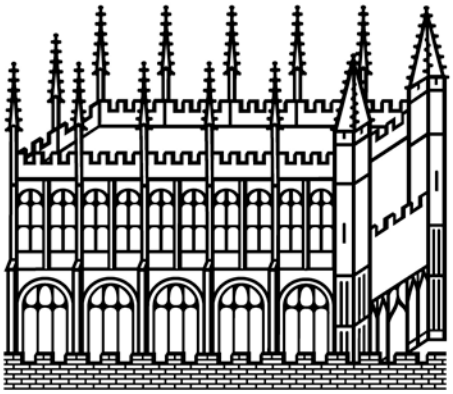

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WIT AND PLEASURE

"HE SAW HER STANDING BY THE WRITING-TABLE."

Page 36.

WIT AND PLEASURE

SEVEN TALES

BY SEVEN AUTHORS

WITH SEVEN ILLUSTRATIONS

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THOROUGHBRED.

A Story in Four Chapters.

By EDMUND YATES,

AUTHOR OF "BROKEN TO HARNESS," "BLACK SHEEP,"
"LAND AT LAST," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

OFFICIAL.

LONDON in the month of August, and the summer at its height. Hot everywhere, even in the broadest thoroughfares, where such little air as there was found ample space for its languid circulation, and in the narrowest and shadiest courts where no sunlight ever penetrated. No escaping from the heat in the lowest or the highest situation. It was hot in underground "shades" and cellars in the city known only to the initiated, who dived into them surreptitiously and after ten minutes' submersion came to the surface with faces redder and foreheads more perspiration-beaded than before: it was hot even in the long low room, No. 120, of the Draft and Docket Office, which was up four pair of stairs, and facetiously declared by the gentlemen engaged in it, to have its floor on an exact level with the top of the cross of St. Paul's.

Let us take a glance at this room and its occupants.

It is furnished in true official style with three heavy massive oak desks, one of which stands in each of the windows, while the third, placed in the middle of the room, affords its owner the opportunity of overlooking his companions. There are several cane-bottomed chairs, a large map or two on the wall, and a washing-stand fenced off by a green canvas screen in one corner. There must have been something else besides the washing-stand behind the screen, one would imagine from the manner in which the young man who just emerged from it was wiping his mouth with his handkerchief and the pleasant smile which illumined his face. A pleasant young fellow enough, well dressed and well looking, a man of education and of society, a type of the modern Government official, an enormous contrast to the "Public Office" man of a quarter of a century ago.

"That shandy-gaff is really A 1," he said, walking towards his desk, and vaulting into his seat; "just sufficiently iced, and a mild innocuous tipple that allows one to do his duty to his country without throwing in any unofficial fervour or enthusiasm. How absurd the old fellows in this place are! When I go away sharp as the clock strikes four, which, I am bound to say, happens every day, old Kincherton says to me, 'Mr. Hatton, you have no zeal for the service.' Of course I have not; Talleyrand was a far greater *diplomat* than old Kincherton, and what he said to a man in my

position was, 'surtout, point de zèle!' Consequently, if Talleyrand——"

"Ah! shut up about Talleyrand!" cried a man sitting at the desk in the other window, "and let me finish this grind."

"Mr. Clement Dyne," cried Hatton, in a tone of some severity, "I am astonished at this interruption; I am more than astonished that a gentleman of your known good taste, at a quarter to four o'clock, and on the last day of his official existence, should be unprincipled enough to be engaged in any official composition."

"It is because it is my last day, Jack. I am just finishing up something I had to do—one struggle more, and I am free. Now then, 'I have the honour to be, my Lords, your Lordships' obedient humble servant,'—There!" he cried, throwing down his pen, "that is the last dying speech and confession of Clement Dyne, and, if charm of composition and neatness of caligraphy have any effect with the Treasury, it ought not merely to carry its object, which is to get an extra two pound a year to an unfortunate tide-waiter, but ought to get me made a baronet, at least."

"What do you want to be made a baronet for?" said the man in the centre of the room, for the first time joining in the conversation. "Your uncle is going to take you up, and leave you all his money; you will be

a rich man, which is far better than being a baronet or any other titled fool!"

"Dobbs," said Clement Dyne, holding up his finger reprovingly, "you are a radical of the deepest dye! You have sat at the home-made boots of Odger and listened to the witcheries of Boanerges Bradlaugh. You hate swells, and cannot find anything too bad to say of them."

"I wish you hated them a little more," said Dobbs, "and would do yourself a little more justice; perhaps then you would be a little more particular in the selection of your friends."

"Now, Dobby," said Clement Dyne, repeating the admonitory finger movement, "you're going in a perisher at Roger Cholmeley."

"I didn't name any one," said Dobbs; "but suppose I did mean Cholmeley, what then?"

"You do him as much injustice as he does you. Call him an idiotic swell; he thinks you an unmitigated cad. He is offensive in your nostrils because of the Ess. bouquet on his handkerchief; you are unbearable in his eyes because of the cut of your coat and the shape of your boots."

"Yes, Dobby dear," broke in Jack Hatton; "your boots are terrific: we have wearied you with supplications about them, and all to no purpose."

"My boots are quite good enough for my friends," commenced Dobbs.

"Exactly," repeated Hatton; "'Show me what boots you wear and I will tell you what company you keep!' *vide* Dr. Watts, *passim*. Those boots, sir," he added, disdainfully eyeing Dobbs's feet under the table, "if left to themselves, would strike straight off for Dalston, and would feel perfectly at home at Hackney; but would rush away from Piccadilly, as though they were the original seven leaguers of nursery fiction."

"Well, as it has just struck four," said Dobbs, rising, "they shall carry me to Dalston now. Good-bye, Dyne," said he, shaking hands with his friend. "I wish you all luck in your new career."

"A worthy, though ill-dressed man," said Hatton, looking after him; "a good heart beating under an always ruffled and protruding shirt-front. But now, Clement, that we are alone, and this is our last chance of a talk, tell me something of your plans."

"I scarcely know that I have any plans of my own, Jack," said his friend, "though I shall be perfectly willing, no doubt, to fall in with any that may be made for me."

"Was Dobbs right in saying that your uncle intended to make you his heir?"

"The old man has never said so in so many words, though I expect that to be his intention; else why should he have insisted on my giving up my berth here,

and going down to take up my quarters with him at Red Bluffs?"

"At what? What on earth makes him call his place by such a hideous name?"

"Guess it's a Western title, stranger," said Clement Dyne, laughing. "Old Mr. Murray was one of the earliest to go out to California, and still retains a great deal of property there. When he came home and bought a place in England, he called it Red Bluffs, after some favourite 'gulch' or 'ranch,' or something of that kind, that one reads of in Bret Harte's books."

"And why has his long-repressed affection for you thus suddenly burst forth?"

"Simply, I believe, because the man is growing old, and finds the necessity of having some one to manage his estates who could take more than a hireling's interest in him and them. His daughter is very nice indeed, pretty, bright, and clever; but then, you see, she is a girl."

"That's very curious!" said Jack Hatton.

"Exactly. Mr. Murray had a son once, an uncommonly bad lot, I believe; I never saw him, but he went to the dogs early, continued with them, and died about two years ago."

"And now the old gentleman sends for you to supply his place. I should think you would suit him very well,

Clement; you are clear-headed, practical, and business-like."

"Thanks, generous stranger; these be compliments indeed! However, I think I *do* know a little about estate management, as I used to look after the Rectory farm for my poor old father before I came here, and fancy I have rather a taste that way."

"And when do you go down to Yorkshire, Clement?"

"To-morrow; by the mid-day train."

"Alone?"

"No; my uncle is rather anxious that I should bring some friend with me to break the 'monotony of the family circle,' as he puts it, but, as I rather think, to see what sort of men I choose for my chums. That was why I asked you, about a fortnight ago, if you could manage to take your leave at this time."

"Quite impossible, old man, as I told you then; considering Parliament is not sitting, the work is extraordinarily stiff just now, and for the next month I shall have to do your share of it in addition to my own! Much obliged to you all the same for the kindly recollection and the compliment implied. Whom do you take in my place?"

"Well, I have asked Roger Cholmeley to come with me."

"Cholmeley!" repeated Hatton, with a loud whistle; "you are a bold man, Clement."

"Oh, I don't think he will be much bored; he has been at Cowes for the last fortnight, knocking about in the *Miranda*, and he says he is pretty sick of it; and Mr. Murray writes me there is a fair show of grouse on his moors—Yorkshire grouse, you know, not so strong as Scotch, but still giving a deal of sport,—and there are sure to be heaps of partridges next month. I think Roger will be able to knock a month out of the place very comfortably."

"I was not thinking of Roger, but of you," said Jack Hatton, "wondering whether you were quite wise in taking such a man to your uncle and presenting him as a specimen of your friends."

"Why, surely you don't share Dobbs's opinion of Roger Cholmeley?" said Clement Dyne, elevating his eyebrows in astonishment.

"Not the least in the world; my notion of Roger Cholmeley is that he is a man of more than average ability, possessing a clear head, steady common sense, and keen powers of observation and judgment of character; but all these qualities are overlaid with the external tissue of cynicism and indifference."

"You mean that he does not do himself justice?"

"Not merely that, but worse; he does himself the greatest injustice. Your uncle will see before him a

man hard and polished as a diamond, perfectly well bred, a man full of caustic epigram and veiled sarcasm —excellent company, no doubt, but scarcely the person whom the old gentleman, with his, doubtless, somewhat antiquated notions, would select as the intimate companion of his nephew."

"And yet, with all that affectation and hardness and cynicism, Roger's heart is as tender as a woman's," said Clement Dyne, in warm vindication of his absent friend.

"No one knows that better than I," said Jack. "We were at Bucharest together for a month in the cholera time, and the kindly things that fellow did and the manner in which he exposed his own life on the chance of helping others, cannot be too loudly praised."

"And yet you don't think he is the kind of man to take down to Red Bluffs?"

"Not merely for the reasons I have stated, but for these in addition. Your uncle, as I understand, has been a man of action all the days of his life; even now he takes interest in the management of his affairs, and only hands it over to you in consequence of his utter incapacity to get about as he used. Such a man has naturally the greatest horror of idlers, and our friend Roger Cholmeley, though he may not be idle *au fond* (and, indeed, when it has been required, I have seen him do an immense amount of hard work), he has a

kind of listless manner which will drive the old gentleman crazy. Out shooting, he will be all very well; there the excitement of the sport keeps him going; but when there is nothing going on, in the evening for instance, he will lounge about with his hands in his pockets, looking disdainfully contented, as though he had never had an aspiration or an ambition in his life."

"Well," said Clement Dyne, "as our friend, Colonel Nat. S. Carter, with whom we dined at the Langham the other day, would remark, 'I guess that will give fits to the old gentleman.' However, it is too late to be undone now; Roger is invited, has accepted, and will come without doubt."

"By the way, what ladies are staying at the Red Bluffs?" asked Jack Hatton, leaning forward.

"Only my cousin Edith, Miss Murray," replied Clement.

"Did I not understand from you that there was a slight *tendresse*—nothing serious of course—between you and your cousin?"

"Yes, indeed, I found her wonderfully nice when I went down to stay there, and we seemed to get on very well together. I have a notion, too, that if such an arrangement could be brought about, my uncle would make no objection, but would rather like it."

"And don't you think," said Jack Hatton, with a

curious expression on his face—"what I am going to say is not very complimentary, old man; but you know I mean no harm—don't you think it is rather weak of you to take a man like Cholmeley down to Red Bluffs with you, and throw him daily into the company of a pretty and agreeable young lady upon whom you are already sufficiently spooney, and an alliance with whom is necessary for the advancement of your fortune?"

Clement Dyne burst into a merry laugh. "What a suspicious old character you are! Such an idea as that never entered into my head, and now, upon reflection, I don't think much of it. Cholmeley is not a man who pays much attention to women, or cares for their society; he will be infinitely happier drinking the Squire's very good claret or smoking in the billiard room with some of the young men about Yorkshire, who are sure to be asked over during his stay."

"I am not suspicious, my son," said Jack Hatton sententiously, "only my name is Ulysses, and I happen to have seen men and cities, and to know something of the world; more than you do I suspect, when you say that Robert Cholmeley does not pay any attention to women. Why, there was——"

"Never mind who there was," interrupted Clement Dyne. "I do not think Miss Murray would suit Cholmeley's fancy, even if he were such a terrible fellow as you are disposed to make him out, and I am pretty

nearly certain that he would not interest her. As I said before, he is invited and must come, and I must take my chance of any rivalry."

"You don't care for the young lady much yourself," said Hatton, "or you would not speak of her in that light manner."

"Who set you up to be a ruler and a judge amongst us?" said Clement Dyne; "who does care much for anybody nowadays? Unless this terrible Roger Cholmeley annihilates my prospects, I look forward to a calmly happy future, in which Edith and I will get on quietly and amiably together; coming up to town for two months during the season, entertaining in the autumn, subscribing to local charities, and doing our duty in that state of J. P. and country gentry life to which we have been called. You don't want me to wear my Christian name embroidered on my shirt front, I suppose, or to go about getting people to say something unpleasant of her that I may espouse her cause. You don't want any vengeance nonsense of that kind, do you Jack?"

"No," said Jack, "I suppose my ideas are *moyen-age* and *rococo* and that sort of thing; but I confess I like to see a little less Manchester calculation and a little more heart and romance in such matters than there is nowadays."

"Oh, romance!" cried Clement Dyne. "If you are

on that hobby, for heaven's sake get off at once. You have been a blighted being ever since you were jilted by the dentist's daughter at Broadstairs, and when you fall into one of those moods there is no bearing with you. Now let us wash our hands, stroll quietly off westward, and dine at the club. There will be no one there, but the room will be all the cooler for that, and the *chef* is probably shooting in Scotland; but he has doubtless left a trustworthy kitchen-maid or two behind him, and on this solemn occasion I will stand dinner."

Clement Dyne was a very good specimen of the young Englishmen of his class; well-educated and by nature earnest and intelligent, but slightly imbued with that spirit of *persiflage* which is prescribed by the ruling taste of the day. The epidemic was far less developed in him than in most of his compeers, and when he was by himself all trace of it was lost. On such questions as religion, politics, and duty in general, he held very decided views, and when in society where he knew they could be appreciated, would express himself earnestly and to the admiration of his hearers. Thoroughness was his strongest characteristic, and those who knew him best had long maintained that he only wanted some opportunity to prove his superiority to the ordinary run of his companions. That opportunity he was now about to have. In the anticipation that he was about to succeed to a fortune, he had been

allowed to pass his youth in a sufficiently desultory manner, and when at his father's death it was discovered that the property had been entirely eaten away by that peculiar kind of dry-root which is so prevalent in the estates of indolent, easy-going men, who surrendered themselves entirely into the hands of their lawyers and agents, he was within a few months of the limit of age prescribed for those seeking appointments in the Draft and Docket Office, which his uncle's influence procured for him. His official superiors gave him a good character, and on the few occasions when he had visited Red Bluffs, his uncle had seen so much to like in him that he had determined to place his property in the young man's hands and to make him his heir. With this view he had instructed his nephew to resign his official appointment, and to repair to the scene of his forthcoming duties; giving him, however, a few weeks' grace during the shooting season, so that he might gradually accustom himself to harness, and bidding him bring any of his friends to break the dulness which he might feel on his first removal from London.

At a quarter to twelve the next day the King's Cross Station was thronged, as it always is just before the departure of any express train at that time of the year. When Clement Dyne arrived there he could scarcely make his way through the surging mass of humanity. Porters groaning under accumulations of

portmanteaus and gun-cases, or struggling with yelping pointers which, entirely ignoring the fact that they were coupled together, made frantic dashes round intervening posts, and caused the direst confusion. When to this was added the fact that scores of agriculturists, petty shop-keepers, and sea-faring population from Hull, who had come up on a three days' excursion and were about returning, persisted in mistaking the express for their train, and had to be summarily ejected from the comfortable positions which they had taken up, it may be imagined that Clement Dyne's usually serene temper was somewhat ruffled, more especially as it was close upon the time when the train should start, and he had seen no sign of his companion. At length, within two minutes of the starting of the train, Roger Cholmeley appeared before him, perfectly dressed in a dark grey travelling suit, calm and unconcerned.

"Here I am, my dear Clement," was his salutation, "punctual as usual."

"Gad, I don't know about that," replied Clement Dyne, "you seem to me to have run it pretty fine; in two minutes we shall be off!"

"Exactly," said Cholmeley, "so you see I have just two minutes to the good. Life, my dear fellow, is much too short to waste any portion of it at a railway station. Well, Louis," he added, and turning abruptly to a man who came up to him, "you have seen the things in

the van—two portmanteaus and three gun-cases, and you have the tickets?"

"Yes, sir," replied the man in a foreign accent, "Here is yours."

"And your own?"

"Yes, sir, thank you," said the man, touching his hat.

"Well, then, don't forget to get out at Oakenshaw—that's the name of the station, isn't it Clement?"

"Yes," replied Dyne, with some astonishment, "that's the name of the station, but," dropping his voice, "is this your servant!"

"Certainly."

"And is he coming to the Red Bluffs with us?"

"Most certainly."

Cholmeley was about to say something more, but the bell rang, the guard hurried them into their seats, and the train started.

"What an extraordinary fellow you are, Clement," said Roger Cholmeley, as soon as they had fairly settled themselves into their seats, "and what odd questions you ask! You didn't possibly imagine that I was going anywhere without my servant, did you?"

"No, oh no, of course not," said Clement, "only I thought——"

"Never talk in a tunnel," said Roger Cholmeley touching him lightly on the arm as they plunged into the darkness.

Before they emerged Clement had had time to wonder within himself whether Jack Hatton had not been correct in his theory, and whether Roger Cholmeley was exactly the guest who would find favour in his uncle's eyes. This first episode in the affair was not promising; the old gentleman had all his life been accustomed to "shift for himself," as he expressed it, and would by no means understand that a young man in the full possession of his faculties could not do without a servant. However, there was no remedy for it now, Louis was booked as far as Oakenshaw, and even on their arrival there it would seem discourteous if any hint were given of the advisability of his return. "At all events, the old boy must like Roger's looks," said Clement Dyne to himself, as he sat gazing at his friend, who was calmly reading the paper, "and a favourable first impression is half the battle."

And surely you might have gone a long summer day's march without meeting with anything much more attractive in the masculine way than the face and figure of Roger Cholmeley; though, I fear he would scarcely have come up to the standard of our lady novelists, as he was neither "gigantic," nor "tawny," nor had he anything like a "pitiless" expression. A man not much above the middle height, with thin well-cut features, large black eyes, and thick black hair; his face was bloodless and clean shaven, save

where the heavy moustaches overhung his upper lip; his figure was slight but strong and wiry, and he looked much more calculated to endure fatigue than many a man of heavier build. There was a careless, insolent grace in his position as he sat with one leg swinging negligently over the stuffed barrier which separated his seat from the next, in an attitude which would have been infinitely trying to a man of less refinement. Presently he burst into a subdued chuckling laugh, "Give it him!" he said, "let him have it over the head and ears! you cannot make it too hot or too strong for him!"

"What is it that amuses you?" asked Clement Dyne.

"Merely an article on old Dilwyn, the permanent Under Secretary of the Foreign Office, and one of the greatest old tyrants that ever existed. He rules those unfortunate F. O. people, the men at home and the fellows at the embassies, with a rod of iron, and they dare scarcely say their souls are their own. I fancied I was the only man who ever really astonished him, though this article may really have the effect of calling Lord Selmerston's attention to what he really is, and make the old brute resign."

"How did you astonish him?" asked Clement.

"It was years ago," said Cholmeley, "when my poor old dad insisted on my remaining in that wretched F. O. service to give me what he called a knowledge

of the world. I was an unpaid attaché at Paris at the time, and was leading a very jolly life there, doing nothing and doing it well, when I received a letter signed by old Dilwyn to proceed to St. Petersburg, whither I had been transferred. Naturally, I took no notice of this, and equally naturally in the way in which affairs are managed in Downing Street, three months passed before I heard anything more about the matter. Then I received a short and angry letter. Had I received a communication of such a date? to which I calmly replied that I had. Then a further peremptory missive, Why had I not obeyed orders and reported myself at St. Petersburg? Then came my reply, couched in the civilest terms, and written in that beautiful broad hand in which old Selmerston delighted. An unfortunate misunderstanding had prevented my obeying orders before, but I was about to leave Paris the very next day; however, it would probably be some time before I reported myself at St. Petersburg, for, as the Foreign Office did not allow travelling expenses, and as I had no money of my own, *I should be compelled to walk!* Dilwyn never forgave me, even after I retired from the service, and the mention of my name to him is to this day, I understand, sufficient to cause a threatening of apoplexy."

Some time later, and when they were nearly

approaching the end of their journey, Cholmeley said to his friend, "By the way, Clement, it is always advisable to know something of the party one is likely to meet, and your people are all strange to me. Tell me something about them. What is Mr. Murray like?"

"My uncle," said Clement, "is a plain, straightforward, frank, hospitable man, not particularly polished, but with the innate bearing of a gentleman. He does not know much about modern ways or the manners of what is called 'society,' and you must make allowance for any little eccentricity, remembering that the early portion of his life was passed at the Californian diggings in their crudest time."

"All right," said Cholmeley, lazily; "eccentricity is a thing I adore. Now for the rest of the household? Son? No, of course; I had forgotten—else where would you be? Any daughters?

"One."

"What is her name?"

"Edith."

"Nice name, Edith. What is she like?"

"A pretty thorough English-looking girl," said Clement rather stiffly, for he didn't much approve of this style of cross-questioning.

"Ah, I know what that means," said his com-

panion, "prim and bread and buttery. Any other ladies?"

"There will be some staying in the house, I suppose, but there is only one regularly resident, Mrs. Carlyle, a kind of chaperon or companion to Miss Murray."

"What is she like?"

"I really cannot say. She was away last time I was at the Bluffs."

"Don't trouble yourself, my dear fellow. I can picture her perfectly without your aid—a short skinny woman, in a skimpy black alpaca dress, with fair hair and, probably, spectacles; wears a flapping straw-hat, and sniffs a good deal—Gad!" he muttered below his breath, "what a cheery look out!"

His companion took no notice of this remark, as he was already busied in getting together his travelling traps, and within a few minutes the train stopped at Oakenshaw, and there they alighted. A drive of half-an-hour in a neat dog-cart, which had been sent to meet them, brought them to some pretty iron gates, through which they wended their way up a long avenue of elms, with their destination, a quaintly gabled house, ruddy and glowing in the light of the sinking sun, plainly visible about a mile distant. On the other side of the avenue lay a well-kept park, with here and there groups of deer couchant in the shade

of some wide-spreading tree, and a general air of peace and prosperity pervaded the scene.

"This is nice, very nice!" said Roger Cholmeley, looking round; "your uncle must have taste as well as money, my dear Clement, to have selected such a good style of place as this, and he was lucky to find it in the market at the time. Neat dog-cart, too, and the man is very well turned out. The old man preserves, I suppose?—there ought to be a good lot of pheasants in that copse to the right. Ah, ah! we are evidently expected. There is the old gentleman on the steps and two ladies on the lawn. Can you make out who they are?"

"The shorter one is Miss Murray; the other, I imagine to be Mrs. Carlyle."

"Oh, yes," said Cholmeley, "the companion!—and from all I can make out," he muttered to himself, "the companion seems to have a deuced nice figure of her own."

The next moment they drew up at the porch.

CHAPTER II.

PRIVATE.

THREE months had passed away, and although numbers of visitors had come and gone, the original party at Red Bluffs remained the same. Grouse shooting was long since over; great havoc had been committed among the partridges, and the pheasants had been severely thinned, and still scarcely a day passed during which Roger Cholmeley was not out gunning for two or three hours in the Squire's preserves. To be sure, the keepers complained that he was not half so keen at it as he had been at first, that he did not give up to it so much of his time, now always returning to the house for luncheon, and that even while shooting he was absorbed and pre-occupied —'moithered,' the Yorkshire keepers called it—and the amount of his bag suffered accordingly.

Nevertheless he was still at Red Bluffs. His friends this year had missed him from all his wonted places

of resort. A Russian princess and a Parisian actress had counted upon seeing him as usual at Homburg, and had each bemoaned his absence for full half a day, after which they consoled themselves with other *délassements*. He had had an invitation into Norfolk, and those who knew what the Marham and Stradsett cover shooting is like thought Roger Cholmeley must have gone mad when he did not put in an appearance at the proper time. It was his habit in the early days of November to run through to Paris, and take up his quarters in that prettily furnished *entresol* of the Rue Taitbout which he had rented for several years; but it was now the middle of the month, and the *concierge* in the Rue Taitbout declared to all inquirers that he had no *nouvelles* of M. Shomlee, and had not the faintest idea when to expect him.

A change in the constitution of the household was, however, imminent. Every day, notwithstanding the attention which he had paid to his uncle's guests, shooting with the men, flirting with the ladies, pic-nic improvising and croquet party getting up, devoting himself to Edith, and generally delighting the old gentleman, Clement had given up a certain number of hours to steady work, making himself acquainted with the whole of his uncle's property, suggesting economies here, improvements there, and proving himself a thorough man of business. In the course

of his investigations, in which he was materially helped by Mr. Murray, Clement discovered that certain large holdings of real estate, purchased by the old gentleman in the early days of San Francisco, and now worth nearly twenty times what he had given for them, were in jeopardy, some doubt having arisen as to the legal title under which they were held. It was necessary, therefore, according to Clement Dyne's judgment, that some one, possessing full information, and armed with full authority, should go out and represent Mr. Murray in person. His uncle admitted the force of the argument, but did not see how it was to be managed or who there was to undertake the commission.

"Only one person," said Clement, "myself!"

Mr. Murray at first would not hear of this arrangement; Clement could not be spared; he had become entirely necessary to him; he must remain to look after the home property; and, above all, what would Edith say?

"We will take the last of your objections first, sir," said Clement sharply. "Edith is a dear, good, sensible girl, and will see at once the necessity for my going. I shall only be away for six months, and if you will give us a promise that we shall be married immediately on my return, that will give us both something to cheer our spirits during my absence. The home property

is now put so straight that for so short a period, with your occasional supervision, it can look after itself. And it is not merely the real estate in San Francisco, that I must set straight. Last night, after you had gone to bed, I was reading the report issued by the management of the Don Pablos Bank in Sacramento, in which you are largely interested, and I am strongly of opinion that their method of doing business might be improved, so far at least as your dividends are concerned. I can make one job of these two matters and be out and home within seven months, just in time to enjoy the best part of the London season after our marriage."

There was no gainsaying this young man, so ardent and withal so prudent and business-like was he. So that, after Edith's slowly given consent had been obtained, it was decided that Clement should undertake his self-imposed mission, and the day of departure was fixed. When Clement left, his friend Robert Cholmeley's visit would necessarily come to an end, and thus the whole party would be broken up.

When all this had been determined on, Mr. Murray announced his intention of giving a grand ball to the county folk, and the neighbourhood generally, on the night before Clement started for Liverpool. Vainly was it pointed out to him that he had better defer the festivity until his nephew's return. "They could have

another one then," he said. But he was an old-fashioned man, who, when he was pleased, liked his delight to find vent in other ways than mere words. He was delighted at his daughter's engagement, at the good qualities of his nephew, and he had lived, he said, too long on the other side of the water not to know the cheering value to a man who was going away of a good "send-off." That "send-off" Clement should have, and it being found impossible to shake the resolution, the invitations were dispatched, and every one agreed to do their best in insuring the success of the ball.

It was the morning of the day on which the entertainment was to take place, and Mrs. Carlyle, "the companion," as we have heard her called, was seated at a writing-table in the library. A vulgar person would have looked out of place in that stately room; but there was a quiet dignity in the lady's appearance which perfectly harmonised with the quaintly-carved black oak and deep crimson velvet, the dim age-embrowned pictures and the old armour hanging against the walls. A woman of about seven-and-twenty years of age; her figure tall and well-developed, her features regular, with large grey eyes and dark chestnut hair. A strange expression on her face, as though she had gone through trouble, the impress of which had almost died away, but was liable to return at any moment. A physiognomist

would have read firmness in her mouth, even in those full red lips, which the ordinary observer would have associated but with pleasure. Her hair was plainly dressed, taken off her face, and confined in a clump at the back of her head, and she wore a black silk gown with neat linen collar and cuffs.

She was so absorbed in her writing that she did not hear the door open, or notice the entrance of Roger Cholmeley, until he stood close beside her. Then she started, with an exclamation. "I beg your pardon, Mr. Cholmeley," she said, with a little laugh. "It was very absurd of me to be so nervous, but I really had no idea you were in the room."

"I hope I have not disturbed you," he said in a low voice, so different from his usual London bantering tone.

"Not at all, I was merely making a list of a few books at Mr. Dyne's request; such books as I thought would amuse him on the voyage, or during his long day journeys over the Western plains. Did you expect to find him here?"

"No, indeed, I was not looking for Clement, but for you. I have a request to make; a favour to ask of you."

She looked up frankly in his face without the smallest sign of affectation, and said, "If it is in my power to grant it, Mr. Cholmeley, you may look upon it as done."

"I knew I might calculate on that answer," he said quickly. "Years ago, I forget when and I forget where, I read a poem, one verse of which remains in my memory. It ran thus—

"'When the men and maids are dancing,
And the folk are mad with glee,
In the Temple's shady gardens
Let me walk and talk with thee.'"

"I know it," said Mrs. Carlyle, "the poem is called 'The Ballad of Richard Burnell,' and was written, I think, by Mary Howitt. You are a strange man, Mr. Cholmeley. This is not the first time you have surprised me by evidence of your odd desultory reading, and yet one never would have imagined that—that—" and she stopped in some confusion.

