fixed to take place as soon as their joint finances should reach twenty pounds. At present they were some short way from it. Jessie had her thirteen pounds (she had now informed her lover of the amount), and Edward had five-and-twenty shillings. He would have had two pounds, but he had lately made Jessie a present of a brooch. All that was now wanting was five pounds, and in another month her quarter's wages would be due, so that very shortly after Mr. Mostyn's return the ceremony could take place, and Jessie would be completely happy.

By way of trying his power of working a sub-contract, Edward Walters one evening told Jessie that if he had ten pounds in hand he would take a job at once, and by it he was certain of clearing at least five pounds profit. Jessie opened her eyes at the prospect of such a lucrative affair, but unfortunately she could not assist him, she said, as all her money was in the savings bank, and she must give at least a week's notice before she could withdraw it. Walters seemed somewhat annoyed at this, but there was no alternative. Later in the evening he asked her, if he could get the contract put off for ten days or a fortnight, whether she would let him have the money. At first she readily answered in the affirmative, but upon a moment's consideration she corrected herself, and told him it was impossible, as she must attend at the office herself to give notice, and she had promised Mr. Mostyn that she would never leave the house in the evening till his return. Thereupon her lover began to

argue on the folly of making such promises, and asked what objection there could be, as he was perfectly willing to remain in the house during her absence and see that all was right till her return. It required very little argument to prove to Jessie that there could be no possible danger, and it was agreed that on the next Monday evening she would leave her lover on guard and give the requisite notice at the office for the withdrawal of the ten pounds.

On the Monday, Edward Walters, true to his promise, called on Jessie in the evening, and shortly afterwards the poor girl put on her bonnet and shawl and proceeded to the savings bank office. She had hardly been gone five minutes when a knock was heard at the door, and when Edward opened it, who should stand before him but Mr. Meffy! Not the slightest surprise was elicited, not a question asked, but Mr. Meffy walked into the house with the most perfect confidence, and seating himself on a chair, he threw his hat on the sofa. Now what rendered this behaviour the more extraordinary was, that although he and Walters both lived in the Rents, and met each other possibly more than once each day, they were never seen to speak or take the slightest notice of each other; and here, on the contrary, they seemed to be on terms of the most perfect acquaintanceship, and by their manner it might be assumed they could not have parted ten minutes before.

No sooner had Meffy seated himself than he looked round the room with a peculiar glance of anxious curiosity. Presently he rose from his chair, and advanc-

ing to an old bookcase, he examined it cautiously and attentively. His scrutiny over, he threw himself again in his chair, exclaiming, "There's nothing there ; what is there overhead?" "Come and see," was the laconic answer he received ; and Edward Walters, taking the lighted candle from the table, preceded his friend upstairs. The first room they entered was Mr. Mostyn's bedroom. The sagacious eye of Mr. Meffy lighted up the first moment he looked around him, and there was on his face the expression of joy an Australian digger might be expected to show if he had hit upon a twenty-pound nugget. He walked straight up to the escritoire and examined it attentively. In a few moments he pulled out from his pocket a bunch of skeleton keys, and attempted to open the lock. He soon, however, desisted. "D—n it!" said he, "it's a patent lock, and I cannot open it."

"Nonsense!" said his friend, "let me try. I know I'll manage it."

So saying, he took up the keys and was proceeding to put one in the lock, when Meffy stopped him. "Walters," said he, "that will not do ; you are too clumsy. Understand that I am to have the management of this job, or it goes no further. The way you are setting about it proves to me that all will be found out."

"How do you mean?" said Walters.

"You are so precious clumsy. To do that job properly not a mark ought to be left on the lock—not even the slightest scratch ; but from the way you are going to work, the police would know as well that it was done by

a picklock as if you had written it over it, and instead of throwing the scent on the girl, it would be clear it had been done by strangers. Once more, I must have the whole management of the job, or I will go no further."

"Do as you like, then, but tell us what it is you intend doing."

"We will come again another night—the one before the old man's return, perhaps, would be the best, as it will then appear the next day as if the girl had made use of his keys, as he no doubt has them about him. I will bring with me some that will open the best lock that ever was made, without leaving the slightest trace on any part of it. When do you expect him back?"

"I don't know; he is to write to Jessie a day or two before he comes."

"Well, you keep a bright look-out and let me know. Now let us see what else the old fellow has got."

Mr. Meffy then looked round the room, and noticed in it a large and deep cupboard in a recess. He immediately advanced to it, and after a moment's glance at the lock he again took out his keys, and without the slightest difficulty opened it.

For a moment Mr. Meffy remained motionless, examining the objects which met his view. There were several boxes on shelves, on which his eye rested for a moment; but his attention was principally riveted on an ironbound chest on the floor. Presently he took a step forward, and stooping down, attempted to lift the chest, but from its weight he was unable to accomplish it. There was no doubt as to the contents of the chest, for

not only did its appearance betoken them, but two silver articles (a cream-jug and a sugar-basin) were placed on the lid.

"There will be a pretty good haul there," said Edward Walters, who was standing behind Meffy.

"It looks so," was the reply.

"There can't be much doubt about the matter," said Walters, "if you cannot lift it."

"That in itself," said Meffy, "is no proof. I have frequently known plate-chests screwed to the floors from the inside, and many a fellow has been deceived and run the risk of fourteen years, to find, when they were opened, that they held but very little. However, this I think is a different case."

"What makes you think so?"

"Do you see those two things left out—the cream-jug and the sugar-basin? In a house where everything is as neat as it is here, it is a sign there was not room in the chest. But we must be careful what we are about. Find out to-night from the girl when her master is expected home, and we will arrange everything, if possible, for the night before."

"But," said Walters, "ain't you going to do anything with those?" alluding to the two articles which had been left out.

"Well," said Meffy, reflectively, "I hardly know. Yes, I think you might take one of them—the milk-jug."

"Why not both?"

"Because if one only is taken, and by any accident things go wrong, suspicion will immediately fall on the

girl, as they will say if it had been done by thieves they would have taken both."

"But what does it matter if we are going to take the rest later?"

"If we find the old fellow has much money here," said Meffy, placing his hand on the *escritoire*, "I am not sure whether I would touch the plate at all. If it is left, it would throw the police off the scent."

"Just as you please, Meffy, but I do not like leaving the others," said Walters. "I'll take this now, then?" said he, taking up the milk-jug.

"Yes, and give it to your governor; he knows how to get rid of it."

"But," said Walters, "he won't do it without having something out of it; you don't know him if you think he would."

"And quite right too. Anyhow, it is better he should do it than you. It's always better to make as many breaks in a thing of this kind as possible. Now I'll be off before she comes back, as I do not want her to see me."

Then, locking the cupboard, and taking another rapid glance round the bedroom, Mr. Meffy descended the stairs, and Walters closed the street door after him.

Shortly after Meffy had left the house Jessie returned, in blissful ignorance of what had taken place during her absence. Walters appeared delighted to see her, and thanked her warmly for the trouble she had taken in his behalf.

"Don't think anything about it," said Jessie ; "it will soon be all one."

"Have you no idea," inquired Walters, "when the old fellow will be home?"

"Some day next week for certain. I hope, however, it will not be before Tuesday, as on Monday night I must go to the savings bank for the money."

After a little more conversation, Walters left her, and Jessie, after having fastened up the house, went to bed to dream of the happiness she believed to be in store for her.

Edward Walters's thoughts, as he returned home, fluctuated on a variety of subjects. In the first place he by no means agreed with Meffy as to the advisability of leaving the plate, even in the case of finding plenty of money in the *escritoire*. Like many vulgar minds, that which made the greatest glitter had to him a charm even above the intrinsic value of the article itself. He even began to feel rebellious, and thought in what manner he could set Meffy's plans at defiance. It need hardly be said that no love existed between the pair of scoundrels, and Meffy, being certainly the most talented of the two, was looked upon not only with suspicion by his friend, but with envy. Still, Walters had an instinctive idea that Meffy was a dangerous character to quarrel with, and so at last he determined that he would follow the advice of the latter till he had an opportunity of escaping from his hands. Afterwards Walters began to think over the affair of the milk-pot. He did not at all like the idea of placing it in his father's hands ; and, in fact, he

hesitated for some time before the shop of a pawnbroker, trying to summon up courage enough to go in, but the fear of Meffy restrained him. He then continued his walk homewards, till he arrived at the entrance to the "Rents," where he saw his father, who was evidently expecting him. Edward Walters made a slight grimace of annoyance when he saw him, as he rightly guessed he had been informed of all that had taken place by Meffy; but he concealed the feeling, and the next moment father and son were seen walking together towards the Broadway.

"Meffy told me," said the father, "that you have something you want me to sell for you; what is it?"

"Only this," said the son, furtively placing the silver milk-jug in his hand.

"That ain't much, at any rate," said the father. "If you could get this, why not more?"

"I don't know," said Edward; "Meffy set his face against it."

"Was there much more?"

"A good deal; but there was only a sugar-basin out. When I say a good deal, I believe so, for it was locked up in a chest."

"But why didn't Meffy open it?"

"It was a patent lock, like the bureau, and he had nothing that would fit it."

"But why did you leave the other thing?"

"Meffy said it was more prudent, for if things went wrong, and one only was missing, it would look more like the work of a servant than any one else."

That was true enough," said the father, reflectively. "He's a downy one, is Meffy; well, I will manage this, and I will meet you at home. Don't say you have seen me to your mother;" and the father and son separated.

Two days afterwards the elder Walters proposed to his son that he should accompany him to see Jessie. He had never been introduced to her, and he thought it would be a good excuse for his visit to form her acquaintance. It need hardly be said he had another object in view; it was to see how the ground lay, and also to ascertain, if he could, whether Meffy were playing them false. The son agreed to the proposition, and in the evening, about nightfall, both father and son arrived at Mr. Mostyn's house. Jessie, when she was informed who was her new visitor, received him warmly, and the elder Walters on his part appeared delighted to see his future daughter-in-law. They chatted pleasantly together for some time, the conversation being led by him to the subject of the approaching marriage, concerning which he asked a volley of questions. As his manners were candid and open even to affectation, he soon won the poor girl's heart. After he had been in the house about an hour, he proposed returning alone, and then Jessie remembered for the first time that she had offered her guest no refreshment, and proposed getting him a cup of tea. This, however, he declined, saying that he would stop at a public-house on his way home, and get some refreshment. To this young Walters objected, saying that he also was thirsty, and that if Jessie would lend him a jug he would go to fetch some beer himself. But

Jessie determined to play the hostess, and putting on her bonnet and shawl, she started for the public-house, saying she would not be more than five minutes away. Immediately on her quitting the house both father and son ran up-stairs to Mr. Mostyn's bedroom, and were soon engaged in examining externally both the plate-chest and *escritoire*. After a little consideration, they found the locks were both patent, and evidently by the same maker, and the few skeleton keys the pair had with them, though capable of opening the cupboard-door, were inert upon the patent lock. "We can do nothing with them to-night," said the elder Walters, "we must abide by Meffy's advice. However," he continued, opening the cupboard-door, "I see no reason we should leave this behind," taking up the sugar-basin, his cupidity being aroused by the sight of it. "You need not mention to Meffy that we have got it, or that I have been here this evening. If we have got a haul, we may as well keep the fish." The father and son then descended the stairs into the parlour, the former placing the sugar-basin in his hat, and covering it with his great-coat.

They had hardly seated themselves, when Jessie returned with the beer. She then busied herself in getting some bread and cheese (in justice to Jessie it should be mentioned that during her master's absence she was on board wages), and having spread out a cloth on the table, they were all soon enjoying a comfortable supper, conversation the while being carried on in the most friendly manner. At last the elder Walters rose to leave, and Jessie, in her haste to please her future father-in-law,

attempted to take up his overcoat, which covered his hat. With great haste, and greater presence of mind, he caught her hand before she had grasped the coat. "No, my dear," he said, with excellently affected gallantry, "not yet. When you're my daughter you may wait upon me if you like, and I shall thank you for it, but not now. Edward," he said, "come and give me a hand with my coat, will you? What a lazy fellow you are!"

Edward immediately understood his father, and went to assist him, carefully keeping his back to Jessie the while. He told her to see if his father had not placed his stick in the corner of the room, to give him time to place the sugar-basin under his arm, cover it with his coat, and get into the dark passage. The elder Walters, however, found his stick near him, and Jessie, when she bade him farewell, did not notice, from the obscurity of the night, that he had anything with him.

The father had hardly quitted the door-step when he almost ran against a policeman on his beat; indeed, he partially touched him. "I beg your pardon," said Walters, "I did not see you."

"No offence," replied the policeman; then looking hard in Walters's face by the aid of the street lamp, he said: "Hullo, Theodore Walters, is that you?"

Walters was naturally disconcerted at the recognition, the more so as he could not catch a view of the policeman's features, as he stood with his back to the lamp.

"Yes, it is," said Walters; "but who are you?"

"Don't you remember me? My name is Thompson. I was with you in the Dublin police;" and then he pro-

ceeded to mention the part of the town in which they had been on duty together. If Walters was annoyed at the recognition, he was doubly so to find the policeman knew him when he was in the Irish police, as the circumstances attendant on his quitting that force were but little to his credit. "Oh yes," said Walters, feigning great satisfaction, "now I remember ; but didn't you leave the Irish police before I did?"

"Oh no, I stopped there two years after that affair of yours," said Thompson.

"Ah," said Walters, "never was a man worse treated than I was in that affair. I was innocent as a lamb. When that old woman gave me the teapot to sell for her, I had no idea it was not her own. It ain't likely I should have touched it if I had."

"Of course not ; who would?" said Thompson ; "but what a jade she must have been to swear she never gave it to you at all !"

"Oh, she'll suffer for it when her time comes," said Walters, sanctimoniously. "A thing of that kind can't go unpunished."

"What did you get?" said Thompson.

"Twelve months of it, to my sorrow."

"It's a caution," said Thompson, with something like irony in his tone, which Walters did not perceive. "It's a caution to our fellows never to do a good-natured action for women ; I wouldn't. You're sure to get yourself in some trouble if you do. What are you about now?"

"Well, nothing particular. I do a little bit for the

detective people sometimes ; especially the Private Inquiry Office."

"They pay well, I understand," said Thompson.

"Well, on some jobs," said Walters, "they do pretty well, but I'd rather be in regular work somewhere. I wish, if you hear of anything, you would let me know."

"Certainly. Where do you live now?"

"In Fryingpan Alley, Tooley Street, No. 7, the second door on the right," said Walters, attempting to pass on.

"Well," said his friend, "if I hear of anything I'll let you know ; but take my advice, if you can get any good detective work keep it, for it's a precious deal better than tramping the streets all night."

As the policeman said this, apparently by way of giving emphasis to his remark, he struck two or three times with his knuckles the protuberance made by the sugar-basin under Walters's coat, which each time returned a dull, metallic sound. "Hullo," he continued, "what have you got there?"

"Oh, nothing particular ; only a job I've got to get done for my old woman."

"Does she live at Mostyn's?"

"Mostyn's," said Walters, "Mostyn's ; who's he?"

"Why, the old fellow who lives at the house you have just left."

"Oh, I know now what you mean. No," he continued, somewhat confused ; "I only called there to see a person I know."

"Was he at home?"

"What does that concern you," said Walters, trying to laugh, "whether he was or no, or whether it was a man or a woman?"

"I say," said Thompson, with mock gravity, "you're somewhat old, you know, for that sort of thing."

Walters again forced a laugh, and bade his friend good night, saying he was in a great hurry, and the policeman continued his beat in the contrary way.

Walters commenced his walk in a jaunty manner enough, but soon it sank into one of a far more sober description. Nothing could have been more annoying than his *rencontre* with the policeman Thompson, who had known him when he had been a member of the Dublin police-force, and who was also cognizant of the disgraceful act which procured not only his dismissal, but a long imprisonment as well. The circumstances of the case were as follows. Although a married man with a son, he had attempted to profit by the well-known strong affinity between cooks and policemen, and passed himself off as a bachelor. Under that disguise he had contrived first to engage the notice and then the affection of a somewhat elderly cook in a small family. She had lately come to the conclusion that, as she was verging on fifty, it was time she should settle herself in life—no very difficult matter when it was known that what she wanted in youth was to a certain extent compensated for by a most respectable account in the savings bank. Although of sound common sense and considerable shrewdness, Walters contrived to gain great power over her affections. He was in every respect "the man for her

money." He was not young nor flighty, but, on the contrary, of staid and respectable demeanour. The courtship went on happily enough for some time; the only thing that gave the old lady the slightest uneasiness was an apparently irrepressible desire on the part of Walters to borrow half-crowns. This went on for some time, sorely to her annoyance, but her vexation was at last brought to a height by a request for a loan of five pounds. Some very sharp words took place between them on the occasion, principally on her part, which, however, ended peaceably, Walters expressing his sorrow at having offended her, and promising he would never again ask her for money, unless it was to purchase the goodwill, stock, and fixtures of a chandler's shop—the highest ambition of most cooks,—and then everything should be conducted by herself.

About a fortnight afterwards, in consequence of several trifling things, such as a few spoons, being missed from the house, a watch was kept by the master, and one evening he found Walters emerging cautiously from the door with apparently something concealed under his coat. He immediately rushed after him and seized him by the collar, and insisted on knowing what he had got with him. For some short time Walters attempted to bully it out, but not succeeding, and a policeman approaching, he acknowledged that he had with him a teapot, which had been given him by the cook to sell, and he produced one which the gentleman immediately recognised as his own property. Walters was instantly given in charge. The case was committed for trial, bail

being taken for the unfortunate cook, her master himself offering to be bound in any amount for her, so certain was he of her innocence. At the trial Walters was found guilty, but his fellow-prisoner was acquitted, as not a tittle of reliable evidence could be brought against her, while her fifteen years' character raised her innocence still higher in the eyes of both judge and jury ; and she left the court, in the phraseology usual on occasions of the kind, without the slightest stain upon her character. On Walters the judge not only pronounced a sentence of two years' imprisonment with hard labour, but strongly animadverted on his infamous and cowardly behaviour. After the expiration of his sentence Walters returned to London, and had principally supported himself by acting as an agent to one of those disgraceful nuisances, a Private Inquiry Office, and by other means if possible less honourable.

Walters went on his way meditating deeply on the circumstance of his recognition by his former fellow-policeman, and calculating if any and what unpleasant effects could arise from it, when on suddenly stopping and casually looking around, he thought he saw Thompson the policeman in the obscurity on the other side of the way, apparently watching him. On looking more attentively, however, he found that he (assuming it was Thompson) had turned round and was walking now in a contrary direction. After a moment's reflection he decided that it was simply that power which makes cowards of us all that had called up the suspicion, and he continued his road homewards. Arrived nearly at

Westminster Bridge he began to calculate whether it was worth while to carry the sugar-basin further or to dispose of it at once to a tradesman he was acquainted with in the neighbourhood. At last he decided on the latter course, and he entered a small dark shop, lighted by a single candle, near the foot of the bridge. The tradesman, a respectable old man of the Jewish persuasion, asked him a variety of questions, all of which Walters answered fluently enough. The sugar-basin was weighed, some memoranda of the transaction were then made by the tradesman, and the money handed over to Walters, who then quitted the shop. Before he had gone half-a-dozen paces, a young countrified-looking man stopped him near a gas-lamp and asked him the way to Kennington Cross. Walters explained it to him, but as the young fellow did not clearly understand him, he repeated the question, looking in Walters's face quite in a simple manner the while. Walters again repeated his answer, which this time the young man understood, and thanking Walters for his civility, wished him good night.

CHAPTER XV.

THE DESTROYING ANGEL PASSES OVER THE RENTS.



WE must now return to our hero and his wife. The poultry trade flourished with them remarkably well, so much so that they had already contrived to put by several pounds in the savings bank. Meffy conducted his part of the business satisfactorily enough. Duke every evening gave him an account of the day's sales, paying him the price agreed on, and the stipulated royalty on the profits. Twice a week, at the appointed spot in the neighbourhood of Kennington Common, Duke met Meffy's friend from the country and received from him a basket of poultry, sometimes larger than at other times, but always fresh and good, if occasionally a little skinny. As soon as Duke had received them he returned home, and the mortuary toilet of the deceased birds commenced. In this the skill and experience of Mrs. Duke were of great use to her husband, although she invariably left all the artistic points—such as trussing them so as to make them look plump, singeing them, putting on the powder so as to diminish as much as possible any appearance of age, and other matters of the same kind—entirely to the superior delicacy of touch of her husband. When every-

thing was ready, Duke would don his smock-frock, which Jemima used to keep as scrupulously clean as those we see in ballets at the Victoria Theatre—where, in fact, she had acquired her notions of a pastoral life—and start on his round. He had contrived by his civility to obtain a very respectable *clientèle*, so much so that he had more than once entertained the question of taking a small shop in the Wandsworth Road, and adding to the poultry trade the tripe and dogs' meat business; but Jemima very justly reminded him how dangerous a failing was ambition, and as he very properly looked upon her as his better half, he subdued his aspirations till their circumstances should be based upon a more solid foundation than they were at that moment, flourishing as they seemed to be.

On the morning after the Monday evening on which the scene we have narrated took place at Mr. Mostyn's, when Jessie Morgan went to give notice at the savings bank that she intended withdrawing her ten pounds, Meffy called on Duke and Jemima as he descended the staircase, and told them he had come to bid them good-bye for some days. He could not say how long, probably a fortnight. He had an uncle who was very ill who wished to see him, and although he did not expect to inherit anything by his death, still it was only Christian-like on his part to see the old man on his death-bed. Jemima thoroughly agreed with him, and told him it was very kind of him to go and do so. Meffy seemed pleased at her approval, and then, addressing Duke, he told him that the poultry would arrive as usual, and that

he had better not pay the carrier when he brought it, but keep the money till his (Meffy's) return, when they could settle everything, including the rent. Duke, of course, had no further objection to offer than his sorrow at losing Meffy's society for the time he should be absent, but as there was no alternative he shook hands with his friend and wished him a happy journey, at least as happy as was possible considering the melancholy nature of his errand. Jemima fully concurred in her husband's good wishes, and Meffy left them.

During the first week of Meffy's absence things went on with Duke and his wife in a perfectly satisfactory manner, so much so that on the Saturday evening, when taking stock, they found their week's returns to have been greater than any they had had since they commenced their new line of business. One thing only gave them any annoyance, and that was that the last quantity of poultry they had received from the country had been far greater than usual, and a considerable portion of it remained yet unsold, but as the weather was cold, and their outhouse well adapted for the purpose, there was little risk in their keeping it till the Monday in a perfect state of preservation.

On the Monday, as usual, Duke started for the beat he was accustomed to take on that day of the week, and he returned home somewhat later than usual, it being nearly six o'clock. He had made a very successful day of it; in fact, when he entered his house he had but one fowl left. Its exceptional state, perhaps, after all was not much to be wondered at, as it had by no means a

pleasant appearance. It was thin and scraggy, and the skin of its legs told it had formerly been younger. Indeed, Duke was somewhat ashamed of it, if the truth must be told, and had resolved he would not again offer it to his customers. Jemima approved of the resolution he had come to, and they then deliberated what should be done with it. Jemima opined that it would be rather hard eating if boiled, and uneatable if roasted, but at the same time she quoted, unknowingly of course, the Italian proverb that "an old cock makes good broth," and submitted that it might be tried in that shape. From this Duke dissented, as he had a truly British aversion to "slops" of any kind, but at the same time he saw no objection to its being boiled for their supper. While the discussion was going on, some one tapped at the door, and on being told to come in, Gobby made his appearance. He was evidently agitated about something, for there was a disturbed appearance on his countenance very different from its usual placid cast.

"I say, mate," he said, addressing Duke, "I wish you or your missus would lend us a hand. That poor girl, the soldier's wife, is very bad."

"What is the matter with her?" inquired Mrs. Duke.

"Why, you see, she has never been well since she was confined about six weeks since, but has been getting worse and worse. It's consumption, the doctor says, and he gave her something to rub her chest with, but I suspect starvation is a precious deal nearer the mark."

"Don't her husband do anything for her?"

"What can he do?" said Gobby; "he's now with his

regiment in Dublin, and he could not help her much if he was here. He sent her ten shillings the week before last, but she was owing pretty well the whole of it for rent."

"How is the baby?"

"Dying, I think. I don't believe it will live till morning, and I ain't over-sure the mother will either."

"What has she had to-day?" inquired Mrs. Duke.

"Nothing at all; leastwise, I got her a hot saveloy, but she said it made her sick. Now I say, missus, do come; it will be very kind of you if you will. There isn't a soul for her to speak to but myself, and I ain't much use."

"Well," said Mrs. Duke, "go back, and I will be over in two or three minutes."

"Well, that's very kind of you," said Gobby; and he left the house.

No sooner had he gone than Mrs. Duke proposed to her husband that they should put the fowl on the fire which had occasioned their conversation, and make some broth for the poor creature, and to this proposition of his wife's Duke gave a ready assent. Jemima then brought forward her best saucepan, wiped it out with her apron, filled it with water, and hastily arranging the fowl, placed it in it. She threw some fresh coals on the fire, placed the saucepan on them, and then went down on her knees to blow up a flame. While she was thus occupied another person knocked at the door, and was told to come in. No second invitation was needed, for the door immediately opened, and Jemima, imagining it was Gobby, went on with her occupation, leaving Duke, who

was seated on a chair leaning his head on the table, and half asleep after the fatigues of the day, to answer him.

"I say, Jemmy Ducks, are you good-natured to-night?" said a hoarse female voice.

Jemima, in astonishment, turned her head round to see the visitor, and to her intense disgust recognised Mrs. O'Flaherty. Duke was as much surprised as his wife, but said nothing, as he had hardly recovered himself from his doze. Jemima, before answering, placed the bellows on the ground, and rose from her knees, but even then her indignation was so great she could not find words to express her feelings. It was more than she as a loving wife could bear, to hear such a creature as Mrs. O'Flaherty speak to her husband with such familiarity; and more than that, not only to make such a base parody on his name, which had been given him in honour of the Duke of Wellington, but also to convey in it an allusion to his present line of business. Drawing her gigantic form up to its full proportions she prepared herself to speak with a dignity calculated to overpower the impudent intruder, but Mrs. O'Flaherty was too quick for her. Pretending to be unconscious even of the presence of the virtuous Jemima, she broke in with "Ducks, be a good fellow, and lend us a hand. There's that poor fellow Stride so ill to-night, I hardly think he'll live till morning. The dispensary doctor says that nothing but good food will keep him up, and that I can't get for him, for I am hard up. I wouldn't ask you, Ducks, if I could, and God knows I've tried hard enough to-night. But I can get nothing, either by fair means or

foul. Whenever I went into a public-house and saw any of my old pals, and asked them to lend me a tanner, they all refused me, but offered me a glass of gin. When I told them I should be thankful for it if they'd let me take it to a poor devil I had got at home, they laughed at me, and said I only wanted to prig the glass it was in. Well, then I thought I'd try what I could do somewhere else, but it was all useless. If I went into a shop, or spoke to a respectable person, I always found a Bobby at my elbow."

"And quite right too, ma'am," said Jemima, with great dignity.

"Who spoke to you, ma'am?" said Mrs. O'Flaherty. "Mind your own business, and speak when you're spoken to."

"I think, ma'am, said Jemima, her dignity and her temper rising at the same time, "when you speak to my husband in that familiar way, I have a right to interfere, and I will."

"Now be quiet," said Duke, "both of you. Is it really true that Stride is so bad as you say?"

"Go over and judge for yourself," said Mrs. O'Flaherty. "I will remain here rather than make your wife jealous."

"Jealous indeed, ma'am!" said Jemima; "jealous of such a thing as you are! I must be low indeed."

Patience under provocation was hardly one of Mrs. O'Flaherty's attributes, and she commenced a retort in terms we are hardly at liberty to quote. Duke, however, again interfered.

"If you will come over with me I will go at once," he said to Mrs. O'Flaherty.

"Thank you," said that lady, in a sardonic manner, "but I've a character to lose, and I shall not go with you."

Mrs. Duke laughed sarcastically, and the danger between the two ladies of coming to extremities was again apparent, and poor Duke hardly knew how to act. He wished to help Stride if he could, but he was afraid of leaving Mrs. O'Flaherty and his wife together.

Mrs. O'Flaherty understood him. "Ducks," said she, "go over and see Stride. I will remain outside your door till you come back, so that your wife can see me if she likes. You are a good fellow," she continued, "and I should be sorry to annoy you, or I should like to pitch into that beauty of yours amazingly."

Duke thought the better way to put a termination to the scene would be for him to go at once. He inquired whether there was a light in Stride's room.

"Where was I to get a light from?" was the answer. "There's a fire, but I was obliged to break up one of my two chairs to make that."

"Which is his room?" inquired Duke, who only knew Stride by sight.

"The top one, to be sure. Take care how you go up the staircase, because it's rather dangerous."

Duke immediately crossed over to the other side of the Rents, and Mrs. O'Flaherty placed herself outside Duke's door, where she remained, singing at the top of her voice, "Oh, she is beautiful," to let Mrs. Duke know

she was there. Jemima in the meantime remained in her room, her mind the while offering a singular psychological study. She was seated on a chair halfway between the door and the fireplace, her eye fixed on the saucepan, and her opposite ear listening to the song of Mrs. O'Flaherty, which she rightly interpreted to be one of defiance. The fire was burning brightly, and the saucepan was boiling, so, that giving her little anxiety, she could bring her mind to bear the better on Mrs. O'Flaherty. The longer she listened the stronger grew her anger, and an almost irrepressible desire came over her to come into personal collision with her annoyer. Still she restrained herself, her innate dignity telling her she would lose caste, even if she succeeded in the battle, by mixing her name up with that of a creature of the kind. But the desire increased, and she was on the point of giving way to it when, fortunately, Mrs. O'Flaherty was silent for a moment, and the next Duke entered, the last of her words which reached Mrs. Duke's ears being, "You are a good fellow, Ducks, after all."

Jemima received her husband in anything but a gracious manner. She felt annoyed with him for his conduct to Mrs. O'Flaherty, and that lady's last words by no means shed oil on the troubled waters. Duke, however, took no notice of his wife's ill-humour, but simply contented himself with asking how the chicken broth was getting on. He received no answer. He repeated the question with no better success. "Jemima," said Duke, with considerable (for him) sternness of manner, "don't let us have any ill-humour. That poor

fellow Stride is dying, and that vixen has behaved very well to him. Some time you may want help yourself, and you will be grateful to those who are kind to you, and you ought to be pleased to see kindness in others."

Jemima was more touched by the words of her husband than she would have been by a sermon from the Archbishop of Canterbury. She answered him not a word, but stooping down she kissed him on the forehead as he stood upright, and then attended to the broth. Finding everything progressing satisfactorily, she left it in charge of her husband, and crossed over the Rents to Gobby's.

Of the visit of Duke to Stride there is little to be told, and that little very sad. Duke, when he got to the house, with great difficulty succeeded in getting up-stairs. When he entered the poor man's room he could hardly breathe, so foetid was the atmosphere. The room was a picture of abject misery. The window-panes, with one exception, were all broken, but most of them had wisps of straw or hay, or rags, thrust into them to keep out the cold. Yet through the broken tiles in more than one place it entered, forming the only ventilation the room possessed. A little fire, not more in bulk than might be held in the two hands, was on the hearthstone, which not only was sufficient to shed a dim light in the room, but to prove by some of the unburnt portions of the fuel that Mrs. O'Flaherty's statement was true, that it was made of the parts of her broken chair. On a sort of bed or mattress on the ground, apparently composed of flock, hay, and shavings mixed together, with a scant,

torn coverlid over him, was poor Stride. Death had already set his seal upon his brow, but he was perfectly placid and resigned. Duke stooped down to him and said kindly, "I dare say you do not know who I am, but I live in the Rents over the way. Mrs. O'Flaherty tells me you are very ill, and I have come to know if I can do anything for you."

"I am very much obliged to you," said the sick man ; "if you could give me my Bible, which is on the window-sill, and get me a candle, it is all that I want ; I know I am going, and I thank God for it."

"Certainly," said Duke, "I will send you a candle ; but don't you want anything to eat?"

"No, thank you. Mrs. O'Flaherty says I ought to eat something or I shall die, but I do not care about it ; the sooner I die the better, for my life is a trouble to others, and no comfort to myself."

"But," said Duke, kindly, "can't I do anything else for you?"

"Nothing that I know of, thank you ; at least nothing that I have a right to ask you to do for me, although, God knows, it gives me great sorrow to think of it."

"What is it?" said Duke.

"That I shall be buried by the parish."

When Duke was entering his own house he saw (and heard) Mrs. O'Flaherty standing at the door. "There's half-a-crown," he said, "get a candle for Stride, and anything else he wants. I will see him to-morrow before I go out." The answer was the one already quoted, which aroused Mrs. Duke's anger

Jemima, when she reached Gobby's house, made her way up the dark staircase as well as she could, and entered the room where the poor soldier's wife lay. The furniture was of the poorest, still vastly superior to that in Stride's chamber. Here, at any rate, was an apology for a decent bed. A fireplace was in the chimney, and in it was some fire. There was, moreover, a small old three-legged table, on which burned a candle, and a dilapidated chair. Jemima proceeded at once to the bed, and placed herself on the side opposite to Gobby. The poor creature looked at her with that painful smile on her countenance that those who have had much experience with poor helpless sick women must have often remarked they show to those who visit them on a mission of mercy.

