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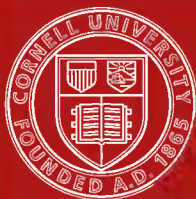
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'IT WAS A TRYING POSITION.'

[p. 19.]

TINKLETOP'S CRIME

&c.

BY GEORGE R. ^{Robert}SIMS

AUTHOR OF

MARY JANE'S MEMOIRS, 'ROGUES AND VAGABONDS, 'HOW THE POOR LIVE,
'THE DAGONET RECITER,' ETC.



WITH A FRONTISPIECE BY MAURICE GREIFFENHAGEN

NEW YORK:
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TINKLETOP'S CRIME.

MR. JEREMIAH TINKLETOP was a very nice old gentleman. He had commenced life as a stable-boy ; he had acquired an extensive and peculiar knowledge of life in an atmosphere redolent of artfulness ; he had drifted on to the turf, first as tout and runner to a bookmaker, then he had become the bookmaker's clerk, and then the bookmaker's partner, and eventually he had finished up by being a bookmaker absolutely on his own account. In the practice of his calling he had acquired a large fortune, and having come to sixty years of age without experiencing the tender passion, he had settled down into the typical nice old boy—fond of a good dinner, fond of good company, and ever ready to beam on those around him with that benevolent smile which is so easy when you have a good balance at the bank and a large fortune safely invested in sound securities.

Everybody liked 'Old Jerry Tinkletop,' as he was familiarly called ; 'Good old Tinkletop !' the young fellows always said when they spoke about him. Ever ready with a kindly word, and never backward in putting his hand in his pocket for a deserving case, what wonder that he was a popular old gentleman, and much run after by the people who are always hanging about the residence of Dives on the look-out for crumbs ?

Having said all this in Tinkletop's favour, I am compelle

by the necessities of my narrative to say a little on the other side. But if I show Mr. Tinkletop in a light which would not recommend him to the Archbishop of Canterbury as a bosom friend, I do so with a full sense of my responsibility. Parents who read this true story aloud to their children will, I am sure, be gratified by its moral; for its moral is irreproachable. Mr. Tinkletop—he was old enough to know better—occasionally kept doubtful company. It was very wrong of him; but look at the bringing up which he had and the whole surroundings of his life! Don't imagine for one moment that I am attempting to defend him. On the contrary, I am going to show what happened to him in consequence of his keeping doubtful company in order that it may be a warning to all old gentlemen of the same age.

When I say 'doubtful' company I do not wish to be misunderstood. Where I think Tinkletop was wrong—and I have argued the matter out with some of the best men in the country who knew him—was in allowing fighting men, boxing men, and the inferior kind of racing men to be too familiar with him. He should have kept them at their distance.

If he had become a churchwarden or a vestryman, and interested himself in parochial matters, he might have passed his evenings in very different company.

Still, we know that Fate moves in a very mysterious way, and it is quite possible that Mr. Tinkletop was meant to do as he did, in order to 'point a moral and adorn a tale.'

One evening, then—the date is quite unnecessary—Mr. Tinkletop, having been invited to join a nice little party at a famous restaurant, which has gorgeous rooms upstairs and a *café* and a bar below, put on his dress-coat, placed a beautiful 'malmaison' in his button-hole, and sallied forth.

The dinner was charming, and so was the company. There was Captain Jinks of the Horse Marines and Mrs. Jinks, and Tom Cobblestone, the gentleman who had begun life as a 'bus-driver, and was now the owner of a score of racehorses and the luckiest man on the turf; there was Professor Pot Walloper, the celebrated master of the noble art of self-defence, who taught all the nobility how to box; there was young Lord De Juggins, who had just inherited a couple of millions and the title from his grandfather; there was Miss Lola D'Arcy, a charming pretty songstress out of an engagement for the moment in consequence of the Frivolity season being over; and there was her brother, Jack Smith, whose occupation was unknown to anyone but himself. Besides these there were several ladies and gentlemen who were less known to fame, but they were all excellent company.

Tinkletop sat next to Miss D'Arcy, and he thought she was very charming. She was very nice and affable, and her conversation was bright and cheery, and she didn't snub Tinkletop in the least because he was old.

As the dinner progressed the good-fellowship increased all round, and a happier, merrier party never assembled under the roof of the famous restaurant.

When dinner was over the company began to separate. Some had engagements elsewhere. Some were going to the theatre, and others to their clubs. Presently Miss D'Arcy and Tinkletop, and Professor Pot Walloper and Miss D'Arcy's brother, were the only ones left at the table. Suddenly Tinkletop had an idea.

'Let's all go to the opera,' he said; 'I'll take a box. It's "Faust" to-night, and they say Gus Harris has put it on A 1.'

'Oh, I should like it immensely!' said Miss D'Arcy. 'The De Reszkés are splendid. Shall we go, Jack?'

'Certainly,' replied Jack; 'you three go first, and I'll follow you.'

'Right, my boy!' exclaimed Tinkletop, delighted.

He thought an evening at the opera, with the pleasure of Miss D'Arcy's society, would be magnificent; and he was quite radiant with dinner and delight when he rose to get his overcoat.

Jack, the brother of Miss D'Arcy, had gone out of the room; Miss D'Arcy was just going to get her cloak, and Professor Walloper was pouring the Chartreuse into his coffee-cup, as he found the liqueur-glass so absurdly small to drink out of, when there entered suddenly a handsome young gentleman in faultless evening dress.

Miss D'Arcy started.

'Oh, Captain Jones!' she said. 'I am so sorry. I'd forgotten all about you.'

'I thought so,' replied the Captain. 'I met your brother outside, and he told me you were here. Are you ready?'

'Quite ready,' said Miss D'Arcy. Then turning to Tinkletop, she said, with a sweet smile, 'I'm so sorry, Mr. Tinkletop; but I'd quite forgotten that I'd promised to go to the Lyceum this evening with Captain Jones. It's all Jack's fault—he ought to have reminded me.'

Another smile, a little nod of the head, and the vision of beauty had gone—and so had Captain Jones!

Tinkletop fell back heavily into a chair, one arm in his overcoat and the other arm out.

'Well!' he yelled; 'of all the cool impudence! The idea of that fellow daring to walk in here and take Miss D'Arcy off before my very eyes!'

'Why didn't you give him one over the nose?' said Professor Walloper, putting half a dozen big cigars into his pocket.

'Why didn't I?' exclaimed Mr. Tinkletop, almost in a

white heat with rage, 'because I'm old enough to be his father, and my boxing-days are over. But I'd give a hundred to have been young enough to do it.'

'Give a tenner,' said the professor, 'and somebody else'll do the job for you.'

'Give a tenner to have that fellow taught manners? Wouldn't I! Rather!'

'Give us your tenner,' said the professor, 'and consider it's done.'

'No violence!' exclaimed Tinkletop, as he put his hand in his waistcoat-pocket.

'Lor' bless you, no. Look here: you just want his hat knocked over his eyes and his shirt-front spoilt, to teach him not to be so jolly fast a-coming into private rooms and taking the company away. That's it, ain't it?'

'Yes,' said Tinkletop, 'that's it. Make him look ridiculous in Miss D'Arcy eyes, that's all.'

'Don't you fidget yourself,' said the professor, grabbing the tenner from the hesitating fingers of Mr. Tinkletop; 'it's only a little lesson he'll get. There's two or three of the division downstairs that'll be glad of the job, and do it well.'

Professor Walloper stuffed the note into his pocket and went downstairs, leaving Tinkletop alone with the head waiter, who had just come in with the bill, the rest of the company—including the donor of the dinner—having quite forgotten that it wasn't settled.

When Tinkletop went downstairs he met the professor standing in the doorway.

'It's all right, guv'nor,' said Walloper; 'the three chaps I've given the office to are gone to the Lyceum. They know their man, and when he comes out they'll give him a little lesson in good manners.'

Mr. Tinkletop said nothing, but went off home in a very

bad temper. Long before he reached his residence he was sorry that he had said anything to Walloper at all. Suppose the three roughs hurt the young fellow! Oh, nonsense; he wasn't going to worry himself about that. He had three whiskies and five pipes and went to bed, and had an exceedingly bad night; for he dreamt that he was standing at the altar with Miss D'Arcy, who was just about to say 'I will,' and become Mrs. Tinkletop, when a young fellow came up from a trap in the floor, and, seizing her, bore her away through the roof before his very eyes.

* * * * *

About half-past ten the next morning Mr. Tinkletop was having his breakfast when the servant came in and said that a gentleman wanted to see him on a very important matter.

'Show him in,' said Tinkletop.

The gentleman came in, and proved to be Professor Walloper.

The professor's features were distorted with anxiety.

'Good heavens, Walloper!' shrieked Tinkletop, as he saw the expression of the professor's face, 'what's the matter? There was no—no mischief done last night, was there?'

'No,' replied the professor, his voice gruff and gloomy, and his face as long as a farthing kite, 'no mischief; only them blessed fools went and killed the capting, that's all.'

'What! No, no! You have not come here to tell me the poor young fellow is dead?'

The professor shrugged his shoulders.

'That's the size of it, guv'nor,' he said. 'They hit him on the 'ed as he was going along the Embankment, meaning only to bash his hat in, and he went down like a log, and when they felt his 'eart he was dead. It's a very orful thing.'

'Awful!' exclaimed Tinkletop, mopping his brow, 'it's terrible! it's ruin—ruin to us all!'

'Oh, I don't know about that,' said the professor: 'it mightn't come to hanging, if we're careful.'

'Hanging! Oh, don't, don't!' moaned Tinkletop, as he buried his face in his hands; 'have the—the police—found the body?'

'No; not yet. My chaps tied a brick round the capting's neck, and threw him into the river.'

'Oh dear, oh dear!' gasped the old gentleman, 'how shocking! That makes it look like a deliberate crime. Poor young fellow! I wouldn't have had it happen for twenty thousand pounds.'

'Well, what are you going to do?'

'I—er—I don't know. I'm overwhelmed. Help me to think.'

'Well, you see, it's like this. You're all right if it never comes out as it was you as paid to have the captain mur—, I mean bashed; but them three young fellows as done it—you ought to think o' them. One of 'em's conscience is pricking him already; and he says he'll go and make a clean breast of it to the police, and say it was your gold as tempted him—'

'What! If he does that, I'm lost!' yelled Tinkletop.

'So I said,' replied the professor. 'And I argeyed it out with him, and I got 'em all to agree to get out of the country and lie quiet, till they see if the body's found, or the captain's friends inquire about it. It might blow over, you know, in time—'

'Yes, yes, quite right; and will they go?'

'Well, you see, guv'nor, they're poor fellows; they ain't got the coin to spare, and they've got mothers dependin' on 'em.'

'I'll pay all expenses.'

'I told 'em you would ; so they said a hunderd 'ud do it, and they're waitin' in a place of safety. Give me the hunderd, and I'll go and ship 'em off to Spain at once.'

'Here you are—here's the hundred-pound note. Go, go at once !'

The professor took the hundred pounds, groaned inwardly, and left the room. Then Tinkletop buried his face in his hands, and shed scalding tears. He would have given all his vast wealth and gone back to be a stable-boy again if he could only have undone that dark night's work.

* * * * *

For a week Jeremiah Tinkletop was like a man in a dream. He couldn't eat or sleep, for murder was on his soul and terror in his heart. He trembled at every sound. When he met the hangman in a public thoroughfare he always blushed and looked the other way. A fortnight after the first interview the professor turned up again. 'One of the young fellows had got home-sick, and was coming back. He couldn't stand Spain. If he could go to Australia—— It was the one that wanted to make a clean breast of it.'

'Yes, yes ; let him go to Australia ; let 'em all go,' murmured Tinkletop ; 'the farther away they go, the better I shall like it.'

It was two hundred pounds that the professor took away to send to Spain that day. It would just pay the fares of the three accomplices to Australia, and leave them a little to live on when they got there.

Six weeks afterwards the professor came again. This time he only had another hundred for the poor young fellows, but in about six months Mr. Tinkletop's crime had cost him £1,000.

It might have cost him more ; but one afternoon while

walking down Regent Street, he came suddenly upon Miss Lola D'Arcy, and she was leaning on the arm of *the murdered man*! At first Tinkletop thought it was a ghost, and his knees trembled under him.

He was to be haunted!!!

But presently, as he was wiping the heavy drops of perspiration from his brow, he saw the murdered man and Miss D'Arcy go into a jeweller's shop.

They asked to see some wedding-rings. The young lady tried one on, and the murdered man put down a hundred-pound note to pay for it.

Tinkletop was looking through the window and saw the number of the note. It was the number of the note he had only that morning given to the professor for those poor young fellows in Australia. With a wild cry of rage Tinkletop turned away, and, hailing a passing omnibus, went home, and tore up the confession of murder which he had left in a secret drawer of his writing-desk, to be opened with his will.

* * * * *

Professor Walloper only grinned when he met the infuriated Tinkletop that evening. He said it was a rattling good 'barney'—whatever that may mean—and everybody who was in the know, and a good many were, laughed too, and said it was the finest practical joke they'd heard for years.

It had all been got up for Tinkletop by his 'friends,' and the captain had never even been followed. The money obtained of the amorous bookmaker had been equally divided among the merry conspirators, and on their share of the 'joke' Miss D'Arcy and the captain had arranged to get married.

In honour of their benefactor their first little boy had 'Tinkletop' given to it as a Christian name

In the course of time Mr. Tinkletop sufficiently recovered his equanimity to tell the story himself, and now he laughs as loudly as anyone at the terror he experienced in consequence of his share in the 'crime.'

But he is more careful than he was about the company he keeps, and there is a whisper in the neighbourhood in which he lives that next year he will stand for churchwarden, and devote his leisure to parochial affairs, and spend his evenings at the local club, where everybody is eminently respectable and the whisky unimpeachable.

THE 'ALLIGATOR' BABIES.

CHAPTER I.

A STRANGE WINTER.

It was a Strange Winter.

Everybody said that it beat the summer, and that had been strange enough in all conscience. The month of June had been chiefly remarkable for a three weeks' fall of snow, during which many villages were buried; and railway communication was interrupted to such an extent that all express correspondence had to be sent by balloons, and a special corps of aerial postmen were drilled in the use of the parachute by Professor Baldwin.

The month of July saw a change. Thunder and lightning took the place of the snow, which, melting somewhat rapidly, caused serious floods and inundations. So serious were they in the Metropolis, that half the town was under water, and the delivery of letters had to be undertaken by experienced watermen.

It certainly was, all circumstances considered, a strange summer. But this Winter——

Was it a Strange Winter?

Was it not!!!

All through November the sun shone brilliantly. The heat was so intense that several coal merchants turned

their businesses into public companies, and with the capital thus obtained, started in the ice trade and realized fortunes in an incredibly short space of time.

The pawnbrokers had to enlarge their premises to take in overcoats and blankets, and an enterprising draper, who made a corner in summer costumes, had to be bought out by the Government in order to avoid a general uprising of the people.

In December the suburbs of London were ablaze with roses and pinks and blue forget-me-nots; and strawberries, on Christmas Day, were only sixpence a basket, and so plentiful that in all the workhouses they were given away to the pauper inmates with cream.

It *was* a Strange Winter!

But it is not at present with the Strange Winter that we are concerned, but with something stranger still, viz., an event which occurred in the Mediterranean Sea on or about the 21st of January, 188—, an event which affected the after-lives of many people to whom the reader has yet to be introduced.

It had been a glorious day in the Bay of Naples, and the officers of H.M.S. *Alligator* were spending the evening on deck, smoking cigarettes and talking over the events of the week.

In the distance Mount Vesuvius was smoking his evening pipe, and in another direction the beautiful blue island of Capri nestled on the bosom of the ocean like a tired child asleep upon its mother's breast.

Presently the swift dusk of an Italian night descended upon the scene, then the stars came out, and then, one by one, the officers of the *Alligator* commenced to turn in.

Only two were left—Admiral the Earl of ——— and Lieutenant Vere de Lacy, affectionately called 'Tootles' by all his comrades.

Both sat and looked at the stars, and presently both heaved a deep sigh.

'Belay there, admiral!' exclaimed the lieutenant; 'it seems to me that you have little to sigh for. A peer of the realm, an admiral of the fleet, a member of the Carlton, owner of the horse of the century, who has won ninety-nine races and never known defeat, and one of the few noblemen admitted behind the scenes of the Marionette Theatre at the Italian Exhibition—it seems to me that you can have no cause to sigh.'

'My dear Tootles,' replied the admiral, 'every heart knoweth its own sorrow. I am far from happy, and I don't feel very well. This Mediterranean fish is very pretty to look at, but I have my doubts about it if kept too long. But it is not digestion which troubles me now, but conscien——'

'You, an earl and an admiral, have a conscience?'

'Yes, Tootles, I confess it with a certain amount of diffidence; and I have also had domestic circumstances. You are aware that I married in early youth a beautiful Lady Rope Walker, whom I met at Charlton Fair when the fleet was anchored in the Thames.'

'Yes, it was in the society papers at the time,' said Tootles.

'The marriage was a most happy one. Except for a strange desire at times to put up a rope in our grounds and go for a walk upon it, my dear Annetta was all that an English countess should be. It was, alas! in attempting to renew the feats of her youth, at the age of forty-five, that she overbalanced herself and fell to the ground.'

'Poor girl!' exclaimed Tootles, wiping away a glistening teardrop with the back of his hand.

'She left me two sons, who grew up in course of time; one, the eldest, and my favourite, I lost sight of for many

years, and didn't know what had become of him until I was sent for late one night to bail him out at Bow-street. He didn't thank me, but walked away, and when the case was called on he didn't turn up, so my bail was estreated. Poor Fred! he was always a bad one for keeping appointments. He eventually committed Brandyceide.'

'Poor Fred!' exclaimed Tootles, with a sympathetic sigh, adding, as soon as he had recovered himself, 'and your other son, what became of him?'

'Don't mention him in my hearing,' exclaimed the admiral angrily, bringing his telescope down with a bang on the taffrail. 'Hugh was a bad fellow; he disgraced the family by marrying a governess who taught at the East-End of London—Bethnal Green or some dreadful place, I believe. But pass the rum bottle. I'll have just one more tumbler, and then I shall turn in.'

The lieutenant hastened to pass the rum bottle, for the admiral was as hasty and irascible an old sea dog as there was in the service. As soon as the admiral had mixed himself a jorum, he turned to the sympathetic lieutenant and said:

'And you, Tootles: there is something in your life that makes you sad, is there not?'

'There is, my lord,' replied Tootles; 'there is the memory of other days.'

'A love affair, eh, Tootles?'

'Yes, my lord—a love affair,' replied Tootles, gazing far away over the Mediterranean to the distant shores of Algeria. 'I loved Marion Grey with a love that nothing can alter, but she refused my hand and disappeared. She refused it with tears, and said there was a reason. You knew Marion Grey, my lord?'

'What, the pretty little girl who used to be behind the bar at the Three Jolly Tars at Plymouth!—do you mean her?'

'Alas! yes. When I spoke to her of marriage she shed tears and declared that it could never be. A week afterward she was gone, and none knew whither; and from that day to this I have heard nothing of her, and it is now more than five years ago. Poor Marion!'

'Well, Tootles, it is no good regretting the past,' exclaimed the admiral, emptying his glass; 'we must think of the future. If we are going ashore the first thing tomorrow, and going to walk up to the top of Vesuvius, we'd better turn in and get a good night's rest.'

Tootles thought so too, so, bidding his superior officer a hearty good-night, he went downstairs to his berth.

When he pushed the door open he uttered an exclamation of astonishment. He rubbed his eyes, unable to believe that he was awake.

For sitting up in his bunk was a lovely little girl of about three, with golden hair and deep violet eyes. She had Tootles' full-dress cap on her head, and she had made a dolly of Tootles' sword.

'What the deu——' exclaimed Tootles. Then he stopped short. The little girl looked up at him and laughed, and said: 'Baby Dolly. Baby Dolly——'

'Confound it!' yelled Tootles; 'this is a nice go! What the dickens is the meaning of it? It's a nice trick to play a fellow to go and put a baby in his bed. And where the dickens does she come from? there's not a female about the ship.'

Presently he approached the child, and noticed that a piece of paper was attached to her dress by a pin.

He took it off and read it:

'I have not the means to support our child any longer, so I return it to its unnatural father.'

'Oh, blow it all!' yelled Tootles; 'I'm hanged if I can

stand that; I'll throw it overboard, or there will be a scandal.'

He picked the little intruder up in his arms and was about to put it through the porthole, when the child, with a merry laugh, flung her arms about his neck and kissed him.

'I oo baby—oo dear ickle baby. I Miss Champignon,' she said, and then, laying her little golden head upon his shoulders, she fell fast asleep.

Tootles was conquered. He sat down gently on the edge of the bed, and rocked the baby to and fro, as he had seen young mothers do, and began to sing 'Hush-a-bye, baby,' and so much was he taken up with his new occupation, that he didn't notice that the admiral, followed by several of his officers, had burst into his room, until the admiral yelled out: 'Why, hang me, if there isn't another of 'em here!'

CHAPTER II.

SOMETHING FOR THE ADMIRAL.

Poor Tootles blushed crimson as he found himself in the presence of his comrades with a child in his arms, but he put his finger to his lips and said, 'Don't make a noise, or else you'll wake the baby,' and, instantly, all the brave fellows were as silent as mice, and walked about Tootles' cabin on tiptoe. All except one, Lieutenant Grimthorpe, who curled his lip, and made a very objectionable remark about brats being brought on board to disturb the harmony of the ship.

He was speedily scowled down by the other officers, and then the admiral told Tootles the object of his visit. He had come to inquire if he, Tootles, had seen anybody put a little boy in his, the admiral's, cabin.

'A little boy?' exclaimed Tootles, 'you don't mean to say, my lord, that there is a little boy in your cabin?'

'Yes, I do, Tootles—a little boy rather older than your little girl.'

'Don't say *my* little girl, if you please. I assure you that I never saw the child before——'

'Or her mother either,' said Lieutenant Grimthorpe with a grin.

'Shame on you, Grimthorpe,' exclaimed the other officers, as they handed Tootles' Baby from one to the other, and took it in turns to walk up and down with it and hush it to sleep.

'Come with me, Tootles,' said the admiral, 'and see the boy; perhaps he is meant for you, too!'

Tootles followed the admiral to his cabin, and there, sure enough, fast asleep in the admiral's bunk, lay a beautiful little fellow of about six. He was neatly dressed in a black velvet suit, and had long golden curls.

'It is a most extraordinary thing,' said the admiral, 'and I can't think how he got here.'

'Very odd,' said Tootles, 'that I should have a little girl put into my bed at the same time.'

'Odd!' exclaimed the admiral, 'it's inf——'

'Hush!' said Tootles, putting his hand over the admiral's mouth. 'Not before the boy.'

At that moment the dear little fellow opened his big blue eyes and woke up.

'Now, then, young shaver!' exclaimed the admiral, 'who are you?'

'If you please,' said the little boy, getting up and arranging his curls in front of the looking-glass, 'if you please, I'm a publican.'

'A what?' roared the admiral.

'A publican. At least, that's what Mr. 'Obbs is, and me and Mr. 'Obbs are friends.'

'Oh, you're a publican, little boy, are you? And what's a publican, pray?'

'A publican is a man wot cuts kings' throats and 'ates the haristocracy.'

'Good gracious!' said the admiral, 'this child means that he is a Republican. At his age it is very awful.'

'It is very, very awful,' sighed Tootles. 'I trust, admiral, that you will put him ashore at once. He might poison the mind of the little girl in my cabin.'

'You young rascal!' roared the admiral; 'how dare you come on board one of Her Majesty's ships and talk treason? You shall have the cat.'

'Oh! thank you, sir. I am very fond of cats. My mamma has one. Do you drown your cat's kittens?'

The admiral laughed till he was black in the face.

'You're a rum little codger,' he said. 'What's your mamma's name, pray?'

'I always call her "Duckey."'

'Humph! That's a nice name for a boy to call his mother.'

'My papa always called her Duckey, and I thought that was her name.'

'Ho! ho!' said the admiral, 'so you've got a pa and a ma also?'

'No, sir; my papa is dead. Duckey told me so.'

'And pray, young shaver, how did you come on board this ship?'

'I was brought by a lady. She was coming from London with a little girl she wanted to leave with its papa, who was in a ship here—the admiral looked hard at Tootles, who turned the colour of a peony—and my mamma heard of it, and asked her if she would bring me and leave me with my grandpapa at the same time, as I was getting a big boy, and my education ought to be seen to.'

'Your grandpapa!' exclaimed the admiral; 'is he on board this ship?'

'Yes, sir. He is Admiral the Earl of —, and I am Little Lord Folderoy.'

In a moment the admiral realized the position. This was his grandson—the child of the son he had cast from his hearth and home—the child of poor dead Hugh. But he was a proud old man, and checked his emotion. The keen, gray eyes glistened under his shaggy eyebrows, and though he was proud of the boy, yet he wouldn't show it.

'So you are my grandson,' he exclaimed; 'very well, I must take care that proper respect is shown you. You must be officially received.'

At a signal from the admiral all hands were summoned, and the electric light having been turned on, the admiral made a short speech.

'Officers and men of the *Alligator*, this little boy is my grandson, Lord Folderoy. You will, in future, receive his orders as though they were mine.'

'Ay, ay, sir.'

It was a trying position for a child reared in lowly circumstances, as little Hugh had been. His mamma lived in two rooms in the Bethnal Green Road, where she gave lessons on the piano to the shopkeepers' daughters, but, having American blood in her veins, nothing could make her anything but a lady by birth. The child, reared amid these surroundings, had certainly learnt to drop his h's, but nothing could alter his noble bearing or his aristocratic breeding.

'Men of the *Alligator*,' he said, in his childish treble, after they had all saluted him, 'I am very glad to meet you. I 'ope we shall all be great friends. I shan't like you better than Mr. 'Obbs, the pork butcher, but I may like you as well, and I 'ope you are all publicans.'

The bo'sun stepped forward.

'Asking your young honour's pardon,' he said, 'we ain't all publicans, but we're all jolly good customers to 'em when we are ashore, and maybe that'll do as well.'

'You don't understand me, I fear,' replied the little lord, putting his hands in the pockets of his black velvet knickerbockers. 'I mean, I 'ope you all 'ate the haristocracy, and would cut a king's throat if you got the chance.'

'Ay, ay, your honour, that we would,' replied the men.

'What, you dogs!' yelled the admiral, and he instantly ordered every man to receive a hundred lashes.

The men fell on their knees and begged for mercy. They declared that they had acquiesced in his young lordship's sentiments involuntarily; but the admiral swore that discipline must be maintained.

The first man was led forward, and was about to be flogged. The cat-o'-nine-tails was in the air, and about to descend on the poor wretch's back, when there was a cry from Tootles.

He had brought the little girl up to see the reception of the little lord, and she had stolen away and climbed up on the side of the vessel, and her hat had blown off. In trying to save it she overbalanced herself and fell into the sea.

In a moment every man rushed to the side of the vessel, but, before a boat could be launched, the little lord, flinging off his velvet jacket, had jumped upon the bulwarks and plunged into the ocean.

In a moment he had Tootles' Baby in his arms, and, seizing a rope which was thrown to him, was dragged on deck.

With tears in his eyes the old admiral embraced him, and even the most hardened of the common sailors wept.

'My boy! my boy!' said the admiral, 'I am proud of you. I shall die happy now, knowing that my title and my

estates will pass to one who will worthily uphold the honour of our race.'

Before the men went back to their berths a double allowance of rum was served to each, and then, with three times three, they drank the health of Little Lord Folderoy and Tootles' Baby, and the old admiral was so affected that he borrowed Tootles' pocket-handkerchief, and, burying his weather-beaten face in it, sobbed like a child.

CHAPTER III.

WHAT HAPPENED ON VESUVIUS.

ON the following day a party of English naval officers sat together near the edge of the crater on the summit of Mount Vesuvius. They had come up by the Funicular Railway to the cone, and had completed the rest of the journey on foot. Lieutenant Grimthorpe was of the party, so was Tootles, and so was the admiral.

Little Lord Folderoy and Miss Champignon were playing about on the crater, watching, with childish glee, the stones which the great volcano hurled ever and anon into the air.

'What are you going to do with that brat, Tootles?' said Grimthorpe presently, as Miss Champignon came playfully behind him and dropped some hot lava down the back of his neck.

Tootles' face went crimson.

'I'll thank you to mind your own business, Lieutenant Grimthorpe,' he exclaimed angrily.

'It is my business,' replied the lieutenant. 'The kid's an infernal nuisance.'

Little Lord Folderoy had overheard the conversation. His fair young face was scarlet with indignation, and his

big blue eyes sparkled as he rushed up to Grimthorpe and exclaimed :

'How dare you speak so of Miss Champignon in my presence, sir ?'

Grimthorpe looked down at the lad contemptuously

'Go away, little boy,' he said.

'Not till you apologize,' and the lad drew himself up to his full height.

'And if I refuse ?'

'I will wait till I am a man, and then I will fight you !'

The old Earl of —, who had been having forty winks with his handkerchief over his face, leapt up and caught the boy in his arms.

'My brave boy,' he cried, 'how proud I am of you !'

'Are you, grandpapa ? I am so glad. I shall tell Mr. 'Obbs that there is some good in Hearls after all.'

The admiral laughed.

'Where does Mr. Hobbs live ?' he said.

'Oh, just opposite Duckey. I'll introduce him to you when I get home, and perhaps he'll take you one Sunday afternoon to a meeting of the Democrackik Fed—something—it's a very hard word—they meet in Hyde Park and Trafalgar Square, and you'll learn a lot about haristocrats there——'

The boy and his grandfather were talking, and Tootles was listening to them. The other officers were playing cards, and no one noticed Grimthorpe, who had strolled away towards the edge of the crater, where little Miss Champignon was playing at hopscotch.

A piercing cry made everybody spring to their feet, and glance in the direction of the sound.

There, on the edge of that seething caldron, stood Grimthorpe—in his arms he held Tootles' Baby, little Miss Champignon. A terrible look was on his face.

'Curse you!' he cried; 'why did your mother bring you on board the ship?—your fate be on her head!'

Then he hurled Tootles' Baby from him, and down she went, golden curls, and blue eyes, and pretty ways and all, into the burning fiery furnace. She had been swallowed up in the crater of Mount Vesuvius.

Strong arms seized the wicked lieutenant, and he was instantly bound, and two marines were ordered to mount guard over him.

Tootles rushed to the edge of the crater, and tried to peer through the sulphurous smoke. He saw only the awful abyss vomiting flames and lava, and sulphurous fumes. Then he fell on his face in a fit, and knew no more.

The officers agreed that nothing could be done, and were about to descend the mountain with the prisoner, when the admiral cried out, 'Where is Lord Folderoy?'

Nobody knew.

The boy had disappeared.

Suddenly the truth burst upon them—Little Lord Folderoy had gone after Miss Champignon.

The admiral in his despair threw his cocked hat on the ground and jumped upon it, and then he bit the buttons of his uniform and went off in a strong fit of hysterics.

And while they were all wondering what they should do, a little voice was heard to proceed from the midst of the smoke on the summit of the mountain.

'Grandpa!'

The voice was Little Lord Folderoy's.

The officers rushed to the spot, and peering down into the crater beheld a little form dressed in black velvet hanging on by a rock, and supporting the fainting form of little Miss Champignon.

A rope was procured and thrown to him, and presently the children were drawn up again safe and sound. The boy

had gone down hand over hand into the mouth of the crater ; there he had found Tootles' Baby lying on a ledge of rock, and then he had climbed up with her till he could go no further, and had to shout for help.

She was all right again in a few minutes, and so was he, only the beautiful black velvet suit was scorched all over, and Little Lord Folderoy would never be able to wear it any more.

'My dear boy,' said the admiral, as soon as he had mastered his emotion, 'what can I give you for this brave deed? Shall I buy you a pony?'

'No, grandpapa; I couldn't ride it on the *Alligator*. If you must reward me for a deed which any gentleman would have done under the circumstances, promise that when I am old enough I shall marry Miss Champignon.'

'Tootles,' said the admiral, 'do you consent?'

'I could wish my baby no better fate than to be your lordship's granddaughter-in-law,' replied Tootles, and taking Miss Champignon's hand, he was about to place it in that of Little Lord Folderoy, when Grimthorpe, who was lying bound upon the ground, leapt to his feet.

'I forbid the banns!' he cried in a voice of thunder.

'You do! and by what right, sir?' exclaimed the admiral, his voice quivering with indignation.

'By every right, sir. Miss Champignon is my child; her mother is my wife.'

If an eruption of Vesuvius had taken place there and then, it could not have caused more surprise to the officers of H.M.S. *Alligator*.

''Tis false!' cried Tootles, feeling that he must say something.

''Tis true!' replied Grimthorpe. 'I was married secretly, and I didn't send my wife my pay, so she brought the child to Italy, and put it in my bed on board the *Alligator*. When

I found it there, I picked it up and put it in Tootles' bed instead. Now, do with me as you will, but while I live, my daughter shall never be the bride of Little Lord Folderoy.'

CHAPTER IV.

THE PRISONER IN IRONS.

LATE that night the admiral and Tootles sat together in the admiral's cabin. Grimthorpe was a prisoner and in irons, and the question to be decided was whether to hand him over to the Neapolitan authorities for the attempted murder of his child, or to court-martial him and then dismiss him from the navy, and let him go upon condition that he resigned all claim to Miss Champignon.

The sailors adored Miss Champignon. When they heard of the attempted crime, they were with difficulty restrained from keel-hauling the delinquent. Miss Champignon was everybody's pet. She spoke to the man at the wheel. She had the big guns fired off for her amusement, and, dressed in a sweet little naval costume, she stood on the bridge with a little telescope under her arm, and gave orders which the men obeyed with a hearty 'Ay, ay, missie,' and they blessed her 'purty face,' and were her humble slaves.

The admiral was for hanging Grimthorpe to the yard-arm and saying nothing about it, but Tootles wished to know a little more about Miss Champignon's mamma first.

So, obtaining the admiral's consent, he went to the place in which Grimthorpe was confined, and interviewed him.

'Grimthorpe,' he said, 'you are a bad fellow, but if you make a clean breast of it, I will intercede for you. Who is Miss Champignon's mamma?'

Grimthorpe eyed his interlocutor with a fierce eye that glistened with hate.

'Can't you guess?' he said.

A fierce pang shot across Tootles' breast. He had been wondering whose face the child's reminded him of. Grimthorpe's 'Can't you guess?' was a revelation to him.

'Not Marion Grey?' he cried; 'don't say it is Marion Grey!'

'Her name *was* Marion Grey. It is now Marion Grimthorpe.'

At last poor Tootles knew the truth. Marion had refused his love because she was the wife of another. And that other had basely and cruelly deserted her and her child—the child that he, Tootles, now loved as his own daughter.

'Grimthorpe, you are a villain.'

Grimthorpe shrugged his shoulders.

'There must be villains in the world,' he said, 'and,' he added, looking straight at Tootles, 'there must be fools.'

Without noticing the covert insult, Tootles continued:

'Where is Marion now?'

'Be good enough not to call my wife by her Christian name.'

'Where is Mrs. Grimthorpe now?'

'I don't know, and I don't care. I only know that it was like her impudence to put the brat in my bed.'

'That did not give you the right to put it down the crater of Vesuvius.'

'A man can do what he likes with his own.'

'No, not according to the law of civilized nations. For the attempted murder of your child you can be severely punished.'

'Yes, but I can't be hanged. So Mrs. Grimthorpe won't be a widow. Aren't you sorry?'

'Listen, Grimthorpe. I scorn your vulgar insinuations; but I have a proposition to make to you. Leave this ship, abandon all claim to Miss Champignon, and you shall be set at liberty.'

'I certainly can't leave the ship till I am set at liberty.'

'Promise to do as I say and your irons shall be removed.'

'I'll see you——'

At that moment Little Lord Folderoy came running in.

'Hush!' exclaimed Tootles, 'not before the boy.'

'Tootles,' said the little lord, 'grandpapa has just promised me that when we get back to England, Duckey—that is my mother—shall live in one of the labourers' cottages on his estate rent-free. Isn't it good of him?'

'Very,' sneered Grimthorpe. 'Will he give her the washing from the Hall as well?'

'How dare you insult my mamma!' said Little Lord Folderoy, stamping his foot. 'She is a lady, and never washes herself.'

'You mean, dear, that she never does her own washing,' interrupted Tootles gently.

'Yes, that's what I mean. Please come away and leave this bad man alone. Grandpapa wants you to come and help him with another bottle of rum.'

'I'll join the admiral presently,' replied Tootles.

And getting rid of the boy, he once more endeavoured to come to terms with Grimthorpe. But Grimthorpe was obstinate. He vowed that they might do what they liked with him, but he would never resign his authority over little Miss Champignon.

CHAPTER V.

THE STEEPLECHASE.

Six months had passed away, and H.M.S. *Alligator* had returned home and been paid off. Grimthorpe had been released by the admiral, who, after thinking the matter out, had decided that if Miss Champignon was to become Lady Folderoy, and eventually Countess of ——, it was just as

well that her father should not be a convicted felon. So the matter was hushed up, and Grimthorpe was allowed to retain his rank. But the other officers treated him with marked coldness, and the men despised him.

It was the day of the naval and military steeplechases at Kempton Park. In the members' enclosure were Tootles, Miss Champignon, Little Lord Folderoy, and Admiral the Earl of —.

Duckey was on the course in a carriage which her son had provided for her. He ran across and kissed his mamma after every race, but the admiral declined to be introduced to her, as she was only an East-end governess, of American descent.

'Don't you think Duckey is very pretty?' said Little Lord Folderoy one day to his grandpapa.

'Yes, my boy; she's an exceedingly pretty young woman, but she does not belong to my set. I wish her to have everything that is right, but don't introduce me to her.'

So Duckey, although she was never invited to the Hall, had her cottage on the estate kept in good repair. And when the Hall cat had five kittens the earl ordered four to be drowned, and one to be sent to his son's wife with his compliments; and the gardener was instructed to leave a cabbage or a vegetable marrow now and then, and in various little ways such as these the earl showed that his love for his grandson was gradually softening his heart towards the pretty governess.

It was the great race of the day. The numbers had gone up, and the jockeys' names were being put beside them. The riders were all gentlemen and officers of the army or navy. Tootles looked through his glasses in order that Miss Champignon might mark her card. When he got to 'No. 15, Captain Jones's Royal Commission, by Lord

Randolph out of Bribery,' he uttered an exclamation of surprise. The jockey was Lieutenant Grimthorpe.

The horse was first favourite for the race, and Miss Champignon's father was its rider.

The admiral saw it, too, and both men looked long and earnestly at each other.

The bell rang, and the course was cleared. The horses went to the post, and started. On they came, nearer and nearer; over the hurdles and over the ditches they flew, and suddenly there was a cry. A little boy had got on the course right in front of the horses—right in front of the last hurdle.

The people shouted. The boy, terrified, stood still. Royal Commission was about to clear the hurdle. Seeing the horse so close to him the boy threw up his hands. Royal Commission swerved and came down with a crash, his rider falling under him.

The boy was Little Lord Folderoy. He was dragged out of danger by a beautiful young woman who had run on to the course. It was Duckey.

But Lieutenant Grimthorpe didn't move, and he was carried off on an ambulance.

That afternoon the earl drove home in Duckey's victoria, with Little Lord Folderoy between them.

'Madam,' he said, 'henceforth I shall receive you at the Hall and treat you as an equal, for you have saved my grandson's life.'

And the same afternoon Tootles was fetched in a hurry to the bedside of a gentleman jockey who had broken his neck in three places.

'Tootles,' said the unhappy man, 'I want you to forgive me, for I can't last long. Marion's address is No. 739, Peabody's Buildings, Farringdon Road. When Miss Champignon is Lady Folderoy, tell her that her father was sorry

for what he had done, and give her my blessing. You'll find a judgment summons for £58 10s. in my coat-pocket. If you would like anything to remember me by, Tootles, you can have that.'

* * * * *

Twelve months afterwards, Lieutenant Tootles, R.N., was married at St. George's, Hanover Square, to Marion Grimthorpe, and Miss Champignon and Little Lord Folderoy were at the wedding; and so was the earl, and so was Duckey, who is a great lady now, and resides at the Hall, and is treated with the greatest respect by everybody.

Miss Champignon is staying there while Tootles and her mamma are away on their honeymoon, and the little lord is her devoted cavalier. He has already greatly improved the estate, and the earl does nothing without consulting him.

Mr. 'Obbs has cut the Social Democratic Federation, and has been made an honorary member of the Carlton Club, where he spends his evenings reading the *Morning Post*; and during the recent riots in Trafalgar Square he was sworn in as a special constable, and had his head broken by his former comrades, of which he is very proud.

Miss Champignon is idolized by the earl's tenantry, and when she and Little Lord Folderoy gallop by on their ponies, with their grooms behind them and sixteen dogs scampering in front of them, the villagers all look after them and say: 'Bless their pretty hearts, what a nice young couple they will make, surely!'

But though the little lady loves the little lord, and it is an understood thing that in twenty years or so they will be married, Miss Champignon never forgets her new papa, and every morning, at breakfast-time, she climbs on his knee and says, 'Miss Champignon loves Tootles,' and then she turns to her mamma and says, 'Mamma, you love Tootles, too, don't you?'

And mamma laughs, and says, 'Yes, my dear, very much indeed.'

And when the admiral, and Duckey, and Little Lord Folderoy come in, there is quite a family party, and they are all as happy as happy can be.

One thing, however, did upset Miss Champignon for a time, and that was when she came home after a long stay at the Hall and found a little dolly in long clothes on Tootles' knee.

And when they told her it was Tootles' Baby, she stamped her foot and said, 'No ; *I'm* Tootles' Baby.'

But she got used to it in time, and now she loves her little brother very much. And if you want to know any more about these interesting people you must pay another shilling.

A ROMANCE OF THE PEERAGE UNBURKED.

I AM four-and-twenty years of age, tall, well-looking, and a duke ! I have not gone very deeply into the family history, because I have always been afraid of what I should find out, and I remember the old proverb, ' Where ignorance is bliss, 'tis folly to be wise.' I have no doubt that my ancestors came over with the Conqueror, but I don't think they did much good, as in a horrid Radical journal which was sent me anonymously by post, with a big pencil-mark to draw my attention to an article on the aristocracy, I read that we were not made dukes till the reign of Charles II.

I don't trouble now very much about my ancestors, but I am rather concerned about myself. To tell you the honest truth, I am in what my mamma, the duchess, would call a ' bit of a mess.'

My mamma, the duchess, has never quite forgotten the language of her youth, and her youth was passed in the land of comic songs.

My mamma, the duchess, was a celebrated serio-comic in her day, and my papa fell in love with her and married her when he was very young. There is a portrait of her in an old volume of the *Entr'acte* which I found in a library, and from this I should think that she was very charming and very ' chic ' in those days. Some of the old boys I meet sometimes tell me she was quite the rage of the music-halls

once, and that her song 'Sarah's up to Snuff' took the town by storm, and got three encores nightly.

My papa, the marquis, died at the North Pole after five years of happy married life—he was sent to the North Pole by my grandpapa, the duke, who thought it was the best place for him. My mamma remained at home, and still, I believe, continued to do 'three turns nightly' at the principal halls of the Metropolis.

Being a marchioness, she got magnificent terms. I even heard that one manager paid her as much as £100 a week, on condition that she would come on in her coronet to sing 'Sarah's up to Snuff'—and she did. My papa became a duke while he was at the North Pole, owing to the death of my grandpapa; and then, of course, my mamma became a duchess—and I was a marquis. I was a tiny baby at that time and knew nothing about it. All I know I have learned since.

After my papa, the duke, died there was a lot of trouble. My grandpapa had, it seems, gambled very nearly all the estates away, and my papa had finished the rest, so that there was very little left for us—only enough to bring us in a very modest income, all our property, which was not much, having been parted with before we came into it.

I am not an Irish duke, as you might imagine perhaps from the above, but an English one. I have taken my seat in the House of Lords because mamma wishes me to do so, but that is all the benefit I have derived from the position.

My mamma, the duchess, married again two years after my papa died. She married Mr. Tom Lingham, a lion-comique, and they made a good deal of money by appearing together as 'The Duchess of Shadwell and Mr. Tom Lingham,' in an entertainment specially written for them, and a dog who was very clever.

The dog was Mr. Tom Lingham's. We had a house in

the Wandsworth Road, I remember, and there I was brought up, with my younger brothers and sisters, the young Lingham, and the dog.

They thought a lot of me, and so did the servants, because I was a duke, and so did Mr. Lingham's and mamma's relations, who used to come to tea on Sunday, and call me 'your grace'; but my papa's relations never came to tea on Sunday or any other day, and we never saw anything of them at all.

Mamma said they were a stuck-up lot, and I suppose they must have been; but she said she didn't care, for she was a duchess, and if they didn't like her using the coronet on the stage at the music-halls, they could lump it. It was her coronet, and she should do as she liked with it. Mamma was very fond of her coronet; she had it on everything.

It was awfully big on the brougham that used to take her and Mr. Lingham to the Halls of an evening, and there was a very big gilt one on our front door in the Wandsworth Road; and when we went to Margate I had a coronet on my spade and bucket when I went on the sands, and mamma had hers on her field-glasses, that she always wore slung across her shoulders on the jetty, in case she wanted to look at a man-of-war in the offing.

I remember all these things now I sit down to write the history of my life, which, after going to the House of Lords and mixing with other dukes, I think must have been a very remarkable one.

I was a great success in the House of Lords. I didn't say anything, but everybody stared at me; and in the smoking-room a lot of the other lords came and talked to me, and asked me questions, and they got me on to sing a comic song I had learned of my mamma, the duchess.

At the time I took my seat in the House of Lords, mamma had become very stout, and had retired from the profession;

and Mr. Lingham, who had lost his voice, had made a ready-money book in the little ring at race-meetings, and gone broke over it, and had started a music-hall agency in the Waterloo Road ; and I don't think we were quite as well off as we used to be.

When I had been to the House of Lords once or twice, and found out how other dukes enjoyed themselves, I began to feel dissatisfied with my position, and I went home and had a long talk with Mr. Lingham and the duchess. It was then I learnt that my papa had left me nothing but the title, and that all the family property had gone to the money-lenders.

I am sure that my papa must have been jolly hard up, for a boy at the school I went to in Wandsworth, whose father was a socialist lecturer in Hyde Park on Sunday, told all the other boys that my papa had once been had up at the Old Bailey for getting a thousand pounds on false pretences—it was something to do with a bill—and that he had been through the Bankruptcy Court and paid fourpence in the pound soon after he married my mamma. We had a fight and he made my nose bleed, and then all the boys came round and said it was not blue blood, but red, just like a greengrocer or a tailor.

I am not much of a duke, but I am duke enough to know that it was not good form to wash one's family dirty linen in public. I have only recalled all these circumstances of my early life to let you know exactly the position I am in at four-and-twenty.

It is this.

Mr. Lingham says he has quite enough to do to support his own family, and my mamma, the duchess, has given me to understand that it is time I looked out for myself, and earned my own living.

That is where the difficulty comes in. There are so few

things a duke can do, especially a duke who is not particularly clever at anything. Mamma says I had better go to America and advertise that I am open to offers from millionaires with a daughter to spare. But how am I to go to America? I won't go steerage; and how am I to live when I get there? The one pound a week that mamma allows me won't go far in America. Besides, I am in love!

Oh! if you could see her you would understand all I feel as I write these words——

She is the charmingest, prettiest girl in all the world, and she serves behind the counter at Messrs. Jones and Co.'s, the drapers in the Wandsworth Road, and her name is Daisy.

Daisy Smith!

I like to write it. I write it everywhere. I write it with the soap on my looking-glass. I write it on my cuffs with a lead-pencil. I write it with my fingers in the dust on the mantelshelf in our front parlour. I write it in chalk on our front door. If I were a prisoner, I should write it with my blood on my dungeon walls!

My darling Daisy is eighteen; her father is a four-wheel cabman, and her mother is pew-opener at St. Mary's Church, Shoreditch. They idolize her—and so do I.

I am always going into Jones and Co.'s on some excuse—if it is only to buy a penny packet of pins—and then I take a chair and gaze at Daisy till the shopwalker comes along and starts me off.

And of an evening I wait outside till the shop shuts, and then I walk with Daisy as far as her home. She would like to ask me to tea on Sunday, but there are difficulties in the way. She has found out that I am a duke, and she says that if it were known that she had a duke to tea her character would be gone.

I cannot see why, but I suppose there is plenty of gossip if a shop-girl takes a duke home to tea with a four-wheel

cabman and a pew-opener. It makes me curse the day that I was born a duke—though, of course, I was really only born a marquis—or not that, for papa was only a marquis when I was born, so that I was really only a lord; but I am a duke now, and it is the same thing in the end.

But though I have not yet been home to tea with Daisy, we are engaged—we have plighted our troth and broken a sixpence, and both sworn never to marry anyone else.

I see more of Daisy, too, than I used to, because the shopwalker doesn't interfere, and Jones and Co., understanding that we are an engaged couple, allow me to sit on the big chair at the counter for an hour a day. They have recognised my position by putting a big card in the window, on which is printed 'By appointment to the Duke of Shadwell.' That's because I sometimes buy a pennyworth of pins there!

* * * * *

It is a month since I wrote the last lines. A great change has taken place in my prospects, and in Daisy's too.

She has made me the happiest of men. We are going to be married, and mamma has given her consent. This is how it happened.

When my dear Daisy had her annual week's holiday, she was very unwell with the long hours and the gas in the shop, and she was told by her father's club doctor she ought to go to the seaside; and so, though it broke her heart to be parted from me so long, she went to stay with a married sister at Brighton.

It was Brighton race week, and my dear Daisy went one day to the races.

While she was leaning over the rails she saw a rough-looking fellow come up to another rough-looking fellow, and she heard him say: 'It's all right; the "Shemozzle colt" is on the job, and the owner is on a thou. S.P. in London.'

'Oh!' said the other fellow, 'then I shall have a quid on. I can get 12 to 1.'

Daisy's father, the four-wheel cabman, is a bit of a sportsman, and she had heard him talk about horse-racing, and she knew the conversation she had heard meant that the 'Shemozzle colt' was going to win at 12 to 1.

She had a sovereign in her pocket, and she thought she should like to turn it into £12. That would mean so many benefits for her parents.

She went to a bookmaker, and said, 'The "Shemozzle colt," please,' and gave him her sovereign and took a ticket, and watched the race.

It was a desperate race, and poor Daisy thought her sovereign was gone; but just at the last moment the 'Shemozzle colt' came with a 'wet sail.'

'The "Shemozzle colt" wins!' yelled the crowd. And it did, for it just got its head in front on the post.

When Daisy went for her money, her heart was in her mouth. There was a noisy crowd round a battered and broken board, and they said they had been 'welshed.'

But Daisy's bookmaker was at his post smiling. And when Daisy handed up her ticket, she received thirteen golden sovereigns, and almost jumped for joy.

When she was walking away with her money past the carriages, she saw a young gentleman come up to two ladies in a carriage, and she heard him say to them, 'You must have a little on 'Gilliflower' for the next race. Tommy Loates rides it, and the trainer's just told me it is a certainty.'

Daisy went to her bookmaker directly the numbers were up, and asked him what price 'Gilliflower' was.

'Seven to one to you, my dear,' he said.

'Yes, seventy pounds to ten,' said Daisy.

The bookmaker shook his head.

'I'm not betting to tenners,' he replied; 'you'd better go to the ring.'

Daisy looked across the course to Tattersall's. How was she to get her money on there? But she was not going to be beaten, so she walked across to the railings, and saw a nice gentleman, who looked like the Duke of Edinburgh, taking bank-notes from everybody. So she held her money through the railings, and said, "'Gilliflower," please!'

The nice gentleman looked at her and smiled, and said, 'Six to one to a lady,' and gave her a ticket; and when 'Gilliflower' won by three lengths, Daisy went back and received £70 in nice crisp Bank of England notes.

She could not hear anything about the next race, but just as the horses were going to the post, she heard one of the ladies in a carriage say that the owner of 'Barnacle' had told her that it couldn't be beaten. Off ran Daisy to the rails, and in her excitement she gave £50 to the bookmaker, and got 4 to 1. It was a very narrow squeak this time. Everybody thought that 'Barnacle' had just been beaten by 'Simon Tappertit,' the first favourite; but the judge didn't think so, and put up 'Barnacle's' number, and Daisy was the proud winner of £200.

