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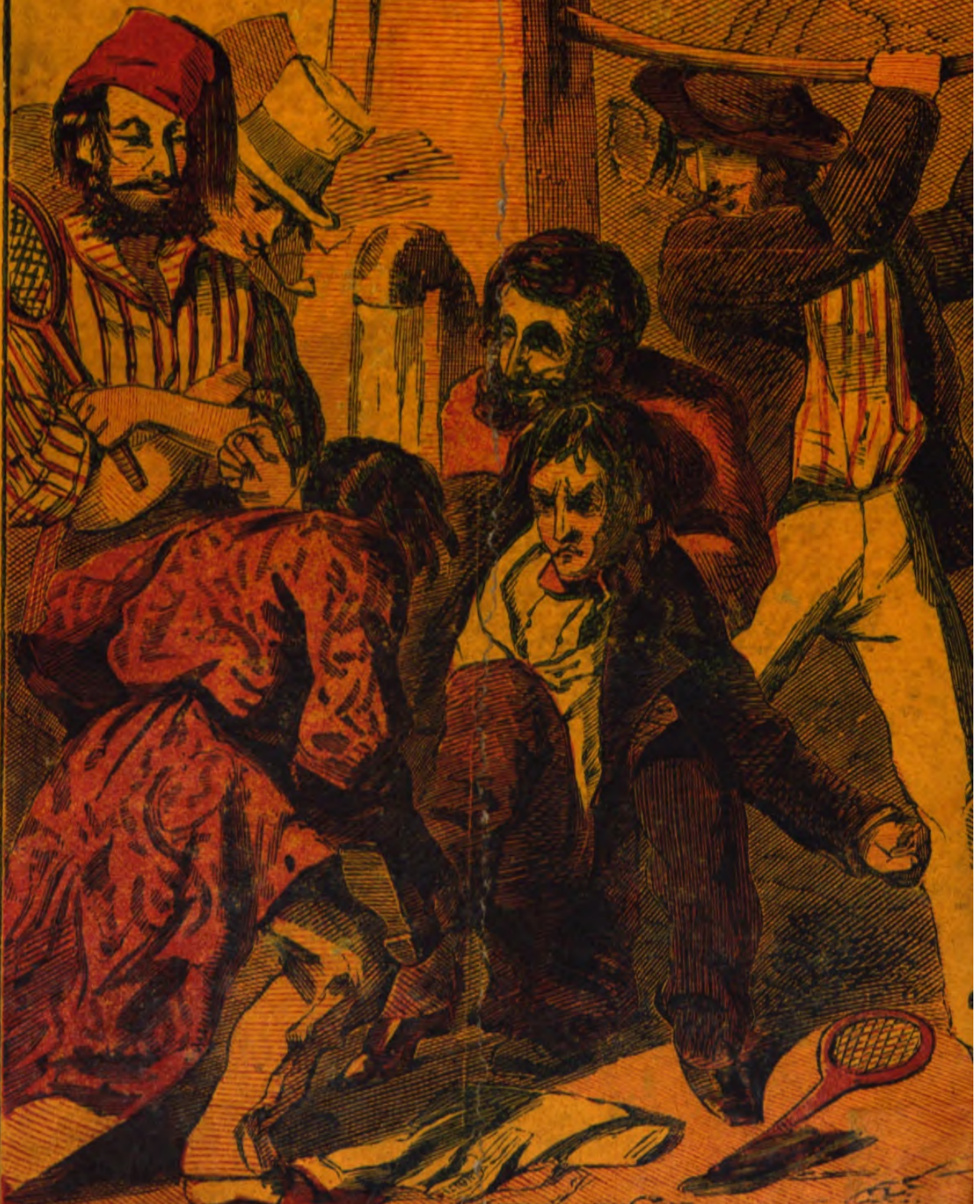
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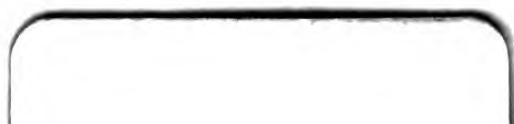
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LEAVES
FROM THE
DIARY OF A LAW CLERK
BY THE AUTHOR OF
RECOLLECTIONS OF A DETECTIVE POLICE OFFICER





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LEAVES

FROM THE

DIARY OF A LAW-CLERK.

BY THE AUTHOR OF 'RECOLLECTIONS OF A DETECTIVE
POLICE OFFICER,' &c.



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PREFACE.

THE general favour with which the 'Recollections of a Detective Officer' have been received, induces the publishers to reprint, by permission, the following papers, by the same author,—who, in these sketches, as in the 'Recollections,' has endeavoured to render, as faithfully as might be, the records of a real experience.

London, 1857.

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LEAVES

FROM THE

DIARY OF A LAW-CLERK

THE DIAMOND NECKLACE.

THE reader must not expect any artistic finish or colouring in such brief transcripts as I can furnish of bygone passages in my clerkly experience. Law-writers and romance-writers are very distinct classes of penmen, and I am consequently quite aware that these sketches have no other claim to attention than that they are genuine excerpts,—writ large,—from a journal in which the incidents of the day were faithfully noted down at the time of their occurrence: their accuracy, therefore, does not depend upon memory, which certainly I do not find to be as virile and tenacious at seventy as it was at seventeen. No one will feel surprised that I should, in my vocation, have turned over several startling leaves in the darker chapters of our social history; and some of these, I have thought, may prove even more interesting to a numerous class of minds, when plainly and unpre-

tendingly set forth, than if tricked out in the showy varnish and false jewels of romance and fanciful invention.

On the evening previous to the day, Mr. P——, —suppose, for convenience-sake, we call him Mr. Prince, he was one in many respects,—on the evening, then, previous to the day, Mr. Prince, a barrister, whose clerk I had been for about three years, intended setting out, for the second time, on the Western Circuit, a somewhat unusual circumstance, or rather couple of circumstances, occurred. I must premise that Mr. Prince had at the previous assize made a great hit at Salisbury, by a successful objection to an indictment framed under the 30th Geo. II., which charged a respectably-connected young man with stealing a sum of money in bank notes. Mr. Prince contended that bank notes were not ‘moneys, wares, goods, or merchandize,’ within the meaning of the statute, an opinion in which the judge, Mr. Baron Thompson, after much argumentation, coincided, and the prisoner was acquitted and discharged. This hugely astonished the agricultural mind of Wiltshire: a lawyer who could prove a bank note, then a legal tender, not to be money, was universally admitted to be a match, and something to spare, for any big-wig on the circuit, and a full share of briefs would, it was pretty certain, thenceforth fall to Mr. Prince’s share.

And now, to return to the circumstances I was speaking of. I was waiting at chambers in the Temple on the evening in question for Mr. Prince, when who should bustle in but old Dodsley, the attorney of Chancery Lane. Many persons must still remember old Dodsley, or at all events his powdered pigtail,

gold eye-glass, tasseled Hessian boots, and everlasting pepper-and-salt pants. This visit surprised me, for the spruce and consequential antique had not hitherto patronized us, we not having as yet, I supposed, a sufficient relish of age about us to suit his taste.

‘ Mr. Prince,’ he said, ‘ of course goes the Western Circuit? To be sure, to be sure. Is he retained in the Salisbury case of the King on the prosecution of Gilbert against Somers?’

I knew perfectly well he was not; but of course I replied that I would look, and passed my finger slowly and deliberately down the page of an entry-book. ‘ No, he is not,’ I said on reaching the foot of the leaf.

‘ Then here is a retainer for the defence.’ Dodsley placed a one-pound note and a shilling on the table, and, as soon as I had made the usual entry, added, ‘ I am acting in this matter for Cotes, of Salisbury, who, as the case is of some importance, will deliver the brief, handsomely marked I believe, and with a good fee to clerk, at Winchester; good-bye!’

A quarter of an hour afterwards, the great Mr. Pendergast, solicitor of Basinghall Street, ascended the stairs, and presented himself. He had a brief in his hand, marked ‘ Fifty Guineas.’ This I saw at a glance: indeed, of all the characters on the back of a brief, the figures,—the fee,—by some magnetic attraction or influence, invariably caught my eye first.

‘ Mr. Prince proceeds on the Western Circuit?’

‘ Certainly.’

‘ And is not, I conclude, retained in the Crown case against Somers for larceny?’

‘The deuce! well, this is odd!’ I exclaimed, ‘Mr. Dodsley left a retainer for the defence not above ten minutes ago.’

‘You don’t say so!’ rejoined Mr. Pendergast, peevishly; dear me, dear me; how unfortunate! The prosecutrix is anxious above all things to secure Mr. Prince’s services, and now—dear me! This is a kind of business not at all in our line; nor indeed in that of the respectable Devizes firm who have taken the unusual course of sending the brief to London, although only relating to a simple matter of larceny;—dear me, how unfortunate! and the fee, you see, is heavy.’

‘Surprisingly so, indeed! The prosecutrix must be wonderfully anxious to secure a conviction,’ I replied with as much *nonchalance* as I could assume, confoundedly vexed as I was. It was not at all likely, for all old Dodsley had hinted, that the brief in defence of a prisoner committed for larceny would be marked at a tenth of fifty guineas: however, there was no help for it, and after emitting one or two additional ‘dear me’s!’ away went Mr. Pendergast with brief, fifty guineas, and no doubt proportionately handsome clerk’s fee, in his pocket. I was terribly put out, much more so than Mr. Prince, when he came in and heard of what had happened, although fifty guineas were fifty guineas with him at that time. ‘I have seen something of the case,’ he said, ‘in the newspapers; it has curious features. The prisoner is a young female of great personal attractions, it seems. We must console ourselves,’ he added with jocose familiarity; ‘it is something to be the chosen champion of beauty in

distress.' To which remark I perceive the word 'Fudge!' in large capitals, appended in my diary. 'Humbug' would have been more forcible, but that expressive word had not then been imported into the English vocabulary, or it would, I doubt not, have been used.

Mr. Prince of course travelled by post-chaise with a learned brother, and I reached Winchester by coach, just as the sheriff's trumpets proclaimed the arrival of my lords the judges in that ancient city. Our Wiltshire fame had not yet reached Winchester, and although the criminal business of the assize was heavy, very few cases were confided to Mr. Prince. Cotes arrived on the second day, with the brief in the Salisbury case, marked, I was astonished to find, 'Twenty Guineas,' and the old fellow behaved, moreover, very well to me. Mr. Prince was in Court, and I had full leisure to run over the matter, and a very strange, out-of-the-way, perplexing business, as set forth in Mr. Cotes's instructions to Counsel, it appeared to be. Divested of surplusage, of which the brief contained an abundant quantity, the affair stood about thus:—Mr. Hurdley, a wealthy person, who had resided many years at Hurdley Villa (then so called, but now, I hear, bearing another appellation, and not very distant, by-the-by, from Bowood, the Marquis of Lansdowne's country seat), had died three or four months previously, intestate, and Hurdley Villa was now inhabited by a Mrs. Gilbert, the deceased's sister-in-law, and her son, Charles Gilbert, the heir-at-law, but who yet wanted some ten months of his majority. The day before his death Mr. Hurdley despatched James Dakin, an aged and

confidential servant, to bring home one Emily Somers from Brighton, where he, Mr. Hurdley, had placed her some fourteen years previously in a first-rate school. He told the mistress of the establishment, a Mrs. Ryland, that the child, then about five years old, was the orphan daughter of a distant relative; a statement discredited as she grew up by the evidence of her features, described as presenting a beautiful and feminine but still surprisingly accurate reflex of those of Mr. Hurdley. This remarkable resemblance not only gave birth to calumnious rumours, but appeared to greatly impress Mr. Hurdley himself, at the last and only interview he ever had with the young girl since he consigned her to Mrs. Ryland's care. This was about six months before he died; and on his return home he gave Mr. Cotes directions to prepare a new will, by which he bequeathed twenty thousand pounds to Emily Somers, and divided the residue, about double that amount, amongst his nephew, Charles Gilbert, and other more distant relatives. This will was drawn out and duly executed, but was subsequently destroyed under the following circumstances:—The instant Mrs. Gilbert heard of the serious illness of her wealthy brother-in-law, she hastened with her son to Hurdley Villa, and immediately set to work, tormenting the dying gentleman into annulling his will. Wearied out at length, it seemed, by Mrs. Gilbert's importunities, he yielded the point, and the will was burnt in the presence of Cotes, the attorney, a medical gentleman of Devizes, Mrs. Gilbert, and the housekeeper, a Mrs. James. 'You persist, Charlotte,' said Mr. Hurdley, feebly addressing his sister-in-law, 'that Emily Somers ought

not to inherit under this will?' 'I do indeed, my dear Robert; you may be sure she will be sufficiently provided for without the necessity of your bequeathing her such an enormous sum as twenty thousand pounds.' 'Are the two letters I gave you sent to the post?' asked Mr. Hurdley of the housekeeper. The woman hesitated for a moment, and then said, 'Oh yes, certainly; some time since.' A strange expression, something like mockery or malice, Cotes thought flickered over the pale face of the dying man as he said, addressing the attorney, 'Then I authorize and require you, sir, to burn that my last and only existing testament.' This was done, and everybody except the medical gentleman left the room. Mrs. Gilbert vanished instantly her wish was accomplished, following sharply upon the heels of the housekeeper.

Mr. Hurdley died on the following day. He was already speechless, though still conscious, when Dakin returned from Brighton with Emily Somers, upon whom his fast-darkening eyes rested whilst yet a ray of light remained, with an intense expression of anxiety and tenderness. The wealth, I may here state, of which Mr. Hurdley died possessed, was almost entirely personal, Hurdley Villa and grounds being, indeed, the only reality, and was lodged in British securities. It was the intention, Mr. Cotes believed, of Mrs. Gilbert and her son, the instant the latter came of age and could legally do so, to dispose of those securities, and invest the produce in land: that time was, however, not yet arrived.

Matters went on smoothly enough at Hurdley Villa for some time after Mr. Hurdley's death; Mrs. Gilbert was exceedingly civil and kind to Emily

Somers;—her son, from the first, something more; and it was soon apparent that he was becoming deeply attached to the gentle and graceful girl bequeathed to his mother's and his own generous care by her deceased protector. These advances, evidently at first encouraged by Mrs. Gilbert, were by no means favourably received,—why, will presently appear,—whereupon that lady worked herself into a violent rage, both with her son's folly and the intolerable airs and presumption of Emily Somers, who had forthwith notice to quit Hurdley Villa, accompanied by an intimation that an annuity of fifty pounds a year would be settled on her. This scandalous injustice roused the spirit of the young girl, acquainted as she was with the burning of the will, and a violent altercation ensued between her and Mrs. Gilbert, in the course of which something was said or hinted that excited Mrs. Gilbert to downright frenzy, and she vowed the insolent, audacious minx should not sleep another night in the house. This scene occurred just after breakfast, and a chaise was ordered to be in readiness by two o'clock to convey Emily Somers to Devizes. About half-past twelve Mrs. Gilbert went out for an airing in the carriage, and was gone about an hour; her passion had by this time cooled down, and the servants thought, from the irresolute, half-regretful expression of her countenance, that a conciliatory word from Miss Somers would have procured her permission to remain. That word was not spoken, and Mrs. Gilbert, with a stiff bow to the young lady, who was already equipped for departure, sailed grandly away to her dressing-room. In about ten minutes a terrible hurly-burly rang through the

house: Mrs. Gilbert's diamond necklace and cross was declared to be missing from her jewel-case, and a hurried search in all possible and impossible places was immediately commenced. Miss Somers, distracted as she said by the noise and confusion, intimated that she should walk on and meet the chaise, which could not be far distant; 'and as Mrs. Gilbert,' she added with bitter emphasis, 'insists that every trunk in the house shall be searched, I will send for mine to-morrow.' So saying she left the apartment, and, a minute afterwards, the house. The post-chaise was not far off, and she had reached it, and seated herself, when a footman came running up with a request from Mrs. Gilbert that she would return immediately. Miss Somers declined doing so, and ordered the postilion to drive on. Seeing this, the footman, a powerful fellow, caught hold of the horses' heads, exclaiming, as he did so, 'that it was a matter of robbery, and the young lady should return.' The chaise was accordingly turned round, and the now terrified girl was in a manner forcibly taken back to Hurdley Villa. There it was proposed to search her. She vehemently protested against being subjected to such an indignity; but Mrs. Gilbert peremptorily insisting that she should, and a constable having been actually sent for, she, at length, reluctantly submitted. The search was fruitless, and Mrs. Gilbert, taking up the young lady's muff,—it was the month of January,—which was lying in a chair, tossed it contemptuously towards her, with an intimation that 'she might now go!' The muff fell short, and dropped on the floor. A slight sound was heard. 'Ha! what's that?' exclaimed Mrs. Gilbert. Quickly the muff

was seized, felt, turned inside out, ripped, and the missing diamond necklace and cross were found carefully enveloped and concealed in the lining! Miss Somers fainted, and had only partially recovered when she found herself again in the chaise, and this time accompanied by a constable, who was conveying her to prison. The unfortunate young lady was ultimately committed for trial on the charge of stealing the jewels. Miss Somers' refusal to entertain the suit of Mr. Charles Gilbert, and the large fee marked on the brief in defence, were explained by the fact that a Lieut. Horace Wyndham, of the artillery service, then serving in Ireland, had, when at Brighton, contracted an engagement with Emily Somers, fully sanctioned, Cotes believed, by the late Mr. Hurdley. This young officer had remitted a considerable sum to the attorney, with directions that no expense should be spared; and further, stating that he had applied for leave of absence, and should, the instant it was granted, hasten to Wiltshire.

This was the tangled web of circumstance which it was hoped the ingenuity of counsel might unravel, but *how*, Mr. Cotes, a well-meaning, plodding individual, but scarcely so bright as the north star, did not profess to understand. Mr. Prince took great interest in the matter, and he speedily came to the conclusion that it was highly desirable Miss Somers should be directly communicated with. The etiquette of the bar of course precluded Mr. Prince from himself visiting the prisoner, but I, though it was rather out of my line of service, might do so, by permission of Mr. Cotes. This was readily accorded, and the next day I and the attorney set off for Salisbury.

We had an interview with Miss Somers early on the following morning. All my clerkish bounce was thoroughly taken out of me by the appearance and demeanour of the young lady. There was a dignified serenity of grief imprinted on her fine pale countenance, a proud yet tempered scorn of the accusation and the accuser in her calm accents, so different from the half-swaggering, half-whining tone and manner I had been accustomed to in persons so situated, that my conviction of her perfect innocence was instantaneous and complete. She, however, threw no light upon the originating motive of the persecution to which she was exposed, till, after refreshing my memory by a glance at the notes Mr. Prince had written for my guidance, I asked her what it was she had said on the occasion of her quarrel with Mrs. Gilbert that had so exasperated that lady? 'I merely ventured,' she replied, 'to hazard a hint suggested by an expression used by Mr. Hurdley in a letter to—to a gentleman I have reason to believe Mr. Cotes will see to-day, or to-morrow, to the effect that I might after all prove to be the rightful heiress of the wealth so covetously grasped. It was a rash and foolish remark,' she added, sadly, her momentarily-crimsoned cheeks and sparkling eyes fading again to paleness and anxiety, 'for which there was no tangible foundation, although Mrs. Gilbert must, it seems, have feared there might be.'

This very partial lifting of the veil which concealed the secret promptings of the determined and rancorous prosecution directed against our interesting client rendered me buoyantly hopeful of the result, and so I told Cotes on leaving the prison. He, how-

ever, remained like old Chancellor Eldon, permanently 'doubtful,' and, moreover, stared like a conjuror, which he was not, when, after again consulting Mr. Prince's memoranda, I said he must let me have two subpoenas for service on Mrs. James and Mr. Dakin at Hurdley Villa.

'Nonsense!' he exclaimed; 'what will be the use of calling them?'

'I don't know; a great deal of use it may be; but at all events the subpoenas will give me an excuse for seeing them both, and that I must do as early as possible.'

He made no further objection; and by eleven the next day I was at the hall door of Hurdley Villa, blandly requesting to speak with Mrs. James. I have always piqued myself upon not having the slightest odour of law or parchment about me, and I was only gratified, therefore, not surprised—*ahem!*—at overhearing the servant who answered the door assure Mrs. James that the person inquiring for her 'was quite the gentleman.' This was, moreover, only a fair return for the compliment I had paid the damsel's blooming cheeks. I was immediately ushered into the housekeeper's room, where, as soon as the door was closed, I handed the astonished woman a strip of parchment and a shilling. She hopped back as if suddenly confronted by a serpent.

'A subpoena, Mrs. James,' I said, 'commanding you, in the name of Our Sovereign Lord the King, to attend and give evidence on the trial of Emily Somers.'

'I give evidence!' she replied, much flurried; 'I know nothing of the matter; I wash my hands of the whole business.'

‘That will require, my dear lady, a very profuse and judicious use of soap and water, or the damned spots will not out, as the lady says in the play.’

‘Oh, don’t bother me about the lady in the play,’ she retorted angrily. ‘I can give no evidence, I tell you, either for or against Miss Somers. I did not accuse her of stealing the necklace!’

‘That I am sure, Mrs. James, you did not. You are, I know, too just and sensible a person to do anything at once so wicked and foolish; but you *must* tell the judge how it was the two letters—ha! you begin to perceive, do you, that more is known than you imagined?’

‘Letters,—what letters?’ she muttered, with pale lips.

The words which had so startled her had been suggested by a surmise of Mr. Prince, and a remark which dropped from Miss Somers, implying that Lieutenant Wyndham had been expecting a promised explanation from Mr. Hurdley when the news reached him of that gentleman’s death. The woman’s tremor convinced me that I had struck the right trail, and I determined to follow it up boldly.

‘I will tell you, Mrs. James,’ I replied; ‘but first, and for your own sake, ascertain that we are entirely alone.’ She looked into the passage, reclosed the door, and said, with fast-increasing agitation, ‘Quite, quite alone; what *can* you mean?’

‘This: the two letters intrusted to you by Mr. Hurdley, the day before his death, you had neglected to forward, as you ought to have done.’

‘I—I meant no harm,’ she huskily gasped; ‘as I live and breathe, I meant no harm!’

'I believe you; and it was *after* the will was burned that Mrs. Gilbert who followed you out of the sick-room, obtained possession of them.'

She did not answer in words, and it was not necessary that she should: her scared looks did that sufficiently.

'Do you remember either of the addresses of the letters, Mrs. James,' I presently continued, 'or shall I refresh your memory? Was not the first syllable of one of the names Lieutenant Wyndham—'

'Ha!'

'Now don't make a noise, there's a good woman. To whom was the second letter addressed? Answer that question, or you will be in custody before ten minutes have passed; answer it truly, and you will not be in the slightest degree molested:—come, out with it!'

'The Reverend Mr. Ridgway, Yeovil, Somerset.'

'Very good. And do you know anything about this Mr. Ridgway, whether he was related to, or in any way connected with, the late Mr. Hurdley?'

'As I hope for mercy, I do not.'

'Very well: now pay attention to what I am about to say. Mrs. Gilbert must not be made acquainted with what has passed between us.'

'Oh no, certainly not; on no account whatever, she quickly replied. 'She strictly forbade me to mention the circumstance.'

'No doubt: as she is sure, however, to hear that I have been here, you had better admit that I have served you with a subpoena. Good day,' I added, taking her hand, which was cold as ice,—'and remember—SILENCE! or it will go ill with you.'

‘Come, George,’ I mentally exclaimed on emerging with exultant step from Hurdley Villa—‘Come, George,’—*my* name is George—‘you are getting along in first-rate style, my boy; and as there is nobody I wish half so well as I do you, I am heartily rejoiced at it. Old Dakin is at Devizes, it seems; well, I don’t know that it’s worth while waiting about to see him, so I’ll e’en be off back again at once.’

The news I brought which, well managed, would in all probability lead to important results, put quite a varnish upon old Cotes’s mahogany phiz; and it was needed, for Lieutenant Wyndham, who had arrived at Salisbury shortly after I had left, had kept him in a state of terrible anxiety and harassment from the first moment he entered the office. He was a fine dashing young fellow, by Cotes’s account, sudden and fiery as a rocket, and at first seriously proposed to send a bullet through young Gilbert’s head, as the only fitting answer to the atrociously absurd accusation against Miss Somers. Convinced at last that ball practice, however sharp and well directed, would avail little against a ‘true bill’ for felony, he bounced off to procure permission to visit the imprisoned lady. This could not be for the moment granted, ‘and,’ added Cotes, ‘he has been tearing in and out of the office for the last hour and a half like a furious maniac, threatening to write immediately to the Home Secretary, nay, the Prince Regent himself, I believe, and utterly smash every gaoler, sheriff, and magistrate in the county of Wilts;—oh, here he is again!’

The youthful soldier was certainly much excited and exasperated, but I found no difficulty in so far calm-

ing him that he listened with eager attention and interest to what I had to relate. 'I cannot do better,' he exclaimed the instant I ceased speaking, 'than start immediately for Yeovil, and ascertain what the Reverend Mr. Ridgway knows of Em—of Miss Somers or Mr. Hurdley.' We agreed that it was highly desirable he should do so, and in less than ten minutes he was off in a post-chase from the 'Antelope' for Yeovil.

The next day, Saturday, as I and Cotes were busy, about noon, drawing a fresh brief for counsel, a horseman, followed by a mounted groom, alighted in front of the attorney's house, and presently a small clerk threw open the office door and announced—Mr. Gilbert!

The appearance of this young gentleman was somewhat prepossessing, albeit he appeared to be suffering from illness of body or mind, perhaps of both; and there was a changing flush on his brow, a quick restlessness in his eyes, and a febrile tremor, as it were, in his whole aspect and manner which, read by the light of what we knew and suspected, had a deep significance.

'You are the attorney for the defence, I understand, in'—he hesitatingly began,—'in the unfortunate affair of the diamond necklace?'

'I am,' replied Mr. Cotes, 'and what then?'

'Your clerk has served a subpoena upon Mrs. Gilbert's housekeeper; what may that mean?'

'A silly question, sir, you will pardon me for saying: we lawyers are not generally in the habit of making confidants of those opposed to us.'

There was a silence for some time: Mr. Gilbert

crossed his legs, tapped the toe of his boot with his riding-whip, and passed his right-hand fingers several times through the thick brown locks that fell over his forehead, his irresolute, wavering glance all the while shifting from Cotes's face to mine, and back again.

'Would it not be better,' he at length said, 'that this unhappy business were accommodated? There is a means—one,' he added, flushing intensest scarlet, 'whereby that desirable result may be accomplished. I must be frank with you, for I cannot otherwise communicate with the—the prisoner: it is this,—if Miss Somers will accept my hand, the prosecution is at an end.'

Cotes was about to speak, but I pinched him with such sudden force that he sprang upon his feet instead, and the first attempted word broke into a shriek of pain.

'Is this proposition made with Mrs. Gilbert's consent?' I hastily interposed.

'Yes, certainly;—yes.'

'Mrs. Gilbert consents, does she, that her son shall wed a fortuneless girl accused of the disgraceful crime of theft, her character unvindicated, her—'

'Stay, sir, a moment. I speak of course in confidence. If my proposal be accepted, I will say that I placed the necklace in the muff in jest, or as a present.'

'Do you say, Mr. Gilbert,' I exclaimed, 'that it was you, *not your mother*, that placed the jewels in the lining of the muff?'

Ha! ha! That shaft, I saw, found the joint in his armour. He started fiercely to his feet. 'What do you mean by that, fellow?'

‘Precisely what I said, *sir*. Mr. Cotes,’ I added, ‘you can have nothing more to say to this person.’

‘Certainly not,’ snapped out the attorney, who was limping about the room, and rubbing one particular part of his left thigh with savage energy.

The young gentleman, finding that his *conciliatory* mission had missed fire, began to bully, but that failing also, he went his way, muttering and threatening as he went. And I soon afterwards departed, after very humbly apologizing to Mr. Cotes for the extreme liberty I had taken with his still very painful leg.

On Monday, the day the Commission was opened at Salisbury, Lieutenant Wyndham brought us the Reverend Mr. Ridgway. What he had to say was this:—Mr. Hurdley had married privately, for fear of his father’s displeasure, Emily Ridgway, the reverend gentleman’s sister, at Bridgewater. The marriage was a most unhappy one: a causeless, morbid jealousy possessed the husband to such an extent that he believed, or affected to believe, that the child, a girl, baptized Emily in giving birth to whom her mother died, was not his; but this child, so Mr. Hurdley wrote to the Reverend Mr. Ridgway, died at the age of four years.

The reader is now quite as wise as the wisest in the consultation held at Mr. Cotes’s on the Tuesday morning, when it was known that the grand jury had returned a ‘true bill’ against Emily Somers. The announcement that our case would probably be called on almost immediately, broke up the council, and away we all departed for the Court, Mr. Prince, of course, who was in costume, walking up Catherine

Street with the gravity and decorum which so well becomes the law: I and the lieutenant walked faster.

'A queer fish,' said the anxious and irate artillery officer, 'that master of yours: he listened to everybody, it is true, but said nothing himself, nor did anything, for that matter, except rub his nose and forehead now and then.'

'Never mind; wait till it is his cue to speak. I have no fear, unless, indeed, luck should run *very* contrary.'

The small, inconvenient Court was crowded to excess. Mr. Justice Rook presided, and the Earl of Pembroke, with, if I mistake not, the present Earl Radnor, then Lord Folkestone, were on the bench. Immediately a trifling case was disposed of, Emily Somers was brought in and arraigned. A murmur of sympathy and sorrow ran through the crowd at the sad spectacle, in such a position, of one so young, so fair, so gentle, so beloved,—ay, so beloved, as all could testify who witnessed the frightful emotion depicted in Lieutenant Wyndham's countenance when the prisoner was placed in the dock: it was a speechless agony, and so violent, that I and the Reverend Mr. Ridgway caught hold of his arms and endeavoured to force him out of the Court. He resisted desperately; a deep sob at last gave vent to the strangling emotion which convulsed him, and he became comparatively calm. The leading counsel for the prosecution,—there was a tremendous bar against us, as if that could avail!—opened the case very temperately, and the witnesses, previously at the request of Mr. Prince ordered out of Court, were called *seriatim*. The first were servants, who merely proved the find-

ing of the necklace, as before described, and Miss Somers' anxiety to be gone before the chaise arrived; they were not cross-examined. Charlotte Gilbert was next called. At the mention of this name the crowd undulated, so to speak; a wave seemed to pass over the sea of heads, and all eyes were eagerly, the great majority angrily, bent upon the person of a lady about fifty years of age, splendidly attired in satin mourning. She was a fine woman, and ordinarily, I should have supposed, of imperious, commanding aspect and presence, but not now: she had, it was clear to me, undertaken a task beyond her strength, and every fibre in my body pulsed with anticipated triumph.

She answered, however, the few questions put to her by the prosecuting counsel distinctly, though in a low tone, and without raising her eyes. The necklace produced was hers, and she had seen it found in the prisoner's muff, *et cetera*. Mr. Prince rose amidst the profoundest silence; 'Will you have the kindness, Mrs. Gilbert, to look at me?' he said. The witness raised her eyes for a moment, but utterly unable to sustain his glance, they were instantly cast down again.

'Well, never mind, we must excuse you; but listen, at all events. The letters addressed to Lieutenant Wyndham and the Reverend Mr. Ridgway, which you purloined the day before Mr. Hurdley died, —where are they?'

A faint bubbling scream, she vainly strove to entirely repress, broke from the quivering lips of the witness. 'The letters!' she feebly gasped.

'Ay, the letters informing those gentlemen that Emily Somers was in truth Emily Hurdley, and the legitimate heiress to the writer's wealth.'

There was no attempt to answer, and Mrs. Gilbert clutched tightly at the front of the witness-box. 'Your witness is fainting,' said Mr. Prince to the counsel for the prosecution; 'has no one a smelling-bottle?' One was found, and the terrified woman appeared to partially revive. The cross-examination was resumed.

'When you placed the diamond necklace in the prisoner's muff, you—'

A piercing shriek interrupted Mr. Prince, and when we looked again towards the witness-box it seemed empty,—Mrs. Gilbert had fallen, utterly insensible, on the floor. She was borne out of Court, and Mr. Prince, addressing the opposite side, said in his blandest tone, 'You had better, perhaps, call another witness; the lady may presently recover.' This was acceded to, and the name of Charles Gilbert was bawled out once—twice—thrice. The attorney for the prosecution left the Court to seek for the unanswering Charles Gilbert. He had been gone a considerable time, and the judge was becoming impatient, when he re-entered, looking very pale and agitated. 'My lord,' he said, 'the prosecution is abandoned! Mrs. Gilbert and her son have driven off in their carriage.'

The tempestuous hubbub that followed this announcement, the exclamations in a contrary sense,—maledictions on the prosecutrix, congratulations of the accused,—could not be for some time repressed. At length order was restored, a *quasi* explanation ensued between Counsel, and Mr. Justice Rook, turning towards the jury, said, 'I conclude that after what we have just witnessed and heard, there can be

EDWARD DRYSDALE.

masters, who had long known each other, were intimate as brothers, notwithstanding that Bradshaw was much the richest of the two, having contrived to pick up a considerable amount of prize-money, in addition to a rather large sum inherited from his father. Neither did the difference of circumstances oppose in Bradshaw's opinion, the slightest obstacle to the union of his niece and heiress, Rachel Elford, with Edward Drysdale, his fellow-veteran's only surviving offspring. The precedent condition, however, was that Edward should attain permanent rank in the Royal Navy; and with this view, a midshipman's warrant was obtained in '99 for the young man, then in his eighteenth year, and he was despatched to sea.

The naval profession proved to be, unfortunately, one for which Edward Drysdale was altogether unfitted by temperament and bent of mind; and sad consequences followed. He had been at sea about eighteen months, when news reached England of a desperate, but successful cutting-out affair by the boats of the frigate to which he belonged. His name was not mentioned in the official report,—but that could hardly have been hoped for; neither was it in the list of killed and wounded. A map of the coast where the fight took place was procured; the battle was fought over and over again by the two veterans, and they were still indulging in those pleasures of the imagination, in the parlour of the 'Hunter's Inn,' when the landlord entered with a Plymouth paper in his hand, upon one paragraph in which his single orb of vision glared with fiery indignation. It was an extract from a letter written by one of the frigate's officers, intimating that midshipman Drysdale

had shown the white feather in the late brush with the enemy, and would be sent home by the first opportunity. The stroke of a dagger could have been nothing compared with the sharp agony which such an announcement inflicted on the young man's father, and Bradshaw was for a few moments equally thunder-stricken. But he quickly rallied. William Drysdale's son a coward! Pooh! the thing was out of nature,—impossible; and very hearty were his maledictions, savagely echoed by Burnham, with whom young Drysdale was a great favourite, of the lying lubber that wrote the letter, and the newspaper rascals that printed it.

Alas! it was but too true! On the third evening after the appearance of the alarming paragraph, the two mariners were sitting in the porch of Poplar Cottage, separated only by a flower-garden from the main-road, conversing upon the sad and constantly-recurring topic, when the coach from London came in sight. A youthful figure in naval uniform, on the box-seat, instantly riveted their attention, as it did that of Rachel Elford, who was standing in the little garden, apparently absorbed till that moment by the shrubs and flowers. The coach rapidly drew near, stopped, and Edward Drysdale alighted from it. The two seamen, instead of waiting for his approach, hastily arose from their seats and went into the cottage, as much perhaps to avoid the humiliating, though compassionate glances of the outside passengers, as from any other motive. The young man was deadly pale, and seemed to have hardly sufficient strength to move back the light wicket-gate which admitted to the garden. He held by it till the coach

had passed on, and then turned with a beseeching, half-reproachful look towards Rachel. She, poor girl, was as much agitated as himself, and appeared to be eagerly scanning his countenance, as if hopeful of reading there a contradiction of the dishonouring rumour that had got abroad. In answer to his mute appeal, she stepped quickly towards him, clasped his proffered hand in both hers, and with a faint and trembling voice ejaculated,—‘ Dear, dear Edward! It is not true,—I am sure it is not, that you,—that you—’

‘ That I, Rachel, have been dismissed the naval service, as unfit to serve his majesty, is quite true,’ rejoined Edward Drysdale, slowly, and with partially-recovered calm,—‘ quite true!’

The young woman shrank indignantly from him,—fire glanced in her suffused eyes, and her light, elegant figure appeared to grow and dilate with irrepressible scorn, as this avowal fell upon her ear. ‘ A coward!’ she vehemently exclaimed; ‘ you that,—but no,’ she added, giving way again to grief and tenderness, as she looked upon the fine, intelligent countenance of her lover, ‘ it cannot be; there must be some error,—some mistake. It is impossible!’

‘ There is error and mistake, Rachel; but the world will never, I fear, admit so much. But, come, let us in: you will go with me?’

We will not follow them till the first outburst of angry excitement is past; till the father’s passionate, heart-broken reproaches have subsided to a more patient, subdued, faintly-hopeful sorrow, and Rachel’s wavering faith in the manhood of her betrothed has regained something of its old firmness. Entering

then, we shall find that only Mr. Bradshaw has remained obstinately and contemptuously deaf to what the young man has falteringly urged in vindication of his behaviour in the unhappy affair which led to his dismissal from the service. He had, it appeared, suddenly fainted at the sight of the hideous carnage in which, for the first time in his life, he found himself involved.

‘You have a letter, you say, from Captain Otway,’ said Mr. Drysdale, partially raising his head from his hands, in which it had been buried whilst his son was speaking. ‘Where is it? Give it to Rachel,—I cannot see the words.’

The note was directed to Mr. Drysdale, whom Captain Otway personally knew, and was no doubt kindly intended to soften the blow, the return of his son under such circumstances must inflict. Although deciding that Edward Drysdale was unfit for the naval profession, he did not think that the failure of the young man’s physical nerve in one of the most murderous encounters that had occurred during the war, was attributable to deficiency of true courage, and as a proof that it was not, Captain Otway mentioned that the young man had jumped overboard during half a gale of wind, and when night was falling, and saved, at much peril to himself, a seaman’s life. This was the substance of the note. As soon as Rachel ceased reading, Mr. Drysdale looked deprecatingly in his friend’s face, and murmured, ‘You hear?’

‘Yes, William Drysdale, I do. I never doubted that your son was a good swimmer, no more than I do that coward means coward, and that all the letters

in the alphabet cannot spell it to mean anything else. Come, Rachel,' added the grim, uureasoning, iron-temperēd veteran, 'let us be gone. And God bless, and if it be possible, comfort you, old friend! Good-bye! No, thank ye, young sir,' he continued, with renewed fierceness, as Edward Drysdale snatched at his hand. 'That hand was once grasped by Rodney in such another business as the letter speaks of, when its owner did *not* faint! It must not be touched by you!'

The elder Drysdale took not long afterwards to his bed. He had been ailing for some time; but no question that mortification at his son's failure in the profession to which he had with so much pride devoted him, helped to weaken the springs of life and accelerate his end, which took place about six months' after Edward's return home. The father and son had become entirely reconciled with each other, and almost the last accents which faltered from the lips of the dying seaman, were a prayer to Bradshaw to forget and forgive what had past, and renew his sanction to the marriage of Edward and his niece. The stern man was inexorable; and his pitiless reply was, that he would a thousand times rather follow Rachel to her grave.

The constancy of the young people was not, however, to be subdued, and something more than a year after Mr. Drysdale's death, they married; their present resources, the rents,—about one hundred and twenty pounds per annum,—of a number of small tenements at Exeter. They removed to within three miles of that city, and dwelt there in sufficiency and peace for about five years, when the exigencies of a fast-increasing family induced them to dispose, not

very advantageously, of their cottage property, and embark the proceeds in a showy speculation promising, of course, immense results, and really ending in the brief space of six months in their utter ruin. Edward Drysdale found himself, in lieu of his golden hopes, worth about two hundred pounds less than nothing. The usual consequences followed. An undefended suit at law speedily reached the stage at which execution might be issued, and unless a considerable sum of money could be instantly raised, his furniture would be seized under a *fi. fa.*, and sacrificed to no purpose.

One only possible expedient remained,—that of once more endeavouring to soften the obduracy of Mr. Bradshaw. This it was finally determined to attempt, and Mr. and Mrs. Drysdale set off by a London morning coach upon the well-nigh hopeless speculation. They alighted at the ‘Hunter’s Inn,’ where Drysdale remained, whilst his wife proceeded alone to Rodney Place. Thomas Burnham was friendly and good-natured as ever. The old mariner, he told Drysdale, was visibly failing, and his chief amusement seemed to be scraping together and hoarding up money. James Berry, a broken-down tailor, and a chap, according to Burnham, who knew how many beans made five as well as any man in Devonshire, had been for some time valet, gardener, and general factotum at Rodney Place, and appeared to exercise great influence over Mr. Bradshaw. The only other person in the establishment was the old cook, Margery Deans, who, never otherwise, since he had known her, than desperately hard of hearing, was now become deaf as a stone. Drysdale, it was afterwards remembered, list-

ened to all this with eager attention, and was especially inquisitive and talkative respecting Mr. Bradshaw's hoarding propensities, and the solitary unprotected state in which he lived.

Mrs. Drysdale was long gone; but the tremulous hopes which her protracted stay called feebly forth, vanished at the sight of her pale, tearful, yet resolved aspect. 'It is useless, Edward,' she murmured, with her arms cast lovingly about her husband's neck, and looking in his face with far more lavish expression of affection than when, with orange-blossoms in her hair, she stood a newly-consecrated wife beside him. 'It is useless to expect relief from my uncle, save upon the heartless, impossible condition you know of. But let us home. God's heaven is still above our heads, though clouds and darkness rest between. We will trust in Him, Edward, and fear not.'

So brave a woman should have been matched with a stout-hearted man; but this, unhappily, was not the case. Edward Drysdale was utterly despondent, and he listened, as his wife was afterwards fain to admit to myself and others, with impatient reluctance to all she said as they journeyed homewards, save when the condition of help spoken of, namely, that she should abandon her husband, and take up her abode with her children at Rodney Place, was discussed,—by her indignantly. Once also, when she mentioned that the old will in her favour was not yet destroyed, but would be, her uncle threatened, if she did not soon return, a bright, almost fiery expression seemed to leap from his usually mild, reflective eyes, and partially dissipate the thick gloom which mantled his features.

This occurred on a winter's day in early March, and the evening up to seven o'clock had passed gloomily away with the Drysdales, when all at once the husband, starting from a profound reverie, said he would take a walk as far as Exeter, see the attorney in the suit against him, and, if possible, gain a little time for the arrangement of the debt. His wife acquiesced, though with small hope of any favourable result, and the strangely-abstracted man left the house.

Ten o'clock, the hour by which Edward Drysdale had promised to return, chimed from a dial on the mantel-piece. Mrs. Drysdale trimmed the fire, lit the candles, which, for economy's sake, she had extinguished, and had their frugal supper laid. He came not. Eleven o'clock! What could be detaining him so late? Twelve!—half-past twelve! Rachel Drysdale was just about to bid the servant-maid, who was sitting up in the kitchen, go to bed, when the sound of carriage-wheels going *towards* Exeter stopped at the door. It was a *return* post-chaise, and brought Edward Drysdale. He staggered, as if intoxicated, into the kitchen, reached down a half-bottle of brandy from a cupboard, and took it to the post-boy, who immediately drove off. Anne Moody, the servant-girl, was greatly startled by her master's appearance: he looked, she afterwards stated, more the colour of a whited wall than of flesh and blood, and shook and 'cowered' as if he had the ague. Mrs. Drysdale came into the kitchen, and stood gazing at her husband in a white, dumb kind of way (I am transcribing literally from the girl's statement), till the outer door was fastened, when they both went up stairs into a front sitting-room. Curiosity induced Anne Moody to

...w. ... upon them,
 ... I
 ... a nervous shaking voice,
 ... No, I
 ... Then
 ... for a minute or two,
 ... stream from
 ... followed,
 ... person of her class,
 ... make out,
 ... You,
 ... O God!
 ... fearful
 ... but crept
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 ... On the fol-
 ... and mis-
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 ... and
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 ... it was clear that
 ... One thing and
 ... the children
 ... till half-
 ... just as he was leaving
 ... A constable
 ... on a charge of bur-
 ... had been found

early in the morning cruelly stabbed to death beside his plundered strong-box.

I must pass lightly over the harrowing scenes which followed,—the tumultuous agony of the wife, and the despairing asseverations of the husband, impossible to be implicitly believed in even by that wife, for the criminating evidence was overwhelming. Drysdale had been seen skulking about Rodney Place till very late by both Burnham and Berry. In the room through which he must have passed in going and returning from the scene of his frightful crime, his hat had been found, and it was now discovered that he, Drysdale, had taken away and worn home one of Berry's,—no doubt from hurry and inadvertence. In addition to all this, a considerable sum of money in gold and silver, enclosed in a canvas-bag, well-known to have belonged to the deceased, was found upon his person! It appeared probable that the aim of the assassin had been only robbery in the first instance, for the corpse of the unfortunate victim was found clothed only in a night-dress. The fair inference, therefore, seemed to be that the robber, disturbed at his plunder by the wakeful old seaman, had been compelled, perhaps reluctantly, to add the dreadful crime of murder to that which he had originally contemplated. The outcry through the county was terrific, and as Edward Drysdale, by the advice of Mr. Sims, the attorney, who subsequently instructed Mr. Prince, reserved his defence, there appeared to be nothing of a feather's weight to oppose against the tremendous mass of circumstance arrayed against the prisoner.

