THE

MYSTERIES OF LONDON.

BY

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CHAPTER CX.

CONTINUATION OF THE BLACK'S VISITS TO HIS PRISONERS.

HAVING quitted the dungeon in which Josh Pedler was confined, the Blackamoor proceeded to the next cell; but, instead of opening the door, he merely drew back a small sliding-lid that covered a grated trap, and the faint rays of a light streamed from the inside.

"Tidmarsh," said the Blackamoor, in a feigned tone, "has your mind grown easier?"

"Yes, sir—oh! yes," replied the prisoner from the interior of his dungeon. "Since you allowed me a light and good books, I have been comparatively a happy man. I know that I deserve punishment—and it seems to do me good to feel that I am atoning for my offences in this manner. I am not afraid of being alone now; and when I put out my light, I am not afraid of being in the dark."

"You pray with more composure?" said the Black, interrogatively.

"Yes, sir—I can settle my mind to prayer now," was the answer; "and I am sure that my prayers are heard. But pray believe, sir, that I never was so wicked—so very wicked as that bad man who kept me for years in his employ. I know that I was too willing an instrument in his hands; and I am sorry for it now. The thing that lays heaviest on my mind, is the share I had in sending poor Tom Rain to the scaffold."

"You are sorry for that deed?" inquired the Black, in a low and slightly tremulous tone.

"Oh! God forgive me!" exclaimed Tidmarsh, his voice expressing sincere contrition. "I do indeed deeply—deeply deplore my share in that awful business; and the ghost of poor Tom Rain used to haunt me when I was first here. In fact, Tom Rain was ever uppermost in my thoughts; and—strange though it may seem—it is not the less true, sir, that your voice appeared to penetrate to my very soul, as if it was Tom Rain himself that was speaking to me. But I have got over all those ideas now—since I learnt to pray; and when I grow dull I read the good books you have lent me. Sometimes I study the Bible; and I find that if I pore over it too much, it makes me melancholy. Then I turn to the Travels and Voyages; and I become tranquil again."

"Should you not rejoice at any opportunity of retrieving your character—even in your old age—and earning an honest livelihood for yourself?" asked the Black.

"Oh! if such a thing could be!" cried the man, in a tone of exultation. "But no—it is impossible, impossible!" he added, after a pause, and speaking in an altered voice. "I have sinned too deeply in respect to poor Tom Rain, to be able to hope for such happiness. God is punishing me in this world, you being His instrument—and yet I can scarcely call it punishment, since you treat me with such kindness. There are times when I even wish that I was more severely punished *here*, so that I might expiate all my sins and feel certain about my fate in another world."

"God is full of forgiveness, Tidmarsh," said the Black: "I feel that He is," he added, in a somewhat enthusiastic manner. "The prospect I distantly hinted at in respect to yourself, may possibly become practicable. You are old—but you may still have many years to live; and it would be wrong—it would be detestable not to give you a full opportunity, sooner or later, of enabling you to testify your contrition. But I cannot speak farther on this subject at present. I have brought you some more books: one is a tale—'*The Vicar of Wakefield*'—the perusal of which will do you no harm. It will show you how virtue, though suffering for a time, was rowarded at last. In a few days I shall myself visit you again."

The Black closed the trap, and stood away from the door, which Wilton now opened; and the basket furnished the prisoner with his provisions and also with some volumes of good and beneficial reading.

The visiting-party next proceeded to the cell in which Toby Bunce and his wife were confined together; and here, as in the immediately preceding instance, the Black spoke to them through a sliding trap, from which a light also gleamed.

"For three days have you now been together, after dwelling some time apart," said the Blackamoor, continuing to speak in a feigned tone; "and I now conjure you to tell me truly whether you would rather be thus in each other's company, or separated as before?"

"Oh! leave us together, sir—leave us together, I implore you!" cried Mrs. Bunce, in a voice of earnest appeal. "We are now the best friends in the world; and I have promised my husband never to say a cross word unnecessarily to him again."

"She seems quite an altered woman, sir," observed Toby. "But then——"

"But then what? demanded the Black, seeing the man hesitated.

"Well, sir—I will speak my mind free," continued Bunce; "because I'm no longer afraid to do so. I was going to say that p'rhaps it is this loneliness in which we are placed that makes Betsy talk as she does; and that if we was to be again together out of doors——"

"You would not find me change, Toby," interrupted the woman, but not in a querulous manner. "I like to hear you read to me from the Bible, and from the other good books that the gentleman has given us. I wish we had passed more of our time in this way before we got into all this trouble. But pray, sir," she added, turning towards the door, "do tell me whether you mean to keep us here all our lives!"

"You must ask me no questions, remember," said the Black, in a mild but firm tone. "I have told you this before. Learn to subdue all impatience, and to become resigned and enduring. You have made others suffer in the world;—you have been the agents and tools of a wicked man;—and you now see that heaven is punishing you through the means of one who has power thus to treat you."

"Oh! how I wish that I had never known that detestable Bones!" exclaimed the woman, covering her face with her hands.

"And how I wish that I had stuck to my trade in an honest manner!" cried Toby Bunce in a voice of unfeigned contrition.

"Think of all that—repeat those sentences to each other—as often as you can," said the Blackamoor. "In the course of a few days I shall visit you again."

With these words, he stood back from the door, which Wilton opened; and the two inmates of the dungeon received supplies of wholesome food and moral or instructive books.

The party then proceeded further along the subterranean passage from which the various cells opened.

"Do you mean, sir, to fulfil your intention of this night visiting *him*?" inquired Cæsar, addressing his master in a low, faint, and tremulous tone, as if he were a prey to some vague terror.

The Blackamoor did not immediately answer the question; but, placing his hand upon his brow, appeared to reflect profoundly for almost the space of a minute.

Wilton—who seemed acquainted, as well as Cæsar, with all his master's secrets—likewise surveyed the Black with mingled curiosity and apprehension.

"Yes!" at length exclaimed the mysterious personage; "I will now, for the first time since he has been my prisoner here, hold personal communication with Benjamin Bones!"

The party proceeded in silence to a cell near the extremity of the long subterranean passage; and on reaching it, the Black handed the lamp to Cæsar, at the same time making a sign to that youth and the other dependants to stand back so that no gleam of the light should penetrate into the dungeon when the door was opened. They obeyed in profound silence; and their master immediately entered the cell, closing the door behind him with that rapidity which is exercised by a brute-tamer when introducing himself into the cage of a wild beast.

The interior of the dungeon was as dark as pitch,—so dark, that there was not even that greyish appearance which obscurity frequently wears to

eyes accustomed to it. It was a darkness that might be felt,—a darkness which seemed to touch and hang upon the visual organs like a dense black mist.

"Who is it?" demanded the sepulchral voice of Old Death, his tone marked with a subdued ferocity and a sort of savage growling which seemed to denote a rancorous hate and pent-up longings for bitter vengeance against the author or authors of his solitary imprisonment.

"I am the person who keeps you here," answered the Black, studying to adopt a voice even more feigned and unlike his natural tones than when he was ere now addressing Tidmarsh and the Bunces.

Still that voice had in it some peculiarity which appeared to touch a chord that vibrated to the very core of Old Death's heart; for he evidently made a starting movement, as he said hoarsely and thickly, "But who are you—a spectre or a living being? Tell me who you are!"

"I am a living being like yourself," was the reply, delivered in a voice disguised in deeper modulations than before. "Are you afraid of being visited by spectres?"

There was a long pause, during which the deep silence was interrupted only by the heavy breathing of Old Death, as if the utter darkness of the place sate oppressively upon him.

"Are you afraid of spectres, I ask?" demanded the Black, who was leaning with folded arms against the door, and with his eyes in the direction where he presumed Old Death to be seated; though not even the faintest outline of his form could he trace amidst that black obscurity.

"Bring me a light, or let me out—and I will answer all your questions," cried Benjamin Bones, his anxiety to obtain his freedom giving a cadence of earnest appeal to his voice in spite of the tremendous rage which his bosom cherished against the individual who had proclaimed himself to be his gaoler.

"Do you deserve mercy?—do you merit the indulgence of man?" asked the Black, in a tone profoundly solemn.

"What do you know of me?—who are you?—why did you have me brought here?—and by what right do you keep me in this infernal place?" demanded Old Death, rapidly and savagely.

"Is it not a just retribution which makes you a prisoner in a subterranean where you have often imprisoned others?" said the Black.

"Then 'tis that miscreant Ellingham who has put me here!" exclaimed Bones, in a tone which showed that he was quivering with rage. "Demon!—fiend!—yes—you are Lord Ellingham—I thought I knew your voice, although you tried to disguise it. At the first moment I fancied—but that was stupid,—still it struck me that it was the voice of Tom Rain which spoke. Ha! ha!" the old wretch chuckled with horrible ferocity and savage glee—"I did for him—I did for him! I sent him to the scaffold—I got him hanged—and now he is food for worms! Ellingham—for I know you *are* Lord Ellingham—I can have the laugh at you, you devil, although you keep me here!"

"Miserable old man," said the Black, in a tone of deep pity, though still disguised in modulation, —"are you insensible to the whisperings of conscience?"

"Yes—now that you are here!" cried Benjamin Bones, his clothes rustling as if with the trembling nervousness of enraged excitement. "You made me sell you these houses—you took them away from me by force, as it were; and now you keep me a prisoner here. It is all through vengeance that you do it—*you* who pretended to be above all thoughts or intentions of revenge!"

"As God is my judge, I harbour no such sentiment towards you!" said the Blackamoor, emphatically. "But will you converse tranquilly and calmly with me?"

"Well—I will try," returned Old Death. "What do you want to say to me?"

"To remind you that you are an old—very old man, and that you cannot hope to live much longer——"

"Fiend! would you kill me in cold blood!" interrupted Bones, in a sort of shrieking, yelling tone that indicated mingled alarm and rage.

"Had I intended to slay you, I might have done it when you were first brought here as my prisoner," answered the Black. "Rest satisfied on that head——"

"Then you do not mean to kill me?" exclaimed Old Death, with all the hysterical joy of a coward soul, in spite of his natural and still untamed ferocity.

"Heaven forbid!" ejaculated the Blackamoor.

"There—now 'tis the voice of Tom Rain once again!" cried Old Death, evidently shuddering as he spoke. "But, no—I am a fool—you are the Earl! Yes—tell me—are you not the Earl of Ellingham?"

"No matter who I am," was the solemn reply. "If you ask me questions, I will immediately leave you."

"No—don't go for a few minutes!" exclaimed Old Death, imploringly. "I have been here a month,—yes—for I have counted the visits of your men, who come, as they tell me, every night to bring me food,—and I know that I have been here a month. In all that time I have only exchanged a dozen words with human beings—and—and—this solitude is horrible!"

"You have leisure to ponder on all your crimes," said the Black.

"Who made you my judge?" demanded Old Death, with a return of his ferocity of tone and manner. "If you want me to confess all my sins, and will then set me free, I will do it," he added in a somewhat ironical way.

"Confession is useless, without true repentance," observed the Blackamoor. "Besides, all your misdeeds are known to me,—your behaviour to your half-sister, Octavia Manners, years ago—your treatment of poor Jacob Smith—your machinations to destroy Thomas Rainford——"

"Then, by all this, am I convinced that you *are* the Earl of Ellingham!" cried Old Death. "Ah! my lord," he immediately added, in a voice which suddenly changed to a tone of earnest appeal, "do not keep me here any longer! Let me go—and I will leave London for ever! Reflect, my lord—I am an old man—a very old man,—you yourself said so just now,—and you are killing me by keeping me here. Send me out of the country—anywhere you choose, however distant—and I will thank you: but again I say, do not keep me here."

"When the savage animal goes about preying upon the weak and unwary, he should be placed under restraint," said the Blackamoor. "You are not repentant, Benjamin Bones! A month have you been here—a month have you been allowed to

ponder upon your enormities,—and still your soul is obdurate. Not many minutes have elapsed since you glorified in one of the most infamous deeds of your long and wicked life."

"I spoke of Tom Rain to annoy you—because I was enraged with you for keeping me here," returned Old Death, hastily. "There have been moments," he added, after a short pause, "when I have felt sorry for what I did in that respect. I would not do so over again—no, my lord, I assure you I would not! I wish your poor half-brother was alive now—I would not seek to injure him, even if I had the power."

"You speak thus because you have been alone and in the dark," observed the Blackamoor, in a mournful voice:—"but were you restored to freedom—to the enjoyment of the light of God's own sun—and to the possession of the power of following your career of iniquity, you would again glory in that dreadful deed."

"No," answered Old Death: "I am sorry for it. I know that my nature is savage and ferocious: but will you tame me by cruelty? And your keeping me here is downright cruelty—and nothing more or less. It makes me vindictive—it makes me feel at times as if I hated you."

"I shall keep you here, nevertheless, for some time longer,—aye, and in the dark," returned the Blackamoor: "because you seek not to subdue your revengeful feelings. It is terrible to think that so old a man should be so inveterately wicked. Do you know that your gang is broken up—rendered powerless? In the centre of this subterranean are Timothy Splint—Joshua Pedler—Mrs. Bunce and her husband—and your agent, Tidmarsh."

"Then I have no hope *from without!*" growled Old Death, his garments again rustling with a movement of savage impatience; and for an instant it struck the Blackamoor that he could see two ferocious eyes gleaming in the dark—but this was doubtless the mere fancy of the moment.

"Yes,—you are beyond the reach of human aid, unless by *my* will and consent," said the Blackamoor. "Your late companions or tools in iniquity are all housed safely here;—and, what is more, they are penitent. Listen for a moment, Benjamin Bones; and may the information I am about to give you prove an instructive lesson. Timothy Splint is at this instant reading the Bible, therein to search for hope and consolation, which God does not deny to the worst sinners when they are truly penitent. Joshua Pedler is occupying himself in writing a letter of advice to a young girl who became his mistress, whom he drove to prostitution, but who is now earning her livelihood in a respectable manner. Tidmarsh deplores the folly which made him your instrument; and he is reading good books. Bunce and his wife are together in the same dungeon; and the woman is rapidly yielding up to her husband that empire which she had usurped. They too regret that they ever knew you; and the Bible is their solace. Of six persons whom I imprisoned in this place which was once your own property, five are already repentant; you, who are the sixth, alone remain obdurate and hardened."

"And my old friends curse me!" moaned the ancient miscreant, his voice seeming more hollow and sepulchral than ever, as if he were covering his face with his hands. "What—the people who owe so much to me—the Bunces—Tidmarsh——"

"Would not speak to you, unless it were to convert you," added the Black. "Thus, you perceive, you—who in the common course of nature, are of all the six the nearest to the threshold of the tomb,—you, who have so many years upon your head, and such deep and manifold crimes to expiate,—*you*, Benjamin Bones," continued the warning voice, "are the last to show the slightest—the faintest sign of penitence. Is not this deplorable? And even now you appear to regret that your late companions in crime should be in their hearts thus alienated from you. Doubtless you trusted to the chapter of accidents—to the hazard of chances to enable them to discover your place of imprisonment and effect your rescue?"

Old Death groaned heavily, in spite of himself.

"Yes:—such was your hope—such was your ideas," resumed the Black; "and now you are unmanned by disappointment. Even your friend Jeffreys turned against you—he led you into the snare which I set for you—he will not raise an arm to save you you from my power. He does not even know where you are."

"Then I am abandoned by all the world!" shrieked forth the wretched miscreant, unable to subdue the agonising emotions which this conviction excited within him.

"He who finds himself abandoned by all the world, should throw himself upon his Maker," said the Blackamoor.

"There—there—'tis the voice of Rainford again!" cried Old Death, evidently seized with ineffable terror. "But, no—no—you are the Earl of Ellingham—you must be the Earl! Yet why do you every now and then imitate the tone of Tom Rain? Is it to frighten me, my lord? Tell me—is it to frighten me?"

"You seem impressible to fear of any kind," answered the Black,—"I mean a fear which may be permanent and salutary. You have occasional qualms of conscience, which you cannot altogether resist, but which almost immediately pass away. Have you no wish to make your peace with heaven? Would you pray with a clergyman, were one to visit you?"

"No:—I am unfit for prayer—I should not have the patience to stand the questioning of a clergyman," answered Old Death hastily: then, almost immediately afterwards, he said, "But I was wrong to give such a reply! Yes—send me a clergyman—let him bring a light—do anything to relieve me from this solitude and this darkness. My lord—for I know that you are the Earl of Ellingham—pray take compassion upon me! I am an old—a very old man, my lord; and I cannot endure this confinement. I told you just now that I was sorry for what I did to your brother-in-law; and you know that I cannot recall him to life. Neither will you do so by killing me. Have mercy upon me, then, my lord: let me leave this horrible place——"

"To enter the great world again, and renew your course of crime?" interrupted the Black. "No—Benjamin Bones, that may not be! Let me first become assured that you sincerely and truly repent of your misdeeds—let me be impressed with the conviction that you are sorry for the crimes which have marked your long life,—and then—*then* we will speak of ameliorating your condition. For the present, do not consider me as your enemy—do not look upon me as a man acting towards you from

vindictive motives only. No;—for were I inclined to vent on you a miserable spite or a fiendish malignity, the means are not deficient. I might keep you without food for days together—but each day your provender is renewed; or I might even kill you outright—and yet I would not violently injure a hair of your head! To-morrow evening I will visit you again: in the meantime endeavour to subdue your feelings so that you may then speak to me without irritation."

With these words the Black abruptly thrust the door open, and quitted the dungeon; but at that instant Cæsar, who had been pacing up and down with Wilton in the immediate vicinity of that particular cell, was so close to the entrance that the light of the lamp which he carried in his hand streamed full upon the countenance of his master as the latter sprang from the deep darkness of Old Death's prison-house.

The glare for a moment showed the interior of the dungeon; and the Black, mechanically turning his eyes towards the place where he presumed Benjamin Bones to be, caught a rapid glimpse of the hideous old man, seated—or rather crouched on his bed, his hands clasped round his knees, and his form so arched that his knees and chin almost appeared to meet.

In another instant the dungeon-door was closed violently by the Blackamoor, who, as he locked and barred it, said in a low and somewhat reproachful tone to Cæsar, "You should not have been so incautious as to throw the light upon me just as I was leaving the cell. Old Death had time, even in that single moment during which the glare flashed upon my countenance, to observe me distinctly."

"I am truly sorry, sir, that I should have been so imprudent," answered Cæsar, in a tone of vexation at his fault. "But it is impossible that he could recognise you."

"I believe so," observed the Black; "and therefore we will say no more upon the subject. The old man remains obdurate and hardened," he continued, still speaking in a low whisper; "and yet I have hopes of him as well as of the others."

Wilton supplied Benjamin Bones with provisions through the trap in his dungeon-door; and the party then quitted the subterranean by the mode of egress communicating with the house in Red Lion Street, Clerkenwell—for the reader now perceives, as indeed he may long ago have conjectured, that the Black's dwelling was established in the quarters lately tenanted by Old Death.

CHAPTER CXI.

A CONVERSATION.

Pass we over another month—eight weeks having now elapsed since the six prisoners were first consigned to their dungeons, and four weeks from the date of those visits the description of which has occupied the two preceding chapters.

It was between nine and ten o'clock in the evening; and the Blackamoor was seated in his apartment, looking over some letters, when Cæsar ushered in Dr. Lascelles.

"Good evening, my dear sir," said the Blackamoor, shaking the worthy physician cordially by the hand. "Be seated—and Cæsar will bring us a bottle of that claret which you so much admire. I am delighted that you have at length found time to give me an hour or two, in order that I may enter into full and complete explanations of certain matters——"

"I understand—I understand," interrupted the doctor, good humouredly. "Your theory has proved to me more practical than I expected: but I shall not say any more about it until you have given me all the details of its progress. And before you begin, I must observe that the case which took me out of town six weeks ago, and has kept at Brighton all the time, has ended most satisfactorily. I have effected a complete cure."

"I am delighted to hear tidings so glorious from you, doctor," said the Black. "A case which had baffled all the physicians who had previously been concerned in it, is now conducted to a successful issue by yourself. It will wondrously and deservedly increase your reputation, great as that fame already was."

"My dear friend," replied the physician, "without for a moment seeking to recall anything unpleasant connected with the past, I must inform you that galvanism was the secret of the grand cure which I have effected. But let us pass on to another subject," exclaimed the doctor hastily, as if considerately turning the discourse from a disagreeable topic. "I have been absent for six weeks—quite a strange thing for me, who am so wedded to London; and you are one of the very first of my friends on whom I call. All day long I have been paying hurried visits to my patients; and now I come to sit a couple of hours with you. I suppose you have plenty of news for me?"

"None of any consequence beyond the sphere of my own affairs in this place," answered the Black. "You are of course aware that the Earl has made Esther an offer of his hand——"

"To be sure, my dear friend," interrupted Lascelles: "that engagement was contracted, you remember, two or three weeks before I left London, when summoned to Brighton. But I presume that the Earl is still ignorant of——"

"All my proceedings?" exclaimed the Black, finishing the sentence for the physician. "Yes—he remains completely in the dark respecting everything. The time may, however, soon come when he shall be made acquainted with all; and then I do not think he will blame me."

"Far from it!" cried Lascelles, emphatically: "he doubtless owes you his happiness, if not his life—for there is no telling what that miscreant, Old Death, might not have done to gratify his frightful cravings for vengeance. The monster!" exclaimed the physician, indignantly: "he would even have inflicted the most terrible outrages and wrongs upon the amiable Esther and the generous-souled Lady Hatfield, in order to wound the heart of the Earl."

"And yet I do not despair of reforming that man, bad as he is," observed the Black.

"Reform the Devil!" cried the doctor. "But I will not anticipate by any hasty opinion of mine the explanations which you are going to give me. By the bye, have you had any intelligence relative to that Mr. Torrens?"

"Yes," answered the Black. "Esther received a letter from his daughter Rosomond a few days ago. The poor girl and her father were on their way to Switzerland, where they intended to settle

in some secluded spot. The old gentleman is worn down and spirit-broken; and Rosomond states that she is afraid he is oppressed with some secret care beyond those with which she is acquainted."

"And your man Jeffreys?" said Lascelles, interrogatively.

"The next time you visit Hackney, doctor,—should your professional avocations take you to that suburb," replied the Blackamoor, "forget not to look out for the most decent grocer's shop in Mare Street; and over the door you will see the name of JOHN JEFFREYS. He entered the establishment only a few days ago; and I believe he is a reformed man. I tried his fidelity as well as his steadiness in many ways, during the last two months; and I have every reason to entertain the best hopes relative to him. At all events, he has every chance of earning an honest and good living; for he has purchased an old-established business, which Wilton previously ascertained to be a profitable concern."

"Have you heard or seen anything lately of our friend Sir Christopher Blunt?" inquired the physician, laughing as he spoke.

"I have not seen him since that memorable night when he fulfilled the duties of a magistrate in this room," answered the Black, smiling; "but I have occasionally heard of him. He is so puffed up with pride in consequence of the importance which he derived from his adventure here, that he looks upon himself as a perfect demigod. By the bye, I saw an advertisement in this day's papers, announcing the speedy publication of the '*The Life and Times of Sir Christopher Blunt. By Jeremiah Lykspittal, Esq. With numerous Portraits; and containing a mass of interesting correspondence between the Subject of the Biography and the most Eminent Deceased Men of the present Century.*' So ran the advertisement."

"At which you of course laughed heartily," exclaimed the doctor. "But here is Cæsar, with the wine—and long enough he has been in fetching it up, too."

The lad made some excuse, placed the decanters and glasses on the table, and then withdrew.

"Now for the promised explanations, my friend," cried the physician, as he helped himself to the purple juice of Bordeaux.

"First," began the Blackamoor, "I shall speak to you of the six prisoners generally—or rather of my system, as applied to them. My belief originally was that bad men should become to a certain extent the reformers of themselves through the medium of their own thoughts. It is not sufficient, I reasoned within myself, that criminals should be merely placed each night in a situation to think and reflect and then enjoy the light of the glorious day again. A night's meditations may be poignant and provocative of a remorse of a salutary kind: but when the day dawns, the mind becomes hardened again, and all disagreeable reflections fly away. The most guilty wretches fear not spectres in the daytime: 'tis in the darkness and silence of the night that phantoms haunt them. In a word, then, the natural night is not long enough to make an impression so deep that the ensuing day can not easily obliterate it."

"Good!" exclaimed the physicians: "I follow you attentively."

"These considerations," resumed the Black, "led me to the conclusion that a wicked man's thoughts could only be rendered available as a means to induce sincere repentance and excite a permanent remorse, by extending their train to a long, long period. If a night of a few short hours' duration would produce a very partial and limited effect upon the mind of a criminal, I reasoned—why not make *a night* of many weeks, and hope for a proportionately grand and striking result? Accordingly, I resolved to subject those six prisoners to the test; and I will now give you a detailed account of the consequences."

"Proceed," said the physician: "I am becoming deeply interested."

"The six prisoners were each placed in a separate cell, and not allowed any light in the first instance," continued the Blackamoor. "Each dungeon was plainly but comfortably furnished; and every evening they were supplied with a sufficiency of food for four-and-twenty hours. They were ordered to perform their ablutions regularly under pain of having their meat stopped; and you may be sure that they did not fail to obey the command. Twice a week the men were shaved by one of my people; and twice a week also they were supplied with clean linen. The woman was of course provided with additional changes; and as her health was more likely to suffer than that of the men, I allowed her to walk up and down the long subterranean for two hours each day, watched by Wilton so that she might not communicate with either of the prisoners. But I am now about to enter on details connected with each individual."

The physician drew his chair a little closer to the Black.

"Tidmarsh was the first who showed any signs of contrition," resumed the latter. "He could not endure that one, long, endless *night* into which I had plunged him,—a night interrupted only by the short and regular visits of myself and my people. He was ever alone with his own thoughts, which no intervals of a long day broke in upon: the impression created by his thoughts was ever in his mind—the *continuous night* kept that impression *there!* By degrees he began to see the error of his ways — and, when his thoughts were on one occasion intolerable, and his imagination was filled with frightful images, he had recourse to prayer. The next time I visited him he assured me that his prayers had relieved him, but that he could not sufficiently settle his mind to pray so often as he desired. That was the moment to give this man a light, and I did so. At the same time I offered him his choice between the Bible and a Tale-book; and he chose the former with unaffected readiness. Had he selected the latter, I should have seen that he craved for amusement only—and he would have had neither lamp nor books until he had gone through a farther ordeal of his lonely thoughts in utter darkness. Well—this Tidmarsh, by the aid of the light, was enabled to study the Bible and settle his soul to prayer. But a continual and unvaried perusal of the Bible is calculated to render the mind morbid, and convert a sinner into a grossly superstitious fanatic. Accordingly, when I saw that Tidmarsh began to grow gloomy—which was in a very few days—I gave him books of Travels and Voyages: and his soul was refreshed by the change. The improvement in that man was far more rapid than I could have possibly anticipated. During my visits to him, I tested his sincerity in a variety of ways,—by means of questions so artfully contrived as to admit of two kinds

of answers: namely, one kind hypocritical, and the other sincere—and at the same time implying a sort of promise of release if the hypocritical reply were given. But I found him straightforward and truly conscientious in his answers. In due time I allowed him such novels as '*The Vicar of Wakefield*,' '*Paul and Virginia*,' '*Elizabeth, or the Exiles of Siberia*,' to read: but I found that he preferred the Travels, Voyages, and Biographies of great and good men. Indeed, scarcely six weeks had elapsed from the date of that man's incarceration in the dungeon, when I felt convinced that he was so far a reformed character as to be anxious to earn an honest livelihood if he were only afforded the chance. Then I removed him from his dungeon, and lodged him in a room up stairs. He was still in reality a prisoner, because any attempt to escape on his part would have been immediately detected—so narrowly yet secretly was he watched. To him, however, it must have seemed that he was free: but he never evinced the least inclination to avail himself of the apparent liberty which he enjoyed. Every circumstance spoke in that man's favour; and the night before last he was sent off, in company with one of my dependants, to Portsmouth, whence they embarked together for the island of Alderney, where Tidmarsh is to settle in a small way of business, to establish which the means will be found him. My retainer will remain for a few weeks—or perhaps months—so as thoroughly to watch his conduct; and if during that period, and in a place where there are no evil temptations, he manifests an uniform steadiness of conduct, I think we may safely calculate that there is no fear of a relapse."

"And all this has been effected in two short months!" exclaimed the physician, with a tone and manner indicative of mingled surprise and admiration. "I could scarcely have believed it possible."

"Listen to my next case, doctor," said the Black; "and you will see that my system is most salutary. I shall speak of the two Bunces collectively. The man Bunce I always looked upon rather as a soft-pated, hen-pecked fool than a radically wicked fellow; and accordingly, the moment he began to exhibit very serious alarm and horror at being alone and in the dark, I gave him a lamp and the Bible. The *length of night* which I made him endure was not more than two-thirds of a week. In respect to his wife, the first demonstration of repentance which she showed, was in a desire to speak to her husband if only for a few minutes and through the trap-door of his cell. Of course I issued orders that the request should be complied with; and it was evident that the woman derived comfort from this indulgence. Next day she was permitted to converse with him at the trap-door for nearly half an hour; and then she was overheard begging his pardon for the ill-treatment which he had so often endured at her hands. For many, many successive days this short intercourse was allowed them; and on one occasion, Toby Bunce read her a few verses from the Bible, he being in his cell with the lamp, and she standing outside his door in the dark subterranean passage. The manner in which she received the passage thus read to her, induced me to order that she also should be provided with a light and a Testament; for the *night* which she endured, and which could scarcely be said to have been even interrupted by the daily walk in the dark passage, was just *three weeks*. It gave me pain, doctor—oh! it gave me pain, I can assure, to punish that woman so severely; but her mind was very obdurate—her heart very hardened;—and darkness was long before it produced on her the effect which I desired. At length, a few days after she had been allowed a lamp,—and a little more than one month ago—I yielded to her earnest entreaties that she might be lodged with her husband. Then what a change had taken place in her! She was tamed—completely tamed,—no longer a vixenish shrew, but questioning her husband mildly and in a conciliating tone relative to the passages of the Bible, or the Travels and other instructive books, which he had read to her. Good feelings appeared to establish themselves rapidly between this couple. I had put them to several tests. On one occasion Wilton persuaded Toby Bunce that he was not looking very well, and some little luxury was added to the evening's supply of food, it being intimated that the extra dish was expressly for himself. Wilton remained near the cell, and listened to what passed within. Bunce insisted upon sharing the delicacy with his wife; and she would not hear of such a proposal. He urged his offer—she was positive; and in this point she once again showed a resolution of her own, but not in a manner to give her husband offence. The very next day—this was a week ago—I had the pair removed to a chamber over-head, giving them the same apparent chance of escape as in the case of Tidmarsh. They did not however seek to avail themselves of it; and yesterday evening they were separated again—but only for a short time. In fact, Bunce was last night sent off to Southampton, in company with one of my people; and thence they doubtless embarked for the island of Sark this morning. Mrs. Bunce will leave presently, guarded by my faithful dependant Harding and his wife, who will not only take her to rejoin her husband in the little islet opposite Guernsey, but will also stay with them there for a period of six months. Bunce will follow his trade as a tailor, Harding finding a market for the clothes which he makes in St. Peter's Port, which is the capital of Guernsey, as you are well aware."

"So far, so good," exclaimed the physician, highly delighted with these explanations. "Should your system produce results permanently beneficial, you may become a great benefactor to the human race; for it is assuredly far better to reform the wicked by a course of a few weeks' training by playing upon their feelings in this manner, than to subject them to the contamination of a felons' gaol and inflict years of exile under circumstances which are utterly repugnant to all hopes of reformation. But pray answer me one question. Should either of these Bunces, or Tidmarsh choose to resist the control and authority of your dependants who have charge of them at present—and should any one of those quasi-prisoners demand their unconditional freedom — how can your men exercise a power or sway over them?"

"These quasi-prisoners, as you term them," answered the Black, "have not, as a matter of course, the least idea who I really am. Their minds, somewhat attenuated by their incarceration and all the mysterious circumstances of their captivity, are to a certain extent over-awed. They know that they have been, and still believe themselves to be, in the power of one who wields an authority which they cannot comprehend; and fear

alone, if no better motive, therefore renders them tractable. This ensures their obedience and their silence at least for the present. Eventually, when they again become accustomed to freedom, they will find themselves placed in a position to earn an honest and very comfortable livelihood—care being taken to keep alive in their minds the conviction that the business which produces them their bread and enables them to live respectably, only remains their own so long as they prove worthy of enjoying its advantages. Now my calculations and beliefs are these:—People who have entered upon a course of crime, continue in it because it is very difficult, and often impossible, to leave it for honest pursuits. But when once they have experienced the dreadful effects of crime, and are placed in a way to act and labour honestly, very few indeed would *by choice* relapse into evil courses. Therefore, I conclude and hope that the Bunces on the one hand, and Tidmarsh on the other, will, if from mere motives of policy and convenience alone, steadily continue in that honest path in which they are now placed, and the advantages of which they will soon experience."

"Good again," said the doctor. "If your calculations only applied to six criminals out of ten, you would be effecting an immense good by means of your system. But I hope and indeed am inclined to believe that the proportion in your favour is even larger."

"I am certain that it is," answered the Blackamoor. "Well, I now come to Timothy Splint—the man, who, as you may remember, was the actual assassin of Sir Henry Courtenay."

"If you succeed in redeeming that fellow," exclaimed the physician, "I shall say that your system can have no exceptions. Stay, though!" he cried, a thought striking him;—"I had forgotten Old Death. Ah! my dear friend, you may as well endeavour to tame the boa-constrictor, as to reform that dreadful man."

"You shall hear of him in his turn," said the Black, his tone assuming a slight degree of mournfulness, as if he were less satisfied in respect to the applications of his system to Old Death, than in either of the other cases. "For the present," he observed, "you must have patience enough to listen to certain details relative to Timothy Splint."

"Go on, my dear friend," cried Dr. Lascelles. "I am all attention — and patience too, for that matter. Your narrative is too interesting to be tedious.

"Timothy Splint," continued the Blackamoor, "appeared to suffer more horribly from the darkness than all the others. The spectre of the murdered baronet was constantly by his side, and even prevented him from committing self-destruction. For a whole month did his *night* continue; and during that period he must have endured the most frightful mental tortures. This was all the better: such a state of mind naturally drove the man to pray:—and prayer relieved him. I remember how touchingly, although in his rude style, he assured me one evening that when he prayed the spectre grew less and less. Now, notwithstanding I was well pleased to find him in this frame of mind, I did not choose to encourage superstitious notions: and therefore I explained to him that the only apparitions which existed were those that were conjured up by a guilty conscience. At the expiration of, I think, exactly thirty-one days, I allowed this man a light and a Bible. Then I pursued the same treatment with him as in respect to Tidmarsh and the Bunces: I mean, I gave him books of Travels and Voyages and moral Tales. He seemed very grateful—not only seemed, but really was; and his hard heart was melted by my kind treatment. A few days ago, he gave me the outlines of his early life; and I found that circumstances had driven him into the ways of crime. His reformation was, therefore, all the easier; because he had a youth of innocence to look back upon and regret. He moreover assured me that even with his late companion in crime, Josh Pedler, he had frequently spoken, in mournful mood, of the unhappiness which often marks the hours of men of lawless character; and all these circumstances tended to give strength and consistency to his declarations that he longed—deeply longed to have an opportunity of earning an honest livelihood for the future. What to do with him I scarcely knew. Whenever I reflected on this subject, I remembered that he was a murderer—stained with the blood of a fellow-creature; and his case was therefore widely different from that of the Bunces and Tidmarsh. At length it struck me that emigration to a far-distant land was the only fitting course to adopt; and I proposed it to him. He was rejoiced at the idea; for he instantly saw how, by changing his name, and commencing the world anew in another sphere, he should be removed from old haunts where either unpleasant reminiscences would be awakened, or temptations present themselves. Moreover, he beheld the necessity of repairing to some part of the earth where he stood no chance of being recognised by either friend or foe. His consent to my proposed arrangement being thus obtained, and all his best hopes and feelings being warmly enlisted in the plan, I had then to ascertain whether any one of my dependants would consent to accompany such a man on a long voyage and to a far-off clime. Fortunately my enquiries amongst my retainers were followed by success; and at a very early hour this morning Timothy Splint and his guardian, or rather companion, set off for Liverpool, thence to embark for the United States. There, in the backwoods of the Far West, let us hope that this man—this murderer, whom the savage law would have *hanged*,"—and the Blackamoor shuddered, as he pronounced the word,—"let us hope, I say, that Timothy Splint will some day rise into a substantial farmer, and that he may yet live to bless the period when he went through the ordeal of the subterranean dungeon."

The Black paused, and drank a glass of the cooling claret; for his mouth had grown parched by the simple fact of giving utterance to *that one word* on which he had shudderingly laid so great an emphasis. The physician, who appeared to guess full well what was passing in his mind, made no remark; and in a few minutes the other continued his explanations in the ensuing manner:—

"I now come to Joshua Pedler. His disposition is naturally savage and brutal; and *a long night of darkness* produced on him effects which varied at different periods. His thoughts were dreadful to him; and sometimes, when I visited him, he would at first speak ferociously. But a kind word on my part immediately reduced him to meekness. He had not been many days in the dungeon when, doubtless encouraged by my manner towards him, he told me that he was not only unhappy on his own account, but also on that of a young woman

whom he had married according to the rights of the vile class with which he had so long herded. I immediately undertook to provide for the girl; and Pedler really demonstrated a sincere gratitude. You need scarcely be told that I kept my promise. Wilton sought her out; and she was found in a state of starvation and despair. A comfortable lodging was taken for her; and when she was somewhat restored to health, needle-work was supplied her. But all this was done without allowing her to believe that any other circumstance beyond a mere accidental discovery of her wretched condition had thus rendered her the object of Wilton's charity. The assurance which I gave Pedler that Matilda was provided for, had a most salutary effect upon his mind; although he frequently afterwards showed signs of savage impatience. The tenour of his thoughts was chiefly a regret that he had been so foolish as to pursue an evil career. He reproached himself for the folly of his wickedness, rather than for the wickedness itself. He disliked solitude and darkness, but was not so much influenced by fears as his late companion, Splint. During the first month he remained in darkness, and never once spoke to me of prayer. Two or three times he alluded to the Bible, but did not express a wish to read it. At last he admitted to me his conviction that the thoughts which oppressed him were beneficial to him, though most unpleasant. I fancied this to be a favourable opportunity to test his worthiness to receive some indulgence. I accordingly asked him if he would like to be able to write to Matilda. My calculation was just: I had touched him in a vulnerable point;—and he was that night allowed a lamp and writing-materials. Moreover, on that very occasion, he shed tears; and I no longer despaired of taming the last remnants of ferocity which lingered in his nature. A few days afterwards he gave me a letter to send to Matilda. Of course I opened and read it; for it was to obtain a precise insight into the real state of his mind that I had suggested the correspondence with his mistress. The contents of that document confirmed the hopes I already entertained of him; and I saw that his affection for that young woman might be made a most humanizing means in respect to him. I accordingly had her brought into this house, and lodged in one of the attics. Then I broke to her as gently as possible the fact that Joshua Pedler was my prisoner. I shall not pause to describe her joy

at receiving intelligence concerning him; suffice it to say that she read his letter with tearful eyes, and gladly consented to reply to it. In the evening I took her answer to the prisoner; and he wept over it like a child. I then knew that his reformation was a certainty. Two or three days afterwards, he begged me to allow him a Bible; and his request was of course complied with. The correspondence that passed between him and Matilda was frequent and lengthy; and that he might feel himself under no restraint, I assured him that I neither saw his letters nor his replies. 'T was a falsehood on my part—but a necessary, and therefore an innocent one. For I *did* peruse all this correspondence; and Matilda was aware of the fact by which I was enabled to watch the gradual but sudden change that was taking place in the mind of that man. At length I perceived that I might in safety think of providing for him elsewhere; and I was as much embarrassed how to accomplish this aim, as I was in the case of Timothy Splint. But in the midst of my bewilderment I happened to notice an advertisement in a daily newspaper, stating that by a particular day two men, or a man and his wife, were required to undertake the care of Eddystone Light-house. You may start with surprise, doctor—you may even smile: but I assure you that this advertisement appeared most providentially to concur with the object I had in view. Without a moment's delay I spoke to Matilda respecting the matter; and she expressed her readiness to follow my advice in all things, so long as there was a prospect of her being reunited to Josh Pedler. Her consent being procured, it was no difficult task to obtain that of the man. On the contrary, he accepted the proposal with joy and thankfulness. Wilton soon made the necessary enquiries and arrangements; and at this moment Joshua Pedler and the young woman are the sole inmates of the Eddystone Light-house!"

"Thus, my dear friend," said the physician, counting the names of the persons upon his fingers, "you have disposed of Tidmarsh in Alderney—the Bunces are to go to Sark—Splint is bound as an emigrant to the Far West—and Joshua Pedler is on the Eddystone rock."

"And Pedler is the only one who is unaccompanied by an agent of mine," observed the Black: "because Matilda is a good young woman; and I can rely upon her. Moreover I should tell you that I procured a license for them; and Wilton saw them legally married at Plymouth, before they embarked for the Light-house."

"I congratulate you upon the success of your projects thus far," said the physician. "It is truly wonderful how admirably you have managed thus to redeem and satisfactorily dispose of some of the greatest villians that ever lurked in the low dens of this metropolis. But now, my friend, I wish to hear something of that arch-miscreant, Old Death."

At this moment the door opened; and one of the Black's dependants entered the room.

"The woman Bunce, sir" he said, "is most anxious to communicate something to you before she quits London. She declares that she has a secret preying upon her mind——"

"A secret?" exclaimed the Black.

"Yes, sir—a secret which she says she must reveal to you, as it is too heavy for her heart to bear. She cried a great deal, and implored me to come to you."

"Doctor," said the Blackamoor, after a few moments' profound reflection, "you know wherefore I do not wish that woman to behold my features—even though they be thus disguised. During her incarceration I never spoke to her save through the trap of her dungeon door; and since she has been an inmate of the house I have not visited her. It will be as well to continue this precaution: do you, then, hasten to her and receive the confession, whatever it be, which she has to make."

"Willingly, replied Lascelles; and he followed the servant from the room.

CHAPTER CXII.

THE CONVERSATION CONCLUDED.

UPWARDS of a quarter of an hour had elapsed, when Dr. Lascelles returned to the apartment in which he had left the Blackamoor.

"Yes," exclaimed the physician, throwing himself into the chair which he had recently occupied; "that woman is indeed penitent—truly penitent!"

"What proof have you acquired of this fact, doctor?" demanded the Black.

"The confession which she has just made to me—or rather the motive which induced her to make it," answered Lascelles. "But not to keep you in suspense, my dear friend, she has revealed something which only confirms a suspicion that you yourself had long ago entertained, if I remember right."

"And that suspicion——"

"Is relative to Jacob Smith," added Lascelles.

"Ah! the woman has confessed it?" exclaimed the Blackamoor.

"She has confessed that Jacob Smith is her own son, and that Benjamin Bones is his father," replied the physician, in a solemn tone.

"My God! what a parent that man has been!" cried the Black, his brows contracting, and his voice indicating the emotions of horror that were suddenly excited within him. "When I recall to mind every detail of the history of poor Jacob,—his neglected infancy—his corrupted youth,—when I reflect that his own father was the individual who coolly and deliberately initiated him in the ways of crime——Just heavens! I begin to think with you that the reformation of such a monster is an impossibility!"

"Subdue your excitement, my dear friend," said the doctor; "and let us converse calmly and reasonably upon these matters."

"First, then, explain to me the nature of your interview with Mrs. Bunce," observed the Black. "I shall listen with earnest attention."

"I went up stairs to the room in which she is located," said Lascelles; "and she rose from a chair the moment I entered; but she started back in evident disappointment mingled with surprise when she saw me. '*It was not you, sir,*' she almost immediately observed, '*that I wanted to see. I know that the master of this house is of dark complexion; for I have caught a glimpse of him when he has visited my dungeon below.*'—I explained to her that I was a friend of your's, and that you had deputed me to receive any confession which she had to make. She appeared to hesitate for a moment, and then burst

into tears. '*I have been wicked—very wicked, sir,*' she said, in a voice broken by deep sobs; '*and it is only very lately that I have had my eyes opened to my sinful life. The dark gentleman, who I suppose is the master here, has done this good thing for me: and now he is going to provide for me and my husband. But I shall not go away happy, unless I tell him every thing that weighs on my soul.*'—I spoke a few words of comfort to her; and in a few minutes she confessed that the lad who bore the name of Jacob Smith is her own son, born while she was the mistress of Old Death, and before her marriage with Bunce. I informed her that Jacob was well provided for and happy; and she seemed deeply grateful for this assurance. Then I recommended her not to reveal this secret to her husband when they should be united again; inasmuch as, having entered on a new phase of existence together, it would be useless and wrong to acquaint him with a fact calculated only to disturb that harmony. She promised to follow my advice, and appeared much eased in mind by having unbosomed her secret to me."

"You gave her most excellent counsel, doctor," said the Black: then, after a few moments' reflection, he added, "Jacob ought not to be informed of this secret of his hideous parentage—— at least not for the present."

"By no means!" exclaimed the physician. "His mind is tranquil—he feels a certain confidence in himself—and your friendship is his greatest delight. Let not that salutary equanimity be disturbed."

"No—it would be wrong and useless," said the Black, musing. "I remember that in the course of the long narrative which he gave me of his life, he mentioned the occasional scintillations of kindness which marked the conduct of Mrs. Bunce towards him. I also recollect that he observed to me how there were moments when he thought a great deal of any gentle words which she ever uttered to him, or any kind treatment she ever showed him."

"Nature, my dear friend—Nature!" exclaimed the good physician. "Even in a woman so bad as she was at the time of which he spoke, there were certain natural yearnings which she could not altogether subdue; while, on his part, there existed filial inclinations and tendencies which he could not understand. How much that villain Benjamin Bones has to answer for!"

"Alas—alas! I fear that he is beyond redemption!" cried the Black, bitterly. "But—no," he added immediately afterwards, in a changed and more decided tone: "we must not despair!"

"I am now anxiously waiting to hear your report concerning him," observed Lascelles.

"He is still in darkness—*his night* still continues," was the answer. "A month has elapsed since I visited him for the first time in his dungeon; and during the other four weeks that have subsequently passed, I have had several interviews with him in the same manner. These interviews have taken place in the utter obscurity of his cell; and I have been constrained, though with pain and difficulty, to assume a feigned tone on each of those occasions. At my first visit he declared, in terror and amazement, that he recognised in my voice something which reminded him of that of Thomas Rainford; and then he seemed to be impressed with the conviction that I was the Earl of Ellingham. His rage against the Earl was deep and terrible; and I saw too plainly that if he relapsed into a milder tone, it was but to deceive me as to the real state of his mind, and induce me to grant him some indulgences—if not his freedom. I visited him again on the following night; and he spoke less savagely, and more meekly: but I mistrusted him—yes, I mistrusted him, and I fear with good grounds. I cannot give you a very satisfactory description of our subsequent meetings. At one moment he has appeared touched by my language, and has even expressed penitence and contrition for the past: at the next moment, he has exhibited all the natural ferocity of his disposition. Sometimes he has assumed a coaxing manner, and has endeavoured to move me to grant him a light;—but I have hitherto refused. One thing I must not forget to mention—which is that never since the first visit I paid him has he once alluded to the impression made upon him by the sounds of my voice; and never has he again addressed me as Lord Ellingham. In moments of excitement or rage, he has demanded in a wild and almost frantic tone who I am: but seldom waiting for the reply, he has relapsed either into a humour of stubborn taciturnity, or of a meekness which I knew to be assumed. Indeed, there are many points in his character and conduct, since he has been an inmate of the dungeon, which I cannot comprehend. It is however certain that darkness has not produced on him the same rapid and important effects as upon the other five: something more severe in the shape of punishment, or something better calculated to touch his heart and appeal to his feelings, is requisite. At the same time, I believe him to be already moved and shaken in his obduracy to a certain degree: but reformation in respect to him must be a work of time."

"On the whole, you have hopes?" said the physician, interrogatively.

"Yes—when I call to memory all the particulars of his conduct and language from the first occasion of my visits until the last, which took place yesterday, I can recognise a change," answered the Black. "Indeed, I am almost convinced that if it were possible for me to speak to him at very great length—to argue with him on the folly and wickedness of his past life—to reason with him unrestrainedly, I should be able to move him deeply. But the necessity of maintaining an assumed tone, and the impossibility of taking a light with me so as to watch the changings and workings of his countenance and follow up those appeals or those arguments which appear to have most effect with him,—in a word, the disguise I am compelled to sustain and the precautions I am forced to adopt, militate considerably against my system in respect to *him*."

"It would be imprudent for *me* to visit him on your behalf," observed the physician. "On that memorable night when Lord Ellingham had him, Tidmarsh, and Mrs. Bunce, in his power in an adjacent room, and wrested from them all the secrets of their damnable plots and schemes,—on that occasion, you know, I was present; and Old Death would therefore cherish only rancorous feelings with regard to me."

"True," said the Black, musing: then, suddenly starting from a deep reverie of a few minutes, he exclaimed, "Doctor, I have thought of a plan which I hope and trust, for the honour of human nature, may prove efficacious in respect to that obdurate sinner: but I hesitate—yes, I hesitate to put it into execution!"

"Explain yourself, my dear friend," replied Lascelles; "and I will give you my advice candidly and frankly."

"In a word, then, doctor," continued the Blackamoor, "I have such faith in the soft persuasion of woman, that I am half inclined to conjure Esther de Medina to assist me in this good work. Would she but consent to visit this great sinner—or rather to address him through the sliding-panel of his dungeon door, I am certain that her eloquence, aided by the musical tones of her voice and the deep feeling which would characterise her language,—I am certain, I say, that she would succeed in touching a chord in his heart, which no words—no appeal of mine can reach."

The physician heard with attention, and began to reflect profoundly.

"For my part," continued the Blackamoor, "I believe that the eloquence of woman, when rightly used and properly directed, is endowed with an influence and a power almost irresistible. Woman's mission is to tame and humanize the ferocity of man's disposition; and the more antagonistic are the characters of two beings of opposite sexes thus to be brought in contact with each other, the better for the purpose. Now, decidedly no two living creatures can be more dissimilar in all respects than Benjamin Bones and Esther de Medina,—the former so savage and unrelenting; the latter so mild and forgiving,—the one possessing a soul blackened by every possible crime; the other endowed with every virtue that approximates the nature of woman to that of the angel!"

"I like your project—I see not the least objection to it, my dear friend," said Dr. Lascelles, after a long pause, during which he pondered deeply on the plan suggested. "Do you think that Miss de Medina would consent to aid you in this matter?"

"I have no doubt of it," returned the Black. "You perceive that the dilemma is somewhat serious, and not slightly embarrassing. I cannot allow Benjamin Bones to go forth again into the world, to recommence his vile intrigues: besides, to give him his liberty thus, would be to defeat the primary object which I had in view in breaking up his gang. To release him at present is therefore impossible; and I scarcely feel myself justified in keeping him locked up much longer in a dark dungeon. It would be unsafe to remove him into one of the apartments of either this house or that in Turnmill Street; for such a crafty fox can alone be kept secure by massive stone walls and iron bolts. What, then, am I to do with him?—how am I to dispose of him? Esther will assist me in this difficulty; and God send that through her agency, some salutary impression may be made upon Old Death's mind!"

"Bear in memory," exclaimed the physician, an idea suddenly striking him, "that one of this man's horrible schemes was to avenge himself on Lord Ellingham by torturing Esther de Medina."

"And when he hears her sweet voice revealing to him her knowledge of his atrocious designs, and sincerely promising him her pardon,—when he discovers how much virtue and goodness there is in woman," continued the Black, in an impassioned tone, "he will be moved—he will be led to contemplate the blackness of his own heart—he will find himself placed in such frightful contrast with that forgiving angel——"

"Yes—yes!" cried the physician, emphatically: "it must be done! You have devised the only means to produce a real and effectual impression on that bad man's heart; and if he prove inaccessible to the persuasiveness of Esther's tongue, his case may be looked upon as hopeless."

The deep-toned bell of Clerkenwell church now struck the hour of eleven; and scarcely had the sound died away in the silence of night, when a post-chaise drove up to the door of the house.

"Mrs. Bunce is now about to take her departure," said the Black. "Every thing is prepared in that respect—Harding and his wife have already received full instructions and the necessary funds—and the sooner that the woman is safe out of this mighty city of temptation, the better."

The sounds of several footsteps were now heard descending the stairs; and a minute afterwards, the post-chaise drove rapidly away from the house.

"Of all my prisoners, Old Death alone remains to be disposed of," observed the Black, as soon as the din of the wheels was no longer audible.

"And it is to be hoped that *he* will not be a source of difficulty or embarrassment to you for many weeks more," said the physician, rising to take his departure.

CHAPTER CXIII.

ESTHER DE MEDINA AND OLD DEATH.

It was on the third day after the explanations given to Dr. Lascelles, and between five and six o'clock in the evening, that Esther de Medina was conducted by the Blackamoor into the subterranean passage, the latter holding a lamp in his hand.

"Shall I remain near you, Esther?" he enquired, in a whisper.

"No—it is not necessary," she answered. "I am not afraid of being in this place, gloomy as it appears; and since I am merely to address the miserable man through the trap-door of his dungeon, no harm can reach me."

Thus speaking, she turned and received the light from her companion,—her manner being calm and even resolute, though her countenance was very pale.

"God bless you, Esther!" said the Black, emphatically: "your willingness to aid me in this important matter is not the least admirable trait in your character!"

"It is a duty—though a painful one," responded the beautiful Jewess. "And now leave me—I would rather proceed alone to the prisoner's cell."

"Remember," said the Blackamoor, "it is the last on the right hand side of this long subterranean passage."

He then retraced his way up the stone-staircase communicating with the house in Red Lion Street, while Esther advanced along the gloomy cavern, in which the lamp shone but with feeble lustre.

In less than a minute she reached the door of Old Death's dungeon: and there she paused for nearly another minute, a sensation of loathing and horror preventing her from immediately announcing her presence to the terrible inmate of that cell. For the Black, in order to prepare her as fully and completely as possible for her philanthropic mission, had been compelled to reveal to her all the details

of those dreadful designs which Benjamin Bones had cherished against herself and Lady Hatfield, and which had been made known through the medium of John Jeffreys. It was therefore natural that Esther de Medina should shrink from the bare idea of holding the slightest communication with a miscreant of so ferocious a character: but a short—a very short interval of reflection was soon sufficient to arm her with the courage necessary to support the ordeal.

Drawing back the sliding-panel which covered the small aperture in the upper part of the massive door, she said in her soft, musical voice, "Prisoner, will you grant me your attention for a few minutes?"

"Who are you?" demanded Old Death, starting as if from a lethargic state—a movement that was indicated by the sudden rustling of his garments and the creaking of the bed whereon he was placed.

"I am Esther de Medina," was the answer; and the beautiful Jewess allowed the lamp to cast its light upon her countenance, which was so close to the aperture that Old Death caught a momentary but perfect view of her features.

She then placed the lamp upon the ground, thus again leaving the interior of the cell in complete darkness.

"Yes—it is Miss Esther de Medina!" exclaimed Benjamin Bones, in a voice which he endeavoured to render as mild and conciliatory as possible. "Dear young lady, open the door, and let me out of this horrible place. I am sure you possess a good heart——"

"A heart good enough to forgive you for the dreadful atrocity which you contemplated against me upwards of two months ago," interrupted Esther, scarcely able to subdue a shuddering sensation which came over her. "Yes—I know every thing," she continued: "you would have entrapped me into your power—you would have deprived me of the blessing of sight,—and yet I never, never injured you."

"But you say that you forgive me!" cried Old Death, impatiently. "Open the door, then, my sweet young lady—and I will find means to reward you well. Listen," he exclaimed, approaching the trap, and speaking in a confidential kind of hollow, murmuring whisper,—"do n't be offended at what I am going to say—but I know that you are fond of jewellery—and it is natural for such a beautiful creature as you are——"

"Silence, sir!" interrupted Esther, indignantly. "I am well aware to what you allude; and it is time to undeceive you on that head," she added, in a proud tone: "indeed, there is no longer any necessity for concealment in that respect! In my turn I desire you to listen—and listen attentively. You entertain a belief so prejudicial to my character, that I cannot allow even such an one as you to cherish it another minute. Know, then, that I have a sister so like myself in outward appearance——"

"By Satan! it must be so," ejaculated Old Death, a light breaking in upon his mind as in a single moment he took a rapid survey of all the circumstances which had originally led him to suppose that Esther was the thief of Mr. Gordon's diamonds and the mistress of Tom Rain. "Yes—yes—I understand it all now!" he added, in a tone that appeared to imply vexation at his former blindness in respect to these matters.

"With pain and sorrow am I thus compelled to allude to a sister who is so dear—so very dear to me," resumed Esther: "but this explanation was necessary—not only for my own sake, but likewise to convince you of the folly and wickedness of endeavouring to induce *me*, by the promise of reward or bribe, to draw back the bolts of your prison-door. No—my visit to you is inspired by the earnest desire to move your soul to the contemplation of all the dreadful deeds which have marked your life——"

"Then you will not set me free?" exclaimed Old Death, in a tone of subdued rage and latent ferocity.

"Not now—not now," repeated Esther. "But listen to me attentively!"

"Go on," growled the inmate of the dungeon, as he retreated from the door, and threw himself upon his bed again.

"If you entertain the slightest hope that you will ever be allowed an opportunity to re-enter on a course of wickedness and crime, you are sadly mistaken," continued Esther, speaking in a conciliatory and yet energetic tone. "Even were you liberated this moment, measures would be adopted to render you completely powerless for the future in respect to the perpetration of fresh enormities. Reflect, then, whether it will not be better for you to devote the remainder of your days—and in the ordinary course of nature they must necessarily be few—to the important duty of making your peace with heaven! Do not despair of pardon—oh! no—do not despair! You see that I, who am a mortal being, can forgive you for the wrongs you meditated against me,—and surely the mercy of heaven is greater than that of human creatures? Yes—repent ere it be too late; and God will not cast you off eternally. *His* mercy is infinite: *His* pardon is never asked in vain by the penitent sinner."

"Continue to speak to me thus," cried Old Death, in a tone strangely subdued and wondrously meek, considering the ferocious excitement which so lately animated him.

"Oh! I sincerely hope that you will recognise the error of your ways, ere it be indeed too late!" exclaimed Esther, in a tone of enthusiasm deeply felt by her generous soul. "Consider your advanced age—and think how soon the hand of Death may be laid upon you! Then how wretched—how awful would your feelings be,—and how would you shudder at the idea of being about to stand in the presence of that Almighty Power whose laws and mandates you have so often violated! For, after all, what have you gained by your long, long career of wickedness? All your treasures were annihilated in one hour——"

"Yes—yes," interrupted Old Death, in a voice half suffocated with emotions which the Jewess fondly believed to be those of remorse.

"The hoardings of many years and the produce of innumerable misdeeds were thus swept away," she continued, impressively; "and Providence at length decreed that you should become a prisoner in the very place where you had so long ruled as a master. Does not heaven, then, afford you solemn and significant warnings that your career of crime is no more to be pursued with success?—and do not those warnings move your heart to repentance and remorse? Neglect not such warnings as these, I conjure you!"

"Your words do me good, young lady!" exclaimed Old Death. "I am glad that you have come thus to speak to me."

"And shall you ponder upon what I have said?" she demanded.

"Yes. But you will not leave me yet?—and you will come again?" he said, in a voice indicative of suspense and anxiety relative to the answer that was to be given.

"I will return to-morrow," observed Esther.

"Thank you!" exclaimed Old Death, his tone now denoting a profound emotion.

But Esther did not immediately leave the vicinity of the cell on the present occasion. Believing that she had succeeded in making some salutary impression upon him, she was desirous of following up the promising commencement of her mission; and she accordingly continued to reason with him for nearly half-an-hour longer. In the course of the observations and arguments which she addressed to the ancient sinner, she displayed a sound judgment and a deep but enlightened religious feeling: there was nothing bigoted—nothing fanatical in her language. She indulged in no quotations from the Old Testament—the book that formed the basis of her own nation's creed: but she expatiated on the goodness of the Creator—the hope that exists for penitent sinners—the terrors of a death-bed without previous repentance—and the folly, as well as the wickedness, of the course already pursued by the prisoner. Old Death interrupted her but seldom; and when he did interject an observation, it was in a tone and of a nature calculated to inspire the charming Jewess with the hope that her mission had not been undertaken in vain.

At length she quitted the vicinity of the cell, having reiterated her promise to return on the following day.

And this pledge was faithfully kept;—and again do we find the Hebrew maiden persevering in her humane—her noble task of awakening proper feelings in the breast of a terrible sinner. To her question whether he had meditated upon his spiritual condition, Old Death replied earnestly and eagerly in the affirmative; and throughout this second visit, he not only sought to retain the young lady near him—or rather at his door—as long as possible, but likewise seemed sincere in his endeavours to inspire her with the belief that her reasoning and her representations had not been thrown away upon him.

On the third day, Esther fancied that there was even a still more striking change in his language when he responded to her questions or her remarks; and not once, during the hour that she remained standing outside his dungeon, addressing him in a style of fervid eloquence which came from her very heart,—not once; we say, did he give the least sign of that ferocity and savage impatience which characterised his behaviour on the first occasion of her visit.

For a fortnight did the Hebrew maiden continue her visits regularly, without however venturing to enter the dungeon. On the fifteenth day she found the prisoner anxiously expecting her arrival as usual; and almost immediately after she had drawn aside the panel and announced her presence, he said, "Oh! dear young lady, I am so glad you are come! I have been thinking so much—so very much over all you have lately told me; and I have felt comforted by repeating to myself the arguments you advance urging me to repentance. Ah! Miss, I have been a dreadful sinner—a dreadful sinner; and I see that I am righteously punished. But though I am penitent, you have no confidence in me yet—and that gives me pain. You are afraid to trust yourself with me! Do you think that I would harm you?"

"I hope not," replied Esther; "and you shall not much longer have to accuse me of want of confidence in you. I am pleased to observe that you at length *feel* how shocking it is to become an object of mistrust and suspicion."

"You are an angel, young lady!" exclaimed Benjamin Bones, approaching the door on the outer side of which stood the Hebrew maiden. "No one on earth save yourself could have made such an impression upon my mind, and in so short a time. But will you promise me one thing?"

"Name your request," said Esther.

"That you will not send any man to converse with me," answered Old Death. "You are of the gentle sex—and that is why your sweet voice has had such power and influence with me. Had that gentleman—whoever he is—continued to visit me, he would have done no good. I suspect my own sex:—I do not think that men can be so sincere—so conscientious——"

"The gentleman to whom you allude will not visit you again without your consent," interrupted Esther. "I have undertaken this mission, and will fulfil it to the utmost of my ability. I have now something important to communicate,—important indeed, I should imagine, to one who has been so long in darkness. In a word, I intend to give you a lamp——"

"Oh! excellent young lady!" cried Benjamin Bones, in a voice expressive of the most unfeigned joy. "Make haste and open the door—give me the light——"

"Nay—I must not manifest too much confidence in you all at once. See what it is to have been so long the votary of crime and wickedness—you inspire a mistrust which cannot be dissipated in a moment."

"What can I do to convince you of my penitence—my gratitude?" demanded Old Death, in an earnest—anxious tone.

"Leave me to judge for myself relative to your state of mind," said Esther. "You perceive that I already begin to entertain hopes concerning you: the proof is that I now give you a lamp—and a book also, if you have a sincere inclination to examine its pages."

As she uttered these words, Esther unfastened the grating which covered the aperture, and passed the lamp through to Old Death—then the volume to which she had alluded.

The light flashed upon his countenance as he received the lamp; and it struck Esther that there was something hideous even in the expression of joy which now animated those repulsive features:—but she knew that looks which had grown sinister and become stamped with ferocious menace during the lapse of many, many years, could not be changed nor improved in a moment, however great were the moral reformation that had taken place within.

"Thanks, dear young lady—a thousand thanks!" exclaimed Old Death, as he placed the lamp upon the table: then, after a few minutes' pause, during which he looked into the book, he said in a tone of surprise, "But you have brought me a Bible containing the New as well as the Old Testament—and yet yourself only believe in the latter?"

"I respect the religion of the Christian, although I have been taught to put no faith in it," answered Esther de Medina, in a modest and subdued tone. "But I must now depart: and to-morrow I shall visit you again."

Esther withdrew, in the firm belief that a most salutary impression had been made upon the mind of one of the greatest criminals of modern times. Her report was received with the most heart-felt joy by the Blackamoor; and he was enthusiastic in his expressions of gratitude towards the beautiful maiden for her exertions in what may unaffectedly be denominated "a good cause."

"Do you return to Finchley Manor with me this evening?" she asked, cutting short his compliments with a good-humoured smile.

"No—I have particular business to attend to, Esther," he replied. "But you may tell a certain young lady," he added, now smiling in his turn, "that I shall be sure to see her to-morrow evening."

"To-morrow!" repeated Esther. "You forget——"

"Ah! I did indeed forget," interrupted the Black. "To-morrow is the day on which Arthur returns to town; and I must not risk a visit to the Manor. The fortnight of his absence has soon expired, methinks: but doubtless in that time he has made all the necessary preparation to render his country seat in Kent fitting and comfortable to receive his bride," observed the Black, smiling again. "Nay—do not blush, Esther: he is a noble fellow, and well deserving of all your love! And, by the bye, this absence on his part has proved most serviceable in one sense," he continued, again assuming a serious tone: "for had he remained in town, you never would have been able to devote the time you have given each day to the reformation of that wretched man below."

"To speak candidly," observed Esther, "I foresee a considerable difficulty relative to my future visits to the unhappy prisoner: but I feared to mention my embarrassment in this respect—I fancied that you might suppose me to be wearied of the task I had undertaken——"

"I know you too well to entertain such an injurious suspicion," interrupted the Black, hastily and emphatically. "But it is natural, now that Arthur and yourself are so shortly to be united, that he should seek your society as often and for as long a period each day as circumstances will permit——"

"Yes," observed Esther, with a modest blush: "and though his welfare is so deeply interested in our present enterprise—though, in a word, so many grave and important interests depend upon the success of our endeavours to humanize and reform that wretched prisoner, and disarm him for the future—still I could not stoop to any falsehood or subterfuge to account to the Earl of Ellingham for my daily absence from home for several hours. It is true that my father is in the secret of our proceedings—that he even approved of the course which you suggested, and which I have adopted——"

"Stay! an idea strikes me!" suddenly ejaculated the Black. "You told me ere now that Benjamin Bones implored you to continue your visits to him, and not allow me to take your place; and from this circumstance we have both drawn favourable auguries relative to his ultimate and complete repentance. He already looks upon you as his guardian angel—the means of his salvation; and it would be perhaps productive of evil results—it might even lead to a moral reaction on his part—were he to believe that you had deserted him. You have so well prepared the way in the grand work of reformation with regard to this man, that *another* might now undertake *your* duties—and Benjamin Bones would still continue to believe that it is the same Esther de Medina who visits him."

"I understand you," said the Hebrew maiden, evidently rejoiced at a suggestion which relieved her mind from the fear of a serious difficulty. "But would *you* be satisfied with such an arrangement?"

"I see no alternative," replied the Black. "Arthur will call daily at Finchley Manor—and your frequent absence would, to say the least of it, appear strange."

"Oh! wherefore not allow Arthur at once to be made acquainted with the whole truth?" demanded Esther, in an earnest and appealing manner.

"No—no—that may not be!" exclaimed the Blackamoor. "My projects must first be carried out to the very end: for it would be my pride and my triumph, when all danger shall have passed away, to say to him, '*Arthur, you were surrounded by perils which you did not suspect: demons were plotting every kind of atrocity against your peace; —and I have annihilated all their schemes, and tamed the schemers themselves!*' Urge me not therefore, my dear Esther, to deviate from the course which I have chalked out for myself, and which I consider to be to some extent an atonement for the misdeeds of my own life. Yes—for he who accomplishes a great good, assuredly expiates a great amount of evil."

"For heaven's sake, recur not to the past!" murmured the beautiful Jewess, turning pale and shuddering at the crowd of unpleasant—nay awful reminiscences which her companion's language recalled to her mind.

"No—let us deliberate only for the present," exclaimed the Black; "and the more I think of the plan which I have suggested, the more suitable does it appear. Yes," he continued, "this is the only alternative. Let *your* visits to Benjamin Bones cease, Esther—and yet let him still continue to believe that he is not neglected nor deserted by Miss de Medina. I need say no more: the rest lies with you."

"I understand you," returned the Hebrew maiden; "and it shall be as you desire."

She then took her departure.

CHAPTER CXIV.

OLD DEATH IN THE DUNGEON.

It was five o'clock in the evening of the following day; and Old Death was crouched up, like a wild beast, upon his bed in the dungeon, which was now lighted by the lamp that Esther de Medina had given him.

His natural emaciation had so frightfully increased, that he seemed but a skeleton in the clothes which hung upon him as if they had never been made for one so thin as he. The skirts of his old grey coat were wrapped around his wasted shanks—for, though it was now the month of May yet it was cold in that

dungeon. His countenance was wan and ghastly;—but its expression was little calculated to excite pity—for any thing more diabolically ferocious than the old miscreant's aspect, cannot be well conceived. His face was the horrible reflex of a mind filled with passions and longings of so savage and inhuman a nature, that the mere thought makes one shudder.

"She will come presently," he muttered to himself, with a kind of subdued growling which indicated the fury of his pent-up rage: "she will come presently," he repeated, his eyes glaring like those of a hyena beneath his shaggy, over-hanging brows; "and perhaps it will be for to-day! Who knows? she may think me penitent enough to be no longer dangerous: and then—then——"

He paused, and ground his jaws savagely together as if they were filled with teeth; and his hands were clenched with such spasmodic violence that the long nails ran into the palms.

"For two months and a half," he continued at length, and still musing to himself, "has the fiend—the infernal wretch—my mortal enemy, kept me here! For two months and a half have I been his prisoner! Perdition seize upon him! That man was sent into the world to be my ruin—to thwart me—to persecute me! From the first moment I ever met him six or seven months ago, all has gone wrong with me. But the day of vengeance must and shall come,—yes—vengeance—vengeance—though it costs me my life. Ah! he fancies that I am ignorant of his secret: and yet I understand it all now—yes—all, all! Rapid as was the gleam of the lamp which showed me his features the first time he ever visited me here, so quick did a light flash to my mind—so quick did the truth break upon me! Yes—yes—I understand it all *now*;"—and he chuckled in a scarcely audible manner, yet the more horribly menacing because it was so subdued and low. "But how can it be?—how could he have been saved?" he asked himself, in his sombre musings: then, after a brief pause, during which he rocked to and fro on the bed, he continued, "Never mind the *how!* That such is the fact I am confident—and that is enough for me! Yes—yes—that is enough for me! Fool that I was ever for a moment to suspect him to be Lord Ellingham! And yet I should have clung to this belief, had not the lamp glared upon his face as he darted out of the cell! Ah! ah! he little thinks that I know him now—that I have known him ever since the moment when the light showed me his features, blackened as they were! Ah! ah!" again chuckled Old Death: "I fancy that I have lulled them into an idea of my penitence! They imagine that the work of reformation has begun with me! Ah! ha! I played my cards well there! I did not whine and weep too soon—I appeared to be precious tough, and precious obstinate: and my slow conversion seemed all the more natural. They will fall all the easier into the snare: they——"

At this moment a slight noise at the door of the cell made the ancient miscreant start; and he instantaneously composed his features into as mournful and sanctimonious an expression as such a horribly hang-dog countenance could possibly assume.

The trap-door opened; and a sweet, musical voice said, "I am here again, according to my promise: you see that I do not desert you."

"Ah my dear young lady," cried Old Death, affecting a tremulous tone, "you are too good to such a dreadful sinner as I have been! My God! when I think of all the atrocity that I once planned against you, I feel inclined to implore you to depart from even the vicinity of such a wretch as me!"

"Have you not been already assured that you are fully and completely forgiven in reference to the wickedness to which you allude?" demanded the young lady, whose beautiful countenance was now plainly visible to Old Death through the grating over the aperture in the door.

"Yes, Miss de Medina," returned the wretch, assuming a still more penitent tone; "but I cannot forgive myself. You are an angel, dear young lady—and I am a demon. I know I am! All last night I endeavoured to read the Bible that you gave me yesterday: but I cannot settle my mind to the task. I want some one to read it to me—if only for half an hour every day. But this cannot be—I am aware it cannot! You—the only person living that could have made such an impression upon me—are afraid to enter my cell. You told me so yesterday. But am I not a human being?—am I a wild beast? Ah! dear young lady—I could not injure you!"—and the old miscreant appeared to weep.

"Do you think it would console you if I were to place confidence in you—enter your cell—and read you a portion of the Word of God?"

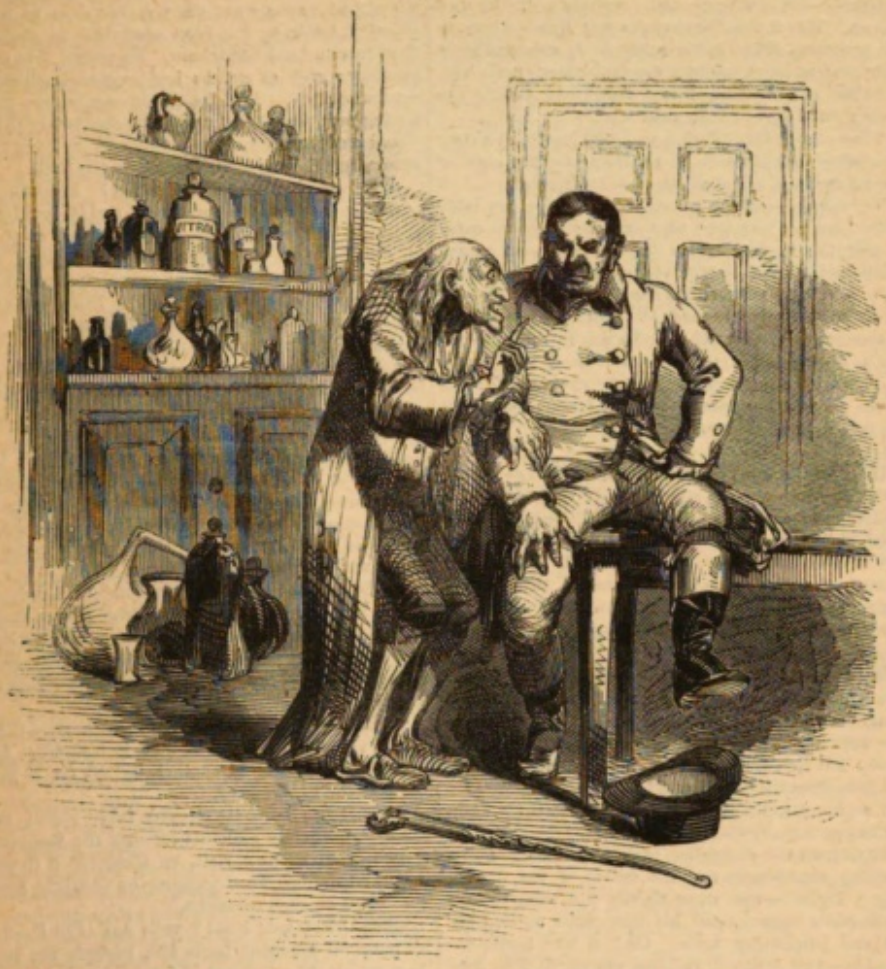
"Why do you tantalize an old, old man who is miserable enough as it is?" asked Old Death, in return to this question. "Do you suppose that I am not weighed down to the very dust by an awful load of crime? If you are afraid to come into the cell, send me a clergyman. But, no—no," he added, as if yielding to the sudden influence of a second thought: "I will pray with no one but yourself! You have been my good angel—you first touched my heart. I must wait till you have sufficient confidence in me to follow up the blessed work you have already begun so well. Yes—yes—even if I must remain here for a whole year, I will not receive consolation from any one but you!"

"If I only thought that you were so far advanced in the path of penitence——"

"Can you doubt it?" hastily demanded the prisoner. "Have you such little confidence in your own powers of persuasion? Oh! my dear young lady," continued the wretch, falling upon his knees on the floor of the cell, and joining his hands together, "have pity upon me—have pity upon me! Your mistrust of me pierces like a dagger to my heart. I crave—I long to be able to show you my gratitude;—and that can only be by proving my contrition. Dear young lady, have mercy on an old, old man, who would embrace the very ground on which you tread!"

"It would be wicked—it would be a crime to refuse your demand," said the sweet, musical voice, now tremulous with emotion, of her whom the demon-hearted hypocrite called his good angel. "Stay—I will fetch the key—and on my return I will read the Bible to you."

And the Hebrew lady hurried away from the vicinity of the dungeon; and, having ascended the spiral stone staircase with rapid steps, entered the apartment usually inhabited by the Blackamoor. But he was not there: and she paused—uncertain how to act; for she now remembered that he had gone out for a short time immediately after giving



ner certain instructions relative to the conduct she was to maintain towards Old Death.

"I should not like to do this without his consent," she murmured to herself: "and yet the prisoner is so penitent—so contrite, that it would be a sin—nay, a crime, not to confirm the salutary impression which is now so strong upon him. Yes—yes," she continued: "I will take this step upon my own responsibility! Surely *he* will not blame me for thus exceeding his instructions, when the cause is so good and the need seems so urgent!"

Thus speaking, she took down a large key from a nail inside a cupboard, and retraced her way to the subterranean.

In the meantime—during the ten minutes which her absence lasted—Old Death was agitated by a thousand conflicting thoughts. At one moment an infernal joy filled his heart, and he rubbed his hands together in horrible and fiend-like glee: at the next instant his countenance became convulsed with the hideous workings of his fears lest something should occur to prevent the Jewess from entering his cell. He seemed to live an age in that ten minutes; and he felt that if the terrific excitement which he thus endured, were to last for an hour, it would crush and overwhelm him. All the worst passions of his diabolical nature were set in motion like the waves of the sea: and in that short space of time were awakened feelings which, for intensity of awful spite and inveterate malignity, were probably never before nor since paralleled in the breast of man!

At length there was a slight rustling of a silk dress and the sound of a gentle though hasty tread in the passage without; and in a few moments the beautiful countenance of the Jewess appeared at the grated aperture.

"Blessed young lady!" exclaimed Old Death, suddenly exercising an immense mastery over his ferocious passions, and assuming a tone of mingled gratitude and hope.

"Heaven grant that the step which I am now taking may have a permanently beneficial effect!" said the Jewess, in a voice profoundly sincere, as she placed the key in the lock.

Then, with her gentle hands, she drew back the massive bolts; and in another moment she entered the dungeon in which the greatest miscreant that ever disgraced human nature was crouched upon the bed, like a tiger ready to spring from its lair

For upwards of a minute this dreadful man could

scarcely believe his eyes—could scarcely credit his own senses. Was it possible that she was there—there, in his presence—there, in his power? It appeared to be a dream; and a momentary dizziness seized upon him.

"Give me the Bible," said the Jewess, taking the chair; "and do you draw near me."

"Here is the book," observed Old Death, in a deep tone which might well be mistaken for the sign of solemn feelings, and was indeed so interpreted.

The lady placed the sacred volume upon the table before her, and began to turn over its leaves in order to find the passage which she deemed most appropriate and suitable for the circumstances of the occasion. Having discovered the chapter which she sought, she raised her eyes towards Old Death's countenance in order to assure herself that he was in readiness for her to begin; but a sudden sensation of horror and apprehension seized upon her, as she caught a glimpse of the diabolical expression of those features on which the pale light of the flickering lamp fell with sinister effect.

Then, with a howl of ferocious rage, that old man, whom the deep craving after a bloody vengeance now rendered as strong as a giant,—that old man precipitated himself upon the terrified Jewess with all the fury of a ravenous monster. The chair broke down beneath the shock; and with dreadful shrieks and appalling screams, the Hebrew lady fell upon the dungeon-floor, held tight in the grasp of the miscreant, who was uppermost.

In another instant those shrieks and screams yielded to subdued moans; for his fingers had fixed themselves round her throat like an iron vice. Desperate—desperate were her struggles,—the struggles of the agony of death: but Benjamin Bones seemed to gather energy and force from the mere fact of this strong resistance;—and as his grasp tightened round his victim's neck, low but savage growls escaped his lips.

By degrees the struggling grew less violent—and a gurgling sound succeeded the moans of the Jewish lady. Tighter—and more tightly still were pressed the demon's fingers, until his long nails entered her soft and palpitating flesh. Oh! it was horrible—horrible,—this scene of ruthless murder in that subterranean dungeon!

At length the movements of the victim became mere convulsive spasms: but her large dark eyes, now unnaturally brilliant, glared up at Old Death, fixedly and appallingly. Nevertheless, he was not terrified—he was not stricken with remorse! No—still, still he clung to his victim, his own eyes looking down ferociously into her's, and the workings of his countenance displaying a fiend-like triumph—a savage glory in the awful deed which he was perpetrating.

Nearly five minutes had elapsed from the instant when the murderer first sprang upon the unfortunate Jewess: and now, suddenly starting to his feet, he seized the lamp and dashed it upon her head. A low moan escaped her—and all was silent.

Yes—all was silent, and all was darkness too; for the light had been extinguished:—and Old Death precipitated himself from the dungeon.

He hurried along the subterranean, which he knew so well,—hurried along towards the spiral stair-case, wondering whether he should be enabled to effect his escape, yet almost reckless and desperate as to what might become of him, now that his savage vengeance was accomplished.

He ascended the stone steps—he entered the room which had for years and years served him as a bed-chamber, before he had been compelled to dispose of the house to Lord Ellingham. He passed into the laboratory: and as yet he had proceeded without interruption. Joy! joy! he should escape yet—the adjoining room, now fitted up as a handsome parlour, was likewise untenanted at the moment:—joy! joy! he is descending the stair-case leading to the hall!

Is it possible that he will escape? Fortune seems to favour the diabolical murderer; and his hand is now upon the latch of the front-door—he stands as it were once more upon the threshold of that great world which is so wide and has so many channels for the machinations of the wicked! The house seems deserted—not a questioning voice falls upon his ear,—not the step of a human foot, save his own, interrupts the silence of the place! Yes—it appears as if escape be now a certainty,—escape for him who dared not hope for it, and did not even think of it, when intent on the all-absorbing scheme of his vengeance!

And now the front-door opens to his touch: but—ah! he has blood upon his hands—the blood that had flowed from the neck of the murdered Jewess. He starts back—he hesitates for a moment,—but only for a moment: Old Death is not the man to remain long uncertain how to proceed in such a strait!

Thrusting his hands—his gore-stained hands—into his pockets, the demon-hearted monster issues as coolly and calmly from the house as if it were his own and he had nothing to fear. The fresh air of heaven—untasted by him for ten long weeks—comes gushing upon his face: he is free—he is free!

"Ah!" is the hasty ejaculation which now falls on his ear: he looks around—a man is bounding, flying towards him;—and in another instant he is in the grasp of the Blackamoor.

A short and desperate struggle takes place; and a crowd immediately gathers near—for the Sessions are being held at Hicks's Hall, on Clerkenwell Green, so that the neighbourhood presents the bustling appearance usual on such occasions.

"Seize him—hold him!" yells forth Old Death, as his powerful opponent hurls him towards the house-door, which the miscreant had not closed behind him.

"He is a mad-man—escaped from a lunatic asylum!" exclaimed the Blackamoor, horrible apprehensions filling his soul relative to the Jewess—for his eyes had caught sight of the blood upon Old Death's hands.

"No—no—I am not a mad-man!" shrieked out the latter. "Seize him—hold him, I say:—*he has escaped the scaffold—he is* TOM RAIN, *the highwayman!*"

At that dreadful announcement the Blackamoor was struck speechless and motionless, as if a thunderbolt had fallen at his feet; and in the next instant he was in the grasp of Dykes and Bingham, who, having business at the Sessions House, happened to be amongst the crowd gathered at the entrance of Red Lion Street.

"Yes—seize him—hold him tight!" yelled Benjamin Bones: "he is Tom Rain, I tell you—his face is coloured purposely—but I know that he is Tom Rain!"

"And hold that miscreant also!" ejaculated Rainford—for he indeed the Blackamoor was: "seize him—let him not escape!" he cried, recovering the power of speech, as his eyes again caught a glimpse of the blood-stained hands of Old Death. "There has been murder committed in this house——My God! my God!"

The crowd had now not only increased to such an extent as to render the way perfectly impassable; but a tremendous sensation suddenly seized upon the assemblage,—the news that Tom Rain, the celebrated highwayman, had escaped death by some miraculous means, and was once more in custody, circulating like wild-fire. Dykes and Bingham, knowing that in such a case the sympathies of the mob were most likely to turn in favour of the prisoner, hurried him and Old Death into the house, whither they were followed by three or four other constables; and the door was immediately closed in the face of the crowd, and secured within.

On reaching the sitting-room on the first-floor, the party halted; and Old Death, now completely overcome by the excitement of the incidents which had so rapidly succeeded each other in a short half-hour, threw himself exhausted into a chair.

"Well, Mr. Rainford," said Dykes, with something like a malicious grin, "I am sorry for this business—but how, in the name of all that 's wonderful, did you escape after being so deuced well hung as I seed you was with my own eyes?"

"Silence!" ejaculated Rainford, in an imperious tone: "and come with me at once down below. For, as sure as you are there, murder—a horrible murder has been committed by that wretch," pointing to Old Death, who now quivered beneath his furious looks; "and, if you doubt it, behold the blood upon his hands!" added Tom Rain, with a cold shudder.

"Bring him along with us, Bingham," said Dykes, addressing his brother officer.

"No—no—I won't go down there again!" yelled forth the murderer, his countenance becoming convulsed with horror; for he was now afraid of his crime, in the revulsion of his feelings.

"Well—let him stay here in custody," observed Dykes; "and me and a couple of the runners will go with Mr. Rainford."

The officer and the two myrmidons whom he had selected, accordingly proceeded with Tom Rain into the room where the trap-door of the spiral stair-case had been left open by Old Death; and the constables surveyed each other with mingled apprehension and astonishment.

"You are not afraid?" exclaimed Rainford, in a contemptuous tone, as he lighted a lamp: then, with impatient excitement, he cried, "Do your duty, and come with me. Life may still be left in her—come—come!"

"Yes—yes: we shall go along with you, sure enough," growled Dykes, as he led the way, followed by Rainford—the two runners closing the rear.

In three minutes more the little party entered the dungeon which had so lately been the prison-house of Old Death: and there what a dreadful spectacle met their eyes! The murdered lady was stretched upon the floor—her countenance horribly discoloured and swollen—the forehead completely smashed by the blow inflicted by the lamp which had been dashed at her—and her eyes staring with a stony glare, as if about to start out of their sockets.

"O Tamar! Tamar! my dearest—best beloved Tamar!" cried Tom Rain, in a tone of bitter—bitter anguish, as he threw himself upon his knees by the side of the corpse.

The officers, rude in heart, and rendered obdurate as they were by the very nature of their profession, stood back in respectful silence at this outburst of sorrow from the lips of the resuscitated highwayman.

"My God!" murmured the unhappy man, clasping his hands together; "who shall break these fearful tidings to your father and your sister? And will they not reproach me?—will they not attribute this frightful calamity to that project of reformation which I had devised in behalf of Benjamin Bones? O Tamar—my dearest Tamar—who could have foreseen that such a terrible destiny was in store for thee!"

And, bowing down his head, he wept bitterly.

Suddenly loud voices were heard from the top of the spiral stair-case, summoning Dykes thither.

"Come along, sir—it is useless to remain here!" cried the officer, speaking hastily but respectfully to Tom Rain, who suffered himself to be led away—or rather, he did not offer any resistance to those who conducted him thence.

"Well—what now!" demanded Dykes, hurrying up the steps, at the head of which his friend Bingham was continuing to shout after him.

"Why—don't you know," was the reply, "that Government has offered a reward for the diskivery of the chap wot carried off Sir Christopher Blunt and Dr. Lascelles—about that there Torrens's affair——"

"Well—what then?" cried Dykes, impatiently.

"Blowed if it ain't Tom Rain," responded Bingham: "he did it—and we 've knabbed him. So that's a cool two hundred and fifty a piece!"

"By goles!" ejaculated Dykes, his countenance expanding into the most glorious humour possible, as if all remembrance of the horrible scene he had just witnessed were banished from his mind: "this is good news, though," he added, as he emerged from the stair-case into the little back room with which it communicated. "But how do you know that the chap as kidnapped the knight and the doctor is Mr. Rainford?"

"Because I've been talking with old Ben Bones," answered Bingham; "and he told me as how he 'd been kidnaped too, and kept a prisoner down there for a matter of ten weeks;—and how there was a lot on 'em—and Josh Pedler and Tim Splint among the rest. So, when he mentioned them names, I pricks up my ears—and I asks him a question or two; and I find that they was all kidnapped just at the time that the Torrens affair was a-making sich a noise: so it's a clear case."

"Clear enough, to be sure!" exclaimed Dykes.

"Ben Bones does n't seem to know any thing about that affair," continued Dykes: "cos why, he was lugged off and took down in that there place afore the business was made public by Sir Christopher and the doctor. But, I say—what has happened below?'

"A young o'oman killed—that's all," answered Dykes. "So here 's a pretty day's business for us, Bingham: a man that had been hung, took up fust—then a murder diskivered, and the murderer in our power—and now this here affair about the Government reward. Well—we v'e been rather slack lately—and a little okkipation 's quite a blessin'."

Thus conversing together, Mr. Dykes and Mr. Bingham returned to the apartment where Old Death was still sitting in a chair, watched by a couple of constables: but the moment Rainford, who had only a confused idea of what was passing around him, was led into that room, he started back in horror—exclaiming, "No—no: I cannot bear to be in the company of this dreadful man!"

Old Death, to whom he pointed, grinned in savage triumph: but Rainford had already rushed back into the laboratory, attended by Dykes and two runners.

Almost at the same instant, the lad Cæsar who had heard from the crowd outside enough to convince him that Rainford had been discovered, and also that a person answering the description of Old Death had first denounced the resuscitated highwayman, and had then himself been arrested on a charge of murder,—Cæsar, we say, now made his appearance, and threw himself at his master's feet, exclaiming wildly, "Oh! no—my generous friend—my more than father—they shall not take you from us!"

"Jacob," said Tom Rain, raising the distracted youth, who was no other than the reader's former acquaintance, Jacob Smith,—'do not yield to grief. We have need of all our courage on this occasion. I have received a frightful blow—wounded I am in the tenderest point—oh! I can scarcely restrain my anguish, while conjuring you to be calm! And yet it is necessary to meet my afflictions face to face! Hasten, then, to Finchley—and break the sad intelligence to Mr. de Medina and Esther: tell them, Jacob—as gently as you can—tell them that Benjamin Bones has crowned all his enormities by——"

"My God! it is then too true!" ejaculated the youth; covering his face with his hands.

"Yes—Tamar is no more!" added Rainford, tears gushing from his eyes. "My poor wife has been brutally—foully murdered by that miscreant!"

Jacob Smith hurried away, his own heart feeling as if it were about to break.

"And now," said Tom Rain, suddenly turning towards Dykes, "I appeal to you as men to allow me to superintend the removal of the remains of that lady, who was my wife, to a chamber in this house; and then, that duty being performed, I shall be ready to accompany you whithersoever you may choose to conduct me."

"We are not particular for an hour or so, Mr. Rainford," returned Dykes. "Indeed, it would be better to let the crowd disperse a little; and if so be you don't mind staying here a bit, we 'll wait till dark. The evenings is long now, you see——"

"I should have wished to remain here until the relatives of the deceased lady had time to arrive and take charge of the body," interrupted Tom Rain: "but I dared not ask such a favour at your hands. As it is, however, I thank you."

"But you must likewise let old Ben Bones stay here, until after dusk at least," urged Dykes: "for if it was knowed to the people outside that it was the ancient fence who had killed a woman, they 'd be after tearing him to pieces. So we must smuggle him out presently."

Rainford gave his consent to the proposition: he was too sick at heart—too profoundly overwhelmed by misfortune, to attempt to argue any question that might arise from the lamentable incidents of that evening.

CHAPTER CXV.

THOMAS RAINFORD.

The arrest of Tom Rain and Old Death took place at about twenty minutes to six on the evening in question; and by ten o'clock that night the news were circulated throughout every quarter of the metropolis.

The incidents involved in the double arrestation were well adapted to produce as much excitement as the extraordinary adventures of Sir Christopher Blunt and Dr. Lascelles ten weeks previously.

In the first place, a man who had been publicly executed at Horsemonger Lane, was now discovered to be alive, having been doubtless resuscitated in some extraordinary way; although the more credulous and wonder-loving portion of the community were firmly convinced that Tom Rain had never been hanged at all, but that the body of some prisoner recently deceased at the time was ushered through the dreadful ordeal instead of the formidable highwayman.

In the second place, this said Thomas Rainford was said to be the mysterious personage who, usurping the attributes of justice, had kidnapped Dr. Lascelles and Sir Christopher Blunt, and had somehow or another disposed of the real murderers of Sir Henry Courtenay, after having devised the necessary means to prove and make public the innocence of Mr. Torrens.

In the third place, a notorious fence, named Benjamin Bones, who had defied the police and the laws for many, many years, had at last fatally entangled himself with justice, by committing a diabolical murder upon the person of Thomas Rainford's wife.

And, in the fourth place, it had been discovered that there were situate two houses in the very heart of London having a subterraneous passage connecting them, and this subterranean communicating with several dark and gloomy dungeons, decently furnished, and in which half-a-dozen prisoners had recently been confined. One of these prisoners was now known to be Benjamin Bones: but what had become of the other five?

Such were the circumstances which took the whole town by storm, and produced a tremendous sensation from one end of London to the other,—the intelligence reaching even Lady Hatfield, retired and secluded as was her mode of living.

Shortly after ten o'clock on that eventful evening, a private carriage drove up to the house in Red Lion Street; and Mr. de Medina, Esther, and Lord Ellingham alighted. Jacob Smith leapt down from the box; and in a few moments the entire party entered the dwelling, thus disappearing from the gaze of the assembled crowd.

The Jew, his daughter, and the young nobleman were immediately conducted by one of Rainford's dependants into the apartment where the unhappy husband of the murdered Tamar was pacing up and down, Dykes sitting in a corner watching his movements. The prisoner was no longer disguised: during the interval which had elapsed since his arrest, he had, by the officer's express desire, washed off the black dye from his face and hands; and he now wore his natural aspect in one sense—though, in another, his expressive countenance was altered by the despair that filled his soul.

"Oh! Thomas—what terrible afflictions have occurred!" exclaimed Lord Ellingham, as he flew into his half-brother's arms

"You will not reproach me, Arthur——Oh! do not augment my grief!" cried Rainford: and he wept bitter tears.

"No one will reproach you, excellent young man," said Mr. de Medina, taking the hand of his bereaved son-in-law. "But——Oh! my daughter—my daughter, Tamar! Great God! thou hast chosen to afflict me deeply—deeply!"

In the meantime, Esther de Medina had thrown herself into a chair, giving way to the wildest

paroxysms of grief—the Earl of Ellingham having vainly accosted her with the hope of imparting some slight consolation. But, alas! he himself was a prey to the most poignant anguish: and, even had he been more calm, how was it possible to comfort Esther de Medina for the loss—the cruel assassination—of that sister whom she loved so tenderly and so well?

"Thomas," at length said the Earl, approaching his half-brother, "has Jacob Smith told us the dreadful tale correctly?—and is it—he—Benjamin Bones—who has done this? My God! I have scarcely been able to comprehend all the terrible particulars!"

"It is true—it is too true—I know that it is!" exclaimed Mr. de Medina, shaking his head in despair. "Yes—Tamar is no more; but—at least—let me behold her remains!"

Rainford turned an appealing glance towards Dykes, as much as to say, "You surely will allow me to proceed unwatched and unguarded along with these mourners to the chamber where the corpse lies?"

But Dykes, who understood the meaning of that glance, said in a respectful though firm tone, "I dare not trust you out of my sight!"

"I will be answerable for him, officer!" cried the Earl of Ellingham. "Do you know me? I——"

"I know who you are, my lord," answered Dykes; "but I cannot oblige you."

"Is not grief such as that which you now contemplate," said the nobleman, indicating the weeping father and sister of the deceased lady,—"is not such grief as this too solemn for the intrusion of a stranger?"

"Since your lordship forces me to speak plain," returned Dykes, "Mr. Rainford is my prisoner on two charges——"

"On two charges!" ejaculated the Earl: then, remembering all that his brother had passed through, he said mournfully, "But, just heavens! *one* is enough!"

"As your lordship observes," began Dykes, "one is——"

At that moment another private carriage rattled up to the door of the house, and a lady, alighting with feverish impatience, was instantaneously admitted into the dwelling. In less than a minute she was ushered by Jacob Smith into the room where the mourning party were assembled.

"Lady Hatfield!" cried Tom Rain, the moment she raised her veil: and, as if her presence were another blow on such an occasion, he staggered and would have fallen had not the Earl of Ellingham caught him in his arms.

"Pardon this intrusion," said Georgiana, advancing into the middle of the apartment; "and believe me when I assure you that nothing save the hope of being in some degree able to lighten the afflictions which pour upon you all—nothing," she added emphatically, "but such a hope as this would have induced me to break upon your privacy. The dreadful rumours current in the metropolis reached me ere now—and I flew hither, only—alas! to hear them confirmed. But—Mr. Rainford——"

She stopped short—trembled—and seemed for an instant overcome by feelings of an unutterable nature. The bitterness—the intensity of grief which oppressed the others, was in some degree absorbed for the moment by the profound interest which the presence of Lady Hatfield excited, her words having given promise of hopes the nature whereof defied all conjecture.

But suspense on the part of her listeners was not destined to last long.

"Mr. Rainford," she resumed, exercising a powerful control over her emotions, "you have sustained an affliction so great that it is almost impossible to impart consolation to you. Yet—even in the midst of such woe as this which has overtaken you—it may at least be a satisfaction to learn that the judgment of a criminal tribunal no longer hangs over you—that the past is indeed the past, and cannot be revived——"

"Georgiana!" cried the Earl of Ellingham, surveying her in profound astonishment; "what mean you?"

"I mean that Thomas Rainford is pardoned!" exclaimed Lady Hatfield: "I mean," she continued, the wildest astonishment having sealed the lips of all who heard her,—"I mean that the sentence passed upon him months ago is dissolved—annihilated;—and here is the royal decree—bearing the Sovereign's seal—and countersigned by the Secretary of the Home Department! 'Tis a full pardon for Thomas Rainford!"

Thus speaking, she handed Lord Ellingham a paper: but it fell from his hands—for his half-brother had sunk senseless upon the floor.

Water was speedily procured and all the usual means adopted to restore him. It was, however, some time ere he gave signs of life; and then, beckoning Georgiana towards him, he said in a faint tone, "May the great God above us bless you—for you are an angel!"

It was undoubtedly an immense alleviation of the general sorrow to learn that Rainford had received a full pardon for all those offences which had drawn down on his head the sentence of death pronounced at the Old Bailey; and the Earl of Ellingham, having now hastily glanced over the paper which decreed this act of royal mercy, submitted it to the examination of Mr. Dykes.

"Well, my lord," said that officer, "I see and hear plain enough that one of the charges on which I held Mr. Rainford prisoner, is knocked on the head; and I'm glad of it—'specially as 't is the most serious of the two. But I must still keep him in custody, he being the man who kidnapped Sir Christopher Blunt and Dr. Lascelles——"

"Wait—one moment!" exclaimed Rainford, a sudden thought flashing to his mind and restoring him to the wonted energies of his character.

While all present watched his movements with breathless interest, he hastened to a writing desk standing on a table in a recess; and thence he took a pocket-book, which he opened, and the contents of which he scanned rapidly as he turned over the various papers one after the other.

"Here it is!" he cried triumphantly at last; and, drawing forth a slip of paper, he handed it to Lord Ellingham, who mechanically read it aloud:—

"We acknowledge a sense of deep obligation to the bearer of this memorandum, the said bearer having rendered us especial service; and we hold ourselves bound to grant him any boon which he may demand at our hands, so that it be not inconsistent with our royal honour, nor prejudicial to the interests of the State.

"Given this 3rd of March, in the year 1827.

"GEORGE REX." (L.S.)

"You are saved, Thomas—you are saved, in all respects!" exclaimed Mr. de Medina, pressing with affectionate warmth the hand of his son-in-law, while tears trickled down the old man's venerable countenance.

"All this is so truly astonishing," cried the Earl of Ellingham, "that I am bewildered. How you, my excellent friend—my sister," he added, turning to-

wards Lady Hatfield, "obtained the royal pardon for Thomas Rainford, I well know—indeed, I have all along known."

"You!" ejaculated Georgiana, in profound astonishment.

"Yes—I overheard your interview with the King in the Blue Velvet Closet at Carlton House," continued the Earl; "and now I comprehend all the greatness and generosity of your conduct! Oh! and you must pardon me too, for having become a listener on that occasion, and for having ever since entertained suspicions most injurious to your honour."

"The remainder of the tale can then be told by myself," said Tom Rain, hastily: "for it was I—I, the Blackamoor—the negro—who saved your ladyship from insult and outrage, also at Carlton House. But—" he continued, glancing in a significant manner towards Dykes,—"all these explanations shall be for another and more convenient opportunity. In the meantime, Arthur," he added, "it is for you to repair at once to the Home Secretary, and obtain from him all we require to ensure my complete freedom, by virtue of that acknowledgment bearing the sign-manual of the King."

The Earl of Ellingham instantaneously undertook this commission, although at so late an hour; but he fortunately happened to be aware that the Secretary for the Home Department had a reception that evening, and was therefore certain to be at home.

Dykes, who had been led on from one source of astonishment to another, and who perceived that Thomas Rainford not only possessed powerful friends, but likewise the patronage and favour of the King himself,—the worthy Mr. Dykes, we say, now volunteered to withdraw into another room, merely requesting his prisoner to pledge his honour not to leave the house until the order of the Secretary of State should fully and completely release him from custody. The promise was given forthwith; and Dykes repaired to the apartment where Old Death was still remaining in the custody of Bingham and the other constables.

Immediately after the officer had retired, Georgiana rose to take her departure. This was the first time that she had ever seen the Medinas; but she accosted them with the affability of a well-bred lady, and proffered them her deepest and sincerest sympathy on account of the dreadful loss which they had sustained. They received these proofs of friendship in a manner which denoted the gratitude of their hearts; and Georgiana, on taking leave, shook them cordially by the hand.

Then, extending her hand likewise to him whose mere name had hitherto been sufficient to send a cold shudder through her entire form,—yes, extending her hand to him also, in the true spirit of Christian forgiveness,—but without raising her eyes to his countenance, she said, "Mr. Rainford, may you yet know many years of happiness!"

He pressed her hand with grateful fervour—and a tear dropped upon it: but he could not utter a word. His heart was too full to allow him to express his thanks—his admiration of the noble conduct of that woman whom, in a moment of delirium, as it were, he had outraged and ruined! Ah! bitter—bitter were thy reminiscences as thus thou didst stand before thy generous benefactress, Tom Rain!

Mr. de Medina—perceiving that his son-in-law was overcome by emotions which were not altogether intelligible to him—offered his arm to escort Lady Hatfield to her carriage; and Georgiana drove home with a heart rejoicing at the good she had done—for Lord Ellingham's sake!

The Jew returned to the apartment where he had left Esther and Rainford; and there they all three mingled their grief together, for the loss of the lovely and much-loved Tamar.

But over this scene we shall draw a veil: sorrow such as they experienced cannot be adequately described. Neither shall we do more than allude to the violence of the grief and the poignancy of the anguish which were felt when they repaired to the chamber to which the remains of the murdered Tamar had been conveyed. The reader does not require to be informed that this was a ceremony of the most painful description.

While, therefore, Mr. de Medina, Esther, and Rainford, are mingling their tears and lamentations,—while, too, the Earl of Ellingham is absent on his mission to the Home Secretary, armed with the document which bore the autograph and seal of George the Fourth,—we shall request our reader to accompany us to the apartment where Old Death remains in the custody of Bingham and the subordinate officials.

CHAPTER CXVI.

OLD DEATH.

When Dykes made his appearance in the room just alluded to, he found Benjamin Bones rocking himself to and fro on the chair in which he was seated, while Bingham and the runners were partaking of refreshments at the table.

The old miscreant was horribly pale; and there was a wild glaring of the eyes which enhanced the ghastly expression of his countenance. The man was in fact hideous to behold.

Now that he had leisure for reflection, and that the excitement attending the perpetration of his bloody vengeance had passed away, he had become fearfully alive to the awful predicament in which he stood: nevertheless his entire aspect denoted dogged obduracy; and could he have recalled the past, it is more than probable that he would have played precisely the same part over again.

"Well, Mr. Dykes," said Bingham, as the worthy thus addressed entered the room, "will you jine us here in a bit of grub? You see, we're pitching into the cold jint like bricks; and the beer is fust-rate."

"So is the pickles," growled one of the runners, who was naturally of a surly disposition, and could not help speaking in a grunting tone even when best pleased.