Then she reckoned up, and found that she had £273, and she thought it was quite enough, and so she put the notes carefully in the bosom of her dress, and went back to her married sister's and had her tea.

When she came home from her holiday, looking bright-eyed and brown-cheeked and happy, she told me all about it. She did not know how she had done it, but she had, and after buying her father a new overcoat for the winter, and her mother a black dress and a pair of spectacles, and a few things for herself, and a little gold horse-shoe pin for me, she had £260 in the bank—£260! Why, it was a fortune!

That evening, as we strolled together along the Wandsworth Road, she said to me :

‘Tom, when I was poor, I told you that you must not think of me; but now that I am rich, the obstacle is removed.’

I took her in my arms in the darkest part of the thoroughfare, and I said :

‘My darling, you have wealth and I have rank. We are equal now, and we will be married as soon as possible.’

‘Do you think I shall make a nice duchess?’ she said artlessly.

‘The nicest and dearest little duchess in the world,’ I replied. ‘I’ll see your father next Sunday, and ask him for your hand.’

When I went home and told my mamma that I intended to marry, she was very angry; she said that she would never consent—that I ought to marry a millionairess. There were so few unmarried dukes about, that I should be snapped up directly it was known that I was in the market.

We had words, and the result was that I got up from the supper-table and went out, banging the door after me, and saying that I would never return. I had five shillings left out of my weekly allowance, and that night I slept at a coffee-shop.

The next morning I had my breakfast—a cup of tea, three slices and a rasher—and then I had my boots cleaned and went to Jones and Co.’s, and sat in the high chair and had a long talk with Daisy about the future. While I was talking, an old lady came into the shop with a little pug-dog, and asked to see some widow’s caps.

While Daisy was waiting on her, I went to the door. Presently I saw the pug come out. There was another dog in the middle of the road, and the pug-dog went to play with it. A three-horse omnibus came along. The

pug-dog was under the wheel. I heard a shriek behind me. 'Oh, my Popsy!' It was the old lady. I darted into the road, snatched up the pug, and then I knew no more till I woke up and found myself in the hospital.

I had saved the pug, but the wheel of the 'bus had gone over my big toe. When I came to my senses, Daisy was on one side of the bed and the old lady was on the other, and the pug-dog, wagging his tail in frantic gratitude, sat at the foot.

'Your grace,' exclaimed the old lady, 'I have ascertained you are the Duke of Shadwell. You have behaved nobly. You have saved my dog's life, and, since my poor husband died, he is the dearest thing I have on earth. I am rich. I understand you are poor. Pray accept these as a small token of my esteem and gratitude.'

With that she placed a roll of bank-notes in my hand, and left without giving me her address.

I counted the notes. There were ten, for £1,000 each—£10,000!

'Oh, Tom!' said Daisy.

'Oh, Daisy!' cried I.

Then we embraced each other, and in a week I was discharged, convalescent. We had now £10,250 between us, and it was a quiet little wedding.

The bride entered the church, leaning on the arm of her father, who walked lame, being rheumatic, like most four-wheel cabmen, and the pew-opener, her mother, stood by the altar. My mother, the duchess, wearing her coronet, met us at the church-door, and a representative of the *Morning Post* was also present. Four of the young ladies from Jones and Co.'s were the bridesmaids, and after the ceremony we all went to a pastrycook's in the Wandsworth Road, and had sandwiches, and sherry, and port, and a wedding-cake, which we bought out of the window.

As soon as it was known that a duke and two duchesses were in the pastrycook's, a crowd collected, and when Daisy's father drove us to the railway-station in his four-wheeler, the crowd huzzaed and threw the only old slipper they could find after us.

* * * * *

Five years have elapsed, and now everyone is proud to know the Duke and Duchess of Shadwell.

Daisy, the cahman's daughter, has been my Mascotte.

Jones and Co., as soon as they heard that I had £10,000, proposed a partnership. I accepted it. The title of the firm was altered, and over the shop we put up 'The Duke and Duchess of Shadwell and Co.' People flocked from all parts of London to deal with a duke and duchess, especially as the duke received them and the duchess attended to them.

So enormous was the success, that we started branches all over London, and presently 'The Duke and Duchess of Shadwell and Co.' were the great rivals of Shoolbred, of Whiteley, and of Maple. We went into other branches. We dealt in everything, and in three months the business had become so colossal that we turned it into a limited liability company, with myself as chairman. The shares went up to an enormous premium, and even royalty subscribed for them.

I made a million by the transaction, and still retain the principal share of a business which brings in a profit of many hundreds of thousands a year.

It is at the request of the shareholders that I have written these confessions, a copy of which, neatly printed and bound in cloth, will be given away at Christmas to every purchaser of our 'Sans Pareil guinea hamper, containing half a dozen of "Shadwell" champagne, extra

dry, one quart of turtle-soup, a pair of art curtains, a Japanese fire-screen, one dozen non-arsenical fly-papers, hand-painted, and a box of the Duke's Own liver pills.'

It is an excellent commercial advertisement, but it also contains a moral, which is that marriage need not be a failure, even when a duke elevates a four-wheel cabman's daughter to the peerage.

PUNCH AND JUDY.

CHAPTER I.

THE NEW GOVERNESS.

‘WELL, how much?’

It was a gruff, husky voice that spoke—the voice of a square-built, rough-looking, middle-aged man, with a weather-beaten face and bright, brown, gipsy-looking eyes, surmounted by shaggy eyebrows. When you looked at John Merryweather to see what manner of man he was, the eyes took your attention and riveted it. You might casually observe that he had a bullet head, covered with closely-cropped gray hair; that his nose, originally broad and flat, had been broadened and flattened still more by an accident or a blow; that his mouth dropped curiously at one corner, giving him the appearance of wearing a perpetual grimace; that his neck was short and thick; that his general appearance was that of a fighting-man who had taken a public-house and prospered; but you always brought your gaze back to his eyes, and found yourself wondering what it was that made them dominate and obscure the rest of the man.

There were two people in the room—this man and Marion Tredennick, a fair-haired, bright-looking girl of two-and-twenty. Marion was not a handsome girl, she was not even a good-looking girl; but there was that kind, sympa-

thetic look about her that wins confidence at once. She looked what old-fashioned people call 'a nice little body.' Her eyes were kind, her voice was kind, and a sweet sunshiny smile was rarely absent from her pleasant, 'bonny'-looking face.

As she sat opposite Mr. Merryweather in the drawing-room of his pretty villa in the St. John's Wood Road, Marion found herself fascinated by the wonderful eyes of this rough, uncouth person, whose family she was about to enter as morning governess.

She was so fascinated that she hardly caught the meaning of his words, and he had to repeat them.

'Well—how much?'

Marion hesitated. She had never been out before. She had seen Mr. Merryweather's advertisement in the newspaper, and had answered it in person; but she had expected that even if she were lucky enough to obtain the situation her employer would name the terms. She had always read in books that the employer did so; that he or she, as the case might be, said: 'The salary is so much, and the duties are so-and-so.' She was, therefore, to use a homely but expressive locution, 'taken aback' by being called upon to name her price.

'I—er—really—I should prefer to leave the sum to you,' she stammered.

'No, you say; you know better nor I do what's fair,' was the reply. 'I ain't used to this sort o' thing, you see. I didn't have no governesses when I was a young 'un.'

The dropped lip dropped a little lower. It might have been in a smile, it might have been in a sneer; it was impossible to say.

'I'll—I'll think it over,' said Marion.

'No, you won't. Come; I like the looks of you. You're a lady—leastways, you speak like one, and you look like

one, and I think you'll suit me; and if I suit you, why, say how much, and it's a bargain.'

'Would thirty pounds a year be too——'

'Thirty pounds a year—all right!' exclaimed Mr. Merryweather; 'that's a bargain. How'll you have it—weekly, monthly, quarterly? Say what'll suit you; it's all the same to me.'

'Monthly, I think, if——'

'Monthly—that's a bargain—that's settled. Now then, I'll call the young 'uns in, tell 'em who you are, and to-morrow you'll come and give 'em their schoolin'.'

'To-morrow! I didn't think you'd want me so——'

'I want you at once. That's why I put the 'vertisement in the noosepaper. My boy and gal's got to be scholars, which I never was. They've got to be a gentleman and a lady, which me and their mother never was. It's trainin' they want, and the sooner trainin' begins the better. I *do* know somethin' about that. To-morrow, eh? You can make it suit if you like, I suppose?'

'Very well, Mr. Merryweather—to-morrow.'

'Right you are; that's a bargain.'

Mr. Merryweather rose from an uneasy and slouching position on the chair, and went to the door.

'Hi!' he shouted at the top of his voice. 'Punch—Judy—come here; I want you.'

A boy's voice and a girl's voice answered eagerly, 'We're coming, daddy.'

And then there ran into the room two little children, so utterly unlike what Miss Tredennick, judging from their father's appearance, had expected to see, that she could not help looking from one to the other.

The little boy was about eight, the little girl about seven. Handsome children both of them, but nothing of the father about them but the bright, brown gipsy eyes.

Rosy-cheeked children, with gentle, refined faces and shapely limbs, they might have been the children of the daughter of a hundred earls; it seemed hard to believe that the common, vulgar, almost low-looking man who had called them into the room was their father.

‘The young ‘uns don’t take after me, do they?’ said Mr. Merryweather, noticing the governess’s look of astonishment.

‘No, they do not.’

As soon as the words had escaped her Marion Tredennick, conscious of the tone in which she had said them, blushed, and tried to stammer an explanation.

‘Don’t apologize,’ said Mr. Merryweather, the lip again dropping into the expression which was neither smile nor sneer. ‘Nobody don’t believe they’re my young ‘uns. But they are. They don’t take after me—they take after their mother, as handsome a lass, when I married her, as any county in England could show. She ought to ha’ been a lady by her look. She’d a lady’s face, a lady’s manner, and a lady’s ways; but she was only a factory-girl up North, where I met her.’

‘You are a widower, of course?’

Why Marion said ‘of course’ she didn’t know; but everything that had occurred in the interview pointed to the fact, though her new employer had not yet mentioned it.

‘I lost my wife some time ago,’ the man replied; and then he changed the subject. He called the children to him. They ran and climbed upon his knee.

‘Now, my dears,’ he said, ‘this here is your new governess. She’s going to make a lady and gentleman of you. She’s going to make scholars of you, so as you’ll be able to hold your own with the best on ‘em. I want you, when you’re a man and woman grown, to be able to say, “Our old dad spared nothing as we might grow up happy and contented and

good and clever." You'll mind what the lady tells you, won't you?"

'Oh yes, daddy, that we will!' cried the little girl.

'But we shan't always have to be with her, shall we?' asked the boy, looking up at his father eagerly. 'Sometimes we may come and play with you like we do now?'

'Yes, Punch, my lad, of course you may. The lady will only teach you your lessons in the mornings; afternoons we shall play our games and go our walks as usual. You'll find 'em good children, God bless 'em!' said the man, kissing the little ones, and putting them gently from him; 'the best o' children, and they know a lot a'ready. They've been brought up in the country by a decent woman as I left 'em with when their mother—when I lost my wife. The woman taught 'em all she knew, and it was enough for 'em then; but now things is different with us, and they've got to be a lady and gentleman.'

'I'm sure they're good children,' said Miss Tredennick; and she spoke with conviction—she had fallen in love with Punch and Judy already.

I'm sure we shall be good friends and like each other,' she added, turning to the children.

'I like you very much,' replied the little boy, looking up into her face, 'because you are pretty.'

Miss Tredennick blushed.

'And I like you,' said the girl, putting up her sweet little face to be kissed, 'because you are nice, and you haven't got spectacles and a birch like the governess in the picture-book daddy brought us home. When you are old will you have spectacles and a birch and a big nose like it is in the book?'

The new governess laughed.

'We none of us know, dear, what we shall have when we grow old.'

‘Well,’ said Mr. Merryweather, turning to Marion, ‘to-morrow then, miss, eh? What time?’

‘Will half-past nine——’

‘Half-past nine—that’s a bargain; and you’ll stay till half-past twelve, eh? That’ll give the young ’uns time for a walk before dinner, eh?’

‘Certainly.’

‘Then I don’t know as there’s anything more to say. I’ll let you out.’

The new governess kissed the children and said good-bye to them, and followed their father into the hall.

‘Nice children, ain’t they?’ he said, closing the drawing-room door behind him.

‘Dear little children.’

‘You’ll be careful with ’em, won’t you? Do all you can to keep ’em good. They’re all I’ve got in the world—they’re more to me than my life—than everything there is or can be in life. They’re good, honest little children, now, ain’t they? anybody can see that—you think well of ’em, don’t you?’

The eagerness with which the man spoke was terrible. To Marion Tredennick it seemed as though he had some secret fear that her eye might have detected a blemish, a danger hidden from his fond gaze.

She turned to him with a look of sympathy and gentleness in her pleasant face, and said softly:

‘Mr. Merryweather, if I am any judge, your children are good and clever; and with God’s blessing they will grow up good and clever. I will do all that I can to help them and to help you.’

‘Thank you, miss, for that. I’ve been rare and troubled in my mind about the young woman that should have the teaching and the training of ’em; but if fancy goes for anything I think I’ve got the right article in you.’

He shook the new governess heartily by the hand and watched her down the road.

And all the way home Marion found herself wondering what this strange man's history could be, and why he called his pretty children by such odd names as Punch and Judy.

CHAPTER II.

THE TREDENNICKS.

MARION TREDENNICK had taken off her things, and was sitting on a low stool at her mother's feet, working at something mysterious with bits of cream-coloured string on a black board, which is called, I believe, *macramé* work.

It was in a small room on the first floor of a house in Netherwood Street, Kilburn, that mother and daughter lived. Folding doors shut it off from the room behind, which was their bedroom; and they had the use of the kitchen to do their cooking in. They paid ten shillings a week for the limited accommodation, and they could barely afford that, for things had gone ill with them of late.

The Rev. John Tredennick, Marion's father, had been a missionary, a Wesleyan minister, who, with his brave, devoted wife, had helped to sow the seeds of Christianity among the cruel and bloodthirsty Fijian tribes. That was in the old days before Thakombau, the great chief and famous man-eater, had in the names of all the tribes sued for the protection of the British Government and taken the oath of fealty to the British Crown. It was in the days when the great 'ovens' were always full of 'bokola,' or human flesh, and the big death-drums were for ever booming to invite the savage guests to a cannibal feast. Many a canoe-load of human victims had the white-haired old lady, now sitting in the quiet little room at Kilburn, seen brought

to the shore and clubbed to death, to make a banquet for Thakombau and his wives.

Over and over again had she and her husband risked their lives in endeavouring to save some wretched victim from the 'ovens'; and long after some of these savage islanders had accepted Christianity, they would give themselves an occasional treat by including a slaughtered foe or two in the menu of a dinner-party.

But before the Tredennicks left the islands there were over nine hundred churches open for Christian worship, and hundreds of native preachers—old canuibals themselves—preached in the Fijian tongue the Gospel of Christ.

The little room in which Marion sits with her mother contains many a relic of those bygone days. The quaint artistic pottery made by the women of Viti Levu, the polished cocoanut shells in which the horrible Fijian drink yangona was served to guests, the lovely sinnet work—beautiful embroidery in coloured strings—a couple of war clubs, and a chief's spear, attract the eye of the visitor, and in a glass case on the little walnut chiffonier is a curious necklace of sharks' teeth, the favourite jewellery of the women of Fiji.

The Rev. John Tredennick had to give up his post owing to ill-health, and, with his wife and little daughter, Marion, he came back to England to obtain a ministry in London.

At first all went well, but a series of misfortunes overtook the brave old minister, and two years before my story opens he had gone to his well-earned rest, leaving only a few hundred pounds behind him as the savings of a lifetime.

Marion was then twenty—she had been her father's amanuensis, his companion in his daily walks, his right hand in everything, for Mrs. Tredennick's eyes had grown dim, and the privations and hardships of the wild life in

that far-off land of heathenism and cannibalism had told upon her robust constitution, and old age had come on rapidly.

When her father died, the duties of the house fell to Marion. She was all-in-all to her widowed mother. Her brain conceived, her hand executed, all their little plans.

She had one good counsellor and friend—the Rev. Malcolm Grant.

He had been her father's friend—he was Marion's lover. Some day, when they could afford it, they were to be married. But they were both so terribly poor. While her mother lived Marion felt that her place was by her side; when it pleased God to call her mother away she would marry Malcolm. He was to go abroad, as her father had done—to carry the Gospel to the far-off heathen, and she was to be his brave little wife and help him. The girl's imagination had been fired long ago, with the wondrous story of bitter battle and glorious conquest told by her parents. In her had that glorious missionary spirit been awakened, which has given many a deed of silent heroism, many a splendid victory, to the world.

Young Malcolm Grant had caught his sweetheart's enthusiasm. Together they would plan out their future lives, together they would read the stories of the missionary martyrs and the missionary heroes, and within the hearts of both of them burned that noble enthusiasm for the good cause which makes great conquerors of weak men, and hardy amazons of delicate women.

But that was a dream of the future; the present was no dream, but a stern reality, and it had to be faced.

The interest on the little capital left by Marion's father was barely sufficient for their rent, and food, and clothing; there was no margin left for any extra expense that might arise.

So at last, after much pondering and taking of counsel with her mother and Malcolm, Marion determined to devote her mornings to teaching.

That was an employment which would leave her free to be with her mother, and to attend to the housekeeping, etc. for the rest of the day.

She saw John Merryweather's advertisement in a morning paper, answered it, kept the appointment made, and, as we have seen, she obtained the post at a salary of thirty pounds a year.

Thirty pounds a year!—nearly twelve shillings a week. Only those who know what genteel poverty means can imagine the difference which such a sum would make to the comfort of a little home.

To Marion and her mother it meant so much that when Malcolm called that evening he found them radiant—full of hope and thankfulness.

And the old lady, in honour of the occasion, brought out the trophies of her old Fijian mission days, and once again told the stirring stories of adventure and Christian victory that never failed to set the pulses of her listeners beating, and to fill them with dreams of the glorious harvest it might one day be *their* lot to reap in some far-off field.

CHAPTER III.

JOHN MERRYWEATHER'S STORY.

MARION TREDENNICK and her little pupils were the best of friends from the first day that they came together.

Gradually she took in the children's loving little hearts the place of the mother they had known so little of.

They learnt rapidly, and it was their constant study to earn their young governess's smiling approval. Sometimes

Mr. Merryweather would come into the room while the lessons were on, and would listen with fatherly pride to the ready answers his children gave to the historical and geographical questions which were utterly beyond his comprehension.

‘Ah, it’s a fine thing, is eddication!’ he said one day. ‘Perhaps if I’d had more of it things ‘ud ha’ been different with me. Never mind; my boy and my gal will have it. Their way’ll be made smooth, as it says in the Testament.’

‘Was your way not smooth then, Mr. Merryweather?’ asked Marion, her curiosity aroused. She found herself taking a deep interest in this man—so kind, so earnest, and yet so rough. She was woman enough to want to fathom the mystery which surrounded him. She could not understand the difference between the children and their father.

‘Was my way smooth?’ he answered, repeating her question. Then he shook his head. ‘Nay, it was rough—so rough that I wonder the tramp didn’t end long ago. I don’t like to look back on it.’

He stayed in the room until the lessons were finished, and the children went upstairs to dress for their walk.

Then, when Marion was alone with him, he said:

‘Miss Tredennick, I’d like to tell you my story. I think if you knew it it might help you in your task with my young ‘uns. You’ve often wondered, I dare say, why they’ve got such queer names—Punch and Judy.’

Marion confessed that she had thought the names odd.

‘They was called Punch and Judy by their mother; it ain’t their names—their names are Paul and Jennie. You see, I was a showman. I travelled the country with a Punch and Judy show, I and my little wife, God bless her! She was my right hand before the trouble came.’

He paused a moment and drew a deep breath. Then he

continued, his face turned from Marion, his eyes peering into the glowing embers of the fire :

‘ I was a wild sort of fellow, you know, till I met her. I swore a bit and drank a bit and gambled a bit. When me and my pardner, that was with me afore I got married, had a bit o’ luck we’d go on the drink for days. Then we’d starve for a bit till we had a good week of it, and then we’d drink again.

‘ My pardner had a good connection in the country towns, and we’d get engaged for entertainments and to go to feets, and altogether we made a good thing of it, having a first-class show and getting a long price, besides doing well in the towns and villages.

‘ When my pardner got took off with the rheumatics through sleeping dead drunk all one night in a wet lane, having been thrown out of the alehouse at closing time, there wasn’t nobody to claim his share, so I had it all, and paid a man to take his place.

‘ And then in a big town up North I met a lass, and fell in love with her. She was a factory hand, was Jennie ; no father or mother, only an aunt, as took her money and ill-used her. We got to be friends through me lodging in her aunt’s cottage and staying in the place some time, doing well there.

‘ We had long talks together of a Sunday, had me and Jennie. She hated the factory and the close, hard life. She said she’d like to travel and see the world, and always be out in the air like I was, and the long and the short of it was I asked her to be my pardner in the show.

‘ I was over head and ears in love with the pretty lass, and when she said Yes, I felt as if I’d never known what life was afore that day.

‘ She was terribly afraid of her aunt, so we got married

on the quiet, and when I left the town my little wife went with me.

‘I’d done well before, but never so well as when Jennie joined the show. We made no end of money; her pretty face and winning ways got silver where the folks ’ud only ha’ given me coppers, and so we was able to lodge well and live well and put a bit o’ money by.

‘We had four happy years, and in those years the young ’uns was born. The tramping and the rough life didn’t suit either of ’em. They was delicate babies, and then for the first time Jennie began to grumble a bit. So when the little gal fell ill in one place we were at, and it wasn’t good enough for me to stay there, we had to leave the little ’un behind. The doctor said if we could find a cottager to take her for a bit it might be the making of her. If she was dragged about with us from place to place it ’ud kill her.

‘We found a woman—a decent body, with young ’uns of her own—and as we were going to a lot of country pitches, not staying long anywhere, I persuaded Jennie to leave the boy as well.

‘I persuaded her it ’ud only be for a little while, as I’d an idea, and meant to settle in London altogether soon, and then we could have a crib of our own.

‘I thought it ’ud ha’ broken her heart, leaving ’em; but she wouldn’t let me go alone or with a hired chap—she knew what she was worth to the show.

‘But things began to go wrong from the day she parted with her “bairns,” as she called ’em. She pined, and grew fretched and discontented. She tired sooner, and lost the smile that used to draw the silver from the men’s pockets.

‘And one night we had a quarrel—the first real quarrel since we’d been married. After I’d struck work for the night, instead of going home to our lodging, I went to a public-house, and drank more than was good for me, and

got in a row with a navvy fellow. He slanged me, and I flung the beer out of my pewter in his face. Then he went for me like a savage, and smashed my nose, making it what it is now, and in the fight I was knocked through the door, and fell and split my head open on the steps.

‘It ain’t a nice tale to tell a lady, but, worse luck! it’s my story, and if I tell you my story I can’t leave the fight out.

‘I was taken home smothered with blood, and was in the doctor’s hands a month. Poor Jennie! she nussed me night and day. The show had to stand by for weeks, and of course our savings went. When I got round again, I was a ruined man, and, worse than that, I was a bad man.

‘I try to think it was the injury to the head that done it, when I lay awake o’ nights and think of all the wicked things I did, and how I broke my poor lass’s heart; but that don’t take it off my conscience.

‘I was low and weak and out o’ pluck when I mended, and I took to drink again. I drank hard, I swore and cursed, and, God forgive me, maddened by the drink, I was a brute to Jennie. I led her the life of a dog—the drink made me a cowardly ruffian. It seemed to fly to my head directly, and I wasn’t master of myself.

‘Our takings grew less and less, and what we did take I spent in the cursed drink.

‘I was a devil then. I struck her and threatened her life. She grew to fear me—to shrink away from me in terror.

‘Then I grew furiously jealous. There was a young fellow she’d known before she married me, an overseer or something at the factory she’d worked at. One day when we were staying in the town where Jennie had been brought up, I came home and saw this young fellow talking to her at the door. I said nothing—I watched and spied on her. Oh, you don’t know what a mean wretch the drink had

made of me ! One evening when she was gone out I broke open a drawer as she kept locked ! I'd seen her put a letter there. I found the letter ; it was from him. I couldn't read it. I'm no scholar, as I've told you, so I took it to a pal of mine, and he told me as it was a love-letter. It was offering her, if she'd leave me, that he'd keep my children and be a father to 'em. That's what my pal told me.

'I took the letter home. When Jennie came back that night, I——'

The man paused ; great beads of perspiration were standing on his brow.

Marion, horrified, could utter no word.

John Merryweather with a violent effort resumed his narrative :

'I can't tell you what I did. I've never spoken of it to a living soul until now. It was only God's mercy as saved me from the crime of murder, for it was in my mind to kill her that night. The poor lass never said a word—she only looked at me with a look that will haunt me till I die.

'I flung her from me with vile and awful words ; and as she reeled and fell at my feet I swore a fearful oath, and told her to go to her lover ; and I called God to be my witness that if ever she crossed my path again I'd kill her.

'She raised herself from the ground and clung to my knees, imploring me to hear her.

'But I drowned her voice with oaths. I forced her from the house with blows. The last word of mine that I heard, as she stood trembling in the street in the cold and rain that night, was a frightful oath that if ever she crossed my path I'd be her murderer. And from that day to this I have never seen her again.'

Marion hid her face in her hands as though she would shut out the fearful picture the man's story conjured up before her.

‘And—you—you don’t know what became of her?’ she stammered, after a long silence.

‘No. Some time afterwards I heard the young fellow had left the factory about that time and gone to Australia. I suppose Jennie went with him. But it was my fault—all my fault. God forgive me! She was driven to it by me.’

‘And the children?’ said Marion.

‘She went to them. The next day she was at the cottage where they were, so I found out afterwards. She told the woman we’d quarrelled, and that she was afraid of me—that she feared I’d murder her. She didn’t care for herself, she said, but she feared for me—feared that I should come to a shameful death, and all through her. But before she left she made the woman promise that if I didn’t send the money the children should not suffer.

‘It was months afterwards that I heard that, when it was too late to find her and tell her I’d forgive her and take her back. She was gone away then—gone away for ever. She’d never have left the children, I know, but for that wicked oath of mine. She’d have stayed by them, and braved it out; but she feared what might happen to me—that I might be maddened by the sight of her and kill her in my brutal fury.

‘Ah! you look at me now, but you can’t think what I was then.

‘But her going away sobered me. After a bit I came round and took to my business again, and bit by bit I pulled things together, and sent the money regularly for the young ’uns.

‘But I was a miserable, wretched man, and I never knew an hour’s peace or happiness.

‘I couldn’t see the young ’uns often enough then; they seemed to be a link with the old happy days I’d spent with Jennie before the devil got hold of me.

‘I worked for em night and day, and swore that I’d atone to ’em for my sin to their mother, that the rest of my life should be lived for them.

‘Working for them took me away from my thoughts a bit in those days; but now, when there’s no need for me to work, the memory o’ that time comes back to me fiercer than ever, and sometimes I think I shall go mad.’

The ex-showman began to pace the room excitedly.

‘Think of it! think of it!’ he cried. ‘Wealth, comfort, everything to make life happy now, and the lass that should have shared it with me I drove to shame and misery!’

‘The day they told me I was rich—the day the lawyers found me out, and told me a brother o’ mine that had gone over the seas when I was a boy, and as I’d never heard of again, had died in Australia without chick or child, and left his money to me if I was still alive; the day that I knew I was worth thousands o’ pounds, and would never have to do another hour’s work as long as I lived—that day my sorrow came back to me fiercer than ever.

‘I thought only of her who ought to ha’ shared it with me—of what a home it would ha’ been for me and the young ’uns, with her about the place to really be the lady as she was born to be.

‘But for the children’s sake I’m glad of the money now. They must be brought up well, you know, because they’ll be a lady and gentleman and have thousands. When they can take care of themselves, I shall go away somewhere where their fine friends can’t ever see me. They shan’t be ashamed of me. But my place is with ’em now. I must be mother and father too.’

‘Do they think their mother is dead?’ asked Marion, after a pause.

‘No; I haven’t told ’em a lie. I’ve told ’em their

mother's away—that some day she may come back again. Oh, God, if it might only be—if it might only be! They——'

He broke off abruptly, looking at the clock on the shelf.

'I'm keeping you,' he said; 'you ought to have gone home long ago. I ask your pardon.'

Marion rose and held out her hand.

'Yours is a sad story, Mr. Merryweather,' she said. 'I pity you from the bottom of my heart.'

The tears came into her gentle eyes as she spoke.

John Merryweather clasped the proffered hand and gripped it heartily.

'You know my secret now, Miss Tredennick,' he said. 'You know why I'm anxious that the young 'uns should have every chance in life. I'd sooner see them dead in their coffins now than let 'em grow up to suffer for their father's sins.'

CHAPTER IV.

THE BOX OF PUPPETS.

JOHN MERRYWEATHER sat with his children one evening up in the room they called their play-room. Nurse, a middle-aged woman of a serious turn of mind and irreproachable references, had gone to attend a grand missionary meeting at Exeter Hall, so 'daddy' and the children were spending the evening together.

'Daddy' was sitting in the armchair, a book upon his lap, and Punch and Judy were sitting on hassocks on either side of him.

'Come, daddy, you ought to know your lesson by this time,' said Judy.

'I—I—think I do,' replied daddy; 'but it's a plaguey hard one to-day.'

Punch laughed a merry, boyish laugh.

'Why, we said it off without a single mistake, didn't we, Judy?' he exclaimed.

'Yes, that we did,' said his sister.

John Merryweather pored over the book for a few minutes longer; then he gave it to Judy, who held it while her father tried to repeat what he had been learning.

He mispronounced one or two of the long words, and then both the children corrected him together. When he got to the end, Judy said:

'Very good, you can go to the top of the class.'

That sent Punch off into a fit of laughter, and daddy laughed too.

'It is a funny game!' exclaimed Punch.

'It isn't a game at all—it's real, isn't it, daddy?' said Judy.

'Yes, my pets, quite real. I'm learning my lessons and you're hearing me say 'em.'

'Have you done your copy, daddy?'

'Yes; but there's two smudges and a blot,' replied daddy, producing a child's copy-book, and handing it gravely to Judy for her inspection.

The little girl and her brother bent over their daddy's copy-book together, and agreed that he had written his copy very nicely, but they said that the smudges and the blot must be avoided in future; and they pointed out to their scholar that when he made a false stroke it was not necessary to rub it out with his thumb. That was how the smudges were made.

The scene was laughable, but it had its pathetic side.

The man was learning of his children—the lessons Marion taught them in the day they taught him in the evening. He wanted to be less ignorant—he wanted to fit himself for the responsibilities of his new position; he

wanted to polish himself, so that his children should have no cause when they grew older to blush for their father's lack of culture and knowledge. He thought that perhaps in time, if he worked hard, he might improve himself so that he wouldn't injure them by going about with them.

Presently the lessons were finished, and then Judy climbed upon her father's knee, and whispered, 'Daddy, may we have the dolls to-night?'

'Oh yes,' cried Punch, 'do let us have the dolls. Nurse won't be in to put us to bed for ever so long.'

John Merryweather kissed the eager upturned faces of his children tenderly, and then went into an adjoining room, and returned with a long, deep box covered with baize. He opened it, and drew forth reverently and gently the puppets that once had been his stock-in-trade.

There was Punch, weather-beaten and chipped; Judy, ragged and dowdy; Joey, in the last stage of shabby gentility; and the Beadle so utterly dilapidated that he looked more like a candidate for the casual ward than a great parochial officer.

Judy took her namesake and the baby, a badly-used infant, whose robes were a lasting disgrace to its parents. These were her especial favourites. Punch found metal more attractive in the masculine puppets.

To the children they were dolls. They had seen a Punch and Judy show in their walks, and they knew that these dolls were the same as those in the show, but of their real history they were ignorant.

Of his past life their father told them nothing—of that they were to grow up in ignorance. They knew that their mother's hands had dressed these dolls, and that was why their daddy loved them, and why sometimes the tears would come into his eyes as he looked at them.

John Merryweather loved to see the puppets in the

children's arms. They seemed a link that bound the children to the mother they might never see again. Their little hands touched the faded finery that her gentle fingers had fashioned in the old days of his wandering, happy life.

Sometimes he would make the puppets talk to amuse the children, and they were never so delighted as when Mr. Punch squeaked and took his stick and belaboured the beadle. Then the play-room rang with their innocent laughter.

But there was one part of the drama which the old showman never acted: Punch never struck his wife. There was no fun in that to him now. It was a grim and awful tragedy—the tragedy of his own life.

When the children had played till they were tired, their father packed the dolls carefully away in the big box, and took it back to his room, where it was always kept. In that room, alone with his sorrow, he would sit for hours and gaze on these relics of the past—gaze on the faded, tattered dummies, and see *her* face bending over her task, and *her* deft, nimble little fingers at work upon the puppets' wardrobe.

As soon as he had put the box in its accustomed place he returned to the play-room, and then it was time for bed. Nurse would be in directly.

'Will you hear us say our prayers to-night, daddy?' asked the little girl.

The father bowed his head in assent.

Then the children knelt together at his knees, their little hands clasped, and repeated their simple prayer, asking God to bless them and their dear papa, and to watch over them through the night, and to make them good.

The tears trickled down the father's face as he listened.

His lips moved with theirs. He repeated the simple words after them softly and reverently.

When they prayed for him, he stopped them with a touch.

'Pray for your mother, too,' he said; 'ask God, my darlings, every night, that you may meet her again.'

The nurse came in as the children finished their prayers.

Their father rose, kissed them lovingly, and bade them good-night.

With a strange new feeling of hope in his heart he went to his room, flung himself upon his knees, and uttered a passionate prayer to Heaven—a prayer that his children might yet know a mother's love, that he might take his poor lost Jennie to his heart again, and that, all the black past forgotten and forgiven, they might lead a newer and happier life together.

Then he took his hat and went out. Half an hour later he was sitting in Mrs. Tredennick's cosy little sitting-room at Kilburn.

It was the first visit he had paid them, and a supper was prepared in his honour.

And after supper he sat in the big armchair and smoked his pipe, and listened with rapt interest to the wonderful Fijian stories of the missionary's widow. Then Marion and Malcolm Grant told him of their life dreams, and a new idea—the idea of the happiness of helping others—entered into John Merryweather's heart and took possession of it.

This was a field still open to him—a field in which his wealth could be so nobly used. On his way home he thought of nothing else. All the night long he lay and thought, and tried to make the vague schemes that floated in his brain assume a definite shape.

And the next morning, when Marion arrived to give Punch and Judy their daily lessons, John Merryweather's plan was clear and definite, and he was eager to put it into execution.

CHAPTER V.

THE MISSION HALL.

IN one of the poorest suburbs of London there stands a brand-new Mission Hall. Adjoining it and forming part of it is a modest little house, the residence of the missionary and his wife.

You have met them both before. The missionary is the Rev. Malcolm Grant, and his wife's Christian name is Marion. They have abandoned Fiji, and have settled down here to win heathen souls at home.

This was John Merryweather's plan.

'I don't know much about them cannybuls,' he said, when he was full of his new idea, to the Tredennicks; 'but I dare say what Mrs. Tredennick says is all true, and it's very awful; but I do know something about the cannybuls of London. There ain't nothing you've told us of, ma'am, in them islands all those thousands of miles away as can't be beaten any day in places I can tell you of within a cab ride of where we now are. There's work to be done there, and no mistake, and perils and adventures enough to satisfy a boy-pirut. I don't want Miss Marion to go to Fiji, because I want her for my young 'uns; but if she and Mr. Grant will be missionaries to a place I know of in London, why, I'll find the money, furnish a home for 'em, and give 'em an income that they'll be able to live comfortable on.'

The young people hesitated at first, but Malcolm made inquiries and found out what a glorious field there was for missionary enterprise in the district Mr. Merryweather named, and so at last it was settled that he and Marion should be married and accept the ex-showman's offer. Mrs. Tredennick was to live with them, and Marion was to continue her morning lessons to Punc and Judy.

As soon as it was agreed upon, John Merryweather exclaimed joyfully, 'That's a bargain,' and within six months the Mission Hall was built, and Marion and her husband and her mother were established in the snugly-furnished, comfortable little house next door.

John Merryweather flung himself heart and soul into the work. It was his atonement. He found in it a comfort and a solace for the great sorrow of his life. It seemed to him that he was purging his soul from the sin that lay so heavily upon it. The wealth that had come to him was Dead Sea fruit no longer.

With the funds Mr. Merryweather placed at their disposal the young missionary and his wife were able to do much, but their own enthusiasm and courage enabled them to do still more.

Night after night, as they sat at the little supper-table, they were able to tell the old lady of work among the 'heathen,' which put even her Fijian experiences into the shade.

They were carrying something into the heart of a savage district besides the Gospel—they were carrying civilization. Marion, in her gentle, unassuming way, was preaching in the slums and alleys and rookeries the gospel of that which is next to godliness—the gospel of cleanliness. It was a typical district that John Merryweather had selected for his experience—a district largely inhabited by the poor earning precarious livelihoods, and by the criminal classes. It was a district that had not yet been marked out for demolition by philanthropists in search of ten per cent. for their money, and so it was crowded and gorged with immigrants from the demolished areas.

At first Malcolm and his wife were disheartened. They were shocked and horrified at the awful scenes they had to witness daily, at the foul language which fell naturally from

the lips of little children, at the utter 'savageness' of the wild tribes who defied law and order, and who lived perpetually at war with society and with one another. But gradually the vastness of the work to be accomplished fascinated them; the dangers which beset their path on every hand gave the zest of adventure to their task; the overwhelming odds against their success made them the more eager for conquest.

Slowly but surely they gained ground; they had to fight every inch of it, but in a few months the Mission Hall was fairly attended, and Marion and her husband were received in the courts and alleys, if not always with courtesy, at least without any hostile demonstration.

Reports of Marion's kindness to sick women, of her valuable hints on domestic affairs, of her skill in attending to little accidents, of her peacemaking between husband and wife, of the hundred small services which, as a cultured and clever woman, she was able to render her less fortunate brothers and sisters, began to circulate.

In one home she had written a letter from a mother to her son, who was a soldier, and the assistance asked for had come back; in another she had stayed a whole Saturday evening nursing a sick baby while its mother went out with her husband, a hawker, and helped him to sell his goods. A costermonger, nearly mad with toothache, had been relieved as if by magic with something she had given him in a bottle. On behalf of a poor widow summoned by the School Board officers, she had attended the police-court and 'spoken up like a lawyer,' and saved the woman from being fined.

Stories of deeds like these, deeds of patient Christianity, circulated in the public-houses and at the gossiping corners, and very soon Marion became a welcome visitor, and was looked upon as a great acquisition to the neighbourhood.

She and her husband were not like 'them folks with the tractses,' as a lady of the neighbourhood remarked; they were practisers as well as preachers—good Samaritans, instead of Levites.

And many a quiet little deed of charity was done with John Merryweather's money. Many a little home was saved, many an evil hour tided over, by a judicious loan. No true and honest tale was ever brought to the ears of the missionary and his wife but it was laid before Mr. Merryweather, and practical assistance was given. There was no pauperizing, no dole, no degrading charity. It was only timely help that was given, and in nine cases out of ten when money was lent it was repaid at the first opportunity.

Of course, at first Marion was victimized. The canters and the whiners came about her and pitched their doleful tales, and worked upon her pity. Money was given that did no good, clothes were given that were pawned, and the proceeds spent in drink; but the experience gained was valuable, and very little of it was needed.

John Merryweather was a constant visitor to the Mission Hall. Now and then he accompanied Mr. Grant and Marion on their rounds. He was deeply interested in all he saw. His outbursts of honest indignation at the wrongs of the poor were sometimes so terrific that Mr. Grant felt alarmed.

The children, on certain great occasions, came to the Mission Hall. When there was a tea-party to the poor children, Punch and Judy helped to hand round the cake, and at Christmas it was arranged that they were to give a Christmas-tree.

Such a thing had never been heard of in the neighbourhood, except by the little ones who had been in the Children's Hospital, and their descriptions were so glowing that towards Christmas-time several little boys and girls

tried to get accidentally injured without hurting themselves much so that they might participate in the great hospital treat.

But now there was going to be a real Christmas-tree up at the Mission Hall, and the boys and girls needn't be injured to share in the treasures of its laden branches.

Punch and Judy had been about with Marion among her poor people already. Their father wished them to see some of the misery of the great city. 'It'll do 'em good,' he said; 'it'll teach 'em to be thankful, and to prize the blessings they've got, and to make good use of the money that'll be theirs when they grow up.'

The night before 'the grand distribution of prizes' from the Christmas-tree the ex-showman and his children were at the Mission Hall. Punch and Judy were in the seventh heaven of delight. They were helping to decorate the tree, which stood on a raised platform in the centre of the great hall.

Mr. Grant and old Mrs. Tredennick were in the hall with them—they were putting the finishing touches to the tree. Presently the candles in the branches were to be lighted, to try the effect.

Marion and Mr. Merryweather were alone in the little parlour of the adjoining Mission House, which was connected by a narrow passage with the Hall itself.

'Well,' said Mr. Merryweather, with a cheery smile, 'you ain't hankering after Fiji now, are you?'

'Oh no!' answered Marion; 'I know now how great the work is that lies waiting for willing hands at our own doors.'

'That's right, my dear. I listened to your mother's stories of them heathens and cannybuls, and wonderful they were; but I knew something of what there was in London, and I said to myself, I think I can show them

young people something nearer home as'll give them all the perils and adventures and conquests as they're so anxious for.'

'And you did, Mr. Merryweather; you have done a noble work.'

'Oh no, I haven't; you and your husband's done the noble work. You don't get your names in the papers like the cannybul missionaries, and you can't collect tommy-hawks and sharks' teeth and war-clubs, and you don't have books written about your travels, and thousands of pounds subscribed for you at mission meetings; but you're civilizing heathens and reclaiming savages as wanted it quite as badly as them furriners—and you'll have your reward.'

'We have it now,' answered Marion, her eyes filling with tears. 'We have it in the gratitude of the people, in this——'

There was a cry of 'Daddy, daddy—governess, do come!' from the Mission Hall.

Marion and Mr. Merryweather obeyed the summons.

The great Christmas-tree was lighted up; Punch and Judy stood before it, gazing at it in ecstasies of delight.

'Oh, isn't it lovely, daddy?' cried Judy. 'Won't the children be pleased with it?'

'Indeed they will,' replied Marion. 'They have never seen anything like it before.'

Then they began to discuss the programme. The children were to sing, and there were to be little speeches, and Marion was to play the piano.

Suddenly Mr. Merryweather exclaimed, 'By Jove!' and everybody looked at him.

'What's the matter?' said Mr. Grant.

'I've an idea. I—I—what do you say to a Punch and Judy show for the young 'uns as part of the entertainment?'

'Oh, it would be capital!' answered Marion.

'Would it? Then that's a bargain. We'll have one.'

'Will you engage it?' asked Marion. 'I don't know where to get one.'

'Leave it to me. It shall be here. We'll have it after the Christmas-tree, to wind up with, eh? I'll get a man to help me.'

'To help *you*!' exclaimed the old lady.

'Yes—for this occasion only—the performance will conclude with Merryweather's old original Punch and Judy show, and I'll be the showman.'

CHAPTER VI.

THE PUNCH AND JUDY SHOW.

CHRISTMAS EVE had come. The Mission Hall was crammed with eager little children and a tremendous crowd of mothers.

They were not all dressed for an evening party. There were young gentlemen who were so oblivious of etiquette as to come without their boots, and there were young ladies whose frocks could not, by the most violent stretch of the imagination, be called pretty. But faces were polished till they shone, and hair was arranged as neatly as it could be, in a district where brushes and combs were not considered as indispensable toilet requisites.

The distribution of the gifts was a scene of great excitement. There was a babel of tongues, a continuous roar of delight; and the mothers were as noisy as the children.

Punch and Judy handed the gifts to the children, and were the hero and the heroine of the occasion. It was their tree—their entertainment to their poor little brothers and sisters. The mothers were loud in their admiration, and there was a continual chorus of 'Bless their little

hearts' as 'the little laidy' and 'the little gen'elman' moved about among the crowd, and did the honours with perfect self-possession and childlike grace.

When the distribution was over, and amid a din of tongues the little ones were comparing their gifts and holding them aloft, and shouting for 'mother' to look, Mr. Grant rose from his chair on the platform, and requested their attention for a Punch and Judy show.

It was a grand surprise. The children had heard nothing of the treat in store, and their enthusiasm broke out in ringing cheers, amid which a Punch and Judy show was carried on to the platform, the showman under it, only his legs showing beneath the baize, and then a man with a big drum and Pandean pipes stepped up by the side of it, and banged and played away, and the audience went nearly mad with delight.

Then the famous drama commenced.

Some of the children, who had seen a show like it at the street corners of the West-End, explained to the others that the man hidden under the green baize was working the puppets.

They were old, worn, and battered puppets—puppets with dirty faded dresses on—but the children were not critical of such details. They gave themselves up heart and soul to the domestic tragedy, and screamed at Mr. Punch's sallies, even imitating his squeak and repeating his lines. It was a splendid audience—there were no sneerers, no carpers, no blasé sightseers in it.

The drama proceeded. Mr. Punch whacked the Beadle with his stick so mercilessly that it was a wonder even the wooden head stood it without cracking. The 'whacking' was what the children liked best.

One youthful enthusiast, in a moment of silence, yelled aloud to his mother, afar off, 'Oh, mother, *ain't* it prime?'

and then the mothers guffawed all together, and laughed till they had to put the corners of their aprons into their eyes.

And one fat mother had to be slapped on the back by another mother, and several other mothers put their arms akimbo, and rocked themselves to and fro in such convulsive ecstasy, that the forms swayed, and threatened to fall over and deposit whole rows of mothers on the floor.

But there was one mother squeezed up in a corner, unobserved, who never smiled.

She was a pale-faced, pretty-looking young mother, of a different stamp from the crowd around her. In her lap sat a little crippled child—a thin, starved-looking, delicate little boy—who could only laugh now and then, because he had to cough so often.

He looked up in the woman's face once, and said, 'It is funny, isn't it?' But he saw that the tears were running down her cheeks, and her face was white, and wore a look of pain.

His childish imagination could suspect only one cause for the woman's distress.

'Punch ain't really hurting them,' he said. 'They're wood, you know!'

The drama had come to an end. Just as the last word was spoken, suddenly above the level of the wooden stage of the show the head of the showman bobbed up. There was a shriek of astonishment from the children, and then a roar of laughter. It was a capital joke, and they appreciated it. But amid the laughter there rang out a piercing shriek, and every head was instantly turned towards the corner whence it came.

The pale-faced woman nursing the little crippled boy had fallen into a swoon.

The eyes of the Punch and Judy showman and the eyes of the pale-faced woman had met.

There was a wild cry from under the baize, the show was flung fiercely on one side, and from it the showman leapt.

He sprang from the platform, then pushed the terrified children on one side—roughly, brutally, in his feverish haste. He dashed through the open-mouthed, staring mothers, and, taking the swooning woman in his arms, raised her up and cried :

‘Jennie, my lass—Jennie ! Thank God, thank God !’

John Merryweather had found his wife !

CHAPTER VII.

JENNIE.

PUNCH and Judy had risen betimes on Christmas morning. They had been awake since daybreak, although it was quite late when they had gone to bed on the previous night. Mr. Grant had brought them home from the Mission Hall, when the meeting had broken up in confusion, after the extraordinary behaviour of the Punch and Judy showman.

The children had seen little of the occurrence. Marion, suspecting what had happened at Mr. Merryweather’s first exclamation, had drawn the children hurriedly into an inner room. They knew that their papa had seen someone he knew, and had been strangely excited, but they had almost forgotten about it in the delight of waking up and looking in their stockings, hung out on the bed, to see what Santa Claus had sent them.

To their intense disappointment, the stockings were empty. Santa Claus had, in the meanest manner possible, passed them over.

‘Perhaps the presents were too big to put in our stockings,’ said Judy to her disconsolate brother, ‘and Santa Claus will bring them presently.’

The children went to their breakfast in the nursery as usual, but their papa did not come up to see them.

They couldn't understand it.

They went downstairs to his bedroom-door and knocked.

'What is it?' said their papa's voice.

'A merry Christmas to you, daddy, and a happy new year!' cried the children together.

Mr. Merryweather opened the door and came out. 'The same to you, my darlings,' he said, stooping and kissing the children. 'Ah, we shall have a merrier Christmas and a happier New Year than we've had for many a long day.'

'I'm glad of that, daddy!' exclaimed Punch; 'but Santa Claus hasn't been yet. There was nothing in our stockings.'

John Merryweather's face fell. He had forgotten all about the nice things he had intended to surprise his children with. His head had been full of something else when he came home in the small hours of the morning.

'Never mind, my darlings!' he said. 'Santy Claus ain't forgotten you.'

'It was too big to put in our stockings, wasn't it, daddy?' said Punch.

'Much too big, but it'll come presently.'

The children sat with their father while he had his breakfast, and Judy read him what was under the beautiful picture in the Christmas number of the *Illustrated London News*, and Punch showed him a lovely book full of stories and pictures that was a Christmas present from Marion.

They were to have gone to church with daddy that morning, but the arrangements were altered, much to their disappointment. They were to go with nurse; daddy was going out 'on business,' he said.

'But, daddy, business is wicked on Christmas Day,' urged Judy, with some vague idea that Christmas Day was a kind of Sunday.

'The business I'm going on ain't wicked, my pet,' answered the ex-showman, with a smile. 'I'm a-going to fetch what was too big for Santy Claus to put in your stockings.'

'Is it so big it will have to be brought in a cab?' asked Punch.

'Yes, I shall bring it in a cab. Now, run along, and don't ask me any more.'

The children went to church with their nurse, but I'm afraid they were thinking all the time a good deal more about what Santa Claus was going to bring them in a cab than about the service.

John Merryweather jumped into a hansom outside the house, and went straight to the Mission Hall. There he found waiting for him the something that he was going to bring back for Punch and Judy.

Does the reader want to know what it was? Hardly! But the most intelligent reader cannot know what the good gift of Santa Claus to Punch and Judy had told John Merryweather after the strange meeting on Christmas Eve in the East-End Mission Hall.

It was a short story, told in a few words, but no Christmas story that has been written yet has brought more true happiness to the heart of man than did the Christmas story he heard then bring to the heart of John Merryweather.

After their terrible quarrel—with the words of her husband's awful threat ringing in her ears—Jennie had gone straight to where her babies were. She had given the woman who had charge of them the little money that she had. The poor girl was convinced that her husband would keep his threat. She believed that he was going utterly to the bad, and that drink had done its work and transformed him into a scoundrel. She would have clung to him, and been his true and aithful, hardworking little wife, in spite

of all; but her very love for him bade her leave him for ever. She did not dread his violence for her own sake—she was haunted by the horror that he would maim or kill her, and that the law would lay its hand upon him and make him pay the penalty; that her children might be a murderer's children; that the man she loved might meet a felon's doom.

It was hopeless for her to try and explain, or to try and turn his wrath away. The letter she had received was damning proof against her.

It was a love-letter. It was a letter asking her to leave her husband and live with her former lover, a letter promising that he would be a loving husband to her—a father to her children.

She had intended to answer it. She had put it away to do so. She would have told the man that he had outraged and insulted her. But her husband had found the letter, and the mischief was done.

The man heard her story and found her out, offered to go to her husband, and take all the blame on himself and prove her innocence.

But she begged and prayed of him not to go—she feared that in his mad passion her husband might kill the man he believed to be her lover. She made him give his oath that he would never seek her husband, or endeavour in any way to communicate with him.

The man promised, and they parted. She made her way to London to seek for employment; he accepted an offer to go to the colonies and take charge of a factory just started there. And so he passed out of her life, and she heard of him no more.

Up in London she struggled bravely to keep herself, and to put by a little towards the children's keep should their father desert them. But after a time she heard that their

father was paying regularly, and then one terror was lifted from her heart.

It was well that it was so, for her health gave way, and she was hardly able to do enough needlework to pay the rent of her one room, and obtain sufficient food to give her strength to toil.

In the house where she lived was a poor woman, the wife of a man who spent the greater part of his life in gaol. This woman had a little crippled child—a boy. The child would creep into Jennie's room when she was at work, and at last grew to be a companion to her. Her woman's heart yearned for something to love and caress, and in this little one she petted and fondled her own children, who were far away.

