

"THE STORY OF OUR LIVES FROM YEAR TO YEAR."—SHAKESPEARE.

ALL THE YEAR ROUND.

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A WHITE HAND AND A BLACK THUMB.

IN THIRTEEN CHAPTERS.

CHAPTER V.

PASSING over a few days, we find our Polly my-Lamb no longer a solitary little maiden, but under the affectionate and rather piercing eye of Aunty Serocold—no relation in the world, but what, I am sorry to say, is often infinitely better—an old friend, and also a schoolfellow of good Mrs. Humpage, deceased.

This lady who, though the suns of five-and-forty summers had ripened her fair cheek, was yet unchosen as a bride, had passed the later years of her life abroad. The death of her mother, in Holland, had occasioned her return to her own land; and, at the request of the orphaned heiress, she had taken up her temporary abode in Jermyn-street, and there did her utmost to cheer and comfort the lonely little girl.

[In the lowest possible tone, let us whisper to the reader that Aunty Serocold, who was by nature of a lively and social turn, found it sometimes a little, even not a little, dull. No power or persuasion on earth, however, could have prevailed with her to say so. The pair saw no company, and, now, even Sir James Polhill, deeply mortified at the failure of his redoubted lieutenant, had discontinued his visits.]

In the mean time, it had been ascertained that the band of Black-Thumbs, far from breaking up, were more active and united than ever. That excellent brotherhood celebrated their leader's recent successful exploit by stopping the carriage of the Lord Mayor himself, as that dignitary, attended by three footmen and a couple of armed retainers, was returning from a performance at Sadler's Wells. Not a groat did they leave on the persons of any one of the party; but the greatest audacity was perpetrated by Lord Lob himself, who took off the enraged magistrate's wig and chain of office, and rode off, decorated with both! This unheard-of atrocity provoked the Common Council to such a degree as to induce the offer of an immense reward; and it seemed that Lord Lob, the fearless, deemed it no unwise proceeding to relieve the metropolis for a few months of his presence. At all events, his daring and skilful hand was no

longer recognisable in the daily recurring records of London crime. And thus matters stood on the morning on which we re-visit the house of the Three Elms.

"Do you prefer sitting in the window, Aunt Serocold?" asked Polly-my-Lamb. "Will you not be more comfortable here?" arranging a tempting cushioned chair near the fire.

"My dear, who are your opposite neighbours, do you know?" was the rejoinder.

"A Mrs. Ascroft, I believe, ma'am," said the young lady, quietly.

"That's *one* of them, dear. Who else?"

"Oh! Captain Broxley."

"The big man, that always quarrels with his chairmen. Yes. Well?"

"I beg your pardon?"

"Who else, dear? Go on," said Mistress Serocold, her eyes fixed upon the house.

"Ah! yes—a Mrs. —"

"Stuff, Polly! Once for all, who is that pretty young gentleman, always making believe to draw, in the middle window, but always looking—looking—"

"At *you*, aunt?"

"Well, it's certainly very odd," said Aunt Serocold, with a becoming embarrassment. "It unquestionably *is* odd. I wish he wouldn't, you know. Ah! there he is! It was, I think, on the second day after my arrival, that I happened to be standing at the window, when a young person—a remarkably handsome young man—suddenly appeared in the window of the opposite house. Our eyes met. His fell—he withdrew. A few minutes later, I chanced again to approach the window—again he was before me—again his eyes fell, and, with an air of diffidence, shall I call it?—once more he precipitately retired. These little encounters have been of frequent occurrence, my dear. If he sees but the flutter of my dress, in a second he is at his post, but only to desert it again, with an expression of mingled deference and (vanity would whisper) admiration, which, I must confess, have not been wholly without their effect on my mind. I thought at first it might be *you*!"

"Dear me, aunt! why should you imagine that?" asked Polly the innocent.

"I'll tell you why I knew it was not," returned the elder spinster. "You happened to come to the window once, during one of these singular

interviews. In a second the young man's face changed in its whole expression. He coloured scarlet, and stole away as though caught in some fact, to the tender gravity of which his heart bore testimony."

"But, really, aunty," returned Polly, blushing a little, "I think we may find a more agreeable subject to discuss than Master Arthur Haggerdorn."

"Arthur Haggerdorn! So, that's his name! Why didn't you say so before?"

"Did I not, aunt? I—suppose I—forgot—or—didn't remem—Yes—O yes—Master Arthur Haggerdorn." And thereupon the young lady recounted to her companion the history as detailed by Mrs. Ascroft, not omitting the interest with which he had inspired his kind landlady.

Miss Serocold was sensibly touched, and with difficulty refrained from tears.

"The poor orphan!" she exclaimed. "And, doubtless, now he is striving to do something for his daily bread. I shall never forgive myself for having, though involuntarily, embarrassed these noble efforts. He must have wasted an immensity of time at that window. We owe him some reparation, dear. Could we not, now," added Aunt Serocold, with maidenly hesitation, "send him—a little—"

"Money, dear aunt? He does not want it."

"Nor would I so far insult his noble nature as to offer it," said Miss Serocold, warmly. "He would wave it from him with disdain! No—send him a little note, you know. Invite him to tea."

"My dear aunt! Tea? Are you in your senses?"

"I flatter myself I am as collected as yourself, child," returned Miss Serocold, in a high state of perturbation; "nor is there anything so very extraordinary in my proposal. At the Hague, people used to come in to tea without being asked at all. I am sure he draws beautifully. My dear mother was devoted to the art, and I feel I am but paying fitting reverence to her memory in encouraging its professors to the best of my power."

"But not necessarily by inviting them to tea, dear."

"Humph! But it's no matter. Indeed, I must beg your pardon for forgetting that I am myself but a guest."

"You are my dearest, almost my only friend." And Polly-my-Lamb kissed and soothed her in a manner few could resist; but my aunt was hard to pacify, and continued to bemoan the youth's hard fortune, expressing at the same time such a longing desire to inspect those wondrous specimens of art on which he was so unceasingly employed, that Polly-my-Lamb, wearied out, yielded reluctant consent that a verbal message should be despatched to Mrs. Ascroft, intimating a wish to examine more closely any of those productions of the young artist, whose progress had been unavoidably witnessed over the way. The young lady reconciling her conscience to this forward step, by regarding the message as confined to Mrs. Ascroft, and instructing the bearer accordingly.

To her extreme confusion, an answer was returned, with lightning speed, to the effect that the young gentleman would himself fulfil the grateful duty of leaving a few of his best drawings.

My aunt precipitately glided from the room, nor was Miss Serocold visible to mortal eyes, save those of her maid Hester, until near the hour of evening refection, when she rustled into the apartment in a gown of silver-grey, which had not seen the light since the grand entertainment given at the Hague on the marriage of the Stadholder's nephew, and now, redolent of lavender, came forth to do honour to the arts—as represented by Master Haggerdorn.

"Of course we will ask him to tea, aunt," said Polly, reassured by remembering Mrs. Ascroft's allusions to his juvenility. "He shall have tamarisks and Barbary prunes, and you shall tell him a story."

So, in due course, that is, at six o'clock, the expected guest appeared, proving to be a remarkably fine infant of nineteen, who, with galloping pulse and bewildered brain, presented himself, portfolio in hand, and paid his compliments to the two ladies.

Miss Serocold dexterously flung her handkerchief over the Barbary prunes, and both ladies welcomed their guest not the less graciously because the traces of severe illness were still visible on his fair open face. The lad's singular beauty, even more striking on a closer inspection, almost awed Aunt Serocold into silence: while Polly-my-Lamb, who, on seeing the stature of her guest, had resolved to be marble, found herself transmuted, by force of the laws of hospitality, into common clay.

Agitated as he certainly was, young Haggerdorn's manner possessed all the seeming ease and actual grace of perfect breeding. But the perpetual change of colour, the eager, anxious expression of the luminous eye, the tremor of his voice, bore abundant witness to the tempest of feeling that raged within. Polly-my-Lamb felt, with considerable alarm, that she was becoming slightly infected, and was conscious of a hearty desire to run away, put her head into some dark corner, and, being thus, like the ostrich, secure from all peril, weep for a quarter of an hour. But this being, for the present, incompatible with her duties as hostess, the young lady steeled herself as much as might be against the silent fascinations of her visitor, by trying to feel both wounded and offended by his presence there at all—the plea of infancy, so craftily urged by his landlady, being completely overruled. Why, the impudent young man had absolutely a brown and curling moustache, so silken-soft, it is true, as to have passed (across the way) for one of those darker shadows which tedious sickness casts on many a fair face. There was no help, however. Beard, or no beard, the boy—that is, the youth—that is, the man—could not be turned out till after tea.

Now it was that the drawings, which proved

to be very indifferently-executed studies of highly-uninteresting ruralities, proved an inestimable relief. Never, surely, were the early struggles of juvenile artist against the difficulties of perspective and the inexorable laws of gravitation, received with such cheering encouragement. A donkey, upon three swollen legs (fourth invisible), who had parted with his shadow in exchange for the substance of a thistle as big as his own head, provoked a world of enthusiastic comment. A ruined feudal residence, whose toppling towers, rising far above a seemingly impenetrable wood, looked like tipsy Titans fighting in a green bog, restored comparative composure to the embarrassed group. And, finally, a sea view with a huge black specimen of naval architecture, perched on the very apex of a mighty wave erected expressly for the purpose, placed everybody completely at ease.

But, as Polly-my-Lamb regained her accustomed calmness, she became only more and more deeply impressed with the singular character of the countenance before her. Again and again did she turn her eyes, almost angrily, aside. As often did they infallibly wander back, until every lineament of that face of surpassing beauty was rooted in her heart and memory as though engraved in steel.

But the voice—the voice! From what choice cabinet in Nature's laboratory where that skilled craftswoman conceals her rarer gifts, came forth the sounds which, low and tristful as they were, dropped upon the ear like a murmur rather dreamed than heard? Polly-my-Lamb felt her pulse vibrate like an accordant harpstring, and, longing to be angry at the liberty thus taken with her nervous system, sighed unwittingly when the music ceased, and thought her own voice sounded raven-like as she strove to answer.

As for my Aunt Serocold, had the guest preserved anything like reasonable self-possession, her demeanour must have astonished him not a little. Had those golden curls and translucent eyes been exchanged for the hissing snakes and stony gleam of a Medusa, they could scarcely have more effectually subdued her. For ten minutes after his first appearance, she had sat almost like a grey petrefaction, received with dull bewildered apathy the youth's respectful greetings, and, after muttering some half-intelligible sounds, became once more entranced in speechless wonder. We who are entrusted with the key of my aunt's secret soul, perceive one thought alone assuming positive shape, and wandering ghost-like through the intellectual mist, exclaiming, "What upon earth can make this angel in love with me?"

"And I, zese poor limning have broughten you, dears madams," went the musical voice in its pretty foreign-English, "wiz ze fear zat you would sink me for an impostor."

"Sink you, sir!" murmured my aunt.

"Sink me an impostor, when you saw my figuris—sketches."

"'Vigorous,' indeed, sir," said Miss Serocold.

"Zat is, my personen, my humans, I cannot draw a man, far less," he was going to raise his eyes to the younger lady, but changed his purpose, and simply bowed to the elder. "But, ah! An evening red! Here is my best."

And he produced a smudgy landscape, generally mouse-coloured, but representing the god of day half suffocated in a mass of red hot vapour, striking out frantic rays, like feelers, in every direction, and wearing altogether the appearance of a gigantic crab, being grilled on a dullish fire.

My aunt fanned herself involuntarily. The picture was warm enough, but it was nothing to the gaze of the painter, which dwelt searching upon her.

"I wish he'd look at Polly a little!" thought my aunt. "So awkward, really!"

To whatever unseen power the amiable lady appealed, her remonstrance seemed not ineffectual. Miss Humpage requesting him to draw near her tea-table, Arthur Haggerdorn perforce looked towards his inviter. In a second his transparent face was dyed in blushes, from brow to chin. With such extreme sensibility the inexperienced Polly was sorely troubled to deal. She hardly dared address to him the most ordinary expressions of courtesy, and fortunate it was for her that Miss Serocold began at this moment to exhibit manifest tokens of returning life, and presently was able to converse with a collectedness Polly-my-Lamb might envy. What was still more satisfactory, the latter observed that, in proportion as Mr. Haggerdorn's attention was diverted from her friend, so did that lady's disposition to regain it steadily augment.

But now it was that gentleman's turn to be distraught and unintelligible. His replies were made at random, wide of the purpose. He contradicted my aunt in the flattest, though sweetest, manner. He laughed at wrong times. He spilled some cream on the sacred lavender, and saw it not. All his faculties were gradually centring in one point;—the consciousness of being absolutely in the immediate presence of the little idol whose sweet face had, he fondly believed, had power to draw back his fleeting spirit from the very portals of the grave. He knew perfectly well that he was losing self-possession, and yielding more and more to an insane desire to lie down by that footstool on which one of Polly's little diamond shoe-buckles was at that moment glistening, to gaze unreproved upon the bright young face, and listen for the rare words she dropped like jewels on his ear.

So long as Miss Serocold's remarks obtained the slightest notice from him to whom they were addressed, Polly-my-Lamb was comparatively comfortable; but when it became evident that the fire of her ally was wholly ineffective, and that the visitor was becoming more and more unconscious of every object but herself, the poor child grew anxious and confused, blushed, talked nonsense, and, at length, finding the position intolerable, rose and expressed her intention of retiring to her room, and committing

their guest to the care of her aunt for the remainder of the evening.

Polly had expected an effect of some sort from this forced move, but nothing so violent as it did produce. The young man turned deadly white, like one stricken with a sudden terror. The quickened throbbing of his heart was painfully visible. Weakened by recent illness, and with a nervous system wrought to the extreme point of sensibility, it seemed as if but a slight shock was necessary to reduce him to a condition as pitiable as that from which he had so recently emerged. But there was no help for it. The very violence of his emotion only suggested more clearly to Polly the desirability of at once handing over her susceptible love-patient to calmer care. Could there be a fitter doctress than Miss Serocold? Polly-my-Lamb gave him one pleasant smile, and vanished.