"Come, sit down with us," urged Mr. Bingham. "But, I say though, what have you done with Tom Rain?"

"Done with him, indeed!" exclaimed Mr. Dykes, swelling with the importance of a man who had astounding news to communicate: "what has n't he done for his-self, you mean?"

"Has he cut his throat—or taken poison?" demanded Old Death, eagerly.

"Not he!" cried Dykes. "Why—you cursed old fence, you 've always got wicked notions in your head—you have. Mr. Rainford is a genelman, every inch of him—and I always knowed it. He 's got a power of slap-up friends as won't leave him long in the lurch, I can tell you."

And the officer bestowed a significant wink upon his

listeners, whose curiosity he had now worked up to the highest pitch.

"What—what has he done?" gasped Old Death, terribly excited with suspense. "Do you mean to say ——that is—has he——*escaped?*" he demanded, scarcely able to give utterance to the word; so fearful was he lest Tom Rain, against whom he cherished a fiend-like hatred, should not again figure upon the scaffold.

"Patience—patience," said Mr. Dykes, taking a chair. "In the fust place, you must know, that in comes a lady—and who should she be but that very same Lady Hatfield as I 'm sure Tom Rain robbed some months ago near Hounslow, although I could n't bring the thing home to him at the time——"

"Well—well," muttered Old Death, the agony of whose suspense was perfectly excruciating.

"But fust I should tell you," resumed Mr. Dykes, 'that Miss de Medina comes in with her father and Lord Ellingham——"

Old Death gave vent to a savage growl.

"And now I understand all about that diamond affair, Bingham, you know," continued the officer; "for, although one of the sisters is a corpse and her face is disfigured, I never in my life see such a likeness as there is between them."

We should observe that Old Death had already learnt, from the communications which had been made in his presence by the runners who were first in charge of Tom Rain on this eventful evening, that it was not Esther de Medina whom he had slain, but Tamar—the wife of the man whom he considered to be his most mortal enemy.

"But as I was a-saying," continued Dykes, "in comes Lady Hatfield; and, behold ye! she makes a regular set speech to prepare us all for what 's about to take place; and then she tells us plump that Tom Rain has received his Majesty's free pardon!"

"No—no!" yelled forth Old Death: "it 's a lie—it 's a lie!"

"Hold your tongue, you cursed fence!" exclaimed Mr. Dykes, deeply indignant at having his word thus unceremoniously called in question. "Lady Hatfield had the paper with her, all reglar according to the stattit in that case made and purwided."

"It 's a forgery—a rank forgery!" shrieked Benjamin Bones, his countenance becoming truly appalling with its hideous workings. "And you have let him go, upon that pretence——you——you have——"

And he fell back in his chair, gasping for breath.

"Wot an inweterate old scoundrel it is," observed Bingham. "Here—give him a glass of beer, Bill; or, by goles, he'll suffocate—and the scaffold will be cheated of its dues after all."

The runner, to whom the command was addressed, approached Old Death and offered him a tumbler of porter: but the savage monster repulsed it brutally, ferocious growls escaping from his breast.

"Well—leave him alone, then," said Bingham.

The runner accordingly resumed his seat and his attack upon the cold viands at the same time.

"I tell you what it is, Mr. Ben Bones," exclaimed Dykes: "I have seen a many free pardons—'specially where genelmen that got into trouble was concerned, for it's seldom that a poor devil has interest enough to get such a thing—and I know precious well that the one I see just now, was as reglar as possible. It had the King's own name—his sign-mangle, they call it—and his precious big seal—and the Home Secretary's signatur underneath."

"He will escape—he will escape yet!" yelled forth Old Death, clasping his hands together, as if in mortal agony. "The wretch—he will escape the gibbet—he—he——"

And again he gasped in so frightful a manner that his eyes seemed to be starting from his head, and his attenuated frame literally writhed in convulsive spasms.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, after a long pause, during which his shocking appearance had produced a dead silence of horror and amazement: "I have thought of something"—and he grinned malignantly. "Did you not say that men had been spirited away—in that Torrens' affair——"

"To be sure I did," answered Bingham, to whom the question was addressed: "and Tom Rain did it. Well, what about that, Mr. Dykes?"

"Why—that seems to be knocked on the head also," was the reply: "though I have no doubt we shall get the reward, because we did our dooty in arresting him; and if so be that the Home Secretary chooses to grant him a pardon in that respect also——"

"He won't—he won't!" ejaculated Old Death, with feverish—nay, with hysterical excitement. "He does not dare do it! No—no—Tom Rain must swing for that, at all events! 'T is as good as being accessory to the murder—'t is shielding the murderers! Ha! ah! he will swing for that—he will swing for that!"

"I 'm blessed if he will, though," said Dykes, bluntly; "for it seems that he 's got a paper signed by the King which will put him all to rights;—and though I do n't exactly understand that part of the business, I 'm pretty sure Tom Rain is in no danger. Lord Ellingham has got the matter in hand; and he has gone up to the Home Office. That's why I left Mr. Rainford at liberty—just taking his word of honour that he would n't bolt."

"He 'll deceive you—he 'll run away—he 'll escape!" cried Old Death. "You are mad to trust him! Go—seize on him again—put hand-cuffs——"

"Yes—on *you*, in no time—if you do n't hold your tongue," interrupted Mr. Dykes. "But ain't all this a rummy business, though?" he demanded, turning towards Bingham and the subordinate officials. "The old Jew seems a most respectable genelman—I 'd take his bail for any amount, if I was a magistrate. And really his daughter is a sweet young o'oman: the Earl 's going to marry her, I'll swear to it."

"Mr. Dykes—Mr. Dykes," whispered Old Death in his ear; and the officer, turning suddenly round again, perceived that the tall, gaunt form of the fence was close behind him.

"Well—what do you want?" demanded the functionary.

"One word—one word only," murmured Bones, in a low, guttural, sepulchral tone, while his frame shook with nervous excitement: "one word, I say—only one word."

"Now, then—what is it?" asked Dykes, suffering the old man to draw him towards the recess containing the door which opened into the laboratory.

"I must speak to you in private—I have something particular to tell you," was the urgent and impatient reply. "Come into this room—I shan't keep you a moment."

"Well—I suppose I must humour you," said the officer, in a surly tone. "One should look upon you as a dead man; for besides your nick-name, the law will soon make you one in right good earnest."

With this brutal jest—brutal even in respect to so

awful a miscreant as Old Death—the Bow Street functionary conducted him into the laboratory, where a light happened to be burning, and the door of which apartment Benjamin Bones closed cautiously behind them.

"Now, then—make haste, and tell us all you have got to say," said Dykes, eyeing the old man suspiciously and in such a meaning fashion as to imply that any attempt at escape would assuredly prove abortive.

"Mr. Dykes, you are a good man—and a kind man—I know you are," began Old Death, in a coaxing tone and with a manner indicating the most dreadful state of nervous excitement: "you would not like to see a poor, miserable old creature like myself sent to—to—the scaffold. No—no—you would not—you would not. But I know that it must be made worth your while—you understand me—and—and—I will give you all I have—yes, all I have—several thousand pounds—for I have got several thousands!" he added, with a ghastly grin. "But no one knows where they are except myself,—and you and I can go together to the place—and I will give you every guinea—yes, every guinea, Mr. Dykes—remember, every guinea I say—if you will agree to this."

"Agree to what?" demanded Dykes, affecting not to comprehend the old villain.

"Oh! just as if you did n't understand me, my dear friend—my good, kind friend!" exclaimed Benjamin Bones, becoming more coaxing in his tone, which was as low and subdued as his sepulchral voice would admit. "Do consider for an instant—an old man like me to be in such trouble! You would n't be happy if you had it on your mind that you had been the means—the actual means of sending such a wretched creature as myself to the scaffold? Speak to me, Mr. Dykes! Five thousand pounds—yes—five thousand pounds, in good gold guineas—if—if——"

"If what?" asked the officer, with the most provoking determination not to understand any thing that was not explained in unmistakeable words.

"If you—you will let me escape!" whispered Old Death, while his eyes seemed to penetrate to the very soul of the man towards whom he bent in a confidential way as he spoke.

"Now that's English," said Dykes, whose countenance gave not the least indication of the manner in which he intended to receive the proposition.

"And—and you will agree, won't you?" asked Bones. "Remember—five thousand guineas—all to be paid in one lump—this very night——"

"Well, now—it can't be done, old chap," interrupted Dykes, in a cool—almost brutal manner, as if he were glad of the opportunity to encourage hope for a time, merely for the sake of destroying it with a rude hand and in an abrupt way.

"It can't be done," murmured Old Death, despair seizing upon him: "it can't be done, you say?"—and his eyes glanced wildly around.

"Is this all you have to tell me?" demanded the officer. "Because, if so——"

"Five thousand guineas!—and he refuses it!" ejaculated Bones. "My God! what will become of me?—what will become of me?"

And still his looks wandered rapidly about the apartment.

"Now, then—let us go back into the next room, if you please," said Dykes; "for I do n't see no use in staying here, wasting our time."

At that instant Old Death's eyes settled upon something on a shelf close at hand; and, suddenly springing aside, he seized upon a bottle—the particular object for which he had been searching with his eager glances.

Dykes, without even having a moment's leisure to make a single conjecture relative to his intentions, but instinctively foreseeing that something wrong was contemplated, closed upon the old man in an instant.

With the speed of lightning did Benjamin Bones raise the bottle which his right hand grasped; and in less than the twinkling of an eye would it have been smashed down upon the officer, who, seeing his danger, by a natural impulse held down his head—when a yell of agony burst from the lips of the old miscreant.

For, as he raised the bottle, the glass stopper fell out, and the burning vitriol streamed down on his head and over his countenance, a few drops only falling upon Dykes, and those principally on his clothes.

The officer instantaneously fell back; and Old Death threw himself on the floor, where he rolled in horrid agonies—writhing like a stricken snake, and shrieking frantically, "Oh! my eyes! my eyes!"

Bingham and the subordinate functionaries rushed in from the adjoining apartment; and, having assured themselves that Dykes was unhurt—although his escape from the burning fluid was truly miraculous—they turned their attention towards Old Death. One of them obtained water, and dashed it over him; but still he rolled and writhed—uttering dreadful cries, mingled with horrid imprecations—and rubbing his face madly with his hands. For the miserable wretch was burnt in an apalling manner; and his sight was gone!

We must pause for a single moment to explain his design—that design which so signally failed and brought down such frightful consequences upon himself. Perceiving that all hope of being able to bribe Mr. Dykes was frustrated, he thought of the only alternative that could possibly be attempted—an escape. At the same instant that this last idea was formed, it flashed to his mind that Dr. Lascelles had been accustomed to keep many deadly poisons and ardent fluids in the laboratory. His eyes wandered round in search of them; and they lighted upon a large bottle, labelled "Vitriol." To break it over the officer's head, and escape in the confusion that must ensue by means of the little chamber which had once been his bed-room, and which, as the reader may recollect, had two doors—one opening from the laboratory, and the other into apartments beyond,—this was the hastily conceived but discomfitted design of Old Death!

The desperate project had failed—and in a desperate manner, too: for the miscreant had received mortal injuries—and his sufferings were horrible. A pint of vitriol had streamed over his head—penetrating beneath his clothes, all down his neck and chest—burning him horribly, even to his very eyes in their sockets!

Rainford, alarmed by the hideous yells which had reached him in another part of the spacious house, rushed into the laboratory to ascertain the cause, having begged Mr. de Medina and Esther to await his return. At the same instant that he entered by one door, Jacob Smith made his appearance by another; and Dykes hastily explained what had occurred. Rainford accordingly issued immediate orders to transport the dying man to a bed-chamber; and fortunately, at this crisis, Dr. Lascelles arrived at the house.

The physician had been alarmed by the rumours which prevailed relative to the incidents that had oc-

curred in Red Lion Street: but a few words, rapidly exchanged with Tom Rain, relieved the doctor of all apprehensions on account of his friend;—and all his attention was now devoted to Old Death.

But though the laboratory promptly supplied all the remedies needed in such a case, their application was vain. They gave relief, it is true: but they could not arrest the rapid advances which death was making upon the wretched old man.

"Jacob," cried the doctor: "Jacob Smith, I say," he repeated more impatiently, the lad not having heard his first summons; "hand me that bottle, and——"

"Jacob Smith!" cried Old Death, his moanings suddenly ceasing at the mention of that name: "is he here? Then let me tell him——My God! this burning sensation——Jacob—Jacob—my poor boy ——Oh! my eyes—my eyes——doctor, do something to my eyes—they are like red-hot coals in my head——Jacob—I—I—am your——father!"

"My father!" almost shrieked the lad, in the wildness of his amazement at these tidings: then, falling on his knees by the bed-side, he exclaimed, "Oh! if you are indeed my parent——"

"I am—I am, Jacob," exclaimed the dying wretch: "but these tortures——why do they tear my flesh with pincers?—why do they put hot skewers into my eyes? Doctor—doctor——take away the red-hot iron——lift me out of the fire —— take me away, I say—save me—save me—I am in flames—I am burning——My God! I am burning!"

"Father—father," cried Jacob, in a tone of agonising appeal; "compose yourself—think of all your sins—repent——"

"Will no one snatch me from the fire?" yelled forth Old Death, writhing and tossing upon the bed in mortal pains: "perdition seize ye, wretches—I am burning—I am in flames—my eyes scorch me —my flesh is all seared over with red-hot irons—— Oh! it is hell—it is hell! Yes—I am in hell—— My God! this is my punishment! Oh! send me back to the world again—let me retrieve the past—let me live my existence once more—I will be good —I will not sin! No—no—for hell is terrible—terrible—and these fires——Oh! horror—horror—snakes of flame have seized upon me—they are gnawing at my heart—they have thrust their fiery stings into my eyes—they wind themselves round and round me—horror—horror—there—I feel them now—Oh! mercy—mercy——mercy——mer——"

"This is frightful!" whispered Tom Rain to Dr.

Lascelles; and all the others present at the dreadful scene shuddered from head to foot.

Jacob Smith buried his face in his hands, and sobbed convulsively.

The dying man still continued to rave, and shriek, and yell for a short time longer: but his powers of articulation rapidly failed—his writhings grew less violent, until they ceased altogether,—and in a few minutes, the dark spirit which had never spared and never pitied human creature, fled for ever!

CHAPTER CXVII.

AN EXPLANATORY CONVERSATION.

THREE days had elapsed since that eventful evening on which so many exciting incidents occurred; and the scene now changes to the dwelling of Dr. Lascelles in Grafton Street.

It was about four in the afternoon; and the physician was seated in his study, Lord Ellingham being his companion at the time.

"At length, my dear doctor," said the nobleman, "you have found leisure to accord me an hour to give me those explanations which my afflicted brother feels himself incapable to enter into at present. The loss of Tamar, whose funeral is to take place the day after to-morrow, has proved almost a mortal blow to his generous heart: but the kindness of Mr. de Medina and Esther, who insisted upon having him with them at Finchley, must in some degree mitigate his grief. And yet, alas! that bereaved father and mourning sister have themselves such bitter need of solace! Just Heaven! it was a frightful catastrophe!"

"And the murderer perished in a frightful manner," added the physician. "But now that the excitement created by these appalling events, and by all the other circumstances which Old Death's crime was the means of bringing to light, has somewhat subsided,—not only in respect to the public, but likewise with regard to the minds of those persons privately interested in the whole affair,—we may venture to converse upon the topic in the hope of approaching it with some degree of calmness. In the first place, my dear Arthur, tell me how you fared with the Home Secretary—I mean, give me the details of your visit to that Minister."

"On my arrival at his official residence," said the Earl, "on the dreadful night in question, I sent up my card with a message soliciting an immediate and private audience; and the favour was instantaneously granted. In as succinct a manner as possible, I explained to the Minister all that it was necessary to communicate. I told him that Thomas Rainford, who had been doomed to death and publicly executed, had survived the frightful ordeal of the scaffold; but relative to the means or the agents of his resuscitation, I proffered no explanation—and none was demanded of me. The Minister instantly recollected the circumstance of having signed a full and complete pardon on behalf of Rainford, some weeks ago, and at the intercession of the King; and, doubtless knowing well the wayward character of George the Fourth, he perhaps thought that the less he enquired into the business, the better. I then gave him as much information relative to the recent proceedings of Rainford as was known to myself; and when the Minister heard that he was the individual who had played so mysterious a part in the affair of Torrens, his brow lowered. But I immediately showed him the document signed by George the Fourth; and I gave him to understand that Rainford was acquainted with such proofs of the King's profligacy and unprincipled character, as would positively compromise the safety of the throne if they were published. This species of threat I was compelled to hold out, inasmuch as the Home Secretary seemed inclined to permit matters to take their course without any interference on his part. But, when he heard that the King had given that solemn acknowledgment of obligation in order to hush up some affair of which he was ashamed and likewise seriously alarmed, the Minister intimated his readiness to do any thing I required to avoid a scandal that might compromise his royal master. He nevertheless urged that an immense excitement had already been created in the metropolis, and which would of course spread to the provinces, by the sudden discovery that Thomas Rainford had not only escaped the scaffold, but had actually taken upon himself the functions of a judge in disposing of the murderers of Sir Henry Courtenay, according to his own caprice and will. '*In fact,*' said the Minister, '*the public will imagine that Rainford himself was an accomplice in the assassination of the baronet; and every one will ask what has been done with the two men, Splint and Pedler, who have thus been spirited away.*'—To this I could only reply that I was well assured of Rainford's complete innocence in respect to the murder of Sir Henry Courtenay; that he had adopted certain opinions relative to the reformation of criminals, and had chosen to test his system by applying it to those men; that the men were no longer in the country, but whither they had been sent I knew full well Rainford would never divulge to the Government; and that the Minister must decide between two alternatives—namely, whether he would dare public opinion in the case, or whether he would have his royal master seriously compromised. I can assure you, my dear doctor, that it gave me great pain and was most repugnant to my feelings to be compelled to hold out any menace of this kind; but could I leave a stone unturned that would serve the interest of my generous half-brother?"

"You already to some extent know the motives which induced Rainford to return to England instead of proceeding to America, and adopt the disguise under the cloak of which he broke up Old Death's gang?" said the physician, enquiringly.

"I gathered a few rapid and broken details from the Medinas, during the ride from Finchley to Red Lion Street, on that fatal evening when Jacob Smith came to the Manor, where I happened to be at the time, to announce the awful event which had occurred," replied the Earl. "But you may readily believe that both Mr. de Medina and Esther were too profoundly afflicted to be able to give me any very minute explanations. Moreover, I was myself so terribly excited, and so full of serious apprehensions——"

"I understand—'t was quite natural," interrupted the doctor. "But pray proceed with your narrative of the interview with the Secretary of State."

"I have little more to say upon that subject," observed Lord Ellingham. "The Minister balanced for some minutes between the alternatives which I submitted to him, and it was evident that he felt deeply grieved and chagrined at the consequences of the royal indiscretions,—indiscretions which had led the King to sign two important papers, both seriously affecting the proper and legitimate course of justice. But, in the end, he yielded to the alternative which was fav-

curable to our wishes; and, placing himself at his desk, he wrote the order to set Thomas Rainford free, which I delivered to the Bow Street officers on my return to Red Lion Street shortly after midnight."

"It is therefore certain that no farther apprehensions need be entertained on that head?" enquired the physician.

"None," answered the Earl of Ellingham. "The Coroner's Inquest, which sate upon the bodies of Tamar and Benjamin Bones yesterday, elicited, as you are well aware, the fact that the old man had been imprisoned by Rainford, and visited first by Esther, and on the last and fatal occasion by her unfortunate sister, merely with a view to his reformation and redemption from a course of crime——"

"And, therefore," added the physician, "public opinion is actually in favour of Rainford at this moment. But how happened it that Lady Hatfield was enabled to procure that document which conferred a full pardon upon him?"

"That woman possesses a most generous—a most noble heart!" exclaimed the Earl. "The voluptuous monarch sought to render her the victim of his lust; and it suddenly struck her, when his designs became unmistakeably apparent, that she might avail herself of the circumstance to perform an act calculated to exhibit her sincere friendship for me. She accordingly affected to yield in a certain measure to his disgusting overtures: she overcame the natural scruples of a pure soul, so far as to give vague promises and encourage the King's passion, in order to obtain from him the document which she required. And she succeeded. But, on the occasion of that interview with the King at which he presented her with the precious paper, she was nearly falling a victim to her generous conduct and to his brutal violence. An extraordinary combination of circumstances, however, had led Rainford into the palace on that very evening; and accident enabled him not only to deliver Georgiana from the power of the King, but likewise to extort from his Majesty that written promise of deep obligation which has proved so vitally important to his interests."

"The entire affair is truly romantic," observed the doctor. "And now you wish me to give you in detail an explanation of all Rainford's late proceedings?"

"I am already acquainted with much concerning them, and conjecture enables me to comprehend more," returned the nobleman: "at the same time, I should be pleased to hear a connected account from your lips."

"It is by no means a disagreeable task for me to narrate incidents which prove the existence of so many generous traits in the heart of that man whom I was the means of restoring to life and to the world," said Dr. Lascelles; "for since that day on which he opened his eyes in my laboratory, I have regarded him almost in the light of a son. I must begin by informing you that Rainford was deeply touched by a conversation which he had with you, relative to the miseries and crimes of the poor and ignorant classes of society——"

"That conversation took place in the evening following his resuscitation," observed Arthur,—"the same evening on which I captured Benjamin Bones, as he was ascending from the subterranean."

"The discourse which yourself and your half-brother had together on that occasion," resumed the doctor, "induced him to reflect profoundly upon the nature of crime—the circumstances which engender, and afterwards encourage it—and the best modes of producing a reformation. That train of thought led him to ponder upon other matters, essentially regarding yourself. For he saw that Benjamin Bones would prove your most implacable enemy: he knew that old man's character well—and he felt assured that he would devise and carry into effect some atrocious schemes of vengeance against you. These convictions filled Rainford's mind with the gloomiest apprehensions, although he contrived to veil them from you. He trembled lest you should fall into the snares which that incarnate fiend—God forgive me for speaking ill of the dead—was certain to spread at your feet; and he resolved to adopt some means to counteract the effects of that man's malignant spite. In a word, he determined, at any sacrifice, to watch over that brother who had acted so generously and nobly towards him. But not to a soul did he communicate his ideas, until he had safely embarked, with Tamar, Jacob Smith, and Charley Watts, on board the American packet-ship at Havre-de-Grace. Then he revealed his intentions to Tamar; and she immediately fell into his views—for she knew no will save his own. The captain of the ship consented, for a reward, to touch at Guernsey; and there Rainford, his wife, the youth, and the boy, were landed in the middle of the night. The next morning, your half-brother and Cæsar appeared in the disguise of blackamoors; and from Saint Peter's Port, the capital of the island, they sailed for Weymouth—Tamar with Charley Watts proceeding by way of Southampton. The rendezvous was London; and all Rainford's plans, so far as he could forecast them, were already arranged. On her arrival in the metropolis, Tamar immediately sent for her father and sister to the inn at which she alighted; and to them she communicated her husband's design. It was of course necessary to keep the entire scheme concealed from yourself; as it was well known that you would never rest until you had persuaded your brother to quit the country again, were you aware of his return. At that time you were not engaged to Esther; and she had therefore no hesitation in maintaining this much of duplicity towards you. Subsequently—I mean, after your engagement together—she felt herself bound still to guard inviolably a secret that had your welfare as its basis. Well, then, Mr. de Medina and Esther lent themselves to the project—and cheerfully too, because they recognised all the importance of allowing Rainford to adopt the necessary measures to ensure your complete safety. Tamar and Charley Watts accordingly took up their abode at Finchley Manor, the proper precautions being taken to enable them to dwell there in the strictest privacy, and the fidelity of the servants being well assured in respect to their presence at that house. So far all proceeded satisfactorily; and in the meantime Rainford, accompanied by Jacob Smith, whom he named Cæsar, arrived in London. You may conceive my surprise when one evening, having been informed by my servant that an East Indian gentleman was waiting to see me in the drawing-room, I proceeded to that apartment and found myself in the presence of Thomas Rainford! I did not recognise him at once; but he speedily made himself known to me; and, when his plans were developed, I readily agreed to aid him in their accomplishment. As he had expected and indeed calculated, I had full and complete control over the houses in Red Lion and Turnmill Streets; and he felt convinced that you would never think of visiting them. You had purchased them merely to deprive Benjamin Bones of the power of plunging his victims into the subterranean cells; and you allowed me the use of the premises for my laboratory. Under all these circumstances, the house in Red Lion Street

was the best suited to Rainford's designs; and it was speedily furnished in a suitable manner. The neighbours believed that a retired East Indian merchant had taken the place; and therefore no surprise—no excitement was occasioned, when they perceived that the new tenant had his private carriage and numerous dependants. But how did Rainford manage to obtain the assistance of several faithful persons, who were blindly obedient to his will, and to one of whom—named Wilton—he entrusted his entire history? They were all poor and deserving persons whom I knew well—men who had at different times been my patients, and in whom I felt an interest. Thus, in a very few days, the most complete arrangements were effected; and just at the moment when Rainford was prepared to commence operations, and when he had succeeded in tracing the abode of Benjamin Bones, chance threw him in the way of a certain John Jeffreys, whom he resolved to render subservient to his purposes in uprooting the atrocious gang."

The physician then proceeded to relate the manner in which Rainford had drawn Jeffreys into his service,—the revelations made to him by that individual's unfolding all the dreadful schemes of vengeance contemplated by Old Death, and directed against the happiness of the Earl himself,—the projected exhumation of the coffin in Saint Luke's church-yard, and the ferocious idea of blinding Lady Hatfield and Esther de Medina,—the mode in which these diabolical aims were frustrated by the arrest of all the members of Old Death's gang,—and the faithful conduct of Jeffreys. Dr. Lascelles also narrated the proceedings of Rainford in the difficult affair of Mr. Torrens,—how, disguised as an old man, and admirably sustaining that character, he had entrapped Sir Christopher Blunt to the house in Red Lion Street to preside at the examination of the two prisoners,—and how he (Dr. Lascelles) had become a party to that transaction,—all of which particulars are well known to the reader. Finally, the physician made the Earl acquainted with the nature and the results of the system of reformation applied to all the members of the gang,—how it had succeeded in respect to Tidmarsh, the Bunces, Pedler and Splint,—and how Esther de Medina had deputed her unfortunate sister to visit Benjamin Bones on that fatal evening which was characterised by a savage murder!

There was only one point connected with Rainford's affairs, on which the Earl and the physician did not touch; and this was the parentage of little Charley Watts. The doctor was unacquainted with the fact that Rainford had some years back forcibly violated the person of Lady Hatfield, and that the issue of this crime was the boy who still bore the name by which we have just called him. The Earl of Ellingham naturally veiled the circumstance even from a friend so intimate and sincere as Lascelles; and though the doctor knew that Lady Hatfield had been a mother, he also kept this knowledge to himself, and was very far from suspecting the true history of Charley Watts. Lascelles, it will be remembered, had made the discovery relative to Georgiana on that occasion when he attended her in her severe illness, and when he gave her a soporific, as recorded in the early part of this work: but he had never mentioned that discovery to a soul;—and the Earl of Ellingham was as far from supposing that Lady Hatfield's loss of chastity was known to the physician, as the physician was from entertaining even the remotest idea relative to the parentage of the boy.

But Rainford was already aware that this boy was his own son—the issue of the outrage which he had perpetrated upon Lady Hatfield! Yes—on the evening before this interview between the Earl of Ellingham and Dr. Lascelles, the former had so far intruded upon his brother's profound grief, as to make to him a revelation which a sense of duty forbade him to delay. Rainford also learnt, at the same time, that Georgiana was herself acquainted with the fact of he. child being in his care—placed under his protection as it were by the inscrutable decrees of Providence! But for the sake of the honour of Lady Hatfield, and o. sparing Rainford from the necessity of giving unpleasant and degrading explanations to his friends, it had been determined between Lord Ellingham and himself that the boy should still continue to bear the name of Watts, and that his real parentage should be unacknowledged—at least for the present.

In order not to dwell with tedious minuteness upon this portion of our narrative, we shall briefly state that the funeral of Tamar took place on the day appointed; and if the tears of heart-felt grief streaming from the eyes of true mourners can avail for the souls of the departed, then the spirit of the murdered Jewess must have received ample solace and full propitiation in those regions to which it had taken wing!

But how deep a gloom had fallen upon the family of Medina;—and how poignant was the anguish which the bereaved father and sister experienced for the departed!

Nor less acute was the sorrow of the husband who survived that fair but prematurely crushed flower of Israel;—for immense was thy love for her, Tom Rain!

CHAPTER CXVIII.

THE INSOLVENT DEBTORS' COURT.

PASSING through Portugal Street, Lincoln's Inn Fields, you may perceive a low, dingy-looking building, protected by a row of tall iron railings, and with steps leading to the front entrance. This structure is of so dubious an aspect that it places the stranger in a profound state of uncertainty as to whether it be the lobby of a criminal prison or a Methodist chapel; and the supposed stranger is not a little surprised when he learns, on inquiry, that this architectural mystery is neither more nor less than the Court for the Relief of Insolvent Debtors.

At about nine o'clock in the morning the immediate vicinity of the Court begins to wear a very business-like appearance: that is to say, both sides of the street are thronged with the most curious specimens of human nature which it is possible to encounter outside of Newgate or of the Bench. The wonder is whence such a host of ill-looking fellows can have sprung, or whither they can be going, unless it is to either of the two places just named. Then comes the natural question, "But who are they?" The answer is at hand: some are the turnkeys of the County Prisons and the tipstaves of the Bench, having in their charge prisoners about to be heard at the Court,—others are the usual hangers-on and errand-seekers who are always to be found lurking about such places,—while a third set are the friends or else the opposing creditors of the Insolvents. The public-house opposite the Court, and the one at the side are also filled with persons of these descriptions; and before ten o'clock

in the morning many pots of porter are disposed of—many quarterns of gin dispensed in two or three "outs"—and many screws of tobacco puffed off in smoke.

Inside the Court, business commences in somewhat a more serious manner. Four or five barristers take their places in a large box divided into two compartments like pews in a church: a couple of Commissioners seat themselves on a bench made in very humble imitation indeed of those in the Courts at Westminster;—a single reporter lounges into the snug crib so kindly allotted to the representatives of the press;—several attorneys and attorneys' clerks gather round the table between the counsel's seats and the bench:—the Insolvents are penned up altogether in a sort of human fold on the right as you go into the tribunal;—and at the back a crowd of unwashed faces rise amphitheatrically in the compartment appropriated to the audience. The Commissioners endeavour to look as much like the Judges of the Land as possible;—the barristers affect all the consequence and airs of Serjeants-at-Law or King's Counsel;—the Insolvents try to seem as happy as if they had nothing awkward in their schedules to account for;—and the spectators raise heaven and earth to appear respectable: but each and all of these attempts are the most decided failures which it is possible to conceive. A general air of seediness pervades the place: the professional wigs are dirty and out of curl, and the forensic gowns threadbare;—and the disagreeable impression thus created on the mind of the visitor, is enhanced to no trifling degree by a sickly smell of perspiration combined with the stale odour of tobacco smoke retained in the garments of the audience.

Amongst the Insolvents were two individuals whose appearance formed a most striking contrast. These were Mr. Joshua Sheepshanks and Mr. Frank Curtis.

The former was dressed in deep black, with a white neck-cloth, and black cotton gloves a great deal too large for his hands: he had also put black crape round his hat, in the hope of creating the sympathy of the Commissioners by producing the impression of having sustained some serious and recent family loss. His sallow face was elongated with the awful sanctimoniousness which characterised it: his black hair was combed sleekly down over his forehead;—and he sate bolt upright on the hard bench, every now and then raising his eyes to heaven—or rather to the lanthorn on the roof of the Court—as if in silent prayer.

Mr. Frank Curtis was attired in his habitually flash manner; and as he lolled back in his seat, he now and then bestowed a significant wink upon his attorney at the table, or exchanged a few familiar observations with the tipstaff, whom he had treated to egg-hot at the public-house opposite before they entered the Court.

But where was Captain O'Blunderbuss? Had he deserted his friend on this trying occasion? Gentle reader, do not suppose for an instant that the gallant officer was capable of what he himself would describe to be the "most bastely maneness"—so long as Frank had a shilling left in his pocket, or the ability to raise one! The captain, then, *was* there—and in the vicinity of Mr. Curtis; for the terrible Irishman had posted himself as near as possible to the box in which the Insolvents stand to be examined—in the first place, that when Frank should mount to that "bad eminence," he might be close by to encourage him with his looks; and, in the second place, he had taken that particular stand as the one whence he could best dart ferocious glances at the Commissioners, in case these functionaries should take it into their heads to deal harshly with his friend.

And now the business of that day's proceeding commenced; and the Clerk of the Court bawled out in a loud tone—"Joshua Sheepshanks!"

"Here, my Christian friend!" groaned the religious gentleman, drawing himself slowly up to his full, thin, lanky height, and beginning to move slowly and solemnly towards the box above-mentioned.

"Now, then—Joshua Sheepshanks!" cried the clerk, in a sharp tone.

"Come—Joshua Sheepshanks—look alive!" grumbled the official who administers the oaths to the Insolvents.

"Cut along, old fellow," whispered Frank Curtis, giving the sanctimonious dissenter a hearty pinch on the leg as he passed by.

Mr. Sheepshanks uttered a low moan—cast up his eyes towards the lanthorn—muttered something about his having "fallen amongst the ungodly"—and ended by hoisting himself into the box with some degree of alacrity, his slow movements having rendered the Court impatient.

"Does any counsel appear for you, Joshua Sheepshanks?" demanded the clerk.

"None—unless it be the Lord's will that I should be supported by divine grace," answered the dissenting minister, in so doleful a tone and with such a solemn shaking of the head that the whole Court was alarmed lest he was about to go off in a fit.

"I appear to oppose on behalf of several creditors," said Mr. Bulliwell, one of the leading barristers practising in that Court.

"Oh! the persevering bitterness of those rancorous men!" exclaimed Mr. Sheepshanks, clasping his hands together, and turning up the whites of his eyes in an appalling fashion.

"Silence, Insolvent!" cried the clerk, in a sharp tone.

Meantime, the Commissioners had both been taking a long and simultaneous stare at the religious gentleman; and though one was purblind and the other in his dotage, they nevertheless seemed to arrive in the long run at pretty well the same conclusion—which was, that Mr. Sheepshanks was a dreadful humbug. The glances they interchanged through their spectacles expressed to each other this conviction; and the sharper of the two, who rejoiced in the name of Sneesby, forthwith proceeded to examine the schedule.

"I see that you were once a missionary in the *South-Sea Islands Bible Circulating Society*, Insolvent?" said this learned functionary.

"Under the divine favour, I was such a vessel in the good cause," answered Mr. Sheepshanks, with the invariable nasal twang of hypocrisy.

"A what?" demanded Mr. Commissioner Sneesby, in an impatient tone.

"He says he was a *vessel*, sir," observed Mr. Bulliwell, the barrister. "It is a word much in vogue amongst the religious world."

"Oh! the Insolvent calls himself a vessel—does he?" exclaimed the Commissioner. "Well—he has come to a pretty anchorage at last."

"And yet, sir, I can assure you he is no anchorite," said Mr. Bulliwell.

These were jokes on the part of the Commissioner and the counsel; and therefore the attorneys, the clerks, and the audience tittered, as in duty bound when the wig forgot its wisdom and indulged in wit; and the Insolvents all laughed too—but for another

reason. In fact, Mr. Frank Curtis had applied his right hand to his nose, and extended it in a fan-like form—or, in other words, he "took a sight" at the learned Commissioner, and worked an imaginary coffee-mill at the same time with his left hand.

Order being restored, the business proceeded.

"And, having been a missionary, I observe by your schedule, that you turned a Dissenting Minister, Insolvent?" said Mr. Commissioner Sneesby, interrogatively.

"I was a brand snatched from the burning, sir," replied Mr. Sheepshanks; "and, having sorely wrestled with Satan——"

"Give me a direct answer, man!" cried the Commissioner, sharply. "Did you leave an institution connected with the Established Church and become a dissenter?"

"Heaven so willed it," responded the sanctimonious insolvent, in a droning voice: "I had a call—and I obeyed it."

"Who opposes this man?" enquired the Commissioner.

"Jeremiah Chubbley!" vociferated the Clerk of the Court.

"Here!" growled a man dressed as a bricklayer.

"Now, then, Jeremiah Chubbley—stand up in the witness-box," continued the clerk.

"Come, Mr. Chubbley—make haste," said Mr. Bulliwell, the barrister, speaking more civilly and using the honorary prefix of *Mister*, because he had been retained by the individual to whom he applied it.

Mr. Chubbley mounted the witness-box; and while the oath was being administered to him, both the Commissioners inflicted a long stare on his countenance just to satisfy themselves by this physiognomical scrutiny whether he were a trust-worthy person or not;—for Commissioners in the Insolvents' Court are great physiognomists—very great physiognomists indeed.

"Your name is Jeremiah Chubbley?" said Mr. Bulliwell, rising in a stately manner, and darting a ferocious glance towards Mr. Sheepshanks, as much as to say—"Now, my man, I am going to elicit things against you that will prove you to be the greatest rogue in existence."

"Yes—my name be Chubbley, sir," answered the opposing creditor. "But I paid you to tackle that there sneaking-looking chap over there, and not to ke-vestion me."

"My dear sir," said Mr. Bulliwell, blandly, "this is the way of conducting an opposition where counsel is employed. Your name is Jeremiah Chubbley; and you are a master-bricklayer, I believe?"

"I told 'ee so a week ago," replied the opposing creditor, savagely.

"Yes—yes: but you must tell the learned Commissioners all over again what you told me," gently remonstrated Mr. Bulliwell. "I believe you are the proprietor of a chapel in the Tottenham Court Road?"

"Yes—I be, sir," responded Mr. Chubbley. "I built she—and a stronger, better, or more comfortabler place of washup you would n't find in all London—leastways, barrin' St. Paul's."

"Well—and this chapel was to let some three or four months ago, I believe?" continued Mr. Bulliwell.

"Yes—it were, sir: and I had blackguards up at the grocer's round the corner——"

"Had what, man?" demanded the Commissioners simultaneously, and as it were in the same breath.

"He means that he put placards up at a neighbouring grocer's, sir," mildly explained Mr. Bulliwell. then, turning again to the opposing creditor, the learned counsel said, "And I believe that the Insolvent was attracted by the placards, and applied to you in consequence?"

"He come round to my house, sir, jest as me and my missus was a sitting down to dinner," answered Mr. Chubbley. "It was biled pork and greens we had, I remember; cos says I to my missus, says I——"

"Well—well, Mr. Chubbley," interrupted the counsel: "we will proceed, if you please. The Insolvent came round to you, and enquired about the chapel that was to let?"

"Yes—he did: and he axed a many ke-vestions about the orgin and the pulpit, and the westry—and so on."

"And, being satisfied with your replies, he agreeed to take the chapel?"

"Yes—and to pay a ke-varter in adwance, which was eleven pound ten," answered Mr. Chubbley.

"Well—what took place next?" inquired one of the Commissioners, growing impatient, while his brother-judge took a nap.

"Please, my lud, he sits down and pitches into the biled pork and greens," responded the opposing creditor.

There was a laugh amongst the audience; but as the joke did not arise from either the bench or the bar, the ushers bawled out "Silence!" as loudly as they could.

"The Insolvent, I believe, not only omitted to pay the quarter in advance," said Mr. Bulliwell, "but succeeded in obtaining from you the loan of forty pounds?"

"In hard cash—and that's what aggerewates me and my missus so agin him," replied the opposing creditor.

"But in what manner did he obtain those forty pounds?" asked Mr. Bulliwell. "Tell the learned Commissioners——"

"Vy—one on 'em 's asleep—and so it 's no use a-speaking to he!" exclaimed Mr. Chubbley.

There was another laugh, which the clerks and ushers immediately suppressed; and Captain O'Blunderbuss ran a narrow risk of being ignominiously bundled out of the Court for observing in a tone somewhat above a whisper, "Be Jasus! and that 's as thrue as that every rale Irishman loves potheen!" But the best of the business was that the somnolent Commissioner woke up; and catching the fag end of a laugh accompanied by the loud cries of "Silence!" on the part of the officials of the Court, he immediately fancied that some person had perpetrated a great breach of decorum, and exclaimed in a severe tone, "Whoever is the cause of disturbance must be turned out." Hereupon there was another laugh; and even Mr. Bulliwell himself was compelled to stoop down and pretend to examine his brief in order to conceal the mobility of his risible muscles.

"Come, come—let the business proceed," said Commissioner Sneesby, anxious to relieve his brother-functionary from any farther embarrassment; for the latter learned gentleman was quite bewildered by the renewed hilarity which his words had provoked.

"Tell the bench how the Insolvent obtained from you the forty pounds, Mr. Chubbley," exclaimed Mr. Bulliwell.

"Please, sir—my missus has on'y got von eye——"

"Well—and what has that to do with it?" demanded Mr. Commissioner Sneesby.

"Jest this, my lud—that that 'ere sneaking feller

got on the blind side of she, and began a pitching into she all kind of gammon,—calling his-self a chosen wessel, and telling her how she would be sartain sure of going to heaven if we on'y let him have the funds to set up in business as a preacher. He swore that all the airistocracy was a-dying to hear him in the pulpit: and so he persuades my missus to be pew-opener; and he gammons me to call myself a Helder——"

"A what?" exclaimed Commissioner Sneesby.

"An Elder, sir," observed Mr. Bulliwell: for it is to be remarked that when Judges at Westminster or Commissioners in Portugal Street cannot understand any thing—or affect not to do so—the counsel are always prepared to give them an explanation;—yet when these counsel become Judges or Commissioners in their turn, they grow just as opaque of intellect and as slow of comprehension as those whom they were once accustomed to enlighten.

"Well—go on, man," said Commissioner Sneesby, addressing himself to the opposing creditor.

"Well, my lud," proceeded Mr. Chubbley, "that there sniggering feller come over us all in sich a vay vith his blessed insinivations, that we all thought him a perfect saint; and we was glad to vipe off the dust of sich a man's shoes, as the sayin' is. So I goes to my friend Cheesewright, the grocer, and I says, says I, 'Cheesey, my boy, you must be a Helder, too.' So Cheesewright axes what a Helder is; and when I tells him that it 's to purside over a chapel in which a reglar saint holds forth, and that all Helders is booked for the right place in t'other world, he says, says he, 'Chubbley, my boy, tip us your fist; and I 'm your man for a Helder too.'"

"And now tell the learned Commissioners what this business has to do with your opposition to the Insolvent's discharge," said Mr. Bulliwell, seeing that the bench was growing impatient.

"Vy, my luds," continued Chubbley, scratching his head, "that there insinivating chap gets Cheesey to lend him his acceptance for thirty pounds, and he comes to me and gets me to write my name along the back on it—and so he gets it discounted, and leaves us to pay it."

Here Mr. Joshua Sheepshanks held up his hands and groaned aloud—as if in horrified dismay at the construction put upon his conduct.

"Silence, Insolvent!" exclaimed the usher, ferociously.

"And now, Mr. Chubbley," resumed Mr. Bulliwell, "what answer did you obtain from the Insolvent when you stated to him that you had heard certain reports which made you anxious to receive security for the rent of the chapel, the forty pounds, and the amount of the bill for which you were liable?"

"He said as how that the chapel had n't succeeded as he thought it would have done—that he 'd been disappinted — and that me and Cheesewright must have patience."

"And when you told him that you and Mr. Cheesewright would not wait any longer—what did he say?"

"He said we was a generation of wipers."

"And when you put him into prison?"

"He sent for me, and said I must n't hope to be paid in this world; but as I 'd laid up for myself a treasure in heaven, he expected me to let him out of quod for nothink."

There was a general titter in which bench and bar joined; and the only demure countenances present were those of the creditor who was done, and Mr. Sheepshanks who had done him. In fact this pious gentleman was so overcome by the unpleasantness of his position, that he compared himself, in the religious anguish of his spirit, to the man who went down to Jericho and fell amongst thieves.

Silence being again restored, two other opposing creditors were examined in their turn; and their evidence went to prove that Mr. Joshua Sheepshanks had obtained from them a quantity of goods under such very questionable pretences, that he might think himself exceedingly fortunate in having been sent to the King's Bench instead of to Newgate.

The opposition having arrived at this stage, Mr. Bulliwell proceeded to address the Court in a long and furious speech based upon the testimony that had been given against the Insolvent. The agreeable appellations of "sanctimonious hypocrite," "double-faced ranter," "unprincipled trader in pious duplicities," and such like terms, were freely applied to Mr. Joshua Sheepshanks in the course of this oration. The learned gentleman dwelt bitterly—but not one atom more severely than the subject deserved—upon the rascally scoundrelism which is practised by those persons who are denominated "saints;" and he concluded a rather eloquent speech by praying the Court to express its sense of the Insolvent's criminality by remanding him for as long a period as the Act of Parliament would allow.

When called upon for any thing he might have to say in his defence, Mr. Sheepshanks applied a white handkerchief to his eyes; and, after shaking his head solemnly for several moments, he revealed his lugubrious countenance once more—purposely elongating it until he fancied he had tortured himself into as impressive a pitch of misery as one could wish to behold. He then began a tedious and doleful dissertation upon the "vanity of earthly things"—marvelled that his opposing creditors should "prefer the filthy lucre to the welfare of their immortal souls"—declared that when he first went amongst them he found them "lamentably benighted," but that he had "at one time brought them to a state of grace"—complained that they had treated him as if he had been "a vesse. of wrath," whereas he flattered himself that he was in "a most savoury state of godliness"—hinted rather significantly that he looked upon his present predicament as a "glorious martyrdom in the good cause"—and wound up with an earnest prayer to the Commissioners that they would not be "moved by the men of Belial against him," but that even as "heaven tempered the wind to the shorn lamb," they would modify their judgment according to his lamentable condition.

To this speech, delivered in the most approved nasal twang of the dissenting pulpit, and with many doleful moans and frightful contortions, Commissioner Sneesby listened with exemplary patience: so, indeed, did his learned brother-judge—but in this latter case it was with the eyes shut. The moment, however, the harangue was brought to an end, the eyes alluded to opened slowly and gazed rather vacantly around: but with judicial keenness, they speedily comprehended the exact stage of the proceedings; and the possessor of the sleepy optics forthwith began to consult with his coadjutor in solemn whispers. Their conversation ran somewhat in the ensuing manner:—

"It is getting on for one o'clock, and I begin to feel quite faint," said the somniferous Commissioner.

"A chop and a glass of sherry will do us each good," observed Mr. Sneesby.

"Bulliwell does make such long-winded speeches!"

"Well—so he does: but I always pretend to listen to them—and thus he enjoys the reputation of having *the ear of the Court.*"

"I am going to dine with Serjeant Splutterby this evening—and so I shall leave at about four o'clock."

"Very well," said Mr. Commissioner Sneesby: "I shall sit till six. But what are we to do with this canting hypocrite of an Insolvent?"

"Six months, I suppose: he is a dreadful villain."

"Yes—and while you were asleep he made a frightful long speech——"

"Oh! in that case, then, let us give him a twelvemonth—and then for the chops and the sherry."

"Good: a twelvemonth—and then the chops and the sherry."

Mr. Commissioner Sneesby, having thus assented to the suggestions of his sleepy coadjutor, turned in a solemn manner towards Mr. Joshua Sheepshanks and addressed that miserable-looking creature in the following terms:—

"Insolvent, the Court has maturely deliberated upon your case. We have listened with deep attention to the evidence of the opposing creditors and the address of the learned counsel on their behalf. We have likewise followed you with equal care throughout your defence; and we feel ourselves bound to pronounce an adverse judgment. Your conduct has been most reprehensible—aggravated, too, by the fact that your offences have been committed under the cloak of religion. My learned brother agrees with me in the opinion that your proceedings have been most fraudulent. We might even use harsher terms; but we will forbear. The judgment of the Court is that you, Joshua Sheepshanks, be remanded at the suit of your three opposing creditors for the period of twelve calendar months from the date of your vesting order."

"Stand down, Insolvent!" cried the clerk.

The discomfitted Mr. Sheepshanks raised his eyes and hands upwards, and gave vent to a hollow groan, which made the audience think for a moment that it was a ghost from the tomb who was passing through the Insolvents' Court.

"Silence, Insolvent!" vociferated an official, making much more noise to enforce his command than the pious gentleman did in provoking the injunction.

"You must swear to your schedule," said the usher, as Mr. Sheepshanks was descending from the box.

"Damn the schedule!" muttered the reverend Insolvent, in a savage whisper.

"What do you say?" demanded the usher.

"I pray to heaven to have mercy upon my relentless persecutors, even as I forgive them!" answered Mr. Sheepshanks, with a solemn shake of the head.

He then quitted the box, and forthwith accompanied the tipstaff who had charge of him to the public-house opposite, where he drowned his cares in such a quantity of hot brandy-and-water, that the tipstaff aforesaid was compelled to put him into a cab and convey him back to the King's Bench in a desperate state of intoxication.

In the meantime the two Commissioners retired to partake of their chops and sherry: the learned counsel likewise withdrew to *their* private room, where *they* also refreshed themselves;—the attorneys stole away for a quarter of an hour:—and the audience took little portable dinners of saveloys and biscuits from their pocket-handkerchiefs, so that the compartment of the Court allotted to spectators suddenly appeared to have been transformed into a slap-bang shop on an inferior scale.

The fifteen minutes' grace having expired, Commissioners, counsel, and lawyers returned to their places—the audience wiped their mouths—and the Clerk of the Court called forth the name of "FRANCIS CURTIS!"

CHAPTER CXIX.

THE EXAMINATION OF MR. FRANK CURTIS.

CAPTAIN O'BLUNDERBUSS surveyed his friend with a degree of admiration amounting almost to envy, as the latter leapt nimbly into the box; but when the two Commissioners inflicted upon the Insolvent the simultaneous long stare which seemed to form a portion of the judicial proceedings, the gallant officer fixed upon those learned functionaries a look of the most ferocious menace,—muttering at the same time something about the "punching of heads." As for Mr. Frank Curtis, he returned the stare of the Commissioners in so deliberately impudent and yet good-humoured a manner that it was quite evident the physiognomical discrimination of the bench was at least for once completely set at naught. In plain terms, the Commissioners did not know what the deuce to make of the young gentleman.

"I appear for the Insolvent, sir," said one of the learned counsel, Mr. Cadgerbreef by name.

"And I attend for an opposing creditor, sir," observed Mr. Bulliwell.

The Clerk of the Court handed up the schedule to the Commissioners, who occupied some minutes in looking over it, the document being somewhat a lengthy one.

"I see you have got upwards of a hundred and fifty creditors, Insolvent," said Mr. Commissioner Sneesby, fixing his eyes severely upon the youthful candidate for the process of white-washing.

"Be Jasus! and my frind 's a jintleman — every inch of him!" cried Captain O'Blunderbuss: "and no jintleman could think of petitioning the Court with less than a hunthred and fifty creditors."

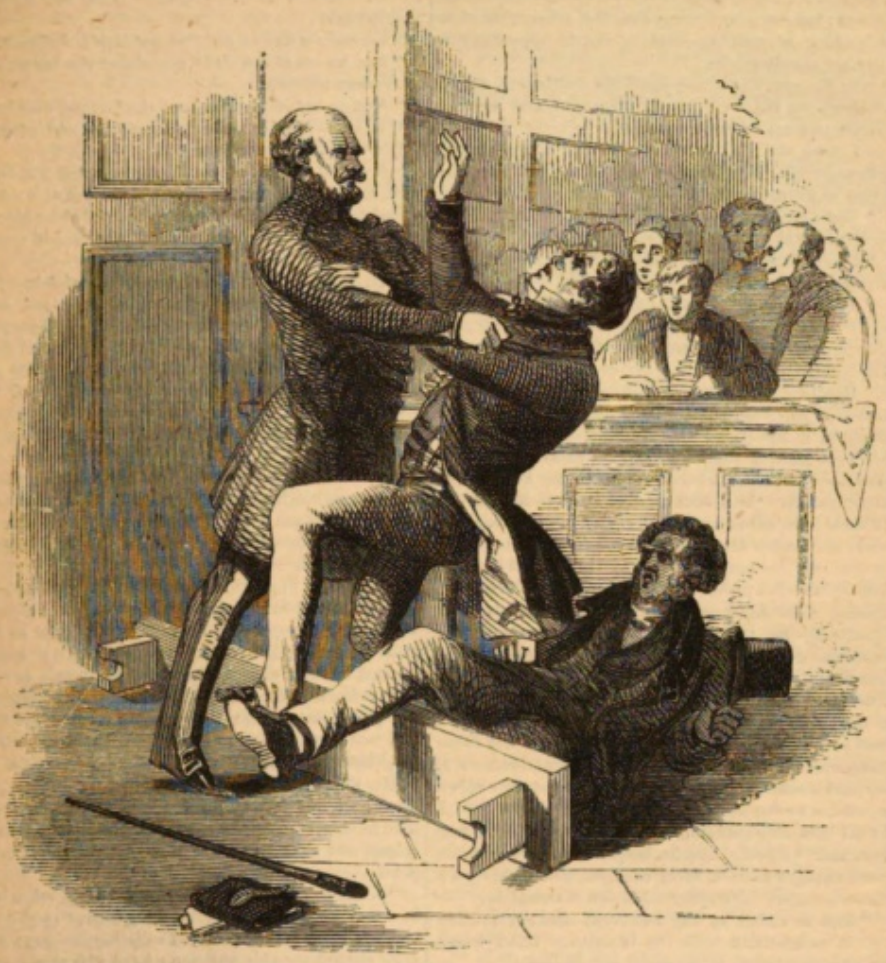
The whole Court was struck with dismay—the bench being perfectly aghast—at this interruption; while the captain stood as dauntless and menacing as if he seriously contemplated the challenging of Commissioners, learned counsel, lawyers, and all. Even the usher was so astounded by his conduct that he forgot to bawl out his usual noisy cry for silence.

"Who is this person?" enquired Mr. Commissioner Sneesby, turning towards his brother-judge, as if the latter knew any better than himself.

"*Person*, be Jasus! Do n't call me *a person*," vociferated the gallant gentleman, stamping his martial foot heavily upon the floor. "Is it me name ye 'd be afther finding out? If so, I 'll hand ye my car-r-d —and you 'll find that I 'm Capthain O'Bluntherbuss, of Bluntherbuss Park, Connemar-r-ra, Ir-r-reland!" added the Insolvent's bosom-friend, rattling the r in such an appalling manner that it seemed as if a waggon laden with iron bars was passing through the Court.

"Turn him out!" exclaimed Mr. Commissioner Sneesby.

"Be Jasus! and it 'll take tin of ye to do that!" ejaculated the captain, taking so firm and dauntless a stand that he appeared literally nailed to the ground. "But we 'll make a compromise, if ye plaze — and that is, I 'll hould my tongue."



"You had better, sir," said the Commissioner: then, perceiving that none of the officials seemed inclined to assail the impregnable front which the ferocious Irishman presented, he thought it prudent to pass over the interruption and continue the business before the Court. "Who attends to oppose?" he accordingly demanded.

"Me!" ejaculated a little, dapper-looking, flashily-dressed person, elbowing his way through the crowd behind the barristers' seats, and getting his glossy beaver smashed flat as an opera hat in the desperate struggle: indeed, what with the smell of onions from one man and tobacco from another,—what with the squeezing, and pushing, and crushing—the treading on toes, and the danger of having one's coat slit up the back or one's pocket picked,—it is no easy nor pleasant matter to transform oneself into a human wedge to be applied to such a stubborn, compact mass as a multitude in a Court of Justice.

At last, however, the little man succeeded in reaching the witness-box,—but not without being compelled to smart under the disagreeable conviction that the studied elegance of his toilette was entirely marred—his shirt-frill tumbled, his white waistcoat soiled through contact with a coal-heaver, and all the polish trodden off his boots.

Adjusting himself as well as he could in the box, he made a profound bow to the bench, simpered in a familiar fashion towards his counsel, glanced complacently at the attorneys, and then turned a look of indignant contempt upon the Insolvent,—so that the little gentleman's transitions from excruciating politeness to extreme hauteur were very interesting indeed.

"Your name is Kicksey Fopperton, I believe?" said Mr. Bulliwell, the opposing creditor's own counsel, specially retained and fee'd for the purpose of getting Mr. Frank Curtis remanded during as lengthened a period as possible.

"That is my name, sir," was the answer, delivered with a bland smile and a half bow.

"What are you, Mr. Fopperton?"

"A tailor by trade, sir;"—for persons of Mr. Fopperton's calling never describe themselves briefly as "tailors," but always as "tailors by trade."

"A tailor by trade," repeated Mr. Bulliwell. "And you carry on business——"

"In Regent Street, sir," replied Mr. Fopperton, glancing towards the bench to notice what effect such

a fashionable address had produced upon the Commissioners: but one was dozing, and the other seemed to be looking at nothing—just as horses appear when they are standing idle.

"In Regent Street," repeated Mr. Bulliwell. "And I believe the Insolvent called upon you, and ordered clothes to a considerable amount?"

"I have supplied him for the last three years," answered Mr. Fopperton, "and never yet saw the colour of his money."

"You never yet saw the colour of his money. But he has seen the colour of yours, though?"

"I have discounted bills for him to the amount of a thousand pounds."

"To the amount of a thousand pounds. Now, on what pretence—or rather, under what circumstances did the Insolvent introduce himself to you?" inquired Mr. Bulliwell.

"He drove up to my door in a dashing gig, sir," answered Mr. Fopperton, "leapt down, rushed in, and enquired if his friend the Archbishop of Canterbury had been waiting there for him? I assured him that his Grace had not visited the shop, to my knowledge, in all his life. '*God bless me!*' exclaimed Mr. Curtis; '*I must have made a mistake, then! But don't you make the leather breeches which his Grace wears when he goes out hunting?*' I replied that I never made leather breeches at all. '*Nor galligaskins?*' said Mr. Curtis. '*Nor galligaskins, sir,*' I said. '*Then blow me tight,*' says he, '*I have come to the wrong shop. My intimate and particular friend the Archbishop of York——*'. I suggested '*Canterbury.*'—'*Canterbury I meant!*' exclaimed Mr. Curtis: '*his Grace promised to introduce me to his own tailor; and here have I been promising introductions likewise to Lord Pumpleby and the Marquis of Dublin, and a whole lot of my fashionable friends. There is a perfect rage all on a sudden to employ his Grace's tailor!*'—I was struck by all this fine-sounding talk, and handed Mr. Curtis my card. '*Egad!*' said he, laughing, '*I've a precious good mind to have a lark, and pit you against his Grace's tailor. My eyes! what fun it would be!*'"

"And it ended by the Insolvent actually putting you in competition with the imaginary tailor which he had conjured up?" enquired Mr. Bulliwell.

"Just so, sir," returned Mr. Fopperton; "and though I heard sometime afterwards that Mr. Curtis received a handsome income from his uncle Sir Christopher Blunt, yet I never got a sixpence."

"Be Jasus! Sir Christopher-r is a regular ould screw!" ejaculated Captain O'Blunderbuss.

"Eh?—what?" cried the Commissioners, the one awaking from his nap and the other from his obliviousness.

"Is it afther distur-r-bing ye I've been again?" demanded the gallant gentleman: "then, be the holy poker-r! I ask your pardon—and I'll hould my pace!"

With these words the captain put his arms akimbo—pursed up his mouth in a most extraordinary fashion—and stood as still as a post and as demure as a methodist parson, to the huge delight of the unwashed audience.

"It appears," said Mr. Bulliwell, resuming his examination of the opposing creditor, "that the Insolvent obtained clothes to the amount of four hundred pounds, and cash to the amount of a thousand?"

Mr. Fopperton bowed an assent.

"And you have every reason to believe that he only talked about the Archbishop's tailor and his noble acquaintances, in order to throw dust into your eyes?"

"To make a fool of me, sir," cried Mr. Kicksey Fopperton.

"To make a fool of you," repeated Mr. Bulliwell.

"And an ass of me, sir!" ejaculated the tailor, with increasing warmth.

"And an ass of you," echoed the learned counsel.

"Yes, sir—and to make a stupid old owl of me!" vociferated Mr. Fopperton.

"A stupid old owl of you," still repeated Mr. Bulliwell, in the most matter-of-fact style possible: then, perceiving that his client had exhausted alike his self-reproaching epithets and his breath, the learned counsel sate down.

Thereupon up rose Mr. Cadgerbreef, who had been retained for the defence of the Insolvent; and as he pulled his gown over his shoulders and prepared to cross-examine the opposing creditor, Captain O'Blunderbuss turned partially round, and forming an arch with his hand on one side of his mouth, said, in a pretty loud tone however, "Be Jasus! and if ye do n't make mince mate of him, it 's meself that 'll skin him alive!"

The learned counsel nodded his head in a significant manner, as much as to say, "Just wait a moment—and you shall see how I 'll serve him;"—and the gallant captain appeared satisfied with the tacit promise thus conveyed.

"Now, Mr. Fopperton," cried Mr. Cadgerbreef, who was considered to be particularly skilful in badgering and baiting an opposing creditor, "you 'll be so kind as to remember that you are upon your oath:" and the learned counsel glanced towards the bench, as much as to intimate that the Commissioners were keeping a sharp look out on him, the opposing creditor aforesaid, and would send him to Newgate without remorse at the least symptom of perjury that might transpire.

Mr. Fopperton cast his eyes timidly in the same direction; and it was no doubt some satisfaction to him to observe that the sleepy Commissioner *was* fast asleep, and that the other was just going off into a doze.

"Well, Mr. Fopperton," exclaimed Mr. Cadgerbreef, in a very loud and very overbearing tone, "so you have come to oppose the Insolvent's discharge—have you? Now answer me this question: have you ever been in that box yourself?" pointing at the same time in a resolute and determined manner towards the place occupied by Mr. Curtis.

"Am I bound to answer that question?" asked Mr. Fopperton, becoming considerably crest-fallen all on a sudden, and appealing meekly to his own counsel.

"I am afraid you must," returned Mr. Bulliwell.

"Well, then, sir—I have had the misfortune to pass through this Court," said the fashionable tailor, his countenance growing excessively blank.

"You *have* been insolvent," exclaimed Mr. Cadgerbreef. "Now, sir, how often have you petitioned the Court and been discharged from your liabilities through the proceedings of this Court?"

"Really, sir—I—I——" stammered the West-End tailor, becoming awfully red in the face.

"Shall I repeat the question, sir?" demanded the learned counsel, affecting a politeness that was even more galling than his severity had been.

"You had better answer, Mr. Fopperton," said Mr. Bulliwell.

"I can't say—that is—not exactly——"

"Oh! very well—then we shall see!" cried Mr. Cadgerbreef, taking up a pen, dipping it deep into the ink, and making believe that he was about to take

down the answers to be given to his questions—so as to catch the opposing creditor out perjuring himself, if possible: "will you swear, Mr. Fopperton, that you have not been insolvent seven times?"

"Yes, sir—I *will* swear to that," returned the tailor, with alacrity.

"You will swear. Well—will you swear that you have not been insolvent five times?"

"Yes, sir—I will swear to that too."

"You will swear to that, too. Now mind what you 're about, Mr. Fopperton: take care what you say," cried Mr. Cadgerbreef, in a tone of awful menace. "Will you swear that you have not been insolvent three times?"

"No, sir—I—I can't swear to that," answered the tailor, looking very miserable.

"You can't swear to that. Now, can you deny it?"

"No, sir—I cannot," said Mr. Fopperton.

"You cannot," repeated Mr. Cadgerbreef, casting a glance at Captain O'Blunderbuss, which seemed to say, "I have him now!"—then, again addressing himself to the opposing creditor, he exclaimed in a domineering, browbeating manner, "Take care what you are about, Mr. Fopperton;—and now tell me whether you have not been bankrupt, as well as insolvent, several times."

"No—only once bankrupt," cried Mr. Fopperton, impatiently.

"Well—once bankrupt—and enough too, when coupled with three insolvencies!" said the learned gentleman, in a tone which very significantly implied his belief that the opposing creditor was the greatest scoundrel in the universe. "And pray how much have you ever paid in the shape of dividend, sir?"

"I really can't say at this moment: I——"

"Oh! you can't—can't you!" cried Mr. Cadgerbreef: "then I'll see if I can refresh your memory;"—and, taking out of his pocket a letter from some friend or relation, he pretended to examine it with very great attention, as if it contained some damning testimony relative to Mr. Fopperton's dealings—although, in reality, it had no more connexion with him or his affairs than with the man in the moon.

"I think I recollect now, sir," said the West-End tailor, getting frightened: "I—I——"

"Well, sir—can you answer my question?" demanded Mr. Cadgerbreef, laying his fore-finger on the letter in a marked and formal manner, just as if he were pointing to the very paragraph which furnished all requisite information respecting the tailor. "I will repeat it again for you: how much have you ever paid, collectively and under all your numerous insolvencies and frequent bankruptcies, in the shape of dividend?"

"Two-pence three farthings in the pound, sir," answered Mr. Fopperton, in a low tone.

"Speak out, sir!" vociferated the learned counsel, although he heard perfectly well what had been said.

"Two-pence three farthings in the pound," exclaimed the unfortunate Snip, who already repented most bitterly that, by coming to oppose Mr. Frank Curtis, he had fallen into the hands of Mr. Cadgerbreef.

"Two-pence three farthings in the pound," repeated this learned gentleman, tossing up his head as if in unmitigated abhorrence at such awful villainy. "And pray, sir, what was the aggregate of liabilities under all your innumerable insolvencies and your equally numberless bankruptcies?"

"I never was bankrupt more than once, sir," mournfully and imploringly remonstrated the tailor, now worked up to a frightful pitch of nervousness and misery.

"Don't shirk my question, sir!" exclaimed the barrister, sternly. "How much did all your liabilities—"

"Thirty thousand pounds, sir," hastily cried Mr. Fopperton, anticipating the repetition of the query on the part of the learned gentleman.

"Be Jasus! and he 's a complete villain!" said Captain O'Blunderbuss, in such a loud tone that both the Commissioners woke up: whereupon the gallant officer affected to be seized with a sudden inclination to gaze up abstractedly at the sky-light, just for all the world as if he were quite innocent of any fresh interruption.

"Now, Mr. Fopperton," exclaimed Mr. Cadgerbreef, seeing that the Commissioners were all attention just at this moment, and taking a skilful advantage of the circumstance, "under your numerous insolvencies and frequent bankruptcies—don't interrupt me, sir—you have paid two-pence three farthings in the pound, on aggregate liabilities amounting to thirty thousand pounds. The Court will be pleased to notice these facts. And yet, Mr. Fopperton, we find you discounting a thousand pounds' worth of bills for my client, the Insolvent. The Court will again please to take a note of this fact."

Of course the Commissioners could not help making—or at least affecting to make the memoranda suggested by the learned counsel: so the sleepy one scrawled a zig-zag line across his note-book, and the other hit off a rapid sketch of Captain O'Blunderbuss's face, Mr. Commissioner Sneesby being very proficient in that style of drawing. The two functionaries then laid down their pens, and looked as solemn and serious as if they had actually and positively taken the notes in the most business-like manner possible.

"Now, sir," continued Mr. Cadgerbreef, once more turning to the opposing creditor, "will you tell the Court how much hard cash you gave the Insolvent for his acceptance of one thousand pounds?"

"Really, sir, the occurrence is so long ago—I—I——"

"Will you swear, man, that you gave him two hundred pounds?" demanded the learned counsel, impatiently.

"Yes, sir—I will," was the instantaneous answer.

"Will you swear that you gave him four hundred?"—and Mr. Cadgerbreef dipped his pen into the ink with an air of awful determination.

"Why—no—I can't exactly——" stammered the tailor, every instant becoming more and more nervous.

"Will you swear that you gave him three hundred and twenty pounds in hard cash for that bill?" demanded Mr. Cadgerbreef.

"That was just what I did pay in money," replied Mr. Fopperton, in a hesitating manner.

"That was just what you did pay. Now tell the learned Commissioners what else you gave the Insolvent for that bill."

"There was three hundred and twenty in cash—and four hundred and twenty in wines, pictures, and other objects of value——"

"Come—that only gives us seven hundred and forty," cried the barrister: "how do you make up the rest?"

"A hundred pounds *discount*, sir—and——"

"A hundred pounds discount. Well—what next?"

"Sixty pounds *commission*, sir—and——"

"Sixty pounds commission. You have still another hundred to account for, Mr. Fopperton," said the learned counsel, sharply. "Come—about that other hundred? and mind what you tell the Commissioners."

"Well, sir—the hundred pounds was for *bonus*," answered the fashionable tailor.

"That will do, sir: you may stand down," said Mr. Cadgerbreef, looking significantly at the learned Commissioners, with a view of impressing it on their minds that he had just succeeded in fully unmasking a most awful rogue.

Mr. Bulliwell now rose and made a very furious speech against the Insolvent; so that a stranger unacquainted with the practice of English Courts of Justice, would have fancied that the learned counsel had some bitter and deadly motive of personal hatred against the young gentleman;—whereas all that apparent venom—that seeming spite—that assumed virulence—and that fierce eloquence were purchased by Mr. Kicksey Fopperton for a couple of guineas. The speech was cheap—yes, very cheap, when we take into consideration the almost excruciating pains that the learned gentleman took to get Frank Curtis remanded to prison for six months. So much perspiration—such frantic gesticulation—and such impassioned declamation were well worth the money; and if it did Mr. Bulliwell good to earn his two guineas on such terms, it must have been equally satisfactory to Mr. Kicksey Fopperton to obtain so good a two guineas' worth.

During the delivery of this oration, Captain O'Blunderbuss could scarcely contain his fury: as insulting epithet after epithet poured from the lips of Mr. Bulliwell, who was always more eloquent when conducting an opposition than when arguing a defence, the gallant Irishman literally foamed at the mouth;—and it was only in the hope of Mr. Cadgerbreef's ability to mend the business, that he succeeded in controlling his passion. At length Mr. Bulliwell sate down; and the captain muttered in a pretty audible tone, "Blood and thunther! he shall repint of this as long as he lives, if my frind is sent back to the Binch!"

Mr. Cadgerbreef rose to defend his client, Frank Curtis; and as the best means of making that young gentleman appear white was to represent the opposing creditor as particularly black, the learned counsel forthwith began to depict Mr. Kicksey Fopperton's character in such sable dyes that the unfortunate tailor soon found himself held up to execration as a species of moral blackamoor. In fact, the poor little man was stunned—astounded—paralysed by the vituperative eloquence of Mr. Cadgerbreef; and as the learned counsel proceeded to denounce his "numerous insolvencies" and "his frequent bankruptcies" as proofs of unmitigated depravity,—as he dwelt upon the features of the bill-transaction, and spoke with loathing of the *discount*, with disgust of the *commission*, and with perfect horror of the *bonus*,—Mr. Fopperton began to say to himself, "Well, upon my word, I begin to fear that I am indeed a most unprincipled scoundrel: but the fact was never brought home to me so forcibly before!"

In the meantime Captain O'Blunderbuss was in perfect ecstacies: he forgot all that Mr. Bulliwell had said, in listening to the counter-declamation of Mr. Cadgerbreef;—and his delight was expressed in frequent ejaculatory outbursts, such as "Be Jasus, and there ye have him!" but which passed comparatively unnoticed amidst the thundering din of the learned counsel's torrent of words. As for Mr. Frank Curtis, he had cared little for the violent assault made upon him by Mr. Bulliwell; but he was immensely pleased at the slaughterous attack effected by Mr. Cadgerbreef on the dismayed and horrified tailor.

The defence being concluded, the two learned Commissioners consulted with each other in whispers; and when they had exchanged a few remarks having no more reference to the case before them than to the affairs of the Chinese Empire, Mr. Commissioner Sneesby proceeded to deliver the judgment of the Court.

Looking as awfully solemn as possible, he said, "Insolvent, it is perfectly clear that you have run a career of extravagance and folly which must be summarily checked. While enjoying a handsome allowance from your worthy uncle, you contracted numerous debts in a most reckless manner; and it is probable that Sir Christopher Blunt withdrew that allowance in consequence of your spendthrift habits. Insolvent, the Court is of opinion that you cannot be allowed your freedom again until you shall have passed a certain time in confinement, both as a punishment for the past and as a warning for the future. The judgment of the Court is, therefore, that you be remanded at the suit of your opposing creditor, Mr. Fopperton, for the space of five calendar months from the date of your vesting order."

"Thin bad luck to ye, ye slapy-headed ould scoundrels!" vociferated Captain O'Blunderbuss.

"Hollon, there!" cried the usher, unable to pass over such a flagrant breach of decorum as this, in spite of the awe with which the terrible Irishman inspired him; and, springing towards the captain, the official clutched him by the collar—while, to use the words of the newspaper reporter, "the most tremendous sensation pervaded the Court."

But Gorman O'Blunderbuss was not the man to be thus assailed with impunity; and, knocking down the usher with one hand and Mr. Kicksey Fopperton on the top of him with the other, he made a desperate rush from the tribunal, no opposition being offered to his exit.

A few minutes afterwards he was joined at the public-house over the way by his friend Frank Curtis and the tipstaff who had charge of the latter; and the three worthies, following the example of the pious Mr. Joshua Sheepshanks, drank spirits-and-water until they were compelled to return to the King's Bench in a hackney-coach.

CHAPTER CXX.

THE LAPSE OF NINETEEN YEARS.

How easy is it to record upon paper the sweeping words—"Nineteen years had passed away since the occurrences just related:"—how easy is it with a few moments' manipulation of the pen to leap over a period embracing almost the fifth part of a century!

Nineteen years!—a few short syllables—a drop of ink—a scrap of paper—and a minute's trouble,—these are all that the novelist needs to enable him to pass by the deeds of nineteen years!

Oh! this very power compels us to look with suspicion upon the utility of our own avocations,—to reflect how far removed from *the* natural is even the *most* natural of the works of fiction,—and to feel the nothingness of all the efforts of the imagination when

placed in contrast with the stern and stubborn facts of the real world!

For though the novelist, exercising a despotic power over the offspring of his fancy, may dispose of years —aye, even of centuries, with a dash of his pen,—yet of Time, as the universe actually experiences its march, not one instant can he stay—not one instant accelerate.

Great Kings, who have proclaimed themselves demi-gods and compelled the millions to abase themselves round their mighty thrones,—at whose awful nod whole nations have trembled as if at the frown of Olympian Jove, and whose impatient stamp on the marble pavement of their palaces has seemed to shake the earth to its very centre,—proud and haughty monarchs such as these have been powerless in the hands of Time as infants in the grasp of a Giant. Though heads would fall at their command, yet not a hair of their own could they prevent from turning gray: though at their beck whole provinces were depopulated, yet not a single moment could they add to their own lives!

TIME is a sovereign more potent than all the imperial rulers that ever wore the Tyrian purple,—stronger than the bravest warriors that ever led conquering armies over desolated lands,—less easy to be moved to mercy than the fiercest tyrants that ever grasped earthly sceptres.

To those who, being in misery, look forward to the certain happiness that already gleams upon them with orient flickerings from the distance, Time is slow—oh! so slow, that his feet seem heavy with iron weights and his wings with lead:—but to those who, being as yet happy, behold unmistakeable auguries of approaching affliction, Time is rapid—oh! so rapid, that his feet appear to glide glancingly along like those of a sportive boy in pursuit of a butterfly, and his wings are as light and buoyant as the fleetest of birds.

The wicked man, stretched upon the bed of death, cries out, "Oh! for leisure to repent!"—but Time disregardeth his agonising prayer, and saith, "Die!" The invalid, racked with excruciating pains and wearied of an existence which knows no relief from suffering, exclaims, "Oh! that death would snatch me away!"—but Time accordeth not the shrieking aspiration, and saith, "Live on!"

Passionless and without feeling though he be, Time shows caprices in which the giddiest and most wilful girl would be ashamed to indulge,—sparing where he ought to slay—slaying where he ought to spare: insensible to all motives, incompetent to form designs, he appears to act with a method of contradictions and on a system of studied irregularities.

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"Nineteen years had passed away since the occurrences related in the preceding chapters!"—Such is the sweeping assertion which we have now to make.

Nineteen years!—how much joy had been experienced, how much misery felt, during that interval: what vast changes had taken place over the whole earth!

In these islands that period was marked with the names of three sovereigns:—George the Fourth—William the Fourth—Victoria.

The debaucheries, vices, and profligacies of George lessened the value of Monarchy even in the eyes of its stanchest supporters: the utter incompetency, weakness, and even downright silliness of William reduced it to a still greater discount;—and the accession of Victoria proclaimed the grand fact that Monarchy is a farce, since a mere school-girl can be put up as the throned puppet of the Punch-and-Judy show of Royalty.

During nineteen years, then, did the value of Monarchy experience a rapid and signal decline: and, though it still endures, it is hastening with whirlwind speed to total annihilation. Men are becoming too wise to maintain a throne which may either be filled by a voluptuary, a fool, or a doll: they see something radically and flagrantly bad in an institution which is fraught with such frightful contingencies;—and they look forward to a convenient moment and a proper opportunity to effect, by moral means, and without violence, a complete change. The throne is worm-eaten—its velvet is in holes and covered with dust: and no earthly power can repair the wood nor patch up the cloth. It is old—ricketty—and good-for-nothing; and the magisterial seat of a President, elected by the nation at large, must displace it. Monarchy falling, will drag down the ancient Aristocracy along with it; and the twenty-six millions of these realms all starting fair together on a principle of universal equality, those who succeed in reaching the goals of VIRTUE and TALENT will constitute and form a new Aristocracy.

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Nineteen years had passed away since the occurrences related in the preceding chapters; and it was now the summer of 1846.

The July sun gave forth a heat of intense sultriness; and not a breath of air fanned the stifling streets of the West-End, nor agitated the green foliage of St. James's Park. Nevertheless all that fashionable quarter of London which lies within the immediate vicinity of the old palace that gives its name to the park just mentioned, presented a bustling and animated appearance; for Queen Victoria was to hold a grand reception at noon that day.

Pall Mall was thronged with well-dressed persons of both sexes;—and the windows and balconies in that thoroughfare were crowded with elegantly-attired ladies and gentlemen, who were either the occupants of the houses at the casements of which they were thus stationed, or had hired seats at the shops where the cupidity of the proprietors turned to advantage the curiosity of the public.

It was evident, then, that the reception to be holden this day was of no ordinary character, and that some great or illustrious personage was expected to attend the royal levee. For, amongst the thousands that thronged the streets, an immense anxiety to secure the best places prevailed; and in all quarters was the eager question asked—"But is it certain that the Prince will come this way?"

We must pause for a few minutes to notice a group occupying the balcony of the drawing-room windows at the mansion of the Earl of Ellingham. This group consisted of six persons—three gentlemen, and three ladies.

The first of the three gentlemen was a fine, handsome, noble-looking man of about forty-five years of age—with a countenance indicating feelings of the most lofty honour, great generosity, and a splendid intellect. This was the Earl of Ellingham.

Near him stood an old and venerable gentleman, whose years were verging fast to three-score-and-ten, but whose small, restless, sparkling eyes beamed with the fires of genius, and whose compressed lips showed

that although he had consented to become a spectator of the gay scene about to take place, his thoughts frequently wandered to subjects of a more serious kind and more congenial to his nature. This was Sir John Lascelles—the most eminent physician of the age, and who had received the honour of knighthood in recompense for the great services which he had rendered to the art of medicine.

The third gentleman was about twenty-five years of age. Tall, handsome, well-formed, and genteel in appearance, he seemed a fit and suitable companion for the lovely girl who leant upon his arm, and of whom we shall speak more fully anon. The fine young man at present alluded to, was called by the name of Charles Hatfield: but in the former portion of this work he was known, when a little boy, to the reader as Charley Watts.

The first of the three ladies was about thirty-seven years of age; and her beauty, in the finest, chastest, and most elevated Hebrew style, was admirably preserved. The lapse of years had only matured her charms, and not impaired them: time had touched not the pearly whiteness of her teeth, nor dimmed the brilliant lustre of her large dark eyes. Her hair was still of the deepest and glossiest jet,—silken and luxuriant, as when we first described it in the fourth chapter of our narrative:—for she of whom we are speaking now, was Esther, Countess of Ellingham.

Conversing with the noble Jewess—for she clung to the faith of her forefathers—was a lady whose style of beauty was of that magnificent and voluptuous kind which sets the beholder at naught in his calculations and conjectures relative to the age of the object of his admiration;—for though forty-four years had passed over the head of Lady Hatfield, she was still endowed with a loveliness that, though matured, seemed to have known only the lapse of summers and never to have passed through the snowy storms of as many winters.

And now we must speak more in detail of that charming girl to whom we alluded ere now, and who was leaning on the arm of Lady Hatfield's son. Ravishingly beautiful was this young creature of seventeen—with the aquiline countenance of her mother, and the Saxon complexion of her father. Yes—lovely indeed was Lady Frances Ellingham, the only issue of the alliance which took place between the Earl and Esther one year after the murder of Tamar, and consequently eighteen years previous to the period of which we are now writing. Much of the description which we gave of Esther in the opening of our tale, would apply to the charms of her daughter, whose forehead was high, broad, and intelligent,—whose mouth was small, and revealing in smiles teeth white as orient pearls,—whose eyes were large and dark,—and whose figure was tall, sylph-like, and graceful. But Lady Frances Ellingham's hair, though dark, was several shades less jetty than that of her mother; and her complexion was delicately clear, with a slight tinge of rich carnation appearing beneath the dazzling purity of the skin.

Such was the interesting group of six persons stationed in the balcony of the Earl of Ellingham's mansion. But while they are awaiting the presence of the illustrious individual who is expected to pass through Pall Mall to the Queen's levee at St. James's palace, we will place on record a few short facts that will render less obscure to our readers the interval of nineteen years over which we have thought fit to leap in our narrative.

For a long—long time after the murder of Tamar, Tom Rain appeared inaccessible to consolation: but at last his naturally strong mind and vigorous intellect began to exercise their energies—the former to combat against the deep and depressing sense of affliction—and the latter to teach him the necessity of putting forth all his powers in the struggle, not only on account of the inutility of repinings, but likewise for the sake of those who were interested in him. It was, however, chiefly on the occasion of Lord Ellingham's marriage with Esther de Medina, that Rainford perceptibly rallied; for it did his generous heart good to behold the happiness of his half-brother. As time wore on, Tom Rain recovered much of his former cheerfulness; and after the lapse of three years from the date of Tamar's death, he began to listen with attention, if not with interest, to the representations made to him by the Earl, urging him to the performance of a duty which it was now in his power to fulfil. Arthur reminded him of Georgiana Hatfield's generous conduct in obtaining the royal pardon,—he assured Rainford that her ladyship no longer thought of him with abhorrence and aversion, but would cheerfully bestow her hand on the father of her child,—and the nobleman moreover advised the alliance on the ground that the boy would then dwell with both his parents. The death of Mr. de Medina, which happened about that time, delayed the negociations thus commenced; but at the expiration of a year the proposal was revived, and the necessary arrangements were speedily adjusted. In fine, it was settled that Rainford should abandon the name by which he had hitherto been known, and assume that of Hatfield,—that the boy should be thenceforth called in the same manner, but should be brought up in the belief that he was Rainford's nephew,—and that after the marriage, which was to be solemnized in the most private manner possible, the wedded pair should proceed to the continent, and there reside for some years. All these arrangements were duly carried out. Rainford—whom we shall henceforth call by his wife's name—became the husband of Lady Georgiana Hatfield;—and, taking with them their child, who was represented to be their nephew, they forthwith repaired to Italy, where they dwelt for nearly fifteen years. Thus, on their return to London, only a few weeks before the date up to which we have now brought the incidents of our tale, all the stirring circumstances once associated with the name of Tom Rain were pretty well forgotten; and none, save those few who were in the secret, suspected that the pleasant, gentlemanly, good-natured Mr. Hatfield was identical with the individual who nineteen years previously had filled all England with his fame.

While we have been thus digressing, the sensation amongst the crowds in Pall Mall has increased;—for the carriages of several eminent or illustrious personages have passed along in their way to the royal levee.

In the balcony at the Earl of Ellingham's drawing-room window, a degree of curiosity and excitement prevailed which certainly could not have been aroused on the part of the intelligent individuals there assembled, by the mere display of gorgeous equipages. Let us see whether the conversation passing in that balcony will throw any light upon the subject.

"Well," exclaimed Sir John Lascelles, almost in a petulant tone, "I wonder how much longer your cynosure of attraction will be before he makes his appearance? Truly, it was worth while for my friend

Ellingham here, to drag me away from my experiments in order to catch a glimpse of a foreign Prince——"

"Nay, doctor," interrupted the Earl, smiling: "it was precisely because this illustrious Prince is *not* a foreigner—but an Englishman by birth and a true Briton in his noble heart—that I thought you would be pleased to join those who are desirous to behold a youthful hero whose name occupies so memorable a page in history."

"Well, well," said the physician, somewhat more mildly: "I will have patience—and since you assure us that the object of all curiosity is indeed an Englishman——"

"Surely you can neither doubt the fact, nor be ignorant of his great achievements, doctor?" exclaimed the Earl. "But if you wish to receive positive assurances as to his Royal Highness's English parentage, Lady Hatfield will satisfy you."

"Yes—truly," observed Georgiana. "When we were staying in Italy, we not only became as it were eye-witnesses of the great Revolution which was conducted to so signally triumphant an issue by the young hero of whom you are speaking; but we subsequently had the honour of forming the acquaintance of his Royal Highness and that of his Princess, who is as amiable as she is beautiful."

"And now that the Prince has come to visit his native land once more," said Charles Hatfield, his eyes flashing the fires of that enthusiasm which filled his soul, "the people assemble in crowds to do honour to their illustrious fellow-countryman. Oh! how delicious must his feelings be, when he reflects that as an obscure individual he once moved, unnoticed and unknown, amidst the mazes of this great city,—and that by his own brilliant merits he has raised himself to that pinnacle of rank and glory which renders him the admiration of the myriads now assembled to welcome his presence."

"Well spoken, my dear Charles," exclaimed Lady Hatfield. "Look up and down the street—it is literally paved and walled with human faces! In the balconies on either side of this house—and opposite too—I recognise many ladies and peers of the highest rank. Yes—Charles, you are right: the feelings of the Prince must indeed be joyous when he reflects that this vast congregation of all classes has gathered to do honour to the fellow-countryman of whom they are so justly proud."

"History teems with examples of bold, bad, and ambitious men usurping power and decorating themselves with lofty titles," continued Charles, addressing himself partly to Lady Hatfield and partly to the beautiful Lady Frances Ellingham: "but in the present instance we have a young Englishman, of generous soul, enlightened opinions, and even rigorous rectitude of conduct, raising himself from nothing as it were and acquiring the proudest titular distinctions. For what a glorious elevation was it from plain *Mr. Richard Markham* to *His Royal Highness Field-Marshal the Prince of Montoni, Captain-General of the Castelcicalan Army, and Heir-Apparent to the Grand-Ducal Throne!*"

Scarcely had Charles Hatfield enunciated these sounding titles in a tone which afforded full evidence of the enthusiasm that filled his soul as he thought of the splendid career of Richard Markham,* when far-off shouts of welcome and of joy suddenly reached the ears of the group on the balcony:—then those sounds came nearer and nearer, as the crowd took up the cries from the direction where they commenced;—and never was Royalty saluted with a more cordial greeting than that which now welcomed the hero of Castelcicala.

"Long live the Prince of Montoni! God save Richard Markham!" were the words sent up by thousands and thousands of voices to the blue arch of heaven.

In a short time a handsome carriage, drawn by four magnificent horses, came in sight of the spectators in the balcony; and nothing could now exceed the enthusiasm of Charles Hatfield, as he once more beheld the object of his heroic idolatry—that fine young Prince whom he had so often admired and envied when in the vast square of the ducal palace of Montoni his Royal Highness reviewed the garrison of the Castelcicalan capital.

The Prince, who was accompanied in his carriage by two aides-de-camp, wore the uniform of his high military rank: his breast was covered with Orders; and in his hand he carried his plumed hat, which he had removed from his brow through respect to the generous British public from whom he now received so enthusiastic a welcome.

His Royal Highness was in the prime and glory of his manhood. He was thirty years of age: his dark hair, which he wore rather long and which curled naturally, enclosed a forehead that appeared to be the seat of genius of the highest order;—and his fine black eyes were bright with the fire of intelligence and the animation of complete happiness. His magnificent uniform set off his symmetrical and graceful figure to its fullest advantage; and he acknowledged with affability and modest condescension the demonstrations of joy and welcome which marked his progress.

As his equipage passed opposite the mansion of the Earl of Ellingham, his eyes were attracted to the balcony; and, recognising Lady Hatfield and the enthusiastic Charles, he bowed to them in a manner which testified the pleasure he experienced at again beholding those whose acquaintance he had formed in the ducal capital of Castelcicala.

"He is certainly a very fine young man," said Sir John Lascelles. "I have seldom seen a countenance so expressive of vast mental resources:" then, after a short pause, the worthy physician added, "I would give much for a cast of his head."

The Earl was about to make some reply, when his own name was suddenly shouted forth by a voice in the street; and that name, taken up by tongue after tongue, was echoed by thousands of individuals who were delighted to associate the stanch friend of the industrious classes of England with their enthusiastic welcomings of the royal champion of constitutional freedom in Italy.

"Long live the Marshal-Prince of Montoni! three cheers for the Earl of Ellingham!" were now the cries that made the very welkin ring; and these shouts were prolonged for some time, until the carriage of his Royal Highness turned into the court-yard of St. James's palace, and the Earl on his side withdrew from the balcony.

"You sigh, Charles?" said Lady Frances Ellingham, in a low and somewhat anxious tone, and speaking apart to him whom she believed to be Lady Hatfield's *nephew*.

"I was only thinking, dear Fanny," answered the young gentleman, "that much and earnestly as I may strive to elevate myself, it will never be my good for-

* See the First Series of "THE MYSTERIES OF LONDON."

time to have such opportunities as the Prince of Montoni found for distinguishing his name and acquiring an immense reputation."

"Are you envious of him, Charles?" enquired the beautiful maiden, in a somewhat reproachful tone. "I thought that you recked not for titles and high rank——"

"No—not when they are hereditary," hastily replied Charles Hatfield: "and this assurance I have often given you in secret—because I should not like to make such an observation before your noble father, whose title *is* hereditary. But I admire—yes, and I envy too, the honours which a great man acquires by his own merits! Do you imagine that the English people would have assembled in vast crowds to hail and welcome one of their own royal Dukes? No, indeed! And yet they seem as if they could not testify their joy in too lively a manner, when the Prince of Montoni appears amongst them."

While this little dialogue was taking place in one part of the spacious drawing-room at the Earl of Ellingham's mansion, the nobleman himself was conversing with his wife and Lady Hatfield in another—the entire group having withdrawn from the balcony, and Sir John Lascelles having quitted the apartment.

"Yes," said the Earl, in answer to a question put to him by Lady Hatfield; "I have understood that the Prince proposes to stay some weeks in London. The Princess Isabella has not accompanied him—her royal parents, the Grand Duke Alberto and the Grand Duchess, being loth to part with her. The Prince has taken up his abode—at least, so states the morning newspaper—at Markham Place, the house where he was born and where all his youth and a portion of his manhood were passed. Accordingly, as you desire, Georgiana, I will call upon his Royal Highness to-morrow; and I will request him to accept of an entertainment at this mansion."

"How did it occur," enquired the Countess of Ellingham, "that Thomas was not with us just now to behold the progress of the Prince to St. James's?"

"You know, dear Esther," answered Lady Hatfield, "that my husband loves privacy and seclusion, and especially avoids appearing in crowded places. He fears to be recognised," she added, sinking her voice so as to be inaudible to Charles and Lady Frances, who were at the opposite end of the apartment: "and he is perhaps right—although so many years have elapsed since those occurrences——"

"To which we will not refer," interrupted Lord Ellingham, hastily. "How very seriously the young people appear to be conversing together," he added, glancing towards Charles Hatfield and Lady Frances.

"Charles has imbibed certain romantic ideas and hopes of distinguishing himself in the world," observed Georgiana; "and I think it right to encourage such noble—such generous aspirations. But your charming daughter is evidently remonstrating with him upon some point: and yet the two cousins appear to be much attached to each other," she added, with rather an anxious look at the Earl, as if she were uncertain how he might receive the observation, into which she threw a degree of significancy.

"You have mentioned a circumstance which gives me much pleasure—nay, not only myself, but likewise my dearest Esther," said the nobleman. "We have already adopted it as the basis of many happy plans for the future——"

"Yes," observed the Countess of Ellingham, emphatically: "an alliance between Charles and our beloved daughter, would prove a source of felicity and satisfaction to us all."

"Arthur—and you, too, dear Esther," murmured Lady Hatfield, in a tone indicative of deep emotions, "I thank you for these assurances. All my earthly ambition—my sole hope, would be accomplished on the day that such an union took place. Alas! poor boy—it is distressing—Oh! it is distressing to be compelled to veil from him the real secret of his parentage—to hear him at times question me relative to his parents—his *supposed* parents, who are represented to be no more! Yes—and it is cruel, too, to be forced to deceive him—to hear him call me his *aunt*—I, who am his *mother!*"

"Georgiana—dearest Georgiana, do not thus afflict yourself!" murmured Esther, pressing Lady Hatfield's hand in a tender manner, and speaking in a tone of consolation and sweet sympathy.

But almost at the same instant a piercing scream burst from Georgiana's lips; and she fell senseless into the arms of the Countess of Ellingham—while the Earl, turning mechanically and hastily round, beheld Charles standing close behind him,—pale—astounded—petrified! For the young man had advanced unperceived—and his tread unheard on the thick, soft carpet—towards the group formed by Lady Hatfield, the nobleman, and the Countess: and his ears had caught these words—"to hear him call me *aunt*—I, who am his *mother!*"

For a few instants he stood motionless—amazed and stupefied by what he had heard:—but, suddenly recovering the power of movement and yielding to the ineffable sensations which were excited in his breast, he sprang forward—and catching his still insensible parent in his arms, he cried, "Oh! my dearest mother—my beloved, my adored mother—open your eyes—look upon me——"

"His mother!" exclaimed Lady Frances, overwhelmed with surprise, and unable, in the innocence of her virgin heart, to form even the slightest notion that might serve as a clue to what was still so deep a mystery to her.

"Yes—my dearest Fanny," said the Earl, hastily drawing his daughter aside and speaking to her in a low and rapid tone: "Charles is indeed the *son*—and not the *nephew*—of Mr. Hatfield and Lady Georgiana. But reasons of an imperious necessity—reasons which you are too young to comprehend, and too discreet to enquire into——"

"My dear father, I seek to know no more than it may please you to tell me," interrupted the young lady, with a decision as amiable as it was dutiful and re-assuring: "and my behaviour shall henceforth be as if I had not been accidentally made the spectatress of this scene."

"You are my own beloved—darling daughter!" exclaimed the Earl enthusiastically, as he pressed his lips to the pure and chaste forehead of the charming countenance that was upturned so lovingly towards his own.

By this time Lady Hatfield had been recovered through the kind attentions of Esther; and, awaking to consciousness, she clasped her son to her bosom, murmuring in a faint tone and broken voice, "Now you have learnt my secret, Charles—a secret which—But another time—another time, you shall know all! Oh! Charles—I feel so much happiness and so much sorrow—strangely blended—at this moment——"

"Compose yourself, dearest—dearest parent!" exclaimed the young man, his tears flowing freely. "I

now know that you are my mother—and I care to know nothing more! Never—never shall I question you concerning the past: the enjoyment of the present, and the hope which gilds the future—these are enough for me!"

"My poor boy!" murmured Lady Hatfield, straining him to her breast: "I feel as if an immense weight were taken from my mind—I seem to drink of a purer source of happiness than I have ever yet known ——Oh! why did I ever hesitate to tell thee that thou wast my son!"

And again she pressed him closer and closer still to her bosom, covering his brow and cheeks with kisses; while tears flowed from the eyes of the Countess and of Lady Frances at the touching spectacle—and the Earl turned aside to conceal his emotions.

CHAPTER CXXI.

MR. HATFIELD.

In the meantime Sir John Lascelles had repaired to the library in the Earl of Ellingham's mansion; and there he found, as he had anticipated, his friend Mr. Hatfield—*late* Tom Rain.

This individual was now in his fiftieth year; and he was much changed by time as well as by art. He still possessed the fine teeth which caused the beholder to forget the somewhat coarse thickness of the lips;—but the laugh that came from those lips, when he was in a happy mood, was more subdued and quiet than when the reader first made his acquaintance many years previously to the present date. Though never inclined to corpulency, he had nevertheless become thinner: yet his form was still upright, muscular, and well-knit. In his calm moments, especially when he was alone, a slight shade of melancholy appeared upon his countenance;—and he even sighed at times as he thought upon the past.

These were the changes which the lapse of years had effected in regard to him; and the appliances of art rendered it still more difficult to recognise in the Mr. Hatfield of 1846 the rollicking Tom Rain of 1827. For his hair and whiskers were dyed a very dark hue; and his attire was a plain suit of black.

Was he happy? Yes—to a certain extent, in spite of the shade of melancholy and the occasional sighs. His was a disposition originally so gay and joyous

that it could not be completely subdued—only mellowed down. Years of rigorous integrity—boundless charity — never-failing philanthropy—and innumerable good deeds, had established in his mind a confidence that the errors of his early life were fully expiated;—and so complacently could he look upon the present, that he no longer reproached himself for the past.

This was the usual tenour of his mind: but, as we have already hinted, there were now and then moody intervals in which thought became painful. These were, however, of no frequent occurrence;—and, thus—on the whole—we may assert that Mr. Hatfield *was* happy.

The conduct of Lady Georgiana towards him, from the moment of their union, had been of an affectionate and touching nature. She studied to enact the part of the tender wife—the sincere friend—and the amiable woman: and she succeeded fully. Espousing him at first solely on account of their child, she soon began to like her husband—next to admire him—eventually to love him. She found him to be possessed of numerous good qualities—noble and generous feelings—and sentiments far more refined than she could possibly have anticipated. The terms on which he lived with her, therefore, aided in insuring his happiness; and the fine principles as well as handsome appearance of their son, were a source of profound delight to them both.

Mr. de Medina had died possessed of great wealth—one half of which was bequeathed to Mr. Hatfield. This amount, joined to Lady Hatfield's fortune, rendered them very wealthy; and their riches were almost doubled by the demise of Sir Ralph Walsingham, Georgiana's uncle, who left them all his fine estates. Thus their income might be calculated at thirty thousand a-year; and no inconsiderable portion of this splendid revenue was devoted to humane and charitable purposes.

When Sir John Lascelles entered the library, as above stated, Mr. Hatfield hastened to welcome him with all the affectionate assiduity of a son receiving a visit from a kind and venerable parent; and the worthy physician evidently experienced a greater elasticity of feeling towards Mr. Hatfield than to any other friend whom he possessed on earth. The one never could forget that he owed his life to the science of the doctor: the other looked on Hatfield as a person whom he had actually restored to the world, and as a living proof of the triumph which had crowned long years of research in respect to a particular study.

"My dear friend," said Sir John Lascelles, when they were both seated, "I have just witnessed a spectacle that I must candidly admit to have been very gratifying. The English are a most generous-hearted people, and are quick also in the appreciation of sterling merit. The Earl's name was just now coupled with the shouts of applause that welcomed the Prince of Montoni."

"I am rejoiced to hear these tidings," observed Mr. Hatfield. "Indeed, it struck me, as the sounds of the myriad voices reached my ears in the seclusion of this room, remote though it be from the apartment whence you have just come,—it struck me, I say, that I heard my brother's name mentioned. For nineteen years has Arthur now struggled in the interests of the middle and industrious classes: session after session has he passed in review the miseries and the wrongs endured by the sons and daughters of toil;—and what has he experienced from the several Administrations which have succeeded each other during that period? Though Whigs and Tories have held the reins of power in their turns, the treatment received by my brother has been uniformly the same. The most strenuous opposition to all his grand proposals has been offered; and when some trifling point has been conceded, 't was as if a boon were conferred instead of an act of justice done. But although Arthur has thus failed in inducing the Government to adopt large and comprehensive measures for the relief, benefit, and elevation of the industrious classes, he has at least succeeded in giving such an impetus to Liberal sentiments out of doors—beyond the walls of the Senate-house—that he has taught millions to think, who never thought before, upon their political condition. Though baffled in the Legislative Assembly—though thwarted by the old school of aristocracy, and the supporters of those vile abuses which are summed up in the phrase '*the landed interest*'—though opposed with unmitigated hostility by the worshippers of '*the wisdom of our ancestors*,'—nevertheless, Arthur has returned undaunted to the charge. Never disheartened—never cast down—always courageous in the People's Cause, he has fearlessly exposed the rottenness of our antiquated institutions, and mercilessly torn away the veil from our worn-out systems. The millions recognise and appreciate his conscientious—his unwearied strivings in their behalf; and they adore him as their champion. Unassuming—honest—and free from all selfishness as he is, it must nevertheless have been a proud moment for my brother when he heard his name associated ere now with that of the illustrious Prince who achieved the liberation of Castelcicala beneath the walls of Montoni."

"The gratitude of the industrious classes is the most welcome reward that a well-intentioned and a true patriot can possibly experience," observed Sir John Lascelles. "The Earl certainly seemed pleased with the high but merited compliment thus paid to him—although not for one minute did he seek it, when he appeared at the balcony; for I noticed that he rather endeavoured to conceal himself behind the window-curtain. But speaking of the Prince—he is a very handsome young man."

"The Castelcicalans absolutely worship him," said Mr. Hatfield; "and they look upon him as in every way fitted to succeed the Grand Duke Alberto, whenever death shall snatch away that great and enlightened sovereign from the throne."

"It was in the Castelcicalan capital that poor Jacob Smith breathed his last—was it not?" enquired the physician.

"Yes—in the suburbs of Montoni," answered Mr. Hatfield. "As you are well aware, the poor youth never recovered the shock which he sustained on learning that he owed his being to that dreadful man—Benjamin Bones; and the horrible way in which that remorseless wretch died, augmented the weight of the fearful blow caused by that discovery. Jacob scarcely ever rallied—scarcely ever held up his head afterwards: the only gleam of happiness which he knew was afforded by the good tidings that we received relative to the Bunces—and even that was insufficient to sustain his drooping spirit. He languished away—for six years he pined in sorrow, accessible to no consolation that travelling, change of scenery, or our attentions could impart. It was several years before the Great Revolution, which, conducted by Richard Markham, gave freedom to Castelcicala and raised up that hero to a princely rank,—it was some years before this glorious era, that Jacob Smith—for he always

retained that name—breathed his last. We buried him in a picturesque cemetery on the banks of the river Ferretti; and a cross—according to the custom of that Catholic country—was placed to mark his last home."

"Poor fellow!" exclaimed the doctor. "He was always sickly—and the discovery of his hideous parentage was too much for so weak a constitution. And now let us turn to another subject:—have you received the letters which you expected concerning the various individuals——"

"I know to whom you allude," interrupted Mr. Hatfield; "and I have now before me," he added, glancing at several letters, "the correspondence relating to those persons. Timothy Splint still remains the occupant of a fine farm in the backwoods of the United States; and the last nineteen years of his existence have proved the sincere penitence which he feels for the crimes of his earlier days. He possesses a competency—if not positive wealth. By his marriage with the daughter of a neighbouring settler, he has a numerous family; and he brings up his children in the ways of morality and virtue. Indeed, I am well aware *that he has lived to bless the period when he went through the ordeal of the subterranean dungeon.*"

"You prophesied that he would!" exclaimed Sir John Lascelles. "Yes—those were the very words which you used when speaking of him to me nineteen years ago. I recollect them perfectly;—for age has not impaired my memory, thank heaven!"

"I now come to Joshua Pedler," resumed Mr. Hatfield. "You will remember, my dear doctor, that this man and his wife Matilda were appointed to the charge of the Eddystone Light-house. There they remained for six or seven years—as indeed I wrote to you to this effect a long time ago——"

"Yes—and then you sent them out as emigrants to Canada," interrupted Sir John Lascelles; "and they continued to do well. What say your last accounts concerning them?"

"They are still happy—contented—and prosperous," answered Mr. Hatfield. "Their shop at Quebec thrives admirably; and they have managed to put by several hundred pounds. Pedler says that the sweetest bread he has ever eaten in his life, has been that which he has earned by his honest toils. I have reason to feel convinced, moreover, that he is kind and good towards his wife, and that his only regret is their not having any children."

"And the Bunces are still living in St. Peter's-Port, after having acquired a competency in the Island of Sark?" enquired the physician.

"Yes—they are still in the capital of Guernsey," was the response. "Bunce tells me in his letter that his wife's health does not improve; in fact, she doubtless received a cruel shock when she heard of the death of Jacob Smith—for it had been her hope that he might some day take up his abode with her and her husband—a hope which she however nourished in secret."

"Bunce himself has never learnt the real parentage of Jacob, I believe?" said the physician. "Indeed, I remember you told me the other day that his wife, always bearing in mind the injunctions you conveyed to her through Mrs. Harding, had retained as a profound secret her former illicit connexion with Benjamin Bones."

