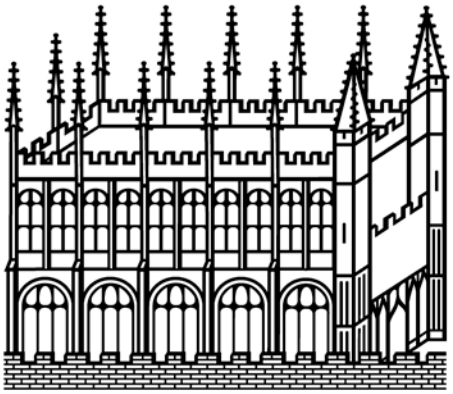

DE PROFUNDIS

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A Tale of the Social Deposits

BY

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AUTHOR OF "SHIRLEY HALL ASYLUM," "MARGARET MEADOWS," ETC.

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DE PROFUNDIS.

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 Tothill 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, however, 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 worst 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 shows 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 upstairs. 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 till 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 was 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 workhouse, 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 inspector, 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 appre-

ciated to need any remark from him (this, by-the-by, was true to a certain 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 his 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.

WHEN 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 consul-

tation 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're 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 headquarters 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 that 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 in 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 that 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 dispatched to the workhouse. 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 you 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 the baby home, 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-by—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 would 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 OBTAINS 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 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 decidedly a "gummy" look about them, which would have taken a great deal from their

value in the eyes of a connoisseur, should ever such a character have entered the locality—a most remote probability. But the principal ornament of the whole consisted of a row of flat-irons ranged rigidly in a line over the chimney-piece, with their plain 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,

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 blest with a good appetite, in almost as famishing a condition as the infant itself. Nor was it 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 her of their number and descriptions when she had 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, who had been 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 hardly have 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, she knew as his superior officer such a feeling would have been derogatory on her part; but that 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 consideration 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 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 touching one

of the little heaps of linen she had spread over the floor, rivalling by the feat, notwithstanding the active working of her mind, 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 deter-

mined 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 till 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 hands 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 develope itself in words, but for some time without effect, so inflexibly iron-like was 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 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, 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 holders.

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 its 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.

A 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, out 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 deathbed; 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 re-commences 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 notice-

able 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 of 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 out-door 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 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 insensiblity 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. Their 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 accomplished; 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 conse-

quence 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 occasionally 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 washerwoman. 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 washerwoman, 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 execu-

tion 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 their 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 houseless 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 con-

nections 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,

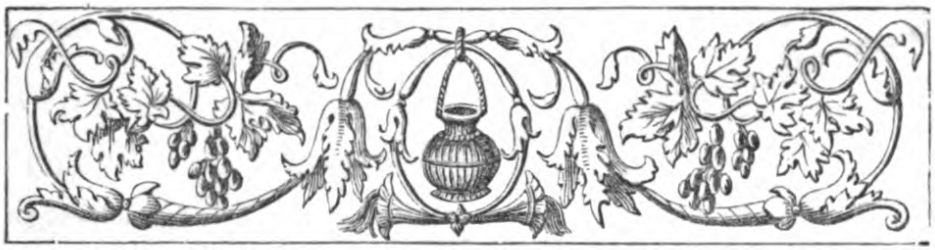
"Leave me alone, will you? don't you know a soldier never takes off his cap? You ought to know that."

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 unmurmuring 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 opera-

tions 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 behave 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 scandalised, 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 tread-mill. 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 develope 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 dare 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 steam-boat 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 steam-boat 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 in 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 for 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 both his powers 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 poul-

terer, 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 divesting 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 he in Bond Street, where, as in his former situation, 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 considerably 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 their 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 knowing 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 con-

valescent. 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 im-

mensely 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 house-keeping 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 sup-

position 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 recognised 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 invitation, 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 suffi-

cient 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.

Duke 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 by-standers 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 regardless 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.

FOR 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 daresay," 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-sharping, 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 com-

panion, 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 head-ache, 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 fol-

lowed, 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 attentively 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 ad-

vanced, 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 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 meantime 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 a 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'm 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 tormenter, 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 acquaintanceship 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.

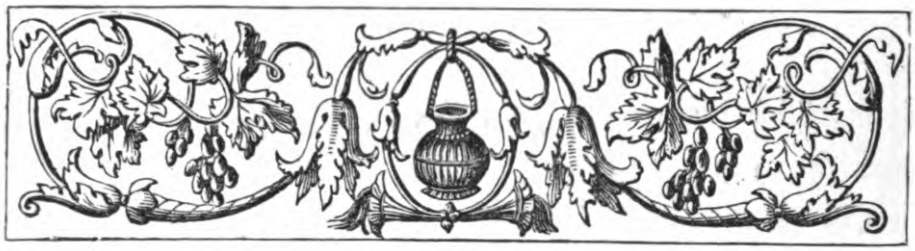
It would be taking up the reader's time most unjustifiably to dwell long upon the affairs of the club. It flourished for three weeks, at least. True, there were many things about it which showed weakness from its very birth; among others, and not the least important, was, that they omitted to obtain 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 realised 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.

IT 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 greengrocery 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 greengrocery, 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 bed-room 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 outhouse. 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 apartment 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 regularity, 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 vendor 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 hardships, 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 comprised 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 downstairs. "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 downstairs.

"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 hus-

band 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 unfortunate 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 upstairs 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 sur-

prised 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 re-

maining 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 secresy 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

useless, he had called at Duke's lodgings to see if he would 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 safe 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 refuse 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 basket-maker 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 round Mrs. Moggs's waist, but the staircases in the "Rents" 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, stupified 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 apparently 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 condition, 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 re-

ceived 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 basketmaker 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 three-

pence 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 basketmaker 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 balanec 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.

AS 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. She 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, promising 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 imme-

diate 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 smockfrock, 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 smockfrock, 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 Follys 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 clean-

liness, 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 Im-

provement 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 misfortune 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—idiocy—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 of 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 basket-maker, 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 out-door 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 descrip-

tion 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-by, he was his bed-fellow) 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 needlewoman, 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 moderate 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 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 soldier's shirts—which she contrived to accomplish by the aid of a powerful pair of spectacles, and for which she probably netted a shilling or eighteen pence—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 with 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.

MR. 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 blowzy-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 memo-

randa; 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' 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 tell 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 to 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 advancing 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 proceeded 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 as innocent as a lamb. When that old woman gave me the tea-pot 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 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 cognisant 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 tea-pot, 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.

END OF VOL. I.

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