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ALL THE YEAR ROUND.

CONDUCTED BY CHARLES DICKENS.

CONTAINING THE AMOUNT OF THREE ORDINARY NUMBERS.

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PERCY AND THE PROPHET:

EVENTS IN THE LIVES OF A LADY
AND HER LOVERS.

RELATED BY

WILKIE COLLINS.

[The Right of Translating this Story is registered by the Author in France, Italy, and Germany, in conformity with the law.]

FIRST WORDS.

THE late Lieutenant-Colonel Bervie was generally very willing to tell the eventful love-story of his youthful days to any persons who were really desirous of hearing it. In relating, at the outset of his narrative, the extraordinary manner in which a total stranger foretold certain events which affected the happiness of two other persons besides himself, he never laid any claims to the unquestioning belief of his audience. "Form your own opinion, friends," he used to say. "Whether I am relating a series of marvels or a series of coincidences, I give you my word of honour I am telling you the truth. If this assurance does not satisfy you, I can only recommend the same modest view of questions that are beyond the range of our own experience, which wise Shakespeare advocates in those well-known lines: 'There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in our philosophy.'"

So the old soldier spoke, when years had taught him to be tolerant of all men, in the peaceful evening of his life.

The story is once more told in these

pages, with the colonel's reservations, though not always in the colonel's language. For example, the noble conduct of one of the characters (to which he never did justice) will now be found to occupy the prominent place on the scene that is fairly its due.

THE STORY.

PART I. THE PREDICTION.

CHAPTER I. THE QUACK.

THE disasters that follow the hateful offence against Christianity, which men call War, were severely felt in England during the peace that ensued on the overthrow of Napoleon at Waterloo. At this melancholy period of our national history, agriculture, manufactures, and commerce suffered an unexampled depression. The deficiency in the revenue was publicly acknowledged in Parliament to be alarming. With rare exceptions, distress prevailed among all classes of the community. The starving nation was ripe and ready for a revolutionary rising against its rulers—the rulers who had shed the people's blood and wasted the people's substance in a war which had yielded to the popular interests absolutely nothing in return.

Among the unfortunate persons who were driven, during the disastrous early years of this century, to strange shifts and devices to obtain the means of living, was a certain obscure medical man, of French extraction, named Lagarde. The doctor

(duly qualified in England as well as in his own country to bear the title) was an inhabitant of London, living in one of the narrow streets which connect the great thoroughfare of the Strand with the banks of the Thames.

The method of obtaining employment chosen by poor Lagarde, as the one alternative left in the face of starvation, was, and is still, considered by the medical profession to be the method of a quack. He advertised in the public journals.

In language studiously free from pretence or exaggeration, the French physician declared himself to have been converted to a belief in animal magnetism (as it was then called), by serious study of the discoveries first announced in France by the famous Mesmer. The two classes of the community to which his appeal was addressed were (first) persons of the invalid sort, afflicted with maladies which ordinary medical practice had failed to cure; and (secondly) persons disposed towards mystical investigation, who might be inclined to test the power of "clairvoyance" as a means of revealing the hidden chances and changes of the future. "No fee is exacted from those who may honour me with their confidence," the doctor modestly added, "because I cannot guarantee beforehand that I shall be successful in ministering to their necessities and wishes. The process that I employ is no secret: it was first made public long before my time. I am thrown into a magnetic sleep; and the hand of the person who consults me is placed in mine. The result depends entirely on mysterious laws of nervous sympathy and nervous insight, to the existence of which I can testify, but which (in the present state of scientific enquiry) I am not able to explain. Those whom I am fortunate enough to satisfy are requested to drop their offerings, according to their means, into a money-box fixed on the waiting-room table. Those whom I do not satisfy will be pleased to accept the expression of my regret, and will not be expected to give anything. It is quite possible that I may be the dupe of mistaken convictions: all I ask of the public is to believe that they are at least the convictions of an honest man. I have only to add that ladies and gentlemen who may wish to give me a trial will find me at home in the evening, between the hours of six and ten."

Towards the close of the year 1816, this strange advertisement became a general

topic of conversation among educated people in London. For some weeks the "sittings" of the seer were largely attended, and (all things considered) were not badly remunerated. A faithful few believed in him, and told wonderful stories of what he had pronounced and prophesied in his state of trance. The majority of his visitors simply viewed him in the light of a public amusement, and wondered why such a gentlemanlike man should have chosen to gain his living by exhibiting himself as a quack.

CHAPTER II. THE NUMBERS.

ON a raw and snowy evening towards the latter part of January, 1817, a gentleman, walking along the Strand, turned into the street in which Doctor Lagarde lived, and knocked at the mesmerist's door. The gentleman was young and handsome, with a certain peculiarity in his gait which revealed him as belonging to the military profession. His dress studiously avoided the exaggerations and absurdities of the hideous fashion prevailing in those days. In a word, the outward mark set on him was the mark which unmistakably proclaims a well-bred man.

He was admitted by an elderly male servant to a waiting-room on the first floor. The light of one little lamp, placed on a bracket fixed to the wall, was so obscured by a dark green shade as to make it difficult, if not impossible, for visitors meeting by accident to recognise each other. The metal money-box fixed to the table was just visible. In the flickering light of a small fire, the stranger perceived the figures of three men seated, apart and silent, who were the only occupants of the room besides himself. The wretched weather had, no doubt, kept the doctor's lady-visitors at home. So far as objects were to be seen, there was nothing to attract attention in the waiting-room. The furniture was plain and neat, and nothing more. The elderly servant handed a card, with a number inscribed on it, to the new visitor, said in a whisper, "Your number will be called, sir, in your turn," and disappeared. For some minutes nothing disturbed the deep silence but the faint ticking of a clock. After a while a bell rang from an inner room, a door opened, and a gentleman appeared, whose interview with Doctor Lagarde had terminated. His opinion of the sitting was openly expressed in one emphatic word—"Humbug!" No contribution dropped

from his hand as he passed the money-box on his way out.

The next number (being Number Fifteen) was called by the elderly servant, and the first incident occurred in the strange series of events destined to happen in the doctor's house that night.

One after another the three men who had been waiting rose, examined their cards under the light of the lamp, and sat down again surprised and disappointed. The servant advanced to investigate the matter. The numbers possessed by the three visitors, instead of being Fifteen, Sixteen, and Seventeen, proved to be Sixteen, Seventeen, and Eighteen. Turning to the stranger who had arrived the last, the servant said:

"Have I made a mistake, sir? My sight is not so good as it was, and I am afraid I have awkwardly confused the cards in this dark place. Have I given you Number Fifteen instead of Number Eighteen?"

The gentleman produced his card. A mistake had certainly been made, but not the mistake that the servant supposed. The card held by the latest visitor turned out to be the card previously held by the dissatisfied stranger who had just left the room—Number Fourteen! As to the card numbered Fifteen, it was only discovered the next morning lying in a corner, dropped on the floor!

Acting on his first impulse, the servant hurried out of the room, calling to the gentleman who had been the original holder of Fourteen to come back and bear his testimony to that fact. The street-door had been opened for him by the landlady of the house. She was a pretty woman—and the gentleman had fortunately lingered to talk to her. He was induced, at the intercession of the landlady, to ascend the stairs again. On returning to the waiting-room, he addressed a characteristic question to the assembled visitors. "*More humbug?*" asked the gentleman who liked to talk to a pretty woman.

The servant—completely puzzled by his own stupidity—attempted to make his apologies.

"Pray forgive me, gentlemen," he said. "I am afraid I have confused the cards I distribute with the cards returned to me. In the case of mistakes of any kind I am ordered to set them right on the spot. In *this* case, I think I had better consult my master."

He disappeared in the inner room. Left by themselves, the visitors began to speak jestingly of the strange situation in which they were placed. The original holder of Number Fourteen described his own experience of the doctor in his own pithy way. "I applied to the fellow to tell my fortune. He first went to sleep over it, and then he said he could tell me nothing. I asked why. 'I don't know,' says he. 'I do,' says I—'humbug!' I'll bet you the long odds, gentlemen, that *you* find it humbug too."

Before the wager could be accepted or declined, the door of the inner room was opened again. The tall, lean, black figure of a new personage appeared on the threshold, relieved darkly against the light in the room behind him. A singularly quiet, sad voice addressed the visitors in these words:

"Gentlemen, I must beg your indulgence. The apparent accident which has given to the last comer the number already held by a gentleman who has unsuccessfully consulted me, may have a meaning which we can none of us at present see. Observe, I don't speak positively, I only say it may be. If the three visitors who have been so good as to wait, will allow the present holder of Number Fourteen to consult me out of his turn—and if the earlier visitor who left me dissatisfied with his consultation will consent to stay here a little longer—I pledge myself, if nothing happens during the first ten minutes of the interview, to receive the gentlemen who have yet to consult me, and to detain no longer the gentleman who has seen me already. On the other hand, if anything does happen, there is a chance at least that one among you—most likely the original holder of Number Fourteen—may be concerned in it. Under these circumstances, is ten minutes' patience too much to ask of you?"

The three visitors who had waited longest consulted among themselves, and (having nothing better to do with their time) decided on accepting the doctor's proposal. The visitor who believed it all to be "humbug" coolly took a gold coin out of his pocket, tossed it into the air, caught it in his closed hand, and walked up to the shaded lamp on the bracket. "Heads, stay," he said, "Tails, go." He opened his hand, and looked at the coin. "Heads! Very good. Go on with your hocus-pocus, sir—I'll wait."

"You believe in chance," said the

doctor, quietly observing him. "That is not my experience of life."

He paused to let the stranger who held Number Fourteen pass him into the inner room—then followed, closing the door behind him.

CHAPTER III. THE CONSULTATION.

THE consulting-room was better lit than the waiting-room, and that was the only difference between the two. In the one as in the other, no attempt was made to impress the imagination. Everywhere, the commonplace furniture of a London lodging-house was left without the slightest effort to alter or improve it by changes of any kind.

Seen under the clearer light, Doctor Lagarde appeared to be the last person living who would consent to degrade himself by an attempt at imposture of any kind. His eyes were the dreamy eyes of a visionary; his look was the prematurely-aged look of a student, accustomed to give the hours to his book which ought to have been given to his bed. To state it briefly, the disciple of Mesmer was a man who might easily be deceived by others, but who was incapable of consciously practising deception himself. Signing to his visitor to take a chair, he seated himself on the opposite side of the small table that stood between them—waited a moment with his face hidden in his hands, as if to collect himself—and then spoke.

"Do you come to consult me on a case of illness?" he enquired, "or do you ask me to look into the darkness which hides your future life?"

The stranger answered gravely: "I have no need to consult you about my health. I come to hear what you can tell me of my future life."

"You know that I can try," pursued the doctor; "but that I cannot promise to succeed?"

"I accept your conditions," the stranger rejoined. "I neither believe nor disbelieve. If you will excuse my speaking frankly, I mean to observe you closely, and to decide for myself."

Doctor Lagarde smiled sadly.

"You have heard of me as a charlatan who contrives to amuse a few idle people," he said. "I don't complain of that; my present position leads necessarily to misinterpretation of myself and my motives. Still I may at least say that I am the victim of a sincere avowal of my belief in a great science. Yes! I repeat it, a great

science! New, I daresay, to the generation we live in, though it was known and practised in the days when the pyramids were built. My sincerity in this matter has cost me the income that I derived from my medical practice. Patients distrust me; doctors refuse to consult with me. I could starve if I had no one to think of but myself. But I have another person to consider, who is very dear to me; and I am driven, literally driven, either to turn beggar in the streets, or to do what I am doing now. Everything is against me. I am a needy foreigner (naturally distrusted in this country). I am a republican and a socialist (naturally exiled from my own country). Who will help such an outlawed man as I am? It doesn't matter. The age is advancing; and the great truths which it is my misfortune to advocate before the time is ripe for them, are steadily forcing their way to recognition. They will conquer yet, when the hard struggle of life is over for the poor quack who now presumes to speak to you. Enough (and too much) of myself! Let us, as you say in England, get to business. To be of any use to you, I must first be thrown into the magnetic trance. The person who has the strongest influence over me is the person who will do it to-night." He paused, and looked round towards the corner of the room behind him. "Mother," he said, gently, "are you ready?"

An elderly lady, dressed in deep mourning, rose from her seat in the corner. She had been, thus far, hidden from notice by the high back of the easy-chair in which her son sat. Excepting some folds of fine black lace, laid over her white hair so as to form a head-dress at once simple and picturesque, there was nothing remarkable in her attire. The visitor, well accustomed to the society of women of high rank and breeding, rose and bowed, as if (stranger though she was to him) he recognised a person of distinction. She gravely returned his salute, and moved round the table so as to place herself opposite to her son.

"When you please, Henry," she said.

Bending over him, she took both the doctor's hands in hers, and fixed her eyes steadily on his. No words passed between them; nothing more took place. In a minute or two, his head was resting against the back of the chair, and his eyelids had closed.

"Are you sleeping?" asked Madame Lagarde.

"I am sleeping," he answered.

She laid his hands gently on the arms of the chair, and turned to address the visitor.

"Let the sleep gain on him for a minute or two more," she said. "Then take one of his hands, and put to him what questions you please."

"Does he hear us now, madam?"

"You might fire off a pistol, sir, close to his ear, and he would not hear it. The vibration might disturb him; that is all. Until you or I touch him, and so establish the nervous sympathy, he is as lost to all sense of our presence here, as if he were dead."

"You believe in magnetism yourself, of course?"

"My son's belief, sir, is mine, in this thing as in other things. I have heard what he has been saying to you. It is for me that he sacrifices himself by holding these exhibitions; it is in my poor interests that his hardly-earned money is made. I am in infirm health; and remonstrate as I may, my son persists in providing for me, not the bare comforts only, but even the luxuries of life. Except in this, he has never heard me express a wish without cheerfully obeying it. Whatever I may suffer, I have my compensation; I can still thank God for giving me the greatest happiness that a woman can enjoy—the possession of a good son." She smiled fondly as she looked at the sleeping man. "Draw your chair nearer to him," she resumed, "and take his hand. You may speak freely in making your enquiries. Nothing that happens in this room ever goes out of it."

With those words she returned to her place, in the corner behind her son's chair.

The visitor took Doctor Lagarde's hand. As they touched each other, he was conscious of a faintly-titillating sensation in his own hand—a sensation which oddly reminded him of bygone experiments with an electrical machine, in the days when he was a boy at school!

"I wish to question you about my future life," he began. "How ought I to begin?"

The doctor spoke his first words in the monotonous tones of a man talking in his sleep.

"Own your true motive before you begin," he said. "Your interest in your future life is centred in a woman. She has not positively rejected you, and she has not openly encouraged you, in the

time that is past. You wish to know if her heart will be yours in the time that is to come—and there your interest in your future life ends."

This startling assertion of the sleeper's capacity to look, by sympathy, into his mind, and to see there his most secret thoughts, instead of convincing the stranger, excited his suspicions. "You have means of getting information," he said roughly, "that I don't understand."

The doctor laughed, as if the idea amused him. Madame Lagarde rose from her place, and interposed.

"Hundreds of strangers come here to consult my son," she said quietly. "If you believe that we know who those strangers are, and that we have the means of enquiring into their private lives before they enter this room, you believe in something much more incredible than the magnetic sleep!"

This was too manifestly true to be disputed. The visitor (a man of strong good sense, when his temper was not ruffled) made his apologies.

"I should like to have *some* explanation," he added. "The thing is so very extraordinary. How can I prevail upon Doctor Lagarde to enlighten me?"

"He can only tell you what he sees," Madame Lagarde answered; "ask him that, and you will get a direct reply. Say to him: 'Do you see the lady?'"

The stranger repeated the question. The reply followed at once, in these words:

"I see darkness all about me, except in one place, where there is light like the light of a dim moon. In the illuminated space, I see two figures standing side by side. One of them is your figure. The other is the figure of a lady. She only appears dimly. I can see nothing but that she is taller than women generally are, and that she is dressed in pale blue."

The stranger started at those last words. "Her favourite colour!" he thought to himself, forgetting that, while he held the doctor's hand, the doctor could think with *his* mind.

"Yes," added the sleeper, quietly, "her favourite colour, as you know. She fades and fades as I look at her," he went on. "She is gone. I only see you. Your hands are over your face; you are crying; you look like a man who is suffering from some dreadful disappointment. Wait a little. You too are growing indistinct; you too fade away altogether. The darkness gathers. I see nothing."

A pause of silence followed. Then the face of the sleeper began to show signs of disturbance for the first time. The stranger put the customary question to him: "What do you see?"

"I see you again. You have a pistol in your hand. Opposite to you, there stands the figure of another man. He, too, has a pistol in his hand. Are you enemies? Are you meeting to fight a duel? Is the lady the cause? I try, but I fail to see her."

"Can you describe the man?"

"Not yet. So far, he is only a shadow in the form of a man."

There was another interval. The appearance of disturbance grew more marked on the sleeper's face. Suddenly, he waved his free hand in the direction of the waiting-room.

"Send for the visitors who are there," he said. "They are all to come in. Each one of them is to take one of my hands in turn—while you remain where you are, holding the other. Don't let go of me, even for a moment. My mother will ring."

Madame Lagarde touched a bell on the table. The servant received his orders from her and retired. After a short absence, he appeared again in the consulting-room, with one visitor only waiting on the threshold behind him.

CHAPTER IV. THE MAN.

"The other three gentlemen have gone away, madam," the servant explained, addressing Madame Lagarde. "They were tired of waiting. I found *this* gentleman fast asleep; and I am afraid he is angry with me for taking the liberty of waking him."

"Sleep of the common sort is evidently not allowed in this house," the gentleman remarked at the door. "It isn't my fault—I couldn't mesmerise myself, could I?"

The speaker entered the room, and stood revealed as the original owner of the card numbered Fourteen. Viewed by the clear lamp-light, he was a tall, finely-made man, in the prime of life, with a florid complexion, golden-brown hair, and sparkling blue eyes. Noticing Madame Lagarde, he instantly checked the flow of his satire, with the instinctive good-breeding of a gentleman. "I beg your pardon," he said; "I have a great many faults, and a habit of making bad jokes is one of them. Is the servant right, madam, in telling me that I have the honour of presenting myself here at your request?"

Madame Lagarde briefly explained what had passed. The florid gentleman (still privately believing it to be all "humbug") was delighted to make himself of any use. "I congratulate you, sir," he said, with his easy humour, as he passed the visitor who had taken his card. "Number Fourteen seems to be a luckier number in your keeping than it was in mine."

As he spoke, he took Doctor Lagarde's disengaged hand. The instant they touched each other, the sleeper started. His voice rose; his face flushed. "You are the man!" he exclaimed. "I see you plainly, now!"

"What am I doing?"

"You are standing opposite to the gentleman here who is holding my other hand; and you are lifting a pistol to take aim at him."

The unbeliever cast a shrewd look at his companion in the consultation. His inveterate habit of taking the ironical view of everything got the better of him again.

"Considering that you and I are total strangers, sir," he said, "don't you think the doctor had better introduce us, before he goes any farther? We have got to fighting a duel already, and we may as well know who we are, before the pistols go off." He turned to Doctor Lagarde. "Dramatic situations don't amuse me out of the theatre," he resumed. "Let me put you to a very commonplace test. I want to be introduced to this gentleman. Has he told you his name?"

"No."

"Of course, you know it, without being told?"

"Certainly. I have only to look into your own knowledge of yourselves while I am in this trance, and while you have got my hands, to know both your names, as well as you do."

"Introduce us, then!" retorted the jesting gentleman. "And take my name first."

"Mr. Percy Linwood," replied the doctor; "I have the honour of presenting you to Captain Bervie, of the Artillery."

With one accord, the gentlemen both dropped Doctor Lagarde's hands, and looked at each other in blank amazement.

"Of course he has discovered our names somehow!" said Mr. Percy Linwood, cutting the Gordian knot to his own perfect satisfaction in that way.

Captain Bervie had not forgotten what Madame Lagarde had said to him, when he too had suspected a trick. He now

repeated it (quite ineffectually) for Mr. Linwood's benefit. "If you don't feel the force of that argument as I feel it," he added, "perhaps, as a favour to me, sir, you will not object to our each taking the doctor's hand again, and hearing what more he can tell us while he remains in the state of trance?"

"With the greatest pleasure!" answered good-humoured Mr. Linwood. "Our friend is beginning to amuse me; I am as anxious as you are to know what he is going to see next."

Captain Bervie put the next question.

"You have seen us fighting a duel—can you tell us the result?"

"I can tell you nothing more than I have told you already. The figures of the duellists have faded away, like the other figures that I saw before them. What I see now looks like the winding gravel path of a garden. A man and a woman are walking towards me. The man stops, and places a ring on the woman's finger, and kisses her."

Captain Bervie changed colour, and said no more. Mr. Linwood put the next question, in his usual flippant way.

"Who is the happy man?" he asked.

"You are the happy man," was the instantaneous reply.

"Who is the woman?" cried Captain Bervie, before Mr. Linwood could speak again.

"The same woman whom I saw before; dressed in the same way, in pale blue."

Captain Bervie was not satisfied. He insisted on receiving clearer information than this. "Surely, you can see *something* of her personal appearance?" he said sharply.

"I can see that she has long dark-brown hair, falling below her waist. I can see that she has lovely dark-brown eyes. Her complexion seems to be all of the same delicate pale colour: she has the look of a sensitive, nervous person. She is quite young. I can see no more."

"Is there any other man present in the garden?" was the captain's next question.

"I can see no other man."

"Look again at the man who is putting the ring on her finger. Are you sure that the face you see is the face of Mr. Percy Linwood?"

"I am absolutely sure."

Captain Bervie rose from his chair.

"Thank you, Doctor Lagarde," he said.

"I have heard enough."

He walked to the door. Mr. Percy

Linwood dropped the doctor's hand, and appealed to the retiring captain with a broad stare of astonishment.

"You don't really believe this?" he said.

"I only say I have heard enough," Captain Bervie answered irritably.

Mr. Linwood could hardly fail to see that any further attempt to treat the matter lightly might lead to undesirable results. "It is difficult to speak seriously of this kind of exhibition," he resumed quietly. "But I suppose I may mention a mere matter of fact without meaning, or giving, offence. The description of the lady, I can positively declare, does not apply in any single particular to anyone whom I know."

Captain Bervie turned round sternly at the door, with the look of a man whose patience was completely exhausted. Mr. Linwood's unruffled composure, assisted in its influence by the presence of Madame Lagarde, seemed to remind him of the claims of politeness. He checked the rash words as they rose to his lips. "You may make new acquaintances, sir," was all that he said. "You have the future before you."

Upon that, he went out. Percy Linwood waited a little, reflecting on the captain's conduct. Had Doctor Lagarde's description of the lady accidentally answered the description of a living lady whom Captain Bervie knew? Was he by any chance in love with her; and had the doctor innocently reminded him that his love was not returned? Assuming this to be likely, was it also possible that he believed in the duel seen by the mesmerist? Did he seriously interpret his absence from the visionary love-scene in the garden, as an intimation that he was the duellist who was destined to fall? Nobody but a madman could go to those lengths. The captain's conduct was simply incomprehensible.

Pondering these questions, Percy decided on returning to his place by the doctor's chair. "Of one thing I'm certain, at any rate," he thought to himself. "I'll see the whole imposture out before I leave the house!"

He took Doctor Lagarde's hand. "Now, then! what is the next discovery?" he asked abruptly. "Anything more about the lady and gentleman in the garden?"

The answer was given in low, languid tones; the sleeper was evidently beginning to suffer from nervous fatigue.

"I see no more of the garden," he said, "or of the persons in it. What I see now is a small room, like a cottage parlour. The woman who has appeared to me throughout presents herself to me again. But, this time, the man who is with her is no longer Mr. Percy Linwood—the man is Captain Bervie!"

Percy smiled satirically. "Good news for the captain!" he said. "It's a thousand pities he went away. If he had waited he would have heard something personally interesting to him. May I ask, Doctor Lagarde, how Captain Bervie and the lady are occupied?"

The sleeper seemed to find some difficulty in answering the question. "I can only see," he said, "that the woman is painfully agitated by something that the captain is saying to her. He puts her arm in his—he seems to be trying to persuade her to leave the room with him. She hesitates; she asks him with tears to release her. He whispers something in her ear, which seems to persuade her. She considers; she says a few words on her side; she yields. He leads her out of the room. The darkness gathers behind them. I look and look, and I can see no more."

"Shall we wait awhile?" Percy suggested, "and then try again?"

Doctor Lagarde sighed, and reclined in his chair. "My head is heavy," he said; "my spirits are dull. I will try again to please you. Don't blame me if I fail."

After an interval, Percy put the customary question. The sleeper answered wearily.

"I see the inside of a travelling-carriage," he said. "The lady is one of the persons in it. There is a man with her. There is ——" He stopped, and began to breathe heavily: the grasp of his hand relaxed.

"Am I the man this time?" Percy asked; "or is it Captain Bervie again?"

Doctor Lagarde roused himself by a last effort. "I can't tell you," he murmured drowsily. "My eyes are aching; the darkness baffles me. I have toiled long enough for you. Drop my hand and leave me to rest."

Hearing those words, Madame Lagarde approached her son's chair.

"It will be useless, sir, to ask him any more questions to-night," she said. "He has been weak and nervous all day, and he is worn out by the effort he has made. Pardon me, if I ask you to step aside for

a moment, while I give him the repose that he needs."

She laid her right hand gently on the doctor's head, and kept it there for a minute or so. "Are you at rest now?" she asked.

"I am at rest," he answered, in faint, drowsy tones.

Madame Lagarde returned to Percy. "If you are not yet satisfied," she said, "my son will be at your service to-morrow evening, sir."

"Thank you, madam, I have only one more question to ask, and you can no doubt answer it. When your son wakes, will he remember what he has said to Captain Bervie and to myself?"

"My son will be as absolutely ignorant of everything that he has seen, and of everything that he has said, in the trance, as if he had been at the other end of the world."

Percy Linwood swallowed this last outrageous assertion with an effort which he was quite unable to conceal. "Many thanks, madam," he said; "I wish you good-night."

Returning to the waiting-room, he noticed the money-box fixed to the table. "These people look poor," he thought to himself, "and I feel really indebted to them for an amusing evening. Besides, I can afford to be liberal, for I shall certainly never go back." He dropped a five-pound note into the money-box, and left the house.

Walking towards his club, Percy's natural serenity of mind was a little troubled by the remembrance of Captain Bervie's strange language and conduct. Something in the captain's manner, rudely as he had spoken on leaving the room, had interested Percy in spite of himself. He began to consider the propriety of reducing to writing Doctor Lagarde's description of the scenes in the cottage parlour and the travelling-carriage, in the event of another meeting between Captain Bervie and himself. If the captain persisted in taking the thing seriously, the memorandum might additionally enlighten him. If, on the other hand, he ended in adopting the rational view, the memorandum might confirm him in taking that sensible course.

Arrived at his club, Percy resolutely set to work in the writing-room. Unhappily for his chances of success, he was one of that large number of persons whose minds become confused the moment they

take a pen in their hands. First, he tried to report the doctor's language literally, and failed to remember it when he put the first words on paper. Then he attempted a brief summary, and lost the thread of his narrative at the second sentence. After spoiling many sheets of paper, and using every new pen within his reach, he gave up the struggle. "It's no use," he said, as he got up from the writing-table. "I am too great a fool to do it, and there's an end of the business!"

He never was more mistaken in his life. The end of the business was not to come for many a long day yet.

PART II. THE FULFILMENT.

CHAPTER IV. THE BALL-ROOM.

WHILE the consultation at Doctor Lagarde's was still fresh in the memory of the persons present at it, Chance or Destiny, occupied in sowing the seeds for the harvest of the future, discovered as one of its fit instruments a retired military officer named Major Much.

The major was a smart little man, who persisted in setting up the appearance of youth as a means of hiding the reality of fifty. After serving with distinction in many parts of the world, Major Much had become an independent man, by inheriting an estate in one of the midland counties. Being still a bachelor, and being always ready to make himself agreeable, he was generally popular in the society of women. In the ball-room he was a really welcome addition to the company. The German waltz had then been imported into England little more than three years since. The outcry raised against the dance, by persons skilled in the discovery of latent impropriety, had not yet lost its influence in certain quarters. Men who could waltz were scarce. Major Much had successfully grappled with the difficulties of learning the dance in mature life; and the young ladies rewarded him nobly for the effort, by taking the appearance of youth for granted, in the palpable presence of fifty.

Knowing everybody and being welcome everywhere, playing a good hand at whist, and having an inexhaustible fancy in the invention of a dinner, Major Much naturally belonged to all the best clubs of his time. Percy Linwood and he constantly met in the billiard-room or at the dinner-table. The major approved of the easy, handsome, pleasant-tempered young man. "I have lost the first freshness of youth," he used to say modestly of himself, "and

I see it revived, as it were, in Percy. Naturally I like Percy."

About three weeks after the memorable evening at Doctor Lagarde's, the two friends encountered each other on the steps of a club.

"Got anything to do to-night?" asked the major.

"Nothing that I know of," said Percy, "unless I go to the theatre."

"Let the theatre wait, my boy. My old regiment gives a ball at Woolwich to-night. I have got a ticket to spare; and I know several sweet girls who are going. Some of them waltz, Percy! Gather your rosebuds while you may. Come with me."

The invitation was accepted as readily as it was given. The major found the carriage, and Percy paid for the post-horses. They entered the ball-room among the earlier guests; and the first person whom they met, waiting near the door, was—Captain Bervie.

Percy bowed, a little uneasily. "I feel some doubt," he said, laughing, "whether we have been properly introduced to one another or not."

"Not properly introduced!" cried Major Much. "I'll set that right. My dear friend, Percy Linwood; my dear friend, Arthur Bervie—be known to each other! esteem each other!"

Captain Bervie acknowledged the introduction by a cold salute. Percy, yielding to the good-natured impulse of the moment, began to speak of the mesmeric consultation.

"You missed something worth hearing when you left the doctor the other night," he said. "We continued the sitting; and *you* turned up again among the persons of the doctor's drama, in quite a new character. Imagine yourself, if you please, in a cottage parlour——"

"Excuse me for interrupting you," said Captain Bervie. "I am a member of the committee, charged with the arrangements of the ball, and I must really attend to my duties."

He withdrew without waiting for a reply. Percy looked round wonderingly at Major Much. "Strange!" he said, "I feel rather attracted towards Captain Bervie; and he seems so little attracted, on his side, that he can hardly behave to me with common civility. What does it mean?"

"I'll tell you," answered the major, con-

fidentially. "Arthur Bervie is madly in love—madly is really the word, my boy—with a Miss Bowmore. And (this is between ourselves) the young lady doesn't feel it quite in the same way. A sweet girl; I've often had her on my knee when she was a child. Her father and mother are old friends of mine. She is coming to the ball to-night. That's the true reason why Arthur left you just now. Look at him—waiting to be the first to speak to her. If he could have his way, he wouldn't let another man come near the poor girl all through the evening; he really persecutes her. I'll introduce you, Percy; and you will see how he looks at us for presuming to approach her. It's a great pity; she will never marry him. Arthur Bervie is a high-minded, honourable fellow, a man in a thousand; but he's fast becoming a perfect bear under the strain on his temper. What's the matter? You don't seem to be listening to me."

This last remark was perfectly justified. In telling the captain's love-story, Major Much had revived his young friend's memory of the lady in the blue dress, who had haunted the mesmeric visions of Doctor Lagarde. "Tell me," said Percy, "what is Miss Bowmore like? Is there anything remarkable in her personal appearance? I have a reason for asking."

As he spoke, there arose among the guests in the rapidly-filling ball-room a low murmur of surprise and admiration. The major laid one hand on Percy's shoulder, and, lifting the other, pointed to the door.

"What is Miss Bowmore like?" he repeated. "There she is, my boy! Let her answer for herself."

Percy turned towards the lower end of the room. A young lady was entering, dressed in plain silk, and the colour of it was a pale blue! Excepting a white rose at her breast, she wore no ornament of any sort. Doubly distinguished by the perfect simplicity of her apparel, and by her tall, supple, commanding figure, she took rank at once as the most remarkable woman in the room. Moving nearer to her through the crowd, under the guidance of the complaisant major, young Linwood gained a clearer view of her hair, her complexion, and the colour of her eyes. In every one of these particulars, she was the living image of the woman described by Doctor Lagarde!