"Dear girl! how thoughtful of her!" was Miss Serocold's reflection. "Now, my young friend, you may speak freely, as I know well enough you have been dying to do."

The words had scarcely framed themselves in her thought, when Arthur Haggerdorn was at her feet: kissing her hands, calling her his hope, his blessing, his guardian angel, imploring her pity, heaping epithet on epithet, such as nothing but idolatrous affection could suggest.

Miss Serocold, not absolutely taken by surprise, was startled at the vehemence of the young lover. She drew her hand coyly away.

"This sudden passion, sir—"

"Sudden! It is twenty-four, forty years of growing!"

("How did he guess my age?" thought my aunt.)

"A sousand years it has lived, in zese six weeks," continued the suitor. "'Passion,' saidst you? It is madness. It is *Dess!* I tell you I sall die if you withdraw zis face, which has killed everysing else in ze world!"

"Compose yourself, I entreat you, sir; I have not said that I intended to withdraw it," said my aunt, gently. "Pray be calm. This excessive agitation may be injurious. It is somewhat embarrassing—I—I am inclined to wish my niece had not left us!"

"I also, wiz all my heart," cried the young gentleman. "Recal her, I beseech you, best madam."

"I will endeavour to do so, since you desire it, sir," said my aunt, rather stiffly.

"Desire it? O, my best madam, you guessed my secret well. You found what was ze matter wiz me, and, your tender heart provided ze's comfort. To-morrow I from London certainly go."

"To-morrow!"

"Surely, to-morrow. Why stay? I have looked on my angel. I have heard her voice. I have her fingers felt. I am ready now to die."

Miss Serocold felt inclined to suggest that an increased disposition to live might be a more legitimate result of these successes. All she

said was: "You really leave London to-morrow?"

"And also England, best lady."

"Permit me then to ask you," said the lady, "might it not have been better to postpone these singular declarations till your return?"

"I return never," replied the lover, emphatically.

"I do not think I quite understand you, Mr. Haggerdorn. Are you evincing a becoming consideration for the feelings of—of others, in expressing your own, thus strongly, under the circumstances you mention? What if you had obtained an even more explicit assurance that your overtures might be acceptable—"

"My dear lady! Acceptable? Is zis then possible? But no—no—"

"No, by all means, if you prefer it, sir," said my aunt, turning her head aside, a little coquettishly.

"You will drive me mad wiz joy! I possessed one sousand terrors. I shall name them. First, that being both so young—"

"One of us might be older," thought Miss Serocold, gazing tenderly on the boyish face.

"A stranger, an orphan—"

"Such are commended to our ch—charity," sobbed my aunt.

"A beggar."

"I am far from penniless."

"How satisfying is that! I rejoice wiz my heart to hear it."

"Perhaps you do," was the mental comment.

"In spite of all, you bid me hope? And she, she will then suffer that I zee her?"

"I beg your pardon?" said my aunt.

"She shall hear my vows?"

"Your—"

"Vows, excellent madam."

"Of what nature, may I be allowed—"

"Great Heavens, madam! Have I not said she is my life, my goddess, my—"

"She!"

"Have I not been pouring my gratitudes to you, for bringing me to gaze so near upon her glorious beauty? Do I not already love you as my mother, best lady?"

The shock was severe. Such a castle, however unstable its foundations, can hardly topple down without occasioning a sensation of something having fallen about one's ears. But the absurdity of her position, should the mistake become apparent, flashed across my aunt's mind, and, as it were, lighted up the way of escape. She had in no way committed herself. Her looks and language, though intended to convey a meaning of their own, had somehow been caught up in the torrent of the young man's passion, and borne away in a totally different direction. My aunt accepted it, with a sigh.

"You hesitate, dear lady. Will you destroy the hopes you raised?" asked the young lover, becoming greatly agitated. "Now that you have spoken, zat is too late. Better madness; better *dess!*" His hand closed involuntarily on

a knife that lay beside him on the table. "O, let me *see* her! Let her tell my fortune—zat is, fate. For me, I will speak never. To-morrow I from England for always go, and my name and my history never shall be hearden more. I shall paint my bread. I shall sketch silently my livings in a foreign shore." (My aunt cast a doubtful look at the donkey, and thought of very short commons indeed.) "Only I ask to look again upon her angel front. I am savage—yes, I am intoxicate. I drove her from ze room, perhaps, wiz my mad lookings. I beseech you, for you have a good sweet heart of woman, let her come and stab me wiz one word—farewell."

He was at her feet again, in his wild anxious entreaty. Miss Serocold would not trust herself to look at him. Indeed, she could not have seen him if she had, the good soul's eyes being suffused with tears of genuine compassion; but she gave his hand a gentle reassuring pressure, and, with her kerchief to her eyes, hurried from the room.

Polly-my-Lamb was not at all in bed, but standing, fully attired, at the window of her apartment, gazing intently at an opposite house which happened to be in the occupation of one Mistress Ascroft. She started round, half-guiltily, as her friend entered, and became pale as death as she noticed her agitation.

"What has happened, dear? Is he—has he—?"

"He *has* indeed, dear," said my aunt. "B—but it's not ec—exactly—what we thought. It is you, dear, that this singular young gentleman honours with his preference. To be sure, he *is* very young," said Miss Serocold, candidly. "He implores you to grant him an interview. He loves you."

"He dares?"

"And he says that in spite of your brief acquaintance—"

"Brief! It is none at all," said Polly, impatiently stamping her little high-heeled shoe.

"Don't, dear; you may bring him up," cried Miss Serocold.

"Up, madam!" exclaimed Polly, now really angry and flushing scarlet. "Is he a lunatic—a housebreaker?"

"I don't think he is either; but I do think he is labouring under a degree of mental excitement which you, who have caused it, can alone allay. But I should have hesitated to bring his request, had not his quitting England to-morrow rendered it unlikely that his presence should ever offend you again. Well, I will dismiss him."

"He—he-leaves to-morrow, aunt?" said the young lady, sitting down.

"Never to return. I could not but feel some pity for one so friendless and desolate. But I think you act wisely in rejecting his entreaty. I need not tell him in what terms you did so, you know. I can say you have retired to rest."

"Thank you, Aunt Serocold. But—but—"

"My dear?"

"I haven't."

"Such excuses are permissible."

"Not when better are at hand. I think the request is impertinent, and—and requires apology."

"I will receive it."

"And—oh, aunt!—how *could* you?" burst out the young lady.

"Eh! could I *what?*" demanded the startled spinster.

"Advise me to receive declarations of—of—goodness-knows-what—attachment do you call it?—from a person to whom I have never spoken in my life, before this night?"

"I advise!" ejaculated poor Miss Serocold. "I am sure I never did anything of the kind. And, besides, in justice to the young man, I am bound to say that I do not think his hopes extend beyond a few words of farewell."

"Oh, indeed! That alters the case," said the little lady. "One ought not to seem churlish, ought one? Well—O, aunt, why don't you speak? Tell me, dear, what ought I to—"

"Put on? Nothing; you look charming."

"I mean, ought I to see him, or not?"

"Go down, by all means, dear," said my aunt, frankly recanting her previous opinions. "You cannot do less."

Polly-my-Lamb, justly regarding the later counsel as the riper, decided on adopting it, and presently—not, however, without a little tremor of the nerves—tripped down stairs, followed by her friend.

She had assumed the most stately demeanour of which her pretty little lithe figure was susceptible; had compelled her animated mobile features into a very ill-fitting mask of indifference, which had in it more of discomfort than dignity, and opened the door with a determination to freeze the young gentleman, with one Gorgon glance, into the condition of decorous quiescence fittest for receiving the little speech of farewell she had arranged, in descending the stairs. Nevertheless, as they entered, her eyes involuntarily fell.

"Why, my good gracious!" exclaimed the voice of Miss Serocold. "If he's not gone!"

Polly-my-Lamb threw one hurried glance round the room, then uttered a loud cry, and, springing like a fawn towards the other side, knelt by the recumbent form of the young man.

"He's asleep!" was Miss Serocold's first perplexed suggestion.

"No, dead! He's dead! Ring! Cry! Call out! Do something, aunt! O, Heaven!"

Miss Serocold did everything proposed, and that with considerable energy; then hastened to Polly's side.

The poor boy was lying almost on his face. In his fall, he had displaced the hearth-rug, a portion of which was grasped in his hand, while a dark thread of blood, proceeding from his lips, crept, like a red snake, across the stone.

"Emotion has killed him. He has broken a blood-vessel. O, aunt, aunt, how *could* you?"

"Could I?"

"We waited too long. O, it was cruel."

"Now Heaven forgive you," began poor Miss Serocold.

The apartment was rapidly filling with alarmed servants. Stephen Gould, the deaf—who had of late discarded his fixed idea of conflagration, and now, on the appearance of any agitation in the household, invariably made a dive across the street, and brought up a doctor—quickly followed, accompanied by Mr. Hartshorne, the busy little practitioner at the corner, who, though present at about the same period at twenty different places in the vicinity, possessed the curious property of always being found at home.

The calm professional presence had its accustomed effect of reducing everybody to silence and self-possession. Hartshorne lifted the white face—white, and seemingly impassive, as the stone on which it lay—and the poor boy being gently placed upon a mattress which had been brought in and stretched upon the floor, the little doctor began a closer examination.

"He's d—d—dead!" sobbed Miss Serocold.

"Not a bit more than you are, madam," said the little doctor, rather sharply. "And, what is almost as satisfactory, the bleeding has stopped for the present. When I have examined the character of the blood, I shall be able to prove —Bless me! that's unlucky, first time in my life, I've left my spectacles behind! I'll not be gone one minute. Get you all out of the room but two; and let those two, for their lives (or rather, for the patient's), not suffer him to be moved, or touched, or even spoken to, till I return."

"I will remain," said Polly, quietly.

"And I," said my aunt.

Presently there was a trembling of the eyelid, the long lashes went heavily, wearily apart, as though waking were unwelcome. But the first object that met his view was the face of his little lady, a tear upon her cheek, and a whole world of pity in her eyes. He saw it, for a hectic colour rose in his cheek, and he made a feeble effort to move.

Polly remembered the doctor's charge. She made a gesture, almost fiercely, with her hand.

"If you move, you die," she murmured.

The boy repeated his effort, without taking his eyes from her face, and succeeded in placing his head about an inch nearer to Polly's foot; then, as though satisfied, suffered his heavy lids to close again.

"If you move hand, or foot, or tongue again, we quit the room," said Miss Serocold.

The patient lay like a stone.

Back rushed the little doctor, fitting his glasses on his nose as he entered. After a careful examination of the invalid's condition, he was enabled to assure the anxious witnesses that all danger had for the present passed away. (Good Mr. Hartshorne was not aware of the new symptom that had declared itself during his brief absence, and, oddly enough, nobody mentioned it!) Extreme quiet, and perfect repose of mind, were now the chief essentials. If the bleeding should

not return within the next half hour, the doctor held that there would be little risk in removing the patient to his own lodging; and as Mr. Hartshorne knew Mrs. Ascot very well, he would call, as he returned home, and arrange with the good woman as to the best mode of conveying him thither.

Had any indifferent person taken note of Polly-M-Lamb's demeanour, since the moment she had been detected by her resuscitated guest in the act of weeping over him—but more especially since that guest had been pronounced out of danger—she must have appeared in the light of a very unfeeling young person. When the doctor reappeared, she withdrew to the other end of the apartment; and no sooner had he uttered the hopeful words, than she quitted it altogether.

"A very self-possessed young lady," thought little Mr. Hartshorne, as he buzzed quietly about his patient, feeling half disposed to remain, and see that the latter received humane treatment. "She offered to watch him, with all the coolness of a hospital nurse, and now that she knows he's not going absolutely to expire on her hearth-rug, walks off, I dare say, to her supper! But she's an heiress, forsooth. Miss is more accustomed to receive attentions than to expend them on the suffering. I hate (if you please, my dear Miss Serocold, hold his head a little higher) coldness in very young people. 'So young, and so untender!' as the cow said, when she mumbled the pine-shoots. Well, well, Thank you, my dear madam—the spoon—so—just a few of these drops before he is moved, and as many after."

Only once more did Master Haggerdorn open his languid eyes; and, seeing no one but my good aunt, speedily closed them again, unnoticed, remaining in that state until he was conveyed in a sort of funeral procession, with Stephen Gould as chief mourner, to his own lodging, and placed in the custody of his landlady.

CHAPTER VI.

It was some days before the sick-chamber exhibited any tokens of living occupancy. The blinds remained half drawn, and not even the figure of a gliding nurse was visible. A message forwarded to Mr. Hartshorne on the day after the catastrophe, importing Miss Humpage's desire (after "compliments") to be informed of the young man's condition, received a decidedly tart reply: "Can't tell her, or anybody, yet. I'm not a witch."

"Hang her 'compliments!'" muttered the little doctor (who was, nevertheless, amenity itself to the sex in general, but had conceived an absolute dislike to poor Polly). "Why the dogs" (the doctor's nearest approach to an execration) "doesn't she send over to the lad's own place? It's nearer. But, no, my lady's fine—'Let some one inquire of the medical person.' Hang the chit's affectation! Yet, if her lapdog had been choking with a chicken-bone, she'd have been down on her knees, shrieking, tearing

her hair. Money spoils her. She was a nice pleasant little girl, was Polly-my-Lamb Humpage, before she got her fortune. Is it pride, now, or—umph!—eh? But, excessive prudery is almost as bad. If she cares about the boy, let her send, like a frank Christian gentlewoman, and ask for him. She'll get no more bulletins from John Hartshorne, M.R.C.S."

Polly so far complied with the doctor's mental suggestion, that she sent over a formal message every other day, and received as formal a reply.

