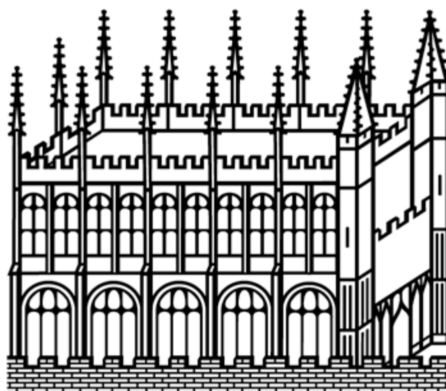

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TALES FROM MANY SOURCES

Tales from many sources

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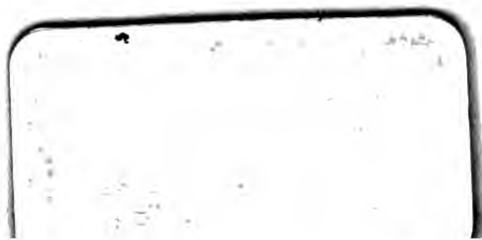

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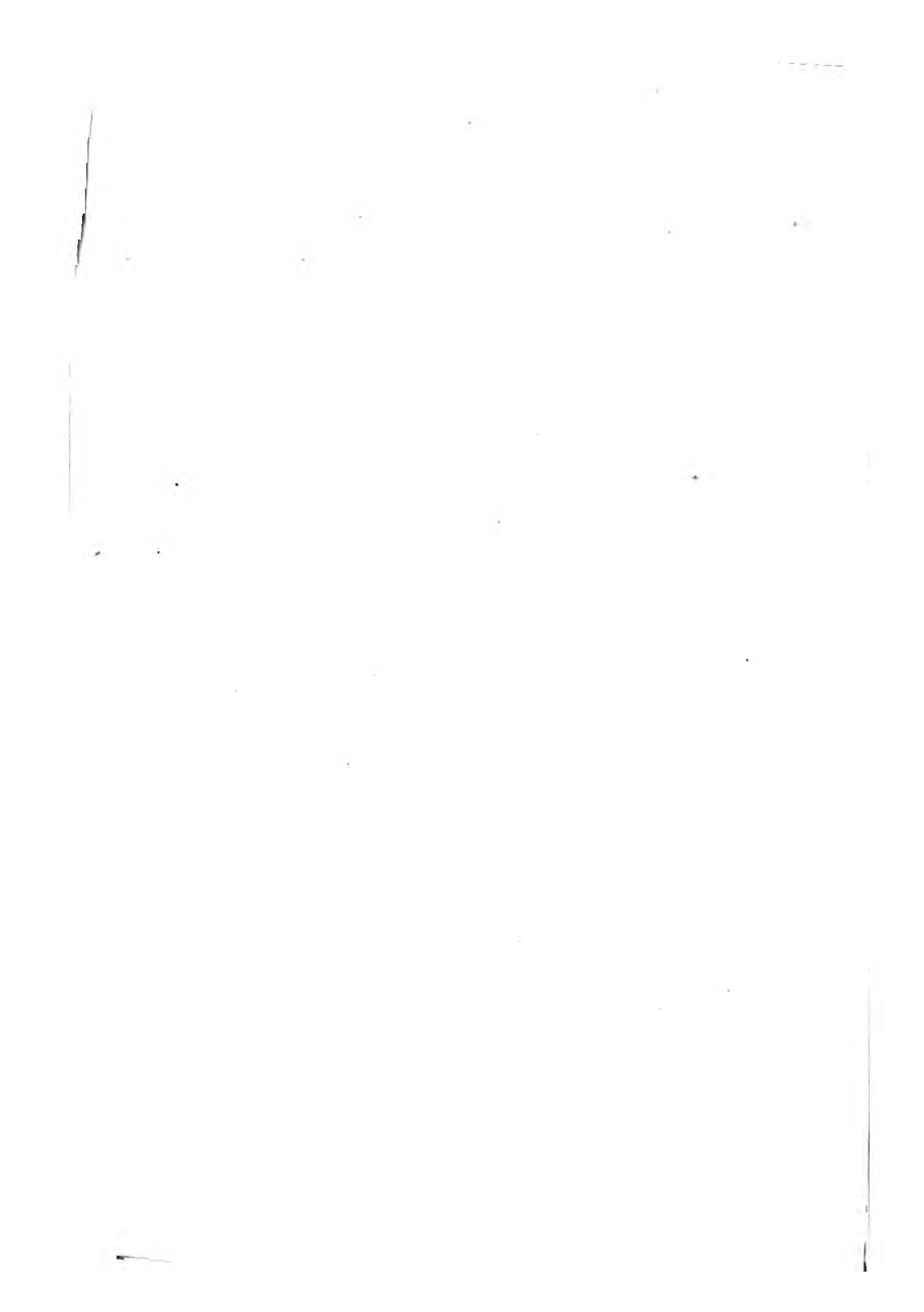
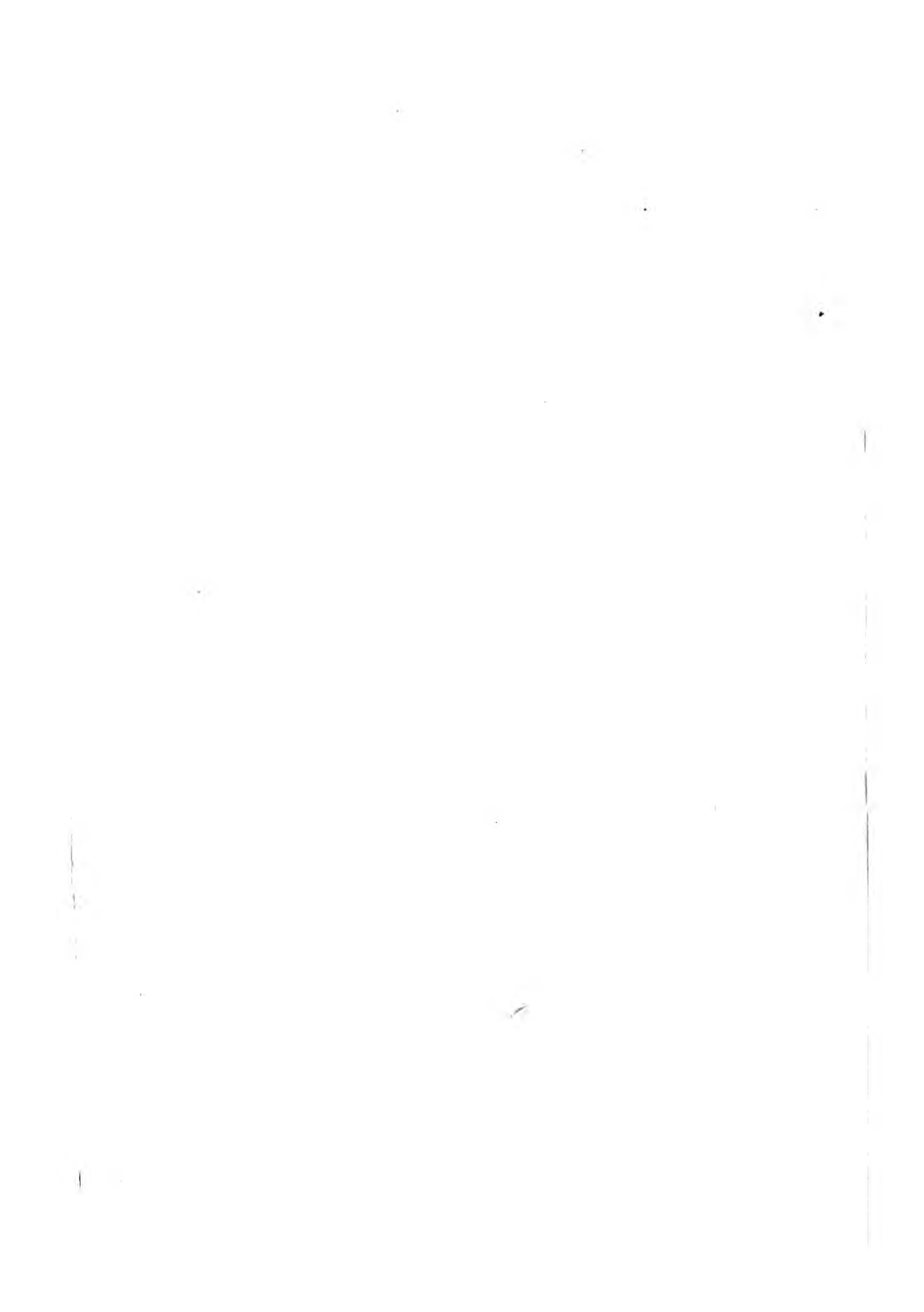
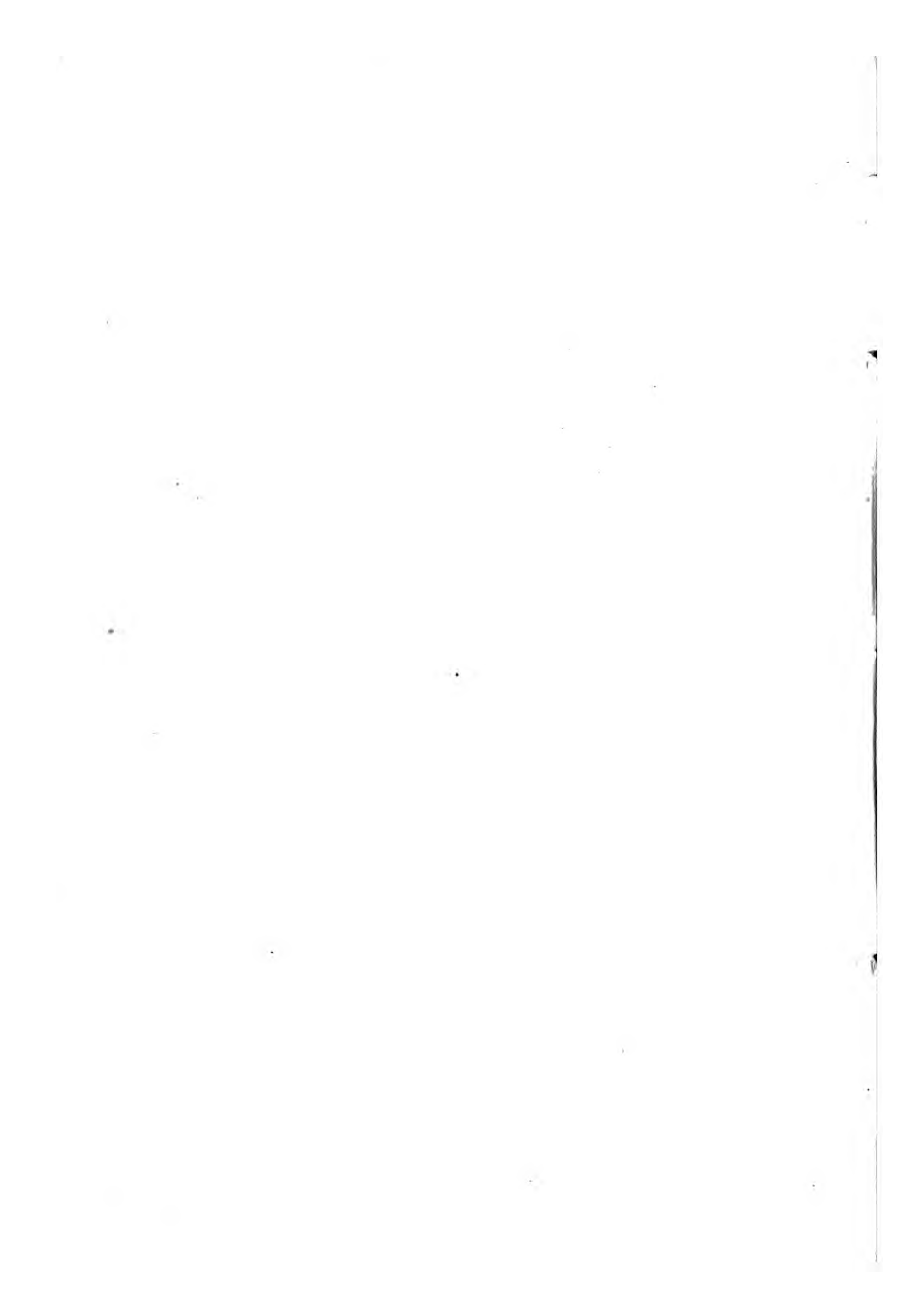




TALES FROM MANY SOURCES

VOL. I.



TALES

FROM MANY SOURCES

VOL. I.

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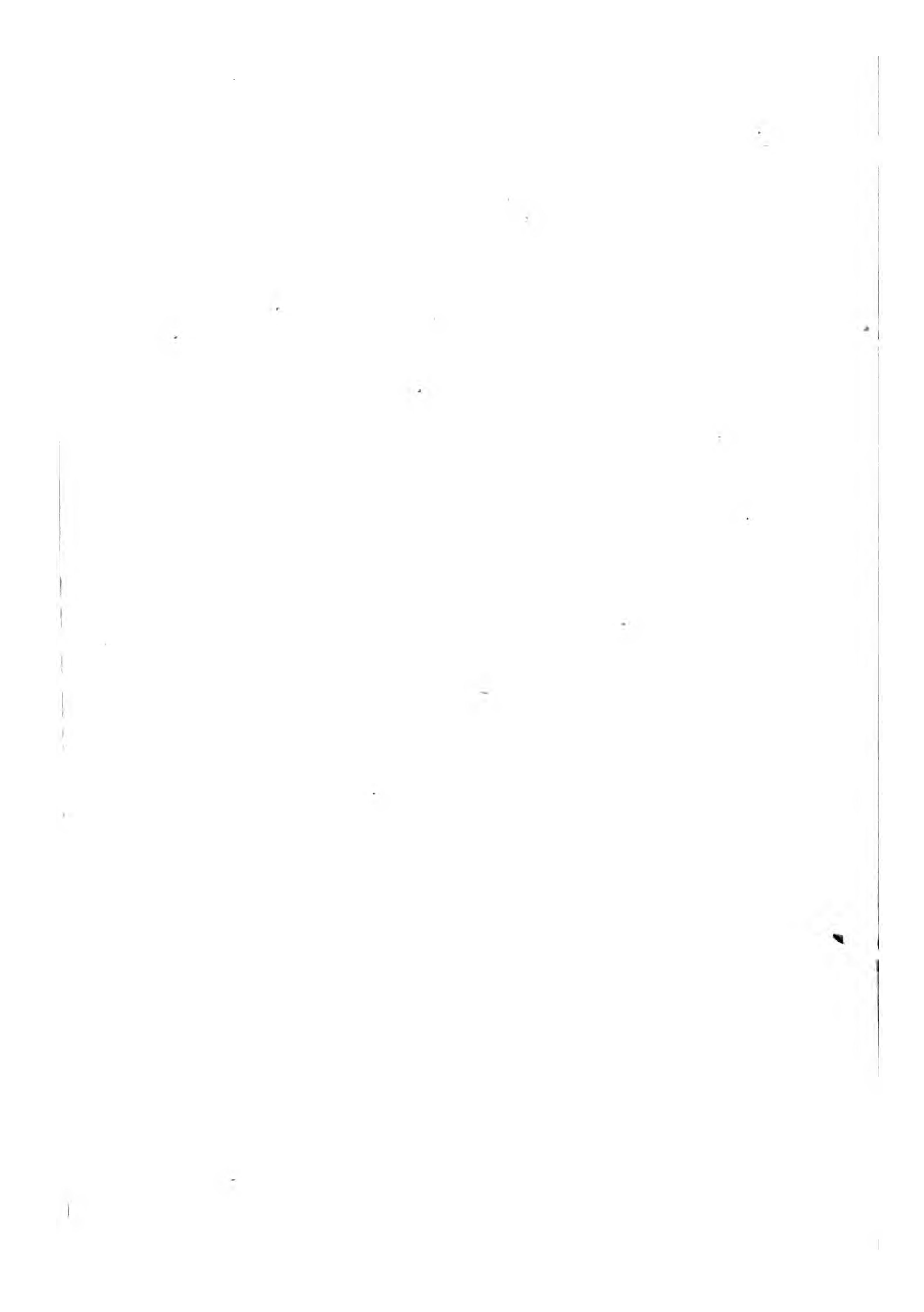

THE THREE STRANGERS.

AMONG the few features of agricultural England which retain an appearance but little modified by the lapse of centuries, may be reckoned the high, grassy, and furzy downs, coombs, or ewe-leases, as they are indifferently called, that fill a large area of certain counties in the south and south-west. If any mark of human occupation is met with hereon it usually takes the form of the solitary cottage of some shepherd.

Fifty years ago such a lonely cottage stood on such a down, and may possibly be standing there now. In spite of its loneliness, however, the spot, by actual measurement, was not more than five miles from a county town. Yet, what of that? Five miles of irregular upland, during the long inimical seasons, with their sleets, snows, rains, and mists, afford withdrawing space enough to isolate a Timon or a Nebuchadnezzar; much less, in fair weather, to please that less repellant tribe, the poets, philosophers, artists, and others who "conceive and meditate of pleasant things."

Some old earthen camp or barrow, some clump of trees, at least some starved fragment of ancient hedge, is usually taken advantage of in the erection

of these forlorn dwellings. But, in the present case, such a kind of shelter had been disregarded. Higher Crowstairs, as the house was called, stood quite detached and undefended. The only reason for its precise situation seemed to be the crossing of two footpaths at right angles hard by, which may have crossed there and thus for a good five hundred years. The house was thus exposed to the elements on all sides. But, though the wind up here blew unmistakably when it did blow, and the rain hit hard whenever it fell, the various weathers of the winter season were not quite so formidable on the coomb as they were imagined to be by dwellers on low ground. The raw rimes were not so pernicious as in the hollows, and the frosts were scarcely so severe. When the shepherd and his family who tenanted the house were pitied for their sufferings from the exposure, they said that upon the whole they were less inconvenienced by "wuzzes and flames" (hoarses and phlegms) than when they had lived by the stream of a snug neighbouring valley.

The night of March 28, 182–, was precisely one of the nights that were wont to call forth these expressions of commiseration. The level rainstorm smote walls, slopes, and hedges like the clothyard shafts of Senlac and Crecy. Such sheep and outdoor animals as had no shelter stood with their buttocks to the wind; while the tails of little birds trying to roost on some scraggy thorn were blown inside-out like umbrellas. The gable-end of the cottage was stained with wet, and the eaves-drop-

pings flapped against the wall. Yet never was commiseration for the shepherd more misplaced. For that cheerful rustic was entertaining a large party in glorification of the christening of his second girl.

The guests had arrived before the rain began to fall, and they were all now assembled in the chief or living-room of the dwelling. A glance into the apartment at eight o'clock on this eventful evening would have resulted in the opinion that it was as cozy and comfortable a nook as could be wished for in boisterous weather. The calling of its inhabitant was proclaimed by a number of highly-polished sheep-crooks without stems that were hung ornamentally over the fireplace, the curl of each shining crook varying from the antiquated type engraved in the patriarchal pictures of old family Bibles to the most approved fashion of the last local sheep-fair. The room was lighted by half-a-dozen candles, having wicks only a trifle smaller than the grease which enveloped them, in candlesticks that were never used but at high-days, holy-days, and family feasts. The lights were scattered about the room, two of them standing on the chimney-piece. This position of candles was in itself significant. Candles on the chimney-piece always meant a party.

On the hearth, in front of a back-brand to give substance, blazed a fire of thorns, that crackled "like the laughter of the fool."

Nineteen persons were gathered here. Of these, five women, wearing gowns of various bright hues,

sat in chairs along the wall ; girls shy and not shy filled the window-bench ; four men, including Charley Jake the hedge-carpenter, Elijah New the parish-clerk, and John Pitcher, a neighbouring dairyman, the shepherd's father-in-law, lolled in the settle ; a young man and maid, who were blushing over tentative *pourparlers* on a life-companionship, sat beneath the corner-cupboard ; and an elderly engaged man of fifty or upward moved restlessly about from spots where his betrothed was not to the spot where she was. Enjoyment was pretty general, and so much the more prevailed in being unhampered by conventional restrictions. Absolute confidence in each other's good opinion begat perfect ease, while the finishing stroke of manner, amounting to a truly princely serenity, was lent to the majority by the absence of any expression or trait denoting that they wished to get on in the world, enlarge their minds, or do any eclipsing thing whatever—which nowadays so generally nips the bloom and *bonhomie* of all except the two extremes of the social scale.

Shepherd Fennel had married well, his wife being a dairyman's daughter from the valley below, who brought fifty guineas in her pocket—and kept them there, till they should be required for ministering to the needs of a coming family. This frugal woman had been somewhat exercised as to the character that should be given to the gathering. A sit-still party had its advantages; but an undisturbed position of ease in chairs and settles was apt to lead on the men to such an unconscionable deal of toping that

they would sometimes fairly drink the house dry. A dancing-party was the alternative ; but this, while avoiding the foregoing objection on the score of good drink, hâd a counterbalancing disadvantage in the matter of good victuals, the ravenous appetites engendered by the exercise causing immense havoc in the buttery. Shepherdess Fennel fell back upon the intermediate plan of mingling short dances with short periods of talk and singing, so as to hinder any ungovernable rage in either. But this scheme was entirely confined to her own gentle mind : the shepherd himself was in the mood to exhibit the most reckless phases of hospitality.

The fiddler was a boy of those parts, about twelve years of age, who had a wonderful dexterity in jigs and reels, though his fingers were so small and short as to necessitate a constant shifting for the high notes, from which he scrambled back to the first position with sounds not of unmixed purity of tone. At seven the shrill tweedle-dee of this youngster had begun, accompanied by a booming ground-bass from Elijah New, the parish clerk, who had thoughtfully brought with him his favourite musical instrument, the serpent. Dancing was instantaneous, Mrs. Fennel privately enjoining the players on no account to let the dance exceed the length of a quarter of an hour.

But Elijah and the boy, in the excitement of their position, quite forgot the injunction. Moreover, Oliver Giles, a man of seventeen, one of the dancers, who was enamoured of his partner, a fair girl of

thirty-three rolling years, had recklessly handed a new crown-piece to the musicians, as a bribe to keep going as long as they had muscle and wind. Mrs. Fennel, seeing the steam begin to generate on the countenances of her guests, crossed over and touched the fiddler's elbow and put her hand on the serpent's mouth. But they took no notice, and fearing she might lose her character of genial hostess if she were to interfere too markedly, she retired and sat down helpless. And so the dance whizzed on with cumulative fury, the performers moving in their planet-like courses, direct and retrograde from apogee to perigee, till the hand of the well-kicked clock at the bottom of the room had travelled over the circumference of an hour.

While these cheerful events were in course of enactment within Fennel's pastoral dwelling, an incident having considerable bearing on the party had occurred in the gloomy night without. Mrs. Fennel's concern about the growing fierceness of the dance corresponded in point of time with the ascent of a human figure to the solitary hill of Higher Crowstairs from the direction of the distant town. This personage strode on through the rain without a pause, following the little-worn path which, further on in its course, skirted the shepherd's cottage.

It was nearly the time of full moon, and on this account, though the sky was lined with a uniform sheet of dripping cloud, ordinary objects out of doors were readily visible. The sad wan light re-

vealed the lonely pedestrian to be a man of supple frame; his gait suggested that he had somewhat passed the period of perfect and instinctive agility, though not so far as to be otherwise than rapid of motion when occasion required. In point of fact he might have been about forty years of age. He appeared tall, but a recruiting sergeant, or other person accustomed to the judging of men's heights by the eye, would have discerned that this was chiefly owing to his gauntness, and that he was not more than five feet eight or nine.

Notwithstanding the regularity of his tread, there was caution in it, as in that of one who mentally feels his way; and despite the fact that it was not a black coat nor a dark garment of any sort that he wore, there was something about him which suggested that he naturally belonged to the black-coated tribes of men. His clothes were of fustian, and his boots hobnailed, yet in his progress he showed not the mud-accustomed bearing of hobnailed and fustianed peasantry.

By the time that he had arrived abreast of the shepherd's premises the rain came down, or rather came along, with yet more determined violence. The outskirts of the little homestead partially broke the force of wind and rain, and this induced him to stand still. The most salient of the shepherd's domestic erections was an empty sty at the forward corner of his hedgeless garden, for in these latitudes the principle of masking the homelier features of your establishment by a conventional frontage was

unknown. The traveller's eye was attracted to this small building by the pallid shine of the wet slates that covered it. He turned aside, and, finding it empty, stood under the pent-roof for shelter.

While he stood, the boom of the serpent within, and the lesser strains of the fiddler, reached the spot as an accompaniment to the surging hiss of the flying rain on the sod, its louder beating on the cabbage-leaves of the garden, on the eight or ten bee-hives just discernible by the path, and its dripping from the eaves into a row of buckets and pans that had been placed under the walls of the cottage. For at Higher Crowstairs, as at all such elevated domiciles, the grand difficulty of housekeeping was an insufficiency of water; and a casual rainfall was utilised by turning out, as catchers, every utensil that the house contained. Some queer stories might be told of the contrivances for economy in suds and dish-waters that are absolutely necessitated in upland habitations during the droughts of summer. But at this season there were no such exigencies: a mere acceptance of what the skies bestowed was sufficient for an abundant store.

At last the notes of the serpent ceased and the house was silent. This cessation of activity aroused the solitary pedestrian from the reverie into which he had lapsed, and, emerging from the shed, with an apparently new intention, he walked up the path to the house-door. Arrived here, his first act was to kneel down on a large stone beside the row of vessels, and to drink a copious draught from one of

them. Having quenched his thirst, he rose and lifted his hand to knock, but paused with his eye upon the panel. Since the dark surface of the wood revealed absolutely nothing, it was evident that he must be mentally looking through the door, as if he wished to measure thereby all the possibilities that a house of this sort might include, and how they might bear upon the question of his entry.

In his indecision he turned and surveyed the scene around. Not a soul was anywhere visible. The garden-path stretched downward from his feet, gleaming like the track of a snail ; the roof of the little well (mostly dry), the well cover, the top rail of the garden-gate, were varnished with the same dull liquid glaze ; while, far away in the vale, a faint whiteness of more than usual extent showed that the rivers were high in the meads. Beyond all this winked a few bleared lamplights through the beating drops, lights that denoted the situation of the country-town from which he had appeared to come. The absence of all notes of life in that direction seemed to clinch his intentions, and he knocked at the door.

Within, a desultory chat had taken the place of movement and musical sound. The hedge-carpenter was suggesting a song to the company, which nobody just then was inclined to undertake, so that the knock afforded a not unwelcome diversion.

"Walk in!" said the shepherd promptly.

The latch clicked upward, and out of the night

our pedestrian appeared upon the door-mat. The shepherd arose, snuffed two of the nearest candles, and turned to look at him.

Their light disclosed that the stranger was dark in complexion, and not unprepossessing as to feature. His hat, which for a moment he did not remove, hung low over his eyes, without concealing that they were large, open, and determined, moving with a flash rather than a glance round the room. He seemed pleased with the survey, and, baring his shaggy head, said, in a rich deep voice, "The rain is so heavy, friends, that I ask leave to come in and rest awhile."

"To be sure, stranger," said the shepherd. "And faith, you've been lucky in choosing your time, for we are having a bit of a fling for a glad cause—though to be sure a man could hardly wish that glad cause to happen more than once a year."

"Nor less," spoke up a woman. "For 'tis best to get your family over and done with, as soon as you can, so as to be all the earlier out of the fag o't."

"And what may be this glad cause?" asked the stranger.

"A birth and christening," said the shepherd.

The stranger hoped his host might not be made unhappy either by too many or too few of such episodes, and being invited by a gesture to a pull at the mug, he readily acquiesced. His manner which, before entering, had been so dubious, was now altogether that of a careless and candid man.

"Late to be traipsing athwart this coomb—hey?" said the engaged man of fifty.

"Late it is, master, as you say.—I'll take a seat in the chimney-corner, if you have nothing to urge against it, ma'am; for I am a little moist on the side that was next the rain."

Mrs. Shepherd Fennel assented, and made room for the self-invited comer, who, having got completely inside the chimney-corner, stretched out his legs and his arms with the expansiveness of a person quite at home.

"Yes, I am rather thin in the vamp," he said freely, seeing that the eyes of the shepherd's wife fell upon his boots, "and I am not well-fitted, either. I have had some rough times lately, and have been forced to pick up what I can get in the way of wearing, but I must find a suit better fit for working-days when I reach home."

"One of hereabouts?" she inquired.

"Not quite that—further up the country."

"I thought so. And so am I; and by your tongue you come from my neighbourhood."

"But you would hardly have heard of me," he said quickly. "My time would be long before yours, ma'am, you see."

This testimony to the youthfulness of his hostess had the effect of stopping her cross-examination.

"There is only one thing more wanted to make me happy," continued the new comer. "And that is a little baccy, which I am sorry to say I am out of."

"I'll fill your pipe," said the shepherd.

"I must ask you to lend me a pipe likewise."

"A smoker, and no pipe about ye?"

"I have dropped it somewhere on the road."

The shepherd filled and handed him a new clay pipe, saying, as he did so, "Hand me your baccy-box—I'll fill that too, now I am about it."

The man went through the movement of searching his pockets.

"Lost that too?" said his entertainer, with some surprise.

"I am afraid so," said the man with some confusion. "Give it to me in a screw of paper." Lighting his pipe at the candle with a suction that drew the whole flame into the bowl, he resettled himself in the corner, and bent his looks upon the faint steam from his damp legs, as if he wished to say no more.

Meanwhile the general body of guests had been taking little notice of this visitor by reason of an absorbing discussion in which they were engaged with the band about a tune for the next dance. The matter being settled, they were about to stand up, when an interruption came in the shape of another knock at the door.

At the sound of the same the man in the chimney-corner took up the poker and began stirring the fire as if doing it thoroughly were the one aim of his existence; and a second time the shepherd said "Walk in!" In a moment another man stood upon the straw-woven door-mat. He too was a stranger.

This individual was one of a type radically

different from the first. There was more of the commonplace in his manner, and a certain jovial cosmopolitanism sat upon his features. He was several years older than the first arrival, his hair being slightly frosted, his eyebrows bristly, and his whiskers cut back from his cheeks. His face was rather full and flabby, and yet it was not altogether a face without power. A few grog-blossoms marked the neighbourhood of his nose. He flung back his long drab greatcoat, revealing that beneath it he wore a suit of cinder-grey shade throughout, large heavy seals, of some metal or other that would take a polish, dangling from his fob as his only personal ornament. Shaking the water-drops from his low-crowned glazed hat, he said, "I must ask for a few minutes' shelter, comrades, or I shall be wetted to my skin before I get to Casterbridge."

"Make yerself at home, master," said the shepherd, perhaps a trifle less heartily than on the first occasion. Not that Fennel had the least tinge of niggardliness in his composition; but the room was far from large, spare chairs were not numerous, and damp companions were not altogether comfortable at close quarters for the women and girls in their bright-coloured gowns.

However, the second comer, after taking off his greatcoat, and hanging his hat on a nail in one of the ceiling beams as if he had been specially invited to put it there, advanced and sat down at the table. This had been pushed so closely into the chimney-corner, to give all available room to the dancers,

that its inner edge grazed the elbow of the man who had ensconced himself by the fire ; and thus the two strangers were brought into close companionship. They nodded to each other by way of breaking the ice of unacquaintance, and the first stranger handed his neighbour the large mug—a huge vessel of brown ware, having its upper edge worn away like a threshold by the rub of whole genealogies of thirsty lips that had gone the way of all flesh, and bearing the following inscription burnt upon its rotund side in yellow letters :—

THERE iS NO FUN
UNTiLL i CUM.

The other man, nothing loth, raised the mug to his lips, and drank on, and on, and on—till a curious blueness overspread the countenance of the shepherd's wife, who had regarded with no little surprise the first stranger's free offer to the second of what did not belong to him to dispense.

" I knew it ! " said the toper to the shepherd with much satisfaction. " When I walked up your garden afore coming in, and saw the hives all of a row, I said to myself, 'Where there's bees there's honey, and where there's honey there's mead.' But mead of such a truly comfortable sort as this I really didn't expect to meet in my older days." He took yet another pull at the mug, till it assumed an ominous horizontality.

" Glad you enjoy it ! " said the shepherd warmly.

" It is goodish mead," assented Mrs. Fennel with

an absence of enthusiasm, which seemed to say that it was possible to buy praise for one's cellar at too heavy a price. "It is trouble enough to make—and really I hardly think we shall make any more. For honey sells well, and we can make shift with a drop o' small mead and metheglin for common use from the comb-washings."

"Oh, but you'll never have the heart!" reproachfully cried the stranger in cinder-grey, after taking up the mug a third time and setting it down empty. "I love mead, when 'tis old like this, as I love to go to church o' Sundays, or to relieve the needy any day of the week."

"Ha, ha, ha!" said the man in the chimney-corner, who, in spite of the taciturnity induced by the pipe of tobacco, could not or would not refrain from this slight testimony to his comrade's humour.

Now the old mead of those days, brewed of the purest first-year or maiden honey, four pounds to the gallon—with its due complement of whites of eggs, cinnamon, ginger, cloves, mace, rosemary, yeast, and processes of working, bottling, and cellaring—tasted remarkably strong; but it did not taste so strong as it actually was. Hence, presently, the stranger in cinder-grey at the table, moved by its creeping influence, unbuttoned his waistcoat, threw himself back in his chair, spread his legs, and made his presence felt in various ways.

"Well, well, as I say," he resumed, "I am going to Casterbridge, and to Casterbridge I must go. I

should have been almost there by this time ; but the rain drove me into ye ; and I'm not sorry for it."

"You don't live in Casterbridge ?" said the shepherd.

"Not as yet ; though I shortly mean to move there."

"Going to set up in trade, perhaps ?"

"No, no," said the shepherd's wife. "It is easy to see that the gentleman is rich, and don't want to work at anything."

The cinder-grey stranger paused, as if to consider whether he would accept that definition of himself. He presently rejected it by answering, "Rich is not quite the word for me, dame. I do work, and I must work. And even if I only get to Casterbridge by midnight I must begin work there at eight to-morrow morning. Yes, het or wet, blow or snow, famine or sword, my day's work to-morrow must be done."

"Poor man ! Then, in spite o' seeming, you be worse off than we ?" replied the shepherd's wife.

"'Tis the nature of my trade, men and maidens. 'Tis the nature of my trade more than my poverty. . . . . . But really and truly I must up and off, or I shan't get a lodging in the town." However, the speaker did not move, and directly added, "There's time for one more draught of friendship before I go ; and I'd perform it at once if the mug were not dry."

"Here's a mug o' small," said Mrs. Fennel. "Small, we call it, though to be sure 'tis only the first wash o' the combs."

"No," said the stranger disdainfully. "I won't spoil your first kindness by partaking o' your second."

"Certainly not," broke in Fennel. "We don't increase and multiply every day, and I'll fill the mug again." He went away to the dark place under the stairs where the barrel stood. The shepherdess followed him.

"Why should you do this?" she said reproachfully, as soon as they were alone. "He's emptied it once, though it held enough for ten people; and now he's not contented wi' the small, but must needs call for more o' the strong! And a stranger unbeknown to any of us. For my part I don't like the look o' the man at all."

"But he's in the house, my honey; and 'tis a wet night, and a christening. Daze it, what's a cup of mead more or less? there'll be plenty more next bee-burning."

"Very well—this time, then," she answered, looking wistfully at the barrel. "But what is the man's calling, and where is he one of, that he should come in and join us like this!"

"I don't know. I'll ask him again."

The catastrophe of having the mug drained dry at one pull by the stranger in cinder-grey was effectually guarded against this time by Mrs. Fennel. She poured out his allowance in a small cup, keeping the large one at a discreet distance from him. When he had tossed off his portion the shepherd renewed his inquiry about the stranger's occupation.

The latter did not immediately reply, and the man in the chimney-corner, with a sudden demonstrativeness, said, "Anybody may know my trade—I'm a wheelwright."

"A very good trade for these parts," said the shepherd.

"And anybody may know mine—if they've the sense to find it out," said the stranger in cinder-grey.

"You may generally tell what a man is by his claws," observed the hedge-carpenter, looking at his hands. "My fingers be as full of thorns as an old pincushion is of pins."

The hands of the man in the chimney-corner instinctively sought the shade, and he gazed into the fire as he resumed his pipe. The man at the table took up the hedge-carpenter's remark, and added smartly, "True; but the oddity of my trade is that, instead of setting a mark upon me, it sets a mark upon my customers."

No observation being offered by anybody in elucidation of this enigma, the shepherd's wife once more called for a song. The same obstacles presented themselves as at the former time—one had no voice, another had forgotten the first verse. The stranger at the table, whose soul had now risen to a good working temperature, relieved the difficulty by exclaiming that, to start the company, he would sing himself. Thrusting one thumb into the arm-hole of his waistcoat, he waved the other hand in the air, and, with an extemporising gaze at the shining sheep-crooks above the mantel-piece, began :—

Oh my trade it is the rarest one,
Simple shepherds all—
My trade is a sight to see ;
For my customers I tie, and take them up on high,
And waft 'em to a far countree.

The room was silent when he had finished the verse—with one exception, that of the man in the chimney-corner, who, at the singer's word, "Chorus !" joined him in a deep bass voice of musical relish—

And waft 'em to a far countree.