While Percy was absorbed over this strange discovery, Major Much had got

within speaking distance of the young lady and of her mother, as they stood together in conversation with Captain Bervie. "My dear Mrs. Bowmore, how well you are looking! My dear Miss Charlotte, what a sensation you have made already!" cried the cordial little man. "The glorious simplicity (if I may so express myself) of your dress is—is—what was I going to say?—the ideas come thronging on me; I merely want words."

Here Major Much waved his hand, with all the fingers well open, as if words were circulating in the air of the room, and he meant to catch them. Miss Charlotte burst into a little silvery laugh; her magnificent brown eyes, wandering from the major to Percy, rested on the young man with a modest and momentary interest, which Captain Bervie's jealous attention instantly detected.

"They are forming the dance, Miss Bowmore," he said, pressing forward impatiently. "If we don't take our places, we shall be too late."

"Stop! stop!" cried the major. "There is a time for everything, and this is the time for presenting my dear friend here, Mr. Percy Linwood. He is like me, Miss Charlotte—he has been struck by the glorious simplicity, and *he* wants words." At this part of the presentation, he happened to look toward the irate captain, and instantly gave him a hint on the subject of his temper. "I say, Arthur Bervie! we are all good-humoured people here. What have you got on your eyebrows? It looks like a frown; and it doesn't become you. Send for a skilled waiter, and have it brushed off and taken away directly!"

"May I ask, Miss Bowmore, if you are disengaged for the next dance?" said Percy, the moment the major gave him an opportunity of speaking.

"Miss Bowmore is engaged to *mé* for the next dance," said the angry captain, before the young lady could answer.

"The third dance, then?" Percy persisted, in his quietest manner, and with his brightest smile.

"With pleasure, Mr. Linwood," said Miss Bowmore. She would have been no true woman if she had not resented the open exhibition of Arthur's jealousy; it was like asserting a right over her to which he had not the shadow of a claim. She threw a look at Percy as her partner led her away, which was the severest

punishment she could inflict on the man who ardently loved her.

The third dance stood in the programme as a waltz. In jealous distrust of Percy, the captain took the conductor aside, and used his authority as committeeman to substitute another dance. He had no sooner turned his back on the orchestra than the wife of the colonel of the regiment, who had heard him, spoke to the conductor in her turn, and insisted on the original programme being retained. "Quote the colonel's authority," said the lady, "if Captain Bervie ventures to object." In the meantime, the captain, on his way to rejoin Charlotte, was met by one of his brother-officers, who summoned him to an impending debate of the committee, charged with the administrative arrangements of the supper-table.

"Surely they can do without me?" Arthur suggested.

"No," said the officer. "In case of any difference of opinion, the colonel requests that all the committee will attend."

Under these circumstances, Arthur had no alternative but to follow his brother-officer to the committee-room. Barely a minute later the conductor appeared at his desk, and the first notes of the music rose low and plaintive, introducing the third dance.

"Percy, my boy!" cried the major, recognising the melody, "you're in luck's way—it's going to be a waltz!"

Almost as he spoke, the low, plaintive notes glided by subtle modulations into the inspiring air of the waltz. Percy claimed his partner's hand. Miss Charlotte hesitated, and looked at her mother.

"Surely you waltz?" said Percy.

"I have learnt to waltz," she answered modestly; "but this is such a large room, sir, and there are so many people!"

"Once round," Percy pleaded; "only once round!"

She looked again at her mother; her foot was keeping time with the music under her dress; her heart was beating with a delicious excitement; kind-hearted Mrs. Bowmore smiled and said, "Once round, my dear, as Mr. Linwood suggests."

In another moment, Percy's arm took possession of her waist, and they were away on the wings of the waltz! Could words describe, could thought realise, the exquisite enjoyment of the dance? Enjoyment? It was more—it was an epoch in Charlotte's life—it was the first time she

had waltzed with a man. What a difference between the fervent clasp of Percy's arm and the cold, formal contact of the mistress who had taught her! How brightly his eyes looked down into hers, admiring her with such a tender restraint, that there could surely be no harm in looking up at him now and then in return. Round and round they glided, absorbed in the music and in themselves. Occasionally her bosom just touched his, at those critical moments when she was most in need of support. At other intervals, she almost let her head sink on his shoulder in trying to hide from him the smile which acknowledged his admiration too boldly. "Once round," Percy had suggested; "once round," her mother had said. They had been twenty, thirty, forty times round; they had never stopped to rest like the other dancers; they had had the eyes of the whole room on them—including the eyes of Captain Bervie—without knowing it; her delicately pale complexion had changed to rosy-red; the neat arrangement of her hair had become disturbed; her bosom was rising and falling faster and faster in the effort to breathe—before the fatigue and the heat overpowered her at last, and forced her to say to him faintly, "I'm very sorry—I can't dance any more!"

Percy led her into the cooler atmosphere of the refreshment-room, and revived her with a glass of lemonade. Her arm still rested on his—she was just about to thank him for the care he had taken of her—when Captain Bervie entered the room. He was pale, with the marked and sinister pallor of suppressed rage; but, when he spoke to Percy, he still preserved his self-control, and expressed himself with scrupulous politeness.

"Mrs. Bowmore wishes me to take you back to her," he said to Charlotte. Then, turning to Percy, he added: "Will you kindly wait here while I take Miss Bowmore to the ball-room? I have a word to say to you—I will return directly."

Left alone in the refreshment-room, Percy sat down to cool and rest himself. With his experience of the ways of men, he felt no surprise at the marked contrast between Captain Bervie's face and Captain Bervie's manner. "He has seen us waltzing, and he is coming back to pick a quarrel with me." Such was the interpretation which Mr. Linwood's knowledge of the world placed on Captain Bervie's politeness. In a minute or two

more the captain returned to the refreshment-room, and satisfied Percy that his anticipations had not deceived him.

CHAPTER V. LOVE AND POLITICS.

It was the fourth day after the ball. Though it was no later in the year than the month of February, the sun was shining brightly, and the air was as soft as the air of a day in spring. Percy and Charlotte were walking together in the little garden at the back of Mr. Bowmore's cottage, near the town of Dartford, in Kent.

"Mr. Linwood," said Charlotte, "you were to have paid us your first visit the day after the ball. Why have you kept us waiting? Have you been too busy to remember your new friends?"

"I have counted the hours since we parted, Miss Charlotte. If I had not been detained by business——"

"I understand! For three days business has controlled you. On the fourth day, you have controlled business—and here you are?"

"That's it exactly, Miss Charlotte."

"I don't believe one word of it, Mr. Percy!"

There was no answering such a declaration as this. Guiltily conscious that Charlotte was right in refusing to accept his well-worn excuse, Percy made an awkward attempt to change the topic of conversation. They happened, at the moment, to be standing near a small conservatory at the end of the garden. The glass door was closed, and the few plants and shrubs inside had a lonely, neglected look. "Does nobody ever visit this secluded place?" Percy asked, jocosely, "or does it hide discoveries in the rearing of plants, which are forbidden mysteries to a stranger?"

"Satisfy your curiosity, Mr. Linwood, by all means," Charlotte answered in the same tone. "Open the door; and I will follow you. There is a bench still left, I think, inside, and a few minutes' rest will be welcome to me."

Percy obeyed. In passing through the doorway, he encountered the bare hanging branches of some creeping plant, long since dead and detached from its fastenings on the woodwork of the roof. He pushed aside the branches so that Charlotte could easily follow him in, without being aware that his own forced passage through them had a little deranged the folds of spotless white cambric which a well-dressed gentleman wore round his neck in those days.

Charlotte seated herself on the bench, and directed Percy's attention to the desolate conservatory with a saucy smile.

"The mystery which your lively imagination has associated with this place," she said, "means, being interpreted, that we are too poor to keep a gardener. Make the best of your disappointment, Mr. Linwood, and sit here by me. We are out of hearing and out of sight of mamma's other visitors. You have no excuse now for not satisfying my curiosity and telling me what has really kept you away from us."

She fixed her eyes on him as she said those words. Before Percy could think of another excuse, her quick observation detected the disordered condition of his cravat, and discovered the upper edge of a black plaster attached to one side of his neck. "You have been hurt in the neck!" she exclaimed. "That is why you have kept away from us for the last three days!"

"A mere trifle," said Percy, in great confusion; "please don't notice it!"

She neither heeded nor heard him. Her eyes, still resting on his face, assumed an expression of suspicious enquiry, which Percy was entirely at a loss to understand. Suddenly, she started to her feet, as if a new idea had occurred to her. "Wait here," she said, flushing with excitement, "till I come back: I insist on it!"

Before Percy could ask for an explanation, she had left the conservatory.

In a minute or two she returned, with a newspaper in her hand. "Read that," she said, pointing to a paragraph, distinguished by a line drawn round it in ink.

The passage that she indicated contained an account of a duel which had recently taken place in the neighbourhood of London. The names of the duellists were not mentioned. One was described as an officer and the other as a civilian. They had quarrelled at cards, and had fought with pistols. The civilian had had a narrow escape of his life. His antagonist's bullet had passed near enough to the side of his neck to tear the flesh, and had missed the vital parts, literally, by a hair's breadth.

Charlotte's eyes, riveted on Percy, detected a sudden change of colour in his face the moment he looked at the newspaper. That was enough for her. "You are the man!" she exclaimed. "Oh, for shame, for shame! To risk your life for a paltry dispute about cards."

"I would risk it again," said Percy, "to hear you speak as if you set some value on it."

She looked away from him quickly, without a word of reply. Her mind seemed to be busy again with its own thoughts. Did she meditate returning to the subject of the duel? Was she not satisfied with the discovery which she had just made? No such doubts as these troubled the mind of Percy Linwood. Intoxicated by the charm of her presence, emboldened by her innocent betrayal of the interest that she felt in him, he opened his whole heart to her as unreservedly as if they had known each other from the days of their childhood. There was but one excuse for him. Charlotte was his first love.

"You don't know how completely you have become a part of my life, since we met at the ball," he went on. "That one delightful dance seemed, by some magic which I can't explain, to draw us together in a few minutes as if we had known each other for years. Oh dear! I could make such a confession of what I felt, only I am afraid of offending you by speaking too soon! Women are so dreadfully difficult to understand. How is a man to know at what time it is considerate towards them to conceal his true feelings; and at what time it is equally considerate to express his true feelings? One doesn't know whether it is a matter of days or weeks or months—there ought to be a law to settle it. Dear Miss Charlotte, when a poor fellow loves you at first sight, as he has never loved any other woman, and when he is tormented by the fear that some other man may be preferred to him, can't you forgive him if he lets out the truth a little too soon?" He ventured, as he put that very downright question, to take her hand. "It really isn't my fault," he said, simply. "My heart is so full of you, I can talk of nothing else."

To Percy's surprise, the first experimental pressure of his hand, far from being resented, was suddenly returned. Charlotte looked at him again, with a new resolution in her face.

"I'll forgive you for talking nonsense, Mr. Linwood," she said; "and I will even permit you to come and see me again, on one condition—that you tell the whole truth about the duel. If you conceal the smallest circumstance, our acquaintance is at an end."

"Haven't I owned everything already?" Percy enquired, in great perplexity. "Did

I say No, when you told me I was the man?"

"Could you say No, with that plaster on your neck?" was the ready rejoinder. "I am determined to know more than the newspaper tells me. Will you declare, on your word of honour, that Captain Bervie had nothing to do with the duel? Can you look me in the face, and say that the real cause of the quarrel was a disagreement at cards? What did you say, when you were talking with me just before I left the ball, and when a gentleman asked you to make one at the whist-table? You said, 'I don't play at cards.' Ah! You thought I had forgotten that? Don't kiss my hand! Trust me with the whole truth, or say good-bye for ever."

"Only tell me what you wish to know, Miss Charlotte," said Percy, humbly. "If you will put the questions, I will give the answers—as well as I can."

On this understanding, Percy's evidence was extracted from him as follows:

"Was it Captain Bervie who quarrelled with you?" "Yes."—"Was it about me?" "Yes."—"What did he say?" "He said I had committed an impropriety in waltzing with you."—"Why?" "Because your parents disapproved of your waltzing in a public ball-room."—"That's not true! What did he say next?" "He said I had added tenfold to my offence, by waltzing with you in such a manner as to make you the subject of remark to the whole room."—"Oh! did you let him say that?" "No; I contradicted him instantly. And I said, besides, 'It's an insult to Miss Bowmore to suppose that she would permit any impropriety.'"—"Quite right! And what did he say?" "Well, he lost his temper; I would rather not repeat what he said, when he was mad with jealousy. There was nothing to be done with him but to give him his way."—"Give him his way. Does that mean fight a duel with him?" "Yes."—"And you kept my name out of it, by pretending to quarrel at the card-table?" "Yes. We managed it when the card-room was emptying at supper-time, and nobody was present but Major Much and another friend as witnesses."—"And when did you fight the duel?" "The next morning."—"You never thought of me, I suppose?" "Indeed, I did; I was very glad that you had no suspicion of what we were at."—"Was that all?" "No; I had your flower with me, the flower you gave me out of your nosegay,

at the ball."—"Well?" "Oh, never mind, it doesn't matter."—"It does matter. What did you do with my flower?" "I gave it a sly kiss while they were measuring the ground; and (don't tell anybody!) I put it next to my heart to bring me luck."—"Was that just before he shot at you?" "Yes."—"How did he shoot?" "He walked (as the seconds had arranged it) ten paces forward; and then he stopped, and lifted his pistol——"—"Don't tell me any more! Oh, to think of my being the miserable cause of such horrors! I'll never dance again as long as I live. Did you think he had killed you, when the bullet wounded your poor neck?" "No; I hardly felt it at first."—"Hardly felt it? How he talks! And when the wretch had done his best to kill you, and when it came to your turn, what did you do?" "Nothing."—"What! You didn't walk your ten paces forward?" "No."—"And you never shot at him in return?" "No; I had no quarrel with him, poor fellow; I just stood where I was, and fired in the air——"

The next words died away on his lips. Before he could stop her, Charlotte seized his hand, and kissed it with an hysterical fervour of admiration, which completely deprived him of his presence of mind.

"Why shouldn't I kiss the hand of a hero?" she cried, with tears of enthusiasm sparkling in her eyes. "Nobody but a hero would have given him his life; nobody but a hero would have pardoned him, while the blood was streaming from the wound that he had inflicted. I respect you, I admire you. Oh, don't think me bold!" she exclaimed, suddenly hiding her face in her hands. "I can't control myself when I hear of anything noble and good. You will make allowance for my being a strange girl? You will understand me better when we get to be old friends."

She spoke in low, sweet tones of entreaty. Percy's arm stole softly round her waist.

"Are we never to be nearer and dearer to each other than old friends?" he asked in a whisper. "I am not a hero — your goodness overrates me, dear Miss Charlotte. My one ambition is to be the happy man who is worthy enough to win *you*. At your own time! I wouldn't distress you, I wouldn't confuse you, I wouldn't for the whole world take advantage of the compliment which your sympathy has paid to me. If it offends you, I won't even ask if I may hope."

She sighed as he said the last words; trembled a little, and then silently looked at him. Percy read his answer in her eyes. Without meaning it on either side, their heads drew nearer together; their cheeks, then their lips, touched. She started back from him, and rose to leave the conservatory. At the same moment the sound of slowly-approaching footsteps became audible on the gravel walk of the garden. Charlotte hurried to the door. "It is my father," she said, turning to Percy. "Come, and be introduced to him."

Percy followed her into the garden.

Charlotte had inherited all that was most striking in her personal appearance from her mother. So far as the question of stature was concerned, her father was no taller than Major Much. Judging by appearances, Mr. Bowmore looked like a man prematurely wasted and worn by the cares of a troubled life. His eyes presented the one feature in which his daughter resembled him. In shape and colour they were exactly reproduced in Charlotte; the difference was in the expression. The father's look was habitually restless, eager, and suspicious: not a trace was to be seen in it of the truthfulness and gentleness which made the charm of the daughter's expression. A man whose bitter experience of the world had soured his temper and shaken his faith in his fellow-creatures—such was Mr. Bowmore as he presented himself on the surface. Whatever compensating virtues he might possess lay hidden deep in his nature, and were only discoverable by those who knew him in the closest relations of daily life.

He received Percy politely, but with a preoccupied air. Every now and then, his restless eyes wandered from his visitor to an open letter which he had in his hand. Charlotte, observing him, pointed to the letter. "Have you any bad news there, papa?" she asked.

"Dreadful news!" Mr. Bowmore answered. "Dreadful news, my child, to every Englishman who respects the liberties which his ancestors won. My correspondent is a man who is in the confidence of the Ministers," he continued, addressing Percy. "What do you think, sir, is the remedy that the Government proposes for the universal distress among the population, caused by an infamous and needless war? We are now at the 17th of Feb-

ruary. In a week's time (I have it on the authority of my correspondent) ministers will bring in a bill for suspending the Habeas Corpus Act!" He struck the letter with his open hand; his eyes brightened with indignation as they rested on Percy's face. "I don't know what your politics may be, sir. As an English citizen, you can hardly hear that the Parliament of England is about to change the free government of this country into an absolute despotism, without some feeling of indignation and alarm!"

Before Percy could answer, Charlotte put a question to her father, which appeared to amaze and distress him.

"What is the Habeas Corpus Act?" she asked.

"Good God!" cried Mr. Bowmore, "is it possible that a child of mine has grown up to womanhood, in ignorance of the palladium of English liberty? Oh, Charlotte! Charlotte!"

"I am very sorry, papa. If you will only tell me, I will never forget it."

Mr. Bowmore reverently uncovered his head: he took his daughter by the hand, with a certain parental sternness: his voice trembled with emotion as he spoke his next words:

"The Habeas Corpus Act, my child, forbids the imprisonment of an English subject, unless that imprisonment can be justified by law. Not even the order of the reigning monarch, not even the authority of the highest court in the country, can prevent us from appearing before the judges of the land, and summoning them to declare whether our committal to prison is legally just."

He put on his hat again. "Never forget what I have told you, Charlotte!" he said solemnly. "I would not remove my hat, sir," he continued, turning to Percy, "in the presence of the proudest autocrat that ever sat on a throne. I uncover in homage to the grand law which asserts the sacredness of human liberty. You are perhaps too young to know by experience what will happen if this infamous bill is sanctioned by Parliament. I can tell you what did happen, when the Habeas Corpus was suspended in England at the end of the last century. The friends of liberty were liable to imprisonment, and even to death on the scaffold, on warrants privately obtained by the paid spies and informers of Government, from justices who were the humble

servants of the terrified Ministry of the time. The same horrors will be repeated in a few weeks more, unless the people can force Parliament to defend their liberties. Does my indignation surprise you, Mr. Linwood? Are you, in these dreadful times, a lukewarm person who takes no interest in placing a really liberal Government in power?"

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Bowmore," Percy interposed. "I have reasons for feeling the strongest interest in supporting a liberal Government."

"What reasons?" cried Mr. Bowmore, eagerly.

"My late father had a claim on Government," Percy answered, "for money expended in foreign service. As his heir, I inherit the claim, which has been formally recognised by the present Ministry. My petition for a settlement (long since due) will be presented at the opening of Parliament, by friends of mine who can advocate my interests in the House of Commons."

Mr. Bowmore took Percy's hand and shook it warmly.

"In such a matter as this you cannot have too many friends to help you," he said. "I myself have some influence, as representing opinion outside the House; and I am entirely at your service. Come to-morrow, and let us talk over the details of your claim at my humble dinner-table. To-day I must attend a meeting of the Branch Hampden Club, of which I am vice-president, and to which I am bound to communicate the alarming news which my letter contains. In my little garden here," proceeded Mr. Bowmore, waving his hand over his modest property, "I am accustomed to consider the main points of my speeches at the club, in the necessary retirement. I have made some remarkable bursts of eloquence on this walk. Will you excuse me for to-day? and will you honour us with your company to-morrow?"

If Percy had not been in love, he might have felt some surprise at Mr. Bowmore's extraordinary devotion to his interests, after an acquaintance of about ten minutes' duration. As things were, the proposed meeting on the next day offered him an opportunity of seeing Charlotte again; and, on that account alone, he unhesitatingly accepted the invitation. Mr. Bowmore honoured him with another squeeze of his patriotic hand, and withdrew to meditate new bursts of elo-

quence in the suggestive solitude of the garden walk.

CHAPTER VI. THE WARNING.

"I HOPE you like my father?" said Charlotte, as she and Percy turned in the direction of the cottage. "He is such a great politician; we are so fond of him and so proud of him! All our friends say he ought to be in Parliament. He has tried twice. The expenses were dreadful; and each time the other man defeated him. The agent says he would be certainly elected if he tried again; but there is no money, and we mustn't think of it."

A man of a suspicious turn of mind might have discovered in those artless words the secret of Mr. Bowmore's interest in the success of his young friend's claim on the Government. One British subject, with a sum of ready money at his command, may be an inestimably useful person to another British subject (without ready money) who cannot sit comfortably unless he sits in Parliament! But honest Percy Linwood was not a man of a suspicious turn of mind. He only echoed Charlotte's filial glorification of her father; and Charlotte rewarded him by a smile and a look.

Just as they reached the garden entrance to the cottage, a shabbily-dressed manservant met them with a message, for which they were both alike unprepared. "Captain Bervie has called, miss, to say good-bye, and my mistress requests your company in the parlour."

Having delivered his little formula of words, the man cast a look of furtive curiosity at Percy and withdrew. Charlotte turned to her lover, with indignation sparkling in her eyes and flushing on her cheeks at the bare idea of seeing Captain Bervie again. "The wretch!" she exclaimed. "Does he think I will breathe the same air with the man who attempted to take your life?"

Percy checked the flow of her anger by taking her hand, and looking at her gravely.

"You are sadly mistaken," he said; "and I am glad of the opportunity of setting you right. Captain Bervie stood to receive my fire as fairly as I stood to receive his. When I discharged my pistol in the air, he was the first man who ran up to me, and asked if I was seriously hurt. They told him my wound was a trifle; and he fell on his knees and thanked

God for preserving my life from 'his guilty and miserable hand.' I myself saw the tears streaming down his cheeks. He said to me, 'You have shown me my vile temper as I have never seen it yet. I will get the better of it—I will go away somewhere by myself, and not return until my mind is purified from every feeling of hatred and jealousy towards the man who has forgiven me and spared my life.' He was not content with only making that promise—he held out his hand to me. 'I am no longer the rival who hates you,' he said. 'Give me a little time; and I will be *your* brother, and *her* brother. Am I worthy to take your hand?' We shook hands—we were friends. Whatever his faults may be, Charlotte, Arthur Bervie has a great heart. Go in, I entreat you, and be friends with him as I am."

Charlotte listened with downcast eyes and changing colour. "You believe him?" she asked, in low, trembling tones.

"I believe him as I believe you," Percy answered.

She secretly resented the comparison, she detested the captain more heartily than ever. "I will go in and see him, if you wish it," she said, with a sad submission in her voice. "But not by myself. I want you to come with me."

"Why?" Percy asked.

"I want to see his face, when you and he meet."

"Do you still doubt him, Charlotte?"

She looked up suddenly and made this strange reply: "Your mind sees him, penitent, on his knees. My mind sees him, pointing his pistol to take your life."

They went together into the cottage. Fixing her eyes steadily on the captain's face, Charlotte saw it turn deadly pale when Percy followed her into the parlour. The two men greeted one another cordially. Charlotte sat down by her mother, preserving her composure so far as appearances went. "I hear you have called to bid us good-bye," she said to Bervie. "Is it to be a long absence?"

"I have got two months' leave," the captain answered, without looking at her while he spoke.

"Are you going abroad?"

"Yes. I think so."

A pause followed that reply. Percy claimed the captain's attention by speaking to him next. Charlotte seized the opportunity of saying a word privately to her

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mother. "Don't encourage Captain Bervie to prolong his visit," she whispered; "I like him less than ever."

Mrs. Bowmore, born and bred in the exercise of that patient politeness which has long since been reckoned among obsolete social accomplishments, was shocked at her daughter's inhospitable suggestion. In the confusion of the moment, the good lady actually interrupted Captain Bervie's conversation with his friend by offering him a cup of tea! He rose as he thanked her; and made the customary apologies for not prolonging his visit. To Charlotte's surprise, Percy also rose to go. "His carriage," he said, "was waiting at the door; and he had offered to take Captain Bervie back to London." Charlotte instantly suspected an arrangement between the two men for a confidential interview. Her obstinate distrust of Bervie strengthened tenfold. She reluctantly gave him her hand, as he parted from her at the parlour door. The effort of concealing her true feeling towards him, gave a colour and a vivacity to her face which made her irresistibly beautiful. Bervie looked at her with an immeasurable sadness in his eyes. "When we meet again," he said, "you will see me in a new character." He hurried out to the gate, without waiting to be answered, as if he feared to trust himself for a moment longer in her presence.

Percy took his leave next. Charlotte followed him into the passage. "I shall be here to-morrow, dearest!" he said, and tried to raise her hand to his lips. She abruptly drew it away. "Not that hand!" she answered. "Captain Bervie has just touched it. Kiss the other!"

"Do you still doubt the captain?" said Percy, amused by her petulance.

She put her arm over his shoulder, and touched the plaster on his neck gently with her finger. "I don't doubt," she said, "the captain did *that*!"

Percy left her, laughing. He was too happy to remonstrate seriously with her at that moment. At the front gate of the cottage he found Arthur Bervie in conversation with the same shabbily-dressed man-servant who had announced the captain's visit to Charlotte.

"What has become of the other servant?" Bervie asked. "I mean the old man who has been with Mr. Bowmore for so many years."

"He has left his situation, sir."

"Why?"

"As I understand, sir, he spoke disrespectfully to the master."

"Oh! And how came the master to hear of *you*?"

"I advertised; and Mr. Bowmore answered my advertisement."

Bervie looked hard at the man for a moment, and then joined Percy at the carriage door. The two gentlemen started for London.

"Did you notice Mr. Bowmore's new servant?" asked the captain, as they drove away from the cottage. "I don't like the look of the fellow."

"I didn't particularly notice him," Percy answered.

There was a pause. When the conversation was resumed, it turned on common-place subjects. The captain looked uneasily out of the carriage window. Percy looked uneasily at the captain.

They had left Dartford about two miles behind them, when Percy noticed an old gabled house, sheltered by magnificent trees, and standing on an eminence well removed from the high road. Carriages and saddle-horses were visible on the drive in front, and a flag was hoisted on a staff placed in the middle of the lawn.

"Something seems to be going on there," Percy remarked. "What a fine old house! Who does it belong to?"

Bervie smiled. "It belongs to my father," he said, simply. "He is chairman of the bench of local magistrates, and he receives his brother-justices to-day, to celebrate the opening of the sessions." He stopped, and looked at Percy with a certain embarrassment. "I am afraid I have surprised and disappointed you," he resumed, abruptly changing the subject. "I told you when we met just now at Mr. Bowmore's that I had something important to say to you; and I have not yet said it. The truth is, I don't feel sure, on reflection, whether I have been long enough your friend to take the liberty of advising you."

"You mean kindly towards me," Percy answered in his frank, hearty way. "Trust me, whatever your advice is, to take it kindly on my side."

Thus encouraged, the captain spoke out.

"You told me that you had been introduced to Mr. Bowmore to-day," he began; "and you said that he took a great interest in the success of your claim on the Govern-

ment. You will probably pass much of your time at the cottage, and you will be thrown a great deal into Mr. Bowmore's society. I have known him for many years. Speaking from that knowledge, I most seriously warn you against him as a thoroughly unprincipled and thoroughly dangerous man. Without entering into the question of his politics, I can tell you that the motive of everything he says and does is vanity—inordinate, devouring vanity. To the gratification of that one passion he would sacrifice you or me, his wife or his daughter, without hesitation and without remorse. His one desire is to get into Parliament. You are a wealthy man, and you can help him. He will leave no effort untried to make you help him; and if he gets you into political difficulties, he will desert you without scruple. I see I astonish and shock you. If you think me prejudiced, write to my father, who has official knowledge of the perilous position in which this man stands. I will forward your letter, and vouch for you as a gentleman who will respect any confidence placed in him. My father will confirm me, when I tell you that this Bowmore belongs to some of the most revolutionary clubs in England; that he has spoken rank sedition at public meetings; and that his name is already in the black book at the Home Office. If the rumour be true that Ministers, in fear of insurrectionary risings among the population, are about to suspend the Habeas Corpus Act, Mr. Bowmore will certainly be in danger; and it may be my father's duty to grant the warrant that apprehends him. In your own best interests, decline resolutely to join him in any political conversation; refuse to accept his assistance in the matter of your claim on Parliament; and, above all things, stop him at the outset, when he tries to steal his way into your intimacy. I need not caution you to say nothing against him to his wife and daughter. They are infatuated about him; his wily tongue has long since deluded them. Don't let it delude *you*! If you were my brother, I could give you no sounder or better advice than this. Reflect on what I have said, at your leisure; and let us turn in the meantime to a more interesting subject. Have you thought any more of our evening at Doctor Lagarde's?"

"I hardly know," said Percy, still under the impression of the formidable warning which he had just received. "You have

given me far more serious things to think of than mesmerism."

"Let me jog your memory," the other continued. "You went on with the consultation by yourself, after I had left the doctor's house. It will be really doing me a favour, if you can call to mind what Lagarde saw in the trance, in my absence?"

Thus entreated, Percy roused himself. So long as he abstained from attempting to express them in writing, his recollections were perfectly ready to answer any reasonable call on them. He repeated in substance the doctor's description of the first of the two visions that had appeared to him after the captain's departure.

Bervie started. "A cottage parlour?" he repeated. "We have just left a cottage parlour! A man like me, trying to persuade a woman like——," he checked himself, as if he was afraid to let Charlotte's name pass his lips. "Trying to induce a woman to go away with me," he resumed, "and persuading her at last, in spite of her tears? Pray go on! What did the doctor see next?"

"He saw a travelling-carriage," Percy replied. "The lady was one of the persons in it. And there was a man with her. And there was something else—only the doctor couldn't see it."

"Could he tell you who the man was?"

"No. He was too much exhausted, he said, to see any more."

"Surely you returned to consult him again?"

"No. I had had enough of it."

"When we get to London," said the captain, "we shall pass along the Strand, on the way to your chambers. Will you kindly drop me at the turning that leads to the doctor's?"

Percy looked at him in amazement. "You still take it seriously?" he said.

"Is it *not* serious?" Bervie asked warmly. "Have you and I, so far, not done exactly what this man saw us doing? Have I not shed bitter tears of disappointment; and who was the cause of them but the woman whom he saw by my side? Did we not meet, in the days when we were rivals (as he saw us meet), with the pistols in our hands? Did you not recognise his description of the lady, when you met her at the ball, as I recognised it before you?"

"Mere coincidences!" Percy answered, quoting Charlotte's opinion when they

had spoken together of Doctor Lagarde, but taking care not to cite his authority. "How many thousand men have been crossed in love? How many thousand men have fought duels for love? How many thousand women choose blue for their favourite colour, and answer to the vague description of the lady whom the doctor pretended to see?"

"Say that it is so," Bervie rejoined. "The thing is remarkable, even from your point of view. And if more coincidences follow, the result will be more remarkable still."

The next coincidence, if it happened, would realise the love-scene with the ring. Was there anything remarkable—was it even worth calling a coincidence—if Percy put an engagement-ring on the finger of the woman who loved him, and if he kissed her afterwards? He considerably forbore, in this case, from communicating his thoughts to Bervie. "The thing that most surprised *me* in the doctor's performance," he said, "was his thinking with our thoughts, and finding out our own knowledge of our own names."

The captain shook his head. "A mere question of nervous sympathy and nervous insight," he answered. "Doctors meet with similar cases in cataleptic patients. I have seen them recorded in medical books."

Percy declined to follow his friend into the mysteries of medical literature. Arrived at the Strand, he set Bervie down at the turning which led to the doctor's lodgings. "You will call on me or write me word, if anything remarkable happens," he said.

"You shall hear from me without fail," Bervie replied.

That night, the captain's pen performed the captain's promise, in few and startling words:

"Melancholy news! Madame Lagarde is dead. Nothing is known of her son but that he has left England. If he has ventured back to France, it is barely possible that I may hear something of him. I have friends at the English embassy in Paris who will help me to make enquiries; and I start for the Continent to-morrow. Write to me while I am away, to the care of my father, at 'The Manor House, near Dartford.' He will always know my address abroad, and will forward your letters. For your own sake, remember the warning I gave you this afternoon! Your faithful friend, A. B."