"Yes—it was useless to make a revelation which would only have troubled their domestic peace," said Mr. Hatfield. "Harding divined the hope that the woman had formed relative to Jacob—and in his letters he communicated his ideas to me. But even if death had spared Jacob, he would not have quitted me—no, not though it were to dwell with his own mother!"

"And Jeffreys?" asked the physician: "what of him?"

"He is well pleased that he removed last summer from Hackney to Liverpool. The money he had saved during a period of eighteen years at his shop in the London suburb, enabled him to take a very handsome establishment in the great commercial town in the north; and he is carrying on a large and flourishing business."

"Thus, in every instance, save that of Old Death, have you succeeded in reclaiming those wicked people whose reform you took in hand," said Sir John Lascelles. "Tidmarsh died tranquilly in his bed in the Island of Alderney—and the others still exist, worthy members of society."

With these words the physician rose and took his leave; and almost immediately after he had quitted the library, the Earl of Ellingham entered, closing the door behind him with the caution of one who has some important or mysterious communication to make.

"Arthur, you have evil tidings for me?" exclaimed Mr. Hatfield, advancing towards his noble half-brother.

"Nay—they can scarcely be called evil, Thomas," was the reply: "and yet—'t would perhaps have been better——"

"Speak! Keep me not in suspense," interrupted the other.

"Charles—your son——"

"Ah! he has discovered his parentage!" cried Hatfield. "Yes—I am sure that this is the circumstance which you came to communicate;"—and he walked twice up and down the room in an agitated manner: then, suddenly turning towards his brother, he said, "How did this occur, Arthur?"

The Earl related the incident just as it had taken place, not forgetting the short but impressive dialogue which he had with his own daughter, Lady Frances, respecting the sudden and accidental revelation of the secret of Charles Hatfield's birth.

"After all, I am not sorry that this has so happened," observed the nobleman's half-brother. "Sooner or later the truth must have been confided to my son—my dear son;—and since the secret may still be preserved in respect to the world and to those whom we would not wish to become acquainted with it——"

"Sir John Lascelles himself does not even suspect it," interrupted Arthur. "It is known but to our immediate family—and Georgiana's honour is as safe as ever it was. The breath of scandal cannot reach it."

"Thanks, my dear brother—a thousand thanks for this assurance!" exclaimed Mr. Hatfield. "And now let my son come hither to embrace me as his father:—but, Arthur," he added, sinking his voice to a low and solemn tone, "let him not enquire into the motives which induced his parents to envelop his birth in mystery. Enjoin him to forbear from any attempt to gratify his curiosity in that respect!"

"I hope—indeed, I believe that you have no painful ordeal of such a nature to apprehend," replied the Earl of Ellingham; and having thus spoken, he quitted the library.

Two minutes elapsed, during which Mr. Hatfield once more paced the apartment in an agitated manner.

for, knowing the fine spirit of his son, he trembled lest it should be checked or even broken by the mortifying suspicion that he was illegitimate!

"A falsehood is abhorrent to me," he thought within himself: "and yet—if he should question me respecting his birth—I dare not avow the truth! I must not confess to my own son that his being resulted from an atrocious outrage perpetrated by myself:—nor must I permit him to suspect the honour of his mother! Silence on my part, I now perceive, would engender such suspicion in respect to her; and she must not lose one particle of the dignity of virtue in the eyes of her own offspring! Alas! painful position!—and, Oh! with what foolish and short-sighted haste did I ere now affirm that I was not sorry for the discovery which he had made!"

At this moment the door opened, and Charles sprang forward into his father's arms, which were extended to receive him.

For some minutes they remained silent—each too profoundly the prey to ineffable emotions to give utterance to a syllable.

"I am proud—I am rejoiced to be able to call you by the sacred name of *Father!*" at length exclaimed Charles, speaking with the abrupt loosening of the tongue which was caused by a sudden impulse. "But are you—are you well pleased that accident should have thus revealed to me——"

"Charles—my dear boy," interrupted Mr. Hatfield, summoning all his firmness to his aid, "you must be aware that weighty reasons—the weightiest reasons—could alone have induced your mother and myself to practise a deception towards you and the world in respect to the degree of relationship in which you really stood with regard to us. Is it sufficient for you to know at last that you *are* our son?—or do you demand of me an explanation wherefore you must still pass as our *nephew?*"

"Oh! then Lord Ellingham spoke truly as he brought me hither just now!" cried Charles, in a tone of vexation: then, in another moment brightening up, he added feelingly, "But by what right do I dare to question the conduct of parents who have ever treated me so kindly? No—my dear father—I seek not any explanation at your hands—I am content to obey your wishes in all things."

"Generous youth!" exclaimed Mr. Hatfield. "Though you must pass as my nephew, Charles, yet in all respects shall you continue to be treated as my son! You are doubtless aware that I am rich—very rich;—and all that your mother and myself possess is bequeathed to you."

"One word, father—only one word!" cried Charles. "I have an ardent longing to ask a single question—and yet I dare not—no—I cannot tutor my lips to frame the words——"

"Speak!" said Mr. Hatfield, emphatically: "I can almost divine the question you hesitate to put to me."

"Ah! my dear father—I would rather know the truth at once than remain in suspense, a prey to a thousand wild conjectures—the truth regarding one point—and only one!" repeated the young man, in an earnest and imploring tone. "And imagine not," he continued, speaking with increased warmth and rapidity, "that I should ever look less lovingly or less respectfully upon my dear mother—if——"

"Set that suspicion at rest, my son," interrupted Mr. Hatfield, in a solemn manner. "Your mother has ever been an angel of innocence and purity! As God is my judge she has never been guilty of weakness or frailty—no—never—never!" he added emphatically.

"And therefore no stigma is upon my birth?" asked Charles, his heart palpitating—or rather fluttering violently, as he awaited the response.

"None!" replied his father, with an effort which was, however, unnoticed by the young man in the excitement of his own feelings.

"God be thanked!" exclaimed he, wringing Mr. Hatfield's hand in gratitude for this assurance. "And now I seek to learn no more."

CHAPTER CXXII.

TWO OF THE READER'S OLD FRIENDS.

Bucklersbury—a tortuous street, leading from Cheapside to Walbrook—abounds in dining-rooms, where for fifteen pence the "City man" can procure a meal somewhat on the "cheap and nasty" principle. There 's ten-pence for a plate of meat, cut off a joint—two-pence, a pint of porter—a penny, potatoes—a penny, bread—and a penny the waiter.

The moment a person enters one of these establishments and seats himself at a table, a waiter with a dirty apron to his waist, and a ditto napkin over his arm, rushes up, and gabbles through the bill-of-fare, just in the same rapid and unintelligible manner as an oath is administered to a juryman or a witness in a court of justice.

It was while the preceding scenes were taking place at the West End of London, that two gentlemen lounged into a dining-room in Bucklersbury, and took their places, facing each other, at one of the numerous little tables that were spread with dirty cloths and strown in a random fashion with knives, forks, salt-sellars, pepper-boxes, and vinegar-cruets,—all in preparation for the afternoon's process of "feeding."

Scarcely had the two gentlemen thus brought themselves to an anchor, when the waiter darted up to them as if the necessity of speed were a matter of life or death;—and, heedless whether the visitors were attending to him or not, the domestic functionary hurried over the list of delicacies at that moment in readiness in the kitchen.

"Roast beef—biled beef—roast leg of pork—biled leg of pork and pease pudding—fillet of weal and 'am—beef steak pie—biled leg of mutton and caper sarse—greens—colliflowers—and taturs. Give your orders, gentle-*men*."

But were the rapidity of the waiter's utterance properly represented in print, his repetition of the bill-of-fare would more properly stand thus:—

"Roast beef biled beef roast leg of pork biled leg of pork and pease pudding fillet of veal and 'am beef steak pie biled leg of mutton and caper sarse greens colliflowers and taturs give your orders gentle-*men!*"

"Well—what shall we have, old fellow?" said the younger gentleman of the two to his companion.

"Be Jasus! 'an it's afther boiled leg of por-r-rk and paze pudding that I am, my frind!" was the emphatic reply, delivered with a ferocious look at the waiter as much as to let that individual know that he had better not have any of his nonsense—although nothing was farther from the poor devil's thoughts at the moment.

"Very good, sir!" cried the waiter. "Biled pork and pease pudding!" he shouted out for the behoof of the young lady within the bar at the remote end of the room.

"And the same for me," said the Irishman's companion.

"Same for gentle-*man!*" bawled the waiter, again addressing himself to the young lady just alluded to. "Ale or stout, gentle-*men?*"

"Porther—a pint!" exclaimed the ferocious Hibernian.

"Pale ale for me," intimated his friend.

"Pint of porter and pint palale for gentle-*men!*" vociferated the waiter. "Weggitubles—bread?" he next demanded.

"No bread—greens!" ejaculated the Irishman.

"Bread and potatoes for me," said his companion.

"One bread—one greens—one taturs—for gentle-*men!*" cried the waiter, thus conveying his last instructions to the young lady who officiated at the bar; and the said young lady sent each fresh order down a pipe communicating with the kitchen—her own voice being as affected and her manner as lackadaisycal as the waiter was natural, rapid, and bustling.

But before the various luxuries thus commanded were hoisted from the kitchen to the bar by means of the moveable dumb-waiter that worked up and down between the two places just mentioned,—we must pause to inform our readers—if indeed they have not already suspected the fact—that the two visitors to the dining-establishment in Bucklersbury, were our old friends Captain O'Blunderbuss and Mr. Francis Curtis!

The gallant Irishman had now numbered sixty-four years; and although the lapse of time had rendered his head completely bald, and turned his whiskers and moustachios to a bright silver, the ferocity of his aspect remained unaltered, and his fiery disposition was unsubdued. He was still the terrible Captain O'Blunderbuss—ready to exchange shots with any one and on all occasions—and more devoted to poteen than ever. His form was as erect as when in the prime of life; and his military coat, all frogged and braided, was buttoned over an ample chest that no stoop had contracted. The captain had grown somewhat stouter than when we took leave of him nineteen years previously to our present date; but his physical strength seemed to have remained unimpaired.

Frank Curtis was now forty-three. He also had "filled out," as the phrase is; but his countenance, in fattening, had lost nothing of its ignoble expression of self-sufficiency and impudent conceit; and his manner was as flippant as ever. Neither had he laid aside any portion of his mendacious habits, but had rather added thereto by varying the style of his boastings and the nature of his lies. He continued to dress in a flashy way—delighting in a hat of strange appearance, and in a waistcoat concentrating in a yard of stuff all the colours which have existence and name upon earth.

We must however admit—for the truth cannot be blinked in this respect—that there was a certain air of seediness about both the captain and Mr. Frank Curtis, which neither the bullying insolence of the former nor the impertinent self-sufficiency of the latter could altogether throw into the shade. It was evident that they had lost the confidence of their tailors and hatters—and even of their washerwomen;—for their garments might have been less thread-bare, and their wristbands a trifle cleaner. We say "wristbands," because those were the only portions of their shirts which met the eye—the captain's frogged coat and Mr. Curtis's faded double-breasted waistcoat being each buttoned up to its owner's throat.

"Waiter-r!" vociferated the gallant officer, when about a minute and a half had elapsed from the time that the orders had been given for the repast.

"Yes, sir—coming, sir," cried the functionary thus addressed, as he hurried away in quite another direction.

"Be Jasus!" ejaculated the captain, thumping his fist so vigorously down upon the table that the pepper box danced the polka with the mustard-pot, and the knives and forks performed a *pas de quatre*. "Is that boiled por-r-rk and paze pudding afther coming to-day at all, at all?"

"Just coming, sir!" said the waiter, under no excitement whatever, though in an immense bustle—for waiters always remain cool and imperturbable when most in a hurry.

"If it do n't come in sivin seconds, ye villain," thundered the captain, "I 'll skin ye alive!"

"Very good, sir," said the waiter, as he hastened to attend upon some new-comers.

"The beauty of the French eating-houses is that the moment you order things they appear on the table by magic," observed Frank Curtis, in a tone loud enough to let every one present know that he had been in France. "When I was in Paris—on that secret mission from the English Government, you know, captain——"

"Be Jasus! and I remimber quite well," exclaimed the gallant officer. "'T was at the same time that I wint to offer my swor-r-d and services to the Imperor of the Tur-r-rks—the Sulthan, I mane."

"Just so," said Frank. "Well—as I was going to tell you——"

"Two biled pork—two pease pudding—for gentle-*men*," cried the waiter at this juncture, as he set the plates upon the table. "One-bread—one greens—one taturs—for gentle-*men*."

The captain and Mr. Curtis fell to work upon the delicacies thus placed before them; and after an interval of silence, during which the boiled pork and *et ceteras* disappeared with astonishing rapidity, the latter leaning across the table, said in a low whisper, "It was a deuced lucky thing that I met my friend Styles just now; for if he had n't lent me this sovereign, we might have gone without dinner as well as without breakfast."

"Be Jasus! and that's thrue enough, Frank!" returned the gallant officer, likewise in *sotto voce*. "Where did ye appint to mate Misther Styles again this afternoon?"

"At a nice quiet little public that I know of—where there's a good parlour and capital spirits," answered Mr. Curtis.

"Ah! the thrue potheen—the rale cratur!" said the captain. "Well that 's a blissing, at all evints! And, be Jasus! I hope your frind Misther Styles will be after putting us up to do a something, as he suggisted—for, be the power-r-rs! Frank, it 's hard work looking about for the sinews of war-r-r!"

"Styles is a splendid fellow, captain," replied Mr. Curtis, smacking his lips after his last glass of pale ale—or "palale," as the waiter denominated it. "Why, God bless you! it was him who got up the London and Paris Balloon Conveyance Company, with Parachute Branches to Dover and Calais."

"And how came it to fail?" demanded the gallant officer.

"Simply because it was never meant to succeed, answered Frank, in a matter-of-fact way. "The object was to make money by showing the balloons and

parachutes that were to be used in the business; and the press took up the affair quite seriously. As long as curiosity was kept alive, Styles cleared upwards of five guineas a-day by the admissions at a shilling a-head. Ah! he's a clever fellow—a deuced clever fellow, I can tell you. But its pretty near time we went to meet him: for, though he has n't any thing particular to do at present, he always pretends to be in a hurry, and never waits one minute over the hour for an appointment:—that 's the way he has got himself the character of a man of punctuality and business-habits."

"Waiter-r!" vociferated Captain O'Blunderbuss.

"Coming, sir!" cried the functionary thus adjured: then, rushing up to the table, he said interrogatively, "Cheese, gentle-*men?*"

"No. What 's to pay?" demanded Curtis.

The waiter enumerated the items in a rapid manner, and mentioned the amount, which was forthwith discharged by Frank, who ostentatiously threw down a sovereign as if he had plenty more of the same kind of coin in his pocket. On receiving his change, he gave the waiter sixpence—a specimen of liberality which induced that discriminating personage to disregard all the other demands made at the moment upon his services, until he had duly escorted the two gentlemen to the door.

Upon quitting the dining-rooms, Captain O'Blunderbuss and Mr. Frank Curtis proceeded arm-in-arm into Cheapside; and, on catching a glimpse of the clock of Bow Church, the latter gentleman said, "We are in lots of time. It's only half-past two—and we're to meet Styles at three at a public in Fleet Street. So we need n't gallop along as if a troop of sheriffs' officers were at our heels."

"Be Jasus! d'ye remimber what fine fun we had with the snaking scoundrels up in Baker Street?" cried the gallant officer. "Why—it must be upwards of twinty years ago—or nineteen at the laste!"

"Yes—and do you remember what larks we had in the Bench too, during the time that the sleepy old Commissioners remanded me for?" said Curtis.

"Be the holy poker-r! and I've forgotten nothing of all that same!" ejaculated the captain. "But it was a sad blow to ye, my frind, when Sir Christopher-r died without laving ye a single sixpence!"

"I can't bear to think of it, captain—although a dozen years or more have passed since then. But who do you think I saw the other day, riding in her carriage just as if she had been a lady all her life?"

"Be Jasus! and ye mane Sir Christopher's wife that was!" exclaimed the gallant officer. "Had she got the fine stout livery-servant standing up behind as usual?"

"Yes—and young Blunt was inside," added Curtis. "He's as like the stout footman as ever a lad was to a middle-aged man in this world—the same pudding face—sandy hair—stupid-looking eyes——"

"Now be the power-rs! I think you're too hard upon the footman, Frank!" interrupted the captain. "He 's not such an ugly fellow as you would be afther making him out. I do n't say, for insthance, that he 's so handsome as you, my dear frind—or yet so well made as me, Frank——"

"Very far from it, captain," cried Mr. Curtis. 'I do n't think that we 're the worst looking chaps in Cheapside at this moment. That 's exactly what Styles said to us this morning. '*I want a couple of genteel fellows like you,*' says he, '*to join me in something that I have in hand.*'"

"We 're the very boys to co-operate with him, Frank!" exclaimed the captain: "and what 's more, you and me can play into ache-other's hands. 'Tis n't for nothing that we 've been frinds for the last twinty years."

"In which time we 've seen many ups and downs, captain," observed Frank,—"had many a good dinner, and gone many a time without one—spent many a guinea, and seen many a day when we did n't know where the devil to get a shilling——"

"Be the power-rs! and had many a rar-r lar-r-rk into the bargin!" said Captain O'Blunderbuss. "D'ye remimber our gitting into the station-house the night afther your dear wife left ye to jine the old gintleman that fell in love with her, and——"

"And who was kind enough to take her off my hands, children and all!" exclaimed Frank, laughing heartily. "Ah! that was a glorious business—that was—I mean, old Shipley relieving me of my dear spouse and the five responsibilities."

"And did n't I conduct the bargin for ye?" demanded the captain. "Did n't I make him pony down a thousand pounds to prevint an action of *crim. con.?* Be the potheen of ould Ireland—I did that same business as nate and clane as iver such a thing was setthled in this wor-r-rld!"

"True enough, captain," said Frank. "But it 's just on the stroke of three, I declare!" he exclaimed, glancing up at Saint Bride's, which they were now passing. "How we must have dawdled along! I wish you would n't loiter to stare at the gals so, captain," he added, laughing.

"Be Jasus! and it 's yourself, Frank, that ogles all the lasses that we mate," cried the captain, throwing back an insinuation that was intended as a friendly compliment. "But which is the place, me boy?"

"Here," said Curtis, turning into a public-house in Fleet Street just as the clock struck three.

CHAPTER CXXIII.

A MAN OF BUSINESS.

Mr. Bubbleton Styles was a gentleman of about fifty years of age. Short, thin, dapper, and active,—with a high, bald forehead, and small restless, twinkling eyes,—he seemed a perfect man of business—an impression that was enhanced by a certain sly knowingness which he had assumed years before, and which was now habitual to him. He was uneducated and ignorant: but he had studied the manner in which well-instructed persons spoke—he compared their language with his own—and he had actually weeded his style of speech of the solecisms and grammatical errors that originally characterised it. He had not, however, been able to improve himself in spelling, with equal facility; and therefore he took care never to write a letter. He always had some plausible excuse for throwing this duty in business matters upon some other person more competent than himself.

Astute and cunning, he forebore from touching on topics which he did not understand: but if the conversation did turn, in spite of his endeavours to the contrary, on subjects whereof he was ignorant, he so artfully managed his observations that even those who knew him well were far from suspecting that he was otherwise than profoundly acquainted with the matter under discussion. Every body thought him a

very shrewd fellow;—and he had a habit of looking so knowing and critical when any one was speaking, that his opinion, when subsequently delivered, was received with respect and deemed an authority.

The reader may therefore perceive that Mr. Bubbleton Styles was a thorough man of the world. He took care never to commit himself. In small money transactions he was always regular and correct: he therefore escaped the imputation of meanness, and actually acquired at a cheap rate the denomination of "an honourable character." The consequence was, that when he failed—which was very often indeed—in large transactions, he was considered merely as "a spirited but unsuccessful speculator,"—never as a dishonest person.

He had an office in the City: but were any of his friends to ask, "What *is* Styles?" the answer would be a vague generality—such as, "Oh! he is a City man, you know—engaged in business and all that!"—a reply leaving the enquirer just as wise as he was before. And yet, at his office, there were all the symptoms and evidence of "business,"—a letter-box at the door—a clerk engaged in writing at the desk—a pile of letters here, and a heap of account-books there—samples of many kinds of goods on the mantel and shelves—mysterious-looking bales and hampers on the floor—files covered with dingy papers, looking like invoices and bills of lading—and the words *Bills for Acceptance* labelled over a slit in the board-work that enclosed the desk. Thus the place had a very business-like aspect: and yet no one could define what was the precise nature of the business carried on there.

But we have travelled to Mr. Bubbleton Styles's office in Crosby Hall Chambers; whereas Mr. Bubbleton Styles himself is just now in a tavern-parlour in Fleet Street.

The clock had just *begun* to strike three as Captain O'Blunderbuss and Mr. Frank Curtis entered the public-house: and by the time they reached the aforesaid parlour it was six seconds *past* three.

There sate Mr. Bubbleton Styles—with his silver watch in his hand, and gazing at the Ducth clock over the mantel-piece, as if he were anxiously comparing the two dials, and found himself much put out because there happened to be a slight difference between them.

"If I thought it was my watch that was wrong," he said aloud, apparently in a musing manner, but really because he caught a glimpse of the entrance of Curtis and Blunderbuss at the moment, and he never lost an opportunity of impressing even his best friends with an idea of his punctuality,—"if I thought it was my watch that was wrong, I would trample it to pieces beneatn my heel."

"No—don't do that, old fellow!" exclaimed Frank, advancing towards him. "Much better give it to me!"

"I would not do any thing so prejudicial to a friend as present him with a watch that went irregularly," returned Mr. Styles, in a solemn tone. "But the fault is *not* with my watch, I am convinced: it lies with that rascally old clock. However, you are only six seconds after your time: I should have allowed you the full minute—and then I should have waited no longer. Come, sit down, Curtis—Captain O'Blunderbuss, sit down: I have just one hour to devote to you. As the clock strikes four, I must be off. What will you take?"

"Potheen for me, if ye plaze," said the gallant officer.

"Brandy for me," observed Frank.

"And wine-and-water for me," added Mr. Bubbleton Styles. "I never take spirits until after supper."

The various beverages required, were immediately ordered and supplied; and the three gentlemen proceeded to business, the parlour at the tavern—or rather public-house—being occupied only by themselves at the moment.

"Well, old fellow," said Mr. Frank Curtis, addressing himself to Mr. Styles, "what good thing can you put us up to?"

"A speculation that will enrich us all three," replied the gentleman thus appealed to. "I do not mind telling you that I have been rather unfortunate lately in one or two enterprises—and I want something to set me square again. I have a few bills coming due in a couple or three months, and would not have them dishonoured on any account. Thank God! however, I have no paltry debts—no mean milk-scores—no peddling affairs. I always avoid them. Still I must make a bold stroke for the sake of my larger transactions;—and I presume that neither of you are averse to earning a little money easily and speedily."

"Arrah! and be Jasus! that's the most wilcome thing ye could be afther saying to me, my frind!" exclaimed the captain, surveying the speculator with deep admiration.

"Now," continued Mr. Styles, "I have been thinking that we three can work the oracle well together—and I propose——"

"What?" demanded Mr. Curtis, anxiously.

"Hould your tongue—and have patience, Frank!" ejaculated the gallant officer. "It shall be your turn to spake prisintly. Well, sir—and what is it, thin, that ye're afther proposing!"

"A Railway!" returned Mr. Bubbleton Styles.

"Divil a betther idea could ye have formed!" cried the captain, enthusiastically.

"Glorious!" exclaimed Curtis, in an equally impassioned tone of approval.

"Don't be excited—take things calmly—in a business-like way," said Mr. Bubbleton Styles. "It is now twenty minutes past three: we have forty minutes more to converse upon the subject. Much may be done in that time. Here," continued the speculator, drawing a skeleton-map of England from his pocket, and spreading it on the table; "you see this line drawn almost longitudinally from one end of Great Britain to the other? Well—that is my projected Railway. You perceive, we start from Beachy Head in Sussex—right on, as straight as we can go, to Cape Wrath on the northern coast of Scotland. Of course we avoid as much as possible placing any portion of our line in competition with railways already existing; but we shall have Branches to all the principal cities and manufacturing towns, and Single Lines wherever they may be asked for."

"Capital, be Jasus!" exclaimed the Hibernian officer, unable to restrain the exuberance of his delight at this magnificent scheme. "And be what title d'ye mane to call this purty little bantling of your's, Misther Styles?"

"The Grand British Longitudinal Railway," answered the speculator, in a measured and emphatic manner.

The captain was so elated by the grandeur and vast comprehensiveness of this denomination, that he rang the bell with furious excitement, and ordered the waiter to replenish the glasses.

"Now," continued Mr. Bubbleton Styles, "having expounded my views, it is necessary to take into con-

sideration the mode of procedure. Of course I am the promoter of the scheme; and to-morrow I shall register it. This will only cost five pounds—and then the thing is secured to us. '*Provisionally Registered, pursuant to 7 and 8 Victoria, cap.* 110;'—and so forth. Capital £8,000,000, in 400,000 shares of £20 each. Deposit, £2 2s. per share. You, Frank, must be the Secretary; and you, captain, Consulting Engineer."

"Is it an Ingineer ye'd be afther making of me in my ould age?" cried the gallant officer: "for, be the power-rs! I've forgot more than I ever knew of that same!"

"Oh! the place will be quite a sinecure—good pay and nothing to do," said Mr. Styles. "We shall have a regular Engineer, as a matter of course; but it will look business-like to speak in the prospectus of having '*secured the valuable services of that eminent Military Engineer, Captain O'Blunderbuss, of Blunderbuss Park, Ireland; who, having surveyed the whole of the proposed line, in concert with the Company's Civil Engineer, has reported most favourably of the scheme, and has offered suggestions which will produce a saving to the Company of nearly half a million sterling in the progress of the works.*' This is the way to manage business, gentlemen," added Mr. Styles, glancing in a satisfied manner at his two companions, one after the other: then, looking at his watch, he exclaimed, "Just ten minutes more to stay—and I must be off! Now, we have settled that I am to be Promoter—you, Curtis, are to be Secretary—and you, captain, Consulting Engineer. This evening I will draw up the prospectus: we must have about thirty good names for the Provisional Committee—and by to-morrow afternoon the document will be printed and ready."

"You will not have time to call on the people to ask them to let you put down their names?" said Frank Curtis, conceiving at the moment that his friend was going a trifle too fast.

"Nonsense, my dear fellow!" exclaimed Mr. Bubbleton Styles: "I know that I can take the liberty of using the names of at least half of my intended Provisional Committee-men; and the others will not think of contradicting the prospectus, when they see that we have got Mr. Podgson as chairman."

"What—Podgson!" cried Mr. Curtis, almost wild with joy and surprise. "You don't mean to say that you've got Podgson?"

"Not yet," answered the speculator, with his characteristic coolness: but I *shall* have him by this time to-morrow."

"I thought that you had not spoken of your scheme to a soul before you met me and the captain this morning——"

"Neither had I—and Podgson is totally unaware at this moment that such a project is in existence," interrupted Mr. Styles, calmly and deliberately. "But I know how to deal with him: I have read his character from a distance;—and, although I have never yet exchanged a word with him in my life, depend upon it I shall hook him as our chairman before I am twenty-four hours older. Three minutes more!" cried the speculator: then, as if to make the most of the hundred and eighty seconds at his disposal, Mr. Styles closed the present interview in the following business-like and highly gratifying manner:—"You are both as shabby as you well can be; and you must obtain new clothes as soon as possible. Here is a ten-pound note for each of you. Moreover you must get respectable lodgings at once; and you can give a reference to me. To-morrow, at three o'clock punctually, there will be chops and sherry in readiness at my office—and I shall expect you both. Not a moment before three, remember—because you will be interrupting me: and if you're a moment after, I shall decline any farther transactions with you. So good bye—I haven't time to shake hands."

Thus speaking, Mr. Styles rushed from the room, it being four o'clock to an instant;—and it is perhaps as well to observe that this perfect man of business had only made an appointment with his friends at the public-house in Fleet Street, because he had another gentleman to meet in the neighbourhood at six minutes past four.

CHAPTER CXXIV

CHARLES HATFIELD.

It was past midnight; and in only one chamber throughout the Earl of Ellingham's spacious mansion was a light still burning.

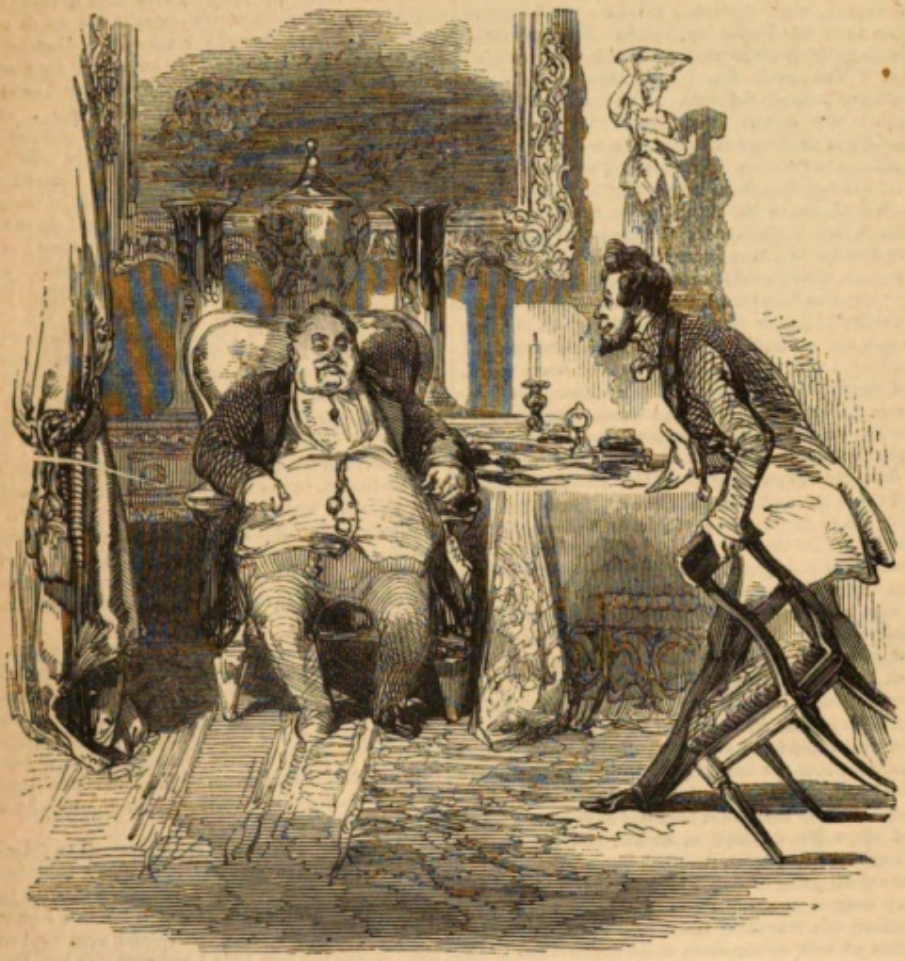
In that chamber Charles Hatfield was pacing to and fro—his mind filled with thoughts of so bewildering, exciting, and painful a nature, that he felt the inutility of endeavouring to escape from them by retiring to his couch.

This young man of twenty-five years of age,—so handsome, so intelligent, and with the certainty of inheriting vast riches,—possessing the most brilliant worldly prospects, and knowing himself to be the object of his parents' devoted affection—entertaining, too, a profound love for the beautiful Lady Frances Ellingham, and having every reason to hope that his passion was reciprocated,—this young man, with so many advantages in respect to position, and so many sources of felicity within his view,—Charles Hatfield was restless and unhappy.

The striking incident which had marked the day—the sudden discovery that those whom he had hitherto looked upon as his uncle and his aunt, were in reality his parents,—the assurance which he had received respecting the honour of his mother and the legitimacy of his birth,—then the mysterious fact that his parentage was still to remain a secret to the world,—all these circumstances combined to torment him with doubts and misgivings—to excite his curiosity to a painful degree—and to animate him with an ardent longing to penetrate into all that was so obscure and suspicious.

It was true that he had promised his mother never to question her relative to a subject that might be disagreeable to her;—for the moment, too, he had been satisfied with the assurances of his legitimacy which he had received from the lips of his father. But when he found himself alone in his own bed-chamber—surrounded by the stillness of night—he could no longer check the natural current of his reflections:—the deep silence in which the mansion was enveloped—the secluded position of his apartment—and the slightly romantic turn of his mind,—all united to give an impulse to thoughts which were so intimately associated with subjects of mysterious and strange import.

Then, many circumstances, remembered in connexion with his early boyhood, but until now never before pondered upon with serious attention,—recollections, hitherto vague and disjointed,—gradually assumed a more intelligible aspect to his mental contemplation



—memory exerted herself with all her energy, to fill up blanks and bring vividly forward those reminiscences that until this moment had been like dim and misty vapours floating before the mind's eye:—he fixed his gaze intently on the past, until the feeblest glimmerings assumed a bolder and more comprehensible light;—and by degrees the confusion of his ideas relative to his early being, yielded to something like order—so that he became enabled to fit incidents into their proper places, and even make some accurate calculations with regard to the dates of particular occurrences.

In a word, a light had streamed in upon his soul—illuminating many of the hitherto unexplored cells of his memory,—giving significancy to recollections on which he had never before paused to ponder, and investing with importance various reminiscences that had not until this period engaged his serious attention.

Naturally of a happy—cheerful disposition,—and intent on soaring aspirations relative to the future, rather than on speculations and wanderings connected with the past,—he had never until now been struck with certain facts which, though having a dwelling-place in his memory, had failed to occupy his meditations or excite any thing like suspicions in his mind.

But *the incident* of the day had set him to work, in the silence of his chamber and the depth of night, to call forth all those sleeping reminiscences—examine them one by one—connect them together—make them up as well as he could into a continuous history—and from the aggregate deduce a variety of truths intimately regarding himself.

All this was not done through any disrespect for his mother or his father—any change of feeling in reference to them. No:—he loved them the more tenderly—the more fervently, now that he knew they were *his parents*, and not *mere relations*. But if he fell into the train of thought in which we now find him engaged, it was that he could no more help yielding to that current of reflections than a child could avoid being carried whirlingly along the rapids of the Canadian stream which had engulphed it.

And now let us see into what connected form the meditations and recollections of Charles Hatfield had settled themselves?

Seating himself at the table, on which he leant his elbows, and supporting his head on his hands, in which he buried his face, he pondered in the ensuing manner:—

"My earliest remembrances carry me back to a

period when I must have been about five years old; and then I was accustomed to call a good woman whose name was Watts, my *mother*. But she died—I forget precisely under what circumstances; and then, when I was nearly six, I was taken care of by a gentleman named Rainford. Yes—and he had a beautiful wife named Tamar;—and this Tamar was the sister of the Countess of Ellingham. Mr. Rainford and Tamar were very kind to me, I remember well; but I was not with them long. And now there is so much confusion in my thoughts—so much bewilderment in my reminiscences touching that particular period in my life, that I scarcely know how to render my ideas continuously accurate. I fully recollect, however, that he whom I grew accustomed to call by the endearing name of '*father*'—although I knew that he was not my father—I mean this Mr. Rainford,—I recollect, I say, that he was absent for some weeks, and that I pined after him. Then Tamar would reassure me with promises of his return;—but I remember that she used to weep very much—oh! very much! One day she put on black clothes—and she was going to dress me in mourning also; but she cried bitterly, and threw the dark garments away. Next I recollect being taken to the house of Mr. de Medina, where I saw Esther for the first time—that Esther who is now Countess of Ellingham. The happiness I experienced that day dwells in my mind; for I recollect as well as if it were but yesterday, that all Tamar's sorrow had suddenly disappeared, and that she gave me the most earnest promises that I should soon see Mr. Rainford again.* And I did behold him again soon—but it was at some town in France, whither I was taken by Mr. de Medina and his two daughters.† Then we all travelled in a post-chaise and four—and we repaired to Paris, where I remember that the Earl of Ellingham and Jacob Smith joined us.‡ Next we went to Havre-de-Grace—I remember it was that town, because I have seen it since; and there Mr. de Medina, Esther, and the Earl of Ellingham left us—Mr. Rainford, Tamar, Jacob Smith, and myself going on board of a ship.§ We were not very long at sea, but the next incident which I remember was travelling alone with Tamar to London, where we took up our abode at the country-seat of Mr. de Medina.‖ That was at Finchley. We never went out, I remember—but kept close to our own room, Esther and Mr. de Medina frequently visiting us. How long we lived in this manner I cannot recollect: but now my mind settles with horror on the never-to-be-forgotten lamentation which, child as I was, struck horror to my soul as it echoed through the dwelling! For Mr. de Medina and Esther had suddenly learnt that Tamar—the good, kind Tamar—who had been absent a considerable time that day, was foully and brutally murdered. Oh! how I cried—how bitterly I wept: but if I asked any questions—which I must naturally suppose that I did—they were not answered, or were answered vaguely. Yes—all particulars were carefully kept from me;—and this was doubtless nothing more than a mere matter of prudence—for I was but a child of between six and seven! Mr. Rainford now came back to live at Finchley; but how unhappy he was! I remember well one evening—a very few days only after the dreadful death of her whom I was wont to call '*my mamma*'—that Mr. Rainford, after a long conversation in whispers with Lord Ellingham, suddenly turned towards me—caught me up in his arms—and covered me with kisses. Yes—that incident has ever remained indelibly impressed upon my memory!* It was followed very soon by Tamar's funeral; and almost immediately afterwards I was sent to a school at a great distance—for I remember that Mr. de Medina and Esther themselves took me there, and that we travelled all day in a post-chaise. Ah! and now I recollect too—yes—it flashes to my mind, that before they left me they charged me never to mention the name of Rainford at the school;—for my own name was at that time Charles Watts. For three years did I remain there, Mr. de Medina and Esther frequently visiting me, even after she had become the Countess of Ellingham. Every six months I went home to Finchley for the holidays, and found Mr. Rainford always staying at Mr. de Medina's house, and always ready to receive me with kindness. Then Mr. de Medina died; and we all went into mourning for him. I returned to school for another year; and when between ten and eleven I was suddenly sent for home—that is, to the manor-house at Finchley, which Mr. Rainford had continued to occupy after Mr. de Medina's death. But instead of seeing Mr. Rainford, as I had expected, I was taken into the presence of a gentleman and a lady, neither of whom I had ever beheld before. These were Mr. Hatfield and Lady Georgiana!"

Here the young man paused in his meditations, as if to fix all his powers of thought with as much intensity as possible upon that era of his life whence dated as it were a new existence. But his ideas came rushing in upon his soul with such overwhelming force, as literally to hurry him along; and, obedient to the current of continuous and self-linking reflections he thus proceeded in that silent history which he was repeating to himself:—

"And what were my first impressions on entering into the presence of Mr. Hatfield and Lady Georgiana? I scarcely know now—for I remember that the lady snatched me to her bosom—folded me in a fond embrace—covered me with kisses—and even wept over me. It was the first time I had ever seen her, to my recollection. Mr. Hatfield then embraced me in his turn, and with as much fervour as if he had been the Mr. Rainford whom I had expected to meet and to behold! I was then, as I just now reckoned, between ten and eleven when all this happened; and it struck me—I recollect it well—that there was a considerable likeness between Mr. Rainford and Mr. Hatfield:—but then Mr. Rainford had light hair, and Mr. Hatfield black,—Mr. Rainford had reddish whiskers, and those of Mr. Hatfield were dark as jet. Yes: those were my ideas at the time; but I suppose that they were the offspring of a delusion. Nevertheless, when I call to mind the features of that Mr. Rainford who was so good to me in my infancy, it even seems now that I can recollect a resemblance between them and the countenance of my own father such as it now is. Still, this is most probably mere fancy;—and I wish to arrive at truths, not indulge in idle speculations. Well, then—to go back to that interview,—that first interview between myself and those who have since turned out to be my parents,—I can call to mind each look they bestowed upon me—each word they uttered. They told me that they were my uncle and my aunt

* See Chapter LIX. † See Chapter LXIV.
‡ See last paragraph of Chapter LXV.
§ See Chapter LXXIX.
‖ This was when Rainford quitted the packet-ship at Guernsey, and commenced his career as the Blackamoor.

* See first paragraph, second column, page 28, of this Volume of the Second Series.

—that they were rich, and intended to have me to live with them altogether thenceforth, and be recognised as their heir—that Mr. Rainford had gone upon a long, long voyage to settle in a far-off land, whence perhaps he should never return—and that they would supply the place of the parents whom I had lost in my infancy and of the generous friend who had thus quitted his native shores for ever! There was so much in the voice—manner—and language of Mr. Hatfield which reminded me of Mr. Rainford, that this circumstance materially consoled me for the deprivation of my long-loved protector; and I was moreover just at that age when kindness, handsome clothes, indulgence, and the change of scene which immediately followed, were fully calculated to attach me to those who gave me so many enjoyments. Thus, I am afraid that I was ungrateful to the memory of Mr. Rainford—by loving Mr. Hatfield too soon and too well,—for I could not then suspect that he was my father;—no—nor did I ever until the truth burst so suddenly on me this day! But, ah! it was nature which prompted that feeling;—and I remember well how joyous and happy I was when told, on the occasion of that first interview, that thenceforth I must bear the name of *Hatfield!*"

Here he paused again, as if in doubt whether he had omitted any detail, reminiscence, or incident which should constitute a link in the narrative that he was endeavouring, in his progressive thoughts, to render as complete as possible;—and solemnly—profoundly interesting would it have been for a human observer, himself unobserved, to have contemplated that fine and handsome young man, thus devoting the hours when others slept to the task of tracing, by memorial efforts, his career from the days of infancy to the present moment! But no eye beheld him save that of Him who beholdeth all things, and who sleepeth never!

"Scarcely had I thus been taken into the care of Mr. and Lady Georgiana Hatfield,"—it was thus he proceeded in his continuous meditations,—"when we repaired to the Continent. Having travelled through France, we crossed the Alps, and entered the delicious land of Italy. The Sardinian States were traversed by us in that leisurely manner which allowed us to view every thing worthy of inspection;—for some weeks we stayed at Florence, the capital of the beauteous Grand Duchy of Tuscany;—thence we journeyed to Rome,—and for several months did we sojourn in the Eternal City. But the health of a young man who was with us, and whose name was Jacob Smith, required a change of climate. Mr. Hatfield was deeply attached to this youth, who, on his side, treated my father with the utmost deference and devotedness. The Roman physicians recommended the genial air of Montoni; and we accordingly removed to the sovereign city of Castelcicala. But Jacob Smith appeared to have some secret sorrow preying upon him; and he pined away before our very eyes. Yes—he *had* a secret source of grief: for I remember well now, that one night he uttered dreadful screams and ejaculations in his sleep, which awoke and alarmed me—for I slept in the next room to him. I recollect that I rushed in, fearful lest his chamber had caught on fire; and that before I could arouse him, he shrieked forth in thrilling tones—'*Old Death—Benjamin Bones—my father! No—no!*'—Poor fellow, he died soon afterwards; and I wept much—for he was always kind and good to me! But that ejaculation of '*Old Death—Benjamin Bones!*' even then seemed to touch some chord within my soul, as if awaking a long dormant but vague reminiscence: and now again, that name of *Benjamin Bones*—that frightful appellation of *Old Death*,—Oh! they do not seem so unfamiliar to me as if I had never heard them mentioned but that once, and by the lips of Jacob Smith. Were not those names, in fact, in some way associated with recollections of a much earlier date? Did I never hear those names pronounced in my earliest boyhood? It appears to me that I did; and yet I vainly—oh! how vainly endeavour to plunge my eager glances through the mist—the dense, dark mist, which envelopes that idea,—reducing the thought to a suspicion so dim and vague that I dare not adopt it as a link in this history of mine! And yet why does the name of *Old Death* produce a kind of shuddering within me, as if the influence of a very early recollection still partially remained? Wherefore does the appellation of *Benjamin Bones* seem more familiar to me, than I can possibly conceive a reason for? There are moments when I appear to obtain the least glimmering—the least scintillation of a light at the remote profundity of this mystery,—a light which for an instant seems to promise an elucidation of all I wish to know in that respect, and then becomes suddenly extinguished—leaving me in a deeper and darker uncertainty than before!"

Charles Hatfield pressed his hands violently to his forehead, as if to awaken recollections that slumbered too soundly to be otherwise aroused: but he could not conjure up nor evoke a single idea that was calculated to throw any light on the obscurity which enveloped every thing in his mind respecting the two names, the utterance whereof thrilled to his very soul.

"What means that horrible phrase—*Old Death?*" he asked himself a hundred times: "and is it in any way connected with the name of *Benjamin Bones?* Is the phrase a name itself likewise? and if so, are *Old Death* and *Benjamin Bones* one and the same person? Why should those names produce upon me a disagreeable effect, as if I suddenly came in contact with a loathsome snake? I know not:—and yet it is so! The more I ponder upon that night when poor Jacob Smith shrieked out in his sleep—the more vivid do my recollections become concerning the horror that convulsed him, and the piercing—tense anguish which marked his tone! Oh! then, there must have been something dreadful—appalling—terrible in the associations which the names of *Old Death* and *Benjamin Bones* conjured up in the young man's mind at the time; and this Benjamin Bones must have been a bad—a very bad person. But wherefore do I say '*must have been?*' May he not be alive now? In a word—what do I know of him? Nothing! nothing! And yet—and yet, something seems to tell me that I did know more of him once than I do now! Perhaps, when I was a child, I heard evil things said of him,—things which have long since fled from my mind, leaving only a general and very faint impression behind—and that impression unfavourable to the object of it. Let me not then dwell longer on this point of my narrative—that narrative which I seek to compile from the myriads of ideas that until this night have been all scattered in my brain—never concentrated and reduced to order until now! Yes—from that chaos of memories, I have succeeded in rescuing reminiscences and thoughts sufficient to form a somewhat continuous and connected history;—and heaven must guide me, if its will so be, sooner or later to clear up all that is still obscure, and gratify my craving—ardent curiosity unto the fullest extent! But wherefore am I devoured

with this burning desire to know all that there may be to know relative to myself? Alas! 't is in my nature: the incident of the day just past has suddenly aroused that curiosity within me—for I feel, I have an innate conviction that there is a mystery attached to my birth, the elucidation of which must some day or another have a powerful influence upon my destinies! And oh! if it should prove that I am pursuing investigations which must end in stamping *me* with the stigma of illegitimacy, and bringing to light the dishonour of my mother—— But, no—no! this cannot be! My father would not otherwise have given me the solemn assurance that my mother is *an angel of innocence and purity, and never has been guilty of weakness or frailty!*"

Again he paused: and now he arose from his seat, and paced the room for several minutes—agitated by the fear that he was militating against the wishes, or perhaps even the interests, of kind parents, by venturing to give full rein to the impetuous curiosity that had seized upon him. And yet—as ere now observed—he could not restrain the ardour of that sentiment, which, more powerful than himself, engulphed him in its onward, eddying influence.

Resuming his seat,—resuming likewise his meditative attitude,—and with his countenance again buried in his hands,—the young man took up the chain of his thoughts from that point where he had suddenly broken off to reflect on the secret and mysterious influence which the words *Old Death* and *Benjamin Bones* produced upon him.

"I reached in my mental narrative that epoch when poor Jacob Smith died. I was then about thirteen—a little more than thirteen; and I mourned sincerely for him. Frequently did I visit his grave in the beautiful cemetery where he was buried; and often—often as I wandered on the bank of the clear and broad Ferretti, down to whose chrystal margin that cemetery stretched,—often did I marvel who that departed youth was—and what secret tie might have linked him to Mr. Hatfield! Years passed rapidly away,—years unmarked by any incident on which my mind need pause to ponder: I grew up—happy, gay, and seldom thinking of the past. The bright and shining future—decked with all the glorious and golden hues which a sanguine imagination could devise—was ever the topic of my thoughts. Oh! well do I recollect that when between eighteen and nineteen years of age, I began to comprehend the affairs of the great world—to study well the political condition of nations—and to observe that the State of Castelcicala languished under the tyranny of the Grand Duke Angelo. Then I longed to become a hero—to have an army at my command—to achieve the independence, not only of Castelcicala, but of all Italy. These aspirations continued until I became an enthusiast in the cause of freedom; and though of English birth, yet deeply—sincerely did I sympathise with the generous-hearted Castelcicalans, when the treachery and despotism of the Grand Duke Angelo called a mighty Austrian army into the State, to besiege and overawe the capital! But Providence suddenly sent a champion to rescue a fine country and a noble people from the power of the invaders. No Castelcicalan native—no Italian patriot watched the career of Richard Markham with so much anxiety, such burning hope, and such deep suspense as I! When I heard those persons who were his best-wishers in their hearts, shake their heads and declare that the Constitutional Cause could not possibly succeed with so youthful a leader and such slender resources, I thought otherwise:—yes—I thought otherwise—because I wished otherwise. Then as victory after victory marked the progress of the hero—Estella, Piacere, and Abrantani giving their names to the triumphs of the Constitutional Army,—I longed—Oh! I longed to fly into the presence of the conqueror, and implore him to permit me to wield a sword in the same cause. But we were then prisoners as it were within the walls of Montoni, which was besieged by the Austrians; and while all was dismay—confusion—and terror around, I alone seemed to entertain a conviction as to the result. Nor was I mistaken: the Constitutional Army, under the command of Richard Markham, advanced to raise the siege—and beneath the walls of Montoni was fought the most sanguinary action of modern times. From morning's dawn till the evening, lasted that terrific encounter;—but at eight o'clock on that evening the capital was delivered. Yet why should I now dwell on all these incidents,—why detail to myself all that followed?—the flight of the Grand Duke Angelo—the accession of Alberto to the ducal throne—and the subsequent arrival of Richard Markham, then Prince of Montoni, to settle with his lovely wife, the Princess Isabella, in the capital of the State which owed so much to him! Never—never shall I forget the exuberant joy which greeted his return to Montoni; and to render that day the more remarkable, the Grand Duke, his father-in-law, had convoked for the first time the Chambers of Senators and Deputies, instituted by the new Constitution previously promulgated! And the first act of those Chambers was to recognise the Prince as heir-apparent to the throne; while the Grand Duke appointed him Captain-General of the Castelcicalan Army—that army which he had led to conquest and to glory! It was a joyous and a memorable day for me when Mr. Hatfield and Lady Georgiana, having left their cards at the palace, received an invitation to a ball given by the Grand Duke and Duchess to celebrate the arrival of their son-in-law and beauteous daughter;—for I was permitted to accompany those whom I at that time believed to be my uncle and my aunt. Then did I find myself in the presence of Royalty for the first time; and I was agreeably disappointed and surprised to discover that condescension, affability, and great kindness of manner were fully compatible with the loftiest rank,—for such was the bearing of the Grand Duke Alberto and his Duchess, as well as of the Prince and Princess of Montoni. From that time forth I have become almost a worshipper of his Royal Highness the Prince,—an enthusiastic admirer of his genius, his character, and his glorious achievements:—to me he appears unrivalled as a warrior, faultless as a statesman, and estimable as a man,—endowed with every virtue—every qualification that can ennoble him not only as an individual who created rank and honours for himself by his high merits, but who is also the most splendid specimen of Nature's aristocracy that the world has ever yet seen!"

The young man raised his head as he reached this climax in his thoughts; and as the light of the lamp beamed upon his countenance, it was reflected in eyes brilliant with enthusiasm and with the glow excited by a heart swelling with the loftiest aspirations.

"Oh! shall I ever be able to raise myself to eminence?" he exclaimed, clasping his hands together, as if in earnest appeal to heaven: "may I hope ever to make for myself a name which the whole world shall

pronounce with respect and admiration? But first—first," he continued, still speaking aloud and in an excited tone,—"I must satisfy this ardent curiosity which has seized upon me! Wherefore all these dreadful mysteries?—wherefore do not my parents acknowledge me as their son, if I be really legitimate?—why am I still to pass as their nephew? Are they ashamed of me?—have I ever done aught to bring disgrace upon their name? No—no: and they gave me that name—their own name of Hatfield, and of their own accord! But who was the good woman, Sarah Watts, that I used to call by the title of *mother?*—why was I entrusted in my infancy to her care?—for what motive was it that my parents never took charge of me until I was upwards of ten years of age?—and who was that kind and generous Mr. Rainford that I loved so much, and whom I have not now heard of for many long—long years? Oh! I must find the solutions of all these mysteries—the answers to all these questions! Yes:—whatever be the result,—whatever be the consequences, I must tear away the veil which conceals so much of *the past* from my view!"

Charles Hatfield rose from his chair as he pronounced these last words with strong emphasis; and, beginning to pace the room in an agitated manner, he was repeating his impassioned determination to clear up all that was at present obscure and dark, when a remorse struck to his soul—producing a sensation that made him reel and stagger!

For had not he said to Lady Georgiana but a few hours previously—"*I now know that you are my mother—and I care to know nothing more! Never—never shall I question you concerning the past: the enjoyment of the present, and the hope which gilds the future—these are enough for me!*"

And had not he said to his sire—"*By what right do I dare to question the conduct of parents who have ever treated me so kindly? No—my dear father—I seek not any explanation at your hands—I am content to obey your wishes in all things.*"

Charles Hatfield was a young man of fine principles and noble feelings; and the solemn nature of those assurances, striking with suddenness and force upon his mind, filled him with bitter regret that he should have ever thought of violating such sacred pledges.

"No—no!" he exclaimed in an impassioned manner,—"I will not play so vile a part towards my parents—I will not render myself so little in my own estimation! Let me endeavour, rather, to fly from my thoughts—to crush, subdue, stifle this wicked curiosity which has seized upon me—let me indeed be contented with the happiness of the present and the hopes of the future, and not seek to tear away the veil that conceals the past! The secrets of my parents must be solemnly preserved from violation by my profane hands:—how dare I—presumptuous and wilful young man that I am,—how dare I institute a search into the private matters and histories of the authors of my being?"

Then—enraged and indignant with himself, in one sense, and satisfied with the timeous decision to which he had come in another—Charles Hatfield hastened to retire to his bed, where the exhaustion and fatigue of long and painful thought soon sealed his eyelids in slumber.

But will he succeed in crushing the sentiments of curiosity which have been awakened within him?—or is he already preparing the way, by this night's long meditation, for a vast amount of sorrow to fall upon and be endured by many?

CHAPTER CXXV.

THE PROJECTED RAILWAY COMPANY.

It was striking ten by all the clocks at the West End, on the morning of the day following the incidents which have occupied the five preceding chapters, when a cab drove with insane speed along a fashionable street, in that district of the metropolis just alluded to; and having stopped at the door of the best house in the said street, out leapt Mr. Bubbleton Styles, with a large roll of papers in his hand.

"I told you that you would not do it by ten o'clock," said this gentleman, addressing the reproach, accompanied by an angry look, to the cab-man.

"Not done it by ten, sir!" exclaimed the astonished and indignant driver: "vy, it 's on'y jest a-finished strikin' by every blessed clock in this here part o' the town."

"Just finished striking!" cried Mr. Styles, pulling out his watch: "it 's a minute and a quarter past ten, I tell you Here 's your fare."

"Two bob, all the **vay** from Crosby Chambers!" growled the man, turning the money over and over in a discontented fashion in the palm of his hand: "come, come—that won't jest do, if *you* please, sir. You promised me three bob if I brought you here by ten——"

"And you did not fulfil the bargain," sharply interrupted Mr. Styles, as he hurried up the steps of the large house and knocked at the door, which was immediately opened by a servant in such a splendid—outrageously splendid livery—that no other indication was required to distinguish the mansion of a *parvenu*—or, in other words, a vulgar upstart. "Is Mr. Podgson at home?" demanded Mr. Styles.

"Yes, sir. Walk in, sir. What name, sir?" were the hurried phrases which came from the domestic's lips.

"Vell, ain't ye a-going to pay us the extra bob, you gent?" cried the cab-man, as he mounted sulkily to his seat and drew a sack round his knees although it was in the middle of summer—so strong is the force of habit.

Mr. Styles deigned no reply to this derogatory adjuration; but, having given his card to the servant, he entered the great man's great house—while the cab drove away at a pace which seemed to intimate that the horse had become as sulky as its master.

The hall was very magnificent: but every thing was new. The statues—the vases—the marble pillars—the gilding on the doors that opened into the ground-floor apartments—even to the liveries of the servants lounging about,—all was new! Mr Styles was shown into a small parlour, where the pictures—the mirrors—the mantle ornaments—the furniture—the carpet—the hangings,—every thing there was likewise new. The paint scarcely seemed to have dried, nor the putty in the window-frames to have hardened.

In a few minutes the domestic, who had left Mr. Styles alone during that interval, returned with the intimation that Mr. Podgson would see him at once; and the railway projector was forthwith conducted up a wide and handsome marble stair-case—through a splendidly furnished ante-room — into a sumptuous apartment, where the great man was seated at a table covered with railway plans, letters, maps, newspapers visitors' cards, and Acts of Parliament, all scattered

about in a confusion that had been admirably well *studied* and *purposely arranged*.

The impression of the *newness* of every thing in the mansion was strengthened in the mind of Mr. Bubbleton Styles at every pace which he had taken from the hall-door into the room where he now found himself. It appeared as if Mr. Podgson—or Mr. Podgson's wife—or both, had endeavoured to the utmost of human power to crowd the apartments, the stair-cases, the landings, and, in fact, every nook and corner, with as many evidences of wealth as possible. Fine paintings by old masters, set in bran new glittering frames, were hung in the very worst lights, and without the least regard to their relative styles, colouring, or subjects. Each room had two or three time-pieces in it; and as they were not in accordance with respect to the hour, Mr. Bubbleton Styles's ideas of precision and punctuality received a severe shock when he heard ten o'clock proclaimed half-a-dozen different times during the first twenty minutes which elapsed after he first set foot in the mansion. In a word, the entire aspect of the house was a reflection of the vulgar, untasteful, and self-sufficient minds of the "stuck-up people" who, having grown suddenly rich, did not know how to render their dwelling elegant and comfortable without making it gaudy and ridiculously ostentatious in its appointments.

Mr. Podgson was a short, stout, thick-set man, with an enormous stomach, a very wide back, and little stumpy legs. His head seemed to be stuck on his shoulders without the intervening aid of any neck at all; and his features were coarsely ugly, and totally inexpressive of even the slightest spark of intelligence. His tongue appeared to be much too large for his mouth, his speech being remarkably disagreeable: indeed, his free utterance seemed to be impeded as if he were always sucking a large lollipop, or had an enormous quid of tobacco stuck in his cheek. When he walked, it was with the most ungainly waddle that can possibly be conceived; and his clothes, though no doubt made by a fashionable tailor, sate upon him just as if they had been thrown on with a pitch-fork. Had this man been invested with regal robes,—had he arrayed himself in the Tyrian purple which Rome's Emperors were wont to wear,—he could not have looked otherwise than a low vulgarian,—which he was!

We shall not pause for a moment to give any account of the rise of Mr. Podgson from obscurity to that renown which the sudden acquisition of great wealth established for him. Having sprung from the people, he turned against the people when he became a rich man. His property enabled him to *purchase* a borough; and the instant he found himself in Parliament, he joined the Protectionists—the bitter enemies of the popular cause!

Had this man taken his place amongst the Liberals, we should not have remembered his physical ugliness and his immense vulgarity of manners: we should have admired and esteemed him. But *he* to associate with aristocrats,—to squeeze that squat, podgy form amongst the "exquisites" and the "exclusives" of the West End,—to affect the most refined notions, and ape every thing fashionable,—for *him* to do all this—— Oh! it is really too ridiculous—too ludicrous—too absurd to permit us to keep our countenance when we think of it!

Persons cannot help being naturally vulgar, any more than they can help being ugly: but the vulgar should not thrust themselves into those scenes and spheres where they are certain to stand out in most ignoble prominency, thereby forcing on all beholders the effect of the ludicrous contrast;—neither should the ugly adopt such an awful swagger and assume an air of such insufferable self-complacency as to render themselves most disagreeably remarkable and conspicuous.

Mr. Podgson had acquired his immense wealth by railway speculations; and the disgusting sycophants who invariably attach themselves to rich men with weak minds, had nonsensically dubbed him the *Railway Lion*! Had they called him the *Railway Elephant*, in allusion to his unwieldy proportions—or the *Railway Bear*, in reference to his manners—or the *Railway Donkey*, in respect to his intelligence,—they would have been more faithful to truth. But the *Railway Lion* he was;—and it was now in the presence of this tremendous animal that Mr. Bubbleton Styles stood.

Without rising from his chair, Mr. Podgson, M.P., waved his hand with all the majesty of a stage-monarch; and as this gesticulation was intended to be a fashionable—no, a dignified mode of desiring Mr. Bubbleton Styles to be seated, Mr. Bubbleton Styles seated himself accordingly.

Mr. Podgson then stared very hard at his visitor; and this was the Railway Lion's method of intimating that he was "all attention."

"I believe, sir," said Mr. Styles, in a very polite and courteous manner—but without any thing like cringing servility,—"I believe, sir, that you last night received a letter from Alderman Tripes——"

"Oh! ah!" exclaimed Mr. Podgson, in his thick voice: "I remember! My very particular and intimate friend, Mr. Alderman Tripes, assures me in his communication that you have a famous project on the tappy——"

Mr. Podgson meant *tapis*—but could not precisely achieve the correct pronunciation.

"And that project I shall have much pleasure in submitting to you, sir," added Mr. Styles, proceeding to unfold the large roll of papers which he had brought with him.

"Well—I do n't mind—that is, to obleege you, I 'll just look over them," said Mr. Podgson, in an indifferent—careless way. "But," he added, glancing at the elegant watch which he drew with affected negligence from his waistcoat pocket, "I 've got an appointment at a quarter to eleven—and I must be punctual to the rendy-woo."

Mr. Styles assured the great man that he would not detain him a moment beyond the time named for the *rendez-vous*; and, spreading his plans and maps upon the table, the small speculator began to explain his objects and views to the large capitalist.

"Who 's the engineer?" enquired the latter: then, looking at the corner of the plan, and perceiving the name, he cried, "Oh! Dummerley—eh? Well—he 's a good man—a very good man! I was talking to Lord Noodleton the other day about him—Lord Noodleton and me are intimate friends, you know—very intimate——"

"His lordship has reason to be proud of your friendship, sir," observed Mr. Styles, adroitly availing himself of the opportunity to pay a compliment.

"Hem! well—Noodleton *does* seem grateful," said the Railway Lion, glancing complacently at one of his boots. "But, about this spec of your's, Mr. Styles? Shall you have a good list of Provisional Committee?"

"First-rate, sir—especially if you will condescend to head it," returned the small speculator with a bow to the great one.

"Well—we shall see!" exclaimed Mr. Podgson. "But first as to the probability of success? Let me just make a calculation or two—nothing is done without calculations; and I'm raythor quick at figures. Now, your capital is £8,000,000 in 400,000 shares. Good! Deposit, £2 2*s.* per share. Good again! But about the expenses and receipts—the outlay and the incomings, on which we may reckon with certainty? Let me see—twice two 's four—and twice four 's eight—and nine times nine 's eighty one—and eleven times eleven 's a hundred and twenty one—that gives us five hundred thousand there—then there 's two hundred thousand here——Well!" cried the great man, suddenly interrupting himself in the midst of calculations which, though they were as unintelligible as the Chinese language to Mr. Styles, it is to be hoped were a trifle more comprehensive to the gentleman who was making them in a musing, half-whispering tone, and counting mysteriously on his fingers at the same time:—"well!" he cried, suddenly desisting from the arithmetical process with the satisfied air of a man who had arrived at a conviction by means of the most subtle considerations,—"well, I *do* think it will succeed, Mr. Styles—and I——I ——"

"Will condescend to become our Chairman, Mr. Podgson?" said the other, finishing the sentence which the Railway Lion's extreme modesty and sensitive bashfulness had left thus incomplete. "I am well aware, sir,—and the public are well aware likewise—that you have entered into the grand affairs of the Railway World with no interested motive,—that you never took a single share with the idea of making it a means of gain! No—sir—your views have been wholly and solely to benefit your fellow countrymen. Indeed, you yourself have proclaimed as much in your place in the House of Commons—and the civilised world echoes with the mighty truth! You are a benefactor, sir—a philanthropist—a patriot; and no sordid ideas ever influenced you! It is upon this ground, and on this ground only,—without even venturing to hint that there will be five thousand shares reserved for the Chairman and Provisional Committee-men, and that they are certain to rise to a high premium the moment they are issued,—without daring to mention such a thing in *your* presence, sir—but relying solely on your known readiness to countenance every fair—legitimate—and honourable undertaking which promises to benefit our fellow-men and produce fifty per cent. profits,—'t is upon these grounds, Mr. Podgson, that I solicit you to become the Chairman of the Grand British Longitudinal Railway!"

Mr. Styles narrowly watched the effect which this magniloquent oration produced upon the Railway Lion; and as he beheld the fat, ignoble, vulgar countenance of that stupendous animal slowly expanding with satisfaction, he knew that he was as sure of nailing Mr. Podgson for a Chairman, as he was sure of seeing Captain O'Blunderbuss and Mr. Frank Curtis in the afternoon at three o'clock to partake of chops and sherry at Crosby Hall Chambers.

Nor was Mr. Bubbleton Styles mistaken. In as dignified a manner as it was in his nature to assume, and in as good English as it was in his power to employ, the great Mr. Podgson gave his assent to the proposition; and Mr. Styles was already in the midst of a set speech of thanks, when a pompous-looking livery-servant entered the room.

"Well, Thomas—what now?" demanded Mr. Podgson.

"Please, sir," answered the domestic, whose countenance denoted offended dignity and wounded pride, "there 's a troublesome gentleman down below who says he must and will have a hinterwiew with you, sir——"

"Must and will!" ejaculated the Railway Lion, sinking back in his chair with an amazement which could not have been greater had some one rushed in to tell him that the Chinese had invaded England and made a Mandarin Lord Mayor of London.

"Yes, sir—must and will!" groaned the horrified domestic.

"Well—I never heard such impudence in my life!" exclaimed Mr. Bubbleton Styles, affecting the deepest indignation—a little piece of hypocrisy which completely won the Railway Lion's heart.

"And does this *person*—for you was wrong to call him a *gentleman*, John," said Mr. Podgson, somewhat recovering from his stupefaction,—"does this *person*, who *must* and *will* see *me*—*me*, John—*me*, Mr. Styles,—does this *person*, I say, give his name or business?"

"Please, sir, he gave me his card," returned the flunkey; "and here it be."

The high and mighty Railway Lion took the pasteboard between the tips of his thumb and forefinger; and having glanced at it, he tossed it with sublime scorn into a waste-paper basket, exclaiming in his rough, disagreeable voice, "Mr. Clarence Villiers—eh? Well—I suppose I 'd better see him. Don't move, Mr. Styles: you shall just see how I 'll serve the insolent fellow that *must* and *will* have an interview with ME!"

The domestic retreated without turning his back upon his master,—or, in other words, stepped backwards to the door, as if he were quitting the presence of Royalty; and Mr. Styles again vented his well-affected indignation and surprise that "people should be so bold and inconsiderate as to obtrude themselves into the presence of Mr. Podgson in such a manner."

"Bold and inconsiderate!" repeated the Railway Lion. "It is owdacious and intolerable."

"Shameful!" cried Mr. Styles.

"Perfectly insupportable!" vociferated Mr. Podgson.

"Monstrous in the extreme!" exclaimed Mr. Bubbleton Styles, actually working himself up into a passion.

"But I 'll put a stop to it!" continued the Railway Lion, dealing a tremendous blow with his clenched fist upon the table: "I 'll bring in a Bill next Session, Mr. Styles, to protect public men from insolent intrusion!"

"It will serve the scoundrels quite right, my dear sir," responded the small speculator, approvingly.

"By Gad! I 'll pay the reskels off for it!" exclaimed the mighty man, who could command hundreds of thousands of pounds, but not the minutest fraction of his temper.

The door now opened again; and the pompous domestic, whose countenance was expressive of deep indignation, ushered in the reader's old friend—Mr. Clarence Villiers,—now a fine, handsome man, in the prime of life.

"Well, sir—and what do *you* want?" demanded Mr. Podgson, with all the overbearing insolence of a contemptible *parvenu*.

"In the first place, sir," replied Clarence, speaking in a firm but gentlemanly tone, and glancing towards the servant who lingered near the door, "I must take the liberty of advising you to recommend your lacqueys

to treat at least with respect, if not with courtesy, those persons whom business may bring to your house; for I can assure you that it required no ordinary forbearance on my part to restrain my hand from laying this cane across his shoulders."

"What, sir—you dare, sir——" stammered Mr. Podgson, his vast, ignoble countenance becoming the colour of scarlet.

"I dare chastise any one who is insolent to me, be he who or what he may, sir," answered Villiers, in a very significant way, and in so determined a tone, too, that the pompous domestic evaporated and the Railway Lion was struck speechless with amazement—for he felt as if he were literally bearded in his den! "Being myself a gentleman by birth and education, and I hope in manners and conduct, I am accustomed to treat my equals with courtesy and my inferiors with kindness; and I will tolerate insult from neither. But enough of that subject, Mr. Podgson," continued Villiers: "the object of my visit is soon explained. For many years I have enjoyed a confidential situation in the service of the Earl of Ellingham——"

"Oh! I really beg your pardon, Mr. Villiers!" exclaimed the Railway Lion, with a start as if the piles of a voltaic battery had suddenly been applied to his unwieldy carcase. "I was n't aware that you knew Lord Ellingham—or else——But pray take a chair, Mr. Villiers."

"Thank you, sir—I would rather stand," answered Clarence, in a cold—almost contemptuous tone; for he saw full well that this sudden politeness was not paid to *himself*, but to his connexion with aristocracy. "Yesterday afternoon, Mr. Podgson, I returned from the country by the Western Provinces Railway; and I was most anxious to reach London at the usual hour for the arrival of that particular train, inasmuch as the business which I had in hand for my noble employer was urgent and pressing. Conceive, then, my annoyance when the train stopped for three quarters of an hour at a midway station—and without any substantial reason. I remonstrated with the persons on duty at that station: I even alighted, and saw the clerk. Several other gentlemen, whose time was likewise precious, joined me in my endeavours to prevent farther delay,—but all in vain! And the excuse was *—that the train had to wait for a basket of fruit for Mrs. Podgson, the lady of the Chairman of the Company!* Now, sir, with all possible respect for the fair sex, I submit to you that it is too bad——"

"And pray, sir," interrupted the mighty Railway Lion, flying into a furious passion, "why should *not* my wife receive her fruit in time? By Gad! sir—the train should have waited an hour for it, had it been necessary; and it would have been as much as the situations of the guard and engineer were worth to have continued the journey without that basket!"

"Then you mean me to understand, sir," said Villiers, in a calm and gentlemanly tone which contrasted strongly with the insolent, overbearing manner of the purse-proud vulgarian-upstart,—"you mean me to understand that you approve of the conduct of your underlings in delaying a train containing upwards of a hundred persons, to most of whom time was precious, for the sake of a basket of fruit!"

"*Approve* of it!" cried the Railway Lion, astonished that any doubt should exist upon the point: "why—I *ordered* it! sir!"

"Then all I can say in comment upon such improper conduct is—that if the Government and the Legislature have permitted Companies to grasp these tremendous monopolies in order to use them as instruments of private convenience, without the slightest regard to the time or feelings of the public,—then, I for one," continued Clarence Villiers emphatically, "protest against so atrocious a despotism; and I begin to be ashamed of my own country, when I find it becoming the scene of a petty tyranny that would raise an outcry even in Russia or Austria."

"Oh! ho! the shoe pinches there—does it," cried Mr. Podgson, in the vulgar triumph effected by wealth over the popular interests. "I tell you what, sir—and I shall not attempt to disguise the matter:—we *monopolists*, as you call us, have got the railways in our own hands—and we mean to keep 'em—aye, and to do with 'em just as we like! Do you know how many hundred miles of railway I've got under my control? Ask the first person you happen to meet—and you 'll be sure to find out. Well—do you think I won't use my rights and privileges,—I may almost say *prerogatives*—eh, Mr. Styles?"

"Oh! decidedly, my dear sir," exclaimed that gentleman, approvingly.

"Well," resumed the Railway Lion,—"do you think I won't use my prerogatives as I choose and fancy? If Mrs. Podgson wants even so trifling a thing as a new-laid egg from any particular station, the train shall wait for it. Talk to me about people's time—what the devil do I care for it? People must put up with things as they find 'em. They can't help themselves: we 've knocked all the coaches off the roads—and you have no alternative but to go with us. But perhaps, when a train is late at starting, or when it is kept as it was yesterday, some of you knowing gentlemen will be after taking a post-chaise at the Company's expense? I 'd just advise you to do it! You 'd have to sue us for the amount—and we 'd ruin you in return. To recover five guineas you should have to pay as many hundreds in law costs. Why, sir—it is perfect madness to think of fighting great Public Companies;—and we 'll let the people know it too."

Having arrived at this liberal and enlightened determination, the Railway Lion ceased through sheer exhaustion,—the volubility of passionate declamation not suiting his guttural voice.

"Although, sir, I obtain at your hands no satisfaction for the infamous delay to which the train was subjected yesterday," said Mr. Villiers, who had listened with calm and gentlemanly attention to the furious mouthings of the upstart,—"I am nevertheless pleased that I should have taken the trouble to call upon you in reference to the matter. I have learnt a lesson which I had not expected. I find that the sudden acquisition of wealth is calculated to set a man who rises *from* the People, *against* the People; and that monopoly is a more tremendous engine of oppression in the hands of narrow-minded and self-sufficient persons than even its greatest haters could have conceived. I do not envy you your riches, sir—nor your sovereign sway over many miles of railroad—no, nor even the title with which a fulsome and contemptible flattery has invested you:—for the poorest mechanic who does his duty towards his fellow-creatures, is a worthier and more estimable being than you."

With these words—uttered not savagely, but in a tone of firm and measured reproach—Clarence Villiers retired from the presence of the Railway Lion, who appeared for the moment to have had "a calf's skin" thrown about "his recreant limbs," so astounded and amazed was he at the language which his visitor had *dared* to address to him.

"This is the most atrocious proceeding I ever knew in the whole course of my life!" at length exclaimed Mr. Bubbleton Styles, who in reality had been much amused by the scene.

"I suppose that the riff-raff—as I always call the People—will be telling us next that railways are public property!" cried Mr. Podgson: "but we'll show 'em the difference—eh, Mr. Styles?—won't we, Mr. Styles?"

And the Railway Lion condescendingly thrust his fingers in a jocular way into the small speculator's ribs;—and then the great man and the little man had a hearty laugh together—that of the former being in the boisterous "ho! ho! ho!" style, and that of the latter in the more respectful and submissive "he! he! he!" fashion.

Having got upon this very comfortable and pleasant understanding together, Mr. Podgson and Mr. Styles chatted for about a quarter of an hour respecting the new railway scheme: and the latter took his departure, highly delighted with the reception he had experienced and the success of his visit.

Punctually as the clock struck three that afternoon, did Captain O'Blunderbuss and Mr. Curtis present themselves at the office in Crosby Hall Chambers; and as the third stroke was proclaimed by the churches in the neighbourhood, they entered the speculator's private room, where that gentleman was seated at the table with his watch in his hand.

"Good!" exclaimed Mr. Styles, returning the watch to his pocket: "this is business-like—and I am well pleased. The chops, you perceive, are smoking hot—the sherry, I know, is first-rate."

Thus speaking, he did the honours of the table; and the two guests did honour to the meal. The chops speedily disappeared—so did a bottle of wine; and a second was already opened before a word had been uttered on business matters.

"Now, gentlemen," at length cried Mr. Styles; "I will give you a toast. Here 's the health of our Chairman—the Railway Lion!"

"No! you don't mean to say——" ejaculated Mr. Curtis.

"Hould your tongue, Frank—and let Misther Sthyles say whatever he chooses!" exclaimed the captain. "Dhrink the toast, man—and that 's all about it!"

"I can assure you, gentlemen," continued the promoter of the new concern, "that I have fulfilled the promise which I made you yesterday. Podgson is our's!"

"Hooray!" vociferated Frank Curtis.

"Hur-rah-ah!" thundered Captain O'Blunderbuss.

"It is indeed a subject for gratulation," said Mr. Styles. "The next point I wish to speak to you about is the prospectus, a proof of which I have received from the printer. It would have been all ready for issue by this time, only my interview with the Railway Lion was prolonged far beyond the hour at which I had expected to be back in the City again;—and you may be sure that I was in no hurry when engaged with *him*," added Mr. Bubbleton Styles, smiling significantly. "Here, you see," he continued, displaying the proof of the flaming prospectus which he had drawn up,—"here is the glorious document. It is sufficient to set the very Thames on fire. Never were such magnificent promises—never such brilliant hopes held out! And look—thirty-two names of the most eminent Aldermen, merchants, Common Councilmen, and gentlemen——"

"Why—half of them have got F.R.S. to the end of their names!" ejaculated Frank Curtis: "what the deuce does that mean? And, by Jove!" he cried, now completely beside himself with astonishment,—this *is* strange! Here's the '*Secretary, Francis Curtis, Esq., F.R.S., M.A., M.S.L.S., &c. &c.*' My dear friend Styles——"

"Patience—patience, Frank," said that gentleman, with bland complacency. "Those initials stand for various honorary distinctions which give respectability to the name. For instance, you are represented as being a *Fellow of the Royal Society*, a *Master of Arts*, and a *Member of Several Learned Societies*. God bless you, my dear fellow! even the very *et ceteras* have their weight in a Railway Prospectus."

"But I am nothing of all that you describe!" ejaculated Frank Curtis, surveying Mr. Styles with an expression of amazement that was quite ludicrous.

"I am well aware of that," answered the City gentleman, coolly: "neither are half the Aldermen or Common-Councilmen F.R.S.'s or any thing else—unless it is A.S.S.'s. But no Railway scheme can be got up without this kind of *gammon*—for that is precisely the word; and an Alderman who would send a poor devil to the treadmill for obtaining goods under false pretences if he only represented himself as Jones instead of Noakes, will himself assume any honorary distinction that is calculated to gull the public. Look at Alderman Higgs Higgs, for example's sake! Glance over the list of different Railway schemes—and amongst the Provisional Committee-men belonging to each you will see '*Higgs Higgs, Esq., Alderman, F.R.S., &c. &c.*' Even that consummate ass, Alderman Sun, has dubbed himself in a similar fashion;—and therefore I see no reason why Frank Curtis, Esq., or Captain Gorman O'Blunderbuss, should not be an F.R.S. likewise."

This explanation was highly satisfactory to the two gentlemen last mentioned; and on the strength of it they drank bumpers to the success of the projected enterprise.

"I have duly registered the Company," observed Mr. Styles; "and I have had an interview with Dummerley, the Engineer, this afternoon! Oh! I can assure you that I have not been idle. Dummerley is ready to swear that he has surveyed the whole line from the south of England to the north of Scotland——"

"But how is that possible?" demanded Frank, again lost in astonishment: for, crafty and cunning as he was in petty trickeries, he was altogether bewildered in the mazes of colossal swindles. "You only thought of the plan a few days ago—and Dummerley would not have even had time to travel the whole distance there and back post haste—much less to survey it leisurely."

"You are quite green in these matters, Frank," observed Mr. Styles.

"Green!" ejaculated Captain O'Blunderbuss: "be Jasus! the Imerald Isle itself is n't so green as my frind Frank in cer-r-r-tain respicts. But it 's afther enlightening him ye are, Misther Sthyles—and he 'll be all the betther for the taching."

"Dummerley is a regular good fellow, I can assure you," resumed the promoter. "'*You will be the Engineer*,' said I to him this afternoon: *I told Podgson that you would*.'—'*Most certainly*,' he replied.—'*And in case the Bill should be opposed in Committee, you will be ready to swear that you particularly surveyed the part of the line relative to which objections may be raised?*'—'*Oh! of course*,' was his answer.—'*And you will also swear that your plans are perfectly correct?*'—'*As a matter of course*,' he again replied.—'*Well, then*,' said I, '*here's a five pound note for you; and now fall to work as hard as you can to get all the plans up in such a business-like way that they may look legitimate*.'—Dummerley accordingly took himself off as happy as a prince; and thus every thing goes on completely in our favour. But it is now three minutes to five; and at five precisely I step into the Hackney omnibus at the Flower-Pot," added Mr. Styles, looking at his watch for the hundredth time during the last quarter of an hour.

Frank Curtis and Captain O'Blunderbuss took the hint and their departure; and the promoter of a scheme for raising millions treated himself with a sixpenny ride in an omnibus as far as Cambridge Heath Gate, in which suburban quarter this great man resided in a six-roomed house, including the kitchens.

CHAPTER CXXVI.

ELUCIDATIONS.

At the conclusion of the hundred and twenty-fourth chapter we asked whether Charles Hatfield would succeed in crushing the sentiments of curiosity that had been awakened within him?

Alas! no—it was impossible!

His better feelings, aroused by the startling remembrance of the assurances he had respectively given his father and mother, had for a few hours triumphed over that insatiable longing to penetrate into the mysteries of the past:—but when he again found himself alone in his chamber, in the silence of night, he could not subdue the thoughts which forced themselves upon him, and which were all connected with those mysteries.

Thus was it that we again find him pacing his chamber while others slept,—pacing up and down in an agitated and excited manner, and maintaining a desperate struggle within his own soul.

For the irresistible temptation which beset him, was to ponder once more and deeply on the incidents of his early days, and to endeavour to retrieve from the abysses of his memory any other recollections that might be slumbering there. For the sake of the pledge given to his mother—for the sake of the assurance made to his father, he strove,—yes—sincerely, ardently he strove—to vanquish that temptation: yet

he could not—human nature possessed not so grand a power;—he might have ruled his actions by his will—but his thoughts defied all controul.

Yielding, therefore, at length to their current, he was whirled along by the same eddying tide of reflections which had swept him through so considerable a portion of the preceding night;—and now the efforts of memory—by one of those superhuman strainings which, while they seem as if they must break the very fibres of the brain, also appear to evoke a sudden flash from the depth of some profound cerebral cell,—those powerful and painful efforts in a moment, as it were, established a connexion between the name of *Benjamin Bones* and *the murder of Tamar!*

Yes: Charles Hatfield suddenly became aware that the name and the incident were in some way associated:—and he necessarily supposed that, in his childhood, he had heard facts mentioned which had created that impression at the time, but the nature of which he could not now for the life of him recall to memory. This impression was probably vague even at the period when it was engendered; because Charles recollected full well that the utmost caution was adopted by those around him not to discourse upon the particulars of the foul murder in his presence, nor even to respond otherwise than evasively to the questions he put,—he being a mere child at the time.

As the young gentleman paced up and down, his mind labouring with the new reminiscence which had arisen within, it suddenly struck him that there were means of informing himself of all and every detail of that murder, whereof he at present entertained only a vague and general impression of its atrocity. His long absence on the continent had prevented him from ever, even accidentally, falling in with an English book of criminal annals, or a file of English newspapers, to which he might have referred, had the thought struck him so to do. But now what was to restrain him from making those searches which would throw every light on an occurrence of such fearful interest?

Scarcely was this idea conceived, when the means of instantaneously carrying it into execution suggested itself. For Charles Hatfield remembered that in the well-stored library of the mansion he had observed a complete set of the *Annual Register*, from the very origin of that useful work until the most recent date of its publication!

And now he trembled from head to foot—he literally gasped for breath, at the thought of being enabled to tear away the veil of mystery from at least one incident which was so materially connected with his childhood: for Tamar had been as a mother to him during the few months that he was in her care!

There was in his soul a deep and yet undefined presentiment that he stood on the threshold of strange discoveries—that important revelations were about to be made to him;—and, without being superstitious, he bent to the influence of this solemn but dim forecasting—this awe-inspiring but vague prescience.

Taking the lamp in his hand, he stole gently from his chamber—descended the wide and handsome staircase—traversed a long corridor, in the niches of which stood beautiful specimens of sculpture—and entered the spacious library.

On each side of the door was a marble statue as large as life; and the young man started—but only for a moment—as the white and motionless effigies stood out suddenly as if it were from the deep darkness which the lamp illumined. It was not that he had forgotten such statues were there—nor that he was positively frightened at their appearance:—but his soul was influenced by one of those presentiments which are of themselves superstitious in character—and moreover he was on the point of seeking information relative to the details of a foul and horrible murder.

Instantly recovering himself, and blushing at his fears, he advanced into the library, closing the door carefully behind him: then, approaching a particular range of shelves, he reached down the *Annual Register* for the year 1827.

In less than a minute he was seated at the table, with the book opened at the proper place before him;—and greedily—Oh! how greedily he plunged as it were into its contents.

But—great heavens!—why starts he thus? What discovery has he made?—what revelation has been afforded him?

He learns, with a frightful sinking of the heart, that Rainford was a highwayman—that he had been executed at Horsemonger Lane Gaol—that he had been resuscitated by some means or another with which the writer was unacquainted—that he had reappeared in London in the disguise of a Blackamoor—and that he had received the royal pardon for all his crimes. These details were incidentally given in the course of the narrative of the foul murder of Tamar, who was represented to have been Rainford's wife;—and now also Charles Hatfield discovered how terrific was the connexion between the name of Benjamin Bones and the assassination of that ill-fated daughter of Israel. Yes—and he perceived, too, that *Benjamin Bones* and *Old Death* were one and the same individual;—and he shuddered from head to foot as he perused—nay, almost rushed through the details of the crime which had been committed nineteen years previously in the subterranean cells belonging to a house in Red Lion Street, Clerkenwell!

But Charles Hatfield is not satisfied with what he has already *devoured*—for we can scarcely use the word *read*:—his curiosity to know more has become insatiable;—and guided by the hints and the observations occurring in the narrative of the murder, he refers to an earlier page in that volume, in order to obtain a full and complete insight into the trial and condemnation of Rainford—that Rainford whom he had loved so well!

The whole particulars were given in detail and with accuracy,—the robbery of Sir Christopher Blunt—the capture of Rainford by Dykes and his myrmidons in Lock's Fields—the trial—the condemnation—and the execution!

Charles read—read on with horrified feelings which often threatened to get the better of him;—but there was one point in the evidence which rivetted his attention. Dykes, the officer, in explaining the mode in which the highwayman had been taken into custody, used these words:—"*When I and my people gained admittance into the house in Brandon Street, the prisoner was in bed with his mistress, a Jewess.*"

"Then," thought Charles Hatfield immediately, "Tamar was not his wife! Ah! that is clear enough—although the narrative of the murder would imply otherwise. But the only inference that can be drawn from this discrepancy, is that the reporter of the assassination was delicately and judiciously sparing of the feelings of the Medina family—whereas, in the former case, it was absolutely necessary to record the evidence just as it was given. Poor Tamar!—no wonder that thy name is never mentioned now by those who once knew thee—no wonder that even thy

very sister, the Countess of Ellingham, seems to have forgotten thee!"

Thus, Charles Hatfield suddenly adopted the belief that Tamar was not Rainford's wife. Neither, indeed, was she at the time when Rainford was arrested by Mr. Dykes; and it never struck the young man that the matrimonial ceremony might have been performed between the period of Rainford's resuscitation and the murder of the Jewish lady. For when the nuptial blessing *was* performed in Paris, Charles—being then a mere boy—was not present at the proceedings which took place as privately as possible in the British Ambassador's Chapel. As for his suspicion that the Countess of Ellingham was ashamed to breathe the name of Tamar,—Oh! the reader may judge how erroneous was that belief! In her heart of hearts did the generous Esther treasure the image of that dearly-beloved sister;—and if neither herself nor her noble husband ever breathed her name, it was through kind feelings towards Mr. Hatfield and motives of delicacy in respect to Georgiana. But Charles, being as yet ignorant that his father and Rainford were one and the same person, could not possibly suspect the necessity for the exercise of such kind feelings on the one hand or such delicacy on the other.

"And thus," murmured Charles to himself, as he closed the book which had made such marvellous and horrifying revelations,—"and thus Thomas Rainford was a highwayman! The good—kind-hearted—generous man who loved me, was a felon—a criminal: he passed through the hands of the public executioner! Oh! my God—what dreadful things have I this night learnt!" he exclaimed aloud, pressing his hand to his forehead. "But how came this Thomas Rainford to have the care of me?—how was it that my parents could have left me so long in his hands—or at his disposal? Oh! no wonder—no wonder that Mr. de Medina and Esther should have charged me, when first they left me at school, never to mention the name of Rainford! And now how many gaps in the earliest portion of my reminiscences are filled up,—that absence of Mr. Rainford for several weeks, during which period I pined after him—that constant weeping of Tamar—then the removal to Mr. de Medina's house, and the sudden revival of joy which Tamar experienced there. But—a highwayman—a felon—a criminal! Oh! what awful mysteries envelop all this matter still! For the Earl of Ellingham was intimate with Rainford—and it was said, I remember, that at Mr. de Medina's death he left to this same Rainford a large fortune. A fortune to whom?—to the seducer of his daughter—to one who had passed through the hands of the public executioner! And Lord Ellingham was intimate with the man who seduced the sister of his intended wife;—and Esther was friendly likewise with him who ruined that sister. Gracious God! all this is most unaccountable—so unaccountable, that I am lost and bewildered! But most mysterious—ten thousand times the most mysterious of all these incidents, is that one grand fact to which I cannot but recur,—how could my parents have left me in the care of a highwayman! 'T is true that he received the royal pardon: but that pardon——Ah! the *Register* says that it was procured through the interest of Lady Hatfield—that Dykes, an officer of justice, was present at the time when that lady announced——Just heavens! a light breaks in upon my soul——Oh! no—no——and yet that resemblance ——May God have mercy upon me!"

And the young man, groaning bitterly—bitterly, in the anguish of his spirit, fell back in his chair—covering his face with his hands.

Yes—a light had indeed broken in upon him, elucidating a terrible mystery in a terrible manner! Lady Georgiana Hatfield had procured the royal pardon:—Lady Georgiana Hatfield must therefore have had strong reasons thus to exert herself in behalf of a convicted felon, who had passed through the hands of the hangman, but had been recalled to life and restored to the world in some wondrous manner. But of what nature were those potent reasons? Naturally did it strike Charles Hatfield that *love* must have been the cause;—and when he recollected the resemblance which existed between his own father and that Thomas Rainford who had once been his friend and protector, it flashed to his mind that he in whom Lady Hatfield had shown such tender interest—even to the compromising of her fair fame in the eyes of the world,—he for whom she had so far stepped aside from the precise course of female delicacy as to implore the royal pardon,—he it must be who was her husband!

Yes—yes: it was now as clear as the sun at noonday:—Mr. Hatfield and Thomas Rainford were one and the same individual,—and he—Charles Hatfield—was the son of a highwayman who had been tried—convicted—and ushered through all the ignominious ordeal of the scaffold!

For several minutes the young man sat motionless—crushed, stupefied, astounded by the appalling truth which he had elicited from his fatal investigations into the past:—for several minutes it must have been a mere balancing of chances whether he should awake from that dreadful reverie to the light of reason once more, or suddenly start up a howling, hopeless maniac!

But this latter condition was not to be his frightful doom. By degrees—by very slow degrees, he recovered so much of his self-possession and composure as to be enabled to look his misfortune in the face, and even fall into additional reflections on the subject.

"Yes—Thomas Rainford and Mr. Hatfield are the same individual—and *he* is my father! It was but little more than nineteen years ago when the trial and the ordeal of the gallows took place—and I am twenty-five! Was my mother—was Lady Hatfield my father's *wife* at that time? In other words—am I legitimate? '*As God is my judge*,' said my father yesterday, '*she has never been guilty of weakness or frailty.*' Then what am I to believe? That my father and my mother were married privately in an honourable manner—and that I was the offspring of that lawful union;—then, that my father deserted my mother, and became enamoured of Tamar, whom he took as his mistress;—and, lastly, that after Tamar's death, my parents were reunited! This—this must be the truth—and therefore my father deceived me not when he so emphatically proclaimed my mother's virtue and my legitimacy. But—Oh! my God!—well might he have said that *the weightiest reasons had alone induced him and my mother to practise a deception towards myself and the world in respect to the degree of relationship in which I really stood with regard to them!* Yes—for the world perhaps dates the marriage of my parents only from the time when they were reunited a few years after Tamar's death:—and hence the necessity of calling me their *nephew!* I understand it all now—Oh! yes, I understand it all too

well! I am legitimate—but I am the son of a highwayman: my God! how bitterly—bitterly is my curiosity punished this night!"

And now the young man sobbed as if his heart would break.

Whither had flown his dreams of ambition?—where now were his hopes of emulating the career of His Royal Highness, the Prince of Montoni?

"The son of a highwayman!"—these were the words that fell ten times in a minute from his tongue:—that was the idea which now sate, dominant and all-absorbing, but like a leaden weight, upon his soul.

And did he loathe his father?—did he curse the author of his being?

No—no: a thousand times, *no!* Deep—profound—immeasurable was the pity which he entertained for his sire;—and if he loathed any thing, it was his own existence—if he cursed aught, it was his own being!

For, oh! terrible indeed was it for that fine young man, of lofty principles, generous nature, and soaring aspirations,—terrible was it for *him* to receive a blow so sudden—a shock so rude—a rebuff so awful!

Better—better far had it been for him to remain in ignorance of his parentage,—still to have looked on Mr. Hatfield as his uncle, and on Lady Georgiana as his aunt,—rather than have learnt a secret which only prompted him to fathom collateral mysteries and clear up associated doubts! For the result of those researches was the elucidation which had flashed on him with almost lightning effect,—blasting—searing scorching!

"Accursed book!" he suddenly exclaimed, hurling the *Annual Register* across the apartment, as if the volume were a living thing, and endowed with human feelings, so as to be susceptible of the venting influence of his rage.

But in the next moment he reflected that no trace of an untimely or mysterious visit to that library must remain,—that none must suspect his pryings or his researches: for not for worlds—no, not for worlds—would he have his father or mother know that he had made the discoveries which characterised this memorable night! He accordingly rose from his seat—raised the volume from the floor—and turned to the book-case to replace it.

This act, so simple in itself, was destined to lead to a circumstance thenceforth influencing the entire destiny of Charles Hatfield: for as he thrust the volume back into the place on the shelf whence he had taken it, he heard a sharp abrupt sound, like the click of a lock.

He was in that humour when every incident, however trivial, was calculated to assume an importance in his imagination; and, standing on a chair, he proceeded to examine the wainscotting at the back of the shelves—for which purpose he removed several of the books. To his surprise, he observed a small aperture formed by the opening of a sliding panel, and which revealed a recess in the wall of about a foot square,—the violence with which, in his excitement, he had thrust the book on the shelf, having acted on the secret spring whereby the panel was fastened.

Under ordinary circumstances, Charles Hatfield would have immediately closed the recess, in which he beheld a small leathern case and a packet of letters,—in the same way as he would have abstained from reading a manuscript lying on a desk or evidently left about through inadvertence. But, on the present occasion, he was not his own master:—his honourable feelings were triumphed over by emotions of the most painful nature;—and it was impossible, in this state of mind, that he should avoid catching at any circumstance savouring of mystery,—every such circumstance apparently linking itself with his own concerns.

Thus, obedient to an impulse which he could not controul, he seized the leathern case and the documents as if they were a glorious prize; and, returning to his seat, proceeded to examine them.

The leathern case contained a roll of letters, and other documents *tied round with a piece of riband so faded that it was impossible to determine what its colour might have originally been.* The writing in the papers was, however, still completely legible—the leathern case, and the total absence of damp in the little recess, having preserved them for a period of half a century!

Wrapped round the roll of papers in the case, was a letter, addressed to the Earl of Ellingham; and it instantaneously struck Charles that it was in the handwriting of his father—Mr. Hatfield! By the comparative darkness of the ink, it was of a far more recent period than the documents which it accompanied;—but the precise time when it was written did not immediately appear, no date being attached to it.

Without pausing to reflect upon the impropriety of violating the sanctity of correspondence concealed with so much precaution in a secret recess,—but carried away by the influence of those feelings which we have above attempted to describe,—Charles Hatfield devoured the contents of this letter; and though they are already familiar to the reader, yet for the purposes of our narrative we quote them again:—

"I have sent you the papers, my dear brother—for so I shall make bold to call you still,—to convince you that I did not forge an idle tale when we met last. Whatever your motive for abandoning me in my last hours may be, I entertain no ill feeling towards you: on the contrary, I hope that God may prosper you, and give you long life to enjoy that title and fortune which in so short a time will be beyond the possibility of dispute.

"I had promised to leave behind me a written narrative of my chequered and eventful history for your perusal: but—need I explain wherefore I have not fulfilled this promise?

"T. R."

"His brother—his dear brother!" gasped Charles Hatfield, as the letter dropped from his hands; but his eyes remained intently fixed upon it: "his brother!" he repeated. "My God! then am I the nephew of the Earl of Ellingham?—am I the cousin of Lady Frances, whom I already love so well? But——gracious heavens!" he ejaculated, as another and still more thrilling idea flashed to his mind: "if Mr. Hatfield be indeed the brother of the Earl of Ellingham—as he assuredly is,—then is he the elder brother! And if the elder brother, he himself should be the bearer of the title—and I—I should be a Viscount! But—ah! perhaps my father is the illegitimate offspring of the late Earl—and that this is the reason wherefore the family honours and estates have devolved upon the younger brother! And yet—what mean these words?—*'give you long life to enjoy that title and fortune which in so short a time will be beyond the possibility of dispute!'* Oh! here again is some dreadful mystery: just heavens! what a fated—doomed family is our's! Doubt—uncertainty—secrecy characterise all its history:—at least the experience of the last two days would lead me so to believe!"

At this moment the young man's eyes fell upon the roll of paper which he had taken from the leathern case: and with feverish impatience—yet still with

care, inasmuch as the documents were as fragile with old age as tinder—he proceeded to examine them.

And, oh! how deep—how intense suddenly became the interest with which he now perused the diary and the letters of the unfortunate Octavia Manners! His excitement was stilled—his impatience was subdued: a deadly pallor succeeded the hectic flush upon his cheeks;—still and motionless sate he, his eyes devouring the contents of those important papers!

The frightful treachery of Old Death towards his half-sister, the beautiful but ill-fated Octavia, was revealed step by step;—but there was likewise an elucidation which touched a chord that thrilled to the inmost recesses of young Hatfield's heart,—and this was the fact that Octavia was wedded by the late Earl of Ellingham previous to the birth of the child! Yes—there was the marriage-certificate: there, too, was the certificate of the child's baptism;—and that child was therefore, at its very birth, the heir to the proud title and the entailed estates of a mighty Earldom!

Here let us pause for a few moments to afford an explanation which now becomes necessary.

If the reader will refer to the forty-seventh chapter of this narrative, he will find recorded so much of the history of poor Octavia Manners as Arthur himself was acquainted with. In relating that history to Lady Georgiana Hatfield, Arthur had stated that Octavia fled away from her vile half-brother's house the very day after her disgrace was consummated. "For several months no trace was discovered of her: it was feared she had committed suicide." During that interval the first Countess of Ellingham died. At length the Earl (Arthur's father) accidentally discovered that Octavia was living, and that she was in a way to become a mother. "He hastened to the miserable garret which she occupied, and found her in the most abject state of poverty—endeavouring to earn a subsistence with her needle." All his affection for her revived, with renewed vigour; and his heart smote him with remorse for the appalling treachery which he had perpetrated towards her. He saw her ruined in health, character, and spirits,—ruined by him,—still surpassingly beautiful, but only a wreck of what she once was;—he saw all this—and he was horror-struck at the effects of his crime! He threw himself on his knees—he offered her every possible reparation which it was in his power to make;—and then—for the sake of the child which she bore in her bosom—she said, "If you would prove your contrition, my lord—if you would impart one single gleam of hope, however faint, to my soul—you will make me your wife! It is not for myself that I demand this boon at your hands,—for a boon it becomes when the violater espouses the violated,—yes, a boon in the estimation of the world, though only an act of justice in the eyes of God! No—it is not for myself: 't is for our child! Think not that I—the sister of the marine-store dealer—shall ever assume the name or adopt the rank of Countess of Ellingham! Let our union be secret—only let it take place at once, so that our child may be legitimate!" Thus spoke Octavia Manners on that occasion; and the Earl of Ellingham, her violater, consented to all that she asked. They were married with so much privacy that even Miranda—the faithful gipsy girl who had formed so strong an attachment to Octavia—remained ignorant of the important occurrence. But the very next day Octavia fled! No affection had she for the noble who had ruined her—who had been the cause of her severance from the object of her first and only love: she had only asked him to marry her for the sake of the honour of their child's parentage—and, the ceremony being performed, she withdrew herself into the strictest solitude and obscurity, to brood over her woes and sufferings in secret!

Such was the substance of that portion of Octavia's own diary which revealed to Charles Hatfield the fact that the injured girl was indeed the Countess of Ellingham when her child was born! And that child's career could be traced—yes, satisfactorily traced—step by step, by means of the papers which the young man had taken from the leathern case, and the packet of letters that he had likewise found in the recess;—and it was evident, beyond the least possibility of doubt, that the individual whom the world had known as Thomas Rainford, and whom it now knew as Mr. Hatfield,—it was clear, even beyond the remotest ground of suspicion to the contrary, that this individual was the rightful Earl of Ellingham!

Recollect, too, reader, that Charles Hatfield had become firmly impressed with the belief that he was the *legitimate* offspring of his parents;—and now, therefore, conceive the wild enthusiasm of his delight, when he came to the conclusion that he was in reality a Viscount by present rank, and had an Earldom in the perspective!

Forgotten was the fact that had ere now stunned and stupefied him,—the fact that his father was the notorious highwayman, Thomas Rainford:—he thought of that no more, in the delirium of his rapture at the idea of having a noble title within his reach. But had he not, on the previous day, assured Lady Frances Ellingham that he envied only the greatness which had made itself, and not that which was obtained by the accident of birth? Yes: and at the time he conscientiously believed that he spoke his own thoughts correctly. Now, however, that the temptation appeared to be within his reach, it possessed charms and attractions of irresistible power!

Recalling to mind the sounding titles of the object of his admiration and heroic worship, he began to fancy that *the Right Honourable the Earl of Ellingham* was not comparatively so very insignificant, even when uttered after the swelling appellations of *His Royal Highness Field Marshal the Prince of Montoni, Captain-General of the Castelcicalan Army, and Heir-apparent to the Grand Ducal Throne.*

Suddenly, as it were, we behold the young man, whose sentiments were so noble and generous while he deemed himself to be a mere civilian having every exertion to make in order to rise to eminence,—suddenly we behold him seized with an insatiable ambition, now that a coronet appeared to be actually within his reach.

But did he contemplate the immediate adoption of measures to force his father to wrest the title and estates of the Earldom from Arthur? We know not all that passed through the mind of Charles Hatfield on this fatal night:—we can, however, aver that having fully perused the valuable documents which had made to him such important revelations, he did not restore them to the secret recess where he had found them, but secured them about his own person.

Previously to quitting the library, he closed the sliding panel, and replaced the *Annual Register* in such a manner that the shelf did not appear to have been disturbed.

The west-end clocks were striking three, and the light of a July morning was streaming through the

windows of the mansion, when Charles Hatfield retired to his own chamber. His first care was to consign to his writing-desk the documents and letters which he now considered to be the arbiters of his destiny; and, this being performed, he sought his couch.

But slumber would not visit his eyes:—myriads of conflicting ideas were in his brain. He felt that he had to play the hypocrite—to keep a bridle on his tongue—to controul every look, and measure every word, until the time should come for proclaiming all he knew. For the present he would not distress his parents by allowing them even to suspect that the things which they considered to be such profound secrets, were no longer so to him. No:—he would endeavour to appear the same gay—frank—confiding—affectionate Charles Hatfield that he hitherto had been!

These were amongst the principal reflections which chased sleep from his pillow until long past four o'clock;—and when at length his heavy lids were weighed down through sheer exhaustion of the mental and physical energies, his slumber was agitated with wild and varying visions, and he awoke unrefreshed, and still suffering with the fatigue of his long vigil.

CHAPTER CXXVII

THE WANDERERS.

The night on which Charles Hatfield made the important discoveries detailed in the preceding chapter, was marked by other events of a scarcely less interesting nature.

It was about eleven o'clock—the weather was intensely warm—and not a breath of air agitated the foliage on the way-side, as two females toiled slowly and painfully along the high road between Dartford and Shooter's Hill.

One was a hideous old harridan whose years could not have been less than sixty-two or sixty-three; and yet, though her form—once tall, symmetrical, and on a large scale—was bowed with age and sufferings, she still possessed considerable physical energy. The countenance was weather-beaten and tanned to such an extreme that, had she been dressed in male attire, no delicacy nor feminine cast of features would have betrayed her real sex: her short grizzled locks were confined by an old kerchief wound round her head in a gipsy fashion;—and her garb denoted the utmost penury and distress. Not only did she leave upon the mind the disagreeable impression of revolting ugliness;—but her look was sinister and repulsive. The wrinkles beneath her eyes and about her closely compressed lips, bespoke a ferocious and determined character,—a soul resolute and nerved to every evil purpose;—and the acute observer might also mark in that countenance traces of those stormy and impetuous passions which had influenced her earlier years.