"The patient is much the same."

But, at the same time, it came to pass by some mysterious arrangement, that no change in the invalid, be it for worse or better, no faint syllables that he had uttered, no wish that he had contrived to express, was for many minutes unknown to the tenants of number twenty-seven. Through the same occult intervention, it became known that the invalid was rapidly regaining strength. Finally, by a ridiculous accident, Polly, who had happened to take unwonted pains with her toilette that day, chanced to be standing at the window, when the corresponding casement opposite suddenly became the frame of a little pale-faced picture, with entreating eyes, looking as if it begged pardon for being yet alive, and was not too sure of obtaining it. Polly neither started nor ran away. Had Mr. Hartshorne been passing at the moment, and noticed the gentle, gratulating look and pleasant smile with which she greeted the convalescent, he would have received her back to favour on the spot.

My lady, however, had no idea of pampering her young—well!—say friend. So, with a little care, she taught the young gentleman to understand that it was of no earthly use to hold a perpetual vigil—that, as no discreet fisherman expects to snare a trout on a sunny day between the hours of eleven and four—so no Polly was to be seen contemplating the smiling landscape of Jermyn-street, at any hour but the meridian.

Having educated her young worshipper thus far, Polly felt it incumbent upon her as a faithful teacher, not to break faith with her pupil. Hence, these mid-day meetings recurred with the regularity of clockwork, until (so extraordinary a thing is habit!) I am persuaded that either party would have forfeited dinner, rather than foregone one moment of the allotted time. What passed in these unspoken dialogues, I am not in a position to state. All I know is, that Miss Humpage woke one day from a reverie, with a sudden start, to find that Mr. Arthur Haggerdorn was restored to perfect health, and to wonder what was to be done next.

The young lady's first feeling was one of having lost something. She had experienced it, she remembered, in a milder form, when, years and years ago, she lost a pet goldfinch. Then she felt angry, and a good deal injured, that Arthur had not devised some fit means of informing her that he was no longer entitled to the indulgence due to a life in peril, and that he wished the daily meetings to be discontinued.

It was excessively rude—most inconsiderate of her feelings. He should quickly be brought to a sense of the fault he had been guilty of. She would never appear at the window again!

On the following day, Polly-my-Lamb engaged herself particularly in her own room, examining some lace, until past one o'clock, after which, with a slightly-accelerated pulse, she stole down stairs. Had he waited? How would he look? Should she be satisfied with this slight punishment, for the present, and withdraw herself more gradually? At all events, since she *had* come down—Why stay to reason? As if it were within the bounds of possibility, O my Polly, that you or any woman, under the circumstances, would have come down, and not at least ascertained if he was there! Go, "like a frank Christian gentlewoman," and look at the boy whom your love, under Providence, has kept alive. For it's a terrible power committed to your weak hand, that of wielding the entire happiness of another's soul, and, if you use it childishly, no after-wisdom can redeem the fault.

Half humbled, she crept to the window, and gazed forth.

The blinds were closely drawn.

There was a strange quiet about the whole house, which was ordinarily, it should be observed, of somewhat gayer aspect than its fellows, Mrs. Ascroft holding that birds and flowers are excellent baits for lodgers, as evincing gentle rural tastes in a landlady, a disposition untainted by the sharp selfish life of London. Not a leaf or a feather was to be seen. What was yet more extraordinary, Polly, as her eyes glanced from floor to floor, noticed with a sudden tremor that the entire front might be considered as closed, every sash being shut down, and every blind drawn! What if he had suffered another attack, and one that had proved fatal? That *she* had been its proximate cause, was too frightful a thought, nor was there as yet any reason to subject her conscience to such a charge.

In spite of herself, a feeling of vague apprehension took such hold upon her, that Polly had to sit down, feeling very sick, and was presently found in that position by Miss Serocold, who, shocked at her ghastly face, ran to her, caught her in her arms, and begged her to tell her what was the matter. Finding that the young lady would not or could not reply, my aunt became seriously alarmed, and, ringing the bell, declared her intention of sending to May-Fair for Doctor Pettibone, the family physician.

Polly shook her head.

"But, my love, you *must* see some one. Such an attack as this—Ha! how lucky! There's that good little Hartshorne just leaving Mrs. Ascroft's. The very sight of him is as good as a vinaigrette. I'll wave my handkerchief. Ah, he sees! Mercy! what a grave face! walks, too, as though he were following the funeral of his last patient. There's his knock."

Polly made no answer nor resistance. Her heart was throbbing like that of a criminal about

to receive sentence. She was using the brief interval of the doctor's approach in attempts to nerve herself for whatever she might be called upon to hear.

The doctor entered, with a gait and aspect that completely justified Miss Serocold's criticism, and Polly turned her white face to him in silence, leaving to her friend the duty of explaining the reason of the summons.

After announcing that he could discover nothing beyond the traces of a slight nervous attack, and giving such directions as seemed needful, he took his hat, and prepared to withdraw. Then Polly took courage.

"I—I beg your pardon, Mr. Hartshorne, your patient, Mr.—Mr. Haggerdorn, is—"

"Hm," said the doctor. "Permit me once more." (He felt her pulse.) "Yes. Good morning."

"And—the—young gentleman?"

"I beg your pardon? Young—"

"Miss Humpage alludes to our neighbour, Mr. Arthur Haggerdorn," explained my aunt.

Mr. Hartshorne shook his head.

"Ah! Sad—sad."

And again he offered to retire.

"You have just left the house, I think, sir. Pray let us know."

"And a melancholy house it is, ma'am," said the little doctor, with a countenance black as night. "She will miss him terribly. A kind soul is Mistress Ascroft. She cried herself almost into a fit."

"Good gracious, sir! Do you mean us to understand that the poor young man—"

"I wish you to understand, my dear madam, that the day to which this poor boy has looked forward so long and earnestly, with such singular earnestness, like a prisoner for freedom," said the little doctor, almost solemnly, "has at length arrived. Yes, Miss Humpage, since you condescend to take some kind of interest in this young orphaned stranger, let me announce to you that he is gone—Eh! my dear little girl—what is this?" concluded the doctor, in a very different tone, as Polly-my-Lamb sunk suddenly forward on his shoulder in a dead swoon.

Eagerly did he direct Miss Serocold in the application of restoratives, and with an almost paternal solicitude watch their effect, till a faint colour revisited her cheek, and the eyelids quivered with awakening life. Then he placed her gently on a sofa, enjoined silence for ten minutes, and, half drawing the curtains, turned to hold a whispered colloquy with Miss Serocold.

"Does she suffer frequently from these little attacks?" he inquired.

"Little attacks! Oh, doctor, doctor," sobbed the lady, "how could you be so sudden?"

"Sudden!"

"Death is sufficiently dreadful—but, to be informed thus abruptly—"

"Death, madam!" exclaimed the doctor, forgetting his own injunctions of silence.

"Why—did you not tell us that the poor boy was 'gone'?"

"Gone!" shouted the doctor. "Yes. To Greenwich."

"Green—" faltered my aunt.

"—wich. It's his birthday. He is greatly improved in health, and we had promised him, if all went well, a walk this day in Greenwich Park. So, about one o'clock (he would not go before), we put him into a chair; and now, I take it, he is gliding down the Thames, not the Styx, with old Joyce, my waterman, for Charon, and one of my steadiest nurses for companion, gay as any lark."

"But you said Mrs. Ascroft was almost in a fit from sorrow."

"Pardon, my good lady; I might have said from joy. She was overcome with delight in witnessing the pleasure of her favourite at being able once again to breathe fresh country air, and wander under the waving trees. She misses him for the moment, as I said, but looks forward to his return home this evening with renovated strength, and is busying herself in preparing a little treat to celebrate the day. Good night, my dear young lady," he continued, in the gentlest tone, as he approached Polly, "I see that you have no further need of doctor or nurse. Am I right?"

Polly looked at him once, blushed, hesitated, smiled, and frankly gave him her little hand.

He withdrew.

Miss Serocold whispered, as she followed him out, "There is nothing to fear?"

"Nothing in the world," said Mr. Hartshorne, quietly.

METEORIC STONES.

THE statements made by Livy, Herodotus, and others, regarding the fall of meteoric stones from space to the surface of the earth, were a century ago discredited by those who were then considered to be the authorities in all matters relating to science; but the publication of Chladni's pamphlet, of Izarn's work, *Des Pierres Tombées du Ciel*, and Howard's paper, published in the Philosophical Transactions, led to a more intelligent consideration of the subject, and the evidence was found to be so strong in favour of the assertion that such stones had reached our planet as hardly to admit of question. There are so many recorded instances that it would not be possible to do more here than mention the chief of them.

On the 13th of November, 1799, meteoric stones fell in such profusion that the heavens seemed to be raining fire. This phenomenon was witnessed from points of the earth widely separated. The Moravian missionaries in Greenland passed several hours in looking at the splendid spectacle; and Humboldt describes the appearance it presented to him in South America. For four hours, he says, there was not a space in

the heavens equal to three diameters of the moon through which one or more of these meteors was not constantly passing; all of them leaving a luminous trail which endured for seven or eight seconds. They were also seen at Weimar; and a Mr. Ellicot, who on that night was at sea between Cape Florida and the West India Islands, says: "The whole heavens appeared as if illuminated with sky-rockets, which disappeared only by the light of the sun after daybreak. The meteors, which at one time appeared as numerous as the stars, flew in all possible directions, except from the earth" (Humboldt says their direction was very regular from north to south), "and some of them descended perpendicularly over the vessel we were in, so that I was in constant expectation of their falling on us." Exhibitions of this kind have been frequent before and since. One of these was so brilliant by reason of the immense number of these glowing meteors which constantly filled the air, that the people of Quito, and those who dwelt in the surrounding country, imagined the volcanic mountain of Cayambaro to be on fire, and were greatly terrified. Similar falls were seen in Canada, and a person writing from the North Sea in 1818, related that the atmosphere surrounding them looked like an ocean on fire. Equally magnificent displays of the same kind are recorded which have been visible from a large portion of the earth's surface. But by far the grandest exhibition of the kind on record, was observed in America. Showers of fiery meteors had been observed to fall on a certain day in November in two succeeding years, and in the following year, on the same day of the month, there was a repetition of the phenomenon on a scale which has never been witnessed before or since. "I was," says a South Carolina planter, "suddenly awakened by the most distressing cries that ever fell on my ears. Shrieks of horror, and cries for mercy, I could hear from most of the negroes on three plantations, amounting in all to about six or eight hundred. While earnestly listening for the cause, I heard a faint voice near the door calling my name. I arose, and, taking my sword, stood at the door. At this moment I heard the same voice still beseeching me to rise, and saying, 'O, my God, the world is on fire!' I then opened the door, and it is difficult to say which excited me most—the awfulness of the scene, or the distressed cries of the negroes. Upwards of one hundred lay prostrate on the ground—some speechless, and some with the bitterest cries, but with their hands raised, imploring God to save the world and them. The scene was truly awful; for never did rain fall much thicker than the meteors fell towards the earth; east, west, north, and south, it was the same." All these meteors seemed to emerge from a particular part of the heavens, near a brilliant globe of fire, which remained visible during the entire display: similar globes, many of them of immense magnitude, but travelling with great velocity, were likewise seen, one in particular, which is described as

having an apparent diameter exceeding that of the moon at the full.

Many of these meteors left long trains of various coloured light behind them, which in some cases did not disappear for several minutes. These larger bodies, no doubt, passed through the earth's atmosphere, or they would not have become luminous; but it would seem that their distance from the earth was so great that, combined with the velocity with which they moved in their orbit, the attraction of our planet was insufficient to draw them to its surface; while, as regards the lesser bodies, the intensity of the heat generated in them by the rapidity with which they traversed our atmosphere reduced them to ashes, and they only reached us in the form of dust, as in the instance related by Père la Feuillée, who says that a shower of sand fell on the Atlantic for fifteen hours; and others might be mentioned of a like kind, in addition to those recorded by Siegesbaer and Geoffroy le Cadet, the former of whom tells us that a shower of powdered sulphur fell at Brunswick in 1721, and the latter that a shower of fiery particles fell at Quesnoy on the 4th of January, 1717. Some of theaërolites which have been seen to pass through the higher regions of our atmosphere, have been of such enormous magnitude, that, if they had descended upon the earth in an unbroken state, they must have caused great local damage, even if their volume were insufficient to affect the inclination of the axis of the earth. There was one, for instance, supposed to have been at least five hundred thousand tons in weight, which passed within twenty-five miles of us; and others have been seen to pass us at a higher elevation, immensely exceeding this in dimensions. Probably it was a meteor of this kind which the Arab historians describe as having fallen in India just previous to the visitation of the frightful epidemic spoken of as the Black Death, which went far towards depopulating the world. Indeed, they regarded the fall of this meteor as giving rise to the pestilence; for they said it either generated or was accompanied by a foul vapour, which poisoned the air for miles round, and killed innumerable persons.

It would seem that the Creator of the universe has provided a shield for the protection of his creatures from evils which are not inevitable results of their own wickedness or folly. We do not remember any instance on record in which an explosion did not take place before the aërolite reached the earth, by which it was blown harmless to pieces; some of the fragments reaching the earth at different points; others, and these probably the larger portions, continuing their revolutions through space. An extraordinary instance of a series of such explosions was observed in France, which was subsequently made the subject of an inquiry by a commission under the direction of M. Biot. The explosions were preceded by the appearance of a huge ball of fire seen over nearly the whole of Normandy. Then, for five or six minutes, they followed each other

with great rapidity, and such loudness that they were heard all over a circle about sixty leagues in diameter. They appeared to come from a brilliant cloud. An emission of a vapour resembling smoke followed each explosion. This was at mid-day, in an almost cloudless sky, and immediately after the first explosion, and during the whole time they lasted, an immense number of aërolites fell to the ground with a hissing noise. Nearly three thousand of these were afterwards picked up, the largest of which weighed over seventeen pounds.