And when, upon the arrival of the King's Com-

his own ; but he solemnly denied having been in the room, or near the part of the house where his hat was alleged to have been found. This was the gist of the explanation ; but, unfortunately, it was not sustained by any receivable testimony in any material particular. True, Mrs. Drysdale, whom everybody fully believed, declared that this account exactly coincided with what her husband told her immediately on arriving home in the post-chaise,—but what of that ? It was not what story the prisoner had told, nor how many times he had told it, that could avail, especially against the heavy improbabilities that weighed upon his, at first view, plausible statement. How was it that knowing Mr. Bradshaw's almost insane dislike of himself, he did not counsel his wife to make terms with her uncle, preparatory to her returning to Rodney Place ? And was it at all likely that Mr. Bradshaw, whose implacable humour Mrs. Drysdale had experienced on the very day previous to the murder, should have so suddenly softened towards the man he so thoroughly hated and despised ? I trow not ; and the first consultation on the case wore a wretchedly dismal aspect, till the hawk-eye of Mr. Prince lit upon an assertion of Thomas Burnham's that he had gone to Mr. Bradshaw's house upon some particular business at a quarter-past twelve on the night of the murder, and had seen the deceased alive at that time, who had answered him, as he frequently did, from his bed-room window. 'Rodney Place,' said Mr. Prince, 'is nine miles from Drysdale's residence. I understood you to say, Mr. Sims, that Mrs. Drysdale declares her husband was at home at twenty minutes to one ?'

'Certainly she does; but the wife's evidence, you are aware, cannot avail her husband.'

'True; but the servant-girl! The driver of the post-chaise! This is a vital point, and must be cleared up without delay.'

I and Williams, Sims' clerk, set off instantly to see Mrs. Drysdale, who had not left her room since her husband's apprehension. She was confident it was barely so late as twenty minutes to one when the post-chaise drove up to the door. Her evidence was, however, legally inadmissible, and our hopes rested on Anne Moody, who was immediately called in. Her answer was exasperating. She had been asleep in the kitchen, and could not positively say whether it was twelve, one, or two o'clock when her master reached home. There was still a chance left,—that of the post-chaise driver. He did not, we found, reach Exeter, a distance of three miles only from Mr. Drysdale's, till a quarter to three o'clock, and was then much the worse for liquor. So much for our chance of proving an *alibi*!

There was one circumstance perpetually harped upon by our bright, one-eyed friend of the Hunter's Inn; Cyclops, I and Williams called him. What had become of a large sum in notes paid, it was well-known, to Mr. Bradshaw three or four days before his death? What also of a ruby ring, and some unset-precious stones he had brought from abroad, and which he had always estimated rightly or wrongly, at so high a price? Drysdale's house and garden had been turned inside out, but nothing had been found, and so for that matter had Rodney Place, and its two remaining inmates had been examined with the like ill success. Bradshaw, who was excessively dissatisfied with the pro-

gress of affairs, swore there was an infernal mystery somewhere, and that he shouldn't sleep till he had ferreted it out. That was his business: ours was to make the best of the wretched materials at our disposal; but the result we all expected followed. The foregone conclusion of the jury that were empanelled in the case was just about to be formally recorded in a verdict of guilty, when a note was handed across to Mr. Sims. One Mr. Jay, a timber-merchant, who had heard the evidence of the postilion, desired to be examined. This the judge at once consented to, and Mr. Jay deposed that having left Exeter in his gig upon pressing business, at about two o'clock on the morning of the murder, he had observed a post-chaise at the edge of a pond about a mile and a half out of the city, where the jaded horses had been, he supposed, drinking. They were standing still, and the post-boy, who was inside, and had reins to drive with passed through the front windows, was fast asleep,—a drunken sleep it seemed, and he, Mr. Jay, had to bawl for some time, and strike the chaise with his whip, before he could awake the man, who, at last, with a growl and a curse, drove on. He believed, but would not like to positively swear, that the postilion he had heard examined was that man. This testimony, strongly suggestive as it was, his lordship opined did not materially affect the case; the jury concurred, and a verdict of guilty was pronounced and recorded amidst the death-like silence of a hushed and anxious auditory.

The unfortunate convict staggered visibly beneath the blow, fully expected, as it must have been, and a terrible spasm convulsed his features and shook his

frame. It passed away ; and his bearing and speech, when asked what he had to say why sentence of death should not be pronounced according to law, was not without a certain calm dignity and power, whilst his tones, tremulous, it is true, were silvery and unassuming as a child's.

‘I cannot blame the gentlemen of the jury,’ he said. ‘Their fatal verdict is, I am sure, as conscientious as God and myself know it to be erroneous,—false! Circumstances are, I feel, strangely arrayed against me ; and it has been my fate through life to be always harshly judged, save only by one whose truth and affection have shed over my chequered existence the only happiness it has ever known. I observed, too, the telling sneer of the prosecuting counsel, connecting the circumstances under which I left the navy with the *cowardice* of the deed of which I stand here accused,—convicted I suppose, I should say. I forgive that gentleman his cruel sneer as freely as I do you, gentlemen of the jury, your mistaken verdict,—you, my lord, the death-sentence you are about to pronounce. The manner in which I hope to pass through the brief, but dark and bitter passage lying betwixt me and the grave will, I trust, be a sufficient answer to the taunt of cowardice ; and the future vindication of my innocence, not for my own, but my wife and children's sake, I confidently leave them to Him into whose hands I shall soon, untimely, render up my spirit. This is all I have to say.’

The prisoner's calm, simple, unhurried words produced a marvellous effect upon the Court and auditory. The Chief Baron Macdonald, a comparatively nervous man, paused in

the act of assuming the black-cap, and presently said, rather hastily: 'Let the prisoner be removed; I will pass sentence to-morrow.' The Court then immediately adjourned.

I was miserably depressed in spirits, which the cold, sleety weather that greeted us on emerging from the hot and crowded court considerably increased. I was thinking,—excuse the seeming bathos,—I was only a clerk, and used to such tragedies; I was thinking, I say, that a glass of brandy and water might not be amiss, when whom should I rudely jostle against but Cyclops, *alias* Thomas Burnham! He was going the same way as myself in prodigious haste,—his eye bright and flaming as a live coal, and his whole manner denoting intense excitement. 'Is that you?' he broke out. 'Come along, then, and quick, for the love of God! I've missed Sims and his clerk, but you'll do as well; perhaps better.' I had no power, if I had the inclination to refuse, for the enthusiastic man seized me by the arm, and hurried me along at a tremendous rate towards the outskirts of the city. 'This is the place,' he exclaimed, as he burst into a tavern parlour, where two trunks had been deposited. 'He's not come yet,' Burnham went on, 'but the coach is to call for him here. He thinks to be off to London this very night.'

'Whom are you talking of? Who's off to London to-night?'

'James Berry, if he's clever enough! Look there!'

'I see; "James Berry, passenger, London." These, then, are his trunks, I suppose?'

‘Right, my boy; but there is nothing of importance in *them*. Sly, steady-going Margery has well ascertained that. You know Margery;—but hush! here he comes.’

Berry—it was he—could not repress a nervous start, as he unexpectedly encountered Burnham’s burly person and fierce glance.

‘You here?’ he stammered, as he mechanically took a chair by the fire. ‘Who would have thought it?’

‘Not you, Jim, I’m sure; it must be, therefore, an unexpected pleasure. I’m come to have a smoke and a bit of chat with you, Berry,—there isn’t a riper Berry than you are in the kingdom,—before you go to London, Jim,—do you mark?—before you go to London,—ha, ha! ho, ho! But, zounds! how pale and shaky you’re looking, and before this rousing fire, too! D—n thee, villain!’ shouted Burnham, jumping suddenly up from his chair, and dashing his pipe to fragments on the floor. ‘I can’t play with thee any longer. Tell me,—when did the devil teach thee to stuff coat-collars with the spoils of murdered men, eh?’

A yell of dismay escaped Berry, and he made a desperate rush to get past Burnham. Vainly did so. The fierce publican caught him by the throat, and held him by a grip of steel. ‘You’re caught, scoundrel!—nicked, trapped, found out, and by whom think you? Why, by deaf, paralytic, Margery, whose old eyes have never wearied in watching you from the hour you slew and robbed her good old master till to-day, when you dreamed yourself alone, and she discovered the mystery of the coat-collar.

‘Let me go. gasped the miscreant, down whose pallid cheeks big drops of agony were streaming. ‘Take all, and let me go!’

A fierce imprecation, followed by a blow, replied to the despairing felon. A constable, attracted by the increasing uproar, soon arrived; the thick coat-collar was ripped, and in it were found a considerable sum in Exeter notes,—the ruby ring, and other valuables well known to have belonged to Mr. Bradshaw. Berry was quickly lodged in gaol. A true bill was returned the next day by the grand jury before noon, and by the time the clock struck four, the murderer was, on his own confession, convicted of the foul crime of which a perfectly innocent man had been not many hours before pronounced guilty! A great lesson this was felt to be at the time in Exeter, and in the Western country generally. A lesson of the watchfulness of Providence over innocent lives; of rebuke to the self-sufficing infallibility of men, however organized or empanelled, and of patience under unmerited obloquy and slander.

Edward Drysdale was, I need hardly say, liberated by the king’s pardon,—pardon for an uncommitted offence,—and he and his true-hearted wife, the heiress of her uncle, are still living, in competence, content, and harmony.

MALVERN VERSUS MALVERN.

THE remarkable suit I have just named, came on for hearing before Lord Ellenborough and a special jury, at Westminster Hall, about five-and-thirty years ago. Mr. White, of Furnival's Inn, Mrs. Leigh Malvern's solicitor, retained Mr. Prince for the defence, which was to be led by the great Nisi Prius celebrity, Mr. S——. The matter, in its first aspect, had a queer, almost absurd, character. Mr. Raymond Malvern, a broken-down gentleman of high family, but by no means equally elevated character, had brought, on the demise of his elder brother, Mr. John Leigh Malvern, in conjunction with the mythic John Doe, an action in ejectment, to establish his right to certain property in Middlesex, wrongfully withheld from him by Mrs. Leigh Malvern, the guardian of the said deceased's infant son. The claim in-
t to the whole of the Malvern

estates which were extensive. At first, Mr. White believed the action to be a mere flash in the pan, a stupid clumsy device to terrify Mrs. Leigh Malvern into supplying, much more largely than she was inclined to do, the ruined *roué's* necessities. As the suit however proceeded, a vague feeling of apprehension succeeded to the solicitor's contemptuous *pooh-poohish* manner of treating it, and yet, wherein could lie the danger? Mr. and Mrs. Leigh Malvern had been married some four or five years; three children, two boys and a girl, were the issue of the union; and the estates contended for were entailed on the heir-male. There could be no doubt of all this; still, Mr. White, a wary, clever man, grew more and more fidgety when Hilary Term came round, and the cause was ripe for hearing at an early day. And this vague, undefinable feeling of alarm appeared at the last consultation held at Mr. Prince's chambers on the eve of the day when the cause would, in all likelihood, be called to be shared by all the counsel engaged, Mr. S—— included. Mrs. Malvern, accompanied by her brother, Mr. John Halcombe, was present for a short time, and they also, I observed, looked pale and nervous, chiefly, I concluded, in consequence of the grave tone of the lawyers. Those gentlemen could not divest themselves of a suspicion that something remained behind; something which the form of the pleadings did not afford a hint of. One or two questions suggested, rather than directly put, by Mr. S——, kindled Mrs. Malvern's fine, expressive countenance to a flame, and the dark, lustrous eyes sparkled with fire. She was a splendid woman, not more than five or six-and-twenty years of age, of

a Juno-like presence and aspect, and a complexion so fair as to be almost dazzling,—especially heightened and relieved as it was by the glossy blackness of her hair: she was one of the queens of earth, in short, whose sceptres command the homage of the reddest of red republicans. It could not be for a moment supposed that she would wilfully conceal anything, and the puzzled conclusion was, that either the record would be withdrawn at the last moment, or that some incomprehensible conspiracy was hatching by the plaintiff and his attorney, whom I shall call Mr. Benjamin Walker, a gentleman whose name had been more than once in danger of suddenly disappearing from the roll of attorneys.

The Court of King's Bench was crowded the next day chiefly by distinguished persons, of both sexes, anxious to learn the issue of so strange a suit. About twelve o'clock the case was called. An instant hush pervaded the eager auditory, and all eyes were bent upon Mr. G——, who led on the other side, and who, as soon as the case had been formally stated by one of the juniors, rose to address the Court and jury. His tone, it struck me from the first moment, though firm and confident, was regretful, almost sad, and it was quickly apparent that the curtain was rising, not upon an insane farce, as we had hoped, but upon the opening scene of what threatened to prove a lamentable tragedy. 'His client, Mr. Raymond Malvern,' Mr. G—— said, after a brief exordium, 'claimed the property in question, as heir-at-law of his elder brother, Leigh Malvern, who had died childless—'

'Died childless—'

and having done so,

there can be no doubt that the verdict must be for the plaintiff. In a word,' continued counsel, 'a great crime has, I am instructed, been committed against the estimable, but unfortunate lady who defends this suit as guardian of her son. With that, however, my client has nothing to do. It was only very lately, and by mere chance, that he hit upon the true circumstances of the case, and, as advised, brought this action for the recovery of his undoubted right,—a right which cannot be withheld, however much the necessity of coming to such a decision may be regretted.'

Counsel paused, as if to gather energy and courage to launch the thunderbolt that was to annihilate the defendant, and I had a moment's leisure to look around. Mr. Raymond Malvern was busy with his snuff-box, so that I could not see his features; but Benjamin Walker, Esquire, I observed, looked as cadaverous and shaky as a man in a fit of tertian ague. I next glanced at Mrs. Malvern, who, closely veiled, was seated, not far from us, between her father and brother. She was playing with the leaves of a law-book lying before her, and counsel's solemn sentences, I was rejoiced to perceive, had not, in the slightest degree, troubled the disdainful calm of countenance and manner, which contrasted so strikingly with the nervous agitation of the majority of the audience, many silk and stuff gowns included.

'Mr. Leigh Malvern,' counsel resumed, 'was married in October, 1811, to—'

'In February, 1813,' interrupted Mr. Prince, glancing at the certified copy of the marriage-

arried,' persisted Mr. G——, 'on the 7th

of October, 1811, at Stratford-le-Bow Church, to a person whose name will not be unfamiliar to the lady so unfortunately interested in this most painful case,—one Eleanor Beauchamp—'

A slight exclamation arrested the barrister's words, and turned the eyes of every one in Court upon Mrs. Malvern. 'Eleanor Beauchamp!' she ejaculated with impulsive wildness,—'married to Eleanor Beauchamp,—good God!' The calm, disdainful confidence was gone; the book had fallen from her nerveless grasp, and the dead marble of her features gleamed, almost spectre-like, through the meshes of her black veil.

'Who died in the month of April, 1813, never having borne her husband a living child.'

Mr. G—— stopped abruptly. Mrs. Malvern had fainted, and was instantly conveyed out of Court by her agitated relatives. As soon as the confusion caused by this incident had in some measure subsided, the address to the jury was resumed; but there was little more to say, and the first witness Samuel Pendergast, was called. This person, counsel informed the Court, was a very reluctant witness, much so, that from some expressions that had escaped him, it had been thought necessary to compel attendance by a judge's order.

A tall, well-looking individual, of about forty years of age, appeared upon the summons, in the charge of a servant, and was conducted to the witness-box. Reluctant as he was said to be, I never saw a man better dressed and made up for the part of a conscientious, solid respectable man. He was habited in a dark coat and without

speck: his white, parson-tied cravat, and shirt-front, were equally unexceptionable; his port-wined, double-chinned visage, and ample corporation, were of unquestionably well-to-do colour, sleekness, and rotundity; and his right mourning-ringed hand held a gold-headed cane.

Mr. Pendergast was sworn, and the examination in chief was about to commence, when the witness begged, with submission, to address the Court. This being acceded to, he went on: 'I find myself,' he said, 'in a most painful position. I would not, for half I am worth, have appeared here to-day. However, as the harsh measures of the plaintiff have compelled my attendance, I respectfully ask your lordship whether I can be obliged to answer questions which must convict myself, if not of legal criminality, yet of moral neglect of duty, of criminal supineness, at all events, at a time when prompt exertion might have averted the lamentable consequences which I fear may flow from these proceedings?'

'Over-doing it, Mr. Plausible!—over-doing it!' shot through my brain, and almost escaped my lips. And so, I was pretty sure, thought Lord Ellenborough, who had been keenly eyeing Mr. Samuel Pendergast during his very smooth speech. 'We must wait to hear what questions will be asked,' replied the Chief Justice, coldly. 'If you object to answer, the Court will decide whether you must or not.'

The examination went on, and, substantively, the witness deposed as follows:—He had been long in the service of Mr. Malvern's and his venerable mother's household, and was left in August, 1811, under circumstances which were willing and able to satisfactorily

explain, if called upon to do so. The quarrel between him and Mr. Leigh Malvern had been envenomed and rendered irreconcilable by a gentleman, whose name he had no desire to mention, and towards whom he felt not the slightest animosity. He knew Eleanor Beauchamp; she lived as companion with Mrs. Malvern. She was a young lady of rare personal attractions. Mr. Leigh Malvern paid her very assiduous attentions, but studiously apart from his mother, Mrs. Malvern's observations. In the beginning of October, 1811, a rumour, communicated by one of the servants, reached him that a stolen marriage was on the tapis; and, by dint of close observation, he, witness, contrived to be present at the ceremony, which took place on the 7th of October, at Stratford Church. At about ten o'clock on the morning of that day, Eleanor Beauchamp was privately married to Mr. Leigh Malvern. The reason he had been so inquisitive, he was not ashamed to say, was, that he had himself made Miss Beauchamp an offer of marriage, and been somewhat rudely repulsed: a feeling of jealousy or envy had prompted his conduct. He had seen the lady, then Mrs. Leigh Malvern, at a place near Cardiff, in Wales, where she was living in strict retirement. This was in the following August: he had sought her out to solicit her good offices with Mr. Malvern for the restoration of his, witness's, place,—a request she declined acceding to for the moment, but hinted that, if he were discreet enough not to speak of her marriage till after Mrs. Malvern's death, who had a large personalty at her disposal, his silence would be rewarded. Mrs. Leigh Malvern appeared to be in delicate health; and Mr. Griffiths, a surgeon, of

Cardiff, who attended her, said she had just previously been confined with a still-born infant. Mr. Malvern, it was also stated, visited his wife very seldom, and then remained so brief a time, and was so wrapped up and disguised, that even the servants would have great difficulty in recognising him. Witness saw Mrs. Leigh Malvern, in the following November, at Everton, near Liverpool, where she was then residing, still in strict privacy. He preferred the same request as before, and was put off with the same excuse and the same caution. He then determined on settling in Liverpool as commission agent, and God had prospered him. In December, 1812, a paragraph in a London paper announced the approaching marriage of Mr. Leigh Malvern with Miss Julia Halcombe. He at first paid no attention to it. 'And here,' solemnly exclaimed Samuel Pendergast,—'here, my lord and gentlemen, was my first criminal neglect of a plain duty, and it was only, I grieve to say, after much hesitating reluctance that I, at last, determined to see Mrs. Leigh Malvern, and show it her. She laughed at it as a ridiculous fabrication. Weeks passed on; witness was busy in his new business; still the newspaper report disturbed him at intervals, and it was at length so strongly borne in upon his mind that he ought, in honour and conscience, to investigate the rumour, that he started for London in person, and arrived there on the 20th of February, just three days too late,—the sham marriage of Julia Halcombe with Leigh Malvern having been celebrated on the 17th! Even then,' continued the penitent witness, 'I had not the moral courage to inform the real wife of what had happened. But a rumour of the truth, at length,

reached her, and she sent for me: I was, of course, obliged to confirm it. She had been long ailing,' added the witness, passing the back of his hand swiftly across his eyes, and speaking in a broken voice, 'and she sank rapidly under this last blow. I saw her on the 29th of March, and on the 3rd of April, she was a corpse!' After a pause, the witness said, in reply to a question from counsel, that 'he had then, perhaps erroneously, decided that it would be better for all parties that the unfortunate marriage should be buried in oblivion. How the plaintiff had come to a knowledge of the facts, he, witness, knew not.'

The evidence, admirably delivered as it was, produced a powerful impression, and there was immediately an eager whispered consultation between the counsel for the defendant and Mr. White. I did not hear a word; but, at its conclusion, Mr. S—— intimated that he had no question to ask the witness. Mr. Pendergast stood down, and other evidence was called, confirmatory of his testimony: Mr. Griffiths, of Cardiff, the clerk of Stratford Church, and a Liverpool sexton. Neither of them, indeed, knew either Mr. Leigh Malvern, or Eleanor Beauchamp, personally. Mr. Griffiths had never even seen the husband of the lady he had attended; but, upon a miniature being placed in his hands,—that of a singularly beautiful female,—he swore positively that the Mrs. Malvern he had known was the original of that portrait. Mr. White whispered me, that it was as unquestionably that of Eleanor Beauchamp, and an admirable likeness. A Mr. Heyworth, the last witness, deposed, that it was the portrait of Miss Eleanor Beauchamp, which he had painted by order of Mr. Leigh Malvern, who had

paid him ten guineas for it. This was the plaintiff's case, and, taken all in all, a sufficiently staggering one, it must be confessed.

Mr. S—— briefly addressed the Court. 'My lord,' he said, 'we have been taken completely by surprise: we have been kept, by the other side, in entire ignorance both of the true nature of the claim intended to be set up, and of the evidence by which it was to be supported. We have thought it best, therefore, not to attempt struggling for a verdict on this occasion, but to allow it to pass for the plaintiff, with leave to move the Court above for a new trial, on the ground of surprise.' The Chief Justice concurred, the formal verdict was recorded, and the Court adjourned.

'Mr. White,' said Mr. Prince, addressing me, *sotto voce*, 'wishes you to follow, and closely observe Mr. Samuel Pendergast; he knows White's clerk, it seems, personally, so that you will be likelier to succeed than he.' I was off in a jiffy, and got in sight of the immaculate witness, just as he was crossing Palace Yard. He walked rapidly on till he reached the Golden Cross, Charing Cross,—a very different place then, by the way, to what it is now,—where he first secured an inside place in that night's Liverpool coach, and then ordered dinner, a very nice one indeed, and a pint of sherry with it. I ensconced myself in the coffee-room, whence I could easily observe all in-comers and out-goers. It was half-past five o'clock, and dark as pitch,—the oil lamps being, with the exception of a doubtful twinkle here and there, extinguished by a fog of extra thickness,—when Samuel Pendergast, his portly body encased in

a stout greatcoat, and his jolly throat swathed with a red comforter, sallied forth. I stealthily pursued up the Haymarket, across Coventry Street, and finally housed my man in a public-house in Sherrard Street, the name of which I forget, though I passed it but the other day: I cautiously opened the bar-door, and peeped in; he was not there. I entered, but afraid to make any inquiries, I could only call for some porter, and sit down behind a tall cask which happened to be close by. It was fortunate I did so; for, presently a loud guffaw, undoubtedly Mr. Benjamin Walker's, echoed by the more subdued chuckle of Samuel Pendergast, and, if I did not greatly mistake, a faint laugh from Mr. Raymond Malvern, came distinctly out of a back-parlour,—a private apartment for the nonce, no doubt,—as a waiter, in obedience to a loud ringing of the bell, entered for orders. My patience was not, this time, very severely tried. Scarcely half an hour had passed when out they came, all three, in jocund spirits,—it was Mr. Raymond Malvern,—and were going out together. Just at the door, they paused. 'Well,' said Benjamin Walker, 'good-bye. I hardly think we shall want you again: they're dead beat, in my opinion; but, if we do, why, we know how to *compel* your services, don't we, my fine fellow, eh?' The attorney's laugh was echoed by his companions, and the three separated, going off singly, in different directions.

My report was, of course, deemed significant, and several minor circumstances, not easily appreciable save by men versed in such matters, gave life, colour, and distinctness, to the dim, shadowy suspicion ex-

cited in the minds of the defendant's counsel by the evidence of Samuel Pendergast. It was resolved that there should be no bustle or preparation, no exhibition of confidence, the reverse rather,—so as to afford a better opportunity of catching the adversary napping in his fool's paradise. The rule for a new trial was made absolute, upon payment of costs, and the tone of Mr. Prince, who moved for it, was as little confident as Benjamin Walker, Esquire, or his client, could have desired. In consultation, albeit, the opinion of counsel was encouraging and hopeful, and the agonizing alarm of Mrs. Malvern gradually subsided,—ought I not to say, rose?—into a patient trustfulness in Him who ruleth the hearts and trieth the reins of men.

Yet was there much to be done; and, amongst other arrangements, it was finally determined that I, being—as before stated—unknown to Samuel Pendergast, should proceed to Liverpool and ascertain what, in the way of rebutting evidence, could be fished up there.

I found that Mr. Samuel Pendergast's character stood high in Liverpool,—that he was esteemed to be a prosperous, highly respectable commission agent, and the pattern-pillar of a religious community—of what denomination it is unnecessary to say: there are black sheep in all flocks. He was married, but had no family; and his wife—reported to be in delicate health—lived in almost entire seclusion at his private residence, Everton. This was hardly worth journeying two hundred miles for, but an interview with Dr. Roundtree, who, Mr. White had discovered, attended the *soi-disant* Mrs. Malvern in her last illness, promised better results. I brought a

note from an old friend of the doctor's, and, after a full explanation, he said he would willingly assist in defeating such a plot, if plot there were. The doctor seemed disposed to believe Mr. Pendergast's evidence. 'A specious, hypocritical man, no doubt,' he remarked; 'pharisaical, and so on, but not the atrocious villain you appear to take him for.' In reply to my question as to the personal appearance of the said Mrs. Leigh Malvern, he said she was of fair complexion, and had light-brown hair and blue eyes. The vague hope I had entertained died within me. The portrait had blue eyes, brown hair, and fair complexion. 'Very beautiful, was she not?' I added.

'Oh, dear, no; quite the reverse,—exceedingly plain, I should say.'

'Exceedingly plain!'

'Surely; but that is, after all, a matter of taste. Her sister, now—Mr. Pendergast's wife—is, or rather, has been—for the grave-shadow overlies her beauty—a beautiful woman.'

'Her sister! Mrs. Pendergast!' It was a gleam of lightning! Why, what devil's game was the fellow playing? 'Eleanor Beauchamp,' I hurriedly, exclaimed, 'had no sister!'

'Well, but hear me,' said calm, steady-going Dr. Roundtree. 'It was by mere inadvertence, and not very long ago, that Mrs. Pendergast let fall the observation; and I, noticing her vexation, feigned not to have heard it. She might mean her sister-in-law, you know.'

'I should be very glad to see Mrs. Pendergast,' I said.

'Ah! poor soul, nobody will see her long. An

unhappy, long-suffering woman; and, decorously as Pendergast treats her before others — though she seldom sees any one—there is only one thing she dreads more than she does him, and that is death! I have seen her cower beneath that hard, glittering eye of his, like a beaten hound. She daily grows more and more superstitious, too, and her dread of dissolution is, as I have told you, intense. Her husband has constantly urged me to buoy her up with hopes of lengthened life; but that is fast becoming impossible.'

'But can I see her?' I impatiently, almost rudely, iterated.

Dr. Roundtree reflected for a few moments, and then said, 'Yes; it may be managed. I have to send her a prescription in the morning, accompanied with some directions concerning diet. You can, if you like, be my messenger. She is sure to see and cross-question you as to my *real* opinion of her state.' I joyfully acquiesced, took leave, and immediately wrote and posted a letter to London, requesting Mr. White to come down instantly.

I was at Everton the next morning about half an hour after Mr. Pendergast had left for his place of business, and was instantly admitted to the patient's presence. The curtains of the sick room were closed, but one glance only, even in the faint light which struggled in through the yellow damask and exaggerated the death-hue of the worn and anxious countenance which met my gaze, sufficed to convince me that I was in the presence of the original of the portrait of the once gay, fascinating, Eleanor Beauchamp. Although somewhat prepared for this, I was

so much startled that my hand trembled in presenting her with the physician's note, almost as much as the white, transparent one that received it, and my answers to her anxious queries were so incoherent, contradictory, and absurd, that she bade me, with some asperity, leave the house immediately, and inform Dr. Roundtree that she implored him to come to her without delay. I obeyed, after promising to fulfil her injunction. Dr. Roundtree was at home; and, five minutes after my return, was on his way to Everton.

He was gone nearly three hours. When I again saw him, he said, 'I begin to think you are right. At all events, Mrs. Pendergast is in a most pitiable state, both mentally and physically. So rapidly has a change for the worse come on, that I felt it my duty to inform her, peremptorily, she had not a week, perhaps not half that time, to live. Her despairing outcries were for a time terrific; but as she calmed, the religious traditions of her youth returned with their old power upon her imagination. Her mother, it seems, was an Irishwoman, and she was educated in the Catholic faith. I have promised her, though I hardly think I ought to have done so, to bring her a clergyman of that creed; and this, too, without her husband's knowledge. Confound it, I wish I had not promised; but, there, my word is given, and I must speak to one of the clergymen of St. Patrick's Chapel,—a worthy man whom I happen to know. He may perhaps induce her to make a clean breast of it before the world.'

This was greatly to be desired, for the unhappy lady's own sake; and great was the satisfaction of

Mr. White and Mr. John Halcombe, who had arrived only a few hours previously, when informed that Mrs. Pendergast was desirous of making a full confession in the presence of such witnesses as might be deemed necessary.

This expiation of her partial complicity in the guilt of Samuel Pendergast was made in the chamber where I had first beheld her; and there were present the Catholic priest, Mr. White, Mr. Halcombe, and myself. Brokenly, and with many pauses of her failing breath, the dying woman murmured forth a full and explicit statement of all that was necessary to be known, which Mr. White took carefully down in writing. I need only give here a brief summary of it: 'From early girlhood,' she said, 'her mind had been warped and inflated by vanity and ambition,—vanity and ambition prompted, generated, by the homage paid to her personal attractions. When living with the elder Mrs. Malvern, as companion, she aspired to wed with her son, Mr. Leigh Malvern, and spared no art to effect her purpose. For a time she believed herself on the verge of success; but his fancy had been caught merely, not his heart—as she had hoped—subjugated; and he offered no serious objection when his mother—irritated by some impertinence of hers with respect to her son—peremptorily ordered her to leave the house. She soon became acquainted with the cause of his indifference. He had seen Julia Halcombe—his friend, John Halcombe's sister—and fallen violently in love with her. A tempest of jealous fury swept through her brain at this intelligence, succeeded by a wild thirst for revenge—utterly causeless, for the young man

This vehement exertion exhausted the last powers of life: the supplicating arms dropped down: the relaxing muscles of the neck could no longer sustain the upraised countenance, the elevated head, and she fell forward, with her face on the bedclothes. We raised her up: she was dead; albeit a living smile still played about the lips, as if her last prayer had been granted in its utterance.

Let me hasten to conclude. There was, of course, no second trial of the case of Malvern *versus* Malvern, and we managed to convict Samuel Pendergast of wilful and corrupt perjury, for which he was sentenced to twelve months' imprisonment with hard labour; a leniency of punishment I could not at all understand. Benjamin Walker, Esquire, and his client, could not be legally reached, but they both died, I have reason to believe, in miserable poverty, abroad. Samuel Pendergast was luckier, for a time at least, for if he was not the sleek secretary of one of the bubble companies of 1825, my eyes must have strangely deceived me, which is not at all likely; for even now, after the lapse of more than another quarter of a century, I can see, like Beatrice, a church by daylight. Men's evil deeds follow them, it is true, but it is not always in *this* world that they overtake the wrongdoer.

BROTHER AND SISTER.

THE leaf which I am about to transcribe will be found to be only, in a slight degree, the record of my own personal observation; but I do not the less feel confident in its general accuracy, inasmuch, as my informants could have had no motive for mystifying or misleading me—a postulate of great importance in estimating the credibility of the most trustworthy persons. There are one or two blanks in the narrative which I might indeed inferentially fill up, but this I have no doubt the reader will do quite as well for him or herself.

Mr. and Mrs. Edward Reeves were, I believe, both natives of Clifton, Bristol. Certainly the husband was the son and sole offspring of a wealthy, but somewhat feeble-minded gentleman, who had long resided there. Edward Reeves was the issue of a second marriage, and his father was again a widower at the

age of sixty-three: in less than two years afterwards—having been, I suppose, wonderfully happy in his choice of previous partners—the old gentleman ventured—rash gamester!—for a third prize in the conubial lottery, and drew—a widow, one Mrs. Halliday, the handsomest, cleverest, and poorest of two sisters; her sole wealth, her brilliant eyes, her silver tongue, her Houri smile, and two fine children—boys. Alas! the brilliant eyes, the silver tongue, the Houri smile, seen by the light of common day, which in this instance, dawned upon the matrimonial horizon in something less than a fortnight after the ‘happy’ one, proved to be mere shams—surface lacquer—elaborate deceit. A disastrous union it was soon found to be for Edward Reeves, his young, gently-nurtured wife, and their children, Jonathan and Mabel. The orange-blossoms of the bride, were cypress-wreaths to them,—funereal emblems of departing peace and competence. The old story, in such cases, quickly developed itself. The senile bridegroom lapsed into a nonentity without a serious struggle; and little Jonathan, happening one day to thrash Master Halliday, a boy about his own age (seven years), for spiteful usage to his sister, Mabel, accelerated the catastrophe. The antagonistic parties could no longer inhabit the same house; Edward Reeves and family removed to a cottage in the vicinity, and the son was thenceforth a stranger to his father’s dwelling, till he received a formal invitation to attend his funeral, and the reading of his will. ‘In the name of God, Amen!’ rasped out the shaky voice of Randall, the attorney,—a worthy man though a lawyer. ‘I, Jonathan Reeves, being of sound mind, and in full possession

of all my faculties, hereby give and bequeath to Maria, my beloved wife, all and sundry the estate, real and personal, of which I may die seised and possessed: to wit——' A fierce outcry, natural, if unseemly, under such circumstances, interrupted the reader. It came from the beggared son, who had leaped to his feet in wild dismay, as the lawyer's words of doom—for such they truly were—fell upon his ear. But the utter consternation and despair of the revived man were too terrible and giant-like for articulate utterance; and, after one or two abortive efforts at speech, he sank on the floor in a fit. The usual bustle ensued—the usual remedies were applied; Edward Reeves was restored to consciousness, and conveyed home. The formal reading of the will was completed; the hearers went their several ways; and the tiny segment of the world's great circle in which the incident occurred, revolved again pretty much in its old course,—except indeed as regarded the disinherited son and those dependent on him. To be sure, everybody said it was a scandalous will—a downright robbery of the legitimate heir; but everybody also smiled graciously or fawningly, as the case might be, upon the fair and fortunate legatee; and everybody that could, cheerfully ate her dinners, and gaily quaffed her wines. The property thus uxoriously disposed of, amounted to about twenty-five hundred a year, beside the personals, and was devised absolutely to the widow, with the remainder to *her* sons, unless she otherwise determined by will: even pretty little Mabel, of whom her grandfather was so fond and proud, was not left so much as a keepsake.

I know little concerning the legally-plundered family

during the following nine or ten years, except that Edward Reeves never thoroughly recovered the shock inflicted by his father's will, and that his wife, a meek-hearted, loving woman, but, like her husband, of no great force or energy of character, participated his wearing grief and resentment, and descended step by step with him to a premature grave. They were withdrawn, I understood, somewhat suddenly, and within two or three weeks of each other, to that brighter and better land, but for whose auroral promise, this earth of ours were so drear a Golgotha, strewn with mouldering bones, and withered hopes, and breaking hearts. Neither can I relate the precise gradations of descent in the social scale passed through by the unfortunate family, till, at the period of the father and mother's decease, they occupied a poorly-furnished second-floor in Redcliffe Street, Bristol, nearly opposite the church. I fancy, however, remembering to have heard that business of some sort was attempted by Edward Reeves, with money obtained through the intervention of Mrs. Robinson, the usurping legatee's sister, and a very decent person, let me add, although, from inferiority of worldly circumstances, greatly in awe of her lucky relative. Be this correct or not, Jonathan Reeves had been apprenticed to a working jeweller, and when his parents died, was within a twelvemonth of finishing his time. Mabel, two years her brother's junior, had not then left her poor home; chained there as she was by love for her heart-broken parents, though frequently offered a comfortable asylum, by sympathising friends, in interchange for such light service as she could render. That lingering tie had snapped, and

the fair girl's hesitating step trembled at length upon the threshold of the world—she feared, yet longed to enter. I can readily believe all I have heard of Mabel Reeves' singular attractiveness as a girl, from what I saw of her when a matron. It was easy then to trace the yet lingering elastic grace, the slight, but finely-rounded outline of her charming figure; the delicately fair, pale-rose tinted features, which, lit meekly up with guileless eyes of blue, and shrouded with down-falling golden hair, caused the dullest-visioned passer-by to pause in instinctive admiration of the beauteous flower, fresh as it seemed, from the hand of God, and still radiant with the angel-light of Paradise. Jonathan was not uncomely; but it was difficult—so strongly marked was the contrast between the sombre, saturnine intelligence of his aspect, and the innocent candour, the almost infantine simplicity of hers—to believe they were such near relatives. Yet were they true and loving ones. Jonathan Reeves loved his sister beyond all things—even money!—and Mabel's affection for her brother was as deep and earnest as it was confiding and unselfish. They differed as widely in turn of mind and disposition as they did personally. The clouds of life passed over, and left no lasting trace upon Mabel's joyous, kindly temperament, and she was ever forgiving as a child. Jonathan, on the contrary, brooded with revengeful rancour over the wrongs of his family, and pursued with his bitterest maledictions those who had caused and profited by its downfall; evil wishes, which, however provoked, generally, as the Arabic proverb hath it, 'come like domestic fowls home to roost.'

Mabel went to live with a Mrs. Houston, of Clifton,

in a kind of hybrid capacity, compounded of lady's-maid and companion. Mrs. Houston greatly disliked the rich and handsome widow Reeves (though on quite civil visiting terms with her), chiefly—so friendly gossips sneered—because she *was* rich and handsome; and dearly the patronizing lady loved to parade before their mutual acquaintance the interesting girl rendered destitute, but for Mrs. Houston's interposition, by the infamous will,—goodness knows how obtained—of her imbecile grandfather. Mabel was, however, very well treated by her somewhat ostentatious patroness, and her education was sedulously advanced. Her improvement was so marked and rapid, that her brother grew impatient, almost jealous, of the change. It seemed to be creating a gulf between them: other *indices* relating to her, augmented his chagrin and disquietude.

'These Sunday visits to your brother, Mabel,' he broke out one day, with a bitterness lately but too habitual with him, 'are becoming wearisome and distasteful to you. These narrow rooms, this shabby furniture, contrast miserably with Mrs. Houston's gilded saloons.'

'Oh! Jonathan, how can you be so cruel,—so unjust?' exclaimed poor Mabel, with suffused eyes, and trembling voice.

'I have noticed this impatience,—this growing alienation—this disgust—call it what you will—for months past,' resumed the brother, with increasing violence. 'And tell me,' he added, with quick anger, and pausing in his hasty striding to and fro to seize her by the arm, and look with menacing sternness in her face,—'Tell me who was the perfumed fop I saw you with in the park on Thursday last—answer

quickly and without equivocation, or the God of Heaven——’

‘I, with!’ stammered the pale, startled girl,—‘I with! you mistake, Jonathan. There were several—’

‘Yes, yes, I know; Mrs. Houston and half-a-dozen others were of the party—a gay assemblage, Mabel, which your vulgar brother dare not profane by a too close approach. But this beringleted bewhiskered *gentleman* I speak of, was with *you*; affected to be conscious of no other’s presence; walked, whispered, at your side—and you, Mabel, you smiled upon his insulting courtesies! Mabel,’ continued the excited young man, after vainly waiting a few moments for a reply, ‘Mabel, you do not answer. Once—once!’ he added, in a changed and lower tone, but fierce and deadly as the hissing of a serpent—‘Once, as twilight was falling, I caught a nearer view of his face, and it flamed through me that I had seen it before; that—but no, it could not be: to suppose that of our murdered mother’s child were——’

‘Oh, Jonathan!’ sobbed Mabel, ‘you will break my heart.’

‘Nay, forgive me, Mabel!’ exclaimed the brother, with sudden revulsion of feeling —‘forgive the blaspheming thought that for a moment wronged you. Dear child, how could I be so mad!’

‘Dear Johathan! dear brother!’ murmured the weeping girl, as her head sank upon his shoulder; but her eyes, he noticed, were stedfastly averted, as if dreading to encounter his.

‘I am rash as fire, at times, dear Mabel,’ said the brother, after a lengthened silence, ‘and utter words without sense or purpose. But we will talk of this

matter calmly, wisely, as friendless orphans in this bad world should. You, sweet sister, possess in a peerless degree the dangerous gift of beauty: men such as he with whom I saw you in eager converse look upon beauty in our class of society as a toy, as——'

'Our class of society!' echoed Mabel, flushing scarlet; 'surely we are as well born, of lineage as reputable, as any of Mrs. Houston's friends or visitors. The difference between us is in the accident of riches only—nothing else.'

'Of riches only—nothing else!' shouted Jonathan Reeves, with a renewed paroxysm of anger mingled with scorn, and casting his sister off as he sprang impetuously to his feet. "'Riches only," quoth she, as if—great God!—riches were not the be-all and the end-all of this nether world! The prime distinction between base and noble—vice and virtue—and did not sunder men as widely as earth's from heaven! Riches *only*, forsooth! Hark ye, girl,' he added, 'you are on the verge of a precipice, and by heaven—'

He spoke to deaf ears. Mabel had fainted. As soon as she was sufficiently recovered, a hack coach was called, and Jonathan escorted her to Clifton, the silence between them only broken by mutual 'good night.' The next day he gave Mrs. Houston written notice that, on that day month, Mabel Reeves would return to his, her legal guardian's home.

It was soon apparent that Mabel Reeves was extremely averse to compliance with her brother's wishes or commands. She grew dull, melancholy, absent, and reserved in manner, and appeared to dread that, till she attained her majority,—and it wanted a whole twelvemonth of that,—she would be little better than

a prisoner in his house. A day or two before the expiration of the stipulated term, the brother received a hurriedly-scrawled note from Mrs. Houston. Mabel had fled!—To London it was rumoured, but with whom (if with anybody) nobody could conjecture. She had been gone five or six hours before the discovery was made. Finally, Mrs. Houston wished to see Mr. Reeves instantly.

The brother tore the note to atoms, and sped off with frantic speed towards Clifton. Before Mrs. Houston—who was painfully agitated—could utter a word, Jonathan Reeves broke in with ‘Those vipers—the Hallidays, I mean—are in the habit of visiting here. James, the youngest, especially. Is that so?’

‘Yes, certainly, they are, but——’

He did not wait the conclusion of the sentence, and in a minute or two he was thundering at the mansion of the dowager Mrs. Reeves. The servant who opened the door was instantly thrust aside, and, guided by the voices he heard within, Jonathan Reeves burst unannounced into the dining-room. ‘My sister!’ he gasped,—‘thieves—plunderers—devils—where is my sister?’

The company, thus flatteringly addressed, were Mrs. Reeves, Mrs. Robinson, and the two Messrs. Halliday. They stared at each other, and at the questioner, their looks indicating not so much surprise or alarm, as concern and irresolution.

‘We have heard something of this unhappy business,’ said Mrs. Robinson; ‘but be assured no one here has been privy to, or aided your sister’s flight.’

‘You—you answer!’ shouted Reeves, addressing the gentlemen; ‘it is you I suspect, not your aunt!’

‘My aunt’s answer is mine,’ said the elder Halliday; ‘and I deeply grieve ——’

‘Perdition to your grief and you! And now, sir, *your* reply. What say *you*?’

Mr. James Halliday sat in the shadow of the heavy window-curtains, and it was growing dusk, so that his face could not be distinctly seen; but his voice was firm enough as he replied, ‘I have nothing to say: it is now three or four days since I last saw Miss Reeves.’

The baffled querist glared bewilderedly for a few minutes from one to the other, and then muttered aloud, but speaking to himself, ‘It may be as they say. They are certainly both here, and she gone; gone—six hours since. But if she be hidden in the bowels of the earth, I’ll find her.’

He then rushed out of the house as madly as he had entered it, reached home, provided himself with money, and left per mail for London the same evening. A fortnight afterwards he returned, haggard, worn, half-crazed,—without Mabel.

Again a gap occurs in this roughly-connected narrative, extending over eighteen years and upwards; and when I again re-knit its broken thread, it is the month of March, 1812,—at which time it happened that I visited Bristol on some legal business, in which Mr. Randall, the solicitor, was concerned, and thus became a hearer and spectator of the last act in this curious domestic drama.

Jonathan Reeves, I must first state, was still a bachelor, and resided in Redcliffe Street, but nearer towards Bedminster Bridge than he formerly lodged, where he kept a small working jeweller’s shop. He

was still poor; and not only so in purse, but in heart and spirit. Years of senseless repining and unavailing regrets had done their work upon him, aided, it is grievous to record, by the ravages of drink, to which fatal propensity he had gradually addicted himself; so that, not yet forty, he was already an aged man! Mabel he had never seen nor heard of, directly, but he had every year received parcels containing presents of some value, which could only come from her, and denoting that, at all events, she was not suffering from poverty. There was no address given—no line written—but every parcel contained a lock of golden hair, and, strangely enough, the brother thought the well-remembered colour did not suffer change from age,—nay, the very last he had received was positively, he was sure, more brightly golden than that which he had hoarded up some fifteen years before! Mrs. Reeves, his grandfather's wealthy relict, still lived—in London he believed; but it warmed the sickness of his cankered heart to know—in paralytic helplessness, as well as deep mental gloom, caused by the untimely passing away, within a twelvemonth of each other, of her two sons, who had both died unmarried. Charles Robinson would therefore—unless in a fit of caprice she disinherited him, and she was, people said, as vengefully capricious, as much dominated by selfish and obdurate passions, as when life was young with her—come ultimately into possession of the greatly improved and augmented property.

This is all I think I have to set down respecting the interval of eighteen years and upwards, which terminated in March, 1812. In that month the long-desired letter from his sister reached Jonathan Reeves.

It was affectionate, but reserved and brief in regard to her flight from Bristol, and subsequent existence; and it was stated that the time for a full explanation was still, in all probability, far distant. She was a widow, and alone, and yearned to find herself once more in the home of her brother. She should not be a burden to him, having enough (though barely so) for her own maintenance. She would be in Bristol on the fourth day after the receipt of the letter, which was subscribed 'Mabel,' only.