"One would never have imagined that I knew or read anything," said Cholmeley, laughing, "that was what you were going to say, and I dare say you are perfectly right. However, as you know the verse, my request is the more simple. I substitute this room for the 'Temple's shady garden,' and Mrs. Howitt has expressed it for me!"

A faint flush rose on Annie Carlyle's cheek as, looking up at him, she said, "You wish me to meet you in this room to-night?"

Roger Cholmeley's face was very grave, and his manner very earnest, as he replied, "I do, and I trust

you know me sufficiently by this time to be certain that, in making that request, I am actuated by the sincerest respect for you."

Annie Carlyle bowed. "I have no doubt of that," she said quietly.

"I wish you to come here to-night," pursued Roger, "because I have something to ask of you, your reply to which will be to me at least of the highest importance. I cannot ask it now for everybody is about, and I am expected back at once to assist in the decoration of the ball-room; but to-night, when they are all engaged, when 'the men and maids are dancing,' I will ask you to give me ten minutes in this room where we shall be secure from interruption."

There was silence for a minute. Then Mrs. Carlyle said, "I ought perhaps to be shocked at the unconventionality of such a proceeding, but I am not a conventional woman. I know you to be a gentleman, Mr. Cholmeley, and I have every confidence in your honour. I will be here to-night at eleven o'clock."

Then he bowed and left her.

The ball was a great success. When Sir Hugh Stapleton, after a short and inglorious career on the turf, went finally to the bad, and had to sell Stapleton Hall—it had been in the family for generations. Mr. Murray, the purchaser, was at first looked upon with some suspicion and ill-feeling by the neighbouring

county gentry. He was a *parvenu* they said, and though it was granted that he had money, that money had not been made in a legitimate and recognised way. They perfectly appreciated the position of the Rothschilds, the Barings, and persons of that class, and there were among themselves bankers and brewers who with their families were highly respected and made much of, but these worthy people did not understand much about foreign countries, and when it was rumoured that Mr. Murray's wealth had been acquired in California—to them a perfect *terra incognita*—they were in the habit of speaking of him among themselves as the "bushranger," or the "miner," while Miss Skymmerton, a frisky young lady of fifty-five, whose sarcasm was dreaded throughout the neighbourhood, had christened the house "The Diggings," by which appellation it was universally known.

But when after a time it began to be seen that the new comer lived in good but perfectly modest style, that he gave himself no airs, that he attended the parish church, and contributed to the local charities, when above all it was seen that Lord St. Thomas, the Colonial Secretary, and Sir Hesketh Briggs, were among the guests at Red Bluffs during the shooting season, it was agreed that the new owner of Stapleton Hall ("though what he can mean by calling the dear old place by such an outlandish name I cannot imagine, my dear") was a

man to be acknowledged by the county, and by the county he was acknowledged accordingly.

The prolonged stay of Roger Cholmeley at Red Bluffs had excited a vast amount of speculation amongst the neighbouring families, for Roger Cholmeley was a well-known man. Not a manœuvering mamma in the country but knew his history; how he had been the only child of thoroughbred but poor people; how he had been educated at Christ's Hospital and Heidelberg; how, while attached to the embassy at Paris, he had attracted the notice of his eccentric great uncle, the Marquis of Hatfield, who was delighted to find in the young man a character as eccentric and sardonic as his own, and who dying a few years after, left his grand-nephew a fortune which was roughly estimated at two hundred thousand pounds.

What could a man of this kind find to detain him so long at the Red Bluffs? Plainly there was no lady in the case, for Miss Murray, though a pretty little girl enough, had no style about her, and besides she was engaged. Old Murray was a pleasant man enough, but decidedly not much of a companion, and the nephew had only been a clerk in a Government office—where could Mr. Cholmeley find the attraction? Finally, they put it down to his eccentricity, a pleasant quality which covers a multitude of shortcomings and lapses from social propriety.

There was no mistake about it that the presence of Mr. Cholmeley attracted a great many persons to the ball. The mammas knew of his wealth, and the young ladies had heard of his good looks, and both were anxious to see him; and even among the men there was a kind of curiosity to look at one who was of them, who had gained a reputation in odd and various ways; who, with the character—for all his wealth—of being a prudent man, had "stood a cracker" on the Leger and lost a large sum of money without turning a hair, and who, notably listless and indolent as he was presumed to be, had plunged off the pier-head at Yarmouth and fought his way to the shore with a child whom he had rescued from the boiling waters. Nor was Roger Cholmeley the only attraction. Some came to see the "bush-ranger" at home, some to notice, criticise and satirize his manner of living, some to see the grand old hall which they had known in its decay under the shabby poverty of its late owners, now "gilt by the touch of a millionaire," some to fuss and flatter and lay seed for further invitations, and many with the simple object of honest enjoyment.

At such entertainments pleasure is early a-foot, and by eleven the ball was at its height. Just as the clock struck, Roger Cholmeley, who had been the lion of the evening and had delighted every one by his gracious affability, slipped from the ball-room and made his way to the library.

Mrs. Carlyle was there before him.

By the light of the shaded moderator lamp placed on the high oaken mantelpiece, he saw her standing by the writing-table, simply dressed in black tulle with one tea-rose in her hair, and thought that in all his experience he had never seen any one more graceful and more beautiful.

"I hope I have not kept you waiting," he said, advancing towards her, "I came away the instant I had the chance."

"There is not the least occasion for an apology," she replied. "I saw you surrounded by devotees, and knew you would have some difficulty in ridding yourself of them. Only do not think me rude if I say that your absence is likely to be marked, and on that account it is advisable that we should return as soon as possible."

"I perfectly understand you," he said, "and will say what I have to say at once. What I have to ask you demands a certain amount of courage, so that I shall ask you to give me some credit at the outset. I think, Mrs. Carlyle, you will do me the justice to say that since I have been in this house I have never by actual word or open look shown a preference for any of its inmates, or any of those who may have been staying here as its guests?"

She bowed, without speaking.

"And yet," he continued, approaching closely to her and lowering his voice, "when you have heard, as I have heard, the various expressions of wonder as to what could have detained me here so long and the curious remarks on my protracted stay—not from my host of course, he is the kindest and dearest old man alive, but from some of his silly friends—when you have heard these you must have known perfectly in your own heart that if you had chosen you could have given the solution to the mystery, which might not have been credited perhaps, but which would have been strictly true."

"Why should I have known this?" she asked.

"Because no woman was ever loved by one in whose society she was constantly thrown without immediately divining the fact. However hard I may have striven to conceal it, every word and every look revealed to you, but to you alone, that it was your presence that detained me here, and that so long as I had the happiness of looking at you and listening to you I could not tear myself away! Mrs. Carlyle—Annie!—you believe me! You know I am telling you truth!" and he seized her hand and looked eagerly into her eyes.

"Was it to say this," she asked, struggling to release her hand, "that you came here?"

"To say this and more," he replied quickly; "to stop there would be insulting to you and ridiculous in me.

I have told you I loved you, and I came now to ask you to let my hopes have fruition, to say to you what, in a life which has not been without its temptations, I have never said to woman yet—to ask you to be my wife!"

Annie Carlyle gave a little start and a shiver, but was silent.

"You do not reply," said Roger, "and I am afraid I spoke hastily and without sufficient explanation. Perhaps you would say that you know nothing of me, and indeed I have but little to say for myself. I have led an odd, lounging kind of life, never doing much harm I believe, but certainly doing little good. It was a life that had great attractions for me, and I thought I should never tire of it; but somehow since I have been down here I have thought differently, and fancied I might have done better things. Anyhow I am thankful to be able to declare that there is nothing dishonourable attaching to my name, nor need any woman have compunction on that score in becoming my wife. In regard to other matters, I have a fortune, which——"

"Pray pardon me, Mr. Cholmeley," said Annie Carlyle, interrupting him, "there is no occasion to go further into these matters. I am very much flattered by the honour you have done me, very sorry that I am compelled to decline it."

"To decline it!" cried Roger. "Do you mean —— I beg your pardon," he said, checking himself and in an altered tone; "I am the last man in the world to have placed both you and myself in this awkward position if I had not, with absurd vanity, no doubt, misinterpreted your feelings towards me—I imagined that——that——"

"That I cared for you," said Mrs. Carlyle, interrupting and laying her hand lightly on his arm. "I do care for you, Roger Cholmeley, far more than for any other being in the world!"

"You do?" he cried, in his turn breaking in, "you do care for me, Annie?"

"So much," she said, in the same grave voice and with the same earnest look fixed upon his face, "so much that I am going to tell you why I cannot be your wife. This is no boy and girl love nonsense between us, Roger Cholmeley! we are past the age of romance and have each of us seen too much of the world to attempt to deceive, at least ourselves. So, knowing you to be a gentleman in the fullest sense of the word, and thereby incapable of taking any advantage of the confession, I tell you that I like you, that I love you, if the old-fashioned word suits you better, and I ask you to bear with me for a few moments while I tell you why I say 'No' to you, and deprive myself of the greatest gratification that life could give."

"For God's sake do not talk to me in that way, Annie!" cried Roger, bending his head, "I cannot bear it."

"You must bear it, Roger," said Annie, with a sad smile. "You will when you recollect that I have to bear it too. And you must hear my story that I may justify myself in your eyes. I know you to be an honourable man of generous impulses, and I believe that at the present moment you sincerely feel for me all that you allege; but I know you also to be a man indolent and listless, unstable as water, without any definite purpose in life. Since you have been here you have become in some respects a totally changed man, you have developed your natural talent, you have shown your quaint reading and research. Only last evening Mr. Clement Dyne was saying that none of your town friends would know you for the vacillating *flaneur* of Pall Mall."

"And it is you who have worked this change!" he cried.

"I have little doubt of it," she said. "In your desire to please me you have endeavoured to throw aside that air of wearied nonchalance and cynical boredom which you saw was not merely unintelligible but offensive to me; you have succeeded admirably, but how long will it last? I am a novelty to you now; but if I were your wife, and you were accustomed to me, how long

would it be before you fell back into the old style of life?"

"Never!" he cried; "with you as my wife it would be impossible."

"Would it?" she said, with a sigh. "You seem to forget, Roger, that I have been married before. I was a girl of seventeen, living in a little cottage in a country town with an old aunt, when, at a lawn party, I made the acquaintance of Mr. Carlyle, who was staying at a neighbouring country house. I had led a very humdrum life, with only the curate and the doctor as the representatives of male society, and I had never seen such a man before, easy and self-possessed, full of high spirits, which did duty for wit, and rattling nonsense, which passed for conversation. I became fascinated with him at once. He was pleased with me too; said he found my simplicity such a charming contrast to the women of the world, and, after a little time, during which he had made inquiries and found I was entitled to a small fortune of four thousand pounds, he made me an offer. In spite of my aunt's advice, I accepted him, and from that day I date my sufferings. We were married, and very shortly after I seemed to fall into that useless desultory kind of life which he had led so long. Had there been the slightest stability about him, we might have both gone on very well, for Ward Carlyle was a man of kindly impulses, and,

so far as lay in him, had a real affection for me. But he had no profession, nothing to call out his latent energy, no end or aim in life, nothing to do but to dawdle on from week's end to week's end, killing time. He rode, and acted, and sang, and danced, and shot, all well, and these accomplishments in his bachelor days had made him a welcome guest everywhere; but, after his marriage, he found the difference. His old acquaintances were polite to us, but to a bachelor alone belonged the place he had filled, and in much of the society he had frequented I was not merely an encumbrance but a drawback. If I had flirted, if I had chosen to "go my own way," as society phrases it, as Ward went his, I should have been acceptable enough, but I had been brought up differently and could not undertake the position. I verily believe, if at that time my husband had had anything to do, anything to occupy his mind, he might have been saved. As I saw him re-enter our Bond Street lodging, with wearied air and irritable manner, after a long lounging turn round the clubs, round the Park, I used to call to mind all those men of my early acquaintance whom I had so recently despised—the curate visiting the poor, the doctor driving over the wind-beaten, rain-soaked common to carry aid and consolation to the sick, and to think how useful—ay, and how happy were their lives in comparison with Ward's! It could not last

long, this state of existence, and in less than two years my four thousand pounds had come to an end, for, during the last half of this time, my husband had taken means to dissipate his weariness and ennui. That he gambled I knew soon after our marriage, for he had more than once boasted to me of his success on the turf; but, later on, I discovered that he drank heavily. The drinking, I suppose, destroyed his head and his calculating powers, for he lost in every speculation that he touched, and declared his luck had deserted him. At last came the end. We had moved from our grand apartments in Bond Street some time before, and were living in little rooms in South Molton Street, mean and poorly furnished, but looking better on that night than usual, for I had managed to dress them up with some pretty flowers which I had brought over from Covent Garden. It was the end of May, the day after the Derby Day, and I had not seen Ward, who had been staying with some friends at Sutton for three days. I was sitting looking out of the window disconsolately enough, when I heard his foot-step, and, turning round, found him in the room. In his worst times he had never been harsh to me, and now he came forward and took me in his arms and pressed his burning lips upon my forehead. His face was very white, and when he spoke his voice shook.

"Sit down, child," he said, "for a minute; I have something to say to you. It is all over, Annie! The game is played out, and we are ruined! I lost twelve hundred pounds on the Derby yesterday, and nearly as much more is owing in outstanding bills; I hoped to recoup myself on the Oaks to-morrow, but the mare which I had backed has just been scratched, and settling-day is on Monday. I cannot face Monday, Annie! so I am off to-night to Australia. All we have in the world is two hundred pounds, and here is the half of that sum for you. If I do well, you shall hear from me; if I come to grief, try and forget that there ever was such a person, for you have been a good girl to me; and, if I thought there would be any use of it coming from me, I would say, 'God bless you.' He held me to his heart again for an instant, and was gone. With the money which he left me, I paid up the little debts owing in the neighbourhood, and advertised for a situation as companion to a young lady. By Heaven's mercy, I fell in with Edith, and have remained with her ever since."

"And your husband, what of him?" interrupted Cholmeley.

"I had been here scarcely six months," said Annie, very gravely, "when I received a letter, apparently from a lawyer in California, and a newspaper. The letter briefly stated my husband's death; the newspaper

gave details of it. He was killed, it seemed, during a brawl in some bar saloon or night cellar."

There was silence for a few minutes, silence during which Roger Cholmeley's better nature was struggling with a wrathful spirit rising within him, but which at last got the better of him and burst forth.

"And, because this man," he said, "was a gambler and a drunkard, you refuse my offer, and seem to predict a similar fate in store for me!"

"No, you know better than that, Roger Cholmeley," said Annie, quietly; "I have no dread for you; mine is a more selfish fear, a more selfish hope. You would never seek the debasing associations in which Ward Carlyle found consolation, but your self-suffering would be as great; your life is as purposeless and as desultory as was his, and in a short time you will weary of it as much as he did, and if I were your wife, you would weary of me, and then," she added, with a sad, sweet smile, "then what should I do?"

"For God's sake," he said, with sudden earnestness, "don't talk about being my wife, merely to dilate upon the impossibility of becoming so! Do you mean to say that if I were a different man you would marry me?"

"Not if you were a different man, Roger, but a man in a different position. I want my husband to fill up his time in the world, and, in filling it up, to give me

something to be proud of. By natural ability and education you are far beyond the ordinary run of men, and there is no walk in life in which you might not have distinguished yourself."

"It is rather late to think of that now, I fear," said Roger, with a half comical shake of his head; "I might go into Parliament, it is true; there are two or three boroughs always in the market."

"And sit as the representative of a bought constituency!" said Anne. "I am afraid there will be scarcely much honour in that—nor do I——"

"Stay!" interrupted Roger, seizing her hand, "stay, Annie, and listen to me for one minute! You tell me you care for me, and it is the purposeless life which I am leading which alone prevents you becoming my wife. If I throw off that life at once and for ever, cast it from me as a serpent does its skin, show that I am fitted for better things, and willing to undertake them, will you change your determination?"

"But how can you do it, Roger?"

"By breaking with the old life and its associations at once! By starting with Clement Dyne for California to-morrow morning, and remaining with him all the months of his absence! There I may get new ideas and definite plans for the future: at all events, in the trip I shall be able to rid myself of a manner of existence which has become second nature to me,

and which it would be impossible if I remained here to discard."

"And you will do this for my sake?" asked Annie.

"For your sake I would do anything," said Roger Cholmeley, "on condition that, when I return, Edith Murray is not the only inmate of Red Bluffs who will be married within a month. Is it a contract?"

"It is!" said Annie Carlyle, giving him her hand, with a bright blush.

And the contract was sealed;—only just in time, though; for the next moment the door was opened, and they heard Edith Murray's voice at the far end of the room, saying,—

"Annie, dear!—oh, I really beg your pardon: I had no idea—only they are looking everywhere for Mr. Cholmeley to lead the cotillon."

CHAPTER III.

STARTLING.

THE month of March, but hotter than an English August. The heavy vapour which had hung heavily around during the morning meant heat, as the miners well knew. Towards noon it cleared away, was lifted bodily, as though a veil had been taken off, as though a curtain had been raised, to show the prospect. And what a prospect! Far away as the eye could reach might be perceived the outline of a road, not such a macadamised track as is to be found in England, but, nevertheless, a good road for California, winding its way through a grove of sycamores, and oaks, bordered here and there by the fragrant bay-tree, the dark-green buckeye, and the pretty Californian laurel, and, as it climbed the rising mountain-side, closely skirting a deep, precipitous ravine. That softened distant tinkling came from the bells hanging round the necks of the mules, which, in teams

of from four to eight, were constantly ascending and descending, and thus give to the drivers of other vehicles warning of their approach.

On one of the highest of the hills forming the spur of the coast range there stood a tolerable-sized cabin, neater in its finish and less objectionable in its surroundings than the generality of such places in those regions. Streaks of light blue smoke were curling from its *adobe* chimney, and a glance inside would have shown a couple of clean, rough beds, and a better stock and greater variety of creature comforts than is usually met with in a mining camp. On a patch of ragged grass immediately in front of the door lay two men, smoking silently, and looking around them. Mountain peaks rose on all sides, showing behind and beside each other, dipping themselves down into hollows, one mass of verdure, from the cloud-tipped summit to the broad base hidden in the cañon, save where the tracks made by the sheep and goats in search of the sweet grass and wild oats had left narrow intersecting lines. Far away the waters of Alviso Bay sparkled in the sunshine, while, several miles below them, lay the nearest human habitation, a small settlement of cabins and huts of various sizes, the homes of the miners and their families, which were scattered over the surface of the mountain in an irregular and picturesque manner.

"And so that's your story, Roger?" said one of the two men, expelling a mouthful of smoke, and lazily looking after it as it went curling up over his head. "Romantic enough, by Jove! and told with great effect in a remarkably romantic place!"

"I don't see much romance in it, I confess," said his friend; "and as for the place, I told it to you here, just now, because as we're on the point of starting for home—God bless it!"—

"Amen!" said Clement Dyne, reverently doffing his broad-leafed hat.

"As we're on the point of starting for home, I may be said to have accomplished what I came out for. I think I've pretty well broken with my past life and its associations; and as for Bond Street and Swelldom, Mr. Smalpage would look rather scared at this suit of blanketing, and Chapman and Moore would scarcely congratulate me on my sombrero."

"Ay, but better far than that, old man, is the way in which you have come out, and shown that talent which I always knew to be in you, but which you would never allow any one to give you credit for. Did not Alston, of the Bank of California, while we were out at that magnificent place of his, tell me that you were 'the best' Englishman he had ever met; that he never saw any one grasp the details and bearings of a case so quickly and so completely, and that it was a

cruel shame you were not compelled to earn your living by the exercise of your wits? And then your settlement of that pre-emption question in Colorado, and your proposition for tunnelling those silver mines in Nevada! I've sent copies of all the papers and the reports to Mr. Murray, and he's safe to get them into the *Economist* and the *Financier*, and those kinds of journals, so you must not be surprised to find a deputation of merchants awaiting you at Liverpool, to entreat you to accept the Chairmanship of the Bank of England!"

"I don't know much about that, but I do know that I have gained some experience in matters about which I was totally ignorant; experience which may be of some good to me in the future. And I know also that I have entirely cured myself of my liking for that listless, desultory life of which Annie used to complain so, and that I could never lead it again."

"No, indeed! 'Bottom, thou art translated,' and all this for a woman's sake. 'Haw! the companion's not bad—haw!' I shall never forget your lordship's kind patronage of the establishment and its inmates, that evening when we first drove up to the Bluffs."

"Don't chaff, Clement, please; don't remind me of what I was then. Good heavens, when I think of the difference! I dare not tell you, even you, how happy I am now—so happy that I feel a dread undefined

something impending, as though my happiness were too great, too undeserved, to be capable of fulfilment."

"Exactly! like the schoolboy who cannot realise that breaking-up day is at hand, or the budding miss, who thinks that earthquakes and convulsions of nature will interpose between her and her first ball. With all your experience you are only a child, Roger."

"Where Annie is concerned, I'll allow I'm weak enough; but you see it's rather hard lines, Clement. No acknowledged engagement between us, not even interchange of letters, according to her expressed wishes."

"No; but I've been thinking I should have been much better off, if she hadn't made that stipulation, Master Roger. Of course she has long since confided the secret to Edith, women never can keep those things, and the hearing of them is as great a delight to the listener as the telling is to the speaker, and that's the reason why there has been always so much about dear Mrs. Carlyle and her doings in Edith's letters to me; a base conspiracy of which I have been the victim, in order that I might read those portions out to you."

"Well, there will be no occasion for any more letters. To-night I leave by the stage for Frisco. To-morrow, when you have disbursed that amount of coin amongst our mining friends down yonder, you join me there; a

week sees us in New York, and a fortnight afterwards we shall be eating turtle soup at the Adelphi in Liverpool, and drinking to those dearest to us in a glass of iced punch."

"Which, at its best, is not so good as dry Santa Cruz," said the practical Clement Dyne. "However, I shall be glad when we're there, and not sorry when I'm with you at the Occidental in Frisco, as I scarcely like having such an amount of convertible cash about me with these roughs in the neighbourhood. I don't think though they have much chance; I'm a light sleeper, always have a Derringer under my pillow, and shoot pretty straight."

"And you would not scruple to fire?"

"Well, I should not like to kill a man, but I would do my best to make him uncomfortable for the rest of his life, and rather rejoice at it."

"Remorseless wretch! However, don't let us talk about possible horrors, rather let us discuss coming happiness. You'll settle down at the Bluffs as soon as you're married, I suppose?"

"Oh, yes. That was the bargain with the old gentleman. He would not like parting with his daughter, and his house will form a capital centre of operation for all my future work; and you, what will you do?"

"Whatever Annie may wish. I guess, as our friends

here would say, that she will like to travel, as she has never yet been out of England, and, if so, we should go on the Continent for a year or two. What a companion she would make! Fancy, Clement, being with her in Rome or Florence, roaming through the old galleries, and listening to——"

"Oh, heavens, spare me! To think that the cynic of St. James's Street, the Hermit of Hurlingham, should ever come to this!" cried Clement Dyne, holding up his hands in well-feigned astonishment. "Do you consider such sentiments proper in an Englishman of society of the present day? If it were known that you possessed them you would be turned out of the Raleigh, and have Pratt's doors banged in your face."

"I could put up with even that degradation in such a cause," said Roger Cholmeley, his heightened colour showing even through his red-bronzed skin. "My only fear, as I said before, is that I should not live to achieve my happiness, but something or some one should come between me and the fulfilment of my hopes; lest—what's this?"

He leaned forward as he spoke, and pointed to a white dot which seemed approaching them from the side of the mountain removed from the settlement.

Clement Dyne rose quickly and stepped into the cabin for his glass. By its aid he resolved the white

dot into a man on horseback, making the best of his way towards them. The progress they made was but small, however, for the poor beast seemed tired out, and its rider, after a few efforts to urge it on, gave up the attempt, and permitted it to subside into an uncomfortable amble.

"What do you make him out to be?" asked Roger Cholmeley of Clement, who still had the glass at his eye.

"A miner, I should say," said Clement; "a miner rather out of luck. He is making his way straight here, and, as he has a rifle slung at his saddle, it may be as well to show him we are ready for him."

As he spoke he entered the hut and returned, bringing with him two guns. "I don't want to threaten the poor brute," he said carelessly, "but it is quite as well to let him see we can take care of ourselves."

As he spoke the man, in turning a corner of the mountain-path, disappeared from view. When they next saw him he was close upon them, and then, for the first time, he seemed to notice their guns, for he threw up his arms and extended his right hand in token of peace and amity. Coming to the final and stiffest bit of the ascent he jumped off his horse, and led the poor stumbling, panting beast by the bridle.

"Servant, strangers!" he cried, with a kind of military salute, "no occasion for them shooting-irons: I am

rough to look at, but don't mean no harm. Besides being two to one, you're both of you in prime condition, and could soon make mincemeat of a poor half-starved devil like myself."

He was, in truth, gaunt and worn-looking, though, by nature, a large-framed, well-developed, and, probably, handsome man. There were hollow rings round his dark eyes, and the falling in of his cheeks was visible even beneath his full red beard, which was already streaked with grey, though he could not have been more than forty-two or three years of age. His thin, brown hands were well shaped, and, even in the heavy miner's boots which he wore, his feet looked small and comely. He was dressed in a pair of white duck trousers, a white duck overshirt, and a straw hat, and thrown carelessly over his shoulder was a red bandana handkerchief tied in a loop, and in a sheath at the back of his waistband was a large Spanish knife.

"There is no intention of doing you any harm," said Roger Cholmeley, stepping towards him with outstretched hand, "only, as you doubtless know pretty well, it is advisable to be on one's guard in such places as these."

"Guess you're right there," said the stranger, with a short laugh, "with all the varmint and trash that's laying about a mining camp one needs to be tolerably quick and ready with one's Derringer. I was making

tracks for the Almaden mine, but I don't see my way to getting there now; this knacker of mine is used up considerable, and can scarce put one foot before another."

"The poor beast looks thoroughly tired out," said Clement Dyne, "you will have to go on without him."

"Or better still, stay here till he has recovered," said Roger Cholmeley. "We can put you up for the night, and he will be all right after a rest and a feed."

"I don't know where your friend is to find his quarters," growled Clement Dyne, who wholly disapproved of this treatment of the stranger, "we are confoundedly squeezed as it is."

"You forget I am going away by the stage this evening, Clem," said Roger cheerily, not in the least minding his friend's wrath, "so that there will be ample accommodation."

"This new-found happiness of Roger's has got into his head," muttered Clement Dyne, as he turned angrily away, "and prevents him from exercising his common sense. I'll be hanged if I am going to pass the night in company with some unknown vagabond, more especially when there is all this money in the hut."

"You mustn't let me disturb you, gentlemen," said the stranger in a very different tone of voice to that which he had hitherto assumed, and at the same time

rising and taking off his hat, "I imagine I am talking to the two Englishmen who have been here for some weeks past prospecting on the new Murray claim. Heard of you at San José some time ago, but forgot about you again."

"You must be an Englishman also?" said Clement Dyne, turning back from the cabin and looking with considerably softened glance at the speaker.

"Well, yes, and I have still some recollection of my mother tongue, and some power to employ it, though I have knocked about among these people for so long as to have become almost encrusted with their cant and slang. Besides, it is not very wise to proclaim one's nationality among those fellows, and although down in that seething hive yonder," he added, pointing to the camp, "there are English, Irish, Scotch, and Welch, mixed up with Mexican rancheros, Chinese, and niggers, Johnny Bull is by no means at a premium."

"Well, it is a treat to meet a fellow-countryman so far away from home, more especially when one can be of some little service to him," said Roger.

"We will look after your horse, Mr.—— "

"Clark," said the stranger, quickly, "William Clark, of a respectable Nottinghamshire family which I suppose never had a more graceless representative."

"We will take care of your horse, Mr. Clark, and give you some dinner and a shake-down, which will be rough

"ROGER CHOLMELEY AND THE STRANGER LAY OUTSIDE THE CABIN DOOR."

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enough, but better than your having to tramp it on to the mine."

* * * * *

Two hours after Roger Cholmeley and the stranger lay outside the cabin door some distance down the grassy slope, smoking their pipes, and watching the westering sun. Clement Dyne was in the cabin going through his accounts. The new comer had eaten a huge meal and had drank heavily, although there was not the smallest sign that what he had taken had any effect upon him. They had strolled out to their present position immediately after dinner, but their conversation had flagged, and there had been a long silence, which was broken by Roger, who, looking at his watch, said—

"Two hours more and the stage will start. It seems strange to me to think that I am leaving this country where I have been for six months, and that in all human probability I shall never retnrn to it."

"You ought to consider yourself a deuced lucky fellow," said the stranger stretching himself with a prolonged yawn; "I only wish I could say the same, I am sick of the confounded place and would give anything, if I had it, to hear a song at Evans's again. 'The hardy Norseman's house of yore was on the sounding sea.' Lord! what a time ago it seems since I heard that.

Why doesn't your pal go with you?" he added abruptly.

"He has to pay a large sum of money in wages and settlements on account of the Murray claim to-morrow morning," said Roger. "I would stay with him, but there is some doubt about our getting berths on board the Cunard steamer, which sails a fortnight hence, and I want to telegraph to New York as soon as possible. I tried to get him to depute the payment to his agent here, but he is inflexible in matters of business, and will do everything himself. You can see him now," he said, turning half round and looking towards the cabin, "bent double, hard at work over his accounts."