She starved herself for weeks to save enough money to go down and see them once a year—furtively, cautiously—without making herself known. She dreaded meeting her husband. She was terrified lest he might be put upon her track and keep that fearful oath.

She saw her children happy and playing in the little meadow outside the cottage door. Once she took them in her arms and kissed them, and they went home and told the woman who took care of them that a strange lady had kissed them and cried over them.

One year when she came they were gone; the woman herself had moved, and gone to a town some distance off, her neighbours said—where, they did not know.

Heavy-hearted Jennie returned to the London slums, wondering if she should ever see her children again.

Then she grew to love the little cripple more and more. But it was the love for her own children that she lavished on him.

One day the felon's wife fell ill and could work no more.

Then Jennie took them into her one room, nursed the

sick woman, took care of the child, and starved herself to share her scanty earnings with them.

Starving in one room, working her fingers to the bone, she took on herself this fresh responsibility. It was a shameful extravagance on her part; but it met with its reward.

For the little cripple's sake she went to the great Christmas-tree distribution at the Mission Hall. There she saw the Punch and Judy show, and there, after long years, she met the husband she thought never to see again.

She had not recognised the children. Jammed into her corner while they moved about the crowded hall, she had not seen their features. How could she guess that the little lady and gentleman who were giving their grand entertainment were the little ones she had last seen years ago in the cottage garden far away?

She had told her story to her husband alone in the parlour of the Mission House. No one had witnessed that strange interview; all had been explained; all forgiven, and all forgotten. They had parted then—Jennie to return to her room with her little crippled charge, and to tend her invalid guest, and John to go home and prepare his household for the reception of a new mistress on the morrow—the wife who had been away ‘somewhere,’ and who was to return and take her rightful place once more.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE GIFT OF SANTA CLAUS.

A CHRISTMAS party was gathered together in the dining-room of the house in the St. John's Wood Road.

Mr. and Mrs. Grant were there, and old Mrs. Tredennick

in a wonderful new cap, and Punch and Judy and Mr. Merryweather.

The children were on the tiptoe of expectation. While they were upstairs a cab had driven up to the door and they had heard their father's voice in the hall, but when they looked out of the window they were too late to see what he had brought with him.

Now they were all in the dining-room together. Dinner was nearly ready. The roast beef and the turkey would be on the table in a minute, and still Santa Claus had made no sign.

'Daddy,' said Judy, going up to him, putting her hands on his knee, and looking up into his face.

'Yes, my dear.'

'When shall we see what Santa Claus has brought?'

'In a minute, my dear. It'll come into the room all by itself directly.'

'Oh, daddy, is it something alive, then?'

'Yes. Come here, Punch.'

Punch came and stood by his sister.

'I've told you, my darlings, haven't I, that some day your mamma, that you don't recollect, would come back again?'

'Yes, papa.'

'Well, she's come. Santy Claus has brought her.'

Before the children could speak the door opened. Pale and trembling, with the tears in her beautiful eyes, a woman came slowly into the room.

There was a moment's pause.

She tottered as though she would have fallen.

Marion ran towards her.

John Merryweather held out his hand and took Jennie's, and led her to where the children stood, their eyes open wide with astonishment.

'Punch—Judy—this is your dear mamma.'

Jennie gave a great sob, and then clasped her children in her arms, while her tears rained down upon their upturned faces.

John Merryweather blew his nose violently, and then broke down and cried like a baby. The Rev. Mr. Grant went to the window, and for the first time in his life was guilty of cruelty to a fly on a window-pane.

Marion clasped her mother's hand, and they sobbed together, and cried and smiled one against the other.

'Ye dinna recollect me, my bairns?' cried Jennie, the long-forgotten accent coming back to her lips in the supreme joy of a moment that effaced years of sorrow and pain. 'Ye dinna recollect me, my bonny bairns?'

'Oh yes, we do!' cried Judy. 'You are the pretty lady that kissed us, and cried over us, oh! ever so long ago. Why didn't you tell us you were our mamma then?'

There was joy that Christmas Day in a barely furnished room in one of the great tenement houses of the East-End. A poor mother, nursed back almost to health by the loving hands of a sister sufferer, found that Santa Claus had not forgotten her or her little crippled son. They sat down together to such a feast as they had never heard, or read, or dreamed about. And the boy's eyes were riveted in admiration on some beautiful toys that had come to him like revelations of an unknown world of wonders.

Jennie had not forgotten her humble friends in her own happiness and good fortune. John Merryweather had taken his wife away, but he had left behind him comforts and gifts that would make that Christmas Day for ever memorable in the lives of the mother and her boy. And they knew before Jennie left that they were not to lose a good friend. They had merely found another.

And there was joy that Christmas Day in John Merryweather's grander home. As he looked across the cosy

room, his weather-beaten face beaming with delight, and saw his Jennie with her children by her side, and thought of the happy life that lay before them, his lips murmured, in rough, untutored language, a heartfelt cry to Heaven to make him worthy of God's great mercy shown to him on that day.

When the Grants were in the hall waiting for the cab that was to take them home, Mr. Merryweather gripped Marion's hand and whispered :

'You couldn't ha' done better in Fiji, my dear, could you?'

And Marion confessed that she could not.

'Ah!' he exclaimed, 'it was a blessed day that brought you and me together. But for you there'd have been no Mission Hall; but for the Mission Hall there'd have been no Christmas-tree; and but for that Christmas-tree Jennie and I might never have met again. Now, if you had gone to Fiji——'

Old Mrs. Tredennick had overheard the conversation.

'Don't be too hard on Fiji,' she said with a smile. 'It was talking about Fiji that put it into your head to send Marion and her husband among *your* heathen.'

'Right you are,' answered John Merryweather good-humouredly. 'Three cheers for Fiji!'

The cab drove away with Marion and her husband and Mrs. Tredennick, and then John Merryweather and his wife and his children finished the happy evening together.

'Daddy,' said Judy, 'please may we have the dolls? I should like mamma to see them.'

The old showman went to his room and brought down the puppets.

Jennie looked at them, and as she noticed the ragged, faded dresses she lifted her eyes and met her husband's loving gaze.

‘Just as they were when you saw them for the last time, my lass,’ he whispered. ‘They’ve been sacred to me through all the years of sorrow and pain since we parted.’

‘They want new frocks, don’t they, mamma?’ said Judy.

‘Nay,’ answered her father. ‘As they are now, so they shall be kept as long as we live. Some day when you are older, my darlings, you shall know why these ragged puppets are kept and treasured as they are.’

Before the children went to bed the little girl put a question to her mother which she had been longing to ask.

‘Mamma,’ she said, ‘*did* Santa Claus bring you back to us?’

John Merryweather answered for his wife.

‘No, my pet, it wasn’t Santy Claus—it was Punch and Judy, God bless ’em!’

‘Oh, mamma!’ exclaimed the boy, ‘when I said “God bless Punch and Judy!” one night in my prayers, nurse said it was wicked. Was it?’

‘Nay,’ answered the mother, her pale face flushing with joy and pride in her new-found happiness, ‘it couldna ha’ been wicked, for didna God bless them to bring us all together again?’

That night the children repeated their prayers at their new-found mother’s knee, and when they said ‘God bless Punch and Judy!’ John Merryweather uttered a deep ‘Amen.’

THE LITTLE GUY.

CHAPTER I.

OLD CHUMS.

MARK KINTREA stood with his hands in his pockets looking out of the first-floor window of a house in Great Russell Street. What he was looking at it would have puzzled him to say, for there was nothing within the range of his vision but the dim outline of the opposite houses. A heavy November fog had settled down on London since the early morning, and the few gas-burners lighted here and there only made the yellow mist appear yellower and mistier. The vicinity of Great Russell Street is inhabited by all sorts and conditions of people, and is much affected by the large class whose members are vaguely termed 'professionals.' Actors and actresses, authors and authoresses, barristers and journalists, men about town and business men, learned professors and students who frequent the British Museum, bachelors and families, old ladies who go to the Bank of England in four-wheel cabs on dividend days, and young ladies who go goodness knows where in hansoms almost every day—all these are to be found among the ladies and gentlemen who inhabit the private houses and the rooms over the shops in Great Russell Street. It was eleven o'clock on the morning of the 5th of November

that Mark Kintrea looked out and saw nothing in Great Russell Street but the yellow fog.

After surveying the dispiriting scene for a few minutes, he turned sharply away, walked across the room, picked up the poker, and began hammering with all his might at the folding-doors which shut off an inner room.

‘Eh!—wh—what’s the matter?’ cried a man’s voice within.

‘What’s the matter?’ said Mark. ‘Why, it’s eleven o’clock! I’ve had my breakfast, I’ve read the paper, and there’s nothing for me to do this beastly foggy, miserable morning but to commit suicide, unless you get up and talk to me.’

‘All right, old chap, I’ll get up; only I didn’t get home from the club till five, and I’m as sleepy as an owl. Never mind—here goes.’

There was a yawn, some creaking, the sound as of an elephant playing hopscotch, then the noise of a hippopotamus taking its bath, a grunting and a growling, and Mark Kintrea knew that his friend Tom Darley was getting up.

Tom Darley stood six feet one without his boots, was four-and-thirty, broad of shoulder, and as sound as a bell. He had been a champion cricketer, a champion oarsman, and a champion boxer, had Tom, but he had left off athletics five years ago, intending to settle down to his profession of a barrister. But Tom soon flung his wig and gown into a corner of his chambers, and drifted into Bohemianism. He had a small private income, and he added to it by journalism of a Bohemian kind. A big-hearted, big-handed, easy-going man about town, always going to do something great, and never quite accomplishing it; never so happy as when he could induce a ‘pal’ to come and share his comfortable apartments in Great Russell Street; never so miserable as

when he had to stop away from the clubs and the good fellows, and cudgel his brains for ideas in the loneliness of his sitting-room.

Tom and Mark Kintrea were old college chums, but they had drifted apart. Mark had fallen in love with a pretty English girl, whom he first saw at a *café chantant* abroad, and had married her, and his friends had heard no more of him except that he was living very quietly with his young wife at the lonely but romantic old house in Derbyshire which had come to him with the rest of the family property. Mark at his father's death had inherited a fortune, so that when he married the pretty music-hall singer everybody said that he had made a fool of himself.

For many months no rumour concerning the Kintreas, save that they were happy and comfortable, and received no company, reached the clubs. Then a whisper or two ran round among the men who had been Mark's intimate friends when he was 'about town,' and at last the whispers took a tangible shape, and it was known that Mrs. Kintrea had run away from her husband with another man, and gossip had it that this man was a low fellow who had known her in her days of poverty and struggle.

For six years after that no one saw Mark Kintrea. He went to America, Australia, India; he travelled here and there, flying from the ever-pursuing thought of the faithless woman who had won his heart only to break it. Forget her he never did; she haunted him night and day; he carried her face with him to the uttermost end of the earth—on the lonely prairie, in the crowded city, on the sea and on the dry land: it mattered not where he was, there the woman came and stood between him and the waters of forgetfulness, of which he sought in vain to drink.

'I shall forget her only when I forget all else,' he said to himself. 'The last word upon my lips will be her name—'

the last thought that stirs my failing pulse will be the remembrance of my poor lost Hetty. I shall do no good by wandering about the world a self-made Ishmael. I'll go back to the men who knew me—to the old haunts—ay, to the old vices. I'll live as men do live who've found how false and worthless all that seems best and brightest in this world really is.'

So Mark Kintrea returned to his native land after six years of exile, and, knocking about London, came across his old friend Tom Darley, and was persuaded by that good-natured giant to come and be his guest, and they'd smoke pipes together, and have sprees and be jolly companions, and that would help Mark to get out of the desponding, cynical state in which, as an old friend, Tom was so distressed to see him.

When this narrative commences, Mark Kintrea and Tom Darley had been living together in Great Russell Street for three weeks.

On this especial morning Mark had succeeded, by bringing the poker to bear on the door, and on the argument, in rousing his friend a little earlier than usual, and when Tom, looking just a little sleepy still, emerged from his bedroom, he declared, with a yawn, that he was afraid this early rising would injure his health.

While Tom enjoyed the eggs and ham and buttered toast, and slaked his thirst with copious draughts of coffee, reading the newspaper propped up against the coffee-pot at the same time, Mark went back to the window and stared out into the street again.

The fog had lifted a little by this time, and the few people in the street, who had before appeared like ghosts moving about in an ingeniously-arranged theatrical mist, now took more palpable shape and form, and their features were plainly discernible.

‘What’s that shouting at the top of the street?’ said Tom, suddenly looking up from his paper.

‘Looks like a lot of boys with something in a chair,’ answered Mark.

Tom looked at the top of the newspaper.

‘Why, it’s the 5th of November!’ he exclaimed. ‘Dash it! I’ve got a bill for £50 due to-day, and I’d forgotten all about it.’

CHAPTER II.

THE LITTLE GUY.

THE 5th of November! Mark Kintrea shuddered. He, too, had forgotten the date. One day was as another to him now, and yet he had never forgotten this one before in all the six years that had passed since the great trouble of his life crushed the youth and gaiety out of his heart for ever.

The 5th of November! He still looked out into the street, but he saw far away beyond the ugly houses into the sweet green country. He saw the quaint old house and grounds that had been a home of love to him for six short months. He saw the dear old place as it was on that November afternoon, when he rode up the broad avenue of trees, still beautiful in the fading glory of their autumn leaves, and he remembered how, for the first time in their short married life, his young wife greeted him on his return without a kiss and without a loving word. She pleaded that she was not well; and that evening he dined alone, and Hetty kept her room. And after dinner she seemed so strange and ill that he grew alarmed, and had his horse saddled and rode off five miles to the market town for a doctor. He remembered the bonfire on the green, and he

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remembered how his horse shied and nearly threw him in the one long narrow street of the village, terrified at a squib that a mischievous lad threw down as he passed. If he had only been thrown and killed then—killed on the spot—he would never have known that which had made his life a living death ever since; he would never have ridden back to find his wife gone—gone, leaving a hastily-scrawled, cruel message behind her; cruel, for by its vagueness it added to the torture of his doubts. ‘Forgive me—forget me. I——’ There the letter stopped, as if the writer had been suddenly interrupted—as if there had been no time for her to write more if she wished to escape from the house unobserved. No one had seen her go. On his return Mark found the room empty, the sick wife gone, and this strange, half-finished note lying on the little table in the window.

What he said, what he did, he could hardly remember now. It seemed like a hideous nightmare at first. When he awoke from it and gradually realized what had happened he ordered the place to be searched. He thought she might be wandering about somewhere in the neighbourhood. The wildest theories crossed and recrossed the troubled brain of Mark Kintrea as he thought over the strange flight of the woman he loved.

Of the search made in the house, two things were the result. The first was the discovery that Mrs. Kintrea’s jewellery had disappeared with her, and the safe in Mark’s library had been broken open, and a quantity of valuable property—plate and jewellery, old jewellery of his mother’s—had been abstracted as well.

The second discovery was this. Among the ashes in the fireplace in Hetty’s room the servant found the half-burnt fragments of a letter which had been torn up. Mark took them, and vainly essayed to piece them together and read their secret.

But he only deciphered from the fragments these words, written in a man's illiterate, sprawling hand, 'to-nite,' 'be there,' 'Jim.'

It was an assignation—a meeting planned and arranged with his wife, then, by this man—and she had kept the appointment. She had robbed her husband and fled with a low lover—his Hetty, the woman in whose purity and faith he had trusted implicitly. He had asked no questions concerning her past life. He had loved her, wooed her, and won her, and up to this day had never doubted that her past was aught but a tale of trial and poverty and brave toiling in a profession which is only made disreputable, as any other profession may be, by its black sheep.

It came home to him, the homely truth, that one does not gather grapes off thistles, when he found that the note torn up had been delivered to his wife by a hulking, savage-looking fellow of the gipsy type on the afternoon that he was absent. It came home to him when it was proved beyond a doubt that this man, with all the tools of a burglar in his possession, had forced the safe and committed the robbery. What was this man? His wife's lover, for she had fled with him. Her paramour in the days before Mark met her—in the dark past of her life, from which he had never sought to lift the veil.

It was horrible! Oh, the shame, the bitter shame of it! He had given his name to, and brought to the old home, hallowed with a hundred memories of his dead, gentle, loving mother, a woman who was the paramour of a thief! This woman was his wife, and might have borne him children—children with the taint of crime and vice flowing in their veins, to work its way into their lives in obedience to that great natural law which a thousand influences may combat, but none can wholly conquer.

When the news of the robbery spread, as such news will,

whether the victim wills it or not, the fussy chief constable of — came over and saw Mark in the library. He had been making inquiries. Mark cursed him for an interfering busybody, but listened to the result of his investigation. 'From information received,' the chief constabl was able to inform Mr. Kintrea that a notorious London burglar, lately out of prison, had been seen in the neighbourhood—one James Morton, alias Flash Jim!

'Flash Jim!' Mark Kintrea shuddered, and involuntarily turned his face away.

On the night of the burglary Flash Jim and a woman had been seen in a trap, driving towards the nearest town. Inquiries made there showed that a man of this description, carrying a bag and a large portmanteau, had taken two tickets for London and left by the night mail, which was due about a quarter of an hour after they arrived at the station.

'And there, sir, for the present my information ends. I want your instructions before I go any further.'

Mark looked at the fussy little man opposite him for a moment.

'I suppose if I tell you,' he said, 'that there has been no burglary at my house, and that I have no property to recover, that will satisfy you?'

'Quite, sir; we understand each other.'

They shook hands and parted, and the chief constable muttered to himself as he rode home, 'Poor Mr. Kintrea! I've heard of a burglar getting his sweetheart into a situation, to open the front door to him when the family was at dinner; but this is the first time I ever heard of a burglar putting his sweetheart up to marrying a swell to do the trick for him.'

A week after this conversation Mark Kintrea left the scene of his shameful betrayal, and went abroad.

From that hour he had never sought to fathom the mystery which surrounded his wife's flight with Jim Morton. Only when he is reminded that to-day is the 5th of November, the past surges back into his mind, and the terrible drama is enacted again before his straining eyes, for to-day is its anniversary.

The 5th of November! Then the little crowd up at the end of the street is round a guy. The crowd breaks up. Some portion of it comes through the thin yellow mist, nearer and nearer. He can hear children's voices chanting in a feeble treble :

'Member, remember
Fifth of November,
Gunpowder treason and plot,
See there's no reason
Gunpowder treason
Ever be forgot.'

Then there is a shrill, thin little chorus of 'Hip, hip, hooray!' The children come nearer. Poor little mites! They are the ragged children of the slums; their thin, sharp, starved faces are rudely daubed with black and red, and on to their scanty rags they have pinned jagged pieces of coloured paper.

As the noise comes nearer and nearer, Tom Darley gets up from the breakfast-table and comes to the window.

The group is right in front of the house by this time. In the centre of it two dirty little boys hold up a chair in which is seated a tiny, miserable-looking little guy.

It is a child of five or six at the utmost. Its little legs dangle from the chair as the boys carry it along, and its little hands clutch nervously at the side of the chair whenever a sudden jolt threatens to bring it to grief. It seems so helpless and so miserable in its rags in the chill November

air, its blackened face and the dirty paper cap forced down over its head like an extinguisher give it such a grotesque and yet such a woebegone appearance, that Tom Darley involuntarily exclaims, 'Poor little thing—what a shame!'

Mark looks attentively at the child.

'Why, she's frightened!' he says. 'Look! you can see the white lines down her little black face where the tears have been running. She's—— My God! look at that!'

The front boy carrying the little girl-guy in her chair slips on the greasy pavement. For a second he tries to keep his footing; the chair swings suddenly on one side, and the child is thrown violently on her head on to the sharp kerb.

The two boys set up a howl. They look aghast for a moment at the little white face covered with blood; then, perhaps seized with some vague terror as to what the consequence of their act may be, they leave the chair and the prostrate guy on the pavement, and run off as fast as their legs can carry them.

By this time Tom Darley is in the street. He pushes the three or four gaping children who have witnessed the scene aside, and, stooping down, raises the injured little one gently from the ground.

'Take her to the 'orsepital,' says a butcher's boy, who has stopped to see what's the matter.

Tom hesitates for a moment; then he lifts the senseless little guy, all smothered with mud and blood, in his arms, and carries her up into his room.

With every step he takes the child groans.

'Call the housekeeper up, Mark, and let her see to the child,' he says, as he lays his burden lightly on the sofa. 'I'm off for a doctor; there's one in Bedford Square.'

Mark, left alone, soon has the housekeeper up. Mark holds his handkerchief to the big wound on the child's head to stop the bleeding, while the housekeeper sponges the black and the dirt and the blood from the child's face.

The paper cap has fallen off in the street, and now there lies on Mark's arm a little head, crowned with golden hair, cruelly cut, and hacked short like a boy's. Gradually the dirt is washed from the features, and reveals one of those sweet girl baby faces that our painters love to paint and paint again, and rechristen from time to time Red Riding Hood, Little Miss Muffet, or Goody Two Shoes; only, alas! the sweet face that gradually looms through its veil of black is white and sad.

'Lord, how the poor mite do bleed, sir!' exclaims the housekeeper. 'It 'ud ha' been better to have sent her straight to the 'orsepital.'

Mark Kintrea says nothing. His eyes are riveted upon the child's face. Now for the first time he can clearly discern her features. The housekeeper had moved on one side, and the light from the window falls full upon the little prostrate form.

And at that moment Mark Kintrea starts as if he had suddenly seen a ghost.

Involuntarily a name rises to his lips.

'Hetty!'

And as he cries the name aloud, the child's eyes open, as though a familiar sound has reached her ears, and then, with a deep sigh, she relapses into insensibility again.

CHAPTER III.

MR. VON AARON.

‘Good heavens, Mark! you don’t mean——’

‘Hush!’

Mark Kintrea pointed to the folding-doors. The doctor and the housekeeper were there, with the child, who had been carried into the room and laid on Tom’s bed.

Tom lowered his voice to a whisper.

‘You don’t mean to say that you believe this poor little waif, this ragged, forlorn little mite, is your wife’s child?’

‘I do believe it.’

‘My dear fellow, you are deceived by some accidental resemblance.’

‘Perhaps. But the resemblance to my lost wife is marvellous. And when involuntarily I exclaimed “Hetty!” the child opened her eyes, as though she had heard her own name.’

At that moment he doctor came softly out of the inner room, and both men rose.

‘Well?’ exclaimed Mark eagerly.

‘The child is very badly hurt,’ said the doctor. ‘She’ll be light headed, I expect, and I’m afraid there’s an injury to the back that may make it a long and tiresome case.’

‘She’s not fit to be moved, I suppose?’ said Tom.

‘Well, of course, any movement now is bad for her, but with care she may be taken to the hospital. It’s not far, and——’

‘Tom!’ interrupted Mark; ‘if you don’t mind the child staying here in your house, I should prefer it.’

‘I mind?—not a bit of it! Mrs. West’s a capital nurse.

I can sleep upstairs, and the doctor here can take charge of the case and send the bill in to me.'

The doctor looked from Tom to Mark. It was a strange idea, these two young men charging themselves with the bother and worry of a sick child, who might be on their hands for months.

'Doctor,' said Mark, 'my friend consents. You will visit your little patient here, and all your orders shall be obeyed.'

The doctor bowed, told them that the housekeeper had all instructions, and that he would look in again during the evening.

At the door Mark stopped him.

'I suppose it won't be advisable to talk to her yet—to ask her any questions?'

'Questions! good gracious, no! She must have the most absolute quiet, or I won't be answerable for the consequences.'

'Now, what are we to do?' said Mark, as the door closed. 'The——' He hesitated a moment, then continued with an effort, 'The mother or the relatives will be anxious about her. How are we to find out where they are

'I suppose somebody will call. The boys ran away; but they'll go to the child's home and say what's happened. They saw me carry her into the house, I'll be bound.'

A troubled look passed over Mark Kintrea's face. 'Suppose,' he thought to himself, 'this resemblance is no accidental one. Suppose I am right, and this child is Hetty's; will she come here after her? Will my wife—the woman who wrecked my life so cruelly—come out of her hiding and, not knowing, not dreaming whom she will meet, come here? Or will the thief—this "Flash Jim," as they called him—come instead? Have I fled from my shame all these

years only to find myself face to face with it again? Am I to be—— Pshaw! what a fool I am!

A great peal of mocking laughter burst from the tortured man, and he sprang to his feet and paced the room.

The housekeeper, terrified, ran in.

‘Hush, sir! hush, for Heaven’s sake! The child’s asleep.’

‘I forgot!’ exclaimed Mark. ‘I forgot the child was there. Come out, Tom; for God’s sake, come out into the air!’

When they were in the street, Tom took his friend’s arm, and looked anxiously in his face.

Mark detected the look.

‘It’s all right, old man,’ he said; ‘the day, the accident to the child, the queer thoughts that came into my head, have upset me. I couldn’t help laughing like that at my own tomfoolery. As if this ragged gutter-child was anything to do with me! Of course, it’s absurd. Let us go and have some lunch and a bottle of fizz.’

‘All right, old fellow; let’s go to the grill-room at the Criterion. We can have a chop and a cigar after it, and then we can decide what we’ll do about the kid and finding out whose property it is.’

The café and grill-room at the Criterion was fairly full when Tom and Mark arrived and seated themselves at the only vacant table.

The American bar at one end was crowded with men about town, and professionals, and men whom it would be difficult to classify. Some of them were walking mysteries to everyone but themselves. Tom, to divert his friend’s mind from gloomy thoughts, began to point out the celebrities to him.

‘That’s Starkey, the famous jockey,’ said Tom, pointing to a little man, who looked more like a small poet than a

famous horseman ; ' that's Bob Martin, the light comedian ; that's Jack Jacobs, the money-lender—good chap, Jack, one of the few gentlemen in the profession. That tall young fellow leaning over the bar, and talking to the man behind it, is Bertie Dennis—ran through £50,000 in twelve months ; and that—— Hullo ! do you see who that is just come into the room—aristocratic, foreign-looking fellow, in patent-leather boots and a glossy hat ?'

Mark looked in the direction Tom had jerked his head.

' Who is he ?' he asked mechanically.

' You'd never guess. That's Inspector Von Aaron, the famous detective. Wouldn't think he was that to look at him, would you ? How d'ye do ?'

The ' How d'ye do ?' was said to the great Von Aaron himself.

Von Aaron crossed the room and held out his hand.

' Ah ! how do you do, Mr. Darley ? I haven't seen you for months.'

' No,' said Tom ; ' what have you been up to ?—arresting Fenians ?'

Von Aaron smiled.

' No,' he answered ; ' I've had to turn that up. I'm too well known in Paris now. When I go to an hotel they all clear out the next day.'

' Got anything on now ?' asked Tom.

' Yes ; a murder, I fancy.'

' A murder, you *fancy* ! Why, I should think you ought to know a murder when you see one !'

' Not always. This is rather a curious case. I'm after a man who's wanted for a big burglary, committed a month ago. There's a reward offered. One night a woman calls at the office ; wants to see me. I'm out. Says she'll call again. I get a description of the woman from the inspector who saw her ; recognise her as the woman who is known to

be the mistress of the very man I want. I tumble to her game at once. There's been a row—jealousy, perhaps. She comes to betray the man and get the reward. Knows I'm to be trusted; not sure of inspector on duty, so doesn't split then. I make inquiries. Set one of my lady assistants to work—clever girl. Distributes tracts, and tickets for coals and blankets; gets into all the queer places in the slums on that lay, and finds out a lot from the women; sees a lot, too, that comes in very useful when least expected. She spots the woman after a long search; finds her living with the man still.'

'And you arrest him?'

'Unfortunately, no! I'm out of town on a wretched "long firm" case, and my lady friend keeps the information for me—not going to give it to anybody else, and take the job out of my hands. When I got back last night she tells me. I go off with everything ready to nab my gentleman, and what do I find——'

'What *do* you find?' exclaimed Tom, getting interested in the detective's story.

'I find the birds flown—man gone—woman gone, and their child, a little girl, left behind.'

'Where does the murder come in?'

'Wait, and you'll see. I get a little information, if I don't get anything else. Night before, big row. Somebody's peached on woman, and let out that she's been to Scotland Yard. They make it up, and go out to have a drink. *That night, man comes back alone, queer, excited, drunk; goes up to garret, and comes down again with the child, which he leaves with another lodger, Mrs. Moloney. "I'm going away for a week with the missus," he says; "here's five bob—look after the kid till I come back."*

'But,' exclaims Tom, still in the dark, 'that's no murder! He may have gone away in the country with the woman.'

‘If he has,’ says the detective, with a professional smile, ‘he didn’t wait for her to dress herself. She left her bonnet and shawl on Judson’s Wharf, by the side of the Thames at Bankside.’

‘Poor creature!’ exclaimed Tom, looking over to Mark, who all this time has sat silently listening to the detective’s matter-of-fact conversation. ‘Queer story, isn’t it?’

‘Very!’ says Mark.

‘It is a queer story,’ continues Von Aaron; ‘and a sad one, for the woman had seen better days before she took up with this blackguard. Searching the place, I found a photo of her, taken years ago, when she was a professional singer. You shall see it.’

Von Aaron took out his pocket-book, and, carefully withdrawing a yellow, faded *carte-de-visite*, handed it to Tom.

Mark looked over his friend’s shoulder at the photo of the woman supposed to have been murdered.

Then, with a wild cry, that startled everyone in the *café*, and drew all eyes towards him, he seized the photograph and looked at it intently for a second.

Recovering himself with a supreme effort, his face deadly white, his eyes almost starting from their sockets, he clutched the detective by the arm and gasped:

‘His name!—the man’s name!’

‘James Morton—sometimes called “Flash Jim”!’

Mark Kintrea uttered a deep groan, and let the photograph fall to the ground.

The portrait of the woman supposed to have been murdered the night before last by her paramour was the portrait of his wife!

CHAPTER IV.

STRAWBERRY COURT.

‘ Won’t you leave this to Von Aaron and myself ?’

The speaker was Tom Darley.

After the strange revelation at the Criterion café, Mark, as soon as he had recovered his composure, had insisted upon going at once with the detective to the slum from which ‘ Flash Jim ’ had disappeared.

In his excitement Mark had told the detective the story of his life, and confessed that the woman whose photograph he had just seen was his wife.

The detective had questioned him closely, for the case now presented a fresh feature of interest. When Tom told him about the Little Guy and the marvellous resemblance to Mark’s wife, Von Aaron felt convinced that Mark was correct in his surmise.

This was the child Jim Morton had left with Mrs. Moloney.

While Mark, Tom Darley, and the detective were threading their way through the network of courts and alleys which lies behind Southwark Church, Tom urged his friend to abandon the painful journey.

Mark laid his hand gently on Tom’s shoulder.

‘ No, old friend, I’ll go through with it myself. Don’t be afraid, I am quite calm now. I am prepared for anything. No certainty, however terrible, can be worse than the dreadful doubts which have haunted me for six long years.’

Strawberry Court has lately been scheduled for demolition. The new crusade to the East has resulted in a pretty general conviction that there are certain courts and alleys which are absolutely unfit for human habitation, and Straw-

berry Court is one of the unfittest. But at the time of which I write, Strawberry Court was crowded with men, women, and children. Its dilapidated houses were let out in single rooms to anyone who could pay the rent, and as the rents were considered low at a time when there was fierce competition among the very poor for shelter, the tumble-down houses in Strawberry Court were always crammed with tenants.

Mark followed the detective, who went first and acted as guide through the dirty and poverty-stricken streets, with faltering steps. He took Tom's arm as much for support as for companionship. It was among such scenes as these he saw at every turn, amid this squalor and degradation and vice, that his wife had lived !

When they came to Strawberry Court itself, and, pushing their way through a crowd of ragged women and dirty children, entered a doorway and found themselves in a dark passage, Mark declared he would go no further.

'But this is the house !' exclaimed the detective, striking a match in order to see the staircase.

As the vesta threw a fitful glare over the passage, Mark looked up. He took the whole scene in at a glance. He saw the damp and filthy walls ; he saw the rotten, crumbling staircase ; he knew that if he went farther he should see the room—the horrible den—in which the woman he had idolized had spent the last years of her life.

He turned sick, a sudden tremor seized his limbs, and he put his hand against the awful wall of the passage to support himself.

'I will go no further,' he exclaimed ; 'let me get out into the air. You go with him, Tom. I—I—it's too horrible !'

Mark Kintrea did not stop to hear what the detective had to say ; he stumbled towards the open door, and was gone.

'Poor fellow !' said the detective to Tom. 'I dare say it

does make him feel queer. You're coming with me, I suppose ?'

'Yes,' said Tom. 'But—do you think I might light a pipe ? I'm not used to this sort of atmosphere, you know.'

The detective laughed. 'Light a pipe ? Certainly ! This is Liberty Hall. Come along.'

Lighting another vesta, Mr. Von Aaron went gingerly up the creaking, rotten staircase, and Tom followed, wondering whether, being a heavy man, he should get safely to the top or suddenly drop through.

'This is Mrs. Moloney's,' said the detective, as he reached a narrow landing on the third floor. There was a door there, evidently, for the detective knocked ; but Tom couldn't see it, for the vesta had gone out.

A voice from the other side of the door called out, 'What is it ?'

'All right, Mrs. Moloney—it's Mr. Jones.'

The door was opened cautiously by an old woman who looked as though she had been floured all over : and Tom and the detective entered.

For a moment neither of them could speak for coughing. The room was full of floating fluff and small hair. The floor, the ceiling, the walls, the scanty furniture, all were powdered over. Tom thought that the old woman had been tearing up hundreds of worn-out and dirty powder-puffs and throwing the fluff about the room.

'It's the rabbit fur, your honour ; it takes you like that if you ain't used to it.'

'Mrs. Moloney—prepares rabbit-skins—for the furriers,' explains the detective, coughing between every three words.

The detective proceeded at once to business.

'Where's the little girl that Jim Morton left with you ?'

'She went out guying this morning along with my two young 'uns, and they ain't come home yet, sir'

Darley and the detective exchanged glances. The Little Guy *was* the child of Jim Morton's mistress.

'Now, Mrs. Moloney,' said the detective, 'you know who I am?'

Mrs. Moloney nodded her head.

'There ain't many down the court as don't, sir. After you'd been last night it was all over the place as the 'tecs was after Jim Morton.'

'Very well, we'll come to business. I want Jim Morton badly. There's a reward for him. If you give me all the information you can, you shall stand in.'

'I don't know nothin', sir, upon my soul I——'

Von Aaron put his hand in his pocket and pulled out some loose silver.

'There's half a crown to begin with. Now—you heard the row between Morton and his wife before they went out the other night. What did he say?'

The old woman hesitated.

'They're a rum lot about here, mister; if I blab anything and it's knowed, there's plenty as 'll turn on me and half murder me. I'm a poor widder with two childring to keep as can't earn a shillin' theirselves through the Board School. If I'm called at the Old Bailey through sayin' anything to you——'

'I'll see no harm comes to you. If you're annoyed here you shall move, and I'll pay the rent—there!'

With much coaxing, a little threatening, and a personal guarantee for Tom's discretion, Von Aaron at last succeeded in extracting from the old fur-puller all that she knew.

And all that the information amounted to was this—that she'd heard Morton and the woman rowing; that Morton had charged her with peaching on him, and threatened to do for her; that she'd sworn she was as innocent as a babe inborn, and that after that he'd quieted down and they

went out together; and that late at night Morton came back alone, left the child with her, and said he and the missus were going away for a week.

'Will he come back after the child, do you think?' asked Tom.

'Come back here—Jim Morton—when he's wanted, and this gent's' (pointing to Von Aaron) 'been seen up the court? Not likely!'

'Then you'll keep the child yourself?'

Mrs. Moloney shrugged her shoulders. 'What on—rabbit-skins?' she asked, with a grimace that was meant for a grin. 'I'll keep her till the five bob's gone, and then she'll have to go to the workus. 'Onest folks 'as enough to do these times to keep their own kids, without a-startin' a orphan asylum for burglars's.'

'Thank you, old lady, for what you've told us,' said the detective. 'When I want some more information I'll come and see you again; and as to the child, you needn't trouble about her. I've got her.'

'You've got her!' exclaimed Mrs. Moloney.

'Yes; I'm taking care of her. She's evidence.' And, without vouchsafing any further information, Von Aaron gently pushed Tom out of the room and pulled the door to behind them.

CHAPTER V.

THE CAFÉ CHANTANT.

A MONTH after the eventful 5th of November on which the child deserted by Jim Morton had met with an accident in Great Russell Street, and had been taken into Tom Darley's lodgings, Mark Kintrea was sitting at breakfast in the *salle-à-manger* of the *Hôtel de l'Europe* at Havre.

The events of that terrible day had been too much for him—the horror of discovering that his wife, after leading a life of misery, poverty, and degradation, had met with such a terrible fate, had utterly broken him down. Some days after the disappearance of Jim Morton, the woman's body had been found in the Thames, swollen and disfigured beyond recognition. Only by the clothing was the body identified as that of the woman who had lived with 'Flash Jim' in Strawberry Court.

But at the inquest evidence was forthcoming which proved that it was a case of suicide, and not of murder—a lighterman had seen the woman wandering along the wharf *alone*, and, guessing her intention, had persuaded her to go away.

To this man she had confessed that she was tired of life, and intended to commit suicide.

She must have watched him away, and then returned and flung herself into the water.

People were also found who had been in the public-house where the woman and Morton had taken their last drink together. There had been a violent quarrel between them, and the woman had gone out vowing that the man should see her face no more.

Von Aaron, after carefully investigating the whole circumstances of the case, felt convinced that Morton was not near the wharf that night, and took no active part in the woman's death.

Mark waited till his wife's body was found, but was not allowed to see it—neither was he called on the inquest. There was no necessity that he should be, for the woman was known as Mrs. Morton—her former life had nothing to do with the inquiry, and Von Aaron mercifully suppressed his knowledge of it.

But after the inquest, when the parish officials came to

take away the body, they found that their services were not required. Mr. Von Aaron arranged the funeral on behalf of 'her friends,' and so the poor suicide was buried in a quiet little grave at Nunhead, and on the tombstone above it was this inscription: 'In memory of Henrietta, wife of Mark Kintrea.'

No one noticed it—no one knew of it—save Mark, his friend Tom Darley, and the detective.

Once, before he left England, Mark visited the grave and laid a wreath of white flowers upon it. It was in memory of the old days before the shame and sorrow came.

Meanwhile the child had not progressed so favourably as had been hoped. The injury to the head was much more serious than had at first been supposed, and little Hetty grew so bad that a trained nurse had to be sent for.

Seeing that they could do no possible good by remaining in the house, but that they were really in the way, Tom persuaded Mark, as soon as he was a little better, to come abroad with him, and they had crossed from Southampton to Havre, intending to make a tour through Normandy and Brittany.

They had been in Havre a couple of days, and had hesitated to leave it, for the winter had set in with unusual severity, and stories were coming in all day long of trains blocked in the snow and violent weather all through the country.

'We'd better stop here till the weather breaks,' Tom had said; and Mark had agreed with him.

This morning Mark, as usual, has come down to his breakfast long before Tom has summoned up courage to leave his bed. Early rising is as difficult a matter for Mr. Darley to practise abroad as it is at home.

Mark finds a letter by his plate on the breakfast-table. It is the daily bulletin of little Hetty's condition which the

kind doctor, according to promise, sends him. The doctor writes that at last there is a slight improvement, and that now he hopes for the best, but it will be many days before the little one is sufficiently recovered to be able to converse.

Mark has finished his breakfast before Tom comes down, and strolls into the courtyard to have his morning cigar. There he meets the landlord, and enters into conversation with him.

‘Has Monsieur seen all the sights of the town?’

Yes, Mark imagines so.

‘The circus—the theatres?’

‘Yes.’

‘Has Monsieur seen the *cafés chantants* which are in the street on the side of the quay?’

No, Monsieur has not.

‘Then Monsieur should on no account miss them. They are very curious. Monsieur should go and see for himself. There he will meet his compatriots. There he will see English girls dancing, and hear them sing English songs. It is about these places there have been many inquiries of late by the English police and others.’

Tom Darley finishes his breakfast, and joins his friend before the conversation is finished. He is interested in the subject at once, and gets full particulars from the landlord.

‘We’ll drop in at one or two of them, Mark,’ he says.

Mark says nothing, but he makes up his mind not to go. He has a reason for not wishing to renew his acquaintance with the music-halls of the Continent.

But when evening arrives, and he tries to make an excuse, Tom refuses to accept it.

‘Nonsense, old fellow!’ he says; ‘you want waking up. Come, I don’t want to go by myself, and I’m very curious to see these Havre places. I’ve heard a lot about ’em lately, and there have been some queer statements in the

English newspapers. Let's see if the Devil is as black as he's painted.'

So, after a late dinner, the two friends stroll out, and by asking their way two or three times they at last arrived in front of a dingy, dirty-looking house, standing in a dingy, dirty row, but which is distinguished by a feeble, blue-burning gas star. The ground floor looks like a double-windowed shop, with red blinds pulled down. In the centre is a big, heavy door, which works on a leather strap; on the door is a printed notice to the effect that entrance is free.

Tom pushes the door open, and walks into the room. Mark follows him.

It is a long, narrow room, and is filled with seafaring men and soldiers, who are smoking and drinking at the little tables which are placed about the room. The audience is entirely composed of the kind of people one finds in a low-class quayside café in a Continental seaport town. Near the door is a dirty bar; and behind the bar sits a fat jewelled lady, not very tidy, not very clean, but very much jewelled and braceleted.

In a chair by the side—the outside—of the bar sits a gray-headed old Jewish gentleman, also very much jewelled—and waiting at the bar for her tray to be filled with the drinks ordered by the company is a heavy-eyed, tow-haired damsel who might have stepped out of a low-class Seven Dials coffee-shop—dirty frock, dirty face, dirty hands, broken boots, and all.

The cigar-smoking, elderly Hebrew is the proprietor of the establishment—Papa Samuels—and the fat lady behind the bar is his wife. Once or twice there have been little difficulties with the police, awkward inquiries as to young girls who have disappeared from London and have been heard of as appearing on the stage of this hall, without

voices and without talent, and with nothing but their youth and beauty to recommend them, and strange stories have been told of the 'system' in vogue in this place.

These young ladies live on the premises, and have dresses given them in lieu of salary, and are invited to take champagne with the swell patrons of the establishment.

But we need not investigate the truth or falsehood of these statements, as Papa Samuels indignantly denies them, and, as his establishment still flourishes under the parental eye of the police, he is entitled to the benefit of the doubt.

At the end of the hall is a small stage, two private boxes for the accommodation of the aristocracy of Havre being built upon it. When Tom and Mark entered, the proprietor rose, and, seeing they were 'swells,' offered to conduct them to one of these private boxes; but they declined with thanks, and sat down at a table among the plebeians in the body of the hall.

A girl—an English girl—in a very short frock was singing when they entered. She hadn't a scrap of voice, and very little idea of tune, and she sang an English song which was popular at our music-halls five years ago.

She was vigorously applauded for it by the Frenchmen, who didn't understand a word of it; and then another English girl, in a still shorter frock, came on and sang another English song, and did a few steps at the end of each verse; and she was succeeded by another English girl, very young and very pretty, who hardly knew how to walk across the stage—a raw novice, who stood with her toes turned in and her arms hanging down, and sang her song much in the way that a child at an infant-school repeats a piece of poetry.

But when she had finished Papa Samuels led the applause, which was terrific, and when it was over Papa and

two gentlemen went behind the scenes to congratulate her, and the dirty waitress with the towy hair followed with a bottle of champagne and four glasses on the tray.

Mark rose to go.

'Come away, Tom,' he said; 'I've had enough of this. Let us get out into the fresh air.'

'Tain't up to much, is it?' exclaimed a young Englishman who was sitting near them. 'All very well for these French fellows; but after our music-halls it won't do.'

'No,' said Tom, 'it won't.'

'If you want to hear a real good song and enjoy yourself there's a tip-top place here—a music-hall, not a barn like this. I'm going there, and I'll show you the way if you like to come.'

'No, thank you,' said Mark; 'I've had enough.'

'Oh, come along,' said Tom; 'let's see everything while we're about it.'

Mark, who didn't care much one way or the other so long as he hadn't time to think of his troubles, allowed himself to be persuaded, and the young Englishman, who told him he was in a shipping-office in Havre, leading the way, they set out for 'the' music-hall of the place, the Star, as their new acquaintance informed them that it was called.

The shipping-office clerk went ahead, and Tom and Mark followed him. As they were walking along Mark suddenly stopped.

'I can't come, old fellow,' he said; 'you go on. I'll go back to the hotel.'

'Oh, nonsense! why can't you come?'

'Because the whole thing revolts me. Since I left that wretched place we've just been to, I've done nothing but think of poor Hetty.'

'But she never sang in a place like *that* ?'

'No, thank God; but it was at a music-hall abroad that I first met her.'

'Here you are, gentlemen!' exclaimed the shipping clerk.

They had stopped in front of a big building, brilliantly illuminated, and evidently a well-patronized place of amusement.

Tom didn't allow his friend to hesitate. He took his arm, and they entered the Star Music-Hall.

It was a very different place to the establishment of Papa Samuels, and a very different audience was assembled. The stage was large and well-appointed, and the seats were neatly upholstered. Waiters in evening dress were taking the orders of the spectators, and a chairman, in evening dress, sat in front of the orchestra—as in our English halls. The stage was empty as the three men took their places.

'Madame Marion, of the principal Continental music-halls, will appear next,' said the chairman. The orchestra struck up a sentimental ballad air, and Madame Marion stepped upon the stage.

Mark was staring about the hall when the Continental star came to the footlights; but Tom Darley uttered an exclamation of astonishment which made Mark look up.

Without a word, Mark rose from his seat and went out of the hall.

Tom followed him, and found him leaning against the wall for support. He clutched Tom's arm, and whispered in a hoarse voice:

'That woman, Tom, did you see her?'

'Yes.'

Madame Marion was the living image of the woman who lay buried in Nunhead Cemetery—Jim Morton's mistress, Mark Kintrea's wife!

CHAPTER VI.

MADAME MARION.

TOM DARLEY went with Mark Kintrea to the hotel. Mark remained obstinately silent, and, when they reached the hotel, bade his friend good-night and went to his room. The mental shock of that resemblance had been too much for him, and he wished to be alone.

Tom, finding he could do nothing, lit a cigar and returned to the hall. Madame Marion appeared again at the close of the entertainment, and sang an English ballad, and sang it very nicely indeed.

After the performance was over Tom went to the stage-door, and waited to see the artists come out. He was waiting to see Madame Marion. Presently she came out—a pale-faced, sad-looking woman now, with the paint and powder off. Tom recognised her at once.

‘I beg your pardon, madam, but may I ask you a question?’

The woman looked at him with a haughty stare, and passed on.

Tom was not to be discouraged, so he followed her.

‘I assure you, madam——’ he began.

‘I beg your pardon, sir, but I don’t know you, and I don’t wish to. Pray allow me to pass.’

‘I assure you, madam, I have no intention of insulting you. I merely wish to ask you a question.’

‘Well, sir?’

‘Did you ever know a man named James Morton?’

If Tom had struck the woman a blow in the face she would have reeled back just as she reeled back now.

‘I—I—who are you?’ she gasped.

'Compose yourself, madam,' exclaimed Tom. 'I am sorry if I have pained you, but it is a matter which concerns a dear friend of mine.'

'What can you or your friend know of James Morton?'

'I do know a good deal of him, madam, and I want to know more. He has disappeared. The woman he lived with has been found drowned, and her child——'

'The woman drowned!' cried Madame Marion, clutching Tom's arm; 'and the child—what of the child? Tell me quick—quick!'

'The child is——'

'Dead—not dead! Oh, for God's sake, tell me, sir—my child, my little Hetty——'

'Your child!' exclaimed Tom, startled out of the composure he had endeavoured to assume. 'Good heavens, woman, then you were not drowned! There is some fearful mystery here. Tell me, where did you leave James Morton?'

'I want to know nothing of James Morton,' cried the woman; 'tell me about the child—is it alive? is it well?'

'It is alive.'

'Thank God—thank God for that! My little Hetty! Who are you, sir?—how did you find me?—why have you come here?'

'I came here accidentally. I saw you on the stage, and you were so like a woman who is supposed to be dead that I waited for you and spoke to you. Now, can you not, will you not tell me, for the child's sake, for your own, when you saw James Morton last?'

'Six years ago.'

'What! then you didn't live with him? You are not the woman who quarrelled with him, and left him a month ago?'

'I—no! The woman who lived with him once was his

wife, my unhappy sister ; but she told me that she had left him long ago, and that she was earning her own living. Do you think if I had known she was still with him I should have trusted my child, my little Hetty, with her ? I——'

Before she could say another word Tom seized her arm so fiercely that she cried out.

A sudden idea had come to him—an idea which made his heart leap and jump, and the blood rush to his face, and his brain swim.

'I understand all now!' he cried; 'you are *not* the woman who lived with Jim Morton ; but you *are* Mark Kintrea's wife !'

CHAPTER VII.

A CHRISTMAS PARTY.

It was Christmas morning, but there were very few signs of it in Great Russell Street. It might have been Sunday, because the shops were all shut, and the Museum was closed ; but there was absolutely nothing in the aspect of the locality to suggest the 25th of December. It is difficult, perhaps, to suggest offhand how this state of affairs might have been remedied. One can hardly expect the authorities to decorate the outside of the British Museum with holly and mistletoe, and it is the Museum which dominates and gives character to Great Russell Street. But if there were no signs of Christmas in the streets, there were doubtless plenty inside the houses. Inside *one* house in Great Russell Street, at any rate, there was, and that was the house occupied by Mr. Tom Darley.

It was ten o'clock in the morning, and Tom had—*mirabile dictu*—had his breakfast, and was knocking at the door of the room occupied by the nurse and her little charge.

‘Can I come in?’

‘Yes, sir; Miss Hetty’s awake.’

Tom pushed the door open and entered, a huge doll under one arm and several small packages under the other.

The Little Guy was sitting up in bed, propped up with pillows, and her little white face lighted up into a smile as he entered.

‘Oh, Uncle Tom,’ she cried, as the beautiful presents were laid upon the bed, ‘what lovely things! Are they all for me?’

‘Yes, dear; it’s Christmas Day, you know, and these are your Christmas presents.’

‘Yes, nurse told me it was Christmas Day; and if I’m very good and quiet I’m to get up and see the holly and the mistletoe and the pretty flowers you’ve been putting up in the next room.’

‘Yes, dear.’

‘Uncle Tom, are you sure my mamma will come to-day?’

‘Yes, dear; but you must be very good, you know, and not cry, and not get excited, and you mustn’t talk much, you know.’

‘Oh no! I will only just put my arms round my dear mamma’s neck and kiss her, and then I will be quite quiet.’

Yes; Hetty’s mamma was coming to-day. It was the day the doctor had fixed for the first meeting. He would not allow it till the child was strong enough to bear it.

Since Tom Darley’s strange interview with Madame Marion many things have happened.

After ascertaining her address that night, he had gone back to the hotel and matured his plans. The next day he had taken Mark out with him, and, telling him he was going to introduce him to an old friend, had taken him to where Marion was lodging.

Then, when husband and wife had suddenly found them-

selves together, Tom had, without waiting to see the consequences of his daring act, rushed out of the room and left them alone.

It was late that afternoon when Mark Kintrea returned to the hotel. The first glance at his face showed Tom Darley that the bold scheme he had conceived and carried out to bring matters to a crisis had been crowned with success.

Mark looked ten years younger, and his face was flushed with a joyous excitement. The story was soon told—the mystery explained.

When Mark first met Hetty Joyce she was singing at a big music-hall in Rotterdam—singing the English ballads which she sang so sweetly. Hetty's father had been a clever musician once, but had, when a great trouble came upon him in the sudden death of his wife, taken to drink and grown reckless, and gradually gone down in the professional scale till he had come to have to travel about France in the orchestra of one of those 'Richardsonian' theatres which are only seen at the great fairs.

His two young daughters, Hannah and Hetty, travelled with him, and earned a little by going on in the scenes and singing and dancing.

Hetty had a very sweet voice, and had learned many English ballads from her mother, and it was found that one of these simple, plaintive songs was always a success—perhaps all the greater success because it was sung in a foreign language.

When Joyce died the girls were left entirely to their own resources. Eventually they found themselves in England, where between them, by their professional exertions, they managed to earn a modest income. Hannah, in an evil hour, fell in with a handsome scoundrel, who frequented the hall at the East-End where she was taking part in a

ballet performance, and the end of it was that she consented to become his wife.