Oliver Giles, John Pitcher the dairyman, the parish-clerk, the engaged man of fifty, the row of young women against the wall, seemed lost in thought not of the gayest kind. The shepherd looked meditatively on the ground, the shepherdess gazed keenly at the singer, and with some suspicion ; she was doubting whether this stranger were merely singing an old song from recollection, or was composing one there and then for the occasion. All were as perplexed at the obscure revelation as the guests at Belshazzar's Feast, except the man in the chimney-corner, who quietly said, "Second verse, stranger," and smoked on.

The singer thoroughly moistened himself from his lips inwards, and went on with the next stanza as requested :—

My tools are but common ones,
Simple shepherds all,
My tools are no sight to see :
A little hempen string, and a post whereon to swing,
Are implements enough for me.

Shepherd Fennel glanced round. There was no longer any doubt that the stranger was answering his question rhythmically. The guests one and all started back with suppressed exclamations. The young woman engaged to the man of fifty fainted half-way, and would have proceeded, but finding him wanting in alacrity for catching her she sat down trembling.

"Oh, he's the ——!" whispered the people in the background, mentioning the name of an ominous public officer. "He's come to do it. 'Tis to be at Casterbridge gaol to-morrow—the man for sheep-stealing—the poor clock-maker we heard of, who used to live away at Anglebury and had no work to do—Timothy Sommers, whose family were a-starving, and so he went out of Anglebury by the high-road, and took a sheep in open daylight, defying the farmer and the farmer's wife and the farmer's man, and every man jack among 'em. He" (and they nodded towards the stranger of the terrible trade) "is come from up the country to do it because there's not enough to do in his own county-town, and he's got the place here now our own county man's dead; he's going to live in the same cottage under the prison wall."

The stranger in cinder-grey took no notice of this whispered string of observations, but again wetted his lips. Seeing that his friend in the chimney-corner was the only one who reciprocated his joviality in any way, he held out his cup towards that appreciative comrade, who also held out his own.

They clinked together, the eyes of the rest of the room hanging upon the singer's actions. He parted his lips for the third verse; but at that moment another knock was audible upon the door. This time the knock was faint and hesitating.

The company seemed scared; the shepherd looked with consternation towards the entrance, and it was with some effort that he resisted his alarmed wife's deprecatory glance, and uttered for the third time the welcome words, "Walk in!"

The door was gently opened, and another man stood upon the mat. He, like those who had preceded him, was a stranger. This time it was a short, small personage, of fair complexion, and dressed in a decent suit of dark clothes.

"Can you tell me the way to ——?" he began; when, gazing round the room to observe the nature of the company amongst whom he had fallen, his eyes lighted on the stranger in cinder-grey. It was just at the instant when the latter, who had thrown his mind into his song with such a will that he scarcely heeded the interruption, silenced all whispers and inquiries by bursting into his third verse:—

To-morrow is my working day,
Simple shepherds all—
To-morrow is a working day for me:
For the farmer's sheep is slain, and the lad who did it ta'en,
And on his soul may God ha' merc-y!

The stranger in the chimney-corner, waving cups with the singer so heartily that his mead splashed

over on the hearth, repeated in his bass voice as before :—

And on his soul may God ha' merc-y !

All this time the third stranger had been standing in the door-way. Finding now that he did not come forward or go on speaking, the guests particularly regarded him. They noticed to their surprise that he stood before them the picture of abject terror—his knees trembling, his hand shaking so violently that the door-latch by which he supported himself rattled audibly ; his white lips were parted, and his eyes fixed on the merry officer of justice in the middle of the room. A moment more and he had turned, closed the door, and fled.

"What a man can it be ?" said the shepherd.

The rest, between the awfulness of their late discovery and the odd conduct of this third visitor, looked as if they knew not what to think, and said nothing. Instinctively they withdrew further and further from the grim gentleman in their midst, whom some of them seemed to take for the Prince of Darkness himself, till they formed a remote circle, an empty space of floor being left between them and him—

—— circulus, cujus centrum diabolus.

The room was so silent—though there were more than twenty people in it—that nothing could be heard but the patter of the rain against the window-shutters, accompanied by the occasional hiss of a stray drop that fell down the chimney into the fire,

and the steady puffing of the man in the corner, who had now resumed his pipe of long clay.

The stillness was unexpectedly broken. The distant sound of a gun reverberated through the air—apparently from the direction of the county town.

"Be jiggered!" cried the stranger who had sung the song, jumping up.

"What does that mean?" asked several.

"A prisoner escaped from the gaol—that's what it means."

All listened. The sound was repeated, and none of them spoke but the man in the chimney-corner, who said quietly, "I've often been told that in this county they fire a gun at such times; but I never heard it till now."

"I wonder if it is *my* man?" murmured the personage in cinder-grey.

"Surely it is!" said the shepherd involuntarily. "And surely we've seen him! That little man who looked in at the door by now, and quivered like a leaf when he seed ye and heard your song!"

"His teeth chattered, and the breath went out of his body," said the dairyman.

"And his heart seemed to sink within him like a stone," said Oliver Giles.

"And he bolted as if he'd been shot at," said the hedge-carpenter.

"True—his teeth chattered, and his heart seemed to sink; and he bolted as if he'd been shot at," slowly summed up the man in the chimney-corner.

"I didn't notice it," remarked the grim songster.

"We were all a-wondering what made him run off in such a fright," faltered one of the women against the wall, "and now 'tis explained."

The firing of the alarm-gun went on at intervals, low and sullenly, and their suspicions became a certainty. The sinister gentleman in cinder-grey roused himself. "Is there a constable here?" he asked in thick tones. "If so, let him step forward."

The engaged man of fifty stepped quavering out of the corner, his betrothed beginning to sob on the back of the chair.

"You are a sworn constable?"

"I be, sir."

"Then pursue the criminal at once, with assistance, and bring him back here. He can't have gone far."

"I will, sir, I will—when I've got my staff. I'll go home and get it, and come sharp here, and start in a body."

"Staff! never mind your staff; the man 'll be gone!"

"But I can't do nothing without my staff—can I, William, and John, and Charles Jake? No; for there's the king's royal crown a painted on en in yaller and gold, and the lion and the unicorn, so as when I raise en up and hit my prisoner, 'tis made a lawful blow thereby. I wouldn't 'tempt to take up a man without my staff—no, not I. If I hadn't the law to gie me courage, why, instead o' my taking up him he might take up me!"

"Now, I'm a king's man myself, and can give you

authority enough for this," said the formidable person in cinder-grey. "Now, then, all of ye, be ready. Have ye any lanterns?"

"Yes—have ye any lanterns?—I demand it," said the constable.

"And the rest of you able-bodied——"

"Able-bodied men—yes—the rest of ye," said the constable.

"Have you some good stout staves and pitchforks——"

"Staves and pitchforks—in the name o' the law. And take 'em in yer hands and go in quest, and do as we in authority tell ye."

Thus aroused, the men prepared to give chase. The evidence was, indeed, though circumstantial, so convincing, that but little argument was needed to show the shepherd's guests that after what they had seen it would look very much like connivance if they did not instantly pursue the unhappy third stranger, who could not as yet have gone more than a few hundred yards over such uneven country.

A shepherd is always well provided with lanterns; and, lighting these hastily, and with hurdle-staves in their hands, they poured out of the door, taking a direction along the crest of the hill, away from the town, the rain having fortunately a little abated.

Disturbed by the noise, or possibly by unpleasant dreams of her baptism, the child who had been christened began to cry heartbrokenly in the room overhead. These notes of grief came down through

the chinks of the floor to the ears of the women below, who jumped up one by one, and seemed glad of the excuse to ascend and comfort the baby, for the incidents of the last half hour greatly oppressed them. Thus in the space of two or three minutes the room on the ground floor was deserted quite.

But it was not for long. Hardly had the sound of footsteps died away when a man returned round the corner of the house from the direction the pursuers had taken. Peeping in at the door, and seeing nobody there, he entered leisurely. It was the stranger of the chimney-corner, who had gone out with the rest. The motive of his return was shown by his helping himself to a cut piece of skimmer-cake that lay on a ledge beside where he had sat, and which he had apparently forgotten to take with him. He also poured out half a cup more mead from the quantity that remained, ravenously eating and drinking these as he stood. He had not finished when another figure came in just as quietly—the stranger in cinder-grey.

"Oh—you here?" said the latter smiling. "I thought you had gone to help in the capture." And this speaker also revealed the object of his return by looking solicitously round for the fascinating mug of old mead.

"And I thought you had gone," said the other, continuing his skimmer-cake with some effort.

"Well, on second thoughts, I felt there were enough without me," said the first, confidentially, "and such a night as it is, too. Besides, 'tis the

business o' the Government to take care of its criminals—not mine."

"True; so it is. And I felt as you did, that there were enough without me."

"I don't want to break my limbs running over the humps and hollows of this wild country."

"Nor I neither, between you and me."

"These shepherd-people are used to it—simple-minded souls, you know, stirred up to anything in a moment. They'll have him ready for me before the morning, and no trouble to me at all."

"They'll have him, and we shall have saved ourselves all labour in the matter."

"True, true. Well, my way is to Casterbridge; and 'tis as much as my legs will do to take me that far. Going the same way?"

"No, I am sorry to say. I have to get home over there (he nodded indefinitely to the right), and I feel as you do, that it is quite enough for my legs to do before bedtime."

The other had by this time finished the mead in the mug, after which, shaking hands at the door, and wishing each other well, they went their several ways.

In the meantime the company of pursuers had reached the end of the hog's back elevation which dominated this part of the coomb. They had decided on no particular plan of action; and, finding that the man of the baleful trade was no longer in their company, they seemed quite unable to form any such plan now. They descended in all directions

down the hill, and straightway several of the party fell into the snare set by Nature for all misguided midnight ramblers over the lower cretaceous formation. The "lynchets," or flint slopes, which belted the escarpment at intervals of a dozen yards, took the less cautious ones unawares, and losing their footing on the rubbly steep they slid sharply downwards, the lanterns rolling from their hands to the bottom, and there lying on their sides till the horn was scorched through.

When they had again gathered themselves together, the shepherd, as the man who knew the country best, took the lead, and guided them round these treacherous inclines. The lanterns, which seemed rather to dazzle their eyes and warn the fugitive than to assist them in the exploration, were extinguished, due silence was observed; and in this more rational order they plunged into the vale. It was a grassy, briary, moist channel, affording some shelter to any person who had sought it; but the party perambulated it in vain, and ascended on the other side. Here they wandered apart, and after an interval closed together again to report progress. At the second time of closing in they found themselves near a lonely oak, the single tree on this part of the upland, probably sown there by a passing bird some hundred years before. And here, standing a little to one side of the trunk, as motionless as the trunk itself, appeared the man they were in quest of, his outline being well defined against the sky beyond. The band noiselessly drew up and faced him.

"Your money or your life!" said the constable sternly to the still figure.

"No, no," whispered John Pitcher. "'Tisn't our side ought to say that. That's the doctrine of vagabonds like him, and we be on the side of the law."

"Well, well," replied the constable impatiently; "I must say something, mustn't I? and if you had all the weight o' this undertaking upon your mind, perhaps you'd say the wrong thing too.—Prisoner at the bar, surrender, in the name of the Fath——the Crown, I mane!"

The man under the tree seemed now to notice them for the first time, and, giving them no opportunity whatever for exhibiting their courage, he strolled slowly towards them. He was, indeed, the little man, the third stranger; but his trepidation had in a great measure gone.

"Well, travellers," he said, "did I hear ye speak to me?"

"You did: you've got to come and be our prisoner at once," said the constable. "We arrest ye on the charge of not biding in Casterbridge gaol in a decent proper manner to be hung to-morrow morning. Neighbours, do your duty, and seize the culpet!"

On hearing the charge, the man seemed enlightened, and, saying not another word, resigned himself with preternatural civility to the search-party, who, with their staves in their hands, surrounded him on all sides, and marched him back towards the shepherd's cottage.

It was eleven o'clock by the time they arrived. The light shining from the open door, a sound of men's voices within, proclaimed to them as they approached the house that some new events had arisen in their absence. On entering they discovered the shepherd's living-room to be invaded by two officers from Casterbridge gaol, and a well-known magistrate who lived at the nearest country seat, intelligence of the escape having become generally circulated.

"Gentlemen," said the constable, "I have brought back your man—not without risk and danger; but every one must do his duty. He is inside this circle of able-bodied persons, who have lent me useful aid considering their ignorance of Crown work. Men, bring forward your prisoner." And the third stranger was led to the light.

"Who is this?" said one of the officials.

"The man," said the constable.

"Certainly not," said the other turnkey; and the first corroborated his statement.

"But how can it be otherwise?" asked the constable. "Or why was he so terrified at sight o' the singing instrument of the law?" Here he related the strange behaviour of the third stranger on entering the house.

"Can't understand it," said the officer coolly. "All I know is that it is not the condemned man. He's quite a different character from this one; a gauntish fellow, with dark hair and eyes, rather good-looking, and with a musical bass voice that if

you heard it once you'd never mistake as long as you lived."

"Why, souls—'twas the man in the chimney-corner!"

"Hey—what?" said the magistrate, coming forward after inquiring particulars from the shepherd in the background. "Haven't you got the man after all?"

"Well, sir," said the constable, "he's the man we were in search of, that's true; and yet he's not the man we were in search of. For the man we were in search of was not the man we wanted, sir, if you understand my everyday way; for 'twas the man in the chimney-corner."

"A pretty kettle of fish altogether!" said the magistrate. "You had better start for the other man at once."

The prisoner now spoke for the first time. The mention of the man in the chimney-corner seemed to have moved him as nothing else could do. "Sir," he said, stepping forward to the magistrate, "take no more trouble about me. The time is come when I may as well speak. I have done nothing; my crime is that the condemned man is my brother. Early this afternoon I left home at Anglebury to tramp it all the way to Casterbridge gaol to bid him farewell. I was benighted, and called here to rest and ask the way. When I opened the door I saw before me the very man, my brother, that I thought to see in the condemned cell at Casterbridge. He was in this chimney-corner; and jammed close to him, so that

he could not have got out if he had tried, was the executioner who'd come to take his life, singing a song about it and not knowing that it was his victim who was close by, joining in to save appearances. My brother looked a glance of agony at me, and I knew he meant, 'Don't reveal what you see; my life depends on it.' I was so terror-struck that I could hardly stand, and, not knowing what I did, I turned and hurried away."

The narrator's manner and tone had the stamp of truth, and his story made a great impression on all around. "And do you know where your brother is at the present time?" asked the magistrate.

"I do not. I have never seen him since I closed this door."

"I can testify to that, for we've been between ye ever since," said the constable.

"Where does he think to fly to?—what is his occupation?"

"He's a watch-and-clock maker, sir."

"'A said 'a was a wheelwright—a wicked rogue," said the constable.

"The wheels o' clocks and watches he meant, no doubt," said Shepherd Fennel. "I thought his hands were palish for's trade."

"Well, it appears to me that nothing can be gained by retaining this poor man in custody," said the magistrate; "your business lies with the other, unquestionably."

And so the little man was released off-hand; but he looked nothing the less sad on that account, it

being beyond the power of magistrate or constable to raze out the written troubles in his brain, for they concerned another whom he regarded with more solicitude than himself. When this was done, and the man had gone his way, the night was found to be so far advanced that it was deemed useless to renew the search before the next morning.

Next day, accordingly, the quest for the clever sheep-stealer became general and keen, to all appearance at least. But the intended punishment was cruelly disproportioned to the transgression, and the sympathy of a great many country folk in that district was strongly on the side of the fugitive. Moreover, his marvellous coolness and daring under the unprecedented circumstances of the shepherd's party won their admiration. So that it may be questioned if all those who ostensibly made themselves so busy in exploring woods and fields and lanes were quite so thorough when it came to the private examination of their own lofts and outhouses. Stories were afloat of a mysterious figure being occasionally seen in some old overgrown trackway or other, remote from turnpike roads; but when a search was instituted in any of these suspected quarters nobody was found. Thus the days and weeks passed without tidings.

In brief, the bass-voiced man of the chimney corner was never recaptured. Some said that he went across the sea, others that he did not, but buried himself in the depths of a populous city. At any rate, the gentleman in cinder-grey never did his

morning's work at Casterbridge, nor met anywhere at all, for business purposes, the comrade with whom he had passed an hour of relaxation in the lonely house on the coomb.

The grass has long been green on the graves of Shepherd Fennel and his frugal wife; the guests who made up the christening party have mainly followed their entertainers to the tomb; the baby in whose honour they all had met is a matron in the sere and yellow leaf. But the arrival of the three strangers at the shepherd's that night, and the details connected therewith, is a story as well known as ever in the country about Higher Crowstairs.

THOMAS HARDY.

THE BLACK POODLE.

I HAVE set myself the task of relating in the course of this story, without suppressing or altering a single detail, the most painful and humiliating episode in my life.

I do this, not because it will give me the least pleasure, but simply because it affords me an opportunity of extenuating myself which has hitherto been wholly denied to me.

As a general rule I am quite aware that to publish a lengthy explanation of one's conduct in any questionable transaction is not the best means of recovering a lost reputation ; but in my own case there is one to whom I shall never more be permitted to justify myself by word of mouth—even if I found myself able to attempt it. And as she could not possibly think worse of me than she does at present, I write this, knowing it can do me no harm, and faintly hoping that it may come to her notice and suggest a doubt whether I am quite so unscrupulous a villain, so consummate a hypocrite, as I have been forced to appear in her eyes.

The bare chance of such a result makes me perfectly indifferent to all else : I cheerfully expose to the derision of the whole reading world the story of

my weakness and my shame, since by doing so I may possibly rehabilitate myself somewhat in the good opinion of one person.

Having said so much, I will begin my confession without further delay :—

My name is Algernon Weatherhead, and I may add that I am in one of the Government departments; that I am an only son, and live at home with my mother.

We had had a house at Hammersmith until just before the period covered by this history, when, our lease expiring, my mother decided that my health required country air at the close of the day, and so we took a "desirable villa-residence" on one of the many new building estates which have lately sprung up in such profusion in the home counties.

We have called it "Wistaria Villa." It is a pretty little place, the last of a row of detached villas, each with its tiny rustic carriage gate and gravel sweep in front, and lawn enough for a tennis court behind, which lines the road leading over the hill to the railway station.

I could certainly have wished that our landlord, shortly after giving us the agreement, could have found some other place to hang himself in than one of our attics, for the consequence was that a housemaid left us in violent hysterics about every two months, having learnt the tragedy from the tradespeople, and naturally "seen a somethink" immediately afterwards.

Still it is a pleasant house, and I can now almost

forgive the landlord for what I shall always consider an act of gross selfishness on his part.

In the country a next-door neighbour is something more than a mere numeral; he is a possible acquaintance, who will at least consider a new-comer as worth the experiment of a call. I soon knew that "Shuturgarden," the next house to our own, was occupied by a Colonel Currie, a retired Indian officer, and often, as across the low boundary wall I caught a glimpse of a graceful girlish figure flitting about amongst the rose-bushes in the neighbouring garden, I would lose myself in pleasant anticipations of a time not far distant when the wall which separated us would be (metaphorically) levelled.

I remember—ah, how vividly!—the thrill of excitement with which I heard from my mother on returning from town one evening that the Curries had called, and seemed disposed to be all that was neighbourly and kind.

I remember, too, the Sunday afternoon on which I returned their call—alone, as my mother had already done so during the week. I was standing on the steps of the Colonel's villa waiting for the door to open, when I was startled by a furious snarling and yapping behind, and, looking round, discovered a large poodle in the act of making for my legs.

He was a coal-black poodle, with half of his right ear gone, and absurd little thick moustaches at the end of his nose; he was shaved in the sham-lion fashion, which is considered, for some mysterious reason, to improve a poodle, but the barber had left

sundry little tufts of hair which studded his haunches capriciously.

I could not help being reminded, as I looked at him, of another black poodle which Faust entertained for a short time, with unhappy results, and I thought that a very moderate degree of incantation would be enough to bring the fiend out of this brute.

He made me intensely uncomfortable, for I am of a slightly nervous temperament, with a constitutional horror of dogs and a liability to attacks of diffidence on performing the ordinary social rites under the most favourable conditions, and certainly the consciousness that a strange and apparently savage dog was engaged in worrying the heels of my boots was the reverse of reassuring.

The Currie family received me with all possible kindness: "So charmed to make your acquaintance, Mr. Weatherhead," said Mrs. Currie, as I shook hands. "I see," she added pleasantly, "you've brought the doggie in with you." As a matter of fact, I had brought the doggie in at the ends of my coat-tails, but it was evidently no unusual occurrence for visitors to appear in this undignified manner, for she detached him quite as a matter of course, and, as soon as I was sufficiently collected, we fell into conversation.

I discovered that the Colonel and his wife were childless, and the slender willowy figure I had seen across the garden wall was that of Lilian Roseblade, their niece and adopted daughter. She came into the room shortly afterwards, and I felt, as I went

through the form of an introduction, that her sweet fresh face, shaded by soft masses of dusky brown hair, more than justified all the dreamy hopes and fancies with which I had looked forward to that moment.

She talked to me in a pretty, confidential appealing way, which I have heard her dearest friends censure as childish and affected, but I thought then that her manner had an indescribable charm and fascination about it, and the memory of it makes my heart ache now with a pang that is not all pain.

Even before the Colonel made his appearance I had begun to see that my enemy, the poodle, occupied an exceptional position in that household. It was abundantly clear by the time I took my leave.

He seemed to be the centre of their domestic system, and even lovely Lilian revolved contentedly around him as a kind of satellite; he could do no wrong in his owner's eyes, his prejudices (and he was a narrow-minded animal) were rigorously respected, and all domestic arrangements were made with a primary view to his convenience.

I may be wrong, but I cannot think that it is wise to put any poodle upon such a pedestal as that. How this one in particular, as ordinary a quadruped as ever breathed, had contrived to impose thus upon his infatuated proprietors, I never could understand, but so it was—he even engrossed the chief part of the conversation, which after any lull seemed to veer round to him by a sort of natural law.

I had to endure a long biographical sketch of

him—what a society paper would call an "anecdotal photo"—and each fresh anecdote seemed to me to exhibit the depraved malignity of the beast in a more glaring light, and render the doting admiration of the family more astounding than ever.

"Did you tell Mr. Weatherhead, Lily, about Bingo" (Bingo was the poodle's preposterous name) "and Tacks? Oh, I *must* tell him that—it'll make him laugh. Tacks is our gardener down in the village (d'ye know Tacks?). Well, Tacks was up here the other day, nailing up some trellis work at the top of a ladder, and all the time there was Master Bingo sitting quietly at the foot of it looking on, wouldn't leave it on any account. Tacks said he was quite company for him. Well, at last, when Tacks had finished and was coming down, what do you think that rascal there did? Just sneaked quietly up behind and nipped him in both calves and ran off. Been looking out for that the whole time! Ha, ha!—deep that, eh?"

I agreed with an inward shudder that it was very deep, thinking privately that, if this was a specimen of Bingo's usual treatment of the natives, it would be odd if he did not find himself deeper still before—probably *just* before—he died.

"Poor faithful old doggie!" murmured Mrs. Currie; "he thought Tacks was a nasty burglar, didn't he? he wasn't going to see Master robbed, was he?"

"Capital house-dog, sir," struck in the Colonel. "Gad, I shall never forget how he made poor

Heavisides run for it the other day! Ever met Heavisides of the Bombay Fusiliers? Well, Heavisides was staying here, and the dog met him one morning as he was coming down from the bathroom. Didn't recognise him in 'pyjamas' and a dressing-gown, of course, and made at him. He kept poor old Heavisides outside the landing window on the top of the cistern for a quarter of an hour, till I had to come and raise the siege!"

Such were the stories of that abandoned dog's blunderheaded ferocity to which I was forced to listen, while all the time the brute sat opposite me on the hearthrug, blinking at me from under his shaggy mane, with his evil bleared eyes, and deliberating where he would have me when I rose to go.

This was the beginning of an intimacy which soon displaced all ceremony. It was very pleasant to go in there after dinner, even to sit with the Colonel over his claret and hear more stories about Bingo, for afterwards I could go into the pretty drawing-room and take my tea from Lilian's hands and listen while she played Schubert to us in the summer twilight.

The poodle was always in the way, to be sure, but even his ugly black head seemed to lose some of its ugliness and ferocity when Lilian laid her pretty hand on it.

On the whole I think that the Currie family were well disposed towards me; the Colonel considering me as a harmless specimen of the average eligible young man—which I certainly was—and Mrs. Cur-

rie showing me favour for my mother's sake, for whom she had taken a strong liking.

As for Lilian, I believed I saw that she soon suspected the state of my feelings towards her and was not displeased by it. I looked forward with some hopefulness to a day when I could declare myself with no fear of a repulse.

But it was a serious obstacle in my path that I could not secure Bingo's good opinion on any terms. The family would often lament this pathetically themselves. "You see," Mrs. Currie would observe in apology, "Bingo is a dog that does not attach himself easily to strangers"—though for that matter I thought he was unpleasantly ready to attach himself to *me*.

I did try hard to conciliate him. I brought him propitiatory buns—which was weak and ineffectual, as he ate them with avidity, and hated me as bitterly as ever, for he had conceived from the first a profound contempt for me and a distrust which no blandishments of mine could remove. Looking back now, I am inclined to think it was a prophetic instinct that warned him of what was to come upon him through my instrumentality.

Only his approbation was wanting to establish for me a firm footing with the Curries, and perhaps determine Lilian's wavering heart in my direction; but, though I wooed that inflexible poodle with an assiduity I blush to remember, he remained obstinately firm.

Still, day by day, Lilian's treatment of me was

more encouraging; day by day I gained in the esteem of her uncle and aunt; I began to hope that soon I should be able to disregard canine influence altogether.

Now there was one inconvenience about our villa (besides its flavour of suicide) which it is necessary to mention here. By common consent all the cats of the neighbourhood had selected our garden for their evening reunions. I fancy that a tortoiseshell kitchen cat of ours must have been a sort of leader of local feline society—I know she was "at home," with music and recitations, on most evenings.

My poor mother found this interfere with her after-dinner nap, and no wonder, for if a cohort of ghosts had been "shrieking and squealing," as Calpurnia puts it, in our back garden, or it had been fitted up as a crèche for a nursery of goblin infants in the agonies of teething, the noise could not possibly have been more unearthly.

We sought for some means of getting rid of the nuisance; there was poison of course, but we thought it would have an invidious appearance and even lead to legal difficulties, if each dawn were to discover an assortment of cats expiring in hideous convulsions in various parts of the same garden.

Firearms, too, were open to objection and would scarcely assist my mother's slumbers, so for some time we were at a loss for a remedy. At last, one day, walking down the Strand, I chanced to see (in an evil hour) what struck me as the very thing—it was an air-gun of superior construction displayed in

a gunsmith's window. I went in at once, purchased it, and took it home in triumph ; it would be noiseless, and would reduce the local average of cats without scandal—one or two examples, and feline fashion would soon migrate to a more secluded spot.

I lost no time in putting this to the proof. That same evening I lay in wait after dusk at the study window, protecting my mother's repose. As soon as I heard the long-drawn wail, the preliminary sputter, and the wild stampede that followed, I let fly in the direction of the sound. I suppose I must have something of the national sporting instinct in me, for my blood was tingling with excitement ; but the feline constitution assimilates lead without serious inconvenience, and I began to fear that no trophy would remain to bear witness to my marksmanship.

But all at once I made out a dark indistinct form slinking in from behind the bushes. I waited till it crossed a belt of light which streamed from the back kitchen below me, and then I took careful aim and pulled the trigger.

This time at least I had not failed—there was a smothered yell, a rustle—and then silence again. I ran out with the calm pride of a successful revenge to bring in the body of my victim, and I found underneath a laurel, no predatory tom-cat, but (as the discerning reader will no doubt have foreseen long since) the quivering carcass of the Colonel's black poodle.

I intend to set down here the plain unvarnished truth, and I confess that at first, when I knew what I had done, I was *not* sorry. I was quite innocent of any intention of doing it, but I felt no regret. I even laughed—madman that I was—at the thought that there was the end of Bingo at all events; that impediment was removed, my weary task of conciliation was over for ever!

But soon the reaction came; I realized the tremendous nature of my deed, and shuddered. I had done that which might banish me from Lilian's side for ever! All unwittingly I had slaughtered a kind of sacred beast, the animal around which the Currie household had wreathed their choicest affections! How was I to break it to them? Should I send Bingo in with a card tied to his neck and my regrets and compliments? That was too much like a present of game. Ought I not to carry him in myself? I would wreathe him in the best crape, I would put on black for him—the Curries would hardly consider a taper and a white sheet, or sackcloth and ashes, an excessive form of atonement—but I could not grovel to such an abject extent.

I wondered what the Colonel would say. Simple and hearty as a general rule, he had a hot temper on occasions, and it made me ill as I thought, would he and, worse still, would *Lilian* believe it was really an accident? They knew what an interest I had in silencing the deceased poodle—would they believe the simple truth?

I vowed that they *should* believe me. My genuine

remorse and the absence of all concealment on my part would speak powerfully for me. I would choose a favourable time for my confession; that very evening I would tell all.

Still I shrank from the duty before me, and as I knelt down sorrowfully by the dead form and respectfully composed his stiffening limbs, I thought that it was unjust of Fate to place a well-meaning man, whose nerves were not of iron, in such a position.

Then, to my horror, I heard a well-known ringing tramp on the road outside, and smelt the peculiar fragrance of a Burmese cheroot. It was the Colonel himself, who had been taking out the doomed Bingo for his usual evening run.

I don't know how it was exactly, but a sudden panic came over me. I held my breath, and tried to crouch down unseen behind the laurels; but he had seen me, and came over at once to speak to me across the hedge.

He stood there, not two yards from his favourite's body! Fortunately it was unusually dark that evening.

"Ha, there you are, eh?" he began heartily: "don't rise, my boy, don't rise." I was trying to put myself in front of the poodle, and did not rise—at least, only my hair did.

"You're out late, ain't you?" he went on; "laying out your garden, hey?"

I could not tell him that I was laying out his poodle! My voice shook as, with a guilty confusion

that was veiled by the dusk, I said it was a fine evening—which it was not.

"Cloudy, sir," said the Colonel, "cloudy—rain before morning, I think. By the way, have you seen anything of my Bingo in here?"

This was the turning point. What I *ought* to have done was to say mournfully, "Yes, I'm sorry to say I've had a most unfortunate accident with him—here he is—the fact is, I'm afraid I've *shot* him!"

But I couldn't. I could have told him at my own time, in a prepared form of words—but not then. I felt I must use all my wits to gain time and fence with the questions.

"Why," I said with a leaden airiness, "he hasn't given you the slip, has he?"

"Never did such a thing in his life!" said the Colonel, warmly; "he rushed off after a rat or a frog or something a few minutes ago, and as I stopped to light another cheroot I lost sight of him. I thought I saw him slip in under your gate, but I've been calling him from the front there and he won't come out."

No, and he never *would* come out any more. But the Colonel must not be told that just yet. I temporised again: "If," I said unsteadily, "if he had slipped in under the gate, I should have seen him. Perhaps he took it into his head to run home?"

"Oh, I shall find him on the doorstep, I expect, the knowing old scamp! Why, what d'ye think was the last thing he did now?"

I could have given him the very latest intelligence;

but I dared not. However, it was altogether too ghastly to kneel there and laugh at anecdotes of Bingo told across Bingo's dead body; I could not stand that! "Listen," I said suddenly, "wasn't that his bark? There again; it seems to come from the front of your house, don't you think?"

"Well," said the Colonel, "I'll go and fasten him up before he's off again. How your teeth are chattering—you've caught a chill, man—go indoors at once, and, if you feel equal to it, look in half an hour later, about grog time, and I'll tell you all about it. Compliments to your mother. Don't forget—about grog time!" I had got rid of him at last, and I wiped my forehead, gasping with relief. I would go round in half an hour and then I should be prepared to make my melancholy announcement. For, even then, I never thought of any other course, until suddenly it flashed upon me with terrible clearness that my miserable shuffling by the hedge had made it impossible to tell the truth! I had not told a direct lie, to be sure, but then I had given the Colonel the impression that I had denied having seen the dog. Many people can appease their consciences by reflecting that, whatever may be the effect their words produce, they did contrive to steer clear of a downright lie. I never quite knew where the distinction lay, morally, but there *is* that feeling—I have it myself.

Unfortunately, prevarication has this drawback, that, if ever the truth comes to light, the prevaricator is in just the same case as if he had lied to the most shameless extent, and for a man to point out that

the words he used contained no absolute falsehood will seldom restore confidence.

I might of course still tell the Colonel of my misfortune, and leave him to infer that it had happened after our interview, but the poodle was fast becoming cold and stiff, and they would most probably suspect the real time of the occurrence.

And then Lilian would hear that I had told a string of falsehoods to her uncle over the dead body of their idolised Bingo—an act no doubt, of abominable desecration, of unspeakable profanity in her eyes!

If it would have been difficult before to prevail on her to accept a bloodstained hand, it would be impossible after that. No, I had burnt my ships, I was cut off for ever from the straightforward course; that one moment of indecision had decided my conduct in spite of me—I must go on with it now and keep up the deception at all hazards.

It was bitter. I had always tried to preserve as many of the moral principles which had been instilled into me as can be conveniently retained in this grasping world, and it had been my pride that, roughly speaking, I had never been guilty of an unmistakable falsehood.

But henceforth, if I meant to win Lilian, that boast must be relinquished for ever! I should have to lie now with all my might, without limit or scruple, to dissemble incessantly, and "wear a mask," as the poet Bunn beautifully expressed it long ago, "over my hollow heart." I felt all this keenly—I

did not think it was right—but what was I to do?

After thinking all this out very carefully, I decided that my only course was to bury the poor animal where he fell and say nothing about it. With some vague idea of precaution I first took off the silver collar he wore, and then hastily interred him with a garden-trowel and succeeded in removing all traces of the disaster.

I fancy I felt a certain relief in the knowledge that there would now be no necessity to tell my pitiful story and risk the loss of my neighbours' esteem.

By-and-by, I thought, I would plant a rose-tree over his remains, and some day, as Lilian and I, in the noontide of our domestic bliss, stood before it admiring its creamy luxuriance, I might (perhaps) find courage to confess that the tree owed some of that luxuriance to the long-lost Bingo.

There was a touch of poetry in this idea that lightened my gloom for the moment.

I need scarcely say that I did not go round to Shuturgarden that evening. I was not hardened enough for that yet—my manner might betray me, and so I very prudently stayed at home.

But that night my sleep was broken by frightful dreams. I was perpetually trying to bury a great gaunt poodle, which would persist in rising up through the damp mould as fast as I covered him up. . . . Lilian and I were engaged, and we were in church together on Sunday, and the poodle, resisting all attemps to eject him, forbade our banns

with sepulchral barks. . . . It was our wedding-day, and at the critical moment the poodle leaped between us and swallowed the ring. . . . Or we were at the wedding breakfast, and Bingo, a grizzly black skeleton with flaming eyes, sat on the cake and would not allow Lilian to cut it. Even the rose-tree fancy was reproduced in a distorted form —the tree grew and every blossom contained a miniature Bingo, which barked; and as I woke I was desperately trying to persuade the Colonel that they were ordinary dog-roses.

I went up to the office next day with my gloomy secret gnawing my bosom, and whatever I did, the spectre of the murdered poodle rose before me. For two days after that I dared not go near the Curries, until at last one evening after dinner I forced myself to call, feeling that it was really not safe to keep away any long.

My conscience smote me as I went in. I put on an unconscious easy manner, which was such a dismal failure that it was lucky for me that they were too much engrossed to notice it.

I never before saw a family so stricken down by a domestic misfortune as the group I found in the drawing-room, making a dejected pretence of reading or working. We talked at first—and hollow talk it was—on indifferent subjects, till I could bear it no longer, and plunged boldly into danger.

"I don't see the dog," I began. "I suppose you —you found him all right the other evening, Colonel?" I wondered as I spoke whether they would

not notice the break in my voice, but they did not.

"Why, the fact is," said the Colonel heavily, gnawing his grey moustache, "we've not heard anything of him since : he's—he's run off ! "

"Gone, Mr. Weatherhead ; gone without a word ! " said Mrs. Currie plaintively, as if she thought the dog might at least have left an address.

"I wouldn't have believed it of him," said the Colonel ; "it has completely knocked me over. Haven't been so cut up for years—the ungrateful rascal ! "

"Oh, Uncle ! " pleaded Lilian, "don't talk like that ; perhaps Bingo couldn't help it—perhaps some one has s-s-shot him ! "

"Shot ! " cried the Colonel angrily. "By heaven ! if I thought there was a villain on earth capable of shooting that poor inoffensive dog I'd—— Why *should* they shoot him, Lilian ? Tell me that ! I—I hope you won't let me hear you talk like that again. *You* don't think he's shot, eh, Weatherhead ? "

I said—Heaven forgive me !—that I thought it highly improbable.

"He's not dead ! " cried Mrs. Currie. "If he were dead I should know it somehow—I'm sure I should ! But I'm certain he's alive. Only last night I had such a beautiful dream about him. I thought he came back to us, Mr. Weatherhead, driving up in a hansom cab, and he was just the same as ever—only he wore blue spectacles, and

the shaved part of him was painted a bright red. And I woke up with the joy—so, you know, it's sure to come true ! "

It will be easily understood what torture conversations like these were to me, and how I hated myself as I sympathised and spoke encouraging words concerning the dog's recovery, when I knew all the time he was lying hid under my garden mould. But I took it as a part of my punishment, and bore it all uncomplainingly ; practice even made me an adept in the art of consolation—I believe I really was a great comfort to them.