'You are but little altered, Mabel,' said Jonathan Reeves, after the first rapturous emotions that swelled his heart on again embracing his long-lost sister had somewhat subsided; 'still beautiful, though more sedately so, perhaps,—ay, and I think more hopeful too; but surely, Mabel, this hair, thinner than I once knew it, is scarcely so bright and glossy as the locks you lately sent me.'

Mabel coloured a little, and replied, 'You fancy so, that's all.'

'It may be as you say: a widow, and recently,' he added, glancing at her dress.

'Yes, dear Jonathan; I wrote you so.'

'And children—none?'

'One only,' replied the sad mother, with bowed head and husky voice, 'and she has been taken from me.'

A long silence ensued, suddenly broken by Jonathan Reeves. 'Did you know, Mabel, that Mrs. Robinson—that woman's sister—has returned to Clifton within the last month, and resides in the old place?'

'I have heard so.'

'Her son Charles is now the lawful heir, is he not?'

‘It would appear so, unless our grandfather’s widow should will it otherwise: she has the power to do so.’

‘That is not likely, I think. Mrs. Robinson is a kind woman enough: I have worked for her often. The old dreams are gone, Mabel, and harsh necessity has humbled my pride. She has sent to say I must not forget to call on her to-morrow, on business. You are tired—good night.’

‘You would have been amused, Mabel,’ remarked Jonathan Reeves as he sat down to tea the next evening, on his return from Clifton, ‘to hear how anxious Mrs. Robinson is concerning you. Over and over did she cross-examine me, to find out what she said you *must* have confided to me of past events, and yet I thought she seemed pleased when satisfied that I knew nothing. Is not this a splendid diamond?’ added the jeweller, holding a large old-fashioned ring encircling a magnificent jewel to the light, upon which his grey, eager eyes were fixed all the time he had been speaking,—‘clumsily set, but of the finest water, and very, very valuable, from its size and colour. It was grandfather’s,’ he added quickly: ‘part of the rich spoil of which we were plundered. It should be ours, Mabel.’

‘Yes, perhaps so, in fairness and equity; but in law it belongs to Mrs. Reeves. Tell me,’ continued Mabel, in her turn speaking with quick nervousness, ‘did you notice anybody—any stranger—that is, anybody I know, I mean,—either—no matter, with Mrs. Robinson?’

‘Let me see. Her son was at home, and there was a young woman with her, I hardly can be said to have seen,—Miss Murray, I think they called her, a sort of

humble companion. Ah! You tremble and change colour. You are ill.'

'No, no, a slight faintness, that's all.'

The jeweller's thoughts quickly reverted to the diamond. 'I think,' he said, 'this jewel, which, as you say, is ours in fairness and equity, must be at least worth two hundred pounds.'

'To us that can matter little,' replied his sister, quietly. 'You had better put it away in a safe place at once. I shall take a walk,' added Mabel, 'as far as Mr. Randall's; he lives in Queen Square, does he not?'

'Yes, on the left-hand side from here;—name on a brass plate. At least two hundred pounds'—Mabel heard her brother mutter as she closed the door, his fascinated gaze still rivetted upon the flashing diamond. 'At least that sum—and we so poor.'

Jonathan Reeves' almost continually absorbed contemplation of the diamond, and muttered comments on its value, at length raised a feeling of alarm in Mabel's mind, which closer observation but heightened and confirmed. The resetting had been for some time finished, but Reeves was always ready with an excuse for not parting with it. This appeared unaccountable, till Mabel discovered that he had been industriously engaged in the preparation of a paste imitation, which, in size, cutting, and, as far as possible, in lustre and colour, was a fac-simile of the true jewel. Such a matter required to be promptly and decidedly dealt with, and Mabel was pondering how to proceed, when a lucky chance relieved her from all difficulty. Her brother was out, and Mrs. Robinson's footman called for the ring. Mr. Charles Robinson

was engaged out that evening, he said, and must have it. Mabel desired no better, and instantly delivered it to the messenger. Before going away, the man happened to casually remark that Mrs. Robinson had been summoned to London about a week previously, he believed, in consequence of alarming reports concerning her sister's health; a piece of news which so flurried and agitated Mabel, and so completely drove all thoughts of the diamond out of her head, that it was not till her brother had been ransacking the shop for several minutes in search of the missing treasure, that she remembered to tell him it had been sent home. The intelligence literally dumbfounded him; he stared and trembled as if utterly overwhelmed with surprise and dismay; and when he had somewhat recovered from the shock, he went about the house moaning and lamenting as if he were demented, or had sustained some grievous irreparable loss; and all night long his sister heard him pacing up and down his chamber, as restless and perturbed as during the day.

About three o'clock on the following afternoon, Jonathan Reeves arrived at Clifton, and asked to speak with Mr. Charles Robinson; his request was complied with, and he told the young gentleman that he had called to place a foil beneath the diamond; it should have been done before it left his shop had he been at home when it was called for, and would add greatly to its brilliancy. The young man carelessly consented, and told Reeves to go into his dressing-room where he would find the ring on a toilet-table. The job did not occupy much time, for scarcely three minutes elapsed before the jeweller reappeared, bowed

hurriedly to Mr. Charles Robinson, said it was all right, and hastened away. 'How deuced queer the man looks!' thought Charles Robinson. 'Surely he has not stolen the ring! but no—that is out of the question, I should think; I will see, however.' The ring was safe enough, and the young man blushed for his suspicions. 'A droll improvement, though,' he presently muttered, 'he has effected: my judgment and eyesight must be strangely at fault, or——' Charles Robinson rang his dressing-room bell, and desired the servant who answered it to go instantly to an eminent lapidary, in Wine Street, Bristol, and request that he would come and speak with him, Mr. Charles Robinson, immediately. In less than an hour the lapidary arrived, and what followed thereupon we shall presently see.

It was just dark when Jonathan Reeves reached his home, and had not his sister been herself in a state of great excitement, she must have noticed that he was deathly pale—nervous almost to fainting, and fell with abject helplessness into his chair, like to a drunken man. 'Mr. Randall has just left,' began Mabel, her usually meek, calm eyes, ablaze with light; 'and has brought strange news,—news just arrived. Our grandfather's widow, Mrs. Reeves, is dead,—has died intestate. Mrs. Robinson will be here to-night or to-morrow morning to communicate with her son, and accompany him back to London,—her son, the rightful heir-at-law, you know.' These last words Mabel pronounced with exultant emphasis. Her brother hardly appeared to hear her; the nervous terror that possessed him visibly increased, and a slight scuffle at the door by some passers-by increased

it to frenzy. 'Shut—bar the door, dear Mabel,' he hoarsely ejaculated, 'or I am ruined—lost! O God! that ever I was born!'

The violence of his terror startled Mabel: she hastily bolted the door, and then demanded an explanation of his frightful words. 'I have been mad during the last fortnight,' he answered; 'mad with greed and drink,—I must have been so, Mabel; but no sooner was the crime effected, and I inextricably meshed in the toils, than the wretched, drunken illusion, promising success, impunity, vanished at once, and I saw that detection was inevitable—the gallows sure—and swift as sure.'

'The gallows! Oh my brother!'

A loud knock at the door interrupted them. 'They are come!' gasped the criminal, with white lips. 'Here, Mabel,—quick, take my purse, the accursed thing is there.'

Mabel had hardly time to conceal the purse about her person, than the frail door-fastenings were burst in, and several constables entered.

'We were expected, I see,' remarked the chief of them, glancing at the fear-stricken man. 'We have a warrant,' he added, civilly addressing Mabel, 'for the apprehension of your brother, on a very serious charge, but we need not unnecessarily intrude upon *you*. There is a coach at the door; come Mr. Reeves.'

The instant Mabel found herself alone, she drew forth and examined the purse. The true diamond was there! Alas! alas! And that this calamity should have happened now—now that—but not a moment should be lost. Mr. Randall must be seen instantly. 'Perhaps,'—and the thought which glanced

across her brain sent the hot blood in swift eddies through her veins,—‘perhaps he may yet be saved.’

It was about half-past nine o’clock when Mr. Randall reached Clifton. Mrs. Robinson, who had not long arrived, was busy for the moment, but would see him presently if he could wait. Certainly he could. ‘Mr. Charles Robinson is not at home, I believe,’ he blandly added; ‘but I daresay I shall find Miss Murray in the drawing-room.’ Mr. Randall briskly ascended the stairs, and as he opened the drawing-room door, said, ‘Be sure to let me know the instant Mrs. Robinson is disengaged.’ In about a quarter of an hour he was informed that that lady was expecting him in the library.

‘It is a very unfortunate affair,’ said Mrs. Robinson, after a few preliminary sentences. ‘Had I been at home there should have been no prosecution. But it must, I suppose, now go on.’

‘Your son must appear either to confirm his accusation, or, by absenting himself, admit it to be false.’

‘I am very sorry for it, but the prosecution shall be leniently urged. Poor Mabel Reeves too! You are aware, I know, how much I risked by taking her daughter when neither of them had hardly bread to eat. Had my sister heard of it, it is quite possible my son would have been disinherited. But that danger is now past.’

‘It is true, then, that Mrs. Reeves died intestate.’

‘Yes, and as the two Messieurs Halliday died without *legitimate* male or female issue, my son is, you are aware, the heir, under the original will-settlement.’

‘That would be as you say. By-the-by, who has the custody of this unfortunate ring?’

‘It is locked up,’ was the reply, ‘in a drawer in my dressing-room. Miss Murray shall bring it here if you wish to see it.’

‘Oh dear no, not at all. I am glad to hear you are not disposed to press the case harshly, supposing there to be one at all; and I have the honour to wish you, madam, a very good evening.’

The magistrates’ office was crowded the next day by an auditory which it did not surprise anybody to find, since they were all thoroughly acquainted with the antecedents of both parties, sympathised with the prisoner rather than the prosecution. Mrs. Robinson and her son were seated near the magistrate, *Miss Murray* had placed herself beside her mother, and, but that Mabel looked pale and agitated, two more charming females, at their respective ages, could not, I think, be found in the city of Bristol, or the two counties in which it stands.

At eleven precisely, the accused was placed in the dock, and business commenced. Mr. C. Robinson proved what he had seen, and then the lapidary was placed in the witness-box. He had been sent for by Mr. Robinson, and found that a paste imitation, a very good one he must say, had been substituted for the original diamond, which he knew well, and had very lately seen in the prisoner’s shop.

‘Is the ring here?’ asked Mr. Randall.

‘Yes, it is in this case,’ replied Charles Robinson, handing it across the table.

‘Very good. Now come, Mr. Lapidary, be modestly candid, let me entreat you. Are you positive, I ask, that you can always distinguish paste from a diamond, especially between the lights, as in this instance?’

‘Sure!’ rejoined the lapidary, with dignified contempt, ‘I could tell the difference blindfold. Look at this ring yourself, paste you perceive is——paste you perceive is—the devil!’

‘Is it indeed?—well, that is something new at all events. But pray go on with your very lucid description.’

The confounded lapidary could *not* go on. His face was alternately as red as brick-dust and white as chalk.

‘Can this be the ring,’ he at length stammered, addressing Charles Robinson, ‘that I saw yesterday evening?’

‘No doubt of it—why do you ask?’

‘Because this is unquestionably a real diamond—the real diamond, no doubt about it.’

‘*The* real diamond!’ vociferated the mayor indignantly. ‘What is the meaning of this accusation then? But the witness seems hardly to know whether he stands on his head or his heels.’

A white-headed gentleman in a large way of business, as a jeweller, it was whispered, stepped forward, and after looking closely at the ring, said, ‘This is not only a real diamond, but one of the finest I have ever seen for its size.’ At this confirmation of what had at first appeared to be too good to be true, the audience broke into a loud cheer, which was again and again repeated. The accusation was formally given up, and the prisoner was immediately liberated ‘without the slightest stain upon his character,’ the mayor emphatically assured him. I never, I must say, saw an accused person so thoroughly bewildered by a triumphant acquittal in my life. Happily he held his tongue, which was a mercy.

‘Hand the ring this way, if you please, Mr. Randall,’ said Charles Robinson, tartly.

‘Ought I not, think you, sir, to hand it to the right owner at once?’

‘Certainly—you are asked to do so.’

‘In that case, I must present it to this young lady on my right.’

‘To that young lady—to Miss Murray?’

‘That was a mere *nom de circonstance*, and there is now no necessity for its retention. Her true name is Mabel Halliday, and she is the legitimate daughter and sole heiress of James Halliday deceased. This we shall be able to show beyond the shadow of a doubt at the proper time and place, if her right is opposed, which is not, however, likely. James Halliday and Mabel Reeves were married, by banns, in London; and the fear of disinheritance by Mrs. Reeves has hitherto prevented its acknowledgment. All this can be legally established, and I only mention these details, because I know the great majority of the people of Bristol will rejoice, that an estate, cruelly diverted from the legitimate heirs, has, by the overruling providence of God, been restored to them, in the person of their descendant, Mabel Halliday.’ I do not think the auditory breathed whilst this was uttered, but at its conclusion, a perfect hurricane of cheering took place, prolonged for several minutes. It was taken up in a trice, and ran like wildfire along the streets; in fact, the enthusiasm rose to such a fever-heat that I positively apprehended some accident would befall the mother and daughter, so boisterously did the mob press round to see, congratulate, and hurrah them. As Mr. Randall anticipated, no impe-

tlement was offered to Major Sullivan's accession to the property of which Mrs. Reeves had just possessed according to the tenor—happily unperceived by his implacable persecutor—of her great grandfather's will. Jonathan Reeves, I have reason to know, was startled and sober and decorous enough by the exceedingly narrow escape he had from the iron hands of the law. Should my reader fail in comprehending *how* it was he was so cleverly extricated from such deadly peril, he will be, if that can console him, in precisely the same mental condition as the discomfited lapidary who, to the day of his death, could never comprehend how the paste of the evening could possibly have become the diamond of the morning.

A DARK CHAPTER.

A SMALL pamphlet was printed at Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk, in 1808, which purports to be 'A Full and Complete Summary of the Extraordinary Matters brought to light concerning the Bridgman Family and Richard Green, of Lavenham, with many Interesting Particulars never before published.' By this slight *brochure*—which appears to have had a local circulation only, and that a very confined one—I have corrected and enlarged my own version of the following dark page in the domestic annals of this country.

One Ephraim Bridgman, who died in 1783, had for many years farmed a large quantity of land in the neighbourhood of Lavenham, or Lanham (the name is spelt both ways), a small market-town about twelve miles south of Bury St. Edmunds. He was also land-agent as well as tenant to a noble lord possessing

much property thereabout, and appears to have been a very fast man for those times, as, although he kept up appearances to the last, his only child and heir, Mark Bridgman, found, on looking closely into his deceased father's affairs, that were everybody paid, he himself would be left little better than a pauper. Still, if the noble landlord could be induced to give a *very* long day for the heavy balance due to him,—not only for arrears of rent, but moneys received on his lordship's account,—Mark, who was a prudent, energetic young man, nothing doubted of pulling through without much difficulty,—the farm being low-rented, and the agency lucrative. This desirable object, however, proved exceedingly difficult of attainment, and after a protracted and fruitless negotiation, by letter, with Messrs. Winstanley, of Lincoln's-Inn-Fields, London, his lordship's solicitors, the young farmer determined, as a last resource, on a journey to town, in the vague hope that on a personal interview he should find those gentlemen not quite such square, hard, rigid, persons as their written communications indicated them to be. Delusive hope! They were precisely as stiff, formal, accurate, and unvarying as their letters. 'The exact balance due to his lordship,' said Winstanley, senior, 'is, as previously stated, 2,103*l.* 14*s.* 6*d.*, which sum, secured by warrant of attorney, *must* be paid as follows: one half in eight, and the remaining moiety in sixteen months from the present time.' Mark Bridgman was in despair: taking into account other liabilities that would be falling due, compliance with such terms was, he felt, merely deferring the evil day, and he was silently and moodily revolving in his

mind whether it might not be better to give up the game at once rather than engage in a prolonged, and almost inevitably disastrous struggle, when another person entered the office and entered into conversation with the solicitor. At first the young man did not appear to heed,—perhaps did not hear what was said,—but after a while one of the clerks noticed that his attention was suddenly and keenly aroused, and that he eagerly devoured every word that passed between the new comer and Mr. Winstanley. At length the lawyer, as if to terminate the interview, said, as he replaced a newspaper—*The Public Advertiser*—an underlined notice in which had formed the subject of his colloquy with the stranger, upon a side-table, by which sat Mark Bridgman. ‘You desire us then, Mr. Evans, to continue this advertisement for some time longer?’ Mr. Evans replied, ‘Certainly, six months longer, if necessary.’ He then bade the lawyers ‘good day,’ and left the office.

‘Well, what do you say, Mr. Bridgman?’ asked Mr. Winstanley, as soon as the door had closed. ‘Are you ready to accept his lordship’s very lenient proposal?’

‘Yes,’ was the quick reply. ‘Let the document be prepared at once, and I will execute it before I leave.’ This was done, and Mark Bridgman hurried off, evidently, it was afterwards remembered, in a high state of flurry and excitement. He had also, they found, taken the newspaper with him,—by inadvertence, the solicitor supposed, of course.

Within a week of this time, the good folk of Lavenham,—especially its womankind,—were thrown into a ferment of wonder, indignation, and bewilder-

ment! Rachel Merton, the orphan dressmaking girl, who had been engaged to, and about to marry Richard Green, the farrier and blacksmith—and that a match far beyond what she had any right to expect, for all her pretty face and pert airs—was positively being courted by Bridgman, young, handsome, rich, Mark Bridgman of Red Lodge (the embarrassed state of the gentleman-farmer's affairs was entirely unsuspected in Lavenham); ay, and by way of marriage, too,—openly,—respectfully,—deferentially,—as if *he*, not Rachel Merton, were the favoured and honoured party! What on earth, everybody asked, was the world coming to?—a question most difficult of solution. But all doubt with respect to the *bond fide* nature of Mark Bridgman's intentions towards the fortunate dressmaker was soon at an end; he and Rachel being duly pronounced man and wife at the parish church within little more than a fortnight of the commencement of his strange and hasty wooing! All Lavenham agreed that Rachel Merton had shamefully jilted poor Green, and yet it may be doubted if there were many of them that, similarly tempted, would not have done the same. A pretty orphan girl, hitherto barely earning a subsistence by her needle, and about to throw herself away upon a coarse, repulsive person, but one degree higher than herself in the social scale—entreated by the handsomest young man about Lavenham to be his wife, and the mistress of Red Lodge, with nobody knows how many servants, dependents, labourers!—the offer was irresistible! It was also quite natural that the jilted blacksmith should fiercely resent—as he did—his sweetheart's faithless conduct; and the

assault which his angry excitement induced him to commit upon his successful rival a few days previous to the wedding, was far too severely punished, everybody admitted, by the chastisement inflicted by Mark Bridgman upon his comparatively weak and powerless assailant.

The morning after the return of the newly-married couple to Red Lodge from a brief wedding-trip, a newspaper which the bridegroom had recently ordered to be regularly supplied was placed upon the table. He himself was busy with breakfast, and his wife, after a while, opened it, and ran her eye carelessly over its columns. Suddenly an exclamation of extreme surprise escaped her, followed by—‘Goodness gracious, my dear Mark, do look here!’ Mark did look, and read an advertisement aloud, to the effect that ‘If Rachel Edwards, formerly of Bath, who, in 1762, married John Merton, bandmaster of the 29th Regiment of Infantry, and afterwards kept a school in Manchester, or any lineal descendant of hers, would apply to Messrs. Winstanley, solicitors, Lincoln’s-Inn-Fields, they would hear of something greatly to their advantage.’ ‘Why, dear Mark,’ said the pretty bride, as her husband ceased reading, ‘my mother’s maiden name was Rachel Edwards, and I am, as you know, her only surviving child!’ ‘God bless me, to be sure! I remember now hearing your father speak of it. What can this great advantage be, I wonder? I tell you what we’ll do, love,’ the husband added, ‘you would like to see London, I know. We’ll start by coach to-night, and I’ll call upon these lawyers, and find out what it all means.’ This proposition was, of course, gladly

acceded to. They were gone about a fortnight, and on their return it became known that Mark Bridgman had come into possession of 12,000*l.* in right of his wife, who was entitled to that sum by the will of her mother's maiden sister, Mary Edwards, of Bath. The bride appears not to have had the slightest suspicion that her husband had been influenced by any other motive than her personal charms in marrying her—a pleasant illusion which, to do him justice, his unvarying tenderness towards her through life confirmed and strengthened; but others, unblinded by vanity, naturally surmised the truth. Richard Green, especially, as fully believed that he had been deliberately, and with *malice prepense*, tricked out of 12,000*l.* as of the girl herself; and this conviction, there can be no doubt, greatly increased and inflamed his rage against Mark Bridgman,—so much so that it became at last the sole thought and purpose of his life, as to how he might safely and effectually avenge himself of the man who was flaunting it so bravely in the world, whilst he—poor duped and despised castaway—was falling lower and lower in the world every day he lived. This was the natural consequence of his increasingly dissolute and idle habits. It was not long before an execution for rent swept away his scanty stock in trade, and he thenceforth became a ragged vagabond hanger-on about the place,—seldom at work, and as often as possible drunk; during which fits of intemperance his constant theme was the bitter hatred he nourished towards Bridgman, and his determination, even if he swung for it, of being one day signally avenged. Mark Bridgman was often warned to be on his guard against

the venomous malignity of Green; but this counsel he seems to have spurned, or treated with contempt.

Whilst the vengeful blacksmith was thus falling into utter vagabondism, all was sunshine at Red Lodge. Mark Bridgman really loved his pretty and gentle, if vain-minded wife,—a love deepened by gratitude, that through her means he had been saved from insolvency and ruin; and barely a twelvemonth of wedded life had passed, when the birth of a son completed their happiness. This child (for nearly three years it did not appear likely there would be any other) soon came to be the idol of its parents,—of its father, the pamphlet before me states, even more than of its mother. It was very singularly marked, with two strawberries, exceedingly distinct, on its left arm, and one, less vivid, on its right. There are two fairs held annually at Lavenham, and one of these—when little Mark was between three and four years old—Mr. Bridgman came in from Red Lodge to attend, accompanied by his wife, son, and a woman-servant of the name of Sarah Hollins. Towards evening, Mrs. Bridgman went out shopping, escorted by her husband, leave having been previously given Hollins to take the child through the pleasure—that is the booth and show part of the fair,—but with strict orders not to be absent more than an hour from the inn where her master and mistress were putting up. In little more than the specified time the woman returned, but without the child; she had suddenly missed him, about half an hour before, whilst looking on at some street-tumbling, and had vainly sought him through the town since. The woman's tidings excited great alarm; Mr. Bridgman himself

instantly hurried off, and hired messengers were, one after another, dispatched by the mother in quest of the missing child. As hour after hour flew by without result, extravagant rewards, which set hundreds of persons in motion, were offered by the distracted parents; but all to no purpose. Day dawned, and as yet not a gleam of intelligence had been obtained of the lost one. At length some one suggested that inquiry should be made after Richard Green. This was promptly carried into effect, and it was ascertained that he had not been home during the night. Further investigation left no room for doubt that he had suddenly quitted Lavenham; and thus a new and fearful light was thrown upon the boy's disappearance. It was conjectured that the blacksmith must have gone to London; and Mr. Bridgman immediately set off thither, and placed himself in communication with the authorities of Bow Street. Every possible exertion was used during several weeks to discover the child, or Green, without success, and the bereaved father returned to his home a harassed, spirit-broken man. During his absence his wife had been prematurely confined of another son, and this new gift of God seemed, after a while, to partially fill the aching void in the mother's heart; but the sadness and gloom which had settled upon the mind of her husband was not perceptibly lightened thereby. 'If I knew Mark was dead,' he once remarked to the rector of Lavenham, by whom he was often visited, 'I should resign myself to his loss, and soon shake off this heavy grief. But that, my dear sir, which weighs me down—is in fact slowly but surely killing me—is a terrible conviction and presentiment that

Green, in order fully to work out his devilish vengeance, will studiously pervert the nature of the child—lead him into evil, abandoned courses—and that I shall one day see him—but I will not tell you my dreams,’ he added, after stopping abruptly, and painfully shuddering, as if some frightful spectre passed before his eyes. ‘They are, I trust, mere fancies; and yet—but let us change the subject.’

This morbidly-dejected state of mind was aggravated by the morose, grasping disposition—so entirely different from what Mr. Bridgman had fondly prophesied of Mark—manifested in greater strength with every succeeding year by his son Andrew,—a strangely unlovable and gloomy tempered boy, as if the anxiety and trouble of the time during which he had been hurried into the world had been impressed upon his temperament and character. It may be, too, that he felt irritated at, and jealous of, his father’s ceaseless repinings for the loss of his eldest son, who, if recovered, would certainly monopolizè the lion’s share of the now large family property,—but not one whit *too* large in his—Andrew Bridgman’s—opinion for himself alone.

The young man had not very long to wait for it. He had just passed his twentieth year when his father died at the early age of forty-seven. The last wandering thoughts of the dying parent reverted to the lost child. ‘Hither, Mark,’ he faintly murmured, as the hushed mourners round his bed watched with mute awe the last flutterings of departing life; ‘hither: hold me tightly by the hand, or you may lose yourself in this dark, dark wood.’ These were his last words. On the will being opened, it was

found that the whole of his estate, real and personal, had been bequeathed to his son Andrew, charged only with an annuity of 500*l.* to his mother, during life. *But*, should Mark be found, the property was to be *his*, similarly charged with respect to Mrs. Bridgman, and 100*l.* yearly to his brother Andrew, also for life, in addition.

On the evening of the tenth day after his father's funeral, young Mr. Bridgman sat up till a late hour examining various papers and accounts connected with his inheritance, and after retiring to bed, the exciting nature of his recent occupation hindered him from sleeping. Whilst thus lying awake, his quick ear caught a sound as of some one breaking into the house through one of the lower casements. He rose cautiously, went out on the landing, and soon satisfied himself that his suspicion was a correct one. The object of the burglars was, he surmised, the plate in the house, of which there was an unusually large quantity, both his father and grandfather having expended much money in that article of luxury. Andrew Bridgman was anything but a timid person,—indeed, considering that six men altogether slept in the house, there was but little cause for fear,—and he softly returned to his bedroom, unlocked a mahogany case, took out, loaded and primed, two pistols, and next roused the gardener and groom, whom he bade noiselessly follow him. The burglars—three in number, as it proved—had already reached and opened the plate-closet. One of them was standing within it, and the others just without. ‘Hallo! rascals,’ shouted Andrew Bridgman, from the top of a flight of stairs, ‘what are you doing there?’

The startled and terrified thieves glanced hurriedly round, and the two outermost fled instantly along the passage, pursued by the two servants, one of whom had armed himself with a sharp-pointed kitchen knife. The other was not so fortunate. He had not regained the threshold of the closet when Andrew Bridgman fired. The bullet crashed through the wretched man's brain, and he fell forward, stone-dead, upon his face. The two others escaped—one of them after a severe struggle with the knife-armed groom.

It was some time before the uproar in the now thoroughly-alarmed household had subsided; but at length the screaming females were pacified, and those who had got up, persuaded to go to bed again. The corpse of the slain burglar was removed to an out-house, and Andrew Bridgman returned to his bedroom. Presently there was a tap at the door. It was Sarah Hollins. 'I am come to tell you something,' said the now aged woman, with a significant look. 'The person you have shot is the Richard Green you have so often heard of.'

The young man, Hollins afterwards said, seemed much startled by this news, and his countenance flushed and paled in quick succession. 'Are you quite sure this is true?' he at last said. 'Quite; though he's so altered that, except Missus, I don't know anybody else in the house that is likely to recognise him. Shall I tell her?'

'No, no, not on any account. It would only recall unpleasant events, and that quite uselessly. Be sure not to mention your suspicion,—your belief, to a soul.'

‘Suspicion! belief!’ echoed the woman. ‘It is a certainty. But of course, as you wish it, I shall hold my tongue.’

So audacious an attempt created a considerable stir in the locality, and four days after its occurrence, a message was sent to Red Lodge from Bury St. Edmunds, that two men, supposed to be the escaped burglars, were there in custody, and requesting Mr. Bridgman’s and the servants’ attendance on the morrow, with a view to their identification. Andrew Bridgman, the gardener, and groom, of course, obeyed the summons, and the prisoners were brought into the justice-room before them. One was a fellow of about forty, a brutal-visaged, low-browed, sinister-looking rascal, with the additional ornament of a but partially-closed hare-lip. He was unhesitatingly sworn to by both men. The other, upon whom, from the instant he entered, Andrew Bridgman had gazed with eager, almost, it seemed, trembling curiosity, was a well-grown young man of, it might be, three or four and twenty, with a quick, mild, almost timid, unquiet, troubled look, and features originally comely and pleasing, there could be no doubt, but now smirched and blotted into ill favour by excess and other evil habits. He gave the name of ‘Robert Williams.’

Andrew Bridgman, recalled to himself by the magistrate’s voice, hastily said ‘that he did not recognise this prisoner as one of the burglars. Indeed,’ he added, with a swift but meaning look at the two servants, ‘I am pretty sure he was not one of them.’ The groom and gardener, influenced no doubt by their master’s manner, also appeared doubtful as to

whether Robert Williams was one of the house-breakers. 'But if he be,' hesitated the groom, hardly knowing whether he did right or wrong, 'there must be some smartish wounds on his arms, for I hit him there sharply with the knife several times.'

The downcast head of the youthful burglar was suddenly raised at these words, and he said, quickly, whilst a red flush passed over his pallid features, 'Not me, not me,—look, my arm-sleeves have no holes—no——'

'You may have obtained another jacket,' interrupted the magistrate. 'We must see your arms.'

An expression of hopeless despair settled upon the prisoner's face; he again hung down his head in shame, and allowed the constables to quietly strip off his jacket. Andrew Bridgman, who had gone to some distance, returned whilst this was going on, and watched for what might next disclose itself, with tenfold curiosity and eagerness. 'There are stabs enough here, sure enough,' exclaimed a constable, as he turned up the shirt-sleeve on the prisoner's left arm. There were indeed; and in addition to them, *natural marks of two strawberries* were distinctly visible. The countenance of Andrew Bridgman grew ashy pale, as his straining eyes glared upon the prisoner's naked arm. The next moment he wrenched himself away, as with an effort, from the sight, and staggered to an open window,—sick, dizzy, fainting, it was at the time believed from the closeness of the atmosphere in the crowded room. Was it not rather that he had recognised his long-lost brother, *the true heir to the bulk of his deceased father's wealth*, against whom, he might have thought, an indictment would scarcely lie

for feloniously entering his own house! He said nothing, however, and the two prisoners were fully committed for trial.

Mr. Prince went down 'special' to Bury, at the next assize, to defend a gentleman accused of a grave offence, but the grand jury having ignored the bill, he would probably have returned at once, had not an attorney brought him a brief, very heavily marked, in defence of 'Robert Williams.' 'Strangely enough, too,' remarked the attorney, as he was about to go away, 'the funds for the defence have been supplied by Mr. Andrew Bridgman, whose house the prisoner is accused of having burglariously entered. But this is confidential, as he is very solicitous that his oddly-generous action should not be known.' There was, however, no valid defence. The ill-favoured accomplice, why, I know not, had been admitted king's evidence by the counsel for the crown, and there was no resisting the accumulated evidence. The prisoner was found guilty, and sentenced to be hanged. 'I never intended,' he said, after the verdict was returned (and there was a tone of dejected patience in his voice that affected one strangely), 'I never intended to commit violence against any one in the house, and but that my uncle—he that was shot—said repeatedly that he knew a secret concerning Mr. Bridgman (he didn't know, I am sure, that he was dead) which would prevent us from being prosecuted if we were caught, I should not have been persuaded to go with him. It was my first offence—in—in housebreaking, I mean.'

I had, and indeed have, some relatives in Mildenhall, in the same county, whom, at the termination

of the Bury assize, I got leave to visit for a few days. Whilst there, it came to my knowledge that Mr. Andrew Bridgman, whom I had seen in court, was moving heaven and earth to procure a commutation of the convict's sentence to transportation for life. His zealous efforts were unsuccessful; and the Saturday County Journal announced that Robert Williams, the burglar, would suffer, with four others, on the following Tuesday morning. I reached Bury on the Monday evening, with the intention of proceeding by the London night-coach, but there was no place vacant. The next morning I could only have ridden outside, and as, besides being intensely cold, it was snowing furiously, I determined on postponing my departure till the evening, and secured an inside place for that purpose. I greatly abhor spectacles of the kind, and yet, from mere idleness and curiosity, I suffered myself to be drawn into the human stream flowing towards 'Hang Fair,' and once jammed in with the crowd in front of the place of execution, egress was, I found impossible. After waiting a considerable time, the death-bell suddenly tolled, and the terrible procession appeared,—five human beings about to be suffocated by human hands, for offences against property!—the dreadful and deliberate sacrifice precluded and accompanied by sonorous sentences from the Gospel of mercy and compassion! Hardly daring to look up, I saw little of what passed on the scaffold, yet one furtive, quickly-withdrawn glance, showed me the sufferer in whom I took most interest. He was white as if already confined, and the unquiet glare of his eyes was, I noticed, terribly anxious! I did not again look up

—I could not ; and the surging murmur of the crowd, as it swayed to and fro, the near whisperings of ribald tongues, and the measured, mocking tones of the minister, promising eternal life through the mercy of the most high God, to wretches whom the *justice* of man denied a few more days or years of mortal existence—were becoming momentarily more and more oppressive, when a dull, heavy sound *boomed* through the air ; the crowd swayed violently from side to side, and the simultaneous expiration of many pent-up breaths testified that all was over, and to the relief experienced by the coarsest natures at the consummation of a deed too frightful for humanity to contemplate. It was some time before the mass of spectators began to thoroughly separate, and they were still standing in large clusters, spite of the bitter, falling weather, when a carriage, furiously driven, with the body of a female, who was screaming vehemently and waving a white handkerchief, projected half out of one of the windows, was seen approaching by the London Road. The thought appeared to strike every one that a respite or reprieve had come for one or more of the prisoners, and hundreds of eyes were instantly turned towards the scaffold, only to see that if so it had arrived too late. The carriage stopped at the gate of the building. A lady, dressed in deep mourning, was hastily assisted out by a young man with her, similarly attired, and they both disappeared within the gaol. After some parleying, I ascertained that I had sufficient influence to obtain admission, and a few moments afterwards I found myself in the press-room. The young man—Mr. Andrew Bridgman,—was there, and the lady, who

had fallen fainting upon one of the benches, was his mother. The attendants were administering restoratives to her, without effect, till an inner door opened, and the under-sheriff, by whom she was personally known, entered; when she started up and interrogated, with the mute agony of her wet, yet gleaming eyes, the dismayed and distressed official. 'Let me entreat you, my dear madam,' he faltered, 'to retire. This is a most painful—fright——'

'No—no, the truth!—the truth!' shrieked the unfortunate lady, wildly clasping her hands, 'I shall bear that best!'

'Then I grieve to say,' replied the under-sheriff, 'that the marks you describe—two on the left, and one on the right arm, are distinctly visible.'

A piercing scream, broken by the words, 'My son!—oh God!—my son!' burst from the wretched mother's lips, and she fell heavily, and without sense or motion, upon the stone floor. Whilst the under-sheriff and others raised and ministered to her, I glanced at Mr. Andrew Bridgman. He was as white as the lime-washed wall against which he stood, and the fire that burned in his dark eyes was kindled—it was plain to me—by remorse and horror, not by grief alone.

The cause of the sudden appearance of the mother and son at the closing scene of this sad drama was afterwards thus explained:—Andrew Bridgman, from the moment that all hope of procuring a commutation of the sentence on the so-called Robert Williams had ceased, became exceedingly nervous and agitated, and his discomposure seemed to but augment as the time yet to elapse before the execution of the sentence

passed away. At length, unable longer to endure the goadings of a tortured conscience, he suddenly burst into the room where his mother sat at breakfast, on the very morning his brother was to die, with an open letter in his hand, by which he pretended to have just heard that Robert Williams was the long-lost Mark Bridgman! The sequel has been already told.

The conviction rapidly spread that Andrew Bridgman had been from the first aware that the youthful burglar was his own brother; and he found it necessary to leave the country. He turned his inheritance into money, and embarked for Charleston, America, in the barque 'Cleopatra,' from Liverpool. When off the Scilly Islands, the 'Cleopatra' was chased by a French privateer. She escaped; but one of the few shots fired at her from the privateer was fatal to the life of Andrew Bridgman. He was almost literally cut in two, and expired instantaneously. Some friends to whom I have related this story deem his death an accident; others, a judgment: I incline, I must confess, to the last opinion. The wealth with which he embarked was restored to Mrs. Bridgman, who soon afterwards removed to London, where she lived many years,—sad ones, no doubt, but mitigated and rendered endurable by the soothing balm of a clear conscience. At her decease, not very many years ago, the whole of her property was found to be bequeathed to various charitable institutions of the metropolis.

ELLEN STEPHENSON.

I WAS for several years in the frequent habit of spending an evening in the cozy parlour of a tavern, at no great distance from Farringdon Street, which has long since been pulled down, but at the period I write of had a prosperous trade, and was kept by a man of the name of Stephenson. This, in my wife's very decided opinion, extremely objectionable practice, was brought to a sudden end by the alarming advent of twins, in swift succession to three single blessings of the same kind; previous, however, to which connubial catastrophe, one or two circumstances had occurred in connection with mine host of the Star and Garter, to which after events gave a strange colour and significance.

I must premise that I never liked the man,—the attraction of his house to me consisting solely in the company which frequented it,—though I could have

given no other reason for the disfavour with which I and others regarded him, than a certain down-cast, furtive expression of countenance which seldom left him, for he was a scrupulously civil and obliging person to his customers. I think his unprepossessing aspect was the more noticed by us from the striking contrast between it and the clear, candid brow, and altogether gentle and winsome countenance of his daughter, Ellen, the damsel who waited upon the parlour guests, and certainly one of its chief attractions. This, at least, was emphatically the case as regarded Mr. Richard Barstow, a superior young man, who had recently commenced business as a bookseller in Skinner Street. He, it was quite clear, encountered nightly the murky atmosphere of tobacco-cloud entirely for the sake of the bright eyes, which ever and anon shone through it with a light from heaven; and I was not at all surprised to hear him say, as we one evening walked home together,—‘Ellen Stephenson is certainly the prettiest girl, with the sweetest voice, the gentlest temper, and nicest manners in the world. I have a mind to pop the question, notwithstanding that prudence bids me wait a year or two longer, at the very least.’ I perfectly agreed with my friend’s estimate of fair Ellen’s charms, and still more decidedly with the suggestions of prudence, which I, with a laudable desire to aid the weaker side, endeavoured to fortify with all the wise axioms applicable in such cases I could at the moment think of. But alas! those respectable personages, Prudence and Wisdom, however grave and weighty, are feather-light in the scale against a slim damsel of nineteen, when Youth and

Passion hold the balance; and a week had not passed before it was abundantly plain to me that the question *had* been popped, and answered in the affirmative,—with timid blushfulness, no doubt, for the tell-tale brightness still beamed upon her varying cheek, and sparkled in her gentle eyes. Stephenson had not as yet been consulted, for he looked neither more nor less heavy, austere, preoccupied, than usual; but that would no doubt have been the next scene in the matrimonial comedy, or tragedy, or tragi-comic farce, as the hereafter should determine, had not a fresh actor suddenly intruded himself and sent the previous *dramatis personæ* to the right-about before they had well commenced their parts.

This ominous intrusion took place one fine evening in June, 1814, in the person of a seedy-looking man of about fifty. He entered our symposium just upon half-past nine o'clock, and being a perfect stranger, as well as of much snobbier appearance than we law-clerk dignities — nearly all of us were minor potentates in the big-wig pandemonium—altogether relished, he was rather sternly scrutinized as he stealthily seated himself, and called for a 'go' and a 'screw,' yet none of us afterwards remembered to have read any *purpose* in the fellow's dull, grey eyes, and shuffling, awkward manner. He had, no doubt, dropped in by accident, and I at once summed him up to the full total of a begging letter-writer, or other kindred respectability. In less than five minutes he had subsided into oblivion, and we had resumed our facetious commentaries upon the great personages just then on a visit to John Bull—Prince Blucher's snuffing ugliness,—Alexander's full-

moon features, haloed with red hair, and so on, which poignant witticisms were presently interrupted by a cracked voice, pitched in *alt.*, screaming from out a smoke-cloud—

‘Ah! Master Philip, is that you? God bless me, I’m in luck at last then.’

‘Who the deuce is the fellow speaking to?’ gleamed instantly from a score of eyes,—a question that it did not require words to answer. Stephenson had entered the room with several glasses of spirits and water on a tray, all of which the sudden start elicited by the stranger’s greeting, caused to fall with a crash on the floor, a catastrophe momentarily unheeded by the landlord, who was glaring with terror-dilated eyes at the new comer.

‘You—you here, Duffy?’ he presently gasped out with spasmodic effort; ‘I thought you were—were——’

‘Dead, didn’t you?’ chuckled the cracked voice; ‘but I ain’t you see; and what’s more, as you’ll be, I know, glad to hear, I was never better nor likely to last longer.’

Stephenson glanced at the attentive company, muttered something in excuse of his awkwardness in letting the glasses fall, busied himself for a moment in gathering up the fragments, and then with a hurried deprecatory sign to Duffy, as he called him, left the room followed by the repulsive stranger. This was sufficiently odd and perplexing, but there was much more in the matter than any of us at all guessed of. On the next evening but one, Master Duffy shone out with extreme brilliance, having been newly togged from top to toe, by the

Moseses of the day, at, nobody doubted, Stephenson's expense. He moreover drank nothing less expensive than brandy and water, and that to excess; strutted like a stage prince about the house, and in every way so outrageously conducted himself, that Stephenson must have kicked him a dozen times out of the house had not some more potent influence mastered his rage. But if he dared not defy, he might at least escape the fellow; and it was with only momentary surprise I heard about a fortnight after Duffy's first appearance, that Stephenson had suddenly decamped. The new landlord, Owen Morgan, could only inform us that he had purchased the lease, stock, &c., of his predecessor, who, ten minutes after the money was paid, left the house in a hackney coach, with the weeping, sobbing Ellen, whither to betake himself no one knew, nor after urgent inquiry could discover. Duffy was absent on a pleasure excursion, to witness a prize-fight, I believe, and terribly wroth he was at finding that the bird had flown. As to poor Barstow, he was so utterly disconsolate and woe-begone at the sudden disappearance of the Light of the Star and Garter, that I really feared, for a time, that suicide, in its modern and chiefly fatal form of excessive brandy and water, would be the melancholy result. Time, fortunately, is more than a match, in a general way, for the deadliest rage or the most heart-breaking tenderness. Duffy, after running himself to seed again in fruitless search of the particular coach that had carried off his precious dupe or victim, sank back into his previous haunts and habits; and as to the bereaved bookseller, he recovered with such reasonable speed, that in less, I

think, than four months from the evanishment of his charmer, the last flickering symptom of the disorder still faintly lurking in his veins, showed itself by the present of a shilling to an excruciating street vocalist for her melancholy execution of—

‘Young Ellen was the fairest flower.’

A calamitous donation it proved to be, for not one evening was allowed to pass without a reiteration of the same floricultural fact by the same remorseless voice; till at length my exasperated friend was provoked to the energetic expression of a wish that ‘Young Ellen’ was with an individual unnameable to ears polite; a sign, it struck me, of almost perfect convalescence, spite of his after ingeniously-figurative explanation of the words he had hastily used. Be this as it may, the vocalist was conciliated by a more considerable gift than the first,—‘the fairest flower transplanted to another locality, and Richard (Barstow) was himself again.

Well, the days sped on. Summer, winter, spring, were gone, and summer was slipping away again, when a severe attack of illness confined Mr. Prince for several weeks to his bed, and when subdued, left him in so prostrate a condition, that wintering in one of the sanatoria of Southern Europe was pronounced indispensable to the perfect recovery of health. He left England in September, and I was thrown, for some months at least, on the *pavé*, a disaster which the arrival of the twins before alluded to, did not in the least degree tend to render more agreeable. I was sitting one morning in the Rainbow by the Temple, profoundly meditating, I well remember,

upon the miserable instability of the affairs of the world in general,—the decline of Napoleon's fortunes, and my own more particularly [Waterloo had come off the previous June], and the discussion of some fine natives and finer stout, when who should poke his nose in at the doorway, but Old Dodsley, of Chancery Lane. He was evidently in quest of some one, and that some one, it presently appeared, was me.

'You have nothing to do just at present, I am told,' said Dods., coming according to his wont to business at once.

'As to *nothing* to do, that is an over-statement; nothing of pressing importance would be nearer the mark.'

'Exactly: well, I can put a job in your way, for which, without flattery, you are exceedingly well qualified. Be at the office,' he added, 'precisely at ten to-morrow morning. Good-bye.'

'One moment, if you please, Mr. Dodsley. How about the figure—the *solatium* ?'

'The remuneration will, I have no doubt, be liberal, but I shall not be paymaster.'

'Ha!'

'That's pleasant hearing, isn't it?' continued old close-fist, with a grin; 'Your principal will be Charles Atkins, Esquire, of the Bombay Civil Service. He wished to engage the services of one of my clerks, but neither can be spared. Good-bye again, and be punctual.'