"I have been making you some nice chicken broth," said Jemima; "as soon as it is done I will bring it over. My husband is looking after it."

The poor woman bowed her head as if to thank her, but said nothing; she was too weak to speak.

"How is the baby?" inquired Jemima.

The soldier's wife pulled down the ragged counterpane sufficiently for Jemima to see an emaciated, pallid little infant, in whom no human skill could put a week's life. It was apparently asleep, nestling, with its eyes half open, against its mother's side, yet more probably was quiet from sheer want of vital stamina to cry. The mother first slightly bent her head to look at the child, and then raised her eyes with that peculiarly imploring expression of countenance with

which women show their sick babies to those they have reliance in.

“What a nice little fellow!” said Jemima, soothingly (Jemima, naturally good as she was, had heavier sins to answer for than that falsehood). The poor mother again cast her eyes for a moment on her child, and then raising them filled with tears, said, in a voice “so low that nothing stood ’twixt it and silence,”—“How I wish it could live till he sees it!”

There was not, however, the slightest prospect of such a happiness for the poor woman; and Jemima, willing as she was to please the mother, had not the face to encourage her, so she turned the conversation on the usual subject of keeping her strength up, and remaining quiet, and not worrying herself for her baby’s sake. “Now do see, dear, if you cannot go to sleep for half an hour, and when you wake up I will go for the chicken broth, as it will be done by that time.”

Mrs. O’Flaherty, immediately after receiving Duke’s half-crown, spent a shilling of it in buying some milk, some gin, some bread and butter, and a candle. She then returned home, and after sticking the candle in an old bottle she lighted it, and taking a little saucepan from her own room, she proceeded to warm the milk: When it was ready she put it into a teacup, and placing a little gin in it, she took it to the bedside, and raising Stride’s head, with great gentleness she put the teacup to his lips. The poor creature had great difficulty in swallowing, and turned his head aside from it, which appeared to enrage Mrs. O’Flaherty greatly, and she

showered on him a volley of abuse as if to encourage him. To please her he made a second attempt to swallow, but it was unsuccessful, and Mrs. O'Flaherty, without one moment ceasing her abuse, placed the teacup beside her, and then lowered the patient's head on his pillow. The language of the virago, and her exquisite gentleness of manner and touch in handling him, formed a singular contrast. She was evidently a most experienced nurse; where she had acquired her experience it is impossible to say.

Finding he was in great pain, she resolved on dressing his wound. For that purpose she first removed the Bible from his bed. This she did with singular reverence, the more so as no one had ever seen her inside a church. Whenever he asked for the Bible, she always brought it to him without a word of abuse, but by no persuasion could he get her to read it to him, although he frequently implored her, his eyesight being bad; yet her refusals were also free from any objectionable language. She now proceeded to uncover the ghastly wound, and apply to it the dressing she had that morning received from the hospital. All this was done gently, rapidly, and skilfully, and the poor fellow felt a momentary ease as she gently replaced his head on his pillow of rags. For a moment she was silent, when noticing Stride's lips move, she bent forward, to catch more easily his words. "What a pity it is," he said, "that you who are so good should use such bad language!" Mrs. O'Flaherty gave a sort of satirical chuckle, but for the moment remained silent. Presently she said, bitterly, "I suppose, Stride,

you think I ought to repent and become respectable. It ain't so easy a job as you seem to think. Three or four years ago I determined to try it ; I was really sorry for my behaviour ; perhaps sometimes I am now, but that is neither here nor there. Well, I went to a parson who preaches a great deal to his fallen sisters, as he calls them. I told him how sorry I was, and how much I wished to become respectable. He looked at me doubtfully for a moment. 'What is your age?' he said. 'Forty-five, sir,' I answered. He shook his head sorrowfully. 'I am afraid,' he said, 'there is very little faith to be placed in the repentance of a woman when once she has passed forty.' No, Stride, what I am I shall remain. Everybody hates me—perhaps they are right—and I hate everybody in return."

Then after a few minutes' silence, she said, with greater feeling in her tone and manner than those who knew her would have considered possible for her to assume, "Stride, if ever I have offended you, and I dare say I have, forgive me, I never meant it. It's my way, and I could not help it." Stride was too weak to answer, but he put out his hand for her to take. "How cold your hand is !" she said ; "put it under the clothes again." She assisted him in doing so, threw her ragged shawl over him on the bed to increase the warmth, and then seated herself at the foot of the bed. Here she sat quietly for some time, her head bent on her breast. Presently she raised her eyes, and glanced at her patient. He was quiet, perfectly so, and his breathing could hardly be heard. "Poor devil," she said ; "I'm glad you're

easy, anyhow." She then resumed her former position, and was silent for more than half an hour. Finding Stride perfectly quiet and easy, she rose from her seated position, and after placing the candle on the chimney-piece, so that it might not attract his attention, she left the room and softly descended to her own. There, groping about, with considerable ease, however, for there was but little furniture, she contrived to find a flat pint bottle, like those occasionally seen in gin-shops ; she put it in her pocket, and without troubling herself about bonnet or shawl, she left the house.

In the other sick-room, Jemima sat quietly giving the dying woman what aid she could till she imagined the broth was ready, Gobby standing by the other side of the bed, perfectly silent and motionless. She then rose, and telling Gobby in a whisper not to leave the room till she returned, she descended the stairs, and crossed over to her own house. There she found her husband on duty over the chicken broth, which Jemima tasted and pronounced excellent. She then took it from the fire and poured some of it into a basin, and after placing in it as much pepper and salt as was requisite for the seasoning, she requested Duke would go to bed that he might with greater certainty rise early and refreshed the next morning. Duke, who implicitly obeyed his wife in everything, had already commenced his night toilet before she had closed the door, but was arrested by hearing the sound of Jemima's voice as if in anger. She was answered by another voice still more angry than her own, and in a few moments the altercation became serious, and Duke

ceased his undressing and rushed out to take his wife's part. When outside the door, he found Jemima and Mrs. O'Flaherty in violent dispute, Mrs. O'Flaherty making use of language we must decline repeating, and Jemima, we regret to add, was raising her voice to an extent she would have shuddered at the idea of in her quieter moments. The dispute increased in intensity notwithstanding all Duke's attempts at peace-making, when fortunately, a policeman passing the end of the Rents and hearing the noise, immediately interposed his authority. Jemima now for the first time became aware of the impropriety of her conduct, and she darted rapidly into her patient's house, leaving her husband and the policeman together. Of course Mrs. O'Flaherty was acquainted with the policeman, and she immediately appealed to him for protection from the unprovoked attack of Jemima, but the policeman most ungallantly paid no attention to her complaint, and told her that if she did not immediately make herself scarce, he would lock her up for making a disturbance. Mrs. O'Flaherty took the hint, and returned to her own home, complaining the while of the wickedness of the world in general and policemen in particular. The policeman remained talking with Duke for a few minutes after her departure, and then went on his beat, and Duke betook himself to his house, and shortly afterwards was in bed, but for some hours was not asleep.

Mrs. Duke, when she again entered the sick-room, found the baby was crying and its mother attempting to calm it. Both the child's cry and the mother's voice told

how little of life remained in either. So weak was the mother, that in spite of her exertions to raise herself on her elbow, she was unable to do so. Jemima took the infant from her and placed it for the moment in Gobby's arms, while she arranged the bed of the mother. She placed the pillow in such a manner as to allow her to sit up to take the broth, and then raised her to a sitting position, but the moment afterwards she was obliged to alter it again, for the poor creature had fainted in consequence of the exertion. So severe was the fainting fit, that Jemima became greatly alarmed lest life was extinct, but presently her patient somewhat recovered. As soon as she was sensible, Jemima took a teaspoon and commenced feeding her with the chicken broth. The sick woman swallowed it with great difficulty. Presently she made a movement with her hand indicative of not wishing for more. She became paler, if possible, slightly turned her head on her pillow, and then remained motionless. The baby in Gobby's arms again commenced its faint cry, but its mother took no notice of it. Jemima, judging from her silence, thought that perhaps she would like to sleep, and whispered to Gobby that he would do well to take the infant down into his own room for a little while, that it might not disturb its mother. Gobby, without reply, walked with it to the door, and Jemima, taking up the candle, lighted him down-stairs, and having procured him a light, left him.

Gobby now employed himself in walking to and fro in his little room, trying to calm the baby the while by imitating, as closely as his hoarse voice would allow him

the tones of a nurse trying to induce a fractious infant to sleep. But all without avail ; the low, moaning cry still continued. He stopped short in his walk, and uncovering its face, looked at it for a moment, and then sorrowfully shook his head. He covered the baby up again and recommenced his walk, determining to try what effect his singing would have on it, and commenced, in an intended sweet tone of voice, a song, of which the following is a verse :—

“ As we sailed down the river clear,
The twenty-eighth day of May,
Every ship that we passed by,
We heard the sailors say,—

“ ‘ There goes a crew of clever lads,
We’re sorry for to say,
That for some crime or else another
They’re going to Botany Bay.’ ”

The music had no soothing effect on the baby, and it kept up unceasingly its low, faint cry. Gobby stopped in his singing, and opening his cupboard, took from it a little jug, at the bottom of which remained a few teaspoonfuls of milk from his tea. He then took a small piece of bread, and soaking it in the milk, placed it to the baby’s lips, thinking it might be hungry. The poor infant answered his kindness only by increasing somewhat its cry ; and Gobby, finding it could not swallow, again replaced the jug in the cupboard, and recommenced his singing :—

“ There is a girl in London town,
A girl I know full well,
If e'er I get my *libertie*
Along with her I'll dwell.
If e'er I get my *libertie*
I'll forsake all other girls,
I'll quit all evil company,
And adieu to New South Wales.”

He continued his ditty (it was apparently the only one he knew), and he flattered himself with good effect, for the baby became somewhat quieter. Pleased with his success he sang somewhat louder and in a more jovial tone, and the baby's cry ceased entirely. He paused for a moment in his singing, and listened. Suddenly an inexplicable, solemn feeling came over him he could not account for. Breathlessly he removed the flannel from before its face, and in a moment he knew all—the baby was a corpse !

Gobby reverently replaced the piece of flannel over the face of the child, and remained for a moment in doubt what steps he should take. At last he resolved to seek Jemima, and ask her advice. He crept breathlessly and without his shoes up-stairs, so as not to attract the attention of the mother ; but careful as he was Jemima heard him. When he saw her the expression of her countenance told that something sad was going on in the room—the poor mother was dying. When he entered, the last mechanical, spasmodical movement which precedes death was all that remained of life. The two stood by the bedside, Gobby with the dead infant in his

arms, watching the mother's dissolution. They had but a little time to wait, and "dust was dust." The returned convict did not attempt to restrain his tears, and the tall, heavy, corpulent, one-eyed woman was positively beautiful from the expression of her countenance. They placed the poor woman straight in her bed, and Gobby replaced the infant on her breast ; then, leaving a candle burning on the table, they silently and sorrowfully left the room.

The next morning, when Duke woke, he went over to inquire after Stride. The door of the poor fellow's room was open, and he walked in. On the foot of the bed was seated Mrs. O'Flaherty, apparently asleep, and evidently drunk, for beside her was the pint bottle of gin, empty. On the bed lay poor Stride, happily dead. Duke attempted to arouse the drunken woman, but in vain ; all the answer he could get was, "What's the odds?"

Although we shall somewhat anticipate the current of events, we will first narrate the funerals of those who have just quitted our stage, and then return and continue our story. Poor Stride was, as he dreaded, buried by the parish ; fortunately for him he was where it could give him no annoyance. He had no mourner. Mrs. O'Flaherty, to do her justice, had resolved on acting in that capacity, but a slight dispute with a lady in the Broadway, followed by an invitation from a policeman to accompany him to the station-house, and a request from the magistrate to seclude herself from public observation for the space of fourteen days, prevented her. In plain English, Mrs. O'Flaherty found her hand in the pocket

of a lady with whom she was unacquainted, and the said lady, disregarding Mrs. O'Flaherty's excuse, that "it was so cold one was glad to put one's hand anywhere," gave her then and there in charge, and in prison she remained for some time after the funeral was over. She had already constituted herself Stride's executor, and had given notice to the parish authorities that a funeral would be required. Her treatment of the few effects of her deceased friend was somewhat singular. The Bible she took for herself. She had not the slightest title to it, but she evidently did not look upon the act she had committed as a theft, for she did not in any way attempt to conceal it, but treated it openly with great reverence, and placed it carefully on the top of an old chest of drawers, the only decent piece of furniture she had in her room. His clothes were poor indeed, but those who have noticed the business transacted in old clothes in very poor neighbourhoods know full well that nothing is too mean or ragged to find a purchaser. These, singular to say, she did not touch, but left them in the hands of the parish undertaker's men. As the poor fellow had nothing more, there was no disputing about his effects, and in two days after his decease the earth covered the mortal remains of a quiet, inoffensive, much-enduring man.

The soldier's poor young wife, though buried by the parish, had more respect shown her. Gobby did all that he could in order that the funeral should be as *comfortable* as possible. Jemima, for reasons which we will explain hereafter, did not appear in the matter. When

the poor creature was placed in her coffin, Gobby took great care that the infant's head should lean on her arm, and on the left side, "so that it might be nearest her heart." He then tried to get some flowers to place in the coffin, as "they used to do in the part of the world he came from," wherever that might have been. The time was winter, and no flowers were to be had, at least not with his limited resources, and he bought some sweet herbs instead. When it was time to take the body to the grave he waited down in the Rents with the crowd, quietly smoking his pipe. As the body passed him, as a mark of respect he knocked the ashes out of his pipe, and followed the funeral, though at a considerable distance. When it arrived in the graveyard he placed himself some forty or fifty feet off while the service was being read. He took off his hat, but turned his head slightly another way, as if he wished it to be thought it was for his own convenience he did so, and not that he was attending the funeral. When the clergyman had finished, Gobby put on his hat to watch the gravediggers fill up the grave. The men appeared in a hurry, and took up full spadefuls of earth and flung them heavily on the coffin. Noticing this, he advanced to them.

"I say, mates," said he, "you need not pitch it in so heavily as that."

"Are you afraid it will wake her?" asked one.

"No, but it would seem kinder if you did it more quietly."

"Did you know her?"

"Yes, well, and she was as good a creature as ever lived."

"I did not know you knew her," said the gravedigger, using far less force in his work ; "who was she?"

"She was the wife of a soldier, and her husband's away."

"Poor thing," said the gravedigger, evidently totally uninterested in the history of the deceased, but perfectly willing to sympathise with the feelings of her living friend. "Poor thing, that's very bad though," and the conversation continued in the same strain till his work was done. The gravedigger then commenced treading the ground in, not stamping, but doing it very gently, and when he had finished he smoothed the earth down with his spade with considerable care. "Thankee, mate," said Gobby, when he had finished. "All right," said the gravedigger, cleaning his spade with a piece of an old coffin he had picked up.

Gobby walked home sad enough ; he continued there till the evening, and then, possibly thinking that a little exertion might have the effect of raising his spirits, he took up his bag and left the house. An hour afterwards he was seen near Kensington Church, pressing his wares on the passers-by. He had obtained a singular collection from some merchant, or, what is far more probable, in consequence of his continued attendance on the soldier's wife for some days past, he had been unable to provide a new stock, and so had made a collection of the remaining portions of his old stocks and formed them into what, in custom-house phraseology, is termed a "rummage sale." A short quotation from his address will show the reader the varied character of his wares :—

“A collection of forty-five favourite songs sung before her Majesty at Windsor, and containing, besides all the new and fashionable nigger melodies, the celebrated songs of ‘I’d be a butterfly,’ ‘The light guitar,’ ‘The sea, the sea, the open sea,’ ‘I’ve been roaming,’ ‘Cherry ripe,’ ‘My heart and lute,’ ‘Come dwell with me.’ Also a piece of glass on which any lady wishing to know the initials of the man she is to marry has only to breathe upon it and they will immediately appear, and vanish again as soon as she has seen them. This has been shown to the members of the Geological Society, who declared it was the greatest curiosity in animated nature. Likewise an entertaining collection of the newest riddles : ‘When is a door not a door?—When it’s a-jar.’ ‘Why can’t a bishop eat his apron?—Because it goes against his stomach.’ ‘When is a man thinner than a lath?—When he’s a shaving.’ ‘What is the first thing a young lady does when she goes into church?—She looks out for the hymns (hims).’ ‘Why is an oyster the most wonderful animal in nature?—Because he’s got a beard and he’s got no chin, and he’s taken out of his bed to be tucked in.’ ‘Why is a novel-writer the most wonderful of men?—Because his tale (tail) comes out of his head.’ And forty others. The whole (including all the articles I have mentioned) are well adapted for a long evening’s amusement, and are now to be sold for the small charge of one penny.”

CHAPTER XVI.

SOME MORE OF MR. MEFFY'S HANDIWORK AGAIN.

DUKE, on the morning after Stride's death, dressed himself in his countryman's attire and proceeded to the usual place of rendezvous near Kennington Common. When there he had to wait for some time, Meffy's agent not having arrived. He seated himself very composedly on his basket, and beguiled the time by thinking of the sad end of poor Stride and the disgraceful state of inebriety of Mrs. O'Flaherty. He was not without some terror that the virago, when she had recovered from her drunken condition, would again renew her quarrel with Jemima. The more he thought on this point the more anxious did he become, and he looked round impatiently for the man who was to bring the poultry, that he might return with it to the Rents, and while drawing and plucking the fowls he could keep an eye on Mrs. O'Flaherty's movements as well. No man with poultry was, however, in sight, but a plain-looking, respectable, strong-built man was, and moreover he was advancing leisurely towards Duke, not as if he wished to speak to him, but simply because his road lay in his direction. When, however, he had reached Duke, he stopped, and in a

countryman's tone of voice he asked him which was the way to Vauxhall Bridge, as he had that morning come up from the country and had lost himself. Duke immediately informed him, and in return asked if he had seen a man with a basket of poultry on his arm, as he had expected to meet one there. The stranger said that he had not, but that if he came across him he would send him to Duke. Then civilly wishing our hero good morning, the stranger continued on his road.

About a quarter of an hour afterwards Duke's correspondent arrived with a quantity of remarkably fine poultry, which was transferred into Duke's basket, who immediately turned his steps homewards. He had not proceeded far before he met the stranger who had accosted him a quarter of an hour before.

"Can't you find your way?" said Duke.

"No, I can't at all," replied the stranger, eyeing Duke's basket attentively.

"I am going that way myself," said Duke; "I will show it you, if you like."

The stranger thanked Duke very warmly for his civility, and they started off together. The first public-house they arrived at the countryman insisted on treating Duke, who, nothing loth, accepted the invitation. When they again continued their road, the stranger found, probably as he had expected, that the beer had considerably loosened Duke's tongue, and the pair talked together in a very friendly manner. The conversation was led by the stranger, who talked of many things, but poultry in particular. Although from the country, he knew nothing

about poultry, and asked Duke if keeping them was profitable. Duke replied he knew nothing about breeding poultry, but he thought it must be ; "but," he continued with great caution, not wishing to get another competitor into the market, "there ain't much got by selling them." The stranger inquired if Duke kept a shop, and in what manner the London market was supplied. Duke, unfortunately, did not keep a shop ; he got his living by selling poultry about the streets. The stranger inquired if he had been long in the line.

"About three months," said Duke.

"Then," said the stranger, "you must be pretty well up in the trade. You've got a hawker's licence, of course?"

"Of course," said Duke, colouring slightly.

They had now arrived at the bridge, and the stranger politely insisted on paying the toll for both, which Duke would not allow, and they continued their road together as amicably as possible. When they had arrived at the Middlesex side of the bridge the stranger asked Duke to show him Rochester Row, as he wanted to make a call there. Duke not only promised he would, but offered to go that way to his own house, saying it did not make ten yards' difference. At last they reached Rochester Row, and when they had arrived opposite the police-station the stranger stopped and told Duke he was going no further, and was obliged to him for having conducted him so far ; "but," he continued, "I am a policeman, though in plain clothes, and I should not be doing my duty if I did not ask you to show me your licence."

Duke was aghast. The fact was he had no licence ; the one he had taken out had long since expired, and he had never renewed it. However, he determined to put the best face he could on the matter, and asked the stranger how he could be sure he was a policeman. The man replied quietly that he had only his word to offer in proof, it was true, but if he would ask any of the policemen opposite he would find out that it was a fact. "I preferred," he continued, "asking you myself, being in plain clothes, as it would be more pleasing to your feelings than if I were in uniform." Duke, finding there was no way of avoiding the question, replied that his licence was at home, as he did not consider it necessary to have it always in his pocket.

"But that's against the law," said the policeman. "You had better come in here and send for your licence, and then you can go on quietly enough."

"But," said Duke, catching at a straw, "I am not selling poultry now, and I do not require my licence."

"You forget," said the detective, "that when you were in the public-house you offered to sell a couple of fowls to the landlord, and the bargain only went off because he would not give you within a shilling of your money."

Duke remembered the circumstance full well, and made no further remark, but accompanied the policeman into the station-house. They, however, treated him civilly enough, and allowed him to sit down while a messenger was sent to Jemima for the licence.

Jemima, after she had performed the last sad offices for the soldier's wife, returned to her own home ; and

after Duke had left she threw herself, dressed as she was, on the bed, and in a few moments was fast asleep ; nor did she wake till the messenger from the police-office tapped at her window. She was somewhat surprised and alarmed at the man's appearance, but he told her there was no occasion for her to worry herself, it was only as a matter of form the inspector wanted to see the licence. She found it with some little difficulty, and when the man was gone she again threw herself on the bed, but could not sleep. A certain indefinable sensation of fear came over her she could not account for. She turned over and over again the words of the messenger, that there was no occasion to be afraid, that her husband had especially sent word for her to be quite easy on the matter, and not to trouble herself to come to the station, as he should be home in half an hour ; still she could not shake off the foreboding that some misfortune was hanging over her. She determined on waiting the half-hour named, but as the time advanced her anxiety became in proportion greater. The half-hour expired, but Duke did not arrive. Jemima now rose from her bed, and while resolving to wait some time longer, began dressing herself to leave the house. She had now waited fully an hour, and Duke had not made his appearance, and she determined to run the risk of his displeasure and follow him to the police-station. When she arrived there she found matters worse than she had imagined, but not so much so as to cause her any alarm. She heard that Duke's licence had not been renewed since he first entered the fish-hawking business, and that the case

would have to go before the magistrate. He would impose a fine which Duke would have no difficulty in paying, and it would be a warning to him to be more careful in future.

The case was called, and Duke was placed in the dock, and the basket of poultry on a table in sight of the magistrate. The inspector of police told his worship that although on the charge-sheet the prisoner was only accused of selling poultry in the streets without a hawker's licence, he had now a far more serious charge to bring against him—that of illegal possession. For some time past a systematic robbery of poultry had been carried on in the stable-yards of gentlemen's houses in the neighbourhood of Tooting, Carshalton, Mitcham, and other localities in Surrey, and the police had been on the outlook for the thieves, but without success. That morning, from information he had received, he had placed a detective on a spot near Kennington Common, in the hope of taking two persons engaged in the robbery, one of the thieves and the receiver. The latter he thought they had caught, and he was the prisoner now at the bar for selling poultry in the streets without a hawker's licence ; but, with the magistrate's permission, he would charge him with receiving goods knowing them to be stolen. He had no doubt, if his worship would grant a remand for a few days, he should be perfectly able to bring the charge home against the prisoner. After a few questions his worship granted the remand asked for, and Duke was removed from the bar.

Before he entered the van Jemima had an interview

with her husband, and a sorrowful one it was. His perception, naturally exceedingly blunt, was now sharpened to a point that allowed him to perceive that he had been made a dupe of, and that he should be punished as being guilty of an act of dishonesty of which he was morally innocent. Jemima could not help him on the occasion. In matters of her modest housewifery her intelligence was perhaps upon a par with others of her class, but it was now utterly useless. All she could do was to cry, and that she did with a will ; indeed, so bitterly did she weep that the gaoler, albeit not particularly susceptible on occasions of the kind, fairly sympathised with her, and brought her a glass of water unasked for. After Duke had left the station for the House of Detention, Jemima went back to her home, and there fairly sobbed herself into a state of comparative quietness. The next day she again attended at the police-court to ask one of the policemen to introduce her to an attorney to defend her husband. One was found who took the case on the condition he should be paid in advance, which was immediately done.

It would be a waste of time to narrate the proceedings of the next day ; suffice it to say, it was made clear to the magistrate that Duke was a systematic receiver of stolen poultry, and he was sentenced to three months' imprisonment with hard labour.

For some days after Duke was sentenced, Jemima passed her time miserably enough. She only left the house after night-fall, and then only to obtain what was necessary for her housekeeping. She had a horror of

being seen. It was the first time the stigma of dishonesty had fallen on them, and she felt it acutely. Her pain was somewhat modified by the fact that at any rate the stigma was utterly undeserved. A more honest couple than Duke and his wife never existed, but we must state the truth, their integrity had but little sense to support it, and they had fallen victims to the designs of an unmitigated scoundrel.

A week had passed over, and Jemima's sorrow for her husband and for the disgrace unjustly cast on them continued as profound as ever, but she began to perceive the necessity of making head against her low spirits. She looked around, but for some time without success, for some object which might employ her thoughts, so as to distract her attention somewhat from weightier matters. Her cogitations at last resolved themselves into a desire for the only occupation open to her likely to afford her the slightest interest, and that was cleaning up the place. Clearing her mind by a deep sigh, she arose from her chair and sought her pail and scrubbing-brush. She first determined on attacking Meffy's room, and working down *secundum artem* to her own. She had had the key left with her by that worthy, and with it she opened the door. She entered the room and looked around her with some surprise. She had, it was true, only been in once since Meffy had left, but it appeared to her as if the things, and they were few, had been moved. She reflected for a moment, but the longer she thought over the subject the more certain the fact appeared to her. At last she attempted to persuade herself she must be

mistaken, and commenced her work. She scrubbed on vigorously, and evidently experienced considerable mental solace from her labour. When she had finished she cast her eye over the room, and felt pleased with its artistic appearance. The cleaning of the staircase was a joint work between the blind basketmaker's wife and Jemima, week and week about, and now it was Mrs. Duke's turn. She worked on unceasingly, and in a short time she had got to the bottom. Her own room now underwent a thorough cleansing. Her customary cleaning work being completed she reflected in what other manner she could employ her time. After a little reflection she made up her mind. In the little back storehouse or room a quantity of bricks had been piled up since they had taken the house. There formerly had been a stove there, which had been removed, and which the landlord had promised to replace, but had not kept his word. The bricks which had been taken down had remained, however, carefully built up in the corner of the room. Jemima had often thought of removing these into the little yard, and now it appeared to her just the occupation likely to distract her thoughts from unpleasant subjects. She commenced her task, and continued it till not a dozen bricks remained, when removing one she perceived under it what seemed a parcel wrapped in a piece of brown paper. She cleared the other bricks from around it, and at last brought to light a small packet neatly folded up. She immediately took it up and carried it into the sitting-room, when she cautiously unfolded it. When she reached the contents she was

perfectly overcome with surprise. They were composed entirely of bank notes, and for such large amounts that Jemima was somewhat puzzled to read the words on them. At last, by dint of spelling them over, and then counting them, she found the packet contained eleven bank notes for two hundred pounds each.

Jemima, when she had fully realized the fact, nearly fainted. She remained seated in her chair for some time utterly bewildered, and found some difficulty in persuading herself she was not in a dream. Still she was obliged to admit she was perfectly awake, for there on her knees before her were the bank notes. Clearing her mind at last she resolved on her course of action. Not one thought of appropriating them to her own use ever entered her mind. There was but one idea that struck her, and that she acted upon, and sought for no other. She determined on taking the notes to the police-station in Scotland Yard, and giving them up, as doubtless the person who had lost them had already sent there about them. To resolve and to execute were with Jemima on the occasion almost one and the same thing, and she immediately put on her bonnet and shawl and proceeded to the central police-station, where she asked to see the inspector. The policeman she spoke to inquired what her business was, but Jemima, actuated by a feeling of prudence in an affair of such magnitude, pursed up her lips, and with an air of great determination said she would speak to no one but an inspector. The policeman smiled, and told her she would have to wait there a little while, as the inspector was at that moment engaged.

Jemima, nothing annoyed at the man's manner, seated herself quietly in a chair, awaiting the time the inspector should be at liberty. She now occupied herself in looking round the office, and reading as well as she could the various notices and placards pasted on the walls. Some were simply regulations for carriages attending some fête, others were descriptions of runaway bankrupts, or rewards for lost or stolen property. But there was one placard which particularly riveted her attention: it was headed "Murder." It was some distance from her, and she could not read the whole, but this word "Murder" so completely attracted her eye to it, that there was no possibility of looking at the others. It almost seemed as if she was mixed up in the affair somehow, and yet no human being could have been more free from a sin of the kind than herself. The longer she sat the stronger the fascination became, and she felt relieved when at last the policeman touched her on the shoulder, and told her the inspector would see her.

Jemima followed the man to the inspector's desk, and taking the notes from her pocket, she told him her tale succinctly and clearly. The inspector at first made no remark. He simply laid his hands on the notes, and then fixed his eye steadfastly on some object at the other side of the room with such earnestness that Jemima also turned round, and found he was looking at the placard headed "Murder," which had so strongly attracted her notice.

When the inspector withdrew his eye from the placard,

he first asked Jemima for her name and address, slightly raising his eyebrows when she said "Smith's Rents." He then asked if she were married, and on being answered that she was, he asked what her husband was employed in, and why he had not brought the money himself. This was a terrible blow to Jemima ; what answer to make she knew not. She coloured and was confused, and the inspector noticed her confusion, but, with the tact of an experienced officer, he made no remark. He told Jemima he would send a man with her to examine the place she found the notes in. Jemima begged he would not, as it would look so bad for her to return with a policeman, but the inspector kindly told her that he would send one in plain clothes, who would walk some distance behind her, so that no notice would be taken by either the passers by or the inhabitants of the " Rents " of the circumstance.

When Jemima arrived at her house, she immediately conducted the policeman to the heap of bricks, who examined them attentively. Although well practised in the command of his countenance, it was easy to perceive his suspicions were aroused, and that he did not believe Jemima's statement. He then inquired what other lodgers lived in her house, and she informed him that a blind basketmaker and his family lived in the top room, and a gentleman of the name of Meffy had the first floor. The policeman appeared now much interested in her conversation, and particularly inquired into different circumstances connected with Mr. Meffy's history ; what sort of a looking man he was, what was his occupation,

and especially where he was then ; and when he heard he was in the country, he was most particular in asking the reason of his going out of town.

As the policeman was leaving the house he turned round, and apparently without the slightest interest in the question, beyond keeping up a casual conversation, inquired, "By-the-bye, where is Walters now?" Mrs. Duke informed him that she did not know ; she hardly knew the man by sight ; she had seen him pass the house very often, and sometimes he might have said good morning, but nothing more.

"But he's a pal of your husband's, ain't he?"

"No," said Mrs. Duke, "my husband knows no more of him than you do."

"When did you see Walters?"

"I do not exactly know ; I was too much occupied with my own troubles to think of him."

"But, I say," said the policeman, "what day was it your husband got into trouble?"

"Last Tuesday week," said Jemima.

"Where was he on the Monday night?"

"I don't remember ; oh, he was at home."

"You are sure of that?"

"Quite certain," said Jemima, after a moment's consideration ; "what do you want to know for?"

"Only curiosity," said the policeman, bidding her good night.

CHAPTER XVII.

IN WHICH THE WEALTHY CHARACTER DISAPPEARS.



WE must now return to Mr. Mostyn's house, and trace the events which occurred there. The reader will remember that Jessie had given notice one Monday evening during the absence of her master in the country, of her intention to draw from the savings bank a portion of her money, which she was to apply for the following Monday. It is on this last evening that we take up the thread of our narrative. Edward Walters had promised Jessie he would call on her at an early hour, so that he might take charge of the house during her absence. Between six and seven o'clock in the evening he arrived, and immediately afterwards Jessie put on her bonnet and shawl, and proceeded to the savings bank offices.

She had not been gone five minutes when a low single knock was heard at the door, which was immediately opened by Edward Walters, and Mr. Meffy entered. Edward led him into the parlour, and inquired of him whether he had seen his (Edward Walters's) father.

"Yes; I have just left him with a cab," was the reply.

"I suppose he has taken care of the coachman?"

"He has done better," said Meffy; "he drives it himself."

"He's a downy cove, the old one is," said young Walters.

"Yes, pretty well for that. He has got his badge and number all complete, and is capitally made up."

"When did you see him?"

"About two minutes ago."

"Where?"

"Close round the corner. He will wait there with the cab till he's wanted. If you go for him, don't pretend to know him. Ask him, you know, if he's hired, as you would any other fellow."

"What's all that for?" asked Edward Walters.

"Why, what a fool you are!" said Meffy. "The police will not suspect anything then, if they should happen to catch a glimpse of us. You can then tell him to drive up here, and we can put the bags into the cab, and you may drive off as hard as you please."

"And why not you as well?"

"Don't you think," said Meffy, "that one is enough? I am not sure whether it would not be better to leave the swag entirely in your father's hands."