I had hoped that they would soon get over the first bitterness of their loss, and that Bingo would be first replaced and then forgotten in the usual way ; but there seemed no signs of this coming to pass.

The poor Colonel was too plainly fretting himself ill about it ; he went pottering about forlornly—advertising, searching, and seeing people, but all of course to no purpose, and it told upon him. He was more like a man whose only son and heir had been stolen, than an Anglo-Indian officer who had lost a poodle. I had to affect the liveliest interest in all his inquiries and expeditions, and to listen to, and echo, the most extravagant eulogies of the departed, and the wear and tear of so much duplicity made me at last almost as ill as the Colonel himself.

I could not help seeing that Lilian was not nearly so much impressed by my elaborate concern as her

relatives; and sometimes I detected an incredulous look in her frank brown eyes that made me very uneasy. Little by little, a rift widened between us, until at last in despair I determined to know the worst before the time came when it would be hopeless to speak at all. I chose a Sunday evening as we were walking across the green from church in the golden dusk, and then I ventured to speak to her of my love. She heard me to the end, and was evidently very much agitated. At last she murmured that it could not be, unless—no, it never could be now.

"Unless what?" I asked. "Lilian—Miss Roseblade, something has come between us lately: you will tell me what that something is, won't you?"

"Do you want to know *really?*" she said, looking up at me through her tears. "Then I'll tell you: it—it's Bingo!"

I started back overwhelmed. Did she know all? If not, how much did she suspect? I must find out that at once! "What about Bingo?" I managed to pronounce, with a dry tongue.

"You never l-loved him when he was here," she sobbed; "you know you didn't!"

I was relieved to find it was no worse than this.

"No," I said candidly, "I did not love Bingo. Bingo didn't love *me*, Lilian; he was always looking out for a chance of nipping me somewhere. Surely you won't quarrel with me for that!"

"Not for that," she said; "only, why do you pretend to be so fond of him now, and so anxious to get

him back again ? Uncle John believes you, but *I* don't. I can see quite well that you wouldn't be glad to find him. You could find him easily if you wanted to ! "

"What do you mean, Lilian ? " I said hoarsely. "*How* could I find him ? " Again I feared the worst.

"You're in a Government office," cried Lilian, "and if you only chose, you could easily g-get G-Government to find Bingo ! What's the use of Government if it can't do that ? Mr. Travers would have found him long ago if I'd asked him ! "

Lilian had never been so childishly unreasonable as this before, and yet I loved her more madly than ever ; but I did not like this allusion to Travers, a rising barrister, who lived with his sister in a pretty cottage near the station, and had shown symptoms of being attracted by Lilian.

He was away on circuit just then, luckily, but at least even he would have found it a hard task to find Bingo—there was comfort in that.

"You know that isn't just, Lilian," I observed. "But only tell me what you want me to do ? "

"Bub—bub—Bring back Bingo ! " she said.

"Bring back Bingo ! " I cried in horror. "But suppose I *can't*—suppose he's out of the country, or —or dead, what then, Lilian ? "

"I can't help it," she said ; "but I don't believe he *is* out of the country or dead. And while I see you pretending to Uncle that you cared awfully about him, and going on doing nothing at all, it

makes me think you're not quite—quite *sincere!* And I couldn't possibly marry anyone while I thought that of him. And I shall always have that feeling unless you find Bingo!"

It was of no use to argue with her; I knew Lilian by that time. With her pretty caressing manner she united a latent obstinacy which it was hopeless to attempt to shake. I feared, too, that she was not quite certain as yet whether she cared for me or not, and that this condition of hers was an expedient to gain time.

I left her with a heavy heart. Unless I proved my worth by bringing back Bingo within a very short time, Travers would probably have everything his own way. And Bingo was dead!

However, I took heart. I thought that perhaps if I could succeed by my earnest efforts in persuading Lilian that I really was doing all in my power to recover the poodle, she might relent in time, and dispense with his actual production.

So, partly with this object, and partly to appease the remorse which now revived and stung me deeper than before, I undertook long and weary pilgrimages after office hours. I spent many pounds in advertisements; I interviewed dogs of every size, colour, and breed, and of course I took care to keep Lilian informed of each successive failure. But still her heart was not touched, she was firm; if I went on like that, she told me I was certain to find Bingo one day—then, but not before, would her doubts be set at rest.

I was walking one day through the somewhat squalid district which lies between Bow Street and High Holborn, when I saw, in a small theatrical costumier's window, a handbill stating that a black poodle had "followed a gentleman" on a certain date, and if not claimed and the finder remunerated before a stated time, would be sold to pay expenses.

I went in and got a copy of the bill to show Lilian, and although by that time I scarcely dared to look a poodle in the face, I thought I would go to the address given and see the animal, simply to be able to tell Lilian I had done so.

The gentleman whom the dog had very unaccountably followed was a certain Mr. William Blagg, who kept a little shop near Endell Street, and called himself a bird-fancier, though I should scarcely have credited him with the necessary imagination. He was an evil-browed ruffian in a fur cap, with a broad broken nose and little shifty red eyes, and after I had told him what I wanted, he took me through a horrible little den, stacked with piles of wooden, wire, and wicker prisons, each quivering with restless, twittering life, and then out into a back yard, in which were two or three rotten old kennels and tubs. "That there's him," he said, jerking his thumb to the farthest tub; "follered me all the way 'ome from Kinsington Gardings, *he* did. Kim out, will yer?"

And out of the tub there crawled slowly, with a snuffling whimper and a rattling of his chain, the identical dog I had slain a few evenings before!

At least, so I thought for a moment, and felt as if I had seen a spectre ; the resemblance was so exact—in size, in every detail, even to the little clumps of hair about the hind parts, even to the lop of half an ear, this dog might have been the "doppelgänger" of the deceased Bingo. I suppose, after all, one black poodle is very like any other black poodle of the same size, but the likeness startled me.

I think it was then that the idea occurred to me that here was a miraculous chance of securing the sweetest girl in the whole world, and at the same time atoning for my wrong by bringing back gladness with me to Shuturgarden. It only needed a little boldness; one last deception, and I could embrace truthfulness once more.

Almost unconsciously, when my guide turned round and asked "Is that there dawg yourn ?" I said hurriedly : "Yes, yes—that's the dog I want, that—that's Bingo ! "

"He don't seem to be a putting of 'isself out about seeing you again," observed Mr. Blagg, as the poodle studied me with a calm interest.

"Oh, he's not exactly *my* dog, you see," I said ; "he belongs to a friend of mine ! "

He gave me a quick furtive glance. "Then maybe your mistook about him," he said ; "and I can't run no risks. I was a goin' down in the country this 'ere wery evenin' to see a party as lives at Wistaria Willa—he's been a hadwertising about a black poodle, *he* has ! "

"But look here," I said, "that's *me*."

He gave me a curious leer. "No offence, you know, guv'nor," he said, "but I should wish for some evidence as to that afore I part with a vallyable dawg like this 'ere!"

"Well," I said, "here's one of my cards, will that do for you?"

He took it and spelt it out with a pretence of great caution, but I saw well enough that the old scoundrel suspected that if I had lost a dog at all, it was not this particular dog. "Ah," he said, as he put it in his pocket, "if I part with him to you, I must be cleared of all risk. I can't afford to get into trouble about no mistakes. Unless you likes to leave him for a day or two, you must pay accordin', you see."

I wanted to get the hateful business over as soon as possible. I did not care what I paid—Lilian was worth all the expense! I said I had no doubt myself as to the real ownership of the animal, but I would give him any sum in reason, and would remove the dog at once.

And so we settled it. I paid him an extortionate sum, and came away with a duplicate poodle, a canine counterfeit which I hoped to pass off at Shuturgarden as the long-lost Bingo.

I know it was wrong—it even came unpleasantly near dog-stealing—but I was a desperate man. I saw Lilian gradually slipping away from me, I knew that nothing short of this could ever recall her, I was sorely tempted, I had gone far on the same road

already, it was the old story of being hung for a sheep. And so I fell.

Surely some who read this will be generous enough to consider the peculiar state of the case, and mingle a little pity with their contempt.

I was dining in town that evening and took my purchase home by a late train; his demeanour was grave and intensely respectable; he was not the animal to commit himself by any flagrant indiscretion—he was gentle and tractable, too, and in all respects an agreeable contrast in character to the original. Still, it may have been the after-dinner workings of conscience, but I could not help fancying that I saw a certain look in the creature's eyes, as if he were aware that he was required to connive at a fraud, and rather resented it.

If he would only be good enough to back me up! Fortunately, however, he was such a perfect facsimile of the outward Bingo, that the risk of detection was really inconsiderable.

When I got him home, I put Bingo's silver collar round his neck—congratulating myself on my forethought in preserving it—and took him in to see my mother. She accepted him as what he seemed, without the slightest misgiving; but this, though it encouraged me to go on, was not decisive, the spurious poodle would have to encounter the scrutiny of those who knew every tuft on the genuine animal's body!

Nothing would have induced me to undergo such an ordeal as that of personally restoring him to the

Curries. We gave him supper, and tied him up on the lawn, where he howled dolefully all night, and buried bones.

The next morning I wrote a note to Mrs. Currie, expressing my pleasure at being able to restore the lost one, and another to Lilian, containing only the words, "Will you believe *now* that I am sincere?" Then I tied both round the poodle's neck and dropped him over the wall into the Colonel's garden just before I started to catch my train to town.

* * * * * *

I had an anxious walk home from the station that evening; I went round by the longer way, trembling the whole time lest I should meet any of the Currie household, to which I felt myself entirely unequal just then. I could not rest until I knew whether my fraud had succeeded, or if the poodle to which I had entrusted my fate had basely betrayed me; but my suspense was happily ended as soon as I entered my mother's room. "You can't think how delighted those poor Curries were to see Bingo again," she said at once, "and they said such charming things about you, Algy—Lilian, particularly—quite affected she seemed, poor child! And they wanted you to go round and dine there and be thanked to-night, but at last I persuaded them to come to us instead. And they're going to bring the dog to make friends. Oh, and I met Frank Travers; he's back from circuit again now, so I asked him in too, to meet them!"

I drew a deep breath of relief. I had played a

desperate game—but I had won! I could have wished, to be sure, that my mother had not thought of bringing in Travers on that of all evenings—but I hoped that I could defy him after this.

The Colonel and his people were the first to arrive; he and his wife being so effusively grateful that they made me very uncomfortable indeed; Lilian met me with downcast eyes, and the faintest possible blush, but she said nothing just then. Five minutes afterwards, when she and I were alone together in the conservatory, where I had brought her on pretence of showing a new begonia, she laid her hand on my sleeve and whispered, almost shyly, "Mr. Weatherhead—Algernon! Can you ever forgive me for being so cruel and unjust to you?" And I replied that, upon the whole, I could.

We were not in that conservatory long, but, before we left it, beautiful Lilian Roseblade had consented to make my life happy. When we re-entered the drawing-room, we found Frank Travers, who had been told the story of the recovery, and I noticed his jaws fall as he glanced at our faces, and noted the triumphant smile which I have no doubt mine wore, and the tender dreamy look in Lilian's soft eyes. Poor Travers, I was sorry for him, although I was not fond of him. Travers was a good type of the rising young Common Law barrister; tall, not bad-looking, with keen dark eyes, black whiskers, and the mobile forensic mouth, which can express every shade of feeling, from deferential assent to cynical incredulity; possessed, too, of an

endless flow of conversation that was decidedly agreeable, if a trifle too laboriously so, he had been a dangerous rival. But all that was over now—he saw it himself at once, and during dinner sank into dismal silence, gazing pathetically at Lilian, and sighing almost obtrusively between the courses. His stream of small talk seemed to have been cut off at the main.

"You've done a kind thing, Weatherhead," said the Colonel. "I can't tell you all that dog is to me and how I missed the poor beast. I'd quite given up all hope of ever seeing him again, and all the time there was Weatherhead, Mr. Travers, quietly searching all London till he found him! I shan't forget it. It shows a really kind feeling."

I saw by Travers's face that he was telling himself he would have found fifty Bingos in half the time—if he had only thought of it; he smiled a melancholy assent to all the Colonel said, and then began to study me with an obviously depreciatory air.

"You can't think," I heard Mrs. Currie telling my mother, "how really *touching* it was to see poor dear Bingo's emotion at seeing all the old familiar objects again! He went up and sniffed at them all in turn, quite plainly recognizing everything. And he was quite put out to find that we had moved his favourite ottoman out of the drawing-room. But he *is* so penitent, too, and so ashamed of having run away; he hardly dares to come when John calls him, and he kept under a chair in the hall all the

morning—he wouldn't come in here either, so we had to leave him in your garden."

"He's been sadly out of spirits all day," said Lilian; "he hasn't bitten one of the tradespeople."

"Oh, *he's* all right, the rascal!" said the Colonel, cheerily; "he'll be after the cats again as well as ever in a day or two."

"Ah, those cats!" said my poor innocent mother. "Algy, you haven't tried the air-gun on them again lately, have you? They're worse than ever."

I troubled the Colonel to pass the claret; Travers laughed for the first time. "That's a good idea," he said, in that carrying "bar-mess" voice of his; "an air-gun for cats, ha, ha! Make good bags, eh, Weatherhead?" I said that I did, *very* good bags, and felt I was getting painfully red in the face.

"Oh, Algy is an excellent shot—quite a sportsman," said my mother. "I remember, oh, long ago, when we lived at Hammersmith, he had a pistol, and he used to strew crumbs in the garden for the sparrows, and shoot at them out of the pantry window; he frequently hit one."

"Well," said the Colonel, not much impressed by these sporting reminiscences, "don't go rolling over our Bingo by mistake, you know, Weatherhead, my boy. Not but what you've a sort of right after this —only don't. I wouldn't go through it all twice for anything."

"If you really won't take any more wine," I said hurriedly, addressing the Colonel and Travers, "sup pose we all go out and have our coffee on the

lawn? It—it will be cooler there." For it was getting very hot indoors, I thought.

I left Travers to amuse the ladies—he could do no more harm now; and taking the Colonel aside, I seized the opportunity, as we strolled up and down the garden path, to ask his consent to Lilian's engagement to me. He gave it cordially. "There's not a man in England," he said, "that I'd sooner see her married to, after to-day. You're a quiet steady young fellow, and you've a good kind heart. As for the money, that's neither here nor there; Lilian won't come to you without a penny, you know. But really, my boy, you can hardly believe what it is to my poor wife and me to see that dog. Why, bless my soul, look at him now! What's the matter with him, eh?"

To my unutterable horror I saw that that miserable poodle, after begging unnoticed at the tea-table for some time, had retired to an open space before it, where he was now industriously standing on his head.

We gathered round and examined the animal curiously, as he continued to balance himself gravely in his abnormal position. "Good gracious, John," cried Mrs. Currie, "I never saw Bingo do such a thing before in his life!"

"Very odd," said the Colonel, putting up his glasses; "never learnt that from *me*."

"I tell you what I fancy it is," I suggested wildly. "You see, he was always a sensitive, excitable animal, and perhaps the—the sudden joy of his return has gone to his head—*upset* him, you know."

They seemed disposed to accept this solution, and indeed I believe they would have credited Bingo with every conceivable degree of sensibility; but I felt myself that if this unhappy animal had many more of these accomplishments I was undone, for the original Bingo had never been a dog of parts.

"It's very odd," said Travers reflectively, as the dog recovered his proper level; "but I always thought that it was half the *right* ear that Bingo had lost?"

"So it is, isn't it?" said the Colonel. "Left, eh? Well, I thought myself it was the right."

My heart almost stopped with terror—I had altogether forgotten that. I hastened to set the point at rest. "Oh, it *was* the left," I said positively; "I know it because I remember so particularly thinking how odd it was that it *should* be the left ear, and not the right!" I told myself this should be positively my last lie.

"*Why* odd?" asked Frank Travers, with his most offensive Socratic manner.

"My dear fellow, I can't tell you," I said impatiently; "every thing seems odd when you come to think at all about it."

"Algernon," said Lilian later on, "will you tell Aunt Mary and Mr. Travers, and—and me, how it was you came to find Bingo? Mr. Travers is quite anxious to hear all about it."

I could not very well refuse; I sat down and told the story, all my own way. I painted Blagg, perhaps, rather bigger and blacker than life, and

described an exciting scene, in which I recognised Bingo by his collar in the streets, and claimed and bore him off then and there in spite of all opposition.

I had the inexpressible pleasure of seeing Travers grinding his teeth with envy as I went on, and feeling Lilian's soft, slender hand glide silently into mine as I told my tale in the twilight.

All at once, just as I reached the climax, we heard the poodle barking furiously at the hedge which separated my garden from the road. "There's a foreign-looking man staring over the hedge," said Lilian; "Bingo always *did* hate foreigners."

There certainly was a swarthy man there, and, though I had no reason for it then, somehow my heart died within me at the sight of him.

"Don't be alarmed, sir," cried the Colonel; "the dog won't bite you, unless there's a hole in the hedge anywhere."

The stranger took off his small straw hat with a sweep. "Ah, I am not afraid," he said, and his accent proclaimed him a Frenchman; "he is not enrage at me. May I ask, is it pairmeet to speak wiz Misterre Vezzered?"

I felt I most deal with this person alone, for I feared the worst, and asking them to excuse me, I went to the hedge and faced the Frenchman with the frightful calm of despair. He was a short, stout little man, with blue cheeks, sparkling black eyes, and a vivacious walnut-coloured countenance; he wore a short black alpaca coat and a large white

cravat with an immense oval malachite brooch in the centre of it, which I mention because I found myself staring mechanically at it during the interview.

"My name is Weatherhead," I began, with the bearing of a detected pickpocket. "Can I be of any service to you?"

"Of a great service," he said emphatically; "you can restore to me the poodle vich I see zere!"

Nemesis had called at last in the shape of a rival claimant. I staggered for an instant; then I said, "Oh, I think you are under a mistake—that dog is not mine."

"I know it," he said; "zere 'as been leetle mistake, so if ze dog is not to you, you give him back to me, *hein?*"

"I tell you," I said, "that poodle belongs to the gentleman over there." And I pointed to the Colonel, seeing that it was best now to bring him into the affair without delay.

"You are wrong," he said doggedly; "ze poodle is my poodle! And I was direct to you—it is your name on ze carte?" And he presented me with that fatal card which I had been foolish enough to give to Blagg as a proof of my identity. I saw it all now; the old villain had betrayed me, and to earn a double reward had put the real owner on my track.

I decided to call the Colonel at once and attempt to brazen it out with the help of his sincere belief in the dog.

"Eh, what's that; what's it all about?" said the Colonel, bustling up, followed at intervals by the others.

The Frenchman raised his hat again. "I do not vant to make trouble," he began, "but zere is leetle mistake. My word of honour, sare, I see my own poodle in your garden. Ven I appeal to zis gentilman to restore 'im he reffer me to you."

"You must allow me to know my own dog, sir," said the Colonel. "Why, I've had him from a pup. Bingo, old boy, you know your master, don't you!"

But the brute ignored him altogether, and began to leap wildly at the hedge, in frantic efforts to join the Frenchman. It needed no Solomon to decide *his* ownership!

"I tell you, you 'ave got ze wrong poodle—it is my own dog, my Azor! He remember me well, you see? I lose him it is three, four days. . . . I see a nottice zat he is found, and ven I go to ze address, zey tell me, 'Oh, he is claim, he is gone wiz a strangaire who has advertise.' Zey show me ze placard, I follow 'ere, and ven I arrive, I see my poodle in ze garden before me!"

"But look here," said the Colonel impatiently; "it's all very well to say that, but how can you prove it? I give you *my* word that the dog belongs to *me!* You must prove your claim, eh, Travers?"

"Yes," said Travers judicially, "mere assertion is no proof: it's oath against oath, at present."

"Attend an instant—your poodle was he 'ighly train, was he well instruct—a dog viz tricks, eh?"

"No, he's not," said the Colonel; "I don't like

to see dogs taught to play the fool—there's none of that nonsense about *him*, sir!"

"Ah, remark him well, then. Azor, mon chou, danse donc!"

And on the foreigner's whistling a lively air, that infernal poodle rose on his hind legs and danced solemnly about half-way round the garden! We inside followed his movements with dismay. "Why, dash it all!" cried the disgusted Colonel, "he's dancing along like a d——d mountebank! But it's my Bingo for all that!"

"You are not convince? You shall see more. Azor, ici, Beesmarck, Azor!" (the poodle barked ferociously). "Gambetta!" (he wagged his tail and began to leap with joy). "Meurs pour la Patrie!"—and the too accomplished animal rolled over as if killed in battle!

"Where could Bingo have picked up so much French?" cried Lilian incredulously.

"Or so much French history?" added that serpent Travers.

"Shall I command 'im to jomp, or reverse 'imself?" inquired the obliging Frenchman.

"We've seen that, thank you," said the Colonel gloomily. "Upon my word, I don't know what to think. It can't be that that's not my Bingo after all—I'll never believe it!"

I tried a last desperate stroke. "Will you come round to the front?" I said to the Frenchman; "I'll let you in, and we can discuss the matter quietly." Then, as we walked back together, I

asked him eagerly what he would take to abandon his claims and let the Colonel think the poodle was his after all.

He was furious—he considered himself insulted; with great emotion he informed me that the dog was the pride of his life (it seems to be the mission of black poodles to serve as domestic comforts of this priceless kind!), that he would not part with him for twice his weight in gold.

"Conceive," he began as we joined the others, "zat zis gentilman 'ere 'as offer me money for ze dog! He agrees zat it is to me, you see? Ver well zen, zere is no more to be said!"

"Why, Weatherhead, have *you* lost faith too, then?" said the Colonel.

I saw that it was no good—all I wanted now was to get out of it creditably and get rid of the Frenchman. "I'm sorry to say," I replied, "that I'm afraid I've been deceived by the extraordinary likeness. I don't think, on reflection, that that *is* Bingo!"

"What do you think, Travers?" asked the Colonel.

"Well, since you ask me," said Travers, with quite unnecessary dryness, "I never did think so."

"Nor I," said the Colonel; "I thought from the first that was never my Bingo. Why, Bingo would make two of that beast!"

And Lilian and her aunt both protested that they had had their doubts from the first.

"Zen you pairmeet zat I remove 'im?" said the Frenchman.

"Certainly," said the Colonel; and after some apologies on our part for the mistake, he went off in triumph, with the detestable poodle frisking after him.

When he had gone the Colonel laid his hand kindly on my shoulder. "Don't look so cut up about it, my boy," he said; "you did your best—there was a sort of likeness, to anyone who didn't know Bingo as we did."

Just then the Frenchman again appeared at the hedge. "A thousand pardons," he said, "bot I find zis upon my dog—it is not to me. Allow me restore it viz many compliments."

It was Bingo's collar. Travers took it from his hand and brought it to us.

"This was on the dog when you stopped that fellow, didn't you say?" he asked me.

One more lie—and I was so weary of falsehood! "Y-yes," I said reluctantly, "that was so."

"Very extraordinary," said Travers; "that's the wrong poodle beyond a doubt, but when he's found, he's wearing the right dog's collar! Now how do you account for that?"

"My good fellow," I said impatiently, "I'm not in the witness box. I *can't* account for it. It—it's a mere coincidence!"

"But look here, my *dear* Weatherhead," argued Travers (whether in good faith or not I never could quite make out), "don't you see what a tremendously important link it is? Here's a dog who (as I understand the facts) had a silver collar, with his name engraved on it, round his neck at the time he

was lost. Here's that identical collar turning up soon afterwards round the neck of a totally different dog! We must follow this up; we must get at the bottom of it somehow! With a clue like this, we're sure to find out, either the dog himself, or what's become of him! Just try to recollect what happened, there's a good fellow. This is just the sort of thing I like!"

It was the sort of thing I did not enjoy at all. "You must excuse me to-night, Travers," I said uncomfortably; "you see, just now it's rather a sore subject for me—and I'm not feeling very well!" I was grateful just then for a reassuring glance of pity and confidence from Lilian's sweet eyes which revived my drooping spirits for the moment.

"Yes, we'll go into it to-morrow, Travers," said the Colonel; "and then—hullo, why, there's that confounded Frenchman *again!*"

It was indeed; he came prancing back delicately, with a malicious enjoyment on his wrinkled face. "Once more I return to apologise," he said. "My poodle 'as 'ad ze grave indiscretion to make a very big 'ole at ze bottom of ze garden!"

I assured him that it was of no consequence. "Perhaps," he replied, looking steadily at me through his keen half-shut eyes, "you vill not say zat ven you regard ze 'ole. And you others, I spik to you: sometimes von loses a somzing vich is qvite near all ze time. It is ver droll, eh? my vord, ha, ha, ha!" And he ambled off, with an aggressively fiendish laugh that chilled my blood.

" What the dooce did he mean by that, eh ? " said the Colonel blankly.

" Don't know," said Travers; " suppose we go and inspect the hole ?"

But before that I had contrived to draw near it myself, in deadly fear lest the Frenchman's last words had contained some innuendo which I had not understood.

It was light enough still for me to see something, at the unexpected horror of which I very nearly fainted.

That thrice accursed poodle which I had been insane enough to attempt to foist upon the Colonel must, it seems, have buried his supper the night before very near the spot in which I had laid Bingo, and his attempt to exhume his bone had brought the remains of my victim to the surface !

There the corpse lay, on the very top of the excavations. Time had not, of course, improved its appearance, which was ghastly in the extreme, but still plainly recognisable by the eye of affection.

" It's a very ordinary hole," I gasped, putting myself before it and trying to turn them back. " Nothing in it—nothing at all ! "

" Except one Algernon Weatherhead, Esq., eh ? " whispered Travers jocosely in my ear.

" No, but," persisted the Colonel, advancing, " look here ! Has the dog damaged any of your shrubs ? "

" No, no ! " I cried piteously, " quite the reverse. Let's all go indoors now ; it's getting so cold ! "

"See, there *is* a shrub or something uprooted!" said the Colonel, still coming nearer that fatal hole. "Why, hullo, look there? What's that?"

Lilian, who was by his side, gave a slight scream. "Uncle," she cried, "it looks like—like *Bingo!*"

The Colonel turned suddenly upon me. "Do you hear?" he demanded, in a choked voice. "You hear what she says? Can't you speak out? Is that our Bingo?"

I gave it up at last; I only longed to be allowed to crawl away under something! "Yes," I said in a dull whisper, as I sat down heavily on a garden seat, "yes . . . that's Bingo . . . misfortune . . . shoot him . . . quite an accident!"

There was a terrible explosion after that; they saw at last how I had deceived them, and put the very worst construction upon everything. Even now I writhe impotently at times, and my cheeks smart and tingle with humiliation, as I recall that scene—the Colonel's very plain speaking, Lilian's passionate reproaches and contempt, and her aunt's speechless prostration of disappointment.

I made no attempt to defend myself; I was not perhaps the complete villain they deemed me, but I felt dully that no doubt it all served me perfectly right.

Still I do not think I am under any obligation to put it all down in black and white here.

Travers had vanished at the first opportunity—whether out of delicacy, or the fear of breaking out into unseasonable mirth, I cannot say; and shortly

afterwards the others came to where I sat silent with bowed head, and bade me a stern and final farewell.

And then, as the last gleam of Lilian's white dress vanished down the garden path, I laid my head down on the table amongst the coffee-cups and cried like a beaten child.

* * * * * *

I got leave as soon as I could and went abroad. The morning after my return I noticed, while shaving, that there was a small square marble tablet placed against the wall of the Colonel's garden. I got my opera-glass and read—and pleasant reading it was—the following inscription :—

IN AFFECTIONATE MEMORY
OF
BINGO,
SECRETLY AND CRUELLY PUT TO DEATH,
IN COLD BLOOD,
BY A
NEIGHBOUR AND FRIEND.
JUNE, 1881.

If this explanation of mine ever reaches my neighbours' eyes, I humbly hope they will have the humanity either to take away or tone down that tablet. They cannot conceive what I suffer, when curious visitors insist, as they do every day, in spelling out the words from our windows, and asking me countless questions about them !

Sometimes I meet the Curries about the village, and, as they pass me with averted heads, I feel myself growing crimson. Travers is almost always with Lilian now. He has given her a dog—a fox-terrier—and they take ostentatiously elaborate precautions to keep it out of my garden.

I should like to assure them here that they need not be under any alarm. I have shot one dog.

F. ANSTEY.

LORD RICHARD AND I.

CHAPTER I.

AMONG the characters which I have found worthy of study, that of Lord Richard stands pre-eminent. No other man has so successfully deceived the world. The instinct of woman and the analysis of man have been equally at fault. His many friends, male and female, love him for his frankness and geniality; his political colleagues regard him, in spite of his admitted sagacity, as a very simple fellow. He is raised on a pedestal as The Honest Man, who sees clearly enough, but whose chief claim to admiration is that he is incapable of deceit, almost incapable of concealment. It may be that there are such guileless men in the world, and that they are not simpletons. I will not be dogmatic on this matter. I will content myself with the assertion that Lord Richard, whom the world took for this combination of open simplicity and political sagacity, was a master of dissimulation, the most wily and subtle of men.

Even now I can recall my first impression of my friend's simplicity—an impression so strong that but for my invariable rule, I should have trusted it. As I summon back to me his square figure, his blunt speech, his open eyes turned to mine with an air of

innocent wonder, his easy talk of things political, I am almost surprised that I too was not deceived. By a constant effort I succeeded in reserving my judgment; I was rewarded by the gradual discovery of a most intricate and interesting character; I found him out. I was almost frightened by my unique success. I had to take the greatest pains lest he should discover that I knew his real nature; and in spite of all my care I soon found that he felt an occasional uneasiness in my presence. I suspected this uneasiness, and I cautiously confirmed my suspicion by a few experiments. How happy he was in his inimitable air of innocence! He would look at me with an expression almost infantine, as he pushed his thick hair from his brow; he would seem to be puzzled by my constant presence; he started sometimes when he found me at his elbow. "Hang it!" he would say in his simple, hearty fashion—"Hang it! What are you creeping about here for?" Then I would make some jesting answer, as if I entered into his frank humour. I remember that one day, when I explained my presence by reminding him that I was his secretary, he burst into that jolly laugh which had deceived the nation. "I'll be hanged," he cried out as soon as he could speak for laughter, "I'll be hanged if I know how you came to be my secretary." I only answered with a smile. It was unnecessary for me to inform Lord Richard that I had attached myself to him in obedience to the advice of my dear old tutor at the University, because I considered him the most rising politician of

the day. I knew well enough that to give him information was to carry coals to Newcastle; that he knew all which he cared to know. He had an admirable manner.

I may say without vanity that I was an excellent secretary. I was constant in attendance, ready with my pen, patient in investigation. An apparent carelessness about his correspondence was in agreement with Lord Richard's attitude. As he seemed frank and guileless in speech, so also did he seem indifferent who might read the many letters which he left open on his tables. Of course I was not deceived. He knew well enough what to leave open. Yet in spite of all his cleverness I learned something more than he meant me to. By extraordinary patience and vigilance I succeeded in picking up many scraps of the secret history of contemporary politics. I kept a note-book; I copied many bits of letters; I wrote down many fragments of conversation. Little by little I obtained some valuable knowledge of the hidden mechanism of politics. I already felt at times as if my hand was on the wires. I had made up my mind to go in heart and soul—if I may use the expression—for a political career; and every day I had more and more reason to congratulate myself on my choice of my friend Lord Richard as the first step on the upward path. If ambition be a crime, I plead guilty.

I confess that I was surprised one morning, when my friend invited me to walk with him in the Park. He was generally careful to avoid asking for my society.

Doubtless he kept in mind the fact that it might suit him some day to assert that he was under no obligation to me. However, on this fateful morning his habitual air of frank geniality came so near to jollity, that my suspicions were immediately aroused. He would not attend to his work ; he had an air almost boyish. Of course he was not a boy, though he is still regarded, especially in the political world, as a young man. These sprigs of nobility get such a start in life, that any one of them with a quarter of my friend's ability might be a rising statesman at an age when men like myself have barely got a foot on the lowest rung of the ladder. But though Lord Richard was not more than five or six and thirty, he had no right to look so young as he looked on that eventful day. He assumed the most tempestuous spirits. "Come out," he said, "and see the sun, and the smart people in the Park." He cultivated this habit of speaking of smart people ; he liked to talk as if he were a rough-and-ready son of the soil ; even trifles such as these went to the increase of his popularity. "Come and look at the swells," he said ; "and tell me all the harm you know of every one of them ; then you'll be happy." I laughed at his pleasantry ; I did not refuse to go with him ; indeed I was not unnaturally pleased to be seen with Lord Richard in the Park.

My pleasure was short-lived. In the very centre of the gay crowd, while I was leaning on my friend's arm and regarding the lovely ladies with respectful interest, my eyes suddenly encountered those of my

cousin Tom. It was impossible to pretend not to see him. Lady Raeborough and a few of the choicest ornaments of London society were passing between us at the moment ; but this did not prevent Tom from hailing me with enthusiasm by a ridiculous name, which had been given me by my schoolfellows. I have always disliked this silly schoolboy trick of giving nicknames. I could see that the fair Countess smiled, and Lord Richard began, as usual, to laugh aloud. Such want of tact as Tom's is scarcely less than criminal. My cousin's hat was shabby, and his clothes dusty, but his face beamed with its usual unreasonable satisfaction. Tom is not wholly a humbug ; I really believe that the company in which he saw me was not the sole cause of the warmth of his greeting ; he is strangely impulsive, and has a most absurd feeling for kin. Even the chagrin, which at the moment I could not wholly conceal, did not moderate his ardour. It was only natural that I should be pained to see him there and then. Indeed, I did not care to see him anywhere. He was only my father's cousin, and I had never approved of him. He was a shiftless man, and by no means a successful one ; he had let slip some admirable chances of bettering his position ; he had defended his folly by a parade of scruples, which were old-fashioned and fantastic. Indeed, there was in Tom much which called for the gravest disapproval. Judge if I was pleased to be greeted in the most brilliant crowd of the world by this elderly and shabby journalist !

As I was hurriedly asking the necessary questions about his wife and family, and at the same time forming in my mind a picturesque account of this eccentric cousin, which I could give to my friend, Lord Richard surprised me by resisting my attempts to draw him away. He is far more solid than I; he detained me easily. "Introduce me," he said in a loud whisper. I introduced him wondering; but the next moment I perceived his motive; I felt sure that he recognized in Tom one of the gentlemen of the press. Nobody knew better than Lord Richard the value of politeness to journalists. It was strange to hear these two men talk at first acquaintance with a manner as if neither had a thought to conceal. As for Tom I really believe that he hides very little. Clever and accomplished as he is, I have sometimes thought him little short of an idiot. He did not seem in the least degree overcome when Lord Richard pressed him to visit him. "I shall be delighted," he said; "and I can look up my young cousin here at the same time; he's often with you, I believe." "By George, he is!" said my friend; "he's closer than a brother;" and he burst out laughing again. As we proceeded on our way, I heard him murmuring to himself that silly name which had been given me at school. It was too ridiculous in a man of Lord Richard's position.

When we had walked a little way without further conversation, my companion asked with a suddenness which was, without doubt, the result of calculation:

"Was that your cousin's daughter?"

Nothing escapes Lord Richard. I had hoped that he had not noticed Delia, where she stood half withdrawn at her father's shabby elbow. I myself had detected her in a moment, and had noticed with a strange emotion that the pretty child was changing to a pretty woman. Ah me, for the follies of boyhood! How I remembered our games, when we were children together, in my cousin's old garden! "Tempora mutantur, nos et mutamur!" But no time had been given me now for wandering thoughts and tender reminiscences. When I saw Delia in the crowd, I had decided in an instant that I could pretend not to see her. It was far better that I should ignore her. It was no less than my duty. When Delia was a little girl, with floating hair and grave blue eyes, I had promised a thousand times in jest that she should be my wife; I had been strangely drawn towards the lovely child. One cannot be too careful. I had left all that so far behind me; fortune had carried me away from that youthful silly dream. As out of the corner of my eye I marked her standing there very neat and pretty in her simple gown; as I noted that the charm had grown with her growth, and that she had inherited none of her father's untidy air, I felt that for her sake, as well as for my own, I had better see her as little as possible. On this occasion I had been able not to see her at all.

"Was that his daughter," asked Lord Richard, For a moment I knew not how to reply. I could

not acknowledge that I had seen my little cousin and had not spoken to her. "Was there a girl with him?" I asked in return. "There was," he answered with a sort of mockery in his voice; and in a moment he added, "By George! Is it possible that she and you are cousins?" "Only second-cousins," I said. "I hope she may remember you in her prayers," he said strangely. Then he seemed to forget my existence. I did not interrupt him; I supposed that he was busy with the intricacies of diplomacy. I moved quietly at his elbow, till I heard him humming to himself. I listened, but I could not catch the words; I made out, however, that he was humming a German song. I more than once detected the word "augen," which on consulting the dictionary at home I discovered to signify "eyes."

CHAPTER II.

Not long after the unfortunate meeting in the Park, Lord Richard suddenly spoke to me of the neglected borough of Mudbro'. I knew that there was likely to be a vacancy there; I had been waiting for a good opportunity of insinuating my own merits as a candidate; but I had never expected that the first suggestion of my standing for Parliament would come from my friend. Of course I was well aware that the influence of Lord Richard's family in Mudbro' was practically decisive. If the

present member were really bent on retirement, and if the family supported me cordially, I might leap in a moment into that position to which I had long intended to climb. But my friend's unsought suggestion frightened me. What could be his object? I could not guess. I could only assume a proper modesty — a doubt of my own worthiness. "Surely," I said, "you must know of some more important person."