"I see him," said the stranger with a disdainful glance over his shoulder; "I hate accounts, and I hate work of any kind. I wasn't brought up to it,—I was born a gentleman, and—just let me look at your right hand for a minute. What is that scar on the wrist?"

"That?" said Roger Cholmeley, holding out his hand, "that is a scratch from a sword—"

"Given you by Count Von Aulhorn, on the Margaret Island, near Pesth, on an early summer morning in 'sixty-two."

"How do you know that?" asked Roger quickly.

"Because I was there at the time," said the stranger, with a laugh. "I thought I recognised you once or twice while you were talking to me, but I was not

certain because of that close black beard. You were an attaché at our embassy in Vienna in those days, and your name is Roger Cholmeley."

"Quite right; I 'own up to it,'" said Roger, "as they say here; though it is curious to be recognised so far away from home."

"And to think you're going back to it all!" said the stranger. "Lord, Lord, how I wish I had your chance! I recollect, now, hearing that you had come into a lot of money after that Pesth affair. You've cut the F. O., I reckon?"

"Oh, yes; long ago. I inherited from my great-uncle, and have done no work since."

"Lucky dog! Work is all very well for cads, but no gentleman is fitted for it! Plenty of money; young—you're not five-and-thirty yet, I guess?—and your own master! There's a life for you! I say your own master, without knowing; but you're not married, of course?"

"No," said Roger, with a start, and a half smile, at his companion's strange, abrupt way; "I'm not married."

"So much the better—for the other person's sake, I mean, not for yours! A man can do pretty much as he pleases; if he wants to shake a loose leg he can shake it, go where he likes, and get as much change and variety as he wishes. It's the women that have the dull time."

"Were you ever married?" asked Roger.

"Never more than I am at this minute, I reckon!" said the stranger. "I've got a wife on the other side, a wife that I'm rather proud of; for I guess that, pick 'em where you will, you won't easily find a handsomer woman than my Annie!"

"Annie!" echoed Roger, springing to an upright position, and bending over his companion; "is she called Annie?"

"She is so!" said the stranger, smoking quietly. "Pretty name, isn't it? and it's just suited to her. I think all Annies ought to be mild and gentle and dove-eyed, like mine. What's the muss with you? You seem kinder skeared! Guess you've known an Annie too, and I've set you off thinking about her!"

He might well ask the question, but Roger took no heed of him, and sat, staring at vacancy, and pulling his long moustache. How the name, uttered by another, had jarred upon his ear! And yet, what a fool he was! it was a very common name, there must be thousands of women bearing it in England. Why should——? The sense of depression, the feeling that something unknown, indefinable, was impending, which he had experienced while talking of his happiness to Clement Dyne, came over him again in fullest force. He dreaded the subject, and yet felt himself impelled to return to it.

"You're right!" he said at length, with an effort.

"I knew an Annie once, and a sweet girl she was!"

"Ay, but not so sweet as mine!—not so tender, and trusting, and true! You never tried yours, most likely. It was all fair-weather sailing between you! It wasn't so with me and my Annie! No, sir! I've left her for days and days together in loneliness and poverty; I've spent all her money; I've enjoyed myself while she has been half starved, and yet she has stuck to me! More than that, she was not only true to me, but she has been constant to my memory."

"Your memory?"

"Ay, I thought that would fetch you!" said the stranger with a chuckle. "It was a rum start! Now I'll tell you what I've never mentioned to a soul since I left England, but you're a gentleman and to be trusted—and, even if you wer'n't, you've got no interest in the matter! Listen here; my name's not Clark at all! My name's Ward Carlyle."

It had come at last! The pipe dropped from Roger Cholmeley's lips, and he sat staring at the speaker with a wild strained gaze.

"Ah! I thought you'd know the name!" said the man, with something like a touch of pride in his voice—"though I was a few years before your time. Poverty and hard living have done their work upon me, and I have become crusted over with a kind of

blackguardism which frequently disgusts me, but I have stopped at Ranksborough, and Egerton, and Dropmore, and a whole lot of other houses that you must know very well, and been hand-and-glove with the best of them,—and to think what I am now!"

"You were speaking about your wife," said Roger, in a hard, low voice.

"Oh yes; so I was," said Carlyle; "stay a minute until I go into the cabin for a drink of whisky; it's rather dry work talking."

"You need not move; I have some here in this flask," said Roger, handing it to him.

"That's good tipple," said the man, after taking a long pull at it. "Let me see now, about my wife. What was I going to say? Oh, I remember now. I went a regular cropper on the Derby in Vandyke's year, and had to make a bolt of it and leave Annie, telling her I would send for her when things got square. I went to Melbourne first; then to Ballarat; then back to Melbourne again, things all the time getting from bad to worse. So at last the notion came to me that I had better die—not make away with myself, you know, but merely represent myself as dead to the world. A dead man cannot be called upon to pay his debts; and there are few women that I have ever heard of who care much about you when once your breath is out of your body; so I

quietly cast away over to Geelong, where I was not known, and then I got a paragraph put in the paper by a pal of mine, who was a reporter on the *Argus*, that I had been knocked on the head in a lager beer saloon. I had a copy of the paper sent to Annie, and got another pal of mine to write a kind of official letter, announcing my death, on the headed note-paper of the lawyer's office where he was a clerk. What do you think of that?"

Roger's last hope was gone! He could only make some inarticulate sound, never moving his eyes from his companion's face.

"But, as I said before—just hand us that flask again, will you!—she is constant to my memory, I know it; for the other day, in St. José, I met a man who had come from England about three months ago, who was a Yorkshireman, and had an old county paper with him, which he lent to me, and it was so long since I had heard any news of my own country, that I devoured every word of it. And there, at some school-feast, or something of that kind, at a place called Oakenshaw, I saw that, amongst others, a Mrs. Carlyle had been singing to the children. It was my Annie, I know, for I remember that the songs which were given in the list were just those she used to sing. What do you think of that?—pass the flask."

Roger Cholmeley was still silent, but he had

shifted his position, and, with his head resting on his hands, and his elbows on his knees, was buried in thought.

"I shall go back to her, sir!" said Carlyle, now in a hoarse, thick voice; "I shall go back to her. I shall get some money by some means or other—I don't care much how, but I'll get it! I shall go back to England, and I shall find out my Annie, and we shall live together until—until death do us part.—Let me go to sleep."

As he uttered these last words, he reeled over on his side, and soon fell into a heavy stertorous slumber.

CHAPTER IV.

CONCLUSIVE.

LONDON, in May. Bright revivifying sunshine, soft vernal airs bearing from the suburbs and from the parks and squares the fresh smell of garden flowers, and wafting it through the newly-watered London streets. Such a season has made one believe in the poet's definition that "Those old Mays had thrice the life of these," and enabled a Londoner to escort his foreign friends or country cousins over the capital without being ashamed of the climate.

There were certain rooms, however, in London where, though the sunlight penetrated, it brought no pleasure, and the occupant of which merely chafed under any demonstrations of happiness or festivity which might accidentally be brought under his notice. The majority of the denizens of the Albany, where these rooms were situated, is composed of a sufficiently jolly number of bachelors, some old and some young,

but all men of wealth and status in society, and for the most part having the enjoyment of life as their principal aim and object.

It would have been difficult, however, to have accredited Roger Cholmeley with anything of this kind. It would have been almost impossible to recognise in him the careless, easy-going exquisite who had gone down on his first and only visit to the Red Bluffs some nine months before. He seemed to have grown suddenly and prematurely old: there were lines round his eyes and in the corners of his mouth, and one set expression, half stern half melancholy, on his face. That expression had first been seen there after the day of his discovery that Annie Carlyle's husband was alive, of his discovery that all his hopes of future happiness, on which he had been reckoning so much, were blighted, and that not merely meant he must henceforth pursue his journey through life alone, deprived of that sweet companionship to which he had looked forward with such longing, but that in mercy to her whom he loved so fondly, he must hold his peace and must rather stand condemned in her eyes as one who broke his plighted word and betrayed the trust she had reposed in him, rather than, by speaking, reveal to her the fearful position in which she was placed.

What more cruel fate for him than to know that,

by no fault of his own, he is degraded in her eyes, and that it is impossible for him to defend himself without causing the acutest pain to her whose reputation is so dear to him!

This was exactly how Roger Cholmeley was circumstanced. He had been in England for more than a month, but he had not been down to Red Bluffs, nor had he written to Annie. There was some excuse he felt for his not having paid his respects to Mr. Murray, as Clement Dyne was not yet at home; indeed Roger Cholmeley had made the return voyage by himself, for, at the last moment, he received a letter from Clement, stating that further complications had arisen to detain him, and earnestly entreating Roger to make his way back to England by himself.

Roger was by no means sorry for this. Had he seen Clement he would have been compelled, after the confidences he had originally made him, to acquaint him with the frightful secret which he had accidentally discovered, whereas now he could keep it locked in his own bosom, and know that while he kept proper guard over his lips there was no possibility of Annie's becoming acquainted with the fact that her husband was alive.

"Not to tell her, never to let her know," that was the burden of his thoughts. At all hazards the

truth must be kept from her, at the risk of his being stigmatized in her eyes as false and disloyal. That the household at the Red Bluffs would know of his return was morally certain. He himself had stipulated that his marriage with Annie should take place within a month after the date of his return. He had been home more than a month, and he had not seen her, had not written to her, had not heard from her!

Had not heard from her? There was a strange letter among the batch which his servant had placed on his table that morning, a letter directed in a familiar hand, and bearing the Oakenshaw post mark. He had turned the envelope over in his hand, and looked at it curiously, without breaking the seal. He dared not open it.

There was the letter still; the sole one left on the writing-table. It had for him a kind of magnetic attraction. As he had wandered to and fro the chamber, communing with himself, he ever and anon paused, half inclined to seize upon it and learn the worst. It might not be from Annie, he argued; it might be some casual letter from Edith with inquiries about Clement Dyne. Anyhow, it was obvious that sooner or later he must make himself master of its contents. He decided upon doing so at once. He opened it and read as follows:

"*May* 10.

"You will not be surprised at receiving a letter from me. You must have known that, in the circumstances under which we were placed, it would have been impossible for us to let that which we must now regard as an episode in our lives, pass away without some word of explanation, and as you seem determined to keep silence, it is for me to break it.

"Please understand once and for all that I find nothing in your conduct to condemn or to reproach you with. I do not think for an instant that in anything you said to me on the night previous to your departure, in this room where I now write, you were attempting to deceive me, or in any way practising on my credulity. You believed all you said at the time, and fully intended to abide by it. That you have not done so is not strange or to be wondered at. We were thrown together in a country-house for several weeks; you had not chanced to have previously met a woman constituted as I am, and you were captivated by the novelty. That it is not lasting is no fault of yours; you were willing to do me the greatest honour a man can do a woman, and that without condition or stipulation. These, such as they were, were made by me, and if owing to their exigency the intended contract has fallen

through, the blame—and I may say the punishment —falls upon me, and upon me alone. I write these few lines to explain this and to say good-bye. I do not suppose we shall ever meet again. When Clement Dyne comes home you will, I suppose, be present at Edith's wedding; but you will not find me there, nor will any one know whither I am gone. I could not bear to see you again, for I loved you, Roger Cholmeley, with all my heart and soul! I did, indeed!

"A. C."

As Roger Cholmeley read these words he bowed his head over the paper and groaned aloud. If Annie had reproached him he could have borne it, but the manner in which she absolved him from blame, and above all the simple avowal of her love, were too much for him. For an instant the thought crossed his mind that it was absurd in him to submit to the loss of such a woman, when, by merely keeping silence as to what had occurred in America, and making some easily managed excuse for his not having hitherto visited the Bluffs, he could marry her and carry her off to the Continent, where they might live without any chance of a disturbance of their happiness. But such a plan, captivating though it promised to be, was speedily dismissed.

No! let it pass, and let him prepare himself to drag out the remainder of his life a solitary, heart-broken man. What he had been before he knew Annie Carlyle he never could be again. She had given him higher hopes and aspirations and made him despise his manner of life. What availed it now? Would it not have been better that he should have pursued the aimless, purposeless round of existence rather than be ever lamenting the complete happiness of which he had a foretaste, rather than be for ever pondering over "what might have been"?

What was that his servant said? Whom did he announce? "Mr. Dyne!" Roger could scarcely believe his ears, but there was Clement Dyne before his eyes. With no sign of travel-stain or flurry; with the crisply curling beard which he had grown in America reduced to the ordinary mutton-chop whiskers of British commercial life; neatly got up as in the old days of the Draft and Docket Office, Clement Dyne stood before him.

"Why, Clement, when did you arrive in England?"

"Three days ago in the *Calabria*."

"Where have you come from now?"

"From the Red Bluffs."

"Well, sit down, man, and let us have a talk."

"I am going to talk to you, Roger Cholmeley," said Clement Dyne; "I have come up from Yorkshire for

the express purpose. See here, we are old and intimate friends, and can talk over a difficult matter without losing our tempers, or even our respect for each other."

Roger Cholmeley's brow darkened as he heard these words. "Go on," he said quietly, "I am listening."

"Miss Murray tells me that, though you have been home for nearly six weeks, you have not been to the Red Bluffs, nor have taken any notice by letter or otherwise of Mrs. Carlyle. There is no breach of confidence in this matter; what you told me lying out in front of the cabin with the Almaden mining camp below us Mrs. Carlyle had told to Edith, who is horribly indignant at your treatment of her friend, and who wishes to know the reason of your conduct?"

"I have no reply to Miss Murray," said Roger quietly.

"No excuse to make for your desertion without rhyme or reason of a woman for whom you had professed the strongest attachment, and in order to please whom you had determined to alter your whole course of life—no explanation to give——"

"I said I had no explanation to give to Miss Murray," said Roger, turning fiercely upon him, for he was stung beyond endurance. "If *you* require any you can have it from me in another way."

"Thank you very much," said Clement Dyne, looking straight at him, "I understand you perfectly, but am not

disposed to take advantage of your offers—one dead man is enough on one's conscience!"

"What is that you say?" said Roger, looking up.

"Something which I have had on my mind to tell you and which you may as well hear now, as there does not seem much chance of our ever meeting again. You recollect the night of your departure from the mining camp, and the man whose horse had broken down, and whom you left behind you to share the cabin with me?"

"Yes," said Roger bitterly, "I recollect him."

"You and he were talking for a long time after dinner while I was making up my accounts, and I suppose, in the course of the conversation, you must have mentioned the money which I had with me for the settlement of the miners' claims."

"What makes you think that?" asked Roger eagerly.

"Simply that in the middle of the night, and long after the brute had sunk into a drunken sleep, I was roused by a noise, and, looking up, saw him fumbling at my valise. I called out, when, in an instant, he turned and sprang upon me, muttering about its being his last chance. He had a considerable pull, for I was in bed, and he was moreover much the heavier man. I felt my breath going as he was kneeling on my chest. I saw his knife flashing in the air, when, just at the instant, I bethought me of my Derringer under the pillow. I

seized it, fired, and he reeled backwards on the ground."

"Dead!" cried Roger Cholmeley, starting up.

"Dead as mutton!" said Clement Dyne, wiping his forehead. "It makes me hot to think of that struggle even now. At first I was awfully sorry for the fellow; but it was a plain case of my life against his, and he was an ungrateful brute after the kindness we had shown him. That was the secret of my remaining behind at the camp. I made the miners an excuse, but the real fact was I was quite knocked over by this adventure, and did not like to face you."

"Oh, if you only had, Clement!" said Roger, "there would have been no occasion for the errand on which you have come to-day, or the hot words which have passed between us."

And then he told his friend the whole story, and they consulted how it should best be broken to Annie.

* * * * *

It never was broken to her. She never knew it. When a woman sees the man whom she loves at her feet; when he asks her to fix the wedding-day, and shows by every word and action how he adores her, she readily accepts even a lame excuse for what she imagined to be remissness; and the excuse offered by Clement Dyne on behalf of his friend was not a lame one. There

is no happier couple in the world than Mr. and Mrs. Cholmeley; and, next to the alteration in his character, which was effected at her desire, Annie's greatest pride in her husband perhaps lies in his being so essentially "thoroughbred," though she has no idea of the difficulty through which the possession of that quality assisted him.

RALPH CRAVEN'S SILVER WHISTLE.

By FRANCES CASHEL HOEY,

AUTHOR OF "A HOUSE OF CARDS," "FALSELY TRUE," ETC.

CHAPTER I.

GLENDARRAGH.

I HAD lived, for the eighteen years of my life before my marriage with Stephen Craven, in a flat, richly-cultivated English county, where everything was pleasant and prosperous, and red brick houses and apple orchards were the most picturesque of the surroundings. My uncle's farmhouse was pretty, and peaceful, and all its inmates had been tolerably kind to me, from the hour in which my parents' simultaneous death of "the fever," as the people called it, consigned me, an infant of a year old, to their charitable care; but I did not grieve much at leaving Trent Farm, and I felt no apprehension at all about the strange people and the strange land to which I was going. The strange people were Stephen's people, and the strange land was Stephen's home; that was all I knew, or cared to know, and no happier bride ever said good-bye to the old days and the old things, than I.

Stephen Craven was an Irishman, as we understood it, but he would sometimes tell us with a laugh that his neighbours did not consider him so, because he was descended from an English family, who settled in the South of Ireland in Cromwell's time; and though their posterity had never lived out of Ireland since, and every man had married an Irish woman, every woman an Irish man, they were not entitled to the full honours of perfectly unmixed blood. Stephen was the first to break through the long tradition, the first to bring home an English wife, and I think his mother did not like it, though he assured me she never thought of anything in any other light than as it was pleasing or displeasing to him, and would welcome me for his sake first, and then love me for my own. It was not a case of a fine rich gentleman making a match beneath him, you must understand. I was a gentlewoman, though I had no fortune, and Stephen was by no means well off. The property which had been allotted to his ancestors in Cromwell's time, as a reward for service in the general's wars against the Irish, was situated in a beautiful, but wild district, and it had fluctuated much in value, as well as passed through the hands of many persons whose notions of managing it had been very various. Still, it had been tolerably well kept together, up to the time of Stephen's great-grandfather, who had ruined the family fortunes. So

much I had heard vaguely from Stephen, who had an extraordinary love for the "old place,"—Glendarragh it was called—and oh, the trouble he took to make me give the "ragh" the proper soft sound—where he and his mother had always lived alone. Stephen's father had never seen him; he had been killed by an accident in the hunting-field a few days before the child's birth, and the boy had been "the master" as long as he could remember. He did a fearfully imprudent thing in marrying me. I had no money, and no experience; I had nothing but love, and what he called a singularly contented disposition. I could not perceive my own merit in being the happiest creature on the face of the beautiful earth, as Stephen's wife, but I did not mind taking any amount of credit he was disposed to give me. The story of our meeting is not worth telling, its speedy result was our marriage, and my finding myself transported from the tame, prosperous, homely scene, which was the only home I had ever known, to a wild, beautiful district of the South of Ireland, of which all Stephen's eloquence had failed to give me an adequate idea.

Glendarragh lay many miles distant from the nearest railway station; the great main lines in the south had been but recently constructed—and we performed the last stage of our journey on a "car," which in itself was a surprising novelty. The grey skies, the soft mists

upon hill and valley, the lovely August beauty of the country enchanted me, though I marked its desolate look also. A sudden turn at the base of a heather-covered hill which rose steeply before us, strewn with great masses of dark stone, brought us into a deep, lovely valley, with wide green fields, and scattered trees, and the murmur of falling waters all around, and Stephen said, "Yonder lies Glendarragh." Then I saw an old grey turret, ivy-grown, among trees, terminating a line of low building, and beyond it the placid shining face of a heart-shaped lake, with a strip of white sandy beach at the upper end, and superb feathery trees rising on the farthest bank, and stretching away to the distant hill-tops—awe and delight seized upon me, and unheeded tears streamed down my cheeks. Long before we arrived at the house, Stephen had begun to show me where the former bounds of the family property had been, and how lamentably curtailed it was, the good land broken up into small holdings, and only a small, but well-tilled farm, with a little bit of ornamental shrubbery, and a pretty flower garden, which surrounded the long low venerable house on three sides, remaining in his possession.

"I could get a good price for it," said my husband, "if I would sell Glendarragh. Lord Scaur would buy the place to-morrow—my lady has a great fancy for the lake-side; but I am satisfied, and I could not mention

such a thing to the poor old mother. She would die of the mere dread of being buried anywhere else—no, no, while she lives, at all events, we must stick to Glendarragh."

"Of course we must, and while we live too," I said. "I never saw anything so delightful in my life, and I'm sure we never could want to be better off. It looks a beautiful little farm."

"That's just it, Bella, it *is* a beautiful little farm, and little farms don't pay; then comes a time when the man who can't buy, or rent, must sell, or let; but we won't think about that just now—for here come the dogs—just listen to Finbarr's welcome—and there's my mother, standing by the gate."

I had never seen a really old house, and I delighted in the ancientness of Glendarragh; which delight of mine gave great pleasure to Stephen's mother. I had had but little experience of life myself, but even I could see how unworldly, how innocent, how unspoiled and unspotted a life hers had been; how grief had softened, not embittered her, and how simplicity and monotony had failed to render her narrow. I had never known or allowed myself to fancy what a mother might be, until Stephen's mother taught me, and I had not been a week in the house with her, when the old underlying sense of orphanhood, never lost, though it had never made me quite unhappy, passed away for

ever. She was not, as I had fancied her, like Stephen, who has blue eyes, like our own lake when the sun shines on it, and nut-brown hair, and a dusky skin with a rich colour in it that goes well with his brown beard; who is tall, and broad, and strong, and has a soldierly step, and a deep voice, very sweet though, and tender. When I saw Mrs. Craven at the gate of my home, on the day when Stephen brought me thither, I saw a slight, but upright figure, of low stature, peculiarly graceful and active, and a face so young, so smiling, so unwrinkled, that I was quite startled, for I had not remembered that there was not twenty years' difference between the respective ages of the mother and the son. "The poor old mother," Stephen had said, and hers was a face, hardly middle-aged, with such gentle dark eyes, and such white teeth, and bands of smooth black hair, with no grey lines in them; a face in which a mere girl like me could read comprehension, indulgence, perfect sympathy, and as much promise of kindness as there was superiority. I had never seen a mother and son united by such a love as that which bound these two. My aunt and my cousins were very jolly together in a bustling way, and there was no fault to find with any of the domestic relations of Trent Farm; but this was something quite different, and I shall remember all my life the dawning on my commonplace mind of a true conception of the

greatness of Mrs. Craven's heart, of the nobleness of her, when I saw what Stephen was to her, and how she had borne the coming in of another. Once I said something of the kind to her, and she turned it aside, saying gently, "Perfect love casts out every mean feeling, my dear, as well as fear. I love Stephen for him, not for me." So it came to pass that we were perfectly, profoundly happy, and that I had not an unfulfilled wish.

The old house was much too large for our small household, which consisted of our three selves, two women servants, and Stephen's "boy," as an elderly man who took care of the horse and car was called. The farm buildings were quite away from the house, and the farming operations, always, I am obliged to confess, supremely uninteresting to me, hardly came under my notice at all. Our mother knew as much about them as Stephen knew, and took the keenest pleasure in their details. I looked after the flower garden and the beehives. I did a quantity of needle-work, and I read eagerly all the books in the house which were not far above my capacity. Truth to tell, the majority were so, for the Cravens had always loved books, and Stephen's library would have graced the dwellings of men with Stephen's income a hundred times told. We had not many neighbours, and there was not much sociability about such as we had, but

whenever Lord and Lady Scaur were at the big house, we saw something of the outside world. They loved Mrs. Craven, and liked Stephen, and so, I suppose, they tolerated me. I liked Lady Scaur, and found her and her lord, the greatest man in the county, much easier to get on with than the few small gentry, and the parson and his wife, who made up our ordinary society. If out of these scanty and simple details, you can make a picture of a happy home, and a happy life, you may safely do so, for indeed we were happy, though Stephen was anxious enough sometimes, and I found Lord Scaur held no opinion more strongly than that no "gentleman" could farm on a small scale with advantage. I could hardly understand how so rich a man as his lordship, whose property at Scaur was not a fourth of his possessions, could comprehend our small way of doing things, or calculate our tiny means at all; but he was a practical man, and when he said—"In Craven's place, with his abilities, his want of capital, his prospects of increasing demands, and decreasing income, *I* should emigrate,"—I felt that Lord Scaur thought Stephen's love-match a folly, and that his lordship's counsel was wise. But I never mentioned the matter to Stephen, what he had said on the day we came home was enough for me. And, after all, I would take care that the baby, who was to come to us in the summer, should not be very expensive—you see I did

not remember that Lord Scaur's was a long look a-head, to the time when baby should no longer be baby, and might have, perhaps, an inconvenient following of brothers and sisters.

One day, late in the spring, when Stephen was very busy, and had been away from the house from early in the morning, and our mother had taken the car to the market-town for a day's shopping, to which I had not felt equal, I began to feel restless and weary. I could not employ myself as usual, and I found the time long. I was neither ill, nor out of spirits or temper, but I was simply fidgety; in the mood for pulling things about, and looking over old stores. I bethought me of a box of rubbish, girl's treasures, old letters and keepsakes, and such things, which had been stowed away in a room in the old turret—the first bit of the house I had caught sight of when Stephen brought me home. It would divert the time, if I brought down this box, and sorted its contents; I should probably not wish to keep half of them, for I had outgrown childish things, and it was always well to leave everything settled—"in case!" —I did not finish the sentence, in my soliloquy, but went up to the turret, which I had not entered for months. A square, low room, with thick stone walls, in which small windows were set, glazed with lozenge-shaped panes, in leaden frames, and fastened with rude rusty hasps, the same probably which had been there

from the time the old house was built; the ceiling of sturdy beams of oak, festooned with cobwebs; the flooring of stone. No furniture was in this turret room, but two stone benches raised about two feet from the floor, on which were placed all the empty boxes belonging to the house, and several useless and invalided articles which had been banished from the dwelling-rooms. Tidiness reigned in all Mrs. Craven's domain, so, although this was a lumber room, there was no litter about it, and the boxes were arranged according to their size. I soon discerned my own, and easily lifted it off the bench; but in doing so I chanced to glance towards the window above me, thinking if I could but open the dingy frame, how fine the view from it would be, and I caught sight of a curious, old-fashioned hunting-whip hanging from a stout, rusty nail. It was strangely fashioned, the thong was twisted round the black, carved handle, and in the top was a silver whistle. I stepped up on the bench, caught the whip by the end, and tried to lift it off the nail; but, not succeeding, gave it a strong, sharp pull. It, and the nail too, dropped into my hands, but the slight shock made me unsteady, my foot slipped over the edge of the stone bench, and I fell heavily to the ground, striking my forehead against the iron-bound box.

Not for several hours, as I afterwards knew, did Stephen find me, insensible, as he thought, dead. Not

for many days did I know what had happened; how nearly I had slipped away from the trembling grasp of those who loved me so dearly; how, untimely, the grave had closed over the baby face I never saw. Not for many weeks did I find strength to talk of it, and to question them. And then I found out that there was something in their minds about the old hunting-whip which they had found beside me, on the floor of the turret room, and they, seeing that my mind was set upon knowing what it was, and the risk of excitement to my nerves was greater by refusing to satisfy my curiosity than the risk of excitement to my imagination by complying, told me the legend of Glendarragh.

CHAPTER II.

THE LEGEND.

MY couch had been carried out into the garden, on the side of the house which I liked best, the side next the lake; and as I lay on it I could watch the gently rippling water on one hand, and observe my bees returning with their evening burdens to the hives, on the other. I was very quiet and content; Mrs. Craven sat knitting at a little distance; Stephen lay on the grass beside my couch, and held my hand, as he spoke.

"Mother and I agreed," he said, "that it was better my little English wife, coming from her quiet home where such fanciful things have no place, should not know there was a ghost story connected with Glendarragh; should not hear that foolish people ever held the place to have been haunted. We discussed the matter for this reason; we knew, if we did not tell our servants that they must not, and our friends that we hoped they would not repeat the foolish tale to you, you

would be sure to hear it, and so we warned everybody that the story was not to be told; and it never occurred to either of us that the old hunting-whip, which is connected with the story, and which my great-grandfather ordered by his will to be preserved, while there is a Craven left at Glendarragh, would ever come in your way. But, you see, Bella, it is the old story of Blue Beard over again."

"Yes, yes," I said hastily, my eyes filling with tears —for my curiosity had been severely punished. "Go on."