"I don't see," said Edward Walters, "why we shouldn't put the chest bodily into the cab. It would save time, and the things would not be half so likely to jog about and make a noise."

"Now," said Meffy, losing all patience, "you put me into a funk to think I've got to do with such a fool. I'm sure the whole affair will blow up. First of all, you are as suspicious as you can be that somebody intends doing you—first me and then your own father. Why,

if you only think a moment, with so many respectable silver refiners about (for in a case of this kind we need not even go to a fence), we can change those things into money as easily as we could get two shillings and sixpence for half a crown ; but what should we do with the box ? It would be sure to give a clue to the police somehow or other. In nine cases out of ten, when these things are blown it's always through the box, or the jewel-case, or something of the kind, being found. Those bags could not lead to any identity," pointing to two blue canvas bags he had thrown upon the table ; "but if a plate-chest was found either in your crib or mine, it might lead to serious consequences. If we said it had formerly held our family plate, it's ten to one the beak would not believe us. But we may as well set to work at once."

Walters made no remark, but taking up the candlestick, preceded Meffy up-stairs.

As soon as they had entered Mr. Mostyn's bedroom, Meffy took the candle from his friend and walked straight up to the escritoire. He carefully, and evidently with the eye of an artist, examined the lock, and then took from his pocket a bunch of skeleton keys and a file. Having placed the light in Walters's hand, who looked on for some time in silence, Meffy tried the keys, but none of them seemed to answer. He did not, however, either lose patience or even express by word or look the slightest annoyance, but as each failed he proceeded to try the next on the bunch, and yet with no better success. At last one key, which he had tried with

greater perseverance than the rest, he took from the key-hole, and looked at it for some moments attentively, as if absorbed in some deep calculation. Walters, who appeared to get impatient at the slowness of Meffy's movements, asked him if he intended to sleep there that night.

"Not exactly," said Meffy; "but more haste less speed, you know."

"Oh, hang all that nonsense," said Walters, now getting fairly annoyed. "Get to work, will you? or let me." So saying, he placed the candlestick on the bed and took from his pocket a neat sort of crowbar, known by the profession as a jemmy. It consisted of two pieces of polished steel, each about a foot long, with one end flattened so as to be easily inserted like a wedge. He commenced rapidly screwing the two pieces together, so as to make one lever of the whole. Meffy watched him silently till he had finished, and then asked him in a stern tone what he was going to do with it.

"Why," said Walters, "you are so long humbugging over your work, I may as well take a spell at it myself."

"Take my advice," said Meffy, his usual calm, quiet countenance getting livid with passion. "Take my advice, and don't try it."

"Why not?"

"Because I think it very likely you'll get yourself lagged for your pains."

"Are you going to split?" said Walters, trying to play the bully.

“Not unless the reward is a good one,” said Meffy, with a sneer. “Now let us understand each other. Are you going to have your way, or am I to have mine? Now say at a word.”

Walters sulkily threw the crowbar on the bed, in sign of submission, but said nothing. Meffy then drew his handkerchief from his pocket and placed it on the bed, then, holding a key over it, he commenced skilfully and rapidly filing a portion of it away, the particles of metal falling on his handkerchief, so as to leave no trace on the bed. A moment afterwards he tried it in the lock, but still it would not turn. Not in the slightest way discomposed, nor pretending to notice the expression of ill-humour and disgust on the countenance of Walters, he quietly took the key from the lock and commenced filing it as before over the handkerchief. Again he tried it in the lock, and this time it turned easily. The ill-humour on the face of Edward Walters immediately vanished, and an expression of intense anxiety and curiosity supplied its place. Meffy now drew back the lid of the escritoire, and an immense mass of papers, some loose and others tied up in bundles, presented itself to the eyes of the two thieves. But the expression of their countenances differed extremely. Meffy, before touching them, looked at them with great intentness, as if resolving in what manner he would commence the inspection; while Walters, after waiting a moment and finding his companion did not touch the papers, put on a look of defiance and plunged his hand into the midst of them. This attempt at insubordination completely enraged

Meffy, and, seizing Walters's arm, he drew it back violently.

"You clumsy brute," he exclaimed, "will you leave them alone? Don't touch anything till I tell you, or I'll give up the job, and then get on without me if you can."

"I'll tell you what it is," said Walters, savagely, "if you think you're going to be my master, you're mistaken. I know you, Meffy, and you won't do me, I can tell you."

"Wait a moment," said Meffy, coolly ; "just hand me that other key." Walters mechanically turned round to obey him, and in an instant Meffy had closed the door of the escritoire and placed the key in his pocket.

"Now," said he, "do what you can without me. One of us must be master, and we may as well find out which of the two it will be."

"I don't know what you're after, Meffy," said Walters, trying to conceal his rage ; "but if you don't mind what you're about the girl will be back, and then we shall lose all."

Whether this had any effect on Meffy it is difficult to say, so well had that gentleman his countenance under command, but he addressed Walters with considerably more friendliness in his tone than he had hitherto used.

"Walters," he said, "I don't want either to quarrel or act unfairly by you, but you annoy me ; you are so precious clumsy. Hold the light and leave me alone, and I shall have done in two minutes."

Walters, without saying a word, held the candle again for him, and Meffy once more opened the escritoire.

He now began cautiously to feel the papers, and with a touch so light that he hardly displaced them, although he contrived to insert his hand to the very bottom of the mass. Presently he said, "There is nothing worth having here, but I suspect there is a false back to it. Help me to take out the papers."

In a few moments the papers were on the bed, and Meffy rapidly examined the back. In less than a minute he had made up his mind that the back was false, and he began to touch the different parts to find the secret. At last he succeeded. He pressed heavily with a key the head of a screw in the woodwork, and the same moment the false back fell forward and disclosed a row of three small drawers. Edward Walters gave a low exclamation of satisfaction, and even Meffy's fish-like eye lighted up with animation. He first opened one drawer, but it was empty; the second, however, recompensed him for his disappointment, for in it was a roll of paper. He opened it and found it contained a bundle of bank notes. Edward Walters could hardly restrain himself from seizing them as Meffy opened the roll, when the attention of both was arrested by a cab driving up to the door.

"Put in those papers," said Meffy, "and let us be off. Never mind the plate; here is enough for both."

So saying, he rapidly replaced the false back.

"Never mind the papers," said Walters; "let them be."

"Do as I tell you," said Meffy, replacing some of them, holding the bank notes in his hand the while. Walters obeyed him, and the papers were thrust back in a heap, and Meffy locked the escritoire, when the cabman's double knock was again heard at the street door.

"What the devil does the old fool mean," muttered Meffy, "by making that row? I told him not to come till he was sent for. Pick up that thing," he said, pointing to the crowbar, and thrusting file, false keys, and his handkerchief into his pocket. Then flinging his cap on his head, and repeating, "Pick up that, will you?" Meffy turned to the door, carrying the candle, and Walters followed him with the crowbar in his hand.

"Don't bring it that way," said Meffy; "unscrew it, will you? Do you want to be seen with a jemmy in your hand?"

"Wait a moment," said Walters; "wait a moment, Meffy, and we'll go together."

Meffy turned round angrily. "What are you afraid of?" he said.

"Nothing; only let's have fair play."

"Who wants anything else?" said Meffy, turning round; "but where are the bags?"

"On the chair."

"Fetch them, will you?"

"Well, but stop a moment."

Meffy, who by this time had gained the head of the stairs, only descended the faster, and after placing the candle in the parlour, he opened the street door before Walters had succeeded in finding the bags.

"What the devil do you want here?" said Meffy, in a tone of great surprise, to an old gentleman muffled up to the throat with a great coat and shawl. "Who are you?"

"And what are you doing in my house?" said the stranger, attempting to seize him.

Meffy for the moment seemed almost paralysed, and could not find an excuse.

"Cabman," said the old gentleman, trying to detain Meffy, "call a policeman."

The cabman, who was busy in getting a box out of the cab, did not hear him, and continued his work. Meffy, seeing the affair was getting too dangerous for trifling, made an effort and released himself from Mr. Mostyn (for it was he), and rushed away as rapidly as his limping pace would allow him, and was soon lost in the obscurity.

Edward Walters was for a moment puzzled in what manner to act. He was at the head of the staircase trying to unscrew the crowbar, the two bags under his arm. At first he thought of rushing past and escaping, but by the time he had resolved on this another person entered the narrow passage. This was the cabman, who with Mr. Mostyn and two boxes he had placed on the floor, completely blocked up the passage.

"Just wait here a moment," said Mr. Mostyn to the cabman, "till a policeman comes by. I saw one on the other side of the road. Oh, here he comes."

The policeman came up to the door at the moment, and Walters found all chance of escape cut off from him.

He immediately crept up-stairs and entered a small back garret. Groping his way he found a bedstead, and the next moment he had concealed himself beneath it.

By this time the policeman and Mr. Mostyn were in conversation. Mr. Mostyn had informed him that a man had rushed out of the house, and he was afraid he was a thief.

"What sort of a man was he, sir?"

"I had no time to pay attention. I should not know him again from Adam."

"Perhaps, sir, it was only your servant's young man. He has been here very often lately."

"I know he has," said Mr. Mostyn, "and that is the reason I came up to town. One of the neighbours wrote to me about it."

By this time they had entered the parlour. By the light of the candle they perceived that some bread and cheese, and two glasses, were on the table, but no beer.

"I'd bet anything," said the policeman, "she invited him to supper, and has gone for the beer. You'll see her back presently."

"She never enters this house again," said her master. "I fully trusted that woman, and I find there is no more reliance to be placed in her than in the rest of them."

"Had you not better see if you've lost anything, sir? if not, I can go on my beat."

"Certainly," said Mr. Mostyn; "let me pay the cabman first."

A slight altercation, of course, occurred between the

old man and the cabman, but in the end everything was amicably settled, and the cab drove off.

At first Mr. Mostyn was on the point of asking the policeman to accompany him up-stairs, but upon second thoughts the suspicious old man considered he might be showing the room in which he kept his treasures to the policeman, and he requested the latter would sit down while he went up-stairs to examine the house. The policeman without remark seated himself, probably thinking some bread and cheese, at least, might be in store for him when Mr. Mostyn came down, and, lighted only by his own lantern, he remained quietly below till the old gentleman had finished his search. Mr. Mostyn first carefully examined his own room. He found the cupboard which contained his plate-chest fast locked, his escritoire the same, and everything about the room appeared to be in the most perfect order. This satisfactory state of things somewhat pacified the old man as to the danger of robbery, but his anger against Jessie for leaving the house continued unabated. He descended into the parlour, and told the policeman that evidently nothing had been taken, but that Jessie, for her disobedience of orders, should never again be allowed to enter his house. The policeman, eyeing wistfully the bread and cheese, said Mr. Mostyn would be perfectly justified, as one-half the robberies in private houses arose from servants letting in strange men; but his ready acquiescence with the remark procured him no invitation. After waiting a few moments longer in the vain hope of a shilling, and finally offering to carry the two small

boxes containing the old gentleman's luggage, which were in the passage, up-stairs for him, he prepared to depart. Although Mr. Mostyn declined the offer of carrying the boxes up-stairs, he accepted it so far as to allow him to bring them into the parlour and place them in a corner out of the way. The policeman readily obeyed, and then stood for a moment expecting a gratuity, but he received instead only a curt good-night, and an especial request that he would keep a good look-out on the premises till the next morning. The disappointed policeman said nothing, but left the house, inwardly determining that he would not again enter the street that night unless obliged, and even then he would pass Mr. Mostyn's house with his eyes shut.

As soon as Mr. Mostyn was alone he put up the chain of the front door, and then seated himself in the parlour, muttering to himself as was his wont, and abusing poor Jessie to his heart's content. He continued in this frame of mind till he heard Jessie insert the key of the street door in the lock, and partially open the door, but as the chain was up she could not enter. Her master, with a feeling almost of satisfaction, rose from his chair and went to the door.

"What do you mean, you hussy," he said, "by leaving the house when I told you you were not to do so?"

"If you please, sir," said Jessie, as soon as she had recovered from her surprise, "I only went to the post-office."

"Don't tell me a lie," said her master; "you know you did not go to the post-office. It would not have taken

you ten minutes, and I have been here half an hour. What business had you to have a man in the house?"

"It was only my cousin, sir. He only came to London this morning, and I thought there would be no harm in asking him in."

"That is another lie. He has been here before, several times. A neighbour wrote to me about your goings on, and that is the reason I have come up, and I find it all true. Go about your business. There is half a crown for you to get a bed ; come here to-morrow and I will pay you your wages, and I'll have nothing more to say to you."

As he said this he flung the half-crown on the pavement, and taking the key from Jessie, he closed the street door, and bolted it.

He then went again into the parlour, muttering to himself in a half-audible manner. After remaining thus for half an hour, he rose from his chair, and taking his keys from his pocket, he proceeded to open one of his boxes for the purpose of taking from it his dressing-gown. That done, he took up his candle and went upstairs into his bedroom.

During the whole of this time Edward Walters had been lying concealed under the bed in the back attic listening to every sound. He heard the door shut after the policeman, and he knew that Mr. Mostyn remained in the house, but still he could hear nothing of Jessie. He determined to remain quietly in the position he was in till he heard her return, and then, after her master was in bed. he calculated he should have but little diffi-

culty in leaving the house. Presently, as he began to be accustomed to his situation, he commenced turning over in his mind the affairs of the evening. He soon perceived that in all probability he should never receive one penny of the money in Meffy's hands. He knew too well the cunning, unscrupulous character of that gentleman not to feel certain he would not easily be found, and that as soon as he had changed the bank notes he would depart into some other locality, or most probably set sail for America, and all trace of him be lost. And in what position would he, Edward Walters, be? He who had concocted the whole affair, and had had by far the greater part of the trouble and danger, would receive nothing. It was no use thinking of revenging himself on Meffy, angry as he was with him; that would do no good. After all, if he kept his pluck up, he might not go away empty-handed yet. There was still the plate left, and if he could only get Jessie to assist him, he might do well enough with that. True, it was kept in the old man's bedroom, but there would be little difficulty in overcoming him. Why did not Jessie return?—what could detain her? Presently he heard Mr. Mostyn come up-stairs, enter his bedroom, and lock the door. Here was a difficulty he had not calculated on. Possibly, after all, Mr. Mostyn would not go to bed till Jessie's return. No, of course he would not. Still he would wait a little longer, and, if possible, he would not leave without his share of the plunder. He now crept cautiously from under the bed, and seated himself upon it, the two bags under his arm, and the crowbar in his

hand. In this position he remained for more than two hours, listening earnestly the while for Jessie's return. At last he gave up the point, and determined to escape from the house, as Jessie's conduct seemed to him inexplicable.

Edward Walters rose from the bed, and approached the head of the stairs. He listened attentively, and thought he heard some one moving in Mr. Mostyn's room. He stepped down nearer the door, and could not only distinguish that some one was moving, but also heard a voice, although he could not distinguish the words. He advanced nearer the door, and could see the light of the candle shining through the keyhole. Still he could not understand the words Mr. Mostyn uttered, nor did he hear any other voice. He now concluded that as Jessie had not returned Mr. Mostyn was sitting up for her. The idea of possessing himself of the plate again entered his mind, and he stole up once more to his hiding-place, leaving the door open that he might listen the more attentively.

We must now return to Mr. Mostyn. After he had locked his door he seated himself in an easy chair in his room, and tried to collect his thoughts, but in vain. He was in a state of such nervous agitation that his mind at the moment could hardly be said to be in a sane state. Fatigue and irritation from his journey, combined with the annoyance he had met with on his return home, had completely thrown his reasoning powers off their equilibrium. He had acquired the habit of muttering to himself whenever his mind was particularly

occupied on any subject, but now his agitation was so great that he spoke quite loud. The particular object of his anger was, of course, Jessie. He had trusted her implicitly when he would have trusted no other human being, and she had deceived him. There was no gratitude to be found in the world. He had paid her far higher wages than any other servant in the neighbourhood received, but all was useless to obtain fidelity. He did not remember that the only reason for his employing Jessie was that a servant was necessary for his comfort, and that the higher sum than ordinary that he paid her was simply to secure services which he imagined were valuable to him. He simply gave the more as he considered the commodity was the more valuable.

Fatigue now began to obtain its natural ascendancy over the exhausted frame of the old man, and he fell into an uneasy doze, from time to time waking up as he bent forward in his chair; still no idea of seeking his bed entered his mind. As each successive jerk awakened him, his anger against Jessie diminished. He almost regretted that he had dismissed her. His arguments were now expostulatory rather than passionate, and it is more than probable if Jessie had that moment stood before him all would have been forgiven, subject to her being daily reminded of her fault. In this state of half-waking, half-sleeping, he remained till it was considerably past midnight, when he determined to retire to his bed. The cold of the night appeared to act as a sedative to his brain, and with greater calmness than he had hitherto

shown he began to undress himself. Suddenly he stopped short, as if a serious idea had crossed his mind. He remembered that he had contented himself with simply seeing that the lid of the escritoire and the door of the cupboard which held his plate-chest were fastened, without seeing that their contents were safe. He discontinued undressing, and again put on his dressing-gown, determining that he would see that all was secure before he went to sleep. He now sought in his pockets for his keys, but he could not find them. He became greatly agitated, thinking he might have lost them, and he again seated himself on his chair to collect his thoughts. In a few minutes he rose again with a sigh of relief. He remembered that he had taken his dressing-gown out of his box in the parlour, and that most probably he had left his keys below. He now thrust his feet into his slippers, and taking the candle in his hand, he unlocked his door and proceeded down-stairs. To his great satisfaction he found his keys in the lock of the box he had opened. He first closed it with some difficulty, and then went leisurely up to his room. He did not, as before, close his door, but left it ajar.

The first article he proceeded to examine was his plate-chest. He opened the door of the cupboard easily enough. He then placed the candle on a chair beside him, and going down on his knees, he prepared to open the plate-chest. He had chosen the key from the bunch, and had placed it in the lock, when he suddenly stopped and gazed with an expression of considerable anxiety on the chest. He was endeavouring to recollect whether he

had not left two articles outside on the lid, there not being room for them in the inside. He was fairly puzzled in the matter, and he passed his hand across his brow as if trying to collect his thoughts on the subject. The more he reflected on it the more certain he felt he had done so. Somewhat alarmed, he now proceeded to open the chest, when his attention was attracted to a sound near him. He turned round and saw approaching him a young man with apparently some weapon in his hand. Completely terrified at the apparition, he screamed violently, "Help! Murder!" He had commenced a third word, but he stopped. A fearful blow with the steel crowbar had fallen on the bald head of the old man, and he lay stretched and senseless on the floor. Edward Walters, who had listened to his going down-stairs and watched his return, had noticed he had not locked his door. The devil had suggested to him that he could easily frighten the old man, but had whispered no word of murder. He stealthily descended the stairs, and finding the room-door open had entered. He threw the two bags on the ground, and raising the crowbar in air with the intention of frightening the old man, advanced towards him. Mr. Mostyn's exclamations alarmed him, and the devil advised him to silence him. He did so, and not content with a blow, the devil whispered to him that the old man might recover. Walters, to prevent it, and maddened with a horrible feeling of blood-thirst, struck another blow. This was not so well aimed, yet was perhaps more deadly. He struck somewhat short of his mark, and the flattened, sharp edge of the instrument

struck the old man on the throat, dividing the jugular vein and carotid artery. In a moment the floor was covered with blood, to which Walters paid no attention. He threw the crowbar beside him, and going down on his knees he opened the chest. The sight of the silver plate it contained was insufficient completely to rivet his attention, yet he hurriedly stretched forth his hand to reach one of the bags. He rapidly took piece after piece from the chest, and thrust each into the bag without waiting to see whether it were silver or merely plated. He continued his occupation, trying the while to fix his thoughts on his booty, but a terribly uneasy sensation weighed on him, each moment increasing in intensity. Still he went on. Presently, the dead silence of the room became insupportable to him. The whole scene appeared more like a terrible vision than a reality. Still he continued filling the bag, and still the horrible sensation increased. The bag was now nearly full, and he stretched forth his hand behind him to reach the other. In doing so he kept his eye rigidly fixed on the chest. He dared not whisper to himself what was on the floor, and he endeavoured to fix his thoughts on his prize. Presently he reached the bag, but a damp sensation of warmth was on his hand. He knew perfectly well from what cause it arose, but it did not terrify him, for it was a sensation of reality, and for the moment destroyed the horrible feeling which had oppressed him the moment before. He commenced filling the second bag. Suddenly a deep, unearthly sigh, which seemed to proceed from the body, frightened him, and he closed the lid of

the chest. Slowly he turned round his head and gazed at the ghastly spectacle of the dying man. At that moment a glance of intelligence beamed from his eye sternly on the assassin. Another deep sigh escaped from his breast, and all was silent—the silence of death. This natural termination of his brutality completely terrified the wretch. He arose from his knees, and throwing his cap on his head, he took one of the bags in his right hand, and with the candle in his left he descended the stairs. He placed the bag in the parlour, and then left the room to go for the other. He had no sooner placed his foot on the stairs, than his courage failed him. The deep silence of the house alarmed him so much that he could not advance a step. He then resolved to go for his father, for the idea struck him if there was a living being in the place his courage would return. He placed the candle in the parlour, and opening the door, he cautiously looked into the street to see if any one were in sight. All was perfectly still ; not a person was to be seen. He left the door ajar, and rapidly rushed to the corner of the street to find the cab.

“What, come at last?” said his father, “I thought you were going to sleep there.”

“Come at once,” said his son, “and don’t talk.”

Walters drove the cab to the door. His son was again frightened, for it was wide open ; there was no cause, however, for his alarm, for it was only a gust of wind that had done it. The father got off the box, and his son told him to come quickly into the house. He did so, and closed the door after him.

"Stay there a moment," said Edward, snatching up the candle, "I shall be down directly." He again attempted to mount the stairs, but was again unable. While deliberating within himself whether he would inform his father of what had occurred, the latter heard the horse move. He immediately opened the street door, and a gust of wind blew out the candle in his son's hand. It was now an utter impossibility for him to go up-stairs, and he gave up the attempt. He descended the few stairs he had mounted, and went into the parlour, and there took up the bag and followed his father, closing the street-door after him.

"Stay," said his father, "I have left my hat indoors."

"D—n the hat! leave it alone. There is my cap for you."

"Well, but I want my hat,"

"I can't help it; the door is shut, and I have not got the key. Now drive on as fast as you can."

So saying, he opened the cab door, and placed the bag in it, and getting in himself he again told his father with an oath to drive on. The old man obeyed, and in a few moments, to Edward Walters's intense satisfaction, they had left the street.

CHAPTER XVIII.

FATHER AND SON.



HE cab drove on down the Borough and across London Bridge towards Brick Lane, Spitalfields. There the father had engaged a room in a wretched court, from which he had proposed they should carry on operations. When they had arrived young Walters jumped from the cab.

"Do you think the horse will stand still?" he said to his father; "if so you had better come with me." His father said he thought he would stand quietly, as he had driven there very rapidly. Beyond that he had a great curiosity to see what sort of a prize they had got. He silently followed his son, and they both entered the house, an old woman on the ground-floor having opened the door for them. They mounted the stairs silently to a back room and entered it. The elder Walters now drew from his pocket a box of lucifers and a small candle. He struck a light and lighted the candle, which he placed on the chimney-piece, and then turned round to speak to his son. But not a word could he utter. He turned pale, and seemed on the point of fainting, so strong was the impression his son's appearance made on him. He was literally covered with blood.

"What's the matter with you?" said the son savagely, well knowing at the time the reason of his father's pallor.

"Ned," stammered his father, "tell me the truth; is he dead?"

"And suppose he is; do you think I was going to be taken?"

"You don't mean to say it's the old man," said the father; "I thought he was in the country?"

"And so did I; but he came home and caught me."

"And Meffy, where is he?"

"He cut it, like a white-livered cur as he is, as soon as he found himself in danger."

"My God! what is to be done?" said the father, in a tone of despair.

"What's to be done? why, get rid of the swag, to be sure, and the sooner you set about it the better."

"I'll have nothing to do with it," said the elder Walters.

"You don't mean to say you're afraid?"

"No; but I'll not mix myself up in a murder case."

"Yes," said his son, with a sneer, "you're a respectable man, certainly."

"No matter what I am; I am not, at any rate, bad enough to mix myself up in a case like this."

"You don't mean to say you're going to leave me alone in it. By Heaven, if I thought so I'd cleave your brain open as I did the old man's."

"And perhaps the best thing you could do," said the father. "But I don't want to leave you, God knows, although I'll have nothing to do with the affair. Bad as I am, I had never blood on my hands yet, and I don't intend beginning now. And if you'd take my advice you'd drop it at once. A reward will be offered, and you may depend upon it Meffy will split."

"Not he. He's in for it pretty well as deep as I am. He's got a pocketful of bank notes."

"No matter ; I know him well, and one way or another he'll bring it about. Stow those things away somewhere, and make yourself scarce at once. I tell you again, I'll have nothing to do with it."

"But how can I cut it?" said the son. "I can't go out with my things covered with blood, and I have not got a five-shilling piece in the world."

"I'll go home," said his father, "and pack up some clothes for you, and bring them back as soon as I can. I ain't got much money, but what I have I'll bring you. Once more, take my advice and be off as soon as you can." So saying he took up the cap to depart, but by the light of the candle he perceived some marks of his son's blood-stained fingers on it. "This won't do at all," he said, "I'll leave it here." His son merely sneered, but made no answer.

The elder Walters now drew a handkerchief from his pocket, which he tied round his head, and then left the house. When he arrived at the entrance to the court, to his horror he found the cab was no longer there. He had been so occupied in his conversation with his son

that he had forgotten it. He now rushed up the street in the direction of which his horse's head stood, and at the first turning he found the brute had been stopped by a policeman.

"Thank you, mate," said Walters, out of breath. "I thought I had lost him."

"Well, it was an even bet," said the policeman. "I was just going to take him to the green-yard ; but what have you done with your hat ?"

"Well," said Walters, at hazard, "as I was coming over London Bridge a gust of wind caught it and carried it over into the water."

"It'll be a godsend for some waterman," said the policeman as Walters was getting on his box.

"Yes, it will," was the reply, as Walters drove off.

He drove as rapidly as he could to Smith's Rents, and arrived before daybreak. He was somewhat puzzled what to do with his cab, when fortunately he met one of the young thieves as he was returning from night duty. He asked him to hold the horse for him, which he willingly promised to do. Walters then rushed into his house, and without disturbing his wife he got a light and proceeded rapidly to collect such of his son's clothes as he could find, and then tied them up in a bundle. He opened a drawer and took from it all the money it contained—about five pounds—which he placed in his pocket, and was upon the point of leaving the house when the idea struck him that the cab might possibly be stained with blood. It would have been imprudent for

him to have made the inspection at that moment, as he must have used a light, which would have been difficult ; besides, the young thief would have seen him, so he took a shoe-brush with him, to brush it, if he should have occasion, as soon as it was daylight.

He took the handkerchief from his head and put on a hat, and after extinguishing the candle, left the house. He thanked the young thief for the care he had taken of the horse, and he then mounted the box and drove off. When he arrived in Brick Lane, the horse was so tired that there was no fear of his moving, and Walters took out the bundle and ran rapidly with it into the house. There he found Edward had been making preparations to leave, as he had advised him. He had inserted a piece of wood up the chimney, so as to act as a shelf, and on it he had placed the bag containing the plate. Walters then asked his son if he had told Meffy where to find them, and expressed his satisfaction when he heard he had not. He then gave his son the money. "And now," said he, "let me advise you to be off as soon as possible."

He now left the house, and this time he found the horse had remained on the spot where he had left him. Day was now rapidly breaking, and he examined the interior of the cab, and found in it several blood-spots. These he brushed carefully away, and then taking from under the cushions the real number-plate of the cab, he replaced it for the sham one he had used, and then drove the cab back to the yard.

“You’ve had a good night’s work out of that hoss,” said the stable-man, examining the beast with a critical eye.

“And you have got the money for his work,” said Walters, leaving the yard.

CHAPTER XIX.

EDWARD WALTERS ESCAPES.

OOR Jessie slept but little the night of her dismissal. Her mind was too much agitated, not only at the difficulty she would find herself in to obtain another situation, but also as to the means by which her lover would be able to make his escape. She did not rise very early, for, like most of her class, the idea of not being obliged to get up was to her a sort of luxury, disturbed as she was, and she tried, but without success, to enjoy it. However, she could not remain in bed all day, so about nine o'clock she dressed herself and took her breakfast. About eleven she left the house, and with a palpitating heart proceeded to Mr. Mostyn's. When she arrived, she found the house hermetically closed ; not a shutter curtain, nor window was open. She knocked more than once, but no one answered the door. She became exceedingly nervous, but without any reason to offer to herself for the feeling. The uneasy sensation became more oppressive, and she returned to her lodgings. There she consoled herself by writing a letter in extraordinary characters and worse orthography to her lover, telling him she had left her situation, and giving him her

address ; and then putting on her bonnet and shawl, she started off with it to Smith's Rents. She found only Mrs. Walters at home, and she left the letter with her without further remark than requesting her to give it to her son as soon as she might see him. Jessie then returned to get her dinner.

She had not left the Rents more than ten minutes when young Walters, terribly pale, entered the house. His mother was so alarmed at his appearance that it was some minutes before she remembered the letter. When she placed it in her son's hands, she received, in lieu of thanks, a considerable amount of abuse for not having given it immediately she saw him. She attempted some excuse, but instead of listening to her he tore open the letter and hurriedly read the contents. As soon as he had finished, he told his mother to get him pens, ink, and paper, and immediately wrote an answer. It was short, and without signature or address. He merely told Jessie to meet him that evening at eight o'clock precisely at the Piccadilly entrance to Hyde Park ; not on any account to go to Mr. Mostyn's till she had seen him, nor, in fact, to leave the house, and to tear up the letter as soon as she had read it. He then borrowed of his mother all the money she had got, which was only a few shillings, and afterwards abruptly left her. He now hurried as rapidly as he could to Jessie's lodgings, and when near the house he gave a street boy a penny to take the letter, instructing him to ask to see Jessie herself, standing the while a short distance off, watching the boy. The door was opened, and he could perceive that

it was not Jessie that opened it, but the woman of the house. She left the boy for a moment, and then he saw Jessie come to the door and take the letter from his hand, and all being now arranged to his satisfaction, he departed.

At eight precisely Jessie was at the place of meeting, but her lover was not there. This added greatly to the disquietude the letter had caused her, written as it was in so mysterious a manner. She remained till nine, and she then thought she would walk a little into the Park, as the policeman at the entrance appeared to be watching her. She had hardly proceeded a hundred yards, when some one touched her on the arm, and on turning round she found it was her lover. A sensation of relief immediately came over her, and she clutched his arm with the strength almost of an iron vice. Walters said nothing, but walked with her rapidly into the obscurity of some trees, and then for the first time he spoke to her, after first carefully looking around him.

“Did I not frighten you with my letter?”

“Indeed you did; I never was so surprised in my life.”

“But did you keep indoors all day, as I asked you?”

“Certainly I did; I should not do anything you told me not.”

“And did any one come after you?”

“No one at all; nobody knows where I am. When that sulky old brute sent me away I hardly knew where to go at first myself. I knew something of a woman who lived near where I am, and I first went there to see if she

could give me a bed, but I found she had gone away."

"And who sent you where you are?"

"Oh, I waited about for some time till I saw a policeman, and I asked him where I could get a bed in a respectable house."

"D——n! you don't say so?"

"Well, what was I to do? I knew no one; but don't be angry with me, I did not talk to him for two minutes."

"What did he say to you besides?"

"Nothing whatever beyond telling me where to go to. Oh, you don't suppose, dear, I'd stop talking to any man in the streets, especially a stranger," said Jessie, utterly mistaking the reason of her lover's agitation.

"No, no, I'm sure of that; but you are certain he said nothing else?"

"Nothing whatever."

"And he did not come about the house this morning?"

"Oh dear no, not that I know of; but I shouldn't know him again if I did see him. Now tell me, dear, why did you not like my going to Mr. Mostyn's? He owes me my wages, and he shall pay me; besides, I have not a stitch with me more than I stand upright in."

Young Walters made her no answer, but remained for some moments deeply absorbed in thought, occasionally looking round nervously the while.

"You did not hear me, you naughty boy," said Jessie playfully jogging his arm. "You are thinking of some-

body else, I am sure. I shall be jealous in my turn, if you don't mind."

"Jessie," said Walters, "you must not go near Mr. Mostyn's again."

"Why not, dear?"

"Because the old fellow is dead."

Jessie made no answer, but a terrible sensation of dread came over her. She could hardly realise the news. She stood trembling for some time, clutching nervously the arm of her lover, and at last, when she was a little more composed, she said,—

"Oh, you are joking, dear. Why do you frighten me in that manner?"

"I am not joking; what I tell you is the truth. Old Mostyn is dead."

"How did you know it?"

"I heard it from my father."

"And how did he die?"

"They say he has been murdered, and if so, both you and I will be suspected."

"I," said Jessie, indignantly leaving her lover's arm; "I will give myself up to the police immediately."

"Stop," said Walters, now getting terribly frightened; "they say he has been robbed as well."

"A reason the more," said Jessie; "I never took a farthing wrongfully from any one;" and she was on the point of quitting her lover.