It is not possible to give a positive answer to the question : Why is the fall of an aërolite always preceded by an explosion ? Generally there is a single explosion, but this is not invariably the case, as we have just mentioned one instance in which there was a succession. Almost simultaneously with the report, the aërolite strikes the earth. Whenever this has occurred in the presence of a spectator, it has always been found that the stone was exceedingly hot. The mass of meteoric iron which was dug out of the ground at a village in the Punjab, was almost too hot to be touched, though it had penetrated to a considerable depth in the earth, and some time must have elapsed between its fall and the arrival of the officer of the district on the spot. This mass was sent to the emperor, who directed it to be made into a sabre, knife, and dagger. Heat was likewise very sensible in the case of the stone which fell at Ensisheim on the 7th of November, 1492, though it had to be dug out of the earth from a depth of between five and six feet. This stone was placed in the church at that place by order of the Emperor Maximilian, where it may still be seen; the French, who carried it off to Paris during the Revolution, having subsequently returned it to the place whence they had taken it, minus a fragment retained for the museum of the Jardin des Plantes. One tremendous explosion was said to have accompanied the fall of this meteoric stone, and the same was the case with that, weighing fifty-six pounds, which fell near Captain Topham's house in Yorkshire, descending perpendicularly to the earth, and burying itself in the chalk beneath the surface soil. I can myself vouch for one instance where, at the conclusion of the most terrific thunder-storm I ever witnessed, a tremendous explosion was accompanied by the fall of a number of fragments of an aërolite within a few yards of the house in which I was sitting. Some of these I kept in my possession.

One of the objections formerly urged against the assertion that these meteoric stones fell from the atmosphere, was the fact that they were sometimes found on the surface of the earth. Pallas describes an immense mass of meteoric iron he met with on a slate mountain in Siberia, and few of the thousands who have visited the British Museum can have failed to notice a mass of a similar kind lying on the floor in the mineral department, which, though it weighs over four-

teen hundred pounds, is not a tithe of that from which it was separated, and which is still lying on the plain of Otumba, in Buenos Ayres.

That these aërolites do as a rule penetrate the earth, we have now ample evidence, and there may be special reasons why in the cases just mentioned such enormous masses did penetrate so slightly. I suppose that the larger the mass of meteoric iron, the softer it will be when it comes in contact with the earth; moreover, the force of the collision will be affected by the height at which the explosion takes place. That these masses really fell from the atmosphere, I believe nobody competent to speak on the subject will now attempt to deny; there is the indisputable evidence of identity of composition between them and those aërolites which have fallen in the presence of witnesses. Nowhere in mines has iron ever been discovered in a pure state, but only in the condition of ore. Aërolites are chiefly composed of pure iron, to which are added in small, but slightly varying proportions, nickel, cobalt, sulphur, zinc, silica, and magnesia.

How far this uniformity of constitution may be affected, or produced by fusion in the atmosphere, and the probable presence of electricity drawn up with the vapours about the equator to descend again at the pole, we do not know. That they become incandescent in passing through our atmosphere, we have seen in hundreds of instances quite recently, and the explanation of this is given by the rapidity with which they traverse it, varying according to estimation, from eighteen to forty miles a second. The lowest of these rates would be sufficient to raise the temperature of the mass to a degree we can hardly realise. This exceeding vividness to a certain extent accounts for the different versions that are given of the apparent size of the remarkable fire-ball, seen on the night of the 4th of last March: the eyes of different individuals not being affected alike by strongly luminous objects. This most remarkable meteor was visible over the greater part of England, as well as on the Continent. Dr. Heis, of the Royal Academy of Munster, has given a complete description of it; and, as he is a professor of astronomy, it may be inferred that his account is less likely to be exaggerated than that of an unscientific observer. He says that in a clear bright sky, every object near him was suddenly lighted up by a fire-ball, apparently about the size of the moon when at the full. The time during which it was visible, he estimates at from three to six seconds, the speed at which it moved at forty-seven miles a second, and its actual diameter nearly fourteen hundred feet. Its brilliancy remarkably dazzling, and its motion attended with a hissing noise. Thus it may be inferred that the professor is not far wrong in his estimate, that it approached within seventeen miles of the earth, and that its volume was as enormous as he computes it. The long trail of

light, the appearance of which is differently described by different observers, was probably nothing more than the ordinary effect produced on the retina of the eye by the passage of a luminous body.

A similar phenomenon to the preceding was witnessed on the 5th of December last. The description given of it by many persons who saw it, is that of a ball of fire of intense brilliancy, which threw such a strong light, that one who saw it in the country says it was equal to that of the moon when at the full. There are some discrepancies in what has been published with respect to the appearance it presented. Apart from the apparent magnitude, which is estimated from four times that of Jupiter to about half the size of the full moon, one describes it as followed by a luminous train; another, that it scattered sparks as it went; a third, that just before disappearing, it threw off several balls of a red colour; and a fourth, that it vanished in an explosion.

The hypotheses which have been suggested to explain the origin of these wonderful phenomena are various. Some thought meteoric stones must have been ejected from volcanoes on the earth; but this was very quickly disposed of, by showing that it was impossible, from the absence of any volcano from which they could have been expelled within many miles of the place where they have fallen. Others supposed they might have been thrown out from volcanoes in the moon; but this hypothesis was likewise considered to be destroyed by the objection that during all the ages through which the moon has been observed, no visible change has taken place on her surface, though the evidence of violent volcanic action at some long distant period is distinct enough, if we examine her with a telescope. It was then suggested that they were generated in the atmosphere by the action of electricity; but, inasmuch as the atmosphere does not contain the materials of which they are composed, in any shape, this hypothesis is not worth consideration. Another supposition is, that an infinite number of masses of matter, of all sizes, move round the sun in an orbit which closely approaches that of the earth at the two opposite points which our planet passes through in August and November. There is much that is plausible and probable in the idea that at least a portion of the meteoric stones which reach the earth, are of lunar origin; that they may have been discharged from the moon ages ago; and that they have gradually been drawn so near the earth, that their orbital motion was overcome, and they dropped down upon its surface. But seamed and scarred as the moon evidently is by prolonged volcanic action, the enormous number of fragments of matter which have been seen to pass through our atmosphere seems to disprove the notion that they could all have come from this source; and we are disposed to believe that the greater portion are the smaller fragments of a

great planet moving between Mars and Jupiter, which, having exploded, is visibly represented by the asteroids. Indeed, if it be admitted that these roving planets moving in such eccentric orbits are merely the fragments of what was once a great whole, it would hardly be possible to dispute that the catastrophe which gave rise to them must at the same time have dispersed through space an innumerable quantity of fragments of lesser size, down even to the particles which, from their having reached the surface of our globe in the form of reddish-coloured dust, have given rise to the oft-repeated reports of its having rained blood. But the only real conclusion we can arrive at, is, that we know no more of the origin of meteoric stones, than we do of the origin of the globe on which we live.

FLORIMEL.

I.

THE night is quiet, this New Year's Eve,
Lull'd in a trance of snow and rime;
For a sighing wind, that seems to grieve
Before the path of the coming time,
Is rather a silence than a sound,—
Or, at most, the voice of the great profound
Of darkness closing half-way round
This orb of earth. And I who sit
In my curtain'd study, hearkening it,
By my study fire companionless,
Will send my own voice sighing out
From the haunted dark of an old distress,
Ere yet, in the stormy swirl and shout
Of the bells that clash from every side,
We kiss the lips of the infant Year:
For my heart this night is open'd wide,
And the wind of verse is rising there.

I lift the heavy coffin-lid
From the sweet dead face of the sad dead Past,
Where it lies all white and still amid
The dust which the stealthy years have cast
On the graves of all things. Ah, how fast,
In the kindling breath of love and pain,
The buried time grows warm again,
And arises living, and speaks to us,
As we speak to it! Behold how thus
From death to life comes Florimel,
The light of her love and loveliness
Just shadow'd with awful distance.—Well!
If I saw her not with the inner eye,
I should feel her presence none the less
In the quick, electric, vital nerves,—
In the quivering blood,—in the heart that swerves
From its natural course,—she standing by.

Once more I behold the face of her
Whose actions all had the character
Of an inexpressible charm express'd;
Whose movements flow'd from a centre of rest,
And whose rest was that of a swallow, rife
With the instinct of reposing life;
Whose mirth had a sadness all the while
It sparkled and laugh'd, and whose sadness lay
In the heaven of such a crystal smile
That you long'd to travel the self-same way
To the brightness of sorrow. For round her breath'd
A grace like that of the general air,
Which softens the sharp extremes of things,
And connects by its subtle, invisible stair

The lowest and highest. She interwreath'd
Her mortal obscureness with so much light
Of the world unrisen, that angel's wings
Could hardly have given her greater right
To float in the winds of the infinite.

And she came on me like a swift surprise,
Making the old earth born anew
Out of prophetic dawn, as through
Those lucid windows of the eyes
The souls of us look'd forth, and kiss'd
Suddenly, deeply, darkly : then
Each of the other's being guess'd
The central thought, there lying blest
Beyond the reach of vulgar ken.
What need of words, which are but faint
Colours in which we poorly paint
The eternal flame within, when ray
Mingles with ray, and shoots direct
Into the broad celestial day ?
Yet Love, grown human, must affect
Our brittle human speech ; and I
Sought by the weak infirmity
Of words to prove the truth of what
My innermost nature doubted not ;
And at those words the vision died.

She answer'd, not with scorn or pride,
But rather with sorrowful ruth and awe,
That, gazing into the distance, saw
The Yes of the heart unratiified
By the stern, awaiting Future. So
'Twere better that each alone should go
Through the desolate stretch of arid sand,
Than find at once the blissful land,
Only to faint on the slopes, and bleed
In the midst of the unpluck'd roses. Strange
That my eyes were blind, and could not read
In *hers*, that would so quickly range
From bright to dim, the cause of this
Her faltering answer ! For indeed,—
As a planet out of the vast abyss
Comes with its golden blush suffused,
And, trembling ever with love and fear,
Withdraws itself to the finer sphere
Of heaven's interior ecstasies,—
She faded, smiling, like one unused
To earth ; and as, for a little space,
The planet renews its shining grace,
And glows on the verge of the utmost dark,
She kindled at times (though I did not mark
The changes *then*) with a light of life,
Whereat I marvel I did not weep.

No hope ! Yet ever within the strife
Of the common world I vow'd to keep
The thought of her as a central calm,
Refreshing myself with the sacred balm
Of a passion doubly full and deep
From the added sorrow. This I hold,—
That a true affection grows not cold
Because the sun has left its sky,
But all the night-time warms it by
Its own immortal heat and strength,
Being to its darkness sun and moon
And star ; and knowing that at length
Desire of good, whate'er says Nay,
Fulfils itself, by some rough way
Reaching its Eden, though it swoon.

But still she faded with patient look ;
And, as in a suddenly open'd book,
I read the peril that lay in wait
For the life of my life ; read thus late
The truth, and felt reliev'd almost.

When I saw stand off from the English coast
The ship that bore her, all its sails
Set for the soft Italian gales,
That visit the delicate shore of Nice
From leagues of sunlit sea and peace.
—Fair blow the warm winds over the sea,
And bright may the lovely country be
Where the winter spares the myrtle-tree,—
Divine for ever ; but most of all
When she by its magic breaks the thrall
That keeps her heart from the heart of me !

II.

Month after month pursued its course,
Bringing me news which I perforce
Accepted as comfort, though I felt
The spirit of sadness lived throughout.
And thus, in a wrestle of hope and doubt,
I saw the spring in the summer melt,
And the airy flush of summer pass
Into the autumn's heavier mass.
October had touch'd the skies with grey,
And the year was sad with its hastening death ;
But the west wind breath'd a balmy breath,
And the leaves were thick on bough and spray,
As I sat at my window, and watch'd the day
Wane into the grave, still afternoon,
And heard in a kind of waking dream
The distant brook, and the air aswoon
In the branchy trees. Some warning gleam
Of the imminent fact struck through me when
A letter, not from *her* dear pen,
Came to me out of the weary South.—
Oh, shaking hand ! oh, clammy mouth !
Oh, eyes eclips'd in a sudden fear !
Oh, heart consumed in frightful drouth !
I dare not read what's written here !
No border and no seal of black,
Yet all—all black with fatal dread !
Oh, God, absorb me ! smite me back
To naught ! I read—I read it !—

Dead !

Ah, now I see in rainy light
Of tears her answer growing white
With new translucence ! Not for her
To feel a husband's fondness stir
Around her heart, where Death had set
His standard while its bloom was wet
With dew of the April morning. She,
Turning her face away from me,
Could bear to droop, but could not bear
To see the husband's mute despair ;
Perhaps to leave, before she die,
The sweet and dreadful legacy
Of a small failing life,—a child
Declining, piteously mild,
To its young grave. Ah, bitter fate !
For Love's sake, Love denies its mate !
Yet clearer than noon's full garishness
Are the nights on which such dawns arise,
And sweeter the gall of such distress
Than the honey of most felicities.

III.

The sudden New Year bells burst in,
Trampling the dark with fiery din.
I start, and find myself once more
Wreck'd on the Present's craggy shore.
—The Year is dead, the Year is born :
It is the tender time, and sweet,
When, pinnacled 'twixt the night and morn,
The Year we grieve and the Year we greet

Touch for an instant over the gloom,
And the dead thoughts and the living meet.
Oh, clamour of bells, sweep into my room !
Out of the midnight pulse and swell!
And do not simply ring the knell
Of the buried days and the buried dead,
For I sit with the spirit of Florimel !
For I sit with the soul that has not fled
Forth from this soul of mine, nor will ;
And as once we heard in the air o'erhead
The iron tongues in the steeples tell
That a Year had come, a Year had sped,
So now,—by the heart's deep miracle.