He went on: "During the Irish wars in Cromwell's time, an Englishman named Craven played a distinguished part in the Roundhead Army, and when peace was made (if indeed it ever was made) he settled here, at Glendarragh, on land awarded to him for his services, in the neighbourhood of other and much more important Englishmen, to whom the great prizes in the general confiscation fell. Oliver Craven was a good man, an honest soldier, and an ardent sportsman; he had fought well, done his duty, earned his reward, and now he desired to enjoy it in peace and charity with his neighbours. He built a house—this identical house—and lived in it with his comely English wife and his two sons, and two daughters. The girls were beautiful, staid, shy, Puritanical maidens, and kept the house pretty closely. They were the delight and treasure of

their father's heart, and the pride of their brothers, who were gay and daring youths, wishing no ill to the sulky conquered Irish whom they had come to live amongst, but glad to make friends with them if they might. But the Irish held aloof, and though they were not openly molested, the Cravens were made to feel that the strong hand and the cruel law which had given them property and rights in the beaten country, could not give them friends. There was one exception, a woman—Una Walsh, a beautiful Irish girl, the only daughter of an Irish gentleman who had stood for the king, and had fled to France, leaving his only child in the care of a farmer's wife in an obscure part of the country, whither his wife had fled, and where she had died. Una Walsh met and loved Oliver Craven's youngest son, Ralph, the handsomer and braver of the two. Their love was very hopeless, and quite secret. In those days, there was more dependence upon parents than there is now, and the tradition of reverence for their will in matters of marriage was very strong. Una Walsh knew that the very name of an Englishman, alien in race and creed, would be abhorrent to Phelim Walsh; and Ralph Craven's father finding all his efforts to conciliate the natives vain, had waxed bitter against them, and had no milder name than "savage" for them now. So, the lovers met seldom, and at long intervals, and not without danger. Una Walsh had the courage of her race,

and all the health and hardihood of her mountain training, and her country life. She coaxed over the simple woman whom she had loved like a mother, but commanded like a servant from her childhood—she was seventeen now—and she induced her to let her come, over the blue hills yonder from Dearg to Glendarragh, carrying eggs and butter, and cream—anything for a pretext—that she might find her way to the presence of the Cravens, and get speech of her lover, in the character of a farm servant. Her lover dared not go to Dearg; Irish eyes would have been upon him there, and he would have been betrayed to Una's father, who was away in France, but not without means of communication with the old country. So the men lived their out-door life, hunting, shooting, coursing, drinking, with other English settlers; and the women—both the daughters were betrothed to Englishmen—lived their pure, pale, dull lives at home, shunned and silent. One day, in the early winter, when the Cravens had gone hunting, and the women were about their usual occupations, Una Walsh came over the mountain—where the wind was blowing sharply, and the rain dashed in her face—carrying a basket of eggs, as usual, but with something unusual in her face and voice, as she entered the low parlour—it is the passage room now, Bella—and asked Mistress Craven, abruptly, where the house-girls were, and whether she had sent them on an

errand? Eunice and Phœbe Craven were at their needle-work, in the room, and the mother had been reading to them. Mrs. Craven said no, she had sent the maidens on no errand, and doubtless they were at their work.

"No, no," said Una, hurriedly. "They are gone, they have been ordered away, by those they do not dare to disobey, and you are in danger of your lives. The farm men are in league against you, and the Dearg people are coming down to burn you out. Remember Teague, he that Oliver Craven beat with his stirrup leathers, and turned out of the yard last week—this is his doing; he knew of the hunt to-day, and I overheard him last night, plotting with Red Tim and another. Ten of them are on the road, and they are coming very, very near. I ran as straight as I could here; if I had turned aside to get assistance, you would all have been lost. Fly, woman, fly for your life, and your girls with you."

The women looked at Una Walsh, in blank horror and dismay. "Whither can we fly?" they cried. "There is no hiding-place here, and we have no strength to go away—even if they would not see us." The mother clasped her head with her hands in distraction, and the girls fell on their knees.

"Fly, fly," urged Una. "They mean to carry your daughters away to the hills—this is their revenge on

the father and the brothers—a sure and full one. Fly, fly. Hark! there is the sound of their voices on the wind."

She pulled the trembling girls up from their knees, and dragged them, their mother following, out of the house, down to the edge of the lake—there, Bella, the corner we can see from here, where the great elder-trees are growing now—and she huddled them into the cold, dreadful water, up to their necks, where only their heads appeared against the grey bank, and bidding them be silent for their lives, she flew back to the house. The noise of loud, excited, brutal voices was now not to be mistaken. The ruffians were approaching Glendarragh. Quick as thought, Una snatched up a knife, hid it in her bosom, seized a heavy bunch of keys, and flew to the cellar. Fortune favoured her, she found the right key without difficulty, flung open the heavy door, which disclosed a goodly store of casks and bottles—and then, snatching up a heavy hunting-whip, with a silver whistle in the handle—she knew it well, that whistle was a familiar signal for her;—she ran with deer-like swiftness in the direction opposite to that by which the noise was approaching, and was speedily lost in the defiles of the hills. On came the band of ruffians, bent on pillage and violence, and finding the place deserted, they dispersed themselves with savage cries; seeking the unhappy women, who were trembling with terror

and almost dead with cold, within a few hundred yards of them. A sudden shout proclaimed that the band had discovered the wine-cellar, and they flung themselves upon its contents, broaching the casks, and dashing the necks off the bottles. The floor swam with costly wine and spirits, and the ruffians, forgetting everything, the flight of time included, in the indulgence of their mad desire for drink, abandoned themselves to a wild orgie.

Meantime, the sound of the silver whistle rose clear, piercing, ceaseless, imploring from the hills, and one hunter's ear heard, and recognised it. The hunt was far away, and there had been no intention of returning to Glendarragh, for the huntsmen were to finish the day with a feast at Scaur. But, when the piercing blast struck Ralph Craven's ear, his heart misgave him; he checked his horse and listened, and the terrible, imploring sound went on. There was danger, and Una was in it, and was warning him; the sounds came from the direction of his home, not of her's. He galloped after the party, came up with them, and bade them listen! In a few moments they had turned their horses' heads towards Glendarragh, and were speeding home; three men riding with Oliver Craven and his sons; full of apprehension and of vengeance.

What a spectacle was that they had to gaze on! The house was fired in several places, the furniture was

dashed and hacked to pieces, huge heaps of smashed silver and crockery lay in the dismantled rooms, and on the floors, most of them in the cellar, and on the stone floor of the passage, ten men, in various stages of drunkenness, from the violently raving, to the helplessly incapable. The Cravens and their friends jumped off their horses, and while the strangers bound the senseless ruffians with their leather belts and with cords, the father and sons searched vainly for the women; who dared not call to them, indeed they were no longer capable of speech. Then unspeakable horror seized upon the men's hearts. "These are only some of the ruffians," they said; "and the others have taken our women away to the mountains." Oliver Craven stooped over one of the bound men, pistol in hand, and asked him, "Where are my wife and my daughters?" He was answered by a dull, jeering laugh, and a hideous grimace. Then Oliver Craven put his pistol to the man's ear, and shot him. "I will trust no man's justice to avenge this crime," said the stern Englishman, and he and his sons, and the three men who had ridden home with them, carried out one by one, eight of the ruffians, and deliberately hanged them upon the trees which bordered the lake. The ninth was dead, when they lifted him off the cellar floor, but they hanged the corpse, and that of the man whom Oliver Craven had shot, upon two trees, and then Craven said sternly: "We thank

you, gentlemen—and now we are going to seek our women."

The gentlemen declared that they would go with him, and each was about to loose and mount his horse, when their attention was attracted by the violent and distressful whining and barking of a dog, who was running up and down the brink of the lake. Oliver Craven and his sons ran towards the animal, who jumped upon them and instantly led them to the hiding-place of the unhappy women, whom it would have been soon too late to save. The mother and daughters were lifted out of the lake with difficulty; the mother had long been senseless, and kept from sinking into the water only by the superhuman efforts of her children. They were carried to the house, and three sheep were instantly slaughtered, in whose reeking hides the chill, hardly living forms were wrapped. By this time the night had fallen, and a few of the farming men had come slinking back, and stood aghast at the scene, so different from what they expected, which met their view. Craven did not deign to notice them, beyond ordering them to help in the work which he and his friends were about. They dismantled the house, and packed in two of the rough vehicles then in use all that remained of value, then laid beds upon a third, on which they placed the suffering women, heaped their clothes and bed-coverings upon them, and set out for the nearest town. By midnight

not a living soul remained at Glendarragh, and the corpses dangling from the trees beside the lake were the sole tokens of the tragedy. Oliver Craven and his friends were powerful; the ruffians had been taken red-handed; it was, perhaps, felt that an example was needed; at any rate, no attempt was made to punish Craven for the wild justice of his revenge. He never returned to Glendarragh; his wife died very shortly, she never recovered the horrors of that day, and his sons went soldiering, the oldest in the English, the second in the French army. An agent managed the place, and the Cravens were personally forgotten."

"But Una? Una Walsh?" I asked eagerly.

"You shall hear; Una Walsh and Ralph Craven met no more in Ireland after that day's work. When Ralph Craven went to seek her at Dearg she was gone. Her father had sent for her by trusty, sudden means, and the men and horses were waiting when she reached her home on that eventful night. Her entreaties for a brief delay were of no avail; they hurried her away to the shore, and on board the ship, and she could obtain nothing but her foster-mother's promise that Ralph Craven should know the truth. That promise was kept, and Ralph broke with his father and his friends, went to France and entered the French king's army. He won golden opinions, even from Phelim Walsh, but nothing could induce the Irish exile to give his daughter to the

Englishman's son. So they lived, and loved, and hoped, until Phelim Walsh died, and then Una, long past her youthful prime, and quite a grand French lady, married her constant lover, and the pair returned to Ireland, where Richard Craven, the eldest son of Oliver, had never set his foot again, having married an heiress in England. Ralph and his Irish wife were poor enough, and Richard Craven made over to them on his father's death—the old man lived to eighty years—the property at Glendarragh, which was more valuable now than in his youth. There they lived, there their children were born to them, and from thence they went out into the world. Una Walsh never parted with the hunting-whip which had played so great a part in her history, and while she lived it hung beside her bed. She enjoined her husband on her death-bed to provide by his will that the whip should be sacredly kept in the possession of the owner of Glendarragh, and Ralph duly made such provision.

I do not know whether the story grew, in their time, into a legend, and the house was said to be haunted; it may have been so, these things are quick of growth; but, it is certain that two generations later the place had an evil name. The Craven who then owned it was a dark, morose man, who had made his wife miserable, and ill-treated his children, so that they left him, when their mother went to her rest, and he lived the sullen life

of a solitary man, whose only pleasures were hard riding and hard drinking, and then evil rumours had their full way.

One daring attempt was made to rob Glendarragh, and he then declared that he would leave the place not worth a second. He removed, no one ever knew how, all the plate and jewels, of which a large quantity had accumulated, and, as it was supposed, a very considerable sum in gold, which he must have had in the house. At least, his sons believed him to have had it there, and it never was in any way traced or accounted for. He led a squalid life for some months, no one living in the house but a dumb man, who had been accustomed to do odd jobs about farm buildings, and to whom he had taken a queer cynical fancy. The master and the man both drank deeply, and drank together. One night it is supposed they quarrelled, for Richard Craven was found by the woman whom he employed as a daily servant, dead, on the stone steps leading to the cellar, the dumb man senseless beside him, and his hand twisted in his cravat. Both bore the marks of many blows, and there was no doubt that Richard Craven had died of apoplexy. The dumb man died, a few days later, in gaol, but he had never responded to any of the attempts made to communicate with him by signs, and the secret of that night died with him.

Ralph Craven's son was my grandfather, and now,

Bella, I have told you the story of Glendarragh. No trace was ever found of Richard Craven's money; the farm and the house indeed remained; but my grandfather was an unlucky man, and my father succeeded to even less than he did. The dwindling process went on, and only for our dear mother's providence, and care, and self-denial — well — you would not have been here, for I should have been too poor a man to have ventured to marry even such an easily contented, unambitious wife as you are, Bella."

"Have you ever heard the sound of the silver whistle, Stephen?"

"Never, my dear;" and he laughed. "The ghosts have been laid since my grandfather's time, and the hunting-whip hung forgotten in the turret-room until you must forsooth go there, and knock your head against your own box, and our family traditions."

"I like your old legend, Stephen, and the memory of Una Walsh. And I mean to do as she did, to hang up the old hunting-whip beside my bed forthwith. What are you looking at the turret-wall for, mother? you have been gazing at it as if you expected to see Ralph Craven come out of it."

"I am watching some of your bees, Bella; I cannot quite make them out. I have seen several go into a

cranny in the wall, and they have not come out again."

"Perhaps they have got a nest there, despising the hive," said my husband.

"A nest in the solid wall? Much you know about bees, Stephen."

CHAPTER III.

THE SEQUEL TO THE LEGEND.

IT was the second Christmas Eve since our marriage; a clear, dry, frosty day. Things had not gone well with us, as people say, and though we were very happy we were not prosperous, and many lines of care marked Stephen's handsome face. More and more frequently, I knew, his thoughts dwelt on the lands of promise beyond the sea, where the large sum which Lord Scaur was ready to pay him any day for Glendarragh, would purchase the sure means of future wealth. But he said nothing, not a word. His mother had been very silent and thoughtful of late, and she was perfectly familiar with every particular of his affairs. On the evening of that day she spoke to us both, in the cheerful firelight, and when the Christmas berries and their shining green leaves dressed up our parlour for the "hallowed and gracious" festival of the morrow. I had kept the blinds up that we might see the silver moon sailing in the sky,

and her brilliant track upon the lake, while the frost-laden trees glistened. Never had I seen Glendarragh look so beautiful, and I was just thinking so when our mother's voice broke the silence, and said—I cannot repeat the words, but this was their meaning:—She knew how it was with Stephen, she had understood all his struggles, his misgivings, and his thoughts. She knew what it would be wise that she should do, and that he hesitated for her sake. And now, it was she who bade him go, go to the new world, where he could make a home for us, and for the children she prayed might come to bless us. There was not a quiver in her voice while she spoke, and she took Stephen's hand, and held it; her own was cool and steady, and a quiet smile was on her beautiful face. She would go with us, and he must never think of her as grieved or unwilling. She had thought it all out, she had calculated everything, arranged everything, and, in her calm, sweet, persuasive way, she made us feel with hearts full of gratitude to her, before we parted for the night, as if the plan were an old plan, a resolution taken long previously; and all the agitation of it overpast. We should leave Glendarragh in the spring, and sail for "El Dorado."

Strange to say, Stephen slept soon that night, and soundly. He yielded to the intense relief of a settled resolution, and rested in it. But I could not sleep. My every sense was awake, the slightest distant sound came

clear and solemn to my ear. The night was growing wearisome to me, when, quite suddenly, I fell into a deep, deep sleep. How long it had lasted I do not know when I was awakened by a shrill, piercing, appealing sound, and sat up with a sudden shock; the sound thrilling in my ears. My first impulse, ere it ceased, was to look at Stephen. There he lay, his head upon his arm, in a perfectly untroubled sleep. And the sound, loud, piercing, strange enough to waken any sleeper! While I asked the question of myself, wondering, it came again, shriller, more piercing, louder than before. I put my hands to my ears, and shuddered; but Stephen never stirred. I tried to call him, but I could not speak; I tried to touch him, but I could not move. A third time the piercing note rang through the night, and I sank back helpless on my pillow, raising my eyes to the spot where the old hunting-whip of Ralph Craven hung beside my bed. *It was not there.* Again the piercing note! I knew it for the summons of the silver whistle, and a strange thing happened to me. All surprise, the ecstasy of terror passed away from me, all volition left me. I had ceased to be myself, I was moved by another will, subject to another power. I rose and left Stephen sleeping, and slipped my feet into the fur-lined shoes that lay upon the rug beside my bed; and, all the time the whistle sounded, steadily, piercingly, and clear. I knew the sound was a summons, and something within

me which was stronger than myself, made me obey it. I wrapped a cloak round me, and went down the old stone stairs, without a faltering tread, in the darkness, and opened the old oaken door, which gave upon the flower garden. Upon the threshold of the open door I stood, and looked out into the starlight. Again the whistle sounded, but soft and gently this time, with a guiding note, and then I saw who it was that summoned me; the stars showed him to me, and I was not afraid, that which possessed me, and wrapped me about, did not permit me to fear. The form of a man stood upon the frost-laden grass—a man of tall, upright figure, and stern, swart features. He wore a leathern coat and belt, a falling collar, a wide-leafed hat, high heavy boots, a baldric and short sword; and in the first instant that I saw him, I saw every portion of his attire, without any of the indistinctness of a dream, and certainly without any terror. In his right hand was Ralph Craven's hunting-whip, and he waved me towards him with it, using a gesture of irresistible command. I stepped forward, and then, before I could reach him, he moved across the grass to the turret, went close to it, stretched out the hunting-whip, beat the handle of it noiselessly upon the wall, at a point on a level with his head, and waving the left arm towards me, Ralph Craven disappeared.

I say, Ralph Craven—for this was no dream. When Stephen, having awoke and missed me, and feeling the

cold air rushing through the house, followed me, in an agony of fear; he found me kneeling by the turret wall with wild fixed eyes and clasped hands; and he thought at first, that I had suddenly gone mad, then, that I was fever-stricken, or had taken to sleep-walking. But not one of his surmises was the truth, and he was persuaded at last, and listened to me. For, when he came to me, and touched me, I returned to myself, the spell that had bound me was loosened, and I told him that Ralph Craven had called me, by the voice of his silver whistle, and that I had gone to him. And then, when I was standing on my feet, and his strong arm was round me, and the dawn of Christmas Day had come, I bade him look where the hunting-whip which had hung that night beside my bed, until its old owner had come and taken it, was thrust into the wall, a foot above my head, nearly the whole length of the handle. Stephen looked up, and started, and then he pulled the whip out of the hole into which it had been thrust, and he led me into the house, and took me to my room. I remembered how the cold struck me, as I laid down upon my bed again, and how Stephen kindled a fire, and drew the curtains close, and when I was quiet, for I trembled, though I felt no fear, he went away to call our mother. But before he left the room, a struggling thought fought its way to speech through the surging confusion, which was not painful, in my brain,

and I said:—"The bees went in there, and the whip; *the wall is not solid.*"

What a long, good sleep that was, which they called brain-fever. And how easy, peaceful, untroubled a waking; not exactly indifferent, but quiet and content. I don't remember how it was that I came to understand that we were not going to El Dorado. I was quite content with the new arrangements, and very happy indeed about everything, but, when I grew quite strong and well, I naturally wanted to know what it was that had brought about the change. They put me off as long as I would submit to being put off, but at last they told me, and it was simply this. Stephen had had the outer wall of the turret examined, and it was discovered that it was not solid, but only the casing of an inner wall, with an interval of two feet between; the second wall having been built up from the inside. The intervening space contained a bees' nest, among a quantity of rubbish, and the whole of the long-missing wealth of the Cravens, including seven thousand pounds in gold coin of the reign of King George I. The crested plate, and the quaint old jewels of which Richard Craven had deprived his son's wives, were there, wrapped in mouldering costly shawls, and scraps of ancient French lace, which may have decked the form of Una Walsh. By the light of this discovery, the story of Stephen's great-grandfather might be read with tolerable plainness,

and the secret tie which bound him to the dumb workman who did odd jobs about the farm buildings, divined.

But there is nothing to explain the summons which came to me, and which meant a message to us that we were to keep our dear old home—a Christmas message, though in awful guise—except the literal truth of it. Stephen and our mother think it was a warning in a dream, but I know that it was no dream that led me into the starlight that Christmas Eve; and I believe that I shall hear the summons of that silver whistle once again, when I am to rise and follow it into the perfect day, and that I shall not be afraid.

CISSIE'S COMING HOME.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"THE BLACKSMITH OF HOLSBY," "SPENSER'S WIFE," ETC., ETC.

"Love requires not so much proofs, as expressions, of Love."—RICHTER.

CHAPTER I.

THERE was no little surprise evinced by the gossips at Mainston when Robert Ellison, their grave doctor, suddenly perpetrated a love-match. He was still young and well-looking enough to have chosen a wife from the belles of the pleasant country town, in which years of steady perseverance and a fair amount of ability had secured him good practice; yet he "had gone and married" little Cissie Leigh, who had only a pair of fine eyes and a neat little figure to recommend her.

Moreover she was the penniless orphan of a rival practitioner,—a clever but dissipated man, who, after drifting from one spot to another and growing poorer with every move, settled himself at Mainston. Here, despite the professional skill he possessed, Mr. Leigh sank still lower in the social scale, and, finally, after a night of carousing at one of the principal inns, was

found at the bottom of a gravel-pit, his horse quietly feeding on the brink.

There was no one left to regret him save Cissie, to whom he had always been loving and indulgent. She, poor child, half stupefied with grief, gave up everything to her father's creditors, and accepted the situation of nursery governess offered to her at the Squire's. She filled the post to the best of her ability, but it was offered to her *out of compassion*,—a mode of bestowing a benefit which rarely sits easily on the shoulders of the recipient. She was only "that poor Miss Leigh" with the Squire's lady and her servants, and Cissie was too broken-spirited to assert herself when her rebellious pupils, taking their cue from the rest, tyrannized over her.

The slender figure wasted, and the blue eyes, whose beauty even the most envious acknowledged, became with every day more sad and sunken. In fact, our little Cissie, with no tangible ailment, was fading away, when Robert Ellison—for some time past in regular attendance on a sick child at the Hall—asked her to be his wife. Her tearful consent once gained, he made but a short wooing of it, and carried off his bride to a healthy fishing village on the sea-coast, where their brief but delicious honeymoon was spent.

During their absence, inquisitive glances were often bent on Mabel Ellison, the doctor's handsome, energetic

sister, who had kept house for him ever since she left school; but if Mabel did feel pained at being so suddenly ousted from her place, she guarded her looks and words too carefully to betray it.

All the same, the unspoken trial was a severe one. She had been Robert's right hand during the years in which he made his arduous and often depressing struggle to achieve a name; she had counselled him in his difficulties, cheered him through his perplexities, and economized for and with him when funds were low, with a smiling patience that never failed. Mabel had also enjoyed with her brother those happier hours when, the burden of poverty thrown off, it was no longer necessary to deny themselves the luxuries of life. The tastes and sympathies of the brother and sister assimilated, and they were very happy together, when the pretty, piteous face of Cissie Leigh came between them.

Not even to herself, however, would Mabel acknowledge the jealous dissatisfaction lurking in her heart. Robert had an undoubted right to marry whom he pleased; and though it was but natural to wish that his choice had fallen on some one of better position,—Belle Havons, for instance, whom he used to like, and who would have brought him a few hundreds,—why, he was his own master; and no one could deny that Cissie was the sweetest, dearest little creature in the world.

Every one who saw Mabel with the sleeves turned back from her wrists, hanging fresh curtains at the windows, and superintending the papering and painting which was to make the house bright for the bride, declared that she was behaving admirably. Even Aunt Hester—stern, hard-to-please Aunt Hester—nodded approval when she came to bring her bridal gift—some homespun napery—and her niece proudly led her through the rooms.

"You are a good girl, Mabel, but you'll not stay here after Mrs. Ellison comes home. You can come to me; or your married sister will be glad of your help with her little children."

"Certainly, I shall leave Robert as soon as Cissie is ready to take the housekeeping off my hands," was the prompt reply.

"Do," said Aunt Hester, "for husband and wife are best left to themselves."

Mabel repeated these words to herself with satirical emphasis the morning after the bride and bridegroom returned, when she saw how Cissie—instead of taking heed that Robert swallowed a substantial breakfast before he started on his long country round—sat perched on the arm of his chair, teasing and hindering him with the *insouciance* of a happy child. It was Mabel who brushed his coat, sewed the button on his glove, and ran to the surgery for a missing paper,

Cissie idly looking on the while; and when he rode from the door, running up-stairs and shutting herself in her bedroom to have a good cry over their first separation.

The first months of married life are all honeymoon and heaven, which neither mothers-in-law, sisters-in-law, nor aunts can corrupt, nor the commonplace details of life break into.

But she came down by-and-by with her tears wiped away, to ask if she could help Mabel, who, her dress protected by a large apron, was bustling about, rendering efficient assistance to the doctor's one steady servant.

There was a touch of patronage in the look with which Mabel glanced at her little sister-in-law.

"You shall do whatever you please, Cissie. How have you been accustomed to arrange your mornings?"

Cissie stared and smiled. "I have always let them arrange themselves. I hate doing things by rule, like the Miss Robinsons, who play so many hours, draw so many, work so many, and so on. How tedious, isn't it?"

"But how have you been in the habit of managing your domestic affairs? You were your papa's housekeeper, weren't you?"

The blue eyes dilated.

"I have never had to *manage*. Poor dear papa took

all that trouble off my hands. Besides, we were often in lodgings, where one only had to decide what to have for dinner and settle the weekly account. — It was very nice," she added, "when the landlady was civil."

Mabel drew a long breath. And it was for this ignorant, helpless little woman she was deposed! Such a vision of the confusion that would reign in Robert's household as soon as Cissie was left to govern it floated before her eyes, that half unconsciously she murmured—

"And Belle Havons is such an excellent housewife?"

"Who is Belle Havons?" asked Mrs. Ellison inquisitively; and Mabel could have bitten out her tongue for the foolish utterance.

"A friend, an acquaintance, that is all," she answered somewhat confusedly, and with averted eyes.

Finding she was not disposed to say more, Cissie repeated her offer of assistance.

"But what can you do?"

The question, so bluntly put, would have been a posing one, if her depth of love for the generous man who had taken her to his heart had not prompted the reply:

"I want to do everything I can for Robert—everything. I want to make him very happy. I should not mind what I did if it pleased or helped him. Oh, I

think I could scrub, wash, sew, and work my fingers to the bone if it was for my dear, kind husband!"

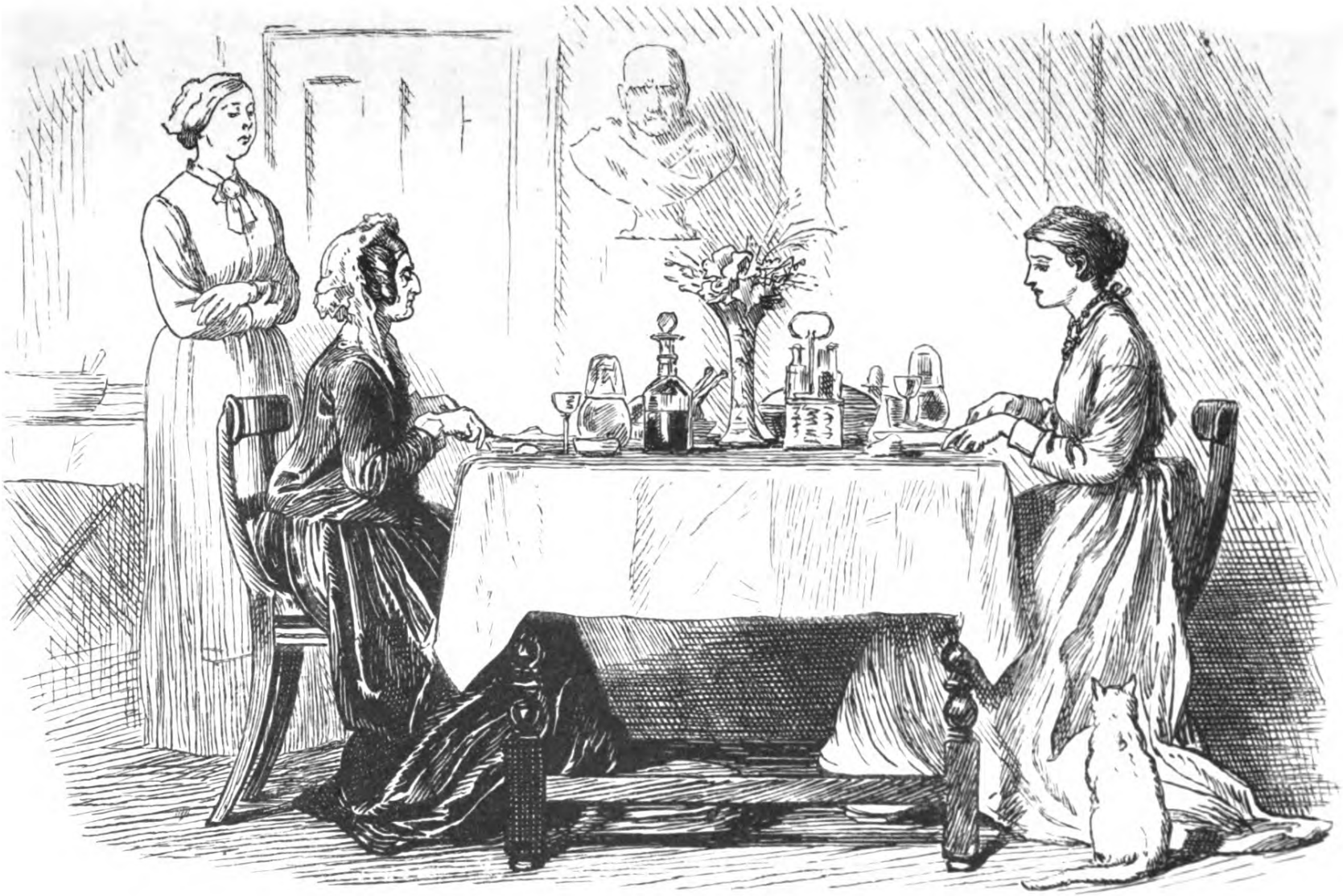
But Mabel, who was neither romantic nor excitable, quietly told her that Robert was not likely to exact any such sacrifices. "He must have known," his sister added,—"known, I mean, when he married you, that you were not used to keeping house. I suppose I shall have to stay with you till you have learned to be more domesticated."

This was said with a smile and a kiss, and Cissie gave her the grateful thanks that were expected; yet the young wife went away feeling a little humiliated. There was something of the whited sepulchre about that smile and kiss. If she had been alone she would have run down into the kitchen to conciliate the old servant, and coax her into permission to lend some help in the preparation of dinner—perhaps be shown how to make a pudding for Robert's own eating. To old Mary she could have fearlessly exposed her ignorance; but not to Mabel, who knew so much and displayed her superiority so unpityingly, although under cover of smiles and kisses.