"For God's sake, Jessie, stop one moment and listen to reason. There is no doubt you will get off, but what will become of me? They will trace out that I was

in the house ; and although I am as innocent of it as the babe unborn, it is very probable they will hang me for it. Oh, if you love me, and I am sure you do, do nothing rash."

Jessie was silent for some moments. At last she caught hold of Walters's arm, and with much hysteria in her tone, said,—

"Edward, as there is a God above us, did you have anything to do with it?"

"Jessie, how can you ask me such a question? I would have starved before doing anything of the kind."

"Do you know who did it?"

Walters was silent for a moment.

"Edward," she repeated, "tell me once more, do you know who did it?"

"No, I don't, Jessie ; but I have my suspicions."

"Who was it?"

"Jessie, don't ask me ; I cannot tell you. If it's the man I believe, I am more likely to be hung than he is, for I will never give up his name."

"Edward," said she, seriously, after a moment's silence, "was it—that father of yours?"

"Jessie, don't ask me ; guess it if you like."

"My God, what shall I do?" said the poor girl.

"Go," said he, "and say you did not do it, and give me in charge. You will hang me by it, although I would at any time lay down my life to save yours."

The girl made no further attempt to go.

"Edward," she said, "what am I to do?"

"Have you got the money from the savings bank?"

"I have, and I will willingly give it all to you if you can save yourself."

The scoundrel hesitated for a moment. His first thought was to take the money ; but then he reflected that if the girl remained behind she might serve as a clue to detect him. He need have been under no alarm, but, a villain himself, he doubted the good faith of every one ; besides, the thought also occurred to him that when Jessie heard of the particulars of the murder, her love for him would change into horror, and she might tell all she knew.

"Jessie," he said at last, "you don't know me, nor how I love you. I will not go without you."

"Where would you go to if I went with you?"

"The money you have is sufficient to pay the passage money of both of us to America. Come with me, and as soon as we arrive I will marry you, and we shall do well enough there. Work is plentiful and the wages are good."

"But I have nothing to go in."

"You won't want much, and what you will want we can get in Liverpool ; ships are always sailing from there, and we shall soon be safe."

"But how shall we manage to go?"

"Go quietly back to your lodgings and pay the woman. Then meet me to-morrow at the North-Western station at five o'clock. Leave the house without any one in the street seeing you. Say you are going to Harwich to see your mother, and no one will suspect you. Do they know your name at your lodging?"

"No, they do not."

"Say it's Thompson, and I will pass under the same name. When you see me at the parliamentary train do not speak to me or notice me, but take your ticket. I will take care to sit by you. I have not money enough to pay my fare. Now do you understand all?"

"Yes, I think I do. Let me repeat it."

She did so, and proved she had got her lesson perfectly.

"That will do capitally," said her lover. "Oh, how happy I shall be when we are together in America! You have no idea what a bad fellow that father of mine is."

"He seemed to me," said Jessie, "to be a very good-natured man."

"He'd cheat a very angel himself," said the amiable son. "Now go, Jessie dear; keep up your courage and meet me at five. You know where the station is?"

"Yes; I have been there before. Good night."

Poor Jessie attempted to move, but her strength failed her.

"Walters," she said, "it seems to me like a terrible dream. It can't be true."

"True it is, to my sorrow," said he. "Now be a dear girl, and keep your courage up. Remember if you break down it will be my ruin, and that will be cruel indeed, when you know how much I love you."

Jessie made another effort and left her lover, who plunged still deeper into the darkness of the park.

Although Jessie's courage upheld her for some time during her walk homewards, it weakened considerably as

she got nearer the house. When she entered the street in which it was situated, it returned for a moment, as she wished to enter unobserved, and caution for the time banished fear. She then called the woman of the house, and told her it was her intention to leave the next morning by the parliamentary train to Harwich, and requested her to call her in time. She had sent on her luggage to the station, she said, so she should have nothing to carry. The woman of the house, who was too well accustomed to erratic tenants, both male and female, to make any remark on Jessie's statement, promised to call her as desired, and inquired what she would like for breakfast. Jessie requested she would have some coffee ready for her, and she should require nothing more. She then paid the woman the money owing to her, as well as for the next morning's breakfast, for although she did not intend to touch it, she had too much honesty to let the woman be at any loss on her account; and then, after telling her if any one called to inquire after Miss Thompson to say she had gone down to see her mother at Harwich, she bade the woman good night and went to bed.

Fortunately for Jessie no other person slept in her room that night, or the disturbed manner of the agitated girl must have aroused their attention if not suspicion. Continually she tried to sleep, but as usual when it is too ardently wooed, sleep refused to visit her. Finding it impossible to close her eyes for five minutes together, she got up, dressed herself in the dark, and paced backward and forward in her little room. Then the thought

struck her that the woman of the house would hear her footsteps and suspect something wrong, and she again flung herself, dressed as she was, on the bed.

She now attempted to think coolly over her position, but it was impossible. All she wished for most on earth (her marriage with Edward Walters) would now be soon realised—at any rate, as soon as the ship arrived in America; and her satisfaction at this for some time deadened her thoughts to the murder of Mr. Mostyn. Then she began to think in what manner it could have occurred, and how the murderer could have got into the house. There was no doubt in her mind that the murder was committed by the elder Walters, but how could he have perpetrated it? He must certainly have been let in by his son before Mr. Mostyn arrived, but how did her lover manage to leave the house and the father remain in it? These reflections gave rise to most unpleasant thoughts, which, although she drove them away almost as soon as formed, contrived to return again to her almost immediately. So pertinaciously, in fact, did they press themselves upon her imagination, that she burst into a violent fit of sobbing, so strong as almost to approach an hysterical fit, when suddenly she remembered that her lover had been particular in ascertaining if she had got the money from the savings bank, that they might be able to pay their passage to America—a necessity which would not have arisen had he been one of the parties who murdered Mr. Mostyn, as in that case he would have had plenty of money, Jessie knowing full well how valuable was the silver plate her master

possessed. This suggestion gave her great consolation ; so much so that the hysterical symptoms changed from crying to laughing, and she had considerable difficulty in subduing them. At length, finding the house and street perfectly quiet, she resolved to go, although it was barely two o'clock, to the place of meeting. She listened carefully first at her room door, and judging from their deep breathing that the inmates of the house must be fast in their first sleep, she cautiously descended the stairs, opened the street door, and then looked anxiously to the right and left to see if there were any passers by, or if the house was watched. All was quiet as the grave ; no one was to be seen ; and Jessie, after quietly closing the door after her, hurried away till she was completely out of any possible danger of being followed.

In the meantime young Walters had remained in the darker parts of the park till it was time to close the gates, and he then hung about the different streets near the Euston Square station till Jessie should arrive, and it would be time for the train to start. About four o'clock he saw a female figure approaching the spot near which he was standing, and on nearer approach he found it was Jessie. Although contrary to his resolution, he spoke to her, and asked if she had contrived to quit her lodgings without suspicion or being noticed. She told him she had ; that she had followed his advice in every particular, and nothing could have succeeded better. He asked her for some money, and Jessie placed a couple of sovereigns in his hand. "I will get the tickets for you," he said, "and will contrive to slip

one of them into your hand, but do not speak to me. Take care also you choose a tolerably empty carriage, so that I can sit by you. You are a dear, good girl, and I love you better than my own life. Now leave me." Jessie did as she was told, and the pair continued to lounge about different streets till the time for taking the tickets.

We must now explain the reasons which induced Edward Walters to quit the booty he had risked his life for, and seek safety in flight, before the slightest knowledge or suspicion of his crime had been made public. Previous to committing the murder he had had no intention of perpetrating so foul a crime, and the probabilities before him, in case the theft were detected, were simply those which attend on every villany of the kind—a lengthened imprisonment. At the time of the murder he had no power of reasoning whatever. It was merely a stolid, brutal action. The devil had placed the opportunity in his way, and had instigated the deed, and he had done it. After the murder, the intense excitement of the moment had shut out from him every thought but of the particular action he was at the moment engaged in. Cunning was natural to him, and he concealed his booty with considerable cold blood and tact, and then, after washing his hands and getting the traces of blood from his person, he left the house. He afterwards wandered for some time, mechanically and without purpose, about the streets in the northern part of London, as if to get as far as possible from the scene of his crime. He now began to reflect more coolly over his position,

and the more attention he gave it the more desperate it appeared. In the first place, he was certain that as soon as the murder should be discovered, a large reward would be offered for the apprehension of the murderers, and that would immediately stimulate Mr. Meffy to action. He rightly judged there would be no act of treachery or falsehood that gentleman would not be guilty of, if he found the slightest probability of turning it to his own advantage. True, he was even more implicated in the robbery than himself, and if that were discovered, the suspicion of murder would be equally strong against him ; but with the intense cunning Meffy possessed, it was almost a certainty he would contrive to conceal his implication in both the robbery and murder, while he could show the strongest proofs of his (Walters's) concern in the transaction. Besides that, Meffy had simply possessed himself of the money, and that he could conceal without difficulty, changing occasionally one of the smaller notes as he required it for his use, and keeping the rest concealed till the whole affair had blown over ; whereas it was impossible for Walters to sell the plate without arousing suspicion. If he took it to a respectable dealer, he would refuse to purchase it from him without a reference ; and if he sold it to one of those agents usually employed by thieves, it was more than probable the purchaser himself would be the first to give notice to the police and claim the reward. Where to go to also puzzled him. To the lodging he had left would be dangerous, and there was no other place open for him but his father's house. He had

already resolved, that if the affair were detected, he would let his parent bear the brunt, and therefore he wished to be seen at the house in the Rents as seldom as possible. Still, he wanted to act in conjunction with his father, and he determined seeking him immediately. The murder in all probability had not yet been made public, and there would be less danger in his now visiting him than later.

He therefore started off for Smith's Rents, and, as has been already stated, when he arrived there he found his father from home. The receipt of Jessie's letter seemed to inspire him with a plan of operation. If she had still the money with her she had received from the savings bank, it was sufficient to enable him to start for America, and when once there, if the affair succeeded sufficiently well to allow his father to obtain possession of the plate they had concealed, he could easily bully the old man out of it by threatening he would write a letter implicating him, while he, in a distant land, would be safe. With this intention he wrote to Jessie to meet him in the park, and the result of that interview, as the reader is aware, was that they should start together for America.

The time had now arrived to issue the tickets for the parliamentary train, and the usual large crowd of applicants surrounded the booking-office. They were of all classes, from people of apparently the highest respectability, though poor, to the dirty, half-drunken railway navigator. One of the most noticeable features was the number of children and mere infants accompanying the women, the elder clinging tightly to their mothers' skirts,

the younger sleeping through the confusion and hustling that surrounded them. All pushed eagerly forward to the booking-place, as if there were a danger of their being left behind if they were not among the first to take their tickets. The women appeared even more anxious than the men, and it was singular to notice the poor mother pushing her way with her apparently unmanageable flock of children, with one at her breast, to the paying-place; and still more curious and pleasing to notice the rough gallantry the motley group which surrounded it offered her. Not an unkind expression or impatient word was uttered, but every one assisted her as they best could. The courteous behaviour of even the lowest class of English society to women with children is a redeeming point in the frequent brutality of their character. In no country is it more noticeable. We have frequently remarked in the crush-room at the opera on a crowded night, behaviour to women which would hardly have passed without remark at the paying-place of a parliamentary third-class train.

Jessie placed herself at the extremity of the hall, watching attentively her lover's movements, while Walters mixed with the throng, waiting his turn to take his tickets. Presently he began to feel nervous; the confined position he was in in the crowd seemed to irritate him; he felt a sensation of overpowering restraint which he could not resist or escape from. As he slowly advanced near the paying-place the feeling increased, and he pressed forward so roughly as to inconvenience the persons around him. "I say, mate," said a man

before him, good-humouredly, "you need not be in such a hurry, the ship won't sail without you. They expect you on board."

Although this was said simply as a piece of what is technically called chaff, without point or meaning, it told with terrific effect on the murderer. He imagined his movements and motives were known, and that he was watched. Desperate when excited, he was when without excitement as arrant a coward as ever lived. He would have staggered, and perhaps sunk, had not the dense crowd upheld him and carried him with it towards the paying-place. When he had arrived at the money-taker's box he had to be twice asked to what place he was going before he could collect himself to give an answer.

When he had obtained his tickets he left the office and proceeded into the open air, and Jessie, after a moment's delay, followed him. He hurriedly slipped a ticket into her hand, and told her to go back again and choose a carriage in which there was plenty of room, and to keep a place beside her for him. He would, he said, follow her at a distance, and mark into which carriage she entered. She followed his advice, and chose a convenient compartment, and a minute before the train started her lover entered it and placed himself beside her.

No conversation or sign of recognition took place between them till the train was some forty or fifty miles from London, when Walters, as it stopped at a station, got out and beckoned, after he had looked carefully around him, to Jessie to follow. She obeyed him, and

he then spoke to her affectionately, at any rate cajolingly. He entered another carriage with her, mixing with a number of countrymen that entered it. One of them, after a short time, began talking to Walters about America, saying he had been advised to emigrate there, as wages were good, and asking what sort of a place it was. Walters shortly replied that he knew nothing about it, and changed the conversation ; but the remark, made purely at hazard, frightened him, and it was some time before he recovered his composure.

When the train had arrived at Liverpool, before even seeking a lodging, Walters, who had been there before, walked with Jessie to the quays, and commenced reading the posting-bills of vessels to New York. At last he found one which was to leave on the morrow. The placard of course spoke in the highest manner of the accommodation, &c., on board, and concluded by stating that the steerage passage-money was only seven pounds for each adult. Walters and Jessie, immediately they had mastered the address of the agents, proceeded to the office, and paid for two berths. Notice was given that they must be on board the steam tenders the next afternoon at two at the latest, and they then left the place to make what purchases they should require for the voyage. That ended, they sought out an obscure lodging-house for the night, and the next day, without further inconvenience than the alarm every trifling circumstance that appeared to bear in the most remote manner on the murder gave Walters, they embarked on board the ship and set sail for America.

CHAPTER XX.

THEODORE WALTERS AT FAULT.



E must now return to the murder of Mr. Mostyn, and the manner of its discovery. The day after it took place the house remained closed. This, however, excited no surprise, as none of the neighbours were aware of Mr. Mostyn's return, and though they had, it would have caused no astonishment, as he was not acquainted with any of them, and none were interested in him. The day afterwards some surprise was manifested by some of the other servant girls in the street, who were on speaking terms with Jessie, at not seeing her doing the door-steps in the morning, nor standing at the door in the evening, especially as her master was away. None surmised that she might have shut up the house and left it for a day or two on a visit of her own, Jessie's well-known habits preventing a supposition of the kind. The third day came, and the house still remaining closed, Jessie's friends became anxious about her, and each in her turn mentioned her anxiety to the policeman on the beat. He took but little notice of their communication, considering it to be simply one of those many excuses which maids-of-all-work employ to break ground with an attractive member of

the force. However, X 97 kept his eye on the house each time he passed it, and from the dead silence which appeared to hang over it, he at last began to imagine it was not simply an excuse on the part of his fair informants to enter into conversation. When he was relieved he called the attention of the policeman who succeeded him on duty to the subject, and also reported it to the sergeant when he arrived at the station-house. When he gave his report, the policeman who had witnessed the dismissal of Jessie two nights before, immediately reminded the sergeant that the master of the house had returned. On inquiry the sergeant found that no signs of the house being inhabited were observed the day before, and he immediately sent one of the reserve to knock at the door and inquire if all were right. The man did so, and returned with the information that although he had knocked as loudly as he could several times, he could not succeed in making any one hear him. The sergeant then informed his inspector of the above facts, who put another policeman on duty to watch the house during the night, resolving the next morning to take more energetic steps to discover the reason of the house being apparently shut up.

When the policeman returned the next morning to the station, he reported that no one had appeared at the house, nor had any one called at it. The inspector now proceeded with a locksmith and a reserve to the house, and examined carefully the front exterior without coming to any conclusion. He then applied for permission at one of the side houses to go to the rear of their premises

and scale the wall which separated the garden. Permission was readily given, but the house was found to be as fast closed at the back as at the front. The locksmith attempted to open the door, but without success: it was bolted on the inside, and he could not touch the bolts. They again went to the front, and the locksmith tried with a skeleton key to open the street door. This time he succeeded without difficulty, and the whole party entered the house, closing the street door after them. They first entered the parlour and opened the shutter. There was nothing to excite particular attention till they came upon a man's hat on the floor. On examining it they found some marks on it resembling dried blood, but in small quantity; and on looking carefully at the dark carpet on the parlour floor they could easily distinguish the footsteps of a man apparently stained in blood. The inspector gave the hat into the care of the policeman, and then proceeded to enter the kitchen. Nothing here was seen worthy of notice, and they proceeded upstairs. When they had arrived at the landing the footprints were still plainer than below. They pushed open the door of the bedroom, and notwithstanding the dim light occasioned by the curtains being drawn, enough was apparent to show that a terrible murder had been committed. The body of the old man could be seen, but it was so covered with blood as to leave the features scarcely distinguishable. As the policeman advanced to open the curtains the floor was crisp with dried blood. When the window-curtains were drawn back they examined the dead body more carefully, but the blood had

so coagulated and dried upon it that it was impossible to remove it without water. The inspector then resolved on allowing the body to remain in the position in which it was till a surgeon had seen it, and the locksmith was despatched for the district police surgeon, but with special directions not to allow the news of the murder to escape for the present.

While the locksmith was absent the inspector and policeman went on with their search. They found the crowbar and the canvas bag, both stained with blood. They found the plate-chest open, and some silver remaining in it, of which they took a list. They then examined the other side of the room. Here a very different spectacle presented itself. All was in order. They examined the escritoire; it apparently had not been touched. Not a drop of blood was on the carpet on this side of the chamber, its thick texture having absorbed it nearer the body; there it appeared to have saturated it.

The inspector and policeman then examined the other rooms, but little beyond the tumbled state of the bed-clothes in Jessie's room, on which Walters had sat before perpetrating the murder, and the intact state of the servant's box, claimed their notice. The locksmith now returned with the district surgeon. The latter, after noting the position of the corpse, sent into the next house for a jug of hot water. With it he carefully washed the blood from the face of the dead man, which occupied him a considerable time, so firmly had it coagulated upon it. He then carefully examined the wounds, and

afterwards pronounced his opinion that the skull of the dead man had first been fractured by a heavy blow, and that the throat had afterwards been cut by a blunt knife, or some instrument of the kind. The body was then carefully placed on the bed preparatory to a coroner's inquest, and the house was left in charge of the policeman who had accompanied the inspector.

Notice of the murder was immediately sent to the head office in Scotland Yard, and a coroner's inquest was called. The body was identified by Mr. Mostyn's heir-at-law, and the proceedings commenced. Nothing more was brought forward than is at present in the possession of the reader. Many inquiries were made about the girl Jessie, who had been so abruptly dismissed, but of course no information concerning her could be given. The coroner expressed his opinion that it was essential the girl should be produced, for although not wishing to say one word to her prejudice, it frequently occurred that robbers were admitted into private houses by means of first obtaining the affections of the servants; in the present instance, however, it appeared somewhat unlikely, as it seemed the girl had been dismissed the house early in the evening. The coroner then adjourned the inquest for some days to allow the police time to make further inquiries.

Slowly, very slowly, was light cast on the affair. A reward of one hundred pounds was first offered for the murderers, which was afterwards increased to two hundred. Still no clue to the discovery of the deed could be obtained, although several minor circumstances were

brought to light which might afterwards be used in clearing up the affair. In the first place the cabman who had brought Mr. Mostyn from the railway-station was discovered. He stated that when they arrived at the house the door was opened by a man, who ran rapidly away. He had not time to take much notice of him, as he only caught a glimpse of his back as he was running down the street; but he seemed to be young. Of Jessie they could hear nothing beyond her having that evening drawn all her money from the savings bank. The police inquired minutely into her manners and pursuits in the neighbourhood, but could hear of nothing which did not tend to her credit. From the few female familiars she had, they learned that she stated she had a young man, but as none of them had ever seen him they thought she was only "bragging." Beyond that, they all considered her as a very respectable young woman. Later the inspector heard of a policeman who had seen a cab-driver without a hat near Brick Lane, Spitalfields. His attention had been attracted by the man having left his horse, which had walked off by itself. When he had asked the cabman what he had done with his hat, he replied that it was blown off his head into the river when crossing London Bridge. Thinking this had altogether a strange appearance, he had written in his note-book the number of the cab, 1702. The police then sought out the driver of the cab of that number, but the man proved so clearly that he had not been on the stand that night, that it was plain the number on the cab which the policeman had seen was a fictitious one. One step, however,

was gained—the policeman stated that he had no doubt he could swear positively to the driver if he saw him again. Jessie's box was examined, but nothing in it was found that could form any clue by which the perpetrators of the murder could be discovered.

We must now return to the elder Walters. He carefully kept away both from the vicinity of Mr. Mostyn's house and that of the lodging he had taken in Brick Lane. He contrived to keep himself acquainted with the principal facts which had transpired relative to the discovery of the murder, and the difficulty the police had in obtaining information on the subject. This at first was to him simply a matter of congratulation, as showing that suspicion was not leaning towards his son. For his own part he appeared to consider that great as his own crime really was, it sank into comparative insignificance beside his son's, and he seemed to think but lightly of any danger that might befall him personally. Presently he read the reward offered of one hundred pounds for the detection of the malefactors. This annoyed him greatly, far less at the prospect of danger arising to his son from it, as he now imagined him to be perfectly secure in some distant place, than because he himself had no opportunity of profiting in a pecuniary manner by it. Presently the reward was increased to two hundred pounds. The temptation was now so great for him to interfere that he could resist it no longer, and he determined, if possible, to assist in the discovery, thinking he could not only probably obtain part of the prize-money, but also succeed in warding off the danger more

successfully from his son and himself. But upon whom should he throw the blame? Not upon Meffy, he was by far too dangerous a person to offend; and, to do Walters justice, villain as he was, he abstained from seeking to throw it upon Jessie. While deliberating in his mind what step he should take, he accidentally heard that a large sum of money had been found in Mrs. Duke's house, and he resolved to throw the blame on her husband. True he was now in prison, but he had been at large at the time of the murder. He then set his brain to work to connect the poor little man with it in the most plausible manner possible. He first invented a conversation which he said had taken place between himself and Duke the evening of the murder, all of which, it is needless to say, was false. When he had thoroughly connected his story, he walked to the Scotland Yard station, and asked, if he should throw any light which would lead to anything important, whether he should be allowed to share in the reward. He was told he certainly would, and he then said he believed a man of the name of Duke, residing in Smith's Rents, had been a party concerned in it; and that, from information he had received, Duke had a large portion of the money in his possession at that moment. After several questions had been put to him, he was greatly surprised to hear that the money was already in the hands of the police; but the inspector asked him how he knew that the money was a portion of the proceeds of the robbery committed at Mr. Mostyn's? He was now obliged to invent a further lie about his meeting Duke on Westminster Bridge, about

ten o'clock on the night of the murder, going in the direction of Lambeth ; that he spoke to him, and accidentally touching the pockets of the smock-frock Duke wore, something rattled like two pieces of iron together, at which Duke appeared particularly annoyed. Little more conversation passed between the inspector and Walters that day, and the latter left the station, promising to call on the morrow if he should be able to obtain any further information.

The next day Walters again called in Scotland Yard, and brought forward one or two statements of but little importance, and when he had concluded a voice behind him said, "But, Walters, did you not know something yourself of the old gentleman?" Walters suddenly turned pale, for he recognised in the voice of the speaker the policeman who had known him in Dublin, and who had met him the night he had taken the silver sugar-basin from Mr. Mostyn's. It was some time before Walters recovered himself, and then he stated he did not know him. The policeman brought forward the conversation which had taken place between them, which Walters denied. Although the inspector present fully appreciated Walters's agitation, he made at the moment no remark, and Walters shortly afterwards left the place.

Walters was exceedingly annoyed at the man's recognising him, and more than once he cursed his own folly for interfering in the matter. He moreover felt that singular oppression fall on his spirits which frequently appears to precede coming misfortune. He wandered restlessly about the park for more than an hour, unable

to trace out any definite path to follow, yet feeling the necessity, now he had proceeded so far, of not remaining idle. Tired and low-spirited, he sought his home, and as soon as he had entered it two policemen made their appearance.

"I was just wanting you, Walters," one said; "I have a search-warrant for your house; will you come with me? I have no doubt it will all end in nothing."

Walters said gloomily, "You can search where you please; I have nothing to conceal."

The policemen went on with their search without meeting with anything suspicious. "There don't appear anything here," said one; "I do not know why they made us trouble you."

"Who has given any information against me?" said Walters. "I don't think there's a more unlikely fellow than myself to take part in anything of the kind."

"I don't know who it was, I am sure. At any rate, he seems to have made a fool of himself. What place is this?" he said, pointing to a low cupboard under the stairs.

"Oh! only a sort of hole into which we fling old things, till we send them away or do something with them."

"Is it open?"

"Yes, it is; do you want to see into it?"

"Well, we may as well."

Walters opened the door readily enough, and waited a little, but suddenly he turned pale and said angrily, "There now, haven't you examined that long enough?"

The policeman withdrew his head and part of his body from the cupboard, holding in his hand a plate of metal, which he cleared of the dust, and then read "1702." "This is a cab number, Walters, and I must arrest you."

Walters attempted to bully and then to ridicule the whole affair.

"Why, what can you want," he said, "with that stupid cab-plate, so beastly dirty as it is? Why, it has been here ever since I have been in the house. It belonged to the tenant before me, who was a cab-driver."

"Can't help that," said the policeman; "you must come with us, and consider yourself under arrest."

Walters in a moment saw it would be useless to attempt any opposition, so he put on his hat and accompanied the policemen to the station. When the charge was entered in the police-book, he made no remark, being perfectly aware, as an old policeman, that it would be useless; but he showed in the expression of his countenance great anger. He afterwards requested no one would tell his wife of his arrest, as it might frighten her, and the magistrate the next day would be sure to release him. The gaoler made no remark, but quietly turned the key on him in his cell.

It was too late that day for the case to be heard, but it was brought before the police magistrate the next day, after the night charges had been disposed of. In some unaccountable manner the affair had got wind, and the court was crowded. The examination, though purely a preliminary one, told terribly against Walters, and before it was half over all his self-possession had left him: He

was charged with the murder and robbery of Mr. Charles Mostyn. Not much evidence was brought against him, but that was of the most conclusive description. The policeman who had stopped the cab-horse in Brick Lane was first called. He swore to the fact that he found the horse wandering without any one with it, and he was on the point of taking it to the green-yard when the prisoner stood forward and claimed it. He noticed that the prisoner was without his hat and appeared greatly agitated. He asked him what he had done with his hat, and received for reply that as he (the prisoner) was coming over London Bridge, a sudden gust of wind had caught it and blown it into the river. Thinking the whole affair seemed mysterious, he entered the number of the cab, 1702, in his memorandum book. On being asked by the magistrate at what house the cab had been stopping, the policeman replied that he had had no opportunity of remarking, as he had met the horse coming towards him, and from the distance the prisoner had run to overtake it, it must have been some distance off. On being asked whether he had any doubt as to the identity of the prisoner, he said none whatever; he had seen him under a gas-lamp, and he was positive he was not mistaken. Walters was asked whether he wished to ask the policeman any question, but he replied that he did not. The owner of the cab 1702 was next called, but he simply deposed that the cab licensed for that number had not left the yard that night, and on being shown the plate which had been found at Walters's, bearing the number on it, he not only said it did not belong

to him, but even pointed out some difference between the form of the figures and those generally used in metropolitan hackney carriages. Walters having no question to ask this witness, the police inspector said he had no further evidence to offer that day, but would request his worship to remand the prisoner for a week, after he had tried on him a hat which had been found at Mr. Mostyn's. He produced the hat, and immediately Walters saw it he turned ghastly pale, and appeared on the point of fainting. After he had recovered himself, the hat was placed on him and fitted him perfectly. The magistrate now asked Walters if he wished to say anything, reminding him that possibly it would be better to wait till he had a professional person to defend him, as anything which he might now say would hardly alter his determination to remand the case, without accepting bail, for one week. Walters simply said that he had no remark at that moment to make, but should reserve his defence, and he was then removed from the dock.

Walters was that day taken to the Tothill Fields prison, and confined in one of the cells, near a gas-lamp burning in the passage, and which threw its light into the cell through the hole made for ventilation over the door. He knew perfectly well for what reason he was placed in it, namely, that he might be watched from time to time in the night without the warder on duty being seen, so that he could not attempt suicide without its being prevented. There was no necessity for a precaution of the kind, for Walters was by far too great a coward to attempt to evade his fate by anticipating it for an hour. He felt

annoyed at it, however, as it disturbed his train of thought, and obliged him to wear upon his face an expression of innocence he did not feel. He slept but little that night, his mind was too disturbed; however, in the course of the next day he contrived to regain something of his self-possession. A curious psychological phenomenon now began to develop itself in him. Instead of occupying himself with his own danger, he became extremely anxious about his son's. He feared he also might be apprehended, and if so he would certainly be hung. Now he was unable to help him, either by advice or in any other manner. True, Edward was cunning enough, perhaps naturally more so than his father, still he had not so considerable an amount of experience. The only way of averting the danger from Edward was to force the suspicion on somebody else, and he now more resolutely than ever resolved to press it on Duke. But in what way was he to accomplish it? and when should he begin? He at last resolved to take no steps in the matter till after the next examination; in the meantime he sent for his wife to concert with her what steps should be taken for his defence.

Mrs. Walters obeyed the message her husband had sent, and called the same day at the prison. When she saw her husband she burst into tears, but found no words to console him. He allowed her some time to collect herself and then spoke kindly to her. He inquired if any one had called at the house since the previous day, and she told him no one. "No one whatever?" he inquired. "Nobody," was the answer. This took a cer-

tain amount of anxiety off Walters's mind. He knew perfectly well the house was watched by the police, and he feared Edward might have called.

"By-the-by, dear," Mrs. Walters inquired, "where is Edward? he has not been near me."

"I do not know," said Walters; "he is away in the country, I believe, on some job." Then trying to stop the conversation on that subject he said, "I wish you would call on Mr. Braham, the solicitor, in Bedford Place, as you go home, and ask him to come here to-morrow, and also bring me all the money you can collect together as soon as possible, for I shall need it all, I can easily foresee." Walters then, fearing his wife might again speak of their son in the presence of the warder who was in attendance, advised her to go at once, as he was afraid Mr. Braham might otherwise be from home. Mrs. Walters, half broken-hearted, followed his advice, and left him.

The day fixed for the next examination arrived, and Walters, attended by Mr. Braham, was placed in the dock. The amount of circumstantial evidence that was that day brought forward was so conclusive, that even the experienced legal practitioner whom Walters had employed to defend him was overwhelmed by it. He saw at a glance how hopeless was the case he had to manage, and although resolved to go through with it, he felt there was no chance of his client's escaping.

The first witness examined was the owner of the cab which Walters had driven the night of the murder. He deposed to Walters, who was known to him as occasion-

ally driving a cab, calling on him the afternoon of the murder for a night cab. He let him have 10,074. Walters returned about ten o'clock the next morning. The horse was fearfully tired and exhausted, and could hardly put one foot before the other. One of his men had called his attention to the interior of the cab, there being evident marks of blood upon the seat. He was very angry when he heard of it, and resolved never to allow Walters to have a cab again from his yard. When asked why, when he found there were marks of blood on the seat of the cab, he had not called the attention of the police to the fact, he replied that he thought it probable it might have been hired by some butcher at one of the markets to take home a quantity of meat, a thing that frequently occurred, although cab-masters, as a rule, set their faces against the practice. The number-plate found in Walters's lodgings he knew nothing about. He had not particularly noticed how Walters was dressed; he remembered he wore a hat when he hired the cab, and a cap when he brought it back. Mr. Braham, on the part of Walters, having no question to ask the witness, he left the box.

The next witness was a sergeant of the detective police. He stated that from information he had received he had visited the house of an old woman in Anchor Court, Brick Lane. Noticing a quantity of soot on the floor of a room on the first story, he examined the chimney, and in it he found a quantity of silver plate, lodged on a board which had evidently been hastily and roughly placed across the chimney. He now produced

the different articles, and called the attention of his worship to several of them being marked with blood, evidently from their having been handled with blood-stained hands. He spoke to the woman of the house on the subject, and she informed him that a middle-aged man, in description strongly resembling the prisoner, had taken the room of her.

Here Mr. Braham interfered, and asked if the sergeant were in order. The inspector answered that there need be no difficulty on the subject, as the old woman who rented the house was now in court, and was ready with her evidence.

The detective left the box, and a diminutive, cunning-looking, ragged old woman entered it. She deposed that she kept a lodging-house in Anchor Court, and that about three weeks since the prisoner called on her and hired a room by the week, and he paid her a fortnight's rent, six shillings, in advance. He then went away, but one morning, about a fortnight since—she could not rightly remember the day—the prisoner called in the morning, and said he should come in that night, he could not tell exactly the time, but as it would be late she had better let him have the key of the street-door. This she refused, and told him her bed was in the front room near the door, and as she slept very lightly she should hear him when he knocked. He then went away, and she thought it must have been about one o'clock in the morning before he returned. She opened the door for him, and noticed that he had no hat on. He had in his hand a bag, which appeared heavy. As

soon as she had let him in, she shut her room door, and she heard him go up-stairs. After that, as she was tired, she fell asleep, but woke early and went out, as she wanted to see some friends who were going to sea, and she did not return till late at night. From that day till the present she had not seen the prisoner.