Hetty at that time was out of an engagement, and she went to live with her sister in Morton's house, at Walworth.

Morton was supposed by both the sisters to be a betting man, and his varying fortunes aroused no suspicion in the girls' minds. At one time he was flush of money, and wore diamond pins and rings and drank champagne; and a month or two afterwards he would be down on his luck, and taking every shilling of the girls' earnings from them.

His frequent absences from home aroused no suspicion; as a betting man he, of course, had to attend races all over the country.

But one day Hetty accidentally made a discovery which filled her with horror. She overheard a conversation between Morton and a man who had come to see him, and then she knew her sister's husband was a criminal—that he was one of a gang of professional burglars, and it was in his house that many of the biggest jobs, as he called them, were put up.

To the girl's horror she discovered that she and her sister had really been helping him in his nefarious schemes. Hetty had taken things for him, when he was hard up, to a man who advanced money on them, and to pawnbrokers, and she found that she had really been assisting him in disposing of stolen property.

Terrified, the poor girl rushed to her sister, and told her what she had discovered. But Hannah knew it already.

Hetty insisted upon leaving the house at once, but not before Jim Morton had made her understand that if ever she breathed a word of what she knew she would pay for it. He terrified the poor girl into believing that she had been his accomplice, and that a word from one of his pals to the police would lead to her arrest and imprisonment.

Hetty swore not to betray her sister's husband, and was allowed to go in peace. She went abroad, and succeeded in getting an engagement at one of her old shows, and managed to live quietly and respectably and make her way in the profession until she met Mark Kintrea, and he fell in love with her, and married her, and took her home to his beautiful place in Derbyshire.

Mark was romantic, and had led the girl to believe he was only a young fellow in a fair position. He wanted to see his little wife's astonishment when she found herself mistress of a beautiful place, and the wife of a wealthy man.

Hetty was a little frightened at the grandeur, and she thought that had she known what Mark was she would have told him about her relatives before he married her. Now she could not do it. It would be so dreadful to tell him that her brother-in-law was a burglar; so she tried to forget all about it, hoping that in her new sphere of life she would never cross Jim Morton's path again.

Her goodness of heart was her undoing. She found out, from letters forwarded to her from the hall at which she had been singing abroad when she married Mark, that her sister was in great trouble. Jim had met with an accident, and they were almost starving. She sent her sister money to the address given, and 'Flash Jim' got hold of the letters, and soon found out what a good thing might be made of his sister-in-law's position.

One day when Mark was out he waited for Hetty in the grounds, and vowed unless she gave him so much money he would get her denounced to the police and arrested. Hetty gave him everything she had. Then he came again and sent her letters, and at last got into the house, and before her very eyes broke the safe open and stole the plate and jewellery.

Hetty begged and prayed of him to go, but it was no use. He swore that if she called for help he would say that he was her brother-in-law, and there by her invitation, and that the marriage was a put-up job between them to enable him to rob the place.

Terrified out of her life, fearing that she might be involved in the robbery and perhaps believed to be an accomplice, the broken-hearted girl lost her courage and fled, leaving an unfinished letter behind her. She felt that she could not meet her husband when he knew the truth, and she fancied by going away she might spare him at least some of the shame and disgrace.

And so she went; and when her child was born she left it with her sister Hannah in London, while she went abroad, feeling that she should be safer there. Hannah had left Jim Morton, and was earning her own living again.

When the child was two years old, Mrs. Kintrea, having settled for a fixed engagement in a French town, came home and fetched her little one. But six months before the accident to the Little Guy, 'Madame Marion' had been compelled to travel again, to fill in with short engagements, and the little girl could not be taken; so Hetty was sent home to her aunt by an English governess, a friend of 'Madame Marion's,' who was returning to London.

Hannah tried to do her duty by the child, and to use the money her sister sent for the child's benefit; but in an evil hour she had gone back to Jim Morton, the man whose influence over her was so great that only death would conquer it. Jim took all the money and spent it, and, being out of luck, he grew desperate in one of his drunken frenzies and committed a clumsy theft, for which he had to keep out of the way more than ever. He took his wife and 'the brat,' as he called her, with him into a wretched slum, where they starved, but he was safe for a time. Twenty

burglars might live unnoticed in Strawberry Court—and did.

There Hannah grew desperate, too. One day, after a quarrel and brutal ill-usage, she went to Scotland Yard to give Morton up. It was only a momentary madness. She repented directly, and left without saying a word.

But Jim Morton heard of it, and the sequel of events the reader knows already.

Poor Hannah, tired of her life, glad to give up the struggle, flung herself in the Thames. She was the woman who was buried as Mark Kintrea's wife; but though sufficiently like her sister to have deceived a casual acquaintance, she was not so like her as to have deceived Mark, but for the photograph.

But the photograph found by the detective in Hannah's room was an old photograph of her sister Hetty, and not of herself, and this it was that left him no room for doubt as to his wife having been the woman who lived with 'Flash Jim,' and had fled to the river to escape his vengeance.

* * * * *

'Now, Hetty dear, you must be very quiet, and lie quite still; here is mamma!'

Uncle Tom held the door open as he spoke, and Hetty Kintrea came softly in and stole to the child's bedside and fell upon her knees.

The child put its arms about its mother's neck, and then there was a silence broken only by sobs.

Nobody could help it, and all the doctors in the world couldn't have stopped it. Hetty sobbed—the little one sobbed; and Tom Darley, finding he was going to make a fool of himself too, said a wicked word under his breath, and went out of the room.

But Mark Kintrea who had come with his wife, stayed

on, and presently, when they were calmer, Hetty told her little one that this was her new papa—the papa she had never seen—the dear papa she would grow up to love as much as she loved her dear mamma.

It was a very quiet Christmas party in the big front room in Great Russell Street, but it was a very happy one ; and the folding-doors were set wide open, so that little Hetty could see her mamma and papa and Uncle Tom, and the Christmas-pudding, with the fire all round it.

It was a happy party, saddened only by the thought of poor Hannah's fate ; but at least she was at peace. The headstone above the grave had been altered directly the strange truth was known, and 'Hannah Morton' stands in the place of 'Henrietta Kintrea' ; for Henrietta Kintrea is not buried, but alive and happy with her husband and her child.

Jim Morton never troubled them again. A man, while attempting to commit a burglary in the North, was shot by the master of the house—shot through the heart.

The local police were enabled by photographs and the official description at once to identify the dead burglar as James Morton, alias 'Flash Jim.'

BISMARCK IN LONDON.

THE following story was related to me by a young Englishman who never told an untruth. Truth is stranger than fiction, and instead of inventing a romance, I prefer on the present occasion to repeat the facts which my friend imparted to me. I will use my friend's words so far as I can remember them.

'In the year 186— I was a student at the University of Bonn. One day the Emperor William, then King William, for United Germany was still a dream, came to Bonn to review the troops. Count Bismarck accompanied him. In the evening Bismarck went to bathe from one of the floating baths on the Rhine. Bismarck jumped into the water and struck out. I jumped in and swam after him. Suddenly I heard a cry; the great man had been seized with cramp, and was sinking. We were the only bathers. I swam to his assistance; I seized him by the hair—he was not so bald then as he is now—and dragged him back to the platform which ran round the bath.

"You have saved my life, young man," said Bismarck, in excellent English; "but don't say anything about it. I ought not to have bathed so soon after a good dinner, and I don't want the papers to say so. I don't want the papers to publish the fact that I could do anything foolish. I have

the reputation for never making a mistake, and I shouldn't like it to be destroyed over such a trivial affair as this. You understand?"

"Perfectly," I replied; "to a statesman in your position a reputation for infallibility is vital. The story of to-night's adventure shall never pass my lips until you give your consent for it to be made public."

'The count thanked me heartily, shook hands most cordially, and, when we were dressed, invited me to accompany him to the temporary residence of his sovereign. I was very pleased at the offer, and I gladly accepted it. That evening I had the honour of smoking a pipe with the king and Count Bismarck, no one else being present. The king and the count both spoke English fluently, and we conversed until ten o'clock, at which hour the king retired to rest.

'Before quitting the apartment he gave me a cordial invitation to call upon him when I was in Berlin. I had earned, he told me, his undying gratitude, for I had saved the life of the one statesman who was capable of carrying out his ideas with regard to the glorious future of the Fatherland.

'Bismarck walked home with me to my lodgings in the Weberstrasse, and there we had more pipes. And the count drank my health in some bottled Bass, which I had procured at great expense from Herr Schmidt, the proprietor of the excellent hotel in the market-place, the Golden Star.

'We parted at midnight, vowing eternal friendship. The next day Bismarck and his royal master continued their journey, and I saw nothing more of them for some months.

'I, however, received in a few days a charming letter of thanks from the count, and in it I was assured that his

Majesty desired his best remembrances to be conveyed to me.

‘Four months afterwards I went to Berlin to spend a short holiday. I called on Bismarck at his official residence, and he took me to see the king. I was in Berlin a week, and during the whole of that time an apartment in the royal palace was placed at my service. The Crown Prince, who had heard the story of the rescue from his father, was most friendly, and took me with him to many places worth visiting, at which it would not have done either for the king or his minister to have shown himself.

‘During my stay at the palace, the count always came in the afternoon and smoked a pipe with me, and on these occasions the conversation generally turned upon English manners and customs, and English politics. I had a fair knowledge of the political situation in my own country, and from the fact of my father holding a high official position in the House of Commons, I knew most of our leading English statesmen.

‘I don’t say that the count, to use a vulgar expression, “pumped” me, but it always seemed to me that his questions were leading ones, and that he had some object in view in making his inquiries, other than idle curiosity.

‘When I left Berlin, the king and Count Bismarck came to the railway-station to see me off. As the train was starting, the great statesman whispered in my ear, “Jack” —we had become very familiar—“if I ever want to come to London on the strict Q.T., can you put me up?” I assured him that I should be delighted. The whistle sounded, the train started, the king waved his hand cordially, and Bismarck waved his pocket-handkerchief until a bend in the line hid him from my view, and a railway-arch striking my hat made me withdraw my head and shoulders into the safe seclusion of the first-class compart-

ment, which by royal orders had been specially reserved for me as far as Cologne.

‘I never visited Germany again. Years went on, but I still kept up a correspondence with the great chancellor. Every New Year’s Day a handsome present arrived from Berlin for me, and the king never omitted sending me a Christmas card.

‘In the meantime, affairs rapidly developed themselves. The Franco-German war was begun and finished, and the dream of the man of “blood and iron” was realized. “United Germany” was an accomplished fact.

‘After that I heard very rarely from my friend, now no longer count, but “Fürst” von Bismarck. He was too busy to write often, he said, but he had not forgotten me. He and the emperor frequently spoke about me, and the emperor, I was assured, had been good enough to say that “United Germany” was my doing. Had Bismarck been drowned that evening in the Rhine, the realization of his grand scheme would have been indefinitely postponed.

‘In the spring of the year 187— I received a visit from a German ambassador. His excellency refused to give his name to my servant, but wrote a message in German on the slate kept for callers, which he desired to be handed to me. The message was brought to my study, and was to the effect that an envoy from the court of Berlin desired to see me on important business.

‘I gave orders for the gentleman to be admitted, and directly he came into my study he double-locked the door, drew down the blind, stuffed a piece of paper in the key-hole, closed the register of the chimney, and led me to a corner of the room.

‘Then, in a subdued whisper, he told me that Prince Bismarck had ordered him to call upon me, and to see if I could receive him, Prince Bismarck, in my house, and

keep his identity a profound secret. "The chancellor wishes," said my visitor, "to study England and the English unobserved. He will arrive disguised in a wig and a heavy black beard and moustache, and dressed as a clergyman of the Lutheran Church. The name he will assume will be that of the Rev. Theodor von Prügelstein. In your company he will visit all the great people to whom you can get an introduction. You will, if possible, get your leading statesmen to dine at your house, and he will engage in conversation with them. The prince would have written you, but you do not know our cypher, and to have written you in English or German would have been hazardous, as letters from Germany are frequently opened at the post-office. Accident or design might have betrayed his plan, and the object of his visit would have been defeated."

'I hesitated.

'After a moment's pause, I said, "Your excellency, I will tell you frankly my objection. I fear that the great chancellor's feelings to my country are not friendly. I might be doing an unpatriotic action in thus introducing him to our unsuspecting statesmen. He might want to go over the Dockyard or Woolwich Arsenal. He might even be coming here to mature plans for an invasion of England. He is awfully clever, my friend Bismarck; as a man I respect and esteem him—but as a statesman—an intriguer—I fear him."

'The ambassador assured me that my fears were ill-founded. The object of the great chancellor's visit was merely to make himself master of English manners and customs, to gratify his desire to penetrate the *vie intime* of English political circles, to go as it were "behind the scenes of English politics."

'I hesitated still.

'"Why the disguise?" I said. "Surely he can come as

Bismarck and be lionized, and see more than I can hope to show him."

"Ach, gnädiger Herr," replied the ambassador; "Sie vergessen die deutschen Socialisten die in London wohnen. Wenn Bismarck öffentlich als Bismarck nach London käme, so würden sie suchen ihn zu ermorden."*

'I admitted that Bismarck was not popular with the German Socialists, but I did not think they would go the length of assassinating him. "Yes, they would," returned the envoy, "if they had the chance. Moreover, so disguised that his own mother would not know him, speaking in a voice utterly unlike his own, which he has acquired by months of practice, he will be able to go about, perhaps among the German anarchists and agitators who infest your Metropolis, and thus acquire information which may eventually be of the utmost service to him. I am, moreover, charged by my imperial master to tell you that he will take it as a personal favour to himself, if you will forward the chancellor's designs by receiving him as your guest and maintaining his incognito inviolable."

'I yielded. The Emperor of Germany had always been a great favourite of mine. Apart from his excessive militarism and a tendency to thank Heaven too effusively for the slaughter of his foes, I had found him as nice an old gentleman as could be met with in a day's march, and I had a grateful recollection of the many happy hours we had passed together over a pipe and a glass of beer in the dear old palace at Berlin.

"Present my compliments to your imperial master, and my good friend Fürst von Bismarck," I exclaimed, "and say that my humble residence is at their service. If the

* "Ah, worthy sir," replied the ambassador, "you forget the German Socialists. If Bismarck came to London as Bismarck, they would seek to murder him."

emperor himself likes to accompany the chancellor, disguised as a Chinese mandarin, a Highland chieftain, or an Arab sheikh, he is welcome. Wild horses shall not drag from me the secret of their identity."

'The envoy bowed and thanked me, and informed me that he was returning that evening by the Continental mail to Berlin with my answer; that, on account of the extreme caution necessary, I should receive no written communication from the chancellor, but that, if I would be at Charing Cross Station to meet the Continental mail arriving on the evening of that day week, I should see stepping from a first-class carriage a Lutheran clergyman in a wig and black beard and moustache, who would be none other than Fürst von Bismarck. In order that there should be no mistake he would hold his soft felt hat in his hand, as though suffering from the heat.

'As we shook hands for the last time on the doormat in the hall, I asked his excellency if there was no fear of Bismarck's design being frustrated in Berlin? Would he not be observed to leave his residence; would not his absence from the capital create some suspense, and cause conjectures to be indulged in by newspaper correspondents and others?

"That is all foreseen and guarded against," replied the envoy. "The day the chancellor leaves Berlin, disguised as a Lutheran clergyman, an official communication to the German newspapers will inform the world that he has set out incognito for a sea trip to the Mediterranean for the benefit of his health."

* * * * *

'During the week that elapsed before the arrival of my distinguished visitor, I imparted the secret to my father, the high official in the House of Commons. I was bound to do so in order to secure the presence of the illustrious

guests I desired Prince Bismarck to meet. My father, like the dear old brick he is, at once set to work and procured invitations for myself and the Lutheran pastor to a reception at the Foreign Office, a dinner-party at Mr. Gladstone's, a ball at Lady Burdett Coutts', and a soirée at the Marquis of Salisbury's. He also procured us two stalls for any evening in the week at the Canterbury Music-Hall, taking care that they were next the stalls usually occupied of an evening at that time by Lord Randolph Churchill and a friend of his, a member of the Fourth party. The Marquis of Hartington called personally upon me, after an interview with my father, and offered to do all in his power to introduce my German clerical friend into the best houses and places of political resort, and to take him to a race meeting or two; and, thanks also to my father's exertions and influence, the editor of the *Daily Telegraph*, the editor of the *Morning Post*, and the editor of the *Daily News* sent kind little notes, offering to do all in their power to assist my German friend in making himself acquainted with all sides of London life.

'My dear old father, in his high official position in the House of Commons, had spent a long life in doing his utmost to oblige everybody, and now he was reaping his reward in seeing with what heartiness the shining lights of politics and literature and fashion and journalism responded to his request that his son's guest might be honoured in the great Metropolis.

'I must confess that once or twice I felt a qualm at the idea of foisting the great and the dreaded Bismarck on our statesmen as a harmless Lutheran pastor. I had vague suspicions that I might be betraying my country into the hands of the enemy, but had I not the great man's assurance that he meant no harm? And on thinking the matter over I felt sure that my old friend, the Kaiser, would not have

lent the light of his countenance to anything mean, treacherous, or dishonourable.

‘ So I made my mind easy, went to a little expense in re-furnishing the suite of apartments intended for the prince, borrowed my father’s gold and silver plate and his butler, and took a footman on for “the job,” as they say in professional circles.

‘ On the evening of the eventful day, I was at Charing Cross an hour before the advertised time of the arrival of the Continental mail. The train was half an hour late, but when it did arrive, the first passenger who caught my eye was a Lutheran clergyman, with a fine black beard and moustache and a mass of thick black hair (a marvellous wig it was) and his hat in his hand.

‘ The disguise was absolutely impenetrable—even the eyes were hidden by tinted glasses, and when the great German statesman addressed me it was in a voice that I utterly failed to recognise, so cleverly had it been altered by its possessor.

‘ In the station my friend was calm and reserved. He had only one small hand-portmanteau, which had been examined at Dover, so we were not detained at the Customs. In the carriage I asked my friend to remove his beard and wig, but he said it would be dangerous. He even asked me to allow him to keep up the false voice. He was afraid if he used his own, even with me, he might in an unguarded moment do it before the company, and then discovery would follow as a matter of course.

‘ “ So, my dear friend,” he said, “ you will excuse me if, when we are alone, I still keep up the appearance and character of the Lutheran clergyman, Theodor von Prügelstein. My life-long training teaches me that a chain is no stronger than its weakest link, and if for one second I relapse into Bismarck, I may as well, for all practical purposes,

walk down Piccadilly with my own face and moustache, and my own three hairs on my own bald head, and my own well-known pipe in my own well-known mouth, and my own well-known dog, Sultan, at my heels."

'I agreed with the logical argument of my friend, and requested him to give himself no anxiety on my account. I would fall in with all his views, and teach myself to regard him as though he actually were Theodor von Prügelstein, and the mildest and most harmless of Lutheran clergymen.

'We dined on the evening of the arrival *tête-à-tête*, and though the great chancellor imparted to me many state secrets, and referred to all that had happened since we last met, he kept up the character he had assumed so remarkably well that I do not believe his august master himself would have recognised him.

'On the following day we "did" a few of the sights of London, and in the evening we went to Arlington Street, and were very graciously received by Lord Salisbury. His lordship drew my friend out as to the present views of the Germans with regard to England, and particularly questioned him as to the general way in which Bismarck was regarded by his fellow-countrymen. I could not repress a smile when Herr Pastor von Prügelstein avowed himself a disbeliever in the Bismarckian policy, and I chuckled in my sleeve when Lord Salisbury swallowed the bait, and abused the German chancellor in good round terms. The French ambassador was present that evening, and Prügelstein entered into familiar conversation with him in his native tongue, frankly avowing his sympathy with France in the loss of Alsace and Lorraine.

'The next evening I had a dinner-party at my own house, and the guests included, among others, Mr. and Mrs. Gladstone, Madame de Novikoff, Mr. Errington, Lord Rosebery, Sir William Harcourt, Mr. Robinson of the *Daily*

News, Sir Thomas and Lady Brassey, Mr. and Mrs. Childers, Earl Granville, Mr. Chamberlain, Sir Charles Dilke, Lady Florence Dixie, and the editor of the *Times*.

‘The pastor, for their edification, told his experiences of the German Socialists, and Mr. Gladstone was so deeply interested that he sent Mrs. Gladstone home at eleven, and stayed in the smoking-room talking with my distinguished guest until two in the morning.

‘The next day Prügelstein went out alone, and did not return until it was time to dress and be off to Lady Burdett Coutts’ reception in Stratton Street.

‘So a fortnight passed away, my German clerical friend rapidly becoming, through my influence and that of my father, and his own amiable qualities, a lion of the London season. He saw everything, went everywhere, and was even taken by Lord Randolph Churchill to the Marlborough Club, and there introduced to the Prince of Wales.

‘At the end of the fortnight a telegram arrived one morning while Von Prügelstein and myself were sitting on the lawn under my mulberry-tree, partaking of strawberries and iced cream. Prügelstein read the telegram and put it in his pocket, informing me that he would have to return to Berlin by the early morning train.

‘“Nothing serious, I hope,” I said.

‘“Oh, no!” replied the disguised chancellor; “only Fritz and his father have been quarrelling again, and the old man thinks I had better come back. Fritz is always difficult to manage when I am out of the way.”

‘“Well, my dear Bismarck,” I replied, “I won’t urge you to stay if you must go, but I hope you have enjoyed yourself, and that you have gained all the information you desired.”

‘“I have learnt all I wanted to,” replied the prince, “and I have only to thank you for your hospitality and to

say good-bye. By-the-way, Herbert, my son, has forgotten to send me a remittance, and I have spent all the money I brought with me. I have some commissions to execute for the emperor this afternoon, and I shall have to pay for the things to avoid betraying my identity. Can you let me have £500."

"I haven't the money in the house, and it is past banking hours, so a cheque would be no use."

"Oh, your cheque will do," replied the prince; "I'm going to call on Baron Rothschild this afternoon, and he will change it for me."

'I drew the cheque, and Bismarck went out. That evening he returned with a large number of boxes, which he brought in and placed in the hall. He told me they contained the articles he had been buying for the Kaiser, and a few little things which he was taking home to his family as presents.

'At 6.30 the next morning, the prince was down and ready to start. We took a hasty breakfast. His boxes were loaded on to two cabs, and I accompanied him to the station, and saw him off by the 7.40 Continental mail.

'We parted with the greatest affection. Bismarck was effusive in his thanks, and he begged me to accept as a mark of his esteem the order of the Red Eagle, which he informed me the emperor wished me to accept, and he further told me that the emperor had written personally to my queen, and begged her to allow me to wear it upon all public occasions.

'I accepted the order and put it in my pocket.

'We parted, the prince promising to write to me directly he reached Berlin, and to send me on the little draft for the £500.

'When I reached home I went straight upstairs, and having pinned the order of the Red Eagle on to my breast,

I walked about in front of the cheval glass and admired myself.

‘I was interrupted by a knock at my bedroom door, and my father’s butler, who had been lent to me during Prince Bismarck’s stay, came in, and, in a voice choked with emotion, told me that his pantry had been entered in the night, and the whole of my father’s gold and silver plate, also lent to me for Prince Bismarck’s visit, had been stolen.

‘I rushed off and gave information to the police at Scotland Yard, and Chief Superintendent Williamson at once sent a detective to examine the premises. While I was in his office, he told me that Lord Salisbury had been on the previous evening to complain that her ladyship’s bedroom had been entered, and over £3,000 worth of jewellery abstracted. On my way home I met Mr. Gladstone, who asked me how the Herr Pastor was. I said that he had left for Germany.

“‘Indeed!’ said Mr. Gladstone, “he called at my house late yesterday afternoon, but he never said a word about going so soon. And last night I met Baron Rothschild, who informed me that he had an appointment with the Herr Pastor this morning.”

‘Of course I understood that this was part of the Bismarckian policy. He didn’t want it to be known that he was leaving London; probably he kept it a secret by way of precaution.

‘I returned home to meet the detective, and to endeavour to find out how the premises had been entered during the night. While I was engaged in minutely examining the front door and the window-fastenings with Inspector Moser, the eminent detective of Scotland Yard, Baron Rothschild jumped out of a hansom and hailed me.

“‘I say, Jack!’ he exclaimed, “where’s the pastor? Is he in?”

"No; why?"

"Because he's forgotten to endorse this cheque, and you made it payable to his order. I changed it for him out of the petty cash I had about me."

'I took the cheque mechanically, and looked at it. I started as if I had been shot. "Good gracious!" I exclaimed, "this cheque has been tampered with. It's for £5,000—I only drew it for £500."

"I've given £5,000 for it!" cried the baron. "You don't mean to say it's a forgery?"

"No, the signature is mine; but if you look you will see the word hundred has been cleverly altered to thousand, and an extra 0 added to the figures!"

'We were both dumbfounded.

'After a pause the baron said, hesitatingly, "But the pastor—this Von Prügelstein—was a friend of yours; you introduced him to me at Lord Salisbury's. Surely you don't think that——'

"No, I don't," I replied. "There's some mistake. I'll wire to Bis—I mean Prügelstein, at once."

'The baron had an appointment with the chairman of the Bank of England, and had to leave. I was fairly puzzled. It was ridiculous to suppose that Prince Bismarck could have purposely altered the cheque—but how else could it have been done? and the baron distinctly stated that he had given my guest £5,000 for it.

'I couldn't say anything to Moser, because, of course, I should have had to say that my guest was none other than the redoubtable Bismarck, and that would not have done.

'While I was absorbed in thought Lord Rosebery's elegant brougham drove up, and his lordship jumped out.

"I say, Jack," he said, as soon as we were alone, "a very unpleasant thing has happened. Your friend Prügelstein was at my house yesterday. I was out, but Lady

Rosebery received him. While there he asked to be allowed to see the new library which I've built adjoining my bedroom, and opening into it. Lady Rosebery took him to the library. While there he put his hand in his pocket, and drew it out hurriedly. It was covered with grease. He informed Lady Rosebery that he had purchased that day a bottle of vaseline, of which he had heard great accounts, and it had broken in his pocket.

'“Will you allow me to step into his lordship's dressing-room and repair the damage, and wash my hands?” he said.

'“Of course Lady Rosebery agreed, and your friend went into the bedroom, Lady Rosebery going downstairs to instruct one of the servants to attend to the gentleman's wants.

'“In a few minutes his pastorate returned, saying he was all right now, and then he left. This morning I find that a case of valuable jewels, worth at least £10,000, is gone from my bedroom. Now, under these circumstances, my dear fellow, I think your friend's conduct looks very suspicious.”

'I was staggered. All these things, coming one upon the other, bewildered me. But Bismarck a forger, Bismarck a thief—the thing was absurd !

'I told Lord Rosebery that he was mistaken in his suspicions, that it was a coincidence certainly, but that I would answer for my friend's innocence with my life.

'I couldn't tell Lord Rosebery that Prügelstein was Prince Bismarck. Had I been able to do so, he would have, of course, recognised at once the absurdity of his suspicions. But I told him he had better go to Scotland Yard, and in the meantime I would communicate with Prügelstein.

'“Where is he?” asked his lordship.

'“He left this morning for Berlin.”

“Did he?” replied his lordship; “then we shan’t see him or my jewels again. I’m off to Scotland Yard.”

When Lord Rosebery had re-entered his elegant little brougham and driven off, I sat down upon my front steps, a prey to a hundred emotions.

My father’s plate had gone, £5,000 had been obtained on my cheque for £500, Lord Salisbury had lost a large amount of jewellery, so had Lord Rosebery, and in each case there was certainly an element of suspicion attaching to the disguised clergyman, who was in reality the world-famous German Reichs-Kanzler. But to suppose him guilty was madness. “Could he,” at last I thought, “could he have been playing a practical joke?” That idea was too wild to be entertained.

In my doubt and anxiety I at last determined to take Inspector Moser into my confidence. I called him into my study and told him the whole story.

He listened with grave attention, and when I had concluded he said quietly: “There is no doubt about it—Bismarck is the culprit.”

“But it’s so improbable!” I urged.

“It is, but it is clearly a case of kleptomania. I have known,” he went on, “a most respectable monarch of long standing, when attacked by this strange disease, pick the pockets of privy councillors. Not long ago a wealthy English nobleman, whose family came over before the Conqueror was born, was caught abstracting the linen from the clothes-line of a washerwoman in humble circumstances, while his footman kept a sharp look-out for the “policeman.” The other day Mr. Howard Vincent received information that a former home secretary had been detected in endeavouring to pawn a Dutch clock, which he had stolen from the kitchen of the House of Commons. And this very morning, if I had not come to you, sir, I should have been

off to the country to investigate the case of a theft of quart pots from a public-house, and we have ample proof that the pots have been taken by a bishop, who has been melting them down and making them into bad half-crowns. These bad half-crowns he has disposed of by changing them for the good ones put in the plate whenever he has preached a charity sermon.

‘I accepted the detective’s view of human nature acquired by long experience, and I felt convinced that it was a case of kleptomania, and I regretted exceedingly that the eminent German statesman should have developed the disease while a guest beneath my roof.

‘Taking Mr. Moser’s advice, I at once sent a telegram to Berlin, addressed to Prince Bismarck. He would be due in Berlin on the following night, and would find it on his arrival.

‘I telegraphed in these words :

“Pray return money, plate, and jewels by first passenger train. It is carrying a joke too far to carry them away with you.”

‘To my intense surprise within two hours I received an answer, and the answer was as follows : “Der Teufel ! was meinst du, du alter Spitzbube ?”*

‘Now, Bismarck could not possibly have reached Berlin in half a day, and the mystery was intensified.

‘That night I set out for Berlin. I travelled without stopping, and on my arrival drove straight to the chancellor’s residence. He was at home, and received me at once.

“Herr Pastor !” I exclaimed, endeavouring to assume a light sarcastic tone, “you’ve got rid of your wig and your black beard and moustache, but I hope you have not parted with the money, the plate, and the jewellery you took away by mistake from London !”

* ‘What the deuce do you mean, you old humbug ?’

‘The man of blood and iron opened his eyes and stared at me.

“*Hundert Tausend Teufel, Donner und Blitzen!* What do you mean?” he exclaimed. “I got your telegram, and thought it was a joke; but you haven’t come all this way to play larks!”

“Come, come, old man,” I said, with a touch of annoyance in my voice, “drop it; the joke’s been carried too far. Where are the things you took from my house, and from Lord Salisbury’s, and from Lord Rosebery’s? and where is the £5,000 you got for that cheque of mine you forged?”

“*Sie sind verrückt!*”* screamed Bismarck. “Go away, get out; I am afraid of madmen! Be off, or I’ll set Sultan on you!”

‘At this moment the emperor came to make his morning call on his minister, and, surprised as he was to see me, greeted me most cordially. In my indignation I blurted out the whole story to his imperial majesty, and begged him to use his influence with the prince, and to see that the property was restored.

‘The aged emperor opened his eyes wider than Bismarck had done. “My dear fellow!” he exclaimed, “have you had a sunstroke, or are you the victim of a delusion, or are you drunk? Bismarck hasn’t been away from Berlin a single day for the last month.”

‘It was my turn to open my eyes. I did—very much. I sank on the sofa, begging the Kaiser to excuse me sitting in his presence, but I really could not help it.

‘Half an hour afterwards I left, fully persuaded that I had been the victim of a marvellous plot, and that Theodor von Prügelstein was neither Prince Bismarck nor a Lutheran clergyman, but an accomplished swindler, who had in some mysterious manner discovered my intimacy with the German

* ‘You are mad!’

chancellor, and carried out, on the strength of it, a daring scheme, unparalleled in the annals of swindling.

‘ Before I left the Kaiser sent for the chief of the Berlin police, and placed the matter in his hands, promising to communicate the result of his investigation to me as soon as possible.

‘ A month later the German ambassadsor—not the envoy who had previously called—came to see me, and told me a strange story.

‘ All had been discovered by the Berlin police, assisted by their London *confrères*.

‘ Theodor von Prügelstein and the German ambassador, who called to arrange his visit to me, were brothers. The latter was a German valet, who had lost his place for dishonesty in London. The former was a discharged Anglo-German official—formerly connected with the Berlin railway station. He had heard Prince Bismarck’s farewell greeting—he had heard him say, “If I come to London on the extreme Q.T., will you put me up?”

‘ For years he had thought the matter over, and had at last matured his plan. His brother in London had ascertained that I was still in communication with the prince and the Kaiser, and that I had the entrance of the great houses and of political circles, and the brothers had worked out the plot between them. My plate was packed by Prügelstein in the night, in the empty boxes in the hall; and the jewel robberies were committed after Prügelstein, thanks to my introduction, had become a welcome guest at the houses of the nobility. His disguise had been of course necessary, as he was not very like the man he was personating, though his exact height and build. Prügelstein, thanks to the efforts of the police, was captured, and the bulk of the stolen property recovered and restored to its owners. At Prince Bismarck’s earnest request the trial

was conducted in secret, and the details were never published.

‘Both Bismarck and the emperor thought that a certain amount of ridicule would be reflected upon the former if the story were made public, and ridicule is the one thing that is most feared in German statecraft and diplomacy. I only tell the story now because two special correspondents of American newspapers have got hold of it from Prügelstein’s mother-in-law, who has found some private letters in the pockets of an old pair of trousers of his, and has put two and two together. As it must be told, I think I have the best right to tell it first, and I do so the more readily as I have the permission both of Prince Bismarck and the aged emperor to divulge it; and my father, having retired on a pension, his high official position in the House of Commons cannot now be injured by the revelation.’

Truth is stranger than fiction. This story is true, for I had it from the lips of a man who could place his hand upon his heart and honestly say that, like George Washington, ‘he never told a lie’!

THE LOST AUTHOR.

*Being an Account of the Adventures of Mr. Horsman Gaunt
and one Sloppygas.*

CHAPTER I.

THE SWIVVLE CLUB.

THE smoking-room of the Swivvle Club was remarkably full on the afternoon of Thursday, August 14, 188—. The Swivvlers are principally literary men, and thus it happens that the wrongs of authors frequently crop up in the course of conversation. On this particular afternoon someone had startled the company by declaring that he knew a perfectly honest and even generous firm of publishers. It was something so novel for a literary man to defend a publisher, that the greatest excitement prevailed in the club-house.

The rumour of what was going on spread rapidly, and the Swivvlers came in from all parts of the building. Members passing along Piccadilly were hailed from the windows, and, alighting from their cabs and omnibuses, hurried into the Swivvle to take part in the proceedings.

The author who had taken upon himself the onerous task of defending a publisher was the celebrated novelist, Mr. Byzantium.

Mr. Byzantium had long ago achieved considerable fame, but just at this period he had made a striking and brilliant success with a novel entitled, 'People Jogged Along Pretty Comfortably Then.'

The plot of Mr. Byzantium's latest work was thoroughly original. It was somewhat as follows :

A young British lieutenant, home for a holiday, plays fast and loose with the affections of a young maid-of-all-work employed in an apothecary's shop. After leading the poor girl on to imagine that he would marry her and present her at court, he pays attention to another young lady of prepossessing appearance, who sings in the chorus of a theatre. This young lady visits the hero at his chambers in the Albany to thank him for having protected her from annoyance in Regent Street; and to show her gratitude, she orders a friend of hers, who has influence in the Horse Guards, to promote the young lieutenant to the rank of general. The maid-of-all-work from the apothecary's shop coming unexpectedly to the Albany, takes in the situation, lets down her back hair and curses the hero, who orders her off the premises.

The lieutenant, now a general, leaves for the seat of war and engages the enemy. The enemy are about to flee, when the general suddenly recollects the young woman's curse, and instantly losing his reason, requests the enemy to turn round, and then and there orders his troops to lay down their arms and surrender.

The troops obey, but for this conduct the young general on his return is condemned to death. The night before the day appointed for his execution, the maid-of-all-work gets into the prison by the chimney, lets him out, and, accompanied by the apothecary, they spend the rest of their lives in cruising about the North Pole. Whether the hero marries the heroine is left in doubt, but when last seen she stands

on the prow of the vessel in a black silk dress, with a big gold chain round her neck.

Mr. Byzantium, than whom a more pleasant and agreeable and thoroughly unassuming gentleman was not to be found in literary circles, was on this August afternoon with his back to the wall, stoutly defending his publishers against all comers.

‘I grant there are wicked publishers,’ he remarked; ‘I grant that authors are frequently shamefully treated; for this reason have we not started a “Society of Authors,” the members of which bind themselves by solemn oath never to part with a manuscript unless they are guaranteed the entire profits, less five per cent. for the publisher’s board and lodging? I grant that much which my brother Swivvlers have urged against the trade is true in substance and in fact; but I still maintain that my publishers, Messrs. Chatter and Pumpus, are honest and fair-dealing, and, what is more, extremely generous men.’

There was a slight interruption in the corner of the room; a tall, intellectual-looking young man of about thirty had risen to his feet, and insisted upon speaking. All eyes were turned in his direction. ‘Silence for Horsman Gaunt,’ cried the Swivvlers. Thus encouraged, Mr. Horsman Gaunt delivered himself as follows:

‘Gentlemen, I beg to endorse every word that my friend Walter Byzantium has said on behalf of his publishers, but I dare to add that mine are equally generous. For my last novel “It,” Messrs. Shortmans have paid me the magnificent sum of £5,000; for my next work, which will deal with the adventures of a masher in Central Africa, and which will be called “The Man with the Eyeglass,” I am to receive £10,000. I have five new works now in my head, and I reckon that these will bring me in at least £100,000.’

There was a pause as though the entire assembly were silently working out a sum in mental arithmetic.

Then a handsome young fellow, over whose curly brown hair some five-and-twenty summers had passed, a lad whom none of the company knew, he having come in that afternoon as the guest of a member, who had never been there before, startled the company by exclaiming :

‘And will they all be about Africa?’

‘All,’ replied Mr. Horsman Gaunt; ‘*Ex Africa semper aliquid novi.*’

The Swivvlers laughed at the epigram, but the sarcasm told home.

Presently a gentleman connected with the *Friday Review* murmured under his breath, ‘I should have thought he had used up his African experiences by this time.’

The words were spoken in a low tone of voice, but they reached the ears of Mr. Horsman Gaunt.

‘The last speaker surmises correctly,’ he exclaimed, a look of scorn curling his lower lip; ‘but my new books will contain my new experiences. I leave for Africa to-morrow, and my new works will all be written on the spot.’

At that moment there was a shout in Piccadilly: a wheel had come off a hansom cab, and an enormous crowd had gathered to witness the scene. The Swivvlers rushed to the window, and became so deeply interested in this ever-attractive phase of street traffic that they forgot all else.

When the cab had been drawn into a side street and the crowd had been dispersed by a staff of constables assisted by the military, the Swivvlers turned from the window to renew the discussion.

But Mr. Horsman Gaunt had departed, arm-in-arm with his friend Mr. Byzantium, and, unobserved by all, the young man with the curly brown hair had stealthily stolen after them.

CHAPTER II.

MR. HORSMAN GAUNT.

BEFORE we attempt to further follow the adventures of Mr. Horsman Gaunt, it is advisable that the reader should be made acquainted with the reason for his enormous popularity as an author. The work which had taken the town by storm was a remarkable romance of the Jules Verne order, entitled 'It.'

A young Girton girl, turning over her dead grandmother's workbox, finds in it an old sampler. Upon this sampler, worked in wool, was a cuniform inscription. This the Girton girl was able to decipher. The cuniform inscription simply recorded the fact that Methuselah was still alive, and at present residing in the heart of Africa. The grandmother was fully convinced that Methuselah was a near connection of the family, and would be glad to know his relations. She herself had wished to set out in search of him, but was prevented by the difficulties of travel, which were very great indeed in her day, but on this sampler she had worked a desire (this was in Greek characters) that her daughter should undertake the journey. This daughter, unable to read the cuniform inscription, and ignorant of Greek, had tossed the sampler aside, married a rich merchant, and died at a ripe old age of cramp in the stomach, caused by eating ice-pudding on Christmas Day, while still warm from the exertion of leaping the garden-wall to escape from the attack of a bull, which was irritated by the old lady's red knitted petticoat, which, owing to a mistake in measurement, came two inches below her dress.

The Girton girl felt her mother's death keenly, for the red petticoat had been her Christmas present; but she did not interrupt her studies till after the New Year, when the

will had been proved, and she came home to take possession. It was in going over her boxes that she discovered her grandmother's sampler.

As soon as she had mastered the inscription thereon, she decided to start off at once in search of Methuselah. Her tutor, one Mr. Mistletoe, and her mother's cook, an old Irishwoman named Biddy McCree, were her companions on this remarkable journey. After many extraordinary adventures, Methuselah was found, and the Girton girl fell in love with him. Biddy, after enlivening the story with much low comedy, came to an untimely and tragic end, and Methuselah insisted on the Girton girl taking Old Parr's Life Pills, in order that she might live for ever. He swallowed a box himself to give her confidence, but the box stuck in his throat, and choked him. The Girton girl and her tutor, Mr. Mistletoe, returned to town to write the story, and send it to a publisher.

Such was 'It.' The daring novelty of killing the low comedian in the big situation had taken the world by storm.

* * * * *

Mr. Horsman Gaunt parted with his friend, Mr. Byzantium, at the statue of Achilles in Hyde Park, for from that point their paths lay in opposite directions.

'Then you really mean to start for Africa to-morrow morning, old fellow,' said the genial Byzantium.

'Yes,' replied Gaunt; 'I have chartered a private vessel, and I sail from the West India Docks to-morrow at noon. I shall penetrate to the interior before I return. I am tired of these abominable charges that I borrow my romances from other people's books. I mean to prove that the only book from which I borrow is the book of nature. Good-bye; God bless you, old fellow. If I never return, say a

word now and again for an old friend, if you see a spiteful paragraph or a malignant review published in my absence.'

With tears in his eyes the genial Walter promised that he would obey his friend's request, and after many handwringings, and one grand final embrace, *à la Française*, the two leading fictionists of the present day parted, and each went his separate and solitary way.

When the last echoes of their footsteps had died away in the distance, a curly brown head popped out from behind the statue of Achilles.

'So he sails for Africa to-morrow at noon, does he?' exclaimed the owner of the curly brown head; 'then there is no time to be lost. £100,000! Men have perilled their souls for half that amount ere now. Avaunt the diamond-fields of the Cape! Avaunt the orange groves of Florida! Avaunt the cattle ranches of Texas! Horsman Gaunt in Africa will be a better spec. by far. Once on board the lugger, and Horsman Gaunt is mine.'

* * * * *

That night, in his princely residence in Park Lane, amid a profusion of fairy lamps, hot-house flowers, and silver plate, the famous author of 'It' made his will, gave his keys to his wife, wrote a letter to his publishers, and appointed a guardian to his son in case of accidents, and, on the following morning, after a simple breakfast and an affectionate leave-taking, he entered a four-wheeler, loaded inside and out with portmanteaux, gun-cases, and medicine-chests, and told the cabman to start.

'Where to?' asked the man.

'To the West India Docks,' replied the famous author.

And that was the last that was seen of Horsman Gaunt in Park Lane for many a long day to come.

CHAPTER III.

OLD AFRICA.

‘YONDER are the shores of Africa, or I am very much out in my bearings!’

It was a glorious September night, the moon shone full upon the far-away shore, sharply defining its outlines.

‘Yes,’ continued the speaker, as he paced the deck, glass in hand, ‘yonder are the Mountains of the Moon; to the left flows the great underground river; to the right are distinctly visible the minarets of Milosis.’

The speaker paused suddenly.

The sky had become instantaneously darkened, the moon was completely obscured by an extraordinary cloud of dense blackness.

‘It’s a storm, sir, I think,’ exclaimed one of the sailors, a young man with curly brown hair.

‘It is no storm,’ replied Mr. Horsman Gaunt, for the gentleman pacing the deck was the famous African novelist. ‘It is a swarm of flying lobsters, and the enormous creatures are actually falling upon the ship.’

The young sailor started back with an exclamation of horror.

Thousands of huge lobsters, with immense staring eyes, were falling on the deck of the vessel. As they fell and cracked their shells, thousands more lobsters fell on the tops of them, and began to tear them to pieces and devour them.

Presently these hideous lobsters of the air fell upon the vessel in such numbers that she began to sink deeper and deeper in the water.

The crew put up their umbrellas, but they were broken instantly by the weight of the crustaceous shower.

'We are sinking,' cried Mr. Gaunt; 'let all hands take to the rigging.'

There was not a moment to lose. The ship was sinking rapidly. As the men climbed the masts they felt the water gaining on them.

Mr. Gaunt chose the tallest mast for himself, and arrived at its summit panting.

'Parnassus is nothing to this,' he exclaimed.

'*Facilis descensus Averni*,' replied the young sailor, who was immediately below his master on the mast.

Mr. Gaunt looked at the speaker suspiciously.

'It is rare to hear a classical quotation fall from the lips of a common sailor.'

'Never mind what falls from my lips, sir. Take care you don't fall from that mast,' was the reply.

The words were scarcely spoken when the ship began to rise again rapidly—the lobsters had been drowned by the inflowing waters, and, unable to hold on to the ship, had slipped off and perished in the depths.

'We are saved,' said Mr. Gaunt. 'A truly remarkable adventure! Now, if I were to put that in one of my books——'

The sentence was never finished. At that moment the vessel struck on a huge rock.

The man at the wheel, unable to see where he was going for the huge pile of lobsters which lay around him, had altered the ship's course, and run her on the rocks.

At that moment the last remnant of the swarm still in the air cleared the moon, and its pearly light fell upon the scene.

The ship was fast going to pieces.

‘This alters my plans,’ muttered the young sailor, ‘but it may save me trouble.’

With the quickness of a cat he seized an axe.

‘We must cut away the mast,’ he exclaimed, ‘and then she may float off.’

‘Nonsense, nonsense!’ cried Mr. Gaunt; ‘we must cut away ourselves.’

But the young sailor heeded not his master’s words. With herculean force he buried his axe in the mainmast, and as it began to sway he gave it a dexterous kick with his foot, which caused it to fall upon Mr. Gaunt’s head with just sufficient force to stun him.

To cut away a boat, throw his senseless master into it, and then leap in himself, was the work of a second. Then he pulled off.

‘Hi, hi!’ shouted the crew. ‘Wait a moment; we want to come too.’

The young sailor spoke no word. He placed his thumb to his nose and spread his fingers out. The next instant he was rowing vigorously towards the shore.

An hour later no vestige of the wrecked vessel or her unhappy crew remained in sight.

But high and dry upon the shore lay the still senseless body of Mr. Horsman Gaunt, and by him sat a figure busily engaged in smearing itself from head to foot with lamp-black. Then over its curly brown hair the figure drew a nigger minstrel’s wig.

Presently the senseless man opened his eyes.

He looked around.

‘Where am I?’ he exclaimed.

‘Guess you are in old Africa, Koos-y-Pagate, Koos-y-uncool,’ replied a strange voice.

Mr. Gaunt looked up and beheld a young black Zulu beside him.

‘And who are you?’ he groaned.

‘Who am I? Koos-y-umcool (mighty chief), guess dis chile’s name is one Sloppygas.’

‘One Sloppygas!’ murmured the prostrate novelist.

Then he closed his eyes again, and murmuring, ‘Call me at seven, Sloppygas,’ fell into a sweet and refreshing sleep.

CHAPTER IV.

THE SACRED BLUEBOTTLE.

FOR three long weeks Horsman Gaunt and the mysterious Zulu, who had started up from nowhere, and who called himself Sloppygas, had been tramping forward into the unknown.

Many wonderful sights they saw, but they did not linger to observe them, Mr. Gaunt saying that he had seen them all before.

There was a river of fire that flowed through a frozen sea; there was a city where the people were black and white in stripes like zebras; and there was a mysterious cave in which the Queen of Sheba had deposited the whole of her family plate before setting out to call upon King Solomon.

At the end of the third week the travellers arrived upon the borders of a sandy desert.

In the distance, brilliant with plasmatic rays in the golden sunlight, they perceived a city which appeared to be made entirely of glass.

Mr. Gaunt paused, and, adjusting his telescope, inspected the city minutely.

‘Sloppygas!’ he exclaimed, ‘this is something new; I must make a note of this for my new book.’

He drew out his notebook, and was about to make an entry, when a bluebottle settled on the fair white page.

'Flick it away, Koos-y-umcool,' exclaimed Sloppygas.

Mr. Gaunt flicked the bluebottle with his finger and thumb, and instantly a clarion sounded, and thousands of horsemen galloped out from the city of glass.

Before he had recovered from his surprise Mr. Gaunt was seized and carried to the royal palace.

On the great glass throne sat a Siamese queen, a beautiful, or, rather, two beautiful white girls. They were evidently united after the manner of the double-headed nightingale, but they were distinct and separate beings, one having short curly black hair, and the other long golden tresses.

To his intense surprise, both queens addressed Mr. Gaunt simultaneously in English.

'Ail to thee, O stranger! Why 'ast thou flicked the Sacred Bluebottle?' they said.

Horsman Gaunt was dumfounded.

'I really don't know,' he stammered.

Then Sloppygas stepped forward and fell on his face and explained that the white stranger was from a far-off land where bluebottles were of no account.

'Ow dost thou know this?' asked the queens; 'thou hart not of the stranger's land by thy colour.'

'No, your Siamese Double-headed Majesties,' replied Sloppygas; 'but I was taken there as a child by one Farini—Farini the Baba (father)—and I lived in the English city of Westminster at the Aquarium for awhile, therefore do I know the customs and the language. I plead with thee, O queens, for this stranger's life. I succoured him when he was shipwrecked on the African coast. I saved his life, therefore I claim it now.'

The high priest of the Temple of the Sacred Bluebottle stepped forward. He had a big red S branded on his brow,

and he accompanied himself on a big drum as he chanted through his nose the following speech :

‘Ho, my friends, I am glad this hafternoon that the wicked man ’as been given hinto hour power. I am glad this hafternoon that ’e ’ath been brought ’ere that we may slay ’im, for the law of the land is that whoso toucheth a Sacred Bluebottle shall be frozen to death in the great refrigerator. I ham glad this hafternoon.’

The Double-headed Queens consulted each other. Sloppy-gas again, with tears in his eyes, urged that the stranger’s life was his, as he had saved it.

The fate of Horsman Gaunt trembled in the balance. He saw the two queens glance at him with admiration. He was a well-formed man, and handsome withal—tall and muscular.

The queens nodded at each other—they had decided.

‘Black stranger,’ they said, ‘the white stranger’s life is yours, but ’e ’as flicked a Sacred Bluebottle, and cannot, by hour laws, leave this city halive ; ’e must remain a prisoner hon parole for the rest of ’is days.’

Horsman Gaunt heaved a deep sigh. He was free, but a prisoner.

‘Hang it all !’ he exclaimed, ‘I shall have more Africa than I bargained for.’

But a strange smile played about the mouth of Sloppygas.

‘At last !’ he muttered between his teeth.

CHAPTER V.

THE PRISONER ON PAROLE.

FOR a month Horsman Gaunt was silent and reserved. He had given his parole to save his life ; but the wonders of the great glass city once exhausted, they began to pall upon him

He had been curious to learn how the Siamese queens and the high priest came to drop their h's and put them on in the wrong place.

Sloppygas explained the mystery. An Englishman had established himself some years ago as a pawnbroker in the glass city. He came from Whitechapel. It was he who taught the royal family to speak English.

But Sloppygas did not tell Mr. Gaunt that this pawnbroker was his own uncle, and that it was through this uncle, who came back to England, that he had heard of the existence of the glass city, and the manners and customs of its inhabitants.

During the second month of his captivity, Gaunt grew moody and morose. Then Sloppygas gave him counsel.

'Write, O Koos,' he said, 'write. Write great books as you say you used to do, O Baba. The labour we delight in physics pain.'

Horsman Gaunt stared at Sloppygas in blank amazement.

'Where did you learn that expression?' he exclaimed.

'Koos Farini would say it to me when I was with his Zulu troupe at the Aquarium,' replied Sloppygas; and the subject dropped.

After the third month Gaunt took his black protector's advice, and began to write. Gradually he forgot his captivity and was lost in the development of his African romances. In twelve months he had finished three new novels, and had a fourth upon the stocks.

As he finished his stories he read them to the Siamese queens and the high priest, and to Sloppygas. They were all delighted, and the high priest asked for the manuscripts to place them among the archives of the Temple of the Sacred Bluebottle.