"You'll do capitally," he cried out with his big voice; "you're made for politics; you don't mind working up details; you're good at ferreting out things; you're not thin-skinned."

I laughed in a deprecating manner at his praise; but still my mind was busy with questions of his motive. I began to think that he wished to loosen the cords which bound us to one another. It seemed probable enough that with his great acuteness he had decided that I was learning too much of himself and of his correspondence with political friends. Of his real motive for banishing me, I confess that I had not the slightest suspicion. As I looked at him doubtfully, he began to laugh as usual. This habit of laughter, which, while it covers awkward pauses, commits a man to nothing, is of great use to Lord Richard. He arranged for my immediate departure as if it were the best joke in the world. He planned interviews for me with the sitting member, with the local lawyer, with his own distinguished father. The fact that I was to be a guest in that famous family man-

sion naturally weakened my instinctive opposition to these sudden schemes. Finally my friend begged me not to hurry back. I hastened to assure him that I should make no unnecessary delay; and that, if I were ever fortunate enough to gain a seat in The House, even that need not prevent me from making myself useful to him. "I could still act as secretary," I said. "No, no, no—damn it, no!" he cried, and hurried out of the room. I laughed at the joke, but I was still disquieted by doubts. How true my instinct was has yet to be shown.

Alas! I lingered at Mudbro'. The cordiality of the amiable if inefficient member for the borough, the stupidity of the principal constituents, the luxury of the Castle in which I was a guest—all these combined to prolong my absence from my friend. Slowly and happily I was winning my way into popular favor; day by day in the leisurely life of that quiet spot I was confirming my position as its future representative; when on a sudden I was awakened from my placidity by the news of the great catastrophe. It was in the library of his ancestral home that I opened the paper with no presentiment, and read that Lord Richard had been blinded by a flash of lightning. I could scarcely believe my eyes. Such was my faith in the man's craft and power, that I could scarcely imagine him the victim of an accident. I found it hard to believe that anything had happened to him which was not the result of his own calculations. Even when I had realized the dreadful truth, I had no suspicion of the extent of

the misfortune which had befallen me. Indeed I saw good in the evil. I saw that Lord Richard's blindness would make him doubly dependent on my care and help. Although I noted—as it is my habit to note details apparently unimportant—that, when Lord Richard met with his terrible accident, he was driving himself home from the suburb in which my cousin Tom lived, I confess that I attached no importance to the fact. It was not for the sake of playing with lightning that my friend had planned my absence in his native borough.

I did not waste time in idle lamentation; I left that to the victim's kinsfolk at the Castle. Now was the time for me to hurry to Lord Richard's side. No one knew better than I what is expected from a friend; I had studied the subject. After all proper expressions of condolence I hurried from the noble mansion, where I had passed such happy hours.

As soon as I reached London I hurried to my friend's abode. I let myself in by means of one of his latch-keys which I always carried. I stepped noiselessly upstairs; I did not know in what condition the nerves of the poor sufferer might be. At the top of the stairs I turned aside into the little back room; I peeped cautiously round the heavy curtain, which hung across the open doorway; I feared that my sudden appearance might startle the invalid. As I peered cautiously into the shaded study, I was reassured by the sound of my friend's voice. He was speaking in his usual tone, with that blunt straightforward manner which I envied. For

a moment I thought that the whole story must be false ; I drew back my head, that I might consider my position. Then it struck me that he might be exaggerating his misfortune—pretending to be wholly blind, that he might excite to the highest point the popular interest and sympathy. In this I did him more than credit.

I waited in silence to discover to whom my friend was talking. Presently I heard the voice of my cousin Tom; and I felt sure (I confess my ill-founded certainty) that I understood the meaning of the situation. How soon, I said to myself, has he found a use for the confidential journalist to whom I introduced him ! I felt no doubt (I confess it) that he was arranging with Tom how the story should be told in the metropolitan, and in the provincial press; how England might be made to thrill from one end to the other by an account of this sudden catastrophe, which had befallen a rising public servant, and of the truly British pluck with which the awful consequences were borne. Intense curiosity nailed me to the spot. I had no time to think of the peculiarity of my position, as I listened with all my ears behind the heavy curtain. Even if I had tried to make my presence known, the words, which presently reached me, would have stricken me dumb. "It seems impossible," said Tom—"My little Delia ?" What was this ? I gave such a gasp, that I thought it must be heard. Could this be a sort of cypher used by these two men, lest there should be eavesdroppers ? No ! The idea was absurd. How

could there be fear of eavesdroppers in Lord Richard's private rooms? As the talk went on, all doubt was speedily removed. I stood spellbound; I could not utter a sound; it was impossible for me to make my presence known.

After a silence, which seemed long, Lord Richard spoke. "It seems almost impossible to me," he said. "I thought that I did not care a jot for all the women in the world. I was rather badly treated by a woman, once, when I was a boy. After that I made up my mind to do without sentiment; I went in for politics; I thought I was strong as a house—and it has come to this." There was something both comical and pathetic in my friend's voice. I could not think what he meant by this strange departure; I did not try to think; all my mind was given to noting his every word, to impressing it on my memory. My report is absolutely accurate. My cousin Tom muttered some words, which did not reach my ears; and then Lord Richard began again speaking slowly and low, as if he were thinking aloud. "Sometimes of late," he said, "I had caught myself in a strange mood, wondering if I had not flung away the fairest gift of life, if it would not be sad to grow old with no one near me—no one to care for me much—no one but some fellow who served me for his own interest, climbed on my shoulders, and would kick me down when I could help him no higher." How morbid a line of thought was this into which Lord Richard pretended to have fallen! Surely he could always command better

service than this, which he foreshadowed for the softening of my cousin Tom. It struck me as overdone.

"I never felt so strange," my friend continued presently with the same musing tone, "as I did that morning, when I met you in the Park. If I were superstitious—and perhaps I am—I should say that I knew I was to meet my fate. My heart was beating like a boy's, as I found myself in that crowd. As I spoke to you, I saw blue eyes look at me with an innocent curiosity ; I saw —— as I shall never see again."

There was so strange a silence that I could not help peeping round the curtain. I felt that I must know all, that I was in some sort bound to understand the whole situation. When I peeped into the darkened room, I saw that my friend had assumed a striking pose. His head was bowed, and his arms, which lay straight along the arms of the chair, conveyed for the moment a suggestion of hopelessness. The whole attitude was an effective appeal for pity. Of course it produced the expected effect on Tom. I could see that my cousin was nervous and excited. His features were twisted into most comical expressions, and his eyes were wandering to the corners of the ceiling. He started spasmodically when Lord Richard referred to his blindness ; he put out his hand with a jerk as if he would seize the other's ; he only grasped the empty air ; then with his usual talent for doing the wrong thing he began to whistle ; then he stopped abruptly. "I'm awfully sorry," he

said suddenly, with a voice which seemed to crack in the middle like a half-grown boy's. Lord Richard pulled himself up in his chair, and felt in his new darkness for the other's hand. It was odd to see this new movement in him, so unlike the old prompt use of the arms. The two men went through the form of shaking hands—apparently for no reason.

"When I saw her again," said my friend presently, "in that charming house of yours, she seemed to me like a little tidy angel, with all her heart for home, but—but with heaven in her eyes." As he spoke, I seemed to see that extraordinary suburban dwelling, which I had known so well in my boyhood—a ramshackle collection of sheds and boxes, all opening into an untidy garden. To call that "a charming house!" To call my pretty little cousin "an angel!" As for that passage about her heart and eyes, I could only admire the speaker with a new wonder; even I had not suspected his power of improvising that sort of speech.

"I was frightened," he said after another pause, "by the full consciousness of her divine childhood. I felt myself old and worldly—unworthy even to think of her. I came away that evening with the fixed purpose of crushing this mad fancy of mine. I was confident, and—and it has come to this."

"It was awful," said Tom; "it seems to me impossible now; I can't believe that you—that you ——"

"That I am blind, or that I am in love?" asked Lord Richard, and he laughed out loud with his

old boldness. "The blindness I can stand well enough," he said without a tremor in his voice. "It's a bore for my friends—I shall victimise you all—and for my political colleagues—poor devils! But it's this other thing—it's this other thing which makes me tremble like a girl. I could have crushed it, but I cannot crush it now. Now in the darkness I see her eyes always; I can't escape; I can't fix my mind on the business of the session; I feel my weakness every moment. I shall take up my public life again; I shall do my work with secretaries and such like necessaries—but I can't face my long life at home alone. I can't do it. I've an odd fancy that heaven has taken my eyes, that I should learn the meaning of those eyes of hers. I—I feel a fool—will you give her to me?"

"You ask a great deal," cried Tom almost angrily. "Poor little Delia! I don't want her to marry and go away from me; she's a child; I'd much rather she married a boy—a nice innocent boy with his way to make in the world; I don't like her going among people who would hold her cheap; you must see that it would be a grave responsibility for her; it would be a hard life to look after a—ah! I beg your pardon."

"Of course it would," said the other; "I ought to be led about by a little dog, like the rest of 'em." He laughed as he spoke; but Tom seemed to be touched none the less; he fidgeted and coughed, and begged his pardon again. I have written down more than enough of this talk. In the end they

agreed that Lord Richard should visit my cousin's strange abode as often as he liked; that he should try to make himself at home there; that he should be allowed to talk to Delia when he would. Meanwhile neither of them was to give the girl even a hint of Lord Richard's wishes. As they gradually came to an agreement, Tom became more cheerful. He did not conceal his hopes that the absurdity of the whole thing would become clear to my friend. "See her as often as you like!" he said at last. "See her!" repeated Lord Richard softly. "Ah!" cried the other again sharply, as if something hurt him, "what a fool I am! Forgive me, and come as often as you can—and thank you." I do not know why he thanked him, but he spoke with deepest feeling. Tom is a strange being. It is my deliberate opinion that he was not in any sense eager that his daughter should marry Lord Richard. I believe that his want of enthusiasm in contemplating this brilliant future for his child was real. He is fantastic. If I wished to speak hardly of my own kin, I should say that he was little short of an idiot.

BODLEIANA·BIBLIOTHECA·

CHAPTER III

THOUGH I freely confess that I was astounded by the discovery of my friend's new purpose, it needed but a few minutes' solitude to make his motives clear. After a few minutes of perplexity I again

did justice to his extraordinary ability. I had found out long ago that story of his youth. I had made the acquaintance of the lady who had treated him badly. I had smiled often to myself at the thought of her chagrin; for the gallant boy whom she had thrown over was becoming a personage in the world, and the rich man whom she had married was unexpectedly chary of diamonds and ponies. Now if Lord Richard in his riper manhood made up his mind at last to take a wife, it was certainly wise of him to seek one who was naturally modest, and who had been brought up to expect little for herself, and to look after the younger children. The care and devotion of such a girl might be bought by corals as easily as by diamonds. But of course no considerations of the sort would have occurred to my friend, had he not met with his great calamity. That much he had admitted, though with a graceful veil of sentiment, in his conversation with my cousin Tom. If to see clearly what is for one's good, and to lay firm hand upon it, be to be great, then my friend Lord Richard is a great man. A lightning flash strikes him blind; in a moment he has fixed upon the best substitute for his eyes; within twenty-four hours he has put everything in motion to ensure his success. What would be the value to him now of a fashionable woman with a heart given wholly to society, and with eyes for other men? He proposed to secure for himself a dear little modest maiden, who would ask no better fate than to devote herself to a great man and a member of the aristocracy.

One mistake, however, even Lord Richard made. Even he must have overrated her gentleness. I confess that I overrated it. I have been rudely corrected. But—as the professional romancers say—to my story!

For some time after Lord Richard's sad accident I was assiduous in my attentions. Not only did his comparative helplessness and the claims of friendship make an appeal which I would not ignore for a moment; but I was eager also to see the conclusion of this little comedy—this skilfully managed idyll of the middle-aged statesman and the guileless suburban maiden. Moreover, I had my own part to play. I had determined at once to do all I could to further the marriage. It was the safest course. Even now, though the result has not agreed with my expectations, I cannot see that I was wrong. If I had tried to hinder the match for the sake of my own influence with my friend, I should probably have failed; I knew Lord Richard's power. Even if I had succeeded in separating the ill-assorted couple, I could not have done it without creating such a coldness between my friend and myself, that our old familiar and delightful converse would have been impossible. How familiar—how easy it was! "What would you do without me?" I asked jocosely one day, when I had written a handful of notes from his dictation and addressed them to his political friends; and I remember exactly the quick movement with which he turned his sightless face towards me and cried out, with laughter, "Upon my soul I should miss

you; you are good for the nerves; I've almost got over jumping when I hear you suddenly at my shoulder." But I must not linger over irrelevant reminiscences; it is one of the temptations to which my abnormally accurate memory lays me open; I must come to the climax of my little story.

In pursuance of my plan I prepared myself to accompany my friend almost every day to that riverside suburb where my cousin Tom presided over his caravanserai; but here I was unexpectedly foiled. I soon found that on this road at least it was not I, but his faithful valet who was to play little dog to the blind man. I have nothing to say against Lord Richard's excellent valet; I never saw him drunk; it was his interest to preserve an excellent place. Still it is only fair to conclude that, like most of his class, he was prying and inquisitive. Certainly he was no fit companion on a sentimental pilgrimage. When my offers of attendance had been many times refused, I saw that I was wasting my time. But I could not abandon my design. I must appear to Delia as an important agent in the business, or where would be my claim on her gratitude? I must see her, or how could I insinuate that she owed Lord Richard's attentions to my diplomatic management? I was determined to impress this view of myself upon my pretty cousin's mind. I made up my mind to see her without delay. Since my friend refused my arm as a guide to the presence of his beloved, I must go to her alone. It was certainly more difficult. I had allowed so long a time to elapse since

my last visit to that tumble-down abode, where I spent so many happy days of boyhood, that I feared an attack of natural, and not unpardonable, shyness, when I knocked anew at that well-known but shabby door. However I trusted to that tact which had never failed me yet.

Fate seemed to be against me. I made three journeys to my cousin's house at different hours of the day; and three times was I refused admittance. I began to think—incredible as it appeared—that the young woman who had charge of the door had been ordered never to admit me. One day, being in a holiday humour, I determined to play my good cousins a trick. I felt that our old familiarity fully warranted so harmless a joke. I engaged a young waterman to scull me up with the tide; I left the boat at the end of the lane which passes Tom's door; and, coming to the corner of the garden in a shady place, I mounted an old rickety iron railing and looked cautiously over the wall. A lofty row of sweet-peas was between me and the house. Smiling at the pleasant trick, which reminded me of boyish days in that happy garden, I slipped softly over the wall and dropped noiselessly down to the grass. The little garden was comically old-fashioned, and by no means well kept. Through the tangled wilderness of sweets I slipped like a serpent; I remembered how I used to play at being a red Indian among those green paths and hedges. I just stopped myself in time. Two people were sitting on an old seat. Though one of them was blind, I

knew the quickness of his ear; I held my breath, and crouched low in the tangled grass. Every word —every gesture remains engraven on my memory. I could not have moved to save my life. I was—as the novelists say—rooted to the spot. Luckily it was a spot whence through a tiny peep-hole in the yew hedge I could command a perfect view of the faces of the actors.

Lord Richard and my little cousin Delia were seated side by side on the old stone seat, which looked as if it might have come in its old age from the shadow of ilex trees in a villa garden of Rome. Even then the charm of the place and of the hour was not lost on me. But, in a moment, all my mind was busy with the strange pair before me. The first thing to be noted was the air of well-tried friendship which was common to the man of the world and to the young girl. They might have been friends for years. Delia was prattling like a child, as if she would amuse her companion; and yet with this childishness there was a little air of protection, almost motherly, which was comical enough. She seemed to have taken charge of him. She went on talking, until it struck me that she was half afraid to stop—afraid of what he might say in his turn. He for his part seemed in no hurry to speak. He sat with his face turned straight to the place where I lay (I could scarcely assure myself that he at least could not see me), and he listened to his pretty little comrade with that broad smile of contentment, which was worth a king's ransom for its persuasion

of simplicity. At last it seemed as if she could think of no more to say. She was silent, but the blush on her cheek grew deeper; she looked at him once or twice quickly, and as often turned away her face as if she forgot that he could not see the pretty trouble in her lips and eyes. I had never seen my little cousin look so pretty. Ah! boyish fancies! Ah! memories of foolish childhood! What says the satirist? "Wait till you come to forty year." Lying there in the grass, I remembered how I had tried to kiss Delia when I came home one summer day from school, and how, in her pretty wilfulness, she had boxed my ears with that little sun-brown hand. How pretty she looked as she sat on that old, gray, moss-stained seat! There was suppressed excitement in her face, and a look in her eyes as if she was not far from tears. She must have known how pretty she looked; probably some of the trouble in her face was due to the sad thought that this prettiness was wasted on the eligible suitor at her side.

There was a pause; I seemed to hear the tiny insects in the air—almost to hear the beating of my heart. At last Delia moved, as if she could bear the silence no longer. He put out his hand with its new uncertain movement, and laid it on hers; and yet he did not speak. At last with a great sigh, "How I love you!" he said. It was splendidly done; it was supremely effective. He must have felt the trembling of her hand, for he took his own great hand away, and laid it for a minute across his sightless eyes. "I ought not to have said it. I

ought not to have dreamed it. I ought not to have dreamed of laying this burden"—and here he stopped short, as if something hindered his speech. It is an old, but an excellent effect. She said nothing; but her little hand came trembling to his, which had fallen limp upon his knee. There was a light of pity in her face, which made it like an angel's. If he had been a rosy Cupidon, and she a Psyche newly awakened by love, she could not have looked more perfectly as if she doted on him. It was supremely feminine. No man could have thrown himself so utterly into the situation. At her touch, Lord Richard turned to look at her, and in an instant a cry came from him sharply—"Ah, God! I cannot see her!" he cried. And now I could see that her eyes were full of tears; she bent her little brown head and kissed his big hand, and her tears fell on it. Then his face flushed with triumph; he had gained his end. He put out his arm towards her, where she was half withdrawn; and when he touched her soft brown hair, he drew her head against his stalwart shoulder. I was too late, and I knew it; they had played the little comedy without me.

It was an unlucky day for me. "What are you doing there?" I heard the fierce whisper close above my head, and a nervous hand was on my collar dragging me backward. It was Tom. It was an awkward situation. I had neither time nor breath for explanation. I returned to London full of melancholy thoughts.

I have forgiven both my friend and my cousin. What is the use of resentment? Lord Richard did not withdraw from me his political patronage. To his influence and that of his family I owed my seat for Mudbro'. As a public man I was worth propitiating in the eyes of my friend. I may add that I have done no discredit to his choice. I flung myself with all my energy, if I may use the expression, into the strife of parties. By my own efforts and by a dexterous use of machinery of which I confess myself proud, I have gained for myself a place in which I am independent of all aristocratic patronage. I have made myself a free man, and, moreover, a rising one.

It is as a private individual that I cannot but regard my friend and my friend's wife with a gentle regret, though without animosity. With neither Lord Richard nor Delia could I preserve a pleasant intercourse. It was no fault of mine; I was eager to be on the footing of a cousin in the house; but all my efforts to be cousinly were vain. The husband indeed received me with laughter—almost with roars of laughter; but the wife was so cold, that at last I could not ignore her show of disfavour. This little lady, whom we had all thought so soft, was cold and hard as steel. I did not grudge her the victory which she had won. She had played her cards well. She was quite right to secure a husband whose blindness was more than compensated for by his high position and comparative wealth. If she could have been made to think that she owed her prize to me,

things would have been different between us. As it was, if I were a vain man, I could not but attribute the attitude of hostility which she preserved towards me to some lurking resentment at the ease with which I had stifled my boyish fancy for her. The strange prejudices of women are often to be explained by pique.

Of my cousin Tom—heaven help him!—I have seen little. I met him once not long after the marriage; and as he spoke to me of the happiness of his little girl I saw real tears in his eyes. As I believe that he was originally by no means eager for the match, so too do I believe that he now regards it with the warmest sympathy as a love match on both sides. I could almost envy my cousin's unique simplicity. Poor Tom!

JULIAN STURGIS.

THE PAVILION ON THE LINKS.

CHAPTER I.

TELLS HOW I CAMPED IN GRADEN SEA-WOOD, AND BEHELD A LIGHT IN THE PAVILION.

I WAS a great solitary when I was young. I made it my pride to keep aloof and suffice for my own entertainment; and I may say that I had neither friends nor acquaintances until I met that friend who became my wife and the mother of my children. With one man only was I on private terms; this was R. Northmour, Esquire, of Graden Easter, in Scotland. We had met at college; and though there was not much liking between us, nor even much intimacy, we were so nearly of a humor that we could associate with ease to both. Misanthropes, we believed ourselves to be; but I have thought since that we were only sulky fellows. It was scarcely a companionship, but a coexistence in unsociability. Northmour's exceptional violence of temper made it no easy affair for him to keep the peace with anyone but me; and as he respected my silent ways, and let me come and go as I pleased, I could tolerate his presence without concern. I think we called each other friends.

When Northmour took his degree and I decided to leave the university without one, he invited me on a long visit to Graden Easter; and it was thus that I first became acquainted with the scene of my adventures. The mansion house of Graden stood in a bleak stretch of country some three miles from the shore of the German Ocean. It was as large as a barrack; and as it had been built of a soft stone, liable to consume in the eager air of the seaside, it was damp and draughty within and half ruinous without. It was impossible for two young men to lodge with comfort in such a dwelling. But there stood in the northern part of the estate, in a wilderness of links and blowing sand-hills, and between a plantation and the sea, a small Pavilion or Belvedere, of modern design, which was exactly suited to our wants; and in this hermitage, speaking little, reading much, and rarely associating except at meals, Northmour and I spent four tempestuous winter months. I might have stayed longer; but one March night there sprang up between us a dispute, which rendered my departure necessary. Northmour spoke hotly, I remember, and I suppose I must have made some tart rejoinder. He leaped from his chair and grappled me; I had to fight, without exaggeration, for my life; and it was only with a great effort that I mastered him, for he was near as strong in body as myself, and seemed filled with the devil. The next morning, we met on our usual terms; but I judged it more delicate to withdraw; nor did he attempt to dissuade me.

It was nine years before I revisited the neighborhood. I traveled that time with a tilt cart, a tent, and a cooking-stove, tramping all day beside the wagon, and at night, whenever it was possible, gipsying in a cove of the hills, or by the side of a wood. I believe I visited in this manner most of the wild and desolate regions both in England and Scotland; and, as I had neither friends nor relations, I was troubled with no correspondence, and had nothing in the nature of head-quarters, unless it was the office of my solicitors, from whom I drew my income twice a year. It was a life in which I delighted; and I fully thought to have grown old upon the march, and at last died in a ditch.

It was my whole business to find desolate corners, where I could camp without the fear of interruption; and hence being in another part of the same shire, I bethought me suddenly of the Pavilion on the Links. No thoroughfare passed within three miles of it. The nearest town, and that was but a fisher village, was at a distance of six or seven. For ten miles of length, and from a depth varying from three miles to half a mile, this belt of barren country lay along the sea. The beach, which was the natural approach, was full of quicksands Indeed I may say there is hardly a better place of concealment in the United Kingdom. I determined to pass a week in the Sea-Wood of Graden-Easter, and making a long stage, reached it about sundown on a wild September day.

The country, I have said, was mixed sand-hill and

links; *links* being a Scottish name for sand which has ceased drifting and become more or less solidly covered with turf. The pavilion stood on an even space; a little behind it, the wood began in a hedge of elders huddled together by the wind; in front, a few tumbled sand-hills stood between it and the sea. An outcropping of rock had formed a bastion for the sand, so that there was here a promontory in the coast-line between two shallow bays; and just beyond the tides, the rock again cropped out and formed an islet of small dimensions but strikingly designed. The quicksands were of great extent at low water, and had an infamous reputation in the country. Close in shore, between the islet and the promontory, it was said that they would swallow a man in four minutes and a half; but there may have been little ground for this precision. The district was alive with rabbits, and haunted by gulls which made a continual piping about the pavilion. On summer days the outlook was bright and even gladsome; but at sundown in September, with a high wind, and a heavy surf rolling in close along the links, the place told of nothing but dead mariners and sea disasters. A ship beating to windward on the horizon, and a huge truncheon of wreck half buried in the sands at my feet, completed the innuendo of the scene.

The pavilion—it had been built by the last proprietor, Northmour's uncle, a silly and prodigal virtuoso—presented little signs of age. It was two stories in height, Italian in design, surrounded by a

patch of garden in which nothing had prospered but a few coarse flowers ; and looked, with its shuttered windows, not like a house that had been deserted, but like one that had never been tenanted by man. Northmour was plainly from home ; whether, as usual, sulking in the cabin of his yacht, or in one of his fitful and extravagant appearances in the world of society, I had of course, no means of guessing. The place had an air of solitude that daunted even a solitary like myself ; the wind cried in the chimneys with a strange and wailing note ; and it was with a sense of escape, as if I were going indoors, that I turned away and driving my cart before me entered the skirts of the wood.

The Sea-Wood of Graden had been planted to shelter the cultivated fields behind, and check the encroachment of the blowing sand. As you advanced into it from coastward, elders were succeeded by other hardy shrubs ; but the timber was all stunted and bushy ; it led a life of conflict ; the trees were accustomed to swing there all night long in fierce winter tempests ; and even in early spring, the leaves were already flying, and autumn was beginning, in this exposed plantation. Inland the ground rose into a little hill, which, along with the islet, served as a sailing mark for seamen. When the hill was open of the islet to the north, vessels must bear well to the eastward to clear Graden Ness and the Graden Bullers. In the lower ground, a streamlet ran among the trees, and, being dammed with dead leaves and clay of its own carrying, spread out every here and

there, and lay in stagnant pools. One or two ruined cottages were dotted about the wood; and, according to Northmour, these were ecclesiastical foundations, and in their time had sheltered pious hermits.

I found a den, or small hollow, where there was a spring of pure water; and there, clearing away the brambles, I pitched the tent, and made a fire to cook my supper. My horse I picketed farther in the wood where there was a patch of sward. The banks of the den not only concealed the light of my fire, but sheltered me from the wind, which was cold as well as high.

The life I was leading made me both hardy and frugal. I never drank but water, and rarely ate anything more costly than oatmeal; and I required so little sleep, that, although I rose with the peep of day, I would often lie long awake in the dark or starry watches of the night. Thus in Graden Sea-Wood, although I fell thankfully asleep by eight in the evening, I was awake again before eleven with a full possession of my faculties, and no sense of drowsiness or fatigue. I rose and sat by the fire, watching the trees and clouds tumultuously tossing and fleeing overhead, and hearkening to the wind and rollers along the shore; till at length, growing weary of inaction, I quitted the den, and strolled towards the borders of the wood. A young moon, buried in mist, gave a faint illumination to my steps; and the light grew brighter as I walked forth into the links. At the same moment, the wind, smelling salt of the

open ocean and carrying particles of sand, struck me with its full force, so that I had to bow my head.

When I raised it again to look about me, I was aware of a light in the pavilion. It was not stationary; but passed from one window to another, as though some one were reviewing the different apartments with a lamp or candle. I watched it for some seconds in great surprise. When I had arrived in the afternoon the house had been plainly deserted; now it was as plainly occupied. It was my first idea that a gang of thieves might have broken in and be now ransacking Northmour's cupboards, which were many and not ill supplied. But what should bring thieves to Graden Easter? And, again, all the shutters had been thrown open, and it would have been more in the character of such gentry to close them. I dismissed the notion, and fell back upon another. Northmour himself must have arrived, and was now airing and inspecting the pavilion.

I have said that there was no real affection between this man and me; but, had I loved him like a brother, I was then so much in love with solitude that I should none the less have shunned his company. As it was, I turned and ran for it; and it was with genuine satisfaction that I found myself safely back beside the fire. I had escaped an acquaintance; I should have one more night in comfort. In the morning, I might either slip away before Northmour was abroad, or pay him as short a visit as I chose.

But when morning came, I thought the situation so diverting that I forgot my shyness. Northmour was at my mercy ; I arranged a good practical jest, though I knew well that my neighbor was not the man to jest with in security ; and, chuckling beforehand over its success, took my place among the elders at the edge of the wood, whence I could command the door of the pavilion. The shutters were all once more closed, which I remember thinking odd ; and the house, with its white walls and green venetians, looked spruce and habitable in the morning light. Hour after hour passed, and still no sign of Northmour. I knew him for a sluggard in the morning ; but, as it drew on towards noon, I lost my patience. To say the truth, I had promised myself to break my fast in the pavilion, and hunger began to prick me sharply. It was a pity to let the opportunity go by without some cause for mirth ; but the grosser appetite prevailed, and I relinquished my jest with regret, and sallied from the wood.

The appearance of the house affected me, as I drew near, with disquietude. It seemed unchanged since last evening ; and I had expected it, I scarce knew why, to wear some external signs of habitation. But no : the windows were all closely shuttered, the chimneys breathed no smoke, and the front door itself was closely padlocked. Northmour, therefore, had entered by the back ; this was the natural, and, indeed, the necessary conclusion ; and you may judge of my surprise, when on turn-

ing the house, I found the back door similarly secured.

My mind at once reverted to the original theory of thieves; and I blamed myself sharply for my last night's inaction. I examined all the windows on the lower story, but none of them had been tampered with; I tried the padlocks, but they were both secure. It thus became a problem how the thieves, if thieves they were, had managed to enter the house. They must have got, I reasoned, upon the roof of the outhouse where Northmour used to keep his photographic battery; and from thence, either by the window of the study or that of my old bedroom, completed their burglarious entry.

I followed what I supposed was their example; and, getting on the roof, tried the shutters of each room. Both were secure; but I was not to be beaten; and, with a little force, one of them flew open, grazing, as it did so, the back of my hand. I remember, I put the wound to my mouth, and stood for perhaps half a minute licking it like a dog, and mechanically gazing behind me over the waste links and the sea; and, in that space of time, my eye made note of a large schooner yacht some miles to the north-east. Then I threw up the window and climbed in.

I went over the house, and nothing can express my mystification. There was no sign of disorder, but, on the contrary, the rooms were unusually clean and pleasant. I found fires laid, ready for lighting; three bedrooms prepared with a luxury

quite foreign to Northmour's habits, and with water in the ewers and the beds turned down ; a table set for three in the dining-room ; and an ample supply of cold meats, game and vegetables on the pantry shelves. There were guests expected, that was plain ; but why guests, when Northmour hated society ? And, above all, why was the house thus stealthily prepared at dead of night ? and why were the shutters closed and the doors padlocked ?

I effaced all traces of my visit, and came forth from the window feeling sobered and concerned.

The schooner yacht was still in the same place ; and it flashed for a moment through my mind that this might be the *Red Earl* bringing the owner of the pavilion and his guests. But the vessel's head was set the other way.

CHAPTER II.

TELLS OF THE NOCTURNAL LANDING FROM THE YACHT.

I RETURNED to the den to cook myself a meal, of which I stood in great need, as well as to care for my horse, whom I had somewhat neglected in the morning. From time to time I went down to the edge of the wood ; but there was no change in the pavilion, and not a human creature was seen all day upon the links. The schooner in the offing was the one touch of life within my range of vision. She,

apparently with no set object, stood off and on or lay to, hour after hour; but as the evening deepened, she drew steadily nearer. I became more convinced that she carried Northmour and his friends, and that they would probably come ashore after dark; not only because that was of a piece with the secresy of the preparations, but because the tide would not have flowed sufficiently before eleven to cover Graden Floe and the other sea quags that fortified the shore against invaders.

All day the wind had been going down, and the sea along with it; but there was a return towards sunset of the heavy weather of the day before. The night set in pitch dark. The wind came off the sea in squalls, like the firing of a battery of cannon; now and then there was a flaw of rain, and the surf rolled heavier with the rising tide. I was down at my observatory among the elders, when a light was run up to the masthead of the schooner, and showed she was closer in than when I had last seen her by the dying daylight. I concluded that this must be a signal to Northmour's associates on shore; and, stepping forth into the links, looked around me for something in response.

A small footpath ran along the margin of the wood, and formed the most direct communication between the pavilion and the mansion house; and, as I cast my eyes to that side, I saw a spark of light, not a quarter of a mile away, and rapidly approaching. From its uneven course it appeared to be the light of a lantern carried by a person who followed the wind-

ings of the path, and was often staggered and taken aback by the more violent squalls. I concealed myself once more among the elders, and waited eagerly for the new comer's advance. It proved to be a woman; and, as she passed within half a rod of my ambush, I was able to recognize the features. The deaf and silent old dame, who had nursed Northmour in his childhood, was his associate in this underhand affair.

I followed her at a little distance, taking advantage of the innumerable heights and hollows, concealed by the darkness, and favored not only by the nurse's deafness, but the uproar of the wind and surf. She entered the pavilion, and, going at once to the upper story, opened and set a light in one of the windows that looked towards the sea. Immediately afterwards the light at the schooner's masthead was run down and extinguished. Its purpose had been attained, and those on board were sure that they were expected. The old woman resumed her preparations; although the other shutters remained closed, I could see a glimmer going to and fro about the house; and a gush of sparks from one chimney after another soon told me that the fires were being kindled.

Northmour and his guests, I was now persuaded, would come ashore as soon as there was water on the floe. It was a wild night for boat service; and I felt some alarm mingle with my curiosity as I reflected on the danger of the landing. My old acquaintance, it was true, was the most eccentric of

men ; but the present eccentricity was both disquieting and lugubrious to consider. A variety of feelings thus led me towards the beach, where I lay flat on my face in a hollow within six feet of the track that led to the pavilion. Thence, I should have the satisfaction of recognizing the arrivals, and, if they should prove to be acquaintances, greeting them as soon as they had landed.

Some time before eleven, while the tide was still dangerously low, a boat's lantern appeared close in shore ; and, my attention being thus awakened, I could perceive another still far to seaward, violently tossed, and sometimes hidden by the billows. The weather, which was getting dirtier as the night went on, and the perilous situation of the yacht upon a lee-shore, had probably driven them to attempt a landing at the earliest possible moment.

A little afterwards, four yachtsmen carrying a very heavy chest, and guided by a fifth with a lantern, passed close in front of me as I lay, and were admitted to the pavilion by the nurse. They returned to the beach, and passed me a third time with another chest, larger but apparently not so heavy as the first. A third time they made the transit ; and on this occasion one of the yachtsmen carried a leather portmanteau, and the others a lady's trunk and carriage bag. My curiosity was sharply excited. If a woman were among the guests of Northmour, it would show a change in his habits and an apostasy from his pet theories of life, well calculated to fill me with surprise. When he and I

dwelt there together, the pavilion had been a temple of misogyny. And now, one of the detested sex was to be installed under its roof. I remembered one or two particulars, a few notes of daintiness and almost of coquetry which had struck me the day before as I surveyed the preparations in the house; their purpose was now clear, and I thought myself dull not to have perceived it from the first.

While I was thus reflecting a second lantern drew near me from the beach. It was carried by a yachtsman whom I had not yet seen, and who was conducting two other persons to the pavilion. These two persons were unquestionably the guests for whom the house was made ready; and, straining eye and ear, I set myself to watch them as they passed. One was an unusually tall man, in a traveling hat slouched over his eyes, and a highland cape closely buttoned and turned up so as to conceal his face. You could make out no more of him than that he was, as I have said, unusually tall, and walked feebly with a heavy stoop. By his side, and either clinging to him or giving him support—I could not make out which—was a young, tall, and slender figure of a woman. She was extremely pale; but in the light of the lantern her face was so marred by strong and changing shadows, that she might equally well have been as ugly as sin or as beautiful as I afterwards found her to be.

When they were just abreast of me, the girl made some remark which was drowned by the noise of the wind.

"Hush!" said her companion; and there was something in the tone with which the word was uttered that thrilled and rather shook my spirits. It seemed to breathe from a bosom laboring under the deadliest terror; I have never heard another syllable so expressive; and I still hear it again when I am feverish at night, and my mind runs upon old times. The man turned towards the girl as he spoke; I had a glimpse of much red beard and a nose which seemed to have been broken in youth; and his light eyes seemed shining in his face with some strong and unpleasant emotion.

But these two passed on and were admitted in their turn to the pavilion.

One by one, or in groups, the seamen returned to the beach. The wind brought me the sound of a rough voice crying, "Shove off!" Then, after a pause, another lantern drew near. It was Northmour alone.

My wife and I, a man and a woman, have often agreed to wonder how a person could be, at the same time, so handsome and so repulsive as Northmour. He had the appearance of a finished gentleman; his face bore every mark of intelligence and courage, but you had only to look at him, even in his most amiable moment, to see that he had the temper of a slave captain. I never knew a character that was both explosive and revengeful to the same degree; he combined the vivacity of the south with the sustained and deadly hatreds of the north; and both traits were plainly written on his face,

which was a sort of danger signal. In person he was tall, strong, and active; his hair and complexion very dark; his features handsomely designed, but spoiled by a menacing expression.

At that moment he was somewhat paler than by nature; he wore a heavy frown; and his lips worked, and he looked sharply round as he walked, like a man besieged with apprehensions. And yet I thought he had a look of triumph underlying all, as though he had already done much, and was near the end of an achievement.

Partly from a scruple of delicacy—which I dare say came too late—partly from the pleasure of startling an acquaintance, I desired to make my presence known to him without delay.

I got suddenly to my feet and stepped forward.