Her companion was a young woman of about nineteen; and though she was dressed almost as wretchedly as the old harridan, yet how different was the form which those rags covered! For her figure, though full even to a maturity beyond her years, was exquisitely modelled,—a waist not ridiculously small, but still small enough to develop in all their voluptuous proportions the swelling hips and fine bust. Clothed in stockings covered with darns, and shod with large clumsy shoes, were limbs and feet that for symmetry might have been envied by a queen;—and, as if anxious in the depths of her penury to preserve her charms as completely as possible, she wore an old pair of gloves upon her beautifully sculptured hands. Then her face, though sun-burnt was of a beauty which even an anchorite must have turned to admire,—yet a beauty of a bold and masculine style, and stamping her rather as a very handsome than as a very lovely woman. Her features were of the Roman cast,—the strong facial aquiline denoting a voluptuous and profoundly sensual disposition;—her fine large grey eyes looked boldly and wantonly from beneath dark brows majestically arched and almost meeting between the temples, and above which rose the high, straight, wide forehead, crowned with intelligence. Her hair was of a dark brown and singularly luxuriant, glossy, and silken;—and it was evident that not even the bitter miseries of poverty rendered her indifferent to the care which that glorious covering required to maintain its splendour unimpaired. Her mouth was small,—the upper lip thin—the lower one fuller, but not pouting;—her teeth, the least thing large, were nevertheless perfectly regular and of pearly whiteness;—and her chin was prominent, but well rounded. The general expression of her countenance was indicative of strong passions and fierce desires—great resolution of purpose—and something approaching even to a resolute sternness of purpose, amounting almost to implacability. She was not above the middle height; and her carriage was more commanding than graceful:—at the same time, it would have struck a beholder that were she attired in a befitting manner, her gait and gestures would have been characterised by nothing positively inelegant.

The reader will perceive that great, in many respects, was the contrast between the mother and daughter—for in such close relationship did the two females stand to each other: but in some points there was a marked resemblance. For instance, the countenances of both indicated strong passions and indomitable resolution;—both were totally devoid of all moral principle, though they could simulate the sanctity of anchorites to suit their purposes or serve their interests;—and both could be implacable enemies, while friendship was a mere name with them at which their lips would curl into a sneer.

In spite of her natural energies and the somewhat substantial remains of physical strength, the old woman dragged herself slowly and painfully along the road towards London; while her daughter exhibited scarcely less evident symptoms of fatigue—approaching almost to total exhaustion.

"Perdita," said the harridan, suddenly breaking a silence that had been of long duration,—"Perdita," she repeated, "we cannot reach London this night: it will be impossible,—I feel it will be impossible."

"Then we must lie down by the road-side and perish with hunger," answered the young woman, who bore, it seemed, the singular Christian name of *Perdita*.

We have above spoken of contrasts and resemblances in respect to these two females, who are destined to play no unimportant part in the forthcoming chapters of our narrative;—but we must pause to observe that it would be impossible to conceive a greater discrepancy in tones than that which marked the voices of mother and daughter.

The voice of the old woman was masculine—hoarse—disagreeable—and grating to the ear; and although she spoke the English language with the most grammatical punctuality, and there was nothing positively

vulgar in her manner of speech, yet the impression it seemed calculated to produce upon a stranger was singularly unpleasant. On the other hand, the whole sphere of harmony has known nothing more melodious than the voice of Perdita,—a voice which was capable of many modulations, each characterised by a charm peculiar to itself; for whether she were speaking in indignation—or in softness,—in outbursting passion—or in dogged ill-humour,—still were the tones of that voice metallic, rich, and flowing.

"The heartless wretches!" exclaimed the old woman, again breaking an interval of silence,—"to thrust us on shore at Deal with only a shilling in our pockets!"

"This is not the least hardship we have ever endured, mother," said Perdita, rather in a tone of remonstrance than consolation. "For my part, I have scarcely ever seen any thing but privation and misery——"

"You ungrateful wretch!" ejaculated the harridan, furiously. "When I had but a morsel of bread to give you, did I ever take a portion for myself! For you, Perdita," she continued, speaking in a milder and even more tender tone,—"for you I have gone through sufferings unknown and unheard of in this country,—for you have I toiled beneath the scorching South Australian sun of summer, and amidst the noisome damps of a South Australian winter! Yes—for years and years have I toiled on—toiled on, that your beauty might not be impaired by want or privation,—at least that you might endure as little want and privation as possible."

"Well—well," cried the young woman, somewhat softened by her mother's words; "do n't let us look back to the past. We are now in England—and you say that we are not many miles from London. Good! We will endeavour to sustain each other's courage and strength to reach the fine city where you hope to change our rags into silks and satins, and fill our empty pockets with gold."

"Yes—and you shall see whether I have deceived you, Perdita!" exclaimed the harridan, in a tone partaking of enthusiasm. "Nearly nineteen years have elapsed since I last saw the mighty metropolis; and, unless its people be much changed, there is a fortune to be made by an experienced woman and a beautiful girl, leagued together."

"And you are the experienced woman, mother?" said Perdita, actually seeking a compliment—for inordinate vanity was amongst her failings.

"Yes—and you are the beautiful girl—and you know it," returned the old harridan. "Being of accord as we are together, it is impossible that we can fail to accomplish our grand designs. Why was it that I implored you not to accept the offers of marriage which needy settlers made you in New South Wales? Because your charms can command thousands of pounds in London; whereas, in that frightful colony, all you could have hoped to gain was what is termed '*a comfortable position.*' And to one possessing your notions—your pride—your strong passions—your soaring disposition,—aye, and to one endowed with your loveliness too,—a mere *home* is not sufficient. You require luxuries—although you have never yet tasted them,—fine clothes—although you have never yet worn them,—a splendid equipage, although you have never yet known the use of one! It was for this that I brought you to England,—it was for this that I besought you to contract no marriage in the colony,—it was for this that I conjured you to abstain from any connexoin that might become permanent!"

"I am well aware of your motives, mother," said Perdita. "In a word," she added, with a strange mixture of pride and irony, "you considered my beauty to be more marketable in London than in New South Wales. And after all that you have told me of the English people and England's capital, I am inclined to believe that you have not misled me. But supposing that I contract some splendid marriage in London—that I find my way into the highest circles—and that I become the *belle* of the great city,—will there not be the constant risk—the ever imminent chance of falling in with the officers of some of those regiments which have returned from Sydney or Botany Bay——"

"I see now that you scarcely understand me—that we do not altogether comprehend each other!" interrupted the old woman, impatiently. "There is no need for you to count only on the chance of making a good match: 'tis indeed far more probable that you may ensnare some young gentleman of birth, family, and fortune,—or some old voluptuary of immense wealth,—and there is more to be gained as the mistress of one of these, than as a wife. Do not marry, Perdita—do not dream of marriage: remain independent—and the moment you have ruined one lover, you can take another. There—that is plain speaking; and now do you comprehend me?"

"Perfectly," answered the young woman: then, under the influence of the wanton thoughts which rushed to her imagination, she said, "Yes—I comprehend you, and I confess that your views now become more suitable to mine. I could not chain myself to one individual, with any hope of being faithful to him:—*love* is a passion which will never obtain over me that influence which it so often exercises over the weak, the simple-minded, or the infatuated."

"Be not too confident on that point, Perdita," said the old woman. "In Sydney and Botany Bay your amours were only the result of a warm temperament;—for carefully as I watched over you——"

"Now, mother, let us have no moral teachings from your lips!" exclaimed the young woman, in an imperious and authoritative tone; "for had you been so very immaculate yourself, I should never have beheld the light of day, neither would you have passed some eighteen or nineteen years of your life in a penal colony. And such a colony as it is! Why—let a pretty girl be hemmed in by all the precautions which a parent can imagine, circumstances must inevitably lead her astray in South Australia! And you,—*you*, who know all this so well,—can you wonder if I were seduced at the early age of thirteen, and if from that period until your pardon arrived and we embarked to return home, I have not failed to indulge my fancy without hesitation? On the one side I obeyed your instructions,—I accepted no offer of marriage, and lived with no man permanently as his mistress: but, on the other, I hesitated not to intrigue with the gayest and most dashing officers——"

"Enough! enough!" ejaculated the mother, who, bad as she herself was, felt a cold chill come over her at this open, audacious, and unblushing avowal of her daughter's depravity,—a depravity that was not however unknown, either in circumstances or extent, to the old woman. "Give me your arm, Perdita—assist me to mount this hill,—for I am ready to drop. There! you are a good girl! Ah! Perdita—I was once young and beautiful as you are now,—well-formed too, and

elegant in carriage! I was a lady in every sense of the word—as far as outward appearance and manners went. But now—oh! how altered I am! My toothless mouth was once filled with pearls as white as your's—my bust was as voluptuous and as firm—my figure was as upright—my feet and ankles as delicate—and my step as light! Ah! that was many—many years ago, Perdita!"

"Shall you not be glad, mother, to visit London again?" demanded the young woman.

"Yes—for 't is the only city in the world where adventuresses like ourselves—beggars, I may say—are certain to succeed. Oh! you have no idea of what a pandemonium is the great metropolis of England!" exclaimed the harridan, with strange emphasis. "'T is a furnace in which millions of passions, interests, and ideas are ever boiling—boiling madly and as if in rage: 't is a scene of immense iniquity and of boundless luxury—of wondrous intrigues and ineffable enjoyments."

"Oh! how I long to plunge headlong into that fine city!" cried Perdita. "It is a vortex that will suit my disposition well."

"Aye—and play your cards as I shall prompt," observed her mother; "and you will speedily be the mistress of all the pleasures which London can afford. But, oh! I am ready to drop with weariness—I am dying with hunger and thirst, Perdita: and not a penny have we to purchase a morsel of bread——"

"I see a strong light yonder—there, mother—in that bye-lane," said the young woman. "Shall we repair in that direction—perhaps it may be a hospitable cottage——"

"No: 't is a gipsy's encampment—I can distinguish the cart and the tent," interrupted the old wretch. "But the gipsy race are good and generous; and they will not refuse us a morsel of bread and a cup of water."

The two wanderers accordingly proceeded towards the strong light which Perdita had first discovered, and which proved to be, as her mother had surmised, the fire of a gipsy encampment situate in a bye-lane. As they approached, they observed a female form crouching over the blazing faggots, in spite of the intense sultriness of the weather, and apparently watching with attention a huge cauldron that was suspended above the fire in the usual gipsy fashion. When Perdita and her mother drew nearer still, they obtained a more perfect view of that female, whose countenance was thrown out in strong relief by the

lurid flame; and they now perceived that she was a very old woman, bent down with the weight of years, but having nothing in her appearance of that weird-like character which so generally marks gipsy women of advanced age. She seemed to be all alone in the encampment at the time;—and her attitude, which had at first struck the wanderers as being that of a person watching the culinary process, now assumed a more thoughtful and serious character.

"Good dame," said Perdita, "we are sinking with fatigue and famishing through want; and we crave your hospitality."

"Ah! a woman as old as myself doubtless?" exclaimed the gipsy-crone, surveying Perdita's mother with attention. "Come—sit down—you are welcome—you are welcome! I am all by myself for the present: my people have gone to a short distance—on business of their own—but *that* is of no matter to you. Young woman," she continued, addressing herself to Perdita, "you are strong and active: I was once so myself! Ascend into the cart—you will find wooden bowls and spoons—and help yourselves to the contents of the pot. There will be enough for my people when they come back."

The old gipsy spoke in so strange—vague—and peculiar a manner that the wanderers were both impressed with the idea that she must be in her dotage; and the rapid look of intelligence which passed between mother and daughter, showed that they had simultaneously entertained the same idea. Perdita, however, hastened to obey the directions which she had received; and, returning with the utensils, she and her mother commenced a hearty meal upon the broth and soddened poultry and meat which the cauldron contained.

While the two wanderers were thus employed, the old gipsy began rocking herself to and fro, and uttering her thoughts aloud. First she addressed herself to her guests: then, by degrees forgetting their presence, and becoming more and more enshrouded in the mists of her own failing mind, she still continued her musings in an audible tone.

"An old woman and a young one—eh?—then you are doubtless mother and daughter? Ah! I wish that I had a daughter so comely to look upon as yourself, my pretty dear;—but I should not like her to be quite so bold in her demeanour as yourself. You are very lovely: and yet methinks you are scarcely as virtuous as you are beautiful. Oh! now the red blood mantles in your cheeks: but do not take offence. 'T were a sorry deed on my part to offer insult to those who share my hospitality. Yes—I wish that I had a daughter, who would love me in my old age. My own people neglect me: they leave me alone—alone—for many long hours together;—and then I have no other companions but my own thoughts. And strange companions are they at times, I can assure you. Let me see—what was I thinking of when you came up? Oh! I remember now:—yes—I remember now. Fifty years ago—no—it was about forty-nine, I nursed a male child,—the child of Octavia Manners and the Earl of Ellingham. I do not mean this present Earl:—no—no—'t was the late Earl. The child had a peculiar mark on the right arm: 't was near the shoulder. Then I was turned away by the dead Octavia's half-brother, Benjamin Bones—a horrible man, who knew no pity. But the child again fell in my way—Egyptia had it in keeping. Ah! I loved that child—I would have adopted it as my own. For seven years did I retain the boy with me—the dear boy, whom methinks I see now. But, the wretches—they sent him away: they lost him in Winchester—cast him off purposely on the wide world. Oh! how I regretted that dear, flaxen-headed boy! They told me he was dead—and I mourned for him. Years and years passed away: heaven only knows how many—I cannot stop to count them now. But it must have been twenty or twenty-one years ago that I met the flaxen-haired boy. Boy! no—no—he was a man—a fine, dashing, jovial, rollicking man;—yes—and, woe is me—a highway robber!"

By this time the two wanderers, who had not lost a single word of all that the gipsy crone was thus uttering aloud in her musings, became interested in the wild, yet still connected history which she was relating,—a history that was revealed by the development of her own thoughts and reminiscences, and which she seemed to experience a "pleasing pain" in reciting. But it was the elder of the two listeners—Perdita's mother—who paid the deepest and most particular attention to the crone's audible meditations, and who seemed to experience a presentiment that they were furnishing a subject which might be turned to her own and her daughter's advantage.

"Yes—yes," continued the old gipsy, "we met in Hampshire—and circumstances revealed him to me. The mark on the arm then proved that it was indeed he! I told him the history of his birth—and he expressed his intention to visit London and seek to recover from Old Death—that was the villain Benjamin Bones—the money of which he had been plundered. Alas! poor Tom Rain—you went to the great city to meet your doom! You were captured—you were tried—you were cast for death—and you were hanged on the roof of Horsemonger Lane gaol. Yes—I saw it all with my own eyes: for I was amidst the crowd—drawn thither by God alone can tell what strange infatuation! And if in the deep anguish that rent my heart, there was a single gleam of joy—a single gleam, however faint—'t was to mark how boldly you died, my brave Tom Rain! Died—died!" exclaimed the old gipsy, now speaking with thrilling emphasis: "no—no—you did not die! Methought, however, as did the rest of the multitude, that you were indeed no more: and for years—for many years—for nineteen years have I held that same belief. And during that interval, oft—oft have I thought of thee,—thought of thee as once I knew thee, Tom Rain—a flaxen-headed boy, and before thou didst bear that name of Rainford! Yes—I have thought of thee—aye, and wept bitterly, bitterly. But—am I dreaming—am I becoming crazy?—or is it indeed true that ten days ago, when in London, I saw thee—yes, thee—alive and in the full enjoyment of health and wealth? Ah! I recollect—'t was not a dream: no—no—I saw thee,—and I recognised thee, too, disguised though thou wert. For not even the hair dyed black—nor the change effected by time—nor the plain and unassuming garb,—no—naught could deceive me, Tom Rain, in respect to you! I beheld you in a carriage, with your half-brother the Earl of Ellingham, and with a fine young man whose countenance was of glorious beauty."

These words suddenly made Perdita as attentive and interested a listener as her mother, both having by this time finished their hearty meal.

"Yes—a young man divinely handsome," continued the gipsy-crone, rocking herself to and fro; "with a countenance that would ensnare any young female heart! And I made enquiries—and I learnt that my Tom Rain was now Mr. Hatfield, and that this young

man was his nephew. Oh! I know it was Tom Rain: but how came he thus alive?—by what means was he resuscitated?—who snatched him from the grave? No—no—I am not a drivelling fool—a dreaming idiot, as my people said: I know full well that it was he—I could not be mistaken;—and yet, 't is impossible to say how he was snatched from death! He is married, too—married to Lady Georgiana Hatfield, whose name he has taken. And they are now all dwelling together at the mansion of the Earl of Ellingham in Pall Mall. I longed to go thither and tell Tom Rain—no, Mr. Hatfield, I mean—that I had recognised him,—tell him that in me he beheld the Miranda whom he once knew: but my people laughed at me—they told me that I was in my dotage—that I was dreaming,—I, who have intellects as keen as ever—and sight so sharp that I knew my dearly-beloved Tom Rain in spite of his dyed hair and his changed aspect! Then my people forced me away with them;—but they cannot prevent me from thinking of Tom Rain as much and as often as I choose!"

The gipsy-crone ceased; and now she seemed to become suddenly aware again that she was not alone. But not reflecting that she had been speaking aloud the whole time, and that her two guests had overheard every syllable she had uttered, she turned towards them, making some remark of a perfectly indifferent character. It was easy to perceive that the poor old creature was half demented, in spite of her self-gratulation on the keenness of her intellects: but Perdita's mother was sharp and far-seeing enough to know that many important truths were evidently commingled with the gipsy's rhapsodical reminiscences.

"You have journeyed far to-day?" said Miranda—for such indeed was the crone's name.

"Many miles," replied Perdita's mother: "but now that we are refreshed through your kindness, we shall push more speedily on to London."

"Ah! you are taking that pretty child of your's to the great city, which we gipsies abhor and never visit unless on urgent occasions," observed Miranda. "What is your name, young woman?"

"Perdita," was the answer.

"Perdita!" repeated the gipsy. "That is a strange name. We have singular names amongst our race: but I never before heard so remarkable a one as that which you bear. What does it mean?"

"Have names any meaning at all?" demanded Perdita's mother, in a tone of impatience. "But, come, daughter—let us thank this good woman, and be off!"

The gipsy was however again rocking herself to and fro before the fire, and seemed to have relapsed into her profound reverie, save that this time she did not give audible utterance to her musings. She was however so much absorbed in thought that she did not hear the thanks that were tendered by the wanderers, nor mark their departure.

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CHAPTER CXXVIII.

THE JOURNEY CONTINUED AND CONCLUDED.

PERDITA and her mother exchanged not a word until they reached the high road once more; but when their faces were again turned towards London, the latter exclaimed in a tone of chuckling triumph, "'Twas a lucky chance which threw us in with that gipsy!"

"Yes, mother—as far as obtaining a good meal was concerned," replied Perdita.

"Silly child! it was the old crone's talk that elicited the remark which I just made. Did you not hear the strange facts she suffered to ooze out in her idiotic musings? Did nothing strike you——"

"Yes: her description of a young man of such divine beauty made so strong an impression upon me, that my very veins appeared to run with lightning," interrupted Perdita.

"Ah!" cried her mother, evidently struck by a sudden thought: "you were pleased with her allusion to that handsome young gentleman? Well, Perdita—trust me when I declare emphatically that this same young gentleman shall sue at your feet for those favours which unasked you would this moment bestow upon him!"

"Mother, you yourself will soon appear to me to be indulging in idiotic musings!" cried Perdita, half in delight—half in contemptuous incredulity. "You never saw this young man—you know nothing of him——"

"Know nothing of him!" repeated her mother, scornfully. "We know enough, Perdita, to compel a whole family to implore our forbearance and our mercy,—to reduce that Mr. Hatfield, Lady Georgiana, and their nephew to the necessity of beseeching our silence on their bended knees!"

"Do you really put faith in the rhodomontade of that gipsy about the identity of the Mr. Hatfield of whom she spoke with a certain Tom Rain who had been hanged?" demanded Perdita, impatiently.

"Yes—because I know it to be true!" ejaculated her mother. "Listen, Perdita:—you were not born at that time—but it was only a few months before your birth when the whole metropolis was astounded by the sudden discovery that Tom Rain, the highwayman, was indeed alive. I was in London at the time——"

"In Newgate, mother?" asked her daughter, as coolly as if it were the most common-place question.

"Yes—in Newgate, if you must have me be particular in every detail," answered the old harridan, bitterly.

"Where I was born," remarked Perdita. "One of the first places I shall request you to show me, will be that same Newgate. But go on—I am listening attentively."

"Well, then—I was in Newgate at the time that all London was astounded by certain discoveries relative to this same Tom Rainford—all brought about in consequence of a dreadful murder committed by that very Benjamin Bones whom you heard the gipsy mention. The story is too long to tell you now; but you shall have it shortly in its fullest details—for it may regard our interests more nearly than you at present imagine. One fact I must however state,—which is that Thomas Rainford was a famous highwayman who was hanged, and that by some means which never transpired, he was rescued from death—resuscitated, in fine. He received the royal pardon for all the deeds he had committed in opposition to the laws; and what afterwards became of him I knew not——"

"Because you had to leave England in pursuance of your sentence, I suppose, mother?" added Perdita, enquiringly.

"Precisely so. And now chance throws us in the way of an old crone who, in the audible musings of dotage, informs us that this same Tom Rain is actually living under a feigned name—aye, and at the mansion of the Earl of Ellingham. It is clear that the gipsy

had never heard of the wondrous fact that Rainford appeared in London disguised as a Blackamoor, only a few months after his execution, as I may call it: it is evident that the circumstance of his having survived the scaffold was unknown to her and to her companions. Thus was she struck with amazement and surprise, as well she might be under such circumstances, when she beheld him in Lord Ellingham's carriage. But gipsies go so little into great cities and towns—hold so little intercourse with any save their own people—and are so little curious in respect to matters which do not immediately concern themselves, that it is not surprising if the old gipsy had never heard reported the well-known fact of Rainford's resuscitation."

"Then you presume that this Rainford is now living, honourably and respectably, in London, under the name of Hatfield," said Perdita, enquiringly; "and you mean to use your knowledge of his real name to work out our particular aims?"

"You now comprehend me, daughter," returned the old woman; "and you may perhaps begin to understand how his nephew shall become bound to you by silken cords."

"I have set my mind upon that handsome young man," said Perdita, emphatically; "and believe me, I shall omit nothing that will tend to gratify my passion."

"Wanton—voluptuous, even as I was," muttered the harridan to herself;—"aye, licentious and depraved as was her father!"

"What are you mumbling to yourself, mother?" demanded Perdita. "Something about me, I warrant."

"No harm—no harm," responded the wretch, hastily. "But, to return to the subject of our conversation, Perdita: what do you think of our prospects now?—knowing all we do of this Mr. Hatfield, and able as we are to overwhelm him, his titled wife, and his nephew in disgrace, if we choose to utter a single word."

"I think that all will go well enough in respect to money; for *that* we have the means of extorting," said Perdita. "But I cannot see how, by such a course, we shall do otherwise than disgust the nephew, and make an enemy of him."

"Ah! short-sighted girl!" ejaculated her mother. "We must not commence with extortion! I know that Lady Georgiana Hatfield was very rich when I was a resident in London years ago; and it is not probable that she has become poor since. Then again, this Hatfield or Rainford must be on intimate terms with the Earl of Ellingham, since he and his family are residing at that nobleman's mansion. All this denotes that the young man can command ample funds at will;—and the young man, then, must be ensnared by your wiles. But if you surrender yourself to him immediately——"

"Trust me for knowing how to play my cards well!" interrupted Perdita, impatiently. "But on our arrival in London to-night, where are we to find a dwelling-place?—how are we to clothe ourselves decently to-morrow?—how, in a word, are we to live until all these grand schemes begin to work?"

"You shall see, Perdita," answered her mother. "During my long sojourn in Australia, one person in England wrote to me frequently—one person sent me sums of money occasionally. Otherwise, Perdita, after I obtained my ticket of leave, we should have starved: for the labour of my hands, severely as I toiled, produced not sufficient to maintain us both. This one person lives in London: I know his address;—and to his door must we first repair before we can even procure the wherewith to obtain a bed!"

"Is it the friend who, as you told me, interested himself to procure your pardon?" demanded Perdita.

"The friend!—the relation you mean," said her mother, hastily. "Yes—he is my relation—the only one I possess in the world save yourself, if a daughter can be called by that name."

The conversation, which may have served to throw additional light upon the depraved character of these two women, was interrupted by the necessity of stepping to the side of the road to permit a cart, which was on the point of overtaking them, to pass. The vehicle was driven along at a rapid pace by a sturdy, good-natured butcher; and as it was whisking by the two females, the pure moon-light falling fully on the handsome countenance of Perdita, enabled the man to catch a glimpse of the surpassing beauty of that face.

Instantly pulling up, he said, "Holloa! my good women, you are out late—or rather early—for 't is two o'clock in the morning."

"We are very tired, and are anxious to reach London as soon as possible," replied Perdita's mother.

"I am going as one may say right through London," observed the butcher: "in fact, to Oxford Street—and if you like to have a ride, both of you, I'll put you down at the nearest point to where your business leads you."

The old woman greedily snapped at the offer; and the good-natured butcher helped her daughter and herself into the cart, which immediately drove on again at a spanking pace.

And now full soon did the myriad lights of London greet the eyes of the travellers; and Perdita felt her heart dilate with ineffable emotions as she drew near that sovereign city of a thousand towers, pinnacles, and spires,—that mighty Babylon in which all her hopes, her aims, her ambitious views were centred. A misty haze of light, resembling a faintly illuminated fog, appeared to hang over the vast metropolis;—and as the vehicle approached nearer and nearer still, the countless dwellings began to stand out in relief from the bosom of that dimly lustrous shroud. On—on the travellers go: the houses are scattered along the road;—but in a short time they become continuous ranges of habitations;—and now it may be fairly said that the wheels of the cart rattle on the pavement of London.

But a feeling of disappointment seizes upon Perdita: instead of lordly mansions, she sees dingy-looking tenements of no considerable size, and presenting any thing but an imposing appearance, especially at that sombre hour. Nevertheless, the farther she advances the more satisfied does she become;—and now the travellers reach that great junction-point for cross-roads, where stands the Elephant and Castle.

The tap is open—the butcher stops, alights, and disappears inside the establishment. In a few minutes he returns with a steaming hot glass of brandy-and-water,—for a good-natured fellow is this butcher;—and he kindly proffers it to the two females. It was not because Perdita was so handsome, that he did it: no—it was through pure kindness, and as much for the sake of her mother as of herself. Nor did the two females require much pressing to partake of the welcome beverage; and while they were drinking *their* glass, their good-hearted friend hurried back to the tap to enjoy *his own* reeking jorum.

And now away they speed again—up the Waterloo Road—over the bridge. Then and there it was that a splendid and soul-stirring spectacle burst upon the sight of Perdita:—for an instant her admiration was rivetted to that magnificent piece of masonry constituting the finest viaduct of the kind in the whole world;—but in the next she threw her glances right and left, embracing thus rapidly all the splendid features of a scene bathed in silver by the cloudless lamp of night. The bosom of the mighty Thames reflected the lights on the banks and the bridges,—those very lights tracing the course of the proud stream and marking its ample width:—then her looks dwelt on the mighty dome of Saint Paul's, rearing its colossal head to the deep purple summer sky;—and lastly they ran rapidly along the northern shore, embracing each point of interest, until they stopped at the New Houses of Parliament, so gleamingly white in the chaste lustre of the moon.

"Yes, mother," she whispered, in an exulting tone: "this is indeed a stupendous city!"

"You have seen nothing of it as yet," was the reply. "But here we must alight," added the old woman, the moment the cart reached the Strand.

The wanderers accordingly descended; and, having proffered their hearty thanks to the butcher for his kindness, they continued their journey on foot, their way now lying in the direction of Brompton.

Along the Strand they proceeded—through Spring Gardens—into St. James's Park,—Perdita admiring the fine buildings which she passed; for the morning was now breaking, and each grand feature of that part of the metropolis emerged slowly and majestically from obscurity.

Perdita's mother, in pointing out Carlton House to her daughter, observed, "When I was last in England George the Fourth was King; and that was his favourite residence."

They proceeded through the park;—and now Perdita beheld the abode of the Queen of England—that palace on which so much of the country's money has been shamefully squandered, and with the arrangements of which her Majesty is still dissatisfied! God help Victoria, if she cannot contrive to make herself comfortable at Buckingham House; we sincerely hope that she will always find such quarters gratuitously provided for her, and that she will learn not to grumble at them. Contrast that palace with the working-man's home, and then let us see whether Parliament would be justified in voting another sixpence to enlarge or improve the sovereign residence. Oh! how loathsome—how revolting to our mind are the caprices, the selfishness, and the insolence of Royalty!

The two wanderers now entered the spacious district of Pimlico, which they traversed painfully—for they had become almost as wearied as when they were toiling on between Dartford and Shooter's Hill.

"Shall we soon be there, mother?" enquired Perdita, her handsome countenance bearing a care-worn expression as if patience and strength were alike nearly exhausted.

"In less than twenty minutes now," was the answer, "we shall reach the place whither we are bound."

"And suppose your nephew should not be in London?" said Perdita.

"Ah! now you have touched the very chord which vibrates with anguish to my heart's core!" exclaimed the old woman. "But let us not yield to despondency," she added, almost immediately.

"No—it is useless to meet evils half way," observed Perdita.

The two proceeded in silence for upwards of a quarter of an hour, until they reached a particular part of Brompton, when the elder wanderer said, "It must be somewhere about here that he lives. Ah! Number Seven! Yes—*this* is the house, Perdita!" she added, indicating a beautiful cottage-residence, standing alone in the midst of a pleasant garden. "But it will be useless for you to accompany me," continued the hag; "on the contrary, many reasons, which I will hereafter explain, render it advisable that my nephew should not come to know you by sight."

"Just as you please, mother," said Perdita, in the quiet way which was habitual to her when she had no inclination either on one side or the other. "There is a large stone at the angle of the road yonder: I will rest there until you return."

"Do so," replied the old woman; and, having paused for a few moments to dwell admiringly on the fine symmetry of her daughter's form as Perdita repaired slowly towards the point indicated, the harridan advanced to the door of the house in which her relation dwelt.

She knocked and rang;—and in a few minutes a servant-maid, throwing open a window, enquired who it was that came at such an unseasonable hour.

"Is your master at home?" demanded the old woman.

"He is: but——"

"Thank God!" ejaculated the visitor, considerably relieved by this announcement. "You must inform him that an elderly female wishes to speak to him on particular business——"

"I cannot venture to disturb him," answered the servant. "Come at eight o'clock: master and missus will be up then."

At this moment another window was opened, and a gentleman, who had evidently slipped on a dressing-gown in great haste, appeared at the casement, exclaiming, "I will see you now—at once!"

And in less than a minute the old woman was admitted into the dwelling by the gentleman who had thus addressed her.

Not a word was uttered,—merely hasty glances of recognition were exchanged, and those looks dubious on her part and reserved on his,—until they entered a parlour, the door of which the gentleman carefully closed, while his visitress sank exhausted upon a sofa.

"I am returned at last, Clarence," she said, in a low and hoarse voice,—for she was now evidently much moved at finding herself in the presence of her relative, and by no means so confident as she had appeared to her daughter with regard to the reception she was likely to experience.

"Yes—returned, against my express desire—against the solemn promise that you sent me to remain in the colony if I procured your pardon!" exclaimed Mr. Villiers—for it was he—in a reproachful tone.

"Would you have had me bury myself in that horrible place of exile?" demanded his aunt—Mrs. Torrens, or Mrs. Slingsby, or whatever she now denominated herself.

"I would have had you keep your pledge so sacredly given," replied Clarence; "and on my side I should have fulfilled my engagement by remitting you forty pounds every half-year. Why—why have you come back to England?"

"Because I would sooner die than remain in a

colony where I have endured so much," responded the woman.

"Yes—you have endured much indeed," said Mr. Villiers, still more bitterly than before: "but it has been your own fault. Do you remember the interviews I had with you in prison both prior and subsequent to your condemnation? Did you not exhibit every sign of the deepest contrition—utter every possible vow of amendment? And what were the results? Arrived in the colony, you became unruly—profligate—a perfect scandal where all is scandalous—shameless where every thing is shameful——"

"Listen to me, Clarence!" exclaimed his aunt, rising from the sofa and advancing towards him: "it is so easy to reproach—but not so easy to admit of extenuation for guilt. As God is my judge, my penitence in Newgate was sincere—my contrition unfeigned! I even longed for the hour of my departure to arrive, that I might for ever quit a country where I had played so vile a part, and to some extent retrieve my character in a penal colony. But when I set foot on board the convict-ship, I found myself thrown into the depths of a very sink of immorality,—plunged into an infernal stew of profligacy, from which escape was impossible. I threw myself on my knees before the surgeon, and implored him to remove me from that dreadful assemblage of fiends in female shape: he laughed at me, and bade me return to my place. Then my companions abused and ill-treated me for having dared to complain;—and the babe which I bore in my arms was made the subject of the bitterest taunts and most cutting gibes. I had named her *Perdita*—as you well know—that her lost and hopeless condition, through the infamy of her mother, might ever be retained fresh in my memory, and that the necessity of toiling hard and honourably for her might be impressed on my soul even by the warning nature of that very name. But, oh! those wretches, with whom I was forced to associate, levelled the most cruel jeers and jests against me on account of that innocent babe; because she was born in Newgate! And nothing is so galling—nothing so terribly afflicting—nothing so poignantly cutting, as to insult a woman through the medium of her illegitimate, helpless babe! My God! what bitter tears I shed on board that convict-ship,—tears which seemed to sear my very countenance as they fell, so scalding were they! Then the frightful scenes which were enacted in our cabin,—the quarrelling that took place, the imprecations that accompanied even the simplest remark, the obscene tales that were told,—oh! it was horrible, horrible. I struggled against the contamination as mortal being never struggled before:—but it was like a combat between a drowning person and the fury of a whelming torrent,—a vain, ineffectual, and useless fight, in which I felt myself to be completely powerless;—until, in despair, I resigned myself to the flood that was whirling me along in its triumphant course;—and I found relief even in drinking of that feculent, fœtid stream from which there was no escape. Yes—thus was I drawn down into the whirlpool of immoralities and profligacies on the brink of which the law placed me:—and if my vows of contrition—my asseverations of penitence proved so many delusions, you must blame the system to which I was subjected—and not myself."

"And do you mean, then, to inform me that you endeavoured to be moral, reserved, pious, and tranquil on board the convict-ship—but that it was impossible to avoid being dragged into the common abyss of depravity?" demanded Clarence, now speaking in a mild and even compassionate tone.

"Most solemnly do I swear that such is the fact!" exclaimed his aunt, with an emphasis which spoke volumes in favour of her sincerity.

"Then are you to be pitied, poor woman," said Clarence; "and the Government of that day must bear all the blame of your relapse and subsequent depravity. But where is your daughter Perdita!"

"She is in the neighbourhood—waiting for me," was the answer. "I did not choose to bring her beneath your roof. Indeed, naught save necessity—necessity the most stern—should have led me hither."

"The accounts which I received from a correspondent at Sydney, spoke, alas! most unfavourably of your daughter," observed Clarence. "My God! could you not at least have saved her from entering the paths that lead to perdition?"

"Behold, now, how ready you are to blame me!" cried his aunt, in a voice expressive of vexation. "I was allotted as a servant to a free-settler in the penal colony; and the man made me his mistress. There was no compliance on my part in the first instance: 't was absolute compulsion. Then I yielded to my fate, seeing that it was useless to contend against it. I had to work hard all day; and the moment Perdita was able to run alone, she played in the streets with the other poor children of Sydney. I could not prevent it—do all I would to endeavour to keep her in doors. Well, at last I obtained a ticket of leave, and tried to earn a livelihood by the toil of my own hands. But to do this, I was compelled to be out all day;—and then, where was Perdita? Where was she?" almost screamed the woman, becoming much excited: "why—*lost*—as her name implies;—not lost as you lose an object and can find it no more,—but lost *morally*—irretrievably lost! 'T is true that I imparted to her as much knowledge as I myself possessed or had leisure to instil into her—and that to do this I deprived myself of my natural rest. But how could I teach her virtue?—how could I read the Bible with her? My story was known throughout the colony;—and Perdita learnt before even she had intelligence to understand the meaning of the facts, that she was a bastard—born in Newgate, the great criminal prison of London—and that her mother was every thing infamous and vile! My God! circumstances would not allow me to nurture her in moral ways, even if I had possessed the inclination: but by the time she was old enough to learn, I had myself become as deeply steeped in profligacy as any other woman in the colony. Can you wonder, then, that she soon fell into the ways of vice? Beautiful as she was—and is—she soon attracted notice;—and your fine English officers—the gentlemen sent out to protect the colony,—*they* were the authors of her ruin—and they encouraged her in a career of infamy. Oh! Clarence, it is a frightful thing for me to stand before you—you, who are my own nephew—and have to make such horrible revelations: but you reproach me for my own wickedness—you would seek to represent me as the cause of my daughter's wickedness—and I am forced to explain to you the appalling nature of the influences acting upon us, and the circumstances surrounding us. Now—now, I could weep in humiliation;—but an hour hence, I shall be obdurate and hardened as ever. The world has made me so."

"And now what do you propose to do?" enquired Clarence. "It is impossible for me even to advise you in the frightful position in which you are placed, and

since you have acted so completely in opposition to my counsel by returning to England. Pecuniary assistance—*that* I can afford you to a limited amount——"

"Give me fifty guineas, Clarence—and you shall never see me more," interrupted his aunt.

"I will spare you a hundred," answered the generous-hearted young man; and quitting the room, he returned in a few minutes, bringing the money in a bag. "Here," he said,—"take that, my poor aunt—and may God make it prosper in your hands. But, oh! suffer not your daughter to continue in the ways of vice and depravity: remember that she possesses an immortal soul—and that there is another world in which an account must be given for the conduct pursued in this."

The old woman made no answer; but, clutching the bag eagerly, she secured it amongst her tattered garments. Then, ashamed of the greedy impatience which she had manifested, and seeking to avert her nephew's attention from the fact by turning the conversation into another channel, she said, "I hope you continue to enjoy that happiness, Clarence, which yourself and your excellent Adelais so much deserve!"

"Thank God! my felicity is as complete as man's can be in this world," was the reply. "Having now for upwards of nineteen years held the good situation which my kind patron, the Earl of Ellingham, gave me, I have enjoyed a certain means of existence—have acquired influential friends—and have been enabled to rear my sons and daughters in a way which, I hope, will be salutary to them on their entrance into life."

"And that man—my husband—have you heard of him lately?" enquired Villiers' aunt, in a low tone and hesitating way.

"Never since the occasion—and that is now nine years ago—when he wrote to announce the death of poor Rosamond at Geneva. I mentioned that fact to you in a letter which accompanied one of the remittances I made to Sydney on your behalf——"

"And from that time you have received no tidings of my husband?"

"Not once!" replied Villiers. "Whether he be alive or dead—what has become of him, I cannot tell you. This uncertainty relative to her father's fate is a cause of uneasiness to Adelais:—but every state and station in life has its annoyances and its sorrows. Poor Rosamond! she fell into a slow decline shortly after leaving England—and for nearly ten years did she linger on, wasting away! Adelais and I saw her once during that period: we visited Switzerland on purpose. Then how deeply was my wife shocked when she beheld the wreck that remained of her once lovely and blooming sister. But I cannot dwell upon that episode in our lives——"

"No—no," exclaimed Perdita's mother, now in haste to depart. "I will not distress you," she added, with a hypocritical appearance of sympathy, "by exacting the painful narrative from you. Farewell, Clarence—farewell."

The generous-hearted Villiers proffered his hand to his aunt,—that aunt who was once so fine a woman, so elegantly dressed, and the mistress of a splendid mansion,—but who was now hideous to look upon, clothed in rags, and as yet homeless on the face of the earth!

For a few instants her heart swelled with profound emotions as she pressed that hand which was thus kindly extended to her, and tears rose to the very brims of her eyes, but did not run over.

Then she hurried away from his presence;—and the moment she set foot on the threshold of the dwelling—or rather, when its door closed behind her—she subdued the feelings that had well nigh overpowered her; and gave all her attention—all her interest—all her thoughts to the precious bag which she had concealed amongst her garments.

"Well, mother, I thought you were never coming back!" cried Perdita, in a reproachful tone: then, perceiving by the old woman's countenance that she had good news, she allowed her own to brighten up, as she hurried to meet her.

"Perdita—we have now the means——"

"Of obtaining shelter and a breakfast, I hope?"

"Of purchasing good clothes—taking fine lodgings——"

"Oh! then your nephew—or relation of some kind, whatever he may be—has behaved well!" cried the young woman, overjoyed by this intelligence.

"A hundred guineas, Perdita—a hundred guineas in this bag!" exclaimed her mother, shaking the precious object of her avaricious worship: then, again concealing it beneath her rags, she said, "But come, Perdita: let us betake ourselves to another quarter of the town—for I have promised Clarence Villiers that he shall see my face no more."

The old hag and the handsome young woman retraced their way into the heart of London; and, arriving in the neighbourhood of Covent Garden, they entered an early breakfast-house, where they partook of a copious meal, to which appetite and good spirits enabled them to do honour.

The repast being despatched, the elder of the two wanderers had a few minutes' whispering conversation with the landlady of the establishment; the result of which was that a bed-room was speedily placed at the disposal of the guests, who retired to partake of a few hours' most necessary repose.

It was near mid-day when the mother and daughter rose; and then another interview with the landlady was shortly followed, in obedience to the instructions given her, by the arrival of a woman who sold second-hand female apparel, and who came laden with band-boxes. The contents thereof were speedily examined; and the wanderers having selected the articles which seemed most appropriate for their temporary use, the slop-seller was well paid and dismissed.

And now Perdita and her parent began to assume each a very different appearance from that which they had so recently worn. Copious ablutions and decent clothing made the elder less revoltingly ugly, and the younger more strikingly beautiful.

As they thus performed their toilette together, in the little chamber of the coffee-house, the mother surveyed, with pride and admiration, the features and form of her daughter,—calculating at the same time how large a fortune the judicious sale of such loveliness was likely to amass;—while on her side the young woman stood in superb complacency before the glass, exercising a thousand little arts to render the details of her toilette as perfect as circumstances would admit.

Perdita's dark brown hair was combed out with the utmost care, and arranged in simple bands, glossy and massive on either side of her fine forehead. By chance she had obtained from the second-hand dealer a gown which precisely fitted her, and which, being very low in the body, displayed her full and swelling bust to its greatest advantage. The darned stockings and the clumsy shoes were superseded by more fitting articles; and now the robust leg, the slender ancle, and the long

narrow foot were as faultless in proportion as if a sculptor had modelled them to his own exquisite but voluptuous taste. A neat straw bonnet and an ample shawl completed her attire;—and now well, but by no means splendidly nor elegantly dressed, Perdita appeared a creature so exceedingly handsome, that even her mother was surprised as much as she was delighted.

And, as for the old woman herself, she had assumed an air of greater respectability than at first might have appeared possible—seeing that her look was sinister and repulsive, and her countenance so weather-beaten and marred by suffering!

Forth went the mother and daughter into the streets of London;—and their first care was to purchase a variety of articles of attire of a far better kind than that which they had just procured,—likewise a little jewellery and the necessary *paraphernalia* of the toilette. The goods were all sent to the coffee-house where they had hired a chamber; and a couple of large trunks were the last objects they bought, and which were despatched to the same place.

These matters having been accomplished, the old woman conducted her daughter into the fashionable quarter of Regent Street; and there Perdita beheld enough to excite her wonder and her admiration. The magnificent shops—the fine buildings—the splendid equipages—and the handsomely dressed gentlemen on horseback, all shared her attention in their turns:—nor was she, an observer, unobserved—for many an old voluptuary and stripling gallant paused to bestow a second glance upon the plainly but decently dressed young female whose countenance was so strikingly beautiful, and in whose looks there was a subdued wantonness engendering the most voluptuous sensations.

To Perdita's mother how altered did London seem! Here was a street which she had never seen before—there a street had been pulled down to make way for some great thoroughfare. Here buildings once familiar had disappeared: there strange edifices had sprung up! In Regent Street she looked for the shops at which she had been accustomed to deal long years before, when she dwelt in the immediate neighbourhood, and when she was deemed a *saint*: but most of the establishments she sought had changed their proprietors and their nature,—a grocer's having become a bookseller's, a milliner's a china warehouse, and so on. She had a great mind to pass into Burlington Street; but she had not quite the necessary courage to do *that*—at least for the present.

Having threaded Regent Street from Oxford Circus to Waterloo Place, the two women turned into Pall Mall West, along which they proceeded for a short distance; when the mother suddenly clasped her daughter's arm almost violently, exclaiming in a hasty whisper at the same time, "This is the mansion of the Earl of Ellingham!"

Scarcely were these words uttered, when the door was opened, and forth came Charles Hatfield. Passing by the two females without noticing that he had immediately become the object of their most earnest attention,—and indeed, without observing them at all, so deeply was he absorbed in thought,—he moved on at a slow and uncertain pace, as if he had merely come out to seek the fresh air, and having no particular destination.

Yes:—he had indeed become the cynosure of attraction on the part of the old woman and her daughter,—the former devouring him with her eyes, in order to read his character and disposition in his countenance, and assure herself from that physiognomical perusal that he was fitted for her purpose,—and the latter embracing with a look of ardent, wanton scrutiny every feature of his fine face and every proportion of his symmetrical form.

He passed on:—and for a few minutes the mother and daughter preserved a deep silence, each occupied with her own thoughts.

"That young man may be rendered pliant and docile according to our will," said the old woman at length.

"He is beyond all doubt the one whom the gipsy alluded to in such glowing colours," observed Perdita, with a voluptuous languor in the eyes, a flushing of the cheeks, and a slow but deep heaving of the bosom.

"And he has something on his mind—that is clear!" added the old woman.

"Which we will soon make him divulge to us," said Perdita. "But how do you intend to proceed in order to form his acquaintance?"

"Oh! nothing is more easy!" returned her mother. "In the first place we must take handsome lodgings. I know of a nice, quiet, retired street in the neighbourhood. Come along, Perdita—we must not waste valuable time."

The two women repaired direct to Suffolk Street, Pall Mall East; and in the window of a house of handsome appearance they saw a card announcing furnished apartments to be let. The lodgings were speedily inspected and hired, the prepayment of a month's rent immediately ensuring the good opinion of the landlady and rendering references unnecessary.

Back to the coffee-house in the vicinity of Covent Garden did the wanderers hasten; and in a few minutes all their packages and new purchases were transported to a hackney coach, which was fetched from the nearest stand. The coffee-house keeper was liberally rewarded, and a handsome fee was bestowed upon the driver of the vehicle to induce him to state, in case of being questioned in Suffolk Street, that he had brought the ladies from some respectable hotel.

All these matters being arranged, the mother and daughter proceeded in the hackney-coach to their new lodgings, where they at once took up their quarters under the imposing name of Mrs. and Miss Fitzhardinge.

Had the worthy butcher who a few hours previously took pity on the two ragged, sinking mendicants, and sustained their strength and courage by means of hot brandy-and-water at the Elephant and Castle,—had he now beheld Mrs. and Miss Fitzhardinge sitting down, elegantly attired, at a well spread dinner-table, and at the fashionable time of six in the evening,—he would not for an instant have supposed that the way-worn beggars of the morning's adventure and the ladies of Suffolk Street, Pall Mall, were indentical: or if, by chance, he should have recognised Perdita's handsome countenance, he would have thought that the delusions of enchantment had been practised upon him or her.

And now we have prepared the way, with due prefatory explanation, for one of the most striking and remarkable episodes in this narrative.—an episode showing how Perdita's arts and Perdita's beauty accomplished aims which women of less enterprise than herself and her mother would have deemed impossible.

Oh! fatal influence—that influence which the depraved and wanton Perdita wielded by means of her transcendant charms!

CHAPTER CXXIX.

THE ADVERTISING AGENT.

ON the day after the one the incidents of which have just been related, Mr. Bubbleton Styles called, precisely as the clock struck eleven in the forenoon, upon an advertising agent dwelling in the immediate vicinity of Cornhill.

The agent, knowing that Mr. Styles was the registered promoter of a scheme which had obtained the patronage of the high and mighty Mr. Podgson, was particularly civil and urbane; and having bowed him into the private office, and presented him with a chair, he said, "Now, Mr. Styles, sir—what can I do for you?"

"I intend to give the newspapers a round of advertisements," answered the City gentleman, pulling out his prospectuses.

"Softly—softly, my dear sir," exclaimed the agent: "you must be guided by me in this. If you went to the generality of agents, they would say, '*Oh! advertise by all means in every paper in existence:*'—but I, Mr. Styles, am a little more conscientious. There are some journals, in fact, which are perfectly useless as advertising media: it would be money completely thrown away."

"I am much obliged to you for your kindness," said Mr. Styles. "Of course we shall advertise in the *Times*."

"As a matter of course!" cried the agent. "'Tis the great daily Leviathan which every body sees, no matter what his politics may be. The *Morning Chronicle*, too, is a good medium: the *Herald*, *Post*, and *Advertiser* must likewise be included;—and it would be folly to omit the *Sun*, *Globe*, and *Standard*."

"Well—and what about the *Daily News* and the *Express?*" asked Mr. Styles, apparently astonished that no reference should have been made to those prints.

"The *Daily News!*" ejaculated the agent, in perfect wonderment: "the *Express!*" he cried, in horrified amazement. "Excuse me, my dear friend—but are you mad? have you taken leave of your senses?"

"I hope not," responded Mr. Styles, in his usual calm, business-like manner. "What makes you think so?"

"What makes me think so!" repeated the agent; "why, the idea that you should for an instant entertain the notion of advertising in those contemptible

abortions! They are a perfect disgrace to newspaper literature, sir," proceeded the agent, who was speaking conscientiously, and indeed truly. "Did you ever happen to read the *Daily News?*"

"I have never seen the paper in my life," answered Mr. Styles: "I had only heard of it."

"And you are not likely to see it," returned the agent, "unless you go into the heart of Wapping or explore the back slums of Whitechapel. No respectable newsman keeps it: not that newsmen are more particular than other shop-keepers—but they only keep what they can sell, Mr. Styles. As for the *Express*, it is a regular cheat of an evening paper—made up entirely of the articles in the *Daily News*, without even having the bad grammar and the typographical errors corrected. But both prints are the most contemptible threepenny things I ever saw in my life; and one would be inclined to fancy that all the real newspaper talent had been absorbed by the pre-existing journals, leaving only the meanest literary scrubs in London to *do* the *News* and the *Express*."

"And yet I thought that the *News* had been started under the auspices of Mr. Charles Dickens—the immortal *Boz?*" said Mr. Styles, interrogatively.

"So it was," replied the advertising agent: "but the name of Charles Dickens was rather damnatory than useful to a newspaper-speculation. Every one must admit that *Boz* is a great novelist—a very great novelist indeed—the Fielding of his age; but he is totally incapable of writing for a newspaper. The proprietors of the *News* made a tremendous splash with his name; but they only created a quagmire for themselves to flounder in. When their paper was first coming out, every body thought it was to do wonders. The *Times* was to lose half its subscribers; and the *Chronicle* was to be ruined altogether. But, alas! never did so labouring a mountain produce such a contemptible mouse; and people began to fancy that the wags engaged on *Punch* had started the *Daily News* as a grand parody on the newspaper press. The leaders were rubbish—the criticisms of new works, mere nonsense—the dramatic reviews, utter balderdash. It however seems that in the lowest depths there is a deeper still even with the bathos of journalists; for when the *News* tumbled down (which it soon did) to a two-penny halfpenny print, the rubbish, the nonsense, and the balderdash became more astounding still. There is a young man named Bilk who does the '*moral department*' of the paper; and he is the most grovelling ass that ever was created. He undertakes to review a whole batch of cheap publications in a lump; but what he calls *reviewing* is nothing else than *abusing* the works with an insolence so cool, and a rashness so indiscriminate that he must be as consummate a coxcomb as he is an unprincipled ruffian. The *News* affects a moral tone, and entrusts its conscience to this half-buffoon—half-barbarian, in the hope that the lucubrations of the ungrammatical scribe may acquire for it the reputation of a serious, sober, and sedate journal. The despicable being to whom I allude is the son of the proprietor of the *Assinæum*—a paper which Bulwer mauled and exposed so terribly in one of his admirable novels many years ago. The articles in the *Assinæum* may be termed TWADDLE UPON STILTS ——"

"You are really very inveterate in your denunciations of these prints," observed Mr. Styles, who having an hour to spare, did not experience any impatience in listening to the agent's remarks.

"Not at all inveterate—only justly indignant," was the answer. "I am indignant, because I admire the newspaper press of Great Britain—I am proud of it—I glory in belonging to the country which possesses it; and therefore when I see journalism prostituted to the lowest and meanest purposes—when I behold such despicable abortions as the *Daily News* and the *Express* daring to show themselves in that sphere where respectability and talent alone existed until those three-penny things made their appearance,—I am angry—I am disgusted! Only see how the *News* has been tinkered and hacked about with the idea of making it a property. First it was five-pence—then it was two-pence halfpenny—next it was three-pence;—and yet with all this derogatory experimentalising, the owners have failed to make it a property. What a miserable thing does it look, with its beggarly three columns of advertisements! The *Times* has as many in a day as the *News* has had altogether since its sickly existence began. The very Parliamentary Reporters engaged upon the *News* are ashamed of their connexion with such a scurvy affair; and the doorkeeper of the Gallery of the House of Commons looks on them with kind commiseration, knowing how degrading it must be to their feelings to take their places in the seats allotted to the representatives of that three-penny hodge-podge. You never see the *News* quoted from nor alluded to by its contemporaries. It is not recognised as a member of the newspaper press. It has tried all imaginable kinds of manœuvres to force itself into notoriety,—sometimes currying favour with the superior journals, and at others abusing them; but all to no purpose. Its contemporaries will *not* notice it: they will not be bullied nor coaxed into such condescension. Why—would you believe that the very Editor is heartily ashamed of his post: but he knows that if he resigned it, he should be compelled to relapse into the lowest walks of penny-a-lining, whence he was dragged forth to conduct the *thing*."

"How is it possible that such a contemptible journal continues in existence?" asked Mr. Styles.

"There! now you puzzle me indeed!" exclaimed the advertising agent. "The question you have put to me involves one of the greatest mysteries of London; and I am quite incapable of affording you the solution. Time will however show: for, in this case, time *must* clear up all doubt and uncertainty regarding the matter. For the present, however, take my advice and refrain from advertising in a paper which is contemptible in circulation and influence—scurrilous* or

* "An obscure threepenny print, called the *Daily News*, published in its impression of November 2nd, an article purporting to be a notice of the leading works belonging to the sphere of Cheap Literature, but in which a vile, cowardly, and ruffian-like attack was made upon Mrs. Reynolds's novel of 'GRETNA GREEN.' The article alluded to appeared in the evening of the same date in the *Express*, a paper made up from the contents of the other, but of whose existence we were totally unaware until the occurrence of the matter in question. The attack, though evidently written by some silly boy, was so savage and malignant, and was made up of such a pack of atrocious lies, that it became necessary to take some kind of notice of it, although neither the *Daily News* nor its evening reflex enjoy a circulation or an influence sufficient to effect the amount of mischief which the dastardly scribe sought to accomplish. Our solicitors were accordingly instructed to write to the Editors of the *News* and *Express*, requiring a complete contradiction to the libel, or menacing an action as the alternative. The letter which our legal advisers despatched was a gentlemanly and talented remonstrance, which soon brought the stupid Editors of the *Daily News* and the *Express* to reason. Bradbury and Evans, the proprietors of those threepenny prints, shook in their shoes at the idea of an action, they already having enough

hypocritical, according to circumstances, in its literary articles—and wishy-washy in the extreme in its leaders."

"Well, I am excessively obliged to you for this most useful warning," observed Mr. Bubbleton Styles. "You have nothing to say against the *Weekly Dispatch*—the *Sunday Times*—*Bell's Life in London*——"

"All good papers!" exclaimed the advertising agent. "But here is a list of those metropolitan and provincial journals in which I should recommend you to advertise."

"I place myself entirely in your hands," answered the promoter of the grandest railway scheme ever devised: and, thrusting his hands into his breeches pockets, he rattled a little silver and a great many halfpence, saying, "Shall I give you a hundred or so in advance? or will you send in the account——"

"Pray do not think of offering any sum in advance, Mr. Styles—my dear Mr. Styles! cried the agent. "It is but a trifle: three hundred guineas will cover the outlay for this first batch of advertisements—and I will send in my little account to the secretary when the Board meets."

"Very good," rejoined the promoter;—and, having come to this excellent understanding, the two gentlemen parted—Mr. Styles betaking himself to Garraway's Coffee-house, where he ate his lunch standing at the bar, and afterwards returning to his office at Crosby Hall Chambers.

CHAPTER CXXX.

PERDITA.

A WEEK had elapsed since the arrival of Mrs. and Miss Fitzhardinge in the great metropolis; and as yet they appeared to be no nearer to an acquaintanceship with Charles Hatfield than they were on the day when they first beheld him issue from Lord Ellingham's mansion;—for that it was he whom they had seen on the occasion alluded to, the mother had satisfactorily ascertained.

Indeed, the old woman had not been idle. Every evening, for a couple of hours, did she watch in the immediate vicinity of the Earl's dwelling to obtain an interview with the young man: but he did not appear to go out after dusk.

Mrs. Fitzhardinge accordingly began to think of changing her tactics, and endeavouring to catch him in the day-time, when fortune at last favoured her views;—for on the eighth night of her loiterings in Pall Mall, she had the satisfaction of seeing him sally forth shortly after nine o'clock.

Unhesitatingly accosting him, she said, "Mr. Hatfield, will you accord me your attention for a few moments?"

The young man turned towards her, and beheld a very ugly, plainly-attired, old lady: he nevertheless answered her respectfully, because she had addressed him in a manner denoting genteel breeding. We

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law business on their hands in consequence of their treatment of Messrs. Powell and Wareing;—and, accordingly, the *News* and *Express* ate their own words, on Tuesday, Nov. 9th, in the following terms:—

"'We have received a letter, protesting against Mrs. S. F. Reynolds's work of "GRETNA GREEN" being included in the list of popular works described as marked by "looseness, warmth of colouring in criminal scenes, and the false glow cast around guilty indulgencies." We must admit that "GRETNA GREEN" does not merit this; and that, whatever its faults, it certainly contains nothing derogatory to the character or delicacy of a lady writer.'

"Now let our readers mark well the atrocity of the proceeding on the part of the *News* and the *Express*. They first denounce 'GRETNA GREEN' in the strongest terms: they are afterwards compelled, *by the fear of law proceedings*, to 'admit that "GRETNA GREEN" does not merit this,' and that 'it contains nothing derogatory to the character or delicacy of a lady writer.' Then how dared the wretched scribe to act such a miscreant's part as to accuse a lady of writing with 'looseness,' when he must have known the charge to be unfounded? He told a downright, deliberate, wilful lie: he has proclaimed himself, and likewise admitted himself to be, an abominable liar! And as such we denounce him.

"But of what value can criticisms of the *News* and *Express* be, when a contemptible scribe is thus allowed to make the columns of these prints the vehicle for his own beastly malignity? What authority can belong to a reviewer who is obliged to say on the 9th of November, 'I was guilty of a foul, cowardly, and unjustifiable calumny against a lady's character on the 2nd of November.' And these two papers belong to men who are so very particular that they turned off their sub-editors, Messrs. Powell and Wareing, because, forsooth, these gentlemen gave insertion to a particular bankruptcy case which the bankrupt himself had written to implore Bradbury and Evans *not* to publish!

"We hope the contemptible slanderer who 'does the criticisms' for the *News* and *Express* will treat his readers (two grown-up persons and a small boy for the *News*, and the small boy without the grown-up persons for the *Express*) with an account of the origin, progress, and present condition of those threepenny things. If so, he must state how the *News* first came out at fivepence with the intention of smashing every thing,—how Charles Dickens was the man entrusted with the obstetric process of introducing this phenomenon to the world,—how froth was never so frothy, and vapouring never so vapoury, as when the bills, placards, and advertisements appeared,—and how the mountain at last brought forth a mouse! In fact, no failure was ever more miserable—more ludicrous—more contemptible than that of the *Daily News*. When a friend once spoke of his uppermost garment to Brummell, the 'exquisite,' laying his finger upon the collar thereof, said, 'Do you call this thing a coat?'—and when the *News* first came out, people held it up between the tips of their forefinger and thumb, and asked each other innocently, 'Do you call this thing a newspaper?' Well, after continuing remarkably sickly for some time, and seeing the utter folly of hoping to compete with the established daily newspapers, Bradbury and Evans—dear, kind, worthy souls!—said one morning to each other, 'This will never do: the public will not be gulled—we must really sell our wares at what they are worth;'—and so down went the price of the *News* to twopence-halfpenny! 'Hurrah for the *cheap* newspaper press!' vociferated they who now affect to look down with contempt on cheap literature altogether: and forthwith they fetch Mr. Dilk all the way from the *Athenæum* office in Wellington Street to manage their paper for them. And such management as it has been! Mr. Dilk knows about as much of newspapers in general as he does of courtesy in the *Athenæum* in particular;—and Bradbury and Evans very soon found that a twopenny-halfpenny daily thing was 'no go.' The price is accordingly raised to threepence; and, just to eke out by hook and by crook, the *Express* is issued as an evening paper, its contents being precisely those of the *News*, with perhaps half-a-dozen lines of new matter just to make a show under the head of 'Latest Intelligence.' Thus has the *Daily News* been tinkered about in all shapes and ways, with the hope of establishing it on some kind of basis or another;—and, after such a career, it fancies itself to be respectable and influential enough to undertake the duties of Mentor! But it has entrusted the office to a disgusting twaddler who scruples not to season his mawkish composition with diabolical lies, as a make-shift for 'Attic salt.' However, enough of this for the present:—we have compelled the *News* and the *Express* to acknowledge themselves to be slanderers;—but we are afraid that after all they have got the better of us, inasmuch as they probably provoked us only for the purpose of obtaining *a gratuitous advertisement* through the medium of any reply which might be made to them in THE MISCELLANY."—*Reynolds's Miscellany, No. 56*

should observe, too, that she had purposely assumed a humble apparel on the occasion of these evening watchings, in order to avoid the chance of attracting the attention of passers-by or policemen, who would naturally have wondered to see a handsomely apparelled person thus loitering about.

"Certainly, madam," replied Charles: "I will listen to any thing you may have to say to me. Will you walk into the house which I have just left: 't is the mansion of the Earl of Ellingham."

"I know well who lives there, Mr. Hatfield," answered the old woman; "and it is precisely because I wish to speak to you alone, that I have accosted you in the street. Can you pardon such boldness?"

"If your business with me be of importance, madam," said Charles, "no apology can be necessary on your part."

"Yes—my business is indeed of importance," returned Mrs. Fitzhardinge, with mysterious emphasis. "But I cannot speak to you here——"

"I have already requested you to accompany me to the house where I am residing with my relatives and friends," said Charles, with the least indication of impatience in his manner.

"And I have already assured you that I am anxious to converse with you alone," responded the old woman, nothing daunted. "Do not mistrust me, sir—do not suppose that I have accosted you for the purpose of soliciting any assistance of a pecuniary kind——"

"Then, madam, what *do* you require of me?" asked Charles, hastily.

"Ten minutes' private conversation—on matters of importance—of deep importance to yourself!" replied Mrs. Fitzhardinge, as rapidly and as firmly as the other had spoken: then, before he had time to make any rejoinder, she added, "For your own sake, Mr. Hatfield—if for no other consideration—you will accompany me to my own dwelling, which is close at hand. What! you hesitate? Then continue to cherish the secret grief which weighs upon your mind——"

"Ah! what did you say?" ejaculated the young man, starting as if a chord had been touched so as to vibrate to his very heart's core.

"I mean that if you refuse to accompany me, you will repent the loss of an opportunity to receive revelations nearly concerning yourself, and which opportunity may not speedily occur again."

As Mrs. Fitzhardinge uttered these words, she fixed a strange, mysterious, and almost ominous look upon Charles Hatfield, who was bewildered and amazed by her language. The old woman had dealt her random shots with good effect; and she experienced an inward triumph at her skill, and a sure conviction of its success.

"Who are you? and what do you know of me?" demanded Charles, breaking silence abruptly after more than a minute's pause, and speaking in a tone of earnestness denoting mingled suspense, wonder, and curiosity.

"My name is Fitzhardinge," replied the old woman; "and I know all—every thing concerning you,—aye, much more than you can possibly suspect. But not another word of explanation will I utter here; and you may now decide whether you will at once accompany me——"

"I *will* accompany you, madam," interrupted Charles Hatfield, in a decided manner. "In which direction does your abode lie?"

"Five minutes will take us thither," was the answer.

The old woman and the young gentleman now proceeded in silence towards Suffolk Street, Pall Mall—the latter wondering who his companion might be what she could possible have to communicate to him, and how she had acquired the information which she alleged to be so important and was about to impart. He naturally associated the promised revelations with the mysterious circumstances which he had so recently fathomed by means of the letters and manuscripts found in the secret recess of the library at Lord Ellingham's mansion;—and yet he was at a loss to conceive how a Mrs. Fitzhardinge, whose name was entirely strange to him, could possibly have any connexion with his own family affairs. At one moment he fancied that the proceeding on her part was nothing more nor less than a plot to inveigle him to some den for predatory purposes: for he had heard that London abounded in such horrible places, and also in persons who adopted every kind of stratagem to lure the unwary into those fatal snares. But when he considered the quarter of the great metropolis in which his companion evidently resided, as she had assured him that her abode was only a few minutes' walk from the spot where she had first accosted him,—when he again noticed the respectability of her appearance, and reflected that there was something superior in her manners, language, and address,—and lastly, when he remembered that amidst circumstances so complicated and mysterious as those which regarded his own family, it was highly possible for that aged female to be interested in them in some way or another,—he blamed himself for his misgivings, and resolved to see the end of the adventure.

Scarcely was his mind thus made up, when Mrs. Fitzhardinge turned into Suffolk Street; and in less than another minute, she knocked in an authoritative manner at the door of a handsome house. The summons was instantaneously responded to by a respectable female-servant; and Charles Hatfield followed the old lady up a wide stair-case lighted by a lamp which a statue in a niche held in its hand. On reaching the first landing, Mrs. Fitzhardinge threw open a door, saying, "Walk into this room, Mr. Hatfield: I will join you in a few moments."

Charles entered—and the door immediately closed behind him.

The young man found himself in a well-furnished apartment, in which the light of the wax candles placed upon the mantel was reflected in a handsome mirror. The atmosphere was rendered perfumed and refreshing by vases of fresh flowers tastefully disposed around: and on a side-table stood a large globe filled with the clearest water, in which gold and silver fish were disporting. The curtains were closed over the windows; but still the room was cool and the air grateful in that sultry summer season.

These observations were made at a rapid glance;—and then Charles Hatfield's looks were concentrated in the cynosure which instantly absorbed all interest—all attention. For, half sitting, half reclining upon the sofa, was a being of such transcendant beauty that never in the wildest of his dreams had he conceived the like. When reading a novel or a poem, his imagination had often depicted to itself the semblance of the heroine—and this mental portraiture was invariably drawn with the utmost perfection of form and feature which impassioned and enthusiastic youth could devise. But no flight—no soaring of that fervid imagination had ever yet idealised such dazzling, brilliant charms as those which now met his astonished gaze.

—charms that intoxicated while they delighted, and that ravished while they infused a warm voluptuousness into the soul of the beholder.

And, in sooth, well might Charles Hatfield experience ineffable feelings and tender emotions as he contemplated the fiend in an angel's shape that was half reclining on the sofa; for Perdita was surpassingly lovely on this occasion! She was attired in a light pink muslin dress, made very low in the body, so that her neck and shoulders were set off in all their dazzling whiteness against the deep purple velvet of the sofa—and her full, swelling, firm bosom was more than half revealed. Her hair was arranged in long ringlets, glittering like hyperions, luxuriant, and sweeping those glowing globes that appeared to heave to their caresses. Her large grey eyes beamed with voluptuous languor, although a brilliant light shone in the depths of the dark pupils;—and her vermilion lips, parted with a smile, displayed the white and even rows of pearls, so faultless in their beauty. The slightly sun-burnt tinge of her face appeared to be the rich hue of an Italian complexion—the carnation glow of health, and youth, and warm blood animating her cheeks. Then her arms were naked,—those arms which were dazzlingly white, robust, and yet admirably modelled, and which seemed ready to stretch out and clasp a favoured lover to the panting breast. One foot was raised on the sofa—the other rested on an ottoman;—and thus, as Charles Hatfield's eyes swept the rich and fine proportions—the undulating contours of that splendid form, it seemed to him as if a halo of voluptuousness surrounded this enchanting being—a very perfume of beauty enveloped her in its intoxicating influence.

She had heard him ascending the stairs—and she had purposely placed herself in an attitude which should seem as if he had disturbed her unexpectedly, and thus serve as an apology for the negligent abandonment of limb which gave to her position an air alike wanton and lascivious. While she, therefore, affected to gaze on him in soft surprise, he was intently devouring her with looks of unfeigned amazement;—and while she still retained that voluptuous attitude as if unwittingly, he was rivetted to the spot near the door where he had stopped short on first catching sight of her. This dumb-show on the part of both,—artificial with her, and real with him,—lasted for nearly a minute;—and during that time Perdita had an opportunity of surveying the young man's handsome appearance with even more searching scrutiny than when she had seen him in Pall Mall the very day of her arrival in London,—while, on his side, Charles Hatfield had leisure to scan a combination of charms such as transcended all his ideal creations, and which, had he beheld them in a picture, he would have declared to be impossible of realization.

Again must we observe how different was this elegantly-attired, captivating creature as she now appeared, from the ragged, way-worn wanderer that she was when first we introduced her to our readers! But oh! dangerous—trebly dangerous Perdita,—a snake with the loveliest skin—a demon with the most heavenly form—utter profligacy in the most witching guise!

And now the young man, who has been brought within the sphere of this perilous influence, recovers his self-possession so far as to be able to stammer forth an apology for what he conceives to be an intrusion occasioned by some strange mistake.

"No excuse is necessary, sir," replies Perdita: "the lady whom you state to have conducted you hither, is my mother; and she has doubtless sought her chamber for a few minutes to change her attire. Pray be seated."

But Charles Hatfield once more stood still—rivetted to the spot, after having advanced a few paces towards Perdita;—for the sound of her voice, so sweetly musical—so enchantingly harmonious, appeared to inspire him with ecstatic emotions and infuse an ineffable delight into his very soul.

Then Perdita arose from the sofa, and indicating a chair close by, again invited the young man to be seated,—accomplishing this courtesy with so ravishing a grace and such a charming smile, that he felt himself intoxicated—bewildered—enchanted by the magic of her beauty, the melody of her silver tones, and the soft persuasion of her manner. For the consciousness of almost superhuman beauty had rendered Perdita emulative of every art and taught her to study every movement which might invest her with a winning way and a witching power;—and thus this singular young woman had acquired a politeness so complete that it seemed intuitive, and a polish so refined that it appeared to have been gained by long and unvaried association with the highest classes.

Sinking into the chair thus gracefully offered him, Charles Hatfield could not take his eyes off the magnificent creature who remained standing for a few seconds after he was seated; for, affecting to alter the position of one of the wax candles on the mantel, as if it were too near the mirror, she placed herself in such an attitude that the young man might obtain a perfect view of the flowing outlines of her glorious form,—the splendid arching of the swan-like neck—the luxurious fulness of the bust—the tapering slenderness of the waist—the plump and rounded arms—the large, projecting hips—and the finely proportioned feet and ankles.

The effect thus produced by the artful, designing creature, whose voluptuous position seemed all natural and all unstudied, was precisely that which she had intended;—for Charles Hatfield experienced a delirium of emotions till then unknown—and he felt that he could almost spring from his seat, catch that bewitching form in his arms, and, covering her with kisses, exclaim, "Pardon me—but I am mad—intoxicated—raving with passion!"

"My mother will not be many minutes, sir," said Perdita, now returning to her seat upon the sofa; "and in the meantime I must solicit you to exercise your patience—for I am afraid you will find me but a dull companion."

"Impossible!" cried Charles, enthusiastically: then fearing that he had spoken in too decided and earnest a manner to one who was a perfect stranger, he added in a more subdued and reserved tone, "But perhaps I am intruding on your privacy, as I am afraid that when I entered—I mean, I fear that I—I disturbed you——"

"I certainly was not aware that my mother expected a visitor this evening," answered Perdita; "and it is I who should apologise, inasmuch as you caught me in such a lounging, lazy attitude. But since I have been in London I have experienced a heaviness in the atmosphere that engenders indolence—for I have hitherto been accustomed to the country."

"Then you have not long resided in London, Miss Fitzhardinge?" said Charles, hazarding this mode of address with the determination of ascertaining whether the beautiful young woman were married or single.

"We have only been in this city for one week," she replied in an acquiescent way which convinced him that she had not changed the parental name by means of wedlock—a discovery that infused a secret glow of pleasure into his very soul, though at the same instant his heart smote him as if he were already playing a treacherous part in respect to Lady Frances Ellingham. "No," continued Perdita, "we have not long resided in London. Urgent affairs have compelled my mother to visit the capital; and as our stay is likely to be of considerable duration, we are about to take a house. For my part, I am not sorry that we are thus to settle in London: for, in spite of its oppressive atmosphere, its smoke, and its noise, it has many attractions."

"You have already seen enough, then, to induce you to prefer London to the country, Miss Fitzhardinge?" said Charles, now admiring the fine aquiline profile of which he was suffered to obtain a perfect view, as Perdita half averted her looks on purpose, though quite in a natural manner.

"I have seen enough to render me an enthusiastic admirer of your great city," she replied, now turning her full countenance upon him, and smiling so as to display her brilliant teeth: "but I am anxious to behold more, and my wish cannot very readily be gratified. For, save our attorney, we have no acquaintances—no friends in London: we are perfect strangers here—and we cannot very well ask our solicitor to escort us to the theatre and to those places of amusement which ladies would hardly choose to visit unless accompanied and protected by a gentleman."

"Is it possible that *you*, Miss Fitzhardinge, should have to experience the want of such a *chaperon?*" demanded Charles Hatfield, again hurried by his enthusiasm into language too little reserved and distant for a perfect stranger to address to a young lady:—at least, so he thought and feared immediately after he had made the observation.

"It is very possible," replied Perdita, in a mild and almost plaintive tone. "In the country we had numerous friends; but here——"

And the artful creature, stopping short, stooped down to pick up her handkerchief as if to apply it to her eyes:—at the same instant Charles, obeying the impulse of polite attention, bent down also to save the lady the trouble and perform the little act of courtesy, when their hair—their very cheeks came in contact,—accidentally as the confused and bewildered Charles imagined, but intentionally on the part of the wanton and astute Perdita.

And that contact—Oh! it was thrilling in the extreme; and Charles Hatfield felt as if his veins ran with liquid fire;—for the perfume exhaled from the lady's hair—the velvety feeling of the luxuriant curls—the softness and the warmth of her carnation cheek—and then the view which he could not possibly avoid for a moment obtaining of the glowing breast which her stooping posture completely revealed,—all this was sufficient to madden him with passion and excite him to a degree when all self-command becomes nearly impossible. But he still possessed a sufficiency of mental energy to controul himself; and, stammering forth an awkward apology, he hurriedly observed, "Would you not think me too bold, Miss Fitzhardinge, I should be proud to offer my services as a *chaperon* to yourself—and your mother," he added, for decency's sake.

The instant this offer was made,—made without the least forethought and in the confusion of the young man's mind arising from the incidents just related,—he repented of his rashness: he would have given worlds to be able to recall the proposal. For, in a moment to his mind flashed the image of the lovely Lady Frances Ellingham—the reflection that he was offering his attentions to a young person totally unknown to him—the remembrance that he had many matters of importance to occupy his leisure—and the general impression that he had committed himself in a most singularly foolish and inconsiderate manner.

Perdita saw what was passing in his mind: at least, she perceived that he repented of the proposal which he had so precipitately made, and which it had rejoiced her so much to receive;—and she resolved to conquer his scruples—overcome his repugnance—and confirm him in the act of vassalage to which her transcendant charms and her wanton arts had already prompted him.

Laying her soft warm hand upon his, and approaching her countenance so near to his own that her fragrant breath fanned his cheek, she said, in a tone apparently of deep emotion, "Mr. Hatfield, this proposal is so generous—so kind—so unexpected, that I know not how to answer you otherwise than by expressing my sincere gratitute. And yet—so frankly have you made the offer, that it would be a miserable affectation on my part to hesitate or to appear less candid and open in accepting it. I *do* therefore accept it, my dear sir—and with renewed thanks. And think not that in constituting yourself the friend—for in such a light must I henceforth consider you—of Miss Fitzhardinge, you are doing aught derogatory to yourself. No: for my mother is descended from an old and illustrious family,—a family which has enumerated amongst its members personages of rank, eminence, and renown;—and should the Chancery suit which she has come to London to prosecute, result favourably to her, she will recover an enormous fortune that has been accumulating for years through remaining in a dormant state."

While Perdita was delivering this tissue of falsehoods with an air of the most profound sincerity, she still kept her hand upon that of the young man—still retained her countenance near his own—and likewise fixed upon him looks at once languishing, tender, and voluptuous.

Again did he lose all power of sober reflection; and, completely yielding to the influence which the syren had in so short a time gained over him, he said, "I shall be proud and delighted to act as your escort, Miss Fitzhardinge. But you just now addressed me by my name—and yet I thought you were unprepared for my presence here this evening."

"I was well aware that my mother wished to see you on particular business," said Perdita, having a ready reply for every question that might be put to her; "and therefore when I saw you enter the room, I concluded that you must be Mr. Charles Hatfield."

"And are you acquainted with the nature of the business concerning which Mrs. Fitzhardinge desired to speak with me?" inquired the young man, wondering why the old lady did not make her appearance.

"Yes—I am well informed on that subject," returned Perdita; "but pray do not ask me to talk to you on business! I detest the very name! And now perhaps you will consider me a silly—flighty—volatile creature——"

"I consider you to be an angel of beauty!" exclaimed Charles, unable to restrain the raptures which hurried him on to this impassioned ejaculation

"I was told before I came to London that the gentlemen of the great metropolis were very fond of paying silly young ladies vain and empty compliments," said Perdita, looking with good-humoured archness at her companion, while her eyes beamed with wickedness and her bosom heaved visibly.

"Is it the first time that you have been assured of your beauty?" asked Charles, still carried away by an uncontroullable influence.

"No—not precisely the first," responded Perdita, with a *naiveté* so admirably assumed that her companion believed it to be completely genuine. "There was a young gentleman—or rather a nobleman, but I must not mention his name—in the country, who offered me his hand;—and he paid me many very fine compliments."

"And you accepted the proposal? you are engaged to him?" exclaimed Charles, with a strange fluttering of the heart.

"Neither the one nor the other," answered Perdita. "I could not love him—and therefore I declined the honour. My mother was angry with me, and talked a great deal about the excellence of the match and so forth: but I was obstinate—yes, very obstinate, Mr. Hatfield," she said archly; "for never—never," she continued, her tone suddenly becoming earnest and her manner serious,—"never could I bestow my hand where I cannot likewise give my heart!"

"And you have resolved wisely, Miss Fitzhardinge!" exclaimed Charles. "Matrimony without sincere affection can afford no promise of happiness. But one so beautiful as yourself—impressed too with such sterling sentiments and harbouring such pure principles—oh, you will prove indeed a treasure to the man who is fortunate enough to secure your heart and hand!"

"Again you compliment me, Mr. Hatfield," said Perdita, looking down and blushing,—for even her very blushes she could command at pleasure. "In reference, however, to the observation you have just made, I should remark that I have never yet met with one of your sex whom I could comprehend fully and who could understand me. I admire openness, candour and sincerity,—that generous frankness, too, which at once establishes friendship and dissipates cold formality. For I believe that the trammels of ceremonial politeness positively spoil the heart,—tutoring it to curb its enthusiasm where enthusiasm would be so natural! I know not how to express myself clearly; but what I mean to imply is this—that I am a believer in the possibility of friendship at first sight——"

"And of love at first sight also?" exclaimed Charles Hatfield, in an impassioned tone.

"Yes—and of love at first sight also," repeated Perdita, again hanging down her head—again commanding a deep blush—and likewise speaking in a low, melting tone of deep emotion, as she drew a long sigh.

"Was it that possibility of experiencing the feeling of friendship at first sight, which led you to accept my proposed services as an escort to the places of public amusement?" enquired Charles.

"Wherefore do you seek thus to probe the secret feelings of my soul?" asked Perdita, turning upon him a look indicative of mingled pleasure and amazement.

"Have I offended you by the question, charming lady?" exclaimed Charles.

"Oh! I do not so readily take offence, Mr. Hatfield," cried Perdita. "But—frank, candid, and ingenuous though I believe myself to be—I still have my little feelings of pride, and I could not think of making an avowal to a gentleman otherwise than as a reciprocity."

"Then were I to declare sincerely and solemnly—and on my honour as a man—that it was a sentiment of friendship, experienced at first sight and according to your own doctrine, which prompted me to offer my services as a *chaperon*," said Charles, hastily and enthusiastically, "would you deign to answer my question?"

"Such a declaration on your part, sir, would necessarily elicit—nay, demand some kind of a response on mine," returned the artful beauty, looking down, and tapping the carpet with her foot in such a manner that her ankle peeped from beneath her dress, and the young man's eyes could catch a glimpse of the exquisitely white skin through the net work of the dainty silk stocking.

Charles hesitated: an avowal of friendship trembled on his tongue—but he thought how dangerous such a confession would be—he thought, too, of Lady Frances Ellingham!

And Perdita again perceived that he hesitated; and instantly had recourse to a new artifice to display her charms to their utmost advantage. Stooping down, she affected to arrange the ottoman in the most convenient manner for her feet;—but, in this attitude which seemed so natural, ingenuous, and artless, she revealed so much of the treasures of her bosom that no room was left for imaginings—and Charles Hatfield felt himself seized with a delirium in which he would have made over his soul to Satan had such been the price demanded for the possession of Perdita.

"Miss Fitzhardinge," he said, his voice almost subdued and his tongue parched through the maddening fierceness of passion, "on my honour as a gentleman, I swear that the offer I ere now made you was dictated by a feeling of friendship! Yes—of a friendship that sprang up in my soul in a single instant—that took birth in a moment—a friendship that prompted me to declare how proud and delighted I should be to act as your escort! For I am candid, frank, and ingenuous as I perceive *you* to be,—and I will give you another proof of the existence of these qualities in respect to myself—even at the risk of offending you. From the first moment that I set foot in this room until now, I have experienced emotions such as I never felt before. In my delirium I apostrophised you as an angel of beauty;—and an angel of beauty must you indeed be to exercise such prompt—such speedy—such witching influence as that which has enthralled me. For it appears as if there were a spell upon me—an enchantment, from which there is no escape. Sweet lady, pardon me for having spoken thus frankly——"

"I again assure you that I do not very readily take offence," answered Perdita: then, laying her hand upon his—for the designing woman sought to excite him almost to madness—and again approaching her countenance so near his own that he could look into the depth of her large, wanton eyes,—she said, "You have made a certain avowal, and you have a right to expect a candid and unreserved reply from me. Then learn, Mr. Hatfield, that never should I have accepted your services as a *chaperon*—never should we have talked thus familiarly—never would you have been suffered to read so much of my disposition as within the last hour you have learnt—had not I likewise

experienced a feeling of friendship at first sight for you!"

"Oh! my God—this is happiness so unhoped—so unlooked for—so unexpected, that I am bewildered—dazzled—amazed!" murmured the young man, a mist obscuring his brain—and yet a glorious, lustrous, golden mist through which he seemed to catch glimpses of paradise. "Friendship did you say, charming lady? Yet is not friendship a dangerous word for lips like ours to breathe—and a dangerous sentiment for hearts like ours to feel?"

"You speak as if you were under an apprehension that you are doing wrong?" said Perdita, in a tone of soft reproach. "Oh! is this candour and frankness? If you regret that you have pledged me your friendship—for such I augur of your words—I release you, Mr. Hatfield, from the bond: nay—I should be too proud to ask you to adhere to it!"

And now the young man beheld the fascinating woman in a new phasis of her charms;—for, with that ready versatility of aspect and demeanour which she had so completely at her command, she suddenly invested herself with all the majesty of sublime haughtiness;—no longer melting, tender, wanton, and voluptuous as Venus—but terrible, domineering, superb, and imperious as Juno,—no longer wearing the cestus of the Goddess of Love—but grasping, as the Queen of Heaven, the thunders of Olympian Jove.

Her eyes flashed fire—her cheeks flushed—her nostrils dilated—her lip curled—her neck arched proudly rather than gracefully—her bosom heaved as if it would burst the low corsage which only half restrained it—and her very form seemed to draw itself up into a height, which, even as she sate and of middling stature as she was, appeared colossal at that moment to the astounded gaze of the young man.

Never was artifice more successful—never was triumph more complete, on one side;—never was defeat more signal—never was humiliation more contrite, on the other. For, overwhelmed as it were by the sovereign majesty of that anger which he believed himself to have provoked, Charles Hatfield fell upon his knees before the haughty beauty, and seizing both her hands in his, he extravagantly devoured them with kisses, exclaiming, "Pardon—pardon!"

"Yes—yes: it is as frankly accorded as sincerely demanded!" exclaimed Perdita, not offering to withdraw her hands from the lips which were now glued to them: and in an instant her whole manner and appearance changed again—and when Charles Hatfield ventured to look up into the syren's face, he saw her bending over him with cheeks flushed it is true, but not by anger—and with eyes that seemed to swim in wanton, liquid langour.

Rising from his suppliant posture, and now taking a seat by the side of Perdita on the sofa,—relinquishing her hands at the same time, for fear of giving offence by retaining them,—the infatuated young man, drunk with passion, said in a low murmuring tone, "We have not been acquainted more than one hour, and we have exchanged vows of friendship—is it not so?"

"Yes—if you do not repent now, and never will repent of that pledge on your part," answered the dangerous young woman, who thus conducted her designing machinations with such consummate skill.

"No—never, never!" cried Hatfield. "And now we know each other as well as if we had been intimate since our infancy! To you, then, henceforth I am *Charles;* and you are to me——"

"*Perdita*," said she.

"Oh! beautiful—singular—and yet ominous name!" exclaimed the young gentleman. "Yes—you are my friend—my dear friend Perdita! And now, Perdita, I will avail myself of this romantic yet not the less sincere friendship that is established between us, to ask you what caprice or fancy gave you so remarkable a Christian name?"

"Because in my infancy—shortly after my birth, and before I was baptised—I was lost,—or rather stolen by gipsies," answered Perdita, investing herself and her history with as much of the charm of mysticism as possible: "and when I was recovered from the kidnappers by my parents, they christened me Perdita—or THE LOST ONE."

"Every thing connected with you seems to be imbued with deep and enthralling interest, my dear friend," said Charles: "a supernatural halo appears to surround you! Your beauty is of a nature so superior to aught of female loveliness that I ever before beheld—your voice has something so indescribably melting and musical that it awakens echoes in the inmost recesses of the soul—your history is strange, wild, and impressive in its very commencement—your disposition is characterised by a frankness and candour so generous that it inspires and reciprocates profound friendship the instant it meets a kindred spirit—and then there is about you a something so witching, so captivating, so enchanting, that the best and most virtuous of men would lose all sense of duty, did you—sweet syren that you are—undertake to lead them astray."

"If I have indeed found a kindred spirit in you, Charles," said Perdita, taking his hand and pressing it as if in grateful and innocent rapture to her heaving bosom—an act which only tended to inflame the young man almost to madness,—"I shall have gained that which I have long sought, and never yet found. For my heart has hitherto been as complete a stranger to a sincere friendship as to love! When I spoke ere now of our friends in the country, I meant those acquaintances whom custom denominates by the other title."

"Perdita—my friend Perdita, the amity that we have pledged each other shall be eternal!" exclaimed Charles, in an impassioned tone.

"And you will return to visit me to-morrow?" said the young woman, her fine grey eyes beaming with an unsettled lustre, as if the mingled voluptuousness of day and night met in those splendid, eloquent orbs.

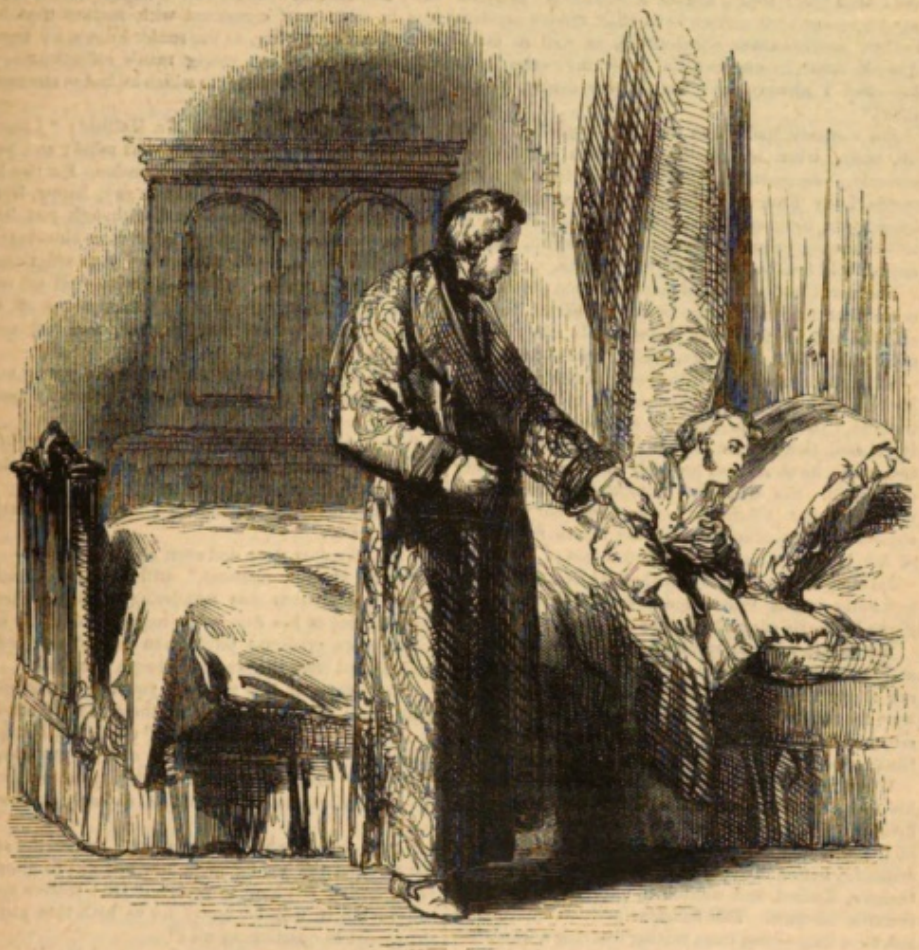
"Yes—oh! yes!" cried Charles, as if it were unnecessary to have asked the question. "And now I shall leave you, Perdita: I shall depart to feast my imagination on the pleasures of this interview."

Thus speaking, the young man pressed Perdita's hand to his lips, and hurried from the room, intoxicated with a delirium of bliss, and scarcely conscious of where he was or whither he was going.

CHAPTER CXXXI.

THE SYREN'S ARTS AND CHARMS.

ON gaining the street, Charles Hatfield hurried along like one demented,—positively reeling with the influence which Perdita's charms, allurements, and arts had shed upon him,—and feeling within his soul a glow of such ineffable happiness that he appeared to have been snatched from the world and wafted to



Elysium. Had he just quitted a banquet where his head had been pillowed on the bosom of beauty, and the fair hands of the charmer had held to his lips brimming goblets of champagne of which he had drunk deeply, he would not have experienced a more extraordinary degree of excitement, nor such felicitous sensations.

But the moment of reaction came; and though the revulsion was slow, yet it was powerful—and even painful.

He had found his way into Saint James's Park; and hurrying to the most secluded quarter, he was still giving rein to the luxuriousness of his thoughts, when it suddenly flashed to his mind that he had not received from the lips of Mrs. Fitzhardinge the important communications which she had promised him. Indeed, he had not seen her again from the moment when she showed him into the drawing-room where he had found the lovely creature to whom his friendship—his eternal friendship was so solemnly plighted.

Striking his repeater,—for obscurity reigned in that portion of the park where he now was, and he could not see the position of the hands of his watch,—he was amazed to discover that his interview with Perdita had lasted two hours.

Two hours!—and it scarcely seemed to have occupied ten minutes!

But now his reasoning faculties returned;—and he began to ask himself innumerable questions.

"Wherefore was I conducted to that house? was it really to receive important revelations from the mother? or only to be thrown into the way of the daughter? Why did not the mother make her appearance once during those two hours which I passed with the daughter? Was it a stratagem devised by designing women to ensnare me? or was Mrs. Fitzhardinge unexpectedly prevented from joining us so soon as she had intended? My God! I am bewildered—I know not what to think! For if they be women of evil repute and having sinister aims in view, Perdita would not have given me to understand that they are at ease in their circumstances, and hope to be even rich very shortly? But that young creature—so beautiful,—so indescribably—so enchantingly beautiful,—what object could she have in pledging her friendship to me—to *me*, a stranger whom she had never seen before? Fool that I am! wherefore did I give a similar promise to her? Oh! it was in a moment of delirium—of enchantment—of intoxication;—and might it not also have been the same with her?

Ah! that belief would denote a boundless vanity on my part;—and yet women have their sudden caprices —their instantaneous attachments, as well as men! Yes—it must be so—Perdita loves me!—she loves me—and I already love her deeply—madly, in return!"

But scarcely had these thoughts passed through his brain, when his heart smote him painfully—severely,—reproaching him with his treachery towards Lady Frances Ellingham, and suggesting a comparison between the retiring, bashful beauty of this charming young creature, and the warm, impassioned, bold loveliness of the syren Perdita.

The more Charles Hatfield pondered upon the strange scene that had taken place in Suffolk Street, the less satisfied did he feel with himself. He saw that his conduct had been rash, precipitate, and thoughtless;—and yet there was something so pleasurable in what he blamed himself for, that he was not altogether contrite. Indeed, he felt—he admitted to his own secret soul, that had he the power of recalling the last two hours, he should act precisely in the same manner over again. For when he thought of Perdita,—remembered her witcheries—dwelt on her faultless charms—and recalled to mind the mystic fascination of her language and the delicious tones of her voice,—his imagination grew inflamed—his blood ran rapidly and hotly in his veins—and it seemed that were she Satan in female shape, he could sell his soul to her!

It was late when he returned to Ellingham House; and he repaired at once to his chamber. But he could not sleep: the image of Perdita haunted him;—and were it not so unseasonable an hour he would have returned to Suffolk Street under pretence of soliciting the promised revelations from Mrs. Fitzhardinge.

When he retired to rest, and sleep did at last visit his eyes, that beauteous image followed him in his dreams. He thought that he was seated by the side of the witching fair one on the sofa, and that she was reclining, half-embraced, on his breast, with her countenance, flushed and wanton in expression, upturned towards his own. This delicious position appeared to last for a long—long time, neither uttering a word, but drinking deep draughts of love from each other's eyes. Then he fancied that he stooped to press his lips to her delicious mouth;—but at that instant the lovely face changed—elongating, and undergoing so horrible a transformation that his eyes were fixed in appalling fascination upon it,—while, at the same time, he became sensible that the soft and supple form which he held in his arms was undergoing a rapid and signal change likewise,—till the whole being, lately so charming, so tender, and so loving, was changed into a hideous serpent. A terrible cry escaped him—and he awoke!

The rays of the gorgeous sun were streaming in at the window, as Charles Hatfield started from his slumber; and, to his surprise, he found his father standing by the side of the bed.

"You have been labouring under the influence of an unpleasant dream, Charles," said Mr. Hatfield, taking his son's hand.

"Yes—'t was indeed a hideous dream!" exclaimed the young man, shuddering at the idea which still pursued him.

"And was that dream a reflex of any thoughts which occupy you when awake?" asked his father, in a kind and anxious tone.

Charles surveyed his parent with astonishment, and then became absolutely crimson in the face;—for this early and unusual visit seemed to imply that its object was in some way connected with matters that had lately been occupying, as the reader knows, no inconsiderable share of the young man's reflections—we mean, the family secrets into which he had so strangely penetrated.

"Yes, Charles," continued Mr. Hatfield; "I feared that you had something upon your mind; and your manner now confirms that apprehension. For the last week you have not been the same gay, happy, lively being you so lately were;—and, although you have endeavoured to conceal your sorrow from observation, yet it has not escaped the eyes of your affectionate mother and myself. Tell me, Charles—tell me candidly, I implore you—is it in consequence of the discovery that we are your parents, and not mere relatives——"

"Oh! my dear father," exclaimed the young man, "that discovery made me happy, I solemnly assure you!"

"Then wherefore are you melancholy and thoughtful at times?" asked Mr. Hatfield, in a tone of deep interest.

"Melancholy and thoughtful!" repeated Charles, mechanically.

"Yes, my dear son: and even at this moment——"

"Even at this moment," still repeated Charles, whose imagination was wandering to Suffolk Street, the influence of his dream having been to fill his soul with a more profound terror than he had ever before experienced from the worst of sleep's delusions.

"Yes—even at this moment you are abstracted—your ideas are unsettled—and there is a wildness in your looks which terrifies me!" cried Mr. Hatfield, speaking with strong emphasis and in an earnest manner. "Charles! again I implore you to tell me the cause of this change which has so lately come over you!"

"Dear father, why will you press me on the subject?" cried the young man, now brought to himself, yet knowing not how to reply. "Oh! believe me—believe me, it will be better for us both that you do not persist in questioning me!"

"On the contrary, Charles," returned Mr. Hatfield, speaking more seriously and firmly than before, "it will be far more satisfactory to me—yes, and to your mother also—to be made the depositors of your secret cares. You have assured me that you are not unhappy on account of the discovery made on the day when the Prince of Montoni was received at Court; and therefore I must conjecture the existence of some other cause of grief. Charles, my dear boy," added his father, gazing steadfastly upon him, "you love Lady Frances—and you are fearful of avowing your passion?"

The young man had expected that his father was about to speak on some of those family matters into the mysterious depths of which he had penetrated; and, therefore, when Mr. Hatfield addressed to him that species of interrogative accusation, Charles experienced a relief which betrayed itself as well in the brightening up of his countenance as in the surprise wherewith he regarded his parent.

"Ah! now I have penetrated your secret!" cried the latter: then, wringing his son's hand, he said impressively, "Fear nothing—but hope every thing, Charles;—and if you have reason to believe that Lady Frances reciprocates your attachment, hesitate not to offer her your hand."

With these words, Mr. Hatfield hurried from the

room, leaving his son amazed and bewildered at the turn which the scene had so unexpectedly taken.

"Yes," exclaimed the young man aloud, after a long pause, during which he reflected profoundly alike on his fearful dream and his father's suggestion; "I will banish Perdita from my memory—for that vision was a providential warning! The most deadly serpents often wear the most beauteous skins;—and Perdita—the syren Perdita—has secret ends of her own to serve in thus throwing her silken chains round me. There is mischief in her fascination:—the honey of her lips will turn to gall and bitterness in the mouth of him who presses them! And Frances—my charming cousin Frances, who knows not that she is thus related to me,—sweet Lady Frances is endowed with every quality calculated to ensure my happiness. Yes—I will adopt my father's counsel: I will secure the hand of this amiable girl! Then, although I must sooner or later compel my sire to wrest the earldom from his younger brother, the blow will fall the less severely on the latter, inasmuch as his daughter will become a Viscountess in espousing me, and a Countess at my father's death!"

Thus reasoned Charles Hatfield, as he performed the duties of the toilette; and when he descended to the breakfast-parlour, there was so fine a glow of animation on his countenance, and so much happiness in his bright eyes, that his parents were rejoiced to mark the change. They did not, however, make any audible observation on the subject; but the rapid and significant glances which they dealt at each other, expressed the delight that filled their souls.

Lady Frances looked more than usually beautiful and interesting on this occasion: at least so thought Charles Hatfield, as, seating himself by her side, he ministered to her the attentions of the breakfast table.

The conversation turned upon an important event which was to take place in the evening—the Prince of Montoni having accepted the Earl of Ellingham's invitation to a banquet at the lordly mansion in Pall Mall. It was resolved, in order to render befitting honour to the illustrious guest, that the entertainment should be of the most sumptuous description; and no expense was to be spared on the occasion. A select number of the noble Earl's acquaintances were invited; and these were chosen not on account of great names and sounding titles,—but on the score of personal merit and consideration.

Soon after breakfast Charles Hatfield and Lady Frances found themselves alone together in the apartment; and the young maiden, approaching her companion, said in her artless, fascinating manner, "I am delighted to see that you have recovered your natural gaiety. Do you know, Mr. Charles, that you have latterly been most desperately moody and reserved?"

"Not towards you, I hope, dear Fanny," he replied. "Not for worlds," he added emphatically, "would I give you cause to think ill of me."

"As for thinking ill of you, Charles," she observed, "*that* would be impossible! But may I not seek to know the reasons of your late unhappiness?"

"Let us not discourse upon the past, Fanny," said the young man, earnestly. "I am happy now, at all events—happier, too, than ever, because I perceive that my welfare is not altogether indifferent to you."

"Far from it," observed Lady Frances, with the ingenuous emphasis of her extreme artlessness. "Do we not live beneath the same roof?—are we not friends?—are not our parent very dear friends to each other?—and is it not therefore natural that I should feel interested in all that concerns your happiness?"

"Adorable creature!" exclaimed Charles, as he drew a rapid contrast between the charming *naiveté* of the beautiful Lady Frances and the forward, bold manner of the voluptuously lovely Perdita: then, taking his cousin's hand, and gazing tenderly upon her innocent countenance, he said, "Fanny, were our parents to sanction our marriage, would you consent to be mine?"

Lady Frances withdrew her hand hastily; and, blushing deeply, she gazed for a few seconds in the most unfeigned surprise on her companion.

"You are not offended with me?" asked Charles. "I had hoped—I had flattered myself——"

"No—I am not offended with you," returned Fanny, now casting down her eyes and blushing even more deeply than before: "but I fear—I tremble lest I am doing wrong thus to listen to you——"

"A virtuous affection is no crime," said the young man, hastily. "And now, my dearest Frances, if you feel that you *can* love me, I will at once declare to your noble parents the attachment—the deep attachment which I experience towards you."

"Whatever my father and mother counsel, will become a law for me," answered Lady Frances, in a low and tremulous tone, which convinced the suitor that he was not indifferent to her.

Charles pressed her hand to his lips, and hurried from the room with the intention of immediately seeking the Earl of Ellingham; but in the passage he encountered a domestic who gave him a note which had just been left by a messenger. The address was in an elegant female hand; and the word "Private" was written in the corner. Charles hastened to his own apartment, and read the note, the contents of which ran as follow:—

"My dearest Friend,—Before you see my mother again, I must have a few words with you in private. She is compelled to visit her solicitor at mid-day, and will be absent for at least two hours. I shall expect you as soon after twelve as possible.

"PERDITA FITZHARDINGE."

"No—I will not accept the invitation!" exclaimed the young man, aloud: then, gazing again at the note, he murmured, "What a charming hand-writing—and how beautiful does her mystic and romantic name appear upon paper! *Perdita!*—'t is a name which possesses an irresistible attraction! But—oh! that dream! And yet it was but a dream;—and a very silly dream, the more I contemplate it. Heavenly warnings are not sent by such means; and Lady Frances might as well have been the subject of the vision as Perdita. What can she require with me? She must have a few words with me in private before I see her mother again. Then her mother expects and intends to have an interview with me—and she must therefore have certain communications to make, after all. This does not appear like delusion nor trickery:—no—the old lady really has matters of import to discuss with me;—and I should be wrong—I should perhaps be criminally neglectful of my own interests, were I not to hear whatever she may have to state. And, Perdita—it would be at least rude and ungentlemanly on my part not to attend to this missive, the nature of which appears to be urgent. Yes—I will call on Perdita: 't is already verging close upon midday—and there is no time to be lost. But—after all that has passed between dear Frances and myself this morning—I shall be as distant and reserved as polite-

ness will admit: I shall arm myself against the fascinations of the syren;—and if she offer to release me from the pledge of friendship so inconsiderately given, I shall not fail to accept with joy the proposed emancipation."

But, before he repaired to Suffolk Street, did he not seek his father to communicate to him the important fact that he had duly followed his counsel and solicited the hand of Lady Frances?—or did he not obtain an interview with the Earl and acquaint him with the nature of the conversation which had taken place between himself and that nobleman's daughter?

Alas! no:—for it was close upon twelve when the young man received Perdita's note;—and he thought that it did not precisely signify for an hour or two when he might make those statements; whereas it was necessary to see the syren without delay.

Thus reasoned Charles Hatfield to himself;—and the reader will agree with us in deciding that the necessity which constituted the excuse for his conduct, was not quite so urgent as he chose to fancy it.

Moreover,—since Charles Hatfield resolved to appear as reserved and formal as he well might be, towards Perdita,—it was assuredly strange that he should devote more than usual attention to his toilette, arranging his hair in the most becoming style, and surveying with inward satisfaction his very handsome countenance in the mirror.

The clock struck twelve as he quitted the house;—and it was impossible to conceal from himself the fact that he was rejoiced at having an excuse to call upon Perdita.