CHAPTER VII. OFFICIAL SECRETS.

FROM PETER WEEMS TO JOHN JENNET, Esq.,
Secret Service Department, Home Office.
Private and Confidential.*

The Cottage, Dartford,
February 24th, 1817.

SIR,—I beg to inform you that there is no fear of my being compelled to leave my situation as servant in Mr. Bowmore's house, before I have completed the private investigations committed to my charge. The attempt made by Mrs. Bowmore and her daughter to have the old servant forgiven and taken back again has failed. He presumed, it seems, on his long and faithful service to warn the master that his political opinions might get him into trouble. Mr. Bowmore positively refuses to forgive the liberty that his servant has taken with him. I am accordingly left in possession of the footman's place; and not the slightest suspicion is felt of my true errand in the house.

My note-book contains nothing relating to the past week, mainly in consequence of the visits here of one Mr. Percy Linwood, which have a little disturbed the domestic routine. This gentleman's avowed object is to pay his court to Miss Bowmore. Whether he is, politically speaking, a person of any importance, I have yet to discover. Judging by appearances, though perfectly respectful to Mr. Bowmore, he is not particularly desirous of cultivating the society of his future father-in-law. Mr. Bowmore perceives this, and resents it. He has turned sulky, and for once he keeps his thoughts to himself. There was a family discussion on the subject of Mr. Linwood the other day, which is of no official interest so far. If it leads to anything, I will not fail to send you the necessary particulars.

March 3rd.—The family discussion *has* led to something.

At Mr. Linwood's next visit, the young lady (Miss Charlotte) had a long talk with him on the subject of his behaviour to her father. They usually meet in the

* Persons desirous of consulting the author's authority for passages which relate to the social and political condition of England at the date of the story, are referred to the Annual Register for the year 1817. In Chapters I. and II. they will find the Reports of the Secret Committees and the Debates in Parliament, which led to the suspension of the Habeas Corpus Act. Further on, at page 66, they will also find the employment of paid spies and informers by the English Government, openly acknowledged in the House of Lords, and openly defended in the speeches of Lord Redesdale and Lord Liverpool.

conservatory; I have broken a pane of glass at the back, and I can hear everything they say. The lady accused her lover of being set against her father by some slanderer. As her anger rose, she did not scruple to guess at the slanderer's name. She mentioned no less a person than Captain Bervie, son of Justice Bervie, of the Manor House. Mr. Linwood's defence was but a poor one; he could only declare that she was mistaken. She refused to believe this, and it ended in her giving him his dismissal, in these plain words: "You distrust my father, and you refuse to admit me into your confidence—you needn't trouble yourself to call here again."

The usual consequences followed upon this. Mr. Linwood is too fond of his young lady to resist her and lose her. He accepted any terms she chose to impose on him as the price of being restored to her favour. Half an hour later, he was walking with Mr. Bowmore in the garden, and was asking leave to consult him about a claim on Parliament for moneys due to his father's estate. Circumstances allowed me no opportunity of listening safely to what passed at the interview. I can only report, as one result of the conversation, that Mr. Linwood accompanied Mr. Bowmore, the same evening, to a meeting of the local Hampden Club. I suppose he had his reward the next day, by being permitted to put a ring on Miss Charlotte's finger in the garden, and to kiss her afterwards to his heart's content! For what took place at the club, I refer you to the special agent who attends there, in the character of one of the members.

March 10th.—Nothing to report, except the growing intimacy between Mr. Bowmore and Mr. Linwood, and another visit of the two to the Hampden Club. Also the happy progress of the young gentleman's love affair. I only mention this latter trifle by way of necessary reference to Miss Charlotte. She has met old Justice Bervie out riding, and has heard from him of the unexpected return of his son the captain from foreign parts. From what I could pick up of the conversation at dinner, I gather that the justice has been informed of Mr. Linwood's visits to the revolutionary club; that he wrote word of it to his son; and that the captain has returned to set his influence over Mr. Linwood against Mr. Bowmore's

influence—if he can. Miss Charlotte is furious at the bare idea of his interference. Poor soul! she honestly believes her father to be the greatest statesman in England. See what it is to be *too* dutiful a daughter!

March 17th.—Being occupied with matters of serious importance, you may not have noticed that Mr. Linwood's claim has been brought before the House of Commons, and has been adjourned for further consideration in six months' time. When the country is threatened with a revolution, Parliament has something better to do than to trouble itself about private claims. It was simply absurd to bring such a matter forward at all.

This, however, is not the view taken by Mr. Linwood and Mr. Bowmore. They are both indignant—especially Mr. Bowmore. He has decided to call a special meeting of the Hampden Club to consider his friend's wrongs; and he has persuaded Mr. Linwood to have his name put down as a candidate for election into the society. Captain Bervie has attempted to interfere, personally, and by writing, and has been repelled. Not Miss Charlotte only, but even that peaceable lady her mother, is shocked at the captain's implied distrust of Mr. Bowmore and the club. Mr. Linwood has informed the captain that he will neither hear nor read one word from him in disparagement of Mr. Bowmore. Miss Charlotte is not ungrateful for this proof of confidence in her father. The gossip among the women in the kitchen informs me that she has consented to appoint the wedding-day.

March 26th.—A longer time than usual has elapsed since the date of my last report.

On reflection, I thought it best to decide our doubt, whether Mr. Bowmore is or is not the secret agent in England of a club of French Republicans, by writing myself to the fountain-head of information in Paris. As you wisely observe, the man himself is a vain fool, who can only give us any serious trouble as an instrument in the hands of others. No such complication as this need be apprehended. After waiting some days for my answer from Paris, I have ascertained that Mr. Bowmore did offer his services to the French club, but that the offer was declined with thanks. Either the Frenchmen made enquiries, or Mr. Bowmore's true character

was known to them when they received his proposal.

Nothing now remains to be decided, but the other question of stopping this man's flow of frothy eloquence (which undeniably has its influence on some thousands of ignorant people) by putting him in prison. If I rightly understand your last instructions, the main reason for delay is connected with the present position of Mr. Linwood. Has he, too, spoken or written seditiously of the Government? And is it desirable to include him in the arrest of Mr. Bowmore?

By way of replying to this, I enclose the shorthand notes of my colleague, charged with reporting the proceedings of the Hampden Club.

The note numbered One contains Mr. Linwood's speech at the debate, on the question of forcing his claim upon the attention of the Government. Judged as oratory, it is wretched stuff. Judged as sedition, it rivals the more elaborate efforts of Mr. Bowmore himself.

The note numbered Two reports the proceedings at a special sitting of the club this morning. The subject of debate is the recent decision of Parliament, suspending the Habeas Corpus Act at the pleasure of the Government. You will see that a public meeting, in "aid of British liberty," is to be summoned in a field near Dartford, on the 2nd of April; that the London societies are to receive the Committee of the Hampden Club on the next day; that they are to escort Mr. Bowmore to Westminster Hall, and to insist on his being heard at the bar of the House of Commons. You will also perceive that the person who seconds the final resolution submitted to the club—which declares that Parliament must be intimidated, if Parliament can be reached in no other way—is Mr. Percy Linwood himself.

I have further ascertained that Miss Charlotte was present among "the ladies in the gallery," who were permitted to attend the debate, and that she is to be married to Mr. Linwood on the 7th of April next. These circumstances sufficiently account, to my mind, for the extraordinary imprudence of which Mr. Linwood has been guilty. Mr. Bowmore declares that the "minions of Government dare not touch a hair of his head." Miss Charlotte believes Mr. Bowmore. And Mr. Linwood believes Miss Charlotte.

These particulars being communicated,

I have now the honour to wait your final instructions.

March 31st.—Your commands reached me yesterday at noon.

Two hours afterwards I obtained leave of absence, and waited privately on Justice Bervie. I had my wig and my other materials for disguise in the pockets of my greatcoat; and I found, in a deserted stone quarry, an excellent dressing-room for the needful changes, before I visited the justice, and before I returned to my footman's place.

Arrived at Squire Bervie's, I sent in your confidential letter, and had an interview with the justice, at which I laid my information in due form. On my asking next for warrants to arrest Mr. Bowmore and Mr. Linwood, the justice retired to consider my application. But for your letter, I strongly suspect he would himself have applied to the Home Secretary before granting the warrant against Mr. Linwood. As things were, he had no choice but to do his duty; and even then he did it with a reservation, in the shape of a delay. He declined, on purely formal grounds, to date the warrants earlier than the 2nd of April. I represented that the public assemblage in the field was to take place on that day, and that the arrest of Mr. Bowmore and Mr. Linwood a day or two earlier might prevent the meeting, by depriving it of its leaders. The justice's reply to this was not very polite: "I am acting in the exercise of my own discretion, sir. Good morning."

On leaving the house, I noticed three persons in a corner of the hall, who appeared to be interested in watching my departure. Two of them I recognised as Captain Bervie and Major Much, both friends of Mr. Linwood. The third was a lady, whom I have since ascertained to be the captain's sister. That the two gentlemen are interested in steering Mr. Linwood clear of political difficulties, I have no sort of doubt. As to Miss Bervie, I can only say that she was certainly in the company of the major and the captain, and to all appearance in their confidence also.

To-morrow evening (April 1st) there is to be a special session of the club, to make the final arrangements for the management of the public meeting on the 2nd. If my warrants had been dated on the 1st, I might quietly arrest Mr. Bowmore and Mr. Linwood on their return from the club; and the news would be spread in

time to prevent the meeting. Under existing circumstances (unless I receive orders from you), I must decide for myself whether I make the arrest before the meeting or after.

In any case, you may rely on the affair being managed (as the Government wish it to be managed) with the strictest secrecy. Your letter to Justice Bervie, containing the Home Secretary's instructions to let no person about him—not even his clerk—know of my application for the warrants, evidently startled the old gentleman. If he ventures to take any living creature into his confidence—and if I discover it—the consequence will be his dismissal from the bench of magistrates. I believe he will hold his tongue. He is sharp enough to understand that Mr. Bowmore and Mr. Linwood (who might otherwise be exhibited as martyrs in the Radical newspapers) are simply to disappear. What an invaluable aid to Government is the suspension of the Habeas Corpus Act! Forgive my indulging in political reflection—I am in such high spirits at the approaching termination of my labours. At the same time, I pity Miss Charlotte. She is so happy, and so entirely unsuspecting of any misfortune hanging over her head. It is certainly hard to have her lover clapped into prison just before the wedding-day!

I will bring you word of the arrest myself; there will be plenty of time for me to catch the afternoon coach to London. Between this date and the 2nd, rely on my keeping a watchful eye on both the gentlemen; and on Mr. Bowmore especially. He is just the man, if he feels the faintest suspicion that he is in any danger, to provide for his own means of escape, and to leave Mr. Linwood to shift for himself. I have the honour to be, sir, your obedient humble servant,
PETER WEEMS.

CHAPTER VIII. THE ELOPEMENT.

ON the evening of the 1st of April, Mrs. Bowmore was left alone with the servants. Mr. Bowmore and Percy had gone out together to attend the special meeting of the club. Shortly afterwards Miss Charlotte had left the cottage, under very extraordinary circumstances.

A few minutes only after the departure of her father and Percy, she received a letter, which appeared to cause her the most violent agitation. She said to Mrs. Bowmore: "Mamma, I must see Captain Bervie for a few minutes in private, on

a matter of serious importance to all of us. He is waiting at the front gate, and he will come in if I show myself at the hall door." Upon this, Mrs. Bowmore had asked for an explanation. "There is no time for explanation" was the only answer she received; "I ask you to leave me for five minutes alone with the captain." Mrs. Bowmore, naturally enough, still hesitated. Charlotte snatched up her garden-hat, and declared wildly that she would go out to Captain Bervie, if she was not permitted to receive him at home. In the face of this declaration, Mrs. Bowmore yielded, and left the room.

In a minute more the captain was in the cottage parlour. Although she had given way to her daughter, Mrs. Bowmore was not disposed to trust her, without supervision, in the society of a man whom Charlotte herself had reviled as a slanderer and a false friend. She took up her position in the verandah outside the parlour, at a safe distance from one of the two windows of the room, which had been left partially open to admit the fresh air. Here she waited and listened.

The conversation was for some time carried on in whispers. As they became more and more excited, both Charlotte and Bervie ended in unconsciously raising their voices. "I swear it to you on my faith as a Christian!" Mrs. Bowmore heard the captain say. "I declare before God who hears me that I am speaking the truth!" And Charlotte had answered, with a burst of tears, "I can't believe you! I daren't believe you! Oh, how can you ask me to do such a thing? Let me go! let me go!" Alarmed at those words, Mrs. Bowmore advanced to the window, and looked in. Bervie had put Charlotte's arm in his arm, and was trying to induce her to leave the parlour with him. She resisted and implored him to release her. Mrs. Bowmore was on the point of entering the room to interfere—when Bervie suddenly dropped Charlotte's arm, and whispered in her ear. She started as she heard the words, looked at him keenly, and instantly made up her mind. "Let me tell my mother where I am going," she said; "and I will consent." "Be it so!" he answered, and hurried her out.

Mrs. Bowmore re-entered the cottage by the adjoining room, and met them in the passage. "Remember one thing," Bervie said, before Charlotte could speak. "Every minute is precious; the fewest words are the best."

In few words, Charlotte spoke. "I must go at once to Justice Bervie's house. Don't be afraid, mamma! I know what I am about, and I know that I am right."

"Going to Justice Bervie's!" cried Mrs. Bowmore, in the utmost extremity of astonishment. "What will your father say, what will Percy think, when they come back from the club?"

"My sister's carriage is waiting for me close by," Bervie answered. "It is entirely at Miss Charlotte's disposal. She can easily get back if she wishes to keep her visit a secret, before Mr. Bowmore and Mr. Linwood return."

He led the way to the door as he spoke. Charlotte kissed her mother tenderly, and followed him. Mrs. Bowmore called to them to wait. "I daren't let you go," she said to her daughter, "without your father's leave!" Charlotte seemed not to hear, the captain seemed not to hear. They ran across the front garden, and through the gate—and were out of sight in less than a minute.

More than two hours had passed; the sun had sunk below the horizon, and still there were no signs of Charlotte's return.

Feeling seriously uneasy, Mrs. Bowmore crossed the room to ring the bell, and send the man-servant to Justice Bervie's house to hasten her daughter's return. As she approached the fireplace, she was startled by a sound of stealthy footsteps in the hall, followed by a loud noise as of some heavy object that had dropped on the floor. She rang the bell violently, and then hurried to the door of the parlour. As she opened it, the footman passed her, running out, apparently in pursuit of somebody, at the top of his speed. She followed him as rapidly as she could, out of the cottage, and across the little front garden, to the gate. Arrived in the road, she was just in time to see him vault upon the luggage-board at the back of a post-chaise, which had apparently passed the cottage, and drawn up a little beyond it. Peter gained the board, just as the postillion started the horses on the way to London. He saw Mrs. Bowmore looking at him, before the carriage had greatly increased its distance from the cottage, and pointed, with an insolent nod of his head, first to the inside of the vehicle, and then over it to the high road; signing to her that he designed to accompany the person in the post-chaise to the end of the journey.

Turning to go back to the cottage, Mrs. Bowmore saw her own bewilderment reflected in the faces of the two female servants, who had followed her out.

"Who can Peter be after, ma'am?" asked the cook. "Do you think it's a thief?"

The housemaid pointed to the post-chaise, barely visible in the distance. "Simpleton!" she said. "Do thieves travel in that way? I wish my master had come back," she proceeded, speaking to herself, "I'm afraid there's something wrong."

Mrs. Bowmore, returning through the garden-gate, instantly stopped and looked at the woman.

"What makes you mention your master's name, Amelia, when you fear that something is wrong?" she asked.

Amelia changed colour, and looked confused.

"I am loath to alarm you, ma'am," she said; "and I can't rightly see what it is my duty to do."

Mrs. Bowmore's heart sank within her under the cruellest of all terrors—the terror of something unknown. "Don't keep me in suspense," she said faintly. "Whatever it is, let me know it."

She led the way back to the parlour. The housemaid followed her. The cook (declining to be left alone) followed the housemaid.

"It was something I heard this afternoon, ma'am," Amelia began. "Cook happened to be busy——"

The cook interposed: she had not forgiven the housemaid for calling her a simpleton. "No, Amelia! If you *must* bring me into it—not busy. Uneasy in my mind on the subject of the soup."

"I don't know that your mind makes much difference," Amelia proceeded. "What it comes to is this—it was I, and not you, who went into the kitchen-garden for the vegetables."

"Not by *my* wish, Heaven knows!" persisted the cook.

"Leave the room!" said Mrs. Bowmore. Even her patience had given way at last.

The cook looked as if she declined to believe her own ears. Mrs. Bowmore pointed to the door. The cook said "Oh?"—accenting it as a question. Mrs. Bowmore's finger still pointed. The cook, in solemn silence, yielded to circumstances, and banged the door.

"I was getting the vegetables, ma'am," Amelia resumed, "when I heard voices

on the other side of the paling. The wood is so old that one can see through the cracks easy enough. I saw my master and Mr. Linwood, and Captain Bervie. The captain seemed to have stopped the other two on the pathway that leads to the field; he stood, as it might be, between them and the back way to the house—and he spoke severely, that he did! ‘For the last time, Mr. Bowmore,’ says he, ‘will you understand that you are in danger, and that Mr. Linwood is in danger, unless you both leave this neighbourhood to-night?’ My master made light of it. ‘For the last time,’ says he, ‘will you refer us to a proof of what you say, and allow us to judge for ourselves?’ ‘I have told you already,’ says the captain, ‘I am bound by my duty towards another person to keep what I know a secret.’ ‘Very well,’ says my master, ‘I am bound by my duty to my country. And I tell you this,’ says he, in his high and mighty way, ‘neither Government, nor the spies of Government, dare touch a hair of my head: they know it, sir, for the head of the people’s friend!’ The captain lost his temper. ‘What stuff!’ says he; ‘there’s a Government spy in your house at this moment, disguised as your footman.’ My master looked at Mr. Linwood, and burst out laughing. ‘Peter a spy!’ says he; ‘poor Peter! You won’t beat that, captain, if you talk till doomsday.’ He turned about without a word more, and went home. The captain caught Mr. Linwood by the arm, as soon as they were alone. ‘For God’s sake,’ says he, ‘don’t follow that madman’s example! If you value your liberty, if you hope to become Charlotte’s husband, consult your own safety. I can give you a passport. Escape to France and wait till this trouble is over.’ Mr. Linwood was not in the best of tempers—Mr. Linwood shook him off. ‘Charlotte’s father will soon be my father,’ says he; ‘do you think I will desert him?’ ‘My friends at the club have taken up my claim; do you think I will forsake them at the meeting to-morrow? You ask me to be unworthy of Charlotte, and unworthy of my friends—you insult me, if you say more.’ He whipped round on his heel, and followed my master. The captain lifted his hands to the heavens, and looked—I declare it turned my blood, ma’am, to see him. If there’s truth in mortal man, it’s my firm belief——”

What the housemaid’s belief was, remained unexpressed. Before she could

get to her next word, a shriek of horror from the hall announced that the cook’s powers of interruption were not exhausted yet.

Mistress and servant both hurried out, in terror of they knew not what. There stood the cook, alone in the hall, confronting the stand on which the overcoats and hats of the men of the family were placed. “Where’s the master’s travelling-coat?” cried the cook, staring wildly at an unoccupied peg. “And where’s his cap to match? Oh Lord, he’s off in the post-chaise! and Peter’s after him!”

Simpleton as she was, the woman (loitering about the hall) had blundered on a very serious discovery. Coat and cap—both made after a foreign pattern, and both strikingly remarkable in form and colour to English eyes—had unquestionably disappeared. It was equally certain that they were well known to Peter, as the coat and cap which his master used in travelling. Had Mr. Bowmore discovered that he was really in danger? Had the necessities of instant flight only allowed him time enough to snatch his coat and cap out of the hall? And had Peter seen him as he was making his escape to the post-chaise? The cook’s conclusion answered all these questions in the affirmative; and, if Captain Bervie’s words of warning were to be believed, the cook’s conclusion for once was not to be despised.

Under this last trial of her fortitude, Mrs. Bowmore’s feeble reserves of endurance completely gave way. The poor lady turned faint and giddy. Amelia placed her on a chair in the hall, and told the cook to open the front door and let in the fresh air. The cook obeyed; and instantly broke out with a second terrific scream; announcing nothing less, this time, than the appearance of Mr. Bowmore himself, alive and hearty, returning with Percy from the meeting at the club!

The inevitable enquiries and explanations followed. Fully assured as he had declared himself to be, of the sanctity of his person (politically speaking), Mr. Bowmore turned pale, nevertheless, when he looked at the unoccupied peg on his clothes’ stand. Had some man unknown personated him? And had a post-chaise been hired to lead an impending pursuit of him in the wrong direction? What did it mean? Who was the friend to whose services he was indebted? As for the proceedings of Peter, but one interpretation could now

be placed on them. They distinctly justified Captain Bervie's assertion, that the footman was a spy. Mr. Bowmore thought of the captain's other assertion, relating to the urgent necessity for making his escape; looked at Percy in silent dismay; and turned paler than ever.

Percy's thoughts, diverted for the moment only from the lady of his love, returned to her with renewed fidelity. "Let us hear what Charlotte thinks of it," he said. "Where is she?"

Another explanation followed this question. Terrified at the effect which it produced on Percy, helplessly ignorant when she was called upon to account for her daughter's absence, Mrs. Bowmore could only shed tears and express a devout trust in Providence. Her husband looked at the new misfortune from a political point of view. He sat down and slapped his forehead theatrically with the palm of his hand. "Thus far," said the patriot, "my political assailants have only struck at me through the newspapers. Now they strike at me through my child!" Percy made no speeches. There was a look in his eyes which boded ill for the captain, if the two met. "I am going to fetch her," was all he said, "as fast as a horse can carry me."

He hired his horse at an inn in the town, and set forth for Justice Bervie's house at a gallop.

During Percy's absence, Mr. Bowmore secured the front and back entrances to the cottage with his own hands. These first precautions taken, he ascended to his room and packed his travelling-bag. "Necessaries for my use in prison," he remarked. "The bloodhounds of Government are after me." "Are they after Percy too?" his wife ventured to ask. Mr. Bowmore looked up impatiently, and cried "Pooh!"—as if Percy was of no consequence. Mrs. Bowmore thought otherwise: the good woman privately packed a bag for Percy, in the sanctuary of her own room.

For an hour, and more than an hour, no event of any sort occurred. Mr. Bowmore stalked up and down the parlour, meditating. At intervals, ideas of flight presented themselves attractively to his mind. At intervals, ideas of the speech that he had prepared for the public meeting on the next day took their place. "If I fly to-night," he wisely observed, "what will become of my speech? I will not fly to-

night! Let them put me in prison—the people shall hear me!"

He sat down and crossed his arms fiercely. As he looked at his wife to see what effect he had produced on her, the sound of heavy carriage-wheels and the trampling of horses penetrated to the parlour from the garden-gate. Mr. Bowmore started to his feet, with every appearance of having suddenly altered his mind on the question of flight. Just as he reached the hall, Percy's voice was heard at the front door. "Let me in. Instantly! Instantly!"

Mrs. Bowmore drew back the bolts, before the servants could help her. "Where is Charlotte?" she cried, seeing Percy alone on the door-step.

"Gone!" Percy answered furiously. "Eloped to Paris, with Captain Bervie! Read her own confession. They were just sending the messenger with it, when I reached the house."

He handed a note to Mrs. Bowmore, and turned aside to speak to her husband while she read it. Charlotte wrote to her mother very briefly:

"DEAREST MOTHER,—I have left you for a few days. Pray don't be alarmed about me, and pray don't think ill of me. Everything shall be explained on my return. I am under the most careful protection; and I have a lady for my companion on the journey. I will write again from Paris.—Your loving daughter, CHARLOTTE."

Percy took Mr. Bowmore by the arm, and pointed to a carriage and four horses waiting at the garden-gate. "Do you come with me, and back me with your authority as her father?" he asked, briefly and sternly; "or do you leave me to go alone?"

Mr. Bowmore was famous among his admirers for his "happy replies." He made one now.

"I am not Brutus," he said. "I am only Bowmore. My daughter before everything. Fetch my travelling-bag."

While the travellers' bags were being placed in the chaise, Mr. Bowmore was struck by an idea. He produced from his coat-pocket a roll of many papers thickly covered with writing. On the blank leaf in which they were tied up, he wrote in the largest letters: "Frightful domestic calamity! Vice-President Bowmore obliged to leave England! Welfare of a beloved daughter! His speech will be read at the meeting by President Joskin, of the Club. (Private to Joskin. Have these lines

printed and posted everywhere. And, for God's sake, don't drop your voice at the ends of the sentences.)"

He threw down the pen, and embraced Mrs. Bowmore in the most summary manner. The poor woman was ordered to send the roll of paper to the club, without a word to comfort and sustain her from her husband's lips. Percy spoke to her hopefully and kindly, as he kissed her cheek at parting. In another moment lover and father had started on the first stage, from Dartford to Dover.

CHAPTER IX. PURSUIT AND DISCOVERY.

FEELING himself hurried away from all possible pursuit, as fast as four horses could carry him, Mr. Bowmore had leisure to criticise Percy's conduct, from his own purely selfish point of view.

"If you had listened to my advice," he said, "or, if you had only suffered yourself to be persuaded by my daughter (who inherits my unerring instincts), you would have treated that man Bervie like the hypocrite and villain that he is. But no! you trust to your own crude impressions. Having given him your hand after the duel (I would have given him the contents of my pistol!), you hesitated to withdraw it again, when that slanderer appealed to your friendship not to cast him off! Now you see the consequence!"

"Wait till we get to Paris!" All the ingenuity of Percy's travelling companion failed to extract from him any other answer than that.

Foiled so far, Mr. Bowmore began to start difficulties next. Had they money enough for the journey? Percy touched his pocket, and answered shortly, "Plenty." Had they passports? Percy sullenly showed a letter. "There is the necessary voucher from a magistrate," he said. "The consul at Dover will give us our passports. Mind this!" he added, in warning tones, "I have pledged my word of honour to Justice Bervie, that we have no political object in view in travelling to France. Keep your politics to yourself, on the other side of the Channel."

Mr. Bowmore listened in blank amazement. Charlotte's lover was appearing in a new character—the character of a man who was actually losing his respect for Charlotte's father!

It was useless to talk to him! He deliberately checked any further attempts at conversation, by leaning back in the carriage and closing his eyes. The truth

is, Mr. Bowmore's own language and conduct were insensibly producing the salutary impression on Percy's mind, which Bervie had vainly tried to convey, under the disadvantage of having Charlotte's influence against him. Throughout the journey, Percy did exactly what Bervie had once entreated him to do—he kept Mr. Bowmore at a distance.

At every stage they enquired after the fugitives. At every stage they were answered by a more or less intelligible description of Bervie and Charlotte, and of the lady who accompanied them. No disguise had been attempted; no person had in any case been bribed to conceal the truth.

When the first tumult of his emotions had in some degree subsided, this strange circumstance associated itself in Percy's mind with the equally unaccountable conduct of Justice Bervie, on his arrival at the Manor House. The old gentleman met his visitor in the hall, without expressing, and apparently without feeling, any indignation at his son's conduct. It was even useless to appeal to him for information. He only said, "I am not in Arthur's confidence; he is of age, and my daughter is of age; I have no claim to control them. I believe they have taken Miss Bowmore to Paris; and that is all I know about it." He had shown the same dense insensibility in giving his official voucher for the passports. Percy had only to satisfy him on the question of politics; and the document was drawn out as a matter of course. Such had been the father's behaviour; and the conduct of the son now exhibited the same shameless composure. To what conclusion did this discovery point? Over and over again, Percy asked himself that question; and, over and over again, he abandoned the attempt to answer it, in despair.

They reached Dover towards two o'clock in the morning.

At the pier-head they found a coast-guardsmen on duty, and more information. In 1817 the communication with France was still by sailing-vessels. Arriving long after the departure of the regular packet, Bervie had hired a lugger, and had sailed with the two ladies for Calais, having a fresh breeze in his favour. Percy's first angry impulse was to follow him instantly. The next moment he remembered the insurmountable obstacle of the passports. The consul would certainly not grant those essentially necessary documents at two in

the morning! The only alternative was to wait for the regular packet, which sailed some hours later—between eight and nine o'clock in the forenoon. In this case, they might apply for their passports before the regular office hours, if they explained the circumstances, backed by the authority of the magistrate's letter.

Mr. Bowmore followed Percy to the nearest inn that was open, with sublime indifference to the delays and difficulties of the journey. He ordered refreshments with the air of a man who was performing a melancholy duty to himself in the name of humanity. "When I think of my speech," he said, at supper, "my heart bleeds for the people. In a few hours more, they will assemble in their thousands, eager to hear me. And what will they see? Joskin in my place! Joskin with a manuscript in his hand! Joskin, who drops his voice at the ends of his sentences! I will never forgive Charlotte. Waiter, another glass of brandy and water."

Having succeeded in obtaining their passports, the travellers were troubled by no further difficulties. After an unusually quick passage across the Channel, they continued their journey by post as far as Amiens, and reached that city in time to take their places by the diligence to Paris.

Arriving in Paris on the 3rd of April, they encountered another incomprehensible proceeding on the part of Captain Bervie.

Among the persons assembled in the yard to see the arrival of the diligence was a man with a morsel of paper in his hand, evidently on the look-out for some person whom he expected to discover among the travellers. After consulting his bit of paper, he looked with steady attention at Percy and Mr. Bowmore, and suddenly approached them. "If you wish to see the captain," he said, in broken English, "you will find him at that hotel." He handed a printed card to Percy, and disappeared among the crowd before it was possible to question him.

Even Mr. Bowmore gave way to human weakness, and condescended to feel astonished in the face of such an event as this. "What next!" he exclaimed.

"Wait till we get to the hotel," said Percy.

In half an hour more they had got to the hotel.

Percy pushed aside the waiter, as soon as he saw the door before him, and burst into the room.

The captain was alone, sitting by the window, reading a newspaper. Before the first furious words had escaped Percy's lips, Bervie silenced him by pointing to a closed door on the right of the fireplace. "She is there," he said; "speak quietly, or you may frighten her. I know what you are going to say," he added, as Percy stepped nearer to him, determined to be heard. "Will you give me a minute to speak in my own defence, and then decide whether I am the greatest scoundrel living, or the best friend you ever had?"

He put the question earnestly and kindly, with something that was at once grave and tender in his look and manner. The extraordinary composure with which he acted and spoke had its tranquillising influence over Percy. For the moment at least, he felt himself surprised into giving Bervie a hearing.

"I will tell you first what I have done," Bervie proceeded, "and next why I did it. For reasons presently to be mentioned, I have taken it on myself, Mr. Linwood, to make an alteration in your wedding arrangements. Instead of being married at Dartford church, you will be married (if you see no objection) at the chapel of the Embassy in Paris, by my old college friend the chaplain."

This was too much for Percy's self-control. "Your audacity is beyond belief," he broke out. "Even granting that you speak the truth, how dare you interfere in my affairs without my permission?"

Bervie held up his hand for silence. "One minute's hearing isn't much to ask," he said. "Take that cane in the corner, and treat me as you would treat a dog that had bitten you, if I don't make you alter your opinion of me in one minute more by the clock!"

Percy hesitated. Mr. Bowmore seized the opportunity of making himself heard.

"This is all very well, Captain Bervie," he began. "But I, for one, object, under any circumstances, to be made the victim of a trick."

"You are the victim of your own obstinate refusal to profit by a plain warning," Bervie rejoined. "At the eleventh hour, I entreated you, and I entreated Mr. Linwood, to provide for your own safety; and I spoke in vain."

Percy's patience gave way once more. "Your minute by the clock is passing," he interposed; "and you have said nothing to justify yourself yet."

"Very well put!" Mr. Bowmore chimed

in. "Come to the point, sir! My daughter's reputation is in question."

"Miss Bowmore's reputation is not in question for a single instant," Bervie answered. "My sister has been the companion of her journey from first to last."

"Journey?" Mr. Bowmore repeated, indignantly. "I want to know, sir, what the journey means. As an outraged father, I ask one plain question. Why did you run away with my daughter?"