I was punctual, and found Charles Atkins, a bilious-looking gentlemanly man, of between fifty and sixty, I judged,—but perhaps the liver misled me a few years,—there before me. The business in hand, I found, was to set out immediately on a voyage of

discovery through Great Britain and Ireland, in search of a missing damsel, one Laura Atkins, and only child of the gentleman before me. The preliminary particulars confided to me were briefly these:— ‘Mr. Charles Atkins, of Boroughbridge, Yorkshire, after being married to Laura Franklin, of the same place, about six months, obtained a cadetship in the Civil Service of the Honourable East India Company, and thereupon forthwith set off for the Western Presidency, leaving his wife to follow as soon as a decrepit and only aunt who had money to bequeath, and relatives eager to receive it, should have departed this life. This event did not occur till nearly three years afterwards, when the young wife and mother—for a daughter, the Laura now in question, had been born about five months after Mr. Atkins’s departure,—immediately made diligent preparation for the Indian voyage. Death—unexpected, almost sudden, for she was ill only about a week—surprised her at the task, but not till she had given instructions that an elderly female servant, in whom she had great confidence, should, without loss of time, proceed to Bombay with the child. Accordingly on the third day after the funeral of Mrs. Atkins, the woman—a married person, but separated from her husband, a drunken, worthless fellow—set out with her infant charge by coach for the metropolis, where they were to embark in the ‘Clive’ East Indiaman. Neither woman nor child reached London, and the only reliable particulars since obtained were, that on changing coaches at Sheffield, a respectable looking man, with whom the woman appeared to be extremely intimate, continued the journey with her. Peterboro’

was reached in safety, but after leaving that city, a terrific night-storm overtook them, the horses took fright, and madly plunging away, upset the coach at a quick turn of the road not very far out of Cambridge. The woman and another person were killed on the spot; the child escaped unhurt, and was taken charge of by the man who assumed to be the woman's husband. After the inquest-verdict of "Accidental Death" had been returned, he proceeded on to London, taking with him, as a matter of course, his wife's luggage, containing money and other property belonging to Mr. Atkins, to the amount of more than five hundred pounds. Neither he nor the child had since been seen or heard of; but it had been well ascertained that the man who obtained possession of the infant, Laura, and her father's property, was *not* the real husband of the woman, who was a fellow of the name of Duffy——'

'Duffy!' I exclaimed, 'Duffy!'

'Yes, James Duffy: does that name suggest anything to you?' said Mr. Atkins, with quick interrogation.

'Well, I can hardly say: what manner of man is he?'

'I have never seen him, but people tell me a loutish fellow, now about fifty,—it is sixteen years since his wife was killed,—of sallow complexion, and a shrill, harsh voice.'

'And the man who carried off the child; is his name known or suspected?'

'Yes, suspected. He is thought, from the description obtained of his person, to have been one Philip Gosnold.'

'Philip Gosnold; humph! Have you the description of his person with you?'

WILLY STEPHENSON.

... his handbill?
... hurried silence,
... Dark
... Stephenson does not wear
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... es. but thin!
... change.
... low-legged.
... looked up.
... It seems were
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... insidiously
... out and

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reduced to writing—you will excuse, I know, inveterate business habits—I set forward at once upon my mission, with, let me add, some *hope* of bringing it to a successful issue.'

All necessary preliminaries being at last settled, I sallied forth in mounting spirits, which, however, an hour or two's quiet cogitation cooled down considerably. True, I had little doubt that my Duffy was *the* Duffy, mine host Stephenson, Philip Gosnold, and pretty Ellen, the lost Laura; but how to run the quarry to earth without giving such tongue as would allure others to the scent, and consequent participation of the spoil, was a matter of much difficulty. The first two or three days I spent in quietly seeking out Duffy, who, I at last succeeded in assuring myself, had left London about a month previously. The next step was to advertise, in a friend's name, a reward of five pounds for the discovery of the hackney coachman who had, on such a day and hour, conveyed Stephenson and daughter from the Star and Garter. This produced Coachee himself, and by diligent following up of the clue thus obtained, I at length discovered that Stephenson and Ellen had left London more than two months after they disappeared from the Star and Garter, by the Southampton coach. Other indices, unnecessary to detail, showed themselves. I determined to vigorously follow up the trail thus fortunately hit upon, and with this view booked myself for that ancient, and now go-ahead city, by, I think, the Telegraph coach, without delay. But I could not have the heart to leave town without giving my old friend Barstow a quiet hint of the delightful possibilities beginning to dawn upon the horizon of the dreamland

of the future. I found him, as far as outward appearance went, in the enjoyment of vigorous health of mind and body, and I had engaged in getting up, in conjunction with a gentleman of the law, a new and splendid edition of *Seneca* with various notes by an eminent A. M. I had not seen him for some time, and his greeting was very cordial, and he seemed, to add to the pleasure of the visit, he intended set about reprinting the work & making it more attractive from the new work, & the beauty of the illustrations of everything, which I was glad to see in his work. — There, there, that will do, my dear boy. The old headman was quite right. I have not time to tell you how it so very interesting & useful in all I suppose, somewhat interest you to know that it is possible I shall see Ellen Stephenson in a day or two.

And he said, "The great sinister of Seneca looked up from his chair like a flash of lightning, striking, as he did so, the sacred book at the other end of the shop.

"Good God!" he exclaimed, "see Ellen—see Ellen Stephenson! What can you mean?"

"Firstly, my dear boy, what are you about? Then, a moment ago, you'd have believed that Seneca would now be sprawling open-leaved upon the waste heap, and by your irreverent hand, too,—he! he!"

"Pshaw!—Stuff!—Humbug! You spoke of Ellen—"

"And this, too," I persisted, "just after reading that delightful passage upon the folly of love and the vanity of beauty, which is worth by the divine"

'The devil fly away with the divine Seneca,' burst in my excited friend, quite fiercely; 'speak to me of Ellen! what of her?'

It would have been cruel to tantalise him further; so I e'en yielded to his impatience, and briefly ran over the chief incidents of the eight or ten previous days. The relation greatly agitated him, and the flashing of his fine dark eyes showed that the smothered and seemingly extinguished fire was blazing again as fiercely as ever.

'It is she,' he said, in a quick tremulous voice, 'Ellen is the Laura you are in search of, I feel assured; and you will I fervently hope, trust, believe, find her. And thank God,' he added, with a burst, 'that her father is not a rich man. I have myself, Robert,' he added, 'had a windfall lately in the shape of a legacy, which, the duty paid, will put fifteen hundred pounds in my pocket!'

This was gratifying; but it is needless to prolong the conversation. It will suffice to say, that I was intrusted with a hundred love-messages, all of which I forgot before reaching Holborn Hill; and of one letter, which I promised and fully intended to deliver at the proper time.

My search in Southampton was a protracted and tedious one, but perseverance seldom fails of success, and I finally obtained information which left little doubt that I should find Philip Gosnold, *alias* Stephenson, and now it appeared *alias* Parker, at a roadside inn, near Titchfield, on the road to Gosport

from the coach when within about a
e of the house, and walked quietly

on. The fates were propitious. The first person my eye lit on upon entering the door, was Ellen! She was standing within the bar, and it needed but a single glance to show me how hardly anxiety and grief had dealt with her. The rounded outlines of her charming person had become spare and angular, and she was pale as marble,—a paleness instantly effaced by a flood of richest crimson as she caught sight of me; and with a slight scream, yet eagerly extended hands, recognised and gave me welcome. The next moment the death-like pallor came again, and her flurried look was turned towards a man at the further corner of the bar.

‘Ah, Stephenson,’ I exclaimed, ‘you there——’

‘Hush!’ interrupted Ellen, ‘hush!’

I followed her glance from some persons outside the open door to the swinging sign, which announced that ‘James Parker’ was licensed to sell wines and spirits at the Black Horse. I nodded compliant intelligence, and walked inside the bar. Stephenson, who looked extremely worn and anxious, and more gloomy and downcast than ever, appeared at first uncertain how to receive me, but my frank greeting partially reassured him, and we were soon chatting with some familiarity together. There was, I presently found, a nearer fear than I could possibly inspire, lower limb of the law as I might be, the incarnation of which dread presently appeared in the likeness of Duffy! Duffy, handsomely rigged out again, and ten times more triumphantly insolent than ever!—why and wherefore I now perfectly understood. He appeared a little startled at seeing me, but his look quickly changed to a cold and impudent

one,—a favour which I have seldom experienced any difficulty in returning full change for.

My course was now plain, but I was first desirous of a private interview with Ellen. This I with some difficulty obtained; and she, poor harassed child, was soon induced to give me her entire confidence. She had been aware, from the time of leaving the Star and Garter, that her father,—as she, of course, still believed Stephenson to be—‘was in Duffy’s power for some fault—some—some crime,’ she hesitated, with her sweet eyes full of tears, ‘known to his persecutor. I could not abandon him,’ she went on to say with increasing emotion; ‘for whatever his faults, he has been ever kind and indulgent to me; and even now, when he is again and hopelessly in that bad man’s thrall, refuses to purchase safety by even appearing to acquiesce in the—the proposal—the——’

Poor Ellen burst into a flood of tears: I quite understood her. ‘The ugly miscreant!’ I exclaimed. ‘But never mind, we will fit him with something more suitable than the prettiest wife in all England. And as for you, my poor child, I really think I have a letter for you somewhere about me. Ah, here it is.’ How eagerly, well-mannered as she was, did she snatch Barstow’s thickly-scribbled missive from my hand, and recognise with the bright carnation of her glowing cheeks, the no doubt familiar hand. I now withdrew, first, however, exacting a pledge of secrecy, and busied myself in penning, and despatching, two letters, one to Mr. Charles Atkins, the other to Mr. Richard Barstow, which gentleman I counselled to wait without a moment’s delay upon, as I hoped, his future father-in-law.

A scrap of writing reached me by the earliest post from Barstow.

‘All right—gloriously right,’ he scrawled: ‘Dear Ellen’s father and himself would be with me exactly at the time appointed, and as I had directed, would quit the post-chaise at about a mile from the Black Horse. As to Stephenson, he was to be forgiven, of course, for his kindness to Ellen, &c.’

All right, indeed, and not one hour too soon. Duffy, who had a keen scent for coming events, was, I heard, furious for his immediate union with Ellen; and when I and my two eagerly-impatient friends entered the Black Horse by the back way, he, Stephenson, and Ellen, were,—the maid of all work whispered,—together in the inner bar, and, as our ears quickly made us aware, quarrelling, the men at least, fiercely. Mr. Atkins was too nervously agitated to act decisively, but I could hardly hold that confounded Barstow back for half a minute.

‘You defy me then, do you, Philip Gosnold?’ we heard Duffy exclaim at the top of his cracked voice; ‘but I tell you again, that either I marry Ellen, or——’

‘You be——,’ roared Barstow, bursting into the room, followed by Mr. Atkins and myself; ‘Ellen, beloved Ellen, — your father — myself—everybody,— O Lord!’ He was blubbing like a mooncalf, and so were others for that matter; but I shall not attempt to transcribe the Babel of exclamations, explanations, sobs, raptures, embracings, hysterics, that followed. Indeed, I heard a part only, having immediately busied myself in driving out the astounded Stephenson, and his quondam friend, Duffy. The former slowly

comprehended the bewildering scene, and very grateful he was for the assurance I gave him, that, in consideration of the redeeming point of his kindness to Ellen, or rather Laura Atkins, he would not be prosecuted. When we had leisure to look about for Duffy, we discovered that that worthy had absquatulated, as Yankees say, taking with him the bar cash-box, a not very weighty affair, and he has never, to my knowledge, turned up since. An hour afterwards I looked in at the bar parlour: the tremulous calm of a recent but assured happiness had succeeded to the first tumultuous emotion of the father and daughter, of the lover and his promised bride. I was overwhelmed with thanks and praises. My friend Barstow pronounced me to be emphatically the cleverest fellow in all England; dove Ellen kissed me; and Mr. Atkins grasping me warmly by the hand, left there a cheque for——but that is private business. I may, however, mention, that in the pleasant dreams I had that night, one perpetually recurring image presented itself, namely, Mrs. T——, papering up in the very wantonness of riches, the locks of our five olive branches with bank notes.

THE WIFE'S EVIDENCE.

‘HAVE you heard of the accident that has befallen poor old Mr. Goldsworthy?’ asked my wife in a hurried, trembling way, the moment I entered the house, one bitterly-cold snowy evening in winter.

‘Not I! what accident?’ was my somewhat sour ungracious rejoinder; the wind and snow that had been blowing in my teeth for the last three or four hours as I sat perched upon the box-seat of the Chelmsford coach, having given an unusually keen edge to both my temper and appetite.

‘He fell or threw himself last night from the folding-doors of the loft leading from his bedroom on the third floor of his house, in Newman Passage, Newman Street, Oxford Road, into the paved court below, and must have been killed on the spot,’ replied my wife, partly reading from a newspaper in her hand.

‘God bless me, how dreadful!’ I exclaimed, thoroughly interested spite of my eagerness for dinner. ‘His strange habit of walking in his sleep has then, as we feared, resulted fatally at last!’

‘So the paper doubtfully hints,’ replied my wife, still with the same odd quivering of lips, eyes, and voice; ‘but you know it was Charlotte’s care that not only the door spoken of, but her father’s bedroom window should be securely fastened after he had retired to bed, either by herself or her husband. Ah! there is his knock again! Goodness me how I tremble,’ she added, turning pale as death, and, it seemed, scarcely able to stand. ‘He has been here twice before!’

‘Whose knock?’ I hastily demanded, for my wife’s evident panic partially affected me; ‘and who has been here twice before?’

‘Charlotte’s husband, Richard Warren, to request your presence at the inquest to be holden to-morrow morning—ha!—Good God!’

I was not surprised at this last exclamation of apprehensive astonishment, for the face which peered doubtfully in at the partially-opened door, was that of a corpse, in its mortal pallor, to which the dark terror-gleaming eyes and black dishevelled hair, dripping with snow moisture, gave a frightful intensity.

Before I could speak, Richard Warren, perceiving that only my wife and I were present, pushed wide the door, staggered in, and dropped helplessly upon the nearest chair.

‘What in the name of heaven is the matter, Richard?’ I said at last, finding that the ashy lips moved not, although the white face and haggard eyes

were bent upon mine with eager questioning. He strove mightily to answer, I could see, but the overpowering agitation under which he convulsively laboured, choked his words, and a gurgling inarticulate murmur only surged through his lips. My wife, with readier presence of mind, though more alarmed than myself, poured out a tumbler of brandy, which Warren eagerly seized, although his shaking hands could hardly carry it to his mouth.

It seemed to steady his nerves somewhat, and presently he said in a low, palpitating voice, 'I—I wish you to attend the inquest to-morrow morning.'

'On whose behalf—your's? Why, what on earth ails the man?'

A slight tap at the door by our little stump of a servant maid, who wished to know if my dinner was to be brought in, produced such a violent start, that the tumbler fell from his nerveless grasp, and was smashed to bits on the floor, whilst the long-drawn groan-like breath which followed the girl's entrance, testified alike to the greatness of the relief, and the previous terrible dread that he had felt.

'One word, Robert,' he, after a few moments of unquiet silence, again murmured; 'One word: Charlotte, my wife, has you know been ill,—she is mad!'

'Mad! your wife mad!'

'Yes—she must be so. And tell me, is—is a wife's evidence admissible, even supposing she were deemed sane, against——: Merciful God—they are come!—have, as I suspected—dreaded—dogged, tracked me hither!'

A light, single knock at the street-door occasioned

this wild off-break, and Warren awaited what might follow in an agony of paralysing fear. He was not long kept in suspense. A whispered sentence addressed to the girl who opened the door, was succeeded by hasty footsteps on the stairs, and before you could count ten, Townshend, the officer, accompanied by Lipscombe, abruptly entered the room. Warren started back, looked wildly round as if in search of some outlet for escape—saw none, and would, I think, have fallen, but for the iron grasp of the officers, in which he was immediately seized. It is useless attempting to depict the distress and confusion attendant upon such an incident as this; suffice it to say that it was not till some time after Lipscombe had gone for a coach, that I comprehended, and then dimly only, from the officer's curt *sotto voce* answers, that Richard Warren was grievously suspected of having robbed his father-in-law,—and, detected by the old man in the act,—of hurling him after a fierce struggle from the loft doors into the court below! 'But for his wife's asseverations, which cannot, however, be made legally available, I doubt that——But here is the coach,' added Townshend, in his usual, business-like, peremptory tone. 'Now, sir, if you please, at once, and without any bother!'

Their prisoner was hurried away without further preface, and I had barely sufficient readiness of mind to say in answer to his mute, but piteous appeal, that I would not fail to be present at the inquest on the morrow. A minute afterwards I felt an impulse to follow, shake him by the hand, and whisper a few words of hope and confidence in an all-seeing, overruling Providence; so quickly did the testimony of

his blameless life,—his placid equanimity of temper under many and sore trials,—his unobtrusive piety, weigh down the presumptive evidence of guilt, which a serious accusation of so frightful a nature, must, under almost any circumstances, suggest; but he was gone before my tardy purpose could be effected.

My wife and I were so utterly confounded by what had occurred, that it was a long time before we could reason coherently upon the subject, or advise as to what should be done. That Richard Warren, of all men in the world, should be accused of such a crime was, we both heartily agreed, marvellous,—incredible. He and I were born in the same parish; I had never lost sight of him from his boyhood, and knew that he had ever been a dutiful son, an attached husband, and an honest industrious citizen,—though not one with whom the world had gone smoothly. His trade was that of a herald-painter; that is, he painted arms and devices upon coach-panels; and when he came to London, had found employment at the Messrs. Houlditch's establishment, in Long Acre. He saved a considerable sum from his earnings, and was thereby emboldened to marry Charlotte Goldsworthy,—an amiable, intelligent young woman, and to furnish a house at Hampstead, with a view to increase his income by letting furnished apartments. This latter speculation proved more difficult of successful accomplishment than he had imagined, as I well knew, from having been consulted by him relative to several debt-difficulties, in which, from the furniture having cost much more than was anticipated, he had become temporarily involved. To this hard struggle to save himself from being pushed to

the wall by one or two impatient creditors, I attribute the great error he committed in not insuring his property,—every shilling being, as it were, of vital importance in the up-hill game he had to play. The neglect, however occasioned, was a fatal one. He had let his first floor to a disabled veteran, who had served in the Peninsular war. This gentleman, on the night of the illumination for the victory of Vittoria, not only had his windows let up in very profuse style, but drank so many bumpers in gratulation of the triumph of Wellington and his army, that on retiring to bed, he contrived—instead of extinguishing the candles as he intended—to set fire to the window and bed-curtains; and so swiftly did the flames gain head, that before efficient assistance arrived, the house was a mass of fire, and poor Warren's furniture, save a few articles, utterly consumed! This was a cruel blow in itself, and greatly aggravated by the falling of a blazing beam upon the unfortunate proprietor's right arm, whilst he was strenuously engaged in endeavouring to rescue some portion of his entire worldly substance from the flames. He became, in consequence, an inmate of Middlesex Hospital for between two and three months; and when discharged 'cured,' found that his right hand had irretrievably lost the cunning which had enabled him to gain high wages as a herald-painter, and that nothing was left to him but a chance of earning an existence in the much-worse-paid calling of an ordinary coach-painter. Even in this lower mechanical walk, the accident he had met with prevented him from acquiring quickness, or more than a barely average skill, and he was sinking rapidly lower and

lower in the world, when his father-in-law, Bartholomew Goldsworthy, came very unexpectedly forward to the rescue, and it seemed probable that Richard Warren might even yet attain to a comfortable niche in the world's great market-galleries.

Bartholomew Goldsworthy was an odd, wayward, eccentric kind of mortal,—exceedingly deaf, half blind, a cripple in his arms, and, moreover, addicted in his latter years to a growing habit of talking aloud to himself, unconscious apparently of the presence of others, and of walking in his dreaming sleep. In fact, his falling mind dwelt continually day and night—and every hour of the day and night—upon one idea,—that of his boards, and the means whereby they might be added to, to the exclusion of all other thoughts, passions, or desires, except love for his daughter Charlotte, which one saw from time to time gleam through the thick crust of worldiness that enveloped his whole life. I doubt that her union with Richard Warren ever had his hearty approbation, and I always thought, oddly as it may sound after what I have just written of his affection for his daughter, that his determining motive in consenting to her marriage was, that her going away to another home would necessarily relieve him from the cost of her maintenance,—a seeming paradox, no doubt, but scarcely more so than to grudge one's *self*, as the Goldworthy class of men invariably do, the food and clothing essential to one's *own* existence. This penurious old man possessed considerable house-property in Goolge Street, Tottenham Court Road, and continued for many years to have himself domiciled in a *very* small *one* of his own, in New-

man Passage, Newman Street. He now proposed that Warren and his wife should have apartments therein, free of charge, and further suggested, that as he had all the upper part of a large light workshop in the same court untenanted, his son-in-law might set up business there as coach-painter to the trade.

The offer was gladly accepted by Warren and his wife, and I was told that matters were beginning to wear a brighter aspect with them. Charlotte's affectionate and untiring ministrations to her father's daily-increasing infirmities, gradually softening, as there could be little doubt they would, the old man's flinty miserliness, though not yet to the extent, much as his daughter pressed him upon the point, of effectually assisting Richard Warren with money in his business. Goldsworthy's propensity to dream-walking had, I knew, increased with years, and but a few months previous to his untimely end, he had been caught deliberately unfastening, in the dead of night, the very folding-doors through which he had now fallen, or been hurled. They were always afterwards carefully secured at night, as well as every other aperture through or out of which he might by possibility fall in his frequent sleep wanderings. Sometimes his bedroom door was locked on the outside, but to this precaution he himself strongly objected from a nervous dread of fire.

This brief summary of our acquaintance with and knowledge of Richard Warren, will sufficiently account for the concern and consternation with which his arrest on a charge of murder overwhelmed us

Mrs. Warren had been not long before con

fined of a still-born child; milk fever had, we knew, been apprehended; and after much dismal cogitation on the subject, we dimly concluded that some wild expressions uttered by the wife in her frenzy, aggravated, it might likely enough be, by an unguarded communication of her father's dreadful death, had led to the apprehension of her husband.

I did not sleep much that night, and my first business in the morning was to see Mr. M'Intyre, solicitor, of Southampton Buildings, and engage his services in behalf of Richard Warren. I then strode on towards Newman Street, with a double purpose in my mind;—one, to obtain, if possible, an interview with Mrs. Warren,—the other to get myself, as I knew how, called upon the inquest. I found not only Newman Passage, but the immediate neighbourhood crowded with gossips and idlers of both sexes, all eagerly commenting on the numerous exaggerated and varying rumours afloat, relative to the cause of Bartholomew Goldsworthy's death, but all mainly agreeing in this,—that but for some revelation of the wife of Richard Warren, no suspicion of foul play would in all probability have been entertained. I could not obtain speech of Mrs. Warren; no one for some very peremptory reason, it appeared, being permitted access to her, except a nurse and medical attendant. I had no difficulty, however, in getting myself placed on the jury, which on the arrival of the bustling coroner, who was not more than half an hour behind his time, entered forthwith upon its functions.

The body was viewed according to precedent in such cases, and as far as I could see, exhibited no

external marks of injury that might not have been caused by the fall from such a height upon the granite paving of the courtyard. The coroner, however, and one or two of the initiated amongst the jury, looked serenely solemn and mysterious; and as soon as we were settled on our chairs in the room selected for the jury's accommodation, and some trifling evidence had been adduced, the coroner directed Charlotte Warren to be summoned. Mr. M'Intyre objected instantly to such a course being taken. 'If,' as he understood the case, 'that person's husband was accused of the murder—if, indeed, which he, Mr. M'Intyre, much doubted, any murder had taken place—his wife could not be permitted to give evidence which might affect him, favourably or otherwise.'

The coroner replied that Richard Warren was detained as a measure of precaution only, and that, although if sent to trial on a capital or other charge, whatever his wife might say could not be used against him; yet in that court of unfettered inquiry as to the cause of the death of the deceased Bartholomew Goldsworthy, they had a right, and were indeed bound, to hear everybody likely to throw light upon the matter. A coroner's court was essentially an open one—*et cetera*. This was legally correct enough; the order to bring forward Mrs. Warren was repeated, and after a delay of about ten minutes, she was supported into the room by a nurse and assistant, and seated in a chair almost in a fainting state, and looking as pale and convulsively agitated as her husband on the previous evening at my house. It seemed a great cruelty to force her at such a time,

and under such circumstances, to confront the rude scrutiny of an inquest-room, but the coroner was obviously bent upon the point; and after a short pause the examination proceeded. Richard Warren, I should state, was not present, the coroner not deeming his presence essential in the present stage of inquiry. A whispered caution from him a minute or two previous to Mrs. Warren's entrance, informed me, moreover, that she was ignorant of her husband being in custody. The statement, elicited with much difficulty, from Mrs. Warren, was in substance, this: 'On the previous evening she had found herself much better, and her husband about nine o'clock left her to proceed something more than a mile beyond Hampstead, on particular business. About eleven o'clock the nurse went home, promising not to be gone more than an hour. Mrs. Warren supposed she must have been some time asleep afterwards, when she was awoke by a noise of struggling and half-stifled cries in the adjoining bed-room—her father's. Starting up in bed, she drew a curtain from before a small window in the partition which looked into Mr. Goldsworthy's room, and saw by the dim, uncertain moonlight, her father, in his night-dress, struggling in the grasp of a man. She was so terrified, so panic-stricken, that although she strove with all her might to call for assistance, she could not do so, and remembered nothing more till restored to consciousness by the nurse, a little before one o'clock.'

There was a dead silence for a few minutes after Mrs. Warren ceased speaking, broken by the coroner, who after whispering with Townshend, said in his mildest tones,—'You noticed the dress, I believe,

Mrs. Warren,—the coat, at least, which the man you saw struggling with your father wore?’

How shall I describe the sudden, flashing change that passed over the wife's pale features upon hearing this question? It seemed that an unseen dagger struck her, or that a serpent-memory or suspicion had been awakened by it into life. In a moment she had hidden her face in her outspread palms, whilst a convulsive shuddering visibly passed through and shook her frame.

Mr. M'Intyre again essayed to interpose, but was peremptorily silenced by the coroner, who tartly reminded him that he had no right to speak, save by courtesy, or as a witness in that court. He had no *locus standi* furthermore, his client, if he had one, not being formally before them.

Having thus delivered himself, the coroner proceeded with his inquisition, mildly as before. ‘You told the nurse, I hear, Mrs. Warren, during the first agitated moments that followed your restoration to consciousness, that the robber and assassin wore a light brown great-coat, with large pearl buttons,—the same kind of coat, in fact,’ added the coroner, in a tone subdued involuntarily by the terrible suggestion his words conveyed, ‘the same kind of coat, in fact, that your husband usually wears?’

The convulsive tremor by which the wretched wife was shaken, as if with a paroxysm of ague, increased in violence, but no words replied to the coroner's question. ‘Nay,’ persisted that functionary, ‘you have been heard, when no doubt fancying no one was within earshot, to directly and vehemently accuse your husband to his face of being the assassin of—’

'It could not be!' screamed the wife distractedly, and springing from the chair to her feet; 'It is false; or, if true, I must have been crazed—mad!—Oh God!'—She had fainted, and was immediately carried out of the room in a state of rigid insensibility.

Dr. Henslop, of Newman Street, remarked, that although there had been at one time apprehension of fever in Mrs. Warren's case, he was quite sure her mind had never been in the slightest degree affected. The next witness was Martha Riddel, the nurse; she had returned to Newman Court at about a quarter to one, having been detained at home longer than she intended. Just as she reached Mr. Goldsworthy's door, she noticed the shadow of a man, as she thought, in Mr. Warren's workshop, passing quickly about, and now and then stooping down; once she thought there were *two* persons in the loft, but on looking more attentively, concluded that the dim moonlight had deceived her; she wondered rather that Mr. Warren, who she knew had gone to Hampstead, should be in his workshop at that time of night, and thought she would mention it to Mrs. Warren, whom, on entering the house, which she did with a latch-key, and proceeding upstairs to her bed-room, she found lying across the bed, fainted away. Upon coming to herself, she seemed to be for some minutes in a kind of distracted maze, and told witness, first that a man in her husband's coat,—then that her husband himself,—had, she was sure, robbed and murdered her father. Witness then gave the alarm, just upon which Mr. Warren himself came hurrying upstairs, looking, witness thought, very pale and scared. She was sure he had on the light brown great-coat he

generally wore. Mrs. Warren fainted away again at the sight of her husband, and the house was soon afterwards filled with people. In reply to Mr. M'Intyre, who, by the way, had obtained a brief interview with Richard Warren, she said that the great-coat was always hanging up in the passage when not worn by Mr. Warren; that the street door opened with a very common sort of latch-key, and that Purfleet and his journeyman, who were packing-case makers, and worked in the lower part of Mr. Warren's workshop, were quite familiar with the house and its ways. She certainly had thought at one time that she saw the shadows of *two* men crossing to and fro, and stooping down, in the upper floor of the workshop, but had come to the conclusion that she must have been mistaken. Mr. Goldsworthy's bureau, she further deposed, as well as a large tin box, kept in his bed-room, had been wrenched open, and all the gold and silver they contained, supposed to be a large sum, carried off. She further added, that the key of the loft door was, she believed, generally carried by Mr. Warren in his coat-pocket.

Townshend gave the finishing-stroke to this evidence. In the tightened grasp of the deceased he had found a small piece of light brown cloth, matching precisely with a rent in Richard Warren's great-coat, and torn off, as he, Townshend, supposed, if what had been stated was true, in the death-struggle. He had also discovered about ten pounds in gold and silver concealed under the floor of Richard Warren's workshop, but the amount carried away, he was bound to add, was known to exceed five hundred pounds.

This was more than sufficient, and the inquest was

adjourned to the next day, when Richard Warren would be present, and the evidence be read over and subscribed,—a needless ceremony, like the presence of the accused at these altogether *ex-parte* proceedings. Richard Warren's statement in explanation did not in the least mend his position. He had gone to a friend living beyond Hampstead to borrow a sum of money for a pressing occasion, but judging, on arriving there, from the closed shutters, and the absence of lights, that his friend had retired with his family to bed, he refrained from disturbing him, and returned home empty-handed as he went. He had neglected to take his great-coat with him, but on re-entering his home, and seeing it hang up as usual in the passage, he had slipped it on, as he knew his wife would be vexed if she knew he had gone out on such a bitter night without it. It was easy to see that neither the coroner nor one of the jury,—keen, far-scanning, astute gentlemen all of them,—believed a word of this simple story, and a verdict of 'Wilful Murder' against Richard Warren was quickly returned by a majority of seventeen to one, that one being myself, much, I could see, to the disgust, amongst others, of my facile friend the beadle, to whose kindness I was indebted for my place in the jury.

The inquest-verdict, would, I doubted not, be ratified by the Old Bailey jury. The wife's evidence and reported expressions had been printed and enlarged upon in every newspaper in the metropolis; and however gravely the judge might warn the jurors to banish from their minds all they had previously heard,—which they could about as easily do as banish their own identity from their minds,—would, I was

quite certain, insure Richard Warren's conviction, if the evidence that could be legally adduced at the trial were of the faintest, flimsiest kind,—which, however, it was not by any means, as will have been readily seen.

Still there were many weak as well as favourably suggestive points about the evidence, even to those who, not knowing the accused as I did, could not examine it by the light of his pure and blameless life and character. Where, in the time, could he have effectually concealed the large sum in gold and silver that had been carried off? The ten pounds that had been discovered was obviously a plant, and the *two* figure shadows which the woman Riddel had, I felt convinced, seen,—to whom could they point but to Purfleet and his man, who were both familiar with the ways of Goldsworthy's house, intimate with Warren, and had access by a common door to his workshop? Mr. M'Intyre coincided perfectly in my opinion, and Mrs. Warren, who was half distracted with grief, remorse, and dread, being enabled by her father's will, bequeathing all his estate, real and personal, to her exclusively, to furnish us with ample funds, Townshend's services were specially engaged, and other springs carefully set to ensnare and convict the real murderer or murderers.

No positive result was, however, for a long time obtained, and the Old Bailey session was already unpleasantly near, when Townshend suggested, as a last resource, that a reward of 200*l.* should be advertised for the discovery of the perpetrator of the crime, payable to any accomplice in the deed except the actual murderer, and roundly promising, though of

course not in his Majesty's name, impunity under the prescribed conditions to the informer. 'This may perhaps,' said Townshend, 'cause that Jenkins, Master Purfleet's journeyman, who has so suddenly vanished, to turn up; and, at all events, it is worth trying.'

It was tried, and bore fruit with magical celerity. The bills had not been posted twelve hours when Townshend's agents apprised him that Purfleet was selling his trade-stock for anything he could get for it, evidently with the intention to bolt. A closer watch than ever was kept upon the fellow's motions, who, on the evening of the third day from the issue of the menacing advertisement, booked himself by the Plymouth night coach as an inside passenger, and was accompanied to that ancient sea-port by a remarkably civil gentleman of the name of Lipscombe. A fleet was in the Sound, ready to sail under convoy with the first favourable wind, one of which, the 'Jacintha,' was bound for Halifax, in British America. James Dixon, *alias* Thomas Purfleet, secured a passage on board the 'Jacintha,' and a few hours afterwards a shift of wind set all the blue-peters in the fleet flying, and the first signal-cannon from the commodore gave warning of speedy departure.

'O, these are your packages, are they?' said Lipscombe, as James Dixon hurriedly unloaded them from a barrow on the quay, preparatory to their being hoisted into the boat waiting to take him on board the 'Jacintha,' 'I wondered where the deuce you had hidden them, friend Dixon,—or Nix'em,—which is it, eh? or might not the name of *Thomas Purfleet* suit you as well, or better?'

The villain seemed turned into stone as by the

stroke of an enchanter's wand, as the officer's words of doom smote upon his ear: presently the thick perspiration oozed through his clammy forehead; his knees smote each other, and his quick, gasping breath barely enabled him to articulate, in an accent of utter despair, 'I see it all now, and that I am a dead man! This is Jenkins's doing!'

'Perhaps so; but this packet of valuables would, I think, do for you without *his* aid. Come along! it is always at the last pinch, you know, that the devil deserts his mates; now then!'

Instead of Richard Warren, Thomas Purfleet and Isaac Jenkins were tried at the ensuing Old Bailey sessions for the murder of Bartholomew Goldsworthy, found guilty, and sentenced to be hanged. Purfleet underwent the extreme penalty; but the judgment to die passed upon Jenkins was commuted to transportation for life. Mr. and Mrs. Warren still live in comparative affluence, and have a numerous family, grandchildren included. Richard Warren told me, for perhaps the hundredth time, the other day, that after the first hour or so of panic he never for an instant doubted of a true deliverance, a confidence which in all cases, I grieve to say, has not been so happily realized.

THE TEMPTRESS.

RICHARD PENSON was a native of Westmoreland, his place of birth being the small village of Bedstone, on the borders of Gilgraith forest, some miles north of Appleby. His father had been what is called a 'statesman' in those parts, that is, he farmed his own land; but long-continued ill-health, the death of his notable wife, and other crosses and losses, so reduced him in the world, that he died—when Richard, his only child, was in his twentieth year—in little better than insolvent circumstances, the son, who, from his desultory and rather bookish habits, had never been of much use upon the farm, finding himself, after everything had been disposed of, and all debts paid, the master of about 200*l.* only, and destitute, withal, of skill in either head or hand to turn his modest capital to account. Being, however, so young, of stout frame and sanguine temperament, he might not for some

time have fully realized the undesirableness of his position and prospects, but for the light unexpectedly shed over them by the dark, scornful eyes of Judith Morton, a damsel of about seventeen, and the daughter of John Morton, a statesman of comfortable means, with whom, whilst his father yet lived in reputedly fair circumstances, he had been on terms of sweetheart intimacy, or at least as much so as some half-a-dozen other bovine youths, whom Judith Morton's handsome person, and comparatively cultivated airs and graces, attracted round her. The first time Richard Penson met her, after the final winding-up of his father's affairs, he was so thoroughly made to understand that an idle, know-nothing young fellow, with 200*l.* for all his fortune, was no match for Judith Morton, that the next half-hour was passed in mental debate as to which of the three expedients for ridding himself of hateful life—hanging, drowning, or poisoning—he should adopt; and he at length decided upon almost as desperate a leap in the dark as either of them, by forthwith writing to a London attorney, whose advertisement, setting forth a willingness to accept an active, clever young man as articled clerk, at a moderate premium, had strongly arrested his attention the day previously at Appleby—that he should be in London for the purpose of having a personal interview with the advertiser as quickly as the coach, leaving Appleby on the following morning, would carry him thither. Three days afterwards, accordingly, Richard Penson presented himself at the attorney's office. That worthy's business lay chiefly at the Old Bailey, and he was rightly reputed one of the sharpest, least scrupulous practitioners

that classic institution could boast of. He quickly discerned, with those keen, vulpine eyes of his, that there was the stuff for a clever fellow in Richard Penson; and a bargain was finally struck by which, in consideration of the greatest part of his cash, and his services for five years, the young countryman assured himself of board, lodging, and a small salary during that period, and his articles at the end thereof. Penson took readily to his new vocation, and ultimately became noted as a keen adept in the tortuous, shifty practice so highly appreciated by the class of clients with whom he had chiefly to deal; though I do not believe he would have lent himself to any decidedly unprofessional expedient, dangerously near as, in the fervour of his temperament, he might at times have ventured near the faintly-traced boundary-line which marks the limit which an attorney may not overstep in defence of the most liberal and interesting of clients. For the rest, Richard Penson was a fairly-conducted, pleasant, companionable young fellow, except when more freshly primed than usual, and alone with some one or two of his intimates, he got maudlin about Judith Morton,—her charms, caprices, cruelties. A detestable infliction, I well remember, were those obliging confidences; but rested so slightly upon my memory, that the sole and hazy impression I derived from them was, that he had been jilted by a handsome young shrew, who, most likely, on account of her brimstone temper, had not yet obtained a husband; when Richard Penson finished his time, and inscribed his name on the roll as an attorney of the Court of King's Bench. Soon after that event he left town for Westmoreland in renewed

quest, I had no doubt, of his old flame. I neither saw nor heard anything of him again till about three years afterwards, when I met him just by the Great Turnstile, Holborn; but so changed was he, that I for some moments vainly cast about in my memory as to whom the pallid, care-worn, poverty-stricken man, whose proffered hand I mechanically held in mine, could be.

‘You do not remember me?’ he said, with a dull, wintry smile. The voice, and a peculiar north-country accent, enabled me to do so instantly; and I blurted out, ‘Richard Penson! But, good God! what has come to you? Why, you look like an old man!’

‘I *am* one,’ he answered. ‘Age is not always truly reckoned by years.’

‘Surely,’ I said, after a slight pause, ‘that old craze of yours about the Westmoreland spitfire you used to talk of, cannot have made such a wreck of a sensible man?’

‘Certainly not; or, at least, not in the way you appear to suppose. But come; if you have an hour to spare, and will stand treat for a few glasses, I will tell you all about it.’

‘Stand treat for a few glasses!’ The hot blood burned in my cheeks and temples as I echoed this sad confession of meanness and degradation from my former acquaintance; but he did not appear to heed, or was callous to, the implied meaning of the exclamation; and upon my stammering out that he was welcome to as many glasses as he chose to have, he brightened up into a kind of sickly gaiety, said, ‘I was always a *tramp*,’ and led the way to a tavern in Chancery Lane. There, and at subsequent interviews, I

was made acquainted with the following strange and warning story. Much of the dialogue, which he had a morbid fondness for repeating, he had written out.

When Richard Penson, after an absence of more than five years, revisited his birthplace, he found Judith Morton still single; and though in her twenty-third year, as freshly beautiful, to his mind, as when he had last seen her. He soon found, moreover, that it was quite out of the question that she should become his wife, albeit the refusal was this time more gently intimated than on a former occasion. According to the gossip of the neighbourhood, one Robert Masters, a thriving 'statesman,' but about ten years her senior, had been courting her off and on for a long time; but somehow the affair seemed as far or farther off than ever from a matrimonial termination. It was also reported that a former beau of hers, Charles Harpur, who had emigrated to America, and greatly prospered there, with whom she had constantly corresponded, was shortly expected to pay a visit to England, and of course to Westmoreland. Thus admonished of the folly of further indulgence in his dream-fancies, Penson turned his lingering steps, first towards Appleby, where, however, no opening for an additional attorney presented itself, and finally he came as far southward as Liverpool, opened an office in Scotland Road, and diligently strove to edge himself into the legal business of that flourishing city. The result was so disheartening, that at the end of about six months' fruitless endeavour he had made up his mind to sell his office-desk, stool, chairs, and brass plate, and return to the service of his old master, who would, he knew, be glad to employ him, when an

opening for the exercise of his peculiar talents suddenly presented itself, and he was tempted to venture upon the perilous path, the near end of which was destruction.

He was sitting, he told me, in his office, one wet, gloomy afternoon in January, before a handful of fire, alternately revolving in his mind his own dismal present and future, and two or three startling paragraphs that had just been copied into the Liverpool journals from the Westmoreland county paper. To him they were of great interest, but in some degree unintelligible. Robert Masters, the quondam bachelor of Judith Morton, before spoken of, had, it appeared, been killed at a place in Gilgraith Forest by a pistol-shot; and according to one account, robbery must have been the motive of the assassin, as the deceased's pockets had been rifled, and his gold watch carried off; whilst, according to another and later paragraph, Charles Harpur, a person of good property, recently arrived from abroad, had been fully committed for the murder; the suggested cause whereof was jealousy with respect to a Jemima Morton, a young woman, the paper stated, of great personal attractions. 'The mistake in the Christian name, Jemima for Judith,' mused Penson, 'is obvious enough; but how comes it that both jealousy and plunder are spoken of as motives for the crime? Charles Harpur is not a robber, and yet both money and watch were missing. I must even, poor as I am, pay a visit to Bedstone. Ha!

Well, this is strange!

A slight noise at the window had caused him to look suddenly up in that direction, and to his great surprise, almost consternation, he saw the handsome

and excited countenance of Judith Morton, just above the dwarf Venetian blinds, the dark, flashing eyes, peering eagerly into the office, wherein she yet, he observed, discerned nothing. His sudden starting up revealed him to her; a kind of wild smile of recognition glanced over her features, and in another minute Judith Morton was face to face with Richard Penson,—she, this time, the suppliant for favour.

Miss Morton was habited in deep mourning, and her appearance and manner evinced much flurry and disquietude. Hastily seating herself, she drew forth a sealed packet from a large reticule, saying, as she did so, in reply to Penson's questioning glance at her mourning dress, 'For my father; he died about three months since.' Then holding the packet or parcel in her hand, she gazed fixedly for a moment or two at her astounded auditor, as if to ascertain if the influence she once possessed over him had been weakened by time and absence. Apparently the scrutiny was satisfactory; a bright gleam of female pride danced in her eyes, and there was an accent of assured confidence in the tone with which she said, 'I am here, Richard Penson, to retain you professionally in a matter deeply affecting myself, with the full persuasion that, spite of—perhaps in some degree because of—bygones, you will not fail me in this hour of need.'

Penson's heart was in his throat, and a few broken words could only gurgle through to the effect that he was soul and body at her service. The prideful smile shot more brightly than before across the face of the temptress, and the voice was gentle and caressing which replied, 'I knew that would be your answer, Richard.' After hesitating for a moment, she took a

note from her purse and placed it before the wonder-mute attorney: it was a Bank of England note for fifty pounds; and in the excitement of his chivalrous enthusiasm he rejected it almost indignantly.

‘Nay, nay,’ said Judith Morton, ‘you must accept it. My father, as I told you, is no more, and I am tolerably well off,’ adding, with insinuating meaning, ‘and, better perhaps than that, I am now my own mistress.’ Penson took the note thus pressed upon him, and an embarrassing but brief silence ensued, broken by Judith Morton, who having unsealed the packet of papers, said, ‘These are office copies of the depositions made in the case of Charles Harpur, of which you have doubtless heard.’ The attorney’s countenance fell as Judith pronounced that name, and she hastened to say, ‘It is not, you will find, for his sake that I am chiefly interested,—but first you must read those papers. I will go and take tea while you do so, at the inn below, where the coach stopped. I shall not be gone more than half an hour.’

The peremptory manner of the young woman forbade reply, and as soon as the street-door closed behind her, Penson addressed himself to the perusal of the depositions. It was some time before the palpitating bewilderment of his brain so far subsided as to enable him to distinctly seize and comprehend what he read; but professional habit at length resumed its influence, and by the time Miss Morton returned he had thoroughly mastered the case as far as it was disclosed by the depositions.

‘Well,’ said she, with seeming calmness, ‘your opinion upon this sad affair.’

‘There can be but one opinion upon it,’ replied

Penson, 'the facts lie in a nutshell: Harpur met the deceased at a farmers' dinner, after which, both being elevated by wine, Harpur took offence at something—it is not stated what—that Masters said respecting you; and a violent quarrel and fight ensued. Three nights afterwards Masters is found dead, with a bullet through his brain. James Blundell, a respectable man, whom I know well, swears positively that he heard the report, and about ten minutes afterwards saw Harpur running from the spot, not far from which the body was next morning found—his face, clearly visible in the brilliant moonlight, as white as chalk, and holding a pistol in his hand. There can be no doubt, therefore, that Harpur killed the deceased, though perhaps under circumstances that, if proveable, might reduce the offence to manslaughter.'

'You noticed that the man's watch and money were not to be found?' said Judith Morton.

'Yes; and that is certainly an odd circumstance; but probably, as I see is suspected, they were stolen by some person who discovered the body earlier in the morning than Blundell and the constable did.'

'Is there nothing which in your opinion affects the credibility of Blundell's testimony?'

'Not essentially: to be sure there appears to have been ill-blood between him and Masters, but that fact cannot have any weight against the——'

'Not if strengthened—*made* weighty?' interrupted the young woman, with suggestive emphasis.

'I—I do not comprehend you,' stammered Penson; greatly startled, as he told me, more by her manner than words.

'You must then, and thoroughly,' said Judith Mor-

ton, who was now deathly pale, 'or nothing effectual will, I see, be done. There is no one within hearing?'

'Not a soul!'

'Draw your chair closer to mine, however, that I may speak the secret, *which will place me in your power*, in a whisper: it was I slew Robert Masters!'

'God of heaven!—you!—impossible!'

'It is true, and therefore possible, as you shall hear—but first let me ask you this question: With all my faults of temper, caprices, vexatious follies, was I not always a truthful girl?'

'Certainly; you were ever sincere and plain spoken.'