Then, as he proceeded with some degree of rapidity towards Suffolk Street, he could not possibly prevent his imagination from indulging in exciting conjectures how Perdita would be dressed—how she would look by day-light—and how she would receive him when she observed his studied coolness and his constraint of manner.

"Poor girl!" he murmured to himself: "if she really hoped to find a sincere friend in me, how will she bear the disappointment which is in store for her? It grieves me—Oh! it grieves me to be compelled to inflict a wound upon her gentle heart; but duty—yes, my duty towards Lady Frances leaves me no alternative."

With a beating heart he knocked at the door;—and in less than a minute he was conducted to the drawing-room, where Perdita was waiting to receive him.

The young lady was dressed in an elegant morning wrapper; and, the weather being intensely hot, the ribbands which should have fastened it round her neck, were left untied, so that it remained open at the bosom. Her hair was arranged in bands, and she wore a cap of the slightest material, but the snowy whiteness of which enhanced the glossy richness of those luxuriant masses that crowned her fine forehead. Her large grey eyes, with their dark pupils, were as bright and lustrous as on the preceding evening; and the noon-day sun detracted not from the exquisite whiteness of the neck and shoulders, and the healthy hues of the complexion of the countenance, which had shone to such advantage by candle-light.

No: Perdita was as ravishingly beautiful on this occasion, as on the former;—and there was a freshness—yes, even an appearance of virgin freshness, about her, matured and developed as her charms were, which counteracted the impression that her wanton looks and the forwardness of her manner might otherwise have created in respect to her virtue. Her depravity in Australia had not impaired her loveliness, nor marred the youthfulness of her beauty: her face—her figure afforded not an intimation that she had been steeped in licentious enjoyments from the age of thirteen until she embarked on board the ship that wafted her to England.

The moment Charles Hatfield entered the room, he was struck by the enchanting loveliness of Perdita as much as he had been on the preceding evening—indeed, as completely as if this were the first time that he had ever seen her. For an instant he stopped short as if he dared not proceed farther within the sphere of that Circean influence which a warning voice within his soul seemed to declare was alluring him on to total destruction. but, fascinated as is the tremulous bird by the eye of the serpent, he advanced towards the beautiful creature who rose from the sofa to receive him.

Then as he felt her warm hand in his,—as her countenance beamed upon him in all the glory of its loveliness,—as her soft, musical, and delicious voice flowed upon his ear, borne on a breath fragrant as the perfume of flowers, and issuing from lips that seemed to have robbed the rose of its tint,—he felt his stern resolves thawing within him, and experienced the impossibility of manifesting coolness towards a creature of such exquisite charms and such rare fascinations.

"I thank you, my dear friend, for this punctuality," she said, gently drawing him to a seat by her side on the sofa, where she resumed her place. "Have you thought of all that passed between us last evening?—and have you reflected that we played the part of silly children in pledging eternal friendship, total strangers as we were to each other?—or did you regard the proceeding as a natural and solemn compact, to be inviolably maintained?"

"Wherefore these questions, Perdita?" enquired Charles, dazzled by the impassioned looks that were fixed upon him. "Have you yourself repented ——"

"I never repent of any thing that I may do," answered Perdita, hastily. "I do nothing without being convinced beforehand that I am acting judiciously and properly; and when I most appear to be the child of impulse, I am on those occasions the most considerate, cautious, and reflective. But this may not be the case with you: and, therefore, it was incumbent upon me to ascertain your feeling in respect ——"

"In respect to that friendship which I have sworn!" exclaimed Charles, no longer master of himself. "Not for world's would I recall the pledge I gave——"

"Then we are friends—friends in the manner I had hoped we should be," said the young woman. "But it was necessary that I should be assured of this before I spoke to you on a subject which otherwise would have been indifferent to you," she added, bending on her companion a look that seemed to invite him to kiss the red, pouting lips which, now parting with a delicious smile, revealed her somewhat large, but pearly, even, and admirably shaped teeth.

"Proceed, my dearest—dearest friend," exclaimed Charles, no longer thinking of Lady Frances, but totally absorbed in the fascination which attracted him towards the bewitching Perdita.

"You call me your friend—and it is as a friend that I wish to consult you, Charles," said the young woman, heaving a deep sigh. "You must know that, singular being that I may appear to you, and even unmaidenly hasty in forming so sincere a friendship——"

"No—no: you obeyed the dictates of a generous

heart—a heart as ingenuous and innocent as it is fervid and warm," cried Charles, seizing one of her hands and pressing it in both his own.

"Ah! now you comprehend my sentiments just as I would have explained them had I been able to find language for the purpose!" she said, abandoning her hand to him as if unwittingly. "But, as I was about to observe, I am all candour and frankness:—that is my disposition;—and when you left me last evening, I immediately hastened to my mother, who was seized with a sudden indisposition which prevented her from joining us in this room; and to her I revealed at once and unhesitatingly every word of the conversation that had occurred between you and me."

"And she doubtless reproached you for opening your heart so freely to one who was a complete stranger to you?" said Charles, now fearful lest Mrs. Fitzhardinge should forbid his visits to Perdita in future.

"She reproached me indeed—but mildly and blandly," answered the deceitful young woman, assuming a plaintive tone; "and yet not so mildly as was her wont on former occasions—for it appears that she has formed certain views in regard to me—views of marriage——"

"Marriage, Perdita!" repeated Charles Hatfield, bitterly.

"Yes," she responded, her voice growing more mournful still. "A man of immense wealth—and with a noble title, but whose name I do not even yet know, and whom I have never seen——"

"Oh! this is infamous, thus to dispose of you to a person whom perhaps you may never be able to love!" cried Charles, with strange emphasis and excitement of manner.

"Love! I shall hate and abhor him, even though he be handsome and amiable beyond all conception," exclaimed Perdita. "I shall detest him for the mere fact that I am compelled to espouse him."

"But will you yield with docility to an arrangement which seems to me—pardon the freedom with which I speak of your mother—to be indelicate and unjust?" demanded the young man.

"Alas! I fear that I have no alternative save to yield with as good a grace as I can assume," answered Perdita, tears now starting to her eyes, and trembling on her long dark lashes; "for the nobleman whom my mother would thus force me to wed, is her opponent in the law-suit—and he has discovered a means of establishing his claims beyond all possibility of farther dispute."

"Oh! I understand the dreadful selfishness that is now at work in respect to you!" cried Charles. "He will allow your mother to enjoy the fortune, provided you are immolated—sacrificed——"

"Yes: those are the terms;—and now you may easily comprehend how I shrink from such a fate!" exclaimed the young woman, sobbing profoundly.

"But this nobleman—who is he? what is his name?" demanded Hatfield, powerfully excited.

"I know so little of my mother's private affairs, that I am unable to answer the questions," said Perdita. "To speak candidly, she refused even to mention the name or the age of this unknown suitor for my hand: and therefore I apprehend the worst. Indeed, from an observation which she inadvertently dropped, I am convinced that that he is old—very old——"

"And you who are so young—and so beautiful!" cried Charles Hatfield, gazing upon her with admiration—nay, with adoration and enthusiastic worship. "It were an infamy—a crime—a diabolical crime, thus to sacrifice you!"

"Yet such is my mother's intention," murmured Perdita; "and therefore was it that she reproached me for vowing a permanent friendship with you."

"Then Mrs. Fitzhardinge will immolate you on the altar of selfishness—she will sell you for gold,—sell you, perhaps, to an old man who may be hideous, and who is certain to be loathsome to you?" exclaimed Charles, speaking with all the rapidity of wild excitement.

"Yes:—and it was not until last night that I was aware of the frightful arrangement which my mother had thus made—the dreadful compact to which she had assented. It seems that this nobleman had heard of me—and the description given of my appearance pleased him; so that when he yesterday discovered the existence of some paper which at once annihilated all my mother's previously conceived hopes of gaining the law-suit, he proposed his hateful conditions."

"And Mrs. Fitzhardinge has now sought her attorney——"

"For the purpose of declaring that I assent to this most unnatural union!" added Perdita, with the well-feigned emphasis of violent sorrow.

"But was it possible that you could hold out to your mother even the faintest prospect of thus sacrificing all your happiness suddenly and in a moment?" demanded Charles.

"When I beheld my mother weep—heard her implore and beseech—and was made aware of the ruin that threatened her unless I agreed to the proposals of this unknown suitor, I wept also—and, my tears choking me, my silence was taken for assent. Then my mother departed to visit her solicitor: and in my despair I despatched a note to you, praying you to call on me during her absence."

"My God! what counsel—what advice can I give you?" exclaimed Charles, bewildered by the tale which was told so plausibly that not a doubt of its truth existed in his mind. "I cannot see you sacrificed thus:—yet how can I save you? Oh! were I possessed of a fortune, I would bestow it upon your mother that she might leave you free and unshackled to obey only the dictates of your own will—follow your own inclinations—and bestow your hand where you could likewise grant your affections!"

"Ah! my generous friend," murmured Perdita, advancing her countenance towards his own as if unwittingly and in the excitement of her feelings: "how deeply grateful to you am I for these assurances! I knew that I should receive your sympathy—if not your aid,—your commiseration—if not your assistance."

"How can I assist you, dearest Perdita?" exclaimed Charles, pressing her hand violently in his own. "The liberality of my pa—— my uncle and aunt, I mean—have enabled me to accumulate some seven or eight hundred pounds—for my allowance is far more liberal than my expenditure: and that amount is at your mother's service. But it is so small—so contemptibly small in comparison with the fortune which she doubtless hopes to acquire——"

"Nevertheless, it may procure a delay, by rescuing my mother from the immediate embarrassments in which this sudden change in the aspect of her affairs has plunged her," said Perdita: "for, to speak candidly to you, her solicitor has been advancing her a regular income during the time that the suit has

lasted;—and now, since all hope of gaining it is destroyed, no farther supplies can be expected from that quarter."

"Yes—it may procure a delay," said Charles, in a musing tone; "and with leisure to reflect calmly—deliberately—much may be done! O Perdita—never, never could I see you thus sacrificed to a man whom you would abhor!"

"Generous friend—'t was heaven who sent you to me!" exclaimed the young woman, drooping her head upon his breast, and weeping,—weeping tears of gratitude, as he fondly believed.

He threw his arms around her—he pressed her to his heart—he clasped her with such fervour that the embrace was passionately violent—he strained her as it were to the seat of his very soul: then, hastily loosening his hold, he raised her face—her warm, blushing face—and on her lips he imprinted a thousand rapturous kisses,—those lips that were literally glued to his own. He looked into her eyes, and read love, desire, and passion in those orbs, now melting with languor and wantonness;—for Perdita herself had almost entirely lost all power of self-controul, and clung to him as if inviting the full extreme of voluptuous enjoyment. He felt her bosom heaving against his chest; and, maddened with excitement, his daring hand invaded the treasures of those swelling, palpitating globes, so snowy in their whiteness—so warm with their licentious fires.

But at that instant Perdita recovered her presence of mind: and it flashed to her memory that it was no part of her scheme to surrender herself completely up to him until she had ensnared his affections so fully—so inextricably, that all subsequent escape or estrangement, through repentance and remorse, should be impossible.

Accordingly—wresting herself from his embrace, and retreating to the farther end of the sofa, she hastily arranged her cap and dishevelled hair—drew the wrapper over her breast—and, turning upon him eyes that still seemed to swim in liquid languor, said in a half-reproachful manner, "Oh! Charles—is this friendship? would you ruin me?"

"Sweetest—dearest creature," exclaimed the young man, "did I not tell you yester-night that *friendship* was a sentiment dangerous for us to feel, and a word perilous for our tongues to utter? O Perdita—it is not friendship that I feel for you: 't is love—ardent, sincere, and devoted love! And 't was not friendship at first sight that I experienced for you the moment I last evening set foot in this room: but 't was love—love, my Perdita—such love as never before did man entertain for woman!"

"And it was because I love you, Charles," murmured Perdita, in her softest, tenderest tones, "that I loathe and abhor the idea of that union which my mother has so inconsiderately—so rashly—so cruelly planned for me!"

"You love me, Perdita!" ejaculated the young man, wild with joy: "oh! thanks—ten thousand thanks for that assurance, my own sweet Perdita! I was happy in the possession of your friendship: but I am now mad—demented in the confidence of owning your love! For the love of such a being as yourself is something that would make a paradise of the blackest and most barren desert on the face of the earth! Is it possible, then, that I possess your love, Perdita—dearest Perdita? Oh! tell me so once more: it is so delicious to hear such an avowal from your lips!"

"Yes, Charles—I love you—I do indeed love you," replied the young woman, throwing as much softness into her melting tones, as much witchery into her manner, and as much voluptuous languor into her glances as she possibly could.

It was like a scene of enchantment for that young man of wild and fervid impulses; and he was completely—wholly absorbed in its magic interest,—an interest so enthralling, so captivating that he felt as if he had been suddenly wafted into a new world of delights unknown in this sublunary sphere. Lady Frances was forgotten—his parents, his ambitious aims, and even his admiration of the Prince of Montoni,—all, all were forgotten in the delirium of passion which had seized upon him.

"You love me—you do indeed love me!" he exclaimed; and, approaching the object of his worship, he again wound his arms around her—again drank in the sweetness of her moist red lips.

"Charles—Charles," she murmured; "you are gloriously handsome—and I adore you!"

But as she thus spoke, she once more disengaged herself from his maddened embrace—for she felt that her own passions, ever violent, were raging to a degree that became almost uncontroullable.

"And now listen to me—patiently and tranquilly if you can; and I will lay down the conditions on which our complete happiness may be based,—conditions which have for their elements that generous confidence, that mutual reliance, and that candour and frankness which alone constitute pure affection."

"Proceed, dearest Perdita," said Hatfield: "I am all attention—and your voice is sweeter in my ears than the most delicious music."

Perdita once more arranged her cap and the massive bands of her glossy hair: then, turning with a simulation of charming artlessness towards her companion, she addressed him in the following manner.

CHAPTER CXXXII.

THE DANGEROUS SOPHISTRY OF A LOVELY WOMAN.

"You are now about to discover a new phasis in my character, dear Charles; and perhaps you will look upon my notions and opinions as unmaidenly and bold—if not positively immoral. But remember that I am not like the generality of my sex; and that my sentiments, though audacious as innovations, are nevertheless as sincerely believed in as they are tenaciously clung to by me."

"It is because you are so different from other women, not only in the loveliness of your person, but also in the tone and strength of your mind," said Charles, "that I am thus enamoured of you—yes, and proud too of possessing your affection in return."

"But I am about to preach a doctrine which you may think repugnant to the befitting delicacy of my sex," returned Perdita: "for it is of the uselessness of the marrige rites that I have now to discourse."

"Proceed, dearest," said Charles; "and I will frankly give you my opinion on your views in this respect."

"Ah! now you encourage me to open my heart to you, my dear friend," exclaimed Perdita; "and you do not affect the sanctimonious hypocrite, who frowns even before he has heard the argument broached. Thus stands our present position in my estimation:—We love each other——"

"Devotedly—earnestly," added Charles, with strong emphasis, the image of Lady Frances being as completely banished from his mind as if such a person as that charming creature did not exist in the world.

"Yes—we love each other devotedly and earnestly," continued Perdita; "and the extent as well as the ardour of our passion is a something which should remain a solemn and sacred mystery to the vulgar and curious observer. 'Tis a secret which we should cherish between ourselves,—a secret whose charm is spoilt, or at all events marred, by being revealed to others who are indifferent to us. This is one reason wherefore I consider the pompous ceremony of marriage to be actually detrimental to the fervid, ardent, and warm attachment which seeks to hide itself in the bosoms of the fond couple who entertain it. Then, again, I should not be happy were I to have the conviction that I was so enchained to you by legal trammels that you could not cast me off did I become displeasing to you;—for I should never know whether you still clung to me through the endurance of real affection, or because an indissoluble bond forged by human legislation united us. No:—I would rather that our love rested upon its own basis alone—existing by its own vitality, and through no borrowed and artificial auxiliary,—that it should be a mutual confidence—a mutual reliance,—free and independent in one sense, and compulsory in none. If on these terms you will take thy Perdita to thine arms, Charles—then indeed shall I gladly become thine:—but if our union must be characterised by solemn ceremonies and cold, inanimate rites—then, heartbreaking as the alternative will be, I can never—never be more to thee than a sincere and faithful friend."

"Dearest Perdita," exclaimed Charles, "I receive all these confessions of your peculiar sentiments as new proofs of your love for me! For by the very nature of the conditions which you stipulate, you convince me of the trust which you repose in my fidelity and honour."

"Yes—because in defiance of the opinion of the world, I surrender myself up to you, to be a wife in every thing save in respect to that ceremony which is the first object of a virtuous woman's thoughts," murmured Perdita. "And now, dear Charles, do you entertain a mean opinion of my principles, because I dare to chalk out a path of happiness according to my own fancy?"

"No—no, Perdita!" cried the young man, pressing to his lips the hand which was extended to him with such an appearance of ingenuousness that it quite enchanted him. "But how is it possible that you—so young—should have pondered so seriously on the subject of love and of marriage? For you have assured me that you never loved till now——"

"Though nineteen summers have not yet passed over my head," interrupted Perdita, "my mind has travelled much in the realms of thought and meditation;—and though, as I will candidly confess to you, I have read but little, yet have I pondered much."

"And there is about you a mystery as charming and as interesting as your loveliness is indescribably great," said Charles: "and you know, angel that you are, how I adore you!"

"Then if we plight our faith to each other to-day, as solemnly and as emphatically as yester-night we vowed an eternal friendship, shall you ever repent the step you will have taken?" asked Perdita, gazing affectionately on her handsome companion, whose looks seemed to devour her.

"Repent!—what, repent the step that makes you mine?" he exclaimed. "No—never, never!"

"And you take me as your wife on the conditions I have named—that I am to be a wife, and no wife?" said Perdita, her musical voice sounding soft as a silver bell and tremulously clear,—ravishment in her tone, love in her eyes, and warmth in the tender pressure of the hand which the young man had grasped.

"Yes—I take you as my wife on those conditions," he returned, pressing her to his bosom. "But there are still many things to be considered, my Perdita," he observed, after a short pause, during which they exchanged the most rapturous kisses. "In the first place, your mother——"

"I shall boldly acquaint her with what I have done," said Perdita; "and she will not seal my unhappiness by an opposition—which, after all, would be vain and useless," added the syren.

"And will not Mrs. Fitzhardinge recoil in horror from the idea that her daughter should have formed this connexion, without bearing the legal name of a wife?" demanded Charles, gazing earnestly on her beautiful countenance.

"Leave me to make my mother a convert to my own principles respecting marriage," was the reply. "And now, with regard to yourself, my Charles,—you need be under no restraint. Continue to dwell with your family—and visit me as frequently as you can. In fact, I shall of course expect you to pass as much of your time as possible with me,—but never when your relatives and friends require your presence."

"Oh! on these terms we shall indeed be supremely happy!" cried Charles. "And now you are my wife?"

"Yes—and you are my husband," blushingly answered the syren, as she drooped her head upon his breast.

He wound his arms around her; and then their lips met in warm and luscious kisses. Charles grew bolder: his hand wandered to Perdita's glowing bosom,—and Perdita no longer restrained him—no longer shrank back. Still, however, she did not choose to surrender herself immediately: a little more tantalization would only rivet his enthusiastic attachment and confirm the madness of his devouring passion;—and, accordingly—at the moment when, wild with desire, he was about to claim the privilege of a husband, she started from his arms, exclaiming, "Hush! my mother has returned—I hear her approaching!"

They separated—retreating to the ends of the sofa; and Perdita arranged her disordered hair once more.

No one however came: it was a false alarm,—as Perdita indeed well knew it to be.

"You must leave me now, Charles," she said; "for my mother cannot be long ere she comes back. To-morrow, at mid-day, I shall be again alone—for I am aware that she will have to pay another visit to her attorney. Come, then, at that hour—and I will tell you all that has passed between my parent and myself."

"Not an instant later than twelve to-morrow shall I be!" exclaimed Charles. "And now,—forgive me for returning for a moment to worldly affairs—quitting the paradise of happiness to which you have raised me, my Perdita,—but in respect to the small sum——"

"Oh! I had forgotten all our arrangements with regard to that matter," said Perdita: "and, indeed—I detest and abominate money-affairs. But now—as your wife, dearest Charles—I may mention my

wishes on that head without a blush. I should therefore be pleased if you could forward the amount to me in the course of the afternoon; and I will use it to the best possible advantage with my mother."

"In less than an hour it shall be here in an envelope, sealed, and addressed to yourself," said Charles. "Farewell, my sweet Perdita—farewell, until to-morrow!"

They embraced each other fervently; and Charles Hatfield took his departure.

Before he returned home, he walked into the park to collect his scattered thoughts and acquire some degree of composure. His perfidy—his infamous treachery towards Lady Frances now burst upon him in all its hideousness. That very morning had he demanded his cousin's hand in marriage;—and within an hour afterwards he had solemnly contracted a strange and scarcely comprehensible union with Perdita Fitzhardinge.

His conduct seemed vile in the extreme: his heart, smote him painfully.

Yet was he so completely infatuated with Perdita, that he could not calmly contemplate the idea of breaking with her for ever. He was like a gambler who loathes himself for his ready yielding to a ruinous vice—but who nevertheless returns with renewed zest to the gaming-table.

For Charles thought of the happiness which he had so nearly attained on this eventful day, and which he felt assured must await him on the morrow;—he could not banish from his imagination the recollection of those charms which had plunged him into a perfect delirium of passion;—and the more he thought on the witching loveliness of Perdita, the less inclined was he to resign her.

Then came the almost inevitable results of the sophistry which the designing woman had called to her aid,—results which may be explained the more completely by following the current of the young man's thoughts.

"After all, I am not indissolubly bound to Perdita—nor has she for ever linked her destiny with mine. No marriage ceremony has taken place between us—nor will any. I am not inextricably fastened to her apron-strings. And yet—and yet, is it honourable of me to make such calculations, the inferences to be drawn from which I am ashamed even to express to my own secret self? No—no: because no legal ties exist between us, I am the more imperiously bound to remain faithfully attached to her! Beautiful—enchanting—mysterious Perdita, how hast thou enthralled me! But—my God! am I not your willing slave?—do I not accept the yoke which thou hast thrown upon me? —would I release myself from those silken chains, even were I able? No—ten thousand times *no*, my adored—my worshipped Perdita! I care not whether thou dost exercise a supernatural enchantment over me: if thou art Satan in a female shape—or a serpent, as my dream appeared to give warning—I cannot cease to love thee,—no—never—never!"

But what of Lady Frances Ellingham? Oh! it was rash—it was indiscreet of him to solicit her hand;—but had he not acted in pursuance of the advice of his father?—and had he gone so far as to be unable to retreat?

Alas! Charles Hatfield, the sophistry of Perdita has rendered thee sophistical, until thou dost stand on the very threshold of—villainy!

Reckless art thou of the whisperings of conscience: —thou art infatuated with the fatal beauty of thy Perdita—and the hope, the burning hope of tasting it her arms the pleasures of paradise, renders thee studious only to subdue the remorse that whispers to thee the name of the outraged Lady Frances Ellingham!

Having wandered in the park for upwards of half an hour, Charles Hatfield bethought himself of the promise to send the amount of his savings to his beauteous Perdita; and, hastening home, he sought his chamber, which he reached unperceived by any one save the domestic who gave him admission. That he was thus unobserved, was a source of satisfaction, —inasmuch as he felt that his cheeks were flushed, and he feared lest his appearance might seem singular.

Opening his desk he took from a secret drawer the Bank-notes which constituted his savings; and enveloping them in a sheet of paper, he issued forth again to leave the parcel at the house in Suffolk Street. This being done, Charles returned to the park, where he roamed about until the hour arrived when it was necessary for him to return home in order to dress for dinner.

The reader must not forget that a splendid banquet was to take place that evening at the mansion of the Earl of Ellingham,—a banquet given in honour of the Prince of Montoni, and at which his Royal Highness was to be present.

As the hour approached, Charles Hatfield felt his heart beat; and all his admiration of the illustrious hero revived;—so that his mind was labouring under no inconsiderable degree of excitement, as he thought of Perdita on the one hand—the Prince on the other —and also of Lady Frances Ellingham!

CHAPTER CXXXIII.

A THRONE SURROUNDED BY REPUBLICAN INSTITUTIONS.

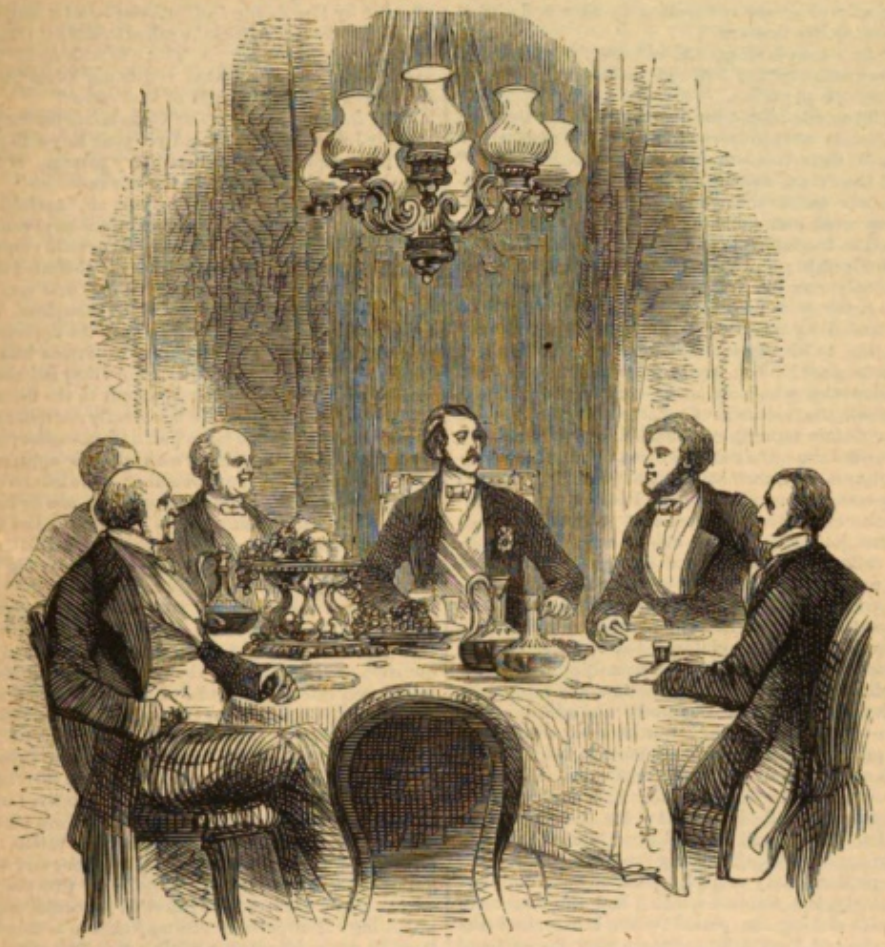
THE entertainment was of the most splendid description—worthy of the hospitality and taste of the noble host and hostess.

The Prince of Montoni was dressed in plain clothes: but on his breast gleamed the star denoting his rank; and on his left leg he wore the English Garter, his Royal Highness having been admitted on the previous day a member of that illustrious Order.

He was seated on the right of the Countess of Ellingham, Lady Frances being next to him, and Charles Hatfield occupying the place immediately following. In addition to these personages, and the Earl of Ellingham, Mr. Hatfield, and Lady Georgiana there were Sir John Lascelles, Clarence Villiers and Adelais, and the select few who had been invited to the banquet on this occasion.

The Prince was naturally of a modest and unassuming disposition,—though endowed with ample dignity to maintain his lofty rank and honourably fill his high position,—yet bearing himself so condescendingly and affably, that every one felt completely at ease in his presence. Even Sir John Lascelles, who had grown somewhat morose, and difficult to please in his old age, was quite delighted with the youthful hero, whose conversation was characterised by so much sound sense and such a total absence of obtrusiveness.

Charles Hatfield was delighted at the thought of being once more in company with the object of his worship; and he seemed to hang upon every word



that fell from the lips of the Prince of Montoni, as if he were listening to a demigod.

When the ladies had retired, the conversation turned upon political matters; and the Earl of Ellingham questioned the Prince relative to the condition of the Castelcicalans, whom report, newspapers, and books represented to be in the highest possible state of civilisation, prosperity, and happiness.

"His Sovereign Highness, my revered father-in-law," said the Prince, "has exerted himself in all possible ways to render his people contented and flourishing. The task may seem to be difficult for a monarch to undertake; but it really is not so. Honourable, upright, and liberal-minded Ministers are to be found in all countries, if the sovereign have but the discrimination to select them: indeed, a Chamber of Deputies, rightly constituted, will be sure to indicate the most efficient and trust-worthy men to whom the responsibilities of government may be safely confided. Every man in Castelcicala, having a habitation in which he may be said to be settled,—no matter whether it be a house of his own, or a mere lodging,—has the right of suffrage. The elections take place by ballot; and thus, considering that all save absolute mendicants have the power of voting, and seeing likewise the immense number of voters that there are, bribery is almost impossible. But to ensure, as much as mortal means can, the purity of election, any attempt at bribery or intimidation is counted a misdemeanor, and is punished by a fine, imprisonment, and the loss of civil rights for a period of seven years. Under the circumstances our elections take place in an orderly, quiet, and honest manner: the people conduct themselves with propriety, because they recognise the generous confidence reposed in them by their sovereign, and endeavour to render themselves worthy of it."

"When your Royal Highness liberated Castelcicala and opened the way for the Grand Duke Alberto to the throne," said Sir John Lascelles, who had listened attentively to the Prince's observations, "the Castelcicalans were in a state of abject slavery. Were these boons of consummate freedom conferred upon them in a moment?—and if so, were the people prepared in any way to receive them?"

"A nation in slavery, Sir John," answered the Prince, "is like a body in a condition of deep disease. Now, would you restore that body to perfect health all in a moment, if you had the power?—or would

you only effect the restoration by slow and almost imperceptible degrees?"

"As a conscientious and an honest man, I should of course adopt the mode of instantaneous cure," replied the physician.

"Then, Sir John, your question whether the Castelcicalans were prepared to receive the consummation of their freedom in a moment, is answered," said the Prince, smiling. "Believe me, those statesmen who talk of the necessity of gradual reform are either weak and timid, or else in their hearts opposed to the interests of the people. Freedom is a nation's right; and a right cannot be recognised too suddenly nor too frankly. Were your fortune in the grasp of a rapacious monarch, should you be contented by receiving it in small instalments according to his caprice and good pleasure? No: certainly not! You would demand and expect to receive the whole at once—and would consider yourself the victim of a monstrous tyranny, were your claims refused, or ridiculed, or set at naught. Yes, Sir John—the Castelcicalans obtained in a moment, as it were, their emancipation from tyranny and oppression. Immediately after His Sovereign Highness ascended the throne of that powerful State, he promulgated a decree, not merely conceding universal suffrage as a boon, but at once proclaiming it as the recognised right of the people. He did not say, '*I give it to you*;' but he said, '*I do not for an instant attempt to withhold it.*' The people saw that they were not treated as children, but as a free and enlightened nation; and they generously proffered gratitude, and testified their admiration and respect for their monarch. The Chambers assembled in due time—both Senators and Deputies being elected, and the principle of an hereditary Peerage being totally eschewed. Not even is the President of the Senate appointed by the Grand Duke: he is chosen by his compeers, as is the President of the Chamber of Deputies. The Grand Duke pledged himself to retain in power or to nominate only those Ministers whom the parliamentary majority pointed out; and, accordingly, the Cabinet which I had the honour to appoint during the period when I exercised the unctions of Regent, immediately after the battle of Montoni, has remained in office ever since that time—because it is supported by the majority. There is an Opposition in both Chambers,—an Opposition consisting of the Aristocracy of the Old School, High Churchmen, and a few very wealthy landowners; and indeed an Opposition is necessary to all good government, because were measures passed by universal acclamation, there would be no sifting of all their details to the very bottom. The Progressist Ministry in Castelcicala is therefore rather thankful to the Opposition than otherwise;—but the popular voice is entirely in favour of the Ministerial party."

"The Grand Duke is therefore almost a cypher in Castelcicala?" observed Sir John Lascelles.

"Not so," returned the Prince, mildly but firmly. "There must be a chief magistrate—an executive—in every State; and he is that chief magistrate. Do you suppose that the task of discriminating and rewarding merit,—in patronising the arts and sciences,—in raising the humble but deserving individual,—and in performing all the various services to a country which the supreme ruler must ever have the opportunity of doing,—do you not suppose, Sir John Lascelles, that these are duties which render a good Prince anything but a cypher? It is true that Castelcicala has a Throne; but it is surrounded by Republican Institutions;—and it matters very little whether Alberto be called President, Grand Duke, Emperor, or King. There is nothing in the name of the office: all that merits our attention is the extent of the privileges of that office."

"But the sovereignty of Castelcicala is hereditary,' said Sir John Lascelles; "and yet your Royal Highness is an opponent to the hereditary peerage. If the principle be objectionable in the one case——"

"Pardon me for interrupting you, sir," exclaimed the Prince: "but you are arguing on a false premise. The hereditary principle is abolished even in respect to the sovereignty. Alberto voluntarily abdicated this dynastic privilege; and one of his first acts was to place his diadem at the disposal of the Chambers. He told them that he was willing to obey the sovereign will of the people. The Chambers confirmed him in his high office; and of their own accord they honoured me by naming me the heir-apparent to the throne. But the hereditary principle is virtually annihilated; because one generation cannot bind its successor; and the law which thus appointed me as the heir-apparent, may be repealed by a new Chamber. It is monstrous to suppose that the hereditary principle can be tolerated by a nation knowing its own power and appreciating its own interests: for that principle may give you a good sovereign to-day, and a tyrant, an idiot, or a degraded sensualist to-morrow."

"I admit the force of your Royal Highness's argument," said Lascelles; "and if I object it is rather to seek information on these subjects than to question the excellence of the system of government introduced into Castelcicala. I would now deferentially seek to learn how far that system has benefitted the people of your Highness's adopted country?"

"In the first place, Sir John," returned the Prince, "the people have the elections entirely in their own hands, and return to Parliament representatives who do not buy their seats, but who are chosen on account of their merits. At least, this observation applies to the great majority of the Senators and Deputies. The elections take place every two years; so that ample opportunity is allowed the constituents of getting rid of persons who may chance to deceive them or prove incapable; while a sufficient space of time is afforded for giving the representatives a fair trial. The result of these arrangements is, that the majority of the representatives legislate for the interests of the mass—and not of the few. Good measures are the consequence; and the happiness of the people is promoted, while civilisation progresses rapidly, and the prosperity of the country increases daily. My lord," continued the Prince, turning towards the Earl of Ellingham, "history has recorded the memorable speech which your lordship delivered nineteen years ago in the House of Lords—the speech that first introduced your lordship to the world as the generous defender, vindicator, and champion of the People;—and it rejoices me unfeignedly to be enabled to inform you, my noble friend—for so you will permit me to call you—that the speech I allude to, and all your subsequent orations on the same subject have been studied, weighed, and debated upon in the Councils of the Sovereign of Castelcicala."

The Earl acknowledged the compliment in befitting terms; and the Prince of Montoni continued in the following manner:—

"To prove to your lordships that it is no idle flattery—of which, indeed, I am incapable—that I am now addressing to you, I will at once inform you that every suggestion which your lordship's first and grandest

oration contained, has been carried out with complete success in Castelcicala. Anticipating the pleasure of being enabled this evening to give your lordship some account of the condition of the Castelcicalans, I had furnished myself with a copy of the memorable speech to which I have already several times alluded; and I will now explain in detail the results of your lordship's views, as exemplified in their application to the Grand Duchy."

The Prince produced a manuscript; and, spreading it before him, his Royal Highness continued in the ensuing terms,—addressing himself to a most attentive and delighted audience:—

"Your lordship stated that it was too frequently alleged that the industrious classes are thoughtless, improvident, ungrateful, and intellectually dull: but this assertion you emphatically denied; and you proceeded to reason thus:—'Despair, produced by their unhappy condition, naturally led to dissipation in many instances; but were the working man placed in a position so that his livelihood should be rendered less precarious than it now was—were his labour adequately remunerated—were he more fairly paid by the representatives of property—were a scale of wages established, having a fixed *minimum*, but not no fixed *maximum*, the increased comfort thus ensured to him would naturally remove from his mind those cares which drove him to the public-house.'—Well, my lord and gentlemen," continued the Prince, "the suggestion has been adopted in Castelcicala; a fixed *minimum* for wages has been established—the lowest amount of payment ensuring a sum sufficient to enable the working man to maintain himself and his family in respectability. The results may almost be said to have been instantaneous. Crime diminished rapidly: statistical returns soon proved that intemperance experienced a remarkable decrease; and such was the falling off in the consumption of spirituous liquors, beer, and tobacco, that the Government found it necessary to grant a compensation to the licensed victuallers, publicans, and tobacconists who suffered by this change in the habits of the people. Even *employers* speedily began to recognise the advantage of the new state of things in the improved condition of their *employed*, the increase and the excellence of the labour they obtained, and the superiority of their agriculture or their manufactures. No *maximum* of wages has been fixed in Castelcicala; and when I left the country a month ago, those wages were higher than ever they were known to be before. The demand for labour has greatly increased; and, though the territory be densely populated, employment may be found for all. If a man be now a pauper or mendicant in Castelcicala, it must be either through physical infirmity, or through his unwillingness to work. Of this latter, however, we have comparatively few examples—emulation and patriotism acting powerfully in a country where so much happiness and such prosperity prevail. Now, with a slight alteration in your lordship's speech, one of the most remarkable passages in that speech reads thus when applied to Castelcicala:—'There is no fixed *maximum* of wages, because wages are always to be increased in proportion to the value of productive labour to employers: but there is a *minimum* established, to obviate the cruel and disastrous effects of those periods when labour exceeds the demand in the market. This is not considered unfair towards employers, because when the markets are brisk and trade is flourishing, they (the employers) reap the greatest benefit from that activity, and enrich themselves in a very short time; therefore, when markets are dull and trade is stagnant, they are still compelled to pay such wages as enable their employed to live comfortably. The profits gained during prosperous seasons not only enable employers to enjoy handsome incomes, but also to accumulate considerable savings; and as the best wages scarcely enable the employed to make anything like an adequate provision for periods of distress, it is not deemed fair that the representatives of property should use the labour of the working classes just when it suits them, and discard it or only use it on a miserable recompense when it does not so well suit them. For the labour of the employed not only makes annual incomes for the employers, but also permanent fortunes; and the value of that labour is not calculated as lasting only just as long as it is available for the purpose of producing large profits. Labour is recognised in Castelcicala and positively stated to be the working man's *capital*, and bears constant interest, as well as money placed in the funds—that interest of course increasing in proportion to the briskness of markets; but never depreciating below a standard value—much less being discarded as valueless altogether, in times of depression. A thousand pounds always obtains three per cent. interest, under any circumstances; and, at particular periods, is worth six or seven per cent. Labour is considered by the Castelcicalans in the same light. Stagnant markets diminish the profits of employers, but do not ruin them; if they do not obtain profit enough to live upon, they have the accumulations of good seasons to fall back upon. But how different used to be the case with the employed! To them stagnation of business was ruin—starvation—death;—the breaking up of their little homes—the sudden check of their children's education—the cause of demoralisation and degradation—and the necessity of applying to the parish! All these terrible evils have been completely annihilated by the system introduced into Castelcicala. The supply and demand of labour are necessarily unequal at many times, and in many districts; and the Government has therefore adopted measures to prevent those frightful fluctuations in wages which carry desolation into the homes of thousands of hard-working, industrious, and deserving families. In fact, a law has been passed to ensure the working-man against the casualty of being employed at a price below remuneration.'—Thus, my lord, you perceive that so far your views have been most successfully carried out: they are no longer a theory—I have seen them reduced to positive practice; and I pledge myself most solemnly and sacredly to the admirable working of this enlightened reformatory system."

"Would that I could see my own fellow-countrymen rendered thus happy—raised thus high in the social sphere—and thus tenderly cared for by their rulers!" exclaimed Lord Ellingham, in the impassioned tone of the most earnest and heart-felt sincerity.

"The day must come," observed the Prince of Montoni, "when the English people will recognise all the grand truths which you enunciated nineteen years ago from your place in the House of Lords. And, in England you have failed to convince the aristocracy and the landowners of the wickedness of the course they are pursuing,—are not your labours in some degree rewarded by the knowledge that your lordship's plans have been carried out to the very letter in the

Grand Duchy of Castelcicala,—yes, and carried out too with such unequivocal success?"

"The information which your Royal Highness now imparts, gives me the most unfeigned pleasure," said the Earl. "I had indeed read and heard of the recent grand improvements which had taken place in that Italian State where there is a Throne surrounded by Republican Institutions: but I was not aware—indeed, the loftiest flights of vanity never could have suggested to me that my views and theories had in any way contributed to the prosperity of the MODEL STATE, as the Liberals in England now denominate Castelcicala."

"To convince you, my lord, how far your ideas have been applied to the elevation of Castelcicala to its present proud eminence," said the Prince, "I will again refer to a passage in your lordship's ever memorable speech, and point a few contrasts. 'In England the poor are not allowed to have a stake in the country;' I have shown you that the very reverse is the case in the Grand Duchy. 'In England there are no small properties: the land is in the possession of a few individuals comparatively; and thus the landed interest constitutes a tremendous monopoly, most unjust and oppressive to the industrious classes.'—In Castelcicala the law of primogeniture is annihilated; there no man can leave his estate solely to his eldest son; it must be divided amongst all his male children equally, a charge being fixed upon it for the support of his daughters. Thus the territory is rapidly undergoing a process of sub-division, which admits thousands to the enjoyment of a real stake in the country, and breaks down the tremendous monopoly of the landed interest. In Castelcicala, moreover, 'property is compelled to maintain labour as long as labour seeks for employment and occupation.' What now, then, is the condition of the Castelcicalan people? Being well treated, rendered free, and having every possible avenue opened to them for the attainment of real property, 'the working classes are not driven by their cares and troubles to the excessive use of alcoholic liquors; they do not become demoralized by being compelled to migrate from place to place in search of employment—they are not forced to go upon the tramp, sleeping in hideous dens of vice, where numbers are forced to herd together without reference to age or sex; they are not unsettled in all their little arrangements to bring up their children creditably and with due reference to instruction;—they are not made discontented, anxious for any change no matter what, vindictive towards a society which renders them outcasts, and sullen or reckless in their general conduct.'—On the contrary, they feel settled in their condition; they know that the cottage which constitutes their home, is not held upon a precarious tenure: they never feel the sickening conviction that if they have bread and meat to-day, they may have only bread to-morrow, and no food at all the day after. The industrious classes in Castelcicala are no longer the mere slaves and tools of the wealthy classes: they are no longer retained in bondage—no longer kept in absolute serfdom by an oligarchy. I now pass to another subject," said the Prince: "and here again I refer to the speech of the Earl of Ellingham—applying to Castelcicala the observations which he used in reference to England. The Castelcicalan industrious classes, then, 'were ground down by indirect taxes, in which shape they actually contributed more to the revenue, in proportion to their means, than the rich. The only luxuries which the poor enjoyed, and which had become as it were necessaries—namely, tea, sugar, tobacco, beer, and spirits,—were the most productive sources of revenue. If aristocrats reproached the poor for dirty habits, as he well knew that it was their custom to do, he would ask them why soap was made an article subject to so heavy a tax? It was a contemptible fallacy to suppose that because the poor contributed little or nothing in the shape of direct taxation to the revenue, they were positively untaxed. The real fact was that the poor paid more in direct taxes than the rich did in both direct and in indirect ways, when the relative means of the two parties were taken into consideration.'—Such was the state of the industrious classes of Castelcicala until their voice was heard in the legislative assemblies; and all taxes upon the necessaries of life were speedily removed. Luxuries alone were left to bear the weight of taxation—the duties upon carriages, livery-servants, armorial bearings, hunters, racers, hounds, and foreign wines being doubled."

The Prince of Montoni paused; and the Earl of Ellingham exchanged a rapid but significant glance with Mr. Hatfield—for they both remembered the time when, nineteen years previously, and when the latter lay on the bed in Old Death's house, they had conversed upon the best means of ameliorating the condition of the suffering millions.

His Royal Highness, finding that his auditors were most anxious that he should continue his explanations, and perceiving that Sir John Lascelles had become especially interested therein, resumed his subject in the following manner:—

"The inequality of the laws, and their incongruity, severity, and injustice towards the poor, long constituted a crying evil in Castelcicala. 'Every advantage was given to the rich in the way of procuring bail in those cases where security for personal appearance was required; but no poor man could possibly give such security. He must go to prison, and there herd with felons of the blackest dye. Perhaps on trial his innocence would transpire; and then what recompense had he for his long incarceration—his home broken up during his absence—and his ruined family? It was possible—nay, it often happened that a man would lie thus in prison for four or five months previously to trial; and during that period it would be strange indeed if he escaped gaol contamination.'—In order to remedy these evils, vast facilities were afforded in respect to bail, the respectability and not the monied qualifications of the sureties being considered. Thus a working man may be bailed by any two of his associates who can obtain a good character from their employer: this of course applies to charges of a lighter kind, heavier responsibility being required where a serious accusation is involved. But even should an accused have to go to prison until his trial, he is not placed in a felons' gaol: he is not, while still untried, subjected to that indignity and contamination. He is confined in a building having no connexion with a prison, and termed *A House of Detention*. Again, the judges have the power to order a compensation to every one whose innocence transpires on trial; and I must inform you that the trial may take place as soon after committal as the individual chooses. All depends on the speed which he makes in getting up his defence. When committed, he is asked if he have the means of retaining counsel: if he prove to the magistrate that he is poor, a barrister is immediately provided for him. The trial may come on the very next day;

for there are local Courts throughout the Grand Duchy, and these courts have no recess—no holiday. Were I, on my return to Castelcicala, to inform a person not well acquainted with English laws and customs, that in this very same englightened England a man may languish several months in a common gaol awaiting his trial, I should scarcely be believed."

"And what is the nature of the punishments inflicted in the country of your Royal Highness's adoption?" enquired Sir John Lascelles.

"I will tell you," said the Prince. "In the first place we have abolished the punishment of death, as barbarian, un-Christian, and demoralizing. Murder is punished by imprisonment for life; and imprisonment, fine, confiscation of property in the cases of single men having no persons dependent on them, and the loss of civil rights—these are the penalties used amongst us. The individual who is condemned to imprisonment, is not on that account rendered an useless member of society. Every criminal gaol is an assemblage of workshops where all trades and manufactures are carried on; and each prisoner must work at his own trade, or be taught one. If he have a family out-of-doors, his earnings go to support that family: if he have none, they accumulate until the day of his release. Should he refuse to work, he is put upon bread and water; and this fare soon compels him to adopt habits of industry in order to obtain plentiful and wholesome meals. Castelcialan prisons resemble vast factories rather than gaols; and so admirable—so salutary—so reformatory is the discipline maintained in them, that a prisoner on his emancipation finds no difficulty in obtaining work again. Employers consider, in such a case, that he has expiated an offence which should not be remembered to his prejuice; and he begins the world again with a new character. He has, as it were, passed through a criminal bankruptcy court, and obtained his certificate. Should he, however, experience any difficulty in finding employment, the local authorities are bound to supply him with work at the average rate of wages. The results of all these arrangements are strking. In the first place, a Castelcicalan prison is reformatory instead of being a sink of contaminating iniquity; secondly, a man on leaving a criminal gaol, is not forced back into the ways of vice. If he relapse, it must be through determined wickedness: but relapses are very, very rare in the Grand Duchy—for happily those individuals are few who remain in the ways of crime for crime's sake! And now, my lord, you will perceive how far the framers of all these salutary enactments respecting prisoners and prison discipline, were indebted to the following passage in your speech:—'The criminal laws of England are only calculated to produce widely spread demoralization—to propagate vice—to render crime terribly prolific. A man no matter what his offence may have been—should be deemed innocent and untainted again, when he has paid the penalty of his misdeeds; because to brand a human being eternally, is to fly in the face of the Almighty and assert that there should be no such thing as forgiveness, and that there is no such thing as repentance. But the nature of punishments in England is to brand the individual, and so to dare the majesty of heaven. For the gaols are perfect nests of infamy—sinks of iniquity, imprisonment in which necessarily fastens an indelible stigma upon the individual. He either comes forth tainted; or else it is supposed that he must be so. Under these circumstances, he vainly endeavours to obtain employment; and, utterly failing in his attempt to earn an honest livelihood, he is compelled perforce to relapse into habits of crime and lawlessness. This fact accounts for an immense amount of the demoralization which the Bishops so much deplore, but the true causes of which they obstinately refuse to acknowledge. The criminal gaols are moral pest-houses, in which no cures are effected, but where the contagious malady becomes more virulent. Society should not immure offenders solely for the sake of punishment—but with a view to reformation of character.'"

"Castelcicala has the honour of having taken the initiative in all the great and glorious reforms which you suggested," said Mr. Hatfield, turning with admiration towards the Earl of Ellingham. "In England reform is much talked of; and when a small concession is made—for *a concession* it is in this country, to all intents and purposes—the people congratulate themselves as if their complete emancipation were at hand."

"There is a passage in the Earl's speech," resumed the Prince, "which particularly struck the Grand Duke and the Ministers when they were deliberating upon the proposed reforms and ameliorations to be introduced to the Chambers. That passage ran thus:—'When a poor man is oppressed by a rich one, it is vain and ludicrous to assert that the Courts of Law are open to him: law is a luxury in which only those who possess ample means can indulge. In a case where some grievous injury is sustained by a poor man—the seduction of his wife or daughter, for instance—redress or recompense is impossible, unless some attorney takes up the case on speculation; and this is a practice most demoralizating and pernicious. But if left entirely unassisted in that respect, the poor man can no more go to Westminster Hall than he can afford to dine at Long's Hotel.'—Now in Castelcicala, a plan has been adopted which seems to meet the difficulties set forth in the Earl of Ellingham's speech, and which does not involve the additional danger of rendering law so cheap as to encourage litigation in every paltry quarrel. To every Local Court are attached officers denominated the *Peoples' Attorneys-General*; and any poor man having a ground of complaint against a neighbour, addresses himself to one of those officers, who immediately examines into the affair, and if he see that the plaint be well founded, he prosecutes on behalf of the poor man. These officers are paid fixed salaries by the Government, and dare not take fees. They are selected with care, and are as incapable of bribery as the judges themselves;—and thus every means is taken to guarantee the poor man justice. Seduction and adultery are not made mere pecuniary matters in Castelcicala: they are punished by imprisonment;—and the penalty is very heavy in a case where a rich man debauches a poor man's daughter. I now pass on to the subject of Education; and your treatment of this subject, my dear Earl, in your speech, is not the least remarkable portion of the oration. You declared that 'it was positively shocking to think that such care should be taken to convert negroes to Christianity thousands of miles off, while the most deplorable ignorance prevailed at home. The Church enjoys revenues the amount of which actually bring the ministers of the gospel into discredit, as evidencing their avaricious and grasping disposition;—while the people remain as uneducated as if not a single shilling were devoted to spiritual pastors or lay instructors.' You boldly 'accused both Houses

of Parliament and the upper classes generally of being anxious to keep the masses in a state of ignorance. Where instruction is imparted gratuitously, it is entirely of a sectarian nature; just as if men required to study grammar, history, arithmetic, or astronomy on Church of England principles. The whole land is over-run by clergymen, who live upon the fat of it—Universities and public schools have been richly endowed for the purpose of propagating knowledge and encouraging learning,—and yet the people are lamentably ignorant. It is a wicked and impudent falsehood to declare that they are intellectually dull or averse to mental improvement. Common sense—that best of sense—is the special characteristic of the working classes; and those who can read are absolutely greedy in their anxiety to procure books, newspapers, and cheap publications for perusal. The fact is, that the mind of the industrious population is a rich soil, wherein all good seed will speedily take root, shoot up, and bring forth fruit to perfection: but the apprehensions or narrow prejudices of the upper classes—the oligarchy—will not permit the seed to be sown. Now as the soil must naturally produce something, even of its own accord, it too often gives birth to rank weeds; and this is made a matter of scorn, reviling, and reproach. But the real objects of that scorn—that reviling—and that reproach, are those who obstinately and wickedly neglect to put the good soil to the full test of fertilisation.'—All these observations," continued his Royal Highness, "were as applicable to Castelcicala a short time back as they have ever been and still are in England. But the reforms in the Church and in the Educational System were not the least important of those which characterised the new order of things. The two institutions were separated, and rendered entirely independent of each other, the Church being abandoned entirely to the voluntary principle, and the duty of educating the people being attached to the State, a Minister of Public Instruction being appointed. All sectarianism in education is now abolished: the system is entirely secular. The schoolmasters are appointed by the municipal corporations in the various localities, and their salaries are paid by the state. They are all laymen; for it is now a principle established in the Grand Duchy that parents shall train up their children in the creed which they may prefer. Thus Protestants, Catholics, and Jews all receive the blessings and benefits of the secular education; no tampering with religious opinions—no proselytism being permitted. The whole scheme is on the broadest basis of liberality; and the people are delighted with its working. As for the Church, it is entirely separated from the State; and the order of Bishops has been suppressed. The Catholic religion is still that of the great majority: but it is shorn of its pomp; and ecclesiastical ostentation and vain display have received a blow which they will never recover. The result is, that the Christian creed has been restored to something resembling its primitive simplicity, and such as its Divine Founder intended. I have now, my lord and gentlemen, given you a hasty, but I hope intelligible sketch of the condition of Castelcicala at the present day; and it only remains for me to sum up the reforms which have been accomplished, and which completely carry out the views and the theories so ably propounded by you, my dear Earl, nineteen years ago. In the first place, there is a Throne surrounded by Republican Institutions; and the hereditary principle as well as the law of primogeniture have been annihilated—never to be revived. Then, we have adopted 'a *minimum* rate of wages, to prevent the sudden fluctuation of such wages, and to compel property to give constant employment to labour:—indirect taxes upon the necessaries of life have been abolished;—the laws and their administration are equitably proportioned to the relative conditions of the rich and the poor;—a general system of national education has been established, and intrusted to laymen, totally distinct from religious instruction and sectarian tenets;—a complete reformation in the system of prison discipline has taken place; and establishments have been founded for the purpose of affording work to persons upon leaving criminal gaols, as a means of their obtaining an honest livelihood and retrieving their characters prior to seeking employment for themselves;—and the franchise has been so extended as to give every man who earns his own bread by the sweat of his brow, a stake and interest in the country's welfare.'"

The Prince ceased speaking; and those who had been his auditors expressed their sincerest thanks for the gratifying explanations he had given them with so much readiness and affability. Nor less were they charmed to find that a truly liberal and enlightened system of policy would stand such remarkable tests, and work so well. The question, whether the nations of Europe are civilised enough to receive Republican Institutions, was completely solved, to their satisfaction; and even Sir John Lascelles, who was somewhat tainted with the doctrines of the Old School, acknowledged himself to be a convert.

The party then joined the ladies in the drawing-room; where political subjects gave way to discourse upon less serious topics;—and when the company took their departure, the inmates of the lordly mansion did not separate to retire to their respective chambers until they had exchanged many enthusiastic comments upon the character, disposition, talents, and bearing of his Royal Highness, the Prince of Montoni.

CHAPTER CXXXIV.

A PAINFUL SCENE.

We deemed it advisable to break as little as possible, by comment or extraneous explanation, the thread of the Prince of Montoni's discourse upon the reform that had been introduced into the Grand Duchy of Castelcicala. We therefore refrained from giving any account of the manner in which Charles Hatfield listened, and received—or rather, greedily drank in—the narrative of his Royal Highness.

To say that the young man heard with enthusiasm, were to convey but a feeble idea of his emotions as he hung upon every sentence—every word that fell from the lips of the Earl's illustrious guests:—when, however, we declare that even Perdita's image fell into the back-ground of his mind, during the whole time that the Prince was discoursing, our readers may form some notion of the nature of that impression which was made upon him.

On retiring to his chamber at about one o'clock in the morning, Charles Hatfield thought not of seeking his couch: but, throwing himself into an arm-chair, he gave way to the agitating—conflicting—turbulent ideas which had been excited in his soul.

"The modesty of the Prince," he thought, "concealed the fact that nearly all the reforms which he detailed, were suggested by himself. Oh! what would I give to be enabled to raise myself to eminence in

the world! Twenty years of my life?—Ah! yes—willingly—willingly would I yield up a quarter of my probable existence to gain a name, honoured and renowned as that of the Prince of Montoni! And is not rank within my grasp? Can I not in a moment—by the waving of my hand, as it were—place upon my brow the coronet of a Viscount? May I not yet stand before the world as the heir-apparent to the Earldom of Ellingham? Yes:—and if once I find my way into the supreme legislative assembly, shall I not be enabled to advocate the cause of the People, and obtain a glorious renown? It were trifling with my own interests—it were wronging myself, to abstain from asserting my just rights! If my father choose to remain a simple commoner and allow his younger brother to wear the honours and hold the estates of a proud Earldom, am I to be bound by his will? No—no: and my father acts not a parent's part towards me in thus keeping me in obscurity. 'Tis clear that my sire's early life renders him desirous to shun all circumstances that may attract attention towards him: 'tis clear—my God! how dreadful to think of!—'tis clear, I say, that he feels the impropriety of a highwayman laying claim to a lordly title! Oh! the sins of the father are indeed visited on the child in my case! But I am innocent: my life has been spotless and pure—my character is untarnished. Wherefore should I suffer for my parent's crimes? It is unjust—most unjust; and even filial duty, in its best and holiest sense, cannot compel me to renounce the distinctions to which by birth I am the heir! No—no: a young man of my ambition—my talents—my feelings—my burning hopes, must not immolate himself for the sake of a father who acts unjustly towards him. For how stands the case between us? The question is whether a parent should make any and every sacrifice for his child; or whether the child must make all possible sacrifices for his father. In asserting his rights, claiming his title, and thereby enabling me to assume my own, he doubtless would have to make a sacrifice: he must declare who he is—my God!—the Resuscitated Highwayman! But, on the other hand, in consenting to keep his secret, do I not wilfully blind myself to my own interests—wantonly thrust aside those opportunities of gaining distinction and acquiring renown which are within my reach—crush with suicidal hand the glorious aspirations which I have formed—and purposely trample on all the hopes that are developing themselves before me?"

Charles Hatfield rose—paced the room in an agitated manner—then, recating himself, again plunged into his ominous reflections.

"I have read that those who yield to the influence of false sentimentalism, never rise in the world. He who would attain to the pinnacle of eminence must harden his heart,—even as did Napoleon, when he put away from him that charming Josephine who loved him with such pure and fervid devotion. Yes—family, kith, and kindred must be sacrificed—all sacrificed—by him who follows the dictates of his ambition. And yet—and yet, did not Richard Markham rise by his virtues, as much as by his talents and heroism, to that eminence which enabled him to take his place amongst the mightiest Princes of Europe? Oh! but *he* had opportunities which may never occur again; he is the one in the thousand whom Fortune takes by the hand. If I remain obscure—unknown—plain *Mr. Charles Hatfield*—I am but an unit amidst the millions which constitute the mass called *the People*. But if I suddenly stand forth as a Viscount, and the heir of a wealthy Earldom, shall I not at once be placed in a position to carve out a career for myself? Oh! how glorious—how thrilling would it be, to have the power of saying to my Perdita, '*Beautiful angel! I am not the obscure young man I appear to be: in me behold Viscount Marston, the heir to the Earldom of Ellingham!*' Ah! Perdita, then would you feel honoured in my love—and I should not be compelled to evince my gratitude to thee for loving me! Charming, adorable Perdita—thine image is coupled with the bright dream of ambition that now animates me;—for when I shall have distinguished myself in the Senate, how delicious will it be to see thee welcome with pride and admiration my return to thine arms,—to behold thy fine eyes fixed upon me, eloquently proclaiming how proud thou art to own the love of a man who is filling the world with his fame! Yes—I must assert my rights:—but how? Oh! I will confide all to Perdita—and she possesses a mind so strong and an intellect so powerful, that she will assist me with her counsel in this difficulty. And it will be so sweet to receive advice from her lips—so delightful to mark the interest which she will take in my affairs!"

Again he rose from his seat: for a sudden thought had struck him—accompanied by a severe pang,—a pang that went through his heart like a barbed arrow.

"My mother!—my poor mother!" he murmured to himself: "Oh! what a blow will it be to *her* if I compel my father—compel her husband—to assert his claims to the Earldom of Ellingham! And yet—was I not for years neglected by her?—did she care for me—did she even have me to dwell with her during my infancy? No—no: I was abandoned to the woman Watts;—and had I become a thief in the streets—a prowling, houseless vagabond—my mother would have been to blame!"

Thus was it that this young man, having imbibed from Perdita the art and facility of sophistical reasoning,—thus was it that he crushed all the naturally generous feelings of his soul, and struggled desperately to subdue the promptings of his really good disposition.

Love and ambition produced these baneful effects!

But his love,—was it a pure and honest love inspired by a virtuous being?—or was it a frenzy engendered and sustained by a depraved and designing woman endowed with the most glorious beauty?

And his ambition,—was it that fine spirit of emulation which warms the generous heart, and prompts the enlightened mind to seek distinction for the sake of being enabled, by means of influence and high position, to benefit the human race?—or was it a selfish craving after rank and power, in order to enjoy the sweets of applause, become the object of servile flattery, and obtain the honour ever shown in this country to sounding titles and proud aristocracy?

The reader can answer these questions for himself.

Having passed nearly two hours in the wild reverie which suggested schemes so menacing in their nature to his own and his parents' happiness, Charles Hatfield retired to rest;—and in his dreams he beheld a variety of scenes and images, incongruously grouped and confusedly jumbled together, the voluptuous form of Perdita stretched in a witching undress on the sofa, and extending her arms to welcome him to her embraces, the Marshal Prince of Montoni, seated on horseback, surrounded by a brilliant staff,—thousands and thousands of persons gathered together to witness

the passing of a gay cavalcade, of which he fancied himself to be the leader as well as the hero of the occasion,—and then his father and mother kneeling and weeping at his feet, and proffering some prayer to which he refused to accede. Then he thought that he was roving in a delicious garden, where the singing of birds, the hues of the flowers, and the fragrance of aromatic shrubs made everything delightful to the senses, and where Perdita was his companion. She appeared to be clad in the loose and scanty drapery which heathen goddesses are represented to wear,—fastened by a clasp on the left shoulder, flowing so as to leave the right bosom entirely bare, and confined by a zone to the waist. Airily, airily they tripped along together, until they beheld a temple standing at a distance: then Perdita suddenly assumed the majesty of a queen—and conducting her lover to a shrine within the temple, made him kneel down while she crowned him with a wreath of flowers, while unseen minstrels poured forth a strain of delicious music.

Under the influence of this last dream he awoke;—and the image of Perdita still remained uppermost in his mind.

Then as he performed the functions of the toilette, he reconsidered all the arguments and plans—repeated to himself all the sophistical reasoning—into which he had fallen before he retired to rest;—and, hardening his heart in respect to his parents,—yes, and hardening it, too, with regard to Lady Frances Ellingham,—he resolved to sacrifice all and everything to the two idols of his soul—ambition and Perdita!

In this frame of mind he descended to the breakfast-parlour, where the Earl and Countess of Ellingham, Lady Frances, Mr. Hatfield, and Lady Georgiana were already assembled. Charles assumed as gay an appearance as possible: for he was resolved to mask his knowledge of all the family secrets as well as his sinister designs, until he should have consulted with Perdita. But in spite of himself, there was a certain constraint and embarrassment in his manner when he spoke to Lady Frances; and this artless, beautiful young creature surveyed him with astonishment and grief.

The fact was that the heart of Charles Hatfield smote him for the vile and perfidious part he had enacted towards his cousin; and he scarcely dared to look her in the face.

Her parents and his own, as well as she herself noticed the peculiarity of his demeanour in this respect; and Lady Georgiana was so affected by his apparent coolness towards the Earl's daughter that it was with difficulty she could restrain herself from questioning him then and there on the subject. A hasty whisper, however, from her husband sealed her tongue and gave her the assurance that he would soon ascertain the cause of their son's altered behaviour towards the young lady who was already looked upon as his future wife.

Accordingly, when the morning repast was concluded, Mr. Hatfield beckoned his son to follow him to the library; and now Charles was struck with a sudden fear—conscience exciting the apprehension that his schemings were discovered, and seen through by an outraged, indignant father.

On entering the library, Mr. Hatfield motioned him to take a seat near him: then, fixing his eyes upon the young man's countenance, he said, "Charles, has any misunderstanding occurred between Lady Frances and yourself?"

"No—not that I am aware of," returned Charles, considerably relieved by the question that indicated the nature of the colloquy which it opened. "Wherefore should you entertain such an idea?"

"Because your manner towards Lady Frances at the breakfast-table was cool, constrained, and embarrassed," said Mr. Hatfield. "She herself noticed the circumstance; and I observed that Lord and Lady Ellingham were pained by it likewise. As for your mother, Charles—she was deeply grieved; and I was both hurt and annoyed."

"I am sorry, my dear father—but—but, I was not aware of any difference in my demeanour towards her ladyship," stammered Charles, unskilled as yet in the arts of duplicity and guile.

"My son—my dear son, do not attempt to deceive me!" exclaimed Mr. Hatfield, emphatically. "Lady Frances, in the artlessness of her soul—in the confiding candour of her amiable nature—yesterday acquainted her mother, the Countess of Ellingham, with all that had taken place between yourself and her in the morning. You made her an offer of your hand, in pursuance of the counsel which I gave you;—and her parents will cheerfully yield an assent to your suit. Indeed, the Earl expected to see you on the subject yesterday afternoon; but it appears that immediately after your interview with Lady Frances, you went out and remained absent for some hours. How you dispose of your time, it is not for me to enquire: you are of an age when you are entitled to be your own master. But this I implore of you,—lose no time in seeking a private interview with the Earl, and soliciting him to accord you the hand of his daughter. 'Tis a mere ceremony which a parent, and a personage of his standing, naturally expects you to perform;—and I promise you that there is no chance of a refusal."

"My dear father," said Charles, the natural candour of his nature asserting its empire; "I was too hasty in proposing to Lady Frances. Would to God that I could recall the step I thus rashly took!"

Mr. Hatfield surveyed his son in profound astonishment for nearly a minute: then, breaking forth indignantly, he exclaimed, "What, sir! you have dared to trifle with the affections of an amiable and accomplished girl?—you decline a match which is so desirable in every point of view, and on which your mother's heart is set?"

"I must decline the honour of this alliance," answered the young man, speaking with a courage which even surprised himself.

"Do you know, Charles," demanded his father, with an utterance almost suffocated by indescribable emotions,—"do you know that your conduct is that of a villain? And shall it be said that you—*you*, a young man of whom such lofty expectations have been formed——"

"By whom have these expectations been formed?" suddenly cried the rebellious son, his choler rising as all his wrongs, real or imaginary, rushed to his mind,—those wrongs which he believed himself to have received and to be still enduring at the hands of his parents.

"By whom?" repeated Mr. Hatfield much pained by the tone, words, and manner of the young man. "By whom should such hopes be experienced, save by your parents?"

"My parents!" cried Charles, with withering irony. "Wherefore am I not acknowledged as your son?—why do you not proclaim yourselves to be my parents? Was not the discovery on my part a matter of mere chance?—and should I not have been kept for ever

ignorant of the fact, had not an accident revealed it to me?"

"Oh! my God!—this is retribution!" murmured Mr. Hatfield, bowing himself down, and covering his face with his hands.

At that moment the door opened—and Lady Georgiana, pale as death and scarcely able to support herself on her tottering limbs, made her appearance.

Unable to endure the state of suspense in which she had been plunged relative to the altered manner of her son towards Lady Frances at the breakfast-table,—and having a vague presentiment that some unpleasant scene was occurring between him and her husband in the library,—she had determined to repair thither and relieve herself at once from an uncertainty that was intolerable. But upon reaching the door she heard Charles talking loudly and bitterly: she instinctively paused;—and those terrible questions which he addressed to his father, smote upon *her* ear like the voice of the Angel of Death.

Staggering into the room, she mechanically closed the door behind her; and then leant against it for support. Her fine—her handsome countenance denoted the most poignant anguish: it was absolutely distorted—while a frightful pallor overspread it.

"My mother—my dear mother!" exclaimed Charles, bounding towards her;—for his soul was touched by the pitiable appearance which she presented to his view

"Just heaven! Charles—what have you said to your father!" she asked, in a tone of despair;—and flinging herself into her son's arms, she gave vent to a flood of tears.

"I implore your pardon, my dear parents, if in a moment of haste and impatience I said aught that can give you offence," exclaimed the young man: "but I was not master of my emotions—for you, my father had termed me a *villain!*"

"Let us not recriminate," said Mr. Hatfield, rising and taking his son by the hand, Lady Georgiana having in the meantime sunk into the chair to which Charles conducted her. "I was wrong to address you thus harshly: but your refusal to form an alliance with Lady Frances, to whom you only yesterday imparted a confession of attachment——"

"O Charles! is it possible that your parents are to experience such bitterness of disappointment as this?" exclaimed Lady Georgiana, turning a look of appeal—of earnest appeal—upon her son. "You know not how profound will be my sorrow if you thus enact a perfidious part towards Lady Frances Killingham!"

"Would you have me wed where my heart is not fixed?" demanded Charles, warmly. "I laboured under a delusion: I fancied that I loved Lady Frances as one whom I should wish to make my wife—but I now find that it was only with the affection of a brother or of a very sincere friend that I in reality regarded her! Yesterday morning you, my dear father, entered my chamber, at a moment when the confusion of ideas caused by unpleasant dreams was scarcely dissipated;—you urged me to confess an attachment to Lady Frances—to seek her hand;—and I obeyed you. But I acted under an impulse for which I could not account;—I yielded to some unknown influence which I could not resist. And yet it was not love, my dear parents;—no—it was not love! In making Lady Frances my wife, I should only ensure the unhappiness of an excellent—a beautiful—an accomplished girl——"

"You admit all her admirable qualities, Charles," interrupted his mother; "and yet you refuse to avail yourself of an opportunity to secure so precious a prize—to link your fortunes with one who is certain to make the best of wives!"

"It is truly incomprehensible!" exclaimed Mr. Hatfield, whose knowledge of the world and large experience of the human heart convinced him that there was something more at the bottom of his son's conduct than the alleged reasons for so abruptly breaking off a match that, he thought, must appear in every way so eligible and advantageous to the young man.

"My dear parents, this scene is most painful to us all," said Charles, who, glancing rapidly at the timepiece upon the mantel, saw that the hour was approaching for him to visit Perdita.

His father, observing that impatient look cast towards the clock, instantly comprehended that his son had some appointment to keep; and connecting this discovery with the strangeness of his conduct in respect to Lady Frances, it flashed to his mind in a moment that the young man had formed some attachment elsewhere.

"Charles," he accordingly said, turning abruptly towards his son and looking him full in the face, "you love another?"

The young man became red as scarlet, and stammered out a few unintelligible words, which his father soon cut short.

"Now we have discovered the truth! But surely you have formed no unworthy attachment?—surely you cannot love one whom you are ashamed to name?" cried Mr. Hatfield.

"Speak, Charles—speak! Answer your father!" said Lady Georgiana, in an imploring tone, as she perceived her son turn away towards the mantel.

For rebellious thoughts again rose in the mind of the young man;—and he felt hurt and vexed that his conduct should thus be questioned by parents who never had acknowledged him as their son until the necessity was forced upon them by his accidental discovery of the secret of his birth, and who now kept him out of what he conceived to be his just rights. Moreover, was he not twenty-five years old?—and was that an age at which he should thus be tutored and treated like a child? Lastly, it was verging fast upon twelve; and had he not assured his Perdita that he would not be a minute later than mid-day?

"Charles, why do you not answer me?" asked Mr. Hatfield, approaching him: "wherefore do you treat your parents with contempt?"

"Wherefore did my parents treat me with such unnatural neglect as to bring me up as their nephew?" demanded the young man, turning abruptly—almost savagely round upon his father. "Wherefore do they now pass me off to the world in that latter capacity?" he cried, becoming fearfully excited.

Lady Georgiana uttered a faint scream, covered her face with her hands, and fell back in her chair sobbing bitterly.

"You speak of unnatural conduct!" cried Mr. Hatfield, growing excited in his turn. "Tell me at once, Charles—do you mean to throw off all allegiance to your parents? If so—remember that it is in our power to deprive you of the immense fortune which is otherwise destined for you——"

"Ah! menaces!" ejaculated the young man: and darting upon his father a look of mingled regret and anger—of united sorrow and indignation,—a look so strange, so ominous that Mr. Hatfield started with horror,—he rushed from the room.

"Stay! stay!" cried Lady Georgiana, springing towards the door.

But her son heeded her not: he obeyed not her voice;—and the unhappy mother sank upon the floor, gasping for utterance, and feeling as if her heart would break with the wretched sensations that filled her bosom.

Mr. Hatfield hastened to raise his wife—to place her in a chair—and to breathe words of consolation in her ears.

When she was somewhat recovered, she clasped her hands convulsively together; and, looking up appealingly into his face, said, "Is this a reality? or is it a dream?"

"Alas! it is a terrible reality," responded Mr. Hatfield, in a tone of mingled bitterness and sorrow.

"And what can it all mean?" asked Lady Georgiana, wildly: for she was bewildered by the strangeness of her son's conduct—amazed by the sudden alteration of his manner from respect to insolent indifference towards his parents.

"Heaven alone can solve that question for us at present," returned her husband. "Can it be that he has learnt any thing—that he suspects aught of the past? No—no: that is impossible! But ever since the discovery of his real parentage, he has been altered;—sometimes moody and thoughtful—at others petulant and hasty,—now unnaturally gay and excited—then deeply depressed and melancholy,—but never unruly and overbearing, disobedient and rebellious, as he has shown himself this forenoon."

"'Tis easy to perceive, I fear, that he is troubled by the mystery which induced us to conceal his position with regard to us," said Lady Georgiana;—"and likewise—yes, likewise," she added hesitatingly, "the circumstance that he still passes as our nephew weighs upon his mind!"

"Oh! this is a terrible retribution for my sins!—an awful punishment for the foul misdeeds of my earlier years!" exclaimed Mr. Hatfield, wringing his hands bitterly.

"My dear husband," said Lady Georgiana, whose turn it now was to console; "give not way thus to your sorrow! Let us hope that he will repent of this strange unruliness of conduct——"

"Alas! I have sad forebodings of evil!" cried the unhappy man. "I fear that he has formed some unworthy connexion, Georgiana: but let us dissemble our sorrow—let us not afflict the Earl and the amiable Esther by giving them any account of the occurrences of this day."

"And yet what can we say respecting the union

that was contemplated between their amiable daughter and our son?" demanded Lady Georgiana, in an anxious tone.

"We will by some means find an excuse for the embarrassment and coldness of manner which Charles exhibited at the breakfast-table," returned Mr. Hatfield; "and I will seek the earliest opportunity to reason with him fully and calmly upon the subject."

"If he should have formed an attachment elsewhere——"

"That is scarcely probable, when we come to look calmly at the matter—since he yesterday morning declared his affection to Frances."

"Alas! 't is a mystery which pains and alarms me," said Lady Georgiana.

"A mystery which I will penetrate, my dear wife!" exclaimed Mr. Hatfield, in a resolute—almost stern tone of voice. "But for the present, it is useless to hazard a conjecture."

CHAPTER CXXXV.

CHARLES HATFIELD AND MRS. FITZHARDINGE.

It was a little after twelve o'clock when Charles Hatfield reached the house in Suffolk Street.

"Is Miss Fitzhardinge at home?" he enquired of the female servant who answered his summons at the door.

"Have the kindness to walk up into the drawing-room, sir," was the response; and, with beating heart, the young man followed the domestic into the apartment where he expected again to behold his beauteous Perdita.

But, to his disappointment—a disappointment which he could not conceal, he found himself in the presence of her mother.

"Be seated, sir," she said, coldly and formally indicating a chair, into which Charles Hatfield fell as if in obedience to the command of a witch. "I have many matters whereon to converse with you; and, to speak candidly, scarcely know how to commence. One subject personally regards you: another intimately relates to my own interests. But I will begin with that which so nearly concerns yourself."

"I am all attention, madam," said Charles, endeavouring to assume as respectful a demeanour as possible, but in reality glancing with much impatience towards the door—as if by his eager looks inviting the entrance of Perdita.

"My daughter will not interrupt us, Mr. Hatfield," exclaimed Mrs. Fitzhardinge, with an affectation of malice which seemed ominous and foreboding to the young man. "Indeed, whether you will ever see her again, depends upon the result of our present interview."

"My God! madam," cried Charles, in an imploring tone; "have I offended your beautiful daughter—or yourself?"

"I am not precisely offended, Mr. Hatfield," said the old woman, assuming a more conciliatory manner: "but certain explanations are necessary between us;—and indeed, it depends entirely on yourself whether you ever behold Perdita again."

"Then I shall behold her again, madam," returned Charles, emphatically. "And now I can really listen to you with attention——"

"And perhaps with patience," added Mrs. Fitzhardinge, her rigid features at length relaxing into a faint smile. "But I will not tax that patience longer than I can help. Firstly, then, we are to speak of the matters which concern yourself. And now—will you not be surprised when I assure you that I am acquainted with many strange and marvellous secrets connected with your family?"

"Ah!" ejaculated Charles, starting.

"But perhaps I even know more than you yourself are acquainted with?" said Mrs. Fitzhardinge.

"No, madam—no: that is impossible!" he cried, emphatically.

"Do any of those secrets give you pain to contemplate?" she asked, fixing her eyes searchingly upon him. "Pardon me for thus questioning you——"

"And why, madam, do you so question me?" he demanded, almost angrily.

"Because I am as yet ignorant to what extent your knowledge may go in certain respects," she replied.

"Then believe me, madam—believe me," cried Charles Hatfield, bitterly, "when I assure you that I know much more than you can possibly have an idea of?"

"Is the name of Rainford familiar to you?" asked the old woman, steadily watching the effect of her question.

"Madam," exclaimed Charles, starting from his seat, and approaching Mrs. Fitzhardinge in a threatening manner, "would you taunt me with the infamy of my birth?—for I see that it is no secret to you! But imagine not—if such indeed be your idea—that I am unworthy the love of your daughter Perdita! You were about to marry her to an old nobleman: what if a young nobleman were to demand her hand?"

"A young nobleman!" ejaculated Mrs. Fitzhardinge, now surprised in her turn: for it must be remembered that all she knew concerning the present subject was gleaned from the musings of the old gipsy; and those musings had led her to believe that Charles was the nephew of Mr. Hatfield, *alias* Thomas Rainford.

"Yes—madam—a young nobleman!" he repeated, carried away by the excitement of feelings under which he laboured: for he fancied that the old lady had intended to reproach him—*him*, the son of the resuscitated highwayman—with having dared to love her daughter. "And now, perhaps, it is your turn to be surprised: for, as surely as you are seated there, I am not the plain, and humble, and obscure Charles Hatfield—but the *Lord Viscount Marston*, heir to the Earldom of Ellingham!"

Mrs. Fitzhardinge restrained her surprise with the utmost presence of mind—exerting indeed an extraordinary power of self-controul; and, surveying him with an unblushing effrontery, she said, "Well, my lord, your lordship is at length led to confess who you really are!"

"My lord"—"your lordship!"—Oh! how sweetly—how sweetly sounded those words on the ears of Charles Hatfield:—he forgot that he was the son of the resuscitated highwayman—he remembered not that his sire had passed through the ordeal of a scaffold: he heard only that he was saluted with a title of nobility; and already did it seem as if half his ambition were gratified.

"Madam," he said, at length recovering his self-possession, and subduing as much as possible the wildness of that joy which had seized upon him, "then it appears you were acquainted with my right to a title of nobility?"

"I was," she answered, with an air of the most perfect truthfulness: "and believing *you* to be ignorant

of that fact, I was anxious to make the revelation to your lordship."

"You are consequently acquainted with every thing that regards me?" continued Charles, not perceiving, in the still elated condition of his mind, that the question was foolish because it embraced a vague and undefined generality.

"Every thing, my lord," returned Mrs. Fitzhardinge, repeating the titular appellation, because in her latent shrewdness she saw full well the pleasure that its swelling sound afforded to the young man.

"This is most strange—most singular!" cried Charles, musing audibly: "for I came hither with the intention of revealing all—every thing—to your Perdita, through whom you would have learnt the entire particulars in the course of this day;—and, behold! I am anticipated—for you already are as well acquainted with those most mysterious circumstances as I myself! But may I ask, madam," he exclaimed, turning abruptly towards Mrs. Fitzhardinge,—"may I ask how you came to know that Mr. Hatfield is my father, and that he is the rightful Earl of Ellingham, legitimately born?"

Mrs. Fitzhardinge had hitherto known nothing at all of those circumstances; but, without manifesting the least surprise, she said, "Pray be seated, my lord—compose yourself—give not way to unnecessary excitement; and I will at once proceed to explain all my conduct to your lordship."

Charles Hatfield threw himself into an arm-chair, and showed a disposition to listen with attention.

"Has your lordship ever heard of a gipsy named Miranda?" enquired Mrs. Fitzhardinge.

"Yes: I lately read the entire history of that Octavia Manners who became Countess of Ellingham, and who was my father's mother. The gipsy of whom you speak was her faithful friend: but she must now be very old—even if she be in existence!"

"She *is* in existence—or at least was a short time back," said Mrs. Fitzhardinge. "From her lips did I receive the entire history of your family."

"But she could not have known that the late Earl of Ellingham married the injured Octavia Manners," cried Charles: "she could not have been aware of my father's real rank and position."

"Yes—she knew all," returned the wily woman, uttering a deliberate falsehood: "how and by what means, it matters not—neither, indeed, did she inform me. When the whole tale was revealed to me, I thought that you must be in ignorance of your just rights; and, having by accident heard a good account of your lordship's generous heart and amiable qualities——"

"From whom?" demanded Charles.

"Oh! I must not gratify your curiosity in these minute details," exclaimed Mrs. Fitzhardinge. "Suffice it that I adhere to the important points of our present topic."

"Proceed, madam: I will not again interrupt you unnecessarily," said the young man.

"Well, then, my lord—I fancied that it was a flagrant shame and an abhorrent cruelty thus to retain you in ignorance, as I supposed, of your true standing in the world; and a sense of justice determined me—although a total stranger to you—to acquaint your lordship with those facts which, it however appears, were already well known to you."

"To speak candidly, my dear madam," said Charles, "I *was* in complete ignorance of all those circumstances until eight or ten days ago, when they were revealed to me by the strangest accident in the world."

"May I, without appearing indiscreet, enquire the nature of the accident that thus put your lordship in possession of such important—such vitally important facts?"

"Assuredly, my dear madam," returned Charles Hatfield. "You yourself have behaved to me with so much kindness and candour in this respect, that I owe you my entire confidence. A mere chance threw in my way certain papers which fully prove that Octavia Manners was the wife of the late Earl of Ellingham when their child was born; and that my own father, who now bears the name of Hatfield, but who was so long and so unhappily known by that of Rainford, was the child to whom allusion is made."

"And those papers—have you them in your possession?" asked Mrs. Fitzhardinge.

"I have—carefully concealed in a private compartment of my writing-desk, in my own chamber at Lord Ellingham's mansion."

"But has your lordship no hesitation in proclaiming your rights and titles—or rather in acquiring them by forcing your father to proclaim his own?" demanded the old woman, again fixing her eyes steadfastly upon his countenance.

"Ah! *there*, madam, you touch the wound in my heart!" exclaimed Charles, the sudden workings of his countenance displaying the anguish which the thought excited within him. "I am loth to take the grand—the important—the irrevocable step on the one hand; and I cannot bear to surrender up all my privileges on the other. Moreover, my parents have not acted towards me in a way to render necessary every sacrifice on my part;—and even this morning—this very morning—my father added a new injury to the list of those already committed against me—a new wrong, by upbraiding me, under particular circumstances, with harshness—even brutality."

"Certainly your lordship cannot permit a false sense of filial duty to mar all the golden prospects which open before you!" exclaimed the vile woman, who was thus encouraging evil thoughts in the young man's mind. "Consider your youth—your handsome appearance—your great talents—the brilliant hopes which develop themselves in the horizon of the future——"

"Oh! I have thought of all this—I have weighed every thing for and against the course which I long to adopt, but which the interests of my parents oppose——"

Charles paused—dashed his hand against his heated brow—and, rising, paced the room in an agitated manner.

"My lord, this excitement is useless," said Mrs. Fitzhardinge. "If you will deign to consider me as a friend——"

"I do—I do!" he cried, approaching her, and pressing her shrivelled hand with fervent, but oh! with how mistaken gratitude: "have you not proved yourself my friend? Did you not, though a stranger, contemplate the generous act of revealing to me secrets which you considered as necessary to be known to me? And have you not even now given me advice which is consistent with my interests?"

"Then, if your lordship will thus regard me as a friend, permit me to suggest that you do not on the one hand abandon your determination to assert your rights, nor on the other adopt any course that has not been well deliberated upon. Consider," said Mrs.

Fitzhardinge, "your lordship will have to steel your heart against a father's prayers—a mother's tears: you will have to contend against the entreaties of your uncle, the Earl—and of his handsome Jewish wife,—aye—and the beseechings of their daughter too;—for I understand that your lordship has a beautiful cousin——"

"Oh! how many hearts may I not have to break in piling up the fabric of my ambition!" exclaimed Charles Hatfield, his heart once more smiting him severely,—or rather with an anguish that was intolerable.

"Yes—those are the considerations which lie before your lordship," resumed Mrs. Fitzhardinge. "But you must also reflect, my lord, upon the immense interests you have at stake. Is it better to remain simple *Charles Hatfield* all your life—or——"

"You need not finish the question, madam," said the young man, suddenly interrupting the infamous old harridan, and now speaking in a cold tone of desperate resolution. "I must persevere: my destiny is fixed—and even if hearts break in the struggle, I will not shrink from the contest that is to give me my just rights! But let us talk no more of this for the present. May I be permitted to enquire after your charming daughter——"

"You have now, my lord, turned the conversation on the second subject which required discussion between us," interrupted Mrs. Fitzhardinge. "Perdita has confessed to me all that has taken place between herself and your lordship——"

"And you are doubtless offended!" exclaimed Charles Hatfield, observing that the old lady's countenance had again become very serious.

"No, my lord—I am not precisely angry," she returned; "but I tremble to approach a topic which involves so many difficulties."

"Ah! madam—with your strong mind, all difficulties are surmountable," said Charles· "and you have only to stipulate, in order that I shall assent to every thing that you may propose."

"In the first place," resumed the wily woman, "you are aware of the strange—fanciful—and, I must say, unfortunate notions which my daughter has imbibed relative to marriage; and your lordship must be aware that—supposing your mutual passion be allowed to take its course unrestrained—the world will regard her only as your lordship's mistress!"

"Madam—I would cheerfully conduct her to the altar——"

"Whither she will not go," added the old woman, emphatically. "No—my lord, it is useless to reason with that strong-headed, obstinate girl on the subject. Admitting, then, that I—her mother—placing her happiness above conventional opinions, and entertaining implicit faith in your honour and integrity,—admitting, I say, that I consent to the union of hearts proposed in this case,—waiving the ceremony of the union of hands,—can you, my lord, undertake to ensure my daughter against the contingencies of poverty?"

"Situated as I now am, the means at my disposal are limited indeed," said Charles Hatfield: "but the moment my rights are proclaimed and recognised——"

"Then, at the same instant, the family estates, at present held by the Earl of Ellingham, will pass into the hands of your father—and you still remain totally dependant upon him until his death," said Mrs. Fitzhardinge, embracing at a glance the whole range of contingencies.

"True!" cried Charles, suddenly becoming much embarrassed, and seeing difficulties most unexpectedly start up.

"*But*," resumed Mrs. Fitzhardinge, after a few minutes' pause, and laying strong emphasis upon the monosyllable,—"*but*, my lord, even should you immediately quarrel with your father by compelling him to wrest the titles and estates from the hands of his younger brother who now holds them, there are ways and means for your lordship to raise money—those estates becoming inalienably your's in the perspective."

"Yes—I understand—there is that alternative! exclaimed Charles. "But my father would not discard me altogether—he would not deprive me of the means of support during his life-time——"

"You know not, my lord, what may be the results of the family convulsion—the domestic revolution—which your contemplated proceedings will bring about. Pardon me, my dear Viscount, if I thus dwell upon matters so purely worldly;—but remember that I myself am now placed in a cruel position by the total wreck of the brilliant hopes which my claims in Chancery so recently held out;—and unless I succeed in raising a few thousand pounds within a week, I shall positively be menaced with imprisonment in a debtors' gaol."

"Merciful heaven!" cried Charles Hatfield: "how can I possibly assist you?"

"You will not think me mercenary, my lord——"

"Oh! no—no, my dear madam!" he exclaimed impatiently. "Tell me if there be a means of raising the amount you require; and my readiness to adopt those means must be received by you as a proof of my anxiety to render myself worthy of Perdita's love and your esteem."

"Generous nobleman!" cried Mrs. Fitzhardinge, pretending to be affected by the scene: "my daughter will indeed be happy in the possession of your heart! Listen, my lord," she continued; "and our interview may soon be brought to a close—for I know that you are as anxious to see a certain person as she is dying to behold you. Your lordship ere now alluded to particular papers which prove the legitimate birth, rights, and identity of your father:—by means of those papers, and on your lordship signing a document, I can undertake to procure as large a sum of money as may be required either by my necessities or for your own present wants."

"This evening, my dear madam, I will place the papers in your hands," said Charles, who was anxious to terminate this interview as speedily as possible—for his impatience to behold Perdita began to exceed his powers of endurance.

"At eight o'clock this evening I shall expect your lordship," observed Mrs. Fitzhardinge: and, with these words, she quitted the apartment.

Charles Hatfield approached the mirror—arranged his hair in the most becoming manner—and had just snatched a last satisfactory glance at the reflection of his handsome countenance, when the door opened and Perdita entered the room.

CHAPTER CXXXVI.

INFATUATION.

PERDITA was dressed in a more modest and, to speak truly, in a more delicate manner than on either of the former occasions when Charles had seen her. A plain

morning gown, made with a high corsage, set off her fine figure, without affording even a glimpse of the charms the full proportions of which its shape developed. Her hair was arranged in plain bands; and there was altogether an appearance of so much innocence, candour, and maiden reserve in her demeanour, that it seemed to Charles as if he now beheld in her some new phasis of her wondrous beauty.

Hastening forward to meet her, he caught her in his arms and covered her lips, her cheeks, and her brow with kisses: for—whether it were imagination or reality we know not—but she appeared to be far more lovely than ever in his eyes.

"Dearest—dearest Perdita!" he exclaimed, forgetting at that moment all and every thing in the world save the object of his adoration.

"Charles—my lord—how am I to call you henceforth?" she murmured, in that soft, musical tone which flowed like the harmony of the spheres in unto the very soul.

"Am I not *Charles* to you, dear girl?" he demanded, looking at her tenderly and half reproachfully: then, conducting her to a seat, and placing himself near her, he added, "I have had a long interview with your mother, Perdita; and from all that I could gather, she has no opposition to offer to our love."

"I know it," responded the girl, casting down her eyes with a modesty so admirably assumed that it would have deceived the most experienced individual. "And are you well satisfied that she has thus proved favourable to our hopes?"

"Will you always seem to doubt my affection?" demanded the young man, in an impassioned tone: "will you ever appear to believe that I am so volatile—so fickle—so inconstant, as to regret to-day a step that I took yesterday?"

"Pardon me, Charles—pardon me," said Perdita, looking up into his face with an expression of the most charming *naiveté*: "but my mother heard a rumour—and yet it might be unfounded——"

"Speak—speak, Perdita!" cried the young man, impatiently

"A rumour to the effect that you were looked upon as the future husband of Lady Frances Ellingham," added Perdita, in a tremulous tone, as if scarcely daring to give utterance to the jealous suspicion that the words implied.

Charles Hatfield became suddenly red as scarlet; and Perdita burst into tears.

"Oh! then the rumour is true—and you are deceiving me, my lord!" she exclaimed, affecting a passionate outburst of grief: but, in a few moments, she seemed to exercise an abrupt and powerful controul over her feelings, and rising from her seat, drew herself up into a demeanour of desperate calmness, saying, "Viscount Marston, I will show you that my affection is of no selfish nature. If you love this young lady, who must be your cousin, from all I have heard and know through my mother,—if you prefer the beauteous Frances—for beautiful I am aware she is,—Oh! then I release you from your vows to me—I restore your plight—and I, the obscure and neglected Perdita, will pray in secret for your welfare,—yes, and for the welfare of her who will have robbed me of your affections!"

"No, Perdita—no!" cried Charles, profoundly touched by this well-enacted piece of apparently generous self-denial: "I do *not* love my cousin Frances—and it was only this very morning that I disputed with my parents because I refused to form an alliance on which their hearts are set. Perdita—my beloved Perdita, I thank thee—Oh! heaven alone knows how sincerely I thank thee for this manifestation of generosity,—a generosity that, if possible, has rivetted my affections more indissolubly on thee!"

"And you will pardon me, Charles—if in a moment of jealousy——" murmured the designing young woman, hanging down her head in a charming kind of confusion and bashfulness.

"Pardon thee!" repeated her dupe, catching her in his arms, and straining her passionately to his breast: "what have I to pardon? Must I pardon thee for loving me so well, my Perdita?—for only those who love well, can know what jealousy is! And, did I think that I had cause, should I not be jealous of thee, sweet Perdita? Oh! yes—and my jealousy would be very fierce and terrible in its consequences. But on neither side shall there be cause for jealousy——"

"At least not on mine, Charles," returned the young woman, gently extricating herself from his arms, and resuming her seat upon the sofa. "And now, my lord," she added playfully, "when do you intend to take some charming suburban villa—fit it up in a chaste, elegant, and beautiful style—and bear thither your bride,—for your bride am I prepared to become on the conditions which have already been established between us?"

"Without a day's—without an hour's unnecessary delay, my beloved Perdita," answered Charles, his cheeks flushing and his eyes sparkling with the hopes and voluptuous thoughts inspired by the question thus put to him; and throwing his arms around her, he drew the bewitching syren towards him.

"Charles—Charles," she murmured, as he glued his lips to her warm, glowing cheek; "you are adorably handsome—and I love you as woman never loved before. But I implore you to release me now—for—my mother might return to the room—and—and—Oh! Charles—you clasp me too violently——"

And she succeeded in disengaging herself from his arms, having maddened him as it were by the contact of her fine, voluptuous form, and the caresses she had allowed him to lavish upon her.

"Perdita, you are more reserved with me than you were yesterday," said Charles, half reproachfully.

"Or rather say that yesterday I was so hurried away by the rapturous thoughts—the delightful emotions—the elysian feelings which were excited within me by the certainty of possessing your love," murmured the young woman, "that I had no controul over myself."

"And now that you are assured of my love, you have grown comparatively cold and reserved," said Charles, with the least degree of humour.

"Should you think the better of me if I were without the least particle of maiden reserve?" she asked, in a reproachful tone. "Listen, my beloved Charles—and look not angrily on your Perdita!"

"No—not for worlds!" he exclaimed, pressing her hand to his lips, and feeling in the renewed infatuation of his soul that he was prompt to do her bidding and yield to her will in all things.

"Now you are kind and good—and I love you, dear Charles," said Perdita, in a tone of captivating artlessness. "Although we shall have no bridal ceremony as performed at a church," she resumed, "yet must our wedding-day—if I may so call it—be duly fixed and celebrated. When, therefore, you have provided for me and my mother such a home as you would wish me and my parent to possess—then shall

you bear me thither, my dearest Charles, as your bride—and—and—I will be unto thee as a wife in all respects," she added, bending her beauteous head down upon his bosom, and concealing her blushing countenance there.

"Be it as you say, my sweet Perdita!" he exclaimed. "And in all things will I do your bidding—for I love and adore you. You are an angel of beauty;—your manners are irresistibly winning;—your voice has the charm of the sweetest melody;—and your looks would kindle love in the breast of an anchorite."

"Ah! flatterer," she cried, raising her head, and tapping him gently upon the face. "Will you always think thus well of me?"

"Yes—always, always!" he exclaimed—so completely infatuated was he with the syren. "And now tell me, my charmer—in which part of London should you wish me to fix upon a beautiful villa for your reception?"

"The more secluded the spot—the better," said Perdita. "I do not wish to form the acquaintance of prying and curious neighbours, nor shall I court the presence of visitors. When you are with me, I shall have no thought but for you: when you are absent, to think of you will be sufficient occupation. I have heard that in the neighbourhood of Holloway there are some delightful villas, newly built——"

"Holloway! It is there—in that neighbourhood—that Markham Place, the mansion where the Prince of Montoni is staying, is situated."

"And you are acquainted with that Prince?" said Perdita. "Yes—for in this morning's newspaper I read, amongst the Fashionable Intelligence, that his Royal Highness had yesterday partaken of a banquet at the mansion of the Earl of Ellingham in Pall Mall."

"Oh! he is a great and illustrious Prince, Perdita!" cried Charles, his cheeks suddenly glowing with animation.

"But he is not so handsome as you, Charles?" said Perdita, half enquiringly—half playfully.

"He is very handsome, dearest," was the reply: "but his heroic deeds—his noble disposition—his boundless philanthropy—and his staunch support of the Rights of Man, constitute attractions which, were he ugly as Satan, would render him adorable as an angel."

"And have you none of those qualities, my Charles?" demanded Perdita. "Are you not gloriously handsome?—have you not a proud title, which you can claim when you will—aye, and which you will claim shortly?—and will you not some day be a Peer of the Realm, and able to electrify the senate with your eloquence? For that you would be eloquent, Charles, I am convinced;—and, oh! what pleasure—what unfeigned, heart-felt pleasure would it give your devoted Perdita to occupy even the humblest, most secluded nook in the place where you were delivering yourself of the burning thoughts and splendid ideas——"

"Oh! Perdita—do you too hope that I shall yet create for myself a great and a glorious reputation?" demanded the young man, surveying his beauteous companion with joy and surprise.

"Yes, Charles: for do I not love thee?" she asked, in her dulcet, silvery tone.

"Now—oh! now can I understand how the image of the Princess Isabella might cheer and hearten on the once obscure Richard Markham to the accomplishment of those great deeds which have placed him on so proud an eminence! Now," continued the enthusiastic, infatuated Charles,—"now can I comprehend how gallant knights, in the days of chivalry, would dare every peril—encounter every danger, at the behest or command of their ladye-loves! And you, my Perdita,—you shall be as a Princess Isabella in my eyes—you shall be my ladye-love;—and animated by thy smiles, will I yet carve out for myself a glorious career in the world."

"I long to see thee in possession of thy titles, Charles—to behold thee, too, occupying thy place in the House of Peers," said Perdita. "But, hark—the clock strikes two; and now I am compelled to accompany my mother into the City——"

"To her attorney's?" asked Charles, a sudden fear seizing upon him.

"Yes—to her solicitor's office," responded Perdita: then, after suffering him to manifest a sentiment of pique and annoyance for a few moments, she threw her arms around his neck, exclaiming, "And so you are very jealous, sir—are you?—and you thought perhaps that I was about to call upon this lawyer to signify to him my readiness to accept the hand of the old nobleman who is my mother's relentless opponent in the suit? But I can assure you that the object of my visit in that quarter is one which you will no doubt highly approve. It is to inform the legal gentleman, with my own lips, that I utterly and totally decline the honour of the proposed union——"

"Charming—dearest Perdita!" ejaculated Charles, straining her in rapture to his breast.

"Inasmuch," she added, with playful artlessness—or rather with an affectation of that delightful *naiveté*,—"inasmuch as the solicitor will not believe that I can possibly resist so splendid an offer; and he is determined to hear the truth from me—and from me only."

"And were he to over-persuade you, Perdita—to impress you with the necessity of yielding in this instance——" began Charles, still labouring under the vague apprehension with which the artful creature sought to inspire him in order to attach him the more completely to her.

"Have you so much to fear on the part of an old nobleman whom I have never seen, as I have on the part of that beautiful Lady Frances who dwells beneath the same roof with you?" enquired Perdita, in the most melting tones of her flute-like voice.

"Pardon me—pardon me, dearest girl!" cried Charles, embracing her fondly.

"I have no more to pardon in you at present, than you had to forgive in me ere now," murmured the guileful woman, placing her warm cheek against his own and allowing their hair to mingle.

For a few moments she remained with him in this position,—a position that enchanted, thrilled, and intoxicated him: then suddenly withdrawing herself from his arms, she said, archly, but impressively, "It now remains with you, Charles, when our wedding-day is to be celebrated."

"Ah! if you were only as impatient as I!" he exclaimed.

They parted—the young man hastening, as was his wont after these visits, to the park to feast his imagination with a delicious reverie the whole and sole subject of which should be Perdita!

A few minutes after he had taken his departure, Mrs. Fitzhardinge sought her daughter in the drawing-room; and the ensuing dialogue took place.

"Every thing tends to forward our designs with respect to this young man," observed the old woman,

seating herself in a chair opposite to her daughter, who was reclining upon the sofa.

"And yet I cannot *now* altogether comprehend your policy, mother," returned Perdita.

"In which particular point, my child?" demanded the vile parent.

"Respecting the nature of the connexion which is to subsist between myself and Charles," said Perdita. "It was all very well for me to calculate upon being his mistress before we were aware that he is in reality a Viscount, and must be an Earl: but since you succeeded so nicely in extracting those revelations from him this morning, why should we not secure so glorious a prize by a means more durable and powerful than mere sophistry and the love which he bears me? Consider, mother, how instantaneously he took a fancy to me; and believe me when I assure you that coolness will follow as rapidly, after full satiety, on his part."

"Silly girl! thou art thyself in love with him!" cried Mrs. Fitzhardinge, in a tone of vexation.

"Yes—more than half: I acknowledge it," returned Perdita, coolly.

"And yet—but a few days ago you assured me that you could not chain yourself to one individual with any hope of being faithful to him,—that love was a passion which would never obtain over you that influence which it so often exercised over the weak, the simple-minded, and the infatuated."

"It is perfectly true, mother, that I said all which your memory has so faithfully treasured up, and your lips so accurately repeated," said Perdita, still speaking without excitement. "But *then*, my dear mother," she added, almost satirically—no, almost jeeringly, as if diverting herself with her parent's evident vexation,—"*then*, you know, I had not seen Charles Hatfield."

"And I told you not to be too confident on that point to which we are alluding," cried Mrs. Fitzhardinge. "My dear Perdita, renounce all ideas of marriage with this young man: indeed, you have compromised yourself too deeply in your denunciations of the marriage-tie to be able to recall your sentiments on that head."

"Not at all," said Perdita, authoritatively. "In the same way that I induced Charles to accede to my proposals, and even fall into my views—so can I, in a very short space, and by means of other sophistry, convince him that I had merely been playing a part to test the value of his affection——"

"No—no, Perdita: you must not attempt such a perilous proceeding," said Mrs. Fitzhardinge, evidently listening with great uneasiness to the words that fell from her daughter's lips.

"I dare and will attempt all I choose or fancy with that young man!" cried the head-strong Perdita, in an imperious tone.

"Will you not follow my counsel?" demanded Mrs. Fitzhardinge. "Have I not fulfilled all my promises to you?—did I not declare that in London you should find luxury, plenty, and ease?—did I not pledge myself that the young man should sue at your feet and implore your love?—and could you have brought about all these results for yourself?"

"I do not pretend that I could, mother," returned Perdita "But am I to be your tool—your instrument—an automaton in your hands?—am I not to have an opinion in our councils?—or am I to pay blind obedience to you, even though I have reasons for questioning the prudence of your proceedings?"

"And do you now question the prudence of my proceedings?" demanded Mrs. Fitzhardinge, growing every moment more and more irritable.

"Yes—I do!" answered Perdita, firmly and resolutely—at the same time fixing her brilliant eyes rebelliously upon her mother. "I admit that if we had only ensnared in our toils a simple commoner—a plain Charles Hatfield—with limited resources within his reach, it would have been advisable to form no lasting connexion with him. But now—*now* that we are assured, beyond all possibility of doubt, that he is himself a nobleman and the heir to enormous wealth, it would be madness—it would be folly not to bind him to us by irrefragable chains. Why—here is a position to be obtained and ensured at once,—a position which will render us rich for the remainder of our days! And think you, mother, that I have not a little feeling of ambition in my soul? Would it not be a proud thing for you to be enabled to call the Vicountess Marston—and in due time the Countess of Ellingham—your daughter? All these considerations never flashed to my mind until immediately after Charles had quitted the room ere now: or I should have assuredly commenced the undoing of all that stupid work which, by your persuasion and so well tutored by you, I achieved in respect to the conditions whereon our connexion was to be based. What!" she cried, her eyes absolutely flashing fire: "have a coronet within my reach—and refuse it!—have a wealthy noble—or one who will be enormously wealthy—sighing at my feet, and not wed him! Mother," she cried, actually exciting herself into a passion, "you must think me to be a fool—an idiot—a mad woman!"