Instead of answering the "outraged father," Bervie took two slips of paper from his pocket, and handed them to Percy with a smile.

"I ran away with the bride," he said, coolly, "in the certain knowledge that you and Mr. Bowmore would run after me. If I had not forced you both to follow me out of England on the 1st of April, you would have been made State prisoners on the 2nd. Those slips of paper are copies of the warrants which my father's duty compelled him to issue for 'the arrest of Percy Linwood and Orlando Bowmore.' I may divulge the secret *now*—warrants are waste paper here. Don't speak, Percy! the minute isn't quite at an end yet. Answer me one question, and I have done. I vowed I would be worthy of your generosity on the day when you spared my life. Have I kept my word?"

For once there was an Englishman who was not contented to express the noblest emotions that humanity can feel by the commonplace ceremony of shaking hands. Percy's heart overflowed. In an outburst of unutterable gratitude he threw himself on Bervie's breast. As brothers the two men embraced. As brothers they loved and trusted one another from that day forth.

The door on the right was softly opened from within. A charming face—the dark eyes bright with happy tears, the rosy lips just opening into a smile—peeped into the room. A low sweet voice, with an under-note of trembling in it, made this modest protest, in the form of an enquiry:

"When you have quite done with him, Percy, perhaps you will have something to say to ME?"

LAST WORDS.

I.

THE letter which Charlotte wrote to her mother, on the day of Percy's arrival in Paris, contains certain facts which may be reproduced with advantage at the close of the story.

Failing to persuade her to consent to his daring stratagem on any other terms, Bervie had taken Charlotte to his father, and had prevailed upon the justice to run the risk of trusting her with the secret of the coming arrests. Having first promised to respect the confidence placed in her, until the 2nd of April was over and past, she had no choice left on the evening of the 1st, but to let her father and her lover go to prison, or to take her place with Captain Bervie and his sister in the travelling-carriage.

The person whose daring and dexterity had drawn the spy away in the wrong direction, exactly at the time when his absence was of the utmost importance, was no other than Major Much. That old campaigner being a guest at the Manor House when Charlotte arrived, and hearing that the false footman was the one obstacle in the way of his dear Arthur's success, hit on the bright idea of personating Mr. Bowmore. They were both of the same height and build. Dressed in the patriot's travelling coat and cap, the back view of Major Much (presented to Peter as soon as the necessary noise had brought the spy up from the kitchen to the hall) would have deceived anybody. At every stage on the way to London, the major was as careful to lie back like a sleeper, with his handkerchief over his face, as Peter was to look in at the carriage-window and make sure that his victim was inside. Arrived at his own lodgings, the old soldier rushed in under cover of the darkness, in admirable imitation of a man who was afraid to be seen. Keeping watch himself over the house, Peter sent for assistance to his superior officer, by the first unemployed man who would carry his letter. As soon as the church clocks, striking midnight, announced that the second day of April had lawfully begun, he and his assistants entered the house with their warrant, encountering no opposition on the part of the servant who opened the door. The first person whom they discovered was Major Much, smoking his pipe in his own character; and denying all knowledge of Mr. Bowmore's whereabouts, with such a judiciously-assumed appearance of confusion, that Peter and his men wasted hours in searching the house, and interrogating the inmates, from the kitchen to the garrets. By the time the spy had arrived at his first suspicion that he might have been imposed upon, and had made his way back to Dartford by the morning coach,

Percy and Mr. Bowmore were eating their breakfast at Dessein's Hotel in Calais.

Having relieved her mother's anxiety so far, Charlotte touched next on the subject of her marriage.

"Miss Bervie will be my bridesmaid" (she wrote), "and our dear captain will be Percy's 'best man;' and papa will 'give me away,' of course. But nothing can be done without you. An experienced courier has received Percy's instructions to escort you to Paris. You must come here, dearest mother, not only for my sake, but for your own sake too. Neither Percy nor papa can return to England; and your being left alone at Dartford is not to be thought of. Besides, you will help to quiet papa's mind. Do what we can to pacify him, he persists in being angry with Captain Bervie. When I remind him that he would have been put into prison if the captain had not saved him, he smiles sorrowfully. 'I could have reconciled my mind to a prison,' he says. 'But what I can NOT endure is being made the victim of a trick!'"

With this domestic anecdote, and with sundry instructions relating to the packing of dresses, the letter came to an end.

A fortnight later the marriage took place. The persons immediately interested were the only persons present. At the little breakfast afterwards, Mr. Bowmore insisted on making a speech to a select audience of five—namely, the bride and bridegroom, the chaplain, the captain, and Mrs. Bowmore. But what does a small audience matter? The English frenzy for making speeches is not to be cooled by such a trifle as that. At the end of the world, the expiring forces of Nature will hear a dreadful voice—the voice of the last Englishman making the last speech. Mr. Bowmore spoke for half an hour. Subject of the discourse: How can I be most useful to my country at the present crisis? As an exile on the Continent, or as a martyr in prison? Answer to the question: My friends, let us leave it to time.

Percy wisely made his honeymoon a long one; he determined to be quite sure of his superior influence over his wife, before he trusted her within reach of her father again. Mr. and Mrs. Bowmore accompanied Captain Bervie on his way back to England, as far as Boulogne. In that pleasant town, the banished patriot set up his tent. It was a cheaper place to live in than Paris, and it was conveniently close to England, when he had quite made up

his mind whether to be exile or martyr. In the end, the course of events settled that question for him. Mr. Bowmore returned to England, with the return of the Habeas Corpus Act.

II.

THE years passed. Percy and Charlotte (judged from the romantic point of view) became two perfectly uninteresting married people. Bervie (always remaining a bachelor) rose steadily in his profession, through the higher grades of military rank. Mr. Bowmore, wisely overlooked by a new Government, sank back again into the obscurity from which shrewd ministers would never have assisted him to emerge. The one subject of interest left, among the persons of this little drama, was now represented by Doctor Lagarde. Thus far, not a trace had been discovered of the French physician, who had so strangely associated the visions of his magnetic sleep with the destinies of the two men who had consulted him.

Steadfastly maintaining his own opinion of the prediction and the fulfilment, Bervie persisted in believing that he and Lagarde (or Percy and Lagarde) were yet destined to meet, and resume the unfinished consultation at the point where it had been broken off. Persons, happy in the possession of "sound common sense," who declared the prediction to be skilled guess-work and the fulfilment manifest coincidence—other persons, whose minds halted midway between the mystic and the rational view, and who set up a theory of "thought-reading" as the true solution of the problem—agreed, nevertheless, in ridiculing the idea of finding Doctor Lagarde as closely akin to that other celebrated idea of finding the needle in the bottle of hay. But Bervie's obstinacy was proverbial. Nothing shook his confidence in his own convictions.

More than thirteen years had elapsed since the consultation at the Doctor's lodgings, when Bervie went to Paris to spend a summer holiday with his friend the chaplain to the English embassy. His last words to Percy and Charlotte when he took his leave were: "Suppose I meet with Doctor Lagarde?"

It was then the year 1830. Bervie arrived at his friend's rooms on the 24th of July. On the 27th of the month, the famous revolution broke out which de-throned Charles the Tenth in three days.

On the second day Bervie and his host

ventured into the streets, watching the revolution (like other reckless Englishmen) at the risk of their lives. In the confusion around them, they were separated. Bervie, searching for his companion, found his progress stopped by a barricade, which had been desperately attacked, and desperately defended. Men in blouses, and men in uniform, lay dead and dying together: the tricoloured flag waved over them, in token of the victory of the people. Bervie had just revived a poor wretch with a drink from an overthrown bowl of water, which still had a few drops left in it, when he felt a hand laid on his shoulder from behind. He turned and discovered a National Guard, who had been watching his charitable action. "Give a hand to that poor fellow," said the citizen; "he wants someone to help him." He looked as he spoke at a workman standing near, grimed with blood and gunpowder. The tears were rolling down the man's cheeks. "I can't see my way, sir, for crying," he said. "Help me to carry that sad burden into the next street." He pointed to a rude wooden litter, on which lay a dead or wounded man, his face and breast covered with an old cloak. "There is the best friend the people ever had," the workman said. "He cured us, comforted us, respected us, loved us. And there he lies, shot dead while he was binding up the wounds of friends and enemies alike!"

"Whoever he is, he has died nobly," Bervie answered. "May I look at him?"

The workman signed that he might look.

Bervie lifted the cloak—and met with Doctor Lagarde once more.

ONE SPRINGTIME PAST.

BY THEO. GIFT.

A VERY small steamboat bobbing up and down on a very rough sea at the end of Portsmouth pier. On the deck a dozen men or so buttoned up in overcoats and ulsters, for, it is raining slightly, and there is a raw east wind. Half-way down the companion-ladder a girl of nineteen peering nervously into the small saloon beyond. There is no one there; that is one good thing, for, if I am to be ill, I would rather be so in privacy than struggle to ward it off in the fresher air above, with all these men staring at me. So I go below, and

make my way to one of the long red benches lining either side of the cabin.

Will anyone unused to the ways of the world believe that, though the owners are on deck, I find the only two available corner seats of those benches occupied by the newspapers, carpet-bags, umbrellas, &c., of some gentlemen who have been careful to retain seats for themselves against they require them? It doesn't much matter. I believe I do forget myself so far as to exclaim, sotto voce, "Selfish pigs!" but the motion of the boat is getting too violent to calculate one's words nicely, and in another moment I have swept a carpet-bag on to the floor, an umbrella and roll of papers to the farther end of the bench; and am ensconced in their place with my head on somebody's ulster for a pillow, and wishing very heartily that godfather would not live in the Isle of Wight, or that mother wouldn't go to stay with him and send for me to join her; or that it was possible for me to take a twenty minutes' voyage without feeling so helplessly ill: in the midst of which meditations I am disturbed by a sudden trampling, and become conscious, though my eyes are closed, that someone has come into the cabin, and after picking up the umbrella and other "impedimenta" is standing glaring at me. *Hateful man! Why doesn't he go away again?* but even with the thought another, far more horrible, occurs to me. I am lying on his ulster, and he wants it, and—oh dear! oh dear! the boat is rolling so terribly, that if I even move one half-inch I don't know what the consequences may be. In great misery of mind I open my eyes, see a big grim-looking man, dripping with rain-drops, just retreating to the door, and say feebly:

"Please take it away. I am very sorry. I didn't think of its being yours; but—but I can't lift my head."

"Don't try then," he says shortly, and marches off, but only to return in a moment with a glass of wine, and a great bunch of sweet wax-white narcissi and dark red wallflowers. The wine he makes me drink, for the simple reason that I am too faint to refuse; and the flowers he lays beside me, saying, "Smell these, they'll do you good;" after which he disappears, and I see him no more except for one half-minute after we have landed, when, though he puts me into a comfortable carriage and finds my handbag for me, he is so far from presuming on his kindness that he gets into a

smoking compartment himself without waiting to be thanked, or take back his flowers, which I am still holding in a grateful clutch.

That is how I first meet John Charlesford, and therefore, when on the very next morning he walks into my godfather's pretty gray stone cottage at Bonchurch, and is welcomed by that gentleman as one of his oldest friends, and a great traveller and botanist, it is little wonder that I flush up with pleasure, and stretch out my hand to him, as if he were an old friend of mine too; nor that I accept without grumbling the post—which, as we grow more intimate, soon devolves on me—of guide and cicerone to Mr. Charlesford in his wild-flower researches by cliff and wood and hedgerow, to aid him in his new work on the Flora of the South of England.

Not but what he is a somewhat formidable companion for a girl who has only been through her first season, and is as wild and full of spirits as a kitten; a man fifteen years my senior, and over six feet high, with one of those rugged faces which would be stern if the smile which lights it were not so sweet, and the frank blue eyes so kindly; and with the additional awe-inspiring element of being in mourning for his wife, who was killed in a railway accident near Paris, about six months ago, when he was away in England, laid up with fever.

He is quite well again now, however, and despite his recent widowhood no one dreams of looking on him as in any way bereaved, or requiring pity and consolation. The fact is, everyone who knows John Charlesford knows that his marriage was the one great folly of his life, expiated by three years of mutual misery and disgust; and repented during nine of solitude after the inevitable separation. Death has but broken the last link of a chain virtually shattered long ago; and only my quiet eyes, or girlish fancy, can see the traces of it in the rigid lines about the mouth and gravely sober brow—though even these lighten and fade before my light-hearted cheerfulness.

Is there anything in life like the colour and the sweetness of those woods in early spring? The tender, fresh green of feathery larches; the large, white, furry buds of the horse-chestnut, just parting to unfold their first fan-shaped leaves of a brighter and yellower verdure; the rounded tops of the beeches and elms still bare of leaves, but clothed with every variety of

tint, from reddish-brown and gray to delicate purple and rose-madder, and more resembling a cluster of feathery, tender-coloured seaweed seen through a powerful magnifying-glass than anything solid or umbrageous enough for a tree; the ground here a tangle of small, white-veined ivy and emerald moss, lit up now and again by a heap of pale yellow light, a clump of primroses in their rough crimped leaves; there broken away into banks purple with violets, or opening out into patches brilliant with the golden fire of the earlycelandine; glades, where the network of boughs is woven closely together in a delicate red tracery, through which the stainless blue of an April sky looks down on last year's burnt-out leaves, still clinging like a ruddy girdle round the knees of the young oak-trees, or lying on the brown earth in a light, rustling carpet, through which the wild hyacinth thrusts its deep blue bells, and the frail, rose-white cups of the wood-anemone sway like fairy blossoms on their slender stalk. Behind rise the cliffs, gray and seamed with age, silvery with lichen and red with moss, and broken here and there by a blackthorn springing from some unseen crevice, and filling the air with a snow of milk-white blossom; and beyond all is the sea! sometimes blue and calm as liquid glass, and shimmering through a mystic, opaline veil; sometimes green as the downs above it, crested with foam, and striped with broad dashes of brown and purple; alive with cloud reflections so beautiful, that for their sake one would almost chafe at the stiller beauty of a changeless sky. Is it wonderful that in such a scene, when one feels half in love with Nature herself, so sweetly does she smile in your face, and deck herself in green and rosy raiment for your greeting, that I should grow to love John and he me? And so it comes to pass that as the days wane, and the flowers bud and break, the flower of our love bursts into blossom too; and this is how I find it out.

We are botanising in the woods one day, our favourite Luccombe-woods between Bonchurch and the Chine. Our walk there has been wonderfully quiet, for John has had one of his fits of silence, walking along with set lips and blue, earnest eyes, looking far ahead as if trying to solve some knotty question in the distant coast-line; and I—I seem to have caught his mood. Certainly, mother says, I have been growing quieter and more

dreamy of late; and to-day I walk by his side rapt in a silent musing which is perfectly content to be *there*, even though he does not speak to me. But when we get to the woods, the first breath of the violets sends my girl spirits up to their wonted pitch, and I am soon bounding over the big boulders of rock, flung down from the hills above in the first landslip; and creeping under the trailing boughs of ash and thorn to fill my hat with the gay purple blossoms, calling out my whereabouts now and then to John, who is busy digging up some rare orchid roots, till by-and-by I come springing back to him, and hold up something for his admiration.

"No, not the violets; I know you don't care for the scentless ones; but this!" waving a tuft of young sycamore leaves, so vividly green as to almost pale the flowers. "Yes, now don't laugh at me, Mr. Charlesford; I know it is only a twig, but, oh! isn't it fresh?"

"Exquisitely. Did you think I should laugh at you?" But as he speaks his eyes are turned not on the leaves but on me; and there is a look in them which somehow brings the blood burning into my cheeks. I think he sees it too; for the next moment he has taken my hands, full of leaves and flowers as they are, and lifted me down from the mossy stone on which I am standing, while, he admires my treasure, shaking his head reproachfully as he does so.

"For it will fade and die even before you get home; while, if you had left it on the bough, it would have gone on growing and deepening in colour, and have thrown out fresh shoots as green as itself for another spring."

"Would it? But it was too lovely to be only looked at on the tree. Don't you think it would live a few days in water?"

"No, child; these leaves are not like flowers. They will be as limp and colourless as your little hand would be if it were cut off from the arm, in another day. Don't you know that the green colouring which gives them their exquisite tint, is nothing more or less than the blood which runs in your hands and makes the finger-tips so pink and the veins so blue?"

He has kept my hand in his while he looks at the spray, and he holds it still. He has often held my hand before. What should there be in his doing so to-day that his touch should make my fingers tremble, and send the colour to my face

again? Suddenly his hand closes tightly over mine.

"Nellie," he says, looking straight into my eyes, and speaking very gravely, almost huskily, "I am like you after all. There is something I am not content to admire on the parent bough. I want to gather and have it for my own. I think it would not fade in my hand. Dear, will you give it me?"

Give it? Ah me! could I take it away, even if I wished, holding it as firmly as he does now? but I don't wish. I wish nothing but to let it rest where it is; and so I suppose he understands, for after a minute or so he lifts my head from the hiding-place it has found, and saying very softly, "God bless you, my darling," kisses me on the lips. And I look up at him, blushing very much, but not trembling any more—that has all passed away—and say, quite simply, "Thank you."

We walk home through the green, quiet woods very silently afterwards; but my hand is in his all the way, and though the much-prized orchids lie forgotten where they have been dug up, I know that my leaves, withered already, have been nestled carefully in his breast-pocket. I wonder—Oh John, I wonder if you have them with you still!

Nobody makes much objection when they hear of what has happened. In fact it almost troubles me that, seeing I think our love is true, the course of it should run so very smooth. My godfather indeed is pleased and kisses me, saying he wonders what such a clever, sensible fellow as Charlesford can find to care for in a silly little thing like Nell; and though mother says I am too young to marry at all, and wishes we were nearer of an age, and that he were not a widower; and my elder sister writes that I might have done much better if I had waited a little and gone into society with her and her husband; it occurs to me that, as Bess chose for herself, I may do likewise. John completely wins my mother over in their first tête-à-tête by that wonderful mixture of almost womanly tenderness with manly honesty which makes him so irresistibly lovable to those who can appreciate it; and though she sighs still, she is driven to confess that he is a very dear fellow, and she thinks the separation from his wife must have been all her fault; and as I am quite of the same opinion we are all satisfied.

And now begins that time in my life at which even now—so many years gone past

—I scarce can bear to look, so sharp is the pain its loss brings back to me to-day; that time in which I live too often now, so perfect was the joy it brought me then. We are to wait six months. Some fancy of my mother's, that people having seen the death of the first Mrs. Charlesford in the newspapers, may find occasion for gossip if his second marriage follows within the conventional year, has prompted a delay to which John is ill-inclined. And truly, seeing that his virtual widowhood has already lasted over nine years, it seems hard that he should have to wait longer for such a little gift as a young girl, who has so little dowry besides her first frank love, her freshness and inexperience, to bring with her!

But yet we never think of grumbling. There will be a little nest in Devonshire to furnish first, and mother and I are to go up to London by-and-by and help John to buy the things; and meanwhile are we not here together, making holiday, and so happy that even he hardly thinks that there could be anything better?

He has suffered so long and bitterly already from a woman's unworthiness, that the wonder is that he could ever trust or care for one again; and I feel as if I could never make up to him enough for choosing me, young and silly as I am, to put his confidence in anew. My one great aim is to make him happy, and myself a full and perfect companion for him; and though (being only a girl) I am sometimes cross, and give him the benefit of it, or wilful and mischievous, and tease him till many another man would lose his temper, it makes no difference. The crosser I am the gentler becomes John, shaming me by his patience and tenderness with "his little woman's" whims; while as for wilfulness or teasing, he either takes them as coolly as a big brown bear might the buzzing of a fly in the sunshine, or catches me in his great arms with a laugh, and kisses me into breathlessness and quiet. And all the while I am learning from him; learning how to class the pretty fragrant ferns just unrolling their green fronds in woodland hollows; how the flowers call by sweet scent messages the bees to help them make bright many a spot where never a blossom would blow without; and how the leaves that die out in a blaze of red, or gold and purple, in the autumn open with those same tints in early spring; learning these, and how many more things, in those long

rambles at John's side, when I listen eagerly to the lore he loves so well to teach, until he suddenly remembers that we have gone a long way and the little feet must be weary; and we sit down on some dry rock or fallen tree, where, with my head upon his shoulder, we rest and talk of happy springs to come, and all that we shall do in the days when I am his.

His! Ah God, did we ever think that that day might never come? Was it some heaven-sent warning which made me once break into a sob, and cling closer to him, crying out:

"Oh John, I hope God will let us live to be quite old people. I hope no one will ever take me from you. I couldn't live without you now, I love you so. Oh John, I do love you!"

And John laughed and folded me closer to him, stroking back my hair with tender touch, as he answered:

"My darling, I know you do. Isn't it the same with both of us? Why, Nellie, what's the matter? A likely notion, indeed, that I would let anyone take my pet from me!"

Likely! but it must have been God who sent the fear; though it was so soon dissipated, that in another minute we were quarrelling merrily over some argument, and walked home in such high spirits that, though John says twice that he ought to go home and write business letters, he cannot tear himself away; but stays, making me sing all his favourite Scotch songs for him, till eleven has struck, after one of the merriest evenings we have ever spent, the last—now God be merciful and strengthen me while I think of it!—that John and I shall ever spend together.

For next day is the end!

We were to have driven over to Godshill to get daffodils, this morning, and I am awake by six and watching the gray, mottled colour of the sky with anxious eyes, when I hear—can it be?—John's voice, speaking to a servant on the path below my window.

"Give this to Miss Brandron."

And next moment a letter is brought me.

It is from him, I see by the outside; and begin to fear that something has occurred to put off our excursion; but as I open it, it is not his writing on which my eyes fall first, but a stranger's; a letter to him, dated from Paris! This is what it says:

"MY DEAR CHARLESWORTH,—I have something to tell you which will, I fear, be a shock to you, and not a pleasant one; but

anyhow you must hear it, and it is an infamous shame that you should not have done so long before. I am not good at beating about the bush, so I will simply tell you that yesterday evening, coming out of the Palais Royal, I met face to face—your wife! You can guess my dismay. She herself burst out laughing when she saw it, and held out her hand, saying:

“Well, Major Burt, do you take me for a ghost? Looks like it, certainly; but you see it's only fair I should appear to haunt you, since it was you who buried me; and people do get out of their graves sometimes. How do you do?”

“I said, ‘Madam, do you know that Mr. Charlesford believes that you are dead; and that it was only because he was too ill to leave his bed, that I assisted at the interment of a person supposed to be yourself; and had a stone erected to her memory?’”

“She laughed out again. People passing turned to look at her.

“‘Ah! my dear friend, so kind of you! Yes, I've seen the stone. You might have given me more of an epitaph, though. But as the maid, not the mistress, lies beneath, it doesn't so much matter. Poor Josephine! People always said she was so like me. And how is my forlorn widower? Does he still hate “bonny Bohemia,” and love grubbing for weeds and beetles, and going to bed at ten o'clock, as much as ever? Do you know I've been almost hoping to see him announced as again a Benedick! It would have been such fun to put in an appearance; and now I suppose you won't give me the chance?’—”

“Charlesford, I need not repeat anymore. In your last letter you hinted at—something. I can only hope it has not gone farther, so as to bring fresh pain into your life and another's. The post is going out, so will send all particulars to-morrow; and will merely add that the unfortunate mistake of maid for mistress—which, believe me, I can never sufficiently deplore or forgive myself—was occasioned by Mrs. Charlesford having stayed behind at a station en route, and sent this girl on with her boxes, thus escaping the accident! The subsequent concealment and deception was simply her own devilish mischief, and designed for your annoyance, the letters from her sister, demanding her clothes, &c., being positively dictated by herself.”

And then follow a few kind, warm-hearted words, but I hardly see them; nor a half-veiled hint about the practicability

of a divorce; for *his* writing is underneath, and it is that I am looking for. A great sea is opening and swallowing him up away from me; and I stretch out my hands to catch at any bit of him that remains. It is not much.

“I found this awaiting me when I reached home. All night I have been trying to think how I may best break it to you; and I cannot find a way. Will you come to me once again—but I know you will—where we have so often met before, in Luccombe-wood? Do not hurry, I shall be there all day—only if you can forgive me first. Would I had died before I brought this upon your innocent head!”

That is all. Not one word of what he is suffering, or of love for me; not even my name or his, the name that was to have been mine! There is no softening at all of this blow, more bitter than death. The great sea has rolled in and swept him away, and, with him, all I have in life; and yet I do not weep, there is not even one tear in my eyes as I throw on my clothes, dressing with feverish rapidity.

For I am going to him now. There is no thought of delay, not even of flying to mother first, and seeking comfort and soothing from her in the dull, hopeless agony, which seems as though it were crushing me to the ground. He has said, “Come to me,” and though, of course, he will not be there yet, I must go, and at once. Perhaps, if I waited, if I gave myself time to think, I might go mad, and then——! I dare not even kneel to say my prayers, or raise one cry to the Father who has laid this on me. There will be time enough for that, for that and all else, later.

The whitish, mottled clouds have settled into one sheet of dull, faint gray. The sea is gray too, a still, unrippling calm. The morning air strikes me with a damp, chilly breath as I hasten down the steep lane, past the old chapel at Bonchurch, where there is no sun to-day to cast the shadow of the iron cross upon the grave beneath, along the cliff path and down into the little wood, the wood where John first asked me to be his wife.

What am I going to do or say there? Is it wise to go at all when I do not even know what this is to him, he who once said to me: “Perhaps there were faults on my side too. She had a passionate nature; and she loved me once, I know. I do not care to blame her now that she is dead.”

And she is not dead! It is he who has

died to me. The words are ringing in my ears with a dull, fierce pain when I turn the corner of the huge gray rock which has so often been our trysting-place, and see—ah! why did I think it could be less to him than me?—John waiting for me.

John! but how changed! His hair was brown before, brown, with a golden glimmer in the sun; and now—oh! that long night, while I lay sleeping and he strove “how to break it to me!”

And even now his chief thought is for me; for, as I come into his view, a great light of tenderest love and pity fills all his worn face, and he makes but one step to me.

“My Nellie! My little girl!”

Only that word; but he has taken me into his arms; and the worst is over then. How long we stand there I do not know. He does not speak, only holds me tightly, tightly in that strong clasp, and I cling to him as a child might if they were tearing it from its mother, trembling from head to foot with the silent, passionate weeping which the first sound of his voice had power to loose. A little cold breeze steals over the downs and breaks the vapoury clouds which hang like a pall over our head, letting the clear white light beyond rain through in broken, glimmering rifts. Far away on that leaden sheet of liquid glass, one single line of silver lies sharp as a glittering spear athwart its moveless breast. It has been raining in the night, and the drops hang like a broidery of diamonds over the feathery, deep green moss, and from the purple leaves of the honeysuckle; while somewhere from the damp earth rises a scent of cowslips, breaking my heart beneath its tale of happy spring days gone. I cannot bear it. My whole soul seems to rise up suddenly in passionate rebellion; and I throw back my head, looking with piteous, streaming eyes into John's face as I cry.

“Oh! why should it be? John, I cannot bear it, I *cannot*. I had rather you had killed me than this. She never loved you as I do. She was dead to you years ago. John, don't you care for me? John!”

Care? Writing this, years later, I bow my face upon my hands and pray to be forgiven for that moment's cruelty and injustice; but the blow had been so sudden, and at nineteen misery is apt to be unthinking. Even as it is, the sound of my own voice, harsh in rebellion, startles me

into sudden shame and penitence; for he never answers—I have cut too deep for that—only draws me closer to him and turns his face away; and I—when I feel the tall, muscular frame, which looks as if no storm could shake it, trembling like a reed—when I see great scalding tears falling through the fingers which hide John's bowed face from me—all the wickedness dies out of my heart at once and for ever in one great wave of love and pitying for him, and I nestle to him, trying, though timidly, to draw his hand away and beg him to forgive me. “I did not know what I was saying. I didn't mean it, indeed I did not.”

“I know,” he says gently. “Child, child, do you think I can ever forgive myself? Will you ever look as happy again as you did before I crossed your path? Sweet,” his strong voice breaking with the intensity of its sorrowful tenderness, “it is my doing; mine, who loved you too well to let you be. I might have left the leaf upon the bough, and I plucked it, plucked it only to wither. May God forgive me for it!”

His eyes are looking into mine, haggard with a remorse which is so utterly selfless in its wistful reading of the white, tear-stained face lying on his breast, that strength not my own comes into me to meet and give it rest. How can I let him go away with the burden of a broken heart upon his soul, if any courage of mine can spare him?

“John,” I say, trying to look up bravely, and dry the tears which dim my eyes from his, “they will not wither. Dear John, don't fret about me, please don't. There is nothing to forgive. You loved me. You have never been anything but good to me, and I thank Heaven for it. Yes, even now; for we have done no harm. How could we guess?”

“I might have waited,” he says hoarsely, the anguish in his eyes all unappeased. “You were so happy. I might have left you so.”

“No, for I loved you; and your love has made me happier than I ever was before, and—and for that,” my voice strengthening as I see the tightened lines relax about his mouth, “I would rather have it as it is; I can bear it better so than if you had not loved me. John, won't you believe me? I was mad and wicked just now, and hurt you; but indeed I am stronger than you think. See, I am not crying now! I will try not to cry any

more; no, not even when you are gone. I know it is all over; that I can never, never be your wife now; but I love you all the same; and if it will comfort you, if it will only make you happier, I will try to bear it well, and—and not to breakdown anymore.”

I am near doing it then though; but his eyes are as full as mine, and I thank Heaven he cannot see.

“God bless you,” he says then, very low and softly, “and strengthen you to keep your word, my own true love. ‘If it will comfort me!’ Don’t you know that it is the one hope which can make my life tolerable to me? Nellie, will you give it me as a promise—to try and be happy?”

Happy! but he is looking at me so eagerly I dare not let my lips quiver as I answer, “I will try;” and he cannot speak at first to thank me; only, after a minute he takes my two hands, and bending his head low, kisses them, saying again, “God bless you.”

And then for a little while we are silent. What is there more to say when all is said, or do when all is done? There is no thought with us but of the inevitableness of what has fallen upon us; no thought, despite Major Burt’s hint, which might have shaken some minds less right and true than John’s, that any wrong-doing of hers, anything but death itself, can bring us two together now; or that we shall ever stand hand-in-hand again, as for the last time we stand to-day.

The last time! Yes, does not the very tightening of John’s fingers tell it as they stroke with lingering pressure the head bowed now upon his sheltering arms; while look and speech and even consciousness are all but swept away from me in the pitiful clutching at every second as it passes, in terror of that moment which must take me for ever from the heart which has been mine—the heart on which, even now, I lean for strength.

And I get it. When John says, in a whisper louder to me than the archangel’s trump, “Nellie, kiss me,” I know the time has come. I know too that every minute’s delay only makes it worse for both of us; and there are only silent tears on my face when I lift it to his in that last, lingering kiss. The silver line has faded from the sea, and the hurrying clouds have broken into a small swift rain. John lifts my shawl, which has fallen to the ground, and wraps it round me with that anxious, loving care which once I thought would have made my life easy for evermore. Does he

think of that? Oh! my love, my love, no need, looking in your face, to ask or doubt, and yet through all his grief for me, his keen remorse, his bitter pain and tender, passionate love, not once has any word or sign for self crossed the stainless mirror of my lover’s heart, or wrung one word of rebellion from the lips which will never touch mine again on this side of the grave.

To the last, his one thought is for me; and he knows how to use it, for when he leaves me at my own door he says:

“Darling, you have given me a promise. Remember, when I am gone, my last word to you. I, who love you more than life, who lose more than life in losing you, I trust you to keep that promise to me as you would have kept your marriage-vow.”

And I have. It is fifteen years to-day since that April morning. Fifteen years! and in all that time I have never even seen John’s face again, never heard his voice, or felt the touch of his hand in mine. Nay, and I never shall again till the Father of Mercy calls my tired feet to rest in the haven where, five long winters back, I saw my love had gone before me—gone in the prime of his life, and in the midst of those labours through which alone they, who hoped that silence would teach me to forget, have suffered me to learn that he still existed. And all this while I have gone on living; living from girlhood into womanhood; living as I may live on till old age; not unhappily—he “trusted” me for that. No, nor uselessly—or how could I be worthy to see his face again? only as the tree lives which, stripped by the lightning, yet holds the ivy on its branches, and shelters by its trunk the primroses which grow about its root.