Months elapsed, and still Mabel's departure was deferred, for how could she resolve to leave Robert's home comforts at the mercy of such a childish little wife as Cissie? and again Cissie thanked her for staying, and audibly wondered what she should have done when

visitors made their first calls if she had not had the support of Mabel's presence. Yet household affairs did not glide on as easily as in the old times; there were days when Mabel took umbrage if Cissie attempted any interference, and regarded herself as snubbed; and others, when she felt ill-used, that the whole weight of pastry-making or preserving devolved upon her, while the actual mistress of the house sat at her piano, or dawdled away the morning with a book or some tatting. She would sit at lunch sometimes without uttering a word for half an hour, wearing an expression that only maiden ladies can command. On these occasions something or other was sure to be neglected; and this fretted Robert, especially as the blame in most cases rested on Cissie, of whose shortcomings he was beginning to be painfully aware. Robert felt there was something wrong—Cissie knew there was; yet neither would fall upon the other's neck, or propose comparing notes. And Mabel, without distinctly intending to appear in the character of an evil influence, yet certainly not attempting to assume that of a good one, diligently fed both flames.

Aunt Hester was at her nephew's one evening, when the non-delivery of a message brought to the house during his absence had put him to much inconvenience. He looked seriously displeased as he commented upon it.



"SHE WOULD SIT AT LUNCH SOMETIMES WITHOUT UTTERING A WORD."

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"Of course I concluded that Cissie had told you," Mabel said in self-defence. "Had it rested with *me*, I should have written down the message and laid it on your desk."

"I ought to have done so," cried Cissie penitently. She was too generous to remind her sister-in-law that she was lying down with a headache when the messenger arrived. But Robert was not appeased by her evident regret, and uttered such a sharp reproof, that, crimsoning to her temples, she gathered up her work and left the room.

Aunt Hester knitted awhile in silence, and then abruptly asked Mabel how much longer she purposed staying at her brother's. It was the doctor himself who answered.

"Do not attempt to take Mabel away from us. What should we do without her?"

Aunt Hester shook her head, and he hastily added, "I see you think we are selfish in wishing to keep her here; but Mabel herself was saying only the other day that she did not see how we could manage till Cissie has gained a little more experience."

Aunt Hester said no more, but her silence was always significant; and after she had gone back to her own little cottage, Mabel came to her brother's side, and with a troubled face laid her hand on his shoulder.

"Is aunt right, Robert? am I really an interloper? I have been flattering myself that I was of service both to you and Cissie."

Robert Ellison paused a moment before he answered.

"Do what *you* feel to be right, Mabel. Aunt does not know how entirely I have to look to you for everything. Presently Cissie, poor child, will have more definite ideas of her duties."

No one asked Cissie whether it pained her to find herself, after this conversation, completely set aside. Not unkindly, nor all at once, but in such a manner that she scarcely knew how it happened that she was left to her own resources, while Mabel and Robert fell into their old habit of consulting and acting together just as if the young wife were not; and this at a season when her weakened health rendered her morbidly sensitive. She never complained, rarely lost temper, and was as grateful as ever for the attentions Mabel—who prided herself on her nursing as upon her cooking, both being useful domestic accomplishments—bestowed upon her; but there were many sorrowful hours in which she brooded over the months of married life which bore so faint a resemblance to the future she had planned, and tormented herself with the question, was it for love or for pity only that Robert Ellison had made her his?

She became a mother. A wee fragile girl, a miracle

of beauty in her rapt eyes, lay on her bosom; a pale flower, born on the first day of chill November, and hastily baptized while the safety of both mother and child was doubtful. Over her firstborn Cissie hung with unwearying delight: yet beside its cradle, even in the first glad hours of maternity, her doubts of her husband's love gathered strength.

Robert testified no pleasure when she caressed her child; nay, on more than one occasion he hinted that her affection was inordinate; and if he took it in his own arms it was only to give it to the nurse and send her away. Cissie resented this, but she held her peace, and no one suspected that an estrangement was growing up betwixt the husband and wife, least of all Mabel Ellison.

The hasty baptism of her baby vexed the young mother, who had prepared elaborate christening-robes for the ceremony; and as soon as she had recovered her own health, she urged Robert to let the child be publicly presented at the font on Christmas Day, and invite a large party of their neighbours to do honour to the occasion.

But his consent was so hard to win, that Cissie—already disposed to judge him harshly—began to seek deeper for the reasons of his unwillingness to yield to her wish.

"It isn't my notion of the right way to keep such a

festival," he objected. "I like to see at my table on that day the faces of those I love, and to enjoy myself soberly, not to be tasked with entertaining a set of people whom I care nothing about."

"It is the first favour I have asked of you for a long, a very long while," said Cissie resentfully. "For baby's sake you might have granted it."

"It is for baby's sake that I feel more disposed to refuse it," he answered. "I am afraid the little creature is made the excuse for her mother's desire to *fête* her acquaintances."

He spoke half in jest though carelessly, but Cissie answered him in hot haste.

"You can think what you please. Am I to have my wish—yes, or no?"

Robert, who was busy with his books, wrote on for a minute or so before he spoke. Perhaps he thought she would repent her waywardness and atone for it; but finding that she continued to stand drumming on the table impatiently, he gravely said—

"You seem to forget how much trouble such an affair would entail on Mabel—everything rests on *her*."

Cissie looked more mutinous than before. Was it wholly her fault that Mabel did so much, and she so little? Did Robert never guess how often it pained her to know that she was regarded as little better than a useless encumbrance?

Presently the busy writer raised his eyes again, and she repeated her words. "Am I to have my wish?"

Robert knitted his brows at her persistence.

"Yes, I suppose so."

"But you do not grant it willingly?" she told him.

"No," he answered, "I cannot. I have been accustomed at this season to give a certain sum to our poorer neighbours. I must curtail this, if your whim is gratified."

"I did not know that your objections to my *whim*, as you choose to call it, were based on the fear that it would touch your pocket." Cissie commented so sharply, that her husband was roused into taking a similar tone.

"With most wives the assurance 'I cannot afford it,' would suffice, but you never have studied my interests."

Her eyes flashed. "What! all those cruel words because I want to have a little honour done to my baby—my little treasure, the only living creature that would miss me if I died! If you loved her as I do, you would not be so—so unfeeling. You would not make your baby an excuse for speaking harshly of your wife."

"Psha!" said Robert, but in gentler tones. "Does it prove that I am wanting in feeling because I object

to a poor little delicate baby being exposed to the cold air, and fussed over by a parcel of people who will only call it pretty to please you? Take care, Cissie, you are making an idol of a gift which at any moment God may recall. Will you never cease to be a thoughtless child?"

The warning might have sunk deeply, but for the words that followed it—words which sent Cissie back to her nursery wounded afresh and sullenly chafing over the injustice with which she was treated.

Two or three days after this, the doctor, coming home to snatch a hasty luncheon, found his wife and sister busy making out a list of guests. He was feeling far from well, for an epidemic had been raging at a village on the outskirts of Mainston, and Doctor Ellison's services had been required at all hours, early and late, till he was thoroughly fagged. The irritability consequent upon excessive fatigue, made the subject of the Christmas party more distasteful than ever; but he sat drinking his cocoa and eating a slice of ham in silence till the name of Belle Havons was mentioned, then he spoke peremptorily enough.

"Don't invite Miss Havons."

Mabel reddened; it was she who had proposed her old school friend, and she asked sharply, "Why not?"

"Am I obliged to give a reason for everything I

say?" he queried in return, and pushing his plate aside, went into the next room.

"How rude Robert can be when he chooses!" exclaimed his offended sister. "He used to like to see Belle Havons here well enough at one time."

"How is it I have never been introduced to this young lady?" queried Cissie suspiciously.

"She has been away from Mainston ever since your marriage, and only returned last week."

"Ever since my marriage," the little wife repeated. "Who is Miss Havons?"

"We were children together, Belle, and Robert, and I; and some of our pleasantest holidays were spent at Birchlea Farm. It will look so odd to leave Belle out on such an occasion."

"Will it? Are you afraid people will say Robert has a reason for it? You need not look so startled, Mabel. Do you think I am too obtuse to understand the truth? Robert was to have married your school friend. You wished it with all your heart. Is it not so?"

With that provoking look, half pity, half patronage, on her face, which always made Cissie shrink into herself, Mabel answered her—

"I don't know why I should deny that I have sometimes thought Belle would make an excellent wife. She is so clever, so thrifty!"

"And Robert agreed with you?"

As Cissie asked this question something in her voice

"FOR A FEW MOMENTS SHE SAT WRESTLING WITH CONVICTIONS THAT WERE AGONY."

startled Mabel, and made her look up in dismay. She had by those few words committed irreparable mischief, for deep down in Cissie's heart there lurked a terrible

passion, hitherto unsuspected because nothing had occurred to awaken it—fierce, unreasoning jealousy.

She believed that she had learned the reason why the tide of her domestic life had not run smoothly; found it in the fact that her husband's heart had been given to Belle Havons before he saw the poor little orphan to whom, in a moment of mistaken compassion, he had offered his hand. For a few moments she sat wrestling with convictions that were agony, then she sprang from her seat, no longer mistress of herself, or capable of reasoning justly. Mabel caught hold of her dress as she was speeding from the room.

"Cissie, what ails you? What are you going to do?"

"Only to thank Robert for his consideration in sparing me the sight of my rival. Do you think that I have not seen for some time past that he repents our marriage?"

She was gone before Mabel could remonstrate

CHAPTER II.

THE door of Robert's study was thrown open, and there stood before him, not the loving, docile Cissie he had married—but a passionate, wild-eyed woman, to whose lips thronged words that stupefied him with astonishment.

"Why did you bring me here?" she cried, after upbraiding him with his love for Belle Havons. "We were happy while we were together by the sea, but as soon as I set foot in this house something came betwixt us, and we have been drifting apart ever since. I know now what has palsied my efforts to be a true wife to you; I know now why you have kept me out of your confidence and treated me as a silly child. Your heart has gone back to your first love and I am a burden to you; I and my baby. In a little while we shall be hateful in your sight."

"Have you lost your senses, Cissie? How dare you accuse me?" Robert cried, bewildered.

"I dare do anything now I know why you have been so cold and cruel. Do you think you may heap any amount of injuries upon me, and that I shall tamely bear them?"

Robert was beginning to recover his self-possession; he picked up his hat and buttoned his coat, for time was precious, and Cissie in her present mood would be better left to herself.

"Are you going?" she demanded, as he turned from her; "going, and without an effort to exonerate yourself? Is it because you cannot, or is Belle Havons waiting for you?"

Robert Ellison bit his lip, and made a great effort before he could conquer himself sufficiently to speak with tolerable composure.

"Take care, Cissie; you have said what I shall find it difficult to forgive. I will not see you again till you acknowledge that you have been shamefully unjust to me."

She could not appreciate his forbearance just then, but passing Mabel, who had been standing in the passage trembling with alarm, she ran up-stairs and shut herself in the nursery.

Robert, who looked too stern and angry to be accosted, also passed his sister without speaking; but he came back from the door to pat her shoulder, and say kindly—

"Don't look so frightened. You had better leave Cissie to herself until she regains her senses, and then you may tell her from me that Belle Havons is on the point of marriage; and that my reason for not inviting her here was because I knew from her father that she spends her Christmas with the friends of her betrothed."

From his own house Doctor Ellison went from patient to patient till he was arrested by a critical case, which he watched till he was able to assure the grateful relatives of the sufferer that the worst was over. Then through the darkness of night—through bitter wind and pelting hail—he rode back to the High Street of Mainston, led his horse to the stable, and, chafing his numbed hands as he went, let himself in at the surgery door.

His assistant had long gone to bed, but a lamp was burning, and Mabel wrapped in a shawl was there waiting for him. She had barely uttered an agitated "Oh, Robert!" when he silenced her. Cissie's jealous caprice sank into insignificance before the scenes he had passed through and his own excessive weariness.

"Leave me at peace to-night, Mabel. I will snatch an hour's sleep in this arm-chair, and see Cissie in the morning."

"But she is gone, Robert! She has taken her baby and fled no one knows where."

Every vestige of colour forsook Robert Ellison's face. Cissie had done a deed that a husband finds it difficult to pardon, and only a haunting fear of some evil befalling her kept down his anger. He questioned his sister closely, but she had little more to tell. In obedience to his command she had not approached the nursery till the dinner was brought up, and then she found no one there but the nursemaid at her sewing. Mrs. Ellison, she said, had run in some hours earlier, wrapped a shawl round the infant, and carried it into her own room; thither Mabel proceeded, but no Cissie was there. Her garden hat and waterproof had also disappeared.

"Nothing can be done to-night," said Robert, after a pause. "Go to bed, Mabel. Yes, I say, you must. I had rather be alone."

How the deserted husband passed the next hours no one was permitted to know, and he had gone out when Mabel came down to breakfast. When he came home in the evening, looking, if possible, more weary and depressed than on the preceding one, he stopped all questioning by saying, "Cissie is at——" (he named a village a few miles distant), "at the house of a widow with whom her father used to lodge."

Mabel clasped her hands thankfully.

"You will fetch her home, Robert, or let me go to her?"

"I will do neither the one nor the other," was the stern reply. "She has chosen her path; let her follow it."

Nor would he listen to any expostulations. He was deeply wounded by Cissie's conduct. He had borne with her deficiencies and her childishness, rarely complaining even to himself, but hoping ever that time would mould her into such a good, thoughtful matron as his mother had been, whose memory he still kept green. He was ignorant of the many hindrances that had been put in Cissie's way, and of the hard and wearying battles she had fought with some of these.

With a heavy heart Mabel recalled the few invitations that had been issued, and telling inquirers that Mrs. Ellison had gone on a visit to an old friend, tried to go about her work as though nothing were wrong. It surprised her to find how much she missed the gentle little woman she had never attempted to love; and how that one hour of jealous frenzy faded before a thousand reminiscences of Cissie's sweetness of temper and readiness to oblige. And oh! the long, lonely evenings, when Robert had shut himself up in his study and Mabel sat shivering and sighing in the sitting-room, erstwhile so pleasant. The sobbing of the winter winds and the monotone of the clock were sad exchanges for the notes of Cissie's piano, or the

sweet old songs with which she used to rock her baby to sleep.

Sitting there, with nought else to do but ponder over the past, Mabel began to commune with her own conscience as she had never done before; and after these hours of self-examination, she crept away to bed to lie awake, haunted by the thoughts, "What if Cissie should die? What if the husband and wife should meet no more?"

The troubled look on her face deepened as day followed day, and neither Robert nor Cissie evinced any desire for a reconciliation. Christmas came, and the evening that was to have been devoted to a social gathering found the brother and sister seated on either side of the hearth, silent and abstracted. There were lines about Robert Ellison's mouth and on his forehead that had not been there a twelvemonth since. He was suffering acutely, although too proud to betray it, for he too missed the blue eyes that used to look so wistfully into his, and the greeting smiles that never welcomed him home now. Mabel was very dear to him, but she could not fill the place of the little wife whose head had been pillowed on his bosom, and at this same hour, one year ago, had sat beside him, listening with him to the church-bells that softly, joyously swelled on the clear air, carrying with them a faint echo of the angels' song, "Peace and good-will to all."

Robert Ellison yearned for peace, but he was acutely sensible of having been deeply wronged, and, as he thought, wilfully so—made a victim to his young wife's thoughtlessness. He shaded his eyes with his hand, nor raised his bent head, till suddenly, and to his intense astonishment, Mabel threw herself on her knees at his feet.

"Robert, I have a confession to make. It has been on my lips for this week past, but I had not courage to utter it till now. Will you hear me patiently?"

He nodded, and would have drawn her towards him, if she had not refused the caressing touch, and rested her clasped hands on his knee.

"Do you remember how our poor Cissie declared that something came betwixt you as soon as you brought her home?"

He moved uneasily. "It could have been but a foolish fancy. Why speak of it?"

"Because it was no fancy; because it was I who overshadowed her wedded happiness!"

Robert would have risen, but she restrained him.

"You promised to hear me, and let me tell you all. I know now that I grudged her the place that had been mine. I had been first with you so long, that I had no kindly feeling in my heart towards your bride. I despised her timid attempt to do her wifely duty; bewildered and sneered at her when I should have

helped and advised; opened your eyes to her deficiencies, when I should have concealed them; and usurped her place instead of strengthening her efforts to fill it worthily."

"Are you not blaming yourself morbidly?" her brother asked in low, agitated tones. "What should I have done without you in the house?"

"Kept your wife closer and more fondly to your side," replied Mabel firmly. "Then she would never have drifted from you. She would have been encouraged to do her best to make her home a happy one, when she knew that its comforts depended on herself, and you would have borne with her mistakes and helped her to retrieve them."

"Nay, dear, you have meant well," said Robert, though he sighed as he spoke; "I will not be taught to doubt that."

"But it does not console me to hear you say so, while I am obliged to feel that I have been cloaking my selfish arrogance under that very pretence. Besides"—and this avowal was hard to make—"it was my incautious tongue that taught Cissie to connect her unhappiness with Belle Havons."

In strong agitation Doctor Ellison flung off the hands resting on his knee, and springing up began to pace the room. "If Mabel had done this——" But again the chime of the bells filled the quiet

room with melody, and he remembered the lessons they taught.

Coming back to the fireplace he raised his penitent sister.

"Let there be peace between us, my dear; neither you nor I have been blameless, or Cissie would not have been driven from her home. If it be not too late we must try and atone to her for our unkindness."

If it be not too late. The words echoed the fear already haunting Mabel, and snatching up a shawl that lay near, she began wrapping it round her.

"I am going to Cissie," she panted, in answer to her brother's inquiring look. "I am going to——"

But she paused involuntarily, for there was an imperious summons at the outer door; and then a light, hurried step came up the stair, which made Robert Ellison's heart leap, and the next moment Cissie rushed into the room; how wan, how changed by weeping and watching, who shall say!

Flinging back the wrappers that had shielded her infant from the night air, she held the child towards its father, with a gesture of entreaty.

"Save her, Robert, save her!" she cried wildly. "They tell me that she is dying—that I must have killed her with the exposure when I carried her away from you. Alas! you said I was mad, and so I must have been, to doubt you and to do this!"

"My poor Cissie! Why did you not come back to me sooner?"

These were the only words that Robert spoke that sounded like upbraiding, for who could have reproached one so crushed and utterly miserable as that despairing mother?

"I never dreamed of danger to the baby till it was hissed in my ear an hour ago," she answered piteously. "But for this I had never found courage to come and say, 'Forgive me, my husband!' or to tell how Belle Havons has visited me in my miserable lodging; she is a good as well as a generous woman, and has taught me how weak and wicked I was to leave you! But baby—you are so clever—you will save her, Robert?"

He did not answer the appeal, but relieving his wife of her light burden, carried it to the lamp. They had told her truly, her child was past all human help; and tenderly laying the little creature on Mabel's knees, he drew Cissie to his breast and mercifully sheltered her face there till the last faint struggles were over.

But when she began to break forth into bitter self-reproaches, he thanked God that he was able to console her.

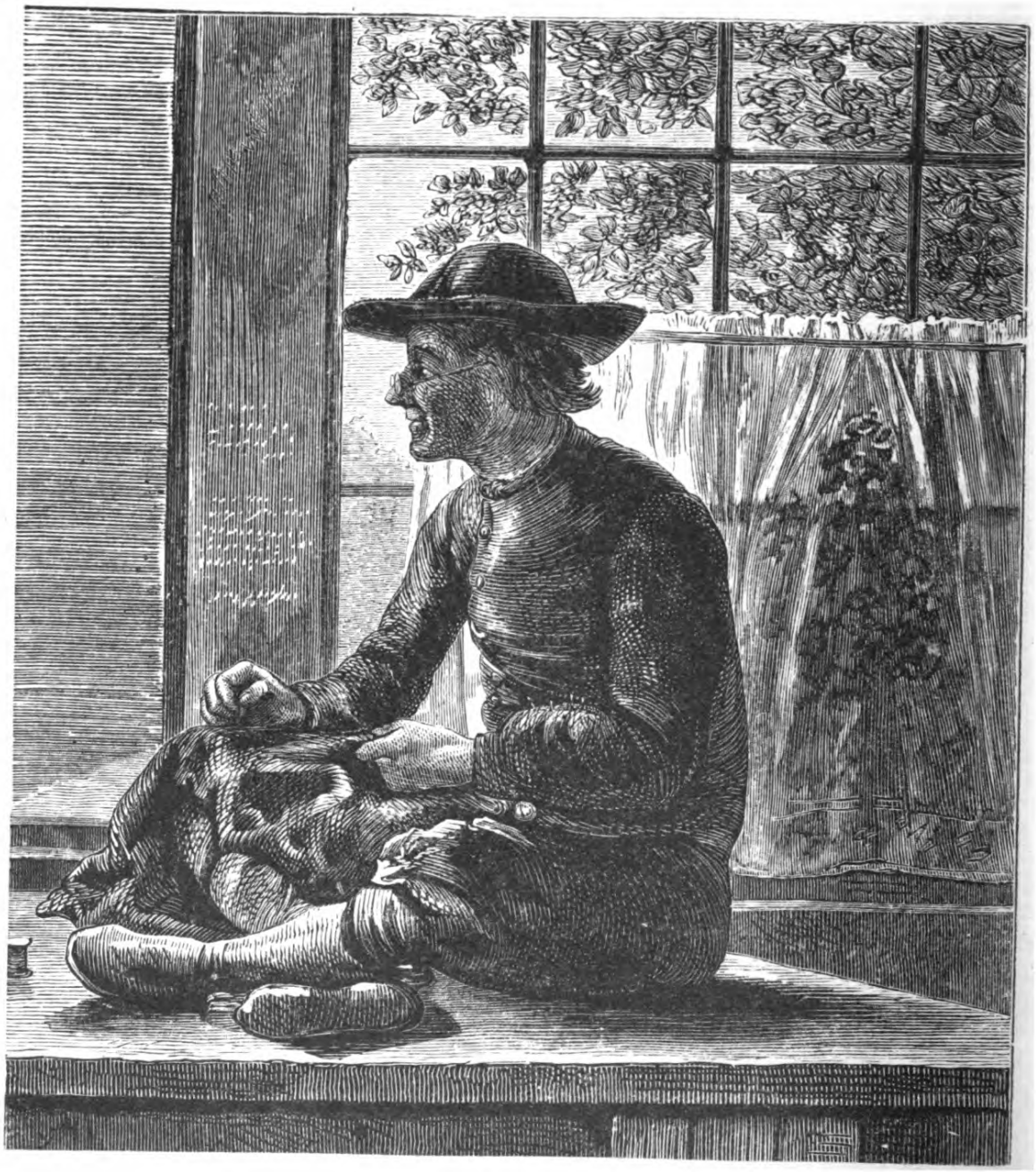
"Be calm, my poor love," he said tenderly. "You are not as guilty as ignorant women have led you to

suppose. Do you remember how I warned you that He who bestowed the gift might speedily recall it? I saw from the first that our child could not live. But be comforted, Cissie; she is but gone from us to the loving care of the angels, where she *can* live, and where she waits."

And Cissie was comforted in the midst of her grief. The shadow was removed from her life, and Mabel's confession has borne good fruit to herself as well as others.—And now, when other children sport around her and playfully struggle for her kisses, the memory of the babe so quickly taken away hallows and moderates her love for those who fill its place; and not even Belle Havons has proved herself a wiser mother or a more tender, prudent wife than gentle Cissie Ellison.

THE TRUE STORY OF CINDERELLA:

Without the Glass Slipper.



TONY.

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We were mostly old friends—several of us being in the medical profession, having read together, and passed together, first the hospitals, then our examinations. The occasion was a wedding. We had just returned from throwing the customary old shoe, and were settling down to a long talk before rejoining the ladies. I had returned thanks for the ladies with modest brevity, yet with a few of the standard jokes proper to such an occasion, when Tom, one of my oldest friends, who had given the bride away, and in whose house we were assembled, threw down a sealed packet upon the table. "Well, gentlemen, I think it right to say that I don't know what may be in this budget, for which reason I thought it better that we by ourselves should have the first reading. If, on the whole, tolerably satisfactory, we may have it read in the evening to the ladies. I dare say that wench has gone and done it just as she used to do. It was not that I objected to a plain, unvarnished account of how it fell out, but Cinny always seemed to me to tell the story in such a way that I never felt quite comfortable and honest like. I used to think I must be an impostor, because I never saw half so much in my part of the business as she did. But there—I promised to let this bit of paper of hers be read, if ever the prince and she should—should—there, will somebody read it? God bless them."

The task fell to me, and on opening the packet I found it read thus:—

THE TRUE STORY OF CINDERELLA:

WITHOUT THE GLASS SLIPPER.

EVERY one who knew "A. Smelt, Tailor, &c.," as his signboard indicated, called him "Tony." It was scarcely a nickname, for he was not the sort of character to provoke derision. To be brief; he once had a mother—in fact he was his mother's only son and only earthly representative; and his name being Anthony, what more natural than that he should

be her "dear Tony" or her "Tony dear?" It is odd how certain appellatives get to cling to people. Sometimes a complete series of transformations will form the natural links in the history of them: like the sketch made by a clever pencil-driver out of a boy's top. A boy is dreaming of his top, the top presently becomes a pig, and ends by becoming a plum-pudding. If we look back, within the circle of our acquaintance or otherwise, we surely remember some curious instances in which epithets have developed by a strange Darwinian process of selection, until at last they have crystallized beyond power of change. But Tony had been Tony ever since Tony was a boy, and there is no more mystery about his name. As a tailor, however, let it be known that he was as whole and complete a man as you will find in any calling. None of your jeers about the "ninth part of a man." No tailor will ever be simply the ninth part of a man who sews his buttons on, or stitches his button-holes, as conscientiously as Tony did. Probably, however, we are bound to add, this may have been the reason why Tony never "got on," as they say. Certainly he never did. You mustn't be too careful about buttons and button-holes nowadays if you want to get on. And thus it was that this impracticable man when he found anything to love, loved it, just as he sewed the buttons on, well and truly.

Now, Tony did not live in a fashionable neighbourhood; I do not say this was the reason why he loved—as he did his work—well and truly—but it may account for his finding something to love so truly. Of the aristocratic heaven of fashionable society he knew but little. He was of the earth, earthy; indeed of the ashes, ashy; with a literal exactness to be borne in mind. For in his neighbours might be detected many of those useful, but sometimes noisily, self-assertive men, the dustmen: and the sound of their carts, going empty and returning full, generally pervaded the air with an undefinable rumbling. Among these men Tony was a great authority, and his little adopted child (he had never married) a great favourite. He had enjoyed an education quite equal to the requirements of his station, so that when any little difficulty arose among the men—he called them "my constituents"—by reason of the deficiency of that little article, his grimy friends in the neighbouring yard usually referred to him.

"Look here, Mr. Tony," one would say, "we bean't quite so stoopid but that we know a thing or two. Many a bit of knowledge is to be picked up out of a dust-oh's cart." "No doubt," would be the reply, "and many a bit of other matters too—ay, Charlie?" "Well, master, what if we do sometimes find a brooch or a spoon? Don't our guv'nor *con*tract for *dust*?

If we picks up a bit of metal or a bone or so now and again, what's that to he? And look'ee. It ain't —no, by no manner of means—possible to say as where they gets shovelled in to the basket. O' course not. But mind, if ever we're arkst if we've found a wallyable we allus says honourable and out-like. The man as didn't would be looked on as having demeaned hisself to do a dirty trick. If we ain't arkst, them's our perkisites: out of them we find our sweethearts and wives presents. Don't we, ducky?" turning to Miss Cinny, as she was mostly called, to whom only a few days ago he approached majestically carrying an immense chimney-ornament, which, by the cunning art of a china-mender, had been sufficiently recovered from a severe compound fracture to pass very fair muster with those whose course had been untroubled by fracture. "Ay, indeed," sighed Tony thoughtfully, and speaking to himself, "many a thing is wilfully dropped in the dust to be picked up by another and prized more than the owner ever prized it."—He struck home there.—"I once picked up love and trust and duty. Some one had recklessly thrown the treasure in the dust, and fortunate I picked them up; didn't I, Cinny?" turning to the little one, who knew something in his words had reference to her. "And didn't she bring to my poor solitary home ever so much sweetness and fra-

grance and light and hope, when one after another the lights had gone out? Ah, lassie!" and a tear dropped down upon the somewhat ill-kept locks of his little Cinderella, of which name Cinny was the easy diminutive. From all which it will be seen that save the dustmen Tony had not many friends. His father was a poor-spirited, limp, and hen-pecked man, and died when Tony was young. His mother was of such sort that he did not care to follow in his father's steps and take unto himself a wife.

One visitor Tony had at intervals, a bluff, sailor-like young fellow, owner of a very extensive but not very profitable practice somewhere down in Rotherhithe, a Dr. Thomas Strong, who was getting immensely popular by the waterside; and chiefly because while he doctored the women and children he had an intense sympathy with the wharf-men, bargees, and others down there. Politically a radical, the men knew, he was nevertheless terribly "down upon them," as they said, as periodical grievance-time came round (as it does with all classes). He would never allow himself to be drawn into the eddies or driven before the gusts of angry clamour. His reputation therefore as a true friend of the people soon reached Tony, and under pretence of asking him to see to some juvenile ailment of Cinny, he had him over at a time of restlessness among his constituents, when

their grumblings bade fair to rival and perhaps stop the rumbling of their carts. A strong mutual regard sprang up between these two so-different men: and it needed but Cinny's bright eyes to tell how welcome the doctor was. His "Is Mr. Smelt at home?" on his first visit was answered by, "Does 'oo mean my Tony, Mister Gemplo?"

"Halloo, young bright eyes, who are you? I don't want your Tony. Who's Tony? your doggie, or what?"

"My Tony is eberyting to Cinny,—doggie, pussie, cuddie and all, dear dada Tony."