This witness was cross-examined by Mr. Braham. On the night mentioned, after she was certain that the prisoner was her tenant, she closed her bedroom door directly, as she did not like being seen in her night-dress (a laugh). She was very particular. When she went out in the morning it was to see some friends who were going on a sea voyage. No, they were not gentlemen, as they had not behaved like gentlemen to her. They had not paid her the money they owed her, but they made it all right before they went. She did not return till late at night ; she had been engaged in business all day. She could not remember what business, but she was sure it was business. Her memory at times was very bad, and she could not remember what day it was. Why did he (the solicitor) want to know ? she could not tell him, at any rate. If he was very particular about it, he had better call at the Tower Hill station and find out, as she had been struck with a dizziness in the head on account of the sun, and a policeman had taken her there that she might not be made the victim of bad characters.

This was something more than Mr. Braham had bargained for, and he asked her no more questions.

The next witness was the policeman who had met

Walters the night he had committed the robbery of the sugar-basin and milk-jug. He had hardly commenced when Mr. Braham objected to his deposition, as not bearing on the case, but the inspector pressed it, assuring the magistrate, on the contrary, that it was most necessary, as forming a connecting link in the chain of evidence. The policeman then went on, and related how he had noticed something under Walters's arm, which gave a metallic sound when he touched it. He knew Walters of old, and he followed him for a time at a long distance, when he met a policeman of his division in plain clothes, and he requested him to follow Walters, which he did.

The next who was examined was the policeman mentioned by the last witness. He merely stated that he had tracked Walters to a silversmith's shop near Westminster Bridge. When he came out he spoke to him on some excuse for the purpose of recognising his features, and that he afterwards went into the silversmith's, and asked him to put by the articles for a few days, which he readily agreed to.

The next witness was the silversmith. He deposed to purchasing of Walters, at their full value, the sugar-basin and jug, and that at the request of the policeman he had kept them by him.

The articles were produced, and compared with the coffee and tea-pot. They were of precisely the same pattern, and evidently of the same set. The inspector said that at present he had no further evidence to offer, and submitted that there was already sufficient to send

the prisoner for trial. Mr. Braham said that on the part of his client he should reserve his defence, and Walters was fully committed for trial for the murder of Mr. Mostyn. The magistrate refused Mr. Braham's application to take bail, which, knowing there was not the slightest probability of his worship's accepting it, Mr. Braham stated to be of the most respectable and responsible description.

Walters slept not for an instant that night. He saw the net by which he was encircled drawing closer and closer, and now, in spite of all the ingenuity he was master of, improved by experience, not a chance seemed left for him. He recapitulated over and over again in his mind the evidence brought forward at the two examinations, but, singular to state, the evidence of the cabman who had brought Mr. Mostyn from the railway station, and who had deposed to the door being opened by a young man, who had run swiftly away after Mr. Mostyn had spoken to him, caused him, if not more anxiety, certainly a prior anxiety to any other. To what would it lead? To the certainty there was another and a younger man engaged in the murder, and that again was strengthened by the idea that if he (Walters) had driven the cab, some one else must have assisted in the crime, as it would have been impossible for him to perpetrate it single-handed. There appeared, then, almost a certainty that suspicion would fall upon his son, and what could he do to avert it? He felt terribly his own position, but he felt equally the danger of his son, although perhaps he was even unaware that he had in

him such a beautiful feeling as parental love. Often as he turned his mind to his own danger, so often did it return to his son's. Agitated and disturbed, he lay motionless on his narrow bed, not daring to move, knowing he was watched, and fearing that restlessness might be taken as a proof against him.

Dawn broke, and anxious and confused as his brain had been the whole night, it became clearer as daylight advanced. He now began to concentrate his thoughts, and contrive a definite course of action. After he had breakfasted, he requested the prison warder to bring him one of the bills offering a reward for the apprehension of the murderers, and promising a pardon to any accomplice who would turn Queen's evidence, provided he was not actually engaged in the murder. The warder brought him the placard, and after he had read it he pointed to the clause offering the pardon, and asked whether it might be relied on. The warder replied that he could give no opinion, but that he would mention it to the governor. In a few minutes the governor of the prison entered the cell, and Walters again asked the question. He received for reply that he could give no definite answer, and that Walters, after reading the placard, must act on his own responsibility. All he could state was that the notice the prisoner held in his hand was an official one.

Walters reflected for a few moments, and then said he wished to make a declaration, which was to the following effect:—That he had hired the cab as stated, and changed the number-plate, and that he had been im-

plicated in the robbery, but the murder had been perpetrated by his accomplice, a man of the name of Duke, residing in Smith's Rents. In answer to questions put to him, he stated that it was Duke who had been in the house when Mr. Mostyn arrived, and who had quitted it, but he had contrived to take with him the street-door key. That he (Walters) had remained with the cab at the corner of the next street, and that about midnight Duke returned to him and said he was going to try if the door could be opened. Walters told him it would be useless trying, as no doubt the bolts would be shut. Duke, however, went to the house, and in a few moments returned, saying that he had opened the door, and telling Walters to drive round quietly to the house in about a quarter of an hour, to take the swag. That Duke had at last opened the door, and asked Walters to come in and help him, and told him that he had done the job. Walters then went into the house and placed his hat on a chair, and took out to the cab one canvas bag filled with plate ; when he returned for the other, he noticed that Duke's hands were covered with blood, and on asking him the reason, he said he had done for the old fellow, and that he (Walters) thereupon refused to have anything more to do with the affair, and left the house. Duke followed him, and got into the cab, and not wishing to have any altercation with him, he drove him to Brick Lane, and that there Duke persuaded him to accept the plate and he would keep the money, and to this arrangement he (Walters) foolishly consented.

The governor hardly knew how to act on the occasion.

He, however, had the deposition written out and forwarded to the solicitors engaged for the prosecution, for Mr. Mostyn's heir-at-law had now taken up the matter. In the afternoon Mr. Braham called at the prison, and informed Walters that a two hundred pound note (part of the moneys found in Mrs. Duke's house) had been traced, and that it had been a portion of some money lent by Mr. Mostyn some time since on a bill of exchange, and which had been paid. Walters told Mr. Braham he was delighted to hear it, as it assisted in bringing out the truth of the statement he had that day made that Duke was his accomplice, and had committed the murder. Mr. Braham was thunderstruck, not at the complicity of his client, for from the first he had fully held him to be guilty, but at his audacity at taking any steps without his advice. As soon as he had a little recovered himself, he told Walters that he should throw up the case, such a method of proceeding being utterly at variance with respectable criminal practice—a conclusion he was helped to considerably from having found out that morning that his client was very poor, and that there was little or nothing to be got out of the affair. He then, with much virtuous indignation on his countenance, left Walters to carry on his own case as he best might.

CHAPTER XXI.

MRS. DUKE SEARCHES FOR EXCULPATORY EVIDENCE FOR HER HUSBAND.



TO continue at any length the legal proceedings preparatory to the trial would be to give our narrative too much the appearance of a police report ; we shall therefore be as brief as possible. The Crown, in consequence of the many discrepancies in Walters's deposition, refused to accept him as a witness against Duke ; in fact, nothing but that feeling which prompts a drowning man to snatch at a straw could ever have induced Walters to invent the tale he did. Unfortunately, the *primâ facie* evidence seemed strong against Duke. The finding of the money itself was considered a proof to a certain extent, as Mrs. Duke had admitted that the act of bringing it to the police-station was not done by the advice of her husband, he not even being aware of the circumstance, imprisoned as he was at the time. His innocence, though to her certain, was by no means so to the police, who rather seemed to think he had secreted the money in the spot in which it was found to make use of it later. Added to this, from the inquiries they had made, slight enough it is true, they could not very

well make out how he had employed his time on that particular evening, and his wife, hearing that a suspicion of murder and robbery was afloat respecting her husband, declined to answer or evaded every question put to her. Her treatment of the police when they made inquiries of her on the subject by no means raised a favourable impression. Indignant at the suspicion cast upon her husband so unjustly, she received the inquiries in anything but a courteous manner, patience under insult being scarcely her principal characteristic.

But poor Mrs. Duke's troubles were soon increased by the certain knowledge that her husband was not only suspected, but positively accused, of the crimes of murder and robbery. At the expiration of his sentence for the illegal possession of the poultry, a policeman arrested him on the new charges, and again conveyed him to the police-station. His wife there met him, and sad indeed was the meeting. The gigantic woman wept like a child, and the little man, though miserably down-hearted himself, used all the logic and argument in his power to cheer and console his better half. The examination before the police magistrate took place the next day, but none of the depositions or statements made by Walters were allowed to be mixed up with it. The money being found in Duke's house, part of the amount certainly having been Mr. Mostyn's, bore heavily against him. Again, it was sworn to by a policeman that he had seen Duke one day in the passage of Mr. Mostyn's house, conversing with that gentleman, while offering some fowls for sale. He remembered the circumstance per-

fectly well, as Duke had asked him to keep an eye on his basket while he ran to get change for a sovereign with which Mr. Mostyn had paid him for a fowl he had purchased. Duke had on at the time a smock frock similar to the one he now wore. Another policeman swore to the fact that he had noticed Duke at Mr. Mostyn's, and that he had seen a person very near Mr. Mostyn's house the night of the murder who closely resembled Duke, but he could not swear to him positively. This and other slight circumstantial evidence tending to connect Duke (who was undefended) with the murder was brought forward, and the hearing concluded by Duke's being fully committed for trial on the charge of murder.

For the rest of the day poor Mrs. Duke remained almost broken-hearted. Her circle of acquaintance was very restricted, as she considered herself somewhat select, and in return was looked upon by the majority of the inhabitants of the "Rents" as proud. But still she had some friends; yet whom to apply to in the present emergency she knew not. The first person who came to her aid was the sickly young thief who has been already casually mentioned in a former chapter. Mrs. Duke, though utterly reprobating his course of life, had been very kind to him in his illness, frequently giving him food, and mending his things for him, improving the occasion at the same time by giving him good advice, all of which he readily promised to follow, and it is needless to say he as easily forgot. This lad, who was perfectly acquainted with the routine of the police-court,

called upon Mrs. Duke in the evening, and asked her if he could be of any service to her, as he would willingly assist her if he could.

Mrs. Duke really felt grateful to the lad for his offer. In the abundance of her sorrow his visit brought consolation with it, although she did not very clearly see in what he could aid her. She was, however, mistaken, for after asking her how things stood, he inquired what solicitor she had engaged.

"I do not know one," said Mrs. Duke, "and I did not know it was necessary."

The young thief looked at her with an expression of sorrow and reproof on his countenance as he perceived the sad results of her restricted education.

"You must hire a lawyer," he said; "you can do nothing without one. If you don't know one, I do, and a precious sharp fellow he is. He got Limping Davey off when he was actually caught blowing his nose with the handkercher he had prigged, and a dozen other fellows I know. You'd better let me fetch him to-morrow. He'll do your job for you, if anybody can."

"I wish you would," said Mrs. Duke; "I shall then have a weight off my mind."

The young gentleman promised to bring his professional adviser early the next morning, and, after spending an hour with Mrs. Duke, and taking a cup of tea with her, consoling her the while with anecdotes tending to prove how contemptible was the power of the law in the hands of a clever solicitor, he bade her

good night, and Jemima sought her solitary couch, but neither to sleep nor rest.

The next morning Master Perkins, the young thief, called with his professional friend, Mr. Merridew, a shrewd, slim, delicate, shabby-looking young man, about twenty-five years of age. He candidly told Mrs. Duke he did not exactly practise on his own account, and yet he did, and he asked if she understood him. Mrs. Duke replied that she did, but she evidently did not. He then drew from his pocket and showed her the headings of several lengthy "police reports," stating that the prisoner was defended by Mr. Merridew, from the office of Messrs. Jones & Black, and he also pointed to the conclusion of them, in which the magistrate generally said he did not think there was sufficient evidence before him to send the prisoner to trial. He had quitted his late firm, and was on the point of engaging himself with another, but in the meantime he should be happy to conduct her affair. He should want some money from her, as there were considerable expenses attending the defence of a prisoner on so heavy a charge, and he wished to know what she could afford to expend on her husband's behalf.

Poor Mrs. Duke replied that she had not more than a sovereign in the house, and a few pounds in the savings bank. Mr. Merridew shook his head, and said he was afraid it would not go far in a case of the kind, but that he would certainly make it go as far as it could. Before commencing operations he asked to see the savings bank book, which Mrs. Duke produced and placed

in Mr. Merridew's hands, who, after convincing himself that there was fully seven pounds still remaining to her credit, began business.

Mr. Merridew when he came was fully possessed with the idea of the extreme probability of Duke's guilt, and he opened his plan of proceeding with that view so evidently before him that even Mrs. Duke could not help perceiving it, and she warmly repelled the idea of the possibility of anything of the kind. Mr. Merridew, perfectly accustomed to such denials, listened patiently to her statements, and then reminded her of the difficult task he should have in working up against the evidence of the day before, and he also mentioned to her that he had heard, on excellent authority, that Walters had offered to turn Queen's evidence, and stated that he could easily prove the murder was perpetrated by Duke. Mrs. Duke rebutted this statement with so much genuine warmth, and declared so determinedly that she could prove her husband had not left the house for one hour on the night of the murder, that Mr. Merridew, unaccustomed as he was to believe in protestations of innocence, began to be staggered. He told her if all she stated was really the case and she could prove it, there was no doubt her husband would be acquitted; but it unfortunately happened that when really honest men were accused of acts of dishonesty, it was very difficult to prove their innocence. He, in his experience, had frequently met with cases of the kind. However, if she could obtain credible witnesses to the fact that her husband was at home that night, there was not a doubt

ne would be acquitted of the murder at any rate. He then left her, promising to call the next day, or the day afterwards at the latest; in the meantime she had better give notice as soon as she could at the savings bank office that she intended to withdraw her account.

Mrs. Duke now began to consider what would be the best means of proving that her husband had been at home that night. She remembered that, after the death of the soldier's wife and child, Duke had informed her that the blind basketmaker on the second floor had come into his room while he, Duke, was in bed, and had conversed with him upon different matters for some time. Although Duke by no means complained to his wife of the blind man's visit, still she remembered that he had said he had been prevented by it from sleeping. Now if Trivet, the blind basketmaker, had not forgotten the circumstance, he would be able greatly to assist her. She determined to appeal to him immediately on the subject, and for that purpose she went up-stairs to the second floor and tapped at the door. She was requested to come in, and when she entered the room she found Mrs. Trivet sitting up in bed making soldiers' shirts, and the younger children playing about the room. The father and the three elder children were all absent.

"This is very kind of you to come and see me," said the sick woman. "You cannot think how dull I feel."

"I did not know you were ill," said Mrs. Duke, "or I should have come before. How long have you been poorly?"

"About a week ; but I have to thank my own imprudence for it."

"How is that?"

"Well, Mrs. Jackson one afternoon comes to me and says, 'Mrs. Trivet,' says she, 'I don't know what to do, I have not a single farthing left, and the children are as hungry as they can be. I have been obliged, worse luck, to pawn my shoes, and now Mrs. Wilson has lent me a couple of score of red herrings, and if I had got my shoes at home I could have gone into the Broadway and sold them.' Well, my boots were at home, and I did not think I should want to use them that night, so I told her she could take them if she liked, as I thought they would fit her, but she must let me have them again that evening, and she said she would, and she kept her word, I will say that. Well, she was very thankful for my offer, and tried the boots on, and they fitted her as if they had been made for her. She had not been gone half an hour before our little Johnny was seized with the spasms, so I thought I'd run to the doctor's shop for a pennyworth of Daffy's Elixir, when all of a sudden I remembered I had not got my boots. What to do I did not know. The night was damp and cold, and I did not want to go out, but there was Johnny crying, and at last I thought as it was dark nobody would see me, so I ran out ; but I soon found the cold strike to me, and when I came back my face and hands were quite blue. Then I began spitting blood again the next day, and my cough, which had been so much better, returned, and here I am. But now how are you?"

"Almost broken-hearted," said Mrs. Duke, beginning to cry; "I suppose you have heard they've accused poor Duke of murder?"

"No, I never heard it; but then I've been in bed, you know. Who accuses him?"

"That villain Walters, I understand, while I am sure Duke never spoke a dozen times to him in his life."

"That man is a villain, and I always said so," remarked Mrs. Trivet. "But what are you going to do?"

"I've hired a lawyer, and he says I must get as many people as I can to show that Duke was at home the night the murder was committed. Now, my dear, I want you to help me."

"I will if I can, you may be sure; but how can I do it?"

"I want your husband to prove that the night I made the chicken broth for the poor woman over the way, he went down to Duke when he was in bed and sat talking with him for some time."

"That he did, sure enough, and very angry I was with him for it, for I was tired and wanted to go to sleep; and he did not come up till nigh two o'clock in the morning. But what has that got to do with it?"

"Why, that was the night of the murder."

"Well, that seems clear enough, if you are sure that was the night. My husband, you may depend on it, will do all he can for you as soon as he comes back, for you are a great favourite of his."

"Oh, I am in no hurry; to-morrow will do."

"I mean as soon as he comes back from the country."

"From the country?" inquired Mrs. Duke, aghast.

"Yes, he had been ailing for some time past, and I thought that the air of the country would do him good, but we did not know how to manage it, for things don't go particularly well with us; when one day Mr. Sweets, the lame man that plays the flute about the streets, and lives at No. 7, came in to say good-bye, as he was going round the country for a change, as the police began to annoy him in London. We asked him what part he was going to, and he said he should try Kent this time. Well, my husband remembered that the brewer's wife who lived near here, and who had, on several occasions, been very kind to us, told him if ever he came near Dartford she would give him a good job to bottom the kitchen chairs and make some garden baskets, as well as try to find him other work in the neighbourhood. Thinking it might be a good opportunity for my husband to get out in the fresh air, I asked Mr. Sweets if he was likely to go near Dartford, and he said he should go right through it. I then asked him if he would take my husband with him, and he said with great pleasure; at the same time he should remember he could not go many miles a day, as he was asthmatic; and when a man was lame, and had an asthma, walking was very hard work, particularly if he had to play the flute at the same time; and it was all the harder for him, for he had to hide his asthma as much as he could, as people otherwise would not think his music was good. I told him I

did not care how slow he walked, as my husband was far from strong; and he then said he should like him for a companion very much, as Trivet could talk to him on serious subjects—which my husband can do very well—when he was not playing, and his music would amuse Trivet when he was, and so it would be pleasant for both. Well, my husband got a stock of cane for bottoming the chairs, the willow for the baskets he could get in any town, and they started off together. All I know is they got to Dartford, and that Trivet got on very well there; Mrs. Jones, the brewer's wife, gave him more than a week's work. He used to go at about eight every morning to the house, and he had his breakfast and dinner there every day. Sweets used to take him there and bring him back to their lodgings every evening, and generally had his supper at the house as well. Sweets behaved very kindly all along, and used to put his flute in his pocket when he took my husband there of a morning and fetched him back in the evening, that he might make Trivet appear the more respectable."

"Do you expect your husband to be back soon?" asked Mrs. Duke.

"I don't know at all. I told him not to hurry himself."

"Where is he now?"

"I haven't the least idea. He left Dartford about a fortnight ago, and he sent me some money by Mr. Stokes, the tinman, who met him at Dartford; and he said also where he intended going to, but I am sure I don't remember where it was."

"But Mr. Stokes is in trouble himself, so I don't think it will be of much use trying to get anything out of him," said Mrs. Duke.

"Yes, but his time must be out now in a day or two, and I'm sure he'll tell you willingly, and assist you in any way he can. He's as good a husband and father, and as kind a fellow as ever lived when he's sober, and when he's not he's more mad than anything else, and so is to be pitied. You know, I suppose, what he's in for?"

Mrs. Duke did not, and Mrs. Trivet thereupon proceeded to inform her that it was for flinging a kettle of boiling water at his wife's head; but as she was somewhat prolix in her narrative, and after all left a great deal untold, we will attempt a short sketch of the life of Mr. Stokes.

Of Mr. Stokes's ancestors we cannot speak, as he had never known either father or mother, and was even unacquainted with their names. Whence he had obtained the one he bore, that of John Stokes, it is impossible to say. He was brought up in one of the Metropolitan workhouse schools, and when old enough to leave it he was apprenticed to a tinman. His apprenticeship was unsatisfactory, both to master and pupil. The former accused the lad of being idle and impertinent, although he admitted his perfect integrity; and the latter stated that his master was exacting, tyrannical, and mean, and, in fact, half starved him. He complained also that he learnt nothing of the art and mystery of tinmanship, beyond mending pots and kettles.

Domiciled as he was in Westminster, it is not to be wondered at if he admired those superb young men who hang about Delahay Street and Duke Street, with uniforms fitting them as tightly as their skins, and with streamers tied to their caps ; nor was it more astonishing if he wished to exchange the squalid attire of the parish apprentice tinman, for the magnificent trappings of the soldier. Giving way, at last, to the temptation, he enlisted into a regiment in the East India Company's service, the proximate cause being the seductive tales of delight told by a recruiting officer of the terrestrial paradise the life of a private was in the East Indies, with one servant to carry his knapsack, another to cook his dinner, leaving him barely anything to do for himself, except to take care of the diamonds and prize-money, and other valuables which would fall to him when the booty of Rajahs' palaces was shared among the soldiers, which generally occurred once every three months. Thus, full of hope, he left England for the sunny East, leaving his master to apply for another apprentice at the workhouse. In his regiment, John Stokes acquired the reputation of a steady, good soldier, always attentive to his duty, and not more drunken in his habits than the average of his comrades. In fact, drunkenness was really the only fault he could justly have been accused of ; and that, as he was never known to be drunk on duty, was never registered against him. After he had been in India about eight years, a corporal in the regiment died, leaving a widow and four young children. Stokes had always been on excellent terms with both

husband and wife, and he did the best in his power to comfort and assist the poor woman in her trouble. He succeeded, and so well, that six months after the death of her husband she married John Stokes. The time between the decease of her first husband and her marriage with the second certainly seems short, but in India matrimonial alliances with the widows of privates and non-commissioned officers take place quickly, if they take place at all.

Stokes was now a happy man in more ways than one, for he not only inherited the widow of his deceased friend, but his chevrons as well, for the week after his marriage he was made corporal. He behaved after his promotion perfectly well, and gave great satisfaction to his superiors. His habits of drinking were certainly something less, and being aware how derogatory it was to the dignity of a non-commissioned officer to be seen drunk, he contrived to acquire the habit of simulating sobriety when more than half intoxicated; about as dangerous a practice as could well be adopted in India, and most noxious in its effect on the brain.

He continued corporal for two years, when one day he suffered a sun-stroke, and when he had partially recovered from its effects he was still retained in the hospital as a lunatic. He soon, however, somewhat recovered, sufficiently so to be allowed to go at large, but not so as to be fit to go on duty; and, in consequence, he received his discharge, and was sent with his wife and family, and some other invalids, to England.

When he arrived in England, he found himself in a

most unfortunate position indeed. He was not adapted for any occupation, and the knowledge of the cause of discharge, which was entered on his certificate, precluded him from any situation of trust. At last he determined to try his original occupation, as far as he had learned it—that of a tinman. He equitably mortgaged his trifling pension, and with the proceeds purchased one of those travelling barrows, or trucks, combining with it a grindstone, which are so frequently seen about the London streets.

Stokes rapidly adopted the manners and habits of a civilian. He was a most affectionate and tender husband; and his wife having no family to him, he treated the four children she had had by her former husband with as much affection as if they had been his own. On her part, she loved him very sincerely. She was a good mother, and, what is not often met with in her class of society, a good manager as well. Thus their life was on the whole a happy one, but with occasional and terrible exceptions. Stokes rarely got tipsy, but when he did, a more complete metamorphosis could not take place than occurred in the character and disposition of the man. From the kind, docile, and even submissive husband, he became both in language and brutal treatment the most repulsive blackguard. He was on these occasions a very maniac, and in his mania appeared that frequent phase of insanity which impels the patient to attack those whom in his sane moments he holds in the greatest love. His neighbours, when these fits were on him, generally interfered to protect his wife, and mise-

rable indeed was her existence and those of his children during the time the paroxysm lasted. When over, he was again the quiet, affectionate husband, and steady, honest, industrious man. His drunken bouts were sometimes two or three months asunder, and during that time he appeared to take excessive pains to eradicate the bad impression his past conduct had had on his wife.

The eldest boy was now nearly fifteen years of age, and was clever and active; but unfortunately he had picked up some bad acquaintances, and had once been punished at the police court for some act of dishonesty. His mother and her husband thought he was reformed when he left the prison, but like many other lads similarly situated, the sentence he had received appeared to have done him more harm than good, inasmuch as it had added hypocrisy to his other faults. Unknown to his parents he got acquainted with some professed thieves, and committed with them a considerable robbery. Cheated by his companions out of his share of the plunder, and finding that more blame was liable to fall to his share than to the others, the boy decamped, and some time afterwards Stokes heard he was connected with a gang of young thieves, then infesting the neighbourhood of Gravesend. His mother was almost broken-hearted at the intelligence, and Stokes, although his finances at the time were at low-water mark, determined to go after the boy; and, if possible, bring him back with him, or find him some honest employment. With this view he started off, and searched unremittingly every locality he thought he was likely to hear of the young

fellow in, but without success ; and at last, penniless and down-hearted, he returned home. In passing through Dartford he had met Trivet, who sent a message by him to his wife, as well as some money. He also told him to inform her that work had been abundant, and that he had been recommended from one house to another, and that he should continue away some time longer. He concluded by adding that his health had much improved during his journey, and that she should hear of his movements whenever he met any one he knew going to London.

When Stokes arrived in Smith's Rents, he brought great joy to the blind man's family, and great sorrow to his own. Mrs. Stokes wept bitterly when she heard of the bad success of his mission, and would not be comforted. Poor Stokes tried all the persuasions and consolations in his power, but without effect, and he left the house to deliver his message to Mrs. Trivet, on whom he had not yet called. She received him most kindly for his own sake, for the old soldier was a great favourite in the Rents—when sober. His information, also, of the improved state of her husband's health, and the considerable amount of money he had brought with him—more than thirty shillings—combined to make her supremely happy, and in the fulness of her heart she asked Stokes if she could be of any use to him in return. Stokes, like an old soldier, immediately improved the occasion, and borrowed five shillings, stating at the time what was the perfect truth—that neither he nor his wife had a shilling. Without a moment's hesitation Mrs.

Trivet granted the loan, and Stokes started off in somewhat better spirits to purchase some household necessities. He had scarcely arrived in the Broadway when he met an old comrade, an Irishman. He noticed poor Stokes's cast-down appearance, and, hurt at seeing his old friend in trouble, he offered him a drop of the "cratur," which Stokes readily accepted. The gin was swallowed, and the effect was miraculous on Stokes. It was only a glass, and yet that glass had in an instant cancelled all the disappointment and fatigue the poor fellow had met with, and had changed him into a jolly, rollicking companion. But even then his love for his wife did not for a moment subside. He thought of her while he was drinking, and after he had drunk, his first thought was what he could do for her benefit. He was soon resolved. With part of his five shillings he immediately purchased a pint bottle of glorious Old Tom for one and tenpence, bottle included, and put it into his pocket. He invested the remainder in tea, sugar, bread, and meat, and then started tolerably well laden for his home, of course having first returned the treat his Irish friend had given him, as he was not the man to be beholden to an old comrade even for a glass of gin.

Arrived at home he found Mrs. Stokes with her youngest child, a sickly boy about four years of age, on her lap. She was still weeping over the apparent loss of her firstborn, and Stokes went up to her, and commenced placing his purchases, which she did not even look at, on the table. Without saying a word he filled the tea-kettle with water, placing it on the hob ; he then

seated himself by his wife, and, kindly putting his arm round her waist, attempted to cheer her with his conversation. To a certain extent he succeeded, and then, perceiving the impression he had made, he took up the gin-bottle from the table, and showed it to his wife, winking playfully at her the while. Mrs. Stokes shook her head sorrowfully but by no means angrily. He repeated his dumb solicitation, and she partly smiled. Stokes, who when sober perfectly understood his wife's psychology, without uttering a word rose from his seat, and taking a teacup (the establishment did not boast of a drinking-glass), he put in two lumps of sugar, a quantity of gin, and then filled it up with hot water from the kettle. He next placed a spoon in it, which he first with great delicacy wiped on the tail of his coat, and all being in readiness, he offered it to his wife with the bewitching smile of entreaty he had found so efficacious when, single and a private, he used to offer bashful beauties in a public-house his glass to drink out of. With a sigh she took the teacup from his hand, and after stirring its contents, she applied it to her lips. In the meantime Stokes took another teacup, and half filling it with gin, he drank it off. In a short time the spirit certain divines tell us was given to man by a beneficent Providence for his moderate use and comfort, began to have its effect. The wife began to talk, and her husband to answer her. The conversation, which commenced amicably enough, began to assume some sharpness. The spirit, as is usual with it, acted in its own peculiar way on the peculiar temperament of the

drinkers. It made the wife loquacious and spirited; it made the kind-hearted, gentle husband, with his easily disordered brain, mad. The misunderstanding commenced after the second draught, but the good sense and affectionate feeling of both husband and wife not being completely obscured, they made up their quarrel, and took another dose of the poison to cement their loves. It had not the effect desired, and their quarrel recommenced, the original fault really being on the side of the wife. She accused Stokes of not using sufficient energy in his researches after the missing boy, and Stokes, raving like a madman, denied the accusation. The quarrel continued till Stokes, utterly demented, seized the boiling tea-kettle and flung it at his wife. In a moment the poor woman and sick child were deluged with the scalding water, and their screams soon brought the neighbours into the room. Owing to the mad behaviour of Stokes they were obliged to send for a policeman, who took him with great difficulty to the station, and the wife and child were carried to the Westminster Hospital. As soon as the woman was able to appear she was taken to the police-court to give evidence, which she did with many tears, concluding with the hope, so often heard in our police-courts, that his worship would not be hard upon him, for when sober a better husband never lived, but when drunk he was more mad than anything else. The magistrate declined to listen to her plea, and told Stokes he was a disgrace to the name of a British soldier. He would take care that no insanity should be urged in his excuse for some time to come,

and he sentenced him to three months' imprisonment with hard labour. Stokes was removed from the dock, his wife was again taken to the hospital, and the two remaining children were cared for by the other lodgers in the house.

After Mrs. Duke had quitted Mrs. Trivet she went direct to the savings bank office, and gave notice of her intention to withdraw her deposits. She then called on Mrs. Stokes, who was now able to leave the hospital with her child. She found her at home, sad and dispirited; bitter poverty was painfully apparent in her room, and her children appeared half famished. Stokes the bread-finder was still incarcerated, and she was reduced to parish allowance, with the addition of slices of bread continually thrust into the hands of the children when met by those of the inhabitants of the "Rents" who were better off than the poor mother. Mrs. Stokes received her visitor with much kind feeling, as one more to be pitied than herself, the report of Duke's being accused of murder of course having reached her. Mrs. Duke told her the object of her visit was, if possible, to obtain some knowledge of the whereabouts of the blind basketmaker, as he alone could establish the fact that from twelve to two on the night of the murder Duke was at home and in bed. Mrs. Stokes told her that she personally knew but little about it, but as her husband's punishment would end in three days, she had better accompany her to the prison to meet him as he came out, and then she could obtain from him all the information she required. Mrs. Duke, after a short

visit, thanked Mrs. Stokes for her kindness, and promised to go with her to the prison, and then went home. There, before going to bed, she humbly and earnestly (and she could pray earnestly) prayed God to assist her in her exertions to procure the proofs of her husband's innocence. That night she slept more soundly than she had done for some time previously, for she felt a sort of assurance she should succeed, and the next morning she arose early, and systematically commenced her task of collecting witnesses in her husband's favour, to be brought forward at the trial.

CHAPTER XXII.

PREPARATIONS FOR THE DEFENCE.

WHEN Mrs. Duke arose the next morning, before commencing operations she went on her knees and devoutly asked the assistance of the Almighty in the work she was about to undertake. She prayed as most respectable poor women pray—beautifully. Few specimens of more pure, devotional phraseology could possibly be imagined than that they occasionally make use of. There is no circumlocution in it. It is generally as simple as the exquisite English of the Bible itself. It is always the direct appeal for help or consolation, not a word more than is necessary to express their thoughts is used ; but frequently the few words contain most eloquent meaning. This was especially the case with Mrs. Duke's. It was no lengthened prayer, in elaborately dictated sentences. The best idea that can be given of it is by stating it was greatly in the manner of " Lord, help me, or I perish."