There is no more “story” in my life.

FROM THE CLIFF'S EDGE.

IN THREE SCENES.

BY MRS. CASHEL HOEY.

THE FIRST SCENE.

I WAS young when it all happened. I am old now, but the recollection of it has never faded from my mind, and the details are as vividly and consecutively present to me, as on the sultry summer afternoon when I awoke from my sleep among the golden gorse, and heard the voices of a man and woman speaking close to the spot where I lay.

I had come to the place—a beautiful quiet spot on the coast of Devon—to enjoy a barrister's long vacation. I was wandering about, revelling in the beauty of rock, cliff, and swelling down; of many-coloured strand and sparkling wave-line; of gorgeous cloud and dancing sunshine; the lavish treasures of our fairest coast scenery being for the first time revealed to me. So I had rambled far, and was full of a pleasant weariness when I reached the grassy height of a great bluff, with a red-brown front to it, which stood out from the down, and had a fellow at a little distance, so that they held between them, formed by the inward course of the shore, a silent, shingly, sunny little bay; musical with the slow rhythm of the sun-tipped sea. For miles along and around, upon the land and upon the strand, no human form was visible. The birds and the bees and I had it all to ourselves, as I lay down on the far side of a huge bush whose deep gold blossoms sent forth their delicious perfume on the warm salted air, and after a lazy study of the stately procession of the clouds overhead, fell asleep.

Evening was near when I awoke, and heard the voices and saw the forms of the man and woman. I did not at first realise that I was awake: I could not get up and warn them of my presence. It seemed to me that only my mind awoke, while my limbs lay motionless on the crisp grass. The man and the woman were standing near the verge of the bluff, beyond the end of the bush of golden gorse, and between me and the descending sun-rays. They stood within arm's length of each other, but something in their respective attitudes told of division and dispute between them. The woman faced the man, and looked directly at him; she was quite motionless, and her hands were held in front of her, the fingers joined and the palms turned out. The man stood bareheaded, his hat in one hand, while he passed the other restlessly, and with a peculiar expression of distress, across his forehead and eyes. His figure was tall, his face dark, handsome, and melancholy. The woman was the fairest I had ever then, or have ever since, seen. The Italian painter, whom the people called "Angelic," never painted, when he knelt at his work, a purer, more radiant, more seraphic face than that into which the dark-browed and dark-eyed man gazed, with a look of despair; a face with clear blue eyes, a

broad white brow, rosy cheeks and lips, set in a frame of golden ringlets, which lay profusely on shoulders whose graceful form was set off by a simple white gown. There was a startling contrast between the face and form on which my drowsy eyes opened, and the first of this woman's words which distinctly met my ear.

"I tell you again, Philip, nothing can alter my resolution."

There was confirmation of the sense of the words in her clear, decisive tone.

"You doom me to despair, to—you do not know, you cannot think, what! And all for an idle rumour—you, Grace, promised to me for so long, promised to me with your dead father's consent."

"Not for an idle rumour, for you admit its truth. You have told me you are a gambler."

"I have told you; yes, I have not lied to you, as many a man would have done, and held it no dishonour, with such a terrible stake at risk as mine is—oh Grace, it's everything, it's everything—and am I to be condemned out of my own lips, and given no credit that I have confessed the truth?"

She looked away from him over the shining sea, and her face was paler as she answered him.

"I have said it, Philip—let the subject rest for ever. I marry no man whom I cannot honour. I can honour no man who owns a vice for his master."

"A fine formula, good cut-and-dried morality," he said, with scathing bitterness; "it would not stand a moment against one breath of real love — such love as mine — and well you know it! What could you own to that would make me give you up, or covet you less than I do—answer me that, if you can?"

"I cannot answer you that," she said calmly, "and it need not be answered. You are only making us both wretched. You would have done more wisely, Philip, if you had kept away, as I asked you, and taken my letter for what it meant."

"For my death-warrant!" he said fiercely. "I should have done more wisely! You were always as cold as a stone, Grace, but I declare I think there's some magic over you now, to make you so callously unable to understand what you are doing, to blind you to the fact that you are driving me to despair and ruin, and breaking your most sacred promises, in the name of duty and conscience."

He walked a few paces away from her,

and returned, but he did not attempt to approach her more nearly, and her attitude remained unaltered.

"There's no magic over me," she said. "There's nothing in what I do but common sense and self-knowledge. I could not honour the man who has brought another to ruin and disgrace—a mere boy, whose father trusted him to you, as my father trusted me—and I will never stand before the altar and swear to a lie."

"I owe this to Edward Heathcote, then?"

"You owe my knowledge of the truth to him, indeed, but it's a good debt, Philip. If I had married you and found it out, I should have been a miserable woman. What would you have been?"

"The happiest man on earth! But you never loved me; you never knew the meaning of love."

She said nothing, when he paused for a moment, but moved a step or two away.

"You want to leave me," he said, vehemently; "you grudge me the few minutes you would have denied me, had I not secured them by following you up the sea-road. You shall not leave me thus, Grace. You must give me some hope."

She shook her head sadly.

"By heavens!" he exclaimed, "I don't know what keeps me from pitching you off yonder cliff, and throwing myself after you. At least, no other man could then win what I have lost."

There was a wild look in his face, which might well have frightened a woman alone with him, as this one believed herself to be; but it did not frighten this woman.

"No man shall ever win me," she said, "and you know that. Though I do not indeed understand love as you mean it, I have been your promised wife—according to my father's wish, and I will never be the same to any other man."

"Then give me hope, Grace, give me hope. Let me come to you, a year hence, five years hence, and tell you that no vice is my master; that no man's ruin, nor my own, lies any more at my door. You know it was not I who won Edward Heathcote's money, I only induced him to risk it——"

"And with it all his widowed mother's livelihood!"

"Hush! What did I know about the boy's mother? Let him be; if I'm a gambler, so is he. Only say, Grace—once my own Grace—that I may come to you,

when this shall be the truth, and tell it to you."

His vehemence had changed to a pleading tone, which might have softened the sternest woman, had she but loved him even a little. It did not soften the fair-faced, passionless angel who stood, white-robed, on the grass above the sea. He saw that it did not, and in a moment he took in the whole truth.

"You are glad to be free," he said, in a cold, hard voice; "you are sorry for me, on my account, that I have furnished you with a reason which will satisfy your conscience, and the people whose standard of right and wrong is like your own; but on your own account, you are glad. You never loved me, even the little that you could love! Is this the truth, or is it not? Speak, I have told the truth, to my own destruction. Do you tell it now—it cannot harm you!"

There was not a gleam of colour in her face, but her eyes still looked at him steadily, while she replied:

"I will tell you the truth. I thought I loved you enough, but I have never been happy in the prospect of being your wife. I was afraid—not so much of you as of myself, and of the future. But—but I would have married you if I could."

"This is truth, and I thank you for it. Yes, you never loved me. You cannot conceive of love, neither can you comprehend despair. Well, well; it is no fault of yours. It is all over; I make no further prayer to you. I will go, Grace, and leave you in the peace you have asked me for; I will leave England at once."

"You need not, if you only wish to avoid me," she said, with a cold gentleness. "I am going to travel, with a companion—with Mrs. Heathcote."

He started as if he had been stung.

"That you may keep my ill-doing fresh in your memory! That one of my victims may be always before your eyes! Heathcote has well revenged himself on me."

"Not so, he has taken no revenge; the circumstances, not he, betrayed you. And I do not want to remember, but so far as I can, to undo what you have done."

He struck his heel deep into the springy grass, and went quickly away from her, then returned, and threw himself upon his knees at her feet, holding her white gown convulsively with one hand, and clutching with the other at her interlaced fingers. What did he read in the fair face, hidden from me for the first time, as it bent

slightly over him? Was it fear of him? Was it avoidance of him? I cannot tell; at least it was not hope for him, for he loosed his hold, and springing up from the ground, he rushed to the side of the cliff and disappeared, taking, I afterwards found, a steep, ladder-like path, of whose existence I had previously been unaware, to the sea-shore.

The beautiful woman stood still for a while where he had left her, and her face was turned away from me, but after a little she began to pace slowly to and fro on the side of the great bush of golden gorse opposite to where I lay, and I could see her features more plainly than before. As I lay and looked at her, wondering how the interview just ended had come about, how long it had lasted before I had borne my part in it of unintentional spy, she lifted her arms and spread them abroad, like one relieved of an oppression, and raising her blue eyes to the blue sky, she murmured, with a great sigh:

"Yes, he is right! I am glad to be free!"

Then, with a wave of her hand—unconscious, I am sure—towards the side on which the man had disappeared from her sight, she turned and walked with a swift and steady step along the sweep of the brow of the cliff, in the opposite direction, until a sudden dip in the graceful green line of the down hid her white-robed figure from my sight.

THE SECOND SCENE.

I TOOK great delight in the shingly strip of coast forming the little bay, with the brown-red fronted cliffs for its protecting arms. Studying it in every aspect, and under every light, I found myself, in the early morning, on the edge of the eastern cliff, lying along the grass, resting on my elbow, and gazing at the lovely lines of growing light upon the sea. The stillness of the morning was deeply impressive, and the solitude of the scene was complete. I leaned over the edge of the great bluff, and looked down; the clearness of the air was such that the many-tinted pebbles were all distinct beneath, and every ridge and hollow of the bluff was sharp-cut to my sight. The cliff was sheer until within about twenty feet of the beach, where an irregular mass of reddish earth and creviced, sharp-pointed rock broke its uniformity, making a little picture all to itself. It had fallen, no doubt, at some immemorial period, and lay there, securely

above high-water mark, though sometimes, it might be, touched by the spray of winter seas, in storms which now seemed impossible of occurrence, mere bad dreams to the gazer on the serene loveliness revealing itself to the new-risen summer day.

A slight sound broke the silence—the sound of oars—and past the edge of the western cliff there glided into sight a small boat, in which three men were seated. One of them was rowing. In another minute the three men had landed, and were drawing the boat up on the beach. That done, one of them took out of the boat something which he placed under his arm, and the three walked slowly, and at a considerable distance from each other, across the beach in the direction of the eastern cliff. Two of the three men I had never seen before, but the figure and air of the third, who walked on the inner side nearest to the cliff over which I leant, were strangely familiar to me. His face I could not distinctly see, but his height and gait were those of the man who had talked with the fair woman, the man whom she had called Philip; and when he took his hat off, and carried it in his hand, I could see his dark, flowing hair, worn long, as was the fashion of those days. The man who walked upon the outer side, keeping near the sea, was younger, and slighter, and his hair was light; I could not distinguish his features. The third, who had rowed the boat, and now walked between the other two, was a stout, middle-aged person; and it seemed to me that the three maintained unbroken silence; for, if they had spoken, the voices, though not the words, would have reached me in the serene stillness.

The coming of the boat, the landing of the men, the passing of the three silent figures across the bright-lined little beach, had indeed broken up the still-life effect of the scene which I had been enjoying with an intensity that held me motionless, and seemed to suspend even thought itself; but they had invested it with a keener interest. Curiosity respecting the newly-added human features of the scene awoke within me. Who were these three men, what were they doing there, and why had he whom the fair woman called Philip lingered in the place where he had suffered discomfiture, which he had held so crushing and complete? I asked myself these questions, feeling their idleness; and while they were passing through my mind, the

three men were nearing the foot of the eastern cliff. When they had reached it, they were no longer visible to me; and I supposed that they would pass beyond the jutting mass of rock below, and continue their walk along the curving shore. But a strange thing now happened. The young man only advanced on the right beyond the mass of rock; the man whom the fair woman had called Philip reappeared on the left of it, and retraced his steps for a short distance in the direction from which he had come. The third man remained invisible to me. The two stood motionless, their faces turned towards the sea, which now lay sparkling under the fully diffused morning light. Then the third man stepped out from the shelter of the rock upon the beach, and laying the object which he had hitherto carried under his arm upon the shingle—I could make out that it was a box—he knelt on one knee beside it, apparently examining its contents with careful closeness. While the three were thus severally within my vision, a glimpse of the significance of the scene came to me, undefined, dim, but startling; and without any conscious seeking for it. At the same moment, I became aware that a steep and difficult path, more narrow and undefended than that on the side of the western cliff, by which the man called Philip had descended to the beach after his interview with the fair woman, opened close upon the spot on which I lay, and led to the shingly strand; the lower end of it being only a few yards on the far side of the mass of rock at the foot of the projecting cliff. Now, for the first time, the sound of voices reached me, and I saw that the third man had set down the box upon the beach, had gone up to Philip, and was speaking earnestly with him. Eagerly, but in vain, I strained my ears to catch what was said, nothing but vague sounds reached me; and I glanced away from the two, to where, on the other side of the barrier of rock, the light-haired young man stood, his slim figure sharply defined, with his arms folded across his breast. A sea-bird flew overhead, and, as he lifted his face upwards, looking after its flight, I saw him distinctly for the first time. Then I returned to the effort to hear what the other two men were saying. It was vain, but I witnessed an action on the part of him whom I call, for clearness, the third man, which in an instant made my dim suspicion of the significance of the scene clear vision, and turned my idle curiosity into active

horror. The third man placed something in the hand of Philip, and immediately stepped out of sight, reappearing a moment later on the far side of the barrier of rock, and going up to the light-haired man. During the brief interval, Philip slowly lifted his right arm, and stretched it out laterally from the shoulder, thus enabling me to see that the object in his right hand was a pistol. He held the pistol thus, he being invisible to the other two, for a few seconds, then allowed his arm to drop slowly into its former position, and again stood perfectly motionless. A glance on the other side showed me the young man with light hair, also holding a pistol, and the third walking away from both down the beach.

This, then, was what the scene signified, this was the meaning of the human intrusion upon the gladness of the summer morning, shed over land and sea! These two men had come hither to set their respective lives upon the chance of a duel, to kill or to be killed; this was the outcome of a fierce and deadly quarrel. A horror of duelling was comparatively a new-fashioned sentiment when I was a young man, and I was hardly then a convert to it; but I was no less quick to perceive that this was a duel under improper conditions, than I was to discern the true state of the case. Here was an infringement of the laws of duelling itself, as well as a breach of the law of the land. Here was but one second! Was the man mad, to double thus his tremendous responsibility and risk? Was there even fair play in the case? At least I might secure that there should be; for I would hasten down by the cliff-path to the beach, and offer my services as second to the younger man.

With a last glance over the edge of the cliff, which showed me the solitary second, apparently selecting a space of level ground a few yards in advance of the rock, and the two principals, still invisible to each other and each in his former position, I began the steep and difficult descent. I had not called to the men below, but I thought it probable that the third man would have seen me as I sprang up from the grassy verge and began to scramble down, dislodging a quantity of small fragments of stone and earth, which went rumbling down before me. As I hurried on, I doubted the wisdom of my first impulse. How would my interference be taken? The man who was incurring this great risk was evidently in the

confidence of both the others equally, and must be perfectly well aware of what he was about. These second thoughts did not, however, lead me to pause for a moment in descending the path, which was much more difficult and winding than it had appeared from above, and whose sudden depth, sinking between rocky banks on either side, hid the scene below from my sight for several seconds—an interval of surprising length in such a situation. When the rough path lay again on the surface of the cliff face, and the three men came again into my sight, the scene had changed. The solitary second had chosen and stepped the ground, and was in the act of placing the principals. I threw myself forward, with some wild inexplicable impulse, to attract their attention, but the next instant recoiled in terror, natural and irresistible, for myself. A yawning gulf was beneath me; the cliff had been riven asunder at the point of the path which I had reached, and where it projected slightly, forming a narrow shelf; the rift was not noticeable from above, and I had taken no alarm or warning from the disused appearance of the footway. I had narrowly escaped destruction, but with the shock of the escape came its certainty, and came also the sense of my utter powerlessness as regarded the scene passing before my eyes. I must either scramble back to the top of the cliff, or remain upon the narrow shelf of rock which I had reached, and thence witness what was about to occur. My heart was beating too fast and my head was throbbing too giddily, for me to attempt to climb up again the path I had come down, and I steadied myself as well as I could against the shelving side of the declivity, and crooking my arm round a piece of stone which jutted out opportunely within my reach, I waited with a sickening sense of suspense and helplessness.

I had not long to wait. From my point of view I could see the face of the light-haired young man, and that of the second; but Philip's face I could not see. He was placed so that I saw his figure sideways, and the second stood between the principals, and beyond them on the sea-side. They were placed at an equal distance on either side of the mass of rock I have before described, which formed the immediate background of the terrible and ominous group. I had only a moment in which to take it all in with a glance, when a handkerchief dropped from the upraised

hand of the second, and two pistol-shots rang sharply on my ear. In that instant of time, I saw that the man called Philip had fired in the air, and that he was hit somewhere in the side, it seemed to me, by the ball from the light-haired man's pistol. For a space too brief to measure, he stood still, then swayed backwards, dropped his pistol, felt rapidly with the fingers of his left hand for the exact position of the wound, and, with inconceivable quickness, plunged with the right hand into the same spot some sharp weapon, drawn I could not tell from where. I saw the shining of the thin, skewer-like steel; the whole action was invisible to the two other spectators. I saw the sad, stricken face of the young man as he beheld his enemy stagger, just as the second ran up to him, and I saw the last movement by which, with a desperate exertion of his will, the self-murderer furtively flung the weapon which had served his dreadful purpose away from him. The weapon fell among the crevices of the mass of rock, and at the same instant the man dropped, in a heavy, senseless heap, upon the shingle beach. A little longer my strained senses served me, but when the two living men bent over the dead man, seeking for the life which had fled, they failed me; and I saw and heard no more.

THE THIRD SCENE.

I WAS in Paris. The season, late autumn, was one at which I had no business to be in Paris, but I was on my way back to England, after a spell of travel which had been rendered necessary by an illness whose effects hung about me, and made me unfit for my work. They made me indifferent to it also, I did not fret at my idleness, I gave in to it, and was pretty lethargic about everything, or had been until I reached Paris, and then I revived very much, and felt that I was going home to be all right again. But I had been especially forbidden to travel rapidly, or incur any unnecessary fatigue, and I contemplated a rest of fully a fortnight's duration before I should put myself into the malle poste for Calais. I write of the days before railroads on the other side of the Channel. Paris was in one of its peaceful intervals, so brief during the earlier years of this century, and though it had then most of its old characteristic features remaining, and was far from the elaborate modern prettiness which it put on with the Second Empire, it was the

most charming place within my knowledge. I had been rambling about for hours, and had turned into a then famous café in the Palais Royal to dine. The room was of the ordinary crimson and gold description, with plenty of light, and a sprinkling of foreigners among the habitués of the place. I had hardly taken possession of a little table in a corner, and ordered my dinner and wine, when I perceived that my nearest neighbour was also an Englishman. He was a jolly-looking, middle-aged man, dressed like a Briton of the period in every item, and he ate his dinner—he had reached its concluding stage—with a comical fortitude amusing to observe, while he kept up a subdued monologue of growl at everything; and yet he was plainly good-natured, and I saw that the liberality of his subsequent gratuity surprised even a Parisian waiter into an expression of genuine satisfaction. He had propped up an English newspaper against a water-bottle, secured it with a roll, and, regardless of observation, was reading as he ate. I had not seen an English newspaper for some days, and I suppose the covetousness that I felt expressed itself in my look, as I watched my neighbour while he paid the waiter, collected his hat, stick, and gloves, and folded up his newspaper prior to putting it in his pocket, for he paused in the latter action, and held out the paper to me. He had recognised my nationality, as I had recognised his.

“Perhaps you’d like to see an English newspaper?” he said, with the bashful abruptness with which a man of that peculiar type does a polite action.

“Thank you, I should, very much indeed; but you are going away, and I shall be depriving you of it.”

“Not at all, not at all, I’ve read it through. There’s nothing in it, but it is English—and that’s something here. Very happy, I’m sure,” and he departed with great rapidity; the very “moral” of an unwilling tourist, who packs all his prejudices in his portmanteau when he comes abroad.

The newspaper was four days old, but none the less was it new to me, and I, in my turn, perused its columns while I dined. There was no stirring public news in it, and it did not deal with legal business; so that I too might have considered that there was nothing in it, had not my attention been attracted by the name of the beautiful seaside place in Devonshire, where I had witnessed from

the edge of the cliff the tragic scene of the duel and the suicide. It was singular, perhaps, that I had not thought much about the circumstance ever since; but then I had been ill, and illness pushes everything else into the background. I remembered it clearly enough as I read; I could write the exact words of the paragraph here, but that would be needless; it was what used to be called a penny-a-liner’s paragraph, and this was the simple substance of it.

The public were reminded that within the current week the accused persons in the famous duelling case at D—, who had been committed for trial by the local magistrate on a charge of murder, and in whose case true bills had been found, would be brought up for trial at Exeter. The circumstances were recapitulated. Edward Heathcote and John Jermyn had been arrested in the act of escaping from the country, after the discovery of the dead body of Sir Philip Trent, with whom they had left a certain village on the coast, on the morning of the same day, in a boat hired from the person who identified the two living men and the dead man. The public excitement about the matter was intense, as Sir Philip Trent was a well-known and popular man in the county, and the duel, if duel it were at all, had been not only illegal but irregular, there having been but one second present, and there being no evidence of any kind to corroborate the extraordinary story told by the prisoners. Mr. Jermyn, the person who had acted as second according to his own account, was unknown in Devonshire, a circumstance which seemed to tell against him rather unreasonably, and it was alleged that he had been solicited to act in the matter by both parties, but that the cause of the quarrel between Sir Philip Trent and Mr. Heathcote had been concealed from him by common consent. Concerning that cause, painful rumours, seriously affecting the character of the dead or murdered man, were rife, and the name of a young lady of great personal attractions, and whose family had long occupied a position of the highest respectability and consideration in the county, had been injuriously mentioned. In fact, Mr. Heathcote was charged with the doubly odious offence of having cheated Sir Philip Trent in love and at the gaming-table; and the public anxiety that an example should be made of offenders against the law which had

been passed against duelling, was much inflamed by the peculiarly treacherous and disgraceful features of the present case. Jermyn, the accessory to this crime, might or might not have been intimate with Sir Philip Trent—for that there was no evidence beyond his own assertion—that he was a constant associate of Heathcote could be amply proved. The young lady, so unfortunately implicated in this fatal affair, had undoubtedly been for some time engaged to be married to Sir Philip Trent, with the approbation of her relatives, and it was currently reported that the quarrel between Sir Philip and Mr. Heathcote had originated in the discovery made by the former that his betrothed was on the point of eloping with the latter. Public sympathy was entirely with the victim of this double treachery, and great curiosity was felt with respect to Miss Grace Durant. Was she or was she not to be summoned as a witness at the trial? Whether she would appear, summoned or not summoned, was another and an equally debated question, for she had left England immediately after the discovery of Sir Philip Trent's death, and before there was any mention of her in connection with the matter. The case was to be fought earnestly on both sides, the counsel for the Crown and for the defence being all gentlemen of great distinction in the profession of the law.

As I read this paragraph, all the clouds that had gathered over my memory dispersed themselves, and the events of the summer day, when I lay hidden alongside the bush of golden gorse, and those of the morning when I gazed over the cliff's edge at the scene on the beach at D—, came back to me with startling distinctness. These men were not murderers. The duel had been a fair duel; the solitary second had done his duty well; the dead man had been slain by his own hand; and more than all this, the tale of the provocation, of the origin of the quarrel which had had so deadly an issue, was false. The betrothed bride of Sir Philip Trent had broken with him for no other lover's sake; the accused man had been Sir Philip Trent's victim, not his betrayer. The theory of the circumstances was false throughout. And on the trial, human justice might prove as fallible as in all the preliminaries to it; public opinion had been mistaken and misguided. I sat pondering upon these things, after I had dined, so long that at last the waiters at the café

began to fidget about me, and to give me hints to which I could not remain inattentive, that I was occupying my red velvet corner, and monopolising my white marble table for an unreasonable time. All of a sudden it occurred to me that, the case being as I knew it to be, I had no business to stay any longer in Paris, my place was where all this error and misapprehension existed; to clear them away by telling the truth as I knew it to be; and to remove an unmerited stigma from innocent men. What did I here? A feverish impatience to get away seized upon me. I calculated the time within which, by travelling at a rate which would outrage all the proprieties of my own particular case, I could arrive at Exeter before the close of the trial. If the time for its commencement, announced in the newspaper I had just read, were correct, it would be impossible that I could arrive before it should have commenced. I returned to my lodgings, with the fullest sense of the absolute necessity of an immediate start upon me, made all my arrangements for leaving Paris at an early hour on the following morning, and had no sooner done so, than I felt an extraordinary lethargy creeping over me, which made me apprehend a physical impossibility of doing the thing I wanted and was resolved to do. How this determined itself, I cannot at this distance of time explain, nor did I very clearly know then. Suffice it that I carried out my intention. I did leave Paris on the following morning, and I did travel through to London, without an interval of rest; an achievement which meant a good deal at that time, though it is so insignificant nowadays.

After a brief delay, I left London for Exeter. Only a portion of the journey could then be performed by railway; and I had the satisfaction of learning, on my arrival in the Devonian capital, that the trial of Heathcote and Jermyn, for the murder of Sir Philip Trent, was not yet concluded. It was expected to come to an end in a few hours, and the excitement in the town was intense, public opinion setting dead against the prisoners. I enquired who was the judge trying the accused men, and learned that he was an acquaintance of my own. I hurried down to the court, and found myself hopelessly barred from the entrance by the crowd, and unable for some time to ascertain what was going on within. When at length the state of the

proceedings was reported to the multitude outside, among which I waited, the news was that the leading counsel for the Crown was replying on the case. Immediately afterwards would come the judge's charge, and the finding of the verdict. I recall nothing in all my life more distinctly than the feeling of desperation which took possession of me as I struggled and implored, raving myself hoarse in my appeals to someone in some sort of official place and authority to get me a hearing from the people inside, to get it made known that an important witness, an eye-witness was there, who could clear the accused men, not indeed of a breach of the letter of the law, but of the actual death of Sir Philip Trent. In the strife and confusion of the moment I did not know, and I never subsequently learned, who it was that snatched from my hand, lifted high among the swarming crowd, the paper on which I had written, and signed with my name, my earnest entreaty that the judge would order me a hearing; but someone was at length moved, by my unceasing appeals, to do this, and to send the memorandum, through scores of hands, into the court. It was done, and before I could make out how it happened clear to my perception, a way was made for me through the crowd by the constables in attendance, and I was led along the open space into the presence of the judge, the jury, the bar, the closely-packed audience, and the prisoners.

Yes, there they were, worn and altered by imprisonment, and dread, and the long-felt shadow of death; but the same men whom I had seen upon that fair summer's morning, from the cliff's edge, the stout middle-aged man who had carried the box under his arm, and the light-haired young man who had looked so sad and startled, when the shot he had intended to do but little harm, had apparently killed Sir Philip Trent. Every face in the crowd was turned towards me in enquiring surprise, and the same look was in their faces. Who is he? What has he to do with it? What brings him here, if even he has anything to do with it, at this time, the eleventh hour, indeed? All these questioning eyes confused and flurried me, but still I told my story, and intelligibly. I directed my narrative to the judge, and I remember that I kept to the point and preserved my composure only by concentrating my mind on him, so forcing myself to disregard the presence of all

the other people, that soon it seemed to me that he and I were alone in all that space, filled as it was. I told my story, and my astonishment was great when I perceived that its first effect was to produce incredulity, not only on the part of the judge, and the jury, and the bar, but on that of the prisoners. They looked at one another, and shook their heads, and the others shook their heads, and whispered, and looked at me. Then the questioning of me began. The judge admitted me as a witness, notwithstanding the irregularity of the proceeding, and I was sworn. I had not foreseen that there could be any difficulty in accepting so simple a statement as mine, terrible as were the facts, of what had happened before my eyes, but the difficulty was reasonably enough presented. The accused man and his companion had never pleaded any doubt that the shot fired from Heathcote's pistol had caused Sir Philip Trent's death, and the result of the coroner's inquest had been to that effect. The prisoners, who, if my account of my position were true, must have seen me, denied, through their counsel, any knowledge of my presence; and I had taken no steps at the time to make the truth, according to my version of it, known. I could not explain, I could only reiterate my statement. The three men, absorbed in their deadly task, and believing themselves secure from detection by any human eye, had not seen me, because they had not looked for me; the coroner and his jury, and the village doctor, who examined the slain man, had not seen anything in the wound beyond the hole made by a pistol ball, because they had not looked for anything beyond it; this was all I could suggest in explanation. It impressed the judge, and perhaps the counsel for the prisoners, but the spectators received it with murmurs of derision—which the court suppressed—and I could see that I was failing in my enterprise, and that the prisoners had not been inspired with any hope or confidence by what had taken place. There was a consultation between the bench and the bar, and I felt that I was about to be ordered to stand down, when a happy thought struck me.

"Would your lordship," I asked, "be better inclined to give credit to my story, if the weapon with which the man killed himself were found and produced in court?"

"That would make a great difference certainly, and be a strong confirmation of your narrative," replied the judge.

"The weapon, my lord, was flung into the mass of rock and earth in front of the foot of the cliff. The rock is full of crevices, and it is above high-water mark; the weapon is, in all probability, there still. Adjourn the trial, have the place searched. I will remain here, under the eyes of the authorities, while that is being done, and I venture to predict that the truth of my statement will be vindicated."

Another consultation took place, and the result was that my proposal was agreed to. The trial was adjourned, the prisoners were removed, wondering and incredulous, orders were given for the proper persons to proceed at once to D——, and commence their search early on the next morning, and I went to my hotel, escorted by a couple of constables, and followed by a mob more anxious than polite.

Early in the afternoon of the following day, the persons who had been sent to make search for the dagger among the rock crevices at D—— returned, bringing with them a rusty dagger. The weapon was of the kind I had described, a thin piece of steel resembling a skewer, set in a silver cross-handle. When the handle was rubbed clean, the name and arms of Sir Philip Trent were found to be engraved upon it. When I entered the court on the resumption of the trial, this weapon was in the hands of the counsel for the younger prisoner, who was exhibiting it to the jury, with an air which happily combined confidence in its effect upon his own case, with contempt for the limited intelligence of the counsel for the Crown. The jury acquitted the prisoners, and the opportunity for a great moral lesson on the law against duelling was lost.

I am told that, though my story is a tolerably consecutive one, and my recollection of all its details is very clear, for the work of the memory of an old man like me, there are many incongruities in it, it is unfinished, and it has lapses in it, which need filling up. I cannot arrange those incongruities, nor fill those lapses, nor can I finish my story. Is any story ever finished? Especially when it is not a story but a dream. Nothing in all my life is more real to me than the scene which I saw from the cliff's edge at D——, and yet they assure me it is only a dream, a fever phantom of the time when I lay ill for weeks after a fall which I had in climbing up a sea road in that neighbourhood, on the very day which I cherish and

bless for ever in the calendar of my memory, beyond all days of my life, except one, my wedding-day. It was the 10th of June, and I had that morning seen for the first time the fairest woman in all the world, the white-robed angel of my story, my dream, and my life. Her name is Grace, and mine is Edward Heathcote.

THREE MONTHS AFTER DATE.

BY THE

AUTHORS OF "WHEN THE SHIP COMES HOME."

THERE is, on high ground, a southern suburb, lying, as the auctioneers say, "well positioned" between Tooting Beck and Clapham Commons. The air is fresh, the soil gravel, the society eminently respectable. Bankers, merchants, and City men generally choose it for their home; but, from the number of them settled there, the locality would seem to exercise an especial claim over the produce brokers. The late Sir Francis Bigsby, Bart., alderman, having passed the chair, and produce broker of Mincing-lane, when he moved from Highbury, selected Clapham-park for his residence.

"The Limes," a square, well-built, in-artistic, most comfortable house, seated in the midst of some ten or a dozen acres of garden, grounds, and paddock, was one of the hereditaments he devised to his young and handsome widow; and to this house, after a couple of years of mourning for Sir Francis, she took home Mr. Farquhar, a quiet gentleman, who had left the army early in life, a widower, with one son, seventeen years of age.

Farquhar's friends thought he had made a good match, and so he had in taking himself and his four hundred a year to The Limes. After a short experience of the lady, he found his own level—the little smoking-room she allotted to him, and "that nasty pipe" he was so much attached to.