Dear love! dear ghost! dear memory !
Beam of the light that does not die !
Now, while we hear the eddying chime
Which marks the solemn season set,
Like the sword-sharp bridge of Mahomet,
Between the Past and the Future time,
Do we not vibrate each to each ?
Yes. Though the senses may not reach
Beyond the graveyard's barren wall,
And although we often grope and fall,
And see no opening, clear or dim,
Along the horizon's cruel rim,—
Thank God that across the shoals and sands
Of this perilous life, which is but death,
We feel at times with a catching breath
The wind that comes from the outer main—
From the sea that bathes the larger lands
Where the soul may grow and perfect itself,
Having space to beat its wings, and attain
To the sum of its being broad and high;
Not cramp'd as now on the narrow shelf
Of its undevelop'd capacity.
—All might be more than any are;
Our natures languish, incomplete;
Something obtuse in this our star
Shackles the spirits' wing'd feet:
But a glory moves us from afar,
And we know that we are strong and fleet.
And I know, oh Florimel, I know
That I can wait, and nowise fail,
Until from the ship that delivers me
(The ship that hoists no mortal sail)
I see the coast-line dropping low,
And hear the long wind breathe and blow
In the Year that is and is to be.

BEN'S BEAR.

THIRTY years ago, my father, a half-pay captain, emigrated to Lower Canada. He bought a farm in the vicinity of Stanstead, where he settled with a family of three boys and as many girls. There were too many of us for his means in England, where boys often cost more than they are worth—and possibly this is sometimes true of girls. Brother Ben was nineteen when we went into the bush: a brave boy, and a good leader for his younger brothers, and a good protector for his sisters, who were younger still.

We had a log-house, as most settlers had then, to begin with. It was quite an aristocratic edifice for that region, having three large rooms, while most log-houses had but two rooms, and many but one. It was ceiled with hemlock bark, smooth side towards the rooms, for we were to

spend one winter in it. We moved to our "opening" the first of May, and had the summer before us. We were full of spirit and hope. A new country and a new life, with all before you to conquer, and the consciousness of strength to make the conquest, is a constant inspiration.

Ben's bear was his first winning in the game which he had set himself to play with the wild nature of the woods. I was then ten years old, and that bear is the one thing that stands out most clearly in the dim distance of thirty years ago. Ben had shot the mother bear, and the same ball that killed her, killed one of her cubs; the other he brought home in his bosom. "Poor little fellow," he said, "he is too young to mourn for his mother, and I intend to be a mother to him." And he kept his word.

The small beast slept with Ben, always laying his nose over Ben's shoulder. He grew apace; I used to think we could see him grow. He was very fond of milk and butter, and he ate bread and milk, and mush and milk, with avidity. During the first winter, he was a numbed sort of half life. In the early spring he was a happy bear, going everywhere with his master, and only miserable if he lost sight of him. He was entirely obedient to my brother, and always woke him in the morning. As my father was about to build a frame-house, he sent Ben to buy material of a man who had a sawmill in the next town. This was Bruin's first affliction, for he could not accompany his master. Ben stole away from him, and when the bear knew that he was gone, he began a search for him. He went to my brother's bed, and, beginning at the head, inserted his nose under the sheets and blankets, and came out at the foot; then he turned, and reversed the process. This strange search he would keep up by the hour, if he were not shut out of the room. He took possession of his master's clothes and other belongings, and used them so roughly, still seeking for their owner—inserting himself into legs of trousers and sleeves of coats—that my mother locked everything in a wardrobe. Nothing of Ben's was left out, except a large folio Bible, which rested on the top of the wardrobe, six or seven feet from the floor. Up this, the bear contrived to climb, and taking the Bible in a tender embrace, he curled himself up, and dropped to the floor with it. My mother attempted to take it from him, but for the first time he showed fight. Many blows from the broomstick were administered, but the bear held fast to the book, and my mother came off second best from the contest. This was fatal to her authority, as we discovered afterwards.

When Ben came back, the bear's joy knew no bounds. He lost his love for the sacred volume, and had no care what became of it. He showed his disrespect for my mother by taking the butter from the tea-table and eating it before her eyes. Ben gave him a drubbing for the robbery, and he submitted to Ben's authority, but butter and honey, and sweets of all kinds, were appropriated, if Ben were not at hand to enforce good behaviour. My mother was very unhappy, between

her love for Ben, and her fear of Bruin. She grew miserably afraid of the bear, and, what was worse, the bear knew it. She complained to Ben; but he only said, "Mother, you have only to be resolute with him. Ellen can drive him away from the table, because she is not afraid of him."

"But I am afraid of him," said my mother, "and I think he will do me harm yet."

"Give him a taste of a hot poker, mother, and I'll answer for him afterwards."

"I would not try it for the world," said my mother.

The bear had his own way very completely, till a circumstance occurred which resulted more favourably for the peace of the family than my mother's mild remonstrances. We had a neighbour, a Mr. Bennett, who had a very lovely daughter of seventeen. Ben fell in love with her, as in duty bound, she being the prettiest girl in the New World. He had been unable to get any clue to her sentiments towards him. She had spent a considerable portion of the past year with a married sister in Stanstead, and Ben and the brother-in-law being friends, it was there my brother had seen her. Her coolness towards him was a great torment to an impulsive lover. I believe Ben would have served seven years merely to know how she regarded him. At last he lapsed into a state so unhappy and anxious that even his bear could not comfort him. About this time Alice Bennett came home to remain, and in neighbourly kindness, she, and a younger sister, came to visit us. She had never seen Ben's bear, and did not even know of its existence. Ben shut Bruin into his bedroom in compliment to our guests, and the afternoon passed pleasantly to all but the prisoner. When the time came for Alice and her sister to go home, my brother and I prepared to bear them company through the woods to their opening. Ben incautiously opened his bedroom for his hat, never thinking of Bruin, and came running to catch us. The liberated bear ran after his master, and jumped for joy upon him, hugging him after the manner of bears. Alice turned and saw Ben in the (to her) terrible embrace. She shrieked as a girl with a good voice only can shriek, but instead of running away, she rushed up to my brother, and tried to help him like a brave girl, crying, "Dear, dear Ben, you will be killed."

My brother threw off the beast, and caught the fainting Alice to his glad heart, saying, "Dear Alice, he is a tame bear, do not be afraid."

The poor girl looked like a broken white lily, she was so frightened at herself and the bear. She could hardly realise that the bear was harmless, and she was ashamed of having been betrayed into such an avowal of a tenderness for Ben. When she recovered her wits, she said, "O, I'll never come here again."

"Indeed you will," said Ben. "I'll banish Bruin, or imprison him, or do anything you wish."

It was surprising how clear-sighted Ben became regarding faults on the bear's part that he had heretofore made light of. My mother had

no need to complain of stolen butter, or a highway robbery of honey on its way from the pantry to the tea-table. Ben suddenly discovered that his pet was a nuisance. "I don't see how you have borne with him so long, mother," he said, in the most considerate manner, when he had taken a plum-pudding from a plate in my mother's hands, and had made his way to the woods with it.

"I am glad you saw him take it," said my mother.

"He must have a prison," said Ben.

And so it came to pass that the poor bear was chained, in the centre of the space that had been cleared and levelled for our new house, with the light surveyor's chain used to measure land. The bear immediately described a circle, limited by the length of his chain, which he walked over, turning a somersault always at one point, and only stopping to eat, or pay attention to Ben, if he came in his vicinity. Why he inaugurated this particular and peculiar exercise I am unable to say, but I have often noticed a tame bear keep up the circle and the somersault hour after hour, and day after day. He did not tug at his chain, nor quarrel with it, as we poor mortals do with chains, but apparently accepted it as a provision of Ben's superior wisdom. This view of the case, if he took it, was sure to be abandoned at bedtime, when he would inevitably break his chain, to get into his master's bedroom. His indomitable desire to lie on the foot of Ben's bed, or to hug an old vest under it, was sure to make him break away from any breakable restraint. Therefore a prison was made for him. It was made of small logs, "cobbled up;" that is, the ends notched with an axe, and the end of a log fitted into each notch. The roof was of boards destined for the new house, held in place by heavy stones. The first night the poor beast occupied his new den, he raised the boards in his struggle to get out, impelled by the desire to seek his master. He got his head out, and then hung by his neck, and so was choked to death. I shed some tears for him, and my mother rejoiced. I think Ben was not very sorry. Under other circumstances he would have mourned for the loss of his sublimely ugly pet; but he had a new and life-long pet in prospect—perhaps many other pets after that—and he had no need of, and no place for, a bear.

ON THE SOUTH COAST.

If I want to taste the very essence of early English history, I betake me to the southern counties of our island, and more especially to those parts which border on the Channel. At Dover I behold the cliffs and beach where the great Cæsar came with his Roman legions, and his eagles that had glittered in the sunlight of half the countries on the globe. Round the eastern corner of Kent, where Thanet juts into the sea, and North Foreland and South Foreland ruffle the waters, to the great anguish of cockney

voyagers like myself, all is Saxon to the backbone : names of places, names of people, blue eyes and ruddy cheeks, grey churches with the moss about their stones, old villages with the lichens on their roofs. I forget that any alien Italians ever held rule here, and think only of Hengist and Horsa at the head of their Norsemen, or of Rowena weaving the meshes of her charms round British Vortigern. In Sussex, I recal the days when the Normans and the Anglo-Norman Plantagenets, with their mailed warriors and mitred abbots, kept the Saxon churls in subjection, and fattered on the heritage they had won. Here, on the sea-shore, is Pevensey, where the Conqueror landed on that memorable September day eight hundred years ago, and, falling on the sand, filled the minds of his followers with gloomy omens, till William Fitz-Osbert, the duke's steward, exclaimed that the incident was a favourable token, for that their leader had "embraced England with both his hands." Here, to the eastward, is Hastings, where the invader made his proclamation to the English people, giving his reasons for claiming the crown ; there, to the north, lies Battle, where the great struggle took place, and the ruins of the old abbey which rose in pious recognition of the victory yet remain in the heart of their wooded hills. Westward is Lewes, where the rebellious barons of the reign of Henry the Third laid the foundations of English liberty, as was set forth in these columns more than a year ago ;* and all about the downs, and the woodlands, and the long marshes, and the sweet grassy meadows, and the hills that are blown by the salt breath of the sea, are many spots of historic interest, where the nobles wrangled and the monks and friars feasted in the far mediæval days.

One might learn much of "our rough island story" by merely travelling from town to town in this county of Sussex, visiting the ancient relics, and looking up the traditions. Rye would tell us of the reign of Stephen, when William de Ypres, Earl of Kent, built Ypres Tower, now used as a jail ; of Queen Elizabeth, who gave to the town church its communion table and its clock, both said to have been taken from the Spanish Armada ; and of the attacks on the coast made by the French in 1377 and 1448. Winchelsea, with its sand-choked harbour and its decayed prosperity, would speak mournfully of the time when the waves came up to its feet, bringing with them the commerce of distant lands, after having engulfed the old city that had been founded by the Romans. Arundel Castle carries us back to the age of Alfred, and even into the core of old English legendary romance, for the sometime warder was no less a man than the giant Bevis of Hampton ; and yet the very same stones are eloquent of the great "war of ideas" in the seventeenth century, when the

fortress was twice taken within two months—first by the Royalists, and afterwards by the Parliamentarians. The ruins of Pevensey Castle, reposing slumberously in their wide tract of marshland, amidst the flat green meadows, the long meandering dykes, and the countless herds of sleepy-eyed cattle, is a very incrustation of history, from the era of the Romans, who built the outer walls, to that of the Normans, who reared the inner towers, and so down the grand expanse of our later annals to comparatively recent times, with many a story of war and festival, and woful imprisonment of kings and queens and princes. Along the coast, from Beachy Head to Selsey Bill, and for miles inland, the soil is thickly strewn with Saxon and Norman antiquities ; and the sight of the coast guardsmen, lounging about with the inseparable telescope under the left arm, will remind us of the period when a guard was needed for something more than anti-smuggling purposes—viz. for the protection of the maritime towns and villages from the ravages of piratical Frenchmen and Spaniards. Past these coasts, in the summer of 1588, sailed the Great Armada which was to make us all vassals of his Most Catholic Majesty and the Pope ; and many an anxious eye must have looked seaward from the coast towns and headlands at the slow passage of that portentous cloud upon the waters. More than two centuries earlier—in 1350—the Spaniards were encountered not far from Winchelsea by an English fleet under the command of Edward the Third in person, and were beaten, with the loss of fourteen ships ; during the progress of which action, gentle Philippa was staying at William de Echyngham's house at Udimore, trembling for the safety of her lord and children, the more so as her attendants, who had watched the battle from the hills, told her that the Spaniards had forty large ships. You can scarcely mention a single town or village along the coast, but you find traditions of the place having been sacked and harried several times by the French and Spaniards. In 1545, a party of marauders belonging to the former nation made a descent on Seaford, with a view to advancing on Lewes, but were repulsed by a gentleman of that town, named Sir Nicholas Pelham ; concerning whom and his feat of arms, a punning epitaph-writer composed this couplet :

What time the French sought to have sack't Seaford,
This Pelham did repel 'em back aboord.