Horsman Gaunt hesitated.

'I will copy them, O Koos-y-umcool,' whispered Sloppy-gas, 'and give them the copies.'

Mr. Gaunt yielded to his faithful follower's advice, and the MSS. were duly copied and handed to the high priest.

A fourth novel was finished, and a fifth, and all were copied and placed among the sacred archives.

And wandering at eve through the beautiful shores of the glass city, the captive author would say to himself:

'By Jove! if ever I get free, what a terrific sum these books will realize! I wonder what my friends in London will think has become of me?'

He did not know that his long absence was already causing comment, and that his friend, Mr. Byzantium had written a letter to the *Times*, urging that an expedition should be sent to Africa in search of him.

CHAPTER VI.

A NEW AUTHOR.

THREE years after the events narrated in the last chapter, a new author burst with meteoric splendour upon the London literary world. Mr. Allan Darvil, the author in question, was a young man with curly brown hair. His books were brought out in rapid succession by Shortmans, Chatter and Pumpus, Brokenly and Co., and Bagmen and Vestibule. The critics said they were in the style of Mr. Horsman Gaunt, but vastly superior in quality. The author received fabulous sums for his manuscripts, and it was rumoured that he had made £200,000 by his works, and would write no more.

Allan Darvil was lionized through the London season; he had his yacht and his horses, and when in town lived in

magnificent style in Berkeley Square. He was at once the admiration and the envy of all who knew him. Duchesses came daily, and sat in his hall to ask for his autograph, and all the transatlantic steamers leaving New York were crowded with American beauties coming to seek his hand in marriage.

At the Swivvle Club he was the great subject of conversation in the smoking-room. No one knew anything of his antecedents. Some five years ago he had been brought by a member as a visitor one afternoon, but since then, until he became famous, no one remembered to have met him. Still, all the Swivvlers acknowledged his merit as a writer ; that is to say, all those who did not write novels themselves.

Alone in the gorgeous bedroom of his mansion in Berkeley Square, Allan Darvil became a different man. His gaiety forsook him, and he was silent and depressed, and at night he would toss feverishly on his pillow, and mutter the name of Horsman Gaunt in his dreams.

* * * * *

Let us return to the great glass city for awhile.

It is a great fête day, the birthday of the Sacred Blue-bottle.

There is a ball in honour of the Bluebottle at the royal palace, and Horsman Gaunt has the honour of dancing the first war-dance with the double-headed queens.

He looks older and more careworn than when we saw him last. He is pining for his home and his lost identity. Just as the slaves are handing round alligator sandwiches and iced Merissa (a kind of beer made from durra), the high priest rushes into the room in a state of great excitement.

‘What’s hup?’ exclaim the queens, speaking in English, that their court may not understand.

'The harchives! the harchives!' replies the priest; 'the books of the white stranger, dedicated to the Sacred Bluebottle, 'ave been stolen.'

'Who can have done this?' cries Horsman Gaunt; 'they are of no value except to the owner.' Suddenly a strange thought flashes through his brain: 'When were the archives examined last?'

'A year ago to-day; they are only examined on the Bluebottle's birthday.'

'Then the thief is Sloppygas. It was the day after the Bluebottle's last birthday that he disappeared.'

'It is sacrilege,' says the priest; 'the Bluebottle's wrath must be appeased by a human sacrifice. Sloppygas must die.'

'Release me from my parole and I will search the earth till I find him,' exclaims Gaunt.

The queens consult together.

'Take hus with you,' they reply, after long and earnest deliberation, 'hand you shall go. We should like to see the world while we hare young.'

Gaunt hesitates.

'Would it be proper?' he says, after a pause.

'Perfectly,' reply the queens, 'we 'ave a widowed haunt who will haccompany hus.'

* * * * *

That very night, accompanied by the double-headed queens and their widowed aunt, Horsman Gaunt left the glass city en route for London. A secret instinct told him that it was in the Modern Babylon that he must search for the missing Sloppygas.

CHAPTER VII.

HOME, SWEET HOME.

Six months later, after remarkable adventures, a royal and distinguished party from Central Africa arrived in London and put up at the Charing Cross Hotel. The Double-headed Queens went off to see the sights of the Metropolis; but Mr. Gaunt drove to his home. There he was most affectionately greeted, and his family held their breath while he related his marvellous adventures. He told them the plots of the missing manuscripts. Astonishment was expressed on their features. They told him that he was simply quoting from the famous works of Mr. Allan Darvil.

He rushed off to the Swivle Club. There, in consequence of the non-payment of his subscription, his name had been crossed off the list of members, and the hall-porter refused to admit him. But the members kindly came out and conversed with him on the doorstep.

He told his story and the plots of the missing MSS.

'Oh, come, dear boy,' exclaimed the members, 'you are really going too far. There isn't an incident that you haven't borrowed from Allan Darvil.'

'Where is this Allan Darvil to be found?' he cried.

At this moment Mr. Darvil drove up in his brougham and stepped out.

'There he is!' cried the Swivvlers in chorus.

Horsman Gaunt started back; this was not Sloppygas—not a bit like him. It was a young, fair-faced man with curly brown hair. But Mr. Gaunt failed to recognise in the faultlessly-dressed masher the curly-headed sailor of his private ship.

'Sir,' he cried, mastering his emotion, 'have you ever met a Zulu named Sloppygas?'

'Never,' said Mr. Darvil, and passed into the club.

'Well,' said Gaunt, 'I'll prove that I am right, and that these plots are mine. I'll go back to the hotel and fetch the originals. They are only the copies that have been stolen.'

He returned to the hotel and fetched the MSS.; but the Swivle Club was empty, the members had gone home.

Next day he took his MSS. to a publisher. The publisher read them through.

'I am very sorry, Mr. Gaunt,' he said, 'but these incidents are all in the works of Mr. Darvil.'

'I swear that I never read a line of Darvil's in my life,' yelled Gaunt, with a passionate stamp of the foot.

'Then it is an extraordinary coincidence,' said the publisher. 'Good-day.'

Eventually Mr. Gaunt succeeded in getting a publisher for his novels. When they came out there was a fearful chorus of condemnation. 'A tissue of plagiarisms' was the verdict.

Mr. Gaunt read Mr. Darvil's works, and vowed that Darvil was the plagiarist. In some extraordinary way he had become possessed of the MSS. deposited in the archives of the Sacred Bluebottle, and stolen by Sloppygas.

Then arose a perfect torrent of sarcasm. The papers were full of jokes at Mr. Gaunt's expense. 'Mr. Gaunt,' wrote one particularly spiteful critic, 'has an unfortunate habit of never having read the authors whose stories his own so curiously resemble. His last explanation is supremely ridiculous. The author who published the stories first copied them *from him!* Copies of the MSS. were stolen from the Temple of the Sacred Bluebottle. Where is that temple, Mr. Gaunt? and where is the mysterious Sloppygas who revealed your plots to Mr. Allan Darvil? *It won't do, sir!*'

When Mr. Gaunt read the above remarks in the leading literary journal, he retired from the contest, and left the critics to say what they liked. But he intends, for the future, to write his stories locked in his coal-cellar, and he spends his leisure in reading through the entire library of the British Museum, in order to guard against a charge of plagiarism in the future.

Why did he not produce the Double-headed Queens and their widowed aunt to give evidence against Sloppygas? you ask. I will tell you why.

On the evening of their arrival the royal ladies went down Regent Street to see the shops, and were so insulted by a policeman that they went back to the hotel, packed their boxes, paid their bills, and returned to Africa by the 8.5 Continental mail, which they just caught.

Mr. Allan Darvil has retired from literature with a fortune. When, later on, he met Mr. Gaunt at the Swivvle, he told him in the most gracious way that their styles were too much alike, and, as he was sick of novel-writing, he would leave the African field clear for his less fortunate rival.

Mr. Gaunt has gradually regained his old position, and is now at the head of his profession again. He has forced himself to believe that the glass city and the Sacred Blue-bottle were dreams. And it has never yet occurred to him to identify his former rival, Allan Darvil, with 'One Sloppy-gas.'

THE CHINA FAIRY.

TOM JOHNSON was five-and-twenty, and a clerk in the City. He was married to the dearest little woman in the world, and they lived in three rooms in a nice respectable street near Camden Town. Rose, Tom's wife, was a perfect little household fairy. Tom could only give her thirty shillings a week out of his salary, but she did wonders with it. The little sitting-room was always bright, and cosy, and clean, and there was always something nice for Tom's tea when he came home fagged out with the work and worry of the office. Of course they were obliged to be very economical, and to deny themselves many things they would have liked; but one treat they always allowed themselves every week, and that was a visit to a place of amusement. Tom and Rose were both very fond of the theatre, and by waiting till a play had had a good run, and by getting to the doors early, they generally managed to get a good place in the pit.

Being so fond of the theatre, Tom and Rose naturally took a great deal of interest in the theatrical items of news and gossip, without which nowadays a newspaper is not considered to be fully adapted to the requirements of the public.

Poor little Rose used to give a sigh of envy sometimes

when Tom read out to her the paragraphs about the enormous incomes which dramatic authors were making.

'Oh, Tom,' she would say, 'fancy making hundreds of pounds a week like that just for writing a play! Fancy if you had been able to do it!'

'It would have been fine, wouldn't it?' Tom would reply, and then they would begin fancying what they would have done with the money. They would have had a beautiful house, and a carriage and pair for Rose; and when she went to the theatre on the first night to see her husband come on the stage and bow amid the tremendous applause of a crowded house, she would have worn the loveliest dresses, and her diamonds would have been the envy of all the ladies.

'Oh, how beautiful it would be, Tom!' the young wife cried one day, as they conjured up visions of splendour together; 'no getting up at half-past seven in the morning for you, dear; no turning out in all winds and weathers; you would be able to have your breakfast nice and comfortably with me, and take plenty of time over it; and you would stop at home and work in your study, and I could bring my sewing and sit with you, and when you'd finished we should be able to have dinner together, and go out every evening to some place of amusement. Oh, Tom dear, *couldn't* you write a play?' "

Tom shook his head.

'I'm afraid not, Rose,' he said. 'There's a peculiar knack about it, I expect.'

'I suppose it is very difficult,' sighed Rose.

'You may be sure it is, my dear,' answered Tom, 'or there would be a great many more people doing it, and the authors wouldn't be getting such prices for their work as we read about in the newspapers.'

One Saturday Tom and Rose went to the morning performance of a play that had been acted two hundred times

straight off in London, and the author of which was reported already to have realized £10,000 by it.

On their way home they passed an old curiosity shop, and stopped to look in at the window. Among the odds and ends there was a pretty little china fairy to which Rose took a great fancy.

'Oh, Tom dear!' she cried, 'look at that little china figure. Isn't it pretty? That's just the sort of thing I should like on my mantelshelf. I should never be tired of looking at it. Do go in and see how much it is.'

Tom went in and asked the price, and returned with the information that it was ten shillings.

'Oh dear,' said Rose, 'that's much more than we can afford! Come along, Tom.'

But though Rose said 'Come along,' she didn't move. She stood looking lovingly at the little china fairy. All at once she gave a start.

'Oh, Tom!' she exclaimed; 'look at that fairy's lips, they're moving!'

'What nonsense!' said Tom, laughing; 'you've been staring at it; it's an optical illusion.'

'Tom, would it be very wicked if we bought it? I'd save the money out of my housekeeping.'

'Well, it's a lot of money, but I dare say it won't ruin us. I see you want it, dear, and you shall have it.'

And before Rose could stop him Tom had stepped into the shop, and presently he came out with the little china fairy carefully wrapped up in paper. Rose put it in her muff—it was quite a *little* fairy—and they bore it off home in triumph.

It looked so lovely on the mantelshelf, Rose couldn't take her eyes off it, but kept going up to it all the evening and saying, 'Oh, you little dear!' and she would have it that the fairy's eyes were looking at her.

Tom laughed, but he confessed that it really was a very life-like little figure. The face was quite real, and the wonderful thing about it was that its expression seemed to change.

Being Saturday night, the young couple sat up rather late. Tom smoked his pipe while Rose read to him, and they were so comfortable and so happy that they never noticed the time till Tom happened to look at his watch, and then he cried out :

‘ Good gracious, Rose, it’s one minute to twelve !’

Rose closed her book—she had reached the end of the chapter—lit the bedroom candle, and then Tom turned the gas out. As he did so the big clock downstairs struck twelve.

Just as the last stroke died away, a sweet, soft, silvery voice exclaimed :

‘ Thank you so much for buying me.’

Rose was so startled that she dropped the candle, which fell on the floor and went out. Tom turned round with an exclamation, and there, with a halo of light round her head, stood the little china fairy on the mantelshelf. It was the fairy who had spoken. Her lips were parted, showing two rows of pearly teeth, and the kindest, sweetest smile was on her face.

‘ Don’t be frightened,’ said the fairy, as Rose clutched Tom and wondered whether she ought to faint or not ; ‘ don’t be frightened : I am a good fairy. I was turned to china by a wicked enchantress, but every night at twelve o’clock I recover the power of speech, which lasts until dawn. I was very unhappy in the old curiosity shop, where I was taken by the person who found me in a forest and thought I was an ornament. There was nobody there at midnight for me to talk to except a lot of Chinese idols and brass figures and creatures of that sort, and they didn’t understand me. I was very pleased when you brought

me to your nice happy home, and you can't think how I've been longing for twelve o'clock, to be able to thank you.'

'I'm sure we're very pleased,' stammered Rose, 'but, of course, it's very odd. I don't like to ask you, but—er—would you like anything to eat?'

The fairy laughed a silvery laugh.

'Oh no,' she said; 'fairies are never hungry. Besides, I want you to be kind enough to open the window for me and let me fly away. If I can get back to Fairyland before dawn I may find my protectress, who will take away the spell that has been put upon me.'

'Oh, certainly,' said Tom, 'with pleasure;' and he was proceeding to open the window when he recollected the fairy had cost him ten shillings, and that the transaction would be a dead loss to him.

The fairy evidently guessed what was passing in Tom's mind, for she flew gracefully off the mantelpiece and came and stood on the table beside him.

'I will not be ungrateful,' she said; 'as a reward for your kindness I can grant you one wish, whatever it is.'

'Oh, Tom!' exclaimed Rose, who had gradually shaken off her nervousness, 'wish to be a dramatic author.'

Tom was always an obedient husband (that was why he was so happy), and so he said at once:

'I wish to be a dramatic author.'

'Certainly,' said the fairy. 'Go to bed, and to-morrow when you wake up you will be one. Now, thank you very much, and good-night.'

The fairy kissed her little hand to the young couple, spread her wings, and flew away into the moonlight. Tom and Rose watched her as far as they could see her, then closed the window and retired to rest.

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The next morning, when Tom woke up, he had a splitting headache, and he felt so awfully seedy he could hardly sit up to look at his watch.

'By Jove!' he exclaimed, 'it's twelve o'clock!' Then he looked round for Rose, and found she wasn't there.

'Rose! Rose!' he called out, 'where are you?'

Rose came running in from the next room.

'Oh, you are awake at last, Tom!' she said. 'Will you have a cup of tea?'

'I think so; I—— By Jove! I'm awfully ill, and I can hardly open my eyes.'

'I don't wonder at it,' said Rose; 'it was six o'clock this morning when you came home.'

'Oh, ah, yes! I remember,' said Tom, sitting up and looking round the large, elegantly-furnished bedroom—'a beastly all-night dress-rehearsal. And I've to go down to the theatre again to-day, and see that scene. I have to alter the situation at the last minute to suit the scene, because the scene itself can't be altered in time.'

'Was Mr. Smith any better tempered last night?'

'No; he swears it's the worst part he ever played, and he's sure that it will be a frost; and Miss Brown won't have that speech cut out; she says it's the only good one she has, and I'm sure that it will be goosed, and it comes just at a critical point.'

Tom was just going to lie down again till the tea came, when a servant came up.

'Please, sir, Mr. Jones has called, and he says he must see you at once.'

'Oh, bother!' said Tom. 'What's the matter now? Ask him to come up.'

Rose went down, and presently Mr. Jones, the manager of the theatre where Johnson's drama was to be produced on Monday evening, came in.

'Sorry to worry you, old fellow,' said Jones, 'but it's serious. Everybody who saw the dress-rehearsal last night says the fifth act will settle the play. You must end it in the fourth.'

'What!' yelled Tom, pressing his hands to his splitting head; 'cut out the last act? It can't be done. A year has to elapse between Acts 4 and 5.'

'Oh, you can get over that. At any rate, it will have to be done.'

'I won't do it,' shrieked Tom; 'I won't! I'd sooner throw the confounded play in the fire. Why, it's ridiculous. Look here, Mr. Jones; I'm the author, and I'm responsible. You'll either play my play as I've written it, or you won't play it at all.'

Tom had worked himself up into a violent rage, and the manager tried to calm him.

'Don't be a fool, Johnson,' he said; 'think it over and come down to my house. Smith' (that was the leading man) 'will be there, and Robinson' (the stage-manager), 'and we'll talk it over quietly. I must go now. I must call on Miss Blank and see if she can play Mary Walters to-morrow night.'

'Miss Blank? Why, Miss Dash is going to play it.'

'What! haven't you heard? She was thrown out of her cab going home from the rehearsal last night, and won't be able to play for a month.'

Tom groaned and flung himself back on the pillow.

'Everything in the play depends on Mary Walters,' he said, 'and you're going to have it played at twelve hours' notice by a girl who's never seen a line of the part yet.'

'What are we to do?'

'I don't know,' groaned Johnson; 'I'll come round presently. I believe this play will drive me mad.'

An hour later Tom was going downstairs growling and groaning to himself, when Rose came out of her boudoir.

‘Going out, Tom? Why, you haven’t had your breakfast.’

‘I can’t eat a morsel,’ said Tom. ‘I’m done up, Rose. I wish I’d been at Jericho before I became a dramatic author.’

* * * * *

Monday night came, and Tom, in a state of high fever brought on by overwork and anxiety and late hours, walked up and down outside the theatre, trying to summon up courage to go in. He had cut out the last act; he had given Miss Blank one hurried rehearsal; he had quarrelled with the leading villain, who had told him before the whole company that the play was rot; he had gone home in a vile temper, and made Rose cry her eyes out; and now, in a state bordering on delirious fever, he was awaiting the verdict on a play which had cost him months of anxious thought, and on which the management had expended thousands of pounds.

‘If it’s a failure I’ll never write again,’ groaned Tom.

Just then a man came hurriedly out of the stage-door.

‘Curtain up yet?’ asked Tom nervously.

‘No, sir; there’s something gone wrong with the scene in the first act, and the mechanical change won’t work. I’m just going out to see if I can find Mr. ——. They say it’ll be half an hour before it will be put right.’

Tom rushed into the theatre. As he went upon the stage he could hear the audience stamping and shouting. It was then five minutes past the time the curtain should have gone up.

Everybody was bustling about, and there was evidently something wrong.

‘It’s all right,’ said the stage-manager, coming up to Tom

and trying to ease his mind. 'It's not so bad as we thought. We'll ring up directly. We can get it right, I dare say, while the first scene is being played. If not, I must come on and explain there's been an accident.'

Tom groaned, and rushed out into the street again.

'Oh, my poor play, my poor play,' he cried, 'it's damned before it's begun.'

* * * * *

An hour and a half later, Tom, pale, shivering, clutching his hands together in nervous excitement, crept into the back of the pit. The third act was just beginning. There was a very powerful scene in this act. Tom had built upon its making a great impression on the audience.

The villain suddenly appears at a window, and while another villain is writing a letter, shoots him, and the unfinished letter is left on the table and found by the hero, who rushes in and reads the plot against his happiness.

The villain has to cautiously open the window. He does so after struggling with it for five minutes, and making a noise which could be heard all over the house, but of which the other villain takes no notice.

'He has not heard me,' says the villain.

'He must be jolly deaf, then,' says a boy in the gallery, and the house titters.

The perspiration bursts from every pore of Tom's skin. His situation is going wrong.

But the house is hushed immediately. There is no fairer audience in the world than that which assembles in a London theatre on a first night.

But it is only a human audience, and so when, as the villain crept in at the window and was just advancing on his victim, the looking-glass, real, fastened on the scene, came down with a crash, and the victim, following his

author, exclaimed, 'No sound disturbs the silence of the night,' there was a roar.

The situation was going fast. It went utterly when the villain, disconcerted, as well he might be, in creeping up behind the victim's chair, caught his foot against a platform intended to draw the table off for a change of scene, and fell sprawling, his pistol going off between his unconscious victim's feet.

With the roars of laughter which followed this final catastrophe ringing in his ears, Tom Johnson rushed from the theatre to the Thames Embankment.

'It is ruin; it is disgrace!' he cried. 'I can never survive it. Curse the hour when I gave myself up to this life of constant harass, annoyance, and disappointment! How can I read the awful things that will be said of me in the papers to-morrow? How can I meet my friends and listen to their condolences? How can I ever enter a theatre again? No, I will not live to die in a lunatic asylum. I will end it all in the peaceful river.'

Tom leapt upon the parapet and was about to make the fatal plunge, when he heard a sweet, silvery voice behind him.

It was the china fairy's.

With a frantic cry Tom turned to her.

'Can you grant me another wish?' he exclaimed.

'Certainly.'

'Then make me a clerk in the City again, and at once.'

* * * * *

'Tom.'

It was Rose's voice.

Tom woke up with a start.

'Breakfast's ready, dear, and it's nine o'clock. Aren't you going to get up?'

Tom shouted for joy. He was a clerk again, and it was

Sunday morning, the happy day of peace and rest at home with his dear, contented little wife.

Oh, what a happy Sunday it was! How snug and comfortable the little sitting-room looked! And after breakfast, when he sat down and read in the Sunday paper an awful 'slate' of Mr. Three Stars' new play, he felt a great weight lifted from his heart, and he exclaimed, 'Thank heaven, I'm not a dramatist, but only a happy City clerk, with just enough to live on, and only one master!' And he never wanted to be a dramatist again as long as he lived.

A CHANGED MAN.

CHAPTER I.

A FALL IN THE FOG.

I WAS groping my way round Soho Square on a bad November night. A horrible yellow fog had settled down upon the Metropolis, and a man with the most strongly developed bump of locality would have had a job to find his way anywhere after being turned round three times. I haven't any bump of locality at all, and I had been wandering in and out of Soho for an hour, vainly endeavouring to find a short cut to Tottenham Court Road.

Suddenly I heard a heavy vehicle coming along at a rather rapid rate, and the idea took possession of me that I was in the middle of the road, and that the man who would drive at such a rate in such a place, on such a night, must be drunk or a fool. I shouted, 'Hi, steady there!' and made a run for what I imagined to be the railings of the square.

Instead of clutching the railings, I ran full tilt into something that was on the footway. It uttered a cry and went down flop on the pavement; I had knocked somebody over!

I apologized; but the something made no reply. I knelt down, struck several flammers which I had in my pocket, and at last discovered what it was that I had capsized.

To my utter astonishment it proved to be a monk of the order of Capuchins.

A Capuchin in London—a monk with a shaven poll, clad in the russet-brown frock of the Capuchins—is such a rare spectacle in the streets of the Metropolis that my astonishment was excusable.

I addressed the prostrate brother in apologetic terms. I smacked his hands, and lifted his head upon my knee—as I did so, to my unutterable dismay and terror, his skull came off in my hand.

‘Great heavens!’ I cried, ‘I have killed him! the fall has taken the top of his head off!’

But presently the head without a skull exclaimed:

‘All right, sir; I’m better now. I was stunned for a minute, that’s all.’

At that moment some boys came along with torches, and I discovered that the fallen skull was a false one, and that my victim was a poor fellow, dressed up as a Capuchin by an advertising firm, and sent out to distribute handbills.

I got him to his feet, and put him against the railings. Directly he was upright he thrust his hand into the pocket in the breast of his garment and uttered a cry of horror.

‘They’re lost!’ he cried.

I looked on the pavement to see if anything was lying there, and saw what looked like a roll of paper.

I picked it up.

‘Is this what you have lost?’ I exclaimed. Then the touch of the paper told me what I held in my hand. The light of the torches revealed the rest. The poor human advertisement had dropped a roll of Bank of England notes. Instinctively I counted them. There were ten, and each was for a thousand pounds!

CHAPTER II.

THE CAPUCHIN.

HALF an hour later I sat alone with the Capuchin in the top garret of a miserable house in the Dials. I had conducted him home, and he had consented to tell me his story. He said that I might advise him what to do under the very peculiar circumstances in which he found himself.

I had discovered from the man's conversation that he was a person of education, and my curiosity was excited by the strange incidents which had marked our accidental meeting.

The false monk, lighting a dirty clay pipe, sat on the truckle bed in the corner of the garret, and told me the following remarkable story :

This afternoon I was walking through Gerrard Street. I had distributed some of my bills in Oxford Street, and was taking another batch to give away in Piccadilly, according to the instructions of my employer.

As I was passing along, a young girl ran out of a house, and, seizing me by the arm, exclaimed in Italian : ' Oh, Padre, come quick ! Come quick to a dying man ! '

I speak Italian fluently, as I do French and German.

I saw at once this poor foreign girl's mistake, and I was about to say that, though habited in the garb of a Capuchin father, I was nothing of the sort.

But a secret instinct whispered me to follow the girl. I thought I might be of some assistance as a layman—the girl evidently being in a state of great terror—and I said to myself that it would be time enough for me to explain the mistake when I found out what was really the matter.

I followed the girl into one of the houses, and, ascending

a rickety staircase, was ushered into a dark room. In the dim light I could just make out the outline of a bed, and on the bed lay a man.

The man lifted his head as I entered. 'Giacomo,' exclaimed the girl, 'ecco un santo Padre mandato della santissima Madonna. Li dica tutto—tutto, O caro mio.'*

I approached the bed. I saw a handsome Italian, a man of about five-and-thirty, lying there. A glance told me that the man was seriously ill. From his first words I gathered that he believed himself to be dying. He seized my hand and kissed it, and before I could say a word began to pour out his confession. He had a guilty secret, and he wished to unburthen his soul of it, that he might die in peace. The first words of his strange confession startled and interested me. I hesitated to undeceive the man; and, besides, I was terrified. The man's manner was so wild and strange, I fancied he might be in a delirium. If I had said, 'I am not a holy father; I am an impostor,' he might have done me an injury.

I cannot tell you the story as he told it to me—his eyes bright with fever, his cheeks flushed, his bosom heaving. I must tell it to you in my own English way. Briefly, this is what he said:

'I am dying. This poor girl is my wife. I am a stranger in this place, and I speak no word of English. I have swindled. I am a thief and a murderer. I want to make what reparation I can. The murder was in self-defence, but the theft was a sin. It is for that I want pardon. It is for that I want to atone before I die.

'Five years ago I returned from the Brazils. There my father and mother, who had emigrated, died, leaving me their small fortune. I had no friends, no relations; so with

* 'Giacomo, here is a holy father sent by our blessed Lady. Tell him everything—everything, my darling.'

the money I came to Europe to enjoy myself. I led a life of pleasure in Italy. In an evil hour I was lured to the gaming-table. There I lost almost all I had, and was compelled to alter my course of life. But I sighed after the pleasures my money had brought me. One day I had a bit of luck. I bought a lottery ticket, and won a prize—a few hundred pounds. I had learned a little wisdom, and I gambled no more. I thought with this money I would be careful; I would travel a little, live moderately, and presently find some employment. But, for all that, I wanted to be rich—rich enough to lead a gay life of dissipation again.

‘One evening in a café on the Corso in Rome, I was reading the *Popolo Romano*. An exclamation in the room attracted my attention. I looked up, and fancied I must have a looking-glass opposite me. I saw *myself*—but the myself I saw was smoking a cigar, while I had a cigarette between my lips. I met the eyes of myself; we were both staring at each other. We both rose, we both walked towards each other. Then we both burst into a roar of laughter, in which all the company joined. It was too absurd. There were two men in the room so exactly alike that, but for the cigarette and the cigar, no one could have said which was which.’

CHAPTER III.

THE CHANGED MAN.

THE dying man paused for a moment, and his wife lifted a cup to his lips. Presently he went on again:

‘That evening the man who was so like me walked back to my hotel with me. We asked each other questions as to our parents, our ancestors. We imagined we must in some

way be related, but we could find no proof in our family history. My *alter ego*, my double, was an Italian gentleman named Luigi Palmieri, a person of noble lineage, having his palazzo in Florence and his villa on the hills behind Fiesole. He was not living in his palazzo; he had let it to a rich banker—for he was poor. His residence was the little villa, and he was returning there on the morrow from Rome. I spent the evening at his hotel—a friend of his, a Doctor Cassianni, joined us there, and we sat and smoked far into the night. I left with an invitation to come and see my new friend in a week, to bring my portmanteau and spend a month with him.

‘I was glad to accept the invitation. It would save me hotel bills, and it would be companionship and society for me. In a week I arrived at the villa. It was not very grand. In fact, it was a lonely, old-fashioned, gloomy place; there were no other houses near it, and the style in which my friend lived convinced me that, like many Italian gentlemen of high birth, he had inherited more family pride than family fortune.

‘But I didn’t grumble. The doctor was there as a visitor, and we three made a very pleasant trio, and we spent a merry week.

‘The room in which I slept was a big, old-fashioned apartment, hung with faded and ragged tapestry. If I had been a nervous man, I should have thought that it was haunted. Once or twice I awoke in the night and fancied someone was in the room, but I thought it was *only* fancy, and I went to sleep again.

‘At last I made up my mind that I had stayed long enough. We never went into the town. We lived entirely in the grounds and saw no company. There was only an old female servant to wait on us, and I was beginning to feel dull.

‘ One night I told my host of my intention to leave on the morrow. He endeavoured to dissuade me, but I was firm.

‘ That night, after drinking my usual bottle of wine, I felt heavy, and retired to rest early. I hadn’t been asleep long when I awoke with a dull dazed sense of having someone standing over me.

‘ I opened my eyes ; it was dark, but I distinctly saw the outlines of two forms near my bed. I suspected something wrong, and continued to breathe as though asleep.

‘ A voice—the doctor’s—exclaimed in a whisper : “ He is fast asleep ; now is your time.”

‘ Another voice—Palmieri’s—replied : “ Yes ; now is the time. You are sure the pad will kill him without a struggle ?”

‘ “ Quite sure. I have made it a study. He will die without a struggle. It will be heart disease. To-morrow he will be found dead in his bed, and I shall call in the village doctor. His certificate and mine will be enough.”

‘ I still breathed regularly, but an icy perspiration burst from every pore. I was about to be murdered, and yet I could make no effort. I felt dazed and fascinated. Instantly I remembered how heavy I had felt after the wine—I had been drugged !

‘ There was dead silence for a moment, then Palmieri whispered : “ Suppose there is some mark about him—something that will show that he is not me—that I am not the corpse lying in this bed—something that will raise a suspicion ?”

‘ “ There is nothing,” replied the doctor. “ The man is so like you that he would deceive your own mother. Besides, no one has seen him about. He came at night. I met him, and drove him from Florence. He has never been out of the grounds. Old Giulia is the only living soul who has seen him here, and she is yours body and soul.

When the dead man is found to-morrow morning in your bed, I shall certify that it is you, Luigi Palmieri ; that it is heart disease. The village doctor will do the same. The body will be buried in twenty-four hours, thanks to the excellent custom of the country. All your wife has to do then is to claim the £20,000 from the insurance offices, and go to America. There, under another name, you can join her by-and-by. The scheme is without a flaw. Come, do your work and I will do mine."

" " You put the pad over his mouth ; my hand shakes."

" " No ; I must go and see that all is ready for you to get away unobserved. I will watch that nobody is about. Directly you have done your work you must dress in the disguise we have prepared ; get away while it is dark ; walk to Florence, and go by the first train to Milan. There I will meet you as soon as the death formalities have been seen to and the certificates signed. You have money enough for your journey ?"

" " Plenty."

" " Then I'll go and watch outside. Come to me when all is over."

" The doctor crept out of the room on tiptoe.

" Palmieri leant over me ; I could feel his breath on my face. I gathered myself together for a terrific effort. A second would decide my fate. The hideous plot was as clear as noonday to me, and in an instant I had decided what to do.

" Palmieri put something out of his hands on to the bed, then crept to the door to lock it after the doctor.

" Noiselessly I slid my hand outside the coverlet and grasped the something. It was a soft, spongy pad. I drew it towards me, and gripped it firmly in my hand.

" Palmieri crept back. He leant over the bed, and began to feel for the pad. In a second my arm was round his

neck, and with the free hand I thrust the pad in his face, and held it pressed over his mouth and nostrils.

‘He uttered a smothered cry, but I held him like a vice. There was a little struggle, and then he fell senseless against the bed.

‘Still covering his face with the pad, I slipped out of bed and fumbled for a light. I found one on the table by the bed. I struck a match and lighted my candle, and held it in Palmieri’s face.

‘He was senseless or dead.

‘I lifted him on the bed, and pressed the pad on his mouth again, holding it there till the last sign of life had gone. Then a wild idea came into my head. I would turn the tragedy into a comedy, and the doctor should be my innocent accomplice.

‘In desperate haste, I stripped Palmieri. I put him into my night attire, and laid him in my bed. Then I put on Palmieri’s clothes.

‘As soon as the change was complete, I stole downstairs and found the doctor.

“‘Is it over?’ he exclaimed anxiously.

“‘Yes.’”

‘Then the doctor went upstairs with me to see for himself.

“‘By Jove!’ he exclaimed, “it is marvellous! If I hadn’t known, I should have sworn myself that the man lying here was Luigi Palmieri.”

“‘My dear fellow, if the likeness hadn’t been so perfect, where would our scheme have been?’ I replied.

“‘Help me to get the body into your bed,’ said the doctor; “then you must put on the disguise and be off. Remember, we meet in Milan this day week, at the railway-station, at noon. Take poor lodgings; you are a working man, and mustn’t appear to be anything else.”

‘I found a workman’s blouse and cap and clothes,

complete, in another room. After all was arranged I put them on and left for Milan. A week later the doctor met me, and showed me the certificates ; everything had been arranged beautifully, and now there was only the claim to be made on the insurance companies, which I ascertained were English, and the money to be paid to my wife—the wife I had never seen, and who I ascertained was in Paris, waiting for instructions from the doctor what to do.

‘After the necessary time had elapsed the claim was satisfied, and the doctor, who had been to Paris and London, handed me £10,000 in bank-notes. The other money, less £500 given to Palmieri’s wife to go to America with, he had taken as his share of the plunder.

‘You may be sure that I never joined the lady. To this day she is wondering when her husband is coming out. I got away with my £10,000, but I hesitated to spend it ; I felt that I was party to a fraud, and that if it were ever found out I should be prosecuted. A year after I met Annetta here, and we were married. But I could not rest : I was always thinking of the money I had helped to cheat the English companies of. To get work we came to England, and I fell ill here, and I am dying. Father, I want you to take this money, this £10,000, which I have never touched, and restore it to the people I helped to steal it from.’

‘I promised the man to do what he asked,’ said the Capuchin, as he finished the Italian’s story. ‘I took the money, and was making my way home when you knocked me down in the fog in Soho Square.’

CHAPTER IV.

LOST AND FOUND.

For a few minutes after the sham Capuchin had finished his extraordinary story I could find nothing to say. I should have believed he was telling me a tissue of falsehoods, but for the £10,000 which lay on the table in his room.

‘What are you going to do?’ I exclaimed, when I had recovered my powers of conversation.

‘I am going to take these notes to the insurance company,’ he said; ‘I will tell them the whole story, and leave them to inquire into it. But I don’t like having such a sum about me in a place like this, especially after the notes have been seen by people in the street, who may tell the bad characters living about here. What can I do with them till to-morrow?’

I hesitated. It was certainly dangerous for a man to have £10,000 in such a place in such a neighbourhood.

‘Perhaps, sir, you could take charge of them for me, and I could call on you to-morrow for them?’ said the Capuchin hesitatingly.

‘But you don’t know me!’ I exclaimed. ‘How do you know that I am an honest man?’

‘I’ll trust you, sir. I know a gentleman when I see one. Just give me a memorandum for the amount, and take the notes away, and I’ll call for them in the morning.’

There couldn’t be any harm in what was proposed, and it certainly wasn’t safe for this man to have such an amount about him in such a den. He might be murdered and robbed in the night.

After a little hesitation I took the notes and gave a

receipt for the £10,000, which I undertook to hand to the man when he called on me the next morning.

I put the notes in my pocket, and went downstairs. The fog had partially cleared, but I had great difficulty in finding my way. At the corner of a street someone ran up against me and apologized.

At last I reached Gower Street, and found my own door by striking matches. When I was safe inside I put my hand in my pocket to take the notes out. Someone had saved me the trouble, and done it already.

* * * * *

Over that night of sleepless torture I draw a veil. The next morning, when my friend, no longer a Capuchin, called, I told him the hideous truth. Tears came into his eyes, and he beat his breast. It was ruin to him. The Italian would suspect him of being a thief; and he had hoped that the insurance offices would give him respectable employment, and perhaps reward him.

I said that I was only waiting for him to give me the numbers of the notes.

He hadn't taken the numbers.

Then I would go to the police-station at once.

No; that was no good. That would only frighten the thieves into getting rid of the notes at once. Perhaps, as they were for such a large amount, a reward might get them back. Would I pay a reward?

Yes; but a moderate one.

Might he put it about in the neighbourhood that, if the notes were brought to me, I would give £100, and ask no questions? He knew the gang that were about Soho. He had, alas! had to mix with them. A reward might get them back, as there would be difficulty in passing such big notes.

At last I consented. What else could I do? It was

horrible to think that I had deprived somebody of £10,000; besides, I might be made responsible for the amount. I had given a receipt for it.

That afternoon the man returned, his face beaming with joy.

The notes would be given to him for £100. He was so satisfied that, if I would give him the £100, he would hand me my receipt.

I gave him an open cheque, and I received his receipt.

And I never saw him again.

But when I told the extraordinary story to one of my friends at Scotland Yard, he laughed, and said I'd been 'had'—that the roll of bank-notes given to a poor man to take to the rightful owner was an old confidence dodge, only that my friend, being a man of education—probably a high-class swindler—had worked it a little romantically.

'But I saw the notes!' I exclaimed, 'and I knocked the man down by accident.'

'He was waiting for a rich man to knock him down,' said the detective; 'and as to the notes, here, look at this.' He drew a five-pound note from his pocket.

'Perfectly genuine,' I said.

'No, it isn't. It's a flash one, and it's turned out by the same firm as made the thousand pounders that deceived you. You've been let off easy for £100.'

I am looking out for that Capuchin. I am going to advise him to give up the confidence dodge and take to writing stories. With such an imagination he ought to do well.

THE EMPRESS EMILY ANN.

A Tale of 189—.

IN the year 189— I was in Paris. I had been sent there as a special correspondent for the London edition of the *Timbuctoo Times*. I have never been able to understand by what process of reasoning a Timbuctoo firm arrived at the conclusion that Londoners wanted a *Timbuctoo Times* published daily in their midst, but there is no necessity that I should air my views on the matter, as I have simply to deal with facts, and the *Timbuctoo Times* (London Daily Edition) is a very accomplished fact, and I am its Paris correspondent.

One afternoon, as I was riding in the Bois de Boulogne, I heard a series of piercing shrieks uttered behind me. I turned, and saw a lady on horseback. The lady had lost all control of the horse. It had bolted. In a moment the animal had dashed past me. I made a wild attempt to seize the reins as it passed, but without success, and away flew the animal, amid the cries and exclamations of the bystanders.

The lady's groom passed me in another moment at a mad gallop. We were the only equestrians in the Bois.

'Who is she?' I exclaimed.

'The empress!' he replied.

'What?' I cried, for I fancied my ears must have deceived me.

'She is indeed, sir,' said the man, whose face was as white as death. 'She would ride out what she calls incognito, and that's why I haven't got the imperial livery on. She was going her rounds of charity, and she always goes unknown then. My poor mistress! Whatever shall we do?'

By this time the horse and the empress were out of sight.

'Do?' I exclaimed. 'Why, ride after her.'

'Impossible,' he replied; 'the horse she is riding is one of the swiftest animals ever foaled!'

'Mine can beat it,' I said calmly.

'Go on with you, you don't know what you are talking about,' replied the groom, who was an Englishman.

'Indeed I do. The horse that I am riding is the famous Ortolan, who won eighteen races for the Duke of Westminster and was never beaten once. The duke was offered a little over his value for him, and, being a poor man, took it, and let the horse go to Timbuctoo. On the voyage the horse became seriously ill, and, thinking it was dead, it was flung into the sea. I happened to be cruising about in the *Timbuctoo Times* yacht, and came upon the body. I recognised it as Ortolan by the white blaze on the nose and three white hairs on the tail. I got it on board, applied restoratives, and was presently rewarded by a gentle neigh. Since then my famous Ortolan has accompanied me everywhere I go. The world, including Don Juan de Boko, the Timbuctoo millionaire, who bought the horse, believe it to be at the bottom of the sea, John. You and I know better.'

I called him John because that is the name of most English grooms.

'A very interesting story, sir,' replied John, 'and I'm very glad to see old Ortolan again, for I backed him for the

Derby, the Leger, the Lancashire Plate, the Kempton Park Royal Stakes, and for all his races as a four-year-old ; but while we're talking the empress may be lying on the ground unattended, perhaps dying.'

'True,' I replied, and with that I touched Ortolan gently with my spurs, and in a moment we were flying forward in pursuit of the fugitives.

The gallant racehorse seemed to know that a lady's fate depended on his speed. He beat all his previous records ; the trees, the roads, the houses seemed to fly past us with a whiz. In five minutes we had caught the empress up. Her horse was dead beat, and was slowing down, but the empress had fainted. In a moment she would have slipped from the saddle.

Just in the nick of time I reached her side, and, seizing her horse, stopped it. It had shot its bolt, and stood like a lamb while I lifted the unconscious Empress of the French from the saddle.

We were quite alone in a deserted part of the Bois de Boulogne.

As I lifted her from the saddle she sank to the ground. I raised the thick veil she wore over her face in order to give her air.

It was the first time I had seen the empress, as I had only arrived in Paris a few days previously.

As the features of the fair occupant of the throne of France were revealed to me I gave a gasp of surprise.

'Emily Ann !' I exclaimed.

The empress opened her eyes.

'Where am I?' she murmured ; then, as the situation gradually dawned upon her, she looked up at me.

'*Merci, mille fois merci, monsieur,*' she said in French. Then, stopping suddenly, she cried : 'Good heavens above ! do my eyes deceive me ? Are you not Master George ?'

It was the old familiar name of my childhood that the imperial lips uttered.

‘Yes, Emily Ann, I am; but tell me, how in the name of goodness is it that I find in the Empress of the French that Emily Ann who was a faithful little nurse-girl in my mother’s family many years ago?’

‘Ah, it is a strange story,’ replied the Empress of the French, ‘but I have no time to tell it you now. Will you help me to mount my horse again? I must ride back to the palace at once, before the emperor has had time to become alarmed.’

I assisted the empress, who was now quite recovered to mount her horse. I was so bewildered by my strange discovery that I was unable to make any further observations.

As soon as she was in the saddle, and had patted her horse’s neck, the empress gave me her hand.

‘Good-bye for the present,’ she said, ‘and thank you very much. To-night the ministers dine with us, but if to-morrow night you will dine with the emperor and myself, quietly and *en famille*, I shall be so pleased, and then I will tell you my strange life’s story.’

‘Certainly, Emily Ann—I mean your majesty,’ I replied. ‘I accept your invitation with pleasure.’

‘We dine at eight,’ said the empress; then, with a graceful wave of the hand, she said ‘*Clk*’ to her horse, and rode back rapidly in the direction of Paris.

‘Well I never!’ I exclaimed, as I remained glued to the spot. ‘Here’s little Emily Ann, who was our under-nurse-maid years ago, and whom I and my sister teased nearly out of her life, Empress of the French.’

I knew that the emperor, who was proclaimed after the downfall of Boulanger, married an English lady whom he met abroad, but I never imagined that it was the Emily

Ann who was nursemaid to my little sisters many years ago.

* * * * *

The next evening, punctually at eight, I arrived at the new imperial palace, which had been erected on the site of the old Tuileries, and was shown into the White Drawing-room. The empress rose to receive me, and presented me to the emperor.

The emperor I found a very charming fellow. He was about five-and-thirty, and what the French call 'bel homme.' I knew he had been a sailor, and much of the free-and-easy manner of the naval officer remained with him in his greatness.

'My dear sir,' he said, as he led me to a seat on the sofa between himself and the empress, 'my wife has told me of your former acquaintance. I am delighted to meet you.'

I glanced at the empress. How much had she told the emperor of her past life?

'Henri knows everything; you need have no fear.'

Husband and wife exchanged a glance of mutual love and confidence, and I felt at my ease directly.

I was much struck with Emily Ann's perfect behaviour at table. She was every inch an empress, and I felt that much credit was due to her, as she had practically raised herself from the position of a little London maid-of-all-work to the imperial purple.

It was a charming dinner, and as soon as it was over the empress rose and left us to our cigars.

'Do not be long, Henri dear,' she said, 'for I want Master George to hear my story to-night. I have dismissed my ladies, and shall wait for you in the Japanese boudoir.'

* * * * *

It was just midnight when I quitted the imperial palace.

The empress shook me warmly by the hand, and the emperor invited me to bring my luggage and make the palace my home during my stay in the French capital. I was very glad to get out into the fresh cool air of the night. I wanted to feel the breezes upon my brow, I wanted to look upon the lights of Paris, I wanted to be on the boulevards to see the gay cafés and the bustling crowd, I wanted to make sure that I was wide awake and not the victim of a disordered dream. The story that the Empress Emily Ann had told me was so marvellous that had I not personally known her as a maid-of-all-work I should have believed to my dying day that she was endeavouring to impose upon my credulity.

On my return to my apartments in the Rue Louis le Grand I at once sat down and wrote out from memory the whole of the empress's remarkable story.

I give it as nearly as possible in her majesty's own words.

I was born of poor but educated parents. My father was the son of a gentleman by birth named Smythe, and my mother was a governess at a national school. Soon after my parents married my father lost his fortune, and became a clerk at the docks. One day a heavy bale of goods which was being unloaded from a ship fell on him owing to a crane accident, and killed him. My mother never recovered the shock, and at the age of five I was left an orphan. Some kind people got me into a charity school, where I was brought up until I was fifteen, and then I was put to service. My first place was that of under-nurse-maid in the family of a gentleman who is now a well-known journalist [here the Empress looked across at me and smiled], but when I left, owing to a little misunderstanding with the head nurse, I determined to go where there were no other servants. and I obtained a situation as

general servant in a house in the Lambeth Road. The house, I soon discovered, was let out in lodgings, and the place was a very hard one. My mistress, 'the landlady,' as she was generally called, had a peculiar connection—all the lodgers were connected with the 'show' business. At one time we had a house full of Hungarian young lady musicians; at another, a party of Zulus, who were exhibiting at the Aquarium, were deposited with us by their manager. While I was there I waited upon a Russian princess who played the violin at the music-halls, a family of Japanese acrobats, a tattooed lady and gentleman, a troupe of Laplanders, a family all over hair (who looked like ourang-outangs), and a troupe of Spaniards who performed at the exhibition. Some of these people were very peculiar in their habits and eccentric in their behaviour, and sometimes I thought I had better take a place in a lunatic asylum at once. But the most remarkable lodgers we ever had were a lot of Arabs from Algeria, who swallowed swords and put knives through their noses and ears, and ate live serpents and glass bottles, and sucked red-hot pokers, and did such dreadful things that it made your blood run cold to look at them.

These people called themselves the Aissaouas, and they performed at a hall at the West-End. When they came I didn't know what they were, and so the first morning when I went into their sitting-room to lay their breakfast I was so horrified at what I saw that I dropped the tray on the floor, smashing all the crockery, and ran out of the room with my hair on end, screaming.

I really wonder I didn't lose my reason from the shock. Fancy a nervous girl, brought up in a Christian country, opening a door in a Christian room in a Christian house, and seeing a lot of savages whirling themselves round, and throwing javelins at each other, with serpents halfway

down their throats, while a lot of other serpents sat up on their tails with their tongues out and hissed at them !

They were only practising, I learned afterwards, but I certainly ought to have been warned before I went in.

I was so terrified that I should have given notice and left, but for the old professor who lived at the top of the house. He was a very old gentleman, with a long white beard and long white hair falling all over his shoulders, was the professor, and he was our only lodger who wasn't in the show business.

I waited on him, and I liked him very much, because he was so kind and gentle. He was a very clever man, and I heard mistress tell someone that he could speak and write forty languages, some of them so old that everybody else had forgotten them. But when his eyesight grew bad he lost his situation at the British Museum, and had to live on a small pension, and that is why he came to us. I often thought it very hard for a clever man like that to have barely any comforts up in his garret, while the people in the parlour who swallowed swords and balanced feathers on the ends of their noses lived on the fat of the land.

But that is the way of the world.

When I went upstairs to take the old professor his breakfast after I had been so frightened, and he saw that I had been crying, he asked me what was the matter, and I told him everything.

Then he explained to me what these people were, for it seems he knew all about them, having studied their language in their own country. He told me they were impostors, and all they did was only trickery, just like other conjurers, and that I needn't be frightened of the serpents, as they were quite harmless. He also wrote a lot of queer

signs on a piece of paper, and asked me to give it to Mr. Abdallah, the chief of the Aissaouas.

When I gave the note to Mr. Abdallah he seemed quite excited, and made me understand that he wanted to see the writer ; so I took him upstairs : and if he and the professor didn't begin talking away to each other just as comfortably as if they were talking English, though the professor told me afterwards it was Arabic they talked !

Mr. Abdallah and the professor became great friends after that, and when the Aissaouas were at home in their lodgings Mr. Abdallah was always upstairs with the professor, smoking pipes and talking with him.

One day I found the professor in great glee, poring over a queer-looking bit of leathery stuff, that he told me was a bit of parchment. It was covered with faded signs, and the professor said :

'Look, Emily Ann, what the good Abdallah has given me as a souvenir of his visit. This is thousands and thousands of years old. It dates from the time of Rameses II., the most famous of the Pharaohs, and is therefore over three thousand years old. By to-night I shall have deciphered the writing, and will tell you what it is about.'

Of course I didn't know anything about Rameses then, and very little about any Pharaohs—only the one I'd read about in the Bible, who was so cruel to the Children of Israel—but I thought the professor must be a bit touched to believe that bit of rag was thousands of years old.

But afterwards I knew what a wonderful thing it was, and it was through the professor reading it that I became Empress of the French.

(Here the emperor pressed Emily Ann's hand lovingly, and they looked into each other's eyes.)

Yes (continued the empress), I learnt all about it nearly a year after the Aissaouas had left and gone back to their

own country. One night when I went upstairs to tidy up the old professor's room I found him lying on the bed and looking very ill.

He beckoned me to him, and whispered :

'Don't be alarmed, Emily Ann, I am dying.'

'Oh, sir,' I said, 'let me call a doctor !'

'No,' he said, 'it is useless. I know that my end has come. I shall linger for some time, but I shall never get up again. Now, listen to me. You have been a kind, good girl to me, and I have no one in the world I care for, so I am going to leave you a fortune.'

'Oh, sir !' was all that I could say.

'Don't interrupt, Emily Ann,' he said ; 'but listen to me attentively. Take the packet that is under my pillow.'

I took it.

'That packet,' said the poor old gentleman, 'contains the parchment Mr. Abdallah gave me. It is yours, and now you must know its history. Abdallah's father found it many years ago in a rocky cleft among the hills in the oasis of Kufarah, in Tripoli, on the borders of the Libyan desert. Listen, and I will read you what those signs say. They are written in the hieroglyphics of the days of Rameses II., but I can read them. This is what the parchment says in English :

"I, Mneptah Khamis, general in the army of Rameses the king, am dying in the desert of Libya. My soldiers have been slain, and I have crawled to this cleft in the lonely hills to die. I set out in search of the great treasure stolen from the great temple of Memphis, and known to have been buried in these hills. I had discovered the spot, when I was stricken down. It lies below this cleft in which I lie. Let this parchment be borne to my lord and master the king by whomsoever finds my body, that this vast treasure, stolen from the temple of the gods, may be

his. The cavern in which it lies is beyond the cleft. The secret is not known to the tribes of the desert. It was lost, and I alone have discovered it.”’

When the professor had finished reading the parchment, I was dazed. I couldn't see what all the wonderful story had to do with me, and I said so.