"Northmour!" said I.

I have never had so shocking a surprise in all my days. He leaped on me without a word; something shone in his hand; and he struck for my heart with a dagger. At the same moment I knocked him head over heels. Whether it was my quickness, or his own uncertainty, I know not; but the blade only grazed my shoulder while the hilt and his fist struck me violently on the mouth.

I fled, but not far. I had often and often observed the capabilities of the sand-hills for protracted ambush or stealthy advances and retreats; and, not ten yards from the scene of the scuffle, plumped down again upon the grass. The lantern had fallen and gone out. But what was my astonishment to

see Northmour slip at a bound into the pavilion, and hear him bar the door behind with a clang of iron!

He had not pursued me. He had run away. Northmour, whom I knew for the most implacable and daring of men, had run away! I could scarcely believe my reason; and yet in this strange business, where all was incredible, there was nothing to make a work about in an incredibility more or less. For why was the pavilion secretly prepared? Why had Northmour landed with his guests at dead of night, in half a gale of wind, and with the floe scarce covered? Why had he sought to kill me? Had he not recognized my voice? I wondered. And, above all, how had he come to have a dagger ready in his hand? A dagger, or even a sharp knife, seemed out of keeping with the age in which we lived; and a gentleman landing from his yacht on the shore of his own estate, even although it was at night and with some mysterious circumstances, does not usually, as a matter of fact, walk thus prepared for deadly onslaught. The more I reflected, the further I felt at sea. I recapitulated the elements of mystery, counting them on my fingers; the pavilion secretly prepared for guests; the guests landed at the risk of their lives and to the imminent peril of the yacht; the guests, or at least one of them, in undisguised and seemingly causeless terror; Northmour with a naked weapon; Northmour stabbing his most intimate acquaintance at a word; last, and not least strange, Northmour fleeing from the man whom he had sought to murder, and barricad-

ing himself, like a hunted creature, behind the door of the pavilion. Here were at least six separate causes for extreme surprise; each part and parcel with the others, and forming all together one consistent story. I felt almost ashamed to believe my own senses.

As I thus stood transfixed with wonder, I began to grow painfully conscious of the injuries I had received in the scuffle; skulked round among the sand-hills; and, by a devious path, regained the shelter of the wood. On the way, the old nurse passed again within several yards of me, still carrying her lantern, on the return journey to the mansion-house of Graden. This made a seventh suspicious feature in the case. Northmour and his guests, it appeared, were to cook and to do the cleaning for themselves, while the old woman continued to inhabit the big empty barrack among the policies. There must surely be great cause for secresy, when so many inconveniences were confronted to preserve it.

So thinking, I made my way to the den. For greater security, I trod out the embers of the fire, and lit my lantern to examine the wound upon my shoulder. It was a trifling hurt, although it bled somewhat freely, and I dressed it as well as I could (for its position made it difficult to reach) with some rag and cold water from the spring. While I was thus busied, I mentally declared war against Northmour and his mystery. I am not an angry man by nature, and I believe there was more curiosity than resentment in my heart. But war I certainly de-

clared; and, by way of preparation, I got out my revolver, and, having drawn the charges, cleaned and reloaded it with scrupulous care. Next I became preoccupied about my horse. It might break loose, or fall to neighing, and so betray my camp in the Sea-Wood. I determined to rid myself of its neighborhood; and long before dawn I was leading it over the links in the direction of the fisher village.

CHAPTER III.

TELLS HOW I BECAME ACQUAINTED WITH MY WIFE.

For two days I skulked round the pavilion, profiting by the uneven surface of the links. I became an adept in the necessary tactics. These low hillocks and shallow dells, running one into another, became a kind of cloak of darkness for my enthralling, but perhaps, dishonorable, pursuit. Yet, in spite of this advantage, I could learn but little of Northmour or his guests.

Fresh provisions were brought under cover of darkness by the old woman from the mansion-house. Northmour, and the young lady, sometimes together, but more often singly, would walk for an hour or two at a time on the beach beside the quicksand. I could not but conclude that this promenade was chosen with an eye to secresy; for the spot was open only to the seaward. But it suited me not less excellently; the highest and most accidented of the

sand-hills immediately adjoined; and from these, lying flat in a hollow, I could overlook Northmour or the young lady as they walked.

The tall man seemed to have disappeared. Not only did he never cross the threshold, but he never so much as showed face at a window; or, at least, not so far as I could see; for I dared not creep forward beyond a certain distance in the day, since the upper floor commanded the bottoms of the links; and at night, when I could venture farther, the lower windows were barricaded as if to stand a siege. Sometimes I thought the tall man must be confined to bed, for I remembered the feebleness of his gait; and sometimes I thought he must have gone clear away, and that Northmour and the young lady remained alone together in the pavilion. The idea, even then, displeased me.

Whether or not this pair were man and wife, I had seen abundant reason to doubt the friendliness of their relation. Although I could hear nothing of what they said, and rarely so much as glean a decided expression on the face of either, there was a distance, almost a stiffness, in their bearing which showed them to be either unfamiliar or at enmity. The girl walked faster when she was with Northmour than when she was alone; and I conceived that any inclination between a man and a woman would rather delay than accelerate the step. Moreover, she kept a good yard free of him, and trailed her umbrella, as if it were a barrier, on the side between them. Northmour kept sidling closer; and,

as the girl retired from his advance, their course lay at a sort of diagonal across the beach, and would have landed them in the surf had it been long enough continued. But, when it was imminent, the girl would unostentatiously change sides and put Northmour between her and the sea. I watched these manœuvres, for my part, with high enjoyment and approval, and chuckled to myself at every move.

On the morning of the third day, she walked alone for some time, and I perceived, to my great concern, that she was more than once in tears. You will see that my heart was already interested more than I supposed. She had a firm yet airy motion of the body, and carried her head with unimaginable grace ; every step was a thing to look at, and she seemed in my eyes to breathe sweetness and distinction.

The day was so agreeable, being calm and sunshiny, with a tranquil sea, and yet with a healthful piquancy and vigor in the air, that, contrary to custom, she was tempted forth a second time to walk. On this occasion she was accompanied by Northmour, and they had been but a short while on the beach, when I saw him take forcible possession of her hand. She struggled, and uttered a cry that was almost a scream. I sprang to my feet, unmindful of my strange position ; but, ere I had taken a step, I saw Northmour bare-headed and bowing very low, as if to apologize ; and dropped again at once into my ambush. A few words were interchanged ; and then, with another bow, he left the beach to re-

turn to the pavilion. He passed not far from me, and I could see him, flushed and lowering, and cutting savagely with his cane among the grass. It was not without satisfaction that I recognized my own handiwork in a great cut under his right eye, and a considerable discoloration round the socket.

For some time the girl remained where he had left her, looking out past the islet and over the bright sea. Then with a start, as one who throws off preoccupation and puts energy again upon its mettle, she broke into a rapid and decisive walk. She also was much incensed by what had passed. She had forgotten where she was. And I beheld her walk straight into the borders of the quicksand where it is most abrupt and dangerous. Two or three steps farther and her life would have been in serious jeopardy, when I slid down the face of the sand-hill, which is there precipitous, and, running half-way forward, called to her to stop.

She did so, and turned round. There was not a tremor of fear in her behavior, and she marched directly up to me like a queen. I was barefoot, and clad like a common sailor, save for an Egyptian scarf round my waist ; and she probably took me at first for some one from the fisher village, straying after bait. As for her, when I thus saw her face to face, her eyes set steadily and imperiously upon mine, I was filled with admiration and astonishment, and thought her even more beautiful than I had looked to find her. Nor could I think enough of one who,

acting with so much boldness, yet preserved a maidenly air that was both quaint and engaging; for my wife kept an old-fashioned precision of manner through all her admirable life—an excellent thing in woman, since it sets another value on her sweet familiarities.

"What does this mean?" she asked.

"You were walking," I told her, "directly into Graden Floe."

"You do not belong to these parts," she said again. "You speak like an educated man."

"I believe I have a right to that name," said I, "although in this disguise."

But her woman's eye had already detected the sash.

"Oh!" she said; "your sash betrays you."

"You have said the word *betray*," I resumed. "May I ask you not to betray me? I was obliged to disclose myself in your interest; but if Northmour learned my presence it might be worse than disagreeable for me."

"Do you know," she asked, "to whom you are speaking?"

"Not to Mr. Northmour's wife?" I asked, by way of answer.

She shook her head. All this while she was studying my face with an embarrassing intentness. Then she broke out—

"You have an honest face. Be honest like your face, sir, and tell me what you want and what you are afraid of. Do you think I could hurt you? I

believe you have far more power to injure me! And yet you do not look unkind. What do you mean—you, a gentleman—by skulking like a spy about this desolate place? Tell me," she said, "who is it you hate?"

"I hate no one," I answered; "and I fear no one face to face. My name is Cassilis—Frank Cassilis. I lead the life of a vagabond for my own good pleasure. I am one of Northmour's oldest friends; and three nights ago, when I addressed him on these links, he stabbed me in the shoulder with a knife."

"It was you!" she said.

"Why he did so," I continued, disregarding the interruption, "is more than I can guess, and more than I care to know. I have not many friends, nor am I very susceptible to friendship; but no man shall drive me from a place by terror. I had camped in Graden Sea-Wood ere he came; I camp in it still. If you think I mean harm to you or yours, madam, the remedy is in your hand. Tell him that my camp is in the Hemlock Den, and to-night he can stab me in safety while I sleep."

With this I doffed my cap to her, and scrambled up once more among the sand-hills. I do not know why, but I felt a prodigious sense of injustice, and felt like a hero and a martyr; while, as a matter of fact, I had not a word to say in my defence, nor so much as one plausible reason to offer for my conduct. I had stayed at Graden out of a curiosity natural enough, but undignified; and though there was another motive growing in along with the first,

it was not one which, at that period, I could have properly explained to the lady of my heart.

Certainly, that night, I thought of no one else; and, though her whole conduct and position seemed suspicious, I could not find it in my heart to entertain a doubt of her integrity. I could have staked my life that she was clear of blame, and, though all was dark at the present, that the explanation of the mystery would show her part in these events to be both right and needful. It was true, let me cudgel my imagination as I pleased, that I could invent no theory of her relations to Northmour; but I felt none the less sure of my conclusion because it was founded on instinct in place of reason, and as I may say, went to sleep that night with the thought of her under my pillow.

Next day she came out about the same hour alone, and as soon as the sand-hills concealed her from the pavilion, drew nearer to the edge, and called me by name in guarded tones. I was astonished to observe that she was deadly pale, and seemingly under the influence of strong emotion.

"Mr. Cassilis!" she cried; "Mr. Cassilis!"

I appeared at once, and leaped down upon the beach. A remarkable air of relief overspread her countenance as soon as she saw me.

"Oh!" she cried, with a hoarse sound, like one whose bosom has been lightened of weight. And then, "Thank God, you are still safe!" she added; "I knew, if you were, you would be here." (Was not this strange? So swiftly and wisely does Nat-

ure prepare our hearts for these great life-long intimacies, that both my wife and I had been given a presentiment on this the second day of our acquaintance. I had even then hoped that she would seek me; she had felt sure that she would find me.) "Do not," she went on swiftly, "do not stay in this place. Promise me that you will sleep no longer in that wood. You do not know how I suffer; all last night I could not sleep for thinking of your peril."

"Peril?" I repeated. "Peril from whom? From Northmour?"

"Not so," she said. "Did you think I would tell him after what you said?"

"Not from Northmour?" I repeated. "Then how? From whom? I see none to be afraid of."

"You must not ask me," was her reply, "for I am not free to tell you. Only believe me, and go hence —believe me, and go away quickly, quickly, for your life!"

An appeal to his alarm is never a good plan to rid oneself of a spirited young man. My obstinacy was but increased by what she said, and I made it a point of honor to remain. And her solicitude for my safety still more confirmed me in the resolve.

"You must not think me inquisitive, madam," I replied; "but, if Graden is so dangerous a place, you yourself perhaps remain here at some risk."

She only looked at me reproachfully.

"You and your father——," I resumed; but she interrupted me almost with a gasp.

"My father! How do you know that?" she cried.

"I saw you together when you landed," was my answer; and I do not know why, but it seemed satisfactory to both of us, as indeed it was the truth. "But," I continued, "you need have no fear from me. I see you have some reason to be secret, and, you may believe me, your secret is as safe with me as if I were in Graden Floe. I have scarce spoken to anyone for years; my horse is my only companion, and even he, poor beast, is not beside me. You see, then, you may count on me for silence. So tell me the truth, my dear young lady, are you not in danger?"

"Mr. Northmour says you are an honorable man," she returned, "and I believe it when I see you. I will tell you so much; you are right; we are in dreadful, dreadful danger, and you share it by remaining where you are."

"Ah!" said I; "you have heard of me from Northmour? And he gives me a good character?"

"I asked him about you last night," was her reply. "I pretended," she hesitated, "I pretended to have met you long ago, and spoken to you of him. It was not true; but I could not help myself without betraying you, and you had put me in a difficulty. He praised you highly."

"And—you may permit me one question—does this danger come from Northmour?" I asked.

"From Mr. Northmour?" she cried. "Oh, no; he stays with us to share it."

"While you propose that I should run away?" I said. "You do not rate me very high."

"Why should you stay?" she asked. "You are no friend of ours."

I know not what came over me, for I had not been conscious of a similar weakness since I was a child, but I was so mortified by this retort that my eyes pricked and filled with tears, as I continued to gaze upon her face.

"No, no," she said, in a changed voice; "I did not mean the words unkindly."

"It was I who offended," I said; and I held out my hand with a look of appeal that somehow touched her, for she gave me hers at once and even eagerly. I held it for awhile in mine and gazed into her eyes. It was she who first tore her hand away, and, forgetting all about her request and the promise she had sought to extort, ran at the top of her speed, and without turning, till she was out of sight. And then I knew that I loved her, and thought in my glad heart that she—she herself—was not indifferent to my suit. Many a time she has denied it in after days, but it was with a smiling and not a serious denial. For my part, I am sure our hands would not have lain so closely in each other if she had not begun to melt to me already. And, when all is said, it is no great contention, since, by her own avowal, she began to love me on the morrow.

And yet on the morrow very little took place.

She came and called me down as on the day before, upbraided me for lingering at Graden, and, when she found I was still obdurate, began to ask me more particularly as to my arrival. I told her by what series of accidents I had come to witness their disembarkation, and how I had determined to remain, partly from the interest which had been wakened in me by Northmour's guests, and partly because of his own murderous attack. As to the former, I fear I was disingenuous, and led her to regard herself as having been an attraction to me from the first moment that I saw her on the links. It relieves my heart to make this confession even now, when my wife is with God, and already knows all things, and the honesty of my purpose even in this; for while she lived, although it often pricked my conscience, I had never the hardihood to undeceive her. Even a little secret, in such a married life as ours, is like the rose-leaf which kept the Princess from her sleep.

From this the talk branched into other subjects, and I told her much about my lonely and wandering existence; she, for her part, giving ear, and saying little. Although we spoke very naturally, and latterly on topics that might seem indifferent, we were both sweetly agitated. Too soon it was time for her to go; and we separated, as if by mutual consent, without shaking hands, for both knew that, between us, it was no idle ceremony.

The next, and that was the fourth day of our acquaintance, we met in the same spot, but early in the morning, with much familiarity and yet much

timidity on either side. When she had once more spoken about my danger—and that, I understood, was her excuse for coming—I, who had prepared a great deal of talk during the night, began to tell her how highly I valued her kind interest, and how no one had ever cared to hear about my life, nor had I ever cared to relate it, before yesterday. Suddenly she interrupted me, saying with vehemence—

"And yet, if you knew who I was, you would not so much as speak to me!"

I told her such a thought was madness, and, little as we had met, I counted her already a dear friend; but my protestations seemed only to make her more desperate.

"My father is hiding!" she cried.

"My dear," I said, forgetting for the first time to add "young lady," "what do I care? If he were in hiding twenty times over, would it make one thought of change in you?"

"Ah, but the cause!" she cried, "the cause! It is ——" she faltered for a second—"it is disgraceful to us!"

CHAPTER IV.

TELLS IN WHAT A STARTLING MANNER I LEARNED THAT I WAS NOT ALONE IN GRADEN SEA-WOOD.

THIS was my wife's story, as I drew it from her among tears and sobs. Her name was Clara Huddlestone: it sounded very beautiful in my ears;

but not so beautiful as that other name of Clara Cassilis, which she wore during the longer and, I thank God, the happier portion of her life. Her father, Bernard Huddlestone, had been a private banker in a very large way of business. Many years before, his affairs becoming disordered, he had been led to try dangerous, and at last criminal, expedients to retrieve himself from ruin. All was in vain; he became more and more cruelly involved, and found his honor lost at the same moment with his fortune. About this period, Northmour had been courting his daughter with great assiduity, though with small encouragement; and to him, knowing him thus disposed in his favor, Bernard Huddlestone turned for help in his extremity. It was not merely ruin and dishonor, nor merely a legal condemnation, that the unhappy man had brought on his head. It seems he could have gone to prison with a light heart. What he feared, what kept him awake at night or recalled him from slumber into frenzy, was some secret, sudden, and unlawful attempt upon his life. Hence, he desired to bury his existence and escape to one of the islands in the South Pacific, and it was in Northmour's yacht, the *Red Earl*, that he designed to go. The yacht picked them up clandestinely upon the coast of Wales, and had once more deposited them at Graden, till she could be refitted and provisioned for the longer voyage. Nor could Clara doubt that her hand had been stipulated as the price of passage. For, although Northmour was neither unkind or discourteous, he had shown

himself in several instances somewhat overbold in speech and manner.

I listened, I need not say, with fixed attention, and put many questions as to the more mysterious part. It was in vain. She had no clear idea of what the blow was, nor of how it was expected to fall. Her father's alarm was unfeigned and physically prostrating, and he had thought more than once of making an unconditional surrender to the police. But the scheme was finally abandoned, for he was convinced that not even the strength of our English prisons could shelter him from his pursuers. He had had many affairs with Italy, and with Italians resident in London, in the later years of his business; and these last, as Clara fancied, were somehow connected with the doom that threatened him. He had shown great terror at the presence of an Italian seaman on board the *Red Earl*, and had bitterly and repeatedly accused Northmour in consequence. The latter had protested that Beppo (that was the seaman's name) was a capital fellow, and could be trusted to the death; but Mr. Huddlestone had continued ever since to declare that all was lost, that it was only a question of days, and that Beppo would be the ruin of him yet.

I regarded the whole story as the hallucination of a mind shaken by calamity. He had suffered heavy loss by his Italian transactions; and hence the sight of an Italian was hateful to him, and the principal part in his nightmare would naturally enough be played by one of that nation.

"What your father wants," I said, "is a good doctor and some calming medicine."

"But Mr. Northmour?" objected your mother. "He is untroubled by losses, and yet he shares in this terror."

I could not help laughing at what I considered her simplicity.

"My dear," said I, "you have told me yourself what reward he has to look for. All is fair in love, you must remember; and if Northmour foments your father's terrors, it is not at all because he is afraid of any Italian man, but simply because he is infatuated with a charming English woman."

She reminded me of his attack upon myself on the night of the disembarkation, and this I was unable to explain. In short, and from one thing to another, it was agreed between us, that I should set out at once for the fisher village, Graden Wester, as it was called, look up all the newspapers I could find, and see for myself if there seemed any basis of fact for these continued alarms. The next morning, at the same hour and place, I was to make my report to Clara. She said no more on that occasion about my departure; nor, indeed, did she make it a secret that she clung to the thought of my proximity as something helpful and pleasant; and, for my part, I could not have left her, if she had gone upon her knees to ask it.

I reached Graden Wester before ten in the forenoon; for in those days I was an excellent pedestrian, and the distance, as I think I have said, was

little over seven miles; fine walking all the way upon the springy turf. The village is one of the bleakest on that coast, which is saying much: there is a church in a hollow, a miserable haven in the rocks, where many boats have been lost as they returned from fishing; two or three score of stone houses arranged along the beach and in two streets, one leading from the harbor, and another striking out from it at right angles; and, at the corner of these two, a very dark and cheerless tavern, by way of principal hotel.

I had dressed myself somewhat more suitably to my station in life, and at once called upon the minister in his little manse beside the graveyard. He knew me, although it was more than nine years since we had met; and when I told him that I had been long upon a walking tour, and was behind with the news, readily lent me an armful of newspapers, dating from a month back to the day before. With these I sought the tavern, and ordering some breakfast, sat down to study the "Huddlestone Failure."

It had been, it appeared, a very flagrant case. Thousands of persons were reduced to poverty; and one in particular had blown out his brains as soon as payment was suspended. It was strange to myself that, while I read these details, I continued rather to sympathize with Mr. Huddlestone than with his victims; so complete already was the empire of my love for my wife. A price was naturally set upon the banker's head; and, as the case was inexcusable and the public indignation thoroughly aroused, the

unusual figure of 750*l.* was offered for his capture He was reported to have large sums of money in his possession. One day, he had been heard of in Spain; the next, there was sure intelligence that he was still lurking between Manchester and Liverpool, or along the border of Wales; and the day after, a telegram would announce his arrival in Cuba or Yucatan. But in all this there was no word of an Italian, nor any sign of mystery.

In the very last paper, however, there was one item not so clear. The accountants who were charged to verify the failure, had, it seemed, come upon the traces of a very large number of thousands, which figured for some time in the transactions of the house of Huddlestone; but which came from nowhere, and disappeared in the same mysterious fashion. It was only once referred to by name, and then under the initials "X. X."; but it had plainly been floated for the first time into the business at a period of great depression some six years ago. The name of a distinguished Royal personage had been mentioned by rumor in connection with this sum. "The cowardly desperado"—such, I remember, was the editorial expression—was supposed to have escaped with a large part of this mysterious fund still in his possession.

I was still brooding over the fact, and trying to torture it into some connection with Mr. Huddlestone's danger, when a man entered the tavern and asked for some bread and cheese with a decided foreign accent.

"*Siete Italiano?*" said I.

"*Sì signor,*" was the reply.

I said it was unusually far north to find one of his compatriots; at which he shrugged his shoulders, and replied that a man would go anywhere to find work. What work he could hope to find at Graden Wester, I was totally unable to conceive; and the incident struck so unpleasantly upon my mind, that I asked the landlord, while he was counting me some change, whether he had ever before seen an Italian in the village. He said he had once seen some Norwegians, who had been shipwrecked on the other side of Graden Ness and rescued by the lifeboat from Cauld-haven.

"No!" said I; "but an Italian, like the man who has just had bread and cheese."

"What?" cried he, "yon black-avised fellow wi' the teeth? Was he an I-talian? Weel, yon's the first that ever I saw, an' I dare say he's like to be the last."

Even as he was speaking, I raised my eyes, and, casting a glance into the street, beheld three men in earnest conversation together, and not thirty yards away. One of them was my recent companion in the tavern parlor; the other two, by their handsome, sallow features and soft hats, should evidently belong to the same race. A crowd of village children stood around them, gesticulating and talking gibberish in imitation. The trio looked singularly foreign to the bleak dirty street in which they were standing, and the dark gray heaven that overspread them; and I confess my incredulity received at that moment a shock from which it never recovered. I might rea-

son with myself as I pleased, but I could not argue down the effect of what I had seen, and I began to share in the Italian terror.

It was already drawing towards the close of the day before I had returned the newspapers at the manse, and got well forward on to the links on my way home. I shall never forget that walk. It grew very cold and boisterous ; the wind sang in the short grass about my feet ; thin rain showers came running on the gusts ; and an immense mountain range of clouds began to arise out of the bosom of the sea. It would be hard to imagine a more dismal evening ; and whether it was from these external influences, or because my nerves were already affected by what I had heard and seen, my thoughts were as gloomy as the weather.

The upper windows of the pavilion commanded a considerable spread of links in the direction of Graden Wester. To avoid observation, it was necessary to hug the beach until I had gained cover from the higher sand-hills on the little headland, when I might strike across, through the hollows, for the margin of the wood. The sun was about setting ; the tide was low, and all the quicksands uncovered ; and I was moving along, lost in unpleasant thought, when I was suddenly thunderstruck to perceive the prints of human feet. They ran parallel to my own course, but low down upon the beach instead of along the border of the turf ; and, when I examined them, I saw at once, by the size and coarseness of the impression, that it was a stranger to me and to those in

the pavilion who had recently passed that way. Not only so; but from the recklessness of the course which he had followed, steering near to the most formidable portions of the sand, he was as evidently a stranger to the country and to the ill-repute of Graden beach.

Step by step I followed the prints; until, a quarter of a mile further, I beheld them die away into the south-eastern boundary of Graden Floe. There, whoever he was, the miserable man had perished. One or two gulls, who had, perhaps, seen him disappear, wheeled over his sepulchre with their usual melancholy piping. The sun had broken through the clouds by a last effort, and colored the wide level of quicksands with a dusky purple. I stood for some time gazing at the spot, chilled and disheartened by my own reflections, and with a strong and commanding consciousness of death. I remember wondering how long the tragedy had taken, and whether his screams had been audible at the pavilion. And then, making a strong resolution, I was about to tear myself away, when a gust fiercer than usual fell upon this quarter of the beach, and I saw now, whirling high in the air, now skimming lightly across the surface of the sands, a soft, black, felt hat, somewhat conical in shape, such as I had remarked already on the heads of the Italians.

I believe, but I am not sure, that I uttered a cry. The wind was driving the hat shoreward, and I ran round the border of the floe to be ready against its arrival. The gust fell, dropping the hat for a while

upon the quicksand, and then, once more freshening, landed it a few yards from where I stood. I seized it with the interest you may imagine. It had seen some service; indeed, it was rustier than either of those I had seen that day upon the street. The lining was red, stamped with the name of the maker, which I have forgotten, and that of the place of manufacture, Venedig. This (it is not yet forgotten) was the name given by the Austrians to the beautiful city of Venice, then, and for long after, a part of their dominions.

The shock was complete. I saw imaginary Italians upon every side; and for the first, and, I may say, for the last time in my experience, became overpowered by what is called panic terror. I knew nothing, that is, to be afraid of, and yet I admit that I was heartily afraid; and it was with a sensible reluctance that I returned to my exposed and solitary camp in the Sea-Wood.

There I ate some cold porridge which had been left over from the night before, for I was disinclined to make a fire; and, feeling strengthened and reassured, dismissed all these fanciful terrors from my mind, and lay down to sleep with composure.

How long I may have slept it is impossible for me to guess; but I was awakened at last by a sudden, blinding flash of light into my face. It woke me like a blow. In an instant I was upon my knees. But the light had gone as suddenly as it came. The darkness was intense. And as it was blowing

great guns from the sea and pouring with rain, the noises of the storm effectually concealed all others.

It was, I daresay, half a minute before I regained my self-possession. But for two circumstances, I should have thought I had been awakened by some new and vivid form of nightmare. First, the flap of my tent, which I had shut carefully when I retired, was now unfastened; and, second, I could still perceive, with a sharpness that excluded any theory of hallucination, the smell of hot metal and of burning oil. The conclusion was obvious. I had been awakened by some one flashing a bull's-eye lantern in my face. It had been but a flash, and away. He had seen my face, and then gone. I asked myself the object of so strange a proceeding, and the answer came pat. The man, whoever he was, had thought to recognize me, and he had not. There was yet another question unsolved; and to this, I may say, I feared to give an answer; if he had recognized me, what would he have done?

My fears were immediately diverted from myself, for I saw that I had been visited in a mistake; and I became persuaded that some dreadful danger threatened the pavilion. It required some nerve to issue forth into the black and intricate thicket which surrounded and overhung the den; but I groped my way to the links, drenched with rain, beaten upon and deafened by the gusts, and fearing at every step to lay my hand upon some lurking adversary. The darkness was so complete that I

might have been surrounded by an army and yet none the wiser, and the uproar of the gale so loud that my hearing was as useless as my sight.

For the rest of the night, which seemed interminably long, I patroled the vicinity of the pavilion, without seeing a living creature or hearing any noise but the concert of the wind, the sea, and the rain. A light in the upper story filtered through a cranny in the shutter, and kept me company till the approach of dawn.

CHAPTER V.

TELLS OF AN INTERVIEW BETWEEN NORTHMOUR, CLARA, AND MYSELF.

WITH the first peep of day, I retired from the open to my old lair among the sandhills, there to await the coming of my wife. The morning was gray, wild, and melancholy; the wind moderated before sunrise, and then went about, and blew in puffs from the shore; the sea began to go down, but the rain still fell without mercy. Over all the wilderness of links there was not a creature to be seen. Yet I felt sure the neighborhood was alive with skulking foes. The light that had been so suddenly and surprisingly flashed upon my face as I lay sleeping, and the hat that had been blown ashore by the wind from over Graden Floe, were two speaking signals of the peril that environed Clara and the party in the pavilion.

It was, perhaps, half-past seven, or nearer eight, before I saw the door open, and that dear figure come toward sme in the rain. I was waiting for her on the beach before she had crossed the sand-hills.

"I have had such trouble to come!" she cried. "They did not wish me to go walking in the rain."

"Clara," I said, "you are not frightened!"

"No," said she, with a simplicity that filled my heart with confidence. For my wife was the bravest as well as the best of women; in my experience, I have not found the two go always together, but with her they did; and she combined the extreme of fortitude with the most endearing and beautiful virtues.

I told her what had happened; and, though her cheek grew visibly paler, she retained perfect control over her senses.

"You see now that I am safe," said I in conclusion. "They do not mean to harm me; for, had they chosen, I was a dead man last night."

She laid her hand upon my arm.

"And I had no presentiment!" she cried.

Her accent thrilled me with delight. I put my arm about her, and strained her to my side; and, before either of us was aware, her hands were on my shoulders and my lips upon her mouth. Yet up to that moment no word of love had passed between us. To this time I remember the touch of her cheek, which was wet and cold with the rain; and many a time since, when she has been washing her face, I have kissed it again for the sake of that

morning on the beach. Now that she is taken from me, and I finish my pilgrimage alone, I recall our old loving kindness and the deep honesty and affection which united us, and my present loss seems but a trifle in comparison.

We may have thus stood for some seconds—for time passes quickly with lovers—before we were startled by a peal of laughter close at hand. It was not natural mirth, but seemed to be affected in order to conceal an angrier feeling. We both turned, though I still kept my left arm about Clara's waist; nor did she seek to withdraw herself; and there, a few paces off upon the beach, stood Northmour, his head lowered, his hands behind his back, his nostrils white with passion.

"Ah! Cassilis!" he said, as I disclosed my face.

"That same," said I; for I was not at all put about.

"And so, Miss Huddlestone," he continued slowly but savagely, "this is how you keep your faith to your father and to me? This is the value you set upon your father's life? And you are so infatuated with this young gentleman that you must brave ruin, and decency, and common human caution——"

"Miss Huddlestone——" I was beginning to interrupt him, when he, in his turn, cut in brutally——

"You hold your tongue," said he; "I am speaking to that girl."

"That girl, as you call her, is my wife," said I: and my wife only leaned a little nearer, so that I knew she had affirmed my words.

"Your what?" he cried. "You lie!"

"Northmour," I said, "we all know you have a bad temper, and I am the last man to be irritated by words. For all that, I propose that you speak lower, for I am convinced that we are not alone."

He looked round him, and it was plain my remark had in some degree sobered his passion. "What do you mean?" he asked.

I only said one word: "Italians."

He swore a round oath, and looked at us, from one to the other.

"Mr. Cassilis knows all that I know," said my wife.

"What I want to know," he broke out, "is where the devil Mr. Cassilis comes from, and what the devil Mr. Cassilis is doing here. You say you are married: that I do not believe. If you were, Graden Floe would soon divorce you; four minutes and a half, Cassilis. I keep my private cemetery for my friends."

"It took somewhat longer," said I, "for that Italian."

He looked at me for a moment half daunted, and then, almost civilly, asked me to tell my story. "You have too much the advantage of me, Cassilis," he added. I complied, of course; and he listened, with several ejaculations, while I told him how I had come to Graden; that it was I whom he had tried to murder on the night of landing; and what I had subsequently seen and heard of the Italians.

"Well," said he, when I had done, "it is here at

last; there is no mistake about that. And what, may I ask, do you propose to do?"

"I propose to stay with you and lend a hand," said I.

"You are a brave man," he returned, with a peculiar intonation.

"I am not afraid," said I.

"And so," he continued, "I am to understand that you two are married? And you stand up to it before my face, Miss Huddlestone?"

"We are not yet married," said Clara; "but we shall be as soon as we can."

"Bravo!" cried Northmour. "And the bargain? D—n it, you're not a fool, young woman; I may call a spade a spade with you. How about the bargain? You know as well as I do what your father's life depends upon. I have only to put my hands under my coat-tails and walk away, and his throat would be cut before the evening."

"Yes, Mr. Northmour," returned Clara, with great spirit; "but that is what you will never do. You made a bargain that was unworthy of a gentleman; but you are a gentleman for all that, and you will never desert a man whom you have begun to help."

"Aha!" said he. "You think I will give my yacht for nothing? You think I will risk my life and liberty for love of the old gentleman; and then, I suppose, be best man at the wedding, to wind up? Well," he added, with an odd smile, "perhaps you are not altogether wrong. But ask Cas-

silis here. *He* knows me. Am I a man to trust? Am I safe and scrupulous? Am I kind?"

"I know you talk a great deal, and sometimes, I think, very foolishly," replied Clara, "but I know you are a gentleman, and I am not in the least afraid."

He looked at her with a peculiar approval and admiration; then, turning to me, "Do you think I would give her up without a struggle, Frank?" said he. "I tell you plainly, you look out. The next time we come to blows——"

"Will make the third," I interrupted, smiling.

"Aye, true; so it will," he said. "I had forgotten. Well, the third time's lucky."

"The third time, you mean, you will have the crew of the *Red Earl* to help," I said.

"Do you hear him?" he asked, turning to my wife.

"I hear two men speaking like cowards," said she. "I should despise myself either to think or speak like that. And neither of you believe one word that you are saying, which makes it the more wicked and silly."

"She's a trump!" cried Northmour. "But she's not yet Mrs. Cassilis. I say no more. The present is not for me."

Then my wife surprised me.

"I leave you here," she said suddenly. "My father has been too long alone. But remember this: you are to be friends, for you are both good friends to me."

She has since told me her reason for this step. As long as she remained, she declares that we two would have continued to quarrel; and I suppose that she was right, for when she was gone we fell at once into a sort of confidentiality.

Northmour stared after her as she went away over the sand-hill.

"She is the only woman in the world!" he exclaimed with an oath. "Look at her action."

I, for my part, leaped at this opportunity for a little further light.

"See here, Northmour," said I; "we are all in a tight place, are we not?"

"I believe you, my boy," he answered, looking me in the eyes, and with great emphasis. "We have all hell upon us, that's the truth. You may believe me or not, but I'm afraid of my life."

"Tell me one thing," said I. "What are they after, these Italians? What do they want with Mr. Huddlestone?"

"Don't you know?" he cried. "The black old scamp had *carbonaro* funds on a deposit—two hundred and eighty thousand; and of course he gambled it away on stocks. There was to have been a revolution in the Tridentino, or Parma; but the revolution is off, and the whole wasp's nest is after Huddlestone. We shall be all lucky if we can save our skins."

"The *carbonari!*" I exclaimed; "God help him indeed!"

"Amen!" said Northmour. "And now, look

here: I have said that we are in a fix; and, frankly, I shall be glad of your help. If I can't save Huddlestone, I want at least to save the girl. Come and stay in the pavilion; and, there's my hand on it, I shall act as your friend until the old man is either clear or dead. But," he added, "once that is settled you become my rival once again, and I warn you—mind yourself."

"Done!" said I; and we shook hands.

"And now let us go directly to the fort," said Northmour; and he began to lead the way through the rain.

CHAPTER VI.

TELLS OF MY INTRODUCTION TO THE TALL MAN.

We were admitted to the pavilion by Clara, and I was surprised by the completeness and security of the defences. A barricade of great strength, and yet easy to displace, supported the door against any violence from without; and the shutters of the dining-room, into which I was led directly, and which was feebly illuminated by a lamp, were even more elaborately fortified. The panels were strengthened by bars and cross-bars; and these, in their turn, were kept in position by a system of braces and struts, some abutting on the floor, some on the roof, and others, in fine, against the opposite wall of the apartment. It was at once a solid and

well-designed piece of carpentry; and I did not seek to conceal my admiration.

"I am the engineer," said Northmour. "You remember the planks in the garden? Behold them!"

"I did not know you had so many talents," said I.

"Are you armed?" he continued, pointing to an array of guns and pistols, all in admirable order, which stood in line against the wall or were displayed upon the sideboard.

"Thank you," I returned; "I have gone armed since our last encounter. But, to tell you the truth, I have had nothing to eat since early yesterday evening."

Northmour produced some cold meat, to which I eagerly set myself, and a bottle of good Burgundy, by which, wet as I was, I did not scruple to profit. I have always been an extreme temperance man on principle; but it is useless to push principle to excess, and on this occasion I believe that I finished three-quarters of the bottle. As I ate, I still continued to admire the preparations for defence.

"We could stand a siege," I said at length.

"Ye—es," drawled Northmour; "a very little one, per—haps. It is not so much the strength of the pavilion I misdoubt; it is the double danger that kills me. If we get to shooting, wild as the country is, some one is sure to hear it, and then—why then it's the same thing, only different, as they say, caged by law, or killed by *carbonari*. There's the choice. It is a devilish bad thing to have the law against

you in this world, and so I tell the old gentleman up stairs. He is quite of my way of thinking."