Her prayer over, she breakfasted, and then coolly thought over the step she was about to take. She understood tolerably well what she had to do, and the end she wished to arrive at. To insure the acquittal of

her husband it would be necessary for her to account for the manner in which he had spent his time on the night of the murder. Her greatest difficulty was to account for the hours from eleven to three. Up till two o'clock she had already got over by the evidence of the blind basketmaker. She now began to think of proving Duke was at home in the earlier part of the evening. Suddenly she remembered that Gobby had seen him, when he had requested her assistance to the poor soldier's wife. It would be necessary then to secure his evidence. There was another person also who had seen Duke (Mrs. O'Flaherty), but to seek her evidence was more than Mrs. Duke's wife-like dignity could do without suffering the greatest pain, if not degradation. She kept, then, Mrs. O'Flaherty's evidence in reserve, resolving only to apply to her in the last emergency. She now put on her bonnet and shawl to cross over to Gobby's. As she left her house she saw him emerging from his, but with considerable difficulty, and accompanied by a rattling noise. When he was clear of his door his hat fell off, and he was unable to pick it up again, for he was perfectly enveloped in a labyrinth or network of 'olls' bedsteads, which precluded his stooping. Mrs. Duke picked up his hat for him and placed it on his head, for which he thanked her. "I want to speak to you," she said, "if you can wait a minute."

"I will wait ten, if you want me," he said.

"Do you remember," said Mrs. Duke, "the night the poor woman died who lodged over you?"

"Quite well; I ain't likely to forget it."

"You have heard, I suppose, my husband is wrongfully accused of murdering an old gentleman in Lambeth? It took place on that night. Now you can remember his being in the room when you came over to ask me to go and see the poor creature?"

"Certainly. I ain't likely to forget anything that took place that night, as I said before. It ain't often one meets with a sadder affair than that was."

"Will you give evidence of it? If you will, it'll help poor Duke very much."

"I will help him in that or any way I can," said Gobby, "for he's a good fellow, and a kind neighbour. But I saw him twice that night. The other time was when that brute of a woman kicked up a row. He came to the door to see what it was all about. Oh, if you're certain that was the night, he's all right."

"I am certain of it," said Mrs. Duke.

"Then make your mind easy, for he's safe enough. Let me know when I am wanted, and I'll be ready. Now I wish you'd help me in not letting these here dolls' bedsteads knock against the wall as I go out into the street. Every one of them which gets the least scratched no child will buy, and they remain on my hands; bedsteads is not a very good thing to get off at the best of times, even when in the finest condition."

Mrs. Duke immediately complied with his request, and gently kept the bedsteads from the wall till Gobby had emerged into the high road, when he thanked her and pursued his way over Westminster Bridge to Lambeth.

Gobby had scarcely parted from Mrs. Duke when some one touched her on the arm ; she looked round and found it was Master Perkins. "You are the very person I wanted to see," said Mrs. Duke ; "come with me ;" and the boy followed her into the house. When they were in the room, Mrs. Duke closed the door, and said to him very seriously, "I want you to be my friend and assist me in my trouble ; will you do it ?"

"Of course I will, you know that."

"Yes, but I want you first to promise me you will do nothing dishonest while you are helping me. If you don't, I shall not ask you to do anything."

"I don't want to do nothing dishonest if I can help it," said the boy ; "but I must eat, mustn't I ?"

"Certainly, but that's no reason for being dishonest."

"It's very easy talking, but if you had been without any better roof to cover you than a market-basket for months together, perhaps you wouldn't be much honester than I have been."

"But you've got a roof to cover you now, so that's no excuse."

"I know it, but I only got that by having such a cold and cough as I had ; and them chaps first took pity on me and let me into their crib, and you afterwards giv' me something to eat."

"If you will behave honestly, I will not only give you something to eat, but pay you as well, as long as I have anything to pay with ; though, God help me, perhaps that won't be long. Now, will you be honest ?"

"Try me, and if I take anything that don't belong to

me, I hope I shall be struck dead. I wouldn't take a farthing of yours if I was starving."

"But I do not mean only of mine. I mean of anybody's."

"I won't do anything wrong unless I am drove to it by hunger ; and that ain't likely with you."

"Very well ; I will trust you. Have you had your breakfast this morning?"

"No ; how should I ? I haven't a farthing in the world."

"Well, there's some bread and butter for you. I shall be back before you have finished it."

So saying Mrs. Duke placed before the boy some bread and butter and milk and water, and then went into the street to make some purchases. When she returned she found her young friend had finished his meal and was awaiting her orders.

"Are you ready," she inquired, "for a long walk ?"

"Quite. I did not feel very strong just now, but I am better. Where do you want me to go to ?"

"I have heard my husband say that he used very often to have a chat with the toll-keeper at Vauxhall Bridge. I wish you would go to him and inquire if he saw Duke the morning of the night the murder was committed. He must have passed through the gate about five o'clock, judging from the time he left home, and very frequently he used to say a few words to the toll-collector."

Master Perkins willingly accepted the commission, and started off at the shambling pace his ragged fraternity show when going on any definite errand. At last he

arrived at the foot of the bridge, and was walking up boldly to the toll-house, when to his horror he found the collector speaking to a policeman who had had more than once the painful duty of taking him into custody. Master Perkins turned back so rapidly when he saw the policeman as to call the attention of the latter to the movement, and as soon as he saw who it was he kept his eye strictly on the lad, imagining, and not without excuse, that he was bent on some act of dishonesty. The poor boy shuffled off for some time till he thought the policeman had forgotten him, but as soon as he returned he found the policeman still on the look-out. He went away a second time, and remained away for at least an hour. When he returned he found all clear, and was on the point of putting his head into the toll-house to speak to the collector, there being no passengers passing at the moment, when he felt his collar grasped by a powerful hand, which drew him violently back, and he found himself in the clutches of the very policeman he had tried to avoid, and who had simply for the moment hidden himself that he might secure his prey with greater certainty. "So, my fine fellow, I have caught you at last," he said. "I've been watching you all the morning."

"If you please, sir, I was not about anything wrong. I only wanted to speak to the toll-collector."

"That I am sure of," said X 49, with a sneer. "Now be off, and if I find you here again, I'll lock you up for attempting to commit a felony."

"What felony?" inquired Master Perkins, angrily.

"Stealing the collector's money. Now, once more, be off while your skin is sound ; if you stay here any longer you'll come to grief, I can tell you."

Master Perkins did as he was requested, and slunk sorrowfully back, concocting in his brain some excuse to tell Mrs. Duke ; but before he had arrived at her house he changed his mind and told her the truth.

Mrs. Duke now in her turn went to the bridge. With out any hesitation, as soon as she found the collector disengaged, she addressed him, and told him she wanted particularly to find out the collector who was on duty the night of the murder of Mr. Mostyn, in Lambeth. He replied she was unfortunate in her application, the man having left them for good, but that on the morning after he himself had been on duty from four o'clock till eight.

"But do you mean the same night?" said Mrs. Duke.

"Yes ; I mean the same night. Why do you ask ?"

"Well, my husband is falsely accused of being one of the murderers, and I want to prove, if possible, that he came through here at five o'clock from his own house."

"I can't help you in that," said the collector ; "we have so many persons passing it is impossible to remember one in particular."

"I am very sorry," said Mrs. Duke ; "but as he passed here very often at that time I thought you might remember him, especially as he used to say you sometimes spoke to him."

"What sort of a man is he ?"

"He's a short man, and he used to wear a smock-frock and deal in poultry."

"Oh, stop. I remember him perfectly well. You don't mean to say he is suspected of murder. Why, he always seemed to me a very civil, honest sort of fellow."

"He's as honest a man as ever lived, and it's all a mistake ; but could you remember whether he came through here that morning? You would save his life if you could."

"Well, upon a thing of that serious kind I should not like to speak off-hand, but I'll turn it over in my mind, and if I can help you, I will. By-the-by, did not he get into trouble about some poultry?"

"Yes, the same day."

"Well, then, I did see him. For a man I know to be a detective came here about six o'clock to ask me if I had seen him go through, and I told him I had ; and I remember seeing them come back together talking in a friendly sort of way. I should think you would have no difficulty, but I'll turn it over in my mind, and if you'll come here some morning I'll let you know all I can remember ; and if it's in my power to assist you with my evidence, I'll do it willingly."

Mrs. Duke then sincerely thanked him for his kindness, and left him.

The next day she saw her legal adviser, and told him what she had done. He commended her diligence, and told her if she could get the three witnesses to swear to the facts as she had stated them to him, there was no

cause for alarm as far as complicity in the actual commission of the murder was concerned. The robbery would be a different affair ; but even then the fact of her finding the money and returning it would tell greatly in Duke's favour. He advised her by no means to fail in obtaining the evidence of the blind man, for, as far as he could understand the case, he would be a most important witness, as his testimony would prove the impossibility of her husband's being at Mr. Mostyn's house at the time the murder was committed. In conclusion, he inquired if she had given notice at the savings-bank, and on being told that she had, he expressed his satisfaction, as nothing could be done without money, he said, and then wished her good morning.

But it was fated that Mrs. Duke's exertions on behalf of her husband should be attended with difficulties. On the appointed day she called on Mrs. Stokes to accompany her to the prison, to meet her husband on his release. They proceeded together till they arrived at the gates, and there they waited with the crowd of relatives and friends of the prisoners whose time had expired, and who were then to be liberated. One by one the prisoners left the building, and were received by those waiting for them with such words and marks of joy and affection as proved that as pure and disinterested love and friendship can exist among the lowest and most depraved as may be found in any class of society. The wretched mendicant had another to take him by the hand and congratulate him on his liberation ; the thief had his friend ready to accompany him to his home ;

and the lost unhappy girl found at least one other of the fallen sisterhood to clasp her in her arms and conduct her to the nearest gin-shop, there to take that draught which was again to be the first step towards destroying the good lessons she had received from the prison chaplain. Mrs. Stokes and her friend waited in vain for Stokes's appearance ; he came not, and they remained till they found themselves alone. They then consulted what steps they should take, neither liking to propose the only course open to them—that of inquiring of the porter at the gate why Stokes had not left with the others. Mrs. Stokes knew perfectly well that the only way she could be informed was by applying to the man, but her terror at the probability of hearing that her husband had again misbehaved himself, and had been subjected to a further term of imprisonment, withheld her. Still there was no other alternative left, and taking Mrs. Duke with her for support, she advanced to the lodge, and inquired why Stokes, whose term of imprisonment had expired, had not been liberated with the others.

“Are you his wife?” inquired the man.

“I am.”

“Then I am sorry to tell you your husband is very ill.”

“Can't I see him?” she asked.

“No ; he is not here.”

The poor woman now became so terribly alarmed that she was near fainting. The porter perceived it, and kindly invited her into his lodge, and gave her a seat. As soon as she had somewhat recovered from the shock,

ne told her that, two days since, insanity, which the prison doctor had for some time suspected, had fully developed itself in her husband, and that he had been removed by a Secretary of State's order to the Colney Hatch Lunatic Asylum, where she would now find him. He further stated that the prison authorities had sent to inform her of the circumstance, but that, in consequence of some error in her address, the messenger had been unable to find her house.

The grief of the poor woman on receiving this intelligence was so overpowering that the porter himself, albeit unused to the melting mood, was visibly affected by it; and Mrs. Duke, although the intelligence caused her great terror, as it increased her difficulty in finding the blind basketmaker, forgot her own sorrow for the moment, and wept like a child, from pure sympathy for her friend. When Mrs. Stokes was able to listen to reason, the porter advised her to go down immediately to the lunatic asylum and see her husband, as well as leave there her own address. "You will have no difficulty," he said; "he is no longer a prisoner, and I am sure the people there will give you all the assistance they can. It's a very sad case, and I am sorry I cannot help you further in the matter." The two women, after ascertaining where the asylum was situated, left the prison with the purpose of immediately visiting the poor man.

The porter at the prison had advised them to take the Great Northern Railway as the quickest and easiest method of arriving at Colney Hatch; but neither of the poor women had a shilling with them, and, as it would

take them some time to get back to the Rents, they proposed walking. Mrs. Duke, although now terribly alarmed at the possibility of finding Stokes unable to give her any information respecting Trivet, did all in her power to comfort her poor companion ; and sorely she needed it. With all his unfortunate propensity to drink, and the sad results which generally followed his drinking bouts, Stokes was a good and affectionate husband, and, moreover, the bread-finder of his family. Since his incarceration they had suffered great privation, and had even been obliged to apply to the parish for relief, which they certainly received, but in such small proportion as to be utterly inadequate to the maintenance of life, and Mrs. Stokes and her children showed the effects of insufficient food very visibly in their persons ; added to which, their landlady was pressing for her rent, which had been allowed to stand over solely with the idea that as Stokes was on that day to be released, in all probability he would soon be able to pay off the arrears. But now that hope was crushed, and there was nothing but the workhouse before her, in which she would be reduced to the dreadful necessity of being separated from her children ; and her pet, the youngest, being of a most delicate constitution, would make the infliction the more terrible. She explained so graphically her position to the kind-hearted Mrs. Duke, that she promised, as soon as she could obtain her money from the savings bank, she would lend her sufficient to pay her current rent for the next month (twelve shillings), if the landlady would let the arrears stand over, which no doubt she could be brought

willingly to do, as turning the poor creature and her children into the streets would be a dead loss. She would thus, Mrs. Duke said, have a roof over her head for some time to come, and that would give her an opportunity to look round her. More she could not do, as every other farthing she could scrape together would be required for Duke's defence. Mrs. Stokes warmly and fervently expressed her gratitude for her friend's kindness, and thus conversing together on subjects connected with their affairs, they at last reached the asylum.

They told their tale with all the simple eloquence which poor women use in their distress, and their application to see Stokes having been carried to the superior authorities, permission was immediately granted. They found him an utter maniac, totally insensible to every question put to him, garrulous enough, it is true, but quite incapable of bringing his mind to bear on one subject for two moments together. After remaining in the asylum for a short time, the two women left it, one thoroughly broken-hearted, and the other disappointed and terrified at the probability of not finding the principal witness in her husband's defence.

It was late in the afternoon before they arrived at home. They were both thoroughly exhausted and foot-sore, having been absent from five o'clock in the morning, walking the greater part of the time, without a mouthful of food having entered their lips. Sad as was Mrs. Duke's condition, it was even less to be pitied than Mrs. Stokes's, for the former had at least some provisions in the house ; her companion had none. Mrs. Duke, however,

saw one of Mrs. Stokes's children enter the court, and she beckoned to him to approach. She then divided her loaf and sent it by the boy, with some cheese, to his mother. Mrs. Duke then proceeded to place her own tea-pot in requisition, and before half an hour had elapsed she was seated at her table, enjoying as comfortable a meal as it was possible to eat under the anxiety of mind from which she was suffering.

When her fatigue had somewhat subsided, Mrs. Duke began to think what steps could be taken to find Trivet, but the more she considered the question, the more difficult did it appear of solution. A dozen different plans did she start, and each, after a moment's reflection, she was obliged to throw aside as impracticable. Presently she determined she would pay Mrs. Trivet a visit, and consult her on the subject. She was about rising from her chair for that purpose, when Master Perkins entered the room. He had that morning executed some little commission for her, and had come to give in a report of his proceedings. As he appeared tired, she offered him the remaining contents of her tea-pot, which he readily accepted, and she remained with him while he took his meal. She told him, in the course of conversation, the disappointment she had met with in the morning, and the embarrassment she was that moment in to determine on some means to discover the whereabouts of the blind man. Perkins told her that he knew several chaps on that beat, and moreover he had once gone through Kent himself, in company with some hoppers. If he could assist her in the matter, he would readily do so.

If Master Perkins had been an angel sent from heaven (to use Mrs. Duke's own phraseology), instead of a young thief, his offer could not have been more gratefully accepted. She took him with her up-stairs to Mrs. Trivet, and got her to inform him of the circumstances of her husband's journey, as far as she knew them. As we have already stated, her information went no farther than Dartford, but she was able to give him so good a description of the position of the country house of the brewer's wife as to make it easy for him to find it. He had also heard of Stokes's misfortune, and he expressed himself in strong terms on the disgraceful manner in which young Stokes, with whom he had the honour of an acquaintance, had left his mother alone in her trouble.*

* It may here be remarked, that among the young London thieves there always exists a singular and intense love for their mother. Their father they appear to care little about; yet, although they may give but little attention to the teachings of their mother, they generally hold her in great affection. This peculiarity has frequently been noticed by prison chaplains, and the records of the Feltham and Red Hill Reformatories also prove it in a remarkable manner. Perhaps after all this is little to be wondered at when it is borne in mind that the mother is not only the first to forgive a young thief his fault, but the more the public hold him in aversion the more she nerves herself for his protection. Even when the mother is herself a thief or a drunkard this love for her continues. In the Red Hill Reformatory a child lately died who had been nine times convicted of thefts instigated by his mother; yet to the last his affection for her was of the most touching and beautiful description.

Perkins inquired if they were proud people, as in that case he would do himself up carefully ; and on being told that the brewer was a very wealthy man, he immediately began to consider in what way he could improve his appearance to create the best effect. As his wardrobe was of the most limited description, the whole being carried about with him unless in very hot weather, what he should wear caused him but little difficulty ; but how he should wear it so as to conceal the dilapidated portions of it was a different affair. He confided his perplexity to Mrs. Duke, who kindly assisted him in the matter with her needle and thread, and after placing seven shillings and sixpence in his hand for travelling expenses during the time he should be out (we may as well state the whole truth, and say she obtained the money at the time by pawning Duke's watch), she told him to take the parliamentary train to Dartford the next morning, and then wishing him God-speed, she bade him good night.

Before four o'clock the next morning Master Perkins was up and stirring. With his toilet he took great pains, polishing his face with soap till it shone again. His boots were cleaned, and he really appeared as respectable as it was possible for a boy to do, all of whose clothes were three sizes too large for him, and utterly threadbare besides. When dressed, he packed up his luggage, which consisted of a piece of yellow soap, in brown paper, and having carefully placed it in his pocket, he left the Rents.

He made his way to the railway station, and, like a

gentleman, took his third-class ticket to Dartford. When he had arrived at his destination, he inquired for, and easily found out, the house to which he was bound. It was a handsome villa, and altogether an establishment which it required no little nerve to ask to be admitted to. Bashfulness, however, was one of the least of Master Perkins's faults, and without hesitation he rang the bell. A woman-servant, who was dusting the hall (it was yet early), opened the door and asked the boy what he wanted. Master Perkins had already concocted a tale that Trivet's wife was very ill, and wanted to see him immediately, and that she had commissioned him to find him. The girl quickly sympathised with the boy, but told him that Trivet had left the house a long time since, and she had no idea where he had gone to. She said, however, perhaps her mistress knew, but as she was then getting up she did not like to disturb her, and she advised Perkins to go round to the back of the house into the kitchen and wait there till the lady should be at leisure, when she would ask her if she could give him any information.

Perkins found his way round to the back door without more difficulty or annoyance than that caused by the growling and barking of a large house-dog, chained fortunately; but as in the course of his experience he had frequently met with adventures with house-dogs of a far more unpleasant description, he took but little notice of the circumstance. The barking of the brute, however, aroused the attention of the cook, a fat, good-natured, middle-aged woman, who came to the back

door to discover what had raised Boxer's anger to such an extraordinary degree, and there she saw Perkins, who told her his errand, and that he had been sent to the back door by the housemaid. The cook, who had seen a good deal of Trivet when he was working at the house, and had conceived a very friendly feeling towards him, listened with great attention to Perkins's statement. She also told him she could give him no information on the subject, not having heard of the blind man since he left Dartford, but possibly her mistress might know more about him. She invited Perkins into the kitchen, and told him to take a seat by the fire, as the weather was cold. She then entered into conversation with him about Trivet's family, and in reply to the questions she asked, it is only justice to admit that Master Perkins showed great inventive and poetical powers. She then questioned him on the chapel he attended, a subject far more difficult for the young gentleman to answer than any relative to the Trivet family, and he began to feel rather uneasy, when the cook suddenly stopped and regarded the boy attentively for some moments ; then, after wiping her mouth with her apron, she asked him if he were hungry. Master Perkins was, for the purpose of keeping up his independence, on the point of saying no, but the word would not leave his lips. The cook appeared to understand him, and taking up a quartern loaf she proceeded to cut him a sandwich of such dimensions as nothing but the stomach of a hungry young thief would have had the courage to attack. As she proceeded to place the beef artistically between the

slices of bread, the eyes of the lad dilated in proportion, and in the end began to fill with tears ; so seldom had he experienced from a person of respectability the slightest kindness, that it really had a powerful effect upon him. As soon as she had placed the sandwich before him, she took an earthen mug and filled it with warm milk and water, which she also gave him, and then quietly stood by watching him eat. Possessing herself the delicacy of constitution peculiar to stout cooks, she fairly envied the boy his appetite ; for, as she afterwards expressed herself to the housemaid, " It really did me good to see how heartily he got through it." He had hardly finished it when the cook left the kitchen for a moment, and when she returned she told Perkins that her mistress knew no more about Trivet than that when he left her she had sent him to a gentleman's house near Gravesend, where he was likely to obtain work. The boy thanked her for the information, engrafted the address well on his memory, and then thanking the cook again for her kindness, he left the house, and they saw each other no more.

Young Perkins now sauntered leisurely along towards Gravesend. He felt that his breakfast had done him good, and he apparently resolved not to injure its beneficial effect by too rapid exercise immediately after a full meal. In about an hour, however, he got into full swing, or rather shuffle, and continued it for some time, when suddenly he stopped and began to reflect profoundly, for a circumstance had that morning occurred to him he could in no way account for. While in the

kitchen at Dartford he had noticed on the dresser, while the cook had left the room, a silver table-spoon, and yet during the whole of the time not one thought of appropriating it to his own use ever entered his head. He could not account for it; and it was indeed remarkable, as in the war these young gentlemen carry on against society at large, a silver table-spoon is considered a prize of the highest kind ; it is so easy to carry, and so readily converted into cash. It is true that he had promised Mrs. Duke while acting as her agent he would commit no deed of dishonesty, but a temptation of such a description would naturally have proved an exception. It never entered his mind that the gratitude he had felt had neutralised his desire to steal ; still more singular did it appear to him that he felt no anger against himself for the omission. He began, on the contrary, to be perfectly satisfied with his conduct on the occasion ; he had received great kindness from the cook, and by leaving the spoon behind him he had returned it with interest. He had, in fact, more than paid for his breakfast twenty times over, without in the slightest degree destroying the gratitude he felt for the kindness he had received.

As soon as he had come to this conclusion he raised his head from the meditative position it had been in, and continued his route at peace with himself and all the world.

It was nearly evening before he arrived at Gravesend. With little difficulty he found the house he was to call at, but before ringing the bell he cast a rapid glance,

both mental and physical, at his toilet. He perceived that his trousers were muddy, and also that his hands were excessively dirty; moreover he suspected, and with truth, that his face was in no better condition. Calculating, and justly, that his personal cleanliness had acted favourably in his behalf with the cook at Dartford, he drew from his pocket his small brown paper parcel, and took from it the piece of yellow soap. He then sought for a ditch where there was some clean water, and having found one he proceeded with his toilet. He first intended polishing his face, and had taken his handkerchief from his pocket to act as his towel, but on looking at its condition he began to suspect it would be quite as likely to leave marks on his countenance as to obliterate the dirt already obscuring it. He prudently, therefore, determined first to try the effect on his hands. He washed them thoroughly, but when he proceeded to dry them with his handkerchief his worst suspicions were realised, for it left them even dirtier than before. Thankful for his foresight he rubbed his shoes carefully with it, and then placed it in his pocket, contenting himself with drying his hands on the legs of his trousers, and when that was completed he boldly walked up to the house and rang the bell. The door was opened, not by a kind-hearted, sympathising maid-servant, but by a stern, pompous-looking footman, who asked him sharply what he wanted. Perkins told him, and received for answer that all he knew about Trivet was, that when he had done his job there, he had left for Chatham; so saying he closed the door abruptly in young Perkins's

face. The boy slowly moved from the house, reflecting in his mind on the great difference of temper occasionally found in human beings, and comparing the behaviour of the cook at Dartford with that of the footman at Gravesend.

He now began to consider how he should pass the night, as it was getting late and he was too tired to proceed to Chatham. He first thought of bivouacking under a cart, his usual method of passing the night when on professional tours in the country, but upon reflection he considered himself perfectly entitled to a night's lodging at Mrs. Duke's expense, which, however, would not exceed fourpence, possibly less. He then, with a feeling of courage and independence no doubt engendered by his liberal and honourable behaviour in the morning in the matter of the silver spoon, went up to a policeman and asked him where he could obtain a bed in a respectable house, and the policeman immediately directed him to one, somewhat puzzled at the fastidiousness of a young gentleman whose outward appearance bore so strong a resemblance to a youth preparing for a reformatory. Perkins, after treating himself to a penny roll and a sausage, with a ha'porth of genuine Gravesend shrimps, went straight to the lodging-house, and in it passed a comfortable night. He arose at a somewhat late hour the next day, and after having soaped himself to a state of high polish—there was a looking-glass in the room—he left the house to go on his search, but was fairly puzzled where to begin. There was no doubt he could find his way easily enough to Chatham, but he

was aware that Rochester and Stroud were joined to it, and that it was a very large city, and he had not the slightest clue as to what part he should commence at. Down-hearted and annoyed he wandered for a short time about the streets of Gravesend, looking into the shop windows, and mechanically, without the slightest sinister intention, casting inquisitive glances at the pockets of all well-dressed persons he passed, when suddenly he heard the melancholy tones of a flute. They gave him but little interest, as naturally he was not fond of music, but his steps unconsciously led him towards the player, whom he immediately recognised to be Sweets, of Smith's Rents, with whom Trivet had left Westminster.

It would be difficult to describe Master Perkins's joy at this rencontre. There would now in all probability be something to work upon, as there was little doubt Sweets would be able to give him some information on the subject. He approached to address him, but as he found he was playing to three children and a lady at a parlour window, he thought it would be indiscreet to interrupt him at that moment, and he stood quietly aside till Sweets should leave off playing, anxiously, however, wishing the time was over. At last Sweets stopped, and was moving off, casting a sorrowful and disappointed look at the lady, when suddenly the window opened and she threw him a penny. Sweets took up the money, and in a fit of gratitude, after touching his hat, and to Master Perkins's extreme disgust, recommenced playing, and went three times through, "In the

Strand, in the Strand." All things, however, must have a termination, as has been very justly said before, and at last Sweets's tune came to a conclusion, and he moved off.

Perkins now addressed him, told him who he was, without describing particularly his profession, and related the nature of his errand. Sweets was thunderstruck at the position poor Duke was in, and inquired if he personally could be of any use.

"None whatever," said Perkins, "beyond telling me where I can find Trivet, the blind basketmaker."

"That I can do easy enough," said Sweets; "but what do you want Trivet for?"

"To prove that Duke was in his own house the night of the murder, which Trivet can easily do, as he sat talking with Duke beside his bed exactly at the time the murder was committed, and an hour before and after it. Duke is sure to be found not guilty, if he can get Trivet up as a witness. Do you know where he is, that I may go and find him?"

"Yes, I know where he is," said Sweets; "he's in Chatham, but I can't for the life of me remember the name of the street. He's to remain there a week longer, and then I am to go and fetch him. A little girl at the house he lodges at takes him every morning to his work, and brings him home again in the evening. How annoying, now, I can't think where it is he's living!"

"I'll wait with you here till you do," said Perkins, "perhaps you'll remember it presently."

"Do, there's a good boy; perhaps I may. Now tell

me all about the murder, for I have a sad dull life of it here, after all."

Master Perkins began explaining to Sweets the different circumstances connected with the crime, in all of which Sweets was intensely interested. When Perkins was in the middle of the murder scene, as described at the coroner's inquest, a lady's school made its appearance, and Sweets immediately raised his flute and plunged into the "Last rose of summer," nudging Perkins at the same time to continue his narrative, and bending his head slightly down towards him that he might hear him the better. Sweets got nothing from the school, as the young ladies agreed that he played dreadfully out of time, which was a fact. When they had passed he said to Perkins, "I find I can't remember the street Trivet lives in, but I like Duke, and am glad to be able to do him a good turn, and I'll tell you what I'll do. Although business is very good here and very bad at Chatham, unless you play in public-houses, which I don't particularly like, I'll go there with you and show you the house."

"You'll be a very kind-hearted man if you do," said Perkins; "and I am sure you'll save Duke's life."

"I'll do it then, and we'll start at once, if you like; leastwise, after I have been to the house and got my bag, and you'd better get yours at the same time."

Perkins said that would not take him long, as he'd got on him at that time all he possessed in the world, but he would go with Sweets while he packed up his things.

While Sweets was in the lodging-house, Master Per-

kins disappeared for a few moments. We regret to say it was to commit a gross act of extravagance ; in fact, to invest threepence in shrimps ; but he attempted to excuse himself by the reflection that it was hardly more than once in a fellow's life that he could get the Gravesend shrimps pure and unadulterated, and he might easily be pardoned for indulging in them a little too freely. He offered some to Sweets, who declined them, saying that although he was as fond of them as anybody, they didn't agree with the flute, as they were apt to make it husky.

They now started for Chatham, but their progress was of the slowest, owing to Mr. Sweets's lameness and his habit of playing a tune before each house they passed. It was dark before they arrived at their destination, but they found Trivet had not yet gone to bed. He listened with intense surprise and interest to the account he heard of Duke's misfortunes, and expressed his resolution to go back to London the next morning for the purpose of rendering him all the assistance in his power. It was at last arranged that Perkins should call for him the next morning, and they would go up by the parliamentary train together. As the house Trivet lodged in was full, with the exception of one bed, which was taken by Sweets, he directed Perkins where he could find a lodging for the night.

Master Perkins, when he left the house, in vain tried to find the lodging Trivet had recommended him to. He got into a very disreputable-looking street, and from that into a court which was worse. At last an old woman asked him if he wanted a bed, as there was part

of a one to let in her house. He told her that he did, and she led him into a filthy room with four beds, all tenanted, and one in which there were two boys already she pointed out to him as that which was to receive him, requesting threepence in advance for the accommodation. Perkins paid her the money, which completed two shillings and sixpence he had expended since leaving London. He had now a five-shilling piece left, and its custody in the society he was in gave him the greatest uneasiness. He saw perfectly the character of the company he was in, and the danger he ran of losing his money. He undressed himself leisurely enough, and cautiously took the crown piece from his pocket, holding it in his hand unseen by any one. He then got into bed, still holding it securely. He was tired and wished to sleep, but he was afraid if he slept his fingers would open and he would lose his treasure. At last he thought of putting it in his mouth, as it would then be difficult for any one to take it without his being aware of it. But his mouth was small and the crown piece in proportion large, and altogether it felt exceedingly uncomfortable. He kept on, falling into a troubled slumber, and again awaking and trying to take up a more easy position, when his nearest bedfellow, losing all patience, said, "I'll tell you what it is, young fellow ; if you don't keep quiet, I'll kick you out of bed." The voice startled him, for he recognised it immediately. Perkins quickly slipped unseen the five-shilling piece into his hand, and then inquired if his bedfellow were not Frank Stokes, from Smith's Rents.

"And who are you?" said Stokes, avoiding the question, as he did not particularly wish to be known by all the world.

"I'm George Perkins, and I live at No. 7, in the Rents. I've seen you often enough."

"What lay are you upon here?" inquired Stokes.

"I have come to find blind Trivet as a witness in Duke's favour in that murder affair."

"And have you found him?"

"Yes, and I go back with him to-morrow. When do you come back?"

"Never, if I can help it; so if you see the old fellow at our place don't say you met me."

"I ain't very likely to see him, as I ain't very likely to go after him. He's not so pleasant an acquaintance."

"Where is he, then?"

"He's gone mad, and is in Colney Hatch Lunatic Asylum."

"You don't say so! and what's mother about?"

"Starving, I believe, or next door to it. I can't think how you can leave her so. If I'd ever had a mother, I never could have left her when she's as bad off as yours is."

"How should I know she was bad off? I never heard a word about it till this minute."

"Well, you know it now," said Perkins, turning round and going to sleep.

He woke shortly afterwards, and found day was fast breaking. Stokes was sitting up in bed with so thoughtful a countenance that Perkins got frightened, and sought

for his five-shilling piece, which had slipped from his hand, but which he soon found.

"Perkins," said Stokes, "I want to go back to London; can you lend me some blunt?"

"No, I haven't got a farthing."

"How did you get here, then?"

"By cadging."

"I don't want much," said Stokes, "I've got enough for the train all but ninepence."

"I'll ask Trivet to lend you that," said Perkins; "I know he's got some money now."

"I'll pay you faithfully," said Stokes, "if you will; but I can't bear the idea of the old woman being in trouble and I here."

It need hardly be said the ninepence was in the end advanced from the five-shilling piece, and Perkins, when he gave Stokes the money, congratulated himself that he had saved four and threepence by his caution in the night. That evening the young thief had the satisfaction of conducting not only the blind man home, but also young Stokes to his mother.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE TRIAL.