"Come awa' then, lassie, ye'll shock the grand gentlefolk 'gin ye talk that way to them," said a voice whose tones quite accounted for a donkey being a "cuddie" to Cinny; and, appearing from an inner room savoury with onions, Old Peggy added, "Maister Smelt—Maister Tony most hereabout ca' him—'ll be in directly, sir; please you'll walk in. Now bairnie, come along and dust the chair for the gentlefolk. This, I'm sure, must be the good braw doctor: isn't it so, sir?" all in a breath said this tried and severely faithful soul, to whom Tony was committed when his late mother declined most unwillingly to stitch any more linings and pockets for the firm, and who now reigned supreme.

Rather awful she seemed at times to young five-

year-old; because Peggy had a notion, which could not help developing itself every "Sawbath," that Cinny ought to be knowing something more about Scripture and less about Red Riding Hood. Tony, however, planted his foot firmly there, so Peggy had in quiet a sort of ejaculatory service every Sunday: "To think of a child growing up not knowing anything about Adam and Eve and the Serpent, and Moses and the Red Sea! What will become of a child who even asks, 'What for don't they bathe the babies at home: and why do they want to have them done by the gemplo?' Hech! 'tis fearfu' warldliness that is before the child."

Peggy did not know much of human nature, especially of the child sort: and but for Tony—gentle, patient Tony—who knew by instinct the way to a child's heart, the little one would have had but a sorry time of it. His early life had been so cheerless, and the prevailing tone of talking about and to children so repressive, that come what may, any child he could help to the true play of its merry instincts should have that help.

Dr. Strong had not to wait very long before the tailor appeared, discreetly concealing a pipe and something besides. He had a way, moreover, of taking down your curious propensities on occasion, by looking you full in the face and fixing you by the eye.

This time his mesmeric power somewhat failed him, and an apology for his pipe acknowledged at once Dr. Strong's supremacy over him.

"You see, sir—doctor, I mean—I don't smoke at my work. In that I suppose your profession and mine agree. But after heavy morning work, and dinner over, I—well, I do sometimes—indeed mostly—yes, I may say always, take just one pipe. Peggy there, you see, is very fond of onions. I hate 'em. So I give way to her in the matter of onions, and she to me in the matter of a pipe."

"Now, Mr. Smelt——"

"If it wouldn't be disagreeable—well, Cinny says it isn't a disagreeable word—if you wouldn't mind calling me Tony, sir—doctor, I mean—I should feel it a kindness. I am sure it will be Tony. I had a presentiment it would be. I said so, Peggy, didn't I? Didn't I say that I was sure that the gentleman who was coming to see us—the gemplo has come now, Cinny, you know—would be one to call me Tony? That's so familiar-like. I am sure it will be Tony."

"Right, Tony," said the doctor, at which Cinny clapped her hands and said—

"I likes that gemplo, and I *will* take *his* medicine; only pease don't 'et it be velly nasty."

From which it would appear there had been some

debate over the subject; and no wonder, for Peggy's remedies were of a very emphatic sort.

"Well, Tony, don't give her any more of those messes; the stomach of a hippopotamus wouldn't stand them. Come here, little one. Rather exhausted by Peggy's doctoring. Too thoughtful. Wants the companionship of children—hum! Are you learning to read?"

"I'se learnt to read ever so long,—all about the babes in the wood—wasn't that shocking? dear birdies though; and let me see, there's Cindella, and the coach made out of the pumpkin, and the mouses for the horses — and, oh! what a lovely prince! Tony dear took me to the circus, and we saw *him;* and that's where I got my name, wasn't it? Tony told me 'fore we went that I was a 'ittle cinder-girl once, and so my name's Cinny: it used to be Toddlekins."

"Well, now, Cinderella, I want you to put away all your books till you're bigger, to get as much into the dirt as you can—you've got a splendid garden near here, I find, the dust-garden. Don't run up and down the hills too much, and take the medicine I shall send." And then to Tony, "Let her have as much fun as you can give her. And as to the dust-heaps—well, there's a good deal to be got among the cinders."

"Bless my soul—now, there!" and Tony started to his legs and walked a pace or two. "Why, I know now, that's pretty nearly what a dustman said to me the other day. And that reminds me about this grievance question."

And so they went on, becoming faster friends the more they differed in argument.

It does not much interest us perhaps to know how this closeness of intimacy came about through such apparently unfriendly an influence as disagreement. So it is, however; people's logic may differ in its methods, and yet their common principles bind them together.

It does more concern us just now, however, that the medicine sent to Cinny was no other than a box of the most amusing toys that could be got and a quantity of dolls—some of them very amusing ones too. And it also concerns us to know that the five-year-old one grew and strengthened, and got to call Dr. Thomas Strong "Uncle Tom;" that as she grew and strengthened, the gentle Tony wizened and weakened. Life was almost too much for him. With less conscience he might have had more work. His head was with that little one daily, and that child took his hand in hers and led him to great peace and purity and trustfulness. That child taught him how much more beautiful even the dust-garden, as it was

satirically called, had become to him since some good angel led his feet where he might find that little cold, cold hand; and touched his heart to take that little cold, cold hand and warm it by that heart: and that child taught him also how much beauty there was in the world, even in its dreariest, most dusty places, when the heart becomes touched with generous affection.

The old Scotch domestic, familiar, what you will, appeared, one cold, uncanny night, at the door of Uncle Tom's surgery (we may call him by that name now), and after sundry skirmishes with a somewhat irritating young Sawbones—as she derisively and triumphantly named him, feeling within herself that she had completely settled him then—succeeded in getting an audience of the doctor, who was at that moment (much to Peggy's horror) teaching a parrot some rather naughty words. The parrot had been the property of a small inn-keeper in the barge district, but from the refined commencement of her comical dialogue, or rather monologue, it was clear that once she lived where the waitering was not done by the landlord.

"Waiter!"—pronounced Waitaw—"bring me a pot of beer." After an interval, to allow of the consumption of the said article, "O dear, dear! Poor Polly's sick; fetch the doctor quick, quick, quick!" Then,

looking severely around, as though fetching away the miserable culprit, "You wretch!"

Tom was endeavouring to add to the accomplishments of Poll, and at the unfortunate moment of Peggy's introduction had succeeded in making her say, "O what a rummy guy!" This naturally gave some offence to so staid a person, and may have accounted for the measure of irritability displayed by her when she opened fire upon Tom.

"It is na' a time to be crackin' jokes upon a puir boddie who has only come to do her young maister's bidding." He was always but a boy in her estimation.

"Well, Peggy, what now? Is anything the matter at home? Any fresh grievance among the dustmen, that you have come to me this time of night, and such a night too?"

"Ye may well say such a nicht, for it is enough to chill the bones of a likelier body than me. But it's worse than a' to be made fun of by a wicked, heathenish birdy that talks to Christian folk like that."

"Well, Peggy, to come to business, what's the matter?"

"Matter enough, I think, sir. Tony is in a bad way and would like to see you. I wish he'd telt me what it was; but you see, doctor, sin' you didna' come these weeks past he's been weak in his head

like, and talks aboot dying, and Cinny (she's got to be a forward minx, and it's all through want of proper grounding). So I just slipt on my bonnet and cam' awa' to you to see if ye can do him any gude. Ye was always a gude, well-meanin' man, though what for ye keep sic an ill-favoured boddie as that young Sawbones I dinna know."

"I'll be there in a brace of shakes, Peggy;" and to conciliate her somewhat ruffled spirit he added, in a louder tone, "Charlie, come here, and make your apologies to Mrs. Peggy. What shall it be, ma'am, a wee drappie, ay?"

Thus peace was made, and the doctor was soon at Tony's side. Surprised and pained he learned the cause of his ailment. It was not altogether mental, neither was it altogether physical.

"You see, doctor, I was taking my usual ramble in the 'garden'" (as he called it) "about ten days ago when I met a strange woman prowling about, who, directly she saw me, ran at me with intense fury and threw me. When I came to myself she was gone. Ever since I have been trying to recall what it was she said as she attacked me so furiously, and I think she said something about her child. It is but indistinctly I can recover her words. Only I remember this, that she said she wasn't going to let her dear child be made a Scotchie of; and, as I suppose,

referring to Peggy, she threatened to 'double her up' if she ever saw her trying to 'put on' upon her darling child. I didn't tell Peggy because I knew she would be a little more touchy than she is (and she is *rather* trying at times). I believe that Cinny and she came to words about something, and I know Cinny has got a temper of her own. But what can this woman mean? Is she Cinny's mother do you think? O dear, my head, my head!"

It needed but a little observation to discover that this fright, added to the fall, had so overbalanced poor Tony, that, with his somewhat feeble constitution, the worst fears were to be entertained about him. Tom stayed with him that night, and among the incoherent ramblings of his speech he gathered enough to conclude that Cinny, about whose antecedents he had always been very reticent, was literally a cinder-wench; that he had found her among the heaps, but had never, till the day referred to in the conversation narrated, known whether she had any relatives. When Tony had an interval of relief, and was sufficiently himself to speak of the subject, Tom said—

"Don't disturb your mind about this; I will try to ferret it out; but now be quiet. I will come again as soon as I can."

For several days Tom was so busy among his people that he could not find his way to Tony. When he did

come he found the wizened and wearied Tony so tired that he must soon—very soon—go to rest. The last time he saw him Tony was at work upon a button-hole, his ruling passion being always to do everything as well as he knew how. But the last button was put on and the last button-hole stitched, and Tony —good, faithful, patient, much-enduring Tony—was at rest—at rest for ever. When Tony's small will was examined it was found that, under strict charge of his late lamented mother, he had left to Peggy all of which he was possessed. It was not much, but it was a great deal to Peggy, and she made the most of it. She had her friends up from Scotland, and made high time of it. Cinny was looked upon as a serious inconvenience to them, and in one of their carouses (for Peggy's piety did not forbid the free use of the national liquid) it was debated whether Peggy was really bound by a mere verbal charge to take care of Tony's Cinny. By general consent, therefore, Cinny was told that as Tony had picked her up out of the dust she had better make herself scarce and get out of the place, into the dust or elsewhere.

Meanwhile Tom had not been idle. He had often sought for some clue to Cinny's parentage and resources. This came to him, as it often does, in an unexpected way. Tom had been on a voyage of discovery one murky, cheerless afternoon in early spring.

The sun had not gathered sufficient strength all day long to wipe off the rime from the cabbages and other vegetables out in the market-gardens at Battersea. The evening darkened into night when he reached the pay-box of the nearest bridge. It was a bridge the dim lights of which suggested anything but wholesome meditations. Dismal enough in themselves, they were too suggestive to be at all serviceable in the highest sense. They seemed to say, "Don't mind us, we are not looking. As far as we are concerned no one will be any the wiser." And the hint thus given was sometimes taken readily enough. Along the bridge he saw an unsteady figure gliding along, and he suspected danger. The figure, however, moved in the direction of a churchyard gate on the other side. Following quietly he saw the figure presently cowering upon the oozy soil, and heard its voice—

"God knows how I got here. Come, old man, let's be together. Let me in; let me in."

Hearing Tom's footsteps, the figure said, "I say, what's your little game? Are you a post-mortemer or what, you? O, I see you, Mr. Doctor. How's my dear daughter that I shall never see again? Let me in, let me in, dear old boy."

"Come away, my good woman, come away from this."

"No, no; I've come here, and my old man will let

me in: won't you? We used to quarrel and fight over that blessed girl of mine, but that's all past now, isn't it? Let me in."

Tom felt that this was getting rather a question for some constituted authorities; but, obtaining help, he got the woman, who was in the last stage of exhaustion, into a lodging close by. Opium and gin had told their cruel story upon her. Tom was constant in his attendance, and was rewarded one night by hearing her, during the flickering intervals of consciousness, call out for her girl, Tony's child.

"I knew you, Mister Doctor. Often and often I dogged you, to see that you were acting on the square with my bright-eyed one; and you were, God bless you!"

And then she told her story, how that after her old man's death she had quarrelled with his daughters—they were not hers; how that she one night left her own and only child in the dust-garden, having heard of Tony's goodness among the men; how that in all her misdoing she had prowled about the place to know that her child was safe and cared for; how that the daughters of her husband had allowed her something every week, which of course she always spent in gin, barring a small sum which she kept for her darling; and how that having had strength of heart and will left her to keep these littles, she had got stitched about

her some good golden coins for her darling. And now to think that her Doctor should have come just at the last!

Well, it was her last on the earth; she soon passed into another world, where a more charitable judgment it is hoped will be passed upon her life, with its many failures, than I fear will be awarded to her by many of the readers of this sketch.

A day came when Cinny felt she must face the wide world, with her griefs and her loneliness. Tom had not been at the house for some days. Little did she know what had engaged him. When next he appeared, he saw Tony's quiet house invaded by a very rollicksome set of people, Cinny waiting upon them most duteously but sadly. They were talking loudly, so that as Tom approached he could hear the conversation. It was very pious and yet very ribald. It is astonishing what devout sentiments can spring from the combined effect of Scripture texts lashed into a foam by drink and carousal. This much he could gather, that Cinny's presence was looked upon as altogether undesirable. Mrs. Peggy was not behind any in emphatic avowal that the godless chit ought to be now taking herself away. Tom came upon them with suppressed indignation, and pouncing upon Cinny, carried her away there and then.

Our story to be complete ought now to tell what

Tom did with her. He could not take her to his bachelor home; so he sought to fulfil the trust imposed upon him by the dying woman. The money she had entrusted to him was not very much, but he had so tender a heart, that he made it go very far. Cinny was so far his ward, that she obeyed him in every particular, and having slipped away from the granite grasp of Peggy she began to breathe a different air.

Here, then, our story must be incomplete. It cannot tell all that Tom did with her. It can only hint that she found herself cared for, without knowing its source. She found herself put into the way of helping herself, without feeling that anyone else was helping her, which she now knows must have been the case. She found that a wonderful ingenuity was always at work in her behalf; and no one knew—though she might guess—whose it was. And thus she grew up to womanhood; and through dear Uncle Tom's help and influence she had fought her way and made herself a place in life. And how strange it is that now, after the lapse of so many years, dear Uncle Tom should still be unmarried, while I, the Cinderella, have found my prince, and am henceforth to be known as Cinderella Sawbones—but that is only an *alias;* the true name is *Prince.*

Here the paper concluded. The heroine of it was of course the writer, and, like her of the story, she had her godmother fairy—dear Uncle Tom. We

cannot exactly find the pumpkin-coach, the mice-horses, and the rat-coachman. Let any one discover analogies, and allegorize to his heart's content. At the close of the reading some one ventured to remark that at present we did not see how the fairy's good offices could have brought the prince to the feet of Cinderella. "Tom," said I, "do you remember when we read together Mrs. Browning's 'Cry of the Children?'"—"Remember it!" said Tom, "it haunted me for months like a familiar spirit. There was so much of my own musing in it. Haven't I had the Cry of the Children in my ears all day long for years, until I began to doubt whether there was any Divine ear into which the cry could enter? O, those children! Why, the other day, as I was coming home from the station, I saw a fellow reeling along clutching a bundle of something, out of which dangled two thin dirty legs. I never told you though, did I? my adventure at the Sick Children's Home in Great O——— Square, and what came of it."—"No; what was it?"—"Well, as I was looking at those pretty little patient sufferers I saw a rather tall child with restless eyes and busy fingers. He had been brought there, just snatched from the jaws of death, and when quite convalescent I took him home with me, and taught him as I best could the little I knew—and it is surprising how little, after all, we doctors know. Well, he got into my surgery and proved a treasure indeed. Unselfish, thoughtful, and patient; what wonder that Cinny should be drawn to him more and more every time she spent a holiday with me? Well, would you credit it? Alas, for the ingratitude of human nature! That Cinny and he struck up an affection for each other, and now, bless their dear ungrateful souls, they have deserted me. My boy and Cinny have just now gone on their marriage tour. Here's to the health of Mr. and Mrs. Prince!"

UNCLE ARCHIE'S BANKRUPTCY;

The Story of a Year's Probation.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"HIS BY RIGHT," "JOHN HESKETH'S CHARGE," "UNDER FOOT," ETC., ETC.

"Many men have such weak spirits, that though God gives them abundance of mercies, yet, if but one affliction befall them in the midst of their abundance, they forget all but it. One trouble is as the grave to bury hundreds of mercies."—BURROUGHES.

CHAPTER I.

THE cheerless November day was closing in with small blinding rain, and a heavy leaden-hued sky brooded pall-like over the usually bright, busy little town of Brierton, whose commercial advantages had been considerably heightened by the opening of a new line of railway. It was a perfect beehive of a place, abounding in busy tongues as well as busy hands. At the time our story opens the former had found ample employment in the discussion of an event, which had been freely canvassed by all the gossips of the neighbourhood—this was the unexpected bankruptcy of one of its wealthiest residents, one Archibald Thorn, an eccentric old gentleman, whom report had hitherto credited with money enough to buy up half the town. No wonder the news took the people of Brierton by surprise; they had believed so implicitly in the solvency of the owner of the large stone house, standing back from the principal street with a patrician air of exclu-

siveness, surrounded by a beautiful garden, with a stately sweep of lawn before the door, and cut off from intrusion at the back by a charming little rivulet. Every one in Brierton knew old Archibald, who, in spite of his eccentricities, was a favourite among all classes. He had never married, but had adopted and educated the three children of a deceased half-brother, and among them, it had been understood, he would divide his wealth, the wealth that had now suddenly collapsed like a bubble. No wonder that it created a sensation among the tradespeople when it was rumoured that the valuable furniture, with the house and land, were going to the hammer; but the general excitement was intensified a few days later, by the startling announcement that old Mr. Thorn had disappeared, none knew whither; also that the proposed sale had been anticipated, the whole property having been disposed of to a private purchaser.

"Gone! Uncle Archie gone and left us behind! That cannot be true, Basil; there must be some mistake."

"It is true for all that, Constance; true that he has deserted us, left us to struggle on by ourselves; and he has never given me a word of explanation, left it all to others—to Barton, the steward—who has just informed me that the place is sold, and that we must leave to-morrow."

"LOOKING STRAIGHT INTO THE FIRE WITH A WISTFUL LONGING."

Page 169.

The speaker was the eldest of the adopted family—Basil Thorn, a young man of two-and-twenty, tall and handsome, with clearly cut features, cold bright eyes, and a haughty carriage that did not fail to impress those with whom he came in contact. He had just come into the room where his young sister Constance sat alone in the dreary November twilight, crouched in a low reading-chair before the small fire, which was almost lost amidst the cold glitter of highly-polished steel in the handsome grate; thinking there, with chin resting in her hand, and sad pathetic eyes looking straight into the fire with a wistful longing, as though trying to trace there pictures of the loved and lost. She started up as her brother entered, and glancing apprehensively at his clouded face, stood on the hearthrug waiting, with her slender white hands clasped tightly together, eager and expectant, yet dreading to hear the result of her brother's inquiries. His words left a hot flush on her cheeks, and called up a look of protest, half-tearful and half-angry, as he added—

"I only wish I could say my say to him, for misleading me as he has done with respect to his wealth; I would let him know my opinion——"

"Don't talk of uncle in that way, Basil; it is so unkind after all he has done for us."

"Done for us!" he repeated ironically. "A nice doing he has made of it!"

"Oh, Basil! remember how good he has always been to us."

"Constance, you are a silly little thing, with no more worldly wisdom than a baby. I tell you that our good considerate Uncle has deceived us as to his social position, and now he has made matters worse by this desertion; but here is a note addressed to you, perhaps it may help to enlighten us."

As the young man spoke he handed to his sister the letter. She read it, through a mist of blinding tears, then handed it back to him. He perused it with contracted brows and an expression of bitter dissatisfaction in the curl of his sarcastic mouth.

"MY DEAR CONSTANCE,—

"Before this is in your hands I shall be miles away from Brierton. It seems a strange thing to do, but I have done strange things all my life. I know I shall be judged and condemned for the ruin I have brought upon you all; perhaps not by my little girl, at least not to the extent of others—she will sometimes give a kindly thought to the lonely old man, and think of him in her prayers. Can I ask her to have faith in her old uncle through all the dark days that must come, and credit him with good intentions?"

"Poor Uncle Archie!" Constance murmured as her brother handed her the letter again.

"Have you read it?" he asked sharply.

"Yes," was the tremulous response, as she raised her flushed, tearful face with a look of inquiry.

"And yet you talk of him in that way—poor Uncle Archie." He repeated her words with a mocking ring in his voice, and began pacing the room with impatient steps; suddenly he stopped and continued bitterly, "Poor Uncle Archie, indeed——"

"Don't speak of him in that way, Basil," she again interrupted, but he took no heed of her protest.

"He has no claim on your gratitude; there, don't interrupt me again, but listen, for on this our last night at the Grove it is no time to sit down and drivel out sentiment. He has left us to our fate, and we are suddenly turned adrift upon the world, almost beggars, and after living all these years in affluence and ease, it is terribly mortifying to find ourselves forced into the lower strata of society, and we have to thank *him* for the change. Do you expect me to waste my sympathy upon a man who thinks only of himself, and could leave us as he has done? I could not have believed that any one bearing the name of Thorn could be so pitifully mean."

More than once the gentle girl's voice had tried to check the vehement torrent of words.

"Oh, Basil, Basil, this is dreadful! don't give way to such bitterness. He is an old man, and we have no

right to judge him. Besides, the money was his own."

The excited young man threw himself into a chair, saying petulantly—

"Constance, you try my patience with your silly nonsense. You surely don't realise what is before us, and how your own prospects will be influenced. You and Harry Ormond cannot marry now."

His words sent a drift of crimson into her delicate cheek, but it faded as she said quietly—

"We are both young, and can afford to wait."

"Wait for what? Do you think he will wait for a penniless wife?"

Before the harsh words could receive an answer, the door opened, and the younger brother, William—generally called Willie—entered. Constance looked gratefully towards him as he came in, she was glad of the interruption. Willie's presence always seemed a relief in time of trouble, there was such an atmosphere of brightness about the fresh-cheeked youth, with his laughing blue eyes—where shadow never lingered long—and fair, frank English face. It now reflected the family trouble, but there were no hard lines. He felt the reverse as keenly as Basil or Constance, but the cloud sat lighter, and he carried about with him the buoyant hopefulness that belonged to his sunny nature.

"Bless me, Constance! you look as if you had been

crying; and you, Basil, look as though you were ready to give up the ghost. Cheer up, old fellow! bad as things are, they might be a jolly sight worse."

Basil made a gesture of impatience.

"Well for you to be able to think so; but every one has not your happy insensibility."

"Not insensibility, Basil; you are wrong there."

"Well, call it anything you please, so that you don't bother me with such nonsense about things being worse. I think they are as bad as they possibly could be."

Willie lowered his voice as he replied—

"It would be worse, Basil, if either of us were ill and unable to work for our little sister." (He looked towards her as he spoke, and his eyes grew tender as his voice.) "And think of the old governor, with his grey head, thrown upon the world at his time of life."

Basil rose from his seat and abruptly left the room, merely saying by way of excuse that the subject was disagreeable to him, and that he wanted to be alone to think over their plans for the future.

As soon as the door closed upon her elder brother, Constance crept up to William, and clasping her arms about his neck, leaned her head against his shoulder. The strain which she had kept up all that day was relieved by a rain of big silent tears.

"Oh, Willie, what will become of us when we leave here? I am afraid we shall find the world very hard and cold."

"Courage, little sister! you will have us to take care of you."

"And poor Uncle Archie," she sobbed, "how will he get on all by himself?"

Willie's voice seemed to gather just something of his brother's sternness as he answered—

"Uncle Archie need not have been alone, had he chosen to stay with us. I don't want to blame him, Constance,, but this desertion of his I cannot understand. Somehow I begin to think that he had no faith in our love, and the thought troubles me, for he has been a father to us; and in his hour of trouble, why did he not turn to us for assistance and consolation?"

Here Constance placed the old man's letter in his hand, saying earnestly—

"Oh, Willie, don't *you* turn against him as Basil has done!"

William Thorn read it through, then turned and kissed his sister as he said falteringly—

"God bless him, Constance!"

CHAPTER II.

OUT in the raw November mist, which had crept along the deserted country lanes and hung a dull, grey canopy over the fields, making the gaunt poplars look like spectres looming weirdly upon any luckless pedestrians whom necessity might have forced out of doors. A truly miserable night to select for a solitary tramp along a dull, dead level of road, where the unrelieved monotony made the eyes ache. Miles away from any friendly shelter, with the dark, starless night advancing swiftly upon him, it was enough to turn him back weary and heartsick. Even for a brave, resolute spirit like Archibald Thorn's it was something to shrink from, that strange, solitary journey, which must end as it had begun, drearily, campanionless; with no pleasant goal to look forward to, no friendly meetings or happy re-unions, everything left behind in the old life which had closed with his flight from Brierton, nothing to look forward to but strange, unsympathetic

faces, solitude, and the rough handling which the world gives to so many who are travelling through it alone.

Late in the day for wealthy Archibald Thorn to enter upon such experience. Yet there he was, moving bravely onward, with his face set resolutely to meet the worst; a man nearly three score and ten, with bright, grey eyes, and a deeply lined face full of thought and power. He carried a small leather travelling-bag and a thick, inflexible-looking stick that seemed made for hard wear. He had not the look of a man who would sneak away from his difficulties, or stoop to any dishonourable means to secure his own personal safety. There was nothing of a coward to be seen in that fine rugged face. Yet appearances were strongly against him, and it seemed as if Basil Thorn was justified to some extent in the hard judgment which he had expressed upon his uncle's unaccountable disappearance.

It was getting late when the wayfarer came upon a village larger than any he had yet passed since he left Brierton. The expression of his face had not changed; it was set in the same resolute lines, and showed no falling from the purpose with which he had set out upon his journey; but his shoulders had a weary stoop, and he limped slightly, as if foot-sore.

The church clock was just striking the hour when he stopped to re-adjust his travelling-bag and look reflec-

tively down the long, straggling village street, to which the lighted cottage windows give an air of cheerfulness, in contrast with the dark November night. There was the inn too, conveniently close at hand, with a bright stream of light shining out of the open door; he was near enough to catch the sound of laughter, as he stood leaning heavily upon his stick, muttering—

"I must rest in this village to-night, or run the risk of being worse to-morrow. This breakdown proves that I have not as much good wear in me as I thought." Here he glanced ruefully down at his aching feet. "I must push on to-morrow, for I cannot trust myself so near to them and yet apart."

A few minutes later saw him in the inn, dispatching his frugal supper, which the fat landlady regarded with something of contemptuous pity.

"Quite good enough for me," he murmured to himself. "If the table was filled with dainties I could not eat them, knowing the trouble my poor little Constance will be in, and how she will fare."

It was the same night on which Constance and her brothers held their conference in the home which they were on the eve of leaving. While they were discussing plans and preparing for the new life that would dawn for them with the morrow, the self-banished uncle was sitting in his bedroom in the little village inn.

Instead of seeking the rest that was sorely needed to recruit his exhausted strength, he sat up long after all sounds of life were hushed, for the primitive villagers had no love for late hours. He was sitting by the humble bed, with part of the contents of his bag emptied out upon the homely check coverlet. In spite of his weariness, he was wakeful, a feverish unrest seemed to have taken possession of him, and there was unwonted agitation in the usually calm, strong face: something that gave the firm lips an expression of tremulous sensitiveness, that made the hardy, resolute pedestrian, tramping so bravely through the November mist, scarcely recognisable as the man who sat there, looking so old and broken and worn. For the first time, the courage which had sustained him thus far on his journey had given way. He had just unfolded a paper that he had taken from the bag, and was drawing through his fingers and smoothing out with careful tenderness a long, curling tress of soft, bright hair, as though it were a sentient thing, and could feel his caressing touch. It was one of the odd treasures which Uncle Archie had brought with him from Brierton. Every line in his face softened as he said musingly, "I cut it from her head when she lay ill with the fever, and I have treasured it all these years." He lifted it to his lips and murmured a blessing on the fair girl whom he had left behind him.

Before he went to sleep, he once more asked himself the question that he had asked so many times that day, "Will she have faith? Will she have faith, and trust me?"

* * * *

The early days of December found the two Thorns and their young sister settled in the cheap lodgings which Willie (to whom the task of selection had been confided) showed his wisdom by engaging in preference to more showy and expensive ones. There they entered on the struggle, and began in real earnest their hand-to-hand fight with the world. Every day's experience seemed to drift them farther away from the old sheltered life, so richly freighted with the good things of earth, which they had never truly prized in the bygone days. The change was a sore trial to them all; but it was Basil whose fastidious taste missed most keenly the culture, social refinement, and nameless little luxuries which belonged to the old days. It was at such times that the sense of personal injury was strong upon him, and he grew more resentful against Uncle Archie as the cause. But there was always Constance to speak up in defence of the old man, to whose memory she clung so lovingly, ready to interpose her gentle voice as a shield between him and her brother's harsh judgment, and not in vain; that sweet, patient face, with its crown of bright hair and

large, tender, grey eyes, had more softening influence over Basil than he would have cared to acknowledge. Unknown even to herself, Constance had won a large increase of power over both her brothers. She filled such an important place in their world that they could not deny her the respect and appreciation that were her due. There had developed in her such a wealth of quiet, womanly goodness, such power of self-denial and strength of endurance where they knew themselves to be weak, that they fell into a habit of taking all their troubles and anxieties to her, each in his own way impressed with the feeling that her presence was the one rift of sunshine in their clouded days. Outspoken William, who had no reserve about his opinions, often declared that it was only the sight of Constance that made their little, poky place seem anything like home.

"So we must do our best to keep a roof over little Conny's head, if we want to prosper."