"Speaking of that," said I, "what kind of person is he?"

"Oh, he?" cried the other; "he's a rancid fellow as far as he goes. I should like to have his neck wrung to-morrow by all the devils in Italy. I am not in this affair for him. You take me? I made a bargain for Missy's hand, and I mean to have it too."

"That, by the way," said I, "I understand. But how will Mr. Huddlestone take my intrusion?"

"Leave that to Clara," returned Northmour.

I could have struck him in the face for this coarse familiarity; but I respected the truce, as I am bound to say, did Northmour, and so long as the danger continued not a cloud arose in our relation. I bear him this testimony with the most unfeigned satisfaction; nor am I without pride when I look back upon my own behavior. For surely no two men were ever left in a position so invidious and irritating.

As soon as I had done eating, we proceeded to inspect the lower floor. Window by window we tried the different supports, now and then making an inconsiderable change; and the strokes of the hammer sounded with startling loudness through the house. I proposed, I remember, to make loopholes; but he told me they were already made in the windows of the upper story.

It was an anxious business this inspection, and left me down-hearted. There were two doors and five

windows to protect, and, counting Clara, only four of us to defend them against an unknown number of foes. I communicated my doubts to Northmour, who assured me, with unmoved composure, that he entirely shared them.

"Before morning," said he, "we shall all be butchered and buried in Graden Floe. For me, that is written."

I could not help shuddering at the mention of the quicksand, but reminded Northmour that our enemies had spared me in the wood.

"Do not flatter yourself," said he. "Then you were not in the same boat with the old gentleman; now you are. It's the floe for all of us, mark my words."

I trembled for Clara; and just then her dear voice was heard calling us to come upstairs. Northmour showed me the way, and, when he had reached the landing, knocked at the door of what used to be called *My Uncle's Bedroom*, as the founder of the pavilion had designed it especially for himself.

"Come in, Northmour; come in, dear Mr. Cassilis," said a voice from within.

Pushing open the door, Northmour admitted me before him into the apartment. As I came in I could see the daughter slipping out by the side door into the study, which had been prepared as her bedroom. In the bed, which was drawn back against the wall, instead of standing, as I had last seen it, boldly across the window, sat Bernard Huddlestone, the defaulting banker. Little as I had seen of him by the shifting light of the lantern on the links, I

had no difficulty in recognizing him for the same. He had a long and sallow countenance, surrounded by a long red beard and side-whiskers. His broken nose and high cheek-bones gave him somewhat the air of a Kalmuck, and his light eyes shone with the excitement of a high fever. He wore a skull-cap of black silk ; a huge Bible lay open before him on the bed, with a pair of gold spectacles in the place, and a pile of other books lay on the stand by his side. The green curtains lent a cadaverous shade to his cheek, and, as he sat propped on pillows, his great stature was painfully hunched, and his head protruded till it overhung his knees. I believe if he had not died otherwise, he must have fallen a victim to consumption in the course of but a very few weeks.

He held out to me a hand, long, thin, and disagreeably hairy.

"Come in, come in, Mr. Cassilis," said he. "Another protector—ahem!—another protector. Always welcome as a friend of my daughter's, Mr. Cassilis. How they have rallied about me, my daughter's friends! May God in heaven bless and reward them for it!"

I gave him my hand, of course, because I could not help it; but the sympathy I had been prepared to feel for Clara's father was immediately soured by his appearance, and the wheedling unreal tones in which he spoke.

"Cassilis is a good man," said Northmour; "worth ten."

"So I hear," cried Mr. Huddlestone eagerly;

"so my girl tells me. Ah, Mr. Cassilis, my sin has found me out you see! I am very low, very low; but I hope equally penitent. We must all come to the throne of grace at last, Mr. Cassilis. For my part, I come late indeed; but with unfeigned humility, I trust."

"Fiddle-de-dee!" said Northmour roughly.

"No, no, dear Northmour!" cried the banker. "You must not say that; you must not try to shake me. You forget, my dear, good boy, you forget I may be called this very night before my Maker."

His excitement was pitiful to behold; and I felt myself grow indignant with Northmour, whose infidel opinions I well knew, and heartily derided, as he continued to taunt the poor sinner out of his humor of repentance.

"Pooh, my dear Huddlestone!" said he. "You do yourself injustice. You are a man of the world inside and out, and were up to all kinds of mischief before I was born. Your conscience is tanned like South American leather—only you forgot to tan your liver, and that, if you will believe me, is the seat of the annoyance."

"Rogue, rogue! bad boy!" said Mr. Huddlestone, shaking his finger. "I am no precisian, if you come to that; I always hated a precisian; but I never lost hold of something better through it all. I have been a bad boy, Mr. Cassilis; I do not seek to deny that; but it was after my wife's death, and you know, with a widower, it's a different thing: sinful—I won't say no, but there is a gradation, we

shall hope. And talking of that— Hark!" he broke out suddenly, his hand raised, his fingers spread, his face racked with interest and terror. "Only the rain, bless God!" he added, after a pause, and with indescribable relief.

For some seconds he lay back among the pillows like a man near to fainting; then he gathered himself together, and, in somewhat tremulous tones, began once more to thank me for the share I was prepared to take in his defence.

"One question, sir," said I, when he had paused. "Is it true that you have money with you?"

He seemed annoyed by the question, but admitted with reluctance that he had a little.

"Well," I continued, "it is their money they are after, is it not? Why not give it up to them?"

"Ah!" replied he, shaking his head, "I have tried that already, Mr. Cassilis; and alas! that it should be so, but it is blood they want."

"Huddlestone, that's a little less than fair," said Northmour. "You should mention that what you offered them was upward of two hundred thousand short. The deficit is worth a reference; it is for what they call a cool sum, Frank. Then you see, the fellows reason in their clear Italian way; and it seems to them, as indeed it seems to me, that they may just as well have both while they are about it—money and blood together, by George, and no more trouble for the extra pleasure."

"Is it in the pavilion?" I asked.

"It is; and I wish it was in the bottom of the

sea instead," said Northmour; and then suddenly—"What are you making faces at me for?" he cried to Mr. Huddlestone, on whom I had unconsciously turned my back. "Do you think Cassilis would sell you?"

Mr. Huddlestone protested that nothing had been further from his mind.

"It is a good thing," retorted Northmour in his ugliest manner. "You might end by wearying us. What were you going to say?" he added, turning to me.

"I was going to propose an occupation for the afternoon," said I. "Let us carry that money out, piece by piece, and lay it down before the pavilion door. If the *carbonari* come, why, it's theirs at any rate."

"No, no," cried Mr. Huddlestone; "it does not, it cannot belong to them! It should be distributed *pro rata* among all my creditors."

"Come, now, Huddlestone," said Northmour, "none of that."

"Well, but my daughter," moaned the wretched man.

"Your daughter will do well enough. Here are two suitors, Cassilis and I, neither of us beggars, between whom she has to choose. And as for yourself, to make an end of arguments, you have no right to a farthing, and, unless I'm much mistaken, you are going to die."

It was certainly very cruelly said; but Mr. Huddlestone was a man who attracted little sympathy

and, although I saw him wince and shudder, I mentally endorsed the rebuke ; nay, I added a contribution of my own.

"Northmour and I," I said, "are willing enough to help you to save your life, but not to escape with stolen property."

He struggled for awhile with himself, as though he were on the point of giving way to anger, but prudence had the best of the controversy.

"My dear boys," he said, "do with me or my money what you will. I leave all in your hands. Let me compose myself."

And so we left him, gladly enough I am sure. The last that I saw, he had once more taken up his great Bible, and with tremulous hands was adjusting his spectacles to read.

CHAPTER VII.

TELLS HOW A WORD WAS CRIED THROUGH THE PAVILION WINDOW.

THE recollection of that afternoon will always be graven on my mind. Northmour and I were persuaded that an attack was imminent ; and if it had been in our power to alter in any way the order of events, that power would have been used to precipitate rather than delay the critical moment. The worst was to be anticipated ; yet we could conceive no extremity so miserable as the suspense we were

now suffering. I have never been an eager, though always a great, reader; but I never knew books so insipid as those which I took up and cast aside that afternoon in the pavilion. Even talk became impossible, as the hours went on. One or other was always listening for some sound, or peering from an upstairs window over the links. And yet not a sign indicated the presence of our foes.

We debated over and over again my proposal with regard to the money; and had we been in complete possession of our faculties, I am sure we should have condemned it as unwise; but we were flustered with alarm, grasped at a straw, and determined, although it was as much as advertising Mr. Huddlestone's presence in the pavilion, to carry my proposal into effect.

The sum was part in specie, part in bank paper, and part in circular notes, payable to the name of James Gregory. We took it out, counted it, enclosed it once more in a despatch-box belonging to Northmour, and prepared a letter in Italian which he tied to the handle. It was signed by both of us under oath, and declared that this was all the money which had escaped the failure of the house of Huddlestone. This was, perhaps, the maddest action ever perpetrated by two persons professing to be sane. Had the despatch-box fallen into other hands than those for which it was intended, we stood criminally convicted on our own written testimony; but, as I have said, we were neither of us in a condition to judge soberly, and had a thirst for

action that drove us to do something, right or wrong, rather than endure the agony of waiting. Moreover, as we were both convinced that the hollows of the links were alive with hidden spies upon our movements, we hoped that our appearance with the box might lead to a parley, and, perhaps, a compromise.

It was nearly three when we issued from the pavilion. The rain had taken off; the sun shone quite cheerfully. I have never seen the gulls fly so close about the house or approach so fearlessly to human beings. On the very doorstep one flapped heavily past our heads, and uttered its wild cry in my very ear.

"There is an omen for you," said Northmour, who like all freethinkers was much under the influence of superstition. "They think we are already dead."

I made some light rejoinder, but it was with half my heart; for the circumstance had impressed me.

A yard or two before the gate, on a patch of smooth turf, we set down the despatch-box; and Northmour waved a white handkerchief over his head. Nothing replied. We raised our voices, and cried aloud in Italian that we were there as ambassadors to arrange the quarrel; but the stillness remained unbroken save by the sea-gulls and the surf. I had a weight at my heart when we desisted; and I saw that even Northmour was unusually pale. He looked over his shoulder nervously, as though he

feared that some one had crept between him and the pavilion door.

"By God," he said in a whisper, "this is too much for me!"

I replied in the same key: "Suppose there should be none after all?"

"Look there," he returned, nodding with his head, as though he had been afraid to point.

I glanced in the direction indicated; and there, from the northern corner of the Sea-Wood, beheld a thin column of smoke rising steadily against the now cloudless sky.

"Northmour," I said (we still continued to talk in whispers), "it is not possible to endure this suspense. I prefer death fifty times over. Stay you here to watch the pavilion; I will go forward and make sure, if I have to walk right into their camp."

He looked once again all around him with puckered eyes, and then nodded assentingly to my proposal.

My heart beat like a sledge-hammer as I set out walking rapidly in the direction of the smoke; and though up to that moment I had felt chill and shivering, I was suddenly conscious of a glow of heat over all my body. The ground in this direction was very uneven; a hundred men might have lain hidden in as many square yards about my path. But I had not practised the business in vain, chose such routes as cut at the very root of concealment, and, by keeping along the most convenient ridges, commanded several hollows at a time. It was not long before I was

rewarded for my caution. Coming suddenly on to a mound somewhat more elevated than the surrounding hummocks I saw, not thirty yards away, a man bent almost double, and running as fast as his attitude permitted, along the bottom of a gully. I had dislodged one of the spies from his ambush. As soon as I sighted him, I called loudly both in English and Italian; and he, seeing concealment was no longer possible, straightened himself out, leaped from the gully, and made off as straight as an arrow for the borders of the wood.

It was none of my business to pursue; I had learned what I wanted—that we were beleaguered and watched in the pavilion; and I returned at once, and walking as nearly as possible in my old footsteps, to where Northmour awaited me beside the despatch-box. He was even paler than when I had left him, and his voice shook a little.

"Could you see what he was like?" he asked.

"He kept his back turned," I replied.

"Let us go into the house, Frank. I don't think I'm a coward, but I can stand no more of this," he whispered.

All was still and sunshiny about the pavilion as we turned to re-enter it; even the gulls had flown in a wider circuit, and were seen flickering along the beach and sand-hills; and this loneliness terrified me more than a regiment under arms. It was not until the door was barricaded that I could draw a full inspiration and relieve the weight that lay upon my bosom. Northmour and I exchanged a steady glance; and I

suppose each made his own reflections on the white and startled aspect of the other.

"You were right," I said. "All is over. Shake hands, old man, for the last time."

"Yes," replied he, "I will shake hands; for, as sure as I am here, I bear no malice. But, remember, if, by some impossible accident, we should give the slip to these blackguards, I'll take the upper hand of you by fair or foul."

"Oh," said I, "you weary me."

He seemed hurt, and walked away in silence to the foot of the stairs, where he paused.

"You do not understand me," said he, "I am not a swindler, and I guard myself; that is all. It may weary you or not, Mr. Cassilis, I do not care a rush; I speak for my own satisfaction, and not for your amusement. You had better go upstairs and court the girl; for my part, I stay here."

"And I stay with you," I returned. "Do you think I would steal a march, even with your permission?"

"Frank," he said, smiling, "it's a pity you are an ass, for you have the makings of a man. I think I must be *fey* to-day; you cannot irritate me, even when you try. Do you know," he continued softly, "I think we are the two most miserable men in England, you and I? we have got on to thirty without wife or child, or so much as a shop to look after—poor, pitiful, lost devils, both! And now we clash about a girl! As if there were not several millions in the United Kingdom! Ah, Frank, Frank, the

one who loses his throw, be it you or me, he has my pity! It were better for him—how does the Bible say—that a millstone were hanged about his neck and he were cast into the depth of the sea. Let us take a drink," he concluded suddenly, but without any levity of tone.

I was touched by his words, and consented. He sat down on the table in the dining-room, and held up the glass of sherry to his eye.

"If you beat me, Frank," he said, "I shall take to drink. What will you do, if it goes the other way?"

"God knows," I returned.

"Well," said he, "here is a toast in the meantime: '*Italia irredenta!*'"

The remainder of the day was passed in the same dreadful tedium and suspense. I laid the table for dinner, while Northmour and Clara prepared the meal together in the kitchen. I could hear their talk as I went to and fro, and was surprised to find it ran all the time upon myself. Northmour again bracketed us together, and rallied Clara on a choice of husbands; but he continued to speak of me with some feeling, and uttered nothing to my prejudice unless he included himself in the condemnation. This awakened a sense of gratitude in my heart, which combined with the immediateness of our peril to fill my eyes with tears. After all, I thought—and perhaps the thought was laughably vain—we were here three very noble human beings to perish in defence of a thieving banker.

Before we sat down to table, I looked forth from an upstairs window. The day was beginning to decline; the links were utterly deserted; the despatch-box still lay untouched where we had left it hours before.

Mr. Huddlestone, in a long yellow dressing-gown, took one end of the table, Clara the other; while Northmour and I faced each other from the sides. The lamp was brightly trimmed; the wine was good; the viands, although mostly cold, excellent of their sort. We seemed to have agreed tacitly; all reference to the impending catastrophe was carefully avoided; and, considering our tragic circumstances, we made a merrier party than could have been expected. From time to time, it is true, Northmour or I would rise from the table and make a round of the defences; and, on each of these occasions Mr. Huddlestone was recalled to a sense of his tragic predicament, glanced up with ghastly eyes, and bore for an instant on his countenance the stamp of terror. But he hastened to empty his glass, wiped his forehead with his handkerchief, and joined again in the conversation.

I was astonished at the wit and information he displayed. Mr. Huddlestone's was certainly no ordinary character; he had read and observed for himself; his gifts were sound; and, though I could never have learned to love the man, I began to understand his success in business, and the great respect in which he had been held before his failure. He had, above all, the talent of society; and though

I never heard him speak but on this one and most unfavorable occasion, I set him down among the most brilliant conversationalists I ever met.

He was relating with great gusto, and seemingly no feeling of shame, the manœuvres of a scoundrelly commission merchant whom he had known and studied in his youth, and we were all listening with an odd mixture of mirth and embarrassment, when our little party was brought abruptly to an end in the most startling manner.

A noise like that of a wet finger on the window-pane interrupted Mr. Huddlestone's tale ; and in an instant we were all four as white as paper, and sat tongue-tied and motionless round the table.

"A snail," I said at last ; for I had heard that these animals make a noise somewhat similar in character.

"Snail be d—d !" said Northmour. "Hush !"

The same sound was repeated twice at regular intervals ; and then a formidable voice shouted through the shutters the Italian word "*Traditore !*"

Mr. Huddlestone threw his head in the air ; his eyelids quivered ; next moment he fell insensible below the table. Northmour and I had each run to the armory and seized a gun. Clara was on her feet with her hand at her throat.

So we stood waiting, for we thought the hour of attack was certainly come ; but second passed after second, and all but the surf remained silent in the neighborhood of the pavilion.

"Quick," said Northmour ; "upstairs with him before they come."

CHAPTER VIII.

TELLS THE LAST OF THE TALL MAN.

SOMEHOW or other, by hook and crook, and between the three of us, we got Bernard Huddlestone bundled upstairs and laid upon the bed in *My Uncle's Room.* During the whole process, which was rough enough, he gave no sign of consciousness, and he remained, as we had thrown him, without changing the position of a finger. His daughter opened his shirt and began to wet his head and bosom; while Northmour and I ran to the window. The weather continued clear; the moon, which was now about full, had risen and shed a very clear light upon the links; yet, strain our eyes as we might, we could distinguish nothing moving. A few dark spots, more or less, on the uneven expanse were not to be identified; they might be crouching men, they might be shadows; it was impossible to be sure.

"Thank God," said Northmour, "Aggie is not coming to-night."

Aggie was the name of the old nurse; he had not thought of her till now; but that he should think of her at all, was a trait that surprised me in the man.

We were again reduced to waiting. Northmour went to the fireplace and spread his hands before the red embers, as if he were cold. I followed him

mechanically with my eyes, and in so doing turned my back upon the window. At that moment a very faint report was audible from without, and a ball shivered a pane of glass, and buried itself in the shutter two inches from my head. I heard Clara scream; and though I whipped instantly out of range and into a corner, she was there, so to speak, before me, beseeching to know if I were hurt. I felt that I could stand to be shot at every day and all day long, with such marks of solicitude for a reward; and I continued to reassure her, with the tenderest caresses and in complete forgetfulness of our situation, till the voice of Northmour recalled me to myself.

"An air-gun," he said. "They wish to make no noise."

I put Clara aside and looked at him. He was standing with his back to the fire and his hands clasped behind him; and I knew by the black look on his face, that passion was boiling within. I had seen just such a look before he attacked me, that March night, in the adjoining chamber; and, though I could make every allowance for his anger, I confess I trembled for the consequences. He gazed straight before him; but he could see us with the tail of his eye, and his temper kept rising like a gale of wind. With regular battle awaiting us outside, this prospect of an internecine strife within the walls began to daunt me.

Suddenly, as I was thus closely watching his expression and prepared against the worst, I saw a

change, a flash, a look of relief, upon his face. He took up the lamp which stood beside him on the table, and turned to us with an air of some excitement.

"There is one point that we must know," said he. "Are they going to butcher the lot of us, or only Huddlestone? Did they take you for him, or fire at you for your own *beaux yeux?*"

"They took me for him, for certain," I replied. "I am near as tall, and my head is fair."

"I am going to make sure," returned Northmour; and he stepped up to the window, holding the lamp above his head, and stood there, quietly affronting death, for half a minute.

Clara sought to rush forward and pull him from the place of danger; but I had the pardonable selfishness to hold her back by force.

"Yes," said Northmour, turning coolly from the window; "it's only Huddlestone they want."

"Oh, Mr. Northmour!" cried Clara; but found no more to add; the temerity she had just witnessed seeming beyond the reach of words.

He, on his part, looked at me, cocking his head, with a fire of triumph in his eyes; and I understood at once that he had thus hazarded his life, merely to attract Clara's notice, and depose me from my position as the hero of the hour. He snapped his fingers.

"The fire is only beginning," he said. "When they warm up to their work, they won't be so particular."

A voice was now heard hailing us from the entrance. From the window we could see the figure of a man in the moonlight; he stood motionless, his face uplifted to ours, and a rag of something white on his extended arm; and as we looked right down upon him, though he was a good many yards distant on the links, we could see the moonlight glitter on his eyes.

He opened his lips again, and spoke for some minutes on end, in a key so loud that he might have been heard in every corner of the pavilion, and as far away as the borders of the wood. It was the same voice that had already shouted "*Traditore!*" through the shutters of the dining-room; this time it made a complete and clear statement. If the traitor "Oddlestone" were given up, all others should be spared; if not, no one should escape to tell the tale.

"Well, Huddlestone, what do you say to that?" asked Northmour, turning to the bed.

Up to that moment the banker had given no sign of life, and I, at least, had supposed him to be still lying in a faint; but he replied at once, and in such tones as I have never heard elsewhere, save from a delirious patient, adjured and besought us not to desert him. It was the most hideous and abject performance that my imagination can conceive.

"Enough," cried Northmour; and then he threw open the window, leaned out into the night, and in a tone of exultation, and with a total forgetfulness of what was due to the presence of a lady, poured

out upon the ambassador a string of the most abominable raillery, both in English and Italian, and bade him be gone where he had come from. I believe that nothing so delighted Northmour at that moment as the thought that we must all infallibly perish before the night was out.

Meantime the Italian put his flag of truce into his pocket, and disappeared, at a leisurely pace, among the sand-hills.

"They make honorable war," said Northmour. "They are all gentlemen and soldiers. For the credit of the thing, I wish we could change sides—you and I, Frank, and you too, Missy, my darling—and leave that being on the bed to some one else. Tut! Don't look shocked! We are all going post to what they call eternity, and may as well be above-board while there's time. As far as I'm concerned, if I could first strangle Huddlestone and then get Clara in my arms, I could die with some pride and satisfaction. And as it is, by God, I'll have a kiss!"

Before I could do anything to interfere, he had rudely embraced and repeatedly kissed the resisting girl. Next moment I had pulled him away with fury, and flung him heavily against the wall. He laughed loud and long, and I feared his wits had given way under the strain; for even in the best of days he had been a sparing and a quiet laugher.

"Now, Frank," said he, when his mirth was somewhat appeased, "it's your turn. Here's my hand. Good-bye; farewell!" Then seeing me stand rigid and indignant, and holding Clara to my side—

"Man!" he broke out, "are you angry? Did you think we were going to die with all the airs and graces of society? I took a kiss; I'm glad I had it; and now you can take another if you like, and square accounts."

I turned from him with a feeling of contempt which I did not seek to dissemble.

"As you please," said he. "You've been a prig in life; a prig you'll die."

And with that he sat down in a chair, a rifle over the knee, and amused himself with snapping the lock; but I could see that his ebullition of light spirits (the only one I ever knew him to display) had already come to an end, and was succeeded by a sullen, scowling humor.

All this time our assailants might have been entering the house, and we been none the wiser; we had in truth almost forgotten the danger that so imminently overhung our days. But just then Mr. Huddlestone uttered a cry, and leaped from the bed.

I asked him what was wrong.

"Fire!" he cried. "They have set the house on fire!"

Northmour was on his feet in an instant, and he and I ran through the door of communication with the study. The room was illuminated by a red and angry light. Almost at the moment of our entrance, a tower of flame arose in front of the window, and, with a tingling report, a pane fell inwards on the carpet. They had set fire to the lean-to out-house, where Northmour used to nurse his negatives.

"Hot work," said Northmour. "Let us try in your old room."

We ran thither in a breath, threw up the casement, and looked forth. Along the whole back wall of the pavilion piles of fuel had been arranged and kindled; and it is probable they had been drenched with mineral oil, for, in spite of the morning's rain, they all burned bravely. The fire had taken a firm hold already on the out-house, which blazed higher and higher every moment; the back door was in the centre of a red-hot bonfire; the eaves we could see, as we looked upward, were already smouldering, for the roof overhung, and was supported by considerable beams of wood. At the same time, hot, pungent, and choking volumes of smoke began to fill the house. There was not a human being to be seen to right or left.

"Ah, well!" said Northmour, "here's the end, thank God."

And we returned to *My Uncle's Room*. Mr. Huddlestone was putting on his boots, still violently trembling, but with an air of determination such as I had not hitherto observed. Clara stood close by him, with her cloak in both hands ready to throw about her shoulders, and a strange look in her eyes, as if she were half hopeful, half doubtful of her father.

"Well, boys and girls," said Northmour, "how about a sally? The oven is heating; it is not good to stay here and be baked; and, for my part, I want to come to my hands with them, and be done."

"There is nothing else left," I replied.

And both Clara and Mr. Huddlestone, though with a very different intonation, added, "Nothing."

As we went downstairs the heat was excessive, and the roaring of the fire filled our ears; and we had scarce reached the passage before the stairs window fell in, a branch of flame shot brandishing through the aperture, and the interior of the pavilion became lit up with that dreadful and fluctuating glare. At the same moment we heard the fall of something heavy and inelastic in the upper story. The whole pavilion, it was plain, had gone alight like a box of matches, and now not only flamed sky-high to land and sea, but threatened with every moment to crumble and fall in about our ears. Northmour and I cocked our revolvers. Mr. Huddlestone, who had already refused a firearm, put us behind him with a manner of command.

"Let Clara open the door," said he. "So, if they fire a volley, she will be protected. And in the meantime stand behind me. I am the scapegoat; my sins have found me out."

I heard him, as I stood breathless by his shoulder, with my pistol ready, pattering off prayers in a tremulous, rapid whisper; and I confess, horrid as the thought may seem, I despised him for thinking of supplications in a moment so critical and thrilling. In the meantime, Clara, who was dead white but still possessed her faculties, had displaced the barricade from the front door. Another moment, and she had pulled it open. Firelight and moonlight illuminated

the links with confused and changeful lustre, and far away against the sky we could see a long trail of glowing smoke.

Mr. Huddlestone, filled for the moment with a strength greater than his own, struck Northmour and myself a back-hander in the chest; and while we were thus for the moment incapacitated from action, lifting his arms above his head like one about to dive, he ran straight forward out of the pavilion.

"Here am I!" he cried—"Huddlestone! Kill me, and spare the others!"

His sudden appearance daunted, I suppose, our hidden enemies; for Northmour and I had time to recover, to seize Clara between us, one by each arm, and to rush forth to his assistance, ere anything further had taken place. But scarce had we passed the threshold when there came near a dozen reports and flashes from every direction among the hollows of the links. Mr. Huddlestone staggered, uttered a weird and freezing cry, threw up his arms over his head, and fell backward on the turf.

"Traditore! Traditore!" cried the invisible avengers.

And just then, a part of the roof of the pavilion fell in, so rapid was the progress of the fire. A loud, vague, and horrible noise accompanied the collapse, and a vast volume of flame went soaring up to heaven. It must have been visible at that moment from twenty miles out at sea, from the shore at Graden Wester, and far inland from the peak of Graystiel, the most eastern summit of the Caulder

Hills. Bernard Huddlestone, although God knows what were his obsequies, had a fine pyre at the moment of his death.

CHAPTER IX.

TELLS HOW NORTHMOUR CARRIED OUT HIS THREAT.

I SHOULD have the greatest difficulty to tell you what followed next after this tragic circumstance. It is all to me, as I look back upon it, mixed, strenuous, and ineffectual, like the struggles of a sleeper in a nightmare. Clara, I remember, uttered a broken sigh and would have fallen forward to earth, had not Northmour and I supported her insensible body. I do not think we were attacked; I do not remember even to have seen an assailant; and I believe we deserted Mr. Huddlestone without a glance. I only remember running like a man in a panic, now carrying Clara altogether in my own arms, now sharing her weight with Northmour, now scuffling confusedly for the possession of that dear burden. Why we should have made for my camp in the Hemlock Den, or how we reached it, are points lost for ever to my recollection. The first moment at which I became definitely sure, Clara had been suffered to fall against the outside of my little tent, Northmour and I were tumbling together on the ground, and he, with contained ferocity, was striking for my head with the butt of his revolver.

He had already twice wounded me on the scalp ; and it is to the consequent loss of blood that I am tempted to attribute the sudden clearness of my mind.

I caught him by the wrist.

"Northmour," I remember saying, "you can kill me afterwards. Let us first attend to Clara."

He was at that moment uppermost. Scarcely had the words passed my lips, when he had leaped to his feet and ran towards the tent ; and the next moment, he was straining Clara to his heart and covering her unconscious hands and face with his caresses.

"Shame !" I cried. "Shame to you, Northmour!"

And, giddy though I still was, I struck him repeatedly upon the head and shoulders.

He relinquished his grasp, and faced me in the broken moonlight.

"I had you under, and let you go," said he; "and now you strike me ! Coward !"

"You are the coward," I retorted. "Did she wish your kisses while she was still sensible of what she wanted ? Not she ! And now she may be dying ; and you waste this precious time, and abuse her helplessness. Stand aside, and let me help her."

He confronted me for a moment, white and menacing ; then suddenly he stepped aside.

"Help her then," said he.

I threw myself on my knees beside her, and loosened, as well as I was able, her dress and corset ; but while I was thus engaged, a grasp descended on my shoulder.

"Keep your hands off her," said Northmour

fiercely. "Do you think I have no blood in my veins?"

"Northmour," I cried, "if you will neither help her yourself, nor let me do so, do you know that I shall have to kill you?"

"That is better!" he cried. "Let her die also, where's the harm? Step aside from that girl! and stand up to fight."

"You will observe," said I, half rising, "that I have not kissed her yet."

"I dare you to," he cried.

I do not know what possessed me; it was one of the things I am most ashamed of in my life, though, as my wife used to say, I knew that my kisses would be always welcome were she dead or living; down I fell again upon my knees, parted the hair from her forehead, and, with the dearest respect, laid my lips for a moment on that cold brow. It was such a caress as a father might have given; it was such a one as was not unbecoming from a man soon to die to a woman already dead.

"And now," said I, "I am at your service, Mr. Northmour."

But I saw, to my surprise, that he had turned his back upon me.

"Do you hear?" I asked.

"Yes," said he, "I do. If you wish to fight, I am ready. If not, go on and save Clara. All is one to me."

I did not wait to be twice bidden; but, stooping again over Clara, continued my efforts to revive her.

She still lay white and lifeless ; I began to fear that her sweet spirit had indeed fled beyond recall, and horror and a sense of utter desolation seized upon my heart. I called her by name with the most endearing inflections ; I chafed and beat her hands ; now I laid her head low, now supported it against my knee ; but all seemed to be in vain, and the lids still lay heavy on her eyes.

"Northmour," I said, "there is my hat. For God's sake bring some water from the spring."

Almost in a moment he was by my side with the water.

"I have brought it in my own," he said. "You do not grudge me the privilege ?"

"Northmour," I was beginning to say, as I laved her head and breast; but he interrupted me savagely.

"Oh, you hush up !" he said. "The best thing you can do is to say nothing."

I had certainly no desire to talk, my mind being swallowed up in concern for my dear love and her condition ; so I continued in silence to do my best towards her recovery, and, when the hat was empty, returned it to him, with one word—"More." He had, perhaps, gone several times upon this errand, when Clara reopened her eyes.

"Now," said he, "since she is better, you can spare me, can you not ? I wish you a good-night, Mr. Cassilis."

And with that he was gone among the thicket. I made a fire, for I had now no fear of the Italians,

who had even spared all the little possessions left in my encampment; and, broken as she was by the excitement and the hideous catastrophe of the evening, I managed, in one way or another—by persuasion, encouragement, warmth, and such simple remedies as I could lay my hand on—to bring her back to some composure of mind and strength of body.

Day had already come, when a sharp "Hist!" sounded from the thicket. I started from the ground; but the voice of Northmour was heard adding, in the most tranquil tones: "Come here, Cassilis, and alone; I want to show you something."

I consulted Clara with my eyes, and receiving her tacit permission, left her alone, and clambered out of the den. At some distance off I saw Northmour leaning against an elder; and, as soon as he perceived me, he began walking seaward. I had almost overtaken him as he reached the outskirts of the wood.

"Look," said he, pausing.

A couple of steps more brought me out of the foliage. The light of the morning lay cold and clear over that well-known scene. The pavilion was but a blackened wreck; the roof had fallen in, one of the gables had fallen out; and, far and near, the face of the links was cicatrized with little patches of burnt furze. Thick smoke still went straight upwards in the windless air of the morning, and a great pile of ardent cinders filled the bare walls of the house, like coals in an open grate. Close by the

islet a schooner yacht lay to, and a well-manned boat was pulling vigorously for the shore.

"The *Red Earl!*" I cried. "The *Red Earl* twelve hours too late!"

"Feel in your pocket, Frank. Are you armed?" asked Northmour.

I obeyed him, and I think I must have become deadly pale. My revolver had been taken from me.

"You see I have you in my power," he continued. "I disarmed you last night while you were nursing Clara; but this morning—here—take your pistol. No thanks!" he cried, holding up his hand. "I do not like them; that is the only way you can annoy me now."

He began to walk forward across the links to meet the boat, and I followed a step or two behind. In front of the pavilion I paused to see where Mr. Huddlestone had fallen; but there was no sign of him, nor so much as a trace of blood.

"Graden Floe," said Northmour.

He continued to advance till we had come to the head of the beach.

"No farther, please," said he. "Would you like to take her to Graden House?"

"Thank you," replied I; "I shall try to get her to the minister's at Graden Wester."

The prow of the boat here grated on the beach, and a sailor jumped ashore with a line in his hand.

"Wait a minute, lads!" cried Northmour; and then lower and to my private ear: "You had better say nothing of all this to her," he added.

"On the contrary," I broke out, "she shall know everything that I can tell."

"You do not understand," he returned, with an air of great dignity. "It will be nothing to her; she expects it of me. Good-bye!" he added, with a nod.

I offered him my hand.

"Excuse me," said he. "It's small, I know; but I can't push things quite so far as that. I don't wish any sentimental business, to sit by your hearth a white-haired wanderer, and all that. Quite the contrary: I hope to God I shall never again clap eyes on either of you."

"Well, God bless you, Northmour!" I said heartily.

"Oh, yes," he returned.

He walked down the beach; and the man who was ashore gave him an arm on board, and then shoved off and leaped into the bows himself. Northmour took the tiller; the boat rose to the waves, and the oars between the thole-pins sounded crisp and measured in the air.

They were not yet half way to the *Red Earl*, and I was still watching their progress when the sun rose out of the sea.

One word more, and my story is done. Years after, Northmour was killed fighting under the colors of Garibaldi for the liberation of Tyrol.

R. L. STEVENSON.

THE HERMIT OF SAINT-EUGÈNE.

UNTIL quite recently, anyone who chanced to stroll out of Algiers towards evening, by the rue Bab-el-Oued, and thence past the barracks to the dusty, evil-smelling suburb of Saint-Eugène, would have been pretty sure to meet him. Between four and five o'clock during the winter months, and a few hours later when the long, hot summer had set in, it was his habit to walk up and down the stretch of high road which borders the sea there, pausing sometimes to look across the blue waves towards France, or up at Notre Dame d'Afrique, rising dark on its hill top against the fiery sunset. His tall, thin figure, his hollow cheeks, his drooping grey moustache, his threadbare coat, with its scrap of red ribbon in the button-hole, and something in his manner of carrying his head and twirling his cane which can only be described as a sort of deprecating jauntiness—all these things were apt to arrest the attention of the unoccupied stranger.

If such a person looked hard at him, he would return the gaze half timidly, half affably, and would probably end by raising his old, but carefully brushed hat, and saying "Bon soir, monsieur," in a high, quavering voice. He was willing, upon slight en-

couragement, to enter into conversation, and would descant upon the beauty of the weather and the charm of the surrounding scenery, and similar commonplace topics, with a good deal of courteous fluency. "An adorable country, monsieur!—a divine climate! Figure to yourself that I came here twenty years ago, and that I have not yet been able to tear myself away! What would you have?—when one becomes old, one learns to value tranquillity above all things." But if by any chance his interlocutor grew inquisitive, asked where he lived, produced a card case, or showed other signs of wishing to keep up the acquaintance thus begun, he would take alarm. His loquacity would cease, he would draw his heels together, lift his hat again, and, "Monsieur," he would say, with a low bow, "j'ai l'honneur de vous souhaiter le bon soir." With which he would retire hurriedly.

It was not that he had any desire to conceal either his name or his place of abode. M. Lelièvre was well known to all the inhabitants of Saint-Eugène, and any one of the dirty children playing on the beach, or of the black-browed women lounging in the doorways, or of the unshaven men playing bowls in their shirt-sleeves before the cafés, could have shown you his house—a white villa, with all its *persiennes* closed, standing in a neglected garden and shut in by rusty iron gates, upon the side posts of which, the inscription *L'Hermitage* in thin black letters was barely legible. That amount of information M. Lelièvre would have grudged to nobody;

but he dreaded the society of his fellow-creatures as much as he loved it, because he had once been hospitable, and could be hospitable no longer.