WHILE these energetic measures were being taken by Mrs. Duke for the defence of her husband, and with every probability of success, nothing whatever could be found by Mrs. Walters in her husband's favour, notwithstanding her utmost exertions. She had contrived to obtain the assistance of one of those disreputable harpies who infest the purlieus of our police and criminal courts, but in spite of all his tact, and he certainly possessed a considerable amount of it, as well as experience, till the very day of the trial they had not succeeded in finding one favourable witness without running the danger in cross-examination of producing some fact in the wretched man's history which would completely counterbalance the favourable evidence the witness had given. Again, the singularity of his position tended greatly to his disadvantage. He dared not admit to his legal adviser or his wife anything that would bear on the true circumstances of the case, and the former had quite penetration enough to detect that all the data his client was giving him were false. Over and over again he had thought of implicating Meffy in the transaction, but the deep cun-

ning of that individual completely terrified him ; for he could see how easy it would be for him to deny all complicity in the affair, and how certainly, if only out of a spirit of revenge, he would implicate Edward Walters. Again, after the refusal of the Crown to accept his evidence against Duke, how could his accusations against Meffy be received ? Although the statement he had made on that occasion might not prejudice him on his trial, still it would cast great doubts on any others he might make. On the score of his son's safety he began now to be comparatively easy, as not a word had been heard from him, which he held as a sign that he was in perfect concealment. The fate of Jessie, however, puzzled him extremely. The only conclusion he could arrive at was the true one—that she had gone off with his son ; but then, why should she have left all her boxes behind her ? The whole affair was so complicated, and mixed up with so much mystery, he was completely puzzled how to move in it. Each day he invented some fresh system of defence, and the next he abandoned it as impracticable. In this state of mind day after day passed till the eve of the trial, when he found himself, with the exception of a brief cunningly enough drawn up by his attorney, showing the improbability, if not impossibility, of his having committed the affair, unprovided with defence. Then, again, he had no counsel engaged, for his wife was too poor to procure one, and the attorney relied on the judge placing the case for the defence in the hands of the junior barrister in court. Here again arose a circumstance against him.

The barrister who would be called upon to undertake the defence would certainly be inexperienced, while the one engaged for the prosecution was **among** the most celebrated of those usually employed in criminal cases. However, hope, feeble as it was, still supported Walters, and on the morning of the trial he felt, without being able to give the slightest reason for the feeling, an amount of courage he had not experienced since his arrest for the murder.

When the case was called, Walters entered the dock without the slightest symptom of fear or hesitation. His appearance was considerably in his favour. Although somewhat in the decline of life, he seemed to be hardly more than forty years of age. His face was rather prepossessing than otherwise, at least at first sight ; and of this he was fully aware, and had composed his features into a certain appearance of *bonhomie*, which certainly told in his favour. He had been too often in court not to know the value of a good command of countenance, and he maintained his almost through the whole day's proceedings. But to the close observer, that organ equally expressive with the face, the hand, told a very different tale : not for an instant was it quiet. The fingers moved without purpose, and were continually employed on some object, evidently without the control of the brain, partaking of the nervous fear and irritability of the mind, without the slightest restraint from reason. He surveyed the court with apparent calmness, and took not the slightest notice of the hum of voices or the expression of curiosity in the faces of the crowd present. When his fellow-prisoner entered the dock, he cast on

him for a moment an angry expression of countenance, but it quickly vanished ; nor did he again turn his face towards him during the remainder of the trial.

When Duke first entered the dock, his appearance presented a marked difference from that of Walters. An expression of shame, annoyance, and possibly fear, was distinguishable on his homely features, which made anything but a favourable impression on the beholders. He soon, however, somewhat rallied, for on looking round the court, he perceived those in it who gave him considerable consolation. He had already been informed how excellent was his case, and now the expression of perfect satisfaction and confidence in the face of his wife and witnesses completely reassured him, if for a moment his courage had somewhat failed. First, there was the wife of his bosom, Jemima, looking perfectly happy, her hair appearing even redder than usual, her one eye beaming on him with more love in it than any ordinary woman could express with two, and her size looking larger than usual, possibly from the somewhat slim figures of those of her friends who surrounded her.

First, and nearest to her on one side, stood Master Perkins, specially got up for the occasion. The date of the trial was contemporaneous with the re-establishment of shoe-blacks in London, and he had formed the acquaintance of a lad who had quitted bad ways, and had taken to that method of earning a livelihood. This boy he employed not only to polish his boots, but to brush his clothes as well. The last operation required considerable artist-like delicacy of touch ; for although Mrs.

Duke had, with great ingenuity, mended certain rents which, for the sake of propriety alone, urgently required repair, and sewn on certain buttons in important situations, still the drapery of the young gentleman was of the most delicate and fragile description, such, in fact, as no rude or inexperienced hand should be allowed to approach. His boots also were polished, till they almost resembled the surface of a mirror. Nor was that all ; there were two fissures in them, which plainly allowed the skin of his feet—for he despised socks—to be seen beneath them ; into these holes the shoe-black skilfully inserted the blacking-brush, and then carefully turned it round, so that the blacking should spread well underneath the leather, and he then applied the polishing-brush over all, and brought both skin and leather up to the same point of beauty, so that a few yards off it was impossible for any but those gifted with extraordinary power of vision to detect that Master Perkins had not on a sound pair of boots, with the strong possibility of a clean pair of socks beneath them. But the most lavish expenditure of time had been spent on getting up his face and hair. The amount of soap he had used in this operation might have been deemed, with perfect justice, extravagant. His face shone with a lustre scarcely second to his boots. He had also with the soap carefully smoothed down his hair, till it absolutely stuck to his head. His countenance he had composed to a pious, chapel-going expression ; and altogether, as he stood by Mrs. Duke's side, he was as nice a boy, in appearance, as any mother might wish to own.

On the other side of Mrs. Duke, leaning his head back against the wall, was Trivet, the blind basketmaker. His appearance was certainly most respectable. The poor fellow, notwithstanding his infirmity, had really a noble expression of countenance, through which the natural piety and resignation of the man was fully discernible. His wife was not present ; she was too ill to leave her bed. Master Perkins had conducted Trivet to the court, and in doing so had increased the good opinion that those who did not know him began to entertain of him.

Near the blind man stood Gobby. He was quietly and neatly dressed ; there was little in his countenance calling for remark ; he had evidently come there to give his evidence honestly, and he was fully prepared to do so. In a different part of the court was the policeman who had seen Duke at the time of the altercation between the two women, as well as the toll-taker at Vauxhall Bridge.

There was also another person in court, whose presence caused so much sorrow and shame in the breast of Mrs. Duke as to neutralise to some extent the satisfaction she otherwise felt ; this was Mrs. O'Flaherty—and drunk too ; at least, so much so as to make her conversation most loud and objectionable, without incapacitating her from moving about. She occupied herself till she was turned out of court by informing the bystanders that she had come to “ give evidence for Jemmy Ducks, one of the kindest-hearted little fellows that ever lived. He no more committed that murder than she did, and

she was willing to take her oath of it, and she'd do it too. A better little fellow she never knew, although he was married to that one-eyed gunner in petticoats, on the other side of the court." She then went on to explain her opinion of Mrs. Duke so explicitly, as well as so loudly, that she was forthwith handed out of court by two policemen.

As for Walters, there was but one person in court who seemed interested in him, and that was a little, poorly dressed, delicate-looking woman—his wife. She looked at him but seldom, but wept incessantly—not clamorously, or in such a manner as to claim attention, but so subdued and calmly that she appeared almost to try to conceal the noise her falling tears might make in their descent. From time to time, but very rarely, he glanced at her, and then the forced expression of candour and innocence on his countenance appeared to subside, and a look of affection the wretch could hardly be imagined capable of feeling supplied its place. These occasions lasted but for a moment, and again his whole attention was riveted on the proceedings of the court.

It is not our intention to give a minute, detailed description of the trial, as it would only be to a great extent a repetition of facts already stated. Mrs. Duke had obtained the services of counsel, and the junior barrister present was requested by the judge to act on behalf of Walters. The brief for the defence was placed in his hands, and he hurriedly glanced his eye over it. But rapid as had been his investigation, it was sufficient to

prove to him the hopeless nature of the task he had undertaken. Doubts, and doubts alone, were all he could bring forward in defence of his client. These, it is true, were important, but still not sufficiently so to offer the slightest probability of a favourable verdict, unless supported by material facts, and of these there did not appear to be one. He had only to rely on the chapter of accidents bringing forward something in favour of the prisoner, and endeavour to clear up the many mysterious points in the case as he best could.

Nothing, however, occurred in the course of the trial tending to relieve Walters from the heavy accusation against him, nor could his counsel in his really talented cross-examination elicit anything in his favour ; on the contrary, on more than one occasion, the answers his questions drew forth had more an injurious tendency than otherwise.

On Duke's side, on the contrary, the cross-examination of the witnesses was certainly favourable to him. Not an adverse circumstance, more than is already known, was brought against him ; the principal cause of suspicion was the fact of the money of which Mr. Mostyn had been robbed having been found in his house, and although it had been voluntarily returned by the prisoner's wife, it was proved to have been without either his consent or knowledge, and not till a heavy reward had been offered for the robber and murderer.

The defence was then commenced, and the sole object of Duke's counsel was to prove an alibi. This appeared easy enough by the brief, but was hardly so easy in perform-

ance. Duke's attorney, not knowing her character, had subpoenaed Mrs. O'Flaherty, who had seen the prisoner in Smith's Rents the night of the murder. Mrs. O'Flaherty, it will be remembered, had been turned out of court, and she had improved the occasion from that time till she was called for examination in a neighbouring gin-shop. When she appeared in court she was so thoroughly intoxicated that the judge would not allow her evidence to be taken, and she was sent ignominiously away.

The next witness was George Perkins. The oath was administered to him, and he mounted the step of the dock in a quiet, self-possessed manner, as if impressed with the solemn nature of the proceedings, but still not afraid. The object of his evidence was to show that on the night of the murder he had witnessed the row between Mrs. Duke and Mrs. O'Flaherty, and had seen Duke attempt to separate them previous to the appearance of the policeman. As far as that went, his evidence was clear and lucid enough, but unfortunately he went beyond it, and showed his powers of memory as well as volubility to be so great that the counsel for the defence became perfectly terrified at the behaviour of his own witness, and attempted to stop him, although for some time without effect.

When at last he had succeeded in making Master Perkins understand that his evidence had been thoroughly satisfactory, and that he did not want to hear any more, the cross-examination began.

Counsel. "I suppose, Master Perkins, that, as you have no doubt been well and properly brought up, you

understand what is meant by the moral obligation of an oath."

Perkins. "Yes, sir, of course I do."

Counsel. "Will you have the kindness to explain it?"

Perkins. "You take the book in your right hand and swear to speak the truth, and the whole truth, and you then kiss the book. I have seen them taken hundreds of times."

Counsel. "That is all very well as far as it goes; but is that the full meaning of the moral obligation of an oath?"

Perkins. "No, sir; if you have a glove on your right hand you must take it off."

Counsel. "Very well; now I am satisfied. But you mentioned just now you had seen oaths taken in a court of law hundreds of times. Might I ask on what occasions?"

Perkins (*somewhat uneasy*). "Oh, I don't remember exactly on what occasions."

Counsel. "Nor in what courts?"

Perkins. "Well, in different courts; Westminster and Lambeth principally."

Counsel. "Indeed! Now let me ask you seriously a question. As you appear to understand perfectly the moral obligation of an oath, did you ever, on any one occasion, hear them sworn when you were the defendant?"

Perkins. "I don't understand you."

Counsel. "In plainer English then, were you not once charged with robbery—about a handkerchief or something of that sort?"

Perkins (doggedly). "I ain't obliged to answer that question, and I sha'n't."

Counsel. "Pardon me, but you must. I am sure his lordship will inform you I am perfectly in order."

Judge. "You must answer the question."

Perkins. "Well, then, yes, I was, but it was more or an accident than anything else."

Counsel. "I should be sorry to let an accidental circumstance injure you, and I will not say more about it. But, tell me, were you not a second time convicted?"

Perkins. "Yes ; but I was driven to that by distress."

Counsel. "Well, then, as that was the case, I will not press that question ; but, candidly, were you not a third time convicted?"

Perkins. "Yes ; but that was to screen another boy."

Counsel. "Most disinterested behaviour on your part, certainly, and I will not dwell on that conviction ; but were you not a fourth time convicted?"

Perkins (moodily). "Yes."

Counsel. "And a fifth?"

Perkins (penitentially). "Yes."

Counsel. "And a sixth?"

Perkins (triumphantly). "No. The magistrate said he should hardly be justified, considering the helpless state of intoxication of the prosecutor, in accepting his evidence without further proof, and he therefore gave the prisoner the benefit of the doubt ; and so I was honourably acquitted."

Counsel. "I sincerely congratulate you, Master Perkins. You may stand down."

Master Perkins accordingly did stand down, and two minutes afterwards, with a facility peculiar to his profession, had made his way not only through a densely crowded court, but to the bottom of Ludgate Hill as well.

The next witness called was George Wilson, and Gobby walked deliberately up, took the oath, and mounted the witness-box. His evidence went to prove that he had seen Duke about ten o'clock, and that about four o'clock in the morning, when he had accompanied Mrs. Duke across the Rents to her house after the death of the soldier's wife, he had heard Duke's voice, which he knew perfectly well, asking who was there when she opened the door, and that Mrs. Duke had replied, "Me, love."

In cross-examination Gobby was asked whether he had not been in trouble himself. He attempted for some minutes to evade the question, but on the judge informing him it must be answered, he replied candidly and boldly, "Yes, I have been, and I worked out my time, and have, since I returned to England, gained an honest living, and have never wronged any one of a shilling. I am an unlearned man, and was never taught better when I was a boy, or I might have been as respectable as you, sir. There is Mr. Briggs, the inspector of police. I challenged him to say one word against me."

The judge asked the inspector if he knew the witness, and he replied that he had known him by sight in Westminster for some years as a very inoffensive, honest man, who gained a livelihood by selling children's toys about the streets.

Gobby here left the box, his evidence having apparently made a considerable and favourable effect on the jury.

The next witness examined in defence of Duke was the blind basketmaker. It was with some difficulty he was got into the witness-box, but when once there he gave his evidence clearly and to the point. He proved having sat beside Duke's bed conversing with him from midnight till two o'clock in the morning on the night of the murder. In his cross-examination he was severely questioned as to how he knew the time, as well as to his certainty of the particular night, all of which he answered clearly and distinctly, although the counsel for the prosecution tried the usual measures employed by the Old Bailey bar to shake his evidence.

"You are, I believe," said the counsel, "a basket-maker; have you any other means of gaining a livelihood?"

"None whatever," said Trivet, "with the exception of my wife assisting me by working for an army clothier when she is strong enough."

"I did not allude to that. I wish to know if you do not also get money by asking for charity in the public streets?"

"Certainly not," said Trivet, indignantly; "I never asked for charity in the streets in my life, although, God knows, I have frequently from poverty been almost under the necessity of doing so. I am no more a street beggar," he continued, still more angrily, "than yourself, sir. Ask the police if ever they saw me ask a farthing of anybody."

“There is no occasion to do that,” said the counsel, more good-naturedly, “if you deny it; but I am instructed that you are in the habit of relying on charity for your subsistence.”

“If you mean, sir, that charitable people have sometimes relieved me at home—I mean those that know me—I admit it to be true, and I am most grateful to them for it; but when a man is blind, and has a sick wife and five helpless children, he may sometimes receive help without it shaming him much.”

And so the jury and all present evidently thought, from the expression of their countenances, and the approving murmur which arose from all parts of the court. The counsel himself apparently thought so also, for he sat down without asking Trivet any further questions.

The next witness was the policeman, who swore to seeing Duke the evening of the murder at the altercation between his wife and Mrs. O’Flaherty. He even went beyond that, and stated that about two o’clock in the morning he entered the “Rents” to see that all was quiet, and looked into Duke’s house, as the door was open. He then distinctly heard Duke’s voice in conversation with some one, who he believed was the last witness. On being questioned whether he was sufficiently acquainted with Duke to recognise his voice, he replied that he was; that he had frequently conversed with him, and did not consider it possible he could be mistaken.

The last witness examined in Duke’s favour was the toll-collector at Vauxhall Bridge, who swore positively to

seeing him go through the gates about five o'clock in the morning.

Duke's counsel now asked the judge whether he thought there was any case against his client to go to the jury. He submitted that an alibi had been established in the clearest manner, and that not a shadow of suspicion of murder could rest on the prisoner for whom he appeared. The judge applied to the counsel for the prosecution if he had any objection to make, who replied that he had none. He had brought forward all the evidence he had against the prisoner, and if the judge and jury considered the alibi sufficiently established, no one would rejoice more sincerely than himself; at the same time there had been no explanation of the bank notes having been found in Duke's house. The judge reminded the counsel that all the evidence went simply to prove that as soon as the notes were found Duke's wife had immediately placed them in the hands of the police, but how they came to be concealed there there was no evidence adduced which directly tended against the prisoner. The counsel merely remarked that he was entirely in the hands of the court, and the jury expressed their opinion that the alibi had been already proved, and that not a shadow of suspicion could rest on Duke as having been concerned in the murder, upon which the judge immediately ordered him to be dismissed.

Duke left the court directly in company with his wife and friends.

On Duke's release from the dock, for the first time during the trial did Walters's firmness forsake him. He

had watched attentively the course of the trial, and had paid great attention to the witnesses as they were successively examined, without expressing in his countenance the slightest annoyance or fear. He had heard the most damning proofs brought against him, he had seen one by one the cab-plates, his hat, the silver articles, and other *pièces de conviction* brought forward and compared and examined, and then handed to the jury, without a remark, but the removal of his fellow-prisoner from his side for the time completely unnerved him. He looked for some moments at the spot on which Duke had stood with a sort of bewildered air. While he had been there Walters appeared to think the danger was divided, but when his fellow-prisoner was released the danger seemed all his own. But the effect of Duke's removal did not act solely on Walters. The little woman, who had been silently crying during the whole of the proceedings, now broke out into a loud irrepressible fit of sobbing, so much so as to disturb for the moment the business of the court. Her cry reached Walters, and he turned his head towards the spot from whence the sound proceeded. A policeman at that instant advanced to lead her from the court, and as she went she for a moment raised her eyes to the prisoner. Walters, brutal as he was, was powerless against that glance; and as he looked at her his lips quivered and his eyes filled with tears. The next minute she had left the court, and Walters, with a sudden effort, recovered his self-possession, but not so completely as he had hitherto shown. It was easy to perceive his courage had fled, and that his

present bearing was perfectly artificial ; nor did he recover himself entirely during the remainder of the proceedings.

The case for the defence being now ended, the counsel for the prosecution replied, and the judge proceeded to sum up. He cautioned the jury not to allow themselves to be influenced in their verdict by any out-of-door rumours which might have reached them, but to decide solely on the evidence they had heard. He then brought forward in detail all the several points sworn to by the different witnesses. He recapitulated the evidence almost verbatim, showing, as he proceeded, its different bearings against the prisoner, and with even-handed justice pointed to the many parts which appeared obscure. He dwelt especially on the necessity of their seeing every point clearly, and if on any one they were in doubt, they would give the prisoner the benefit of that doubt. He would now, he said, leave it in the hands of the jury, who, he was satisfied, would return a verdict, without favour or prejudice, according as their consciences should dictate.

The jury turned to consult together. The eye of Walters watched them with intense anxiety. He trembled at the idea of their debating over the subject in the jury box, and breathlessly looked at the foreman as he turned to speak, hoping it would be to say they wished to retire. He was terribly mistaken. "Gentlemen, are you agreed in your verdict?" "We are;" and they immediately returned a verdict of guilty. The wretched man now gazed for a moment longer, hoping it would be

followed by a recommendation to mercy, but not a word was uttered.

The judge now rose and addressed the prisoner, who stood stupefied and aghast:—

“Theodore Walters, after a long and patient trial, you have been found guilty by the jury of one of the most infamous murders it has ever been my unfortunate duty to try. In that verdict I perfectly agree; indeed, it would in my opinion have been impossible for a jury to have arrived at any other conclusion. You entered the house of an aged and helpless man, and, in the dead of the night, you slew him in the most barbarous manner. But that was not the whole of your crime; it appears you had already robbed him of silver plate to a considerable amount. That many obscurities still exist, and that you might have had an accomplice whom you do not choose to name, I admit; still, of the murder having been perpetrated by you, or with your assistance, there cannot be the shadow of a doubt. But your infamy has gone still deeper, although, doubtless, unknown to the jury. You volunteered your evidence, in the hope of escaping the punishment richly your due, to inculcate as the principal the man who stood beside you in that dock, and who in the clearest manner was proved to be totally innocent of the crime. You thus attempted a second murder, equally infamous with the first. Providentially, you contradicted yourself so grossly that the Crown refused to accept your evidence; still the infamy of your behaviour remains a stain upon you. It is my painful duty to pass on you the sentence of death, but, at the same time, I cannot

hide from myself that you most richly deserve it. Let me beseech you to pass the few days which remain to you in this world in making, by sincere repentance, your peace with Heaven, for on earth there remains for you not one spark of hope."

The judge, in the usual form, then proceeded to pass the sentence of death, and the prisoner, utterly stupefied, helpless, and speechless, was removed from the dock by two officers.

That night was one of sincere rejoicing in the house of Mrs. Duke. She had managed to control her feelings to a very considerable degree till she had arrived at home, but she then went into strong, very strong hysterics, which lasted for the space of half an hour. She then recovered herself, and proceeded to kill the fatted calf in honour of her husband's acquittal. Gobby and the blind basketmaker and his wife were invited to the feast, which might be called magnificent, when it is remembered that the expense she had been put to in defending her husband had reduced all her available assets to the sum of eleven shillings; but not otherwise, for it consisted of tea, porter, bread and butter, and saveloys. Soon the tongues of the whole party were loosened, not even exempting that of Gobby. Over and over again were the various events of the day brought forward, and as frequently did the compliments of the guests shower on Mrs. Duke, not only for her admirable behaviour during the whole of the proceedings of that day, but also for the exertions she had made in getting up the defence. Duke, at least twenty times in the course of the evening,

rose from his chair for the purpose of embracing his wife, who, he said, had behaved more like a mother to him than anything else. The blind man also gave much good and pious consolation on the occasion. Once when Mrs. Duke naturally spoke of the low-water mark to which the expenses of the defence had reduced their finances, he became really eloquent. He reminded her that Heaven always acted just according to that which was best for us, and he had no doubt that sooner or later she would be amply rewarded for all the trouble and sorrow she had undergone. He illustrated his arguments by a circumstance which had occurred to himself. A large builder in the neighbourhood had charitably given him several bricklayers' baskets to make; in fact, was one of his best customers. A fire one night broke out in the builder's yard, and a vast quantity of materials was consumed. Trivet said he thought when he heard of the fire that his fortune would be made in replacing the baskets destroyed; but, to his utter disappointment, although much valuable property had been burnt, not a basket was injured. However, he resolved to bear his loss with resignation to the best of his ability, and he did so, and what was the result? Three days afterwards, a certain benevolent lady sent for him, and gave him all her kitchen chairs to bottom. "So you see," he concluded, "that sooner or later we are sure to be recompensed, if we behave honestly, for any misfortune or disappointment which may happen to us."

The conversation continued in the same comfortable moral tone for some time. All seemed imbued with a

sense of the justice of Providence, and Gobby even, ordinarily most taciturn, added his experience in support of the idea. He narrated a circumstance which occurred to him some two years before, which he considered bore remarkably on the subject. "I had that night," he said, gone out with my first venture of dolls' bedsteads. I had chosen the Tottenham Court Road, and had placed myself beside the pavement near the corner of the second street on the left-hand side beyond the chapel. On one side of me was a poor woman with stay and boot laces, and on the other a lame man who sold coloured prints for children, and it ain't a bad-paying lodge either; I've tried it myself, and it answered capitally. Well, I wasn't badly placed, being near a gas-lamp, but the man with the prints was nearer to it than I was. He'd got a large umbrella which was open, with the point on the ground, and the prints placed inside it all the way round, and a capital way it was too, for he kept turning the umbrella round so that every picture, one after the other, was brought to the light. And a precious good business he made of it too, I can tell you; but as I sold pretty well I had no right to be jealous of it. Business altogether that night was good, and the poor woman with her stay-laces, who had got a bad cough, and a little girl standing by her side, did as well as either of us, considering. We went on in this way comfortably enough, and doing well, when a lady passed us and was on the point of going up the street, when she appeared suddenly to remember something, and she turned back to where I was standing, and stretching past

me to the woman with the laces, asked for one, and offered the penny at the same time. She could not get near the woman because there was another choosing some laces just in front of her. Well, as I did not like the poor creature should lose a customer, I stepped back to give more room like, when a master butcher in his cart, with a pal with him, came driving very sharp along the road. They evidently, from the manner they were singing, had been drinking and was very fresh. I looked round to get out of their way, when one of them nudges the other on the arm and points to me. The other, who was driving, makes bolt at me, and drives smack into the middle of the bedsteads as they was slung at my back. Fortunately they did not hurt me myself, but when I heard my bedsteads smash and rattle, I was precious savage, I can tell you, and I turned to go after them, although it would have been useless, as they had such a fast horse. Well, instead of pulling up and begging my pardon, or seeing if I was hurt, they first whipped their horse into a gallop, and then turned round and made a long nose at me. But they caught it in their turn. While looking after me they did not see which way they was going, and they ran against a lamp-post, about a couple of hundred yards ahead. They was both pitched out, but the one who had nudged the other on the arm to drive at me, fell on his skull and was taken up dead. When I heard of it outside the doctor's shop to which he had been taken, I said, There's Heaven's justice on that. I had not any more spirits to try and sell that night, so I walked straight home. Well, will

you believe it, ma'am?—but perhaps you won't, as it appears almost like a miracle,—but when I took off my bedsteads and examined them the damage done to the whole was not more than fourpence, which is the more wonderful as I believe dolls' bedsteads is the most delicate things in nature."

The auditors all admitted the justice of the butcher's sentence and the saving of the dolls' bedsteads, and the conversation was beginning to assume a general tone, when the company was increased by the arrival of Master Perkins. He was considerably changed in appearance, for the afternoon had been very wet, and the streets were very muddy, and the whole of the gloss for which he had been so remarkable in the morning had vanished, and a considerable layer of dirt supplied its place.

He also looked somewhat cowed when he found himself in the presence of Mrs. Duke, whom he held in high veneration. She had heard his examination, and although she was aware his mode of life had not been exactly what it ought, still she could hardly, he thought, have been cognizant of the number of his misdeeds. Her kind reception soon, however, set him at his ease, and he readily joined in the conversation. He informed his friends of the verdict, which they had not yet heard, and moreover told them of Walters's offer to turn Queen's evidence and inculcate Duke, all of which he had heard from a friend, for he himself had hung about the purlieus of the court, being ashamed to enter it again.

It would be difficult to express the astonishment and indignation of the party when they received this information. They for some time could hardly realise it, so diabolical did it appear; and when they did, their astonishment for some time kept them dumb. Presently Gobby asked what had become of Walters's wife. Perkins could only inform him that she had been compelled to leave the court before the trial had terminated, and he had not heard of her since. "After all," said Gobby, "that poor woman is much to be pitied."

Gobby was right; it would have been difficult to find a human being more worthy of pity than Mrs. Walters was that day. A spell had kept her in court till the fact of Duke's acquittal had impressed her with the really desperate position of her husband, and her feelings then had gained such an ascendancy over her that she was obliged to be led from it. To be so near to her husband, and to hear the candid remarks expressed by the bystanders and those that left the court as to his chance of escape, became so painful to her that she left the vicinity of the building and turned her steps towards Smithfield, not only without intention, but utterly ignorant of the path she was taking. She wandered on and around, totally indifferent to the rain, which was falling in torrents, and in a short time she was thoroughly drenched. Not for a moment did she think of turning her footsteps homewards. Night came on and still she walked on, turning into the different streets surrounding Newgate, never getting far away nor yet advancing towards it. To describe the state of her mind correctly

would be impossible. She was bewildered, yet she felt keenly that a terrible misfortune no power could avert was hanging over her. She sought consolation, not by reasoning, but solely by tears; yet, although they came abundantly, she experienced no relief. They seemed simply to have the effect of keeping her grief from accumulating. As the darkness increased she came nearer to the prison, and as she did so she began to feel the necessity of some certainty as to the course events were taking; but how to obtain it? She thought she would go nearer still, and listen to the conversation of some of the groups of individuals she should be sure to find there. She made the attempt, and saw a group of men close to the court-house standing in earnest conversation. She approached somewhat nearer to them, but her courage failed her and she stopped short. Anxiety to know the result of the trial increased within her, but her dread of what it too probably was kept her for some moments motionless. She then suddenly started off and walked rapidly past the group of men, approaching them so closely as to touch them, with the sense of hearing sharpened to its utmost. She heard their conversation, but did not understand it. They were evidently not talking of anything which concerned her.

When she had passed the group about a hundred yards she stopped, and again returned towards the court-house, but this time slowly and loiteringly. "He's booked, at any rate," said a man near her, "and richly he deserves it." Two or three rapid steps that she took

carried her out of ear-shot. Her tears dried up in the terror she felt. Still they might have been speaking of somebody else. "Shall you come to see him hung?" said one boy passing to another. "That I will," was the reply; "even if it rains like this." Presently she received another confirmation, this time from a policeman, and all doubt, as well as all hope, vanished.

She now turned from the spot tearless and bent her steps homewards. She crouched down from the rain, but made no hurry to avoid it; on the contrary, her walk was exceedingly slow. She arrived at last in the Rents, and the feeble, shaking, miserable creature, whose garments, saturated with rain, clung to her as she passed along to a house at the end of the court, was the once happy wife of Theodore Walters.

We must now return to Duke and his guests. The conversation had continued as to the probable time of Walters's execution, and other subjects connected with it, for some time, when Gobby again said, "But what will become of the fellow's wife? I am sorry for her, for she's a harmless creature enough." Nobody, of course, could think of any other end but the parish, for her son, who was now out of a job, showed her not the slightest affection or attention.

"I wonder if she has come home?" said Mrs. Duke. "I wish, Perkins, you would go and see, if only for curiosity's sake."

Master Perkins did as he was desired. He first looked out, but saw no light in Mrs. Walters's windows. He then went to the house and found the door open.

He asked a neighbour if she had seen Mrs. Walters, and she told him she had seen her open her door about half an hour since, apparently quite wet through, but she knew nothing more of her. With this news Perkins returned, and the conversation immediately turned on what condition she might be in. "I'll tell you what it is," said Gobby; "we've none of us any right to bear malice against that poor thing, whatever we may do to her husband. I shall go and see if she wants anything." So saying, he left the house and proceeded to Walters's. He also found the street-door open, and he knocked at the door of the room on the ground floor, in which he knew Mrs. Walters was accustomed to sit. He received no answer, and he turned the handle of the door and looked into the room. At first he could perceive nothing, but presently, as the shutters were not closed, he could dimly make out a female form seated in a chair. He spoke to it twice, and the second time he received an inarticulate answer. He approached, and placing his hand on her shoulder found it was wet and cold, but the figure said nothing.

Gobby now returned to Duke's and related his adventures. With one accord the whole party rose and proceeded to Walters's, Duke carrying a candle with him, which he shielded from the weather with his hand. They found Mrs. Walters hardly conscious. "Why don't you get a fire and dry yourself?" said Mrs. Duke; "you'll catch your death of cold if you remain so." She received no answer, for rain, fatigue, sorrow, and hunger had completely exhausted the poor creature.

Want of energy was no fault in the character of Mrs. Duke, and she soon collected some fuel and made a fire.

"Now," she said to Mrs. Walters, "make an effort and rouse yourself. Get a candle (I can't leave you mine) and make yourself a cup of tea."

"I can't," whispered the poor woman, now thawing from the glow of the fire; "I have not any in the house, and I have not a farthing in the world."

Mrs. Duke was not proof against this, and she immediately advanced a shilling from the few yet remaining to her. Perkins was sent for a candle, and they all left the house. About half an hour later, Mrs. Duke was seen carrying a cup of hot tea, with a plate of bread and butter on the top of it, covering the whole with her apron, and going towards Mrs. Walters's. "There, my good soul," she said, "take that, and I will call and see you to-morrow."

She placed the tea upon the table, and was about leaving the room, when Mrs. Walters rose from her chair and said—her eyes filling with tears the while—"He was always a kind husband to me, ma'am."

"Very likely, ma'am," said Mrs. Duke, as she left the room, silently wishing she had that kind husband in her clutches at that moment.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THEODORE WALTERS'S LAST DAYS.



THE next morning Duke and his wife had a striking proof of the truth of the blind basketmaker's remark, that Providence never allowed those who were really honest to remain without some compensation for any misery they may have innocently suffered. They had risen at a somewhat late hour, and at their breakfast they talked over their present position and prospects, and sad enough they appeared. All their little savings had vanished, and they had to begin the world again without capital and without friends, at least such as were able to offer them any material assistance. Again, they would very likely suffer from annoyances caused by the late trial and the unfortunate possession of the stolen poultry. The latter had especially got wind in the only neighbourhood Duke was accustomed to work in, and customers would hardly be likely to deal with a man who was known so lately to have left a prison, in which he had been incarcerated for an act of dishonesty, although in fact it was merely his innate simplicity which had got him into trouble. If he began again in the fish-hawking line, he must choose another beat in which he was unknown, but where to

find one puzzled him extremely. Besides, he had sold his barrow, and he had not the money to buy another, hardly enough, in fact, to procure the thick woollen apron which is the sign of a respectable costermonger in that line of business. What to do they knew not. They talked over every probable means they could think of to obtain an honest livelihood, but without success ; and they were on the point of sinking into a state of deep despondency, when some one tapped at their door, and a gentlemanly-looking man entered the room. As soon as he had assured himself they were the persons he wished to find, he told them he had come from the office of the solicitors for the prosecution on the part of the heir-at-law of the late Mr. Mostyn. He assured them how grieved the prosecutor felt at the inconvenience they had been subjected to, and also told them he was willing to make them some compensation if he could clearly see in what way it could be done to their advantage. He then inquired what were their present prospects, that he might carry back with him some definite information on the subject.