Even Basil had nothing to say against this view of the case, which he was rather disposed to favour: and Willie, much gratified, wound up his speech—

"I am glad you think as I do, Basil. I am always sorry for single young fellows when I see them knocking about the world by themselves, with no settled homes, and no mother or sister to care whether they go right or wrong. I am sorry even when they happen to have

lots of money; for money isn't everything, Basil," he added sententiously.

They did try, going to work with a will, and doing their utmost to make the best of their new home in the shabby little house, which was one of a row of stunted two-story dwellings, commanding an unobstructed view of an extensive brick-field and a duck-pond, much patronised by a noisy family of those unmusical but very demonstrative fowls.

Before his uncle's failure Basil had been reading for the Bar. Now, in the time of need, he so far conquered his pride as to descend to law-copying, at which he worked early and late, while during the day he filled the important post of an auctioneer's clerk. They little guessed how he hated the work, and despised his master —a little, pompous man, with plenty to say, but almost devoid of feeling, who tyrannized over his unfortunate clerk in a manner that severely tried the young man's powers of endurance.

Basil worked on and endured, hoping that something better would turn up. William quietly resigned his dream of Oxford honours and hired himself as a book-keeper. The work was heavy and the salary small; but he said hopefully that he didn't mind, as it was not so bad for a beginning. And Constance also took her share of the burden, though her efforts did not meet with the success which they deserved. In any other

field than Brierton her versatile talents would have met with more liberal recognition, for her nimble fingers seemed equally at home painting hand-screens, modelling wax-flowers, or making elegant trifles in Berlin wool. But she was labouring under certain disadvantages attendant upon her position, which was as yet somewhat vague and scarcely fixed in the minds of the Brierton shop-keepers. They had not quite made up their minds about Miss Thorn, and felt some awkwardness in hiring the services of one who had formerly been one of their most liberal patrons. Brierton gentility had not been troubled by any scruples concerning Miss Thorn, it had given her the cut in the most approved fashion, and dropped her at once out of its circle as one whom it was ineligible to retain on its visiting lists.

"I wish we could get away from this confounded place," Basil said one evening, indignantly throwing on the table a roll of deeds which he had just brought home for engrossing, "it is filled with such a mean, sneaking set of earth-worms. Uncle Archie knew what he was about when he took flight."

"What is the matter, Basil?" Constance asked gravely, getting up from her work and glancing anxiously at his hot, excited face.

"I've just had a dead cut coming up High Street. I met young Nisbet and the two Simpsons, fellows who

were glad to cringe to me in the old days; and, would you believe it, Constance? the unmannerly curs cut me dead—passed close enough to touch me, and looked into my face at the same time, but with no more recognition than if I had been an entire stranger. I felt inclined to kick them off the pavement, but they were not worth the trouble. You may be sure that I returned the look," Basil added with an angry flash. "I don't know how you and Willie stand it, but I am disgusted with the whole set."

Constance answered gently—

"Learn to live it down, dear Basil; you will get above these annoyances in time, and they will cease to annoy you. One of the benefits of adversity is that it helps us to find out our real friends."

His sister's words had the effect of soothing Basil, but he had not yet recovered from his fit of grumbling.

"You and Will are alike, Constance; I often wish I could take things in the same spirit; but I cannot help getting irritated or else despondent. It is such weary up-hill work, no wonder that it takes the pluck out of a fellow." After a slight pause he continued. "By-the-bye, Conny, have you had a letter from Harry Ormond lately?"

Her face flushed a little under his keen glance.

"Yes, I had a letter this morning. Harry is generally punctual."

"Is he? I am glad to hear it. I wonder if his letter confirms the news I heard this morning, that none of the Ormonds will be at home until the spring on account of the health of the old people. Is that true, Conny?"

"Quite true, Basil. Harry tells me there is very little improvement in the health of either father or mother, and that they will be obliged to spend the winter in Italy."

"I am sorry to hear such bad news; but tell me, Constance, does he mention the Harveys?"

"Yes, they are staying at Milan for a few weeks."

"And, of course, he has told them the news of our—our ruin."

"Yes, he told them all he knew, but he does not make any comments on how they received it, he only adds that Kate was looking very well."

After sitting for some time quietly watching his sister, who had resumed her work, he startled her by saying suddenly—

"Constance, the Harveys have been a month at Milan, and I heard that Harry Ormond and Kate Harvey are——"

"Hush, Basil, I don't believe a word of it," and Constance stood up with an angry flush upon her face.

"Bless me, Conny! what is it you don't believe?"

"That—that—what were you going to say about Harry and Kate?"

"That I heard they were always together."

Constance sank back upon her seat with a sigh of relief.

Basil studied his sister's face for a few seconds, then said softly, as if the discovery had just been forced upon him—

"You are very fond of him, Constance; pray God he may deserve it always; for your sake I pray his love may be of the quality that will wear well. I don't want to doubt him, Constance; but past events have soured my judgment. Kate has never written to me since I left the Grove."

"Have you written to her, Basil?"

"No; for I had no heart to write; and after Uncle Archie's strange conduct, and our experience of Brierton friends, I am misanthrope enough to believe the worst of human nature. With regard to Harry Ormond he may be honourable enough, but I have heard of men who play with women's hearts like shuttlecocks. I have lost faith in Kate's love. Have you no fear for Harry?"

"None, Basil, none; I could not love where I could not trust."

"So be it, Constance; but should ever Harry Ormond betray that trust, let him keep out of my way."

CHAPTER III.

IT was one of the saddest Christmas mornings that Constance had ever known, a season of scarcity and high prices had set in with the winter, which threatened to be unusually severe. There was much distress among the poor of Brierton. Local charity was at work, and private benevolence was doing its best to help, but it was insufficient to reach all the varied phases of social misery, which had outgrown both forms of succour. There was much unrelieved suffering on that cold, white Christmas morning, when the pure fresh snow lay like a carpet over the fields, and fantastic wreaths of gem-like crystals had given the trees a new kind of foliage. But there were empty tables and fireless hearths to which the festive season of plenty came as a mocking of their desolation, and the bright, invigorating frost seemed only a cruel enemy to those who hungered and shivered, even while the air was throbbing with the music of the joy-bells, proclaiming far and

near the sweet old gospel message of "peace and good-will."

The Thorns were among those who suffered; for them as well as others the past year had been a season of sore trial, recording little but misery and privation, disastrous failures and gradual dying out of hope in their ineffectual struggles to make a defensive stand against hard times. For the first few months after the startling reverse which had thrown them so unexpectedly on the world, things had not seemed so bad for the young people, but this promise of prosperity had not lasted long. The first note of distress had been sounded by Basil. The auctioneer had come down to his office in an unusually bad temper one morning, and there being no one else but Basil at hand to vent it on, he began abusing his unfortunate clerk, who, to his great surprise and dismay (for he was beginning to appreciate the value of the young man), turned suddenly upon him, saying passionately—

"I will stand this no longer! You had better get some one who will."

And with those words he had put on his hat and walked out, leaving the man to himself and to manage how he best could. So Basil found himself out of employment and with little chance of finding any in Brierton, for his reserved and haughty manners had made him unpopular. The little law-copying he had to

do was at this time scarcely worth going for, and was insufficient to keep him fully employed in the evenings. It was sad to see how he chafed and fretted at his enforced idleness. He was uneasy about Constance, who was getting pale and thin. The privations of their present life were beginning to tell upon her health: but she endured in uncomplaining silence, and never lost her bright looks in the presence of himself or William. Yet it was easy to see that she was burdened beyond her strength; she was untiring in her efforts to add something to the family purse, but as the winter drew on she found greater difficulty in disposing of her work. Willie was now their only dependence, but there came a time when even this help failed. He had the misfortune to give some slight cause of offence to one of the partners: it was nothing that a more generous nature would have remembered against him, but the man was vindictive and unforgiving. He conceived a strong dislike to the young book-keeper, and never rested until he had procured his discharge. This last crushing blow was almost too much even for brave-hearted Constance. It was about six weeks before Christmas that the new trouble came. The loss of William's situation was the withdrawal of their last frail chance in the battle of life,—there was nothing now to stand between them and starvation; they were sinking down into deep waters, and there was no friendly hand to

help them to make the land. For the first time since they left the Grove the two brothers, drawn closer together in their desolation, looked into each other's faces, dumbly asking the question which they could not trust themselves to put in words, "What could they do in their extremity?"

The sister unconsciously answered by placing on the table before them a Bible, which had been their mother's, open at a chapter which she had marked; she pointed to it, saying in a simple, prayerful spirit, which was not without its effect on the young men—

"Basil, Willie, read and take comfort; there is One who watches over the fall even of the sparrows. He will not forget us in our need."

The brothers obeyed her, each in turn taking the sacred book and reverently reading the passage underlined by her pencil.

* * * *

"Constance, you have had a visitor. I see by your eyes—no need for me to ask who, for a cab drove away from the door as I came up the street, and I caught sight of some one inside—either Harry Ormond, or his ghost."

"You are right, Basil; Harry Ormond has been here."

"What is the matter, Constance? let me look at

you." And in spite of some gentle resistance on the part of the girl the brother turned her face towards him. "What! crying, Conny? What does this mean? Has Harry Ormond done anything to cause these tears? You do not answer, Constance. If it is as I suspect, and he has been trifling with my sister's love, God help him! for I will show him no mercy."

"Dear Basil!"

Something in the tone of her voice reassured him, and he said with evident relief—

"Then he has not played you false, little one?"

"No, no, Basil!" She looked up into his face, and though tears were still hanging thickly on the heavy lashes, rosy waves of colour were rippling over her cheeks, and there was a play of light upon her face like sunshine after rain. "I was crying be—because I could not help it. Harry's love is so disinterested and true. It may seem selfish in the midst of our troubles, but his offer made me feel very happy, even though I sent him away with a refusal."

"What was his offer, Conny?"

"That we should all spend Christmas together at his father's house in the country, and he wants us to be married at once."

"I thought you said his love was disinterested. Why, he wants to take from us the dearest little sister in the world!" In spite of his efforts to prevent it,

Basil's voice faltered. "And you refused, refused because you would not leave your luckless brothers to their fate? But you must not sacrifice yourself for us. Will and I will be able to fight on all the better for knowing that you are provided for."

But Constance only shook her head and closed her mouth in a pretty, inflexible way, that showed she was quite capable of holding fast to her purpose.

"You might spend Christmas Day with them, Constance."

"Dear Basil, the invitation was to all; so if I go, you and Willie must go with me."

"That is out of the question, Constance."

"Yes, I knew you would say so, Basil, so I declined."

"It will be a sorry Christmas for you, sister."

"Let it be never so sorry, if I have you and Willie with me I shall not lose all hope; for though God is trying us hard, I am sure He will not forget us."

Basil folded his arms round her fragile form and whispered, "God has been very good to give us such a sister."

So it was, that a week later Christmas morning came and found the Thorns still in their cheap lodgings, and to all appearance beaten in their struggle with the world. Basil was sitting dejectedly by the fire, and Constance, who was doing her best to cheer him, was standing by the window.

"I wish you had accepted Harry Ormond's invitation for yourself, dear Constance."

"Basil, you distress me: do let us forget that he gave us one, for I assure you I should be miserable away from you and Willie."

At that moment the door opened, and the younger brother entered.

"What about Willie?" he asked, with a glance towards Basil, as he threw himself into a chair.

"Basil is grieving because I did not accept Harry's invitation; and I tell him that I could not be happy away from my brothers."

"Well, it's no use talking about it now, though I agree with Basil that it would have been better for you than staying in this dismal place; but it's done, and can't be helped. I say, Basil, guess what I heard just now from young Pearce."

"Tell us at once, Will; guessing is a mental exercise I am not up to to-day."

"Well, the new owner of the Grove arrived late last night. He's come over from the Continent, where he's been staying, to spend Christmas at the old place; in fact, he is going to settle down here."

"Let him," said Basil querulously. "We have no interest in the matter. He may burn the place down to-morrow for what I care."

"Of course we have no interest in it," repeated

William. "I only thought you would like to hear the news. But I have something else to tell you. What do you think of old Barton, Uncle Archie's steward and butler, giving me the cut this morning? As soon as he saw me coming towards him, he turned up a by-street to get out of the way. A few months ago I should have followed the old scoundrel and punched his head. I suppose now that his new master has come he will not recognise us."

"I did not know Barton was still at the Grove, Willie," Constance said, glancing at her brother.

He replied with a laugh—

"Oh, yes; he was looked upon as a fixture, and was passed over at a valuation like the rest of the furniture."

She turned to the window with a sigh, for her heart was too sad for her to join in the laugh. The next instant both Basil and William were startled by a cry from Constance.

"Uncle Archie! Uncle Archie!"

They were instantly at her side, both followed her eager, straining look down into the street, but they saw no one passing except a woman and a boy. Basil was the first to speak.

"My dear Constance, what odd fancy is this?"

It was some moments before she could answer.

"Uncle Archie; I am certain that it was him I saw crossing the street."

"Nonsense, Conny! you are mistaken."

"I am quite sure it was Uncle Archie, Basil."

"Don't be so foolish, Conny; a moment's thought will convince you that I am right; Uncle Archie would not show himself in Brierton."

"And why not, my boy?" struck in a well-known voice from behind them. "Why should not Uncle Archie show himself in Brierton?"

It was all so sudden and bewildering. That unexpected echo of Basil's words given in the old familiar tones, with the sharp ring which they all recognised, and the unexpected apparition of Uncle Archie himself standing at the door of the room, looking older and thinner than when they saw him last, but still Uncle Archie, with his bright grey eyes taking quick note of everything. There was no mistaking the fact that it was Uncle Archie, who had so unexpectedly stolen upon them. Uncle Archie, with his heavy-knobbed walking-stick and his quaint dress, to which he adhered in defiance of modern fashions.

"Well, children, you don't say why Uncle Archie should not show himself in Brierton."

He was only answered by a sob from Constance. Another moment she was folded in the old man's arms, one of his wrinkled hands softly stroking her bright hair as he murmured—

"My poor little darling, after all you have suffered

this year, can you quite forgive your foolish old uncle for losing all his money and bringing you all to poverty?"

"Don't talk of it, uncle; it seems like an answer to my prayers now you have come back. But why did you leave us at all? I was only cross with you for going away?"

"What, stay and be an extra burden, child! In these days it is hard enough for the young to fight for themselves without being troubled with the old."

It was now that William found his voice.

"Yes, uncle, it was really too bad of you to keep away all this time, and never to let us know whether you were ill or well. It looked as if you had no faith in us, and thought we only cared about losing the money; why didn't you stay and give us a trial?"

"Right, Will, my boy; I'm glad you've pluck enough left to speak your mind; the year's grinding in Watson's counting-house has done you no harm. Come, shake hands, this is Christmas Day, the time to forgive and forget everything unpleasant. We must not have any cloud over our happiness to-day to spoil the flavour of our plum-pudding or the taste of the spiced negus; you know Barton prides himself on his spiced negus."

"Barton—spiced negus!"

Basil repeated the words, looking uneasily at his uncle. The old man caught the glance.

"You look at me as if you thought my old brain was addled. Nothing of the kind, boy; but, come, it is time for confession, the masquerade has lasted long enough, too long, to judge from Conny's white face. It should not have lasted so long if I had known how the trial was telling upon her."

He looked at the three perplexed faces, watching the effect of his words; then he said—

"The carriage will be here in three-quarters of an hour, just giving us time to get to the Grove for luncheon."

"Uncle Archie, what does this mean?" asked Constance faintly.

"It means, my child, that Archibald Thorn is as solvent as the Bank of England. He has neither fooled away his money nor destroyed the prospects of those for whom he undertook to provide."

The two brothers seemed to be still in a state of helpless bewilderment. At last William blundered out—

"Then you are not poor, after all, Uncle Archie?"

The old man gave a confirmatory nod.

"Then why did you sell the—— Uncle Archie, I don't understand it at all." And he gave up in despair.

"No, no, of course, you don't. The Grove was never sold, Will, my boy, only to me. Barton was in the secret."

"Then you are the new owner that the Brierton people are talking about?"

Archibald Thorn rubbed his hands as he said, "Right, boy; and our return will surprise the Brierton folk, particularly those who were so ready to give you the cold shoulder. But, Constance, my darling, I see the scene is becoming too much for you. I am afraid you are grieving because your old uncle was cruel enough to put you through such a severe probation. I grant that it was a bitter experience, but I shared it with you in my banishment. Now for my motive. I wanted to put you all to a test. I knew your different characters, but I wished to try the gold. I am more than satisfied with the result, both as regards you and Harry Ormond. I wanted to find out if his love for my little girl was genuine enough to survive the loss of fortune. I am glad to know she was just as dear to him, as the penniless niece of a bankrupt, as when he thought her an heiress. But, hark! there is the carriage; put your things on, Conny, for we have no time to lose. Basil, my boy, give me your hand. I will own now that your faults of pride and temper made me specially distrustful of you; but this year's discipline has shown you in brighter colours than I expected, for you stood your ground and put your shoulder to the wheel in a way that makes me proud of you. Now let us turn our faces to the Grove, and do our best to make this a memorable Christmas Day."

As the carriage rolled through the town, on its way

to the Grove, with the old man, his niece, and nephews, it became evident that somehow or other it had become known to a few, that old Archibald Thorn had returned to the Grove; and it was amusing to see the surprise and, in some instances, dismay on the faces of those who saw them pass. Basil had the satisfaction to see the two Simpsons standing on the curb, looking at them, as the carriage passed through the lodge gates. He could see their chagrin, and did not envy them their thoughts.

They arrived in good time for luncheon. Barton surpassed himself in the manufacture of the hot spiced negus, in which Uncle Archie, with a sly glance at his nephews, drank the health of ill-used auctioneers' clerks and needy book-keepers.

The Ormonds and Kate Harvey were guests at dinner, and largely increased the happiness of two of the party—Constance and Basil. Basil's doubt of Kate's love and constancy was now dispelled; and it is certain that there was not, in all Brierton, a more joyous family group than that which gathered within the cheery light of the huge Christmas fire that welcomed the return of Uncle Archie and his wards.

THE FAIRY OAK.

By E. H. KNATCHBULL-HUGESSEN, M.P.,
AUTHOR OF "TALES AT TEA TIME," "CRACKERS FOR CHRISTMAS," ETC.

THE FAIRY OAK.

A MERRY-HEARTED, lively little lassie was Violet Armstrong. I am not going to tell you her real name, because her friends might not like it; and although I have nothing to say about her that is not nice and pleasant, experience has taught me that people are sometimes so foolish as to object even to nice and pleasant things being said about their friends and relations, unless they are said of them under a different name from the real one. So I shall call the young lady of whom I am about to write "Violet Armstrong," and no one shall ever find out what was the real actual name by which she was known among mortals in this world of ours. Violet was a dear little girl, with a sweet smile upon her face and a cheerful look in her eyes, that made you feel friendly towards her the moment you spoke to her; and well she deserved that you should feel so, for she was a pleasant little dame, full of fun and merri-

ment, and withal as amiable as her best friends could wish. She lived with her father and mother in a country house which was situated in one of the prettiest counties in England, and as both her parents preferred the fresh air and bright sun of the country to the smoke and fogs of London, Violet was brought up a regular country-girl, and knew nothing of the ways of fashionable life or the delights of society. Not that she wanted for society; some she had at home in the shape of three brothers and two sisters, and neither cousins nor neighbours were wanting to supply her with companions, but they were for the most part country people too, whose ways were simple and tastes rural, so that Violet was in a fair way to grow up without any knowledge of the pleasures and vanities of the gay metropolis. However, as she did not feel the want of this knowledge, she lived on just as happy and contented without it, and reached the mature age of fifteen without a single wish to lead a less quiet and simple life than that which had fallen to her lot. Her great delight, indeed, was one which she could scarcely have enjoyed to the full had she lived in London. A ride upon her favourite pony Cæsar was her chief pleasure. Cæsar was indeed a favourite, and deserved to be so. He was a bay pony, perfect in shape and action, devoted to his mistress, and as gentle as a lamb, or indeed much more gentle, for I have frequently seen lambs skip and jump in a

manner to which no pony with a due sense of propriety would for a moment condescend. Yet could Cæsar trot fast, canter easily, and indulge in a stretching gallop when so required. No sluggard, indeed, was Master Cæsar, and at a whistle or a word from his young mistress he would quicken his pace to one which it would have taken a very fast pony to beat. But so safe was the good little animal that Violet could ride him alone all over the country, and this it was her dear delight to do. At first she rode with a groom to lead her, then she was allowed to ride without any other restriction than that she should not go out of sight of Miss Hugwell, her governess, and at last she was deemed fit to ride alone, although she always preferred the company of her papa when it was to be had. This, however, was not always the case, and many a lonely ride did Miss Violet take upon her pet Cæsar;—they were hardly to be called "lonely" rides though, for the light-hearted child found friends wherever she went, and had a kindly, cheerful word for every one she met; the old cottage dame, sitting in front of her door and enjoying the sun's bright rays, found something almost as bright in the pleasant smile with which the young rider would greet her as she passed. There was a friendly nod and "how d'ye do," too, for the labourer at his work, and the school-children, if they met her, were sure of a merry greeting; and when there were neither men, women, nor children to

meet her, and she had ridden out upon the open common or far away down the quiet country lanes, the birds sang to her, the bees hummed for her, and all the animals seemed to recognise a friend in the cheerful little lady. It happened one day in the warm summer weather, that Violet, having a half-holiday, had taken advantage of it to indulge in a ride to the great wood which was almost joined up to the further side of her father's park. It was a wood which possessed many charms for the little damsel, for it was so big that you might ride about its green tracks for hours, and in many places you could leave the tracks and ride under the shade of the old trees, beneath which was no brushwood to hinder your progress, but a carpet of primroses and violets on all sides, and a stillness which was only broken by the songs of the woodland birds and the occasional chattering of the squirrels overhead. On this particular day Violet rode gaily into the wood, determined to spend her afternoon in one of her favourite rambles. Never had the place appeared more pleasant and attractive, contrasting vividly with the intense heat of the open fields and road. She rode gaily into it, and gave herself up to thorough enjoyment of the favourite scenery and all its beauties. Cæsar seemed thoroughly to enjoy himself too, for he shook his little head to get rid of the last fly that had settled on his nose as he came out of the sun into the shade, gave a

friendly, comfortable little neigh, and then began to walk quietly and sedately down the wide green track by which Violet had entered the wood. However, as she meant to have a good long ramble, and go as far as she could that afternoon into the depths of the wood, she touched the pony lightly with her riding-whip, and put him into a canter, to which he had no possible sort of objection, in the luxurious coolness of the woodland shade. On, on they cantered for some way, until they came to a part of the wood where the trees grew very large, and where the pony could easily pass under the branches and make his way out of the regular track. Here Violet stopped, and turning Cæsar to one side by a gentle touch of the rein, guided him in under the trees and let him find his own way, diving into the wildest part of the old wood where she had never ridden before, and which she had long wished to explore. Cæsar was not less inclined than his young mistress to ramble on under the shade of those beautiful trees; the moss was soft beneath his feet, the sun could not penetrate through the thick foliage above his head, and there were no troublesome insects to annoy him. So, like a sensible pony, he walked quietly along, quite appreciating the advantages of the place. The huge trunks of the trees were thrown about in fantastic shapes, sometimes leaning down on one side as if they were inclined to lie down upon the ground, but could not quite make up their minds to do

so; sometimes split right asunder, half leaning one way and half another, as if the two sides of the tree had quarrelled irreconcilably, and wished to be as far off as possible from each other—sometimes standing up quite erect, and throwing out their branches in a becoming and dignified manner. Here and there were patches of fern, tall and stately in their growth, and contrasting vividly with the darker green of the leaves above; then you came upon a bank rich with wood strawberries, tempting alike to eye and hand, and at another spot you saw nothing but a bed of impudent nettles, with their touch-me-if-you-dare look, flourishing as if the world was made for nettles, and for nettles alone. As Violet and her pony advanced slowly through the wood, it seemed to grow darker and darker; the birds, who love to be cheered by an occasional gleam of sunshine, no longer enlivened the place with their sweet-sounding music, and a perfect stillness reigned around. Still Violet pushed quietly on, more and more delighted with the soft, sweet silence, and feeling as if she had escaped from the common every-day world and had entered into a new country.

On and on she wandered, until the sound of water, softly murmuring with a hollow, send-me-to-sleep sound, fell upon her ears, and in a few moments she reined in her pony close to the spot whence the pleasant sounds proceeded. There was a very old oak leaning forward

as if it were anxiously protecting something beneath its shade, and that something was certainly worth preserving. Two or three large square stones, which had apparently formed part of a building at some time or another, lay imbedded in the earth close to the oak in the form of a square, and within the square the clear water bubbled up and trickled, over the stone which lay lowest, into a little channel which it had gradually worn for itself through the moss and grass around the old tree. The water rose very softly and gently, and as you looked over the stones you could see quite to the bottom of the spring, where was a kind of crystalized sand through which the water seemed to ooze and bubble up. The ground on each side sloped down to the spring, and then away from the spring through the mossy banks down into the wood, and Violet thought it would be very nice to be small enough to get into a wee little boat and float along down that stream from the spring, far, far away into the deep, dark woods beyond. This, however, you know was impossible, for neither was Violet small enough, nor was there any boat there even if she had been, so it was only a thought which came into her dear little head for a moment. She jumped off her pony by the side of the oak, and turned him loose under its shade, for she knew that he was too well trained to move away far from his mistress. Then she stepped down the bank, knelt down on one of the stones by the

spring-side, and, dipping her hand in the cool water, drew it across her forehead. So nice and refreshing it was! and then she took a little water in the hollow of her hand and drank it, and it was so cold and fresh that she did the same again. As she raised her hand to her mouth this second time, and just as the water was about to touch her face, she heard a sound which made her start so suddenly that the water ran off the palm of her hand back into the spring before she had time to taste it again. At the same moment Cæsar, who was close by his mistress, started back with a little snort of terror, fixed his forefeet in the ground, and gazed forward with a curious awe-struck expression upon his face such as is not often seen upon the countenance of a respectable pony. The sound which Violet heard was a low, silvery laugh which seemed to come out of the very heart of the old oak above the spring; not an unpleasant laugh by any means, but quite the contrary, only it seemed so surprising to hear it just at that time and place, that it is not all to be wondered at if both the child and her pony were somewhat alarmed at the moment. A laugh, however, is not a very terrifying thing in itself, and Violet regained her composure in another instant, and looked up at the oak rather with surprise and amazement than with any feeling of fear. The same sound was not repeated, but instead of it there came another which was still more astonishing to the little girl. A voice spoke—a

soft, gentle voice, something between the rippling of a stream and the distant sound of a sweet-toned bell —and it evidently proceeded from the same quarter whence had come the sound of the laugh. And this is what the voice said :—

"Who rests beside the fairy spring?
Who sits upon th' enchanted ground?
Who risks the ire of Elfin king,
Yet starts alarm'd at elfin sound?"

By this time Violet, though still very much astonished, had sufficiently recovered from her first alarm to have quite regained her powers of speech. So she neither fainted, nor screamed, nor did anything else which a town-bred or fanciful young lady might have felt inclined to do; but, looking steadily in the direction from which the voice came, answered in the following words:

"'Tis I, kind elf, whoe'er you be,
I pray you, do no harm to me—
With my dear pony here I came,
Good Cæsar! Violet's my name,
And trust, indeed, I do no ill
In drinking from the fairy rill."

Upon this there was a short pause, after which the same voice spoke again :—

"Thou dost no harm, so have thy will,
And rest thee by the fountain still.
Yet know that whatsoever treads
Where the old oak his shadow spreads,

And drinks the water, pure and sweet,
That bubbles up beneath his feet,
E'en as he bends to reach the well,
Comes subject to the fairy spell;
So, when thou to thy feet shall rise,
Think not to see with mortal eyes!
Strange sights to see will then be thine,
Such as no mortal could divine;
Strange sounds to hear, strange scenes to view,
To mortals, beautiful and new."

As the voice ceased a strange feeling of dread and wonderment stole over the little girl, and, impelled by something—she knew not what—she sprang at once to her feet. Hardly had she done so, when she perceived a sight the like of which she had never seen before. Immediately opposite her, upon the other side of the spring, stood a form which, beyond all question, was that of an unmistakable fairy—a little lady of exquisite figure and proportions, clad in the most approved fairy costume, bright and beautiful to see, and wearing upon her head a chaplet of oak-leaves twined together in the prettiest manner imaginable. But this was not nearly all that Violet saw. There were numbers of acorns upon the tree, although not nearly ripe, or at all ready to fall to the ground. But, even as the little girl rose to her feet, the acorns began dropping fast around her, and each one as it touched the ground at once assumed the shape of a very small man or woman, fantastically dressed in garments of a bright green colour, and evidently belonging to the Elfin race. A

"EACH . . . . ASSUMED THE SHAPE OF A VERY SMALL MAN OR WOMAN."

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great number of these little creatures soon stood around her, and presently all joined hands and began to dance solemnly round the old oak, singing, in clear, sweet tones, words to which Violet listened so attentively that she was able to remember them quite well ever afterwards :—

"The oak is lord of forest trees,
And monarch of the wood;
We'll praise him in our grateful glees,
As Elfin singers should.

"For, 'neath his spreading branches we
Enjoy a safe retreat,
And safely to his shelter flee
From mid-day sun and heat.

"Then summon every Elfin band
And loyal fairy folk,
To join the chorus, hand in hand,
Around the noble oak!"