Time has moved so fast during the last decade, and changes have been so many, that probably only a very few people recollect M. Lelièvre as he used to be in the days of his prosperity—those good old days before the war, when an Imperial official could afford himself a pretty villa in the suburbs as well as his house in the town, and could even go so far as to invest his surplus cash in a farm far away on the Metidja plain, which everybody said was sure to pay magnificently. In that happy præ-republican era, Saint-Eugène was as lovely a retreat as any official could wish for, and the guests at the merry breakfast parties which used to take place at the Hermitage several times a week were wont to swear, as they looked out upon the roses in the garden and upon the sea, glittering through a belt of palms and bamboos, that M. Lelièvre was the luckiest dog in Africa. He did not contradict them; his opinion, indeed, quite coincided with theirs. He had a sufficient income, congenial employment, a charming daughter; and if anything had been lacking to complete his happiness, the want was supplied when, after somewhat lengthy negotiations, he was able to announce Isabelle's betrothal to that aristocratic personage the Vicomte de Lugagnan. Perhaps he exulted a little too much over this latter piece of good fortune; perhaps M. de Lugagnan's name was rather too frequently upon his lips; and perhaps his

friends sometimes laughed at him in their sleeves. If so, he was unconscious alike of incurring ridicule and of having given cause for it; for there never lived a more innocent or unsuspicious creature.

But all this is ancient history. There are no more breakfast parties at Saint-Eugène now, and such of the villas as have not been pulled down are inhabited by nobody knows whom. Saint-Eugène itself is lovely no longer. The devastating hand of modern civilisation has fallen heavily upon it, pouring forth tram-cars and omnibuses on to its highway, defiling its beach with drainage and rubbish, and making its shores hideous with mean habitations, where that strange and unprepossessing being, the French colonist, dwells cheerfully in an atmosphere of dust and mephitic gases. Possibly this sad transformation did not affect M. Lelièvre as much as it might have done, had his own transformation been less complete. He fell with the fall of the Empire, and, on losing his appointment, discovered, as many others have discovered under similar circumstances, that he had been somewhat imprudent in making no provision for a rainy day. When France was lying under the heel of the invader, and every able-bodied man was volunteering for active service, M. Lelièvre went off to fight for his country with the rest. He committed his daughter to the care of a lady friend of his (for his friends were still numerous then), and departed with his usual indomitable cheerfulness; but he came back a good deal aged and broken, only to find that his farm had been sacked during the

Arab insurrection, and that his bailiff had decamped, leaving neither money nor address behind him.

This was a rather serious calamity; for the old gentleman had calculated that the sale of the farm and stock would help him out considerably with the *dot* of Isabelle, whose marriage was now about to be solemnised. It was not in the least likely that M. de Lugagnan and his family would consent to any diminution of the large sum agreed upon, and a rupture at the eleventh hour, if it had not broken Isabelle's heart, would assuredly have gone very near to breaking her father's. He passed through some weeks of mental agony; but somehow or other, the money was forthcoming at the required date; the marriage took place; the bride and bridegroom left for France; and M. Lelièvre might have sung *Nunc Dimittis*, had it not been the will of Heaven that he should live a good many years longer in a world which cannot have possessed many attractions for him.

It was now that the Hermitage began to deserve its name, and that its owner, who, with his old servant Marthe, only occupied three of its rooms, began to be known as the Hermit. The sobriquet was conferred upon him, not by his former acquaintances, who had all gone away or had forgotten his existence, but by the humbler neighbours who watched his proceedings and manner of life with a certain curiosity. Neither from him nor from Marthe did they gain any information as to his circumstances; but if a man gives no orders to the

butcher and seldom troubles the grocer, it is tolerably safe to conclude that his purse is as empty as his stomach. All Saint-Eugène was aware that M. Lelièvre did not sit for hours on the rocks with a bamboo fishing-rod in his hand merely *pour se distraire*, which was Marthe's explanation of that habit of his. It was notorious that, with the Hermit, Lent lasted all the year round; and if he could keep body and soul together with a few red mullet, such gleanings from the harvest of the sea were not grudged him by his fellow-citizens. "He will not be very fat when old Cohen decides to eat him up," they were wont to say, with grim pleasantry.

That he would be eaten up eventually none of them doubted. M. Elias Cohen, that wealthy Hebrew and powerful municipal councillor, had risen from the smallest of beginnings to his present high estate by nothing else than by eating people up, and that the poor Hermit was already in his larder was evidenced by the fact that M. Cohen was the only visitor who ever rang the door-bell at the Hermitage. He was fond of calling there on Saturday afternoons, after performing his religious duties at the Synagogue, and was often to be seen walking about the deserted garden with M. Lelièvre, whose gait at such times had no jauntiness at all. These periodical visits, it was true, had gone on for a matter of ten years, and the hermit was not yet devoured: but that proved nothing. M. Cohen had his plans and his fancies; you could never tell for certain what he meant to do with you; the only thing of

which you might feel quite sure was that, when once you had fallen into his clutches, you would not escape from them again until death or ruin set you free.

One fine Saturday afternoon in January this redoubtable personage was sitting in M. Lelièvre's garden. He had carried out a wooden chair from the house, because the weather was hot, and he was neither as young nor as thin as he had once been. M. Lelièvre was standing beside him, leaning on his stick.

"My friend," the Jew was saying, with the thick oily utterance of his nation, "I have been very good to you. I have had patience—ah, what patience I have had!"

"M. Cohen," returned M. Lelièvre, who was a good deal agitated, "I have paid you interest regularly—and ah, what interest I have paid!"

"Are you going to say now that I have made you pay high interest?" shouted the other. "That would be perfect!—nothing more than that would be wanting! Oh, Elias, Elias, see what you gain by generosity! Not only are you kept out of the use of your money, not only do you miss opportunities of making your fortune from sheer want of capital; but those whom you have robbed yourself to serve turn upon you and cut you to the heart with their ingratitude! Will you never learn to be just to yourself?"

M. Cohen was very fat, very dirty, and very ugly. His complexion and features were those of the

Moorish variety of his race; but he had adopted the European costume. As he thus apostrophised himself, there was a mixture of cunning and sincerity in his tone which might have seemed comical enough, if his victim had been in a mood to appreciate the comic side of things. But poor M. Lelièvre had never felt less inclined to laugh in his life.

"Listen, M. Cohen," he said persuasively, after a pause: "you will not have long to wait for your money. When the *croque-mort* has come for me you will get everything. Could you not allow me to die in my old house?"

"*Your* old house! But it is not your house, it is mine; and precisely what I complain of is that it is old. You have not treated me well, my friend; you have cheated me by allowing this place to fall into ruins; and what is it worth now as security?"

"I am told that it is worth more than it was when I borrowed the money of you," answered the old man hesitatingly.

"Ah, M. Lelièvre, you should not say such things! You are trying to deceive one who has been very kind and forbearing with you, and you think that because he has shown so much weakness he must be a fool. Now that is very wrong; for I am as well aware as you are that house-property in Saint-Eugène commands a lower price in the market than it did some years ago."

"And the new road?" cried M. Lelièvre eagerly. "You forget the new road which is to cut through the middle of my garden. It has been surveyed

already, and only a few days ago I received the plans and a letter, asking me to state what I should require as compensation. I believe I might ask a large sum, for it will destroy my privacy. Would you like to see the papers?" And he drew them from his pocket with trembling fingers.

But M. Cohen waved them aside. "Ah, bah! the road is not made yet. They are always talking about roads and never beginning them. As for compensation, I can tell you, if you do not know, what that means. You will make your demand; you will be informed that it is excessive; the road will then be declared to be a measure of 'public utility,' and you will have to accept what is given you. It is not by that transaction that you will make your fortune, my dear friend."

Now it was by no means unlikely that this pretion would be fulfilled in the case of a humble proprietor like M. Lelièvre, but a very different result was to be anticipated in the event of the Hermitage passing into the hands of M. Cohen, who had means of bringing pressure to bear upon the authorities which were not open to his unlucky debtor.

"For the rest," he added, with an air of indifference, "you can easily keep possession of this old ruin, if you hold to it. You have only to pay me what you owe me. But unless I am paid in three weeks' time, I must enter upon possession in your place. You have had ample warning, my dear friend; it is for you to make your arrangements."

And without further words M. Cohen took his leave.

For some minutes after his departure the old man stood still on the same spot, tracing wavering lines in the dust with his stick. "Of what is Monsieur thinking?" asked a gruff voice behind him, which caused him to start and turn round.

"My good Marthe," he replied, at once assuming a sprightly mien, "you would never guess. Is it not absurd that at my time of life I am beginning to feel the want of a change? Yes, decidedly I shall give up the Hermitage. After all, it is too large a house for you and me, and the neighbourhood is not what it was, and—there are great advantages in living in the town. I do not say in the European quarter, which is expensive and unhealthy; but in the Arab town, where the air is naturally purer, owing to the greater height——"

"Monsieur need not give himself the trouble to invent histories," broke in the old woman, whose yellow, wrinkled face wore an expression of mingled anger and pity. "I heard all that passed between Monsieur and that animal of a Jew—and to-night I write to Madame la Vicomtesse."

"Marthe, you would never do such a thing as that!"

"Pardon me, monsieur, that is what I am going to do. Ever since mademoiselle's marriage it has been one pretext after another to keep the truth from her and prevent her from seeing you. You would not go over to France because you were afraid of the sea-sickness; you could not receive her

here because you were having the house papered and painted—though Heaven knows whether we have ever had a sight of paper or paint-brush! Then the children were born; then M. le Vicomte had business to attend to; and then this, and then that—what do I know? But now it is time that there was an end of all these excuses."

"Marthe, you do not know what you propose. You would break my daughter's heart."

"Supposing always that she has one," said the old woman, drily.

"Supposing that she has a heart! that Isabelle has a heart! What do you mean?"

"With all the respect that I owe to monsieur, I will permit myself the observation that I would not have allowed ten years to go by without seeing my father, whether he was papering his house or not."

"I know why you say that. You want to frighten me, and you think that I will send for my daughter to convince myself that she has not changed. But you are mistaken. I shall never doubt her, and I will not have her distressed and put to shame. I swear to you, Marthe, that if you tell her of my difficulties I will never forgive you!"

"She shall be told nothing about them, then, since you are so obstinate," answered the old woman sullenly.

Nevertheless, she posted the following brief missive before she went to bed:

"Madame la Vicomtesse,—I have the regret to inform you that monsieur is failing rapidly in health,

and if you wish to see him again in this world, I think you would do well to postpone your visit to Algiers no longer."

The Hermit flitted quietly from Saint-Eugène without waiting for his three weeks' period of grace to run out. He had decided to sell such furniture as remained to him, and he thought it would be well to get the auction over before M. Cohen, who was more given to seizing property than to surrendering it, became the owner of the Hermitage. He hired three small rooms in one of the few European houses which have been built near the Kasbah, or Citadel, a quarter standing high in a physical sense and somewhat low in a moral one. M. Lelièvre affected to be delighted with it. It was occupation enough only to sit at the window all day long, he declared. The view over the port and the bay; the purple mountains of Kabylia in the distance; and nearer at hand the dazzling white houses, the minaret of the mosque of Sidi Ramdan, and glimpses of narrow, tortuous streets, through which Moors, Jews, negroes, and veiled ladies in their voluminous white trousers and high-heeled shoes kept passing and repassing—all these things he did not fail to point out to Marthe, who professed herself unable to discover the elements of beauty or interest in any one of them. It was a little tiring to be sure, to climb up these steep streets from the French town; but that inconvenience, as M. Lelièvre observed, might be disposed of by the simple expedient of not going down to the French town.

He had, however, to descend thither once a week to get his letters—or rather his letter—from the Post Office; for during all the years that they had been separated, his daughter had never omitted to write to him on Sundays, and he had of course been careful not to mention his change of address to her. He had not been long established in his new abode, when he returned from one of these periodical descents with a scared face.

"Marthe," he said, holding out an open letter in his shaking hands, "here is Isabelle, who announces to me her arrival for the day after to-morrow. What is to be done?"

"Is it possible!" cried the old servant, with every appearance of profound surprise.

"It is as I tell you. A sudden decision, she says—a long-promised visit—and I am to engage rooms for them at an hotel. Ah! Marthe, would you believe that I am such an old fool that I can hardly contain myself for joy? But she must suspect nothing—mind that!—she must suspect nothing. After all, concealment will be easier than if we were living at Saint-Eugène still. I shall explain that I am changing my house, and that I have taken lodgings in the meantime. They will not ask to see the lodgings, I hope. I shall place them at an hotel at Mustapha, which is more healthy than the town and—farther away. All will arrange itself." And the old gentleman, who had got over his first feeling of alarm, rubbed his hands gleefully.

It is impossible to tell at what hour the steamer

from Marseilles will reach Algiers. Sometimes, when the weather is fine, it will enter the harbour at midnight; more often it comes in at five o'clock in the morning, and sometimes not until several hours later. There is thus considerable difficulty about going on board to welcome friends from Europe, and no sensible person thinks of attempting such a thing. The proof that M. Lelièvre was not a sensible person is that he spent the whole of the night which preceded his daughter's arrival in trotting up and down the quay, and trying to keep himself warm. For the best of all possible reasons, he had not brought a great-coat with him, and if he neither caught his death of cold, nor dropped from fatigue, it was probably because the special providence which is said to watch over children and drunkards, extends a little of its care to foolish old men whose daughters are about to be restored to them after a separation of ten years.

The sky and the sea were losing their delicate opalescent hues, and the glow upon the snowy Djurdjura mountains showed that sunrise was near, when the wished-for steamer hove in sight, and M. Lelièvre hastened to secure a boat. He felt none the worse for his long vigil; his only regret was that he was not shaved. But perhaps Isabelle would not notice that. In other respects he felt that he was looking his best. His coat had been carefully brushed and inked at the seams, the red ribbon of the Legion of Honour was in his button-hole, an Arab boy had polished his boots beautifully for a

sou, and Marthe had bought him a perfectly new pair of grey cotton gloves. "Not much appearance of penury here, I think," murmured M. Lelièvre complacently, as he hurried up the gangway of the steamer and gazed eagerly among the passengers in search of the one whom he hoped to meet.

He could not see her anywhere. There was a stout lady who resembled her a little ; but—yes ! certainly that tall, solemn man was M. de Lugagnan ; and here, sure enough, was the stout lady flinging her arms round his neck and exclaiming, "But, papa, do you not recognise me, then ? "

It was a moment of profound emotion. When the embracings were over, M. Lelièvre took a clean handkerchief from his pocket, shook it out, and blew his nose loudly ; after which he proceeded to wipe his eyes, not being in the least ashamed to let people see that he was shedding tears of joy. He began to bustle about, insisting upon carrying as many of his daughter's packages as she would let him take ; he hurried her and her husband into the boat and accompanied them to the shore, where he had ordered a carriage to be in waiting for them. When he was seated in the latter, with his back to the horses (M. de Lugagnan having allowed him to take that place, after some slight protest), he entered upon a confused explanation of his inability to receive them at the Hermitage.

"You come at an unlucky moment—if your coming at any moment could be called unlucky. I am in the act of moving from my old house, and I could

not ask you to the rooms which I have taken provisionally in the town—though, to be sure, they are very comfortable for a single man. For the rest, you will find yourselves in a better air and a more fashionable quarter at Mustapha Supérieur. Our poor Saint-Eugène is much changed since you saw it last."

Madame de Lugagnan, who had not been listening to him very attentively, caught up his last words. "But everything is changed!" she exclaimed. "This row of fine stone buildings, which look as if they had been picked up in Paris and dropped here by mistake—what do they call it? Boulevard de la République—it was Boulevard de l'Impératrice once, and it was not half as long. And the rue Bab-Azoun, which we used to think so gay—how narrow and dark and dirty it has grown! And can this be Isly?—this vulgar faubourg, which might be an outlying quarter of Marseilles! Ah, yes; everything is changed. Everything, except you, papa," she added, with a slight laugh. "You are always the same."

The old gentleman was delighted with this compliment. He rubbed his hands and chuckled and nodded at his son-in-law, who said, with grave politeness: "In truth, M. Lelièvre, you appear to me to be in excellent health."

And yet he was as much changed outwardly as Isly and Madame de Lugagnan. It is true that in thought and speech he was exactly what he had always been; and perhaps that was what his daugh-

ter had meant. She sighed after she had spoken, thinking perhaps of a certain Isabelle Lelièvre, whom she vaguely remembered to have known long ago, and of whom this return to once familiar company and scenes reminded her. The world moves on and we must needs move with it; it is only hermits who, at the end of ten years, can boast that they have lost nothing of their former identity.

When he had conducted his beloved travellers to the door of their hotel, M. Lelièvre made as though he would have withdrawn, but they insisted upon it that he should remain and breakfast with them; and in truth his consent was not very difficult to obtain. The repast to which he presently sat down was not precisely a marvel of culinary skill; but, such as it was, it was by far the most ample and the best-served meal that he had partaken of since Isabelle's marriage. The three glasses of champagne which he permitted himself brought the colour into his withered cheeks and excited his unaccustomed brain. Something of the rather noisy joviality of those far-away years before the war came back to him, and broke out every now and then in an odd, fitful way, like snatches of an old air played out of tune. After breakfast, while he was sitting in the garden with his son-in-law, smoking a cigarette and sipping his black coffee, he exclaimed suddenly, "It is a dream! The good breakfast, the cigarette in the shade, the sunshine, the purple Bougainvillea on the wall yonder—you both—all as it used to be! Ah, Raoul, *mon ami*, do not speak: you might wake me!"

M. de Lugagnan, who could hardly be expected to share the ecstasies of this singular old person, with whom he had never been very intimate, smiled indulgently. He was quite willing to remain silent, having indeed nothing particular to say, and it was reserved for Isabelle to speak the word which should recall her father to actualities.

She came out of the house by-and-by, and leaning over his chair, said pleasantly: "Now, papa, we shall take you for a drive. We are going down to Saint-Eugène to see the old home. It is too bad of you to have abandoned it."

M. Lelièvre fell from the seventh heaven at once and landed on earth somewhat heavily. "Not to Saint-Eugène!" he exclaimed in consternation. "Not now, at all events, for it is exactly to-day that there is a little sale—some of the old furniture—useless things. No, no, my dear child, you must not go there; it would distress you."

Madame de Lugagnan, however, was not to be dissuaded. Her father did not dare to say too much, lest he should arouse her suspicions; but during the long drive down the hill, through the town and out again by the western gate, he was uneasy and absent-minded, feeling that there was danger ahead, and being conscious of one especial danger to which he hardly liked to give definite expression, even in thought.

At length they reached the villa, where the auction was in full swing; they met the purchasers coming away, bearing chairs and mattresses and what not;

they walked up through the garden, and Madame de Lugagnan uttered shrill cries of astonishment at the dilapidated aspect of all that had once been so trim and well-cared for. But to these M. Lelièvre paid no heed; for there—just as he had feared—stood M. Elias Cohen before the door, his hat on the back of his head, and his hands in his pockets; and M. Cohen was by no means to be put off with a hasty bow.

He did not return the salute; he took one dirty hand out of his pocket, and shook his forefinger within a few inches of his alarmed debtor's nose with a gesture of bantering reproof. "Oh, M. Lelièvre!" he exclaimed, "what a hard man of business you are! To sell every stick at the last moment and leave me only the bare walls! It is not well to treat an old friend so—no, it is not well!"

"Another time, M. Cohen," whispered the old man, in great perturbation—"any other time I shall be most happy to talk with you; but I implore you to leave me now. Do you not see that I have my daughter with me?"

M. Cohen responded to this appeal by removing his hat with a flourish, and bowing low to Madame de Lugagnan, who was contemplating him in blank amazement.

"Madame la Vicomtesse," said he, "if you will permit me to advise you, you will make your poor father a little allowance and not trust him with capital. The best of men, madame, but extravagant —terribly extravagant. I have been obliged to

claim this house, after waiting in vain for my money for many, many years. I might have claimed the furniture perhaps, but that I waive. I am a loser by the affair, madame, and if M. Lelièvre were to repay me and take possession of his house again, he would make a bad bargain. For the property, alas! is worth next to nothing."

The meaning of this speech was that M. Cohen, who knew that the new road would be made, and that the result would be highly advantageous to him, as owner of the Hermitage, was in a mortal fright lest Madame de Lugagnan should propose to pay off her father's debt. But if Madame de Lugagnan had any such intention, she did not divulge it. She turned away, without vouchsafing a word of reply to the Jew, and said, "Come, papa; let us go back to the hotel."

M. Lelièvre followed her, hanging his head, like a naughty child. Fain would he have crept away home and hidden his shame; but that was not to be. "You will return and dine with us, papa," Madame de Lugagnan said, in a somewhat severe tone; and he did not refuse. Of course there must be an explanation; of course his daughter would insist upon making some provision for him in his old age; of course, too, she would feel hurt at his having concealed his want from her for so long. Almost he regretted that he had seen her again; the happy dream of the morning was likely to be paid for dearly. But at any rate she could not suspect that he had impoverished himself in order

to provide her with her dowry. She must suppose that he had been extravagant, that he had made unlucky speculations—anything rather than the truth.

He had ample time in which to concoct some fresh scheme of duplicity; for when the hotel at Mustapha was once more reached, M. and Madame de Lugagnan, who had spoken little during the return drive, left him alone in their sitting-room, saying that they needed a little rest before dinner. The old man sat for some time there, gazing vacantly before him and drumming with his lean fingers upon the table. He was wondering whether Isabelle was displeased with him, and whether, after all, he might not be able to persuade her that he needed no assistance.

Suddenly a door slamming in some other part of the house caused that which separated Madame de Lugagnan's bedroom from the sitting-room to come unfastened. It was only a chink that thus opened, and the two persons who were conversing on the other side of the door did not notice what had occurred. Their voices were plainly audible.

"I consider that I have every right to be annoyed," M. de Lugagnan was saying. "I am not more avaricious than another; but when a man gives his daughter three hundred thousand francs on her marraige it is reasonable to expect that he will leave at least as much when he dies. I have counted upon this succession; I have come here, at great inconvenience, because it was represented to me that there was a probability of—of its falling in before long; and

what do I find? Why, not only that your father is in the best of health, but that he is in the worst of circumstances, and that so far from inheriting anything from him, I shall most likely be asked to contribute to his support!"

"It will not be for long, Raoul."

"Eh, who knows? It is proverbial that pensioners never die."

"But we need not give much. Five thousand francs a year would suffice, I think."

"Five thousand francs! Are you aware, madame, that you are asking me to rob your children?"

There was a long sigh; and then Madame de Lugagnan's voice said plaintively, "It must be confessed that this is rather hard upon us both."

M. Lelièvre waited to hear no more. He stole noiselessly out of the house and trotted away as fast as his tottering legs would carry him. He was half-way down to the town before he found out that his strength was well-nigh exhausted. He dropped on to one of the benches by the road-side, and there sat until long after sunset, an object of some curiosity to the passers-by, one or two of whom stopped to ask him whether he was ill. He replied to them by a bewildered stare and a few muttered words. He was, in fact, not quite certain whether he was ill or not.

The moon had risen, and the Arab town was bathed in white light and black shadow, when at length he climbed to his lodging, where Marthe was impatiently awaiting him.

"Well," she said, "has the day been good?"

"Yes, Marthe," he answered, "it has been a good day, a happy day—a very happy day, but it has come to an end now, and I am a little tired, I think."

He drew the one rickety arm-chair which the room possessed to the open window, and sank into it, resting his elbow on the sill and looking out upon the jumble of white roofs beneath him and the silvery path of moonlight on the sea. "I have had many happy days," he murmured; "one must not ask too much of life. I remember in the time of the war there was a young fellow killed by a splinter of a shell beside me, and it brought the tears into my eyes. It seemed so sad, so cruel, that he should be sent out of the world when the world was still full of pleasant things for him; for he was rich and he had a great number of friends. A mistake, my good Marthe. We make many mistakes of one kind and another; but the worst mistake of all is to live too long. For that fault there is no pardon."

The old servant wanted him to go and lie down; but he said no, he thought he would sit still for a little and enjoy the moonlight; and so she left him.

When she came in early in the morning to sweep the room she was astonished to find her master still in the same attitude. "But, monsieur!" she ejaculated indignantly, "what does this mean? Have you not been to bed, then?"

He did not reply; his head was turned away, and she thought he must have fallen asleep. It was only when she drew nearer and bent over him that she saw that he was dead.

W. E. NORRIS.

MATTIE: THE HISTORY OF AN EVENING.

A DULL and tiresome October afternoon was passing away in what was too plainly a fit of the sulks, to admit of hopes being entertained, even by the most sanguine, that it would have any pleasant or inspiriting termination.

Wednesday is not the worst day in the week for events to happen upon. There is no possible reason why a startling piece of news should not reach one's ear on a Wednesday — why a budget of interesting letters should not arrive by the post on a Wednesday—why an unexpected turn of good fortune should not befall one on a Wednesday; but somehow, upon this particular Wednesday, the idea of anything occurring to break the monotony of its wearisomeness seemed absolutely preposterous to one, at least, of the persons with whom we have to do — the mistress of Castle Cairntree, a lonely mansion on the Scottish coast. Mrs. Boscawen was an invalid, who, whatever she might have been in the bloom of her youth and health, was, with shattered nerves and impaired temper, susceptive of every outward influence, more especially when it was of a depressing or irritating nature. On the

day in question, she was so much tormented by the ceaseless drone of the wind, varied as it was merely by the rattle of the passing showers which drifted from time to time overhead, that by five o'clock she was only anxious to get rid of the remaining hours of daylight, and try what closed shutters, large fires, and candles could do towards restoring the aspect of things around her to that comfort which aided so materially her own cheerfulness.

The notion of comfort was certainly somewhat at variance with the outward appearance of the thin grey tower with its modern wings, which, according to the fashion of the district, was dignified by the appellation of "Castle." There was little of grandeur, still less of beauty, in its appearance; the site was poor, the country around barren—in short, the former laird, who had prided himself on the handsome manner in which he had restored and enlarged the old place, would have done his successors better service by razing it to the ground and building another in its stead. Draughty, troublesome, ill-constructed, however, as the mansion was, it was endeared to its present owner by association and possession; and consequently, by the aid of thick curtains, double doors, carpets, and endurance, his wife contrived to exist, and even to be satisfied with her home. Her standing grievance—namely, her being unable to accompany her daughters into society—did not, perhaps, embitter her existence as much as she would fain have had it supposed that it did. To lie on her sofa in the little sitting-room, which was

the one really luxurious apartment in the house—to keep herself warm in winter and cool in summer—to trifle with her needlework, and dabble amongst her correspondence, with intervals of desultory chit-chat as her husband and children went in and out of the chamber—this was the sort of routine which, to confess the truth, suited Mrs. Boscawen to a hair's-breadth; and it was scarcely more from necessity than from predilection that she had softly, and by gentle gradations, sunk into it.

But then it was necessary to the preservation of her spirits and general equanimity that the machinery of the family and household should work smoothly, that perplexities should not be allowed to embarrass, or vexations to annoy—whilst, at the same time, agreeable interruptions were especially valued, as giving a fillip to the languid hours.

Whether the letter which was put into her hand as daylight waned on the day whose length and dreariness she had repeatedly bemoaned, was to prove a source of pleasure or of trouble, remained to be seen; but at the moment of receiving it, the lady was certainly roused to curiosity. More than curiosity, more than mere ordinary interest, was visible on the countenance of the tall girl by her side, whose eyes by turns regarded the sheet and perused the expression on her mother's face, and who betrayed by the varying colour in her cheek and by the nervous clasping and unclasping of her hands, a certain anxiety and agitation which she was endeavouring otherwise to conceal. Fortunately for

the attempt she was not exposed to the scrutiny of a keen observer, for if Mattie's face had declared what was passing in Mattie's bosom, it would have been a sad piece of work. Mrs. Boscawen would have jumped off her sofa in surprise and bewilderment, and the letter and all it contained—— But never mind, let us confine ourselves to what really did happen, and not fritter away our time in idle conjectures.

The weather having been so depressing, and the day monotonous to both mother and daughter, a little event out of the common, a trifling incident of this kind, was exactly the right thing, coming at the right time,—and at the first brush the parent appeared to be the more eager of the two in discovering its nature; but no sooner had the contents of the note been mastered, and its object understood, than she lapsed into her usual state of nervous indecision and querulousness.

"I wish Adelaide or Julia were here," she said. "So tiresome of them to be out just when they are wanted. I knew something would be sure to happen when they were out of the way. It always does."

Her companion was silent.

"What o'clock is it, Mattie?"

"Nearly five, mamma."

"They will surely be here soon. But what is to be said? You see what your aunt wants—you to go there with the rest to-night, and take Douglas's place at the dinner-table. I suppose you will have to go. You would like to go?"

"Yes, mamma."

"Ridiculous to send over at such an hour; it gives one no time to consider——" The door opened. "What! An answer wanted?" exclaimed Mrs. Boscawen, with the startled air of one unaccustomed to sudden demands. "But, Boyd, how can I send one? Stop a moment,—Mattie, speak; what is to be done?"

"What do you mean, mamma?" said her daughter, gently. "What is it that——"

"Don't you see, my dear? Boyd, *you* understand; Miss Adelaide is not come in yet; the man must wait."

"His orders is to be back immediately, ma'am. I don't think the young ladies can be in yet awhile, ma'am."

As he spoke, Boyd glanced at Miss Mattie, whose elder sisters were the delinquents, and whom he, in common with the rest of the household, had as yet scarcely learned to take into account. Only a few months before she had returned to them from her foreign school, almost a stranger; and in what ways, and to what extent, she might be depended upon, had yet to be found out. Boyd himself had carried the fair maid in his arms as a baby, and was jealous as a parent of her dignity and her honour,—but he was not sure that she was to be trusted with the ink-bottle on the present occasion. Lady Turner, to whom a note had to be written, was a person of great importance to the Boscawen household; and Miss Mattie was just Miss Mattie, who never

put herself forward, never was sent for when visitors were in the drawing-room, never was taken into council on any matter of consequence,—from whom, in short, nothing was expected but unobtrusive dutiful acquiescence in all things soever that might be ordained by the ruling powers.

As she stood meekly by, offering no suggestion, Boyd and his mistress alike debated what was to be done.

Mrs. Boscawen was the first to speak, having naturally the most at stake ; whatever Boyd might think, she was not going to get off her sofa and set herself to the task of writing, just when she was feeling particularly low, and nervous, and wretched, —startled, too—anything sudden was always so tiresome and startling. Mattie must surely be able to pen a few words that would not disgrace her—Mattie, on whose education so much had been spent, and who was, as it were, just off the irons. She felt, all at once, that it was foolish to have hesitated ; and without permitting herself to reflect further, or even to consult the grey-headed dependant, who stood waiting, with her eye, observed decidedly, "Then, Mattie, my dear, you must go to the writing-table."

She need not have feared, however, that any intervention would be offered. Boyd had come to the same conclusion as his mistress ere he respectfully withdrew ; for although he shook his head wisely outside the door, and prognosticated no great things of the performance now to be gone

through, he felt that the emergency was extreme. The groom was impatient, the light was going: under such circumstances, and since—although he stopped at every window along the gallery to peer out, in hopes of seeing Miss Adelaide and Miss Julia—they were not anywhere in view, the risk must be run.

"Now, Mattie," said her mother, brightening up in spite of herself at the novelty of the proceeding, "have you got proper paper? Don't put too much on one page, my love; a note should never be compressed. And a few lines are all that is needed, just to say that my poor head is so bad to-day that I have made you my deputy-correspondent since your sisters are out; and——"

"Stop a moment, please, mamma."

"Write it nicely, my dear; your aunt is a great observer of little things."

"Yes, mamma. I am ready now."

"Then you must thank her, and say I am very happy that you should accept her kind invitation. I cannot understand her asking you, nevertheless," added Mrs. Boscawen; "for certainly one of the young Hamiltons or Wrays would have filled Douglas's place better than you. *You* cannot fill a man's place. How can you hand—— Well, well, I won't speak; and it does not signify, either; it is your aunt's own affair if her table is disarranged. How are you getting on, my love?"

How she was getting on the youthful scribe could scarcely tell herself. Pretty well, she thought. Her

fingers might tremble, and her heart beat, but the page before her was neither blotted nor blurred. With some complacency she surveyed the whole, ere she carried it to the sofa for inspection, and watched for the effect it would produce, much as she had been wont to anticipate the commendation so fair and even an exercise would have won at school.

It was this gentle glow of self-approval manifested in her daughter's countenance which checked the "My dear child!" just rising to the parent's lips. She looked at Mattie, looked at the letter, and looked up again with a smile.

All at once the fair young face was suffused with colour. "Is it not right, mamma? Will it not do?"

"Well, my love, ye—es, it will 'do,' I daresay. It is not a *very* good note, you know, Mattie,—not like Adelaide's or Julia's notes; but your aunt will understand to make allowances, and perhaps, she may not look at it much,"—turning the sheet over in her hands dubiously; then, with a start, "My child, you have spelt correspondent with one *r*!"

"Give it me, mamma, quick. I can put that in easily."

"Softly, my love; don't be in too great a hurry. Yes, you can slip it in very well in the corner—at least you must do it as well as you can; you would not like to write it over again? Come here, let me show you. All these little sentences at the end,—all this part—'Believe me, your affectionate niece,

Matilda Boscawen,' should be in distinct short lines,—not running into one another as you have made them do. Do you understand? Then here again"—turning to the page before—"you should have begun afresh here—make a new start with a large M. A note or a letter ought not to be filled up like a copy-book. Of course, I could not see to direct you in this respect; and the phrases are all very well,—you have said exactly what I told you; but these trifling points, the knowing where to stop and where to begin—and your lines should be a great deal further apart besides,—all this is of importance to the look of the thing. And let me tell you, my dear, that to write a good note should be one of a woman's chief accomplishments."

"But what *am* I to do?" sighed Mattie.

"Let it go for this time," unexpectedly rejoined her mother, who, having had the satisfaction of pointing out the defects, felt, as many other people would, that they were not worth further trouble. "Remember what I said for another occasion, my love; and now, ring for tea."

"I am to send this?"

"Dear me, yes, there is no help for it." Such relapses into fretfulness were not uncommon to the speaker. "It must go, I suppose. What are you doing now?"

"Directing the envelope, mamma."

"Is that still to be done? Then could you not just take out a fresh sheet, and—— But, no! I am so tired I really cannot go over it all again. No, I

cannot look at the direction, my head aches too much. Take it down-stairs yourself, like a good child ; and don't let me have Boyd fussing in and out of the room more than can be helped."

The door was scarcely heard to close behind the departing messenger, it slid so softly into its socket. But once outside, it was the flight of a terrified bird that brought Mattie to the bottom of the great staircase, across the hall, along the passages, till she found her object. Boyd, she guessed, would not be far to seek ; and sure enough, though her light footsteps left no sound, he caught the rustle of her dress, and emerged from a doorway, ere she had considered by what means to summon him.

The letter was now taken from Mattie's hands, and scarce a minute elapsed ere her listening ear caught the sound of a horse's hoofs pass beneath the window where she stood on the watch, and she saw the groom despatched by Lady Turner trot quickly out of sight.

A sigh of ecstasy burst from her lips. A wonderful, well-nigh impossible thing had come to pass. An event which she could not have stirred hand or foot to bring about, had been brought about for her. A mystery she could not fathom had been accomplished ; a miracle had been wrought. All this, and nothing less, it seemed to this simple maiden, because the most ordinary common thing in the world had happened. What more natural than that her brother having failed, she should be summoned by her aunt to supply his deficiency ? What more

likely than that she should be permitted to do so? What need of this fear, this trepidation, this emotion on so trite a subject?

And why should Mattie care to go at all? The night was dark and wild—the circle at Lady Turner's would in all probability prove formal and unattractive,—formidable, moreover, to one so shy and unused to society. It would have been much more easily understood, much more in accordance with the young Matilda's character, if she had shrunk from and shunned the ordeal. It would,—and yet it had seemed as if her very heart would break if she had had to send a refusal. Underneath that passive exterior, veins were throbbing and swelling: that gentle acquiescence hid a passion of entreaty.

She had so envied the elder ones who had been preferred before her, had so patiently borne her deprivation, and so proudly hidden her desire, that the present reaction was almost too much.

To none had a whisper of her secret been confided; and how childish would one and all have deemed her, knowing nothing,—how much, how infinitely worse than childish—a fool, a simpleton—had the truth come out?

That Frederick was to be there—the handsome, haughty, stiff-necked Fred, the pride and object and worry of his mother's life—the incomprehensible, unmanageable, unsusceptible cousin,—what should that have been to any of the fair Boscawens? They had been deeply annoyed,—at least Adelaide

and Julia had, for the youngest sister knew nothing of such matters,—because a ridiculous rumour had got abroad, and been bandied from one to the other, founded on the mere fact of Frederick's having been seen galloping across the floating sands which lay between Rimmin and the Castle, whereas he ought to have gone round to his uncle's door by the road at the head of the bay. Suppose he had chosen the quickest path—suppose he were a dare-devil rider who risked his neck without much thought of its value—was that to say that he would not as readily have done the same had the dangerous route led him to any other goal? He had brought Mattie a fragment of pink sea-weed from the islet in the heart of the bay, and Mattie had taken it with a burst of tears.

This had been unfortunate, foolish. She had been spoken to, and told how absurd she was, and kept away from Rimmin strenuously from that time. She had also been tutored to avoid her cousin, to speak coldly to him, withdraw herself from his company when accident brought him to the Castle, and in all respects show that what had so unluckily happened was merely the effect of the shock consequent on finding that any one—*any one*—had been so thoughtless, and had had so narrow an escape.

All this Mattie had done, and no further blame had in consequence attached itself to her.

But now Frederick was going away; and going, as she felt, under an impression so false, that if he left Rimmin at this time, according to his present

intentions, all was over that ever might have been between them. Once, she had felt nearly sure she was beloved, but of late coldness had begotten coldness, and reserve, formality—so that the alienation at length had become complete, and one at least had well-nigh despaired of anything ever happening to break it down. But might not Mattie have this one chance more? Might she not just see him, hear him, be in his presence once again?