He attended her ladyship to the parties about Streatham, and Balham, and Clapham, and was very uncomfortable generally among the people he met there, reading the next Saturday morning in the local prints that Lady Bigsby and Mr. Farquhar were "observed" at Mrs. Alderman's garden-party, or were among the guests at Mrs. Turtle's fancy dress ball. An entertainment of this kind proved fatal. By his wife's command, Mr. Farquhar assumed

the character of Winter on a very cold night, as part of a quartet in which her ladyship appeared in a Roman peasant dress as Autumn, and her two nieces as Spring and Summer. The effect produced at the time was good, Lady Bigsby receiving the congratulations of her acquaintance upon one of her happiest ideas as she sailed about the rooms at the ball, with a basket of fruit on her arm, and a dress trimmed with autumn leaves, bunches of grapes, and miniature sheaves of corn. But, a fortnight after, her husband died of pleurisy, and she was a second time a widow with a stepson, aged thirty-one—"somewhere abroad"—and two nieces—one married and settled at Streatham, the other living with her aunt.

Lady Bigsby took the death of her second husband as resignedly as she did that of her first; but Rose Maxwell—a girl with a soft heart—mourned long the loss of her uncle.

Thus much by way of prologue. I will now divide my story into three scenes, which we will call, if you please, October, June, and September.

October: scene—the drawing-room at The Limes: present—Lady Bigsby, in a Marie Stuart cap, with long tulle streamers over her shoulders, and crape covered gown. Rose Maxwell, simply clad in merino of sombre tint; in fact, in what is called half-mourning.

They were expecting the arrival of Arthur Farquhar from South America.

Taking up a telegram which lies on a work-table near her, Lady Bigsby reads: "He says he shall 'arrive Clapham Junction 9.30.'"

Rose: "It is a quarter to ten now; he ought soon to be here."

"If he is like his poor father, child, he won't hurry; and the South-Western trains are generally late, too. I almost wish now I had sent the carriage, but I do not like having Robert waiting about at a station. A cab will do just as well."

"It would have looked attentive, aunt."

"Nonsense, child," said the matron, giving the folds of her gown an impatient shake; "young men who have been roughing it, as they call it, all over the world, and never, I daresay, seeing, much less riding in, a civilised vehicle, can ride in anything."

"I do wonder what he will be like," said Rose demurely, to herself more than

to her aunt, for she was a young lady who took a healthy interest in the affairs of life; and the prospect of seeing Cousin Arthur for the first time, and under circumstances into which, later on, some little element of romance might be imported, made her young heart beat quicker. She loved a bit of romance, as all honest young Englishwomen do, and here was a stranger dropping down from the clouds into the drawing-room at Clapham, who might turn out to be—anything. So she questioned her aunt to fill up time. "What do you think he will look like, aunt?"

"Heaven knows, child. When he went off—came in as cool as a cucumber one fine morning (I recollect as well as if it were yesterday) and told his father—he never honoured me with his conversation—that he did not like the City, though the late Sir Francis's partner took him at my request, and informed us he was going abroad. If I had been his father he would not have gone. I did not interfere between them, and his father, who always gave way to him, shed a few tears and let him go. Arthur said he did not like the City. I believe," said her ladyship, with some trace of hardness in her tone, "he did not like ME!"

"Oh, dear aunt, that could not have been it."

"Perhaps not, my dear. I may be wrong," replied Lady Bigsby, in a tone that expressed injury and infallibility. "You asked me," she added, after a moment's pause, "what I thought he would be like."

"Yes, aunt; it is curious we have no likeness of him. You would have thought he would have sent his father a photograph or something."

"Nothing of the kind, my dear; I should never have thought it. It would be unlike a Farquhar to do it. His father thought photographs were folly. I had to make him sit, or he never would have done it. When Arthur went away he was a pasty-looking lad, just turned eighteen, a hobbledohoy, tall and clumsy; blushed if you asked him to ring the bell, and, like his poor father, was without the least taste for society or anything proper."

Rose's face fell. She said, "Oh dear, aunt, I'm afraid I shan't like him at all."

"It won't matter, my dear. He is only coming here till he gets his father's affairs settled, and some papers handed over to him—a business I can get through in ten minutes—he will go then. I never told

you much about him, for I felt sure he would never come back. I did not expect," wiping a dry eye, "to lose—his—poor—father—and nothing but that would have brought him back, I'm certain."

"Why, aunt?"

"Why, child, because when a Farquhar has been away from civilisation for twelve or thirteen years, he prefers the bush to society. I daresay he is married; perhaps to a negress, for anything we know."

"Oh!" sighed Rose, horror-stricken, having always pictured Cousin Arthur a little rough, perhaps, but a bachelor.

"She may be with him, and a batch of skewbald chickens into the bargain, for he never writes what I call a satisfactory letter, or tells you one word about his doings in a straightforward way."

Rose looked grave, for she felt she could not kiss black children or love them.

"He can't bring her here, my dear—if she exists that is—he knows me too well."

"What did he go to do abroad?" asked Rose.

"Hunt butterflies, my dear."

"Butterflies!" cried Rose in astonishment.

"Yes, those fine ones there are abroad, like the Suttons have got in all the glass cases in their music-room."

"What a queer thing to do."

"He meant to catch them and sell them. I recollect he showed his father some figures on a piece of paper; a sort of profit-and-loss account, with a large balance of profit of course. It was just the sort of wild-goose chase a Farquhar might be expected to set out on. When he was here he was always out at his knees and elbows with bird-nesting or something. I believe at school they called him Buffon."

"Did he succeed?"

"I don't know; but I know his father would have sent him two hundred a year, if I would have let him do it, but I explained that we really must put down the carriage if he persisted, and of course he gave in."

"Poor Uncle Farquhar!" sighed Rose, inconsequently; "a quarter-past ten, aunt, I wonder if he will come?"

"I should not be the least surprised, my dear, if he telegraphed from some outlandish place or other—his poor father had that trick of telegraphing—to say he would not come till to-morrow, or some other day, after giving us all this anxiety and trouble."

"Ah!" cried Rose, jumping up from her seat, "here he is."

The sound of a vehicle stopping on the gravel outside was heard, and Lady Bigsby and Rose went downstairs to the hall. At the door stood Arthur Farquhar. Rose, who had the quick perception of her sex, took this comer from foreign parts in at a glance, as she stood a few paces behind her aunt. Tall, strong, brown, with a bushy beard, large bright eyes, a big diamond ring, and a shooting-coat.

"Well, Arthur," said his stepmother, giving him her hand and holding a cheek in readiness, if required, for a filial kiss that was not forthcoming; "back at last. Welcome home—you will make this place your home."

Though young Farquhar did not kiss his relative, he shook hands with her in the heartiest fashion, taking both her hands in his strong grasp.

"I must introduce you, Arthur," said her ladyship, releasing herself, "to my niece, who, you know, lives with me. Rose, my dear, your cousin Arthur."

"Miss Maxwell," said Farquhar, "I am delighted, it is charming to see an English girl again."

The servant and the cabman were busy with a huge pile of luggage that covered the roof of the cab; the housemaid was fussily doing nothing behind her mistress's portly figure, after the fashion of those young ladies.

"Be careful with that case, give it to me. Snakes, aunt, beauties, present for the Zoo; never seen any like them before."

"Snakes!" screamed Lady Bigsby.

"Yes—perfectly harmless—in their cage."

"This," said he, disengaging a chain under the cab, "is a monkey for you; great pet of mine."

"A monkey for me! Oh Arthur, as well make the place a menagerie at once."

"With your permission I will," he answered coolly, but with perfect good humour. "I've a mongoose, and an armadillo, and all sorts of things coming along from Southampton, I promise you. My nigger will turn up with 'em all in town to-morrow."

"Nigger—in town—to-morrow!" gasped Lady Bigsby, overcome. "I don't know what we shall do with them, or him."

"Here, Susan, take these rugs and sticks, my girl. There; all out. Now, cabby," said the traveller, standing on the steps, with the pet monkey, viciously

showing his teeth, crouched between his legs, "what's your fare?"

"Leave it to you, sir."

"I'll have nothing left to me. Legal fare, not a copper over."

"Four shillings, sir."

"Nonsense;" and he opened the door of the cab and studied the table of fares.

Lady Bigsby looked blank, and poor Rose was dreadfully disappointed with the new cousin.

"Inside the radius—outside the radius. Is Clapham inside or outside the radius, Lady Bigsby?"

"Upon my word I can't say," her ladyship replied with dignity. "I usually drive to the station in the carriage. Ask Robert."

"Quite so. Seven packages outside at twopence each, one-and-two. Fare two shillings, three-and-twopence, driver. You see I have not forgotten English money. And now," turning to Lady Bigsby, "what shall we do with the monkey? The snakes must be put by the kitchen fire, they'll take care of themselves. Where shall we put Pizarro?"

"Heaven knows," exclaimed the lady of the house. "Has he not got a cage?"

"Does not want one, do you, well-bred 'Zarro? If you will excuse me, ladies, Robert shall show me to my room. Bring up that bag. I'll take Pizarro with me, as Robert and Susan—is it Susan?"

"Mary, sir."

Robert and Mary look rather shy at him.

"And then I will bring him down, and he can have a bit of supper with us."

"With us!" exclaimed Lady Bigsby, as the traveller, led by Robert, strode up the stairs with his monkey on his shoulder; "well, my dear, what do you think of this? I declare I am nonplussed."

It was five minutes after twelve, when the two ladies found themselves seated before the fire in Lady Bigsby's dressing-room.

"Aunt!"

"Rose!"

And they pressed each other's hands in sympathy; but, being women, were not silent long.

"I declare I feel already as if I were not in my own house; he is awful, simply. The idea of my being set to crack nuts for that odious ape, and doing it."

"Mary says the cook will give notice in the morning, if the snakes remain on the premises, and of course Mary would go too."

"He shall not turn my establishment upside down, and make me the laughing-stock of the neighbourhood, I can promise you that. Mr. Farquhar must transact his business with me and go. I could not put up with it. I am not used to a menagerie or the habits of wild animals. What the Suttons will say when they hear of the monkey affair I don't know."

"I don't altogether dislike him though, aunt. He is outré, that I'll allow, but rather agreeable."

"Do you think it agreeable to have a wrangle going on with a cabman at your very door about a matter of sixpence?"

"No, aunt, certainly not, and I don't defend his conduct at all."

"I should hope not. Such a thing never occurred at my house before. What's that? I hope those snakes are not racing round my kitchen."

Rose listened at the door. "I think it is only Robert fastening the doors. What I was going to say was, I do not think he is mean at all. I think he is only determined not to be cheated, and—and—businesslike."

"Then he is the first of his family that ever was. Sir Francis Bigsby was businesslike, but then he was brought up to it. Arthur's father had not the remotest conception of it."

"Then I think he is very unlike his father."

"From what little he vouchsafed to tell us, it is pretty plain that he has not carried on a very profitable business abroad, Rose; and I believe, as soon as he has settled what there is to settle of his father's affairs, he will be off back again. And," said her ladyship, with severity, "as soon as he is gone I'll give the monkey to the first organ-man I meet who will take it. And now, child, it is time we left off talking; though I am sure I shan't close my eyes with boa-constrictors in the kitchen, a monkey in an adjoining room, and the prospect of an armadillo, a mongoose, and a negro to-morrow. I should like to know who could?"

"I think I can, aunt," said Rose, laughing. "Good-night." And she tripped lightly away to her own room, where she thought over all the wonders of the evening.

June.—It was the lovely month of roses, the trees, hedges, and greenswards of Clapham-park wore their most beautiful aspect, the gardens were bright with

flowers, the nightingale sang in the groves. It is evening, twilight is softening into darkness, soon to be lighted by many peeping stars and crescent moon. Two figures still linger on the lawn at The Limes, seated one at either end of a rustic seat—Arthur Farquhar and Rose Maxwell. For the butterfly-hunter has not gone away yet from his stepmother's house, though he has often talked of taking a run on the Continent, getting something to do, and so on. He is perfectly at home; Rose is very cousinly, and likes his society, and Lady Bigsby is most amiable. Pizarro is the pet of the establishment, being a monkey of the most uncommon talents.

The snakes did it, backed by the armadillo. Farquhar sent them to the Zoo, together with some humming-birds he had preserved, sundry reptiles in spirits, some butterflies and beetles; and all were new. The society was charmed, and gave him a field-night to help in discussing the objects he had presented. The doings of the evening were reported in the papers, Farquhar was invited to parties, dinners, and evenings—"West," as Lady Bigsby observed, sighing as she reflected on the glories of Sir Francis's year of lord mayoralty. She found all sorts of good in her stepson, and petted Pizarro. The nigger turned out to be an unobjectionable person, quite white, and an excellent cook and valet; but he was sent home to his friends at once, as Farquhar said he did not want any servant.

Of course you see why the naturalist had stayed on at The Limes. He was over head and ears in love with Rose Maxwell, and still in doubt whether she cared a row of pins for him except in a cousinly way; added to which there was another young fellow dangling after her, who, though he had not Farquhar's opportunities, had the advantage over him of prior right.

Lady Bigsby was receiving a few friends in a quiet way. The rooms were hot, and several of the guests had strolled round the grounds, enjoying the cool evening breeze. All had returned to the drawing-room, except Rose and Arthur. They sat on the terrace, with their backs to the French windows opening upon it. They could hear the buzz of conversation and the music, to rather better advantage than if they had been in the room.

Two young ladies sang a duet, then, after a pause, a man's voice was heard singing melodiously, a pretty song—a love-song—meant to catch the ear of Rose.

"That is Char—Mr. Smith," she said, half rising. "Had we not better go in? It is getting a little chilly."

"No, Rose; let us sit here. In the first place it is not chilly, and you know it is not; in the second, I don't want to see that fellow sing, I can hear him here. Rose, if I were in that room and saw him singing that stuff at you, I should—I should pitch him out of the window."

"Arthur!" said Rose, astonished, or feigning astonishment; for I think this young lady was not behind the rest of her sex in discovering the state of an honest man's heart.

"Rose," said her lover, drawing close up to her, while she turned her head from him, "I can bear this suspense no longer. I love you—no man ever loved a woman better. I live for you; I would die for you. I won't beat about the bush. I am eleven years older than you are. Can you love me? Will you have me?"

She sat with her head drooped, her back turned towards him, neither moving nor speaking.

"I am a little rougher, perhaps, than I should have been if I had stayed at home; but not worse, Rose—not worse; and I will make you happy, and I shall be the happiest man alive. Say you will take me?"

But she sat silent.

"When I came back to England, I never thought of marrying; but your beauty, your gentleness, have made me love you—oh, so well. Say yes, Rose."

And she said "Yes!" very softly, with her beautiful face averted in maiden modesty.

He clasped her in his arms, and imprinted manly kisses on her fair brow and cheek.

"I do love you, Arthur," she said, timidly; "but Aunt Bigsby has made me promise her I would never marry without her permission. I am afraid she will never give it to my marrying you. She has told me never to encourage you in the least——"

"The—the devil she has."

"And I shall never be happy again." Her head fell upon his broad chest, tears falling fast.

"Now then you people—Arthur, Rose!" It was the Bigsby at the French window, tapping the sash with her fan to call their attention. "We are going to supper."

Supper! Love wants no supper, though the Bigsby does.

"Come, Arthur," she says.

She is in the light, and they can see her distinctly. They are in the almost darkness of the summer evening, and she can only see they are sitting together.

"We will stroll once more round the gravel-walk by the roses, and then join you."

And at supper, Rose is pale but radiant, without any trace of tears.

Farquhar, as you have already discovered, is a determined fellow, and means to secure Lady Bigsby's consent without a day's delay. Smith, the pretendant to Rose's hand—with the prior claim, however—and one or two other people loiter about after supper; until the evening has got so late, when Lady Bigsby, Rose, and he are left together, that he concludes it is best to put the matter off till the morning.

Rose blushes a heavenly pink when they meet at the breakfast-table, as her eye rests on his. Lady Bigsby is rather late, giving the lovers time for an opportune tête-à-tête. When she makes her appearance, she is not in her best temper; she has in her hand a large blue envelope, which is presumably the cause of her annoyance.

The high spirits of the other two, however, soon revive her, and breakfast goes off smoothly, and even pleasantly, with a fair mixture in the conversation of good-humoured banter about the people at the party the night before. The only remark that gives trouble to Rose and makes her blush crimson, is when Lady Bigsby says: "You were very nonchalant in your behaviour to Mr. Smith last night, Rose. You must be very civil to him when you meet him to-morrow, and wipe out the remembrance of an unpleasant impression."

"You know, Arthur," said her ladyship, playfully tapping his arm with her fat white hand, "I have made up my mind to marry these two eligible parties. The Smiths are rich, Rose is poor—they are very nice people. You need not blush, my dear. I am sure that young fellow is on the eve of popping the question. I expect it every time he comes."

During this speech, a peony's were a pale colour compared with Rose's tell-tale cheek. Arthur simply drooped his eyelids after his own manner and wrinkled his forehead, at the same time giving Rose's foot a gentle pressure, intended to be reassuring and to mean, "I will make this right directly. You will see."

They were leaving the room together, when Lady Bigsby stopped him.

"You go, Rose," she said; "I want to speak to Arthur."

"I was just going to say I wished to have a word or two with you, Lady Bigsby."

"Come then, you begin."

"Ladies first."

"Well, I was going to ask your advice, Arthur, and I hope you will oblige me by attending to what I am saying, and not sit as you sometimes do when I begin to talk, staring into vacancy and thinking of something else all the while."

"I promise you my best attention," Arthur replied.

"Then I will premise by saying, that the late Sir Francis did not behave so well to me as he should have done. There was very little of his property settled on me, for, as I had no money of my own, my poor father at the time felt that the matter ought to be left to Sir Francis entirely. This was done, to my great regret afterwards, but I was too young and inexperienced then to know anything about it."

Arthur bowed, and Lady Bigsby proceeded.

"I took care when I married my niece from this house, that everything that was handsome was done. I shall take the same care in Rose's case. People say married and settled; I say settled, then married. If my own income were twice as large, I should not have a penny more than I could spend, living in the most careful way. It is true I have this house rent-free for my life, but I have come to the conclusion that, now your father's income has become yours, I must leave off keeping a carriage. It's very hard after so many years."

"Very hard," said Arthur.

"Well, now comes the tug of war," said her ladyship; "I have very rarely been fool enough to lend any money."

"I can quite believe it."

"Yes, but some time ago, under circumstances of a very peculiar kind, I lent an old friend, not money exactly, that was not asked, but my name, which had been asked for."

"You put your name on the back of a bill?"

"On the front: I am the acceptor. I am quite familiar with all these terms, and the routine of business. I used to help Sir Francis so much after he had his first stroke, and while he was able to attend at all to his affairs."

"A lady or a gentleman?"

"A lady—an old schoolfellow who had claims on me I could not resist very well."

"You will have to provide the money to meet it, I suppose."

"That is the tug of war I spoke of. I haven't got the money, Arthur."

"How much is it?"

"Six hundred pounds."

"Phe-w-w. Lady Bigsby, I respect the promptings of a generous heart, but be whipped if I thought you were the woman to have done it."

"I am not so hard as you think me," said her ladyship, graciously placing her hand on his shoulder. "Now advise me, Arthur, what is to be done? I only want your advice—I know out of your income you can't help me with the money. I spoke to my lawyer yesterday, and he said he hardly saw his way, which meant he did not want to lend me the money. I may tell you that the document bearing my name was given to a man to whom my friend was indebted for the sum it represented. She has got a friend who would endorse a new note at three months, and with two new names, the man would renew it for three months at moderate interest, which I think might be paid for the accommodation."

Arthur Farquhar sat pulling his long beard, without replying to the obvious hint.

"Arthur," said Lady Bigsby, in her sweetest tones, "I was—going—to ask—you."

He looked up, and was about to speak, when Lady Bigsby interrupted.

"There, there; don't begin to tell me you never did such a thing in your life—strong objection to put your name on stamped paper—could not possibly meet it—render yourself liable, etc. etc. My dear Arthur, there is really not the least risk in the world, as I know my friend will have the money ready long before the acceptance becomes due; and if there is an esclandre about it now, she is a ruined woman. You were going to say you wouldn't, I know you were; but do say yes, and oblige me for ever."

"Lady Bigsby, if you had permitted me, I was going to say I should do it with all the pleasure in the world."

"Arthur," taking his hand, "how kind of you!"

"Don't say a word more about it. After the great kindness I have received from you and from Rose since I have been back in England, the obligation still remains with me."

"If we have made you comfortable, we

are delighted. I am so much obliged to you; you have helped me out of a great difficulty.

"Then," said her ladyship firmly, fetching a pen and ink from the next room, "you shall write your name here now, and the thing will be done, and I will have it posted at once."

In half a minute "Arthur Farquhar" was scrawled across on the bill, and underneath it "Charlotte Bigsby" appeared, in the neat running hand the writer had learned at school—angular, with very sharp crosses and dots, such as young ladies were taught to make thirty years ago.

Having carefully blotted the signatures, Lady Bigsby rang the bell, and handing the letter to the maid who answered the summons, said, "Give that to Robert to post—tell him to take it at once."

"Now I shall ask you to give me a minute or two," said Arthur, rising, and standing with his back to the empty fireplace. "Lady Bigsby, I am going to ask your opinion, advice, and, I may say also, your consent, to a step I think of taking which will have an important effect upon my life after I have taken it."

"If it is anything about business or occupying your time, I shall say yes at once, Arthur; you are not in that way in the least like your poor father, for I am sure you have real aptitude for business."

"You think I have, Lady Bigsby?"

"I do. And if I were you I would not leave England again. Stay here, and we can hunt up somebody who can give you something suitable, no doubt, though without capital it's always difficult to start to advantage here, or, for the matter of that, I suppose anywhere else."

"I was not about to speak on that subject, my dear lady. In a matter of that kind I am old enough and sufficiently experienced to act for myself."

"Oh! I thought you said it was some step of importance you wanted my advice about, Arthur?"

"Quite so. I do."

"Well, I am all attention. I beg your pardon for having mistaken your meaning and wasted your time."

"I am thinking, Lady Bigsby, of—getting married."

"Married!" screamed her ladyship. "Married! Arthur, why, who in the world to? I know," she went on with her usual volubility, "to the girl you left behind you, and have been carrying on a

correspondence with ever since you have been with us, and never told us a word about. Rose will be surprised, upon my word. I really must tell her. It is a secret I can't keep, for the life of me."

"Rose knows all about it," said Farquhar, quietly.

"Rose knows; dear me, you have made her a confidante, and not me, eh, Master Arthur?"

"I had a reason for communicating my intention to Rose first, Lady Bigsby."

"Oh, no doubt, ha, ha! Well, come tell me am I right; is it a rich, young, and beautiful planter's daughter? Who is it? I am dying to hear."

"Rose—Miss Maxwell."

"Rose!" screamed the aunt, jumping up and taking her stand near the door; "I am dumfounded." This was purely a figure of speech. "I would not have had such a thing happen for the world."

"No, Lady Bigsby?" coldly closing his eyelids and wrinkling his brow.

"I mean Rose to have young Smith. He is madly in love with her, I know; and you know that his father has got fifteen thousand pounds a year, and that he and his sister will have it all."

"I had heard so."

"No, Arthur; come, let us be serious; you know you can't afford to marry a poor girl, and Rose hasn't a penny. What I have been thinking of I don't know, to let this be going on under my very eyes, and not see it. I am sure I never dreamt of this. I thought you were cousins, and nothing more. You do shock me. I hope you have not said a word of this to Rose."

"She returns my love and will marry me with your consent."

"Which I will never give, if I live to be as old as Methuselah. A girl with Rose's face and style to be almost a pauper, to be absolutely thrown away."

"Thank you, Lady Bigsby."

"Oh, I know I am in a fine fume, and not without cause. In common decency you know, Arthur, you can't stay any longer. You have really quite abused my hospitality."

"Yes; well, I am ready to pack up my traps now, if your ladyship will permit me to leave the room."

"Not till I have called Rose in and placed her face to face with you, and asked her what she means."

The door opened, and in walked Rose.

"What is all this, Rose?"

"I love him, aunt."

"But you shall never marry him if I can stop it. Arthur, you will go; Rose, you will forget him."

"Never, aunt."

"I will get that document back to-morrow, Arthur. I am dreadfully sorry now I ever sent it to the post."

"I will not stay now. I will send for my traps. Rose, you will not forget me, or love me less, if I go away for a short time?"

"Oh, don't go, Arthur; aunt will forgive me."

"Never!" said the worldly one, inexorably, "but I will try to bring you to your senses."

"Good-bye, Rose," said Farquhar. "Good-bye, Lady Bigsby. I will come back, surely."

"When, Arthur, when," cried Rose, all tears, and looking supremely lovely through her grief, "when shall we see you again?"

"Three months after date."

Which reply almost gave Lady Bigsby a fit.

He kissed Rose, and bowing stiffly to her ladyship, he crossed the hall, slammed the door after him, and was gone.

September.—"Property. I had no idea he had any property to look after," said her ladyship, after Arthur's first letter to Rose arrived. "I did not give a Farquhar credit for having done any good for himself."

The three months passed slowly by on leaden wings for Rose, but a long letter every mail from Arthur did much to cheer her, and reconcile her to his absence. Having had much experience of her aunt's character, and really loving her, she listened, without comment, to the sermons delivered on the subject of pauper marriages, but secretly made up her mind to take Arthur for better or for worse when he came back to claim her, with her aunt's consent if she could get it, without it if she could not.

During the last two or three weeks before Arthur's return, Lady Bigsby fidgeted about the acceptance, which I need hardly say Farquhar paid.

"I hope you are not angry with me?" said her ladyship.

"Not the least, my dear aunty; it is not the smallest inconvenience to me."

"And you are quite rich. Dear me, wonders never cease. If I were younger

I would go out, butterfly hunting, and silver prospecting, and so on, myself. You will make him a good wife, Rose; he is just the man I always pictured you would have. I am not sorry to leave The Limes for a smaller house in the neighbourhood, and I promise you I shall very often come to see you."

"You can't come too often, dear aunt, after we come back," said Rose.

"And about when do you think that will be?"

"When will it be, Arthur?"

"Well, dearest, let us say three months after date."

MAJOR MACBETH.

BY DUTTON COOK.

It was a sea-port, and had claims to be accounted a fashionable watering-place, but in comparison with more famous resorts, it was quite of miniature dimensions; on the scale, let us say, of half an inch to the foot. It possessed a small wooden pier or jetty running out into the sea, but to no great distance, stopping short suddenly as though exhausted by the exertion; a confined harbour, which at low tide smelt as badly as if it had been of much larger size; a Place d'Armes; an Hôtel de Ville; an abattoir; an établissement; a market-place with a little fountain in its midst; and a building, diminutive, but yet of ornate and pretentious aspect, which you were requested to consider a cathedral, however much you might be disposed to think of it merely as a chapel of ease. Add uneven tiers of high, red-roofed, white-faced houses, with green blinds, climbing almost from the water's edge to the top of the steep hill at the back; sprinkle the streets and the shaded avenue leading up to what is called the High Town with clusters of lively children, guarded by cheery bonnes in the whitest of caps; with squads of red-trousered soldiers, low of stature but gallant of port; with groups of red-nightcapped fishermen and bare-legged fisherwomen; and dot here and there about the scene the rusty black, burly figure of a priest, with a red-edged breviary in his hand, a shovel-hat upon his head, and a green or purple cotton umbrella under his arm, and you have Blancheville-sur-Mer completely before you. Stay, there is just one thing more—the English boarding-house in the

Rue de l'Univers, kept however by a French lady, the widow of an Englishman, and calling herself Madame Wix, her husband having spelt the name Wicks. It was at the English boarding-house that I met Major Macbeth.

If you, being an Englishman, stayed at Blancheville-sur-Mer during the summer months, it was well understood that you came to enjoy the sea-air, to bathe, to pace the pier or the sands, to enjoy yourself generally. You were welcome, you paid your money, you took your departure; no questions were asked concerning you, and no further thought was bestowed upon you. But if you remained at Blancheville-sur-Mer during the winter, then the explanation was very simple. You were in debt and in difficulties, and you could not return to your native land for fear of creditors, arrest, writs of execution, imprisonment, and such like disasters and disagreeables.

It was admitted upon all hands that the major was a gentlemanly man and a well-informed man, who had travelled, who had seen life, who had served—it was not certain where, but Mexico, the Brazils, the territory of the Nizam, and other outlandish parts were vaguely hinted at. The major was not explicit upon the subject, but he had been known to mention that he had at no time held a commission in the service of the British crown. All the same, his belligerent figure and presence, the projection of his chest, the curve of his moustaches, the firmness of his step, the stiffness of his movements, fully justified his assumption of a military title. Indeed, if he had designated himself a colonel, or even a general, no one could reasonably have objected. There was a sort of modesty in his contentment with the simple rank of major.

That the major was poor was beyond question. Some means he undoubtedly possessed, but they must have been decidedly limited; and he was glad to supplement them by turning to pecuniary account his dexterity as a billiard-player and his skill at the whist-table. No one had ventured to impute to the major any unfairness of conduct, either with the cues or with the cards, but the advantages arising from long experience and constant practice he certainly enjoyed. He was very neat in his dress, but the seams of his garments were whitened by age and wear; his linen was clean always, but frayed as to its edges; his hat shone,

not with the gloss of youth, but with that rather woebegone lustre induced by the application of a wet brush.

He was a handsome man still, although no doubt his personal attractions were rather out of repair. His shapely features were a trifle pinched, his complexion had faded and sallow, his eyes had dimmed, and round them had gathered a curious collection of wrinkles. His hair had thinned, and now needed careful combing, so as to form a sort of trellis-work over a large bald circle upon his crown. He had indeed a very worn and withered look. But he spoke pleasantly, and was very willing to converse; his manners were irreproachable, and his smile was really engaging; he seemed easily pleased himself, and showed alacrity in his efforts to please others. Indeed, he was voted generally to be quite an acquisition—that was the term we employed—an acquisition to the circle at the English boarding-house in the Rue de l'Univers, Blancheville-sur-Mer.

I was for a period—no matter on what account, that is a matter of detail we need not discuss—one of Madame Wix's "in-mates," as she preferred that we should call ourselves. Her charges were moderate, and her establishment was conducted with reasonable regard for cleanliness and comfort. She was really a clever woman. She kept up appearances wonderfully, and she had an admirable way of accepting the appearances kept up by others, of affecting not to penetrate their disguises, or to perceive the flimsiness of their pretexts. She took care to be paid, of course, but she was anxious at the same time that her establishment should be maintained in what I may call the odour of gentility. We might, or some of us might, be a little embarrassed pecuniarily, our clothes might not be of the newest gloss, or of the latest cut; still, from Madame Wix's point of view, we were all strictly ladies and gentlemen. She welcomed us to her drawing-room in the evening, regaling us, and inviting us to regale ourselves, with music, both vocal and instrumental. She herself was accustomed upon occasions to sling a guitar about her, and to bid it discourse after a feeble tinkling and twanging fashion, accompanying her voice, which was not perhaps what once it had been. There were whispers indeed that Madame Wix had early in life sung with applause at the opera-house; but the rumour did not meet with implicit belief, evidence in support of it being certainly indistinct.

She was one of those very plain French-women, who yet somehow justify a claim to good looks because of a certain slimness of figure, adroitness of movement, and skill in dress. She had bright eyes, white teeth, and unnaturally black hair, very smoothly banded across her forehead; she rouged a little, and the arch of her eyebrows was artificially defined; but the hard, tight look of her forehead, the dimensions of her mouth, the prominence of her cheekbones, and the hollowness of her eyes, imparted to her face a skull-like appearance that was not attractive.

The most important of Madame Wix's boarders was unquestionably a Mrs. Berringer, understood to be a widow who had been left specially well provided for by her departed husband. She dressed very splendidly, and she was one of those women whose majesty of bearing and expanse of frame enable them to display dress to great advantage. She was about thirty, or she may have been some few years older; but the fat—and Mrs. Berringer was certainly to be so described—are often credited with more of age than is strictly their due. She was blessed with a hearty appetite, and with digestive powers that always seemed to be in perfect working order; and she fully appreciated the pleasures of the table. We inferred that Madame Wix received from Mrs. Berringer payment for her board after an increased scale. She frequently drank champagne when we poorer boarders were content with ordinaire, or with beer; but wine of course was an extra charge. She was always assisted to the choicest morsels of food, and her plate seemed to be supplied with particular liberality. Moreover, she was allotted a separate sitting-room; and she kept a private store of cognac in a chiffonier. But it was, I think, her diamonds that most impressed us all. It was only on gala occasions that she displayed her entire collection of precious stones; but when she did this, the effect in its starry splendour was certainly meteoric and planetary, if I may so express myself.