'I was sure you would do me that justice: you will then have no misgiving as to the exact truth of what I am about to relate, which I will do as briefly as possible. Charles Harpur, one of my old lovers, as you know—though after what has passed he can never be, under any circumstances, more to me than he is at this moment—lately returned from America much richer than he left England, and renewed his addresses, which were accepted. This came to the knowledge of Masters, who was once engaged to me, and he, as you know, met and quarrelled with Harpur. The injurious hints thrown out against me on that occasion were dismissed from Harpur's mind, after an explanation with me, and Masters, foiled in his selfish and malignant purpose, had the audacious insolence to write me word that unless I broke with Harpur, he would send him some foolish letters of mine, long since written, of no harm whatever if read and interpreted by calm reason, but which would, I knew, drive Harpur mad with jealous fury. I so far supplanted my mind as to write a note to Masters, demanding, in the

name of manliness and honour, the return of those letters to me. Judging by his reply he was in some degree affected by the justice and earnestness of my appeal, and promised, if I would meet him at nine o'clock that evening at an old trysting-place he mentioned, he would return my letters, should he not succeed in persuading me not to marry Harpur. I determined on meeting him; the evenings were light and calm, and I have ever felt an almost man-like want of fear. Yet, as the hour approached, and I set off for the place of meeting, I was disturbed by a vague sense of misgiving, as of the near approach of calamity and misfortune, and I called at Harpur's lodgings, with the purpose of informing him of what had occurred, and guiding myself by his counsel. Unhappily he was not at home, and after waiting some time, I again determined to keep the appointment with Masters at all hazards. As I turned to leave the room, an open case containing two small pistols caught my eye, and I immediately seized one, precisely why I hardly know myself, except from an undefined thought of shielding myself from possible insult, should Masters' rage at finding me invincible to his entreaties prompt him to offer me any. I concealed the weapon beneath my shawl, and did not, I well remember, bestow a thought even as to whether it was loaded or not. I met Robert Masters,—he urged me by every argument he could think of to discard Harpur and renew my long since broken engagement with himself. I refused firmly, perhaps scornfully, to do so, and passionately insisted upon the fulfilment of his promise respecting the letters. In his exasperation, Masters swore he would do no such

thing, and taking one from his pocket, he opened and pretended to read from it a love-passage which, had I not been almost out of my senses with rage and indignation, I must have been sure I never could have written. I sprang forward to clutch the letter, a struggle for its possession ensued, and, how it happened I know not, certainly by no voluntary act of mine, the pistol in my hand went off: there was a flash and a report, sounding to me like thunder, and Robert Masters lay dead at my feet! What followed I can only confusedly describe: for a time I was transfixed,—rooted with terror to the spot, but presently the stunning sense of horror was succeeded by apprehension for myself; and, by what prompted cunning I know not, though doubtless with a wild hope of thereby inducing a belief that the deed had been committed by robbers, I threw myself on my knees beside the corpse, and not only possessed myself of the letters, but of the slain man's watch and purse. I had scarcely done so, when I heard footsteps approaching, and I started up and fled with the speed of guilt and fear, leaving the fatal pistol on the ground. The footsteps were Harpur's: he had reached home soon after I left, and followed me only to arrive too late! I disclosed everything to him: he had faith in my truth, as I am sure you have, and swore never to betray me. He has, you know, faithfully kept his word, though himself apprehended for the crime.'

Judith Morton ceased speaking, and Penson, aghast, stupified, could not utter a word.

'Well, Richard Penson,' said she, after a painful silence of some minutes, 'have you no counsel to offer me in this strait?'

‘Counsel, Judith,’ replied Penson, with white lips, ‘what counsel can I offer? The only effect of this confession, if made public, would be to consign you to the scaffold instead of Harpur; for those who would sit in judgment upon your life would not believe that the pistol was accidentally discharged.’

‘That is also my opinion, and can you do nothing to save my life—my innocent life, Richard? for be assured that rather than a guiltless man shall perish through my deed, I will denounce myself as the slayer of Robert Masters. You have a reputation for lawyer-craft,’ she added, ‘and money shall not be wanting.’

‘There is no possibility of obtaining an acquittal,’ said Penson, ‘except by having recourse to perilous devices that—— In short, I see no chance of a successful defence.’

‘You once loved me, Richard Penson,’ said Judith Morton, in a low, agitated voice, ‘or at least said you did.’

‘*Once* loved you—*said* I did,’ echoed Penson.

‘I know not what to say,’ continued Judith, as if unheeding his words, and with eyes bent on the ground: ‘Harpur can never be, as I told you, more to me than he is now—I have reason, indeed, to believe that he has no wish to be: faithful, *as yet*, as he has proved to his promise not to betray me; and it may be, Richard—it may be, I say,—though that, I begin to think, will have slight weight with you—that—that gratitude might lead me to reward, to return the devotion to which I should be indebted for the preservation of my young life.’

‘Judith—Judith Morton!’ gasped Penson, ‘do not drive me mad!’

‘Make no rash promises, Richard, to incur peril for my sake,’ said Judith Morton, rising from her chair; ‘by to-morrow morning you will have thought the matter calmly over. I will call about ten o’clock, and you can then tell me if I can count or not upon effectual help from you. Good night.’

She was gone, but not till her purpose had been thoroughly accomplished. Richard Penson’s resolution was taken, and before he threw himself upon his bed that night, his eager and practised brain had elaborated a plan—audacious and full of peril to himself—whereby an acquittal might be, with almost certainty, insured. ‘I do it,’—it was thus he glozed the scheme to his own conscience,—‘I do it to save her life,—her young and innocent life, as she truly says,—and I will take care that no harm shall ultimately befall Blundell. He will have abundant means of self-vindication when—when I and Judith are safe beyond the Atlantic.’

The clocks were chiming ten when Judith Morton entered the young attorney’s office on the following morning. ‘There is more than hope, there is triumph, safety in your look,’ she said, unglowing her hand, and extending it to Penson.

‘Yes, Judith,’ he replied, ‘I have determined upon running all risks to extricate you from this peril. And first the watch—a description of which I shall, as the prisoner’s attorney, take care to advertise by-and-by—have you it with you?’

‘Yes! here it is; but what is it you propose doing?’

‘That, dear Judith, I must be excused for not disclosing. Success depends upon close secrecy. I will,

however, see Harpur as his professional adviser, without delay, and assure him—for his continued silence is paramountly essential—that an acquittal is certain, but not of the means of procuring it—stone walls having ears, as they say, and indiscretion being as fatal as treachery.’

‘No evil will fall upon any innocent person?’ asked the young woman.

‘No *permanent* evil—of that be assured,’ replied Penson. This was about all that passed between the confederates, and a few minutes afterwards Judith Morton took leave, and was soon on her way home.

Harpur’s trial came on during the March assize, at Appleby, and as the case had excited much interest in the county, the Crown Court was densely crowded. The witnesses for the prosecution were not asked a single question by the counsel instructed by Penson for the defence till it came to the turn of the last and only important one, James Blundell. The cross-examination of this man was from the first a menacing one, and the hush of the excited auditory deepened into painful intensity as it became evident, from the stern questioning of the counsel, that the defence intended to be set up was, that the deceased had met his death at the hands of the witness, not of the prisoner. It was elicited from Blundell, though with much difficulty, that he was in embarrassed circumstances, considerably in debt to the deceased, with whom he had, in consequence, had words more than once, and that he knew Robert Masters had been heard to say he would sell him (Blundell) up before long. The witness was greatly agitated by this exposure of his affairs, and so fiercely was he pressed by

the zealous counsel for nearly an hour of merciless cross-examination, that he could scarcely stand when told to leave the witness-box.

'I have to request, my lord,' said the prisoner's counsel, 'that the last witness be not permitted to leave the court—for the present at least.' The judge nodded assent, and a couple of javelin-men placed themselves by the side of the nervous and terrified Blundell. The case for the crown having closed, and, no speech in those days being allowed to be made by a reputed felon's counsel, witnesses for the defence were at once called. 'Call Thomas Aldous,' said Richard Penson, to the crier of the court, and presently Thomas Aldous, a middle-aged, gold-spectacled gentleman, of highly-respectable aspect, presented himself in the witness-box.

'You are the proprietor, I believe, Mr. Aldous,' said the prisoner's counsel, 'of an extensive pawnbroking establishment in London?'

'Well, sir,' replied the witness, 'I cannot say mine is an extensive establishment, but it is, I am bold to say, a respectable one, and situate not in London proper, but in the Blackfriars Road, Southwark.'

'No matter: you have been within the last few days in communication with respect to an advertised gold watch, with the attorney for the prisoner, Mr. Penson?'

'I have.'

'Do you produce the watch in question?'

'I do: here it is. It was pawned with me,' added the scrupulous witness, refreshing his memory by a glance at the duplicate, 'on the 18th of February last, for 10*l.*, and the address given, No. 8, Lambeth Walk, is, I have since ascertained, a fictitious one.'

‘Will the brother of the deceased who has already been sworn,’ said the examining barrister, ‘have the kindness to look at this watch?’

Mr. James Masters did so, and identified it as belonging to his brother, and worn by him at the time of his death.

‘Should you be able, Mr. Aldous,’ continued counsel, ‘to recognise the person who pawned the watch?’

‘I should have no difficulty in doing so,’ said the pretended Aldous, ‘although it was just between the lights when the man, a middle-aged, stoutish person came to my shop, as he not only had a peculiar cast in his eyes, but that once or twice when a handkerchief which he held to his face, I supposed in consequence of tooth-ache, slipped aside, I noticed a large, bright, red stain, either from scrofula or a natural mark across his lower jaw.’

As this audaciously-accurate description of Blundell left the witness’s lips, every eye in court was turned upon that astounded individual; the javelin-men drew back with instinctive aversion from in front of him, and he, as if impelled by a sympathetic horror of himself, shrieked out, ‘That’s me! he means me! oh God!’ ‘That is the man,’ promptly broke in the pawnbroker, ‘I should know him amongst a million.’ This was too much for Blundell; he strove to gasp out a fierce denial, but strong emotion choked his utterance, and he fell down in a fit, from which he did not entirely recover for some hours, then to find himself in close custody upon suspicion of being the assassin of Robert Masters!

The proceedings in court need not be further detail of course, irretrievably

broken down, and there was nothing for it but to formally acquit the prisoner, who was at once discharged, and the crowded court was immediately cleared of the excited auditory, numerous groups of whom remained for long afterwards in the streets, eagerly canvassing the strange issue of the trial. As Richard Penson left the court a scrap of paper was slipped into his hand upon which was scrawled in pencil, and in a disguised hand, 'Thanks—a thousand thanks—but no harm must come to poor B——. You shall hear from me in a few days at Liverpool. J——.'

As soon as Blundell could collect his scattered thoughts and advise with a lawyer, there was found to be no difficulty in establishing an *alibi*, that on the day of the pretended pawning he was in his own home at Bedstone, and he was conditionally liberated. Inquiries were next set on foot respecting Mr. Aldous, and as no such person could be found, the nature of the conspiracy by which justice had been defeated, gradually disclosed itself. An effort was also made to arrest Penson, the prisoner's attorney, but as he had previously disappeared from Liverpool, and it was reported sailed for America with Judith Morton, the pursuit was abandoned. This information was completely erroneous: Judith Morton had indeed embarked for America, but it was with her husband, Charles Harpur, to whom she had been privately married three weeks previous to the death of Robert Masters, the wedding having been intendedly kept secret for a time, partly on account of the recent death of the bride's father, who, by-the-by, died in poor circumstances, and partly because of some family quarrel of Harpur's. This intelligence reached Penson

at Liverpool, in a letter dated London, about a week subsequent to the trial, containing many apologies, another 50*l.* note, and signed 'Judith Harpur!'

I will not detain the reader with any description of the wretched, vagabond life led by Penson, from the moment of his departure from Liverpool till I met him in Holborn—till his death, in fact,—for he was utterly irreclaimable—which was not long delayed, and took place in the infirmary of a city workhouse. He, at all events, though not reached by the arm of the law, paid the full penalty of his offence. Whether the same might be said of Judith Morton, I know not, Penson never having heard either of her or Harpur since they left England for the States.

[THE following papers, though included under the heading of 'Leaves from the Diary of a Law Clerk,' purport, it will be seen, to have been written by one of the partners of the law firm of Flint and Sharp; they, like the 'Leaves,' are the records of a real experience.]

A LIFE ASSURANCE.

BESIDES being the confidential advisers, attorneys are the 'confessors' of modern England; and the revelations—delicate, serious, not unfrequently involving life as well as fortune and character—confided to the purchased fidelity and professional honour of men whom romancers of all ages have stereotyped as the ghouls and vampires of civilised society, are, it is impossible to deny, as rarely divulged as those which the penitents of the Greek and Latin churches impart to their spiritual guides and helpers; and this possibly for the somewhat vulgar, but very sufficient
that 'a breach of confidence' would as cer-

tainly involve the professional ruin of an attorney as the commission of a felony. An able but eccentric juriconsult, Mr. Jeremy Bentham, was desirous that attorneys should be compelled to disclose on oath whatever guilty secrets might be confided to them by their clients; the only objection to which ingenious device for the conviction of rogues being, that if such a power existed, there would be no secrets to disclose; and, as a necessary consequence, that the imperfectly-informed attorney would be unable to render his client the justice to which every person, however criminal, is clearly entitled—that of having his or her case presented before the court appointed to decide upon it in the best and most advantageous manner possible. Let it not be forgotten either that the attorney is the only real, practical defender of the humble and needy against the illegal oppressions of the rich and powerful—the shrewd, indomitable agent who gives prosaic reality to the figurative eloquence of old Chancellor Fortescue, when he says ‘that the lightning may flash through, the thunder shake, the tempest beat, upon the English peasant’s hut, but the king of England, with all his army, cannot lift the latch to enter in.’ The chancellor of course meant that in this country overbearing violence cannot defy, or put itself in the place of the law. This is quite true; and why? Chiefly because the attorney is ready, in all cases of *provable* illegality, with his potent strip of parchment summoning the great man before ‘her Sovereign Lady the Queen,’ there to answer for his acts; and the *richer* the offender, the more keen and eager Mr. Attorney to prosecute the suit, however needy his own client; for he is then sure of his costs, if he suc-

ceed! Again, I cheerfully admit the extreme vulgarity of the motive; but its effect in protecting the legal rights of the humble is not, I contend, lessened because the reward of exertion and success is counted out in good, honest sovereigns, or notes of the Governor and Company of the Bank of England.

Thus much by way of conciliatory prologue to the narrative of a few incidents revealed in the attorney's privileged confessional; throughout which I have of course, in order to avoid any possible recognition of those events or incidents, changed the name of every person concerned.

Our old city firm, then, which, I am happy to say, still flourishes under the able direction of our active successors, I will call—adopting the nomenclature appropriated to us by imaginative ladies and gentlemen who favour the world with fancy pen-and-ink portraits of the lawyer tribe—that of Flint and Sharp; Sharp being myself, and Flint the silver-haired old bachelor we buried a few weeks since in Kensal Green Cemetery.

'Mr. Andrews,' said a clerk as he threw open the door of the inner office one afternoon. 'Mr. Jesse Andrews.'

'Good-day, Mr. Andrews,' was my prompt and civil greeting: 'I have good news for you. Take a chair.'

The good-humoured, rather intelligent, and somewhat clouded countenance of the new-comer brightened up at these words. 'News from my Cousin Archibald?' he asked as he seated himself.

'Yes. He laments your late failure, and commiserates the changed position and prospects of your wife and boy, little Archibald, his godson. You he has not much compassion for, inasmuch as he attributes your

mistakes entirely to mismanagement, and the want of common prudence."

"Certainly, certainly," grinned out Mr. Jesse Andrews: "but an odd sort of good news!"

"His deeds are kinder than his words. He will allow, Mr. Avenfield retains his majority—— Let me see: how old is that boy of yours now?"

"Ten. He was two years old when his godfather went to India."

"Well, then, you will receive two hundred pounds per annum, payable half-yearly, in advance, for the next ten years—that is, of course, if your son lives—in order to enable you to bring him up, and educate him properly. After that period has elapsed, your cousin intimates that he will place the young man advantageously; and I do not doubt will do something for you, should you not by that time have conquered a fair position for yourself."

"Is that all?" said Mr. Andrews.

"All! Why, what did you expect?"

"Two or three thousand pounds to set me afloat again. I know of a safe speculation, that with, say three thousand pounds capital, would realise a handsome fortune in no time."

Mr. Jesse Andrews, I may observe, was one of that numerous class of persons who are always on the threshold of realising millions—the only and constant obstacle being the want of a sufficient 'capital.'

I condoled with him upon his disappointment; but as words, however civil, avail little in the way of 'capital,' Mr. Jesse Andrews, having pocketed the first half-yearly instalment of the annuity, made his exit in by no means a gracious or grateful frame of mind.

Two other half-yearly payments were duly paid him. When he handed me the receipt on the last occasion, he said, in a sort of off-hand, careless way, 'I suppose, if Archy were to die, these payments would cease?'

'Perhaps not,' I replied unthinkingly. 'At all events, not, I should say, till you and your wife were in some way provided for. But your son is not ill?' I added.

'No, no; not at present,' replied Andrews, colouring, and with a confusion of manner which surprised me not a little. It flashed across my mind that the boy was dead, and that Andrews, in order not to risk the withdrawal or suspension of the annuity, had concealed the fact from us.

'Let me see,' I resumed, 'we have your present address—Norton Folgate, I think?'

'Yes, certainly you have.'

'I shall very likely call in a day or two to see Mrs. Andrews and your son.'

The man smiled in a reassured, half-sardonic manner. 'Do,' he answered. 'Archy is alive, and very well, thank God!'

This confidence dispelled the suspicion I had momentarily entertained, and five or six weeks passed away, during which Andrews and his affairs were almost as entirely absent from my thoughts as if no such man existed.

About the expiration of that time, Mr. Jesse Andrews unexpectedly revisited the office, and as soon as I was disengaged, was ushered into my private room. He was habited in the deepest mourning, and it naturally struck me that either his wife or son was dead—an

impression, however, which a closer examination of his countenance did not confirm, knowing as I did how affectionate a husband and father he was, with all his faults and follies, reputed to be. He looked flurried, nervous, certainly; but there was no grief, no sorrow in the restless, disturbed glances which he directed to the floor, the ceiling, the window, the fireplace, the chairs, the table—everywhere, in fact, except towards my face.

‘What is the matter, Mr. Andrews?’ I gravely inquired, seeing that he did not appear disposed to open the conversation.

‘A great calamity, sir—a great calamity,’ he hurriedly and confusedly answered, his face still persistently averted from me—‘has happened! Archy is dead!’

‘Dead!’ I exclaimed, considerably shocked. ‘God bless me! when did this happen?’

‘Three weeks ago,’ was the reply. ‘He died of cholera.’

‘Of cholera!’ this occurred, I should state, in 1830.

‘Yes: he was very assiduously attended throughout his sufferings, which were protracted and severe, by the eminent Dr. Parkinson, a highly-respectable and skilled practitioner, as you doubtless, sir, are aware.’

I could not comprehend the man. This dry, unconcerned, business sort of gabble was not the language of a suddenly-bereaved parent, and one, too, who had lost a considerable annuity by his son’s death. What could it mean? I was in truth fairly puzzled.

After a considerable interval of silence, which Mr. Andrews, whose eyes continued to wander in every direction except that of mine, showed no inclination to

break, I said—‘It will be necessary for me to write immediately to your cousin, Mr. Archibald Andrews. I trust, for your sake, the annuity will be continued; but of course, till I hear from him, the half-yearly payments must be suspended.’

‘Certainly, certainly: I naturally expected that would be the case,’ said Andrews, still in the same quick, hurried tone. ‘Quite so.’

‘You have nothing further to say, I suppose?’ I remarked after another dead pause, during which it was very apparent that he was labouring with something to which he nervously hesitated to give utterance.

‘No—yes—that is, I wished to consult you upon a matter of business—connected with—with a life-assurance office.’

‘A life-assurance office?’

‘Yes.’ The man’s pale face flushed crimson, and his speech became more and more hurried as he went on. ‘Yes: fearing, Mr. Sharp, that should Archy die, we might be left without resource, I resolved, after mature deliberation, to effect an insurance on his life for four thousand pounds.’

‘Four thousand pounds!’

‘Yes. All necessary preliminaries were gone through. The medical gentleman—since dead of the cholera, by the way—examined the boy of course, and the insurance was legally effected for four thousand pounds, payable at his death.’

I did not speak, a suspicion too horrible to be hinted at held me dumb.

‘Unfortunately,’ Andrews continued, ‘this insurance was only effected about a fortnight before poor Archy’s death, and the office refuses payment, although, as I

have told you, the lad was attended to the very hour of his death by Dr. Parkinson, a highly respectable, most unexceptionable gentleman. Very much so indeed.'

'I quite agree in that,' I answered after a while. 'Dr. Parkinson is a highly-respectable and eminent man. What reason,' I added, 'do the company assign for non-payment?'

'The very recent completion of the policy.'

'Nonsense! How can that fact, *standing alone*, affect your claim?'

'I do not know,' Andrews replied; and all this time I had not been able to look fairly in his face; 'but they *do* refuse; and I am anxious that your firm should take the matter in hand, and sue them for the amount.'

'I must first see Dr. Parkinson,' I answered, 'and convince myself that there is no *legitimate* reason for repudiating the policy.'

'Certainly, certainly,' he replied.

'I will write to you to-morrow,' I said, rising to terminate the conference, 'after I have seen Dr. Parkinson, and state whether we will or not take proceedings against the insurance company on your behalf.'

He thanked me, and hurried off.

Dr. Parkinson confirmed Mr. Jesse Andrews in every particular. He had attended the boy, a fine, light-haired lad of eleven or twelve years of age, from not long after his seizure till his death. He suffered dreadfully, and died unmistakably of Asiatic cholera, and of nothing else; of which same disease a servant and a female lodger in the same house had died just previously. 'It is of course,' Dr. Parkinson remarked,

in conclusion, 'as unfortunate for the company as it is strangely lucky for Andrews; but there is no valid reason for refusing payment.'

Upon this representation we wrote the next day to the assurance people, threatening proceedings on behalf of Mr. Jesse Andrews.

Early on the morrow one of the managing directors called on us, to state the reasons which induced the company to hesitate at recognising the plaintiff's claim. In addition to the doubts suggested by the brief time which had elapsed from the date of the policy to the death of the child, there were several other slight circumstances of corroborative suspicion. The chief of these was, that a neighbour had declared he heard the father indulging in obstreperous mirth in a room adjoining that in which the corpse lay only about two hours after his son had expired. This unseemly, scandalous hilarity of her husband the wife appeared to faintly remonstrate against. The directors had consequently resolved, *non obstante* Dr. Parkinson's declaration, who might, they argued, have been deceived, to have the body exhumed in order to a post-mortem examination as to the true cause of death. If the parents voluntarily agreed to this course, a judicial application to enforce it would be unnecessary, and all doubts on the matter could be quietly set at rest. I thought the proposal, under the circumstances, reasonable, and called on Mr. and Mrs. Andrews to obtain their concurrence. Mrs. Andrews was, I found, absent in the country, but her husband was at home; and he, on hearing the proposal, was, I thought, a good deal startled—shocked rather—a natural emotion perhaps.

'Who—who,' he said, after a few moments' silent

reflection—‘who is to conduct this painful, revolting inquiry?’

‘Dr. Parkinson will be present, with Mr. Humphrey, the surgeon, and Dr. Curtis, the newly-appointed physician to the assurance office, in place of Dr. Morgan, who died, as you are aware, a short time since of cholera.’

‘True. Ah, well, then,’ he answered almost with alacrity, ‘be it as they wish. Dr. Parkinson will see fair-play.’

The examination was effected, and the result was a confirmation, beyond doubt or quibble, that death, as Dr. Parkinson had declared, had been solely occasioned by cholera. The assurance company still hesitated; but as this conduct could now only be looked upon as perverse obstinacy, we served them with a writ at once. They gave in; and the money was handed over to Mr. Jesse Andrews, whose joy at his sudden riches did not, I was forced to admit, appear to be in the slightest degree damped by any feeling of sadness for the loss of an only child.

We wrote to inform Mr. Archibald Andrews of these occurrences, and to request further instructions with regard to the annuity hitherto paid to his cousin. A considerable time would necessarily elapse before an answer could be received, and in the meantime Mr. Jesse Andrews plunged headlong into the speculation he had been long hankering to engage in, and was, he informed me a few weeks afterwards, on the royal road to a magnificent fortune.

Clouds soon gathered over this brilliant prospect. The partner, whose persuasive tongue and brilliant imagination had induced Mr. Andrews to join him

with his four thousand pounds, proved to be an arrant cheat and swindler; and Mr. Andrews' application to us for legal help and redress was just too late to prevent the accomplished dealer in moonshine and delusion from embarking at Liverpool for America, with every penny of the partnership funds in his pockets!

A favourable reply from Mr. Archibald Andrews had now become a question of vital importance to his cousin, who very impatiently awaited its arrival. It came at last. Mr. Andrews had died rather suddenly at Bombay a short time before my letter arrived there, after executing in triplicate a will, of which one of the copies was forwarded to me. By this instrument, his property—about thirty-five thousand pounds, the greatest portion of which had been remitted from time to time for investment in the British funds—was disposed of as follows:—Five thousand pounds to his Cousin Jesse Andrews, for the purpose of educating and maintaining Archibald Andrews, the testator's godson, till he should have attained the age of twenty-one, and the whole of the remaining thirty thousand pounds to be then paid over to Archibald, with accumulated interest. In the event, however, of the death of his godson, the entire property was devised to another more distant and wealthier cousin, Mr. Newton and *his* son Charles, on precisely similar conditions, with the exception that an annuity of seventy pounds, payable to Jesse Andrews and his wife during their lives, was charged upon it.

Two letters were despatched the same evening—one to the fortunate cousin, Mr. Newton, who lived within what was then known as the twopenny post

delivery, and another to Mr. Jesse Andrews, who had taken up his temporary abode in a cottage near St. Alban's, Hertfordshire. These missives informed both gentlemen of the arrival of the Indian mail, and the, to them, important despatches it contained.

Mr. Newton was early at the office on the following morning, and perused the will with huge content. He was really quite sorry, though, for poor Cousin Jesse: the loss of his son was a sad stroke, much worse than this of a fortune, which he might have expected to follow as a matter of course. And the annuity, Mr. Newton thoughtfully observed, was, after all, no contemptible provision for two persons, without family, and of modest requirements.

A very different scene was enacted when, late in the evening, and just as I was about to leave the office, Mr. Jesse Andrews rushed in, white as a sheet, haggard, and wild with passion. 'What devil's fables are these you write me?' he burst forth the instant he had gained the threshold of the room. 'How dare you,' he went on almost shrieking with fury—'how dare you attempt to palm off these accursed lies on me? Archy rich—rich—and I—— But it is a lie! An infernal device got up to torture me—to drive me wild, distracted—mad.' The excited man literally foamed with rage, and so astonished was I, that it was a minute or two before I could speak or move. At last I rose, closed the door, for the clerks in the outer office were hearers and witnesses of this outbreak, and led the way to an inner and more private apartment. 'Come with me, Mr. Andrews,' I said, 'and let us talk this matter calmly ever.'

He mechanically followed, threw himself into a

chair, and listened with frenzied impatience to the reading of the will.

'A curse is upon me,' he shouted, jumping up as I concluded: 'the curse of God—a judgment upon the crime I but the other day committed—a crime, as I thought—dolt, idiot that I was—so cunningly contrived, so cleverly executed! Fool, villain, madman that I have been; for now, when fortune is tendered for my acceptance, I dare not put forth my hand to grasp it: fortune, too, not only for me, but— Oh God, it will kill us both, Martha as well as me, though I alone am to blame for this infernal chance!'

This outburst appeared to relieve him, and he sank back into his chair somewhat calmer. I could understand nothing of all that rhapsody, knowing as I did that his son Archibald had died from natural causes. 'It is a severe blow,' I said, in as soothing a tone as I could assume; 'a very great disappointment: still, you are secured from extreme poverty—from anything like absolute want'—

'It is not that—it is not that!' he broke in, though not quite so wildly as before. 'Look you, Mr. Sharp, I will tell you all! There may be some mode of extrication from this terrible predicament, and I must have your advice professionally upon it.'

'Go on; I will advise you to the best of my ability.'

'Here it is, then: Archy, my son Archy, is alive!—alive! and well in health as either you or I!'

I was thunderstruck. Here was indeed a revelation.

'Alive and well,' continued Andrews. 'Listen: when the cholera began to spread so rapidly, I bethought me of insuring the boy's life in case

of the worst befalling, but not, as I hope for mercy, with the slightest thought of harming a hair of his head. This was done. Very soon the terrific disease approached our neighbourhood, and my wife took Archy to a country lodging, returning herself the same evening. The next day our only servant was attacked, and died. A few hours after that, our first-floor lodger, a widow of the name of Mason, who had been with us but a very short time, was attacked. She suffered dreadfully; and her son, a boy about the age of Archy, and with just his hair and complexion, took ill also. The woman was delirious with pain; and before effective medical aid could be obtained—she was seized in the middle of the night—she expired. Her son, who had been removed into another room, became rapidly worse, and we sent for Dr. Parkinson: the poor fellow was also partially delirious with pain, and clung piteously round my wife's neck, calling her mother, and imploring her to relieve him. Dr. Parkinson arrived, and at first sight of the boy, said, "Your son is very ill, Mrs. Andrews—I fear past recovery; but we will see what can be done." I swear to you, Mr. Sharp, that it was not till this moment the device which has ruined us flashed across my brain. I cautioned my wife in a whisper not to undeceive the doctor, who prescribed the most active remedies, and was in the room when the lad died. You know the rest: and now, sir, tell me, can anything be done—any device suggested to retrieve this miserable blunder, this terrible mistake?

'This infamous crime, you should say, Mr. Andrews,' I replied; 'for the commission of which you are liable to be transported for life.'

‘ Yes, crime; no doubt that is the true word! But must the innocent child suffer for his father’s offence?’

‘ That is the only consideration that could induce me to wag a finger in the business. Like many other clever rogues, you are caught in the trap you lured for others. Come to me to-morrow: I will think over the matter between this and then; but at present I can say nothing. Stay,’ I added, as his hand was on the door; ‘ the identity of your son can be proved, I suppose, by better evidence than your own?’

‘ Certainly, certainly.’

‘ That will do, then; I will see you in the morning.’

If it should cross the mind of any reader that I ought to have given this self-confessed felon into custody, I beg to remind him that for the reasons previously stated, such a course on my part was out of the question—impossible; and that had it *not* been impossible I should do so, Mr. Jesse Andrews would not have intrusted me with his criminal secret. The only question now therefore, was how, without compromising this guilty client, the godfather’s legacy could be secured for the innocent son.

A conference the next morning with Mr. Flint resulted in our sending for Mr. Jesse Andrews, and advising him, for fear of accidents or miscarriage in our plans, to betake himself to the kingdom of France for a short time. We had then no treaty of extradition with that country. As soon as I knew he was safely out of the realm, I waited upon the insurance people.

‘ The money ought not to have been received by

Jesse Andrews, you say, Mr. Sharp?' observed the managing gentleman, looking keenly in my face.

'Precisely. It ought not to have been received by him.'

'And *why* not, Mr. Sharp?'

'That is quite an unnecessary question, and one that you know I should not answer if I could. That which chiefly concerns you is, that I am ready to return the four thousand pounds at once, here on the spot, and that delays are dangerous. If you refuse, why of course—and I rose from my chair—I must take back the money.'

'Stay—stay! I will just consult with one or two gentlemen, and be with you again almost immediately.'

In about five minutes he returned. 'Well, Mr. Sharp,' he said, 'we had, I suppose, better take the money—obtained, as you say, by mistake.'

'Not at all; I said nothing about mistake. I told you it ought not to have been received by Andrews!'

'Well—well; I understand. I must, I suppose, give you a receipt?'

'Undoubtedly; and, if you please, precisely in this form.'

I handed him a copy on a slip of paper. He ran it over, smiled, transcribed it on a stamp, signed it, and as I handed him a cheque for the amount, placed it in my hands. We mutually bowed, and I went my way.

Notwithstanding Mr. Newton's opposition, who was naturally furious at the unexpected turn the affair had taken, the identity of the boy—whom that gentleman persisted in asserting to be dead and

buried—was clearly established; and Mr. Archibald Andrews, on the day he became of age, received possession of his fortune. The four thousand pounds had of course been repaid out of Jesse Andrews' legacy. That person has, so to speak, since skulked through life a mark for the covert scorn of every person acquainted with the very black transaction here recorded. This was doubtless a much better fate than he deserved; and in strict, or poetical justice, his punishment ought unquestionably to have been much greater—more apparent also, than it was, for example sake. But I am a man not of fiction, but of fact, and consequently relate events, not as they precisely ought, but as they *do*, occasionally occur in lawyers' offices, and other unpoetical nooks and corners of this prosaic, matter-of-fact, working-day world.

JANE ECCLES.

THE criminal business of the office was, during the first three or four years of our partnership, entirely superintended by Mr. Flint; he being more *au fait*, from early practice, than myself in the art and mystery of prosecuting and defending felons, and I was thus happily relieved of duties which, in the days when George III. was king, were frequently very oppressive and revolting. The criminal practitioner dwelt in an atmosphere tainted alike with cruelty and crime, and pulsating alternately with merciless decrees of death, and the shrieks and wailings of sentenced guilt. And not always guilt! There exist many records of proofs, incontestable, but obtained too late, of innocence having been legally strangled on the gallows in other cases than that of Eliza Fenning. How could it be otherwise with a criminal code crowded in every line with penalties of death, nothing

but—death? Juster, wiser times have dawned upon us, in which truer notions prevail of what man owes to man, even when sitting in judgment on transgressors; and this we owe, let us not forget, to the exertions of a band of men who, undeterred by the sneers of the reputedly wise and *practical* men of the world, and the taunts of ‘influential’ newspapers, persisted in teaching that the rights of property could be more firmly cemented than by the shedding of blood—law, justice, personal security more effectually vindicated than by the gallows. Let me confess that I also was, for many years, amongst the mockers, and sincerely held such ‘theorists’ and ‘dreamers’ as Sir Samuel Romilly and his fellow-workers in utter contempt. Not so my partner Mr. Flint. Constantly in the presence of criminal judges and juries, he had less confidence in the unerring verity of their decisions than persons less familiar with them, or who see them only through the medium of newspapers. Nothing could exceed his distress of mind if, in cases in which he was prosecuting attorney, a convict died persisting in his innocence, or without a full confession of guilt. And to such a pitch did this morbidly-sensitive feeling at length arrive, that he all at once refused to undertake, or in any way meddle with, criminal prosecutions, and they were consequently turned over to our head clerk, with occasional assistance from me if there happened to be a press of business of the sort. Mr. Flint still, however, retained a monopoly of the *defences*, except when, from some temporary cause or other, he happened to be otherwise engaged, when they fell to me. One of these I am about to relate, the result of which, whatever other impression it produced,

thoroughly cured me—as it may the reader—of any propensity to sneer or laugh at criminal-law reformers and denouncers of the gallows.

One forenoon, during the absence of Mr. Flint in Wiltshire, a Mrs. Margaret Davies called at the office, in apparently great distress of mind. This lady, I must premise, was an old, or at all events an elderly maiden, of some four-and-forty years of age—I have heard a very intimate female friend of hers say she would never see fifty again, but this was spite—and possessed of considerable house property in rather poor localities. She found abundant employment for energies which might otherwise have turned to cards and scandal, in collecting her weekly, monthly, and quarterly rents, and in promoting, or fancying she did, the religious and moral welfare of her tenants. Very barefaced, I well knew, were the impositions practised upon her credulous good-nature in money matters, and I strongly suspected the spiritual and moral promises and performances of her motley tenantry exhibited as much discrepancy as those pertaining to rent. Still, deceived or cheated as she might be, good Mrs. Davies never wearied in what she conceived to be well-doing, and was ever ready to pour balm and oil into the wounds of the sufferer, however self-inflicted or deserved.

‘What is the matter now?’ I asked, as soon as the good lady was seated, and had untied and loosened her bonnet, and thrown back her shawl, fast walking having heated her prodigiously. ‘Nothing worse than transportation is, I hope, likely to befall any of those interesting clients of yours?’

‘You are a hard-hearted man, Mr. Sharp,’ replied

Mrs. Davies between a smile and a cry ; ‘ but being a lawyer, that is of course natural, and, as I am not here to consult you as a Christian, of no consequence.’

‘ Complimentary, Mrs. Davies ; but pray go on.’

‘ You know Jane Eccles, one of my tenants in Bank Buildings : the embroideress who adopted her sister’s orphan child ?’

‘ I remember her name. She obtained, if I recollect rightly, a balance of wages for her due to the child’s father, a mate, who died at sea. Well, what has befallen her ?’

‘ A terrible accusation has been preferred against her,’ rejoined Mrs. Davies ; ‘ but as for a moment believing it, that is quite out of the question. Jane Eccles,’ continued the warm-hearted lady, at the same time extracting a crumpled newspaper from the miscellaneous contents of her reticule—‘ Jane Eccles works hard from morning till night, keeps herself to herself ; her little nephew and her rooms are always as clean and nice as a new pin ; she attends church regularly ; and pays her rent punctually to the day. This disgraceful story, therefore,’ she added, placing the journal in my hands, ‘ *cannot* be true.’

I glanced over the police news : ‘ Uttering forged Bank-of-England notes, knowing them to be forged,’ I exclaimed ; ‘ the devil !’

‘ There’s no occasion to be spurting that name out so loudly, Mr. Sharp,’ said Mrs. Davies with some asperity, ‘ especially in a lawyer’s office. People have been wrongfully accused before to-day, I suppose ?’

I was intent on the report, and not answering, she continued, ‘ I heard nothing of it till I read the shameful account in the paper half an hour ago. The

poor slandered girl was, I dare say, afraid or ashamed to send for me.'

'This appears to be a very bad case, Mrs. Davies,' I said at length. 'Three forged ten-pound notes changed in one day at different shops each time, under the pretence of purchasing articles of small amount, and another ten-pound note found in her pocket! All that has, I must say, a very ugly look.'

'I don't care,' exclaimed Mrs. Davies, quite fiercely, 'if it looks as ugly as sin, or if the whole Bank of England was found in her pocket! I know Jane Eccles well: she nursed me last spring through the fever; and I would be upon my oath that the whole story, from beginning to end, is an invention of the devil, or something worse.'

'Jane Eccles,' I persisted, 'appears to have been unable or unwilling to give the slightest explanation as to how she became possessed of the spurious notes. Who is this brother of hers, "of such highly respectable appearance," according to the report, who was permitted a private interview with her previous to the examination?'

'She has no brother that I have ever heard of,' said Mrs. Davies. 'It must be a mistake of the papers.'

'That is not likely. You observed, of course, that she was fully committed—and no wonder!'

Mrs. Davies's faith in the young woman's integrity was not to be shaken by any evidence save that of her own bodily eyes, and I agreed to see Jane Eccles on the morrow, and make the best arrangements for the defence—at Mrs. Davies's charge—which the circumstances, and the short time I should have for preparation—the Old Bailey session would be on in a

few days—permitted. The matter so far settled, Mrs. Margaret hurried off to see what had become of little Henry, the prisoner's nephew.

I visited Jane Eccles the next day in Newgate. She was a well-grown young woman of about two or three-and-twenty—not exactly pretty, perhaps, but very well looking. Her brown hair was plainly worn, without a cap, and the expression of her face was, I thought, one of sweetness and humility, contradicted in some degree by rather harsh lines about the mouth, denoting strong will and purpose. As a proof of the existence of this last characteristic, I may here mention that when her first overweening confidence had yielded to doubt, she, although dotingly fond of her nephew, at this time about eight years of age, firmly refused to see him, 'in order,' she once said to me, and the thought brought a deadly pallor to her face—'in order that, should the worst befall, her memory might not be involuntarily connected in his mind with images of dungeons, and disgrace, and shame.' Jane Eccles had received what is called in the country 'a good schooling,' and the books Mrs. Davies had lent her she had eagerly perused. She was therefore, to a certain extent, a cultivated person; and her speech and manners were mild, gentle, and, so to speak, religious. I generally found, when I visited her, a Bible or prayer-book in her hand. This, however, from my experience, comparatively slight though it was, did not much impress me in her favour—devotional sentiment so easily, for a brief time, assumed, being in nine such cases out of ten a hypocritical deceit. Still she, upon the whole, made a decidedly favourable impression on me, and I no longer so much wondered at the bigotry

of unbelief manifested by Mrs. Davies in behalf of her apparently amiable and grateful protégée.

But beyond the moral doubt thus suggested of the prisoner's guilt, my interviews with her utterly failed to extract anything from her in rebutment of the charge upon which she was about to be arraigned. At first she persisted in asserting that the prosecution was based upon manifest error; that the impounded notes, instead of being forged, were genuine Bank-of-England paper. It was some time before I succeeded in convincing her that this hope, to which she so eagerly, desperately clung, was a fallacious one. I did so at last; and either, thought I, as I marked her varying colour and faltering voice, "either you are a consummate actress, or else the victim of some frightful delusion or conspiracy."

"I will see you, if you please, to-morrow," she said, looking up from the chair upon which, with her head bowed and her face covered with her hands, she had been seated for several minutes in silence. "My thoughts are confused now, but to-morrow I shall be more composed; better able to decide if—to talk, I mean, of this unhappy business."

I thought it better to comply without remonstrance, and at once took my leave.

When I returned the next afternoon, the governor of the prison informed me that the brother of my client, James Eccles, quite a dashing gentleman, had had a long interview with her. He had left about two hours before, with the intention, he said, of calling upon me.

I was conducted to the room where my conferences with the prisoner usually took place. In a few minutes she appeared, much flushed and excited, it seemed to

be alternately with trembling joy and hope, and doubt and nervous fear.

‘Well,’ I said, ‘I trust you are now ready to give me your unreserved confidence, without which, be assured, that any reasonable hope of a successful issue from the peril in which you are involved is out of the question.’

The varying emotions I have noticed were clearly traceable as they swept over her tell-tale countenance during the minute or so that elapsed before she spoke.

‘Tell me candidly, sir,’ she said at last, ‘whether, if I owned to you that the notes were given to me by a—a person, whom I cannot, if I would, produce, to purchase various articles at different shops, and return him—the person I mean—the change; and that I made oath this was done by me in all innocence of heart, as the God of heaven and earth truly knows it was, it would avail me?’

‘Not in the least,’ I replied, angry at such trifling. ‘How can you ask such a question? We must *find* the person who, you intimate, has deceived you, and placed your life in peril; and if that can be proved hang him instead of you. I speak plainly, Miss Eccles,’ I added in a milder tone; ‘perhaps you may think unfeelingly, but there is no further time for playing with this dangerous matter. To-morrow a true bill will be found against you, and your trial may then come on immediately. If you are careless for yourself, you ought to have some thought for the sufferings of your excellent friend Mrs. Davies; for your nephew, soon perhaps to be left friendless and destitute.’

‘Oh spare me—spare me!’ sobbed the unhappy young woman, sinking nervelessly into a seat. ‘Have

lay upon me, wretched, bewildered as I am!" To relieve her, and after a while she said, "It is useful, in prolonging this interview. I could not, I solemnly assure you, if I would, tell you where to search for the person of whom I spoke. And," she added, with the lines about her mouth of which I have spoken grew distinct and rigid, "I would not if I could. What indeed would it, as I have been told and believe, avail, but to cause the death of deceived innocent persons instead of one? Besides," she continued, trying to speak with firmness, and press the shoulder which crept over and shook her with agony—"besides, whatever the verdict, the penalty will not, cannot, I am sure, I know, be—be—"

I understood her plainly enough, although her resolution failed to sustain her through the sentence.

"Who is this brother, James Eccles he calls him whom you saw at the police-office, and who has to been here, I understand—once to-day?"

A quick start revealed the emotion with which I heard the question, and her dilated eyes rested upon me for a moment with eager scrutiny. She speedily recovered her presence of mind, and with her eyes again fixed on the floor, said in a quivering voice, "My brother! Yes—as you say—my brother."

"Mrs. Davies says you have no brother!" I said rejoined.

"Good Mrs. Davies," she replied in a tone scarcely above a whisper, and without raising her head, "do not know all our family."

A subterfuge was, I was confident, concealed in the words; but after again and again urging her to confess in me, and finding warning and persuasion alike un-

less, I withdrew discomfited and angry; and withal as much concerned and grieved as baffled and indignant. On going out, I arranged with the governor that the 'brother,' if he again made his appearance, should be detained, *bongré malgré*, till my arrival. Our precaution was too late: he did not reappear; and so little notice had any one taken of his person, that to advertise a description of him, with a reward for his apprehension, was hopeless.

A true bill was found, and two hours afterwards Jane Eccles was placed in the dock. The trial did not last more than twenty minutes, at the end of which an unhesitating verdict of guilty was returned, and she was duly sentenced to be hanged by the neck till she was dead. We had retained the ablest counsel practising in the court, but, with no tangible defence, their efforts were merely thrown away. Upon being asked what she had to say why the sentence of the law should not be carried into effect, she repeated her previous statement—that the notes had been given her to change by a person in whom she reposed the utmost confidence; and that she had not the slightest thought of evil or fraud in what she did. That person, however, she repeated once more, could not be produced. Her assertions only excited a derisive smile; and all necessary forms having been gone through, she was removed from the bar.

The unhappy woman bore the ordeal through which she had just passed with much firmness. Once only, whilst sentence was being passed, her high-strung resolution appeared to falter and give way. I was watching her intently, and I observed that she suddenly directed a piercing look towards a distant part

of the crowded court. In a moment her eye lightened, the expression of extreme horror which had momentarily darkened her countenance passed away, and her partial composure returned. I had instinctively, as it were, followed her glance, and thought I detected a tall man enveloped in a cloak engaged in dumb momentary communication with her. I jumped up from my seat, and hastened as quickly as I could through the thronged passages to the spot, and looked eagerly around, but the man, whoever he might be, was gone.

The next act in this sad drama was the decision of the Privy Council upon the recorder's report. It came. Several were reprieved, but amongst them was *not* Jane Eccles. She and nine others were to perish at eight o'clock on the following morning.