A French army landed at Rottingdean in 1377, and marched over the downs towards Lewes, but were defeated, and obliged to take to their ships again. Winchelsea, Rye, Hastings, Brighthelmstone, and Newhaven, have all at various times felt the fury of these maritime assaults ; and even as late as 1690, a French squadron caused great alarm all along the Sussex coast, and fired into Hastings. We who have inherited the traditions of the times of Rodney

and Nelson can hardly understand our southern coast lying at the mercy of a naval power which we have long known to be vastly inferior to us at sea. And it is equally difficult to picture these tranquil ports and inland villages, and these breadths of pastoral uplands, where the crops grow and ripen undisturbed, as the scene of clamorous battle, rapine, and incendiaryism. The little village of Rottingdean, for instance—who can fancy it in the hands of a savage enemy? Of all quiet places it is surely the quietest. The waves strike against the cavernous white cliffs, and now and then the south wind must come with a roar from sea; but those are the only ungentle sounds it knows. Go there on a Sunday morning, when all the people are in the quaint old Norman church, seated apart on a little knoll of rising ground, and you may think it is the very Sabbath of creation, such a balmy silence steeps the houses and the billowy land beyond, especially if it be about the harvest season, when Nature seems to hush the babbling voices of the spring and summer, and the winds themselves are tranquil. A drowsy place, whose dwellings have caught the ripened red of many vanished summers; whose roofs are painted with the rusty gold of lichens that have sprung from the kisses of last century's rain and sun; whose silvery-grey flint walls dividing field from field are touched with the sunny flicker of invading moss. An enchanted place, you might almost say, haunted for ever by harmonies of winds and waves, visited by delicate influences from sea and land; in front a wide expanse of many-tinted waters, and round about long slopes of corn-bearing fields, across which, and up the high green hills, and over the fair nestling hollows, the chime of the church bells floated this Sunday morning in undulating cadence; hamlet calling to hamlet in that community of worship. Who can think of the French pouring like a tempest through this peaceful nook?

But the centre of our South Coast memories is certainly Hastings. We date a new epoch of English history from that little town. The great event connected with Hastings changed our destinies as a country, modified our national character, revolutionised our language, founded our aristocratical system, and inaugurated the long era of feudalism. The chivalrous pageant of our mediæval annals takes its start from that sea-side borough. When I observe the young gentlemen in wide-awakes, and the young ladies in cavalier hats, lounging on the beach, I feel inclined to tell them that they are like Madeline in the Eve of St. Agnes, who went to sleep “in lap of legends old.” They are frolicking and flirting like so many infants in the lap of venerable mother History. The younger ones, when they go back to school, will have a more vivid and personal idea of Norman William and Saxon Harold from having trodden the ground which felt the shock of their contending forces. Wonderful is the magic which lies in actual contact with memorable spots. Pericles is

less a dream to those who have seen the Acropolis; and the Cæsars live once more to him who wanders among the ruins of Imperial Rome. There are parts of Hastings which, though undoubtedly much more modern than the eleventh century, are yet old enough not to contradict the sentiment of antiquity. The town that existed at the time of the Conquest has been almost entirely swallowed up by the sea; but “the new town” is now in itself old—at least, many parts of it are. Quitting the more fashionable localities, and penetrating into the back streets, you find yourself in a region of ancient houses, reared on different levels, and over-peering one another, like wizen old elf-men playing at bo-peep; with pathways before them so much higher than the road, and so utterly unprotected by chains or posts, that, on going home at night, you must look out sharp for your neck; with bits of the old town wall breaking in here and there in an utterly unreasonable manner; with the ruins of the castle (which has been decaying for the last six hundred years, or more) on the summit of the West Hill; with flint-built churches, scathed by the fire of the French in centuries gone by, yet standing up bravely, large, massive, and crumbling; and with a background of craggy cliffs, like an impending avalanche. A rough and angry coast has Hastings; and the sea, time after time, has eaten its way into the land, tearing down almost the whole site of the original town, and defying every attempt to reconstruct the pier destroyed by a great storm in the early part of Elizabeth's reign. The ruins of that pier may still be seen at low water, and its importance to the town, as forming a harbour of refuge for merchants and fishermen, is testified by a royal proclamation, bearing date the 31st of October, 1578, wherein we read that since the carrying away of the pier by the extreme rage and violence of the sea, “the town is much decayed, the traffique of merchants thither forsaken, the fishing, by reason of the dangerous landing, but little used, the riche and wealthy men gone thence, and the poore men yet remaining would gladly doe the like, if without offence of our lawes they might be elsewhere received, whereby our people are likely to perishe, and our said port likely to be subverted, and become desolate, or els the people there by necessitie driven to commit great and heynous offences, to the great hindrance of the public weale, unlesse some spedie remedie be for them provided.” The object of the proclamation was to empower certain of the local gentry to collect voluntary subscriptions for the construction of a new pier. The attempt was made, and renewed over and over again in Elizabeth's and subsequent reigns; but the sea was too strong for the engineers, or the subscriptions failed, or the commissioners embezzled the funds, or some other unlucky accident occurred, and frustrated the plan. Thus Hastings, from having been a place of no small commerce and of some political importance (even possessing a mint in the days of Saxon

Athelstan), became little better than a poor fishing village, till Dr. Baillie, at the latter end of last century, found out the advantage of its warm equable air for his consumptive patients, and so turned the famished little town into a fashionable watering-place.

The Hastings fishermen, who, with their families, number about three thousand persons, have long borne a high reputation for being excellent seamen; but at one time they also possessed a character of a more questionable sort. They were great smugglers, and desperate fellows enough in an encounter with the revenue cutters. In very early times they seem to have been downright pirates, sparing neither foreign nor English vessels, and exciting such terror that, on entering any port, it was usual for the authorities there to hold up a hatchet, as a sign of hostility—a custom which is said to be continued even to this day in some of our western harbours. Every now and then, a number of these marauders were strung up, as an example to the rest; but they were a reckless set of men, and went their way all the same. At the present time they are a peculiar race, with a physiognomy distinct from that of their townfellows, attributable partly to their often intermarrying among themselves, partly to their having, of old, in their wild raids on the French coast, chosen wives among the women there. Many a pretty bit of corsair romance, I doubt not, might have been picked out of the family records of these men, had any been kept; stories of love and adventure, with the smack of the briny wind in them, and the bloom of a certain chivalrous tenderness suffusing the reckless savagery, as good as ever were told of Barbary pirates or South American buccaniers. It is curious to find how the same families continue from generation to generation in the same calling, as the descendants of the exiled French Protestants are still weaving with their old hand-looms in the attics of Bethnal-green and Spitalfields. When, in 1586, the government of Queen Elizabeth were preparing to defend the country from the anticipated descent of the Spaniards, a return was sent in from Hastings of the ships that could be supplied by that port, with the names of their masters and of all the able-bodied mariners under them; and this document (which is preserved in the State Paper Office) contains a great many names that exist to this hour among the boatmen. Two of them I have myself observed about the town over shop doors—two patronymics remarkable for their jingling oddity; to wit, Bossum and Cossom. And this reminds me of a good story of the said names told by Leigh Hunt in a letter to one of his daughters, and published in the Correspondence (1862). The writer, referring to a sojourn at Hastings in his early life, says that “a Mr. Bossum used to visit our landlord, or a Mr. Cossom, I forget which, and there was a shopkeeper at the entrance of the town, whose name was the *other* of the two names, whichever that was; and Hastings had then a vile high

pavement on one side of the street, very fit to break people’s necks; and you must know there was a pianoforte in the house; and so I used to thump the pianoforte to a threatening air, and sing the following words, the absurdity of which has made me remember them:

If the people of Hastings don’t mend this vile street,

I’ll Bossum and Cossom, and kick all I meet.

There was another couplet; but, having more sense in it I suppose, it has slipped my memory.” As I have already intimated, the “vile street” is as “fit to break people’s necks” as ever; and Bossum and Cossom still hold their own. May the bearers of those famous names increase and multiply, and may the shadows of their craft upon the waters never be less!

I am told in the guide-books that Mr. Banks, of Bleak House, Hastings, has made sundry observations with reference to the atmospherical influences of the town and neighbourhood, from which it results that “the ‘cloudy fine’ days number 46; the ‘cloudy,’ 52; the ‘fine-rain,’ 42; and the ‘cloudy-rain,’ 30.5; while the ‘rainy’ days only amount to nine in the year. From this it is evident that the number of days on which the invalid cannot get out on account of the weather is very few; and those on which he may enjoy the rays of the sun are 280. To these must be added 52 which are dry though overcast; hence there are 332 days on which a person may enjoy a walk.” I have no doubt this calculation is perfectly correct; yet I cannot help calling to mind a day which must have been one of those exceptional nine—a day of perpetual, of inveterate, rain—a day when the air seemed made of rain, and the house fronts were soaked and blotchy, and the very sea looked wet with a wetness not its own. I had dropped down on Hastings for a few hours, and, having no lodgings to go to, and not a soul in the place that I could call on, was obliged to divide my time between a bar-parlour and forlorn perambulations through the sloppy streets. I glanced from time to time out of the said bar-parlour windows, and tried to draw hopeful auguries from the scud of the clouds; but it rained with a gloomy pertinacity. I sallied forth, and looked at the old churches and the old houses; and it rained. I returned to shelter and to speculation on the skyey portents; and it rained. I effected a sortie towards the castle walls, and saw a high hill, and a grim circumvallation on the top, and a leaden sky on the top of that; and the rain. Once more I beat back to quarters, and in savage mood heaped sundry maledictions on all connected with Hastings, from the time of William the Conqueror downwards; with special and intensified application to certain cooks and waiters who had still further embittered my fate by serving me with an execrable dinner. And it rained. In short, it was just such a day as that which Mr. Longfellow describes in some dismal verses, when “it rained, and the wind was never weary;” though I was very soon

weary of seeing the one and hearing the other. Hastings was assuredly in one of those fits of ill-temper in which, it seems, she only indulges nine times in the course of each revolving year.

But she is a beauty for all that, and none the less so for being in a pet now and then, as it is the lofty privilege of beauties to be. She has the mingled charms of sea-side and woody inland—of beach and cliff, of rock and glen, of field and grove, of hill and dale. Ancient castles and churches, ruined abbeys, dismantled priories, and venerable ancestral seats, sprinkle the surrounding land, and make it teem with ever-living interest. A submarine forest, overwhelmed for centuries, lies off the beach, the trees just visible at low water, and nuts and branches from some of them lying on the sands when the tide is out. Caves of sandstone, supported on pillars, wind through the cliffs. A score of lovely spots with pretty or quaint names—Lovers' Seat, Dripping Well, Fairlight Glen, the Old Roar, &c.—lie round about the town; and Lovers' Seat has a story attached to it, which is a good story, whether true or false, and it is generally held to be true. The heroine was a Miss Boys, of Rye, who was beloved by the gallant Captain Lamb, of the revenue cutter Stag. The old Boys (or, to speak more correctly, Boyses—that is to say, the damsel's father and mother) disapproved of the match, and removed their daughter to a lonely farm-house, the Warren; but she, of course, contrived to slip out at times, and would come at night to a woody spot on the summit of a high cliff, and, like another Hero, hold forth a light to Leander, who was cruising about off shore in his cutter. Very naughty of Miss Boys, no doubt, and highly reprehensible, sir, in Captain Lamb; yet, as long as "sex dividual" shall last, the sympathies of most men and women will be on the side of such adventures; and it is of this stuff that poems are made, and ballads that come to us with a living touch out of the waste of ages. We may be sure the captain kept his weather eye open towards that cliff, more sharply than ever he kept it open for the running of contrabands into creek or cave. And we may be equally sure that every man on board the cutter was heart and soul with the captain as his vessel crept along those darkling waters, with no other sound than the strain of the sail upon the mast, and wash of the long waves, waiting for the glimmer of Hero's light upon the headlands. Nay, so much were they concerned in their commander's success, that when at length he and the young lady managed to get one day to Hollington Church to be married, they posted themselves as guards up and down the sylvan paths and dingles of a thick wood in the midst of which the church is placed, that they might be ready to repel any rescue, should it be attempted. It was *not* attempted, and the lovers were duly spliced, and the old folks had the good sense to forgive and forget, and they all—it is not so stated in the local histories, but I will have it so—they all lived happy ever after. Is not this

enough to make Hastings the chosen spot of young lovers in want of sea air, as long as the generation lasts?

THE CARDINAL'S WALKING-STICK.

"WHY—West? old fellow? West!"

"Crooke, my boy!"

We stood silent for a few seconds, holding each other's hands, in the first surprise of the unexpected meeting. And as we thus stood, the strange foreign street, the tall white Roman houses, balconied and terraced, vanished like dissolving views, and before our eyes rose Magdalen College, Oxford, and the images of two beardless undergraduates in cap and gown. At least, I can answer for myself. Crooke and I had been fast friends and college chums, long ago, and I forgot, in the pleasure of seeing my companion of well-remembered days, how different were the paths which we now trod. Then gradually came back to me what had passed, and how our correspondence had languished first and finally dropped, until we who had been so intimate had wholly lost sight of each other. I cast a glance at Crooke's garb, that of an ecclesiastic of the Church of Rome, and could not help sighing.

"You are still an Anglican, I see? Have you been busy all this time with that curacy in the north—at Leeds or Halifax, wasn't it?—or have you a fat benefice from some lucky turn of the wheel of fortune?" asked my old acquaintance, in a tone that I hardly liked. Probably he had seen my involuntary start when I caught sight of the habit he wore—a trim black soutane and hat of moderate brim, not like the portentous Dom Basilio headgear usually assumed by priests of Italian birth. Hastily I recalled to mind how Crooke had given up his fellowship, and a fair prospect of preferment, from conscientious motives; how he had incurred slights and aversion on the part of his friends; had been the cause of grief and anger in his own family; and, finally, how I had vaguely heard of his working with all the enthusiasm of a neophyte somewhere in London, until a newspaper paragraph announced that the Rev. Titus Crooke, ex-prizeman at Oxford, and Fellow of Magdalen, had gone abroad. From that time forth I had wholly lost sight of him.

I suppose my old chum saw that I was ruffled by his somewhat flippant remark, for he passed his arm through mine, saying very gently that he begged my pardon if he had annoyed me; but that I must be lenient with a poor fellow whom many of his countrymen and countrywomen, kind-hearted enough at other times, chose to condemn unheard. He did not think me narrow-minded or uncharitable enough to treat him thus. The path he had chosen, from no selfish motives, was sometimes a very stony one, and he did not mind confessing that it had often happened that the coldness or repugnance of old friends had cut him to the soul.

What on earth was I to do? My heart softened towards my old companion in his ad-

versity, for I could not but see that the poor fellow was far from happy, and not in very robust health. His face was sallow and thin, his eyes were terribly sunken, and his temples were getting bald, while there was a nervous twitching about his mouth that told of anything but content.