‘Emily Ann,’ exclaimed the professor, ‘that treasure, which may be worth millions, is in the cavern beyond the cleft still. This parchment was found by Abdallah's father in the cleft. It had lain there under a rock through the ages—lain there thousands of years after the skeleton of the general of Rameses had become dust. You must go to the Libyan desert and find this cavern, and the treasure is yours!’

I thought I should have fainted at the very idea. I, a poor general servant, go to a desert and find the treasure that had been taken from a temple thousands of years ago? It was too absurd.

But the professor wouldn't listen to my objections.

‘In this packet, Emily Ann, you will find full instructions written out by me how you are to proceed. I have left you all my little fortune, some £300 that I have saved from my pension. It is all yours. When I am dead obey my instructions, or this treasure will lie in the Libyan desert until the world's end, and then it will be of no use to anyone.’

* * * * *

A month after that the professor died. I found that he had left me £350, and a number of documents. I gave up my place, went into lodgings, and read the documents. What I read made me determine to carry out the professor's wishes. He recommended me to disguise myself as a young Arab man, and stain my face with walnut-juice. This I did the day before (obeying his written

instructions) I went to Marseilles, and I there took a passage in a steamer of the Compagnie Transatlantique bound for Tunis.

In Tunis I stayed for a few days, waiting for a vessel for Tripoli, and it was in Tunis one morning that I met a handsome young French naval officer, whose name I afterwards learned was Henri de Bourbon.

One evening, while being rowed across the Bay of Tunis, a small steamer ran our little boat down, and I was flung into the water. When I came to my senses, I was lying in an elegant cabin, and an old gentleman was standing by my side.

He addressed me in Arabic, then in French, and I could not reply, not understanding him; but in my confusion I exclaimed :

‘Where am I?’

‘Mon Dieu!’ exclaimed the doctor in broken English, ‘you are an Englishwoman.’

I knew that my secret was discovered.

‘Oh,’ I exclaimed, ‘do not betray me!’

‘This is very strange,’ said the old gentleman; ‘I must call the captain.’ He went out, and presently returned with the captain of the French man-of-war, on to which I found afterwards I had been carried by the sailors who had rescued me.

The captain, a handsome young fellow——

‘Hush!’ said the emperor, interrupting, with a smile. You make me blush. You must know, my dear sir,’ continued the emperor, ‘that at that time I was simply Henri de Bourbon, the direct descendant of Louis XVI. of France, through his son Louis, who escaped when a boy from the prison of the Temple (through the kindness of the cobbler Simon, who pretended his prisoner was dead),

and who lived in retirement, unknown and unhonoured, for the rest of his life. I was merely a captain in the French navy, a servant of the French Republic, and had no idea beyond doing my duty loyally to the land of my birth. Now, my dear,' he added, turning to the empress, 'proceed with your narrative.'

The captain (continued the empress), whom my husband refuses to allow me to describe as handsome, returned with the old gentleman, who was the ship's surgeon, and was very much astonished when he learned that the young Arab who had been rescued from drowning in the bay was in reality a young English girl.

My confusion was intense, but the kindness of Captain de Bourbon soon put me at my ease. 'My dear young lady,' he said, in excellent English, 'your secret is safe with us. Pray consider yourself an honoured guest on board my ship until you have thoroughly recovered from your accident.'

I spent two days on board the vessel, the captain's cabin being entirely given up to me. During those two days, so great was the confidence with which the captain inspired me, that I told him my story, and placed all the documents in his hands.

He was deeply interested, but he utterly discouraged the idea of my making the journey to the Libyan desert alone.

'There are a thousand dangers,' he cried, 'with which you will be utterly unable to contend.'

'Must I then abandon the treasure?' I said.

'No; but you must let me assist you. I am entitled to six months' leave. If you will allow me to find an escort, and appoint me the captain of the force accompanying you, I shall be delighted.'

I accepted the offer at once. I must confess that the

idea of making that terrible journey to the Libyan desert alone had frequently caused me much uneasiness.

As soon as I was convalescent I returned to my hotel in Tunis. The captain called upon me every day, and together we concocted plans for our expedition.

A few days before we were to start my captain came to me, and I noticed that he seemed nervous and preoccupied.

‘Is there anything the matter, M. de Bourbon?’ I said.

He looked at me earnestly for a moment, then falling upon his knees, and taking my hand in his, exclaimed :

‘Emily Ann, I can keep my secret no longer. I love you. Will you be my wife?’

For a moment I was so overcome by emotion that I could not reply.

‘Ah!’ he exclaimed, ‘you do not know how I love you—how I have loved you from the first moment I saw you. I am but a poor sea captain, but I am of illustrious birth, and I will make you happy.’

‘I also, Henry, am poor at present, but, though I confess to you now that I have been a domestic servant, I must tell you that I also am of good birth. My father was a gentleman; his father was the eighth son of a baronet, whose ancestors were nobles of Britain when William the Conqueror landed. I tell you this because I love you, and I do not wish you to think that you are marrying beneath you.’

‘Then you love me, and will be my wife?’

My eyes answered him, for my lips trembled too violently to reply.

He clasped me in his arms and pressed his lips to mine, and went off at once to make arrangements for our marriage before the French consul.

The day after our marriage we left Tunis, a detachment of native soldiers procured by my husband accompanying us, and for additional safety we took with us a dozen French

bluejackets, who had obtained permission to accompany their captain.

We reached Tripoli in safety, and made our way on camels to the oasis of Kufarah. We had no difficulty in finding the cleft in the rocks where the general of Rameses died, as it was the only cleft in the desert.

We then ordered our escort to camp some distance off, and we searched for the treasure alone.

Passing straight through the cleft, we found a small opening overgrown with brushwood. Cutting this away, we found the narrow entrance to a cavern. Into this we penetrated, and then, following the professor's written instructions—he knew how the ancients buried their treasures—we at last came upon some large metal boxes. The ancients must have been excellent workmen, for these boxes, though thousands of years old, were still intact. My husband broke them open with his pickaxe, and we found them full of gold and precious stones, and splendid ornaments, and vessels of gold, marvellously wrought. My husband declared that the value of this treasure was fabulous, and we have since realized over ten millions by the sale of a portion of it. We had made all our plans, and with the aid of the bluejackets, in whom we had every confidence, we loaded our camels and brought the treasure to Tripoli. There we took ship for Tunis, and, my husband having tendered his resignation to the French admiralty, we set out for Paris with the treasure that had been taken from the Temple of Memphis before the days of Rameses II.

‘Marvellous!’ I exclaimed, interrupting the empress. ‘If I hadn’t known that you were always a truthful girl while in my mother’s service, I should think—but, after all, you are an *empress* now, and that is more wonderful still.’

‘No’ (replied the empress), ‘it is very simple. On our

return to Paris we found General Boulanger president. He had declared a war of revenge against Germany, and Europe was in a state of wild excitement.

‘But on the very eve of the departure of the French troops quartered in Paris, the general, while reviewing them, was thrown from his famous black charger Tunis—who had not been properly exercised and was very fresh. Boulanger fell heavily on the ground, and Tunis kicked him on his head. It was a very inglorious proceeding, and a bad omen. When the general had been put to bed it was found that his reason had been affected. He believed himself to be Bonaparte, and kept running to the window and declaring war against everybody.

‘When he told his physicians he was going to conquer England and wipe out Waterloo, they felt that nothing more could be done for him, and sent him to the lunatic asylum at Charenton, where he still remains, poor fellow ! To humour him, the attendants call him Bonaparte, and assure him that England and Germany are now annexed to France, and that the Kaiser and his aged English grand-mamma are prisoners on the island of St. Helena.’

‘But how did your husband become emperor, Emily Ann ?’ I exclaimed.

‘Well, he was a Bourbon, as you know, and he was the direct descendant of Louis XVI. When Boulanger fell, he happened to be a spectator of the scene.

‘He ran forward and seized Tunis and leapt upon his back. “Frenchmen,” he cried, “I am Henri de Bourbon. Boulanger would have led you to war and ruin ; let me counsel you to remain at peace, and think only of the prosperity of our beloved country.”

‘His words had a magical effect. Instantly the crowd cried, “Vive Henri de Bourbon ! Vive l’empereur !” Ah, it was a wonderful spectacle. That night there was a

bloodless revolution. France was sick of the petty jealousies of the intriguers of all the parties. She longed to be an empire again. The citizens came in a body to our house in the Faubourg St. Germain. "Will you be our emperor?" they cried. Henri stepped out on the balcony and said: "Avec plaisir, mes amis."

'A week afterwards he was crowned, and, clasping me in his arms before the assembled multitude, he said, "My people, behold your empress!"

'Then he informed the people that, as I had brought him a fortune of twenty millions, we should not want to draw anything from the State, and so the taxes would be reduced at once.

'*"Bravo!"* exclaimed the people. "We have an emperor and empress who can support themselves. We are the most favoured among the nations." And from that moment we have never had our right to the throne called in question.

'Now you know how the little general servant, Emily Ann, became Empress of the French. Before you go, I want you to see my baby.'

The emperor and empress led me to an adjoining apartment, where, in a cradle of gold, there lay a beautiful little baby-boy fast asleep.

'Behold the prince imperial!' exclaimed the emperor, 'the inheritor of the vast treasure that was stolen from the Temple of Memphis. General Mneptah Khamis set out in search of it for Rameses II., and Emily Ann found it a few thousand years afterwards, and settled it upon the youngest descendant of the Smythes of Great Britain and the Bourbons of France. We owe a good deal to the general.'

'Yes,' said the Empress Emily Ann; 'but we must not forget that these millions would never have come to our boy but for the aged professor, who was kind to his mother, and

had not his mother once been a general servant in the house in the Lambeth Road where the Aissaouas came to lodge, with Abdallah, their chief.'

* * * * *

'To the Editor of the "*Timbuctoo Times*" (*London Daily Edition*).

'SIR,—

'I have this day telephoned you a full account of my interesting interview with the Empress of the French, *née* Emily Ann Smythe. I think it will make a great sensation. You will, I trust, appreciate the advantage you have over your contemporaries in having appointed *me* your Special Correspondent in Paris.

'Faithfully yours,

[*Signature illegible.*]

'PARIS, *April 1, 1891.*'

MISS PRISCILLA.

It was past ten o'clock, and a bitterly cold winter night, and Miss Priscilla Pargeter, who had been somewhat late abroad for an elderly maiden lady, was settling herself down in her easychair, and putting on her gold spectacles. It was Miss Priscilla's invariable custom to read a chapter or two from some favourite author before she retired to rest.

It was quite immaterial to Miss Priscilla what chapters they were. Where she opened her book, there she read, for she knew her favourite authors by heart, having read the same works through and through again for the last thirty years.

It would have been useless to urge Miss Priscilla to read a new book. She would have said that she was too old to take to new-fangled ideas. The books her dear mother read, and the books her dear sister—dead, alas ! these ten years—read were good enough for her.

Miss Priscilla lived in a comfortable little house in an unfashionable square in unfashionable Islington. Her father had lived there and died there. Her mother had died there, and Priscilla and her elder sister Prudence had kept the old house on for the sake of its hallowed memories.

The sisters Pargeter were well known in the neighbourhood. 'Dear old ladies,' everybody called them, and, if their old-fashioned ways occasionally made their pushing,

go-ahead neighbours smile, their old-fashioned gentleness and kindness made everybody respect and esteem them.

It was a terrible blow to Priscilla when Prudence died, for she had the little house all to herself then. She was the last of her race. Friends she had in plenty, but no relatives, and, being of a loving nature, she was compelled to find something to love now that the last of her kindred had departed from the old home.

She had always loved cats and dogs. Never did a stray cat mew piteously down an area or on a doorstep within earshot of Miss Priscilla but Mary the housemaid was instantly despatched to see where the poor thing was, and to coax it in and give it some nice warm milk; and never did a stray cur or a lost dog hang about Miss Priscilla's doorstep but it was invited inside and regaled with bones and scraps.

A young gentleman who lodged in a house at the corner of the square, from the windows of which a commanding view of Miss Pargeter's front door could be obtained, and who was a medical student, was wont to declare in the billiard-room of the Compton Arms, which he frequented of an evening, that there was a freemasonry existing among the dogs of London, and that by a code of signs they communicated to each other the fact that 'Pargeter's was a sure bone.'

Even Mary the housemaid, who was haunted by the idea that one day they would take in 'a hydrophoby case,' and had twice given notice on the plea that she didn't engage for a cats' and dogs' lodging-house, and who would not willingly have granted a single virtue to either the feline or the canine race, confessed her belief that the starving dogs who were so nobly feasted went away and gave Miss Pargeter's address to all the other starving do they chanced to meet in their wanderings.

After her sister's death, Miss Priscilla—the old form of address clung to her though she was Miss Pargeter now—enlarged the sphere of her benevolence, and, being lonely at times in the now silent house, took to going about more and attending the meetings of the various societies in which the vicar and the curate of the parish were interested. It was at a meeting held in connection with the agitation for a better law for the protection of little children that her indignation was aroused by the terrible stories related on the platform. She found it at first difficult to believe that innocent little children were inhumanly treated and starved by their own fathers and mothers. But the moment she grasped the fact she began to look out for unhappy little children as well as unhappy little cats and dogs.

When Mary heard that Miss Priscilla had taken up the 'child' question, she declared that now she *should* have to leave. 'She'll begin a-takin' in all the starving childring,' said Mary, 'and then they'll get brought and left on the doorsteps by dozens, and I suppose I'll have to take 'em in with the cats and the dawgs. It's more than human flesh and blood can stand, and I ain't goin' to. I didn't engage for it.'

But Mary's alarm was premature. Miss Priscilla did not arrive home of an afternoon with her arms full of babies, and a string of starving and shoeless children clinging to her skirts.

But whenever she went out for a walk or to a mother's meeting, or to a little tea-party at a friend's house, she kept her eyes open and would frequently harangue the sturdy men and women begging or playing music in the streets, who dragged sickly and miserable-looking children about with them in order to excite the sympathy of the passers-by.

On the eventful evening when the incidents occurred,

but for which this story could never have been written, Miss Priscilla had been to tea with the curate's wife, and, returning home about nine o'clock, she had met a drunken woman staggering out of a public-house with a child in her arms.

Miss Priscilla's indignation had been aroused at once, and she had boldly harangued the woman on the iniquity of her conduct, much to the delight of the customers at the bar, who had come flocking out, and who received Miss Priscilla's oration with several 'hear, hears,' at first ironical, but in the end sympathetic.

Quite a little crowd had gathered round before Miss Priscilla had exhausted her indigation, and when the drunken woman began to bestow on the brave Priscilla a few epithets entirely unsuited to an elderly maiden lady's ears, one or two women stepped forward, and, crying shame on her for a 'wicked faggit,' stopped her flow of invective by a method more vigorous than polite, and roundly declared that the 'laidy hadn't given her no more than she deserved,' and advised her to 'git on 'ome to her husbing, and put the pore little kid to bed.'

There had been one spectator of the scene whom nobody had noticed. Standing behind the crowd a little lad of about thirteen had eagerly listened to every word that Miss Priscilla said on the subject of babies.

He was a poor little stunted child of the slums, with a pale, wizened face and hungry eyes, and in his arms, wrapped in an old ragged shawl, he carried a bundle. Every now and then he hugged the little bundle close to his breast, as though to keep it warm; and once, when the bundle gave a little whimpering cry, he put one foot on the curb and swayed himself to and fro, as a mother does when rocking her baby to sleep.

Every now and then the little fellow coughed a hollow

cruel cough, and then made a violent effort to restrain himself, for his whole frame was shaken by it, and the little bundle was disturbed.

As Miss Pargeter quitted the scene of her oratorical triumph, her face flushed, and her bosom heaving partly with indignation and partly with the unwonted exertion of her vocal powers in the night air, the boy slipped quietly out of the crowd and stole softly after her.

He kept at a respectful distance, but he never lost sight of her. When Miss Pargeter knocked at the door of her house, the boy stood on the opposite side against the railings of the square, and watched her enter.

Then he came across and looked at the number on the door.

'No. 7,' he muttered to himself, 'that's it. S'pose I was to put 'er down on the step and ring the bell and 'ook it. S'pose as the laidy took 'er in, it 'ud be all right. I could watch oppersite till I see 'er took in. I wonder if it 'ud be all right?'

He lifted the shawl gently from the baby's face, for the bundle in his arms was a baby, and then he stooped and kissed the little face that looked cold and blue in the light of the lamp underneath which he was standing.

'No, Bibby,' he said, 'I couldn't leave yer like that. I'll make sure as you'll be took'd in by the kind laidy. I'll tell 'er how it's to save yer life as I've done what I have, and I know as she won't turn me away then, for she's a real good 'un to kids, she is, and she'd be sorry for yer, dear, like she was for the drunken woman's baby.'

But the lad evidently hesitated. He must have walked up and down for some time, perhaps gone away and come back again before he could screw his courage to the sticking point, for it was past ten o'clock, and Miss Priscilla was sitting down to read her two chapters previous to retiring

to rest, when there came a timid, feeble little single knock at the door.

'Dear me, whoever can that be at this time of night?' said Miss Priscilla, laying down her book and ringing the bell in case Mary should not have heard the knock.

Mary had evidently not heard it, for she came into the room.

'There's a knock at the door, Mary. Whoever can it be so late?'

'Goodness knows, ma'am, said Mary, 'unless it's one of them dawgs. I'd never be surprised if they took to knocking themselves, they're that artful.'

'Nonsense, Mary! go and see who it is.'

Mary went, and presently she returned with an expression of indignation on her face.

'I knew how it 'ud be, ma'am,' she said; 'there's a baby come.'

'A what!' shrieked Miss Priscilla.

'There's a ragged boy at the door with a baby, and he wants to see the lady as lives here, he says.'

'Dear me!' said Miss Priscilla; 'a boy with a baby?'

'Yes, ma'am.'

'Well, don't keep him out in the cold street a night like this; ask him to come in.'

'Yes, ma'am,' said Mary; but as she went she muttered to herself, 'As if cats and dogs wasn't bad enough, it's to be ragged boys and hinfants in harms now. They won't want a 'ousemaid here soon, they'll want a wet nuss.'

There was a shuffling of feet, a hollow racking cough, and then there stood timidly in the doorway of the sitting-room, his eyes blinking in the unaccustomed light, a dirty, ragged little boy with a bundle in his arms.

Miss Priscilla stared at him for a moment in amazement, and then she said kindly:

‘Well, my boy, what do you want with me?’

‘Please, marm, I hopes as you won’t be hangry,’ he gasped, the words bubbling out one after the other in his fear and anxiety; ‘but I heerd wot you said about babies to that drunkin woman, and I thought as p’raps—as p’raps you’d——’

‘Perhaps I’d what?’ exclaimed Miss Priscilla, wondering what she was expected to do.

‘As p’raps you’d take in my baby for the night till I kin find a place where they takes ’em in reg’lar, for nuffink.’

‘Take in your what?’ shrieked Miss Priscilla.

‘My baby, marm; this ’ere.’

He put the old shawl back a little way and showed Miss Priscilla the sleeping child’s face.

‘Your baby; what do you mean?’

‘It’s my baby, marm—leastways, it’s my little sister—mother’s in a ’sylum, and father’s got somebody else in the ’ouse as hain’t zackly his wife, but knocks us about—and—and—— Well, I carn’t tell you orl, ’cus it ’ud be up agin father wot I heerd, but I’ve run away and took my little sister with me, and I ain’t niver goin’ back agin, more’s she if I kin ’elp it. Afore mother was took’d she says to me, “Johnny, take care of poor baby, won’t yer, and love ’er,” and I sed I would, and if they kills me for it I will. She ain’t no trouble, laidy, and she takes the bottle, and she’s as good as a hangel if you jumpses her up and down a bit when she yells. Do take ’er, laidy, if it’s only for ternite. I kin doss anywhere—under a barrer or hon a doorstep, or hup a yard, I don’t mind; but it ’ud kill her, and I ain’t got not no money to buy ’er no milk, and, oh, laidy—do take my baby in. Yer will, won’tcher?’

Miss Priscilla had listened in open-eyed amazement at the boy’s long speech. He had never stopped to let her get a word in. He pleaded his cause with feverish anxiety,

and only stopped at last when a fit of coughing shook his feeble little frame.

'My poor boy,' exclaimed Miss Priscilla, 'I—er—really don't know what to say—why have you left your home? Why have you taken the baby with you? It's a dreadful thing to do.'

'Is it?' said the boy, almost fiercely. 'Is it? If you'd 'ad a little sister, and you knowed it was goin' to be murdered, and you loved it, wouldn't you try to save its life? P'raps you never 'ad no sister?'

The tears came into Miss Priscilla's eyes. The poor little ragged urchin was terribly in earnest. This was no imposture, no plot to impose upon her kind heart, she was sure of that. But she hardly felt justified in taking in a baby which a boy confessed he had run away from home with.

'What do you mean by saying it would be murdered?' she said, after a moment's silence, during which she was really wondering what to do with the baby and the boy. 'Who would murder it?'

'I ain't a-goin' to say, so don't arsk me. I ain't a-goin' to get nobody pinched for it, not me.'

'Pinched!'

'Yuss, took to gaol, for they could be, I know that. I give you my word, laidy. I heard suthin this afternoon, and I know as they'd do it. Keep 'er ternite, marm, and I'll come for 'er to-morrer and take 'er away agin, if you like. I——'

The boy suddenly put his hand to his mouth. When he took it away it was tinged with blood.

'Good gracious, my poor boy!' cried Miss Priscilla, jumping up. 'You are ill. You——'

'Oh, it's nuffink, laidy. I'm often took like that. It's kersumption, they say. I shan't live long. I heerd 'em

say that at the orspital, but it don't matter to 'em about me, you see. I haint 'shured, but she what ain't zackly married to father, she's 'shured the baby and——'

A gleam of light suddenly came to Miss Priscilla. She had heard some terrible tales at one of the meetings in aid of the agitation for an Act for the better protection of children.

'Little boy,' she said, 'you can trust me. Tell me the truth. You heard something which makes you think that your little sister will be got rid of—neglected—allowed to die, by someone who wants the money she is insured for—is that it?'

'Will yer take yer dyin' oath yer won't never tell no one?' said the boy, looking anxiously, half doubtingly, as it were, in Miss Priscilla's face.

'I don't take oaths, my boy,' replied Miss Priscilla. 'That is wicked; but I give you my promise that I'll keep your secret if you trust me with it.'

'I believe yer,' whispered the boy. 'You're kind and good. I'm sure on it. Yuss, that's what it is. I heerd my father and that woman a-torkin, and she said 'as the baby was wuth money if it was dead, and only corsted money alive, and it was in the way when I was at the Bord School, and not 'ome to nuss it and look arter it, and then they said *as they meant to have the money*, and I waited, and when they was gond out together to the puberlick 'ouse I took the baby and wropped it up and I rund away with it. They kin kill me if they like, but I ain't goin' to see no 'arm come to the young un.'

* * * * *

Five minutes afterwards Mary, who gave notice for the tenth time, then and there was despatched to the house of a charwoman, with a large family, skilled in the art of nursing, and bidden to bring her back at once, and that

night the stolen baby fared better than it had ever done in its unhappy little life before.

And that night a ragged little boy slept on a sofa wheeled up to the kitchen fire, after partaking of a basin of the most delightful mixture he had ever tasted ; and that night Mary the housemaid lay awake, feeling her injuries so great that it was impossible to sleep upon them, and her last coherent utterance before she finally dozed off was that if the place was 'goin' to be a fondling 'ospital as well as a 'ome for lost dogs and cats,' she'd sooner forfeit a month's wages than stop another hour in it.

But Mary thought better of it in the morning and stopped, consoling herself with again giving notice, and the boy stopped, and the baby stopped.

The poor little fellow wanted to go in the morning, but Miss Priscilla wouldn't hear of it. He was too ill. She sent for the doctor, and the doctor came and shook his head, and told Miss Priscilla it was only a question of months—at the most of a year.

'Then he shall stay with me and end his poor little life in peace,' exclaimed Miss Priscilla, the tears in her kind old eyes.

And the boy stayed, and grew happier and happier, and weaker and weaker, and Miss Priscilla would sit and read to him and talk to him of all the wonderful things he had never heard of, or had never rightly understood. But his greatest joy was when the baby was brought to him—his little sister, whose life he had saved ; and when he saw how well and bonny his dear baby was looking, he would give a little sigh of joy, and tell Miss Priscilla that he could die happy now that he knew his little sister was safe, and he had kept his promise to the poor mother he would never see again.

He did die happy. He died with one hand clasping Miss

Priscilla's, and the other laid gently on his baby sister's cheek, as they held her to him for his dying eyes to see.

Before he died he called Miss Priscilla to him, and told her how it was no inquiry had ever been made for him and the child, and how it was that she never need fear that the baby would be sought for and taken from her.

He had left a rudely-scrawled letter behind him—something written in his best School Board hand on a dirty half-sheet of paper.

It was only a few words, but it told his father that he had overheard 'that woman's' oath to get the baby's insurance money, and it registered a boyish oath to 'peach' on both of them if they tried to recapture the little victim he had saved from being slowly but surely done to death for the sake of a few pounds, which the guilty wretches would only squander in drink.

The poor little lad's rough, ill-spelt note didn't say all that, but it meant it, and probably the wretched woman and her accomplice understood it, and were satisfied to be rid of both their 'encumbrances.'

Miss Priscilla has the baby still, and she will keep it as long as she lives. Every year it grows prettier and gentler, and the lonely home is bright with childish laughter, and even Mary is soothed by it, and has left off giving notice.

But there is no childish laughter on certain days in the year, when the little girl and Miss Priscilla go hand-in-hand to a great cemetery near London, and seek out a little gravestone in a quiet corner, and reverently lay upon it, with tearful eyes, a handful of wild-flowers, gathered in the fields and meadows that the little sleeper never saw.

THE MURDERER'S DOG.

IN the winter of the year 1887 I spent a few weeks in Madrid.

I had 'descended,' as the French say, at the Fonda de la Paz, the hotel principally patronized by English and American tourists.

The rooms allotted to me, in return for a payment of forty pesetas a day, were on a second floor, and commanded an uninterrupted view of the famous Puerta del Sol, the principal public thoroughfare of the capital. From my balcony a perpetual panorama of Spanish life unfolded itself before me, and the scene was always *égayante* and interesting.

There was only one drawback to the many advantages the situation of my apartments conferred upon me, and that was the perpetual noise.

Life on the Puerta del Sol commences about 5 a.m. and leaves off about 3 a.m.

Up till 2 a.m. the newspaper boys continue to shout their special editions, and the vendors of oranges, lemonade, and sweetmeats to yell their wares, and the traffic never ceases at all.

At first I found it difficult to sleep at all through the continuous uproar, but gradually I grew accustomed to it, and then even a dozen newsboys yelling, 'A horrible

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murder !' under my window all night long failed to keep me awake.

One gets at last so accustomed to noise that it is its cessation which interferes with your repose.

I have had this experience often—the most notable instance was when for a whole fortnight I lived in a hotel in Covent Garden. My bedroom window then looked right upon the space immediately in front of the market, and all night long the heavy carts rolled up over the great stones, and the horses' hoofs clattered, and the drivers and the market-porters shouted, creating between them a perfect pandemonium.

Singularly enough, after a night or two, the incessant noise ceased to interfere with my rest. It was only on Saturday nights, when the place was as silent as the grave, that I lay and tossed from side to side. I *missed* the noise, and that kept me awake.

I have only mentioned this circumstance because it is exactly on all fours with my experience when I lived on the Puerta del Sol in Madrid.

One day, after returning from a bull-fight at which 'all Madrid,' including the queen-regent, had assisted, I found quite a large crowd gathered round the entrance to my hotel, and a number of people in the crowd were talking at the top of their voices, and gesticulating violently. The hotel interpreter was standing calmly surveying the scene in the most approved and dignified Spanish manner, and, pushing my way through the people until I reached him, I begged him to explain to me what was the matter.

'It is nothing,' he said quietly; 'only that man yonder in the long cloak is a murderer, and he is being stared at by the crowd.'

'A murderer !' I exclaimed. 'Then how is it he is not in custody ?'

'He has been. He has come out of prison to-day.'

'He has been released?'

'No; he has had leave of absence to attend the bull-fight. Instead of returning to prison, as he should have done, he has taken a stroll on to the Puerta. The people have recognised him, and so now he is waiting here until the police come to take him to prison again. Some of the crowd might annoy him if he walked away.'

I went upstairs to my room, and from my balcony I saw the dénouement of this little incident of Spanish everyday life. In about five minutes the police arrived; and, under a strong escort, the murderer was taken away, and politely conducted back to prison.

As he stood in the centre of the officers, I had a good opportunity of observing his features. I took a mental note of them, and registered them on my memory.

That evening the interpreter accompanied me to a café-chantant in a low quarter of the town, where it was dangerous for a foreigner to go alone.

In the intervals of the entertainment (one which would have roused Mr. County Councillor MacDougall to frenzy) my interpreter told me the story of the murderer of whose rescue from the mob I had been an eye-witness that afternoon.

Don Roderigo C—— was awaiting his trial for the murder of his wife under peculiarly atrocious circumstances. The poor woman had aroused his jealousy by some thoughtless act, and after a violent quarrel he had confessed that his suspicions were groundless, and he was quite satisfied with her explanation.

But on the morning after the quarrel, while she was sleeping calmly by his side, he had deliberately stabbed her to death with his navaja, a murderous, long-bladed knife, which is to the Spaniard what the stiletto is to the Italian.

For this murder he was arrested, and was awaiting his trial, when he obtained a day's holiday from an official of the prison to go and see the bull-fight.

The temporary release of a prisoner under such circumstances seems incredible to Englishmen ; but the custom of letting prisoners out of gaol is a very common one in Spain, where the gaol discipline is extremely lax, and most of the officials are corrupt.

A case occurred only a year or two since, in which an old lady was found murdered and robbed in Madrid, and for a long time the case was shrouded in mystery. The son, a notorious spendthrift and keeper of bad company, would have been suspected, but he was already in prison on a charge of swindling.

But one fine day this son had a quarrel with his gaoler, whom he nearly strangled, and whom, in his rage, he accused of being a scoundrel. Mutual recriminations followed, and at last it came out that on the day the old lady was murdered the gaoler had allowed his prisoner to leave the prison, on condition that he returned the next morning. The price of this favour was to be a thousand pesetas.

On the following morning the prisoner duly returned, but in the meantime he had gone secretly to his mother's apartment and murdered and robbed her—the thousand pesetas he handed his gaoler were part of the plunder.

But to return to my murderer. I have in my possession a collection of photographs connected with famous criminal cases, and a whole album full of the portraits of ladies and gentlemen who have qualified themselves for admission to the Chamber of Horrors. I mentioned this fact to my guide, and told him I should very much like to add a Spanish murderer to my collection. I was assured that my desire could easily be gratified, as Don Roderigo's photo-

was being exposed for sale in one of the principal shops in Madrid. On the following day the photograph was in my possession.

A few nights afterwards, returning very late to my hotel, I met an English friend, a well-known impresario who had come to Madrid to hear an operatic star who was then singing at the opera-house.

We adjourned to my rooms, and sat talking and smoking until far into the night. When my friend left me I flung my windows open to let out the smoke, and stepped out into the balcony.

There was plenty of life in the Puerta still, and I stood and finished my cigar and watched the cloaked Spaniards, looking like conspirators in a comic opera as they flitted past me in the moonlight.

Suddenly my attention was attracted by a man who was dragging a large black poodle dog after him by a string, and swearing at it and kicking it.

I had noticed the same man walking up and down in front of our hotel with a dog before, and I understood that he was a dog-dealer.

I had never seen the dog before, but I saw at once that it was a valuable one. Pitying the poor beast for falling into such hands, I closed my window and went to bed.

The next day, when I went out, the dog-dealer was outside the hotel, and he was still accompanied by the poodle. The man came up to me, and, addressing me in Spanish, asked me to buy the dog.

One of those odd impulses for which one cannot always account seized me, and I thought I would buy the dog, if only to save such a handsome fellow from cruel treatment. I called the hotel interpreter to my aid, and the bargain was eventually struck. I paid a good deal more than the dog was worth; but I have no doubt the interpreter added

a good percentage to the price for himself. He informed me that the dog was formerly the property of the murderer I had seen on the previous evening. After his arrest it had been bought by the dealer who had now sold it to me.

'You are fond of curiosities, señor,' said the interpreter. 'You have one now, for you have a murderer's dog!'

'A murderer's dog!' I said to myself. 'It doesn't sound pretty, but I suppose the animal hasn't acquired any of his master's bad habits.'

As soon as I had paid the money, I took the dog up to my room and coaxed him and petted him, and we soon became good friends. But as I did not want to drag a poodle through Spain with me, I made inquiries as to the best way of sending him to England with a certainty of his being well looked after on the journey.

Fortunately, I discovered an English coachman who was taking some horses to England, and to him I entrusted my new purchase, whom, in honour of his nationality, I had christened 'Don.'

* * * * *

In the spring of the year 1889 I was walking through Leicester Square with Don, when my attention was attracted by his running and barking around a man whose face seemed familiar to me.

'Where have I seen that face before?' I said to myself; and then it suddenly occurred to me that the man in Leicester Square was very like the Madrid murderer whose dog I had bought.

Before I could get near enough to take a good look at him he was lost in the crowd.

When I went home that afternoon, I took out the portrait of Don Roderigo, and looked at it carefully.

It was a most extraordinary resemblance.

'Don,' I said to the poodle, who was now my constant companion, 'Don, my boy, I believe that was your old master.'

Don wagged his tail.

But, when I came to think it out, I felt sure that I must have been deceived by an accidental likeness. The man who murdered his wife must either have received 'La Garotte' long ago, or be working out his sentence in a Spanish prison.

It was about a fortnight later that one evening at the opera, while glancing round the house through my opera-glasses, I uttered an exclamation of surprise.

Seated in a box by the side of a beautiful girl was the man who was so like Don's master.

Seated in the next stall to me was a friend of mine who knows 'everybody' in London.

I asked him if he knew the occupants of the box.

'Oh yes,' he said: 'the old gentleman standing at the back of the box is a Mr. Tomkins, a retired tradesman, very wealthy man, rose from nothing, made his money out of a sauce, I believe. The young lady is his only daughter—pretty girl, isn't she? The foreigner is a Spaniard—Don Pedro del Campo his name is.'

'Know anything about him?'

'Not much. He gives himself out as a Spaniard of fortune, and is supposed to come from South America. He's engaged to Miss Tomkins—met her, I believe, at Nice this winter. Father doesn't like him, but the girl is madly in love with him.'

'Seems to be a little mystery about him, eh? Is he in a good set over here?'

'No. But there's no doubt he's wealthy. Old Tomkins is a business-like man. I believe he required a banker's reference before he consented to the marriage.'

I left the opera that night determined to find out something about Don Pedro del Campo.

I had paid a good deal more attention to him all the evening than I had to the opera, and I had become convinced that he was none other than the man I had seen in custody in Madrid for the murder of his wife.*

My first inquiries were so far satisfactory. Don Pedro was a man of wealth. There was no doubt that his wealth came from South America. He lived in good style in London, and his credit was excellent.

I thought I would find out if Don Roderigo's fate was known in Madrid, so I wrote to a friend there, and from him I received the following information.

Don Roderigo was found guilty, with extenuating circumstances, and condemned to several years' imprisonment.

Some six months later he saved the governor of the prison from an attack made upon him by a convict, and assisted the officers to quell a revolt. For this he was pardoned on condition he left the country. It was rumoured that directly after his release he inherited a fortune from a brother who died in South America.

Don Pedro del Campo was Don Roderigo the murderer ! I was sure of it.

But how was I to prove it ?

I found out the places Don Pedro was in the habit of frequenting, his hours of going out, etc., and one day I stationed myself outside his house near Hyde Park about eleven o'clock.

I had Don with me.

About ten minutes past eleven Don Pedro came out. I followed him a little way, then passed him, having the dog on a lead.

I thought the dog seemed excited as he passed the Spaniard. He sniffed and cocked his ears up.

Presently I loosed the dog, and he ran back and began to bark and jump up at Don Pedro.

I called the dog to me, and, raising my hat, apologized for my dog's attentions.

In fairly good English Don Pedro assured me that no harm was done.

'This dog is a countryman of yours,' I said.

'Indeed!'

Don Pedro looked at the dog more attentively.

'Yes; I bought him in Madrid two years ago. He was the dog of Don Roderigo, who murdered his wife.'

Don Pedro looked at me nervously; then he looked hard at the dog, who still whined and barked and attempted to caress his late master.

The Spaniard's face went ashy white for a moment, but he regained his composure.

'Call your dog off!' he said angrily. 'I am afraid of dogs.'

Then he turned round and walked rapidly away.

That afternoon I took a bold and decided step.

I called on Mr. Tomkins, and told him my story. The old gentleman was horrified, and declared he would at once demand an explanation of his future son-in-law.

'A murderer!' he exclaimed. 'Great heavens, what a fate for my child!'

As I was leaving the house with Don, who had accompanied me, we met Don Pedro on the steps. He was about to call.

When he saw the dog he uttered an exclamation of surprise, and, muttering something in Spanish, walked hurriedly away from the door.

A week afterwards I received a letter of thanks from Mr. Tomkins. Don Pedro had written to say that business had necessitated his immediate return to South America, and

under these circumstances he resigned all claim to the hand of Miss Tomkins.

The young lady was inconsolable for a time ; but when she learned that her hero was a wife-murderer she gradually recovered her spirits and felt that she had had a lucky escape.

I still have Don, and I never look at him without thinking how astounded his master must have been when he came sniffing about his legs near the Park. When you commit a murder in Madrid you don't expect the dog you left behind you there to come suddenly barking and frisking around you in London.

THE FOURSTARS FAMILY.

CHAPTER I.

THE GAS.

THE Earl of Fourstars sat alone in the great dining-room of Fourstars Court. It was ten long years since he had disinherited and cast off for ever the last of his children, and he was beginning to feel lonely.

A portrait of his wife, painted by a German artist, who had been made fashionable by the patronage of royalty, hung over the fireplace.

The earl, who had been sitting moodily with his eyes cast down upon the ground, suddenly raised them in order to contemplate the ceiling, and his gaze was arrested midway by the picture of the countess.

‘Ah, Euphrosyne!’ he exclaimed, ‘perhaps I was wrong, after all. I dare say I was hasty, and when I put you outside the front door that bitter winter morning, and told you never to let me see your face again, I acted inconsiderately. But why—oh! why would you always side with the children against me?’

At that moment the butler entered.

Gostage, the butler, had been a servant in the Fourstars family all his life. His mother was a Fourstars housemaid and married a Fourstars gardener. He was devotedly

attached to the earl, and firmly believed that the world consisted of the Fourstars family and a lot of nobodies.

‘Beg pardon, my lord,’ said Gostage, ‘but there’s been another houtrage.’

‘Indeed,’ said his lordship. ‘What is it this time?’

‘Well, my lord, I hardly like to tell you—it is *such* a houtrage; but the gas-collector called this hafternoon while your lordship was out, and he left a most impertinent message.’

‘What did he say?’

‘Well, my lord, I humbly ask your pardon for repeating such impudence, but the person said that he wasn’t a-going to call again, and if the amount due wasn’t forwarded before twelve o’clock to-morrow, he’d—he’d——’

‘Well, well, what would he do?’ exclaimed his lordship impatiently.

‘Well, your lordship, I hardly like to mention such a thing after the years I’ve been in the family, but he said if you didn’t pay he’d cut your lordship’s gas off!’

‘Ah,’ sighed his lordship. ‘I expected it. We live in democratic and communistic days, Gostage!’

‘We do, indeed, my lord; the country’s going to the dogs, and I can’t understand it with a Conservative Government in power. Now, if it was old Gladstone——’

‘Yes, yes, then we could understand it, couldn’t we, Gostage? But when, under a Conservative Government, a peer’s gas ceases to be sacred, we may expect anything to happen.’

‘Indeed, we may, my lord, and that’s just what I said to Mrs. Gostage, my lord. “Sarah,” I said, “if they cut his lordship’s gas off, the next thing they’ll do will be to summon his lordship for the poor rates.”’

‘They have done so, Gostage,’ replied his lordship, taking a summons from his pocket.

Gostage, although he was gratified that the spirit of prophecy had been so strong upon him, was yet visibly distressed when he caught sight of the blue paper.

'Oh, my lord!' he exclaimed, tears running down his honest face, 'you don't mean to say they have took that liberty?'

'They have not only taken the liberty, but I expect, if I don't pay, they'll take the spoons and forks. But I've a week to attend to this summons—the gas is a more immediate matter. What is the amount?'

'Thirty-two, fourteen, six, my lord.'

Lord Fourstars drew his purse from his pocket, opened it and counted the contents.

'My available cash at the present moment is five pounds and sixpence. Wait one moment—let me be strictly accurate. I have two postage stamps—five pounds and eightpence.'

'But your lordship can draw a cheque?' exclaimed the butler.

'Yes, I might, but it would be wasting the penny stamp upon it. The bank would not honour it. My account is already overdrawn nearly fifty pounds, and the bank has given me notice that they cannot allow any further irregularity.'

'I have a few pounds upstairs, my lord——'

'No, no, Gostage—you are a good fellow and a faithful servant, but your wages are already two years in arrears, and I must leave you something to live on when I am gathered to my fathers.'

'Thank you, my lord. Ah! if there were only more masters like you!'

'We must keep the gas going, Gostage, because I hate candles, and I can't see in the dark. I think you had better take the spoons and forks and a couple of candlesticks to Jones to-morrow.'

'The pawnbrokers, my lord!' exclaimed Gostage, the cold beads of perspiration standing on his brow.

'Yes, he will not be astonished. I have hitherto done the pawning that has been necessary myself, but it has been confined to jewellery and things that I could easily carry about me concealed from observation. I don't care to walk into the pawnbroker's with the plate-basket on my arm.'

'Very well, my lord,' said Gostage, with difficulty restraining his sobs. 'It shall be as you wish; but I never thought that I should live to see the day when your lordship's spoons and forks would go to your lordship's uncle.'

CHAPTER II.

LONG after the faithful Gostage had retired to rest with the plate-basket under the bed, Lord Fourstars sat in his lonely halls and brooded o'er the past.

Still hale and hearty, and barely sixty, he was alone in the world.

One by one he had driven his children from beneath his roof.

They wanted to earn their own livings. They had become impregnated with the democratic ideas of the age. The eldest son, Lord Doubledash, took in the *Star*, and played billiards with a Home Rule M.P. The second son, The Hon. Richard, a mere child, was constantly in the stables with the groom and the one horse which the earl jobbed from a livery stable. He was a bold rider, and was in the habit of riding the horse down to the village green, and letting it out to excursionists and cheap trippers at sixpence an hour. With the money he made in this way he paid the

village tailor for a suit of clothes, for which his father had owed for three years.

'I have worn out the clothes. I will pay for them,' he said proudly.

When the earl heard of it, he ordered Richard out of the house, and forbade the family ever to mention his name again.

The boy was proud, and went.

Lord Doubledash, the eldest son, pleaded for his little boy brother. He declared that it was more honourable to trade and pay than to do nothing and owe. Heedless of the furious glance which the earl cast at him, he went on to say that he himself had made enough money to defray his college expenses, and had done so.

'How did you make it?' shrieked the earl, clutching at the mantelshelf for support.

'I made a little book at the Fourstars Arms on the Leger,' replied the young lord proudly. 'An outsider won, and I skinned the lamb.'

The earl fell down in an apoplectic fit. When he recovered, he sent for the family solicitor, cut off the entail, and, taking his heir by the collar, flung him out into the night.

'Never darken my doors again!' he exclaimed. And although the doors were oak, and black with age, the young lord never did.

Left alone with his wife and daughter, the Lady Arabella, the earl became gloomy and despondent. He no longer had the energy to let himself out as a director of public companies, or to write testimonials for patent medicines, and so his income was seriously diminished. There are so few things that a nobleman can do who respects the traditions of his order, and the Earl of Fourstars not only respected, but venerated them.

The butcher, the baker and the grocer valued the

Fourstars custom too much to press for payment of their accounts, although they were several years overdue; but when, one day, in a Radical paper, it was stated that the earl was having his soap and candles sent down from the Co-operative Stores in London, and paying cash for them, an indignation meeting was held in the bar-parlour of the Fourstars Arms. The meeting was the work of a Socialist agitator, who was on tour with a Society-for-the-Abolition-of-the-House-of-Lords van.

That night, every tradesman in the village was enrolled in the League, and paid half a crown for a ticket of membership. The next day the van drove off, and the village tradesmen sent in their bills with a request for immediate payment.

‘It is infamous!’ exclaimed the earl. ‘There is no longer any respect for law and order in the country. Another year, and I could have pleaded the Statute of Limitations.’

That afternoon the Lady Arabella met the butcher’s wife, and the butcher’s wife didn’t curtsy.

‘Why do you not curtsy as usual?’ said the Lady Arabella.

‘Because your pa owes my husband for six years’ meat. Them as pays their way have no need to curtsy to them as don’t.’

‘That is quite true,’ replied the Lady Arabella, and she went home and sought an interview with her father.

It was a stormy one.

The Lady Arabella declared that she would no longer eat meat that was not paid for. Kissing her mother affectionately, she packed her box, asked the housemaid to help her carry it to the station, and set out in the world to earn her own living.

The countess, who had long secretly mourned for the

departure of her sons, was broken-hearted when her daughter left.

‘Henessey,’ she said, ‘is it not possible for us to live within our income, and retain the respect of our children?’

‘We have no income except my directors’ fees, and what I get for the use of my name on the prospectuses of public companies.’

‘But surely, dear, that is enough to enable us to live in lodgings and pay our way?’

The earl rose from his seat trembling with passion.

‘Live in lodgings!’ he yelled. ‘What next? Why not propose that you put a card in the parlour window—
“Mangling done by the Countess of Fourstars.”’

‘I should not object to do a little mangling, dear, but I should prefer dressmaking. I have a taste for that, and there is more money to be earned.’

A dressmaker—his countess a dressmaker!

With the light of madness in his eyes, the earl took his wife by the shoulders and pushed her out of the front-door.

‘Go, woman!’ he shrieked—‘go, and be a dressmaker, and never darken my doors again!’

The earl, you see, was very strict in the matter of having his doors darkened.

From that hour, no rumour of the whereabouts of any member of his family had penetrated Fourstars Court. The earl read no newspapers, and sternly refused to receive any information. At first the family wrote to him, but their letters were burned unopened.

The earl had managed to rub along on his directors’ fees, etc., but these were not enough to enable him to pay his tradespeople, and now these tradespeople were beginning to clamour. The social agitator, who travelled with a van, caused a revolution in the village. Directly it was known that the butcher had issued a writ, the baker and the grocer

followed suit. The spoons and the forks and the candlesticks saved the gas, but a man came into possession for the poors rate, and at last Fourstars Court was full of brokers' men.

The earl refused to meet them, and had a bed made up for himself in the summer-house. On the morrow he would have to leave even that, for the estate had been sold at auction, and the new proprietor was about to arrive.

At four o'clock one bright autumn afternoon a carriage and pair dashed up to the gates, and a man of about thirty leaped out and rang the bell.

Gostage, who was living at the lodge, opened the gates, and for a moment blinked. He was blinded by the brilliancy of the diamonds in the visitor's scarfpin.

'Don't you know me, Gostage?' exclaimed the stranger.

'Good 'evins!' exclaimed Gostage. 'Are my eyes deceiving me, or is it Lord Doubledash?'

'You can put a monkey on that, Gostage,' replied the viscount. 'I've bought the estate, cash down, and I'm coming to live here.'

Lord Doubledash strolled into the grounds. His father came from the summer-house trembling with passion.

'How dare you?' he exclaimed.

'It's all right, dad!' exclaimed Doubledash. 'I've bought the place, and I've come to ask you a favour.'

'Speak, sir; but I warn you——'

'Oh, it's all right. I'm going to turn myself into a public company. I'm a bookmaker — Doubledash, the Leviathan. I make £50,000 a year profit.'

'A bookmaker? How disgraceful!'

'I've secured all the directors, but we want a chairman for Doubledash and Co., Turf Accountants, Limited. Come, governor, I'll qualify you, and the salary of the chairman will be £2,000 a year.'

'Ah, a public company! I see. Of course, that removes the stigma of trade. Yes, I will be chairman. Can you give me half a year's salary on account?'

Lord Doubledash pressed a thousand-pound note into his father's hand.

At that moment a tremendous cheer was heard outside. A dapper little fellow had ridden up on a thoroughbred horse. The crowd had recognised him as The Hon. Richard, the celebrated light-weight jockey, who was reported to make £100,000 a year.

Richard leapt from his horse and entered the grounds.

'Well, governor!' he exclaimed, flicking his boots with his riding-whip, 'how are you? Sorry to hear that you're stony, but Doubledash and I will soon put that right.'

'My son—a jockey!' groaned the earl.

'Yes, they call me the Fred Archer of to-day, and by the time I'm too heavy to ride I shall have put by a million. What do you think of that? Now, look here, governor. The Ebor Handicap is run this afternoon. I'll put you on a good thing. Back Silver Spur for a thousand. Doubledash'll lay you starting price; won't you, Doubledash?'

'Well,' said the noble bookmaker, 'not on the nod; but if it's to be cash——'

'Go on,' whispered the noble jockey. 'Give him that thou. you've got in your hand. It's a cert.'

Lord Fourstars took his jockey son's tip, and handed his bookmaker son his own thousand-pound note back again.

Just then, the winner came up on the tape

Silver Spur, 1. Starting price, 10 to 1.

'I always pay directly after the race!' exclaimed Lord Doubledash; and he handed his father eleven thousand-pound notes.

'My dear boys,' said the earl, tears of joy flowing down his cheeks, 'embrace me!'

Thus were father and sons reconciled.

An hour later, the countess arrived on a four-in-hand, driven by Lady Arabella.

'Well, pa,' said Arabella, 'we heard of your trouble, and I've brought ma to see you.'

'Arabella, what means this costume?' said the earl.

His daughter was dressed in a suit of cricketing flannels, and carried a bat over her shoulder.

'It means, papa, that I am captain of a professional eleven of lady cricketers. I am running the show myself, and our share of the gate-money averages £10,000 a year.'

'And you, my wife,' said his lordship. 'How came you with a four-in-hand?'

'You see, dear, it's like this,' replied the countess, blushing: 'I went to London and established myself as a dressmaker. Now I have an enormous business, and I make most of the dresses for the drawing-rooms.'

'My wife a dressmaker! Oh, how awful!'

'Listen, dear,' interrupted the countess. 'I have now establishments not only in London, but in Paris, Vienna, and New York. It is too much for me. I am turning it into a public company. If you will be a director, I will qualify you, and you can make £1,500 a year in directors' fees.'

'A public company! Ah, that is so different to a retail business. Yes, I will be a director, and you can give me as many shares as you like.'

That night bonfires were lighted on the village green; all the tradespeople had been paid, and the estates remained in the Fourstars family.

And the proud father sat at the head of his table opposite his dressmaker wife, and exchanged loving glances with his

cricketer daughter and his bookmaker heir and his jockey son.

‘After all,’ he said to Gostage, as that worthy fellow came in to put out the gas, ‘after all, Gostage, there is no harm in a nobleman earning his living, if he earns a good one; and my wife and eldest son being turned into public companies, I can share the profits with an easy conscience.’

And he did.

JOHN HARBINGER.

JOHN HARBINGER sat in his little back parlour nursing the baby.

He was nursing the baby because the 'missis' was busy in the shop.

It wanted only a week to Christmas, and it was time for John's little sweetstuff shop to be put in Christmas order. Now, John didn't understand very much of the business. He could weigh out an ounce of sugar-plums or cocoa-nut ice or hardbake, and he had a nice pleasant way with the children who came in with their farthings and their half-pennies. His voice was very soft and musical, and he had a kind, gentle look that made the children feel quite at home with him at once. He had a way of saying, 'What's for you, my little dear,' to a tiny tot whose head barely reached to the counter, and who had to stretch her plump little hand up with the halfpenny clutched in her baby fingers for John to take it, that put her at her ease at once, and enabled her to express herself with much more clearness as to her desires than she would have been able to had the gruff and grumpy Mrs. McGrudder, who kept a rival shop on the other side of the road, made the inquiry.

Mrs. McGrudder had a larger shop than the Harbingers. Moreover, she had 'a good connection,' and frequently took orders for 'a quarter of a pound' of sweets at a time.