"I shall think you to be a fool—an idiot—and a mad woman if you persist in thwarting my plans or proceeding contrary to my advice," said Mrs Fitzhardinge, her tanned, weather-beaten countenance becoming absolutely livid with rage.

"Ah! you have some sinister purpose to serve, mother!" cried Perdita, a sudden idea striking her "else never would you oppose yourself so completely to the dictates of common sense. What were your words to me when I spoke to you—and spoke so rashly—about the inaccessibility of my soul to the passion of love? You advised me not to count only on the chance of making a good match: you declared it to be far more probable that I might ensnare some young gentleman of birth, family, and fortune—or some old voluptuary of immense wealth;—and you added that there was more to be gained as the mistress of one of those, than as a wife. In fine, your advice was that I should remain unmarried and independent, so that the moment I had ruined one lover, I might take another."

"Yes—and that counsel was the wisest I could proffer you," said her mother, actually speaking in a savage tone, and looking as if she could have leapt, tigress-like, upon her daughter and torn her with her nails as if they were claws.

"Oh! the advice was good enough under certain circumstances," exclaimed Perdita. "It was good in so far as it related to the probability of my securing a succession of lovers, each with only a comparatively small fortune, and each individual, therefore, to be soon set aside. But now that, at the very outset, chance has thrown in my way a young noble, who must sooner or later inherit a vast fortune which no extravagance can completely dissipate,—a fortune, indeed, which will minister to all extravagances, and yet remain unimpaired,—should I not be the veriest fool that ever tossed gold into a river or hurled

diamonds into an abyss, were I not to secure the brilliant advantages thus placed within my reach?"

"Daughter," exclaimed the old woman, with difficulty preventing a complete outburst of her fury, "I tell you that this may not be! Secure Charles Hatfield—or rather Viscount Marston—as your paramour: *I* will undertake to raise as much money, as you can persuade him to lavish upon you;—and then—*then*, my child," she added, adopting a tone of fawning conciliation, "you can choose a new lover and make inroads into another's fortune."

"I am determined to pursue and follow out the plan which my own convictions indicate as the most rational—the most sensible—the most advisable!" exclaimed Perdita; "and, therefore, the present dispute is useless and absurd."

"Dispute!" repeated Mrs. Fitzharuinge, her countenance again becoming absolutely livid, and her whole form trembling with rage: "I do not choose to dispute with you, insolent girl that you are! Now listen to me, Perdita—and know once for all that I *will* be obeyed in this, as in all things—or I will abandon you to your own resources—I will hurl you back into rags, want, and poverty——"

"Not while I possess this beauty of which a queen might be proud!" said Perdita, in a quiet manner, as she glanced with self complacency at her own handsome countenance as it was reflected in a mirror opposite.

"Oh! think not that beauty is the only element of fortune!" cried the old woman, surveying her daughter with almost an expression of fiend-like hate: "for, if you dare to thwart me, Perdita, I will become your bitterest and most malignant enemy, though you are my own child:—I will pursue thee with my vengeance;—wherever you may be, I will spoil all your machinations and ruin all your schemes;—nay, more—I will compel your very lovers to thrust you ignominiously forth from them! For I will boldly proclaim how that Perdita who has enthralled them, was accursed from her very birth—born in Newgate—thence taken by her mother to a penal colony, where she became lost and abandoned at the early age of thirteen—and how every handsome young officer in garrison at Sydney could boast of the favours of this profligate young creature!"

A mocking laugh came from the lips of Perdita,—a laugh that rang more horribly in the ears of her mother than an explosion of maledictions, recriminations, and insults would have done,—a laugh that

seemed to say, "Wretched—drivelling old woman, I despise thee!"

"You will repent this conduct, vile girl—you will repent it!" muttered Mrs. Fitzhardinge, approaching Perdita, and gazing on her with eyes that seemed to glare savagely. "Whatever be the risk—even though I involve myself in the downfall of our splendid prospects—I will ruin thee, if thou darest to oppose and thwart me! Abandon thy scheme of marrying the young nobleman—and we will be friends again: persist in it—and we separate, as mortal enemies. Yes—and the first step which I shall take will be to repair to Charles Hatfield—implore his forgiveness for having been a party to the scheme plotted against him and his—and give such a character of thee, Perdita, that his blood shall run cold in his veins at the mere thought of ever having been placed in contact with thee! And, oh! the picture which a mother will draw of her daughter in such a case,—that picture will be terrible—very terrible! Pause, then—reflect——"

"One word, mother," said Perdita, who had maintained an extraordinary degree of composure throughout this scene—doubtless because she knew that she must triumph in the long run. "You threaten bravely: let us look calmly and deliberately at what must be the inevitable results of a fearful quarrel between you and me;—let us see who would get the better of it! On one side would be you—old—ugly—disgustingly ugly, I may say—so that to become any thing save a beggar, grovelling in the kennel, would be impossible. On the other side would be myself—at all events handsome enough to gain the favour of some soft fool: and, spoil my character as you will, you cannot prevent me from finding a paramour amongst those who care nothing for the reputation, but every thing for the beauty, of their mistresses. Bread to me is certain: rags and starvation to you are equally well assured. My life of pleasure, gaiety, and dissipation is to come: your's has passed—and naught remains for you save to die in a workhouse or on a dunghill! Pardon me, my dear mother, for speaking thus openly—thus plainly," added the young woman, now throwing a spice of irony into her tone: "but you did not spare me when you summed up my characteristics just now. And before I quit the subject, I may as well observe that you yourself are not the most immaculate woman upon the face of the earth. Heaven only knows how prolific were the debaucheries of your youth: but you veiled them all beneath the aspect of a *saint!* Oh! that was excellent, dear mother—excellent, indeed!" cried Perdita, her merry, musical laugh echoing through the apartment: "only conceive you once to have been a *saint!* In good truth, you have not much of the appearance of a saint now, mother: neither had you when living with the free-settler as his mistress!"

"Perdita—Perdita!" gasped the wretched Mrs. Fitzhardinge, writhing like a snake at these bitter words, and shaking convulsively from head to foot: "you—you will drive me mad!"

"Ah! what—do you possess *feelings*, then, my dear mother?" demanded the young woman, assuming an air of profound astonishment. "And yet you must have imagined that your daughter was totally without those same little feelings which it is so easy to wound, and so difficult to heal. Well—I will forbear: otherwise, I was about to have reminded you of those glorious times—before I was born, indeed—when you were the paramour of Sir Henry Courtenay, whose name you so pleasantly and quietly forged to a slip of paper one day——"

"Silence—Perdita—silence!" said Mrs. Fitzhardinge, in a hoarse and hollow tone—clasping her hands convulsively at the same time. "I was wrong to provoke you thus: you are very hard upon me—you have the best of it, Perdita—and I—I——"

Here the old wretch burst into tears,—not an assumed grief—no crocodile weeping,—but a flood of genuine tears, wrung from her by the cutting, biting, bitter sarcasms which her daughter had so mercilessly—so slaughterously levelled against her.

Perdita suffered her to weep without offering the least consolation: for the young woman was hurt and wounded on her side as well as the old harridan was hurt and wounded on the other.

The recriminations of those two females—that mother and daughter—had been terrible in their implacability, and appalling in their unnatural malignity.

There was a long pause—during which Mrs. Fitzhardinge sate sobbing—being absolutely hideous in her grief,—while Perdita—with flashing eyes, dilating nostrils, flushing cheeks, and palpitating bosom, lay half reclined upon the sofa—tapping the carpet petulantly with the tip of her long, narrow, exquisitely shaped shoe.

"My dear child," at length said the old woman, "are we to be friends or enemies?"

"That depends entirely upon yourself, mother," was the answer: "I am not to be tyrannised over by you—nor menaced in the fearful way in which you have threatened me to-day, without showing resentment in return. Really, one would have supposed that you were addressing yourself to the bitterest enemy you had in the world—rather than to your daughter who has done all she could to place you in a comfortable position for the remainder of your days."

"Well—well—let us be friends, Perdita!" exclaimed Mrs. Fitzhardinge.

"Yes—we will be friends," responded the daughter. "But remember that my views in respect to Charles Hatfield—or rather, Viscount Marston—are to be carried into effect."

"Without again quarrelling," interrupted her mother, "let me assure you that I cannot—cannot possibly consent to this deviation from our original arrangements. It was an express understanding between us that *marriage* was, in every case, to be out of the question——"

"And may not circumstances transpire to change original plans?" demanded Perdita, beginning to divine the reasons of her mother's uncompromising opposition to her matrimonial scheme.

"A truce to these arguments!" cried Mrs. Fitzhardinge, again growing irritable. "Remember that this evening your love-sick swain will deposit in my hands all the papers containing the evidence of his father's right to the earldom and estates of Ellingham——"

"And you will use your power to coerce me?" said Perdita, in her quiet way, which nevertheless seemed to breathe defiance.

"I do not affirm *that*, my child," cried the old woman, smothering her rage. "But I would ask you of what use those papers would be without my assistance to raise money on them?"

"Of no more utility than our acquaintance with Charles would be to *you*, were it not for *me*," returned Perdita. "And now, mother, I may as well inform you at once that I can penetrate into all the motives

which prompt you thus to oppose my marriage views with respect to Charles. You imagine that if I become his mistress only, I shall be so completely in your power that I must still continue your slave,—that a word from you relative to my past life would send away Charles Hatfield in disgust,—and that in order to prevent you from speaking that word, I shall obey you blindly. In fine, you hope to exercise a despotism alike over him and me,—dispose of the purse—and controul the household with sovereign sway. On the other hand, you imagine,—nay, do not look so black, my dear mother—we are only telling each other a few agreeable truths——"

"Go on, vile girl!" gasped Mrs. Fitzhardinge, trembling—suffocating with rage.

"On the other hand, then," pursued the young woman, in a placid, unexcited manner,—"on the other hand you suppose that if once I become the wife of Charles Hatfield—if once he shall have taken me for better or worse—if once the indissoluble knot be tied, your power over me would cease. For were you to avenge any slight by making revelations respecting me, I might lose my husband's esteem and love, but should not the less remain his wife. You therefore dread lest you should become a cypher—dependant upon us for your daily bread—unable to controul the purse and the domestic economy——"

"And what will you do to guarantee that all you are now saying is not a predictive sketch of what you know must happen in case I permit your marriage?" demanded Mrs. Fitzhardinge, dismayed by this accurate reading of her heart's secrets on the part of her daughter.

"I can only assure you this much, mother," was the answer,—"that if you conduct yourself well towards me, I shall act well towards you,—that you shall have your own way in every thing where my will is not violently thwarted,—and that I will co-operate with you cheerfully for our mutual interests, so long as you do not attempt to drive me as a slave."

"And all this you faithfully promise, Perdita?" demanded her mother, eagerly; for she was now glad to effect any compromise rather than come to an open rupture with her daughter, who, she saw, had in reality so much the better of her.

"Be assured, mother," replied Perdita, "that I am not for war;—and if we quarrel any more, it will be your fault."

"We will *not* quarrel, Perdita," said Mrs. Fitzhardinge: "you shall marry Charles Hatfield—or Viscount Marston, as we ought to call him;—and here let our dispute finish."

"With all my heart. And now tell me, mother, how—where—and with whom you intend to raise the money upon these papers which Charles is to send or bring in the evening?"

"A few evenings ago, when I was lurking about Pall Mall waiting for that young gentleman, I suddenly encountered a person whom I had known years and years since, and who played me a vile—a very vile trick. He was much altered," continued Mrs. Fitzhardinge; "but I knew him—knew him the moment the light of the lamp flashed upon his features. I accosted him—told him who I was—and upbraided him for his villainy of former times. He spoke softly and in a conciliatory manner—and we fell into a more amicable train of conversation than at first. We soon understood each other; and giving me his address—for, by-the bye, he has taken a new name—he invited me to call upon him—and we parted. Since then I have made enquiries in the neighbourhood where he dwells; and I learn that he is reputed to be immensely rich—a miser and money-lender. He is therefore the man whom I require;—and we may reckon confidently upon his aid in the business of raising funds on the documents. This very evening I will call upon him——"

"You will permit me to accompany you, mother," said Perdita, rather in a tone of command than of interrogatory.

"Yes—if such be your pleasure," was the reply: for the old woman saw that it was useless and totally adverse to her own interests to thwart her daughter in any single respect.

CHAPTER CXXXVII.

TWO MORE OLD ACQUAINTANCES.

It was about eight o'clock in the evening of the same day when these scenes took place, that an old man coming from a northern direction, entered the metropolis by the suburb of Pentonville.

He was upwards of seventy-four years of age,—tall—thin—and retaining so much muscular vigour as only to stoop slightly in his gait. His complexion was perfectly cadaverous in hue, ghastly and careworn, and sinister in its expression. His attire was shabby, thread-bare, and travel-soiled,—his dusty boots denoting that he had journeyed some distance on foot. Nevertheless, there was about him a certain air which, in spite of his repulsive features and his sordid garb, denoted gentility; and an observer would have pronounced him to be, as indeed he was, a decayed gentleman.

Having passed by the Model Prison, he struck out of the highway into the fields where so many houses are now rapidly springing up, and which lie in the immediate vicinity of the Barnsbury and Liverpool Roads.

It was evident, however, that he had no definite object in view—no home whither he was proceeding; and he had turned into the fields merely to rub off the dust from his boots in the long grass, and rest himself for a few minutes in a secluded place.

At length he rose; and his wandering footsteps led him into the vicinity of the detached rows of small houses and cottages which dot the immediate neighbourhood of the Caledonian Road.

Once he stopped beneath a lamp; and taking his money from his pocket, counted it slowly. And heaven knows that the amount of his pecuniary property did not require long to reckon; for two shillings in silver and a few halfpence constituted all the store.

"This will at least purchase me a meal and procure me a bed for to-night," he murmured to himself; "and then—to-morrow—I must present myself to those who have not heard of me for so long a time!"

With these words, the old man resumed his slow and painful walk—for he was wearied and exhausted by the length of his day's journey. It was evident that he had been absent many—many years from the capital; for, though he had once known this neighbourhood well, yet now it was so changed that he gazed around him with astonishment,—aye, and paused to gaze around, too,—streets, rows of houses, and gardens having taken the place of the open fields.

He had now reached a spot where the dwellings

were more thinly scattered, and where the path was as yet unpaved and the road was thickly strown with flints.

It was now close upon nine o'clock; but the July evening was so beautiful that it was far from dark—only dimly obscure;—and thus, though there was no lamp in the neighbourhood where the old man was pursuing his way, yet was it sufficiently light for him to obtain a good view of objects, and even of the countenances of the few people whom he met.

Not that he paid any particular attention to the latter:—still, a stranger just arriving in London, or a person who returns to the capital after a very long absence, observes and marks every thing and every body with an earnest scrutiny at first.

The old man was passing by two small houses, forming one isolated building, and standing back from the road, when he encountered an individual whose face immediately struck him as being one which he had formerly known full well; and in the next instant a light flashed in upon his mind.

"Yes—'t is he!" he ejaculated to himself; and, laying his hand upon the other's shoulder, he said, "Mr. Howard, we meet at last—after a separation of upwards of nineteen years!"

"My name is not Howard—and I know nothing of you, sir. Let me go!" was the impatient reply, delivered by the individual whom the old man had accosted, and who was himself well stricken in years—being now midway between sixty and seventy.

"Were I on my death bed, I could swear that your name was *once* Howard, and that you were an attorney in London—an attorney who absconded, ruining thousands," exclaimed the old man.

"What means this insolence?" asked the other, affecting a tone of deep indignation mingled with surprise. "Pass on your way, sir—and let me pursue mine!"

"Not till I have had recompense or vengeance," growled the old man, ferociously. "For a sum of money did I sell myself to a vile and abandoned woman—a certain Mrs. Slingsby, whom you knew well;—and this money was deposited with you, villain that you are! For you fled—and the loss of that money was not the lightest of the myriad misfortunes that fell upon me at the time. Now do you know who *I* am, Mr. Howard?—for I know *you* full well!"

"You have spoken of a number of unintelligible things to me, sir—mentioned names with which I never was acquainted—alluded to circumstances entirely unknown——"

"Liar!" ejaculated Mr. Torrens—for he was the old man who had just now so wearily entered the suburb of Pentonville: "liar!" he repeated, seizing the other individual by the collar; "what should prevent me from raising an alarm and giving you into custody? For though years have elapsed, yet your offences have never been expiated——"

"Softly—softly, my good sir," interrupted the person thus addressed, and whose manner began to evince trepidation and alarm. "Let us adjourn somewhere and talk amicably on this matter——"

"No!" cried Mr. Torrens. "How do I know but that you intend to inveigle me into a den where you may perhaps silence my tongue for ever?"

"Fool—dotard!" muttered the other between his lips: "does he take me for a murderer?"

"I believe you to be capable of any villainy," returned the now infuriate Torrens, whose ears had caught the sense of those low mutterings. "But I shall not lose sight of you until I have received full and complete satisfaction for the wrongs I endured at your hands many years ago. And that you *are* able to give such satisfaction, your appearance proves full well," he added, as his eye caught a glimpse of the gold chain and massive seals which depended from the other's fob.

"Mr. Torrens—I will no longer attempt to conceal a fact of which you are so well assured. I *am* the Howard to whom you allude: but, in the name of God! do not ruin me—do not expose me. Here—this is my dwelling," he continued, pointing to one of the two houses in front of which this colloquy took place: "walk in with me—and—and we will converse at our ease——"

"Yes—I will accompany you," said Mr. Torrens, in a laconic manner: "lead the way, sir."

Mr. Howard drew forth a small key from his pocket, and with it opened the iron gate of the railings in front of the house. Torrens followed him across the little enclosure; and with another and larger key he opened the door of the dark and gloomy-looking dwelling. No domestic appeared; and the lawyer, entering the parlour, groped about in the dark until he found some lucifer-matches—Torrens remaining all the while in the passage. At length a light was obtained; and the visitor was requested to enter the room, which, by means of the one poor candle that now threw a feeble gleam around, appeared to be but indifferently furnished,—so that the aspect of the small and cheerless house somewhat damped the hopes which Torrens had entertained of compelling the individual whom he had thus accidentally encountered, to disgorge the sum embezzled by him upwards of nineteen years previously.

"Do you live all alone here?" he demanded, taking the seat to which Howard pointed.

"Yes—all alone," was the reply. "I am too poor to keep a servant."

"Too poor!" exclaimed Mr. Torrens, his heart sinking within him.

"Yes, indeed! How should I be possessed of any money?" said Howard, glancing around with nervous anxiety, as if he were afraid of being overheard: "From the moment that I was forced, by unexpected reverses and sudden misfortunes, to fly from London, I have led a life of continued struggles; and although, a few years ago, I was venturous enough to return to the metropolis and settle in this little cottage, which I got at a cheap rent as it was only just built,—yet my affairs have not improved——"

"But you must have some means of subsistence?—you pursue some avocation?—you doubtless continue to practise——"

"No—no," interrupted Howard, hastily. "I have been compelled to change my name—and it is as Mr. Percival—*poor Mr. Percival*—that I am known in this neighbourhood."

"You adopt strange precautions for a poor man;" said Torrens, pointing to the strong iron bars that fastened the shutters of the window: then, turning a look full of sardonic meaning upon Howard—or Percival, as we shall call him,—he added, "And methinks that when you opened your front door just now, a heavy chain rattled. Assuredly your little house is well protected."

"What would you infer from these facts?" demanded Percival: "that I have money—that I have turned miser?" he cried, with a forced and unnatural laugh. "Absurd! The person who lived here before

me, had those bars put up to the window-shutters, and that heavy chain to the street-door——"

"I thought you got the house cheap because it had only just been built?" said Torrens, smiling with malignant incredulity.

"Yes—but I did not tell you that I was the first person who occupied it," exclaimed Percival, as if eager to explain away an inconsistency in his statements and efface from the mind of his visitor the disagreeable impression made there.

"This is mere child's play, Mr. Howard—or Percival—or whatever your name may be!" cried Torrens. "You have got money—and you wish me to believe you poor. For myself, I *am* poor—so poor that I have but wherewith to obtain a meal and a bed for one night. It is true that I have a daughter and a son-in-law in London;—and it is likewise true that necessity—stern, imperious necessity has driven me at last to this city to seek assistance at their hands. But for nine years have I remained as one dead to them: for nine years have I wandered about the world, caring not what might become of me, and wishing to be believed dead in all reality by my daughter who suspects that I have been very criminal, and by my son-in-law who knows that I have! Yes—yes: I have purposely left them in uncertainty relative to me—unhappy man that I am,—purposely left them so, I say, in order that they may apprehend the worst! Stern want, however, was driving me to them when I encountered you: to-morrow morning I should have appeared in their presence,—in the presence of the daughter whom I do not love, and of her husband whom I hate—*hate*, for his very virtues, and because he knows me to be so vile!" added the old man, bitterly. "But now, sir, that I have met with you, your purse must save me the pain—the humiliation—the annoyance of encountering those beings face to face! Come, Mr. Percival—I have spoken to you frankly: do you be equally candid with me."

"Candid in what?" demanded the individual thus addressed.

"In respect to your own means and resources," returned Torrens. "I do not wish to be hard upon you; but a portion of the money that you robbed me of, I must and will have."

"These are harsh words—and unavailing, too," said Percival: "for I have not a sixpence to bless myself with! But," he added, with a malicious grin, "if I cannot give you money, I may perhaps impart a piece of agreeable intelligence."

"What! to me?" exclaimed Torrens, in a tone of surprise.

"Yes—to you. What would you think if I were to tell you that your dearly-beloved wife was in London at this very moment, and passing under the aristocratic name of Fitzhardinge?"

"My wife!" repeated Torrens, turning positively livid as these words struck upon his ears. "No—impossible! I would not meet that dreadful woman for thousands of pounds!"

"Then if you remain here you will assuredly encounter her," said Percival; "for I received a note from her this evening announcing her intention to honour me with a visit," he added, intently watching the effect which these words produced upon his companion.

"Villain! you are endeavouring to get rid of me as speedily as possible!" cried Torrens, almost foaming at the mouth with rage.

"Should you recognise your wife's handwriting?" demanded Percival, a diabolical grin still distorting features which, once handsome, had been marred and rendered repulsive by time and evil passions. "Though she is now stricken in years and has become positively hideous in personal appearance, that handwriting retains all the grace and fluency which ever characterised it."

With these words, he took a perfumed note from his pocket-book, and handed it to Torrens, who, hastily glancing over its contents, read the following words:—

"Mrs. Fitzhardinge presents her compliments to Mr. Percival, and will call upon him between nine and ten o'clock this evening on very particular business. She therefore hopes that Mr. Percival will have the kindness to remain at home to receive her."

"Now are you satisfied?" demanded Percival, who perceived by the workings of Torrens' countenance that the handwriting had been fully recognised.

"And on what matters is she—that vile woman—coming to you?" asked Torrens, impatiently.

"I cannot answer the question. You perceive that she speaks only of *particular business* in a vague fashion. I met her by accident some few days ago—and have not seen her since."

"And she comes between nine and ten," mused Torrens: "and it is already close upon ten o'clock! I would not meet her for the world: 't would recall to my mind, with intolerable force, all the anguish—all the sufferings——No—no," he cried, suddenly interrupting himself and starting from his chair; "I will not—I cannot meet her!"

"Then you had better depart at once," said Percival, evidently most anxious to see the unwelcome visitor turn his back upon the house.

"Yes—I shall depart indeed," exclaimed Torrens: "but you must give me money first. Nay—no more excuses: I am a desperate man——"

At that instant a double knock at the street door echoed through the little dwelling.

"'T is your wife!" said Percival.

"Hide me—or let me escape," cried Torrens, manifesting a violent and most unfeigned reluctance to encounter the woman whom for so many reasons he loathed and abhorred.

"Here—by the back gate," said Percival; and, taking the light in his hand, he hastily conducted the almost bewildered Torrens along the passage—down a few steps—and thence to a door opening upon a piece of unenclosed waste ground at the back of the house.

At that instant the double knock was repeated—more loudly than before and evidently with impatience.

"Good night, Mr. Torrens," said Percival, scarcely able to subdue a spice of lurking satire in his tone.

"Good night," returned the other, savagely. "But I shall visit you again to-morrow morning."

Percival closed the back gate as if to shut out this intimation from his ears; and, hurrying to the front door, he gave admittance to Perdita and her mother.

CHAPTER CXXXVIII.

THE MONEY-LENDER.

Mrs. and Miss Fitzhardinge were attired in the plainest possible manner, so that they seemed to be some poor tradesman's wife and daughter. But the moment the light of the candle fell on Perdita's coun-

tenance, Mr. Percival literally started as the glorious beauty of that face was revealed to him. The young woman perceived the effect of her charms on the old lawyer; and a smile of triumph played on her haughty lip,—for she said within herself, "Wherever I go, men pay homage to my loveliness!"

Hastily closing the front door, Percival now conducted his two visitresses into the back-parlour, which was far more commodiously furnished than the one where his interview with Torrens had taken place. The shutters of this room were, however, as strongly protected by iron bars and as well secured as those in the other; and Mr. Percival had multiplied in them the number of holes cut in the shape of a heart, in order that he might be enabled to fire his blunderbuss at a moment's warning, and in almost any direction, through the shutters, in case of an attempt on the part of burglars to effect an entry in the rear of the building.

For it was perfectly true, as he had informed Torrens, that he lived alone in the house: but he was reported to be a miser—and such indeed he was. Having been extravagant and profligate in his earlier years, he had fallen into the opposite extreme; and when he absconded from his creditors, the money which he had taken with him he hoarded carefully. For a long time he had remained concealed in a distant town, placing out his funds in small loans at an enormous interest; so that as his wealth augmented, his parsimonious habits increased. At last, become greedy and griping as any miser whose renown has been preserved in tale-book or history, Percival—as we shall continue to call him—resolved on venturing to London, where the field for his cupidity was more ample than in the provinces. Trusting to the alteration that years had made in his personal appearance, and to the disguise of the name which he had assumed, he settled in the secluded neighbourhood and comparatively lonely house where we now find him;—and, without seeking business obtrusively, he soon found plenty. One person whom he obliged with a loan would give his address to another also requiring assistance; and thus his clients or patrons—whichever the reader may choose to call the borrowers—increased. He was almost constantly at home—formed no acquaintances—and was short and pithy in his mode of transacting business. He never advanced money save where he perceived the security to be ample; and if occasionally he made a bad debt, he employed an attorney who asked no impertinent questions to sue the defaulter in his own name, it being alleged that the unpaid bill had been passed in a legitimate manner to the pettifogger aforesaid. An elderly widow, of the name of Dyer, occupied the house next door; and she acted in the capacity of charwoman for Mr. Percival—keeping his dwelling in order and preparing for him his frugal meals.

Having recorded these few necessary particulars, we shall now return to the little back parlour, where Mr. Percival and his two visitresses were seated. His back was turned to the window: but Mrs. Fitzhardinge and Perdita, who sate opposite to him, faced it,—while the candle stood on the mantel,—so that had any one peeped through the heart-holes in the shutters, the countenances of the women must have been plainly visible to such curious observer outside the casement.

"Your daughter, madam, I presume?" said Mr. Percival, with a polite inclination of the head towards the handsome Perdita.

"Yes, my dear sir," was the reply. "And she is about to form an excellent match with a young gentleman who is indeed a nobleman by right, and who will shortly assert his title to that distinction. He wishes to borrow money for his immediate purposes and also to assist me: hence my visit to you this evening."

"Well—well, my dear madam," said Percival; "if the security be good——"

"The security is ample," returned Mrs. Fitzhardinge. "He is indubitably the heir to vast estates—and his bond——"

"Will be quite sufficient," added Percival. "That is—presuming him to be of age——"

"He is twenty-five years old," said Mrs. Fitzhardinge. "But the history of himself and family is most extraordinary: and his father is not altogether unknown to you:—for, if I remember aright, it was you who prosecuted the celebrated highwayman, Thomas Rainford, for the robbery of the late Sir Christopher Blunt?"

"What earthly connexion can exist between Tom Rain and the young nobleman who wants to borrow money?" demanded Percival, with unfeigned astonishment.

"Grant me your patience, my dear sir," said Mrs. Fitzhardinge, "and I will explain the matter as concisely as possible. Thomas Rainford was in reality the son of the late Earl of Ellingham—the eldest son, and legitimately born, of that nobleman, who privately married a certain Octavia Manners. The individual who at present bears the title and enjoys the estates of the Earldom of Ellingham, is the offspring of a second marriage contracted by his father. He and Rainford are consequently half-brothers. All these facts are proven by certain papers now in the possession of myself and daughter. One of the documents is the marriage-certificate of the late Earl with Octavia Manners,—another the baptismal certificate of their son,—a third the journal of Octavia Manners explaining many matters connected with the whole affair,—and then follows a variety of documents establishing the identity of Thomas Rainford with the son of the late Earl and the Countess Octavia. Thus far the rights of Thomas Rainford are clearly made out. I must now inform you that Rainford and Lady Georgiana Hatfield have long been united in matrimonial bonds, and that the husband has for a considerable time adopted his wife's name. The offspring of this alliance is the young gentleman of whom I have already spoken to you, and who at present bears the denomination of Charles Hatfield. Now, his father being the rightful Earl of Ellingham, this Charles Hatfield is actually the Viscount Marston, and heir to the title and estates of the Earldom."

"Your history, my dear madam, is clear and comprehensive enough," said Percival, already calculating the enormous gains which might be derived from the fact of becoming the banker to a young nobleman having a vast fortune in the perspective, and whom he supposed to be as extravagantly inclined as youthful scions of the aristocracy in such cases generally are. "And you possess the proofs of all the singular facts which you have detailed?"

"The proofs—the positive proofs," replied Mrs. Fitzhardinge, emphatically;—and turning towards her daughter, she said, "Show Mr. Percival the papers."

"It is useless," answered Perdita, in a firm but quiet manner, "unless he first agree to advance a certain sum of money, should they be satisfactory."

"True," said her mother, biting her lip at the thought that her daughter was more keen than herself: then, addressing herself to the miser, she observed,

"You heard the remark that fell from the lips of Miss Fitzhardinge?"

"Yes—yes," returned Mr. Percival. "We shall most likely do business together—most likely," he repeated. "At the same time, I must see my way very clearly——"

"And we must be careful not to reveal unnecessarily any more of the important secrets of which we are the depositories," said Perdita.

"Quite right, young lady!" exclaimed the miser, who experienced no slight degree of embarrassment: for he was afraid, on the one hand, of letting a good chance slip through his fingers—and he was fearful, on the other, of admitting that he had ample resources immediately available.

Not that Percival dreaded on the part of Mrs. Fitzhardinge the same attempt at extortion, or rather of obtaining restitution, which had been made by Mr. Torrens; because he knew full well that she was occupying a false position in the world, and living under an assumed name as well as himself;—and should she take it into her head to threaten him with an exposure as being no other than Howard the run-away attorney, he could in a moment retaliate by proclaiming her to be Mrs. Slingsby—or Mrs. Torrens—the woman who had been transported for forgery!

No:—Mr. Percival dreaded not menace on the part of Mrs. Fitzhardinge; but the naturally suspicious disposition of the miser, and the vague fears that ever haunt the avaricious man when questioned as to the amount and whereabouts of his resources—these were the influences which made Percival hesitate to plunge too precipitately into the transaction now submitted for his consideration.

"Well, sir,—are you prepared to negociate with us—or not?" demanded Perdita, after a short pause, during which the miser fidgetted nervously upon his chair.

"It all depends, Miss—it all depends on the amount your noble friend requires," he answered at length.

"The entire business is left in our hands," said Mrs. Fitzhardinge; "and we wish to raise between five and six thousand pounds in the first instance——"

"Of which one thousand must be paid to-night," added Perdita, "as an earnest that the transaction is seriously entered into."

"A thousand pounds to-night!" cried the miser. "But how is that possible—even if I had the money in the house," he asked, looking anxiously around, and sinking his voice to a low whisper,—"how is it possible, I say, since the young nobleman is not here to give me any acknowledgment?"

"This objection was naturally anticipated by us," replied Perdita. "Viscount Marston, instead of sending us the papers this evening, did us the honour to call personally with them; and his lordship confided to me,—and to *me* alone," added Perdita, with a rapid glance of triumphant meaning at her mother,—"his note of hand for one thousand guineas."

"I must congratulate you, my dear madam," exclaimed Percival, addressing himself with a smile to the old woman,—"I must congratulate you on possessing a daughter of the most business-like character in the person of Miss Fitzhardinge."

"Then pray let us transact our present affairs in a business-like manner," said Perdita, who was rapidly putting herself more forward in the matter, and proportionately throwing her mother into the back-ground: so that the old woman more than once bit her lip to restrain her rising choler;—but, remembering the terrific scene of the m ing, she saw no alternative save to allow her daughter to have her own way—trusting, however, to the chapter of accidents to restore to her in the long run that paramount influence which she had lost.

"You wish me to discount at once that note of hand for a thousand guineas?" said the miser, fixing his eyes admiringly on Perdita's splendid countenance.

"Yes—as an earnest that you are not prompted by mere curiosity to look farther into this most extraordinary, mysterious, and yet easily understood affair," replied Perdita.

"I will accede to your terms, Miss Fitzhardinge," said Percival, after a few minutes' deliberation,—"provided that the documents in your possession bear out your mother's statements."

"Place the money on the table, sir," returned the young woman, in her quiet though somewhat imperious manner; "and these papers," she added, producing a sealed packet at the same time, "shall be submitted to your perusal."

"Good!" cried the miser.

He then rose from his seat; and, having once more cast a furtive look around him, as if it were possible for an intruder to secrete himself in a room fourteen feet by ten, and which the three inmates already nearly filled, he proceeded to open an iron safe that was fitted into a kind of cupboard in one corner. Thence he took forth a tin cash-box, which, when opened, revealed heaps of Bank-notes, and a large amount in gold.

"There, ladies," said he: "I have now convinced you of my ability to proceed farther in this transaction; and it is your turn, Miss," he added, looking at Perdita, "to take the next step."

"Granted!" was the reply; and, opening the packet, she handed the several papers, which were properly classed and numbered, one by one to the miser,—receiving back each before she gave him the next following.

Mr. Percival read the documents without much emotion. His pecuniary avocations had blunted the sentiment of curiosity in his soul: he viewed the matter only in a business-light;—and so long as the security was good, he cared not if all the highwaymen in the world should turn out to be noblemen in their own right. He thought of the profits that might arise from ministering to the extravagances, as he supposed, of a young nobleman having excellent certainties in the perspective; and it was not of the slightest importance to him how Mrs. Fitzhardinge and Perdita had contrived to inveigle him into their meshes—how they had gotten possession of the papers—or how the money raised was to be expended.

"This is completely satisfactory as far as it goes," he said, returning to the young woman the last paper which she had placed in his hand. "The documents show that Rainford is the real Earl of Ellingham; but there is no evidence to prove that your Charles Hatfield is his son."

"We are well convinced of that fact," said Mrs. Fitzhardinge.

"Yes—I suppose it may be admitted," observed Percival, who had not the least idea that Charles Hatfield had ever passed and was still passing as the nephew of those who were really his parents. "But there is still one question which must be fully cleared up;—and this is the legitimacy of the young man's birth. If he be the lawfully begotten son of the rightful owner of the title and estates of the Earldom—

then is he the heir, beyond all possibility of doubt: but if he be illegitimate——"

"The idea is absurd," interrupted Mrs. Fitzhardinge. "There can be no hesitation in declaring that Thomas Rainford and Lady Georgiana had been privately married long before the man himself was condemned to death: else wherefore should she have exerted her interest to obtain a pardon for him at the hand of George the Fourth?"

"I remember the transaction," said Percival; "and I have no moral doubt that all you tell me is perfectly correct. Indeed, I am so well assured of it, that I have not the least objection to discount the note of hand, on condition that the defective evidence be supplied me before I am called upon to make further advances."

"Most certainly," exclaimed Perdita. "Charles will give you every satisfactory proof of the validity of his claims. You require testimony to show that he is the lawfully begotten son of those who now pass under the name of Mr. and Lady Georgiana Hatfield?"

"The certificates of *their* marriage and *his* birth," said the miser. "Where is the note of hand?"

Perdita produced it; and a little altercation then arose respecting the rate of discount. Mrs. Fitzhardinge manifested a greedy anxiety to conclude the bargain on the miser's own exorbitant terms: but Perdita argued the point with him in a resolute manner. At last, however, an amicable understanding was arrived at; and the miser was permitted to deduct seventy-five pounds for the discount. Perdita received the amount which he then told down upon the table; and the old woman's features grew distorted with rage—a rage the more intense, because she was forced to restrain it—when she found that her daughter did not offer to render her the guardian of the purse.

But Perdita had that day asserted an empire which she was resolved to maintain—a domination which she was determined to grasp indivisibly. Without positively offending or irritating her mother by pointed and overt insult, she nevertheless had made up her mind to act as the mistress in all things;—and thus had the punishment of the vile old woman already begun, even on account of the new schemes of wickedness which she had set on foot.

Having secured the precious packet of papers and the money about her person, the beautiful Perdita rose from her chair, saying, "We may now take our departure, mother."

"One word first!" exclaimed Percival, a sudden reminiscence striking him: then, turning towards Mrs. Fitzhardinge, he said, "My dear madam, I have some news to impart which I had almost forgotten in the absorbing nature of the business that has occupied us for the last hour,—news which will not a little astonish you——"

"Then pray keep me no longer in suspense!" exclaimed Mrs. Fitzhardinge, Perdita's conduct not having put her into the best of possible humours.

"Just before you knocked at the door this night——"

"Well, well?" ejaculated the impatient woman.

"A man was with me——"

"And that man?" repeated Mrs. Fitzhardinge, gasping for breath, as if she anticipated the reply.

"Was your husband!" added the miser.

A hideous expression passed over the countenance of Mrs. Fitzhardinge,—an expression of mingled hate, apprehension, and rage; and she staggered for a moment as if she were about to fall.

But subduing her emotions, she approached the miser, and said in a low, hoarse, grating tone, "Does he know that I am in London?—is he aware that I am in England—passing by the name of Fitzhardinge——"

"No—no," replied Percival hastily: for he saw by the old woman's manner that she would not thank him were he to inform her that he had made her husband acquainted with so many particulars concerning her.

"You are sure—you are certain?" demanded she, breathing somewhat more freely.

"Since Mr. Percival has already answered you satisfactorily, mother, wherefore require additional assurances?" said Perdita, who was in haste to depart—for it was now waxing very late.

"Because I would sooner meet one of those hideous snakes that I have seen in Australia, than encounter that man!" responded the old woman. "I know not why,—but I hate him—I loathe and abhor him——"

"Come along, mother," interrupted Perdita, impatiently: "Mr. Percival cares nothing about all this."

"True! but one word more," cried Mrs. Fitzhardinge. "Tell me, sir—is that man—*my husband*,"—and the words appeared almost to choke her,—"is he well off—or poor and wretched?"

"He seemed to be very miserable," answered the miser;—"so miserable that he wished to obtain assistance from me! But I—I never give," he added, after a moment's hesitation.

"I believe you, sir," remarked Perdita, a faint smile of contempt curling her haughty but beauteous lip. "Now, mother, at last you are ready, I presume?"

"Allow me to light you to the door," said Percival; and, with a bow, he preceded the two females into the passage.

He opened the front door, and Perdita, wishing him "good night" bounded forth first into the open air—for she felt relieved at escaping from the miser's cheerless abode:—her mother followed more slowly—and just as she passed by Percival, who stood on the threshold officiously holding the candle, the light streamed fully on the countenance of the old woman. At that same instant Mrs. Dyer—the widow who lived at the next house—was returning home from a neighbour's; and she caught a complete view of the face of Mrs. Fitzhardinge. It struck the good woman at the moment that she had seldom beheld such a repulsive, sinister countenance: but she was accustomed to see strange-looking people visit the miser's abode;—and the circumstance therefore made no particular impression on her mind.

She merely said "Good night, sir," to the miser, and forthwith entered her own abode.

Percival's door closed at the same instant; and Mrs. Fitzhardinge having overtaken her daughter, the two retraced their way to the City Road, whence they took a cab to Suffolk Street,

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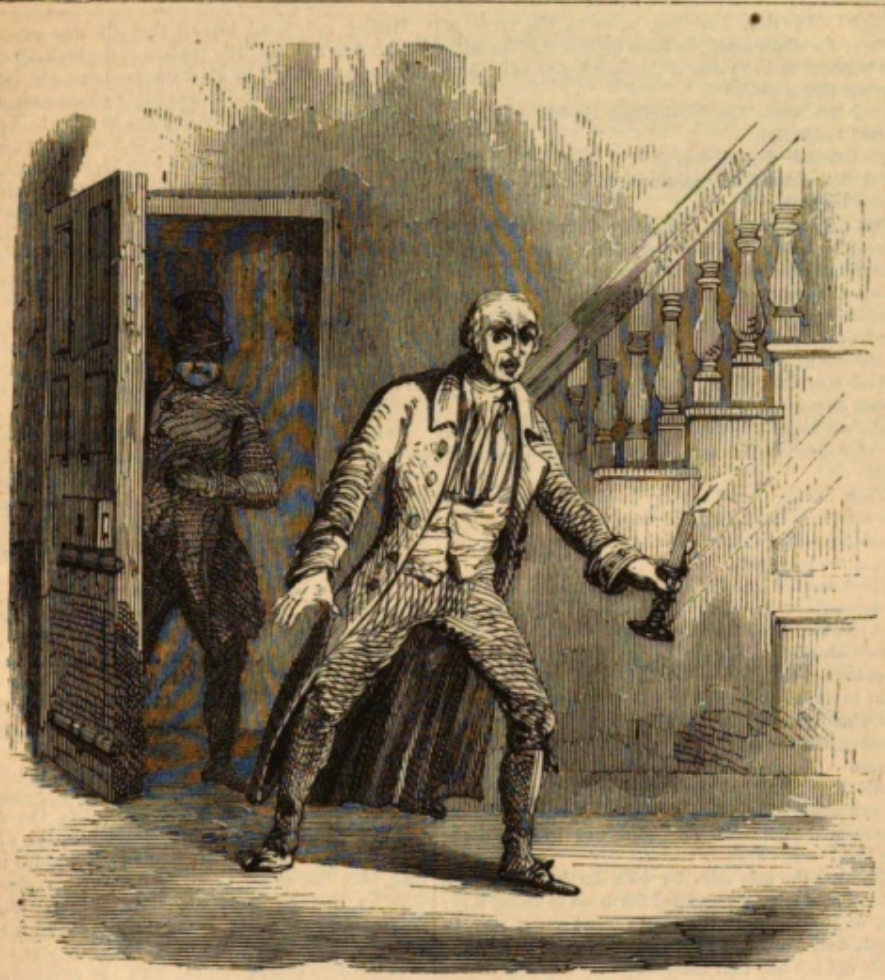
CHAPTER CXXXIX.

THE MISER ALONE IN HIS DWELLING.

HAVING carefully barred and bolted the street-door Percival entered the front room, and assured himself that the shutters were safely fastened.

He then returned to the back parlour; and, seating himself at the table, proceeded to examine the contents of his cash-box.



He looked at the note of hand which he had received that night, and which bore the signature of *Marston*—for, in compliance with the suggestion of Mrs. Fitzhardinge, the infatuated Charles Hatfield had signed the document with the name to which he believed himself to be entitled.

The first sensations of the miser, as he fixed his eyes on the "promise to pay" at a specific date the sum of *one thousand guineas*, were of pleasure: for he calculated the profit he had derived from the transaction—and he flattered himself that he had gained seventy guineas in a single hour.

"And with so little trouble, too," he muttered to himself.

But, in the next moment, a gloomy shade began to cross his countenance: for the thought stole upon him that perhaps he had acted too precipitately—that the women might have forged a number of papers to delude him—that, after all, there might be no such person in existence as Charles Hatfield, or Viscount Marston.

"Pshaw!" he exclaimed emphatically, as he endeavoured to banish these unpleasant reflections from his mind; "it is all right—and I am a fool thus to yield to misgivings. Why should not Tom Rain be the rightful Earl of Ellingham? Things more strange and improbable have occurred in this world. And if he be really the elder brother of the nobleman now bearing the title, why should he not have a son who is the heir to that title and likewise to the estates? Yes—yes: it is all feasible enough! Besides, amongst those papers were the marriage certificate of the late Earl and Octavia Manners—and the baptismal certificate of their child. Well, then—granting that there is a Charles Hatfield,—or, in other words, a Viscount Marston,—what is less extraordinary than that so beautiful a creature as this Miss Fitzhardinge should have captivated the young noble? She is a splendid girl—a very splendid girl! Even in the plain garb which she wore this evening—a sort of disguise, no doubt—she looked truly bewitching. What eyes!—what a profile!—what teeth!—what hair! Ah! I wish that I was a young man now—that I had not these sixty-five winters on my head: I would even yet endeavour to rival Viscount Marston! But, no—no: that were impossible! These young girls are smitten with titles more than with money: and, on my honour, Miss Fitzhardinge will become the rank of Viscountess full well. She has the dignity—the stateliness—and yet the grace and elegance of a woman of

fashion! All this, doubtless, must be the work of nature: for where could she have become familiar with the manners and customs of the drawing-room? Ah! was not that a noise?"

And the miser, hastily shutting up his cash-box, started to his feet.

He listened—but all was still!

"A false alarm," he murmured to himself—and resumed his seat.

But the incident had completely disturbed the current of his thoughts which were flowing into a more voluptuous channel than for years and years they had done,—the beauty of Perdita having made a deep impression upon the mind of the miser, and for a few minutes weaned away his attention from the hitherto all-absorbing gold that he worshipped so devotedly.

And now that alarm,—whether false or real, we cannot as yet determine,—recalled his errant thoughts to the one engrossing subject: and carefully depositing his cash-box in the safe, he next secured the safe itself.

Then, having placed the key in his pocket, he took the candle in his hand, and once more inspected the street-door—the shutters in the front-room—and the bolt of the back-gate.

He descended into the kitchen,—that kitchen which no domestic occupied, and the hearth of which so seldom sparkled or shone with blazing coal or wood,—a cursed hearth which, even in the very midst of summer, seemed cheerless and cold! The area that gave light to the kitchen-window was strongly barred over: the window itself was likewise barred;—and the door opening into the area was well secured with bolts and chains.

All these multiplied precautions were duly inspected by the miser. Forgotten now was the image of Perdita:—gold—gold—*his* gold,—this was the one absorbing idea!

No—not the only *one*: for with the thought of possessing gold is ever associated the dread of losing it;—and at this moment the man's mind was a prey to vague fears—undefined alarms—gloomy misgivings.

He did not like that noise which he had heard:—it haunted him like a spectre;—it was something that weighed upon his soul like lead.

He felt—he knew that he was really *alone* in that house,—aye, and that the house was lonely in situation likewise: for he could not count for aid, in case of need, on the elderly widow next door and her two or three poor female lodgers. Thus, the fact that there *was* a house adjoining did not detract from the sense of utter loneliness awakened in his mind respecting his own abode.

But were not the bolts secure—the chains fastened—the bars all firm and strong? Oh! he had not spared his money to obtain the best iron and the best work when those precautions were adopted: and, since he had become a miser, he had never paid a bill so cheerfully as that which the defences of his dwelling had incurred.

Yes:—the bolts *were* secure—the chains *were* well fastened—and the bars *were* all firm and strong;—and yet Percival was not at ease in his mind.

That unknown, unaccountable noise had alarmed him. It was a noise the nature of which he could scarcely explain to himself,—nor whether it had occurred inside or outside the house: no—nor whether it were the creaking of timber—or the shaking of the shutters—or the sound of a human voice speaking low, hoarse, and in a disguised tone.

Having convinced himself that all was secure in the kitchen and the little scullery at the back, Percival once more ascended to his back parlour. He looked at his watch, and found it was half an hour past midnight:—still he felt no inclination to sleep! Vague and oppressive fears continued to haunt him;—and the more he essayed to wrestle with his reflections, the more intolerable did they become,—till at last horrible ideas were forced upon his imagination,—of how misers had been murdered for their gold—how their blood had been poured out even on the very treasure-chests to which they clung with desperate tenacity while the blows of the assassins rained down upon their heads!

Of all these things he thought; and his brain appeared to whirl. He cast his eyes around: objects of terror seemed to encounter them in all directions—for his fevered, excited imagination conjured up the most horrifying phantoms.

Suddenly taking his head as it were in his hands, and pressing it violently, he exclaimed aloud, "Perdition take this cowardly nervousness! What have I to fear to-night—more than any other? I need rest—repose—slumber;—and when I awake in the morning, I shall laugh at myself for the absurd terrors to which I have yielded now!"

Taking the light in his hand, he was about to quit the room and seek his chamber up stairs, when a sound, as of the back door slowly opening, fell upon his ears;—and so great was the alarm with which this circumstance filled him,—striking him as it were with a sudden paralysis,—that he let the candle fall upon the floor—and the light was immediately extinguished.

Then there was the rush as of a man up the stairs leading from the back door to the parlour;—and in another moment Percival was assailed in the dark, and in a desperate manner. A heavy blow, as with a bludgeon, felled him to the ground,—not quite stunning him, but so far depriving him of his physical energies that he could not even cry out. But he grasped the murderer by the throat; and a short struggle ensued. The assassin, however, was armed with the determination, if not with the strength, of a demon;—and, dashing the miser back on the floor again with all his force, he seized the bludgeon and wielded it with such fearful effect, that in a few instants the victim lay motionless and silent beneath him!

This fearful crime was accomplished in the dark and yet the murderer appeared not to be afraid—nor to lose his presence of mind. It would also seem that he was acquainted with the nook where the miser's gold was concealed: yes—even circumstances more minute still were known to him. For, stooping down, and passing his hand over the corpse, he felt in the very pocket where Percival had placed the key of the cupboard enclosing the iron safe;—and then, groping his way to that cupboard, he opened it,—opened likewise the iron safe,—and drew forth the tin case containing the miser's gold and bank-notes. Breaking open the lid of the box, the miscreant secured all the coin, notes, and papers about his person, and then stole away from the dwelling by means of the back-gate, which he closed behind him.

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At half-past seven o'clock in the morning, Mrs Dyer knocked at the door of the miser's house, and was somewhat surprised when, five minutes having elapsed, her summons remained unanswered.

"Perhaps he has over-slept himself," she muttered to herself: "I will come back again presently;"—and the woman returned to her own abode.

But something like a misgiving had stolen into her mind,—a vague and indefinable fear—a presentiment against which she could not wrestle. A gloom had fallen on her spirits: she was in that humour when people who are in any way superstitious, expect bad news. Not that she had heard any noise in the course of the night, or that she had any motive for suspicion: —the feeling that oppressed her was excited by no accountable and intelligible cause,—unless, indeed, it were that during the five or six years she had waited upon Mr. Percival, this was the very first occasion on which she had failed to find him already up and dressed, and ready to admit her at a stipulated hour.

Having performed a few domestic duties in her own house—but in a strange manner, as if she scarcely knew what she was doing,—Mrs. Dyer returned to the miser's front-door, at which she knocked again.

But again there was no response: all was silent.

The widow-woman was now seriously alarmed; and, hastening back into her dwelling, she informed her female lodgers that she could not make Mr. Percival hear next door, and was afraid something had happened. The three women, to whom these observations were addressed, accompanied her to the miser's house; and as all within was still silent as the grave, they proceeded round to the back-door with the intention of looking in through the window shutters, which, as we have before stated, were perforated with many heart-holes. But Mrs. Dyer first happened to try the back-gate, and, to her surprise, found it unfastened. She and the other women then entered the house; and their attention, now rendered keen by dark suspicions, was immediately attracted to the fact that the part of the door-post into which the bolt of the back-gate fitted, had been cut away, *from the outside*, in such a manner that it was an easy affair to slide back the bolt. The females beheld this ominous appearance with dismay; —but how shuddering were the looks of deep apprehension which they rapidly and silently exchanged, when they likewise noticed an old piece of iron still sticking in the lock,—a sure indication of that lock having been picked, also from the outside!

Had either one of the women now manifested the least hesitation to proceed, the others would have gladly followed the example to retreat. But, huddling all together—and in deep silence—they slowly ascended the stairs leading to the back parlour.

The door of this room was half open; and as the widow endeavoured to push it farther back still, it was stopped by something that evidently was not a table nor a chair,—no—nor aught made of wood.

The women slowly entered the parlour:—and then their tongues were suddenly loosened—and piercing shrieks burst from their lips. For the prismatic light which streamed through the heart-holes of the closed shutters, played on the smashed, gory, and disfigured countenance of the murdered man!

Terror for a few minutes rooted to the spot the spectatresses of this horrible spectacle:—and, clinging—hanging to each other, they remained gazing, in terror and dismay, on the remains of him whom they had all seen alive and in health on the preceding day!

At length the female who was nearest to the door seemed suddenly to recover the use of her limbs; and, with another ejaculation of horror, she fled precipitately,—her companions following her with a haste which seemed to indicate that they were afraid lest the murdered man should stretch forth his hand and clutch the hindermost by the garments.

Oh! what terrors are inspired by the cold—inanimate—powerless remains of mortality! And yet men of the strongest minds have had their fears in this respect;—and heroes who would have faced a serried rank bristling with bayonets, or hunted the savage tiger in the jungles of Hindoostan, have feared to remain alone with the corpse of a fellow-creature!

Full soon was the dreadful rumour spread throughout the neighbourhood that the miser Percival had been murdered during the night;—and the police were speedily upon the spot.

The dead body indeed presented a hideous spectacle to the view:—the countenance was so disfigured as to defy recognition;—and the skull was fractured in several places. By the side of the corpse lay a heavy stake; and, as it was covered with blood, and some of the hair from the murdered man's head was sticking to it, there was no difficulty in pronouncing it to have been the weapon used by the assassin. The candlestick was found on the floor close by;—the cupboard and the iron safe were open;—and the tin-box, emptied of its contents, was stumbled over by one of the officers.

Not the slightest suspicion could possibly be attached to the widow-woman or her lodgers occupying the adjacent house;—but they were necessarily questioned by the inspector, with a view to elicit any particulars that might aid the officers of justice in sifting the most mysterious and horrible affair.

Mrs. Dyer stated that she had heard no disturbance during the night; and her lodgers all made a similar declaration.

"I passed the evening with a neighbour," said the widow, naming the friend at whose house she had supped; "and I returned home about half-past eleven o'clock. Mr. Percival was at that moment taking leave of some visitors at his own door: and——Oh! I remember now," exclaimed Mrs. Dyer, a sudden thought striking her,—"there were two women—one apparently young, if I might judge by the hasty glimpse I caught of her figure—for I did not see her face, as she was standing by the gate opening into the road——"

"And the other woman?" demanded the inspector.

"Was old and very ugly," returned the widow. "I saw her countenance plainly enough; for the light which Mr. Percival held, streamed full upon it;—and I thought at the moment that I had never in my life beheld such a repulsive—horrible-looking creature. I was really frightened—there was something so unpleasant in her looks."

"And was any man with them?" enquired the officer.

"No: the two women were alone. They took leave of Mr. Percival, and, I suppose, went away. At all events, I know that he closed his door just at the same moment that I shut mine. I said 'Good night' to him: and that was the last time I saw the poor gentleman alive."

"It is highly important," observed the inspector, "that we should find out these two women of whom you speak—as they were, to all appearances, the last persons who were with the deceased?"

Mrs. Dyer then gave as accurate a description as she could of the personal appearance of the old woman whose countenance had struck her as being so repulsive and sinister;—and the inspector, having left a couple of officers on the premises where the crime had

been committed, departed to acquaint the Coroner with the dreadful occurrence.

CHAPTER CXL.

FRESH SCENES AND MORE TROUBLES AT HOME.

WHILE the discovery of the assassination of the old miser was being made in Pentonville, as just related, a scene of some interest occurred simultaneously at the mansion of the Earl of Ellingham, in Pall Mall.

Charles Hatfield had risen early, after having passed a restless night; and, his toilette being completed, he was just meditating—unpleasantly meditating on the demeanour that it was proper for him to assume at the breakfast-table,—when the door opened, and his father entered the chamber.

The young man had not encountered his parents since the dispute of the preceding morning: he had purposely avoided them throughout the day—not appearing at the dinner-table, and absenting himself likewise from the usual family meeting at the supper-hour. He therefore felt himself somewhat disagreeably situated,—being totally unprepared to meet his father, and having decided on no definite course to pursue with regard to him.

"My dear son," said Mr. Hatfield, approaching and taking the young man's hand, "it is necessary that we should have an immediate explanation. I allude to the occurrences of yesterday morning; and I regret that you should have adopted the unusual course of absenting yourself throughout the day——"

"I returned home between seven and eight last evening," interrupted Charles, hastily, but not disrespectfully.

"I am aware of it," said Mr. Hatfield, fixing his eyes upon his son in a penetrating manner. "But you only remained in the house a few minutes;—and, having visited your chamber, you hurried away again. Were you afraid to encounter your parents? Remember, Charles, if you felt that your conduct of the morning had been undutiful and improper—nay, I will even say *cruel*, towards us—yet a single word expressive of contrition would have made us open our arms to receive you."

"You denounce my behaviour as cruel towards you," exclaimed Charles: "but did you not first provoke *me*, father?—did you not call me harsh names? And if, in return, I complained of what I considered to be the unnatural conduct of my parents toward me——"

"Wherefore thus pertinaciously endeavour to penetrate into those secrets which, for good and salutary reasons, your parents keep concealed from you?" demanded Mr. Hatfield: "for I presume that you allude to the fact of our still desiring that you should pass as our nephew."

"You have assured me that I am legitimate—that there is no stigma upon my birth," cried Charles;—"then wherefore not acknowledge me as your son? You claim from me the duty of a son—and yet you deny me the title! And again I must remind you, father, that to an accident alone am I indebted for the knowledge of my birth!"

"I would ask you, Charles," said Mr. Hatfield, in a serious and impressive tone, "what all this has to do with the proposal of marriage that you made to Lady Frances Ellingham: for it was on *this* point that our dispute commenced yesterday morning. Am I to suppose that my son, being unwilling to contract an alliance so honourable to him, seeks other grounds whereon to base his design of flying in the face of his parents?—am I to conclude that, being resolved to thwart us in this—our dearest hope, you seize upon another and ignoble pretext to justify your rebellion against us!"

"No—ten thousand times *No!*" exclaimed the young man, cruelly hurt by these suspicions. "In the first place, I do not love Lady Frances Ellingham otherwise than as a brother may love a sister——"

"Because," interrupted Mr. Hatfield, fixing his eyes sternly upon his son,—"because you have formed some connexion of which you are ashamed——"

"Ah!" cried Charles, starting violently. "Has my father acted the spy upon me?"

"Listen," said Mr. Hatfield, to whose countenance the indignant blood rushed as his son thus insolently addressed him: but he chose to controul his feelings—and he succeeded: "listen, Charles—and then decide whether you ought to judge me so harshly. Your conduct of yesterday morning towards your mother and myself was of such an extraordinary—unaccountable—distressing nature, that you cannot blame me if I resolved to discover the motives that had actuated you. In this determination I was fixed by your protracted absence throughout the day—your stealthy return in the evening—your short visit to your own chamber—your avoidance of all the inmates of this house—and your hasty and also stealthy departure again. I confess, then, that I followed you last evening——"

"You followed me, father?" repeated Charles, in a low, hoarse, and hollow voice.

"Yes—I followed you to Suffolk Street," continued Mr. Hatfield, with a firmness and a cool determination of tone and manner which he hoped would overawe the rebellious young man: "and, on inquiry in the neighbourhood, I learnt that at the house which you entered, dwells a very beautiful young lady. Now, I give you my honour, Charles, that I asked no more—was told no more than this one fact. I have no desire to become acquainted with the *liaisons* of my son:—indeed, I know that young men will be—what shall we call it?—*gay*, if you will. All I wished to ascertain was whether there were any grounds for supposing that you had formed a connexion which you may believe to have *love* for its basis, and which induced you yesterday morning to refuse the fulfilment of your own offer to Lady Frances Ellingham."

"Father," said Charles Hatfield, scarcely able to restrain an outburst of indignation, reproach, and bitter recrimination,—in which, had he allowed that torrent of feelings to force a vent, all that he knew of his family and their secrets would have been revealed, or rather proclaimed, in no measured terms;—"father," he said, fortunately subduing the evil promptings of the moment,—"I have listened to you with attention—though not without impatience. Yesterday you reviled me—you heaped bitter reproaches upon me—you menaced me with disinheritance: then, in the evening, you enacted the spy upon my actions—you watched me—you followed me——"

"It was my duty—and a most painful one, I can assure you," interrupted Mr. Hatfield, alarmed by the strange—the ominous coldness that characterised his son's tone and manner.

"Your duty!" ejaculated Charles, now speaking with an indignation that burst forth in frightful contrast with the unnatural tranquillity on which it so

abruptly broke; "and wherefore have you not performed your duty in all things? Duty, indeed! But know, father, that there are other duties to fulfil than merely playing the part of a spy on your son's actions:—there are such duties as giving him his proper name—allowing him to assume his just rights—and placing him in that social position which he ought to occupy! You menace me with the loss of fortune, father?—Oh! you know how vain and ridiculous is this threat—and how it aggravates the wickedness of all your former conduct towards me! I am no longer a child to be held in leading-strings—no longer a silly sentimentalist who, through maudlin and mawkish feelings of a false delicacy, will consent to have my nearest and dearest interests trampled upon—my privileges altogether withheld—my rights cruelly denied me! You have played the mysterious too long,—you have enacted the cruel and unnatural until endurance has become impossible;—and now you would assume the part of the absolute dictator—expecting to find me still a pliant, docile, grovelling slave,—without spirit—without courage—without even the common feelings of a man! But you are mistaken, father:—and if I have thus been driven to tell you my mind, you have only yourself to reproach, for so distressing—so painful a scene!"

Thus speaking,—and before his father had so far recovered from the amazement into which this volley of words threw him, as to be able even to stretch out a hand to retain him,—Charles seized his hat, and rushed from the room.

In less than a minute the front-door of the house closed behind him; and he hurried on, like one demented, to Suffolk Street.

But before we accompany him thither, we must pause to explain the effect which this scene had upon his father.

Indeed, Mr. Hatfield was struck with an astonishment so profound—a bewilderment so complete, that his heart seemed as if it were numbed against pain. He could not comprehend the drift of Charles's passionate address,—otherwise than by supposing that the young man required to be recognised as a son, and not as a nephew. For it did not—as, in fact, it could not—for a single moment enter Mr. Hatfield's head that Charles had discovered all the occurrences of former years, and that he had thence drawn the false and fatal inference that he—this same infatuated young man—was the heir to the proud title and vast estates of the Earldom of Ellingham. He therefore saw in his son's conduct only the rebellious spirit of an individual who, having formed a connexion of which he was most likely ashamed and which he knew to be improper, endeavoured to meet his parents' reproaches with recriminations, and seize upon the least shadow of an excuse or pretext for resisting the paternal authority.

When reflection thus diminished the wonderment which Mr. Hatfield experienced at the behaviour of the young man, pain and sorrow succeeded that first feeling. Indeed, the unhappy father was cruelly embarrassed: he knew not how to act. Charles was of that age when,—even did circumstances permit Mr. Hatfield to acknowledge that he really was his son,—no legal authority could be exercised, nor constraint practised; and he felt assured that any farther attempt to interfere with him in the connexion which he had formed, would only aggravate the irritability of the wrong-headed young man.

Then again, it was impossible to abandon him thus to courses which might hurry him on to utter ruin;—and moreover, the Lady Frances Ellingham had been so cruelly trifled with, that an explanation with *her* parents became absolutely necessary.

Now was it that Mr. Hatfield cursed the hour when he had been induced to leave Italy, and return to England on this visit to his half-brother—a visit which the Earl had by letter urged him to pay, and to which he had assented in full confidence of the complete safety of the step.

Bewildered with the variety of his conflicting thoughts, and feeling the necessity as well as recognising the propriety of consulting the Earl, Mr. Hatfield repaired to the library, whence he despatched a message to the nobleman requesting his lordship to join him there as speedily as possible:—for it still wanted upwards of half-an-hour to the usual breakfast time.

The Earl of Ellingham was just issuing from his chamber when the message was delivered to him; and, immediately apprehending some evil news, he hastened to the library, where he found his half-brother pacing up and down in an agitated manner.

Mr. Hatfield, without any disguise, hesitation, or circumlocution, immediately unfolded to the Earl all that had taken place, both on that and the preceding day, in respect to Charles;—and Arthur listened with emotions of mingled pain, astonishment, and apprehension.

"Much as it would have delighted me," he at length observed, "to witness the union of my daughter and your son, Thomas, I cannot for a moment recommend that the young man's inclinations should be forced. Such an union seemed necessary—almost imperiously necessary under the peculiar circumstances in which we are placed. While you, the elder brother, renounce the title which is your just right—I, the younger one, have long borne it and bear it still;—though, heaven knows that I value it indeed but little——However," added the Earl, interrupting himself hastily,—"I was about to observe that, situated as we thus are, it appears but natural and proper that your son should receive a positive and acknowledged admission into the family by means of an alliance with my daughter. And she, poor girl—she loves him," continued the nobleman, his voice faltering; "and he has acted unwisely—to use no harsher term—in declaring an attachment which he does not feel, and making a proposal which he cannot accomplish."

"I am at a loss how to act!" said Mr. Hatfield.

"My God!" he cried, in a tone expressive of deep feeling, "am I ever to be the means of giving annoyance and vexation to you, my dear Arthur,—you, who have been so kind and generous a friend to me?"

"Not on *this* account must you distress yourself, Thomas," returned the Earl, emphatically: "you are not responsible for the wayward humours of your son. But surely this sudden manifestation of a rebellious disposition on his part, cannot arise wholly and solely from the connexion which you believe him to have formed. Have you enquired concerning the character of the women—the mother and daughter—whom he visits in Suffolk-street?"

"No: I contented myself with ascertaining that at the house which I saw him enter, there is a young lady of very extraordinary beauty."

"And are you convinced that Charles has learnt nothing relative to the events of former years—nothing calculated to diminish——"

"I understand you, Arthur," said Mr. Hatfield, seeing that his half-brother hesitated: "you would ask

whether I have any reason to believe that he has learnt aught which may have a tendency to diminish the respect he had until within these two days past maintained towards his parents? On this head I am of course unable to answer you positively: but my impression is that he is as much as ever in the dark relative to the dread occurrences of the past. Indeed, how can he have possibly learnt a single fact——"

"May not the discovery that he is your *son*, and not your nephew, have induced him to seek for farther information?" enquired the Earl of Ellingham. "May not some sentiment of ardent curiosity have been awakened within him——"

"But where could he address himself to this task of raising the veil from the mysteries of by-gone years—even if he have the slightest ground to suspect that such mysteries do exist?" demanded Mr. Hatfield, interrupting the Earl. "To what source could he repair for the means of elucidation?"

"I know not: and yet—I am now impressed with suspicions of a most unpleasant nature," observed the Earl. "It is very essential that some immediate step should be taken to redeem this fine young man from a career of error—perhaps of depravity——"

"Oh! yes—yes!" exclaimed Mr. Hatfield. "My God! if the sins of the father be in this case visited upon the son, life will become intolerable to me!—Rather would I at once have a full and complete understanding with Charles,—tell him all—yes, *all*,—reveal to him who I really am—open to him the means of a complete retrospection, embracing all my sad history,—and then throw myself on his mercy—imploring him at least to have pity upon his innocent mother, if not on me who am so guilty!"

"No—no, Thomas: this humiliation may not be!" ejaculated the Earl. "For if, as you believe, your son has at present no suspicion of the past, it would be madness to make unnecessary revelations."

"I am bewildered—cruelly perplexed: I know not how to act!" cried Mr. Hatfield. "Oh! if I were confident that he has no such suspicions—that he has learnt or surmised nothing calculated to diminish the respect due to his mother and myself——"

"How can he have fathomed the obscurity which hangs over your former life?" demanded the Earl. "And as to supposing that he could, by any possible means, obtain even the shadow of an idea of your real birth and parentage——"

"No: for the papers—those important papers which I gave you years ago, and which I requested you to destroy,—those papers, I say," exclaimed Mr. Hatfield, "could alone make such important revelations to my son: and, thank heaven! they are not in existence."

"My dear brother," returned the Earl of Ellingham, taking Mr. Hatfield's hand, and speaking in a very serious tone, "I must frankly and honestly inform you that those papers have *not* been destroyed. At the same time, they have been kept in a place of perfect security—a secret recess known only to myself——"

"And wherefore were not such dangerous documents burnt—annihilated!" asked Mr. Hatfield, in a reproachful tone.

"I dared not perform a deed which would argue so much selfishness on my part," replied the Earl of Ellingham, now speaking with a strong emphasis—the result and impulse of his generous, lofty, honourable feelings. "So long as those papers remain in existence, you, my dear brother, can at any moment say to me, '*I repent of the step which I took in renouncing my just rights and privileges; and I now claim them:*'—and should you at any time thus address me, it would only be for me to produce the papers that establish your claims."

"Oh! Arthur, you are generous—even to a fault!" exclaimed Mr. Hatfield. "You know—or, at least, I again assure you for the hundredth time, that not for worlds would I heap disgrace on a noble name by daring to assume it! Merciful heavens! shall the coronet which becomes you so well, be snatched from your brows, and transferred to those of——"

"Hush! Thomas—hush! this excitement is most unnecessary," interrupted the Earl. "You must not blame me for the motives which induced me to keep the documents;—and now—if you will have them restored to you——"

"Yes—yes: give them to me, Arthur," cried Mr. Hatfield, resolving to destroy the papers without farther delay.

"You claim them—they are your's—and they shall at once be returned into your hands," said the nobleman. "But I conjure you to act not hastily nor rashly——"

"Fear nothing, Arthur," exclaimed Mr. Hatfield: "but give me the papers! There is no time to lose—the ladies will be waiting for us at the breakfast-table——"

"True!" ejaculated the Earl: and, approaching that shelf at the back of which the secret recess was formed, he said, "Once every year have I inspected this well concealed depository: once every year have I assured myself that the precious documents were safe;—and on those occasions, I have cleansed them of the dust which even accumulates in a place that is almost hermetically sealed."

As the Earl thus spoke, he took down from the shelf the books which stood immediately before the recess; and Mr. Hatfield, receiving the volumes in his hands, placed them upon the table. While performing this simple and almost mechanical act, his eyes were suddenly attracted to the name and date of one of the books;—and his looks were rivetted, as it were, on the words—"*Annual Register*, 1827."

For the nature of the volume and the date of the year whose incidents it recorded, suddenly revived the poignancy of many bitter recollections, the sharpness of which had been somewhat blunted by time: and it was in a moment of strange nervousness—or idiosyncratic excitement, that he opened the book which thus had aroused those painful memories.

An ejaculation of horror—irrepressible horror—escaped his lips: for he had lighted on the very page which contained the account of his *Execution* at Horsemonger Lane:—and at the very same instant a cry of mingled amazement and alarm burst from the Earl of Ellingham.

"Oh! is this a mere accident?" exclaimed Mr. Hatfield: "or a warning——"

"Merciful heaven—the papers!" ejaculated the nobleman.

"A warning that my son has seen this?" added the unhappy father, almost distracted with the idea.

"Some miscreant has done this!" cried the Earl, stamping his foot with rage: and it was seldom that *he* thus gave way to his passion.

The brothers turned towards each other—exchanging hasty glances of mutual and anxious enquiry.

"The papers are gone!" said the Earl, clasping his hands in despair.

"Gone!" repeated Mr. Hatfield, staggering as if struck by a sudden blow. "And this book—this book," he faltered, in a faint tone, "was in the immediate vicinity of the recess! He who took the papers—might have read also—in that volume—the terrible account——"

Mr. Hatfield could say no more: overpowered by his feelings, he sank exhausted on the nearest seat.

The Earl glanced at the open page which his half-brother had indicated; and, observing the nature of the statement there recorded, he instantly comprehended the cause of Mr. Hatfield's emotions, and also of the suspicions which had suddenly seized upon him.

"Yes—yes: this book has been read lately," said Arthur, in an excited and hurried manner: "behold! the corners of the covers have been recently injured. Oh! my God! what does all this mean?"

It will be recollected that on the memorable night when Charles Hatfield pursued his successful researches in the library, he had hurled away from him, in his rage and almost maddening grief, the volume that made such strange—such appalling revelations: and the violence of the action had so far injured the book, as to bend and graze the corners of the binding,—the marks of the injury remaining clearly visible, and the white interior of the leather being laid bare, and thus proving how recently the work had been used.

"The book has been read very lately," murmured Mr. Hatfield, in a musing tone; "and the papers have perhaps been stolen lately——"

"Yes," exclaimed the Earl: "for not a month has elapsed since I inspected that recess and found them safe."

"Then who could have done this?" cried Mr. Hatfield, starting from his seat, in a sudden access of excitement which was accompanied by a return of moral and physical energy. "Oh! is it possible that Charles is the author of all that seems so mysterious? Has he searched for the records of my earlier life?—has he by accident discovered and purloined those papers—those fatal papers?"

"Yes—it must be he!" exclaimed the Earl: "for did you not tell me that he spoke of claims—and rights—and privileges unjustly withheld,—and that he has harped upon what he termed the unnatural conduct of his parents in concealing from him the secret of his birth? Thomas—my dear Thomas," continued Lord Ellingham, speaking in a lower—more measured—and more impressive tone, "I can see it all! That young man has found out who you are: he has learnt that you are the rightful heir to the honours and estates which I enjoy;—and, believing himself to be your legitimate son—according to the assurance that you were forced, for your wife's sake, to give him—the deluded, deceived Charles Hatfield fancies himself to be the lawful heir to the Earldom!"

"You have divined the truth, Arthur!" cried Mr. Hatfield, his heart wrung to its very core by all the maddening fears and torturing reflections which were thus suddenly excited within him. "Oh! what dreadful embarrassments—what frightful complications, will this misapprehension entail on my unhappy son—on you—on me—on all who are connected with us!"

"There is not a moment to lose!" exclaimed Lord Ellingham. "We must hasten after this infatuated young man——"

At that moment the door opened; and Clarence Villiers entered the library—the Earl having requested him on the previous day to visit him at the hour when, true to the appointment, he thus made his appearance.

Villiers, perceiving at the first glance, that something unusual was agitating Lord Ellingham and Mr. Hatfield, was about to retire, when the Earl, beckoning him to advance, turned hastily round to his half-brother, and said in a hurried whisper, "We will entrust this matter to Villiers: he will conduct it with less excitement than you and I; and, as he knows your secret——"

"Yes:—but all he *does* know is that the Mr. Hatfield of to-day is identical with the Thomas Rainford of former times," interrupted the Earl's half-brother, also speaking in a low and hasty tone: "remember—he is unacquainted with aught of our family secrets—ignorant of the parentage of Charles——"

"Neither is it necessary that he should be made acquainted with all these facts," interrupted Arthur:—"but leave the matter to me." Then, turning towards Clarence, he said, "My dear Mr. Villiers, you come most opportunely to render us an important service. We have every reason to believe that Charles has formed an improper connexion with a young female of great beauty, residing with her mother in very handsome lodgings in Suffolk Street: we likewise conclude that he is there at this present moment. Hasten thither, my good friend—demand an immediate interview with Charles—and tell him that certain discoveries have been made at home, in which he is deeply interested. In a word, compel him to accompany you away from the designing women who have doubtless entangled him in their meshes——"

"Nay: let us not judge hastily," cried Mr. Hatfield: "remember—I have heard nothing against the characters of these ladies; and it may be a virtuous and honest affection, after all, that renders Charles a visitor at their house. Let Mr. Villiers, then, act with circumspection—and behave with the strictest courtesy towards these ladies, should he encounter them."

"Yes—but under any circumstances you must persuade Charles to return with you immediately to this house," said the Earl. "Mr. Hatfield will acquaint you with the precise address of the lodgings in Suffolk Street——"

The Earl's half-brother mentioned the number of the dwelling to which he had traced his son on the preceding evening;—adding, "The name of the ladies is Fitzhardinge—and I heard that the daughter bears the singular denomination of *Perdita*."

"Perdita!" cried Villiers, starting violently. "Oh! if this be the case——unhappy, lost Charles Hatfield!"

"Good heavens! what mean you?" demanded the wretched father, rendered terribly anxious by those ominous words that fell on his ears like a death-knell.

"Two ladies—mother and daughter—dwelling together—and the girl named *Perdita*," mused Clarence Villiers, not immediately heeding the earnest appeal of Mr. Hatfield: "yes—yes—it must be they!—my aunt—my wretched, wretched aunt who has returned from transportation—and her profligate but beauteous daughter!"

"Do you mean that Mrs. Slingsby who—years ago—you know to what I allude?" asked Mr. Hatfield, in a hurried tone, as he grasped Clarence violently by the wrist.

"Yes—I *do* mean that bad woman!" exclaimed Villiers, who had now become painfully excited in his turn: "and I regret—Oh! I regret to say that she

has brought over to England her daughter, whom report mentions as an angel of beauty and a demon in profligacy——"

"My God! Mr. Villiers—save Charles—save my Charles from these incarnate fiends!" cried Mr. Hatfield. "Or I myself——"

And he was rushing to the door of the library, when the Earl held him back, saying, "No, Thomas—you must not go in this excited state: let Villiers take the affair in hand."

Mr. Hatfield fell back into a seat, a prey to the most painful—the most agonising emotions; while Clarence hurriedly departed to execute the commission entrusted to him.

The Earl now addressed himself to the task of consoling his unfortunate brother-in-law;—and he had just succeeded in inducing Mr. Hatfield to assume as composed a demeanour as possible, preparatory to their joint appearance at the breakfast-table, when Clarence Villiers rushed into the room.

Not a quarter of an hour had elapsed since his departure;—and this speedy return, together with his agitated manner, raised new alarms in the breasts of the Earl and Mr. Hatfield.

"They are gone—fled—all three together!" cried Villiers, throwing himself exhausted on an ottoman, and panting for breath.

"Gone!" repeated the miserable father, surveying Clarence with eyes that stared wildly and unnaturally.

"Yes—gone!" said Villiers. "Ten minutes before I reached Suffolk Street, my aunt, her daughter, and Mr. Charles departed in a post-chaise, which had been sent for apparently in consequence of some sudden plan: for the people of the house were previously unacquainted with the intention of their lodgers thus to leave so abruptly."

"But where was the chaise hired? and which road has it taken?" demanded Mr. Hatfield, now manifesting an energy and determination that proved his readiness to meet the emergency and adopt measures to pursue the fugitives.

"I sought for that information in vain," returned Clarence Villiers. "It appears that my aunt herself went out to order the post-chaise; and that care was taken not to allow the people of the house any opportunity to converse with the post-boys. The rent and other liabilities were all duly paid; and the landlady of the lodgings accordingly makes no complaint of the women who have quitted her abode."

"What course do you intend to adopt?" hastily demanded the Earl, turning to his half-brother.

"Order me your best horse to be saddled forthwith," said Mr. Hatfield; "and I will proceed in pursuit of the runaways. 'Tis ten to one that I will obtain some trace of them. Perhaps Mr. Villiers will likewise mount horse, and take the northern road."

"While I shall do the same, and pursue a westerly direction," observed the Earl.

"Good: for it was my intention to choose the route towards Dover," added Mr. Hatfield. "And now one word more, Arthur," he continued, the moment Villiers had left the room to give the necessary orders respecting the horses: "as it is probable that we may recover and reclaim my self-willed son—and as, in that case, penitence on his part might induce you to forgive this absurd freak, so that the result may yet be favourable to our nearest and dearest wishes,—under all these circumstances, I say, suffer not Frances to learn aught disparaging to his character."

"I understand you, Thomas," exclaimed the Earl, wringing his half-brother's hand in token of cordial assent to this proposition. "I will even speak as warily and cautiously as I may to my wife;—while, on your side——"

"Oh! I must tell every thing to Georgiana," said Mr. Hatfield: "suspense and uncertainty would be intolerable to her. I shall now seek her for the purpose of making a hasty but most sad communication: and then away in pursuit of the ingrate!"

A quarter of an hour afterwards, the Earl of Ellingham, Mr. Hatfield, and Clarence Villiers—all three equipped for their journeys—repaired to the nobleman's stables in the immediate vicinity of the mansion;—and thence they speedily issued forth, well mounted, and each taking a separate direction.

CHAPTER CXLI.

THE FLIGHT.

Upon breaking away from the presence of his father, in the manner already described, Charles Hatfield hurried to the house in Suffolk Street; and bursting into the room where Mrs. Fitzhardinge and Perdita were seated at breakfast, he exclaimed, "I have at length thrown off all allegiance to my parents;—and I must now act wholly and solely for my own interests."

"Not altogether for *your own*, Charles—dear Charles," said Perdita, fixing upon him a plaintive and half-reproachful look, which made her appear ravishingly beautiful in his eyes.

"No—not altogether for myself will I act," he cried, embracing her tenderly: "but for thee also, my angel—yes, for thee whom I love—adore—worship!"

"What has occurred this morning to render your lordship thus agitated?" enquired Mrs. Fitzhardinge.

"Oh! a quarrel with my father," exclaimed Charles, who, in the enthusiasm of his blind devotion to Perdita, had forgotten the old woman's presence. "He has played the part of a spy upon me—he has followed me to your door—he knows that I visit you—and he will doubtless endeavour to cause a breach between us!"

"Let us depart hence—now—at a moment's warning!" cried Perdita. "We have ample funds for the purpose. Last night a money-lender discounted your note, Charles: and I have the proceeds safe in my own keeping."

"Fortune favours us, then!" said the infatuated young man. "Yes—we will depart without delay: we will hasten to some retired place where we can deliberate, fearless of interruption, on the course which it will now be necessary for me to pursue."

"I will hasten to order a post-chaise," observed Mrs. Fitzhardinge. "This task had better be performed by myself—so that we may leave behind us no trace of the route we shall have taken."

"Thanks—a thousand thanks, my dear madam!" cried Charles: then, when the old woman had left the room, he caught Perdita in his arms and pressing her fondly to his bosom, said, "My parents are resolved to force me into a marriage with Lady Frances Ellingham—they would separate me from you——"

"Oh! Charles—were such a destiny in store for me," said Perdita, affecting to be melted to tears, "I should not be able to bear up against the misfortune. For on you are all my hopes now fixed,—to you have

I given my heart—irrevocably given it;—and were you the veriest mendicant on the face of the earth, I would never cease to love you as now I love!"

"Adored Perdita!" cried the young man, enraptured by the tender words and the enchanting manner of the syren, as he strained her to his breast and imprinted a thousand kisses on her brow, her cheeks, and her lips. "Oh! never—never could I prove faithless to thee, my beloved Perdita! Would that you were mine indissolubly—that you were mine by the rites of the Church and the sanction of the law;—for then we might defy the world to separate us!"

"Would you have me renounce the peculiar opinions which I have formed?" asked Perdita, her heart palpitating with joy—for the young man had thus, of his own accord, broached the delicate subject on which she longed to speak, yet knew not how to begin. "Because, if such be your wish, my beloved Charles, I will make even the sacrifice of my strongest prejudices to your heart's desire—"

"Now, indeed, do I know that you love me, sweetest—dearest girl!" interrupted Charles, experiencing ineffable happiness at the idea of possessing the beautiful Perdita on terms which would not render him ashamed of his connexion. "Yes—yes; I do demand that sacrifice at your hands; and, if you yield to my wishes in this respect, I shall receive your assent as the most eloquent—the most convincing proof of the attachment you avow! And, moreover, Perdita—dearest, dearest Perdita—I shall be so rejoiced to place a coronet on that fair brow of thine,—so proud to present thee to the world as my wife! Never—never will enraptured husband have experienced a triumph so complete as that which will be mine, when I shall conduct thee—so radiant, so dazzling in thy beauty—amongst the friends whom the declaration of my rank will gather around me,—and when I shall introduce thee, adored one, as the Viscountess Marston! Yes—I shall indeed be proud of thee, my angel; and now—will you not breathe the word that is to promise me all this triumph and all this joy?—will you not say, '*Charles, for thy sake, I will accompany thee to the altar, and wed thee according to the rites of the Protestant Church and the exigencies of the community.*"

"Oh! not for another instant can I hesitate, my beloved—my handsome—my generous Charles!" exclaimed the syren, casting her arms round his neck, and pressing him as if in rapture to her glowing bosom: then, in the sweetest intonations

of her melodious voice, she said, "Yes—Charles, for thy sake, I will accompany thee to the altar, and will wed thee according to the rites of the Protestant Church and the usages of that society in which we live!"

"Now am I supremely happy!" cried Charles Hatfield, his tone and manner fully corroborating his words. "We will repair to Paris, my beloved Perdita—for there we can be united by the chaplain of the British Embassy without an instant's unnecessary delay; and thence also can I write to my father, solemnly and formally calling upon him to assert his right to the peerage which he has so long permitted his younger brother to usurp. And in Paris my Perdita will be the cynosure of all interest——"

"Oh! yes—let us visit that delightful city of which I have heard so much!" interrupted the young woman, her eyes gleaming resplendently with the pleasing sensations excited by the idea. "But I must now leave you for a moment, to prepare for this sudden journey—as my mother cannot be long before she returns."

Perdita rose from the sofa, and hastened from the room, kissing her hand with playful fondness to her lover as she crossed the threshold. Even that simple action on her part excited the most ravishing feelings in his soul;—for as she thus turned round for an instant ere the door closed behind her, his looks swept all the fulness—all the contours—all the rich proportions of her voluptuous form,—while the morning sun-light, rosy from the hues of the hangings through which it penetrated, shone on her beauteous countenance, giving splendour to the fine large eyes, freshness to the vermilion lips, and a halo to her glossy hair!

She disappeared; and Charles, who had risen from his seat simultaneously with herself, advanced to the window. The street was quiet;—but the sounds of the rapid vehicles in Cockspur Street met his ears;—and he wondered whether the postchaise were yet approaching the dwelling.

This idea led him to ponder on the step which he was about to take;—and a sensation of sadness slowly crept upon him, as he reflected that he was on the point of leaving his home—abandoning his parents and friends! The recollection of his mother smote him—smote him painfully;—and yet he did not seek by inward, silent reasoning to improve this better state of feeling, and act upon its warnings. No:—with that perverseness which so frequently characterises those who are on the point of adopting a measure which they secretly know to be injudicious and unwisely precipitate—even if no worse,—he sought in sophistry and specious mental argument an apology for his conduct. Again he reminded himself that his parents had acted unnaturally towards him,—and that their uniform conduct in this respect had now been followed up by harshness, upbraidings, menaces, and *espionnage*, on the part of his father. Then he feasted his imagination with the thoughts of possessing Perdita:—in a few days she would be his—irrevocably his,—and in a manner which would enable him to present her proudly to the world as his wedded wife. From this strain of meditations he glided into glorious, gorgeous visions of future greatness:—the words, "My Lord," and "Your Lordship," only so recently addressed to him, sounded like delicious music in his ears:—and his painful reflections were subdued by the feelings of triumph now once more awakened within him. Love—ambition—hope,—all—all his yearnings, all his cravings were now on the point of being gratified: he should cast off that parental yoke which had latterly weighed so heavily upon him;—he was about to visit Paris—he would appear as a Viscount, and with a beauteous bride, in the sphere of fashion the most refined, elegance the most perfect, and civilisation the most consummate,—and he already fancied himself walking in the delicious gardens of the Tuileries, with Perdita—the observed of all observers—leaning fondly on his arm!

These visions—sweeping like a gorgeous pageantry through his excited imagination—brought him to that state of mind, in which all regrets were banished—all remorse was forgotten;—and when Perdita returned to the apartment, ready attired for the journey, he flew towards her—he wound his arms around her wasp-like waist, and pressed her enthusiastically to his bosom.

This was the first time that he had seen her in a walking-dress;—and he thought that she even appeared more ravishingly beautiful than when in her morning *deshabillée*, or her drawing-room garb. The pink crape bonnet, adorned with artificial flowers, set off her fine countenance with such admirable effect:—the flowing drapery of the elegant summer-shawl meandered over the proportions of the symmetrical form—developing each contour with its wavy undulations:—and the straw-coloured kid gloves, fitting tightly to a fault, described the shape of the beautiful tapering fingers.

"You are lovely beyond the loveliness of woman!" murmured Charles Hatfield, surveying her with an admiration the most unfeigned—the most sincere.

"And you, Charles—are not you my own handsome, dearly beloved Charles—so soon to be my husband?" asked Perdita. "You said just now that you should be proud to present me as your wife to your friends:—Oh! I feel—yes, I feel that I shall also be proud to be so presented. My mind seems to have undergone a complete change since I made you that promise to wed you at the altar;—and you must forget, dear Charles, that I ever wished it otherwise!"

Hatfield, for all answer, impressed a burning kiss upon her rosy lips;—and the young woman's eyes became soft and melting in expression—voluptuous and languid with desire.

At this instant her mother returned, with the announcement that the post-chaise would be at the door in less than a quarter of an hour; and the old woman hastened to the bed-rooms to pack up the trunks. Her daughter, who kept the purse, then gave her the necessary money to liquidate all liabilities due to the landlady of the house; and while this was being done, Perdita placed the gold and Bank-notes in Charles's hand, saying, "In the excitement of the morning's incidents I forgot to tender you this amount before.'

"Henceforth all that I have is your's equally, my beloved," said the young man, as he secured the money about his person.

The post-chaise-and-four now appeared; and while the trunks were being strapped on to the vehicle, Mrs. Fitzhardinge superintended the process, apparently with the bustling officiousness of an old woman of particular habits, but in reality to prevent any communication between the post-boys and the people of the dwelling;—for she knew how inquisitive lodging-house keepers were apt to be, and that postilions were proportionately communicative.

At length all the arrangements were completed;—Charles handed his Perdita into the vehicle—manifested the same politeness towards the old mother—and then entered it himself. Mrs. Fitzhardinge had

placed herself with her back to the horses, on an imperious sign from Perdita to that effect;—so that the young couple were next to each other on the same seat.

The post-chaise rolled rapidly away from Suffolk Street, and passed down Whitehall towards Westminster Bridge. So long as the wheels rattled over the stones, but little conversation took place inside the vehicle,—though Charles and Perdita conveyed to each other many tender assurances by means of the eloquent language of the eyes and the pressure of hands. When, however, the chaise emerged from the more crowded thoroughfares of the metropolis, and entered upon the Dover Road, the travelling party were enabled to discourse at ease.

The day was very sultry;—but the upper part of the barouche was now thrown open; and the speed at which they travelled, created a current of air that mitigated the intensity of the heat. However, Perdita put up her parasol; and as the faces of the happy pair were not very far apart, the silk canopy, circumscribed though it were, shaded those fine countenances which really seemed made to be side by side with each other,—both being so handsome!

For a short time the conversation was general amongst the three:—gradually, however, Mrs. Fitzhardinge was, as it were, excluded from its range—not rudely so,—but because it became of a tender description between the young gentleman and her daughter;—and then it languished somewhat, inasmuch as the old woman was a restraint upon them.

At length there was a pause altogether; but still Charles and Perdita felt no weariness in each other's society They gazed on each other—drinking draughts of love in each other's looks,—and often pressing each other's hands

For Perdita really loved the young man,—loved him with a deep and ardent affection, of which however sensuality formed no inconsiderable portion. Nevertheless, she *did* love him after the fashion of her own heart;—and thus to some extent the snarer had become ensnared!

It was in a humour of melting and voluptuous languor, that, suddenly breaking the silence noticed above, Perdita said in her soft, dulcet tones, "Charles, how delicious is it to travel in this manner! Do you know that I feel as if I should like you to repeat to me a piece of poetry—or tell me some interesting tale—for it is so sweet to hear the sound of your voice. But if you thus gratify my caprice—this whim of the moment—let the theme of your recitation be love!"

"I will endeavour to please you, my charmer," returned the young man;—"and at this moment I bethink me of a Love Story that I wrote myself some few years ago—one day, when the mania for scribbling suddenly seized upon me."

"Oh! that will be truly delightful!" exclaimed Perdita. "A story of your own composition! Begin, Charles—dear Charles: I am dying to hear this specimen of your abilities."

"I am afraid it will prove but a poor one," returned Hatfield. "At the same time, such as it is, I will repeat it."

Mrs. Fitzhardinge, having overheard this dialogue, intimated the pleasure she should experience in listening to the tale;—and as the chaise was now rolling along a road rendered, as it were, soft by the accumulation of the dust of summer, Charles was not compelled to pitch his voice to a key unpleasantly high, in relating the ensuing narrative.

CHAPTER CXLII.

THE DRESS-MAKER: A LOVE STORY.

"It was between nine and ten o'clock on a dark and rainy night, in the month of November, 1834, that a young female, plainly but decently attired, was wending her way along Oxford Street. She had a large parcel beneath her cloak;—and this parcel she protected against the rain with the most jealous care,—thinking more, in fact, of the object of her solicitude than of picking her path with sufficient nicety to enable her to avoid the puddles of water that were ankle-deep in some parts of the pavement—but more especially at the crossings. For, in sooth, it was a bitter—bitter night:—the windows of heaven appeared to be indeed opened, and the rain fell in torrents. The streets seemed to be positively covered in with an arcade of umbrellas, on which the quick drops rattled down with the violence of hail. The young female whom I have mentioned, had an umbrella;—but she found it rather a difficult task to hold it comfortably with one hand, while her left arm encircled as it were the precious parcel beneath her cloak. For the passengers in the streets of London are never over remarkable for their civility to each other—still less so on such a night as the one I am describing. The consequence was that there was an incessant struggle amongst the strong to push their umbrellas safely through the mass, and amongst the weak to prevent their own umbrellas from being dragged out of their hands;—but it naturally happened that the latter fared the worst.

"The young female was meek, timid, and unobtrusive She only sought to be permitted to pursue her way in peace, without being molested;—for, heaven knows! she had not the least desire on her part to inconvenience a soul. But first some rude, hulking fellow would thrust her against the houses—almost through the shop windows; then, if she moved over to the kerb-stone of the pavement, she found herself speedily pushed into the mud. To pursue a middle course was impossible; because the two streams of persons carrying umbrellas were the monopolists there;—and so the young female began to lament the necessity which had sent her forth into the streets on such a night as this. At length she reached the iron gates leading into Hanover Square; and she rejoiced—for she thought within herself that she had now got clear of the crowd, and need entertain no farther apprehension of having the precious parcel knocked out of her hands. But just as she entered the Square, a rude, coarse fellow rushed against her as he was running hastily round the corner; and such was the violence of the concussion, that the parcel was knocked from beneath her arm. The ruffian who had caused the accident, burst into a ferocious laugh, as if he had just performed a most humorous or clever feat, and darted away. But the young female was disconsolate at what had occurred; and tears started into her eyes. Though bruised and hurt by the man's violence, she thought not of herself—she felt no pain:—it was on account of the parcel that she was so deeply grieved. Hastily picking it up, she hurried to the nearest lamp; and the moment she examined the packet beneath the gas-light, she found her worst apprehensions confirmed. For the parcel contained a costly silk dress, well wrapped up in brown paper;—but the side on which it had fallen was dripping wet and covered with mud!

"'O heavens! no food *again* to-night!' exclaimed the young female aloud—for in her despair she paused not to notice whether she were noticed or overheard. And she *was* both noticed and overheard,—and by a tall, handsome individual, of gentlemanly appearance, and muffled in a capacious cloak. He had issued from the nearest house at the moment the accident occurred; and, perceiving the brutality of the encounter, though too late to prevent it or to chastise the perpetrator, he stood still to observe the young female, whose countenance, as the rays of the lamp fell upon it, struck him as being remarkably beautiful. In that rapid survey, partial as it was by the flickering light, which was moreover dimmed by the mist of the falling rain, the stranger fancied that he perceived—independently of the despair which that countenance now wore—a certain settled melancholy expression, that at once rivetted his interest and excited his sympathies. But when those words—so terrible in their meaning,—'O heavens! no food *again* to-night!' fell upon his ears, he accosted the young female, and said, in a tone of respectful though somewhat condescending pity, 'My poor girl, it appears that a sad accident has befallen you.'—The young woman, or rather girl—for she was not more than eighteen years of age—looked up into the face of the individual who thus addressed her; and, perceiving that it was no insolent coxcomb who spoke, she replied in a tone of deep melancholy, 'Yes, sir: it is to *me* a great misfortune!'—The stranger read, or fancied he read, an entire history in those few and plaintively uttered words,—how, perhaps, a young dress-maker had toiled to finish a particular piece of work in the hope of receiving instantaneous payment on taking it home,—how the article had been thrown down, soiled, and rendered at least unfit to be delivered that night to its owner, even if it were not spoilt altogether,—and how the poor girl had lost her only chance of obtaining the wherewith to procure a meal. Upon more closely, though still with great delicacy, questioning the young female, the stranger found all his surmises to be correct; but she could not tell whether the silk dress were injured beyond redemption or not. 'In any case,' she added, still weeping bitterly, 'I shall tell the lady the truth when I take home the dress to-morrow.'—These words, uttered with the most unquestionable sincerity, made a deep impression upon the gentleman who was addressing her; for they denoted an unsophisticated uprightness of character which augmented the interest he already felt in the poor young creature.—'And who is the lady you speak of?' he enquired.—'The Dowager Marchioness of Wilmington,' was the reply.—'Ah!' ejaculated the stranger: then, after a moment's pause, he said, 'Pardon me, young woman, for having asked you so many questions: but it has not been through motives of idle curiosity. Here is a small sum that will procure you immediate necessaries;'—and thrusting a coin into her hand, he hurried away. The deed took the poor girl completely by surprise;—for although it has occupied me some time to relate all that passed between her and the generous stranger, yet in reality their dialogue was of scarcely more than two minutes' duration; and the dress-maker had not yet recovered from the grief into which the accident to her parcel had plunged her. When, therefore, the light of the lamp flashed upon a bright yellow coin, she could scarcely believe her eyes:—she fancied that her benefactor had made a mistake, and intended to give her a shilling,—and then, in spite of the cold night, the warm blood rushed to her cheeks, at the idea of any one treating her as a mendicant—for she had her little feelings of pride, poor though she were! But her next thought was that the stranger might really have intended to present her with a sovereign; and—so strange a sentiment is human pride, even in the most virtuous bosoms—her soul revolted not from receiving that amount. And now, lest this circumstance should induce you to form an evil opinion of my heroine, I must inform you that it was no selfish nor avaricious feeling that made her draw a distinction between the gift of a shilling and that of a sovereign:—but she had been tenderly and genteelly brought up—and the comparison which her mind drew, was simply as between the alms that one would toss to a mendicant, and the pecuniary aid which a delicate benevolence would administer to a person in temporary embarrassment.

"Of all these things she thought as she retraced her way along Oxford Street,—holding her umbrella with her right hand, and with her left arm encircling the parcel more carefully than before. She came to the conclusion that the sovereign was not given by mistake; and she resolved to avail herself of the bounty which Providence itself had appeared to bestow upon her in the hour of her bitterest need. She thought of the little brother who was anxiously expecting her return, and who had fared so scantily for the last few days,—that little brother of only eight years old, whom the sudden, premature, and almost simultaneous death of their parents, about two years previously, had left so completely dependant upon her! As she drew near the street in which she lived, she stopped at the baker's where she was accustomed to deal, and purchased some nice buns;—and then she hurried on until she reached the house wherein she rented a small back room on the third floor. On entering the little chamber, which, though poorly furnished, was very clean and neat, a beautiful boy, with light brown curly hair and fine blue eyes, but with cheeks somewhat pale, sprang towards her, exclaiming 'Oh! dear sister Julia, I am so glad you have come back: for I cannot bear to be left alone so long!'—'I have brought you something nice, Harry,' said the kind girl, smiling sweetly upon him; and, she placed the bag containing the buns in his hand. Joy sparkled in his eyes;—but in another moment he observed that his sister had brought back the parcel, which she had opened, and was carefully examining the silk-dress to ascertain the amount of injury done to it. Throwing the cakes upon the table, the boy hastened to question her; but poor Julia could not answer him—scalding tears were trickling down her cheeks—a suffocating grief filled her bosom,—for she found, to her dismay that the dress was completely spoilt!

"She sate down, and gave full vent to her anguish;—and then little Harry threw his arms round her neck, and endeavoured to console her. The flood of tears which she shed, and the affectionate conduct of her little brother at length considerably soothed her;—and the poor girl made up her mind to meet her misfortune with resignation. 'You are dripping wet, dear Julia,' said Harry: 'and there is not a morsel of coal left,' he added, looking at the miserable remnant of a fire which was fast extinguishing in the grate.—'Poor boy! you have been cold,' exclaimed the dress-maker,' not thinking of herself.—'No, dear Julia,' he answered; 'for I have been walking up and down the room, to keep myself awake till you came back. I was only afraid that the candle would not last.'—'Nor will it many minutes longer, Harry!"

cried Julia, starting from her seat. 'But do not be afraid, my dear little fellow; for I have plenty of money to buy all we want for the moment. A good kind gentleman took compassion upon me, and—and ——'; she did not choose to say, '*and gave me some money*;'—for, somehow or another, her pure soul revolted from the idea that she had been the object of eleemosynary benevolence on the part of a stranger:—so, cutting the matter short, she kissed her little brother tenderly, bade him eat his cakes, and, promising to return in a few minutes, hurried away. She ordered up coals and wood from the nearest shed,—thence she repaired to the grocer's, where she purchased a few articles,—and lastly, she sped to the baker's, to buy bread. But the moment she entered this shop, the master rushed from behind the counter, seized her rudely, called her by many opprobrious names, and, raising an alarm, attracted the attention of a policeman who was passing by. The constable entered the shop, and enquired the cause of the disturbance; but poor Julia had fainted;—and she, therefore, heard not the charge that was made against her. When she came to her senses, she gazed wildly around, thinking that she had just awoke from a horrid dream;—but, alas! it was all too true! She was seated in a chair in the middle of the shop—a policeman standing near her—and a gaping, curious crowd collected at the door. 'Now, young woman,' said the officer, 'come along with me!'—Julia cast upon him a look so full of horror and amazement, that the man's heart was for an instant touched;—but, being accustomed to endless varieties of imposture on the part of offenders, he speedily recovered the cold indifference so characteristic of his class, and said sternly, if not brutally, 'None of this nonsense: you must tramp off to the station-house!'—'But what have I done? what offence have I committed?' asked Julia, in a tone of the most pathetic entreaty. 'Oh! there must be some dreadful mistake in all this!'—'No mistake at all,' said the officer; 'and you'll know all about it in the morning, when you go before the magistrate!'—'The magistrate!' repeated the girl, with the emphasis of despair. 'But my poor little brother, what will become of him?'—'That's no business of mine,' returned the constable: 'come along!'—and he dragged the half-fainting Julia from the shop.

"Away to the nearest station-house was the unhappy young woman rather borne than conducted;—and so stunned—so stupefied was she by this sudden, unaccountable, and overwhelming misfortune, that her tongue refused to give utterance to the questions which her suspense prompted her lips to frame. The station was close by; and thus was it that before she had leisure to recover from her bewilderment and terror, she found herself thrust into a dark cell—all dripping wet from head to foot as she was. When full consciousness returned, and she was enabled to look her misfortune in the face, she found that all the articles she had purchased at the grocer's and all the remainder of her money were gone. Yet she could not possibly conceive on what charge she had been thus rudely treated;—and her conscience inspired her with the hope that her complete innocence must become apparent in the morning. But the thought of her little brother excited the most painful sensations in her bosom:—her heart was rent with pangs that seemed to threaten her very existence! The poor little fellow!—she fancied she saw him sitting in the cold, lonely chamber, crying bitterly at his sister's prolonged absence:—and then a thousand fears haunted her—all distracting in the extreme. Might he not take it into his head to go out to look after her?—he, who was so ignorant of London!—and then might he not be lost in the mazes of the mighty metropolis, and on a night when it would be almost death to him to wander about the flooded streets? Oh! all these fears—these thoughts were terrible;—for she dearly loved her little brother—loved him, perhaps, the more affectionately, the more tenderly, because their orphan condition rendered him so completely dependant upon her,—and because he was so much attached to her, and his ways were so winning—his disposition so cheerful!

"In the midst of these harrowing meditations a policeman opened the trap in the door of the cell, and called her by name—'*Julia Murray!*' She answered in a faint and feeble tone; and the officer was about to close the trap, satisfied that his prisoner was not ill nor had attempted suicide,—when the young woman suddenly exclaimed, 'Stop one moment!'—'Well, what is it?' demanded the constable.—In a few hurried words Julia explained to him how she had a little brother expecting her return, how he would be overwhelmed with grief at her unaccountable absence, and how grateful she should feel if any one could be sent to inform the child that his sister would be certain to return in the morning. The constable, who was a kind-hearted man, promised that her request should be complied with; and he was about to depart when, a thought striking him, he said, 'But are you so sure, young woman, of getting off so easy as you imagine. The charge is a serious one, mind!'—'The charge!' she repeated: 'I do not even yet know what it is!'—'Oh! that's all gammon,' cried the constable, closing the trap abruptly; and now, his opinion of the prisoner being that she was a hardened impostor, and had some sinister motive in view in sending a message to her lodgings, determined to trouble himself no more concerning the matter. It was, however, some consolation to the poor girl to believe that her commission would be duly executed;—for, though she had heard the officer's unfeeling, cutting observation relative to her ignorance of the accusation against her, she could not for an instant suppose that he would neglect to fulfil his promise regarding her little brother. But wearily—wearily passed away that night—not once did the poor dress-maker close her eyes—and she counted every hour that was proclaimed from the neighbouring church-clock—often saying to herself that never, never had time travelled with such leaden pace before! She had not tasted food for many hours—and yet she was not hungry; but she experienced a terrible faintness at the chest, and an oppressiveness on the brain, that at intervals made her mind wander. Her cloak was dripping wet when she had been locked up, and her shoes, stockings, and the lower part of her dress were saturated;—but she had thrown her cloak aside, and her garments had dried upon her;—and now she felt not positively cold—only a numbness in her limbs, which gave her however no pain.