The anxiety and worry inseparable from this most unhappy affair, which, from Mr. Flint's protracted absence, I had exclusively to bear, fairly knocked me up, and on the evening of the day on which the decision of the council was received, I went to bed much earlier than usual, and really ill. Sleep I could not, and I was tossing restlessly about, vainly endeavouring to banish from my mind the gloomy and terrible images connected with the wretched girl and her swiftly-coming fate, when a quick tap sounded on the door, and a servant's voice announced that one of the clerks had brought a letter which the superscription directed to be read without a moment's delay. I sprang out of bed, snatched the letter, and eagerly ran it over. It was from the Newgate chaplain, a very worthy, humane gentleman, and stated that, on hearing the result of the deliberations of the Privy

Council, all the previous stoicism and fortitude exhibited by Jane Eccles had completely given way, and she had abandoned herself to the wildest terror and despair. As soon as she could speak coherently, she implored the governor with frantic earnestness to send for me. As this was not only quite useless in the opinion of that official, but against the rules, the prisoner's request was not complied with. The chaplain, however, thinking it might be as well that I should know of her desire to see me, had of his own accord sent me this note. He thought that possibly the sheriffs would permit me to have a brief interview with the condemned prisoner in the morning, if I arrived sufficiently early; and although it could avail nothing as regarded her fate in this world, still it might perhaps calm the frightful tumult of emotion by which she was at present tossed and shaken, and enable her to meet the inevitable hour with fortitude and resignation.

It was useless to return to bed after receiving such a communication, and I forthwith dressed myself, determined to sit up and read, if I could, till the hour at which I might hope to be admitted to the gaol should strike. Slowly and heavily the dark night limped away, and as the first rays of the cold wintry dawn reached the earth, I sallied forth. A dense, brutal crowd were already assembled in front of the prison, and hundreds of well-dressed sight-seers occupied the opposite windows, morbidly eager for the rising of the curtain upon the mournful tragedy about to be enacted. I obtained admission without much difficulty, but, till the arrival of the sheriffs, no conference with the condemned prisoners could be possibly permitted. Those

important functionalities happened on this morning to arrive unusually late, and I paced up and down the paved corridor in a fever of impatience and anxiety. They were at last announced, but before I could, in the hurry and confusion, obtain speech of either of them, the dismal bell tolled out, and I felt with a shudder that it was no longer possible to effect my object. 'Perhaps it is better so,' observed the reverend chaplain in a whisper. 'She has been more composed for the last two or three hours, and is now, I trust, in a better frame of mind for death.' I turned, sick at heart, to leave the place, and in my agitation missing the right way, came directly in view of the terrible procession. Jane Eccles saw me, and a terrific scream, followed by frantic heartrending appeals to me to save her, burst with convulsive effort from her white quivering lips. Never will the horror of that moment pass from my remembrance. I staggered back, as if every spasmodic word struck me like a blow; and then, directed by one of the turnkeys, sped in an opposite direction as fast as my trembling limbs could carry me—the shrieks of the wretched victim, the tolling of the dreadful bell, and the obscene jeers and mocks of the foul crowd through which I had to force my way, evoking a confused tumult of disgust and horror in my brain, which, if long continued, would have driven me mad. On reaching home, I was bled freely, and got to bed. This treatment, I have no doubt, prevented a violent access of fever; for, as it was, several days passed before I could be safely permitted to re-engage in business.

On revisiting the office, a fragment of a letter written by Jane Eccles a few hours previous to her death, and

evidently addressed to Mrs. Davies, was placed by Mr. Flint, who had by this time returned, before me. The following is an exact copy of it, with the exception that the intervals which I have marked with dots, were filled with erasures and blots, and that every word seemed to have been traced by a hand smitten with palsy :—

‘ FROM MY DEATH-PLACE, *Midnight.*

‘ DEAR MADAM—No, beloved friend, mother let me call you Oh kind, gentle mother, I am to die to be killed in a few hours by cruel men!—I, so young, so unprepared for death, and yet guiltless! Oh never doubt that I am guiltless of the offence for which they will have the heart to hang me Nobody, they say, can save me now; yet if I could see the lawyer I have been deceived, cruelly deceived, madam—buoyed up by lying hopes, till just now the thunder burst, and I—oh God! As they spoke, the fearful chapter in the Testament came bodily before me—the rending of the veil in twain, the terrible darkness, and the opened graves! I did not write for this, but my brain aches and dazzles It is too late—too late, they all tell me! Ah, if these dreadful laws were not so swift, I might yet—but no; *he* clearly proved to me how useless I must not think of that It is of my nephew, of your Henry, child of my affections, that I would speak. Oh, would that I But hark!—they are coming The day has dawned to me the day of judgment!’

This incoherent scrawl only confirmed my previous suspicions, but it was useless to dwell further on the

melancholy subject. The great axe had fallen, and whether justly or unjustly, would, I feared, as in many, very many other cases, never be clearly ascertained in this world. I was mistaken. Another case of 'uttering forged Bank-of-England notes, knowing them to be forged,' which came under our cognisance a few months afterwards, revived the fading memory of Jane Eccles's early doom, and cleared up every obscurity connected with it.

The offender in this new case was a tall, dark-complexioned, handsome man, of about thirty years of age, of the name of Justin Arnold. His lady mother, whose real name I shall conceal under that of Barton, retained us for her son's defence, and from her and other sources we learned the following particulars:—

Justin Arnold was the lady's son by a former marriage. Mrs. Barton, a still splendid woman, had, in second nuptials, espoused a very wealthy person, and from time to time had covertly supplied Justin Arnold's extravagance. This, however, from the wild course the young man pursued, could not be for ever continued, and, after many warnings, the supplies were stopped. Incapable of reformation, Justin Arnold, in order to obtain the means of dissipation, connected himself with a cleverly-organized band of swindlers and forgers, who so adroitly managed their nefarious business, that, till his capture, they had contrived to keep themselves clear of the law—the inferior tools and dupes having been alone caught in its fatal meshes. The defence, under these circumstances necessarily a difficult, almost impossible one, was undertaken by Mr. Flint, and conducted by him with his accustomed skill and energy.

I took a very slight interest in the matter, and heard very little concerning it till its judicial conclusion by the conviction of the offender, and his condemnation to death. The decision on the recorder's report was this time communicated to the authorities of Newgate on a Saturday, so that the batch ordered for execution, amongst whom was Justin Arnold, would not be hanged till the Monday morning. Rather late in the evening a note once more reached me from the chaplain of the prison. Justin Arnold wished to see me—*me*, not Mr. Flint. He had something of importance to communicate, he said, relative to a person in whom I had once felt great interest. It flashed across me that this Justin might be the 'brother' of Jane Eccles, and I determined to see him. I immediately sought out one of the sheriffs, and obtained an order empowering me to see the prisoner on the afternoon of the morrow (Sunday).

I found that the convict had expressed great anxiety lest I should decline to see him. My hoped-for visit was the only matter which appeared to occupy the mind or excite the care of the mocking, desperate young man; even the early and shameful termination of his own life on the morrow he seemed to be utterly reckless of. Thus prepared, I was the less surprised at the scene which awaited me in the prisoner's cell, where I found him in angry altercation with the pale affrighted chaplain.

I had never seen Justin Arnold before; this I was convinced of the instant I saw him; but he knew, and greeted me instantly by name. His swarthy, excited features were flushed and angry, and after briefly thanking me for complying with his wishes, he added

in a violent, rapid tone, 'This good man has been teasing me. He says, and truly, that I have defied God by my life; and now he wishes me to mock that inscrutable Being, on the eve of death, by words without sense, meaning, or truth!'

'No, no, no!' ejaculated the reverend gentleman. 'I exhorted you to true repentance, to peace, charity, to'——

'True repentance, peace, charity!' broke in the prisoner with a scornful burst: 'when my heart is full of rage, and bitterness, and despair! Give me *time* for this repentance which you say is so needful—time to lure back long since banished hope, and peace, and faith! Poh!—you but flout me with words without meaning. I am unfit, you say, for the presence of men, but quite fit for that of God, before whom you are about to arrogantly cast me! Be it so: my deeds upon my head! It is at least not my fault that I am hurled to judgment before the Eternal Judge himself commanded my presence there!'

'He may be unworthy to live,' murmured the scared chaplain, 'but oh how utterly unfit to die!'

'That is true,' rejoined Justin Arnold with undiminished vehemence. 'Those, if you will, are words of truth and sense: go you and preach them to the makers and executioners of English law. In the meantime I would speak privately with this gentleman.'

The reverend pastor, with a mute gesture of compassion, sorrow, and regret, was about to leave the cell, when he was stayed by the prisoner, who exclaimed, 'Now I think of it, you had better, sir, remain. The statement I am about to make cannot, for the sake of the victim's reputation, and for her friends' sake,

have too many witnesses. You both remember Jane Eccles?' A broken exclamation from both of us answered him, and he quickly added—'Ah, you already guess the truth, I see. Well, I do not wonder you should start and turn pale. It *was* a cruel, shameless deed—a dastardly murder if there was ever one. In as few words as possible, so you interrupt me not, I will relate *my* share in the atrocious business.' He spoke rapidly, and once or twice during the brief recital the moistened eye and husky voice betrayed emotions which his pride would have concealed.

'Jane and I were born in Hertfordshire, within a short distance of each other. I knew her from a child. She was better off then, I worse than we subsequently became—she by her father's bankruptcy, I by my mo——, by Mrs. Barton's wealthy marriage. She was about nineteen, I twenty-four, when I left the country for London. That she loved me with all the fervour of a trusting woman I well knew; and I had, too, for some time known that she must be either honourably wooed or not at all. That with me was out of the question, and, as I told you, I came about that time to London. You can, I dare say, imagine the rest. We were—I and my friends I mean—at a loss for agents to dispose of our wares, and at the same time pressed for money. I met Jane Eccles by accident. Genteel, of graceful address and winning manners, she was just fitted for our purpose. I feigned reawakened love, proffered marriage, and a home across the Atlantic, as soon as certain trifling but troublesome affairs which momentarily harassed me were arranged. She believed me. I got her to change a considerable number of notes under various pretexts, but that they were forged

she had not and could not have the remotest suspicion. You know the catastrophe. After her apprehension I visited this prison as her brother, and buoyed her up to the last with illusions of certain pardon and release, whatever the verdict, through the influence of my wealthy father-in-law, of our immediate union afterwards, and tranquil American home. It is needless to say more. She trusted me, and I sacrificed her—less flagrant instances of a like nature occur every day. And now, gentlemen, I would fain be alone.’

‘Remorseless villain!’ I could not help exclaiming under my breath as he moved away.

He turned quickly back, and looking me in the face, without the slightest anger, said, ‘An execrable villain if you like—not a remorseless one! Her death alone sits near, and troubles my to all else hardened conscience. And let me tell you, reverend sir,’ he continued, resuming his former bitterness as he addressed the chaplain—‘let me tell you that it was not the solemn words of the judge the other day, but her pale, reproachful image, standing suddenly beside me in the dock, just as she looked when I passed my last deception on her, that caused the tremor and affright, complacently attributed by that grave functionary to his own sepulchral eloquence. After all, her death cannot be exclusively laid to my charge. Those who tried her would not believe her story, and yet it was true as death. Had they not been so confident in their own unerring wisdom, they might have doomed her to some punishment short of the scaffold, and could now have retrieved their error. But I am weary, and would, I repeat, be alone. Farewell!’ He threw himself on the rude pallet, and we silently withdrew.

A paper embodying Justin Arnold's declaration was forwarded to the Secretary of State, and duly acknowledged, accompanied by an official expression of mild regret that it had not been made in time to save the life of Jane Eccles. No further notice was taken of the matter, and the record of the young woman's judicial sacrifice still doubtless encumbers the archives of the Home Office, forming, with numerous others of like character, the dark, sanguine background upon which the achievements of the great and good men who have so successfully purged the old Draco code that now a faint vestige only of the old barbarism remains, stand out in bright relief and changeless lustre.

THE PUZZLE.

TEMPUS FUGIT! The space of but a few brief yesterdays seems to have passed since the occurrence of the following out-of-the-way incidents — out-of-the-way even in our profession, fertile as it is in startling experiences; and yet the faithful and unerring tell-tale and monitor, Anno Domini 1851, instructs me that a quarter of a century has nearly slipped by since the first scene in the complicated play of circumstances opened upon me. The date I remember well, for the Tower guns had been proclaiming with their thunder-throats the victory of Navarino but a short time before a clerk announced, 'William Martin, with a message from Major Stewart.'

This William Martin was a rather sorry curiosity in his way. He was now in the service of our old client Major Stewart; and a tall, good-looking fellow enough, spite of a very decided cast in his eyes, which the

rascal, when in his cups—no unusual occurrence—declared he had caught from his former masters—Edward Thorneycroft, Esq., an enormously rich and exceedingly yellow East India director, and his son, Mr. Henry Thorneycroft, with whom, until lately transferred to Major Stewart's service, he had lived from infancy—his mother and father having formed part of the elder Thorneycroft's establishment when he was born. He had a notion in his head that he had better blood in his veins than the world supposed, and was excessively fond of aping the gentleman; and this he did, I must say, with the ease and assurance of a stage-player. His name was scarcely out of the clerk's lips when he entered the inner office with a great effort at steadiness and deliberation, closed the door very carefully and importantly, hung his hat with much precision on a brass peg, and then steadying himself by the door-handle, surveyed the situation and myself with staring, lack-lustre eyes and infinite gravity. I saw what was the matter.

'You have been in the "sun," Mr. Martin?'

A wink, inexpressible by words, replied to me, and I could see by the motion of the fellow's lips that speech was attempted; but it came so thick that it was several minutes before I made out that he meant to say the British had been knocking the Turks about like bricks, and that he had been patriotically drinking the healths of the said British or bricks.

'Have the goodness, sir, to deliver your message, and then instantly leave the office.'

'Old Tho-o-o-rney,' was the hiccoughed reply, 'has smoked the—the plot. Young Thorney's done for. Ma-a-ried in a false name; tra-ansportation—of course.'

CHAPTER IV

The first thing I noticed when I awoke was a sense of peace and quiet. The room was dimly lit, and the air was still. I looked around, trying to remember where I was, but my mind was blank. It was only when I heard the sound of a door opening that I realized I was in a hospital. A nurse came in, and I told her my name. She led me to a room where I was to stay. The room was simple and clean, with a bed, a chair, and a table. I sat on the bed, feeling a little better. The nurse came back and told me that I was to stay in the hospital for a few days. I nodded, not really listening. I was too tired to care. The next day, I was visited by a friend. He came to see me and to tell me that I was to stay in the hospital for a few days. I nodded, not really listening. I was too tired to care. The next day, I was visited by a friend. He came to see me and to tell me that I was to stay in the hospital for a few days. I nodded, not really listening. I was too tired to care.

disease. A slight flush tinged the mortal pallor of his face as I entered, and the eyes emitted a slightly-reproachful expression.

‘It is not more, my dear sir,’ I replied softly but eagerly to his look, ‘than a quarter of an hour ago that I received your message.’

I do not know whether he comprehended or even distinctly heard what I said, for his feeble but extremely anxious glance was directed whilst I spoke to a large oil-portrait of Rosamond Stewart, suspended over the mantelpiece. The young lady was a splendid, dark-eyed beauty, and of course the pride and darling of her father. Presently wrenching, as it were, his eyes from the picture, he looked in my face with great earnestness, and bending my ear close to his lips, I heard him feebly and brokenly say, ‘A question to ask you, that’s all: read—read!’ His hand motioned towards a letter which lay open on the bed: I ran it over, and the major’s anxiety was at once explained. Rosamond Stewart had, I found, been a short time previously married in Scotland to Henry Thorneycroft, the son of the wealthy East India director. Finding his illness becoming serious, the major had anticipated the time and mode in which the young people had determined to break the intelligence to the irascible father of the bridegroom, and the result was the furious and angry letter in reply which I was perusing. Mr. Thorneycroft would never, he declared, recognise the marriage of his undutiful nephew—nephew, *not* son; for he was, the letter announced, the child of an only sister, whose marriage had also mortally offended Mr. Thorneycroft, and had been brought up from infancy as his (Mr. Thorneycroft’s)

son, in order that the hated name of Allerton, to which the boy was alone legally entitled, might never offend his ear. There was something added insinuating of a doubt of the legality of the marriage, in consequence of the misnomer of the bridegroom at the ceremony.

‘One question,’ muttered the major, as I finished the perusal of the letter: ‘Is Rosamond’s marriage legal?’

‘No question about it. How could any one suppose that an involuntary misdescription can affect such a contract?’

Enough—enough!’ he gasped. ‘A great load is gone!—the rest is with God. Beloved Rosamond’—— The slight whisper was no longer audible; sighs, momentarily becoming fainter and weaker, followed—ceased, and in little more than ten minutes after the last word was spoken life was extinct. I rang the bell, and turned to leave the room, and as I did so surprised Martin on the other side of the bed. He had been listening, screened by the thick damask curtains, and appeared to be a good deal sobered. I made no remark, and proceeded on down stairs. The man followed, and as soon as we had gained the hall said quickly, yet hesitatingly, ‘Sir, sir!’

‘Well, what have you to say?’

‘Nothing very particular, sir; but did I understand you to say just now that it was of no consequence if a man married in a false name?’

‘That depends upon circumstances. Why do you ask?’

‘Oh, nothing—nothing: only I have heard it’s transportation, especially if there’s money.’

‘Perhaps you are right. Anything else?’

‘No,’ said he, opening the door: ‘that’s all—mere curiosity.’

I heard nothing more of the family for some time, except with reference to Major Stewart’s personal property, about 4000*l.*, bequeathed to his daughter, with a charge thereon of an annuity of 20*l.* a year for Mrs. Leslie, the aged housekeeper; the necessary business connected with which we transacted. But about a twelvemonth after the major’s death, the marriage of the elder Thorneycroft with a widow of the same name as himself, and a cousin, the paper stated, was announced; and pretty nearly a year and a half subsequent to the appearance of this ominous paragraph, the decease of Mr. Henry Thorneycroft at Lausanne in Switzerland, who had left, it was added in the newspaper stock-phrase of journalism, a young widow and two sons to mourn their irreparable loss. Silence again, as far as we were concerned, settled upon the destinies of the descendants of our old military client, till one fine morning a letter from Dr. Hampton informed us of the sudden death by apoplexy, a few days previously, of the East India director. Dr. Hampton further hinted that he should have occasion to write us again in a day or two relative to the deceased’s affairs, which, owing to Mr. Thorneycroft’s unconquerable aversion to making a will, had, it was feared, been left in an extremely unsatisfactory state. Dr. Hampton had written to us at the widow’s request, in consequence of his having informed her that we had been the professional advisers of Major Stewart, and were in all probability those of his daughter, Mrs. Henry Allerton.

We did not quite comprehend the drift of this curious epistle ; but although not specially instructed, we determined to at once write to Mrs. Rosamond Thorneycroft or Allerton, who with her family was still abroad, and in the meantime take such formal steps in her behalf as might appear necessary.

We were not long in doubt as to the motives of the extremely civil application to ourselves on the part of the widow of the East India director. The deceased's wealth had been almost all invested in land, which went, he having died intestate, to his nephew's son, Henry Allerton ; and the personals in which the widow would share were consequently of very small amount. Mrs. Thorneycroft was therefore anxious to propose, through us, a more satisfactory and equitable arrangement. We could of course say nothing till the arrival of Mrs. Rosamond Allerton, for which, however, we had only a brief time to wait. There was, we found, no indisposition on that lady's part to act with generosity towards Mr. Thorneycroft's widow—a showy, vulgarish person, by the way, of about forty years of age—but there was a legal difficulty in the way, in consequence of the heir-at-law being a minor. Mrs. Thorneycroft became at length terribly incensed, and talked a good deal of angry nonsense about disputing the claim of Henry Allerton's son to the estates, on the ground that his marriage, having been contracted in a wrong name, was null and void. Several annoying paragraphs got in consequence into the Sunday newspapers, and these brought about a terrible disclosure.

About twelve o'clock one day the Widow Thorneycroft bounced unceremoniously into the office, dragging

in with her a comely and rather interesting-looking young woman, but of a decidedly rustic complexion and accent, and followed by a grave, middle-aged clergyman. The widow's large eyes sparkled with strong excitement, and her somewhat swarthy features were flushed with hot blood.

'I have brought you,' she burst out abruptly, 'the *real* Mrs. Allerton, and——'

'No, no!' interrupted the young woman, who appeared much agitated—'Thorneycroft, not Allerton.'

'I know, child, I know; but that is nothing to the purpose. This young person, Mr. Sharp, is, I repeat, the true and lawful Mrs. Henry Allerton.'

'Pooh!' I answered; 'do you take us for idiots? This,' I added with some sternness, 'is either a ridiculous misapprehension or an attempt at imposture, and I am very careless which it may be.'

'You are mistaken, sir,' rejoined the clergyman, mildly. 'This young woman was certainly married by me at Swindon church, Wilts, to a gentleman of the name of Henry Thorneycroft, who, it appears from the newspapers, confirmed by this lady, was no other than Mr. Henry Allerton. This marriage, we find, took place six months previously to that contracted with Rosamond Stewart. I have further to say that this young woman, Maria Emsbury, is a very respectable person, and that her marriage-portion, of a little more than eight hundred pounds, was given to her husband, whom she has only seen thrice since her marriage, to support himself till the death of his reputed father, constantly asserted by him to be imminent.'

'A story very smoothly told, and I have no doubt in your opinion quite satisfactory; but there is one

slight matter which I fancy you will find somewhat difficult of proof : I mean the identity of Maria Emsbury's husband with the son or nephew of the late Mr. Thorneycroft.'

'He always said he was the son of the rich East Indian, Mr. Thorneycroft,' said the young woman with a hysterical sob ; 'and here,' she added, 'is his picture in his wedding dress—that of an officer of the Gloucestershire Yeomanry. He gave it me the day before the wedding.'

I almost snatched the portrait. Sure enough it was a miniature of Henry Allerton : there could be no doubt about that.

Mr. Flint, who had been busy with some papers, here approached and glanced at the miniature.

I was utterly confounded, and my partner, I saw, was equally dismayed ; and no wonder, entertaining as we both did the highest respect and admiration for the high-minded and beautiful daughter of Major Stewart.

The Widow Thorneycroft's exultation was exuberant.

'As this only legal marriage,' said she, 'has been blessed with no issue, I am of course, as you must be aware, the legitimate heiress-at-law, as my deceased husband's nearest blood relative. I shall, however,' she added, 'take care to amply provide for my widowed niece-in-law.'

The young woman made a profound rustic courtesy, and tears of unaffected gratitude, I observed, filled her eyes.

The game was not, however, to be quite so easily surrendered as they appeared to imagine. 'Tut! tut!' exclaimed Mr. Flint, bluntly : 'this may be mere practice. Who knows how the portrait has been obtained?'

The girl's eyes flashed with honest anger. There was no practice about her I felt assured. 'Here are other proofs. My husband's signet-ring, left accidentally, I think, with me, and two letters which I from curiosity took out of his coat-pocket—the day, I am pretty sure it was, after we were married.'

'If this cumulative circumstantial evidence does not convince you, gentlemen,' added the Rev. Mr. Wishart, 'I have direct personal testimony to offer. You know Mr. Angerstein of Bath?'

'I do.'

'Well, Mr. Henry Thorneycroft or Allerton was at the time this marriage took place on a visit to that gentleman; and I myself saw the bridegroom, whom I had united a fortnight previously in Swindon church, walking arm-in-arm with Mr. Angerstein in Sydney Gardens, Bath. I was at some little distance, but I recognised both distinctly, and bowed. Mr. Angerstein returned my salutation, and he recollects the circumstance distinctly. The gentleman walking with him in the uniform of the Gloucestershire Yeomanry was, Mr. Angerstein is prepared to depose, Mr. Henry Thorneycroft or Allerton.'

'You waste time, reverend sir,' said Mr. Flint, with an affectation of firmness and unconcern he was, I knew, far from feeling. 'We are the attorneys of Mrs. Rosamond Allerton, and shall, I dare say, if you push us to it, be able to tear this ingeniously-coloured cobweb of yours to shreds. If you determine on going to law, your solicitor can serve us; we will enter an appearance, and our client will be spared unnecessary annoyance.'

They were about to leave, when, as ill-luck would

have it, one of the clerks, who, deceived by the momentary silence, and from not having been at home when the unwelcome visitors arrived, believed we were disengaged, opened the door, and admitted Mrs. Rosamond Allerton and her aunt, Miss Stewart. Before we could interpose with a word, the Widow Thorneycroft burst out with the whole story in a torrent of exultant volubility that it was impossible to check or restrain.

For a while contemptuous incredulity, indignant scorn, upheld the assailed lady; but as proof after proof was hurled at her, reinforced by the grave soberness of the clergyman and the weeping sympathy of the young woman, her firmness gave way, and she swooned in her aunt's arms. We should have more peremptorily interfered but for our unfortunate client's deprecatory gestures. She seemed determined to hear the worst at once. Now, however, we had the office cleared of the intruders without much ceremony, and as soon as the horror-stricken lady was sufficiently recovered, she was conducted to her carriage, and after arranging for an early interview on the morrow, was driven off.

I found our interesting, and, I feared, deeply-injured client much recovered from the shock which on the previous day had overwhelmed her; and although exceedingly pale—lustrously so, as polished Parian marble—and still painfully agitated, there was hope, almost confidence, in her eye and tone.

‘There is some terrible misapprehension in this frightful affair, Mr. Sharp,’ she began. ‘Henry, my husband, was utterly incapable of a mean or dishonest act, much less of such utter baseness as this of which he is accused. They also say, do they not,’ she con-

tinued, with a smile of haughty contempt, 'that he robbed the young woman of her poor dowry—some eight hundred pounds? A proper story!'

'That, I confess, from what little I knew of Mr. Henry Thorneycroft, stamps the whole affair as a fabrication; and yet the Reverend Mr. Wishart—a gentleman of high character, I understand—is very positive. The young woman, too, appeared truthful and sincere.'

'Yes; it cannot be denied. Let me say also—for it is best to look at the subject on its darkest side—I find, on looking over my letters, that my husband was staying with Mr. Angerstein at the time stated. He was also at that period in the Gloucestershire Yeomanry. I gave William Martin, but the other day, a suit of his regimentals very little the worse for wear.'

'You forget to state, Rosamond,' said Miss Stewart, who was sitting beside her niece, 'that Martin, who was with his young master at Bath, is willing to make oath that no such marriage took place as asserted at Swindon church.'

'That alone would, I fear, my good madam, very little avail. Can I see William Martin?'

'Certainly.' The bell was rung, and the necessary order given.

'This Martin is much changed for the better I hear.'

'O yes, entirely so,' said Miss Stewart. 'He is also exceedingly attached to us all, the children especially; and his grief and anger when informed of what had occurred thoroughly attest his faithfulness and sincerity.'

Martin entered, and was, I thought, somewhat con-

fused by my apparently unexpected presence. A look at his face and head dissipated a half-suspicion that had arisen in both Flint's mind and my own.

I asked him a few questions relative to the sojourn of his master at Bath, and then said: 'I wish you to go with me and see this Maria Emsbury.'

As I spoke, something seemed to attract Martin's attention in the street, and suddenly turning round, his arm swept a silver pastil-stand off the table. He stooped down to gather up the dispersed pastils, and as he did so, said in answer to my request, that he had not the slightest objection to do so.

'That being the case, we will set off at once, as she and her friends are probably at the office by this time. They are desirous of settling the matter off-hand,' I added with a smile, addressing Mrs. Allerton, 'and avoiding, if possible, the delays and uncertainties of the law.'

As I anticipated, the formidable trio were with Mr. Flint. I introduced Martin, and as I did so watched, with an anxiety I could hardly have given a reason for, the effect of his appearance upon the young woman. I observed nothing. He was evidently an utter stranger to her, although, from the involuntary flush which crossed his features, it occurred to me that he was in some way an accomplice with his deceased master in the cruel and infamous crime which had, I strongly feared, been perpetrated.

'Was this person present at your marriage?' I asked.

'Certainly not. But I think—now I look at him—that I have seen him somewhere—about Swindon it must have been.'

William Martin mumbled out that he had never been in Swindon; neither, he was sure, had his master.

‘What is that?’ said the girl looking sharply up, and suddenly colouring: ‘What is that?’

Martin, a good deal abashed, again mumbled out his belief that young Mr. Thorneycroft, as he was then called, had never been at Swindon.

The indignant scarlet deepened on the young woman’s face and temples, and she looked at Martin with fixed attention and surprise. Presently recovering, as if from some vague confusedness of mind, she said: ‘What you *believe* can be no consequence: truth is truth for all that.’

The Rev. Mr. Wishart here interposed, remarking that as it was quite apparent we were determined to defend the usurpation by Miss Rosamond Stewart—a lady to be greatly pitied, no doubt—of another’s right, it was useless to prolong or renew the interview; and all three took immediate leave. A few minutes afterwards Martin also departed, still vehemently asserting that no such marriage ever took place at Swindon or anywhere else.

No stone, as people say, was left unturned by us, in the hope of discovering some clue that might enable us to unravel the tangled web of coherent, yet, looking at the character of young Mr. Allerton, *improbable* circumstance. We were unsuccessful, and unfortunately many other particulars which came to light but deepened the adverse complexion of the case. Two respectable persons living at Swindon were ready to depose on oath that they had on more than one occasion seen Maria Emsbury’s sweetheart with Mr. Angerstein at

Bath; once especially at the theatre, upon the benefit-night of the great Edmund Kean, who had been playing there for a few nights.

The entire case, fully stated, was ultimately laid by us before eminent counsel—one of whom is now, by-the-by, a chief-justice—and we were advised that the evidence as set forth by us could not be contended against with any chance of success. This sad result was communicated by me to Mrs. Allerton, as she still unswervingly believed herself to be, and was borne with more constancy and firmness than I had expected. Her faith in her husband's truth and honour was not in the slightest degree shaken by the accumulated proofs. She would not however attempt to resist them before a court of law. Something would, she was confident, thereafter come to light that would vindicate the truth, and confiding in our zeal and watchfulness, she, her aunt, and children, would in the meantime shelter themselves from the gaze of the world in their former retreat at Lausanne.

This being the unhappy lady's final determination, I gave the other side notice that we should be ready on a given day to surrender possession of the house and effects in South Audley Street, which the Widow Thorneycroft had given up to her supposed niece-in-law and family on their arrival in England, and to re-obtain which, and thereby decide the whole question in dispute, legal proceedings had already been commenced.

On the morning appointed for the purpose—having taken leave of the ladies the day previously—I proceeded to South Audley Street, to formally give up possession, under protest however. The niece and

aunt were not yet gone. This, I found, was owing to Martin, who, according to the ladies, was so beside himself with grief and rage that he had been unable to expedite as he ought to have done the packing intrusted to his care. I was vexed at this, as the Widow Thornycroft, her *protégée*, and the Rev. Mr. Wishart, accompanied by a solicitor, were shortly expected; and it was desirable that a meeting of the antagonistic parties should be avoided. I descended to the lower regions to remonstrate with and hurry Martin, and found, as I feared, that his former evil habits had returned upon him. It was not yet twelve o'clock, and he was already partially intoxicated, and pale, trembling, and nervous from the effects, it was clear to me, of the previous night's debauch.

'Your mistress is grossly deceived in you!' I angrily exclaimed; 'and if my advice were taken, you would be turned out of the house at once without a character. There, don't attempt to bamboozle me with that nonsense; I've seen fellows crying drunk before now.'

He stammered out some broken excuses, to which I very impatiently listened; and so thoroughly muddled did his brain appear, that he either could not or would not comprehend the possibility of Mrs. Allerton and her children being turned out of house and home, as he expressed it, and over and over again asked me if nothing could yet be done to prevent it. I was completely disgusted with the fellow, and sharply bidding him hasten his preparations for departure, rejoined the ladies, who were by this time assembled in the back drawing-room, ready shawled and bonneted for their journey. It was a sad sight. Rosamond Stewart's

splendid face was shadowed by deep and bitter grief, borne, it is true, with pride and fortitude; but it was easy to see its throbbing pulsations through all the forced calmness of the surface. Her aunt, of a weaker nature, sobbed loudly in the fulness of her grief; and the children, shrinking instinctively in the chilling atmosphere of a great calamity, clung, trembling and half terrified, the eldest especially, to their mother. I did not insult them with phrases of condolence, but turned the conversation, if such it could be called, upon their future home and prospects in Switzerland. Some time had thus elapsed when my combative propensities were suddenly aroused by the loud dash of a carriage to the door, and the peremptory rat-tat-tat which followed. I felt my cheek flame as I said: 'They demand admittance as if in possession of an assured, decided right. It is not yet too late to refuse possession, and take the chances of the law's uncertainty.'

Mrs. Allerton shook her head with decisive meaning. 'I could not bear it,' she said in a tone of sorrowful gentleness. 'But I trust we shall not be intruded upon.'

I hurried out of the apartment, and met the triumphant claimants. I explained the cause of the delay, and suggested that Mrs. Thorneycroft and her friends could amuse themselves in the garden whilst the solicitor and I ran over the inventory of the chief valuables to be surrendered together.

This was agreed to. A minute or two before the conclusion of this necessary formality, I received a message from the ladies, expressive of a wish to be gone at once, if I would escort them to the hotel; and Martin, who was nowhere to be found, could follow. I

hastened to comply with their wishes; and we were just about to issue from the front drawing-room, into which we had passed through the folding-doors, when we were confronted by the widow and her party, who had just reached the landing of the great staircase. We drew back in silence. The mutual confusion into which we were thrown caused a momentary hesitation only, and we were passing on when the butler suddenly appeared.

‘A gentleman,’ he said, ‘an officer, is at the door, who wishes to see a Miss Maria Emsbury, formerly of Swindon.’

I stared at the man, discerned a strange expression in his face, and it glanced across me at the same moment that I had heard no knock at the door.

‘See Miss Emsbury!’ exclaimed the Widow Thorneycroft, recovering her speech: ‘there is no such person here!’

‘Pardon me, madam,’ I cried, catching eagerly at the interruption, as a drowning man is said to do at a straw: ‘this young person *was* at least Miss Emsbury. Desire the officer to walk up.’ The butler vanished instantly, and we all huddled back disorderly into the drawing-room, some one closing the door after us. I felt the grasp of Mrs. Allerton’s arm tighten convulsively round mine, and her breath I heard came quick and short. I was hardly less agitated myself.

Steps—slow and deliberate steps—were presently heard ascending the stairs, the door opened, and in walked a gentleman in the uniform of a yeomanry officer, whom at the first glance I could have sworn to be the deceased Mr. Henry Allerton. A slight exclamation of terror escaped Mrs. Allerton, followed by a

loud hysterical scream from the Swindon young woman, as she staggered forward towards the stranger, exclaiming: 'Oh merciful God!—my husband!' and then fell, overcome with emotion, in his outstretched arms.

'Yes,' said the Rev. Mr. Wishart promptly, 'that is certainly the gentleman I united to Maria Emsbury. What can be the meaning of this scene?'

'Is that sufficient, Mr. Sharp?' exclaimed the officer, in a voice that removed all doubt.

'Quite, quite,' I shouted—'more than enough!'

'Very well, then,' said William Martin, dashing off his black curling wig, removing his whiskers of the same colour, and giving his own light, but now cropped, head of hair and clean-shaved cheeks to view. 'Now, then, send for the police, and let them transport me: I richly merit it. I married this young woman in a false name; I robbed her of her money, and I deserve the hulks, if anybody ever did.'

You might have heard a pin drop in the apartment whilst the repentant rascal thus spoke; and when he ceased, Mrs. Allerton, unable to bear up against the tumultuous emotion which his words excited, sank without breath or sensation upon a sofa. Assistance was summoned; and whilst the as yet imperfectly-informed servants were running from one to another with restoratives, I had leisure to look around. The Widow Thorneycroft, who had dropped into a chair, sat gazing in bewildered dismay upon the stranger, who still held her lately-discovered niece-in-law in his arms; and I could see the hot perspiration which had gathered on her brow run in large drops down the white channels which they traced through the thick rouge of her cheeks. But the reader's fancy will supply

the best image of this unexpected and extraordinary scene. I cleared the house of intruders and visitors as speedily as possible, well assured that matters would now adjust themselves without difficulty.

And so it proved. Martin was not sent to the hulks, though no question that he amply deserved a punishment as great as that. The self-sacrifice, as he deemed it, which he at last made, pleaded for him, and so did his pretty-looking wife; and the upshot was, that the mistaken bride's dowry was restored, with something over, and that a tavern was taken for them in Piccadilly—the White Bear I think it was—where they lived comfortably and happily, I have heard, for a long time, and having considerably added to their capital, removed to a hotel of a higher grade in the City, where they now reside. It was not at all surprising that the clergyman and others had been deceived. The disguise, and Martin's imitative talent, might have misled persons on their guard, much more men unsuspecting of deception. The cast in the eyes, as well as a general resemblance of features, also of course greatly aided the imposture.

Of Mrs. Rosamond Allerton, I have only to say, for it is all I know, that she is rich, unwedded, and still splendidly beautiful, though of course somewhat *passée* compared with herself twenty years since. Happy, too, I have no doubt she is, judging from the placid brightness of her aspect the last time I saw her beneath the transept of the Crystal Palace, on the occasion of its opening by the Queen. I remember wondering at the time if she often recalled to mind the passage in her life which I have here recorded.

BIGAMY OR NO BIGAMY ?

THE firm of Flint and Sharp enjoyed, whether deservedly or not, when I was connected with it, as it still does, a high reputation for keen practice and shrewd business-management. This kind of professional fame is usually far more profitable than the drum-and-trumpet variety of the same article ; or at least *we* found it so ; and often, from blush of morn to far later than dewy eve—which natural phenomena, by the way, were only emblematically observed by me during thirty busy years in the extinguishment of the street lamps at dawn, and their reillumination at dusk—did I and my partner incessantly pursue our golden avocations ; deferring what are usually esteemed the pleasures of life—its banquets, music, flowers, and lettered ease—till the toil, and heat, and hurry of the day were past, and a calm, luminous evening, unclouded by care or anxiety, had arrived. This con-

duct may or may not have been wise ; but at all events it daily increased the connection and transactions of the firm, and ultimately anchored us both very comfortably in the three per cents ; and this too, I am bold to say, not without our having effected some good in our generation. This boast of mine the following passage in the life of a distinguished client—known, I am quite sure, by reputation, to most of my readers—whom our character for practical sagacity and professional shrewdness brought us, will, I think, be admitted to in some degree substantiate.

Our connection was a mercantile rather than an aristocratic one, and my surprise was therefore considerable, when, on looking through the office-blinds to ascertain what vehicle it was that had driven so rapidly up to the door, I observed a handsomely-appointed carriage with a coronet emblazoned on the panels, out of which a tall footman was handing a lady attired in deep but elegant mourning, and closely veiled. I instantly withdrew to my private room, and desired that the lady should be immediately admitted. Greatly was my surprise increased when the graceful and still youthful visitor withdrew her veil, and disclosed the features of the Countess of Seyton, upon whose mild, luminous beauty, as rendered by the engraving from Sir Thomas Lawrence's picture, I had so frequently gazed with admiration. That rare and touching beauty was clouded now ; and an intense expression of anxiety, fear—almost terror—gleamed from out the troubled depths of her fine dark eyes.

'The Countess of Seyton !' I half involuntarily exclaimed, as with my very best bow I handed her ladyship a chair.

‘Yes; and you are a partner of this celebrated firm, are you not?’

I bowed again still more profoundly to this compliment, and modestly admitted that I was the Sharp of the firm her ladyship was pleased to entitle ‘celebrated.’

‘Then, Mr. Sharp, I have to consult you professionally upon a matter of the utmost—the most vital importance to me and mine.’ Her ladyship then, with some confusion of manner, as if she did not know whether what she was doing was in accordance with strict etiquette or not, placed a Bank of England note, by way of retainer, before me. I put it back, explaining what the usage really was, and the countess replaced it in her purse.

‘We shall be proud to render your ladyship any assistance in our power,’ I said; ‘but I understood the Messrs. Jackson enjoyed the confidence of the house of Seyton?’

‘Precisely. They are, so to speak, the hereditary solicitors of the family more than of any individual member of it; and therefore, though highly respectable persons, unfit to advise me in this particular matter. Besides,’ she added, with increasing tremor and hesitation, ‘to deal with, and if possible foil, the individual by whom I am persecuted, requires an agent of keener sagacity than either of those gentlemen can boast of; sharper, more resolute men; more—you understand what I mean?’

‘Perfectly, madam; and allow me to suggest that it is probable our interview may be a somewhat prolonged one: your ladyship’s carriage, which may attract attention, should be at once dismissed. The office of the

family solicitors is, you are aware, not far off; and as we could not explain to them the reason which induces your ladyship to honour us with your confidence, it will be as well to avoid any chance of inquiry.'

Lady Seyton acquiesced in my suggestion: the carriage was ordered home, and Mr. Flint entering just at the time, we both listened with earnestness and anxiety to her communication. It is needless to repeat verbatim the somewhat prolix, exclamative narration of the countess: the essential facts were as follows:—

The Countess of Seyton, previous to her first marriage, was Miss Clara Hayley, second daughter of the Reverend John Hayley, the rector of a parish in Devonshire. She married, when only nineteen years of age, a Captain Gosford. Her husband was ten years older than herself, and, as she discovered after marriage, was cursed with a morose and churlish temper and disposition. Previous to her acquaintance with Gosford, she had been intimate with, almost betrothed to, Mr. Arthur Kingston, a young gentleman connected with the peerage, and at that time heir-apparent to the great expectancies and actual poverty of his father, Sir Arthur Kingston. The haughty baronet, the instant he was made aware of the nature of his son's intimacy with the rector's daughter, packed the young man off to the continent on his travels. The Reverend John Hayley and his beautiful Clara were as proud as the baronet, and extremely indignant that it should be thought either of them wished to entrap or delude Arthur Kingston into an unequal or ineligible marriage. This feeling of pride and resentment aided the success of Mr. Gosford's suit, and Clara Hayley, like many other rash, high-notioned

young ladies, doomed herself to misery, in order to show the world, and Mr. Arthur Kingston and his proud father especially, that she had a spirit. The union was a most unhappy one. One child only, which died in its infancy, was born to them; and after being united somewhat more than two years, a separation, vehemently insisted on by the wife's father, took place, and the unhappily-wedded daughter returned to her parent's roof. Mr. Gosford—he had some time before sold out of the army—travelled about the country in search of amusement, and latterly of health (for his unhappy cankerous temper at last affected and broke down his never very robust physical constitution), accompanied for the twelvemonth preceding his death by a young man belonging to the medical profession of the name of Chilton. Mr. and Mrs. Gosford had been separated a few days less than three years, when the husband died, at the village of Swords in Ireland, and not far distant from Dublin. The intelligence was first conveyed to the widow by a paragraph in the 'Freeman's Journal,' a Dublin newspaper; and by the following post a letter arrived from Mr. Chilton, enclosing a ring which the deceased had requested should be sent to his wife, and a note, dictated just previous to his death-hour, in which he expressed regret for the past, and admitted that he alone had been to blame for the unhappy separation. A copy of his will, made nearly a twelvemonth previously, was also forwarded, by which he bequeathed his property, amounting to about three hundred pounds per annum, to a distant relative then residing in New Holland. By a memorandum of a subsequent date Mr. Chilton was to have all the money and other personals he might die in

actual possession of, after defraying the necessary funeral expenses. This will, Mr. Chilton stated, the deceased gentleman had expressed a wish in his last moments to alter, but death had been too sudden for him to be able to give effect to that good, but too long delayed intention.

It cannot be supposed that the long-before practically widowed wife grieved much at the final breaking of the chain which bound her to so ungenial a mate; but as Lady Seyton was entirely silent upon the subject, our supposition can only rest upon the fact, that Arthur Kingston—who had some time previously, in consequence of the death of the Earl of Seyton and his only son, an always weakly child, preceded a few months by that of his own father, the baronet, succeeded to the earldom and estates—hastened home, on seeing the announcement of Gosford's death in the Dublin paper, from the continent, where he had continued to reside since his compelled departure six years before; and soon afterwards found his way into Devonshire, and so successfully pressed the renewed offer of his hand, that the wedding took place slightly within six months after the decease of Mr. Gosford. Life passed brilliantly and happily with the earl and countess—to whom three children (a boy and two girls) were born—till about five months previous to the present time, when the earl, from being caught, when out riding, in a drenching shower of rain, was attacked by fever, and after an acute illness of only two or three days' duration, expired. The present earl was at the time just turned of five years of age.

This blow, we comprehended from the sudden tears which filled the beautiful eyes of the countess as she

her veil. 'Can there,' she added, in a still fainter voice, 'be anything done—anything'——

'That depends entirely,' interrupted Mr. Flint, 'upon whether this fine story is or is not a fabrication, got up for the purpose of extorting money. It seems to me, I must say, amazingly like one.'

'Do you really think so?' exclaimed the lady with joyful vehemence. The notion that Chilton was perhaps imposing on her credulity and fears seemed not to have struck her before.

'What do you think, Sharp?' said my partner.

I hesitated to give an opinion, as I did not share in the hope entertained by Flint. Detection was so certain, that I doubted if so cunning a person as Chilton appeared to be would have ventured on a fraud so severely punishable. 'Suppose,' I said, avoiding an answer, 'as this note appoints an interview at three o'clock to-day at Seyton House, we meet him there instead of your ladyship? A little talk with the fellow might be serviceable.'

Lady Seyton eagerly agreed to this proposal; and it was arranged that we should be at Seyton House half an hour before the appointed time, in readiness for the gentleman. Lady Seyton left in a hackney-coach, somewhat relieved, I thought, by having confided the oppressive secret to us, and with a nascent hope slightly flushing her pale, dejected countenance.

The firm of Flint and Sharp had then a long conference together, during which the lady's statement and Mr. Chilton's documents were, the reader may be sure, very minutely combed over, analysed, and commented upon. Finally, it was resolved that if the approaching interview, the manner of which we agreed upon, did

not prove satisfactory, Mr. Flint should immediately proceed to Ireland, and personally ascertain the truth or falsehood of the facts alleged by Chilton.