The young ladies and gentlemen of the neighbourhood dealt with Mrs. McGrudder, and their mammas and their governesses came to Mrs. McGrudder, who not only dealt in lollipops and bull's-eyes in the ordinary acceptation of the term, but also displayed a large assortment of bonbons, the very names of which were sufficient to alarm children of neglected education.

Mrs. McGrudder had the custom of the poorer children until the Harbingers opened their shop, because it was Hobson's choice. But the halfpenny customers were never received with the same cordiality as the young masters and misses who spent their twopences, their threepences, and occasionally their sixpences. If there was one thing Mrs. McGrudder, who was the widow of a police-sergeant, and, it is rumoured, had at one time occupied the proud position of female searcher, was proud of, it was her aristocratic connection. The 'quality' dealt with her, and Mrs. McGrudder worshipped quality. Now, it wasn't quality the halfpenny customers wanted, but quantity, and the boys especially took up a great deal of Mrs. McGrudder's valuable time. They were a long time making up their minds as to what they would have for their halfpenny, and they were not to be put off with gelatines or carraway comfits and acid drops. They would enter into arguments with Mrs. McGrudder on the subject of chocolate creams, and nougat, and fruits glacés. They didn't see why Mrs. McGrudder couldn't make a ha'porth of the best-looking sweets just as easily as she could make a ha'porth of pear-drops or gelatines.

And while they were arguing the point sometimes a nicely-dressed little girl would come in with her mamma, and then Mrs. McGrudder would lose her patience, and tell the vulgar and ill-dressed little boy to be off, and turn with smiles and smirks to her fashionable clients. She

felt that the presence of the untidy little boys and girls, who would put their dirty little fingers on the counter, was calculated to shock and distress the 'quality,' and perhaps make them imagine that she did a low and common trade.

It was, therefore, a great relief to the 'common' children when suddenly a modest little shop opened on the opposite side of the street, and they discovered that the proprietor and his wife were nice kind people, who took a halfpenny with a smile, said 'Thank you,' and didn't bustle their juvenile customers who liked to have a good look round at all the tempting dainties before finally deciding in which to invest their modest capital. John Harbinger, or 'Muster 'Arbinger,' as he was generally called in the neighbourhood, was an especial favourite with the children. Indeed, they presumed on his kindness and gentleness sometimes so far as to want two separate kinds of lollipops for their halfpenny—a farthing's worth of this and a farthing's worth of that.

The children, finding that they were welcomed and treated civilly and allowed plenty of time to make up their minds, deserted Mrs. McGrudder altogether, and bestowed their entire patronage on the Harbingers, and by-and-by their parents came in with them, and then a few of the richer children came in, and in a couple of years the Harbingers had established quite a nice little business, the shop being always clean and the stock 'attractive.'

Nobody in the neighbourhood knew where the Harbingers came from. Even Mrs. McGrudder had failed to find out anything of their past history. Two of the travellers from the wholesale houses called at both shops for orders, but neither of them could give Mrs. McGrudder any information. They thought that the Harbingers were new to the business when they came, for they didn't seem to know any of the trade terms. But Mrs. Harbinger, who was a

smart little woman, had soon picked up the technicalities, and now, in the words of one of the travellers aforesaid, 'she was smarter than many of the old hands.'

The Harbingers had been four years in the little sweet-stuff shop on the eventful day that John sat nursing his baby in the back parlour. Mrs. Harbinger was decorating the window, and setting out the special goods to make a Christmas show. Nobody, surely, ever arranged sugar jugs and sugar eggs and chocolate cigars and Christmas-tree ornaments with such marvellous effect as Lily Harbinger. John declared that she had 'regular fairy fingers,' and when the window was fully dressed, and it grew dark and the gas was lighted in the window, John said it looked quite like fairyland.

The Christmas show brought plenty of extra customers, although it wanted fully a week to Christmas. The children's pennies and halfpennies burnt holes in their pockets as soon as their eyes fell upon the delightful white sugar pigs, and pink sugar harps, and yellow Christmas crowns—and there was soon quite a clamouring little crowd waiting to be served.

About nine o'clock the trade began to slacken, and John, who had been serving, went into the parlour, where Lily was getting the supper ready. The baby had gone to bed long ago, and so had the other children—little John and little Lily.

'Well, Lil,' said John, rubbing his hands, 'we're doing better every day.'

'Yes,' replied his wife, looking up lovingly at her husband, 'we've had nothing but good-luck, John dear, since we came here.'

'Thank God!' exclaimed John reverently.

'Thank God,' replied his wife, a shadow for a moment passing over her pretty face.

'Lil,' said the man, taking his wife's hand gently in his, 'you're thinking how different it might have been if——'

'Hush, John dear! We're not going to speak of that again. It's buried in the past, dear, and only a dream now.'

'Yes, only a dream now, but it was an awful reality then. To-day, while I was nursing dear baby, it all came back to me of a sudden, that awful night, and for a moment I was afraid of myself. I wanted to call you to take the child from me.'

'John, dear John, don't, don't talk like that. You mustn't—indeed, you mustn't. You have been the best of husbands—the best of fathers—and——'

'Someone in the shop,' said John, interrupting her, as the sound of money tapped on the counter attracted his attention.

'I'll go,' said Lily.

'No, no, dear; you're tired. I'll go.'

And John pushed open the little glass door, and, walking into the shop, behind the counter, politely asked the customer what he could serve him with.

The customer was a tall, powerfully-built man, of about thirty, with a thick overcoat on, and a travelling-cap pulled down over his eyes.

'I want some cough candy, if you have any—a couple of ounces,' said the man. 'I've got a bit of a cough. Hulloh!'

John, who was looking for the cough candy, looked up astonished; and again the customer exclaimed, 'Hulloh!'

'What's the matter?' said John, somewhat nervously.

The customer stared hard at John, who lowered his eyes and went very red, and then suddenly very white.

'I'm sorry for you, old chap,' said the man; 'but I know you, and I must do my duty. Come, old chap, you remember me.'

'No,' said John faintly, 'I don't.' But he had been

looking intently at his customer; and presently he threw up his arms, and exclaimed, 'God help my poor girl! has come at last, then!'

'I knew I wasn't mistaken,' said the man, not unkindly. 'Now, what am I to do? Will you go back with me quietly, or shall I call the police in?'

'No, no! for God's sake, no!' exclaimed John Harbinger. 'For my poor wife's sake, keep my secret!'

A low cry attracted their attention.

Lily Harbinger was standing at the little glass door. She had seen; she had heard; and she understood.

'Oh, sir, whoever you are, you won't take him from us now. For four years he has been with us—the kindest and gentlest of husbands and fathers.'

'I'm very sorry, ma'am, but I *must* do my duty. I'd ha' given a sovereign out of my own pocket rather than have come in here. But I came, and I've recognised your husband; and it's more than my place and my pension's worth not to take him——'

He had followed John up to the door; the wife beckoned him into the parlour, and closed it.

An hour later, when the shop was shut and the street was all quiet, John Harbinger, dressed for a journey, came out, with a look of blank dismay upon his face and tears in his eyes, and went slowly down the street with the man in the overcoat and travelling-cap.

The man was a warder at Broadmoor. He had been to London with a convict whose time had expired, to make arrangements for his being forwarded to the county asylum; and he had called in at John Harbinger's shop, and recognised John Westropp, a Queen's pleasure man, who had escaped from Broadmoor Asylum four years previously, and of whom all trace had been lost.

John Westropp had only been in the asylum for a year.

His was a sad story. Soon after his marriage the little fortune left him by his father had been lost, owing to the failure of a solicitor who had 'invested' it for him. To drown his grief at the loss of his money, John had taken to drink, and, alas! had brought himself at last to that terrible condition of alcoholism generally known as delirium tremens. One night, when in this condition, he had taken his child from its cradle, and, rushing out of the house with it, had thrown it into the canal. He was going to follow himself, when he was seized by someone who had seen the deed. The child was rescued, and John was dragged off to the police-station.

He was tried for the attempted murder, and acquitted on the ground of insanity, and sent to Broadmoor, to be confined there during her majesty's pleasure.

He had eluded the vigilance of his keepers one day and escaped. He had made his way to his home in the north, found his wife and child, and together they had made their way to London, where they lived for a time, John earning just enough for them to live on by working at the docks, where he passed by the name of Harbinger, which was his wife's maiden name. And then a relative of his wife's died, and left her a little money—just enough to enable them to take the little sweet-stuff shop in London, where we first saw John, nursing his youngest born.

And now, after four years, a warder had recognised him and taken him back to Broadmoor, the Queen's great pleasure-house, the home of the mad murderer and the lunatic criminal.

* * * * *

Mrs. McGrudder was one of the first to hear of Mr. Harbinger's disappearance. It had got about, in some mysterious way, that he had been arrested. Mrs. McGrudder

said she knew how it would be. Folks didn't get on like the Harbingers had done on selling ha'porths of sweets ; and she forthwith sallied across the road, ostensibly to condole with Mrs. Harbinger, but in reality to see what she could find out.

Lily Harbinger was in the shop. She had not closed her eyes all night ; she had only wept, and hugged her little ones to her, and prayed for her lost husband.

But in the morning she conquered her woman's weakness, and said that she would be brave. 'For my children's sake,' she said to herself ; and then, drying her tears, she went downstairs and set about her daily avocations.

She would tell Mrs. McGrudder nothing—only that her husband had unexpectedly had to go into the country.

Mrs. McGrudder tossed her head and went home again. 'She wasn't going to waste no sympathy on them as didn't want it.'

Oh, what a sad week it was to poor Lily Harbinger—the week when everybody around her was preparing for the happy Christmas-time !

But she went about her work bravely, and served in the shop ; only the children's prattle and merry laughter, as they came to spend their pennies and buy things for their Christmas-trees, made her own hopeless sorrow harder to endure.

So Christmas Eve came, and at nine o'clock, worn out and broken-hearted, she closed the shop.

Little John and little Lily had not gone to bed. They had asked to sit up, and she had allowed them to ; she was glad of their company.

The children had at first asked where their father was ; but they had seen that it distressed their mother, who told them he had gone on a journey.

They had accepted her answer, only they saw that their

mother's eyes were always tearful ; and they wondered and were sad.

It was to have been such a happy Christmas for them all !
And now——

The poor little loving wife hid her face in her hands. She could control herself no longer ; and as her children crept up to her, and put their arms about her neck, she let her head fall upon the table, and sobbed aloud.

And then there came a knocking at the outer door.

' See who it is,' she said to the little girl ; ' I—I—can't go.'

The girl went to the door and opened it, and then she gave a cry of joy, and then——

And then John Harbinger held his fainting wife clasped to his breast, and pressed his lips passionately to her pale, tear-stained cheeks ; and when she came to herself. he told her the wonderful news.

* * * * *

It was a happy Christmas Day in the little back parlour after all—the happiest the Harbingers—or shall we say now the Westropps?—had known for years ; for was not the great shadow of their lives lifted from them for ever ?

The doctors at Broadmoor had listened to John Westropp's tale ; they had made inquiries, and found that for four years he had lived respected and esteemed in one place. They had satisfied themselves that he was perfectly sane, and they had given him his discharge and sent him home.

He had been sent to Broadmoor to be detained during her majesty's pleasure. It is not our good Queen's pleasure to keep a sane man in a lunatic asylum.

My story is a true one ; I have but altered names. It is a humane law which does not punish a sane man for the crime he committed when he was not responsible for his

actions. Even had he murdered his child, John Westropp would have been released when he had given sufficient proof of his restoration to perfect sanity again. His story was told to me not so many weeks ago, in Broadmoor itself, as I sat among the poor mad murderers, whom our wise and true humanity bids us pity and tend as patients rather than punish as criminals.

And it was the interpretation of that humanity in its truest and broadest sense which caused John Westropp to be released from the Queen's pleasure-house, and sent home to comfort his loving wife and little ones on Christmas Eve.

HIS WEDDING-DAY.

JOHN WINTERDYKE reckoned himself the happiest man in London. As he sat in his big easy-chair at the window of his bachelor chambers on the Thames Embankment, and looked out at the bright sunshine which lay upon the grimy city like a golden mantle, he dropped into a reverie, and with his eyes half closed he looked back upon the years of his life that had gone.

They had been years full of stern reality, but to-day they seemed to him only as a dream in which the actors flitted by, shadowy and vague, and in which the scenes melted into one another as the scenes flung upon the stretched sheet by the magic-lantern.

He saw himself, a young lad, left fatherless and motherless in a great city, and taken charge of by his aunt, a peevish, fretful widow with a family of her own to bring up on a small income left her by her husband, and such profits as she could make out of a lodging-house in a second-rate street in Marylebone.

Aunt Mellish meant well by her dead sister's child, but, like a good many other well-meaning people, she failed in carrying out her good intentions successfully. Little John Winterdyke was a hungry boy and a growing boy, and these were two grave faults in the eyes of Aunt Mellish. He never seemed to have enough to eat, and he was perpetually growing out of his clothes.

Little John Winterdyke very soon grew to understand that he was an encumbrance and an interloper. He knew that he was an encumbrance when he felt his aunt's eyes on him at meal-times, and he trembled to appear before her when he found his jacket-sleeves receding farther and farther up his arms, and his trousers ascending higher and higher up his legs.

He knew that he was an interloper when he heard his aunt telling her lodgers about the hardness of her lot in having to increase her family with 'her dead sister's child.' So fond was his aunt of expatiating upon this particular grief, that the lodgers grew to refer to little John in conversation among themselves as 'the dead sister's child.'

John himself overheard the second-floor say to the drawing-room; 'Oh, my dear, I had twenty minutes this morning of the "dead sister's child,"' and the drawing-room answered: 'Only twenty minutes—you're lucky! I had an hour of it last night, and she stood with the tea-tray in her hand at the door the whole time.'

He grew in time to feel his position acutely, and his mind was filled with vague ideas of running away to sea, hiring himself out to a street tumbler, or going for a drummer-boy. He was a clever, bright lad, and read everything he could come across in the intervals of preparing his lessons for the day-school which he attended with his two boy cousins. Fortunately, the literature which fell in his way was not the pernicious trash which makes heroes of burglars and pirates, and fills the youthful imagination with a wild desire to die game upon the gallows. Had he fallen across some of the penny dreadfuls which are the delight of the modern errand-boy, he might have settled his future career by running away with the money his aunt had put by for the rent, the second-floor's gold watch and chain, and the drawing-room's diamond ear-rings.

Even at this lapse of time, as John Winterdyke, now a man of fifty, thought of what might have been, a smile passed over his face—a happy, peaceful smile—as there came to him the remembrance of the day when an old gentleman who had apartments in his aunt's house, and who had been clerk for twenty years with a City firm, finding him crying, invited his confidence, and there sprang up between the old man and the boy a friendship which was the foundation of the great success which had been his in life.

The old gentleman, finding the boy clever and straightforward and anxious to make his way in the world, introduced him to the firm, and at the age of fifteen John Winterdyke commenced his City career as office-boy in the house of Ashcroft Brothers, merchants of Eastcheap.

From the moment he saw himself seated for the first time on the high stool in the dingy office in Eastcheap there were few changing scenes in John Winterdyke's reverie. It was always the same office, only the boy grew up and moved from the office to the counting-house, from the counting-house to a table in the partners' private office, and then at last he found himself sole occupant of that office.

Yes. At the age of forty, John Winterdyke, the office-boy, was Mr. John Winterdyke, sole surviving partner of the firm of Ashcroft Brothers. Industry, patience, and honesty, and a determination to conquer in the battle of life, had brought their due reward. The business founded by the Ashcrofts had been extended by the young man, who was made a junior partner at the age of thirty, as a reward for his untiring devotion to the interests of the firm, and in recognition of his business abilities and energies.

When the brothers retired, both old bachelors, they left John Winterdyke absolute control of everything, and when they died they left him the business, subject to an annual payment to their only relative, an elderly maiden sister.

And now, at the age of fifty, John Winterdyke is a wealthy man, a wealthy bachelor. His business demands very little of his time; he has people about him whom he can trust, and he has accumulated a fortune which will enable him to retire altogether to-morrow if he should wish to do so.

He has made good use of his wealth. He is a liberal supporter of charities, and he has advanced and brought up all the children of his aunt Mellish, and two of his cousins occupy at the present moment high positions in his office. If he had only to look back upon such a career as his had been, John Winterdyke would have every cause for thankfulness; but it has been given to him, what is not always given to men who have come to fifty years—he can look forward. He can look forward, with joy and hope, to the future, believing that the happiest and brightest days of his life have yet to come. For to-morrow is to be John Winterdyke's wedding-day.

At the age of forty-nine he had fallen in love. His romance had come to him late in life, but it had come with all the glow and fervour of youth. He was a man who bore his fifty years well. His dark wavy hair was tinged with gray, but time had dealt lightly with his handsome, clean-shaven, Yorkshire face.

John Winterdyke was still 'a fine figure of a man,' and many a time had he been told by the fond mammas of marriageable daughters that it was positively wicked of him to remain a bachelor.

'I shall never marry,' he had replied laughingly, and he honestly believed that he never would. But his fate came to him at last.

One day, at the office, his head cashier, Mr. Marsden, was taken suddenly ill. He was seized with a fainting fit, and would have fallen but for timely assistance. It was

late on Saturday afternoon—all the clerks had left—and so Mr. Winterdyke, as soon as the cashier had recovered, insisted upon accompanying him home himself.

‘I will go with you, my dear fellow,’ he said; ‘you are not fit to go alone, and your wife and daughters would be alarmed to see you as you are. Let me go and assure them that it has not been a serious attack.’

Mr. Winterdyke not only accompanied his cashier home, but he insisted upon staying until the doctor had been fetched and had prescribed for the patient and had given his assurance that it was merely an attack of vertigo, which might have arisen from very simple causes.

Mr. Winterdyke found the family of his cashier a most charming one. Mrs. Marsden was a lady in every sense of the word, and the two daughters, Lottie and Katie, were delightful girls. Kate was only sixteen, but Lottie, the elder, was two-and-twenty. John Winterdyke stayed and talked with the family for an hour, and in that one hour the mischief was done to his heart which all the years before had failed to accomplish.

The staid, sober City merchant of forty-nine fell violently in love, there and then, with his cashier’s daughter.

That evening, in his lonely chamber, John agreed with himself that it was an absurdity; that, at his age, he ought to know better; that forty-nine had no business to fall in love with twenty-two; but none of his arguments could alter the fact which he himself fully recognised—that he was in love.

He visited his invalid cashier on Sunday, just to see if he was better; he insisted that his cashier should take a week’s holiday, and during that week he called three times.

Mrs. Marsden thought her husband’s employer a delightful man, and the girls both declared he was very handsome.

And then—well, then John tried to cure himself of what

he called his 'insanity'; but it was stronger than himself, and he invented excuses to call at the house. He had heard that Mrs. Marsden was fond of birds, and he took her a pair of canaries which a friend had given him, saying that he knew they would be better taken care of by the young ladies than by his housekeeper. And then he found that he was always having tickets for concerts for which he had no use, and he gave them to Marsden, as he knew his daughters were fond of music, and at these concerts the young ladies and their mamma generally found Mr. Winterdyke in the seat next to them.

But John Winterdyke was too honourable a man to continue these little subterfuges long, and so one day, after he had known the Marsdens for about three months, he called his cashier into his private office, and, blushing and stammering like a school-boy, told him that he loved his daughter Lottie, and that he would ask her to be his wife if he thought she could care sufficiently for him to give him a hope that one day she would share his home.

Richard Marsden pretended to be very much astonished. He hastened to assure his employer that he was flattered and honoured, and that he could not have hoped for such a brilliant future for his child, and he promised to talk the matter over with his wife, and let Mr. Winterdyke know on the following day if it would be advisable for him to mention the fact to Lottie.

For the first time in his life, John Winterdyke passed a sleepless night, and the following morning, to the astonishment of his housekeeper, he scarcely touched his breakfast. He hoped, and yet he feared. Would the fair young girl of two-and-twenty entertain the idea of a husband of forty-nine? Had she perhaps a lover already, or some little romance of her own of which her father as yet knew nothing?

But all John's fears and doubts were set at rest when his cashier gave him a little note from Mrs. Marsden. It was as follows :

' DEAR MR. WINTERDYKE,

' My husband has told me the news, which, I confess, has not astonished me. It has been evident to me for some time that you admired my daughter. Lottie is a good girl, and will make a good wife, but neither I nor her father will attempt to influence a decision on which the happiness of her future life depends. It is from her lips you must receive your answer, and you have our full permission to ask for it. I may add, and I do so sincerely, that you have our hearty sympathy and our best wishes.

' Yours sincerely,

' CHARLOTTE MARSDEN.'

That afternoon Mr. Winterdyke paid a formal visit to the Marsdens, and presently Katie and her mother withdrew and he was left alone with Lottie. Then, trembling, confused, he stammered out his avowal and waited to know his fate.

The tears were in his eyes when he had finished—tears of which the strong man need not have been ashamed, for his heart was full. He stooped his head to hide them, and so he did not see the flush fade from Lottie's face and her lip tremble as she tried to speak. He did not see that for a moment the girl's cheeks were as pale as death, and that her hand clutched at the little table in the window for support. He saw nothing—he only heard her sweet voice falter, ' Mr. Winterdyke, I know how good a man you are, and how noble a man you are—my parents have told me. I am sure that you really love me, and I will be your wife.'

' My wife !'

John Winterdyke, looking up as he spoke the words, brushed away the tears of joy that dimmed his eyes, and, taking the young girl's hand in his, bent down and kissed it tenderly.

'My darling,' he said, 'my life shall be devoted to your happiness.'

It was not very romantic; it was not the action of a young lover, but the words came from the strong man's heart, and as he bent his head again to kiss the little hand that still lay in his broad palm, his lips murmured a prayer to Heaven that he might be worthy of the sacred trust which from that day forth was his—the sacred trust of a young girl's life and happiness.

* * * * *

And to-morrow was to be his wedding-day. He would have his darling all to himself. They were going away abroad for the honeymoon. Lottie had not been very well lately. At times she had appeared a little depressed. Her mother had explained that it was anxiety about the health of her father, to whom she was devotedly attached, and whose health had been bad since the fainting fit at the office.

Mr. Marsden was to have a long holiday. After the honeymoon he and his wife and Katie were to come to the beautiful place John had bought in the country, and stay with them for a time. John was still looking out upon the sunny river, and dreaming of the happy future, when a knock roused him from his reverie.

'Come in,' he said.

His housekeeper entered with a note.

'A young gentleman brought it, sir, and said I was to give it you at once, and he will wait for an answer.'

Mechanically, John Winterdyke opened the note and read it.

‘SIR,

‘Will you give me a few minutes’ interview? I have an important communication to make to you on a matter which concerns the family into which you are about to marry.’

John Winterdyke knitted his brow and read the letter again. What did it mean? He turned to the housekeeper.

‘The person who brought the note is waiting?’

‘Yes, sir.’

‘Send him up to me.’

When the housekeeper had gone, John re-read the letter. He did not like the look of it. What right had anyone to come to him with a communication about the Marsdens? Was it some enemy of theirs? Some jealous relative? Well, he had better hear what the person had to say, and if, as he suspected, it was some mean, despicable mischief-maker, he should know how to deal with him.

His reflections were interrupted by the return of his housekeeper, followed by a tall, dark young man of about eight-and-twenty. For a moment the two men eyed each other silently. Each seemed to be taking the measure of the other.

As soon as the housekeeper had gone, closing the door behind her, the young man commenced.

‘Mr. Winterdyke,’ he said hesitatingly, ‘it is a very unpleasant business which brings me here.’

‘Then get it over as soon as possible, sir,’ replied John; ‘you are the writer of this letter?’

‘I am.’

‘Then I warn you, sir, that if you say in my presence anything derogatory to Miss Marsden’s family, our interview will be a short one.’

The young man shrugged his shoulders.

'I have no wish to prolong it,' he said; 'but when you have heard what I have to say you will appreciate my motive in coming here. My name is Stephen Darvell.'

'Well, sir?'

'That name does not account to you for my presence here?'

'No, sir; I have never heard it before.'

'Ah! then I have wronged you. I believed that at the time you asked Miss Marsden to become Mrs. Winterdyke you were aware that she was my affianced wife.'

For a moment John Winterdyke reeled as though he had received a fierce blow from the man standing in front of him. But he recovered himself, and the hot blood rushed to his cheeks.

'It is a lie!' he cried; 'Miss Marsden was never any man's affianced wife but mine.'

'Pray be calm, Mr. Winterdyke; you have injured me enough already; you need not insult me.'

'I injured you?' stammered John.

'Unwittingly, I believe now, but none the less deeply. Until you came on the scene, Lottie Marsden and I were lovers. It was understood that as soon as my position improved we were to be married. I was a poor man, you were a rich one, and I was thrown over.'

'It is a lie—I repeat, it is a lie. Had there been this engagement I should have been told of it. You forget, sir, you are slandering the lady who to-morrow will be my wife. You are a coward and a villain.'

'I am neither the one nor the other. But I am not going to see the woman I love—the woman who loves me—sacrificed without an effort to save her.'

'The woman you love—the woman who loves you—do you dare to say this to me?'

'I dare—and I will prove my words. Lottie Marsden is

going to the altar to-morrow with a lie upon her lips and misery in her heart.'

With a violent effort, John Winterdyke mastered the rage that had made his limbs shake and his hands tremble to clutch his visitor by the throat.

'You are either a villain or a madman,' he said quietly. 'If you are only the former, perhaps you will tell me why, if Miss Marsden loves you and despises me, she has consented to conceal her feelings and become my wife?'

'Yes, I will tell you that,' was the reply. 'Lottie Marsden is marrying you to save her father from prison. You are not likely to prosecute your own father-in-law when you find out that for years he has abused the trust reposed in him, and robbed you of thousands of pounds.'

This time John Winterdyke uttered no cry of rage or remonstrance. Suddenly the light had come to him. He knew—he felt that the man before him was speaking the truth. He understood now the anxiety of Lottie about her father—her depression of spirits, from which at times he had such a hard task to arouse her. It was not over her father's health she was grieving—it was over his infamy. A hundred things came back to him then, and confirmed the man's terrible revelation.

He had lived in a fool's paradise; Lottie had consented to marry him to save her father from disgrace, and that was the end of his dream. He sank into a chair and buried his face in his hands, oblivious of everything but the awful truth that had come to him as a thunderbolt from the blue heavens above. When he came to himself and looked up, Stephen Darvell had gone.

* * * * *

An hour later Mr. Marsden was summoned to his future son-in-law's residence. To avoid alarming him, the note which summoned him was couched in these terms :

‘DEAR MARSDEN,

‘Will you come and see me on a little matter of business? I shall not have time to talk to you to-morrow.’

The moment the two men met, John Winterdyke put the question bluntly.

‘Marsden, to what extent are your accounts wrong?’

The guilty man staggered and appeared as though he would fall to the ground.

‘Don’t be afraid,’ said his employer coldly; ‘no one will ever hear of it again. Only tell me, that I may put it right.’

Eventually the unhappy man, assured as to his safety, made a full confession. He had speculated disastrously, and to save himself from ruin he had taken large sums of his employer’s money, and cleverly falsified the accounts to conceal the fraud. He had speculated again, hoping to gain enough to restore the amount, and had further involved himself. His defalcations amounted to over £5,000.

‘I forgive you, and will take means to prevent the fraud ever being discovered,’ said Winterdyke, when he had extracted the full confession. ‘Now, go back and tell your daughter, Lottie, that she need have no further fear for you, and that she is free to marry the man she loves. Tell her I forgive her and honour her, and shall esteem and honour her as long as I live. And, on the day she marries the man she loves, ten thousand pounds will be placed to her credit at my bank. It will be my wedding gift to her. Not a word more. Go!’

* * * * *

All night long, John Winterdyke sat in his lonely chambers and gazed out upon the gleaming lamps that stretched away far down the darkened river. His dream was over—the happiness had gone out of his life, as the sun had gone from the river, and the darkness of night had

settled in his heart. Morning found him still by the open window. He was stunned by the blow. He was helpless, hopeless, and he sat there and waited for the dawn—the dawn of the day that should have made Lottie Marsden his wife.

The sun rose, and light and life came back to the world, but it brought him no relief. At last, worn out with the sorrow that no tears came to relieve, his head fell down upon his breast, and he slept. When he awoke, the great clock at Westminster was chiming nine. For a moment he forgot all that had happened, and remembered only that it was his wedding-day.

And then the awful truth came back to him, and he rose with a wail of despair, crying; ‘Lottie, Lottie! Oh, my darling! would to God I had died believing that you loved me!’

And as he turned to the door it opened softly, and Lottie stood before him.

‘Lottie!’ he cried; ‘you! you! Oh, why have you come to torture me?’

‘I have not come to torture you, dear,’ she said, her sweet blue eyes filling with tears. ‘I have come because last night you sent me a message by my father which I do not understand. I know that I can never be your wife now you have discovered the terrible secret of my father’s madness—for he was mad, John, to do as he did; but your gift I cannot take, for I shall never marry the man I love.’

‘You will not marry Stephen Darvell?’

‘Ah! he has been to you. I understand all now.’

‘Is he not the man you love?’

‘No; he asked me to be his wife and I refused. Not because I thought you would ever love me then, but because I did not love him. He has done this out of revenge, to break off my marriage with you.’

'You do not love him—you never have loved him?'

'Never! I have only loved one man. I shall only love one man till I die!'

'And that man——'

Lottie did not answer; she only gave a little sob, and the next minute John Winterdyke's arms were around her, and her head was pillowed on his breast.

* * * * *

The ceremony had been arranged, and it was not put off. It was to have been a very quiet wedding, and it was, only Lottie and her father and mother and sister, and one or two friends. And no one but Marsden and his wife and Lottie ever knew that a few hours previously the bridegroom had resigned the bride for ever. John Winterdyke, as he left the altar, whispered to his father-in-law that all the past was blotted out of his memory for ever, only he couldn't have his father-in-law for a servant, and so he would have to take a retiring pension. And John Winterdyke never had reason to repent his clemency. He had but one little trouble to get over, and that was Mr. Stephen Darvell. This young gentleman had found out the family secret in some mysterious way—probably he had overheard a conversation between Lottie and her father; they thought so. His silence had to be assured for the sake of the future peace and happiness of the family, and it was assured. The young gentleman, having failed in his great scheme of revenge, was content to go to Australia and hold his tongue for a consideration, which was a good deal more than he deserved.

And so, after all, the rising sun that brought life and light to the world brought light and life, after the blackness of that awful night, to John Winterdyke upon his wedding-day.

A TALE OF KHARTOUM.

A BROAD stream of translucent blue water that reminds one of the Rhone as it issues from Lake Lemman ; long parallel rows of palm-trees crowned with rich foliage ; then, partly hidden behind them, a line of white stuccoed buildings, above which tower the domes and minarets of mosques ; a perspective of low, flat-roofed houses, gardens, groves, and green fields, and—far away in the background—a whitish streak of glistening water bathing the fiery sands of the Kordofan Desert stretching beyond the horizon : the whole lighted up by a fierce sun glaring from a deep-blue, cloudless sky—a blaring picture, intensely white, blue, and green ; a daub without shadows or intermediate mellow tints—such was Khartoum, the capital of the Soudan, the mistress of two Niles, as seen from the northern island of Tuti in the noonday sun.

Khartoum, the Dar-el-Jelal, the city of glory of the nomad Arab, the Eldorado of poor pashas and beggared beys, the gay city of adventurous Nubian youths, the earthly paradise of successful slave-hunters, the Gehennam of kidnapped negroes, the city of fantasias and dancing-girls, of open-air cafés and dram-shops, of smoke-baths and bazaars, of showy squalor and hidden wealth, the great entrepôt of ivory and slaves, the market of every marketable Eastern commodity—such was Khartoum, in 1879, when I knew it.

I had been ordered to travel by my physician. I was falling a prey to that subtle form of madness known as melancholia. 'Go away,' said the doctor; 'go as far as you can. Go to the North Pole, or the Rocky Mountains, or the Dismal Swamp, or the Congo; get into Mecca, ride to Khiva, paddle your own canoe on the Albert N'Yanza, try a bicycle trip to the steppes of Tartary, go anywhere, do anything, go as far away as you possibly can, and see something that will astonish you and divert your thoughts.'

With a mighty effort I roused myself from my lethargy, packed my portmanteau, stuffed my money-belt with gold and notes, made my will, bought a revolver and a waterproof and a pith helmet, and set out for the East.

I was miserable at Marseilles, I endured agony in Alexandria, care sat heavily upon me in Cairo, I pouted at the Pyramids, and grew dyspeptic in the Desert.

I was on the point of returning home to take prussic acid comfortably in my own private apartment, when I fell in with a traveller who talked of nothing but the White Nile and the Blue Nile; the First, the Second, and Third Cataracts, and who strongly advised me to see Khartoum.

His tales of travel titillated my jaded palate. He gave me letters of introduction to some of the principal merchants in Khartoum, and, after shaking him heartily by the hand, I set out for that now famous city.

My adventures by the way I took no note of. I fell twice from my camel when in a brown study. While bathing in the Nile I had a desperate struggle with a crocodile; and a hippopotamus, whose back I had mistaken for an island on which I could sit and weep unobserved, sank with me to the muddy depths of the river. Twice I was left for dead by the savage Soudanese; but at last I reached Khartoum, and took up my residence in a large empty house, which the governor kindly placed at my disposal.

The life amused and interested me. I flung aside my European habits and clothes and became an Oriental. I wore the tarboosh, smoked the shesha, drank kahweh and mastic and sherab; bought slaves, and, investing all the capital that remained in my money-belt in the business of an ivory and ostrich-feather merchant, I fell into the routine of a well-to-do Hhawaghe.

I had been in Khartoum about six months, when, walking one evening near the Mudirieh, I met a young Englishman, who asked me, in excellent Arabic, for a light for his pipe from my cigar.

I granted his request, and addressed him in English. We became friendly, and then he unfolded to me the strange story of his life.

His name was Eustace FitzHerbert. His father, a scholar of distinction, had made a mésalliance. While still an undergraduate at Cambridge, he had married the daughter of his bedmaker—a good-looking girl, but very ignorant.

Eustace was born. Soon after, his father and mother quarrelled fiercely, and separated. His father's father, indignant at the match, cut the young student off with a shilling, and stopped his allowance, so he could leave his wife very little.

He obtained the post of travelling tutor to a young nobleman. He left his young charge in Cairo, and that was the last that was heard of him. He sent no money to his wife. She had told him in her passion she never wished to hear of him again.

In the meantime, Mrs. FitzHerbert, embarrassed by her baby, was in desperate straits.

Her own friends were too poor to assist her.

She must have come to London in search of employment, probably to take a situation, for one fine morning Eustace

was deposited for the day in a crèche at the East-End, and was not called for when evening came.

On searching the child the matron found a letter, badly written and ill-spelt, in which the unhappy mother set forth her story, and begged the charitable manageress of the crèche to be good to her baby until she was able to claim it.

‘That letter was given to me years afterwards,’ said Eustace, ‘when I began to investigate the mystery that surrounded my birth and parentage. Here it is!’

I took the letter and read it. It contained the bulk of the information Eustace had just imparted to me.

‘The matron at the crèche, it seems,’ he continued, ‘sent to Cambridge, and found the story was true. The Cambridge men who had known my father and liked him took the case up; a subscription was made, and it was arranged that I should be kept at the crèche until I was old enough to go to-school, and that then the cost of my education should be defrayed by the subscription of these good friends.’

‘For many years the generosity of my father’s old University friends protected me. During all that time nothing was heard of my father or of my mother.’

‘At fifteen I was a bright, intelligent lad; and then the matron, who was a widow and childless, adopted me, and sent me to a finishing school at her own expense.’

‘At eighteen my education was completed. I was quick, and had been an apt scholar. I was a clever mathematician, and I could speak five European languages. I had heard the story of my parentage, and the dream of my life was to discover my father. To facilitate my endeavours, I determined to learn Arabic, and I soon spoke it fluently. In fact, I am an excellent Oriental scholar.’

‘When I was twenty the good matron died: and having made no will, her relatives claimed her money, and I was left destitute.’

‘I was too proud to appeal to the Cambridge men, who had done so much for me, or to write to my father’s relatives, who had treated me so badly.

‘So, raising money on the little property I had acquired during the life of my protectress, I came to Cairo, and started as an interpreter to the European visitors.

‘My knowledge of so many European tongues and of Arabic caused me to be much run after. At the end of a few years, I had saved five hundred pounds.

‘Then I determined to follow up a clue to my father’s proceedings, which I had discovered in Cairo.

‘Five-and-twenty years ago a Mr. FitzHerbert had left Cairo for Khartoum. The fact was proved by the police archives of the city. On the day previous to his departure he had been robbed in the Esbekieh Gardens by a Greek, and had given him into custody. This Mr. FitzHerbert stated in his evidence that he was about to start for Khartoum. I saw the name in the records. It was Eustace Herbert FitzHerbert. That was my father, beyond a shadow of a doubt.’

‘And did you find him?’ I exclaimed, interested in the story.

‘I only arrived in Khartoum last night!’

‘And your mother—you have never heard anything of her?’

‘Nothing! If I fail to find my father, I shall go back to England and look for her!’

We parted that evening, my new friend promising to come and look me up at my rooms the next day.

The next morning I went down to the banks of the Blue Nile to bathe. To my astonishment, I found a middle-aged Oriental already there, divesting himself of his clothes.

It is so unusual for an Oriental to take a morning dip in cold water, that I expressed my astonishment in Arabic.

The Oriental replied in excellent English. He told me that he was an Englishman, that he had resided for nearly a quarter of a century in Khartoum, and had never missed his morning swim.

While we were both undressing, it occurred to me that he would be able to tell me all the points of interest in the city. Perhaps he would act as my guide.

I inquired if he would do so.

‘I should be very happy to,’ he replied; ‘but I leave Khartoum for Europe to-morrow.’

‘Indeed!’

‘Yes; I am going to England in search of a long-lost son—a son I basely deserted.’

At that moment the likeness of this man to the young fellow I had seen the previous evening struck me.

As we plunged into the Nile and swam out, I whispered in his ear, ‘How do you do, Mr. Eustace Herbert Fitz-Herbert?’

He sank—went down to the bottom like a lump of lead; it was with astonishment.

When he came to the surface, he exclaimed:

‘Great heavens! how do you know me? You must have been a child when I left England, by your appearance.’

‘I not only know you, but I know your son,’ I said, turning over and floating on my back to enjoy his amazement.

He was about to reply, when a huge crocodile came to the surface and darted at him.

‘Help!’ he shrieked. The crocodile was dragging him under by his legs.

I seized him by the arms. It was a tug of war; but a crimson tinge was on the water.

‘I am a dead man!’ he exclaimed. ‘Listen! I shall go under in a moment, or you will be left with only half of me;

nothing can save me. I have £100,000 in the bank at Cairo. I have made a fortune here, and invested all my savings there. In my pocket-book, on the bank, you will find a cheque for the amount. I had intended to cash it in Cairo, and go straight to England on my sacred mission. That mission is now yours. Cash the cheque, and, as you know my boy, give him the money.'

'I will,' I replied. 'But courage! I may save you yet.'

'Promise!' he said faintly, his eyes closing in the agony of death.

'I give you my oath!'

At that moment I felt a desperate tug. The poor fellow was dragged from my arms, and sank beneath the water, to rise no more.

Swimming hastily to the bank, I gathered up the Oriental clothes, found the cheque in the pocket-book, and went straight to my residence.

All that day I waited at home to receive young Fitz-Herbert, and to tell him the sad news.

He did not come.

The next day and the next day came, and still no visit from him.

Then I searched the town, and made inquiries everywhere. Nothing was known of him; nobody had heard of him.

I waited a month, and then I felt sure he had quitted Khartoum. I returned to Cairo, cashed the cheque, obtaining a draft for £100,000 and some odd pounds over on London, and left for home, thinking that in England I could advertise better for the missing man.

Through the advertising agents I caused notices to be inserted in all the Eastern and European journals circulating in Egypt. I had left all particulars with the English vice-consul at Khartoum, and the consuls at Cairo and

Alexandria; and I did all that mortal man could do to discover young FitzHerbert.

But all in vain. Twelve months afterwards the £100,000 was still at my bankers, and the fate of my Khartoum friend was still shrouded in mystery.

* * * * *

A long time afterwards I was reading the *Standard*, when I came upon a paragraph headed 'Extraordinary Windfall.'

A servant in the employment of Sir Thomas Stalleybrass, of Tewkesbury Hall, had just been informed that she was entitled to a sum of £500,000. For many years she had gone by the name of Dobbin, which was her maiden name, but she was really the wife of the Mr. Eustace Herbert FitzHerbert who disappeared some six-and-twenty years ago from Cambridge.

The sum in question was left under the will of her father-in-law, the Hon. Eustace FitzHerbert, who, having no other children, had left his whole fortune to the wife of his son, as some compensation for his life long neglect of her. She had written him once for assistance, and that is how he knew the name she was passing under.

I at once wrote off to Mrs. FitzHerbert, at the address given to tell her my strange story. I received a reply from Sir Thomas, who stated that the poor woman was so overjoyed at the news of her good fortune that she had had an apoplectic fit, and died.

'We found,' Sir Thomas added, 'on searching her boxes, that she had made a will, many years ago, leaving all she might die possessed of to her son. This son she left in a crèche in London when he was an infant, and he has never been called for yet.'

I read the letter, and sat down to think the whole story out. My melancholy was cured long ago, and my thoughts had been concentrated on finding young FitzHerbert.

And now there was another £500,000 for him! Where on earth could he be? What could have happened to him that night we parted in Khartoum to prevent him calling on me next morning?

Perhaps he was still searching for the father who had, long ago, disappeared down the jaws of the crocodile, or for the mother who was sleeping her last sleep in the little churchyard at Tewkesbury.

Advertisements for the missing heir were inserted, for weeks, in all the London papers.

I want to see Sir Thomas, and he agreed that an expedition ought to set out for the East at once.

But the Soudanese troubles had arisen, and Khartoum was cut off from civilization, and wrapped in a mist that no European eye could penetrate.

And, in the meantime, the £100,000 was at my banker's, and £500,000 was in the Court of Chancery waiting for the missing man.

On Christmas morning, 1885, I went for a walk after breakfast—a good long walk, for my old enemy, dyspepsia, was threatening me.

I strolled as far as Epping Forest. In the densest part I saw a piece of paper being blown about by the wind.

I perceived that it had writing on it—something scribbled with a lead pencil.

I picked it up and read it.

‘I have taken poison. I am destitute, and can no longer support an ignominious existence. My name is Eustace FitzHerbert, and I come of a good family. Bury me decently!’

‘Good gracious me!’ I exclaimed. Then I looked around me. Where was my Khartoum acquaintance? Where was the body belonging to the paper?

After a short search I found it close by. It was the

missing man. He was still breathing, but quite unconscious. I was beside myself with grief and terror. I begged my friend not to die. I told him that he was heir to £600,000. He did not hear me.

At that moment I heard a footstep. I called aloud.

A gentleman ran towards me. I explained the situation.

'How fortunate!' he exclaimed. 'I am a medical man. I have just been to attend a case of accidental poisoning, and I have my stomach-pump in my pocket.'

He instantly commenced operations on the prostrate Fitz-Herbert, and presently the senseless man opened his eyes.

We carried him between us to the Forest Hotel, engaged a room, and put him to bed.

I spent my Christmas by his bedside, having my turkey and my plum-pudding brought up to me.

The next day he was much better; in a week he was quite well.

We went to London together. He was grieved at the death of his parents; but as he had no recollection of either of them, he soon got over their loss; and when the £600,000 was handed to him he was quite happy.

He explained how it had happened that he had not kept the appointment with me in Khartoum, and why he had not seen my advertisement.

After quitting me on that eventful evening, he heard of a white man who had left Khartoum for Unyoro, a country situated between the Albert and the Victoria N'Yanza.

He felt convinced, from the description, that it was his father.

A detachment of Egyptian soldiers, commanded by Abd-el-Kader Bey, was starting at dawn the next day for the Equatorial provinces, and Abd-el-Kader Bey was on a mission to M'tesa, the King of Uganda.

On his journey he would pass through Unyoro.

Unwilling to lose so rare an opportunity, FitzHerbert embarked with the bey at dawn, and thus had no time to call upon me.

At a place called Wadelaï he had fever, and was left for dead. When he recovered he found himself a prisoner. M'Wangu, the chief of the tribe, detained him as a hostage for some of his people who had been kidnapped by the bey's followers.

He was kept in captivity for three years. At last he managed to escape, and, after many marvellous adventures in the heart of Africa, he reached Zanzibar, and came to England. His health had been utterly broken down by his sufferings in the Soudan, and he was advised by a European doctor that his only chance was to breathe his native air.

He took the first trading-vessel from Zanzibar, and arrived in London without a shilling on December 1, 1885. For nearly a month he had lived from hand to mouth in the London streets, holding horses, getting odd jobs at the street corners.

But his health grew worse, and his liver, affected by the climate, caused him to suffer the most terrible depression.

On Christmas Eve he found sixpence in the gutter. He bought some rat-paste of a poisonous kind with the money, and tramped down to Epping Forest, thinking it a nice quiet place in which to die, and one where his corpse would not be likely to upset anybody's Christmas dinner.

He was always a most considerate man.

As soon as his inheritance was safely in his possession, he turned to me, and said :

‘ Old fellow, I owe you more than I can ever repay. You have saved my life and given me a fortune. What can I give you ?’

‘ Leave to make use of the strange details of your life in a Christmas story,’ I replied.

The request was immediately granted, and the result is now before my readers.

Did he marry and live happy ever afterwards?

Oh yes.

He married my youngest sister, and their first baby, born two months ago, is christened Khartoum, in remembrance of its father's adventures and of its grandfather's fate.

I am its godfather, and I shall never take little Khartoum on my knee without thinking of the lucky walk in Epping Forest on Christmas morning that enabled me to save a fellow-creature's life, to give my sister a rich husband, and to have a godson and nephew who will some day come into £600,000.

His mamma and papa live very comfortably on the interest. Little Khartoum will have the principal intact.

But I hope we shall all have many a merry Christmas and many a happy New Year before little Khartoum comes into his fortune.

A PRIZE POEM.

WHENEVER I hear people discussing the value of poetry in the sense of what it will bring the poet himself in hard cash, I am always tempted to tell a little story which I have kept for many a year buried in that portion of me which, for lack of a thorough knowledge of anatomical technicalities, most of us call the inmost recesses of the heart.

I don't know the one word which expresses the inmost recesses of the heart, and perhaps I shall never learn it until that fortunate day when I discover one word which will express the railway offence now called 'riding in a class superior to that for which a ticket has been taken.'

Early in life I became a poet. Not a Tennyson, or a Browning, or a Swinburne, of course. No boy ever becomes that sort of poet—he must be born it, a sentiment which has been previously well expressed by another gentleman in Latin. I became a poet to the extent of writing verses quickly and fluently on the minor events of daily life. I could string together some tolerably good lines on a fight between my schoolfellows, and my ode to the Rev. Principal of the college on his seventieth birthday was printed by that gentleman at his own expense, and a copy sent to the boys' parents with his best compliments.

When we were going to draw up a round robin, asking for a holiday or anything of that sort, I was generally asked

to put the thing into rhyme, and the boys who had pretty cousins would come to me for an original birthday verse, that they might add it to the letter of congratulation boys do sometimes send to pretty cousins on such anniversaries.

Once or twice I even attained to the dignity of print in the poets' corner of the local newspaper, and a poem addressed to an imaginary young lady with golden hair and blue eyes duly appeared on the back page of the Halfpenny Journal, among the answers to correspondents.

When I left school and entered an office in the City, as the first step towards becoming Lord Mayor of London, the fame of my poetic faculty followed me, and my fellow-clerks always kept me well employed in writing rhyming satires on their enemies, and rhyming compliments to their friends. I occupied the position among my companions of the public writer of the old days before education was common, who used to sit in the market-place and write love-letters for a small consideration.

I had a consideration. I did not flash forth the fires of my genius for the honour of the thing alone. Had I done so, I might have devoted my entire leisure to the service of others. I asked and received a fee in order to keep the market in check, and the demand on me for acrostics on young ladies' names for valentines, and for flattering odes was very great.

My remuneration was of a varied character. Sometimes it was a foreign postage stamp—a rare one which I desired to add to my collection, sometimes it was a bull pup, and sometimes a book. You will say that I am not proving yet that poetry pays. Be patient. I intend to prove beyond dispute that poetry paid me, but I want it to be clearly understood what sort of poetry it was.

Among the clerks in our office was a young fellow of three-and-twenty, whose father was a great City merchant

himself. Jones—that was his name—was only in our office to learn routine work, to go through all the branches of the business, so that he might take a high position in his father's firm at once, and not have to learn his duties among the clerks to whom he would have to be governor.

Jones was one of my best clients. Hardly a day passed that he did not come to me for a verse or a poem, in which the name of Adelina was to be introduced.

Adelina was a young lady, the daughter of a gentleman who had been Lord Mayor of London. She was an heiress, and very romantic; she idolized poetry, and Jones had won her heart with an acrostic which he had sent her on a birthday card.

Let me give Jones this credit—he never said he composed it; but it was in his handwriting, and Adelina accepted it as a fact that Adolphus Jones was a poet. He was a fine, generous, handsome young fellow, but that might not have turned the scale in his favour had he not been a poet; that is to say, had he not been able to send her poems which she presumed to be his.

When they became engaged, and their papas and mammas met and arranged preliminaries, and the settlements were talked over, poor Jones's conscience smote him. He hadn't wanted to do anything wrong, and so, when Adelina called him her poet, and Adelina's papa, the ex-Lord Mayor, dilated to the Court of Aldermen and the City Companies on the poetical genius of his future son-in-law, and Jones began to have a reputation, and to be complimented on the ninth of November, at the banquet to her Majesty's ministers, and to be referred to in the City Press as a gentleman of extraordinary poetical genius, he began to feel supremely uncomfortable and unhappy.

It is true, no one but Adelina and her papa and their friends saw Jones's poetry—I mean *my* poetry—but then

public fame is soon acquired if you are engaged to the daughter of a millionaire ex-Lord Mayor.

As the time went on, and Jones grew more madly in love than ever with his *fiancée*, so it became more difficult for him to say, 'My dear Adelina, if I were not a poet would you love me still?' No man ever yet engaged in a deception, even though a tacit one, but he placed himself at a disadvantage. A mean or paltry action always comes home to its author, and no matter whether a lie be a white or a black one, it is a weapon which invariably injures the wielder of it. Jones found out too late the price he would have to pay for a plan of deception which had appeared to him innocent enough at the first blush, but which now haunted him, sleeping or waking, and made the prize it had brought him seem but Dead Sea fruit after all.

I, too, was indignant when I became aware of the extent to which the deception had been carried. I did not care for literary fame, and I did not imagine my fellow-clerks quoted me always as the author of the 'poems' they sent to their sweethearts, and sisters, and cousins, and aunts, and rich relations, but I never imagined that I should have lent myself to a fraud, for fraud this undoubtedly was.

Jones had obtained the hand of an ex-Lord Mayor's daughter by false pretences, and, to a certain extent, I was his accomplice.

What was to be done?

I hesitated to betray my friend by going to the ex-Lord Mayor and telling him the whole truth. Jones feared to shock Adelina by a revelation of his perfidy. Every time she called him her poet, a fresh dagger pierced his heart; but should he break hers by casting all other considerations to the winds, and exclaiming: 'The poet you love, oh, Adelina, is not your unhappy Adolphus; it is another?' The position, you must own, was peculiar. For an ardent

lover to tell the young lady who adores him that she loves another, is a task which requires delicacy to accomplish it satisfactorily.

So things went on—Jones still the affianced husband of the girl who loved me, and I still allowing the girl who loved me to go on loving Jones. I gave up writing poetry: it became hateful to me. Over and over again I would cry aloud, ‘Oh! that I was ever born a poet!’ I couldn’t cry it aloud often, because the governor’s office was close to ours, and he would send out to ask who was ill. One day, while I was sitting in the office immersed in thought, and trying in vain to add up a column in the ledger, the governor opened the door of his private office and called me.

I fancied my absent manner of late had attracted attention, and that I was about to receive a month’s notice.

I went in fear and trembling, for the house was one of the oldest and best in the City, and to be discharged from it was fatal to a young man’s chance of ever becoming Lord Mayor of London.