"At length the dull, misty, wintry morning dawned upon the metropolis—though all was still dark in her gloomy cell. Presently an officer entered, and gave her a cup of hot coffee and a piece of bread. She asked him if the message had been sent to her brother;—but he was not the same constable who had made the round of the cells at midnight, and therefore knew nothing about the matter. More-

over, he was a stern, sulky man; and she dared not speak farther to him—much as she longed to ascertain the real nature of the charge against her. She drank the coffee, which seemed to do her good; —but she could not force a single mouthful of the bread down her throat—though the cravings of hunger now began to oppress her cruelly. But, to use a common phrase, her heart heaved against food. A couple of hours more passed away, and then the same policeman who had arrested her on the preceding evening came to conduct her to the police-office. While they were proceeding thither, Julia enquired the nature of the charge against her; and she now learnt for the first time that the coin which she had changed at the baker's, and which she had believed to be a sovereign, was only a gilt counter, of the kind used at card tables in genteel society. She was cruelly shocked at this information, and frankly and candidly explained to the officer the manner in which she had become possessed of it; but he only shook his head, and seemed to put but little faith in her story. Julia was, however, too much absorbed in the vexation and ignominy she had thus been subjected to, and was still enduring, to notice the man's incredulity;—but she clung to the hope that her tale would be believed by the magistrate before whom she was about to appear. It happened that the usual charges of drunkenness were just disposed of, at the moment when the young female entered the court; and she was accordingly at once placed at the bar—the baker being already in attendance to prefer his charge against her. This he did in a plain and straight-forward manner,—showing no ill-feeling against the prisoner—but, on the contrary, alleging that he had always believed her to be a highly respectable, industrious, and praise-worthy young woman until the present transaction took place. He added that he had given her into custody in a moment of irritation, believing himself to have been duped; and that he should be truly delighted if she could make her innocence apparent. Julia's courage was somewhat restored by the forbearing conduct of the baker—for her own good sense told her that the case was really one involving much unpleasant suspicion;—and she now told her tale with an artlessness and sincerity that produced no inconsiderable effect upon the bench. Nevertheless, as the magistrate observed, it certainly appeared strange that a gentleman should have given her a gilt counter in mistake for a sovereign,—strange also that a mere stranger should have intended to bestow upon her a sovereign at all. The magistrate proceeded to state that the prisoner must be remanded, in order that the gentleman of whom she spoke—if her story were true—might come forward, upon seeing the report of the case in the newspapers, and tender his evidence. Julia burst out into an agony of weeping, when she heard that she must go to prison for a week; and the baker requested the magistrate to re-consider his decision. This appeal was, however, made in vain; but it was intimated that bail would be received for the prisoner's re-appearance. The baker gave a whispered assurance to the unhappy girl that he would get two of his friends to become security for her; and this promise consoled her. When she was removed from the office, on her way to a cell in the rear of the establishment, the baker told her that his wife had taken care of her brother, who had passed the night at their house; and he expressed his deep regret that he should have proceeded against her, as he had learnt from her landlady that she was a young woman of most exemplary character. To be brief, the baker performed his promise of procuring bail for the prisoner; and at about two o'clock in the afternoon she was enabled to return home.

"Little Harry was speedily brought back to her by the baker's wife, who, it appeared, had bitterly reproached her husband on the preceding evening for his conduct towards Miss Murray, and, with considerate kindness, had at once sent for her brother, whom the good woman consoled with some plausible tale accounting for his sister's absence. Julia was not however happy, even though restored to liberty; for the charge still hung over her—and so much depended on the chance of the appearance of her unknown benefactor, who, she still firmly believed, had accidentally and most unintentionally given her the gilt counter which had led to so much wretchedness and serious embarrassment. Her first care was now, however, to proceed to the house of the old Marchioness of Wilmington, with the silk-dress, which was completely spoiled; and Julia's heart was heavy as she hurried along Oxford Street. The weather was dull and gloomy; but the rain had ceased, and the two streams of people flowed on, in different directions, without the hurry, bustle, and struggling that had prevailed on the preceding evening. Julia's bosom palpitated nervously when she reached the spot where the accident had occurred—that accident to which her present sorrows might be traced. On reaching the house of the marchioness in Hanover Square, the poor girl was conducted into the presence of the dowager—a proud, stately dame whose age exceeded fifty, but who endeavoured by means of rouge, false hair, false teeth, and the appliances of the toilette, to appear at least twenty years younger. Her ladyship was seated in a small, but elegantly furnished parlour, and was occupied in reading—no, in skimming—the last new novel, which, according to the usual fashion, had been carefully spun out into three volumes, though all the incidents it contained might with advantage have been condensed into one. At a beautiful little work-table, sate a lovely creature of two-and-twenty, with hair as dark as jet, fine large black eyes, and a tall symmetrical, but rather robust figure. On this fair young lady's countenance there was a slight shade of melancholy; and her cheeks were somewhat pale—but apparently through a secret care, and not ill-health. This was Lady Caroline Jerningham, the only daughter of the marchioness, and consequently sister to the Marquis of Wilmington, her ladyship's only son.

"On entering the presence of these ladies, Julia, who had previously arranged in her own imagination the precise terms in which she proposed to tell her tale,—with a strict adherence to truth,—forgot all her studied task, and became overwhelmed with confusion. The marchioness looked so stately—so prim—so queen like in her deportment, not to say positively austere, that the poor girl was seized with vague apprehensions and unknown terrors, as if she had committed a great and grievous fault. Lady Caroline, however, cast upon her a look of such kind encouragement, and also of such significance, that it almost struck Julia at the moment that the young patrician lady had a fore-knowledge of the disaster which had occurred to the dress. Yet how was that possible?—and as the absurdity of such an idea forced itself upon the girl's mind the instant after the idea itself was entertained, her confusion and embarrassment were increased, and she burst into tears. The dowager uttered an ejaculation of surprise: and Julia, hastily wiping her

eyes, cast an appealing glance on Lady Caroline, who, to her relief and amazement, she beheld gazing upon her with an expression of reassurance and deep—almost tender interest. Encouraged by the evident graciousness of the young lady, Julia proceeded to open the parcel; and, while so doing, she began an explanation of the accident which had occurred to the dress. The countenance of the marchioness, to whom she glanced timidly, lowered and contracted;—but Lady Caroline hastened to observe, in a kind and condescending manner, 'Whatever has happened to the dress, Miss Murray, I am confident my mother will attribute to a misfortune, and to no blameable neglect on your part.'—'Permit me to answer for myself, Lady Caroline,' said the dowager, in a tone of haughty remonstrance to her daughter, and with an austere look at the trembling Julia. 'Young woman,' she continued, now addressing herself direct to the poor girl, 'you were recommended to me by Lady Lumley, as an efficient, honest, careful, and deserving person,—one, who, having been brought up tenderly and by parents moving in a genteel sphere until the time of their decease, was suddenly compelled to have recourse to the needle to earn a subsistence. Under such circumstances, and with this recommendation, I sent for you—I agreed to give you a trial—and, as I perceive, you have spoilt for me a dress that will cost me ten guineas to replace it.'—'I admit, my lady,' said Julia, 'that you have great cause to be dissatisfied. But heaven is my witness that it was an accident; and if your ladyship will permit me, I will toil day and night until I shall have obtained the wherewith to make good the loss.'—'No, young woman,' observed the marchioness, somewhat mollified by the artlessness and respectful demeanour of Julia Murray; I cannot, being rich, oppress you, who are poor. All that I can do in the case is to decline giving you any farther employment. You may retire:' and, having thus spoken with a sententious pomposity that would have become a statesman, the noble lady waved her hand authoritatively.

"Julia's eyes filled with tears, which nearly blinded her—so that she observed not how peculiar was the interest with which Lady Caroline Jerningham was surveying her:—but, having vainly endeavoured to stammer forth a few words imploring a continuance of the patronage of the marchioness, she hurried from the room. On the landing outside she paused for a few moments to wipe away the traces of tears from her countenance and somewhat compose herself; for she shrank from the idea of attracting unpleasant notice on the part of the lacqueys lounging in the hall through which she must pass to reach the street-door. Suddenly she felt a gentle touch upon the shoulder; for she had seated herself in a chair on the landing, being overcome with grief and physical exhaustion;—and starting up, she beheld Lady Caroline standing by her side. 'Hush!' said the fair patrician, placing her finger upon her lip, and glancing towards the parlour-door, as much as to imply that she had stolen away from her mother's presence and would not have her motive suspected: 'here, my poor girl, take this—and, when you require a friend, fear not to apply to me—but by letter, remember, in the first instance!'—Thus speaking, Lady Caroline thrust five sovereigns into Julia's hand, and instantly returned to the parlour, not waiting a moment to receive the thanks of the astonished and delighted girl.

"Julia Murray now hurried home, and found little Harry anxiously expecting her return;—for, although he was too young to comprehend the nature of the alarms which she had experienced, when sallying forth, on account of the spoilt dress, yet he was fearful lest she might remain away from him for several hours again. He had no cares—that poor little fellow—when his sister was with him; and he now asked her, in so sweet yet earnest a manner, not to leave him any more during a whole night, that she felt as if she would go through fire and water for that darling boy. But she had no work in hand; and though she possessed five sovereigns,—real sovereigns, and no gilt counters this time,—yet she could not bear the idea of being idle. She however promised to remain at home all that day; and she prepared a nice little dinner, which made Harry so happy that she wished—Oh! how sincerely she wished—she could always provide for him in the same manner. She endeavoured to appear as cheerful as she could;—but there was a weight upon her spirits—for the accusation still hung over her head, and she was in suspense whether the unknown would see her case in the papers, and appear to justify her. Besides, would not the publicity given to the affair injure her with those kind patronesses who had hitherto taken such an interest in the orphan girl? and, should the stranger-gentleman *not* be forthcoming, would not a stigma be affixed upon her character, even though the magistrate (as the baker assured her must be the alternative) should dismiss the case? Of all these things she thought;—and when Harry noticed her not, a pearly tear would trickle down her pale but beauteous face. For Julia *was* very beautiful. Her hair was of a rich dark brown—her eyes of melting blue—her teeth of pearly whiteness—and her shape elegant, graceful, and sylph-like.

"On the ensuing morning, after breakfast, Julia had just put on her bonnet and shawl to go out for the purpose of calling upon her various patronesses and enquiring whether they needed her services, when the landlady of the house in which she lodged, entered the room and said, 'Miss Murray, a gentleman wishes to speak to you: he will not walk up to your apartment, as he does not know whether you may choose to receive him here; and he is accordingly waiting in my parlour.'—A ray of hope flashed to the mind of the young woman: what if it were the unknown who had given her the gilt counter? The suspicion was strengthened by the delicacy of his behaviour in not ascending to her chamber; for, during the brief discourse which she had with him on the night so fatal to her, he had manifested a disposition quite in accordance with the propriety of conduct and considerate proceeding adopted by the individual who now waited to see her. Telling Harry that she should not be long, Julia hurried down stairs; and in a few moments she found herself in the presence of the individual who was uppermost in her thoughts. Yes:—it was indeed he—the unknown,—the same tall, handsome man,—and enveloped, too, in a cloak richly lined with sables. He was about eight-and-twenty years of age; and there was something noble and commanding, though gracious and encouraging, in his air and demeanour. The moment Julia made her appearance, he rose from the chair in which he had been seated, and taking her hand, said in a tone of the most earnest sincerity, 'Miss Murray, I know not in what terms to express the shame and grief which I experience at the misfortune that has overtaken you. It was not until I saw this morning's

newspaper, that I even dreamt of the mistake—the dreadful mistake I had made: and the instant the case met my eyes, I hurried hither. The explanation which I have to give, you can of course anticipate:—I had purchased some gilt counters only half-an-hour before I met you in Hanover Square, and I put them loose into the same pocket which contained my money.'—'I never for an instant imagined, sir,' said Julia, 'that you had purposely trifled with my feelings.'—'Generous young woman, to put such a construction upon a matter which has caused you so much suffering!' exclaimed the unknown. 'But it is now my duty to accompany you at once to the police-court, and place your character in the same honourable light in which it originally stood.'—Julia was overjoyed at this announcement; and the gentleman, giving her his arm, escorted her to the police-court, calling however on the baker in their way to desire him to attend immediately before the magistrate. During the walk, the stranger asked the young woman a great many questions—not of an impertinent nature, nor denoting an idle curiosity,—but rather evincing an interest in the orphan girl. It however struck Julia as somewhat singular that he did not put a single query to her relative to the spoilt dress: it seemed as if he had quite forgotten that incident!

"On their arrival at the police-office, the gentleman immediately handed his card to the magistrate, to whom he whispered a few words at the same time; and his worship became all civility and politeness. The case was called on without a moment's delay: the gentleman concisely but effectually explained the affair of the gilt counter; and the magistrate, on declaring Julia to be discharged, assured her that she would leave the court without the slightest stain on her character. The stranger placed ten pounds in the magistrate's hands for the use of the poor-box, and then departed in company with Julia, whom he escorted back to the house in which she dwelt. On reaching the door, he paused, and taking her hand, said, 'Miss Murray, I shall not insult you by offering a pecuniary recompense for the mortification, annoyance, and distress you have undergone through that gilt counter. But I shall endeavour to serve you in another way. Farewell for the present: you will shortly see me again; for, be assured,' he added, gazing earnestly upon her for a moment, 'I shall never forget you.'—Thus speaking, he pressed her hand and hurried away;—and it was not until he had disappeared from her view that she remembered she was still in profound ignorance of who or what he was. It, however, struck her that the case would be again reported in the newspapers; and she therefore hoped that the morrow would clear up the mystery. But it was with some degree of anxiety and painful suspense that she thus awaited the publication of the journals of the ensuing day;—and she could not account to herself for the feelings that thus agitated her. Although her character had been completely cleared from the imputation thrown upon it, and her innocence was made unquestionably apparent,—although she had ample funds, through the generosity of Lady Caroline Jerningham, to provide for all present wants,—and although a secret voice seemed to whisper in her soul that she possessed a good friend in the stranger-gentleman,—yet, somehow or another, poor Julia was not entirely contented. Was it that the handsome countenance of her unknown benefactor had made any impression on her heart?—was it that his kind and sympathising conduct had touched a tender chord in her pure and innocent bosom? It is impossible to answer these questions at present: but it is very certain that Julia experienced a disappointment almost amounting to a positive shock, when she found that the morning papers seemed to be in as much ignorance as herself relative to her unknown benefactor. The report merely alluded to him as '*a gentleman whose name did not transpire*;'—and this mystery in which her friend evidently wrapped himself, became a source of secret trouble to the young dress-maker. Wherefore had he not revealed his name to her? Disreputable that name could not be; else how could it have produced so magical an effect upon the magistrate? Was it, then, a great—a famous—or a noble name? Julia sighed—and dared not hazard any conjectures: but in her heart there suddenly appeared to arise a hope—a secret wish, that the stranger was *not* so very highly exalted above her own social sphere!

"Again was Julia preparing to sally forth and visit the various ladies for whom she was accustomed to work, when her landlady brought her up a note. It was from Lady Caroline Jerningham, requesting Miss Murray to call upon her in the evening at a stated hour, as her ladyship had a quantity of work to place in her hands. The young maiden was overjoyed at the receipt of this missive, which not only promised her employment, but likewise seemed to be an assurance of the tender interest which the charming Lady Caroline had taken in her. She did not therefore stir out until the evening;—and little Harry was delighted that his sister remained at home with him. But when the appointed hour drew near, she tranquillised her brother with a promise of a speedy return; and away she sped, with a heart full of hope, towards Hanover Square. On reaching the splendid mansion occupied by the Dowager-Marchioness, Julia was received by Lady Caroline's own maid, and was forthwith conducted to the chamber of her fair patroness, who treated her in the most kind and condescending manner. 'I regret, Miss Murray,' she said, 'that I am forced to admit you thus stealthily into the house; but my mother is of a peculiar temper, although in reality possessed of a good heart.'—'I understand your ladyship,' returned Julia: 'the Marchioness cannot forgive me for what she considers neglect. I am however deeply grateful to your ladyship for thinking otherwise, and for giving me such substantial proofs that you entertain so favourable an opinion.'—'My dear Miss Murray,' observed Lady Caroline, 'I will do any thing I can to serve you; for I can well imagine how grateful must be the sympathy of a friend to one who is acquainted with sorrow!'—These words were uttered with almost a mournful emphasis, as if the fair speaker craved that sympathy and friendship for herself which she proffered to another;—and Julia could not help regarding her with mingled surprise, gratitude, and tender interest. They were alone together—that elegant patrician lady and that beautiful milliner,—the maid having retired; and it appeared as if a species of sisterly feeling suddenly sprang up between them, inspiring them with mutual confidence, and for the time annihilating the barrier that social distinctions had raised up between them in the eyes of the world. Thus was it that when Lady Caroline saw Julia's looks fixed upon her in so earnest and plaintive a manner she felt herself irre-

sistibly urged to respond to that tacit yet eloquent proffer of sympathy and affection. 'Ah! my dear Miss Murray,' she said, 'you must not imagine that unhappiness exists only with those who have to toil for their daily bread. Perhaps, indeed, their lot is preferable to that of the rich who have causes of grief;—for *you* have a constant occupation which allows little leisure for disagreeable reflection; whereas *I* have so much time——'.—Lady Caroline checked herself, turned away, and hastily passed a handkerchief across her face. She had perhaps said more than she intended: for, from speaking of the richer and poorer classes in general terms, she had been carried into personal illustration of the truth of her remarks by pointedly placing herself and Julia in juxta-position. Miss Murray, though totally devoid of artfulness, was yet endowed with an intellect keen enough to perceive this fact: and she now learnt, then—as indeed she had previously suspected—that Lady Caroline was unhappy. But it was not for her to invite a revelation of the fair patrician's cause of sorrow: she therefore remained silent.

"'Julia,' said her ladyship, suddenly turning towards her again, and taking her hand as she thus spoke,—'Julia,' she repeated, in an earnest, appealing tone, 'I will be a friend to you; but it may happen that I also shall require the aid and sympathy of a friend——'; and, once more checking herself, she sighed profoundly.—'I would serve you night and day, dear lady!' exclaimed the young milliner, pressing to her lips the hand which still grasped her own.—'I have not read your disposition inaccurately, dearest girl,' responded Lady Caroline: then, assuming a more cheerful tone, she said, 'Be it understood, we are friends! And now you must leave me, as my mother will be enquiring after me.'—Julia received a parcel containing a variety of costly stuffs, which she was to make up into dresses for her fair patroness, and which would furnish her with work for at least a month; and, as she was leaving the room, Lady Caroline said, 'My own maid will call upon you every Saturday evening and bring away whatever you may have finished, until the whole be complete.'—They then separated, Lady Caroline pressing Julia's hand warmly at parting; and the young dressmaker hurried homeward, her heart beating with joy at the kindness which she had experienced and the friendship she had formed. 'After all,' she murmured to herself, as she ascended

the stair-case to her chamber, where little Harry was sitting up to await her return,—'after all, the adventure of the spoilt dress has proved a service, rather than an injury, to me: and perhaps,' she added,—but it was her heart, and not her lips, that now spoke,—'the affair of the gilt counter may likewise bring me good luck!'

"Julia now addressed herself to the work of which she had such profusion; and while she sate plying her needle, with little Harry playing about the room, she often thought of the handsome unknown. Every day, after the frugal dinner, she took her brother out to walk for an hour, that a little exercise and fresh air might benefit them both; and, of an evening, when she laid aside her work, she gave him instruction in many useful branches of education. During the day, too, he learnt his lessons; and never did she suffer him to go out alone into the streets—no, not even on the slightest errand. In fact, this excellent young woman took as much care of her little orphan brother as if she had been his parent, instead of his sister; and it was a charming as well as touching sight to behold them repairing to the parish church on a Sabbath-morning,—each attired with so much neatness, and yet in a plain and unobtrusive manner. Well, three weeks had passed since the interview between Julia and Lady Caroline; and on each Saturday evening her ladyship's maid called to receive and pay for the work that was finished. The domestic was sure to have some pretty present from her mistress for Julia, and a handsome toy—such as a transparent slate, or puzzle, or a miniature carpenter's tool-box—for Harry; and the grateful milliner sent back her kindest but most respectful regards to her good patroness. But during those three weeks she had neither seen nor heard any thing of the handsome stranger;—and yet, had he not promised that he would shortly call again? Wherefore should he call? Julia never paused to ask herself that question;—but she did sometimes admit, within the secret recesses of her own heart, that she thought it somewhat unkind he did not fulfil his promise, after the distress she had endured in consequence of the mistake he had made respecting the gilt counter. One day the landlady tapped at Julia's door; and, on being desired to enter, the good woman informed her that '*the gentleman in the cloak*,' was waiting in the parlour below. A blush instantly spread itself over Julia's cheeks; whereupon the landlady said in a low but impressive tone, 'you need not be ashamed of an honest attachment, Miss; and I know you are too good a girl to form any other. In fact, I told the gentleman what an excellent creature you were, and how well you behaved to your little brother.'—'You told him all *that*?' exclaimed Julia, looking up in a surprise mingled with secret pleasure, while the blush upon her beauteous countenance deepened.—'Certainly I did, Miss, replied the landlady: 'but not to-day. It was when he called on account of that unpleasant little affair, you know; and before he sent me up to fetch you down, he asked no end of questions about you; and he seemed so pleased when I told him that you were such a good, industrious young person, and so kind to your orphan brother; and how you kept yourself so quiet and respectable, having no acquaintances scarcely, and certainly no vistors except your lady-customers or their maids.'—'But the gentleman did not ask all those questions?' said Julia, in a hesitating manner and with a tremulous voice, while her heart palpitated with emotions of unknown pleasure.—'Indeed he did, Miss,' returned the landlady. 'But, dear me! now I think of it, he charged me not to tell you that he had asked any thing at all concerning you: and by the same token, he gave me a sovereign to hold my tongue in this respect; and therefore, Miss, you must not even *look* as if you knew a syllable of what occurred on that occasion. I am sure he is some great person in disguise; and I am also certain that he has fallen in love with you.'—Julia's countenance now became scarlet; and she was about to make a remonstrative reply, when little Harry, who began to grow impatient of so much mysterious whispering between his sister and the landlady, approached them, saying, 'Is any thing the matter, dear Julia?'—'Nothing, my darling boy,' was the cheerful reply: 'I shall return in a few minutes;'—and Julia hastened down stairs, the landlady remaining with Harry.

"Though the young maiden endeavoured to compose herself as much as possible, yet all that the landlady had told her rushed to her mind with renewed force and stronger significancy just as she crossed the threshold of the parlour and appeared in the presence of *the gentleman in the cloak*. He observed her confusion—noticed the blush that mantled on her cheeks—and, mistaking the cause said, as he took her hand, 'I am afraid, Miss Murray, that you consider it indiscreet for me thus to pay my respects to you; and indeed, that fear has prevented me from calling sooner.'—Julia started cast down her eyes, and made no reply; for in her artless innocence, it had never before struck her that, an evil construction might be placed upon the visits of the gentleman: but now the conviction that such was indeed the result to be apprehended, was forced—yes, painfully forced—upon her sensitive mind. The stranger read what was passing in her imagination; and if he were delighted to observe that the danger which he had specified was previously unsuspected by her ingenuous soul, he was not the less gratified to acquire the certainty that her pure thoughts were shocked by the idea of compromising her reputation.—'Fear not, Miss Murray,' he continued, again taking her hand; 'I should be the last person on the face of the earth to do you a wilful injury in any way. I have merely called, as in duty bound, to assure myself that you have perfectly recovered from the effects of the distressing ordeal through which you were compelled to pass in consequence of my carelessness. But innocence, Miss Murray,' he added, emphatically, 'will invariably triumph in the long run; and virtue will not ever languish unrewarded. Your exemplary conduct, Miss Murray, must sooner or later be adequately recompensed: your tenderness towards your orphan brother must ensure for you the esteem and respect of all liberal and honest persons. May I request, as a particular favour, that you will presently call on Mr. Richardson, the solicitor, in Berners Street, close by; as I know that he has some tidings, of rather an agreeable character, to impart to you.'—With these words, the stranger pressed the young maiden's hand, and respectfully took his leave of her.

"Julia hastened back to her own chamber, and related to the worthy, well-meaning, but garrulous landlady, every thing that *the gentleman in the cloak* had said to her. 'Ah! Miss,' cried the woman, 'I

seemed to have a fore-knowledge that something good was to happen to you; and now I am sure of it. But pray make haste and see what the lawyer wants with you.'—Julia did not require to be pressed upon this point: she herself was too anxious to solve this new mystery to permit any unnecessary delay to take place; and, having dressed little Harry in his Sunday apparel, she put on her best bonnet and shawl, and away the sister went with her little brother to the lawyer's. They entered an office in which there were a great many clerks, who all left off writing to turn round and have a look at the pretty young lady—for a lady did Julia really seem, as she actually was by birth, education, and manners;—but when she timidly mentioned her name, she found herself the object of the most respectful attention. The head clerk ushered her and her brother into a handsome apartment, where an elderly gentleman, with a benevolent countenance, was seated at a desk covered with papers; and the reception which he gave Julia Murray was more than courteous—it was cordial and, as it were, paternally kind. 'Sit down, young lady,' he said, handing her to a chair: 'and you, my little fellow, place yourself near your sister. And now, Miss Murray,' he continued, raising his large silver spectacles from his eyes to his forehead, 'I have some good news to communicate to you; and I am sure, after all I have heard of you, I am proud and happy to be the medium of conveying any thing agreeable to your ears.'—'You are very kind, sir,' murmured the young maiden, still in the deepest suspense.—'Did you ever hear your late father speak of any one who owed him a sum of money?' enquired the lawyer.—Julia reflected for a few moments, and then replied in the negative.—'Well, perhaps he did not mention his private affairs before you,' observed the lawyer; 'it is nevertheless a fact, that many years ago he advanced a certain sum to a friend who was in difficulties; but these embarrassments continued, ending in bankruptcy or something of the sort; and so your poor father lost the whole amount thus advanced. The friend went abroad; and he has latterly returned to England, a rich man—having retrieved his fortunes in a foreign clime. He made enquiries after your parents, and to his sorrow learnt that they were no more; but he could not succeed in tracing you out. At length he saw a report of a certain case in the newspaper, and ascertained that you were the young lady therein mentioned. His sorrow at the first appearance of the affair was only equalled by his joy when he beheld the result; for he has your interest deeply at heart. He has, however, been compelled to leave London in a great hurry;—but before he went away, he gave me certain instructions, which I have fulfilled with all possible despatch. The sum which he borrowed of your father, with compound interest, amounts to six hundred pounds; and this money I have laid out for you in the purchase of a neat little house, with good, serviceable furniture, in Camden Town. There is an excellent young gentlemen's school close by; and my client has paid a year in advance for Master Harry's tuition. He also intends that you shall be at no expense for the boy's education. Over and above all this, I am instructed to place these fifty pounds in your hands; and if my client has thus done more than his actual liability to your father required, it is simply as a recompense for the long delay which has occurred in refunding a loan so generously advanced and so vitally necessary to him at the time. Now, my dear young lady, I have no more to say, farther than that this card furnishes the address of your house, of which I likewise present you the key; and may this little gleam of good fortune encourage you to pursue the course which has hitherto won for you so much esteem, and which may yet lead you to the highest pinnacle of happiness and prosperity.'—With these words, the kind-hearted man shook Julia warmly by the hand; the young maiden endeavoured to express her heart-felt gratitude for the unexpected benefits thus showered upon her: but tears—tears of happiness flowed down her cheeks—and her bosom was so full of strange and conflicting emotions, that her powers of utterance were suspended. Even as she took up the bank notes, the key, and the card, and thrust them all together into her little silk bag, her hands trembled so that she could scarcely perform those simple acts; and when in a few minutes she found herself walking along the street, with little Harry by her side, she could not remember leaving the lawyer's office. She fancied that she had been giving way to some wild hallucination—some absurd delusion of the brain: but when she felt in her bag, *there* were the proofs of the reality!

"It was no easy task to make little Harry comprehend the altered nature of their circumstances. He could not conceive how his sister had possibly obtained a house of her own, and fancied that she was joking with him; for he had not been able to understand very much of what the lawyer had said to Julia. However, all doubts on the boy's part vanished, when he heard his sister explain to their landlady every thing that had taken place at Mr. Richardson's, and conclude by requesting that good woman to accompany her forthwith to Camden Town. This desire was complied with; and away they all three went in a cab to the address designated upon the card. In due time the vehicle drew up opposite a neat house forming one of a terrace recently built; and the little party entered the dwelling with the least possible delay. It was all new from top to bottom,—the furniture, which was substantial and good, was new likewise;—the hangings to the windows and the carpets had been selected with admirable taste in reference to the colour and pattern of the paper on the walls:—in fact, the abode was fitted up in the most comfortable manner! 'I congratulate you, my dear Miss Murray,' exclaimed her companion; 'and I am sure I am as delighted as yourself, although I shall lose you as a lodger. But you do not, then, think that it was *the gentleman in the cloak* who has done all this?'—'No,' answered Julia; 'that cannot be, because I am sure the gentleman you speak of never knew my father; and moreover the kind friend who has thus handsomely repaid the money my father lent him, has gone out of town.'—'Then how came *the gentleman in the cloak* to call and tell you, Miss, that the lawyer wished to see you?'—'Ah! I never thought of *that!*' exclaimed Julia. 'And yet,' she added, after a few moments' serious reflection, 'Mr. Richardson said that my father's debtor had found me out through the medium of the newspaper report; and this circumstance may have brought him and *the gentleman in the cloak* together.'—'True!' ejaculated the garrulous woman. 'Oh! what a sweet place this is, to be sure!'—'It is too good for me,' said Julia, in a mournful tone.

the first feelings of delight now yielding to sober reflection: 'the occupant of such a house as this requires a servant, and should possess a certain income; whereas I cannot afford the former, not possessing the latter.'—'Oh! Miss, are you blind to all the advantages now spread before your eyes?' demanded the woman. 'Here you are in your own house, rent free, and with fifty pounds in your pocket—Harry's schooling to be paid into the bargain! All your kind patronesses will give you as much work as you can possibly manage, now that they will see how you are getting on in the world; and the number of your customers must increase. Then you can have the assistance of one or two respectable young girls; and you will not only obtain a good living, but be able to save money.'—Julia saw the truth of these observations; and her heart was relieved from a heavy load.—'Besides,' said the talkative but well-meaning woman, 'it would seem like flying in the face of Providence not to be thankful for such bounties.'—'Yes,' ejaculated Julia, touched more profoundly by this remark than by the worldly reasoning previously advanced by her companion: 'I *do* sincerely and firmly believe that HE, who watches all our ways and knows all our steps, has taken compassion upon me and my darling brother; and I receive in thankfulness the blessings thus showered upon me!'—Thus speaking, the young maiden turned aside for a few moments; and heart-felt though short was the prayer which she breathed in silence to the Almighty Ruler of the Universe!

"On the following day Julia and her little brother removed to their new house. It would be vain to attempt to describe the joy and delight experienced by little Harry at this change, the more so inasmuch as there was a large piece of ground attached to the back part of the dwelling, where he could play when the weather was fine. Through the agency of her late landlady, a poor widow-woman, of middle age, steady habits, and great respectability, was recommended to Julia as servant or housekeeper; and thus commenced the economy of the little household. Julia's first care was to address a note to all her kind patronesses to acquaint them with her removal; and Lady Caroline Jerningham was not forgotten. Harry commenced his attendance at the neighbouring school, the master of which called upon Miss Murray and informed her that he had received from Mr. Richardson a year's payment in advance for the boy's tuition; and the preceptor being a kind, worthy man, Harry soon became a great favourite with him. Several weeks passed away; and it was astonishing how Julia's business increased. Carriages were constantly stopping at her door, the number of her patronesses rapidly augmenting; and, on enquiry, she usually found that the new recommendations emanated from Lady Caroline, who appeared, by these results, to be constantly thinking of her friend, the young milliner. In fact, Julia had so much work upon her hands that she was compelled to give a great portion out to respectable needlewomen in the neighbourhood; for she preferred this mode of fulfilling her engagements, rather than by taking assistants into the house.

"Four months had thus passed away; and during this interval Julia had never once seen *the gentleman in the cloak*; nor had she received a visit from her father's debtor, to whose honesty and generosity she owed so much. She called once upon Mr. Richardson to express a hope that the individual thus alluded to would give her an opportunity of thanking him personally; but the lawyer assured her and, as she thought, somewhat abruptly, that he had left the country on a long voyage; and she returned home, much vexed at the tidings she had received. One evening—it was a Saturday evening, and at about nine o'clock—a cab stopped at the door, and a double-knock immediately announced some visitor. It happened that the housekeeper was absent on a visit of two or three days to some relations in the country—the girl who had been temporarily hired to do her work, and who did not sleep in the house, had gone for the night—and Harry was in bed in his own little room adjoining his sister's bed-chamber up-stairs. Julia was accordingly compelled to answer the door herself; and her surprise was only equalled by her delight, when she found that her visitress was Lady Caroline Jerningham, who had arrived thus mysteriously in a common street-cab, which she had dismissed on alighting at her young friend's house. Miss Murray received her with the most sincere manifestations of joy, and conducted her into the parlour, where a cheerful fire was burning in the grate; for though it was now the month of April, yet the evenings had not entirely lost the chill of winter. You must remember that Julia had not seen Lady Caroline since that evening when the latter sent for her to the mansion in Hanover Square, and on which occasion they had exchanged vows of friendship. Nearly five months had passed since that date; and it struck Julia, as the light of the candles flashed upon the fair patrician's countenance, that she was much altered. Her face was pale and care-worn; and her eyes beamed not with their wonted fires. 'My dear Julia,' she said, seating herself near the fire, 'I had intended to call upon you long ago; but I have been ill and suffering, in mind and body. However,' she added, hastily, 'I have never once forgotten you; and I am delighted to find that your business has prospered so well.'—'I am under obligations to your ladyship which I can never repay,' exclaimed Julia, taking the patrician's hand, and conveying it to her lips.—'Do not address me in that formal style, Julia,' said Lady Caroline. 'My God!' she cried, bitterly, 'would that I were *not* of noble birth: would that I were a daughter of toil; for *then* I should not have the thousand Argus-eyes of *the world* upon me!'—and she clasped her hands in a manner indicative of deep mental anguish.—'Dearest Lady Caroline,' exclaimed Julia, 'what ails you? Oh! tell me, and show me how I may minister to you in your sufferings!'—'You once assured me, Julia, *that you would serve me by day and by night*,' said Lady Caroline, speaking in a low and almost hollow tone, and casting anxious glances around as if she were afraid of being overheard.—'Yes, dearest lady,' returned Julia, emphatically; 'and I renew that pledge! By day and by night can you command me.'—'Are we in danger of intrusion?' demanded Lady Caroline anxiously.—'Not in the least, dear lady: excepting my little brother, who is asleep in his own chamber, we are alone in the house.'—'Heaven be thanked!' ejaculated Caroline Jerningham, speaking as if at least some portion of the heavy weight that lay upon her heart, were removed by this assurance.—'My generous friend,' said Julia, 'I see that you have a terrible but secret cause of grief: make me

your confidant, I implore you! If I can aid you, I shall rejoice indeed to have the opportunity of proving my gratitude for all the kindness I have received at your hands; and if I cannot assist, I may at least be able to console you!'—'Dearest Julia, I do indeed require a friend at this moment; for surely never was wretched woman in such dreadful embarrassment as myself! For the last few weeks I have lived only like one distracted—keeping my chamber, and affecting an illness, though steadily refusing to receive the advice of the family physician! And now, fortunately my mother has gone on a visit for a few days to some friends in the country; and my own maid is in my confidence and is trustworthy. Thus my absence from home will not be suspected; and in this is now my only hope! O Julia, Julia—can you not understand my meaning?'—then, casting herself at the feet of the young milliner, the almost heart-broken Lady Caroline exclaimed, in the wildest paroxysm of bitter, bitter grief, as she joined her hands imploringly, 'Save my honour, Julia—save my reputation,—and by so doing you save my life: for I would perish by my own hand rather than endure exposure!'—'My God! dearest lady, what do you mean?' demanded Julia, fearful lest her friend's senses were leaving her, and that she was uttering meaningless phrases in the incipient aberration of the intellect: 'tell me, how can I save you in any way? for you know that you may depend upon me to the utmost!'—'How can you save me!' repeated the agonising young lady, in a voice of the most plaintive appeal: 'Oh! do you not comprehend my condition, Julia? And yet I am about to become a mother!'

"These words fell with stupefying, astounding effect upon the ears of Julia Murray: indeed, she could scarcely believe that she had rightly interpreted their meaning. The unhappy Caroline mistook the cause of the young milliner's silence and amazement; and, rising from her suppliant posture, she exclaimed, while the proud patrician blood rushed to her cheeks, 'I understand you, Miss: you are shocked at the announcement I have made, and you are indignant that I should apply to you to screen me. I will drag myself away from your house, therefore; imploring you only to keep the secret which I have been so foolish, so inconsiderate to reveal to you.'—'Just heaven! what do I hear? reproaches from your lips!' cried Julia; and embracing the unhappy lady with sisterly warmth, she said, 'No, no: you have misunderstood me! Grief and surprise for a moment sealed my lips: but you find me ready to succour you, dearest benefactress, to the utmost of my power!'—'Thank you, kind friend,' murmured Lady Caroline, falling back exhausted into her seat; for the agitated state of her feelings, and the harrowing emotions which the dread of Julia's coldness had just caused her to experience, produced effects of a most perilous nature. The young milliner knew not how to act: she was bewildered; and, wringing her hands, exclaimed, 'Oh! what shall I do? how can I aid her?'—Lady Caroline partially recovered her presence of mind as these words fell upon her ears; and giving a few hasty instructions, these were instantly obeyed. Julia conducted, or rather supported her to her own bed-chamber; and then, throwing on her bonnet and shawl, hurried away to fetch the nearest surgeon. The medical man whom she sought was at home; and he accompanied the milliner to the house, where he arrived just at the moment that his services were required. In a word, Lady Caroline Jerningham that night became the mother of a fine boy, although the birth was premature by nearly a month, and she had risked much by the necessity of adopting the indispensable means in regard to dress to conceal her situation for many weeks past.

"The surgeon, who had every reason to be satisfied with the liberality of Julia on behalf of her unhappy friend, and who was moreover a discreet man, perceived that his patient was a young lady of superior grade in society, and therefore volunteered his aid in ensuring the concealment of the affair. In fact, he stated that he was acquainted with a poor woman in the neighbourhood, who, having just lost her own infant, would be delighted to take charge of the newly-born babe. Lady Caroline was so far recovered as to be able to take part in this conference; and, without suffering the slightest hint to transpire as to who she was, she nevertheless intimated her readiness and ability to remunerate in the most liberal manner those who might be instrumental in completing the arrangement suggested. The surgeon accordingly undertook the settlement of the business; and, after an hour's absence, he returned, accompanied by a young, good-looking, healthy woman, who was willing to embrace the proposal that had been made to her. She was married to a labouring man; her name was Porter; and she lived at the distance of about half a mile from Julia's house. Lady Caroline had a well-filled purse; but even if the contrary had been the case, her friend the milliner could have supplied the funds required. As it was, the young mother gave Mrs. Porter twenty pounds in advance; and having mentioned a feigned name and address, when questioned on that point, Lady Caroline parted with her babe—though not without many a bitter pang and a torrent of heart-wrung tears!

"That was a wretched night for poor Julia Murray. In the warmth of her gratitude and friendship, she had become an accomplice in what she fancied, when she had leisure for sober reflection, to be something bordering upon the nature of a crime. Her pure soul shrank from the idea of the unnatural abandonment by a mother of her child to the mercy of a stranger, rendered necessary even though the proceeding were by the peculiar circumstances in which that mother was placed. Moreover, the readiness with which Lady Caroline had given a false name and address had somewhat shocked the truth-loving Julia;—and then she feared lest the whole matter should by any possibility become known, and compromise her own reputation. All these thoughts and apprehensions swept across her mind, after the surgeon and Mrs. Porter had taken their departure, and while Lady Caroline slept. But the generous girl strove to banish from her mind reflections which tended to diminish her respect for the patrician lady who had manifested so much kindness towards her: moreover, the natural feelings of a woman towards one of her own sex placed in such interesting though embarrassing, not to say *alarming* circumstances,—the sentiments of commiseration, deep sympathy, and tender friendship, soon triumphed over all other considerations;—and when Caroline awoke, just as the grey dawn of morning was breaking into the chamber, she found the young milliner watching by

her bedside. The suffering lady was considerably refreshed and strengthened by the long sleep she had enjoyed: her mind was moreover relieved from the most excruciating anxieties:—and she poured forth her gratitude to Julia Murray in the most sincere and heartfelt manner. Then, in the fulness of the tender confidence which had arisen between them, Caroline told her friend how she had loved her cousin, a young lieutenant in the Navy,—how their union was forbidden by her proud mother, though assented to by her generous brother, the Marquis of Wilmington,—how her mother had used her interest privately to get the young man appointed to a ship and sent to sea with only a few days' warning,—and how, in the anguish of parting, she—Lady Caroline—had fallen a victim to her fatal passion! This narrative moved Julia to tears;—for the young milliner now comprehended what love was—and she felt that she also loved,—and that when she sorrowed in secret at the protracted absence of the stranger who had given her the gilt counter, it was in consequence of the impression which he had made upon her heart! Thus did Julia Murray at length obtain the reading of the mysterious sensations that stirred within her own soul.

"Fortunately there was a means of egress from little Harry's room, without the necessity of the boy's passing through his sister's chamber; and thus was the presence of Lady Caroline retained a profound secret from him. You must also recollect that the incidents just related occurred on the Saturday night; and Harry had by chance received an invitation to pass the Sunday with his schoolmaster's family. Every circumstance thus appeared to favour the complete concealment of Lady Caroline's confinement. But it was now necessary that Julia should repair to the mansion in Hanover Square, and acquaint the young lady's confidential maid with the event which had taken place, as well as to arrange for Caroline's unobserved return home on the Monday evening;—for though at the risk of her life, she was resolved to remain away no longer than the time specified. This commission Julia faithfully performed; and after an absence of upwards of two hours, she reached her own abode once more. The patient was improving rapidly; and when the surgeon called a second time on that Sunday, he was astonished to find her so strong and in the possession of so much physical and moral energy. To be brief, on the Monday evening, according to agreement, Lady Caroline, well wrapped up, disguised in the attire of a daughter of the middle class, and with a dark green veil drawn carefully over her countenance, accompanied Julia in a hackney-coach to Hanover Square; and the two were admitted into the mansion, the hall-porter believing his young mistress to be a friend and equal of the milliner. In this manner they reached Caroline's own chamber without the truth being for an instant suspected; and the confidential maid was in readiness to receive her lady. Julia remained there until the maid had ascertained that the hall-porter had been relieved by another domestic during the supper-hour; and then the milliner took her departure, accompanied by the fervent gratitude and blessings of the fair patrician whom she had thus extricated from a maze of the most frightful difficulties.

"The very next morning, while Julia was seated at work in her parlour, reflecting upon the incidents of the three preceding days, she heard the iron gate in front of the house groan upon its hinges; and, looking up, she beheld from the window the tall, handsome gentleman approaching the door. The day was fine; and he no longer wore his cloak;—and his garb was plain, unpretending, and perfectly genteel. The housekeeper having returned home that same morning, Julia awaited with a beating heart in the parlour the presence of her visitor; and when he entered, she felt so confused—for a variety of reasons—that she could not utter a word. In the first place she knew that she loved him;—secondly she remembered all the enquiries he had put to her late landlady concerning her;—and thirdly, she recalled to mind the gentle, good, and almost paternal way in which he had addressed her when last they met; and she fancied that in her conduct respecting Lady Caroline she had deviated somewhat from the strict line of integrity, truth, and virtue for pursuing which he had so emphatically commended her, and in which he had with equal earnestness enjoined her to persevere. Taking her hand, he said, 'Miss Murray, have you completely forgotten me?'—'Oh! no, sir,' she cried, with a start as if at an imputation of ingratitude: 'that were impossible!'—'And yet why should you remember me?' he asked, gazing intently upon her 'have I ever done you any service that deserves a thought? The only incident which is likely to dwell in your mind respecting me, is the wretchedness and embarrassment to which my thoughtless conduct exposed you. But for all that you then endured, have I ever made you the slightest recompense?'—'Oh! sir,' cried Julia, the blood rushing to her cheeks, 'do you think for a moment that I ever sought or looked for a pecuniary indemnification? Heavens, how have you mistaken my character!'—and she burst into tears. The stranger gazed upon her, and even smiled as if in satisfaction but he said nothing.—'No, sir,' resumed the young milliner, hastily passing her handkerchief across her countenance and wiping away the traces of her grief; 'I am not a mercenary person, such as you appear to suppose me. I *did* remember you *with gratitude*,' she continued, her voice becoming mournful and plaintive in spite of herself; 'because you spoke kindly to me on that evening when the accident occurred to the silk dress—because you proffered me assistance at a moment when I and my little brother really needed it—because I always believed and still believe that it was on your part entirely an error which led me into such a serious difficulty—because you *then* told me that you would not insult me by offering me any pecuniary recompense—and because, when you called again, you spoke kindly to me as before, gave me good advice, and also brought me intelligence from Mr. Richardson, which has led to my present prosperity. For all these reasons, sir,' she added emphatically, 'I have thought of you often and often; and I considered myself to be deeply your debtor.'—'Excellent girl!' exclaimed the gentleman, surveying her with mingled admiration and interest: 'not for worlds would I insult your feelings, nor wound your generous heart! And it was precisely through delicacy in those respects, that I never did openly proffer you any pecuniary assistance, since that one unfortunate occasion in Hanover Square. Again, let me observe, that if I have not visited you for

four long months, I have not been unmindful of your welfare. I have, as it were, watched over you from a distance; and I have learnt with supreme satisfaction, that your conduct *has* continued most exemplary. Miss Murray, I am perhaps singular and eccentric in my notions; and, though highly placed in the social sphere, yet I have determined to consult only my own happiness, at least for the future, in the most important step which a man can adopt in life. I allude to marriage.'—Julia started, blushed, and cast down her eyes; and this confusion on her part seemed to encourage her visitor to proceed.—'I must candidly inform you,' he resumed, that I have been a husband already, and that the alliance which I formed almost in my boyhood, and in obedience to the dictates of an imperious mother, was an unhappy one. My wife was a heartless coquette—vain—frivolous—and possessing no *mind*. I sought by gentleness and kindness to render her attached to her home, although I never really loved her; but all was useless. At last she caught a severe cold when returning from a rout, early on a winter's morning; and a rapid decline soon carried her to the tomb. This occurred two years ago. I then vowed that if I should ever contract a second union, it must be where the heart alone was interested. This resolve I declared to my mother; and it has in a measure, I regret to say it, incensed her against me. The very first time I ever saw you, I felt myself suddenly and mysteriously attracted towards you. All that I have since heard or seen of you has tended to confirm that favourable impression; and I am come this morning to offer you my hand, as you already possess my heart.'

"A faintness—an indescribable sensation of mingled joy and apprehension came over Julia, as these last words met her ears,—joy in the hope that she had heard aright, apprehension lest she were the prey of a delightful vision which was too soon to be dissipated. But when she felt her hand pressed to the lips of that handsome suitor who now knelt at her feet, and listened to the tender assurances of an honourable and lasting affection which he breathed with manly sincerity in her ears, she exclaimed, under the sudden impulse of her heart's emotions, Is it possible that so much happiness can be in store for me?'—Her suitor received those words as an assent to his proposal; and, pressing the young maiden to his bosom, he said, 'Then without knowing my name you have loved me, dearest Julia?'—She murmured an affirmative; and a rapid interchange of questions and replies convinced him that the young maiden had all along remembered him not *with gratitude*, but *with affection!* Thereupon, seating himself by her side, and retaining her pretty hand in his, he said, 'Then henceforth, Julia, there need exist no mystery on my part. I am the pretended debtor to your deceased father; and Mr. Richardson, my own attorney, followed my secret instructions in providing for yourself and your brother. My object was to place you in comfort, yet still leave you in a condition that rendered you to a certain degree dependant on your own honest industry; and I have been overjoyed to find that prosperity has not induced you to relax your energies, nor led you into extravagances, nor in any way proved injurious to your fair fame, your amiable disposition, and your steady perseverance. With delight, then, shall I accompany so worthy a woman to the altar; and with pride shall I present you to the world as the Marchioness of Wilmington!'—'Oh! my lord,' murmured Julia, a greater faintness than before now coming over her, as the lofty rank of her suitor was thus announced to her, 'is it possible that you can be the brother of that young lady to whom I owe so much?'—and then she blushed deeply, and a cold shudder passed over her frame as she remembered what a tremendous secret she had retained in her bosom, and must retain inviolably concerning the sister of him who offered to make her the partner of his rank and fortune.—'Yes,' said the marquis, attributing her emotions to the happiness as well as the maidenly confusion which it was natural for her to experience under existing circumstances; 'that Lady Caroline whom you know, is my sister. You may judge my surprise when, on the night that I first encountered you in Hanover Square, you informed me that the spoilt dress was my mother's. The very next morning I called at her residence and privately acquainted Caroline with the little adventure, casually saying that I had been a witness of the accident which was occasioned through no neglect nor carelessness on your part, and desiring her when you presented yourself to mitigate as much as possible my mother's certain resentment against you. Since that period my sister has frequently spoken to me concerning you, and has recommended you extensively to her numerous fashionable acquaintances. But, much as I love and would trust Lady Caroline, I have never informed her of the attachment I experienced for you, nor of the fact that I was your father's pretended debtor. This reserve originated merely in the determination to watch your conduct,—I may tell you all this now, dear girl,—from a distance, so that time might decide whether I should lay my coronet at your feet, or renounce all farther idea of an alliance with you. Thank heaven! the former is the happy destiny; and now I have explained all that may have seemed strange or mysterious in your estimation.'

"Julia could scarcely find words to express her gratitude for all the delicate attentions and generous acts of which the nobleman had thus been the hitherto unknown author: but he sealed her lips with a fond kiss, and then proceeded to address her in the following manner:—'I propose, dearest girl, that our union shall take place in six months from the present time. The reason that I suggest so long a delay is that I may visit you occasionally, in company with my sister, be it understood, so that you may learn to know me better than you now do; and as I shall at once make a confidant of Caroline, and am well acquainted with the generosity of her disposition, you need not apprehend any coolness or hostility on her part. Quite the contrary: she will love you as a sister. Ah! I observe that you sigh and experience an agitation of feeling, my Julia; but you have no cause to dread any exhibition of foolish pride with Caroline. Relative to my mother, I say nothing—promise nothing: at the same time I cannot permit her will to rule my happiness. And now I shall take my leave of you for the present, Julia, and I shall at once hasten to Hanover Square, to confide all that has occurred between us to my sister, who, I regret to state, has been confined for some days past to her own chamber. Alas! she, poor girl, has suffered in her best and holiest affections through her mother's pride; but I rejoice to say that happiness awaits her yet. By the sudden death of a young cousin, Lieutenant Quentin has become

Lord Hartley, and his ship will return in a few months to England. This most unexpected succession to title and wealth, will smooth down all the difficulties which my mother has hitherto interposed in the way of her daughter's happiness; and who knows, Julia,' added the marquis, smiling, 'but that the two marriages may be celebrated at the same time?'—'God grant that they may!' exclaimed the young milliner, with a strange emphasis; then, immediately afterwards she observed, 'For, believe me, I have your sister's happiness most sincerely at heart.'—'I shall not fail to tell Caroline all you say,' returned the marquis; 'and she will be prepared to love you the more tenderly. And now, dear Julia,' he added, rising to depart, 'I must bid you farewell for the present. The next time I call I shall give you due notice beforehand, so that you may have little Harry here to see me. But permit me, before I depart, to request you to divest yourself by degrees of the business and occupations which have accumulated upon you. To speak plainly, you need receive no more work from any person; and you will permit my solicitor, Mr. Richardson, to supply you monthly with such sums as you may require for your expenditure.'—All this was said by Lord Wilmington in so delicate yet tender a manner, that it increased Julia's attachment to him, as well as her high esteem of his character; and they parted, more than ever pleased with each other.

"In the afternoon, Julia was sitting at her work, pondering upon all that had occurred, and scarcely able yet to convince herself that she was not a prey to some delusive vision, when Lady Caroline's maid called with a note from her mistress. In this *billet* the fair patrician said, '*My brother has told me all, dearest Julia; and believe me when I assure you, that it will afford me unfeigned delight to hail you as a sister. Never, never can I forget all your goodness towards me in the hour of my bitter extremity. But, for heaven's sake! guard well my secret! This injunction, however, I need scarcely give you. And yet, there is one thing which now affects me; this is*—— *shall you not blush to acknowledge* ME *as your sister-in-law, since you are acquainted with my disgrace? My heart tells me that you commiserate and sympathize: but my fears—Oh! until I receive from you an assurance that may calm them—those fears are truly painful!*'—The generous Julia hastened to pen a reply, conveying in the tenderest terms the assurance solicited; and, having ascertained that the young lady was progressing rapidly towards complete convalescence, she dismissed the maid with the letter entrusted to her. Three weeks, however, elapsed before Lady Caroline was sufficiently recovered to call upon her friend Julia; and then she came alone—for her mother's heart yearned to visit her child. Under the influence of this feeling, she was moved to tears when she learnt that every alternate day Miss Murray had made it a point to call at Mrs. Porter's residence and assure herself that the poor babe was duly cared for. 'This is another proof of your goodness, Julia!' exclaimed Lady Caroline, falling upon her friend's neck and weeping with mingled gratitude and joy. They presently proceeded together to the good woman's abode; and the young mother was charmed to find her child thriving to her heart's best satisfaction. On the following day Lady Caroline revisited Julia; but this time it was in company with her brother the Marquis;—and little Harry was at home to see them. You may suppose that the party was a happy one; and it gave the nobleman ineffable delight to observe that his sister and his intended wife were on the best possible terms with each other. But he little suspected the tremendous secret that had thus cemented their friendship;—and it cost poor Julia many a pang when she reflected that she was compelled to retain any secret at all from the knowledge of the generous man who reposed such confidence in her! There was however no help for it;—and yet Julia felt as if she were acting with blameable duplicity in veiling a circumstance which for her friend's sake, she would nevertheless rather die than reveal: and after her noble visitors had taken their departure, she did not experience that amount of happiness which, with her present brilliant prospects, she knew she ought to enjoy.

"I must not dwell upon this portion of my narrative. Let us suppose five months to have passed away; during which period the marquis had been constant in his visits to Julia, but always in the company of his sister. So delicate was his behaviour in respect to the reputation of his intended bride, that he avoided every chance of compromising her; and although the neighbours saw a gentleman, whose name they did not know, call three times a-week upon the beautiful milliner, they never beheld him repair thither alone. Thus there was no scope for scandal; and Julia's conduct was always so circumspect as to prove a complete antidote to calumny. I should observe that during the five months mentioned, the attachment subsisting between the pair increased, and warmed into the most ardent love; and I must not forget to state that Lady Caroline visited her child at Mrs. Porter's house as frequently as she was able. But Julia seldom failed to call there every alternate day; and thus the rearing of the poor infant was strictly watched by its mother, and that mother's bosom friend. Sometimes Harry accompanied his sister in her walk to Mrs. Porter's cottage; but the little fellow was always made to wait in one room while Julia was shown the baby in another—and thus the real motive of her visits there was unsuspected by him. Not that she feared he would reveal any thing which he was enjoined to keep secret; but Julia believed—and rightly believed—that it was alike more prudent and delicate to leave him in total ignorance of the object which took her to the cottage. Thus time wore on, as I have already mentioned; and now I must remark that in compliance with the wishes of Lord Wilmington, Julia had by this time altogether ceased to receive work; but instead of drawing on the funds placed at her disposal in the hands of Mr. Richardson, she subsisted upon the savings which she had been enabled to accumulate. I mention all these little circumstances, to afford you as good an idea as I can convey of the excellence of her disposition, and the total absence of selfishness from her character. In fact, the more the marquis saw of her, the more enamoured of her did he become, and the greater grew his admiration of her amiable qualities. It was therefore with joy the most unfeigned that he at length considered himself justified in fixing the day for the bridal; and this ceremony was settled to take place precisely on the completion of the six months from the hour in which he had offered her his hand.

"While Julia was occupied in preparing her own wedding-dress, the Marquis busied himself in rendor

ing his splendid mansion in Belgrave Square as suitable as possible for the reception of his bride. In the meantime he had communicated to the Dowager-Marchioness his intended marriage; but, as he had feared, his design experienced the most decided disapproval on her part. Vainly did he reason with her on the subject—uselessly did he represent that his happiness was seriously involved: his mother refused to listen to him;—and he had the mortification to incur her most serious displeasure. The bitterness of her hostility to the match he however concealed from Julia; and, much as he deplored the breach which now existed between himself and his only surviving parent, not for a moment did he entertain the thought of yielding to her tyranny. Thus the time passed on; and it was now within three days of the one fixed for the bridal ceremony, when an incident occurred which produced a terrible change in the aspect of affairs.

"It was a fine summer morning, and the clock was striking eight just as Julia and little Harry were sitting down to breakfast, when the old housekeeper entered to inform her mistress that a woman by the name of Porter desired to speak to her without delay;—for you must remember that the housekeeper was entirely ignorant of the transaction which so nearly concerned Lady Caroline Jerningham, and to some extent involved Miss Murray, at least as an accessory, in the mysterious business. Mrs. Porter was instantly admitted into the parlour; and when she appeared, and the housekeeper had retired, Julia approached her in an agitated manner and with an enquiring look,—for it struck her that this visit—the first which the woman had ever paid to the house since that night when the infant was entrusted to her—augured something unpleasant. In her excitement she forgot the presence of her brother Harry—whom the woman herself likewise overlooked; and, to the anxious glance darted upon her, Mrs. Porter verbally replied by exclaiming, 'Oh! Miss, the dear child has been suddenly taken dangerously ill!'—'The child dangerously ill!' repeated Julia, who had learned to love the infant almost as much as if it were her own: 'I will accompany you directly;' and, hurrying from the room, she presently reappeared with her bonnet and shawl. Then, noticing Harry, it flashed to her mind that he had overheard what had been said: but a second thought told her that more harm would be done by attempting to explain away any impression that might have been made upon his mind, than by leaving the matter as it then stood;—and, having merely observed

to him that she should return shortly, Julia hastened away in company with Mrs. Porter. Harry finished his breakfast, not thinking much of the few words which had caught his ears, but which he could not rightly understand; and, as it was holiday-time, he was about to repair to play in the garden at the back of the house, when a double knock at the front door made him hasten to the window. Perceiving that the visitor was the Marquis, he ran to give him admittance; and the nobleman entered the parlour. 'Where is your sister, Harry?" he asked, caressing the boy in a kind manner.—'She is gone out, my lord,' was the reply.—'Thus early!' exclaimed the Marquis; 'and I had promised myself the pleasure of breakfasting with you both. The morning was so fine, and as I am a very early riser, I rode out as far as the turnpike, and have sent my horse back with the groom.'—The nobleman spoke this rather in a musing tone, than actually addressing himself to the boy; and, after a pause, he observed, 'I suppose your sister will not be long?'—'I do not know, my lord,' answered Harry. 'A woman came just as we were sitting down to breakfast, and Julia seemed much vexed at what she told her.'—'I hope that nothing disagreeable has occurred?' cried the Marquis, in a tone of alarm.—'The woman, whose name is Porter, informed Julia that the child was dangerously ill,' responded Harry; 'and then they went away together.'—'Oh! I understand,' said the Marquis: 'the child of some poor woman named Porter is unwell, and your sister has gone to see it.'—'No, my lord, I don't think the child is Mrs. Porter's,' returned Harry, ingenuously, and with boyish communicativeness; 'for I have often called at her cottage with Julia, and I have heard Mr. Porter say that his wife's own baby died last winter.'—'And Julia has often called there?' exclaimed the Marquis, a horrible suspicion suddenly arising in his mind.—'Very often indeed,' answered Harry, totally unconscious of the tremendous amount of mischief he was occasioning. 'When we have been out walking together, we have come round that way, and stopped at the cottage; and then I have waited in the kitchen with Mr. Porter, who used to give me cakes or marbles, while Julia went up stairs with Mrs. Porter.'—'And did you ever see the child?' asked the nobleman, assuming as much composure as he could possibly call to his aid.—'No; Julia never told me a word about it.'—'And how did you first hear of it?'—'Just now, when Mrs. Porter rushed in and said that the child was ill.'—'And was Julia very, very sorry?' demanded the Marquis.—'Oh! yes, indeed!' cried the boy, who saw nothing strange nor unusual in the nobleman's tone or manner, and regarded this dialogue as mere chit-chat.—'And whereabout is Mrs. Porter's cottage?' asked Wilmington, in whose bosom a perfect hell was now raging.—'Shall I show your lordship the way?' said Harry. The nobleman nodded his head affirmatively; and the little fellow hastened to fetch his cap. They then proceeded in silence until they came within sight of the cottage, which Harry pointed out.—'You may now go home again,' said the Marquis; and Harry obeyed the hint, still totally unsuspicious of the harm which his candid garrulity had accomplished.

"The nobleman, when thus left alone, could no longer restrain the emotions which agitated within him. Turning aside from the path leading towards the cottage, he rushed into the fields, exclaiming aloud, 'Just heavens! on what an abyss was I hovering! But can such diabolical perfidy exist on the part of one so young? Oh! yes—it is too apparent; and my mother was right when she counselled me never to bestow my hand on a woman moving in a sphere beneath my own!'—Having thus given vent to his excited feelings, Wilmington grew more composed; and he now approached the cottage. The door stood open; and, entering without any ceremony, he saw a woman at the same instant descend from a staircase. 'Is your name Porter?' he enquired, speaking in as mild a tone as possible.—'Yes, sir,' she answered.—'And it is here that a child who has been, as it were, abandoned by its unnatural mother, is lying dangerously ill?' he said, fixing his eyes keenly upon the woman's countenance.—'Thank God, the dear innocent is better!' exclaimed Mrs. Porter, taken completely off her guard, and even entertaining a suspicion that the gentleman himself might be the father of her nursling.—'Now, confess every thing,' cried the Marquis, 'or it will be the worse for you! Was it not Miss Murray who engaged your services——'.—'No, sir: it was the surgeon who attended the lady in her confinement,' interrupted Mrs. Porter, terrified by the stern tone which her querist had suddenly adopted; 'but it was at Miss Murray's house——'.—'Enough! enough!' ejaculated Wilmington; and he hurried away from the cottage.

"In the meantime Julia had returned home, having assured herself that the child was out of danger; and as she retraced her way by means of a bye-path, it happened that she did not encounter her brother and the marquis. But little Harry was light of foot; and he, having been dismissed by the nobleman in the way above stated, reached the front door at the same instant as his sister. She was surprised to find that he had been out—still more so when she learnt that Lord Wilmington had called so early. But a frightful sensation seized upon her, when Harry ingenuously observed that the nobleman had taken him to lead the way to the cottage. Subduing her emotions, however, as well as she could, she proceeded to question her brother; and in a short time she ascertained all that had passed between him and the Marquis. Each answer that he gave—each detail that he mentioned, increased the horrible fears which now oppressed her; and, at last—comprehending the full extent of her misfortune,—perceiving the nature of the suspicions which were sure to have seized upon her intended husband,—she uttered a piercing cry, pressed her hands in anguish to her throbbing brow, and exclaimed in a piercing tone, 'Oh! Harry, Harry, you know not what you have done!'—The boy was frightened; and, darting towards his sister, he threw his arms around her neck, imploring her to forgive him if he had acted improperly. Even in the midst of her bitter, bitter anguish, she could not find it in her heart to continue angry with her little brother, who had not wantonly nor wickedly inflicted this appalling injury upon her; and, assuming an appearance of calmness, she became the consoler. In the depth of misery there is a crisis that makes even despair the immediate precursor of hope; and Julia began to reason to herself that all might not be so dark as she had feared. But while she was thus endeavouring to persuade her inmost soul to render itself accessible to consolation, a note was put into her hand by the housekeeper. She glanced at the address which was hurriedly—almost illegibly written, and the ink of which was scarcely dry,—so that she knew it had been penned somewhere in the neighbourhood. With trembling hands she tore it open; and her strength and mental energy sustained

her sufficiently to permit the entire perusal of the letter. Its contents ran thus:—'*I have discovered your frailty, your guilt, your hypocrisy, just in time to save myself from an alliance which would have brought dishonour on my name, and heaped endless miseries on my head. I shall not attempt to reproach you at any length for your conduct towards me: my generous confidence has been met by the blackest duplicity—the most diabolical ingratitude; and your conscience will punish you more—oh! far more severely than any words that I may address to you. Neither shall I adopt the mean and petty revenge of exposing you: but if you ever dare to boast that you were once engaged to be married to the Marquis of Wilmington, then shall I consider that it would be a sin to spare you.*

"The letter dropped from Julia's hand; and, with a wild shriek, she fell senseless on the floor. The housekeeper administered restoratives, while little Harry, who was himself a prey to the liveliest grief he had ever yet known, hurried to fetch the surgeon. It was the same medical man who had attended upon Lady Caroline Jerningham; and he was prompt in repairing to a house where his former services had been so liberally rewarded. Julia had somewhat recovered in the meantime; but he pronounced her to be in a dangerous state—and, indeed, she seemed quite unconscious of every thing that was passing around her. She was conveyed to her chamber,—medicine was prescribed,—and the surgeon recommended the housekeeper not to leave her mistress alone more than was absolutely necessary, inasmuch as he feared that her brain was affected. Little Harry was inconsolable at his sister's illness—the more especially that he reproached himself with having been the cause of it all; though how he had done the harm he could not by any means understand. Seated by Julia's bed-side, he fixed his tearful eyes on her pale countenance, as she slumbered uneasily; and when hours had passed, and evening came, and still she awoke not, he was afraid that she was dead. The housekeeper, however, assured him to the contrary; and then he bent softly over his sister, to whom the surgeon had administered an opiate, and gently kissed her lips. She murmured a name—it was his own name—and opened her eyes. Complete consciousness returned in a few minutes; and as she rapidly surveyed her misfortune and calculated its extent, she shuddered at the idea of even attempting to meet it with resignation. But for that little brother's sake—the sake of him whom she had found bending over her, and whose name was the first that her lips breathed on her waking,—for *his* sake she nerved herself to wage war with the world once more. Though a word of explanation—the mere revelation of Lady Caroline's secret would at once restore her to that position so full of hope which she had occupied in the morning,—still her generous heart would not allow her to betray her friend. No: she would sooner pine away and go down to an early grave, heart-broken and spirit-crushed, than proclaim to the Marquis the secret of his noble sister's dishonour!

"It was about seven o'clock in the evening of this dreadful day that a hasty and impatient double-knock at the front door was heard; and a few moments afterwards Lady Caroline Jerningham was ushered into the chamber where Julia was lying. The moment she entered, the patient made a signal for the housekeeper and little Harry to withdraw; and when the two friends were alone together, a most affecting scene took place. It appeared that the marquis had that afternoon written a letter to his sister, of which the following were the enigmatical contents:—'*I am almost heart-broken, my dearest Caroline, and cannot see you at present. I shall retire into the country for a few weeks—perhaps months—to hide my grief from every eye, and endeavour to regain somewhat of that mental composure which has been almost completely wrecked this day. Julia is unworthy of my love and of your friendship: what the proof of this may be, ask not—seek not to learn;—but I charge you to visit her no more. Your afflicted brother,*' &c.—On the receipt of this note, Lady Caroline, who could not help suspecting that this suddenly wrought change in the sentiments of the Marquis arose from some fearful misunderstanding or some partial discovery respecting the child, had hastened, almost distracted and a prey to intolerable suspense, to Julia's abode; and there she was shocked to find her generous-hearted friend stretched upon a bed of sickness. Embracing each other affectionately, they gave mutual explanations; and Lady Caroline perceived that her worst fears were confirmed. The Marquis had indeed made a discovery relative to the infant; but he was deceived with regard to its maternity. And now who can describe the admiration which Lady Caroline experienced for the character of her friend, when she learnt that the poor girl would rather lie under the dread suspicion of the Marquis—rather resign all her brilliant prospects, and see her heart's fondest affections blighted,—rather, in fact, resign herself to immolation than betray her whose secret she deemed so sacred!

"'No—no!' exclaimed the fair patrician, throwing herself upon Julia's bosom, and weeping plenteously; 'this may not be! Never can I permit you, noble-hearted girl, to endure infamy, reproach, and wretchedness for my sake! I will at once follow my brother into the country, throw myself at his feet, confess all, and bring him back to you!'—'And then what will become of *you*, Caroline?' asked Julia, mingling her tears with those of her friend.'—'Oh! I shall retire from the world, and bury myself, with my innocent babe, in some solitude—in some far-off village, perhaps, where, under a feigned name, I may escape the world's scorn for this fatal weakness which has caused so much misery!'—and, as she spoke, Lady Caroline's voice indicated the most acute anguish of heart. 'Unless, she added, her tone suddenly becoming hoarse and hollow, and her manner unnaturally subdued,—'unless, indeed, my brother, in the first ebullition of his rage should stretch me dead at his feet; and that is the most probable result!'—'Then, dearest Caroline,' exclaimed Julia, speaking in a tone of mingled alarm and earnest entreaty, 'for heaven's sake renounce this mad project! Do not think of seeking your brother and thus exposing yourself to his rage. I owe you a deep, deep debt of gratitude; and now let me pay it by enduring that weight of suspicion against which I may haply bear up, but which would crush and overwhelm you. For never, never can I forget that when I appeared, full of terror and trembling, with the spoilt dress in your mother's presence, your looks gave me encouragement, and your kind words reassured me. Then, when I was leaving your dwelling without the means of even procuring a loaf for my dear little brother and myself, you put gold into my hand. Oh! dear lady, these are manifestations of generosity which never can be forgotten; and, noble as you are by name, you are nobler in heart. It will be my joy—my pride to screen *you*, who have proved so kind a friend to

me; and there is no sacrifice that I am unprepared to make in order to save you from unhappiness and shame!'—'It is an angel that speaks!' murmured Lady Caroline, overpowered by this generosity on the part of Julia Murray. 'But nothing, nothing,' she continued, with reviving energy, and after a few moments' pause, 'shall induce me to yield to your desire. I recognise all that is great and noble in your conduct; and so long as I remain possessed of intellect and memory, I shall pray night and morning for the Almighty to bless you, my dearest Julia. I have been frail, and I must bear the consequences. Seek not to wean me from this intention: I should never know a happy moment, were I to permit *you* to become the victim of *my* shame!'*—'One word!' exclaimed Miss Murray, after a minute's profound reflection: 'I will no longer urge you to act contrary to your heart's dictates; but promise me that you will not take a single step towards revealing every thing to your brother and exculpating me, until four-and-twenty hours shall have elapsed. During that interval we shall both have time for serious and calm meditation; and no advantage will result from precipitate haste.'—'Yes; I make you this promise, Julia,' returned Lady Caroline; 'on the condition that when we meet again to-morrow evening, it shall not be to argue whether I am to confess or not, but in what manner the confession can be most suitably and safely made.'—'Agreed!' cried Miss Murray: 'and to-morrow evening, at seven o'clock, you will visit me again?'—'I will,' answered Lady Caroline Jerningham; and she then took her leave of her friend, whom she embraced with the warmth of the most sincere affection.

"On the following day, at about three o'clock in the afternoon, a letter, addressed to Lady Caroline Jerningham, was delivered at the mansion in Hanover Square by a porter, who hurried away the moment he had placed it in the servant's hands. The contents of this note ran as follow:—'*Dearest Caroline, it is useless for you to call this evening at the house which I have occupied for so many months, and which was purchased by your excellent brother's money. I shall no longer be the occupant of that house, when this note reaches you. My mind is made up to endure every thing for your sake; and I therefore this day withdraw myself, in company with Harry, into a retirement and an obscurity whither you cannot follow me. It will therefore be unnecessary and ridiculous—I may almost say* wicked—*for you to make any revelations to your brother. By sacrificing yourself, you would confer no benefit upon me; as nothing shall induce me to alter the plans I have formed respecting the future. Retain profoundly secret all those circumstances the confession of which can have no useful result; and think sometimes of me—for I shall often, often think of you, my well-beloved friend,—although we may never, never meet again!*'—This letter, on which were the traces of weeping, produced a stupefying sensation on the part of Lady Caroline. Was it possible that Julia, in the zeal of her ardent friendship, had outwitted the fair patrician, and had won the generous game at which they were playing? No wonder that Miss Murray had requested Caroline to suspend all proceedings for twenty-four hours: in that time, the noble-hearted girl had consummated the sacrifice of herself! And now nothing could exceed the sincerity and the depth of that grief which seized upon the lady: for an hour after she received the note, she was as one demented; and her confidential maid experienced the utmost difficulty in restraining her from manifestations of feeling which would have excited the strangest suspicions in the household. At length, when she had grown comparatively calm, Lady Caroline, attended by her maid, repaired to Camden Town; but there they only beheld those appearances which corroborated the statements contained in Julia's letter. For the house was shut up; and, on enquiry being made of a neighbour, it was ascertained that Miss Murray, her servant, and her little brother had taken their departure soon after mid-day, although, according to the same authority, the young milliner was evidently suffering from indisposition. The fair patrician's last hope of seeing her friend and weaning her from her intention, was thus destroyed; and the poignancy of her grief was renewed. She proceeded to Mrs. Porter's cottage, where she learnt that Julia had called in the morning to assure herself of the child's convalescence and imprint upon its little countenance a farewell kiss. This touching instance of Julia's goodness of heart moved Lady Caroline to tears; and she reproached herself bitterly for having been the cause of all her friend's present sorrows.

"There, however, appeared to be a remedy which might yet be adopted; and to this measure did the lady make up her mind. She resolved, in fact, to write to her brother without delay, inform him of every thing, and urge him to lose no time in discovering the retreat of Julia, that justice—full and ample justice—might be done to her. Accordingly, on the following morning she penned a long letter to the Marquis of Wilmington, imploring him to forgive her for the dishonour she had brought upon the family, and drawing such a picture of Julia's generosity in sacrificing herself for a friend, that she wept long and plentifully over the pages as she perused them. When this epistle had been despatched to the post, Caroline's heart felt easier; and she said to herself, 'Even if my brother should wreak the bitterest vengeance upon me, I can endure his resentment with resignation; for I now have the consciousness of performing a sacred and solemn duty.'—The Dowager-Marchioness, in the meantime, had been suffering through indisposition which confined her much to her chamber; and she did not therefore perceive any particular variations in the manner and aspect of her daughter.

CHAPTER CXLIII.

CONCLUSION OF THE HISTORY OF THE DRESS-MAKER: A LOVE STORY.

"Two days after Lady Caroline Jerningham's letter had been sent, the Marquis of Wilmington arrived in London; and, hastening to Hanover Square, he obtained an immediate interview with his sister. Pale, trembling, and unable to endure his glance, she awaited in torturing suspense the first words that should issue from his lips; and never was relief from agonising feelings more welcome or more complete, than when the Marquis, taking his sister's hand, said in a gentle though mournful voice, 'Caroline, I am not come to reproach you—much less to add to your

* The readers of the First Series of "THE MYSTERIES OF LONDON" will recollect the character of Lady Adeline Enfield in the "History of an Unfortunate Woman." Lady Caroline Jerningham is drawn expressly in contrast with that heroine,—one of the objects of "THE MYSTERIES OF LONDON" being to depict the good and the bad—the generous and the selfish—of all classes of society.

afflictions by the heartless cruelty and absurd inutility of an exposure. No: I give you all my sympathy; and I thank you most sincerely for having confessed every thing, that you might restore your friend to my favour.'—Lady Caroline threw herself into her brother's arms, and wept upon his breast; but when the emotions attendant upon this meeting had somewhat subsided, the Marquis said, 'Heaven be thanked that Julia is innocent! Deeply, deeply as I deplore the sad circumstances involved in your revelation, Caroline, yet it is a relief to know that she—that poor, suffering, wrongly suspected girl—is worthy of all my love! And if I before loved her—if I before esteemed and admired her as the pattern of every thing great and noble, generous and amiable in Woman,—Oh! now what strength have those sentiments acquired! No time must be lost in finding her out; and this moment shall I enter upon the search.'—The Marquis then took a hasty leave of his sister, and in the first instance repaired to Mr. Richardson to consult him upon the subject. Without in any way compromising his sister, the Marquis related enough to let the worthy lawyer know that Julia had been unjustly suspected—that her innocence was completely established, and that he now longed to find out her retreat, with the view to make her the fullest possible reparation. Mr. Richardson then stated that three days previously a porter had called on him, bringing the key of the house at Camden Town, with an intimation that Miss Murray surrendered up the tenement to its proprietor, with all the furniture it contained,—in fact, in the same condition as when the property was made over to her. A tear stole into the eye of the Marquis, as he received this proof of Julia's strict integrity; and Mr. Richardson advised that an advertisement, drawn up in a manner calculated to strike Miss Murray's comprehension, but ambiguous to the public generally, should be kept standing in the *Times* and other widely circulated newspapers until her retreat should have been discovered. The Marquis approved of this plan; and, leaving his solicitor to execute it, he departed from the office to pursue his search elsewhere. He now proceeded to Camden Town, and (having the key with him) entered the house; but delicacy forbade him to penetrate into any other rooms save the parlours; and there he found not a letter nor a scrap of paper that might afford any clue to the place whither Julia had retired. His heart was heavy—his grief was profound; and frequent sighs rent his manly breast as he repaired to the cottage where the child—his sister's child—dwelt under the care of Mrs. Porter. His strange manner on his previous visit did not obtain for him a very welcome reception at the hands of that female; but when she found that he spoke kindly and inquired anxiously concerning the infant, her reserve began to dissipate, and she at last thought him a very agreeable gentleman. The child was brought to him, and he kissed it affectionately. An allusion which Mrs. Porter happened to make to Miss Murray, enabled the Marquis to turn the conversation upon that loved being who seemed lost to him; and now he heard the warmest and sincerest praises uttered in regard to her; but not a syllable affording a trace of her present abode. In fact, it was very evident that Mrs. Porter was as ignorant as himself in that respect; and still was it with a heavy heart that the nobleman turned away to prosecute his search elsewhere.

"He had learnt from his sister that Julia, her little brother, and the old housekeeper had taken their departure together in a hackney-coach; and he concluded that the vehicle was hired from some stand in the neighbourhood. Behold, then, this rich and well-born peer visiting all the stations of cabs and coaches in the vicinity, and pursuing his enquiries amongst a class of men whom his liberality alone succeeded in divesting of their habitual insolence. But still all his endeavours to solve the painful mystery were fruitless; and, after a weary day's researches, he returned home, exhausted in physical energy and worn down by mental depression, to his magnificent house in Belgrave Square. His reliance was now in the advertisements which were to be inserted in the newspapers; but even this hope was almost stifled within him by the reminiscence that Julia seldom read the public journals. Day after day passed—weeks glided by—these had swollen into months in the lapse of time—and winter returned;—but still no trace of Julia! In the interval, matters of importance had occurred in respect to Lady Caroline Jerningham. The child had died in a fit of convulsions, to which it was subject, and in spite of the tender care of Mrs. Porter and the attentions of the medical man: the remains of the infant were interred in the churchyard of Old Saint Pancras; and the Porters, who were well rewarded for their kindness to the child from the moment of its birth until that of its death, still remain in ignorance of the real name and the rank of its mother. Not many weeks after the removal from this earthly sphere of the evidence of Lady Caroline's frailty, Lord Hartley returned home from abroad; and his first act, on arriving in London, was to hasten to Hanover Square. His heart had remained constant to Lady Caroline; and he now boldly claimed her hand of the Marchioness, who received him most graciously, there being, in the Dowager's eyes, a vast deal of difference between the noble and wealthy Baron Hartley of Hartley, and the poor Lieutenant Quentin of His Majesty's Ship *The Tremendous*. The *Morning Post* accordingly announced the 'approaching marriage in high life;' and the ceremony took place in November, 1835,—precisely one year after the date of the commencement of our tale.

"Thus Lady Caroline Jerningham became Lady Hartley: she was united to the object of her affection;—but her happiness was not complete. Every day—every hour did she think of poor Julia Murray; and her husband, to whom she had confided every thing, shared in her deep anxiety to obtain a clue to that excellent young woman. The Marquis of Wilmington had put into execution every means which human ingenuity could devise to procure that clue: but all to no effect; and he now gave himself up to despair. His health began to fail him; and his appearance speedily grew much altered. Vainly did his sister endeavour to console him: she also required solace, and almost in respect to the same cause,—for if the one mourned the loss of an intended bride, the other deplored that of a dear friend!

"I said that the incidents of my tale had brought me down to the month of November, 1835; and it now becomes necessary to make some mention of Julia Murray. It was a night of pouring rain and gushing wind, as on that when she first encountered the Marquis of Wilmington; and the unhappy young woman was seated in a miserable garret in some street near Covent Garden Market. The cheerless chamber was almost completely denuded of furniture; and the little that was in it, belonged not to her. Not a spark of fire appeared in the hearth;—the cupboard door was opened, but no food was seen on the shelves;—and the

candle that shed a fitful light around the bare, damp walls, was every moment in danger of being extinguished by the cold draught from the ill-closed window. Leaning her head upon her hand, and her elbow on the table, Julia sate, gazing down on the upturned countenance of her brother who occupied a stool at her feet. Pale and wan were their faces: gone was the bloom of health from the cheeks of the once happy, beauteous boy,—gone, too, was the delicate tinge of carnation that had been wont to enhance the loveliness of his sister. Misery was in that garret—misery for *two*—misery for that almost heart-broken young woman and that affectionate, grateful boy. The want of needle-work and illness had plunged Julia into the direst poverty: she could have borne it all had she been by herself—borne it almost without repining;—but when she looked on the pale face of her little brother, saw that he was famishing for want, and knew also that he endeavoured to conceal his hunger from her for fear of increasing *her* grief,—oh! it was this—it was *this* that crushed and overwhelmed her! She glanced around: there was not an article of clothing that could be now spared to pledge, save her scanty shawl—and then how could she go abroad to ask for needlework without it? Heavens! twelve hours had the boy already fasted—twenty-four hours had elapsed since Julia had tasted a morsel of food;—for she had almost forced the last crust into his mouth! And now how many hours more must elapse ere a chance might present itself to afford them a meal? And if no work could be obtained, what were they to do? What, indeed!

"In the midst of all these bitter—harrowing reflections, a thought—or rather a reminiscence flashed to Julia's mind;—but it was only to plunge her more deeply into the abyss of woe, and not to solace her. Just one year had elapsed since she had first met the Marquis of Wilmington,—just one year, day for day: and through how many vicissitudes had she and her darling brother passed in that period! They had known prosperity and happiness: they had also experienced the bitterest misery, and yet they had not deserved the vengeance of heaven: but, then, those whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth! Still pure and guileless—still innocent and artless, Julia Murray's principles had remained unshaken by the rude contest which she had been compelled to endure with the world's ills; and her brother was still the same affectionate, good, endearing boy as when I first introduced you to him. Oh! it was cruel—it was cruel that *they* should suffer thus—those poor orphans who had never injured a living soul, who clung to each other so tenderly, and who night and morning put up their prayers to the Almighty that He would be pleased to change their wretched, wretched lot. But, alas! those supplications—so sincere, so earnest, so respectful and adoring towards the Majesty of Heaven—remained apparently unheard; and on the particular night to which allusion has been made, do we find that sister and brother on the verge of perishing through sheer destitution!

"'Harry,' said Julia, after a long pause, 'are you not very hungry?'—'Not very, dear sister,' he returned, while tears started into his eyes.—'Oh! my darling boy, you are starving!' she cried frantically, as she strained him to her breast: then, growing more composed, she said, 'But this must not be! Here, Harry, take this shawl over to that shop which you see opposite, give it to any one whom you may see behind the counter, and you will receive some money and a small card in exchange. Then go to the baker's and buy a loaf; and return as quickly as you can.'—The boy hesitated; and at length said, 'But, Julia dear, what will you do without your shawl? You cannot go out.'—'And you cannot starve,' she returned hastily; as she almost thrust him, but not harshly, out of the room. Then, when the door closed behind him, she reseated herself, and burst into an agony of tears. It was the first time she had ever sent Harry to the pawnbroker—the first time she had ever allowed him to go out into the streets alone after dusk. And this was not all that pained her: Oh! she was oppressed with the most direful apprehensions—for now she was indeed a prisoner in that wretched garret—she could not go out to seek for work, and work would not be brought to her. And again, and again, and again—for the thousandth time that day—did she ask herself what was to be done, and what was to become of them? While she was wrapt up in these harrowing reflections, she heard certain well-known—too well-known steps ascending the stairs; and now she felt that even the crushing amount of misery which already weighed upon her, was not complete. The door was thrown open; and a stout, elderly, red-faced woman, who had evidently been drinking, walked unceremoniously into the chamber. 'Now, Miss,' she cried, almost ferociously, 'are you going to pay me the three weeks' rent that's due? If not, be so kind as to tramp, and make room for them as will pay; 'cos I 've a respectable married couple which is ready to take the place this very night.'—'If you will wait a few minutes,' answered Julia, in a faint tone, 'I will pay you as much as I can.'—'Come, that won't do for me,' vociferated the woman: 'I see your brother go out with your shawl, and I know what 's what. But if you 're obliged to spout your things to pay a trifle this week, how will you be able to pay any at all next Saturday, much less cash up altogether?—'Heavens! have patience, my dear madam, and I will endeavour to pay you all, as soon as possible!' said the poor young woman, reduced to despair.—'Patience, indeed!' repeated the landlady, contemptuously: 'and who will have patience with me? There is the Taxes will call on Monday morning; and the Water Rate has been put off till he's tired of coming near the place. So I can't and won't wait no longer for such a beggar as you.'—At this goading insolence Julia's grief redoubled.—'Oh! crying won't pay no bills,' ejaculated the inhuman landlady. 'And now I think on it, I 'll just look at the bed-clothes and see that you haven't pawned none of the blankets!'—'I would sooner starve—aye, and see my brother perish through want also, than commit such an act!' cried Julia, starting to her feet, while her indignation actually tended to mitigate the acuteness of her grief. 'Well, I 'spose you 're honest,' said the woman, somewhat ashamed of herself: 'but I must have my money to-night all the same; if not, you and your brother had better turn out at once.'—'I repeat that it is impossible for me to pay you all I owe this evening,' exclaimed poor Julia, now condescending to the adoption of a tone of appeal; 'and I implore you not to drive me and that dear boy homeless into the streets.'—'A pretty gal like you need never want money,' said the woman, fixing a meaning look upon the unhappy dress-maker; 'and if you would only take my advice ——.'—'Begone,' cried Julia in a voice so penetrating that it seemed to thrill through the brain of the vile wretch who was about to develope the most infamous resources to the view of

that pure-minded girl.—'Begone, indeed!' repeated the woman, recovering her insolence: 'that's a pretty thing to say to me, that you owe money to. However, once more I tell you that I *will* be paid to-night; or else, when my husband comes home from the public-house, off you 'll bundle!'—Thus speaking, the wretch bounced out of the room, leaving the door wide open behind her.

"Julia wrung her hands in despair; and again she asked herself those unanswerable questions — What would become of them? and what was to be done? At this moment, when her brain appeared to reel and reason was rocking on its throne, the sounds of hasty steps ascending the stairs met her ear, and she heard Harry's voice exclaim, 'Up higher still—to the very top!' And up those hasty footsteps came:—good heavens! were fresh miseries in store for her? But scarcely had this thought traversed poor Julia's imagination, when some one darted into the room—and as she was sinking on the floor, through terror, want, and exhaustion, she was received in the arms of the Marquis of Wilmington!—'Julia, dearest Julia!' he cried, in an impassioned tone, as he strained the insensible form of his beloved one to his breast: and that voice, sounding on her ear as if heard in the midst of a dream, recalled her to herself;—and opening her eyes slowly, she encountered the tender looks that were bent upon her.—'Is it possible!' she exclaimed, tearing herself from the nobleman's embrace: 'your lordship here?'—'Yes: here to implore your pardon for the past; to declare to you how profound is the regret and how bitter the remorse I have experienced for the unfeeling haste with which I judged you on the barest suspicion; and to offer you my hand, Julia,' added the Marquis, 'if you will now condescend to accept it!'—But I need not pause to describe in detail the discourse which now ensued: suffice it to say that the nobleman gave the fullest explanation of all that had occurred since he had last seen Julia—how his sister had confessed her frailty, and thus cleared up the suspicion which had so unfortunately fallen upon Julia—how the child had died—how Lady Caroline had married Lord Hartley—and how every possible search had been made for so many long, weary months, after Miss Murray. It must be added that the Marquis, in his almost ceaseless wanderings about the metropolis in the prosecution of that search, happened on this memorable evening to pass through the very neighbourhood where Julia resided; and as Harry emerged from the pawnbroker's shop, the light flashed full upon the little fellow's countenance, which, in spite of its altered appearance, was immediately recognised by the Marquis.

"But little more remains to be told. A messenger was instantly despatched to Hartley House with a note from Lord Wilmington; and in less than an hour his sister Caroline, accompanied by her faithful lady's maid, who had charge of a box full of clothes, arrived in her carriage at the door of the house where Julia occupied the miserable garret! Affecting indeed was the meeting between the two friends; and while the Marquis took Harry away with him to the nearest ready-made clothes' shop to equip the boy from head to foot in new apparel, Lady Hartley hastily made such a change in Julia's appearance, by means of the contents of the box before alluded to, that when his lordship returned he was charmed to see that, though pale, she was still eminently beautiful. In the meantime the rumour had spread throughout the house how a great nobleman and a great lady had come to take the poor dressmaker away in their carriage; and now the vile woman who only an hour before had menaced Julia with ejectment—who had insulted her by offering to search the few miserable things in the room to see if any had been made away with—and who had hinted at an infamous proposal from which the young creature's soul recoiled in horror and loathing,—that same detestable wretch was now most assiduous in offering the use of her parlour and rendering herself so officiously busy, that Lady Hartley was forced to order her in a peremptory manner to retire. In fine, all necessary preparations being made so that Julia and her brother might appear in a becoming way at the splendid mansion whither they were now about to repair, the happy party entered the carriage, which drove straight to Hartley House, where Caroline's husband received Julia and Harry in the kindest possible manner.

"Thus was the aspect of affairs signally changed; and from the cold, cheerless garret, where want stared them in the face, were the sister and brother suddenly wafted into the very bosom of luxury, comfort, and happiness. Virtue met with its reward, after the many trials to which it had been subjected, and the numerous temptations it had triumphantly passed through. Mr. Richardson, the lawyer, was overjoyed when the Marquis called upon him next morning and related all that had happened; and the instant his lordship had taken his departure, the worthy solicitor hastened to Hanover Square, resolved, if possible, to accomplish a certain project which he had in view. Presenting himself to the Dowager-Marchioness, he argued with her upon the inutility and injustice, the folly and the cruelty of her opposition to an alliance which so nearly regarded her son's happiness; and he dilated so warmly upon the good qualities of Julia Murray, that her ladyship, who had at first heard him with impatience, began to listen attentively. In a word, Mr. Richardson succeeded in persuading the Marchioness to have the credit of assenting to an union which she had not the power to prevent; and the policy of this step at last triumphed over her other repugnances. She accordingly rang the bell, ordered the carriage, and proceeded with the lawyer to Hartley House, where her presence augmented the happiness already experienced beneath that roof. Thus nothing was now wanting to complete the felicity of all those in whom, I hope, you are interested; and it was astonishing how speedily the bloom came back to the countenance of Julia, and the ruddy hues of health to the cheeks of little Harry.

"Six weeks after the discovery of the orphans in their wretched garret, Julia became the Marchioness of Wilmington. Happy—happy was that bridal, and beautiful was the blushing bride—so beautiful that a stranger would not have suspected the privations and miseries which she had undergone. And, as if heaven, in its justice, were determined to afford a signal proof that though it can chasten, it can also reward as fully—from the day that this union took place, Julia and her brother have not known a care. Possessing the power to do good, the Marchioness of Wilmington has been enabled to soothe many an afflicted heart; and her experience of the past has taught her that the severest misery is that which pines unseen and hides itself in garrets—not that which obtrudes itself, in the shape of mendicity, upon the public eye. Her *secret charities* are therefore boundless; and the elevation of such a woman to rank and the possession of immense wealth, has proved beneficial to thousands. I must not forget to observe that the housekeeper who had accompanied

her on her departure from Camden Town, and who had subsequently returned home, at Julia's request, to her friends, once more became an attendant in the household of the mistress whom she loved; and every one who had in any way shown kindness to my heroine when she was but the humble dress-maker, was sought out and liberally rewarded, by her whose heart had undergone no change although she had become the Marchioness of Wilmington."

CHAPTER CXLIV.

DOVER.

It must not be supposed that this long tale was related without an interval of rest. When it broke off at the end of the hundred and forty-second chapter, the travellers were just on the point of entering Rochester, where they lunched; and, after this brief halt, they pursued their journey, Charles resuming the thread of his narrative, to which Perdita listened with deep interest.

The young woman experienced an ineffable pleasure in drinking in with her ears the rich tones of her lover's voice; and the pathetic nature of his story increased the tenderness which she felt for him. She, who had defied the influence of the blind deity, was wounded by his shaft; and the more she saw of Charles Hatfield, the less selfish became her passion—the more sincere her attachment.

Mrs. Fitzhardinge read, with a keen eye, all that was passing in her daughter's mind; and there were moments when she could scarcely restrain her rage at the idea that Perdita had succeeded so skilfully in throwing her into the back-ground. But the old woman resolved to abide her time—in the hope that circumstances might yet enable her to resume her sway, and compel the enamoured couple to bend to the dictates of her will.

The journey was pursued in safety, and in freedom from any unpleasant interruption, until the post-chaise entered the town of Dover. There the travellers were to pass the night; and thence they were to embark on the ensuing morning for Calais.

They took up their quarters at an hotel, where an excellent dinner was provided; and in the evening Charles Hatfield and Perdita rambled together upon the beach, Mrs. Fitzhardinge remaining at the inn on the plea of fatigue, but in reality because her daughter made her a private sign to intimate that her company was not needed.

It was a summer evening of surpassing loveliness: the sea was calm and tranquil in its mighty bed, agitated only at its margin where wavelets, so small that they might almost be denominated ripples, murmured on the beach;—and the western horizon was gorgeous with purple, and orange, and gold—the swathing robes of the setting sun.

There were many ladies and gentlemen walking on the Marine Parade, and enjoying the freshness of the air after the oppressive heat of the sultry day. Amongst the loungers, several officers belonging to the garrison were conspicuous by their scarlet coats; and giddy, silly young ladies of sixteen or seventeen felt themselves supremely happy if they could only secure the attentions of these military *beaux*.

Here and there were long seats, painted green, and occupied by ladies, their male companions standing in lounging attitudes; and the conversation that occupied these groups was for the most part of a frivolous nature,—for people at watering places only seek to kill time, and not to use it for intellectual purposes.

On one of the benches just alluded to, was placed a middle-aged mamma with her three marriageable daughters, who were pretty, chatty, agreeable girls, according to the general meaning of the epithets: at all events, whenever Mrs. Matson appeared on the Parade with the three Misses Matson, the officers were sure to steal away from other groups or parties in order to join the new-comers—to the immense gratification of the objects of this preference, and to the huge mortification of the Jones's, the Smiths, the Jenkins, the Greens, and the Browns.

"Were you at Lady Noakes's last evening, Captain Phinnikin?" enquired the eldest Miss Matson of a gallant officer of some four or five and twenty, who was lounging near her.

"No—not I, faith!" was the reply given in a drawling tone, as if the gallant officer aforesaid were a martyr to that dreadful malady termed *ennui*. "Lady Noakes's parties are such slow affairs—I have quite abjured them. Besides," he added, suddenly recollecting that this was an excellent opportunity to throw in a compliment, "I knew *you* were n't to be there."

"Oh! dear, no!" exclaimed Miss Julia Matson—the second of the marriageable sisters: "one does meet such strange people at her ladyship's, that we really could not think of accepting the invitation."

"Well, but you must recollect, my dear," observed Mrs. Matson, in a tone which seemed to be of mild reproof, "that poor dear Lady Noakes is only the widow of a brewer who was mayor of Deal or Sandwich, I forget which, and was knighted by William the Fourth for taking up some address to his Majesty'.

"That 's all!" said Miss Anna-Maria Matson, the third sister: "and therefore I am sure no one need be surprised that Lady Noakes is glad to fill her rooms with any body she can get."

"Well, I was there last night," observed another young officer—a lieutenant in the same regiment with Captain Phinnikin, and who formed one of the group at present occupying our attention: "and I must say that the supper was excellent."

"Oh! but, Mr. Pink," exclaimed the eldest Miss Matson, reproachfully, "it is so very easy to give a good supper—but not so easy to make the evening agreeable."

"Granted!" rejoined the lieutenant: "and I must candidly admit that no parties are so agreeable as those at your house."

"Flatterer!" cried Miss Matson, with a sweet smile. "I suppose the Browns were at her ladyship's last night."

"Oh! certainly. You meet them every where."

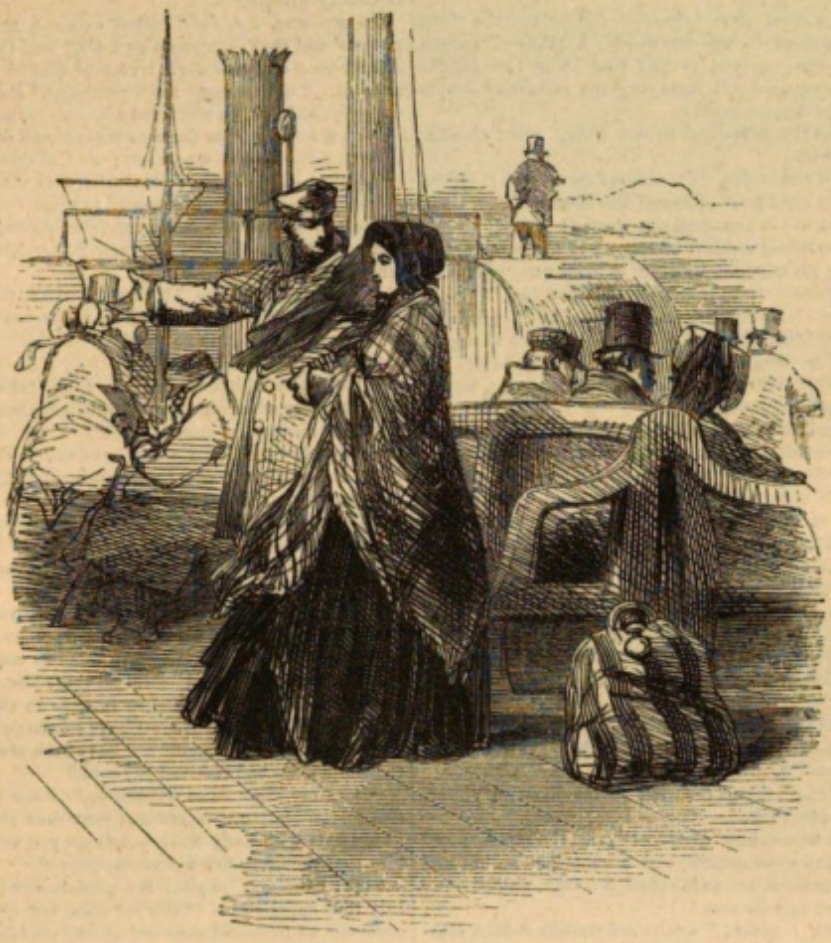
"And, faith! Miss Amelia Brown is a deuced pleasant girl—deuced pleasant," observed Captain Phinnikin.

"Well, I really never could see any thing particular in her," said the eldest Miss Matson. "Besides—you know what her grandfather is?" she added, sinking her voice to a confidential tone, and hastily glancing around to assure herself that the object of her remark was not nigh enough to overhear her.

"'Pon my honour, I never heard!" responded Captain Phinnikin.

"They *do* say—but, mind, I will not assert it on my own authority," continued Miss Matson,—"at the same time, I believe it is pretty well ascertained——'

"Oh! certainly—beyond all doubt," exclaimed Miss Julia, tossing her head contemptuously.



"*I* never heard it contradicted!" added Miss Anna-Maria.

"What do they say the grandfather is?" demanded Captain Phinnikin.

Again did Miss Matson look anxiously around: then, lowering her voice to a whisper, and assuming as mysterious an air as possible, she said, "A hatter!"

"Oh, you naughty, gossiping girls!" cried Mrs. Matson, shaking her head with an affected deprecation of her daughters' scandal-loving propensities, but in reality enjoying the tittle-tattle.

"Well, ma," said Miss Julia, "I am sure there is no harm in telling the truth; and I thought that every one knew what Miss Brown's grandfather was—just the same as it's no secret about the Greens beings related to a soap-boiler."

"Hush! my dear," exclaimed Mrs. Matson, putting her finger to her lip: "we really must not pull people to pieces in this way. At the same time I candidly confess that it *is* annoying to find so many low persons at the very watering-place which we chose for the summer. I don't wish to be severe upon anybody; but if Mr. Thompson, who is known to be a retired draper, *will* allow people to address their letters to him as *Thomas Thompson, Esquire*, he *must* expect to be talked about."

"And then those Miss Thompsons, who give themselves such airs!" cried the eldest Miss Matson, with an indignant gesture.

"I am sure they made quite frights of themselves last Sunday at church," added Miss Julia, "with their dresses after the latest Parisian fashion!"

"Besides, pink bonnets don't at all become *their* dark complexions," observed Miss Anna-Maria.

"Ladies must have very good complexions indeed, for pink bonnets to suit them," drawled forth Captain Phinnikin, smiling languidly at the same time;—for the three Misses Matson all wore bonnets of a roseate hue—a fact which they *appeared* to have entirely forgotten while speaking of the Misses Thompson.

At this moment, Lieutenant Pink uttered an ejaculation of surprise; and the rest of the group, turning their eyes in the same direction in which his were bent, beheld a very handsome young gentleman to whose arm hung a young lady of marvellous beauty.

"They are strangers here," observed Miss Matson the elder.

"New-comers," continued Miss Julia.

"But nothing very particular, I dare say," added Miss Anna-Maria.

And having thus expressed themselves, the three sisters turned towards the officers; but they were much piqued and annoyed to find that those two gallant gentlemen were still surveying the attractive couple with the deepest interest.

"That face is familiar to me, Pink," cried Captain Phinnikin.

"And to me also. But where I have seen it before, I cannot recollect," observed the lieutenant. "Upon my soul, she is a magnificent woman!"

"A splendid creature!" ejaculated the captain, forgetting his habitual drawl for a moment. "Faith! I remember——and yet—no—it is impossible!"

"Yes—it *is* impossible—it *cannot* be!" cried Mr. Pink, as if divining and echoing the other's thoughts. "But I am sure I have seen her before! And will you believe me, Phinnikin, when I assure you that, at the first glance, I thought——"

"Egad! it is her profile—her figure!" cried the captain, pursuing the train of his own thoughts, as his eyes followed the young couple who were passing leisurely along at a little distance, and quite unconscious of the interest that one of them at least was creating.

"Well—it strikes me that it is the same!" observed the lieutenant, his amazement every moment becoming greater, and his uncertainty less.

"Who do you take her to be?" demanded Phinnikin, turning abruptly towards his brother-officer.

"Perdita," responded the lieutenant, without hesitation.

"And yet—in England—so changed too, in circumstances—and in company with that genteel young fellow——"

"All those things occurred to me likewise," interrupted Mr. Pink.

"Let us convince ourselves!" cried the captain; and the military gentlemen, with a somewhat abrupt and unceremonious bow to the Matson family, walked away together, arm-in-arm.

"Well, I never!" exclaimed the eldest Miss Matson, now tossing her head more indignantly than on any previous occasion, yet looking wistfully after the two really handsome and elegant, though conceited and coxcombical young officers, whose fine figures were rapidly receding along the parade.

"I could not have supposed that Captain Phinnikin would have been guilty of such rudeness!" said Miss Julia.

"Oh! as for the captain—I was prepared for any thing with *him*," observed Miss Anna-Maria: "but it's Mr. Pink that *I* 'm astonished at!"

"I am sure the captain is the best behaved of the two," exclaimed Julia.

"That shows your ignorance, Miss," said Anna-Maria, tartly.

"I know what 's genteel as well as you, I should hope," retorted Julia.

"Do n't be cross, my love," said Anna-Maria, affecting a soothing tone.