Mrs. Duke, who was spokeswoman on the occasion, candidly told him all ; how they had spent the whole of their money, and the great difficulty they had in again commencing the world. The gentleman then asked them if they wished to remain in Westminster, as he thought it probable, considering the notoriety the whole affair had occasioned, they might like to live in some other locality. Mrs. Duke replied, they had not yet sufficiently thought over the matter, but at the same time

she imagined it possible, if they could clearly see their way, that they should like to move.

"Should you," said the gentleman, "like to emigrate? I ask that question because our client has great connections with Sydney, in New South Wales, and he thought it probable that, as your husband is an expert poulterer, there might be an opening for him there, and he would give him letters to several of his correspondents in that city, requesting them to deal with him and assist him in every way they could."

Both Duke and his wife were so astonished at the offer, they knew not what answer to make to it. Their only knowledge of New South Wales was from reports that had reached them of criminals having formerly been sent there, and they could not understand how a voyage there could in any way benefit them. The gentleman then explained that Sydney was a very large and flourishing city, containing a wealthy population, who, as such, were likely to be good friends to a poulterer who thoroughly understood his business. "Understand me," he said, "our client has no wish you should go there against your own inclination, he merely suggested it as a means by which he considers you might be able to make a good deal of money, and in which he might possibly have it in his power to assist you greatly in forming a connection. I tell you what you had better do. Turn over the project in your own minds during the next fortnight ; I will then call on you again for your answer. In the meantime our client told me to present you with this ten-pound note ; and also to tell you he had set aside fifty pounds more to

start you in any way of business you like, provided he approved the plan you decide on. I should also tell you, in case you resolve on going to Australia, that he will not only provide you both with an outfit for the voyage, but procure for you a free passage as well. I shall now bid you good-bye, and you will see me again this day fortnight. Till then make yourselves as comfortable as you can ; but take my advice, do not tell anybody of the conversation which has passed between us." So saying, he bade them good-bye, leaving Duke and his wife not a little astonished at his visit.

As soon as their surprise had somewhat subsided they began to feel the gratitude due to Providence for its mercy towards them. They did not pray, but they, without clearly understanding the meaning of the phrase, resolved to make an offering of good works, and visit the wretched woman who was soon to be a widow, and whose husband had acted so infamously towards them. They took with them the few remaining shillings they had, without changing the ten-pound note, and proceeded to her house. They found her in the same clothes, and almost in the same position, they had left her in the evening before. They spoke kindly to her, but could offer her no consolation, as her terrible position precluded the possibility of hope as far as regarded her husband. After a short time the wretched, inert little woman began somewhat to recover her self-possession. She told them she had already sold every article of furniture she had, to assist her husband, with the exception of the few pieces that remained in her room, and that

she was utterly destitute. Mrs. Duke then made a fire, prepared her breakfast for her, and then impressed on her the necessity of exerting herself in her own behalf. She gave Mrs. Walters also some money, and spoke what sentences of comfort she could to her, but they fell cold and powerless on the poor creature's brain. When Mrs. Duke left she promised she would visit her again the next day, and in fact resolved in her own mind not to lose sight of her at any rate till after the execution of Walters.

Duke now conversed with his wife on the propriety of making some compensation to the blind man, Gobby, and the boy, but, with the exception of the latter, Mrs. Duke proposed they should do it later, as the gentleman had advised them not to let their affairs at present be known, and if it got abroad that they were in the possession of money, it might raise suspicion that they had received some assistance, the more so as it was believed in the Rents they were at low-water mark in relation to money matters. With respect to Perkins, they determined to give him his meals daily till they could do something better for him; but they both saw that the only effectual way of benefiting that young gentleman was to get him from the Rents, as the associates he had there were sure to bring him again into trouble.

We must now return to the wretched culprit in the condemned cell. During the night which followed his sentence he remained almost in a stupefied state, which gradually subsided into a disturbed sleep. The next morning he appeared more composed, and after break-

fast he entered into conversation with the warder in his cell, for till his execution he was not for a moment to be left alone. He told the warder he had no doubt he should be reprieved, for although he acknowledged he was implicated in the robbery, he had had nothing whatever to do with the murder. He had hitherto kept silent, as he did not like to betray any one if he could help it ; but to be hung for another was not a thing he would do to please anybody ! He then stopped short, and appeared somewhat confused, for his attempt to throw the blame on poor Duke, who had so triumphantly proved his innocence of the murder, came to his memory, and he was fully aware that the warder was acquainted with the circumstance.

He again became silent, and commenced turning over in his mind in what manner he could escape the death he had been sentenced to. Without the slightest reason for hope, he was most hopeful. He could not realise the certainty of his fate, and he felt convinced he should escape it. But when he began to consider what plan he should adopt, what excuse he should frame, he soon became utterly bewildered. Not that he lacked invention, but every plan as he framed it he threw aside as impracticable. There was only one which dwelt with any constancy on his mind, and that was to accuse Meffy. He considered it would be easy to arrange such an account of the transaction as would throw the blame on him, still he felt so great a terror of that man's deep cunning, that he resolved only to use it in the last emergency. He never for a moment thought of casting the blame on his

son, although from his silence he believed him to be concealed in some place of perfect safety. Singular as it may appear in so thorough-paced a scoundrel, he even feared the possibility of his son's reputation being injured by suspicion being cast on him, notwithstanding the fact of his being personally free from danger.

Some days passed over, and still Walters had decided on no settled plan, although his hope of escape seemed greater as the probability of it grew less. Occasionally the terrible calculation came before him of how many days had elapsed since the trial, and how few there were remaining before his execution, and then he became terribly depressed.

One morning the sheriffs called on him to ask if he had any revelation to make relative to the murder, for it was apparent to them that some other individual had been concerned in it. They told him that, if he could prove that he personally had had no hand in the murder, it was more than probable that his life would be spared, although they were not authorised to make any statement on the subject. Here was for him, indeed, a tempting offer, and he reflected for a few minutes on it. While doing so, he remembered that only four days stood between him and the execution, and in a fit of desperation he said he would candidly tell all. He informed them that the murder had been perpetrated by a man of bad character of the name of Meffy, who lodged in Duke's house, and that he (Walters) had assisted him in hiding the plate in the chimney of the house in Anchor Court, Brick Lane. He rapidly ~~invented~~ the whole cir-

cumstances necessary to implicate Meffy in it, but in his hurry he made so many discrepancies that the sheriffs utterly disbelieved all he said. They reminded him of his statement about Duke, and its entire falsehood, and hoped he was not again trying to implicate an innocent man in his crime. Walters assured them solemnly he now stated the truth, and if they would take the trouble to inquire into Meffy's previous character they would find he was fully capable of a crime of the kind.

The sheriffs left him, strongly doubting his statement, but at the same time resolving to make full inquiries on the subject. They found it was true that Meffy's character was far from a good one, but that he was by no means a person to take part in a crime of such a brutal description as the murder of Mr. Mostyn, but was rather addicted to petty acts of swindling and cheating, and that there was not on record anything of a ruffianly character against him. A detective also called at Duke's house to inquire after Meffy, and was told that about two months since he had left London to visit an uncle to whom he was much attached, and that they had not heard one word of him since ; moreover, they did not believe that the slightest acquaintance existed between Walters and Meffy, as both Duke and his wife had frequently seen them pass each other in the "Rents" without a word of recognition. Other inquiries the police made in following up Walters's statement were, equally unsuccessful, and the sheriffs, convinced that the story told them was false, gave up any further investigations on the subject.

The conclusion they had arrived at was communicated

to the prisoner the next morning, and the hope he had nourished was destroyed. There now only remained three days till the execution, and the terrible nature of his position became painfully apparent to Walters. When the chaplain, who had been unremitting in his attentions, saw him that day, the wretched creature begged to be allowed to join in prayer with him. His wish was accorded, and he prayed for some time with the clergyman, apparently with great devoutness. When it was over, he requested him to remain a little longer with him, as his presence gave him great consolation. In the course of their interview the clergyman asked him if he would not like to take leave of his family before his execution. Walters told him he should like to see his wife once more, and the chaplain promised that a messenger should that day be sent to her requesting her attendance, and asked him if there was no other member of his family he would like to see. Walters replied there was none. "Have you no children?" the chaplain inquired. Walters's suspicion was immediately aroused. He firmly and hurriedly answered, "I have only one son, sir, and he is on a job in the country, and I don't know his address. Besides, I should not like him to see me in the position I am in; it would shock him so, for he is as honest and hard-working a lad as ever lived." The reverend gentleman seemed pleased at his penitent's good feeling, and asked him no further questions, but shortly afterwards took his leave.

Mrs. Walters called the next morning to see her husband. The meeting was painful enough on both sides.

With all his faults the wretch had not been an unkind husband, and his wife, in her quiet, undemonstrative manner, was much attached to him. He clasped her fondly in his arms, and wept bitterly for some time. Suddenly he stopped, and looking at her attentively, he said, with much solemnity of manner, "Martha, I have now not more than two days to live. I hope you do not believe me guilty of that murder, for, as I shall soon stand before God, I am as innocent of it as you are."

His wife implicitly believed him. "What will Edward say when he comes back and hears of it?" she remarked.

"Be sure you tell him what I said," he replied, "for I would no more like he should believe it than you should."

It would be a curious study to analyse the feeling the wretched man had for his son. He had never shown him any affection, nor was he even aware at the moment of the love he really bore him. It was simply latent in him. It had been planted in his breast by the Almighty, and it was simply a part of his nature, which he was no more capable of understanding or explaining than the theory of his life itself.

After his wife had left him he continued in a most despondent state till late at night, when he fell asleep. His slumber was deep and heavy, as in fact might be expected of a man whose mind had been for many hours painfully on the stretch. Still his brain was not for a moment inactive, and dreams of startling reality presented themselves to him, yet not one of a painful nature

was among them. They were principally connected with circumstances long since gone by, and which, when waking, it is more than possible he had utterly forgotten.

At the commencement his dreams were of a kaleidoscopic character, combined principally of events which had occurred during the last few days. As the night advanced they assumed a more continuous and consistent form. They then dated from years long past and gone, and, as frequently happens when people are in great distress, they dwelt principally on scenes of happiness. They continued in this manner, with little interruption, till at last they rested on circumstances which had occurred during the first years of his married life. One was particularly vivid. He was then in the chamber of his wife, at the time very young, and he was watching her first attempt to give her child the breast. He watched her with interest, and at last the poor girl, proud of her success, glanced at him with no little satisfaction as her baby took its first meal. He heard the steps of some one on the stairs, and his mother-in-law entered the room. She attempted to close the door after her gently, for fear of disturbing the baby, but it shut with a loud and iron clang. He awoke, looked around, and found himself in his cell, the noise which had aroused him being caused by a warder who had entered with his breakfast. The wretched man gazed wildly around for a moment, as wishing to persuade himself he was still asleep. The stern reality soon impressed itself on him, and he burst into tears and wept like a child.

He had no appetite for his breakfast, and it was

removed untasted. The morning passed in silence, and about noon one of the sheriffs visited him to ask him if he had any disclosure to make relative to the murder, or any other subject. The presence of the sheriff renewed for a moment his hope of escape, and he told him that he wished to confess the whole circumstances connected with the crime for which he was to suffer the next morning, but that it would take some time, perhaps a week, to prove the truth of his statements, and he asked if there were no means of obtaining a reprieve for that time. The sheriff, in reply, told him that such a demand would be hopeless ; that no interest could obtain him a reprieve, even for an hour ; and that he had better not delude himself with any idea of the kind. Walters, on hearing this, burst into a violent fit of tears, which the sheriff attempted in vain to stop.

In the afternoon the chaplain again visited him, and remained with him some time in prayer, which for a moment appeared to have a happy effect on the mind of the prisoner. The reverend gentleman asked him no questions relative to his crime, and even carefully avoided all conversation on the subject, fearing it might only lead the prisoner to the perpetration of some other falsehood.

Night came on, and brought with it sombre despair. He seemed almost to feel that the fading of the light was the fading of his life. As night advanced, a sensation of fatigue came over him, but he wrestled against it. Midnight sounded, and the wish to sleep was almost

overpowering, but he dreaded to close his eyes. He remembered the vision of the night before, and feared his waking so intensely that the certainty of death in comparison seemed less terrible.

But it was not from Walters's couch alone that sleep was driven. In one room in the Rents it was equally banished. His wife passed the night in little less misery than her husband. On her side, however, she was surrounded with kind friends, while he had no one with him but the unsympathising, half-sleeping warders. Mrs. Duke, Gobby, the blind basketmaker, and Perkins did all in their power to console the wretched little woman. Her grief, which at the commencement of the evening was deep and subdued, increased in energy as the night passed. In the room was a common Dutch clock, which did not strike the hours, and as the night advanced she from time to time cast a glance at it, and a fresh and more poignant burst of anguish followed each occasion. The dawn broke, and any unreality which the night might have brought with it vanished, and the stern unmixed certainty that in scarcely more than one hour her husband would be executed became painfully apparent. When near eight o'clock, and her sorrow and terror were at their height, Perkins, unseen by any one, advanced the hand of the clock to a quarter past eight. As soon as he had accomplished it he pointed to it. "It is all over," he said, "it is a quarter past eight."

"Thank God," said the poor woman. "I hope he is happy; with all his faults he was a good husband to

me." Her tears were now a relief to her, and she gave them full sway.

Suddenly the Abbey clock tolled eight, the hour of the execution, and the poor woman gave one unearthly scream and sank senseless on the ground.

CHAPTER XXV.

CONCLUSION.



Our drama is now approaching its termination, we must withdraw, one by one, our actors from the scene, to clear the stage. The first on the list is Mrs. Walters. She never recovered from the shock produced by her husband's death, aggravated as it was by the clumsy though well-meant expedient of Perkins. She remained in a state of almost unconsciousness for some days, and when reaction came on, it was weak and uncertain. She received from her friends in the Rents the greatest kindness and consideration. One day Mrs. Duke ventured to ask her what were her future prospects, as, although her neighbours were perfectly willing to assist her in any way they could, still, as they were all poor, she ought to do something to help herself.

"I wish," said Mrs. Walters, "to remain here till I die."

"But you must do something, for all that," said the practical Mrs. Duke ; "you can't live upon nothing."

"I shall sell the few things I have one by one, ma'am, and they will last me as long as I stay here."

"Nonsense ! you must rouse yourself, and get some needlework or something."

"I can't indeed ; I have not the strength. I get weaker and weaker every day. I am sure I shall soon die. God will not leave me here as miserable as I am. He could not have the heart to do it, ma'am."

The poor woman was right ; she never recovered the shock, but gradually sank, her life appearing the while simply to fade away, without disease or any other visible cause.

The next on the list is Mrs. O'Flaherty. In the course of this lady's promenades in the neighbourhood of the Broadway and Tothill Street, she was one afternoon seized with a giddiness in the head, and fell into a hole in the road which had been made by some gas-fitters, severely lacerating the skin over the shin-bone in her fall. She took but little notice of it for some time, probably thinking it might heal of itself ; but with so dilapidated a constitution as hers this was a far more difficult matter than she had counted on, and her leg, instead of getting better, got gradually worse. The inflammation at last arrived at such a height that she was scarcely able to put her foot to the ground, and she then resolved on applying to the hospital for assistance. She had no patient's letter of recommendation, as, with an amount of delicacy those who knew her would hardly have given her credit for, she declined applying, as ~~she~~ she was advised by the porter at the hospital to do, to any of the governors' houses for one, thinking they would not like a person of her appearance to be seen at their doors. She took her place with the other female applicants, and waited her turn to see the surgeon. At last it came.

"You must take great care of that wound," he said, "or you will get your leg into a very bad state. I will give you some ointment to dress it with, and some medicine to take, and you must nurse yourself quietly at home."

"But I want to be taken into the hospital, sir."

"That I cannot do for you," he replied; "it is against the rules to take in tedious cases of that description."

"But I have no home, sir."

"Then you must get your friends to assist you."

"Good God!" said the wretched creature, her eyes filling with tears, "where should I find a friend in the world?"

"I can't help that. We can't take you in."

As Mrs. O'Flaherty was preparing to leave the room, one of the assistant surgeons entered it. He looked at her for a moment, and then said,—

"Are you not the woman who used to come here with a patient with a cancer?"

"Yes, sir, I am."

"What has become of him?"

"Oh, he's dead and gone, and I wish I was along with him."

The surgeon now inquired what she had come for, and his colleague told him.

"Oh!" said the other, "let us take her in, if there is a bed vacant; she behaved very kindly to that poor fellow, and we ought to stretch a point for her in return."

"With all my heart," said he, "if you know her. You can come in if you like," he continued, addressing Mrs.

O'Flaherty ; "but take my advice, go home and change those ragged, tawdry things of yours, or you will lead a precious life of it with the other women, I can tell you."

To those who only know Mrs. O'Flaherty by report, and are aware that her wardrobe generally consisted of the things she stood upright in, the recommendation of the surgeon would appear difficult to be followed. But such was not the case. The miserable sisterhood of which she was a member made contributions of such modest-looking clothing as they possessed to make Mrs. O'Flaherty look respectable ; for, lost as they were, they knew well the meaning of the word. And they succeeded in a marvellous manner, although her costume and bundle were made up from many contributions. They then wished her luck, and sent her on her way, promising they would not come near the hospital while she was in it, that they might not disgrace her.

Mrs. O'Flaherty during her residence in the hospital behaved as women of her class generally behave—unexceptionably. She was quiet and subdued in her manner ; and her illness, and the privations she had undergone previous to her entrance into the ward, having taken a good deal of her florid colour from her face, she really looked respectable. She was liked by the nurses for her readiness to assist them and the other patients on all occasions, and the chaplain and matron also looked on her with favour. The time, however, approached for her to leave the hospital, and sorrowfully she regarded it. She had begun to like respectability, and she trembled at the idea of resuming her former habit of life. But

good fortune befriended her. A patient was brought into the hospital suffering from a disease so loathsome that he was ordered to be placed in a ward by himself, and a special nurse was to be found for him. Mrs. O'Flaherty, who had accidentally overheard the matron inquiring of the sister of the ward if she was acquainted with any person who would nurse the poor man, immediately volunteered her services, which were accepted, and she was to receive ten shillings a week for her trouble.

She nursed the poor creature tenderly and patiently, nor did she make use of one bad expression during the whole of the time. When the patient died, Mrs. O'Flaherty was again in a state of anxiety about her future, but the matron received a letter from the matron of an infirmary in one of the midland counties, stating that she was in want of a night-nurse for their accident ward, and requesting her to send her one if possible. The appointment was offered to Mrs. O'Flaherty, who gratefully accepted it. She has retained it ever since, and is much liked for her patience and humanity, so much so that the surgeons on two occasions have shut their eyes to the fact that Mrs. O'Flaherty, after receiving her wages and taking her holiday, had considerable difficulty in ascending the steps from the street leading to the hall ; a difficulty which she said arose from a wound she had formerly received in the leg, and which they did not believe.

Master Perkins, notwithstanding the good feeding and excellent advice given him by Mrs. Duke, suffered a relapse. After all, it was not altogether his fault. As

he had considerably improved in health, his associates insisted he should take his part in their common dangers, and Perkins as a lad of courage was not deaf to the appeal. But from the time he had remained honest he had lost a considerable amount of skill, and the first pocket he attempted to pick ended in his being handed over to the police. As five previous convictions were proved against him, he was sentenced to two months' imprisonment, and at the end of his sentence to be sent for three years to the Red Hill Reformatory. Here he was taught the trade of a carpenter, at which he attained a considerable amount of skill. He behaved exceedingly well during his residence at Red Hill, and after his time had expired he emigrated under the auspices of the school managers to the Cape of Good Hope. Little was heard of him for the first three years, when he wrote a letter to the chaplain. He told him in it that he had remained in the same situation since his arrival in Africa, that he was much liked by both his master and mistress, and that already he had fifty pounds in the savings bank. The letter also contained a five pound note, which he requested might be expended in decorating the school chapel in which he had learned to be an honest man.

Young Stokes remained with his mother, and treated her with great kindness. He entered into partnership with a young man several years his senior, who was brought up as a working cutler. They go about the streets of London with Stokes's barrow, with its apparatus, young Stokes mending kettles and his com-

panion sharpening knives. Report says they are doing well.

Of Gobby we have little to relate. He remained but a short time longer in the Rents. The secret of his sentence of transportation, which was drawn from him at his cross-examination, induced every thief in Westminster to attempt to form his acquaintance. This annoyed him greatly, as he wished to be considered respectable, and had firmly resolved never again to do a dishonest action. He, however, for some time submitted to the infliction ; but one morning, immediately after the payment of his week's rent, he disappeared, leaving his key in the door, and owing not a farthing to any one. When his landlord entered on possession, he found his room perfectly clean and in good order, but not an article of any description, not even a scrap of paper, remained in it. It has been said that he was shortly after seen in Liverpool, selling memorandum books in the street, but the authority was too uncertain to be relied on.

Trivet, the blind basketmaker, shortly after the trial, removed to a kitchen in Brompton. Here he contrived to form the acquaintance of some benevolent persons, who managed to get a considerable quantity of work for him. His circumstances now rapidly improved, till he was able to take a couple of rooms on the top floor of a house in Yeoman's Row. A great amelioration then took place in the health of his wife, who, in her turn, contrived to get more work to do. The first use he made of his improved finances was to send his children

to the National Schools, where they managed to pick up the rudiments of a decent education. He is now in better circumstances than he has ever been in since the accident which deprived him of his sight. His children are all off his hands, having obtained respectable situations, and his wife is in constant work, earning twelve shillings a week, in the Government clothing stores in Pimlico.

Of Edward Walters and Jessie Morgan we have had no account. In this we admit our narrative is sadly deficient, as it would have given us, as well as the reader, great satisfaction if we had been able to record that he had met with a punishment adequate, if possible, to his villany. Of this we may be sure, that the justice of Heaven would not allow so infamous a crime to pass unpunished, but of what that punishment consisted we must ever remain ignorant.

Duke and his wife remained for some time undecided what answer they should give to the solicitor of the heir-at-law relative to their emigration to Sydney. From the information they had contrived to obtain, it seemed to them that in a worldly point of view nothing could be more beneficial; still, they had a violent objection to leave Westminster, connected as it was with their earliest and dearest associations. Mrs. Duke, holding in view the promise of the fifty pounds, had hopes, if they remained, they should be able to remove to their former aristocratical (in comparison) lodgings in Pye Street; but Duke began to feel considerable annoyance at being perpetually pointed at as the man who had been sus-

pected of the murder in Lambeth. He, however, tried all he could to treat the annoyance with the philosophical contempt exhibited by his wife, and good-naturedly listened to her arguments to remain in England. Still he felt uneasy, and had not the courage to think of entering on any other line of business.

One morning as he was sauntering down the Broadway, some one touched him on the arm, and, on looking round, he recognised Meffy. For some moments surprise kept him dumb, and he hardly knew whether to accept the hand that Meffy offered him. Good nature, however, was always predominant in Duke's character, and at last he shook hands with his old acquaintance.

"Why, Meffy," he said, what have you done with yourself all this time? I thought you were never coming back to London. We have kept your room for you, and you never sent us a farthing for rent, although you must have known perfectly well that we must have wanted the money."

"Kept my room for me!" said Meffy, simulating the greatest surprise. "Why, the week after I left I sent Long Thompson to you with the week's rent, and another in advance, saying I should not want the room any more, as I was going to stay in Leicester. I met him there, and, as he was coming to London, I made him promise he would not be here an hour without coming to see you. Why, what a scoundrel that fellow must be! I thought you might have trusted him with anything. 'Pon my soul, there's no knowing who to trust," and he

assumed a misanthropical expression of countenance, as if he were disgusted with the whole human race.

"But it's been a hard thing for us, Meffy," said Duke. "I dare say you have heard of my trial, and the narrow escape I had. Your money would have been very acceptable, I can tell you."

"Well," said Meffy, "it's a good thing now it's over ; but you can't think how sorry I was for you. When I heard it, I cried like a child. However, I was precious glad when I heard of your good fortune."

"What do you mean ?"

"Why, the ten-pound note the prosecutor sent you, and the fifty pounds more you are to have."

"Why, who told you of that ?" said Duke, greatly astonished.

"A boy in the lawyer's office that I know something of. I wanted to find you particularly, as I have got a speculation to offer you that will make both our fortunes."

"I don't much think it will," said Duke, "judging from the two things I took up by your advice."

"Let bygones be bygones," said Meffy. "Nobody can be more sorry than I am that they did not turn out better ; but this is a sure go, I can tell you."

"What is it ?"

"I cannot tell you here in the street ; but if you'd come with me to my room down by Vauxhall Bridge, I'd tell you all about it. Have you anything to do just now ?"

"No, nothing particular."

"Then come at once, for there is no time to be lost. If you don't take it up, I know half a dozen fellows that will."

Duke immediately started off with Meffy. On their road he asked him if he knew any one who had ever been in Australia.

"Plenty," said Meffy; "why do you ask?"

"Because I want to know something about the place. The lawyer says I shall be sure to make my fortune there, and he has offered me and my wife a free passage to Sydney."

"My dear fellow," said Meffy, with great earnestness, "don't think of going there; I would not, if the streets of Sydney were paved with gold; it would not suit either of us, for I don't believe there is an honest man in the whole place; besides, you don't know what a place it is. Why, what could you do there?"

"He says there is a capital opportunity to start in the poultry line."

"Nonsense! and if you did get a good price for your poultry, consider what your losses would be; why, the weather is so hot there, a fowl won't keep above a day when it's killed, and you'd be obliged to throw one-half of your stock away once a week; besides, the place won't suit your wife, I know."

"Why not?"

"Because water is scarce, and a clean woman like her would go mad. The whole place swarms with fleas."

This was indeed a stumbling-block for Duke, as

his wife was as clean a woman as there was in Westminster.

They walked along talking together in a very friendly manner till Meffy stopped at a house in a back street. He opened the door with a latch-key and ushered Duke into a room on the first floor, in which was a bed, a table, and a couple of chairs. He requested Duke to be seated, and he then began explaining the new and lucrative speculation in which he was about to plunge, as soon as he could find a partner with a little capital to assist him.

"My plan is this," said Meffy ; "it is to get up a show, and I can do it well if you and your wife will join it."

"I don't understand that sort of business at all," said Duke.

"Now, Duke, do hold your tongue for five minutes, and let me talk. The show would be all your own, as well as all the profits arising from it. Now, don't speak till I've done," he continued, noticing an expression of doubt on Duke's countenance at this very liberal arrangement. "I shall have my profits in another way. When we have got our show together, I shall get a handsome suit of clothes, and take a respectable house in a good thoroughfare, under pretence of opening a silversmith's shop. In it we will put the show, and as soon as the landlord finds out his mistake he will pay me to give up possession of the premises, and that shall be my share of the profits."

"But that won't be fair," said Duke, who had already

made up his mind to have nothing to do with the speculation.

“Now, Duke, hear me talk. I’ll prove to you presently it will be all fair enough. I ain’t a man to propose anything unfair to you, depend upon it. Well, the show will consist first of a spotted boy. I know a chap that has got a child with some spots upon him, and with a little caustic melted in water we can make as many more as we like. Well, this fellow has been about the country with a learned pig, and he will let us have it for a trifle, and mind the door as well. Now, here,” said he, uncovering a large glass jar which stood on the table, “is another thing. I bought it at a sale of a surgeon’s goods. It’s a pair of bottled twins; what I want them for I’ll explain afterwards. But here,” he continued, with evident pride, “is the show coal of the whole; but to carry it out I must get your wife to help me.”

So saying, he arose from his seat, carried his chair to the wall to stand upon, and proceeded to untie the strings of a large roll of canvas hung upon nails, which when unfolded exhibited one of those large pictures seen outside caravans at country fairs. He then got off his chair, and looking at the picture with great admiration expressed on his countenance, he commenced a sort of showman’s speech,—“Walk in, walk in, ladies and gentlemen, and see the greatest collection of curiosities ever offered to the British public, and now exhibiting for the small charge of one penny! Here you will see the famous learned pig, who will pick out the handsomest lady in the room, and spell the name of her beloved on

cards. Also the celebrated spotted boy, who was exhibited before her Majesty and the royal children at Windsor Castle. Likewise, ladies and gentlemen, the celebrated Queen of the Amazons, lately arrived in England to see the curiosities, and who has been prevailed upon to allow herself to be seen by the public before her return home. Here, ladies and gentlemen, you see her correct likeness, dressed in her native costume. You will particularly notice she is blind of the right eye. When the tyrant Alexander visited America, he was so enraged at the bravery of the women, that he ordered all their right eyes to be put out, that they should not see to take aim with the bow and arrow, and ever since the custom has existed in that barbarous nation of putting out the right eyes of their queens in honour of that memorable event. To prove that this is no deception, we have obtained a pair of their twins, in whom you will perceive their right eyes are perfect. Walk in, ladies and gentlemen; walk in, or you will never have another opportunity, as she leaves England next week. Only a penny! Only a penny!—It is not quite true about the right eye,” continued Meffy, turning to Duke—“but what’s the matter with you?”

The question was a perfectly natural one, for Duke was standing by the chimney-piece deadly pale, and almost in a fainting condition. Nor was it to be wondered at. There, on the canvas, was portrayed his wife, due justice having been done to her golden hair and one eye, her full charms arrayed in “her native costume,” as

Meffy called it, which consisted of a towering plume of ostrich feathers on her head, a necklace of shells, a marabout petticoat, and a spear. It would be impossible to do justice to the horror of the little man when he saw the chaste wife of his bosom portrayed in such an indelicate manner.

"Meffy, you villain, what do you mean by drawing my wife in that manner! Why, she would rather die than be seen so."

"What on earth has the inside of a show to do with the outside? No, your wife will be dressed in red satin, like a lady."

"And what should I be about?" said Duke, with a sneer.

Meffy did not understand the sardonic allusion. "Why," said he, "you will be inside a green baize curtain playing a barrel organ, with a china plate on it to receive the coppers, all of which will be your own."

Duke, from the persecution he had lately suffered, had become exceedingly subdued in temper; but there are occasions on which the anger of the mildest among us would be aroused, and the present was one. Terrible as had been the blow to his feelings in seeing his wife painted in a costume so extremely *décolleté*, it was nothing to that occasioned by the proposition that he should grind an organ to invite persons of all classes to enter and see her for a penny a head. The ordinary mild expression of the little man vanished in a moment, and one of the ferocity of the tiger leaping on his prey supplied its place. He first struck Meffy such a violent

blow on the face as would have certainly knocked him down had not as violent a kick established his equilibrium. He then collected all his strength to butt at Meffy like a bull; but that worthy, terrified at the horrible aspect of his foe, did not remain to receive the shock, but rushed wildly to the street-door, opened it, and vanished. Yes, vanished is the proper expression, for he was never afterwards seen. What became of him no one ever knew; whether he sank to the lower regions—a fact far from improbable, considering the Satanic nature of the wretch—or whether an angel of darkness, to preserve him, snatched him away—a circumstance equally probable, as there was a strong smell of sulphur easily traceable across the river to Vauxhall—no one can tell; he was never heard of afterwards. The show was apparently seized by his landlord for rent, for we have occasionally seen it about the streets of London, but with the right eye painted in, as well as the portraits of her Majesty and the royal children gazing on the giantess in wonder and admiration.

Duke, with a feeling of delicacy which did him great credit, abstained from mentioning to his wife the meeting with Meffy. He, however, determined, in spite of all his wife's arguments to the contrary, to emigrate to Australia; and Jemima, too affectionate a wife to oppose her husband when he was determined to have his own way, withdrew her objections and made her preparations for the voyage. An obstacle occurred, however, at the very commencement. The shipbrokers refused to take Mrs. Duke as an ordinary steerage passenger, avariciously

urging that she occupied the space of three statute adults. This difficulty was smoothed over, however, by the kind-hearted solicitor, and Mr. and Mrs. Duke embarked on their voyage. They arrived safely in Sydney, where they drew the fifty pounds and made a speculation in fowls and eggs, which, thanks to the letters of recommendation they had brought with them, turned out admirably. They continued to succeed, till one day, when Duke was absent, a handsome, elegantly dressed lady drove up to the house in her carriage; she gave a large order for poultry, and told Mrs. Duke that as her husband (the Governor) had been requested to patronise them, they could for the future regularly supply her establishment. Mrs. Duke, in a high state of delight, thanked the lady for her kindness. When Duke returned, however, his wife did not mention the circumstance to him, as she intended to surprise him on his birthday, which would occur in a few days. As Duke returned that day from market, he found a board over his shop windows, on which was inscribed in large gold letters, "Duke, Purveyor of Poultry to His Excellency the Governor." Duke rushed into the house and inquired if it were really a fact, and on being informed that it was, he clasped his wife in his arms (at twice) and reminded her of the saying of the blind basket-maker—that virtue, industry, and honesty were, sooner or later, sure to meet with their reward.

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