All this time the fierce white light of the midday sun was pouring down its force upon the bleached stones of the pavement, and the heat was extreme. I was glad to step aside into the shadow of a cool caffè, with a gay red and white awning before it, where a drowsy waiter was fanning away the flies with a green bunch of twigs, and where two or three of the foreigners who chanced to be in Rome at that unfashionable season, were languidly smoking cigars or sipping iced sorbetti and lemonade. It was, indeed, not only the hour of a summer's day when, according to the Italian proverb, mad dogs and Englishmen have a monopoly of the thoroughfares, but it was August, the most unhealthy part of the year in the Roman States. Crooke, who, as I gathered from his hints, had remained at Rome, summer and winter, for three years, smilingly asked me how I ventured to the Eternal City at that dreaded season of sickly heats.

"My leave is not a long one," said I, laughing. "School begins again on the 18th of next month, and I must be at my post when the bell rings for early prayers."

"School?" said Crooke, with a puzzled look.

"Even so," said I, reddening a little, I am afraid, "but I don't mean that I have gone back to the status pupillaris. Only I have just been appointed third master at St. Winnipeg's, and must enter on my duties at the end of the midsummer vacation. Not a bad post, and quite as good as my deserts entitled me to expect, though it is not what I used to dream of when we were lads at college, and I fear I shall never be an Arnold. At any rate, I must make haste if I am to 'do' Rome and Naples."

"Ah," said my former friend, "so you are going to Naples."

Lightly as I had mentioned my appointment to the office of third classical master on the ancient and stately foundation of St. Winnipeg's, the post was anything but a matter of indifference to me. It had cost me much trouble and anxiety, and the kind help of friends, to secure my election, and I thought myself a very lucky curate to obtain it. Fortunately I had a good degree; I had kept up my classical lore when more brilliant scholars had permitted theirs to rust like a useless sword, and if I could but teach as well as learn, and win the confidence and respect of the boys, I trusted not to prove unworthy of the favour of the governors of that fine old school. For the rest, there was a tolerable house, and an income large enough, as Emma and I thought, to marry upon. Emma's parents thought so too; but it had been made a condition of our engagement that I should wait until I had had at least a couple of terms' experience of the practical duties before me.

I had been appointed just at the commencement of the vacation, and had decided on taking that rare opportunity for a short but rapid continental tour. My time was brief, and my purse but moderately replenished, so I was obliged, though with a sigh, to forego ambitious visions of Greece and Egypt, but it was a great treat to me, after a peep at Paris and the Rhine and Switzerland, to cross the Alps and visit that Italy that I had so often pictured to myself, but which I only knew from books. And now I had seen Milan, Venice, Florence, and, more interesting still, to one who travelled with Eustace's volumes in his portmanteau, the old Etrurian cities, and had recently reached Rome. But already my time was waning, there was much to see, and brief space remained to explore the wonders of Rome, Pompeii, Pæstum, and Herculaneum, and I must not miss the Liverpool packet that left Naples in the first week of September, unless I would be a truant on the 18th of the month. Should I fail to be present at the somewhat ceremonial opening of the new term, Dr. Swishington, the august head-master, were he so disposed, could "suspend" me from my duties, and the governors had full powers to cancel my appointment, without official inquiry, or the prospect of legal proceedings. On this account—not that I had the slightest reason to apprehend any hostile feeling towards myself on the part of my future superior, to whom I was personally a stranger—I was naturally a little nervous. But I consoled myself by remembering the admirable punctuality, on the whole, which modern steam-packets display in the performance of their service, and by the prospect of a swift and easy summer voyage in that favourite and powerful vessel the Volcano. All that was necessary was, that I should not permit any circumstances to interfere with my embarking on the proper day. So, not to lose the golden hours of this rare holiday on classic soil, a chance that might not occur again until my limbs should stiffen and my hair grow grey, I was eager to make the best use of my time. And it was vexatious to find that the dull professional ciceroni, to whom time was of no value, except as represented by the piastre earned by a day of plodding beside Murray—consulting tourists, could not distinguish the chaff from the corn.

In this strait, Crooke proved a valuable ally. He had spoken no more than truth when he said that he knew Rome thoroughly. And he assured me that he had ample leisure (his duties, whatever they were, did not seem very onerous), and that it would be a pleasure to him to guide me to the cream of that inexhaustible treasure of antiquities which Rome contains.

"Dismiss your laquais de place, and accept me as a volunteer in the same capacity," said Crooke, with great good humour. "Depend upon it I'll not let grass grow under your feet. You shall 'do' the seven-hilled city in less time than ever did even a Yankee excursionist, come

to Europe to stay his three thousand dollars, and yet miss none of the true lions."

The ex-Fellow of Magdalen faithfully kept his word, and acted as a skilful and zealous guide, while I found it a great comfort to be conducted through the wondrous old city by a scholar and an Englishman, instead of the snuff-taking old Mentor whom he had supplanted, and who referred all buildings to Nero, and all pictures to Raffaeli. Very kind and attentive my former chum certainly proved himself; but there was something in his manner that perplexed me, for it suggested that, for unknown reasons, he was acting a part. And yet I was angry with myself for the meanness of the suspicion, and drove it from my thoughts as an intruder. Why, after all, should Crooke take the trouble to pioneer my steps through church and temple, arena and Vatican, as he did, save from pure kindness and recollection of our old friendship. Why, indeed?

Imprimis, there was nothing to be got out of me. My former fellow-student was the reverse of a parasite, and declined all invitations to dine with me at my hotel, nor would he even permit me to pay more than half the hire of carriages or boats on the Tiber. As for the idea of Crooke's borrowing my money, that was absurd. I had none to spare, as he very well knew, and, moreover, he belonged to a wealthy family enough, and had private means, which were quite sufficient for a person of his careful and unostentatious habits. Nor did he appear to be possessed by any peculiar proselytising fervour. I stood on my guard at first, prepared to do battle, and expecting to be battered with the heavy artillery of Jerome and Augustine, and sapped by the subtler casuistry of Pascal and Fénelon; but I was agreeably disappointed. Crooke showed not the slightest desire to make a convert of the third classical master of St. Winnipeg's. Indeed, beyond a hurried assurance, in answer to some timid question of my own, that he had "found peace" in his present belief, he was almost silent on the subject of his own faith and calling.

But he talked freely and amusingly enough on mundane topics, and displayed great knowledge of Italian politics and statesmen, having endless anecdotes to relate. His view of affairs in the peninsula naturally differed from mine, but he spoke without bitterness, though in terms of gentle blame, of the king and Cavour, and with admiring regret of Garibaldi. The ex-King of Naples he described as a rash and generous youth, while admitting that there really were great faults, coupled with great qualities, inherent in the Bourbon stock. But he drew a most masterly and touching picture of the bleeding and torn kingdom of Naples, the priests persecuted, the bishops insulted, the nobles exiled or captive, the simple peasantry hunted and harried by cruel soldiers, ground to the earth by taxation, harassed by harsh martinets, civil and military, from the pedantic regions of Piedmont.

Now, I had no especial sympathy with brigands and plotters, lay or cleric, but it was difficult to

refuse entire credence to my friend's statements, highly coloured, no doubt, but still supported by legions of facts, real or imaginary, and by all manner of circumstantial evidence, drawn not only from newspapers but from private letters, of which Crooke translated sundry passages for my behoof, and of which he seemed to possess a never-failing supply. At first I was incredulous, then staggered, and at last I was brought to own that very likely there had been instances of unnecessary severity or caprice, and that it might go hard with an ignorant and helpless population, squeezed as in a vice between Chiavone on the one hand, and La Marmora on the other.

And then the cloven foot peeped out. Crooke very cautiously asked, in a circuitous fashion, if I would—if, in a word, I would do him the service of smuggling a few letters over the frontier of the new reprobate kingdom of Italy. He did not ask me to take any peculiar trouble in delivering these letters, which would be made up into one thick packet, and which I could easily conceal about my person, while I could simply leave them at a certain house in the suburbs of Naples. It was wonderful what good the safe arrival of those letters would effect. They would heal dissensions, comfort those who were ready to perish, restore hope to the afflicted, stop bloodshed, and, in a word, benefit everybody without hurting anybody. But such was the hard and jealous tyranny of the sub-alpine government, that these letters, with all their attendant blessings, would be intercepted, unless secretly conveyed by an Englishman, who could hardly be suspected, would—

"Stay, my dear fellow," I broke in; and I felt the blood rush up to my face, and set my very ears tingling, as I thus interrupted my old friend, for the idea of seeming churlish and ungracious was one that I flinched from, resolute as I was not to be beguiled into doing what was wrong. "Stay, Crooke, and don't tell me any more secrets of state, for it is impossible that we should think alike upon the point in question. You are a far cleverer fellow than I—always were—and I remember what capital speeches you used to make at our old debates at the Union at Oxford. You have spoken very well now, and I do you the justice to believe that you believe every word you have uttered, but, you see, I am a plain Englishman, and I can't go with you. I cannot believe the Piedmontese to be detested usurpers, the monks and brigands suffering saints, King Bomba an exiled martyr, and United Italy a myth. And sooner than carry a single letter, however well intentioned, that should tend to plunge back those poor Neapolitans into the slough of degraded servitude they had swallowed in so long, I tell you frankly that I would abandon the pleasure of my journey altogether."

I began this speech, an unusually long one for me, in a diffident and stammering way, but I spoke warmly and earnestly after the first words were out. Stranger as I was in the land, and few as had been my opportunities of intercourse with the natives, I had seen and heard enough

to convince me that the immense majority of the people had accepted the new order of things, heart and soul, and that rich and poor were alike full of hope that a brighter and better era than Italy had ever known was dawning throughout the country. Everywhere industry seemed to be springing up into healthy vigour, old rubbish, moral and material, to be swept away by the sudden touch of improvement, and populations long inert to be awakening into active and intelligent life. Nor could I endure—however I might respect Crooke's convictions—that he should regard me as a willing instrument in thwarting and impeding the march of Italian regeneration.

Still, my heart smote me at the idea that I might give pain to my kindly fellow-countryman, to whom I was indebted for much attention since my arrival in Rome, and I broke the awkward silence that ensued by some expressions of regret that I should be obliged to refuse the desired service—expressions clumsily worded, I am sure, but none the less sincere.

Crooke took the refusal very well indeed. I could see that he was hurt, but he bore the disappointment better than I had expected, wrung my hand, said that he "fully entered into my feelings," begged I would allow the subject to drop, and, after gazing out of the window for a minute or two, began to converse on other topics with more than his usual fluency of speech and lightness of spirit. Nor did he again allude to the unlucky subject of the contraband correspondence.

However ardent a sight-seer may be, his researches are necessarily limited to the period of daylight, and, even at Rome, the Coliseum is the only lion which can well be explored by the help of torches or the moon. It was summer, and the Opera company had quitted the city, while the foreign residents, and most of the Romans who possessed country-houses, were away. But there were a good many palaces still tenanted, and Crooke was very kind in introducing me to his numerous Italian acquaintance. My evenings would have been dull enough, spent in the empty sala of my hotel, but for this thoughtful attention on the part of my former chum. As it was, I was "presented" in the drawing-rooms of several of the Roman nobility, at whose houses Crooke was intimate, and was hospitably made welcome at the frequent "receptions" of sundry ladies of rank.

A reading and rowing man at College, a working curate afterwards, and third master elect of St. Winnipeg's, I had no experience of London fashionable life, and the little I had heard of it had by no means caused me to aspire to an initiation into its social inanities. I dare say the society of the Roman grandes, into which, under Crooke's auspices, I was admitted, was sufficiently tiresome and stupid, but, at any rate, it was thoroughly new to me, and had a sort of picturesque dulness and gloom about it. The great shadowy rooms, with priceless pictures on the walls, peerless marbles, cabinets

of gems, and costly heirlooms of all kinds, the cumbrous furniture, carpetless floors, and frescoed walls, all seen by the dim light of a few sorry candles, pleased my fancy much. There was an illustration of national life and Old World modes of thought in everything around, even in the scanty and cheap refreshments, a few cakes, a few glasses of syrup or lemonade, a little of the common wine of the country, a collation for which eighteenpence would have paid amply, served on monstrous silver trays by domestics in shabby but gorgeous liveries. And the calm, portly marchionesses, with their fans, their black silk and old lace, their diamonds, good-humoured stolidity, and soft voices, were a study in themselves. And so were the snuffy old counts—there seemed to be few or no young people at these parties—with their decorations, quaint politeness, and solemn manner of playing trictrac.

Perhaps part of the charm of these curious réunions was due to sheer vanity on my part, for, as Crooke took care to inform me that an Englishman was very seldom admitted into the dingy but magnificent saloons of which, with him for my Mentor, I was free, I could not help piquing myself on my rare good fortune. "What a capital subject of conversation," thought I, "my sojourn in Rome, and the opportunities I have had of seeing how Romans really live and amuse themselves, would hereafter prove." And I found time to write long descriptions of life and society in Rome to a correspondent who was pretty certain to consider my account as a masterpiece of all that was graphic and diverting. It was when the period allotted for my stay began to dwindle until the hours might be counted, that my old companion proposed to present me at a house the threshold of which I had not yet crossed.

"It is—don't be shocked—a cardinal's palace, that of Cardinal Campobasso, the ablest scholar, and most judicious collector of antique statuary and mosaics in all Italy. His Eminence has fine taste, and his noble fortune enables him to gratify it without stint. You are not afraid, are you, to be the guest of a cardinal? I'll pledge myself that no one shall make even an effort to win you to our way of thinking."