Violet listened in great astonishment, but her wonder was not to cease with the termination of the elfin song. Suddenly the oak seemed to open, and the little folk all passed into the hollow tree. Scarcely knowing what she did, the child followed the crowd, and found herself in a beautiful room, where dancing was evidently about to take place. The room was tastefully decorated with the loveliest flowers, the floor was in first-rate order, and upon a kind of dais at the end were the musicians arranging and tuning their instruments ready to begin. As Violet looked around her, lost in amazement at the scene, and wondering what

would happen next, a sprightly little being, whom she recognised immediately as one of those who had fallen from the tree and joined the chorus around it, came up to her with a polite bow and begged to have the honour of dancing the first dance with her. Violet hesitated for an instant. How *could* she dance with an acorn?—the notion was ridiculous. True, he seemed to be a man (though a very little man) at that particular moment; but she knew he *had* been an acorn, and how *very* awkward it would be, and how foolish she would look, if he was to turn back into his own original shape in the middle of the dance! These thoughts flashed across her brain as the little gentleman stood bowing and scraping before her; but at the same time she remembered that her mamma had always told her to be polite to every one, and to hurt nobody's feelings if she could by any possibility avoid it. The little fellow would doubtless be hurt and annoyed if she refused him on account of his former, and probably future, condition; and, moreover, it was very likely that he might not be called upon to resume it until the dance was over. So, although they hadn't been introduced, which might have been made an obstacle by some *older* young ladies than Violet, she thought that, upon the whole, she had better accept his offer, and take her chance of the result. It was not long before she found herself exceedingly glad

that she had done so. The little fellow was a first-rate dancer, and although she had wondered how he would ever be able to manage a partner so much bigger than himself, somehow or other he seemed to find no difficulty at all in the matter, but whisked her round and round quite as rapidly as the fastest waltzer could have wished, and never wanted to stop unless she asked him to do so. The music was exquisite, the tunes perfection, and Violet thought this was the most charming dance which she had ever seen or enjoyed. When it was over, another elf and then another asked her to dance, and as she had now quite got over her doubts as to their capabilities, she made no scruple about accepting their offers, and danced away as merrily as if she was among her best and oldest friends.

All things, however, pleasant or the reverse, have a perpetual habit of coming to an end; and this dance, alas! proved no exception to the general rule. It did not end, though, in the usual way of mortal dances. No everlasting *cotillon* wound up the affair, followed by a universal ordering of carriages, calling for servants, crushing and crowding and pushing through doorways full of smart people, all wishing each other out of the way, and getting home hurry-scurry as best they could. Nothing of the kind occurred in this elfin dance, and the only thing that was at all like it was that all of a sudden the band struck up "God save

the Queen"—and gloriously they played it too! But as soon as ever it was finished, the oak suddenly opened again, and in the most quiet and orderly way possible the little people all trooped out, Violet following them as she had done before. When they had all reached the outside of the oak, the old tree slowly closed again, and the little beings, once more joining hands, danced solemnly round the monarch of the forest, chanting the same words as before, in the same sweet tones. As they sung, a feeling of intense, yet pleasant, fatigue seemed to steal over Violet, which was perhaps hardly surprising, considering the exercise she had just taken. Fairy dancing is, I suppose, not less tiring to mortals than their own natural exercise of the same sort. Be this as it may, however, it is certain that Violet felt a sensation in all her limbs which prompted her to sit down on the bank by the elfin rill with the least possible delay, and at the same time she experienced a soothing, dreamy feeling stealing over her senses, and peacefully and quietly the little girl sank into a deep sleep. And as she slept she dreamed of many things. She thought that she was in the school-room with Miss Hugwell, her governess, and that the latter *would* keep chanting the French verbs instead of reading them properly; then the French grammar suddenly turned into an acorn, and what was more, "Mangnall,"

"WITH A HORSE'S, OR RATHER A PONY'S, HEAD UPON HER."

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the dictionary, and several other books, usually of a grave and respectable character, instantly followed its example. Miss Hugwell began to scold them, just as if they were real people, and told them that the oak wouldn't like it, as they had no right to be acorns at all; and then, whilst she was in the act of scolding, she herself seemed to turn into an acorn, larger than the rest, but with a horse's, or rather a pony's head upon her, the very image of Cæsar. Impelled by the sincere desire that all little girls have to assist their governesses, Violet dreamed that she rushed forward, or tried to do so, to give Miss Hugwell her natural head back again, but found herself perfectly unable to move, which signified the less inasmuch as Miss Hugwell approached her at once, making the most extraordinary grimaces, and asked her to dance a hornpipe. Just as she was protesting that she couldn't do so, because she had never learned and didn't know how, some one came up and threw a cold sponge right in her face, and so real did this seem that Violet woke up all at once with a start, having no idea how long she had slept, nor indeed can I pretend to say, since I only know the story from her own account. Well, the cold sponge was easily accounted for, and what do you think it was? why, Cæsar's nose! Honest old Cæsar, thinking it time to go home, and seeing his dear young mistress still slumbering there, put his

cold nose against her face, softly and tenderly, as a gentle reminder that oats and hay were not to be had by stopping out in the wood. So the little lady sat up and rubbed her eyes and looked around, and as she became more and more awake, she remembered all that had happened. But she saw no elfin forms. There was the sparkling fairy rill, there the venerable oak, and there, actually upon his branches whence they had all descended, were scores and scores of acorns, looking as if they were *only* acorns after all, and evidently pretending that they had never been anything else. Violet looked up, then down, then to her right hand, and then to her left, in the most profound astonishment. She could not understand how the little beings with whom she had so lately danced had managed matters so cleverly, and how the oak had become repossessed of his fallen fruit in such a marvellous manner. Witchcraft or magic there had certainly been, and she began to feel that she had herself been very lucky not to have been turned into an acorn, or a stick, or a toad-stool, or something else equally objectionable. As, however, it was no use sitting there and thinking, she slowly rose from her seat, and mounting her pony, left the enchanted spot. Cæsar quietly wended his way through the wood again, and in due time he and his little mistress came out into the green track, and thence

quite out of the wood, and so away home. They saw nothing remarkable on their way, and when they got home everything seemed to be going on just as usual. Violet said not a word about the oak and the strange acorns to anybody at all, until her mamma came up to see her in bed that evening; then she told her story, and asked her mamma what she thought of it all. I am sorry to say that Mrs. Armstrong, having never seen an elfin dance herself, was much inclined to believe that Violet had fallen asleep under the oak, and had dreamed the whole thing. But Violet knew very well that this was only one of the mistakes which mammas and grown-up people *will* always persist in making: *they* have so much of the stern realities of life to attend to, that they would have no time to see fairies and acorn-elfins even if they appeared to them, and therefore they fancy that nobody else can see them! But it is children and light, merry-hearted people who do not know trouble, and who cast care away when it comes to them, that the little elves love to visit; this Violet knew well enough, and so she kissed her mamma, and gave her a smile of pity as well as love as she wished her good night, and fell asleep, very soon to dream of the little beings she had seen that day, and whom she earnestly hoped that she might see again in some of her future pleasant woodland rambles!

THE HEXENTANZPLATZ.

A Legend of the Hartz Mountains.

THE HEXENTANZPLATZ.

THIS is a story of the olden time, when there were no heartless critics to ask, "How do you know?" And still less were there any unpleasant children to interrupt a story by demanding, "But is it really true?" One sees a picture in the clouds sometimes; and it remains engraven on the heart when the intolerant sun has driven all the clouds away. Certainly we want the clear strong sunlight to ripen the corn; but the noon-day sky is never so beautiful or dear as the early morning clouds.

Some hundreds of years ago Martin Stern was a miller's *lehrgeselle*, in the Bode Thal. We should call him an apprentice; but the English word has a curt prosaic sound not nearly so expressive of half-filial relations and youthful romance as is the German term. The Bode Thal is the boldest and most beautiful glen in all

the Hartz country. The little river, after dallying amongst a maze of fir-clad slopes, appears to be suddenly seized with the sense of a mission in life, and makes a vigorous push for the open plain. I say, a vigorous push,—for one forgets the millenniums of its patient toil, and is overwhelmed with amazement at the resolute force with which it seems to have hewn down a gigantic barrier of rock that once imprisoned it in a lonely tarn, and to have cut the mountains down to their roots in its passion for freedom and the sea. Here at the mouth of the glen, where the fields begin to open out towards Quedlinburg and Aschersleben, the hills rise on either side in two towering masses, at whose summits the sheer rock escapes from the clinging embrace of the shaggy forest which clothes all the lower heights. There, outside the dark valley, in the broad sunlight where the river straggles widely as though languid after its strenuous effort, the town of Thale has grown up, and has become a great resort of German pleasure-seekers. For their convenience a large hotel has been built, and paths have been cut to all convenient points of view. Along these paths they swarm on summer days, ranging in groups of three or four, and always attended by a guide who, even in the most broiling weather, carries a burden of great coats and shawls. For Germans have usually a marked antipathy to "frische Luft" in any form. And when the pilgrims reach their exalted

destination, they either take refuge in the refreshment saloon which is usually provided, carefully closing every window and door, or they wrap themselves in cloaks and shawls against the inclemency of the summer breeze.

But when Martin Stern was a *lehrgeselle*, hundreds of years ago, Thale was a little hamlet, unconscious of its fashionable destiny; and within the jaws of the glen no sign of human life was to be seen, except only the mill on the left bank of the stream. And, indeed, that could hardly be seen until one was close upon it, or had climbed above it; for it was shut in by the forest. Here, lulled by the muffled echoes of falling water, and shrouded in a gloom only broken when the sun was high, the mill had stood for generations, and had kept Franz Mühler's ancestors in dusty contentment. But whether it would continue to keep his descendants or not, was a question very much dependent on the inclinations of his motherless child, a daughter. At the time I speak of, however, there seemed to be little doubt on that score; for Amalie Mühler, though not formally betrothed, was as nearly engaged as she could be without that ceremony to Martin Stern, the *lehrgeselle*. Amalie was but a child as yet, in her sixteenth year, and juvenile for her age. Her mother, who was dead, was a foreigner, whom Franz had met with in his *Wanderjahr*, or year of travel. And Amalie's piquant nose and chin, her shining dark hair, and black sparkling eyes, her elastic step and lithe

graceful form, showed unmistakable traces of other than German blood. It was now three years since Martin Stern had come to the mill; and that was a pleasant memory to her. For the last *lehrgeselle* had been a heavy, lumpish fellow, who scolded her for being in his way, and grudged to her the trembling joy she felt in pulling the handle that turned the water on, and so setting the great wheel in motion with her tiny hands. But Martin when he came was a bright boy of fourteen, only two years older than herself. His fair face and golden hair, his deep blue eyes set in long silken lashes, his frank yet bashful smile as he looked down upon her, had won her heart at once. His gratitude, and his admiration of her knowledge when she showed him all about the mill, his ready welcome afterwards when she sought a refuge for her loneliness amongst the groaning and clatter and dust, the games he played with her, and the toys he carved for her, so deepened her childish admiration, that it bid fair at her transformation into womanhood to be glorified into love. Her father, a grey, silent man, who was credited by the country side with strange adventures during more than one long absence from home in earlier years, would watch the pair at times with uneasy glances as they sported in the evening by the river, and then would call her to his side. "Is it very happy then?" he would ask, as he smoothed away her wind-tossed hair.

"Why not, little father (Väterchen)?"

"And thou wouldst not go away to live in the fine city I have told thee of?"

"Why, then?" she would ask; and break away at the call of Martin to see a toy boat dancing down the stream.

And the father would sigh, and murmur to himself, "Well, better as it is."

Martin had never known any relative but his grandmother, who brought him up at a lonely cottage deep in the forest, where his playmates were the squirrel and the wood-pigeon. All that he had ever learned was taught him by his aged relative, whom he always called by the name of mother. And, to the wonder of all around, not only could he read and write admirably, but when he and Amalie pored over the pictures in the miller's illuminated missal, he would interpret to her many of the mysterious words which the priest intoned at the altar. Besides, his mind was stored with thrilling tales of siege and battle. One, especially, he used to tell, of which Amalie never wearied, though it always made her weep. It was of a count and his three sons, who fell fighting amidst the ruins of their flaming castle, against the might of a cruel king, while the only souls that escaped were a lady and a baby that she carried. Amalie always wished to learn what became of them; but this Martin did not know.

One day, towards the end of April, Martin's grandmother, Margaret Stern, came to visit him. She did not often come; for, in truth, she was not usually a very welcome visitor anywhere. The denizens of the Hartz did not like any one whose belongings were unknown. Still less did they approve the possession of unusual knowledge, such as Martin's education showed this woman to have acquired. Such prejudices were not, however, shared by Franz Mühler. He always made her welcome enough; but as to Amalie, not even her affection for Martin could overcome the freezing dislike and distrust she felt. However much she tried to conceal it, her flow of spirits and her elasticity of movement seemed alike paralysed when this woman came. Margaret Stern always appeared and went with the suddenness of an apparition. Amalie stepped out to draw water from the stream, and as she stooped she saw, beside the reflection of her own face, another which made her utter an involuntary cry. This brought Martin out from the mill, to find her struggling to free herself from Margaret's arms.

"Child, hast thou seen a water-sprite?" said the latter.

"Oh, you seemed to fly through the air," cried Amalie; "you frighten me."

"Hush! silly girl," replied Margaret, severely, "you know not what you say."

But now Franz Mühler came forth to welcome his guest, and all went in to the evening meal. Scarcely had the night fallen when Margaret rose up to go. All were too well habituated to her manners to attempt useless persuasion, and went out into the moonlight to bid her farewell. The crags opposite shone like glittering silver; the dark forest glimmered with softer radiance, and here and there cavernous shadows yawned black as the mouth of hell.

"Just a night for witchery," said Franz.

"No, father; this is a fairy night," said Amalie. "I know witches love storm and thunder."

"*Thou* knowest!" cried Margaret, turning upon her with a gloomy smile.

"Well, Martin says so," she answered, and hid herself behind her father.

The rocky platform up to which they were looking was firmly believed to be a favourite meeting-place for witches, and is to this day called the Hexentanzplatz, or witches' dancing-place.

"Ay," said Franz, "there's light enough up there for honest folks to-night. Some lads and lasses I know would enjoy a moonlight dance as much as ever a witch of them all; eh, Malchen?"

"Heaven forbid!" said Margaret, solemnly.

"Why, mother?" asked Martin.

"Wouldst thou dare to face the powers of evil in their

own stronghold, now of all seasons in the year when Walpurgisnacht is close at hand, and when all the spirits of earth and air haunt these mountains?"

"Not he," said Franz, "he's moonstruck already; isn't he, Malchen?"

And Amalie peeped out from behind her father's shoulder and smiled. In the uncertain light there seemed to Martin a touch of mockery in the smile; his face burned, and he was about to answer with heat. But he checked himself; and no one knew of the resolve that he had formed. He turned to bid adieu to the mother; but she was gone. And though he followed hastily on the path, she was nowhere to be found.

The moon was peeping into the Bodethal as Walpurgisnacht drew on. The mill-wheel was hushed, and the stillness of a calm night was broken only by a faint rustle of multitudinous leaves, and by the soothing music of flowing water. Along the trunks of trees laid from rock to rock, the figure of Martin Stern glided out of the shadow into the moonlight that fell on the river's farther bank. But when he had gained the middle of the stream he started and almost fell; for there before him stood the white form of Amalie, pale as death, warning him with uplifted finger, and looking upon him with eyes of such strange, unwonted sadness that he was stricken with dread for her, and

sprang forward to her aid. But when he reached the opposite side she was gone. With anguish he called her name aloud, but there was no answer; and, after searching vainly in the woody shadows, he sped back again across the stream. There he saw her in the open doorway of the house, shading an open light with a hand that seemed transparent, and peering out into the night.

"What is the matter?" she asked, as he came up breathless. "Surely it was you that called. But what has happened? Are you hurt?—or frightened?"

"Hush," said he; "you girls think every one as easily frightened as yourselves. But you may hear many voices to-night, Amalie. Don't heed them."

"But are you not coming in?" she asked.

"Yes, when I have finished," he said; "but it may be late. Good night."

He knew she had never left the house; and he turned to the river again with a creeping horror that was only overcome by the echo of her unlucky question, "Are you frightened?" Crossing the water again, with blanched cheek and trembling limbs, he looked down to steady his steps, and there saw his own features distorted and ghastly, his limbs torn and bleeding, with rusty fetters eating into his flesh. He drew hastily from his breast a phial of holy water and let fall a drop. The horror was gone; he crossed

himself, and with a strong effort he sprang into the wood, ran swiftly up a winding path, and began to climb the crags to which it led. Rapidly the glimpses through the trees clinging to the rocks stretched farther and farther over the winding river and the fields sleeping under the moon. The violence of his exertion, far from exhausting him, had nerved his limbs again; and when he gained a resting-place below the last wall of rock which he had to climb, he was able to look calmly round upon the prospect. The time was now drawing towards midnight; for though it seemed as if he could have dropped a stone upon the mill, some two hours had elapsed since he started. There was a stir in the air; the face of the sky had changed; clouds every now and then obscured the moon. But the stir in the air seemed more than a rising breeze, and the passing darkness that flitted over him more than the shadow of clouds. There was a weird sense of intangible and invisible presences all around him, that as he grew cooler made his flesh creep once more. Suddenly a terrific shriek rent him like the piercing of a sword. His heart stopped with the shock, and he fell senseless. Whether what followed was a dream or a waking vision he could not tell; but there, on a point of rock below him, was a ruddy glow which shone from a pile of burning wood. The flames rose high, enwrapping and overarching an

awful figure with crossed arms, upturned face, and wild grey hair. It was the form of his mother—Margaret!

Again he clutched the phial from his breast, and while his teeth chattered with horror he sprinkled the holy drops towards the hideous sight. In a moment all was gone; and the sleek silver of the moonbeams was the only light he saw where it had been.

"Thank heaven!" he murmured, as he crossed himself anew. "God is stronger than the devil after all. Amalie! Amalie! thy man shall conquer fear. The breast that shelters thee should be strong as the shield of an archangel."

With that he sprang up the steep, and as he went there hovered above his head another and a different sight. A bright cloud came borne by a wind, that sang softly as it went. And on its surface he saw himself clad in knightly armour, while Amalie, in the splendour of a princess, leaned fondly upon him and turned her face proudly to the wide world. All previous portents vanished now. This was, he felt assured, the work of angels, not evil spirits; and though it melted slowly away, he held it fast in his heart as he sprang amongst the woods that crowned the summit of the hill.

But he had not yet reached his destination. Turning to the left along the ridge, he pursued his way

among the trees towards the Hexentanzplatz. This, as before mentioned, was a bare platform of rock, crowning the extremity of the ridge. The moon came out now only in fitful gleams, that seemed all the more startlingly bright through contrast with the alternate gloom. In one of these luminous moments, as he skirted the precipice at the edge of the wood, a magnificent prospect opened out. The nearest foreground was the opposite wall of the abyss, going sheer down in massive voluminous shadow. And beyond, a broad shaggy mountain glade, bordered by immense rolling waves of foliage, ran back to the distant horizon, where the blunt-topped Brocken crowned the view. About that summit sparkles seemed to dance, as though the mountain had been encircled with a diamond necklace. Then darkness fell upon the prospect, and the sparkles burned more brightly. But as the youth was pondering what these could mean, a chorus of harsh grating laughter fell upon his ear. He pressed forward, and in a moment more saw on the dim open space of rock before him, a sight that made him pause, and cower behind a bush. Three old crones sat upon the ground, each with her knees drawn up to her chin, and all watching the antics of a hideous dwarf, who had apparently been the cause of their laughter. In a moment there appeared to be another in the company, and presently a fifth, each greeted by the

horrible laughter heard before; though how, or from what quarter they came, Martin could not discern. Then harsh croaking speech was heard, and he gathered that they were expecting some one who was late. "Midnight at hand; and she is not here," said one. "All is lost for another year." "Nay, nay," said another, "for ever and aye; the Emperor comes not another day." "Hers is the boy," cried a third; "but whose is the girl? Who gave her to the miller churl?" Then chanted a fourth, "Under the window a gondola lies; up, stepmother, the prisoner flies." Here there was a sudden stir; all rose from their seats, and joined in chorus: "Welcome, welcome! and only in time. Quick with the spell upon Ingelheim!" Then Martin saw a fire begin to glow; and its flames revealed a cauldon hanging from a tripod. Beyond it stood a gaunt grey figure. And as the face reflected the firelight, he recognised his mother, Margaret! "It is an illusion of hell," he said to himself, and drew the phial from his breast. But that had no power now to dissipate the vision, and he stood paralysed with grief, indignation, and terror. He saw her cast some small glittering object into the cauldron, and heard her chant, "Ring, sink into the troubled flood. Love, mount into the throbbing blood!" Another ring was then thrown, and he heard the words, "Southern sun and northern gloom, mingle in the

richest bloom." But he could bear no more. "Now help me, God, and all holy angels!" he cried; and holding his phial, rushed forth from his hiding-place. "Mother! mother!" he said, "ask nothing for us from hell." And heedless of the howling discord of shrieks and curses that arose, he sprang to Margaret's side, and throwing his arms around her, sought to draw her away. Speechless, and with a face of despair, she strove to release herself; and in the struggle the phial fell into the cauldron. Instantly the air was filled with flame; a terrific explosion shook the mountains to their bases; and then all was still.

Martin awoke from a long trance, weak, shivering, and sick, just as the sky was touched with earliest morning grey. He tried to move, but could not. There was something in his hand, which at first he thought must be the broken remains of his phial. But when he raised his stiffened arm to look, he saw that he held two jewelled gold rings, interlocked one with another, like the links of a chain. One showed in cornelian a wild boar's head, and the other in sapphire the prow of a boat. He was so faint that he felt no wonder, and lay there without any care for life or death. Here he was found by Franz Mühler, who said that early in the morning Mother Margaret had appeared, and had counselled that he should be

sought in this spot; for, said she, it was most likely that some curious whim had drawn him hither, and that he had had a fall. Amalie had entreated permission to accompany her father, but was not permitted; and now awaited in misery the result of his search. Strengthened by a cordial, and leaning heavily on his stalwart master, Martin crawled slowly down to the mill by a circuitous route. But Margaret had disappeared just before his arrival. An old dame, skilled in nursing, was sent for from the neighbouring hamlet; and Martin lay long in a dangerous fever between life and death. Amalie, not suffered to approach him, grew pale and emaciated through very helplessness of anxiety. There was something mysterious going on, that she could not understand. The old nurse insisted on sending for a priest, who, though the patient was quite incapable of confession, remained for a long while listening to his ravings. When the priest came out of the chamber, he had an interview with Franz, whose voice was heard at times in contemptuous deprecation or loud anger. That night Amalie saw the form of the mother Margaret standing outside the house, wringing her hands, and looking up to Martin's window with streaming tears. But when Amalie hastened out to find her, she was gone.

At last Martin began slowly to recover; and as

soon as he was able to walk, Amalie became his ministering angel, undemonstrative and demure, with few sparkles of her old vivacity, but with all the pure and natural freedom of feminine tenderness to suffering and weakness. They never mentioned that dreadful night. He never spoke of his mother; and she, without any understanding of the mystery, somehow felt that a silence had fallen on the name. But one day he suddenly said he was strong enough now, and must go to seek his mother, for he feared some evil had befallen her. Franz would not hinder him; and Amalie pleaded only for a delay of a few days, but in vain. Next morning, however, when he was ready to set out, two men-at-arms appeared from Quedlinburg, and claimed him as their prisoner. For a moment he seemed thunderstruck. But when Franz said, "This, then, is the priest's work," he turned deadly pale, and going to Amalie, threw his arms around her.

"Farewell, then, little one," he said; "I wished to show myself worthy of thee; but it was a foolish way. God shield thee, and give thee a wiser man; a truer thou canst not have."

He would have torn himself away, but now she threw off all restraint, and clung to him with convulsive sobs.

"It cannot be! it shall not!" she cried. "Thou hast done nothing evil."

"No, no," he said; "and will not. Master,—father, take her away; forgive my folly; but false I have never been."

"No, truly thou hast not," said Franz, taking the distracted girl from his arms. "Go; and the dear God who kept thee from the powers of hell, preserve thee from false judgments of the world."

It is not needful to dwell at length on the cruelties that were in old times inflicted in the name of justice, and under the impulse of superstitious fears. Suffice it, that in the castle of Quedlinburg, Martin was interrogated again and again on the subject of his midnight adventure, and as steadfastly refused to answer what was required. He was charged with knowing and concealing the names of unholy witches, and of complicity in their guilt. But neither loneliness, nor starvation, nor even promises of instant restoration to Amalie's side, could shake his persistent refusal to speak. At length, and with many protestations of ecclesiastical tenderness and unwillinghood to yield to the secular arm, he was put to the torture. But even when the sweat of agony burst from every pore, no sound could be rung from him, but the irrepressible shriek that preceded unconsciousness. To have uttered the name "Amalie" would have been like a cordial to him. But he knew what that might mean to his persecutors; and kept it in his heart. At last, when he

was torn, blood-stained, and faint, a female prisoner was suddenly ushered into the vault. A wild cry made him open his eyes; and he saw the mother Margaret, struggling with her jailors and striving to come near him.

"Hush," he said, "hush, mother, say nothing now."

"Demons!" she cried, "hell does not hold your like, you coward crew. Here am I—the witch. Torture me, scorch, burn to death. The torments of a woman will gratify you as much as those of a boy. Oh men—if you are men—for God's sake send him home. I am guilty, I tell you. Oh why did I not know you had him in your power?"

Some weeks after this scene, the scattered inhabitants of the forest and the hamlets round were gathering in excited groups along the winding tracks that led up to the Hexentanzplatz. Almost every one was saying to the other, "I told you so; I knew she would come to this." Some said, "I thought the execution would have been put off till after the Emperor had passed." Others said, "No; judgment rests only with the Prince; and it is well the country should be purified before the Emperor comes." One sighed, "The pretty Amalie; what will become of her?" Another said, "She was seen in the dusk last night, covered with a black veil like a nun, and

hurrying, like one distracted, out towards Quedlinburg."

The rocky platform, bright now with the summer sun, was trampled by many feet, and in the midst stood a black stake surrounded by a heap of faggots. Soon arrived a gloomy procession of men-at-arms guarding the shackled prisoner, whom a priest wearied with threats and exhortations. Margaret Stern walked with head erect, and eyes fixed beyond all earthly scenes. Martin, between two soldiers, halted painfully behind. But Franz Mühler was nowhere to be seen. When Margaret came in sight of the stake, her eyes drew in their gaze, not with any sign of fear, but as though with sudden recollection. She stopped, and turning slowly round to an officer of some rank, said, "Once more I warn you. I do not seek to avoid death. It is inevitable now. But greater interests than you know demand that I should live till the Emperor comes."

But the officer said, coldly, "Enough; forward there, proceed."

At that moment a trumpet was heard in the vale below.

"It sounds a recall," said an old soldier. But the officer took no heed.

"One word at least with my grandson," said the doomed woman.

"Heaven forbid!" said the priest; "speak only to the saints to intercede for thy wretched soul."

The procession moved slowly on. They bound her to the stake with her face towards the Brocken, while the priest seemed to be urging something upon her.

"Yes," she said at length, "I will do as you say; I will confess before I die. Hear, all good people. I was forsaken by heaven; and I made a league with Satan. I was not always what I seem now. I saw my husband and three sons slain before my eyes while defending our home against a usurping prince. I hear now that the new emperor, whom God defend, has avenged us. But then I was alone, a helpless woman, with an infant grandson in my arms. I despaired of help from heaven; I took it from hell, and I am here; but take notice all, that Margaret, Countess of Ingelheim, owing allegiance to the Emperor alone, is here put to death by a subject prince. And there stands Martin, rightful Count of Ingelheim, whose cause let the Emperor judge. Now may the fire purify my soul!"

"Mother, mother," cried Martin, "thou shall not die! If I be count, I claim my rights. I appeal to the Emperor. Let me go, fellows."

But they laughed him to scorn. The torch was applied to the faggots; the flame began to flicker,

when Franz Mühler's head appeared above the rocky edge of the plateau. Breathless he sprang to his feet, flew to the pile and kicked away the burning faggots.

"In the Emperor's name, hold!" he cried. "Did you not hear the signal? In a few moments' time a detachment of his guard will be here. Behold his sign manual!"

The officer scrutinized the document, and dared not refuse an imperial claim to reserve judgment on a feudatory of the crown. As Franz predicted, a file of the Emperor's body-guard soon appeared, and conducted the prisoners to Quedlinburg again, where the Emperor had arrived at the castle. There he sat enthroned in the hall; and Margaret, followed by Martin, was placed before him. But what was Martin's bewilderment to see Amalie, pale as lily, and richly but darkly arrayed, standing amongst other attendant ladies not far from the Emperor's side!

"Margaret, Countess of Ingelheim," said the latter, "I recover three subjects this day. One has quailed under misfortune, and suffered it to blight her with its unholy suggestions. Another, unconscious of his worth, has stood the intensest fire, and proved himsel fit for noble service. A third, poor child, knowing nothing of the world or life, has shown in humble station the inspiring power of a pure and holy love.

Martin, Count of Ingelheim, take thine Emilia, marchesa in her own right, through inheritance from her mother. I count you two of the brightest jewels in my imperial crown. For you, Countess, I can offer nothing but a life-long penitence, if some pious sisters can be found to take you in charge. And you, Franz Mühler; it was a crime to take advantage of the despair of an ill-used girl. But you cherished her loyally, and now have played the man. We shall find you some preferment that will keep you near your daughter."

Amidst the loud acclaim that greeted the Emperor's judgment, Margaret fell back into her grandson's arms, and ascended to a higher tribunal.

J. A. P.

THE END.

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