It was all very well to ridicule her as "a walking jeweller's shop." I have heard her so described; but, all the same, diamonds are things to be respected, and a woman who is rich in diamonds is almost a woman to be loved. Forthwith, many of Madame Wix's male boarders proceeded to profess love for Mrs. Berringer.

Her husband was said to have been a Peruvian merchant. She had journeyed

to Blancheville, intending to remain there a few weeks only; but she had suffered seriously on her voyage across the Channel. She had even believed that her life was gravely imperilled upon that occasion; and, finding herself very comfortable at the English boarding-house, she had remained there many months, and expressed no intention of speedy departure. She appeared to have no relatives or friends who could legitimately claim her presence in England.

My own name, I may mention, is Epps—Frank Epps. With that information concerning myself, I must ask the reader to be content. There is no necessity, indeed, for any further enunciation on the subject; for I am not the hero of this little narrative, if, indeed, it can be credited with a hero at all. Certainly, it has little to do with matters of an heroic quality.

We had been looking for some show of preference on the part of Mrs. Berringer. We felt persuaded that a woman encircled by suitors, as she was, must, sooner or later, disclose the state of her own feelings upon the subject. But certainly it was long before she made any sign or seemed to arrive at any decision. She was a good-natured woman, but her habits of mind were not active. She was always warm, and she was always fanning herself; that, indeed, was the only exercise in which she indulged; and, comfortably lodged in the easiest of chairs, warm and fanning herself, her face creased with smiles, she listened to us attentively, without according to any of us observations of an encouraging kind. I do not mean to say that we any of us addressed her formally with distinct offers of marriage; we proceeded vaguely, yet with a definite object in view, permitting ourselves looks and language which, by-and-by, might be conveniently treated as the foundation-stones, or the building materials, so to say, of manifest and positive courtship.

All at once we decided with curious unanimity that Mrs. Berringer had made her choice. There was no question in the matter. She had been impressed by the military deportment, the agreeable speech, and the handsome, if rather faded, looks of the major. Of course she had not made him the subject of any open avowal. But she reserved for him her best, or perhaps I should rather say her largest smiles; she, with some difficulty, made room for him beside her on the sofa. It was even said that her face had flushed at his approach.

I must remark, however, that her face was usually much suffused with colour, and could hardly under any circumstance know much increase in that respect.

Madame Wix had been heard to say that it would be an excellent thing for Major Macbeth. However, she had the feelings of her other inmates to consider, and she was careful to add a caution to the effect that people should not rush at conclusions, and that slips between cups and lips were of frequent occurrence.

To do him justice, the major had not been at all a pushing or a prominent suitor. Possibly to that fact he owed his success, if it were to be called success. His composed air, his calmness of manner, had perhaps attracted Mrs. Berringer much more than the effusiveness of others. People are usually prouder of a difficult conquest, than of one effected upon easy terms. We had hurried to the feet of Mrs. Berringer. The major had scarcely exerted himself to meet her half-way. Almost he had persuaded her to come to him the whole distance.

He spoke to me in regard to her with the utmost frankness. I remember it was just before I lent him five pounds to meet a pressing engagement, which had been suddenly brought to his recollection. We were very good friends, the major and I. We played billiards together frequently. Of course I was no match for him, but he allowed me points, and I have always held that it is decidedly improving to practice with a good player. But I found it expensive, I must own. As he said when I lent him that five pounds: "You know I am pretty sure to win that sum of you before the month is out."

As to Mrs. Berringer, he observed: "Never you mind what they say about the lady. It's all idle chatter—there's nothing settled. She likes me, I think; that seems to be generally acknowledged. But you know my consent has to be asked. You know the proverb, 'Once bit, twice shy.' Go in for the thing, if you like—and win if you can. I give you my word of honour I won't balk you. I'm in no hurry. I know all about it. I've been married before."

"A widower?"

He nodded significantly. "A man who has been once married, thinks twice about marrying again," he said sententiously. "So Epps, my dear fellow, if you're inclined for this business, you shall have a fair field so far as I'm concerned. Walk

straight up to the lady; win and wear her, if you can, diamonds and all. And now we'll go and knock the balls about a bit."

He was a pleasant man; but I was never quite satisfied as to the perfect sincerity of Major Macbeth.

We were sitting at dinner one day—and we had generally very good dinners at Madame Wix's, although about French fowls there certainly is an inclination to be skinny, and yellow, and bony, to an extent I have never observed in English poultry—when Jules the waiter approached the major, handing upon his salver a crumpled note in the form of a cocked hat.

The major took it with an indifferent air and opened it leisurely. But presently, I noticed that his face had undergone an extraordinary change. He rose abruptly, and murmuring some confused words of apology, hurriedly quitted the room.

Madame Wix's inmates looked at each other. Someone asked Jules who had brought the letter? Jules answered simply, "a lady." Madame Wix's inmates smiled, winked, and shrugged their shoulders, with the exception of Mrs. Berringer, who laid down her knife and fork, and took up her champagne-glass.

Some hours passed; Major Macbeth did not return. "Poor man, to go away in the middle of his dinner!" said Madame Wix, pityingly. To do her justice, she was never disposed to stint her inmates; she liked to see them enjoy their meals, even though her profits might in such wise undergo diminution.

The wind was blowing rather hard, and I could hear from a considerable distance the sound of the waves beating upon the sands, or thumping against the timbers of the pier. The moon was shining brightly, however, if, every now and then, ragged and twisting scraps and patches of cloud were driven swiftly across its surface, dimming its radiance for the moment. I lighted a cigar, and buttoning up my coat to the neck, sallied forth for a brief walk before bed-time.

At first I kept well under the shadow and shelter of the houses. But presently I was drawn nearer to the sea by the attractions of the moon, the red and green gleams of the harbour and pier lights, and the clouds of steam of the packet puffing beside the jetty, only waiting for the mails to start on its midnight voyage across the Channel.

There were but four people on the pier;

it was very wet with spray, and in places the waves almost washed over it. Yet—surely I could not be mistaken—there stood, leaning against the luggage-crane, and partly sheltered by it from the wind, the figure of Major Macbeth. He was lightly clad for so rough and cold a night. Some thin sort of overcoat he wore, otherwise he was in evening dress. He was not alone. He was engaged in close conversation with a woman, wrapped in a heavy waterproof cloak. I could not see her face.

I walked rapidly away towards the lighthouse at the head of the pier. I did not want him to think that I was watching him, or trying to overhear anything he might say. But it was clear that I must, in returning, pass very close to him again. For a moment's deliberation I waited on the least windy side of the lighthouse.

"Hullo!" said some one. I recognised the voice. It belonged to one of my fellow-inmates of the English boarding-house. A quiet, prosaic, rather corpulent person, with a fat, unmeaning face, adorned by a neat pair of triangular whiskers. His name was Yallop. He had never said much about himself; I had always set him down as a retired London tradesman, anxious to see something of continental life, but too timid to venture far from Blancheville-sur-Mer.

"It's Epps, isn't it? I thought so. Did you see the major? Busily engaged, wasn't he? What would Mrs. Berringer say, I wonder. What a thing it is to be a favourite of the ladies."

But I did not want to discuss the subject with Yallop.

"It's no affair of ours, I take it," I observed rather sharply.

"Oh no, certainly not," Yallop said humbly: so humbly, indeed, that I was sorry then that I had been so quick with him.

"Good-night," and he left me standing under the shelter of the lighthouse. I watched him as he went struggling down the pier, wrestling with the wind.

Presently I followed him. As I came near the luggage-crane I heard the sound of voices engaged in dispute. I could distinguish the major's tones—they were hoarse and tremulous. His companion was clearly very angry. She was gesticulating vehemently. As I gathered, she was threatening him and reviling him. I hurried past. I was curious, I admit; but I did not desire to witness, or to take part in what was manifestly an unpleasant scene.

I hurried back to Madame Wix's; soon afterwards I lighted my candle and retired to my room. As I wound up my watch I noticed that it was very late, past midnight. I had not been in bed half an hour when there came a gentle tapping at my door.

"Are you awake, Epps?" It was the major who spoke. I admitted him.

"Do you happen to have such a thing as a drop of brandy?" he asked. "Everybody seems to have gone to bed."

"Are you ill?"

"I'm not very well." He was deadly pale, and trembling violently.

It chanced that there was some brandy left in a pocket-flask I was wont to carry with me when travelling.

"I've got cold, I think. There was a cruel wind on the pier, enough to cut a fellow to pieces. Did I see you there, Epps? I had a notion that I saw you there," and he looked at me suspiciously.

"Yes, I was there, for a short time only. It was blowing very hard. I was glad to come off."

"You saw me there, perhaps?"

"Yes, I saw you there."

"You didn't follow me? You didn't go there to spy upon me? But no, of course not. What am I thinking about? Why should I ask such silly questions?"

"Are you better now, major?" He had swallowed the brandy.

"Yes, thanks. I am rather susceptible of cold, from having lived many years in tropical climates."

His teeth chattered as he spoke. I observed that he kept on his gloves. He carried his hat in his hand and looked about with a helpless air, as though much troubled as to where he should deposit it. Finally, as though in a passion with it, he flung it into a corner of the room.

"You saw—her, I suppose?" he asked, presently. I nodded.

"Epps, I can trust you, I know," he said. "You're a dear, good fellow, and I've the greatest regard for you. I'm the most unfortunate wretch that ever existed." And he burst into tears.

I decided that he was not sober, that he had been drinking before paying me his nocturnal visit.

"I suppose you wouldn't know her again?" he enquired hastily.

"No. I scarcely looked at her. She seemed to be dark and tall; but she was much muffled up."

"Just so." After a pause he added:

"I'll tell you something, Epps; but in strict confidence, mind. That woman was my wife."

"Your wife?"

"Precisely. My wife; and the cause of every unhappiness I have ever known. If ever there was an incarnate fiend on earth, it's that woman."

"Major!" It was very clear that he was not sober.

"It's the simplest truth," he cried with an oath. "She's been my ruin—root and branch, body and soul. She's shamed me, and blighted me, and beggared me. I married when I was very young. She was a half-caste girl, born at Pondicherry. I was mad, of course. Who isn't mad at some time or other of his life? But I can't speak of the thing now. I've been heavily punished for my folly—my sin; for Heaven knows I don't pretend to be wholly blameless in the matter. Yet the utter misery, the suffering, that woman has brought upon me! We've been parted, of course, for years and years. But she has a way of reappearing every now and then; and she reappeared to-night. She had tracked me here, and she needed to be bought off again, as I've bought her off a score of times before. She has that to sell, you see, which I must buy of her—I mean her absence from me. Thank Heaven, Epps, you don't know what cruel havoc a wicked woman can make of a man's life!"

"But you've got rid of her once more, major?"

"Yes. I've got rid of her," he cried, with a wild laugh. "She left by the mail packet. I saw her safe on board. And indeed I hope I may never see her again." He laughed again; it seemed to me that he was fairly beside himself, that he did not know what he was saying or doing. "I had to pay her her price, of course. It was simply all I had in the world, with a promise to send more as soon as possible. Look here!"

He showed that his shirt was without studs; that his watch and chain and rings were gone; that his pockets were empty. He burst into tears again, hiding his face in his hands.

"Don't desert me, Epps. Don't turn your back upon me. You're the only friend I have in the world. Have you got a cigar? You won't mind my smoking here? I can't sleep. I hate my room. I can't bear to be alone in my present mood, and a cigar is such a comfort to a fellow."

I enjoyed little sleep that night. The

major could not rest himself, and he would not let me do so. It was daybreak before he quitted my room. He had emptied my cigar-case; he had drained my flask. For hours he had done nothing but walk up and down, up and down, at the foot of my bed, turning abruptly when he came to the wall on either side, like a wild beast in a cage.

He looked dreadfully ill, and haggard, and worn in the morning.

"Come out and breathe a little fresh air, major; it will do you good."

We went out together. I was turning in the direction of the pier, but he drew me towards the sands. "There's too much wind on the pier," he said. "What a night it was! How the wind blew! The sea is not so rough this morning, however. The heavy rain has beaten it down, I suppose."

"I wonder how the packet got across the Channel."

"Don't speak of it," he said with a shudder.

We walked briskly along the sands two miles or so, beyond the tall headland with the lighthouse on its crest, that protects Blancheville from the east wind. We had kept close to the sea all the way, having sometimes to pass over broken rocks, heaps of seaweed—brown, green, purple, and crimson, masses of shingle and shells. Suddenly our attention was attracted towards a group of figures some distance in front of us, that seemed standing with the sea over their ankles. There were men and boys in the long scarlet nightcaps of the country, in boots of the largest size, with flapping tops and the thickest of soles, in overalls of tarpaulin, and trousers that seemed made of sail-cloth liberally coated with tar; there were women in many-coloured petticoats, in tight-fitting blue worsted jackets, with bright handkerchiefs tied round their heads, with long and heavy gold rings in their ears, and nothing whatever on their calves or their feet; and in addition to these maritime folk, we could perceive, as we drew nearer, cocked hats, and white cross-belts, and shining black cartouche-boxes, and brass-hilted swords in glittering steel scabbards.

What was the matter?

Ah, monsieur, it was this. Ah, monsieur, it was that. Le bon Dieu only knew for certain. But after such a night, who could be surprised at anything? We could obtain little but exclamations, and unintelligible cries, and vague gestures from the outer circle of the group.

I peeped over the shoulder of one of the cocked hats, at the risk of being severely pricked by the pointed end of his moustache, had he turned suddenly.

The body of a woman lay upon the sands, yet partially raised upon a pillow of rock. She was plainly, rather poorly dressed, in a dress of dark substance, much smeared and stained by the action of the tide upon the sands. She was of middle age as I judged, tall, and symmetrical of figure, her complexion very swarthy, her hair black, yet streaked with gray. It was the general opinion that she had been in the water many hours, had been carried by the tide some distance, and finally flung upon the shore, where she had been found by the fishermen. They had duly communicated their discovery to the proper authorities, and forthwith the cocked hats had appeared upon the scene. There had been a wreck in the Channel it was conjectured: the stormy night justified belief that numerous wrecks had occurred. Yet many deemed it strange that no other bodies had been found, only this poor woman's: that no other evidence of wreck had come ashore, in the way of broken spars or shattered ship's furniture.

I felt my arm firmly gripped. The major drew me out of the crowd. His face was livid; he seemed gasping for breath.

"You're not well this morning, major, and this painful sight has rather upset you. I own it has given me a turn."

"Come away, Epps. Don't let us be overheard. We must take care what we do, or we shall rouse suspicion; at any rate we must have time to think."

"Why, what do you mean?"

"Good heavens, don't you understand? That's her body. The woman of whom I told you last night. My wife."

"But she left by the mail. The packet's lost then."

"No, she did not go by the packet."

"You told me she did."

"I was wrong. I told you a lie."

He had removed his hat, and was dabbing his wet forehead with a cambric handkerchief. As it chanced, there was no glove this morning upon his long, thin, nervous white hand. My eyes rested upon certain long scratches that extended from his wrist to his knuckles. Was it to conceal these he had worn his gloves so persistently last night? Had he taken them off this morning in pure forgetfulness? He noticed the direction of my glance and winced perceptibly.

"Don't think that of me, Epps; for Heaven's sake, don't think that of me. I know what you suspect, but I swear to you that it isn't true. She was like a mad creature last night. She was often mad, really mad, I mean. She was beside herself with rage and vexation, with hatred and malice, and she tried to murder me last night, as she had tried more than once before. God knows I am speaking the truth, Epps. She drew me to the head of the pier, flung her arms tightly round me, and tried her best to throw me over the side. It was nothing to her that she must have died with me. So that my death was secured, she cared nothing for the rest. She was mad last night, I tell you, stark mad. It was all I could do to save myself—she tore at my flesh with her nails, as you see. I struggled only to get free. I did not push or strike her, I swear to you. But—we were on the edge of the pier, the boards were slippery with the rain. Suddenly there was a slight scream of surprise rather than of fear; she had lost her footing, she had gone over the side. I could not hear the splash of her fall below, the waves were beating too noisily against the pier. I was alone. There was no one near. I could do nothing to save her. Could anything have been done? Think what a night it was! And just then it was pitch-dark; the moon was thickly clouded over. I thought she must have been dashed to pieces against the piles. I had forgotten that the tide had turned and was running out. She was carried away, you see, and then brought back and tossed on shore more than two miles away from the pier."

We were startled by a footstep behind us, and the sound of a cough. The man Yallop was following us. We had not noticed his approach, the wet sand had so deadened the sound of his tread. We certainly did not want his dull company, but he was, we all considered, a harmless sort of man, and we were almost bound to be civil to him, seeing that he was a fellow-boarder at Madame Wix's.

"Fine fresh morning after the rain and the wind, isn't it?" he said. "I thought I'd take a constitutional, but I certainly did not expect to come in for such a sight as that yonder. How do they manage things of this sort in France, I wonder? Do they have an inquest on the body as we do, and a verdict of 'Found Drowned?' It always seems to me so odd that the police should wear cocked hats. Some-

how you never can go on the Continent without coming across cocked hats. I suppose they'll try and get the body identified—that's our way—you know. At Paris"—he called it Parry—"they have what they call the Morgue expressly for the exhibition of dead bodies. I don't know whether they've got anything of a morgue here. None of that lot there seemed to recognise the woman; and, of course, it might be that there's been a wreck in the Channel, and that's one of the poor unfortunates floated ashore. But it strikes me that I saw a woman very like that on the pier last night."

"He suspects me," whispered the major.

"You were on the pier, too, Epps. Now, didn't you see a woman like that on the pier, just before we met by the lighthouse?"

"No," I said, for I did not choose to be interrogated by Yallop. "I think not. I can't say. I don't remember. One couldn't see faces well such a night as last night was."

"Well, it was night, but the moon was shining."

"Have you got any cigar-lights about you?" I asked, to get rid of the subject.

The major was really in a pitiable condition. Returned to Madame Wix's, I obtained some more brandy for him, which he drank in my room. He was half-dead with fatigue and exhaustion and absolute panic. It seemed to me that his mind was giving way. What was he to do? he asked over and over again. What was to become of him? I undertook to assist him with money, so far as I was able, until he could obtain further supplies, or bring his affairs to a more regular condition. And I strongly advised him to meet the matter boldly; to tell his story and identify the body, and trust to the justice of his case. Only it was very necessary that he should lose no more time. But his nervous system seemed to be completely shattered. I led him to his room, partly undressed him, and left him disposed to sleep, lying upon his bed.

At dinner he did not appear. I judged that he was too unwell; but to my surprise I learnt that he had quitted the house, and had been seen walking inland. There was some wondering as to his non-appearance, for the boarders were usually very punctual in their attendance at meals. Mrs. Berringer expressed a hope that the major had not been taken ill, and then resumed energetic exercise of her knife and

fork—completed, indeed, a very ample dinner.

Hours passed, and still the major did not return. I hardly felt alarm on his account, although I must own to some uneasiness, even while endeavouring to brace myself up with the cynical, selfish argument that the matter did not really concern me in any way, that I had nothing whatever to do with it. I went to bed early, for I had enjoyed little sleep the night before, and I was altogether exceedingly tired.

“May I come in?”

I was awake. It was morning; the sun was streaming into the room. I did not immediately recognise the voice.

“Come in.”

“The major? No; Yallop!”

“I’m afraid you’ll think this a liberty, Mr. Epps.”

I did think so. All the same, I did not say that I thought so. On the contrary, I said: “Not at all, Yallop. What is it? What can I do for you? Take a chair.”

“Thank you, I will.”

I was struck by a change I perceived in Yallop. I had thought him rather a fool, to tell the truth, and had dealt with him in an off-hand, upper-hand sort of way. But I now discerned in his fat flat face a curiously sharp, shrewd look, and about his heavy square jaw there was really a sense of power, an air of command. If I had ever felt disposed to patronise him, it was certainly his turn now to patronise me.

“Any news of the major?” I asked.

“No, no news of the major,” he answered. “Yet, curiously enough, it was partly about the major I came to speak to you.”

“What about him? He came back last night?”

“No, he didn’t come back last night, and it’s my firm belief that he won’t come back again; but you’re entitled to consider it a matter of opinion either way. Only look here, Mr. Epps. My room happens to be next to yours; there’s only a thin wooden partition between us. I could not help hearing, therefore, a good deal that went on here, and particularly your conversation with the major. Now, you’ve behaved very well all through, I’ll say that for you. Indeed, there isn’t a word to be urged against you. Don’t be alarmed; I’m not in the police, not now, and I’ve nothing to do with this matter officially. But between ourselves, now, as friends, it looks ugly; now doesn’t it? Wouldn’t

a jury call it wilful murder? I put it to you. Take the facts. Here’s a gent that hates his wife—with good reason, but that doesn’t signify—that has always hated her, that has never met her for many a long year but to quarrel with her almost to fighting. I heard him tell you the whole business last night. Well, they’re seen together on the pier, at eleven o’clock at night; they’re seen and they’re heard wrangling and jangling together heavens hard. You saw and heard them, you know, Mr. Epps, and so did I. Well, he comes off the pier, alone, terrible pale, and trembling, asking for brandy, and with his hands very much scratched! Nothing more is seen of the woman until her body’s found thrown up by the tide, on the shore nearly three miles away. Now, what do you say? Which does it look like? Did she fall off the pier by accident; did she jump off of her own accord, in one of those fits of temper to which women—some women, we’ll say—are subject; or was she chucked over by the husband who hated her, and who wanted to marry someone else? You can’t make it look comfortable, you know, Mr. Epps, turn it which way you will. And what does the major do? He finds she’s gone over; does he make any stir? does he call for drags and ropes, or ask them to put out in a boat? They couldn’t have done it, the weather being what it was, but he didn’t ask them. No, he says nothing to nobody. He comes home quietly, and tells you his wife went away in the packet. Then when her body is found, still he doesn’t say a word! He looks at her, makes sure of her, and then walks away holding his tongue. Do you think he doubts her identity? Not a bit of it; for, indeed, there can be no question as to that. They’ve found upon the body the rings and studs, the watch and chain, he gave her over-night. Which you could identify if need be, Mr. Epps, and certainly I could, for we’ve often seen them in the major’s possession. Altogether, it’s not at all surprising to me that the major’s off. He was last seen walking towards the railway. Take my word for it, Mr. Epps. We shall see nothing more of Major Macbeth.

“But it wasn’t altogether about him that I took the liberty of stepping in here,” he resumed presently; “you seem to me a nice sort of young man, Mr. Epps, though your head mayn’t be so strong, nor your intellect so fully developed as it might be.

Excuse my frankness. I want to do you a service, I really do. Now, as I said, I'm no longer in the police; moreover, I'm in foreign parts; and such a case as that of our friend the major's I can deal with now only in an amateur way. Still, I'm here on business, for I'm in what we call the Private Enquiry Agency line. And I'm here to keep my eye on certain diamonds—they may be wanted or they mayn't—it's my duty to know in any case where they are and where they go. She's a fine woman, I quite agree, and I don't say she isn't a nice woman in her way, and taking her size and her appetite into consideration. But, drop it; that's my advice, Mr. Epps. You're all of you sold, and that's the truth, Mr. Epps. The widow of a Peruvian merchant! Nonsense. She's not a widow at all. She's the wife of a jeweller in Barbican, who's gone bankrupt. His name's Burrage, not Berringer, and he's suspected of what we call fraudulent concealment of property. The fact is, he started his wife for the Continent, loaded with all his stock-in-trade, so far as he could lay hands on it. They're real stones, all of them, and some of them are great beauties. Womanlike, you know, she can't help sporting them; and I own they're very becoming, and she's a fine woman, as I said. There's no criminal charge; there's no warrant out; and not being in the force, I could do nothing with it if there was; but I'm employed by the creditors to keep my eye on those diamonds, and that's what I'm doing and going to keep on doing."

"But Madame Wix said she was a widow."

"Well, you know it may be that Madame—don't be hard upon her, she's an agreeable woman—but perhaps she did not really know the truth; or perhaps she thought it would be more cheerful for you gentlemen to think that she had a rich widow, the widow of a diamond merchant, among her boarders."

I decided that I would quit Blancheville very shortly.

"Perhaps it would be better," said Yallop. "It seems to me that you've had rather a shock."

But he was to give me another shock some hours later.

"You haven't heard?" he said. "But no, of course you haven't. The body of a man has been discovered—cut to pieces, almost—upon the down-line of the railway. It was supposed, at first, that a passenger

had thrown himself or been thrown from the Paris train; but that seems not to have been the case. That he was insane, there can be little doubt. He had thrown away his hat, taken off his shoes and stockings, and emptied his pockets. Could he have thought that he was going to bed? He had laid himself down upon the metals. Can you guess who the man was?"

"Major——?"

Yallop nodded with grim significance, placed his forefinger upon his lip, and withdrew.

Poor Major Macbeth!

PAN.

BY R. E. FRANCILLON.

"YES; I do wish old Mark Waterman was back again," said Jack Andrews, one morning as he stood, palette on thumb and brush in hand, before an unfinished picture that promised, if not to be famous, at any rate to be wonderful. "It's queer; but I do. Not that I'd let him know it! That would never do. Vanity's not a thing to be encouraged. There—I flatter myself that picture will do pretty considerably; there's genius there, as well as burnt umber. Holloa!"

The young man in the ragged velveteen jacket, with the rough head, unshorn face, and wooden pipe, turned round so suddenly at the sound of a footstep behind him as nearly to overturn his easel. As it was, he had to drop brush and palette on the half-inch of dust that hid the floor of the small and chaotic studio, in order to hold out both hands to another young man who strode in without knocking.

"Why—Mark, old boy!—Hurrah! I was just saying to myself—no, I wasn't, I was just thinking—I hope you've brought your own bird's-eye? I can offer you an empty pipe and the relics of a chair, so sit down and make yourself at home."

"Considering I am at home, I will, Jack. And how are you getting on? You're on a new thing, I see."

Mark Waterman was not like his friend Jack Andrews. Friendship is a case of harmonies—not of unisons. Jack was a rough-and-tumbled little man, whose growth had run to breadth and thickness, with a round, twinkling, comically ugly face and stumpy hands, all of which might have been, and certainly should have been cleaner, and a most extraordinary head of

hair—extraordinary in this, that every hair of it seemed to possess an individuality of its own, and, by standing out separately and on end, to express hatred and defiance of its companions. Mark, on the other hand, carried but few signs of that province of outer Bohemia to which both his home and his friend unquestionably belonged. He was at the first sight a man, and at the second a gentleman; by using which word of him I do not mean that Jack was otherwise, or that there are no gentlemen in Bohemia, but simply that he looked what thousands are in spite of seeming. He needed no eccentricities of aspect, and used none, to give him distinction. His features, without being conspicuously labelled handsome, were marked by the better qualities of strength and energy; his gray eyes were grave and kind, and his full moustache and thick brown beard seemed to cover like promises, unless the all-important lips strangely contradicted the eyes. The touch of humour in his smile when his friend welcomed him with the sudden withdrawal of a first impulse to grasp both his hands did not contradict his general gravity of expression; and there was yet a third look in his face—a preoccupied expression: one of mingled pride and despondency without weakness; a subtle combination, and hard to describe.

"Yes," said Jack, "I'm on a new thing. And it's one of two—it's either infernally bad, or infernally good. I'm rather inclined to think it's infernally good; but if I'm wrong, it's nothing between. What do you say—my uncle's, or the line?"

"If it's good, your uncle's; if it's bad, the line. But what's it all about, Jack? It looks to me like an experiment with a syringe."

"Well, you are dull. Do you mean to say you can't tell?"

"Dull? You're right enough there. Treat me accordingly. Fancy me an R.A. What is it?"

"Pan!"

"Pan?"

"Of course! Pan."

"I don't see him, Jack. Where are his pipe, and his hoofs, and his horns, and the rest of it? Where, in short, is Pan?"

"Well; of all the—and I thought you were a poet, if you weren't a painter! Of course you don't see Pan. That's only a subject—a detail. One must leave something to the imagination, don't you know.

There'd be no occasion to call it Pan, if Pan were bodily in the picture. That's part of the idea. It's where he's in love with Echo, don't you know, after she's turned to a sound—*vox et præterea nihil*. That's my picture. You don't see Pan, because he's understood, and you don't see Echo, because she's invisible by nature. But you see the bulrushes and you see the wind. Wh—e—ew! Doesn't it seem to whistle through your bones!"

"So—those are bulrushes? I thought they were area-railings."

"Rather! But there—I've had enough of it to-day. How've you been getting on? Sold anything? Been paid anything? Say yes—for, hang me, Mark, if you haven't, the wind will have to whistle through my bones, for want of flesh to whistle through. Yes, Mark; you're Mother Hubbard, and I'm the dog. The cupboard's bare. Have you found anything?"

"Well—yes, Jack."

"Hurrah! Landscape-painting for ever!"

"Wait a bit, before you say hurrah. I went out poor, and I come back—no, not poorer! I won't mind you're calling me a fool. I'm—engaged."

"What—to paint a dozen pictures for a duke—for a dealer? To——"

"To be married, Jack. To the best girl in the world."

"Oh!" Every twinkle went out of Jack's face.

"Never mind, old fellow. It's the best thing that could happen. I've got to work for Nelly—for her, now; not for myself any more."

"Money?" growled Jack, savagely; taking up his palette again, and recklessly dashing in another gust of white wind over the area railings.

"Not a penny."

Jack Andrews faced round again. "Mark Waterman," he said, with stern solemnity, "of all the fools in all creation, you're the—best of them. No; I don't congratulate you. It's bad enough to marry. But if you'd married for money, I'd—I'd have kicked you out of the studio, though it's your own, and you're the bigger man. You've got a shilling, I suppose? Come along, then. I suppose I've lost a friend, but never mind, old boy—you didn't invent women. Let's drink, anyhow. I didn't invent drink. So it comes square."

"Jack! Who—what's that? Listen!"

They were already leaving the studio—

which was among the very attics, by the way—when Mark Waterman suddenly stood still, as if spell-bound. From immediately below them, and through the open door, flowed up the sound of a voice in song—the richest, most divine contralto into which the soul of music could ever have been breathed. No wonder that any man with the poorest ghost of a soul in him should be caught as by a sudden charm. It was not in the music, but in the voice of the singer that the wonderful magic lay. There are voices that can transmute the veriest dross of music into pure gold; and this was one of them. And to be heard here, in this poor Bohemian corner, was as if the golden sunshine had been turned into sound. Mark Waterman, who was country bred, felt for the moment as men feel when they catch the scent of lilac in the air, in the first days of spring.

“Oh, never mind that,” said Jack Andrews, impatiently. “I expect it’s a young woman; nothing more. Yes—she sings every day; confound her!”

“It’s a wonderful voice!”

“So much the better for her. It’s not for nothing that fortune ends in tune. I wish it began in paint.” And as he spoke, tragedy, in the shape of a frown, entered the comedy of his face, and his voice took a deeper growl.

The voice was a wonder. But it was nothing to the fact that Mark Waterman was really engaged, he of all men; and to Nelly Vincent, of all women in the world. He was a painter, and a better painter than his incongruous friend and comrade, Jack Andrews, though he looked less like one. At any rate, though at the age of thirty he might not deserve the success that he certainly did not obtain, he was an artist in mind and soul. He was a professed worshipper of beauty, wherever it is to be found apart from women; but—because he was a painter—in music, beyond all other things. People always keep the deepest corners of their hearts for the art that is not their own; for fear they should turn into monomaniacs, I suppose. As to what is supposed to follow from beauty—love—he had been saved from any but the most light and easy touches of that, by the possession of an ideal. He had never—like the man in the song—doubted what sort of creature his queen was to be; but he was a great deal less sure that her coming was inevitable.