‘Mr. Chilton is announced,’ said Lady Seyton, hurriedly entering the library in Grosvenor Square, where Mr. Flint and myself were seated. ‘I need not be present, I think you said?’ she added in great tremor.

‘Certainly not, madam,’ I replied. ‘We shall do better alone.’

She retired instantly. Flint rose and stationed himself close by the door. Presently a sounding, confident step was heard along the passage, the library door swung back on its noiseless hinges, and in stalked a man of apparently about thirty-five years of age, tall, genteel, and soldier-looking. He started back on seeing me, recognising, I perceived, my vocation at a glance.

‘How is this?’ he exclaimed. ‘I expected’——

‘The Countess of Seyton. True; but her ladyship has deputed me to confer with you on the business mentioned in your note.’

‘I shall have nothing to say to you,’ he replied abruptly, and turned to leave the room. Mr. Flint had shut, and was standing with his back to the door.

‘You can’t go,’ he said in his coolest manner. ‘The police are within call.’

‘The police! What the devil do you mean?’ cried Chilton angrily; but, spite of his assurance, visibly trembling beneath Flint’s searching, half-sneering look.

‘Nothing very remarkable,’ replied that gentleman,

‘or unusual in our profession. Come, sit down; we are lawyers: you are a man of business, we know. I dare say we shall soon understand each other.’

Mr. Chilton sat down, and moodily awaited what was next to come.

‘You are aware,’ said Mr. Flint, ‘that you have rendered yourself liable to transportation?’

‘What!’ exclaimed Chilton, flashing crimson, and starting to his feet. ‘What!’

‘To transportation,’ continued my imperturbable partner, ‘for seven, ten, fourteen years, or for life, at the discretion of the judge; but considering the frequency of the crime of late, I should say there is a strong probability that *you* will be a *lifer*!’

‘What devil’s gibberish is this?’ exclaimed Chilton, frightened, but still fierce. ‘I can prove everything I have said. Mr. Gosford, I tell you——’

‘Well, well,’ interrupted Mr. Flint; ‘put it in that light how you please; turn it which way you will; it’s like the key in Blue Beard, which I daresay you have read of; rub it out on one side, and up it comes on the other. Say, by way of argument, that you have *not* obtained money by unfounded threats—a crime which the law holds tantamount to highway robbery. You have in that case obtained money for compromising a felony—that of polygamy. An awful position, my good sir, choose which you will.’

Utterly chopfallen was the lately triumphant man; but he speedily rallied.

‘I care not,’ he at length said. ‘Punish me you may; but the pride of this sham countess and the sham earl will be brought low. And I tell you once for all,’ he added, rising at the same time, and speak-

ing in ringing, wrathful tones, 'that I defy you, and will either be handsomely remunerated for silence, or I will at once inform the Honourable James Kingston that he is the true Earl of Seyton.'

'And I tell *you*,' retorted Flint, 'that if you attempt to leave this room, I will give you into custody at once, and transport you, whatever may be the consequence to others. Come, come, let us have no more nonsense or bluster. We have strong reasons for believing that the story by which you have been extorting money is a fabrication. If it be so, rely upon it we shall detect and punish you. Your only safe course is to make a clean breast of it whilst there is yet time. Out with it, man, at once, and you shall go Scot-free; nay, have a few score pounds more—say a hundred. Be wise in time, I counsel you.'

Chilton hesitated; his white lips quivered. There *was* something to reveal.

'I cannot,' he muttered, after a considerable pause. 'There is nothing to disclose.'

'You will not! Then your fate be on your own head. I have done with you.'

It was now my turn. 'Come, come,' I said, 'it is useless urging this man further. How much do you expect? The insolent proposal contained in your note is, you well know, out of the question. How much *money* do you expect for keeping this wretched affair secret? State your terms at once.'

'A thousand per annum,' was the reply, 'and the first year down.'

'Modest, upon my word! But I suppose we must comply.' I wrote out an agreement. 'Will you sign this?'

'Yes: Lady Seyton, as she calls
it never sees the light.'

and in two or three minutes returned
with a cheque. 'Her ladyship has no present cash at
'the banker's' I said, 'and is obliged to post-date this
cheque twelve days.'

'Theascal grumbled a good deal; but as there was
no help for it, he took the security, signed the agree-
ment, and walked off.

'A sweet nut that for the devil to crack,' observed
Mr. Flint, looking savagely after him. 'I am in hopes
we shall trounce him yet, bravely as he carries it.
'The cheque of course is not payable to order or
bearer?'

'Certainly not; and before twelve days are past, you
will have returned from Ireland. The agreement may
be, I thought, of use with Cunningham or Mullins. If
they have been conspiring together, they will scarcely
admit the light in which you can place the arrange-
ment, as affording proof that he means to keep the
lion's share of the reward to himself.'

'Exactly. At all events we shall get at the truth,
whatever it be.'

The same evening Mr. Flint started for Dublin *via*
Blackhead.

I received in due course a letter from him dated the
day after his arrival there. It was anything but a satis-
factory one. The date on the grave-stone had been
truly represented, and Mullins who erected it was a
highly respectable man. Flint had also seen the grave-
diggers but could make nothing out of him. There
was no regular register of deaths kept in Swords except
that belonging to Cunningham; and the minister who

buried Gosford, and who lived at that time in Dublin, had been dead some time. This was disheartening and melancholy enough; and, as if to give our unfortunate client the *coup-de-grace*, Mr. Jackson, junior, marched into the office just after I had read it, to say that, having been referred by Lady Seyton to us for explanations with respect to a statement made by a Mr. Edward Chilton to the Honourable James Kingston, for whom they, the Messrs. Jackson, were now acting, by which it appeared that the said Honourable James Kingston was, in fact, the true Earl of Seyton, he Mr. Jackson, junior, would be happy to hear what I had to say upon the subject! It needed but this. Chilton had, as I feared he would, after finding we had been consulted, sold his secret, doubtless advantageously, to the heir-at-law. There was still, however, a chance that something favourable might turn up, and as I had no notion of throwing that chance away, I carelessly replied that we had reason to believe Chilton's story was a malicious fabrication, and that we should of course throw on them the onus of judicial proof that Gosford was still alive when the late earl's marriage was solemnised. Finally, however, to please Mr. Jackson, who professed to be very anxious, for the lady's sake, to avoid unnecessary *éclat*, and to arrange the affair as quietly as possible, I agreed to meet him at Lady Seyton's in four days from that time, and hear the evidence upon which he relied. This could not at all events render our position worse; and it was meanwhile agreed that the matter should be kept as far as possible profoundly secret.

Three days passed without any further tidings from Mr. Flint, and I vehemently feared that his journey

had proved a fruitless one, when, on the evening previous to the day appointed for the conference at Seyton House, a hackney coach drove rapidly up to the office door, and out popped Mr. Flint, followed by two strangers, whom he very watchfully escorted into the house. 'Mr. Patrick Mullins and Mr. Pierce Cunningham,' said Flint, as he shook hands with me in a way which, in conjunction with the merry sparkle of his eyes, and the boisterous tone of his voice, assured me all was right. 'Mr. Pierce Cunningham will sleep here to-night,' he added; 'so Collins had better engage a bed out.'

Cunningham, an ill-looking lout of a fellow, muttered that he chose 'to sleep at a tavern.'

'Not if I know it, my fine fellow,' rejoined Mr. Flint. 'You mean well, I daresay; but I cannot lose sight of you for all that. You either sleep here or at a station-house.'

The man stared with surprise and alarm; but knowing refusal or resistance to be hopeless, sullenly assented to the arrangement, and withdrew to the room appointed for him, vigilantly guarded. For Mr. Mullins we engaged a bed at a neighbouring tavern.

Mr. Flint's mission had been skilfully and successfully accomplished. He was convinced, by the sullen confusion of manner manifested by Cunningham, that some villanous agency had been at work, and he again waited on Mullins the stone-cutter. 'Who gave you the order for the grave-stone?' he asked. Mr. Mullins referred to his book, and answered that he received it by letter. 'Had he got that letter?' 'Very likely,' he replied, 'as he seldom destroyed business papers of any kind.' 'A search was instituted, and finally this

letter,' said Mr. Flint, 'worth an earl's coronet, torn and dirty as it is, turned up.' This invaluable document, which bore the London post-date of June 23, 1832, ran as follows:—

' ANGLESEA HOTEL, HAYMARKET, LONDON, *June 23, 1832.*

' SIR—Please to erect a plain tombstone at the head of Charles Gosford, Esquire's, grave, who died a few months since at Swords, aged thirty-two years. This is all that need be inscribed upon it. You are referred to Mr. Guinness of Sackville Street, Dublin, for payment. Your obedient servant,

' EDWARD CHILTON.'

' You see,' continued Flint, 'the fellow had inadvertently left out the date of Gosford's death, merely stating it occurred a few months previously; and Mullins concluded that, in entering the order in his day-book, he must have somehow or other confounded the date of the letter with that of Gosford's decease. Armed with this precious discovery, I again sought Cunningham, and by dint of promises and threats, at last got the truth out of the rascal. It was this: Chilton, who returned to this country from the Cape, where he had resided for three years previously, about two months ago, having some business to settle in Dublin, went over there, and one day visited Swords, read the inscription on Charles Gosford's grave-stone, and immediately sought out the gravedigger, and asked him if he had any record of that gentleman's burial. Cunningham said he had, and produced his book, by which it appeared that it took place December 24, 1831. "That cannot be," remarked Chilton, and he referred to the head-stone. Cunningham said he had noticed the mis-

take a few days after it was erected; but thinking it of no consequence, and never having, that he knew of, seen Mr. Mullins since, he had said, and indeed thought, nothing about it. To conclude the story—Chilton ultimately, by payment of ten pounds down, and liberal promises for the future, prevailed upon the gravedigger to lend himself to the infamous device the sight of the grave-stone had suggested to his fertile, unscrupulous brain.'

This was indeed a glorious success, and the firm of Flint and Sharp drank the Countess of Seyton's health that evening with great enthusiasm, and gleefully 'thought of the morrow.'

We found the drawing-room of Seyton House occupied by the Honourable James Kingston, his solicitors the Messrs. Jackson, Lady Seyton, and her father and sister, to whom she had at length disclosed the source of her disquietude. The children were leaving the apartment as we entered it, and the grief-dimmed eyes of the countess rested sadly upon her bright-eyed boy as he slowly withdrew with his sisters. That look changed to one of wild surprise as it encountered Mr. Flint's shining, good-humoured countenance. I was more composed and reserved than my partner, though feeling as vividly as he did the satisfaction of being able not only to dispel Lady Seyton's anguish, but to extinguish the exultation, and trample on the hopes, of the Honourable James Kingston, a stiff, grave, middle-aged piece of hypocritical propriety, who was surveying from out the corners of his affectedly-unobservant eyes the furniture and decorations of the splendid apartment, and hugging himself with the thought that all that was his! Business was imme-

diately proceeded with. Chilton was called in. He repeated his former story *verbatim*, and with much fluency and confidence. He then placed in the hands of Jackson senior the vouchers signed by Cunningham and Mullins. The transient light faded from Lady Seyton's countenance as she turned despairingly, almost accusingly, towards us.

'What answer have you to make to this gentleman's statement, thus corroborated?' demanded Jackson senior.

'Quite a remarkable one,' replied Mr. Flint, as he rang the bell. 'Desire the gentlemen in the library to step up,' he added to the footman who answered the summons. In about three minutes in marched Cunningham and Mullins, followed by two police officers. An irrepressible exclamation of terror escaped Chilton, which was immediately echoed by Mr. Flint's direction to the police, as he pointed towards the trembling caitiff. 'That is your man; secure him.'

A storm of exclamations, questions, remonstrances, instantly broke forth, and it was several minutes before attention could be obtained for the statements of our two Irish witnesses and the reading of the happily-found letter. The effect of the evidence adduced was decisive, electrical. Lady Seyton, as its full significance flashed upon her, screamed with convulsive joy, and I thought must have fainted from excess of emotion. The Reverend John Hayley returned audible thanks to God in a voice quivering with rapture, and Miss Hayley ran out of the apartment, and presently returned with the children, who were immediately half smothered with their mother's ecstatic kisses. All was for a few minutes bewilderment, joy, rapture! Flint persisted

to his dying day that Lady Seyton threw her arms round his neck, and kissed his bald old forehead. This, however, I cannot personally vouch for, as my attention was engaged at the moment by the adverse claimant, the Honourable James Kingston, who exhibited one of the most irresistibly comic, wo-begone, lackadaisical aspects it is possible to conceive. He made a hurried and most undignified exit, and was immediately followed by the discomfited 'family' solicitors. Chilton was conveyed to a station-house, and the next day was fully committed for trial. He was convicted at the next sessions, and sentenced to seven years' transportation; and the 'celebrated' firm of Flint and Sharp derived considerable lustre, and more profit, from this successful stroke of professional dexterity.

THE CHEST OF DRAWERS.

I AM about to relate a rather curious piece of domestic history, some of the incidents of which, revealed at the time of their occurrence in contemporary law reports, may be in the remembrance of many readers. It took place in one of the midland counties, and at a place which I shall call Watley: the names of the chief actors who figured in it must also, to spare their modesty or their blushes, as the case may be, be changed; and should one of those persons, spite of these precautions, apprehend unpleasant recognition, he will be able to console himself with the reflection, that all I state beyond that which may be gathered from the records of the law courts will be generally ascribed to the fancy or invention of the writer. And it is as well, perhaps, that it should be so.

Caleb Jennings, a shoemender, cobbler, snob—using the last word in its genuine classical sense, and

by no means according to the modern interpretation by which it is held to signify a genteel sneak or pretender—he was anything but that—occupied, some twelve or thirteen years ago, a stall at Watley, which, according to the traditions of the place, had been hereditary in his family for several generations. He may also be said to have flourished there, after the manner of cobblers; for this, it must be remembered, was in the good old times, before the gutta-percha revolution had carried ruin and dismay into the stalls—those of cobblers—which in considerable numbers existed throughout the kingdom. Like all his fraternity whom I have ever fallen in with or heard of, Caleb was a sturdy Radical of the Major Cartwright and Henry Hunt school; and being withal industrious, tolerably skilful, not inordinately prone to the observance of Saint Mondays, possessed, moreover, of a neatly-furnished sleeping and eating apartment in the house of which the projecting first floor, supported on stone pillars, overshadowed his humble workplace, he vaunted himself to be as really rich as an estated squire, and far more independent.

There was some truth in this boast, as the case which procured us the honour of Mr. Jennings's acquaintance sufficiently proved. We were employed to bring an action against a wealthy gentleman of the vicinity of Watley for a brutal and unprovoked assault he had committed, when in a state of partial inebriety, upon a respectable London tradesman who had visited the place on business. On the day of trial our witnesses appeared to have become suddenly afflicted with an almost total loss of memory; and we were only saved from an adverse verdict by the plain,

straightforward evidence of Caleb, upon whose sturdy nature the various arts which soften or neutralise hostile evidence had been tried in vain. Mr. Flint, who personally superintended the case, took quite a liking to the man; and it thus happened that we were called upon some time afterwards to aid the said Caleb in extricating himself from the extraordinary and perplexing difficulty in which he suddenly and unwittingly found himself involved.

The projecting first floor of the house beneath which the humble workshop of Caleb Jennings modestly disclosed itself, had been occupied for many years by an ailing and somewhat aged gentleman of the name of Lisle. This Mr. Ambrose Lisle was a native of Watley, and had been a prosperous merchant of the city of London. Since his return, after about twenty years' absence, he had shut himself up in almost total seclusion, nourishing a cynical bitterness and acrimony of temper which gradually withered up the sources of health and life, till at length it became as visible to himself as it had for some time been to others, that the oil of existence was expended, burnt up, and that but a few weak flickers more, and the ailing man's plaints and griefs would be hushed in the dark silence of the grave.

Mr. Lisle had no relatives at Watley, and the only individual with whom he was on terms of personal intimacy was Mr. Peter Sowerby, an attorney of the place, who had for many years transacted all his business. This man visited Mr. Lisle most evenings, played at chess with him, and gradually acquired an influence over his client which that weak gentleman had once or twice feebly but vainly endeavoured to

shake off. To this clever attorney, it was rumoured, Mr. Lisle had bequeathed all his wealth.

This piece of information had been put in circulation by Caleb Jennings, who was a sort of humble favourite of Mr. Lisle's, or, at all events, was regarded by the misanthrope with less dislike than he manifested towards others. Caleb cultivated a few flowers in a little plot of ground at the back of the house, and Mr. Lisle would sometimes accept a rose or a bunch of violets from him. Other slight services—especially since the recent death of his old and garrulous woman-servant, Esther May, who had accompanied him from London, and with whom Mr. Jennings had always been upon terms of gossiping intimacy—had led to certain familiarities of intercourse; and it thus happened that the inquisitive shoe-mender became partially acquainted with the history of the wrongs and griefs which preyed upon, and shortened the life of, the prematurely-aged man.

The substance of this everyday, commonplace story, as related to us by Jennings, and subsequently enlarged and coloured from other sources, may be very briefly told.

Ambrose Lisle, in consequence of an accident which occurred in his infancy, was slightly deformed. His right shoulder—as I understood, for I never saw him—grew out, giving an ungraceful and somewhat comical twist to his figure, which, in female eyes—youthful ones at least—sadly marred the effect of his intelligent and handsome countenance. This personal defect rendered him shy and awkward in the presence of women of his own class of society; and he had attained the ripe age of thirty-seven years, and was a

rich and prosperous man, before he gave the slightest token of an inclination towards matrimony. About a twelvemonth previous to that period of his life, the deaths—quickly following each other—of a Mr. and Mrs. Stevens threw their eldest daughter, Lucy, upon Mr. Lisle's hands. Mr. Lisle had been left an orphan at a very early age, and Mrs. Stevens—his aunt, and then a maiden lady—had, in accordance with his father's will, taken charge of himself and brother till they severally attained their majority. Long, however, before that she married Mr. Stevens, by whom she had two children—Lucy and Emily. Her husband, whom she survived but two months, died insolvent; and in obedience to the dying wishes of his aunt, for whom he appears to have felt the tenderest esteem, he took the eldest of her orphan children to his home, intending to regard and provide for her as his own adopted child and heiress. Emily, the other sister, found refuge in the house of a still more distant relative than himself.

The Stevenses had gone to live at a remote part of England—Yorkshire, I believe—and it thus fell out, that till his cousin Lucy arrived at her new home he had not seen her for more than ten years. The pale, and somewhat plain child, as he had esteemed her, he was startled to find had become a charming woman; and her naturally gay and joyous temperament, quick talents, and fresh young beauty, rapidly acquired an overwhelming influence over him. Strenuously but vainly he struggled against the growing infatuation—argued, reasoned with himself—passed in review the insurmountable objections to such a union, the difference of age—he leading towards thirty-seven, she

barely twenty-one: he, crooked, deformed, of reserved, taciturn temper—she full of young life, and grace, and beauty. It was useless; and nearly a year had passed in the bootless struggle when Lucy Stevens, who had vainly striven to blind herself to the nature of the emotions by which her cousin and guardian was animated towards her, intimated a wish to accept her sister Emily's invitation to pass two or three months with her. This brought the affair to a crisis. Buoying himself up with the illusions which people in such an unreasonable frame of mind create for themselves, he suddenly entered the sitting-room set apart for her private use, with the desperate purpose of making his beautiful cousin a formal offer of his hand. She was not in the apartment, but her opened writing-desk, and a partly-finished letter lying on it, shewed that she had been recently there, and would probably soon return. Mr. Lisle took two or three agitated turns about the room, one of which brought him close to the writing-desk, and his glance involuntarily fell upon the unfinished letter. Had a deadly serpent leaped suddenly at his throat, the shock could not have been greater. At the head of the sheet of paper was a clever pen-and-ink sketch of Lucy Stevens and himself: he, kneeling to her in a lovelorn ludicrous attitude, and she laughing immoderately at his lachrymose and pitiful aspect and speech. The letter was addressed to her sister Emily; and the enraged lover saw not only that his supposed secret was fully known, but that he himself was mocked, laughed at for his doting folly. At least this was his interpretation of the words which swam before his eyes. At the instant Lucy returned, and a torrent of impreca-

tion burst from the furious man, in which wounded self-love, rageful pride, and long pent-up passion, found utterance in wild and bitter words. Half an hour afterwards Lucy Stevens had left the merchant's house—for ever, as it proved. She, indeed, on arriving at her sister's, sent a letter supplicating forgiveness for the thoughtless, and, as he deemed it, insulting sketch, intended only for Emily's eye; but he replied merely by a note written by one of his clerks, informing Miss Stevens that Mr. Lisle declined any further correspondence with her.

The ire of the angered and vindictive man had, however, begun sensibly to abate, and old thoughts, memories, duties, suggested partly by the blank which Lucy's absence made in his house, partly by remembrance of the solemn promise he had made her mother, were strongly reviving in his mind, when he read the announcement of her marriage in a provincial journal, directed to him, as he believed, in the bride's hand-writing; but this was an error, her sister having sent the newspaper. Mr. Lisle also construed this into a deliberate mockery and insult, and from that hour strove to banish all images and thoughts connected with his cousin from his heart and memory.

He unfortunately adopted the very worst course possible for effecting this object. Had he remained amid the buzz and tumult of active life, a mere sentimental disappointment, such as thousands of us have sustained and afterwards forgotten, would, there can be little doubt, have soon ceased to afflict him. He chose to retire from business, visited Watley, and habits of miserliness growing rapidly upon his can-

kered mind, never afterwards removed from the lodgings he had hired on first arriving there. Thus madly hugging to himself sharp-pointed memories which a sensible man would have speedily cast off and forgotten, the sour misanthrope passed a useless, cheerless, weary existence, to which death must have been a welcome relief.

Matters were in this state with the morose and aged man—aged mentally and corporeally, although his years were but fifty-eight—when Mr. Flint made Mr. Jennings's acquaintance. Another month or so had passed away when Caleb's attention was one day about noon claimed by a young man dressed in mourning, accompanied by a female similarly attired, and from their resemblance to each other he conjectured brother and sister. The stranger wished to know if that was the house in which Mr. Ambrose Lisle resided. Jennings said it was; and with civil alacrity left his stall and rang the front-door bell. The summons was answered by the landlady's servant, who, since Esther May's death, had waited on the first-floor lodger; and the visitors were invited to go up stairs. Caleb, much wondering who they might be, returned to his stall, and from thence passed into his eating and sleeping room just below Mr. Lisle's apartments. He was in the act of taking a pipe from the mantel-shelf, in order to the more deliberate and satisfactory cogitation on such an unusual event, when he was startled by a loud shout, or scream rather, from above. The quivering and excited voice was that of Mr. Lisle, and the outcry was immediately followed by an explosion of unintelligible exclamations from several persons. Caleb was up stairs in an

instant, and found himself in the midst of a strangely-perplexing and distracted scene. Mr. Lisle, pale as his shirt, shaking in every limb, and his eyes on fire with passion, was hurling forth a torrent of vituperation and reproach at the young woman, whom he evidently mistook for some one else; whilst she, extremely terrified, and unable to stand but for the assistance of her companion, was tendering a letter in her outstretched hand, and uttering broken sentences, which her own agitation and the fury of Mr. Lisle's invectives rendered totally incomprehensible. At last the fierce old man struck the letter from her hand, and with frantic rage ordered both the strangers to leave the room. Caleb urged them to comply, and accompanied them down stairs. When they reached the street, he observed a woman on the other side of the way, dressed in mourning, and much older apparently, though he could not well see her face through the thick veil she wore, than she who had thrown Mr. Lisle into such an agony of rage, apparently waiting for them. To her the young people immediately hastened, and after a brief conference the three turned away up the street, and Mr. Jennings saw no more of them.

A quarter of an hour afterwards the house-servant informed Caleb that Mr. Lisle had retired to bed, and although still in great agitation, and, as she feared, seriously indisposed, would not permit Dr. Clarke to be sent for. So sudden and violent a hurricane in the usually dull and drowsy atmosphere in which Jennings lived, excited and disturbed him greatly: the hours, however, flew past without bringing any relief to his curiosity, and evening was falling, when a peculiar

knocking on the floor overhead announced that Mr. Lisle desired his presence. That gentleman was sitting up in bed, and in the growing darkness his face could not be very distinctly seen; but Caleb instantly observed a vivid and unusual light in the old man's eyes. The letter so strangely delivered was lying open before him; and unless the shoemaker was greatly mistaken, there were stains of recent tears upon Mr. Lisle's furrowed and hollow cheeks. The voice, too, it struck Caleb, though eager, was gentle and wavering. 'It was a mistake, Jennings,' he said; 'I was mad for the moment. Are they gone?' he added, in a yet more subdued and gentle tone. Caleb informed him of what he had seen; and as he did so, the strange light in the old man's eyes seemed to quiver and sparkle with a yet intenser emotion than before. Presently he shaded them with his hand, and remained several minutes silent. He then said with a firmer voice, 'I shall be glad if you will step to Mr. Sowerby, and tell him I am too unwell to see him this evening. But be sure to say nothing else,' he eagerly added, as Caleb turned away in compliance with his request; 'and when you come back, let me see you again.'

When Jennings returned, he found, to his great surprise, Mr. Lisle up and nearly dressed; and his astonishment increased a hundredfold upon hearing that gentleman say, in a quick but perfectly collected and decided manner, that he should set off for London by the mail-train.

'For London—and by night!' exclaimed Caleb, scarcely sure that he heard aright.

'Yes—yes, I shall not be observed in the dark,' sharply rejoined Mr. Lisle; 'and you, Caleb, must

keep my secret from everybody, especially from Sowerby. I shall be here in time to see him to-morrow night, and he will be none the wiser.' This was said with a slight chuckle; and as soon as his simple preparations were complete, Mr. Lisle, well wrapped up, and his face almost hidden by shawls, locked his door, and assisted by Jennings, stole furtively down stairs, and reached unrecognised the railway station just in time for the train.

It was quite dark the next evening when Mr. Lisle returned; and so well had he managed that Mr. Sowerby, who paid his usual visit about half an hour afterwards, had evidently heard nothing of the suspicious absence of his esteemed client from Watley. The old man exulted over the success of his deception to Caleb the next morning, but dropped no hint as to the object of his sudden journey.

Three days passed without the occurrence of any incident tending to the enlightenment of Mr. Jennings upon these mysterious events, which, however, he plainly saw had lamentably shaken the long-since failing man. On the afternoon of the fourth day, Mr. Lisle walked, or rather tottered, into Caleb's stall, and seated himself on the only vacant stool it contained. His manner was confused, and frequently purposeless, and there was an anxious, flurried expression in his face which Jennings did not at all like. He remained silent for some time, with the exception of partially inaudible snatches of comment or questionings, apparently addressed to himself. At last he said, 'I shall take a longer journey to-morrow, Caleb—much longer; let me see—where did I say? Ah, yes! to Glasgow; to be sure, to Glasgow!'

‘To Glasgow, and to-morrow!’ exclaimed the astounded cobbler.

‘No, no—not Glasgow; they have removed,’ feebly rejoined Mr. Lisle. ‘But Lucy has written it down for me. True—true; and to-morrow I shall set out.’

The strange expression of Mr. Lisle’s face became momentarily more strongly marked, and Jennings, greatly alarmed, said, ‘You are ill, Mr. Lisle; let me run for Dr. Clarke.’

‘No—no,’ he murmured, at the same time striving to rise from his seat, which he could only accomplish by Caleb’s assistance, and so supported, he staggered indoors. ‘I shall be better to-morrow,’ he said, faintly, and then slowly added, ‘To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow! Ah, me! Yes, as I said, to-morrow, I’—— He paused abruptly, and they gained his apartment. He seated himself, and then Jennings, at his mute solicitation, assisted him to bed.

He lay some time with his eyes closed; and Caleb could feel—for Mr. Lisle held him firmly by the hand, as if to prevent his going away—a convulsive shudder pass over his frame. At last he slowly opened his eyes, and Caleb saw that he was indeed about to depart upon the long journey from which there is no return. The lips of the dying man worked inarticulately for some moments: and then with a mighty effort, as it seemed, he said, whilst his trembling hand pointed feebly to a bureau chest of drawers that stood in the room, ‘There—there, for Lucy; there, the secret place is——’ Some inaudible words followed, and then after a still mightier struggle than before, he gasped out, ‘No word—no word—to—to Sowerby—for her—Lucy.’

More was said, but undistinguishable by mortal ear ; and after gazing with an expression of indescribable anxiety in the scared face of his awestruck listener, the wearied eyes slowly reclosed—the deep silence flowed past ; then the convulsive shudder came again, and he was dead.

Caleb Jennings tremblingly summoned the house-servant and the landlady, and was still confusedly pondering the broken sentences uttered by the dying man, when Mr. Sowerby hurriedly arrived. The attorney's first care was to assume the direction of affairs, and to place seals upon every article containing or likely to contain anything of value belonging to the deceased. This done, he went away to give directions for the funeral, which took place a few days afterwards ; and it was then formally announced that Mr. Sowerby succeeded by will to the large property of Ambrose Lisle ; under trust, however, for the family, if any, of Robert Lisle, the deceased's brother, who had gone when very young to India, and had not been heard of for many years—a condition which did not at all mar the joy of the crafty lawyer, he having long since instituted private inquiries, which perfectly satisfied him that the said Robert Lisle had died, unmarried, at Calcutta.

Mr. Jennings was in a state of great dubiety and consternation. Sowerby had emptied the chest of drawers of every valuable it contained ; and unless he had missed the secret receptacle Mr. Lisle had spoken of, the deceased's intentions, whatever they might have been, were clearly defeated. And if he had *not* discovered it, how could he, Jennings, get at the drawers to examine them ? A fortunate chance brought some relief to his perplexities. Ambrose Lisle's furniture

was advertised to be sold by auction, and Caleb resolved to purchase the bureau chest of drawers at almost any price, although to do so would oblige him to break into his rent money, then nearly due. The day of sale came, and the important lot in its turn was put up. In one of the drawers there were a number of loose newspapers and other valueless scraps; and Caleb, with a sly grin, asked the auctioneer if he sold the article with all its contents. 'Oh yes,' said Sowerby, who was watching the sale; 'the buyer may have all it contains over his bargain, and much good may it do him.' A laugh followed the attorney's sneering remark, and the biddings went on. 'I want it,' observed Caleb, 'because it just fits a recess like this one in my room underneath.' This he said to quiet a suspicion he thought he saw gathering upon the attorney's brow. It was finally knocked down to Caleb at 5*l.* 10*s.*, a sum considerably beyond its real value; and he had to borrow a sovereign in order to clear his speculative purchase. This done, he carried off his prize, and as soon as the closing of the house for the night secured him from interruption, he set eagerly to work in search of the secret drawer. A long and patient examination was richly rewarded. Behind one of the small drawers of the *secrétaire* portion of the piece of furniture was another small one, curiously concealed, which contained Bank of England notes to the amount of 200*l.*, tied up with a letter, upon the back of which was written, in the deceased's hand-writing, 'To take with me.' The letter which Caleb, although he read print with facility, had much difficulty in making out, was that which Mr. Lisle had struck from the young woman's hand a few weeks

before, and proved to be a very affecting appeal from Lucy Stevens, now Lucy Warner, and a widow, with two grown-up children. Her husband had died in insolvent circumstances, and she and her sister Emily, who was still single, were endeavouring to carry on a school at Bristol, which promised to be sufficiently prosperous if the sum of about 150*l.* could be raised, to save the furniture from her deceased husband's creditors. The claim was pressing, for Mr. Warner had been dead nearly a year, and Mr. Lisle being the only relative Mrs. Warner had in the world, she had ventured to entreat his assistance for her mother's sake. There could be no moral doubt, therefore, that this money was intended for Mrs. Warner's relief; and early in the morning Mr. Caleb Jennings dressed himself in his Sunday's suit, and with a brief announcement to his landlady that he was about to leave Watley for a day or two on a visit to a friend, set off for the railway station. He had not proceeded far when a difficulty struck him: the bank notes were all twenties; and were he to change a twenty pound note at the station, where he was well known, great would be the tattle and wonderment, if nothing worse, that would ensue. So Caleb tried his credit again, borrowed sufficient for his journey to London, and there changed one of the notes.

He soon reached Bristol, and blessed was the relief which the sum of money he brought afforded Mrs. Warner. She expressed much sorrow for the death of Mr. Lisle, and great gratitude to Caleb. The worthy man accepted with some reluctance one of the notes, or at least as much as remained of that which he had changed; and after exchanging promises with the

widow and her relatives to keep the matter secret departed homewards. The young woman, Mrs. Warner's daughter, who had brought the letter to Watley, was, Caleb noticed, the very image of her mother, or rather what her mother must have been when young. This remarkable resemblance it was, no doubt, which had for the moment so confounded and agitated Mr. Lisle.

Nothing occurred for about a fortnight after Caleb's return to disquiet him, and he had begun to feel tolerably sure that his discovery of the notes would remain unsuspected, when, one afternoon, the sudden and impetuous entrance of Mr. Sowerby into his stall caused him to jump up from his seat with surprise and alarm. The attorney's face was deathly white, his eyes glared like a wild beast's, and his whole appearance exhibited uncontrollable agitation. 'A word with you, Mr. Jennings,' he gasped—'a word in private, and at once!' Caleb, in scarcely less consternation than his visitor, led the way into his inner room, and closed the door.

'Restore—give back,' screamed the attorney, vainly struggling to dissemble the agitation which convulsed him—'that—that which you have purloined from the chest of drawers!'

The hot blood rushed to Caleb's face and temples; the wild vehemence and suddenness of the demand confounded him; and certain previous dim suspicions that the law might not only pronounce what he had done illegal, but possibly felonious, returned upon him with terrible force, and he quite lost his presence of mind.

'I can't—I can't,' he stammered. 'It's gone—given away——'

‘Gone!’ shouted, or more correctly howled, Sowerby, at the same time flying at Caleb’s throat as if he would throttle him. ‘Gone—given away! You lie—you want to drive a bargain with me—dog!—liar!—rascal!—thief!’

This was a species of attack which Jennings was at no loss how to meet. He shook the attorney roughly off, and hurled him, in the midst of his vituperation, to the further end of the room.

They then stood glaring at each other in silence, till the attorney, mastering himself as well as he could, essayed another and more rational mode of attaining his purpose.

‘Come, come, Jennings,’ he said, ‘don’t be a fool. Let us understand each other. I have just discovered a paper, a memorandum of what you have found in the drawers, and to obtain which you bought them. I don’t care for the money—keep it; only give me the papers—documents.’

‘Papers—documents!’ ejaculated Caleb in unfeigned surprise.

‘Yes—yes; of use to me only. You, I remember, cannot read writing; but they are of great consequence to me—to me only, I tell you.’

‘You can’t mean Mrs. Warner’s letter?’

‘No—no; curse the letter! You are playing with a tiger! Keep the money, I tell you; but give up the papers—documents—or I’ll transport you!’ shouted Sowerby with reviving fury.

Caleb, thoroughly bewildered, could only mechanically ejaculate that he had no papers or documents.

The rage of the attorney when he found he could extract nothing from Jennings was frightful. He lite-

rally foamed with passion, uttered the wildest threats ; and then suddenly changing his key, offered the astonished cobbler one—two—three thousand pounds : any sum he chose to name, for the papers—documents ! This scene of alternate violence and cajolery lasted nearly an hour ; and then Sowerby rushed from the house, as if pursued by the furies, and leaving his auditor in a state of thorough bewilderment and dismay. It occurred to Caleb, as soon as his mind had settled into something like order, that there might be another secret drawer ; and the recollection of Mr. Lisle's journey to London recurred suggestively to him. Another long and eager search, however, proved fruitless ; and the suspicion was given up, or, more correctly, weakened.

As soon as it was light the next morning, Mr. Sowerby was again with him. He was more guarded now, and was at length convinced that Jennings had no paper or document to give up. 'It was only some important memoranda,' observed the attorney carelessly, 'that would save me a world of trouble in a lawsuit I shall have to bring against some heavy debtors to Mr. Lisle's estate ; but I must do as well as I can without them. Good morning.' Just as he reached the door, a sudden thought appeared to strike him. He stopped, and said ; 'By the way, Jennings, in the hurry of business I forgot that Mr. Lisle had told me the chest of drawers you bought, and a few other articles, were family relics which he wished to be given to certain parties he named. The other things I have got ; and you, I suppose, will let me have the drawers for—say a pound profit on your bargain ?'

Caleb was not the acutest man in the world ; but

this sudden proposition, carelessly as it was made, suggested curious thoughts. 'No,' he answered; 'I shall not part with it. I shall keep it as a memorial of Mr. Lisle.'

Sowerby's face assumed, as Caleb spoke, a ferocious expression. 'Shall you?' said he. 'Then be sure, my fine fellow, that you shall also have something to remember me by as long as you live!'

He then went away, and a few days afterwards Caleb was served with a writ for the recovery of the two hundred pounds.

The affair made a great noise in the place; and Caleb's conduct being very generally approved, a subscription was set on foot to defray the cost of defending the action—one Hayling, a rival attorney to Sowerby, having asserted that the words used by the proprietor of the chest of drawers at the sale barred his claim to the money found in them. This wise gentleman was intrusted with the defence; and, strange to say, the jury—a common one—spite of the direction of the judge, returned a verdict for the defendant, upon the ground that Sowerby's jocular or sneering remark amounted to a serious, valid leave and licence to sell two hundred pounds for five pounds ten shillings!

Sowerby obtained, as a matter of course, a rule for a new trial; and a fresh action was brought. All at once Hayling refused to go on, alleging deficiency of funds. He told Jennings that in his opinion it would be better that he should give in to Sowerby's whim, who only wanted the drawers in order to comply with the testator's wishes. 'Besides,' remarked Hayling in conclusion, 'he is sure to get the article, you know, when it comes to be sold under a writ of *fi. fa.*' A few

days after this conversation, it was ascertained that Hayling was to succeed to Sowerby's business, the latter gentleman being about to retire upon the fortune bequeathed him by Mr. Lisle.

At last Caleb, driven nearly out of his senses, though still doggedly obstinate, by the harassing perplexities in which he found himself, thought of applying to us.

'A very curious affair, upon my word,' remarked Mr. Flint, as soon as Caleb had unburdened himself of the story of his woes and cares; 'and in my opinion by no means explainable by Sowerby's anxiety to fulfil the testator's wishes. He cannot expect to get two hundred pence out of you; and Mrs. Warner, you say, is equally unable to pay. Very odd indeed. Perhaps if we could get time, something might turn up.'

With this view Flint looked over the papers Caleb had brought, and found the declaration was in *trover*—a manifest error—the notes never admittedly having been in Sowerby's actual possession. We accordingly demurred to the form of action, and the proceedings were set aside. This, however, proved of no ultimate benefit: Sowerby persevered, and a fresh action was instituted against the unhappy shoemender. So utterly overcrowded and disconsolate was poor Caleb, that he determined to give up the drawers, which was all Sowerby even now required, and so wash his hands of the unfortunate business. Previous, however, to this being done, it was determined that another thorough and scientific examination of the mysterious piece of furniture should be made; and for this purpose Mr. Flint obtained a workman skilled in the mysteries of secret contrivance, from the desk and dressing-case

establishment in King Street, Holborn, and proceeded with him to Watley.

The man performed his task with great care and skill: every depth and width was gauged and measured, in order to ascertain if there were any false bottoms or backs; and the workman finally pronounced that there was no concealed receptacle in the article.

‘I am sure there is,’ persisted Flint, whom disappointment, as usual, rendered but the more obstinate; ‘and so is Sowerby: and he knows, too, that it is so cunningly contrived as to be undiscoverable, except by a person in the secret, which he no doubt at first imagined Caleb to be. I’ll tell you what we’ll do: You have the necessary tools with you. Split the confounded chest of drawers into shreds: I’ll be answerable for the consequences.’

This was done carefully and methodically, but for some time without result. At length the large drawer next the floor had to be knocked to pieces; and as it fell apart, one section of the bottom, which, like all the others, was divided into two compartments, dropped asunder, and discovered a parchment laid flat between the two thin leaves, which, when pressed together in the grooves of the drawer, presented precisely the same appearance as the rest. Flint snatched up the parchment, and his eager eye had scarcely rested an instant on the writing, when a shout of triumph burst from him. It was the last will and testament of Ambrose Lisle, dated August 21, 1838—the day of his last hurried visit to London. It revoked the former will, and bequeathed the whole of his property, in equal portions, to his cousins Lucy Warner and Emily Stevens, with succession to their children; but with

reservation of one-half to his brother Robert or children, should he be alive, or have left offspring.

Great, it may be supposed, was the jubilation of Caleb Jennings at this discovery ; and all Watley, by his agency, was in a marvellously short space of time in a very similar state of excitement. It was very late that night when he reached his bed ; and how he got there at all, and what precisely had happened, except, indeed, that he had somewhere picked up a splitting headache, was, for some time after he awoke the next morning, very confusedly remembered.

Mr. Flint, upon reflection, was by no means so exultant as the worthy shoemender. The odd mode of packing away a deed of such importance, with no assignable motive for doing so, except the needless awe with which Sowerby was said to have inspired his feeble-spirited client, together with what Caleb had said of the shattered state of the deceased's mind after the interview with Mrs. Warner's daughter, suggested fears that Sowerby might dispute, and perhaps successfully, the validity of this last will. My excellent partner, however, determined, as was his wont, to put a bold face on the matter ; and first clearly settling in his own mind what he should and what he should *not* say, waited upon Mr. Sowerby. The news had preceded him, and he was at once surprised and delighted to find that the nervous, crestfallen attorney was quite unaware of the advantages of his position. On condition of not being called to account for the moneys he had received and expended, about 1200*l.*, he destroyed the former will in Mr. Flint's presence, and gave up at once all the deceased's papers. From these we learned that Mr. Lisle had written a letter to Mrs. Warner, stating

• what he had done, and where the will would be found, and that only herself and Jennings would know the secret. From infirmity of purpose, or from having subsequently determined on a personal interview, the letter was not posted; and Sowerby subsequently discovered it, together with a memorandum of the numbers of the bank-notes found by Caleb in the secret drawer—the eccentric gentleman appears to have had quite a mania for such hiding-places—of a writing-desk.

The affair was thus happily terminated: Mrs. Warner, her children, and sister, were enriched, and Caleb Jennings was set up in a good way of business in his native place, where he still flourishes. Over the centre of his shop there is a large nondescript sign, surmounted by a golden boot, which, upon close inspection, is found to bear some resemblance to a huge bureau chest of drawers, all the circumstances connected with which may be heard, for the asking, and in much fuller detail than I have given, from the lips of the owner of the establishment, by any lady or gentleman who will take the trouble of a journey to Watley for that purpose.

EVERY MAN HIS OWN LAWYER.

A SMARTER trader, a keener appreciator of the tendencies to rise or fall in colonial produce—sugars more especially—than John Linden, of Mincing Lane, it would have been difficult to point out in the wide city of London. He was not so immensely rich as many others engaged in the same merchant-traffic as himself; nothing at all like it, indeed, for I doubt that he could at any time have been esteemed worth more than from eighty to ninety thousand pounds; but his transactions, although limited in extent when compared with those of the mammoth colonial houses, almost always returned more or less of profit; the result of his remarkable keenness and sagacity in scenting hurricanes, black insurrections, and emancipation bills, whilst yet inappreciable, or deemed afar off, by less sensitive organizations. At least to this wonderful prescience of future sugar-value did Mr. Linden himself

attribute his rise in the world, and gradual increase in rotundity, riches, and respectability. This constant success engendered, as it is too apt to do, inordinate egotism, conceit, self-esteem, vanity. There was scarcely a social, governmental, or economical problem which he did not believe himself capable of solving as easily as he could eat his dinner when hungry. Common-sense business-habits—his favourite phrase—he believed to be quite sufficient for the elucidation of the most difficult question in law, physic, or divinity. The science of law, especially, he held to be an alphabet which any man—of common sense and business habits—could as easily master as he could count five on his fingers; and there was no end to his ridicule of the men with horse-hair head-dresses, and their quirks, quiddits, cases, tenures, and such-like devil's lingo. Lawyers, according to him, were a set of thorough humbugs and impostors, who gained their living by false pretence—that of affording advice and counsel, which every sane man could better render himself. He was unmistakably mad upon this subject, and he carried his insane theory into practice. He drew his own leases, examined the titles of some house-property he purchased, and set his hand and seal to the final deeds, guided only by his own common-sense spectacles. Once he bid, at the Auction Mart, as high as fifty-three thousand pounds for the Holmford estate, Herefordshire; and had he not been outbidden by young Paliser, son of the then recently-deceased eminent distiller, who was eager to obtain the property, with a view to a seat in parliament, which its possession was said to almost insure—he would, I had not at the time the slightest doubt, have completed the purchase, with-

out for a moment dreaming of submitting the vender's title to the scrutiny of a professional adviser. Mr. Linden, I should mention, had been for some time desirous of resigning his business in Mincing Lane to his son, Thomas Linden, the only child born to him by his long-since deceased wife, and of retiring, an estated squirearch, to the *otium cum*, or *sine dignitate*, as the case might be, of a country life; and this disposition had of late been much quickened by daily-increasing apprehensions of negro emancipation and revolutionary interference with differential duties—changes which, in conjunction with others of similar character, would infallibly bring about that utter commercial ruin which Mr. Linden, like every other rich and about-to-retire merchant or tradesman whom I have ever known, constantly prophesied to be near at hand and inevitable.

With such a gentleman the firm of Flint and Sharp had only professional interviews, when procrastinating or doubtful debtors required that he should put on the screw—a process which I have no doubt he would himself have confidently performed, but for the waste of valuable time which doing so would necessarily involve. Both Flint and myself were, however, privately intimate with him—Flint more especially, who had known him from boyhood—and we frequently dined with him on a Sunday at his little box at Fulham. Latterly, we had on these occasions met there a Mrs. Arnold and her daughter Catherine—an apparently amiable, and certainly very pretty and interesting young person, to whom, Mr. Linden confidentially informed us, his son Tom had been for some time engaged.