Crooke went on to tell me that the Cardinal, who was one of the richest prelates in Italy, and was, among other things, archbishop of the wealthy Neapolitan diocese of Foggia, was just then absent from Rome, attending to his archiepiscopal duties. But the honours of his palazzo were admirably well done by his sister. His sister and his niece, the latter of whom, a young widow, was reckoned among the most beautiful women in Rome. They had a reception on that evening, and Crooke had asked and obtained permission to present me. For the first time I demurred. It was Thursday, and a hot and breezeless day, and I had been racing through picture-galleries for the last time, had inspected the wonderful cabinets of the Doria collection since lunch, and was knocked up and weary. As for Crooke, nothing seemed to tire him. But

then I was booked to start, early on the following morning, for the Neapolitan frontier, as No. 3 in the coupé of a shabby green diligence, and I should have preferred a night's unbroken repose. I could hardly be tempted, even by my friend's account of the treasures of classic art, the Byzantine mosaics, the Greek intaglios, in the Cardinal's saloons, and was quite deaf to his praises of the beauty and grace of the fair hostess. However, I did not wish to be churlish, and I consented, groaning the while, to put on my dress suit, and to accompany Crooke to the "reception." Indeed, he made such a point of my compliance, that I could hardly refuse, little as I guessed the real reason of his eagerness.

The "reception" at the Campobasso Palace differed in some respects from those dreary parties at which I had previously been a guest while at Rome. The huge mansion was brilliantly lighted, the servants wore liveries that were grotesque, certainly, but rich and new, and there was no lack of music; a well-stored buffet, and a crowd of company, amid which youth and good looks were mingled in fair proportion. It was a real party, in fact, with clean cards on the tables, instead of the well-thumbed packs that the old counts and abbés must have known by heart, with a blaze of wax-candles, refreshments that were meant to be eaten and imbibed, good singing, and fresh toilettes. The saloons were gorgeously furnished in the style of Louis Quinze, and there were objects of art in even greater profusion than Crooke had led me to expect.

My friend introduced me to the Cardinal's sister, a stiff old lady in velvet and diamonds, whose name I did not catch, and to the Cardinal's niece, Countess Minetta something, but the latter somewhat curtailed the introduction by giving me her hand with a sort of queenly condescension, and observing in tolerable English that she "was glad to see one of whom M. Crooke had told her so much good. Her own papa had been half an Englishman, and she regretted to speak his language so imperfectly."

I do not think I could describe the Countess Minetta if I were to try. I can only say that she was a very beautiful creature, with a dark, almost Spanish cast of face, which her black dress and sparkling jewels set off to perfection, that she seemed very young, and had a fawn-like timidity of manner that was very charming. But what pleased me most was her great kindness to an undistinguished stranger like myself, and her filial affection for her absent uncle, the Cardinal. Of the latter she spoke with the utmost pride and fondness, regretting that he should have been away from Rome during my sojourn there. His Eminence would have been delighted to converse with a learned Inglesi like myself—ah! I must not be bashful about my attainments—M. Crooke had told them *all* about me—and I should have been sure to like the Cardinal. Why not? Her uncle was a scholar, a poet, like Petrarch, a father to his flock, the tender protector of the poor, kind and benevolent to all. Any one less conscientious than

himself, so his niece declared, would have stayed away from his diocese, which his vicar could administer, but Cardinal Campobasso was a model archbishop. His age and infirmities, alas! weighed every year more heavily upon him, but never was he known to be deaf to the call of duty.

Then Madame Minetta, begging my pardon with the prettiest humility for having wearied me with her egotistical praises of the good old relative who had been as a parent to her, offered to show me some of the Cardinal's rare stores of curiosities. Very notable and exquisite were many of the cameos and scraps of many-tinted mosaic to which she called my attention, hurriedly describing them in her low sweet voice, but I could hardly distinguish one from the other. I was fairly dazzled for the moment. It was not that I was silly enough, or fickle enough, to fall in love; my heart never swerved from its allegiance to Emma, at home in England; but there was something in so much loveliness and excellence as that of the Cardinal's niece that interested me very much. I fancied, too, that she was not happy; there was a pensive melancholy in her dark eyes, and a sad music in her voice, that seemed to hint at hidden sorrows. Perhaps she was inconsolable, I thought, for the loss of her husband, Count something—I only know that the name was a long and sonorous one. Or could it be that she found no congenial spirit in that gay and frivolous society, amid which her lot was cast. How noble, in any case, were her sentiments, and how exquisite was her devotion to that good old uncle, Cardinal Campobasso.

I had plenty of time to think all this, for the young countess could not, of course, neglect her other guests, among whom were princes and great ladies, French officers of the garrison, Knights of Malta, and bishops, to spend all the evening in showing Macedonian medallions and Syracusan bronzes to the third master at St. Winnipeg's. But as she glided gracefully through the midst of the company, she never passed me without a bright smile, and a word or two in her pretty broken English. And she introduced me to one or two persons, among others a handsome young Roman lady, who looked like Juno, but spoke little, and appeared ignorant of all topics, save only her parish church, its rich shrines and altar-pieces, and her confessor, Father Bonifacio, who preached there in Lent, and her own, the countess's, brother. The latter was a tall young officer in the Pope's Noble Guard, very splendid and good humoured, but without any of his sister's keenness of feeling or grace of manner. Of Crooke I saw little. He had many friends, and seemed very busy indeed.

The party gradually broke up. The guests took their leave, and I, like the rest, made my bow to the Cardinal's sister in black velvet. The niece I did not see, nor at the moment was Crooke visible. But before I got clear of the ante-chamber, Crooke hurried up and caught my arm.

"Come back, West, for just a moment! Countess Minetta has something to say to you."

So she had. In her sweet soft voice, and with her flashing dark eyes a little more hidden by the drooping lashes than I had seen them before, she asked me to do her a favour, if she might presume on the kindness of one who must regard her merely as a troublesome stranger. But Englishmen were always ready, she had heard, to fulfil a lady's entreaty—was it not so? Ah, so her papa had told her in her childhood! She was *so* reluctant to trouble me, but M. Crooke said I was going to Naples next day, and the temptation was too strong to be resisted. Would I oblige her? She asked nothing alarming. But the Cardinal-Archbishop was gouty and old, and he had left his favourite stick, which usually supported his tottering steps, dear man, behind him in Rome. He had written twice to his niece from his palace at Foggia, lamenting, in serio-comic fashion, the want of this well-remembered staff, which he missed sorely. He had sticks in plenty, but none suited him like this old favourite, which had belonged to his father, Prince Julian Campobasso, and was a sort of heirloom.

"The aged have their fancies, you know," said the young widow, smiling with angelic benignity, as she finished this explanation: "here is the stick. If you would kindly take care of it on the journey, and leave it at Capua with the Cardinal's factor, Signor Boccotristo, whose house is opposite the chief hotel, you would really oblige us all. The dear good uncle! I know his kind old eyes will brighten when he sees this quaint crutch of his once more!"

The stick was a curious one, a tall and stout staff of some dark wood, probably ebony, with a silver ferrule, a crutch handle of ivory, serrated by the file, and a profusion of ivory rings let into the wood. It looked ancient, the very ivory being discoloured by age to a pale yellow tint, and I could easily fancy that its familiar support might be endeared by custom to its venerable owner. Of course, I willingly undertook to execute the countess's commission. My road led me through Capua, and a walking-stick was no formidable addition to my baggage. I pledged myself, however, never to lose sight of the Cardinal's stick until, at Capua, I should resign my trust. The countess thanked me in her bewitching way, and I took my leave.

Crook saw me off next morning, early as was the hour of my departure. I took my place in the diligence, along with some intensely national fellow-passengers, who insisted on keeping the windows closed, and who sustained nature on cigarettes and slices of melon, as we rolled along. The Cardinal's stick was in my hand. "Good-by, and a good journey, West, old boy. Perhaps we shall never meet again, but I shan't forget you. Mind you take care of the stick," were the last words of my Oxford friend.

The diligence, with its load, jangled and jolted but slowly along the road through the Pontine Marshes; the dust hung around us in heavy

clouds, and through the hot haze the burning sun glared like a red ball. Early as had been our start from Rome, it was dusk when we left Terracina, and dark night when we got to the frontier town of Fondi. The boundary line lies, as all travellers know, some four miles north of the latter place, and there we had duly undergone the usual routine of inspecting passports, tapping pockets, and "visiting" luggage. All this had passed over pretty smoothly, and as the officer of the Dogana Reale returned me my keys, I felt that I was fairly out of Papal Rome, and a denizen of Living Italy. But at Fondi we found lighted torches, a guard under arms, and unwonted signs of activity at the second custom-house.

"Body of Bacchus!" cried the conductor, letting down the glass on my side of the coupé, "something must be up. Signors and dames, you are invited to descend for the gratification of the royal officers. A second search takes place."

Out we got, grumbling, sleepy, and disgusted at this unexpected call on our obedience, and again portmanteaus were unstrapped, bags forced to disgorge their contents, and trunks uncorded and unlocked. The second search was very severe, and I was called on to explain the purport of even my English papers and manuscripts, poor Emma's letters inclusive, while several cards and notes of invitation from the Roman grandes were set aside and remitted to the custody of the controller. The scrutiny was long and minute. Our pockets, even, were emptied, and the failure of all these efforts to discover anything contraband only seemed to sour the temper of the officials, who eyed us with actual hostility, the reason of which I could not guess.

"That stick, English signor; that stick?"

I handed over the Cardinal's staff, smiling the while, to a lynx-eyed person in uniform. A fat good-humoured chief clerk in plain clothes smiled too, and shrugged his shoulders.

"Blessed Gennaro, Signor Vulpini, we must not vex the forestieri for nothing. Give the English illustrious—one his cane back again. Cospetto, man, we don't care, as the Tedeschi used to do, even if there be a sword or a dirk in that slip of old wood."

But what was my dismay, when the prying personage addressed, unscrewing the crutch handle of the cane, drew from a hollow in the staff itself, *not* a sword, but a long roll of closely-written papers, which had been craftily concealed in that receptacle, and of which I had been the unconscious bearer. There was a hum, and then a Babel of vociferous exclamations, and all the officers rushed, as to a focus, to the spot where the papers were rustling in the hands of the wily finder.

"Instructions to the band of Chiavone!" cried one, seizing a document.

"The College of Cardinals, to all regular and secular clergy, greeting!" bawled another.

"A regular commission of lieutenant-general, under the hand of Francesco de Bourbon, King

of the Sicilies, to Hernan Mendez, the Spanish brigand," cried a third; "and here are letters to all the worst conspirators and most pig-headed codini in Naples, enough to hang the messenger ten times over. See, comrades, to the Englishman!"

I had scanty time given me to protest my innocence. Collared, hustled, my hands pinioned behind my back, I was paraded off to jail between two soldiers with drawn bayonets, regarded by my fellow-travellers as little better than a demon, and hooted by a large ragged population that seemed to start from porch and stone stair, from hovel and cavernous house, throughout the ruinous old town. I scarcely had leisure for reflection, before I found myself thrust into a bare and damp room, which contained but a truckle-bed and a broken stool, but which yet was reckoned the state chamber of the prison of Fondi.

What I underwent in that wretched place of confinement, during several of the longest and most miserable days that I ever spent, I scarcely like to think of. I was not wilfully ill treated. The jailer and his subordinates were rough, but not cruel. It was the hard fare, the extreme discomfort, the blank monotony of my captivity that I felt so bitterly. The prison had been designed, in the Bourbon times, for the reception of mountain robbers, but what might have been endurable to them, the grim bare room, the bed of coarse sacking, covered by a flea-infested rug, the polenta and rancid bacon, tried my spirit sorely. The people persisted in regarding me as a great criminal. A judge came to visit me, and a grefier with him, and I was interrogated, cross-examined, worried to my wits' end. In vain I protested my good will to Italy, and my utter ignorance that the staff contained papers dangerous to the State. The judge only shrugged his shoulders. And all this time the days were dropping one by one into eternity, and the time of the packet's sailing drew near. The eighteenth of September would come, and St. Winnipeg's school would assemble, masters and boys, but the third classical master—where was he? In an Italian prison, unwashed, hungry, despairing, and the governors would no doubt proceed to a new election. Emma!

"Mr. West, you are free!" said a tall young Englishman, coming suddenly into the room where I lay, sullen and desponding, on the wretched bed. "Unscrupulous as he is, your precious college friend, what's his name, Crooke,

never intended that your captivity, if the papers of which you were the unwitting bearer should fall into wrong hands, should be a very long one. He wrote to my uncle the consul, and we have lost no time in settling matters with the authorities at Naples. I have come over here on purpose to effect your release, and if you can start at once, I should be happy to have your company back to Naples. Here, Giacomo, Beppo, whatever you call yourself, unlock those irons, can't you? English wrists get chafed by such bracelets."

The jailor, as obsequious and apologetic now as rough and suspicious formerly, removed my chains, and before I well knew where I was, I was whirling away from Fondi, by the side of my kindly young countryman, who seemed to consider the whole matter a capital joke, pushed, perhaps, a little too far.

"Hard on you, I must say," remarked he, "but the Italians could only judge by appearances. They are not to blame, you know; but, excuse me, Mr. West, how could you let yourself be hoodwinked as you were? It was known papers of a treasonable nature were on their way; but bah! I dare say you are sick of the subject."

With all our speed, and my deliverer was very good natured in hurrying on when once I had told my reason for haste, I did but reach the Chiaia at Naples, and jump into a boat, as torrents of black smoke gushed from the Volcano's chimney. The boatman pulled and shouted, and just as the huge paddles began to revolve, we were alongside, and I was hauled up the side-ladder.

"Just saved the boat, sir. Cast off there, Johnny, and, now, go on ahead!" shouted the captain. And off we went.

But when the dreaded eighteenth came round, the third classical master of St. Winnipeg's, very lean and sunburnt, was at his desk in the ancient hall, and Dr. Swisherton nodded to him with civil approval. The third classical master is at home there now; his name is the Rev. William West; his Italian misadventures seem like a dream in the distance; and Emma is his wife. He has never heard anything more of his former chum at Magdalen College, Mr. Titus Crooke.

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