With imaginary chinks and colours he had painted a portrait on the canvas of the air, as the type of the Helen for whose sake alone he would count the world well lost—not much of a loss indeed as yet, but even a penniless painter in a London attic has a world to lose, though it consists but of an easel, a few unsaleable pictures, one pipe, one comrade, a thousand hopes, and ten thousand despairs. Once Jack Andrews had found, in the studio which he shared at less than a peppercorn-rent—for Mark never took money from his friends any more than from his enemies the dealers, and Jack never had any to be taken—the half-painted head of a woman, whom he could not identify with any professional model of his acquaintance, and which therefore puzzled him. It must have belonged to a royal full-length, indeed, with its contour of Juno, its Titianesque glory of sombre hair, its large calm brown eyes, and the lips that looked fashioned for the grander and deeper part of song.

But the miracle was a reality. Mark, as a professed landscape-painter—that ideal face was his solitary slip into portraiture—had one summer made a tour afoot, in the quiet country round Gressford. There, in one of the half-adventurous chance encounters to which foot travellers are subject, he had made the acquaintance of the Vincents. Mr. Vincent, as the chief brewer in that country, was a very great man out of doors; at home, he was a sort of pasha. He was exceptionally blessed in the absolute obedience of a wife, six daughters, and a niece. The six daughters were heiresses; all were charming girls, and four of them were engaged. There were still two to spare, and Mark Waterman, the slave of an ideal Helen, within one month of his first acquaintance found himself in love with the niece, Nelly. And even he, in the midst of the rose-light of that first discovery, could only ask why?

“Why,” indeed! She was no more like his ideal than a leaf is like a flower, though both may grow from the heart of the same tree. She was small and not beautiful, without even the charming piquancy that more than outbalances beauty in such matters. I doubt if anybody had ever called her so much as nice-looking. She had the common prettiness of youth indeed, and the less common grace of gentle ways and kind eyes, but there she seemed to end. Even in details she was not Mark’s

Helen. Her hair had not the sombre glory of Titian, nor her colour the morning sunlight of Guido. Her bearing had the quiet of shrinking shyness, instead of royal dignity. She did not pretend to be clever, and had but little to say. She could not help suggesting the idea, not of a goddess, but of a little human mouse which might be tamed even to eat off one's finger, but could never cease to be timid and shy. Last contrast of all, she could no more sing than a mouse. Mark had never heard her try even to hum a tune.

But if their love-story seemed wonderful to Mark, what did it not seem to her? Quiet Gressford lay beside its river, in a sort of chronic, dull wonder that the ripples should run by it in such perpetual hurry to get from nowhere to nowhere. Even so Nelly Vincent looked out from the narrow windows of her wisdom, over the intensely exciting life—such it was to her—of dull Gressford, and took for granted that life contained a great deal of interest—for others. Nothing of that sort ever came to her, or was likely to come. Why should it, indeed? She was no Cinderella, pining among the ashes, and filled with unattainable longings for dances at Gressford, and for princes, in the shape of young lawyers and bank clerks, for partners. They were her cousins' property, by right of wealth and beauty; discontent in her case would have been envy. I am half ashamed to say it, but she was not unhappy, though dependent, even for her livelihood, on kindness, which even to a mouse of any spirit is supposed to be the sorest of trials. I fear she was poor-spirited enough to like to think that people were kind to her, and to feel that her dependence on her uncle's family was proof positive that there are good and warm hearts in the world.

So she waited—for nothing; finding plenty of daily occupation in smoothing the smaller wheels of life for her cousins to roll upon, and finding her reward. But all things come to those who know how to wait; and one fine August day came the change. The wandering painter from far-off Bohemia, whom chance made a guest in Gressford for awhile, did not, as was natural, fall in love with one of her rich and pretty cousins, but with her. The few summer days that followed were a poem of a quiet heart trembling into life; it was summer in Gressford, but lilac-time with Nelly. It was wonderful;

she could hardly believe her own heart, even when it told her so plainly. But when Mark came down again to Gressford, and told her so with his own lips, then she believed—I was almost about to say, as woman never believed man before. Nelly, at least, thought so.

Now it is all very well for a man to follow his own heart, let it lead him where it may. But he cannot expect all the rest of the world to follow him, as in the goose-chase of the story, where Dümmling carried the golden goose and was run after by all who saw it, in spite of themselves, till he made the king's daughter laugh and so won her. Nelly, in Mark, saw her own and the whole world's hero. Her uncle, the brewer, saw a poor painter, with threadbare coat and empty pockets, who had made a little mistake in making love to the only girl in the house who was not able to fill them. Naturally, he was angry. He was fond of Nelly; and was not willing to throw her away on a Bohemian adventurer.

But Nelly had been firm, as firm as only those quiet little women can be. She knew well enough that if Mark had made any mistake at all, it was in thinking her worthy of him. Once, even, she summoned up courage enough to blush and tell him so.

"How can you care about a girl like me, poor, stupid, plain, who can do nothing at all to help you?"

"Not help me, Nelly! Can't you love me?"

"That isn't helping you, Mark. That's dragging you down. It's half wicked of me to—to let you love me! Oh, if I could only do something in the world! Tell me what I can do."

"Well, of all the forgiving souls—I ask you to be a poor man's wife; to give up everybody who has been kind to you; to leave home and comfort and more, and all you could ever look for; and you say you are dragging down *me*! Don't you know you are giving up everything for me?"

"Everything's nothing! Tell me, what can I do?"

"Only wait, Nelly! Wait a year. Your uncle won't refuse you to me then."

Why should a woman's first great joy for ever mean a woman's first great sorrow? For him to work, and for her to wait—it was worse than weeping. But she did wait; and the months passed, and letters came. At first they were as brave as his parting words had been, when he kissed

her and said good-bye. Then, little by little, she read between the lines how courage was turning into the recklessness of a battle, first doubtful, then desperate. Work as he would, and he did work, starve as he might, and he did starve (she knew it without his telling), that first success, which is the only hard one, always seemed farther and farther away. By-and-by the letters became shorter, then fewer. Then they ceased for awhile; and then, at last, came one which, though as loving as ever, was written in so changed a tone that Nelly, whose heart was quicker than her brain, could read in it nothing but defeat from which hope was gone; without even enough courage left to tell her so.

"He is killing himself for me," thought poor Nelly. "What in the world can I do?"

It was at this last ebb of fortune that Mark Waterman came back from Paris to his London attic, and for the first time told his unprofitable tenant, Jack Andrews, that he was engaged. He was not a man to talk about such things, far less to write of them, to any man; his love for Nelly was so strange and uncharacteristic of him that he could not account for it even to himself; nay, could hardly altogether realise it at times. Mark Waterman the painter, Mark Waterman, Nelly's lover, seemed to be two distinct people only accidentally combined. Whenever he thought of Nelly he could forget his work; but when he was plunged heart-deep into one of his pictures—well, he could forget Nelly. She never went out of his heart, but she did at times slip out of his brain when it was very full.

The morning after his return from Paris he received a letter from Nelly, who was still waiting at Gressford. Hers were always pleasant and loving letters, with bright touches here and there, not to be expected from her conversation. Above all things, they were pathetic for the utter trust and belief in him that filled every line, and gave an intenser meaning even to her commonest words. He had just finished reading this last letter, when Jack Andrews lounged in, with an extra look of civil war in his head of hair. It always looked most combative in the morning; from which it was surmised by some that even he, great genius as he was, was not exempt from the universal law that leads little men to make use of the toilette as a means of looking taller than Nature made them.

"Now for another go in at Pan," he said, defiantly, as he filled his pipe lazily. "What are you putting on the stocks? By the great god Pan himself, I wish I had half-a-crown to put in 'em. What are you going to do for the line? Fontainebleau?"

"I don't know. One thing's as good to fail in as another, I suppose. You go in for another gust of wind; I'll look on."

"Did I dream somebody said yesterday, 'I've got to work for Nelly?' Come, drink some beer, take off your coat, and begin."

"Jack, you and I are old friends. I talked big last night, but it's easy talking. I've been talking to myself, just like that, for the whole year I haven't seen you. No, I'll look on. I feel like giving in."

"Hollo!"

"Yes, if it wasn't for Nelly, poor girl, whose life I'm spoiling as hard as a man can, I'd throw up the whole thing, and break stones, or something of that kind. I'm pretty strong with my arms. I've half a mind to do it now. Love in a cottage is better than love in an attic; and Nelly doesn't care much about art, poor girl. They don't see pictures down at Gressford—nothing but nature."

"Happy mortals!"

"And, I don't know, I talk of working, but my hand doesn't seem to follow my head, now. Working's no good without hoping. I think I could do something still if I had an idea. It's the fancy that's gone, and without that I'm nowhere."

"High-flown bosh. Wait till it comes back again, and fill up with pot-boilers. Ideas indeed! Why they're lying all about this very room. Take any one you please. No landscapes of course—chimney-pots aren't suggestive, at least to my mind; but I know you did a head once, and you can do it again. There's Ophelia, there's Titania, there's Lady Godiva, there's Mary Queen of Scots—all my own ideas, and all good ones, and you're welcome to the best of them. Confound it all! There's that singing woman at it again!"

And, as he spoke, the same wonderful voice of yesterday rose up through the floor.

The same voice sounds differently to different ears. However it might be with Jack Andrews, to Mark this divine contralto, rendered more divine by mystery, came like the gradual unveiling of a thousand secret things. He sat, and smoked, and listened, in a dream whence the twin nightmares of poverty and love

without fruit or blossom gradually faded away. He began to understand the history of David playing before Saul. She—for the voice, though invisible as Echo herself, must be personified—was singing “*Che farò*,” as he had never dreamed of hearing it sung, and filling every note of it with a fresh soul. Jack Andrews was still dashing in winds and rushes, growling the while half audibly; but Mark was not aware of his presence, so entranced was he in the clear, deep river of song that was rolling through and over him. The song ended, all too soon; but it began again.

Gradually—for he was a painter, who must needs transform all things into form—the song took shape in the eyes of his mind. What voice indeed, even to those of us who are not painters, does not suggest its own fitting outward form? He saw a statue of Juno changed into life, breath, and colour, with a Titian’s glory of sombre hair, large, calm, brown eyes, full of a fire too deep to flame, and a mouth as sweet as it was royal—in one word, the very Helen of his old dreams. He knew her at once.

“Who is she, in Heaven’s name?” he asked, as the song, at last, came to an end.

“That’s what the sultan used to say—‘Who is she?’—when he heard of any mischief done. I shall indict her for a nuisance.”

“But who——”

“How the deuce should I know? Am I the Post-office Directory?” But he growled in such a way that Mark, who knew his friend pretty well by this time, felt sure that, if he did not know, he cared.

The next day Mark Waterman went straight to his easel—he had had no letter from Nelly that morning. And, at precisely the same hour, the voice began its music again. And, remember that we are hearing with his ears. We might not thus have been entranced by the music of that voice, though alas for us if we have never been thus entranced by some other, either in speech or in song. But to-day he did not merely listen. He painted in the midst of a dream of music which to-day was more fully Helen—he even thought of it by its ideal name. At first he worked idly and vaguely, as if feeling about among preludes. But twilight came upon him before he was conscious that he had worked an hour, or that his friend had gone out, or that the voice had ceased to sing in any ears but those of his fancy.

He scarcely looked at what his hand had done during the day. He went out into the street, feeling as if some great load had been lifted from him. He was as poor, and as far off from Nelly as ever; but he felt as if a gate in his life had been thrown open, through which he had walked out into the fresh air.

It was with a feeling well-nigh akin to profanity, that he tried to satisfy his mere curiosity by asking the woman of the house who the lady was that sang there every day, for he soon convinced himself that Jack Andrews really did not know. And the reason was simple enough—nobody knew. A foreign lady who never went out of doors lived, as they knew, on the floor below them, and she kept a piano; but she was elderly, and could not, at her time of life, have suddenly developed a voice of such wonderful beauty. It must be the younger lady, dressed in black and always closely veiled, who—so he learned—came and went every day at certain regular hours. One day he thought of trying to pass her on the stairs as she went up or down. But he dismissed that plan as soon as it was formed. He had had enough of associating such a vulgar thing as curiosity with the idea of Helen. Might not her charm depend, like that of nymphs and fairies, upon her very mystery? So he satisfied himself with this voice in the air and worked on with a will.

In some subtle fashion it seemed to him now as if he were hardly conscious of his work, but as if his hands went of themselves, without help from his brain. It was the same story day after day, and while the days were lengthening out once more into August, the hours of daylight seemed to grow shorter and fewer. He saw wonderfully little of Jack Andrews now; that eccentric genius, having finished—as he called it—his own picture, was no doubt taking a holiday. But Mark missed neither him nor anybody. The song came to him daily; and, during the hours of its silence, left the vision of Helen with him.

Meanwhile, how did he live? How do hundreds of men live every day, without money, without credit, and yet without dishonour? But they do—and it is useless to ask of them, for they never know themselves. Some of them, it is true, and those not always the worst, do literally starve. All starve comparatively—not only with bodily famine, but

with art-hunger, or love-hunger, or some other terrible form in which the famine-fiend knows how to appear. There are men who live thus all their lives, and yet die at a good old age—and who enjoy their starvation as a few of us manage to enjoy feasting, and with less repentance. Mark was very far indeed from being one of these hardened Bohemians, but he was compelled to live like them; that is to say, without knowing how. And, if at that moment someone had said to him, throw down your palette and be rich, he would assuredly have answered No, had it not been for Nelly in Gressford, who was waiting for him.

So the days and the weeks passed on in misery and joy. At last, one afternoon when the day's song was over, but its influence still upon him—it was an everyday story now, and he never gave it a single conscious thought—Jack Andrews came in, for a wonder, and, for another wonder, not alone. Mark looked up, not over-courteously; for his work was not to be interrupted lightly. He was just giving it the last touches of such an approach to perfection as he could dare to think of; and that was the moment to be least interrupted of all. But the stranger took the want of courtesy very indifferently. Perhaps, he was used to painters' oddities. Jack Andrews introduced him in an elaborately inaudible growl, stood with him for a silent ten minutes beside the painter and before the picture, and then went off with him.

That evening he received this letter:

“DEAR SIR,—I will give you five hundred pounds for your Helen; on condition that you paint a companion picture, for which I will give the same sum. Yours faithfully,
DERESFIELD.”

His heart gave a bound. Lord Deresfield was a peer, less noted even as a great picture-buyer than for laconics and liberality. At last his time had come! Nelly Vincent, though all the way off at Gressford, was very near him now.

“So I've got to thank you for this, Jack!” he said, with all his gloom and his fever gone out of him, and only the bright smile left that Nelly had seen a year ago. “How in the world did you manage to get hold of old Deresfield?”

“Hem! Well, the fact is, I don't think much of old Deresfield. By some hook or crook, or something of that sort, I got him to see Pan. Well, he didn't speak; he

never does, you know; but he turned up his nose—he can do that uncommonly well. However, I said I knew of a pretty good picture he might like; I said it was a work of genius by way of a puff; so he nodded, somehow managed to find words enough to make an appointment, and came. The rest's his own affair. Voilà tout.”

“No, you don't take me in like that, old fellow. I know you—you've just been moving heaven and earth for three weeks to make Lord Deresfield look at my picture. Thank you, Jack. Of course, you'll try to knock me down if I say more. What do you think of her, after all?”

“Of the Helen? Oh, glor—she'll wash, I mean. And what's to follow?”

“I must wait and hear.”

So his time had come—at last! He was already rich; and with Lord Deresfield's name at his back, fame was within reach and happiness in his hands. He looked at his Helen once more, with new eyes. Could it be really the work of genius for which those who knew best already accepted it? He looked at it impartially, for indeed he could not recognise the work of his own hands. It had been breathed into him; it was as if he had been veritably and literally inspired. Could he ever repeat such a picture? Could it ever be sung into him or out of him again?

The voice had not yet begun that morning. Silence made him think; and he could not but recognise the influence under which he had produced the Helen. Its divine music had gone straight to his soul, and given its best part to the outer air. Was it possible that others heard that voice as well as he, or was it merely a fancy of his own. But no—that was impossible; even matter-of-fact Jack Andrews seemed to have been moved by it in his own fashion. How was it that he could not hear it to-day?

He could not yet begin to think over his own picture. He took out a sheet of paper to write the good news to Nelly; but he could not write a word. He had never felt in so strange a mood before. For weeks of work he had never missed the voice for an instant, even during its daily hours of silence; but here was total silence, just on the day of coming victory; and the triumph had lost its savour. He had conquered—for Nelly; and he could not even tell her the good news, because an unknown woman, whom he had never seen but as an imaginary Helen, had for once forgotten to sing.

What could it mean? Was there such a thing as witchcraft after all, and was he the victim of a voice and a charm? He could settle to nothing, and think of nothing; he could only feel that the voice of Helen was not in his ears.

"Jack," he said abruptly, when his friend returned and found him pacing the studio in the twilight, "I am a scoundrel."

"The deuce you are! What have you been doing now?"

"What have I been doing? What should you say of a man who made a good, innocent girl love him, who divided her from her home for his sake and from all who loved her, who ruined her future, who made her wait for him when he ought to have given up all for her, and who then—then when the time of waiting was over and he could take her to him, was false to her—false at the first sound of the voice of a stranger; if you don't call him a scoundrel——"

"Who said I didn't call him one? I do. Who is he?"

"I told you. I."

"You? Nonsense, you've been selling a picture. That's enough to turn any man's brain. I've had mine half turned before now, with only managing to spout one. Any more?"

"Jack, you understand me well enough. Don't joke, for Heaven's sake. I love Nelly as much as I ever loved her."

"It's all right, then? Then marry her."

"But—well, there's no better way to say it—I love another woman with all my soul."

"Marry her, then. You can't marry both in this country, that's clear. Does the other woman——"

"Did I say woman? It may be. But I only know it's a voice, Jack."

"A voice? *The* voice? By the horns of the great god Pan, Echo herself!"

It was not only for to-day that the voice was silent. The next day, and the next, and the next, it was still unheard. That voice, now inextricably blent with the Helen of his fancy, haunted him with longing, and it had passed away from his life just when he had discovered that to make poor, patient Nelly his wife now would be a worse sin than having been untrue to her. All this he now realised bitterly. He dared not regret that the disappearance of the singer had prevented his winning the

fruits of his treason; it was only right that he should do life-long penance for the wrong he had done to Nelly. He did not even try to forgive or excuse himself, when at last, out of utter, unconquerable heart-hunger, he did what most men would have done long sooner, and set to work to identify his Helen with some living woman. But nobody could tell him anything. The singer was but a veiled stranger to the people of the house, and the foreign lady in whose room she sang had gone abroad on the first day of silence. And so, with the premature, but not for that the less utter despair of a young man with an artist's temper, he felt that an unheard-of doom was upon him for the rest of his days, to remain bound in honour to a girl who loved him with all her heart, while he loved a mere vanished voice, a lost echo, with all his soul.

It was marvellously like witchcraft, indeed. But who can doubt the power of a voice to bewitch a man? It has been said that the voice is the soul; and if so, there must needs be more power in it than in all colour and form, even than in eyes, which are after all but the soul's windows. No, he could not write to Nelly with this witchcraft upon him.

But surely such a voice as that must be heard somewhere in the world. It could not have been wasted for a short season upon an attic in Bohemia. He no longer tried to work, for his inspiration was gone and had left only reaction; but he haunted every place, from the highest to the lowest, where voices are to be heard. It was all in vain. His Helen was embodied neither in opera prima donna nor in music-hall star. It was half a relief to hope and to lose again; after all, he had shuddered at times to think of who she might be to whom the voice belonged, and whom he would needs have to follow to the ends of the world.

He might not be all his conscience called him, but he had assuredly become false to a real woman for the sake of a dream. He never thought of Helen, but he recalled his own parting words a year ago: "If I don't live for you, and work for you, and win for you, I'm the greatest scoundrel ever born." He had always half wondered at his love for poor Nelly Vincent, and if he could only make her unlove him—but he knew that could never be. She would never believe him, he knew, if he called himself scoundrel to her face a thousand times over. He must give her up, ruin

her life and break her heart, or marry her without love and break her heart no less: which was the most merciful way of breaking a heart, the swift or the slow?

"I see there's a new woman going to set the Thames on fire," said Jack Andrews. "I suppose that'll interest you," emphasising "that" with a vicious splash of colour on his canvas, as if to say that his friend was lost to art, and could now be only interested in barrel-organ tunes, concert songs, and such like things.

"There generally is," said Mark, carelessly. "But the Thames seems fireproof, so far."

"What, you don't care even for that now? I don't know what's come to you. Well, I suppose it is hard to work or care much for anything, when one's got one five hundred pounds and can get another when it's gone."

"No, I hate it all. I've heard enough music to last me my time."

"I should think so. That woman, who would sing 'Che farò' right under my very toes, while I was working, was enough for me. Thank the gods, she's gone. However, I'm glad the voice-fever's gone out of you. That was an uncommonly bad time for me."

"Well, consider me clothed and in my right mind."

"Pan in boots, in fact. However, we're but inconsistent creatures, we mortals, saving your ex-godship. I hate and abhor music; but I want you to hear this young woman, to oblige a friend of mine. You've been seen about the singing places, and talking to old Deresfield, and that's enough to dub a man critic. It's all right, I suppose. Most things are. I daresay it's all right that I should go on painting pictures, and sell them to nobody."

"Anything but that, Jack. Ask me anything but that, I mean."

"You've made up your mind to drop the shadow for the substance, then?"

"You mean, to marry Nelly Vincent? No. I've made up my mind to that, any way. Poor girl."

"Why? For loving you? Now I really should like, for once, to feel the sensation of thinking I could break a girl's heart by not marrying her. No, you needn't put on airs. I broke a girl's heart once, and another fellow mended it; in fact, made it better than new. I never called her poor, though; I was too poor myself to throw stones. However, as you're not

going to marry her, she can't be jealous of one voice more. This is a girl that deserves a good turn, I'm told, and you might mention her to Deresfield."

"Can't I mention her without hearing her?"

"Of course you can do that, just as I've mentioned her to you. Of course that's easy. Only I haven't said she's good or bad, without hearing. She may be as bad as the rest of them, for aught I know. When I said she deserves a good turn, I only say what I'm told."

"What makes you so interested, Jack?"

"Why shouldn't I be interested in a woman I've never seen, as well as any other man?"

"But you haven't even heard her."

"Better reason why I should be interested. Hearing spoils our illusions—if I kept such things—which I don't, unless it's thinking you're a painter spoiled. No; I don't mean that 'spoiled' is the illusion. I mean 'painter.' I've promised to let you hear her, you see; and I don't want to be forsworn. To-morrow, in revenge, you shall take me even to—the opera."

It was true, without a shadow of affectation, that Mark could hardly bear to let himself be prevailed upon to hear a voice in song again. The fit of inspiration over, he forced himself to remember that, after all, he was a man, and as such was bound to face the worst unflinchingly, and to decide, once for all, whether he was the victim of a passing fever of fancy, such as the white heat of an artist's work may well bring with it, or of a settled monomania. He examined himself, and found the question immaterial to his life's true issue. Whichever way he might decide it, he was Nelly's lover no more. The voice had taught him that it was not his true whole self he had given or could give to Nelly; and he could only think now of his duty to her. He would seek for the owner of the voice no more; that would be like taking advantage of his wrong, and thus make him guilty of double treason. But that alone would not save Nelly from a heart-break; for his faith in her love and faith was only made more intense, by his bitter knowledge of the vanity of her faith in his own. And thus, even while talking coldly and carelessly to his friend, the only end was before his face all the while.

Death does not break hearts; and better death than dishonour.

I hardly care to speak more plainly. But when a man, otherwise sane, is haunted all day long by such a madman's vision as an incarnate voice, when he feels it making him every moment false to his own manhood, and to the womanhood of her for whom he has sworn to live; when his life means, in his sight, an endless desert of wasted love for hers, and his death nothing more than a regret and a sorrow to be cured by time—how is it possible for one who carries in him a fuller share than common of the painter's paganism, the worship of ideal beauty, to think otherwise than longingly upon escape and rest under earth or water? He did not put the desire even into mental words; but more than the mere desire was there. What mattered it what became of his own despicable soul? He could imagine no more terrible eternity than being voice-haunted for ever; he knew the worst, and could not bring himself to imagine more. And Nelly would know him to be dead, and never know him to be false; and death does not break hearts, he thought over again.

To play with such thoughts is not perilous—it is fatal. He knew, without telling himself so, that this was to be his last day alive in the world. "If I am mad," he thought, "there is no sin; if I am not mad, I must think of Nelly." Desire will always lead an army of reasons. And there are many ways of slipping out of life decently, as all but the extremest madmen know, so that design may be made to look like accident, and art like nature.

Such moods are invariably passive. It becomes immaterial, in what one feels to be one's last hours, whether one does this or that, goes here or there. What would it matter, after all, if he heard one song less or more? It would not prevent his sending Helen's voice out of the world in company with his soul. So he let his friend lead him that evening where he pleased, protesting no more.

He was even deliberately passive. He asked no questions, and well-nigh made a point of not observing the street or the house whither he was being led—a morally blind man. Presently he found himself just within the door of an ordinary drawing-room, unlighted except by summer twilight, and with the windows open. About half-a-dozen people were in the room. Jack Andrews and he did not enter farther at first, because a young lady was standing

at the piano to sing, and the prelude had already begun.

"Che farò senza Euridice!"

Her back was towards the door—but what need was there to see a face he had never seen?

The divine voice had come back to him; with his living ears he was listening to that, and no other; he was looking on the Helen of his dreams with his living eyes. What could it mean—disillusion, or tenfold despair? He was half driven to escape; but the music held him there. Perhaps the voice was sent back to him in mercy, that he might not die sane.

The last note died away, and the singer turned slowly round.

She was, and she was not, Helen. There was the queenly look; but it came from conscious triumph, and not from statuesque stature or repose. There was the beauty, too; but it was of light and life, colour and breath—the voice indeed was Helen, but the lips and the eyes—

Had he gone mad, indeed? Nelly was not beautiful, Nelly could not sing, Nelly was at Gressford—and this was she!

A madman's frenzy—he was right; he was not to die sane. And yet, how could he doubt when he caught her old shy blush at the sight of him, and saw the look of triumph turn to the old sweet look in her eyes, and felt her hand in his with the gentle touch he had not felt for a year? What could it mean?

"Don't forgive me, Mark," said Nelly's, not Helen's, voice as they stood together in the deeper twilight on the balcony of that drawing-room in Dreamland.

His whole self, and not his voice, questioned her.

"How could I think," she answered him, "how could I bear it, of your killing yourself, and for me? Oh, Mark, you cannot tell what you bade me do when you told me to wait—to sit with my hands idle and watch you break your strength and your heart before my eyes! Could I not read your letters—could I not read between the lines? Could I live and be a curse to you? And could I really do nothing, and yet be a fit wife for you? I could not stay at home, Mark. I might find something I could help you by, and bring you nearer to—to having to work and fight less hard. My uncle let me go. He wanted to keep me, but I disobeyed him, and—and—well, I got my

way. Perhaps he thought I might forget you if I found something else to put into my head; as if putting into one's head is putting out of one's heart, Mark!"

"But you did not leave home? No; it is impossible."

"You mean about my letters?"

"Nelly—if you are Nelly—tell me at once—is it you I have heard sing?"

"No, Mark. It is not I. It was Mademoiselle Saffi. Oh, can you ever forgive me? I meant it all so for the best, and I have become a living fraud. I began by disobeying you, by not waiting—that obliged me to get cousin Kate to forward your letters to me from Gressford, and to send her mine to post to you; and then I had to take a false name—they turned me into an Italian. It was Mademoiselle Saffi that sang, and I am Mademoiselle Saffi. Oh, you don't know how I have been hating myself for deceiving you, though—"

"But the voice? No; it is not yours."

"Do you—do you dislike it so much? They say it is a good one. Madame Casca, whom I used to go and practise with till she went abroad again, found it out and made me sing. Don't dislike my voice too much, Mark! I am afraid it is me."

"But the voice must have been there. And if that is you—then—"

He could not end the speech. "Then I never knew you," was in his mind; "I never loved you; I never met you till I heard you sing."

Had he indeed ever met her till now? She was, and she was not, the same girl that he had left at Gressford a year ago. And she was, and she was not, the Helen of whom he had dreamed. She was both at once; he seemed to see in her at once the soul of Helen and the heart of Nelly. Even while he loved her, he thought her plain; now he found her beautiful beyond all women—beyond even the ideal of his dreams, even as the true human must always surpass the imagined divine. Was the change in her or in him? Had Pan found eyes, or Echo taken a form?

She answered his thoughts rather than his words. "Could I sing to you at Gressford," she said meekly, "when you were teaching me? I had heard no singing but the birds'; I learned when you came."

And this was the girl to whom he had been false—for false to her he had been, in heart and soul, though it was, by a

marvel of Destiny, her own very self for whose sake he had been false to her. She was indeed transformed. All this while his love, false and imperfect as it was, had been giving her a soul that could speak as well as hide; and she, unseen, had been sending him her soul, and inspiring him, and making him love her invisible best more clearly, truly, and fully than with the best love he could ever have felt for her had he been simply true. Moment by moment, more and more like his ideal Helen she grew, till he could well-nigh fancy the growth of this little mortal into Olympian Juno herself, and see the light deepen and darken in her eyes.

But her coming glory still meant shame for him. It was she who had been working and living for him—not he for her. The little girl whom he had wondered at himself for loving had become literally the voice of his soul.

"Nelly," he said at last, "you said just now, 'Don't forgive me' . . . You meant, I suppose, for being truer and wiser than I. That is hard for a man to forgive in a woman, I know. What shall you say when you hear I have not been true to you?"

"Who will say that? And as if you didn't know what I should say!"

"But if I say it, Nelly?"

"If you do—" He felt her voice tremble a little.

"Can you begin to love me—all over again—when I tell you that I have been false; that I ceased to love you because I began to love you, and that if I could have found you I would have left you and followed you all over the world—whoever you were? And that I had thought—Heaven forgive me!—of dying rather than you should break your heart by knowing I loved you?"

"That is all beyond me, Mark. I don't understand."

"I heard you sing every day when you went to Madame Casca. Nelly, your own voice made me forget you. And if it had not been yours!"

"But you see it was mine," she said, with illogical simplicity. Perish "ifs" even, if those are the only roughnesses in the road. "Perhaps you would not have liked it so much, if—if it had not been mine."

"Ah, if I could only think that I somehow felt it to be your own voice, all the while!"

"And I am so glad you cared for my voice, without knowing it was me! Now I shan't be so much afraid of boring you; for I shall sing a great deal, now that I know how."

"Is there no end to your forgiveness, Nelly?"

"Forgiveness—forgiveness for loving me less for a little because you found you loved me more?"

Mark answered not a word. Why should he indeed, without being more of a madman than he had once thought himself, and more obstinate in his shame than this most obstinate of girls had been in her self-will? They were still alone upon the balcony, and he drew her closer to him than he had ever done in his life before, for he drew her soul to his own.

"There," said Jack Andrews. "There is the picture, Miss Vincent. It still wants the companion, though."

They were standing in the gallery of Lord Deresfield's town-house; and the sun was shining.

Nelly looked at her lover's first victory long and earnestly; and, she could not herself tell why, tears came into her eyes.

"Who is it?" she asked. "That is a real woman, I am sure."

"Helen," answered Mark, with a touch of solemnity. "She was a real woman once—before Homer."

"Helen?" she asked again, doubtfully.

"She's right, Mark," said Jack Andrews. "I always told you that's no more like Helen than I am." And certainly, if he were critically right, no fault could be found with his comparison. He was not like Helen.

"Why do you call her Helen?" she asked a third time.

"She was the woman I saw when you sang."

"And yet you did not know it was I?"

"Have I not told you so?"

"Nobody was ever so beautiful as that.

But it came by my singing, and you gave it my name!"

"Your name, Nelly?"

"Did I never tell you what Nelly is short for? My name is Helen, Mark; didn't you know?"

"You never used to tell me anything then, Helen! And know? Shall I ever know? Shall I ever know you? But, like you or not, that is your picture—the very picture of your voice, your soul. That is as I always see you now—Helen! My dream of beauty and my real wife, both in one."

"I'm thinking about that companion picture," said Jack Andrews, who had lately developed a most tragical scowl, whenever he did not forget to put it on. "Look here, Mark; take my notion of Pan and Echo—the only good notion I ever got—and make it sell. Take it and welcome—I don't care about the confounded thing. You've only got to put in a Pan and an Echo, if you must have details, and there you are."

"Yes; but how is one to paint Echo? Lord Deresfield didn't order a *duplicate*," said Mark, looking at Helen.

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