The fiat went forth—"No." Adelaide and Julia alone accepted their aunt's hospitality, and not a word or sign gave the little sister when she heard it. Hard as her fate was, she had borne it bravely; but none the less had the disappointment been bitter, and to find herself once more, without act or effort of her own, within a few hours of meeting her cousin within his own halls, filled her with amazement and strange delight. No wonder that tremors had over run her frame as she stood in patient silence during her mother's deliberation; Mattie could never speak, but she could keenly feel.

It was not the decision she had had to fear, however, it was the delay. And that we shall presently explain.

Mrs. Boscawen, being precluded by the state of her health from leaving her own apartments, had known nothing of what had passed between Frederick and his cousin. She saw Mattie gentle, quiet, composed as ever, and fancied that her youngest daughter, whose temper and disposition she had hardly so far had an opportunity of studying, was

by nature silent and reserved, as she had certainly shown herself to be under the diligent supervision before mentioned. Since the parent had nothing whereof to complain, she asked no questions, and was vouchsafed no information, there being no occasion for her to be enlightened.

At least so thought Adelaide and Julia, and they had their own reasons for reticence. Frederick's gallantry had annoyed them to the full as much as had its effect upon their sister, and they had been even more out of temper with their friend and gossip, Norah Hamilton, than with either; for it was Norah who, referring to the foolhardy feat, had alleged that people "talked," and that it was given out everywhere that Sir Frederick was engaged to one of his cousins. This was the more provoking since there neither was, nor ever had been, any truth in such a statement, and the idea was repudiated with indignation,—but it was not repeated at home.

"Mattie would think it did not signify what people said," averred Julia.

"Mamma would show that there was something wrong before Aunt Caroline," added Adelaide.

"We should be prevented going to Rimmin ourselves," concluded both. And that settled the matter.

For they liked going to Rimmin very much, if not quite so much as Mattie did; and as they came home along the shore from their walk to the village on the afternoon in question, they were in high good-

humour at the prospect of spending the evening there. They had thought themselves obliged to go out, stormy as the weather was, alleging that a few little odds and ends of messages, trifles that were wanted by one and another, would not be properly attended to unless they took upon themselves the task. Mattie was no good; they did not think of asking her to undertake the business; and on no account would they have out a carriage, a carriage being needed so soon again. That is to say they wanted the walk to exhale some of their exuberant spirits, and to heighten the roses in their cheeks for the evening.

When Lady Turner's messenger arrived at the Castle it was not far from the hour when the return of the two might be looked for, and it was the knowledge of this which made all the time spent by Mrs. Boscawen in considering the question, and pointing out the errors of Mattie's epistle, one of trial to her daughter. In every gust of wind she fancied she heard her sisters' footsteps at the door; and once admitted to the deliberation, their influence was everything with their mother. By intuition she knew what scale it would weigh down in the present instance, and that her chance might go to the winds once Adelaide raised her voice, or Julia her eyebrows.

But the note was written, and the man gone. Joy, joy! No one could now recall him; the walkers were coming from an opposite direction; and by the time they knew anything of the matter, the answer

would be in her aunt's hands, and she might snap her fingers at all interference. But she must calm the flutter in her breath, and shade the light within her eye: none must suspect what she would hide, even from herself, if she could. At Rimmin all would be easy; she was not afraid of betrayal, once in Frederick's presence,—the very thought that he was near was enough to silence and to petrify,—but beforehand, an unguarded speech, a look of happiness, might attract fatal attention.

Mrs. Boscawen, however, was still alone when Mattie returned to the boudoir.

"My tea, Mattie; I am so thirsty, child," she began, plaintively. "Your sisters really need not have stayed so long. It is past five now, and getting quite dark. I don't like their being out at this hour."

"It is only dark in this room, mamma; it is quite light outside."

"Adelaide will not have been able to match my wool, I am sure."

"I daresay she will; it is not a difficult blue to get."

"More difficult than you think; there are so many shades nowadays. I wish I had told her to bring another case of needles. If I should lose this needle to-night, I should not know what to do; it is my last; I have not another anywhere. Dear! how stupid of me not to think of that before, when she was actually going to the needle-shop! Now I shall have a whole evening doing nothing——"

"You must just not lose your needle, mamma," said Mattie, gaily. Poor child! She could not but be gay, do what she would. Everything was now in her eyes as bright as in her mother's all was sombre, and her conviction of the daylight's having lasted, and of her sisters' successful shopping, would have extended itself to further cheerfulness on any other subject started; she could not conjure up needles, but she could say, "you must just not lose yours," as though such words had a charm to retain it.

The invalid, however, was not to be beguiled from her mood.

"I do not drop it on purpose, my dear. But you know what a sad helpless creature I am of an evening, when I have had all the worries of the day to go through; and if it should slip through my fingers, how am I to find it again? I cannot hunt it up myself, and Harrison has no eyes. If I send for her, it upsets me altogether. It is rather hard that I am to be left to Harrison alone for my entire evening."

This was to be expected; it was only wonderful that the prospective want of a companion during the hour which she spent in the sitting-room after dinner before retiring for the night, had not presented itself as a misery before.

"I had thought to have had you, at least," pursued Mrs. Boscawen, in accents conveying, "You are not much, but still you are better than nothing." "I had been looking forward to hearing the end of the book Julia is reading to me. But I suppose, now that Douglas is gone, you will all three want to

go everywhere. I shall have to give in, for I dislike, of all things, making myself a drag upon my children; but I must say, my hours of solitude are the most trying part of all my ill health."

"But, dear mamma, it happens so seldom that you have any. You know we hardly ever go out at all, and you have never once been without one of us before."

"You would not like it yourself, Mattie."

Mattie was silent, assiduously bending over the tea-table, and by-and-by the benign influence of a strong and steaming cup began to appear. "My head is really better," the invalid allowed, "and perhaps it was as well that the others did not come in till I could better bear their voices. Be sure you keep the teapot warm, Mattie; they will not like to find things uncomfortable."

"Mamma, there is a little rose in that glass,—it is not doing much good there——"

"Not doing much good?" said Mrs. Boscawen, laughing. "What good should it do? What do you mean, child?"

"It would be just the thing for my hair to-night, if you do not want it very much."

"Is that it? No, I do not want it very much, at least I think I can exist without it, Mattie; bring the glass to me. Here," continued the speaker, raising herself on her elbow, "this pretty bunch of scarlet geranium, and that spray of jessamine, will suit you better than the rose. But we want some green; this piece of myrtle—I almost grudge the

myrtle ; but, however, it will not be wasted—take them now, my love ; that is as pretty a bouquet as you could have "

" Thank you, thank you, mamma."

" I declare you have quite a colour to-day, Mattie."

" Have I, mamma ? "

" You are generally pale, and this morning I fancied you particularly pale ; I wondered if your head, too, ached. Now go and dress, my dear, for you will want help, and there is not so very much time. Harrison can go to you first, so as not to interfere with your sisters."

They did not come in until the room had been silent for nearly a quarter of an hour. They had been round the garden and greenhouse after returning from their walk, having, like Mattie, a fancy for wearing natural flowers in their hair, and they now appeared laden with fresh-scented blossoms.

' Heliotrope, even," cried Julia, gaily. " I do think we manage well. Mamma, I would leave these with you, only I have nothing else to wear."

" I did remember some ferns for your glass, mamma," subjoined Adelaide. " Here they are. But where are all the flowers gone ? " inquired she, in surprise. " They were only gathered this morning."

" A marauder has carried them off. If I had known you were going to the greenhouse, I might have waited to see what you brought in ; but I gave them all to Mattie."

" To Mattie ? What did Mattie want to do with them ? "

"To wear them to-night, as you and Julia do."

"But Mattie is not going to-night, mamma."

"Indeed she is. A little event happened whilst you were out. Your aunt sent over a special messenger to invite her. She is wanted to fill Douglas's place at the dinner-table."

"And she is to go?" The voice was Adelaide's, but so changed was it from the jovial pleasantry of its tone on her first appearance, that it sounded in her mother's ears perfectly appalling. In an instant Mrs. Boscawen took the alarm. She had done the wrong thing, and there was now no escape for her; instead of having the pleasure of recounting the details of the "little event"—instead of being able to dwell upon her difficulties in the matter of the note, on Lady Turner's civility, and the groom's impatience, with the unction of one who had not often the chance of being a narrator,—she was to be brought to the bar, and called on sharply for her defence.

In her confusion and astonishment the poor lady shuffled. "I did not like to refuse," she murmured, uneasily. "I—I really did not know what to say."

"Did you accept the invitation for her, mamma?" It was Julia whose accents now expressed, "Answer me that, without further circumlocution."

"I—— Well, I allowed her to write for herself."

"And to say she would go?"

"She said she would go. Yes."

A solemn silence ensued, during which the par-

ent's heart quaked in spite of herself. She could not stand it. "If I had had a minute to think," her nervous apology ran, "if I had not been hurried so, I might have managed to hit upon some excuse. But the man was waiting, and Boyd insisted, and Mattie was no help to me one way or another. She never is, poor child. I was left entirely to myself; and yet I was told the answer must be sent immediately! It was all so quickly done,—in such a bustle. Why were you so late in coming home, you two? If you had only been here——"

"We could not tell that we should be wanted," said Adelaide, gloomily; "but I am sure I wish with all my heart we had been."

Then she glanced at Julia, and there was a passing aside—"What is to be done?"

"If I had only had time," reiterated the culprit, querulously. "People have no right to rush at one in that impetuous way, demanding answers on the spot. It makes one shake all over; I have been uncomfortable ever since,—at least I was just quieting down when you came in to stir it all up over again. My head has been so bad this afternoon. It is no pleasure to me, I can tell you," she added, with some spirit, "to have only a lonely evening before me, I do not send Mattie away for my own good."

"Mamma, why did you not think of that before?" cried Julia.

"It would have been the very thing to say," added her sister.

Mrs. Boscawen looked troubled. "I don't know, I'm sure," she said; "your aunt would immediately have set me down as selfish."

"Not if Mattie had written it herself. If she had said that she could not think of leaving you—at least, that *we* could not think of your being left entirely by yourself—Aunt Caroline would have understood at once."

"But Mattie would have been disappointed."

"Did she say so?"

"You know she never does say anything. No; I don't remember that she expressed any wish on the subject, but I think she was *willing*— I am sure she was quite *ready*, to go. It is so seldom that she cares about being taken anywhere, that I was really glad she should have the treat."

"That is it, mamma; it *is* a treat. Mamma, I do think you ought to know. Mattie likes to go to Rimmin, because Frederick—because she and Frederick——"

"What!" exclaimed Mrs. Boscawen, bolt-upright on her sofa, headache and grievances forgotten.

"Oh, nothing much, mamma; nothing at all much. But she is foolish about him; at least she behaved rather absurdly once, and I am not quite sure that if anything of the sort happened the second time, she might not do the same again."

"Anything of what sort?"

Then followed Julia's version of the ride across the quicksands, and the favour which Mattie had been told to wear in her breast, and which had made

her cry. "But of course," added the sister, "she was very much ashamed, and has been on her guard ever since. As Fred is going away, we thought there was no need to say anything,—it will all be forgotten before they meet again; but, for Mattie's own sake, I am sorry she is to see him again just now."

"Has she ever seen him since?"

"Only once or twice; and then she kept away from where he was, and they hardly spoke to each other at all. It will be different to-night; he will be able to find her out if he wishes, and she cannot well keep out of his way."

"I don't feel sure that she desires to keep out of his way," observed Adelaide, bluntly. "If I were certain of that, I should not mind her going so much."

"You see, mamma," pursued the milder Julia, "it is a pity to make too much of it. Fred meant nothing, but Mattie was startled, and thought him a sort of hero; and you know she is sensitive, and easily upset. Really," she subjoined, charitably, "I don't think she was so much to blame as appeared."

"But I would stop her going to-night," said Adelaide, with resolution.

"You would? Now?" Mrs. Boscawen looked from one to the other, to make sure that both were in earnest,—that in the midst of all these new thoughts and ideas she still retained sense enough to understand aright.

Certainly there was no mistaking the expression on either daughter's face. They were fine-looking

girls, with abundance of flaxen hair, high noses, and determined well-shaped mouths. Mattie, who was chestnut, and had a small and tender lip, was not more unlike the older pair in her shrinking, varying temperament than in the contrast her mobile features presented to their large calm faces. By emotion it was certain neither of the two now under scrutiny would at any time be carried away, but at the present moment they were roused as much as their mother ever remembered to have seen them. It was not becoming; they did not look the better for it, as Mattie did; but it answered its purpose. The parent was mastered in time. The cardinals subdued their pope; forced from her a decree; and compelled her to name a legate.

Meantime within her large dimly-lighted chamber, Mattie's toilet was proceeding joyously. Stepping from mirror to wardrobe, from table to cupboard, she hummed a tune in the pauses betwixt directing the maid and submitting to her nimble fingers. All went well; the glossy locks were knotted up, the fragrant blossoms wreathed in and out between them, the white robe was on, and the pearls were clasped round the soft young throat. Completely arrayed she stood, and no fairer form had ever been reflected in the ancient pier-glass than that which, like a pensive lily, with hanging head, almost too shyly satisfied to look, paused for a last survey in front.

"Oh, to-night, to-night!" whispered a voice within the young girl's bosom. "What may to-night

bring? What will to-night do? Who would ever have dreamed that there was to be such a to-night to such a morning?"

A tap at the door.

Mattie started. Was it the wind? Was it the rattling of the old cornices which age had loosened, or was it a quick imperative voice without, demanding admittance? The latter.

Blushing, she turned from the mirror, ashamed to be detected in such a contemplation, and went quickly forward as the door opened. "It was not bolted, Adelaide; you need not have waited. The handle is stiff, that is all."

"Mattie—— Oh, it is a pity that you are dressed."

Mattie's eyes were raised in gentle wonder. A pity? She had let them fall on the ground, modestly awaiting the approving glance which perhaps even her eldest sister might vouchsafe to such a toilet, and she could not understand that her cares and pains should produce only "a pity."

"Mamma will tell you. I think she wishes to see you at once. I am in a hurry," said Adelaide, with a haste that was curious, all things considered, "I cannot stop to talk. Is Harrison gone to our room?"

"Adelaide,—what is it?" But Adelaide was gone.

The gloves and handkerchief just gathered into her sister's hand fell beneath the table; something of evil Mattie boded, and even that something was enough; it was an effort to collect herself and go down-stairs.

"You are dressed? That is a pity. I was afraid

you would be," said Mrs. Boscawen, using almost the same words as her daughter had done, but in a tone of more regret. "I am really sorry you should have had the trouble, my dear; for, on second thoughts, I think it right to cancel my permission for you to go this evening."

It had been agreed on during the council that no reason was to be given—that nothing about Frederick, at least, was to be said.

"I had not fully considered the question," continued the speaker kindly, and yet with a definite purpose and strength in her present resolution that had not been apparent in the former—"I was taken by surprise, seized upon all at once, taken advantage of——"

"Oh, mamma!"

"Well, well, my dear, I did not mean by *you*. It was Boyd's fault, and your aunt's, and—and altogether I seemed to have no choice. Your sisters, when they came in, were quite astonished to find that I had been prevailed on to consent—they thought it quite unwise, and though I wish that you had not had all the trouble of making ready—looking so nice, too," she could not resist adding—"still I am afraid, my love, I must send you to take off your things again."

She paused for a reply, but in front of her stood a marble statue, dumb and motionless.

"Do you not understand?" pursued Mrs. Boscawen, with a touch of irritation.

"Aunt Caroline," murmured Mattie, for on this

rock she had built for security; "what would—she —say?"

"Adelaide will explain it to her. Both your sisters think that I ought not to be left alone on such a doleful evening; they will show that it was natural I should not think of my own comfort," said the invalid, with the complacency of one who considered herself irreproachable in that respect; "and you are so young, no one would expect you to be as thoughtful for me as the two who have been more at home, and know what a poor broken-down creature I am —broken-down in every way. Even this wind tries my nerves almost more than I can bear," putting her hand to her forehead.

Twice her auditor essayed to speak, and twice the trembling lips refused their office; but at length a low sound caught the parent's ear.

"Well," she said.

"Mamma——"

"Well, my dear, well? What is it? I hear you."

"Let me go this once."

Mrs. Boscawen stared. This was, in plain terms, more than she had bargained for; it had been hitherto so easy to govern and direct this child, that the idea of the child ever suggesting, far less insisting on a thing for itself had never for a moment entered any one's head.

"What did you say?" she inquired incredulously.

"Let me go this once, if you please, mamma."

"That I shall not," said her mother, with asperity.

"Dear mamma——" The eyes were swimming, and one large drop slipped from the lash on which it hung, and stole down the cheek. No more could be spoken at such a moment.

"Fie, Mattie! To cry for this! To make so much of such a paltry sacrifice! I am really hurt; it is the last thing I should have expected. Many a sick parent has to urge her children to leave her side for the sake of their own health, but mine require to be bidden to stay with me."

"Just this once. Dear mamma, don't speak like that; you know I like to sit with you, and read to you, and play to you, and you know I never did think it any sacrifice,—but to-night, I want—oh, I *want* to go."

"Why should you want to go? What is there about an ordinary dinner-party to make it an object of desire to any one? *I* am not going; and though, of course, I should like as well as others to do as they do, and take part in what they enjoy, you do not see me making a fuss and complaining that I cannot."

"If you would allow me——"

"I will not allow you. After this, after your showing so much persistency and self-will in the matter, I should consider myself quite to blame if I gave way. Now you need not stand there any longer. I am not going to have any contention on the matter; it is for me to decide on such a point, and your duty is to obey without hesitation. Go at once and take off your things."

"Mamma——"

"Really, Mattie, I could not have believed it of you. I desire you to go, and you stand as still as a stone! I never would have thought that you, of all people, would be the one to whom I should have to speak twice. I shall say no more, but I am much disappointed by the way in which you have behaved to-night."

Then Mattie left.

Mrs. Boscawen had seldom in her life been so peremptory with any one. She was, as has before been hinted, a feeble-minded, characterless person, who was seldom interested in much beyond her own petty comforts or complaints,—timid by nature, yet jealous of maintaining such power over the family and household as she could by any means keep within her grasp. She was neither unkind nor inordinately selfish; provided it cost no effort, she could agree to a request cheerfully, and listen to an account with patience; but the moment an adverse wind blew, she yielded to its blast—she was at the mercy of any dominant power.

It had been distasteful to her beyond measure to find that there had been passages—scenes between the cousins, whereof she had known nothing. A deprivation of this sort was precisely what she could smart under; and, moreover, the consciousness of not having herself behaved with strict integrity, of having been evasive and timorous during the interview with the elder sisters, had found vent in an extra display of peevish authority when she had

been called on anew to face the younger. They should not, one and all, set her at nought as they had done; she would have one at least under her maternal sway; and though Adelaide and Julia had as usual made this sway their cat's-paw, Mattie could not know, she flattered herself, that they had done so. (Mattie, we may be allowed to suspect, knew very well; but that is not to our purpose.)

And then Mrs. Boscawen was really vexed by what she had heard.

Sir Frederick might, of course, had he so chosen, have sought an alliance with his Scottish cousins; it would have been perhaps satisfactory if he had done so. But since nothing of the kind had ever been attempted, and since, up to the present time, they had all got on so amicably together, it was really too tiresome of Mattie, a chit of a school-girl, to come home and introduce an element of discord between the sober households. What should she know of Fred in three months? Adelaide and Julia had been intimate with him for years, had stayed at his hunting-box, where Lady Turner presided during the spring months, and met him every other night in town for several seasons—yet to them he was only an escort, a good-humoured influential cousin, good for tickets to shows and *fêtes*—a man whom they liked to be seen with, but whom they had not the smallest ambition to be with unless they *were* seen. They tried to believe that he admired them and was proud of them; but there was sufficient uncertainty on the point, to provoke effort, to

make them more than ordinarily particular as to their appearance and manners when he was present.

At least, however, he should not amuse himself with Mattie. He had never attempted anything of the sort with either of the grown-up Miss Boscawens, and they had no idea of his paying their sister the dubious compliment of gallantry that meant nothing. If there lurked a secret twinge of jealousy at her having attracted an attention, even a passing attention, which their charms had failed to inspire, at least the fair prudes did not themselves suspect as much. They felt that they had done the right thing as to the point now at issue, and attired themselves for the evening, with the peaceful consciousness that the desired end had been attained.

"But we need not say anything to your father," observed Mrs. Boscawen, to the first who came down after the interview above narrated.

It chanced to be Julia—Julia in ruffles and flounces, ribbons and jewels, more ample, fuller blown than ever; and as she spoke, the mother surveyed the finery doubtfully. Mattie had looked different.

To be sure, what suited Mattie would hardly have been the thing for Julia; and the simple folds of a white frock, which did excellently well for slim eighteen, were not perhaps calculated to set off the maturer form of robust five-and-twenty. There was so much of this particular five-and-twenty, moreover, such a neck and bust, and arms and shoulders, that the fully trimmed, festooned, and rust-

ling train could not be said to be superabundant; but, nevertheless, the effect was not so pleasing as it ought to have been. Had necessity compelled the mother to desire that it and all its accessories should be doffed, it is certain that she would not have ejaculated that "Looking so nice, too," which escaped ere she was aware, when passing the decree upon her youngest.

No fears nor doubts, however, disturbed the resplendent Julia herself. Satisfaction shone in her eye, showed itself in the tones of her voice, and even influenced the tenor of her reply. She agreed with her mother, and spoke of her sister as "Poor Mattie."

"I went to her room just now," she said, "and she was so quiet that I should not have thought she had minded, only I saw that she had thrown all her things—her nice white muslin and all, in a heap on the floor; and her hair was loose over her shoulders——"

"That was temper; there was no need to have touched her hair. She might, at least, have let me have the pleasure of seeing it nicely arranged, she need not have thought it wasted."

"You did not give any reason for stopping her, mamma?"

"None whatever. I said exactly what you and Adelaide told me—nothing that she could have minded—nothing, at least, that she *ought* to have minded. I could not believe my ears, when she actually tried to make me alter my decision afterwards."

"Did she do that?"

"She did indeed."

"What did she say, mamma?'

"She begged to go; that was all. Quite enough too, for one who never asks to be taken anywhere. It showed me immediately that I was right—that you and Adelaide were right, in advising me to put a stop to it."

"I am really sorry for her. Mamma, don't say any more about it; it will do no good."

"And I am sure *I* have had enough of the subject. I wish now you would all get away as quickly as possible, and let us settle down to our quiet evening. I daresay we shall be quite happy together. Your father has brought in the parcel from the library; it was kind of him to call for it, and it will be quite an interest to Mattie to see what we have got. I am looking forward to her reading aloud—it will keep the dismal howling of the wind out of my ears."

Already she was impatient to begin. "I do wish you were all out of the way now," she proceeded. "Could you not go down to the drawing-room and wait there? The going in and out, and the talking of many people in this little room, always fusses me."

"Very well, mamma; I will go down with the very next person that appears; but I may stay till some one does, may I not? This room is so nice and warm," with a little shiver.

"Have you wraps enough?"

"Quite, mamma, thank you."

"You will not get blown about at either house, that is one good thing. The entrance to Rimmin is as well sheltered as our own."

"Better; at least it was better until papa built up that archway. Oh, we shall be quite out of the wind going in and out of the carriage, but I wish we had not to drive along the shore-road; the tide is so high to-night that the waves are breaking right over the rocks."

"Indeed!" said Mrs. Boscawen, languidly. She was not going to drive along the shore-road herself, and the waves seemed a good way off from her cosy pillows. "Oh, here are papa and Adelaide at last. Now, then, good-bye; go down to the drawing-room everybody. What! Is the carriage there? That's right, then. Do shut the door, Boyd, the cold air coming in from the passage chills one all over. Put your shawls on, girls, quickly."

"But where is Mattie?" inquired her husband.

"She will be here directly. As soon as you are gone, we shall have our little dinner together ——"

"Is she not going with us?"

"Not to-night; she will go another night."

"I wish her to go to-night," said Mr. Boscawen, decidedly. "Julia, call your sister, and say we are waiting."

"Papa ——" Julia paused, looking round for support; and at the look, a voice was raised from the sofa.

"It is impossible, my dear," said the mother. "If I had known that you wished it before—but

now it is too late. She is not thinking of going. She is not dressed, nor—nor anything."

"Then she must dress, and tell her to be quick."

"The carriage is at the door."

"It can wait a few minutes. Do as I desire you, Julia."

To such a tone even Julia must submit, and without a word she left the room.

But who shall describe the shock of mingled feelings which that message gave? Oh, how bitterly did Mattie now repent her ill-advised haste, her passionate weeping! Get ready to go now? *Now*, when every single part of her attire would have to be put on afresh,—when her hair, all dishevelled as it was, would in itself require care, pains, attention, —and when the flowers lay broken on the floor?

Now? Was she dreaming? Her trembling feet refused their office, as she rose in bewildered consternation, and down upon the chair she sank again. Could she ever, with such a beating heart and such nerveless fingers, begin from the beginning once more, and rehabilitate herself within the time permitted? Harrison seemed an age in coming.

"And oh, Miss Mattie," cried the maid, "'twill take a good half-hour, your hair alone; and there's your dress to lace, and the bows to tie, and even then—bless me, bless me!" Which latter aspiration, murmured under the speaker's breath, was called forth by a vision of the pale, tear-stained face beside her, as contrasted with its glowing freshness when last seen so short a time before.

"I can be ready, Julia, indeed I can. Oh, Harrison, what need to brush my hair all over? Put it up as it was, or—or any way you can. Oh, my flowers, my pretty flowers! Oh, Julia, why did mamma change so often? Why did she insist on my undressing, as she did? Tell papa I will be ready, immediately. Dear, kind papa. Please find my gloves, Harrison, I had them one minute ago."

Another messenger, in haste and breathless, a voice at the door saying, "If Miss Mattie's ready, she is to come; .if not, Miss Julia is to come immediately. Coachman says the tide is still rising, and the horses will be frightened if the waves come too near. Master says he can't wait another minute."

"It's of use, Miss Mattie," said Harrison, with the calmness of despair; "we couldn't be ready, not if we tried never so, for a quarter of an hour——"

"I must go, you see," added Julia, hurriedly. "Don't go on trying, Mattie, it is of no use. I wish papa had let it alone."

"Get on, Harrison, get on," whispered the youthful mistress to her maid, as the two were left behind. "Never mind what they say. I shall be in time yet. Are you nearly done? Oh, this dreadful gown! How far have you got? You must be half-way? I can be collecting my things——"

"If you jump about like that, Miss, I can't find the holes."

"Well; but tell me the moment you reach the top—— *What is that?*"

It was the carriage rolling away from the front door.

* * * * * *

Mrs. Boscawen rather enjoyed her dinner after that. She considerately explained that, if she had only known her husband's wishes in time, she would not have cancelled her permission, and would not have sent her daughter to unrobe; she also demonstrated that if Mattie had not been over impetuous in fulfilling her commands, her toilet might have been effected for the second time without difficulty. Finally, she considered that everybody had been to blame, and that she, who had tried to please all, had been unrewarded for her efforts. It was certainly hard that her husband, who so seldom took any part in family matters, should have been vexed and put out by what had happened. She could not understand his caring about such a trifle at all, and still less his, "Well, I suppose I can make it all straight, but I wish it had not happened."

With unusual discretion, she did not confide the above remark to her companion, aware that it might be ruminated upon more than would be advisable, but confined herself to general subjects, after a passing word of commendation to Mattie's thoughtfulness in coming at once when summoned to the meal, instead of waiting for further alterations in her appearance. It could do her pretty dress no more harm to wear it on this quiet occasion, than to take it out and have it crushed among a crowd of people. She liked to see her children nice, and so

seldom had that pleasure, that really it did her good,—and so on, and so on. But, alas! after dinner the headache returned, so that even books and music could not be thought of with any satisfaction. No, she must go to bed; she was very sorry; it was vexatious, now that they might have had a nice cheery evening together, but it was of no use bearing up any longer. "And don't sit up late yourself, little one," exhorted the parent, as she left the room. "You will not have above an hour or two alone, for it is nearly eight now,—you might have come into my room, but I must try to get a sleep. Don't go on with the story to yourself, Mattie; that would be too bad of you, when we are both so much interested. I think I shall take it with me," laughing, "to put it out of the way, for fear you should be tempted. Good night. Dear, that wind! But I don't think it is quite so bad as it was."

Not a sound now broke the silence in the house, save the dull moaning of the blast without, and the occasional patter of a shower on the window-panes. The servants were too far off in their own regions for voice or laugh to penetrate the passages above; and in the weird stillness which prevailed, the striking of the hour by the great clock outside made the solitary watcher start.

She started still more when immediately following the last note of eight there rang through the house the sharp imperative peal of the great door-bell. At such an hour, on such a night, who could be thus seeking admittance? Tenants did occasionally

come of an evening, when business obliged them to speak to her father, and a message from the farm was a thing of frequent occurrence, but such visitors or despatches were usually conveyed through the back door; and even the parcels sent up by the village tradespeople found their way into the house without passing through the entrance-hall.

What could it be? The others returned? No, the road was never impassable, even in the spring-tide; and if anything had happened to the horses, news must have been heard of it long before. They had had time to reach Rimmin and come back again, Mattie calculated. But what should the carriage return for? There was a carriage, she made out, as in some curiosity she hung over the staircase, listening and peering through the open door into the portico. How very odd! It must be their carriage, of course, and what was it doing there? Come for *her?*

Boyd was leisurely ascending the staircase ere the thought had had time to do more than dart into the listener's mind—ere she had had a minute wherein to canvass its merits, and school herself for its rejection if necessary. And once more in that eventful evening she had to learn that the wheel of fortune had turned.

"Sir Frederick's carriage come to fetch you, Miss Mattie, by master's orders," said the old man, with cheerful sympathy in his eye and tone. "Her ladyship hopes to find you in the drawing-room when they come out from dinner."

And accordingly, a pale, silent girl was sitting in a distant recess of the great drawing-room at Rimmin, listening, or feigning to listen, to a companion of her own age, pretty Isabel Wray, who was bearing her company, when Frederick cast his eyes around to see whether the day was like to be his own or not. He came in last of all the stragglers from the dining-room. He stood still in the doorway, as though he had no particular desire to enter further, pulling his long moustache, and speaking to no one; but something in the gesture, in the pause and halt, meant to Mattie that her cousin had seen her. Next she became aware, and that without once raising her head or turning from her companion, that he was coming.

"How do you do!" said Fred. "What a long way off from everybody you two have flown! Did you come here to escape from us all?"

"Miss Wray," continued he, pleasantly, after a while, "how good it was of you not to have been singing before we came in! I was afraid we had been missing a great deal. May we hope you will now—ah—delight us all with a ballad?"

It was too late, another lady had been prevailed upon.

"Have you seen these new prints?" The polite host adroitly covered his defeat. "We have only just got the book. My mother is tremendously taken with them."

In fact, Lady Turner had already inflicted the volume on all present, and it had at length been made over to the girls. They had dutifully gone

through the whole set, and everything that could be said had already been exhausted between them ; but under Sir Frederick's guidance, to be sure, they were nothing loath to commence the task afresh.

He was bent on finding entertainment for both, directing his attentions to Isabel, but keeping by the other's side. Yet he scarcely spoke to Mattie, leaning across her even, to point out beauties to her companion ; and she began at last to wonder whether she was really happy or wretched, and to commune with herself as to whether she had not better take the first opportunity of rising and leaving a seat which, although by her cousin's side, yet brought her no closer to him.

At length the sounds of music ceased.

"Miss Hamilton is tired," said Fred, shutting the book briskly ; "and she is not in voice to-night. We must not allow her to be tasked again. Now it is your turn." And he rose, resolutely addressing Isabel.

Naturally she stood up also.

A table which had been drawn in front of the trio for the heavy book to lie upon was pushed aside by the gentleman,—pushed right in front of his cousin, that Miss Wray might pass by the more conveniently, and in the movement a clumsy accident occurred—a valuable vase of Lady Turner's was thrown down and broken.

"Oh dear!" cried both the horror-stricken damsels, in consternation.

"Pray go on," implored the more hardened of-

fender. "Don't stop, or it will be noticed. I will pick up the pieces. In the name of charity, Miss Wray, rush to the piano, and save me from my mother."

Miss Wray obeyed, and the coast was clear at last.

"Mattie," said Frederick, very softly, "help me, will you?"

She stooped in search of the fragments, and he, like a blockhead, took the same moment for stooping also, at the risk of the two heads crashing together. Was it that which made her start, and the china fall from her hand again? No, it was not a blow, but a whisper from her cousin. "I must see you for a moment alone. I must speak to you to-night."

The song began.

"Go into my mother's little room," said Fred, with his back to the company and his head still bent over the broken jar. "Go out at this door, and no one can see—you won't refuse me? Wait till you hear. I will be with you immediately."

How she got out, or whether she were really unobserved or not as she stole away, Mattie never knew. Fred declared afterwards that she did it admirably, but then he allowed at the same time that he had neither looked nor cared; he knew she *went*, and that was enough for him.

He found his own way out by the principal entrance at the other end of the room, taking, as it were, a casual stroll towards it, with a word here and

a word there to one and another of the company whom chance threw in his way, and then seizing his opportunity to escape when all were engaged. Within a very few minutes he was keeping his tryst.

But the light was so partial in the little room, only a single bar of moonshine having shot through the mullioned window, that to the first survey no figure was discernible anywhere within.

He stopped short. "Mattie!"

"I am here."

She was nearly hidden from his view by the curtain, even when her voice directed him where to look; her dress might have been one of its folds, in the deep shadow where she stood.

"I am here." But she did not turn round, nor move towards him.

The waves were booming over the rocks below, but there was no longer the angry roar of a flowing tide to aid their clamour; the wind had subsided with its ebb, and a sullen swell had succeeded to the tumult of the waters.

Even so was Mattie's breast heaving with departed passions, conflicts, griefs, and bitterness. All these were over now; she scarcely trembled—she was calm, solemn, wrapped in a sort of trance;—a sense of wondering awe held her still, and quieted the beating of her heart. What had happened, or what was going to happen, she could but dimly realize. Yet was she neither confused nor bewildered, only conscious of a deep, strange peace, and then of a voice in her ear, a presence by her side, some

one holding her in his arms. "Why, Mattie! My darling!

* * * * * *

Mattie did not swoon away, she only turned very white and sank gently forwards, before she was caught and upheld; and since even fainting people can do without water when it is not to be had, it is to be presumed that Frederick considered this to be a case in which that restorative might be dispensed with.

He did not go in search of it, he tried other means; and so successful were these, that tears were flowing and cheeks were blushing rosy red again, long ere he had done: and so much had to be said, and vowed, and sworn, and the speaker was so fervent and impetuous in his mode of saying it, and so resolute in claiming his right to add appropriate accompanying actions, that his fair companion was in no danger of mistaking reality for dreamland again.

"But, indeed, you gave me a fright when first I saw you to-night," said Fred, at last. "I could not understand that pale, sorrowful face. I thought we had dragged you here against your will. Why,—did your father not tell you all about it?"

"My father?" said Mattie, raising her eyes.

"Who else? Did he—did you not know? I waylaid him this afternoon, got his consent and his promise to bring you. Then I went home and made my mother write."

"And when I did not come?"

"Ay, indeed, when you did not come, I thought

it was all up with me; but my uncle had the charity to take me aside before dinner and explain how it was. So I sent for you. Why, the tide was nothing; that coachman of yours is an old wife for thinking of such rubbish. But, do you know, my little cousin, I had not the pluck to ask whether you had obeyed the summons or not! Upon my word, Mattie, I was such a craven, that I sat still in the dining-room, though I heard the carriage pass the window, and could not muster enough spirit either to make an excuse for going outside to meet you, or even to inquire if you were there. Until I beheld you with my own eyes, I had no idea what I was to expect. And now——"

And now the victory was his, as he deserved it should be. Like a right bold gallant, he had gone straight on his course—whatever of weakness he might choose to confess in a tender moment—and the event had justified his temerity. His cousin, he had argued within himself, had certainly been cold, constrained, and distant to him—but that was all he could allege against his hopes of her. And what of that! Was it for him to be backward because the woman of his choice did not fling herself into his arms? Cold, indeed? Were she to all appearance as cold as ice, was that to say there was no warmth within,—no smouldering volcano beneath the snowy surface? How could he tell if he never tried? He would have it out, yea or nay, and know her mind from her own lips. If she loved him, well; if not, if she would have none of him,

the worst was out, and there would be no more beating about the bush, disappointments, vexations, and heart-burnings ever recurring. He would bear his rejection, if need be, like a man, but he would at least meet it face to face. In short, our lover made a second dash through the quicksands, and a second time reached the shore in safety. Would that more were like him !

But Mattie's ups and downs were scarcely over for that eventful evening, even now. She had to go back to the great saloon presently, to run the gauntlet of inquisitive glances, of affectionate anxiety, and of sisterly frowns. Even with Fred by her side, these could not but be felt ; even with his shadow between her and the lights, her lip must quiver and her eyelids droop. While the rest of the company remained, the hour must have its drawbacks.

But at length came happiness, complete and unalloyed. She was cleared in the eyes of all ; her father smiled, her sisters stared, she was taken to her aunt's heart, and she was Fred's for evermore.

Now, was there ever likely to be another evening in Mattie's life like unto this ?