‘I don't know much about her family,’ observed Mr. Linden one day, in the course of a gossip at the office,

‘but she moves in very respectable society. Tom met her at the Slades’; but I *do* know she has something like thirty-five thousand pounds in the funds. The instant I was informed how matters stood with the young folk, I, as a matter of common sense and business, asked the mother, Mrs. Arnold, for a reference to her banker or solicitor—there being no doubt that a woman and a minor would be in lawyers’ leading-strings—and she referred me to Messrs. Dobson of Chancery Lane. You know the Dobsons?’

‘Perfectly: what was the reply?’

‘That Catherine Arnold, when she came of age—it wants but a very short time of that now—would be entitled to the capital of thirty-four thousand seven hundred pounds, bequeathed by an uncle, and now lodged in the funds in the names of the trustees, Crowther and Jenkins of Leadenhall Street, by whom the interest on that sum was regularly paid, half-yearly, through the Messrs. Dobson, for the maintenance and education of the heiress. A common-sense, business-like letter in every respect, and extremely satisfactory; and as soon as he pleases, after Catherine Arnold comes of age, and into actual possession of her fortune, Tom may have her, with my blessing over the bargain.’

I dined at Laurel Villa, Fulham, about two months after this conversation, and Linden and I found ourselves alone over the dessert—the young people having gone out for a stroll, attracted doubtless by the gay aspect of the Thames, which flows past the miniature grounds attached to the villa. Never had I seen Mr. Linden in so gay, so mirthful a mood.

‘Pass the decanter,’ he exclaimed, the instant the

door had closed upon Tom and his *fiancée*. 'Pass the decanter, Sharp; I have news for you, my boy, now they are gone.'

'Indeed; and what may the news be?'

'Fill a bumper for yourself, and I'll give you a toast. Here's to the health and prosperity of the proprietor of the Holmford estate; and may he live a thousand years, and one over!—Hip—hip—hurra!'

He swallowed his glass of wine, and then, in his intensity of glee, laughed himself purple.

'You needn't stare so,' he said, as soon as he had partially recovered breath; 'I am the proprietor of the Holmford property—bought it for fifty-six thousand pounds of that young scant-grace and spendthrift, Palliser—fifteen thousand pounds less than what it cost him, with the outlay he has made upon it. Signed, sealed, delivered, paid for yesterday. Ha! ha! ho! Leave John Linden alone for a bargain! It's worth seventy thousand pounds if it's worth a shilling. I say,' continued he, after a renewed spasm of exuberant mirth, 'not a word about it to anybody—mind! I promised Palliser, who is quietly packing up to be off to Italy, or Australia, or Constantinople, or the devil—all of them, perhaps, in succession—not to mention a word about it till he was well off—you understand? Ha! ha!—ho! ho!' again burst out Mr. Linden. 'I pity the poor creditors though! Bless you! I shouldn't have had it at anything like the price, only for his knowing that I was not likely to be running about exposing the affair, by asking lawyers whether an estate in a family's possession, as this was in Dursley's for three hundred years, had a good title or not. So be careful not to drop a word, even to Tom—for my

honour's sake. A delicious bargain, and no mistake! Worth, if a penny, seventy thousand pounds. Ha! ha! —ho! ho!

‘Then you have really parted with that enormous sum of money without having had the title to the estate professionally examined?’

‘Title! fiddlestick! I looked over the deeds myself. Besides, haven't I told you the ancestors of Dursley, from whose executors Palliser purchased the estate, were in possession of it for centuries. What better title than prescription can there be?’

‘That may be true enough; but still——’

‘I ought, you think, to have risked losing the bargain by delay, and have squandered time and money upon fellows in horse-hair wigs, in order to ascertain what I sufficiently well knew already? Pooh! I am not in my second childhood yet!’

It was useless to argue with him; besides the mischief, if mischief there was, had been done, and the not long delayed entrance of the young couple necessitating a change of topic, I innocently inquired what he thought of the Negro Emancipation Bill which Mr. Stanley, as the organ of the ministry, had introduced a few evenings previously, and was rewarded by a perfect deluge of loquacious indignation and invective; during a pause in which hurly-burly of angry words I contrived to effect my escape.

‘Crowther and Jenkins!’ exclaimed one morning Mr. Flint, looking up from the ‘Times’ newspaper he held in his hand. ‘Crowther and Jenkins!—what is it we know about Crowther and Jenkins?’

The question was addressed to me, and I, like my partner, could not at the moment precisely recall why

those names sounded upon our ears with a certain degree of interest as well as familiarity. 'Crowther and Jenkins!' I echoed. 'True: what *do* we know about Crowther and Jenkins? Oh, I have it!—they are the executors of a will under which young Linden's pretty bride that is to be inherits her fortune.'

'Ah!' exclaimed Mr. Flint, as he put down the paper, and looked me gravely in the face—'I remember now: their names are in the list of bankrupts. A failure in the gambling corn-trade too. I hope they have not been speculating with the young woman's money.'

The words were scarcely out of his mouth when Mr. Linden was announced, and presently in walked that gentleman, in a state of considerable excitement.

'I told you,' he began, 'some time ago about Crowther and Jenkins being the persons in whose names Catherine Arnold's money stood in the funds?'

'Yes,' replied Flint; 'and I see by the Gazette they are bankrupts, and, by your face, that they have speculated with your intended daughter-in-law's money, and lost it!'

'Positively so!' rejoined Mr. Linden, with great heat. 'Drew it out many months ago! But they have exceedingly wealthy connections—at least Crowther has—who will, I suppose, arrange Miss Arnold's claim rather than their relative should be arraigned for felony.'

'Felony!—you are mistaken, my good sir. There is no felony—no *legal* felony, I mean—in the matter Miss Arnold can only prove against the estate like any other creditor.'

'The devil she can't! Tom, then, must look out for

another wife, for I am credibly informed there won't be a shilling in the pound.'

And so it turned out. The great corn firm had been insolvent for years; and after speculating desperately, and to a frightful extent, with a view to recover themselves, had failed to an enormous amount—their assets, comparatively speaking, proving to be *nil*.

The ruin spread around, chiefly on account of the vast quantity of accommodation-paper they had afloat, was terrible; but upon no one did the blow fall with greater severity than on young Linden and his promised wife. His father ordered him to instantly break off all acquaintance with Miss Arnold; and on the son, who was deeply attached to her, peremptorily refusing to do so, Linden senior threatened to turn him out of doors, and ultimately disinherit him. Angry, indignant, and in love, Thomas Linden did a very rash and foolish thing: he persuaded Catherine Arnold to consent to a private marriage, arguing that if the indissoluble knot were once fairly tied, his father would, as a matter of course—he being an only child—become reconciled to what he could no longer hope to prevent or remedy.

The imprudent young man deceived both himself and her who trusted in his pleasing plausibilities. Ten minutes after he had disclosed his marriage to his father, he was turned, almost penniless, out of doors; and the exasperated and inexorable old man refused to listen to any representation in his favour, by whomsoever proffered, and finally, even to permit the mention of his name in his hearing.

'It's of no use,' said Mr. Flint, on returning for the last time from a mission undertaken to extort, if possible, some provision against absolute starvation for

the newly-wedded couple. 'He is as cold and hard as adamant, and I think, if possible, even more of a tiger than before. He will be here presently to give instructions for his will.'

'His will! Surely he will draw that up himself after his own common-sense, business fashion?'

'He would unquestionably have done so a short time since; but some events that have lately occurred have considerably shaken his estimate of his own infallibility, and he is, moreover, determined, he says, that there shall be no mistake as to effectually disinheriting his son. He has made two or three heavy losses, and his mind is altogether in a very cankered, distempered state.'

Mr. Linden called, as he had promised to do, and gave us the written heads of a will which he desired to have at once formally drawn up. By this instrument he devised the Holmford estate, and all other property, real and personal, of which he might die possessed, to certain charitable institutions, in varying proportions, payable as soon after his death as the property could be turned into money. 'The statute of mortmain does not give me much uneasiness,' remarked the vindictive old man, with a bitter smile. 'I shall last some time yet. I would have left it all to you, Flint,' he added, 'only that I knew you would defeat my purpose by giving it back to that disobedient, ungrateful, worthless boy.'

'Do leave it to me,' rejoined Mr. Flint, with grave emphasis, 'and I promise you faithfully this—that the wish respecting it, whatever it may be, which trembles on your lip as you are about to leave this world for another, and when it may be too late to formally revoke

the testament you now propose, shall be strictly carried out. That time cannot be a very distant one, John Linden, for a man whose hair is white as yours.'

It was preaching to the winds. He was deaf, blind, mute, to every attempt at changing his resolve. The will was drawn in accordance with his peremptorily-iterated instructions, and duly signed, sealed, and attested. Not very long afterwards, Mr. Linden disposed of his business in Mincing Lane, and retired to Holmford, but with nothing like the money-fortune he had once calculated upon, the losses alluded to by Mr. Flint, and followed by others, having considerably diminished his wealth.

We ultimately obtained a respectable and remunerative situation for Thomas Linden, in a mercantile house at Belfast, with which we were professionally acquainted, and after securing berths in the 'Erin' steamer, he, with his wife and mother-in-law, came, with a kind of hopeful sadness in their looks and voices, to bid us farewell—for a very long time they and we also feared.

For an eternity, it seemed, on reading the account of the loss of the 'Erin,' a few days afterwards, with every soul on board! Their names were published with those of the other passengers who had embarked, and we had of course concluded that they had perished, when a letter reached us from Belfast, stating that through some delay on the part of Mrs. Arnold, they had happily lost their passage in the 'Erin,' and embarked in the next steamer for Belfast, where they arrived in perfect safety. We forwarded this intelligence to Holmford, but it elicited no reply.

We heard nothing of Mr. Linden for about two

months, except by occasional notices in the 'Hereford Times,' which he regularly forwarded to the office, relative to the improvements on the Holmford estate, either actually begun or contemplated by its new proprietor. He very suddenly reappeared. I was cooling my heels in the waiting-room of the chambers of the Barons of the Exchequer, Chancery Lane, awaiting my turn of admission, when one of our clerks came in half-breathless with haste. 'You are wanted, sir, immediately; Mr. Flint is out, and Mr. Linden is at the office raving like a madman.' I instantly transferred the business I was in attendance at chambers upon to the clerk, and with the help of a cab soon reached home.

Mr. Linden was not *raving* when I arrived. The violence of the paroxysm of rage and terror by which he was possessed had passed away, and he looked, as I entered, the image of pale, rigid, iron, dumb despair. He held a letter and a strip of parchment in his hand: these he presented, and with white, stammering lips, bade me read. The letter was from an attorney of the name of Sawbridge, giving notice of an action of ejectment, to oust him from the possession of the Holmford estate, the property, according to Mr. Sawbridge, of one Edwin Majoribanks; and the strip of parchment was the writ by which the letter had been quickly followed. I was astounded; and my scared looks questioned Mr. Linden for further information.

'I do not quite understand it,' he said in a hoarse, palpitating voice. 'No possession or title in the venders: a niece not of age—executors no power to sell—Palliser discovered it, robbed me, absconded, and I, oh God! am a miserable beggar!'

The last words were uttered with a convulsive

scream, and after a few frightful struggles he fell down in a fit. I had him conveyed to bed, and as soon as he was somewhat recovered, I hastened off to ascertain from Sawbridge, whom I knew very intimately, the nature of the claim intended to be set up for the plaintiff, Edwin Majoribanks.

I met Sawbridge just as he was leaving his office, and as he was in too great a hurry to turn back, I walked along with him, and he rapidly detailed the chief facts about to be embodied in the plaintiff's declaration. Archibald Dursley, once a London merchant, and who died a bachelor, had bequeathed his estate, real and personal, to his brother Charles, and a niece, his sister's child—two-thirds to the niece, and one-third to the brother. The Holmford property, the will directed, should be sold by public auction when the niece came of age, unless she, by marriage or otherwise, was enabled, within six months after attaining her majority, to pay over to Charles Dursley his third in money, according to a valuation made for the purpose by competent assessors. The brother, Charles Dursley, had urged upon the executors to anticipate the time directed by the will for the sale of the property; and having persuaded the niece to give a written authorization for the immediate sale, the executors, chiefly, Sawbridge supposed, prompted by their own necessities, sold the estate accordingly. But the niece not being of age when she signed the authority to sell, her consent was of no legal value; and she having since died intestate, Edwin Majoribanks, her cousin and undoubted heir-at-law—for the property could not have passed from her, even by marriage—now claimed the estate. Charles Dursley, the brother,

was dead; 'and,' continued Mr. Sawbridge, 'the worst of it is, Linden will never get a farthing of his purchase-money from the venders, for they are bankrupt, nor from Palliser, who has made permanent arrangements for continuing abroad, out of harm's reach. It is just as I tell you,' he added, as we shook hands at parting; 'but you will of course see the will, and satisfy yourself. Good-bye.'

Here was a precious result of amateur common-sense lawyership! Linden could only have examined the abstract of title furnished him by Palliser's attorney, and not the right of Dursley's executors to sell; or had not been aware that the niece could not, during her minority, subscribe an effective legal consent.

I found Mr. Flint at the office, and quickly imparted the astounding news. He was as much taken aback as myself.

'The obstinate, pig-headed old ass!' he exclaimed; 'it almost serves him right, if only for his Tom-fool nonsense of "Every man his own lawyer." What did you say was the niece's name?'

'Well, I don't remember that Sawbridge told me; he was in such a hurry; but suppose you go at once and look over the will?'

'True: I will do so;' and away he went.

'This is a very singular affair, Sharp,' said Mr. Flint on his return from Doctors' Commons, at the same time composedly seating himself, hooking his thumbs into the arm-holes of his waistcoat, crossing his legs, and tilting his chair back on its hind legs. 'A very singular affair. Whom, in the name of the god of thieves—Mercury, wasn't he called?—do you

suppose the bankrupt executors to be? No other,' continued Mr. Flint with a sudden burst, 'than Crowther and Jenkins!'

'The devil!—and the niece then is——'

'Catherine Arnold—Tom Linden's wife—supposed to have been drowned in the 'Erin!' That's check-mate, I rather fancy—not only to Mr. Edwin Majoribanks, but some one else we know of. The old fellow up stairs won't refuse to acknowledge his daughter-in-law now, I fancy!'

This was indeed a happy change in the fortunes of the house of Linden; and we discussed, with much alacrity, the best mode of turning disclosures so momentous and surprising to the best account. As a first step, a letter, with an enclosure, was despatched to Belfast, requiring the return of Thomas Linden and family immediately; and the next was to plead in form to the action. This done, we awaited Catherine Linden's arrival in London, and Mr. Linden senior's convalescence—for his mental agitation had resulted in a sharp fit of illness—to effect a satisfactory and just arrangement. †

Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Linden and Mrs. Arnold arrived by the earliest steamer that left Belfast after the receipt of our letter; and much astonished were they by the intelligence that awaited them. Catherine Linden was for confirming the validity of the sale of the Holmford estate by her now authoritative consent at once, as a mere act of common justice and good faith; but this, looking at the total loss of fortune she had sustained by the knavery of the executors, and the obstinate, mulish temper of the father-in-law, from whom she had already received such harsh treatment,

could not for a moment be permitted; and it was finally resolved to take advantage of the legal position in which she stood, to enforce a due present provision for herself and husband, and their ultimate succession to the estate.

John Linden gradually recovered; and as soon as it was deemed prudent to do so, we informed him that the niece was not dead, as the plaintiff in the action of ejectment had supposed, and that of course, if she could now be persuaded to ratify the imperative consent she had formerly subscribed, he might retain Holmford. At first he received the intelligence as a gleam of light and hope, but he soon relapsed into doubt and gloom. 'What chance was there,' he hopelessly argued, 'that, holding the legal power, she would not exercise it?' It was not, he said, in human nature to do otherwise; and he commissioned us to make liberal offers for a compromise: half—he would be content to lose half his purchase-money; even a greater sacrifice than that he would agree to—anything, indeed, that would not be utter ruin—that did not involve utter beggary and destitution in old age.

Three days after this conversation, I announced to him that the lady and her husband were below, and desirous of seeing him.

'What do they say?' he eagerly demanded. 'Will they accept of half—two-thirds? What do they say?'

'I cannot precisely tell you. They wish to see you alone, and you can urge your own views and offers.' He trembled violently, and shrank nervously back as I placed my hand on the door-handle of the private office. He presently recovered in some degree his self-possession, passed in, and I withdrew from the humi-

liating, but salutary spectacle, of obdurate tyrant power compelled to humble itself before those whom it had previously scorned and trampled upon.

The legal arrangements which Flint and I had suggested were effected, and Linden senior, accompanied by his son, daughter-in-law, and Mrs. Arnold, set off in restored amity for Holmford House. Edwin Majoribanks abandoned his action, and Palliser, finding that matters were satisfactorily arranged, returned to England. We afterwards knew that he had discovered the defect of title, on applying to a well-known conveyancer to raise a considerable sum by way of mortgage, and that his first step was to threaten legal proceedings against Crowther and Jenkins for the recovery of his money; but a hint he obtained of the futility of proceedings against them, determined him to offer the estate at a low figure to Linden, relying upon that gentleman's ostentatious contempt of lawyers that the blot in the title, subjected only to his own common-sense spectacles, would not be perceived.

THE INCENDIARY.

I KNEW James Dutton, as I shall call him, at an early period of life, when my present scanty locks of iron-grey were thick and dark, my now pale and furrowed cheeks were fresh and ruddy, like his own. Time, circumstance, and natural bent of mind, have done their work on both of us; and if his course of life has been less equable than mine, it has been chiefly so because the original impulse, the first start on the great journey upon which so much depends, was directed by wiser heads in my case than in his. We were school-fellows for a considerable time; and if I acquired—as I certainly did—a larger stock of knowledge than he, it was by no means from any superior capacity on my part, but that his mind was bent on other pursuits. He was a born Nimrod, and his father encouraged this propensity from the earliest moment that his darling and only son could sit a pony or

handle a light fowling-piece. Dutton, senior, was one of a then large class of persons whom Cobbett used to call bull-frog farmers; men who, finding themselves daily increasing in wealth by the operation of circumstances they neither created nor could insure or control—namely, a rapidly increasing manufacturing population, and tremendous war-prices for their produce—acted as if the chance-blown prosperity they enjoyed was the result of their own forethought, skill, and energy, and therefore, humanly speaking, indestructible. James Dutton was, consequently, denied nothing—not even the luxury of neglecting his own education; and he availed himself of the lamentable privilege to a great extent. It was, however, a remarkable feature in the lad's character, that whatever he himself deemed essential should be done, no amount of indulgence, no love of sport or dissipation, could divert him from thoroughly accomplishing. Thus he saw clearly, that even in the life—that of a sportsman-farmer—he had chalked out for himself, it was indispensably necessary that a certain quantum of educational power should be attained; and so he really acquired a knowledge of reading, writing, and spelling, and then withdrew from school to more congenial avocations.

I frequently met James Dutton in after years; but some nine or ten months had passed since I had last seen him, when I was directed by the chief partner in the firm to which Flint and I subsequently succeeded, to take coach for Romford, Essex, in order to ascertain from a witness there what kind of evidence we might expect him to give in a trial to come off in the then Hilary term at Westminster Hall. It was the first

week in January: the weather was bitterly cold; and I experienced an intense satisfaction when, after despatching the business I had come upon, I found myself in the long dining-room of the chief market-inn, where two blazing fires shed a ruddy, cheerful light over the snow-white damask table-cloth, bright glasses, decanters, and other preparatives for the farmers' market-dinner. Prices had ruled high that day; wheat had reached 30*l.* a load; and the numerous groups of hearty, stalwart yeomen present were in high glee, crowing and exulting alike over their full pockets and the news—of which the papers were just then full—of the burning of Moscow, and the flight and ruin of Bonaparte's army. James Dutton was in the room, but not, I observed, in his usual flow of animal spirits. The crape round his hat might, I thought, account for that; and as he did not see me, I accosted him with an inquiry after his health, and the reason of his being in mourning. He received me very cordially, and in an instant cast off the abstracted manner I had noticed. His father, he informed me, was gone—had died about seven months previously, and he was alone now at Ash Farm—why didn't I run down there to see him sometimes, &c. ? Our conversation was interrupted by a summons to dinner, very cheerfully complied with; and we both—at least I can answer for myself—did ample justice to a more than usually capital dinner, even in those capital old market-dinner times. We were very jolly afterwards, and amazingly triumphant over the frost-bitten, snow-buried soldier-banditti that had so long lorded it over continental Europe. Dutton did not partake of the general hilarity. There was a sneer

upon his lip during the whole time, which, however, found no expression in words.

‘How quiet you are, James Dutton,’ cried a loud voice from out the dense smoke-cloud that by this time completely enveloped us. On looking towards the spot from whence the ringing tones came, a jolly, round face—like the sun as seen through a London fog—gleamed redly dull from out the thick and choking atmosphere.

‘Everybody,’ rejoined Dutton, ‘hasn’t had the luck to sell two hundred quarters of wheat at to-day’s price, as you have, Tom Southall.’

‘That’s true, my boy,’ returned Master Southall, sending, in the plenitude of his satisfaction, a jet of smoke towards us with astonishing force. ‘And, I say, Jem, I’ll tell ee what I’ll do; I’ll clap on ten guineas more upon what I offered for the brown mare.’

‘Done! She’s yours, Tom, then, for ninety guineas!’

‘Gie’s your hand upon it!’ cried Tom Southall, jumping up from his chair, and stretching a fist as big as a leg of mutton—well, say lamb—over the table. ‘And here—here,’ he added with an exultant chuckle, as he extricated a swollen canvas-bag from his pocket—‘here’s the dibs at once.’

This transaction excited a great deal of surprise at our part of the table; and Dutton was rigorously cross-questioned as to his reason for parting with his favourite hunting mare.

‘The truth is, friends,’ said Dutton at last, ‘I mean to give up farming, and——’

‘Gie up farmin’!’ broke in half-a-dozen voices. ‘Lord!’

‘Yes ; I don’t like it. I shall buy a commission in the army. There’ll be a chance against Boney, now : and it’s a life I’m fit for.’

The farmers looked completely agape at this announcement ; but making nothing of it, after silently staring at Dutton and each other, with their pipes in their hands and not in their mouths, till they had gone out, stretched their heads simultaneously across the table towards the candles, relit their pipes, and smoked on as before.

‘Then, perhaps, Mr. Dutton,’ said a young man in a smartly-cut velveteen coat with mother-of-pearl buttons, who had hastily left his seat further down the table—‘perhaps you will sell the double Manton, and Fanny and Slut?’

‘Yes ; at a price.’

Prices were named ; I forget now the exact sums, but enormous prices, I thought, for the gun and the dogs, Fanny and Slut. The bargain was eagerly concluded, and the money paid at once. Possibly the buyer had a vague notion that a portion of the vendor’s skill might come to him with his purchases.

‘You be in ’arnest, then, in this fool’s business, James Dutton,’ observed a farmer, gravely. ‘I be sorry for thee ; but as I s’pose the lease of Ash Farm will be parted with ; why—— John, waiter, tell Master Hurst, at the top of the table yonder, to come this way.’

Master Hurst, a well-to-do, highly respectable-looking, and rather elderly man, came in obedience to the summons, and after a few words in an under-tone with the friend that had sent for him, said : ‘Is this true, James Dutton?’

‘It is true that the lease and stock of Ash Farm are to be sold—at a price. You, I believe, are in want of such a concern for the young couple, just married.’

‘Well, I don’t say I might not be a customer, if the price were reasonable.’

‘Let us step into a private room, then,’ said Dutton, rising. ‘This is not a place for business of that kind. Sharp,’ he added, *sotto voce*, ‘come with us; I may want you.’

I had listened to all this with a kind of stupid wonderment, and I now, mechanically as it were, got up, and accompanied the party to another room.

The matter was soon settled. Five hundred pounds for the lease—ten years unexpired—of Ash Farm, about eleven hundred acres, and the stock, implements; the ploughing, sowing, &c., already performed, to be paid for at a valuation based on the present prices. I drew out the agreement in form, it was signed in duplicate. a large sum was paid down as deposit, and Mr. Hurst with his friend withdrew.

‘Well,’ I said, taking a glass of port from a bottle Dutton had just ordered in—‘here’s fortune in your new career; but as I am a living man, I can’t understand what you can be thinking about.’

‘You haven’t read the newspapers?’

‘O yes, I have! Victory! Glory! March to Paris! and all that sort of thing. Very fine, I daresay; but rubbish, moonshine, I call it, if purchased by the abandonment of the useful, comfortable, joyous life of a prosperous yeoman.’

‘Is that all you have seen in the papers?’

‘Not much else. What besides have you found in them?’

‘Wheat at ten or eleven pounds a load—less perhaps—other produce in proportion.’

‘Ha!’

‘I see further, Sharp, than you bookmen do, in some matters. Boney’s done for; that to me is quite plain, and earlier than I thought likely; although I, of course, as well as every other man with a head instead of a turnip on his shoulders, knew such a raw-head-and-bloody-bones as that must sooner or later come to the dogs. And as I also know what agricultural prices were *before* the war, I can calculate without the aid of vulgar fractions, which, by-the-by, I never reached, what they’ll be when it’s over, and the thundering expenditure now going on is stopped. In two or three weeks people generally will get a dim notion of all this; and I sell, therefore, whilst I can, at top prices.’

The shrewdness of the calculation struck me at once. ‘You will take another farm when one can be had on easier terms than now, I suppose?’

‘Yes; if I can manage it. And I *will* manage it. Between ourselves, after all the old man’s debts are paid, I shall only have about nine or ten hundred pounds to the good, even by selling at the present tremendous rates; so it was time, you see, I pulled up, and rubbed the fog out of my eyes a bit. And, hark ye, Master Sharp!’ he added, as we rose and shook hands with each other—‘I have now done *playing* with the world—it’s a place of work and business; and I’ll do my share of it so effectually, that my children, if I have any, shall, if I do not, reach the class of landed gentry; and this you’ll find, for all your sneering, will come about all the more easily that neither they nor

their father will be encumbered with much educational lumber. Good by.'

I did not again see my old school-fellow till the change he had predicted had thoroughly come to pass. Farms were everywhere to let, and a general cry to parliament for aid rang through the land. Dutton called at the office upon business, accompanied by a young woman of remarkable personal comeliness, but, as a very few sentences betrayed, little or no education in the conventional sense of the word. She was the daughter of a farmer, whom—it was no fault of hers—a change of times had not found in a better condition for weathering them. Anne Mosely, in fact, was a thoroughly industrious, clever, farm economist. The instant Dutton had secured an eligible farm, at his own price and conditions, he married her; and now, on the third day after the wedding, he had brought me the draft of lease for examination.

'You are not afraid, then,' I remarked, 'of taking a farm in these bad times?'

'Not I—at a price. We mean to *rough* it, Mr. Sharp,' he added gaily. 'And, let me tell you, that those who will stoop to do that—I mean, take their coats off, tuck up their sleeves, and fling appearances to the winds—may, and will, if they understand their business, and have got their heads screwed on right, do better here than in any of the uncleared countries they talk so much about. You know what I told you down at Romford. Well, we'll manage that before our hair is grey, depend upon it, bad as the times may be—won't we, Nance?'

'We'll try, Jem,' was the smiling response.

They left the draft for examination. It was found

to be correctly drawn. Two or three days afterwards, the deeds were executed, and James Dutton was placed in possession. The farm, a capital one, was in Essex.

His hopes were fully realised as to money-making, at all events. He and his wife rose early, sat up late, ate the bread of carefulness, and altogether displayed such persevering energy, that only about six or seven years had passed before the Duttons were accounted a rich and prosperous family. They had one child only—a daughter. The mother, Mrs. Dutton, died when this child was about twelve years of age; and Anne Dutton became more than ever the apple of her father's eye. The business of the farm went steadily on in its accustomed track; each succeeding year found James Dutton growing in wealth and importance; and his daughter in sparkling, catching comeliness—although certainly not in the refinement of manner which gives a quickening life and grace to personal symmetry and beauty. James Dutton remained firm in his theory of the worthlessness of education beyond what, in a narrow acceptation of the term, was absolutely 'necessary;' and Anne Dutton, although now heiress to very considerable wealth, knew only how to read, write, spell, cast accounts, and superintend the home-business of the farm. I saw a good deal of the Duttons about this time, my brother-in-law, Elsworthy, and his wife having taken up their abode within about half a mile of James Dutton's dwelling-house; and I ventured once or twice to remonstrate with the prosperous farmer upon the positive danger, with reference to his ambitious views, of not at least so far cultivating the intellect and taste of so attractive a maiden as his daughter, that sympathy on her part with the rude, unlettered clowns,

with whom she necessarily came so much in contact, should be impossible. He laughed my hints to scorn. 'It is idleness—idleness alone,' he said, 'that puts love-fancies into girls' heads. Novel-reading, jingling at a pianoforte—merely other names for idleness—these are the parents of such follies. Anne Dutton, as mistress of this establishment, has her time fully and usefully occupied; and when the time comes, not far distant now, to establish her in marriage, she will wed into a family I wot of; and the Romford prophecy of which you remind me will be realised, in great part at least.'

He found, too late, his error. He hastily entered the office one morning, and although it was only five or six weeks since I had last seen him, the change in his then florid, prideful features was so striking and painful, as to cause me to fairly leap upon my feet with surprise.

'Good heavens, Dutton!' I exclaimed, 'what is the matter? What has happened?'

'Nothing has happened, Mr. Sharp,' he replied, 'but what you predicted, and which, had I not been the most conceited dolt in existence, I, too, must have foreseen. You know that good-looking, idle, and, I fear, irreclaimable young fellow, George Hamblin?'

'I have seen him once or twice. Has he not brought his father to the verge of a workhouse by low dissipation and extravagance?'

'Yes. Well, he is an accepted suitor for Anne Dutton's hand. No wonder that you start. She fancies herself hopelessly in love with him—— Nay, Sharp, hear me out. I have tried expostulation, threats,

entreaties, locking her up; but it's useless. I shall kill the silly fool if I persist, and I have at length consented to the marriage; for I cannot see her die.' I began remonstrating upon the folly of yielding consent to so ruinous a marriage, on account of a few tears and hysterics, but Dutton stopped me peremptorily.

'It is useless talking,' he said. 'The die is cast; I have given my word. You would hardly recognise her, she is so altered. I did not know before,' added the strong, stern man, with trembling voice and glistening eyes, 'that she was so inextricably twined about my heart—my life!' It is difficult to estimate the bitterness of such a disappointment to a proud, aspiring man like Dutton. I pitied him sincerely, mistaken, if not blameworthy, as he had been.

'I have only myself to blame,' he presently resumed. 'A girl of cultivated taste and mind could not have bestowed a second thought on George Hamblin. But let's to business. I wish the marriage-settlement, and my will, to be so drawn, that every farthing received from me during my life, and after my death, shall be hers, and hers only; and so strictly and entirely secured, that she shall be without power to yield control over the slightest portion of it, should she be so minded.' I took down his instructions, and the necessary deeds were drawn in accordance with them. When the day for signing arrived, the bridegroom-elect demurred at first to the stringency of the provisions of the marriage-contract; but as upon this point Mr. Dutton was found to be inflexible, the handsome, illiterate clown—he was little better—gave up his scruples, the more readily as a life of assured idleness

lay before him, from the virtual control he was sure to have over his wife's income. These were the thoughts which passed across his mind, I was quite sure, as taking the pen awkwardly in his hand, he affixed *his mark* to the marriage-deed. I reddened with shame, and the smothered groan which at the moment smote faintly on my ear, again brokenly confessed the miserable folly of the father in not having placed his beautiful child beyond all possibility of mental contact or communion with such a person. The marriage was shortly afterwards solemnised, but I did not wait to witness the ceremony.

The husband's promised good behaviour did not long endure; ere two months of wedded life were past, he had fallen again into his old habits; and the wife, bitterly repentant of her folly, was fain to confess, that nothing but dread of her father's vengeance saved her from positive ill usage. It was altogether a wretched, unfortunate affair; and the intelligence—sad in itself—which reached me about a twelvemonth after the marriage, that the young mother had died in childbirth of her first-born, a girl, appeared to me rather a matter of rejoicing than of sorrow or regret. The shock to poor Dutton was, I understood, overwhelming for a time, and fears were entertained for his intellects. He recovered, however, and took charge of his grandchild, the father very willingly resigning the onerous burden.

My brother-in-law left James Dutton's neighbourhood for a distant part of the country about this period, and I saw nothing of the bereaved father for about five years, save only at two business interviews. The business upon which I had seen him, was the alteration of his will, by which all he might die possessed of was

bequeathed to his darling Annie. His health, I was glad to find, was quite restored ; and although now fifty years of age, the bright light of his young days sparkled once more in his keen glance. His youth was, he said, renewed in little Annie. He could even bear to speak, though still with remorseful emotion, of his own lost child. 'No fear, Sharp,' he said, 'that I make that terrible mistake again. Annie will fall in love, please God, with no unlettered, soulless booby ! Her mind shall be elevated, beautiful, and pure, as her person—she is the image of her mother—promises to be charming and attractive. You must come and see her.' I promised to do so ; and he went his way. At one of these interviews—the first it must have been—I made a chance inquiry for his son-in-law, Hamblin. As the name passed my lips, a look of hate and rage flashed out of his burning eyes. I did not utter another word, nor did he ; and we separated in silence.

It was evening, and I was returning in a gig from a rather long journey into the country, when I called, in redemption of my promise, upon James Dutton. Annie was really, I found, an engaging, pretty, blue-eyed, golden-haired child ; and I was not so much surprised at her grandfather's doting fondness—a fondness entirely reciprocated, it seemed, by the little girl. It struck me, albeit, that it was a perilous thing for a man of Dutton's vehement, fiery nature to stake again, as he evidently had done, his all of life and happiness upon one frail existence. An illustration of my thought or fear occurred just after we had finished tea. A knock was heard at the outer door, and presently a man's voice, in quarrelling, drunken remonstrance with the servant who opened it. The same deadly scowl I had

seen sweep over Dutton's countenance upon the mention of Hamblin's name, again gleamed darkly there; and finding, after a moment or two, that the intruder would not be denied, the master of the house gently removed Annie from his knee, and strode out of the room.

'Follow grandpapa,' whispered Mrs. Rivers, a highly respectable widow of about forty years of age, whom Mr. Dutton had engaged at a high salary to superintend Annie's education. The child went out, and Mrs. Rivers, addressing me, said in a low voice: 'Her presence will prevent violence; but it is a sad affair.' She then informed me that Hamblin, to whom Mr. Dutton allowed a hundred a year, having become aware of the grandfather's extreme fondness for Annie, systematically worked that knowledge for his own sordid ends, and precluded every fresh attack upon Mr. Dutton's purse by a threat to reclaim the child. 'It is not the money,' remarked Mrs. Rivers in conclusion, 'that Mr. Dutton cares so much for, but the thought that he holds Annie by the sufferance of that wretched man, goads him at times almost to insanity.'

'Would not the fellow waive his claim for a settled increase of his annuity?'

'No; that has been offered to the extent of three hundred a year; but Hamblin refuses, partly from the pleasure of keeping such a man as Mr. Dutton in his power, partly because he knows that the last shilling would be parted with rather than the child. It is a very unfortunate business, and I often fear will terminate badly.' The loud but indistinct wrangling without ceased after awhile, and I heard a key turn stiffly in a lock. 'The usual conclusion of these scenes,

said Mrs. Rivers. 'Another draft upon his strong box will purchase Mr. Dutton a respite as long as the money lasts.' I could hardly look at James Dutton when he re-entered the room. There was that in his countenance which I do not like to read in the faces of my friends. He was silent for several minutes; at last he said quickly, sternly: 'Is there no instrument, Mr. Sharp, in all the enginery of law, that can defeat a worthless villain's legal claim to his child?'

'None; except, perhaps, a commission of lunacy, or'——

'Tush! tush!' interrupted Dutton; 'the fellow has no wits to lose. That being so—— But let us talk of something else.' We did so, but on his part very incoherently, and I soon bade him good-night.

This was December, and it was in February the following year that Dutton again called at our place of business. There was a strange, stern, iron meaning in his face. 'I am in a great hurry,' he said, 'and I have only called to say, that I shall be glad if you will run over to the farm to-morrow on a matter of business. You have seen, perhaps, in the paper, that my dwelling-house took fire the night before last. You have not? Well, it is upon that I would consult you. Will you come?' I agreed to do so, and he withdrew.

The fire had not, I found, done much injury. It had commenced in a kind of miscellaneous store-room; but the origin of the fire appeared to me, as it did to the police-officers that had been summoned, perfectly unaccountable. 'Had it not been discovered in time, and extinguished,' I observed to Mrs. Rivers, 'you would all have been burned in your beds.'

'Why, no,' replied that lady, with some strangeness

of manner. 'On the night of the fire, Annie and I slept at Mr. Elsworthy's' (I have omitted to notice, that my brother-in-law and family had returned to their old residence), 'and Mr. Dutton remained in London, whither he had gone to see the play.'

'But the servants might have perished?'

'No. A whim, apparently, has lately seized Mr. Dutton, that no servant or labourer shall sleep under the same roof with himself; and those new outhouses, where their bed-rooms are placed, are, you see, completely detached, and are indeed, as regards this dwelling, made fire-proof.'

At this moment Mr. Dutton appeared, and interrupted our conversation. He took me aside. 'Well,' he said, 'to what conclusion have you come? The work of an incendiary, is it not? Somebody, too, that knows I am not insured'——

'Not insured!'

'No; not for this dwelling-house. I did not renew the policy some months ago.'

'Then,' I jestingly remarked, 'you, at all events, are safe from any accusation of having set fire to your premises with the intent to defraud the insurers.'

'To be sure—to be sure, I am,' he rejoined with quick earnestness, as if taking my remark seriously. 'That is quite certain. Some one, I am pretty sure it must be,' he presently added, 'that owes me a grudge—with whom I have quarrelled, eh?'

'It may be so, certainly.'

'It *must* be so. And what, Mr. Sharp, is the highest penalty for the crime of incendiarism?'

'By the recent change in the law, transportation only; unless, indeed, loss of human life occur in conse-

quence of the felonious act ; in which case, the English law construes the offence to be wilful murder, although the incendiary may have not intended the death or injury of any person.'

'I see. But here there could have been no loss of life.'

'There might have been, had not you, Mrs. Rivers, and Annie chanced to sleep out of the house.'

'True—true—a diabolical villain no doubt. But we'll ferret him out yet. You are a keen hand, Mr. Sharp, and will assist, I know. Yes, yes—it's some fellow that hates me—that I perhaps hate and loathe'—he added with sudden gnashing fierceness, and striking his hand with furious violence on the table—'as I do a spotted toad!'

I hardly recognised James Dutton in this fitful, disjointed talk, and as there was really nothing to be done or to be inquired into, I soon went away.

'Only one week's interval,' I hastily remarked to Mr. Flint one morning after glancing at the newspaper, 'and another fire at Dutton's farmhouse!'

'The deuce! He is in the luck of it apparently,' replied Flint, without looking up from his employment. My partner knew Dutton only by sight.

The following morning I received a note from Mrs. Rivers. She wished to see me immediately on a matter of great importance. I hastened to Mr. Dutton's, and found, on arriving there, that George Hamblin was in custody, and undergoing an examination, at no great distance off, before two county magistrates, on the charge of having fired Mr. Dutton's premises. The chief evidence was, that Hamblin had been seen lurking about the place just before the flames broke out, and

that near the window where an incendiary might have entered there were found portions of several lucifer-matches, of a particular make, and corresponding to a number found in Hamblin's bedroom. To this Hamblin replied, that he had come to the house by Mr. Dutton's invitation, but found nobody there. This, however, was vehemently denied by Mr. Dutton. He had made no appointment with Hamblin to meet at his, Dutton's, house. How should he, purposing as he did to be in London at the time? With respect to the lucifer-matches, Hamblin said he had purchased them of a mendicant, and that Mr. Dutton saw him do so. This also was denied. It was further proved, that Hamblin, when in drink, had often said he would ruin Dutton before he died. Finally, the magistrates, though with some hesitation, decided that there was hardly sufficient evidence to warrant them in committing the prisoner for trial, and he was discharged, much to the rage and indignation of the prosecutor.

Subsequently, Mrs. Rivers and I had a long private conference. She and the child had again slept at Elsworthy's on the night of the fire, and Dutton in London. 'His excuse is,' said Mrs. Rivers, 'that he cannot permit us to sleep here unprotected by his presence.' We both arrived at the same conclusion, and at last agreed upon what should be done, attempted rather, and that without delay.

Just before taking leave of Mr. Dutton, who was in an exceedingly excited state, I said: 'By-the-bye, Dutton, you have promised to dine with me on some early day. Let it be next Tuesday. I shall have one or two bachelor friends, and we can give you a shake-down for the night.'

‘Next Tuesday?’ said he, quickly. ‘At what hour do you dine?’

‘At six. Not a half-moment later.’

‘Good! I will be with you.’ We then shook hands, and parted.

The dinner would have been without interest to me, had not a note previously arrived from Mrs. Rivers, stating that she and Annie were again to sleep that night at Elsworthy’s. This promised results.

James Dutton, who rode into town, was punctual, and, as always of late, flurried, excited, nervous—not, in fact, it appeared to me precisely in his right mind. The dinner passed off as dinners usually do, and the after-proceedings went on very comfortably till about half-past nine o’clock, when Dutton’s perturbation, increased perhaps by the considerable quantity of wine he had swallowed, not drunk, became, it was apparent to everybody, almost uncontrollable. He rose—purposely it seemed—sat down again—drew out his watch almost every minute, and answered remarks addressed to him in the wildest manner. The decisive moment was, I saw, arrived, and at a gesture of mine, Elsworthy, who was in my confidence, addressed Dutton. ‘By the way, Dutton, about Mrs. Rivers and Annie. I forgot to tell you of it before.’

The restless man was on his feet in an instant, and glaring with fiery eagerness at the speaker.

‘What! what!’ he cried with explosive quickness—‘what about Annie? Death and fury!—speak! will you?’

‘Don’t alarm yourself, my good fellow. It’s nothing of consequence. You brought Annie and her gover-

ness about an hour before I started to sleep at our house——’

‘Yes—yes,’ gasped Dutton, white as death, and every fibre of his body shaking with terrible dread. ‘Yes—well, well, go on. Thunder and lightning! out with it, will you?’

‘Unfortunately, two female cousins arrived soon after you went away, and I was obliged to escort Annie and Mrs. Rivers home again.’ A wild shriek—yell is perhaps the more appropriate expression—burst from the conscience and fear-stricken man. Another instant, and he had torn his watch from the fob, glanced at it with dilated eyes, dashed it on the table, and was rushing madly towards the door, vainly withstood by Elsworthy, who feared we had gone too far.

‘Out of the way!’ screamed the madman. ‘Let go, or I’ll dash you to atoms!’ Suiting the action to the threat, he hurled my brother-in-law against the wall with stunning force, and rushed on, shouting incoherently: ‘My horse! There is time yet! Tom Edwards, my horse!’

Tom Edwards was luckily at hand, and although mightily surprised at the sudden uproar, which he attributed to Mr. Dutton being in drink, mechanically assisted to saddle, bridle, and bring out the roan mare; and before I could reach the stables, Dutton’s foot was in the stirrup. I shouted ‘Stop’ as loudly as I could, but the excited horseman did not heed, perhaps not hear me: and away he went, at a tremendous speed, hatless, and his long grey-tinted hair streaming in the wind. It was absolutely necessary to follow. I therefore directed Elsworthy’s horse, a much swifter and

more peaceful animal than Dutton's, to be brought out; and as soon as I got into the high country road, I too dashed along at a rate much too headlong to be altogether pleasant. The evening was clear and bright, and I now and then caught a distant sight of Dutton, who was going at a frantic pace across the country, and putting his horse at leaps that no man in his senses would have attempted. I kept the high road, and we had thus ridden about half an hour perhaps, when a bright flame about a mile distant, as the crow flies, shot suddenly forth, strongly relieved against a mass of dark wood just beyond it. I knew it to be Dutton's house, even without the confirmation given by the frenzied shout which at the same moment arose on my left hand. It was from Dutton. His horse had been *staked*, in an effort to clear a high fence, and he was hurrying desperately along on foot. I tried to make him hear me, or to reach him, but found I could do neither; his own wild cries and imprecations drowned my voice, and there were impassable fences between the high road and the fields across which he madly hastened.

The flames were swift this time, and defied the efforts of the servants and husbandmen who had come to the rescue, to stay, much less to quell them. Eagerly as I rode, Dutton arrived before the blazing pile at nearly the same moment as myself, and even as he fiercely struggled with two or three men, who strove by main force to prevent him from rushing into the flames, only to meet with certain death, the roof and floors of the building fell in with a sudden crash. He believed that all was over with the child, and again hurling forth the wild despairing cry I had twice

before heard that evening, he fell down, as if smitten by lightning, upon the hard frosty road.

It was many days ere the unhappy, sinful man recovered his senses, many weeks before he was restored to his accustomed health. Very cautiously had the intelligence been communicated to him, that Annie had not met the terrible fate, the image of which had incessantly pursued him through his fevered dreams. He was a deeply grateful, and, I believe, a penitent and altogether changed man. He purchased, through my agency, a valuable farm in a distant county, in order to be out of the way, not only of Hamblin, on whom he settled two hundred a year, but of others, myself included, who knew or suspected him of the foul intention he had conceived against his son-in-law, and which, but for Mrs. Rivers, would, on the last occasion, have been in all probability successful, so cunningly had the evidence of circumstances been devised. 'I have been,' said James Dutton to me at the last interview I had with him, 'all my life an overweening self-confident fool. At Romford, I boasted to you that my children should ally themselves with the landed gentry of the country, and see the result! The future, please God, shall find me in my duty—mindful only of that, and content, whilst so acting, with whatever shall befall me or mine.'

Dutton continues to prosper in the world; Hamblin died several years ago of delirium tremens; and Annie, I hear, *will* in all probability marry into the squirearchy of the country. All this is not perhaps what is called poetical justice, but my experience has been with the actual, not the ideal world.

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