"And do n't you pretend to know better than one two years older than yourself," cried Julia. "As for *you*," she continued, addressing herself to her eldest sister, "I was quite surprised to hear how you went on about the Browns and the Thompsons. How foolish we should all look if it were found out that Uncle Ben was a pawnbroker in Lambeth Marsh——"

"Hush! girls—hush! Drat your tongues—how they are going!" interrupted Mrs. Matson, in a hoarse and hasty whisper.

"I am sure, ma, Julia talked as much about the Browns and the Thompsons as I did," said the eldest daughter; "and now she is trying to quarrel with me about it. But here come the Thompsons," she added abruptly, as her eyes wandered along the parade.

Mrs. Matson and the three young ladies all smoothed their countenances in a moment; and nothing could be more amiable, affable, or charming than the manner in which they rose simultaneously to greet the Misses Thompson—two tall, handsome, well-dressed, and really most genteel girls, let their father have been what he might.

"Oh! my dear Miss Thompson," cried the eldest Miss Matson, "I am so delighted to see you! How well you are looking, to be sure!"

"We were talking about you only a few minutes ago, to Captain Phinnikin and Mr. Pink," said Julia; "and we were admiring those dears of bonnets that you wore last Sunday at church."

"I am glad you liked them," responded the elder Miss Thompson. "But how happened it that you were not at Lady Noakes's last night?"

"Well—we do n't mind telling you, dear," said Miss Matson the elder: "the truth is that we were not invited; and I suppose it must have been an oversight of her ladyship."

"Her ladyship was quite surprised that you were not present," returned Miss Thompson: "she assured me that a card had been duly forwarded to you."

"Oh! how provoking!" cried all three Misses Matson at the same moment, and as it were in the same breath. "The invitation must have miscarried somehow or another. We would not have been absent for the world if we had received the card."

"But, my dear Miss Thompson," continued the eldest Miss Matson, "as you and your dear sister are so intimate with Lady Noakes, perhaps you would just hint that the invitation did miscarry——"

"Oh! certainly," replied the good-natured young lady thus appealed to. "But we must say good bye now—for we promised papa not to stay out late, and it is already near eight o'clock."

"How is that dear good soul, Mr. Thompson?" asked Mrs. Matson. "I was speaking of him to Captain Phinnikin and Mr. Pink just now, and saying what great respect we all entertained for him."

"Thank you, my dear madam—papa is quite well," returned Miss Thompson. "But we must really say good bye, for we expect the Greens to drop into supper presently——"

"Delightful girls, the Miss Greens!" exclaimed Mrs. Matson; "and very well connected, I have heard."

"Oh! certainly—their uncle is a Member of Parliament," responded Miss Thompson. "But good bye."

"Good bye," repeated her sister; and away they went—happy, joyous, kind-hearted, and good girls, who would not have suffered their tongues to utter a word of scandal,—thus proving a striking contrast with the Matson family.

"What a vulgar buoyancy of spirits the eldest Miss Thompson always has!" exclaimed the senior of the three sisters, after a pause. "I really can scarcely seem commonly polite to her."

"And the youngest is just like her in that respect," observed Julia.

"They are the rudest and worst-behaved girls in Dover, except the Miss Greens," added Mrs. Matson.

"Well," said Anna-Maria, "since I have heard that the Greens are related to a Member of Parliament, I don't fancy them to be so vulgar as I used to do. Oh! what a thing it would be to get acquainted with a Member, and have him at our parties next winter! Would n't the Snipsons be in a way?"

"And the Styles's!" added Julia.

"Yes—and the Tubleys, who are so proud of their Irish Member!" exclaimed the eldest Miss Matson. "Oh! ma, let us make up to the Greens and get as friendly with them as possible; so that we may be on visiting terms with them when we go back to London,—and then we shall be introduced to their uncle, the Member."

"By all means," said Mrs. Matson, charmed with the suggestion. "I will persuade your papa to allow us to give a party next week, on purpose for the Greens."

In the meantime Captain Phinnikin and Mr. Pink had proceeded somewhat rapidly along the Marine Parade, until they had reached the extremity, when they turned, and walked more slowly, so as to meet Charles Hatfield and Perdita.

"To-morrow, at this time," said the infatuated young man, as the syren leant confidingly upon his arm, "we shall be far on our road to Paris: and within three days from this moment, my beloved one, you will be mine! Oh! I believe firmly that we were intended for each other—and therefore happiness awaits us!"

"To be with you, Charles, is happiness indeed," returned Perdita, with that melting softness of tone which gave her words so exquisite a charm, and made every chord in her lover's heart thrill with rapture: then, casting upon him a sweet glance which drank in his own, she said, "I am rejoiced that we have taken this decided step—for in London, I was so fearful that your relatives might adopt means to separate you from me!"

"No—that could not be, dearest Perdita," he observed: "for I am of an age at which no parental despotism could be legally enforced; and I have acquainted you with every thing that has already passed between my father and myself. Were I a weak-minded boy, I should perhaps have yielded to his threats or to my mother's entreaties: but I have chosen to act for myself and on my own responsibility—and I do not repent the decision."

"And never—never shall you repent, my beloved Charles," murmured Perdita, with no affectation of feeling, but under the influence of that passionate tenderness which she in reality experienced towards the young man. "And, oh! how delightful is it to be your companion in such a delicious evening walk as this—by the scarcely rippling sea—and at the hour when the sun is sinking to its ocean-bed!"

"Yes;—and while with you, my Perdita," responded Charles, "I seem to feel as if we two were alone together—sole witnesses of the scene! I observe not the other loungers: I see only my Perdita—hear only her voice!"

At this moment his fair companion, to whom he was addressing those words of heart-felt tenderness, appeared to start violently; for his arm to which she clung was suddenly jerked by her hand with some degree of force. Charles instinctively raised his head, which had been bent partially towards her ear; and glancing straight before him, he beheld two officers staring most rudely, as he thought, at his well-beloved and beauteous Perdita.

"What means this insolence?" he exclaimed, in a tone of irritation.

"Let us turn back, Charles—dearest Charles," murmured Perdita, in a faint and tremulous tone; and she wheeled him round, as it were, with extraordinary alacrity.

A loud burst of laughter on the part of the officers met their ears; and Charles, uttering an ejaculation of rage, was about to relinquish his fair companion's arm and rush back to demand an explanation, when Perdita said, "In the name of heaven, molest them not—I implore you!

And she hurried him away.

"My God! Perdita," he said, when they were at some distance from the spot where the officers had stopped short to gaze upon Perdita, and where their complete recognition of her had betrayed them into an act of rudeness which they almost immediately afterwards regretted—for they felt that they had no right to insult the young woman by laughing at her altered circumstances: "my God! Perdita," said Charles, labouring under a painful state of excitement; "what means this conduct of those unmannerly fellows? and wherefore will you not permit me to chastise them?"

"Would you expose me to the ridicule of all the persons assembled on the Parade?" demanded Perdita, who had now recovered her presence of mind—at least sufficiently to feel the necessity of immediately allaying her lover's excitement.

"But those officers insulted you—insulted you grossly, Perdita!" cried Charles, who did not, however, entertain the remotest suspicion prejudicial to the young woman, but merely felt deeply indignant at an insolence which he could not understand, and which was so completely unprovoked.

"They insulted *us*—they insulted *you* as well as myself, Charles," answered Perdita, hastily: "it was because you were bending, as it were, over me while you spoke—because your head was approached so close to my ear—and because I was listening with such unconcealed delight to your tender words! They saw that we were lovers—that we felt as if we were alone even amidst the crowd of loungers——"

"Yes: it must have been as you say!" cried Charles, receiving Perdita's ingenious explanation as natural and conclusive, and now absolutely wondering at his own stupidity in not penetrating the matter before.

"You may conceive," resumed the artful girl, "how ashamed and bewildered I suddenly felt, when, on raising my eyes, I saw the two officers standing still only a dozen yards in advance, and gazing upon us in the rudest possible manner. I instantly understood the truth: women, dear Charles, are sometimes more sharp-sighted than your sex. It flashed to my mind that our manner had betrayed that we were lovers; and hence my emotions! And can you wonder, my beloved Charles, if I hurried you away from a scene where you incurred the chance of becoming involved in a quarrel with those fire-eaters?"

"In good truth, my Perdita," said Hatfield, now smiling, "they seemed to me—if I might judge by the short glimpse I had of them—to be rather fitted for the drawing-room than to smell gunpowder."

"Oh! that may be," exclaimed the young woman, her voice still continuing tremulous and her manner imploring: "nevertheless, I would not for the world that you should fall into danger! Consider, Charles, how dreadful would be my feelings, were I to know that you were about to fight a duel! Oh! my blood runs cold in my veins when I think of it! But were

you to fall in such hostile meeting——Ah! my God, what would become of your unhappy, wretched Perdita?"

"Dearest—sweetest girl!" cried the enraptured young man: "how blest am I in the possession of such a love as thine!"

And he gazed tenderly upon her as he spoke, pressing her arm at the same time with his own: for now her countenance was flushed with the emotions that agitated in her bosom; and, as the rays of the setting sun played upon her face, she seemed lovely beyond all possibility of description.

They returned to the hotel; and, having partaken of supper, sought their respective chambers at a somewhat early hour—for Mrs. Fitzhardinge and Perdita complained of fatigue, and Charles knew that the ensuing day's travelling would prove even more wearisome still.

The reader has seen how artfully the young woman contrived to find an explanation for the untoward and menacing event which had occurred upon the Marine Parade. The real truth was that while Charles was pouring words of tenderness and love into the ears of Perdita, she suddenly raised her eyes, and was horror-struck at beholding the countenances—too well-known countenances—of Captain Phinnikin and Lieutenant Pink. For their regiment had been stationed at Sydney; and those two officers had enjoyed the favours of the beautiful and voluptuous Perdita. She saw that she was recognised; and for a moment the chances were equal whether she should sink beneath the blow, as if struck by a thunder-bolt—or whether she should recover her presence of mind. The latter alternative favoured her on this occasion; and her sophistry, her demonstrations of tenderness, and the horror which she expressed at the idea of a duel, succeeded in completely pacifying her lover.

CHAPTER CXLV.

A MYSTERIOUS OCCURRENCE.—THE JOURNEY CONTINUED.

Our travellers rose early in the morning; for the French mail steamer, *Le Courier*, was to start for Calais at nine o'clock.

Breakfast over, Charles Hatfield and Perdita walked down to the pier at twenty minutes to nine—Mrs. Fitzhardinge, who was determined to make herself as busy and also as necessary as possible, remaining behind to see that the baggage was safely consigned to the porter in readiness to convey it.

The weather was delightful; and the fresh sea breeze, with its saline flavour, seemed to waft invigorating influences upon its wing. Charles and his beloved were in high spirits; although Perdita threw ever and anon an anxious glance around, to assure herself that the dreaded officers, who had caused her so much alarm on the preceding evening, were not near to renew that terror. Every thing was satisfactory in this respect; and never had the heart of the young woman been more elate, than when she stepped upon the deck of the gallant steamer, which was already puffing off its fleecy vapour with a snorting noise, as if it were a steed impatient of delay.

Seating themselves upon a bench, Charles and Perdita were soon absorbed in a conversation of a tender nature; and, forgetful of every thing save the topic of their discourse, they noticed not the lapse of time until they happened to perceive the captain standing on one of the paddle-coxes, and heard the orders which he gave to the busy French sailors.

These symptoms of immediate departure instantaneously aroused the attention of Charles and Perdita to the fact that Mrs. Fitzhardinge had not joined them.

"Where is my mother?" demanded the latter, embracing with a rapid glance the entire range of the deck, and unable to discover the object of her search amongst the passengers scattered about the vessel.

"Wait here one moment, dearest—and I will see," said Charles; and he hastened forward, thinking that perhaps the funnel might conceal the old woman from their view.

But she was not to be found; although a glance at the piles of baggage in the immediate vicinity of the chimney showed him his companions' boxes, together with a portmanteau of necessaries which he had purchased for himself on the preceding evening.

Yes: there was the baggage—but where was Mrs. Fitzhardinge?

What could have become of her?

Perhaps she had descended to the cabin.

This idea seemed probable; and Charles was about to hurry back to the bench where he had left Perdita, when she joined him, saying, "I have been into the cabin; and my mother is not there."

Before Charles had time to make any reply, a porter in his white frock approached him, and, touching his hat, said, "Please, sir, are these your things?"—pointing to the boxes.

"Yes," answered Hatfield: "but where is the lady who was giving you instructions about them when we left the hotel?"

"Please, sir, she came after me as far as the beginning of the pier," returned the porter; "and there, as I happened to look round, I saw her speaking to two men. I went on—looked round again, and could see nothing more of her."

"This is most extraordinary!" exclaimed Hatfield.

"I cannot comprehend it," observed Perdita: then, suddenly struck by the idea that Charles might propose to land and search after the old woman, she added hastily, "But we need not alarm ourselves: if any thing has happened to detain my mother a short time, she will doubtless follow us by the next boat."

At this moment the huge paddle-wheels began to turn—Charles hastily tossed the porter half-a-crown—and the man leapt on the pier in company with several others of his own calling,—while the steamer moved away with stately steadiness of pace.

Perdita and Charles Hatfield paced the deck, arm in arm, and conversing on the unaccountable disappearance of Mrs. Fitzhardinge. The latter could conjecture no possible key to the mystery: nor did Perdita offer any suggestive clue—although she thought it probable that her mother, having lost her despotic authority, had withdrawn, in a moment of ill-temper, from the company of those whom she could not hope to reduce to the condition of slaves But the young woman said to herself, "She will soon repent of her folly and rejoin us;"—while to Charles she expressed an uneasiness and an apprehension lest any accident should have befallen her mother.

On sped the steamer: the harbour is cleared—and now she enters upon the expanse of green water, over which she walks "like a thing of life,"—the huge paddles raising a swell, which, covered with foam, marks the pathway of the gallant vessel.

On—on she went;—and now the white cliffs of Albion diminish and grow dim in the distance,—while, still far ahead, the coast of France, like a long brown streak in the horizon, appears in view!

And, oh! may that green sea never waft a hostile navy from one shore to the other;—may the peace which now subsists between the two greatest nations in the universe, remain undisturbed! Let France and England continue rivals,—not in the art of war,—but in the means of developing every element of civilisation and progress. Such a striving—such a race between the two, will be glorious indeed; and the whole world will experience the benefit.

Shame, then, to those alarmists who are now endeavouring to spread terror and dismay throughout the British Islands, by their calculations of the facility with which the French may invade us, and by their predictions of the consequences of such an invasion.

Well aware are we that were France to entertain the project, its realization would be easy;—for with our navy dispersed over the world, our coast-defences so few and far-between, and our totally insufficient army, we have no means of resisting an invading force of eighty or a hundred thousand men so admirably disciplined as the soldiers of France.

But neither Louis-Philippe nor his Government entertains the remotest idea of disturbing the peace of the world;—and it is madness—it is wickedness on the part of the public journals and of pamphleteers to write for the very purpose of creating an impression that an invasion by the French is imminent.

A terrible panic has been raised throughout the length and breadth of the land;—and with sorrow do we record the fact that the Duke of Wellington has placed himself at the head of the alarmists!

To consummate the folly, all that is now required is —what?

To give Prince Albert the command of the Army!

——Or rather, O Englishmen! does not the apprehension of danger from an invasion by a foreign power lay bare, in all its nakedness, the monstrous folly—the astounding absurdity of suddenly elevating that young and inexperienced man to the rank of a Field-Marshal?

A Field-Marshal, who has never smelt powder save in the heartless, inhuman cruelty of a *battue* of game, —and who has never in his life seen a shot fired in anger!

England does not require such a Drawing-Room Field-Marshal: she wants a Captain-General who, if need be, can compete with such a man as Bugeaud.

But where will Royal Folly stop?—and when will any statesman have the courage to resist the childish caprices of the Queen?

In the same newspapers which are constantly telling us that the French meditate an invasion—that if the Cuirassiers enter London on the east, the best thing the Horse-Guards can do, will be to march out on the west—that the conquerors will be sure to levy contributions upon us, demand the settlement of old scores, strip us of our colonies, and humiliate us in every way, —in the very same journals which tell us all this, we read that *the Queen is anxious for Prince Albert to become Commander-in-Chief, the Duke of Wellington retiring to make room for him!*

Merciful heavens! is such a monstrous absurdity to be consummated? Is that grey-headed veteran, who won the field of Waterloo, to be superseded by a mere boy? Much as we have disliked the Duke of Wellington as a politician, yet we have felt proud of him as our national hero;—and no words can convey an idea of the disgust with which we perused the paragraph intimating that this mighty warrior was to be put upon the shelf, to make way for a Prince who knows no more of military matters than he does of the hieroglyphics on the Pyramids of Egypt.

If the Duke be desirous of withdrawing into private life, let him be succeeded by some great Captain who knows what hard blows in the field are;—let his place be supplied by one of his own companions-in-arms.

Have we none of the heroes of the Peninsular battles still alive?—have we no names rendered glorious by victories achieved on the banks of the Sutlej?

It would be an insult the most glaring—the most flagrant, to all the illustrious chieftains alluded to, were a young man who never saw an angry shot fired, to be placed in authority over their heads! Already have the great warriors of England been sufficiently humiliated by the elevation of that young man to the rank of Field-Marshal:—but really if the English Court be allowed to "play at soldiers" in this disgraceful manner, it is no wonder that such men as the Duke of Wellington should look with apprehension at the consequences of a French invasion.

Prince Albert may be very resolute and very determined in worrying a poor otter with his dogs,—or he may be desperately brave in firing vollies of small shot upon harmless birds: but as for his capacity or his courage to lead an army——the idea is ridiculous!

The English people have not gone stark, staring mad—even if some few of their rulers have: and most sincerely do we hope that, if the attempt to raise Prince Albert to the post of Commander-in-Chief be persisted in, the country will oppose it by all moral and legal means,—by memorial, petition, and remonstrance,—by public meetings and the omnipotent voice of the public press,—in fine, by an universal agitation such as that which knocked down the Corn-Laws!

For the consummation of so astounding an absurdity will prove the ruin of the British Army!

Surely it is not in civilised England, and in the middle of the nineteenth century, that Royalty is to play its fantastic tricks, and use all our grandest institutions as playthings? If so, we shall have the Prince of Wales created an Admiral very shortly, and Dr. Howley may resign the Archbishopric of Canterbury to little Prince Ernest Alfred. And why not? Such appointments would be quite as rational as that of Prince Albert to the post of Commander-in-Chief.

Let not our readers suppose that we seek to bring Princes into ridicule: they have a right to be Princes, if the people are foolish enough to let them; but when they make themselves ridiculous by grasping at offices for which they are totally unfitted, it is time for us to speak out.

We are inspired by no awe and entertain no solemn terror in dealing with Royalty: for, after all, royal persons are only human creatures, as well as we—and they seldom possess the good feelings and sterling qualities which are to be found in honest, hard-working, enlightened mechanics.

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After a most agreeable voyage of two hours and a half, the French steam-packet entered Calais harbour.

Charles and Perdita proceeded to Dessin's Hotel; and there they determined to wait at least a few hours until the arrival of an English steamer, which was

to leave Dover about a couple of hours later than *Le Courier*.

During this interval Charles bethought himself that, should Mrs. Fitzhardinge not join them in the course of the day, Perdita and himself would be compelled to continue their journey to Paris; and, with a due sense of delicacy towards her who was to become his wife, he saw the impropriety of their travelling alone together. He accordingly intimated to Perdita the necessity of procuring for her a lady's-maid without delay; and though she would have much preferred that herself and lover should be the sole occupants of the interior of the post-chaise, she nevertheless comprehended that the expression of such a wish on her part would give him but a poor idea of her modesty. She therefore assented to his proposal with apparent cheerfulness, and thanked him for his kind consideration.

By the agency of Madame Dessin, the landlady of the hotel, a French lady's-maid, who understood English, was speedily obtained and engaged; and Perdita was now by no means displeased to find herself elevated to the position of a woman of some consequence. She, who but a short time before had entered London in a butcher's cart and clad in the meanest apparel, was now provided with a special attendant and could choose dresses of the latest fashion and the costliest material.

The lady's-maid was a pretty young woman of about three and twenty, with fine hair and eyes, good teeth, and a beautiful figure; and her attire was of the most tasteful, though quiet and unassuming, description. Her manners were very agreeable, and would be termed lady-like in this country: but, beneath a modest and innocent-looking exterior, she concealed a disposition for intrigue and no small amount of subtlety. At the same time, Rosalie—for that was her name—would not for the world seek to lead a virtuous mistress astray; and to such virtuous mistress she would doubtless prove an excellent, faithful, and trust-worthy servant. But should she have to deal with a mistress given to gallantry, then Rosalie would cheerfully exercise all her arts of duplicity—all her little cunning machinations—and all her aptitude for the management of an intrigue, and would take delight in enabling her lady to deceive a husband or a lover.

Such was the young person who now became Perdita's attendant: but it must be observed that the character of Rosalie, as far as it was known to the landlady of the hotel, was unimpeachable:—that is to say, she bore the reputation of honesty, cleanliness, a perfect knowledge of her duties—in fine, all those qualifications which are sought and required in an upper servant of her description.

Having waited until the arrival of the English packet, and finding that Mrs. Fitzhardinge did not make her appearance, Charles, to whom her absence was unaccountable and bewildering to a degree, ordered the post-chaise to be got ready; and, while this was being done, he proceeded with Perdita to the British Consul's to obtain passports. Finally, at about five o'clock in the afternoon, our travellers took their departure from Dessin's Hotel in a chaise and four—Rosalie occupying a seat inside, for the sake of appearances.

Oh! had Charles Hatfield known that the young woman—his intended bride—for whose reputation he manifested so much delicate care,—had he known that she was so thoroughly polluted in body and mind,—could he have heard the history which the two officers at Dover might have told of her, had they chosen—he would have been shocked and horrified,—he would have spurned her from him—and all his ardent, enthusiastic love, amounting to an adoration and a worship, would have changed into feelings of abhorrence, loathing, and hate.

But he believed her to be pure and virtuous,—possessing some strange, wayward, and eccentric notions, it is true,—and yet endowed with a spirit so plastic and ductile as to yield willingly to good counsel and to be ready to sacrifice any peculiarity of opinion to the man whom she loved.

It is likewise true that he remembered how she had permitted him, in moments of impassioned tenderness, to toy with her—to press her glowing bosom—to glue his lips to her's, as if she herself would on those occasions accord even more: but he likewise recollected how invariably she started from his arms—withdrew herself from his embrace—and manifested a suddenly resuscitated presence of mind, when he had grown too bold and, maddened with desire, had sought the last favour which a woman, in amorous dalliance, can bestow. He therefore reasoned that, although her naturally warm temperament had led her to bestow upon him such unequivocal proofs of her love, yet that a virgin pride and a maiden's prudence had enabled her in every instance to triumph over temptation;—and this belief enhanced his profound admiration of her character.

But from the moment that Charles had first beheld Perdita, his brain had been in an incessant state of excitement,—an intoxication, an elysian delirium which made Perdita an angel of beauty and almost of excellence in his eyes:—and those fervent caresses which he had been permitted to bestow upon her, and those slight foretastes of the most voluptuous enjoyments which he had been allowed to snatch, had only tended to sustain that excitement—increase the dreamy delights of that intoxication—and enhance the bliss of that continuous delirium.

Then, in addition to the fascinating influence of the syren—in addition to the enthralling witchery which her charms, her arts, her conversation, and the silver sounds of her dulcet voice exercised over him,—were his ambitious hopes, his soaring aspirations!

All these circumstances had combined to unsettle, if not altogether change, in an incredibly short space, a disposition naturally good—a mind naturally energetic and powerful: and then those unhappy scenes with his father, when neither fully understood the meaning and drift of the other's observations, had aided to produce an excitement which was thus hurrying the young man along apparently to his utter ruin!

Unless, indeed, some good angel should yet intervene, ere it be too late——

But we must not anticipate

On the contrary, let us return, from this partial though not unnecessary digression, to the thread of our narrative,—so that we may all the sooner be enabled to bring our readers back to that metropolis—that mighty London, of which we have still so many Mysteries to unfold!

The travellers pursued their journey all night, Charles being anxious to reach the French capital with the least possible delay, and Perdita seconding him fully in the wish.

Let us therefore succinctly state that in the morning they breakfasted at Amiens—in the afternoon they

dined at Beauvais—and at ten o'clock in the evening they entered the splendid city of Paris.

Did our limits and the nature of the tale permit us, we would here gladly pause for a few minutes to describe that peerless capital which we know and love so well: but this may not be;—and we therefore hasten to state that Charles and Perdita, attended by Rosalie, proceeded to a respectable family hotel, where they hired a handsome suite of apartments.

And now for an important event in this section of our narrative,—an event which nevertheless may be related in a few words!

For, at eleven o'clock on the morning following their arrival in Paris, *Charles Hatfield, claiming to be Viscount Marston, and Perdita Fitzhardinge were united in the bonds of matrimony, at the British Ambassador's Chapel in the Rue Saint Honoré, and by the Chaplain to the Embassy.*

CHAPTER CXLVI.

TWO UNPLEASANT LODGERS.

In the meantime certain little incidents had occurred in London, which we must faithfully chronicle before we proceed with the adventures of the newly married couple,—adventures, which, could Charles have possibly foreseen——

But we were for a moment oblivious of the scenes that require our attention in London, and which took place while Charles Hatfield and Perdita were as yet on their way to Paris.

Charterhouse Square—situate between Aldersgate Street and St. John Street (Smithfield)—has a mournful, gloomy, and sombre appearance, which even the green foliage in the circular enclosure cannot materially relieve. The houses are for the most part of antiquated structure and dingy hue—the windows and front-doors are small—and, pass by them when you will, you never behold a human countenance at any one of the casements. The curtains and the blinds,—and, in the winter time, glimpses of the fires burning in the parlours,—these are, to a certain extent, symptoms that the houses *are* tenanted: but no farther signs of the fact can be discovered. Often and often as we have passed through that Square, we never beheld a soul coming out of, nor going into, any one of the gloomy abodes: we have observed a baker's boy and a butcher's ditto hurrying rapidly round—but never could satisfy ourselves that either of them had any particular business there, for they did not knock at a single door;—and on one—and only one occasion—when we met a two-penny post-man in the Square, he seemed to be as much astonished at finding himself in that quarter as we were to encounter him there. As for the beadle—his occupation seems to consist of lounging about, switching a cane, strolling into the Fox and Anchor public-house, and chatting for half-an-hour at a time with the very sober-looking porter of the Charter House.

There is a something really solemn and awful in the silence of that Square,—not a silence and a repose which seem to afford relief to the mind and rest to the ear after escaping from the tremendous din of the crowded streets,—but a silence that strikes like a chill to the heart. Whence arises this sensation?—is it because, while traversing the Square, we are reminded that in the vast cloistral building to the north are pent up eighty old men—the Poor Brothers of the Charter House,—eighty denizens of a Protestant Monastery in the very heart of civilised London,—eighty worn-out and decrepid persons who drag out the wretched remnant of their lives beneath the iron sway of a crushing ecclesiastical discipline! Does the silence of the Square borrow its solemnity from that far more awful silence which reigns within the Charter House itself,—a silence so awe-inspiring—so dead—so tomb-like, that even in the noon of a hot summer-day, the visitor shudders with a cold feeling creeping over him as he crosses the cloistral enclosure!

The reader will probably remember that, when Mr. Bubbleton Styles had propounded his grand Railway scheme to Captain O'Blunderbuss and Mr. Frank Curtis, he gave each of those gentlemen a ten-pound note, desiring them to take respectable lodgings, and refer, if necessary, to him. We know not precisely how it happened that the gallant officer and his friend should have selected Charterhouse Square as the place most likely to suit them with regard to apartments; but thither they assuredly did repair—and in that gloomy quarter did they hire three rooms: namely, a parlour on the first floor, and two bed-chambers on the second. The landlady of the house was a widow; and, having some small pittance in the shape of regular income, eked out by letting a portion of her abode. She was an elderly woman—tall, starch, and prim—and very particular in obtaining good references—or, at least, what she considered to be good ones—respecting any applicants for her apartments; and therefore, previously to admitting Captain O'Blunderbuss and Mr. Frank Curtis into her house, she had sought all possible information concerning them at the hands of Mr. Styles. His account was satisfactory, and the two gentlemen were thereupon duly installed in their lodgings at Mrs. Rudd's, Charterhouse Square.

The first two or three days passed comfortably enough, because the captain and Frank, having ready money in their pockets, took their dinner and supper—aye, and their grog too—at some convenient tavern,—troubling Mrs. Rudd only in reference to their breakfast, which she cheerfully prepared for them, because she thereby obtained whole and sole controul over their groceries. She was a very pious woman, and attended a Methodist Chapel regularly every Sunday; but being, as she often expressed herself, "a lone widow," she thought there was no harm in using her lodgers' tea, sugar, and butter for her own repasts. "Heaven was very good to her," she would often tell her neighbours, "and enabled her to make the most of her little means:" she might have added—"and of her lodgers' also."

The captain and Frank, however, soon began to find that their evening entertainments at the tavern were very expensive; and, as they could not again draw upon Mr. Styles for some time—all his resources being required for the promotion of the railway—they resolved to economise. The best method of carrying this object into effect, was to take their dinner, supper and poteen at home; and Mrs. Rudd, on being sounded in respect to the plan, willingly assented—for the excellent woman felt assured that her lodgers would not miss a slice or two off a cold joint any more than they noticed the marvellous disappearance of their groceries. So the captain and his friend became more domestic; and as Frank did not get particularly drunk on the two first evenings, Mrs. Rudd had no complaints to make.

But at last she began to suspect that she had some

ground for doubting the steadiness of her lodgers. It was on a Sunday evening, and the worthy woman had just returned from chapel, where she had heard a most refreshing and savoury discourse by the Reverend Mr. Flummery,—when, on crossing the threshold of the house door, and while still ruminating on the truly Christian manner in which the eloquent minister had promised hell-flames to all heathens,—she was suddenly startled by hearing a terrific noise proceeding from up-stairs.

She paused—and listened!

Yes: the sound *did* emanate from above; and most strange sounds they were, too. Deeply disgusted—nay, profoundly shocked at this desecration of the Sabbath, Mrs. Rudd crept up stairs; and the nearer she drew to the parlour-door, the more convinced did she become that Captain O'Blunderbuss and Mr. Curtis were fighting a single combat with the shovel and poker. The conflict was, however, only in fun: for the clash of the fire-irons was accompanied by tremendous shouts of laughter, and such ejaculations as these:—"There, be Jasus! I have ye again, Frank! Blood and thunther, keep up your guar-r-d, man! Now, would ye be afther a feint? Be the powers! and ye can't touch me at all, at all! Hit hard, me friend—niver mind the damned ould poker-r-r—the ould woman is at chapel!"

Mrs. Rudd was astounded—stupefied. Was it possible that these were the lodgers whom Mr. Styles—a respectable "City man"—had recommended as the very patterns of quietness and steadiness? Why, if she had let her rooms to two Bedlamites, things could not have been worse! She was positively afraid to go in to remonstrate; and, having recovered the use of those limbs which wonder had for several minutes paralysed, she hurried down stairs to consider what was best to be done, while supping off her racketty lodgers' cold joint.

That same night Frank Curtis got so gloriously inebriated, that he threw up his bed-room window and treated the whole Square to a specimen of his vocal powers—singing some favourite Bacchanalian song, and introducing the most terrific yells by way of variations. The captain, who had also imbibed a little too much, soon after threw up *his* window, and exerted all the powers of *his* lungs in chorus with his friend; so that the deep, solemn, and awe-inspiring silence of Charterhouse Square was broken in a fashion that seemed to surprise the very echoes themselves. Without any figure of speech, it is certain that the inhabitants were surprised; for their night, usually passed in such death-like tranquillity, was unexpectedly and suddenly "made hideous;" and several nervous old ladies, dwelling in the neighbourhood, fancied that the frightful yells were warnings of fire, and went off into strong hysterics.

Vainly did Mrs. Rudd knock first at the captain's door—then at Frank's: they heard her not—or, if they did, took no heed of her remonstrances;—and when the beadle, who had been aroused from his bed, came and thundered at the front-door, the two lodgers simultaneously emptied their water-pitchers on his head. Then, satisfied with this exploit, they closed their windows and retired to rest.

When they descended to their parlour to breakfast in the morning, Mrs. Rudd acquainted them, in a tone evincing the most violent concentration of rage, that she could not possibly think of harbouring Captain O'Blunderbuss and Mr. Curtis any longer. But, to her amazement, they both swore that they were perfectly innocent of the disturbance of the previous night,—alleging that they themselves were as much annoyed by the row as the landlady herself. Mrs. Rudd could scarcely believe her ears: had she been dreaming? No: the noise had really taken place—for her lodgers admitted that they had heard it—though, to use a common phrase, they swore "eyes and limbs" that they had not made it. However, she gave them a week's warning, and then calmly reminded them that a week's rent was already due; whereupon Captain O'Blunderbuss flew into a terrific rage at the idea of "the maneness of the woman in spaking of such a thrifle!" Mrs. Rudd was frightened, and turned in an appealing manner to Mr. Frank Curtis, who declared point blank that the captain was cashier, and that she must draw upon him: but, finding that the gallant officer was a cashier without cash, Mrs. Rudd was compelled to retire—muttering something about her being "a lone widow," and intimating a hope that the two weeks' rent would be paid "all in a lump" on the following Monday morning.

The captain and Mr. Curtis now completely threw off the mask. They no longer affected even to be "steady, quiet men of regular habits," as Mr. Styles had represented them; but they drank poteen "till all was blue," as Frank Curtis said—or, in the language of the gallant officer, "till they couldn't see a hole through a lath-er." The disturbances they created at night were hideous; and poor Mrs. Rudd received from all her neighbours the most positive threats that they would indict her house as a nuisance. At last, in the depth of her despair, she had recourse to that excellent man, the Reverend Mr. Flummery; and the Reverend Mr. Flummery, having heard her sad tale, undertook to go in person and remonstrate with "these men of Belial."

Accordingly, one afternoon, just as the captain and Frank had finished a couple of bottles of stout by way of giving themselves an appetite for dinner, they were somewhat surprised when the parlour-door was thrown open, and in walked a short, podgy, red-faced man, dressed in deep black. Still more amazed were they when he announced himself as the Reverend Emanuel Flummery, and stated that he had come to remonstrate with them on their behaviour towards "a lone widow." The captain, winking at Curtis, desired the minister to be seated, and proposed to discuss the business over another bottle of stout. His reverence thought there was something so affable in the offer, that it would be churlish to refuse it; and he accordingly gave his assent. The stout was produced; and Mr. Flummery, being thirsty and hot, enjoyed it excessively.

He then began a long remonstrance with the two gentlemen—the gist of which was that Mrs. Rudd would be very much obliged to them if they would pay their rent and remove to other lodgings. The captain and Frank pretended to listen with attention; and the reverend minister, finding them in such a tractable humour, as he supposed, did not choose to mar the harmony of the interview by declining a second bottle of stout. Talking had renewed his thirst—and, moreover, if there were one special beverage which the Reverend Emanuel Flummery loved more than another, it was Guinness's stout. Accordingly, he emptied his tumbler, and then continued his remonstrance and his representations, in which, however he was cut short by a sudden pain in the stomach—doubtless produced by the effervescent malt liquor The captain was prompt with a remedy; and Mr.

Flummery had swallowed a good dram of whiskey before an eye could twinkle thrice. Thus cheered, and finding the two gentlemen most docile and respectful, his reverence consented to partake of a hot glass of toddy with them, just to convince them that he was inclined to be friendly; and this one glass led to a second, and then Frank Curtis cunningly brewed him a third, while the reverend minister was expatiating upon the good qualities of Mrs. Rudd. In fine, Mr. Emanuel Flummery became so much disguised in liquor, that, when he took his leave, he swore the captain and Frank Curtis were two excellent gentlemen—begged them not to put themselves to any inconvenience in moving—and assured them that he would make it all right with the landlady.

Mrs. Rudd, however, was mightily shocked when she beheld the condition in which the reverend gentleman presented himself at her own parlour-door; and she could indeed scarcely believe her eyes. But when, after hiccupping out some unintelligible words, that self-same reverend gentleman—the pastor of an admiring flock, and whose sermons were so refreshing and so savoury,—when *he*,—the individual whom she had looked upon as the essence of human perfection,—when *he*, we say, cast his arms around her neck and administered to her somewhat wrinkled cheeks a hearty smack,—*then*, what did she do? Why—she put up with the affront—doubtless to save the reputation of the minister;—and, perhaps with the same charitable desire to avoid the scandal of an exposure; she permitted him to repeat his caresses as often as he chose during the half-hour that he remained in her company. She even made him some tea, which materially tendered to sober him; and, when he had at length taken his departure, she muttered several times to herself, "Well—after all, this saint of a man is mere flesh and blood like any other!"

But when Mrs. Rudd's more pleasurable reflections had ceased—for pleasurable they certainly were, both during the reverend gentleman's presence and for a short time after the door had closed behind him,—she remembered that her disagreeable lodgers were still in the house, notwithstanding the remonstrances which, according to his statement to the widow, the pious minister had most eloquently addressed to them. And that they *were* still in the dwelling, she was very soon made to understand;—for the obstreperous behaviour of those "dreadful men," to use Mrs. Rudd's own

words, recommenced in the form of the most hearty peals of laughter—and the clashing of the fire-irons—and the stamping of feet, as if the two gentlemen were mad.

"They have begun their booze," said Mrs. Rudd to herself, looking up in despair at the ceiling, as if she thought the captain and his friend must inevitably come through upon her devoted head. "But never mind!" she suddenly exclaimed aloud, as a thought—a very bright thought struck her: "I will put up with it for this once—and to-morrow—to-morrow——"

Here Mrs. Rudd stopped short; for she would not even trust the empty air with the lucid idea which had struck her.

We may however inform our readers that this said idea was nothing more nor less than to lock out the two gentlemen when they went for their usual walk on the morrow.

Tranquillised by the excellence of the scheme, Mrs. Rudd refreshed herself with a small drop of brandy, and then spread her huge Bible open on the table before her—not to read it, but merely because "it looked pious-like," as she thought, if any of her neighbours should happen to drop in. For Mrs. Rudd delighted in the reputation for sanctity which she enjoyed amongst her acquaintances in general, and the frequenters of the reverend gentleman's chapel in particular.

Let us now return to Mr. Frank Curtis and Captain O'Blunderbuss, who, as the landlady rightly concluded, were enjoying themselves in their own peculiar fashion up-stairs.

Having partaken of a cold joint, and the slip-shod girl of the house having provided them with a jug of hot water, the two gentlemen commenced the evening's orgie. The whiskey-punch which they brewed was of that kind which is libellously alleged to be peculiarly affected by ladies—namely, "hot, strong, and plenty of it;"—and, under its influence, they soon manifested their wonted exuberance of spirits. First, Captain O'Blunderbuss would insist upon giving Frank a lesson with the broad-sword—the one using the poker, and the other the shovel;—and every time the gallant officer thrust his friend in the ribs, a hearty shout of laughter burst from their lips—for they considered it prime fun.

When they were tired of this amusement, they resumed their seats—replenished their glasses—and chatted on divers matters interesting to themselves. Presently Frank started up, and leapt over a chair in order to show his agility, although he had grown somewhat stout of late years;—and as he acquitted himself in a clumsy manner, the captain volunteered to teach him how to do it. But the gallant officer only tumbled over the chair, causing a tremendous split in his trousers—an accident at which they nevertheless both laughed more heartily than ever.

"Be Jasus!" cried the captain, "and it's the only pair of unmintionables that I possess! But niver mind: I'll be afther telling the gal to take them round to the tailor's the first thing in the morning; and so I'll take my breakfast in bed, Frank. They'll soon be sent home again."

"Let's see? we've got to meet Styles to-morrow at three in the afternoon," said Curtis; "and, by Jove! we must make him come down with the dust."

"Be the power-rs! and you're right, my frind!" exclaimed the captain. "It's eighteen-pince that's left in my pocket at this prisint spaking——"

"And nothing at all in mine," interrupted Frank, both his hands diving at the same time down into the depths of the empty conveniences alluded to. "Deuce take this railway affair! It gets on precious slow. I remember when I was in Paris two or three-and-twenty years ago, they were making a new path-way through my friend the Archbishop's estate at Fontainbleau; and if his Grace didn't go and swear at the men all day long, they never would have got on with it."

"Be the power-rs! if it's a thrifle of swearing that would make Misther Styles push a-head," said the gallant officer, "I'm the boy to help him on with that same."

"You see there's been what they call a tightness in the Money-Market lately," observed Frank: "at least, that's what Styles told me the other day——"

"And it's an infer-r-rnal tightness that's got hould of *our* Money-Market, my frind," interrupted the captain. "Be Jasus! there's the potheen bottle empty—and no tick at the public!"

"You've got eighteen-pence in your pocket, captain," suggested Curtis.

"Right, me boy!"—and he rang the bell furiously.

The slip-shod girl answered the summons, and was forthwith despatched for a supply of whiskey at the wine-vaults which the lodgers honoured with their custom.

"Now we're altogether aground," said Curtis, after a pause which had followed the departure of the servant. "But we've every thing necessary in the house for to-morrow morning's breakfast, except the milk——"

"And bar-r-ring my breeches, ye spalpeen!" cried the captain. "They must be immediately menthed, any how."

"Oh! the tailor won't think of asking for the money when he brings them home," said Curtis: then, beholding the comical expression of his friend's countenance, which was elongated with sore misgivings respecting the amount of confidence the snip might choose to put in his honour, Frank burst out into a tremendous fit of laughter.

"Arrah! and be Jasus! and it's all mighty fine for you, Misther Curtis, to make a damned fool of yourself in that fashion," exclaimed Captain O'Blunderbuss, becoming as red as a turkey-cock: "but I can assure ye that it's no joking matther for me to contimplate the prospict of lying in bed for a week or two till I get my breeches back again. And now, if you're not afther houlding your tongue, Frank, I'll tip ye a small rap on the head with the poker—by the howly poker-r, I will!"

"Do n't get into a rage, captain," said Curtis, putting a bridle upon his mirth in consequence of the threat just held out—a threat which he knew his amiable friend was perfectly capable of putting into force. "I will go out the first thing in the morning and see Styles—and I have no doubt he will give me some money. I shall be back again by the time the tailor comes home with—with——"

"The unmintionables!" vociferated the captain, his wrath reviving as he saw that his friend was once more on the point of giving vent to a hearty cachinnation. "But here's the gal coming up stairs with the potheen; and so we'll be afther enjoying ourselves for the prisint, and think of the tightness of the Money-Mar-r-rket in the morning."

"Well, what the deuce has made you so long?" demanded Frank Curtis, as the slip-shod domestic entered the room.

"Long, sir!" echoed the girl, as if in surprise. "Lor, sir—I ain't been a minit!"

"Not a minute!" cried Frank, who always bullied servants—when they were n't footmen who could knock him down for his impudence: "I tell you, you've been more than a quarter of an hour."

"Well, sir—and if so be I have," said the girl, suddenly recollecting something which had occurred to hinder her on her errand, "it was because as I went out of the street-door a man come up and asked me if so be as Mr. Smith lived here. '*No*,' says I: '*he don't.*'—'*Well, then*,' says the man, '*Mr. Brown does.*'—'*No, he don't, though*,' I says, says I; '*nor yet Mr. Jones, nor Mr. Noakes neether.*'—'*Well, who does live here, then?*' says the man; and as I thought it would teach him not to be so precious knowing another time, I out and told him slap as how two gentlemen lived here as was named Blunderbuss—leastways, O'Blunderbuss, and Curtis."

"The devil you did!" ejaculated the two lodgers as it were in the same breath, and exchanging significant glances which expressed the same apprehension.

"To be sure I did, sir," responded the girl, not perceiving the alarm which she had created in the minds of the gentlemen, but rather attributing their excited ejaculations to an approval of her conduct:" 'for I thinks to myself, thinks I, '*Now, my fine feller, you 'll believe that there 's no Smiths or Browns here; and you won't be quite so positive another time.*'"

"Well—and what did the man say?" demanded Frank Curtis, darting another uneasy glance at his friend.

"He only said '*Oh!*' and went away," returned the girl; "and that 's what kept me a little in going——"

"What sort of a looking fellow was he?" asked Curtis.

"He warn't a gentleman, sir—and he smelt horrible of drink," said the domestic.

"But what should you take him for?" demanded Frank, impatiently.

"A thief, sir," was the ingenuous response.

"Be Jasus! and thin it 's a shiriff's ——" ejaculated Captain O'Blunderbuss, starting in his chair: but, instantly stopping short ere he completed the sentence, he added in a few moments and in a less excited tone, "You may go down stairs, my dear; and if any one comes and asks for Misther Frank Cur-r-tis or Captain O'Bluntherbuss, ye must deny us, mind—or I'll be afther skinning ye alive!"

"Lor, sir!" cried the girl; and, horrified by the dreadful threat, she hastened from the room as if the individual who had uttered the menace were preparing to carry it into execution.

For some few minutes after she had taken her departure, Captain O'Blunderbuss and Mr. Curtis sate eyeing each other in silence,—the same idea evidently occupying both—and both fearful to express it; as if to give utterance to the thought were positively to meet the dreaded misfortune half-way.

"Well," exclaimed Curtis, at length, "and what do you think of that?"

"Be Jasus! and it 's what do *you* think of it?" cried the captain.

"For my part I think it 's Rumrigg and Kaysay the lawyers, who've found out where we are, and mean to take us on that cursed cognovit we gave them last Christmas for the discounter's affair," said Mr. Curtis, who, having now fully expressed his fears, no longer hesitated to look particularly blank upon the matter.

"Faith! and that same's my opinion also," exclaimed the gallant officer: then, grasping the poker very tight in his hand, he said, "But if the thunthering villains of shiriff's-officers crape into this house, it's myself that'll sind 'em out again with a flay in their ear. So do n't make yourself unhappy at all, at all, my frind; but let 's dhrink bad luck to the bastes of the airth!"

"With all my heart," cried Frank, brewing for himself a strong glass of toddy. "The only thing is——"

"Is what?" demanded the captain, suddenly desisting from his occupation of mixing a tumbler of grog for himself, and fixing his eyes sternly upon his friend.

"The breeches," was the laconic answer.

"Ah! now—and can't ye be asy about those same unmintionables?" cried the gallant officer. "I suspicted it was afther them ye was harping again and again. It 'll become a sore subject in time, Frank. So dhrink—and bad luck to the inexprissibles."

And the two gentlemen did drink, until the bottle was empty, when they retired to rest—the captain having previously informed the servant-girl that he should leave his trousers outside his chamber door, and that she must take them round to the tailor the very first thing in the morning, with instructions for him to mend and return them as speedily as possible.

CHAPTER CXLVII.

THE CAPTAIN'S LUDICROUS ADVENTURE.

Mr. Curtis arose at a very early hour—at least for him,—it being only eight o'clock when he sallied forth with the intention of seeking Mr. Bubbleton Styles, on whose purse he contemplated as deep an inroad as that gentleman's circumstances would permit.

But before he quitted the house, he partook of breakfast, and likewise carried in some tea and toast to his friend the captain, who was compelled, "under painful circumstances," as Frank observed, to keep his bed for an hour or two. The gallant officer charged his companion and ally to return without delay—the prudence of shifting their quarters as soon as convenient, being strongly suggested by the enquiries instituted regarding them on the preceding evening.

Having disposed of his breakfast, Captain O'Blunderbuss turned himself round in his bed and took a nap—in which luxurious state of light and dreamy repose he remained for upwards of an hour, when he was suddenly awakened by a low, sneaking, suspicious kind of double knock at the street-door.

He started up in bed; and, as he hastily collected his scattered ideas, the affair of Rumrigg and Kaysay flashed to his mind.

Leaping from his couch as a chesnut bounces from a shovel on the fire, Captain O'Blunderbuss pulled on his stockings, thrust his feet into his slippers, and stole out upon the landing, where he held his breath and listened attentively.

At that very instant the servant-girl, who invariably kept people waiting at the door as long as possible, answered the summons; and the captain overheard the following colloquy.

"Is the genelmen at home, my dear?" asked a rough, harsh, grating voice.

"Oh! you 're the one that stopped and spoke to me last evening," responded the girl.

"Just so: but it was o'ny to make a few civil enquiries consarning your missus's lodgers. I s'pose they 're at home; and so me and my friend will just walk up, my dear—'cause our business is partickler."

"Well, then, it ain't of no use to go up now," said the servant-girl: "for Mr. Curtis has gone out, and the captain is n't out of bed—leastways, he has n't left his room yet; and he brekfusted there."

"Never mind, my dear," persisted the man with the hoarse voice: "we 'll just walk up and pay our respeks to the captain, who is a wery nice genelman no doubt."

From this conversation the gallant officer learnt that there were *two* persons enquiring for him, although *one* only appeared to speak in the matter. His worst suspicions were confirmed: they were bailiffs, come to arrest him on the cognovit given jointly by himself and his inseparable friend Mr. Francis Curtis to those astute gentlemen, Messrs. Rumrigg and Kaysay.

What was to be done? He must dress himself in all possible haste, and fight his way desperately out of the house!

This was his first idea

But it was so easy to think of dressing—and so difficult to carry the scheme into execution: for, alas! the gallant officer's unmentionables were at the tailor's; and he knew that Frank possessed not a second pair!

What, then, was to be done?

Should he surrender himself into the hands of the officers, and be borne ignominiously to Whitecross Street? The thought was ridiculous with such a man as Captain O'Blunderbuss!

Locking his own door, and taking the key with him, he scud up to the top storey, and sought refuge in the bed-chamber of Mrs. Rudd, who, he felt assured, had gone out to market as usual—otherwise she would have been certain to emerge from her parlour below and join in the conversation which had taken place between the bailiffs and the servant-girl.

The captain's first thought, in thus flying to his landlady's bed-chamber, was merely to seek refuge there, and leave the officers to suppose that he had gone out. It struck him that they would knock at his door—would force open that door on not receiving any answer—and would then conclude that he really was not at home. In the meantime he should have leisure to decide upon the best means of ultimately avoiding the bailiffs altogether.

But scarcely had he entered Mrs. Rudd's room, when a new and truly magnificient idea suggested itself—or rather, was suggested by the fact that an open cupboard revealed the worthy landlady's best silk gown, while upon a chest of drawers stood the good woman's Sunday bonnet, to which she had been putting a new ribband that very morning before she went out. The bonnet, which was of fine straw and of a large shape, was provided with an ample blue gauze veil; for Mrs. Rudd liked to be smart on the Sabbath—if it were only to compete with her female neighbours who attended the "ministry" of the Reverend Emanuel Flummery.

The appearance of the two articles of dress just specified, determined the gallant officer how to act; and his arrangements were made with almost lightning speed.

The reader will recollect that he had no clothes at the moment to put off before he put others on—he having sought the landlady's room in his shirt, stockings, and slippers. To slip into the silk dress was therefore the work of an instant: to assume the Leghorn bonnet was an affair accomplished with equal speed;—and to ransack the widow's drawers for a shawl was a matter scarcely occupying ten seconds. Then, drawing the veil in thick folds over his moustachioed and whiskered countenance with one hand, and grasping Mrs. Rudd's parasol in the other, Captain O'Blunderbuss took a hasty survey of himself in the glass, and was perfectly satisfied with the result.

We have before stated that Mrs. Rudd was very tall, starch, and prim; and the reader is aware that Captain O'Blunderbuss was no dwarf—neither was he particularly stout. Thus, although he certainly appeared a very colossal woman, he might still pass as one at a pinch—and surely need was never more pinching than on the present occasion. At all events he was resolved to make the attempt; and the exciting nature of the incident was just of the kind which he particularly relished—though, perhaps, he would rather have had the fun without the danger of the thing.

In the meantime he had not been in a state of ignorance of what was passing on the landing of the floor below; for the bailiffs, having ascended to that height, stopped at his own chamber door, at which they knocked. But receiving no answer, the one with the hoarse voice exclaimed, "Captain O'Blunderbuss, I 've got a message for you wery particklar from a friend of your'n."

Still there was no response; and the man, addressing himself to the servant-girl, asked her if she were sure that the captain was at home.

"I 'm certain he is," was the reply; "because he 's sent out his—his—trousers to be mended, and is lying a-bed till they come back."

"But may n't he have another pair?" demanded the bailiff.

"I do n't b'leive he have," said the girl: "leastways, I never see more than one either on or off him."

"Then the captain *is* at home," growled the sheriff's-officer; "and we must do our dooty, Tom."

These last words were evidently addressed by the speaker to his companion; and the captain comprehended that the forcing of the door would be the next step. Nor was he wrong in his conjecture;—for, before the servant girl could divine the intention of the two men, they had effected an entrance into the chamber which the gallant officer had only quitted three minutes previously.

The captain, who had been listening at the door of Mrs. Rudd's own bed-room, now partly descended the stairs, and again stood still to listen—his proceedings being conducted as noiselessly and cautiously as possible.

"Well—I'm blowed if he 's here!" exclaimed the bailiff with the hoarse voice.

"No more than a cat," returned his companion.

"How 's this, my dear?" continued the first speaker: "have you been a-making fools on us?"

"No," answered the girl sharply: "I thought the captain was here—but he ain't So I s'pose he 's gone out without my hearing or seeing him. But now you 've broke the lock of the door and must pay for it—or else missus will blow me up finely when she comes home from market."

"Then she *is* at market," said Captain O'Blunderbuss to himself, his hopes becoming more elated by the assurance thus conveyed to him through the servant-girl's remark to the bailiffs.

"Pay for it, indeed!" growled the one with the hoarse voice. "That won't suit our books neither

S'pose we fix the lock on agin in such a way that it won't be knowed as how we ever busted the door open at all?"

"Well—do what you like; but make haste about it, 'cause missus is sure to come home in a minit or two—leastways if she 's raly out; for I did n't see her go. But I s 'pose she is—or else she 'd have been down afore this to know what all the row 's about."

"We 'll see to it, my dear," observed the hoarse-speaking bailiff. "But I say, Tom—here 's the captain's cap, and coat, and veskitt. Bless 'd if I believe he 's gone out arter all! Let 's search t' other rooms: this gal is a-playing tricks with us."

"Come into Mr. Curtis's chamber and see," exclaimed the juvenile servant; and the captain heard the party pursuing their domiciliary visit in the quarter alluded to. "Well, now?" said the girl, with a derisive laugh: "is he there? Oh! ah! you may look under the bed! Why do n't you search the drawers—or get up the chimley and look out on the tiles?"

"Don't be sarsy, my dear," growled the bailiff. "Come—here 's a shillin' for you. Now tell us the truth—ain't the captain somewhere in the house?"

"Yes—I 'm sure he be," returned the girl; "'cause his breeches is gone to be mended, and his coat and wescutt and cap is in his own room—and I know he ain't got two suits of clothes. Besides," she added, sinking her voice to a tone of mysterious confidence—though not so low as to be inaudible to the gallant officer on the stairs above, "his bluchers is down stairs to be blacked—and I 'll swear he ain 't got two pair of them."

"Then he is in the house," said the bailiff. "Now, Tom, I tell 'ee what we must do. You stay here, and me and the gal will just toddle down stairs and look in the kitchen, and scullery, and sich-like places."

"Oh! but you must put the lock right first," exclaimed the girl; "for if missus——Lor! here she is!" added the affrighted servant, in a hurried whisper.

The fact was that the captain, by some awkward and unintentional movement, at that very instant rustled the silk gown loud enough for the sound to catch the ears of the girl and the bailiffs; and he was about to curse his folly, when, finding that all had suddenly become still on the floor below, it instantly struck him that the juvenile servant had imposed silence on the officers for fear her mistress should stop to enquire the cause of their presence and thereby notice the damaged lock.

He was perfectly correct in his conjecture; and, perceiving that the sudden stillness remained unbroken, he boldly descended the stairs—imitating as well as he could the measured walk of the sanctimonious landlady, and treading with feminine lightness in his slippers.

On reaching the landing—the dreaded landing whence opened the room where the officers were concealed with the servant girl—Captain O'Blunderbuss felt a violent inclination to make a precipitate rush down the remainder of the stairs to the bottom: but, fearing that such a proceeding would only lead to his capture, as it was certain to excite an instantaneous suspicion of the truth and a vigorous pursuit in consequence, he pursued his way with measured tread, taking good care to rustle the silk dress as much as possible.

The landing of the first floor was gained in safety: he was descending the last flight—and his escape appeared certain,—when a loud double knock at the front-door echoed through the dwelling.

For an instant the gallant officer was staggered: but a second thought convinced him that it was not his landlady's knock—and he sped boldly on.

Drawing his veil as closely as possible over his countenance, and tucking the parasol under his arm for the moment, he opened the front-door.

The visitor was the Rev. Mr. Emanuel Flummery.

"Ah! my dear madam," said that pious man, stepping into the passage with all the unceremonious ease of a familiar friend, and not at the instant noticing the extraordinary height of the person whom he thus addressed; "I looked in just to ask you how you were—and—and," he added, sinking his voice to a low whisper, "for the purpose of tasting in your arms a renewal of those favours which you yesterday——"

But to the ineffable wonderment of the reverend gentleman, the fictitious Mrs. Rudd dealt him such a sudden and violent blow with a heavy clenched fist, just between his two eyes, that he was floored on the spot; and the captain seizing the front-door key, darted out of the house.

Banging the door behind him, the gallant officer locked it, and marched away with a haste and a manliness of step which, had any one been passing at the time, would have betrayed his real sex in a moment.

Suddenly, however, it struck him that he was playing a female character; and, instantly relaxing his speed, he assumed a gait so mincing, affected, and fantastic, that his appearance was most comical and ludicrous.

He put up the parasol, and held it so as to screen his countenance, over which he likewise kept the blue gauze veil in many folds; and, in this manner, the gallant gentleman pursued his way half round the Square—not daring to take precipitately to his heels, yet fearful every instant of hearing a hue and cry raised behind him.

"Lauk-a-daisy me!" cried a female voice, suddenly breaking upon the captain's ears, and speaking close by.

"Be Jasus! mim—and is it yourself?" ejaculated the gallant gentleman, stopping short: "because it's me that 's afther being Misthress Rudd just at the prisint spaking!"

"You Mrs. Rudd!" exclaimed the infuriated landlady. "Here—murder—thieves——"

"Hould, mim!" said the captain, in a tone so ferocious that it silenced the woman in an instant: "if ye 're afther raising an alarm, mim, I 'll bethray ye to all the wor-r-ld for having bestowed your favours yesterday on that spalpeen of a methodist parson—that will I, Misthress Rudd, and bad luck to ye!"

The landlady was thunderstruck—astounded.

"So now, mim, just walk on quietly to your own house, of which I hereby prisint ye with the kay," continued the captain; "and mind ye do n't look once behind ye until ye reach your own door—and I 'll sind your toggery back again this evening—and you 'll be sure to give mine to the missinger that brings yours, paying likewise for my throusers, mim. And bewar-r-r, mim," added the gallant gentleman, with a terrific rattling of the r's, "how ye bethray me in any way—if ye valley the sacret of your indacent proceedings with the methodist parson."

Thus speaking, the captain handed the bewildered Mrs. Rudd the key of her house, and hurried on.

From the moment that he had quitted the dwelling until the termination of this scene, scarcely three minutes had elapsed: but the captain was well aware that the bailiffs would not be much longer before they discovered his flight, as the Rev. Mr. Flummery, whom he had so unceremoniously knocked down in

the passage, would speedily and inevitably give them such information as would open their eyes to the real truth of all the recent proceedings.

Accordingly, the gallant gentleman's object was to get away from Charterhouse Square within the shortest space of time possible; and the moment he parted from Mrs. Rudd he struck into the Charter House itself, under the impression that there was a thoroughfare in this direction.

But before he turned under the gloomy archway of that monastic establishment, he looked round and beheld the landlady still standing on the spot where he had left her—motionless, and apparently petrified with horror and astonishment at the threats which he had held out. Her back was, however, turned towards him,—and he therefore felt more at ease in his mind as he entered the Charter House.

"Who do you want, mem?" said the porter, as he emanated from his crib.

But Captain O'Blunderbuss affected not to hear the challenge, and passed on—adopting that mincing affectation of gait which we have before noticed, and which made him appear such a comical figure.

"Well, I 'm blowed if I ever see sich a o'oman!" muttered the porter to himself, as he returned to his lodge. "Vonderful giantesses ain't nothink to her. And her petticuts—my eye! ain't 'em short too? But she has n't a wery bad leg neither—though her stockins might be a trifle or so cleaner."

The captain continued his way,—still shading his head with the parasol—still keeping the veil closely folded over his countenance,—but not the less able to reconnoitre the place in which he now found himself for the first time in his life.

He beheld a wide, open space, laid out in grass plats, bordered and intersected by gravel walks, and surrounded by low continuous buildings, of uniform architecture and cloistral appearance.

Here and there were scattered groups of old men—collected in knots of threes and fours, and apparently basking in the summer sun, which warmed their frames so attenuated and chilled by age. They did not appear happy—scarcely comfortable or contented;—and could the captain have overheard the remarks which they mumbled and muttered to each other, he would have found that they loathed and detested—hated and abhorred the monastic gloom, the rigid discipline, and the monotonous course of life to which necessity had consigned them.

When the gallant officer made his appearance in this enclosure, his strange and ludicrous figure instantly attracted the notice of the various groups alluded to; and the old fellows began to wonder whom the tall, stately-looking dame was about to honour with a visit.

But by this time Captain O'Blunderbuss had arrived at the unpleasant conviction that there was no thoroughfare either into Goswell Street or Wilderness Row; and he once more found himself, as he subsequently observed, "in a divil of a pother."

The reader is, however, well aware that our gallant friend was not precisely the man to turn back and surrender to his enemies, who, he felt assured, must by this time be instituting an active search after him in the vicinity—even if they had not become aware that he had sought refuge in the Charter House.

What was to be done?

Nothing—save to enlist some kind inmate of the establishment in his interests;—and on this proceeding he at once decided.

From an upper window he beheld a good-natured, red, round, jolly face looking forth, the casement being open;—and a rapid glance showed the captain the staircase that led to the particular room in which the proprietor of that face must be.

He accordingly walked on with the steady pace and apparent ease of a person who had the assurance of knowing his—or should we not rather say *her*—way;—and entering the building, he ascended the stairs, until he reached a door on which was a brass-plate bearing the name of Mr. Scales.

Without any ceremony, the captain walked into the room; and the gentleman with the red face, turning away from the window, began to contemplate his supposed visitress with the most profound amazement.

But how much was this surprise enhanced, when the apparent lady threw down the parasol, exclaiming in a voice of singularly masculine power, "Bad luck to ye! ye damned spalpeen of an umbrilla!"—and then immediately afterwards raised a veil which revealed a face embellished with a fierce pair of moustachios and a very decent pair of whiskers—to say nothing of a certain ferociousness of expression and a weather-beaten complexion, which added to the unfeminine appearance of the whole countenance.

"What the deuce does all this mean?" demanded the Brother of the Charter House, at length recovering the use of his tongue, and with difficulty subduing an inclination to laugh;—for he was a jolly old bird, as his face denoted, and doubtless fancied that some masquerading amusement was in progress.

"What does it mane!" ejaculated the gallant officer; "why, just this, me frind—that I 'm no more a woman than ye are yourself—but it 's Capthain O'Bluntherbuss I am, of Bluntherbuss Park, ould Ireland. The shiriff's people are afther me—and I 'scaped 'em in this toggery. So now it 's your own precious aid and assistance I want—and, be the pow-r-rs! ye 'll not repint of any kindness ye may show to a genthleman in timporary difficulties."

Mr. Scales—for such was indeed the name of the red-faced Brother whose hospitality and aid the captain thus sought—now burst out laughing in good earnest; and the gallant officer laughed too—for he dared not show any ill-feeling on the score of his new friend's merriment. Besides, that very merriment seemed to augur a willingness to render the assistance demanded; and therefore the two laughed in concert very heartily and for upwards of a couple of minutes.

At last Mr. Scales's mirth subsided into a low chuckle, until it became altogether extinct so far as its vocal expression was concerned;—and then he enquired in what manner he could render his aid to Captain O'Blunderbuss.

The gallant gentleman very frankly revealed to him his real position: namely, that he had been compelled to beat a precipitate retreat from his lodgings, where he had left his cap, coat, waistcoat, and boots,—that his breeches were at the tailor's,—that he had nothing on but his landlady's garments, barring his own shirt, stockings, and slippers,—that he had not a penny in his pocket, nor indeed any pocket at all as he then stood equipped,—and that he was most anxious to get into the City, where he could obtain funds in a minute.

Mr. Scales indulged in another laugh, and then proceeded to comment on the statement which had been made to him.

"I have got a couple of sovereigns in my pocket,"

he began, "and do n't mind advancing them for your service if they will do any good."

"Faith! and they 'll pay the landlady and the tailor!" ejaculated the captain, quite delighted at the prospect just held out.

"Very well," said Mr. Scales. "Then we can recover your clothes for you. But how will it be if the officers are in the house, and, seeing your landlady give me the garments, should follow me?"

"Be Jasus! and Misthress Rudd is complately in my power-r!" cried Captain O'Blunderbuss: "just tell her that if she do n't manage the thing slily for ye, that I'll split upon her and the Riverind Mr. Eminuel Flummery—and she 'll turn as make and as mild as a lamb. But I must be afther sinding her back her own toggery."

"I 've got a large band-box in my little bed-room adjoining," said Mr. Scales; "and I do n't mind carrying out the gown and the bonnet and shawl in it. Never do things by halves—that s my motto. In the meantime, you can put on my dressing-gown:—I am sorry my own clothes would be much too small for you—or else——"

"Oh! be Jasus! and I 'd sooner get back my own," cried the captain. "I niver should dar-r to prisint myself in any other toggery to my frind in the City."

"Well and good: you can step into my bed-room and undress yourself," said Mr. Scales; "and I 'll be off as soon as you are ready."

"And them ould fogeys down stairs in the yard," observed the captain,—"they 'll be afther quistioning ye, my frind, about the tall lady in the black silk gown that 's a foot and a half too shor-r-t for her."

"Oh! leave them to me," said the good-natured Brother of the Charter House: "I 'll tell them it 's my sister. Bless your soul, they 're all purblind, and never will have noticed any thing peculiar in your dress. It 's the nurses that I most fear—the charwomen of the establishment, I mean;—for if any of them saw you——"

"I did n't observe one of them, my dear frind," interrupted the captain. "But we 've niver a ha'porth of time to lose—and so I 'll be afther getting out of this infer-r-nal silk gown and Lighorn bonnet."

From the moderate-sized, but lofty and airy apartment in which this colloquy took place, the captain passed into a little chamber only just large enough to contain a bed, a chest of drawers, and a toilette-table: and there he speedily extricated himself from the feminine apparel, all of which he thrust pell-mell into the band-box which his friend had pointed out to him for the purpose. He then wrapped himself in Mr. Scales's dressing-gown; and this being done, he gave the good-natured Brother the necessary instructions how to proceed with regard to the landlady and the tailor.

Having tied a string round the band-box, so as to carry it the more conveniently, and likewise with a better appearance of negligent ease, Mr. Scales now set out on his mission—previously enjoining the captain to keep the door carefully locked until his return, and mentioning a signal by which his knock at the door might be known, so that the gallant officer should not incur the danger of admitting any other person. The moment the martial gentleman was left to himself, he advanced straight up to the cupboard, which he unceremoniously opened; and, to his huge delight, perceived a bottle containing a fluid which was unmistakeably of that alcoholic species so widely known under the denomination of gin. The captain took a long draught of the raw spirit, and, much refreshed, sate down to await his new friend's return.

A quarter of an hour passed, during which he calculated the chances of eventual escape from the bailiffs.

If they had not discovered the trick which was played them, before the captain had entered the Charter House, there was every prospect in his favour; because he felt assured that Mrs. Rudd, even if she had seen him take refuge there, would not dare to betray him.

But if, on the other hand, they had ascertained the whole truth while he was as yet outside the Charter House gates, then they had most probably rushed to the windows and obtained a glimpse of his person in the Square.

And yet, recurring to the chances that were favourable to him, he reasoned that when the noise attendant upon knocking down the methodist minister had reached the ears of the officers, some time would then be lost in receiving explanations from that reverend gentleman, and in vain attempts to open the door—until Mrs. Rudd's return with the key; and in the interim his place of concealment would have been gained, and would remain unsuspected by the bailiffs.

On the other hand, once more, what if the officers had not waited for Mrs. Rudd's return at all, but had leapt out of the ground-floor windows?

"Oh! bad luck to the pro and con!" ejaculated the captain aloud. "I 'm safe here—and that 's enough. For if the spalpeens had suspicted that I *am* here, they 'd have been afther me long ago!"

Rising from his seat, he crept cautiously up to the window and took a survey of the enclosures through which he had passed a short time before; and this reconnoitring process was highly satisfactory. The old Brothers were lounging about as he had just now beheld them; and not a shadow of a sheriff's-officer was to be seen.

Highly delighted by the hopeful assurances which the aspect of things thus conveyed to his mind, Captain O'Blunderbuss paid another visit to the cupboard, and regaled himself with another refreshing draught from the gin-bottle—after which potation, he smacked his lips in approval of the alcoholic beverage, and resumed his seat and his meditations.

The latter continued for another quarter of an hour; at the expiration whereof the gallant gentleman paid his respects a third time to the cupboard; and scarcely had he closed the door of that commodious recess, when the concerted signal was given, announcing his friend's return.

As Mr. Scales entered the room, a glance showed the captain that his friend had succeeded in his mission; for the red countenance wore a triumphant smile, and the band-box had not come back empty.

"Be Jasus! and you 're a thrump!" exclaimed the gallant Irishman, as he marked these indications of success. "But what news of them bastes of the airth——"

"Oh! you 're all safe, my dear fellow," interrupted Mr. Scales, wiping the perspiration off his rubicund countenance. "The clothes are in the box—the landlady is intimidated, and therefore in your interests—and the bailiffs have got entirely on a wrong scent. In fact, they had left the house before I got there: but there 's no doubt they 're waiting about in the neighbourhood—and therefore it will be better for you to remain here until dark, if you possibly can. I will give you a bit of dinner—and may be a glass of grog——"

"Potheen—rale potheen!" ejaculated the captain, viewing with supreme satisfaction the present prospect of affairs.

"Well—whiskey, if you prefer it," said the obliging Mr. Scales. "At all events we'll have a jolly afternoon of it, and drink to our better acquaintance."

"Betther acquaintance!" cried the Irishman, who, in spite of his adventurous kind of existence, possessed many of the truly generous qualities of his much maligned and deeply injured fellow-countrymen; "betther acquainted we can't become, my frind: for when a man has done all he could for another, and that other a tothal stranger to him, I mane to say it makes them inthimate at once. And, be Jasus! Misther Scales, if ye've an inimy in the whole wor-r-ld, tell me his name and give me his address, and it's Capthain O'Bluntherbuss that'll be afther paying him a morning visit, sinding up his car-r-d, and then skinning him alive!"

Mr. Scales expressed his gratitude for these demonstrations of friendship, but assured the gallant gentleman that he had no enemy whom he wished to undergo the process of flaying at that particular time.

The captain now entered the little bed-room, and hastily equipped himself in his own clothing—the breeches, which the good-natured Brother had paid for at the tailor's, being neatly mended: so that the Irishman speedily re-appeared in the semi-military garb which became him rather more suitably than the habiliments of Mrs. Rudd.

CHAPTER CXLVIII.

THE CHARTER HOUSE.

Captain O'Blunderbuss, having made himself thus far comfortable, wrote a note to Curtis, which Mr. Scales despatched by a messenger to Mr. Bubbleton Styles's office in the City;—for the Irishman calculated that if Curtis should return to the lodgings in Charterhouse Square before the said note reached him, he would, on hearing the adventures of the morning, retrace his way to Crosby Hall Chambers—there to await either the presence of the captain, or at least some communication from him. This arrangement appeared to be far more prudent than to trust Mrs. Rudd with either letter or message announcing the place where the captain was concealed.

The note being written, and the messenger despatched with it, Mr. Scales proposed a luncheon of bread and cheese and porter, as it was only eleven o'clock in the forenoon, and he intended to order dinner for half-past two. A "nurse," as the charwoman was called, making her appearance about this time, the refreshments above mentioned were duly procured; and Mr. Scales intimated to his attendant that he should not dine in the common hall that day, but would entertain his friend with steaks and potatoes in his own apartment.

When the captain and the worthy Brother were again alone together, they fell into a conversation upon the establishment to which the latter belonged and in which the former had found so hospitable a refuge.

"Ye seem to have a comfortable berth of it, my frind," observed the martial gentleman, after burying his countenance for nearly a minute in a pewter-pot.

"Well, the fact is," returned Mr. Scales, "I manage to make myself happy, because I am naturally of a gay and lively disposition, and I have a great many friends who come to see me. Moreover, I have a few pounds coming in from a snug little annuity—and therefore I can afford those luxuries which the others have no chance of obtaining. But if it were n't for these circumstances, captain," added Mr. Scales, sinking his voice to a mysterious whisper, "I should never be able to endure the place."

"Not endure the place!" repeated the captain, who manifested unfeigned surprise at the observation. "Be the holy poker-r-r! and it sames a broth of a place, it does!"

"Ah! it's all very well for people out of doors to be told of the existence of the charity," resumed the Brother; "and how it gives an asylum to eighty poor men, who are widowers and past fifty years of age: but it's the discipline, my dear sir—the interior discipline,—and then the manner in which we are treated by the authorities of the establishment!"

"Then there's abuses in the Charter-r-r House as well as elsewhere?" said the captain, interrogatively. "Blood and thunther! where the divil are n't there abuses, if this same is the case?"

"No where, when the Church has any influence in the matter," returned Mr. Scales. "But I will explain myself more fully. This institution, you must know, was founded for the purpose of affording an asylum to poor and deserving men, chiefly of the literary or learned professions. But will you believe it? There's scarcely a literary man in the place; and the only one of any repute at all is Mr. Valcrieff, the celebrated dramatic author. The patrons put in their old and worn-out butlers or lacqueys;—but this would not matter, so long as worthy, deserving, and respectable characters were nominated—which is not the case——"

"Then you have some quare characters among ye, I'll be afther guessing?" exclaimed the captain.

"We have indeed, my friend," responded Mr. Scales; "and that is what I chiefly complain of. For instance, we've lately had a certain Colonel Tickner thrust upon us—but who is no more a Colonel than I am. A short time ago he called himself Major Tickner—and a little while before that, he was Captain Tickner. So, you perceive, he rises rapidly—and I have no doubt he will be a General next week."

"A Ginral, be Jasus!" cried Captain O'Blunderbuss. "It's thrue I might have been one myself by this time, if I'd only stuck to the service: but I'll swear by the holy poker-r, that your Colonel Tickner is nothing more nor less than an imposthor—a vile imposthor,—and it's meself that'll unmask him."

The gallant gentleman deemed it necessary to fly into a passion relative to the pretences of the self-styled Colonel Tickner to a high military rank; inasmuch as such a display of indignation on his part at the assumption of another, seemed to justify his own right to the honourable grade of Captain.

"Well, it is shameful for men to pretend to be what they are not," observed Mr. Scales. "This Colonel Tickner sometimes bores me with his company; and it is not at all improbable that he may look in after dinner. If so, we will have some rare fun with him."

"If he dar-r-rs to have any of his impudence to me," cried the captain, looking particularly ferocious at the moment, "I'll trate him as I trated a French dhragoon at Water-r-r-loo. '*Come hither, ye spalpeen, and let me cut ye down to the middle!*' says I:—'*Oui, Monsieur,* says he; and on he comes with a rush.—'*Blood and*

stunther!' says I, '*is it fighting ye mane, when I've as good as taken ye prisoner before-hand?*'—and griping him by the throat, I throttled him, sir, in less time than ye'd be in tossing off a thimbleful of potheen. But pray go on telling me about the Charter House, my friend—and let's hear all your little gravances. Ye were spaking of the discipline of the place just now; and sure it's meself that knows what discipline ought to be."

"Ah! my dear sir, the discipline of the Army and that of the Church are two very different things," said Mr. Scales. "We're eighty Poor Brothers in this establishment; and every night the curfew rings—eight strokes of the bell! When one dies, there are only seventy-nine strokes until the vacancy is filled up; and you may believe me when I tell you that there is something horrid in sitting in one's lonely room of a dark wintry night, and counting the bell to see whether a Brother has not died since we all met in the common hall in the afternoon. For there are some very, very old men here; and old men go off, you know, like the snuff of a candle. Then, when one does die, and we hear the bell stop at seventy-nine, it sends the blood all cold and icelike to the heart—and a shudder creeps over the frame, from head to foot,—for there's no saying whose turn it may be next. Ah! captain, it may seem but a trifling thing to you—a very trifling and paltry thing, this tolling of the curfew-bell: but I can assure you that to us, who are pent up here, it is no such trivial matter. For, in the deep, deep silence of this cloistral building, the dreary, dull, monotonous tolling of that bell suddenly arouses the most painful thoughts—thoughts of approaching death, and coffins, and shrouds, and new-made graves, and all the sombre ceremony of funerals. But to hear that bell toll one *less*—to know that a Brother has succumbed to the icy hand of the destroyer—to feel that there is a gap in our fraternity—a vacancy in our association,—even though we may not have loved—perhaps not even respected the individual who is gone,—still to have forced upon us, by the deep-toned monitor, the conviction that he is gone,—this—this is terrible in our loneliness!"

The captain made no observation; but he evidently listened with profound attention;—and Mr. Scales, warming in his subject, went on.

"I told you just now that I am naturally of a gay and cheerful disposition, and that I can make myself

happy under most circumstances. But when I am alone here of an evening, and listen to the curfew-bell, I—yes, *I* also am seized with a cold shuddering, and my blood creeps with an ice-chill in my veins. And if I hear the strokes stop at seventy-nine, it suddenly appears to me that a shape, dim, shadowy, and wrapped in a shroud, flits past me;—and I cast my eyes around—almost dreading lest the pale and ghastly spectre of the deceased Brother should be standing behind my chair. And, when there *is* one lying dead in the Charter House, I feel afraid at night—and sleep visits not my pillow. I do not believe in ghosts—at least, I do not believe in them when it is day-time: but in the deep, silent, and dark night,—yes, *then* I believe in them—and I tremble! Oh! you can form no idea of the horrors endured in this place while the curfew-bell tolls; for if it give forth a single note less than the eighty, then every one shudderingly says within himself—aye, and in the solitude of his own chamber—'*Who knows but that it may be my turn next?*' Is it not cruel, then, to maintain that monastic custom of ringing the nightly bell,—to alarm weak and trembling old men whose intellects are attenuated by the weight of years, and whose imaginations are so susceptible of all influences likely to engender the gloomiest forebodings; for such is the case with the great majority of the Poor Brothers of the Charter House."

The captain made a brief remark to show that he was listening with deep attention—as indeed he was; and Mr. Scales proceeded in the following manner:—

"Yes—the greater portion of the Poor Brothers are very infirm old men, who need companionship to enliven them, and little attentions to cheer them, and indulgences to render their existence tolerable. But every morning,—summer and winter—hot or cold—sunshine above, or snow knee-deep below,—they must all turn out at an early hour from their warm beds; and while still fasting, must repair to the chapel to attend prayers. And in the performance of this duty, which is rigidly enforced by fine, we are compelled to wear long, dark cloaks, so that when thus muffled up we appear to be a procession of monks, each wrapped in his cowl! Here again you may observe that there is no harm in the custom;—but you must remember that there is a vast difference between what one does spontaneously, and what he is forced by a rigid, inexorable discipline to do. The fact that these poor old men are thus compelled to wear the badge of monastic pauperism is the iron that enters into their souls. They have been compelled by their necessities to accept an asylum in this place—and they feel that they are treated as paupers. Their old age, which the world without believes to be passing in a serene and tranquil happiness here, unruffled by mundane cares, is rendered miserable and wretched by a thousand little vexatious points of discipline which make up an aggregate sum of tremendous ecclesiastical oppression In the deep silence of the night—the awful silence that reigns throughout this pile,—and in the solitude of his gloomy apartment,—each of those poor old creatures broods upon what he deems to be his wrongs;—and you need not be surprised when I tell you that they are often driven to the very verge of despair—or to the threshold of madness! Ah! and it is not only the curfew-bell—nor the compulsory attendance at chapel—nor the long, dark cowls,—it is not all this alone," continued the Brother, now speaking with solemn earnestness;—"but it is that we are watched by spies—watched in all our movements within or without the walls,—watched to be caught tripping, be it never so lightly—in order that we may be punished—or perhaps expelled, to make room for some one whom the Master or any other authority is anxious to provide for. The surgeon is a spy upon us—the porter is a spy upon us—all the nurses are spies upon us; and what is worse," added Mr. Scales, now sinking his voice to an ominous whisper, and bending his head forward so as almost to reach the captain's ear with his lips,—"and what is worse," he repeated, bitterly but still in that low tone,—"we are spies upon each other!"

Captain O'Blunderbuss started, and surveyed his new friend with astonishment.

"I do not mean to say that I am a spy upon the rest—nor will I assert that we are all spies with regard to each other," resumed Mr. Scales: "but this I declare—that there are many inmates of the place who do enact the part of spies against their fellows. Some wish to curry favour with the Master, Archdeacon Hale—others carry their tittle-tattle to the surgeon;—some gossip of their Brethren to the manciple, or steward—others endeavour to worm themselves into the good graces of even the cook;—and all the nurses, with scarcely an exception, are the spies of the matron. I tell you, sir, that there is a monstrous system of supervision and *espionnage* in existence within these walls;—and one Brother cannot talk as a friend to another—because he is afraid that he may be all the time making revelations to an individual who will betray him! We have no confidence in each other—we are all afraid of one another. There is not such a thing as a good-natured chat and harmless conversation in the Charter House. If you make the most common-place observation upon things the most indifferent, Brother Gray, or Brother Jones, or Brother Jenkins will shake his head knowingly, as if he saw something covert and mysteriously significant at the bottom of the remark. But wherefore does such a state of things prevail in the Charter House, you will enquire;—and perhaps you will observe that if the Brethren enact the part of spies upon each other, they alone are to blame for making themselves miserable. Pause, however—and reflect that it is all the fault of the authorities. *They* encourage this contemptible tittle-tattle—*they* show favour to the poor silly old dotards who carry them tidings of all the complaints, expressions of discontent, or occasional instances of convivial excess which occur on the part of the rest. These spies are favoured by the authorities: the others know it, and become spies themselves;—and thus they all spy upon each other, even as the Jesuits do in obedience to the rules of their Order. Oh! the mean and contemptible littleness of mind which such a state of things engenders! I am sick—disgusted, Captain O'Blunderbuss, when I think of it."

"Be Jasus! and well you may be, my dear frind!" cried the gallant gentleman. "But who is the governor, d'ye say?"

"Archdeacon Hale is the Master, as he is called—Archdeacon Hale, the notorious pluralist who fattens upon the loaves and fishes of the Church, without ever having done a single thing to render him deserving of such fine preferment and such large emoluments. He it is who presides over this Protestant monkery,—who enforces in the nineteenth century the grinding discipline of the sixteenth,—who moves the whole machinery of *espionnage*, and rules us as a mitred abbot was wont to sway his Romish brotherhood. If a gentleman, reduced by adversity, once enters these

walls as an inmate, he must resign himself to the treatment of a pauper. The authorities look upon us in that light; and the servants behave to us accordingly. The very porter will sometimes call us by our Christian or surnames, without the prefatory *Mister*. If the surgeon visit us, it is evident that he considers himself to be doing us a great favour—just as you may suppose that the medical man belonging to an Union of Parishes behaves towards the pauper invalids requiring his services. Should the Matron have occasion to call upon us, it is with all the airs of a fine lady—she who curtseys and does not dare sit down in the presence of the Archdeacon's wife! The manciple, or steward, is likewise a great man;—and woe to the Poor Brother who does not receive *him* with all possible respect. The nurses attend upon us in a slovenly, negligent manner; and we dare not complain nor remonstrate—for we know that they are spies ready to report us for every incautious word that we may utter, or even to *invent* charges against us. It was but the other day that one of the inmates—a poor old man of nearly seventy—*did* venture to complain of the shameful neglect which he experienced at the hands of his nurse. What was the consequence? She made a counter-charge, to the effect that he had taken liberties with her! The woman's statement—her unsupported statement was believed in preference to the denial and the complaint of the old man, and he was expelled the Charter House for six months—turned out upon the wide world to live how he could, or die as he might!* Oh! you have no idea of the tremendous tyranny that is perpetrated within these walls, where all is so silent and all appears to be so serene and tranquil! A short time ago a Brother, driven to despair by the horrors of the place, went away—took an obscure lodging—and put an end to his life by means of poison. The authorities hushed up the matter as well as they could—prevented the interference of the Coroner—and had the man buried within three days from the moment of his self-destruction.† These are all facts, sir—stubborn facts; and the public should know them. Yes—the public should learn that there are eighty old men dwelling in a monastic institution in the very heart of London—enduring a discipline as severe, and subject to a system as despotic and oppressive as in the olden times and in those very cloistral establishments which Henry the Eighth destroyed! The public should be informed that these eighty old men are the victims of ecclesiastical tyranny, and that they are compelled to endure neglect and even insult at the hands of the very servants who are so liberally paid to attend upon them."

"Be the power-r-s! it 's a bur-r-ning shame!" cried Captain O'Blunderbuss: "and what 's worse of all, is that it 's the parsons who are your governors and by consequence your oppressors in this establisment. Bad luck to 'em, say I!"

"A good parson is a most estimable, as well as a most necessary character in society," said Mr. Scales; "and this every sensible man must admit. But an intolerant, illiberal, tyrannical parson is the greatest curse that can be inflicted upon a community. Such is our case—such is our misfortune. We have half-a-dozen parsons belonging to the institution; and their main object is to get all the loaves and fishes to themselves. Though they rule us with a rod of iron, they do not mind breaking the regulations themselves. For instance, if a Poor Brother remains away from chapel without the surgeon's leave, or returns home a little after hours in the evening, he is reported and fined—fined out of the beggarly pittance of seven pounds ten shillings a quarter allowed him to purchase tea, sugar, milk, and the many other necessaries which the establishment does not supply. But though the regulations specify in distinct terms that the Master is to reside constantly upon the premises, he laughs at the enactments, and passes weeks or months together in the country. No fine—no punishment for him! Who would dare to talk of calling the Very Reverend Archdeacon Hale over the coals? But who does *not* hesitate to kick Poor Brother Gray, or Poor Brother Jones, or Poor Brother Scales from pillar to post, and from post to pillar, if he be caught tripping in the slightest degree?"

"Jist now, me frind," exclaimed Captain O'Blunderbuss, looking particularly fierce, "ye assured me that ye had n't an inimy in the wor-r-ld: but it sames pritty clare to me that I must be afther punching the head of your Archdacon—or manciple—or porter—or some one, jist to revinge your wrongs and create a little sinsation for the Poor Brothers, as ye call yourselves."

"My dear fellow, do nothing mad or rash!" cried Mr. Scales, positively believing at the moment that the formidable Irishman was about to declare war against the authorities of the institution, and that he would experimentalise with his fists upon the first of those functionares who might chance to come in his way. "All that I have been telling you is sacred between you and me;—and as a man of honour, I must appeal to you——"

"Be Jasus! and if it 's to me honour-r-r ye appale," interrupted the captain, slapping his left breast with the palm of his right hand, "I 'll not brathe a wor-rd to a sowl that I 'm acquainted with any gravances at all, at all. But, remimber, if the time should come when ye may feel inclined to administher a thrifling dhrubbing or so to any of thim spalpeens of whom we 've been talking——"

"Hush!" cried Mr. Scales, suddenly: "some one is ascending the stairs. Let us pretend to be speaking on matters quite indifferent."

"With all my heart!" said the captain: and, elevating his voice for the behoof of the person who was approaching the room from the stairs, he exclaimed, "Yes—'t is a very fine mornin', Misther Scales—a very fine mornin' indeed!"—just as if, in the natural course of things, he would have made, after a visit of nearly three hours, the remark with which a conversation is usually commenced.

Mr. Scales burst out laughing at this display of his new friend's ingenuity; and the captain laughed heartily likewise—though he knew not precisely at what.

In the midst of this cachinnation, the door opened, and the nurse, or charwoman, entered to lay the cloth for dinner.

CHAPTER CXLIX.

A STRANGE NARRATIVE.

THE nurse was a tall, middle-aged, powerfully-built woman, with brawny arms, and a countenance that indicated a slight affection for an occasional drop of

* Fact.

† Fact. This incident shows how the Ministers of the Established Church will at times unscrupulously set the laws of the land at defiance.

"something short." In fact, it was observed by the Brethren on whom she waited, that she never looked sulky when requested to repair to the public-house to order any thing in the shape of beer or spirits; but if entrusted with an errand of another kind—such as the purchase of half a quire of writing-paper or a stick of sealing-wax—it was a very great chance if she would be seen any more until the next day. Her manners were of the free-and-easy school; and she was accustomed to address the Poor Brothers in a half-pitying, half-patronising style, as if they were patients in a hospital or in the infirmary of a debtors' gaol. If wearied, she would unhesitatingly seat herself without being asked, and glide imperceptibly into a familiar kind of discourse, while wiping the perspiration from her rubicund face with her blue checked cotton apron; and if it were in the cold weather, she would wait upon her masters with a black bonnet, like an inverted japan coal-scuttle, on her head—the propriety of leaving the tegumentary article in the passage outside, never for a moment striking the ingenuous and simple-minded creature.

If this excellent woman had any special failing,—besides such little faults as drunkenness, inattention, slovenliness, cool impudence, and deep hypocrisy,—it was a propensity to gossip and a love of scandal. If she were only carrying a pail down the stairs, and met another nurse with a pail coming up the stairs, they must both set down their pails on the landing, and stop to have a quarter of an hour's chat on the affairs of their respective masters. Then one would whisper how Poor Brother Smith was the meanest skin-flint on the face of the earth; and the other would declare that it was impossible for him to be worse than Poor Brother Webb, who was always complaining and yet never gave her even so much as a drop of gin;—and in this manner the two women would unburthen their minds, to the sad waste of their time and the neglect of those whom they were well paid to render comfortable. But Mrs. Pitkin—for that was the name of the nurse who waited on Mr. Scales and the other gentlemen living in the chambers opening from the same staircase,—Mrs. Pitkin, we say, was a more inveterate gossip than any other charwoman in the place; and, as a matter of course, when she had no trifling truths to retail or make much of, she deliberately and coolly invented a pack of lies, purporting to be the most recent sayings and doings of her masters. The consequence was, that a great deal of mischief resulted at times from these playful exercises of Mrs. Pitkin's imaginative qualities; and more than one poor Brother was looked upon as an habitual drunkard, or as a sad old fellow amongst the women, without any other ground for the entertainment of such an opinion than the mysterious whispers of Mrs. Pitkin.

Well, it was this same Mrs. Pitkin who made her appearance, as already described, to lay Mr. Scales's cloth and get the dinner ready.

"What o'clock is it, nurse?" asked Mr. Scales, suspiciously.

"Only a little after two," she replied: but scarcely were the words uttered, when the Charter House bell proclaimed the hour of three. "Well, I'm sure!" she cried, affecting the profoundest astonishment; "I never could have believed it were so late. Deary me! deary me! But it's all through that disagreeable Mr. Yapp, who would have his cupboard washed out this morning—though I told him it was n't near six months since he had it done last."

"Well—where have you put the potatoes to boil?" demanded Mr. Scales.

"The taturs, sir? Lor, sir—did you order taturs?" asked Mrs. Pitkin, now pretending to seem more astounded than ever. "Well, I 'm sure I thought as how you said you 'd have your chops without any waggitables at all!"

"Chops!" repeated Mr. Scales, now waxing positively wroth: "I ordered steaks——"

"Steeks!" cried the woman, holding up her hands as if in amazement. "Why—how could I ever have misunderstood you so? But it 's no matter—I can just as well get steeks as chops; and one do n't take much longer cooking than another."

"Then, am I to understand that you have as yet got neither chops nor steaks?" asked Mr. Scales, subduing his anger as much as possible.

"Lor, sir! how could I go to the butcher's when there 's three of my masters is inwalids and dines in their own rooms to-day? But I'll be off at once—and you shall have dinner in a jiffey, I can promise you!"

Thus speaking, the woman walked lazily out of the room; and when the door was closed behind her, Mr. Scales, turning to the captain, said, "Now you perceive how we Poor Brothers are waited upon by these nurses. You heard me give her specific orders to have a steak and potatoes ready for us at two. She comes in at three, and has totally forgotten all about the dinner—for *that* is the English of it. And yet I dare not complain against her: I dare not even speak harshly to the woman's face. But should you not imagine that, after her neglectful conduct, she would make all possible haste to get the meal ready? No such thing! Look there," continued Mr. Scales, motioning Captain O'Blunderbuss to the window: "she has fallen in with another nurse, and they are stopping to have a gossip. Now they are going out together; and before we shall see Mrs. Pitkin again, she will have paid a tolerably long visit with her companion to the bar of the Fox and Anchor."

"Be Jasus! and shall I be afther her, my dear frind?" demanded Captain O'Blunderbuss, rushing towards the door.

"It is useless," said Mr. Scales, holding him back: "we must have patience. But do you see that old man, standing apart from the rest——"

"And laning on a stick?" cried the captain.

"The same," returned the good-natured and communicative Brother. "Observe how pensive—how melancholy he seems! That is Brother Johnson—late Alderman and once Lord Mayor of London."

"Be Jasus! and I ricollict!" exclaimed the captain: "'t is the hero of the Romford Bank affair."

"Precisely so," responded Mr. Scales. "And now do you perceive that short, stout, elderly gentleman, leaning on the arm of a friend from outside ——"

"He walks as if he was blind," interrupted the captain.

"And blind he unfortunately is," said Mr. Scales: "but not irremediably so. There is every prospect that, with care and good medical advice, he will recover his sight. He is a man who has made some noise in the world—but with high honour to himself: in a word, he is Valcrieff, the celebrated dramatic author."

"And a most rispictable-looking gintleman he is," observed the captain. "I've laughed many times at his farces, and little thought I should iver have the pleasure of seeing the writer-r himself, even at a disthance."

"There is one inmate of this establishment," said Mr. Scales, quitting the window and returning to his seat—an example followed by the gallant officer,—"there is one inmate whose early history is very peculiar; and the most extraordinary circumstance connected with the matter is that he believes the events of his younger days to be entirely unknown and unsuspected within these walls. I should not point him out to you, even were he amongst the loungers in the court at this moment: neither shall I mention his name—or rather the name by which he is here known. But I may state that thirty years ago I knew him by the name of Macpherson. We met in Paris, shortly after the peace—and he was living, with a beautiful French woman as his mistress, in very handsome apartments. Her name was Augustine; and she certainly was the most lovely creature I ever saw in my life. Macpherson adored her; and while he believed that she worshipped him in return, her infidelity was notorious amongst all his friends. He had succeeded to a small fortune, by the death of an uncle; and, on visiting Paris, had fallen in with this young lady, whose charms immediately enthralled him. She was a banker's cast-off mistress, and was glad to ensnare a handsome English gentleman in her meshes. Her extravagance was unbounded; and in less than a year Macpherson's resources were completely exhausted. It would appear that Augustine at that period introduced to him a Frenchman whose real name was Legrand, but whom she passed off as her brother. This Legrand was elegant in manners and agreeable in conversation, as well as handsome in person; but he was unprincipled, dissipated, and of broken fortunes. From all I subsequently learnt, and from the knowledge I had of Macpherson's character, I feel convinced that Legrand made my English friend his dupe and victim; and that Macpherson was entirely innocent of any intentional complicity. Certain however it is that one morning I was thunder-struck by the tidings that Macpherson had been arrested on a charge of forgery. I hastened to him in prison; and he declared most solemnly that he was guiltless. It was true that he had negotiated the instrument which was discovered to be fictitious: but he assured me that Legrand had induced him to do so. The examination before the Judge of Instruction led to the arrest of Legrand; and it was confidently hoped by Macpherson and his friends that the real truth would transpire at the trial. But when the case came on, Augustine—the faithless, treacherous, ungrateful Augustine—gave such evidence as entirely to exonerate Legrand and fix all the guilt upon Macpherson. She committed perjury: but her tale was believed,—for it was consistent, though false—delivered with plausibility, though based on the most damnable deceit. In fact, the vile woman sacrificed the Englishman whom she had ruined and never loved, to the French paramour whom she had passed off as her brother; and Macpherson, being pronounced guilty, was condemned to be exposed and branded upon a scaffold on the Place de Grêve, and to be afterwards imprisoned for a period of five years at the galleys at Brest. Myself and another English gentleman drew up a memorial to the King, setting forth a variety of circumstances in favour of Macpherson, and imploring the royal mercy on behalf of our unhappy fellow-countryman. Louis the Eighteenth referred the petition to the Judges who had condemned Macpherson, and as they stated that they had taken every thing into consideration when they pronounced his punishment, the Minister of Justice and Grace could not hold out to the petitioners any hopes of a commutation of the sentence. We had endeavoured to obtain the remission of that portion of the sentence which condemned Macpherson to be publicly exposed and marked with a red hot iron—but, alas! this indignity could not be spared the unhappy sufferer. Well, the fatal morning arrived, when this dread public ceremony was to take place. Macpherson rose early, and devoted unusual care to his toilet. His countenance was ghastly pale—his eyes were fixed,—his lips compressed. He did all he could to appear calm, and endeavoured to meet his punishment with firmness. But to be condemned for an offence of which he was innocent;—to see the fairest years of his youth destined to be passed in a horrible state of servitude;—to know that he was about to be branded with an infamous mark, which he would carry with him to the grave,—all this must have been beyond human endurance. Had he been really guilty, his sufferings would not have been so acute;—had he deserved his punishment, he would have bowed to those destinies which he would have thus prepared for himself. But he was innocent—innocent; and the world did not know it:—only a few faithful friends consoled him by the assurance that they believed in his innocence. On the fatal morning which was to consummate his disgrace, I visited him early; but when I found him so apparently resigned and calm, I did not offer those consolations which I would otherwise have tendered, and which were all I had now to offer.

"It was about eleven o'clock, in the forenoon," continued Mr. Scales, "when Macpherson was summoned to the lobby of the prison. Two gendarmes were waiting there to conduct him to the Place de Grêve, where he was to remain exposed for two hours, and then be marked. He resigned himself to their custody, and, accompanied by myself, proceeded towards the great square where the hideous ceremony was to be performed. Immense crowds were collected in all the avenues leading to the Place, which was itself thronged to excess. Two lines of soldiers kept a pathway clear for the march of the prisoner up to the foot of the scaffold. He did not cast his eyes downwards:—nor did he glance to the right or to the left; but he kept them fixed upon the scaffold towards which he was advancing. He ascended the ladder with a firm step, accompanied only by the gendarmes; for I was compelled to remain below. The moment he appeared upon the platform, a tremendous shout arose from the thousands and thousands of spectators assembled to witness his punishment; but no indignity of a violent nature was offered to him. He cast a hurried and anxious glance around: the whole square seemed literally paved with human faces, which were continued up every street communicating with the Grêve, as far as he could see. The quay behind him, the bridges, the windows and roofs of all the houses, and even the towers of Nôtre Dame and the parapet of the Hotel-de-Ville were crowded with human countenances. Macpherson remained exposed for two hours, seated upon a chair on the scaffold, while the populace, with hyena-yells and laughter, were contemplating him as if he were a wild beast which they delighted to see, but of which they were afraid. The idea, whether this penalty were deserved or not, never entered the head of one single individual in that vast multitude;—all that they cared about was the man and his punishment—and both were there! At the expiration of the two hours, the crowd suddenly opened, and the

public executioner, attended by his two sons, appeared at the foot of the scaffold. One of the lads carried a small iron pot, at the bottom of which there was a grating: in this vessel was a bright fire of red hot cinders and charcoal. The other boy carried an iron implement in his hand. It was like a very small shovel, with a tolerably long handle. The three wretches ascended the ladder, and the shouts and the hootings of the mob recommenced with increased violence as the public functionary bowed jocosely to Macpherson. A horrible laugh issued from those who stood nearest, and who comprehended the fashion of the executioner's salute. This individual then arranged his *paraphernalia* in a convenient manner. He placed the brazier close to the convict's chair, and put the shovel-looking implement into the fire. He next proceeded to inform Macpherson that he must take off his coat and other vestments from his left shoulder. The prisoner obeyed mechanically. He doffed his coat and his waistcoat on the left side; and the executioner instantly cut a large square piece out of his shirt, just above the left shoulder-blade, immediately above the curve of the shoulder. The most breathless suspense now prevailed; and not a cry—not a murmur was heard throughout the dense masses of people wedged together around. 'Take courage, my boy,' said the executioner, half ironically and half in pity; 'it will only be the affair of a few moments.' I heard him make these remarks—for I was close by the scaffold. He then proceeded to strap the convict tightly down in his chair, confined his arms and legs, and twisted the cords in such a manner around his body and the back of the seat that he was rendered as motionless and powerless as if he were a statue. Ten minutes elapsed, and the thick part of the iron was by that time red hot. This was the crowning moment of the whole day's amusement—an amusement provided by the law that forbade bull-baits and punishes cruelty to animals! The executioner stooped down, seized the iron, and applied it to Macpherson's flesh—to that bare part which the square cut out of the shirt had left exposed. The iron hissed on the young man's shoulder; and a fearful yell escaped his lips. The iron remained upon the flesh for two or three instants: the sufferer writhed in agony; but only that one loud, long, and piercing cry escaped his lips. The implement was withdrawn;—one of the executioner's sons placed a cup-full of water to the convict's lips, and thus saved him from fainting in the chair. The cords were then unbound,—the young man's dress was adjusted,—and the gendarmes told him that they were ready to convey him back to prison. As he passed through the dense multitude that had witnessed his punishment, he now hung down his head—abashed and ashamed. Even had he not felt the smart of the burn upon his back, the knowledge that he was branded with the mark of infamy would have been sufficient thus to humble and subdue him. Women held up their children to gaze upon him as he passed along;—he heard an old father bid his son take warning from the example he had just witnessed; and as he emerged from the crowd, and entered a comparatively deserted street, on his way back to prison, he caught the following words which were uttered, with a laugh, by one spectator to another,—'Oh! there's the man who has just been marked!'—'Marked! eh—and with a scar that he would carry to his grave!' thought I, shuddering from head to foot. He returned to the prison of La Force; and the moment he entered the lobby, he fell into my arms; for I had walked by his side from the Place de Grève. The courage of the man now failed him altogether; and he burst into a violent passion of grief. The tears flowed in torrents from his eyes; his breast heaved convulsively. I endeavoured in vain to console him; and then I thought it best to allow his agony to have full vent, and he would feel relieved. The truth of this opinion was speedily confirmed; and, when Macpherson dried his tears, he exclaimed, 'Now that the first bitterness of my career of misery is over, I feel nerved and resigned to encounter the ills which heaven has in store for me.'—'My dear friend,' I said, 'you must yet hope for many happy years: the term of your incarceration will soon pass away, and you will then hasten to England, where friends will be prepared to receive you with open arms, and enable you to forget the sorrows that will then be over!'—'Alas!' he cried—and the words still ring in my ears,—'how can I forget all this degradation and infamy? How can I ever again appear in the great world, every member of which will have read my trial, and many of whom have this day seen me writhing beneath the hot iron in the hands of the public executioner? Even supposing my innocence be eventually proved, and that all moral infamy be separated from my name, who will remove the scar from my shoulder? who will not remember that for five years I shall have herded with the refuse of mankind? who will believe that, even if guiltless I went to the galleys, uncontaminated I have been released from them? What father will entrust his daughter to the convict? what mother will consent to the union of her child with a man who has been publicly marked upon the scaffold? what brother would allow his sister, pure and chaste, to link herself to one whose outset in life has been so horribly characterised as mine? And lastly, lastly,' added he, sinking his voice almost to a whisper, and clenching his fists and grinding his teeth as he spoke,—'and lastly, who can remove the deep, deep scar from my heart, even should there be a physician skilful enough to efface the one upon my shoulder?'—I was then compelled to take leave of him; and, on the following day, he was removed to Bicêtre, and lodged with the other convicts who were about to travel the same road together. He now found that his situation was wretched indeed. Compelled to associate with men who had been guilty of the most horrible crimes, and who gloried in their infamy, his ears were offended with their obscene conversation and their fearful blasphemies; and he was ill-treated by his fellow-prisoners, because he would not laugh at their jokes or join in their revolting discourse. If he threatened to complain, he was reviled and mocked. But I shall hasten to the end of my story—or at least to this part of it. The day for the departure of the Chain of Galley-Slaves arrived; and I took leave of my unfortunate friend. He was conducted to Brest, where he worked on the port for a short time; and then, on account of his good conduct, he was made a clerk in the office of the Governor. This was the last account I heard of him while he was at the Galleys; for just at that period the death of a distant relative called me to England, and the inheritance of some property was accompanied with the condition that I should change my name to that of the individual whose fortune thus devolved upon me.

"Six years had passed," continued Mr. Scales,—"six years since the events which I have just related to you, when accident enabled me to obtain a complete assurance of that which I had all along fully believed,—namely, the innocence of Macpherson respecting the forgery. I was passing down Aldersgate Street late