Judge of my surprise when, on entering the private office, I saw, standing with his back to the fire, the father of Adelina. The ex-Lord Mayor eyed me up and down for a moment, said ‘Humph!’ and then, taking a letter from his pocket, handed it to me.

‘Take that letter, sir!’ I took it. ‘Read that piece of poetry, sir!’ I read it.

‘Oh, Adelina, ever dear,
The world is fair when thou art near;
But when thy face I do not see,
A desert it must be to me.
A sunbeam thou, the earth to cheer,
Oh, Adelina, ever dear!’

‘Now, sir, did Adolphus Jones write that?’ I blushed, and hesitated. ‘Answer me, sir!’

What could I say? I said what I could—‘No.’

‘Did *you* write it, sir?’

I blushed again, I hesitated again, and then I fell on my knees, and begging Adelina’s father’s forgiveness, I sobbed out, ‘Yes.’

I expected an avalanche, and I was astonished as the seconds passed on and nothing fell on my bowed head. I felt a hand gently touch my shoulder, a kind voice bade me rise, and the ex-Lord Mayor, taking my arm, led me to his carriage and pair, which was standing at the door.

Before I could recover from my surprise we were whirled through the City streets, and presently we stopped at the doors of a magnificent mansion in a West-end square.

Two powdered footmen descended and assisted me out, and the ex-Lord Mayor personally conducted me into the drawing-room. There I found Adolphus and Adelina both bathed in tears. Adolphus had confessed all in a moment of agony, and the indignant ex-Lord Mayor had rushed off for me at once. I cast a timid glance at Adelina, a pained one at Adolphus, and then bowed my head and shuffled my feet. I never felt so supremely uncomfortable in the whole course of a long and eventful life as I did at that moment. The ex-Lord Mayor paused a moment, and then, with a little preliminary cough, attacked the situation.

‘Adelina, my child, this young gentleman is the author of the poems with which Adolphus Jones has basely ensnared your affections. As a City magistrate, as an Englishman and a father, I am bound to see justice done. You engaged yourself to Adolphus, believing him to be a poet. The poet is this young man. You must therefore renounce Adolphus and marry this young man.’

‘Oh, sir!’ wailed Adolphus.

‘ Oh, papa !’ shrieked Adelina.

‘ Spare us !’ they both exclaimed together, looking appealingly at me.

My lips trembled, and I tried to speak, but the ex-Lord Mayor interrupted me.

‘ This young man has nothing to say ; it is I who am master here. Now, Adelina, do you renounce the false and accept the true ? do you give up Adolphus, and accept this young man ?’

‘ Oh, papa, I cannot ! I have grown to love Adolphus.’

‘ But this is the poet !’

‘ Alas, papa ! the information comes too late. I would sooner Adolphus had been a poet, but since he is not, I will take him as he is.’

The ex-Lord Mayor rang the bell. A powdered footman entered.

‘ John, request Mrs. Smith, the housekeeper, to pack Miss Adelina’s boxes at once, and prepare to accompany her to the Langham Hotel.’

‘ Oh, papa ! what would you do ?’ cried the poor girl.

‘ Silence, miss ! you are no longer a child of mine. Mrs. Smith will remain with you at the Langham Hotel until you become the wife of Adolphus, if he chooses to marry you, knowing that my vast wealth will go to another.’

‘ To another ?’

‘ Yes, to this young man, that justice, which has ever been the watchword of London’s Lord Mayors, may be done. This young man ought to be my heir, as he ought to have married my heiress, she having given her heart and her hand to the writer of certain verses, and he being that writer. My child does not see the matter in that light—she has not passed the civic chair. I have.’

Let me draw a veil over the bitterness of the parting, over the sobs of Adelina, and the humiliation of Adolphus.

Suffice it to say that he too had a wealthy father, so that it did not much matter. Adelina became his wife, and they are supremely happy in one of the noblest mansions on Wimbledon Common.

And I am supremely happy as the heir of the millionaire ex-Lord Mayor: his partner in a magnificent business, and his constant companion at all the civic banquets and company dinners. My poetry has paid. Had I not written poetry, I might still have been toiling at the desk. But I do not write it now for remuneration, nor do I ever write it for other fellows to pass off as their own and send to young ladies, and so win their confiding hearts.

I *am*, however, engaged in writing a poem, and *it is* addressed to a young lady; but she is the particular young lady who will very shortly lead me to the hymeneal altar, and become the proud bride, not of a poor poet, but of the heir of a millionaire ex-Lord Mayor.

MASTER'S FRIEND.

FOR the following narrative I am indebted to my old friend Mary Jane, formerly Miss Mary Jane Buffham, housemaid, and now, as the reader is of course aware, Mrs. Harry Beckett, hotel proprietor. Those of my readers who have perused 'Mary Jane's Memoirs' and 'Mary Jane Married,' will require no further introduction. For the benefit of those who have not made themselves acquainted with Mary Jane's contributions to contemporary literature, I need only say that both as a housemaid in various families and as the wife of a prosperous innkeeper, Mary Jane kept a diary and a note-book, and plunged one eventful day head-first into authorship.

She has not written anything lately, because the superintendence of a large hotel and the cares of a small family have left her little spare time for the gratification of her literary instincts, but she has not ceased, as she herself expresses it, 'to keep her eyes and ears open'; and it is whispered that she has lately acquired sufficient material for a little work, which she contemplates bringing out one of these fine days, and which she intends to call 'Some of our Guests.'

It was in connection with this contemplated work, of which I had heard rumours, that I called upon her the other day at the excellent hotel in a Midland town of which

she is now the honoured hostess. I was anxious, if possible, to secure the editorship. Mary Jane, in spite of her many excellent qualities both as an authoress and a woman of business, still requires 'editing,' and I confess that I should feel it very deeply if that pleasant task were confided to anyone but myself.

I discovered her, I gave her the words of encouragement which induced her to give her 'Memoirs' to the world, and I look upon her as my literary protégée.

I need hardly tell you that I was most heartily welcomed both by Mary Jane and her excellent husband, Mr. Harry Beckett. It was late when I arrived, and the children had gone to bed, much to Mrs. Beckett's regret, and—I am almost ashamed to confess it—rather to my relief. I love children very much, but I am always at a loss for appropriate words when I feel that I am expected to express my admiration for their beauty and intelligence.

I very soon felt at home in Mrs. Beckett's charming little sitting-room, and when I found myself sitting in front of the fire and smoking a pipe with Mr. Beckett, while Mary Jane with her own fair hands made us a bowl of the whisky punch for which her house has become famous, I felt that it was just like 'old times,' and I said so.

That set us talking of old times, of course.

Is there anything more delightful than a chat by the fire-side on a winter evening with old friends about old times? The poet has told us that

'There is no joy the world can give,
Like that it takes away ;'

and, alas ! there are few of us on the wrong side of thirty to whom the sad truth contained in these exquisite lines does not come home.

It is this that makes old times so pleasant to talk about. We live again in the happy past. The future to few of us

who are old enough to talk of old times looks particularly bright and encouraging, but the past teems with memories that brighten up the passing hours with their afterglow.

It was impossible to talk long with Mary Jane without mentioning her 'Memoirs,' and this gave me an opportunity of introducing the subject of the book which I had heard was contemplated.

Mrs. Beckett smiled and shook her head :

'Oh yes,' she said ; 'it is quite true that I have talked of writing another book, but I'm afraid I shall never get the time. Things are so different now, you see. Really, I haven't a minute to myself all day. There is so much to see to, and in the evening I'm glad to sit down and rest a little. You can't think how I have begun to appreciate the words of the poor old lady who said that her idea of heaven was "a place where you did nothing for ever and ever."'

Harry smiled.

'My wife isn't so fond of writing as she was,' he said. 'She's getting lazy.'

Mrs. Beckett bridled up a little.

'Lazy!' she exclaimed. 'Oh, these men, these men ! They think that a woman ought never to be tired. They can't understand the wear and tear of looking after everything in a big house, and the trouble of servants. Why, only to-day I have been worried nearly out of my mind. The new cook and the housemaid have been quarrelling fearfully.

'It is all about the butcher's young man. Cook will give me notice if I keep the housemaid. The head housemaid, poor girl ! broke down and became quite hysterical when she began to tell me how disagreeable cook was making things for her ; and they're both valuable servants, and I don't want to lose either of them. Upon my word, sometimes I wish there were no servants.

'We had a chambermaid at the beginning of the year who drove me nearly mad. She made the most extraordinary statements about me to people staying in the hotel. I thought some of the gentlemen used to look at me strangely, and one day a gentleman who had got to know my husband very well through coming often, said: "What a sad thing about your wife!"

"Eh," said Harry; "what! Sad thing! I don't know what you mean."

"I beg your pardon," said the gentleman; "of course, I ought not to have mentioned it; it must be a very painful subject."

'Harry was dumfounded, as the saying is, so he said, "My dear sir, for goodness' sake, tell me what you mean."

"Well, of course you know what I mean? I'm sorry I mentioned it. It was very thoughtless of me. Let us talk of something else."

"No," said Harry; "you've gone so far you must go a bit further. In plain English, what is there sad about my wife?"

"Well, of course, it's sad about her having to be taken to a lunatic asylum now and then?"

"What!" yelled Harry; "why, you must be the person that ought to be taken to a lunatic asylum. Are you mad?"

"Do you mean to say that she doesn't go off her head always—well, after there's an addition to your family?"

'Harry couldn't speak for a moment. It took his breath away. But presently he grasped hold of the gentleman's arm, and he said, "Look here, Mr. —, either you are mad or I am. What put such an awful idea into your head? Where did you hear such a thing?"

'Then it all came out.

.. 'It was that dreadful chambermaid. She had told this gentleman, and also one or two others, that I had gone out

of my mind after my first baby, and tried to drown it down a well, and that I always went out of my mind after similar circumstances, and had to be put away for fear I should murder my baby.

' When Harry came in and told me I felt that if I had been a man my hair would have stood bolt upright ; but, of course, with a woman, such a thing is impossible ; but I thought I should have had a fit, and after I had given a shriek I burst into tears.

" " Oh, how infamous ! " I exclaimed. " What a wicked wretch ! Send for a policeman ! "

" " No," said Harry ; " we'd better not make too much fuss about it. We'd better see the girl and find out what she means, and where she heard it. "

' I wouldn't see the girl. I was too upset, and I believe I should have flown at her ; but Harry saw her, and when he came up to me where I was crying with rage and shame in my bedroom, he told me all he had been able to find out.

' The chambermaid denied point-blank she had ever said such a thing, and trembled and cried and went on in a wild sort of way, and Harry said, " My dear, I don't think she's quite right in her head. "

" " Right or wrong," I said, " out she goes this minute, and if you had a spark of manhood about you she'd be gone now, and her boxes flung after her. "

' Harry said that wouldn't do. He must get to the bottom of the scandal, and see if there was anybody else in it.

' I was so ill over it that Harry, when our doctor passed by, asked him to come in and see me, and then I told him to go in and see that wicked hussy and when he came down he said he couldn't make her out.

' So I said, " I can," and nothing satisfied me till she was out of the place, and I made Harry inquire of all our regular customers if they had ever heard the story, and told him to

deny it; and, would you believe it! after she'd been gone a week we found out that she herself had been in a lunatic asylum for that very thing, and the people who had given her a character to us had said nothing about it, thinking she was quite sane now, and not wanting the past to stand in her way.

'A nice thing, wasn't it? And that's what you have to put up with from servants. Then there was a servant we had——'

Mr. Beckett raised his hand with a deprecating gesture.

'Don't give us anything more about the servants to-night, my dear. I've had nothing but her servants dinned into my ears for the last fortnight, and I'm sure our friend Mr. ——'

I saw that we were approaching dangerous ground, so I hastened to turn the conversation.

'I suppose you've collected plenty of material for your new book among the guests, Mrs. Beckett,' I said.

'Oh yes,' replied Mary Jane, giving her husband a glance that had a suspicion of malice in it. 'We've had plenty of guests here who have been worth studying.'

'A good hostess should always study her guests,' said Harry.

Just a little contemptuous curl of the lip was all the reward Harry received for his joke, and then Mary Jane continued, without deigning to take any verbal notice of the interruption:

'I think I have material enough for a book, but I'm almost afraid if I wrote it I shouldn't care to publish it.'

'Why not?'

'Well, you see, it might injure our house. People might say, "Oh! we shall never again stay at that hotel. Mrs. Beckett writes books about her customers. We don't want to be put in a book."'

I confessed there was some force in these arguments. Very few people care to be put in a book. Charles Dickens was constantly having trouble with people who declared that he had put them in his books.

'I myself, my dear Mrs. Beckett,' I said, 'have had trouble even with my own relations, who declared that I had put them in my books and held them up to ridicule. And once I had a gentleman come to my house and make quite a disturbance, declaring that I had libelled him by using his name in a farcical comedy, and that his was the only family of that name. He said he wouldn't have minded had I made him a gentleman, but I had made him an awful little snob. He said all his friends declared it was him; but I soothed him down by assuring him that it was impossible, as nobody could mistake him for a snob. And we became great friends afterwards.'

'Yes,' said Mary Jane, 'it is awkward. Look at the trouble you had about my "Memoirs" through people declaring that I had put them in and made them ridiculous. Of course it didn't matter so much, I having ceased to be a servant, and they being my masters and missuses no longer; but with an hotel it's different. You get people who would be awfully wild to be written about, and those whose stories are the best and most striking would, of course, be the first to be recognised, and so the first to object.'

'Take a case which only happened about a week ago,' continued Mrs. Beckett. 'We had a nobleman and his wife staying here——'

'That is certainly a case in point,' I said. 'You cannot expect the nobility to patronize your house if you make stories about them.'

'No, of course we couldn't, and that's where the difficulty comes in. All the best stories are those that would be recognised by the people they were written about. For

instance, this nobleman and his wife would be bound to hear about it if I put them in my book. Their story is such an uncommon one.'

'An uncommon story, my dear Mrs. Beckett?' I exclaimed; 'pray let me hear it. Uncommon stories are rare in these days of over-production, when every idea has been used up and every subject worn thread-bare.'

'Well, I don't mind telling you this story, because I *can't* put it in my book, and it's one that I know you'll be interested in. You see it was like this. About six months ago we had a telegram to say that we were to keep a suite of rooms for Lord and Lady Altonthorpe.'

'Lord Altonthorpe! Why, that is the nobleman they say married a housemaid.'

'Ah, you've heard it, have you?'

'I've heard that Lady Altonthorpe was a housemaid. I saw a paragraph to that effect in one of the sixpenny journals.'

'But you don't know the true story, do you?' asked Mrs. Beckett, looking just a little disappointed.

I hastened to assure my amiable hostess that I knew nothing except that there had been a rumour that Lady Altonthorpe was a domestic servant, and I begged her to continue her narrative, which I shall now proceed to give in her own words, omitting the interruptions of which Mr. Beckett—'who would have his little joke'—was occasionally guilty.

'Of course, when I got that telegram,' said Mrs. Beckett, 'I was anxious that everything should be right—not that it is an uncommon thing for me to have aristocracy here; but still, it does the house good, and so I gave orders to have the best rooms turned out and clean curtains put up, and I carried a lot of the ornaments out of our sitting-room, and

even changed the picture on the wall, which was a scene from the French Revolution.

‘That was Harry’s idea.

‘He said noblemen mightn’t always like to be sitting opposite a picture of noblemen being put to death by the common people. I thought he was right there, but if I had known about Lord Altonthorpe I should have left the picture up. You see that I didn’t know anything of his history, not being one to be constantly reading about the aristocracy like some people will, even taking in society journals and paying sixpence for them, just to read that Lord This has gone to the South of France for the winter, or that Lady That has taken a house in some square or other for the London season. What possible interest that sort of thing can be to anybody but their friends I never could make out.

‘You wouldn’t believe the trouble I had with those rooms. They were the best that we had empty, but the sitting-room chimney smoked whenever the wind was in a certain direction, and I couldn’t tell how the wind would be when my lord and lady arrived.

‘Then we had had complaints about the best bedroom lately. A clergyman who had slept in it declared that there were mice in it, and that they ran about in the walls and squeaked all night, preventing him sleeping.

‘“They’re the best rooms in the house,” I said to Harry. “We’ve nothing else that will do for nobility, so they must have them; but it will be a dreadful thing if the sitting-room chimney smokes them out all day and the mice keep them awake all night.”

‘However, it was no good worrying, so I hoped that the wind would be all right for the chimney while they were with us, and that the mice might perhaps be sleepy and not play about all night. Still, I was anxious, and on the day that my lord and lady were to arrive I got out of bed

at six in the morning, and went to the window and looked out at the weathercock to see which way the wind was blowing.

‘It was the *right* way, thank goodness, and that was off my mind, as they were only to stay a day and a night, as they were on their way to Buxton for his lordship’s health, he suffering with rheumatism very much.

‘That worried me a little, too, because I knew how touchy and fidgety people with rheumatism often are, declaring that the windows don’t fit, and that there’s a draught from the door, and being that fussy about their beds, never believing they are properly aired, etc.

‘When the fly drove up with them from the railway-station, I was in the hall to meet them. His lordship got out first. A gentleman about forty, he was tall, with a clean-shaven face, and a slightly odd look, and what I should call carelessly dressed—that is, not much style, his overcoat being much too big for him and his pockets baggy, and out of shape; and his hat was quite a curious one—a soft felt, like you see in the pictures of Lord Tennyson, only it looked as if it had not been brushed for a week.

‘While I was taking stock, as the saying is, of his lordship, he assisted her ladyship to alight, and then they came in together, and when I saw her ladyship (stylishly dressed she was, but everything very new, and, as I thought, not put on well), you might have knocked me down with a feather, so to speak.

‘I looked at her and said, “Oh!” and then she looked at me, and said, “Oh!” too, and then I knew I hadn’t made a mistake. The lady who was coming into my hotel as Lady Altonthorpe was a young woman named Sarah Martin, who had been under-housemaid at the very last place I ever had. She was about seventeen then, and would be about seven-and-twenty now. Lord Altonthorpe saw we recognised each

other, and he turned to his wife and said, "You know this lady?"

"Yes, dear," she said; "we were fellow-servants together many years ago."

'He didn't seem a bit surprised at that, but put out his hand to me and said, "Very glad to meet you, ma'am; old friend of my wife's, eh? How do you do?" and before I could get over my astonishment at being shaken hands with by a lord like that, he turned round, and was helping our Boots to get the luggage off the fly, and said he'd give him a hand to carry the heavy trunk of my lady's into the hall.

'I said to Harry afterwards, "Well, he's the queerest nobleman I ever saw;" and so he was, but a nice gentleman, and a real gentleman, too, as we found. Would you believe it! He never rang the bell, but when he wanted anything would come down and ask for it; and once, if I hadn't stopped him, he would have carried a scuttle of coals upstairs himself.

'It was all a mystery to me, and I thought, of course, he was mad, and that was how he had come to marry Sarah Martin; but in the evening, when he had gone out for a walk, Sarah—my lady that is now, of course—sent for me to come upstairs, and made me sit down, and told me all about it.

'It seems his lordship was only the Hon. Thomas Jones when she first met him, and was a poet and a Socialist, so she said, but didn't quite know what that was. She was living as housemaid with a gentleman who was a poet and a great writer; and the Hon. Thomas Jones was her master's great friend, and very often a visitor.

"The first time he came, my dear," she said, "I thought he was very curious, for he shook hands with me and called me 'Miss,' and asked if Mr. — (my master) was at home. I was half afraid to leave him in the hall while I went to

see if master *was* in, because I'd read such things in the paper about gentlemanly men, and overcoats and umbrellas; but he gave me a card, and when I saw on it 'The Hon. Thomas Jones,' of course I knew he must be honourable.

"I told the other servants about it (I was new to the place), and they said, 'Oh, he's all right; he's a Socialist, and believes in the equality of everybody. He always calls the servants "miss" and shakes hands with them. And why shouldn't he? for it's quite true what he says: we are all born equal, and it's only money that makes the difference.'

"Still, I will say," continued her ladyship, "that he was always extra polite to me; and one day, when I happened to say I liked poetry, he gave me one of his books to read. I am sure it was very clever, for I couldn't understand it; but I heard master say he was a great poet and a dreamer, and born before his time; and I began to respect him very much. And one day, meeting me out, he walked as far as the house with me, and talked to me about the dignity of labour, and said would I like to hear him speak at a Socialist meeting, and gave me a ticket.

"At that time, you must know, my dear," said her ladyship, "the policeman on that beat was very friendly with me, being a young man who came from my neighbourhood, and he saw me walking with the Hon. Mr. Jones, and was absurdly jealous and very impertinent, actually daring to say that a servant couldn't walk with an honourable gentleman without losing her character.

"I was very cross; but he was a very good-looking young man, and going to be made a sergeant, and so we made it up again, and walked out together—me and the policeman, I mean—next Sunday; and it was settled we were as good as engaged.

"And now, my dear, to make a long story short, I'll tel

you how it all happened. The Hon. Mr. Jones being, so to speak, free of master's house, often came when he was out, and went into the library and waited for him to come in, and sometimes would sit and read there till late at night when master was out for the evening.

“Just before Christmas the Hon. Mr. Jones went out of town, and the day before Christmas master went unexpectedly, and cook had leave to go home on Christmas Day; and it happened I was all alone on that day, taking care of the house, and my sister and her young man were to come and spend the day with me. Master was coming home late that night; but he had his latchkey, and told me not to sit up for him.

“About ten o'clock, just as my sister was going, a knock came at the door, and who should it be but the Hon. Mr. Jones?

“He said he had come back from the country in a hurry, through the people where he had gone to spend Christmas having scarlet fever break out all of a sudden; so, being lonely at his chambers, he thought he'd come and see master.

“I told him master was out, and wouldn't be back till late.

“‘Oh, all right,’ he said; ‘I'll just go into the library, and wait there till twelve; and if he doesn't come, I'll go.’

“Of course, he being in the habit of doing that, I couldn't say, ‘You shan't!’ and he went, and I went downstairs into the kitchen to sit up to let cook in, and took up a book, which was the Hon. Mr. Jones's own poetry book, which he had given me, and fell fast asleep.

“When I woke up and looked at the clock, it was two in the morning, and I was quite cold.

“‘Good gracious!’ I said, ‘where's cook?’ and thinking perhaps she'd been ringing and I hadn't heard her, I went

up to the front door to look out ; and when I got to the hall, I heard snoring in the library.

“ ‘ ‘ ‘ Good gracious ! ’ I said, ‘ the Hon. Mr. Jones must be there ; ’ and I knocked, and he said :

“ ‘ ‘ ‘ Eh—what—who is it ? ’

“ ‘ ‘ ‘ Please, sir, it’s two o’clock, ’ I said. ‘ Is master there ? ’

“ ‘ ‘ ‘ Good gracious—two o’clock ! ’ he said. ‘ I’ve fallen asleep ; I must go. ’

“ ‘ ‘ He got up and apologized, and said he was very sorry but he must have dropped off to sleep without knowing it and I went to the door and let him out.

“ ‘ ‘ It was a moonlight night.

“ ‘ ‘ On the doorstep he turned and shook hands, and apologized again, and then he went down the steps and walked away.

“ ‘ ‘ I looked after him ; and then what do you think I saw ?

“ ‘ ‘ On the opposite side of the road, standing in the shadow, was *our cook and the policeman I was engaged to !*

“ ‘ ‘ I was horrified. It was a terrible situation for a poor girl, my dear, as you will understand, knowing how wicked the world is.

“ ‘ ‘ Cook came in then, bouncing and saying, ‘ Pretty goings on ! ’ and my policeman came to the gate, and called me a traitrix, and said he should make a report to the inspector, who would send it to my master ; and I was never to dare to speak to him again.

“ ‘ ‘ It seems my policeman had seen the Hon. Mr. Jones come in, and had watched and hadn’t seen him come out ; and when cook came by to come in, he said to her, ‘ Oh, she’s alone, is she ? ’ and told her what he’d seen ; and they watched together.

“ ‘ ‘ I was so indignant I couldn’t speak, so I slammed the door to, and went to bed and cried ; and, only that cook

was a hard-hearted wretch, I should have had hysterics ; but I knew she would have let me shriek, and so I didn't.

“The next morning, when I got up, I found master had come in and gone to bed, and directly he came down to breakfast I told him everything ; but that mean wretch the policeman had gone to the inspector, and, if you please, a report came from the police to master that one of his servants had been seen letting a man out of the house at two in the morning.

“Of course I explained to master, who, being a poet and a Socialist himself, understood all ; but that horrid policeman had spread it all over the neighbourhood, and when cook was asked about it at the butcher's and the greengrocer's she made the most of it ; and *my character was gone*.

“Well, the Hon. Mr. Jones heard of it—I suppose master told him. At any rate, my dear, one day he came to the house, and asked to see me alone, and he said, ‘Miss Martin, you have suffered a great wrong through my carelessness and thoughtlessness. I owe you a reparation. I will marry you if you like ; I owe it to you to do so, if you wish it.’

“Of course it was a great thing for him to do, but I should have been a foolish girl to say ‘No,’ especially as my policeman would never have believed anything but what he did believe, and I couldn't explain everything to the neighbourhood, who didn't understand poets and knew nothing about Socialists ; and so, my dear, I said ‘Yes.’

“And a month afterwards we were married ; and we hadn't been married a week when Tom's eldest brother died, and only leaving eleven daughters and no son, my Tom became Lord Altonthorpe, and I became ‘my lady’ ; and a better, kinder husband—though odd—no woman could wish for.

“Only I do wish he'd go into society, and not be so fond

of calling servants 'miss,' and trying to make common people believe they are his equals."

'Of course I congratulated her, and said what a splendid thing it was for her. And she told me that her husband was very rich, but didn't care much about money himself, or grandeur, or anything of that sort, only he let her have everything she wanted; and she told me she had had a grand time in London—buying beautiful dresses and things, and they were going abroad later on, and were to stay in Italy, where my lord, being a poet, was always happiest, it being the thing, it seems, for poets to be fond of Italy, and to like to live there.

"And you know, my dear," said Sarah—I beg her pardon, Lady Altonthorpe—"I do hope when I have him more to myself out there, I shall be able to get him out of his Socialism ideas a little. They are so absurd. As if it was possible for common people to be the equal of an earl!"

'I must say that Lady Altonthorpe was very nice, and didn't seem spoilt, like so many people are by their good fortune; and when she went away she said my lord had never been so comfortable in his life anywhere, and they should recommend our house to all their friends.

'That,' said Mary Jane, 'is the story of Lord and Lady Altonthorpe, two of our guests. Don't you think it very remarkable?'

'Very; and I can quite believe it, because I know that Lady Altonthorpe *was* a housemaid.'

'You agree with me, though, don't you,' said Mrs. Beckett, 'that it wouldn't be right of me to tell that story in my book, "Some of Our Guests"? You see, Lady Altonthorpe told it to me herself, and my being the landlord's wife——'

'Exactly, my dear Mrs. Beckett: it would be a breach of confidence on your part; don't use it on any account.'

Mrs. Beckett said that she certainly should not, and then we talked of old times till the clock struck one, and Mr. Beckett began to yawn, and I saw that I was keeping them up, so I said 'Good-night' and went to bed.

I spent a very pleasant evening with the Becketts, and the next day when I left (after duly admiring the children), I had Mrs. Beckett's promise that if she did bring out a new book I should edit it, as I had edited the previous volumes of the Mary Jane series.

But as the story of Lord and Lady Altonthorpe is *not* to be included, I have taken the liberty of using it myself, and I sincerely trust that when Mrs. Beckett learns what I have done, she will forgive me, in consideration of the services I was able to render her when she was only 'Mary Jane,' and not the prosperous buxom landlady of one of the best hotels in the Midland counties.

‘COME TO ME.’

MRS. TOLBOYS stood at the entrance of the court leading to Tolboys's Registered Lodging-house, looking up the street. It wasn't a pleasant street to look up at the best of times, but on this particular afternoon it was a slough of unutterable despond. From the 1st of December to the 6th it had been a sharp frost, on the 7th it had thawed, and on the 8th it had frozen again. On the 10th it had snowed heavily all day, and on the 11th a dense fog, heavily charged with 'London blacks,' had been succeeded by a rapid thaw. A rapid thaw in a West-End thoroughfare is not an unmixed blessing, but Oxford Street in a state of mud batter and slush cream is Paradise compared with Furrow Street, Mint, when the black snow begins to melt into the blacker mud, and the unswept roadways, rich with the accumulated cabbage-stalks and orange-peel and general refuse of the surrounding tenements, are inundated with a thick, greasy, and malodorous garbage soup.

When to this brief description of the thoroughfare I add the information that Mrs. Tolboys was a comely matron of fifty, with a bright colour, a clear kindly eye, a spotless white apron, and a general air of comfortable well-to-do-ness about her, you will at once come to the conclusion that it is not for the purpose of admiring the scenery that the good lady looks up the street. Take a peep inside the

court at the entrance to which Mrs. Tolboys stands, and you will at once be struck with astonishment that under any circumstances whatever Mrs. Tolboys should be tempted to look up the street at all.

Just through the court is a little open square, half yard, half garden. A few green plants still ornament the narrow bed which runs round the wall. Half a dozen thoroughly respectable hens, accompanied by a sedate and well-mannered cock, are leisurely promenading the little gravelled centre square. A flagged path leads across the open square to the house; the flags are scrupulously clean, and the doorstep is as white as Mrs. Tolboys's cap and apron.

Pausing in astonishment at the neatness, the comfort, and the cleanliness of this little oasis in a desert of disorder and dirt, you see through two lower windows the fires burning brightly, one in a charming and cosy little parlour, and the other in a beautifully-scrubbed, newly-whitewashed kitchen. You are not left long in doubt as to what this comfortable, well-to-do-looking tenement is, for as you run your eyes above the front door, which stands temptingly ajar, you are confronted with a painted board, which you must, if you know anything of the poorer parts of London, have seen over and over again in the course of your peregrinations: 'Registered Lodging-house. Beds 4d. a night.'

Yes; this is a registered or a common lodging-house. No wonder, if you are familiar with the ordinary common lodging-houses of the Metropolis, you almost doubt the evidence of your senses. Air, light, comfort, cleanliness, a neatly-kept garden, a yard in perfect order! What does it mean?

The meaning is clear as soon as you learn a little more about Mr. Tolboys, the finely-built, handsome north-countryman who, assisted by his good wife, manages this house. The house is his own property; by it he makes his

living; but attached to it and forming part of the premises is a mission-hall—none of your circularizing, begging-for-subscriptions, advertisement, and appeal-inserting missions, but a sound, robust, manly affair—a mission of bone and muscle and sinew, not a mission of hysteria.

Tom Tolboys is a Radical and a teetotaler and a philanthropist. From the first moment he purchased the property and took up his residence in the slums he saw that it was quite possible to run a common lodging-house on sound commercial principles, and yet to try and do something towards humanizing the inmates. It was not long before he made the acquaintance of a Nonconformist minister—an earnest temperance advocate, who was known far and wide as 'the Bishop of the New Cut.' The bishop laid himself out to try and rescue drunkards from ruin and misery, and to put them on the right road again.

To him, in consequence of his reputation for kindness of heart, there came day after day men and women with terrible tales of sin and misery and remorse, and hopeless struggles with the fiend that held them help'ess and writhing in its grasp.

Money himself he could not give. It would have brought every loafer, every impostor to his door with some whining promise of reform. But he gave practical help and sympathy wherever he thought there was a chance of better things.

Many a broken-down, helpless, homeless wanderer did he send to Tom Tolboys, telling him to take them in and house them, and, if they showed an inclination to go straight, not to bother them about their nightly fourpence for a bit, but to hold him responsible for it.

In this way Tolboys's lodging-house began to get together quite a remarkable class of customers. Often enough in the common kitchen might be found seated together in

front of the fire worn and tattered victims of the struggle for life, quite fifty per cent. of whom were men of first-class education—men whom drink had brought from prosperity to penury—barristers, gentlemen, naval and military officers, merchants, scholars, doctors,—ay, even clergymen.

I have sat by the kitchen fire of this common lodging-house, and I have heard tattered and ragged outcasts of the London streets, gray-bearded old men some of them, conversing together on some great subject of the day in the purest English, and illustrating their arguments with quotations from classical authors. You had not to listen long before you knew that you were in the presence of men of birth and education, men who had in their day held their heads high in good society, and had some of them been brilliant ornaments of the professions to which they belonged. And yet there they came night after night to the common lodging-house, and sat among street hawkers and odd-job men, and match-sellers and vagrants—mixed with them, talked with them, made pals of them, and often enough paired off with them in the daytime as partners and companions in the wild hunt through the streets of the great city for the cost of their night's lodging and a copper or two over for a little food.

Now that you know the peculiar character of Tolboys's 'doss-house,' commonly called 'The Ark,' you will not be surprised to learn that Mr. and Mrs. Tolboys took considerable personal interest in their lodgers, and tried to be on friendly terms with them. Some of them remained, from the first night they entered the house to the day they quitted it, silent and sullen, refusing to be drawn out as to their past, coming none knew whence, going none knew whither, with the secrets of their stormy lives hidden away in their own hearts—heroes, many of them, in that series of mighty melodramas, 'The Mysteries of Life,' which far

surpass in horror and intensity, in passion and pathos, in sorrow and surprise, any that the boldest playwright has ever dared to fashion for the mimic scene. Others, on the contrary, were only too glad of a sympathetic ear into which to pour their woes, and confided to the genial 'boss' and his helpmate materials for a series of romances of real life which would have made the fortunes of half a dozen ordinary novelists, and given even a Zola plenty of material for a new series of human tragedies.

'The bishop' cases were always the most interesting to Mr. Tolboys. The bishop had a keen eye for character, and he never sent a lodger to the 'Ark' unless it was what is technically known as 'a good case'—a case worth taking up and giving time to and taking trouble over.

On the night of the 10th of December a man had come to the 'Ark' with a note from the bishop to Tom Tolboys: 'Make room for the bearer if you can. It is a terrible case, and I am deeply interested.'

Tom Tolboys read the note and looked up at the 'case.' He was a tall slim man of about forty-two, with a fair brown beard and large dreamy eyes. The face had been handsome and refined once—you could see that at a glance—but it was terribly lined now, and bore unmistakable signs of drink and dissipation. The man had taken off his hat with a graceful bow as he entered the 'deputy's' room, in which Mr. Tolboys received his lodgers; and his long wavy hair, in spite of its unkempt and tousled condition, added to the striking picturesqueness of his appearance.

'What is your name?' asked Mr. Tolboys.

He always entered the bishop's cases in his note-book for future reference.

'William Stanton.'

'And your occupation?'

The man shrugged his shoulders, and a grim smile momentarily lit up his haggard features.

'I have no regular occupation. I have been a good many things. I sell vesuvians, call cabs, lift luggage—do anything, in fact. How much a night is it here?'

'Fourpence. Are you going to pay?'

'Yes,' replied the man, a little proudly; 'I'm not a casual yet. If I hadn't the price of my lodging about me I shouldn't have come here—I should have slept in the street.'

'I beg your pardon. I thought, from Mr. — sending you, perhaps—'

'No; I met him accidentally this afternoon. We got into conversation, and he told me to change my lodging and come here. Here I am, and here's my fourpence.'

He handed the money to Mr. Tolboys, who took it, and then said kindly:

'It's a cold night; you'll be glad to get to the fire. There's plenty of room'; and then, motioning the man to follow him, he opened the door of the common kitchen and pointed to a bench in front of the roaring fire.

'Thank you very much,' said Stanton; then, looking around him, he murmured under his breath, 'Clean and decent—what a luxury!'

Then he made his way to the fire, sat down, and, drawing from his pocket a thick slice of bread, wrapped up in a bit of old newspaper, commenced to eat.

'He's a gentleman, my dear,' said Mr. Tolboys to his wife, when he told her that the bishop had sent another case; 'a perfect gentleman—refined, cultured, and sells vesuvians, and calls cabs. Oh, this terrible curse of drink! Seeing what I see day after day, knowing what I know, I sometimes feel inclined to cry aloud to God that the curse He put upon the world when He let the drink fiend loose

upon it is the vengeance of a remorseless tyrant rather than the punishment of a loving Father.’

‘Hush, Tom, hush!’ cried his wife. ‘These are mysteries we cannot fathom. We see it at its worst, dear. We live on the desolate shore where the fierce winds drive the drowning and the drowned. But because we only see the storm we mustn’t curse the sea, and say that He who made it meant it only to strew the shores with wreckage.’

* * * * *

The next day Mrs. Tolboys managed to have a little talk with William Stanton. She found him what her husband had described—a polite, cultured gentleman; a gentleman in rags, with the mud of the streets caked about the threadbare clothes in which he shivered. But she drew nothing from him, except that he would return that night. He went out once—and he came back again. She knew where he had been in a moment: to the public-house.

She said to him gently:

‘You have seen Mr. ——’ (mentioning the bishop by name). ‘Did he not ask you to try and do without drink for a little while?’

Stanton looked at her for a moment as if he resented the question; then his manner altered.

‘He spoke to me about it,’ he said; ‘but I gave no promise. I shall never give up the drink; it is the one thing that drowns care, and I’ve so much care to drown.’

‘You have been unfortunate—unhappy?’

‘Unfortunate, no. I deserved all that has happened to me. Unhappy, yes. I shouldn’t think there is a more miserable wretch on earth than I am.’

‘I am so sorry. Is there nothing that I can do for you to help you to see things differently?’

‘You are very good,’ said the man softly. ‘No one can do anything for me now.’

‘God can do all things.’

‘God!’ cried the man fiercely; ‘yes, there is one thing He can do for me: take the miserable life that I am too great a coward to take myself.’

Then, evidently anxious to close the conversation, he turned away and went into the kitchen; and then afterwards he went out into the streets. As he passed Mrs. Tolboys in the courtyard he raised his hat and said, ‘I shall come back to-night.’ Then, with his hands thrust into his pockets, he strode up the muddy street, and was out of sight.

It was William Stanton that Mrs. Tolboys was watching. It was after his retreating figure that she looked up the awful street.

‘Poor fellow!’ she said to herself with a deep sigh; ‘what a terrible life’s history his must be, to have sunk so low as this. How I pity him—how I pity him!’

And the tears came into her kindly eyes as she thought of her own happy life—of her good husband, of her stalwart son growing up into manhood, her pride, her hope, her life—and she murmured, half to herself, half to Heaven, with trembling lips:

‘God keep my boy from the curse that brings men down to this!’

* * * * *

William Stanton, the ragged outcast, made his way listlessly towards the West-End. When he came into the busy streets where well-to-do, well-dressed people abound, he pulled his battered hat lower down over his eyes, he thrust his hands into his pockets, bent his head, and gradually lost the independent, defiant manner he had assumed in the lodging-house.

Once or twice in these streets, in the broad daylight, he had been recognised. He had seen men he had known in

his old professional days, and heard them exclaim, 'My God! Stanton!' The look of horror and pity was more than he could endure. One man having recognised him—having probably heard a rumour of his utter degradation—had come to him with money in his hand. Stanton had turned upon him fiercely. 'I don't know you!' he had exclaimed, with an oath, and had walked away rapidly.

There was one thing William Stanton had retained amid all his degradation, and that was his pride. He was a proud man in his rags; a proud man in his maddest moments of drink delirium; a proud man when fierce hunger gnawed at his entrails; a proud man when he slept the long nights through in the parks or in the stone recesses of the bridges, or under the dark railway arches, one of a little herd of vagrants and homeless outcasts huddling close together for warmth and comfort. He had never once in all the awful years of disaster asked for alms. He flattered himself that he still earned his living. He sold his matches, his theatre programmes, outside the doors when he could, and, when he had nothing to sell, he fetched cabs, lifted luggage, did anything that turned up, and for his work he took whatever pay his employer chose to tender him.

And this man was a doctor of medicine—a man who at one time had a brilliant reputation in the large provincial town in which he established himself. Young Dr. Stanton, at the age of thirty, had a magnificent future before him—a skilled surgeon, a brilliant writer upon professional subjects, a universal favourite, looked up to, courted, admired, already beginning to be quoted as an authority upon certain branches of his art, making money fast, married to a beautiful girl who idolized him—everybody prophesied that he would soon be at the top of the tree.

And here he was, ten years later, at the bottom, prostrate,

humiliated, crushed—not only at the bottom, but trodden down into the soil.

How did it happen?

'Alas, how easily things go wrong!'

Things began to go wrong with young Dr. Stanton when, in order to get through the heavy labours of the day, he began to resort too freely to stimulants, and the habit grew upon him before he was aware of it. They went terribly wrong when he lost his only son, a bright little fellow of four, by a terrible accident, of which he was himself the cause. In the long garden at the back of his house he had put up a target, at which he used to practise with a bow and arrow. He was practising one afternoon, and didn't notice that his little boy was in one of the side-walks with the nurse. The little fellow, hearing his father's voice, ran out from behind some bushes—ran right between the target and his father. The arrow struck the child in the throat. At the time of the accident Stanton knew that he was stupidly the worse for drink.

The boy lingered for weeks. His father, maddened by grief, hoping against hope, despairing and tortured, gave uncontrolled sway to his grief, neglected his profession, and then—the story is as old as the hills—why need I dwell upon it?

He began to drink more heavily still to help him to endure the sight of his child's agony. He drank to drown his sorrow when the child died, and then he drank to seek refuge from the thought that he had begun to suffer in name and reputation, and that his patients were dropping away from him.

His wife, his gentle Mary, conquered her own terrible grief for her boy in order to console and strengthen her husband. Her pleadings, her tears, were all in vain. As the outlook grew blacker, as his nerve and skill deserted

him, as his brain became duller and duller, he drank more fiercely still.

He neglected everything and everybody—his wife, his home, his profession—and at last his name became a by-word and a scandal in the town where he had been honoured and revered. The drink curse was upon him, and was dragging him down to the lowest depths of degradation.

Gradually the whole of his patients dropped away from him. A terrible scandal gave the last blow to the crumbling idol, and shattered it to the ground. Summoned to give evidence at an inquest on the body of a man whom he had formerly attended, he came before the court in a state of speechless intoxication, and had to be supported into the witness-box.

After this his madness took a new phase. In his senseless fury he turned upon his wife, met her appeals with curses, her tears with blows. The man was mad—delirious—there was no doubt of that. He threatened her life, and at last she feared that in a moment of drunken insanity he might really kill her. She did not fear for herself, but for him. It was to save him from the crime, not herself from death, that she left him at last, and went to live with her friends.

Even then she made effort after effort to save him, but all was in vain. The end came rapidly, and at last, ruined, bankrupt, penniless, Dr. Stanton disappeared, and was lost in the great City of London.

From the day he left the town where he had practised little was heard of him. Now and then came the rumour that he had been seen, shabby and out at elbows, haunting some well-known drinking-bar. Then it was whispered that he had been recognised in a hospital by a former colleague. He wrote to no one, called upon none of his old friends in London, and his wife never heard from him from the hour they separated.

At last he came down to the slums—to the common

lodging-houses. Everything went in drink, save the few coppers he needed for a night's shelter, but he didn't get enough drink to madden him now: he couldn't buy it. Then conscience, free for a time from the stupefying fumes of the alcohol, awoke, and in the long, lonely nights he suffered all the agonies of remorse. He caught sight of himself once in his mud-stained rags as he passed a shop-window at the West, and he stopped and spat at the image he saw in his horror and loathing.

He was ashamed now to be seen in the daytime, but at night, under cloak of the darkness, he plied his trade of cab-tout outside the theatres.

On the night of the day that Dr. Stanton left Tolboys's lodging-house, he made his way to the Lyceum. He was miserable and dejected. As he had come along the Strand he had stopped to hear a blind man who was singing and accompanying himself on the concertina.

The man had a sweet sympathetic voice, and was singing a ballad. The two first lines kept ringing in the ears of the outcast—

'Come to me
When all Life's dreams have ended.'

It was the tender wail of a woman to the lover who had left her to come back again when he had discovered the falseness of the world, and needed love and sympathy.

'Come to me
When all Life's dreams have ended.'

The words haunted him. He found himself singing them under his voice till the tears came into his eyes and trickled down his haggard cheeks. All the mad folly of the past came back to him. For him all Life's dreams were ended—for him there was now neither love nor hope nor sympathy. He had but to wait till Heaven saw fit to ring the curtain down upon his terrible life's tragedy, and let him rest in a nameless pauper's grave.

When the people came pouring out of the Lyceum an old gentleman touched him on the shoulder, and told him to get a cab. He brought it as soon as he could. The old gentleman returned to the theatre, and brought out a lady muffled up in a cloak, and with an opera-hood over her head. When they were in the carriage, and Stanton had closed the door, the old gentleman gave him sixpence.

Stanton lifted his eyes to thank him. The lady was sitting nearest the door, and their eyes met just as the cabman whipped up his horse. The lady gave a cry of horror. The cab-tout started back with a groan of shame. Husband and wife had met again !

* * * *

‘Come to me

When all Life’s dreams have ended.’

William Stanton murmured the lines again and again as he strode aimlessly through the almost deserted streets at one o’clock in the morning. She had come back to him—the wife of his young manhood, the companion of his happy days. She had come back to him for one brief moment. He had looked upon her face, and in that one short moment his whole life had surged up in his brain for him to see and understand at last. She had come back to him ‘when all Life’s dreams had ended,’ but that was not what the song had meant to him. No ; it was the cry of the woman—the ever-loving, ever-pardoning woman—to the erring wanderer to return—to return when he had seen all the coldness and cruelty of the world, when the hollowness of all life’s fancied joys was known, when all the wild dreaming was over, and the wearied heart sought a haven of rest to anchor in, and be at peace at last.

‘Come to me!’ He thought of her, he thought of himself—the lost, disgraced, drink-sodden wreck. Would she ever breathe those words to him? No, no ; between them rolled a great ocean of black waters. What had she to do with such as he?

And then came the horror of the idea that she should have seen him as he was ; that she should have learnt how low he had sunk. He wondered what she would think—what she would say.

Then he began to wonder what her life had been since they parted. He realized for the first time that she too might have suffered—that her anguish and agony might have been worse even than his, and that now she might be still further shamed and humiliated by the idea that she was tied for life to a loathsome God-and-man-forsaken wretch such as he.

A dozen times he had thought of ending his life, but had never had the courage. Now, slowly but surely, the idea crept into his brain again. That chance meeting, that one glance exchanged between them, had brought back the old love that drink and madness had crushed down in his heart. Henceforth his life would be one burning agony of remorse—one long wail of grief for the love that might be his no more.

And while he lived she was bound to him. He might at least do one deed that was brave and noble—one deed that would give her freedom for a newer and happier life, and break the chain that bound her, good and pure and gentle, to a ragged vagrant, to the companion of thieves and outcasts.

He had spent his last copper in drink before the houses closed. He had rushed to the drink after that meeting ; it was always his friend in trouble, always his refuge from remorse. He hadn't a farthing about him now, so he couldn't go back to Tolboys's. He wandered down a side street in the Strand and on to the Embankment.

There was no moon in the sky. The snow, which was beginning to fall heavily again, had driven the homeless prowlers from the seats, and he had the riverside to himself.

Yes, he would end it all now. But his wife must know that she was free; he wanted her to know that, in spite of all his wickedness, his last thought was of her and for her. Then he thought of the kindly woman who had spoken to him in the morning—Mrs. Tolboys: if he could only send a message to her! He had nothing to write with—nothing to write on.

A slow, heavy tread along the Embankment. Stanton stood up in the shadow, and waited for the policeman to pass.

Instead of passing, the constable turned his lantern on him.

'Hullo!' he said; 'why didn't you want me to see you?'

Stanton shrugged his shoulders.

'I'm doing no harm here, am I?'

'Not as I knows of; but it's a queer pitch on a night like this. Ain't you got any other?'

Stanton saw his chance now.

'Yes; I'm lodging at Tolboys's, in the Mint. Would you like to know my name and my age, and where I was vaccinated? My name is William Stanton—Dr. William Stanton. You'll remember that, won't you?'

'Get out with you!' replied the constable. 'You looks uncommonly like a doctor, you do. If you was a doctor, I should think the best thing you could do would be to order yourself plenty of nourishment, and to be kept warm; but I'm afraid you've been going in too much for the "mixture as before"—eh?'

The policeman laughed at his own wit, and Stanton laughed with him, just to keep on friendly terms.

Then the policeman, apparently satisfied that the shivering wretch wasn't going to rob anybody, as there was nobody about, closed his lantern and resumed his beat, nodding his head and exclaiming with a chuckle:

'Good-night, doctor. You'd better go home and put your

feet in hot water; your voice is thick. There's plenty of cold about, but you ain't likely to put your feet in that; cold water ain't what you perscribes for your complaint generally. Good-night, doctor.'

The man went slowly on down the Embankment, chuckling at his own humour; but he had served Stanton's purpose. He would remember that the man who had said his name was Dr. William Stanton had given his address at Tolboys's; and when his body was found, he would recognise him.

The policeman should *know* that he was the man who had committed suicide. Stanton went rapidly in the direction the policeman had taken, passed him, then climbed upon the parapet, and, with a cry of 'God have mercy on my soul!' flung himself into the black waters of the Thames.

* * * * *

William Stanton, aged forty-two, was charged, as soon as he was well enough to leave the hospital to which he had been taken, with attempting to commit suicide. The policeman on duty told his story, the men in the police-boat who had rowed off and picked him up told theirs; and, as the whole story came out, the reporters in court at once saw their way to a fine report, with a good head-line. A doctor in rags charged with attempting to commit suicide was a romance that did not fall to a reporter's lot every day. But even those gentlemen of the press who saw a good sensational report when the case was half through, were unprepared for the sensational end.

While the magistrate, having heard the evidence, and having ascertained that the miserable, broken-down man before him was really the once celebrated Dr. Stanton, was uttering a few sympathetic platitudes, and wondering whether to order the poor fellow to the workhouse or to send him to prison, a lady, with a sweet gentle face, rose in court, and, addressing the magistrate in a low voice, pleaded

for the prisoner to be set at liberty. ‘If you will discharge him, your worship,’ she said, ‘I will guarantee that he has every care and attention and a home, and he shall never come to this terrible position again.’

The prisoner raised his head as the words fell on his ears; then, with a little cry, he broke down utterly, and fell against the side of the dock, sobbing hysterically.

It was his wife who was pleading for him—his wife who was offering to take him back to her heart and to her home, the poor lost wanderer, the miserable outcast of the London streets. She had seen the case of the attempted uicide reported in the papers, and she had come to the court to claim him and to save him if she could.

* * * * *

It is two years since Dr. William Stanton, of Tolboys’s common lodging-house, was fished out of the Thames and charged with attempting to commit suicide. It is Christmas Day, and in a charming little house in the suburbs of London a Christmas family party is gathered together. Dinner is over, and the guests are all in the drawing-room. The piano is open, and a sweet-faced, graceful, happy-looking woman of two or three and thirty is searching among the music for a song.

Mr. and Mrs. Tolboys have come in for a couple of hours, after presiding at a splendid Christmas dinner which has been provided for the lodgers at the ‘Ark.’ The old gentleman we saw at the Lyceum is there, and the lady of the house calls him uncle, and there are one or two old friends of hers and her husband’s as well.

The husband is a tall, handsome man of four-and-forty. As his wife finds the music she wants, he rises and crosses and stands by her at the piano. She is going to sing her favourite song. Presently her lovely voice floods the room with melody.

'Come to me
When all Life's dreams have ended,'

she sings, and steals a little side-glance at her husband. There are tears in his eyes as he stoops before them all and kisses her brow. Mrs. Tolboys lets two big drops roll down her cheeks, and uncle and Mr. Tolboys cough as though a piece of walnut had gone the wrong way, and their eyes are very bright and shining.

For they all know what that song means to those two hearts united after long years of separation. The wanderer has returned to the fold. On the breast of her who forgave him all and never ceased to love him he has found rest at last. And he has left the old cruel past far behind. The curse has been taken from him. He will not be dependent upon the money his wife has inherited from her father. He has struggled manfully and bravely, and to-day there is a brass plate upon the door of the happy little home, and that plate bears the name of Dr. William Stanton. Patients are coming fast, and he is once more on the high road to prosperity.

That night, when Mrs. Tolboys leaves, the good motherly soul clasps Dr. Stanton's hand as they stand in the hall, and exclaims, 'Did I not tell you that there was hope for you?'

And from the inner room there still floats softly, as they speak, the voice of the loving woman who sings half dreamily to herself :

'When the hopes of youth are withered
And scattered in the blast,
Come to me when thou art weary,
And would forget the past !'

THE END.

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